The bloody problem with water

Capitalism mismanages a liquid asset
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LONDON
North London branch. Meets 2nd Wednesday 6.30pm. Travelodge café/bar, 7-15 City Road, EC1 (nearest Tube and rail stations Old Street and Moorgate). Tel: 020 7622 3811

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

West London branch. Meets 1st & 3rd Tues. 8pm. Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace (corner Sutton Court Rd), W4. Corres: 51 Gayford Road, London W12 9BY.

MIDLANDS
West Midlands Regional branch. Meets last Sunday of the month, the Brier Rose pub, 25 Bennets Hill, Birmingham B2 5RE. Tel: Tony Gluck 01242 235615. Email: tonygluck111@btinternet.com

NORTHEAST
Northeast branch. Contact: Brian Barry, 86 Edgmond Ct, Ryhope, Sunderland SR2 0DY. Tel: 0191 521 0960.

NORTHWEST
Lancaster branch. Meets fortnightly 8.30pm. P. Shannon, 10 Green Street, Lancaster LA1 1DZ. Tel: 01524 382380

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SOUTHERN/SOUTH/EAST/SOUTHWEST
Kent and Sussex Regional branch. Meets second Sunday every month at 2.00pm at The Muggleton Inn, High Street, Maidstone ME14 5HL. Dave Chesham: Email: whichfinder@gmail.com Tel: 07973 142701

South West Regional branch. Meets 2nd Saturday of each month in the Railway Tavern, Salisbury, 2.00pm (check before attending). Shane Roberts, 86 High Street, Bristol BS8 6DN. Tel: 0117 951 1199

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

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

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

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SCOTLAND
Edinburgh branch. Meets 1st Thur. 7.00-9.00pm. The Quaker Hall, Victoria Terrace (above Victoria Street), Edinburgh. J. Moir. Tel: 0131 440 0995. JIMMY@jmoir29.breeserve.co.uk Branch website: http://geocities.com/edinburghbranch/ Glasgow branch. Meets 3rd Wednesday of each month at 6pm in Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road, Glasgow. Peter Hendrie, 75 Lahirldi Road, East Kibble, Glasgow G75 0LH. Tel: 01355 930105. Email: peter.anna.hendrie@blueyonder.co.uk.

Dundee. Ian Ratcliffe, 16 Birkhall Ave, Wormit, Newport-on-Tay, DD6 8PX. Tel: 01328 516461.

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

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

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SUBSCRIPTION ORDERS

should be sent to the address above.


The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on Saturday 5 January at the address above. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the Editorial Committee.

DECEMBER 2012

FEATURES

War, weapons and water

Water grab - the theft and waste of water

Imagining a socialist society

Winstanley, Marx and Henry George

Dutch painting & Brecht

REGULARS

Pathfinders

Letters

Halo Halo!

Brief Reports

Cooking the Books

Material World

Greasy Pole

Cooking the Books

Reviews

Proper Gander

Meetings

50 Years Ago

Action Replay

Voice from the Back

Free Lunch
Editorial

Time to tap the human resource

AS LONG as human life persists we will be faced with a simple, unalterable fact. We are material beings in a material world. Our lives, our thoughts, our feelings and desires, everything we value and hope to accomplish, no matter how solid or intangible are all made possible only because we have a material relationship with the Earth. Everything we have (and will ever have) to support our lives, we have created by applying our labour to the natural resources around us: the land, its minerals, its watercourses, its produce and its sources of energy. We do all this collectively — we always have: it’s who we are. Our mutual dependence has never been more total than it is today: it now takes the work of millions of people to put a single cup of coffee on a breakfast table every morning.

In our present world, though, the Earth’s resources, which should be the foundation of our material and social wellbeing, turn out to be the source of untold human misery. The cause lies not in the resources themselves, nor even in our relationship with them, but in the relationships we form among ourselves in human society. Private property divides us and forces us into competition with each other for the resources that nature gives freely. The demand for profits puts urgency into that competition and drives it to conflict, open or covert, local or global. It is seen everywhere: in the Brazilian rainforest where indigenous people and activists are killed, maimed and driven from their homes by loggers and mineral prospectors; in the Philippines where the killers are claimed to be the police, the military or the private security forces of the mineral companies themselves; in the Democratic Republic of Congo whose untold mineral wealth has been a source of local conflict for over seventy years, a conflict funded by multinational companies, happy to supply access to arms in return for the vast mineral wealth of the country. We’ve seen it in the huge global conflicts of two world wars, more recently in the oil wars of the Middle East, and now in mounting struggles over the world’s dwindling water supplies. Everywhere!

We find ourselves in a trap. Despite our mutual dependence and our social labour, the world’s resources pass not into collective ownership but into the ownership of a few who have acquired a monopoly over them and over the means needed to work them into the things we need. Competition and the mechanics of private ownership direct those few along the path of private profit and not of social need. So, now, most of us go insecure among great natural and created wealth; we spend our days at work but with no hope of controlling the work we do. We see a potential abundance all about us, but we have to make do with much, much less than we see. To all these things we give a single name: capitalism. None of this is any longer necessary. Isn’t it time we made a change?
Water, water everywhere...

SINCE PATHFINDERS last wrote about the curious incident of the jet stream in the summertime (September 2010) a consensus has begun to form like a dark storm cloud across the faces of climatologists. With the arctic now warming at twice the speed of the rest of the world and largely failing to refreeze in winter, the sharp difference between arctic and tropic temperatures is disappearing, and with it the thermodynamic differential that creates and powers the polar jet stream. It is now increasingly believed that this loss of differential is what’s causing the jet stream to slow down, loop, meander drunkenly and stall for weeks on end, which in turn is causing extreme weather events every year in the northern hemisphere. If you are stuck inside a northerly loop you’ll get drowned, drenched, frozen or flooded, while in a southerly loop you’ll be fried to a crisp, even if you live in Alaska or Siberia. Expect more of the same, plus frequent North Atlantic hurricanes and storm surges battering the coastline. The jet stream may even disappear altogether for months at a time, effectively including the UK in the Arctic Circle and further accelerating Greenland and tundra melt.

It’s not the fault of humans that we did this. Nobody could reasonably have predicted it. Had the world turned socialist in the time of William Morris the following century would have been vastly different, not least in avoiding two world wars, but we would still have industrialised and therefore might still have caused global warming by accident. The difference is, we would have started to do something about it by now. But not capitalism. Thanks to its obsession with private as opposed to common property, its byzantine system of related and conflicting sectional, national and class interests has paralysed it in the face of a universal threat. Unable to pursue any common goal, it commonly scores own-goals. Today they’re no further forward than they were at Kyoto twenty years ago. In fact many countries have retreated even from the ‘commitments’ made then. Carbon emissions aren’t going down, they’re rocketing. In the recent Romney vs Obama TV debates no mention was made by either side of climate or environmental issues, even though hurricane Sandy was at that moment knocking ten bells out of New York. Nobody’s even trying to look as if they’re trying.

This year’s word, according to pundits, is ‘omnishambles’, one of many linguistic jewels gifted by the talented writers of BBC’s political comedy The Thick of It. Nowhere is the omnishambles of climate change more obvious than the ‘problem’ of water, the theme of this issue. It simply beggars the imagination how the world’s most abundant renewable resource could have been miseducated so badly that it is expected to become a major, and perhaps the primary cause of future wars. Blue gold indeed. We evolved in the stuff, we’re made of the stuff, and 70 percent of the planet is covered in the stuff. Yet even in the UK, where we are often inundated with the stuff, we are regularly threatened not with deluge but with drought, because water companies prefer to allow reserves to leak away rather than spend shareholder dividends on repairing pipes. Meanwhile we are told to act ‘responsibly’ over our individual use of water, and while the stuff continues to fall out of the sky the meters are being fitted in our houses. We should object strenuously, like Inuits faced with an igloo-tax and being told they’re responsible for depleting ice stocks in the arctic. This is a non-problem, created by capitalism. Our personal ‘responsibility’ has got damn-all to do with it.

If we abolish capitalism and its paralysing sectional conflicts, we could solve this water ‘problem’ in no time. In the first place, water is renewable. There is as much today as there was in the Middle Ages, or the Devonian period. Thanks to our atmosphere it doesn’t evaporate into space. The only real difficulty is that most of it tends to fall in the wrong place, so as the article by Horatio (p.13) points out, it’s not a question of shortage of water but of pipes. Humans have been laying pipes since Babylonian times, so the engineering is not difficult. And if the water for whatever practical reason can’t be made to go to the people, then the people will have to go to the water.

In socialism, where there are no national boundaries or private estates, the laying of pipes would not be confounded by political questions of ownership, nor would populations migrating from dry areas to wet ones have to worry about passports or title deeds. Without any clever technology we could socially ‘engineer’ the Earth, even if it means depopulating the tropics and half of Africa and India and crowding everyone into Canada and (increasingly) Greenland. In fact, at the rate the poles are heating up, we’ll soon be able to colonise West Antarctica as well.

This leaves aside entirely the question of whether people would want to move, and such cultural considerations should not be flippantly dismissed. But such drastic large-scale house-moving operations may not even be necessary if emergent technologies are developed, in particular desalination. A recent report in New Scientist (20 September) describes the problem of supplying water to the 80,000 strong Navajo Nation of Arizona, who are scattered across a huge area of what, before 20 years of unrelenting drought, used to be fertile grassland and is now a desertified hellhole. But the Navajo don’t want to leave their reservation, for historical and in fact pre-historical reasons – the Navajo language is one of the most ancient on Earth, probably Mesolithic and possibly related to old Chinese, Basque and Etruscan. If anyone’s got a right to say they’re staying put and staying together, come what may, it’s probably the Navajo. So now they regularly have to drive hundreds of kilometres to fetch fresh water. Laying pipes over an area the size of West Virginia is an ‘economic impossibility’, while concentrating everyone in a small area of desert is culturally unacceptable, unless the Navajo take it into their heads to build a new Las Vegas and Navajo theme park. There’s no rain even in monsoon season and the aquifers are 120 metres down and full of salt, arsenic and uranium. Needless to say there’s no electricity either. In these circumstances even socialists might be tempted in despair to consider that the Navajo are being a teensy bit bloody-minded. Instead, the University of Arizona has come up with a scheme to use solar energy, with which the Navajo are over-endowed, to power a durable and low-maintenance, off-grid water desalination system. Millions of poor worldwide, without even the modest political clout that the Navajo can muster, will not be so lucky.

Socialists believe in encouraging people to take personal responsibility for resource usage, but as well as and not instead of society-wide responsibility. Capitalism, being systemically incapable of taking responsibility for supplying even the most basic human need, will instead try to confuse us with some blackmailing guff about our own ‘environmental footprint’. On such and hypocritical reasoning we should not fall to pour cold water immediately.
Beamers and bouncers

Dear Editors

Regarding the article on sport in the November Socialist Standard, the beamers is a delivery outlawed in cricket today. The umpire may order the bowler out of the attack immediately. The bowler though I predict will prevail in socialist society, I just hope I am fit enough and young enough to bowl one when such a state exists. Whilst we cannot control the weather, cricket clubs down to the smallest hamlet would enjoy proper facilities to cover the wicket and sight screens. Batters playing on better surfaces and having more leisure time to train would have more opportunity to practice playing the bowler, either by taking evasive action or hooking or pulling it. Whilst socialist society is unlikely to throw up any characters like Jardine it may well spawn a budding Larwood or Voce or Lilley or Thompson, and a Viv Richards to counter them. Who knows, without market forces clubs may well revert to playing in all white.

Jon Brown (by email)

Hurricane Sandy

Dear Editors

After Hurricane Katrina inundated New Orleans and the Gulf Coast of North America I wrote a commentary on the disaster and the feeble attempts to fix things and concluded that The irresponsibility of the capitalist system dwarfs Nero’s fiddling while Rome burned. The problem in New Orleans reveals the malaise affecting the entire country, one that cannot be solved with more civil engineering works nor dams, earthworks, concrete barriers or anything of the sort. It is a profound social problem that requires ending the economic system that has degenerated into a massive death machine, and unfit to manage its own industrial apparatus.

Seeming little has changed since then except for the worse. Similar to Katrina, the devastation, destruction and death caused by the hurricane that swept into the East Coast far inland attests to the ongoing dysfunction of capitalism, for it is the effects of global warming, long scientifically identified as the cause of dramatic changes in the weather patterns, coupled with uncontrolled technological changes and urbanization gone berserk.

Capitalism is the fault. It’s most fundamental configuration orientation of production for profit, with at best, marginal considerations for the human population it dominates, has imparted its primary path of development. That path is urban sprawl, inadequate infrastructure to accompany such urbanization, the so-called ‘automobile culture’ to enable ever more sprawl, with individual dwellings facilitating the endless expansion of home appliances. The whole confronts us with an overwhelming plethora of cars, gadgets, and gismos which fits the sorcerer and his apprentice story to a tee. It constitutes an unending quest for the expansion of commodity markets.

The results are the capitalist cities and urbanization and the vulnerability of cities, of which New York is the quintessential example. This megalopolis is the template for disaster as a result of mindless capitalist city-building.

In these situations a critical element like the subway system is a disaster waiting to happen. The entire complex requires pumping water out of tunnels, storm or no storm 24/7. Ground water seepage requires this. Maintenance of the system is a growing and perpetual burden on the resources of the city and state. The extensive electrical grids, with numerous grade level and below grade transformer vaults are vulnerable. Power plants are characteristically coastal facilities and thus vulnerable. Residential communities of lightly constructed dwellings occupying close proximity to beaches, promoted for their recreational ambience by real-estate/builders interests. Roadways, with their underpasses, tunnels and viaducts, together with corroded bridges are equally vulnerable.

One could go on and on listing vulnerabilities that are posed by capitalist cities. But it must be emphasized that these are capitalist cities, formations created primarily to promote the production of commodities. They are the products of an irrational social apparatus that has gone mad and largely out of control responsive only to the profit motive.

This was recognized very early in the development of scientific socialist thought. Friedrich Engels in his work entitled The Housing Question, 1872, recognized the fundamental conflict when he noted: ‘The housing question can be solved only when society has been sufficiently transformed for a start to be made towards abolishing the contrast between town and country, which has been brought to its extreme point by present-day capitalist society. Far from being able to abolish this antithesis, capitalist society on the contrary is compelled to intensify it day by day.’

In writing of fundamental change, Engels goes on to note ‘In the beginning, however, each social revolution will have to take things as it finds them and do its best to get rid of the most crying evils with the means at its disposal.’ He was writing of the erroneous housing theories that were being bandied about by contemporary reformers. But Engels remarks offer us guidance in the present predicament.

Under socialism, the Socialist Industrial Union government will confront the current problems of capitalist cities and will have to deal with them as best it can. And to that extent it will be far more effective because the motive of production for use will displace production for profit, and with it will fall away the conditions that encumber the productive apparatus of society in such a way that all of the resources of production will be brought to bear upon the residual problems capitalism created, focused largely on the cities.

That natural disasters will occur under socialism is obvious. But prevention of potential calamities will receive top priority, for the welfare of the society will be paramount. What the decisions of the SIU government will be we can only speculate for that is not our job. But rational thinking now, can only imagine that a good deal of gradual dismantling and rebuilding in far more rational terms, of housing, transportation, power resources, and ecological consideration will govern. Only the physical limitations of science and the productive forces of society will be the constraints for the

continued page 21
Like turkeys voting for Christmas

As the dust, the balloons and the glitzy confetti settled on the American presidential election, and Republican voters came to terms with the fact that the man who believes that God lives on a planet called Kolob would not be their new leader, a flood of tweets and website articles were unleashed consoling them and advising how to survive four more years under Obama.

The American people have decided that Barack Obama should have a second term’ lamented one on the Christian Post website. ‘And behind them, in the mystery of providence, God has decided that Barack Obama would be re-elected.’

So that’s how it works. Well, you can’t argue with God can you? We don’t have to understand the ‘mystery of providence’ to see the advantage in capitalism’s glorious future of God making all our decisions for us and people only needing to vote to rubber-stamp them. And the advantage of having an all-knowing god is that, because he is all-knowing, he’s known since the beginning of time what the result of any election will be. We may as well just ask him beforehand who our leaders should be and do away with voting altogether. Or, for example, our leaders could ask: ‘Dear God, we haven’t got enough control over the world’s oil supplies. Should we invade Afghanistan/Iraq/Iran? etc.’ Think of the bother that would save. Come to think of it, that’s more or less what Blair and Bush used to do, isn’t it?

Many of the religious right were not entirely happy with God’s choice of president though. Among comments posted at the end of the Christian Post article one warned, ‘I have received a prophecy that Obama is America’s Idi Amin.’ ‘The occult puts these people into power,’ advised another. And even before the election, a pastor at the First Baptist Church in Dallas announced that Obama’s re-election would lead to the reign of the antichrist. Donald Trump, too, went ballistic on Twitter. ‘We can’t let this happen. We should march on Washington and stop this travesty,’ he raged. And ‘This election is a total sham. We are not a democracy.’ Well, he got the last bit right. Even God can’t please everyone.

And in the race for Georgia’s 10th congressional district, Republican and creationist Paul Broun found he had more unofficial opposition than he had bargained for. Although he is a qualified doctor and a member of the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology, he informed his audience in a pre-election speech that the Earth was only 9,000 years old and that evolution and the big bang theory were ‘lies straight from the pit of hell’.


In fact Darwin received over 4,000 write-in votes despite not being an American citizen and being dead. There’s hope for America yet. Over 4,000 people preferred a dead Darwin to a live right-wing religious fundamentalist.

NW

Wait till you see who I’ve got for you next...

Brief Reports

THE NEXT Archbishop of Canterbury has vowed that the ordination of women bishops will go ahead despite a minority of the General Synod returning a No vote blocking the move. Justin Welby announced that he had received a vision in which God showed him how to fix the Synod voting system to get a Yes result next time. ‘It was rather silly of us to have a consensus voting system, when God clearly would have preferred a simple majority. We just need one small change and then hopefully we can drag the Anglican Church kicking and screaming into the twentieth century.’ Opponents were unrepentant, however, saying that Christian faith must sometimes take a brave stand against the world, public opinion, common sense and universal ridicule. A spokesman for the House of Laity said last week: ‘We don’t think our views are unreasonable. Has anyone proved scientifically that women have got souls, after all? And if you put them in water, don’t they float? I mean, doesn’t that suggest they are spiritually empty? The progressives have powerful friends, however. David Cameron has stated he supports women bishops: ‘The Anglican Church has clearly got a serious credibility deficit, and that’s a subject I feel very concerned about, as do all my colleagues in the Coalition.’

THE FIRM carrying out fitness-for-work assessments for the government lacks disabled access at a quarter of its premises, MPs have heard. Employment minister Mark Hoban said 31 of 123 centres used by Atos lacked ground-floor access for wheelchairs. He added that there was ‘no truth whatsoever’ in the rumour that these were all government-approved buildings and that Atos had been put there expressly to fail all applicants: ‘I object very strongly to the story being put about that these centres are actually tree-houses in municipal parks. They are in fact open-plan elevations in greenscaped locations.’ A disabled user who wished to remain anonymous, on the grounds that she would be passed fit to work if she could remember her name, stated: ‘These centres have only got one form, for non-attendance. If you actually manage to climb up the tree they close the office and swing away on creepers. I don’t think it’s fair at all.’

A NORWICH City player has been fined for carrying a police-style baton in his car. Defender Sebastien Bassong, 26, was stopped by police near King’s Cross in London in September. In mitigation his lawyer explained that Bassong is a French footballer: ‘When he was first signed to play for an English club he enquired into racist violence against black people in this country, and was told that the police were heavily on the case. That’s why he got the baton, in case they arrested him.’ A spokesman for the Metropolitan Police declined to comment.
A Nobel Prize for non-economics

THE NOBEL Prize for economics is not a real Nobel Prize in that it was not set up by Albert Nobel himself but only by the Bank of Sweden in 1968. It usually goes to some economist who has done research on some obscure aspect of the market economy or on some government economic policy in vogue at the time. If you read the Swedish Academy of Sciences’ reason for awarding this year’s prize to Lloyd Shapley and Alvin Roth you could be excused for thinking that this year was no different. According to the citation it was for having ‘generated a flourishing field of research and improved the performance of many markets’ and ‘for the practical design of market institutions’.

Actually, this just shows up how ignorant or, worse, how deliberately misleading (to create the impression that markets are eternal) is the Academy’s understanding of economics. A position shared by the Times (16 October) when it said that the winners’ ‘studies helped to improve efficiency in markets where price was not an issue.’ But a market where price is not involved is not a market. It’s an oxymoron.

What Shapley and Roth had in fact worked on was how to allocate resources to needs in a non-market context. As the Times went on to say, they worked out in theory (Shapley) and practice (Roth) how to match ‘doctors to hospitals, students to dorm rooms and organs to transplant patients,’ adding ‘such matching arrangements are essential in most Western countries where organ-selling is illegal, and the free market cannot do the normal work of resource allocation’ (like allocating organs to those who can pay the most).

Shapley is a mathematician not an economist and so not concerned with markets, while:

‘Professor Roth is regarded as an authority on a field known colloquially as “repugnance economics” – in essence, the study of transactions where the application of the price mechanism is regarded as morally repugnant, such as the sale of body parts, sperm and eggs, prostitution and even dwarf-throwing.’

So, we really are talking about a non-market way of allocating resources. As socialism will be a non-market society where the price mechanism won’t apply to anything, the winners’ research will be able to be used for certain purposes even after the end of capitalism; which is not something that can be said of the work of most winners of the Nobel Prize for Economics.

No doubt it would continue to be used to allocate organs to transplant patients and students to rooms. In fact, this last could be extended to allocating housing to people living in a particular area. While they may not get their first choice, people would get something for which they had expressed some preference and that corresponded to their needs and circumstances. It might even help answer Bernard Shaw’s question, ‘Who will live on Richmond Hill in socialism?’ Since socialism will be a non-market society the answer can’t be, as it is under capitalism today, ‘those who want to and who can afford to.’ This would not only be ‘repugnant’ but impossible.
A WEEK after Hurricane Sandy hit large coastal areas of the northeastern United States at least a million homes were still without heat and power when a snowstorm followed a few days later. Relief had yet to reach some of the areas affected, such as the Far Rockaways, where survivors were fending for themselves as best they could.

Workers held captive
True, some manage to fend for themselves much better than others. Holed up for the duration in a first-class hotel on the island of Manhattan, the business and cultural centre of New York City, David Rohde in The Atlantic (October 2012) dramatically contrasts the position of wealthy guests staying at the hotel with the plight of the hotel workers.

While the guests were somewhat inconvenienced by the blackout, they continued to receive assistance from the hotel staff – and also, in some cases, from servants they had brought along with them. The hotel workers were too busy looking after strangers to care for – or even keep in touch with – their own families during the hurricane. (I am reminded of the slave wet nurse in the Old South, forced to suckle her mistress’ child and neglect her own.) They were not even allowed a few hours off work to go home and make preparations for the storm. Workers in restaurants and garages were held captive in the same way.

There lies the essential difference between wealth and poverty. It is the difference between being able to command the time and energy of others and having to place your own time and energy at the disposal of others.

Manhattan is one of the most unequal places in the world. Here the top 20 percent have forty times the average income of the bottom 20 percent ($391,022 as against $9,681 per year). But the extremes of wealth and poverty don’t usually crowd together in this way. Mostly rich and poor live well apart.

Economic position and height above sea level
In American cities there is a quite close association between economic position and height above sea level. Traditionally, the wealthiest family in a town lives in ‘the house on the hill’, from which they enjoy a splendid view. The poorest, including most black people, are consigned to live in low-lying areas. These areas are especially prone to flooding. They also tend to be ugly, swampy, plagued by mosquitos, susceptible to smog inversions, and close to railway lines, abandoned industrial sites, toxic waste dumps and other ‘noxious land uses’ (The Geographical Review, January 2006).

Even had the inhabitants of low-lying areas possessed the necessary resources, the swampy soil would have prevented them from laying firm foundations for their houses (for this and other reasons, a rational socialist society will either drain low-lying swampy areas or leave them uninhabited). The houses, built with poor-quality wood, could hardly be expected to resist the force of a strong wind. Brick and stone are not widely used for construction in the United States, except for the wealthy.

Economic position is associated with altitude in many cities outside the United States too – from Haifa to Port-au-Prince. Even where people do live well above sea level, it is in many places on terrain equally vulnerable to disaster – for example, shanty towns on unstable mountain slopes prone to mudslides when it rains hard.

Evacuate, but how and where to?
Some news reports complained that residents of poor areas ‘ignored’ evacuation orders. But how were they supposed to get away without a car? And where were they supposed to go without the money to pay for hotel accommodation? City and state authorities issue orders to evacuate, but only rarely do they offer people any help to do so.

After the hurricane subsided, survivors sifted through the rubble of their ruined homes for any objects that might still be useable. Some looked for edible food items in bags that had been thrown out of a flooded store. Then they set off through the debris-strewn landscape in search of shelter and supplies, travelling as most refugees have always travelled – on foot.

And when they finally reached an area that had escaped the fury of the storm, they were greeted by signs like the one displayed by a trigger-happy householder in Nejecho Beach, New Jersey: ‘Looters will be shot, bodies thrown in river!’ Just in case some refugee might be tempted for once to overlook the sacred laws of property.

The storms ahead
Hurricanes and other tropical storms will in probably become increasingly frequent and destructive and inundate larger and larger coastal areas. The scale of the impact of future storms will make Hurricane Sandy seem a minor event in comparison.

This is, first, because energy levels will continue to rise as the oceans and the atmosphere above them heat up. And second, because the sea level will continue to rise as polar ice melts. Due to the enormous inertia of the climatic system, this is so even if decisive action is soon taken to slow down global warming – a pretty long shot under capitalism, although conceivable in the context of a socialist world community.

New York City is considering the erection of movable sea barriers (‘sea gates’). A project of this kind could in principle provide protection against storm surges for a few years. Whether the vast sum required for really effective defences (estimated at $20-30 billion) will be allocated is another matter. In any case, the respite can only be temporary.

STEFAN
SEASONED ADDICTS of the pub quiz may not be too confident when confronted with the question, ‘Who is the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury?’ The answer is not George Osborne’s speech writer but the government’s Chief Whip, the MP whose job is to be what Margaret Thatcher called the ‘Cabinet enforcing agent’ – to smooth the abrasiveness of capitalist administration by ensuring that government MPs turn up in the Commons when they are told to and that when they are there they vote as the government needs. The Chief Whip is allocated to that grand title in order to get paid for so demanding a job, which also applies to the lower manipulators in their office, who are allowed to announce themselves as Comptroller of HM Household or the like, but who are commonly known as Deputy or Assistant Whips.

Discipline
In spite of all that implied chivalry, the Whips are renowned for the ruthless methods they use to discipline the MPs. In the Commons they instruct Members how to vote through hand signals; those who disobey may have to be reminded of their prospects of promotion or receive a discreet word in the ear about the Whips’ awareness of some embarrassing information or personal secrets (which in another context could be known as blackmail). Or there may be MPs who are sick enough to need to be dragged to the Commons. For example, Leslie Spring, the Labour MP for St. Helens during the administration by ensuring that government MPs turn up in the Commons, was desperate ill after a dangerous heart attack, Spring was driven to the Commons by ambulance for a crucial vote. When he arrived two Whips (one Labour, one Tory) could not at first agree whether he was still alive. Then the Tory had the bright idea of fiddling with the controls of the heart machine which briefly revived the patient enough for him to be able to crow, in a kind of triumph, ‘there – you’ve lost!’. Hoon

In spite of the bogus titles and the instructions and the bullying, can the Whips represent themselves as examples of the standards they demand of others? Geoff Hoon, who was Chief Whip from June 2007 until October 2008, was renowned for his prominent ambitions. As an obediently Blairite Defence Secretary he distinguished himself when he did not shrink from admitting that he was willing to have nuclear weapons used against Iraq ‘in the right circumstances’ and later responding to an Iraqi mother that ‘one day they might’ thank the British Army for the ruthless methods they use to discipline the MPs. In the Commons they instruct Members how to vote through hand signals; those who disobey may have to be reminded of their prospects of promotion or receive a discreet word in the ear about the Whips’ awareness of some embarrassing information or personal secrets (which in another context could be known as blackmail). Or there may be MPs who are sick enough to need to be dragged to the Commons. For example, Leslie Spring, the Labour MP for St. Helens during the decline of the Callaghan government. In 1974, although he was desperately ill after a dangerous heart attack, Spring was driven to the Commons by ambulance for a crucial vote. When he arrived two Whips (one Labour, one Tory) could not at first agree whether he was still alive. Then the Tory had the bright idea of fiddling with the controls of the heart machine which briefly revived the patient enough for him to be able to crow, in a kind of triumph, ‘there – you’ve lost!’. Hoon

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Rotten
What the Duke of Wellington called the ‘whipping-in’ system was formally introduced to Parliament in the 1880s. It is now as near an essential weapon of government as can be designed by the most devious and ruthless of political leaders. Governing capitalism is not a simple matter of applying a clutch of easily constructed, widely applicable restraints but a process which must take into account that there is within the ruling class a maze of conflicting interests of power and influence. And there is the need to impose laws, regulations and procedures which are directed at inducing the subject class to accept their inferior place in this society, if necessary through further laws. To ensure that this goes as smoothly as possible is the function of the Whips, who will contest any tendency of legislators to abuse and sneer at the policemen guarding Downing Street. In the end he was forced to resign, with a grudgingly partial admission of being at fault: ‘whatever the rights and wrongs of the matter I will not be able to fulfil my duties...nor is it fair to continue to put my family and colleagues through this upsetting and demanding publicity.’ His reputation sustained further damage when his successor Sir George Young cancelled the order he had made during his brief time as Chief Whip for a luxury Jaguar official car to chauffeur him from Downing Street to Parliament – about 200 yards.

Thrasher
The most recent – and infamous – Chief Whip was Andrew Mitchell who went to Rugby School which makes him only a little less exalted than Cameron and his gang from Eton. Mitchell was a prefect at Rugby where he prided himself on being a ‘stern disciplinarian’, although among the other pupils he was known as ‘thrasher’. After leaving school Mitchell had two spells as an officer in the Army. As Shadow Home Office Minister he covered police matters. All in all his experiences may have persuaded him that he was a Chief Whip whose orders would instantly be obeyed. He broke into the headlines last September when he drew on his barracks-room vocabulary to abuse and sneer at the policemen guarding Downing Street who were obeying their orders to prevent people cycling through a gate – and then he cycled off for supper at the Carlton Club. Mitchell’s response to the surge of negative publicity was not notable for any military precision for after at first denying any blame for the incident, he apologised twice but was then observed, on the Front Benches, mouthing that he had not sworn at the police. In the end he was forced to resign, with a grudgingly partial admission of being at fault: ‘whatever the rights and wrongs of the matter I will not be able to fulfil my duties...nor is it fair to continue to put my family and colleagues through this upsetting and demanding publicity.’ His reputation sustained further damage when his successor Sir George Young cancelled the order he had made during his brief time as Chief Whip for a luxury Jaguar official car to chauffeur him from Downing Street to Parliament – about 200 yards.

Correction – last month we said that Paddy Ashdown retired as Liberal Democrat leader in 1992, whereas we actually had to put up with him for seven years longer and he retired from that post in 1999.
‘Whisky is for drinking; water is for fighting over.’
(Mark Twain)

The BBC in November 1999 reported on a UN Development Programme which argued that potential ‘water wars are likely in areas where rivers and lakes are shared by more than one country’. Speaking in New Delhi in March 2001 the then Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan, predicted that: ‘if we are not careful, future wars are going to be about water and not about oil.’ John Reid, Minister for Defence warned in 2006 that: ‘climate change may spark conflict between nations – and ... British armed forces must be ready to tackle the violence,’ Independent (28/02/06). And in March of this year in the Guardian Energy Secretary, Ed Davies stated that: ‘I have a fear for the world that climate instability drives political instability,’ and continued by saying: ‘The pressure of that makes conflict more likely.’ Mark Twain may have got it right then.

The Pacific Institute (worldwater.org) underline Twain’s words through their chronology of 225 entries from 3000 BC to 2010 of violent conflicts relating to water. Water and air are the two necessities of human life. Fortunately, only water has evolved into private property and only recently as a commodity for sale on the market. Fortune magazine extols its virtues as a commodity: ‘One of the world’s great business opportunities. It promises to be to the 21st century what oil was to the 20th’ (CBC News, 02/03). Which might give Kofi Annan something to brood over.

The origins of conflicts over water developed with the ownership of domestic livestock and the growth of agriculture several thousand years ago. Water had gradually taken on an economic character. Thus, when grazing pasture and natural watering holes dry up, and farmers seem to be flourishing, then peaceful cooperation inevitably stops working. Latterly, under capitalism, the procuring, extracting, treating, storing and delivery of water has a cost and, as Fortune magazine points out, a profit is expected in return. If supplies of any commodity become short, it can be expected that the price will rise.

Growth is as important to capitalism as water is to a human being. And water is a crucial element in any future growth of capitalism. Global capitalists compete to harness and control water because it is an indispensable component for commercial fisheries, agriculture, manufacturing and tourism, and most importantly it is a source of energy through hydroelectric power, which at present supplies around 6 per cent of the world’s commercial energy. But this commodity is becoming scarce. A CIA report in 2000 predicted that ‘By 2015 nearly half the world’s population – more than 3 billion people – will live in countries that are “water-stressed” — have less than 1,700 cubic meters of water per capita per year – mostly in Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and northern China’ (sourcewatch.org).

In Africa, The Okavango Basin is a source of tension between Botswana and Namibia. Both countries are victims of drought and Namibia has already built a water canal and has proposed building a pipeline to divert water from the river back into Namibia. At stake for Botswana is its only source of water and an expanding income from tourism.

Namibia argues that it is entitled to any water that flows through its country. Egypt’s economy is highly dependent on agriculture and thus the distribution of the waters of the Nile. Egypt claims to have a historical right to the Nile, but upstream, Ethiopia and Sudan see matters differently. The former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak threatened in 1989 to send demolition squads to destroy a projected dam in Ethiopia, and ‘The Egyptian army still has jungle warfare brigades, even though they have no jungle’ (aljazeera.com/).

In the Middle East just one per cent of the world’s water is competed for by five per cent of its population. Thus, the former Israeli Prime Minister, General Ariel Sharon, could state that, ‘People generally regard 5 June 1967 as the day the six-day war began. That is the official date. But, in reality, it started two- and-a-half years earlier, on the day Israel decided to act against the diversion of the Jordan.’ And in 1979 following the signing of the peace treaty with Israel, President Anwar Sadat said that

‘Egypt will never go to war again, except to protect its water resources’. Likewise King Hussein of Jordan stated that ‘he will never go to war with Israel again except over water’
Israel maintains control over the River Jordan and has restricted supplies during times of scarcity as the people of the Palestinian Territories will validate.

The Euphrates River has been a regional flashpoint for a number of years. Minor skirmishes had been fought between Syria and Iraq over water rights. In May 1975 tensions were ratcheted up when both sides massed troops on their borders following Syria's claim that Iraq had reduced the flow of water by 50%. In January 1990 Turkey shut off the flow of the Euphrates for 30 days by closing the gates of the Ataturk Dam. And in 1998 distrust, which some observers believed could lead to hostilities, arose because of Turkish plans to build dams that could be used to control supplies to downstream Syria. The escalating scarcity of water in the region has done nothing to improve this situation.

China and India boast two of the world’s mightiest armies who fought a brief border war in 1962. Both stand poised over tensions concerning upstream Chinese proposals to divert water from the Brahmaputra River. The Brahmaputra flows from its source in the Himalayas into Eastern India where it unites with the Ganges. To the east The Kishanganga River thunders down through Northern Kashmir to The Kishanganga Hydroelectric Plant, which was constructed to divert water from the river to a power plant in the Jhelum River basin. The Kishanganga flows on down past one of the world’s most heavily defended borders into Pakistan. The Pakistan state is concerned that the dam will have a detrimental effect on the flow of the river. Water has long been a source of strain between India and Pakistan.

Meanwhile China is also busy in Southeast Asia, along with Laos, in constructing dams over the Mekong River to the alarm of downstream states. Moreover China has built almost 20 dams, and around 40 more are planned, on the eight Tibetan rivers. It is believed that hydropower alone is not the only motive for China’s increasing control over the sources of rivers.

In a society that is awash with weapons that come in various guises, water might appear to be less menacing than many. However, water is now talked of as a ‘Political Weapon’, which is synonymous with the deceptive language conjured up by the school of wordsmiths who gave birth to the snappy idiom, ‘The Nuclear Deterrent’. Brahma Chellaney, the author of the book ‘Water: Asia’s New Battlefield’ has asserted, ‘Whether China intends to use water as a political weapon or not, it is acquiring the capability to turn off the tap if it wants to – a leverage it can use to keep any riparian neighbours on good behaviour.’

Problems globally will be exacerbated with the expected rise in grain and oilseed prices as US crops suffer from the country’s worst drought since 1936 and the farming regions of South America and Russia suffer similar water shortages (Daily Telegraph, 5 September). According to Rabobanks’ commodities analysts, ‘By June 2013, the basket of food prices tracked by the United Nations could climb 15pc from current levels.’ Rising food prices are always a source of social discontent and thus political instability.

A growing number of environmental writers and strategic analysts view water as a potential trigger for future wars. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in 2007 stated that: ‘The consequences for humanity are grave. Water scarcity threatens economic and social gains and is a potent fuel for wars and conflict.’

Socialists view war as the last resort for states. Scarcity of any resource that is vital for the production of profits could be, and has been, seen by states as a reason to go to war.

ANDY MATTHEWS
Water grab - the theft and waste of water

The world has arrived at a critical stage in the way it uses its water.

Water is a fundamental necessity of all life, and essential to the whole of humanity.

So who should be the primary stakeholders?

Water is fast becoming the focus of attention for social justice rights groups, environmentalists and diverse populations, both rural and urban, who recognise the dire effects that increased privatisation, monopoly control, misappropriation and misuse, globalised corporate policies and government and international institutions' complicity and influence have all had on the ordinary citizen's access to it. We are at the stage where the misuse and overuse of water have resulted in severely falling water tables as a result of the over-pumping of aquifers and the negative results from big dams and river diversions are being realised. More water is being used every year than is being replenished.

In effect, water is being stolen from our descendants. According to the Global Footprint Network, capitalism currently uses the equivalent of 1.5 planet earths. Following on from this a recent report published in the journal, 'Nature' assessed capitalism's groundwater footprint. They estimate that the size of the global groundwater footprint, the area required to sustain groundwater use and groundwater-dependent ecosystem services, is about 3.5 times the actual area of aquifers currently tapped for water supplies (tinyurl.com/8267phk).

Land on all continents is becoming increasingly dependent on the unsustainable use of groundwater. Some of the biggest food producers, e.g. US, China and India, are the biggest culprits of over-pumping aquifers and there are others such as Saudi Arabia, which has severely depleted its own aquifers and is now buying up large areas of Ethiopia and elsewhere in order to grow food for itself.

‘Land grab’ is a term which has become familiar in recent years. ‘Water grab’ is a relatively new term. It refers to the different ways in which outside actors divert water from its traditional uses and users and appropriate it for their own benefit by a number of means. Use can be denied in many ways. The most obvious is to physically divert the water via pipes or canals, reducing or stopping the original flow. It may be privatised and monetised, cutting off those who can’t pay. Sources may be overused by industrial development schemes causing contamination of local wells and water courses. Rivers, streams and lakes may be seriously contaminated by mining runoff or industrial and agricultural effluent affecting local and downstream populations. Huge quantities of water are locked up in the production of crops intended as food for humans, animal feed or, increasingly, biofuels. With the rapid increase of international investment in overseas lands for agricultural production for the export market has also come the realisation of just how much water is being denied to traditional local users and how much 'virtual' water is being diverted by moving it around the world locked up in crops and animals.

Water grab transfers the control of water from resident farmers, usually smallholders, and hands it to foreign companies. Local communities who have traditionally had unimpeded access to it for irrigation and general household needs along fertility close to rivers and springs are disenfranchised.
The deals done are generally leasehold for land use, whether for agriculture, mining, industry or pure investment, but land without water is worth little. Usually the deals which are struck take little or no consideration of those living on and working the land but are between governments (local or national) and foreign companies. The transfer of water control from both closely affected and downstream communities to the new user is often not specified in the land deals. However the amount of water required for irrigation is implicit in the crop type and the location, especially in arid-land areas.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation’s Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean has reported that land acquisition (land grab) in Latin America and the Caribbean is in its infancy and only has examples in Argentina and Brazil. However, this has been challenged in the ‘Declaration of Buenos Aires’, signed in March this year at the third special Conference on Food Sovereignty, representing over 100 organisations from 20 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, which stated that ‘these conclusions result from using very limited criteria: the buying up of large extensions of land for the production of food, where at least one foreign government make up the actors or agents involved’ (‘Against the grain’, tinyurl.com/9yblqw). In effect, this means that the FAO does not consider it land grabbing when private investors are the parties involved. According to their report, land grabbing only results from sovereign (state) investment, which clearly reveals their stance as world capitalism’s bodyguards to private takeovers anywhere in the world.

Following the publication of an article in the ‘Wall Street Journal’ in September by the FAO and the European Bank for Research and Development calling for governments and social organisations to ‘embrace the private sector as the main engine for global food production,’ a large group of these social movements, including La Vía Campesina, Grain, Friends of the Earth International and a number of Latin American groups representing independent and non-commercial farmers, peasants and women, strongly countered

Why water is a commodity

‘It’s outrageous,’ Sara Parkin, the Green Party spokeswoman, was quoted as saying, ‘that water should become a capitalist commodity.’

Commodity production is a hallmark of capitalism and if Sara Parkin could be persuaded to dip into Volume 1 of Marx’s Capital the first words to meet her eye would be:

‘The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as an immense accumulation of commodities.’ … Our investigation therefore must begin with the analysis of a commodity.’

And what does this investigation show? That what makes a good (a use value) into a commodity (an exchange value) is its production for sale, with a view to profit. However, how can it be that water through our taps costs us £3 a week whereas falling in a storm it is free? The answer lies in the analysis of a commodity. This brings us back to capitalist society, where water is a commodity possessing value (exchange value). All commodities must have two kinds of value: use value and exchange value. To be a commodity a good must have use value, otherwise it wouldn’t sell and so have no exchange value. Water down our necks in a storm is useless but we need water to do the washing or make a cup of tea.

So what is it that converts water from a useless nuisance into a valuable commodity? There is no shortage of water in the world. It is only unequally distributed in nature. The water is available but has to be brought to where it is needed, as to meet the demands of modern conurbations. As was well said by a World Health Organisation expert, ‘there is no shortage of water, only pipes’, and therein lies our answer.

Reservoirs, tanks, pumps, filtration plants and drains can only be produced by human labour, and it is only human labour which, in capitalist society, imparts exchange value. If value depended upon usefulness, water would be the second most expensive item (after air) on Earth. Rain irrigating crops is indispensable but contains no human labour and so is valueless (free), like the air we breathe. Installations to store, purify and supply water necessitate human labour and water thereby becomes a value-bearing commodity depending on the amount of socially necessary labour required.

Therefore, Sara Parkin’s idea that water could be somehow exempted from capitalist commodity production is a non-starter. Like so much of the Green Party outlook, it is the same old story of capitalism without commodity production, which Pierre Proudhon was advocating 140 years ago.

Under capitalism every useful thing containing human labour produced as a non-use value to its owner becomes a commodity, with a price. This is so whether the means for producing it are nationalised or privatised. Trying to except the water supply (or electricity or gas or transport) from commodity production under capitalism is like trying to run the Boat Race outside the river.

It is capitalism (commodity production) not privatisation which is the cause of water being a commodity. Only its complete abolition will end the situation which so outrages Sara Parkin.

HORATIO
(Socialist Standard, November 1989)
the call. They issued a statement reiterating the evidence found in numerous international studies that those engaged in small farming feed the majority of the world’s population (tinyurl.com/8f3t5zn) and that they feed them using far fewer fossil fuels for transport, production and fertilisers, with more economical use of water, and with a long-term view of care of the soil, the water and the environment in general. As a consequence, their contribution to global warming is negligible compared with that of large agribusiness; in fact, they often claim that they cool the earth.

Projects for which water is the primary requirement – dams and hydro-electric schemes – also seriously affect large numbers of resident populations and the wider environment. Mine Islar describes recent neoliberal reforms which have given the private sector the right to lease rivers for 49 years for electricity production thus: ‘in some cases this particular privatisation in Turkey can be understood as an instance of ‘water grabbing’, where powerful actors gain control over use and increase their own benefits by diverting water and profit away from local communities living along these rivers’ (Islar, M. 2012. Privatised hydropower development in Turkey: A case of water grabbing? www.water-alternatives.org). These schemes negatively affect local farming, community needs and the ecology of the area. All rivers in Turkey are now prey to this threat.

As for large dams, supposedly the solution to control and regulate the flow of water according to geographic and demographic requirements, these are now being seen as problems in themselves. As the climate becomes more extreme (a knock-on effect of global warming) on nearly every continent, ‘large dams are at risk of becoming white elephants due to drought and weapons of mass destruction during extreme floods’ (Lori Pottinger, Huffington Post, 21September).

It is being recognised that wastage by evaporation from big dams can be substantially more than from the rivers and, in the worst examples, accounts for up to half of the annual river flow – an incredibly extravagant waste of much needed water. A hydroelectric dam in the Amazon has been calculated to produce methane (from rotting vegetation in the flooded forest) with eight times the greenhouse effects of a coal-fired power station with a similar generating capacity. Reservoir gases in Ghana emit up to five times as much greenhouse gas as all the country’s burning of fossil fuel. These examples reveal some of the vicious negative effects of big dams on the global water cycle, a serious consideration for the state of the planet (these and many more examples from Fred Pearce’s book *When the Rivers Run Dry*).

One of the conclusions of a detailed study of almost 200 major international water-related projects over the past 20 years is, ‘This mismanagement of water and aquatic systems has ‘led to situations where both social and ecological systems in jeopardy and have even collapsed’ (tinyurl.com/8upcanp).

There is evidence a-plenty to reveal the true culprit – the engine of capitalism driving the all-important imperative for profit. However, it needn’t be like this. Following the elimination of the possibility of manipulation by profit-seeking actors, water, as with all other resources, can be dealt with responsibly in the light of the links between science, technology and policymaking as forged by the democratic decisions in the best interest of the planet and its primary stakeholders, people.

JANET SURMAN
Regarding the possibility of whether and under what circumstances socialism could replace capitalism, Marx wrote of two prerequisites:

1. a clear understanding of socialist principles with an unambiguous desire to put them into practice; and
2. an advanced industrial economy so that free access is technically possible.

As far as the latter is concerned, there’s a broad consensus that there’s no problem that couldn’t be dealt with now, once we’ve collectively reached the former. The political ignorance of many of the working class has to be the major challenge.

**Preparing for change**

More and more people are recognising that the capitalist monetary solution is not viable for a sustainable world and it is here that we can see the schisms in society becoming deeper. If we look at these schisms through a different lens from the one we are regularly directed towards, we can see that the basic problems aren’t actually between ‘rich and poor’ countries, or even between different levels of earners within countries, that is, not between the producers, the workers, the citizens. Those situations, those schisms, have been manufactured to keep divisions between us. When we come together, we become dangerous – a threat to the established system.

The bigger schism, the real antagonism, is the one between power and the people. What stands out more and more is that:

1. the capitalist class, through the global corporations (manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, agribusinesses and financial institutions) have dominance over governments, the very institutions that constituents might believe are there to serve the constituents’ interests; and
2. how weak governments are in responding - in fact how complicit they are (even a cursory glance at the revolving-door principle reveals the extent of the complicity worldwide).

The people may fight back, strike or demonstrate, as they did in Seattle’s WTO meeting in 1999, at the climate meeting in Copenhagen last December, and more recently in Greece, Ireland, Romania, Spain and other countries, following the ramifications of cut-backs in public spending. People take so much and then, as they reach the final straw, they are compelled one way or another to seek to get their voices heard. By whom? By those who are supposed to be working in the best interests of their societies: their governments. Why don’t more people get the irony?

**Rich and poor: manufactured to keep us divided**

Placebos are offered and sometimes accepted, sometimes imposed, but these placebos are always finance-based, always describing how much a project will cost in monetary terms or how much can be saved if we cut this or delay that. Never are they based on the needs of people.

**Reorganising society**

Science and technology – scientists and technologists or technicians – have in their hands the knowledge and the wherewithal to take humanity in any direction they choose to take, but like the rest of us they are constrained by the system we live in. They are not directed by the wishes, needs and aims of society as a whole but have to follow the logic of their master, the market.

Everything becomes possible when the tools are in the right hands, the hands of the producers. It becomes a matter of organisation to bring in the new society. There is plenty of work to be done to achieve the satisfaction of everyone’s basic needs, but is deliberately left undone as the profit motive dictates. It takes a fundamental shift of emphasis away from the dictates of a small minority to the wishes and needs of the overwhelming majority.

This requires that majorities worldwide capture the state apparatus politically in order to restructure social decision-making and administration according to their plan. A plan of a totally democratic system, from whose broadest possible base decisions will pass through the structure, representing the widest possible views. Once the motivation for cronyism and corruption is removed by majority will, the best groups of people (best in terms of most fitted to whatever the particular task) could be occupied for the common good in all areas. This bottom-up, proactive, participatory democracy would be used at all levels: local, regional and world. It’s difficult to find other expressions of unrest from the hierarchical ones we’re so bound up in; the idea here is simply a logistical one, but this particular pyramid definitely has its power at the base with delegates elected to carry forward the message.

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**First of a three-part series, beginning with reorganising society after capitalism.**
and speak for the whole community. To attain the stage where the full development of creative human potential is widely recognised as being the goal of life for human beings: this is the change we need. Not achieving parity of possessions, or even getting out of poverty or beating hunger. We have to have a vision far beyond this stage, to see the decision to turn their backs on the system that has failed them over and over in favour of one for which they are ready to work to make happen, ready to work to continue its progress and which will work for them, not against them. With ever-increasing numbers, discussion and debate will have begun to determine the direction of the path to be taken.

No money barrier
It just seems such obvious common sense to consider the cost of everything in human terms instead of putting a price ticket on it. To place the role of social, political, environmental and whatever other decisions firmly with the people, with no need for a pointless monetary budget (the inputs need only be manpower and resources). This will be the biggest shift of emphasis in the change from capitalism to socialism – with far-reaching effects and benefits for both people and planet.

What a much simpler life we could have with this bizarre third element removed from all equations! Why complicate what could be a perfectly simple arrangement? Why tolerate a third element that only confuses and complicates every issue.

Take, for instance, a project to plant trees: it costs nothing.

Now you could say the outcomes would be beneficial for many people, ensuring the continuance of farming, better air quality, reduction of CO₂ in the atmosphere, preservation of water tables, etc. But surely the simplest, easiest solution – if we recognise it’s advisable to plant such numbers of trees – is to mobilise people to collect seeds and grow them, to take cuttings to strike and then plant them on. We would need to know how many tools will be supplied. These are the numbers we need to count. People working in their local communities for the benefit of all, recognising that everyone can’t have direct access to the best soil but that all can share the produce from it and also share the indirect benefits of the tree planting initiative.

It’s this middle element, money, and the problems arising from it, that prove to be such a difficult concept for many people. In any transaction, and at each and every exchange, it is what’s given to and taken from it (i.e. money) that is essential in the capitalist system but absolutely superfluous to what’s needed in a system built on communities’ needs. What we must get folk to see is that if I work and you work and everyone else works without the complication of money, what will change is there will be no extraction of profit via the surplus labour because all of the labour will be voluntarily contributed. All products and services from our shared labour will benefit the new society as a whole through our system of common ownership and free access. As far as buying and selling is concerned, this exchange will be redundant when we willingly share our common assets, our heads and our hands. What a relief it will be!

JANET SURMAN

Next month: how work will change in a socialist society.
To mark the first anniversary of the Occupy camp at St Paul’s London Occupy organised a series of ‘New Putney Debates’ in October and November. Some took place in the same church in Putney as the original 1647 debates in Cromwell’s army. Two were devoted to the question of land.

The first, on 1 November on ‘Land and Democracy,’ was billed as:

‘Nearly 400 years ago the Diggers described the Earth as a ‘common storehouse for all’ and objected to land being kept in the hands of a few. Are landowners still oppressing the people today, and how should we respond?’

One response was given by Natalie Bennett, the new Leader of the Green Party, who argued her party’s case for a tax on land values. She quoted Churchill (when he was a Liberal Cabinet minister before WW1) and Henry George as favouring this.

Not being a product of labour, the price of land is determined entirely by demand and can command a higher price the more fertile it is or the more favourably it is situated (for example, in a city centre or near a railway station). Land prices rise whenever the land’s situation becomes more favourable (as when a town expands), the benefit of which is reaped entirely by the landowner without having to lift a finger. The idea of a Land Value Tax (LVT) is to tax away this windfall benefit.

Henry George (1839-1897), author of a widely-read book ‘Progress and Poverty,’ was hugely popular in America and was once nearly elected mayor of New York. He advocated that a LVT should be the only tax. Hence the other name of the Georgist movement: ‘Single Taxers.’ Natalie Bennett, while favouring a LVT, didn’t go that far. She was challenged by a Liberal Democrat in the audience who said that it was her party’s policy too. She added that it had also been supported by Karl Marx.

This is true. One of the ten immediate measures (the first in fact) advocated in the Communist Manifesto by the Communist League of Germany for implementation had it come to win political control in 1848 was: ‘Abolition of property in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes.’ Marx later explained (in a letter to F. A. Sorge in 1881) that, as a separate measure on its own, this was contradictory and criticised Henry George and others for ‘believing that if ground rent were transformed into a state tax all the evils of capitalist production would disappear of themselves’.

In the 1880s and 1890s Georgists and Socialists were rivals for working-class support, the Georgists arguing that to solve working class problems it was enough to tax away the rents of landowners while Socialists argued for the common ownership not just of land but of industry too.

It seems that this rivalry is being revived today, with many in the Occupy movement attracted by ideas of Henry George. This became evident at the second meeting on 9 November entitled: ‘A New Economy.’ The announcement for this started off well enough:

‘The foundations of the New Economy are: the means of life (water, food and housing) for all as a right; land and resources held in common and the benefits share,’

before petering out with

‘alternative currencies to foster greater equality and societal cohesion’.

It soon became clear that the organisers did not envisage ‘land and resources held in common’. What they wanted was a single tax on land values. According to their handout, one of the ‘alternative currencies’ they had in mind was:

‘land backed interest free currency – spent into the economy to create infrastructure, rental income to fund citizens income and public services.’

In other words, the government would get money by taxing away the rental income, real or notional, of landowners (which these days includes not just the Duke of Westminster but those who own the leasehold or freehold of their homes) and using this to pay everybody a basic income as well as to finance its own expenditure.

It is not clear that this is actually ‘land based interest free government financing’, which would allow the government to dispense with borrowing money.

Whatever it is, it is not ‘land and resources held in

Winstanley, Marx and Henry George

The Occupy movement has led to the ideas of these thinkers being discussed again at public meetings.


"England is not a free people, till the poor that have no land, have a free allowance to dig and labour the commons..."

Gerard Winstanley, 1644

Socialist Standard December 2012
the speakers claimed that Marx agreed that landowners but not profit was involved in contrast to interest which was a certain profit, saying that it was justified in that an element of risk was involved in contrast to interest which was a certain profit. They cited Sharia Law as making this distinction too. Basically, what they are against is rent and interest but not profit.

Karl Marx came up at this meeting too when one of the speakers claimed that Marx agreed that landowners exploited both capitalists and workers. Actually, Marx's position was that the capitalists exploited the workers but then were themselves exploited by the landowners. This is not at all the same, since it means that ending exploitation by landowners would benefit only the capitalists and not the workers. Marx also looked forward to the time when: "from the standpoint of a higher socio-economic formation, the private property of particular individuals in the earth will appear just as absurd as the private property of one man in other men" (Capital, volume 3, chapter 46).

It is rather surprising that pro-capitalist ideas should be advocated within the Occupy movement which even the new Lord Mayor of the City of London, Roger Gifford, recognised started off as anti-capitalist. As he told the 'i' newspaper (10 November), 'What they were basically saying was: “We don’t like capitalism as it looks today, we want another system.”' What the Georgists in the Occupy movement are saying, rather, is, ‘We don’t like capitalism as it looks today. We want to give it a new look.’

What this shows is that it is not enough merely to have an anti-capitalist gut reaction. You need to know what capitalism really is and how it works. Otherwise you are going to be confused and misled, whether by currency cranks or by land reformers.

At the first meeting, Gerrard Winstanley was favourably mentioned many times, even if he was misunderstood as merely advocating setting up agricultural communes. In fact he was far more radical than this, advocating the common ownership both of the land and of products made from it to which everyone would have free access without money – what the announcement for the second meeting called ‘the means of life (water, food and housing) for all as of right; land and resources held in common and the benefits shared’. In this, even though three centuries earlier, he was far in advance of Henry George and his single tax on the rental incomes of land that would be left in private ownership.

It is good that people are discussing the ideas of past thinkers such as Gerrard Winstanley, Karl Marx and even Henry George. It shows that they are looking for an alternative to the capitalist production-for-profit system. It is disappointing, though, that at the moment it is ideas that are not really anti-capitalist which seem to have the upper hand in discussions within the Occupy movement, at least in London.

ADAM BUICK

Labour’s share goes down

IN JULY, the OECD, an organisation grouping the developed capitalist countries of Europe, North America, Japan and Australasia, published its Employment Outlook 2012. Chapter 3 noted that ‘during the past three decades, the share of national income represented by wages, salaries and benefits – the labour share – has declined in nearly all OECD countries’. The Times (11 July) summarised the report:

‘Automation and computerisation are responsible for as much as 80 per cent of the decline in so-called “labour share”, which measures wages as a proportion of total income generated by the economy ... The research ... shows that the average labour share dropped from 66.1 per cent in the early 1990s to less than 62 per cent in the late 2000s. In all but four of the 26 OECD nations analysed, workers’ slice of their country’s income declined between 1990 and 2009.”

What the OECD was trying to measure, at national level, is what Marx would have called ‘relative wages’, i.e., the workers’ share in what they produce. This does not necessarily mean a decline too in ‘real wages’ (what wages can buy). In fact, according to the OECD, ‘in essentially all OECD countries, while the fraction of national income accruing to labour decreased, economic growth was still sufficiently rapid so that real labour compensation increased and workers were on average better off.

Since the income of the self-employed was divided between labour and capital, a decline in labour’s share meant a rise in capital’s, with the result, as the Times pointed out, that:

‘Corporate investors have been the big winners, as businesses save on salaries and their profits increase.’

Further, as workers became on average better off, the shift meant that ‘corporate investors’ had to have become even more better off.

The OECD’s figures have some bearing on the arguments amongst students of Marxian economics about what has caused the present economic downturn. Some say that is due to a fall in the average rate of profit; others, that it is due to the decline in labour’s share of national income. One passage in the OECD report seems to give some credence to the latter view:

‘... the shift of income away from labour (and, in particular, from low-wage workers) towards capital (and top earners) may have a negative impact on aggregate demand to the extent that workers with below average pay tend to have a higher consumption propensity than do top earners and capitalists.’

On the other hand, it may not, as long as the capitalists use their increased profits to increase their luxury spending and, more importantly, to re-invest in production; which in fact they did until 2008.

The OECD figures say nothing about the rate of profit since they concerned only the division of new income corresponding to new wealth and value produced in a year. The rate of profit measures total profits in relation to the total amount of capital invested. No doubt, due to ‘automation and computerisation’ that went on during the period in question, the stock of capital would also have increased. Whether it would have increased more than the increase in the amount of profits – which it would have to have done for the rate of profit to fall – is not something the OECD went into.

While capitalist firms do calculate an expected rate of return to decide when, where and whether to invest, and check whether or not this is being achieved, they will not take into account the rate of profit of the whole economy, if only because this is something they have no means of knowing.

It is disappointing, though, that at the moment it is ideas that are not really anti-capitalist which seem to have the upper hand in discussions within the Occupy movement, at least in London.

ADAM BUICK

Socialist Standard December 2012
The Rijks Museum in Amsterdam is home to the art of the Dutch Republic of the 17th century, which was 'the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production.'

The Dutch bourgeoisie declared their independence from the Spanish in 1581. The Explosion of the Spanish Flagship during the 1607 Battle of Gibraltar by van Wieringen reflects pride in the victory of the Dutch fleet over the Spanish. The Celebration of the Peace of Munster, June 1648 by van der Helst depicts a banquet and displays the bourgeois pride in independence and victory over feudalism.

The world financial centre was in Amsterdam. It had the first ever Stock Exchange, the Bank of Amsterdam, capitalist cycles of boom-and-bust, speculative asset inflation ('Tulip Mania'), and Isaac Le Maire, the first stock 'bear trader'.

The Syndics of the Amsterdam Drapers Guild by Rembrandt depicts the sampling officials who checked the quality of dyed cloth, and it reflects the Calvinist simplicity of bourgeois self-confidence.

Amsterdam was noted for its 'schutterij', the bourgeois civic militias and these are portrayed in two famous paintings of the era: The Company of Captain Reynier Reael by Hals, and The Company of Captain Frans Banning Cocq better known as The Night Watch by Rembrandt.

The bourgeois religious sensibility was dominated by Calvinism which provided a theological justification for the developing capitalist mode of production. The Merry Family by Steen appears to be a celebration of alcohol, music, and tobacco but a note in the painting provides the subtitle of 'as the old sing, so pipe the young' which warns the viewer not to copy such dissolute behaviour.

The Dutch Republic was the imperial power ('the colonial system of trade and navigation ripened like a hothouse') with colonies and trading posts in North America, Brazil, the East Indies and South Africa. The Dutch East India Trading Company controlled the maritime trade routes and dominated world trade for 200 years. By 1650 there were 16,000 Dutch merchant ships.

Economic competition with England for control over the seas and the trade routes led to three naval wars between the Dutch Republic and England which confirmed Dutch domination of world commerce until the Napoleonic Wars. Several marine paintings by van de Velde depict Dutch merchant and naval supremacy such as The Cannon Shot and Dutch Ships on a Calm Sea.

The Portrait of Baruch de Spinoza depicts the great Dutch philosopher who advocated a classical pantheism, opposed Cartesian dualism and was admired by Marx for his materialism. Hegel believed 'you are either a Spinozist or not a philosopher at all'. Marx concluded 'the total capital of the Republic was probably more important than that of all the rest of Europe put together and the people of Holland were more overworked, poorer and more brutally oppressed than those of all the rest of Europe put together'.

Mocking Hitlerism

Bertolt Brecht’s The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, written in 1941 and first staged in 1958 was recently revived at the Chichester Theatre with a mesmerising performance by Henry Goodman as Ui.

Brecht’s play is an extended metaphor for the rise to power of Hitler with the aim that 'the great political criminals must be completely stripped bare and exposed to ridicule,' and to show that it was 'resistible'. The crisis in capitalism, the support of industrial capitalism, and the failure of bourgeois liberal democracy contributed to the rise to power of the Nazis.

Brecht recasts Hitler’s rise in terms of a small-time gangster’s takeover of the greengrocery trade in Chicago (Germany), and all the major figures are featured: Dogborough (President Hindenburg) and Hitler’s henchmen Giri, Givola, and Roma (Goering, Goebbels, and Roehm). The Warehouse Fire of scene 7 is the Reichstag Fire; a St Valentine’s Day Massacre in scene 11 is the 1934 ‘Night of the Long Knives’; and the Dock Aid Scandal of scenes 1-4 is the real-life ‘Osthilfeskandal’ (East Aid scandal).

East Aid was the ‘Weimar’ Republic’s financial support programme to heavily mortgaged Junker estates in East Prussia. This was at the same time as stringent economic and deflationary policies, 30 percent unemployment, and the DANAT bank collapse. The East Aid became a major scandal in January 1933 when it was discovered the Junkers had spent the money on luxuries and weakened the position of President Hindenburg, which in turn led to pressure from the capitalist class to appoint Hitler as Chancellor.

In 1927, Baron Von Oldenburg-Januschau, a friend and neighbour of Hindenburg, got up a subscription from industrial capitalists to buy the President the highly indebted former family estate of Neudeck (the country house of Dogsborough in scene 4). To avoid inheritance taxes, the estate was put in the name of son and heir, Colonel Oskar Von Hindenburg. This scandal came to light at the same time as East Aid.

These scandals prompt Ui in scene 4 to declaim: ‘Say, that’s corrupt!’

Brecht shows the capitalist class helping Hitler come to power (‘in den sattel heben’ - lifting Hitler into the saddle). Hitler courted the capitalists in his 1932 speech to the Industry Club in Düsseldorf. The Nazis offered the capitalist class reforms to capitalism by crushing organised trade unions and ‘Bolshevism’, developing economic autarky, and rearmament as a prelude to the search for ‘lebensraum’ and markets and raw materials for the capitalist class.

Brecht’s aesthetics and Epic Theatre were influenced by Karl Korsch who emphasised Marxism as heir to Hegel. Brecht referred to Korsch as ‘my Marxist Teacher’.

There is a powerful speech in scene 9 directed at the Nazis: ‘Help! Help! Don’t run away. Who’ll testify? They gun us down like rabbits. Won’t anybody help? You murderers! Fiend! Monster! Shit! You’d make an honest piece of shit cry...’

In the epilogue Brecht warns: ‘though the bastard is dead, the bitch that bore him is again in heat.’

STEVE CLAYTON
What is it we are asked to “remember” every Armistice Day? “Heroism” of course, “sacrifice” of course, and the inevitable “giving” of lives in a war fought for the cause of “peace” and “freedom”. That is the popularly accepted account.

In this reinterpretation of the events surrounding World War Two James Heartfield invites readers to reconsider the accepted victors’ histories of the period. This is not a run-of-the-mill retelling of the official versions produced at the time for popular consumption and reproduced continually ever since as a justification for the carnage. In their place he gives us an unsanitised version of events and an analysis of the fundamental realities behind the conflict that cost sixty million lives and caused almost incalculable destruction of useful constructions (factories, railways, ships, dwellings and other buildings).

It rejects the orthodox accounts of endeavours to liberate Europe, of struggles against evil dictatorships, and of battles to end racism. In their place Heartfield amasses a wealth of evidence to demonstrate that the real underlying concerns of the elites who directed the war on both sides related much more to their economic, strategic, and imperial interests. What had formerly been trading wars had by 1939-1945 turned to armed competition over the spoils of exploitation on a world scale. This was a war over markets and access to raw materials as the post-war settlement over spheres of influence made clear.

This was in no way a People’s War. It was a war against people including, in the words of Arthur Harris the RAF’s chief of Bomber Command, “any civilian who produces more than enough to maintain himself.”

What the democracies and the dictatorships had in common was that they had channelled popular aspirations into nationalist and militarist movements. The working class majority of their populations were successfully persuaded to identify not with class but with country.

Although it does not draw any conclusion regarding the avoidance of future wars this book is highly recommended as a useful corrective to World War Two history as portrayed on TV and taught in both schools and universities. It makes several of the arguments we ourselves have made both at the time even if not explicitly our conclusion that capitalism and war are inescapably entwined. Only establishing a world of common ownership and production for use will make war a thing of the past.

GT

All Together?


2012 has been the UN International Year of Cooperatives, marked by a Co-operatives United World Festival in Manchester at the end of October and start of November. This book charts the origin and history of the co-operative movement and its current size and influence. In a rather pointless future section the Rochdale Aerotech Co-op is shown providing the parachute for a Mars landing. There is also a section that looks at co-operation in nature, e.g. among bees.

The co-operative movement began in Rochdale in 1844, many of its first members being Chartists. According to figures given here, there are now 1.4 million co-operatives in the world, with over 100 million employees and nearly a billion members. In Britain there are over 18,000 organisations in the ‘mutuals sector’, which includes housing associations and NHS Trusts.

So immediately we come up with a problem that is not addressed here at all, that of what counts as a co-operative. One definition (adopted by the International Co-operative Alliance in 1995) is ‘an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically controlled enterprise’. The notion in practice covers a wide range of entities, from The Co-op (staple of British High Streets) to Barcelona Football Club, Best Western hotels and Ocean Spray soft drinks, in addition to genuine small worker-owned enterprises. These may all have in common that they are supposedly owned and run by their employees and other members, but they differ in many ways and they all have to compete in the capitalist market place. For instance, The Co-op’s posh new headquarters in Manchester has been put on the market on leaseback terms (once finished, the building will be sold and leased back, in order to obtain finance to invest in the next stage of the development). And no form of employment under capitalism is voluntary in the terms of the definition above.

Nothing sponsored by the UN can be seen as any kind of threat to the status quo. The Mondragón Co-operative in Spain, usually cited as one of the movement’s success stories, was set up under the Franco dictatorship, despite the oppression suffered in other parts of the Basque Country, so it was hardly any kind of radical undertaking. And as made clear in the useful timeline at the end of the book, The Co-op contributed to the British military machine in both world wars, such as by making military clothing and even weapons. Furthermore, it supports the Co-operative Party (‘the political arm of the co-operative movement’) and hence the Labour Party.

There is nothing at all wrong with workers getting together without bosses to organise production and distribution. But by no means everything that calls itself a co-op should really be counted as such. And the view taken in the book, that the Rochdale pioneers made a revolution, is, unsurprisingly, not argued for at all.

PB
On the Road released in Britain
12th October 2012

Jack Kerouac’s seminal ‘beat’ novel On the Road was first published in 1957. It has finally made it to the silver screen in a faithful adaptation by Walter Salles (director of The Motorcycle Diaries) about the young Che Guevara. Salles captures the excitement of youth in search of “kicks” in the shape of sex, drugs, jazz and travel in the early years of the ‘beat’ generation. The story is autobiographical and concerns the adventures of would-be writers and poets Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William S. Burroughs, and their involvement with Neal Cassady in the years 1947-50 in New York City, Denver, New Orleans, Mexico and their transcontinental journeys.

Kerouac is sensitively portrayed by Mancunian actor Sam Riley who was excellent as Ian Curtis in the Joy Division film Control, while Cassady is played to the hilt by Garrett Hedlund who was Patroclus in Troy.

Cassady represents for Kerouac the lust for life which he described as “the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars.”

In the film Cassady is reading Proust’s Swann’s Way which is given him by Keroauc. Proust and Joyce were major influences on Kerouac as a writer, while Blake, Celine’s Journey to the End of the Night, and Dostoyevsky’s Notes from Underground were literary influences on all the ‘beat’ writers. Philosophically, they were influenced by Nietzsche and Spengler’s Decline of the West, and advocated Rimbaud’s ‘New Vision’ for their writings and his “derangement of the senses” through drugs. Salles’ film includes scenes of marijuana smoking and ‘speeding’ on Benzodrine plus straight and gay sex scenes.

The outstanding performance is by Kristen Stewart as Mary-Lou, and her performance in this film is in stark contrast to her role in the right wing teen vampire films of the Twilight series. Viggo Mortensen as Burroughs is only a brief cameo performance but watch for Joan Burroughs sweeping the lizards out of the tree!

Jazz, in particularly the bebop revolution of the 1940’s as personified by Charlie Parker was an influence on the ‘beats’. In the film there is a ‘scat’ jazz vocal performance by Slim Gaillard portrayed by Coati Mundi. The ‘beat’ generation were a reaction against the consumerism and materialism of post-war American capitalism; the puritanism of bourgeois morality, the conformity of middle class life, the fear endemic in a post-Hiroshima world of the military-industrial complex, the racism and prejudice in society and the general lack of spirituality. The ‘beats’ advocated a “second religiousness” and pursued alternatives to Judeo-Christianity in eastern religions such as Buddhism.

In On the Road, Salles and Kerouac’s sensitive portrayal of the Mexican fellaheen is fundamental to Kerouac’s statement about land and indigenous peoples: “The Earth is an Indian Thing”.

Steve Clayton

Letters continued

wellbeing of society as a whole will be the single dominant motivation for the construction and development of habitation and communities.

Bernard. Bortnick, Texas, USA

Reply. You make some good points. But we don’t agree that socialist society will be run by industrial unions or, as you put it, that there will be an ‘SIU government’. Quite apart from the word ‘government’ which we don’t like because it suggests rule over people, we talk simply of a democratically elected socialist administration, leaving it up to the members of socialist society to decide what the basic units will be. - Editors.

Socialist Standard December 2012
Meetings
For full details of all our meetings and events see our Meetup site: http://www.meetup.com/The-Socialist-Party-of-Great-Britain/

Doncaster
Saturday 8 December 2.00pm
REVOLUTION NOT REFORM
Speaker: Paul Bennett
Ukrainian Centre, 48 Beckett Road, Doncaster DN2 4AD (about 20 minutes walk north-east from Doncaster rail station)

London
Tuesday 18 December 7.30pm
WEST LONDON BRANCH SEASONAL SOCIAL
William Morris pub, 2-4 King St, W6 0QA (2 minutes from Hammersmith tube and bus station).

New Leaflets from The Socialist Party
Identity
Examines and debunks ideas of nationalism
Questions and Answers About Socialism
Answers questions non-members often ask about socialism and The Socialist Party

Orders: Up to 10 £1 p and p. Over 10 and up to 50 £3 p and p. Larger orders, write for details to The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN.

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

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

Declaration of Principles
The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds
1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

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

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

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

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

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

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

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

SO THE crisis is over—for the time being! The Soviets have climbed down over Cuba and have withdrawn their missiles from that unhappy island. Everyone is sighing with relief and no doubt President Kennedy is congratulating himself on the success of his tough line. The press generally acclaimed him as the saviour of the peace, although it has been suggested in one journal at least, that there was no real Russian intention to fight over Cuba because the U.S.S.R. was just not ready for a shooting war yet. Russia, it seems, has run away to fight again another day.

Just what day, when and where, none can say—least of all the various opposing governments themselves. It is one of the terrifying aspects of the whole ghastly business that at the most we can only guess where the next trouble spot will be, and whether that will then trigger an explosion which will blow the world sky-high. Look, however, over the years since 1945. Berlin, Korea, Suez, Hungary, Lebanon, Formosa—the monster of war can rear its ugly head any place at any time and this is not to mention the smaller in-between conflicts such as Indo-China and Algeria.

Cuba has simmered down for a while and maybe will move out of the headlines altogether, as the major capitalist powers find their attention diverted elsewhere. Who amongst us anyway would have risked a wager even six months ago that Castro’s Land would be the focal point in a crisis which edged the capitalist world perilously close to another horror?

And now there is India’s fight with China. This again is in a part of the world which has only recently become big news, as Capitalist China pushes her borders outwards in pursuit of her expansionist aims. She has been squabbling for some time over certain slices of Indian border territory and negotiations have dragged wearily on, but force is the final arbiter in the clash of opposing interests, as we have pointed out on many occasions.

(Editorial, Socialist Standard, December 1962)

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50 Years Ago

Own Goal

THE NFL is the National Football League, but the nation is the United States and the football is the American kind, known as gridiron, with helmets and shoulder-pads. We have commented previously on how dangerous the game can be for the players, how the owners wanted to extend the playing season and reduce wages (Action Replay, March 2011). Now, though, the focus of industrial action has shifted to the referees.

The league wanted to cut referees’ wages and introduce an inferior pension and retirement plan. They relied on the fact that refereeing is a part-time job with a number of perks, and that there would be plenty of refs who have worked lower down the sport’s ladder and would be only too pleased to step into the shoes of their professional colleagues. The refs were seen as an unimportant part of the whole package; as a league vice-president said, “You’ve never paid for an NFL ticket to watch someone officiate a game.” So in June the 121 official refs were locked out and replaced by others who were way down the pecking order in terms of training and experience.

But from the bosses’ point of view things did not go as they hoped. It turned out that the less well-qualified refs were, would you believe, less able to make correct decisions in top games that were subject to massive TV coverage and intense scrutiny by pundits and fans. After the number of mistakes became embarrassing, and some teams missed play-offs owing to the fiasco, in October the league had to climb down and reinstate the proper refs on their original contracts.

The NFL hierarchy had tried to save what was, in the context of the sport as a whole, relatively small amounts of money, only to find that the multi-billion-dollar product was damaged, and they were forced to backtrack. In other words, the industry needed a competent workforce, even in the most unglamorous of its jobs. As elsewhere, it’s the workers who produce the wealth and provide the services.

PB

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Name

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A Cut-Rate Health Service
In times of economic downturn the government searches eagerly for ways to cut expenditure and one of the easier targets is the National Health Service. The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) said that despite the Coalition’s promise to protect frontline staff from cuts the NHS workforce has fallen by almost 21,000 since the Coalition Government came to power. This includes a loss of more than 6,000 qualified nursing posts – from a total of 312,000 nursing posts in the NHS … Patient safety will be seriously undermined by falling numbers of nurses, with the RCN’s chief executive warning that standards of care “are going to get a lot worse” (Independent, 13 November). Spend more on bigger and better bombs, but spend less on health services: that is how capitalism operates.

The Class Divide
The daily press in Britain is fond of creating the myth that workers are gradually improving their economic position in society, but occasionally a journalist will report on what is really happening. Here is an example from the writer Philip Collins giving the facts about Britain. ‘On current trends, an ordinary family will have 15 per cent less cash coming in by 2020 than 2008. This has happened all over the world. Blue-collar workers in America have hardly had a pay rise in 40 years. Their counterparts in Germany and Canada have been stuck for a decade. In the UK the household fuel has risen 110 per cent, council tax by 67 per cent and food is 37 per cent more expensive than in 2000’ (Times, 1 November). Needless to say, during this period the owning class have improved their economic standing.

The Widening Gap
Christia Freeland has spent 20 years of her life working for the Financial Times and Reuters and she has recently turned her long experience of the owning class into a book about them, entitled Plutocrats: The Rise of the New Global Super-Rich. It was recently reviewed by the press. ‘In the 1970s, the top 1% of earners in America captured about 10% of national income. Today their share has more than doubled to 22% … Bill Gates and Warren Buffett have the combined wealth (about $100 billion) of the bottom 40% of the US population - about 120m people’ (Sunday Times, 28 October).

Behind The Statistics
The recent economic downturn throughout Europe has led to the publication of staggering statistics about poverty. ‘Every fifth resident lives in poverty in Spain, new figures showed Monday, dpa reported. The national statistics institute INE said 21.1 per cent of the 47-million population lives below the poverty line, meaning they live on less than 7,355 euros (9,610 dollars) annually … The number of minors aged under 16 living in poverty has increased to 21 per cent from 19.4 per cent in 2011’ (Turkish Weekly, 22 October). Behind the grim figures lies the day-to-day misery that capitalism forces on members of the working class. ‘A woman aged 53 jumped to her death from the balcony of her fourth-floor flat in Bilbao as bailiffs arrived to evict her for failing to pay her mortgage. There are 500 evictions a day in Spain’ (Times, 10 November).

The Priorities Of Capitalism
All over the world capitalist governments facing an economic recession are eager to reduce expenditures. They are examining ways to cut pensions and welfare payments, but there is one area of government expenditure that shows no signs of cut-backs. The USS Gerald R. Ford is the most expensive weapon ever created and will run about $11.5 billion, with three ships costing about $40.2 billion. Even given these generous estimates, the Navy figures that the USS Gerald R. Ford could cost as much as $1.1 billion more than planned, making it far and away the service’s most expensive warship (Business Insider, 25 October). To protect sources of raw materials, markets and spheres of economic and political influence, the owning class must have up-to-date weapons of destruction.