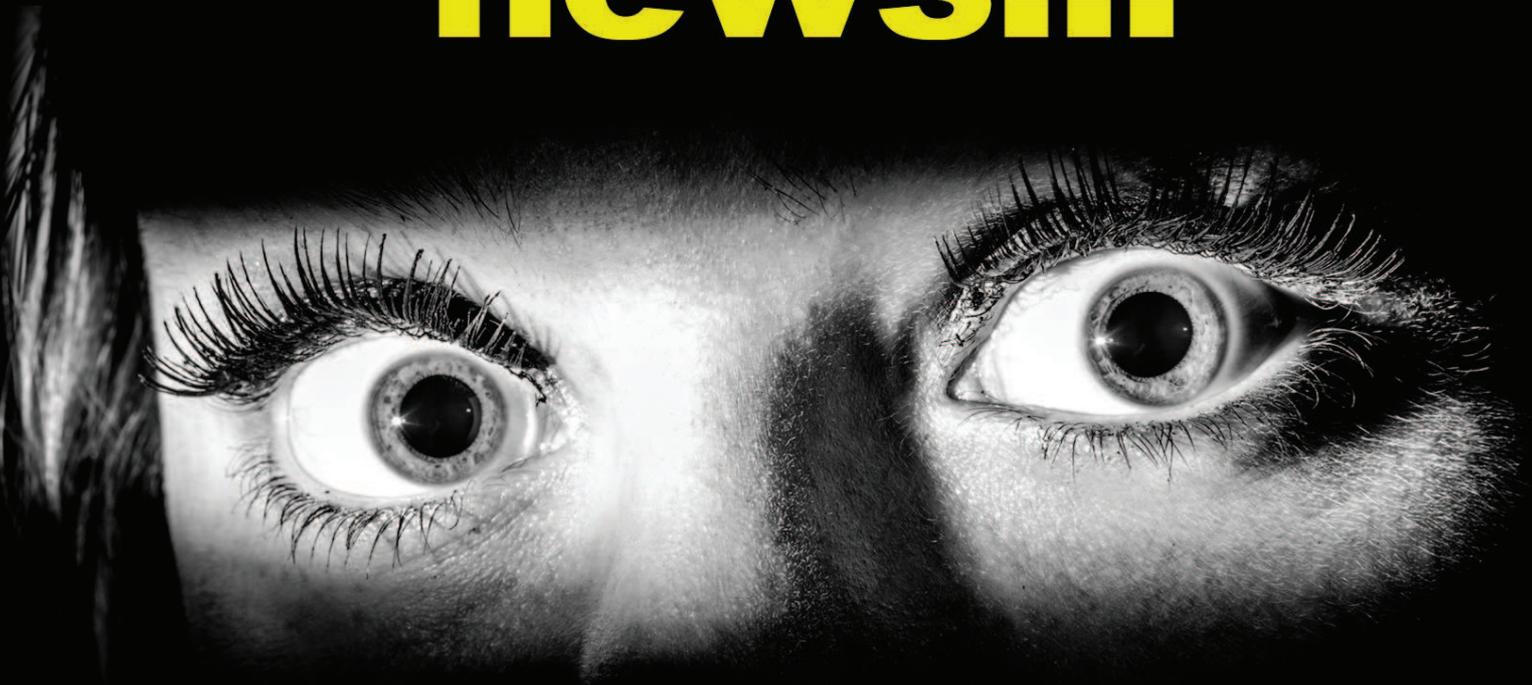


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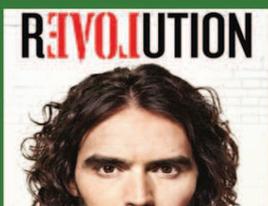
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Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain - Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

And now the news...



Fear and loathing in capitalism



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The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 3 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.

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Introducing The Socialist Party

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

We use every possible opportunity to make

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

The more of you who join The Socialist Party the more we will be able to get our ideas across, the more experiences we

will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

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

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



socialist standard

DECEMBER 2014

Editorial

The choice is always ours

THE MEDIA have not been short of political drama to occupy them in recent months: the rise and rise of UKIP, the defections of two sitting Tory MPs, the accusations of dirty tricks, or the 'nail-biting' drama of the Rochester by-election. Anyone following all this might be forgiven for thinking that the political process is a media soap centred on the rivalries and intrigues of a cast of political celebrities. They might think, too, that it is a game of little consequence for the lives of working people whose only role in all this is to be persuaded to vote this way or that. With the declining turnout at the polls in recent years, it seems that working people, the majority of voters, think so too.

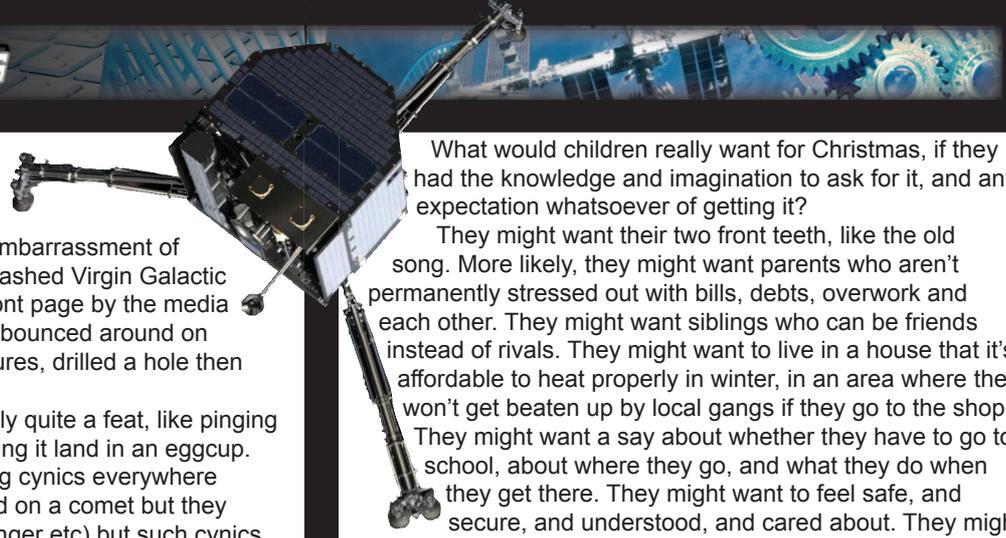
But then in September a remarkable 84.5 percent of the electorate north of the border went to the polls to vote in the Scottish referendum on independence. If working people in Scotland were disillusioned with the current political establishment, then they showed themselves still strong in their belief that their future depends on having the right national institutions and leaders to run the capitalist system. Whichever way they voted, 'yes' or 'no', they demonstrated their ongoing willingness to give away their power to political leaders, representatives of the capitalist class.

Then, in November, alongside the reports of political recriminations and infighting, the media sought to bring a patriotic lump to our throats by reporting on an 'art installation' at the Tower of London. The installation consisted of an assemblage of 888,246 ceramic poppies, each one representing a British military death in the 'Great' war. (An

insult, you might think, to those conscripts among the dead who objected to the slaughter). The unintended symbolism of the event went largely unremarked, but revealed the nationalist and militarist sentiments underpinning it – for the poppies, forming a blood-red sea of lost working-class lives, were set in the defensive moat of the Tower of London, a building deliberately erected to represent the authority of the state in eleventh-century Britain and the power of the economic elites that controlled it.

Millions of working people of many nationalities followed the orders of their political and military leaders and slaughtered one another on the battlefields of WWI – the 'business war' as it was known. Yet it was also tens of thousands of working-class Germans in uniform that helped bring the slaughter to an end by their refusal to carry on the fight. We should also remember that had the fragile internationalism of working-class organisations before the war been more firmly cemented, their pledge not to fight one another might have withstood the onslaught of nationalism. War would then have been prevented and millions of lives spared. Our past failures as a class stand as lessons to us for the future.

We always have a choice: we can continue to place our power as a class into the hands of institutional leaders who use it to pursue the narrow interests of a capitalist elite, or, we can take responsibility for it collectively and democratically, use it to further our own majority interest and, in the process, act in the interests of all humanity.



Watch this space...

SPACE FLIGHT dominated last month's science reporting, with the embarrassment of an exploding Antares rocket and a crashed Virgin Galactic plane being rapidly pushed off the front page by the media hoo-ha over the Philae probe, which bounced around on a comet, sent back half a dozen pictures, drilled a hole then expired.

The Philae landing was undoubtedly quite a feat, like ping-pong across a continent and having it land in an eggcup. A tweet immediately went viral inviting cynics everywhere to complete the phrase 'they can land on a comet but they can't...' (eg. stop war, solve world hunger etc) but such cynics are missing the big picture. Drilling into a comet could tell us whether our water came from outer space, and even more importantly, whether life could have come from outer space, and even more importantly than that, whether humans can feasibly strip-mine speeding space rocks so that fat future profits can also come from outer space.

Now UK news services are abuzz with a new crowd-sourced bid to send a British probe to, er, the moon and drill a hole in that too (BBC Online, 19 November). The enthusiasm seems quite out of proportion to the aim, but it's a chance to put one over on the Chinese and besides, space travel is a good deal more sexy than fixing Earth's problems. Indeed it tends to bring out the silly or downright suicidal in some people, as witness last year's Mars One project. Not a space probe but a Dutch company, Mars One sought volunteers for a one-way manned trip to Mars, the costs being recouped through TV coverage and sponsorship deals. Not one person in their right mind would go for this, you would think, especially as you had to pay a €30 deposit. Over 200,000 people signed up. Socialists might be desperate to escape the capitalist prison, but we're not that desperate. The only red planet we want to live on is this one.

... Oddity

A cover version of David Bowie's famous song *Space Oddity*, done by a Canadian astronaut aboard the International Space Station, has been reposted to YouTube after having been taken down due to licensing restrictions (BBC Online, 4 November). Bowie himself had no objection to the cover, describing it as 'poignant'. What stood in its way were the rules of terrestrial capitalism. As the singer, Chris Hadfield, explained: 'The Space Station was built by 15 countries, and depending on where I floated while singing and playing, whose copyright laws applied? Which Space Agency owned the recording? Whose jurisdiction was I in?'

If aliens ever visit and like any of our pop music, let them beware. It's a minefield down here.

Toys R Us(eless)

Continuing the space theme, the *Telegraph* was recently keen to report the apparently astounding fact that 'There is more computer power in some of this year's top Christmas toys than the first moon mission' (5 November). Big deal. There's more computer power in your washing machine too, and your phone, and if you're a true early adopter, your glasses.

At the risk of resorting to Christmas grumpy mode, what is all this computer power doing? Making crappy dolls to emulate babylike simpering tones while talking to your iPad, and plastic dayglo smart watches that store 900 photographs an inch wide. How cool, how awesome! What a load of utter rubbish, all designed to last two weeks and all designed to cost a fortune, paid out by overworked parents who can't afford it but are trying to make up for ignoring the kids all the rest of the year.

What would children really want for Christmas, if they had the knowledge and imagination to ask for it, and any expectation whatsoever of getting it?

They might want their two front teeth, like the old song. More likely, they might want parents who aren't permanently stressed out with bills, debts, overwork and each other. They might want siblings who can be friends instead of rivals. They might want to live in a house that it's affordable to heat properly in winter, in an area where they won't get beaten up by local gangs if they go to the shop. They might want a say about whether they have to go to school, about where they go, and what they do when they get there. They might want to feel safe, and secure, and understood, and cared about. They might want to feel that they have a future worth looking forward to, that strangers are just friends they haven't met yet, that they are not too fat or too thin or too stupid but just right, that alive is a good thing to be.

But this year, if they're lucky, they'll just get capitalism rammed in their stocking, just like every other year. Ho ho ho.

The only way is ethics?

The Academy of Medical Royal Colleges recently produced a report arguing that doctors have an ethical duty to prevent waste in the NHS (BBC Online, 6 November). It's not hard to understand the argument. Billions are wasted every year that could pay nurses more or buy extra equipment. Doctors of course being no strangers to ethical codes but frequently being utter strangers to budgets, the AMRC naturally thought a spot of moral arm-twisting was in order.

The idea of waste being 'unethical' is a fairly novel one, considering how profligate nature itself is. But it's not the first thing to be morally stigmatised by a civil society anxious to change our behaviour – two recent examples being smoking and drink/driving.

Since socialists are anxious to change the behaviour of civil society, perhaps we ought to use ethical arguments more. The trouble is, the whole subject makes us slightly nervous, because of the problem of moral relativism.

What's ethical to you isn't necessarily ethical to him or her. And while ethics can be based on empirical reasoning, as with the doctors, it doesn't have to be. It could be based on mystical dreams, or God's word. Building a case primarily out of ethics is like building a shed primarily out of blancmange.

Some scientists think that moral relativism is a myth and that we are hard-wired to be moral, pointing to the activities of mirror neurons in the brain's motor cortex, which fire off in sympathy at certain observed behaviours in others and trigger similar behaviours. The strongest of these effects is seen in yawning, however, an activity not normally related to questions of morality unless you're intensely bored with the subject.

Still, there's not much doubt that people are only motivated to act when they perceive that something is ethically 'wrong', not just scientifically 'incorrect'. The Proto-Indo-European root *steig* (prick or pointed) gives us *stick*, *stigma* and *instigate*. What other behaviours can we expect to see stigmatised in the future, with a view to changing behaviour? Using fossil fuels, probably. Eating fat or meat or sugar or being a couch potato, possibly. One key social norm which we would be in a hurry to see stigmatised is the 'right' of a small group of people to exist as a parasitical social elite at the expense of everyone else and the environment. It's about time people realised that's not just incorrect, it's damn well wrong.

PJS

Two tales of one city

We review *Tales of Two Cities: The Best and Worst of Times in Today's New York*, edited by John Freeman and illustrated by Molly Crabapple.

THE 'TWO cities' in the title of this book (published by OR Books in association with Housing Works) are *both* New York. John Freeman in his introduction tells us that he set out to collect stories about life in New York that focus on the human consequences of inequality of wealth, which 'is at its most acute in the 'world cities' where the rich choose to live (or invest their fortunes in real estate).' What does it 'feel like' to live side by side with people who are vastly richer and/or vastly poorer than you are?

Some of the thirty stories are true accounts of experiences in the authors' own lives. Others are fictional, but these too are meant to be true to life. About half of the authors dwell on matters that have no direct bearing on the theme of economic inequality. This is not a complaint: their stories are also of interest. But here we reflect on a few of the pieces that do focus on the ostensible theme of the collection.

An epidemic of child suicides

Maria Venegas describes her experience teaching in an after-school programme for children in an inner city area. The kids find it hard to cope with the demands made on them and often break down in tears. One of them says she wishes she could kill herself. Indeed, ten NYC school students did exactly that in just seven weeks in 2014 – an 'epidemic' by comparison with the previous NYC norm of ten child suicides a year.

'What is pushing these kids over the edge?' – asks the teacher. The immediate 'push' is clearly their anxiety about getting the high marks expected of them in tests that are often confusing and badly designed. But let's look deeper. She gives us a clue when she mentions that a 10-year-old girl in her class has an 'H written across the front of her sweatshirt' – H for Harvard. After a few pages we learn that the hallways at the charter school attended by this girl are named after Ivy League universities: Harvard, Yale, Princeton, etc. 'The Ivy Leagues dangle before her every day.'

Nowadays every American youngster is constantly bombarded from all directions with the message: *You can make it if you try hard enough*. This 'encouragement' is regarded as a big advance on the bad old days when low-caste children were taught humbly to accept their place at the bottom of the pile. But the new message is actually even crueller than the old one, because it carries the clear though unspoken implication that *if you don't make it that will mean you didn't try hard enough*. You will have only yourself to blame.

As those who perform this charade of 'equal opportunity' must know very well, only a few of the children before whom they

'dangle' the highly exclusive, elitist and expensive Ivy Leagues will ever get there – and even fewer will make it through to graduation. The teacher herself, although she probably comes from a background somewhat less disadvantaged than that of her students, went to the University of Illinois, one of the more accessible and considerably cheaper state colleges. The 'dangling' is the psychic equivalent of hurling these kids into a brick wall – again and again and again. The remarkable thing is not that some of them commit suicide but that most of them do not.

Such are the fruits of efforts at reform – undertaken in many cases with the best of intentions – that leaves intact the capitalist structure of our society.

The housing treadmill

Several of the stories are about housing – 'a perpetual concern,' as Freeman notes. An increasing number of city residents cannot afford to rent a home, let alone buy one. Freeman cites some astonishing statistics: nearly a third of New Yorkers pay over half of their annual income in rent, while in the Bronx, which is the poorest of New York's boroughs, rent swallows *two thirds* of the income of the typical household. Besides the problem of high rents, there is also the endless struggle to get basic services and force landlords to make essential repairs.

And yet New York has a long history of legislative reform aimed at controlling rents and protecting tenants against eviction and mistreatment. A recurring theme is the minimal impact of these reforms in practice. Landlords have many ways of evading legal restrictions, some of them quite ingenious. Of particular interest in this respect is the contribution by D.W. Gibson, a lawyer who specializes in the thankless, frustrating, and poorly remunerated task of protecting tenants' rights (most lawyers prefer to practice law in more lucrative fields). He describes how

landlords want to evict tenants but lack adequate legal grounds for

doing so induce them to leave by making life unbearable, one method being to remove kitchen and bathroom installations under the pretext of renovation.

One place where those who couldn't afford the rents used to go – in the 1990s, before the authorities decided to seal them off – was the tunnels beneath the city. There are several hundred miles of tunnels and a couple of thousand people lived down there together with the rats. In a memoir evocatively entitled 'Near the Edge of Darkness' Colum McCann recounts his explorations of this underworld.

Tables turned

Jonathan Dee's story stands alone in being written from the perspective of the rich. The narrator and his wife get caught in a snowstorm as they drive home to their townhouse from a charity dinner. They encounter a poor man with a shovel who offers to dig them out – for \$100, a charge that he soon raises to \$200. The narrator considers this unreasonable and swears at the man, but ends up buying the shovel off him for \$937 – all the cash that he has in his wallet. The man responds to his rant by explaining: 'It's called the

continued page 21



Would You Believe it?

A WORD of advice to those who are in the habit of talking to God; don't bother. You can't believe a word he says and half the time he hasn't a clue what he's talking about.

Back in July he informed a group of 100 Liberian bishops, pastors, prophets and other assorted God-botherers that the Ebola outbreak was sent because of their corruption and immorality. Well, presumably, because of the corruption and immorality of the people generally. Not of the bishops, pastors and prophets, obviously.

He then had them running around like headless chickens demanding that the country be 'locked up for three days of silence, fasting and prayer' because he was 'angry with Liberia' and that 'Liberians have to pray and seek God's forgiveness over the corruption and immoral acts such as homosexuality' (sic) and that 'As Christians we must repent and seek God's forgiveness' (*Liberian Daily Observer* 31 July 2014).

Yet here we are several months later, and after much devout 'fasting and prayer' in Liberia and other affected areas, the Ebola outbreak continues.

Here too, back in February when much of the country was being flooded out God informed UKIP's David Silvester (now ex-UKIP since his expulsion) that the floods had been sent in revenge for the newly-passed legislation allowing gays to get married. 'This is not new, this happened in the Old Testament – they were warned if they turned against God there would be pestilence, there would be war, there would be disasters' Silvester told us.

God must be reasonably happy with our corruption and immorality though. Even



Pope Francis being asked if Richard Dawkins would still go to Hell

without the silence, fasting and prayers he eventually changed his mind and called off the flooding.

OK, he's probably only having a joke and winding us up, but these occasional messages from God do become a bit irritating after a while. And now he's at it again. Not threats this time, no, this time he's decided to help the Pope get his head around the ideas of evolution and the Big Bang.

Unfortunately God doesn't seem to have a very good grasp of these issues himself, or maybe the Pope wasn't paying attention, but according to his latest thinking on the laws of physics (given via the Pope) 'The Big Bang does not contradict the divine act of creation'. And even more puzzling, 'Evolution of nature is not inconsistent with the notion of creation'. (*Guardian* 29 October).

Bearing in mind that without any assistance from God we now know that evolution takes place very gradually, over millions of years, God's latest views on the subject are not much better than his previous message in Genesis; that the act of creation

took just six days, and with both the animals and mankind being created on the final, sixth day. And although he omitted to give us the exact date for it, one of his previous spokesmen, the 17th century Bishop James Ussher, did. Creation took place, apparently, on 23rd October 4004 BC. Not to be outdone, another religious scholar, one Dr John Lightfoot, calculated that it occurred at 9 o'clock in the morning.

Modern science, meanwhile, tells us that the Big Bang occurred about 13.8 billion years ago. So in spite of God's and the Pope's efforts to take us back to the middle ages, and to square bronze-age mythology with reality, there is still a slight discrepancy between science and religion.

What we need, perhaps, is a new version of the bible to clarify God's latest views.

- 'In the beginning was the word, and the word was BOOM!' But until we get that who should we believe?

NW

The Myth Of National Characteristics

There once was a very bad TV situation comedy called '*Mind Your Language*'. The basis of this unfunny comedy was a well-meaning hero teaching an adult night class the English language to a cliché-ridden group of non-English speakers. Stereotypes abounded.

There was the sexually attractive French girl in a short skirt, the randy bottom-pinching Italian, the very proper but dull German and a wide variety of stupid Orientals and Asians. The whole thing was complete nonsense and it says much for the better informed prospective audience that the whole thing sunk without trace after a short run.

Although this particular attempt at national characteristics failed the notion that whole groups of people from a particular geographical area are genetically programmed to behave in particularly predictable fashion is very widespread. It would be almost impossible to watch TV or

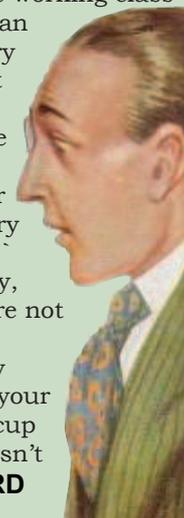
read a newspaper without observing a reference to 'Latin temperament', 'Germanic thoroughness', or even 'American brashness'. In journalism so-called national traits are the norm. In tabloid journalism like the *Sun* or the *Daily Mail* they are almost mandatory. What lies behind this crass affectation? After all journalists are not stupid and they must recognise the wide variety of human foibles and unique behaviour patterns that exist amongst people. The basis of this pernicious poison lies in the misguided nationalistic aims of the mass media. These means of communications exist not just to sell and make a profit they also have a very important function to perform for the owning class.

It is imperative for the smooth functioning of a class-divided society that the working class imagines that they share a common identity with their exploiters. Thus we have deluded wage slaves on the last night of The Proms puffing out their chests and chanting '*Land of Hope and Glory*'. This is a world-wide illusion.

Be Proud That You Are British or exulting in the American Way of Life are all of a cliched pattern.

It is impossible to imagine how capitalism would function so smoothly without the poison of nationalism. In the event of an economic crisis we must learn to buckle to and beat Johnny Foreigner. In the event of a war we must fight and die for 'our country'. In reality of course the working class have no country. It is an accident which country you were born into - it is probably even an accident that you were born at all. There is nothing to be proud or ashamed of the country you happen to live in.

So wake up to reality, Bertie Wooster! You are not British. Put your non-existent monocle away and stop sticking out your pinky when having a cup of char. Aunt Agatha isn't going to call shortly. **RD**





Comic capitalism

THE WORD 'capitalism' is well and truly back in circulation. At one time if you used it you were taken for a Communist. Not any more. Even stand-up comedians have incorporated it into their routines. One is Liam Williams who was given a page in *Time Out* (October 7-13) to tell jokes about capitalism. Actually, they were largely at the expense of those who defend capitalism.

Defining capitalism as being where 'the means of production and trade are privately owned and operated for profit', he has somebody called Mo%^&\$fucker! object

'The only alternative is a primitive economic system involving trading with stones or shits.'

Socialists have often heard this objection as 'so you want to go back to barter?' No, we don't. Socialism will involve the disappearance of money but also the disappearance of all 'trading', all buying and selling. As the means for producing wealth (useful things) will be commonly owned so will the wealth produced.

The question will then be, not how to sell it (how can owners sell what they own to themselves?), but how to distribute it, how to share it out. Socialism doesn't mean going back to barter. It means going forward, now that the technology and skills exist to produce enough for all, to distribution in accordance with the principle of 'from each their ability, to each their need.' People co-operate to produce what they need and then have free access to it. Money becomes redundant and does not need to be replaced by anything.

Williams then deals with a more subtle defence of capitalism:

'Capitalism is now the dominant economic model. It's actually a product of nature, like maths and human song.'

This is the familiar 'human nature' objection to socialism. If socialism is unnatural, then capitalism is natural. Actually, capitalism is neither natural nor eternal. It has not always existed but is a product of social and historical evolution. It came into being, in western Europe, in the course of the 15th to 16th century when countries began producing for sale on an outside market that none of them were able to dominate or control but, on the contrary, had to adapt to in order to survive economically. This set in motion a process which led to one group of people (a small minority) acquiring money seeking profitable investment and another group (the vast majority) of landless people seeking to sell their ability to work to get money to buy what they needed to survive.

Capitalism has now spread all over the world. It is still a system of production by workers employed for a wage or salary by those who own means of production and working to produce wealth for sale with a view to their profit.

He mentions Thomas Piketty's book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* which, he says, 'shows how the gap between rich and poor is widening dangerously' and adds 'but even he thinks outright anti-capitalism is nonsense'. He goes on:

'Most figures of political and intellectual influence agree that his proposals (including a global confiscation tax on the absurdly rich) are unfeasibly idealistic.'

It is not clear whether or not this is another joke at the expense of defenders of capitalism. In any event, it is true that Piketty's proposals are 'unfeasible' as capitalism can't be reformed to stop the rich getting richer. That's a by-product of the accumulation of capital out of profits which is what capitalism is all about.

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US-Mexico border running through the town of Nogales

MIGRANTS, HOPING to find a better life, face death during various stages of their journey, and with destination in sight, face the possibility of being picked up by border guards, detained indefinitely and in most cases deported back to their homeland. Those lucky enough to avoid death or capture then enter into a world of uncertainty, where they are likely to work in low-wage labour, forming an under-class of Europe and North America. People who have risked everything to escape the dire life that they were born into will not be dissuaded by the threat of death or detention and deportation.

It is only going to get worse as the effects of climate change are already impacting upon the growing migration trends. 2.8 million people are struggling to feed themselves in a drought-prone area shared by Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua, according to the UN World Food Programme. The Red Cross said some 571,710 people were affected by the drought in Honduras and that '...families are selling their belongings and livestock to secure food for survival, while others are migrating to escape the effects of the drought.' Researchers believe drought, amplified by deforestation, was a key factor in the collapse of the Mayan empire around 950 C.E.

When the UK Government announced they will not support any future search and rescue operations to prevent migrants and refugees drowning in the Mediterranean, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, François Crépeau, responded:

'Governments that do not support the search and rescue efforts have reduced themselves to the same level as the smugglers. They are preying on the precariousness of the migrants and asylum seekers, robbing them of their dignity and playing with their lives.'

He went on to say: 'Migrants are human beings and just like the rest of us they too have rights. They too have the right to live and thrive. To bank on the rise in the number of dead migrants to act as deterrence for future migrants and asylum seekers is appalling. It's like saying, let them die because this is a good deterrence.'

He cast doubt upon its deterrence 'Sealing international borders is impossible, and migrants will continue arriving

despite all efforts to stop them, at a terrible cost in lives and suffering.' (www.scoop.co.nz/stories, 31 October).

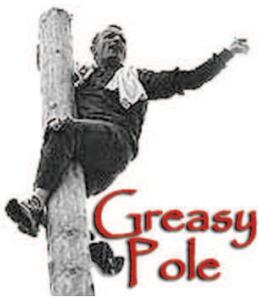
This view has been supported by Italy's Admiral Filippo Foffi who dismissed the idea that having a rescue system 'Mare Nostrum' for migrants in place has created a pull factor: 'If someone is talking about pull factors, he simply doesn't know what he is speaking about,' he said, adding that that many refugees' journeys start more than three months before they make it to the shores of Libya and northern Africa with the majority enduring hardships that meant an estimated half die before reaching the coast (*Guardian*, 29 October).

America's war on illegal immigration with its higher, longer fences and intensified border patrol surveillance merely provides business for the people smugglers. Peter Andreas in his 2001 study, 'Border Games', pointed out that reliance on human traffickers emerged only in response to the US government's border build-up in the 1990s, and not a product of porous borders where people would just walk across on their own and not bother with procuring the services of a smuggler. In 2005, Phil Marshall and Susu Thatunon on the basis of their extensive study of anti-trafficking experience in the six-nation SE-Asia region explained 'tighter border controls exacerbate trafficking...'. (*Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered*).

No matter their reason for leaving the country of their birth, as an asylum seeker or as an economic refugee, record numbers are dying in this process. Yet their deaths and desperation receive muted responses from the politicians who prefer to whinge about how migrants are scrounging from the welfare state, despite the fact that the vast majority of people move home to work and not claim benefits.

For millennia there were no borders, nor countries or nationalities - people wandered freely over the planet. Who are we, each one of us, if not a mongrel species of mixed ethnicities? It's long past time to recognise our common heritage globally and work for a world shared in common. The rich, including African oligarchs, can as always live anywhere they choose (*Guardian*, 26 October).

ALJO



Slags and swamps

TO GET on in what they see as their exclusive world a politician should popularise a word or phrase by which they can be readily identified and

remembered – even if it turns out to work against them. Like Tony Blair and ‘education, education, education...’ Or David Cameron and ‘We are all in this together’... And Theresa May, when she was in opposition and usually relying on her flowery shoes to promote herself, telling the Tory conference that they had earned themselves the title of ‘The Nasty Party’ (although recently her Minister of State Lib Dem Norman Baker resigned because he had found that working for her was ‘like walking through mud’ – which may turn out to be *his* exclusive phrase). And with that same preoccupation with mud there has been the persistently striving Defence Secretary Michael Fallon uttering a warning about the British people being ‘swamped’ by an influx of immigrants which makes them feel that they are ‘...under siege with large numbers of migrant workers and people claiming benefits’.

Blunkett

These comments, just when Nigel Farage is grinning so boozily and hopefully on the side-lines, did not appeal to David Cameron. Naturally he had to step up to defend Fallon, if only because he had so recently promoted him: ‘It is right for politicians to raise concerns about immigration but we should always choose our language carefully’ he advised the Commons. Less heartening for Fallon would have been the support from one of Labour’s most spectacular ministerial failures: ‘I believe both Michael Fallon and I were right to speak out on the issue’ offered ex-Home Secretary David Blunkett in the *Daily Mail*, also suggesting that all UK citizens should be expected to be able to speak English and restricted to benefits based on what they have ‘contributed’ to the country. Whatever changes Blunkett has been through since he was relieved of the stress of ministerial life have not included any development of insight or socially therapeutic thinking.

Rottweiler

In spite of the risks that another speech from him may have stimulated more responses like Blunkett’s, Fallon did his best to apologise, confessing to Radio Five listeners that ‘I misspoke yesterday, I used words I wouldn’t normally have used’. He did not expand on his use of ‘normally’, which might have raised the matter of his reputation, which helped so much towards his promotion as ‘The Thinking Man’s Rottweiler’. And he made no comment on his use of the word ‘swamp’ with its connotations of a cruelly prolonged, widely destructive and epidemical disaster. Was it related to his background as an ardent ‘No Turning Back’ devotee of the Iron Lady (who herself in 1978 gave voice to her thoughts about ‘... people are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture’)? Years later, as Thatcher was being ousted from Number Ten, Fallon called on her to try to convince her that ‘all was not lost’. At first he was turned away, told that she was too busy but when she knew he had called she

had him brought back to make his obeisances. On the anniversary of that day, which is stubbornly celebrated by some of the areas laid waste by the harsher poverty under Thatcher governments, Fallon demonstrates his unchanging devotion to her memory by wearing a black tie.

Defence

Fallon was first elected in 1983, he lost that seat in 1992 but came back, for Sevenoaks in Kent, in 1997. He was soon embarked on a ministerial career, probably in recognition of his talents as a ‘fire-fighter’ to douse any smouldering rebels on the Tory benches. His big chance has been his promotion to his present job as Minister of Defence, after only two years in Business and Enterprise. In his time he has held a series of directorships one of which was in brokers Tullett Prebon, a major donor to the Tory Party and involved in the FSA investigation into what in the City is bashfully called malpractice such as the notorious LIBOR interest fixing operation. Another interest of Fallon has been Quality Care Homes whose comforting title overlays its reputation for paying its workers less than the proposed minimum wage and its low assessment on some matters by the Care Quality Commission.

Slag

For a couple of years leading up to Thatcher’s resignation Fallon was a Tory Whip, so that experienced Members had to learn how to handle him while aware that, as one of them put it, ‘...If he said that everything is going swimmingly’ he was actually saying ‘It’s a fucking disaster’. One example of what was on that Honourable Member’s mind was an incident soon after the Tory victory in 2010, when Cameron was strutting his stuff as the leader of a ‘female friendly’ government. It involved one Bryony Gordon, a journalist who had worked for the *Daily Telegraph* and whose material and style was represented by the title of one of her major autobiographical works *The Wrong Knickers; A Decade Of Chaos*. She was at a leaving party in a ‘grotty bar’ in Westminster when Fallon, who had been drinking at another party, arrived and told her that she was a ‘slag’. The uproar, inflamed by Gordon, was not appeased by Fallon’s minders assuring everyone that he had used the word ‘slattern’ – a distinction too fine to be of any help to the floundering minister. In another incident a couple of years later Fallon arrived at a Christmas party thrown by a wealthy Tory MP. He was an uninvited guest and had already been drinking. He quickly clamped himself to a young woman noticeable in a dramatic party dress. Again it was necessary for him to be extracted by a minder, anxious because the woman was employed by the Russian energy industry while Fallon was the Minister of State for Energy.

As they approach their final general election the Cameron government will intensify their campaign to re-write history by convincing us that they are in progress to cure the blundering chaos of the Labour government. This, they will argue, is due to their insightful policies and sublime personalities. Included in this will be Michael Fallon, now revealing himself in a ministry where his earliest predecessor Liam Fox slipped from a strong contender as a future leader into obscurity. The politics of capitalism will always be scattered with miserable, exposed failures.

IVAN



Michael Fallon

Fear, HATE and Greed

Capitalism is riddled with fear. Fear of its ever present wars. Fear of crime and criminals. Fear of being alone. Fear of being consumed by personal debt. The divisive fear of immigrants. And the fear common to all who are compelled to work for wages – the fear of unemployment.

Fear and hate are frequent bedfellows and Josef Goebbels, the master of Nazi state propaganda, knew exactly where to exploit those emotions when he affirmed: 'Think of the press as a great keyboard on which the government can play'. Where state benefits are concerned the media has peddled hate to the fearful – pounding the keyboard with glee. Cutting back



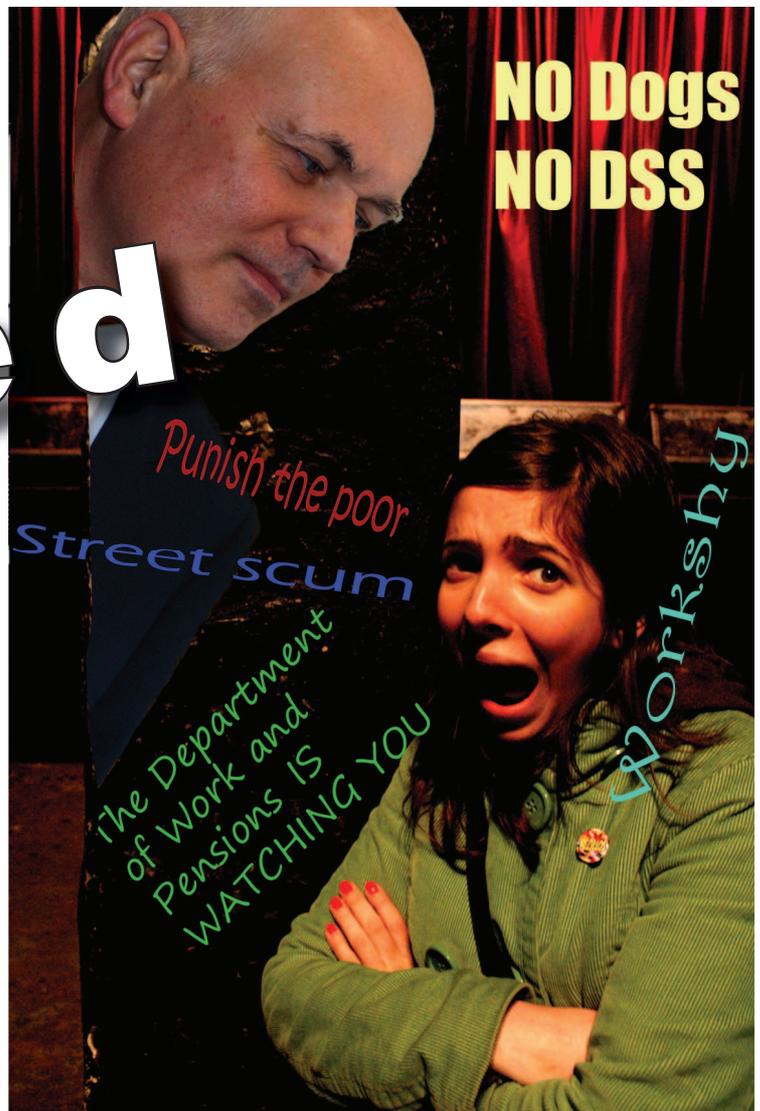
on benefits when capitalism is in crisis is nothing new. During capitalism's last depression those workers who had paid into the scheme received the dole for 15 weeks. The National Government, another coalition, cut the benefits of those on the scheme who were unemployed by 10 percent leaving them to rot alongside the other millions relying on poor law relief. In August of 1931 means testing the unemployed was implemented. Underpinning the poor laws and its sibling, the dole, are the deeply entrenched ruling class ideas of making claiming benefits so, 'unpleasant that, people would not claim it, stigmatising relief so that it became an object of wholesome horror' (wikipedia.org). Governments, whether claiming to be left, right or centre have been cutting benefits since the post-war boom of the 1970's ended. And the reason why? Because they are a charge on profits, and thus detrimental to the real orchestrators of the tune and the owners of the keyboard – the capitalist class.

Handouts and handouts

The words benefits and scrounger have become conjoined. Goebbels would have been proud of the media hacks who have slavishly followed his guidelines: 'The

most brilliant propagandist technique will yield no success unless one fundamental principle is borne in mind constantly – it must confine itself to a few points and repeat them over and over'. Thus the fearful have been given their slogan and its corollary is revealed in, 'a YouGov survey which shows: Up to 212,000 have been physically attacked because they're on benefits' (mirror.co.uk, 8 September).

Benefits, dole, and handouts are what is made available to the unemployed, and those surviving on low wages. Subsidies, funding and support are invested by the state in corporations. A report written for the TUC entitled '*The Great Train Robbery*' showed, amongst other things, that the, 'train operating companies are entirely reliant upon public subsidies to run services. The top five recipients alone received almost £3bn in taxpayer support between 2007 and 2011. This allowed them to make operating profits of £504m - over 90 per cent (£466m) of which was paid to shareholders' (tuc.org.uk, 5 June 2013). Publicfinance.co.uk can report that the total government subsidy to the railway businesses now stands at £4bn per year (16 April). With just a small slice of the subsidy benefitting 'a top executive from Network Rail who will become head of construction. . . on an annual salary



of £750,000, making him one of the country's best paid public servants' (ft.com, 17 January).

'The private finance initiative (PFI) is a way of creating public-private partnerships (PPPs) by funding public infrastructure projects with private capital' (wikipedia.org). Benefitting from this is a clique of banks, builders and service providers who build, and sometimes run, schools, hospitals and related public projects. And the benefits to the clique: state payouts over a 20 or 30 year period. However, 'PFI has been controversial in the UK; though the National Audit Office felt in 2003 that it provided good value for money overall' (wikipedia.org). Not so thought the disenchanted Treasury Secretary Vince Cable six years later: 'The whole thing has become terrible, opaque and dishonest and it's a way of hiding obligations. . . PFI has now largely broken down and we are in the ludicrous situation where the government is having to provide the funds for the private finance initiative' (bbc.co.uk, 3 March). And the funds continue to flow to those that benefit: 'As of 2013, it was forecast that 725 PFI contracts for public facilities across the UK, with a total capital value of £54bn, will cost the Exchequer more than £300bn by the time they are paid off' (newstatesman.com, 20 February).

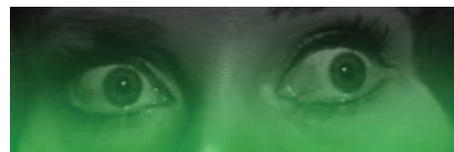
Mindfulmoney.co.uk's headline asked the question, 'What is the cost to the UK taxpayer of supporting our banks'? It answered itself by referring to The National Audit Office's estimate: 'it peaked according to the NAO at £1.162 trillion' (17 July, 2013). Support? Obviously, this isn't the same as Income Support, which currently is awarded, after means testing, to a couple aged over 18 at £113.70p per week. Some commentators are more impolite and call it a bail-out. One of the main beneficiaries in the UK was the Royal Bank of Scotland which is labelled by the media as 'our bank'. 'We' own 82 per cent of it after the state invested £37 billion of its funds in October 2008. But, dear oh dear, 'our' investment has lost a few quid even after more funds were invested. That scourge of the benefits scroungers *The Daily Mail* could run the headline, 'RBS has lost all the £46bn pumped in by the taxpayer'. The editor got out his calculator to let his fretful readers know that, 'In total, the lender has since paid out £4.6 billion in bonuses – £1 billion for every £10 billion it has lost'. Also included in the £46 billion was, 'a £3.8bn bill for customer mis-selling' (27 February). Note the word bill. That couldn't be a fine like those slapped on a benefit scrounger and imposed by the state law courts could it?

Swindlers and swindlers

Such as the case against, 'a mother of three who was jailed for five months for swindling more than £70,000 in

benefits... DWP Minister Lord Freud said: In addition to the sentence imposed by the court, the department always seeks to recover the benefits falsely obtained, to ensure that fraudsters do not benefit financially from their criminal activities' (*Bristol Post*, 6 June 2011). Or a man who gained notoriety via the BBC news site for 'falsely claiming £28,332 in disability benefits. . . Judge Recorder Richard Booth said the offences were disgraceful and so serious that a prison sentence was necessary (3 November). Or, 'a man who stole to eat after his benefits were stopped. . . admitting stealing three packets of casserole steak. . . after changes to his benefits left him hungry. . .he pleaded guilty to stealing the food, worth £12.60, and was sentenced to six weeks in prison (*The Northern Echo*, 22 October).

RT.com on the 28 October reported on a speech by the BoE Deputy Governor, Nemet Minouche Shafik who, 'denounced the actions of UK traders in foreign exchange, currencies and bonds markets, warning financial misconduct in these sectors goes well beyond a few rogue financiers. . . the BoE's deputy governor said the tired argument that financial misconduct relates to the behaviour of a 'few bad apples' is no longer credible. Shafik suggested UK financial regulation lacks efficacy and robustness, and a regulatory overhaul is needed to fix the barrel and to get rid of the bad apples'. This statement acts as a sop to a very long list of so-called financial misconducts amongst an elite that has made the news, albeit unsensationally, since 2008. Misconduct such as the extremely beneficial practice amongst banks of mortgage selling



about which Dean Baker, economist and director of the Centre for Economic & Policy Research said, 'Knowingly packaging and selling fraudulent mortgages is fraud. It is a serious crime that could be punished by years in jail' – However – 'No senior bank executive has faced criminal charges following the mortgage crisis'. William D. Cohan, a former senior mergers and acquisitions banker, wrote in the *New York Times* that 'not only has the government barely punished those on the hook for Wall Street crimes, the Justice Department has also offered 'sanitized' versions of events that led up to the crimes in its accounts given to the public following investigations (rt.com, 22 August). So Nemet, looks like there might be a few barriers in place when it comes to fixing the barrel. Or maybe that's just on Wall Street?

It's easy under capitalism, given all of its contradictions, to see the whole thing as some sort of lunatic asylum. But a better comparison is a prison run by the most proficient thieves. The media is utilised like the pickpocket that directs your attention elsewhere whilst another robs you. One of the things that is stolen is your capacity to think like a human being. Fear, hate and greed permeate the prison walls. But the prison isn't escape-proof. All it takes to get out is to decide that is what you want to do, and join with others working to bring down the prison walls.

ANDY MATTHEWS



Hopes dashed on a Northern Rock

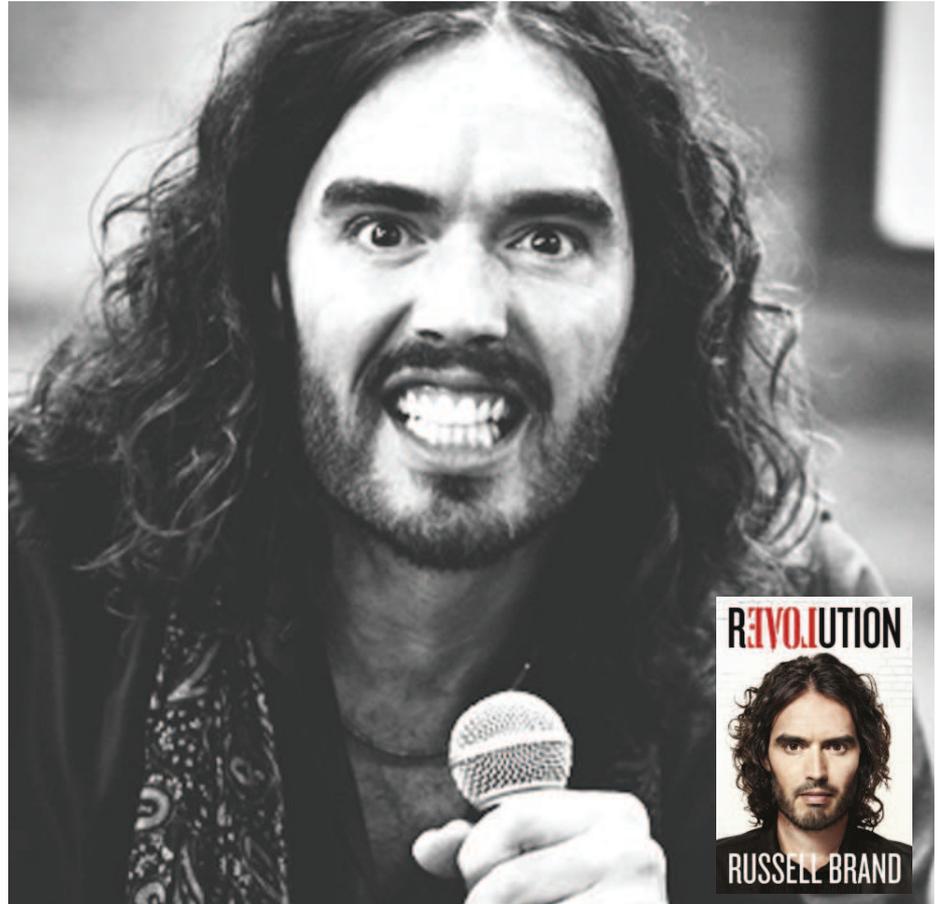
An Open Letter To Russell Brand

On his book, "Revolution", Century, 2014

First, how do I come to be reading your book, *Revolution*? I have spent the past thirty years arguing the point whenever and however I could, that world capitalism has to be ended. Not just in its most excessive manifestations, not just when it is run for private corporations and shareholders as opposed to state bureaucracies, but in every conceivable form it might take. How can you tell if the system in operation is capitalism? With a simple check-list. Employment – the exploitation of employees (French for the 'used') by employers (users) via the legalised robbery of the wages system. The market; in other words, the buying and selling of things which could instead now be created in such abundance that they could be taken freely by anyone in the global population, without the need for any system of money, vouchers, tokens, barter or trade of any kind whatsoever. Also, state power: governments, armies, police, who enforce the class rule by a tiny fraction of the population who own and control all productive resources.

Your book is disarmingly honest about your past, your faults, your flaws, thought processes, previous ambitions and resulting disillusion, the sources of your unhappiness, your latest hopes and desires, your continuing self-doubt, your determination to continue speaking and writing uncompromisingly and unashamedly what you believe to be true, and your refusal to give in to the pressure from snobs and hypocrites. These are people who have often attempted to silence your expression by mocking almost everything about you from your accent to your origins, your supposed lack of education, your poverty, your wealth, your hair, your profession – and, when all else fails, by misquoting, misrepresenting and distorting the ideas you express.

I hope it will make a refreshing change to have it suggested that, far from advocating the impossible or going beyond the thinkable, rather that you need to go one step further by demanding the so-called 'impossible'. Your book is a brave step in promoting discussion of revolution to end the capitalist system we have throughout the world today. You make several cogent and absolutely essential points which



Russell Brand with, inset, his book *Revolution*

are not only true, they cry out to be endorsed and adopted by the thousands who have already read your book – and the millions of others who would relate to so much of it. Points such as:

1. Do not vote – IF there is nothing worth voting for. Do not feel obliged to give moral and practical consent to the status quo by endorsing it, through voting into power one of several parties, each of which are openly pledged to defending, running and upholding that status quo in one form or another. Most of your opponents in the wake of that Paxman interview conveniently ignored the second half of this proposition, pretending that you had some kind of bizarre antipathy to the concept of voting, under any circumstances. More heinous still was their subtle exclusion of even the possibility of allowing a different way of running society: 'you have Labour, Tory, Liberals. Lots of ways of running Capitalism. What more do you want? Now get out there and vote for one of those! And be damn grateful for having this wonderful choice once every five years!' runs their mantra.

2. Global society is currently organised in a way which is designed purely to benefit a tiny (even less than one percent) minority, who have unfathomable wealth and power, who own and control the Earth and its resources – and who in doing so are depriving the 99 percent of access to the riches and comforts those resources have to offer us all. This is an insane, anti-social, irrational, illogical, unacceptable premise and starting point on which to found our global society. It is therefore urgently in our interests as that majority to end that regime completely and utterly, now. Another word for such a huge and urgent change in the way society is run is revolution, so clearly the fact that this is needed is beyond dispute.

3. There are many ways in which the present organisation of society like a vast prison camp (disguised as a holiday camp) causes unhappiness, suffering and distress – way beyond the crudely economic aspects of poverty, crucial and painful though those are too.

Terms like alienation, epidemics like addiction are easy to dismiss as in the first case abstract waffle and in the second a poor choice made by (millions of) individuals. However, these are in fact very real, almost universal side-effects of the global social system we have. Indeed, for many people in the huge cities of the more 'developed' parts of the world – like London or New York – these are some of the most powerful prompts which drive many of us to question the way society is currently structured. The one percent are devoted to maximising the surplus they extract from the work of the rest of us, and this in turn depends on them maintaining a certain social landscape, the consumer culture, the stifling of true dissent, the separation of people from one another and from themselves.

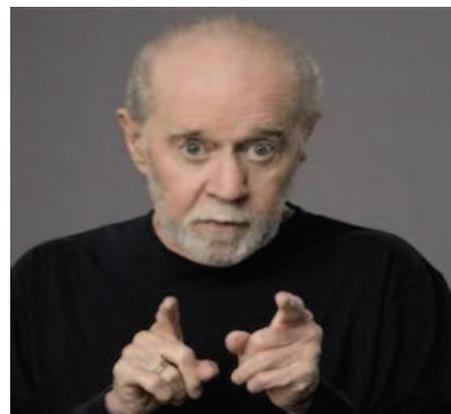
As your book progresses, you draw on input from a variety of activists and social thinkers. Some are more credible than others. One of the more compelling is Naomi Klein, with her brilliant expose of the stark choice now forced on us, between saving capitalism and saving the planet as a viable ecosystem or human habitat, and she shows incontrovertibly how incompatible the two are.

In eventually sketching a plurality of 'alternatives', however, you may be unwittingly over-complicating the situation. There are not 'loads' of alternatives; the one key issue causing all significant social problems is the way we organise society – the system of minority ownership and production for profit. The solution, the one solution, to this is therefore common ownership and production for use. That means no money, banks, finance – and no 'co-operatives' selling goods in the market. Free access to all, for all! From each according to ability, to each according to need – *one* worldwide co-operative society, no buying and selling.

Some notes you quote about the virtues of co-ops mention 'raising capital', 'job opportunities' and making agreements with governments. But the revolution to get rid of capitalism has to mean getting rid of capital, government, finance, money, 'jobs' – all parts of the capitalist way of running world society. Of course, on paper, the idea of having thousands of autonomous co-operatives, each run democratically within itself, and engaging fairly with all the other units sounds a lot more just and pleasant than the current control of the world, its resources and

its population by a tiny, powerful minority of less than one percent of the population. But if we are talking about ending that, then let's end it. All these models and reforms are variations on the market system which, if ever pursued, would inevitably lead us eventually back to where we started. The solution is for us to withdraw our consent from capitalism, as you say – but to create instead a society *without* ownership, in which the whole world and all its resources becomes the common heritage of all humanity.

Of course, this necessitates all of the democratic aspects of administration which you touch on, local, regional and continental, but the key point is that these are ways for the world's population to run a planet *no longer divided into owners and non-owners*. In the model of separate co-ops which you settle



Sun worshipper: George Carlin

on at the end of the journey in your book, you do not go far enough – after all, if each co-op autonomously owns its resources then those outside that co-op are still alienated from the resources in it. You still then have money, trade, competition, separation – and the certainty of corruption, accumulation and minority power again flourishing.

You emphasise your belief in God. Connecting with our true selves and connecting with one another are positive parts of the revolutionary ending of property-based society. Belief in an all-powerful, all-knowing, benevolent force outside of ourselves is significantly less helpful in creating the freedom from oppression to which we aspire. On this I would be more inclined toward the healthy cynicism of the late, great American comedian George Carlin:

I've begun worshipping the Sun for a number of reasons. First of all, unlike some other gods I could mention, I can see the Sun. It's there for me every day. And the things it

brings me are quite apparent all the time: heat, light, food, a lovely day. There's no mystery, no one asks for money, I don't have to dress up, and there's no boring pageantry. And interestingly enough, I have found that the prayers I offer to the sun and the prayers I formerly offered to God are all answered at about the same 50-percent rate.'

You rightly describe as mere 'pipsqueak reformism' the Swedish workers' shares schemes (which in fact are a means of co-opting the impoverished majority into supervising our own exploitation). In one of your final chapters, you then make a list of demands which includes, for example, 'State power to dissolve wherever possible to empower autonomous, democratic communities.' Wherever possible? Although I have no doubt of your sincerity in sketching possibilities for what we construct in place of the wretched system we currently have, I would strongly urge you to reconsider the wisdom of listing multiple 'realistic' steps as the culmination of a book so rich in its often poetic damning of current social relations. The biggest tragedy in history, already played out myriad times, is this lowering of expectations as the first slippery slope back to cynicism and misery.

I recognise the courage and honesty with which you have put yourself on the line, derided your own celebrity status, taken on Paxman and others and often left them in gibbering defensiveness. Your regular podcasts, "The Trews" are a welcome window into reality without the twisting and obfuscation, the bullshit mediation of the media. In many ways it has been a breath of fresh air to see those hilarious and perceptive insights into the madness of capitalism viewed regularly by hundreds of thousands of people.

Let's now take the next logical step and build a majority movement committed to the complete ending of capitalism, in all of its forms, with all of its trappings, and nothing less. On page 297 of your book you slightly misquote Marx in a way which could be significant. You say 'From each according to his means, to each according to his needs'. On Twitter last year, however, you correctly quoted it as 'from each according to ability, to each according to needs'. It was never about redistributing money, but abolishing it – and Marx's slogan is even more relevant today than it was 150 years ago.

CLIFFORD SLAPPER

How Capitalist Dumb-ocracy Deals with Vital Questions

The Japanese government is keen to restart the country's nuclear reactors without real public debate

The 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, like any great crisis in society, laid bare the half-hidden—or 'half-forgotten'—truths of capitalism. People in Japan and around the world were reminded of how companies sacrifice safety in pursuit of profit; how politicians are bought off by those companies; and how capitalists treat the victims of disasters as so much collateral damage.

The aftermath of the disaster has also revealed just how narrow democracy is under capitalism. This has become clear in the way decisions are being made on whether to restart some of Japan's 48 nuclear reactors. The question of whether the reactors are safe enough to be restarted is of great concern to people living in Japan, but, as is so often the case under capitalism, the decision is not really in their hands.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority, a new administrative body formed in 2012 by merging the Nuclear Safety Commission and Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, is tasked with the approval of the applications submitted by energy companies to restart reactors. The government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is quite happy to have the NRA take direct responsibility for the decision, not only to avoid blame in the case of another disaster but also to foster the impression that the decision is being made on a strictly scientific basis, in line with the stricter safety regulations introduced in June 2013.

The new rules call for the construction of sea walls to protect plants from the largest tsunami anticipated and the installation of filters to remove radioactive substances vented from reactor cores during an emergency. The rules also require the installation of a separate

control room to operate the reactor in the event of a disaster. But certain 'grace periods' are allowed for companies to operate reactors before meeting some of these requirements.

In July, the NRA issued its preliminary approval for restarting the two reactors at the Sendai Nuclear Plant in the southern prefecture of Kagoshima, operated by Kyushu Electric Power Co. The final decision will be made by the NRA after verifying the required design changes at the plant and its operating structure.

The government recognizes, however, that a decision made by the NRA alone would lack credibility in the eyes of many, so the approval process also calls for a certain degree of consent among those living near the nuclear plant. But that local approval (or disapproval) is not legally binding in any way—and it is limited to the city where the plant is located (Satsumasendai) and the Kagoshima prefectural assembly.

In essence, this 'informal approval' is just a fig leaf to cover the fact that the decision has been reached by the NRA commissioners (appointed by the Prime Minister) that the Sendai plant should be restarted.

As expected, the Kagoshima prefectural assembly approved the restarting of the reactors on 7 November (by a vote of 38 to 9). The same day, the governor of the prefecture, Yuichiro Ito, backed the decision—although he tried to sidestep his own responsibility by calling the decision 'unavoidable' and claiming that the central government would assume final responsibility in the case of an emergency.

Prior to that approval, the municipal assembly and the mayor of Satsumasendai approved the decision to restart the plant, on 27 October. It was a

foregone conclusion that the city would approve the decision since it receives a massive annual subsidy of roughly ¥1.2 billion (£6.6m) a year, as well as another ¥400 million (£2.2m) for a nuclear fuel tax.

Of course, in the case of a disaster, the fallout would certainly not be limited to Satsumasendai. There are in fact eight other municipalities located within a 30km radius of the plant. But, unlike the host city, they receive few subsidies related to the nuclear plant.

The town of Ichikikushikino, with a population of 30,000, is as close as just 5km from the plant in some places, yet only receives a subsidy of ¥90 million a year (£495,000 - less than 1 percent of its annual income). Given the risks it faces, the town's residents had asked to be included in the informal approval process. The request was turned down for fear of opposition; and in fact half of the residents later signed a petition opposing the restarting of the Sendai plant.

Along with the bogus 'approval' process at the local level, the NRA held a series of 'town hall meetings' in October to reassure residents in Kagoshima of the safety of the Sendai plant. But the number of participants at those meetings was limited and they were not allowed to record the proceedings or ask questions regarding evacuation plans.

The way the government has sought to limit public input and evade criticism extends to the choice of the Sendai nuclear plant to begin the safety screening process. The plant's location in Kagoshima made it an obvious choice for a number of reasons, despite the fact that its reactors are 30 years old.

First of all, the prefecture is a long-standing stronghold of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. Currently, 70 percent of the assembly members are LDP-



Nuclear power stations in Japan. Opposite: Sendai after the tsunami

affiliated. From a simple geographic perspective, the decision also made sense to the Abe administration, since Kagoshima is far removed from Fukushima and from Tokyo, which is the center of a powerful anti-nuclear movement.

Another factor is that Kyushu Electric is one of the regional utility companies that is still in the red, with losses of ¥36.5 billion (£200m) in the first quarter of fiscal 2014 (compared to the ¥52.5 billion profit of Tokyo Electric posted for that same period). This means that the company plausibly can make the argument that the restarting of its nuclear plants is vital to its business.

Other utility companies had been making that argument in trying to get their reactors back online, while also threatening consumers with higher

rates and their own workers with lower wages (and making good on both threats), but now that these companies are profitable again despite the nuclear shutdown, their 'good-for-business' argument has become a bit harder to swallow.

Prime Minister Abe seems to hope that once the Sendai plant is approved, the decision can serve as the template for approving reactors in other prefectures, including those where the conditions are less favorable to his administration. In other words, the approval process is

proceeding according to a political—not a scientific—logic, with more attention paid to massaging public opinion than ensuring public safety.

The basic argument of the government on the need for nuclear power comes down to profit- or 'economic growth', to use the favored expression. The problem, though, is that the Japanese public is aware that even in the heyday of nuclear power, when most of the reactors were up and running, providing around 30 percent of Japan's overall energy supplies, the economy was not exactly booming. And those who have reflected a bit more on their own life experiences, if they have lived long enough, would know that economic growth is no guarantee of better living conditions for workers.

It is true that Japan is a country that lacks energy resources, forcing it to import more oil and gas in the absence of nuclear power. This is a situation that would be faced even in a post-capitalist world. But under capitalism the objective or scientific aspect of the problem is intertwined with the question of profitability, so that the debate is always limited by that reality. This makes it hard to distinguish between the technically and the economically feasible.

Today, the debate over what safety measures are possible or whether more renewable energy can be generated come down to a question of money, not pure science. In a socialist world, people living in Japan could finally have a rational debate on how to generate enough energy for their own needs. The conclusion might be reached that the benefits of nuclear energy to Japan outweigh its obvious risks. But that would be a decision the community could reach democratically, weighing all of the evidence. No such democratic process exists in Japan or anywhere else today, nor could it exist under a system that revolves around profit.

MIKE SCHAUERTE



Japan wind and solar plants - viable alternatives?

The war in Ukraine

The second in our three-part series on wars currently going on due to capitalism

The Ukraine Defence Minister stated 'A great war has arrived at our doorstep, the likes of which Europe has not seen since World War Two' (*Independent*, 2 September). The war in Ukraine in 2014 rose out of the 'Euromaidan' protests in Kiev in November 2013 when Ukraine under pressure from Russia backed out of a trade deal: the Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with the European Union. For the pro-European Ukrainians EU membership is seen as synonymous with democracy as opposed to membership of Russia's Customs Union: the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC) which also includes Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Armenia. The divisions in Ukraine are basically a conflict between two groups of the capitalist class over the choice of the external orientation of the country; toward Europe or toward Russia. As a carrot Russia promised Ukraine \$15 billion in loans and 30 per cent discount on natural gas prices.

Ukraine is the 'bread basket of Europe' with its extensive

fertile farmlands of rich black soil (chornozem black earth) and the vast fields of wheat, barley, rye, oats, sunflower, beets and other grain and oil crops. In 2011, it was the world's third-largest grain exporter, and according to a 2013 forecast by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Ukraine is poised to become the world's second biggest grain exporter in the world, shipping over 30 million tonnes of grain out of the country last year. Ukraine also has a well-developed manufacturing sector, particularly in aerospace and industrial equipment, nuclear power generation and hydroelectric generation, an advanced rocket systems industry plus the old industries from the Soviet period of coal mining, steel, and metals. It also has its own proven, significant, but yet totally undeveloped shale gas reserves.

East or West?

For the Russian capitalist class Ukraine is the 'near abroad' and therefore within the sphere of influence of Russia. On 28 February Crimea (given to Ukraine in 1954)

was occupied by Russia. Since the 1700s it has been the base of Russia's Black Sea Fleet but since Ukrainian independence in 1991 the base in Crimea has been leased from Ukraine, and the leasing agreement was due to expire in 2017, and unlikely to be renewed. This would have meant Russia not having a warm water port giving access to the Mediterranean and via the Suez Canal to the Indian Ocean. A great deal of Crimean real estate is Russian-owned, in late February Russia's Ministry of Economic Development called on Russian capitalists to invest \$5 billion in infrastructural projects in Crimea. Gazprom is interested in rich oil and gas deposits off the Crimean coast, as are such western companies as Exxon, Shell and ENI. In April Chevron signed a 50-year lease to develop Ukraine's shale gas reserves which probably stoked Russian fears about losing its influence in Ukraine and as a major gas market. *International Business Times* (8 November 2013) wrote that 'Chevron's agreement with Ukraine was supported by the US as part of

The 'Euromaidan' protests of 2013



its national security strategy to help reduce Russia's hold on Europe and Kiev.'

In April pro-Russian separatists in the Eastern Ukrainian provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk declared themselves 'independent' of Kiev as the People's Republic of Donetsk. Russia in a throwback to Tsarist times refers to the disputed areas of south-eastern Ukraine as Novorossiia. In six months of fighting 3,000 people have been killed. This area includes the old heartland of Soviet industry with its concentration of coal and steel production; the Don coal basin known as the Donbass. Essentially Russia wants the Donbass as a 'protectorate' so that

distressed civil society with weakened political institutions' (*Bloomberg.com* 28 January). In March the IMF authorised an \$18 billion loan to Ukraine over two years, and the World Bank coughed up \$3.5 billion, both designed to stop Ukraine defaulting on interest payments on its foreign debt. The hryvnia (Ukraine's currency) has lost 35 per cent of its value against the dollar since the beginning of 2014.

Ukraine has not recovered economically from the world capitalist crisis of 2008-09 and further austerity is required, nay demanded by the IMF as a condition of its loans. The IMF want 'commitment from the country

higher gas prices which are projected to rise by 50 per cent in 2014 and by 120 per cent at the end of four years, rising inflation, an increase in unemployment, and a decline in the standard of living for the Ukrainian working class.

The economic crisis hasn't affected the profits of Rinat Akhmetov, the richest man in Ukraine (assets of up to \$28.4 billion), his company DTEK controls half of Ukraine's coal, steel, iron ore and thermoelectric industries, and is the largest employer in the Donbass. A Russian oligarch Abramov owns the mining company EVRAZ. The coal industry in Ukraine is affected by a crisis of over production which was identified in the trade magazine *Coal Age* in December 2013: 'A production surplus in 2013 has hurt the Ukrainian coal industry which needs to reduce the level of production, and in addition, has even decided to temporarily close about 17 per cent of all mines in the country. Ukraine is the fourth largest coal producer in Europe after Russia, Germany and Poland. The Ukrainian coal industry is believed to have 4 per cent of world coal reserves, or 33.9 billion Mt of proven reserves. This is enough to maintain the level of coal mining for 2012 in the country for almost 400 years.'

As always in capitalist crises, the working class are made to pay for the failures of the capitalist system. Ukrainian miners in the Independent Trade Union of Miners at the EVRAZ-owned Krivvi Rih iron ore mine in the Kryvbas (iron ore basin) near Dnepropetrovsk in Eastern Ukraine are fighting to defend their interests as workers against attacks by the capitalist class who are seeking to make redundancies, and 30 to 50 per cent cut in their real wages. The miners oppose Ukrainian nationalism and Russian separatist ideology and concentrate on fighting against 'the never-ceasing encroachments of capital' (*Marx Value, Price and Profit*), but the miners have had to establish self-defence militias to defend themselves against intimidation, and attacks by lumpen elements called 'Tatushka' recruited by the Russian separatists. Essentially these are gangs of thugs organised by mine bosses to crush organised workers before the region can be absorbed into the petro-oligarchy and anarchic-capitalist state that is Russia.

Sanctions

Because of Russia's involvement in Ukraine, the western capitalist powers have imposed sanctions on



Ukraine can never join NATO or fully orient its foreign policy westward. The loss of the Donbass region which accounts for 16 per cent of GDP and 27 per cent of industrial production would be a disaster for Ukraine, whose economy will contract 7 per cent this year and may not expand at all in 2015 according to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (*Russia Today* 14 May). In August the war expanded when a new war front opened on the coast where pro-Russian separatists took Novoazovsk, a small town on the way to the strategic port city of Mariupol on the Sea of Azov.

The economic war between Russia and Ukraine meant that Russian loans were frozen in January, the price of gas to Ukraine was raised by 80 per cent in April, and Russia insisted that Ukraine pay a \$2.7 billion gas debt or it would halt natural gas supplies. Also Ukraine had a foreign debt of \$135 billion in 2012 with \$13 billion due to be paid in 2014 mostly to European banks, and another \$10 billion due in 2015. Standard & Poor cut Ukraine's credit rating describing it as 'a

Above: gas pipelines through Ukraine. Below: civilian dead



to undertake painful austerity measures, tough reforms and a near-certain recession as a result' (*The Times*, 25 February) while *Reuters* called it 'some harsh economic medicine' (5 March). This will mean cutting fuel subsidies, government spending, pensions, and wage freezes for workers. All this will lead to



Russia's capitalist economy with its large energy reserves (oil and natural gas represent 68 per cent of Russia's total exports). These commodities are under pressure as new and cheaper supplies come onto the market, and crude oil prices worldwide hit a nine month low in August.

Russian capitalists targeted by western sanctions included the largest bank Sberbank, oil companies Rosneft and Transneft, and Gazprom. Their access to capital markets for any long-term funding was restricted, new exploration projects in Siberia and the Arctic were affected by barring foreign oil companies Exxon and Shell from providing any equipment, technology or assistance to deep-water, offshore, or shale projects with Gazprom Neft, LukOil, Surgutneftegas, and Rosneft. Russian gas is delivered to Europe by pipeline which probably explains why Gazprom's main business is reported not to be on the sanctions list.

Russia is the EU's third-biggest trading partner with a cross-border trade of \$460 billion, and the EU gets a third of its oil and gas from Russia with 40 per cent of that gas pumped across Ukraine. The dominant capitalist power in Europe, Germany, has an economy intertwined with Russian gas and oil exports worth more than \$75 billion a year. Larry Elliott wrote that 'a key aim of Berlin's foreign policy for the past quarter of a century has been to re-integrate what used to be the Soviet Union and its satellites into the market economy. Expanding capitalism to the east was seen as both good for German business and for German security. Resistance from German industry makes it unlikely Merkel will agree immediately to Iran-style sanctions that would freeze Russia out of western markets' (*Guardian* 28 August). The objective of US and European capitalism is energy diversification which means to reduce dependence on Russian oil and gas.

The US and EU capitalist blocs are using the military threat of a revived NATO against Russia as part of the western capitalist attempt at influencing the external orientation of Ukraine towards Europe. In September NATO announced the creation of a spearhead 4,000 strong 'rapid reaction' force, with a HQ in Poland and forward units in Poland, Romania and Estonia who have all indicated willingness to host the bases so that NATO would have a continuous presence in eastern Europe. Ukraine has decided to pursue membership of NATO, and clearly the western capitalist powers regard the Russian 'near abroad' as their own sphere of influence. The Lithuanian president said 'It is a fact that Russia is in a war state against Ukraine. That means it is in a state of war against a country which would like to be closely integrated with the EU. Practically Russia is in a state of war against Europe' (*Financial Times*, 31 August).

The war in Ukraine was no impediment to the NATO military exercise in Ukraine in September known as 'Rapid Trident' at the International Peacekeeping and Security Center at Yavoriv, 60 km from Lvov in Western Ukraine close to the Polish-Ukrainian border. 1,300 troops from fifteen countries including the US, Britain, Germany, Spain, Poland, Norway, and some former Warsaw Pact countries that are part of NATO's Partnership for Peace programme (non-NATO members such as Ukraine and other former Soviet Republics) took part.

Russia went to war with Georgia in August 2008 when Georgia sought to join NATO. Russia could not allow this and Russia halted NATO expansion into the Caucasus. A Ukraine integrated into the EU and NATO would encircle Russia, which was the same reason for war against Georgia in 2008. As always in capitalism the economic conflict over control of mineral resources and trade routes (such as pipelines) will be the cause of war.

STEVE CLAYTON

(Next month: concluding article on the war in Gaza)

Hard work, taxes and profits

IN AN article in the *Times* (30 October) David Cameron pontificated about having a moral duty to reduce taxes:

'Every single pound of public money started as private earning. Every million in the Treasury represents a huge amount of hard work: early morning alarms, long commutes, hours spent on the factory floor, the office, the hospital ward or the classroom.'

The first sentence is not true but the rest is.

As the government as such produces nothing it does have to get all its money from elsewhere. However, it cannot be said that 'every pound' comes from 'private earning' if by this latter is meant wage and salary earners.

The government's money comes from two sources: taxes and borrowing. Governments borrow from financial institutions but what these lend it can hardly be described as 'private earning'. It is money capital accumulated from past profits, i.e., from past 'unearned income' (as the Inland Revenue used to call it in the days before spin).

As to taxation, some comes directly from taxes on profits, once again not 'private earning' but unearned income. Even the taxes paid by workers fall in the end on employers (though 'paid' is probably not the right word here as, with PAYE, workers never see it and what they have to live on is the take-home pay that goes into their bank account). A tax on wages is an indirect tax on profits as it increases the cost of recreating a worker's labour-power and so what the employer has to pay for it. Economists have long known this but politicians are reluctant to acknowledge this as it blows apart their myth that we are all taxpayers together.

On the other hand, that 'every million in the Treasury represents a huge amount of hard work' is true. The hard work described by Cameron is the source both of the taxes that ultimately fall on profits on and of the accumulated profits that governments borrow.

So, if there's any moral duty involved because of the 'hard work', it would not be to reduce taxes but to reduce, in fact eliminate, the unpaid hard work of wage and salary workers which produces the profits that governments tax or borrow.

In any event, Cameron's moral high ground begins to crumble when he sets out another reason for reducing taxes on profits:

'We know the economic case for cutting taxes: in a competitive world we cannot afford to carry on as a bloated, high-taxing, welfare-heavy nation (...) We have to fight the notion that you can endlessly suck more taxes out of businesses and bite the hand that feeds.'

That's a rather different argument – that taxes on profits have to be reduced so that businesses operating from Britain can remain competitive on world markets. It's an admission, too, that capitalism is governed by the quest for profits and that governments have to go along with this, even at the expense of the welfare of those they rule over.

In fact, how come that 'welfare' has become a dirty word under capitalism? The dictionaries define it as 'the state of faring or doing well' and 'good health, happiness and prosperity'. Capitalism, on Cameron and the other politicians' admission, is not geared to pursuing these objectives but to pursuing profits. It's profits before welfare, which is why capitalism must go if we are to have a true welfare society.

British Folk Art

BRITISH FOLK Art at Tate Britain, London this year was a rare exhibition of working class and artisan art from the mid-seventeenth century until the mid-twentieth century when folk art would become a commodity, and too self-conscious. Jane Kallir in 1982 defined folk art as 'everything that everybody always thought was not art before the modernist revolution at the turn of the century.' Bourgeois condescension labelled such art as 'peasant art' or 'vernacular creativity', and it was such art and crafts that were deliberately excluded from the Royal Academy of Art when it was established in 1769.

The exhibition includes giant trade signs when shops and businesses hung painted or carved signs in the street



The Earth Stopper, c 1835

outside to advertise their goods or services at the time of the 'golden age of trade signs' which lasted from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries. Notable examples are *Scotsman tobacconist shop figure* (1812) in a 1934 photograph of 37 London Street, Norwich, and *Highlander tobacconist shop figure* (c. 1866-1900). The rise of Glasgow as Britain's leading port dealing with tobacco in the mid 1700s explains the association with a highlander. There are examples of the *Blackamoor tobacconist shop figure* (1700s) which signified exoticism and cultural difference. 'Blackamoor' was a variant on 'Black Moor', a dark-skinned African from North Africa.

These artisan trade signs are from the early days of capitalism when a shop had a merchant's counter, and there was social interaction between the merchant and the customer. This was the time of the Petty Bourgeoisie, the owners of small stores, 'the small tradespeople, shopkeepers' who worked alongside their employees. The Petty Bourgeois 'as owner of the means of production he is a capitalist; as a labourer he is his own wage-labourer' (Marx). This was the early days of retailing before bourgeois notions of refinement and good taste, mass production and supermarkets and 'the inevitable ruin of the petty bourgeois.' During the 1871 Paris Commune the shopkeepers set a good example by siding with the working class.

Rural Art is represented by *The Four Alls*, a popular pub sign found particularly in the West Country and Wales which was described as 'a country sign' in 1785. This example is from Caernarvonshire c. 1850 with the four figures representing 'I Govern All, I Pray For All, I

Fight For All, I Pay For All', the last a John Bull character of yeoman country stock, stolid, stocky, the heroic archetype of the freeborn Englishman. George Smart was a tailor in Frant near Tunbridge Wells who painted *The Earth Stopper* c. 1835. In this a male figure jumps in fright from his horse at night in a country lane by the shock of what he takes to be the Devil, who is in fact the Earth Stopper having stopped up the fox's earth while he is out feeding prior to the next day's hunt. The Rampton 1800s painted wood '*All vagrants who are seen begging in this town will be apprehended and punished as the laws directs*' is a salutary reminder that the introduction of new technology to replace agricultural workers meant that by the early 1830s the established system of poor relief was proving to be unsustainable. This was remedied by the consolidation of the institution of the Workhouse ('bastilles of the proletariat') in the 1834 Poor Law Act. The triumph of the bourgeois class in 1846 with the repeal of the Corn Laws would mean small, under-capitalised farmers were squeezed out by low prices and inability to increase production.

Mid-nineteenth century working class sports are represented in several oils by anonymous worker-artists. *Boxers* (c 1850) portrays the pugilist world of the bare-knuckle London Prize Ring Rules, pre-Marquissess of Queensbury, and is reminiscent of the boxing scene in Richard Lester's 1975 film of George MacDonald Fraser's *Royal Flash* with Henry Cooper as John Gully, prize fighter and MP. *Bear Baiting* (c.1830s) and *Champion Ratcatcher* (c.1840) portray the popular sports of the period. The 1835 and 1849 Cruelty to Animals Acts prohibited bear-baiting and cock-fighting but rat catching or 'rattng' was not enforced, and became a very popular sport (London had 70 rattng pits). A dog, usually a terrier would be let loose on a rabble of rats in a round or square pit set up at a pub. Henry Mayhew in his *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851) described 'brightly lit rattng pits with high wooden rims' and 'that these vermin are becoming a trade commodity.'

A room is dominated by the *HMS Calcutta figurehead*



Queue outside Marylebone workhouse, 1903

from the Royal Navy ship launched in 1831 in Bombay. *HMS Calcutta* saw action in the blockade of Russian ports in the Gulf of Finland in the Crimean War, and in the Second Opium War against the Qing Dynasty of China when the British Empire sought to legalise the opium trade, expand 'coolie' (indentured labour) trade and open China to British capitalism.

British Folk Art is a refreshing working class antidote to bourgeois sycophancy such as the Queen's Gallery exhibition *The First Georgians: Art & Monarchy 1714-60* which 'explores royal patronage and taste.'

STEVE CLAYTON

Too Many People?

Danny Dorling: *Population 10 Billion*. Constable £8.99.



Yet another book by the prolific Danny Dorling: this one is not about the current state of Britain but the developments in world population, past, present and future.

For tens of thousands of years, the human population grew very slowly, and only in 1820 did it reach one billion. But after that it grew very rapidly, and the rate of increase itself advanced: two billion by 1926 (perhaps slightly delayed by the Great War influenza epidemic), three billion by 1960, four billion by 1975, five billion by 1988, six billion by 2000 and seven billion by the end of 2011. The population ‘explosion’ began in 1851, and Dorling claims that, despite appearances, a slowdown started in 1971.

As for the future, eight billion is likely by 2025, and maybe nine billion by 2045. The ten billion of the title might be reached by 2100, but may well not be, owing to countervailing factors that lie behind the slowdown mentioned earlier. These factors include the widespread availability of contraception; improvements in education (for instance, university-educated women tend to have their first child later and to have fewer children); reductions in absolute poverty (destitution leads to more births, perhaps as a kind of insurance policy). In many developed countries, fertility is below the replacement rate of 2.1 children per woman and the population is only maintained by immigration. Migrants tend to adopt the fertility patterns of the society they have moved to, so the result is not massive numbers of births to migrant women.

Overall, then, there is little need to worry that the human population will increase at ever-expanding rates, leading to a hundred billion of us in a few centuries. One forecast is fewer than nine billion by 2300. And even if there are ten billion of us, will we be able to feed ourselves, and what is the likely impact on the environment? Dorling makes it clear that producing enough food is not a problem: plenty is currently wasted, growing crops for biofuel is a misplacing of priorities, and lots of land is left idle because that profits the owners. Water scarcity is more of a threat, though

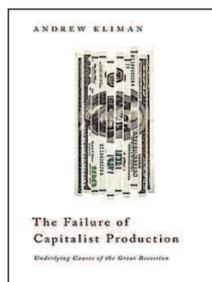
even here there is much that can be done to promote conservation. And ‘it is ... not true that the human environmental impact on the planet is a product of the number of humans’: it is more a matter of how we produce and consume. Car sales have already peaked, and maybe we have to consume less by way of new clothes and so on.

There is much other interesting material here, such as on the various strata within the ultra-rich. Moreover, ‘Our current demographic transition to a steady-state population is almost certainly not possible without a transformation of capitalism’, though unfortunately this does not seem to mean replacing capitalism with a classless society.

Dorling sees himself as a ‘practical possibilist’, someone who neither exudes a bland optimism nor sees the future as inevitably doom-laden. Socialists were once dismissed as ‘impossibilists’ on account of our opposition to reformism, but perhaps Dorling’s label is one we can claim for ourselves. Socialism is a practical and feasible solution to humanity’s current problems and is entirely possible once enough people want it. **PB**

Rate of profit: up or down?

***The Failure of Capitalist Production. Underlying Causes of the Great Recession.* By Andrew Kliman. Pluto Press. 2012.**



What happened to the rate of profit in the decades leading up to the crash of 2008 and the slump that followed? Some say it went up. Others say it didn’t.

Those who say that it went up say it did so as a result of the ‘neo-liberal’ policies implemented from the 1980s onwards as typified by Reagan and Thatcher but continued by their successors. They argue that this reduced consumer demand and would have led to a slump earlier had demand not been sustained by workers borrowing to spend. Eventually the burden of debt proved too much and the bubble burst in 2008. This, essentially, is an underconsumptionist theory of the crisis.

Kliman denies that there was a rise in the rate of profit or that there was

a fall in workers’ standard of living in this period. His explanation of what happened is that when the post-war boom came to an end in the 1970s governments were afraid to let the economic laws of capitalism take their course and devalue existing capital as a way of restoring the rate of profit and capital accumulation. Instead, they resorted to borrowing. The result was that the rate of profit did not recover enough. Eventually, as in the other explanation, the debt-fuelled bubble burst. This is a falling (or not rising) rate of profit explanation of the crisis.

How come that theorists using the same data (US government statistics) can reach different conclusions as to how the rate of profit moved?

Most of Kliman’s book is taken up with defending his method of calculating the rate of profit. The rate of profit is profit as a percentage of capital invested. The two sides more or less agree on how to calculate profit. The disagreement is over how to calculate capital. Kliman argues for using the original value (‘historic cost’) rather than the current replacement cost used by the others. As the latter is generally less than the former it gives a higher rate of profit.

The same argument has gone on between capitalist accountants and it’s a highly technical argument that won’t be easy to follow for those not interested in this sort of thing.

The book’s last two chapters, on the other hand – on the implications of the rising rate of profit theory – are clear. Kliman writes as someone who favours a ‘communal economy’ oriented to the satisfaction of people’s needs which, he says, means that ‘finance, money, exchange, and value would have to be eliminated’, ie. as a socialist. He points out that the rival theory leads to the view that capitalism can be reformed to work in the interests of the workers.

As its proponents blame ‘neo-liberalism’ rather than capitalism as such the implication is that if this policy was abandoned and state intervention resorted to on a wide scale again then things would get better for workers. And if working class underconsumption caused the problem this can be rectified by increasing wages and benefits. This in fact is what they do advocate on the ground in their reformist campaigns (one of those Kliman criticises is the French Trotskyist Michel Husson).

But let Kliman put it in his own words:

‘... the notion of state-controlled capital is an oxymoron, like jumbo shrimp. As long as there is capital,

what are actually in control are the economic laws of capitalism. Individual capitalists, including individual state capitals and worker-run enterprises, must submit to these laws.'

'When all is said and done, accumulation and economic growth under capitalism depend upon the extraction of ever-greater amounts of unpaid labor, not reforms that limit that extraction.'

In fact, such reforms could make things worse:

'... under capitalism, a new economic boom requires the restoration of profitability, but downward redistribution of income will reduce profitability ... [B]y causing investment to fall, downward redistribution could lead to a deep recession, even a depression.'

Nothing to add.

ALB



from page 5

marketplace, bitch. It's called knowing what your customer will bear.'

The rich guy is used to having his way, and under normal circumstances he has the resources to get almost anything he wants. Under the exceptional circumstances of the snowstorm, however, he and his wife find themselves isolated inside a 'bubble' where the only other person is the poor man, and it is he who happens to own the only 'means of production' that matters in that particular situation – namely, the shovel. The tables are turned: for once the narrator experiences the vulnerability of those who do not own the means of production to the blackmail of those who do.

Caught in the toils of the engine

One of the best stories is Bill Cheng's 'Engine.' The author describes the loneliness, emptiness, self-loathing, and self-pity that he felt as a young man struggling to make a living as he drifted from one dead-end job to another. His philosophical reflections are succinct and to the point. For instance:

'I don't know how to talk about money. It's one of those things we can't seem to get shook of. As much as we pretend it doesn't matter, it sets the stage for all our relationships.'

Alone among the contributors, Cheng has a clear concept of the functioning of the capitalist system inside which we all live. He uses the potent image of 'the Engine':

'Even now there are still times when I can almost glimpse the Engine in its entirety: its high walls, the gears and cogs and avenues through which wealth and power traffic.'

We are all caught in the toils of the Engine.

In this respect he contrasts favorably with the book's editor John Freeman, who has no concept of the system as such. He is more interested in the secondary issue of why some people 'succeed' and others 'fail' and does not perceive the mechanism that generates, deals out, and assigns meaning to these human fates. But we can willingly agree with his conclusion that chance ('luck') plays a major role in deciding this secondary issue.

A final observation. The units in the competitive struggle are no longer families, as they were in traditional class societies, but lone individuals. This is exemplified by the story that Freeman himself tells about his relationship with his younger brother. An inheritance has enabled Freeman to buy an apartment in Manhattan, while his brother lives in a homeless shelter. He tries to help his brother, whom he loves and to whom he dedicates the book, but it apparently never occurs to him that he could simply provide him with steady financial support. No doubt his brother's 'pride' would prevent him from accepting such an arrangement.

STEFAN



Fiscal Exercise

CONSIDERING HOW important our income is in shaping our life, talking about it can feel more embarrassing than a conversation about genital herpes. Channel 4's *How Rich Are You?* aims to encour-

age some fiscal debate with its mix of interviews, pundits, comments from the studio audience and lots of statistics. Even when jazzed up with flashy graphics, the show's stats give a depressing picture of our divided society. For example, poorer people die up to 12 years earlier than the rich on average, and just five families have as much wealth as 12 million other people. The widening gap between rich and poor is explained by a tendency for an increasing proportion of wealth to end up as capital rather than being paid as wages. This is illustrated with a replica of a machine built during the 1960s at the London School of Economics, which pushes cold tea through pipes into containers marked 'taxes', 'capital', 'labour' etc to represent how money flows round the economy. While much of this data would benefit from clarification, and terms like 'rich'



and 'wealth' are often left fuzzily defined, the clear message is that the capitalists are still winning the class war. As one member of the audience says, while a minority are laughing their way to the bank, he's on his way to the food bank.

One of the show's richer contributors suggests that to get assets, you should 'get off your fucking arse', as if that's how he acquired his inherited booty. As economist Dr Faiza Shaheen points out, effort and talent are less important in determining our income than the circumstances we're born into.

Social mobility has reduced as wealth inequality has increased. So, it's now harder to break free of the constraining opportunities and life expectancy we grow up with. Dr Shaheen gives plenty of examples of how wealth inequality damages our wellbeing, but her disappointing conclusion is only that too much of a divide hinders capitalist growth. And presenter Richard Bacon's two-penn'orth is to say that we need some rich people for society to function. Unfortunately, capitalism itself isn't questioned by those participating in *How Rich Are You?*, only how it's administered. Despite this, the programme still reminds us why the system doesn't work in the interests of the majority.

MIKE FOSTER

Will the Pacific remain peaceful?

CAPITALISM IS a volatile social system and the *Economist* magazine, ever aware of its potentially explosive nature, has recently examined the possibility of the extreme economic rivalry in the Pacific region leading to what may turn out to be a more violent phase. The main contestants at present are the USA, China and Japan but there are other fringe countries that may well play an important role in the future.

Since the 1970s trade across the Pacific has far exceeded that of the Atlantic. 'China, for instance, has taken its hunger for high-protein foods and raw materials to Latin America and has become the biggest trading partner of distant Chile. By one estimate, in 2010 it provided more loans to Latin America than the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and the United States-Import Bank combined' (*Economist*, 15 November). The developing rim of the Pacific has become a giant growth factory. Take a look at some of the trading figures. Over the last decade the USA economic growth was about 1.6 percent per year, the European Union was 1.7 percent, whereas Latin America expanded by 4.6 percent, East Asia by 5.4 percent and South East Asia by 5.9 percent.

We have now reached the stage wherein the 21 economies of the largest trans-Pacific group of Asian-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) account for nearly half of global trade. It is a situation in which the major players China and the USA must be very cautious

because there is a lot at stake here. This has not stopped China from doing a bit of sabre-rattling from time to time though. 'We've seen indications that Xi Jinping has an ambition to increase China's influence in east Asia, central Asia, and the western Pacific, said Shi Yinhong, an international relations expert at Renmin University in Beijing. Many statements and actions imply that this will come at the cost of American predominance in the same regions. I think that this is already raising concerns in Washington' (*Guardian*, 9 November). A more likely policy to be pursued by China and the USA is probably the one outlined by Hilary Clinton when she was the Secretary of State in 2011 in an article in *Foreign Policy*: 'We all know that feelings and misconceptions linger on both sides of the Pacific. Some in our country see China's progress as a threat to the US, some in China worry that America seeks to constrain China's growth. We reject both views.' Even the belligerent Xi Jinping had a more re-assuring aside to Obama last year when he said 'The vast Pacific Ocean has enough space for the two large countries of China and the United States.'

Despite the diplomatic language when a capitalist country's trading profits are threatened there is no limit to which political threats and counter-threats can be carried out and the frightening use of military violence is always a distinct possibility in this crazy competitive society.

RD

Meetings

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

East Anglia Regional Branch

Saturday 13 December 12 noon - 4.00pm
Business meeting with time for discussion
The Quebec Tavern, 93-97 Quebec Road,
Norwich NR1 4HY.

West London Branch

Tuesday 16 December 8.00pm
Seasonal Social
Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace,
London W4 4JN

Yorkshire Regional Branch

Saturday 20 December 1.00pm
Seasonal Social
The Victoria Hotel, 28 Great George Street
Leeds LS1 3DL

Socialist Party Head Office

Sunday 18 January 2015 3.00pm.
'Homelessness and Health'
Speaker: Mike Foster
52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN

West London Branch

Tuesday 20 January 2015 8.00pm.
'I for one welcome our new robot overlords'
Speaker: Bill Martin
Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace
London W4 4JN.

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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.

50 Years Ago

The Observer and the SPGB

THE FOLLOWING is an extract from *The Observer* (Oct. 9) to which the Party wrote in protest at the reference to the SPGB

'Everywhere around Glasgow, the contrast in political styles is striking. On the Left, they speak with tongues of the old Clyde-side fire, preaching a new society, teaching their audiences a total view of socialist justice and democracy. All have something of the Trotskyite poster in Woodside which snarls at the citizen "Don't vote for the S.P.G.B. (Socialist Party of Great Britain) candidate unless you understand and want Socialism."



The Observer magazine, 1964

We publish, without comment, the Observer's reply:

The Observer, 29th October, 1964.

Dear Sir,

I have now heard from Neal Ascherson, to whom I referred your letter of October 11. After helping us in covering the election campaign he returned to his post as our resident Correspondent in Germany; hence there was some delay in reaching him. He writes:

'I think I should apologise without reserve to the members of the S.P.G.B. for calling them Trotskyite, I was mixing them up in my hurried head with the Socialist Labour League, and there is no excuse for that. I still think that "snarl" expressed the shock of hostility experienced by a reader of the S.P.G.B.'s fiercely honest and uncompromising poster.'

I'm very sorry we can't clarify this point now in our correspondence columns — it would be rather out of date and there is room for so few of all the letters— but we will take care not to make any such mistake again.

Yours faithfully,

(Signed) Charles Davey, Assistant Editor.

(Socialist Standard, December 1964)

SOCIALIST STANDARD INDEX FOR 2013

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ACTION REPLAY

Your Name's in the Book

WHAT DO you do if you are a top sportsperson and age or fitness lead you to retire? You could extend your career a little by moving to a country with a lower standard of play, or you could try to become a coach or manager or pundit. Alternatively, or perhaps in addition, you could write a book, or rather have one ghost-written for you (rather like the many memoirs by actors, musicians or TV 'celebrities'). You could give your side of various arguments and settle some old scores, as well as making a few bob. There have been a couple of prominent examples in recent weeks.



Cricketer Kevin Pietersen has 'written' *KP: My Autobiography*: to a large extent it is built around his annoyance at being blamed for the fiasco of England's Ashes tour to Australia in 2013–14, which the team lost 5-0. It accuses the team's coach, Andy Flower, of being basically useless, and hints that captain Alastair Cook was too weak for the job. But in particular it singles out divisions in the

dresser room and an alleged clique of three top bowlers and a wicket-keeper who could be very nasty to other players. Pietersen was England's most prolific run-scorer of all time, but that is not the book's focus.

Then there's footballer Roy Keane's (pictured) *The Second Half* (ghosted by novelist Roddy Doyle). By the time the book was written, Keane had already had a bit of a dodgy post-playing career, as manager and then as pundit. Despite

his success as a player with Manchester United (including seven Premier League titles), the book has a great negative deal to say about United manager Alex Ferguson, and in particular about the way Keane left the club. In a TV interview Keane criticised his teammates, and Ferguson basically tore up his contract (costing him a sizeable sum of money). There's also material on his arguments with some of the other United players.

Many workers who aren't top athletes will be accustomed to some form of office politics, with cliques and rivalry and people getting at each other. It seems that even at the top of the sporting tree, where the pay is beyond what most people dream of, similar things take place. **PB**

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Voice from the Back

The Charity Fallacy

There are many examples of the madness of capitalism but surely this short, stark statement by *Oxfam* pinpoints the brutal inequality of this insanity: 'The world's 85 richest people own the same wealth as the 3.5 billion poorest. The wealth of the super-rich grows greater whilst world poverty bites deeper' (*Times*, 8 November). *Oxfam* herein concisely expose the madness of the production for profit system but their proposed solution is completely useless. They believe that charity is a solution and claim that if they get enough donations they can solve the problem. It is not charity that is the answer but the complete revolutionary transformation to a society based on common ownership and production solely for use.

lost in the First World War' (*Times*, 8 November). One spectator is reported as saying it was fantastic and when the crowd burst into song the crowd absolutely loved it. It is understandable that newspapers are 'celebrating' the event, after all it is their job to promote mindless patriotism, but why are workers doing the same? They must lead particularly strange lives if the deaths of 888,246 workers in their masters' quarrels lead them to this outlandish behaviour.

Mamma It's Cold Inside

The headline announced the chilling fact that an elderly person dies every seven minutes due to fuel poverty. The article goes on to explain that millions of pensioners are worried that they will not be able to keep warm this winter. 'Every winter 25,000 old people in England and Wales do not survive the bitter weather - 206 deaths a day. Those living in the coldest houses figure most in the excess winter death rates and illness statistics according to *Age UK*' (*Daily Express*, 11 November). Needless to say this problem does not affect the owning class.

to human beings and leads to these tragedies.

Homeless For Christmas

The number of tenants homeless in England and Wales evicted from their houses has hit record levels, with cuts to social security among the factors leading to more than 100 evictions a day. 'Number of tenants evicted hits record bid as benefit cuts slide. Figures show that more than 30,000 tenants thrown out by the end of September which social landlords say is due to bedroom tax' (*Guardian*, 13 November).



Figures from the Ministry of Justice show that 11,000 were repossessed by bailiffs between July and September, the highest quarterly figure since records began in 2000. *Shelter* forecast that 90,000 kids will be homeless this Christmas.

Another Winter Of Discontent

With the advent of winter the government has had to allocate an extra £700m extra for A&E, but the rest of the NHS system is under pressure as these recent figures show: '90,000 more patients waiting for an operation than a year ago. 62 per cent day target for cancer treatment missed for last 6 months. 24 per cent of patients say it's 'not easy' to get through to GP by phone' (*Guardian*, 14 November). Ever helpful, the Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt warned that there will be pressure to deal with an ageing population and suggested that a visit to the pharmacy rather than a hospital may be advisable!



Poppies And Poppcock

Under the headline 'Joy and song bloom with poppies at the Tower', the following piece of news appears: 'As the last of the poppies was planted in the Tower's moat ... most of the attention has concentrated on the extraordinary crowds that have queued patiently every day to see the display of 888,246 ceramic poppies, one for every British and colonial life

Hollywood Fantasy

Everybody is aware of all the old repeated military movies that the TV churns out. John Wayne or some such hero performs wonderful acts of bravery against the enemy. It is a complete fantasy of course. This is nearer the truth. 'Jeremy Sears, a Marine who had served multiple tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, walked onto a shooting range outside San Diego on Oct. 6, placed a handgun to his head and calmly pulled the trigger. It was a local news story but didn't attract attention outside San Diego for the most tragic of reasons. Military suicides have become so common - since 2001, more active-duty U.S. troops have killed themselves than have been killed in Afghanistan' (*Washington Post*, 11 November). War, far from being an ennobling experience is degrading

FREE LUNCH

