

# socialist standard

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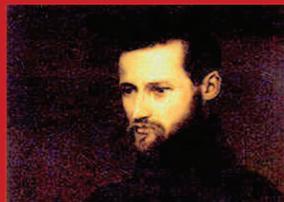
## Margaret who?



### Capitalism grinds on regardless



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# socialist standard

MAY 2013

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### The Socialist Party

52 Clapham High Street,  
London SW4 7UN

Tel: 0207 622 3811

Email: [spgb@worldsocialism.org](mailto:spgb@worldsocialism.org)

Website: [www.worldsocialism.org/spgb](http://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb)

Blog: <http://socialismoryourmoneyback.blogspot.com/>

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The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 1 June** at the address above. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the Editorial Committee.

## Contact Details

### UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

#### LONDON

**North London branch.** Meets 2nd Tuesday 7.30pm. The Coronet, 338-346 Holloway Road, London N7 6NJ

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

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

#### MIDLANDS

**West Midlands Regional branch.** Meets last Sunday of the month, the Briar Rose pub, 25 Bennetts Hill, Birmingham B2 5RE. Tel: Tony Gluck 01242 235615. Email: [tonygluck111@btinternet.com](mailto:tonygluck111@btinternet.com)

#### NORTHEAST

**Northeast branch.** Contact: Brian Barry, 86 Edmond Ct, Ryhope, Sunderland SR2 0DY. Tel: 0191 521 0690.

#### NORTHWEST

**Lancaster branch.** Meets fortnightly 8.30pm. P. Shannon, 10 Green Street, Lancaster LA1 1DZ. Tel: 01524 382380. Email: [spgb.lancaster@worldsocialism.org](mailto:spgb.lancaster@worldsocialism.org)

**Manchester branch.** Paul Bennett, 6 Burleigh Mews, Hardy Lane, M21 7LB. Tel: 0161 860 7189

**Bolton.** Tel: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589

**Cumbria.** Brendan Cummings, 19 Queen St, Millom, Cumbria LA18 4BG

**Carlisle.** Robert Whitfield. Email: [robdotbob@gmail.com](mailto:robdotbob@gmail.com) Tel: 07906 373975

**Rochdale.** Tel: R. Chadwick. 01706 522365

**Southeast Manchester.** Enquiries: Blanche Preston, 68 Fountains Road, M32 9PH

#### YORKSHIRE

**Skipton.** R Cooper, 1 Caxton Garth, Threshfield, Skipton BD23 5EZ. Tel: 01756 752621

**Todmorden:** Keith Scholey, 1 Leeview Ct, Windsor Rd, OL14 5LJ. Tel: 01706 814 149

#### SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

**Kent and Sussex Regional branch.** Meets second Sunday every month at 2.00pm at The Muggleton Inn, High Street, Maidstone ME14 1HJ. Dave Chesham: Email: [whichfinder@gmail.com](mailto:whichfinder@gmail.com) Tel: 07973 142701.

**South West Regional branch.** Meets 2nd Saturday of each month in the Railway Tavern, Salisbury, 2.00pm (check before attending). Shane Roberts, 86 High Street, Bristol BS5 6DN. Tel: 0117 9511199

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

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

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

#### EAST ANGLIA

**East Anglian Regional branch.** Meets every two months on a Saturday afternoon (see meetings page for details).

Pat Deutz, 11 The Links, Billericay, CM12 0EX. [n.deutz@btinternet.com](mailto:n.deutz@btinternet.com)

David Porter, Eastholme, Bush Drive, Eccles-on-Sea, NR12 0SF. Tel: 01692 582533.

Richard Headicar, 42 Woodcote, Firs Rd, Hethersett, NR9 3JD. Tel: 01603 814343.

**Cambridge.** Andrew Westley, 10 Marksby Close, Duxford, Cambridge CB2 4RS. Tel: 07890343044

#### IRELAND

**Cork:** Kevin Cronin, 5 Curragh Woods, Frankfield, Cork. Tel: 021 4896427. Email:

[mariekev@eircom.net](mailto:mariekev@eircom.net)

**Newtownabbey:** Nigel McCullough. Tel: 028 90852062.

#### SCOTLAND

**Edinburgh branch.** Meets 1st Thur. 7.00-9.00pm. The Quaker Hall, Victoria Terrace (above Victoria Street), Edinburgh.

J. Moir. Tel: 0131 440 0995.

[JIMMY@jimoir29.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:JIMMY@jimoir29.freeserve.co.uk) Branch website:

<http://geocities.com/edinburghbranch/>

**Glasgow branch.** Meets 3rd Wednesday of each month at 8pm in Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road, Glasgow. Peter Hendrie, 75 Lairhills Road, East Kilbride, Glasgow G75 0LH. Tel: 01355 903105. Email: [peter.anna.hendrie@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:peter.anna.hendrie@blueyonder.co.uk)

**Dundee.** Ian Ratcliffe, 16 Birkhall Ave, Wormit, Newport-on-Tay, DD6 8PX. Tel: 01328 541643.

#### Lothian Socialist Discussion @

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

#### WALES

**Swansea branch.** Meets 2nd Mon, 7.30pm, Unitarian Church, High Street. Corres: Geoffrey Williams, 19 Baptist Well Street, Waun Wen, Swansea SA1 6FB. Tel: 01792 643624

**Cardiff and District.** Corres: Richard Botterill, 21 Pen-Y-Bryn Rd, Gabalfa, Cardiff, CF14 3LG. Tel: 02920-615826. Email: [richardbotterill@hotmail.com](mailto:richardbotterill@hotmail.com)

#### Llandudno

Contact: Gareth Whitley - Email: [gwhitley@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:gwhitley@hotmail.co.uk)

### INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS

**Latin America.** J.M. Morel, Calle 7 edif 45 apto 102, Multis nuevo La loteria, La Vega, Rep. Dominicana.

#### AFRICA

**Kenya.** Patrick Ndege, PO Box 78105, Nairobi.

**Swaziland.** Mandla Ntshakala, PO Box 981, Manzini.

**Zambia.** Kephass Mulenga, PO Box 280168, Kitwe.

#### ASIA

**India.** World Socialist Group, Vill Gobardhanpur. PO Amral, Dist. Bankura, 722122

**Japan.** Michael. Email: [japan.wsm@gmail.com](mailto:japan.wsm@gmail.com)

#### EUROPE

**Denmark.** Graham Taylor, Kjaerslund 9, floor 2 (middle), DK-8260 Viby J

**Germany.** Norbert.

E-mail: [weltsozialismus@gmx.net](mailto:weltsozialismus@gmx.net)

**Norway.** Robert Stafford.

Email: [hallblithe@yahoo.com](mailto:hallblithe@yahoo.com)

**Italy.** Gian Maria Freddi, Via Felice Casorati n. 6A, 37131 Verona

**Spain.** Alberto Gordillo, Avenida del Parque 2/2/3 Puerta A, 13200 Manzanares.

### COMPANION PARTIES OVERSEAS

#### World Socialist Party of Australia.

P. O. Box 1266 North Richmond 3121, Victoria, Australia.

Email: [commonownership@yahoo.com.au](mailto:commonownership@yahoo.com.au)

**Socialist Party of Canada/Parti Socialiste du Canada.** Box 4280, Victoria B.C. V8X 3X8 Canada.

Email: [SPC@iname.com](mailto:SPC@iname.com)

**World Socialist Party (New Zealand)** P.O. Box 1929, Auckland, NI, New Zealand.

**World Socialist Party of the United States** P.O. Box 440247, Boston, MA 02144 USA. Email: [boston@wspus.org](mailto:boston@wspus.org)

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# Introducing The Socialist Party

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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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## Editorial

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### Thatcher, the icon

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IN LIFE, Margaret Thatcher, never humble, gladly accepted her transformation from shopkeeper's daughter into capitalist icon. She was The Iron Lady, TINA, and the woman who made Britain great again. She was the architect of 'Thatcher's Britain,' a tough, free-market economy whose backbone she stiffened with 'Victorian values.' To her supporters, Margaret Thatcher arose as the conquering hero who broke the power of the unions and saved the country. To her detractors, she was the harpy that devastated working-class communities, destroyed British industry and took pleasure in doing it. Francois Mitterrand, the French 'socialist' president fancied he saw in her, 'the eye of Caligula and the mouth of Marilyn Monroe.'

The Thatcher myth obscures the reality. In truth, the grocer's daughter followed policies that were neither exceptional nor original. When she came to power in 1979 capitalism in much of the world was experiencing its biggest economic depression in 30 years. In Britain, as elsewhere, business enterprises were failing, production had slumped and unemployment had begun to soar. Governments of all political colours were reacting to the economic downturn in the only way that was possible under the iron laws of capitalism, by cutting back on spending and allowing the system to take its course. Those who acted otherwise were soon given a lesson by the system.

If there was anything distinctive about Thatcher's politics, it lay only in the enthusiasm and energy with which she set herself to her task. 'Thatcherism' was a political style: abrasive; uncompromising; and ruthless. It was unapologetic. 'There Is No Alternative' she said and hammered the words

home again and again. Her message was simple and accurate. Capitalism runs in accordance with its own laws and, despite the assertions of many politicians, offers little choice to those who claim to run it. TINA cut back on government spending, opened the nationalised industries to the discipline of the market, allowed unprofitable businesses to fail and sank her teeth into the miners. She was very, very thorough.

Yet the myth prevails, and we should beware of it. Above all, we should beware of the myth promoted by those that hate her for what she did. Thatcher the hate figure is of immense value to capitalism. It is easy to imagine embodied in the woman herself all the ugly and anti-working-class features of the system: its relentless drive to minimise working-class incomes; its unconcern for working-class lives; and its insatiable demand for profit above all other things. These are its unchanging features; Thatcherism was merely its naked political expression. It may be necessary to remind ourselves at this time that the death of Thatcher, real and symbolic, does not imply the possibility of a more benign management of capitalism. That would be to create another dangerous myth: Thatcher the scapegoat, symbolically carrying into death the sins of capitalism and purifying the system. But capitalism can only be run in the interests of the capitalist class.

For socialists, celebration is premature. The death of Thatcher changes nothing. We will save our celebrations for the time when capitalism, the real enemy of the working class, is defeated.

## Crowd Atlas

CROWDS ARE supposed to be predictable, but they're not, and you can never be entirely sure what they're going to think and do next. The British governing class found that out just recently when, to its disgust and embarrassment, the death of one particularly obnoxious old fart in her care home at the Ritz prompted, not the expected outpouring of respectful eulogies, but thoroughly tasteless 'death parties' and the explosive propulsion up the pop charts of a silly song entitled 'Ding Dong the Witch is Dead'.



The nature of crowds is changing. They used to be made up of bystanders, innocent and often ignorant observers at some remove from the action. Today, crowds are the action, the mass protagonist, a new type of collective intellectual resource made possible by the wired world. According to the reasoning, if one person with a computer is smart, then a crowd of 'n' people is smart to the power of 'n'. If the individual knows her local geography, then the crowd is an atlas. This collective thinktanking is called crowdsourcing and is all the rage these days among nerds, netheads, geeks, social media junkies and other tech-savvies who despite this probably get out more than we do. Normally they see themselves as virtuous heralds of a bright and innocent future, but in Boston Massachusetts after the recent marathon bombing, it all went hideously wrong. A crowdsourced amateur photo-enquiry was launched and the wrong people got 'identified' as bombers, forcing them into hiding in fear of their lives. The organiser on Reddit issued a sincere and abashed apology, but the fiasco was a sobering lesson to the digerati that despite their supposed sophistication and tech know-how, there's still a fine line between a crowd and a lynch mob.

Crowdsourced labour in the form of Amazon's Mechanical Turk comes in for sharp criticism too, on the grounds that it exploits a great number of anonymous workers who get paid next to nothing for their efforts. Though it's true the contributors don't get paid much, this overlooks their intrinsic motivations. They're not really in it for the money anyway.

Crowdsourcing is generating a lot of excitement. Crowdsourcing is already being used as a translation service, beating the pants out of machine translators. There is talk of using it as a missing persons agency. It has already been used to solve a number of scientific and technological problems including some prize competitions, such as the Netflix algorithm Challenge, the DARPA balloon experiment and the X Prize. It is an increasingly favoured form of low-risk investment, used to fund start-ups traditional investors wouldn't look at. Now Crowdmed, a start-up medical diagnostic service, is hoping to exploit this collective intelligence in a novel way ('How crowds, not doctors or supercomputers, could diagnose rare diseases', Gigaom.com, 16 April).

The implications for capitalism are ambiguous. Of course it is all in favour of innovation which leads to new sales and new profits. But is there a downside of having smart crowds? Could it be that crowdsourcing is smuggling in, and is itself part of, a set of new crowd-based political attitudes too?

Those that believe that nothing ever changes must have their heads inserted somewhere dank and dark, because we are living in the middle of one of the greatest human revolutions of all time, and nobody is really sure where it's taking us. Politically, ideas which seemed immutable are being challenged openly, specifically ideas about leaders and followers, and the sacred cow of private ownership. A significant property of aggregated humans is that they are more knowledgeable and hence more likely to come up with right answers than

individuals, even individual experts. This is one of the founding principle of socialism, so it's not surprising that it's spawning challenges to old capitalist shibboleths. First there is Open Source, the idea that information wants to be free and that therefore intellectual ideas and collaboration should be free too. From this follows by extension the idea that all software should be free, and not just software. There is considerable and growing opposition to

genome patenting, on the grounds that living organisms should not be owned. An extension of this militancy against ownership is the aspiring 'respectability' of digital piracy culture, and the hero-worship of Julian Assange and Wikileaks. With 3D printing the militancy will extend beyond the binary into the physical. And in response to a recession which is blatantly massacring the livelihoods of the world's poor while leaving the rich not only untouched but actually richer than ever, we see the new moral challenges of the Occupy Movement and other related protests. As the stock of politicians falls ever lower, and with it the credibility of sole leadership as a concept, the smart crowd brings with it a new sense of potency. Taking all this together, are we seeing the emergence of some kind of broad-based communistic trend?

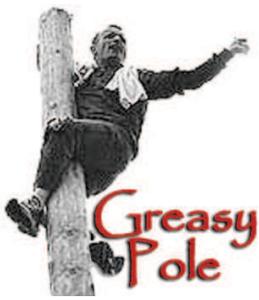
We wish. To be sure, these aren't new protests or impulses, and the digital pioneers don't necessarily join the dots and see their ideals as logically anti-capitalist. Each generation reinvents the ideas afresh, as if they had never been conceived before, but there is something different this time round. Now they have a radical new force behind them, the engine of a communications revolution. There's a sense of a monstrous genie climbing out of a tiny bottle. Workers have always been angry and uppity, but now they've got something which is genuinely dangerous to capitalism. They've got smart.

In terms of material productive capability, the world could have turned socialist a hundred years ago. But culturally and socially it was still backward, mired in tribal prejudices and rigid top-down control of information. Instead of turning socialist it turned to world war, twice. Could it do so again, in an age where your 'enemy' is an email away and every skirmish and scandal is on Youtube? Maybe, but we hope not.

Capitalism doesn't like too much democracy. No democracy is bad for business, but too much is worse. Capitalist leaders depend on a kind of confidence trick in which 'democracy' means 'rule by the people' as long as the people are kept disorganised, confused and distracted, in fear of 'chaos' and the spectre of 'mob-rule'. But democracy and mob-rule are the same thing, the only difference being information. When you have a globally-connected population with good information, new things are possible, politically as well as technologically.

The digerati are excited and for good reason. It's as if the Earth is slowly growing itself a brain, huge, superfast and super-connected. Not too many of them yet are asking the key question a socialist would ask – will such a sentient super-entity tolerate a regime in which one tiny portion of it, like a malignant cancer, is allowed to destroy the entire organism in blind reckless pursuit of its own growth? Would a thinking, rational planet tolerate capitalism? Even leaving aside any moral questions of social justice, such a tolerance would surely be seen as ultimately suicidal. In the long run, a wired world would have to reject such destructive lack of concern for its best collective interests. And if in the long run, why not in the short run? Why not now, in fact? What is there to wait for?

Can capitalism continue to keep control when such questions are hanging in the air? That depends on the people, and that is the trouble with crowds. You can never be entirely sure what they're going to think and do next.



# Thatcher and Thatcherism -

## A Long Time Dying

HARDLY A day goes by without our being reminded that 2012 was a wonderful year. Not because of the weather which was lousy. Especially when it poured down on that flotilla of jubilee boats scudding along the Thames with their cargo of the royal family and that female chorus defiantly bellowing *Rule Britannia* through their sopping wet fringes. It was, we were regularly instructed, a time to shove into forgetfulness all that turgid stuff about the economy drowning in deficit as a result of a horde of idle scroungers sucking at the scandalously luxuriant system of services such as care for the redundant elderly or the vulnerably sick or the unreasonably injured. Whatever the difficulties, the royals and the leaders would see us through. Of course there were a few people unreasonably stubborn enough to refuse to partake of the popular exhilaration but they could be pinched out by reminders that this was some glorious time to be alive and in poverty.

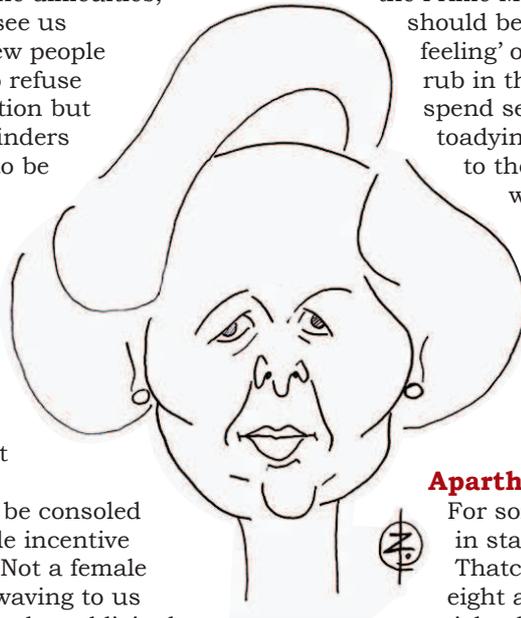
### Iron Lady

And now in 2013 it will be the sixtieth anniversary of Elizabeth walking into Westminster Abbey to get the crown on her royal head – which promises to be as sickening and pointless as last year's events. But that will not be for a month or so; meanwhile the plans are for us to be consoled by another female providing a virile incentive to prod our British pride into life. Not a female standing on a boat in the rain or waving to us from a remote balcony but one who has obligingly fulfilled several months' predictions by dying. Margaret Thatcher – she who was the Iron Lady, the one Not For Turning, the pitiless Snatcher of the Children's Milk, who rasped No!No!No! from the Commons at the meddlers over the English Channel, the implacable enemy of any trade union threatening to bring the nation to a standstill. Her death has focussed attention on the controversies immovably associated with her very name; in some cases she is the subject of mindless worship and in others of intense hatred. She died, cosseted in London's most luxurious hotel, on 8 April. Was anyone bothered? Consider the response of one socially conscious young woman whose caring and industrious mother, some years ago dying of cancer, instructed that a bottle of expensive wine be laid down for drinking on the day Thatcher died – which was exactly what happened, in a gathering of joyful friends.

### Commons Grovelling

Remarkable as Thatcher had been when alive, in death she was even more so. Her long-drawn-out decline had given all parties – the government and the Labour Party led by Gordon Brown, the media, the security forces – plenty of time to prepare. First with their share of hysteria was the gutter press who, as was expected, slavered over her memory and lovingly crafted pages dominated by headline warnings to any intending protesters (perhaps like that woman with her mother's wine) about the reception they might get from vengeful

hordes of Thatcher idolisers. But the red-tops were not alone in this; the day after the death the *Guardian* gave 35 pages over to her. Then there was the decision to recall Parliament so that toadying promotion-seekers could demonstrate their talent for obsequious grovelling. This was requested by David Cameron regardless of the fact that it was in breach of that thing beloved of Parliament – precedent – because such events are by tradition only for matters of national emergency (which might have been more appropriate on to the day of Thatcher's birth). There was a predictably robust attempt by Speaker Bercow to frustrate this manoeuvre by Cameron but he eventually gave way to the weight of the Prime Minister's authority in arguing that there should be a proper response to the 'strength of feeling' over the death. And – perhaps just to rub in the point – the Commons were timed to spend seven and a half hours on their Thatcher toadying, as against the 45 minutes devoted to the end of Winston Churchill. Consistent with the fact that they had been involved from the beginning with planning this monster of hypocrisy, there were Labour MPs who joined in the 'debate' to be washed along in the torrent of adulation. It was no surprise that their contributions were so widely impoverished of any original or perceptive comment.



### Apartheid

For someone who allegedly didn't believe in state subsidies, it is interesting that Thatcher's funeral is costed at between eight and ten million pound, which some might think is a bit steep for dragging a corpse through London except that there had to be all those other people in military uniform and others in a different style of uniform – like dark suits – making long and meandering speeches on the threadbare theme of how historically wonderful she was. Like Cameron: '...a great leader, a great prime minister, a great Briton'; like Miliband: 'we...greatly respect her political achievements and her personal strength'; like Clegg: '...she left a unique and lasting imprint on the country she served'. Well she herself was responsible for much of this rubbish because she also was involved from the beginning in planning the funeral; she had no difficulty in forgetting that all the preoccupation with pomp and diversion was not in accord with her self-constructed reputation for being fearlessly frank in cutting unceremoniously to the core of any situation. She claimed to be a staunch defender of human freedom, which she said was particularly under threat whenever a trade union defended the interests of its members from her government's attacks on their conditions. But the flexibility of her notions about freedom was demonstrated in her support for the vicious apartheid system in South Africa which, along with the suppression, readily tortured and murdered its opponents. South Africa's crime, poverty and tensions continue to bear witness to that gruesome time. Her devotion to 'freedom' was also demonstrated in her close friendship with, and unwavering support for, General Pinochet whose sadistic dictatorship over Chile held tens of thousands of political prisoners with some 1850

executions and a further 1300 classified as 'missing'. When Pinochet was sheltering in England from the Spanish government's attempts to extradite him to stand trial, he was always careful to return Thatcher's feelings, with occasional gifts of flowers and chocolates. What a lovely couple they were.

### Baronetcy

None of this affected the devotees of the myths that Thatcher was meticulously careful in all that she did, leaving nothing to chance. This was not borne out in her obstinacy over the poll tax and her many disastrous choices as ministers. It did however apply when in her Retirement Honours List she made her husband Denis a baronet. This was no ordinary baronetcy, which almost always applies just for the life of the holder; for Sir Denis was pointedly ennobled with one of the rare – hereditary – honours so that when he died their son, in tune with her indulgence of him, became Sir Mark. Mark had been a forgettable pupil at the expensive, exclusive Harrow School (where Winston Churchill and John Profumo, among others, were also 'educated') he scraped through three O Levels before being delivered to a place at a posh firm of accountants but this did not last long and in any case he managed to fail his accountancy exams no less than three times. So he set himself up in business as a rally driver; however he turned out to be navigationally challenged and soon lost his way during a rally which went through the Sahara Desert, causing an expensive operation to bring him to safety. He then turned his talents to a number of suspicious ventures, one of which earned him a suspended prison sentence and, for a time, a ban on entering the United States. Through all such tests of character Mark Thatcher was fondly watched over by his mother who, while abroad on official business, proved her solicitude for him by corruptly influencing an arms deal he was involved in, between the British Firm BAE and the rulers of Saudi Arabia, which set him up with a £12 million pay-off. When Thatcher was under attack for this she contemptuously disposed of the matter by claiming that, like any properly patriotic citizen she had only been 'batting for Britain'.

### World Ratings

In this defence she was pretty safe, since she had won for herself the title of a Prime Minister who had 'made Britain Great Again'. The harvest of this is being reaped now in the economic woes and the attendant depression in the living standards and expectations of the most needy people and the fact that in the ratings of the world's economy British capitalism stands some way below the leaders. In terms of Gross Domestic Product the IMF placed it in 2011 it at 8<sup>th</sup> and in 2012 the Centre for Economics and Business Research placed it at 6<sup>th</sup> – only just above Brazil. But never mind reality; at her end Thatcher was lavishly robed and looked after while a



Above: The 'Special Relationship': Thatcher with President Regan. Right: 'forgettable pupil' Mark Thatcher

horde of compliant acolytes were eager to pay their last, well financed, respects to her.

Political leaders are remembered in a variety of styles and intensity, from blind adulation on one hand to seething hatred on the other, with a no-mans-land of apathy or ignorance stretching between the two. It is a gloomy fact that whatever the reaction it is seldom a natural response to what any particular politician has done or failed to do – which all too often has encouraged them to regard themselves as immune from dismissal by the voters. In Thatcher's case the flagrant pomp of her funeral was the work of her adorers – or the simply ambitious. The bitterness of the haters was so tense as to need relief through some kind of demonstration such as turning their backs on the funeral procession or playing the children warbling *The Wicked Witch Is Dead*. However incandescent the rage about Thatcher, however cynical the manipulation of her funeral, the crucial fact is that she was simply replaced by a succession of other leaders with nothing more to offer. Some twenty years after she was deposed, the working class are subject to the continuing problems of social humiliation.

### Nazi Olympics

A parallel to this situation was that when the Nazis came to power in 1933 the 1936 Olympic Games had already been awarded to Berlin so one of the new government's concerns had to be to set up the event to gain the maximum possible credit for them as a country newly risen from the terror, the grief and the waste of 1914-18 – in contrast to the reality of their murderous



racism, anti-semitism and widespread political suppression. Symbolically, they built a vast new stadium complex in Berlin and arranged for devoted crowds to flock there confident that German athletes would justify their leaders' insistence on their national, racial superiority.

And since then there have been many examples in other countries of the application of the same distorting technique. One case was in Britain last summer when there was a massive governmental campaign to use any success on the track or in the pool or wherever to foster the theory that this was proof of something called Britishness being essentially superior, in order detract attention from the damage being done to the living conditions, the health and the expectations of masses of needy people.

### Choice For Change

And Thatcher's death and her funeral, deliberately planned over a long period, are for the same objective – to obliterate any awareness of what is actually happening to us in this system of human misery. The Iron Lady? She who was not for turning? The scourge of interfering continentals? Take your pick, then consider the diversion from any progressive forethought about our lives and society. Consider how futile and damaging is the assumption that we must forever choose between the hairline differences of competing leaders. In terms of our security and well-being, what choice was there between Thatcher's repressive abrasion and Major's emollient manipulation? Then what benefit was there when the ruling party changed to put us under the blood-spilling Blair? In reality we do not have a choice, other than for radically applying our own talents to free the world of capitalism's continually chaotic deceptions.

IVAN



## Marx and banks

The *Morning Star* (23-24 March) carried a cartoon which has Marx holding a piece of paper on which is written 'Cyprus banks grab'. He is writing on a blackboard: 'Banks in Capitalist society are institutions created for the systematic robbery of the people' and asking, 'Now will you believe me?'

The only problem is that this is not a quote from Marx, nor does it correspond with Marx's expressed views on banks. Marx was well aware of the opportunities for swindlers opened up by the coming of limited liability companies and their promotion, and by stock exchange manipulations in which some financiers and banks already were involved in his day, and wrote about this.

However, Marx's whole analysis of the nature of exploitation under capitalism was that this took place in the course of production in the places where real wealth was actually produced when capitalist employers extracted surplus-value from wage-workers, not in the sphere of money and finance.

In Volume 1 of *Capital* he specifically repudiated such views:

'The great part that the public debt and fiscal system corresponding to it have played in the capitalization of wealth and the expropriation of the masses, has led many writers, like Cobbett, Doubleday and others, to seek here, incorrectly, the fundamental cause of the misery of the people in modern times' (Chapter 31).

A large part of Volume 3 of *Capital* is devoted to a discussion of banking and finance. Here Marx analysed banks as being essentially institutions for collecting the savings of people who did not want to spend their money for the time being and channelling these as money capital for productive industry. As he put it:

'A bank represents on the one hand the centralization of money capital, of the lenders, and on the other hand the centralization of the borrowers. It makes its profit in general by borrowing at lower rates than those at which it lends.'

In other words, banks were not a scam to systematically rob people but institutions which played an essential role in the operation of the capitalist system.

There is another problem with the cartoon's supposed quote. When it says 'banks in capitalist society' this could imply that banks in a non-capitalist society would have a different role. But it was Marx's view that banks would have no place in a socialist society (or as he preferred to call it, a communist society, meaning the same thing).

In Volume 2 of *Capital* he wrote: 'if we were to consider a communist society in place of a capitalist one, then money capital would immediately be done away with' (chapter 14, section 3) and that 'with collective production, money capital is completely dispensed with' (Chapter 18).

This is clear enough. Banks channel savings as money capital. Money capital won't exist in socialism. Therefore banks won't exist in socialism.

Ironically, since the paper normally gives free range to currency cranks, Richard Seymour writing in the *Guardian* (27 March) got it better when he concluded an article: 'Cyprus crisis: why do we need banks at all?'

'To paraphrase Karl Marx on religion, the demand to abolish banking is a demand to abolish the state of affairs that needs banking.'

That's what Marx is more likely to have written on the *Morning Star's* blackboard.

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# North Korea: *Is the Crisis Real?*



IT IS hard to tell what is real in the ongoing Korean 'crisis' and what is contrived. Up to a point – after all, it is in no one's interest to frighten the markets too badly – it suits both sides to foster a sense of crisis. For Kim Jong-un and his generals a crisis atmosphere is a way to exert

pressure for full admission to the nuclear club. For the American rulers and their allies it is also a way to exert pressure – and push North Korea firmly out of the club.

Of course, a good external scare always comes in handy on the domestic front, especially at times when mass misery might otherwise fuel rebellion. It provides an excuse for deteriorating conditions of life, redirects discontent outward and rallies the populace around national leaders.

It seemed for a brief period that the crisis was a real one, but by mid-April the real crisis seemed to be over. Inside North Korea the mobilisation of reserves, air-raid drills and other war preparations were suspended. The focus of mass propaganda switched back to the usual choreographic displays and routine matters like the annual spring drive to collect manure.

Yet only a few days previously, US and South Korean officials were warning that medium-range missiles had been deployed along North Korea's eastern coast, with 'a very high probability' of their imminent launch against US forces in Japan (or, just conceivably, Guam). A North Korean official announced that missiles had been placed on standby and target coordinates set for their warheads.

## A torrent of threats?

The sense of crisis, however, is fuelled mainly by what Fox News called 'a torrent of warlike threats' from North Korean officials. True, the most alarming of these 'threats' are pure make-believe, given that North Korea has no delivery vehicle capable of reaching the US mainland. Moreover, media reports hardly ever reveal that the 'threats' are in fact warnings of what North Korea will do 'in the event of US aggression.' 'Patriotic Americans' are expected to regard the term 'US aggression' as a piece of gibberish and pooh-pooh the very idea that any country might genuinely fear an American assault. As if the peace-loving United States has ever attacked anyone!

Whatever ulterior motives the young emperor may have for inculcating fear in his subjects, it does not follow that he is not afraid or that his fear is unreasonable. Anxiety would be an understandable reaction to the movements of US air and sea forces near North Korean borders, especially the flights of nuclear-capable bombers and stealth jets. He and his advisers know how the US used the issue of nuclear non-proliferation to justify its invasion of Iraq and a contemplated invasion of Iran.

## Use them or lose them

Even in purely military terms, North Korea is by far the weaker party in the confrontation. Despite a large army, its forces are no match for an opposing coalition made up of South Korea, the United States and Japan (it can no longer count on support from China). This in itself makes the deliberate initiation of large-scale hostilities by North Korea extremely unlikely. On the contrary, the vulnerability of its few strategic weapons exposes it to the danger of a successful counterforce first strike.

Here lies the real danger. Facing the perceived dilemma of 'use them or lose them', North Korea's leaders switched to a strategy of pre-emption. This means that they resolved to launch their missiles as soon as they determined that the adversary had begun preparations for an attack. But such a determination might be mistaken, especially when made by people already keyed up in anticipation – because, for example, they suspect (as North Korean strategists say they do) that South Korea and the US will use the joint military exercises they conduct each spring as cover for a real attack.

## Economic and political vulnerability

The sense of vulnerability that makes a North Korean pre-emptive strike possible has economic and political as well as military roots.

In recent years the leaders have partly lost control of the economy and been forced to tolerate a vast expansion of formally illegal internal trade and the emergence of a new group of wealthy black-market operators who potentially pose a political challenge. It is now widely assumed that collapse of the regime and unification of Korea are only a matter of time.

Another economic blow is the new sanctions imposed by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2094, designed to block 'financial transactions and bulk cash transfers in support of illicit activities.' This does not refer solely to trade in uranium and nuclear components. Other 'illicit activities', organised by a special bureau of the party Central Committee, include uranium sales, the counterfeiting of US dollars and the manufacture of methamphetamine and heroin for export (an estimated third of collective farm land is sown with poppies). Besides funding military programmes, the proceeds fill the personal bank accounts held by top officials abroad.

However, the wealth of the North Korean leaders cannot be measured in money. They also enjoy enormous non-monetary privileges. The dynastic family possesses palatial villas in a series of scenic locations, staffed by numerous guards, servants and entertainers. At the same time, hundreds of thousands rot in the labour camps and millions struggle on the verge of starvation. And yet, to our great regret, this system -

marked by inequality perhaps even more extreme than that of the US - masquerades under the name of socialism!

STEFAN



## The Voice of Protest and the Voice of the Lord(s)

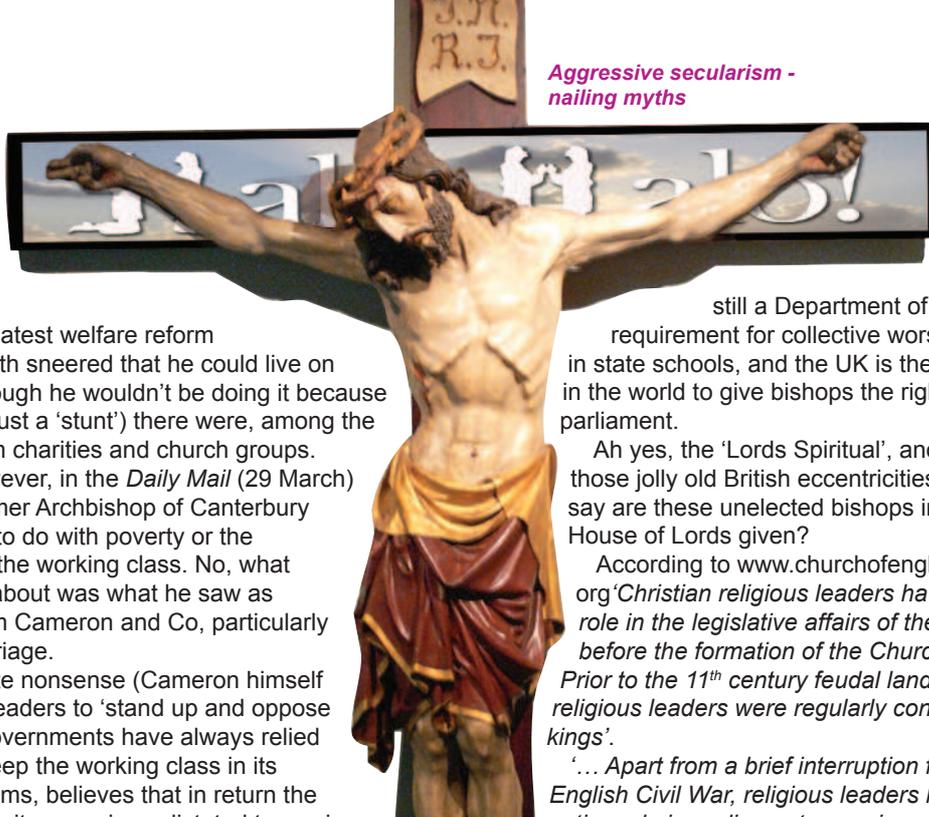
IN THE week that the government announced its latest welfare reform attack and Iain Duncan Smith sneered that he could live on £53 a week if he had to (though he wouldn't be doing it because calls for him to do so were just a 'stunt') there were, among the voices of protest, a few from charities and church groups.

One bitter complaint, however, in the *Daily Mail* (29 March) to David Cameron from former Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey had nothing to do with poverty or the government's contempt for the working class. No, what Carey wanted to complain about was what he saw as 'aggressive secularism' from Cameron and Co, particularly in their position on gay marriage.

This, of course, is absolute nonsense (Cameron himself recently advised Christian leaders to 'stand up and oppose aggressive secularism'). Governments have always relied on the priesthood to help keep the working class in its place and now Carey, it seems, believes that in return the Church has the right to have its own views dictated to us via the government.

But the suggestion that to hold 'secular' views, ie. views that are 'related to worldly as opposed to sacred things', views that are 'not concerned with or related to religion' and views that are 'not within the control of the church' (*Collins English Dictionary*), is an act of 'aggression' is surely bordering on paranoia. And to claim that it is aggressive to disagree with or not want religious mumbo-jumbo in our lives demonstrates the arrogant conceit of the god squad and its leaders who hold that unless we believe in and trust their imaginary friends to solve the world's problems we are doomed to whatever kind of hell they currently have in mind for us.

When it comes to getting the voice of working class struggle heard, and the constant loud protests of 'aggressive secularism' from the self-righteous, secularism, aggressive or otherwise, is



Aggressive secularism - nailing myths

not an issue. Religion is far from being vocally restrained in this country. It is

still a Department of Education requirement for collective worship to be held in state schools, and the UK is the only country in the world to give bishops the right to sit in its parliament.

Ah yes, the 'Lords Spiritual', another one of those jolly old British eccentricities. How much say are these unelected bishops in the unelected House of Lords given?

According to [www.churchofengland.org](http://www.churchofengland.org) 'Christian religious leaders have had an active role in the legislative affairs of the country since before the formation of the Church of England. Prior to the 11th century feudal landlords and religious leaders were regularly consulted by Saxon kings'.

'... Apart from a brief interruption following the English Civil War, religious leaders have played an active role in parliament ever since.'

'The continuing place of Anglican bishops in the Lords reflects our enduring constitutional arrangement, with an established Church of England and its Supreme Governor as Monarch and Head of State.'

'There is always a Lord Spiritual in the House of Lords when it is sitting, to read prayers at the start of the day and to participate in the business of the House'...'bishops also choose to attend the House on an ad-hoc basis when matters of interest and concern to them are before it.'

So how come with all that input from the bishops the country is in the state that it is? Well, assuming anyone's listening to their prayers either the matters that they find 'of interest and concern' have nothing to do with poverty or contempt for the working class, or they're not bloody well praying hard enough.

NW

### STUDENT

### PROTESTS

THE LAST twelve months have seen some of the biggest student protests in recent memory. On 11 April, Chilean students marched in their thousands, with 250,000 estimated national turnout and 100,000 in the capital. These protests have rumbled on since 2011. The leader of student representation is Camila Vallejo, a Castro-fan and member of (purportedly) Communist Youth of Chile, other members of this group involved in the protests include Camilo Ballesteros (President of the Student Federation of the University of Santiago de Chile), Camila Donato (president of the Federation of UMCE), the secondary school leader Roberto Toledo. The protests are in part a result of tremendous inequalities across all the Chilean educational system due to the school voucher system. Some 1800 students have been arrested.

In Quebec, the symbol of a red square was adopted when 500,000 students took to the streets to protest in May 2012. Its objective was to freeze or eliminate tuition fees. It was described as the largest act of civil disobedience in Canadian history. One of the key figures has been Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois of the CLASSE

(Coalition Large de l'Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante). It considers mass mobilization as a catalyst of social change. It favours local general assemblies as decision-making mechanisms instead of referendums, which are considered less democratic. Anarchopanda is an unofficial mascot for the protests, known for hugging students and police. Some 2500 students have been arrested.

In Sussex in Britain, the symbol of a yellow square was adopted. Hundreds of students staged a rally and occupation in March in opposition to privatisation of campus jobs. Some students carried a huge black banner (the biggest thing visible) with white words reading Communism and on the reverse in Latin 'Omnia Sunt Communia' which translates to 'All things are in Common' and was used originally in the 15th Century by German rebel leader Thomas Müntzer. Despite the riot police presence and its retreat, no arrests were made.

Chile has been the most reformist, Quebec somewhere in between, Sussex, though the smallest, has been the most explicit to call for 'Communism'. Student unrest could presage a positive movement in the class struggle. DJW



Angry mum in Montreal



# Why the Left needs a Thatcher

So, Thatcher is dead, the victim of a rotten egg that she told the workers it was safe to eat. The offending chicken has been ritually slaughtered by the Guildford Association of Conservative Ladies. The funeral cortege passes slowly through the streets of London, which have been cleared of beggars the night before. Behind the coffin march vast rows of stockbrokers and workers with red-rimmed glasses and portable telephones; they have gone from deepest Surrey and deepest Sussex, from Hants and Herts and Bucks and Beds. In Dorset the firm selling black armbands (made by cheap labour in Hong Kong, of course) is expecting a boom. The cops and soldiers, saddened by the loss of an Empress, pacified by the overtime bonus paid out for funeral duties, march tearfully. Behind them shuffle the silly old proles who will weep at anything: they wept when Charles and Di got married and when the Queen Mother swallowed a trout bone (who would have believed she'd outlive Thatcher) and when The Firm

got Dirty Den in *Eastenders*. They cried with joy when they received the letter telling them that Maggie was going to let them buy their council slum, and with fear when a letter came informing them that the whole estate had been bought by a property company on the Isle of Dogs. The media whores march along, forgiving the old girl for her excesses; after all, she was a character to write about. And who is this tailing on to the procession? They are weeping more than anyone. They feel deserted, they have lost a cause, Satan has descended to Hell and the children of righteousness have no-one to blame for their misfortunes. With Thatcher goes into the grave Thatcherism: a decade of leftist illusion being carried away to be chewed up by the worms. What will they do without her?

The British Left needs Margaret Thatcher. Bankrupt of ideas or vision, all that is left for them to do is detest hers. The Left rarely talks of capitalism—except, as at the Labour conference last year, when Kinnock said that his government

would have to run it better than the Tories. The aim of the left-wing has always been to establish state capitalism, the profit system planned centrally by a miracle-performing state. Eight Labour governments have demonstrated that the miracle cannot be performed. Whoever runs it, the capitalist system must exploit and oppress the working class; that is its inherent nature. So, the debate on the Left is about how to run capitalism. And to do the job as ruthlessly and callously as the system demands has come to be called Thatcherism.

Most of the Thatcher policies are hated by the Left for good reasons. Thatcher is a militant class warrior. Not even *The Daily Express* would ever have called Wilson or Callaghan that. Laws have been passed in the past ten years which have hurt workers and blunted our instruments of self-defence. The unions have taken a battering; services like the NHS, which Labour had boasted was the cream of the reformist gains, have been attacked and then

**“The Left needs that hideous voice and that look of contempt that leaves you in no doubt that you are being politically abused by the woman even when she is simply telling you the time”**

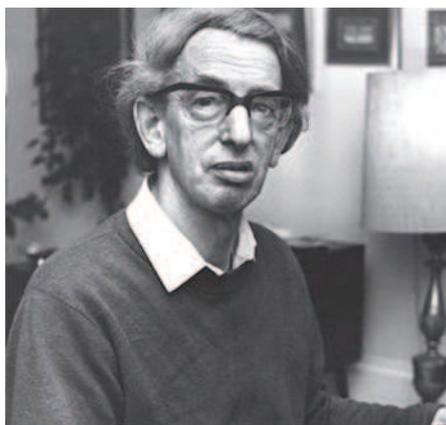
attacked again. It is understandable that many workers see in Thatcher the personification of all that is wrong in society. The question they must ask themselves is, Would society have been a much better place to live in had Thatcher never come into office? The answer, based on the hard evidence of history, is that Thatcher has not been governing capitalism, but that it has governed her. Just as it governed the Labour government before she came to power. That is why the last Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer, Denis Healey, introduced the policy of monetarism as a means of cutting the state budget in a bid to deal with inflation. It was under the last Labour government that expenditure limits within the NHS were first introduced. It was the last Labour government which took on the low-paid workers of NUPE and NALGO in the winter of 1978—when Callaghan told the unions that they would have to take cuts in real wages. Back in the mid-Seventies there were “Fight The Cuts” rallies being organised across the country. Whose cuts were being fought but those of the last Labour government? It was under the last Labour government that unemployment doubled to the then “wholly unacceptable” level of one and a half million.

And those Thatcher policies which Labour did not implement before 1979, they are now ready to accept as their own. Before 1979 Labour was opposed to British membership of the Common Market. Now they agree with Thatcher that Britain should stay in. Labour was opposed to selling off council houses. It is now Labour policy to sell them. Labour was opposed to selling off nationalised services, such as Telecom. It is now official Labour policy not to take back such services from private hands, lest the votes of the shareholders be lost. Labour made noises of opposition to the monstrous Tory laws aimed to limit union powers. Kinnock is now on record as opposing any substantial alteration to those laws in the event of a future Labour government. So, where does the Labour Party actually disagree with the wicked Thatcher who is supposed to stand



*Thatcher: ‘militant class warrior’*

for everything that they are against? Membership of NATO? Both parties agree that Britain should stay in. Troops in Ireland? Both parties want to keep them there. The nuclear bomb? With passionate unilateralists like Neil Kinnock, the men at the Pentagon need have no fears that both British parties of capitalism will be with them on the day. The chief differences between Thatcher and Kinnock are these: she admits to



*‘The foolish tactical plans of Professor Eric Hobsbawm (above left) for a broad anti-Thatcher alliance are to the cause of socialism what Groucho was to Marxism’*

being a swine who will do whatever the system requires of her, he lies about it; she is in power, he is not.

Some of the Left are of the view that capitalism has been fundamentally changed by the Thatcher years. It is no longer the same system. It is now a new phenomenon called Thatcherism. It is, to be frank, very difficult to know what such people are talking about. The Communist

Party’s latest policy document *New Times*, claims that we are now living in a period of “post-Fordism” in which the old working class has disappeared and been replaced by a new Thatcherite breed. The CP’s response to these “new times” is to seek some sort of broad, popular front reform movement, comprising every brand of political timewaster from the SNP to the SDP, with a view to offering the voters a better lifestyle under the system than Thatcher has offered them. The entire theory is flawed by two basic mistakes.

Firstly, the working class never was just that group of people who wore cloth caps and worked on the line at Ford. “Post-Fordism” is a mourning at the funeral of a class which has not disappeared at all, but is now exploited in new areas of the economy. There are vastly more workers in the service industries now than in manufacturing, and over the last ten years the move away from making to selling has been a characteristic of the European and US economies. But the workers in these countries are still wage (and salary) slaves, legally robbed by their employers. You don’t have to be a miner to be in the class struggle.

Secondly, the assumption that the way to fight a system is to concentrate all of your forces into defeating its leader of the moment is as foolish politically as it would be militarily for the Warsaw Pact to imagine that it could win the next



world war by knocking off the current head of NATO. The Communist Party theorists argue that the crucial battle is at election time when a non-Tory alliance must win the day and slay the Thatcherite dragon. But what if a new dragon in the form of an Owen or a Kinnock or a Hattersley is elected instead? Surely, it is the job description and not the person appointed to do the job which is the

real issue. The point of the battle should be to put an end to the dirty job of running capitalism. But, disloyal to the working-class interest in its death throes as much as it was at the outset, the CP is of the view that it is better to have capitalism run by “the lesser evil”. And who are they, who spent most of their political history telling us that Stalin was “the lesser evil”, to advise the workers on such matters? The foolish tactical plans of Professor Eric Hobsbawm for a broad anti-Thatcher alliance are to the cause of socialism what Groucho was to Marxism.

Back in 1979 the Socialist Party took the same principled position that we take now. We are opposed to capitalism and all who seek to run it. We do not want reformed capitalism or the profit system better managed. We are not looking for “nice” leaders or any kind of leaders for the workers to follow. The wages system is against the interest of the workers and only workers’ self-emancipation will solve the problems that we face. We were told not to waste our time upon such revolutionary ambitions. Many on the Left urged us to join the Labour Party and achieve what little could be achieved. After all, that was the party of the workers, so we were told. The present writer was even urged by Neil Kinnock no less (when the latter was Shadow Minister of Education and the former was a persistent questioner at a meeting) to join the Labour Party and help swell the ranks of “real socialists”. We were told that with just a little harder push Tony Benn would take the leadership and set the world ablaze. Those who joined the Labour Party in 1979 have not had much for their subscription money. The Tories have won three elections, with millions of trade unionists voting for them, despite the fact that the union leaders count them in as affiliated members of the Labour Party. Foot was elected as Labour leader (to loud cheers from the Left) and proved to be an utter failure; then Kinnock was elected as the Left’s choice against Hattersley. Now Kinnock is detested by the Labour Left—before he has even had a chance to betray them in power.

Most political commentators, and most of the more candid Labour leaders, do not think that the Labour Party will win the next general election. Indeed, a split in the Labour Party is on the cards. Where Labour is in power locally it has shown that it can be just as ruthless at cutting essential services as the Tories. In short, after ten years of degrading and unprincipled compromise of

**“When Thatcher is cold in her grave and another despicable faker is mouthing her lies,**



**the call to the workers to transcend this system of misery will be as fresh and as urgent as ever”**

the few principles that they once had, the Left stands without much hope, without much support and with a few cranky theories of further opportunism about joining with Dr Owen, the Greens and the Nats to form a reformist alliance. The so-called hard left retreats annually to Chesterfield to lick its wounds, praise the achievements of Gorbachev and listen with devotion to the guru, Benn. The other hangers-on to the Labour Party (who have urged workers to vote for them in every election) have turned into parodies of themselves. The Workers’ Revolutionary Party is now busy singing the praises of the Russian dictators and the SWP has degenerated further than ever, existing now as a group engaged in a few single-issue reform campaigns, such as opposition to the poll tax and—the sign of real senility—support for the Khomeni regime in its territorial conflict with Iraq. The Left which warned the Socialist Party that

we would be left behind while they stormed the fortress has been left seriously wounded, largely by its own utter lack of principles.

That is why the Left needs a Thatcher. It needs that hideous voice and that look of contempt that leaves you in no doubt that you are being politically abused by the woman even when she is simply telling you the time. The hope of the Left is that hatred of Thatcher will cover up the fact that the opposition has nothing to offer in her place. The Socialist Party does have a clear alternative to the mean-minded narrowness of what Thatcher stands for. And when Thatcher is cold in her grave and another despicable faker is mouthing her lies, the call to the workers to transcend this system of misery will be as fresh and as urgent as ever.

**STEVE COLEMAN**

(Reprinted from the *Socialist Standard*, May 1989)

## Letters

Dear Editors

I read with interest Stefan’s commentary on the prevalent automobile culture under capitalism (March *Socialist Standard*). An additional point should be made, if it is not evident to the reader, to the effect that the private automobile is the quintessential commodity of the capitalist system. Its development has enabled the disaster of suburban development that has despoiled hundreds of millions of acres of good land, with its endless roads and freeways, given rise to another mainstay of capitalism the single family dwelling with its myriad repetitive appliances. The private automobile with its required service networks, parts replacements etc., has been a major market prop offering a seemingly endless source of marketable commodities. The glut of “tin-lizzies” grows like the stuff of the Sorcerer’s Apprentice. Can the Wizard of Socialism put a stop to the madness? Absolutely.

**Bernard Bortnick, Texas, USA** (by email)

**Reply:** We can’t predict how people in socialism will use transport systems, or even what they’ll use them for, but if the safety and clean renewable energy questions were properly addressed, there seems no good reason why cars should not continue to be of use – *Editors*.

# ITALY'S NEW BRAND

-  
white-  
washing  
capitalism?



The breakthrough achieved by a new political movement, the 5 Stars Movement (its official name is Movimento 5 Stelle, abbreviated as M5S), was a key result of the election that took place on the 24/5 February in Italy. For the Chamber of Deputies the M5S got 25.55 percent of the votes. The figure for the Senate of Republic was similar. This resulted in 109 seats for M5S in the Chamber of Deputies and 54 seats in the Senate. For the old political establishment this outcome is quite drastic, but what does the M5S stand for, and will the Italian workers benefit from this electoral outcome?

## Corrupt from the start

In order to understand Italian politics we need to go as far back as the artificial creation of Italy by the dominant European powers of that time (i.e., Great Britain, France and Prussia). Since its very foundation in 1861, Italian capitalism and its political establishment have been deeply linked to corruption and collusion with secret societies, such as Freemasonry and illegal organizations. Italian schoolbooks still teach that about 1,000 men led by Giuseppe Garibaldi conquered the southern part of the peninsula, dominated at that time by

the House of Bourbon that could field an army of 150,000 men. Even with the addition of rebels and help from Savoy and Britain, Garibaldi's army could not count on more than 15,000, ten times less than the Neapolitan army (as Marx pointed out in the *New York Daily Tribune* 23 August 1860). How did they do it? Corruption was the main weapon used by Garibaldi's army.

The weapon of corruption worked very well and has dominated Italian politics since. 'Unlike the rest of Western Europe, the disintegration of feudalism in southern Italy failed to produce an independent entrepreneurial middle class' (Judith Chubb, *Patronage, Power, and Poverty in Southern Italy*, 1982). This was in large part due to the colonial politics of the northern Italian bourgeoisie (Antonio Gramsci, *Ordine Nuovo, La Settimana politica, Operai e contadini*, 1919-1920). The banks of the former Kingdom of the Two Sicilies were being systematically robbed by the new elite. From 1863 to 1866 the Bank of Naples lost 37 million lire (Gigi Di Fiore, *Controstoria dell'Unione d'Italia*, 2007). The Bank of Sicily's director, Emanuele Notarbartolo, who tried to save it from bankruptcy, was murdered on the orders of Raffaele Palizzolo, another Member of the Italian Parliament and member

of the management board of the same bank. Palizzolo was also a known Sicilian mafia boss, who took advantage like many others of the unification of Italy to make dubious investments (trafficking) for his own personal profit. The same year, 1893, another scandal involved another bank, Banca Romana, which to extinguish its debts printed fake money. This scandal involved very important political leaders like Giovanni Giolitti and Francesco Crispi, founding fathers of Italy. These historical facts are just some early examples of how the Italian political system worked from the very beginning.

Things did not change during the Fascist dictatorship and after WWII the main party, the Christian Democratic Party (Democrazia Cristiana, DC), refined this rotten system even further. Their political machinery was based on clientelism and patronage. Amintore Fanfani, leader of the DC in the 50s, while advocating against clientelism and personality politics set up a scheme to recruit DC members called *tesseramento* which took clientelism to its extreme. Judith Chubb describes how these *tessere* (party membership cards) were crucial to get power within the DC political party. The tessera of the DC is like a blank check: it can be given out to anyone – to relatives, to the deceased,

to persons chosen at random from the telephone book or from health-insurance list' (*Corriere della Sera* 7 November 1973). The trick was quite easy: you provide me with *tesserati* and I provide you with jobs in provincial councils, local government offices, agencies of the public administration. Of course the public sector grew like crazy with no equivalent growth in the private sector.

Organised crime was another very convenient partner for the political establishment because it controlled a part of the private sector, in particular the construction business. This system soon extended to the rest of Italy, in particular when 'at the beginning of the 70s, Cosa Nostra (the Sicilian mafia) itself began to become a company. A company because, by getting a more and more hefty share – which sometimes became almost a monopoly – of the drug market, Cosa Nostra began to manage an enormous amount of capital' (last interview with Paolo Borsellino, 1992).

As we have seen with Palizzolo, the connection between political class and organised crime has always been there, but now in the 50s, 60s and 70s, it became obvious, with people like Giovanni Gioia, Fanfani's political secretary, Salvo Lima, a collaborator of Gioia with important connections with Cosa Nostra who was murdered by Cosa Nostra itself in 1992, and Vito Ciancimino, DC politician, mayor of Palermo and mafia member. To confirm Borsellino's statement, we could just consider that Silvio Berlusconi started his empire by getting a surety from the Bank Rasini of Milan that was involved in Cosa Nostra money laundering. The best buddy of Silvio Berlusconi, Bettino Craxi, leader of the Italian 'Socialist' Party (Partito Socialista Italiano, PSI), became clearly important when Cosa Nostra and the DC were having some 'marital' problems in the early 80s. It was known that this traditionally small party (9.6 percent of votes), which still carried the hammer and sickle logo until 1985, at once became 'important' and notoriously corrupted to the core.

To an extent, the Italian political class underwent a transition in the period from 1969 to 1977, which in Italy was characterised by intense social and political unrest connected with the first serious economic troubles since the end of WWII. At the conclusion of this phase, the national political class represented not only a relative obstacle to the healthy development of Italian capitalism, but started to act as an absolute brake: the public debt boomed and in 1985 reached the warning level of 80 percent of GDP (in 1970 it was only 40.5 percent).

If in the past Italian politicians were not so different from their counterparts in other European countries - maybe just slightly more naive and less concerned

## **“The connection between political class and organised crime has always been there”**

with an effective capitalist industrial policy - from the first 'pentapartito' (i.e. five parties) government in 1981 they began to act as a simple parasite clique who prompted an artificial economic development making use of what Marcello De Cecco referred to as 'criminal (or bastard) Keynesianism': unbalanced and unproductive public expense, generalised political corruption at all levels, competitive devaluation of the currency, high taxation rates on salaries together with widespread tax evasion in the self-employment sector, and, finally, heavy reliance on the protected export of low-technology goods related to the existence of the European Common Market.

### **Enter Beppe Grillo**

When in 1986 Beppe Grillo, a successful comedian from Genoa, made a joke about the PSI being corrupt he said what everybody knew already. Grillo was banned because of this joke from Italian television. This showed how little

people were then allowed to say in the mainstream media and how bad the political situation was.

Grillo's activism against the political establishment became even more pronounced after that. At that time he was working in theatres, touching upon topics like corruption, pollution, consumer association matters, unemployment, bank scandals, etc. People who did not follow him in theatres could still see him on television on Tele+, where his live performances were broadcast every now and then. Grillo's performances got mainstream media coverage when he talked about scandals like Parmalat's, which broke before the media and justice system knew about it. The internet was the real breakthrough for Grillo. He could finally reach many more people, and his blog became the most popular in Italy. Through Grillo's blog, meet-ups were and are organised to allow 'Grillo's friends' to meet face to face, discuss local problems and organise action groups, for instance against a local council that wants to build a new incinerator. In this way Grillo's friends or followers started to become more and more proactive. In 2007 on the 8 September, a very symbolic date for Italy, a V-Day (Vaffanculo = Fuck off) was organised to gather as many followers as possible to protest against the political establishment. This was a great success, connecting 220 cities at the same time. On this occasion Grillo declared that he did not intend to create a political party but rather to eliminate them.

Grillo specified later that the M5S is in fact a movement and not a party. At the end of 2009 the M5S was founded. For some, Gianroberto Casaleggio is the real mind behind the M5S. It does not matter to us if behind Grillo there is Grillo



**Beppe Grillo**

or Casaleggio or Grillo and Casaleggio. What matters is what this political movement is about. They claim that they want to empower the citizens, getting rid of the old caste of politicians and their old systems based on clientelism and patronage. That's reasonable and necessary in a country like Italy. We can sympathise with such a movement over this point, in the same way that Marx did with liberals like Garibaldi and Francesco Crispi in their battle against the Bourbon monarchy (Karl Marx, *New York Daily Tribune*, 8 August 1860), without this meaning that Marx was a liberal.

### The Five Star Movement's platform

So let's have a brief look at the M5S political platform. M5S complains that the state is disjointed from the citizens, that the constitution (which represents bourgeois law) is not applied, and that the state's cost far outweighs its efficiency. Here a cry for bourgeois legality was expressed through the M5S. Of course this message also appeals to workers, who have experienced years of abuse from the political class. M5S also proposes that the salary of the members of parliament be in line with the national average; this point has been seen as socialist, but in fact is just a sign that when a capitalist economy is in crisis politicians should get the blame too. Nothing socialist there! We think that the capitalist system itself should get the blame and not just its servant politicians.

An interesting proposal is to make debate available to all citizens with internet access via the live streaming of public meetings. This is not direct democracy, but the principle that workers could participate more closely in political debates is interesting. Following the same line, there is the proposal that new laws should be online three months before they are approved to get citizens' comments. It is not clear if these comments will be enough to change the proposed laws or even stop them, but again the principle of participation is interesting. M5S asks for referendums without a quorum condition and for the obligation on Parliament to discuss laws proposed by a people's initiative. All these efforts to make Parliament more accessible to the workers are welcome, however very limited they are by the fact that economic power will be still in the hands of a few who will be influencing the political world anyhow. A more transparent way of doing politics in Italy is the main reason why the M5S got such a large vote. This expressed a feeling amongst many, even some of the upper

class who rely on the bourgeois legality of the constitution, that the current political system was not representing them.

The M5S political platform includes several points about sustainability. Capitalism is not sustainable so to try to reconcile this with the health of the planet raises contradictions by definition. In terms of economic policy the M5S wants to introduce class actions, abolish the dummy corporation system in the stock exchange, and abolish the so-called Biagi law in which workers with temporary contracts have no rights for holidays, sick leave or maternity leave, and have restrictions on their pension payments. Article 18 of the Workers' Statute (Statuto dei Lavoratori, 1970) says that an employer ought to have a fair reason to fire an employee. Several governments have wanted to modify it, so allowing the employer to fire their employees quite easily, to create what they call 'flexibility'. Grillo in his blog proposed that this article should not be changed but that instead the taxes on enterprises should be lowered. The fact that the M5S is against Biagi's law and does not want to change Article 18 was a crucial point to gain votes from the working class. In principle not changing this article is good. Unfortunately the real problem is that the worldwide free labour market has considerably reduced the working class's bargaining power. Instead of hoping that lower taxes on enterprises would solve the problem, workers should get involved in international movements to fight against capital. Instead, M5S

national reformism seems to be the preferred way.

Moreover the M5S tries to counter the anarchic nature of capitalism by proposing to forbid the closure of food and manufacturing industries which have the internal market as their main market and to ban cross share-holdings between the bank system and the industrial system; also that financial advice institutes should share responsibility for losses; that a salary limit be established for the CEOs of corporations in which the State is the main shareholder; abolition of stock options; abolition of state monopolies such as Telecom Italia, Autostrade, ENI, ENEL, Mediaset, Ferrovie dello Stato. This is the part that seems to interest the Occupy Movement. M5S wants to reduce the public debt so as to reduce the costs of the State. As the Italian State costs a lot, the money will also need to come from somewhere else. Benefits to unemployed people are also mentioned in M5S's programme.

M5S reached political power rather quickly as an anti-establishment movement, because in Italy politics, corruption and crime are so interconnected, and public opinion, influenced by bourgeois ideology, can no longer stand it. In economic terms, the M5S response is a Keynesian mixed economy, with the old illusion that government intervention will be able to control or even cure the anarchic nature of capitalism. Unfortunately, the mixed economy already proved to be ineffective in taming capitalism. But can the M5S at least get rid of corruption and collusion? We shall see.

It may be interesting, from the social science point of view, to note that reformist movements are becoming more and more hybrid and decoupled from traditional left and right alignments. The internet has become a powerful medium for people organization, but still people need human contact and public speeches to be convinced. For many people representing the old establishment, this has been a real revolution. For the working class this is yet another reformist movement. The Italian bourgeoisie is in such bad shape that this quite moderate movement, which aims at a capitalist system regulated by the government with no obvious links to organised crime, seems to be asking a lot. The need to apply bourgeois legality is so urgent that voters from all sides were attracted to the M5S. Workers voted for the M5S with the hope that cuts to state expenditure and the abolition of Biagi's law could improve their condition. Unfortunately, capitalism does not have a good face or a bad face, it follows profit. And although it is very appealing to kick the old politicians up the arse, the situation for workers is unlikely to be improved by M5S political reforms.

**CESCO**



Silvio Berlusconi

# How should **socialists** organise?

*The Socialist Party was anti-Leninist from the start.*

In recent months the idea or concept of 'Leninism' has been placed under the microscope with the revelations of the undemocratic activities of the Central Committee of the Socialist Workers Party. In March the *Socialist Standard* republished its 1995 education document as *The SWP: an undemocratic Leninist organisation* which identifies the undemocratic nature of the 'Leninist' concept of 'democratic centralism' in the SWP. The origins of 'Leninism' lie at the beginning of the twentieth century when Lenin distorted the original message of Marx and Engels, but even in this period there were criticisms of 'Leninism' and 'Bolshevism' by such revolutionary thinkers as Rosa Luxemburg and Julius Martov.

Lenin's pamphlet *What Is To Be Done? Burning Questions of our Movement* was published in 1902 when Lenin, Martov and Plekhanov with the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) were in political exile from Tsarist Russia. The pamphlet detailed the organisational structure Lenin believed necessary for a revolutionary political party in an autocratic state like that of Tsarist Russia. This organisational structure of a disciplined centralised party of committed activists is the seedbed for the later authoritarianism and dictatorship in the Bolshevik regime in Russia. Lenin argued that the working class would not achieve political class consciousness simply by fighting the 'economic' battles between capital and labour over wages and working hours, and that Marxists needed to form a political party, a 'vanguard' of dedicated revolutionaries to bring socialist consciousness to the working class.



**Lenin (above) had little if any belief in the working class as agents of change, whereas Martov and Plekhanov (right) believed that the 'proletarian class is the only possible builder of the new society.'**

Lenin wrote that:

'Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers *only from without*, that is, only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers. The sphere from which alone it is possible to obtain this knowledge is the sphere of relationships (of all classes and strata) to the state and government, the sphere of the interrelations between all classes.'

Lenin had little if any belief in the working class as agents of change, believing 'that the working class, exclusively by its own efforts, is able to develop only trade-union consciousness', and that socialist ideas came from 'the educated representatives of the propertied classes' or 'revolutionary socialist intellectuals.'

At the second congress of the exiled RSDLP on Charlotte Street in London in 1903, there was a split between Lenin on one side and Martov and Plekhanov on the other. The opposing factions became known as 'Bolshevik' and 'Menshevik' respectively. The split centred on definitions of party membership. The Martov 'Menshevik' faction favoured a loose (in comparison to Lenin's views) interpretation of party membership as 'one who accepts the Party's programme, supports the Party financially, and renders it regular personal assistance under the direction of one of its organisations.' In contrast Lenin and the 'Bolshevik' faction wanted a restricted membership of a fully committed cadre; 'one who accepts its programme and

who supports the Party both financially and by personal participation in one of the Party's organisations.'

The ideas of Lenin in *What Is To Be Done?* are in contrast to what Marx and Engels wrote in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* in 1848 where they described the proletarian movement as 'the self conscious, independent movement of the immense majority in the interest of the immense majority.' Marx drafted the general rules of the International Working Men's Association in 1864 which began categorically with the line 'that the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves.' In 1879 Marx and Engels felt the need to distribute a circular where they stated: 'when the International was formed we expressly formulated the battle cry; the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves. We cannot, therefore, cooperate with people who openly state that the workers are too uneducated to emancipate themselves and must be freed from above by philanthropic big bourgeois and petty bourgeois.'

In response to Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* Rosa Luxemburg wrote *Organisational Questions of Russian Social Democracy* (1904) which later became known as *Leninism or Marxism?* where she criticised his concept of revolutionary organisation and identified Lenin as a 'Blanquist' socialist revolutionist.

Luxemburg wrote that:

'Blanquism did not count on the direct action of the working class. It, therefore, did not need to organise the people for the revolution. The people were expected to play their part only at the moment of revolution. Preparation for



the revolution concerned only the little group of revolutionists armed for the coup.'

This is the Bolshevik strategy in its essence, both then and now.

Luxemburg identified 'the two principles on which Lenin's centralism rests are precisely these: the blind subordination, in the smallest detail, of all party organs to the party centre which alone thinks, guides, and decides for all. The rigorous separation of the organised nucleus of revolutionaries from its social-revolutionary surroundings.' This is Blanquist organisation, although Lenin himself 'defined his 'revolutionary Social Democrat' as the 'Jacobin indissolubly connected with the organisation of the class-conscious proletariat.'

Lenin's former comrade-in-arms Julius Martov wrote a critique of 'Leninism' and 'Bolshevism' in his 1919 work *The Ideology of 'Sovietism'* identifying the 'Jacobin and Blanquist idea of a minority dictatorship.' Martov reiterated the point made by Engels 'that the epoch of revolutions effected by conscious minorities heading unknowing masses had closed for ever. From then on, he [Engels] said, revolution would be prepared by long years of political propaganda, organisation, education, and would be realised directly and consciously by the interested masses

themselves.'

Martov also quoted the Swiss Social Democrat Charles Naine's observation on 'Bolshevism' as 'the minority possessing the knowledge of the truth of scientific socialism has the right to impose it on the mass.' Later Martov looks at Blanqui as a major influence ('a dictatorial power whose mission it will be to direct the revolutionary movement').

Lenin's own words in a speech on *Economic Construction* in 1920 were also revealing when he said:

*'the Soviet Socialist Democracy is in no way inconsistent with the rule and dictatorship of one person; that the will of a class is at times best realised by a dictator, who sometimes will accomplish more by himself and is frequently more needed. At any rate, the principal relation toward one person rule was not only explained a long time ago but was also decided by the Central Executive Committee.'*

Marx in his 1845 *Theses on Feuerbach* had written that 'The materialist doctrine that men are the products of conditions and education, different men therefore the products of other conditions and changed education, forgets that circumstances may be altered by men and that the educator has himself to be educated. This doctrine leads inevitably to the ideas of a society composed of two distinct portions, one of which is elevated above society. The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionary practice*.'

Martov correctly pointed out that if this thesis is applied '... to the class struggle of the propertyless, this means the following. Impelled by the same 'circumstances' of capitalist society that determine their character as an en-

slaved class, the workers enter into a struggle against the society that enslaves them. The process of this struggle modifies the social 'circumstances.' It modifies the environment in which the working class moves. This way the working class modifies its own character. From a class reflecting passively the mental servitude to which they are subjected, the propertyless become a class which frees itself actively from all enslavement, including that of the mind.'

In conclusion Martov saw 'the proletarian class considered as a whole is the only possible builder of the new society.'

A year after the RSDLP congress in London at which the Bolshevik/Menshevik split took place 142 former members of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) met to found the Socialist Party of Great Britain on quite different organisational principles to those proposed by Lenin. The SDF was riddled with 'reformist' policies, undemocratic party organisation, authoritarianism and dictatorial methods used by its leadership. The rules of the newly established party gave the party membership complete control of the organisation, all meetings at branch, executive committee and conference were open to the public; there were no leaders, just an annually elected executive committee with power only to run week-to-week affairs and carry out membership decisions. The declaration of principles of the new party stated that 'the emancipation of the working class must be work of the working class itself.' We were therefore 'anti-Leninist' in principle and practice before 'Leninism' and the Bolshevik revolution that was its political outcome.

**STEVE CLAYTON**

## Who was Blanqui?



Blanqui was the quintessential angry revolutionist, insurrectionist, conspiratorial socialist, who was in conflict with every French government from the 'July monarchy' of Louis-Philippe, the 1848 National Assembly, Napoleon III's Empire, to the Third Republic. Anarchist Michael Bakunin was won over to ideas of socialism through the influence of Blanqui. Blanqui

lived for 76 years and spent 44 of those years in prison! Blanqui was nicknamed 'L'Enfermé' which translates as the 'the enclosed' or 'the locked one' or even 'the prisoner'. Engels in the 1874 article *The Program of the Blanquist Fugitives from the Paris Commune* wrote: 'Blanqui is essentially a political revolutionist. He is a socialist only through sentiment, through his sympathy with the sufferings of the people, but he has neither a socialist theory nor any definite practical suggestions for social remedies. In his political activity he was mainly a "man of action", believing that a small and well organized minority, who would attempt a political stroke of force at the opportune moment, could carry the mass of the people with them by a few successes at the start and thus make a victorious revolution.'

Blanqui, the revolutionist prisoner of the French state wrote a curious book while imprisoned which was published in 1872 but was unknown until re-discovered by Walter Benjamin in 1938. It is called *L'Eternité par les astres* which translates as *Eternity According to the Stars* and is a formulation of a theory of the Eternal Recurrence of Time which is commonly associated with the philosophy of Nietzsche in the 1880s. The origin of the idea of the Eternal Recurrence of Time can be located to the

poet Heinrich Heine, Marx's good friend in Paris in the 1840s although, quaintly, Heine envisages the altering of time experience. With Nietzsche there is no existential comfort; it is quite literally the eternal recurrence of every moment ad infinitum. To Nietzsche this is 'the greatest burden' or 'heaviest weight', but with a belief in 'amor fati' (love of one's fate) coupled with a nobility of the spirit one can avoid the trap of nihilism and endeavour to engage in a life of existential authenticity and have an impact on time and existence.

But with Blanqui, 44 years in prison has reduced this permanent revolutionist to seeing himself eternally as the confined man; bourgeois society is hell on earth, and every defeat and



suffering of the working class in history are replicated throughout history. He does not envisage a socialist future, writing: 'Until now, the past has for us, meant barbarism, whereas the future has signified progress, science, happiness, illusion! This past, on all our counterpart worlds, has seen the most brilliant civilizations disappear without leaving a trace, and they will continue to disappear without leaving a trace. The future will witness yet again, on billions of worlds, the ignorance, folly, and cruelty of our bygone eras.' Nietzsche's psychological conceit is here an astronomical hypothesis of resignation and defeat. Blanqui's pessimistic 'weltanschauung' is reminiscent of Lenin's statement of the future when he wrote, 'if socialism can only be realised when the intellectual development of all the people permits it, then we shall not see socialism for at least five hundred years.'

## NOW THERE ARE SEVEN – OR ARE THERE?

A new study by academics from the LSE and Manchester has come up with the idea that there are seven classes in British society. You can classify people according to whatever criteria you want and the academics have chosen to combine income, security of income, occupation and leisure pursuits. The seven classes they come up with are: elite (6 percent), established middle class (25 percent), technical middle class (6 percent), new affluent workers (15 percent), traditional working class (14 percent), emergent service workers (19 percent), and *precariat* (15 percent). In fact, in some ways this is just a refinement of the popular division into upper class (toffs and business oligarchs), middle class and working class.

The sevenfold division might have some use for businesses to target their sales but it is useless for explaining social dynamics. Socialists define class in terms of relationship to the means of production – who owns and who does not own the farms, factories, mines, railways, utilities and other workplaces where goods and services are produced. This gives, essentially, only two classes in an advanced capitalist country such as Britain: the rich owners (through shares and bonds) of the means of production and the rest of society who depend on them for a living. Since, on this criterion, most of the ‘middle class’ are in the same position as the ‘working class’, the split could well be around 6/94 as the academics’ figures suggest.

In Marx’s day – and this is the assumption in *Capital* – there were three distinguishable classes depending on their relationship to the means of production: an upper class of big landowners who derived an income as ground-rent from their ownership of land; a middle class of capitalist employers who derived theirs as profits from their capital invested in agriculture or industry; and a working class of non-owners who lived by selling their ability to work for a wage.

This in fact is the historical origin of the term ‘middle class’ as the class between the landed aristocracy and the working class. Since then they have merged with the landowners to become a single capitalist class (both through marriage and through landowners investing in industry), so it no longer makes sense to talk of a ‘middle class’. There is no class in between the capitalist class and the class of those who depend for a living on the sale of their working abilities for a wage or salary. Those referred to in popular parlance as the ‘middle class’ are in reality a part of the class of wage and salary workers; as, indeed, are those seen as the ‘traditional working class’. Both are sub-sections of a wider working class properly so-called.

There is another difference between the socialist concept of class and that of the academics. Their classes are non-antagonistic. It is true that there is in fact an antagonism between their ‘elite’ and their other six classes but this is not recognised. It is also true that, at present, politicians are trying to set everybody against the ‘precariat’ as ‘non-strivers’ and ‘shirkers’, while others see an antagonism between the four bottom classes (which they see as making up the ‘working class’) and the two middle classes. But these don’t represent real antagonisms but attempts to divide classes other than the elite against each other that only serve the interest of the elite.

Socialists see a built-in antagonism between the two classes defined by their relationship to the means of production. As wealth can only be produced by people working, and as profit is a non-work income, it follows that the profits of the capitalist class are derived from the work of the working class. There is an exploitative relation between the two classes. There is therefore not only a division of society into two classes but a class struggle between them.

At present this class struggle is over the division of newly produced wealth into wages and profits, a basic feature of present-day society of much more significance than the cultural differences between the academics’ seven classes. It manifests itself in bargaining between employers and unions over wages and in strikes, in employers trying to increase work-loads and impose speed-ups, and, today, in the government exerting downward pressures on the workers’ living standards.

Ultimately, however, the struggle is over the ownership and control of the means of production and can come to an end only with the victory of the working class and the conversion of the means of production into the common property of all. Then a classless society will have been achieved. The working class will disappear along with the capitalist class and there will simply be free and equal men and women, members of a community with a common interest in working to satisfy the needs of all its members, both as individuals and as a community. **ADAM BUICK**



### Class struggle from above

SOME SUPPORTERS of capitalism are getting worried. They are beginning to wonder whether Marx might not have been right. The latest is Michael Schuman in an article ‘Marx’s Revenge: How Class Struggle is Shaping the World’ in the Business & Money section of *Time* (25 March):

‘With the global economy in a protracted crisis, and workers around the world burdened by joblessness, debt and stagnant incomes, Marx’s biting critique of capitalism — that the system is inherently unjust and self-destructive — cannot be so easily dismissed. Marx theorized that the capitalist system would inevitably impoverish the masses as the world’s wealth became concentrated in the hands of a greedy few, causing economic crises and heightened conflict between the rich and working classes. “Accumulation of wealth at one pole is at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole,” Marx wrote. A growing dossier of evidence suggests that he may have been right.’

The Marx quote comes from the last-but-one chapter of Volume 1 of *Capital* on ‘The Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation.’ The meaning of this passage has been a subject of controversy amongst those in the Marxist tradition. Some have interpreted it as meaning that Marx expected the working class to become more and more ‘impoverished’ in an absolute sense as capitalism developed, i.e. that they would come to have less and less to live on. Others (including us) argued that it meant only that workers would become worse off relatively, i.e. in relation to the amount of wealth they produced that went to the capitalist class.

But irrespective of any long-term trend (which clearly has not been towards falling real wages), in the boom/slump cycle that is built-in to capitalism, real wages rise in the boom and fall in the slump, as Marx was well aware. This is what is happening today in the present slump: real wages are falling while the rich have continued to get richer.

‘The consequence of this widening inequality,’ Schuman noted, ‘is just what Marx predicted: the class struggle is back ... Society has been perceived as split between the ‘99%’ (the regular folk struggling to get by) and the ‘1%’ (the connected and privileged superrich getting richer every day).’

Actually, the class struggle never went away. It’s built-in to capitalism. What is happening today is that governments, acting in the interest of the capitalist class, have started an offensive to reduce our standard of living and we workers are trying to fight back. Not too successfully, as the increased unemployment that occurs in a slump has reduced our bargaining power.

Marx predicted, says Schuman, that ‘as the proletariat woke to their common interests, they’d overthrow the unjust capitalist system and replace it with a new, socialist wonderland.’ But, he reassures his readers, so far ‘Marx’s revolution has yet to materialise. Workers may have common problems, but they aren’t banding together to resolve them. Union membership in the U.S., for example, has declined through the economic crisis, while the Occupy Wall Street movement fizzled.’

As French labour historian Jacques Rancière pertinently pointed out to him, the protestors ‘aren’t aiming to replace capitalism, as Marx had forecast, but merely to reform it. ‘We’re not seeing protesting classes call for an overthrow or destruction of socioeconomic systems in place,’ he explains. ‘What class conflict is producing today are calls to fix systems so they become more viable and sustainable for the long run by redistributing the wealth created.’

True, sadly. But that won’t work as capitalism cannot be reformed to operate in the interest of the vast majority. The workers will still have a world to win.

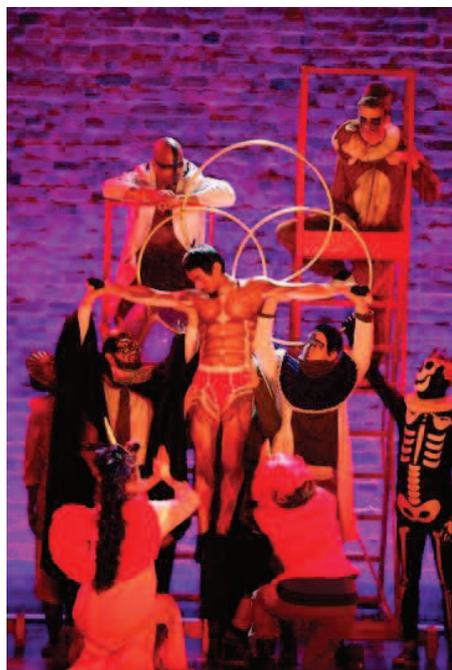
The RSC recently staged Bertolt Brecht's 1947 play *Life of Galileo* at the Swan Theatre in Stratford upon Avon with Ian McDiarmid in the title role. Galileo substantiated Copernican theories of the heliocentric nature of the universe ('the light of science shone as Galileo set out to prove that the sun is fixed and the earth is on the move'), which was counter to the Roman Catholic Church teaching of Aristotelian geocentric 'crystal spheres'.

Galileo is part of the seventeenth-century scientific revolution when science emerged ('the old age has passed, this is a new age') to meet the material needs of the rising capitalist class. In physics there are the fixed laws of Newton, and in the philosophy of Cartesian Dualism the body is a machine, and Descartes 'sees with the eyes of the manufacturing period.' In Scene 11 Vanni, the Iron Foundry owner says to Galileo 'we manufacturers are on your side', and in Scene 1 the university curator states 'how greatly is the science of physics indebted to the call for better looms.' Scientist JD Bernal describes the period as one in which 'religion, superstition and fear are replaced by reason and knowledge.'

Galileo is a sensualist for knowledge but also a financial opportunist who is ignorant of 'Realpolitik' in the Florentine world of Machiavellian ideals. Brecht believes Galileo is a 'social criminal'. After his recantation before the Inquisition, Galileo becomes a servant of authority rather than asserting the right of science to transform the world for the benefit of the whole of humanity. For Brecht, science stood at the barricades with Galileo, but scientists betrayed their calling by neglecting their wider social and political responsibilities. *Life of Galileo* is really about the atomic bomb, the concept of science for the people and the responsibility of science to society. Brecht was dismissive of Einstein who suggested that atomic technology be withheld from the Soviet Union and of Oppenheimer when he had a change of heart after the H-bomb. Brecht's *Galileo* can be usefully compared to the 1962 play *The Physicists* by Durrenmatt.

The scientific nature of Marxism was very important for Brecht. He valued doubt, criticism and free enquiry and believed the most important line in *Galileo* was 'my task is not to prove that I have been right up till now, but to find out whether I have been right.'

In Scene 10 the people sing 'All you who live on earth in wretchedness, Arise! Only obedience holds us back from earthly bliss. Who wouldn't rather be his own liege lord and master?'



## Death: A Self Portrait

*Death: A Self Portrait* at the Wellcome Collection in London was an exhibition of art related to mortality taken from the collection of Chicago antique dealer Richard Harris. The key to Christian art about death is 'memento mori' (remember you must die). Pascal's words 'It is easier to endure death without thinking about it than to endure the thought of death without dying' is fundamental to humanity's thinking about 'this mortal coil.'

Christian art of 'memento mori' in the Late Middle Ages was portrayed in the Dance of Death, which reflected the fragility of life in the midst of famines, the Black Death, the Hundred Years War, and the Peasant War in Germany. The 'danse macabre' depicting revelry uniting humans and skeletons is portrayed in *Toten Tanz* by Wolgemut in the 1493 Nuremberg *Liber Chronicarum*. Inspired by the Book of Revelation, the 1498 woodcut *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* by Albrecht Durer depicts the staples of medieval life; plague, war, famine, and death.



*The Miseries of War* of 1633 by Callot are eighteen etchings of the Thirty Years War portraying soldiers pillaging, burning and killing their way through towns and cities. Engels described this war as 'devastation'. It killed eleven million people, and 'annihilated the most important parts of the productive forces in agriculture.' *The Disasters of War* by Goya are eighty-two prints from 1810-20 which portray abuse, torture, killing, starvation, and other atrocities of the French invasion of Spain in the Napoleonic Wars.

The iconic images of the Mexican Day of the Dead originate with the painting of *Calavera de Huerta* by Posada which satirised bourgeois General Huerta in the Mexican Revolution.



Posada's *Calavera de La Catrina* is a satire on the 1875-1910 bourgeois dictatorship of Diaz which was an 'industrial capitalism on top of the hacienda system, debt-peonage in the shell of a corrupt feudalism.'

The George Grosz 1958 collage *Faces of Death* references his own 1920 painting *Republican Automatons*. Both works are an attack on the mediocrity and mendacity of bourgeois capitalist

civilisation which kills the individual human spirit.

According to bourgeois psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud in his 1930 work *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, the drive to death (Thanatos) now ruled supreme over Eros (Love). He wrote that 'people need a Reality Principle to keep the Pleasure Principle under control otherwise we'd have anarchy.' Wilhelm Reich replied that 'the Reality Principle of the capitalist era imposes upon the proletariat a maximum limitation of his needs...the ruling class has a Reality Principle which serves the perpetuation of its power.'

**STEVE CLAYTON**

## Britain fifty years ago

***An English Affair: Sex, Class and Power in the Age of Profumo* by Richard Davenport-Hines. Harper Press, 2013. £20**

It is 50 years since what was termed the 'Profumo Affair' rocked the Establishment and the ruling class in Britain, but particularly in England and London. Davenport-Hines asserts that it was 'a nation on the brink of a social revolution.' It was not that, but there was considerable change in the mores and life-styles of many workers compared to the pre-war period and for many years after that war.

Harold Macmillan, the Prime Minister, was very much an old-fashioned Tory, dedicated to tradition, hierarchy, so-called Christian morality and, of course, a capitalist society not unlike before the war; although he realised that the sun was setting on the British Empire and Commonwealth. The working class, he felt, 'had never had it so good.' Many other Tories pretended to be much the same as Macmillan but, in fact, spent their time in nightclubs and at parties on estates such as Lord Astor's Cliveden, where the osteopath, Stephen Ward, would bring young and attractive (mainly working-class) girls, such as Christine Keeler and Mandy Rice-Davies, mostly for their sexual pleasure.

One such visitor to Cliveden was the Minister for War, John Profumo, the grandson of an Italian baron. Ward introduced Profumo to Keeler, who had been swimming naked in the pool. Also joining the party, which included the President of Pakistan and Lord Mountbatten and other establishment figures, was the Soviet assistant naval attaché Yevgeni Ivanov (actually a Russian spy known to MI5) brought to Cliveden by Ward. Following his return to London, Profumo phoned Keeler and arranged to meet her the next weekend, as his wife would be away. Subsequently, Profumo and Keeler had an affair which was furtive but known to many people including MI5. Christine Keeler also knew Ivanov, claiming to have had sex with him. The Cold War had been 'hotting up'; and Ward became an unofficial go-between for the Soviets and some British politicians.

When challenged by government ministers, MI5 and others, including Parliament, John Profumo denied having sexual relations with Christine Keeler. But it was too late.

It was common knowledge. Profumo resigned as Minister for War, and Stephen Ward was arrested on trumped-up charges of keeping and living off the earnings of prostitutes, and various abortion offences. During his trial, however, Ward committed suicide. The so-called popular press had a field-day, publishing lie after lie about Ward, Keeler and Profumo. Davenport-Hines has an interesting chapter ('Hacks', no.7), demonstrating that the 'popular' papers and their writers were just as bad as, if not worse than, the red-top papers of today.

The author of *An English Affair* is not a socialist, and his analysis has its faults, but it is a useful reminder of British society 50 years ago. It's worth a read.

**PEN**

## Democracy, ancient and modern

***The History of Democracy: A Marxist Interpretation*, by Brian S. Roper. Pluto Press, 2013**

It is ironic that, just at a time when the undemocratic nature of the SWP's internal structure is being exposed to the public glare, an SWP sympathiser should bring out a book on democracy.

Roper's basic thesis is that the Ancient World produced two different models of democracy – Athenian direct democracy and Roman representative democracy – and that bourgeois democracy conforms to the latter. Rome, even in its republican days, was always ruled by an oligarchy of patricians; the plebs only had a say through representatives, magistrates who were either rich plebs or patricians starting their political career.

To make his point, Roper examines the English, American and French revolutions and has no difficulty in demonstrating that their leaders rejected the concept of universal manhood suffrage; where they did accept a fairly wide franchise they imposed property qualifications on those who could be elected. Some of the New England towns practised direct democracy but the US constitution and that of its states practised what Thomas Hamilton called 'representative democracy', where the people were represented by those who had more property. The French republic had a similar constitution before it was overthrown by Napoleon.

The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw popular struggles in

all capitalist countries to remove property qualifications and extend the franchise. It is a pity that Roper hardly goes into these, but those in Germany, Belgium and Russia gave rise to interesting discussions within the Marxist-oriented Social Democratic movement as to the tactics of the struggle and why it was important. He mentions Rosa Luxemburg's pamphlet on the Mass Strike but omits to mention that she was advocating this as a tactic in both Russia and Germany to obtain the vote and political democracy.

Marx himself supported the Chartist demand for a parliament elected by universal suffrage and with paid MPs and later campaigns to extend the vote to more workers. Roper does not discuss the extent to which this – where workers could in theory represent themselves – could still be called a 'representative democracy' in the sense Hamilton meant it but continues to use the term as if it was.

In the eulogy which Marx drafted for the First International on the Paris Commune of 1871 after its suppression, he offered a different model: a federation of municipalities elected by universal suffrage where these would send mandated delegates to a central assembly; in other words, a parliament which would only be indirectly elected. Whether this would be more democratic than a directly elected one remains a matter for debate.

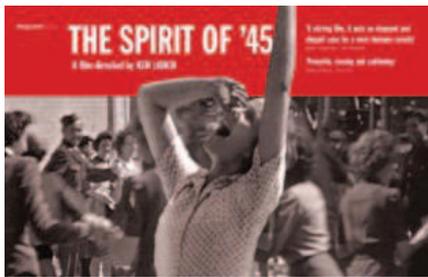
Roper completely ignores Marx's view that, under certain circumstances, the workers might be able to win control of political power via the ballot box, so turning universal suffrage from an instrument for duping people into an agent of emancipation.

According to Roper, 'the experience of the Commune highlighted the need for a centralised revolutionary party to exercise leadership within the working class during the course of the revolution in order to ensure that capitalism and parliamentary democracy are successfully overthrown and replaced by socialist democracy.'

By 'socialist democracy' he means the system that was supposedly established in Russia after the Bolshevik seizure of power in November 1917, based on 'soviets' (workers' councils), in which the direct democracy of a workplace assembly would be the basic unit and which would elect delegates to wider decision-making bodies. Whilst it is true that directly elected parliaments have been hi-jacked by leadership-run parties

**continued page 21**

# Spirit of 45



Spirit of '45 directed by Ken Loach is an impressive but sentimental documentary about the Attlee Labour government of 1945-51 which is nostalgic for 'Old Labour' and the 'cradle to grave' welfare state. The use of Hubert Parry's choral music to Jerusalem is an added touch of emotionalism.

Loach twice shows part of Attlee's election victory speech at Westminster Central Hall when he says it is a 'Labour movement with a Socialist policy' and that 'His Majesty the King has asked me to form a government.' There is footage of Aneurin Bevan, architect of the NHS and the Housing Plan declaring 'nothing but the best for the working class.' The description of the 1951 Festival of Britain as a 'celebration of working class heroes' is hyperbole. All this gives the impression that the Attlee government was running capitalism in the interests of the working class which is absurd and impossible. In 1945 the working class firmly rejected Churchill (there is footage of the working class recalling Churchill sent the army into Tonyandy and killed striking miners in 1910). Churchill's speech in June 1945 is important as it links Hayek's eccentric paean to capitalist market libertarianism The Road to Serfdom, and today's capitalist economic ideology: 'there can

be no doubt that socialism is inseparably interwoven with totalitarianism and the abject worship of the state.'

Loach looks at the nationalisation programme of the Attlee government particularly the railways and the mines. There is no socialist analysis identifying that 'nationalisation' is state capitalism (the wages system under new management), and the working class still have their surplus value robbed and need trade unions and the strike weapon in order to protect themselves from their employers.

The welfare state and the NHS are held up as beacons of enlightenment. The end of the commercial relationship between doctor and patient is trumpeted although private practice was allowed to continue, and some charges on the NHS were swiftly brought in soon after its creation when the capitalist state realised how expensive it all was. There was no socialist analysis in the film identifying the welfare state and NHS as essentially a 'redistribution of poverty among the workers', insuring the capitalist class against working class discontent and maintaining a sufficiently healthy and efficient working population. For the capitalist class the welfare state and the NHS meant increased profits and were seen as 'a necessary expense of production.'

Loach looks at the 1947 National Dock Labour Scheme which 'de-casualised' dock work although no reference is made to the 1945 Dock Strike which was condemned by the Labour Government. Attlee even sent the army in. In 1989 the Thatcher government abolished the National Dock Labour Scheme thereby re-introducing casual labour. In the film there is talk of the 'dignity and respect

of work' in capitalism which underlines the lack of socialist consciousness. Marx put it eloquently when he wrote 'instead of the conservative motto a fair day's wage for a fair day's work, they ought to inscribe on their banners the revolutionary watchword Abolition of the Wages System.'

Sam Watts, an 87-year-old working class Liverpoolian makes some accurate and pithy statements towards the end of the film such as 'the profit system is rotten and corrupt and the quicker it goes the better' and 'the working class can change the whole of history but it has not grasped that it has this power.'

Spirit of 45 is about taking 'the crumbs off the Master's table' when what the working class need to do is demand the whole loaf, take over the bakery and have common ownership of the wheat field.

**SPC**

## Book Reviews continued

dominated by MPs who refuse to consider themselves delegates, it is also true that the Russian soviets were taken over and manipulated by the vanguard party that the Bolsheviks were. They never did function as they were supposed to. What happened could even be used to reach the opposite conclusion to Roper's on the Paris Commune: the dangers of the existence of a centralised party seeking to exercise leadership over the working class.

This is not a work of original research but to a large extent a rehash of the writings of SWP theorists such as Alex Callinicos and the late Chris Harman.

**ALB**



## Monarchy's Maladies

MOST OF us would struggle to find similarities between our lives and that of, say, Charles I. However, *Fit To Rule – How Royal Illness*

*Changed History* (BBC2) wants to 'rein-

troduce you to our monarchs as human beings, people rather like you and me'. The show's presenter, Dr Lucy Worsley (pictured), argues that the wellbeing of our previous kings and queens was like a barometer for the state of the nation. Aware of this, each sovereign has had a personal army of advisers and doctors to scrutinise and promote their health. Back in the sixteenth century, collecting Henry VIII's urine for analysis was the only occasion you could take the piss out of a monarch without ending up in the Tower.

*Fit To Rule* doesn't dwell as much on royal diseases as we're led to believe, suggesting a focus group decided the snappy title first and then crowbarred a format around it. So, the



programme also bounces between GCSE-standard potted histories of the lines of succession, royalty fuelling divisions between Protestants and Catholics, and the decline in the belief that monarchs were god-like. Sadly, the association between royalty and gods sort-of survives today in the deference shown to the elite, although at least scrofula sufferers no longer queue up to be touched by the monarch in the hope of a miracle cure. Nor has the conflict between Protestants and Catholics gone away, as it still soldiers on in Northern Ireland, for example. And we haven't really moved away from

the expectation that kings should be virile and queens should be fertile in order to ensure an heir, as shown by the media's drooling over Kate-n-Will's upcoming prog.

These comparisons aren't to be found in *Fit To Rule*, though, which presents history as a spicy soap opera.

James I's and Queen Anne's possible bisexual dalliances (worryingly discussed in the context of 'illnesses') are described much like an *EastEnders* plotline. In a way, the quirks of the royal dynasties are like a soap, as both distract us from thinking about the economic forces which really move society along. So maybe reminding ourselves that the royal family are only human can help encourage us to scrap this divisive institution.

## Meetings

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

### London

Saturday 4 May 6.00pm  
MAY DAY - INTERNATIONAL  
WORKERS' DAY  
Speaker: Steve Clayton

Sunday 19 May 3.00pm  
HUNTER GATHERERS  
Speaker: Richard Field  
Socialist Party premises, 52 Clapham  
High St, London, London, SW4 7UN.

### London

Tuesday 7 May 8.00pm  
MAYDAY AND SOCIALISM  
Speaker: Adam Buick

Tuesday 21 May 8.00pm  
DEMOCRACY AND THE  
CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF  
LONDON  
Speaker: Steve Clayton  
Committee Room, Chiswick Town Hall,  
Heathfield Terrace, W4 4JN

### London

Saturday 11 May 1.00pm - 5.00pm  
POLITICS TODAY  
1.00pm to 2.15pm THE RISE OF  
SCOTTISH NATIONALISM Speaker: Vic  
Vanni  
2.15pm to 3.30pm THE OCCUPY  
MOVEMENT Speaker: Brian Gardner  
3.45pm to 5.00pm THE CURSE OF  
RACISM Speaker: John Cumming  
Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill  
Road, Glasgow G20 6HT

### Norwich

Saturday 18 May  
"PALESTINE IS THE ISSUE"  
A John Pilger film. Introduction and  
discussion opened up by Pat Deutz.  
The Nelson Hotel, 120 Prince of Wales  
Road, Norwich NR1 1DX (The meeting  
room can be accessed by going through  
the Costa Coffee Café and down the  
stairs. The room is towards the Prince of  
Wales Road end.)

### Doncaster

Saturday 18 May 2.00pm  
WHY THE PROFIT SYSTEM MUST GO  
Speaker: Clifford Slapper  
Ukrainian Centre, 48 Beckett Road,  
Doncaster DN2 4AD.

#### SOCIALIST STANDARD INDEX FOR 2012

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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.

Full residential cost (including accommodation and meals Friday evening to Sunday afternoon) is £150. Concessionary and non-residential rates are available. To book, send a cheque payable to The Socialist Party of Great Britain to Flat 2, 24 Tedstone Road, Quinton, Birmingham, B32 2PD, or book online at [www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/summerschool](http://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/summerschool). Enquiries: [spgb@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:spgb@yahoo.co.uk)

## 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

## Beeching's rail cuts

DOCTOR BEECHING'S casualty list was as long as anyone could have expected.

Nearly a third of the passenger route-miles to be withdrawn; almost a half of the stations to be shut down; seventy thousand railwaymen, by one means or another, to be got rid of.

The Tories have always claimed that they are the party of free competition, which is supposed to be something which will bring enormous benefits to us all. According to Conservative propagandists, the worst thing that can happen to us is to be left at the mercy of a monopoly, which will do dreadful things to our standards of living. Yet the Beeching Plan will give, over large areas of the country, a transport monopoly to the road interests. What if these interests act as the Tories have assured us monopolies always act?

This is not the only example of how flexible is the Tories' regard for their own consistency. At one time the British capitalist class, with the support of the Labour and Conservative Parties, thought that nationalisation of certain industries

was in their own overall interests and was, therefore, inevitable, desirable and morally sound.

But since 1945 the capitalist class have been taking a second look at

State control. Slowly but definitely they have changed the internal structure of some of the State industries; nowhere is this so apparent as on the railways.

Which brings us to the question of whether nationalisation, apart from being a fraud upon the working class, has also disappointed the capitalists?

The Beeching Plan seems to be going out for an immediate profit from the railways, without providing the kind of facilities which the capitalist class as a whole must require from a railway system. That was exactly what nationalisation was supposed to avoid.

There will probably be a big row over the Beeching report, with both sides representing their case as the one which has everyone's interests at heart. And inevitably the working class will be wasting their time in another fruitless controversy while the real problem—the private ownership of society's means of life—is left to do its worst.

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



Beeching

# ACTION REPLAY

## All Above Board

LET'S NOT argue about whether chess is a sport: it certainly contains plenty of rivalry, financial shenanigans and back-biting. It's probably lost some of its public profile since the days of Bobby Fischer and the rivalry between American and Russian players that echoed the Cold War.

But the world championship has long been ensnared in rows about money. Players, usually with the help of private backers, used to provide a purse on a winner-take-all basis. Then Emanuel Lasker, who won the championship in 1894, demanded that the challenger provide the whole of the stake, which had the effect, if not the intention, of reducing the number of championship matches. There followed lots of controversies about how to organise the championships and how to handle the money.

It was only in 1946 that the World Chess Federation (FIDE) set up an official series of eliminators and standard formats for the final champion vs challenger play-off. In 1999, FIDE was recognised by the

International Olympic Committee, and Olympic-style anti-drug rules were adopted (so it must be a sport, then).

Last year, FIDE awarded the commercial rights to the world championship to Andrew Paulson, an American capitalist with his finger in several Russian pies, who has grand ideas for the game. The elimination rounds will be played in glamorous venues in big cities, with lots of media coverage. TV viewers will see the players' pulse rates and so on. 'Spectators will be able to see with the eyes of a grandmaster and feel with the heart of a player', claimed Paulson (*Financial Times*, 21 September 2012). Sponsors, it is envisaged, will cover the costs and the sizeable prize money.

The latest Candidates tournament was held in London in March. The Norwegian Magnus Carlsen won and will challenge current world champion Viswanathan Anand in November. Carlsen, who is only 22, is sponsored by the Oslo-based investment bank Arctic Securities, for whom he works as some kind of ambassador. As Carlsen says on the company's blog, for both chess players and banks, 'precision is of the essence and mistakes can be fatal.' Mind you, chess players generally play no part in global financial meltdowns.

PB

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# Voice from the Back

## The Regal Con Game

Times are hard in British capitalism today so our rulers have had to cut costs. Slash welfare benefits, cap government workers' wages and introduce a bedroom tax. There are some things of course that are sacrosanct. 'The Queen has received a £5m boost in the funds she receives from the taxpayer to carry out her official duties. The sovereign grant, which covers the running costs of the Queen's household, has been set at £36.1m for the 2013-14 financial year' (*Guardian*, 2 April). Keep the workers thinking they are one nation and give them spectacular royal events. Essential to disguise their exploitation. Money well spent.

## We're All In This Together

The recent budget with its welfare cuts and austere forecasts for the economic future must have depressed the Deputy Prime Minister and probably prompted him to take a break. 'Three days earlier, he sat stern-faced through the Coalition's latest 'we're all in it together' Budget. But with a flatlining economy and the row raging over benefits cuts, Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg knew exactly where he needed to be – at his family's £7 million Swiss ski chalet. Leaving the stress of austerity Britain behind, he jetted out with his family for an Easter getaway at the luxury villa nestling between fashionable Klosters and the resort of Davos' (*Daily Mail*, 5 April). Clegg's family ski chalet has 20 rooms and he has been skiing there since infancy. We don't suppose there is a problem about bedroom tax there.

## Startling Statistics

In a review of Leo Hollis's book *Cities Are Good For You*, the writer Tom Chesshyre reveals some startling statistics. 'He travels to fast-growing Mumbai, where he takes in the world's most expensive house, the 27-storey, \$1 billion home of a leading business man; with living spaces for 60 servants, parking for 160 cars and

three helipads. He is damning of the growth of the global super-rich, pointing out that 90 per cent of the world's wealth belongs to the richest 1 per cent' (*Times*, 8 April). He also mentions that in London the richest 10 per cent have 273 times more wealth than the bottom 10 per cent.



## Five Million In The Big Freeze

More than five million families in Britain are facing the threat of having their heating cut off after falling behind with their energy bills, an alarming report warns today. The research said the number of households struggling to pay their bills has jumped by around one million people over the last year. 'On average, they typically owe £123 to their energy supplier, raising fears they face being cut off if they do not eventually find the money to clear their debts. The report, from the comparison website Uswtich.com said the number of cash-strapped families has jumped sharply over the last year from a total of four to five million' (*Daily Mail*, 9 April). This is life in Mr Cameron's 'Big Society' - more like a big freeze society.

## Rich Pickings For Some

The *New York Times* annually reports on the astonishing incomes enjoyed by the capitalist class, but they are not necessarily the richest packages out there. As they report, they rely

on filings required by the Securities and Exchange Commission for public companies. That means they are missing entire categories of businesses: privately held corporations, most hedge funds and many private equity firms, but nevertheless some of their figures are staggering. 'Consider Leon Black, C.E.O. of Apollo Global Management, among the largest private equity firms with \$2.86 billion in 2012 revenue. He took in more than \$125 million last year. .... Steve Schwarzman, founder and chief executive of the Blackstone Group, took in \$8.4 million in compensation last year, and his distributions earned him an additional \$204 million' (*New York Times*, 10 April).

## A Sense Of Values?

It speaks volumes for the media's sense of values when it can report the following fraud but remain silent about a much greater con trick. 'A Florida billionaire, William Koch, 72, has won \$380,000 (£247,000) compensation after 24 fakes were discovered among 2,600 bottles of vintage Bordeaux wine that he bought for \$3.7 million' (*Times*, 13 April). The greater con is, of course, capitalist society itself, which can have people starving whilst a useless parasite can spend millions of dollars.



## FREE LUNCH

