

socialist standard

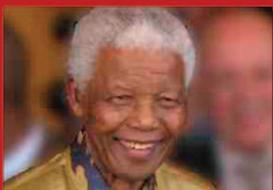
January 2014
Vol. 110 No. 1313
£1.50

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



Skin-deep politics

How capitalism hides behind nationalism



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RATES: One year subscription (normal rate) £15. One year subscription (low/unwaged) £10. Europe rate £20 (Air mail). Rest of world £25 (Air mail). Voluntary supporters subscription £20 or more. Cheques payable to 'The Socialist Party of Great Britain'.

The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 1 February** 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

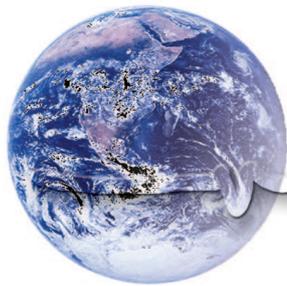
new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest elections 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.



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JANUARY 2014

Editorial

2014: Year of Xenophobia?

FROM ONE point of view the prospects for 2014 don't look good. The elections to the European Parliament in May threaten to become a festival of xenophobia as the main parties try to outbid UKIP by being as, if not more, anti-foreigner than them. August will see the ceremonies to mark the outbreak of the First World War. These, too, threaten to become a celebration of nationalism, with prominent historians already arguing that it was a justifiable war which Britain deserved to win.

This means that this year, in addition to our usual activity of putting across the case for socialism, we will have to step up the socialist case against nationalism and war.

The phrase 'Nation-State' itself assumes that the states into which the world is divided are the political expression of pre-existing 'nations'. In fact, it's the other way round. It is the 'nation' that is the creation of the state. States inculcate into their subjects the idea that they form a community with a common interest and that the state represents that interest. The result is that people come to refer to themselves and other subjects of the same state as 'we' and 'us'.

Socialists do not speak of 'we' and 'us' in relation to so-called 'Nation-States' in which they happen to have been born or live. We know that, in every state, there are two classes with opposed interests: the class of those who own and control the means of production and the rest, the vast

majority, who do not and, to live, have to sell their mental and physical energies to those who do for a wage or a salary.

Wars are not fought between 'nations' but between states, and states represent the interest of their ruling, owning class. Wars arise out of the conflict of economics between states, representing the owning class within them, over sources of raw materials, trade routes, markets, investment outlets and strategic areas to protect these. The slaughter of the First World War was no exception.

Nationalism is used by states to win support – and cannon fodder – for wars. But it can prove counter-productive if it escapes from state control, as it risks doing over the question of Europe. The interest of the dominant section of the capitalist class in Britain is that Britain should stay in the EU so as to have free access to the European 'single market', but a large segment of public opinion is opposed to this on nationalist grounds which UKIP is exploiting.

Throughout the year, then, we will be insisting that wage and salary workers in one state have the same basic interest as their counterparts in other states. We are all members of the world working class and have a common interest in working together to establish a world without frontiers in which the resources of the globe will have become the common heritage of all the people of the world and used for the benefit of all.



Please don't feed the drones

THE ANNOUNCEMENT in December that Amazon planned to start delivering goods by helicopter microdrones prompted a flurry of media excitement prematurely extinguished by the two-faced hagiographic orgy following Nelson Mandela's demise shortly afterwards. But still the story buzzed round the pubs and offices like whirring rotor blades. What if someone nicks your delivery after the drone has dropped it off? What if someone shoots it down with an air rifle or radio pulse? What if there's a mid-air collision? What happens to all the plastic delivery boxes afterwards? And what of civil aviation control systems? Will all these drones flock in droves to Trafalgar Square looking for someone to feed them?

Some po-faced commentators were quick to identify the story as a piece of misdirection from a company already under fire for its working practices, including poor pay, punishing targets and round the clock surveillance, but this was merely journalistic contrariness. Amazon can scarcely be worried given that such bad publicity is old and dog-eared news (see for instance 'UK workforce attacks Amazon', *Guardian*, 14 April 2001). Besides, shock revelations about Foxconn workers jumping in desperation off factory rooftops in China have not raised an eyebrow among Apple's loyal devotees in the west, and Nike and Primark shoppers don't pause for guilty reflection either, so why should Amazon lose sleep?

The risk that these drones would be hacked went from likelihood to certainty after news that another drone had suffered a similar fate ('Parrot drones 'vulnerable to flying hack attack'', *BBC Online*, 4 December). We therefore await with baited breath a near future when Black Friday Christmas online shopping extravaganzas are followed by a mass exodus of all UK deliveries to a single offshore pirate tanker registered in Liberia, or else combined into a festive Stuka dive-bombing raid on Westminster.

And what will these little Santas in their micro-sleighs be carrying to your back door in years to come? The answer is 'wearables'. Not socks or pants, you understand, or at least not in the form you know them, but electronic wearables that 'do' things. Several companies are engaged in a high-street battle to corner the smart watch market, but this must surely be a minor skirmish compared to the battle for the smart bra, the smart wig and the mood sweater. The bra will tell you what mood you're in, the mood sweater will tell everyone else (by lighting up in different colours), and the wig will allegedly let you see in the dark with bat-vision and control computers telepathically. With your Google glasses to complete the look you will be at the electronic leading edge of every fancy dress competition going. Just don't go out in the rain.

Sound ridiculous? Well, it is. But that's the future for you. Or at least it's the future as projected by company sales executives on fire with the possibilities of technology to give an already overstuffed population more of what it's already got.

There are worrying developments in amongst all this that you have to watch out for. Computer viruses are getting cleverer, and now passing themselves off as free virus-checkers. Spammers are overcoming their bad English and sending phishing emails, supposedly from your bank, that are starting to look convincing. Now the game is 'ransomware', a stroke of genius whereby the spammers don't have to be sly, they can just barge right in, lock up your whole computer and then

charge you a fortune in untraceable bitcoins before vanishing into the night – without bothering to release your data. Cue a new term and possibly criminal charge of – 'dataknapping'. Remember, you read it here first.

But despite the concerns, is the future in capitalism any scarier because of this technology than it would otherwise be? Futurologists like Alvin and Heidi Toffler have made careers since the 1960s out of claiming so. Their influential notion of 'future-shock' has just been revisited by Douglas Rushkoff of *Cyberia* (1994) fame in his latest book *Present Shock* (2013), the idea being that the future is no longer the future but is smacking us in the face like a wet herring in today's present. Interesting though these ideas are, socialists tend to take such things with a spoon of salt. For one thing, futurologists like the Tofflers and Ray Kurzweil (long-time predictor of the history-shattering Singularity) tend to overlook class relations as a social dynamic and motor of change. Even Rushkoff, politically more clued-up than them, is in danger of being dazzled by his own hype, coining terms like 'fractalnoia' (the construction of arbitrary patterns out of masses of data, leading to conspiracy theories) and 'digiphrenia' (the ability to be in multiple places and cyber personalities at once) as if these were fundamentally new human behavioural phenomena. In fact, everyone operates multiple personalities, at home, at work, on the phone, at job interviews, in the pub, and humans are forever building baroque theories out of bare bone facts. The underlying tendencies have always been there, so there's no reason to get too excited about new manifestations of them.

Socialists are futurologists too, because socialism is a theory of the future, but we live in the present and our feet are on the ground, where workers actually live. The offices may buzz today with the latest talk of drone deliveries as if it was science-fiction come to life, but tomorrow people will be ordering by drone without a second thought. Workers don't trip over the future and suffer some existential crisis, they simply lengthen their stride. Indeed, the main proof against the futurologist notion of future-shock is the futurologists warning us about it. Forewarned, we forestall any sense of surprise.

Besides, if you look around you and then compare it to any cinema film from the 1960s and 70s, when futurologists were first writing about brave new worlds of the year 2000, what do you see? You see pretty much the same clothes and hair, the same houses, buses, cars and trains. You see the same food, the same language, the same social mannerisms. About the only difference is that the TV cops back then didn't have computers on their desks and they had to call the station from call-boxes. Oh, and they all smoked like chimneys.

That's not to say the world hasn't changed, or that technology has not been instrumental in the changes, but the real differences lie underneath the gadgets, in social attitudes. Far from being paralysed by the blinding speed of change, we are learning to change ideas at blinding speed. Social relationships have been revolutionised, at least in some ways, offering an instant intimacy and membership of identity groups at the touch of a button, thus promoting a new sense of commonality and debate among the young just when old curmudgeons are throwing earth on the grave of supposedly deceased 'community spirit'. From the once-a-day stuffy announcements of old BBC six o'clock headlines, news now travels at light speed via a million channels, challenging the ability of conventional 'stop press' media to keep up, or of governments to keep down, and political movements and trends form literally overnight, challenging regimes from Syria to Ukraine. The future isn't a shock. What is a shock is the discovery that we can make our own future, and that it doesn't have to be what our masters tell us it should be. That's encouraging to anyone who wants progress, and especially to socialists, who can easily feel marginalised and ignored in all the hubbub. The world might not be listening to us today, but give it 24 hours and all bets are off.

Dear Editors,

Let me declare an interest right away . . . I don't like Russell Brand. I was switched off his style of humour (?) when he publicly aimed it at Andrew Sachs on live radio! That aside, I read your article about his views on socialism with some interest, although I confess not as much interest as I would have if it had been written by Frank, the mechanic in my local garage.

Why is Russell Brand's opinion so important that it warrants a four page spread in the *Socialist Standard*? Is it not because he is a 'celebrity'? And what is a celebrity if not a product of the very system Brand rails against? I agree with his railing ...but I find it hard to take advice on changing to a socialist society from a celebrity who makes a great deal of money by acting and conning the rest of the world that he is important. It's a bit like Bono and Bob Geldof telling us all that we have to 'live more simply so that others



Russell Brand

might simply live', while they swan around the world in jet planes living the 'life of Reilly'! Sorry, I don't buy Russell Brand sniping from the sidelines while taking full advantage of the very system he is decrying. I'd sooner take a lesson from Frank my local mechanic. He's no celebrity, but he certainly knows a thing or two about life for a real worker.

Russell Brand is famous for being controversial in order to maintain his position in the public spotlight, and I think his conversion to the cause of socialism is just another stunt aimed at bolstering his public persona.

Ian McRae, Dundee

Reply:

Surely the main point is that Brand is (despite what people may think of him otherwise) using his celebrity to question the system, and that's why we've highlighted it. Unlike perhaps the cases of Bono, Sting, etc who didn't really challenge the system at all, but became friends with the politicians instead - **Editors**

SOCIALIST STANDARD INDEX FOR 2012

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NO ONE can accuse Nelson Mandela of not having the courage of his convictions. Twenty-seven years in prison for campaigning to replace the repulsive apartheid regime with a non-racial political democracy is sufficient proof that he had. Yet, although this was eventually achieved, it did not improve the economic lot of the vast majority of black South Africans, another of his aims.

At his trial for treason in 1964 along with other leaders of the ANC, Mandela declared that he was a 'socialist'. This simply meant was that he shared the views of other 'national liberation' leaders of the time such as Nkrumah and Arafat who were grateful for the support of the state capitalist regime in Russia and admired its economic system. After the collapse of Russian state capitalism Mandela's 'socialism', as that of the ANC, was reduced to a commitment to government intervention to try to improve people's standard of living, the classic reformist position.

As the first President of post-apartheid South Africa from 1994 to 1999, Mandela tried to implement this but came up against capitalism and its economic laws and vested interests . He found himself the head of a government that had to operate within the confines of capitalism, but no government can make capitalism work in the interest of the majority. He was therefore forced to govern on its term. Which are that priority has to be given to profit-making and that anything that goes against this, such as taxing profits to pay for social reforms, risks provoking an economic slowdown and yet more unemployment and misery.

Mandela had to let the big mining corporation operate as usual. They too

Where Mandela failed

had in fact been opposed to apartheid as it was impeding the normal operation of capitalism in South Africa. They wanted, and got, a non-racial capitalism. Capitalist firms don't care about the background of their workers, only that they produce profits for them. In South Africa they didn't like being legally forced to employ an underperforming white worker when more competent non-white were available.

It wasn't just the mining corporation that benefitted from the end of apartheid. So did non-white business and professional people who, as the 'black bourgeoisie, were integrated into the ruling class and its benefits and privileges . Far be it from us to underestimate the psychological and practical benefits of the abolition of separate facilities for 'Blanke' and 'Nie Blanke' for those who were its victims, but the fact remains that the end of apartheid has not benefitted the mass of South Africans economically. But that's because it was replaced by a non-racial capitalism and capitalism in whatever form was never going to work to help them.

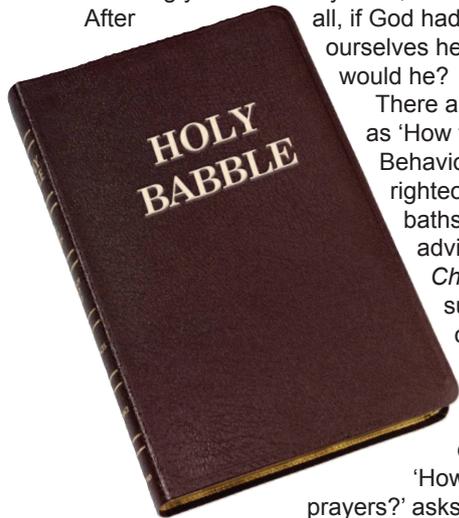
So, in this sense Mandela failed. He did not, however, succumb to the corruption of a Nkrumah or an Arafat (not to mention the present South African president Zuma). But that proves the point. Not even a saint can make capitalism work other than as a profit-making system in which profits have to take priority over people. Reformist governments fail, not because their members are corrupt or sell-outs or incompetent or not determined enough but because they have set themselves the impossible task of trying to make capitalism work in the interests of the majority. As Mandela found out, no doubt to his disappointment.



Keeping the Faith

A LARGE dose of gullibility and desperation must be needed before reasonable adults become hooked on the opium of the people. But once they are, a regular diet of religious hogwash is also required it seems, to keep them in a state of faith-fuelled stupor.

One website that doles this out by the bucketful is *The Christian Post*. Typical articles currently on offer complain of an 'attack' by the media when they dare to ask questions like 'Can we trust the bible?' or make programmes questioning 'the true story of Christmas' etc. This is exactly what the media ought to be doing you may think, but the true believer disagrees. After all, if God had intended us to think for ourselves he wouldn't have sent Jesus would he?



There are also handy hints such as 'How to overcome Impulsive Behaviours'. But instead of the righteous 'plenty of fresh air, cold baths and healthy exercise' advice you might expect, the *Christian Post* assures such sufferers that God 'takes our sin and gives us his righteousness', but 'we have to study the word and spend time with God so he can do this work in our soul'.

'How does God juggle so many prayers?' asks another, apparently serious, article to dispel any lingering doubts its followers may have. 'God has millions of prayers coming before him at any given moment' it assures us. 'How in the world does he hear each one and answer them all?'

Well, ignoring the fact that if even a single prayer were answered it would be hailed as a miracle, how indeed? This

question must have crossed the mind and been worked out by most reasonably bright nine year-olds. The answer though for *Christian Post* readers, who are apparently not bright nine year-olds, is 'Allow this fact to blow your mind: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day'.

These efforts to justify the big religious lie are not just childish stories or unscientific mythology; they are totally meaningless garbage, and an insult to adult intelligence. 'Religion with the drains blocked' as someone once put it.

It's not just Christianity that has to come up with a constant flow of hogwash to keep the faithful in awe of course, and no list of religious absurdities would be complete without something from Islam. Here's a few uncovered by a Cairo university committee, set up to study the fatwas issued by the Muslim Brotherhood and reported in *India Today* (28 Nov 2013).

When a woman goes swimming, as the word for sea is masculine, when the water touches the woman's private parts, she becomes an 'adulteress' and should be punished.



Shopping - a world awash in sin and vice

Another prohibited women from eating certain vegetables or even touching cucumbers or bananas.

One directed women to turn off the air conditioning at home in the absence of their husbands as it could indicate to a neighbour that the woman was at home alone, allowing them to commit adultery with her.

And another decreed that a couple's marriage would be annulled if they had sex with no clothes on.

Allah makes other religions look almost sensible doesn't he?
NW

Tribal politics in Africa

IN AFRICA every political leader that comes into power starts to consolidate himself through stamping out political turncoats and the opposition. This easily gives rise to ethnic suspicions. Thus politicians take advantage of ethnic and tribal prejudices in order to win a political following. This is what took place in Kenya when Odinga lost the elections to Uhuru Kenyatta. The Luos and Kikuyu tribes started to butcher each other. This also took place in Zimbabwe when Joshua Nkomo lost to Robert Mugabe in 1979 – Nkomo invited the Ndebeli to rise against the Shona – there was violence in Matebeleland and hundreds of civilians were killed.

Under the leadership of Dr. Kenneth Kaunda, the slogan 'Zambia One Nation' came to emphasise unity between tribes. Political reputations based on tribal loyalties did not exist under UNIP. Dr. Kaunda preached tribal balancing by appointing cabinet ministers from majority tribes – there was always a Lozi and Tonga as prime minister.

If there was any semblance to tribalism in Zambia under UNIP it only came from the Lozi royal establishment that had grievances with the Barotse government of 1964. The British Crown had given the protectorate to Barotseland in 1889 – but that lapsed when the governor of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland Sir Evelyn Horn handed over self government to Dr. Kaunda in 1964.

Kaunda emulated the 'communist' bloc and played a part in sponsoring the political rebels agitating for political independence in Zimbabwe, Angola, Namibia, Mozambique and South Africa. The incidence of military coups in West Africa – in Ghana and Nigeria both civilian governments were overthrown – made Kaunda promulgate a one-party state in 1973. He became commander-in-chief of the Zambian armed forces, and virtual dictator.

Kaunda threw himself wholeheartedly into the liberation struggle taking place in southern Africa and on this count alone his political reputation rests. The onset of a trade inflation in Western and Eastern countries from 1980 onwards posed economic problems in African countries – in Zambia queues for essential commodities and fuel became a recurring feature.

The promulgation of Perestroika by Gorbachev in Russia led to the fall of 'communism' (state capitalism) in eastern Europe and Africa. This gave rise to demands for political pluralism in Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe. It took the intervention of Tanzanian soldiers to evict the dictator Idi Amin from Uganda. President Mobutu was made to flee Kinshasa when the Rwandan army used the Banyamulenge to attack his army. Kaunda himself was voted out of office in 1991.

The one-party states there were ended but replaced by tribal-based politics.

KEPHAS MULENGA



'I'm not going first'

'I DON'T want UK to be at the forefront of tackling climate change, says Osborne', ran the headline in the *Guardian* (28 September) reporting on an interview George Osborne gave just because last year's Tory conference. His exact words were:

'I want to provide for the country the cheapest energy possible, consistent with having it reliable, in other words as a steady supply, and consistent with playing our part in an international effort to tackle climate change. But I don't want to be the only people out there in front of the rest of the world. I certainly think we shouldn't be further ahead of our partners in Europe.'

Given capitalism, and given his position as a member of the government of one of the many states into which the capitalist world is divided, his logic was impeccable. If Britain alone imposed stricter conditions than its rivals on releasing CO₂ from burning fossil fuels into the atmosphere, this would increase the cost of energy to firms producing in Britain and undermine their competitiveness on world markets. The governments of other states follow the same logic. So nothing effective gets done to tackle climate change.

The main source of CO₂ emissions is the burning of fossil fuels (coal, oil, natural gas) to power industry and transport and to provide heating and lighting. The trouble is that different states have access to fossil fuels more, or less, than others and each wants 'the cheapest energy possible.'

So, any international scheme to reduce CO₂ emissions that involved, for instance, cutting back on burning coal would disproportionately effect states for which this was the cheapest source of energy. It would increase the cost of production across their whole economy and make its products less competitive. The government of a state in this position will therefore oppose or seek to delay or water down any such scheme.

The same applies to oil. Of the fossil fuels burning gas emits the least CO₂. So, a scheme to favour this at the expense of burning coal or oil would favour states with easy and cheap access to gas.

It is these conflicts of interest between capitalist states with different energy supply conditions that is preventing agreement on doing any effective to reduce even the rate of increase of CO₂ emission let alone the absolute level.

It is also why no one state is going to unilateral measures to do this. Greens who campaign for their government to be 'out there in front of the world' on this are being naïve. Any government which did this would, by undermining the competitiveness of its industries, provoke an economic slowdown with increased unemployment and so likely be voted out of office.

Global warming is a world problem requiring a world solution. This is not going to happen under capitalism. Something may well be attempted, but it will be too little, too late. The only framework within which the problem can be solved is where the Earth's resources have become the common heritage of all. Then there will be no capitalist vested interests standing in the way nor any market forces working against a solution.

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MANY HAVE a soft spot for Buddhism as a religion and it frequently escapes criticism. After all, it is a religion where the belief in gods is not a necessary pre-requisite. The popular conception is that all Buddhists are peaceful, simply by virtue of the fact that they call themselves Buddhists. Nothing could be further from the truth. States where Buddhism is the dominant tradition have engaged in many wars and other conflicts over the past centuries. And Buddhist monks have a long tradition of supporting kings and warlords in their conflicts. Particularly in south-east Asia, Buddhism has been the religion allegedly followed by many feudal rulers, in the form of an hierarchical organised religion. Buddhism holds a certain amount of political influence in Myanmar (Burma), Thailand and Sri Lanka.

Buddhists are just like people of other faiths: subject to desire, anger, and ignorance. Buddhism differs only in that it offers the promise of freedom from desire, anger and ignorance to those who seriously practise. Many so-called Buddhists do not engage in serious practice. The thing about these 'peaceful religions' is often a product of the Western imagination, the idea of these far-off people living these incredibly peaceful and wise lives.

Buddhism certainly has much within its precepts about pacifism but as with the Christian crusaders or Islamist militants violence has been justified in the name of a higher good. Buddhist rulers and monks have been no exception. Any religion sooner or later enters into a pact with state power. Buddhist monks looked to kings for support, patronage and order and kings looked to monks to provide the popular legitimacy that only they confer. When Buddhism has become an established religion and a theocracy you have as brutal a feudal despotism as any other, for instance, the monastic version of Buddhism practiced in Tibet, Lamaism. Until recently the Dalai Lama was in effect head of state, not simply a religious leader. This often led to political rather than theological disputes with other leading religious Lamas.

Buddhist nation states have historically sought to use Buddhist doctrine to justify war. The links between Zen Buddhism and samurai warrior culture were partly responsible for the collusion of Zen and Japanese militarism in the 1930s and 1940s. For several years Japanese jingoism seized

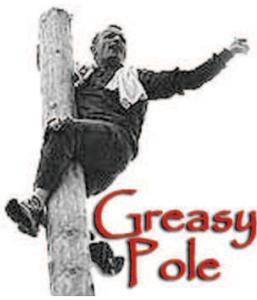
Zen, and its teachings were twisted and corrupted to excuse killing. Zen institutions not only supported Japanese military aggression but raised money to manufacture war planes and weapons.

Tamils are Hindus and they constitute a majority in Northern Sri Lanka. The Sinhalese are Buddhist and have been perfectly willing to exercise ruthless violence against Tamils. In the Sri Lankan civil war hard-line monks were at the vanguard of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism, which viewed the Hindu Tamils and Sri Lanka's smaller Muslim population as outsiders. They joined the government with their own party, the Jathika Hela Urumaya or National Heritage Party. The monks used their new power to argue vociferously against any self-determination for the Tamils in the north, opposing even the more limited measure of autonomy. In religious terms they justified the suppression of the Tamils on the grounds that a fracture in the nation state is a tear in the sacred fabric of a land which represents the well-spring of their belief. Roads have been renamed after Buddhist monks. While many Hindu temples and Christian churches were destroyed in the war, new Buddhist stupas and statues are being built.

In Rakhine State, Myanmar there has been civil strife between Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims whom the Burmese government views not as citizens but as illegal immigrants and therefore affords little protection, and this has led to a refugee crisis as the Rohingya flee from pogroms inspired and led by Buddhist monks. Dr. Muang Zarni, a Burmese human rights activist and research fellow at the London School of Economics has described the 969 movement as a neo-Nazi Buddhist organisation. 969 stands for three things: the 9 stands for the special attributes of Buddha, the founder of the religion; the 6 stands for attributes of his teachings of dharma; and finally, the last 9 stands for special characteristics or attributes of the clergy (<http://www.vice.com/read/is-burmas-anti-muslim-violence-led-by-buddhist-neo-nazis>).

Buddhism can easily be used to support reactionary politics. The conflict between Buddhists and Muslims is often over land and nationalism. Buddhism is neither better nor worse than any other organised religions in its role as an agent of social control.

ALJO



Catching The Eye

HOW MANY compulsive viewers of *Prime Minister's Questions* have noticed that there is one MP who is always firmly in the same seat behind

David Cameron (perhaps he gets there early to reserve it) and does not take part in the racket of bellows and sneers which signal that the Honourable Members are representing their constituents? Then after each question, before the Prime Minister has had time even to consult the 'briefing' which is painstakingly composed to tell him how to respond to, or avoid, each question, this Member gets to his feet and stays there until the next one is asked when he again stands up, then sits down ...until PMQs comes to an end. The procedure for this event is that backbenchers who have missed out in the ballot to ask a question may try for a supplementary by standing to 'catch the eye' of the Speaker. Is this what motivates this Member? Or are his trousers too tight? Does he suffer from cramp? Is he trying to get a clearer view of Balls and Miliband?

Eton

The Conservative Party Member of Parliament for South West Bedfordshire is Andrew Edmund Armstrong Selous, who went to Eton (although his response to a *Guardian* survey of his educational background was that he would 'prefer not to reveal' that detail) then Oxford for a degree in Industry and Trade so that he was ready to become a director of the family firm and an insurance underwriter. From that it was almost natural to try for a place in Parliament but first Selous had to prove himself at an unconquerable Labour seat such as Sunderland North where in 1997 his vote was 6,370 while the Labour incumbent got 26,067. In 2001 he won South West Bedfordshire; his majority was a mere 776 but those were hard times for the Tories, with Tony Blair and his street-corner grin and verbiage seemingly threatening us with Labour rule into the foreseeable future.



Andrew Selous

Sleep-Outs

In opposition Selous spent some time as a Whip until in 2006 he connected himself to a wider horizon as Shadow Minister for Work and Pensions and then, when Cameron ushered in his rag-bag of a Coalition, a 'proper' job nearer the sharp end of power as Parliamentary Private Secretary to Iain Duncan Smith. That was when IDS had been transmogrified into a kind of crusader against the scourge of poverty with an ambition to re-adjust the entire 'benefits' system so as to present it as a lasting remedy to that granitic problem. In tune with this fantasy Selous burrowed into local organisations such as the Conservative Christian Fellowship, the South Bedfordshire Community Family Trust, Leighton Buzzard Parkinson's Disease Society. He is reported to have 'taken part' – although exactly what this demanded of him is not clear – in annual sponsored sleep-outs to publicise the fact that there are some people who are too poor to have

somewhere to sleep. For one such charity – Watford New Hope – he did not sleep out but did some time in the dry and warmth of their workshop where wood and furniture are re-cycled.

RBS

Whatever motive may have driven Selous in his persistent efforts to catch the Speaker's eye it cannot have been an urge to give to the Commons a usefully critical view of what property society does to its people. A typical example of his stifling attitudes is that he supported the British attack on Iraq on the inadequate, quickly discredited, argument that Blair's old friend and Attorney General Lord Goldsmith had '...clearly advised the Government that the military campaign in Iraq is clearly legal'. He is listed as being strongly supportive of the replacement for the mass-destroyer Trident submarine (one of which is said to be able to kill and lay waste on the scale of the entire bomb loads dropped in the last war). In calmer waters he opposes equal rights for gay people and was against the ban on hunting. In June he spoke up for the Royal Bank of Scotland, so recently a prime example of the profit motive rampant. Selous now thinks that the RBS '...has gone from a bad bank under the last government to a normal bank now and it has actually made a profit of over £800 million in the first three months of this year'. What he did not say was that this bank, as part of being 'normal', is now planning to re-commence paying dividends but also imposing a fresh programme of 'savings' which will entail the sacking of thousands of employees who will thus be forced to face some of the most demanding aspects of their reliance on surviving through the sale of their labour power – and therefore on IDS and what may remain of his ministry's 'benefits'.

Lean English

If Selous was looking for a blast of national publicity to help his career it recently arrived, although in an unintended way. And when it did it illustrated that there are limits to his charitable urges. In June George Osborne held forth to the Commons on the potentially rich theme of immigrants who are also benefit claimants, saying that it was a 'reasonable requirement that anyone on benefits would have a basic grasp of English... From now on, if claimants don't speak English, they will have to attend language courses until they do'. Selous was quick join in this but his contribution was deficient in one crucial respect. He tweeted that he would '...strongly support the loss of benefits unless claimants lean English'. The mis-spelling was greeted by a flood of derisive responses, typical of which was 'Were did you lean to rite so good?' which compelled a panicky Selous to delete the tweet. The episode served to emphasise the assessment of him by politics.co.uk under The Worst MP On Twitter that his stuff is 'meaningless, regurgitated of the highest order...no real engagement with constituents...never actually speaks to them...' If Selous does ever succeed in catching the Speaker's eye it is very unlikely that he will grasp the opportunity to offer anything original or penetrative. It would be in his interests if, when the other Members are in full cry, he were to duck down behind the seats in the Commons rather than expose himself.

IVAN

What about the

Roma?

If you believe UKIP by the time you read this millions of Romanians and Bulgarians will have arrived in Britain, many of them Roma. This is nonsense of course, but who are the Roma?

Nazi genocide was not limited to the Jewish population. An estimated 800,000 Roma were murdered in Nazi-occupied Europe, an episode that has come to be known in the Romani language as the Porrajmos (the 'devouring'), or Romani holocaust. When Hitler started his ethnic cleansing of the gypsies he inherited elaborate discriminatory legislation specifically designed to keep the gypsies away. Germany had anti-gypsy laws since the end of the 19th century. During the early days of Nazism, existing anti-gypsy measures were strengthened and led to mass sterilisation and murder.

The history of the Roma (more commonly called gypsies) in Europe is a tragic one. Migrating from northern India to Europe in the eleventh century, most Roma live today in eastern and central

Europe, particularly in Romania and Bulgaria, with many large communities in other European countries. In the parts of the Ottoman Empire today located in modern-day Romania, they have endured persecution and enslavement at the hands of landowners and clergy since the Middle Ages, being emancipated from slavery only in the mid-nineteenth century. The Romanian author Mircea Cartarescu described a life of misery:

'For centuries they could be bought and sold, families were torn apart, children taken from their mothers, women separated from their men. The young women were generally raped by their owners and the 'flock of crows', as they were called, was the target of general contempt and discrimination. One of the voivodes, or provincial governors, used to have them climb trees and then

shot them down with arrows. He called it crow-hunting. Tied to one place and kept like animals, the gypsies multiplied more quickly in the Romanian principalities than anywhere else in Europe. Therefore we only have ourselves to blame for creating the gypsy problem. It is our historical guilt... We are appalled when other countries perceive us as a nation of criminals, but we see the gypsies in exactly the same way.'

After the Second World War in 'communist' eastern Europe, the state set about targeting Roma, with social policies aimed to settle them forcibly and to eradicate 'anti-social traits'. Despite efforts to socially engineer their assimilation, the vast majority of Roma remained marginalised and discriminated against by both state and society. Anti-Roma racism across Europe has remained rampant. In many countries, segregation in schooling and housing is still a fact of life, social attitudes towards



Historical distribution of the Romani people:

- Roma
- Sinti
- Manush
- Romanichal
- Romanisæl
- Welsh Kale
- Finnish Kale
- Iberian Kale



Roma are poisonous and pogroms are not unknown. Negative social attitudes and disastrous state policies toward the Roma has resulted in the reinforcement of the very conditions that contribute to their continued marginalisation, including low literacy levels, poverty, poor housing, poor health and low life expectancy. Throughout Europe reports of violence against the Roma have increased significantly, particularly in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, where extremist and openly racist groups and political parties are gaining in popularity.

There are an estimated million Roma in Hungary, making up one tenth of the population. During the Communist Party rule, social policies encouraged large families and those with three children or more were virtually guaranteed an unconditional mortgage loan. Such financial incentives allowed many Roma to build their own homes. But since the collapse of the former state capitalist system, Hungarians receive less than 50 dollars per child and with the slow Hungarian economy, many Roma are struggling to find work and feed their large families. The previous 'Communist' regime refused to regard the gypsies as a minority, but as a social problem - undisciplined proletarians who needed to be forced into the same mould as the rest. They were accordingly given poor-quality worker housing with those very cheap mortgages, and obliged to toil, like everybody else. The regime didn't want

them to get more education because they needed cheap unskilled labour. But when that system abruptly collapsed in 1989 the Communists' uneconomic factories and plants closed down. It was the unskilled workers at the bottom – the Roma in particular – who were left high and dry. Roma unemployment shot up from 15 percent to 85 percent in two years.

In the absence of work there was now welfare. Milking the system became a survival strategy. A Roma family would live off welfare, which arrives on the fifth of the month. By the money would run out, so they would run up credit at the local shop, and the men of the family would get a few days' casual work, building walls, fixing roofs, in the neighbourhood. But with the financial crisis, credit stopped and people stopped spending money and the work dried up. For the Roma the economic crisis has driven them to the wall, perhaps a bit more than for the rest of us. With increasing poverty amongst the Roma in Eastern Europe, it is hardly surprising that families travel to other countries in order to find work.

Throughout their history the Roma have had good reason to be mistrustful of authorities, and have survived at the absolute margins of society. Europe's roughly 10 million Roma remain the poorest of the poor, often migrating abroad in search of work. In several eastern European countries there is

a war against the Roma. There are marches against them. Self-proclaimed vigilantes bully and threaten them. Walls are built around the sections of town where they live. Their houses are set on fire. They are forced out of their homes and sometimes brutally murdered. Almost everywhere, the authorities have stood aside. In 1993, after three Roma in the Romanian village of Hadareni were lynched with the involvement of the police, the government, in its official explanation, expressed understanding for the 'anger of the villagers'.

These and events since has prompted tens of thousands of them, primarily from Romania and Bulgaria, to head west. Roma refugees have come to Italy, France, UK, and to Germany. In the western European countries they work for a couple of euros an hour doing cleaning, construction, or they beg. Some steal. For many, it is more than they could have ever imagined in their home countries. Those who fight for Roma rights make the argument that those who head to the West are as much political refugees as they are economic ones.

The Roma suffer threefold prejudice in the UK. Firstly because they are gypsies, secondly because they are often asylum seekers or refugees and thirdly because many are Romanian. The Roma are easy scapegoats. They're at the bottom of society and have no effective political lobby. In 2012 the European Parliament had only one member of Roma origin. 90,000 to 120,000 Roma are estimated to be in the UK, a fraction of the one million gypsies who live in France and Germany. Next year, the quotas which let EU countries limit the number of Bulgarian and Romanian migrants crossing their borders will be lifted. Britain wants to deter them from crossing the Channel and is financing an anti-migrant ad campaign in those countries. Suspicions have been raised that what the UK Government really fears – but dares not say publicly – is the mass migration of Roma.

It is not difficult to believe that the government's very public stance against eastern European (aka Roma) immigration is fuelled largely by a desire to appeal to the populist vote and is a demagogic tactic aimed at seducing the far right. Each year we are reminded by the government of the day to remember the Jewish Holocaust, yet the Roma Devouring stays forgotten. August the 2nd is the Roma Holocaust Memorial Day, marking the start of the liquidation by the Nazis of the 'gypsy' camp at Auschwitz. The silence of British politicians was deafening. Our rulers have a long history of camouflaging the failures of capitalism, particularly in times of economic slump, by seeking out scapegoats.

ALJO



In February 2013 the National Curriculum Consultation Document was published and capitalist ideologue and Tory Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove made a statement to the House of Commons about the new history syllabus: 'in history there is a clear narrative of British progress with a proper emphasis on heroes and heroines from our past' (*Daily Telegraph* 7 February).

Earlier at the 2008 and 2010 Tory Party Conferences Gove had complained that 'our children are either taught to put Britain in the dock or they remain in ignorance of our island story, education has been undermined by left wing ideologues, the under-appreciated tragedy of our time has been the sundering of our society from its past and the current approach we have to history denies children the opportunity to hear our island story. This trashing of our past has to stop' (*Guardian* 30 September 2008, *Daily Telegraph* 5 October 2010).

When the Tory-Lib Dem coalition government came to power in May 2010, Gove invited historian Niall Ferguson to advise on the development of a new history syllabus for the National Curriculum, 'history as a connected narrative' (*Daily Telegraph* 30 December 2012). Later in 2010 at the Tory Party Conference Gove announced

historian Simon Schama as the new 'History Czar' to ensure pupils learn Britain's 'Island Story', and review the curriculum. Schama responded 'without this renewed sense of our common story, we will be a poorer and weaker Britain' (*Guardian* 5 October 2010).

Conservative historians

Schama is well known for his 1989 book *Citizens; A Chronicle of the French Revolution* where he defines the 'Revolution' by the Reign of Terror. Historian Eric Hobsbawm described the book as a political denunciation of the revolution, a continuation of a traditional conservative view of the revolution started by Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, and continued in Thomas Carlyle and Charles Dickens *A Tale of Two Cities*. Gove called Edmund Burke 'the greatest Conservative ever' at the 2008 Tory Conference (*Daily Telegraph* 30 September 2008).

Niall Ferguson is a conservative historian who cites as influences Thomas Hobbes, Adam Smith, Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman. His 2011 six-part Channel Four TV series *Civilization: Is the West History?* is a hymn to Western capitalism, global free trade and bourgeois liberalism. Ferguson identifies the 'six killer apps' of competition, science, rule

of law, medicine, consumerism and the work ethic as keys to the dominance of western capitalism. Hobsbawm has called Ferguson an excellent historian but a 'nostalgist for Empire'. He is also a historian of financial capitalism having written *The House of Rothschild* and a biography of a merchant banker *High Financier: The Lives and Times of Siegmund Warburg*. His magnum opus on finance must be the publication in November 2008 of *The Ascent of Money: A Financial History of the World* which unfortunately for Ferguson was overtaken by the events of September 2008 when Lehman Brothers collapsed and the resulting global financial crisis. In this book Ferguson penned a hymn to global financial capitalism whereas we agree with Marx that 'money is the universal whore, the universal pimp of men and peoples'.

The Department of Education stated that 'our approach to the history curriculum has been supported by some of the country's most eminent historians' (*Guardian* 13 May). But the new history syllabus was immediately criticised by the President of the Royal Historical Society, the Historical Association, the Higher Education group History UK, and senior members of the British Academy.

The overall aim of the new history syllabus is 'a knowledge

of Britain's past, and our place in the world helps us to understand the challenges of our time' with supporting aims to be to 'know and understand the story of these islands; how the British people shaped this nation and how Britain influenced the world'. The syllabus will attempt to cover the Palaeolithic era to the fall of the Berlin Wall in seven years. Even at Key Stage 1, ages 5 to 7 years, children are expected to understand terms such as 'civilisation', 'parliament', 'monarchy', 'democracy', and the 'concept of nation and of a nation's history' (*Department for Education:*



National Curriculum Consultation 7 February).

At Key Stage 2, ages 7 to 11 years children will be taught 'the essential chronology of British history sequentially' from the Stone Age to the 1688 bourgeois 'Glorious Revolution'. This is history as a story, chronology, narrative, dates, events which makes Henry Ford comment 'history is bunk and just one damn thing after another' quite apt. Professor Jackie Eales, President of the Historical Society said 'intellectually, it is exactly what *1066 and All That* was designed to lampoon. It is a trawl through history, one damn thing after another, in a very superficial way. It's a very old fashioned curriculum' (*Guardian* 16 February).

One of the recommendations of the 1999 Macpherson Report was a 'National Curriculum aimed at valuing cultural diversity and preventing racism' but in April 2013 History teacher Katherine Edwards pointed out that 'the new curriculum is very likely to alienate and disengage children and young people, especially those of black and Asian origin. Black and Asian people are excluded completely from the primary history curriculum and, apart from the token inclusions of Equiano and Seacole they only feature as slaves in the secondary curriculum until the

arrival of the Windrush generation' (*Guardian* 19 April). Later in June children's laureate Malorie Blackman added 'if children are not taught about black historical figures along with heroes such as Lord Nelson, they might be turned off school altogether' (*Guardian* 4 June). In fact Olaudah Equiano, freed African slave who campaigned for abolition of the slave trade and Mary Seacole, Creole nurse in the Crimean War, were only introduced into the National Curriculum in 2007 but it was announced in 2012 they were to be dropped in the new syllabus. This prompted Operation Black



Left: ideologue Michael Gove. Above: historian Niall Ferguson. Right: 'History Czar' Simon Schama.

Vote to gather 35,000 signatures on a petition to Gove, and American Democrat Reverend Jesse Jackson to write a letter to *the Times*. Gove conceded and Equiano and Seacole stayed in the new syllabus. But Martin Luther King and the US Civil Rights movement have been dropped from the curriculum.

As for the role of women in history there are no women at all mentioned in the Key Stage 2 syllabus except for two Tudor queens. In Key Stage 3, ages 11 to 14 years, Mary Seacole, George Eliot and Annie Besant are grouped under the heading 'The Changing Role of Women'.

China is not included in the curriculum but is only mentioned as a loser to Britain as a result of gunboat diplomacy, although the OECD stated in March 2013: 'from a long-range perspective, China has now overtaken the Euro area and is on course to become the world's largest economy around 2016, after allowing for price differences' (*forbes.com* 23 March).

'Great Man' Theory

The syllabus focuses on kings, queens, and the lives of great men which is part of the bourgeois 'Great Man Theory of History' which has its origin in Thomas Carlyle's 1840 book *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1840) where he

writes that 'the history of the world is but the biography of great men'.

Do 'Great Men' impose themselves on history? Marx wrote in *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*: 'Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past'. It appears that Napoleon Bonaparte perceived this truth when he wrote in exile 'I found all the elements ready at hand to found an empire. If I had not come probably someone would have done like me. A man is but a



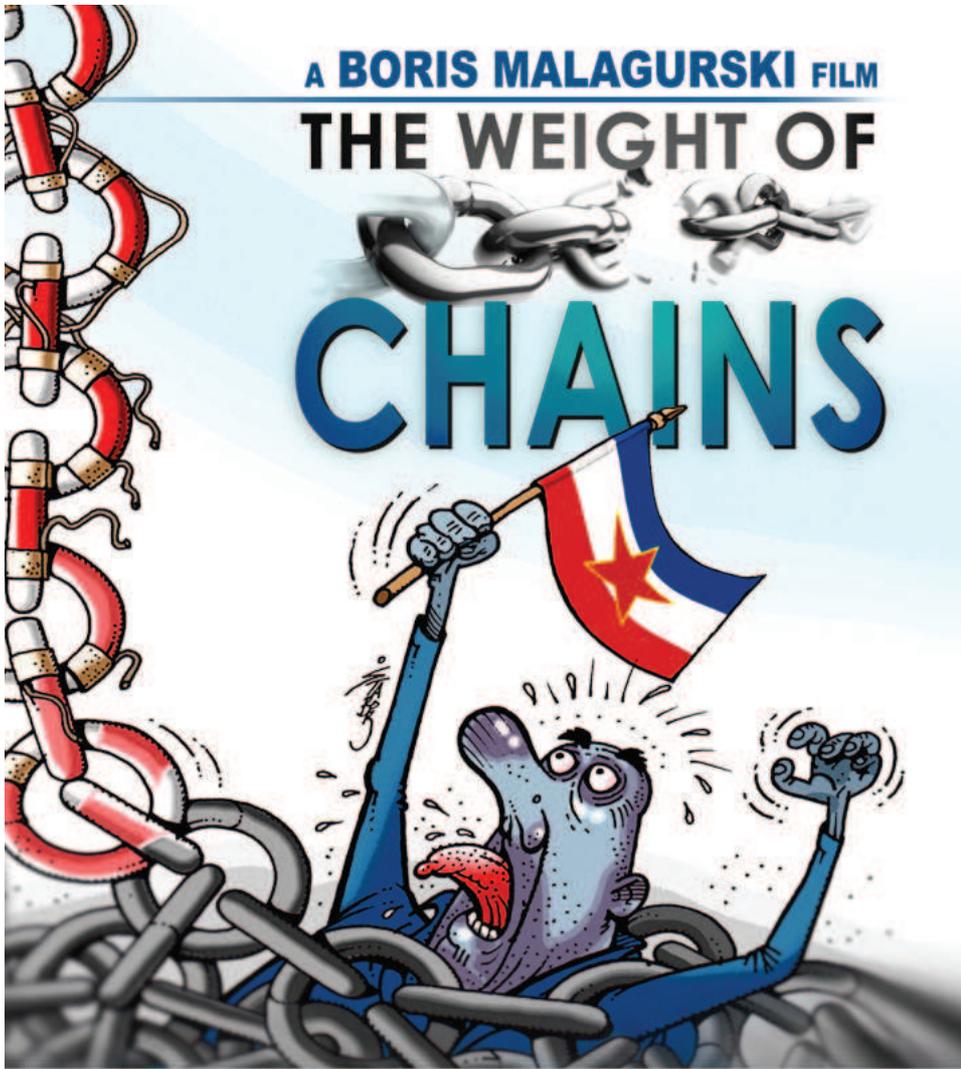
man, but often he can do much; often he is a tinderbox in the midst of inflammable matter, his power is nothing if circumstances and public sentiment do not favour him' (*The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from His Written and Spoken Words* edited and translated by J. Christopher Herold. Columbia University Press: New York. 1955).

Peter Mandler, Cambridge professor of Modern Cultural History said of the new syllabus 'we need to know the history of family life, economic development, class formation, not just a list of prime ministers, admirals and treaties. And when the curriculum talks about the rise and fall of Empires it still only means the Roman Empire' (*Guardian* 16 February 2013).

History from below

The antidote to bourgeois 'Great Men' history is 'History from below' (the term coined by historian George Lefebvre) which is people's history, the history of the working class, everyday history or even micro-history. A good example of 'history from below' is *The Crowd in the French Revolution* by George Rud where he points out that 'those who took to the streets were ordinary, sober citizens, not half-crazed animals, not criminals' in contrast to Carlyle,

continued page 18



Nationalism and destruction in the Balkans

We review a recent film about the break-up of Yugoslavia

‘Who in their right mind would actually want to be a colony?’

So begins *The Weight of Chains*, a documentary written and directed by Boris Malagurski (2010) which argues that the bloody breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s was orchestrated by Western powers in furtherance of imperial ambitions. Director Boris Malagurski, hailed by the Belgrade press as the ‘Serbian Michael Moore’, claims his film ‘takes a critical look at the role that the US, NATO and the EU played in the tragic breakup of a once-peaceful and prosperous European state’.

The film is narrated by Malagurski himself and begins with a whirlwind history of Yugoslavia: the country was first established as a kingdom in 1918, and encompassed people of various religions and ethnicities, including Orthodox Serbs, Catholic Croats, Muslim Bosnians (all of Slavic extraction), as well as sizeable Hungarian and Albanian minorities. The country was reorganised as a federation of six national republics in 1943, the Titoist ruling party opting for an economic model which mixed state and private ownership of capital. By the 1970s Yugoslavia came to enjoy levels of social and economic prosperity which rivalled even many of its avowedly capitalist neighbours.

The historical background thus set, Malagurski pinpoints the beginning of Yugoslavia’s decline to the early 1980s, when it took out an IMF loan to shore up its waning economy. Around the same time, Ronald Reagan issued a secret memo, National Security Decision Directive 133, which committed the US to

widen its sphere of influence in Eastern Europe by aggressively promoting Western-style market capitalism in Yugoslavia. US-sponsored NGOs promptly began funding Yugoslavian opposition groups, journalists, free-market economists, and trade union activists. By the late 1980s, this ideological groundwork had paved the way for ‘privatisation through liquidation’: US-guided Yugoslavian bankers and legislators started implementing monetary and economic reforms which triggered the bankruptcy of thousands of state-run firms. This, explains Malagurski, deepened the state’s massive debt and led to runaway inflation and unemployment, cuts to welfare spending, and tension between the subnational governments. Foreign speculators snapped up failed companies at rock-bottom prices, and the federal government, cut off from further foreign credit, was forced to accede to American demands for ‘free’ multiparty elections in the constituent republics.

Lured by the promise of Western favour and financing for their individual republics, regional politicians sowed the seeds of ethnic discord; these in turn were eagerly cultivated by the impoverished workers who were searching desperately for someone to blame for their sudden misfortune. Malagurski aptly shows how the ensuing nationalist secessions brought their leaders into open and often very bloody military conflict over land and resources.

If any of this sounds familiar, it should – long-term readers of the *Standard* will recognise this part of Malagurski’s analysis of the Yugoslavian breakup and ensuing wars as much the same one we have always presented. Like Malagurski, socialists eschew the ‘ancient hatreds’ theory which holds that interethnic hostility is



Sarajevo 1992

biologically innate and genocidal violence preordained. Instead, we observe how a faction of the ruling elite, when confronted with rivals to its privileged position as owners and controllers, is compelled to enlist masses of the working class to defend that position. One way of rallying this support is to seize upon some unimportant characteristic – say, religion, language, or ethnicity – which the workers share with the ruling faction, but not with the workers of the rival faction. By exaggerating such differences and ignoring or obscuring the more important commonalities, leaders convince the workers that they share a common interest with their masters, and to happily march off to war in support of it.

By this point in the film, therefore, Malagurski has set things up wonderfully for a scathing indictment of nationalism, irredentism, and capitalist warmongering. Unfortunately, this indictment never comes: as it turns out, Malagurski is just another nationalist, albeit one pining for the ‘good old days’ of pre-breakup Yugoslavia (which, rather tellingly, he himself is far too young to remember). While he correctly surmises that the new ‘Bosnian’, ‘Kosovar’ and other national identities are largely artificial distinctions, invented or overinflated by their respective governments in order to win the support of their electorate and of foreign powers, he ignores the fact that the same was true of the even more artificial ‘Yugoslav’ national identity they supplanted.

In support of its pan-Yugoslav agenda, the film devotes considerable screen time to documenting how the political and economic leaders of the newly independent states enriched themselves at the expense of the common people. Malagurski explains how they did this by cutting back social programmes, skimming foreign investment funds, and selling off entire domestic

industries to foreign concerns. But what he fails to establish is how any of this could have been prevented had Yugoslavia remained united, nor why foreign private ownership of industry is any worse for the workers than local private ownership. Russia, for example, emerged from the USSR with a strong national identity and a much greater proportion of its industry in local hands, though its workers also experienced widespread poverty and massive social cutbacks. Of course, even Titoist Yugoslavia was never the paragon of social and economic equality Malagurski seems to think it was. The Yugoslavian *nomenklatura* may have avoided the conspicuous consumption typical of Western capitalists, but it remained a privileged ruling class which was just as keen to enrich itself through exploitation of its workers.

Many of the film’s flimsier claims and arguments can be explained as the work of a naïve but well-meaning patriot, but others cannot be so innocently excused. For example, Malagurski outright denies that the ethnic minorities in Serbia were oppressed, conveniently omitting any mention of the mass protests and general strikes that led to the revocation of their political autonomy in the late 1980s. In another segment, he paints Bosnian president Alija Izetbegović as a rabid jihadist, quoting from a thirty-year old Islamist manifesto which the man had long since repudiated. Most controversially, he presents the infamous Srebrenica massacre as a ‘stage-managed’ ploy by the Bosnians and Americans to justify NATO military intervention against Serbia. Whatever the plausibility of this theory, it’s particularly distasteful how Malagurski trivialises the village’s civilian death toll as ‘no larger than the number of Serbs killed’ in the surrounding area, without any pretence of distinguishing between combatant and non-combatant deaths.

Given this it is not hard to see why Malagurski’s detractors accuse him of being a pro-Serb whitewasher and historical revisionist. Are they correct? With so many of the post-breakup events still under active historical and criminal investigation, it’s hard to say for sure. But at least one thing about Malagurski is clear: for all the effort he spends exposing and decrying the dishonest propagandising which fuelled the Yugoslavian implosion, he certainly has no qualms employing many of the same tricks when it suits his own agenda. Whatever that agenda may be, the conclusion is that he has a very low estimation of the intelligence of his audience.

TRISTAN MILLER



Srebrenica massacre - ‘stage-managed’

Marx,

co-operatives and

capitalism

The recent failure of the co-operative bank and its rescue by hedge funds seems an apt time to review Richard Wolff's latest book, *Democracy at Work: A Cure for Capitalism* (Haymarket Books), which advocates co-operatives as the way towards economic democracy for the working class. Wolff rejects the label 'co-operative', perhaps because of its historical baggage, and chooses another term, 'workers self-directed enterprises' (WSDEs), to describe what he advocates. In practice, though, what Wolff advocates is indistinguishable from the historical aims of the co-operative movement to re-distribute profit amongst its members. Wolff is also an open advocate for long-established co-operative projects such as Mondragon in Spain. Wolff's aims, though, run deeper than support for extending the popularity of co-operatives as presently understood. What Wolff seeks to do in *Democracy at Work* is to redefine working-class co-operative production as socialism in action:

'...in a socialist economy, workers – who produce the surplus – themselves appropriate and distribute the surplus ... socialism and communism are differentiated from capitalism in terms of being nonexploitative, since the producers of surpluses also appropriate and distribute them.' (p.105)

The case against regarding co-operatives as a definition of, or even a route to, socialism is best dealt with by quoting from Wolff's recent book where he sets out how his workers self-directed firms may co-exist with other capitalist firms:

'WSDEs and capitalist enterprises will ... manage their challenges and disappointments differently. Consider a WSDE troubled by the problem of falling revenues (because of lack of demand, technological backwardness, or shortage of inputs). That WSDE could well decide to lower individual wages and salaries and thereby enlarge the surplus available to solve the problem (via advertising, installing advanced equipment, securing new input sources, and so on). The workers who collectively lowered their individual wages would be the same workers who received and then used the enlarged surplus to solve the problem. In contrast, workers in a capitalist enterprise would more likely resist such a solution since other people – the capitalists who exploit them – would receive and decide what to do with any extra surplus realized by lowering individual wages. Distrust accumulated from conflicts and struggles between capitalists and workers would contribute to such a result. Thus WSDEs and capitalist enterprises would likely find and implement different responses to similar enterprise problems.'

Wolff is, of course, describing the actions not of two different types of social organisation (one allegedly socialist and one capitalist) but of two models of capitalist firm. The solutions to the problems faced by



Toad Lane, Rochdale, where the co-operative movement was founded

the different types of firm are not different solutions but the same solution. The difference is that one in scenario the solution (cutting wages, increasing intensity of labour and mechanisation) is enforced by the workers as a collective employer on themselves and in the other scenario enforced by a single employer owner or board of directors.

Wolff's incredible suggestion is that capitalism run by the workers would avoid the conflict between an employing class and an employed class – the problem is cured, the conflict resolved, by the workers becoming their own employer. It will be quite clear to anyone with a cursory acquaintance with the work of Karl Marx that Wolff's cure for capitalism is quite different from anything that Marx worked for or that could reasonably be derived from his writings. However, this is precisely what Wolff claims for his WSDEs – that they are derived from Marxian economic theory:

The alternative economic system that begins to emerge in Marx's writings differs from capitalism in how it

organises the production and distribution of the surplus. ... [In WSDEs] it is the workers –and not a separate, small group of persons, as in capitalism – who play the key roles of appropriating and distributing the surpluses they generate in production. The producers and appropriators of the surplus are then identical...' (p.105)

Here we must beware of a Wolff in Marxian clothing as Wolff's 'surplus theory' supplants Marxian analysis. To prove the point let's take a quick look at what Marx actually said about co-operatives in his own lifetime. Marx was enthusiastic about the emergence of co-operatives and what they portended for capitalism. Writing for the International Working Men's Association (IWMA) in 1864, he wrote:

The value of these great social experiments cannot be overrated. By deed instead of by argument, they have shown that production on a large scale, and in accord with the behests of modern science, may be carried on without the existence of a class of masters employing a class of hands...'

Again for the IWMA in 1866s:

'We acknowledge the co-operative movement as one of the transforming forces of the present society based upon class antagonism. Its great merit is to practically show, that the present pauperising, and despotic system of the subordination of labour to capital can be superseded by the republican and beneficent system of the association of free and equal producers.'

In Volume 3 of *Capital* Marx argued of co-operatives that 'the antithesis between capital and labour is overcome within them, if at first only by way of making the associated labourers into their own capitalist, i.e., by enabling them to use the means of production for the employment of their own labour.'

However, in each case Marx also described the limitations of co-operatives:

'...however... excellent in principle and however useful in practice, co-operative labour, if kept within the narrow circle of the casual efforts of private workmen, will never be able to arrest the growth in geometrical progression of monopoly, to free the masses, nor even to perceptibly lighten the burden of their miseries. ... To save the industrious masses, co-operative labour ought to be developed to national dimensions, and, consequently, to be fostered by national means. Yet the lords of the land and the lords of capital will always use their political privileges for the defence and perpetuation of their economic monopolies. So far from promoting, they will continue to lay every possible impediment in the way of the emancipation of labour. ...To conquer political power has, therefore, become the great duty of the working classes.' (IWMA 1864)

Restricted, however, to the dwarfish forms into which individual wages slaves can elaborate it by their private efforts, the co-operative system will never transform capitalist society. To convert social production into one large and harmonious system of free and co-operative labour, general social changes are wanted, changes of the general conditions of society, never to be realised

save by the transfer of the organised forces of society, viz., the state power, from capitalists and landlords to the producers themselves.' (IWMA 1866)

The co-operative factories of the labourers themselves represent within the old form the first sprouts of the new, although they naturally reproduce, and must reproduce, everywhere in their actual organisation all the shortcomings of the prevailing system' (*Capital*, Vol.3)

So Marx was saying that workers taking control of their own productive work processes, of organising co-operatively in firms, appeared to be a positive reaction on the part of workers to private capitalism. As such it was a source of growing confidence for the working class, proof that the historically progressive role of private capitalists had come to an end:

'Co-operative factories furnish proof that the capitalist has become no less redundant as a functionary in production as he himself, looking down from his high perch, finds the big landowner redundant.' (*Capital*, Vol. 3)

Of itself, though, co-operatives represented an accommodation of workers to capitalism and not a social transformation. Through the experience of engaging in co-operative enterprises Marx believed that workers would come to realise their limitations as a force for social change and grasp the need for political action in order to socialise production generally. From Marx's viewpoint in the middle of the second half of the nineteenth-century this was probably a reasonable, if optimistic, assessment. By the early twentieth-

century, however, it was far clearer that co-operatives were not evolving into a revolutionary response to capitalism. Instead they were being seen by some ex-Marxian socialists such as Eduard Bernstein as proof that capitalism was slowly evolving towards socialism from within, that revolutionary political action was not required.

A hundred years ago these arguments



Ex-Marxian socialist Eduard Bernstein

took place around the debate in the labour movement as to whether reform or revolution was the way towards socialism. Today we face similar arguments from Richard Wolff but from a different direction. Between the early Marxian socialist movement and today occurred the state capitalist revolutions in Russia, China, Cuba and so on. In rightly rejecting these state capitalist political models, radicals such as Wolff (influenced by postmodernism) have unfortunately felt the need to dispense with the materialist conception of history, arguing it to be irrevocably determinist. However, rather than leaving Marx behind Wolff engages in the mystifying process of appropriating Marxian clothing for his co-operative strategy for social change. If there is little enough merit in Wolff's arguments in *Democracy at Work* for co-operatives as a route to meaningful economic democracy, they also lacks integrity in attempting to associate WSDEs with Marxian economics.

CSK

Dickens and Schama.

E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* is a sweeping people's history of the English proletariat but his book *Whigs and hunters: The origin of the Black Act* is a great example of micro-history. Following the collapse of the 'South Sea bubble' in 1720 there was an economic downturn and groups of poachers appeared in forests in



Dropped: Olaudah Equiano, freed African slave

Berkshire and Hampshire stealing deer from the aristocracy. The Whig government responded with an Act in 1723 which introduced the death penalty for over fifty offences. The Act would not be repealed until 1823. The Act can be seen as an example of 'bloody legislation' against the working class. In 1688 there were fifty capital offences on the statute book but by 1800 there were 220 capital offences

mainly concerned with the defence of property. Between 1770 and 1830 35,000 death sentences were handed out with 7,000 executed.

At present capitalist ideologists are engaging in a type of 'historical revisionism' in relation to the First World War. In *The Great War was a Just War* published in *History Today* in August 2013, Gary Sheffield writes 'Britain's First World War was a war of national survival, a defensive conflict fought at huge cost against an aggressive enemy bent on achieving hegemony in Europe. If the allies had lost, it would have meant the end of liberal democracy on mainland Europe'.

Prime Minister David Cameron's speech in October 2012 at the Imperial War Museum announced that there would be commemorative events to mark the First World War. These would include the outbreak of war, the naval battle of Jutland, Churchill's disastrous Gallipoli campaign, the first day of the Battle of the Somme, the Battle of Passchendaele, and the Armistice.

The *Socialist Standard* of November 1914 pointed out that the *Sunday Chronicle* of 30 August 1914 had identified that it was a capitalist war when they wrote 'the men in the trenches are fighting on behalf of the manufacturer, the mill owner, and the shopkeeper'. In August 1919 the *Socialist Standard* concluded that 'while competition between capitalist groups for routes, markets, and control of raw materials exists, the cause of war remains'.

In capitalist society the working class are educated to identify their interest with the interests of the capitalist class and identify with the nation state not with our interests as a class. As socialists we believe 'the working class have no fatherland'.

As well as commemorating the First World War, the capitalist state has also allocated 1 million to restore the battlefield of Waterloo in Belgium ready for the 200th anniversary in June 2015. There is even talk of commemorating the 600th anniversary of the battle of Agincourt. All this is done to bolster nationalism and ensure that the working class identify with capitalist history.

The new History Syllabus in the National Curriculum demonstrates the truth of what Marx and Engels wrote in *The German Ideology*: 'The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, ie. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force'.

STEVE CLAYTON



Co-ops again

DESPITE THE capture of the Co-operative Bank by hedge funds and the exposure as hypocrisy of its claim to be more 'ethical' than other banks, there are still those who stubbornly argue think that co-operative enterprises could be a viable alternative to capitalism. Supporters of capitalism, however, have a more realistic view of co-operatives and what they can and cannot do within capitalism.

One of the arguments put forward in favour of co-operatives is their democratic management structure. They certainly are more democratic than any normal capitalist enterprise which are anything but this. The moment an employee enters the doors of the office or the gates of the factory where they work they cease to be 'free citizens' with a right to vote and become subjects who have to carry out the orders of the unelected managers who are running the business on behalf of its owners.

Under capitalism, however, not being undemocratic is a handicap for an enterprise. Even a nominally democratic structure hinders the emergence of the type of ruthless top executive needed to engage in the struggle with rivals with any chance of success.

This was spelled out clearly in an editorial in the business section of the *Daily Telegraph* (20 November) commenting on the Co-operative Bank and the Co-operative Group generally:

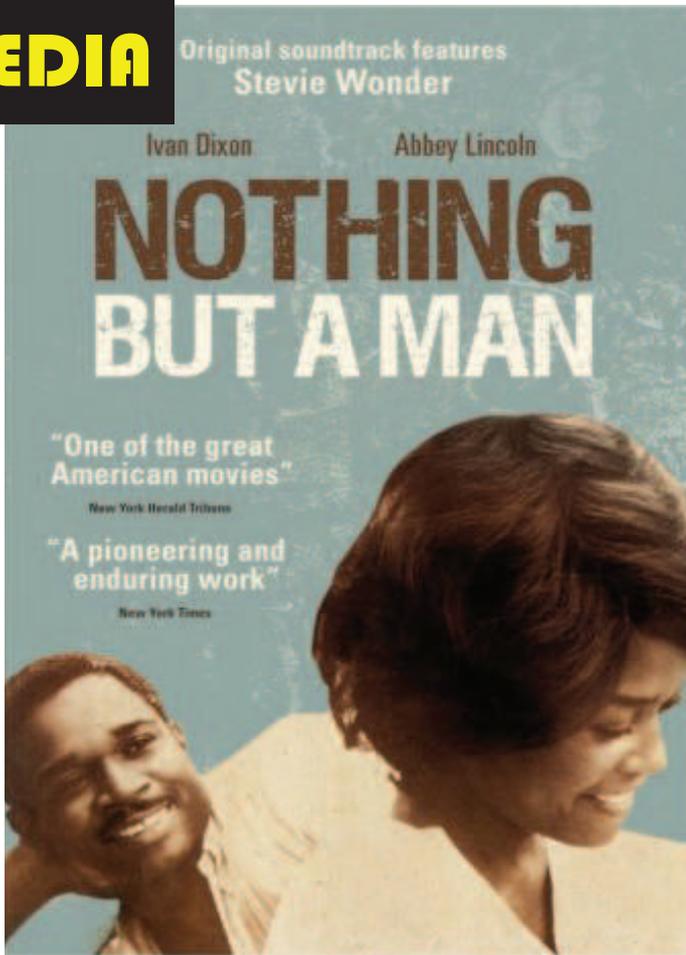
'Its democratic structure, with a Byzantine relationship between area committees, regional boards and the group board, was held up as a paragon of virtue. It was, as has been proved, a recipe for disaster ... It is difficult to imagine any corporation of this magnitude being governed by archaic governance standards more suited to a village charity than an organisation with its sites on major expansion.'

Like it or not, it's true. The sort of decisions that the top executives of an enterprise engaged in the competitive struggle for profits have to take are impeded if they are subject to any degree of democratic control. A democratically-run enterprise just wouldn't survive in the capitalist jungle. If you want to compete with the other beasts in the jungle you've got to behave like one of them.

This has been candidly recognised by the president of the much-touted Mondragón co-operative group (one of whose flagship enterprises has since gone under), Txemia Gisasola, when he told Miles Johnson the *Financial Times* (21 March):

'We receive visitors from many companies and many countries, and some come here with a magical idea of what Mondragón is. This is not magic. We are in this market, competing in the capitalist world, and the only difference is how we do things and why we do things. We have to be competitive, we have to be efficient, we have to have quality in our products and give satisfaction to our clients, and we have to be profitable. In that sense we are no different from anyone else.'

This does mean that there is no place at all for co-operatives within capitalism. There are some niches for a few of them, but they can never spread to take over the whole economy as their more romantic supporters envisage. As the *Times* put it (18 June), 'co-operatives are a model for a few companies, but not for an entire economy.' Co-operatives are in fact not at all an alternative to capitalism, just one form of capitalist enterprise and a not very efficient one at that.



Governor Wallace: 'Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever'

Dixon later in the TV series *Hogan's Heroes*, and Josie by jazz singer Abbey Lincoln who sang on Max Roach's *We Insist! Freedom Now Suite* 1960 civil rights jazz album. The film is notable for its Motown soundtrack of Smokey Robinson, Mary Wells, Martha and the Vandellas, and Little Stevie Wonder.

Nothing But a Man is a pioneering drama about African-American life, 'one of the most sensitive films about black life ever made in this country' (*Washington Post* 10 July 1993), and an early portrait of black pride and anger. Duff says 'They can reach right inside you with their white hands and turn you on and off'. The film was Malcolm X's favourite and was endorsed by the Nation of Islam newspaper *Muhammad Speaks*. The film is emotionally powerful with its portrait of Duff's embittered alcoholic father who was maimed at work in a sawmill, Duff's attacks on Josie's preacher father as a 'white man's nigger, you been stoopin' for so long you don't know how to stand up. You're only half a man', and the heart aches with lines like 'It's not gonna be easy but everything's gonna be alright' and 'I feel so free inside'.

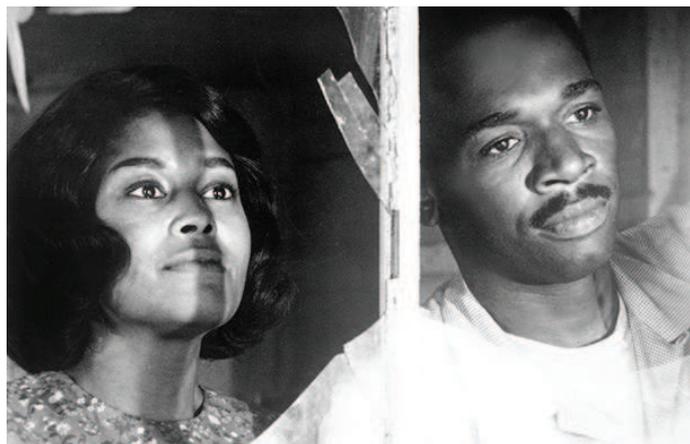
Nothing But a Man has a naturalistic and neo-realist style that is in stark contrast to the Hollywood liberal middle-America films about African-Americans such as *Lilies of the Field*, and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?* It can be compared to the *cinéma vérité* of Fred Hampton's Chicago Black Panther Party in *Medium Cool* by Haskell Wexler and the Paul Schrader film *Blue Collar* about Detroit car workers which starred Yaphet Kotto who was also in *Nothing But a Man*.

Nothing But a Man is set in the period of Bob Dylan's *The Times They Are a-Changin'*, but how much did life change for African-Americans in American capitalist society with the Civil Rights, Voting Rights and Fair Housing Acts?

In 2010 law professor and civil rights activist Michelle Alexander wrote in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* that there are more African American men in prison than were slaves before the start of the Civil War. 846,000 black men were in prison comprising 40 percent of the total when African Americans comprise 13.6 percent of the U.S. Population. More African American men were disenfranchised due to felony convictions in 2004 than in 1870, the year the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified prohibiting laws that explicitly deny the right to vote on the basis of race.

The black and white working class need to realise that they create the world's wealth and that their interests are in common irrespective of race and when the united black and white working class recognise this they can solve their problems by abolishing capitalism.

STEVE CLAYTON



Nothing But a Man

Nothing But a Man, a 'lost' black 1960s American film was recently screened at the National Film Theatre on the South Bank in London. It won the San Giorgio Prize at the 1964 Venice Film Festival then disappeared although it was released in 16mm format and found a black audience when it was shown in churches and schools. It was re-released in the USA in 1993 when the US National Film Registry at the Library of Congress selected the film for preservation as 'culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant'.

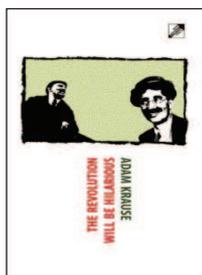
Nothing But a Man was made by white New York liberal Jews, the director and writer was the German Jewish Michael Roemer who had fled the Nazis, and the producer, cinematographer and co-writer Robert M Young. Roemer and Young with the help of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) travelled to the South for three months to research the script for *Nothing But a Man*.

Nothing But a Man was filmed in the Summer of 1963 on a budget of \$230,000 around Atlantic City and Cape May in New Jersey although set in Alabama which was out of the question as a film location. This was the time of the civil rights movement, and Alabama Governor George Wallace's support for 'segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever', and the existence of 'Jim Crow Laws' (mandated *de jure* racial segregation) in the South. Everyone on the film crew was paid \$100 per week, the crew and cast took the day off to march on Washington DC with Martin Luther King Jr.

Nothing But a Man tells of the relationship and rather sweet courtship between Duff, a railroad worker and Josie, a schoolteacher and daughter of a preacher against a background of economic, social and institutional racism and deals with the discrimination, lack of jobs for blacks, and poverty in American society. Duff is played by Ivan

Comical revolution

The Revolution Will Be Hilarious. By Adam Krause, New Compass Press, 2013



The cover of Adam Krause's book features the unlikely combination of Lenin and Groucho Marx. Groucho would be uncomfortable with being in

such proximity to Lenin whose regime announced 'without mercy, without sparing, we will kill our enemies in scores of hundreds, let them be thousands, let them drown themselves in their own blood'. Groucho observed about capitalism 'the secret of life is honesty and fair dealing. If you can fake that, you've got it made.'

Krause opens his book with a scene from Woody Allen's film *Stardust Memories* but the more appropriate film would be *Annie Hall* where Allen places comedy in the service of the radical left:

Allison: I'm in the midst of doing my thesis on Political Commitment in Twentieth Century Literature. Alvy: You're New York, Jewish, left-wing, liberal, intellectual, Central Park West, Brandeis University, socialist summer camps, the father with the Ben Shahn drawings, strike-oriented. Allison: That was wonderful. I love being reduced to a cultural stereotype. Alvy: Right, I'm a bigot, I know, but for the left.'

George Carlin and Bill Hicks have used their comedy to question the way we live and posit an alternative to capitalism. Carlin's lines like 'that's why they call it the American Dream, because you have to be asleep to believe it' and Bill Hicks's statement 'It's not that I disagree with Bush's economic policy or his foreign policy, it's that I believe he was a child of Satan sent here to destroy the planet Earth' contribute to developing class consciousness.

Krause cites the role of the Fool in Shakespeare's *King Lear* as a character that can speak the truth to authority without fear of reprisal. A different Shakespearian reference could be the role of 'working class' characters in *Henry IV Part 1* such as Poin, Bardolph, and Peto who 'hang out' with Falstaff and Prince Hal (the future Henry V) in taverns drinking, whoring, and engaging in tomfoolery and even robbery. Here, the class boundaries are blurred in a revelry of youthful rebellion paid homage to in

Gus Van Sant's film *My Own Private Idaho*.

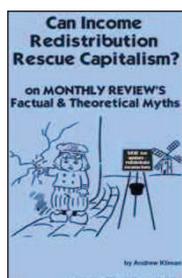
Krause cites Emma Goldman's popular misquote 'If I can't dance, I don't want to be in your revolution' although it is never clear from Krause's book what this 'revolution' is. Krause does not mention socialism although he refers to William Morris's novel *News from Nowhere*. Krause's 'three favourite Marxists' Groucho, Harpo and Chico hilariously send-up militarism and nationalism in the film *Duck Soup* which is also used in Woody Allen's film *Hannah and Her Sisters* as motivation for a character to carry on with life.

Socialists expect the aftermath of 'revolution' to be as Guy Debord writes in *Theses on the Paris Commune*: 'the Commune was the biggest festival of the nineteenth century'. Krause concludes that 'the revolution will be hilarious. Seriously' but during his book he forgets EB White's advice 'humour can be dissected as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind'.

SPC

No, it can't

Can Income Redistribution Rescue Capitalism? By Andrew Kliman, Marxist-Humanist Initiative, 2013, \$8 plus postage from mhi@marxisthumanistinitiative.org



Subtitled 'Monthly Review's Factual & Theoretical Myths' most of this pamphlet deals with the theoretical and statistical errors used by the USA's dominant left-wing journal in explaining the latest capitalist

economic crisis. The *Monthly Review* attributes the crisis to rising income inequality, with the clear implication that income redistribution can rescue capitalism, though it is doubtful that *Monthly Review* would admit to that implication. Underpinning *Monthly Review's* explanation is an underconsumptionist theory of capitalist economic crisis, and this is Kliman's main target. Underconsumption theory argues, basically, that crises are caused by a lack of effective demand.

Kliman shows that in Marx's crisis theory crises result from the normal functioning of capitalism and are inevitable under it.

Underconsumption theory, on the other hand, typically implies that something has gone wrong and can be remedied. Kliman also challenges the popular notion of the alleged success of the 'neoliberal' assault on the working class, the supposed decline in workers' share of output, and their allegedly stagnating wages. He provides evidence that this notion ignores the substantial growth in the incomes of older, female, and more highly-educated working people. The evidence Kliman cites is mainly drawn from the USA but the point generally still stands. The history of capitalism shows that it is not inconsistent with rising living standards for the working class, and the 100 years prior to the 1970s saw consistently rising real wages in the USA and elsewhere but still with regular crises.

Kliman maintains that undue concern over inequality can divert attention from major economic problems like mass unemployment, people losing their homes, and poverty. And what about the fact, he says, which dominates most people's lives, that they are forced to do what bosses tell them to do, day after day, year after year—or else starve? 'Why is there so little outrage about this', writes Kliman, 'or even concern about it?' The criticism here is mainly directed at the 2011 Occupy movement which generally focused less on these concrete problems and more on the abstraction 'rising inequality'. Some may find this line of argument controversial, while for others it will be a breath of fresh air. It should be noted that, contrary to popular belief, Marx did not condemn capitalism for its inequality (rising or not), nor did he frame his arguments for socialism in terms of material equality. For revolutionary socialists, claims Kliman, the interests of the working class and the interests of the system are fundamentally opposed and 'this is the primary reason why they maintain that revolutionary transformation of society is needed' (Kliman's emphasis).

Included in this pamphlet are selections from Kliman's book *The Failure of Capitalist Production* (2011) where underconsumptionist theory is examined in detail. It is sometimes suggested that Marx held to an underconsumptionist position with this statement: 'The ultimate reason for all real crises always remains the poverty and restricted consumption of the masses'. However, capitalist production is production for the market with a view to sale and profit, not directly for human needs. It is profitability,

or the lack of it, which creates the possibility of an economic crisis. And this possibility, argues Marx, is 'no more than the possibility. For the development of this possibility into a reality a whole series of conditions is required' (emphasis added). As Kliman points out, there is no suggestion here that crises are the result of persistently inadequate demand. Kliman is worried about the political implications of underconsumptionist theory because 'underconsumptionism implies that a more equitable distribution of income will make capitalism work better'. This is a fallacy all socialists oppose.

LEW

Satanic Mills

Alan Fowler and Terry Wyke: Spindleopolis: Oldham in 1913. Oldham Council and Manchester Metropolitan University £3.95.

A century ago Oldham, with a population of 150,000, was the world's leading town for the spinning of cotton, with 10 percent of all the cotton spindles in existence. There were also thousands of looms for weaving, and large factories that produced textile machinery, such as Platt Brothers. The townscape was dominated by smoke from the chimneys of the coal-fired mills,

though the more recent ones were powered by electricity.

The mills were very profitable, most paying an annual dividend of eight percent. The mill-owners, of course,



A Lancashire mill town

lived in more scenic surroundings away from the noise and smoke and the pavements made dangerous and unpleasant from the habit of public spitting. Oldham apparently had a reputation as a prosperous town (which can only mean in comparative terms). Children worked full-time from 14 years, and from 12 they split their time between work and school. Many married women worked in the mills, and it was only the combined wages of parents and children that

kept workers' heads above water.

Housing was often expensive and overcrowded, but home-ownership was surprisingly widespread, with about one house in three owned or being bought by its occupants. An enlightening aside is that workers' houses were increasingly being built with front doors that contained letter boxes. Holidays were mainly the annual 'wakes week', usually featuring a stay in Blackpool.

Workers organised themselves in unions such as the Oldham Spinners. Politically, the town veered between supporting Liberals and Conservatives (Winston Churchill was MP 1900-06). Sadly, the major event of 1913 for many residents was the visit of the king and queen in July.

The First World War disrupted the cotton trade, and enabled Japan and other countries to take over the markets once served by Oldham and other Lancashire towns. The cotton industry gradually declined, mills were closed, and Fred Dibnah found a kind of fame demolishing their chimneys on TV.

This booklet was prepared to accompany an exhibition 'When Cotton was King' at Gallery Oldham. It includes some superb contemporary cartoons by Sam Fitton from the *Cotton Factory Times*.

PB



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Screening The Working Class

OCCASIONALLY, TV companies allow programme-makers to bite the hand that feeds them. A recent mouthful was the Royal Television Society Huw Weldon Memorial Lecture *Totally Shameless: How TV Portrays The Working Class* (BBC4). In this insightful

and engaging polemic, Owen Jones explains why it's become acceptable for television to denigrate the working class.

As the broadcasting industry expanded from the late 50s, new opportunities arose for people from lower backgrounds to enter the profession. Consequently, a growing number of TV shows reflected working class experiences, from Galton and Simpson's edgy sitcoms to gritty dramas like *Cathy Come Home* and *The Spongers*. By the mid 80s, the working class had been weakened by the decline of the unions and the rise of individualism. The media and the government started to drum into us that 'we're all middle class now, apart from those scrounging chavs'. The popular perception of class has shifted towards being defined by culture, according to a study by polling group Britain Thinks. Someone who listens to Radio 4 and owns a cafetière is 'middle class', while someone who reads tabloids



Scenes from *Cathy Come Home* and *The Spongers*

and watches soaps is working class.

Worryingly, the term 'working class' has often become equated with the derogatory term 'chav'. Because of this change in the way we see class, and fewer opportunities being available for people from poorer backgrounds to enter the television industry, the traditional blue collar working class has virtually disappeared from our screens. The schedules have become dominated by 'cops, docs and frocks', with the 'docs' – or documentaries – often being voyeuristic prole-baiting sneerathons. Gypsies, for example, are presented as 'a strange breed to be prodded through the bars of their cages'. Extreme examples of benefit claimants, such as families with a dozen kids, are paraded as the tips of uncouth, freeloading icebergs. It's now the norm for television to depict the working class as ugly stereotypes like Vicki Pollard and those chewed up and spat out by *The Jeremy Kyle Show*.

Jones' argument usefully illustrates how television mirrors and contributes to the current belittling of the working class. He wants to fight back with a return to programming which reflects working class struggles honestly, and not through the distorting prism of bourgeois ideology. He doesn't spend long enough discussing how the belief in a 'middle class' gives



a misleading view of society's real class structure. However, he rightly prefers to use definitions of class based on 'wealth and power', rather than lifestyle. After all, 'an aristocrat who watches *The X Factor* is still an aristocrat'.

MIKE FOSTER

Meetings

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

London

Clapham

Sunday **19 January** 2014 at 3.00pm

'Rosa Luxemburg'

Speaker: Pat Deutz

Socialist Party Head Office,
52 Clapham High Street,
London SW4 7UN.

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The Socialist Standard examines their case



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

Death of a President

WHO WOULD have dreamt, on the morning of that fateful November day, that within a matter of hours, the thirty-fifth U.S. President, John F. Kennedy, would be dead, as well as his assassin and a Texas policeman? Yet this was the news which burst upon an astounded world, and sent all the capitalist politicians into huddles.

Kennedy's death was a tragedy for his family and friends, but at times like these it is as well to get the whole business



into some sort of perspective and try to dispel some of the concentrated nonsense to which we have been subjected since the event.

It was *The Observer* for December 1st which said that the shot which killed Kennedy '... must change the course of the world.' But this is really just another repetition of the 'great men make history' theory, and has precious little evidence to support it.

The more sensible remark was that overheard between two young men in a London street the following morning. 'Assassinations don't really make a lot of difference,' said one. 'Things go on pretty much the same as before.' Probably he was not a Socialist, but he certainly hit the nail on the head, for this is precisely what the newspapers were hastening to tell us a few days later. President Johnson would continue the Kennedy policies, said Richard Scott in *The Guardian* of November 28th. He could have added (but of course he didn't) that these would as usual be a reflection of the needs of contemporary American capitalism. They were ably expounded by the new President thus:

'... the unswerving support of the United Nations ... the honourable and determined execution of our commitments to our allies ... the maintenance of military strength second to none ... the defence of the strength and stability of the dollar ... the expansion of our foreign trade ... our programme of assistance and cooperation in Asia and Africa ...'

There have been two Democrats and one Republican at the White House since Roosevelt and any one of them could have uttered those words. For American capitalism has become a giant in world affairs; its days of isolationism are well and truly over.

(from *The Passing Show*, *Socialist Standard*, January 1964)

ACTION REPLAY

Counted Out

NO OTHER sport would tolerate the fatality rate of boxing. We begin with two notorious examples. In 1963 Davey Moore died after a fight, and Bob Dylan wrote a song 'Who Killed Davey Moore?', in which everyone involved, from opponent to manager to gambler to the crowd, denies their culpability. In 1982, Kim Deuk-koo went into a coma after the referee stopped his fight in the fourteenth round, and died four days later. Various changes were made to boxing afterwards: the maximum number of rounds was reduced to twelve, and far more extensive pre-fight medicals were introduced.

In October last year Franky Leal died in Mexico after being knocked out. Boxing writer Mike Gallego noted that Leal had been knocked out more than once before and should probably have stopped (or been made to stop) boxing: 'But Leal soldiered on because that's what fighters do. Especially poor fighters who spend their life as what can generously be described as a B-side fighter, or what sometimes more accurately can be called cannon fodder'

(uppercutting.kinja.com/boxing-is-a-goddamned-tragedy-1450455925).

Fights with less tragic endings can also result in controversy. In Manchester on 23 November, super-middleweight champion Carl Froch beat George Groves after the referee stopped the contest. Many of those watching claimed that Groves was well enough to continue, and that Froch himself could well have been stopped earlier in the bout when he was taking a lot of punishment.

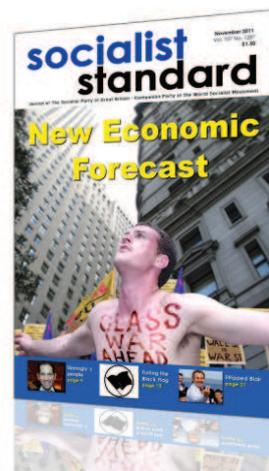
Gallego, quoted above, went on to say, 'Franky Leal is dead because boxing fans and the boxing industry are hypocrites' (he included himself in this). The audience, whether live or on TV, certainly like to see boxers raining blows on each other, and will criticise referees who stop fights 'too early', as in the Froch-Groves case. Further, they often dismiss a boxer who retires from a fight as a 'quitter'.

But it is the promoters, the managers and the broadcasters who do very nicely out of boxing, its violence and its suffering. Any number of ex-professional fighters end up with little to show financially and having to carry on fighting long after they should have retired. But you rarely see an impoverished or punch-drunk promoter.

PB

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Voice from the Back



Zillionaires And Nonsense

The Mayor of London Boris Johnson has told people to stop bashing the super-rich. 'Mr Johnson accused 'everyone from the Archbishop of Canterbury to Nick Clegg' of bullying the group he defined as 'zillionaires' and said the most rich of all should receive 'automatic knighthoods'. Mr Johnson said the rich deserve our 'humble and hearty thanks' for their contributions to charity and the exchequer - quoting figures that say the top 1 per cent pay 29.8 per cent of all UK income tax' (*Independent*, 18 November). Since Mr Johnson's zillionaires tend to get knighthoods anyway we wonder at his concern for them, especially when all their wealth has come from the exploitation of the impoverished majority.

No Recovery For Some

It is often difficult to get up to date figures about poverty in Britain but a recent survey backed by public money has come up with some current statistics. 'Nearly nine million people across the UK are living with serious debt problems, according to a new report. The Money Advice Service (MAS) also said very few people were making any attempt to get professional help. The problem is particularly acute in five English

cities, where more than 40% of the population is struggling to repay debt. According to the survey, 18% of Britons, 8.8 million people, consider they have 'serious' financial issues' (*BBC News*, 27 November). These figures give the lie to political nonsense about a so-called economic recovery.

Not So Glamorous

The following scene is a common one throughout capitalism. 'The line for the soup kitchen starts to form at dusk, and by the time it is fully dark more than 200 people are waiting to be fed. There are toddlers in prams, and military veterans in wheelchairs' (*Times*, 29 November). The scene is not all that unusual but this is not happening in Asia or Africa but in modern sophisticated Santa Monica Boulevard, Hollywood. Every night for 27 years the Greater West Hollywood Food Coalition has given a hot meal to some of the 53,800 homeless estimated to live in Los Angeles. Behind the chauffeur driven limousines and expensive cocktails of the Hollywood cinema dream factory lurks the sordid reality of modern capitalism.

Harsh Reality

British MPs like to pat themselves on the back and boast about improving living standards, but recent information from official sources paints a completely different picture. 'Food poverty in the UK has now become such a big problem that it should be seen as a 'public health emergency', a group of health experts says. In a letter to the *British Medical Journal*, six leading public health figures warned poor nutrition could lead to a host of problems. It comes amid reports that people are struggling to feed themselves. The UK Red Cross has started asking for food donations for the first time since World War Two. And in October the Trussell Trust, which runs 400 food banks, said the numbers

of people it was helping had tripled to 350,000 in the past year' (*BBC News*, 4 December). Poor nutrition for thousands of workers in one of the most developed capitalist countries in the world despite politicians boasts is the harsh reality of the profit motive society.

Poverty Stricken Millions

'More working households were living in poverty in the UK last year than non-working ones - for the first time, a charity has reported. Just over half of the 13 million people in poverty - surviving on less than 60% of the national median (middle) income - were from working families, it said. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation said low pay and part-time work had prompted an unprecedented fall in living standards' (*BBC News*, 8 December). These figures underestimate the extent of the problem as the JRF's annual Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion report was written by the New Policy Institute and tracks a range of indicators, including government data and surveys covering income, education and social security, and has a very frugal concept of what poverty is. In the 2011-12 period, the amount of earnings before a household was said to be in poverty was £128 a week for a single adult; £172 for a single parent with one child; £220 for a couple with no children, and £357 for a couple with two children. How many of the 'we are all in this together' MPs could survive on £128 a week?



FREE LUNCH

