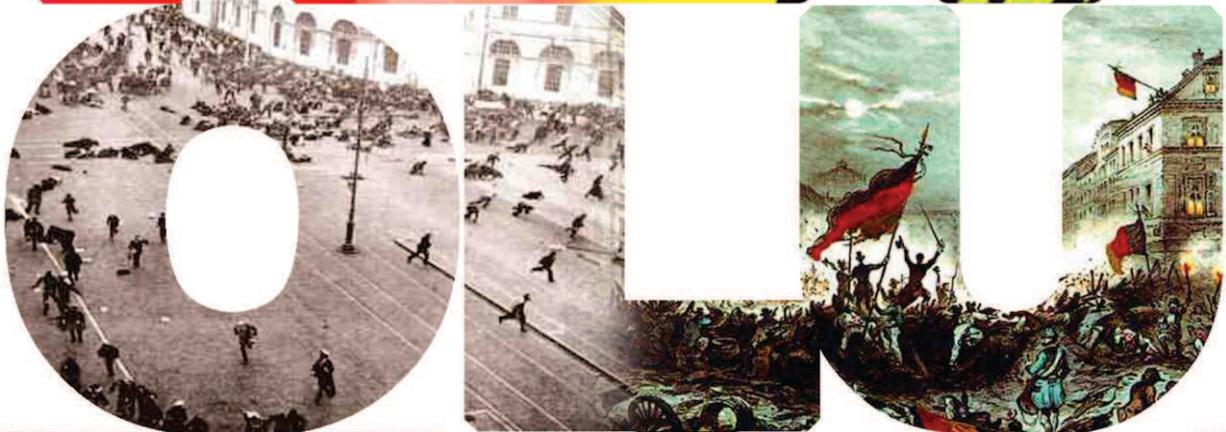


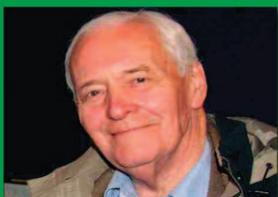
# socialist standard

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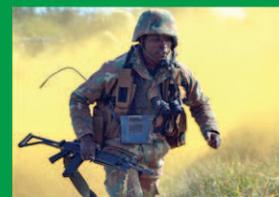
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## The Socialist Party

52 Clapham High Street,  
London SW4 7UN

Tel: 0207 622 3811

Email: [spgb@worldsocialism.org](mailto:spgb@worldsocialism.org)

Website: [www.worldsocialism.org/spgb](http://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb)

Blog: <http://socialismoryourmoneyback.blogspot.com/>

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The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 3 May** at the address above. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the Editorial Committee.

## Contact Details

SPGB Media: [spgb.media@worldsocialism.org](mailto:spgb.media@worldsocialism.org)

### UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

#### LONDON

**North London branch.** Meets 3rd Tues 8pm in April & June at Torriano Meeting House, 99 Torriano Ave, NW5 2RX

and 2nd Tues 7.30pm in May at The Coronet, 338 Holloway Rd, N7 6NJ

Contact: [chris.dufton@talktalk.net](mailto:chris.dufton@talktalk.net) or 020 7609 0983

**South London branch.** Meets 1st Tues. 7.00pm. Head Office. 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN. Tel: 020 7622 3811

**West London branch.** Meets 1st & 3rd Tues. 8pm. Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace (corner Sutton Court Rd), W4. Corres: 51 Gayford Road, London W12 9BY. Tel: 020 8740 6677. Email: [tenner@abelgratis.com](mailto:tenner@abelgratis.com)

#### MIDLANDS

**West Midlands Regional branch.** Meets last Sunday of the month, the Briar Rose pub, 25 Bennetts Hill, Birmingham B2 5RE.

E-Mail: [vincent.otter@globalnet.co.uk](mailto:vincent.otter@globalnet.co.uk). Tel: 01242 675357

#### NORTHEAST

**Northeast branch.** Contact: Brian Barry, 86 Edgmond Ct, Ryhope, Sunderland SR2 0DY. Tel: 0191 521 0690.

#### NORTHWEST

**Lancaster branch.** Meets fortnightly 8.30pm. P. Shannon, 10 Green Street, Lancaster LA1 1DZ. Tel: 01524 382380 Email: [spgb.lancaster@worldsocialism.org](mailto:spgb.lancaster@worldsocialism.org)

**Manchester branch.** Paul Bennett, 6 Burleigh Mews, Hardy Lane, M21 7LB. Tel: 0161 860 7189

**Bolton.** Tel: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589  
**Cumbria.** Brendan Cummins, 19 Queen St, Millom, Cumbria LA18 4BG

**Carlisle:** Robert Whitfield. Email: [robdotbob@gmail.com](mailto:robdotbob@gmail.com) Tel: 07906 373975

**Rochdale.** Tel: R. Chadwick. 01706 522365  
**Southeast Manchester.** Enquiries: Blanche Preston, 68 Fountains Road, M32 9PH

#### YORKSHIRE

**Yorkshire Regional Branch:** Richard Rainferd, 28 Armitage Rd, Armitage Bridge, Huddersfield HD4 7PD. Tel: 01484 327468 [richardrainferd@gmail.com](mailto:richardrainferd@gmail.com)

#### SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

**Kent and Sussex Regional branch.** Meets second Sunday every month at 2.00pm at The Muggleton Inn, High Street, Maidstone ME14 1HJ.

Email: [spgb.ksr@worldsocialism.org](mailto:spgb.ksr@worldsocialism.org)  
Tel: 07973 142701.

**South West Regional branch.** Meets 2nd Saturday of each month in the Railway Tavern, Salisbury, 2.00pm (check before attending). Shane Roberts, 86 High Street, Bristol BS5 6DN. Tel: 0117 9511199

**Canterbury.** Rob Cox, 4 Stanhope Road, Deal, Kent, CT14 6AB

**Luton.** Nick White, 59 Heywood Drive, LU2 7LP

**Redruth.** Harry Sowden, 5 Clarence Villas, Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 1PB. Tel: 01209 219293

#### EAST ANGLIA

**East Anglian Regional branch.** Meets every two months on a Saturday afternoon (see meetings page for details).

Pat Deutz, 11 The Links, Billericay, CM12 0EX. [n.deutz@btinternet.com](mailto:n.deutz@btinternet.com)

David Porter, Eastholme, Bush Drive, Eccles-on-Sea, NR12 0SF. Tel: 01692 582533.

Richard Headicar, 42 Woodcote, Firs Rd, Hethersett, NR9 3JD. Tel: 01603 814343.

**Cambridge.** Andrew Westley, 10 Marksby Close, Duxford, Cambridge CB2 4RS. Tel: 07890343044

#### IRELAND

**Cork:** Kevin Cronin, 5 Curragh Woods, Frankfield, Cork. Tel: 021 4896427. Email: [mariekev@eircom.net](mailto:mariekev@eircom.net)

**Newtownabbey:** Nigel McCullough. Tel: 028 90852062.

#### SCOTLAND

**Edinburgh branch.** Meets 1st Thur. 7.00-9.00pm. The Quaker Hall, Victoria Terrace (above Victoria Street), Edinburgh. J. Moir. Tel: 0131 440 0995.

[JIMMY@jmoir29.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:JIMMY@jmoir29.freeserve.co.uk) Branch website:

<http://geocities.com/edinburghbranch/>

**Glasgow branch.** Meets 3rd Wednesday of each month at 8pm in Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road, Glasgow. Peter Hendrie, 75 Lairhills Road, East Kilbride, Glasgow G75 0LH. Tel: 01355 903105. Email: [peter.anna.hendrie@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:peter.anna.hendrie@blueyonder.co.uk).

**Dundee.** Ian Ratcliffe, 16 Birkhall Ave, Wormit, Newport-on-Tay, DD6 8PX. Tel: 01328 541643.

**Kilmarnock.** Meets last Thursday of month 7pm-9pm at the Wheatsheaf pub (about 2 minutes from bus station). Paul Edwards. Tel: 01563 541138. Email: [rainbow3@btopenworld.com](mailto:rainbow3@btopenworld.com)

**Lothian Socialist Discussion @Autonomous Centre Edinburgh, ACE, 17 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh EH7 5HA.** Meets 4th Wednesday of each month 7.30-9.00pm. Tel: F.Anderson 07724 082753.

#### WALES

**Swansea branch.** Meets 2nd Mon, 7.30pm, Unitarian Church, High Street. Corres: Geoffrey Williams, 19 Baptist Well Street, Waun Wen, Swansea SA1 6FB. Tel: 01792 643624

**Cardiff and District.** Corres: Richard Botterill, 21 Pen-Y-Bryn Rd, Gabalfa, Cardiff, CF14 3LG. Tel: 02920-615826 Email: [richardbotterill@hotmail.com](mailto:richardbotterill@hotmail.com)

#### Llandudno

Contact: Gareth Whitley - Email: [gwhitley@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:gwhitley@hotmail.co.uk)

### INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS

**Latin America.** J.M. Morel, Calle 7 edif 45 apto 102, Multis nuevo La loteria, La Vega, Rep. Dominicana.

#### AFRICA

**Kenya.** Patrick Ndege, PO Box 78105, Nairobi.

**Swaziland.** Mandla Ntshakala, PO Box 981, Manzini.

**Zambia.** Kephass Mulenga, PO Box 280168, Kitwe.

#### ASIA

**Japan.** Michael. Email: [japan.wsm@gmail.com](mailto:japan.wsm@gmail.com)

#### AUSTRALIA

Trevor Clarke, [wspa.info@yahoo.com.au](mailto:wspa.info@yahoo.com.au)

#### EUROPE

**Denmark.** Graham Taylor, Kjaerslund 9, floor 2 (middle), DK-8260 Viby J

**Germany.** Norbert.

E-mail: [weltsozialismus@gmx.net](mailto:weltsozialismus@gmx.net)

**Norway.** Robert Stafford.

Email: [hallblithe@yahoo.com](mailto:hallblithe@yahoo.com)

**Italy.** Gian Maria Freddi, Via Felice Casorati n. 6A, 37131 Verona

**Spain.** Alberto Gordillo, Avenida del Parque 2/2/3 Puerta A, 13200 Manzanares.

### COMPANION PARTIES OVERSEAS

**Socialist Party of Canada/Parti Socialiste du Canada.** Box 4280, Victoria B.C. V8X 3X8 Canada.

Email: [SPC@iname.com](mailto:SPC@iname.com)

**World Socialist Party (New Zealand) P.O.** Box 1929, Auckland, NI, New Zealand.

**World Socialist Party of the United States** P.O. Box 440247, Boston, MA 02144 USA.

Email: [boston@wspus.org](mailto:boston@wspus.org)

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# Introducing The Socialist Party

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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.

**If you would like more details about The Socialist Party, complete and return the form on page 23.**



# socialist standard

APRIL 2014

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## Editorial

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### Russia, Ukraine and Crimea

AS ALWAYS at times of international crisis, we are bombarded by strident propaganda from both sides – propaganda that skilfully combines half-truths, distortions and outright lies. In Ukraine and Russia the resulting mix is emotionally potent enough to set working people speaking slightly different languages at one another's throats.

Each side summons the revered ghosts of World War Two to its ranks. Pro-Ukrainian scribblers present Putin as a new Hitler. Russian propaganda calls the change of regime in Kiev a 'fascist coup' and casts Russia as a heroic knight setting out once again to save Europe from fascism.

Although there are some parallels between post-Soviet Russia and Weimar Germany, Putin is hardly an adventurer on the same grand scale as Hitler. He is, rather, taking advantage of disarray inside a neighbouring country to reincorporate marginal territory with strong historical ties to Russia (as he did in Georgia in 2008).

Of course, the breakdown of the previous consensus against the diplomatic recognition of secession has encouraged such border adjustments. If the Western states can help Kosovo secede from Serbia, asks Putin, why should Russia not help Crimea secede from Ukraine?

Russian talk about a 'fascist coup' does have some basis in reality. The 'Maidan' movement may well have started as a peaceful protest of citizens against the corrupt and oppressive government of President Yanukovich, but it was the violent clashes between police and armed insurgents that finally brought that government down. And it was semi-fascist groups of Ukrainian ultra-nationalists – in particular, the Right

Sector led by Dmytro Yarosh – who played the leading role in the insurgency and were rewarded with posts in the new government.

What strains credulity is the claim that Russia's annexation of Crimea has anything to do with resisting fascism. Even before the annexation local militias were quite effective in keeping Ukrainian ultra-nationalists (and all other 'Maidanites') out of the peninsula. If there is a threat of 'fascism' in Crimea, it comes from *Russian* ultra-nationalists – like the men who dress up as Cossacks and whip opponents of the secessionist regime. Such people are also active in the current protests in the cities of Eastern Ukraine against the new 'Orange' government. For example, Pavel Gubarev, a leader of the pro-Russian protests in Donetsk, is a former member of the fascist organisation Russian National Unity.

Why then has Putin annexed Crimea? There are strategic and economic interests at stake.

Crimea is crucial to strategic control of the Black Sea. Russia's Black Sea Fleet is based at Sevastopol and other Crimean ports. Russia leased the bases from Ukraine, but the term of the leasing agreement was to expire in 2017 and the agreement was unlikely to be renewed.

A great deal of Crimean real estate is Russian-owned. In late February Russia's Ministry of Economic Development called on Russian capitalists to invest \$5 billion in infrastructural projects in Crimea (port infrastructure, roads, etc.). Gazprom is interested in rich oil and gas deposits off Crimea's coast, as are such Western companies as Exxon, Shell and ENI.

# Mission Statement

INTEREST WAS pricked recently in socialist circles by a *Guardian* environmental blog report of a NASA-funded study suggesting that a 'perfect storm' of five economic and environmental factors, namely population, climate, water, agriculture, and energy, were leading to the imminent collapse of industrial civilisation ('Nasa-funded study: industrial civilisation headed for 'irreversible collapse'?', *Guardian Online*, 14 March). According to the *Guardian's* Earth Insight blog, the study is funded by NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center and is the product of a cross-disciplinary team of natural and social scientists based at the University of Maryland (UMD). Their argument is that there is a 5000 year history of civilisation collapses and that they all have two crucial and related factors in common, the 'stretching of resources due to the strain on the ecological carrying capacity' (also key in Jared Diamond's 2005 study *Collapse*) and, somewhat more controversially to anyone but socialists, the 'economic stratification of society into Elites [rich] and Masses (or 'commoners')[poor]'.

Reading eerily like a *Socialist Standard* editorial, the study states that '... accumulated surplus is not evenly distributed throughout society, but rather has been controlled by an elite. The mass of the population, while producing the wealth, is only allocated a small portion of it by elites, usually at or just above subsistence levels.' Technology won't help, the study says, because net consumption will simply rise to match net increased output. Neither will appeals to those elites themselves be any use, because their monopoly on wealth and resources means that they are protected from the 'detrimental effects of the environmental collapse until much later than the Commoners' with the result that they blindly continue their policy of 'business as usual'. This I'm-alright-Jack mentality, argues the study, is why 'historical collapses were allowed to occur by elites who appear to be oblivious to the catastrophic trajectory.' But even where elites bother to address these problems at all, they tend to oppose any conclusion requiring fundamental structural change in society and instead 'point to the long sustainable trajectory 'so far' in support of doing nothing.'

It's worth distinguishing between collapse as envisaged here and two other kinds of collapse as described by ecologists and left-wingers. Ecological collapse, where the world simply dies, is an extreme and largely nonsensical idea. It's also unlikely that humans could damage the world so badly that it became uninhabitable to humans. The collapse of capitalism through its own internal contradictions, a kind of Get-out-of-capitalism-free card devoutly wished for by some on the left, is equally unlikely and anyway undesirable (see *Cooking the Books*, page X). This study describes scenarios which are more plausible because they are consistent with evidence from historical events. In its view, it is not so much nature which fails but workers, through catastrophic immiseration: 'the Elites eventually consume too much, resulting in a famine among Commoners that eventually causes the collapse of society. It is important to note that this [possible scenario] is due to an inequality-induced famine that causes a loss of workers, rather than a collapse of Nature.'

The two key solutions in the study, as quoted in the blog article, are as follows: 'Collapse can be avoided and population can reach equilibrium if the per capita rate of depletion of nature is reduced to a sustainable level, and if resources are distributed in a reasonably equitable fashion.' Since the study has already identified the fact that all the wealth and power are in the hands of elites who don't listen to reason, the likelihood of achieving either of these aims through political reform of capitalism stands at zero. That being the case, the logical conclusion to draw is that the global elites must be immediately dispossessed and overthrown along with the capitalist system which placed them in power.

Is budget-strapped NASA really promoting global socialist revolution? It hardly seems likely. It's not so far been possible to obtain a copy of the study, and investigation of the sources behind the story has proved frustrating. A search of NASA's website reveals no trace of any such study. Ditto the Goddard Space Centre. Apart from a brief synopsis of a seminar given by the named lead researcher last October, there is also no report offered by the National Socio-Environmental Synthesis Center (SESYNC), based at UMD and supposedly where the study originates. The researcher is a bona fide graduate student whose PhD studies may well be funded in some part by Goddard, and his cross-disciplinary colleagues are mostly respectable Maryland professors of public policy, hydrology, geography, meteorology and a weird hybrid, 'econophysics'. However the study is set to be published in the peer-reviewed academic journal *Ecological Economics*, which has had a rocky history and some credibility issues, as has the field of ecological economics in general. According to its current Wikipedia entry the journal has lost focus on its core field and now 'seems to accept anything to do with the environment and economics from any field'.

Hard to fathom too is the role of the *Guardian* journalist behind this scoop, Dr Nafeez Ahmed, whose by-line bills him as executive director of the Institute for Policy Research & Development (IPRD). Apart from a member page entry on the Stanford University MAHB website (Millennium Alliance for Humanity and the Biosphere) which describes IPRD as a London-based 'voluntary global collective of specialist scholars, scientists, and analysts, working in different fields of the social and physical sciences', this Institute appears to exist in name only, with a web address that doesn't work. Dr Ahmed is also the author of a 2011 book, *The Crisis of Civilization*, whose main thrust seems if not identical to that of the UMD study then along very similar lines (see review of this in *Socialist Standard*, February 2011). He advocates certain key resources like energy and water being placed in a 'global Commons' which is immune from monopolisation by any elite. This is encouraging, but then why not all resources? He argues for 'more equal access' but then why not just 'equal access'? Disappointingly the agent of much of this redistribution is, he proposes, banks, an idea which shows that even would-be revolutionary thinkers just can't let go of capitalist institutions no matter how hard they try. It turns out that Dr Ahmed also has a day job as chief research officer for the London-based PR company Unitas, which lists among its services 'media positioning' and 'pre-empting negative media coverage'. This prompts a number of wild speculations. One is that the research team have adopted the increasingly common but dubious practice among scientists of engaging a PR firm to 'spin' their study in the popular press prior to academic publication, either for simple promotional purposes or to offset anticipated hostile reactions. Another is that the Maryland team and the Institute are in cahoots, or even one and the same, while preferring to appear as objectively independent for purposes of academic credibility. As we go to press enquiries to Dr Ahmed and to the lead researcher of the Maryland team have not met with any response.

It would be good to know for sure whether NASA is genuinely behind this, even indirectly. It certainly ought to be. NASA gives itself a bold strapline: Earth. Your Future. Our Mission. So in among its studies of hurricanes, sinkholes, salt and the anatomy of a raindrop it really ought to find space for any serious study that suggests Earth has no future unless the mission parameters change drastically.



# Tony Benn – Rebel’s End



BY NOW we are accustomed, if nauseated, each time a self-promoting rebel – in sport, entertainment, politics – warns us of the end of their need to be disruptive by transforming themselves into something called A National Treasure. This was how it was with Tony Benn who died last month. Among the outpourings of blather there was Ed Miliband: ‘iconic figure of our age, a great parliamentarian and a conviction politician’. Then David Cameron: ‘a magnificent writer, speaker, diarist and campaigner with a strong record of public and political service’. And Benn himself, shortly before he died: ‘the nation’s political grandfather’. Even Denis Healey, Benn’s bitterest enemy when they were fighting each other over the Labour leadership (Benn was an ‘unprincipled careerist’) persuaded himself to comment moderately, suitable to his great age.

We did not contribute to that tsunami of hypocrisy. We have seen too many of capitalism’s political leaders grappling for power by promising to change this social system, out of its essential character, but doing little more than re-arranging some of its more toxic effects while tagging it with another name. Among that parade of frauds and cheats the Labour Party has been most persistent and damaging. And in that party’s disreputable history Tony Benn ranks high as a Treasure, a Grandfather... As examples of his ‘socialism’, during his time as a Minister in the 1960s and 1970s he was involved in many developments such as the creation of the giant motor firm British Leyland which was combined from other similar firms to be in competition with foreign companies such as Volkswagen, Renault, Vauxhall but which floundered. He was enthusiastic about the Concorde airliner, which was sleek and fast but did not fulfil the hopes that it would see off the American Boeing

Corporation. Benn’s fantasy about that rolled out to be no better than flying for the rich – but carrying unforeseen technical faults which eventually wiped it out.

In 1979 Benn agreed to be interviewed by two members of the Socialist Party on the basis of his recently published book *Arguments for Socialism*. An edited account of the interview (approved by Benn), was published in the *Socialist Standard* of January 1980. Benn was first asked for his definition of socialism but then had to be repeatedly encouraged to do just that instead of offering vague, often contradictory, evasions. Our final comment, after outlining socialism as ‘a world common-ownership society with free access and voluntary co-operation’ was to remind Benn that the logic of his argument led, not to socialism but to different forms of capitalism. We had not expected that he would be in any way diverted by the case for socialism and at the end of his life our comment in the 1970s – that ‘capitalism today is as terrible a system to live under as it ever was’ – is as pertinent as ever. Benn’s final comment was ‘Well anyway I’ve enjoyed it very much. A stern cross-examination’.

*Next month we analyse in more detail Tony Benn’s career and politics.*

## The Socialist Party of Great Britain Summer School



**20th - 22nd June 2014  
Fircroft College, Birmingham**

Capitalism causes war. In the last hundred years there has been a proliferation of war: two world wars, countless other conflicts and civil wars, the Cold War with its threat of nuclear armageddon, and today the ‘War on Terror’. Socialists do not support capitalist wars, which veil the class struggle by developing a false sense of identity between the working class and the capitalist class. The interests of the two classes are always antagonistic, and that is why as socialists we speak of the class war. Socialism means, among other things, internationalism, rather than nationalism which always contributes to war.

Our weekend of talks, workshops and discussion will examine the role of war in capitalism and how only socialism can abolish war from the Earth.

Full residential rate: £80

Concessionary residential rate: £40

Day visitors are welcome, but please book in advance

To make a booking, send a cheque (payable to the Socialist Party of Great Britain) to Summer School, Sutton Farm, Aldborough, Boroughbridge, York, YO51 9ER

e-mail [spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk) with any enquiries



## All Things Bright and Beautiful?

*'The rich man in his castle the poor man at his gate, God made them high and lowly and ordered their estate'*

REMEMBER HAVING to sing that during school assemblies? It was before schools discreetly dropped the verse because, to those of us whose estate was more likely to have been a council one than an ancestral mansion with a few hundred acres of land, it pointed out where God's political sympathies lie just a bit too bluntly.

Ah, the good old days. The Church of England wasn't known as 'The Tory Party at Prayer' for nothing and they could be honest about their views on the place of the working class.

But things change. These days, just as in any other business, the old firm of Church of England Ltd has stiff competition, and to retain its share of the market has had to update and improve its public image. And the competition to recruit gullible believers has never been fiercer. While the C of E now attract smaller and smaller congregations, and thus smaller collection plates, the 'happy-clappy' born-again, and the born-yesterday brands are recruiting hard and forging ahead. And they frequently need plastic buckets for their collections.

So once the rumours that poverty and food banks do actually exist in working class Britain finally penetrated Lambeth Palace, and it dawned on them that unlike other banks, these don't pay out millions in bonuses to their bosses every year, the bishops have swooped into action. Prodded on perhaps by stories in the press such as 'Woman in coma told to find work by DWP' (*Independent*, 28 February) and 'Vulnerable man starved to death after cut to benefits' (*Guardian*, 1 March) they have come flying to the rescue of the poor like a heavenly host of dog-collared Batman and Robins.

They're quite cross too, and have told David Cameron that 'We must, as a society, face up to the fact that over half of people using food banks have been put in that situation by cutbacks to and failures in the benefits system'. And to show they mean business they've launched an 'End Hunger Fast'

campaign. This involves asking volunteers to join them for a 'National Day of Fasting' on 4 April and, as an added attraction, includes a couple of vicars announcing that they would only be taking fruit juice and water for 40 days. That will certainly give Cameron and Co something to think about.

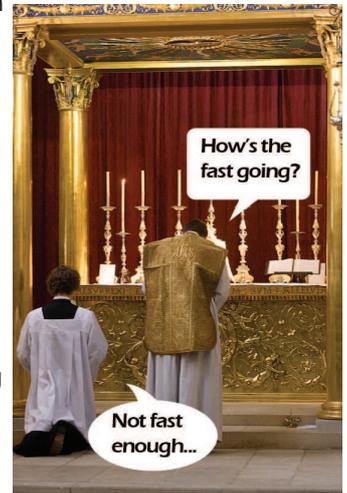
Is the Halo Halo column being a bit churlish here perhaps, do you think? This attack by the government on the poorest in society is one of the most vicious for some time and, as the bishops point out, the fact that in the world's seventh richest country thousands are forced to rely on food banks, 5,500 have been admitted to hospital with malnutrition since last Easter, and numerous single mothers are skipping meals to enable them to feed their children is nothing short of scandalous.

The problem is that religious do-gooder events are no answer to the problem. Thousands are already fasting full time – because they don't have any choice. Instead of stunts where vicars pretend to go hungry, or Tory MPs pretend to live (for a couple of days) on fifty quid a week to show that it can be done, the only solution is conscious class action against the system which causes the problem.

The bishops may be outraged by unemployment and poverty, and rant on about loan sharks, but what the hell do they expect? That's capitalism for you. And the Church of England itself holds investments of about £5.2 billion in capitalist ventures – which included, as came to light last July, a hefty sum invested in Wonga, the payday loan outfit. Political virgins they may be, but how do they think the profits on their investments are generated?

Patronising the poor with charity stunts is insulting and useless. Instead of skipping your corn flakes for Jesus, we urge all members of the working class get involved in the class struggle to end this degrading and unnecessary nightmare.

**NW**

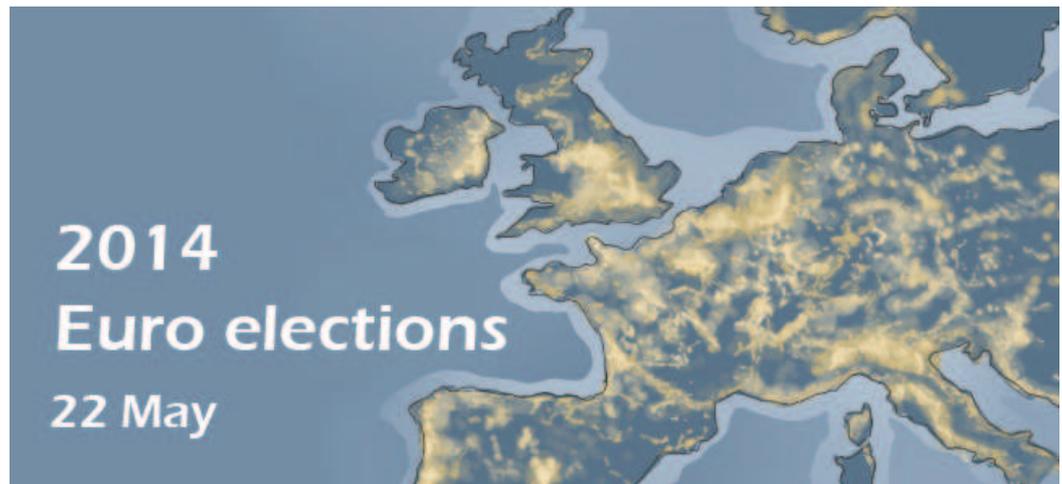


## PARTY NEWS

### Socialists standing in Euro-elections

THE SOCIALIST Party is standing in Wales and the South East Region of England in May's elections to the European Parliament.

The South East Region is the biggest in the country. It covers the counties of Oxford, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, the Isle of White, Surrey, Sussex and Kent and so big urban centres such as Southampton, Reading, Brighton and Oxford. There are some 6 million electors. We plan to distribute over 700,000 leaflets in 14 selected Westminster constituencies in the area (in addition to the centres just mentioned, others such as Canterbury, Dover,



Maidstone, Slough, Crawley and Milton Keynes).

Contesting Wales entitles us to a Party Election Broadcast in Wales, the first time in our history that we will have had one, and which will be broadcast some time in May.

The election is by proportional representation of party lists. We will be presenting a full list of 10 in the South East and 4 in Wales.

We will also be standing candidates

in the local elections in Islington and Lambeth in the London borough elections that are being held at the same time.

Election day is Thursday 22 May, so most of the campaigning will be from the end of April on. Any offers of help to distribute leaflets, write to the press, phone in to radio stations and the like, please contact election committee, by email at [spgb@worldsocialism.org](mailto:spgb@worldsocialism.org) or by post to: The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN

## Down with welfare?

THE *TIMES* (15 January) reported that George Osborne was to tell a conference organised by the think tank Open Europe that 'Europe will face further economic woes if it fails to cut welfare spending':

'As Angela Merkel has pointed out, Europe accounts for just over 7 per cent of the world's population, 25 per cent of its economy and 50 per cent of global social welfare spending. We can't go on like this.'

He didn't explain why not, but the implication must be that, to compete on world markets against the products made in countries which spend less on welfare, Europe has to reduce its welfare spending towards their levels. In other words, a race to the bottom.

One dictionary definition of 'welfare' is:

'1. good health, happiness, and prosperity. 2. the maintenance of persons in such a condition; money given for this purpose.' (*Oxford Reference Dictionary*)

On this definition, Osborne was in effect saying that, due to competition on the world market, all countries are forced to reduce the 'good health, happiness and prosperity' of their population. What an indictment of capitalism! And what a confirmation of the futility of reformists' attempts to make capitalism serve human welfare.

But is it true? One thing Osborne ignores is that 'welfare spending' is not motivated by a desire to improve human welfare but by a desire to improve the productivity of the workforce – a better educated, more healthy workforce feeling less insecure can produce more profits. This was in fact the capitalist rationale behind the introduction of the so-called Welfare State and why the drastic reduction of such spending to the levels in China or India which Osborne and Merkel seem to be proposing could prove to be counter-productive.

Osborne probably knows this and doesn't regard such spending as an unnecessary burden that has to come out of taxes that ultimately fall on profits any more than he does military spending which also comes from this. For him, both will be part of the necessary costs of running capitalism. What he will be against is welfare for those who can't or don't work and so are useless from a profit-making point of view – the sick, the disabled, the mentally ill, the old, the unemployed and the unemployable. In short, the most vulnerable members of capitalist society.

The fact that welfare has become a dirty word for capitalism shows that it is not a system geared to improving human welfare. If it was, then as productivity increased (as it does slowly from year to year) more resources would be devoted to services and amenities that enhance the welfare of everyone. But this is not what happens. Far from it. The pressure is downwards not upwards.

The fact is that capitalism is a system geared to making profits and accumulating them as more and more profit-seeking capital. That's the logic which is imposed on all countries through competition on the world market. In this sense Osborne and Merkel are right, but that's a convincing reason to get rid of capitalism and to replace it with a system in which the welfare of all can and will be the priority. Which is only possible on the basis of the common ownership and democratic control of productive resources and the end of production for the market with a view to profit.

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*Australian immigration police*

IT IS ironic that Australia, a nation built on immigration, enforces a strict policy upon newcomers, particularly those from countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan where it had a direct hand in causing much of the refugee problem. A far different position from a more welcoming attitude when thousands of Vietnamese Boat People were provided a safe haven.

It is equally incongruous that a government should take such pride in the effectiveness of its draconian approach that it declines to even disclose information and would censure the Australian media network ABC for not toeing the line with the appropriate subservience.

A convicted people-smuggler, serving a jail sentence in Indonesia, is in no doubt that he was assisting genuine political refugees and not as the Australian governments would prefer to describe them, economic refugees.

‘Of course they are genuine, of course. There are too many target killings, too many killings in [some countries]. They have no choice but to run. People fear for their lives’ (smh.com.au).

Ninety percent of Australia’s asylum seekers are found to be genuine refugees. The majority of them have experienced trauma from war, violence or the loss of loved ones. Many are victims of gross human rights violations or torture.

Indonesia’s foreign minister has called Australia’s policy to tow migrant boats back into Indonesian waters inhumane. Foreign minister Marty Natalegawa spoke after reports of a boat carrying 34 people from four countries was found drifting ashore in West Java.

‘Can such an [Australian Prime Minister Tony] Abbott administration policy be called the policy of a government that upholds human rights and humanity?’ he was quoted as saying (www.sbs.com.au).

Australia has established off-shore detention centres on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea and Nauru, run by G4S private security. These are token sovereign countries which are economically and politically dependent upon Australia and have little choice but to oblige their powerful neighbour. Instead of finding refuge in Australia, those who arrive by boat are sent to Pacific island detention centres, with little chance of resettlement in Australia. The most recent government figures available put the number of people in immigration detention facilities offshore and in Australia at 6,101, including 900 children. Australia’s Human Rights Commission has announced an inquiry into the mandatory detention of children seeking asylum.

‘These are children that, among other things, have been

denied freedom of movement, many of whom are spending important developmental years of their lives living behind wire in highly stressful environments.’ AHRC President Professor Gillian Triggs said. Prof Triggs highlighted a lack of co-operation from the immigration department. ‘I think I’d have to say over the last few months, we’ve had minimal co-operation in relation to the kinds of details that I need to know, particularly mental health, self-harm and the processes for those that are transferred,’ she said (bbc.co.uk).

‘Asylum seekers are being held in extremely cramped compounds in stifling heat, while being denied sufficient water and medical help,’ Amnesty International Australia’s spokesperson Graeme McGregor said, adding that they were ‘prison-like conditions.’

Human Rights Watch, in its 2014 report, said Australia had damaged its human rights record by persistently undercutting refugee protections. ‘Successive governments have prioritized domestic politics over Australia’s international legal obligations to protect the rights of asylum seekers and refugees. ... Too often, the government has attempted to demonise those trying to reach Australia by boat.’

Australia has international obligations to protect the human rights of all asylum seekers and refugees who arrive in Australia, regardless of how or where they arrive and whether they arrive with or without a visa. As a party to the Refugee Convention, Australia has agreed to ensure that asylum seekers who meet the definition of a refugee are not sent back to a country where their life or freedom would be threatened. Australia also has obligations not to return people who face a real risk of violation of certain human rights under

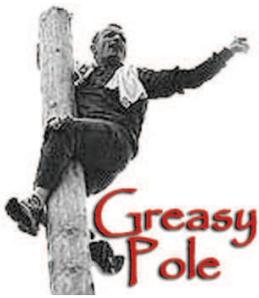


*Sidney detention centre protest*

the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These rights include the right not to be arbitrarily detained and not to send people to third countries where they would face a real risk of violation of their human rights under these instruments. These obligations also apply to people who have not been found to be refugees.

Once again we discover the reality that there is no such thing as ‘rights’ when a powerful ruling class decides to abrogate its legal responsibilities. When the victims are the weak, the vulnerable, and the helpless, it is all too easy for a callous government to incite populist prejudice and turn genuine human suffering into a cynical vote-catching ploy.

**ALJO**



# Mission Implausible

IT WAS enough to recall the reaction of Bumble the Beadle confronted by Oliver Twist asking for another spoonful of workhouse gruel when David Cameron described his government's drive to reduce the number of welfare benefit claimants as a 'Moral Mission... giving them new hope and responsibility' when in fact what they have to look forward to is a closer and more frequent acquaintance with the charity of the Food Banks. The truth of Cameron's phrase was exposed by the author of a recent report from the 'right wing' Policy Exchange think tank '... there are a significant number of people who have had their benefit taken away from them unfairly. Four weeks without any money is driving people to desperate measures'. Even worse – among the regular users of the Food Banks are people suffering from various health problems, including disablement, such that they are unable to work and rely on welfare benefits. Which often requires them to submit to a compulsory programme of tests of their capability and if they fail in this they are likely to be condemned to 'sanctions' – a reduction, or even a stop, of their benefit payments.

## ATOS

It is by way of justifying this process, with all its tensions and misery, that Cameron called for that Moral Mission with its assumption that imposed employment is a guarantee of a freer, happier, more fulfilling life. It was clear that bringing this callous fantasy into operation would require one of the specialist organisations of which the better known are SERCO, G4S, Capita Group – and ATOS – none which have been clear of controversy. The government contract was awarded to ATOS, which was formed in 1997 through a series of mergers, take-overs and sell-offs, now presenting itself as supplying hi-tech IT services and network connecting. In the United Kingdom it holds a £500 million government contract to organise and operate the Work Capability Assessment system which forms a judgement of benefit claimants' fitness to work and passes this to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). ATOS claims to do this '... using criteria set out by government, and provides the DWP with independent advice which is used by a DWP Decision Maker, along with any other information they have received, to decide on your entitlement to benefit'. As to their style in carrying out this delicate and sensitive work, their CEO Joe Hemming recently informed the House of Commons Public Administration Committee that it '... is proud of the work it does ...' with '... a real passion for delivering services to the citizen in a way that continues to satisfy the way the citizen wants to be served'.

## Protests

But the world outside Joe Hemming's fantasies has rather different experiences. In dealing with claimants who have been referred to them ATOS uses the Logical Integrated Medical Assessment (LIMA) method which works with a spreadsheet listing questions which have to be answered by the infamous Box Ticking method. Sitting there with a computer and a mouse the assessor (described by ATOS as a 'healthcare professional') does not rely on any special knowledge or qualifications or previous contact with the trembling applicant before

them. Among the results of these 'assessments' there was the 47-year old woman who was pestered to attend to have her Fitness for Work rated when she was in a coma after a heart attack. A 39-year old woman with three children was suffering from a brain tumour. She informed her assessor of this but was told to start looking for a job. Just weeks afterwards she died. In the year up to September 2013 there were 897,690 'sanctions' (would 'punishment' not be a more suitable word?) by the DWP carrying the threat of a stoppage of benefits. Predictably there was a flood of protest and appeals. During the final three months of that same period there were some 600,000 appeals with a success rate of 87 percent.

## Sanctions

It hardly needs to be said that the work of ATOS, in conjunction with that of the DWP, should always be done so that it is, at the very least, sensitive to the desperate existence of the people they are judging. But that does not happen. In 2013 a doctor who had been an ATOS assessor told the BBC that he had been 'instructed to change my reports, to reduce the number of points that might be awarded to the claimants. I felt that was wrong professionally and ethically'. It was the same for a nurse who said she had been instructed to mark down claimants she knew were unfit for work. It was predictable that claimants heavily dependent on charities and food banks should react aggressively to this treatment. The *Financial Times* reported that in 2013 there were almost 163 cases of ATOS staff being insulted and abused: 'Murdering scum... won't be smiling when we come to hang you bastards' was one sample from Facebook. The response of ATOS staff was also as expected: one said on his Facebook that the claimants were 'parasitic wankers'; another referred to her workplace as '... that Godforsaken place with the down-and-outs'. In Edinburgh the ATOS staff retaliated to a protest outside their office by giving the V sign out of an open window. A likely result of all this is that ATOS will give up on their contract before it is due to expire in August next year.

## Morality

There should be no celebration on this score as so profitable is the mission of cajoling people from the stresses of charity back to those of employment that there are plenty of other companies prepared to take over. There will be no change if Labour win the next election. The Work Capacity Assessment was introduced by the previous Labour government in 2008 and in their 2010 election manifesto they proclaimed their intention to widen its scope – 'people with disabilities will be helped to move into work' – and pledged that they would extend their 'tough but fair work capacity test' to get more people off Incapacity Benefit and Employment Support Allowance.

The morality of capitalism is founded on intrinsic human misery and operates through legalised theft and exploitation and the consequent hostilities within the class which needs above all to be united. There is no need for ATOS – or for Cameron and his Mission in hypocrisy – to remind us so elaborately of this.

## IVAN



*Whatever else you might think of Russell Brand at least he has re-introduced the word 'revolution' into the political vocabulary. But what is a 'revolution'?*

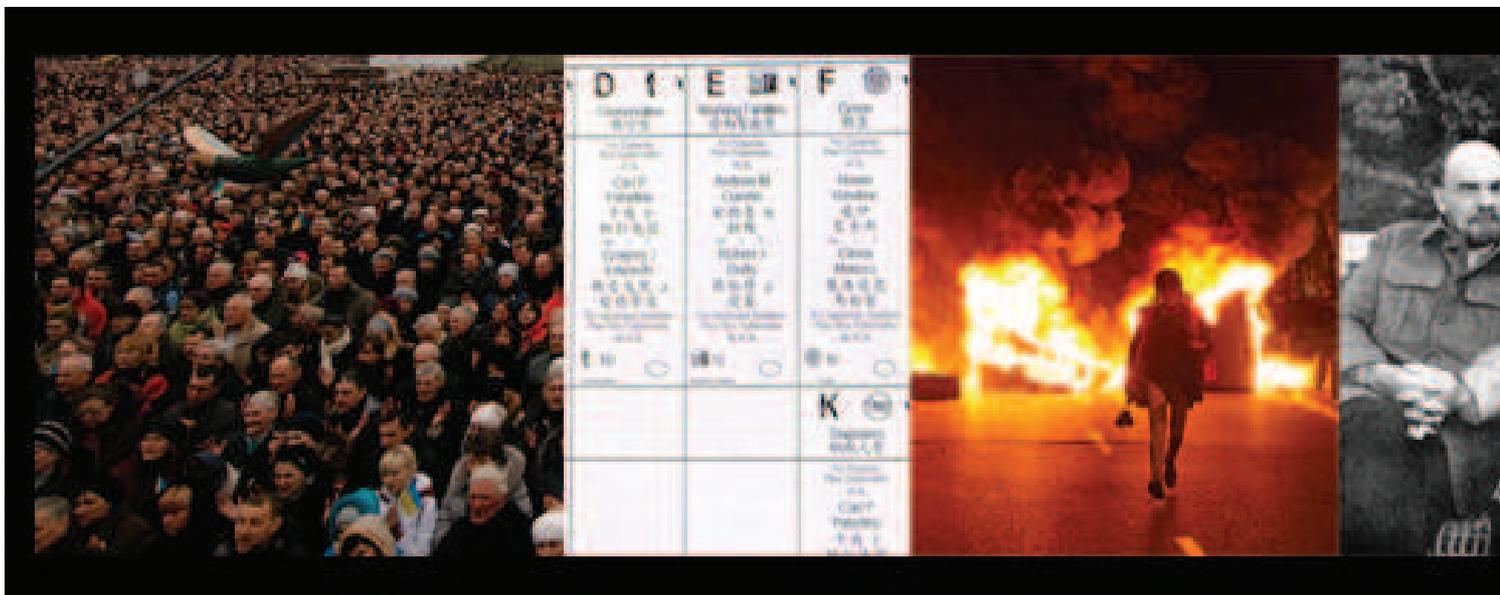
One good definition was given by the Victorian era socialist, William Morris, in a talk he gave in 1884 later published as the pamphlet *How We Live and How We Might Live*:

The word Revolution, which we Socialists are so often forced to use, has a terrible sound in most people's ears, even when we have explained to them that it does not necessarily mean a change accompanied by riot

and all kinds of violence, and cannot mean a change made mechanically and in the teeth of opinion by a group of men who have somehow managed to seize on the executive power for the moment. Even when we explain that we use the word revolution in its etymological sense, and mean by it a change in the basis of society, people are scared at the idea of such a vast change, and beg that you will speak of reform and not revolution.'

A revolution, then, is 'a change in the basis of society', whether or not this is accompanied by violence (Morris in fact thought it would be), a change that has to be fairly rapid, involving a clear break with the existing society.

The change in the basis of society which socialists envisage is a change from what exists today, where society is based on the ownership and control of the means of wealth



production – the means by which society survives – by a tiny minority of rich individuals, corporations and states. We want to change from that to a situation where the means of production have become the common heritage of all to be used, under democratic control, for the benefit of all. A change from a class society to a classless society. A change from capitalism to socialism.

### Why a revolution?

But why is a revolution against capitalism needed? Could it not be gradually reformed out of existence? No, basically because capitalism cannot be reformed so as to work in the interest of the majority. For a start, it is based on their economic exploitation. Because most people are deprived of access to means of production they have to sell their working abilities for a wage or salary to those who do have access. But employers are not philanthropists. They only employ people if there is something in it for them – a profit. If there isn't, they won't employ people or else they make people redundant. This happens all the time.

Since the only way that wealth can be produced is by humans applying their physical and mental energies to materials that originally came from nature, the source of a non-work income like profit can only be the work of those who work. It's workers, not their employers, who are the 'wealth producers'.

Profit is the difference between the value of what wage and salary workers produce and the value of what they are paid as wages and salaries. The extraction and accumulation of profit is the aim of production under capitalism.

A good alternative name for capitalism is the profit system. Because that's what it is. It's a

## “We don't envisage the type of revolution advocated by Leninists of a conscious minority leading a mass of discontented but non-socialist workers”

system whose economic aim is the accumulation of more and more capital out of profits. It's a profit-making system in which profit always has to come before meeting people's needs. If a profit is not made, economic activity slows down, stops or declines. One of the basic economic laws of capitalism is 'no profit, no production'.

This has various consequences. An obvious one is that production is geared only to what people can pay for, not what they need. The rich get their whims met while the poor have to go without heating. Luxury flats are built while many live in unfit accommodation. In fact, while technologically there could be plenty for all, the profit system means that production stops well below that point.

The struggle for profits is a competitive one, with every business trying to maximise its profits. In this 'battle of competition' the main weapon is reducing costs by installing new more productive machinery and methods of production. This, too, has consequences. It leads to speed-up and stress at work. And to pollution and the neglect and destruction of



GF Watts, William Morris, 1870

the environment.

All these problems – housing, stress, pollution, and many others – are interconnected. They are not just isolated problems that can be dealt with one by one. They all have the same root cause in the capitalist system of production for profit and are unavoidable consequences, inevitable effects, of it.

### Revolution not Reform

This is why capitalism cannot be reformed to work in the interest of the majority by putting 'people before profit'. Any government that tried to do this would provoke an economic slowdown, even an economic crisis, and would sooner or later have to give up and accept, and even apply, the economic law of 'profits first'.

There have been governments in the past – Labour governments – which could be said to have genuinely and sincerely tried to put people before profits. They have always failed in the end. Not necessarily because they weren't sincere or were sell-outs or not resolute enough, but because they



had set themselves an impossible task – to make capitalism work other than as a profit-making system in which making profits has to be given priority.

The Labour Party has learned this lesson and has long since given up being other than an alternative management team of British Capitalism plc to the Tories. But some of those on and to its left have not learned this and still imagine that they can impose other priorities on capitalism than profit-making and turn it into something else. The new Left Unity party, formed in November last year, is a case in point, as are the various Trotskyist groups who campaign and contest elections on such platforms as tax the rich to pay for better schools, homes, transport and the like. If tried, by reducing profits, it would probably provoke an economic crisis.

It is surprising how widespread this belief is that governments can change the way capitalism works, when they obviously can't. This is why we say that socialists should direct their energies to ending capitalism not to mending it, to abolishing it, not managing it. In other words, 'Revolution not Reform'. That's our policy and that's what we advocate.

### What kind of revolution?

But what sort of revolution do we need? Going back to William Morris it 'cannot mean a change made mechanistically and in the teeth of opinion by a group of men who have managed to seize on the executive

executive power' but without majority support for socialism.

What they can do in these circumstances is as limited as Labour and other reformists who have got control of executive power on a non-socialist basis, in their case with non-socialist votes. The revolutionary minority, too, have no alternative but to manage capitalism in one way or another.

Lenin eventually realised this and had the honesty to admit it and say that the only way forward for Russia was state capitalism, which is what really happened, though both Stalin and Trotsky refused to recognise this. Stalin called it 'socialism' while Trotsky regarded it as some sort of 'workers' state' till his dying day, which was when he was murdered by an agent of his supposed 'workers' state'.

### Democratic, majority revolution

So, by 'revolution' we don't envisage the type of revolution advocated by Leninists of a conscious minority leading a mass of discontented but non-socialist workers and others.

What we envisage, rather, is a majority revolution in which the majority want and understand socialism and participate in bringing it about. For us, this revolution must be democratic in both senses of the term. It must have majority support and it must be carried out by democratic means.

In a politically and economically advanced capitalist country like Britain and most of Europe, a



Louis-Auguste Blanqui

reform of capitalism). People have to have organised themselves outside parliament into a mass democratic socialist party, into trade unions and other workplace organisations, into neighbourhood councils and the like. The socialist MPs would be merely the delegates – the messenger boys and girls – of the organised socialist majority outside parliament.

So, we have in mind a democratic, majority political revolution which begins with the winning of political power via the ballot box by a socialist-minded majority. The majority then uses this control of political power to dispossess the capitalist class, declaring all property titles, all stocks and shares, all bills and bonds, all limited liability companies and corporations null and void. This means that the means

## “We envisage a majority revolution in which the majority want and understand socialism and participate in bringing it about”

power for the moment.' Speaking in 1884, Morris probably had in mind the French revolutionary Louis-Auguste Blanqui and his followers who were forever plotting an insurrection to take over the Town Hall in Paris. They never succeeded and Blanqui spent most of his life in jail.

His ideas, however, were inherited by Lenin and the Bolsheviks and propagated by their followers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And still are by the Trotskyist groups. It is true that they are not so crude as Blanqui but realise that they need some degree of popular support before staging their uprising. But this support is to be won not for replacing capitalism with socialism but from people discontented for any sort of reason. The end result is the same: a group of people – a minority – find themselves in control of 'the

socialist majority can win control of the 'executive power' via elections. That's our view, as argued in detail in our pamphlet *What's Wrong With Using Parliament?*



Of course, establishing socialism is not just a question of voting for a socialist candidate and waiting for a majority of socialist MPs to vote it in (much as people do today who vote for a party which promises some

of production become the common heritage of all. The socialist majority can also co-ordinate the physical take-over of the means of production by people outside parliament, organised and ready to do this and keep production going.

This done, production can be re-

orientated towards meeting people's needs instead of for sale on a market with a view to profit as at present under capitalism. Goods and services can be made freely available in accordance with the principle 'from each their ability, to each their needs'. This social revolution will then have been accomplished and socialism will have been established.

**ADAM BUICK**

# The relevance of Marxian economics today

Interview with Andrew Kliman, author of a number of books on Marx's ideas.



## How did you come to be interested in Marxian economics and socialism?

I was 12 years old in 1968, a moment of tremendous radical ferment, and I immediately identified with all of the forces struggling for freedom. I don't remember whether I immediately identified with socialism, too – in the environment of the time, immediately linking the two would have been rather natural – or whether that took a bit of reading and thinking.

I used to argue with people about capitalism, and I'd be told, 'you don't understand supply and demand.' I realized that was true, and a main reason why I decided to major in economics in college was to see if my views would survive confrontation with 'the law of supply and demand.' Eventually, I decided to go to graduate school in economics and focus on radical economics. My knowledge of Marx's writings, on economics and in general, was still rather limited. I had tried to read *Capital*, but my eyes kept glazing over and I kept dozing off. But in my first year of graduate school, I took a year-long course that consisted of a close reading of the three volumes of *Capital*. It was quite a struggle, but slowly I began to understand and to be convinced. The irrationality and corrupt nature of the resistance to Marx's ideas, even among 'Marxist economists,' and the sterile and non-revolutionary alternatives they offer, have strengthened my conviction. So have the Great Recession and its 'new normal' aftermath.

I don't think of myself as a 'Marxist economist.' The people who trash Marx or cannibalize his work to further their own ideas and careers have appropriated the term for themselves, and they can have it, as far as I'm concerned.

**In 'The Failure of Capitalist Production' you claim that the underlying cause of the last global economic downturn was a persistent fall in the average rate of profit which had never fully recovered since the late 1970s. Do you think the falling rate of profit is always the deciding factor in regard to economic crisis or can it be explained by other features of capitalism such as the disproportionate growth between different sectors of the economy?**

I say that the fall in the rate of profit was *a*, not *the*, key underlying cause. That's not the same thing as a

'deciding factor.' I think a variety of conditions need to be present in order to produce an economic downturn and financial crisis, especially ones as severe as those we've experienced. That was Marx's view as well. In particular, as I stress in the book,

'Marx's theory holds precisely that a fall in the rate of profit leads to crises only indirectly and in a delayed manner. The fall leads first to increased speculation and the build-up of debt that cannot be repaid, and these are the immediate causes of crises. Thus, the timing of the current crisis and the sequence of events leading to it do not contradict the theory, but are fully consonant with it and lend support to it.'

Clearly, the main *immediate* causes of the Great Recession were the bursting of the bubble in the US housing sector and the financial crisis that resulted. But pointing to these events isn't adequate. If they were the only problems, the economy would have rebounded smartly once the US government quelled the panic; but that was five years ago, and the malaise persists. The recession, and to some extent the financial crisis, were also the product of several other, *underlying* conditions. A persistent fall in the rate of profit led to sluggish investment in production, which in turn led to a rising burden of debt; and the US government responded to these conditions by throwing even more debt at them. The government policies delayed the day of reckoning, but also made the crisis worse when it finally did erupt. These underlying conditions still persist for the most part, and the future of the Euro area and Chinese economies is quite uncertain, so the malaise persists as well.

During the housing-sector bubble, home prices and financial activity grew faster than the rest of the economy. One can, if one wishes, call this 'disproportionate growth between different sectors of the economy.' In this specific sense, the financial crisis and recession can be characterized as a 'disproportionality crisis' (but only with regard to immediate causes, not longer-term, underlying ones). But since 'disproportionality' generally refers to something different – an imbalance between production of means of production and production of consumer goods and services – use of the term is liable to cause confusion.

**What is your attitude towards those that claim government spending and/or increasing working class consumption is a way out of the crisis?**

Of course, the government could borrow more, and thus provide more of a temporary boost, but there's a definite limit to the amount by which governments, even the US government, can run up their debt before the credit market gets spooked and lenders demand so much interest in compensation that running up the debt becomes counterproductive. Even more importantly, running up the debt provides only a temporary fix. It doesn't set off a perpetual-motion machine of economic growth. Once the stimulus money ends, the stimulus it provides ends as well – and let me emphasize that this is what standard *Keynesian theory itself* says.

Although underconsumptionists claim that redistribution of income from wages to profits was an underlying cause of the Great Recession, that isn't true, at least not in the US case. Between 1970 and 2007, employees' share of net output was stable in the corporate and total-business sectors. So was the share of output that the working class could buy with its income, ie. without going deeper into debt. (Please see my pamphlet 'Can Income Redistribution Rescue Capitalism?'



Where it all started: Paris, 1968

which you reviewed in January *Socialist Standard*, for data and sources). Since upward redistribution didn't cause the crisis, it's not plausible that downward redistribution would solve it. Moreover, any serious downward redistribution would reduce profit and thereby tend to destabilize capitalism even further. After all, profit is the fuel on which the system runs. The underconsumptionist theory of crisis denies this, it tells us that the problem is too much profit, but I think there are fatal logical flaws in that theory. I can't go into them here, but I do so in the pamphlet and in my book.

**Similarly, what is your attitude towards those that claim that banking/monetary reform can improve conditions for the working class as well as preventing future crisis?**

Financial regulation, like regulation in general, has a very weak track record. Businesses and investors are always able to find ways around the regulations, and the new regulations that are drawn up are always designed to 'fight the last war.' Also, regulation itself can be a cause of financial crisis. One of the biggest financial crises to date, the collapse of the savings and loan (building society) industry in the 1970s and 1980s, was caused by very strict regulations on the interest that the savings and loans could pay and charge, together with the inability of 'Keynesian' policies to stem the spiraling inflation problem of the time.

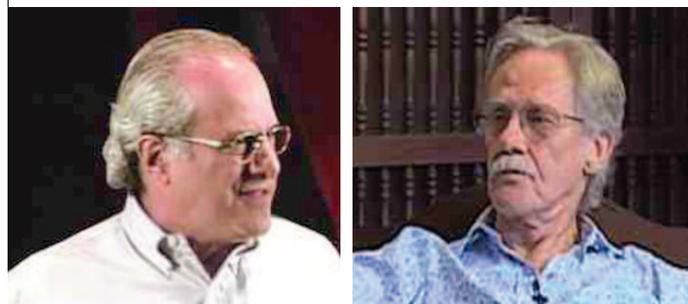
It's possible to set up a government-handout agency that one *calls* a bank, funnel borrowed money through it, and improve conditions for the working-class in that way – temporarily and within strict limits, of course. But if we're talking about genuine banking functions – attracting funds and lending them out – it's not possible to turn banks into institutions that operate for the benefit of working people or that pursue public-policy objectives. The capitalist system has its own laws, economic laws that are independent of the intentions of the people who happen to be running it. State-regulated banks, and even state-run and worker-run banks, are still banks. They have to try to maximize profits, just like every

other capitalist firm. If they don't, they won't be able to provide investors and lenders with a decent return, so the investors and lenders will go elsewhere, and the banks won't get the funds they need to operate. They'll fail or, at best, remain tiny, insignificant islands in the sea of profit-maximizing finance.

**You have made criticisms of the view expressed by Richard D Wolff (and others) that workers co-operatives are the way to socialism (or even are socialism). Could you briefly outline your position on this issue?**

This issue here is really the same one I just discussed. It doesn't matter whether we're talking about banking or some other industry. Indeed, Wolff has applied his general view to the case of banking, calling for worker-run banks which, he claims, would operate for the benefit of working people. Why? Merely because workers have different interests than regular bankers, so they would supposedly make different decisions.

But the road to bankruptcy is paved with good intentions. Worker-run banks, and cooperatives within capitalism generally, would fail or remain tiny islands if they decided to sacrifice profit in order to enhance the well-being of their members or the majority of the population. Wolff just fails to deal with this problem. The only co-operatives that can survive are the ones that operate in accordance with the laws that govern capitalism. The result, as Marx put it, is that the workers in these cooperatives become 'their own capitalist'; they end up exploiting themselves. In order to keep the prices of their products low and remain competitive, they have to keep their pay low, speed-up production, ignore



Richard D Wolff and Vernon Smith

workplace safety and health issues, and so on, just like every other capitalist.

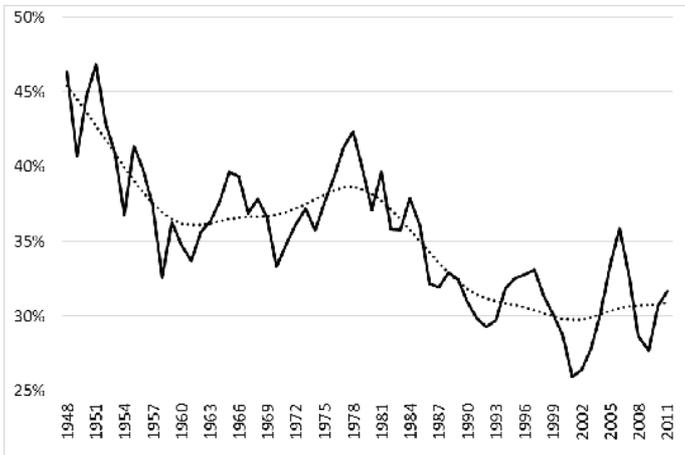
Let me emphasize that the above comments are just about co-operatives within capitalism and as a 'way to socialism.' I'm not objecting to co-operatives as a form or even the dominant form of organization of production within socialism.

**The assumptions of neo-classical economics have increasingly come under a lot of criticism since the financial crash of 2008. This criticism seems to have made significant inroads into the main stream yet the bulk of it comes from a behavioural economics or Keynesian /post-Keynesian viewpoint. Do you think this development can be harnessed by those seeking to promote a Marxian perspective and if so in what ways?**

I've devoted a lot of effort to fighting the suppression of Marx's body of ideas, including the suppression of them by the Marxist and radical economists. But fighting to allow Marx's ideas to be heard is one thing; promoting a

Marxian perspective in the academic-careerist turf-battle sense is another. I'm not interested in that. I'm interested in understanding and transforming reality, and for this, openness to dialogue and to new findings and ideas – from wherever they come – is essential.

I think Hyman Minsky, a post-Keynesian, had some insightful things to say about speculative and Ponzi finance. Irving Fisher's debt-deflation theory of business cycles is also interesting. He was a neoclassicist, but some post-Keynesians have returned to his theory. And Vernon Smith and his colleagues have done what



The falling rate of profit

I regard as tremendously important work in behavioral economics, on the causes of asset-price bubbles. They've demonstrated conclusively that misinformation and lack of information isn't the problem.

I agree with you that mainstream economists are engaged in some genuine rethinking. I also agree that Marx's ideas don't play any real role in that rethinking. This interest in Marx isn't due to dogmatism, but to the fact that these economists are agents of capitalism. Their job is to try to figure out how to solve the economic crisis and how to prevent future crises or at least make them less severe. So I can't think of a thing that Marx has to offer them. His theory of capitalist crisis isn't about the defects of any particular set of institutions or any particular form of capitalism. It's about defects that are inherent in every form of capitalism and are inextricable from it. So I don't think it offers anything to people trying to alter the system while keeping it intact.

**Many groups that have shared the Socialist Party's definition of socialism as a classless, stateless and non-market society have insisted that the working class should abstain from parliamentary activity. The Socialist Party has always maintained that as the state only exists to preserve the position of the property owning minority and that as socialism can only come about through majority understanding and participation, the democratic process should be used in order to win control of parliament for the purposes of preventing the state machine from being used against the socialist majority and to ensure the transition from capitalism to socialism can proceed in as ordered a manner as possible. In what ways would you agree or**

**disagree with this position?**

I wouldn't insist that the working class abstain from parliamentary activity. As a Marxist-Humanist, I support (sometimes critically) all genuine freedom struggles, whatever the form they happen to take at a particular moment. But in the US, where I live, they've taken an electoral form only rarely, for instance in the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party 50 years ago. I think that's largely true elsewhere, too. The institutionalized labor and left electoral parties, even in the best cases, have rarely been vehicles of mass self-activity; and that's one thing I do insist on, as did the First International: 'the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves.'

'Property owning minority' is too narrow – the top bureaucrats in the USSR, China, etc. haven't been owners in the usual sense. I do agree that the state exists to preserve the capitalist system and that socialism can only come about through majority understanding and participation. However, I simply don't see how the rest of the sentence follows from that.

Questions of logic aside, I don't think anything can prevent the state machine from being used against the socialist majority. Governments can and will suspend our rights and ignore laws passed by parliament when push comes to shove, and they often have constitutional authority to do so. I think that what would offer the most protection against this, and the best chance for a revolution without mass bloodshed, is, first, a large majority in favor of socialism. Second, clarity about who its allies and who its enemies are – this is something that has been lacking far too often. Third, serious work to bring draftees and enlisted members of the armed forces over to the side of the people. If they decide to point their weapons in the opposite direction, that will do far more to enforce the will of the majority than parliamentary decrees can.

But getting rid of the old order is only one aspect of social transformation; the other is the creation of new social relations, rooted in a new mode of production that's not subject to the economic laws that govern capitalism. No amount of political will, whether expressed by parliamentary or extra-parliamentary means, can bring this about. It's not a matter of issuing directives, passing laws, or whatever. Unless and until a new mode of production is established that uproots the economic laws that govern capitalism, these laws will continue to nullify parliamentary laws, decisions of workers' councils, and what have you.

## Thought About Joining The Socialist Party?

For further information about about The Socialist Party of Great Britain, return this form to:

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# Religion and conflict in Africa

Utter disgust with the repetitive global political and economic crises, as well as the complete failure of 'Marxism-Leninism' as a political alternative to capitalism, has made many ordinary people in Africa embrace Christianity or Islam.

In Africa the word 'socialism' has been associated with single-party political dictatorships and as such remains resented. But this is a matter of Lenin's misunderstanding the political and intellectual designation of scientific socialism.

Many ordinary people in Africa still believe that the economic underdevelopment of Africa is a product of neo-colonialism, meaning that it is a deliberate political and economic strangulation of Africans by the developed nations.

The legacy of the slave trade has a negative impact upon the racial and political prejudices of Africans. Ideas like gender equality and same-sex marriage seem to be alien from an African cultural and

traditional perspective. Thus religions portraying God as an all-powerful and knowing authority above the conventional political systems do find fertile ground in African communities today.

A glimpse through African political and social history reveals that Christianity and Islam only came to Africa during the period of the slave trade. But this is not to underplay the fact that African diverse tribes had some form of worshipping God or Mwari (Shona word for 'God').

Islam, or Mohammedanism, was the religion of the slave traders. The European missionaries followed in the wake of European explorers.

They built schools and churches and restrained people from practising witchcraft, slave trading, ancestral shrines and so on. Christianity could be said to have had a positive impact on African communities in the sense that it was the

missionaries who first brought a formal education to Africa. At the same time Christianity laid a preparation for the colonisation of Africa by European imperialist

nations.

Islam originated from an Arabic culture, supposedly by the prophet Mohamed and no-one else. Its teachings are vested in the Koran. Islam is the religion of most Arabs and in Africa, outside the Arabic north, it is also found practised in communities in Kenya, Tanzania and Zanzibar.

Islam has come to characterise itself as a militant and anti-western type of religion in Africa today. It is a fact that Islamic fundamentalists tend to be politically autonomous and this gives rise to conflicts. Militant Islam as a religion in Africa is enmeshed in terrorism, a political and cultural nostalgia against west European political and economic ideals (democracy and Christian values). The practice of Sharia Law in African countries in which Islam is a major religion is a naked and orchestrated reaction against Christian morals and ethics.

Islam today appears as a political rather than a spiritual Jihad. In Egypt the conservative military generals had to overthrow the Muslim Brotherhood of President Morsi because of the spiralling clashes between Muslims and Coptic Christians. In Nigeria the Islamic movement called Boko Haram has increased its attacks on Christian communities, oil installations and government institutions.

So-called Islamic insurgents are on the loose in the African countries where Islam is a major form of religion. In this sense Islam as a religion has brought much pain and suffering upon Africans.

Both Islam and Christianity anticipate the end of capitalism as it currently is and its replacement by a hierarchical structure. Whereas to Christians the spiritual revolution is expected to originate in the consciousness of the individual, Muslims believe that it can only be realised through a political Jihad.

It appears strange to Christians in Africa that church attendance has been on the decline in European countries, where the role of the church has been relegated to the pulpit. It is only in the USA where Christianity is a flourishing religion. There

Islam is associated with Islamic terrorism and the two are not separated. Indeed, the

American support of Israel in its role in the political conflicts in the Middle East seems to be the major factor that has given impetus to the Islamic political Jihad.

**KEPHAS MULENGA**



# Intellectual elitism

Living in Cambridge I encounter many students socially. Like every other section of society they include many individuals exhibiting numerous characteristics. Most of them are less likely to exhibit the 'I'm entitled to the Earth and everything in it' attitude they once did but there is still an underlying intellectual arrogance. It never fails to amuse me that the graduates of Oxbridge still feel entitled to 'run the country' despite the obvious mess they have created over the decades. The 'old school tie' cronyism of the city and government continues unabated. Despite giving socialists great evidence for the complete absence of any semblance of a meritocracy within capitalism they seem unconcerned by their continued failures. It sometimes seems that the only success they can claim is their continued ability (with the help of admen and spin doctors) to fool the electorate. I hope this is disingenuous to at least some of them who, one would hope, go into public life with a genuine desire to improve things. Not that this helps, of course, since the knowledge they bring to their work is the result of studying all kinds of political and economic clap trap.

Occasionally socialists can share a seemingly similar arrogance because of the confidence we have in our analysis - but any accusation of elitism must be taken very seriously and hopefully disproved. The establishment of a socialist society depends on mass consciousness and political equality. This is different from saying that we must all be intellectually equal since we all have different talents and many do not have the inclination to study politics, economics, history or philosophy in any depth. Those of us who write for the *Socialist Standard* clearly have some intellectual

proclivities (strangely I'm still embarrassed by this admission - presumably a residue of cultural conditioning); but does this mean that the majority must have read the three volumes of *Das Capital* before we can make the revolution?

A graduate once said to me that socialism was impossible because the majority can never attain the intelligence that we ask of them. Clearly a very elitist thing to say - and stranger still that he should say it to me in such a 'knowingly candid' fashion since I'm clearly of average intelligence myself. So the question becomes: what level of consciousness (intellectual knowledge and insight) is needed to create a socialist revolution? Clearly there has to be some since compassion and idealism alone has led to disaster in the past. Do we all have to become intellectual elitists to make the revolution?

The socialist revolution will be very different from the preceding bourgeois revolutions because, apart from anything else, it requires the participation of a class conscious majority to bring it about. There can be no leaders since, as discussed above, socialism demands equality and democracy to determine policy and action. Some believe this to be hopelessly idealistic because either they feel themselves to be intellectually incapable of such activity or despair of others political abilities. Most of this derives from cultural conditioning and the almost complete absence of any political education.

Socialists believe that political activity is an essential part of what makes us human and as soon as the dreary media politics of the establishment is undermined and people get a taste of real democracy and the empowerment it



provides there will be no stopping us. Once the need for political leaders has ended and people take control of their lives the conditioning that insists on our intellectual political inadequacies dissolves.

I have never doubted the capacity of most people to achieve the requisite intelligence to change the world once their prejudices and self doubt is removed. Political consciousness can strike people quickly (as in that amusing political metaphor with Neo in the movie *The Matrix* when he awakes and removes his connection with the machines) or it can be a slower process of the erosion of any confidence in the lies of capitalist propaganda.

One thing you immediately notice about socialists is their self-confidence. Some will tell you that arrogance is an essential characteristic needed by socialists to deal with the never ending criticism they endure but I think that this is just a misinterpretation of the confidence that comes with consciousness and the knowledge that this enables. Of course this comes with a large measure of political frustration and sometimes despair at the suffering of the world but I don't know of any of us who would like to go back to the darkness of political ignorance. Our confidence helps us ridicule the still widespread prejudice that intellectual labour is somehow superior to other forms of human endeavour – yet another way of creating divisions within the working class. As I write this I'm only too conscious of the many talents that come together to create a computer. But the inventors and programmers are just as dependent on the production lines of alienated labour to produce this technological miracle as vice versa. What neither need, of course, is the capitalist who exploits both!

There seems to be no evidence for, or reason to believe that the majority cannot achieve the knowledge needed to make a socialist revolution. Those who believe otherwise are merely conditioned to think that we always need an elite to guide and lead us. The recent attacks on the education system by the present government illustrates this - the imposition of reactionary syllabuses in history and philosophy are witness to the fear our masters have instinctively of anything that might enable young people to think for themselves. It is one of the oldest tenets of Marxian thought that the need for an intelligent workforce might also enable an anti-capitalist political perspective. This 'internal contradiction' within the system haunts the parasite class. They may not all be conscious of why they fear learning and knowledge but hopefully one day we will be in a position to teach them this last lesson.

**WEZ**



## Capitalism will not collapse

'NOT EVEN CLIMATE CHANGE WILL KILL OFF CAPITALISM. AS LONG AS THE CONDITIONS FOR INVESTMENT AND PROFIT REMAIN, THE SYSTEM WILL ADAPT. WHICH IS WHY WE NEED A REVOLUTION.' This is not a headline from the *Socialist Standard* but the introduction to an article in the *Guardian* (6 March) by Razmig Keucheyan which does indeed put forward an argument similar to ours about not expecting capitalism to collapse of its own accord, in this case from an ecological rather than an economic crisis.

Keucheyan wrote of 'a worryingly widespread belief in left-wing circles that capitalism will not survive the environmental crisis' and went on:

'The system, so the story goes, has reached its absolute limits: without natural resources – oil among them – it can't function, and these resources are fast depleting; the growing number of ecological disasters will increase the cost of maintaining infrastructures to unsustainable levels; and the impact of a changing climate on food prices will induce riots that will make societies ungovernable. The beauty of catastrophism, today as in the past, is that if the system is to crumble under the weight of its own contradictions, the weakness of the left ceases to be a problem. The end of capitalism takes the form of suicide rather than murder. So the absence of a murderer – that is, an organised revolutionary movement – doesn't really matter any more.'

We can add that, supposing the environmental catastrophists were right and capitalism did collapse from an ecological crisis, the outcome would not be socialism. In the absence of a strong socialist movement the outcome would be a social regression to the sort of dystopia portrayed in disaster films. So, there would still be a need to build up a movement consciously aiming to replace capitalism with socialism. In fact it would be more urgent than it already is.

Keucheyan counters ecological catastrophism by arguing that capitalism can adapt to the environmental crisis to the extent that this opens up profit-making opportunities, giving as examples 'militarisation' (investment in producing arms to defend or acquire diminishing resources) and 'financialisation' (in particular insurance against catastrophes). Others, which he didn't mention, would be investment in technologies to reduce CO2 emissions or in developing alternative energy sources to burning fossil fuels.

This is not to say that capitalism is capable of solving the environmental crisis, but merely that it will be able to adapt to it and make profits from attempts to mitigate it. Saying this can be interpreted as saying that capitalism is not as bad as the 'catastrophists' claim. To a certain extent this is true. Capitalist governments have intervened since its inception to prevent the unbridled pursuit of private profit from harming the general capitalist interest. A large section of Marx's *Capital* is devoted to describing the struggle for Factory Acts which the government eventually adopted to prevent employers driving workers into the ground and so threatening future generations of wealth- and profit-producing workers.

A modern example would be the Clean Air Act of 1956 which ended London's notorious smogs. So capitalism is capable of adapting to environmental problems, even if it waits till the last moment (when overall profitability is threatened) and risks doing too little too late. Not that this makes capitalism any more acceptable.

In any event, capitalism will not collapse of its own accord. It will have to be done to death by conscious, majority political action.



## The Marriage of Figaro

MOZART'S *LE Nozze di Figaro* with a libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte was performed last year at the Royal Opera House, Drury Lane, London in Italian with English subtitles. The opera is based on the banned play *Le Mariage de Figaro* by Beaumarchais, and was originally staged just before the French Revolution. Later Napoleon called it 'the Revolution already put into Action.' The major

themes of the opera are sex and class conflict.

Christopher Maltman as Count Almaviva is predatory, displays contemptuous hauteur, and wants to revive the 'droit du seigneur', a nobleman's prerogative feudal right allowing him to have sexual relations with a subordinate woman which was also known as 'jus primae noctis' ('first night'). Luca Pisaroni as Figaro, the barber turned valet and major-domo to the Count denounces this 'offending right' when he discovers the Count intends to sleep with his fiancée Susanna. He sings 'Se vuol ballare' ('If you would dance'): 'Signor Contino, Il Chitarrino, Le Susnero' ('Count, if you come to my dancing school, you'll jump to my tune') and vows 'tutte le macchine rovescierò' ('all of your schemes I'll turn inside out').

Marriage for 'love' was a product of the rise of the bourgeoisie, freeing itself from the feudal norm of arranged marriage, and the notion of 'individual sex-love' was a source of inspiration for Mozart. Da Ponte removed political references such as replacing Figaro's speech in Beaumarchais against inherited privilege: 'Here a Master, there a Servant, according to the whim of fortune, being an aristocrat, having money, a position in society, holding public office. What have you ever done for all this wealth?'

Mozart was a Freemason, then a radical bourgeois reform movement extolling rationalist Enlightenment philosophy mixed with mystic humanism, promoting republicanism and brotherly love, and questioning the accepted idea that nobility makes someone worthy of respect. Mozart was a friend of Adam Weishaupt, founder of the Illuminati which espoused the humanist views of Rousseau and Diderot, and opposed the superstition and prejudice of the Roman Catholic Church. The Illuminati contended that social rank was not coincident with nobility of the spirit, but that people of lower class could be noble in spirit.

Mozart 'knew' his place in the feudal hierarchy as a servant to the Archbishop of Salzburg. Mozart described a typical dinner time: 'Our party consists of the

two valets, the two cooks, and my insignificant self. Note that the two valets sit at the top of the table but at least I have the honour of being placed above the cooks.'

Mozart was the first composer to take the step into capitalism becoming a freelance composer in Vienna, selling his music on the market through subscription concerts and commissions. Mozart had moved into the world of petty commodity production.

## Paul Klee

TATE MODERN in London recently held an exhibition of works by the early twentieth century modernist painter Paul Klee.

Klee contributed to the art and literature magazine *Der Weg* in Munich which in January 1919 proclaimed 'It is time for the revolution to create a revolution, under the stormy pressure of necessity one will not escape socialism.'

With the establishment in Munich of the Bavarian Council Republic (*Bayerische Räterepublik*) on 6 April 1919 Klee wrote, 'the Aktionsausschuss Revolutionäre Künstler (Action Committee of Revolutionary Artists) may dispose completely of my artistic capabilities.' Ernst Toller, Expressionist playwright briefly president described the Bavarian Council Republic as the 'Bavarian Revolution of Love.' This revolution was crushed by the Freikorps ('White Guards of Capitalism') on 3 May 1919 with 1,000 workers killed in street fighting, and 700 workers summarily executed in the following 'White Terror.'

Klee fled to Switzerland where he wrote to Alfred Kubin on 12 May 1919: 'this communist republic did give us the opportunity of checking our subjective in such a community. It was not without a positive result. Of course, exaggerated, individualistic art is not suitable for the general public, it is a capitalist luxury. That part of us which somehow aims for eternal values would be better able to receive support in a Communist Community.'

Klee's paintings of 1920 such as *Aerial Combat*, *Memorial to the Kaiser* and *Christian Sectarian* reflect the revolutionary times in Munich but most memorable is his *Angelus Novus*, the angel of history, part bird, part man, part angel. Walter Benjamin wrote of the painting in his 1940 *Theses on the Philosophy of History*: 'His face is turned toward the past.

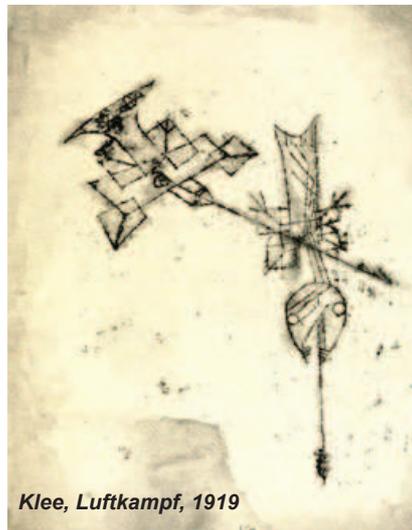
Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.'

The Nazis described Klee as a 'cultural Bolshevik' and in 1937 included his paintings in the 'Degenerate Art' exhibition.

**STEVE CLAYTON**



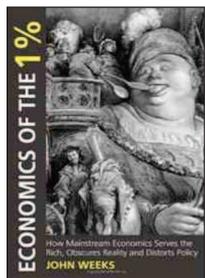
Klee, *Angelus Novus*, 1920



Klee, *Luftkampf*, 1919

## Fake economics

***Economics of the 1%. How Mainstream Economics Serves the Rich, Obscures Reality and Distorts Policy.* By John F. Weeks, Anthem Press, 2014.**



The first man who, having fenced in a piece of land, said "This is mine," and found people naïve enough to believe him, that man was the true founder of civil society. From how many crimes, wars, and murders, from how many horrors and misfortunes might not anyone have saved mankind, by pulling up the stakes, or filling up the ditch, and crying to his fellows: Beware of listening to this impostor; you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody' (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Discourse on Inequality, 1754).

The '1%' are the percentage of people who own the world and profit from it. Weeks's target is mainly the neo-liberal agenda of 'free' markets and reduced state intervention. He argues that this economics obscures the reality of capitalism and distorts the policies of governments. Weeks wants 'a capitalism fit for human life'. He defends 'markets as effective social mechanisms, if and only if they are regulated through a democratic process for the collective good, not when they are left "free" to concentrate riches in the hands of a few.' The result of following the neoliberal agenda is that 'workers lose and capital gains (it is a class issue)' (Weeks's emphasis).

Despite quoting Rousseau approvingly it is clear that Weeks does not really think that the fruits of the Earth belong to us all, and the Earth itself to nobody. He favours the economist JM Keynes's proposal for a capitalism 'wisely managed'. Keynes's *General Theory* was 'the greatest economics book of the twentieth century'. Like Keynes, Weeks believes that governments can 'end the recession by stimulating the economy through public spending. It really is that simple.' But as Oscar Wilde said, the truth is rarely pure and never simple. By focussing on the 'golden age' of capitalism – the 30 years or so after World War Two – Weeks presents a seriously distorted account of what capitalism is and what it can do. For a start, the 1 percent has existed during the last 200 years or so of capitalism. And

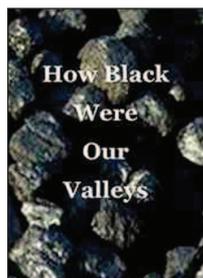
there is nothing in Weeks's account of a 'wisely managed' capitalism to suggest the 1 percent would cease to exist. For a work of economics there is precious little on what drives capitalism – profit. His fix for what ails capitalism is essentially political – democratic accountability. He recognises that there can be class struggles between workers and capital but attributes this to a 'fake' economics rather than the minority ownership of the means of life.

The Socialist Party has a unique record with regard to Keynes and the economics he gave his name to. From the start we recognised that Keynes' solution to mass unemployment (increased government spending) failed to address the issue of profitability. Capitalism – the profit system – is built on the antagonism between profits and wages and economic crises are ultimately the result of a failure of profitability. As we have seen in recent years, an important factor in restoring profitability is holding down wages and attacking workers' standard of living. Weeks's own work obscures the reality of capitalism, but it may inspire in some the illusion that capitalism can be 'fit for human life'.

LEW

## Miners' strike

***How Black Were Our Valleys.* By Deborah Price and Natalie Butts-Thompson. 180 pages. £7.99.**



The authors have recorded and transcribed reminiscences by miners and their wives and daughters in one ex-mining valley in South Wales of the Miners Strike that began thirty years ago. Three things from them stand out. First, the solidarity of people in the mining villages. The strike was practically solid in South Wales, so much so that miners who went from there to picket in other areas such as Staffordshire and Nottingham were surprised to find that it was the strikers not the scabs who were ostracised. Second, that Thatcher is still a hated figure a generation later much as Churchill used to be for what he did in Tonypany in 1911. The first photo in the book is of a poster for a benefit gig in a local hotel for the Miners Benevolent Fund on the day of her funeral. Third, the hostility and bitterness towards

the police because of the brutality they employed to try to stop mass picketing. This lives on too.

In this last regard, the authors reproduce as an appendix a lengthy passage from our 1985 pamphlet *The Strike Weapon: Lessons of the Miners Strike* on 'The Role of the State' which makes the point that 'by the time the strike was over the miners had experienced at first hand the way in which the coercive power of the state can be, and is, used in defence of ruling class interests' and 'that the coercive forces of the state should have been used against the striking miners, is not surprising. Governments – both Labour and Tory have used the police and even the army to break strikes many times before.'

The same divergent views of the tactics employed by the NUM leaders which socialists have discussed amongst ourselves – should there have been a national ballot, was Scargill too intransigent – are expressed in the reminiscences.

There are a couple of silly errors which could have been corrected if the text had been re-read by people around at the time. The NUM Vice-President was Mick McGahey not McCarthy and workers conscripted to work in the mines in WW2 were Bevin, not Bevan, boys. All the same, this is a useful addition to the memory of working-class experience.

ALB

## Sound and some fury

***Sounds From the Park – An Oral History of Speakers' Corner.* Bishopsgate Institute exhibition (till 30 April), London, with associated free booklet, website and local radio broadcast.**

Partly financed through the Heritage Lottery Fund, this is an attempt to explore and record the open-air speaking and debating forum that arose at Speakers' Corner, Hyde Park, from the late nineteenth century onwards. The project makes the point that open-air speaking is something of a dying art, and Speakers' Corner is arguably the last example of it, certainly in the UK.

The right to meet and speak freely in Hyde Park was enshrined in the Parks Regulation Act of 1872 and it has been a popular venue for political protest and debate ever since. As the booklet explains, 'between 1885 and 1939 there were around 100 open-air meetings every week in London alone. After the Second World War they gradually disappeared, in parallel

with the rise of radio and television, leaving Speakers' Corner as the sole survivor'.

The project involved interviewing speakers, hecklers and regular visitors past and present. Perhaps the biggest criticism of the project



Steve Ross

is that there are very few audio or visual clips of the speakers themselves speaking or dealing with hecklers in the Park, and the material relies mainly on the interviews conducted, which gives it a more reflective and passive feel than might have been intended.

Of the four outputs, the website ([soundsfromthepark.org.uk](http://soundsfromthepark.org.uk)) is probably the most impressive, with pages on various noteworthy interviewees, including three current members of the Socialist Party. Several other Party members from the past are featured in reminiscences (like well-known orator from the 1930s, 40s and early 50s Tony Turner) and in photographs (such as the wonderfully evocative picture at the exhibition of Steve Ross on the platform in the 1970s). As might also be expected, the

Methodist and pacifist speaker Lord Donald Soper – who spoke at the Park tirelessly for decades – features prominently too.

The Socialist Party has long had a noticeable presence at Speakers' Corner – indeed, we are the one political organization that has maintained a regular presence there for the majority of its existence. Many of the Party's most well-known orators who featured in an article on open-air speaking in the June 2004 centenary edition of the *Socialist Standard* cut their teeth in the Park, and for all its faults Barltrop's *The Monument* contains as good an analysis of this phenomenon and the Socialist Party's role in it as can be found. Also Steve Coleman – a former regular Party speaker in the Park himself – contributed usefully to the discussion of this phenomenon in his *Stilled Tongues, From Soapbox to Soundbite*.

Today, many would argue that Speakers' Corner is something of a shadow of its former self. The Socialist Party maintains a sporadic pitch there and other political speakers still periodically appear too (such as the anarchist Tony Allen – who wrote a book on the subject called *A Summer In the Park* a few years ago – and Heiko Khoo from *Socialist Appeal*). But the crowds are now ever more composed of tourists from the hotels of nearby Park Lane and Bayswater and the speakers are predominately of a religious bent, with as many Muslims as Christians. This tendency towards domination

by religious demagogues is a shame, because as a rule they rely much less on an analysis of current events than the political speakers, making instead a timeless appeal to faith that disregards reason and evidence. It can also be argued that the comedic value of some of the contemporary speakers often lies less in their wit and originality (as was previously evidenced in deliberate entertainers like Norman Schlund and Martin Besserman) than in their near-hysterical religious sectarianism and general lack of self-awareness.

The sparks of controversy and repartee generated by Speakers' Corner are now more often found in other arenas for discussion, including online. But this project has played its part in chronicling something that has been of real use to the working class movement over time and which has served to introduce many to a distinctive socialist viewpoint that can stand out – head and shoulders – in any crowd.

DAP



## To EDL and back

BROADCASTING BUDGET cuts have led to plans to take BBC3 off the air in 2015, demoted to being an online-only channel. So it looks

like there'll be fewer of its trademark

brash documentaries, like *EDL Girls – Don't Call Me Racist*. This show follows three women attached to the thuggishly nationalistic English Defence League. Gail is a long-standing leader of the Yorkshire 'Angels'. She has a steely, scary determination, undaunted when she's 'disrespected' by founding leader Tommy Robinson's departure from the organisation. Amanda is a younger wannabe member, who thinks 'it's quite romantic going on an EDL demo' as a date with her new boyfriend. Katie is the only one in her family of committed EDLers to doubt their beliefs. She tells her mum that she doesn't want to be thought of as racist as they sit colouring in A4 placards with felt-tip pens.

Those taking part in the programme hope that it will dispel the

stereotype of EDL members as shaven-headed racist young males. If nothing else, it succeeds by reminding us that obnoxious, mistaken beliefs can be held by both men and women. One member objects to bread being marked as halal, claiming that a few pennies from its sale will go to the Taliban. Another says that she doesn't want her children to be 'made to wear a burqa'. There are enough reasons to criticise Islam without having to rely on these kinds of laughable misconceptions.

The EDL makes ill-founded generalisations about others, but can't see the irony when they complain that other people make ill-founded generalisations about them. The difference is that generalisations about EDL members are usually correct, as they all share views which easily fall apart with only the slightest scrutiny. They have a misplaced sense of ownership and loyalty to the country they just happened to have been born in, along with misplaced beliefs about society's problems, and misplaced blame towards Muslims. They've even misappropriated the slogan 'Whose Streets? Our Streets' from the left.

MIKE FOSTER



An EDL supporter

## Film Review

### **Gasland (2010) and Gasland: Part II (2013).**

Directed by Josh Fox.



*Gasland* is an Oscar-nominated film about America's frenzied drilling for natural gas using hydraulic fracturing (fracking) with more wells planned in the next decade than in the last hundred years. Rural residents (and workers) of Pennsylvania are suffering irreversible brain damage and excruciating pain due to neurotoxins in newly contaminated water and air following drilling. The response of the fracking industry has been a hundred million dollar lobbying campaign, in part to suppress criticism. Some lobbyists have even gone so far as to recommend the use of military manuals on psychological operations and treating critics as 'insurgents'. Secrecy plays an important part too. No spokesperson from the industry agreed to interviews with director Josh Fox, and companies in the industry have been buying off contaminated land with confidentiality agreements. In public the argument has been made that there is no alternative, in private, industry figures refuse to drink the contaminated water and provide bottled water to residents.

## 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

One resident commented, 'you want me to shut my mouth? I ain't gonna' and 'I ain't no tree-hugger.'

Despite dismissal of environmental critics as unscientific, industry efforts have ensured actual science is hard to come by. Leaked internal industry memos report no way of completely fixing or preventing cement well-casing from fracturing, so perhaps it's not just cowboy practices. Environmental scientist Bob Howarth comments 'we tested shale gas [claims] as a transitional fuel and a better fossil fuel for global warming and it is neither.' Satirist Stephen Colbert asked one industry figure if he could feed his toddler chemicals used in fracking, 'because they're perfectly safe, right?' Fox's Emmy-award winning sequel is even better than the first. Films about fracking such as the earlier *Split Estate* (2009), like many social justice films, can tend towards a glum tone. Josh Fox as an investigative filmmaker avoids this and is as warm and hopeful as early Michael Moore in covering 'the last gasp of the fossil fuel era.'

**DJW**

### Picture Credits

**Cover:** Tony Benn - © Isujosh 2007 Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.  
**p6:** Anglican mass, 2010, TH, PD  
**p8:** Christmas Island, 2008, DIAC images, CCA 2.0; Sidney Detention Centre protest, 2011, Adam JWC, CCA-SA 2.5  
**p10-12:** Demonstration, 2014, Unknown, CCA 3.0; voting paper, 2010, David Shankbone, PD; Madrid strike, 2012, Montecruz Foto, CCA-SA 2.0; dance party, 2010, Kai Hendry, CCA 2.0  
**p16:** South African soldier, 2013, US

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

## Meetings

For full details of all our meetings and events see our **Meetup** site:

<http://www.meetup.com/The-Socialist-Party-of-Great-Britain/>

### London

Tuesday **15 April** 8.00pm

North London Branch

CRIMES OF PASSION IN A SOCIALIST SOCIETY

Speaker: Clifford Slapper.

Torriano Meeting House, 99 Torriano Ave, NW5 2RX (Kentish Town tube or 390 bus from Archway or King's Cross).

### London

Friday 18 and Saturday 19 April

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

**10.30am to 5.00pm** both days

Socialist Party Head Office,

52 Clapham High Street,

London SW4 7UN.

### Leeds

Saturday **26 April** 2.00pm

YORKSHIRE REGIONAL BRANCH MEETING

Victoria Hotel, George Street, Leeds

(behind Leeds Art Gallery and ten

minutes walk from Leeds railway station).

Army Africa, CCA 2.0

**p19:** Le nozze di Figaro, roh.org.uk;

**p20:** Economics book - www.

antheypress.com

**p21:** EDL supporter - © Gavin Lynn

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Generic license. Socialist Party speaker

- © Pedro Figueiredo 2005 Creative

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**p22:** *Gasland* - www.marcellus-shale.us

**p24:** Central Park West, 2013, Thomas

Craven, CCA-SA 3.0; Warren & Obama,

2010, Pete Souza, PD

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.

# 50 Years Ago

## Oil under the sea

THE SCRAMBLE for oil now goes on under the water as well as over the land. The big companies vie with each other to explore the sea bed in more than a dozen parts of the world and are actively prospecting for more.

As long ago as 1937 the Americans were drawing up oil from the Louisiana seaboard, though the amounts were small. But within the last few years, offshore output has gone up considerably and the search has spread to California and Alaska, Mexico and Venezuela, the Middle East and Egypt, West Africa, the Mediterranean, and now the North Sea.

Spurred on by the recent huge natural gas find in Holland, British, Dutch and German interests are already struggling hard for concessions. The French and Belgians are showing similar concern for their own coastal areas.

Why such a sudden spurt of interest in the oil under the sea? First, because the need for more and more oil is unceasing (reserves in 1939 were estimated at 40 years' supply, today they are reckoned at 30). Second, because even if this were not the case, no oil company can afford to let its rivals steal a march on it—this is a law of capitalism stark and simple.

The chances of finding oil under the sea are good, especially when the prospective deposits lie close to oil-bearing land areas. But the expense gives the oil companies the shivers—it is between three and nine times as costly as land prospecting and, of course, the question of coastal water limits immediately becomes an added problem.

(from 'Finance and Industry' by S.H., *Socialist Standard*, April 1964.)



Latest issue of Socialist Party of Canada journal. Obtainable from 52 Clapham High St, London SW4 7UN for £2 (including postage). Cheques payable to "The Socialist Party of Great Britain".

# ACTION REPLAY

## Putin's Games

THE 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow were the subject of a large-scale boycott following the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. The recent Winter Olympics in Sochi managed to avoid anything similar relating to the situation in Ukraine, but were still not uncontroversial.

New events, such as half-pipe skiing, were staged for the first time, on the basis of their supposed appeal to spectators and TV viewers. And as usual at such enormous events, global companies have been keen to sponsor and gain attention, and also to get publicity without the expense of official involvement (as ambush marketers). Some of the ambushers did pretty well, with Red Bull winning overall (according to Global Language Monitor) and, somewhat incongruously, Subway beating Rolex.

Michael Hudson and Jeffrey Sommers saw the Games as 'the great success Russia hoped for' ([www.counterpunch.org/2014/02/24/russia-after-sochi/](http://www.counterpunch.org/2014/02/24/russia-after-sochi/)). Mon-



Olympic coin

ey and development were brought to the Caucasus region, and the authors were almost rhapsodic in their praise: 'Sochi shows that Russia can pull off world-class projects on the global stage. The games proved how Russia can transform its economy through infrastructure investment in a way that can build up a middle class while countering religious and racist fundamentalist discontent.'

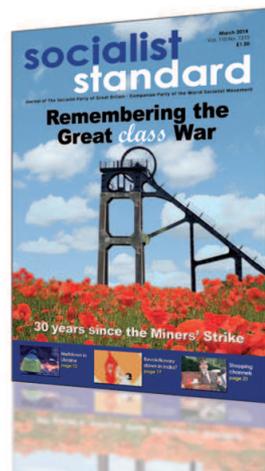
But not everyone was so enthusiastic (see December's Action Replay). Of the £30bn cost of the Games, perhaps one-third went in corruption and embezzlement. Two thousand families were evicted from their homes so Olympic infrastructure could be built. The ecosystem of the Sochi National Park was badly damaged, and the prospects for the city becoming a big winter resort are at best dubious. The clumsy harassment of a Pussy Riot protest did the Russian state's image no favours, either.

A large Italianate residence near Sochi, known colloquially as Putin's Palace and allegedly built for his personal use during his first spell as Russian president, was recently sold for £215m to a fellow oligarch. So Putin's bank balance at least is now in a healthy condition.

PB

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# Voice from the Back

## 100 Years Of Conflict

The centenary of the First World War has produced a plethora of TV programmes and newspaper articles but one fact seems to be usually overlooked: 'British forces are set to withdraw from Afghanistan by the end of 2014. If 2015 is a year of peace for the UK, it will be the first for at least 100 years' (*Guardian*, 11 February). The British army has been involved in wars all over the world constantly since 1914 - Ireland, Iraq, Aden, Kuwait, Palestine, Second World War, Korea, Suez and so on ad nauseam. Ironically the 1914-18 war was named the war to end all wars.

## Billions Of Dollars

We are constantly reminded by the mass media that we are living through a recession and must be prepared to cut down on our economic expenditure, but no such advice is proffered to the owning class. 'The investment firm run by the US billionaire Warren Buffett has reported a record profit for 2013. Berkshire Hathaway made \$19.5bn (£11.6bn) last year, up from \$14.8bn (£8.8bn) in 2012. 'On the operating front, just about everything turned out well for us last year - in some cases very well,' Mr Buffett wrote to shareholders' (*BBC News*, 2 March). Investors in Berkshire Hathaway with an additional \$4.7bn culled from the exploitation of the working class will have no need for any cuts in their expenditure.

## The Gap Widens

The desperate poverty that forces millions to eke out an existence on the equivalent of \$2 a day when we have a handful of billionaires living in luxury is a contrast that was well illustrated recently. 'Microsoft founder Bill Gates has regained the top spot as the world's richest person, according to *Forbes* magazine's annual ranking of global billionaires. Mr Gates' total net worth was estimated at \$76bn (£45.5bn) this year, up from \$67bn in 2013' (*BBC News*, 3 March). Gates is not the only one enjoying this bonanza - in total, there were a record 1,645 billionaires, according to *Forbes*.

## Poverty And Ill Health

Harry Burns, Scotland's chief medical officer had some words of wisdom to say before retiring from his post. 'As a doctor at the Royal, I never once wrote a death certificate saying the cause of death was living in a horrible house or unemployment. People die of molecular deaths, such as proteins coagulating in arteries and causing heart attacks and strokes. Yet we know that poor [social] conditions lead to poor health and premature deaths' (*Guardian*, 12 March). For many members of the working class being exploited all their lives is bad enough but it can even lead to poor health and premature death.

## Negative Equity

One of Mrs Thatcher's proud boasts when she made council houses subject to sale to the occupiers was that Britain was becoming a property-owning democracy. The boast seems a little empty today with growing homeless figures, re-possession and the following news. 'Nearly half a million UK households are

still in negative equity - meaning their homes are worth less than the mortgages on them, figures show. There is wide regional variation, with 41% of borrowers in Northern Ireland - 68,000 homeowners - in negative equity at the end of 2013, the figures from mortgage group HML show' (*BBC News*, 1 March). Another empty political boast proves futile, but negative equity sounds so much better than 'skint' doesn't it?

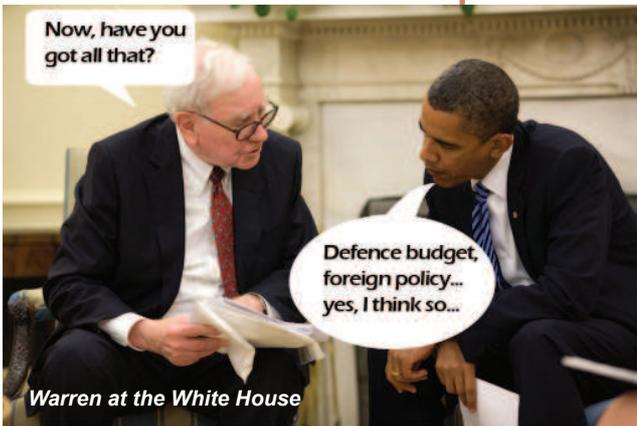
## No Housing Problem Here

Many workers face trouble paying rent and mortgages on their homes but no such problems exist for these New York residents.

It has been labelled 'the world's most powerful address', the luxurious Manhattan tower block where Wall Street titans, foreign oligarchs, technology moguls and film and music stars live away from prying eyes. But a book has now revealed the secrets of 15 Central Park West, an imposing \$1billion tower block where the ultra-rich and famous enjoy commanding views of New York's famous green space. 'It is no surprise that the building is home to New York's most expensive apartment, a palatial \$88million penthouse. It was bought by a trust fund from the fortune of Dimtry Rybolovlev, a Russian fertiliser tycoon, for his 22-year daughter, but it is now at the centre of the world's most expensive divorce battle with his estranged wife, Elena. Apartments at 15 CPW currently on the market include a 6,000 sq ft unit owned by steel magnate Leroy Schecter. He initially listed the property for \$95 million. It is now available for a snip - at just \$65million' (*Daily Telegraph*, 12 March).



15 Central Park West



## FREE LUNCH

