

socialist standard

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Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement



Public
Services



**ECONOMIC DELUSIONS
OF LEFT AND RIGHT**



*Tariffs, Protectionism,
Embargoes & Free Trade*

**TRADE
WARS**



*Also: Homo Economicus
The Lecturers' Strike
Consciousness & Illusion*



socialist standard

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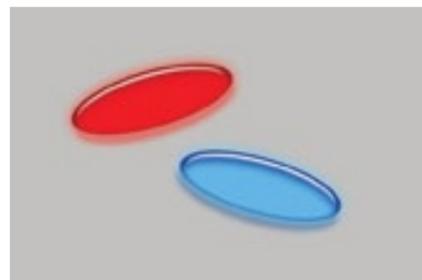
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Editorial Trade War

Donald Trump fought the Presidential campaign pledging to put 'America First'. Soon after taking office, he pulled the US out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TTP) trade deal and plans to cancel the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), a trade deal between Europe and the US.

On 8 March, Donald Trump appeared to fulfil an election promise to steel workers by slapping a 25 percent tariff on steel and 10 percent on aluminium. Canada and Mexico are, for the time being, exempt. However, if during the renegotiation of the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), they fail to make the concessions that Trump wants, then they will also be hit with these tariffs. Trump justified these measures on the grounds of national security and so-called 'unfair' trading by America's competitors. Other countries have threatened to retaliate.

These measures also face opposition within the US Republican Party and some US capitalist interests, such as the aviation sector and car manufacturers, which risk having their profits squeezed by the increased cost of steel. Trump's economic adviser, Gary Cohn, an opponent of these measures, has quit.

The general view seems to be that a maverick president has defied the natural order of free trade that has existed between nations for decades. However, trade protectionism is nothing new in the history of capitalism. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the new American nation state used tariffs to protect its nascent industries from foreign competition. In 1930 the US government introduced the Smoot-Hawley bill, which raised tariffs over a wide range of imports. After the Second World War, when the US emerged as the dominant global power, it supported a liberal trading regime which opened up global markets to US capitalists. However, since the 1980s, its enthusiasm for free trade waned as its economic supremacy was challenged by emerging powers like Japan. Both Ronald Reagan and George W Bush attempted to raise tariffs.

Britain and the European Union have also employed trade protectionist measures, such as subsidising their export industries. Britain, like the US, was in favour of free trade when it was the top economic power in the nineteenth century. However, in the early twentieth century, when facing increasing

competition from rivals such as Germany and the US, it sought a more protectionist trade policy.

Donald Trump's move has to be seen against the backdrop of a global overproduction of steel and the more difficult world trading conditions since the 2008 financial crisis. He is attempting to reassert US capitalism's dominance over world markets and check the rise of Chinese capitalism and keep the European Union in its place. It has little to do with the wellbeing of the American working class. Trade wars are usually cloaked in the language of protecting workers' jobs. Workers should not be fooled by this.

Despite the attempts by global organisations like the World Trading Organisation to regulate world trade, capitalist nations will invariably use their economic clout to gain advantage over their rivals, and on many occasions, back this up with the threat and even use of military force. In this light, to talk of 'fair' or 'unfair' trading practices is a nonsense.

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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Capitalism's Bond Villains

POLITICAL THEATRE turned to Hollywood farce last month as PM Theresa "Mousey" May squared off against Vlad "The Impaler" Putin over the Novichok poisonings in Salisbury. Called upon by the media to flex her non-existent muscles over Russia's blatant attempts to murder one of the entries on its overseas shit-list, she immediately pressed the Maximum Response button by expelling a few token diplomats. Putin predictably expelled the same number of Brit Dips in retaliation, leaving the two leaders looking like kindergarten kids having a spat. Such was the damage to the Russian pin-up's political reputation that he went straight on to win a fourth term as president by a landslide, helped no doubt by the fact that he'd banned his chief rival from contesting. May's international standing didn't suffer either, as it was already non-existent.

Russia's overseas assassination programme has used increasingly baroque methods to supposedly hide its state involvement over the years, in marked contrast to its prosaic internal policy of shooting regime critics in the head in lifts (Anna Politkovskaya, 2006) or in drive-bys (former deputy prime minister Nemtsov, 2015). From ricin in the 1978 Markov hit they progressed to sarin for the 2002 take-down of Chechen leader Khattab, then a failed 2004 dioxin attack on pro-western Ukrainian lead Yushchenko, to polonium in the 2006 Litvinenko murder. Mercury was implicated in an attack on human rights lawyer Karinna Moskalenko in 2008, while in 2012 exiled Russian businessman and police informant Alexander Perepilichny dropped dead in London with a dose of the rare toxic flower gelsemium. 2013 must have been an off-year, as Putin-critic Boris Berezovsky was found merely hanged in Berkshire.

So no big surprise that they're at it again, but using a nerve agent invented and produced only in Russia seems like a downright giveaway, notwithstanding the Russian ambassador's chutzpah in accusing the UK of trying to bump off its own spy by pointing out that 'Porton Down is only 8 miles down the road' from the crime scene. For once Boris 'Ballsack' Johnson seemed to have the measure of the situation: 'The obvious Russian-ness of the weapon was designed to send a signal to anyone pondering dissent amid the intensifying repression of Mr Putin's Russia. The message is clear: we will hunt you down, we will find you and we will kill you - and though we will scornfully deny our guilt, the world will know that Russia did it.'

The world seems increasingly controlled by cartoon Bond villains, as witness the toxic poisoning of already-unhealthy democratic systems by the manipulation and exploitation of big data to influence and perhaps swing popular votes. In the frame lately has been the British firm Cambridge Analytica, implicated in the shock Trump and Brexit votes. Perhaps more credence has been put on behind-the-scenes skulduggery because both these votes returned shock and unexpected results, but even so there's little doubt that skulduggery is at work, and not just by Cambridge Analytica. Unless you live completely off-grid with



no computer, other digital phone or any device, deal only in cash and wear a facemask when you go out, the capitalist data machine is constantly hoovering up information about you which private firms can then use to target you with profiled advertising or political messaging. Such brainwashing, as it's also known, is likely most effective with right-wing voters and others whose brains probably don't require that much detergent, however it's an alarming sign for state regimes when the power of manipulation they used to call their own can now be hired out to the highest bidder. In an astounding display of vapid bravado the UK Information Commissioner Elizabeth Denham demonstrated her complete failure to 'get it' by announcing to Channel 4 News she intended to seek a warrant to access Cambridge Analytica's data files, a statement which has no doubt alerted the company to the need to delete anything incriminating. Or maybe

it was a deliberate move to give them the heads-up today, prior to employing them tomorrow for the hapless May's next desperate electoral attempt to stay in power.

North Korea / Trump talks not hot air, just gas

Mysteriously absent from most media reports about the surprise talks mooted between North Korea and the USA is the proposed Sakhalin gas pipeline running from Russia's gas fields to South Korea and Japan via... North Korea. The pipeline has been on the drawing board for years, but the changing Asian energy market, with coal and nuclear out and gas in, has given the project a new lease of life. Russia is also keen to use South Korea's shipbuilding capabilities to create a huge commercial fleet that can ship liquefied natural gas (LNG) and exploit the opening Arctic sea lanes. Russia has lately sweetened the deal by cancelling 90 percent of North Korea's huge Cold War debts. But what's in all this for Trump? Maybe nothing but face-saving. The US failed despite sanctions to stop Europe from buying Russian gas, so it has little chance of stopping a deal involving Russia, China, Japan and the two Koreas. No daylight between South Korea and the US? Think again!

Thinking Outside the Boss

Prominently displayed on the Letters page of *New Scientist* recently (3 March) was an epistle, the authorship of which may be divined by regular readers of this column, which challenged the magazine to ask the following question: 'has the capitalist system finally passed its sell-by date?' This was in response to the magazine's somewhat self-righteous justification of its own frequent forays into the world of political commentary, on the grounds that science doesn't live in a political vacuum. Quite so, the letter pointed out, and politics doesn't live in a science vacuum either, therefore since the evidence of capitalism's many iniquities is overwhelming, shouldn't the search for an evidence-based alternative social model be a legitimate line of scientific enquiry?

Not a bad question, you may agree, but questions of methodology aside, the likely answer running through the minds of any scientist or journalist reading the question will be: 'Yes, but my boss won't let me.' This probably explains the loud silence that has ensued since the letter was published.

PJS

Day 5: Lecturers are on strike again, with the first tranche scheduled to last fourteen days in all. Cue jokes about academics sat at home not thinking, or troops being sent in to give seminars on the use of Christian symbolism in late-period Anglo Saxon poetry.

I am not an academic, nor am I even in their pension scheme, the root of the conflict. I am a university worker, and I have been standing on the freezing cold picket line, asking staff and students not to cross it.

I understand that academics have achieved something very difficult. The Tories have introduced a new law to make it so that public sector workers proposing a strike have to achieve not only a majority of those voting, but a majority of those eligible to strike must vote as well. (Universities claim to be public sector for this purpose, but have managed to get themselves declared private sector for the purposes of procurement, because a majority of their money comes from fees now).

The result of this is that instead of the gentlemanly dance of previous university strikes - two days here and there - the difficulty of getting a strike called at all means it has to be decisively disruptive: these are the counter-productive aspects of the Tories trying to regulate strikes out of existence, the pressure valve is gone, and it will make strikes more bitter.

The root cause is an attempt to change the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) pension from being a defined benefit scheme (where the academics will receive a guaranteed pension based on their career average salary), into a defined contribution scheme (where the benefit pays depending on the returns of the scheme's investments, throwing all the liabilities of the Universities onto the vagaries of the bond and stock markets). The scheme has already changed from being final salary to being career average related (and employer and employee contributions have both been raised in recent years).

The cause of this is that under accounting rules, the scheme must be funded so that if all universities went bankrupt tomorrow, all the liabilities could be met. This creates a phantom deficit of billions of pounds, despite all universities not being bankrupt, and the scheme currently being able to manage its liabilities.

Make no mistake, universities are far removed from the rarefied world of a David Lodge novel: today they are vast Dickensian factories employing thousands of staff and servicing tens of thousands of students each. This is indicated in the scale of the strike, with a rough (low) estimate of 20,000 workers out. As Boris Johnson noted in his recent farcical speech on Brexit, Britain stands a long way up the value chain, not producing raw materials or components, but designs and innovation. Thousands of foreign, particularly Chinese, students come to the UK to study, bringing in much needed revenue.



When I discuss this matter, friends tell me that academics are lucky to still have defined benefit pensions, or that they themselves have had their pension downgraded. For me,

this makes it all the more important to put a marker in the sand to stop this downgrading of all our deferred salaries.

I understand that what is at stake here is the ability to strike at all, and to have a conscious say in our workplaces: the academics are being attacked as workers, and they recognise their position as workers by calling this strike. They deserve support and solidarity, even at the cost of 14 days' pay, because anything that makes employers think twice about downgrading terms and conditions of their employees is a benefit for all workers, everywhere.

Capitalism draws increasing numbers into the condition of wage slavery, many academics are on the equivalent of zero hours contracts, or have to continually search for funding for their own salaries. Of course, ending capitalism and abolishing the wages system is the necessary political act, but in the meanwhile the class struggle rumbles on, and we have to engage with the struggle to defend ourselves and pursue the best living standards we can manage within the labour market.

If we don't strike, we all lose: and maybe, for all those students who smile wanly, shrug and say they have to go in to lectures, the library or to study, they can learn the lesson that they too will soon be waged workers, who will need solidarity to protect them in their workplaces.

Day 14: The strikes have succeeded so far in dragging the employers to the negotiating table, and throwing their ranks into disarray. The Vice Chancellors of several leading universities have come out in favour of returning to defined benefit. The talks, however, produced an offer which would have still seen lecturers' pensions reduced by at least 19%, and threw in the added insult that lecturers should reschedule classes (which they have been deducted pay for not holding).

I was lucky enough to attend the rally outside UCU headquarters (down an alley in Camden Town), where hundreds of strikers turned up to lobby the committee and delegate meetings considering the offer. The usual toy-town revolutionaries are trying to paint this as a 'revolt by the members' against the leadership, where it was in fact the normal and proper functioning of democracy in a trade union. Indeed, my local branch have been running daily strike meetings to run the operation of the strike, and further, credit where it is due, a useful daily strike bulletin has been brought out by *Socialist Worker*:

There is a question of why the offer was accepted and put to the members given that it was so terrible (and promoted to and by the media as a resolution of the conflict, but some of that will be down to the way ACAS operates, as well as to

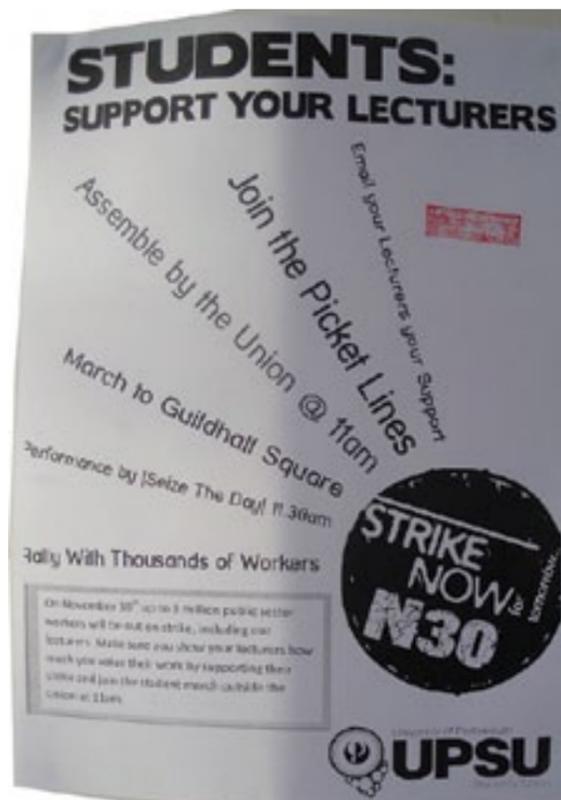
the mandate given to the negotiators). It was heavily voted down by strikers on the picket lines, and voluble cries of 'no capitulation' on social media.

The scene is set then, for the strike to continue, and a further fourteen days in April and June have been approved (but not yet set). We've marched through the streets of London twice now (in relatively well-attended marches), and there is talk of the need to pressure government to agree to underwrite the pension scheme. Many academics are enjoying taking the details of the pension plan apart showing how the deficit is not real. A lecturer at Birkbeck has uncovered documents that show there has been a determination to end the defined benefit scheme since at least 2014 – the general idea is by curtailing the scheme's liabilities, universities will be able to borrow more for building and expansion projects.

Students up and down the country have been occupying spaces on campus in solidarity, and 'teach outs' are commonplace across the country.

On a theoretical side, this strike is a demonstration of how commodity fetishism isn't just a feature or process of capitalism, but a social strategy by the rich and powerful: they are trying to limit their responsibility to their employees through throwing it onto the market, rather than guaranteeing a level of income after we are superannuated.

Ptolemy S.



Zollverein

During the 19th century, even before Germany became a single state in 1871 and was still divided into kingdoms and duchies large and small, there was nevertheless a considerable degree of economic unity. This was achieved through the 'Zollverein', under which the states and statelets who joined committed themselves to two things – a common market, or customs-free trade with other member-states, and imposing the same tariff on imports from outside the union.

Zollverein was translated into English as 'customs union'. When in 1957 six European states – Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxemburg – established what they called the 'European Economic Community' it was popularly known as the 'Common Market' after the free trade area established behind the common external tariff. The common external tariff had another consequence. It meant that the EEC was a single trading bloc vis-à-vis other states and

trading blocs. In 1973 the UK, Ireland and Denmark joined this common market/customs union and trading bloc.

Some of the EEC member-states envisaged going further, seeing the common market as a step towards economic and monetary, and eventually, political union. This aim was formalised in 1993 when, under the Treaty of Maastricht, the EEC changed its name to 'European Union'. This also introduced the aim of removing non-tariff barriers to trade within the area such as differing safety, environmental and technical requirements by establishing common standards and regulations and so a frictionless market called 'the Single Market' (as a step beyond a merely tariff-free 'common market').

In the referendum in Britain in June 2016 a 52-48 majority voted 'leave' in answer to the question 'Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?' But it wasn't clear what this meant in practical terms. Did it mean simply leaving the EU and its political institutions but still staying in the customs union (the minimalist interpretation, which would put Britain in the same sort of position as Norway) or leaving the customs union too (the maximalist

interpretation)?

Ever since, both the capitalist class and its political representatives have been divided on the issue, with a sizeable majority of actual capitalists in favour of staying in the customs union (they never wanted to leave anyway). Their political representatives are more evenly divided, with ironically the Labour Party being closer to the majority capitalist position than the Tories.

The government itself wants to leave the customs union so that Britain can negotiate trade deals on its own. They believe that they will be able to negotiate better deals for the capitalist class than as part of the EU trading bloc. This remains to be seen as one of the original capitalist reasons for being in the EEC was precisely the calculation that a big trading bloc would have more clout in trade negotiations than going it alone. The first test will be what sort of deal an independent UK will be able to negotiate with a big trading bloc like the 27 remaining EU member-states will still be.

As socialists, who have no concern with what is in the best interest of the capitalist class, we can sit back and watch the show.



Rising Star? Do We Need Another One?

THE RELATIONSHIP between Ministers of the Crown and the civil servants who are employed to carry out their wishes has often been a matter of agonising delicacy. For example there was a minister in a Blair government who was faced with a crisis in the NHS while one of his top officials had been hiding about a thousand unanswered parliamentary questions while coming into the office at weekends to falsify the figures on the matter. As one minister put it: 'Everyone thinks they are white knights and that we are the villains whereas the truth, which we all know, is that many officials are useless'. But then there was the Labour minister who was more concerned about the size and temperature of his morning coffee than about any of the vital matters preoccupying his office. Distinct from this, at present there is the Home Office, absorbed in such sensitive issues as crime and immigration, which manages to work in a more relaxed and considerate style. In charge there is the Home Secretary, Amber Rudd, who comes from a family of wealthy financiers, which did not prevent her in 2008 winning a poetry prize in her constituency local paper which included the lines: 'Loving you is so exciting. But why dear heart, did you not mention, What we'll do for contraception?' Rudd was recently said to be in a relationship with Kwasi Kwarteng, the Tory MP for Spelthorne and Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but this was not officially assessed as damaging in the same way as the recent cases of what became known as 'inappropriate behaviour' among politicians.

Quiz

So far there is no record of any poetry being written about Kwarteng. His parents were students who came from Ghana in the 1960s and he was born in London. When he was eight he was placed in an expensive private boarding school – which he said he 'loved' – and from which he blossomed into a King's Scholar at that emphatically costly breeding place for the aristocracy, Eton College. A fellow student there described the place as 'a competitive intellectual hothouse...but everyone said that probably the greatest brain of the lot was the guy with that extraordinary name'. It became something of their history at Eton that when Kwarteng was later being interviewed for a place at Trinity College, Cambridge, he was so graciously confident of the outcome that he could reassure

the nervous young tutor not to worry about his clumsy handling of the matter because 'you did fine sir...'. A memory which must have endured for him – for example when he was a member of the Trinity College team in the TV programme University Challenge and he was broadcast referring to a memory lapse by blurting out 'Oh fuck, I've forgotten!'. Which provoked a flood of complaints, typically in a piece called Rudiversity Challenge in, of all places, Page Three of *The Sun*. The entire episode took on a rather different reputation when the Trinity College team ended up as National Quiz Champions which contributed to Kwarteng sprouting a reputation as an exceedingly brainy performer but also as an extremely charming one. He began to work as what is known as a financial analyst which, as the various crises typical of capitalism flooded around and across the world,



provided hopefuls such as Kwarteng with opportunities to venture into journalism and authorship.

Dry

A succession of books and other material were published in his name or as a contributor. This was all very satisfying for him except that his views on what was happening, and why, did not reveal any original thinking about remedies or even original versions of the problems. In *Thatcher's Trial: Six Months That Defined A Leader* he varies between denouncing her government's 1981 Budget as designed 'to produce three million unemployed' and lauding her as a leader who '...fought passionately for absolute values in a world which seemed diffident and uncertain of purpose'. One of the sour fruits of his co-authorship was a diagnosis that 'Once they enter the workplace, the British are among the worst idlers in the world'. As an enthusiastic economic 'dry' in his tome *Gridlock Britain* he defines himself (as a member of the Transport Select

Committee) with a belief in the effects of working markets, and demands road pricing as against tax-funded free roads which he rejects as part of his version of a moribund 'socialism'.

Spelthorne

So it was that Kwarteng came to explore the possibilities of using his talents in party politics, by offering himself as an electable representative of some parliamentary constituency. The first of these was Brent East. This was an ethnically diverse, busy area of London which was held stolidly from 1974 to 1987 by Labour's Reg Freeson and then, when Freeson died, by the unsettling Ken Livingstone. The next Member in Brent – Paul Daisley – died in 2003 which resulted in a by-election from which there emerged as winner the Liberal Democrat Sarah Teather, who was able to benefit from the stress and anger of the reaction to the attack on Iraq, which continues to roll on. Kwarteng was third at the bottom of the poll, which did not deter him from turning his attention elsewhere, to the constituency of Spelthorne which lies near the airport at Heathrow. Additionally attractive to him was the fact that in the 2016 Referendum Spelthorne was emphatically in favour of Brexit.

Obama

He was selected to stand for the Conservative Party and won with a majority of 10,019, which was increased with each successive election until it reached 13,425 in 2017. By then it seemed appropriate to the Tories that they might

recognise the talents of this persistent wrangler and Kwarteng was made the PPS for the nationally prominent (but, unlike Kwarteng, anti-Brexit) Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond, where his practised skills in trying to ignore the inhuman ravages of capitalism were busily engaged. Meanwhile the Tories seem to be relieved that his relationship with Amber Rudd should be accepted as 'workplace' – which at least distinguishes it from those previous embarrassments among their parliamentary colleagues. Although what the burdened Honourable Home Secretary thinks about him being known as the 'British Obama' has not been revealed. The government of capitalism comes in many shapes and sizes but with the unvarying object of protecting the interests of their ruling class through imposing and managing the repression and exploitation of the subject class.

IVAN

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Glasgow branch. Meets 3rd Weds. at 7pm in Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road, Glasgow. Contact: Peter Hendrie, 75 Lairhills Road, East Kilbride, Glasgow G75 0LH. 01355 903105. peter.anna.hendrie@blueyonder.co.uk.
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CAIN AND ABEL IN AFRICA



IN MARCH, THE BBC's website reported that more than a 100 people have been killed in the last three months in the Democratic Republic of Congo province of Ituri because of unrest between the Hema cattle herders and Lendu farmers fighting for control of land. In 2006, the BBC reported that as many as 60,000 people had died since 1998. Hundreds of thousands of people were forced from their homes, becoming refugees. Much of the animosity revolves around the 1973 land use law, which allows people to buy land they do not inhabit and, if their ownership is not contested for two years, evict any residents from the land. Some wealthy Hema used this law to force Lendu off their land, leading to a growing sense of resentment.

The conflict between herders and farmers isn't an exclusively Congo problem. It's prevalent in a number of countries across Central, East, North and West Africa, particularly in countries like Central African Republic, Cameroon, Kenya, Senegal, Gambia, South Sudan, Mali, and Nigeria. At first glance, these conflicts seem to be fuelled by the quest for grazing land by Fulani herdsmen. The conflicts between herdsmen and farmers are often triggered by attempts to prevent the cattle of nomadic herdsmen from grazing on crop farms. In many parts of Africa there are on-going conflicts often described as tribal, ethnic or religious wars but on closer scrutiny revealed to be between communities of nomadic herders and sedentary farmers. For generations, farmers and pastoralists have been vying with one another in the scramble for resources such as water either to irrigate fields or pastures for feeding animals thus triggering many violent conflicts. Pastoralists-agriculturalists' conflicts have grown, spread and intensified over recent years. People have been killed, communities destroyed. Almost every day, there are more reprisal killings making peaceful

resolution ever more difficult. In the past, there was usually some sort of balance but these days, more often than not, the recurring fights are a symptom of a bigger problem such as industrial plantation agriculture or mining interest or conservation projects. Yefred Myenzi, a researcher from Tanzania's Land Rights Research and Resources Institute, said that most of the fighting over land was the indirect result of decisions and actions taken by the state through its various agencies. 'We have seen the influx of investors who take swathes of land to start commercial farming, ranching or mining activities, in the process triggering conflicts with local people who are evicted from their land without due process,' he added. He also blamed the existing land tenure system for sidelining pastoral communities, since no land has been set aside for them. 'Although land laws require every village to have in place a land use plan, many villages are yet to implement this due to conflict,' he said. Of Tanzania's 42 million people, only 0.02 percent have traditional land ownership titles. Tanzania has approximately 21 million head of cattle, the third largest number in Africa. Tanzania's small-scale farmers produce more than 90 percent of the country's food. Of the country's 94.5 million hectares, only half - 44 million hectares - is arable land. The disputes over land and water have also caused food insecurity among farmers, many of whom

have been unable to harvest crops for fear of reprisals from enraged pastoralists. Different modes of production, that is, how a society produces its necessities of life, create various cultures, lifestyles and customs. This is a key element in the Materialist Conception of History. By studying society we learn that humanity is not the result of some eternal logic or divine laws but is created through our own actions as we produce the things we need and use every day. Losing their land means losing the ability to sustain themselves but farming and herding are not just sources of income, they define people's lives. They will no longer be independent but must rely on government hand-outs or foreign food aid.

Climate change is now bringing with it unpredictable and decreasing rainfall seasons which have led to living conditions of farmers and herders becoming more precarious and insecure. Pastoralists are compelled to move beyond their accepted boundaries in search of water and pasture and risk clashing with other populations unwilling to share resources. It is evident that gradual and sudden environmental changes are already resulting in substantial population movements. Further climate change will displace more people, exacerbating the factors that lead to conflict. Experts say that these resource-based conflicts are also fuelled by ethnic hatred, dwindling resources, and poor land management.

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'Fairness and Simplicity': Who Benefits from Universal Credit?

An account of how it works from someone who has been on this benefit.

When Iain Duncan Smith, as the Work and Pensions Secretary, announced in 2010 that Universal Credit would replace six welfare benefits, he said that this would 'restore fairness and simplicity' to the system. Nearly eight years on, few would agree that Universal Credit has been either fair or simple.

One aspect of Universal Credit which has been anything but simple is its introduction since pilot schemes began in the North West during 2013. Then, it was expected that the new benefit would be fully implemented by 2017, a target which has since been put back five years. Given the problems many people have experienced claiming Universal Credit, it's probably a relief to others that the rollout has been delayed. The benefit is being introduced in stages, going by postcode area. By the end of this year, in every area, new claimants or existing claimants of other benefits with a change in circumstances will have to apply for Universal Credit. Then, it's planned that all remaining people receiving the benefits being replaced (Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and Tax Credits) will be transferred over by 2022, unless there are any further setbacks. The number of people already claiming Universal Credit was 700,000 as of 14 December 2017, a rise of 6 percent on the previous month.

One of the main stated goals of Universal Credit is to encourage its claimants to find jobs. In December 2015, the government boasted that 'Universal Credit claimants are eight percentage points more likely to have been employed in the first nine months of their claim – 71% for Universal Credit versus 63% for Jobseeker's Allowance'. Amazingly, another of its aims is to heal the sick. When it was first announced, the then Work and Pensions Minister Chris Grayling said he hoped it would get at least half of the 2.5 million people claiming sickness benefits back into employment. But before Universal Credit can work its magic on someone, they first need to set up a claim.

The state prefers people to make their claim online, which immediately makes the process far from simple for those who lack computer skills or easy access to the internet. After entering your details on the government website, the system requires your ID to be verified by another organisation. This involves photographing your ID and yourself (face-on and in profile) and uploading the pictures to their website. This stage in the process may not be easy for any claimants without sufficient paperwork or a smartphone; the system isn't designed to be accommodating to those most vulnerable and in need, such as homeless people. The initial online form also has sections to type in what kinds of jobs you are looking for and how you will do this, unless you have a medical condition which prevents you from working.

An appointment will be set for within a few days to attend the job centre. Then, staff make further checks of ID, and your 'commitments' of what you'll do to find work are clarified. These may be ten hours a week trawling through websites, fifteen hours writing applications, two hours travelling to the job centre appointment and back, eight hours compiling a CV and so on, as long as they add up to 35 hours each week.

Waiting Days and Assessment Periods

Once your claim has been set up, the next hurdle to overcome

is the delay before payments start to come through. Until February, when a new claim was made by most job seekers, no payment was given to cover the first week, a period called 'waiting days'. However, you would still be expected to spend 35 hours looking for work during this time. No reason is given for this rule in official documents, and no reply was received to a request for an explanation. It would be easy to assume that this policy was there just to reduce costs to the state and deter people from making a claim.

When Universal Credit was designed, it was decided that the first payment would be received 42 days after making a claim, including the waiting days. In February this 'Assessment Period' was reduced to 35 days, still far too long to manage without being able to buy necessities. The 42 day limit was often not kept; during June 2017, for example, around one in five claimants waited even longer for their first full payment. In comparison, people claiming JSA or ESA during 2015 and 2016 had to wait a relatively easy two weeks before receiving any money.

From the beginning of the claim, it's a requirement that claimants regularly update their online records (called the 'journal') with details of what has been done to look for work. The website also allows messages to be sent between the claimant and job centre, and checks that notifications about rules have been read. Weekly 'Work Search Review' appointments at the job centre are set, when the 'Work Coach' offers some guidance about ways to find employment. More importantly, they review what's been written in the journal and decide whether sufficient effort has been made looking for work. Twice I was accused of not doing enough, just because the adviser hadn't clicked on the box showing what had been written.

If it's decided that not enough has been recorded, or if jobs haven't been applied for, or if appointments have been missed, then payments can be stopped or reduced, known as a 'sanction'. How much and how long sanctions last depend on what you've been judged to have failed to do and how often you've been sanctioned in the previous year. A sanction can last between seven days and three years, with a perplexing set of rules specifying which offence brings which punishment. For example: **'Do all the activities you've agreed with your work coach.** If you don't, your payment will be reduced until the day before you do as you agreed. Once you've done this, your payment will be reduced for an additional 7, 14 or 28 days.' During March 2017, 6.9 percent of claimants were having their payments reduced through being sanctioned, more than the 0.4 percent of people claiming JSA, suggesting that the new system is stricter.

The difficulties which come with Universal Credit described above are faced by claimants willing and able to look for employment. Different problems are faced by claimants with health conditions. After completing a medical questionnaire and sending in a Med 3 form (what used to be called a 'sick note') from the GP, they will have to undergo a 'Work Capability Assessment' at the job centre. This is a medical examination to judge if they are too unwell to manage a job, with the decision made by a benefits assessor overruling that of the GP who signed off the Med 3 form. Failing a Work Capability Assessment is what Chris Grayling meant when he said Universal Credit would help half of those claiming sickness benefits back into work.

When the Payment Arrives

Five or six weeks after making the claim, and if there have



been no sanctions, then the first payment should arrive. A single claimant aged 25 or over receives £317.82 each month, with additional amounts paid to people with disabilities or children and to cover rent. The government says that Universal Credit provides 'every financial incentive to stay in work, because work will pay', a euphemism for the benefit payments being less than people need. The Minimum Income Standard website says that a single person requires £765.48 each month (excluding rent and council tax costs) for a 'decent standard of living', based on April 2017 prices (www.minimumincome.org.uk). The government says that Universal Credit's approach 'enables people to take much more control over their own lives', although it's not explained how you can have control of your life when you can't afford basic necessities.

A difference between Universal Credit and the benefits being replaced is that it is supposed to be paid monthly to the claimant, rather than fortnightly. Ostensibly, this is intended to prepare claimants for budgeting over a month, as most employed people do. Another difference is that this monthly payment includes the component to cover rent. Under the old housing benefit system, money for rent was usually paid directly to the landlord, which didn't prevent arrears building up due to delays or complications with a claim, but gave more assurance to the landlord that their rent was on its way. Not all of someone's rent may be covered by the benefit anyway, for example when a single person is living in a property judged too large for them. The consequences of all this are that some claimants have been unable to afford rent or have spent the money intended for it on other things, leading to arrears building up. In Southwark, Universal Credit claimants renting social housing were each in arrears by an average of £1,178 in the first few months of claiming. The state has back-tracked on some of its policies about the rent component, and from April it will be easier to have this paid straight to the landlord.

Many new claimants aged between 18 and 21 don't get the rent component of Universal Credit at all. Presumably, the reasoning behind this is to deter young people from trying to find state-subsidised housing, which ignores the needs of many young adults who, whether through overcrowding or fraught family relationships, can't or shouldn't live with their parents.

For claimants with a mortgage rather than a rented property, there is very little assistance towards housing costs. It's possible to receive money to cover interest on a mortgage (rather than the mortgage itself), but this is at a flat rate of 2.61 percent rather than the actual rate, and a claim needs to be in place for nine months before this is paid. The rules are even harsher from April, when any payments for mortgage interest will be a loan rather than a benefit.

Once a claimant finds employment and declares it to the job centre, Universal Credit is still paid after they start work until the first wages are received, which at least balances out the unpaid 'waiting days' at the beginning of the claim. The job centre will know when wages have been received even if the claimant doesn't advise them of this, as the computer systems for tax and national insurance contributions are linked to that of the job centre.

Universal Credit claims can continue if you're employed and on a low income, as long as you are looking for more work. Just over two fifths of claimants are in employment, many will be on zero hours contracts or irregular shifts, or be self-employed. This means they are likely to be earning different amounts each week, or even nothing, and trying

to maintain a Universal Credit claim to top up wages is far from straightforward, or lucrative. Self-employed claimants have fallen victim of the 'Minimum Income Floor' clause. This refers to an amount which the state assumes a self-employed person will earn each week, based on their particular trade. This amount is then deducted from the amount paid to the claimant, even if they haven't earned that much, leaving many claimants short of enough money to survive. According to the state, 'this will encourage you to grow your business and make sure it can support you'. From April, when a self-employed claimant earns more than the threshold to qualify for Universal Credit, any surplus is taken into account for six months, meaning they won't receive benefits until this surplus is reduced through subsequent months earning less. This leads to a complicated situation where they re-apply for Universal Credit knowing they won't receive any, but just so that the declining surplus is logged. According to the Resolution Foundation thinktank, roughly 2.5 million households in employment but on a low income will be over £1,000 a year worse off by transferring to Universal Credit (*Guardian*, 20 November).

Consequences

The bureaucrats who devised the rules behind Universal Credit don't have to live with the consequences of their actions. The restrictions, confusions and delays in receiving Universal Credit are forcing its claimants into poverty. The long wait for the first payment has left thousands of people without the means to buy food and other basics, and with rising debts from unpaid bills. Private sector landlords may not want to wait to receive their rent, and so either may evict someone or refuse to house them in the first place. Among the issues discussed at the job centre appointments are how to apply for advance payments and where to get budgeting and debt advice, as the staff realise that people will get into difficulties, especially early on. Staff may be able to issue vouchers to receive supplies at a food bank, or refer claimants on to another agency to get a voucher. According to The Trussell Trust, which operates Britain's largest network of food banks, demand for its parcels has risen by 30 percent since last April in areas where the rollout of Universal Credit is most advanced (*Guardian*, 7 November).

Predictably, Universal Credit has attracted a barrage of complaints and criticisms. The government opened up an online consultation, and of the 55 responses left on their website, only one was positive. Respondents described the benefit as 'inhumane', 'an absolute shambles' and 'disgusting', with many people writing about how scared and poor claiming Universal Credit has made them. Even Tory ex-Prime Minister John Major, writing in the *Mail on Sunday* joined the backlash, saying that the benefit 'although theoretically impeccable, is operationally messy, socially unfair and unforgiving' (7 October). Iain Duncan Smith promised us 'fairness and simplicity', remember.

Regardless of any guidance given by job centre staff, the way that Universal Credit 'encourages' people to find employment is by its brutality: the long wait for not enough money, the constant threat of a sanction, the confusing, obstructive rules. Wage labour is less harsh by comparison, so claimants are pushed towards it, or to the desperation of trying to maintain a claim longer-term. This reminds us that the state isn't there to support people, it's there to support a system which needs wage labour. The pressures, both financial and emotional, on claimants are like a punishment for falling outside the system's expectations.

CLIVE HENDRY

Democratically Run Free Public Services Why Not?

The Labour Party is committed to taking energy supply, rail, water and the post back into 'public ownership'. However, it no longer uses the word 'nationalisation'. Interviewed on BBC Radio 4 on 10 February before a Labour Party conference on 'Alternative Models of Ownership' later that day, the Shadow Chancellor, John McDonnell, said that the 'Morrisonian top-down public corporation model' was not what they had in mind.

Herbert Morrison was a prominent Labour politician in the 30s and 40s. As Minister of Transport in the disastrous 1929-31 Labour government he introduced a Bill to reorganise public transport in London as a 'public corporation' run by an appointed Board. After the War, when Morrison was the Deputy Prime Minister, the same model was followed when coal, rail, electricity, gas, water and other industries were taken over by the state. The workers remained with no say in how the industry was run; in fact they were still compelled to organise in trade unions and go on strike to protect their interests as wage workers as they had been when the industry was in private hands. It was state capitalism.

Elected Boards

So, what is the McDonnellian alternative to this? In his speech to the conference he declared:

'The next Labour government will put democratically owned and managed public services irreversibly in the hands of workers, and of those who rely on their work ... We aren't going to take back control of these industries in order to put them into the hands of a remote bureaucracy, but to put them into the hands of all of you – so that they can never again be taken away.'

This seems to be suggesting that the members of the Boards running the public services in question would be elected some by those working in them and some by those using the service, rather than by being appointed from above by the government. That would be an innovation compared with the nationalisations of the past but the details of who is to represent the workers and who the consumers and exactly how they are to be chosen remain to be seen.

In any event, an elected Board would have to take the same sort of decisions – about investment, surpluses, prices and wage levels – as an appointed one, as these services would continue to be operating in the context of capitalism. Given capitalism, what matters is not who takes the decisions or how they are chosen; it is the decisions themselves, which will be dictated by the way capitalism works.



Revenue-producing

In his BBC interview McDonnell conceded that the public services would still have to balance the books and more – make a surplus of income over expenditure,

aka a profit. Answering the criticism that his scheme would mean the government having to spend more money than now because the current owners would have to be bought out, McDonnell said it wouldn't because 'government bonds can be swapped for shares in a revenue-producing company.' Making it clear that he was talking about producing a surplus of revenue over expenditure, he added:

'It would be cost-free. You borrow to buy an asset and when that asset is producing profits like the water industry does, that will cover your borrowing cost.'

In other words the publicly-owned – in this case – Water Board would still have to aim to make a profit, out of which the former shareholders, now bond-holders, would receive interest instead of dividends. This would eject them from any further say in the way the industry was run but would still leave them in receipt of an unearned income. In this respect, the McDonnell model is the same as the Morrison one.

Also, while the Board might be chosen differently, they would still, like Morrison's, have to aim at making a surplus, not just to continue paying a tribute to the former owners but also to build up capital to re-invest in technological changes. This will bring them into conflict with the workforce who will be wanting a larger proportion of the revenue to be devoted to improving their wages and working conditions. The Board members representing consumers can be expected to press for prices to be kept down rather than for wages to increase. So the class struggle would continue, with the workers hampered by having 'representatives' on the Board.

Free at point of use

Jeremy Corbyn also spoke at the conference. In his peroration he got a bit carried away:

'By taking our public services back into public hands, we will not only put a stop to rip-off monopoly pricing, we will put our shared values and collective goals at the heart of how those public services are run. Whether that's an energy system that doesn't jeopardise the future of our planet, a joined up transport system that helps us, rather than hinders us, from moving away from reliance on fossil fuels, a postal service that delivers for everyone across the UK and which

invests for technological change rather than managing decline, a water system which puts an end to wasteful leakage and environmental degradation, a society which puts its most valuable resources, the creations of our collective endeavour, in the hands of everyone who is part of that society, extending the principle of universalism, right across our basic services, free at the point of use to all who use them. That's real, everyday, practical socialism.'

This would seem to commit the Labour Party to introducing not just free education and free health care, but free public transport, free gas, electricity and water, and free letter delivery too; which would rather conflict with McDonnell's statement that these other services would have to be 'revenue-producing'.

Not that there's anything wrong with democratically-run and free public services. Far from it. That's what socialism will involve. It's just that this won't work out as intended under capitalism; which is what Corbyn and McDonnell envisage.

Profits first

The Labour Party used to talk of the need to control the 'commanding heights' of the economy so as to be in a position to try to make things better for those they now call 'the many'. Corbyn and McDonnell may still believe this but this is not what they are proposing here. They are talking only about public services with the rest of production remaining in private hands.

In his speech Corbyn called for

a 'genuinely mixed economy', in effect only for the 'public' element in the mix to be increased and acknowledging that a large, in fact predominant, private sector would continue. So, the initiative for production is to continue to be in the hands of profit-seeking private enterprises. In which case, the next Labour government will be in a position described by a former Labour cabinet minister, Harold Lever, fifty years ago:

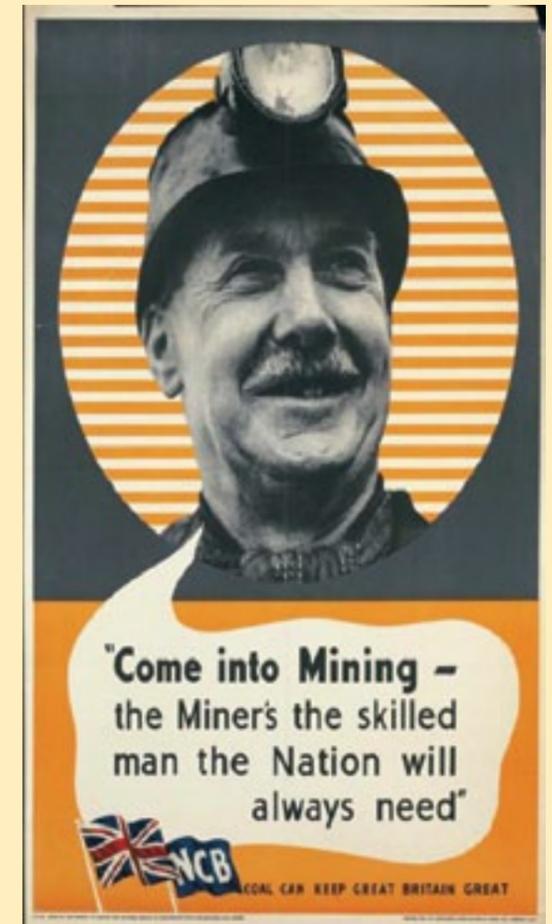
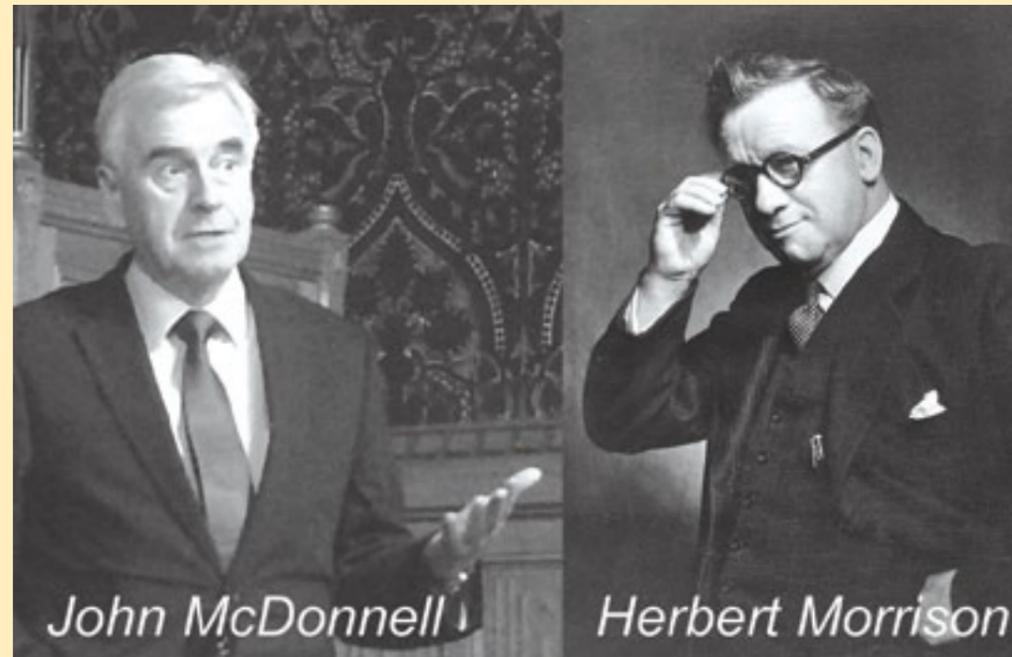
'Labour's economic plans are not in any way geared to nationalisation; they are directed towards increased production on the basis of the continued existence of a large private sector. Within the terms of a profit system it is not possible, in the long run, to achieve sustained increases in output without an adequate flow of profit to promote and finance them. The Labour leadership knows as well as any businessman that an engine which runs on profit cannot be

made to move faster without extra fuel. So, though profits may be squeezed temporarily by taxation and Government price policy, they must and will, over a longer period, increase significantly even if not proportionately to increased production' (*Observer*, 3 April 1966).

In other words, a future Labour government, even under Corbyn and McDonnell, will be compelled to put profit-making first, before anything else including funding for public services.

Democratic control and management of free public services can only be meaningful – and irreversible – where all the means of production are commonly owned, enabling all goods and services to be produced solely and directly to provide for people's needs. Then, the boards – or committees or whatever you want to call them – running public services won't be restricted in the choices they can make by the coercive economic laws of the profit-driven market system.

ADAM BUICK



Human beings are naturally cooperative. Recent research has discovered 'genetic evidence' supporting the 'self-domestication' hypothesis. According to Science Daily (15 February), 'among the driving forces of human evolution, humans selected their companions depending on who had a more pro-social behaviour.'

This makes sense. Contrary to Thomas Hobbes' depiction of early human existence as 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short', human beings have always lived in social groups and have prospered by doing so. Indeed, language itself presupposes society; understanding each other presupposes the shared meanings we attach to our vocalisations. Hobbes' mythical pre-social individual could hardly have forged a 'social contract' with others, vesting power in a single authority (according to him) to maintain the peace and establish a human society, had language not existed in the first place.

To live in a group entails not just benefits but also obligations – that is, the 'moral duty' to cooperate. This is why 'free riders' tend to be universally frowned upon, even despised. Of course, things are not always so straightforward. In a class-divided society like capitalism the exploitative function of a free-riding capitalist class is masked and mediated by a power structure that effectively inverts social reality. Workers are made to appear dependent upon the capitalists when, actually, the very opposite is the case.

Nevertheless, it remains broadly true that living in a group means your own wellbeing depends not just on what you get from the group but on what the group gets from you by way of what you contribute to its wellbeing. The more motivated individuals are to contribute to the group, the more robust the group and the more likely it is to survive and flourish. There is increasing recognition these days that evolution is a 'multi-level selection process.' It operates not just at the level of individuals but at the level of the group as well. A group of rampant egoists is more likely to go extinct than survive.

'Morality' being based on a concern for the wellbeing of others, is both the outcome and prerequisite of social existence. It implies altruism though it is not quite the same thing as altruism. The latter term was coined by the French philosopher, Auguste Comte, as an antonym for 'egoism'. It derives from the Latin word *alteri*, meaning 'other people'. An altruistic outlook is one that regards other people as having value in themselves and not just as a means to your own ends (egoism). Morality builds on this by being prescriptive in how we relate to them.

To clarify – saying a disposition towards moral thinking is fundamental to human society does not make this or that moral belief 'natural'. Particular moral belief systems are the products of particular historical circumstances which can and do change. However, our capacity to think and behave 'morally' is part of what makes us human beings and, indeed, according to ethologists like Frans de Waal it is found to some extent also in other animals like the great apes. Social groups need norms to regulate the behaviour of their members.

Underlying this 'natural' capacity to see the world in moral terms is an ability to empathise with others. The discovery of 'mirror neurons' by Giacomo Rizzolatti and his colleagues in the 1990s suggests this is something we may have acquired

in our evolution as a species. A mirror neuron is a specialised kind of brain cell located in the premotor cortex which 'fires' in response to the observed actions of other individuals and causes the subject to involuntarily mimic or 'mirror' these actions to some extent. An example would be the twitching and tensing movements we make when watching, say, two boxers fighting in a ring. We put ourselves in their shoes, look at the world from their perspective.

Having the ability to empathise does not mean we necessarily always will. Much depends on our social environment and the particular social influences to which we have been subjected. In an article, intriguingly entitled 'Capitalism Short Circuits Our Moral Hard-Wiring', Gary Olson argues that capitalism has contrived to engender a 'carefully manufactured narrative of market capitalist identity', and a self-serving capitalist construct of human nature as fundamentally egoistic, via a relentless barrage of 'elite propaganda' that seeks to override what our mirror neuron system is telling us (*Common Dreams*, December 18, 2008). Nevertheless, suggests Olson, the 'received wisdom about our socioeconomic system', will always struggle to maintain its grip on our thinking since it is fundamentally at odds with what makes us human – our sociality and willingness to help each other.

Egoism or altruism?

However, we should be wary of pushing this argument too far. In every conceivable kind of society there is always going to be a mixture of motives driving individuals. We are not purely altruistic any more than we are purely egoistic.

What is distinctive about capitalism is the way in which these two qualities have been separated out and counterposed to each other by being consigned to, and compartmentalised within, quite different spheres of activity. Egoistic values pertain to the world of business, altruism to the world of charitable giving, the rearing of children and so on.

In a sense, capitalism needs to maintain this dichotomy. What business could survive in a dog-eat-dog world of capitalist competition if it looked upon the needs of its workforce as a charitable concern? On the contrary, it must regard the wages that it pays its workforce as a cost to be ruthlessly minimised. There is no room for sentiment in such a world.

That does not mean businesses will not strive to foster the impression of having the interests of their workforce at heart. Of course they will. Commanding the loyalty, even the affection, of their workforce will tend to raise productivity. However, such sentiments are rooted in the shifting sands of class struggle. By their very nature they are liable to be



THE MYTH OF HOMO ECONOMICUS

transient, superficial and, in the end, two-faced.

This superficial crossover of sentiments from the domain of altruism to the domain of egoism is evident too in the case of 'ethical investment'. The tokenistic nature of such investment, as critics have noted, may be a good selling point but has often served as a fig leaf to conceal some pretty dubious practices or questionable products.

To the extent that ethical investment does indeed live up to its name, the result is a generally poorer return on one's investment. Trying to run together altruistic and egoistic values in a capitalist business is like trying to mix oil and water. As one commentator noted with regard to the Coca-Cola Company:

'Investing in Coke because they're actively trying to make a difference is sort of confusing two separate goals. The goal of investing is to make money (for yourself), while the goal of social good / social responsibility is to make life better (for other people). It is mathematically impossible to maximize for two variables at once... At best, socially responsible investing is an ineffective half-measure that is both costly to the investor and the causes they care about.' (flannelguyroi.com/case-against-socially-responsible-investing-sri/)

Naturalising Capitalism

This fragmented way of looking at things which counterposes the 'economy' as the domain of pure self-interest to other domains of social reality where altruistic values prevail is a uniquely capitalist development. In traditional pre-capitalist societies it would have made no sense at all. There was no such thing as a distinct and separate domain of reality called 'the economy'. Everything was jumbled up and intermixed. What might appear on the surface from the vantage point of modern capitalism to be an example of purely self-interested economic behaviour would be laden with multiple significations – cultural, political and religious.

The journey from traditional 'holistic' societies to modern capitalism involved precisely the disaggregation or breaking up of social reality as a unified 'total' experience into a number of separate domains. In his *Essays on Individualism* (1986), Louis Dumont traces this development culminating in the first clear exposition of the 'economy' as a self-contained and distinctive domain, subject to its own inner laws, in the writings of Adam Smith (misleadingly dubbed the 'Founding Father' of capitalism).

Smith, whose first book was on moral philosophy, was later influenced by Bernard de Mandeville's scandalous tract *The Fable of Bees* (1714) which talked of how 'private vices' could be converted into 'public benefits'. This gave him the core meme that he developed in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). As

he put it:

'It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own self-interest. We address ourselves not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities, but of their advantages.'

Thus, the 'invisible hand of the market' would guide individuals motivated by nothing more than their own self-interest to paradoxically promote the interests of others.

This mechanistic conception of the economy went hand in hand with a thoroughgoing individualistic view of individuals as atomised decision-makers linked to others via an impersonal 'cash nexus'. The decisions these individuals made were essentially egoistic, reflecting our very bedrock nature as a species. According to Smith, the propensity to 'truck, barter, and exchange' in pursuit of one's own interests is something integral to human nature. Out of that emerged the division of labour as a 'very slow and gradual consequence' of this 'natural' propensity.

What Smith was doing, and what many apologists for market capitalism have done ever since, was to retrospectively 'universalise' such capitalist categories as 'market exchange' and treat these as embedded aspects of all human societies, past and future. Earlier societies were said to differ from capitalism chiefly in the comparatively limited extent to which the division of labour had developed within them. But in the basically egoistic motives driving individuals, there was essentially no difference; given time, these motives would eventually deliver a capitalist society as the predestined expression of our human nature.

Smith was writing at a time when the discipline of anthropology was undeveloped and largely speculative in nature. Sweeping conclusions were derived from the opinionated evidence supplied by explorers, missionaries and colonisers moving into the Non-European world (looked upon as providing a window on Europe's own past). Ascendant capitalism needed to 'naturalise its own arbitrariness', as Pierre Bourdieu once aptly put it, and what better way to do that than through a historical reconstruction of the past that emphasises an essential continuity with the present?

However, the subsequent development of anthropology as a discipline, particularly since the introduction of intensive fieldwork as a methodology in the early 20th century, has effectively blown apart such speculative theories.

ROBIN COX



I just have to share this. I'm sure the situation is the same in every country suffering under capitalism.

I am a pensioner and, because I had a major back injury some years ago, I am eligible for a few extra dollars on top of my pension as a disability allowance. This, of course, is means tested. I have to supply the government with receipts for gardening, electricity bills, doctor's bills, prescription receipts, etc. The extra few dollars they throw my way enables me to pay someone to mow my lawn. Okay, that sounds fair enough. This hasn't been updated for several years so I was not surprised when the Department of Work and Income wrote to me asking me to supply receipts for my expenses over the past year. What did surprise me was that there were no contact details on their letter, other than an 0800 number. There was no physical address, no P.O. Box number, no telephone number.

I have had past experience of using an 0800 number for this Government Department and I don't ever want to do so again. What happens is, you end up holding on to the telephone for up to an hour listening to pre-recorded music (their choice of which is rank!) and when the call is eventually answered I found myself talking to some clown in a call centre in a different city, 300 kilometers away, who was unable to help with my enquiry.

Okay, so I photocopied all my receipts for them and then got on the Internet to try to find out where to post them. The letter they sent me had been posted in a small town in the South Island, but no address was given. I live in the capital city. Don't they have an office in the capital city? Right, well, the Internet provided me with a post box number for their office in the small country town in the south island, so I posted the receipts there.

Having done that I thought the next step would be to write a letter to the cabinet minister and complain about the lack of contact details on their letterhead. The Department of Work and Income is a Government Department, so you would expect that there should be a Minister of Work and Income, right? Wrong! She hides under the title of Minister for Social Development! Okay, so the Internet should provide me with the name of the Minister for Social Development, right? Wrong! The name they provide is that of the previous Minister who lost her job 5 months previously when the government changed from National to Labour in the last elections. It seems that it takes them an awfully long time to update their website! (They have updated it now!) Okay, sit tight and wait for a reply. Ha-bloody-ha!

Eventually I got another letter from Work & Income, but from a different writer than on the previous correspondence. I was expecting to hear that my disability allowance would be increased by a few dollars since my expenses had increased considerably. But, No! The letter informed me that my allowance would stay the same and that if I wished to question this I should contact the writer at the address given on the

Same the Whole World Over



back of the letter. I turned the letter over and it was completely blank! Surprise, surprise! They must have written it in invisible ink!

My next step was to make an appointment to see my MP. Well, not exactly the man himself as he is a busy man, but his secretary who runs his office in town. Hooray, at last, a helpful human being. I went along to see her taking all the correspondence with me. I asked whether my MP could do something about making Work and

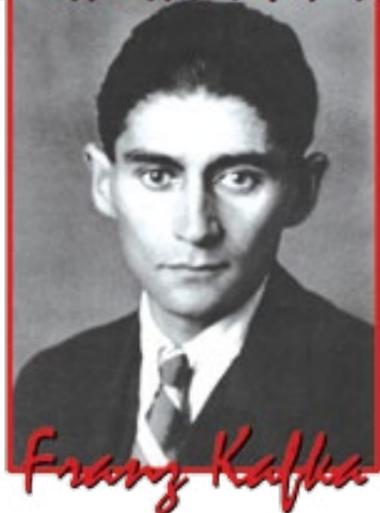
Income more accessible to the public. After all, being a Labour MP, he should now have a bit more clout than he did with the previous government. She explained that there was little he could do and went on to say that the reason we have so many beggars on the streets now is because the government is trying to make it impossible for people to apply for any kind of benefit. Most people get sick and tired of trying to get government assistance that they just give up trying.

I asked her where the Wellington branch of Work and Income is now situated because it had moved from the building it was in a few years ago. She said that they still have a branch in the city, and actually told me what street it was on, but advised me not to go there because they have two security guards on the door and no one can get in unless they have an appointment. Of course, it is impossible to get an appointment because they don't advertise their phone number. Of course, all the money they save from not paying benefits is spent on employing more paper-shufflers and security guards.

Isn't Capitalism wonderful!

MOGGIE GRAYSON (World Socialist Party, NZ).

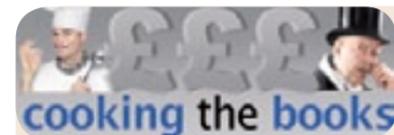
With thanks to



Franz Kafka

Capitalism is a society of inequalities, in how both wealth and power are distributed. These inequalities have often affected women more adversely than men, and campaigns for women's rights have been ongoing for over a century. But the debate around gender equality is no longer just about differences in wages or opportunities. Allegations of sexual harassment and abuse in Parliament and the entertainment industry especially have highlighted how some men have exercised their power. Also, the debate has broadened due to increased awareness of issues affecting transgender people, many of whom have felt marginalised.

How should socialists respond to the new prominence given to gender politics? What does gender inequality tell us about capitalist society, especially how it shapes gender roles? And how does the issue impact upon revolutionary politics? The Socialist Party argues that sexism and misogyny are expressions of how



Fareless transport

Under the headline 'German cities to trial free public transport to cut pollution,' the *Guardian* (14 February) reported on a letter from German ministers to the EU Environment Commissioner. Their idea was to encourage people to use public transport rather than carbon-burning individual cars (and avoid Germany being fined for not meeting EU anti-pollution targets).

Free transport will be a feature of socialist society as part of general production to directly meet people's needs. So, there would not just be free transport, but also free health care, education, communications, restaurants and laundries. There would be no charge to enter museums, parks, libraries, theatres and other places of entertainment and recreation. Houses and flats would be rent-free, with heating, lighting, water, telephone and broadband supplied free of charge.

Free public transport on its own within capitalism is a different matter as under capitalism everything has to be paid for. As the system's defenders put it, there is no such thing as a free lunch. In the case of public transport, the body operating

it has to spend money to provide the service, on buying and maintaining the buses, trams or trains, on maintaining the tracks, on fuel and electricity and general running costs, as well as on the wages and salaries of its employees. If there is no money coming in from fares, somebody has to provide the money to pay for all this. The transport authority has to be subsidised, from central or local government which will have raised the money from taxes and borrowing.

One capitalist justification for such a subsidy is that it would save money that would otherwise have to be spent on something else. The *Guardian* mentions that, according to the EU, 'life-threatening pollution' affects 130 cities in Europe 'costing €20bn euros (US\$24.7bn) in health spending per year in the bloc.' Another reason might be to avoid employers in city centres having to pay higher wages because of the high cost of workers getting to work; in effect, a subsidy to these employers.

Free transport has in fact been introduced in some cities, and has worked to refute the silly objection that opponents of socialism have predicted will happen when anything is made freely available.

When in 1970 the GLC was considering whether or not to introduce free transport in London one Conservative councillor predicted that everybody would rush to take free rides and a



capitalism is inherently divisive and unequal. So, the solution is to address these problems at their source, by uniting to replace capitalism with a society based on equality and freedom.

Our weekend of talks and discussion will examine how gender issues relate to wider society and to revolutionary politics. 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.

E-mail enquiries should be sent to spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk. To book a place online, go to spgb.net/summerschool2018, or send a cheque (payable to the Socialist Party of Great Britain) with your contact details to Summer School, The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 7UN.

contributor to the *Local Government Chronicle* (15 August) opined:

'individual charges are a form of "rationing by the purse", but they are rationing. If there were no individual payments and thus no rationing, buses and trains and so on would surely get even more overcrowded than they are today; powerful and unscrupulous would-be passengers would get places in the vehicles, but what about old people, children, and the disabled? They need transport most of all, but they would be likely sufferers in a free-for-all.'

This has not happened in the places where free transport has been introduced. In a follow-up article on the German proposal, the news website, the *Huffington Post* (22 February) reported on two cities which already have unlimited public transport free at the point of access. In Tubingen, in Germany, where residents pay a tax of €15 (about £13) a month towards the cost. In Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, there is also fareless public transport. In neither case has free transport led to a free-for-all as the physically strong push aside pensioners to grab a seat, nor to people 'joy riding' or 'free loading' just because it's free. People only use the free transport to get from A to B when they need to for one reason or another. As they can be expected to do in socialism too.

Down the centuries many thinkers have been convinced that how we both perceive and conceive the world can be very misleading if not downright deceptive. Humans no longer primarily depend on the sensory and instinctual facilities that our fellow animals exclusively do. Our instincts and perceptions are subordinate to the cultural education that we receive as children; and that cultural education is covertly political. The vehicle of education is language – the communication device par excellence. Human language is a complex system of abstraction: from shapes on paper (writing) to various sounds (speaking) not to mention gesture and expression. A child will take many years to master this system to a point where it doesn't need its parents to survive. Because we do not live in nature the mastery of language is our primary survival tool.

Of course human culture lies within nature but its technology intervenes at every level in our relationship with it. Part of the reason we find 'survival' or 'back to nature' documentaries particularly intriguing is because we have become so alienated from the natural environment that we are vicariously entertained by the helplessness others experience when thrown into it. The complexity of language has reached a point where it allows us to make grandiose claims about our understanding of both nature and culture and, the point of this essay, about the relationship between the two.

Plato's cave

The ancient Greek philosopher Plato presented us with a celebrated thought experiment concerning the relationship between perception and cultural illusion. It featured prisoners chained in a cave in such a way that they could only see shadows of the world on their cave wall. Their perception of the world was necessarily extremely narrow but their sense of sight was not impaired. Plato used this as both a metaphor for how misleading sensory perception alone can be and also to illustrate that we are all, to one intellectual degree or another, prisoners of our culture. In this case these were actual prisoners who were represented as the victims of political manipulation by those with power over both perception and information. Among the many implications of this line of thought are (a) that there exists some kind of independent superior 'reality' and that (b) our inability to witness this realm is caused by the limitations of our cultural (linguistic) context and/or by its manipulation by the powerful to inhibit our access to it. Plato was something of an elitist and he believed that only a small minority were capable of seeing through the illusion of culture and power. Why is it that most of us are so reluctant to subject our received values and perceptions to any level of serious critique?

Certainly some are more predisposed to abstract thought than others. For socialists the balance between thinking and action has always been understood in terms of a praxis which, hopefully, enables us to avoid both intellectual philistinism and intellectual elitism. But we know that without subjecting personal paradigms to a critical process there is little hope of understanding the seductive power and potential manipulation of language. I recently overheard someone claim that Dolly Parton was a socialist because of her charity work. Such a statement would not have been possible without the continual subversion of the word and concept by both the

politically ignorant and the politically astute. The ego rebels against any proof of intellectual manipulation. Our identity is very dependent on what we think we know and any attack on our intellectual integrity is felt as a profound threat. Many retreat into cynicism; the last refuge of the insecure because it both protects the ego and relieves us of any need for political activity. It would seem then that the reluctance to subject the inherited political paradigms to any criticism is partly to protect our identity; this is the main psychological consequence of individualism.

The Matrix

Of all of the political concepts individualism

is one of the most powerful and corrosive together with being the most illusory. Illusory because mankind has never before lived at such a level of global interdependence where every element of the means of life is socially produced. But the ideology of capitalism has to insist on anachronistic individualism to defend the minority ownership of everything. The consequence of this is to lock us all into a tiny egotistical prison cell where others are seen as competitors rather than as the only way to express our humanity (as a community). As you read this, if you are not a socialist, it is probably challenging many of your most profound political values. But before you put it aside answer one question: has anything you eat, think, feel, wear or understand not been socially produced? From your ability to read these little abstract shapes on the page to your very consciousness of existence, these are all socially produced concepts. So having this wonderful inheritance from our species why do we feel so profoundly alone and continually threatened? It is because we have been conditioned to feel this way by the manipulation of information and perception. As to how we might overcome this illusion we must turn to a favourite concept of not just socialists but to almost all who have seriously considered the problem; levels of consciousness.

In the film *The Matrix* we are presented with a scenario where humanity is merely a source of energy harvested by sentient machines. To keep them ignorant of their slavery mankind is distracted by an illusory environment (our everyday world) generated by computers. A revolutionary group has discovered the reality behind this illusion and seek to destroy it by converting those who have suspicions to their cause. Sound familiar? That is the socialist modus operandi and this journal is our version of the 'red pill' which, in the film, is offered to those who wish to see what lies behind the illusion. Of course we part company with the narrative in its search for a messianic figure because, unlike the film's writers and Plato, we believe everyone has the potential to see through the illusion. Revolutionary consciousness is primarily created by the contrast of the professed values and promises of a ruling ideology compared with the reality (for the vast majority) of living in the world that these ideas seek to defend. Many of great intellect, who being unaware of this (Richard Dawkins and Stephen Hawkins for example) are condemned to live in Plato's cave or the matrix despite their intelligence. Socialism needs no magic red pills, Messiahs or philosophic geniuses; it needs you. Illusions can be comforting and even fun but all of us, deep down, need to know what lies behind and beyond.

WEZ



OVER THE years, film awards have become ever more politicised. It used to be that the occasional comment on an issue like the Iraq War would slip in to acceptance speeches, but recently, Golden Globe and Academy Awards ceremonies have been used as platforms for whole campaigns, focused more inwardly on the film and awards industries themselves.

When nominations for the 88th Academy Awards were announced in early 2016, there was some criticism that for the second consecutive year all twenty nominees in the acting categories were white. Social media buzzed with the hashtag #OscarsSoWhite and several prominent film-makers called for the event to be boycotted. The following year, a record number of black actors were nominated. For 2018's awards season, the issue of ethnic diversity was overshadowed by the sexual abuse scandal which broke last autumn. Over 80 women have come forward to accuse film producer Harvey Weinstein of abuse dating back to the 1970s. Weinstein denied any allegations of non-consensual sex, said he had gone into therapy, and hired a Public Relations firm which specialises in crisis management. At January's Golden Globe Awards, many attendees showed solidarity with women suffering abuse by wearing black, and the hashtags #MeToo (used by people to say they have experienced sexual harassment) and #TimesUp (a campaign against sexual abuse and for gender parity) trended on social media. These campaigns were at the start of an explosion of abuse allegations, not only in the entertainment industry, but also in journalism, charities and parliament. There's a widespread, strong feeling that abuse won't be tolerated any longer, which the campaigners have the challenge of translating into cultural change.

Those who dared to dispute how the abuse scandal is being played out have faced a backlash in mainstream and social media. Actress Catherine Deneuve was the most prominent signatory of a French counter-campaign which criticised the current wave for conflating allegations of rape with clumsy attempts to seduce. She later apologised for causing any offence to abuse victims. Germaine Greer said that hashtag campaigns won't work 'because all the powerful men who are now in all sorts of trouble are already briefing their lawyers' ⁽¹⁾. Greer has

hinted at an important point. While these campaigns might lead to some important measures, such as abuse survivors getting support and a sense of justice, they can't change the power structures which led to perpetrators being in the position to manipulate and abuse others in the first place.

These structures are also the root cause of the other issues highlighted through recent awards ceremonies' associated campaigns. While 2016 and 2017's award seasons focused on ethnic diversity, 2018 also highlighted the lack of prominent women in the film industry. A study by San Diego State University of the staff behind last year's 250 most popular films found that women comprised just 18% of senior behind-the-scenes roles ⁽²⁾. At the Academy Awards ceremony, Frances McDormand used her acceptance speech for the best actress gong to suggest increasing diversity with 'inclusion riders'. A 'rider' is part of a contract in which



someone can specify their own demands on a project, so an 'inclusion rider' would involve only agreeing to work on a project with a diverse talent pool. It's yet to be seen how many film-makers will either attempt this or be influential enough to get what they want. The lack of female film-makers was reflected in the awards given; only six went to women, the lowest amount since 2012.

Decisions about who wins an Oscar are made by the 6,000-or-so members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. To become a member, you need to have been nominated for an award or be 'sponsored' by two existing members. In 2016, 683 newcomers joined, nearly half of whom were women and not white. Overall, Academy members were still largely white (89%) and male (73%), and the term 'steak eaters' has been used for the rump of white males with traditional values who have a heavy influence when films get nominated ⁽³⁾. Each November, the nominations process starts with what's known as 'the race', when studios, distributors and publicists push their films to Academy members. The canniest distributors will have just released their movies, as most nominations go to films which come out in the last three months of the year. Members in each 'branch'

of the industry vote for who they want nominated within their own trade, so costume designers vote for other costume designers, for example. This system means that decisions are made either by those with specialist skills best able to judge, or by a closed set of people who like back-slapping each other, depending on how you look at it. Many members would have a vested interest in films they or their pals have contributed to, whether practically or financially. Shortlists for each category are drawn up after the nominations are mysteriously weighted by auditors, then all members can vote for the winners in each category. So, whatever the identity of the Academy's members, deciding who gets an Oscar is still a bit incestuous, with financial concerns never far away.

Challenging the disproportionately high number of white men in both the Academy and in senior roles in the film industry (among others) has been largely through the prism of identity politics. This is the approach where identity is seen as the key issue in how institutions function, rather than economic forces. The surface argument is that non-white, non-male talent has been held back by industry inertia weighted in favour of white males. Not enough discussion has centred on how this inertia is linked to profitability more than identity. Films produced by 'steak eaters' with a casting couch, whatever their faults, were profitable, and that's what the studios' owners are most interested in. Films with diverse casts and crew will flourish only if they can make a profit. Investors can be reassured by figures showing that Oscar-nominated films with a woman in the lead role are around 33% more profitable than those starring men. This is partly driven by American box office returns being 7% higher for female-led films, but more so because they tend to have lower budgets and therefore smaller overheads to eat into profits ⁽⁴⁾.

So, there probably will be greater diversity among film-makers in future, as the economic conditions are right. And of course it's a good thing if more people have the opportunity to make movies, without expecting harassment or abuse. But they'll be working in the same old profit-driven institutions, the same old power structures which enable discrimination and exploitation.

¹ www.theguardian.com/books/2018/jan/23/germaine-greer-criticises-whingeing-metoo-movement

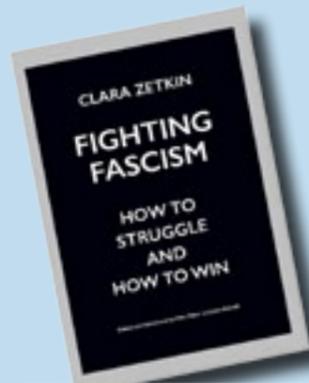
² https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/2017_Celluloid_Ceiling_Report.pdf

³ www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-ca-mn-year-end-diversity-reflection-20161207-story.html

⁴ www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-43146026

MIKE FOSTER

Misreading fascism



Fighting Fascism
by Clara Zetkin
Edited by Mark Taylor
& John Riddell
Haymarket £10.99

This booklet reproduces two main writings of Zetkin on fascism: her report and resolution presented at the Third Enlarged Plenum of the Communist International's Executive Committee in June 1923, and her speech to the German Reichstag in 1932.

Carla Zetkin was an iconic left-wing German Marxist and close friend of Rosa Luxemburg who opted for the political line taken by Lenin and the Bolsheviks, becoming a champion of the Third International. She stayed on the side of the Third International although not without some regrets, even during the rise and 'splendour' of Stalinism.

In order to appreciate the historical and political relevance of Zetkin's analysis, the reader should consider that this came less than one year after the report (*Rapporto sul Fascismo*) presented by the then leader of the Communist Party of Italy (PCd'I) Amadeo Bordiga. His report at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International came a few days after Mussolini had come to power. The fascists' *Marcia su Roma* had taken place while the Italian delegates were away at that congress.

This is not a negligible detail if we consider that eight days after Bordiga's Report on Fascism the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party sent a letter to the Italian delegation, signed by Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Radek and Bukharin to impose the fusion between the PCd'I and the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), from which the PCd'I had split only a little less than two years earlier. Bordiga was a tenacious opponent of the reunification imposed by the International in the name of the 'united front'. This tactic and the interpretation and attitude toward fascism were very much interlinked. So in June 1923, while Bordiga was in jail, and the change of guard at the leadership of the Italian Party – its Bolshevisation – was coming about, an adjusted interpretation of fascism would

strengthen and justify the new direction. This re-interpretation was in fact Zetkin's report and resolution.

To be fair, Zetkin's interpretation of fascism, and Italian fascism in particular, is in many respects truthful and in line with Bordiga's report. However, her version is studded with assumptions and convictions that served the political plan of discrediting Bordiga's 'infantile' position (e.g. of no compromises with social-democrats and Massimalists), and winning the new leadership under Antonio Gramsci over to the united front story. For Zetkin 'Fascism arrives ... as punishment because the proletariat has not carried and driven forward the revolution' and that 'Fascism [is] an expression of decay and disintegration of the capitalist economy... bourgeois state's dissolution'. 'The weaknesses of the Communist Party [of Italy] also played a role here... policy error in viewing fascism solely as a military phenomenon and overlooking its ideological and political side'. According to Zetkin's view, the violent struggle against fascism would allow the proletariat to 'grow conscious, stronger, and more purposeful'. Thus, 'To the masses! ... but maintaining Communist Ideology... Meet violence with violence'.

Fascism did not arrive as a punishment because the workers and their leaders shied away from revolution. As already pointed out by Bordiga in his report, fascism was adopted by the industrial and agrarian bourgeoisie to violently physically repress the workers who occupied factories and fields in the turmoil following WWI. Looking a bit closer, one can see that fascism was in fact generated by the bourgeoisie itself. Money for Mussolini's journal and the creation of his pseudo-anti-parliamentary-pro-worker patriotic movement (*Fasci Italiani di Combattimento*) came mainly from the Italian bourgeoisie.

Nor was fascism an expression of capitalist economic disintegration. Italy was thrown into the First World War completely unprepared, by a secret pact involving the king, Vittorio Emanuele III, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sidney Sonnino and Prime Minister Antonio Salandra, representing the interest of an industrial bourgeoisie hoping for easy spoils. By 1922 the country had already covered 79 billion lira of war costs without borrowing anything from other countries.

When reading Bordiga's report it is also clear that the Italian Party did not see fascism as a mere military phenomenon.

1919 was in fact a bad year for fascism still stuck with patriotic demagoguery. At the end of the war the liberals had some difficulty in keeping control over the army generals. This was evident when the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio, from whom Mussolini later stole completely his style and propaganda, managed to get several generals on his side to occupy the Italian-speaking city of Fiume (now Rijeka,

Croatia), which according to the secret negotiations between Sonnino and the Entente was to go to Yugoslavia.

The old fox Giovanni Giolitti also thought he could use Mussolini's fascists to get rid of the D'Annunzio movement, which was destabilising the army's hierarchy, and to reduce the spread of working class organisations in particular in rural areas. He was looking for a political entity to go into coalition with. At the end of 1920, with government backing, the fascist 'punitive expeditions' started to terrorise the rural north of Italy. At the election of 1921 the fascists finally entered into parliament. They were not enough to serve Giolitti's plans, who now had PSI and *Popolari* (Catholics) against him.

Thus, Mussolini's fascists gained strength when the agrarian bourgeoisie, mainly of Emilia, Lombardy and Tuscany first, and the industrial bourgeoisie of big industrial cities such as Turin and Milan, saw in the fascists' aversion towards working class organisations a viable anti-working-class weapon, even more effective than the *Guardia Regia* that up to then had violently repressed any insurrection. The advantage of using para-military fascist squadrons was that they could physically eliminate the leaders of the working class institutions, like the Mafia was doing in Sicily. The demobilisation of the army helped the fascists to recruit veterans who no longer fitted into society. Nevertheless, as we just mentioned, the fascist violence in the country as well as in the urban areas had always been tolerated if not facilitated by the police forces.

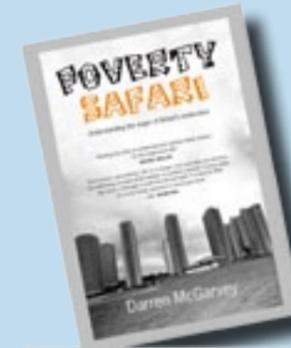
When Mussolini took power in 1922, against Giolitti's calculations, the king did not enforce the state of siege ordered by the then Prime Minister, and permitted this. Hardly a coup d'etat when the Head of State gives his blessing.

Contrary to Zetkin's, Zinoviev's and other Third Internationalists' expectations, Italy was not ready to conduct a successful working class revolution, 'like in Russia'. This was acknowledged in Bordiga's report. Instead of being an 'expression of decay and disintegration of the capitalist economy' fascism was an authoritarian adaptation of the political representation of capital's interests.

The risk in adopting Zetkin's view is to accept the false notion that fighting exclusively against fascism would automatically result in an emancipation of the working class. The danger today is that the 'fight against fascism' becomes a fight only against Trumpism, just because his bombastic ego may resemble Mussolini's. Or that the victory against ISIS (a typical paramilitary ideological movement) is seen as a liberation of the working class in the Middle East from capitalism. The fight

against fascism must not become a 'moral question'. It is a class struggle question just as much as a fight against any other form of representation of capital's interest is a class struggle question.

CESCO



Poverty Safari:
Understanding the Anger of
Britain's Underclass
by Darren McGarvey
Luarth Press £7.99

Blame Game

McGarvey was brought up in the Pollok area of Glasgow. His mother (who had been raped when young) drank heavily, was violent and ran up a massive drug debt, so he had a dysfunctional home life. One consequence was that he felt a deep sense of grievance against anyone he considered well-off and he blamed the 'middle class' (the capitalists don't feature here at all).

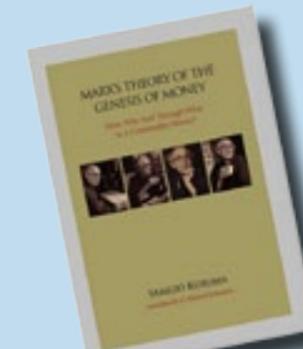
A large part of his book attacks the 'poverty industry', where people make a good living from dealing with problems; not solving everything but leaving some sort of 'legacy', with enough problems still remaining for the industry to continue growing. Outside organisations that address poverty encourage dependency rather than self-sufficiency, and if you are poor it is best not to offend such organisations and those who work for them. In Scotland, 'the poverty industry is dominated by a left-leaning, liberal, middle class'. In contrast, the poor, McGarvey says, need to become 'more active, engaged and resilient'. Identity politics has supposedly replaced class issues, but again is just another means for the socially mobile (which often is equivalent in these pages to middle class) to dominate public discussion. But, considering how unclear his own views on class are, this is not very convincing.

It is odd that he emphasises the importance of taking personal responsibility and not just blaming others while at the same time writing eloquently on the lifelong consequences of childhood poverty and the crucial role played by emotional stress in influencing people's health and social mobility. Many of those who end up in prison have experienced

violence or other forms of abuse while children. Child abuse itself is driven by social deprivation.

As may have been gathered by now, McGarvey's own views are not at all well explained. He sees Socialism in completely anodyne terms, as 'about providing a decent quality of life for everyone in society'. He is now the father of a young son and as such is frightened by the thought of a revolution: but he does not say why, or what such a revolution would involve. Moreover, there is nothing at all here on what the underlying causes of poverty might be. So, if his book has an overall message, it is left very unclear.

PB



**Marx's Theory of the
Genesis of Money**
by Samezo Kuruma
translated & edited by
Michael Schauerte
Brill, 2018

Marx on Money

A collection of essays which examines how, why and through what is a commodity 'money'. It is based solely on the first two chapters of Marx's *Capital*, Volume One. Kuruma (1893-1982) was a Japanese academic who specialised in Marxist economics. Schauerte, who provides a 20-page introduction, is a regular contributor to the *Socialist Standard*. By beginning with the commodity and the theory of value, Marx was able to bring out what he called the 'power of abstraction'. This simply means setting aside whatever elements are not relevant to the theoretical question at hand. As Schauerte points out, Kuruma's interpretation is not original and is simply a close reading of what Marx actually wrote. An important reason for doing this is that Kuruma thought he needed to show that some of his colleagues had misunderstood Marx in important ways. This book is a specialist work and the general reader would perhaps be better directed towards Marx's *Capital* itself or some of the widely-available introductions to it.

LEW

Syria: Story of a Conflict



Nearly half a million people have been killed in Syria since the current fighting began in 2011, and around 11 million forced from their homes. An exhibition at the Imperial War Museum North in Salford Quays, on till the end of May, examines some of the history and issues involved. As noted, it is 'a war of narratives', with all sides competing to tell their own version of what is happening. Whether particular groups are described as rebels or terrorists can have a major impact on how other people see the conflict.

Western media coverage of the fighting and its consequences has tended to focus on the number of refugees who have come from Syria to Europe, especially Greece. But this applies only to a minority, as there are many internally-displaced people in Syria, and over four million refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. The fighting is complicated by the various forces ranged against the Assad government, from Kurds to those who objected to Assad's repressive rule. Some souvenir plates and mugs are displayed that show Assad and Putin together, in a reminder of how outside forces are playing a role in the conflict. Nearby is a gruesome replica of a barrel bomb.

Perhaps the highlight is two series of photos by the Russian photographer Sergey Ponomarev, 'A Lens on Syria'. The first shows life in government-controlled areas, where things are supposedly 'normal' but clearly are not. Homs, for instance, has more or less become a ghost town: one unforgettable image shows a ruined shopping mall with a large election poster of a smiling Assad on it.

The other series shows the plight of refugees, especially those who have been refused entry to countries such as Macedonia. They wait in dreadful conditions in camps, often having risked crossing the Mediterranean in flimsy boats. The misery and hopelessness displayed in these photos show very clearly the human cost of this appalling conflict.

PB

50 Years Ago

Labour's New Race Law

Attacks on wages and the trade unions, defence of profits and unemployment, bringing back health charges and now, again, a colour bar law. Thus, one by one, Labour abandons its old principles, partly under pressure from capitalism, but partly also from a desire to stay in office. While economics has been responsible for the failure of Labour's futile attempts to make capitalism work in the interests of all, politics is behind this, their second, capitulation to colour prejudice. For, as they themselves pointed out in 1962, if anything economics demands free immigration: there is a relative labour shortage in Britain which could delay expansion. (....)

On February 22 Home Secretary Callaghan announced Labour's Bill to stop the Kenya Asians. These unfortunate people were holders of British passports so the Bill had to provide for the extension of the immigration colour bar from Commonwealth to British citizens. (....)

Extending the colour bar to British citizens abroad needed careful drafting to avoid keeping out "white" as well as "coloured" people. In the end Labour found a solution that only those whose father or father's father were born in Britain would from now on have free entry into Britain. One lawyer, writing in *New Society* (29 February) commented:

"Each lawyer will recognise the finger print of the formula that has been evolved: it is designed to draw a racial distinction by finding a dividing line which *approximates* to the racial division yet is capable of expression in words which make no specific reference to race."

The Socialist Party, basing its principles on the fact that workers the world over have a common interest, is opposed to all racialism and to all nationalism. We are opposed to all legislation to prevent the free movement of workers, whether in search of jobs or fleeing from oppression. We denounce the Labour Party's new race law as a shameful sell-out to colour prejudice. Let them never dare speak of the brotherhood of man again!

(*Socialist Standard*, April 1968)

Obituary

Hugh Armstrong

It is with sadness that we report the death of Hugh Armstrong at the age of 80. A member of Glasgow Branch for fifty two years, Hughie, as he was known to his fellow socialists, was born in in the Gallowgate in Glasgow's East End and grew up in the Gorbals. As a young man he was dragooned into the armed forces to do his National Service, an experience which left him with a lifetime contempt for authority, strengthened no doubt, by an incident where, after a 'Disagreement' with a bullying Sergeant Major – the Sergeant coming off second-best – Hughie was beaten senseless by Military Police thugs.

When demob finally arrived, his fellow squaddies decided for some perverse reason to have a whip-round to purchase a present for their Commanding Officer. Hughie not only refused to contribute a penny, but at the presentation he requested, and was granted permission to speak, upon which he emphatically stated that he had not contributed one penny to this travesty.

Hughie was a grafter, and found work as a labourer in the post-war building boom working in various towns and cities in England before returning to Glasgow where he secured permanent employment with the General Post Office.

On a visit to the 'Barras' in the early 60s Hughie chanced upon an outdoor meeting of the Socialist Party of Great Britain. It was a turning point in his life, although hearing the socialist case for the first time he was understandably sceptical but curious enough to return, question, discuss and eventually to join in 1966. He became a tireless worker, attending meetings, selling literature and eventually becoming an outdoor speaker. I have vivid memories of Hughie on the platform; not one for fancy rhetoric but putting over the socialist case in a simple but effective way.

One of the less 'Glamorous' but necessary party activities was to stick up posters on walls and empty shop windows to advertise upcoming indoor meetings. This necessitated a team of three people, one to paste, one to post, and most essential, one to act as lookout for the police, who would apprehend you, resulting in a fine. The area they had chosen also happened to be the favoured haunt of some, euphemistically named 'ladies of the night' who also had to be wary of the police. Midway through posting, Hughie spotted a couple of beat cops approaching and shouted: 'Police!', whereupon the other two members scarpered. The ladies however, assuming despite his diminutive stature that he was a plain-clothes officer, immediately set about him. Propagating the socialist case can

sometimes be detrimental to your wellbeing!

Hughie came from a family who loved singing. His sister Patricia sings jazz in a city centre bar, his ex-wife also sang, and their son Raymond is a professional opera singer. Hughie favoured the Great American Song Book which he would perform at the tea-dances he attended, and in 1990 achieved his dream come true when he saw his idol Frank Sinatra perform live at Ibrox Stadium.

T.M.

Think – and act – for yourselves

The cult of leadership is essential for the preservation of capitalism. 'Bad leadership' is a convenient excuse that something other than capitalism caused a government's failure to deliver, or a reform that doesn't meet expectations. And always there are new leaders, promising the never-never land.

The market and other forces of the system are uncontrollable by any government; political leaders can't stop depressions, wars or the arms race; the system cannot be humanised or controlled. All they can do is try to run the system in the interests of their masters, the dominant class. And in the process, betray their naive and trusting followers.

The majority are capable of informing themselves and taking the necessary political action to establish common (not state) ownership and democratic control of the means for distributing wealth, by and in the interest of society as a whole. Every individual will then stand in equal relationship to the means of production. There will be no more use for the coercive state because division into classes of rulers and ruled will be ended. It will be replaced by social administration, predominantly local, but involving regional and global administration also. A war-less, wage-less, money-less system of conscious, voluntary co-operation and free access according to individually and democratically determined requirements.

The removal of the present artificial restrictions on production and the elimination of capitalism's waste, combined with global materials and energy of which there is no real shortage, will make an abundant, harmonious and meaningful life for all.

Meetings

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

APRIL 2018

LONDON

Saturday 21 – Sunday 22 April, 10.30 a.m. – 5.00 p.m. both days
Annual Conference
 Socialist Party's Premises
 52 Clapham High Street
 London
 SW4 7UN

Thursday 19 April 8pm

Socialism as a Practical Alternative

Torriano Meeting House, 99
 Torriano Avenue, NW5 2RX
 (Nearest tube: Kentish Town)

MAY 2018

NEWCASTLE

Saturday, 5 May, 3.00 p.m. (Doors

open 2.30 p.m.)
May Day Rally
 Venue: Miners' Institute, Neville Hall,
 Westgate Rd, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 1SE @ 3pm (doors open 2.30pm)

"Q. Does {Momentum} + {Force} = {Power}?"

"Losing Momentum: must the left fail again?"

"Capitalism, Post-Capitalism and Socialism"

Speakers: Clifford Slapper and Brian Gardner

BURNLEY

Monday, 7 May from 1.00 p.m.
North East Lancashire TUC May Day festival
 Venue: Towneley Park, Burnley, BB11 3RQ

The Socialist Party will have a stall at this event.

BURFORD

Saturday 19 May, 10.30am-3pm
 Levellers Day
 Literature Stall.
 Venue: Burford Recreation Ground, Burford, OX18 4NB

LONDON

HAMMERSMITH
Saturday, 26 May, 2.00 p.m. – 4.00 p.m.

Public Meeting – The Media and Capitalism
 Speaker: Stephen Harper
 Venue: Quaker Meeting House, 20 Nigel Playfair Avenue, London W6 9JY (off King Street, next to Town Hall, nearest tubes: Ravenscourt Park and Hammersmith)

London Borough Elections

The Socialist Party will be standing three candidates in these elections on 3 May: Islington Junction ward, Richmond Barnes ward, and Southwark Borough and Bankside ward. The campaigns will be run by North London, West London and South London branches respectively. Leafletting and street stalls will take place in April. Details and offers of help to the branch secretary (see page 8).

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The capitalist farm

'China bans George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and letter 'N' as censors bolster Xi Jinping's plan to keep power indefinitely. Experts believe increased levels of suppression are sign Xi Jinping hopes to become dictator for life' (independent.co.uk, 1 March). One famous phrase from this satire concerning the perversion of revolutionary aims is *all animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others*. State capitalist China has over 100 billionaires who together have wealth equal to twice Ireland's GDP and,



according to a Peking University report from 2016, its income disparity is getting worse with the top 1 percent owning a third of the country's wealth and the bottom 25 percent of the population just 1 percent. The human oppressors in Orwell's classic are overthrown by the farm animals, but their desire for the farm to be run for the benefit of all is thwarted by the emergence of a new ruling class composed of dogs and pigs. Under new management the wealth of the farm grows but is accumulated by the rulers rather than shared. The pigs start to argue and reflecting the power struggle between Stalin and Trotsky, one leading pig uses his trained dogs to drive another member of the ruling class off the farm. Such struggles continue today in the real world. We are also informed 'it was not immediately obvious why the ostensibly harmless letter 'N' had been banned, but some speculated it may either be being

used or interpreted as a sign of dissent.' Indeed, why not: the banished pig was called Snowball and the victor Napoleon.

Pigs in paradise

'After long playing second fiddle to China, India has leapfrogged its rival to become the world's fastest-growing major economy' (theweek.co.uk, 1 March). Yet this growing prosperity for a small parasitical class has not lessened the chronic malnutrition of children; in the 2017 Global Hunger Index of 119 countries India slipped to the 100th place. In fact, this country is home to a quarter of the world's hungry – a staggering 190.7 million people or 14.5 per cent of the population is undernourished. India also has the world's largest number of homeless and landless persons. Furthermore, at least 5,650 Indian farmers committed suicide in 2014. Earlier this year, 'seven workers died of suffocation...while cleaning an underground drainage pit at a poultry farm in southern India.... Such accidents



are common in India, where workers clean deep drainage pits without protective gear' (arabnews.com, 16 February). India's ruling class prefer to use the stolen wealth elsewhere: 'New Delhi and Moscow have finalised contractual terms for four new stealth frigates that Russia will supply the Indian Navy for slightly over Rs 200 billion (\$3 billion), or about Rs 50 billion (\$775 million) per vessel' (defensetalk.com, 28 February).

Tolstoy's farm parable

'I see mankind as a herd of cattle inside a fenced enclosure. Outside the fence are green pastures and plenty for the cattle to eat, while inside the fence there

is not quite grass enough for the cattle. Consequently, the cattle are tramping underfoot what little grass there is and goring each other to death in their struggle for existence. I saw the owner of the herd come to them, and when he saw their pitiful condition he was filled with compassion for them and thought of all he could do to improve their condition. So he called his friends together and asked them to assist him in cutting grass from outside the fence and throwing it over the fence to the cattle. And that they called Charity. Then, because the calves were dying off and not growing up into serviceable cattle, he arranged that they should each have a pint of milk every morning for breakfast. Because they were dying off in the cold nights, he put up beautiful well-drained and well-ventilated cowsheds for the cattle. Because they were goring each other in the struggle for existence, he put corks on the horns of the cattle, so that the wounds they gave each other might not be so serious. Then he reserved a part of the enclosure for the old bulls and the old cows over 70 years of age. In fact, he did everything he could think of to improve the condition of the cattle, and when I asked him why he did not do the one obvious thing, break down the fence, and let the cattle out, he answered: 'If I let the cattle out, I should no longer be able to milk them' (Leo Tolstoy, 1828-1910, pamphlet 'to the working classes of all nations').

