

# **socialist standard**

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

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## Rio, Kyoto, Paris...



### Capitalism and climate change



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# Socialist Standard

NOVEMBER 2015

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# Introducing The Socialist Party

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

We use every possible opportunity

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

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

ideas across, the more experiences we will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

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

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



# socialist standard

NOVEMBER 2015

## Editorial

### Climate Change and Capitalism

SINCE THE industrial revolution there has been a significant rise in the average temperature of the Earth's atmosphere and its oceans, and scientists generally agree that the main contributor has been the burning of fossil fuels that generates CO<sub>2</sub> and other greenhouse gases. Not everyone is convinced that this is the case, and there are many who make it their business to deny it. Nevertheless, world governments and other global institutions have taken the issue of climate change sufficiently seriously to come together and attempt to find ways of tackling it.

The major milestones, so far, have been the establishment of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) at the Rio Earth Summit in June 1992, a non-binding agreement to stabilise the levels of greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere, and the signing of the Kyoto protocol in June 1997 which committed the developed countries to binding targets in reducing greenhouse gas emissions by a 5.2 percent reduction from 1990 emission levels by the year 2010.

Yet there is little to show for these efforts. According to Naomi Klein in her book *This Changes Everything: Capitalism versus the Climate*, preliminary data shows that in 2013, global carbon dioxide emissions were 61 per cent higher than in 1990. The United States government, looking after its oil and coal interests, refused to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. Canada, one of the original signatories, withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol in 2011, primarily to avoid possible financial penalties due to its failure to meet its agreed emission targets, mainly because of the extraction processes of its lucrative tar

sands industry in Alberta. A clause within the Kyoto Protocol allows countries to meet their emission targets by purchasing quotas from other countries.

The main obstacle to reducing global warming is capitalism, where production is geared to profit, and production costs have to be kept to a minimum. Measures to curb emissions may increase the latter and place firms at a competitive disadvantage. Also, in many cases, it is more cost effective to import materials from abroad, which requires the burning of fossil fuel in transporting them. Nation states and trading blocs also seek to compete with each other on the best possible terms, and in some cases endeavour to protect their profitable extractive industries. Naomi Klein also noted that in the same period that these international summits were taking place, moves were made to expand world trade through the establishment of global bodies, such as the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which would encourage higher levels of fossil fuel consumption.

The 2015 Paris Climate Conference is due to take place this December and will attempt to set up a new binding agreement to control global warming. Judging from the record of previous summits, the prospects do not look too promising. Attempts to tackle climate change in the context of a world market economy will, at best, achieve only limited results. In socialism, where production can be rationally organised according to human need, we'll have the best chance of successfully curtailing global warming.

# After the Sugar Rush

WHY, WHEN the news has recently been dominated by foreign wars, refugees, China's revolting charm offensive in the UK and the popular new sport Kick-a-Corbyn, has sugar been making the headlines? Well, the immediate cause is that Public Health England produced a long-anticipated report saying that the public is eating too much sugar and that this is leading to obesity and health and dental problems.

Er, this is not exactly news, is it? We've been hearing this for years. The Food and Agricultural Organisation estimated back in 2009 that by 2015 each person in the world would consume 55 lbs of sugar per year, though this looks decidedly spartan next to the US, where per capita consumption stands at 150 lbs. That's about the weight of a moped or a small horse. The problem is that people don't even realise, because the near-ubiquity of the stuff in food products and soft drinks means it's nearly impossible to avoid. You wouldn't eat five straight teaspoons of sugar in a row, but nobody thinks twice about a low-fat yoghurt.

There isn't much doubt in anyone's mind – anyone outside the food industry, that is – that this has got to be a bad thing. But unlike smoking, where the link to cancer and heart disease were firmly established for a long period, sugar studies have been complicated by a lot of variables. For a start, the three different sugars come from different sources and are metabolised by the body in different ways, leading to different problems. Secondly, large-scale health studies were inconclusive because of the difficulty of finding non-sugar-consuming populations to use as control groups. Meanwhile some studies did the unexpected and went against conventional wisdom, for example debunking the popular belief that sugar leads to hyperactivity in children. But in general the links between sugar, obesity, heart disease and diabetes are now beyond contention, and sugar is fast overtaking fat as the main dietary concern among health professionals.

By 2050, 60 percent of men, 50 percent of women and 25 percent of children in the UK are expected to be obese. Epidemiologist Professor Simon Capewell was surely not overstating the case said last year when he said: 'Sugar is the new tobacco. Everywhere, sugary drinks and junk foods are now pressed on unsuspecting parents and children by a cynical industry focussed on profit not health' (*Telegraph*, 9 January 2014).

So what has the 'cynical' food industry been doing about it? Wriggling and writhing like the nest of snakes they are, and finding ways to disguise the sugar content of foods by listing it under different headings. A report by the Union of Concerned Scientists in June last year stated that 'sugar interests use every tool at their disposal to obstruct science-based policy on added sugar'. These tools, they say, include intimidating study authors, threatening to suspend funds, using front organisations for the purposes of deception, spreading misinformation, 'blinding with science' in product promotion, concealing industry links, hijacking science communication and blogs, bribing academics, lobbying state policy bodies and funding pro-food industry politicians ([ucsusa.org](http://ucsusa.org) - <http://tinyurl.com/pktpcec>).

So, nothing unusual there, and you can probably find some or all of the same tactics at work in many other spheres of capitalist industry. But the spectacular success of smoking bans



across the world – against many expectations – has given a fillip to campaigners seeking to ban, tax, restrict or demonise other guilty pleasures, and nobody was surprised when sugar campaigners were next to go on the warpath.

But with a politician's forensic x-ray vision for what's hot in the public sympathies and what's not, the pro-fracking, pro-millionaire David Cameron has so far been resolutely against the idea of a sugar tax, notwithstanding the much-publicised campaigning of our favourite TV chef Jamie Oliver. The reasons for his opposition seem to be a) that Tories don't like nanny-statism and don't wish to interfere in people's personal choices and b) that Denmark and Finland have both tried and abandoned a sugar tax, as everybody drove across to Sweden and bought their naughty treats there by the truckload.

The Tories couldn't care less about 'nanny-statism' versus free choice (they're happy to be super-nannies when it comes to drug prohibition laws), they're just spineless in the face of the food industry's money and political clout. And they're not really afraid that the tax won't work, they're afraid it will.

What gets overlooked because most commentators are self-appointed campaigners drawn from the chattering classes is that, as with tobacco, junk food, meat, recycling, Fair Trade, regional accent, clothes made in Pakistan, Lottery funding and many social 'isms' there is a seedy class aspect to all this. Sweet is cheap and wholesome costs wholly too much. The wealthier educated and professional income groups have the money to avoid unhealthy diets, which is why excessive sugar consumption and hence sugar-related diseases have become a badge of the lower orders within the cultural strata of the working class.

So the war on sugar ends up as a condescending war on the poor who don't have the resources to treat their children to ballet classes or holidays to Thailand but who do have votes, and who – astounding but true fact – very often use those votes to vote Tory.

Even so, the government are likely to be backed into a corner over this issue, particularly as campaigners are pointing to the estimated £4bn annual cost of obesity to the NHS. Socialists don't take a position on questions like whether or not to impose a sugar tax, because they're internal to the workings of capitalism and don't have a direct bearing on the case for revolution. But we certainly do have an opinion on whether it's right for an industry which exists to feed us instead to be deliberately adulterating food and slowly poisoning us in order to give their profits a quick sugar rush. Whether sugar ends up being taxed or not, or other measures brought in to restrict those notorious buy-one-get-one-free deals, the lesson is as plain as the icing on a fruit bun. Capitalism is not interested in your health, only in accumulating wealth at your expense.

**PJS**

### If robots take over

Dear Editors

In your October edition you published an article entitled 'Robots of the World - you have nothing to lose but your blockchains'. Although it was highly amusing it only superficially dealt with a problem in economics that intrigues me. At the moment automation (robots) are merely advanced tools (constant capital) where the profit is made by the labour manufacturing the programming and fabrication (variable capital). What happens when the robots become 'self-programming' and able to build themselves? Does the 'organic composition of capital' become such that the variable part is so negligible that profits plunge? Will profit levels be held up by the monopolistic ownership of these robots and the increased productivity they represent? Surely the capitalists not within that particular industry would object on free market grounds?

**Andrew Westley, Cambridge**

**Reply:** The answer is that, in the fully automated production system that you are asking about where

robots would do everything, building themselves from scratch, supplying their own power and maintaining themselves, as there would be no human labour input there would be no value produced and so no prices, no wages and no profits either.

Such an economy is only a theoretical construct; in fact the theoretical limit to capitalism, as Marx pointed out in the 'Fragment on Machines' in the *Grundrisse*. This is the only place where Marx uses the word 'collapse' in relation to capitalism which he said would happen at the point where productivity was so high that the prices of units of commodity would be virtually zero and so would have been given away free. Obviously capitalism could not function on that basis.

But this point is a (very) long way off and in practice will never be reached, if only because political action would have put an end to capitalism, and its production for sale on a market with a view to

profit, long before.

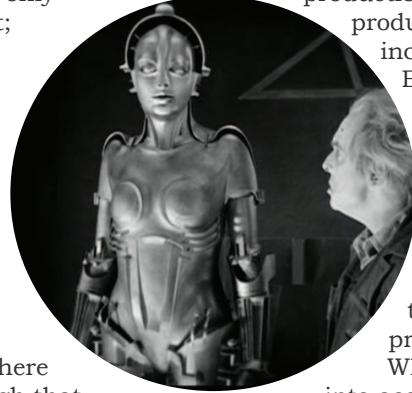
Mechanization, automation, robotization are all manifestations of the same trend under capitalism where, under the lash of competition, capitalist firms are driven to constantly strive to reduce the cost of

production of what they are producing for sale, i. e. to increase productivity.

But productivity does not proceed at the rate that some people sometimes mistakenly assume that it does because they take into account the last stage of production.

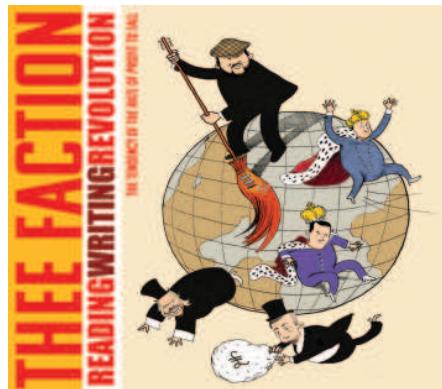
What has to be taken

into account is the labour that has gone into the production of a commodity *from start to finish*. So robots introduced at just one stage of the whole process will only have an impact at that stage. Which is why the increase in productivity in the economy as a whole has been at a rate of only about 2 percent a year, a rate that the capitalist economy can absorb. – *Editors*.



### Music Review

**Reading Writing Revolution: The Tendency of the Rate of Profit to Fall (CD £7 inc P&P).** Thee Faction. 2015. Soviet Beret.



Party loyalists like Billy Bragg. It is refreshing then that Thee Faction are neither nihilist nor po-faced and have a sense of humour in their songs.

In June 1978 we wrote 'what constitutes socialist music? Even if it were desirable, few would want to listen to a Marxist liturgy let alone a rock version of "sing along with Ma(r)x".' and in April 1985 'It is difficult to compress the argument for socialism on to a single track'. Well, this album comes close, with tracks like 'The Three R's' and 'Socialism: Utopian and Scientific' among the more catchy including lyrics 'I'm loving Engels instead, output: prolific, outlook: terrific.'

They've been described as not 'protest songs' but solution songs. They seem committed and sincere, describing themselves as 'socialists first, musicians second' and 'The point of what we do is to do our bit to deliver a socialist society. The point of what we do isn't art.' This is not a gimmick borrowed

for a new album but a theme consistent throughout their back catalogue. In addition, musically, their songs are good tunes and they've even had previous albums reviewed in the *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Telegraph* and played on BBC Radio.

The band members describe themselves as libertarian socialists but the extended spoken part of their song 'Equality' makes clear their fondness for early Labour propagandist G. D. H. Cole who wrote the forward to a 1930 edition of *Capital*, failed to grasp or deliberately misrepresented value theory and the materialist conception of history. No surprise then that a recent gig they headlined was a fundraiser for the campaign for Jeremy Corbyn, but in generously providing me with a copy to review, they wrote that 'the nine of us pull in different (socialist) directions'.

*Reading Writing Revolution* is worth a listen (and might make a good gift) particularly if you like punk rock music and socialist rhetoric.

**DJW**

### Thought About Joining The Socialist Party?

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## Do the Gods Ever Change Their Mind?

DOES A God who is all-knowing and all-wise ever need to change his mind?

Believers who pray for God to bring peace to the Middle East, for example, obviously assume he can be persuaded to take some course of action they fear he may not otherwise be planning. Or if they pray to him to cure Mrs Jones of her lumbago, how likely is he to say 'OK, I've seen fit to let her to suffer for ten years, but as you asked nicely, I'll cure her?'

Don't they ever suspect that God isn't there, or isn't listening, or that maybe he just doesn't give a sod about what's going on down here?

Following the double disaster at the Islamic hajj this year, when 109 people were killed by a collapsing crane and then over 700 more in a stampede which, apparently, he could have prevented – if he'd wanted to – there was the usual hand-wringing and prayers for him to halt the carnage and have mercy on the victims. And let's face it – even without being all-knowing he should have seen this coming. Stampedes at the Hajj have caused many hundreds of deaths in recent years, often at the stoning of the devil ritual (and obviously, the devil is going to be a bit hacked off about that).

In Christianity, too, the logic is no better. Their all-knowing, all-merciful god is quite happy to allow the odd flood, earthquake or some other disaster to occur without lifting a finger to prevent it, but they then fall to their knees in prayer expecting him to suddenly feel remorse at what he, in his infinite wisdom and mercy has allowed to happen. And in spite of this indifference to human suffering there's nothing like a mass shooting or some other disaster to get the believers on their knees.

*'My prayers are with everyone in Oregon. May the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, guard your hearts'* bleated one politician following the October mass shooting in America. And the Presidential candidates lined up, offering their thoughts and advice to God, and anyone else who was

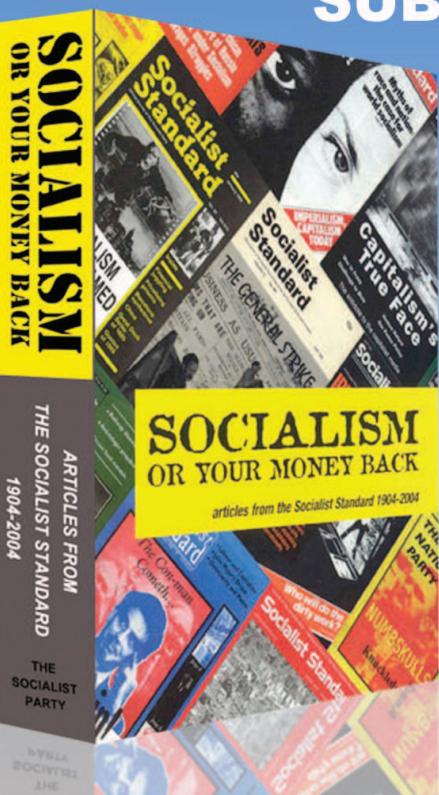
listening, as if they had some influence over the invisible man in the sky.

Part of Barack Obama's statement was, though, perhaps unintentionally, more to the point: *'Each time we see one of these mass shootings, our thoughts and our prayers are not enough. It does nothing to prevent this carnage being inflicted'.*

Exactly. So what is the point? If we assume for a moment that a god who 'transcends all understanding' does exist and knows, more or less, what he is doing, isn't it a bit optimistic to ask him to change his mind halfway through some divine act of carnage in his plans for the world which, of course, he is carrying out for our benefit anyway?

Religion must be the biggest fraud ever to have been carried out to keep the masses docile and in their place. As the French revolutionary Camille Desmoulins put it – 'The Great only appear to us to be great because we are on our knees. Let us rise'.

NW



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**THE INDEPENDENT**



## Moore on Marx

'MARX DID have an insight about the disproportionate power of the ownership of capital. The owner of capital decides where the money goes, whereas the people who sell only their labor lack that power. This makes it harder for society to be shaped by their interests.' So wrote Charles Moore, Thatcher's biographer and former editor of the *Daily Telegraph* in the *World Street Journal* on 25 September.

He had already assured his readers that 'no one should worry that I have become a late convert to Marxism' and went on: 'In recent years, that disproportion has reached destructive levels, so if we don't want to be a Marxist society, we need to put it right.'

As a fan of Thatcher his way of putting it right is to create a so-called 'property-owning democracy' where 'people who sell only their labour' come to own their home and some stocks and shares. Quite a few are already in this position, especially in the US with regard to stocks and shares. But the assumption that this gives them any more power to decide where the money goes or to shape society in their interest is preposterous.

In fact being burdened with a loan to buy a house over decades weakens a person's bargaining power vis-à-vis their employer as they can't afford to lose money by striking or their job through being militant as they need to keep their mortgage payments up or risk losing their house. If 'people who sell only their labour' have a steady income from stocks and shares, as up to a third are said to in the US, this means that their employers don't have to pay them so much to keep fit to work. So what's the gain there? It's just swings and roundabouts.

Moore needn't have worried about being taken for a convert to Marxism as elsewhere in his article he displayed an ignorance of what Marx thought. According to him, Marx 'did not understand markets or respect political institutions, and he thought liberty was a sham.'

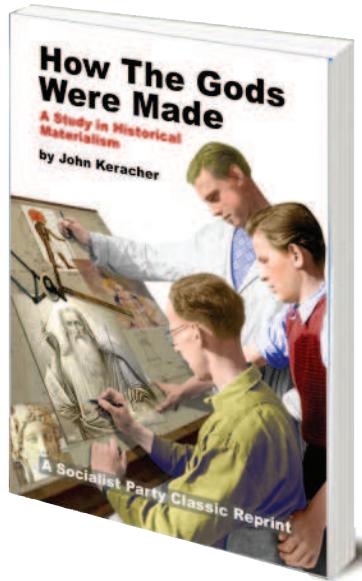
On the contrary, Marx well understood how the market works. In fact Moore himself recognised this earlier in his article when he commended three passages which he later revealed were from the *Communist Manifesto*:

'Where might one find a useful analysis of what is happening today in the market democracies of the West? How about this: "The executive committee of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the bourgeoisie." Or this: "Modern bourgeois society ... is like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the nether world which he has called up by his spells." Or this: "The productive forces no longer tend to further the development of the conditions of bourgeois property; on the contrary, they have become too powerful for these conditions ... [and] they bring disorder into the whole of bourgeois society, endanger the existence of bourgeois property."

And why should Marx have respected the political institutions of capitalist society if they were there to manage the common affairs of the capitalist class? And isn't 'Liberty' a sham if the 'owners of capital' exercise 'disproportionate power'? Not that Marx was against the limited, political democracy that can exist under capitalism. He was all for it but regarded it not as amounting to freedom for 'people who sell only their labour' but only as a means to this, or as he put it, a 'means of emancipation.'

## SOCIALIST PARTY PUBLICATIONS

### How The Gods Were Made by John Keracher



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# Rising sea levels: socialism the only solution



TUVALU IS one of the smallest countries in the world. It has a population of only 11,500 and has been inhabited for almost 3,000 years. In 1997 the then Tuvalu Prime Minister Koloa Talake addressed world leaders at the Kyoto conference. He petitioned countries around the world to take immediate action on global warming and make the changes needed to stop it in its tracks. He explained his low-lying country was sinking into the Pacific Ocean because of rising sea-levels. The current Prime Minister of Tuvalu, Enele Sopoaga, said climate change was the 'Enemy Number One' for his country. The people of Tuvalu don't require scientists to explain it to them. They can see it for themselves. Salt water is flooding the land and the people are having difficulties growing their crops because of salination of the soil. Groundwater is increasingly becoming undrinkable due to sea-water contamination. It is brackish and salty. Islanders are relying on catching rain water.

'What we are talking about is survival,' said Anote Tong, the President of Kiribati, another island nation in the Pacific Ocean that comprises a population just over 100,000 on a string of atolls barely 3ft (0.9m) above sea level. 'It's not about economic development ... it's not politics. It's survival.'

Following the Australian Immigration Minister Peter Dutton's joke about the predicament of the low-lying Pacific Islands ('Time doesn't mean anything when you're about to have water lapping at your door'), President Tong commented 'What kind of a person is he? As long as there is this kind of attitude, this kind of arrogance in any position of leadership, we will continue to have a lot of tension. It shows a sense of moral irresponsibility quite unbecoming of leadership in any capacity. I find that extremely sad, extremely disappointing that we are making jokes about a very serious issue'. Tong went on to warn Dutton that any future Australian immigration minister will have to deal with a wave of Pacific refugees from low-lying countries like Kiribati, if sea levels continue to rise. 'I don't think so, I know so, because the science is quite categorical' he said. Already two islands belonging to Kiribati have been totally submerged.

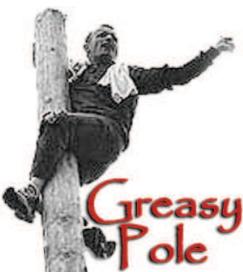
Nor will it be only vulnerable island-states like Tuvalu, or Kiribati and the thousands of islands around the world that are also just above sea level which will disappear. Vast tracts

of river delta are not much higher than the ocean shore while some of the world's biggest coastal cities are very close to sea level. Approximately 100 million people live in areas below sea level. Tens of millions of people who live in these low-lying areas near the ocean will have to migrate.

According to a 2007 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report the sea level rise on the Bangladesh coastline could be about one meter in the next 50 years this will cause 11 percent of Bangladesh's landmass to be covered by the water from the Bay of Bengal, forcing approximately 20 million (near enough the population of Australia) environmental refugees inland to the already densely populated and over-burdened cities. Up to 10 million could be displaced in the Philippines and millions more in the Nile River delta which lies only 2 meters above sea level. Such water level rises would affect low-lying cities around the world including: London, Shanghai, Hamburg, Bangkok, Bombay, Manila, Buenos Aires and Venice.

If places like Tuvalu and Kiribati are to survive we must act so they do survive and that can only be accomplished by establishing a socialist society. Socialism is defined as the common ownership and collective control of the means of production and distribution. It is the name given to the next stage of civilisation, if civilisation is to survive and we are not doomed to a return to the Dark Ages. As long as the instruments of production — land, machinery, raw materials, etc — remain private property, only comparatively few can be sole owners and so long as this is the case, they will use their private ownership for their private advantage, regardless of the cost to others. To protect the environment calls for the rational allocation of resources and for the widest possible development of democracy. This is a struggle for today. This is the struggle for socialism. Capitalists are not about to cut their profits for anybody. Have they ever reduced their profits to provide jobs, end disease, or avoid wars? There's no reason to expect them to do such a thing in order to stop islands sinking into the sea from climate change. Many will simply be seen as unavoidable collateral damage in the drive for profits.

**ALJO**



# Tessa fails to make it

THE DEATH of Denis Healey, who was the last surviving member of Harold Wilson's 1964 Labour Cabinet, revived a clutch of memorable catch-phrases but also some unflattering comparisons with the

uninspiring bunch who now occupy the Labour benches. For example Jeremy Corbyn's recent opponents Andy Burnham, Yvette Cooper and Liz Kendall. Will any of these go down in history as 'the best prime Minister we never had'? Will they construct a description of attacks from one of their opponents as 'like being savaged by a dead sheep'? Or scorn the House of Lords (even while they are a member) as 'the home of the living dead'? How do they measure up to the likes of Hugh Gaitskell, Roy Jenkins, James Callaghan, in their bygone struggles to organise the economy of British capitalism into some kind of election-winning discipline? And would they, like Healey, churn out this stuff as a diversion to their day-time job?



Above: Healey. Right: Jowell

## Casinos

One of the casualties of this situation has been the Right Honourable Dame Tessa Jowell who was recently giving herself a higher chance of being adopted as the Labour Party candidate in the coming election to succeed Boris Johnson as Mayor of London but was defeated by Sadiq Khan. Jowell came into Parliament as the MP for Dulwich, a seat which she won in the 1992 election after a couple of attempts in Ilford North. That was a barren time for Labour and in opposition Jowell was appointed to a succession of Shadow jobs including one which named her as Labour's Spokesperson for Women. Blair's runaway victory in 1997 brought her bigger responsibility until after the 2001 election she replaced Chris Smith, who had been sacked, as Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport. Controversially, she proposed the establishment of a number of 'super-casinos', raising the temperature of the predictable row over her plans when she described her opponents as 'snobs' who were motivated by a resolve to deny 'ordinary people' the opportunity to gamble – a response dismissed by her fellow MP Frank Field as 'crass'.

## Iraq

In this acrimonious stand-off it could not have diverted her opponents to hear that her devotion to Blair was such that she would 'jump under a bus' for him. In fact at the time – February 2006 – it was not unlikely that a substantial number of people would not have demurred if Jowell had taken Blair with her beneath the bus; for one thing there was the shock and outrage after the exposure of the 'dodgy dossier' with its blatant lies about the war in Iraq. Shortly before then a couple of Jowell's constituents, driven to despair by her eager compliance in that war with its deception, its destruction and casualties, had written to Chris Mullins who was an MP for Sunderland, to complain that, among other matters, Jowell was 'just a rubber stamp with "Tony Blair" incised on its bottom'. But it seems that Blair was not impressed by Jowell's worshipful meanderings; she would have been dismayed by his opinion that she was merely 'lukewarm' towards New Labour. All these events were being observed by the smoulderingly impatient Gordon Brown who, when he eventually made it to Labour leader, subjected Jowell to a succession of humiliatingly minor governmental posts until 2009 when he

condescended to bring her back as Minister for the Cabinet Office. The entire process of events among those Labour leaders was a succession of cynical manoeuvres presented to us as examples of loyal consultancy and co-operation.

## Corruption

In conflict with the reassuringly comforting titles of the ministries she was involved in, Jowell's domestic life was not notable for its enduring bliss. Her first marriage, to another Camden councillor, was dissolved in 1976 but she kept the marital surname. In 1979 she married David Mills, described as an international corporate solicitor in the shadows of which he represented none other than Silvio Berlusconi who was then the Italian Prime Minister and who was liable to be entertained by Mills at posh London Clubs. Mills was investigated by the Italian authorities on suspicion of involvement in money laundering and tax fraud; inevitably Jowell was also of interest in these matters, which moved Mills to describe himself as 'an idiot'. In March 2006, to protect her political standing, they sepa-



rated and in 2009 a court in Italy sentenced Mills to four and a half years imprisonment for accepting a bribe from Berlusconi after giving false evidence in a trial for corruption. He appealed against this sentence and in 2010, after a series of applications, a Cassation Court dissolved the case under the Statute of Limitations and ordered Mills to pay €250,000 for damaging the reputation of the office of the

# Economics, politics and climate change



Damage to the environment is a major threat to the stability of human life on this planet, and moreover this is directly attributable to human activity. The truth is that we as human beings interfere with our environment – and this is not always with the most long-term awareness. From the forest clearances of the Neolithic and early Bronze Age through to the planned exploitation of the melting North Pole, we interact with this planet in a way which has a major impact on existing ecosystems. This is nothing new however – what is new is the extent to which we are now doing things which may be pushing us towards environmental tipping points and which may cause irreversible damage to the world we inhabit.

Human beings are not passively compliant with the environment. We are constantly intervening in and altering it, with profound consequences for other species. By some estimates, 140,000 species are going extinct every year, leading some to describe the modern era as the sixth great mass extinction event. We have to find some means by which we can ensure that this unavoidable interfering activity does not prejudice our continued safe existence on this planet.

Accepting that the environmental problems we face at the moment are as a result of human activity, some important questions arise. Firstly, what kind of economy and what kind of material expectations can we have that would enable us to live sustainably? Secondly, questions relating to the politics of any society that might persist in order to promote such sustainability.

## A bit of biochemistry

Material consumption on this planet undertook a step change starting with the industrial revolution in Britain, powered by cheap and accessible coal. Coal is fossilised wood from the Carboniferous period. The reason why there is so much wood from this period is that when trees first appeared on the planet the particular substance which gives wood its hardness, namely lignin, was something which no animal or plant was able to digest, and therefore for many millions of years when trees fell down, there were no bacteria or microorganisms that could recycle the wood into anything else, so they just stayed there and built up generation upon generation of trees on top of each other, finally being covered up and compressed under the earth and turning after millions of years to coal.

Trees and plant life are means of storing carbon. Trees absorb carbon dioxide and emit oxygen, and a simple look at the chemical equation demonstrates that the carbon is missing. The carbon is trapped within the tree and when a

tree decomposes or is burnt the carbon is given off and recombines with oxygen to give CO<sub>2</sub>. The Carboniferous period therefore represents a time when a huge amount of atmospheric carbon was removed and stored. This resulted in a very oxygen rich atmosphere which may in turn have allowed air breathing animals to emerge from the water. Since the dawn of the industrial revolution we have been burning fossil fuels and returning this trapped carbon to the atmosphere.

The foregoing is a quick and dirty outline of what has led us to the problem of the greenhouse effect: the atmosphere acts like glass in a greenhouse, letting in light from the sun during the day, but preventing the resulting heat from dissipating into space at night. This means that, as carbon and other greenhouse gases increase, the planet is warming up... and much of life on Earth is adapted to temperatures below those to which our global temperature appears to be heading. This should sound alarm bells. However this is simply one aspect of the corrosive impact of our activity on this planet. There is also toxicity in the air, earth and water; increasing acidification of the seas and air; degradation of our top soil and loss of drinking water. The list goes on with agrichemicals, hormones, antibiotics, radioactive waste, noise and light pollution.... Suffice to say we have arrived at a situation where we could well be on a downward slide.

## Markets and short-termism

As the world has become progressively global and markets especially so, much attention has centred on the actions of 'hot money'; hot because it doesn't stay in your hands for very long. Large amounts of this money swoop in and out of particular markets because there is a quick kill in sight. Commodities, financial markets and stock markets, futures, all variety of assets – any of these can be prey to a sudden rush or a loss of interest by investors. Financial investment computer packages are now built to identify these and play them accordingly. These minute fluctuations can result in huge payouts for big investors and large bonuses for the guy executing the deal. It's the casino economy in operation. This metaphor reveals much about the nature of this business, because few who enter a casino are looking to the longer term. Likewise, those who execute a split second investment decision are unlikely to be thinking about the potential impact it might have on the employees, or anyone else at all come to that. They are almost certainly not thinking about how this will play out in several months, and certainly not in years: rather grab the winnings and get out quick before something goes wrong.

Politicians of all colours repeatedly talk of 'rebalancing' this economy because

so much of this nation's earnings arise from exactly this kind of activity and, as the banking crisis showed, it can have its downside. However the power and attraction of City finance, of working on fine margins, of split second deals, are both too attractive and too lucrative: amongst the reasons that the greatly trumpeted market reforms amounted to not very much. Moreover these very financiers are often the funders of political parties and want those parties to reflect their interests in return for the cash donations.

But it reveals something deep about the thinking of our society; the thinking behind the throne in our society. It shows that the precept is to make money today and not think about tomorrow. And supposedly there is a theory to support it: as long as markets are free and traders can do what they want, then what happens will reflect the priorities of the active agents: supply and demand ensures that we get what we want and need. Or so we are told. But how is the future factored into this? How are the interests of our children added into the calculation? Where does their demand figure?

Viewed collectively, we are living in a great mansion where we are ripping out parts of the floor and walls to sling on the fires and are not worrying because the house has not yet fallen down. We are carrying on smoking because we haven't developed lung cancer yet...

If you have ever looked at a set of company accounts you'll notice that there is hardly ever anything beyond a five-year projection. Just to add to the mix, governments seldom last for more than 4-5 years. We want results, folks, and we want 'em now: what government ever swept to power on the ticket that things will be better in 25 years?

## Supplying Demand

Adam Smith is the daddy of much capitalist ideology and his view of supply and demand is seen to underpin much of the rhetoric which argues in support of the market system. However, even accepting the theory, for supply and demand to operate correctly all active agents must have perfect information: buyers must know all available options and their relative merits, and this information must be accurate and timely. However Adam Smith was writing in the days before the advent of the PR industry.

Starting in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the science of psychology was utilised in the cause of shaping public opinion, both spawning the PR world and heavily influencing advertising/propaganda. Welcome to the world of false consciousness writ large, a world where in the UK 98 percent of climate scientists assert the reality of human-made global warming whereas

many people still think it's a con. Perhaps as an example the fact that Exxon can offer \$10k to any scientist who publicly criticises the International Panel on Climate Change shows the way they can distort the picture...

Fossil fuel companies have an amazing track record of funding genuine-sounding groups with the sole intention of spreading confusion about climate change. In the same way that tobacco companies knew the dangers of their products way before they were revealed by Richard Doll's research in the 1950s, and pharma companies suppress negative test results, so we have fossil fuel giants distorting the debate with misinformation, personal diatribes, threats of legal action, and simple lies. The problem with supply and demand is that it assumes everyone is equally able to access information; it doesn't work if key players can tilt the playing field to their advantage. And as fossil fuel companies are in the game to make money, and as climate change information represents a threat to their money-making potential, they will use their power to damage it and deflect it; to minimise its impact on their business.

What is hard to understand about the climate change deniers is how they can reconcile their activities with the fact that they are exacerbating a problem which threatens them also, as well as their children and so forth. How can they act as if in some sense they might be able to breathe all this muck they have made; or they can buy another planet to live on? If there is anything in this climate change stuff – and everyone must accept it sounds like a risk – then do they not worry about the future at all? How can they park all these potential concerns?

Naomi Klein has suggested, plausibly, that it is because they cannot conceive of a world unlike this one; and so cannot countenance the idea that it has to change. Essentially they grasp that this system and environmental degradation are synonymous but that this system is the only means to support the life style and world view they have and therefore this system of consumption must be defended at all costs, even if that involves bringing down everything with it. Like the crazed old dictators of history who would rather the entire empire collapsed than they relinquished power, these capitalist titans would rather have it all smashed to smithereens than share any of it. Classic dog in a manger attitude, but with far worse consequences: I'd rather watch it all destroyed than hand it over and become like the rest of you...

## Where do we go from here

So, to summarise:

(1) Climate change (amongst other environmental threats) is happening and is a serious problem for all of us.



(2) Climate change has resulted from human activity.

(3) Capitalism by focussing on the short term is unlikely to take the longer term, and hence the environment, into account

(4) Capitalists and corporations will seek to distort the facts of the matter so they can carry on as usual

(5) Capitalists are ideologically blinkered against climate change since it exposes the dangers of capitalism as an environmental threat

What does this mean?

Firstly, that we cannot expect the problems to be solved within capitalism; all the powers tilt the opposite way. Consider the fact that this has been on the international agenda for 30 years and nothing has been achieved; emissions have increased over this period (and were only halted as an effect of the global recession). Additionally, note that the government has publicly stated that the environment must come second to the economy – but isn't that what got us into this mess?

Secondly, we cannot believe much of what we hear in the mainstream media.

Thirdly, the agenda of all Green groups and so-called leftwing parties, who seek to change things without completely scrapping this system, is a hiding to nothing. The approach advocated by the Green Party of tough regulation is a sham. If regulation worked, wouldn't big corporations be paying their taxes? The legal systems which govern these matters end up as the preserve of well-paid lawyers of whom the corporations have more than the governments.

Ultimately the issue of the environment is an issue of power: *who* has the power to determine what happens to this planet? Only in a society where we have the power to determine what can and cannot be done will we be able to stop this headlong rush to environmental devastation. That means a world of common ownership and democratic control. Anything else which anyone offers is merely using an Elastoplast to seal a volcano. Only socialism can deliver on the environment.

**HOWARD PILLOT**



# Neither Westminster nor Brussels but World Socialism

staff.

Delors and his Social Charter provoked Thatcher into her infamous Bruges speech on the future of Europe in September 1988 which would lead to the formation of the anti-EU Tory Bruges Group which would mutate into the Anti-Federalist League, and ultimately UKIP. The Thatcher Tory government refused to sign the EU Social Charter, and in October 1990 Thatcher spoke out firmly against the vision of European integration, including a 'single currency.' The capitalist class would remove Thatcher from power in November 1990. The Major Tory government signed the Maastricht Treaty on 7 February 1992 and the European Union came into effect on 1 November 1993.

A 2005 European Court of Justice decision in *Pfeiffer v Deutsches Rotes Kreuz* is explicit about the economic relationship between capital and labour: 'the worker must be regarded as the weaker party to the employment contract and it is therefore necessary to prevent the employer being in a position to disregard the intentions of the other party to the contract or to impose on that party a restriction of his rights without him having expressly given his consent in that regard...'

Such pro-worker decisions of a boom-time capitalism are threatened because of the world capitalist recession and Euro-zone crisis which began in 2008. Since the recent capitalist crisis began, a series of decisions determined by the European Court of Justice stress that industrial action by workers violates the employer's rights to freedom to provide services, as provided in the EU Treaty. The Court has also been intervening on the side of the capitalist class by using provisions on free movement against collective industrial action.

## Split in the capitalist class

The split in the capitalist class in Britain over membership of the EU

**T**he European Union (EU) is an institution for the economic interests of the European capitalist class, and their mantra is 'free movement of capital, goods, services and labour.' It was the European Round Table of Industrialists which included the chief executives of Daimler-Chrysler, Fiat, Nestlé, Renault, Siemens, BP, Rio Tinto and Rolls Royce who promoted further European integration in the 1980s and which led to the 1987 Single European Act.

The dominant elements of the capitalist class in Europe see an advantage in organising the economy of Europe on a continent-wide basis because the EU is an attempt to overcome the limits of developing the productive forces within Europe's

nation-states. The EU comprises 28 states and 500 million people, trades as a single market with eventually a single currency, and represents one-fifth of the world's GDP. The EU enables Europe to compete better with other global capitalist powers such as the USA, Russia, India, and China.

The EU and the EEC before it, was an attempt to move beyond war after two world wars had ravaged Europe. EEC founder Robert Schumann said 'make war not only unthinkable but materially impossible', and he proposed Franco-German co-production of coal and steel. The 1951 Treaty of Paris established the European Coal and Steel Community of France, West Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg. The European Coal and Steel Community would lead to the European Economic Community (EEC) also known as the 'Common Market', established by the 1957 Treaty of Rome.

### Social Charter

It is the concept of 'Social Europe' promoted by Jacques Delors (President of the European Commission 1985-95), which sections of the British capitalist class are opposed to. Delors even came to Britain to address the 1988 TUC conference where he stressed economic union must be matched by social union. The 'Social Charter', a Keynesian welfare state model based on full employment in capitalism was adopted at the 1989 European Council.

The Social Charter promoted improved living and working conditions, dialogue between management and labour, health and safety in working conditions, sex equality with regard to job opportunities and treatment at work, protection of pensioners and the unemployed, increased statutory maternity leave, a 48-hour maximum working week, and employment rights for part-time and temporary

is exemplified in the main UKIP policy which is to leave the EU. UKIP leader Nigel Farage is a former City commodity broker, and UKIP want the City of London excluded from EU controls, and the repeal of an EU directive on Alternative Investment Fund Managers which seeks to regulate hedge funds/private equity companies in the City. The EU generates such political heat because it brings no advantages to some elements of the capitalist class in Britain. On 8 August 2013 the *Times* reported on Business for Britain which claimed to have the backing of 500 influential figures, including FTSE 100 directors and the owners of smaller businesses. These supporters include Ian Cheshire, chief executive of Kingfisher, parent company of B&Q, Lord Wolfson, CEO of Next, John Caudwell, founder of Phones4U, Sir Rocco Forte, executive chairman of Rocco Forte Hotels, Tim Martin, chairman of pub group JD Wetherspoon, and Charlie Mullins, managing director of Pimlico Plumbers. They are all bosses of firms producing for the home market.

The majority of the capitalist class in Britain are export orientated businesses. In April 2013, the British Chambers of Commerce poll of 4,380 companies reported in *Bloomberg Business Week* that 18 percent felt leaving would be positive but 64 percent favoured Cameron renegotiating terms, 60 percent felt exiting would harm business, and even 23 percent wanted further EU integration. In May 2013 leading capitalists Martin Sorrel and Richard Branson opposed EU exit. Sorrell said 'Investors choose to build factories and locate their business here because of our access, not proximity to, but access to the single market.' John Cridland, Director-General of the CBI added 'the UK is best served inside a reformed EU, rather than outside with no influence. Access to the single market also been a magnet for investment from around the world. Being part of the EU has helped to make the

EU one of the leading locations for investment, in part because of our direct access to a market of more than 500 million people and an EU economy with a GDP of £9.75 trillion.' (*Guardian* 18 January 2014)

### Away from the Nation-State

Marx and Engels identified that 'the bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country' (*Manifesto of the Communist Party*) The 1995 European Court of Justice decision on free movement of labour for football players known as the Bosman Ruling means football clubs can sign any number of players from EU countries. The ECJ decision was based on EU Articles 45-48 where workers have the right to move freely and work anywhere in the EU without discrimination on grounds of nationality. It is very probable that Bosman helped Manchester United win the Champions League in 1999. British football pre-Bosman found themselves at a huge disadvantage in European competitions, they could only field three foreign players per match. Only five of the thirteen players who featured in Manchester United's 1999 Champions League victory were English. Before Bosman that team could never have set foot on the pitch.

European cinema of the 1980s and 90s is another testament to the 'cosmopolitan' character to production and consumption' with the popularity of French films such as *Diva*, *Betty Blue*, *Subway*, *The Big Blue*, *Jean de Florette*, *Manon des Sources*, *Nikita*, *Delicatessen*, the *Three Colours* trilogy, *Leon*, and *La Haine*; the Yugoslavian film *When Father was Away On Business*; Scandinavian films *My Life as a Dog*, *Babette's Feast*, and *Pelle the Conqueror*, and the Spanish cinema of Pedro Almodovar.

The EU

established the Schengen Area where passport controls are abolished although no surprise the UK opted out of this. On 1 January 2002, the EU introduced the Esperantist-named 'Euro' as the EU currency, again Britain opted out of this. As members of the EU Britons are entitled to the European Health Insurance Card which provides free health care in EU countries. Britain is already a semi-detached member of Europe but to exit entirely would possibly be to surrender to xenophobia and parochialism completely.

Marx in Brussels in his January 1848 speech *On the Question of Free Trade* said 'the protective system of our day is conservative, while the free trade system is destructive. It breaks up old nationalities and pushes the antagonism of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie to the extreme point. In a word, the free trade system hastens the social revolution.' Earlier, Marx had attended a free trade congress in Brussels in September 1847 for which he prepared a speech (which was never delivered). Engels wrote an account of the conference, summarising Marx's view, and a fragment of the speech dealing with protectionism has survived: 'If they (the protectionists) speak consciously and openly to the working class, then they summarise their philanthropy in the following words: It is better to be exploited by one's fellow-countrymen than by foreigners.' (*The Protectionists, the Free Traders and the Working Class*)

There are small benefits for some of the working class in Britain and those living abroad in the EU, other sections of the working class in Britain may benefit from leaving EU, but the majority of the working class will be unaffected by the dispute over the EU. The dispute within the British capitalist class has no class interest for workers. Whether British capitalism is in or out of the EU will make no real difference to their position as a class forced to work for a wage or a salary.

STEVE CLAYTON



Better inside, pissing out...?

# Peter Watkins: a Revolutionary Film-Maker

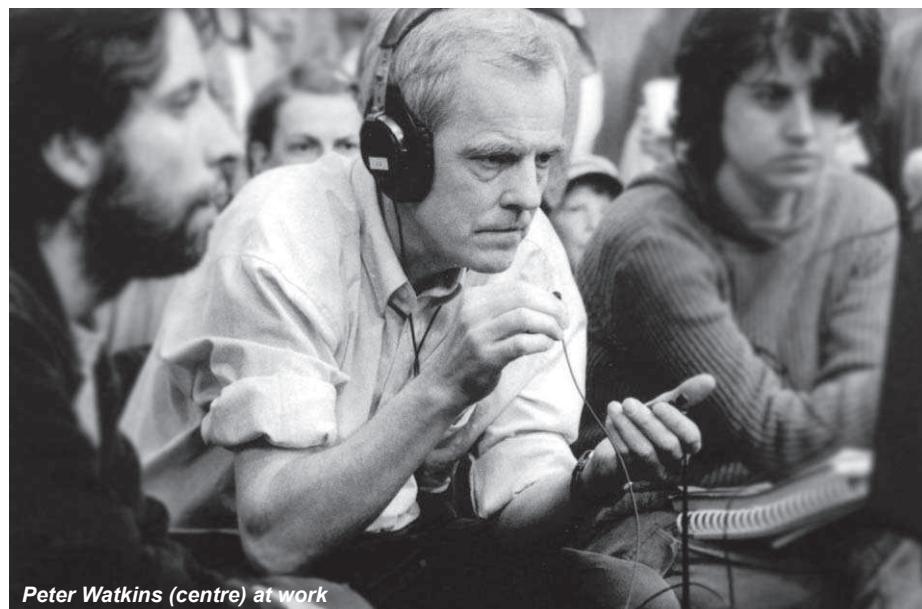
In the second part of our study of the work of Peter Watkins, we look at how his career as an independent film-maker challenged conventional trends.

Frustrated by the poor reception to *Privilege*, Watkins left Britain for Sweden to make his next film. *The Gladiators* (1969) continued the theme of the elite using the media to divert aggression, but instead of music, as in *Privilege*, here violence is the catalyst. Soldiers representing different states are sent to arenas to fight and compete against each other in missions. These 'Peace Games' are televised to massive international audiences. From the comfort of a country mansion, the generals of each side sit together watching the battles and amiably take turns to influence what their soldiers do. One of the strongest messages in *The Gladiators* is that soldiers of any side have more in common with each other than they do with their leaders.

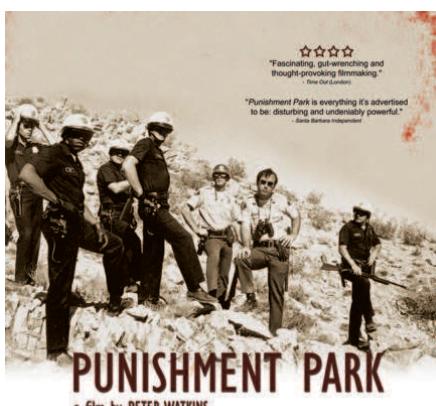
By the start of the 1970s, Watkins had relocated to America, where tensions between the state and the radical political scene were focused on the Vietnam War, the Kent State shootings, and threats to 'civil rights'. Watkins' response was to adapt the setting of *The Gladiators* – a remote arena run by the military – to create a scenario where the views of those disaffected and at risk from the state could be expressed.

*Punishment Park* (1971) followed two groups of militants – civil rights activists, poets, protest singers and draft-dodgers – held by the American police under the 1950 McCarran Act. This piece of real-life legislation allowed the government to detain people expected to cause subversion. Some of the characters were loosely based on those involved in the 'Chicago Trials' which followed countercultural protests at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. One of the sets of militants is on trial from a nationalist tribunal already sure of their guilt. The other prisoners have been sentenced, and have chosen to spend three days in 'punishment park' instead of lengthy prison stays. This is a torturous trek through 53 miles of desert, to reach an American flag within three days while being hunted by trigger-happy cops.

The drama was improvised by non-professional actors, mostly giving their own views in character, whether playing activists, police or draft-board judges. This approach gives the film a raw authenticity which led some viewers to assume that it



Peter Watkins (centre) at work



Above: *Punishment Park*. Below: the 'Chicago riots' of 1968



depicts real events. From this point in his career, Watkins's films would feature only non-professional actors, often improvising their dialogue.

*Punishment Park* received mixed reviews, variously describing it as a 'chilling prognosis', 'hypnotically gripping', and 'the pornography of hate' ([pwatkins.mnsi.net/punishment.htm](http://pwatkins.mnsi.net/punishment.htm)). Most film distributors decided that it would be too volatile to screen, and

consequently it was denied the impact it deserved.

Watkins' next film, released in 1974, was a biopic of Norwegian expressionist artist Edvard Munch. He first discovered Munch's work only a few years before, and felt that the marginalisation of his own work echoed Munch's experiences. The anger of his earlier films is more measured, targeted against repression rather than oppression. Munch's life and work was shaped by the strict social norms of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, as well as a constant threat of illness. The pace is more sedate than in Watkins' previous films, gradually building up a layered picture of what influenced Munch.

Watkins' films acknowledge the presence of the camera crew, especially in *Punishment Park* where they influence events, and even when this would be impossible within the drama, as in *Edvard Munch* and *Culloden*. His intention here was to remind the viewer that film-makers don't objectively and passively record events, but interpret them according to their own agendas. Watkins himself 'appears' in his films as a narrator.

Through the rest of the 1970s and 1980s, Watkins remained in Scandinavia, where he developed his theory of the 'Monoform' and produced films to counter its approach. The Monoform is the standard style of editing and directing films and television programmes, which only presents the film-maker's capitalist ideology, and

stifles alternative interpretations. His films in this period studied 'modern stress' among Danish families (*The Seventies People*, 1974), radioactive waste produced by consumerism (*The Trap*, 1975), protests against nuclear submarines (*Evening Land*, 1976), and public awareness of the threat of nuclear war (*The Journey*, 1987). As always, reviews and reactions were largely hostile, coming from those who supported the oppressive society which Watkins was attacking.

In the early 1990s, Watkins worked with students at the Nordens Folk High School in Sweden on a biopic of radical writer August Strindberg. *The Freethinker* 'has a complex internal structure, and moves in an unpredictable and seemingly random way between' different points in Strindberg's life, offering 'the audience an open-ended process allowing for individual and varied reaction' ([pwatkins.mnsi.net/freethinker.htm](http://pwatkins.mnsi.net/freethinker.htm)).

His 1999 film *La Commune (de Paris, 1871)* is political cinema at its best, and here Watkins attempts to counter the Monoform. Watkins identified that 'the Paris Commune has always been severely marginalised by the French education system, perhaps because it is a key event in the history of the European working class.'

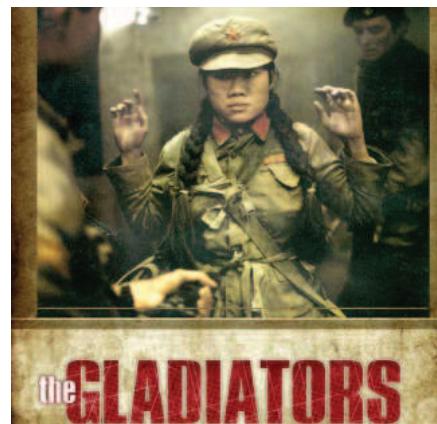
Watkins shot the film in black and white using digital video cameras in 13 days in an abandoned factory on the eastern edge of Paris in July 1999. There were over 220 people in the cast with approximately 60 percent of them having no prior acting experience.

In an effort to counter the Monoform, Watkins engaged in a democratic / collective experience during the filming; his overall objective was to present a collective voice, while the cast was involved in the film's preparation, and during the filming itself. Watkins rarely has the cast framed in close-up as individuals, usually there are at least two or three people in the frame at the same time thus allowing a group dynamic to develop. The cast step out of their roles from time to time to discuss the situation in 1999, and its links to the events of the Paris Commune, contributing to the telling of their own history, and bringing out the modernity of the Commune. They would also discuss what they would say, how they might feel, and how they would react to the events of the Commune which were about

to be filmed, externalising their true personalities and becoming the men and women of 1871.

Watkins brings the class struggle to the screen in his film of an attempt to create a better world. The Commune is not seen as a failure but the beginning of an idea of solidarity amongst people; he celebrates the Commune but its errors and its weaknesses are not hidden. The 375 minutes length of *La Commune* which runs counter to the Monoform ensured its complete marginalisation.

After *La Commune*, Watkins concluded 'We are now moving through a very bleak period in human history... , sheer greed engendered by the consumer society sweeping many people under its wing, human, economic and environmental catastrophe in the form of globalisation ... have synergistically created a world where ethics, morality, human collectivity, and commitment ... are considered "old fashioned"... In such a world as this, what happened in Paris in the spring of 1871 represented (and still



## **the GLADIATORS**

*The Gladiators shows that soldiers of any side have more in common with each other than they do with their leaders*

represents) the idea of commitment to a struggle for a better world, and of the need for some form of collective social Utopia.' He felt that *La Commune* should be seen as a tool for others to use in challenging the dominance of the 'Mass Audio Visual Media' (MAVM) industry.

Watkins sees direct links between the hierarchy and centralisation of the contemporary manipulative role of the MAVM and the globalisation of capitalism. He sees the rationale for the internal lengths and structures of the 'Universal Clock' (timing TV programmes according to adverts) as entirely commercial; they contribute to a loss of history, the increase of

hierarchical forces, and the passive acceptance of global capitalism. Watkins speaks of 'exploitative, morally corrupt free-market ideology sweeping aside everything before it.' In his view, the 'anti-globalisation movement' won't reach its full potential unless it challenges the MAVM.

Watkins published his theories as *The Media Crisis* (2004), a passionate critique of the Monoform and the lack of debate around the production of new audio visual media forms. His rejection of the dominant Monoform style, and his objections to the oppressive media industry which pushes it, has led to most of his films being marginalised and neglected. Consequently, his work hasn't had the exposure or influence it deserves. Despite this, his approach is echoed in films such as the critically acclaimed holocaust documentary film *Shoah* (1985) by Claude Lanzmann, which may be seen as counter to the Monoform. *Shoah* was 11 years in production and editing and released at a length of 613 minutes! Lanzmann used no historical footage, arranged many of the scenes, but not the testimony; the film was made without subtitles, voiceovers, questions and answers were kept on the soundtrack, along with the interpreters. Lanzmann matches the testimony to places, and the audience is encouraged to think about the historical actions of these men, but also the ethics of reflection.

With filming and editing technology now affordable to more people, and the internet as a means to distribute films without going through corporations with their own agendas, there is now more potential for people to produce films which express their own experiences and views.

Watkins should be recognised more among socialists not only for his critique of the power of the media, but also in suggesting a positive alternative style of film-making: docudramas largely improvised by non-professional actors, and a new way of organising society in opposition to global capitalism. His films concerning history, war, pop culture, the oppressive role of the state in capitalism, late 1960s radicalism, the Paris Commune, and the role of artists, are always relevant to socialists.

**MIKE FOSTER & STEVE CLAYTON**

# Growing Old, Growing Old

**We look at the way the older generation fare under capitalism, with poverty dominating the lives of so many**

A recent report by the Intergenerational Foundation pointed out how badly young people have fared over the last five years or so (*Guardian Online*, 11 July). The 'living wage' in Osborne's budget, for instance, will not apply to those under 25, and people under 21 will no longer automatically be entitled to housing benefit. The cost of getting a university degree is sky-rocketing, and the relatively small number of houses being built is a crucial reason why so many young people have little chance of buying their own homes. At the same time, people are living longer and the number of those over 65 is increasing, so the younger generation are supposedly being forced to pay for the pensions and other benefits of the elderly.

Setting one group of workers against another is a standard capitalist tactic to divert attention away from the real clash of interest in society, that between the tiny class of people who own the means of production and distribution and the rest of us. If workers' anger and resentment can be channelled towards immigrants or welfare scroungers or strikers, they are far less likely to hold the social system responsible for their problems. We are not saying that it is explicitly intended this way, but it fits into this whole paradigm to claim that the elderly are doing very nicely, while the young are in many cases mired in poverty with few prospects.

For the elderly suffer greatly under capitalism too. While there are retired workers who live reasonably on a workplace pension (having paid into it for thirty-odd years, mind), there are more who struggle to get by on the state pension and experience loneliness, isolation and poor health. The state currently pays a maximum of just £115.95 per week before tax, though there will be changes from April next year.

Back in 2002 a report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that redundancy or early retirement could have a devastating influence on how people fared in old age. This applied particularly to men who worked for fewer than five years in their fifties and who worked in jobs such as clerical or sales staff. Many of these were among the lowest-paid and also their employment was the most precarious. Things will hardly have changed for the better since then.

According to Age UK, just over a million people have a care need – perhaps as basic as assistance getting out of bed – but receive no help from the state or other agencies. Government funding for local councils' adult care budgets has been cut by a third since 2005–06, and further cuts are in the pipeline. These 'savings' may result in increased pressure on the NHS, as more elderly people go to hospital for emergency care. The government has now announced that it will not after all introduce rules to cap care costs, which means many elderly people will have to sell their homes in order to pay for care.

Towards the end of last year, Age UK reported that 1.6 million pensioners are living below the poverty line; many are entitled to extra state benefits but do not claim, whether through ignorance or pride. Bus passes and free medical prescriptions do not make up for this kind of suffering. In 2011 they produced a report *Living on a low income*

*in later life*, which noted, for instance, that many people 'went without holidays, stopped going out, did not replace household goods, and some took drastic action to reduce their heating and energy costs.'

One appalling indication of the extent of poverty among the elderly and their families is the rise in pauper's funerals, or public health funerals, to give them their official and less unsettling name (*Guardian Online*, 20 October 2014). The state funeral grant is means-tested and is just £700; with the average funeral costing around £4,000, many people cannot afford that or have to go to pay-day lenders to pay for a loved one's funeral. It's all very well saying that people can take out insurance, but frankly people don't, as this is hardly a priority for someone who is struggling to make ends meet anyway. Around one in seven have trouble meeting the costs of a funeral, and a pauper's funeral is the last resort for those who have no family or whose relatives are too poor.

The background is that all this care for the elderly costs the capitalist class, via the state, money. There were fewer than seven million pensioners in 1951, over ten million in 1992 and over twelve million now, with around six per cent of GDP paid out as state pensions. People are simply living longer, thus drawing their pensions for longer. One person in six is over sixty-five, and there are more pensioners than children under sixteen. One response has been to increase the state pension age: the 1995 Pensions Act meant that the pension age for women would increase gradually

from sixty to (if you were born in March 1953) sixty-three. More recent acts speeded up this increase, and the traditional pension age of sixty-five will also be scrapped, so that anyone born after 6 March

1961 will have to be sixty-seven before they qualify for a state pension. So the wage slavery of employment will last longer in future (provided you can get a job at all). And even receiving a pension may not mean the end of working: in 2011, 1.4 million people above the pension age were still working, primarily on grounds of poverty (up from 750,000 in 1993).

Moreover, increases to non-state pensions have since 2010 been based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI), not the Retail Price Index (RPI). These both measure the ups and downs of prices but, because of subtleties in the way the two indices are calculated, CPI is generally lower than RPI. As a result, pensioners are likely to lose out substantially over a period of several years. And final-salary pension schemes are becoming rarer, so the basis for calculating what a works pension will be worth is being reduced.

So it seems that, while the younger generation struggle with benefits, pay, education and housing, the elderly encounter comparable problems, of low incomes, poor health, choosing between eating and heating, isolation and loneliness. Traditional societies valued older people as a store of knowledge and experience, but under capitalism the elderly are seen as little more than unpaid child-minders for grandkids, and as a burden to be looked after as cheaply as possible.

**PAUL BENNETT**



**Above:** village elders in Milawi. Right: pauper's funeral



# Consumerism

If you have the money you can buy anything; from a can of baked beans to a Pacific island. But what does such 'ownership' signify? The right to define the future (immediate or indefinite) of what is purchased - the right to 'consume'. This relationship between humanity and the world humans created is the vital illusory component that sustains capitalism. Who or what gives anyone the right to consume that which is produced by another? It is as if those who produce do not exist, or rather, only exist to facilitate the relationship between product and consumer. That most consumers are also producers is entirely overlooked in terms of the ownership of what is produced. When workers walk out of the workplace they are immediately transformed into consumers surrounded by a seemingly limitless cornucopia of potential acquisition. They are confronted by the alienated fruits of their own labour; stolen from them by the use of the confidence trick called wage labour. Not only have they paid (labour) to create the products but they now are obliged to pay again (money) to retrieve them.

## Regulated theft

There is no point in attempting to formulate and trace the economic origins of 'private property' since this is merely

the history of regulated theft of which capitalism is the latest manifestation. The astonishing fact is that we live in a culture where those who do not produce own everything and those who do produce own almost nothing. Most are only vaguely aware of this and will shrug with a phrase similar to: 'it's always been like that'. If there is such a thing as 'human nature' then it is defined culturally and we can legitimately ask: what kind of being has consumerism produced? Is he/she content and happy? This question has to be rhetorical because we all know the answer. What then are the consequences of the internalisation of consumer culture on our relationships with others, and crucially, with ourselves?

The concept of the ownership of something you did not produce is irrational. That the decision of the fate of something that is made belongs to the producer is infinitely more sustainable both rationally and morally. To enter into a 'contract' that enables another to decide the future of what you have produced can only be the result of an unequal power relationship; and as such it has no moral integrity. To bring something into existence is surely the only rational base for its ownership. It follows that if, as now, most commodities are socially produced then they should be owned socially. The

basis of consumerism is to break that link completely; as if the children belong, not to the parents, but to the owners of the hospital and medication that facilitated the birth.

Paradoxically, and in an inversion of this absurdity, the concept that parents 'own' their children is a direct consequence of the internalisation of consumerism. From our inception we feel owned and as a consequence we seek ownership as validation of status. The emotional and financial expenditure of parents leads many to assume the rights of ownership in terms of the determination of their children's values and their right to, and type of, happiness.

Adult relationships tend to be a replay of this where the 'beloved' within an exclusive relationship is 'owned' by their partner. A glance at any dating web site will leave you in no doubt that what is being offered is a consumer choice of another who will 'complete you and give meaning to your life'. The child or the partner is conceived of as an accessory for a successful lifestyle. Like a flashy sports car others become an extension of the ego. And these are people we love; pity those who serve us in restaurants or on checkouts in supermarkets if they are tardy in their duties. Having paid our hard earned cash, god help anyone

who frustrates the ownership of the service or product we anticipate.

### Everybody's possession

Someone once asked me: 'Would I have to give my record collection to the people after the revolution?' Obviously this is a rather crude interpretation of a property-less culture since it conflates property with products; the former being defined as the means of social production and the latter being the commodities consumed. But it does illustrate the paradox of 'owning music'. We are all aware of the dramatic changes to the technology that mediates the arts. Our record collections are now replaced by 'i-tunes' and 'clouds' that store our favourite melodies. We acquire this music through the internet in a variety of ways, many of which are devoid of conventional payment and the subsequent ownership that defines old fashioned consumerism. The parasite class are furious about this loss of revenue but, in their and our

*John Lennon: said everybody owns music*



absence as the owner, who should define the fate of a recording? Does it become the 'intellectual property' of the musicians who made it? As was said earlier the only rational owner of anything is its creator. But once the decision is made to release music onto the internet those concerned realise it becomes the potential property of everybody – and, therefore, nobody.

Music could be finally returning to its creators – humanity. Those who have the talent to sing will sing, those who can play instruments will play them and those who like to listen will rock. No middleman can stamp his ownership on something as natural to humans as music. Such is the fate of the absurdity of the concept of ownership and consumerism. Technology, so long our master, has rescued us from our enslavement to it by helping to liberate our humanity – the need to transform the world in our work. But the dire warnings of our masters concerning 'piracy' and the immorality of not creating profits for them and 'the economy' still resonates in the ears of many. Capitalism cannot help but create its own demise and it is our duty (and pleasure) to point this out to the working class using such examples as the above. To quote John Lennon: 'Music is everybody's possession. It's only publishers who think that people own it.'

WEZ

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# cooking the books

### A classic reformist

WHEN JEREMY Corbyn appointed John McDonnell as Labour's Shadow Chancellor the media homed in on McDonnell's entry in *Who's Who* that one of his hobbies was 'fermenting the overthrow of capitalism.' Questioned about this by Jon Snow on Channel 4 on 14 September, McDonnell indicated that he didn't really envisage a literal 'overthrow' of capitalism, saying 'change is a gradual process; that's what socialism is all about. At the end of the day I do want to transform it.'

Snow followed up by asking 'is it actually the Shadow Chancellor's role to try to reform capitalism?' To which McDonnell responded:

'Yes it is. I think the Shadow Chancellor's role is to put forward an alternative to what's happening at the moment under our economic system that we've got.'

This is not the Marxism which the media has accused him of. It's classic reformism – the view that capitalism can be gradually transformed into socialism through a series of social reform measures – as advocated by Eduard Bernstein at the turn of the last century and eventually adopted by the Social Democratic parties of Europe.

It only seemed wildly radical to the media because of what the Labour Party has evolved into over the years – a party that openly accepts capitalism and projects itself merely as a better and more efficient alternative manager of the capitalist system than the Tories.

In his speech to the Labour Party conference in September McDonnell made no mention even of gradually transforming capitalism into socialism, let alone of overthrowing it. He only promised policies which he said would end austerity:

'We will dynamically grow our economy. We will strategically invest in the key industries and sectors that will deliver the sustainable long term growth that our country needs'.

Well, yes, of course, if there was growth then the government would not have to cut its spending – 'austerity' in its proper sense – as its tax revenues would automatically go up too, allowing it to continue spending at the same level. Governments were obliged to practise austerity as the crisis and consequent slump (the opposite of growth) meant that its tax revenues went down.

All supporters of capitalism realise that growth is the antidote to austerity, but the question is how to bring about growth? In fact can a government do this, 'grow the economy' as McDonnell put it?

In an interview on BBC 5 Live on 28 September, he remarked:

'If you look at our capitalist system, one of the definitive analysts of how it works – not whether it is condemned, or whether it is right or wrong, just the mechanics of how it works, when it was first formed and how it would be developed – actually was Marx.'

True, but a key aspect of Marx's analysis of the mechanics of capitalism is that governments cannot control its operation. Capitalism is governed by economic laws – capital accumulation before consumption personal and governmental, profits before people – which impose themselves on governments as an external necessity.

Government intervention cannot make capitalism work other than the way it does. But the claim that it can is the whole basis of McDonnell's policy (note that capitalist businesses and entrepreneurs are still going to exist, i.e. capitalism is):

'We will create what Marianna Mazzucato describes as the entrepreneurial state. A strategic state that works in partnership with businesses, entrepreneurs and workers to stimulate growth'.

This is what the Labour government under Harold Wilson that came into office in 1964 tried to do but its 'National Plan' was a miserable failure. Wilson blamed it on the gnomes of Zurich. Actually, it was the economic laws of capitalism wot done it – and would again if ever McDonnell becomes Chancellor.

## Pier Paolo Pasolini

Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-75) was murdered forty years ago on 2 November 1975. He was a heterodox Marxist, a poet, novelist, and film director of exquisite poetic cinema where he showed a natural sympathy for the sub-proletariat and peasantry.

Pasolini was a member of the Italian Communist Party (PCI). His 1948 novel *Il sogno di una cosa* (The Dream of Something) derived its title from Marx's letter to Ruge in September 1843; 'It will then become evident that the world has long dreamed of possessing something of which it has only to be conscious in order to possess it in reality'. Because of a homosexual scandal, Pasolini was expelled from the PCI in October 1949 'for moral unworthiness.' He retorted 'I am and will remain a Communist', and in every election Pasolini declared his support for the PCI. Enzo Siciliano writes 'to be a Communist was for Pasolini almost a fact of nature ... he believed with the strength of faith, that it was in communism that the instinct of self-preservation and the will to survive took form. For him ... communism had to do with love, and also making love.'

His formative ideological influence was Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), a founder of the PCI, whose *Quaderni dal carcere* (Prison Notebooks) were published in 1948. Pasolini's poem *Le ceneri di Gramsci* (The Ashes of Gramsci) written in 1954 'outlining the ideal that illuminates', is also a paean to Gramsci's 'rigour.' Like Gramsci, Pasolini believed in the idea of unifying consciousness through history. His poem is also a demand for a new morality whereby the individual would be salvaged in his entirety, in his specificity, and the pressing need for economic justice. Maurizio Viano in *The Left According to the Ashes of Gramsci* writes 'what attracted Pasolini was Gramsci's idea that intellectuals must engage in a pendular motion across the vertical spectrum of a class society, the duty of suturing high and low, mind and body.' This is what Pasolini aimed for in his first two films, *Accatone* (1961), and *Mamma Roma* (1962). They are naturalistic studies of dispossessed Roman sub-proletarian lives in slums using authenticity, and uncompromising raw poetry, depicting pimps, prostitutes, petty thieves, and the illusion of petit-bourgeois redemption.

*Teorema* released in 1968 demolishes bourgeois ideals, showing the aridity of the modern bourgeoisie where sexual repression and taboos hold the family and the capitalist social structure together. *Teorema* portrays a stranger who seduces the members of a bourgeois family; the maid, the son, the daughter, the mother, and the father. The father appears to be jealous but it is not clear if he is, as in the Oedipal scenario, jealous of the son, or whether he is jealous of the stranger for being able to do to the son what he, as the boy's father, incestuously desires. With seduction of the father, the



whole patriarchal and capitalist structure collapses. The father is stripped of his illusion, and strips himself of his property handing over his factory to the workers.

Pasolini shared Gramsci's faith in the revolutionary potential of the Italian peasantry. Gramsci wrote in *L'Ordine Nuovo* of 2 August 1919 that 'the peasant has always lived outside the rule of law, he has never had a juridical personality, nor a moral individuality. He lives on as an anarchic element, an independent atom in a chaotic tumult'. In his *Prison Notebooks* of 1935, Gramsci wrote 'folklore should be studied as a 'conception of the world and life' implicit to a large extent in determinate strata of society and in opposition to 'official' conceptions of the world.' Pasolini's 1970-74 *Trilogy of Life* which includes *Il Decameron*, *I Racconti di Canterbury* (Canterbury Tales), and *Il fiore delle mille e una notte* (Arabian Nights) portray his delight and celebration of demotic

folk tales and peasant life of pre-capitalist worlds. The *Trilogy* depicts a lost world of prelapsarian sexuality with no Freudian or religious guilt. *Arabian Nights* are dreamlike stories of love, potions and betrayal, filmed in Eritrea, Iran, Nepal, and Yemen. Here, Pasolini strips away Islamic proscriptive ideology to show a relaxed and euphoric delight in the act of love, appreciation of the human body, scenes of carnality smothered in the sounds of laughter in a magic universe watched over by 'Qada' or fate.

In 1975 Pasolini went from joy and vitality to deep mourning when he made *Salò o Le centoventi giornate di Sodoma* (Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom) which transposed the Marquis de Sade's 'psychopathia sexualis' to Mussolini's Fascist state of Salò in Northern Italy of 1943-45. Pasolini links Fascism with sadism, sexual licence and oppression, portraying the sadistic impulses of the bourgeoisie. A banker, a duke, a bishop and a judge inflict upon imprisoned teenagers in a series of Dantesque circles of hell - increasingly cruel sexual tortures ending in executions using four modes of current judicial killing - hanging, shooting, the garotte, and the electric chair. *Salò* is transgressive cinema, full of brutality and despair.

Shortly before his murder, Pasolini wrote, 'never has Marx's statement that capitalism transforms human dignity into exchange goods made more sense than today'.

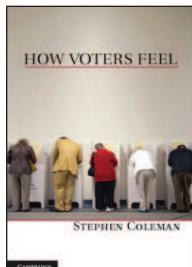
**STEVE CLAYTON**



*Teorema*, 1968

## The blank ballot

**How Voters Feel.** By Stephen Coleman. Cambridge University Press. Paperback at £18.99



Like every other social process within the current alienated form of society, voting has become thoroughly fetishised into a hollow shell, compared to its potential. By examining the subjective feelings around voting Stephen Coleman opens up the question of how valuable that process could once again become, were it to be returned from its current status of begrimed duty into the realm of exciting, engaging action.

*How Voters Feel* does not seek to address the question of economic democracy or the unbridled power of transnational corporations, though Coleman does make in passing the point that:

'Having no votes in the election of officials running the International Monetary Fund or World Bank, let alone private transnational corporations that are increasingly allowed free reign, voters understandably feel estranged from many of the most important sources of power over their lives.'

Nor does it set out to posit what function 'representative democracy' may or may not have in undoing the effective economic dictatorship over resources and power which currently excludes the majority of the population from any real control, and therefore engenders our demoralisation. Clearly, the parties which currently stand before the bulk of the electorate every few years are resoundingly united in seeking to manage that same economic dictatorship, as a cardinal matter of policy.

The book's aim is to explore the experience of voting and to consider how it might be resuscitated as a potential force for change, through the cultivation of a more democratic sensibility. Such a project is especially timely given the continuing disaffection during recent years, particularly of younger people, from the parliamentary system and voting in elections (other than those in the field of entertainment, with telephone voting buoyant and enthusiastic, despite being charged for, in television shows such as *The X Factor* or *Celebrity Big Brother*).

Modern capitalism has long

loved to sing of its own democratic credentials as supposedly evidenced by that magical moment of secrecy inside a wooden booth once every few years. Important as the idea of voting remains to any idea of democracy, it is nevertheless instructive to recognise how feeble a claim that is. True social democracy would take much more account of far more views, ideas, inputs and wishes than this tokenistic selection of one or other management team a couple of times per decade.

The early chapters of Coleman's book recount the history of modern representative democracy in Britain, the USA and elsewhere, from the viewpoint of the gradually enfranchised electorate. He explains, fascinatingly, how universal suffrage was initially perceived on all sides as a possible or even likely harbinger of major social change, and specifically of state intervention to try to ameliorate conditions for the impoverished majority. The century-long journey from aspiration to grim resignation on the part of the newly enfranchised majority, from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century, is excellently set out here.

The middle chapters (4-7) present a wealth of empirical evidence from original research consisting of sixty interviews with both voters and non-voters. A number of themes emerge from this. Voting has, in the modern period, become a private, secret and almost intimate activity, in contrast to the more public processes of previous periods. It is no coincidence that the cover of the book shows a photograph of American voters in Idaho, with their backs to us, in a neat row of cubicles looking amusingly as if they are engaging in that other universal yet 'private' activity of using a urinal or, in the case of the women, entering a toilet cubicle.

Amongst those interviewed, Coleman identifies the 'dutiful voters' who feel obliged to cast votes without any genuine expectations of a positive outcome, and the 'committed abstainers' who decline to vote and yet say they would resist bitterly any move to deprive them of their right to vote. He describes both of these groups as having given up on cultivating a vibrant relationship with their representatives. By his then also adding the observation how important it is for representatives to embody the feelings of those they represent, we seem to be invited to ponder how best to bolster and repair this system of specifically representative democracy.

Might it be even more useful to

interpret these failings as signifying the need to reappraise that concept of democracy? Both the 'dutiful voters' and the 'committed abstainers' have indeed a somewhat dysfunctional relationship with representative democracy, in that the former place excessive weight on that relationship, despite its failure, whilst the latter are incontrovertibly suspicious of the representational process, whilst holding out for its ideal. However, one might equally interpret this, especially in the latter case, as a healthy disregard for the idea of representation itself as compared with the hope of voting becoming less vicarious and part of something more participative, such as delegation and the idea of voting for ideas, or at least for delegates as cyphers for specific policies or actions.

There were also some respondents who on principle would go to vote but then either 'spoil' their ballot paper or leave it blank. This is in fact a long, noble and meaningful practice by those who simply wish to reject 'what's on offer' whilst registering the importance on principle of the vote itself, and in that regard this practice makes perfect sense. It is an option which was written about in the national press at the time of the 2015 general election in Britain, and may well be increasing. It is somewhat frustrating therefore that this practice is not given more attention in these pages than just one paragraph, which comments wryly that 'To speak of casting a blank ballot paper as a 'useful' act is intriguing. It signifies absence by presence; that the voter counts and yet cannot be counted ...'

Perhaps the most fascinating – and significant – section of the book is in chapter 8 which deals, amongst other areas, with the ways in which working-class children are socially conditioned into humility, and sets the challenge of how this might be reversed, to recreate a democratic sensibility comprising confidence both in self and in the prospect of change. Coleman explores many of the complex mechanisms through which 'children internalise the range of possibilities open to them in life.' There is, however, more inspection of the 'how' than the 'why' of this socialisation for subservience, and as a result the proscriptive parts of the chapter may be seen as somewhat optimistic:

If schools are to perform a useful role in preparing young people to play their part in democracy, this must entail conferring resources of hope upon those who have been routinely

and systematically persuaded to think of themselves as naturally or inevitably lacking voice or efficacy.'

Having worked in many schools and been made painfully aware of their specific *raison d'être*, I am less than sanguine about their potential role in spearheading this necessary surge in democratic sensibility. On the other hand, the enormity of the task of overcoming vast socially and psychologically conditioned subservience is even less plausibly seen as depending on the efforts of activism at the fringes of the current systems of universal education.

In all this as in so much else, it is the *class division* of present-day society which most strikingly both explains why meaningful and confident civic engagement by the economically weak majority is not encouraged by the education system, and offers a practical motivational form through which this might start to be redressed.

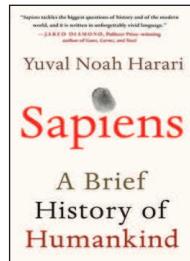
Does the book succeed at what it sets out to do? Absolutely. It is a challenging and at times specialised and complex, yet rewarding read. There are some key questions which it would have been clearly outside the remit of this book to probe. For example, from the point of view of those working to encourage speedy social revolution, is it desirable or an impedance to work to encourage engagement with the specifically parliamentarian and representative

model of democracy?

**CLIFFORD SLAPPER**

## Not So Wise

**Yuval Noah Harari: *Sapiens: a Brief History of Humankind.* Vintage £8.99.**



This is not a book to consult for a century-by-century chronicle of what happened in history. Rather, it provides an overview, focusing on some significant events and on what

Harari sees as important trends and principles. It is a good place to look, for instance, for a summary of recent research on the origin of *Homo sapiens* and our relation to other kinds of *Homo*. And it is instructive to learn that since 1500 the global population has increased about fourteen times, but the value of goods and services produced well over two hundred times.

The Agricultural Revolution about twelve thousand years ago led to a dramatic increase in population but was responsible for worse diets and harder work for most people. Hunter-gatherers were in less danger of disease and starvation than farmers, but it is not clear that this

warrants describing the Agricultural Revolution as 'history's biggest fraud'.

One point made several times is the crucial role played by co-operation. Humans are social animals and it takes a number of people to raise a child (single parents don't do so in isolation). We can co-operate in lots of different ways with large numbers of people. Yet Harari also argues that it is money that promotes trust and co-operation, ignoring the fact that there are plenty of instances of co-operation not involving money (such as mountain rescue, Wikipedia and the Socialist Party). And capitalism, with its wages system, involves coercion rather than co-operation.

Though he is well aware of the extent of suffering in both past and present, he is uncritically accepting of the current social set-up: 'The state and the market are the mother and father of the individual and the individual can survive only thanks to them. The market provides us with work, insurance and a pension'. But this is only because the state and the market are part of the dominant economic system, capitalism, and almost all production currently has to rely on them. It is human labour that provides food, homes, clothing and so on, not the state and the market.

In some cases his explanation for historical events is purely idealist. In the sixteenth century the Spanish

## Soldiering On

**D/IY SOS – Homes For Veterans** (BBC1) is the makeover show's 'biggest ever challenge'. Cheeky chappie presenter Nick Knowles and his team of builders,

technicians and volunteers have 12 days to renovate a dilapidated

terrace street in Manchester. This is to create a therapeutic and accessible community for ex-armed forces personnel with physical and mental health conditions.

It's striking that people choose to go into a profession that they're likely to leave with life-changing injuries and trauma. Presumably, filling your head with enough nationalism to kill for 'your' country, and living in a regimented bubble makes you accept the risks of being a soldier. Adapting from the army mindset back into civvy street can be enough of a struggle, even without additional problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder, brain damage or the loss of a limb, as suffered by tens of thousands of armed forces personnel. If their mobility has been affected, then the home they move back to needs to be made more accessible. The houses being renovated on *D/IY SOS* are purpose-built around the veterans' needs, almost uniquely. Ex-soldier John has anxiety and flashbacks triggered by loud noises, which have put pressures on his family life. In his new home, the front room has been

designed to make him feel more settled, and his bedroom has been soundproofed to improve his sleep.

Perhaps there has always been an epidemic of post-traumatic stress disorder among ex-service personnel, and now it's just recognised more. This doesn't mean that everyone suffering from PTSD gets treatment and support for it, or even any kind of housing. Around 9,000 ex-soldiers are homeless, having been abandoned by the state they fought for. So, only a few of the people in need will benefit from *D/IY SOS*'s community.

The cornerstones of any programme like this are the snappily-edited race against time to get the work done, the blokey builders' banter, and the emotional reveal of the new homes. The 'blitz spirit' is evoked more than once, although not in the context of it being another military slaughter. The only break from the formula is a visit by princes William and Harry, figureheads of the society which creates the wars these veterans have been victims of. We shouldn't be too cynical, though.

Projects like this remind us that people are happy to co-operate and volunteer to help others. But it would still be better to work towards a society which doesn't create the need for wars, nor institutions like the armed forces.

**MIKE FOSTER**



## Meetings

invaders conquered the Aztecs and then the Incas, supposedly because the Incas had a purely parochial outlook and were unaware of the fate of the Aztecs. Nothing to do, then, with the fact that the Spanish had guns and horses, which they did not (horses not being native to the Americas).

Unfortunately, when he discusses economics and anything related to Marxism, Harari goes well astray. For instance, he believes that any factory worker who buys some shares thereby becomes a capitalist. He gives an astonishingly simplistic presentation of the idea that banks can create credit. He sees the 'Soviet Union' as an attempt to implement the principle 'From each according to ability, to each according to need'. As this last example suggests, he unquestioningly accepts that Marxism means Bolshevism, and he sees Communism as a religion (defined as 'a system of human norms and values that is founded on a belief in a superhuman order'). This 'superhuman order' is some unspecified 'law of nature' allegedly discovered by Marx, Engels and Lenin. Communism, he asserts, does not call itself a religion but an ideology: this is quite wrong, though, since for Marx an ideology is a theory that offers a distorted view of reality (such as the view that workers are paid in wages the full value of what they produce).

So this is an interesting and stimulating read, but it also contains much that is misleading or just plain wrong.

PB

## 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

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

### Socialist Party Head Office

Sunday 1 November 3.00pm  
'Some Ideological Obstacles to Societal Transformation'  
Guest speaker (from the USA): Yehudi Webster  
52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN

Speaker: Adam Buick (Socialist Party of Great Britain). The Mitre pub, (upstairs function room) 17 High Street, corner of Turl Street, Oxford OX1 4AG

### West London Branch

Tuesday 3 November 8pm  
DISCUSSION ON THE WAR IN SYRIA  
Committee Room, Chiswick Town Hall,  
Heathfield Terrace, London W4 4JN

### Yorkshire Regional Branch

Saturday 21 November 1.00pm  
'Europe and the Left: How should Socialists vote in Referendum'  
Paul Bennett (Socialist Party of Great Britain) will contribute to the forum on attitudes to the EU Referendum. Hosted by Wakefield Socialist History Group. The Red Shed, 18 Vicarage Street, Wakefield WF1 1QX

### North London Branch

Saturday 7 November 11.00am to 1.00pm  
Wood Green street stall  
Near Wood Green Library, 187 High Road,  
London N22 6XD

### Socialist Party Head Office

Sunday 29 November 3.00pm  
'Charity: capitalism's little helper'  
Guest speaker: Glen Morris  
52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN

### Kent & Sussex Regional Branch

Wednesday 11 November 7.30-9.30pm  
'Labour and the same old story: Corbyn's empty promise'  
The Brighton Centre, Roof Room (lift available), North Road, Brighton BN1 1YD

### East Anglia Regional Branch

Saturday 12 December 2.00pm  
'The Argument Clinic: Logical Fallacies and Cognitive Biases: How thinking about thinking can help give new perspectives to old arguments' – a workshop  
Speaker: Darren Poynton. The Windmill Pub, Knox Road, Norwich, NR1 4LQ.

### East Anglia Regional Branch

Saturday 14 November 12 noon-4.00pm  
Business and discussion meeting  
The Windmill Pub, Knox Road, Norwich, NR1 4LQ

### Socialist Party Head Office

Sunday 15 November 3.00pm  
'Anthropology and the Human Subject'  
Guest speaker: Brian Morris  
52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN

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### West London Branch

Tuesday 17 November 8pm  
CAPITALISM AND CLIMATE CHANGE  
Speaker: Oliver Bond  
Committee Room, Chiswick Town Hall,  
Heathfield Terrace, London W4 4JN

### Oxford Communist Corresponding Society

Thursday, 19 November 7.30pm  
'No need to compare apples and oranges: the case against Economic Calculation'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# 50 Years Ago

## Indian A-Bomb

THE PLAIN fact about the Indian government's much publicised decision, several years ago, not to produce an atomic bomb is that it is too good to be true. And so it is turning out. India's renunciation meant that some people thought of her as a country where human interests were put above those of narrow nationalism. India was held up as an example for the rest of the sabre-rattling world to follow.

This has never been consistent with the way India acted over, say Goa and Kashmir — incidents which made Delhi's attitude to atomic weapon look suspiciously like one inspired by anything but humanitarianism.

In any case, the Indian government always made it clear that, if the international situation demanded it, they would make the Bomb. For a long time they have been working on the basics of a nuclear weapon — their separation plant near Bombay, which

produces plutonium, has been working for over a year.

And now comes the news from New Delhi that the pressure from Indian military and political circles to make the Bomb is growing,

ing, and that (according to *The Guardian* of 27th September last) the first one may be exploded sometime next year.

The campaign in favour of an Indian Bomb, to go with the rest in the world, has gathered strength from recent events. Indian military men complain that Pakistan had the advantage of advanced American weapons in the fighting in Kashmir, and that the threat from China looms ever larger.

They also claim that the old argument, that the Bomb was too expensive, has been disproved. The estimated cost is now around £20 million. There is no record yet of anyone in India protesting at this sort of money being spent on weapons by a country which has such a chronic problem of hunger and disease.

Such considerations are irrelevant. The reasons for making the Bomb are always the same; one senior Indian officer summed them up: ". . . if national interests are at stake . . . we have no alternative but to go ahead."

Everyone is familiar now with the argument of "national interests". It is used to excuse any suffering, any atrocity, any betrayal. It is an argument which will be used by many nations if and when a global nuclear war ever starts.

(from News in Review, *Socialist Standard*, November 1965)



Indian troops in the 1965 war with Pakistan

# ACTION REPLAY

## Online gambling: getting the punters hooked

WITH ONLINE gambling amounting to over £2 billion a year, the number in danger of gambling addiction has grown. There could be as many as one million at risk.

Since online gambling was freed-up by Tony Blair's government in 2005 the gambling firms' strategy has been to recruit new consumers from the professions (including women). Dr Henrietta Bowden-Jones, founder and director of the National Problem Gambling Clinic, has said more women are gambling than ever before. 'The introduction of online gambling has brought into the home an activity that was historically male-dominated.'

Betting firms still continue with their traditional working-class betting shop users but want to maximise profits by the introduction of fixed-odds gaming machines. Labour MP Kelvin Hopkins has said: 'I have been very concerned about alcoholism for a long time, but problem gambling is just as bad.'

Microgaming Software Systems Ltd, created the world's first online casino 20 years ago, and now boasts a multimillion pound turnover. Their website states they are 'the world's largest provider' of online



gaming software. Ladbrokes and 32Red are among the many online casino operators it supplies. Almost anything can be gambled online 24/7: lottery tickets, bingo, slot machine-style games, poker and football pools plus sporting events worldwide.

Ladbrokes chief executive Richard Glynn has boasted that his company offered up to 800 football matches per week for 'bet in play', leading the market with more games to gamble on than any of its rivals.

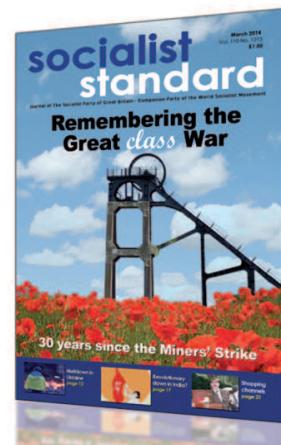
Ironically, the government risked missing out on increased tax revenues coming from this growth as most of the big-name bookies are based overseas. However, since the end of last year a change in the law has meant that the online business has been obliged to pay an estimated extra £300 million a year in UK taxes.

Charities are critical of celebrities glamorising gambling. The Australian cricketer Shane Warne promotes gambling via twitter while Ray Winstone, the face of Bet 65, regularly features at half-time intervals urging punters to 'bet in play, now'.

Want an example of the human cost of on line gambling? In 2013 Jack Keylock, 22, from Cheltenham was jailed for 18 months at Gloucester Crown Court. Jack had resorted to burglary to pay debts run up while gambling online. KEVIN

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# Voice from the Back

## Time on their hands

'Have Half a Million Dollars? Here's a Massive Roger Dubuis Pocket Watch. Roger Dubuis is a brand that's never shy. If you're a fan, you probably use adjectives like *bold* and *pioneering* to describe the ornately skeletonized watches that come from the Geneva-based manufacturer. If you're not a fan, *florid* might seem a less generous description. Whatever your taste though, there's no denying that the new Excalibur Spider Pocket Time Instrument is flat-out insane' (bloomberg.com, 5 October). There are billions of reasons why this is mad. Here are just 600 million of them, the number, in India alone, of people who defecate in the open. Workers of the world wake up. Pull the chain on this system of obscene wealth and abject poverty.

## Hajj Hell

Estimates vary as to how many paid the ultimate price and lost their lives in the rush to submit. The feudalistic theocracy of Saudi Arabia said 769 died in the crush, the Associated Press counted at least 1,453 and Iran over 4,700. Whatever the exact number, the history of the hajj, past, present and future, is tragic. Who is to blame? Mohammed? No, even though, unlike Jesus, there is convincing evidence he lived, we cannot really blame a man long dead. The moronic mullahs who failed to give advance warning of the impending

deaths? No, because they cannot see the future any more than eBible Fellowship leader Chris McCann who stated the world would pass away on 7 October. But, according to one report, a class element is involved: the two waves of pilgrims converged on a narrow road 'which had been partly closed to allow a VIP Saudi prince to jump the cue [sic] causing people to suffocate or be trampled to death' (dissidentvoice.org, 7 October).

## Stephen Hawking boldly goes.... socialist?

'If machines produce everything we need, the outcome will depend on how things are distributed. Everyone can enjoy a life of luxurious leisure if the machine-produced wealth is shared, or most people can end up miserably poor if the machine-owners successfully lobby against wealth redistribution. So far, the trend seems to be toward the second option, with technology driving ever-increasing inequality' (huffingtonpost.com, 10 October). Socialists, preferring the first option, are not ashamed to appropriate Healey's First Law of Holes to remind fellow members of the working class to stop digging. A world of free access and production for use not profit is ours for the taking. Make it so!

## Moore nonsense

Meaningful change cannot come about through leaders, chasing reforms or minority action. Michael Moore disagrees: 'it doesn't take a lot; just a few people have got to do something, not a lot of people. No change has ever occurred with the masses doing it. Fewer than 25 percent supported the American Revolution in the Colonies, right? Jesus has 12 guys that fished!' (cbsnews.com, 2 October). But only the masses can do it! Meanwhile, in the words of William Morris, 'our business... is the making of socialists, i.e., convincing people that socialism is good for them and is possible. When we have enough people of that way of thinking, they will find out

what action is necessary for putting their principles into practice. Until we have that mass of opinion, action for a general change that will benefit the whole people is impossible.'

## \$mith & We\$\$on

Moore is in favour of more gun controls. The manufacturers are too, as such talk improves sales. 'Renewed calls for tougher gun control laws sent gun stocks surging on Monday as investors expected an increase in gun sales. The value of Smith & Wesson's shares went up by 7.29% and Sturm, Ruger & Co increased by 2.75%. It was another good day for gun stock investors. Overall this year, the value of Smith & Wesson's shares has increased by more than 80% and that of Sturm, Ruger increased by more than 60% – making them some of the best-performing stocks of 2015' (Guardian, 5 October).



## Clueless capitalist

'Lord Sugar says today's poor have never had it so good, with mobile phones, computers and televisions making a mockery of claims of deprivation' (Daily Telegraph, 4 October). Just 85 capitalists have accumulated as much wealth between them as half the world's total population combined. Yet the 99 percent suffer poverty because they, unlike the capitalists, do not have direct access to the means of production and distribution.

## FREE LUNCH

