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standard

Journal of The Socialist Party - Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

Illuminating the hidden hand



Why secret societies don't run the world



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The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 1 September** at the address below. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the editorial committee at: The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High street, London SW4 7UN.

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Introducing The Socialist Party

The Socialist Party is like no other political party in Britain. It is made up of people who have joined together because we want to get rid of the profit system and establish real socialism. Our aim is to persuade others to become socialist and act for themselves, organising democratically and without leaders, to bring about the kind of society that we are advocating in this journal. We are solely concerned with building a movement of socialists for socialism. We are not a reformist party with a programme of policies to patch up capitalism.

We use every possible opportunity to make new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest elections when practical. Socialist literature is available in Arabic, Bengali, Dutch, Esperanto, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish as well as English.

The more of you who join the Socialist Party the more we will be able to get our ideas across, the more experiences we will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

The Socialist Party is an organisation of equals. There is no leader and there are no followers. So, if you are going to join we want you to be sure that you agree fully with what we stand for and that we are satisfied that you understand the case for socialism.

Editorial Competition Rules?

IT USED to be that business news concentrated on the performance of the economy and the pearls of wisdom of business leaders. In recent years however the business pages of newspapers have slowly become filled with allegations and investigations of price-fixing, cartels, insider dealing and corruption.

Last month, in headlines which made front pages round the world, British Airways was fined over £300 million for price-fixing – agreeing with their competitor to fix the price of fuel surcharges at an artificially high level. “The world’s favourite airline”, that old advertising slogan for BA, will perhaps not be making a re-appearance anytime soon.

In the dock alongside them of course should have stood one of the UK’s favourite capitalists, Sir Richard Branson of Virgin Airlines, except he turned Queens’ evidence and snitched just in time. According to the bizarre rules which usually seem to affect businesses differently from every one else, by blowing the whistle on the dirty dealings of BA (and themselves) they are automatically free from prosecution no matter how dirty their hands.

The very idea that these two bastions of free enterprise should have been colluding to effectively “defraud” their valued customers might have shocked some. After all here is what British Airways customer policy states: “The well being of our customers is extremely important to us”. Virgin’s customer charter is the same although it seems a little prescient “We put customer service and commitment to our passengers at the heart of what we do. We strive to get it right, first time, every time. But occasionally things don’t go as planned”.

Remember of course that Branson and Virgin for many years played the part of the plucky little David complaining against BA’s Goliath abusing its monopoly position with airports to try and keep Virgin out of the Atlantic market.

The news headlines related primarily to the size of the fine rather than any surprise that these business practices actually go on. These are not exceptions, occasional one-off incidents worthy of a news item. Corruption is an inherent part of capitalism. And what is known about is obviously only the tip of the iceberg.

And we maybe should not even pay much attention to those states trying to regulate their own capitalists – they are just as guilty. US Democrats have recently been trying to legislate (“Nopec”) against OPEC, the oil-producing and exporting countries, on the basis that these countries, instead of competing for market share on the basis of price, agree production rates with each other in order to keep the price high for all. In capitalism maintaining production takes second place to maintaining profit.

World socialists aren’t much bothered which activities of capitalists actually comply with its own laws or not, except perhaps to draw attention to the inconsistencies of the system and to show how it doesn’t even live up to its own ideology: the “free” market just doesn’t do what it says on the tin.

World socialists don’t want the “free” market system. But neither do we have any confidence in a supposedly regulated market system. There will never be enough consumer rights ombudsmen, Offices of Fair Trading or anti-trust legislation to police capitalism. The buying and selling system provides just too much reward. Instead a cosmetic pretence is maintained that the market system is dynamic and competitive. A veneer of fairness is maintained to encourage us all to carry on participating in the game, on the basis that there is some sort of level playing field in capitalism. But the real battle has never been one fought between capitalists, but rather, against them and their system. So which side are you on?



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earth version two

Possibly the deepest fault-line in the territory of that large and disparate body

of people describing or thinking of themselves as 'socialist' concerns the question whether people are either smart enough to organise their own revolution or dumb enough to have to be led to it. On one side we have the 'vanguardists', a motley collection of would-be leaders convinced, mostly on the basis of historical arguments relating to under-educated rural peasants, that the vast majority of the world's people have always needed and will always need to be told what to do. Thus, many left-wing organisations feature a top-down hierarchical structure, entirely the same as the capitalist structures they supposedly abhor. On the other side we have another motley collection of would-be revolutionaries, sometimes called 'libertarians', who consider this kind of hierarchical thinking to be precisely part of the problem, and do not foresee any realistic prospect of emancipation from capitalism while this sort of oppressive mentality remains a part of the picture.

There are interesting hints that the same ambivalent attitude towards the working class is to be found among scientists too. While pundits often debate the question of what workers think of science, rarely does anyone ask what scientists think of workers. Perhaps it is supposed that the boffins are above such value-judgments, solely concerned with their test-tubes and tunnelling microscopes. But of course, scientists are human too, and it would be nothing less than astonishing if they didn't share some of society's prejudices. The evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, for example, plainly struggles to contain his contempt for weak-minded people who believe in elves, pixies and celestial beings, having convinced himself that religion is the root of all evil despite the abundant evidence that atheists can be evil too. In a recent discussion with the eminent physicist Lawrence M Krauss, the two debate the best way to go about weening the population away from fairy stories and into the sunlit uplands of rational science (*Scientific American*, July 07). The 'softly softly' Krauss seems to persuade the firebrand Dawkins to the conclusion that the working class must be 'seduced' out of ignorance rather than beaten over the head with it, a conclusion one can't imagine Dawkins ever sticking to. But what is uncomfortably apparent in their language is a mental image of the worker as an Alabama redneck with a gun in one hand, a crucifix in the other, and who has only ever read two books, both of them about UFO's.

Of course, it may be true, as Sam Goldwyn used to say, that nobody ever went broke underestimating the public intelligence, and the resurgence of Christian fundamentalism and anti-evolution in America will certainly lend weight to that particular prejudice. But the last time 'Intelligent Design' (creationism) was in the news, it was being publicly humiliated in Pennsylvania as working class parents, some of them Christians, took the battle for rationality to court and forced the entire Dover School board of governors, who advocated teaching creationism in class, to resign in ignominy.

In the past, the views of individual scientists about the mental or intellectual capabilities of workers was a matter merely of private discussion. Now, however, the question has begun to

erupt into the foreground, and all because of 'Web 2.0'.

The World Wide Web is changing fast, and whether we like it or not, it has become interactive. More and more, on every hard news or information site, we are seeing invitations to readers to send in their pictures, their articles, reportage or opinions. This is not simply a crafty way to pad out pages at no expense, it is what is called 'user-generated content', the new fully interactive Web – Version Two Point Nought – where every consumer is potentially a producer. And the implications are beginning to expose a fault-line in society which exactly mirrors that found among radical political groups.

For some, the 'democratisation' of the means of communication marks a thrilling phase-change in the pace of human progress. For others, it is the start of a catastrophic dumbing-down which threatens to drown civilisation in a welter of mediocrity.

Leading the charge against what he sees as a colonisation of genuine expertise by an invasion of insipid, inaccurate and second-rate vanity publishing is the Californian entrepreneur Andrew Keen, who argues in his controversial book *The Cult of the Amateur* that "what the Web 2.0 revolution is really delivering is superficial observations of the world around us rather than deep analysis, shrill opinion rather than considered judgment" (quoted in *New York Times*, June 29). And why might this be? Because the crowd is now in charge, and "history has proven that the crowd is not often very wise, embracing unwise ideas like slavery, infanticide, George W. Bush's war in Iraq, Britney Spears." This is a curious argument, considering that the same crowd subsequently abolished slavery and infanticide, and will very likely do the same to the war in Iraq and even, with a bit of luck, Britney Spears. Keen is obviously not keen on the politics of Web 2.0, likening it to Marxism or a 'communist utopia': "It worships the creative amateur: the self-taught filmmaker, the dorm-room musician, the unpublished writer. It suggests that everyone—even the most poorly educated and inarticulate amongst us—can and should use digital media to express and realize themselves." This last quotation comes from his entry in Wikipedia, a user-generated phenomenon which Keen has stated he despises, because anyone can write anything they like in it without being a tenured professor, on the basis that the crowd holds more collective wisdom than the individual. To Keen, this is tantamount to pulling down the Library of Congress and replacing it with the Tower of Babel.

Keen and others have made much of Wikipedia's potential for inaccuracy, while absurdly ignoring the fact that Wikipedia is spontaneously self-correcting. One may as justly accuse science of getting things wrong. Indeed, comparison of Wikipedia and Encyclopedia Britannica articles on science by the magazine *Nature* revealed a roughly equal number of errors in both (*BBC Online*, March 24, 06). And one can't imagine Britannica ever exposing, as Wikipedia routinely does, the identity of those, like the CIA or the Democratic Party, who have attempted to 'influence' certain articles (*BBC Online*, August 15).

Ridiculed by the 'digerati' as a mastodon railing against the warming winds of change, Keen is certainly a minority voice, although probably the vocal end of a significantly large silent rearguard. Whereas elitist notions of worker stupidity tend to predominate in left-wing circles, they are definitely infra dig among the online community. And to give credit to Keen, he is honest enough to admit that he may have overstated his case: "I think I idealised mainstream media ... I concentrated on the good things. I didn't write about the Sun newspaper. I didn't write about Fox" (*Guardian*, July 20). No, he didn't. And he didn't consider the fact either that his historical crowds, wherever they acted stupidly, undoubtedly did so because the ruling elites kept knowledge to themselves in order to maintain their power and prestige. If the advent of Web 2.0 forces this kind of prejudice into the foreground, so much the better. Keen, if he gets lonely, could always go and join the mastodons of the left-wing. Socialists however will feel more at home among the trail-blazing digerati of the interactive revolution. Roll on Earth 2.0.

Letters

Socialist MPs

Dear Editors

I am writing as a sympathiser and one with boundless admiration for Socialist Party, because of its constant refusal to compromise with all that is harmful to socialism. Therefore I was disappointed, when listening to a recent tape of members in discussion, that should a minority of socialist MPs get elected it would be party policy that reforms should be evaluated on their merits and voted for or against accordingly.

Certain reforms can indeed be said to have merit if they have some benefit to the working class, such as medicare, extension of the franchise and safety legislation in the workplace. However, for socialists to vote in favour of such reforms might well attract support from non-socialists who also welcome such measures. Too much of such support would mean you would no longer have a socialist party. I feel a minority of socialist MPs should (as they probably would) point out the class nature of all reforms, and if they did not feel comfortable voting against some of them (such as the above) abstain.

My view is to let the upholders of capitalism work for reforms and for socialists to work for socialism with the same attitude towards reforms as your party was to taking sides in wars, leadership, defence of state capitalism, nationalisation, industrial unionism,

elitism (to name a few) which is "no compromise".

STEVE SHANNON, Mississauga, Ontario, Canada.

Reply:

Our view is also "to let the upholders of capitalism work for reforms" while we put the revolutionary alternative. Socialist MPs and councillors would be mandated to put the case for socialism and to criticise reform activity from the socialist perspective. However, the long-established socialist position is that socialist delegates in such an environment would be duty-bound to consider voting for measures that could benefit the working class as a whole and/or the socialist movement in particular. These issues would be judged on their merits at the time, and could, for instance, involve socialist delegates voting to stop a war, such as the recent war in Iraq. In such a case abstention would not be justifiable. In taking this position, they would still make clear their opposition to capitalism as a whole and to all parties of capitalism and would at no time seek support from the working class on the basis of a reform programme -Editors.

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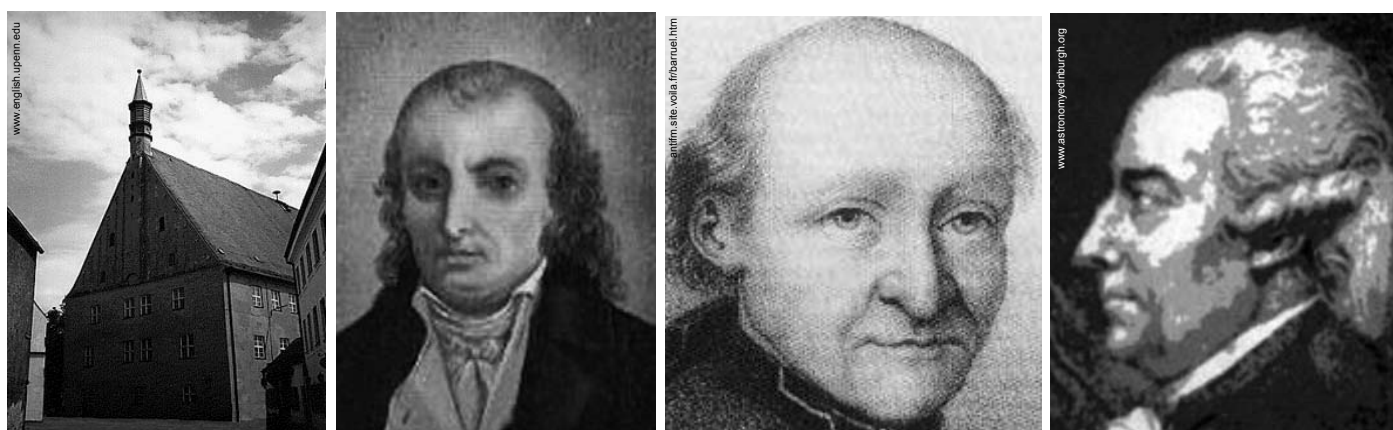
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Why do some people think the world is run by a shadowy group called the Illuminati? Who were they?

Who controls the world: the Illuminati or the Market?



From left: the University of Ingolstadt, Johann Adam Weishaupt, Abbé Barruel and John Robison

Capitalism is a system where the means of production are owned by a minority class and are used to turn out goods for sale with a view to profit. As a result market forces come into operation. These ultimately determine what is produced, how it is produced and where it is produced. As they used to say of God: Man proposes, God disposes. Under capitalism, Man proposes, the Market disposes.

Faced with this situation, the socialist draws the conclusion that capitalism can only work in the way it does work, that is, as a system which puts profits before the needs of the working class, and that the most constructive thing to do is therefore to work to end it and replace it with a system of common ownership, democratic control and production for use.

But what about the non-socialist? At one time, many workers in Europe used to believe that it was possible to reform capitalism and make it work in the interest of the majority. That was the time of mass Labour and, in other countries, Communist parties. But as these failed to deliver – as socialists had always predicted they would – workers began to give up any hope of changing things collectively and on a national scale. Or, put another way, they gave up any belief in the efficacy of political action to tame market forces. This hasn't just affected the workers who merely voted for mass Labour and Communist parties but also those who were activists in them.

This is the sort of atmosphere

– a feeling of helplessness in the face of uncontrollable forces – in which conspiracy theories can flourish. Not just conspiracy theories, but other attempts to give meaning to a situation where people feel they have no control over what happens to them such as religion, gambling and astrology.

These amount to attempts to make some sort of sense of a situation where people know they have no control over what happens to them and want to

“Conspiracy theories are a more primitive explanation of current events than the socialist theory of impersonal economic and historical forces”

understand what's happening to them and why. The socialist understands that we are in the grip of uncontrollable impersonal economic forces, the Market, and knows that this grip can be broken only by establishing socialism and production for use not sale. Some non-socialists seek an explanation in the mysterious hand

of God, the Stars, Fate or Luck. Other non-socialists can't accept the socialist view that our lives are controlled by the impersonal forces of the Market. They find it easier to think that these forces are personal; in other words, they personalise the Market and you have some shadowy group – financiers, Jews, the Illuminati – controlling the world and manipulating events.

This view and the socialist view are rival explanations of the same experienced happenings – economic slumps, financial crises, political revolutions, wars. In one sense perhaps the conspiracy theory is the easier to grasp: that some group of people are deliberately causing these events rather than their being the result of impersonal forces acting as if they were forces of nature. It is what in religion is called “anthropomorphism” – the attribution of human form to a natural force or thing – as, for instance, in the Ancient Greek, Roman and Norse gods, which everywhere preceded the more abstract concept of a single god. In other words, conspiracy theories are a more primitive explanation of current events than the socialist theory of impersonal economic and historical forces. Or, as the pre-WWI German Social Democratic leader, August Bebel, put it less generously, anti-semitism is the “socialism of the fool”. It would have been better if he had said it was “the anti-capitalism of the fool” but his meaning is clear: anti-semitism attributes the problems of the worker – or farmer or small businessman – not to the

capitalist system but to the machinations of a particular group of people, in this case the Jews.

On further reflection, however, attributing economic and historical events to a conspiracy doesn't seem so simple or so reasonable. The conspiracy theory needs to explain how the conspiratorial group bring about these events and how they can keep their existence secret. To control the whole world – plot economic crises, wars and revolutions, let alone spreading AIDS and causing global warming – would require hundreds of thousands of operatives and some of these must be expected to spill the beans at some point. The fact that none ever have – and that therefore there is no verifiable or even unverifiable evidence that the conspiracy exists – is a powerful refutation of it.

The Illuminati

Most people have heard the theory that it is the Jews who control the world and manipulate events. Since the consequences of Nazism, to embrace this view is now bad form, though a glimpse at the internet will show it still exists. Nowadays, it is the 'Illuminati' who are often said to control things.

The Illuminati were a group that really did exist mainly in the German-speaking world for a short period in the late 18th century, but there is no evidence whatsoever that they continued to exist after that or that they still exist today. But who were they and why did some people

distrust them so much?

One of the features of the 18th century was what in English is called the "Enlightenment". It is mainly associated with French thinkers such as Voltaire, Diderot and Rousseau who used "reason" to try to dispel the superstitions of the Dark Ages as propagated in particular by the Catholic Church. The word "Illuminati" is the Latin word for the "Enlightened" and those who formed the secret society (masonic-type lodge) of this name in Bavaria in 1776 aimed to spread and implement the ideas of the Enlightenment in Germany and Austria.

The founder and chief of the Illuminati was Johann Adam Weishaupt, a professor of canon law at the University of Ingolstadt, a town to the north of Munich. No biography exists of him, but we do know that he was born in 1748 and that his father was a professor at the same university. What we know of the ideas and ceremonies of his organisation comes from the writings and correspondence of members who fell out with him and from his own writings justifying his actions after the group was banned by the King of Bavaria in 1786. These formed the basis of two books which were published in 1797, one in English, the other in French, and which argued that the French Revolution had been engineered by the Illuminati as part of their plan to overthrow all religion and all governments and establish a universal republic, or cosmopolis.

What they were accused of is well summed up in the full title of one of these

books, by John Robison:

"Proofs of a Conspiracy against all the Religions and Governments of Europe, carried on in the Secret Meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies, collected from Good Authorities, by John Robison, A. M., Professor of Natural Philosophy, and Secretary to the Royal Society of Edinburgh".

This book and the other, by Abbé Barruel, which in English was called *Memories illustrating the History of the Jacobins*, are both on the internet in full but there's a need to distinguish between what the Illuminati said they stood for and what they were accused of standing for.

What they said they stood for was the happiness of the whole human race, to be achieved by "enlightening" them by freeing them from "superstition" (i.e. supernatural religion and loyalty to dynastic rulers). This done, a world society of liberty and equality would come into being in which all men would be brothers and citizens of the world.

As to their methods, the form of organisation chosen was the hierarchical secret society and the tactic was to infiltrate and seek recruits from the freemasons. There were the usual oaths, ceremonies and degrees of membership that exist in freemasonry generally. Weishaupt called himself – and this must mean something – "Spartacus" after the leader of a slave revolt in Ancient Rome.

The aim seems to have been what they said it was, i.e. to dissipate "superstition", by winning over people of influence, rather than by them seizing power and trying to impose this on people.

A scene from the French Revolution. That it was "the result of a conspiracy organised by the Illuminati was the first conspiracy theory"



However, the secret and hierarchical nature of their organisation did lay them open to the charge and that they wanted to become new rulers through conspiratorial methods.

There is of course nothing wrong with the stated aim of achieving a world society – a cosmopolis – in which people would be politically free and morally equal (i.e. of equal worth). Nor with terms such as “Brotherhood of Man” and “Citizen of the World”. Socialists are in some ways the direct descendants of such ideas.

Barruel devoted Volume Three of his 5 volumes to the Illuminati and says that in it he is exposing “the conspiracy of the sophists of Impiety and Anarchy against all religion and all government without exception not even republics, and against all civil society and all property whatsoever”.

Later, he summarised the views of the Illuminati as follows:

“Equality and Liberty are the essential rights which man, in his original and primitive perfection, received from nature; the first attack on this original Equality was brought about by property, and the first attack on Liberty was brought about by political societies and governments; the only supports of property and government are the religious and civil laws; so to re-establish man in his original rights of equality and liberty, one must start by destroying all religion, all civil society, and end by abolishing all property”.

The Illuminati probably didn’t go this in reality. Barruel was trying to frighten his readers into opposing the French Revolution which he regarded as an antichristian plot.

Robison’s aim seems to have been to cleanse freemasonry from the taint of “illuminism” (though he was also a loyal supporter of the British monarchy and State against revolutionary France). He records what some former members told the King of Bavaria the Illuminati stood for:

“The Order was said to abjure Christianity, and to refuse admission into the higher degrees to all who adhered to any of the three confessions. Sensual pleasures were restored to the rank they held in the Epicurean philosophy. Self-murder was justified on Stoical principles. In the Lodges death was declared an eternal sleep; patriotism and loyalty were called narrow-minded prejudices, and incompatible with universal benevolence; continual declamations were made on liberty and equality as the unalienable rights of man. The baneful influence of accumulated property was declared an insurmountable obstacle to the happiness

of any nation whose chief laws were framed for its protection and increase”.

Here again, the suspicion must be that this is something attributed to them in order to prejudice people against them. Robison and Barruel also questioned the motives of Weishaupt and the others, saying that the real aim was not the happiness of the human race but their own rule over them.

That the French Revolution was the result of a conspiracy organised by the Illuminati was the first conspiracy theory, and it should be noted whose interests it served. As we know, the French Revolution was an anti-feudal, bourgeois revolution and, as such and at the time, a progressive historical development. Those who sought to discredit it were supporters of feudal privilege and dynastic rule. In short, reactionaries trying to turn back the clock of history.

Of course the French Revolution was not a conspiracy, but the outcome of a class struggle, arising out of a clash of economic interests between the rising bourgeois of emergent capitalists and the privileged feudal aristocrats. The ideological reflection of this was the battle between the ideas of the Enlightenment and those of the Catholic Church.

To single out the Illuminati as Utopian plotters aiming to rule the world is to fight yesterday’s battles on behalf of the aristocracy and the Catholic Church against those of the bourgeoisie and the philosophers of the Enlightenment. It is a reactionary position.

Modern-day conspiracy theorists have invented a link between the Illuminati and the Jews. Thus, one conspiracy website has said that the Illuminati were set up and financed by “the House of Rothschild”. Another says that Weishaupt’s father

was a rabbi. Another that he was a converted Jew. Even the Spanish-language Wikipedia article on him says his ancestors were of Jewish origin. There is not a shred of evidence for any of this.

Conspiracy theorists can’t offer an adequate explanation of what’s going on in the world. If we are going to change the world successfully we are going to need to understand it properly. And the only way we can do this is on the basis of verified evidence and logical thinking. This is what socialists do (or at least try to do). Using this method, we can see no evidence of world events being organised by a conspiracy. In fact, we can see that the world is not organised at all. We can see everywhere the anarchy of capitalism and its effects.

Competition is built-in to capitalism. This brings into being the World Market which ultimately determines what happens. But it’s an impersonal mechanism not a conspiracy. And it is the cause of wars, revolutions and other conflicts in that these are by-products of capitalist competition, not the machinations of some occult group. That’s the socialist analysis.

So the enemy is not the Illuminati (or the Jews, the Jesuits or Aliens from Outer Space). It’s not even the individual members of the capitalist class. It’s the capitalist *system*. What needs to be done, to put things right, is to move on to another system, one based on the common ownership of the world’s resources with production to meet people’s needs, not for profit. On that basis, all the things that the conspiracy theorists attribute to their chosen group of conspirators will no longer exist.■

ADAM BUICK



From each according to their ability

*"I don't want to take £1 billion pounds to the grave with me."
(Sir Tom Hunter, Daily Telegraph, 18 July 18).*

ANDREW CARNEGIE, Bill Clinton, Bob Geldof et al would no doubt agree that there can be only a small percentage of financial, business, sport or artistic successes in any one generation. There just isn't space at the top of any profession or vocation for the majority of the population. The system doesn't work like that. A pyramid requires a very broad, solid base made up of multitudinous blocks rising in successively smaller layers to the apex. The financial structure of the world is the same; the many enabling the few to amass their fortunes. In sport or art, whether through talent or promotion, a similar structure exists.

Whilst the super-rich can afford to give away much of their monetary wealth without hardship or set up trusts, charities, concerts and the like to alleviate some of the world's worst conditions (and the rest of us can donate much smaller amounts according to our individual situation and whim), the plain facts are that each year, year in, year out, millions more around the world find themselves in abject poverty. Whatever is given in aid, grants or donations is never, and will never be, sufficient to "make poverty history".

Sir Tom Hunter appears not at all gloomy about the world situation and claims "he gets a bigger buzz from a successful philanthropic venture than from his businesses". There is an obvious satisfaction to be gained from personally being able to bring positive solutions to problems of those less fortunate than oneself; however, even supposing all the world's billionaires were to prove as altruistic in ministering to the world's needy, it would only result in a partial cure of humanity's sores rather than total elimination of the disease.

The *Daily Telegraph* article ends with Carnegie's assertion that

"all personal wealth beyond that required to supply the needs of one's family should be regarded as a trust fund to be administered for the benefit of the community." Which is not all that different from Karl Marx's dictum "from each according to their ability, to each according to their need". However, the poor of the world don't need a hand-out. They simply need to be a part of a world system that doesn't exploit them and with the universal right to nutritious food and clean water, shelter, responsibility for self-determination, all long recognized as prerequisites for a fulfilling life.

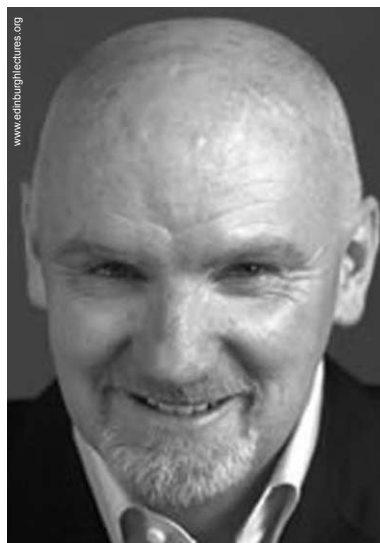
With "from each according to ability, to each according to need" applied globally it will not only be possible but achievable in the foreseeable future to eliminate poverty, malnutrition and the other ills inherent in global capitalism.

When doctors, teachers, musicians, scientists, technicians, farmers, entrepreneurs use their expertise solely for the benefit of the (world) community; when the Earth's rich resources are used for people, not profit; when all citizens of the world are seen to have equal, intrinsic worth regardless of background, intelligence or class; when our collective aims are truly altruistic rather than accumulative then there would be no worries about taking money to the grave. Wealth

would be real, not virtual; the Earth's resources would belong to all, not to be pillaged for profit for the minority; talent, skills and human endeavour would be the wealth to be spent by all for the benefit of all.

How satisfying to go to the grave fully used up with absolutely nothing going to waste.■

JANET SURMAN



Sir Tom Hunter



Turmoil at the Stock Exchange

"FRESH TURMOIL IN EQUITY MARKETS" read the headline of the weekend *Financial Times* (11/12 August) after a week of dramatic

falls in share prices on the world's stock exchanges. "GROWTH THREATENED BY MARKET TURBULENCE, SAY ECONOMISTS" read the one in the *Times* the next day, which reported the principal of one hedge fund are saying "Nobody has yet mentioned to me the possibility of a stock market crash and I find that surprising".

So, what was it all about? Could it really have been a prelude to another 1929 and 1930s slump? Or was it another purely financial crisis hardly affecting the real economy?

Although the turmoil was centred on financial markets, especially stock markets, in most respects its origins lay in the housing sector in the US where financial institutions have been selling

"sub-prime" mortgages, i. e. to those with poor credit records and who are therefore more likely to default – and have been. The US housing market bubble – now being paralleled in the UK and elsewhere – has come to an end and mortgage defaults have escalated.

Financial institutions in the US and elsewhere are now coming under pressure because of their exposure in this market but the main issue at present is that no-one knows the extent of the problem, mainly because much of this debt has been packaged together and sold on to financial institutions other than those originally lending the money.

Some hedge funds and other financial instruments that have invested in this debt in the hope of higher than average returns for their investors have got into trouble. In the case of some funds run by BNP Paribas, they have simply been unable to calculate their value because of the current volatility of this sector of the financial markets, leading to even further fear and uncertainty.

The most serious knock-on effect has been a tightening of credit – banks are reluctant to lend money, even to one another. It is this that has been affecting stock markets in particular.

The easy credit that has helped financial merger and acquisition activity

the last two or three years (especially by private equity firms) propelled the stock markets of the world upwards. This is because private equity groups, by changing the legal status of the firms they take over from public to private companies, have been taking firms off the stock market and so reducing the supply of shares available as a whole; also, easy credit has helped companies buy back their own shares, to the same effect – reducing the supply of shares and so, in accordance with the law of supply and demand, pushing up share prices.

It is the end of this easy credit and the positive stock market conditions it has promoted that is bothering the financial markets more widely. In truth, after the massive stock market falls of 2000-2003, most stock markets are not over-valued but are being affected by a contagious fear that has spread from the housing sector via the credit markets.

But this is one of the problems with the capitalist market economy – the lack of planning and the instability inherent in the system can have far-reaching and unpredictable consequences. Just how far-reaching only time will tell, but given the underlying problems into the UK housing market alone, this period of market fear may have some way to run yet.

Can capitalism ever be green?

Yes, say a new school of green economists. No, say socialists.

During the last hundred years more irreversible damage has been done to the natural environment by human action than in any previous period in recorded history. Rarely a day goes by when our attention is not drawn to the various issues of environmental degradation and how the increase in human activity is impacting on large areas of the natural environment globally. Among these are: climate change; the increase in pollution; the depletion of fish stocks; over-reliance on fossil fuels; nuclear energy; soil erosion and desertification; the pace of species extinction; the increase in skin cancer; forest and wetland depletion; etc.

This has led a dedicated band of economists, with an ecological bent, to make a study of natural resources (which they label “natural capital”) and of the long-term, societal and possible profitable benefits resulting from their careful management. Their premise is that, if capitalism continues on its present course of destroying natural resources by continuing to ignore the real “costs” of the negative effects on the natural environmental and human health, in the long-term it will lose out big time.

Which is a fair conclusion but comes as no surprise to anyone who understands the basic economics of capitalism. However, what these “green economists” propose as a supposedly viable solution — and one which is being vigorously advocated globally — is the creation of an artificial cost-benefit market by the international enforcement of a mixture of environmental taxes and regulations, so there is long-term protection and management of natural resources through market forces. The present trade-offs of carbon emissions is just one example of putting these proposals into practice, and it has been taken up by those who are of the opinion that market forces hold all the solutions to the problem of environmental and health “external costs”, i.e. the money that has to be paid for clearing up the environment or on health care that don't have to be paid for by capitalist firms whose activities

“How do you arrive at a monetary value of the air we breath, of a particular species of wildlife, or even of a snow-capped mountain peak? What exactly are you going to compare and value it against?”

cause them.

There's a lot more of such proposals in the pipeline, but when stripped of their jargon, in practice it means that for capitalism to go green it must factor in all the possible and the expected environmental and health “external costs” and in effect set limits on the accumulation of capital. If the green economists have their way - and it's a very big if - it would mean that a brand new set of market conditions will have to be enforced, ignoring the realities of how capitalism actually operates.

The two most difficult problems that would have to be confronted are measuring the value of these external costs and tracking the specific offenders. Obviously to try putting a price tag on natural resources is going to be extremely difficult for several reasons. How do you arrive at a monetary value of the air we breath when it is freely available? Or measure the value of the disappearance of a particular species of wildlife? Or even of a view of a snow-capped mountain peak? What exactly are you going to compare and value it against?

The green economists are seemingly unaware that a measure of value can only be ascertained once labour power is employed to transform ‘natural capital’ into a commodity. For instance, the deserts of the world have little or no value. However, once labour power is used to make them productive and profitable by extracting the mineral properties that deserts may contain either below or above ground, they come to have a use value and exchange value. Until then they remain deserts. In short, it is only possible to measure and apply value through the use and exchange of commodities. Anything outside of this, like attempting to measure the true external costs — and especially as regards the natural environment and human health — only arrives at a value which is largely subjective.

Cooperation versus competition

This lack of understanding of the workings of capitalism and the production of commodities does not stop here because the premise of the green economists also includes the false assumption that a so-called ‘common interest to protect natural capital’ can be created within capitalism and adopted by society as a whole. Obviously, no sensible person is going to deny that the sooner we work with nature, rather than against it, the better. By increasing our understanding of the interaction between the natural environment and the impact of human activity, society will be in a better position to minimise the damage on natural resources, and be able to arrive at rational judgements on whether or not any interference in the natural environment is justified and warranted.

But capitalism is not a rational system when you consider that the capitalist class have their own agenda which is totally blind to the creation of a common interest. The only interest the capitalist class have is to obtain profits through the quickest and easiest way possible so that the accumulation of capital continues. A fundamental contradiction of capitalism is that although the capitalist have a common interest — as a class — to cooperate to keep the system going, by necessity they also have to compete within the market. If they don't compete they go under or are at best taken over by other capitalists.

This built-in rivalry between the sections of the capitalist class always results in casualties in some form or another. At one end we have the everyday casualties of lay-offs and redundancies. Whilst at

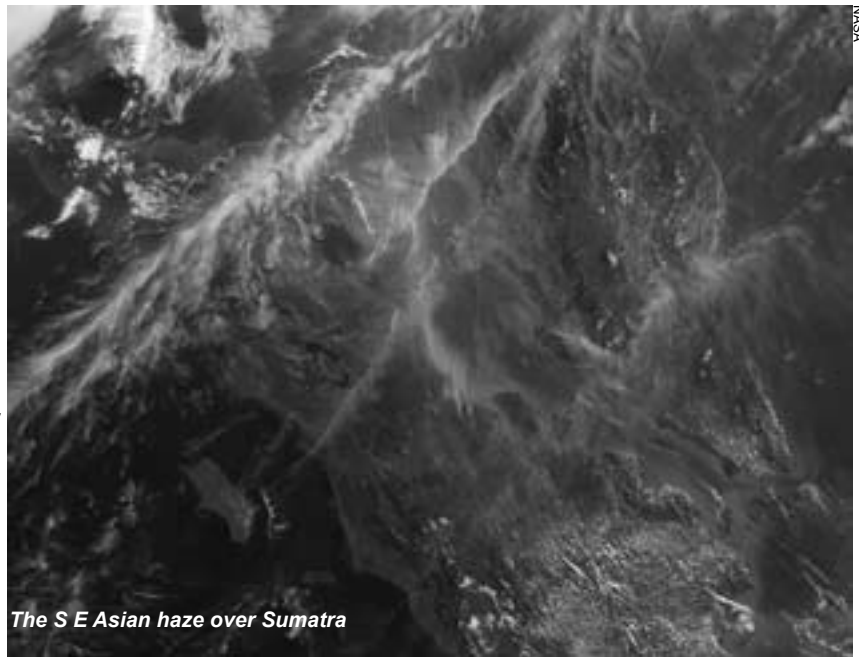
the other end from time to time inter-capitalist rivalry erupts into a full scale war - with extensive human casualties, refugees, communities being destroyed - and extensive damage to the environment and the destruction of wealth on a tremendous scale.

It is these conditions of competition which make it extremely difficult to reach any regulatory agreement which can have a global application. But not impossible. When it has been in the common capitalist interest to facilitate an expansion in the global market capitalist governments have drawn up international agreements, for example on postal services, maritime law, air traffic control, scientific research at the poles, etc. These agreements are generally abided by, specifically because they do not reduce the rate of profit. It's when any such proposals come into conflict with the rate of profit that the competitive self-interest of the various national sections of the capitalist class becomes focused on the problems of winners and losers appears. This is usually announced in the media as, "There was a failure to reach an agreement over who is to pay the bill".

If they do arrive at some agreement on the international regulation of environmental external costs they can only adopt one of two options. Either an approximation of the real external costs is to be shared out amongst the global capitalist class as a whole through a general environmental taxation. Or the costs are to be paid by the individual capitalists, and managed through the nation-states acting as the main agents and international bodies set up to supervise payments and trade-offs and also to regulate environmental impacts and damage. It's the latter that's in the early stages of being adopted with the "carbon trading".

Conundrum

If market forces essentially cause and create environmental damage by literally encouraging an irrational human impact, how can you realistically expect those self-same forces to solve it? This conundrum will almost certainly intensify if globalisation picks up pace and the competition gets even tougher for the possession of scarce resources, especially energy and water. But the conundrum does not end there since the system of capitalism is also dependent on economic growth and the accumulation of capital on a larger and larger global scale. And in order to achieve an accumulation of capital, market forces must not only create and produce commodities on a mass scale but also destroy them in a systematic fashion never known in



The S E Asian haze over Sumatra

human history. When confronted by barriers of environmental legislation which are designed to diminish the rate of expected profits and the accumulation of capital, the capitalists will do what they have always done in their search for short-term profits: finding or creating loopholes, moving the goalposts, corrupting officials, trying to bribe the local population with empty promises, or shifting the whole concern to an area or region where a more favourable reception is expected and profits maintained.

Unlike the green economists socialists conclude that in a class-divided society where the means of living are used to serve the interests of the owners of private property any talk of finding a 'common interest', so that there is a change of course of market forces and consequently a greening of capitalism, is a fool's errand. We have, therefore, consistently argued that, where classes exist, there are class divisions in the production and distribution of wealth with the subsequent inequality manifesting itself in a class struggle between two classes with diametrically opposed interests.

Arising out of this analysis we recognise the need for a majority of the workers to actively engage in a political struggle to bring about a revolutionary change in the social relationships — from private property ownership to a system of common ownership, a society of free access where wage slavery has been abolished, money is obsolete, hierarchical

structures pointless, class laws transformed into social rules, and production is geared to satisfying human needs. Only when we are living in such a society will we be in a position to minimise any environmental damage caused by human activity.

Once we have reach this stage in human development and social evolution — where our interaction with the natural environment not only enhances our understanding of ourselves but also converges with a social recognition that we are as much dependent on nature as is nature dependent on us — so we will be able to start to tackle a rational clean up of the environmental damage which capitalism will have left in its wake. ■

BRIAN JOHNSON



Cleaning up after Exxon Valdez

Politics in Japan has reached a turning point—or a dead end—with the crushing defeat of the Liberal Democratic Party in the upper-house election on 29 July.

The Liberal Democratic Party, led by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, lost the majority it had held in the upper house (along with its coalition partner the New Komei Party), so that now it is controlled by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). Many within the LDP have called for Abe to resign, which is customary after such a major defeat, but as of mid-August he is still holding on to power. Whatever Abe's destiny, however, the election result seems to herald the beginning of the end of what has essentially been a system of one-party rule since the LDP was formed in 1955.

There is no shortage of reasons for the defeat suffered by the LDP. First and foremost, there was the scandal involving the pension system. It was revealed in May that some 50 million pension records had been lost. This means that people who regularly paid into the system are at risk of being shortchanged on their pension benefits. With a huge percentage of Japan's population at or nearing retirement age, it is easy to understand why this scandal has alienated so many people from the LDP.

There were also the scandals involving cabinet members, including the illegal funding of political activities and the usual LDP "verbal gaffes." Two members of Abe's cabinet resigned and the minister of agriculture, who was under fire for a funding scandal, committed suicide. Incredibly, the new agricultural minister was implicated in a similar funding scandal and resigned immediately after the election defeat.

While these scandals seem to have been the *direct* cause of the LDP's defeat, there are long-term political and social changes that have gradually eroded the party's power and contributed to the unpopularity of Prime Minister Abe. One trend, which has been much commented on in the press, is the increasing "social divide" between the richer rich and poorer poor. Among the have-nots the impression is that the "structural reforms" implemented by the LDP, starting with Abe's predecessor Koizumi, have only worsened their lives.

The divide between rich and poor corresponds to a growing disparity between the more affluent cities and the economically depressed rural areas. Traditionally the LDP has depended on votes in the rural districts, and repaid this support with the agricultural protectionism and large-scale public works projects that are the two pillars of the local economies. These policies have become difficult to maintain, given the ballooning

government debt and need to form free-trade agreements, not to mention the public opposition to wasteful government spending on unnecessary roads and dams. The LDP has tinkered with reform, including the promotion of decentralization of government administration, and this has already eaten away at its base of support. One of the most striking aspects of the election result, for example, is that the DPJ was able to win seats in rural districts that up to now have been impregnable LDP strongholds.

Abe hoped that a revival of nationalism could help to conceal or bridge the divisions between rich and poor, and between urban and rural Japan. He raised the creepy goal of creating what he calls a "beautiful country." Abe thought this could be achieved through such efforts as revising the Constitution to eliminate its pacifist clause, whitewashing history so students can "take pride" in their country, and advancing a more interventionist foreign policy in tandem with the US.

But even here Abe has had little luck. One problem is that his campaign to turn back the clock to the 1930s began just as the US was demonstrating to the world the limitations of hairy-chested jingoism. Many people in Japan—even capitalists—must have wondered whether it was a good idea to adopt the George W. Bush approach to winning friends and influencing people. The two-headed quagmire in the Middle East has also forced the US to take a less belligerent stance towards North Korea; a move that caught the Abe government off guard and complicated the effort to use the fear of North Korea to bolster the revival of nationalism.

There has also been hostility towards Abe because the public feels as if it has been "sold a bill of goods" by the LDP. Japanese voters provided overwhelming support to Prime Minister Koizumi when he posed as a renegade hell-bent on overturning the status quo within his own party, resulting in the LDP regaining a firm majority in both houses of parliament. But Koizumi's hand-picked successor, Shinzo Abe, used that power to push through reactionary legislation with little public support, fill his cabinet with political cronies, and even bring back to the LDP some members that Koizumi had expelled for opposing his "structural reforms." The general feeling among the public is that it was a very bad idea, indeed, to have handed the LDP a blank check.

Finally, there is the problem of Abe himself, who clearly lacks the essential political skill of lying in a convincing manner. The charismatic Koizumi might have been able to talk his way out of at least some of the problems listed above, creating a useful distraction or two, but Abe has proved quite incapable of charming the public.

Tweedledum

Probably the least significant factor behind the LDP's defeat was the opposition Democratic Party. The general consensus is that people were voting *against* the LDP, not for the DPJ. Given the numerous problems facing Abe's party just outlined, the DPJ had to do little more than criticize the LDP's handling of those problems and offer some vague solutions.

Under its new leader Ichiro Ozawa, the election campaign of the DPJ emphasized



One-party rule in Japan at an end?



Shinzo Abe - handed a defeat

third and fourth proposals will mean job losses for government workers and economic hardships for the provinces. The next proposal, to help out the “little guy” (=small capital), would also require increased expenditures and run directly counter to the interests of the big-time capitalists who run the show. The sixth proposal is an empty promise, as long as capitalism, with its anarchical money-chasing, remains firmly in place.

Even the final proposal on foreign policy, which is one of Ozawa’s primary obsessions, will be difficult to achieve because Japan is so closely intertwined militaristically with the US, to which it has outsourced its foreign policy for the past sixty years. Ozawa has stated that the DPJ would use its new power to oppose the extension of the Antiterrorism Law, under which Japan has supported the US wars of aggression in the Middle East. It will be interesting to see if he follows through on this promise, given the heavy pressure already being exerted

on the DPJ by the US since the election. The DPJ itself is split over this issue, as reflected in its manifesto, which states that, “a strong and equal Japan-US relationship based on mutual trust” is the “foundation of Japan’s foreign relations,” while in the very next sentence calling for the

“immediate end of the dispatch of Self-Defence Forces (=Japanese army) to Iraq.” If the DPJ can stand up to the pressure from the US, they are certain to gain tremendous public support, but unless there is a real alternative to the current foreign policy, Japanese capitalists may decide to stay aboard the *USS Hubris*.

The promises, pledges, and proposals of the DPJ are not only difficult (and at times impossible) to achieve, they present a false image of that political party. In the election campaign, the

DPJ emphasized a liberal, people-friendly image, but a brief look at the history of the party and its members reveals how similar its outlook is to that of the LDP. Many of the big players in the party, including Ozawa, got their start in the LDP prior to the formation of the DPJ in 1998.

Ozawa rose as high as the Secretary General of the LDP, in 1989. But he found himself on the losing end of a factional struggle, and in 1993 decided to strike out

on his own, forming the Japan Renewal Party. The next decade saw Ozawa in a number of other small parties. Far from steadfastly opposing the LDP, however, Ozawa’s Liberal Party formed a coalition with the LDP and was even negotiating with Prime Minister Obuchi to return to the fold. When opposition in the LDP blocked this political merger, Ozawa tried his luck with the DPJ, dissolving the Liberal Party within it in 2003. Ozawa is clearly an opportunistic politician who does not offer a fundamental break with LDP politics, not to mention that he is wholly faithful to the capitalist system.

If the DPJ represents a step forward for politics in Japan, it is only in the sense of contributing to an understanding that capitalist political parties are fundamentally the same, quite unable to deliver on their sweet-sounding campaign promises. Some may still be holding out the hope that the DPJ will set Japan on the right path, but they are sure to be disappointed. It is the role of socialists to prevent their disappointment from resulting in impotent despair, by showing where the real problems lie and offering a solution.

What’s left?

But the “left” in Japan is not offering a critique of capitalism or pointing the way beyond it.

During elections, the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) makes its presence felt. Even in the smallest towns JCP posters and politicians can be seen. This might give a tourist the impression that there is great interest in socialism in Japan today. In fact, however, the election campaign of the JCP makes no mention of socialism. The primary issues for the JCP are the defence of the current “pacifist” Constitution and the quixotic goal of achieving something called “capitalism with rules” through Keynesian economic policies. And the same approach characterizes the politics of the Social Democratic Party (Japan), which includes remnants of the now defunct Socialist Party.

To borrow the old comparison, the reformist politics of the JCP and SDP are like treating a patient’s symptoms, without paying much attention to the disease. For example, JCP leader Kazuo Shii, in comments made to the Foreign Correspondent’s Club on 3 July, raised the party’s slogan of ending poverty, proposing the following three measures: (1) Oppose regressive taxes (residential tax, consumption tax); (2) enhance social services; (3) enforce work regulations. Not a word about how poverty is endemic to capitalism itself, as a society where production is for profit and profit arises from the exploitation of labour.

No matter how well intentioned, the politics of the JCP and SDP generate the illusion that capitalism can change its stripes. Perhaps in the short-term this will win them some votes, but neither party is offering a solution to problems people in Japan and throughout the world face. And until a genuine socialist party *does* emerge, Japanese politics — and society — will be stuck in an impasse. ■

MICHAEL SCHAUERTE

the growing gap between the “winners” and “losers” in society and made the claim that it could implement policies that would improve the standard of life for common people. In its election manifesto, the DPJ raises the goal of “creating a nation where people can live their lives free of anxiety” and “putting people’s lives first.”

How the DPJ intends to deliver on this promise, under an economic system of production for profit, is a complete mystery.

And even the more concrete “pledges” and “proposals” listed in the DPJ manifesto are unlikely to ever see the full light of day. The party offers three pledges: to resolve the pension problem, increase subsidies for childrearing (to deal with the low birth rate), and providing greater support for farmers. All three require lots and lots of yen, which the government does not have or would prefer to use in more capital-friendly ways.

The DPJ election manifesto includes seven proposals as well: (1) protect jobs and rectify social disparities, (2) solve the shortage of doctors and improve healthcare, (3) eliminate administrative waste, (4) advance the decentralization of government, (5) support small and medium size businesses, (6) take a leading role in environmental protection, (7) adopt a new approach to foreign policy.

The first two require increased spending, while any savings from the

“Abe’s campaign to turn back the clock to the 1930s began just as the US was demonstrating to the world the limitations of hairy-chested jingoism.”

The Scramble for the Arctic

On August 3, the oceanographer and polar explorer Artur Chilingarov descended 14,000 feet in a mini-submarine and dropped a titanium capsule containing a Russian flag on the seabed at the North Pole. "The Arctic is Russian," he declared.

In fact, the Russian government is laying claim not to the whole Arctic, but "only" to the Lomonosov Ridge, a wedge about half the size of Western Europe that it considers an extension of Siberia's continental shelf. According to the UN Convention on the Laws of the Sea, the five states with coastlines on the Arctic Ocean – Russia, Norway, Denmark (through ownership of Greenland), Canada and the United States (Alaska) – are entitled to 200 miles of territorial waters, but can claim more distant chunks of Arctic seabed by demonstrating links to their continental shelves.

This, of course, is a game that not only Russia can play. All the other Arctic states have advanced counterclaims or are preparing to do so, all on the basis of the same vague legal provision.

Why now?

Why is this carve-up happening now? Apart from people concerned with the deployment of nuclear submarine forces, the native Inuit (Eskimos), and a few scientists and explorers, no one used to care much about the Arctic. Vast quantities of oil, gas and other minerals might lie under the frozen wastes (up to 10 billion barrels of oil under the Lomonosov Ridge, for instance), but extracting them was not a practical proposition. So it did not matter if borders and exploitation rights were not very clearly defined.

Now, however, it is starting to matter. In part this is due to advances in extraction technology, but the main reason is the rapid melting of the icecap under the impact of global warming. The extraction of all those underwater resources is no longer a pipedream, and the big oil and gas companies and the governments that back them are jockeying for position in the new arena.

Survival versus profit

From the perspective of survival of the planetary ecosystem, the rush to grab Arctic oil and gas is grotesque in the extreme. After all, it is largely the burning of oil and gas that is melting the ice, thereby opening up the prospect of extracting and burning yet more oil and gas and further accelerating global warming.

The capitalists, however, have a quite different perspective. For them the overriding imperative is to be sure of making every last cent, penny and kopeck of profit from selling hydrocarbons before finally proceeding to exploit the next source of profit – solar energy and other "alternative" energy sources. By then, unfortunately, it may well be too late to prevent runaway global warming from turning Earth into a second Venus. But that is something the capitalists do not want to know.

The melting of the ice will also have a huge impact on shipping. Over the next few years, expanding areas of the Arctic – and within a few decades all of it – will be navigable to commercial shipping throughout the year. The Northeast Passage through the Russian Arctic and the Bering Strait is expected to be open within eight years, greatly reducing the distance and cost of sea transport between Europe and the Far East. The Northwest Passage through the Canadian Arctic will provide another link between the Atlantic and the Pacific, competing with the Panama Canal. New deepwater ports are planned to support trans-Arctic trade. Finally, a continuing rapid growth in Arctic tourism is anticipated.

Not a new Cold War

The alarm with which the media have reacted to the Russian claim on the Lomonosov Ridge is reminiscent of the Cold War, especially in the context of other recent tensions between Russia and "the West." Nevertheless, it is misleading to talk about a new Cold War or, indeed, about "the West." We no longer live in a world of bipolar confrontation between "East" and "West." We now live in a multipolar world of fluid alliances among a fairly large number of powers, some of them rising (e.g., China) and others in decline (e.g., the US). In certain ways the early 21st century resembles the first half of the 20th

century much more closely than it does the second.

Nothing illustrates the new-old pattern of multipolarity more clearly than territorial disputes in the Arctic. Several important disputes do not involve Russia at all. They are between the other Arctic states, all of which are still formally allies, fellow members of NATO.

The potentially most serious disputes are, perhaps, those between Canada and the United States. One concerns the offshore Canada/Alaska boundary, which traverses an area thought to be rich in oil and gas. The other dispute is over the straits that separate Canada's Arctic islands from one another and from the mainland. Last year the Canadian government declared that it regarded these straits, which together make up the Northwest Passage, as Canadian Internal Waters. The US government has made clear that it still regards the straits as international waters by sending its navy to patrol them.

Lord Palmerston is famous for his remark that "Britain has no permanent allies, only permanent interests." Evidently the same is true of any capitalist state.

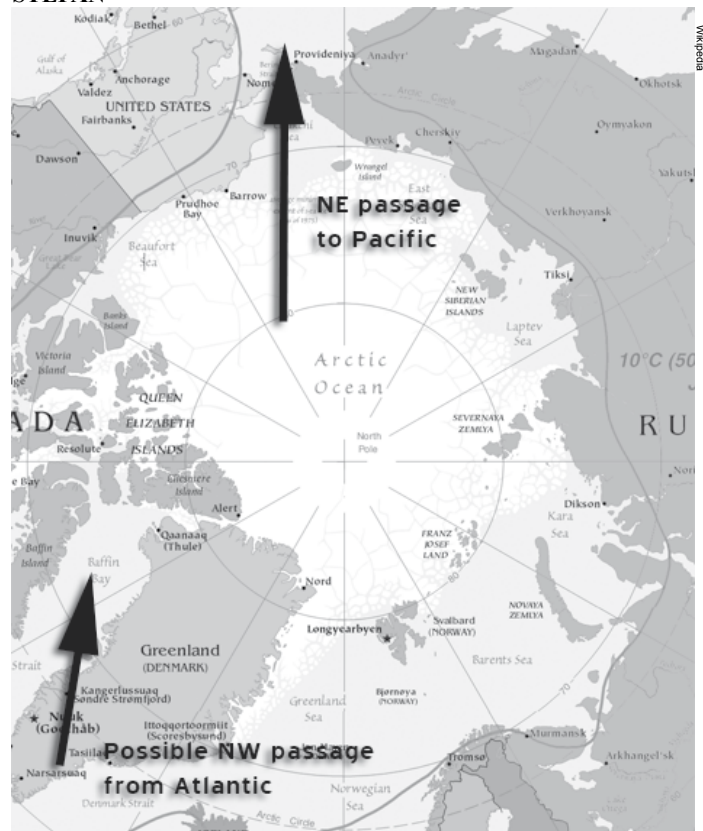
Canada flexes its muscles

The behaviour of the Arctic states also debunks the widely held idea that some states are inherently peace-loving and others inherently militaristic. Many people think of Canada as being in the first category. They might be perturbed to come across the following *Guardian* headline: "Canada flexes its muscles in scramble for the Arctic" (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2007/jul/11/climatechange.climatechange>).

As Canadian prime minister Stephen Harper observed in this connection, "the world is changing." It is changing in ways that on the surface seem quite dramatic. But there is a deeper level at which, as the French saying has it, "the more things change, the more they remain the same." The 21st-century scramble for the Arctic is a phenomenon of the same general kind as the 19th-century scramble for Africa. Both are cases of commercial and military rivalry between the capitalist classes of different countries to open up for plunder and exploitation a region that was previously closed to them.

True, these scrambles now entail dangers that were unknown in the past. The 19th century knew nothing of either nuclear weapons or global warming. It is high time to move on.

STEFAN



Too much hot air

A WEEK may be a long time in politics, but it seems that ten years is not enough for capitalism to take action against climate change. Since the 1997 Kyoto Protocol little substantial has been done to address the problem.

It is almost universally agreed that global warming is brought about by an increase in the amount of greenhouse gases (mainly carbon dioxide) in the atmosphere. These gases trap heat and so lead to a rise in the planet's temperature. The consequences are varied and not fully predictable, but might include water shortages, a fall in crop yields, rise in sea levels and the wiping out of many species.

It's not yet too late to do something about it. Some degree of further global warming is already guaranteed by existing and near-future amounts of the greenhouse gases, but if a reduction in their emission is achieved then warming can be controlled and its worst effects avoided. George Monbiot's book *Heat* is an extended attempt to show that carbon emissions in Britain could be cut by 90 percent. Various methods are described, such as the introduction of a micro-generation system, the use of gas-fired power stations, and an end to flying.

Monbiot argues that the climate change denial industry has managed to delay effective action. This industry is a mixed bag of lobby groups and websites, many of which receive funding from ExxonMobil, a giant corporation which makes most of its profits from oil and therefore stands to lose out if global warming is tackled seriously. Philip Morris, the tobacco company, was among the first to fund the denial industry.

Clearly companies whose business involves the production of greenhouse gases are going to fight tooth and nail against moves to constrain them. Capitalists in general will take a similar line if they feel attempts to combat global warming will reduce their profits. Governments, which — after all — represent capitalist interests will jump in on their side. All talk of global or governmental responses

to climate change has to take these harsh realities into account.

In his book *The Weather Makers* Tim Flannery writes:

"The transition to a carbon-free economy is eminently achievable because we have all the technology we need to do so. It is only a lack of understanding and the pessimism and confusion generated by special interest groups that is stopping us from going forward."

Flannery claims that international action to prevent damage to the atmosphere is possible and has indeed occurred in the past. In 1987 the Montreal Protocol successfully limited the emission of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). These destroy the ozone layer, which blocks lethal ultra-violet radiation reaching the earth. Once the dangers inherent in CFCs were realised, production of them was phased out, and now the ozone layer is recovering.

The problem is that the parallels between the Montreal Protocol and the Kyoto Protocol, which is intended to reduce carbon emissions, are not close enough. CFCs were used in spraycans, some cleaning agents, and so on, and consequently they were nowhere near as important or central to capitalist production as the generation of power and energy, which are basically where greenhouse gases are output. It's not just a matter of the 'special interest groups' to which Flannery refers, but of the drastic

disruption to capitalist industry — and hence to profits — that would be involved. Even though the Kyoto-envisaged reductions are nowhere near what is really needed, even these milk-and-water provisions are unlikely to be adopted.

So it isn't primarily confusion and lack of understanding that militate against capitalism taking serious steps to limit global warming. It's the central role of the profit motive. And that's why it will take a socialist society before these and other environmental problems can be tackled — and humanity live in true harmony with our home planet. ■

PB



Cooking the Books 2

How to undermine socialism

In the "Dear Economist" column of the Financial Times Magazine (4/5 August) a correspondent asked:

"I suffer ridicule from economist friends when visiting a local restaurant. The restaurant supplies complimentary tissues and toothpicks to customers. My friends freely use them and even take some for later use. I feel this is wasteful and not 'playing the game' but their arguments seem more logical - there's no extra cost to taking more, it is included in the costing for the meal, and I'm the mug subsidising everyone else. How can I overcome my hang-up and become a maximising consumer?"

In his somewhat tongue-in-cheek reply Economist wrote:

"You have already realised that your friends are correct. Perhaps more persuasive than the pure logic is the knowledge that by grabbing tissues and toothpicks, they are holding back the forces of communism. I dimly recall - but have not

been able to confirm - that Lenin held up free condiments as an example of the way goods could be free and yet not rationed. It is up to right-thinking people to prove him wrong by walking off with the entire stock. By grabbing toothpicks, your friends are chipping away not only at bits of salad but at the ideological foundations of communism. They deserve your support."

Very funny. But there is a serious point here. In socialism, where not just condiments but nearly all available goods and services will be there for people to take and use freely, if people did try to behave as the "maximising consumers" in the economics textbooks then socialism (or communism, the same thing) would collapse. People would not necessarily take more than they needed, but they would make the "rational choice" for them as individuals of not working to help produce things but leave this to the "mugs" who didn't exploit the fact that they could get something for nothing. In other words, they would be free-loaders.

But this just shows how wrong is the theory that people do (and should) behave as "maximising consumers", only taking into account their own perceived short-term narrow self-interest. People don't behave in this way even under capitalism and no society, not even capitalism, could survive if they did, precisely because it wouldn't be a "society", but simply a mass of competing, back-stabbing individuals.

Human beings are social animals. All our social attitudes and behaviours are derived, in one way or another, from the society we were born into, brought up in and live in. Certainly, as individuals we want to live the best life we can, and, certainly, we are capable of making rational choices and, at the individual level, do so most of the time. But would free-loading be a rational choice in a society of free access?

Those who had just established a socialist society must be assumed to have done so because they wanted to live in such a society and to have understood that it could not survive on the basis simply of "to each according to needs" without its counterpart of "from each according to ability". In these circumstances to choose not to contribute to producing what was needed would be an irrational choice. Not that all work would be the "pain" that bourgeois economics assumes it must be, the "cost" we must pay for the "pleasure" of consumption. That's another myth propagated in economics textbooks.

Even "games theory", which starts from the typically capitalist assumption of a group of isolated self-seeking individuals, ends up concluding that "reciprocal altruism" - do as you would be done by or, more vulgarly, you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours - would be "the rational choice".

The FT's witty economist is right on one thing: the "maximising consumer" would have no place in socialism.

Politics of Apathy

Why We Hate Politics. Colin Hay. Polity Press.

Colin Hay is a Professor of Political Analysis and has produced a book typical of the academic genre – tightly argued and well referenced if somewhat dense, and at times, abstract. His main focus is that politics is ‘an increasingly dirty word’ and he sets out to examine why.

In fairness, some of the information he presents is rather good, especially in the earlier chapters where he looks at trends in political participation within the major developed states of the world, identifying and seeking to explain declines in voter turnout, falling membership of political parties and prevalent attitudes towards democracy and participation as sampled in opinion polls. He notes that somewhat paradoxically, just as traditional political participation has declined in recent decades, so have attitudes towards democracy as a form of running society improved, with less anti-democratic sentiment than in earlier times. This seems to be because while parliamentary democracy may not be perfect, any known, established alternatives to it (e.g. dictatorship from the far left or right) have proved to be even less attractive propositions.

While just over three-quarters of people in Britain consider democracy to be the ‘best form of government’ this means – rather worryingly – that nearly a quarter would prefer something else (e.g. dictatorship), but this is one of the highest levels of anti-democratic sentiment still existing in the Western world, in distinction to the Scandinavian countries, Germany and Japan, for instance, where pro-democracy sentiments are almost universal.

Rather like a bourgeois economist, Hay examines contemporary attitudes towards politics and political participation in terms of demand and supply. He argues that most writers examining this problem have focused principally on the demand side of this equation, in that they have been content to analyse the declining ‘demand for political goods’ amongst the electorate as manifested in voter turnout, political party membership and so on. When turnout declines the blame is apportioned to the voters, not the purveyors of political goods and services like the politicians and spin-doctors, who seem content to market themselves as competing branded versions of essentially the same product.

He argues that this issue of political supply – and the problems associated with it – has largely been ignored. The supply side essentially constitutes ‘changes in the content of the appeals that the parties make to potential voters’ and ‘changes in the capacity of national-level governments to deliver genuine political choice to voters’. Interestingly, unwitting support for this ‘supply-side’ view of political decline comes from the politicians themselves, who seem increasingly keen to abdicate responsibility for the running of society and for the political choices involved in this. In this respect, Hay’s piece de resistance is a quote from Blair’s old lieutenant, former

Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs, Lord Falconer:

‘What governs our approach is a clear desire to place power where it should be: increasingly not with politicians, but with those best fitted in different ways to deploy it. Interest rates are not set by politicians in the Treasury, but by the Bank of England. Minimum wages are not determined by the Department of Trade and Industry, but by the Low Pay Commission . . . this depoliticisation of key decision-making is a vital element in bringing power closer to the people.’

While Hay seems to imply that this is a dereliction of duty by politicians that has led to even more cynicism from the public, it is just as much an admission of their practical failure to create worthwhile change or improvement through active intervention. After all, if there’s little or nothing you can do, then why not (under the guise of being ‘democratic’) effectively hand over the supposed ‘powers’ concerned to someone else? Then they can, at least, take any blame that is due from a weary and sceptical public.

DAP

Hope over Experience?

Pirates of the Caribbean – Axis of Hope. Tariq Ali. Verso \$23.95



A need to “counter systematic disinformation by the corporate media networks” coupled with the “revival of hope and the emergence of a modest alternative to the status quo” is the stated motivation for this book.

One wouldn’t expect neutral views on any topic from Tariq Ali (above), but however strongly he presents them they are backed up with ample evidence of and references to the truths he is presenting. What one would expect and what one gets is a well-written, clearly argued book exploring the growing movements (mainly in South America) against the Washington Consensus which “can allow no enemies of globalization.”

Included is a reminder of the ravages of primitive accumulation affecting the whole continent; a brief history of Venezuela’s politics, dictatorships juxtaposed with spells of democracy and the odd coup thrown in; military control; states of emergency; mass protests following IMF restructuring; massacres and decades of exclusion for 80+ percent of the population. The background to the founding of the Bolivarian groups (in the army and air force starting in 1978) by young army officers including Chavez. Ali’s sources telling of the programme of political interventions in Venezuela are many, including one 1960s senior CIA officer. He lists books, documents and websites for those wishing to delve further.

Two of the many interesting footnotes, one re: V.S. Naipaul’s refusal to be drawn into the disinformation racket after the 2002 coup attempt and the other re: a soon to be published book by Gregory Wilpert which totally supports “with a wealth of facts” the Irish documentary film “The Revolution will not be Televised.”

Ali is overtly supportive of the moves in South America against the Washington Consensus and points to the ways the balance of power is changing.

There is a section on Bolivia outlining the struggle of the people to oust Bechtel and their water privatization scheme described as the democracy from below that is feared by neo-liberal elites everywhere. Also offered is an insight into Evo Morales’ search for “a form of radical social democracy that is totally unacceptable to the Washington Consensus and its institutions.” Ali suggests we should all look at strength in unity (e.g. Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia), “All Andean paths that divert from the neo-liberal motorway will be worth exploring.” He gives some details of his first trip to Cuba in 2005 and reminds us of the 1962 Second Declaration of Havana expounding that their struggle was continental and anti-imperialist, as Chavez and Morales say now. Visiting the University of Information Technology he discovered Richard Stallman’s free software GNU/Linux to be the system of choice. When Ali met Stallman earlier in Caracas, at which time Stallman was ‘Linuxing the country’ and looking to do the same in Cuba, Stallman told him that China, too, had been very interested until they learned they couldn’t charge users for the facility.

The appendices prove informative too, with first-hand information, straight from the mouths of several involved horses, information we are not privy to from the general media. Evo Morales’ speech ‘In Defence of Humanity’ in Mexico City talks of ending selfishness and creating solidarity and mutual aid, of organizing and uniting against the (neo-liberal, imperialist) system, of strengthening the power of the people. The messages from this book are rousing, loud and clear, if, unfortunately, they are not the whole story; end of neo-liberalism and of empire, but no mention of the end of capitalism. According to Tariq Ali, “Hope has been reborn and that is half the battle won.” However inspirational it may be socialists suspect that this will in all likelihood be another triumph of hope over experience.

J.S.

Life of an Anarchist

The Anarchist Geographer: An Introduction to the Life of Peter Kropotkin. Brian Morris. Genge Press, 2007. £8.

This is a short (100 page), readable biography of the anarchist writer Peter Kropotkin. Born a prince in 1842, he became an anti-Tsarist revolutionary for which he was arrested and imprisoned in 1874. Two years later he managed to escape and left Russia, not to return again till the overthrow of the Tsar in

March 1917. He died there in 1922.

Before he became a revolutionary he had been involved in original geographical research in Siberia and had been elected a member of the Russian Geological



Society. In exile he earned a living as a scientific journalist and writer. Hence the title of Morris's book. One series of his scientific writings was later published as *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution*, which became a socialist classic, opposing the Social Darwinists who saw the struggle for existence as the only factor.

In the 1870s when Kropotkin first became active in revolutionary and working class politics in the West – in Switzerland – almost all those involved, including those who were later to describe themselves as “anarchists”, called themselves “socialists”. So did Kropotkin, though he preferred to call himself a “communist” to distinguish himself from those who wanted “from each according to ability, to each according to work done” from those like him who wanted “to each according to needs”.

Kropotkin has been accused of (or credited with, if you prefer) creating a distinct (anti-) political philosophy called “anarchism” which embraced anybody who was against “the State”, even if they weren't socialists/communists. In fact, this includes vociferous anti-socialists like the followers of Stirner, Thoreau or Tucker (individualist anarchists) or Proudhon (market anarchists).

Quite why Kropotkin felt – and why some modern anarchists still feel – some sort of affinity with these open anti-socialists is difficult to understand. But then anarchists do make the mistake of seeing the state, rather than capitalism, as the cause of workers' problems, whereas the state is a consequence of economically-divided class societies.

Kropotkin wasn't consistently anti-state anyway. When WW1 broke out he immediately supported France (and Britain) against Germany, on the grounds that the German state was the greater evil.

ALB

The single issue

The futility of the ever-increasing single issue campaigns is clear for all to see. Could it be because they are being reactive rather than proactive?

WHO CAN'T relate to the feeling that life, sometimes, bogs you down? Every day many tasks, chores, activities lie waiting to be taken care of, from getting up to going to bed again. Food to be prepared, children to be readied for school, laundry to be organized, the car to be refuelled or put in for service and all before arriving at work for another stimulating day adding to the coffers of the wealthy. Issues there range from the state of the toilet facilities, whether there is flexibility in the flexi-time to who'll get the next promotion and who the chop. Home alone to an empty flat or home to a house filled with family, stopping to shop on the way, there are still all manner of jobs lined up waiting their turn, defiant in their refusal to just go away. The garden, the grass, the dog, the shower head that keeps falling off the wall; better put the rubbish out, but what rubbish – black bin, green bin, blue box or paper collection? Freshly prepared evening meal, micro-waved dinner or take-away followed by a well-deserved rest – oh, better just sort out that unpaid bill, answer a few emails and return a phone call, help with homework, wash up, maybe get it done before the news starts,----and so on till bedtime.

Life is full of these single issues; eating, work, health, education, transport, recreation, shopping – for food, clothes, household needs. Single issues, each a part of the big picture, a part of life, the parts constituting a whole. What we choose as the parts and how we put them together probably defines our character in large part. It's not what's thrown at you but how you react to what's thrown at you that reveals your personality. Being proactive rather than reactive will mean being better organized and more in control of one's time, resources and emotions; however, proactive or reactive, issues are what make up our days, years, whole lives. Most of us will prioritise, knowing that ultimately all will need to be dealt with; some can be passed over lightly or shared or delayed, others, more pressing, will receive our urgent attention.

Our cerebral life would find little to exercise it within the confines of daily life as just described but there is the much wider swathe of issues out there engaging those who are in contact with their conscience. So-called *political* issues. *Single* issues.

Poverty: North/South, rich/poor, majority world/minority world, aid, IMF, World Bank, transnationals.

Immigration: problems for asylum seekers and refugees, unequal opportunities for people of different nationalities raising issues of racism, nationalism and xenophobia.

Health: HIV aids, malaria, lack of sufficient potable water and many-tiered systems for access to health treatment.

War: anti-war, anti-nuclear, arms sales and despoliation, depleted uranium and mines.

Women's Rights: Children's Rights: Labour Issues: Agro-business and Big Pharma.

Anti-Globalisation: free trade anomalies,

farm subsidies, land rights.

Trafficking: involving traffickers, carriers, users, and addicts. Contraband includes drugs, arms, children, women, body parts, animal parts and diamonds.

Natural Resources: oil, coal, aluminium, gold, water, uranium, all with connected environmental problems. Qualified people from Least Developed Countries transferring to richest countries and out-sourcing of jobs to cheapest labour wherever it is, further impoverishing the poor.

Wealth: transferred from poor world to rich world and from rich world to off-shore tax havens.

There are many people who work full time on their chosen most important issue for years. There are many more the world over who volunteer part time endeavouring to make a difference on one or more of these never-ending single issues. These are good people, believing they have something to offer, wanting to make the world a better place, wanting to create a level playing field. So, why is it that there are now more of them than ever before in history, trying to reverse the march of ever-widening divisions? If what they were doing was working there would be need for *less* of them, there would be positive indications from statistics, not year on year reports of increasing anomalies. The futility of the ever-increasing single issue campaigns is clear for all to see. Could it be because they are being reactive rather than proactive? Could it be that their perceptions of these issues as 'single' issues is working against them?

As in life, it isn't possible to be involved with all these issues separately. As with life's issues, the single 'political' issues add up to the whole. What is required is a philosophy, a way of life that addresses the sum total of all the issues, large and small. Democracy could be the short answer to all these and other issues. Democracy, not of the voting candidates in or out every 4 or 5 years on spurious promises variety, but simply the democracy of supporting delegates who are charged with upholding truly democratic principles to continue strengthening community welfare worldwide.

Socialism is the natural umbrella for humanity, the vast majority of which desires a peaceful world. All the single issues are seen by socialists as effects, the cause of which is capitalism. Effects can be ameliorated but it is better to eliminate the cause and prevent the effects returning. Once the decision is made by the majority to press forward to cooperative life in a peaceful world based upon the common ownership of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interests of the whole community people will be in place who have the knowledge, skills and passion to bring reality to their long-held dreams of solutions to each single issue, in full recognition that theirs is just one small but significant part of an entity much greater than the sum of its parts. ■

JANET SURMAN

Meetings

Central London

Sunday **23 September** 3pm
SOCIALISM AND THE ARTS
Speaker: Sandy Easton
Socialist Party Head Office,
52 Clapham High St, SW4.
Nearest tube: Clapham North.

A RAMBLE on the Green Chain Walk in
South-East London, approx. 6 miles.
Sunday October 28th, meet Eltham
station 11.00 am.

Contact Richard Botterill on **01582
764929** or Vincent Otter on **020 8361
3017** for more details.

West Country

Saturday **15 September** 2 - 5pm
Meeting to briefly introduce the Socialist
Party and discuss the formation of a
West of England branch. "The Village"
Pub, 33 Wilton Rd, Salisbury (near
Salisbury Railway station).
For further details contact Veronica
Clanchy on **01202 569826** or Ray Carr
on **01202 257556**



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DOUG BROWN, PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS, NORTH

£5.50 (including P & P) from the Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN. Cheques payable to 'The Socialist Party of Great Britain'

You and The Rent Act



October 6th is a significant date in landlord's diaries, for on that day the first instalment of rent increases under the new Rent Act becomes payable. Even if the reader of this article has not the dubious advantage of living in a rent-controlled property, it is highly probably that he or she has already faced a substantial rise in the cost-of-living due to rate-increases or to the withdrawal of housing subsidies.

(...)

From all this, one hopes that workers will realise (in case they hadn't realised it before) just how hollow was Mr. Butler's assertion that the standard of living would be doubled in twenty-five years, and just how empty were the election promises to solve the housing problem. Of one thing workers can be sure—that this Act will not get more houses built, and will not in the slightest degree

solve the problem of overcrowding and bad housing. One might add also that the Labour Party's proposals to nationalise rent-controlled property and put up the rents will do just as little to solve them. The solution to the problem is fairly obvious—that is, for building workers to build decent homes for the people to live in, without landlords, without investment, and without rent-control or rents. The trouble is that Capitalism does not permit of simple solutions of this kind, and so we go on, eternally arguing about what are not more than the effects of an irrational, crazy social system, instead of doing the obvious thing—to replace that system by a sane and reasonable one.

(From front page article by A.W.I., *Socialist Standard*, September 1957)

Declaration of Principles

This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1.That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.)

by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

2.That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

3.That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

4.That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom,

the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6.That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7.That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8.The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.



Like father like son

"If the history of family politicians tells us that successive generations learn little or nothing from experience, the same, must be said about the people who vote to keep them in power."

There is no reason to believe that he was asked what he thought about it but Tony Benn has been transmogrified from an unbending leftwing critic, protester and campaigner into a National Treasure. Manacled in this identity he will find that participation in any future marches, petitions or demonstrations will provoke only the kind of fond indulgence normally given to senile dogs. In addition Benn may be disturbed by the fact that no offspring has followed in his stumbling political footsteps, for his son Hilary made his attitude clear from the very beginning of his time as an MP: "I am a Benn but not a Bennite" – which may be translated as "please forget all that daring but embarrassing stuff I once raved on about – my career is more important to me than any principles you may have attributed to me".

We may ask why there are so few examples of admiring offspring following a parent into a successful career in politics – which is, after all, supposed to be an honourable profession with rewards both material and in public esteem. Is it just a matter of rebellious youth defying parental assumptions? Or is there something about the work and the esteem which discourages?



Tony and Hilary Benn



The Greenwoods

Arthur Greenwood was a leading Labour figure, an MP from 1922 until his death in 1954, who held a number of Cabinet posts. In the chaotic 1929/31 Labour government he was Minister of Health and in 1935 he became Clement Attlee's deputy leader. In the wartime coalition Churchill made him Minister Without Portfolio and then in 1941 Chairman of the Reconstruction Committee – a grandly titled body with the even grander job of organising post-war reconstruction. This committee was expected to produce practical proposals covering a wide range of spheres of action and to this end Greenwood recruited a number of economists and others who thought highly enough of themselves to believe that, at that time of extreme peril for British capitalism, their opinions would have any effect on governmental policy.

In any case the very fact of Greenwood's appointment was evidence of the low priority given to post-war "reconstruction" for his serious drink problem made him quite incapable of keeping up with the demands of the job. Mercifully, in 1942 he was sacked (the Committee had met only four times) and the government could get on with the serious business of organising the slaughter.

His dismissal from the Cabinet left Greenwood free to take on the (unpaid) unofficial leadership of the opposition. The style of his "opposition" may be judged by his contribution to a debate, in February 1943, on the Beveridge Report, heartily welcomed by so many war-weary people under the impression that the type of reforms Beveridge was proposing would be the reward for all their suffering during the war. The coalition, however, was not to be rushed into any such extravagance and Greenwood, by pre-arrangement with the government, introduced an analgesic motion greeting the Report with the meaningless hope that it would – sometime, somehow, somewhere – be implemented.

Anthony Greenwood

In the post war Labour government Greenwood held a couple of minor jobs but his health steadily declined; in 1950, virtually immobile, he was brought to the Commons in a wheelchair by his son Anthony. "He looked dying" recorded Tory MP Henry Channon, "...Anthony, also a Member, has a Surbiton accent but a pleasant, well-soaped appearance". That was alright then, everything well set for another, eminently acceptable, Greenwood to take his place in the most exclusive club in the world where they do the business of managing British capitalism.

Greenwood Junior was among those who conform to whatever the priorities of capitalism demand while protesting that their principles as left wingers would prevent them behaving in that way. A member of the anti-nuclear movement from its early days as the Hydrogen Bomb National Campaign Committee, he stood for the party

leadership against Hugh "Fight And Fight Again" Gaitskell, who won with almost three quarters of the votes cast. Gaitskell's death in 1963 brought Wilson into the leadership and Greenwood was plucked from the back benches to become Secretary of State for the Colonies. This was either a mistake by Wilson or an example of labyrinthine subtlety for he had grumbled to Barbara Castle that "Tony has no brains. I soon realised that all he is good at is public relations" – a breathtaking sneer from one who was himself a keen student of the shadowy art of public relations.

Anthony Greenwood had responsibility for a number of decisions which would have outraged any self-respecting left winger. In 1964 there was concern, in London and Washington, that a general election in British Guiana would bring into power a government led by Cheddi Jagan, who was likely to pursue policies unfavourable to American interests in the area. Stifling his earlier reservations for such subversive, undemocratic activity, Greenwood co-operated with the Americans in an intelligence campaign successfully aimed at undermining Jagan's chances in the election. In 1965 the Americans had designs on building a nuclear base on Diego Garcia, an island in the Indian Ocean. The problem was that the islanders did not want to leave so they were removed forcibly, through deportation or attrition; for example Britain bought the only employer on the island and then closed it down. By 1975 the job was finished and the base was there, where once the islanders fished, farmed and harvested the copra.

Hilary Benn

There is nothing in the family antecedents for any existent Greenwood to take pride in. But the tradition, or whatever it is, lives on; the grandson of Anthony Greenwood, Leo Murray, is a co-founder of Plane Stupid, an organisation which in its own way tries to defy the realities of capitalism by campaigning against airport expansion. Watch out for Leo Murray; there is time for him also to get into Parliament, become a minister and forget the days when he was devoted to trying to make capitalism behave out of character.

Such has been the story of so many politicians, among them Hilary Benn, a fourth generation MP who began as a local councillor at Ealing in London. That was in 1979, when Ealing surprised itself by electing a council which, with policies which were presented as eradicating discrimination but which on balance probably had the opposite effect, made them contenders with others such as Camden and Hackney for the title of loony lefties. At the same time Ealing council significantly upped the local rate which, to voters who are under the delusion that such things are important to them, was little short of electoral suicide. In 1983 and 1987 it almost certainly helped to increase the majority for the sitting Tory MP for Ealing North, where Benn was making his first attempt to get into Parliament. Avoiding another failure at that constituency, in 1999 Benn was returned at a by-election for Leeds Central. He has been the most compliant of Labour MPs, voting for ID cards, university top-up fees, the war in Iraq, replacing Trident...and he has moved smoothly up the greasy pole, to his present Cabinet job in charge of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Enough has been said and written about Hilary Benn's father Tony Benn, left wing irritant turned National Treasure. It is however useful to remember that he was a minister in as succession of Labour governments during the 1960s and 1970s, beginning with Postmaster General for Harold Wilson in 1964 and including the misery and chaos of the infamous Winter of Discontent. Among his notable achievements was his very own carbon footprinting when he oversaw development of the Concorde airliner which, apart from what it did to the ozone layer, was the rich person's exclusive mode of air travel.

If the history of family politicians tells us that successive generations learn little or nothing from experience – well the same, even more so, must be said about the people who, in obdurate masochism, vote to keep them in power. ■

IVAN

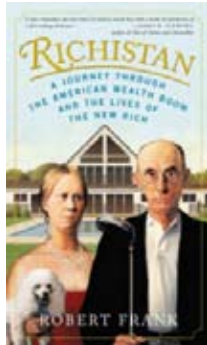


Outdated Marxism?

One of the oppositions to Marxism is that it is so out-dated, it is so 19th century. So let us get up-to-date. "The Royal College of Midwives (RCM) is to ballot its members on industrial action over pay, the first time in its 125-year history that such a move has been made. ...The decision to ballot 23,000 midwives, taken at an RCM council meeting last night, follows the government's announcement that midwives and nurses would get a 2.5% pay rise in two stages, amounting to 1.9% across the year." (*Guardian*, 20 July) It just shows you how outdated Marxism is, after all in 1848 in the Communist Manifesto Marx and Engels wrote, "The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverend awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourer." How outdated, they never even mentioned midwives did they?

Loads Of Money

The *Wall Street Journal* employ Robert Frank to record the comings and goings of the super-rich, so he has decided to publish his findings in his book *Richistan: A Journey through the 21st Century Wealth Boom and the Lives of the New Rich*. This was reviewed by Tim Adams who came up with a couple of statistics that should interest all workers. "There are many statistics that attach themselves to Richistan. These are two telling ones; Wall Street's five biggest firms paid out \$36 billion in bonuses in 2006; and while in the Seventies the average American chief executive typically took home 40 times the wage of his average employee, he now pockets 170 times that of his typical minion." (*Observer*, 22 July) As a "typical minion" how do you feel about that?



Worked To Death

We are all familiar with the old saw "hard work never killed anybody", but it just isn't true as can be seen from the following report. "The number of people killed at work has risen to its highest level in five year, according to figures released by the Health and Safety Commission, whose strength has been cut by 1,000 over the same period. Of 241 fatalities in the last year compared with 217 the previous year, the greatest number, 77 - up 31% were on building sites. Sir Bill Callaghan, the HSE chair said the increase was disappointing. The TUC general secretary



Brendan Barber, said each death was preventable. 'Increasing the likelihood of a visit from a safety inspector would make a real difference.'" (*Guardian*, 27 July) Why increase the expenditure on safety? It cuts profits and capitalism hates that.

Same The World Over

"Mexican telecom tycoon Carlos Slim, who is estimated by some calculations to be wealthier than Microsoft founder Bill Gates, said Thursday he did not care if he was the world's richest person. ...In July, a journalist who tracks the fortunes of wealthy Mexicans said Slim was worth an estimated \$67.8 billion and had overtaken Gates as the world's richest person. Slim hit the No. 1 spot after a recent surge in the share price of his America Movil, Latin America's largest cell phone company, according to Eduardo Garcia of the online financial publication Sentido Comun. Garcia said that made him close to \$8.6 billion wealthier than Gates, whose estimated worth was

\$59.2 billion. ...In Mexico, a small elite holds most of the country's wealth and about half the population lives on less than \$5 a day." (*Yahoo News*, 3 August)

Homeless Heroes

We are all familiar with cheering crowds applauding soldiers as they march to war and the praise of politicians as they fall over each other in adulation of service veterans, but the reality is far different. "One in 10 homeless people in the UK are former members of the armed forces, a charity working with veterans says. A survey in 1997 by the Ex-Service Action Group on Homelessness suggested that 22% of people who were street homeless had a military background. Veterans charity, the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation, said that efforts by the government and the voluntary sector had brought that down to about 10%. It fears the numbers may rise because of service in Iraq and Afghanistan." (*BBC News*, 7 August) "When Johnnie Comes Marching Home" may have been an old popular song but today there is no home nor house either.

Illusion And Reality

Many people imagine that with retirement comes a pleasant period in a hard-working life. Alas, the reality is far from idyllic for many workers. "Pensioners are burdened with debts of £57 billion from mortgages and credit cards, new figures show. One fifth of retired people are still paying off a mortgage and a third owe an average of £5,900 on credit cards and loans, says Scottish Widows, the insurer. The 11 million pensioners who are still making repayments owe an average of £38,000 on their homes, compared with £35,000 last year. One in eight owe more than £50,000." (*Times*, 13 August)

Your last bill is overdue
Please pay your current
For information on ways to pay please
Debit with us. See reverse for details.

Free Lunch

by Rigg

