

socialist standard

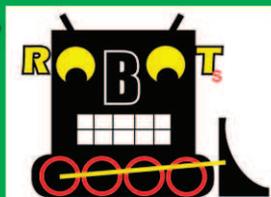
June 2013
Vol. 109 No. 1306
£1.50

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

System failure?



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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

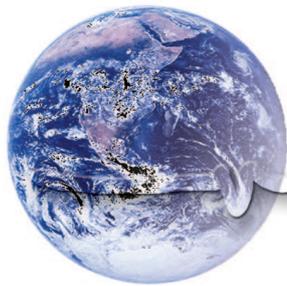
new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest elections 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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JUNE 2013

Editorial

Crises and Catastrophe

WHEN THE market economy is booming there's a tendency to assume this state of affairs will last forever – on so many occasions have we heard that 'it's different this time' and that 'we're in a new paradigm now'. Yet when a slump occurs – as they do periodically – the mood of incautious optimism changes quickly and pessimism and despair can set in.

This has most obviously been the case with the present recession (or series of recessions, depending on how you define it). Since the first signs of crisis appeared in late summer 2007, the mood has been bleak. The nadir was probably reached in late 2008 when the collapse of Lehman Brothers led to massive falls in world stock markets and coincided with the seizing up of the credit markets. Unemployment and bankruptcies soon began to rise.

Since then the mood has hardly improved. Unemployment remains at over 2.5 million in the UK and in some counties – such as Spain, where it is 27 percent – is at levels that are at least as bad as the infamous depression of the 1930s.

Into such a space come the advocates of collapse and catastrophe. The end is nigh, they think, and we'd better buy some candles and get some tins in. Their underlying sentiment – that somehow the existing capitalism system is

fundamentally flawed in many ways – is of course at least half right. But their fatalism that capitalism is in some way going to collapse around our ears in an economic Armageddon certainly isn't. In fact, we've been here before – and are still here . . .

Much though theories of economic collapse may hold a curious fascination for those who want to see an end to the market system, they have been proven wrong time and again – in fact from the earliest days of the system itself. In this issue, we look at why. We examine why capitalism, for all its weaknesses and flaws, is a remarkably resilient system and why the conditions that lead to economic crises and slumps are replaced after time by conditions that prepare the way for a new boom and a repeat of the cycle.

Socialists have learnt that there's no point waiting for capitalism to do us a favour and die. It's just not going to happen. Instead, capitalism has to be put out of its misery and only a majority of convinced socialists can do that, democratically taking the reins of political power, so as to lay the foundations for a society where booms, slumps, crises and catastrophes are a thing of the past.

Wooster sauce

WELL, WE finally made it. The human race has pushed through the CO² 400 parts per million ceiling for the first time in five million years ('Scientists call for action to tackle CO² levels', *BBC Online*, 11 May). This was the symbolic threshold above which climatologists stated global warming would be inevitable. Predictably, scientists are once again leading the demand for governments to do something.

In the UK, the Tory government has been keen to trumpet its 'global leadership' in reducing emissions, a claim somewhat undermined by April's report from its own Climate Change Committee which pointed out that the UK's net emissions have gone up, not down, because it has been importing more goods with 'embodied' emissions ('UK CO² emissions rising, government advisers warn,' *BBC Online*, 24 April).

Most of Europe is engaged in similar card-sharpbery, hoping to look squeaky clean while getting other countries to do their dirty work. China, though, says it has a new five year plan aimed at reversing the effects of thirty years of smog-filled coal-fired industrialisation, a claim that indicates, if nothing else, that it has now caught up with the West in the game of post-industrial piety. Perhaps the plan is to install Tibetans on all their power-station chimneys and make them inhale the smoke.

A dispassionate observer would surely conclude by now that the argument over climate change has been comprehensively won by the climatologists, even if no genuine action has been taken or is even likely. But not everyone is on board. There is still a crusty rearguard in the fetid armpit of the right wing which persists in denying the bleeding obvious. Around the time of the last general election in 2010, the *Guardian* assembled an inquisition of famous scientists and put the politicians in the dock over their policies on funding, climate change and energy, pharmaceutical research data, drug policy, public health, science and libel laws, and alternative medicine ('If science had a vote, which party would it vote for?' *Guardian*, 5 May, 2010).

While the major parties mostly reflected the prevailing scientific consensus on most of these areas, an encouraging result given that the politicians were red-hot for votes and therefore a good barometer of public opinion at the time, not all interviewees were on-message. UKIP's Viscount Monckton gave a wonderful performance, from a comedy point of view, with Bertie Wooster-like responses that were riddled with howlers even after UKIP's press office had hurriedly reworked his answers in a specially-demanded 'phone a friend' concession. According to the Drones Club spokesman, UKIP would appoint a Royal Commission to investigate climate scientists' 'imagined' consequences of global warming and how far they had 'exaggerated them.' To demonstrate that this would be a show trial with only one possible outcome, UKIP would not even wait for the Commission's report before acting. UKIP would in the meantime close down all climate-related funding and research, cancel the UK's commitment to EU carbon-



“The balance of evidence’ is not a sound basis for scientific decision-making”

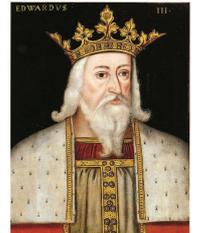
Viscount Monckton

trading agreements, repeal the Climate Change Act and close the government's Climate Change Department, commission new fossil and nuclear power stations, end renewable subsidies, threaten to cut Met Office funding if they gave inaccurate forecasts (references to global warming presumably also qualifying as an 'inaccuracy') and ban Al Gore's movie *An Inconvenient Question* from all schools.

Perhaps one could expect no better, given that UKIP is really a pressure-group with no policies, recently grown temporarily large like a pus-filled boil. Its views on climate change as a 'now-disproven hypothesis,' public health campaigns over food as 'unjustifiable' or stem-cell research as involving 'the killing of very small children' are pretty much what you'd expect from privileged right-wing yahoos who own enough not to have to know anything.

Bones of Contention

A FUSS has apparently broken out over where to rebury the newly disinterred remains of Richard III, the last Plantagenet king, who has been failing to push up daisies under a crypt and then a concrete car park in Leicester for 500 years until his recent sensational rediscovery. Plans to stick the semi-fossilised ex-sponger in Leicester Cathedral are being challenged by his avowed relatives who prefer York Minster. But what relatives would these be after 500 years, given that Richard had no children and was not famous for even liking them? A BBC Radio 4 programme on mathematics (*More or Less*, 10 May) has estimated that if Richard's near kin produced 2 children each, and this output continued at a steady rate, there would be a million relatives by now. However if they had bred at the average rate for the period, at 2.3 children, this number would jump to 17 million. The programme went on to cite a respected 1970s study which suggested that everyone in the UK not from foreign extraction was probably descended from Edward III, Richard's own ancestor. So what gives these 'relatives' the right to start arguing the toss over where to bury the bones, the programme wanted to know? Well quite. But then, what gives any of these royals or privileged poseurs the right to anything based on inheritance? Any given set of genes has a half-life of one generation, so genetically speaking, their connection to their distant forebears is at homeopathic levels anyway. You, dear reader, are probably just as 'royal' as they are. But that's capitalism for you, fetishising utter silliness in the service of the elitist rich.



Edward III - who's the daddy?

Trigger happy

WHAT IF, this column wondered darkly back in Sept 2011, workers start using 3D printing technology to print their own guns and ammunition? Well, who knew it would happen so fast? After gun manufacturers lined up to reassure everyone that printed plastic guns were impossible, a YouTube video was posted in early May showing a 'crypto-anarchist' developer, Cody Wilson, firing the world's first printed gun. Within days there were 100,000 downloads of his print design and utter panic in the halls of the mighty, who will now be feverishly trying to put a stop to their worst nightmare, an armed workforce in a recession. Pathfinders now awaits, with an uncanny perspicacity borne out by events, the world's first bank robbery using a 3D gun, followed by the first rocket-propelled grenade launcher, followed by the first uprising. Socialists argue for revolution 'peacefully if we can, by force if we must,' so we can hardly contemplate such a development with enthusiasm. On the other hand, it's gratifying to consider how the fat cats will be shitting themselves over this.

Socialism is the only alternative



ON 22 June a People's Assembly Against Austerity is being held in central London, with the support of various leftwing groups, trade unions, and Labour and Green Party politicians. Its aim is to 'mobilise' people to oppose the present government's austerity policies. But to what end? To get the government to change them? To elect a government that would reverse them? Or to get rid of the system which, when in an economic downturn, requires the government to impose austerity?

Given that we are living in a period of capitalist crisis, what are the chances of *any* government being able to abandon austerity? Some of those present seem to think that this is feasible. The Communist Party of Britain, for instance, are proposing a 'people's budget' to 'stimulate economic growth and reduce growing social inequality,' involving such measures as 'invest in health, education, housing, public transport and the environment,' 'launch a massive public sector housebuilding programme,' 'nationalise the banks and direct funds into manufacturing, small businesses, cooperatives and housing,' as well as renationalising the railways and utilities and increasing pensions and state benefits.

This assumes that capitalism can be reformed into a system responding to people's needs instead of a system geared to accumulating capital out of profits. That they are thinking in terms of capitalism, even in its private form, can be seen from the answer they give to the question they themselves pose of 'where would the money come from?'

Introduce a 2 per cent Wealth Tax on the super-rich'; 'Reverse the recent cuts in corporation tax for the biggest companies'; 'Impose a financial transaction tax on the City bankers and speculators.' So, the super-rich, profit-seeking big companies and City financiers are to continue to exist but be taxed more.

This is pie-in-the-sky reformism. It's not going to happen and wouldn't work anyway. Any government which tried it would, by putting profits and profit-making under pressure, provoke an even bigger economic crisis. If you accept to work within capitalism (as does the 'People's Budget' and similar proposals to 'Tax the Rich' and 'Make the Bosses Pay') then you have to accept that profits have to be made and capital accumulated (with its by-product,

the rich getting richer). You can't make the capitalist leopard change its spots and it is futile – in fact counter-productive – to try.

The main problem with such proposals is not that they are not going to work, but that they spread the view that they *could* work and so reinforce reformist illusions about capitalism being able to be reformed to function other than as a profit-driven system where profits *have* to be put before people. What this does is delay people coming to understand that capitalism can't be reformed in these sorts of ways and that the only way forward is socialism. It helps prolong capitalism.

As socialism will be based on the common ownership and democratic control of productive resources there will be no obstacles, as there are under capitalism, preventing production being oriented towards satisfying people's needs, as for housing, healthcare, education, transport and other services.

It is all very well being 'against austerity' but the cruel fact is that, when capitalism is going through one of its recurring crises, there is no alternative within the system to austerity. It is not the government that is to blame but the capitalist system. In imposing austerity all that governments are doing is what is required by the way capitalism works.

Of course austerity should be resisted to the extent that it can be – that's what trade unions and such organisations are for – but without illusions. The most that can be achieved is a few mitigations here and there or a different distribution of the cuts, but they cannot be avoided.

This is not defeatism. It is realism. The only alternative to the present austerity is neither a change of economic policy nor a change of government. It is a change of system, from minority ownership and production for profit to common ownership and production directly to meet people's needs, in a word, to socialism.

Socialism is, quite literally, the only realistic alternative to the present austerity. That's what those who call themselves socialists should be advocating. Enough of 'People's Budgets,' 'Tax the Rich,' 'Make the Bosses Pay' and other such reformist nostrums. Let's campaign for socialism.

ALB

**Don't tax
the rich
- scrap the
system!**



Old Gods, New Tricks

SINCE A court ruling in Athens in 2006, it is no longer illegal for Greeks to worship their ancient gods. Just what Dionysus, Apollo and co had done to get themselves declared illegal in the first place is unclear. But anyhow, they're back, and they're gaining popularity here and in the US too.

You'd think we'd got enough confusion with the ones we already have. But perhaps that's it. After 2,000 years we still don't know whether Jesus is a Protestant or a Catholic, and the Shia and Sunni versions of Allah don't have much time for each other either. So, with UFO sightings, crop circles and the Loch Ness monster not as popular as they once were, maybe there's a gap in the mumbo-jumbo market.

Any Christians thinking of converting should find few extra demands on their gullibility. Miraculous deeds and virgin births as a result of liaisons between Zeus and mortal women were ten a penny in the ancient world. They even had a flood myth every bit as good as Noah's.

Zeus had decided, because of mankind's wickedness, to destroy the world with a great flood, and Deucalion was advised to build a boat to save his family and animals. After drifting for nine days the flood subsided, and they came to rest on top of a mountain. He was then told by an oracle to repopulate the earth by throwing behind him the bones of his grandmother. Fortunately he interpreted this to mean the stones of mother earth, and these sprang to life as human beings as they fell to the ground.

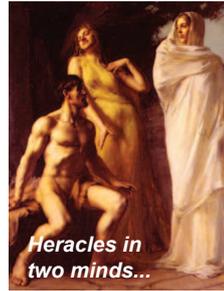
Another story Christians will have little trouble with is about Heracles and his struggle with temptation.

Bible readers will recall how Jesus, after wandering in the wilderness for 40 days, was tempted by Satan to turn stones into bread. (A fairly sensible suggestion – he could, after all, feed multitudes with a few loaves and fishes). But he refused – for the rather puzzling reason that 'man does not live by bread alone.'

Satan then took him up a high mountain where they could see 'all the kingdoms of the world.' If he bowed down before Satan, he was told, all this would be his. (Satan had apparently

forgotten that Jesus was the son of God. His dad made it and already controlled the whole lot.) Not surprisingly, Jesus told him to get stuffed (or rather, to 'get thee behind me').

The temptation of Heracles, on the other hand, was a *real* test. In one of his numerous adventures he was out one day when he came to a fork in the road. One branch was a good, wide road but narrowed and got stony as it went on. By it stood a beautiful, gaudily dressed woman calling him. The other fork was narrow and thorny but got better in the distance. By this was a plain, modestly dressed woman. She also called him. These two, it turned out, were 'Vice' and 'Virtue.'



Now most Greek heroes would have grabbed 'Vice' and made off her without even giving her time to fix her makeup. But holier-than-thou Heracles chose 'Virtue'. *That's* what you call willpower over temptation.

(His moral standards did sometimes slip, however. In another story we are told that when visiting the king of Thespis he managed to get all fifty daughters of the king pregnant. This amazing feat was carried out in a single night.)

For anyone determined to believe, then, but finding contemporary gods not bizarre enough, there are a number of Greek paganism websites to help, www.hellenismos.us, for example: 'Any questions that you would otherwise feel embarrassed to ask, ask here,' it offers. How embarrassed the average questioner is we can only guess, but one asks:

'I am currently learning the skill of flint-knapping; that is, the skill of re-creating stone-age tools using stone-age methods. As I was practicing the other day I thought to myself, 'To which God/Goddess would I make offerings to in this regard?'

The answer - obvious really - was 'For craftsmen and other similar professions there would be a special devotion to the cult of Hephaistos-Vulcanus, and likewise that of Athene-Minerva Ergane, whose domain is especially that of manufacturing in its various forms.'

Jesus Christ! What happens if they find themselves worshipping the wrong bloody god?

NW

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Our lives are shaped by our closest relationships with other people - from our closest loved ones to acquaintances we barely know. But there are wider social factors which influence who we know and why we get on with them. The family has changed over time, our relationships are defined by our job roles, and now technology plays a greater part than before. And how we relate to others is still dictated by status and damaged by prejudice. Our weekend of talks, discussion and workshops will examine capitalist society's influence on how we all fit together, and how socialism can make relationships more equal and fair.

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Bitcoin or bit con?

'DON'T WRITE off Bitcoins as just another bubble,' wrote Matt Ridley in the *Times* (19 April), 'Demand for the virtual currency proves people don't trust governments with their money.' But what are Bitcoins?

The Bitcoin scheme is an attempt to create a digital means of payment which has all the advantages of cash and none of what are seen by its supporters as the disadvantages of being issued by the state.

When a note or a coin is used in payment it passes physically from one person to another who can in turn use it to make another payment. In other words, cash circulates and is untraceable in that it doesn't bear the mark of who happens to own it at any time. The Bitcoin scheme aims to create this for electronic payments (electronic payments do of course exist today but are not untraceable).

This was a technical challenge but the geeks who thought up the scheme (maybe only because it was a challenge) solved it by requiring anybody buying or selling with their electronic money to adopt a pseudonym and by incorporating into the software encryptions and procedures to confirm transfer of ownership and to prevent double spending as well as to create new bitcoins until a total of 21 million is reached.

So, technically, it works. In fact there are claims that, being untraceable, it works too well in that it allows money laundering, drug dealing and tax evasion (just as cash does but not ordinary electronic payments). Also, people have reportedly been speculating on the exchange rate between bitcoins and conventional currencies going up or down, leading to the bubble Ridley mentioned.

But there's also the ideology behind it. Because it's a means of payment that has nothing to do with the state, it is being touted by free marketers (or 'libertarians' as they are called in America), of which Ridley is one. They have visions of it replacing state-issued money and solving the problems of depreciation, inflation and financial crises which in their view go with it. Currency cranks see it as a way of ending both the US Federal Reserve and the commercial banks' supposed power to create additional purchasing power out of thin air.

This is not going to happen, if only because bitcoins can only be used via the internet, but also because capitalism cannot do without a state and because for most people cash and identifiable electronic payments are more convenient. But suppose that it did. This, as the *Gegen Kapital und Nation* Group have pointed out in their excellent article on Bitcoin (<http://gegen-kapital-und-nation.org/en/bitcoin-finally-fair-money>), would not solve the economic problems of capitalism since these are not caused by some flaw in the monetary system but by the very nature of capitalist production and of money capital. A fixed money supply, as envisaged under the Bitcoin scheme, would not prevent booms and slumps but it would constrain the accumulation of capital:

'While clearly a state intervention, the central banks' issuing of money is hardly a perversion of capitalism's first purpose: growth. On the contrary, it is a contribution to it. Systematic enmity of interests, exclusion from social wealth, subjection of everything to capitalist growth – that is what an economy looks like where exchange, money and private property determine production and consumption. This also does not change if the substance of money is gold or Bitcoin. This society produces poverty not because there is credit money but because this society is based on exchange, money and economic growth.'

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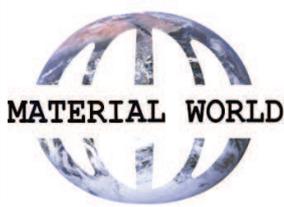
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Capitalism: blind and deaf to the natural world

ONE OF the advantages of the market 'mechanism' – so we are told – is its ability to adjust economic activity to changes in the situation in which it takes place. In particular, investment capital is supposed to flow away from geographical areas where the risks of economic activity are rising into areas where the risks are lower.

Things do often work this way for risks associated with social conditions. Turbulent labour relations, armed conflict, political upheaval and extortion by corrupt government officials are among the risks routinely factored into the expert assessments of 'business climate' that guide investment decisions.

However, it is by no means routine for such assessments to take account of risks coming from the *natural* environment – earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes and other natural disasters, and changes caused by global heating.

Earthquakes – no lasting impact?

For example, there is no sign of large-scale capital flight from southern California or the Greater Tokyo Region, both of which are virtually certain to be hit by powerful earthquakes in the not too distant future.

In one chapter of *The Coming Tokyo Earthquake* (Tuttle Publishing, 1995), Peter Hadfield analyzes how different Japanese companies will be affected. Some will bear much greater losses than others; building firms based outside the danger zone will make a good profit from post-quake reconstruction.

Now, the fund where I had my retirement savings at the time when I read this book invested in Japanese companies, so I wrote to the director of the fund to draw his attention to Hadfield's analysis and ask whether their portfolio managers took these differential effects into account. I received a courteous reply, assuring me that what I was suggesting was quite unnecessary because earthquakes, though tragic from a humanitarian viewpoint, have no lasting economic impact of any significance.

Water: 'a good thing in real estate'

Nor is the rising sea level deterring investment in low-lying coastal areas. In Washington, DC the SunCal company is promoting 'a new upscale housing development and retail center' along the River Potomac, right at sea level. Eddie Byrne, SunCal's vice president of project management, is quoted as saying that the name of the development – Potomac Shores – 'invokes water, a good thing in real estate' (*The Washington Post*, 28 March). And this after Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy and all the other storms that have been battering the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of the US!

Recently I was looking at some internet ads for seaside properties in Florida, built right on the beach and selling for upward of a million dollars. The realtor who placed the ads offered to answer questions about the state of the market, so I took up the offer. No, he told me, house prices are not falling in anticipation of the rising sea level. On the contrary, they are rising. Clearly buyers are not worried about the sea level. I asked how difficult it was

to get these beach houses insured. Also no problem, he assured me.

Carbon bubble?

In August 2012 the Carbon Tracker Initiative (CTI), a project of Investor Watch, issued a report by Jeremy Leggett and Mark Campanale entitled *Unburnable Carbon: Are the World's Financial Markets Carrying a Carbon Bubble?* (www.carbontracker.org). The authors argue that the financial markets overvalue hydrocarbon companies – in February 2011 the combined value of the top 100 coal companies and top 100 oil and gas companies was \$7.42 trillion. This is vastly inflated because it ignores the risk that environmentally responsible governments will force companies to curtail operations and leave much of the remaining coal, oil and gas in the ground. When this happens the 'carbon bubble' will burst, triggering a financial crisis.

In a response to the report, the *Economist* (4 May)



notes that in 2012 the top 200 companies spent \$674 billion developing *new* reserves and suggests that they are betting on governments *not* taking effective action to restrict hydrocarbon extraction. That, after all, has been the situation up to now. In that case the 'markets' (i.e., investors) are not mistaken in their expectations and there is no carbon bubble.

What is the CTI really about? The key person behind it, Jeremy Leggett, has long been committed to environmental causes – in the 1990s he was a prominent figure in

Greenpeace International – and also to relying on market mechanisms to solve environmental problems. His real concern is not helping investors maximise their returns or even maintaining financial stability but saving the planet.

How does he hope to achieve this worthy goal? By manipulating the market – i.e., persuading investors, most of whom know little about the environment and care less, that disinvestment from hydrocarbons is not just good for the planet but in their financial interest. It will be marvellous if the subterfuge works! But that's a rather big 'if'.

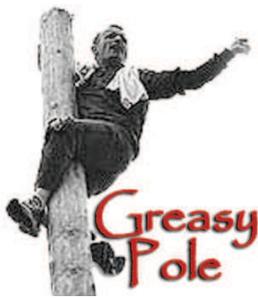
Psychological block

Isn't it in the interests of the capitalists themselves to preserve the ecosystem? Don't they depend on it like everyone else?

Of course. The trouble is that they are incapable of rationally assessing their interests. Their money-making obsession creates a psychological block against any idea that they sense may threaten their pursuit of profit. They repel the voice of nature from the very threshold of consciousness, so the question of factoring it into the equation can never even arise.

At some level the capitalists rightly fear that the natural world demands an end to the system they embody. They blind and deafen themselves to nature so that they cannot see they are harming it or hear it screaming.

STEFAN



Not *another* Maggie Thatcher?

AS THE Iron Lady dissolved into ashes, something similar began to happen to her reputation, so lovingly nurtured, for strength,

courage, honesty and humanity in her promotion of Britishness against any threats from without and within. First there were the biographies, in particular *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography* by ex-*Sunday Telegraph* editor Charles Moore, the publication of which was always intended to be delayed until after her death. This was as she had ordered: the co-operation Moore received was unusually generous on condition that her wishes in this were obeyed (in fact he was – still is – too ardent an admirer of hers to even dream of going against her wishes). Then there was the TV programme *Young Margaret: Love, Life And Letters*, to which Moore was an important contributor, if an apparently embarrassed one. This revealed a rather different character with a talent for cynical manipulation when it came to human relationships. For example among a succession of unsuspecting man friends she at first cultivated a relationship with one she described as displaying ‘...the kind of naivety only a Scotsman can have’ but who owned a fair bit of land and profitable shares in industry. When Margaret had more promising prospects in sight, the farmer was briskly passed on to her sister Muriel who was thus made (we believe) happy ever after. Such discriminatory skills were also applied in the matter of some other holidaymakers in Madeira who are derided as ‘...rather tatty tourists, Jews and novo rich.’ And rich among the examples of cold, calculating tactics is her view of her father, Alf Roberts the grocer from Grantham, once credited, as she worked her way up to the top of the Greasy Pole, as an enduring, invaluable example of parental guidance for a supremely ambitious daughter. After her mother died Thatcher had Alf move in with her but this did not yield the kind of advantages she had planned: ‘He is eating the most enormous meals and doing absolutely nothing except reading’ she complained to Muriel, telling her she intended to ‘shunt Pop off ... will this be all right with you? Otherwise he will just hang on and on and not take any hints.’ A month or so afterwards Alf was writing to Muriel that he never heard anything from Margaret: ‘in fact I don’t think I know their new phone number.’ And then, unremarked, he died.

Tory MP

A spin-off of the *post mortem* reverence for Thatcher was the requirement that any aspirant successor would have to be, apart from female, as scabrous as the Lady herself. It seemed a promising time for the emergence of Liz Truss, MP for South West Norfolk and recently promoted Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Education. Although new to the game of Westminster politics – she was first elected in 2010 – she quickly attracted some notice, for example the assessment of her boss David Gove that she was ‘a minister to watch,’ and then the calculated flattery of Labour MP Sharon Hodgson that she had the ‘common touch of the Iron Lady about her ...she may take it as a compliment.’ Truss could describe

her parents as ‘to the left of Labour.’ As a child she was taken by her mother to CND demonstrations and one of her school essays was an anticipatory piece on the fall of Margaret Thatcher. At Oxford she joined the LibDems, making something of a name for herself with an anti-monarchist speech at their 1994 conference. It was a couple of years later that she found her true place in the Conservative Party and, after the usual couple of abortive efforts, as the party’s parliamentary candidate for South West Norfolk, where at her first election in 2010 she had a solid majority of over 13,000.

Reform

She had been a Deputy Director of Reform, a ‘think tank’ which calls itself independent and non-political but which was founded by a Tory MP and a former head of the political section of the Conservative Research Department. Its declared aim is to promote what it calls a ‘better way’ for public services and economic success through private industry and market de-regulation. It also works for the abolition of ‘pensioner gimmicks’ such as free TV licensing and the winter fuel payment. So when Truss was promoted to Gove’s team she was well placed to implement Reform’s ideas on ‘higher standards’ in schools. For anyone with any doubts on the issue there was her paper *Britannia Unchained* which denounced British workers as ‘...among the worst idlers in the world’ with too many of them who ‘...prefer a lie-in to hard work’. A ‘key plank’ in her



Liz Truss



intentions for nurseries is to work the staff harder by increasing their allocation of two-year-olds from four to six. At the same time she has been free with strictures on those workers because when she had inspected nurseries here ‘I have seen too many chaotic settings where children are running around. There’s no sense of purpose’.. Among the response to these comments, from parents as well as experienced child-care practitioners, the arguments

against stricter discipline for children were flavoured with reminders that the level of morale in nurseries would be associated with low wages, poor working conditions and a lack of expectations for the future.

Affair

And it must be said that Truss has not always been so strict in applying sound principles to her own behaviour. After her adoption as the candidate for South West Norfolk there was a move to reverse the decision when it became known that some years before she had had an affair with Mark Field, the Tory MP for Westminster. Some of the local Tories, dubbed The Turnip Taliban, led by former High Sheriff of Norfolk, Sir Jeremy Bagge, argued that Truss was unsuitable as their candidate because she had chosen to conceal the matter, leaving them to find out through a Sunday newspaper article. In the event, the rebellion failed and Truss continued on her way to emerge as a hopeful to be the new Iron Lady - who might in fact have taught her of the necessity in politics to be ready always to suppress the truth while energetically promoting falsehoods.

IVAN



The Left's *Catastrophic* Logic

'Radical leftists' cling to the belief that capitalism will collapse, thereby ushering in a new society—an illusion that suits their hazy understanding of socialism.

Back in 1932, in the depths of the Great Depression, the Socialist Party of Great Britain went out on a limb, or so it may have seemed to many leftists of the time, by insisting that capitalism would certainly not *self-destruct*. In a pamphlet titled *'Why Capitalism Will Not Collapse,'* it rejected the 'wrong and lazy idea' that capitalism would 'collapse under the weight of its own problems' and criticised the 'fatalistic attitude of waiting for the system to end itself.'

'The lesson to be learned,' the pamphlet concluded, 'is that there is no simple way out of capitalism by leaving the system to collapse of its own accord. Until a sufficient number of workers are prepared to organise politically for the conscious purpose of ending capitalism, that system will stagger on indefinitely.'

It would have been nice if the prediction had been wrong: if capitalism had done us the great service of ending its own life or if the calamity of economic crisis (or war) could have automatically converted the bulk of the working class to socialism. But in fact, over the eight decades since then, capitalism has managed to stagger or even strut

along, defying the hope (or fear) that it would self-destruct or bump up against some absolute limit to growth.

Despite all the examples history has provided us of how capitalism can weather a crisis and how a social cataclysm is no guarantee that workers will be 'radicalised,' many leftists still cling to the hope that economic crisis, war, or environmental catastrophe could topple capitalism or suddenly transform the consciousness of workers.

“Capitalism has managed to stagger along, defying the hope that it would self-destruct”

This unfounded belief came to the fore again in late 2008 amidst an intense financial crisis, as even mainstream economists were toying with words like 'collapse' and 'meltdown' to describe the condition of capitalism. The crisis still continues today, of course, but then again

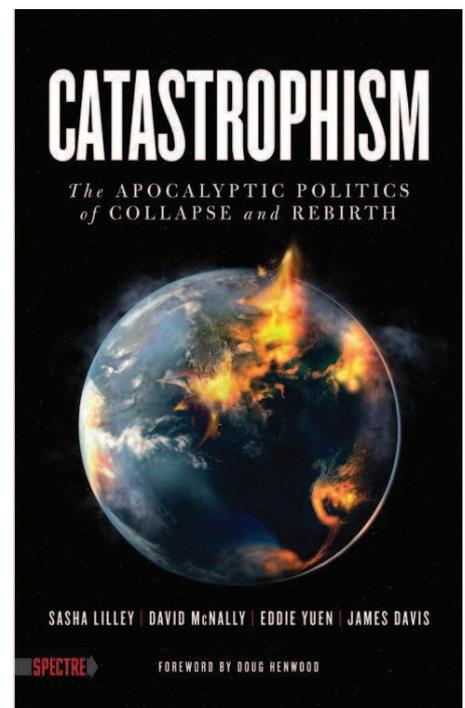
so does capitalism.

Yet one can hope that some of these misconceptions will be reconsidered in light of how these five crisis-filled years have not shaken capitalism at its roots, and that 'radical leftists' will rethink the process of fundamental social change. One sign that this reflection on a failed outlook and strategy may already be underway is the recent

publication of *Catastrophism: The Apocalyptic Politics of Collapse and Rebirth* (PM Press, 2012).

The book is a collection of four articles by 'partisans of the radical left,' critiquing those on both the left and the right who believe society is headed for some sort of total collapse that will either usher in a new age or 'awaken the masses from their long slumber.' The authors label this apocalyptic outlook 'catastrophism'.

The article of most interest to



socialists in the book is, 'Great Chaos Under Heaven: Catastrophism and the Left,' written by Sasha Lilley, the co-host of the radio programme, *Against the Grain*, on KPFA (Berkeley, California).

Lilley identifies the two sides of the left catastrophism that has 'shaped the radical tradition for well over a century'—namely, the expectation that capitalism will collapse and 'predestined forces [will] transform society for the better,' on the one hand, and the 'idea that the worse things get, the more auspicious they become for radical prospects.' She also quite astutely points out how these mistaken assumptions are connected to 'the twin dangers of adventurism (the ill-conceived actions of the few) and political quietism (the inaction that flows from awaiting the inexorable laws of history to put an end to capitalism).'

The idea among leftists that capitalism would collapse is typically based on a one-dimensional reading of Marx, Lilley observes. She notes that, even though Marx had 'argued that crises are essential to capitalism, he did not equate such crises with the collapse of the system,' and that 'those who believe the system will crumble from crises and disasters lose sight of the ways that capitalism uses crises for its own regeneration and expansion.' Unfortunately, the misinterpretation of Marx's theory of crisis took root within the German Social Democratic Party and other supposedly Marxist organisations, exercising a powerful influence throughout the twentieth century.

Intertwined with the belief that capitalism will collapse is the idea that the worse things get, the better the prospects for revolution. Even though Lilley accepts that 'social context' obviously 'shapes how people see their own situation and the forces at play around them,' she emphasises that 'there is no alignment of the stars that leads to collective, rather than atomised, resistance.'

The German Communist Party in the early 1930s provides the

best example of where the 'worse-is-better' logic of the left can lead, encapsulated in their cheerful slogan, 'After Hitler, our turn!' Their turn to be rounded up and sent to the concentration camps, the Communists soon discovered.

The attitude of waiting for things to get worse (so that they can get better) is bad enough, but some leftists take it a further step, Lilley explains, by following the logic that 'if worsening conditions are more propitious for radical change, then radicals should do what they can to make things worse.' This is the asinine logic of the radical terrorists of the late 1960s and early 1970s who tried to 'heighten the contradictions' through violent or spectacular actions and bring down the state repression that

could 'mobilise the unmobilised.'

This strategy is riddled with problems, Lilley explains, 'not the least of which is bringing repression down on others for their own good.' Above all, it is a strategy that simply doesn't work, she concludes: 'radical mass movements typically grow because they offer hope for positive change,' whereas 'fear is corrosive' and 'demobilises.'

The lack of hope is at the heart of the politics of 'left-wing catastrophism,' Lilley argues, reflecting 'a deep-seated pessimism about mass collective action and radical social transformation.' This is certainly true, but socialists would add that this sense of despair is connected to the basic inability of leftists to envisage a true alternative to capitalism. In short, they are (at best) *anti-capitalist* but not *pro*-anything, really—at least nothing that isn't upon closer inspection a variation of capitalism.

Lilley sidesteps this issue of what she and other radical partisans are for by inserting a sort of disclaimer in the introduction to the book and at the beginning of her article, stating that the aim will not be to 'furnish prescriptions for mass action and revolt' but to point out 'what does not, and will not, work.' She adds that a 'militant radicalism with any prospects of success embraces catastrophism at its peril.'

Pointing out what does *not* work is certainly welcome, but one has the impression that Lilley limits

the scope of her argument in part because, like the leftists she criticises, she has no clear idea of what a post-capitalist society would be like.

This muddled outlook is apparent from her attachment to words and expressions that sound revolutionary but are exceedingly vague, such as 'militant radicalism,' 'radical collective politics,' 'mass action and revolt,' 'radical mass movements,' 'a broad anti-capitalist project,' 'mass collective action,' and 'radical social transformation.'

What does any of this mean, really? How can you advocate a 'mass' or 'radical' or 'militant' movement without saying even a word about what the *aim* of that movement is? Isn't this lack of clarity among anti-capitalists precisely why they are so strongly attracted to the outlook of 'catastrophism' in the first place? Without a clear notion of a new society to replace capitalism, or of how workers could democratically bring it about, (anti-capitalist) leftists can only hope that a collapse will usher in a new age.

Instead of offering any source of real hope regarding the sort of society that could take the place of capitalism, Lilley concludes her essay with a sort of pep talk, reminding the reader that 'navigating away from the stormy shoals of catastrophism ... requires a commitment to mass radical collective politics, in inauspicious times as well as auspicious ones.' But some readers might wish to understand what 'mass radical collective politics' means, exactly, before deciding on their commitment.

Still, even recognising the limited scope of the book (whether intentional or inevitable), it is a valuable and timely contribution to those who are frustrated by the limitations of the left. And, in addition to Lilley's critique of the left, the book contains interesting essays dealing with the right-wing version of catastrophism and the Malthusian outlook prevalent among environmentalists.

MIKE SCHAUERTE

"Lack of hope is at the heart of left-wing catastrophism, reflecting a deep-seated pessimism about mass collective action"



'Heightening the contradictions'
- Ulrike Meinhof, 1964

radical collective politics

militant radicalism

a broad anti-capitalist project

radical mass movements

mass collective action

radical social transformation

... blah blah

mass action and revolt

Will ROBOTS cause capitalism to collapse?

In March the Socialist Party debated with Federico Pistono, the author of a book entitled *Robots Will Steal Your Job, But That's OK: How to Survive the Economic Collapse and Be Happy* (reviewed in the *March Socialist Standard*). His argument is typical of many who think that the market-money-wages system we call capitalism is going to soon collapse as a result of the increasing pace of technological innovation leading to constantly growing mass unemployment. Peter Joseph, the founder of the Zeitgeist Movement, put it more dramatically in a TV interview the same month:

'Unemployment is a consequence of technology, entirely. The entire reason we have unemployment in America and across the world is explicitly based on the application of technology for cost efficiency. And this is not going to stop. And this will lead to what has been called by theorists the 'contradiction of capitalism', to the ultimate instability of our social system: the ability to produce more with less people and cheaper rates. It's a complete clash of the system' (www.youtube.com/watch?v=mhZSxeiziMg).

A computer whizz-kid himself, Pistono describes various already-existing inventions that can displace humans in production, particularly due to advances in computer technology. Two he discusses in detail, because of their impact on relatively unskilled labour, are automatic vending machines (which would replace shop assistants) and driverless road vehicles (which would replace van and lorry drivers). He then asks why, if this is all possible, we are not seeing it: 'Sounds futuristic? Every piece of technology needed for making this happen already exists, and has existed for many years. Then why is it not in place already?' Good question. Why indeed?

Why machines are (and aren't) introduced

When a machine is introduced in a particular production unit this reduces the number of workers (living labour) required there to produce the same goods or provide the same service. But, since the machine had to be produced by living labour, extra workers must have been taken on somewhere else to build it, so the question arises of whether the two effects on employment cancel each other out at the level of the economy as a whole.

At first, economists tried to argue that this was so but they soon recognised that they were mistaken and conceded that there would be a net reduction in the total level of employment, not as great as the number of workers displaced in the productive units affected but to a level less than previously. In other words, machines sack more workers than they take on.

Writing in 1821 not long after the Luddites had been smashing knitting machinery, David Ricardo concluded:

'That the opinion entertained by the labouring class, that the employment of machinery is frequently detrimental to their interests, is not founded on prejudice and error, but is conformable to the correct principles of political economy' (*Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, third edition, Ch. 31).

He added that this reduction in total employment could, and normally would, be offset if the economy expanded as a result of new capital investment in some other field of activity. Marx, writing nearly fifty years later, agreed. This – the expansion of capitalist production – is the reason why the introduction of machinery in the past has not resulted in steadily increasing mass unemployment.

Marx made a further point about the introduction of machinery: for a machine to be genuinely 'labour saving' in the sense of reducing the total labour-time required to produce something from start to finish, 'less labour must be expended in producing the machinery than is displaced by the employment of that machinery' (*Capital*, Vol 1, Ch. 15, section 2). By 'labour' Marx meant not simply 'living labour' or its immediate product but also the 'dead labour', the product of previous living labour, incorporated in the raw materials, energy, buildings and machinery used in production.

In a rationally-organised society based on the common ownership of productive resources so that production can be carried on to produce directly to satisfy human needs instead of for profit whether or not a machine did this would be the main criterion for deciding whether to apply it to production. Not all inventions of machines do displace more labour than would be required to produce

“The trouble with many theories of economic collapse is that, if they were true, they need to explain why capitalism has not already collapsed a long time ago”



Spinning Jenny arrives, unemployment looms

them but, in a rationally-organised society, even machines falling into this category could be introduced if it was considered that the specific labour that would be replaced was considered dangerous, unhealthy or boring.

But this is not what happens under capitalism. Built-in to the capitalist system is a drag on the use of machines. As Marx went on to explain:

‘For the capitalist, however, there is a further limit on its use. Instead of paying for the labour, he pays only the value of the labour-power employed; the limit to his using a machine is therefore fixed by the difference between the value of the machine and the value of the labour-power replaced by it.’

Under capitalism the immediate product of living labour is divided into a part that the capitalist firm has to pay for (wages) and a part that it doesn’t pay for (surplus value, the source of profit). This means that under capitalism a machine that would genuinely save labour – the time society has to spend to produce something – would only be introduced if it also reduced the total labour that the capitalist firm had to pay for, ie. the dead labour incorporated in the machine and materials plus the living labour it employs. If this is not the case, then the labour-saving machine will not be introduced, as to do so would reduce the amount of unpaid labour that the firm extracts, ie. the source of its profits. In fact, the lower wages are, the less the incentive to apply labour-saving inventions, and vice versa.

Marx gave some concrete examples to illustrate that under capitalism there is a difference between invention and application:

‘Hence, the invention nowadays in England of machines that are employed only in North America, just as in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries machines were invented in Germany

for use exclusively in Holland, and just as many French inventions of the eighteenth century were exploited only in England ... The Yankees have invented a stone-breaking machine. The English do not make use of it because the ‘wretch’ who does this work gets paid such a small portion of his labour that machinery would increase the cost of production to the capitalist.’

This is the answer to Pistono’s question as to why the futuristic labour-saving inventions he describes have not been used on a wide scale: capitalist firms are only interested in using machinery if it will reduce their costs of production, ie. the

labour (living and dead) that they have to pay for. They will not and do not introduce machines that will increase their costs of production, even if their use would reduce the total amount of labour required to produce them.

This is why, as long as capitalism lasts, the rate of the actual application of machinery to production will always be less than the rate at which labour-saving machines are invented. In this sense speculations such as Pistono’s about the rate at which inventions will increase (he claims, somewhat hyperbolically, that this will become exponential in the coming decades) is irrelevant. It is not this that will determine the rate at which inventions will be applied to production as the rate at which ‘robots will steal our jobs.’ That will depend on the rate at which they reduce the labour that a capitalist firm has to pay for, which will be considerably slower than the rate at which labour-saving machines are invented.

Under capitalism invention is one thing, application another. The mere invention of some labour-saving machine does not destroy jobs; only its application does.

Will history repeat itself?

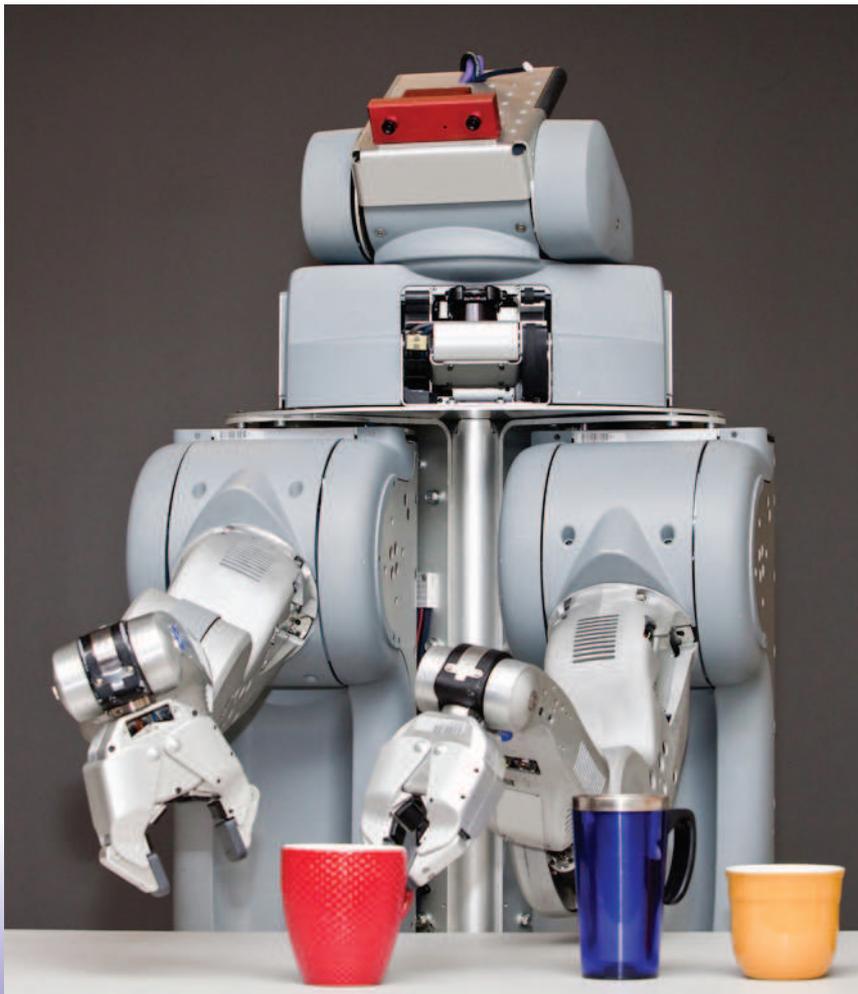
The trouble with many theories of economic collapse is that, if they were true, they need to explain why capitalism has not already collapsed a long time ago. Pistono’s argument is no exception. He is aware of this, as he quotes one critic as exclaiming:

‘Have you ever heard of this discipline called history? We’ve gone through the same crap 150 years ago, and none of what you say has happened!’

It’s actually a good question. Mechanisation has been going on since the Industrial Revolution started in the eighteenth

century (in fact, that’s what this was) but it has not resulted in steadily increasing unemployment. Pistono’s reply is that it will be different this time as in the past the pace of labour-saving technological inventions has never been as fast as it is today.

We have just seen that Pistono commits the fallacy of confusing technological invention with the application of inventions to production. Even so, as in the past mechanisation has not resulted in growing technological unemployment, since the capitalist system expanded to absorb this, a weaker version of Pistono’s contention might still be valid:



“Not all machines displace more labour than would be required to produce them...”



“The lower wages are, the less the incentive to apply labour-saving inventions”

(Why technology did not flourish under slave societies)

that the rate at which machines are introduced (despite the restrictions on this under capitalism) might still be faster than capitalism can expand. In this case unemployment would still grow.

While capitalism does expand in the long run it does not expand, as everyone is agreed nowadays, in a straight upward-sloping line. It goes in fits and starts, booms and slumps, with each succeeding boom reaching a higher level of production and employment than the previous one.

Because capitalism grows in this way, it needs a pool of unemployed workers, which Marx called ‘the industrial reserve army of labour’, that capitalist firms can draw on quickly in a period of boom and who become unemployed again when the slump comes.

So, unemployment rises and falls with the capitalist business cycle.

Pistono does not go as far as Peter Joseph and claim that all unemployment today is technological, but he does advance the increase in unemployment since 2007 as proof of his contention that the increasing application of modern technology is causing unemployment to grow.

Some of today’s

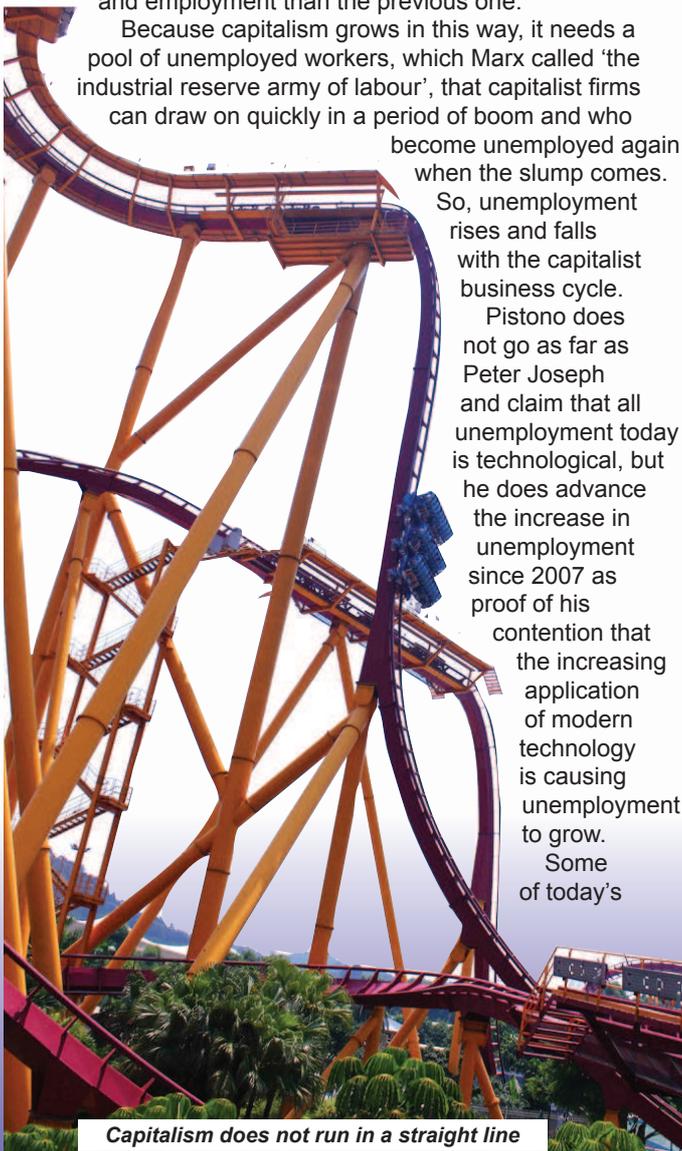
unemployment will indeed be technological in the sense of being living labour displaced by machines and unable to find new employment because capitalism is not expanding (Ricardo’s worst case scenario), but most is cyclical, the result of capitalism currently being in one of its periods of slump. It is the industrial reserve army of labour returning to its slump level. Also, capitalist economists talk cynically about a ‘natural’ level of unemployment (the rate below which they say a rise in price level would result). So, by no means all unemployment today is technological; in fact, only a relatively small proportion will be.

Predictions of a continual increase in mass unemployment will only turn out to be true if capitalism does not recover from the present slump, and even then wouldn’t increase at the rate this hypothesis suggests. If it does recover then unemployment will fall.

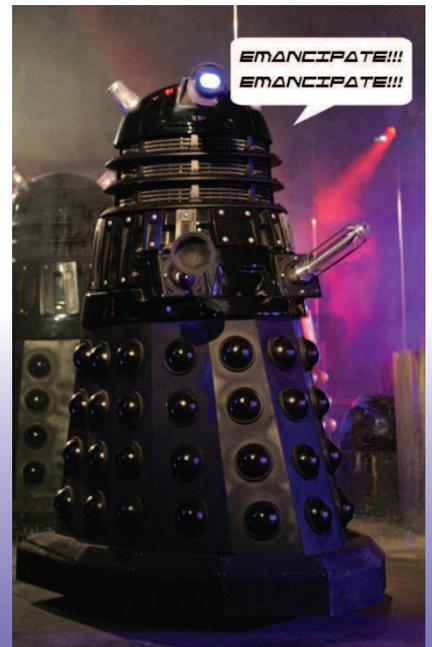
So the question can be reformulated as: Will capitalism recover from the slump or will unemployment go on increasing until the system collapses? Both past experience and the theory of how capitalism works based on this suggest that capitalism will eventually recover, however long it takes and however hard workers have to be squeezed. There is no way of knowing, though, exactly how long it will take.

In any event, capitalism will have to be ended by the conscious action of people who want to replace it by a system where the resources of the planet have become the common heritage of all. Then, there will no longer be any barrier to the robotisation of repetitive and boring jobs. Then, robots will ‘steal our jobs’ much more quickly than today and that will be OK, as there will be no harmful side-effects since access to what people need to live and enjoy life won’t be tied to working for a wage or salary. As Marx put it, ‘the field of application for machinery would therefore be entirely different in a communist society from what it is in bourgeois society.’

ADAM BUICK



Capitalism does not run in a straight line





Capitalism Kills: The Bangladeshi Garment Factory Disaster

The collapse of the Rana Plaza garment factory building in Savar, near Dhaka, capital of Bangladesh, on 24 April this year was another example that the global economic system that we live under, known as capitalism is injurious to the health of the working class. Actually, capitalism kills people; it kills the working class of this world in its pursuit of profit through commodity production. The week before, on the other side of the world, a fertilizer plant had exploded in Texas on 17 April killing 14 workers.

The day before the collapse a crack had been detected in the building's structure and the workers had been sent home, halting production. The next day the workers returned in the morning to be informed the building had been inspected and declared safe and the workers were ordered by managers to return to work. The initial death toll under the 600 tonnes of rubble was 76 workers but after three weeks of recovering bodies the death count had climbed to over 1,000 workers, mainly young women. Around 2,500 workers were injured in the building collapse and 34 bodies were too damaged or decomposed to be identified.

The Rana Plaza building housed the garment factories of manufacturers New Wave Style, New Wave Bottoms, and others. These garment capitalists employed 3,122 workers. The lives of the garment workers are a cheap commodity for the garment capitalists as their labour power is purchased cheaply. The garment workers are paid \$38.50 (£24) per month. According to the International Trade Union Confederation, a Vienna-based labour rights group, garment workers in Bangladesh are among the lowest-paid in the world.

New Wave supply clothing retailer Primark (2010 revenue £2.7 billion) who are owned by the FTSE 100 food processing company Associated British Foods (2012 profit: £583 million). New Wave also supply Italian clothing retailer Benetton (2011 revenue: €2 billion). The Rana Plaza manufacturers also supplied garments to Mango (owned by the Andic brothers; net worth: \$4.8 billion), and Matalan (founded in Preston in 1985 and now with a revenue of £1 billion).

The Bangladeshi garment industry is worth \$20 billion (£13 billion), employs close to 4 million workers and accounts for 80 percent of Bangladesh's exports. Sixty percent of the garment exports go to Europe and 23 percent to the USA. Bangladesh has the second largest garment industry in the world after China. Following the building collapse there were protests on Workers' Memorial Day and May Day. The President of the Bangladeshi Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association expressed the concerns of the capitalist class when he worried about 'the disruption in production owing to unrest,' but the

Bangladeshi Finance Minister said about the garment building collapse: 'the present difficulties... well, I don't think it is really serious – it's an accident.'

The Rana Plaza building collapse follows recent incidents in which workers have been killed in the Bangladeshi garment industry. In April 2005 the Spectrum sweater factory building collapsed killing 64 workers; in December 2010, 27 workers were killed in a fire in a factory that made clothes for Gap; and in November last year a fire at the Tazreen Fashion Factory which produced garments for Walmart and IKEA killed 117 workers. The Rana Plaza disaster even outstrips the devastation of the Karachi garment factory fire in September last year which left 289 Pakistani garment workers dead. Since the disaster there has been another fire, at the Tung Hai Sweater factory in Dhaka on 8 May, killing 8 people.

Doug Miller at Northumbria University said 'Factory owners can't make money on the original order – the price has been set too low – so will therefore find someone who can – subcontracting to producers of ever-declining standards. In Bangladesh you have a glut of buyers in search of a cheap product wanting to place enormous orders; and capacity is built hurriedly. Factory installations are shoddy; workers locked in and lead times are too tight.'

Brad Adams at Human Rights Watch said: 'Given the long record of worker deaths in factories, this tragedy was sadly predictable. The government, local factory owners, and the international garment industry pay workers among the world's lowest wages, but didn't have the decency to ensure safe conditions for the people who put clothes on the backs of people all over the world.'

Trade unions are almost non-existent in Bangladeshi garment factories. Aminul Islam, a trade unionist who worked for local labour groups affiliated with the AFL (American Federation of Labour), had his phone tapped, was subject to police harassment and was once abducted by state security agents and beaten. In April 2012 he was trying to solve a labour dispute at factories that produced shirts for Tommy Hilfiger when he disappeared and has not been seen since.

The history of capitalism is littered with the deaths of the working class: 146 garment workers were killed in the New York City Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire in 1911; the Senghenydd Colliery disaster in South Wales in 1913 killed 439 miners; but nothing we hope can surpass the devastation at the Bhopal Union Carbide Plant in India in 1984 when between 4,000 and 20,000 people died. Warren Anderson, CEO of Union Carbide, never faced prosecution because the US government refused to extradite him to India, citing lack of evidence.

STEVE CLAYTON

Mount Everest – Top of whose world?

‘Because it is there’ was the unbending response of mountaineer George Mallory when he was asked why anyone would want to climb Mount Everest. In that sense Everest had been ‘there’ since the 1850s, when it was first identified in the Great British Trigonometric Survey of India as ‘singularly shy and retiring.’ The fact that this was something extraordinary – the highest in the world, then measured at 29,002 feet – was acknowledged in 1856 when it was considered proper to name it after the retiring Surveyor General of India. Not that Sir George Everest, infamous for his volcanic temperament, was especially impressed. And Mallory? His body was left on the mountain in 1924, tantalisingly close to the summit. Thereafter Everest was inviolate until June 1953, when Edmund Hilary and Tenzing Norgay allowed themselves to spend just fifteen minutes there, burying in the snow some small tokens of their achievement. The news of their triumph was delayed so as to arrive here on the same day as the coronation of queen Elizabeth, resulting in coinciding sixtieth anniversaries which may be used by crazier patriots in a campaign of delusion to play down the fact that neither of those two pioneering climbers was British.

Curzon

It was some time after Everest had been noted and measured that the prospect of climbing it, which involved first crossing the formidable surrounding landscape, was seriously discussed. And when there was such a discussion, it originated among an expensively exclusive elite that prided itself on being driven by what was known as a ‘mystic patriotism’ – but which in reality had notably less exalted motives. This was a cause enjoying the

passionate support of Lord Curzon, supremely imperialist Viceroy of India: ‘It has always seemed to me a reproach ... that we, mountaineers and pioneers par excellence of the universe, make no sustained and scientific attempt to climb to the top...’ In 1906 the proposal was taken on by the Alpine Club on the assumption that the cost would be borne by its more prosperous members who in return would qualify for a place on the expedition. In the event, the entire concept was swamped by the outbreak of war in 1914, when many of the aspiring conquerors of Everest – including Mallory – were persuaded by what they regarded as their obligation as Englishmen to the essential idealism of the human spirit to take their place in the trenches, where they witnessed such horrors as would prepare them for the worst that Everest could offer.

Bell

The foredoomed peace of 1918 allowed the surviving climbers to turn their obsessive attention to the detailed organisation of an Everest expedition. One immediate problem was to ensure that a party would be allowed by the surrounding countries to get at the mountain. This was complicated by the question of whether the British would send arms to Tibet for that country’s continuing dispute with China. There were also religious objections to the invasion of sacred ground. An influential figure in settling this problem was Charles Bell, the British political officer at Sikkim, whose knowledge of Tibet, its people and their traditions was impressively extensive. He reported: ‘...there are several sacred places in the vicinity of Mount Everest... Tibetans

would not like Europeans moving about those places...(and) do not believe that explorations are carried on only in the interests of geographical knowledge and science... Until the Tibetan question is settled with China these expeditions to Mount Everest should not be allowed.’ Eventually Bell’s considerable influence persuaded the British government to supply arms, ammunition and the necessary training and technical advice to the Tibetan army. In December 1920, as part of a more complex initiative in diplomacy, this brought Tibetan agreement to a British Mount Everest expedition.

Hinks

The plan was to send a party in 1921 to assess whether it would be possible to climb Everest and get down again safely and to settle on the most likely route for doing so. This would be followed by yearly expeditions from 1922, setting up a chain of camps from which a select pair of climbers could strike out for the summit and quickly return. Among the most urgent matters for the Committee was to select the mountaineers. Arthur Hinks, one of the joint secretaries, was responsible for this although his temperament was not the most promising for so delicate a task. Among an ocean of volcanic eccentrics he was a sarcastic, intolerant, vituperous bully contemptuous of anything he considered ‘modern’ such as a telephone in his home. There was a strict requirement for all members of the expedition to be British, which allowed Hinks to compose a response to an ex-officer of the German Army: ‘I have hitherto put straight into the wastepaper basket all applications from ex-enemies.’ Not that all cases were judged on climbing ability: in 1923, Richard Graham who offered pretty well everything needed to commend him and who had a number of influential supporters – including Mallory – was at first accepted



but then quietly rejected when an anonymous Committee member objected to him on the grounds that during the war, as a Quaker, he had been a conscientious objector.

were in a very bad state, with Norton snow blind and Somervell fearing he was on the point of death. They both survived and Mallory prepared himself with Andrew Irvine for his third attempt on 8 June, leaving the

So Odell was subjected to strong pressure to refashion his memory of what he had observed, even to supply evidence that the climb had been successful. But what concession he made on this was no more than vague and conditional. Subsequent events offered nothing more: for example when Hilary and Tenzing got to the top they did not find anything to suggest that anyone had been there before.

With the return of the expedition the angry frustration at the failure did not prevent an awareness that this was a potentially profitable situation. Odell was promoted as a rising star, soon speaking at as many as three lectures a day, which yielded him some £700. A lot was expected of the film *The Epic Of Everest*, made by the official photographer John Noel, on which rode an investment of £8000. Noel was not optimistic about the prospects for the film and questioned whether these might have been more promising had there been a female star to inject a romantic interest. Already it featured a type of carnival including dancing and seven performing Buddhist monks, which caused the Dalai Lama to ban Noel from Tibet and forbid any more plans to climb Mount Everest.

Crime

In what are known as these more enlightened times the travel industry has expanded into mountaineering, with offers to conduct willing tourists to the summit – at a suitable price. One agency promises to provide ‘... the very best leadership, equipment, oxygen systems, comfort, food and Sherpa support...’ for some £35,000;



From left: Curzon, Finch and Mallory

Finch

When the mammoth task of organisation was completed the expedition arrived at its base camp early in May 1921. Among the matters to be settled was whether the use of oxygen should be allowed or whether it would be ‘unsporting.’ Especially keen on oxygen, making himself somewhat unpopular in the process, was George Finch, an accomplished climber who in the next expedition in 1922 reached to a record 27,300 feet – during which he saved the life of his partner. A party led by Mallory then failed to improve on this and as they were descending they were hit by a massive avalanche in which Mallory narrowly escaped death but seven native porters were killed. A lack of money prevented another effort in 1923, but on the following year two climbers – Norton and Somervell without using oxygen – reached 28,126 feet, less than 1,000 from the summit. But they

geologist Noel Odell at Camp V to keep observation.

Odell

Early on 9 June as the mist cleared Odell saw, on a ridge near the base of the final peak, what he later described as ‘two black spots.’ As he watched, the two figures surmounted a great rock step before the mist clamped down again and they were lost to sight. ‘There was but one explanation,’ he later wrote, ‘It was Mallory and his companion moving, as I could see even at that great distance, with considerable alacrity...’ He kept watching and hoping for some hours before he gave up. But Mallory and Irvine were never seen again, and the climbers assembled below had to face the agonising truth that they had perished somewhere on the slopes. In effect it was the end of the expedition. But a great deal, in several senses, had been invested in its result, which stimulated some reluctance to admit to failure.

Climbing All The Way To The Bank

A recent incident has brutally illustrated the fact that even when it concerns Mount Everest the profit motive counts above everything.

TOWARDS THE end of April three European climbers – Ueli Steck, Simone Moro and Jon Griffith, all-well hardened on the slopes – were at Everest Camp Two, at about 21,000 feet, working to find a new route to the summit. They were not using ropes or oxygen – they regard climbing with these aids ‘like walking.’ However, on the same slope there was a party of Sherpas laying out fixed lines – permanent ropes for the ‘commercial climbers’ who are not planning to ‘walk’ up Everest. It is usual to leave Sherpas free to do this work, but on this occasion the three European climbers crossed the Sherpa lines. They said they did this in order to reach their tent but Griffith despised the restriction as against the ‘freedom of the hills.’ The Sherpas objected and there was a fight in which rocks, a knife and an ice axe were used, and later some 100 Sherpas came to attack the three men at their tent. The dispute was settled at least for the present, when the Europeans fled back to the Base Camp.

Since then the Nepalese government have intervened,

mindful of the financial importance of the Everest climbing trade. Along the trail to the Base Camp, tourists have spent tens of millions of dollars. The accommodation at the Camp can be luxurious with hot tubs and bedding and food flown in from the rest of the world to order; there is also a helicopter champagne breakfast for those with the right appetite and money. This is no longer sacred ground, protected from the rest: now the tourism authority collects a £6,450 fee for every climber and the normal basic cost of a climb is £22,500, but for the right person this can reach as high as £65,000, even for those who, according to Tenzing Norgay’s son, need instruction to put on crampons. The average annual wage in Nepal is around £128, which is known to be a cause of some resentment among the locals who work to keep those snugly wealthy people happy. All this in the interests of keeping the mountain earning the profits. Which raises the question, unlikely to be asked let alone answered among the celebrations this year: Who Owns Everest?

another charges \$65,000 because it claims to be better than cheaper companies. One effect of this is to create serious congestion on the route up the mountain; recently one experienced climber took a photograph of a huge queue standing for hours on the slopes, waiting its turn. In all he summarised the situation as 'mass hysteria.' There have been accounts of the mountain being disfigured by masses of litter including empty oxygen cylinders and of hurrying climbers in the Death Zone stepping around others who have been overcome. And crime flourished in a



Mallory's remains

setting where it would once have been inconceivable. In his book *High Crimes* Michael Kodas, who had climbed the mountain twice, listed a series of thefts from the tents

of climbers, in many cases involving equipment which was life-preserving, later to be found hidden among other team members' property: '...some of my own teammates... in their efforts to stand on top of the world and make money doing it, behaved more like mobsters than mountaineers.'

It was consistent with these events that in 1999 a party from the Mallory and Irvine Research Expedition should find, at 27,000 feet, Mallory's frozen body. Photographs were then on sale for considerable sums of money; at one stage the price for a single shot reached \$40,000. As Mallory's body was hacked and levered out of the ice the clothing was torn, yielding artefacts which were later catalogued as rare specimens. From the diggers could be heard comments such as, 'There's still some more shit here' and 'This is something...I think it's fucking closed.' One vastly experienced climber who gave vent to his feelings at this was Chris Bonington: 'Words can't express how disgusted I am. These people don't deserve to be called climbers.'

Priorities

After the failure of the 1924 expedition, leaving its bodies out on the frozen slopes, there was a suspension of any more such ventures until 1933. In the meantime there was the preoccupation with glorifying it all as an historic example of purely British endeavour. At the memorial service in St. Paul's cathedral the bishop of Chester intoned about '...the last ascent, with the beautiful mystery of the great enigma... stands for more than an heroic effort to climb a mountain.' These words may have defiantly soothed some ruffled patriots but said nothing about the essentials of what had happened. The drive to climb Everest was at first energised by the pressure to compensate for the failure of British expeditions to be the first to reach either of the Earth's poles. And then, in what was called, after 1918, The Silence as the world was in preparation for another great war, there was the need to assuage the grief over senseless disasters such as the Somme, Passchendaele, Gallipoli... Behind it all the political and military urgency of the tensions in the area sprouted from the priority to assert the British rule of India and stifle any potential threat from Russia. These matters were not unrelated to the fact that marketing the opportunity for people to climb Everest emerged as another investment, essentially no different from all the other degrading examples of the commodity demands of capitalism. In face of that, no human being, no mountain, can stand free.

IVAN



Capitalism is sharia-compliant

Sharia law bans lending money at interest, denouncing it, as Christianity used to, as 'usury.' So how come there can be such a thing as 'Islamic banking?'

Sharia commercial law emerged as a way of regulating trade in pre-capitalist times in those parts of the world where Islam was the dominant religion. This trade was fairly extensive (think Silk Road) and involved buying goods in one place and transporting them to another where they could be sold at a higher price that would more than cover the expenses. Buying cheap to sell dear. Mohammed himself had been such a merchant.

Sharia commercial law was perfectly happy with a merchant making a money profit and distinguished this from a moneylender's interest by seeing it as coming from the merchant using goods rather than money. The profit derived from the goods, not money. It is this concept that modern Muslim theologians have built on to get round their religion's ban on making money out of money; this is all right as long as it involves using goods in the course of making the money.

In fact sharia commercial law developed many of the same practices that later emerged in Christian Europe. For instance, the word 'cheque' comes from the Arabic word *sakk*. The *Times* Raconteur supplement on 'Islamic Finance' (16 April) quoted Harris Irfan, described as 'a seasoned Islamic finance professional,' as saying:

'Trade finance ... fits neatly into the Sharia system because, rather than providing a loan and charging interest on it, the bank effectively buys the asset and then sells it to the end-buyer, with the mark-up being the profit.'

Discounting trade bills was precisely one of the origins of banking in Western Europe. There are 'Islamic mortgages' too:

'Common forms of Islamic mortgages include ijara, in which the homebuyer pays rent until they purchase the property outright by a given period, and diminishing musharaka, which is an equity partnership where the homebuyer and mortgage-provider share ownership of the property until it is bought back in monthly instalments.'

The trick, then, is to make a loan of money appear to be a loan of a non-money asset and the Muslim theologians will declare it sharia-compliant. Property speculation easily passes the test as, like the merchants of old, it involves buying something cheap to sell dear later.

But what about bonds? Surely these, as an arrangement whereby you lend a government or a company money and receive regular fixed payments and get your money back at the end, can't be sharia-compliant? But no, Islamic financiers have developed a product called 'sukuk' which is a bond in all but name.

This gets by the clerics by claiming that the stream of income that provides the regular payments comes from the asset in which the money is invested, not from the money itself. Actually, this is the case. Which means, ironically, that sharia commercial law has a more accurate explanation for banks' interest than that of most economics textbooks. Despite appearances, money can't produce more money out of nothing. The source of interest is always in the end, and in however roundabout a way, past or future production; in other words, from the use of non-money assets.

Sharia law condemns the appearance but not the substance; in fact it emphasises the substance. In Marxist terms it condemns M-M but not M-C-M (where M is money and C is commodity). Which is why it had no objection to capitalist production when it developed. Capitalism, Muslim capitalists will be pleased to learn, is sharia-compliant.

The Master and Margarita

Simon McBurney directed the Complicite Theatre Company in a 'phantastic' dramatisation of the novel *The Master and Margarita* by Mikhail Bulgakov at the Barbican in London recently.

Bulgakov was writing in the USSR in the 1920-30s when Stalin ruthlessly pursued state capitalist industrialisation. Although Stalin personally liked the works of Bulgakov, the author faced prohibitions of his plays by Glavrepertcom (censorship committee) for concerning himself with the fate of intellectuals and Tsarists in the revolution and civil war. Bulgakov politically was a 'liberal conservative monarchist.'

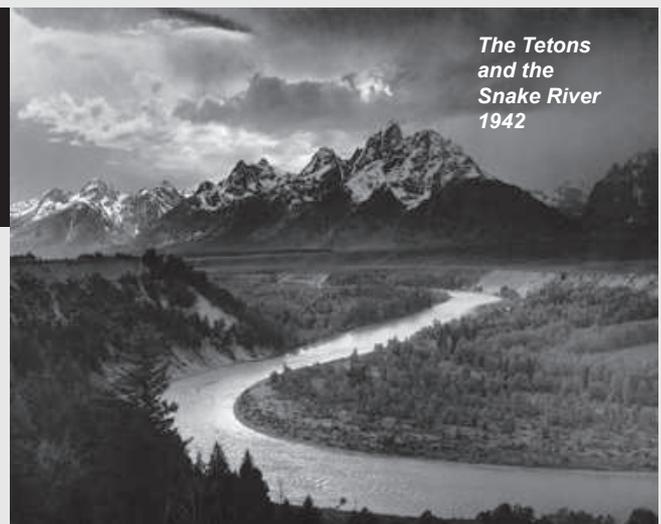
The Master and Margarita is a fantasy and political satire on Soviet society under Stalin and critiques the literary establishment, highlighting the corruption, greed, narrow-mindedness and paranoia in Stalinist Russia. Bulgakov looks at the relation of the individual artist to the state, censorship ('manuscripts don't burn'), the power of love, good and evil and human frailty. The novel was not published until 1966. Bulgakov was inspired by the play, *Faust*, by Goethe, the opera, *The Damnation of Faust*, by Berlioz, and his 'Margarita' is modelled after Goethe's heroine, 'Gretchen' in *Faust*. In his 'Confessions' for Jenny and Laura Marx of 1865, Marx lists Goethe and Gretchen as his favourite poet and heroine.

Bulgakov has 'Professor Woland' (Lucifer) with his demonic two-legged black cat 'Behemoth' (Biblical monster in Job 40:15) visit Moscow where he exposes greed, bourgeois behaviour and the superficial vanities of modern life. Bulgakov portrays Satan's Spring Ball where the notorious in human history such as Caligula are gathered with 'the kings, dukes, chevaliers, procuresses, jailers, executioners, informers, traitors, and spies.' In 1935 Bulgakov attended the Spring Ball at the US Ambassadors home in Moscow along with senior Bolsheviks such as

Bukharin. *The Master and Margarita* was the inspiration for the Rolling Stones song, *Sympathy for the Devil*, and Salman Rushdie has credited the 'magical realism' of the novel as an inspiration for *The Satanic Verses*.

Bulgakov has a second plot involving the trial of 'Yeshua Ha-Notsri' (Jesus of the Nazarene sect) in 'Yershalayim' (Jerusalem) before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. Bulgakov was inspired by the parable of 'The Grand Inquisitor'

in *The Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoyevsky. Bulgakov focuses on Pilate's words as he washes his hands in Matthew 27:24: 'I am innocent of the blood of this righteous person,' and the debate between Jesus ('wanderer and mad philosopher') and Pilate is drawn from Pilate's question in John 18:38: 'And what is truth?' This Christian theme is explicit in *The Master and Margarita* with Pilate's spiritual need for Jesus spelled out clearly at the conclusion of the play.



Ansel Adams: Photography from the Mountains to the Sea

The Ansel Adams exhibition, *Photography from the Mountains to the Sea*, was recently at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, London. Adams's photographic modernism was an attempt to create 'extraction' in photography, as opposed to the impossibility of applying painterly 'abstract impressionism.' Adams used f/64 focal lengths, small aperture settings, in order to give great depth of field, sharpness and clarity and pioneered a zone system for translating perceived light into specific densities on negatives and paper. The foreboding mountains, river and sky are menacing in his 1942 *The Tetons and the Snake River*. He was a believer in unfiltered visualization in the sense of Blake's 'If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear as it is, infinite.'

Adams was influenced by Emerson and his social responsibility to humanity and nature, and also Edward Carpenter's *Towards Democracy* which advocated the pursuit of beauty in life and art. Adams wrote 'I believe in beauty. I believe in stones and water, air and soil, people and their future and their fate.' His landscapes are a form of worship, a pantheism like Spinoza's '*deus sive nature*' which led to his advocacy of wilderness preservation and environmentalism. His 1937 *Clearing Winter Storm* depicts Spinozist perception '*sub specie aeternitatis*.' Adams is close to Wordsworth in his sonnet *The World Is Too Much with Us* which critiques the

industrial revolution and materialism which places humanity out of tune with nature.

Adams's 'creative photography' is Wordsworth's 'poetry as emotion recollected in tranquillity.' His rock-pool photographs such as 1960 *Rocks and Limpets*, and 1969 *Sea Anemones* are 'cleansed perception' like Wordsworth's 'the earth, and every common sight/to me did seem/Apparelled in celestial light.' Adams's 1962 *Stream, Sea and Clouds* evoke the Wordsworth line of 'a sense sublime/of something far more deeply interfused' or in Adams's own words 'I saw more clearly than I have ever seen before or since the minute detail and I had within the grasp of consciousness a transcendental experience.'

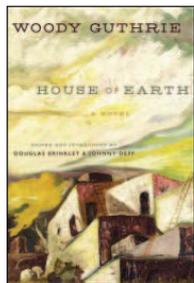
Adams photographed US President Carter in 1979 and was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1980. As befits a transcendental artist his photograph of *The Tetons and the Snake River* was included on the golden record on the NASA Voyager spacecraft in 1977. In a 1983 interview in *Playboy* magazine, shortly before his death, Adams was outspoken in his opposition to the Reagan presidency.

Ansel Adams: 'I know that I am one with beauty and that my comrades are one. Let our souls be mountain. Let our spirits be stars. Let our hearts be worlds.'

STEVE CLAYTON

A place of their own?

House of Earth, by Woody Guthrie. Harper Collins, 2013. ISBN: 978-0-06-224839-8.



Guthrie, America's famous working-class troubadour, who died in 1967, presents in this novel, completed in 1947, a realistic picture of a couple struggling to survive in the Texas Panhandle during the

Dust Bowl of the 1930s.

Tike and Ella May Hamlin feel frustrated with the inadequacies of their wooden shack and naturally yearn for something better. Tike buys a DIY government pamphlet on adobe houses made from the earth itself. Because it would be warm in winter, cool in summer, wind-proof, fire-proof and more importantly, dust-proof, Tike decides to make one himself. Since the Hamlins don't own the land they live on, Tike's efforts inevitably bring them into conflict with the powers-that-be.

What is clearly obvious is the extent to which Guthrie was influenced by the eroticism of D.H. Lawrence (in fact, most of the first quarter of the book is about the Hamlins having sex), and the social realism of his friend, John Steinbeck.

This reviewer would certainly recommend the book, but primarily because of the 34-page introduction by Douglas Brinkley and Johnny Depp, which contains an excellent description of the Dust Bowl and its effects. They destroy the myth that soil erosion was caused by the poor farmers not replenishing it: '...it's that those with power, especially Big Banks, Big Lumber, Big Agriculture, should be chastised as repugnant robber barons and rejected by wage earners.'

Brinkley and Depp mention several interesting tit-bits, such as the social activism of actor Eddie Albert, a friend of Guthrie's and that, when he wrote 'This Land is Your Land,' it was a rebuttal to 'God Bless America.' They contend that Guthrie could not get this book published at its completion in 1947, owing to the political climate of the times, which they called 'Trumanism' and that the book had been largely forgotten during the intervening years.

It is to be regretted that Guthrie was enamoured of the so-called Communist Party and that some of his work was patriotic. In 'The Big Grand Coulee Dam,' he wrote, 'Now roars a flying fortress, for to fight for Uncle

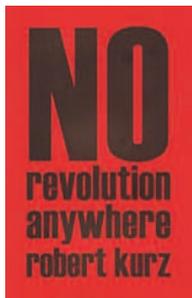
Sam.'

However, in his introduction he hits the nail on the head, 'Life's pretty tough ...you're lucky if you live through it.'

STEVE SHANNON

No revolution?

No Revolution Anywhere. By Robert Kurz. Chronos Publications.



According to Robert Kurz we are in the final days of the capitalist system. The 'third industrial revolution', the rise of microelectronics, has led to an irreversible restructuring of the production

process, invested capital will soon no longer be able to reproduce itself since the human labour-power that is the source of surplus value and profit no longer plays a central role in the manufacturing process. For the past twenty years growth has been sustained not through real accumulation but through debt and financial speculation, but as the crisis is no longer confined to certain regions or sectors we are now witnessing the bubble bursting on a global scale. Unlike previous worldwide economic crisis this one cannot be overcome because capital has now reached its pinnacle. Crises of the 19th century were overcome because industrial development was able to spread into new areas. The great depression of the 1930s occurred at a higher level of technological development but was overcome through the development of Taylorist production methods and Keynesian state regulation. However this time there is no get out for the system, there are no further avenues for the expansion of value extraction.

So what validity is there to these claims and was Kurz (who passed away in mid-2012) really 'the most advanced political and political-economic thinker in the capitalist world in this age' as the publishers of this pamphlet would have us believe?

Whilst we would agree that the ultimate source of all profit is the productive surplus labour of the worker – wage labourers produce a value greater than that they receive back as wages or salaries – and that if production processes reached such a level that the part played by labour was close to zero there would be no source for the further accumulation

of value and the era of capitalism would be over. The question remains, have we really reached this point or are we likely to in the not too astronomically distant future? The answer to both these questions is a firm 'no'. Whilst technology is used in more and more situations (and sometimes pulled back once labour becomes cheaper to use – think hand car washes) we are still a long way from the total elimination of labour from production.

A crisis has the effect of scorching the earth ready for a fresh round of capital growth. Many enterprises fall by the wayside but those that do survive are able to purchase the productive capital assets of their former competitors at knock down prices thus helping fuel a recovery in the rate of profit. This devaluing of capital, one of the factors that Marx saw as counteracting the fall in the general rate of profit, seems to be disregarded by Kurz.

Robotic automation and information technology decrease the dependency of production on labour, as has the introduction of any new technology throughout the history of capitalism, whilst also cheapening the production of both capital and consumer goods. In other words, it takes less time to produce the stuff that is needed for the subsistence of the worker and also less time to manufacture the machinery that makes the stuff. A fall in the total mass of labour therefore does not necessarily lead to a fall in the general rate of profit. This weakens Kurz's claims regarding the irreversibility of the present crisis.

The rest of the pamphlet is concerned with criticising various types of reformist activism, much of which we would agree with. What we would not agree with is Kurz's apparent rejection of the class struggle. For him the working class cannot be an agent for revolutionary change because 'labour' is a category of capitalist social relations, labour struggles are just a part of the development of capitalism. For us this is a half-truth, so long as the working class only struggles for petty changes to the terms of exploitation the system as a whole will continue to function. That is why it is necessary to organise politically for the sole purpose of transforming capitalism into socialism. The working class, which comprises of the vast majority of people, will be the agent for this change since it is this class alone that produces and reproduces the material conditions of society.

DJP

Promised Land



Promised Land by Gus Van Sant, director of *Elephant* and *Milk*, is a morality tale about corporate capitalist Machiavellianism written by Matt Damon, Academy Award winner for *Good Will Hunting* (directed by Van Sant) and John Krasinski. With Matt Damon's effortless naturalism and the wonderful Frances McDormand, Academy Award winner for *Fargo*, as sales people for a global energy company, Van Sant directs a Capraesque film about the contemporary issue of natural gas extraction through hydraulic fracturing or 'fracking.' *Promised Land* is an earnest version of the Bill Forsyth comedy *Local Hero*.

Promised Land was filmed in Pennsylvania where 'fracking' is widespread. The 2010 Academy nominated documentary *Gasland* directed by Josh Fox publicised the methane contamination of thirteen water wells due to 'fracking' in 2009 in Dimock, Pa where one well exploded. Cabot Oil &

Gas were required to financially compensate residents. The US Environmental Protection Agency is currently investigating five cases of groundwater contamination. Another 2010 documentary *Burning Water* looked at 'fracking' in Alberta, Canada, the film's title a reference to the fact that water from faucets can be lit on fire. The capitalist lobby have countered with their own 'pro-fracking' documentary *FrackNation* released in January 2013.

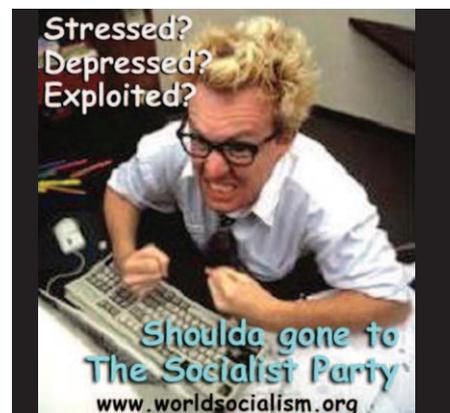
'Fracking' is the pumping of a pressurised mix of millions of gallons of water, millions of pounds of sand and thousands of gallons of chemicals including toxins and carcinogens into deep wells to break up layers of shale rock to release the natural gas inside. But poorly lined wells, contaminated flow-back water coming back up and causing earth tremors or seeping into the water table, and the storage of flow-back water in unlined or leaky storage pits are serious concerns. Terry Engelder, a 'fracking' expert at Penn State University: 'This is not a risk-free industry.' Robert B Jackson at Duke University believes the likeliest cause of contamination is faulty cementing and casing of wells but also that 'fracking' may create cracks upward in rocks that could link up with pre-existing fissures, allowing gas to travel far upward.

The 'fracking' of natural gas is seen as a solution to the global energy crisis in the post-Fukushima era where oil is peaking, tar sand oil

extraction is polluting, gas reserves are limited and although coal is still plentiful it is a 'bête noire,' and not enough development is taking place in 'clean coal' technology. Shale gas extraction is seen as a solution to rising energy prices, the way out of the economic recession and bringing prosperity to struggling rural communities as portrayed in *Promised Land*. In February 2013 PricewaterhouseCoopers said that shale gas reserves could push down oil prices by 40 per cent and boost the world economy by \$2.7 trillion.

In April 2013 the WWF-UK said 'It's simply impossible to keep global warming below 2°C and burn all known fossil fuel reserves – let alone exploit unconventional reserves like shale gas.' Socialists argue that 'fracking is a mining technology, and if it can be made safe, and if we need it, we may use it in socialism.'

STEVE CLAYTON



Hoard Today, Gone Tomorrow

LIKE SCHOOL kids cheating in maths class by copying the person next to them, TV producers are always on the lookout for a formula which someone else has made work.

The BBC's response to the popularity of ITV's *Downton Abbey* was an already-forgotten re-commissioning of *Upstairs Downstairs*, whose original run was itself the template for *Downton*. And hot on the heels of *The Hoarder Next Door* (Channel 4) comes BBC's *Britain's Biggest Hoarders* – a title which implies it's a competition. Why should hoarding, of all things, be the subject of two near-identical primetime programmes?

Both shows state that compulsive hoarding is a growing problem. *The Hoarder Next Door* says that 1.2 million people in the UK hoard, while *Britain's Biggest Hoarders* more than doubles this to 3 million. Whatever the true figure, hoarding has TV appeal not because of its prevalence, but because it's a mental health condition more visual than, say, depression. The symptoms of hoarding are there in the piles



of rusting car parts, unopened boxes of trinkets and bags of tin cans. The sight of a hoarder's packed home gives the kind of voyeuristic jolt documentary makers want. Although, as presenter Jasmine Harman says, 'you live with it all around you and you stop seeing it.'

The programmes focus more on the gradual tackling of the stockpiles than they do with counselling, giving the simplistic impression that the mental health issue is cured when the hoard is tidied away. Clearing out the clutter also gives the producers the opportunity to resurrect the genre of home makeover shows, defunct since the recession.

This kind of programme wouldn't be complete without an emotional reveal of the renewed house underneath. The formulaic approach in both shows gives the uneasy feeling that a mental health condition and its treatment are being moulded to fit a TV programme's format. Hoarding is more complicated and personal than that, although the condition is shaped by the society we live in. In a world which makes commodities both scarce and fetishised, it's understandable that some people will find a kind of security in stockpiling as many as they can, even to the extent of it taking over their lives. A programme looking at hoarding from this angle would be more revealing.

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/>

East Anglia

Saturday 1 June

12noon: informal chat / branch business
1.00 - 2.00pm: meal
2.00 - 4.00pm: branch business
Quebec Tavern, 93-97 Quebec Road
Norwich NR1 4HY
(The meeting takes place in a side room separate to the bar.) All welcome.

Chiswick

Tuesday 4 June 8.00pm
UKIP - BNP IN BLAZERS?
Discussion after branch business.

Tuesday 18 June 8.00pm
SOCIALIST PRINCIPLES AND
POLITICS

Speaker: Jacqueline Shodeke
Committee Room, Chiswick Town Hall,
Heathfield Terrace, W4 4JN.

SOCIALIST STANDARD INDEX FOR 2012

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Clapham High St, London SW4
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Sunderland

Saturday 8 June 11am - 5pm
Socialist Party stall at Working Class
Bookfair.
Museum Vaults, 33 Silksworth Row,
SR1 3QJ.

Truro

Saturday 15 June 1.00 - 3.30pm
Branch meeting and open discussion
Truro Community Library, (medium
community room, top floor), Union Place,
Truro TR1 1EP (Thirteen minutes walk
from Truro rail station).

Manchester

Saturday 15 June 2pm
CLASS
Unicorn, Church Street, M4 1PW.

Clapham

Sunday 16 June 3.00pm
BASIC MARXIAN ECONOMICS
Speaker: Adam Buick

Sunday 30 June 3.00pm
BRITISH COMMUNISM
Speaker: Keith Scholey
Socialist Party premises, 52 Clapham
High St, London, London, SW4 7UN.

Glasgow

Wednesday 19 June 8.30pm
QUANTITATIVE EASING
Speaker: Vic Vanni
Community Central Halls,
304 Maryhill Road, Glasgow.

East Anglia

Saturday 27 July 2.00-5.00pm
A ROBOT STOLE MY JOB:
EMPLOYMENT, AUTOMATION AND
PROFIT.
Quebec Tavern, 93-97 Quebec Road
Norwich NR1 4HY
(The meeting takes place in a side room
separate to the bar.) All welcome.

The Socialist Party badge



Cheque or postal order (no cash) for £10.00 payable to SPGB SW Regional Branch, c/o Veronica Clanchy, FAO: South West Regional Branch, 42 Winifred Road, Poole, Dorset. BH15 3PU. Any queries, please phone 01202 569826. Please include own phone number or other contact details.

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Declaration of Principles

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

Object

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

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e. land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as

a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

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

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

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

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of

the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

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

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

50 Years Ago

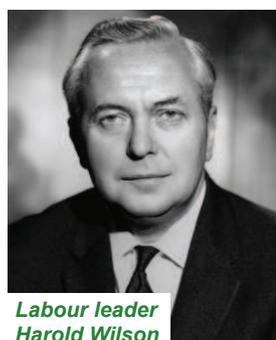
The Labour Party itching for power

THE LABOUR Party, itching for power, is like a man listening to the last few football results with seven draws on his pools coupon.

They suffer. They perspire. They are fearful lest a wrong word should shatter their glorious dream.

That was why the Labour Party was so worried about the railway strike which never got started. Perhaps the strike was something of a forlorn hope. But, after all, strikes are the only weapon workers have in their disputes with their employers.

The Labour Party, let it be recorded, did not oppose the strike for any reason connected with the welfare of the railway workers. They opposed it because they judged that it may have damaged their chance of winning the next election;



Labour leader Harold Wilson

it might have upset their Treble Chance. For Labour, as for other capitalist parties, votes are tremendously important.

Mr. Wilson is doing his best to gather as

many of them as he can. He celebrated May Day, for example, by propounding a plan to "... make a reality of the Commonwealth ..." (although there was nothing very new in what he said—just some more mucking about with Imperial Preferences).

He also threw in his now customary make weight about the Labour Party not being prepared to see Britain as a second rate power.

Now all this may have been palatable to retired colonels in Bournemouth and to the floating, drifting voters whom the Labour Party has wooed so coyly for so long. But it has absolutely nothing to do with the Socialism which Mr. Wilson protests he stands for, nor with the working class interests he professes to defend.

There must still be some members of the Labour Party who can remember the days when strikers were people to support and when patriotism was something of a dirty word. What do they think of their party, as they watch it take its inevitable path to the status of a fully fledged party of capitalism, with power as the one and only object of its miserable life?

(From 'The News in Review', *Socialist Standard* June 1963)

ACTION REPLAY

The City and the World

AT THE end of April, racehorse trainer Mahmood al-Zarooni was banned for eight years after admitting that he had injected anabolic steroids into horses in his charge. This has been claimed to be the biggest doping scandal in the history of horse racing, but it also tells us a lot about the general social setting of sport.

Zarooni worked for Sheikh Mohammed al-Maktoum, the ruler of Dubai, part of the United Arab Emirates. Godolphin, the sheik's enormous racing and breeding concern, has enjoyed great success in winning top races. But it's not just a matter of an expensive hobby or a money-making enterprise. Dubai presents itself as a modern city, built on 'a foundation of innovation and uninhibited achievement.' And 'Godolphin, in encapsulating those same values, exemplifies Dubai and plays a meaningful role in representing the Emirate to the world' (godolphin.com/about-us/about-godolphin/). So it is a gigantic PR exercise, one that could do without the nasty associations of this

scandal. Just as it could do without publicity about the impoverished immigrants who build the skyscrapers and work as domestic servants to the Maktoums and their relations.

The doping scandal also reveals a great deal about how the globalisation of production and distribution under modern capitalism has affected sport. Most Godolphin horses are trained in Newmarket, but many of them spend the winter back in Dubai, enjoying the warmer climate there. This, however, may have been the source of Zarooni's problems, since anabolic steroids are allowed to be used in Dubai, as long as they are no longer in a horse's system by the time it races. In the UK, though, they are prohibited completely. This sort of thing has created problems in the past – in 2009 even one of the queen's horses was found to have raced with a drug (not steroids) that had not cleared its system in time.

Global capitalism sometimes has problems with differing regulations in different countries, so truly global corporations have to make sure that they fit in with whatever rules apply where they want to manufacture or trade. Ah, the trials of being a multinational company ...

PB

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Voice from the Back

A Grim Forecast

Politicians and media 'experts' are always telling us that although times may prove economically fraught at the moment the future will prove much better. Occasionally however the truth leaks out. 'Recession in the eurozone will be deeper than expected this year, the European Commission said yesterday in spring forecasts that predicted continuing record unemployment and a sluggish economic rebound next year' (*Times*, 4 May). Capitalism by its very nature is based on booms and slumps and no 'expert' has ever managed to solve that basic flaw of the system.

Colonial Hypocrisy

The British ruling class have always pretended that they behave in a moral fashion. This fallacy has now been exposed as nonsense. The British government is negotiating payments to thousands of Kenyans who were detained and severely mistreated during the 1950s Mau Mau insurgency. 'In a



development that could pave the way for many other claims from around the world, government lawyers embarked upon the historic talks after suffering a series of defeats in their attempts to prevent elderly survivors of the prison camps from seeking redress through the British courts. Those defeats followed the discovery of a vast archive of colonial-era documents which the Foreign Office (FCO) had kept hidden for decades,

and which shed new and stark light on the dying days of British rule, not only in Kenya but around the empire' (*Guardian*, 5 May). In the case of the Mau Mau conflict, the secret papers showed that senior colonial officials authorised appalling abuses of inmates held at the prison camps established during the bloody conflict, and that ministers and officials in London were aware of a brutal detention regime in which men and women were tortured and killed.

Another Promise Bites The Dust

When the government closed Remploi factories that employed disabled workers their boast was that the closures would lead to more of them getting jobs in mainstream employment. Like most government promises this turned out to be untrue. 'Up to two thirds of the disabled workers who lost their jobs when the nationwide network of Remploi factories began to be shut down last autumn are still out of work' (*Sunday Express*, 5 May). Being unemployed is tough but being unemployed and disabled must be hellish.

Growing Old Disgracefully

Readers of the popular press are aware of world hunger as a pressing problem, but they are probably unaware that this is not just a problem that affects people abroad. 'Most people think of the condition as a 'third world problem', but one in ten older people in the UK are malnourished, the British Dietetic Association and the Malnutrition Task Force said. 'For far too long, malnutrition and dehydration has been thought of as a third world problem,' said Helen Davidson, honorary chair of the British Dietetic Association - the professional body for UK dieticians. 'The reality is, malnutrition and dehydration is a very big problem here in the UK' (*Daily Express*, 9 May). Malnutrition Task Force task force chair Dianne Jeffrey claimed that one in ten older people are malnourished and estimates put the figure at about three

million. That is capitalism for you. Even in an advanced country like the UK old folk are malnourished.

Lots To Smile About

Accompanying a photograph of the two billionaires smiling broadly at a Berkshire Hathaway's shareholders meeting in the USA was the following piece of information. 'Super-rich Bill Gates and Warren Buffett obviously know how to take it easy. It can't be too hard when Microsoft chairman Gates, 57, is worth \$67 billion and Berkshire Hathaway chief executive Buffett, 82, has been valued at \$53.5 billion' (*Sunday Express*, 5 May).



Artful Dodgers

Workers are constantly being reprimanded by politicians and journalists for being 'benefit fraudsters' but in fact whatever dodges they may get up to it's as nothing compared to the tax evasion of the owning class. 'More than 100 of Britain's richest people have been caught hiding billions of pounds in secretive offshore havens, sparking an unprecedented global tax evasion investigation. George Osborne, the chancellor, warned the alleged tax evaders, and a further 200 accountants and advisers accused of helping them cheat the taxman: 'The message is simple: if you evade tax, we're coming after you' (*Guardian*, 9 May). Despite Osborne's threat this is a constant running battle between the government and the owning class's armies of accountants and financial advisers devising new and better methods of evasion.

FREE LUNCH

