

socialist standard

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Bernie's 'revolution' and why it isn't ours

PLUS

Stephen Hawking on human nature

How capitalism disables you

Russia 1917 as we saw it

Peering at the peers



Gramsci

page 15



9 770037 825006

socialist standard

Contents April 2017

Features

10 *Our revolution?*

It is, according to Bernie Sanders. Not according to us though.

13 *What is capitalism?*

A short guide to the salient points

14 *Stick to physics, Stephen*

Stephen Hawking opines on anthropology, and it's not pretty

15 *Gramsci a socialist?*

A look at the life of the Italian activist

17 *Support for all*

How capitalism disables people



14



10



12

Regulars

4 *Pathfinders*

6 *Cooking the Books 1*

7 *Greasy Pole*

9 *Material World*

18 *Cooking the Books 2*

19 *Proper Gander*

20 *Reviews*

22 *50 Years Ago*

23 *Meetings*

24 *Rear View*

24 *Free Lunch*



17

Introducing the Socialist Party

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



capitalism.

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

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

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

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Capitalist health warning

On 4th March 2017, tens of thousands of people marched through London in support of the National Health Service. This winter, hospital waiting times had grown and in the Accident and Emergency (A&E) wards, patients were stranded on trolleys while waiting for beds to become available. This has been exacerbated by the crisis in social care, where elderly people have had to be cared for in NHS hospitals, because of a shortage of places in care homes. Last year, there was a dispute with the junior doctors, who objected to new contracts, which would worsen their working conditions. This is against the backdrop of a squeeze in government funding made in response to the economic downturn in 2008-2009.

The NHS was established in 1948, ostensibly with the principle that health care would be provided free to all regardless of their ability to pay. Although hailed as a great 'socialist' achievement at the time, it arose out of the recommendations of the Beveridge report. During the Second World War, many in the ruling class believed that

the working class should receive some payback for their sacrifices. However, they were not entirely driven by altruism, as they hoped that the workers would become healthier and more productive. Around this time, there was the beginning of the post war economic boom based on the reconstruction of industry, which made commitments, like this one, affordable.

However, like every product or service in capitalism, health care has to be paid for, and is funded mainly from general taxation and national insurance, the burden of which falls ultimately on profits. Charges for prescriptions were introduced by the Conservative government in 1952. These were abolished by the Labour government in February 1965, only for them to be reintroduced at a higher rate in June 1968 by the same government, albeit with a wider range of exemptions.

In 1990, the Conservative government attempted to control costs by introducing an internal market into the NHS in England, with the establishment of NHS trusts. In 1992, the Private Finance

Initiative (PFI) was introduced, in which private firms would be contracted to provide funding for public sector projects. The Labour government supported its use for the NHS and it also established NHS Foundation trusts, which provided more scope for the involvement of private companies. Under the Health and Social Care Act 2012, NHS primary care trusts and strategic health authorities were abolished and more control of NHS funds given over to GPs, who have the freedom to engage private contractors.

Many campaigners blame the Conservative government for the woes of the NHS. However, as experience has shown, Labour have no more solutions to the problems of the NHS than have the Tories. The problems lie not with the Tories, but with the capitalist system itself. The quality of health care depends entirely on the vagaries of the market. If profits are running high, then extra crumbs can be thrown at it, but if profits are falling, then the health service will be squeezed. Only under socialism can the best health care be guaranteed.

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Don't be evil

GOOGLE HAS been in trouble again lately, this time for 'allowing' ads by governments and major companies to appear next to extremist and hate videos on YouTube, making it look as if the videos are being sponsored by the likes of HMG, M&S, the Guardian and others.

The problem, as Google readily admits, is that it doesn't know how to prevent this happening. So-called smart filtering software does exist, but it's unrealistic to expect it always to tell the difference between appropriate and inappropriate content, given that human opinions are often divided on the subject. Current estimates vary, but in 2014 YouTube stated that 300 hours of new material were being uploaded every minute to their site, so policing that volume of content is next to impossible. Nevertheless critics are wont to demand the moon on a stick and attack Google for not doing enough to keep its house in order.

At the same time, Google has also been criticised for censorship, usually when its automated efforts to police content go wrong. An Egyptian blogger's videos of vote-rigging and police brutality were removed in 2007. A video criticising sharia law in Britain and backed by the National Secular Society was taken down in 2008. There are hundreds of other complaints about Google being either dictatorial or drippily laissez-faire, depending on the individual point of view. And YouTube was itself blocked in Pakistan for carrying videos criticising Islam, in Turkey for videos insulting national founder Kemal Atatürk, in Thailand for unflattering remarks against the royals, in the UK and Germany for music copyright infringement, in China, Iran and Turkmenistan in virtual perpetuity, and so on.

It's not just the videos that YouTube has been castigated for. Its policy of allowing comments has repeatedly been under fire for unleashing a barrage of inane bigotry. Time Magazine complained in 2006: "Some of the comments on YouTube make you weep for the future of humanity just for the spelling alone, never mind the obscenity and the naked hatred", and the Guardian in 2015 called it "a hotbed of infantile debate and unashamed ignorance" (Wikipedia). Google in 2013 decided to force viewers to create a Google+ account before they could post comments on videos, but this in turn attracted a storm of protest, even from one of YouTube's own co-founders.

This is all quite apart from controversies about aggressive tax avoidance, supposed

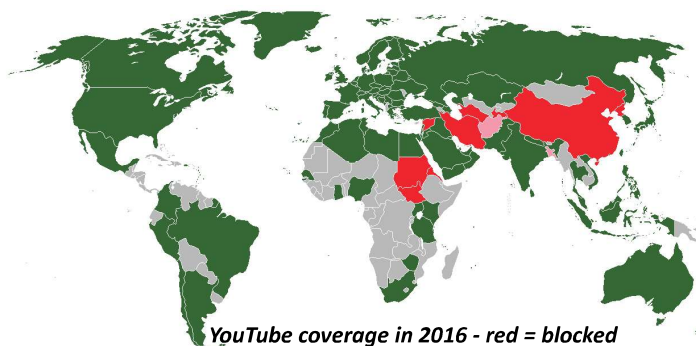
manipulation of search results, source-code secrecy, abuse or appropriation of intellectual property, invasion of privacy and monopolistic practices. Having failed to live up to its founding motto 'Don't Be Evil' (what corporation wouldn't fail, though?), Google adopted a new motto in 2015: 'Do the right thing'. What this means is anybody's guess, but it's likely that Google won't live up to it either.

Google is valued at \$133bn and its parent company Alphabet is listed by Forbes as the 27th largest company in the world, above IBM, General Motors, Gazprom, Intel, Boeing, Disney and Coca-Cola. Just as Uber, wriggling and writhing through its current worker-exploitation controversies by insisting it is a technology 'platform' not a taxi company, so Google aims to avoid government regulation by maintaining that it is a technology platform and not a media company (*Google's crisis of confidence*, BBC Online, 20 March). Whether it's allowed to get away with this in the future remains to be seen.

There is a degree of 'shoot the messenger' involved in all this. The internet has opened a hitherto unsuspected Pandora's Box of horrors including trolling, fraud, cyberbullying, revenge porn and general 'net rage' which reveals the crawling underbelly of capitalism in its harshest light. Young people, caught up in this bilious storm, have been driven to suicide. Pious pundits may wonder where all this rage and cruelty comes from, but socialists are not under any illusions. Happy people are not cruel. Anger runs through capitalism like 'Brighton' runs through a stick of rock. What people are angry about is the conditions they live under in capitalism, and the oppressive power relations that grind them down. Of course it's in the nature of power relations that you can't take your oppressor out into the street and punch his face in. So people vent their anonymous spite on each other instead, and then everybody blames Google for 'allowing' it all to happen. Maybe when Google said 'Don't be evil' it wasn't talking about itself.

What would Google and YouTube screens look like in socialism? Not that different, in some ways. But passwords and paywalls would be obsolete, to

general relief, as would pop-up ads, banners and flashes, adware, spyware, click-bait and porn. Search results would tend to reflect genuinely popular sites as now, but without web developers having a money incentive to 'game' the rankings systems to promote bogus sites. But perhaps the most noticeable difference would be the disappearance of the obsessive cult of online secrecy, including the 'dark web', and the consequent



freedom presently enjoyed by some in capitalism - the freedom to abuse, bully, libel, humiliate and torture someone, sometimes to death, while wrapped in cosy layers of anonymity, safe from discovery. That's not a freedom anyone will want in socialism.

Wiki Games

How accurate is Wikipedia? A recent study of Wikipedia produced a very interesting result. It turned out that Wikipedia's own army of 'bots' - autonomous editing and web maintenance programs - have been engaged in a relentless war with each other for at least a decade, changing and rechanging each other's edits, backwards and forwards, without let or quarter (skeptical-science.com/science/wikipedia-bot-wars/). It seems these programs were designed in isolation, and nobody considered how they might behave when part of a crowded bot ecosphere. As a study author put it, 'humans would have given up by now, but bots just go on forever'. Oddly, there is no entry in Wikipedia itself about its own bot wars, which might be an oversight or else a craven example of truth being the first casualty of war. At any rate it's all a learning experience. Says one researcher: *"It is crucial to understand what could affect bot-bot interactions in order to design cooperative bots that can manage disagreement, avoid unproductive conflict, and fulfill their tasks in ways that are socially and ethically acceptable."*

Great, and when they've managed that, maybe they can start explaining it to humans.

PJS

Not the way to socialism

Dear Editors

Nationalization of the means of production is nothing but state capitalism. This was what was established in the former USSR and now exists in China, Cuba and so on. It shows that the establishment of socialism through state capitalism is a fallacy; the theory already has failed. We have learned from the experience of the nationalization of the means of production there that it was bureaucratic collectivism and gulags in the name of socialism. Every moment there was a political fear in the mind of people in these so-called people's republics. Freedom of speech was unknown under the political dictatorship. All the social product was accumulated by the political state and privileged consumption given to a tiny minority of bureaucrats. This state capitalism was wrongly called socialism.

Centralization of the means of production is nothing but a capitalist appropriation. Capitalist appropriation has been going on since the invention of the steam engine. To argue that socialism will be established through this appropriation process automatically is nothing but a simplistic misunderstanding of revolution and wrong advice to the working class. When wholesale appropriation is emerging in the world there will be frequent mass demonstrations. Maybe then some violence will occur. But we have a task, to elaborate the real socialist theory in general before the violence. Never try to seize the means of instruments, but seize the instruments of the political state.

Co-operative factories and stores, which were first advocated by Robert Owen as a way to socialism, are also a fantasy. Some people want to establish a borderless, moneyless, stateless society through the co-operative mode of production instead of the socialist mode of production. They want to achieve socialism through co-operatives and then the common ownership of the means of production. Co-operatives are nothing but another form of capitalist enterprise and production. Actually socialism means the socialization of world resources and the means of production. This is the object of socialism and the social revolution, but we cannot make a blueprint.

GORACHARD PARAMANIK

Letter from Zambia

Dear Editors

Barely a month after President Lungu swore his new-look cabinet into office in September last year the country was hit by a sudden hike in pump prices. A

litre of petrol jumped up to K13.70 from K11.50 and diesel is now selling at K11.50 from K8.70 a litre. The rise in fuel prices has translated into a rise in other prices – especially mealie-meal which shot up from K75 per 25kg bag of breakfast meal to K110.

Subsidies on fuel were removed by the late President Michael Sata way back in 2012 in order to disadvantage fuel vendors who were deemed the main beneficiaries. But the removal of subsidies on fuel in particular gave rise to unanticipated economic and social problems.

The fight against corruption

During the past years President Lungu has been blamed among other things for having been too silent on corruption. The President announced during the inauguration speech that he was going to stamp out corruption in the PF. The first victim of the fight against corruption was the former Minister of Broadcasting and Information, Mr. Chishimba Kambwili, who was recently dismissed on allegations of corruption.

Back in 2012 the late President Sata had cautioned the anti-corruption Commission against investigating and indicting serving cabinet ministers. It is alleged that Chishimba Kambwili, the most outspoken and versatile of politicians, has amassed large amounts of wealth. It has been revealed that Kambwili recently purchased a fleet of thirty articulated trucks worth billions of kwacha. It is also on record that he owns a construction company that has failed to complete the construction of clinics and schools despite having been paid in full by the government.

In Zambia most cabinet ministers and members of parliament own private enterprises that are awarded tenders to supply building materials, food to hospitals and uniforms for nurses and police officers etc. It is also on record that the government has been in most cases failing to pay private contractors on time – hence the failure to complete public projects. The fight against corruption is in most cases a sterile political tactic as most ministers who have been indicted for corruption have not yet been imprisoned. People were not surprised when President Lungu recently announced that he was forgoing 50 percent of his salary as a contribution towards national development.

Tribalism at the helm

During the presentation of his inauguration speech on 11 September President Lungu went on to assure the people of Zambia that he was going to appoint a Commission of Inquiry to find out who was behind an ethnic fracas that took place in Namwala when a mob of Tonga tribesmen descended upon some Bemba-speaking residents, ransacking their homes and evicting them. This was

after it was announced that PF president Lungu had won the elections. It was an expression of political dissatisfaction and UPND leader Hichilema had disputed the election results. President Lungu had defeated Hichilema by a slim margin of 100,530 votes during an election that has left Zambia divided in terms of political and tribal loyalties. Regional tribalism in Zambia today is perceived to be a cultural, traditional and political antagonism between those who voted for the PF and UPND respectively.

Ever since he succeeded the late Anderson Mazoka as president of the UPND in 2005 Hichilema has been championing tribalism by parading himself as a political spokesman of the Tonga tribe. The UPND leader is renowned for promoting, organizing and inciting political hooliganism during election campaigns. It is Hichilema who has been spearheading the culture of political and ethnic antagonism (defined as tribalism) between the Tonga, Lozi and Bemba tribes. The UPND alleges that the Tonga tribe in particular has been politically marginalized ever since the dawn of political pluralism.

The veteran Zambian politician and member of the UPND Daniel Mukombwe even went to the extent of advocating the rotation of the presidency between the Tonga, Lozi and Bemba tribes every four years. The reluctance of Hichilema to accept the results of the 11 August presidential election gave vent to heightened feelings of ethnic and political marginalization among UPND supporters throughout Zambia.

Conclusion

Because Zambia is officially a Christian nation, the extent to which Christianity is helping to restrain ethnic and tribal prejudice needs to be appreciated. The moral and ethnic value of Christianity blends well with the PF slogan of 'One Zambia One Nation' which is visible among the street vendors who congest Chisokone Avenue in Kitwe town centre and who seem little affected by the hike of fuel and mealie meal prices.

The labour movement in Zambia seems to be a long way from awakening class political struggle in that the trade unions play a minor role in the day-to-day social problems facing the working class. Because the social and economic problems Zambia is experiencing originate from capitalism, they cannot be resolved from within the social and economic programme implemented by government. Social poverty is here to stay.

K. MULENGA

Russia 1917 as we saw it

*In February 1915 pro-war 'Socialists' organised a conference in London to which the Bolshevik section of the Russian party was not invited due to their anti-war stance. Only the **Socialist Standard** was prepared to publish their declaration.*

Comrades, – Your Conference calls itself a conference of the Socialist parties of the allied belligerent countries, Belgium, England, France and Russia.

Allow me first of all to draw your attention to the fact that the Social-Democracy of Russia, as an organised body, as represented by its Central Committee and affiliated to the International Socialist Bureau, has received no invitation from you. The Russian Social-Democracy, whose views have been expressed by the members of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Group in the Duma, now arrested by the Tsar's Government (Petrovsky, Muranoff, Badaeff, Samoiloff representing the workers of Petrograd, Yekaterinoslaff, Kharkoff, Kostroma and Vladimir districts) have nothing in common with your conference. We hope that you will state so publicly, as otherwise you may be accused of distorting the truth.

Now allow me to say a few words with regard to your conference, i.e., to tell you

what the class-conscious Social-Democratic workers of Russia would expect from you.

We believe that before entering upon any deliberations with regard to the reconstruction of the International, before attempting to restore international bonds between Socialist workers, it is our Socialist duty to demand:

(1) That Vandervelde, Guesde and Sembat immediately leave the Belgian and French bourgeois ministries.

(2) That the Belgian and French Socialist parties break up the so-called "block national" which is a disgrace to the Socialist flag and under cover of which the bourgeoisie celebrates its orgies of chauvinism.

(3) That all Socialist parties cease their policies of ignoring the crimes of Russian Tsarism and renew their support of that struggle against Tsarism which is being carried on by the Russian workers in spite of all the sacrifices they have to make.

(4) That in fulfilment of the resolutions of the Bâle conference we hold out our hands to those revolutionary Social-Democrats of Germany and Austria who are prepared to carry on propaganda for revolutionary action as a reply to war. The voting for war credits must be condemned without any reserves. (...)

The German and Austrian Social-Democrats are committing a great crime against Socialism when, after the example of the bourgeoisie they hypocritically assert that the Hohenzollerns and the Hapsburgs are carrying on the war of liberation "against Tsarism."

But those are committing a crime no less stupendous who assert that Tsarism is becoming democratised and civilized, who are passing over in silence the fact that Tsarism is strangling and ruining unhappy Galicia just as the German Kaiser is strangling and ruining Belgium, who keep silent about the facts that the Tsar's gang has thrown into gaol the parliamentary representatives of the Russian working class, and only the other day condemned to six years penal servitude a member of Moscow workers for the only offence of belonging to our party, that Tsarism is now oppressing Finland worse than ever, that our Labour press and organisations in Russia are suppressed, that all the millions necessary for the war are being wrung by the Tsar's clique out of the poor workers and starving peasants.

On behalf of the Central Committee of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, London, February 14th, 1915. M. MAXIMOVICH.

(Full version here: www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/socialist-standard/1910s/1915/no-127-march-1915/russian-challenge).



Never been tried

THE RIGHT-WING think-tank, the Institute of Economic Affairs, published an article on its website on 17 February by Kristian Niemietz entitled 'Has "real" socialism never been tried?'. It was aimed primarily at those who at the time claimed Russia was socialist but who now say it never was. We are specifically singled out as an exception:

'And yet there are exceptions to this, such as the Socialist Party of Great Britain (SPGB). They are not, and as far as I know, never were, apologists of Soviet-style socialism, which they describe as 'state capitalism'. They are among the few socialists who have at least some idea of what they mean by 'real' socialism. They use that term to describe a hypothetical system in which working-class people own and control the economy's productive resources directly, not via the state; a system in which public ownership is not mediated through a government bureaucracy.'

This is a passable, if not entirely

adequate, definition of what we mean by 'socialism' but Niemietz went on:

'I have no idea how this should work in practice, but I suppose we could imagine some combination of public ownership with Swiss-style multi-level direct democracy.'

And then proceeded to criticise this: *'This would mean referenda on the production of razors, carpets, gloves, ink cartridges, curtains, hair straighteners, kettles, toasters, microwaves, baking trays, washing-up liquid, tiles, hand blenders, pizzas, and many, many other things. You would need literally thousands of referenda to organise an economy in this way.'*

According to him, this wouldn't work and decisions would soon be left to experts who, he implies, would become a new ruling class.

We don't envisage the market being replaced by direct democracy. In socialism the means of production will be subject to overall democratic control and individual workplaces will be run democratically. There will also be an extension of democratic decision-making beyond the present boundary of local and national administration.

Referendums are not the only or, in most circumstances, the best way to decide matters democratically. They

are appropriate only where there's a simple yes/no choice, whereas in most cases there is a whole range of compromise options and solutions. Such decisions don't have to be left to 'experts' but can be taken by democratically elected councils able to examine the matter in more detail before coming to a decision.

In any event, Niemietz has got it wrong in imagining that decisions as to how much of everything to produce would have to be decided by a vote. The amount of consumer goods, such as those he lists, to produce could be more or less self-regulating in accordance with the amounts people took from the distribution centres in conditions of free access. What they took over a given period would be a signal as to how much to reproduce, in the first instance to the bulk supplier and then down the line to the places where they are produced. In other words, much the same as the market is supposed to work and as stock control does today.

Only large-scale projects would need to be decided by some elected central council. So, no, there would not be a danger of voting fatigue in real 'real socialism'.



New (?) Hope(?) For Labour

FOR ANY ENDURING Labour Party hopefuls the recent death of Gerald Kaufman summoned up some of the most painful memories. Because all the obituaries for the late MP for Manchester Gorton reminded us that one of his grandest, most memorable achievements was when he ridiculed the Labour manifesto for the 1983 general election, when they were led by Michael Foot and went down to Margaret Thatcher who was still in triumph over the Falklands war, as The Longest Suicide Note In History. The Party then was offering, as a cure-all for the historically typical chaos of militant capitalism, delusions about abolishing the House of Lords and renationalising the likes of British Aerospace and the Post Office. It was no longer suffering the particular conceits of the likes of Roy Jenkins, David Owen and Shirley Williams who were gathered into the Social Democratic Party which was virtually wiped out in that election.

Crises

Now the Labour Party has all that behind them but it still offers its persistently weary ideas on matters such as unemployment, poverty, an embattled National Health Service. And it has nurtured another, equally impotent, bunch of tricksters such as Hilary Benn, Owen Smith, and Yvette Cooper. It has to be expected that from this swamp of despair there should emerge the occasional personality who offers their version of those exhausted options for what are in effect the same obdurate crises as bedevilled the authors of that infamous suicide note. The most recent of these is Sir Keir Starmer who is the MP for Holborn and St. Pancras – who does not welcome being reminded that his success at his former job of Director of Public Prosecutions was rewarded with a knighthood. Now he is being proffered as Labour's new hope in spite of his lack of ministerial experience.

And does his name offer anything new? Keir is among the least likely to be used by newly-doting parents. Most famously it was the middle name for the first ever Labour Member of Parliament – none other than James Keir Hardie who, apart from being

leader of some striking Ayrshire coal miners was also the MP for West Ham South, and prominent in the formation of the Independent Labour Party. His mother was a nurse and his father a ship's carpenter; they eventually moved to Govan where they struggled to survive on his miserly wages. When he was seven, Keir started a life of exploited employment, as a messenger boy for a steamship line, which prevented him attending school. However his father taught him enough about the life of a worker struggling in capitalism to organise a pacifist strike at the start of the First World War. He died in 1915, at the age of 59. It was in tribute to Hardie that Starmer's parents, keen members of

The Once and Future Keir



the Labour Party, gave him that name – although he says that he has never actually discussed the matter with them.

Mother

Starmer's mother has suffered for some 50 years with Still's disease, a condition which for the past five years has prevented her speaking and caused her to have a leg amputated. 'She has been a massive fighter all her life. She's been in high dependency units for as long as I can remember. It was something I grew up with. I certainly have seen the NHS from the inside' was how Starmer has described her suffering and its effect on him. In his legal career, in 1997 he advised Helen Steel and David Morris in the infamous McLibel case brought against them by McDonalds. He was made a Queen's Counsel in 2002 and then, in 2008, reached the heights of Director of Public Prosecutions. In 2005 he won a case in the House of Lords which prevented torture being used to collect evidence presented in court. He later represented to the Privy Council a number of appellants who had been sentenced to death in states in the Caribbean and Africa, which led to the abolition of that mandatory penalty in those countries.

Holborn And St. Pancras

By 1 November 2013 there did not seem a lot more Starmer could do to impress himself on the work of Public Prosecutions so he left the job. 'Well, I'm back in private practice' he told the BBC News 'I'm rather enjoying having some free time and I'm considering a number of options'. One of these was concerned with the chaos and back-stabbing in the Labour Party and all those hopefuls who had so briefly toyed with the idea of winning the Leadership. In particular there was the juicy prospect of the parliamentary constituency of Holborn and St. Pancras, where the long-standing, inveterately wise-cracking Frank Dobson intended to retire. Starmer had not been hesitant in revealing his

ambition: 'Being in opposition is pants ...we achieve nothing other than minor changes to what the Conservatives are doing. The only way we can change things is by being in power'. When Holborn and St. Pancras went to the polls in the 2015 election Starmer romped home with 52.9 per cent of the votes and a majority of 17,048. It was not long before he was raised to the Shadow Cabinet covering the Home Office Minister and then, after a brief spell among the ever-seething group of Jeremy Corbyn's enemies, came out as Labour's participant in the in-fighting over Brexit with all that entailed:

'I'm really glad to be in, to have the opportunity to hold the government to account on some of the biggest decisions for probably 50 years is an incredible privilege.'

Immigration

One response to this was from Harriet Harman: 'It's just as well we've got Keir (and his) wisdom, expertise and ability to solve insoluble problems'. But the reality of this did not entirely square with Starmer's admirers although it might have been comforting to some UKIP theorists licking their wounds after their recent by-election disasters. In September last year he told Politico that any new pact with the rest of the EU must include '... some control over who comes to work in the U.K.' because immigration has been 'too high' and that the Labour Party must support '...some change to the way freedom of movement rules operate'. So we should not be impressed by Starmer and his 'wisdom' as a future manager of the 'insoluble problems' of this property society. As a politician he offers nothing we have not already experienced, leaving us bewildered and exasperated.

IVAN

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North London branch. Meets 3rd Thurs. 8pm at Torriano Meeting House, 99 Torriano Ave, NW5 2RX. Contact: Chris Dufton 020 7609 0983 nlb.spgb@gmail.com
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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. Contact: 020 8740 6677. tenner@abelgratis.com

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Northeast branch. Contact: P. Kilgallon, 29 Nicholson Terrace, Newcastle NE12 9DP
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Southeast Manchester. Contact: Blanche Preston, 68 Fountains Road, M32 9PH.
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Yorkshire regional branch. Contact: Richard Rainferd, richardrainferd@gmail.com

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

Kent and Sussex regional branch. Meets 2nd Sun. 2pm at The Muggleton Inn, High Street, Maidstone ME14 1HJ. Contact: spgb.ksrb@worldsocialism.org 07973 142701.
South West regional branch. Meets 2nd Sat of even months. Railway Tavern, Salisbury, 2pm (check before attending). Contact Head Office, 52 Clapham High Street, tel: 0207 622 3811
Brighton Discussion Group. Contact: Anton Pruden, anton@pruden.me

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Feeding the world

IN RESPONSE to the looming food crisis the Socialist Party is asked how we would go about dealing with the doubling of food production to feed a future global population of 10 billion which the UN predicts will be necessary by 2050. Many press us to promote vegetarian diets and organic agriculture methods as the key and become disgruntled when we do not make it party policy and commit ourselves to such a view. However, it cannot be for the few socialists that there currently are to usurp the democracy of those who have the task of implementing socialism around the planet, by decreeing what is an acceptable solution to a social problem and what is not.

In the world today we can produce sufficient for all to eat heartily and healthily but many people still go hungry. The problem is not in production of enough food or in the choice of what our farms produce but in the distribution of food. That is a political and not a technical issue. Our argument is that if you project present-day capitalist society into the future then there could well be widespread starvation and all the scientific or ecological proposals will merely mitigate the suffering to come. The workers who grow and harvest a cornucopia of crops live in a constant crisis of poverty, malnutrition and homelessness.

When the time comes, socialist communities will heed the recommendations of the experts in the field. These, too, will be free from the constraints of capitalism to offer informed opinion. We are well acquainted with the arguments for organic farming but, for the time being, farming is a business and like all businesses, the goal is to maximise profits.

Cereals such as corn, rice and wheat – usually grown with huge amounts of chemical fertiliser – account for half of the calories consumed by humanity. In agriculture, more than 100 million tonnes of chemical fertiliser is used globally every year, applied to about 60 percent of all agricultural crops. Synthetic fertilisers boost yields, but they contain or generate chemicals – ammonia, nitrates, methane and carbon dioxide, among others – that contribute to global warming, a report in the journal *Nature Plants* has explained. Nitrate-rich run-off from industrial-scale agriculture also damages lakes, rivers and coastal waters around the world, in some cases creating so-called ‘dead zones’.

‘A key part of this challenge is resolving the major conflict embedded in an agri-food system whose primary purpose is to make money, not to provide sustainable global food security,’ the study said. The study’s senior author, Peter Horton, chief research advisor to the Grantham Centre for Sustainable Futures, explained: ‘Profits for farmers and retailers rely on highly productive

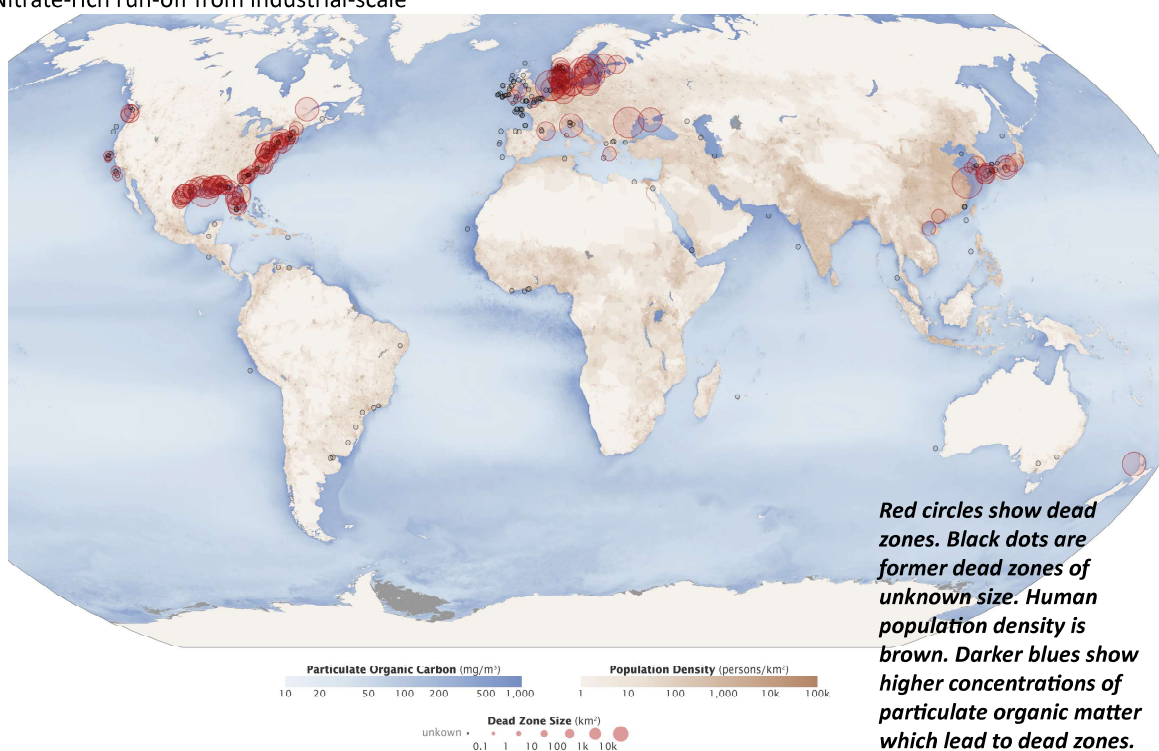
crops – which require lots of relatively cheap fertilizer. However the environmental impact of this fertilizer is not costed within the system and so there are currently no real incentives to fix things. Feeding seven billion people fairly and sustainably is therefore not only a question of technology but also one of political economy.’

Even the assumption that food production must double by 2050 to feed the world’s growing population may well be inaccurate, according to some research. A study in *Bioscience* suggests production likely would need to increase between 25 percent and 70 percent to meet 2050 food demand. An analysis by Mitch Hunter, a doctoral student in agronomy in Penn State’s College of Agricultural Sciences, says that production needs to keep increasing, but not as fast as many have claimed. Despite increased discussion of sustainability in agriculture, the suggestion that we need to drastically increase food production is seldom challenged in agricultural circles.

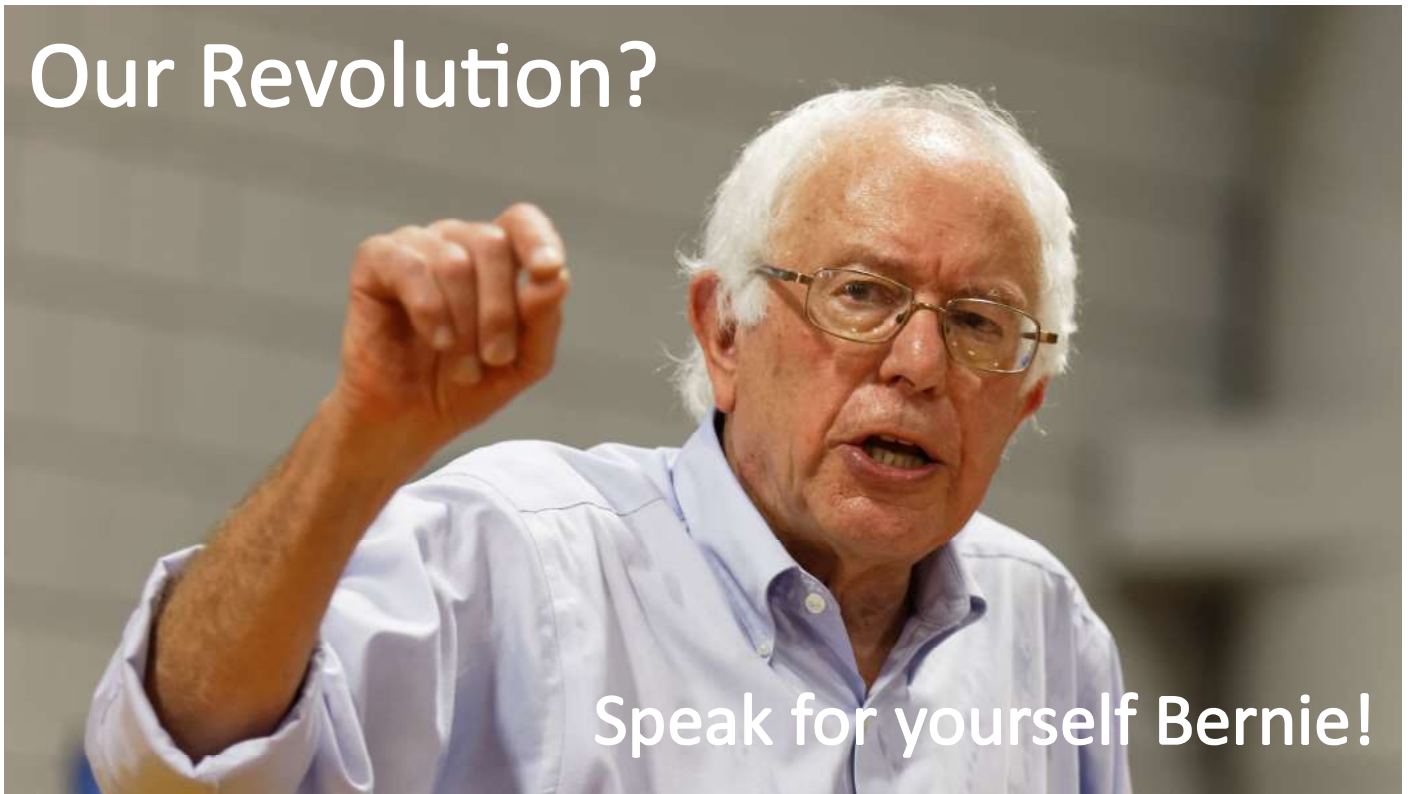
According to Hunter, ‘in the coming decades, agriculture will be called upon to both feed people and ensure a healthy environment . . . Right now, the narrative in agriculture is really out of balance, with compelling goals for food production but no clear sense of the progress we need to make on the environment. To double food production, we would have to increase global agricultural output faster than we ever have before, and we are at a point in the developed world where we already are pushing our farming systems to the max. We don’t know how to double yields in these systems, especially without multiplying our environmental impacts’.

The difficulty of feeding the world’s population isn’t growing the food. It is the economic system we all live under. Within the ‘no money, no food’ capitalist view, hunger prevails in a world of abundance. In socialism, where the wealth will be shared by all but owned by none, the producers would not be trying to make an independent living for themselves but would be carrying out a particular function on behalf of the community where the aim of production would be to satisfy needs on a sustainable basis. This does not have to be a ‘one size fits all’ solution since socialism need not be exactly the same everywhere and at all times, though plainly its basic principles will not vary.

ALJO



Our Revolution?



Speak for yourself Bernie!

Bernie Sanders recently published a book outlining his agenda for transforming America. But the 'political revolution' he envisages leaves capitalism firmly in place.

Bernie Sanders, the self-described 'democratic socialist' who railed against the 'billionaire class' during the Democratic presidential primary, has written a book, titled *Our Revolution*. A promising title, which suggests he might lay out his vision for a socialist society to replace the capitalist profit system. But read the book from cover to cover and you'll hardly find the words 'capitalism' or 'socialism'—much less an explanation of their meaning.

Bernie does throw out the word 'radical' occasionally, but only to reassure readers that his proposals 'are *not* radical ideas'. The more rational among them must wonder, though, how a revolution to uproot 'the Establishment' could be anything but radical, in the most literal sense of the word.

But there is no contradiction here: Bernie hasn't the slightest intention of advocating a genuine social revolution. 'Reasonable' reform, not revolutionary change, is his agenda. In the book, as in his campaign speeches, he is careful to always place the adjective 'political' in front of the 'revolution' he is trying to foist on us as our own, which allows him to limit discussion to political policy reform.

Imagine how much stronger the simple title *Revolution*—or *Revolution!*—would have resounded among those sick of the status quo. But it would have been false advertising, given the book's content, and Bernie is at least honest enough to not raise readers' expectations that high.

What he's not averse to doing, however, is making some outrageous claims for the benefits of his proposed reforms. In his introduction, for instance, Bernie claims that his book 'lays out a new path for America based on principles of economic, social, racial, and environmental justice'. And he writes in the conclusion that it is possible to 'overcome the insatiable greed that now exists and create an economy that ends poverty and provides a decent standard of living'.

Poverty-free capitalism? A society that remains capitalist

but is motivated by justice, not profit? Is this the 'future to believe in' to which Bernie's campaign slogan (and the book's subtitle) is referring? I'll believe it when I see it, Bernie, but frankly it's very hard to imagine given capitalism's track record and essential nature.

Bernie's barrage of facts

Bernie's book is divided into two parts. Part One, 'Running for President', presents information about his life and details his presidential campaign; while Part Two, 'Agenda for a New America: How We Transform Our Country', looks at pressing social problems in the United States and offers policy prescriptions.

We had hoped the book would present Bernie's understanding of the fundamental causes of social problems, but most of it is taken up with the presentation of facts and statistics. Part Two lists many of the problems facing workers in the United States, such as poverty, income disparity, legal injustice, gender and racial discrimination, health-care inequities, unemployment, and environmental destruction. As a narrow-minded nationalist, Bernie strictly limits his discussion to the United States, but he is dealing with problems that exist, to a greater or lesser extent, in every country. These are clearly *capitalist* problems.

In that sense, it might seem that Bernie's fact-bombardment could blast a few holes in the ideological bulwark of capitalism. Certainly, taken together, his statistics provide concrete evidence to support the idea that the current system must be replaced. But listing up facts about social and economic problems is not enough to threaten capitalism. Open any newspaper and you will be confronted with the problems of this system.

What truly worries the capitalist class is not simply the exposure of problems, which could hardly be concealed anyway, but when anyone starts to examine them too diligently, with an eye to locating essential *causes*. That path leads to the understanding that there is no solution to today's social problems without uprooting and replacing capitalism. And Bernie Sanders, the US Senator from Vermont, is not about to travel too far down *that* path.

Bernie does suggest, early in the book, that he has (or once had) an interest in getting to the root of problems. He describes how joining the Young People's Socialist League and other organisations taught him that 'there was a cause-and-effect dynamic and an interconnectedness between all aspects of society', and that, 'things didn't just happen by accident'.

But when Bernie gets around to addressing the causes of American social problems, in Part Two of his book, we see that his understanding of that 'dynamic' is astonishingly superficial.

He is content to simply pin the blame for our social woes on the greed, corruption, and stupidity of billionaires (and their political lackeys), as if the problems of capitalism were arbitrary.

One gets no sense at all from his book that there might be deeper, systematic factors that determine the behavior of his culprits. One can't help thinking that Bernie's barrage of facts is necessary to conceal the poverty of his analysis. Senator Sanders seems to have regressed compared to Young Bernie, who at least knew that 'things didn't just happen by accident'.

There isn't space here to present Bernie's understanding of the 'cause-and-effect dynamic' for each of the problems he raises, so I will limit myself to two key issues: the deterioration of democracy and wealth and income inequality.

Drift toward oligarchy

In the first chapter of Part Two, Bernie discusses the narrowing of democracy and drift toward oligarchy in the United States. He sketches how American democracy started off as 'revolutionary in its day'—albeit limited by 'slavery and racism, rigid class lines, and a deeply rooted sexism'—and was expanded over the next two centuries to become 'more inclusive'.

This unfinished effort to 'perfect our democracy' has broken down in recent years, however, because 'people of incredible wealth and power . . . want to undo the progress we have made and roll back the clock of history'. These are the 'oligarchs' who are 'threatened by what ordinary people can accomplish through the democratic process'. This is Bernie's basic view of the 'cause' of the deterioration of American democracy.

These oligarchs have pursued their goal of sabotaging democracy by pressuring politicians to change election laws so as to allow 'big-money interests' to contribute more freely to election campaigns. In particular, Bernie bemoans the 'disastrous 5-4 Citizens United decision' of the Supreme Court in 2010, which has allowed large corporations to spend 'unlimited sums of money on "independent expenditures"'. The solution Bernie offers is as straightforward as the cause: We simply need to 'pass real campaign finance reform and get big money out of politics'.

The point here is not to criticise campaign finance reform, but to draw attention to how superficially Bernie discusses democracy under capitalism. Bernie writes, for instance, that he 'fears very much that . . . "government of the people, by the people, for the people" will perish in the United States' due to a 'political campaign finance system that is corrupt and increasingly controlled by billionaires and special interests'. But when did such an American government ever exist? And

Bernie doesn't trouble himself with such questions, or stop to consider how capitalism is rooted in inequality

how *could* it ever exist under any class-divided social system?

Even if 'big money' were driven out of the electoral system, it would remain at the core of an economic system in which capitalists own the means of production and workers must hire out their labour-power to them to live. Democracy under capitalism will always be limited because of this reality, even if it does not deteriorate to the point of oligarchy.

In the same chapter, Bernie does throw out a broader and deeper definition of 'democracy' as 'the right of a free people to control their destiny'. But it is

just a passing remark. Perhaps he realised that examining the meaning of democracy too closely might raise awkward questions about its fundamental limits under capitalism.

Widening inequality

In the second and third chapters of Part Two, Bernie looks at the shrinking 'middle class' in America and growing inequality. And here again he offers the same picture of a steady progress that was suddenly upended by greed. The period after World War II, he explains, was a 'time of enormous economic growth' when 'the benefits of the economy were far more equitably shared with the working families that make up the broad middle'. Although it wasn't a 'utopian time', there was far less 'income and wealth inequality'.

So how was it that progress came to an end and is now being reversed? What 'cause-and-effect dynamic' was at play? It's quite simple, really: Things were improving 'until powerful special interests started demanding a bigger and bigger slice of the pie'.

Those must have been powerfully *stupid* special interests, because on the previous page Bernie had just told us that, during the period of growth, 'the rich were doing well, the middle class was expanding, and fewer people were living in poverty'. Why would the rich dare to rock that pleasure boat? Surely slightly less wealth would be acceptable in return for social harmony.

But Bernie doesn't trouble himself with such questions, or stop to consider how capitalism is rooted in inequality, leaving him free to blithely conclude that the greed of those special interests (who pushed deregulation, free-trade agreements, and anti-union legislation) is the reason the 'great American class, once the envy of the world' has been in decline ever since'.

But don't despair! Bernie has a plan to reverse this decline so that we can 'create an economy that works for all, not just the people on top', promising he will 'explain how we can do that' in his chapter, 'Ending the Rigged Economy'. (Some may be curious, to begin with, how an 'economy that works for all' would still have 'people on top'!)

The plan, after Bernie's big build-up, is a let-down. It amounts to little more than raising the minimum wage, based on his reasoning that 'a major reason why more than 43 million Americans are living in poverty today' is the 'erosion of the federal minimum wage'. So, in case you didn't follow his reasoning, a major cause of poverty is that workers don't have enough money. (In other breaking news: Disease may be a major cause of illness.). So the solution is equally straightforward. Raising the minimum wage, Bernie writes,

‘will lift millions of Americans out of poverty, and provide a much-needed boost to our economy’.

It should go without saying (but I’ll say it for the sake of ‘Berniecrats’) that workers naturally must fight for higher wages, as well as for shorter working hours and better conditions. And the fight for a higher minimum wage is part of that struggle. This is all good. The problem with Bernie’s argument is that it portrays poverty as an arbitrary phenomenon under capitalism, resulting from lower wages (tautology!), rather than from some deeper cause.

Moreover, Bernie’s claim that raising wages will ‘boost’ the economy reflects a profound ignorance of how capitalism operates. His assumption is based on the tired old ‘under-consumption theory’, so prevalent on the Left, which states that economic stagnation and crisis can be overcome by raising wages to stimulate mass consumption. Bernie lays out the theory in its crudest form:

‘When low-wage workers have money in their pockets they spend that money in grocery stores, restaurants, and businesses throughout the country. All this new demand gives companies a reason to expand and hire more workers. This is a win-win situation for our economy. Poverty is reduced. New jobs are created. And we reduce the sky-rocketing inequality

By labelling his package of reforms a ‘revolution’ he is channelling the anger of budding class warriors away from the capitalist system itself

that currently exists in this country’.

This is impeccable logic, except for the fact that the motive force of capitalism is *profit*. While capitalists are happy for the workers of their rivals to have more money, they fiercely resist wage increases among their own workers that would reduce profit margins. Indeed, if raising wages really was such a simple, win-win solution, why on earth would capitalists shun it? Is it simply because they are greedy, amoral, and stupid? Bernie sure seems to think so.

But for all his foaming rhetoric against the ‘billionaire class’, Bernie never goes so far as to say: *No more billionaires!* Instead, his ‘message to them’ is that, “they can’t have it all.” But we’d have to assume that ‘they’ would still have at least a billion dollars, the bare requirement for membership in their class. Maybe it’s not ‘having it all’, literally, but for the average worker it sure as hell seems like it!

Bernie’s rhetoric against billionaires is just a distraction from the more essential causes of social problems, thereby letting capitalism (and hence the billionaires themselves!) off the hook.

It’s not about him

During Bernie’s campaign, the sight of enthusiastic workers and students at the rallies, and the unfamiliar sound of words like ‘oligarchy’ and ‘billionaire class’ in the stump speeches, made his politics appear radical. And it was indeed encouraging to see that the ‘language of class war’ could be a vote-winner among the supposedly ‘conservative’ American working class.

But now that the crowds have dispersed and his ideas are lying flat on the page, it is obvious that behind the radical-sounding rhetoric lies a politician whose aim is to reform American political policy—not transform society. Moreover, by labeling his package of reforms a ‘revolution’, and selectively attacking certain sectors of the capitalist class, Bernie is channeling the anger of budding class warriors away from the capitalist system itself.

Rather than targeting capitalism, Bernie attacks the ‘billionaire class’, Wall Street, ‘Big Pharma’, and specific companies like Walmart. He blames free-trade agreements for worsening unemployment and intensifying competition, as if those phenomena were not inherent to the profit system. And, ignoring irreconcilable class differences, Bernie (like Trump) pushes the nationalist myth that American capitalists could be convinced or coerced to look out for the interests of American workers.

Bernie’s book reveals that his politics are incapable of meeting the hopes raised by his campaign rhetoric. In his stump speeches, he was fond of saying: ‘This is not about me—it’s about all of us’, Bernie was right. The time has come for workers to leave reformists like him to their tinkering with capitalism, while we carry out *our revolution*.

MIKE SCHAUERTE



A Short Guide to Capitalism

Capitalism can be defined as a world-wide economic system involving commodity-production by wage-labour, driven by the imperative to make profits and to accumulate them as more and more capital.

Generalised commodity-production, nearly all wealth being produced for sale on a market:

'Commodity' is a term inherited by Marx from the Classical Political Economists Adam Smith and David Ricardo who used it to mean an item of wealth produced for sale on an 'anonymous' market, that is without knowing in advance who the buyer will be. This existed before capitalism, but only on the margins. With capitalism, the production of commodities becomes general with nearly all items of wealth produced for sale. As such they have an 'exchange value', or, in money terms, a price, which is ultimately related to the amount of labour that needs to be spent to produce them from start to finish.

The investment of capital in production with a view to obtaining a monetary profit:

Capital, as a sum of money used to make more money also existed before capitalism but, once again, only marginally, as with moneylenders and long-distance merchants who bought cheap and sold dear. In neither case, however, was the money invested in production. This only began when certain conditions arose, such as productive techniques involving large-scale operations, the accumulation by a few of wealth in the form of money, but above all, the creation of a landless proletariat. Then, money-capital seeking a profit came to be invested in the production of commodities by hired wage workers. So, capital is a sum of money invested in production with a view to profit, or a sum of exchange values used to produce a greater amount of exchange values. Marx described it as 'self-expanding value.'

The exploitation of wage labour, the source of profit being the unpaid labour of the producers:

That most production of wealth today is carried out by people paid a wage or salary is not controversial. It's obvious, an everyday experience. This reflects the division of society into a minority who, together, own/control all the means of wealth production, and the rest who, excluded from such ownership, are forced by economic necessity to try to sell their working skills for a living. What is perhaps not so obvious is that this involves 'exploitation'. The word is associated with low wages and bullying overseers, but this is not the sense used here. Here, it refers to the fact that, as wealth can only be produced through work, a non-work income derived from production, such as profits are, can only come out of what those who work have produced. In more technical terms, productive workers produce new wealth with a value greater than that of their working skills, the difference being 'surplus value.'

The regulation of production by the market via a competitive struggle for profits:

There is not much controversy over this either, but two questions arise. First, what are the units of competition? They are capitals – sums of money invested in production with a view to profit – but embodied in 'enterprises'. An enterprise can be an individual owner, a joint-stock company or corporation, a nationalised industry, even a workers' co-operative; the institutional form of the enterprise is not important as far as competition is concerned. The second question is: who are enterprises competing with? It might be

thought that competition is only between enterprises in the same line of business, but in fact it is much wider than this. All enterprises are ultimately competing against each other to draw as much profit as they can from the pool of new surplus value produced in all lines of business. Due to the tendency of all capitals to make the same rate of profit, while surplus value is created in production it is won on the market. This gives rise to the illusion shared by those in charge of enterprises that this is where profits originate and that they are 'the wealth producers'. In fact, business acumen in the competitive struggle for profits affects only how much profit a particular enterprise gets, not where it comes from.

The accumulation of capital out of profits, leading to the expansion and development of the means of production:

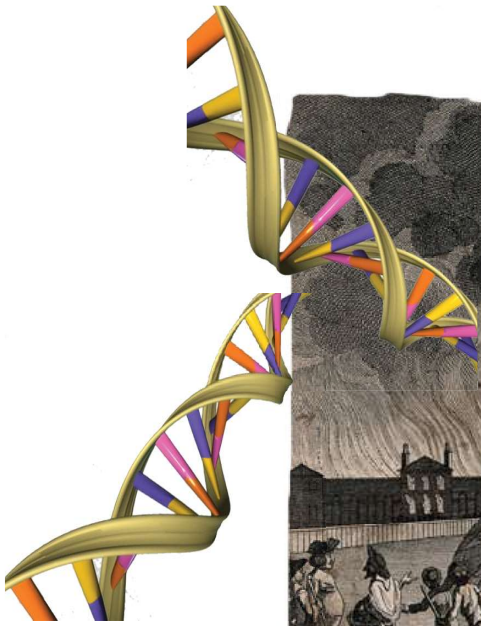
Capitalism is a profit system. Profit is what makes it go round. But it is not a system of profits for the consumption of the owning class. Certainly, they get a share of profits to enjoy themselves and lead a life of luxury, but to maintain their privileged lifestyle is not what capitalism as an economic system is about. It is not driven by their greed. The system works in such a way as to compel the re-investment of most profits as more capital, as more money invested in production. Marx remarked that the battle of competition is fought by the cheapening of commodities. The way enterprises do this is by improving productivity so that the unit cost of their commodity falls (more of them produced in the same period of time), so improving their competitiveness. The main way they do this is by installing new, more efficient machines, paid for out of profits. So, capital comes to be accumulated as more and more means of production, which also leads to enterprises becoming larger and larger. Growth of both productive capacity and production, under pressure of the competitive struggle for profits, is built-in to the system and imposes itself as an external force on those in charge of enterprises. This is what drives capitalism. If an enterprise didn't re-invest its profits but disbursed them all for the personal consumption of its shareholders, then eventually it would lose out in the battle of competition and go bust. Capitalism is a system of profit for capital accumulation, not simply a system of production for profit.

A single world economy:

You often hear talk about 'the British economy', 'the German economy', 'the American economy' and so on, which can suggest that capitalism is a collection of national capitalist economies. But it's not. It's a single economic system that now dominates the whole world. So-called national economies are merely parts of its domain that fall under the political jurisdiction of one or other of the 190 or so states into which the world is divided. Capitalism in one country is just as impossible as socialism in one country. Quite apart from when they run their own enterprises (nationalised industries), states, alongside enterprises, are actors in the world capitalist system in their own right. They act to try to ensure that as much of world surplus value finds its way as profits to enterprises operating from within its borders, by helping to procure and protect overseas markets, investment outlets and sources of raw materials. But what they can do here is limited by the need to avoid undermining the competitiveness of enterprises operating from within their borders. States, too, have to submit to the economic imperatives of capitalism.

Stephen Hawking :

no anthropologist



In an interview with the *Times* (7 March) world-famous scientist Stephen Hawking opined:

"Since civilisation began, aggression has been useful inasmuch as it has definite survival advantages," he said. "It is hard-wired into our genes by Darwinian evolution. Now, however, technology has advanced at such a pace that this aggression may destroy us all by nuclear or biological war. We need to control this inherited instinct by our logic and reason."

He may know a lot about theoretical physics but in stating that human aggression is 'hard-wired' and an 'inherited instinct' he has merely echoed popular prejudices cultivated by certain scientists, as this extract from our pamphlet *Are We Prisoners of Our Genes?* explains.

After leaving a respectable time for people's memories of Nazism to dim a little, the defenders of a muscular biological determinism began to make a reappearance. One of the first was the Austrian naturalist Konrad Lorenz. A book he had written in German in 1963 was translated into English and published in 1966 under the title *On Aggression*. In it he argued that humans were naturally aggressive, or, as he put it, that they were 'phylogenetically programmed' for aggressive behaviour.

In a chapter entitled 'The Spontaneity of Aggression', Lorenz claimed that aggression in humans was an internally-generated 'drive' that was part of their genetically-inherited physiology:

'Knowing of the fact that the aggression drive is a true, primarily species-preserving instinct enables us to recognise its full danger: it is the spontaneity of the instinct that makes it so dangerous. If it were merely a reaction to certain external factors, as many sociologists and psychologists maintain, the state of mankind would not be so perilous as it really is, for, in that case, the reaction-eliciting factors could be eliminated with some hope of success' (*On Aggression*, Methuen, 1969, p. 40).

This assertion was based on his own studies of non-human animals, mainly birds and fishes, and on his personal belief in Freud's view that 'we are still driven by the same instincts as

our prehuman ancestors' (p. 193).

His fellow scientists were highly critical of the book. They pointed out that in talking about 'instincts' in humans he was having recourse to a notion long since discarded as unhelpful; that his view about there being 'phylogenetically evolved patterns of social behaviour' in humans went against the evidence of anthropology and history; that it by no means followed that what applied to other animals therefore applied to humans; that in any event the behaviour he described as aggressive didn't apply to all animals; that even in those to which it did apply it was not always clear that it might not be learned.

On the key issue of whether aggressive behaviour in humans was triggered in response to external factors or, as Lorenz asserted, in response to some internal 'drive' that had to be 'discharged', opinion (apart from a few die-hard Freudians) was unanimous: Lorenz had drawn the wrong conclusions from the facts. There was no 'fighting instinct' or 'aggression drive' in humans; aggressive behaviour in humans was triggered by external causes. This being so, the situation was not as dangerous as Lorenz had imagined since, on his own admission, this meant that these external aggression-eliciting factors could be eliminated 'with some hope of success'.

Ironically, but fittingly, it is the science of genetics itself that is undermining the speculations and prejudices of the biological determinists. Its advances are discovering that the parts of the brain involved in human social behaviour are 'wired' after birth, depending on the social environment in which the human child grows up. It is this biological capacity to get wired after birth that is gene-governed, not the content of the wiring. In other words, the findings of genetics are confirming those of anthropology that the main biological characteristic of humans that distinguishes us from non-human animals is the capacity, as a species, to engage in a great variety of social behaviours.

(Pamphlet can be obtained from us at 52 Clapham High St, London SW4 7UN, price £5 postage included).



Was Antonio Gramsci a Socialist?

This month sees the 80th anniversary of the death of an icon of the left – Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci (1891-1937) was an Italian political activist who was imprisoned by Mussolini's Fascist regime in 1926 and died while still a captive 10 years later from a combination of illnesses. He was an undoubtedly courageous figure who fought difficult family circumstances when young to educate himself and became a prolific writer and editor for the emerging left-wing press in Italy in the second and third decade of the 20th century. He wrote intensively of the need for both workers' rights and workers' revolution and actively involved himself in the political action he advocated. He was a leading member of the foremost left-wing movement, the Italian Socialist Party, until, after the 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia, his disenchantment with what he saw as their over-timid approach led him to become, in 1921, one of the co-founders of the Italian Communist Party, which pledged allegiance to Lenin and the Bolshevik regime. Then, in 1922-23, he spent a significant period in Russia as delegate to the Communist International ('Comintern') and, on his return to Italy, was elected to the Chamber of Deputies and served until his arrest and imprisonment. Sentenced to 20 years for subversion, he was however able to continue writing in prison, where access to books and the extensive knowledge of history and politics he had accumulated during his years of political activity led him to produce a mass of notes, observations and essays on an astonishingly broad spread of topics, later ordered into what were called the Prison Notebooks. It is largely on these and on the collection of letters he wrote from prison – mainly to family members – that his reputation as a social and political theorist lies.

Hegemony

Gramsci is said, in the Prison Notebooks, to have developed a new and original kind of Marxist sociology, which, over the last half century or so, has engendered a vast range of debate, interpretation and controversy by academics and others – the so-called 'Gramsci industry'. One of the key matters debated has been his concept of 'hegemony' ('egemonia').

This was the term Gramsci used to describe what he saw as the prerequisite for a successful revolution: the building of an ideological consensus throughout all the institutions of society spread by intellectuals who saw the need for revolution and used their ability to persuade and proselytise workers to carry through that revolution. Only when that process was sufficiently widespread, would successful revolutionary action be possible. So hegemony was what might be called the social penetration of revolutionary ideas.

This outlook is very different from the fervour with which in earlier years Gramsci had greeted the Russian revolution and advocated similar uprisings in other countries. By the second half of the 1920s, with Italy ruled by a Fascist dictatorship and opposition leaders exiled or imprisoned, Gramsci came to see revolution as a longer-term prospect which would depend on the conditions existing in individual countries.

And it is this 'long-term' idea of revolutionary change that has been interpreted in very many different ways according to the standpoint or political position of the individual commentator. One way it could be read would seem to tie in closely with the Socialist Party's view that only through widespread political consciousness on the part of workers and majority consent for social revolution can a society based on the satisfaction of human needs rather than on the profit imperative be established. In this light Gramsci's hegemony could be seen to have the profoundly democratic implications of insisting on a widespread and well informed desire among the majority of workers for socialist revolution before such a revolution can come about. Indeed it is clear that Gramsci was not unaware of Marx's 'majoritarian' view of socialism (or communism – they were interchangeable for Marx) as a stateless, leaderless world where the wages system is abolished and a system of 'from each according to ability to each according to need' operates. In an article written in 1920, for example, Gramsci refers to 'communist society' as 'the International of nations without states', and later from prison he writes about 'the disappearance of the state, the absorption of political society into civil society'. However, though he referred to himself as using 'the Marxist method',

such reflections on the nature of the society he wished to see established are few and far between and cannot reasonably be said to characterise the mainstream of his thought.

Leninist

When looked at closely in fact, Gramsci's thought is overwhelmingly marked by what may be called the coercive element of his Leninist political background. So, while undoubtedly in his later writings he came to see the Soviet model as inapplicable to other Western societies, he nevertheless continued to conceive of revolution as the taking of power via the leadership of a minority group, even if in different circumstances from those experienced by Lenin in Russia. The most important pointer to this lies in Gramsci's view of the state. Hardly ever does he view socialism other than as a form of state. The overwhelming thrust of his analysis and his recommendations for political action point not to doing away with states and the class divisions that go with them but to establishing new kinds of states. In 1919, enthused by the Bolshevik takeover in Russia, Gramsci wrote: 'Society cannot live without a state: the state is the concrete act of will which guards against the will of the individual, faction, disorder and individual indisciplinecommunism is not against the state, in fact it is implacably opposed to the enemies of the state.' Later too, in his prison writings, arguing now for a 'long-term strategy', he continued to declare the need for states and state organisation, for leaders and led, for governors and governed in the conduct of human affairs – underlined by his frequent use of three terms in particular: 'direzione' (leadership), 'disciplina' (discipline) and 'coercizione' (coercion).

So, despite what Gramsci himself recognised as changed times and circumstances compared with Russia in 1917, he continued to be profoundly influenced by Lenin's view that 'if socialism can only be realised when the intellectual development of all the people permits it, then we shall not see Socialism for at least 500 years' – in other words that genuine majority social consciousness was unachievable. And in line with this, when looked at closely his 'hegemony', far from eschewing the idea of a revolutionary vanguard, sees an intellectual leadership taking the masses with them. In other words the 'consent' that his hegemony, his long-term penetration of ideas, proposes is not the informed consent of a convinced socialist majority but an awakening of what, at one point he refers to as 'popular passions', a spontaneous spilling over of revolutionary enthusiasm which enables the leadership to take the masses with them and then govern in the way they think best.

Human nature

Underpinning this lack of confidence by Gramsci in the ability of a majority to self-organise is a factor little commented on but particularly significant – and that is his view of what may be called 'human nature'. In writing explicitly about human nature, which Gramsci does on a number of occasions, he expresses agreement with Marx's view that human nature is not something innate, fixed and unchanging, not something homogeneous for all people in all times but something that changes historically and is inseparable from ideas in society at a given time. This view of humanity is in fact described by Gramsci as 'the great innovation of Marxism' and he contrasts it favourably with other widely-held early 20th century views such as the Catholic dogma of original sin and the 'idealist' position that human nature was identical at all times and undeveloping. But despite Gramsci's stated 'theoretical' view on this topic, scrutiny of his writings in places where 'human

nature' is not raised explicitly but is rather present in an implicit way points his thought in a different, more pessimistic direction.

When he writes about education, for example, his pronouncements about the need for 'coercion' indicate little confidence in the ability of human beings to behave fundamentally differently or to adaptably change their 'nature' in a different social environment. In corresponding with his wife about the education of their children, in response to her view that, if children are left to interact with the environment and the environment is non-oppressive, they will develop co-operative forms of behaviour, he states 'I think that man is a historical formation but one obtained through coercion' and implies that without coercion undesirable behaviour will result. Then, in the Prison Notebooks, on a similar topic he writes: 'Education is a struggle against the instincts which are tied to our elementary biological functions, it is a struggle against nature itself.' What surfaces here as in other places, even if not stated explicitly, is a view of human nature not as the exclusive product of history but as characterised by some kind of inherent propensity towards anti-social forms of behaviour which needs to be coerced and tamed.

Viewed in this light, Gramsci's vision of post-revolutionary society as a place where human beings will continue to need leadership and coercion should not be seen either as being



in contradiction with his theory of ideological penetration ('hegemony') or as inconsistent with the views that emerge about human nature when his writings do not explicitly focus on that subject. So we should not be surprised that Gramsci's vision for the future is not a society of free access and democratic control where people organise themselves freely and collectively as a majority but rather a change from one form of minority authority to another – a change from a system of the few manifestly governing in their own interests to the few claiming to govern in the interests of the majority.

The evidence of Gramsci's writings therefore suggests that the revolution he envisages is not one in which democracy in the sense of each participating with equal understanding and equal authority prevails. Crucially, the leadership function is not abolished. The hegemonisers will essentially be in charge, since they will be the ones with the necessary understanding to run the society they have conceived. What this society might be like he does not go on to say in any detail. But it would clearly not be a socialist world of free access and democratic control that rejects authority from above together with its political expression, the state. For Gramsci any such considerations were at best peripheral to the thrust of his thought and his social vision. And though he did have a revolutionary project, it is not a socialist one in the terms that socialism is correctly understood.

HOWARD MOSS



There are various forms of disability, and plenty of room for arguments about definition. Under the Equality Act of 2010, an impairment has to be long-term (twelve months or more) and 'substantial' (so not trivial). The Act lays down certain 'rights' covering areas such as education and employment. It is all very well saying that 'As a disabled person, you have rights to protect you from discrimination' (gov.uk), but rights under capitalism mean very little and it is the reality of people's situations that matters.

There are two basic approaches to characterising disability. The standard medical model sees it as something intrinsic to an individual's condition, while the alternative social model 'identifies systemic barriers, negative attitudes and exclusion by society (purposely or inadvertently) that mean society is the main contributory factor in disabling people' (Wikipedia). Under the social model, an individual's condition only leads to them being disabled under certain societally-determined circumstances, a claim which should be borne in mind in reading what follows.

There is no doubt that, in practice, people with disabilities encounter all sorts of problems and difficulties, from accommodation to work and travel. A Guardian article (8 January) gave a number of examples relating to people in their twenties and thirties. For instance, two brothers with Duchenne muscular dystrophy live with their parents and younger sisters. Under pressure from a charity, the local council is paying for personal assistants for them, but this arrangement is shared between them both, making it very difficult for them to live separate lives. One of them would like to go to university, but cannot do so, as the financial situation means his brother would have to go with him. Another woman has Ehlers-Danlos syndrome and autism, and was housed for a while in a cold and

damp fifth-floor flat, where the lift hardly ever worked.

It is common to hear of those who have a choice between eating and heating, but disabled people face this even more starkly because of high heating costs. According to the charity Scope (13 January),

one in four has struggled to pay their energy bills, and many are forced to use expensive pre-payment meters. People turn off their heating even though it is cold, they wear a coat indoors, they wrap themselves in a blanket, they go to bed early, and they can spend up to twice as much on energy as the average household. As the charity's chief executive has stated, 'Life costs more if you are disabled. Scope research shows that these costs add up to on average £550 a month, and higher energy bills play a significant part.' Vicious cuts to benefits and arbitrary decisions to withdraw support make things even worse.

Around one-third of adults with disabilities live in low-income households, which is twice the rate for those without disabilities. This is because they are less likely to be working, with only forty percent of people who are disabled but are not lone parents being in work. Almost half the unemployed are disabled. Three and a half million adults 'report a longstanding illness or disability which limits their activity' (poverty.org.uk), while other sources give seven million with a disability in the UK. Such longstanding impairments are more common the less well-off people are, with poverty probably being both caused by and a cause of the disability. Globally, about one person in ten has a disability: they are disproportionately likely to be illiterate and subjected to violence.

Over the years governments have proposed various schemes to increase the number of disabled people who have jobs, but the proportion in paid work has changed very little. Furthermore, having a job does not in itself solve the problems. A blind

teacher has written (Guardian, 13 February) of how he enjoyed and was good at his job, even though things like marking and keeping student records took him longer than sighted colleagues. But as the paperwork increased, he was less able to cope and became a support coordinator for disabled students. But even here the emphasis on numbers and speed and 'efficiency' made him appear less competent, and the workplace became 'racked by rumour and rivalry'.

Under the law, employers have to make 'reasonable adjustments' to ensure that workers with disabilities are not seriously disadvantaged when doing their jobs. This can cover everything from installing ramps or letting people work on the ground floor to providing a special computer keyboard. But, as noted earlier, people with disabilities are less likely to be employed. Further, there is evidence that when in work they are more likely to suffer various



kinds of ill-treatment, such as being subject to intimidating behaviour, having their opinions ignored or being treated unfairly.

Internet access is also much harder for people with disabilities. 'According to the Office for National Statistics, in May 2015, 27% of disabled adults had never used the internet, compared to 11% of non-disabled adults' (Guardian 29/06/15). Assistive computing can help disabled people use computers, and many do find the internet a great help, such as doing their weekly shop online rather than struggling round a supermarket. But the fact remains that a crucial part of communicating with government or local councils or support organisations is effectively barred to many people with a disability.

People with disabilities are not just workers but also consumers: their spending power is often referred to as the purple pound (compare the grey pound and the pink pound), and is supposedly worth well over two hundred billion pounds. Companies that ignore the needs of disabled customers may miss out on sales: 'Three quarters of disabled people and their

families have left a shop or business because of poor customer service or a lack of disability awareness' (Business Disability Forum 03/05/16). M&S are one example of a company with a range of clothes for disabled children (not available in their shops, though).

While there have definitely been improvements in recent years, travel can still be a major problem too, especially, though not only, for people who use wheelchairs. The BBC's Frank Gardner, who was paralysed in the legs when shot while reporting, has commented that he sometimes gets left on a plane for a while when an airbridge is not used (using one costs the airline money). In a well-publicised recent case, a woman was forced to wet herself on a train journey as there was no disabled toilet available.

If we look at things from the standpoint of the social model of disability, it would be reasonable to aim for a world where as few people as possible are disabled, or at least where as few as possible are disadvantaged because of any disability. This

would be a world where production is keyed to fitting work to humans rather than the other way round, where those with special needs get the support they require, where goods and services truly meet human need. Despite the best efforts of many well-meaning people, a society based on the profit motive cannot be transformed into such a world.

PAUL BENNETT



Proposed new Olympic sport - Hunt the Disabled (part of the Persecute the Poor Decathlon)



Bill Gates on robots

THE ONLINE magazine *Quartz* (17 February) put up a video interview with Bill Gates under the headline 'The robot that takes your job should pay taxes, says Bill Gates'.

Gates didn't say anything particularly profound. The point he made was that robotisation would release workers for other kinds of work, but that this would have to be paid for, one source of money for this being a tax on robots, i. e., on capitalist firms installing them. The other kind of work he had in mind was catering better for some particular human needs:

'what the world wants is to take this opportunity to make all the goods and services we have today, and free up labor, let us do a better job of reaching out to the elderly, having smaller class sizes, helping kids with special needs. You know, all of those are things where human empathy and understanding are still very, very unique. And we still deal with an immense shortage of people to help out there.'

It does make sense to use work

resources freed up by robotisation to meet these, and other, needs. This is what would happen in socialist society since it will be a society directly geared to meeting human needs. But we are not living in socialist society, only under capitalism where this is not the case. So it's not that simple.

Robotisation is no different in principle from the mechanisation that has gone on since the beginning of capitalism. It is, in fact, the latest application of machines to production. Machines have always displaced living labour but, despite dire predictions by some, this has not led to steadily increasing unemployment. Capital accumulation has continued, with the displaced labour (though not necessarily individual displaced workers) being transferred to other industries (making the machines as well as in new industries) and also in the 'service sector'.

This sector includes providers of personal services to workers (and capitalists) for profit, but, also, in large part, services provided by the government and paid for from taxes. Apart from its own administration, national and local, the government provides for health care and education, for the benefit of the capitalist class by providing and maintaining an educated and healthy workforce to produce their profits.

These are part of the necessary expenses of running the capitalist system which capitalists are prepared to pay for out of taxation, which in the end is a burden on their profits. But there are limits. They want these expenses kept to the minimum necessary to benefit them, not to provide an adequate service for workers and their dependants.

Gates favours some of the benefits of the increased productivity that robots bring being used to 'do a better job of reaching out to the elderly, having smaller class sizes, helping kids with special needs.' He should ask himself why this has not happened already. Why are services for the elderly and those with special needs not adequate? Why are there not smaller classes in schools? After all, sixty years ago automation was said to hold out the same promise.

The answer is that capitalism is not a system geared to meeting human needs, certainly not the needs of worker's dependants who don't contribute to production. As a profit-making system, its priority is profits and conditions for profit-making.

Robotisation under capitalism will not benefit people in the way Gates said he would like. The service sector may well expand but mainly for those who can pay. The needs of those who can't will still be neglected.



Peering At The Peers

THE HOUSE OF LORDS isn't just a holding bay for octogenarian Caucasian aristocrats before they pop their clogs. As BBC2's documentary series *Meet The Lords* shows us, it's a weirder and more interesting institution than its fuddy-duddy reputation suggests. Despite the House of Lords' important role in the state, and therefore capitalism, we don't usually see all that much of it on the telly. There's an occasional glimpse on the news, when we get someone like Paddy Ashdown (now The Right Honourable The Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon) or Melvyn Bragg (aka Baron Bragg of Wigton in the County of Cumbria) standing next to those tightly upholstered red benches talking cobblers and looking older than we remember. The producers of *Meet The Lords* have been allowed to film the wider goings-on in the House, including the debates, corridor chats, rituals and mealtimes. However, the price of this unprecedented access is that the series isn't going to show us anything the state doesn't want us to see. An undercover exposé with hidden cameras and smuggled-out documents would be much more revealing, but there's as much chance of that being made as there is a new series of *Eldorado*.

The image that the programme wants to present is that the House of Lords is home to wily mavericks keen to hold the House of Commons in check and who are crazy enough to go out for a curry to celebrate winning a vote. The show focuses less on the doddering old traditionalists we tend to assume make up most of the Upper House and more on livelier

Lords and Ladies. Baron Bird, having gone from working in the House of Lords kitchen when he was much younger to sitting in the House itself, via setting up *The Big Issue* magazine, is certainly more grounded and relatable than many of his peers in the Peerage. He, at least, seems sincere in wanting to use his position to help out plebs like us. Baroness King wants to give the same impression, and says that the House of Lords is vital in tidying up the 'chaos' which comes from the House of Commons. This includes a proposed benefits cap for adopted children, which she fights against because she has three adopted children herself. Another peer acting on self-interest is Lord Borwick, a big-shot property developer involved with amendments to planning laws which will make it easier for him to build houses. Even if they succeed in making reforms which have some small benefit to workers, it's still part of a system structured to defend the interests of the elite. The reforms have to fit in with what's economically

in ribbon between the Houses of Lords and Commons, while phrases in Norman French are still used in official declarations when laws are passed. 'The most ludicrous part of our constitutional set-up', according to The Electoral Reform Society's chief executive Katie Ghose (quoted in *Morning Star*, 4th – 5th March 2017) is the hereditary peer 'by-election'. The House of Lords Act 1999 led to most hereditary peers losing an automatic right to sit in the Upper House. When one of the remaining 92 dies or retires, the others elect a replacement from a tiny pool of aristocrats with an inherited title. Ironically, these hereditary peers are the only people elected into the House of Lords, not that this represents democracy in any meaningful sense to anyone outside the bubble.

The vast majority of the 800 members of the Upper House are life peers, appointed by the Queen and named as such because they're there for the rest of their life. So, if you've ever wondered where David Blunkett, Norman Tebbit, John Prescott, Betty Boothroyd, Nigel Lawson, Tessa Jowell and Floella

Benjamin ended up, then it's in 'the best day care centre for the elderly in London', as one member calls it.

Also skulking about in there is Neil Kinnock (now Baron Kinnock of Bedwellty in the County of Gwent), who at his inauguration speech



viable, meaning whatever measures keep as much wealth as possible in the hands of the capitalist class. So, both the Houses of Commons and Lords share a goal, however much the programme emphasises a 'war of wills' between them.

The two Houses certainly differ in culture, though. The House of Lords seems much more laid-back, albeit in a starchy sort of way. Rivalries between peers of different political parties aren't expressed with the shouty point-scoring common in the House of Commons. Instead, they're politely discussed over dinner, with the seating arrangements deliberately random to encourage different people to meet at each sitting. The odd procedures carried on in parliament underline how it's an archaic, bizarre institution. Clerks wearing gowns unchanged since the 18th Century pass messages wrapped

presumably didn't repeat his quote from *Tribune* (19th

November 1976): 'The House of Lords must go - not be reformed, not be replaced, not be reborn in some nominated life-after-death patronage paradise, just closed down, abolished, finished'. Now, he's acquired a taste for ermine and collects his £300 expenses each day.

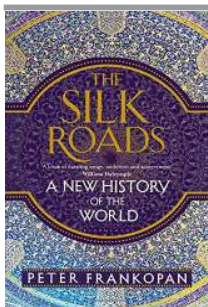
All the above are 'Lords Temporal', which sounds like something from *Doctor Who*. The remaining 26 are Church of England Bishops, collectively 'Lords Spiritual', which sounds like something from *Game Of Thrones*.

Meet The Lords is an interesting insight into those who, literally, lord it over us. The colourful characters and the strange rituals it focuses on, though, are really just window-dressing on a stodgy, elitist institution which props up our divided society.

MIKE FOSTER

The Road Much Taken

The Silk Roads: a New History of the World. By Peter Frankopan. Bloomsbury £10.99.



THE NAME of the Silk Road dates only from the late nineteenth century, but a connection between the Mediterranean and parts of south and east Asia began over two millennia ago. In

this substantial volume, Peter Frankopan traces the history of this vast region and its influence on the wider world, emphasising its role in global movements of people, goods, ideas and armies. We cannot summarise the book here, just pick out some of its main themes.

One of the earliest commodities traded was indeed silk from China: it was a luxury product popular among wealthy Romans, but also an international currency. As Frankopan points out, globalisation was 'a fact of life' two thousand years ago (though perhaps the use of 'globalisation' here is a bit of a stretch). The Greek language, for instance, was spoken and written in central and much of south Asia around 200 BCE. Pottery and spices, among many other goods, were traded along these routes covering Europe, China and points in between, while western Europe was pretty much a backwater. Furs and slaves were transported in later centuries.

The crusades of the eleventh century CE onwards had a religious guise, but considerations of wealth and power were the real motivation, with access to 'exotic' goods for trade being at stake. The Italian city-states benefited from the capture of Jerusalem in 1099: Venice emerged as the most successful, as it was nearer to the Silk Road regions than its rivals. In the thirteenth century, both Venice and Genoa established new colonies, in Crimea for instance. Textiles were transported to the west, after being manufactured in Baghdad and cities in what is now Iran and Afghanistan.

The discoveries of the late fifteenth century changed the balance of power, as Europe became far wealthier and more important, and gold, silver, and other goods were carried across the Atlantic. Frankopan minces no words about what lay behind this: 'The age of empire and the rise of the west were built on the capacity to inflict violence on a major scale.' With reference to Thomas Hobbes, he argues that only a European author could have suggested that the natural condition of humans was a constant state of violence.

The founding of the British Empire, especially control of India, led to a

decline in the overland trade routes. One thing the Empire lacked, however, was meaningful oil deposits. Massive oil finds in Persia in 1908 gave new life to the Silk Road, and oil came to be seen as an essential fuel for the Royal Navy. Shortly before the First World War began, the British government bought a controlling stake in the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (nowadays BP). A network of oilfields and pipelines was built up, and in the 1920s Iraq was cobbled together by Britain as an artificial country that could be pretty much run as the British ruling class wished.

All these shenanigans continued well into the second half of the last century. The US took Britain's place as overlord of the Silk Road region, and MI6 and the CIA were instrumental in the 1953 coup that deposed Prime Minister Mossadegh of Iran. Oil-rich countries became wealthy enough to make massive purchases of weapons and nuclear technology from the US. Wars against Saddam and Gaddafi were all part of the move to control the oil and gas fields in the interest of US national security.

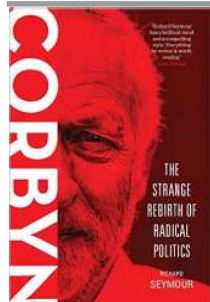
In the present century the Silk Road has re-emerged as a central area of great power rivalry, with the US being threatened by Russia and China, among others. Enormous supplies of coal, oil and gas still await exploitation, and gold and rare earths are available in large amounts. The wheatfields of southern Russia and Ukraine are extremely fertile too. As might be said, watch that space.

Peter Frankopan's book can be hard going, especially in the early chapters, because of the amount of detail it contains. But it gives an excellent overview of how one part of the world has affected global history, and of what the real motives of conquerors and armies are.

PB

Riding for a fall

Corbyn. The Strange Rebirth of Radical Politics. By Richard Seymour. Verso. 2016. 248 pages



relevant things to say.

Seymour explains Corbyn's election as Labour Leader as a reaction to Tony Blair's New Labour project of turning the Labour Party into an openly pro-capitalist party with no other ambition than to win elections to run capitalism more or less

Although written early last year and so missing developments since – Corbyn's re-election, the Brexit vote, Labour's victory in the London mayoral elections – this book still has some

as it is. This uninspiring project had no appeal to young people outside the party who wanted change, and who were able to join under new rules for electing the Leader, nor to many existing Labour Party members.

Despite the almost unanimous and merciless opposition from the media, Corbyn and his supporters were able to use instead social media to rally support for meetings. So, his election was one in the eye for the mainstream media as well as for the unprincipled career politicians that most Labour MPs are. Seymour refutes the idea that Corbyn won because of Trotskyist infiltration (if only because there are not that many of them), seeing most as the sort of people who would otherwise support the Green Party. In fact, the Labour Party bureaucracy excluded many on the grounds that they had previously openly supported the Greens.

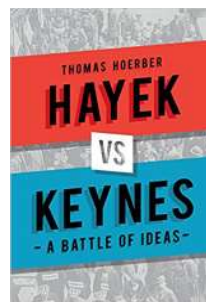
Seymour, a former SWP member, has no illusions about the Labour Party which he sees as having always been a non-socialist party out to manage capitalism – his dissection of the Labour Party is the best part of the book – and so doesn't hold out much hope of Corbyn being able to achieve much. He doesn't think he will be able to democratise the Labour Party or is likely to win the 2020 general election or, if he did, that he would be able to change capitalism.

He is not unsympathetic to Corbyn, seeing him as a socialist (even though he admits that Corbyn's programme is no more radical than Harold Wilson's) leading a non-socialist party and for that reason doomed to fail. If true, that would be what the classical continental Social Democratic parties were and why they failed. Reverting to his Trotskyist roots, Seymour sees this predictable failure as positive in that Corbyn's supporters will thereby come to see the Labour Party as useless as a vehicle for socialism and so turn elsewhere but, now as an ex-Trotskyist, not to a vanguard party but to some grass-roots extra-parliamentary anti-capitalist social movement.

ALB

Capitalist vs Capitalist

Hayek vs Keynes. A Battle of Ideas. By Thomas Hoerber. Reaktion Books. 2017. 150 pages.



This short book compares the ideas of what the blurb on the back calls 'these two giants of the history of economics', discussing Keynes's *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936) and Hayek's

The Road to Serfdom (1944).

But there is no comparison. Keynes's book is a serious work, criticising the workings of the capitalist economy as he saw it and which dominated economic teaching and policy-making for forty years. Hayek's book, on the other hand, was an anti-socialist rant by a reactionary who regretted the growing state interference in the economy under capitalism, claiming that it would lead to totalitarianism along the lines of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia. It was on a par with Churchill's notorious 'Gestapo speech' aimed at the Labour Party in the 1945 general election and may well have inspired it. Hayek was only plucked from his well-deserved obscurity thirty years later and awarded a politically-motivated Nobel Prize for Economics. His admirer Thatcher made him a Companion of Honour.

It is of interest to compare the views of the advocates of unreconstructed laissez-faire capitalism with the reformed capitalism offered by Keynes, but there is no need to elevate a common or garden apologist for capitalism like Hayek to the status of a 'giant of economic thought' to do this.

Keynes's criticism of laissez-faire capitalism was that it could lead – and had led in the 1930s – to a situation where production and income balanced each other at a level below full employment. He proposed to remedy this by the government increasing its spending and redistributing income from the rich to those more likely to spend than save it. This fitted in well with the reforms advocated by Labour and Social Democratic parties who, after WW2, enthusiastically embraced Keynes. Hoerber records that, at its congress in Bad Godesberg in 1959, the

Strange and Familiar

Outsiders can sometimes provide a fresh look at a time or place, observing things that those who live there fail to notice or consider too obvious for comment. Such ideas are behind the exhibition 'Strange but Familiar', currently on at Manchester Art Gallery, which shows the work of a number of international photographers who have depicted Britain (though there are no photos of Manchester).

The photos included cover a period of almost eighty years. The earliest are by Henri Cartier-Bresson, of patriotic crowds at the coronation of George VI in 1937, complemented by some of Elizabeth II's silver jubilee in 1977; these indeed focus on the spectators rather than the official celebrations. Many of the photographers whose work is exhibited adopted a left-wing position, and provide a kind of documentary record of people's lives.

Edith Tudor-Hart (originally from Austria) photographed appalling living conditions from the 1930s, while Candida Höfer shows depressing Liverpool scenes

from 1968. More overtly political photos include those of demos against nuclear weapons from 1961 and the Vietnam war from 1969, and of parades and bombs in Northern Ireland, from 1968–9.

As times changed, the depictions of rundown streets give way to the 'swinging sixties', with joints and skimpier clothes. But decaying council estates and tower blocks from the 1980s show how some things change very little. Jim Dow's shots of corner shops from 1980 to 1994 emphasise how few of these now remain, while Bruce Gilden's striking large photos of three unhealthy faces from West Bromwich in 2014, each of which occupies virtually the whole frame, are a stark reminder of the effects capitalism can have. Raymond Depardon was commissioned by the *Sunday Times* to photograph Glasgow in 1980, but the results, of a city in decline, were too bleak to publish: sometimes the capitalist media cannot accept an accurate picture of the society they support.

PB

SPD publicly abandoned (paper) Marxism for Keynesianism.

For 25 years Keynes's approach appeared to work as there was virtually full employment. But was this due to governments pursuing his policies? A more plausible explanation was post-war reconstruction and an expansion of the world market. The test came with the end of the post-war boom in the 1970s, a test Keynesianism failed as its application led not to full employment but to 'stagflation' (continuing stagnation + inflation). Keynes was discredited, but were those he had

criticised vindicated?

Hayek certainly wasn't as there had been no trend towards 'serfdom', or totalitarianism. Even so, others who had argued that the capitalist economy could not be planned to avoid the boom/slump cycle and ensure permanent full employment were proved correct. But this strengthens rather than weakens the case against capitalism – as it can't be mended, it has to be ended.

ALB

The Environment



Summer School 2017 21st – 23rd July Fircroft College, Birmingham

These days, concerns about the environment tend to get pushed into the background by issues like Brexit, Trump's presidency and ongoing austerity measures. But climate change, pollution and extinctions don't go away just because the headlines are filled with other events. 2016 was the warmest year on record, with implications for sea levels and habitats; more and more waste is produced for future generations to deal with, and many hundreds of species continue to become extinct every year.

Legislation places some restrictions

on the use of dangerous materials, hunting and waste disposal, for example. However, legislators can only work within a system which is structured to safeguard the interests of the wealthy elite, rather than everyone. And of course laws don't always prevent environmentally-damaging methods from being used if they save or make money. Capitalism turns the natural world into a resource to be exploited for a profit.

The Socialist Party argues that the environment can only be managed responsibly if society as a whole is managed co-operatively and in everyone's interests. If our industries and services were owned and run in common, then we would be able to produce what we need and want in the

most reasonable, sustainable way.

Our weekend of talks and discussions looks at the current state of the environment, and its prospects for the future we make for it.

Full residential cost (including accommodation and meals Friday evening to Sunday afternoon) is £100. The concessionary rate is £50. Day visitors are welcome, but please book in advance.

To book a place, send a cheque (payable to the Socialist Party of Great Britain) to Summer School, Sutton Farm, Aldborough, Boroughbridge, York, YO51 9ER, or book online at spgb.net/summerschool2017 or through the QR code. E-mail enquiries to spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk

50 Years Ago

Vietnam: A Tragedy?



The word tragedy is firmly linked to the name of Vietnam, so that it is almost impossible to hear one without the

other. Everyone seems agreed that the war there is regrettable and unnecessary but nobody seems able to stop it.

Harold Wilson mournfully tells us that the only thing needed for the success of his recent joint peace move with Kosygin was a gesture of trust from one side or the other. U Thant, when he was talking last year about resigning the Secretaryship of UNO, bemoaned "... the tragic error of relying on force and military means in a deceptive pursuit of peace," and the



United States Ambassador to UNO, Arthur Goldberg, readily agreed—"We . . . do not believe that force and military means are good arbiters of international dispute." Which was all very well, were it not for the fact that the USA was busily using just those means at the time. (...)

Vietnam is not a tragedy. Nor is it a mistake. Those who say that it is, whether they protest or not, are trying to excuse the inexcusable. They are trying to prove that capitalism's wars need not happen—that they are the result of wrong judgements or moral lapses. The whole point of this pretence is that, if we accept it, we also accept that wars can be prevented simply by finding cleverer, or more morally sensitive, leaders. There is then no need to get rid of capitalism. The melancholy history of capitalism, of its World Wars and of its smaller conflicts like Korea, Algeria and Vietnam, provides the evidence which exposes this pretence. There is small hope for the world, while society regards its problems as tragedies. Capitalism is full of international conflicts. When has it made a comedy of them?

(From an article by Ivan, *Socialist Standard*, April 1967)

ACTION REPLAY

Another club in financial crisis

Leyton Orient is facing a winding-up order over an unpaid tax bill and could face the threat of liquidation if they cannot settle their debt to HMRC, thought to be in the region of £250,000. This would be a disaster for the crisis-hit club who would therefore face exile from the Football League after 112 year's membership. An Orient spokesman has declined to comment on either the winding up petition or the size of the unpaid bill. A Football League spokesman said only 'we are aware of the situation at Leyton Orient and in contact with the club...'

Members of the Leyton Orient Fans Club (LOFT) have set up a fund to raise a £100k rescue package to protect the club, should current Italian owner Francesco Becchetti decide to sell up or if the club goes into administration.

Becchetti is unwilling to part with Orient for anything less than the £4 million he paid to Sports Promoter Barry Hearn to purchase the club in 2014. Hearn became Chairman of Leyton Orient in 1985 after the club was put up for sale for £5 by the then chairman Tony Wood. He has admitted that he



now regrets selling the club to the Italian businessman but has ruled out buying it back. He has also remarked 'thank goodness I kept the ground because otherwise goodness knows what would have happened.' Leyton Orient's home ground was originally called Brisbane Road but is now officially known as the Matchroom Stadium after Hearn's sports promotion company.

Much has been made about Becchetti's 'malign' influence over the club as a 'foreign owner' despite the fact that several clubs in the English Premier League are owned by foreigners, e.g. Manchester United and Liverpool (American), Chelsea (Russian), Manchester City (Arab) and Leicester City (Asian). The nationality of the owner

makes no difference.

It is short-sighted and stupid nationalism to blame foreign owners for a football club's decline. Football, as well as being a sport, is also a business that attracts investment from foreign or home-based capital if there is the prospect of a profitable return on investment. Football operates within capitalism as does any business enterprise and that's why profit and loss has precedence over a long term 'footballing strategy' and why the balance sheet is more important than where the club plays, especially if that provides a chance for property speculation.

KEVIN

Meetings

APRIL 2017

WAKEFIELD

Saturday 1 April, 1.00pm

Wakefield Socialist History Group British Socialism and World War One

Paul Bennett from the Socialist Party will be one of the speakers

Venue: The Red Shed, 18 Vicarage Street South, Wakefield, WF11 1QX

FOLKESTONE

**Saturday 22 April from 12.00 noon
Street Stall**

Venue: Folkestone Town Hall, junction of Sandgate Road and Guildhall Street, CT20 1DY (phone 07971 715569 if you have any difficulty finding the stall)

LONDON

Clapham

Saturday 29 and Sunday 30 April. 10.30 am to 5.00pm both days

Annual Conference

Venue: Socialist Party premises, 52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 7UN

Declaration of Principles

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

Object

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

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e. land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation

MAY 2017

BURNLEY

Monday 1 May, 1 pm

Burnley May Day Festival

The Socialist Party will have a stall at this festival, which is held in Towneley Park, BB11 3RQ

LONDON

Thursday 18th May, 8.00pm

The Overpopulation Myth

Open discussion facilitated by Carla Dee

Venue: Torriano Meeting House, 99 Torriano Avenue, NW5 2RX

DONCASTER

Saturday 20th May, 1.00 – 5.00pm

World Socialism, Nothing Less

Program:

Showing of the *Capitalism and Other Kids' Stuff* Film

Speakers:

Clifford Slapper and Brian Gardner followed by questions and discussion

Free light buffet

Bar available

Venue: The Ukrainian Centre, 48 Beckett Road, Doncaster, DN2 4AD

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

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

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

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

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



For full details of all our meetings and events see our **Meetup** site: <http://www.meetup.com/The-Socialist-Party-of-Great-Britain/>

EC Meeting

Saturday 1 April 2017, 52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 7UN. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the Editorial Committee.

Party News

English County Council elections

The Socialist Party is standing a number of candidates in the South East in these elections, which take place on 4 May. In Kent (Folkestone), East Sussex (Lewes) and Surrey (Guildford).

Most of the work (street stalls, leafleting) will take place in April. If you would like to help contact us by letter (52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN), phone (0207 6223811), or email (spgb@worldsocialism.org)

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Parasites there

'Overall, India is home to 264,300 millionaires. From that group of wealthy people 6,740 are classified as UHNWIs. Between 2015 and 2016, the country witnessed a 12% increase in its UHNWI population; over the next decade, this group is expected to grow by 150%. On average, every UHNWI in India owns more than three houses' (qz.com, 1 March). Capitalism is a social system long past its sell-by date. In a socialist world there will be neither poor nor rich, and the estimated 78 million homeless people, including 11 million street children (2013 figures), in India will, as throughout the world, be provided with essentials such as accommodation, food, medicine, clean water, sanitation and transport. All that is required is for a majority of us to make it so.



Parasites everywhere

'The biggest concern among ultra-high-net-worth individuals (UHNWIs) – those with \$30 million (£24.2 million) or more in net assets – is how they are going to preserve their vast fortunes, make more money, and who will take over their empires when they die. That is according to the results of the Wealth Report 2017 by luxury property agents Knight Frank, which surveyed 900 private bankers and wealth advisors representing more than 10,000 clients across the globe and a combined wealth of around \$2 trillion' (businessinsider.com, 1 March). We can assume that such concerns dominated the thoughts of the 100+ billionaires at state capitalist China's recent annual parliamentary session. Our concern should be the making of

socialists. William Morris put it well: 'one man with an idea in his head is in danger of being considered a madman; two men with the same idea in common may be foolish, but can hardly be mad; ten men sharing an idea begin to act, a hundred draw attention as fanatics, a thousand and society begins to tremble, a hundred thousand and there is war abroad, and the cause has victories tangible and real; and why only a hundred thousand?' (*Art Under Plutocracy*, 1883).

Real education is for life

Once upon a time, in university toilets it was possible to read 'sociology degrees – please take one' scrawled over paper dispensers. Nowadays, it is the turn of another subject. 'Graduates with psychology degrees from British universities overwhelmingly feel like the three years they spent at university was not worth it in terms of the benefits it gave them later in life. That's according to the latest research from salary benchmarking site Emolument. Emolument surveyed 1,800 professionals in its network to ask them whether or not they see the degree they studied as worthwhile for their adult life' (theguardian.com, 3 March). Psychology and sociology will both continue to be



taught in a socialist world, but subjects such as business science, economics, law, political geography and theology will be flushed down the pan along with emoluments!

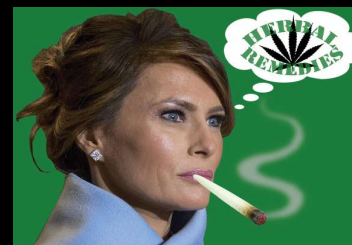
Reformist treadmill

'I have always tried to stand up for my principles – I was a conscientious objector

when I became due for national service in 1949. But it wasn't until the 1955 general election that I did anything about it' (theguardian, 3 March). And this is where we part company with Bunny Easton, who seems to have been a professional protester for most of his 86 years. He started protesting at council rent increases in the 1950s, joined the Suez and Cuba demonstrations, and more recently those against NHS cuts and Trump. This old Communist Party (d. 1991) member may well have been inspired by their 1929 manifesto in which they state 'the struggle for reforms in the present period leads to revolution'. Nearly 90 years later the struggle for reforms – many of them the same futile demands – still leads to nothing but the continuation of the capitalist system. Unsurprisingly, neither this nor the Communist Party's horrid history (Stalin, 1956 & 1968....) is mentioned.

Trumping The Donald

Melania Trump has suggested that Americans who lose their healthcare shouldn't be too worried because they can just turn to the healing properties of nature. Touring a children's hospital recently she said: 'I am a passionate believer in integrating and interpreting nature's elements into our daily lives to create a warm, nurturing and positive environment. I believe that these same natural benefits can be instrumental to enhancing the health and well-being of all children' (trofire.com, 2 March). This nonsense smacks of former Gambian dictator Yahya Jammeh's promotion of herbal 'remedies' for the treatment of HIV and AIDS, and South Africa's Thabo Mbeki's support for vinegar instead of antiretroviral drugs.



FREE LUNCH

