

# socialist standard

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THE MYTH OF



RED  
OCTOBER

**also: *The Real Revolution  
Ideology & Revolution***



# socialist standard

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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.

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## What socialism is really about

PRIOR TO the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, there was an understanding among many workers, that socialism was a society of common ownership of the means of living where the state, money and national frontiers would be rendered obsolete, and that it could be established peacefully and democratically.

That all changed after the Bolsheviks seized power. The Bolshevik leaders understood that socialism could only be achieved worldwide and hoped that the revolution would spread to the West. Lenin admitted that what existed in the new Soviet state was really state capitalism. After the failure of similar uprisings in Europe, their hopes were dashed. Stalin, as the new Soviet leader, came to terms with this reality by promulgating the theory of 'Socialism in One Country' to describe the regime.

Therefore, the prevailing view of socialism was no longer a world society of human cooperation and freedom, but a state capitalist dictatorship imposed on its population. It would not be brought about by a socialist, conscious working class but by a vanguard party leading the working class through a violent uprising.

'Communist' parties were formed worldwide and had become mouthpieces of the new regime and were influential in the trade unions and had some electoral success in countries such as France and Italy. This allowed governments and employers to claim that the 'Communists' were behind many strikes and other manifestations of working class discontent. One example was that during the 1966 seamen's strike, Harold Wilson, the Labour Prime Minister, alleged that the latter had been taken over by the 'Communists'. Trotskyist and Maoist groups, although critical of the Soviet regime, still defended state capitalism in the guise of 'socialism' and the tactic of a vanguard party leading the working class to revolution.

However, events like the violent suppression of the Kronstadt rebellion in 1921, the Stalinist purges in the 1930s, the crushing of the Hungarian uprising in 1956, the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the existence of prison camps in Siberia exposed the oppressive nature of the Soviet regime, where workers lacked trade union and other rights.

Not only was the USSR a political

dictatorship, its economy was falling behind those of the Western countries too, and the living standards of its workers were low in comparison to Western workers. When the USSR finally collapsed, supporters of private-enterprise capitalism were not slow in proclaiming that not only had socialism been oppressive and economically inefficient, but that it no longer worked and that there was no alternative to the free market. Unfortunately, this tenet has defined global politics for at least the last quarter of a century. Many workers who looked for radical change became disillusioned and either dropped out of politics altogether or settled for more mainstream reformist parties.

Needless to say, this has all made it rather more difficult for the Socialist Party to get our message across. However, capitalism always throws up social problems for the working class, and therefore it draws workers into political action. We are confident that more workers will come to see through the fiction that the USSR was ever a 'socialist state' and come to understand what socialism is really about.

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## Subscription-based capitalism

EVERYONE KNOWS that cutting costs means boosting or at least safeguarding profits, and some elements in the capitalist class are now figuring out that they can cut their administration costs by doing away with individual purchase transactions and moving towards a subscription-based business model.

We're familiar with subscriptions with things like unions, clubs, political parties, rail travel, telephone lines and mobiles and newspapers. You could add the BBC TV licence fee, the NHS and any kind of insurance policy too. One can think of a subscription as another form of rent for something you use but don't own. The advantage to you is simplicity. The advantage to the provider is low admin costs, locked-in customers or 'members', and reliable, predictable income, an especially bankable asset for any business.

So now we have Netflix subscriptions, and Spotify and iTunes. Software houses like Microsoft and Adobe, tired of having to market every update and sell it all over again to customers who don't need it, have moved over to subscription-based models. You can't buy the software, you can only rent it, but the updates are all free.

Perhaps no surprise that the founder of Netflix now wants to do the same thing with cinemas (BBC Online, 8 September, <http://tinyurl.com/yabwqfd4>).

The subscription model was always practical for retail areas that were steady and largely unchanging. What's new is that the model can now be applied to areas of fluctuating demand and usage, thanks to sophisticated real-time transaction monitoring within a fully-connected and automated banking system. Just how far can this model go? What if it goes all the way?

Recently technology has facilitated the rise of the so-called Platform service, an aggregation of small or sole traders onto one centralised commercial hub which gives them access for a fee to a level of marketing, market reach and financial administration that would be beyond them as individuals. Think Uber, and the ubiquitous Just Eat, now appearing on every high street. Think eBay, and Airbnb, and Facebook and Google, all matchmaking buyer to seller and streamlining the transactional process.

People who have multiple debts and at least some hope of being able to pay them already know that they can consolidate these disparate debts, with their varying rates and payment terms, into one central

pot. This makes it simpler for them, and works for the debtors too.

Suppose, on the same principle, a new cloud-based super-Platform service arises which offers to consolidate ALL your living expenses including rent, food budget, fuel, education, entertainment, holidays, even savings, into one monthly sub, which amounts to most or perhaps even the whole of your wage. So your wage doesn't go to you, it goes to the Hub, and you don't need to think about money at all unless you want to buy something that's not in the budget. This might then be automatically negotiated as an overall rearrangement in your Hub payment, with less going to savings, holidays etc. You wouldn't have to worry about whether you could pay back a debt because you wouldn't be allowed to accrue any debts. The only thing you'd need to worry about is not losing your job and being unable to pay your monthly life subscription. If you underspend carefully, you'll be in credit and more goes into your savings. If you overspend, then once your savings and holiday funds are gone you will not be able to buy anything as the Hub will not allow it, but will instead place you 'in administration'. What this might involve is anybody's guess. The experience could be like being strangled by your own dog lead.

Well, so what, you might ask. Maybe capitalism will go down this road, maybe it won't. How does this change anything?

Well that's the interesting question, from a socialist point of view. What a subscription does is decouple the act of consumption from the act of transaction. To an outsider who does not see the monthly, digital payment that takes place behind the scenes, normal everyday consumption would look as if it was free. You get a train ticket: no charge. You get breakfast on the train: no charge. You go to the movies, buy a dress, have a couple of G&Ts in a wine-bar, take a taxi home, order a takeout: no charge.

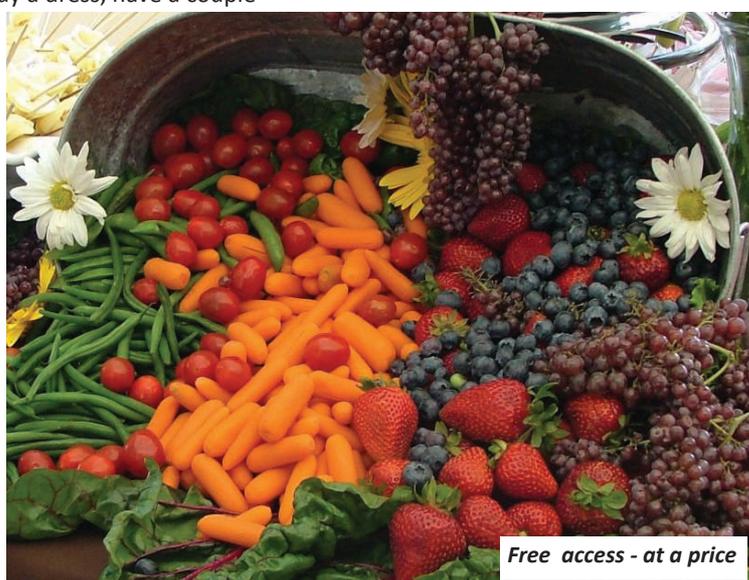
In other words, it would look like a society of free access, and subscribers would grow accustomed to a culture and an expectation of free access. Even though it isn't free, it would look and feel that way.

Paying real cash would come to be seen as weird and unnatural. And perhaps in order to cut admin costs ever further, the Hub would start to make some cheap things *actually* free, the way supermarkets offer free taxi phones and trains offer free newspapers. Over time, the expectation may be one of increasing levels of service and free elements, versus stable or lowering subscription rates.

The subjective experience of such a subscription-based world would be a life without paying for things, without cash or card transactions, where money becomes invisible and, in practice, non-existent. All that would remain is the single subscription, the Life Bond.

Could all this help socialist ideas to prosper, if we don't get a revolution in the meantime through other means? What it could do is reduce the conceptual gap. Life as it is presently experienced in capitalism is a matter of being caught fast in a giant web of debts and financial obligations. It's hard to see how you can sever all the bonds that hold you to capitalism, in fact it seems impossible. But one single connection is a different matter. Then the task becomes conceptually easier. Instead of hacking your way out of a limitless financial mesh, you are invited to cut just one cord, the golden leash that binds you. For the rest, you are already accustomed to free access, so instead of being some frightening leap in the dark, socialism represents a world of familiarity and continuity, something you almost had anyway but not quite, and not for real. Thus, Day One of socialism could mean, for many people, continuing largely as they did before, the only material difference being that they would not be required to worry about subscriptions, or the means to service them, ever again.

**PJS**



Free access - at a price

## Is Marx's analysis of capitalism relevant today?

Dear Editors

The article 'Analysing an economic system' (*Socialist Standard*, September) closes with the words: [today] Marx's *Capital* remains valid and relevant. Well sure as his analysis is valid—correct, and Wall Street spivs confirm this, but as a political weapon for workers...well, increasing less so. The irony is that perhaps Marx's *Capital* is more relevant to 'city types' than to workers. Marx's illuminations to workers (and 'city types') on capitalism: its exploitation, surplus value, its transitory existence, its contradictions—and your point on behalf of Marx, that it's iron-clad rules (economic laws) have not changed over time...etc., etc., are interesting to academics and economists, but for workers today—h'mmm?

Has Marx's analysis in *Capital*, as a value to workers for change, been surpassed by the actual practical workers experience of capitalism today in that today there is increasingly developing an impossibilist situation *reality* for most workers in the West that cannot be turned around or alleviated by social reformers or by capitalists themselves wishing to preserve their society in a Keynes moment? This to be quickly followed by others in China and India and emerging Africa and is this a development which Marx himself would have relished? Practical experience over theory and idea.

So who cares how it works, knowing that it doesn't work and it cannot be made to work by 'romantic fixers' is knowing enough, the experienced reality that it does not work is by far the better educator for workers. Therefore, should SPGB and World Socialist Movement workers and Trade Unionists etc., etc., speak less of Marx and more point out the fact that it cannot be made to work and what it might be replaced with? To highlight how we might do things differently post capitalism is not to become the little cook in his/her cookshop churning out blueprints for some far-off future—the future is here and now. It's time to start cooking! Let us all set out our vision of Socialist Society—*free society* and let us set in motion an on-line discussion and the World Socialist Movement set up another website for this very purpose; you don't have to insist on party membership to participate—being a member of the working class ought to be sufficient.

In the West jobs are disappearing to Far East workers and technology and never to come back, wages are sinking never to come up, pensions are a pittance and

State benefits practically non-existent—certainly diminishing rapidly, and bills for food, rent, clothing and childcare and leisure etc., etc., keep rising and more and more we work longer and longer hours and many in more than one job. The global capitalist economy has created too many workers needing to earn a living—and increasing that number by hundreds of thousands if not millions daily and capitalists cannot meet that need for employment and on wages adequate for everyday bills never mind decent living. Life is no fun for capitalists themselves, they cannot in general make an acceptable profit (acceptable to them) hence more and more tax dodging (legal, illegal and with permission), calls for set-up and maintenance grants, thus they can no longer afford to maintain their States, thus cuts (or austerity) in health, education and council spending and no way can any of these trends be halted never mind reversed. Two cases in point: UK trains and main energy supplier corporations for their size, customer base and capital input cannot make acceptable profits for dividend expectations and this with UK government subsidies for infrastructure maintenance and upgrades. Even the mighty Apple Corporation is fast losing ground to Samsung and Huawei and up-and-coming others.

With the present state of technological development maximised by capitalists this perilous state of Western workers will soon befall those in China and India, and thus well over half the globe's workers will be affected and feel threatened and angry—out of a job and their only source of income.

Endless talk about Marx and his illuminations are not going to get the job done.

Of course Marx and his dialectical method is invaluable for moving forward and we should be applying this method to everyday problems facing the globe as examples. Brush-up here:

[www.nyu.edu/projects/ollman/books/index.php](http://www.nyu.edu/projects/ollman/books/index.php)

WILLIAM DUNN, Glasgow

Reply:

So you like the dialectic but not the much simpler theory of surplus value!

Certainly experience has shown more than any book that capitalism can't work in the interest of the majority class of wage and salary workers and their dependants. And you are right that in the end, as long as people realise this, they don't really need to know exactly why – though having some idea why would avoid the risk of being misled by radical-sounding reformists. As you say, understanding this is the basis of the case for socialism. The deduction from 'capitalism can't be reformed to work for the majority' is that the majority needs to consider what different system of society would work in their interest. Which is where socialists come in. Experience does not automatically lead to understanding; reflection has to intervene whether this involves talking to others or reading.

Marx's analysis – whether in his own words or in popularisations – is a key weapon in the socialist arsenal in the battle of ideas against capitalism. Agreed, we also need to present the alternative, which the second article in the same issue, 'A World Without Commodities', did. The discussion forum you call for already exists and can be found at: [worldsocialism.org/spgb/forum](http://worldsocialism.org/spgb/forum).

Capitalism, at least in the West, is in a bad state compared to in some earlier periods, but whether we can conclude that 'wages are shrinking never to come up again' or that unemployment is to go on growing and growing is another matter. Of course, even if wages do go up again and unemployment goes down the case against capitalism remains valid. Capitalism will still be based on the exploitation of wage-labour for surplus value (as Marx explained in detail) and it will still be impossible to make it work in the interests of the majority – *Editors*.

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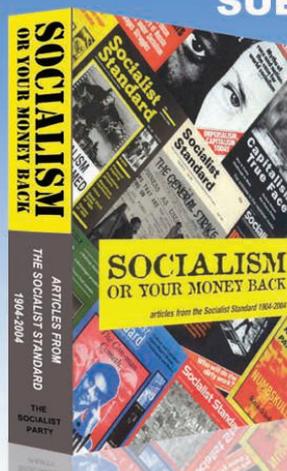
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THE INDEPENDENT



# Russia 1917 - as we saw it

*It was not until August 1918 that the Socialist Standard offered a considered opinion, and only on the basis of the incomplete information then available, on the Bolshevik seizure of power in a 3,500 word article entitled 'The Revolution in Russia. Where it Fails'. Even if it represented a worker's takeover like the 1871 Paris Commune it was not and could not have been a socialist revolution.*

What justification is there, then, for terming the upheaval in Russia a Socialist Revolution? None whatever beyond the fact that the leaders in the November movement claim to be Marxian Socialists. M. Litvinoff practically admits this when he says (p.37):

"In seizing the reigns of power the Bolsheviks were obviously playing a game with high stake. Petrograd had shown itself entirely on their side. To what extent would the masses of the proletariat and the peasant army in the rest of the country support them?"

This is a clear confession that the Bolsheviks themselves did not know the views of the mass when they took control. (...)

From the various accounts and of the capitalist Press (and, as stated above, M. Litvinoff does not supply us with any other information) it seems the Bolsheviks form the driving force, and perhaps even the majority, of the new Government, sometimes called the Soviet Government and sometimes the "Council of Peoples' Commissaries". The Soviet Government certainly appears to have been accepted, or at least acquiesced in, by the bulk of the Russian workers. The grounds for this acceptance are fairly clear. First the Soviet Government promised peace; secondly they promised a settlement of the land question; thirdly they announced a solution of the industrial workers grievances. (...) That this mixed

## The Socialist Party

### Why the Russian Revolution Wasn't a Socialist Revolution

**Julius Martov's**  
*The State and the Socialist Revolution*

#### 'Why the Russian Revolution Wasn't a Socialist Revolution'

A reprint of the Menshevik Julius Martov's critical views on the nature of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and the politics of Leninism from a Marxist perspective. It includes an introduction by the Socialist Party, on the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia.

Copies from the Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 for £2.00 including P & P. Cheques to 'The Socialist Party of Great Britain'.

Government should have been tacitly accepted by the Russian workers is no cause for surprise. Quite the contrary. They (the Soviet Government) appear to have done all that was possible in the circumstances to carry their peace proposals. (...)

As is admitted by the various sections of the capitalist Press, the Soviet representatives at the Brest-Litovsk Conference stood firm on their original proposals to the last moment. That they had to accept hard terms in the end is no way any discredit to them, but it was a result of conditions quite beyond their control. If they had done no more than this, if they had been compelled to give up office on their return, the fact that they had negotiated a stoppage of the slaughter and maiming of millions of the working class would have been a monument to their honour, and constituted an undeniable claim to the highest approbation of the workers the world over. (...)

With the mass of the Russian people still lacking the knowledge necessary for the establishment of socialism, with both groups of belligerents sending armed forces into the country, with the possible combination of those groups for the purpose of restoring capitalist rule, even if not a monarchy, in Russia, matters look gloomy for the people there. If the capitalist class in the belligerent countries succeed in this plan, the Soviet Government and its supporters may expect as little mercy as—nay, less than—the Khirgiz Tartars received. It may be another Paris Commune on an immensely larger scale.

Every worker who understands his class position will hope that some way will be found out of the threatened evil. Should that hope be unrealised, should further victims be fated to fall to the greed and hatred of the capitalist class, it will remain on record that when members of the working class took control of affairs in Russia, they conducted themselves with vastly greater humanity, managed social and economic matters with greater ability and success and with largely reduced pain and suffering, than any section of the cunning, cowardly, ignorant capitalist class were able to do, with all the numerous advantages they possessed.

*(Socialist Standard, August 1918. Full article: [www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/socialist-standard/1910s/1918/no-168-august-1918/revolution-russia-where-it-fails](http://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/socialist-standard/1910s/1918/no-168-august-1918/revolution-russia-where-it-fails)).*

## Reflections on elections

Whenever there is an election, like last year or currently in Germany, the person in the street — the so-called ordinary voter — suddenly becomes very popular. Any number of political parties are anxious to please them and make them all manner of tempting promises, if they in their turn will agree to vote for their party's candidate. Election time, in other words, is the time when there is an enormous hunt for Votes.

The bait which is used in this hunt is largely made up by promises. All other parties offer this bait, and the generosity of their promises is usually in inverse proportion to the likelihood of their getting power. The Labour and Conservative Parties cannot be too extravagant; the Liberals can be a little more wild; the Greens and the far Left can promise almost anything. And so on.

Most of the promises in an election are about things like modernisation, housing, education, pensions, wages and prices, war and peace. To read the literature of these other parties, it seems that all that has to be done to solve overnight all the problems connected with these issues is to vote for their candidate. They will all, it seems, bring British industry up to date, build affordable housing, give everyone a fair chance of the best education, keep prices stable while wages increase, protect the environment, banish war from the earth.

These promises sound very fine and in one election after another millions of working people vote for them. And presumably, when they do so, they think that they are contributing to the solution of our problems.

But stop and think about it.

Firstly, it is obvious that election promises are not a new thing. Political parties have been making them for as long as anyone can remember — and always about the same sorts of problems.

Now what has been the result of all this?

The housing problem remains with us despite repeated promises to deal with it. The sort of education we get is governed by the financial standing of our parents. There are still millions of old age pensioners living on the tightrope of destitution — and it only needs something like a severe winter for many of them to loosen their precarious hold on life.

Prices are rising. Wages are still stagnating. Whatever the respective level of prices and wages, we always find that our wage packet only just covers our food, clothing, entertainment and whatever else goes to keep us ticking over.

War is just as much a universal problem as ever. There are always minor wars

going on somewhere, punctuated by more serious clashes such as North Korea and Syria. Over it all hangs the threat of a war fought out with nuclear weapons.

It is not accidental that the politicians make so many promises and that they have so little effect upon the ailments they are supposed to cure. The world is full of chronic problems, but this is not because political parties have not thought up reforms which are supposed to deal with them nor because their leaders are not clever or knowledgeable enough.

The fact is that the problems persist whichever party is in power — and this suggests that their roots go deep into the very nature of modern society.

We live today in a social system which is called capitalism. The basis of this system is the ownership by a section of the population of the means of producing and distributing wealth — of factories, transport, communications and so on. It follows from this that all the wealth which we produce today is turned out with the intention of realising a profit for the owning class. It is from this basis that the problems of modern society spring.

The class which does not own the means of wealth production — the working class — are condemned to a life of rationed dependence upon their wage or salary. This expresses itself in inferior housing, clothes, education, and the like.

The basis of capitalism throws up the continual battle over wages and working conditions with attendant employment disputes. It gives rise, with its international economic rivalries, to the wars which have disfigured recent history.

Every other party stands for capitalism, whatever they may call themselves. And whatever their protestations, they stand for a world of poverty, hunger, unrest and war. They stand for a world in which no human being is secure.

The way out is a world in which everything which goes to make and distribute wealth is owned by the people of the world. Because socialism is the direct opposite of capitalism, it follows that when it is established the basic problems of capitalism will disappear. There will be no more war, no more poverty. People will live a full, abundant life; we shall be free.

But socialism cannot be brought about by promises. It needs a knowledgeable working class who understand and desire it. They alone can establish the new world system we need.

When we contest elections our candidates from the Socialist Party do not make any promises; they do not try to convince voters that they will do anything for them. What they offer is the case for a new social system. We are seeking to spread knowledge and understanding of socialism and to give as many people as possible the opportunity of voting for a world of abundance, peace and freedom.





## The road from Burma

THE PLIGHT and persecution of the Rohingya have featured in the columns of Material World previously. Like so many problems thrown up by capitalism, the topic slips out of the headlines only to return later with greater tragedy.

Tens of thousands are fleeing Myanmar as best they can, driven from their homes by the violence of Myanmar government troops and accompanying vigilante Burmese mobs inflicting massacres and atrocities, in what now appears customary practice in ethnic cleansing operations. Yet the Rohingya in search of sanctuary find it thwarted by Bangladesh and India border guards,

The Nobel Peace Prize winner, Aung San Suu Kyi, the unofficial leader of Myanmar, congratulates her army and condemns the Rohingya for exaggerating their suffering. She accuses the international aid organisations of complicity in giving the Rohingya 'terrorists' support and succour. Fellow Nobel Laureate Malala Yousafzai has criticised Aung San Suu Kyi for turning a blind eye to the arson and murder. Myanmar has blocked humanitarian aid agencies from delivering vital supplies of food, water and medicine to the desperate civilians. Each day seems to bring new brutalities and expulsion of Rohingya families.

The violence has drastically escalated the sectarian strife. The Myanmar army, the Tatmadaw, who had never really yielded their power to the civilian government, engaged in the brutal repression of dissent, pushing some Rohingya to call for an armed uprising to stop the oppression.

The problem, therefore, became exacerbated by the arrival on the scene of armed groups such as the Arakan Rohingya Salv (ARSA) – who launched violent attacks against Burma's military. In October 2016, hundreds of fighters attacked border posts which prompted a massive army crackdown, with troops accused of rape and indiscriminate killings. In August 2017 attacks on police posts across the north of the state killed 12 members of the security forces and the fully to be expected backlash was swift. ARSA naturally style themselves as 'freedom fighters' yet some analysts such as the International Crisis Group describe them as jihadists financed, recruited and



trained by private individuals in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia who have campaigned to enhance ARSA's religious legitimacy further by obtaining fatwas from senior clerics in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and elsewhere. The stated aim of ARSA is to secure the rights of the Rohingya as citizens within Burma, however its choice of violent resistance may well have set back that cause. It has fuelled the regime's claims that the Rohingya are not peaceful, and that they are foreign interlopers, not truly deserving of national recognition and must be expelled.

What is to be feared by authoritarian states most is non-violent protest. Non-violence is neither passive nor a way of avoiding conflict. A non-violent movement that challenges a well-entrenched dictatorship must be prepared for a long struggle and numerous casualties. After all, only one side is committed to non-violence. However, the alternative entails even larger casualties and holds fewer prospects of success. Peaceful resistance does not mean no resistance. It does not mean non-action. It may invite the other minorities such as the Christian Karen and

Chinese Shan to support the Rohingya.

As soon as you choose to struggle with violence you're choosing to fight against opponents who are on their own terrain and in possession of the best weapons. The state's police and army are better trained in using those weapons. And they control the infrastructure that allows them to deploy their might. To fight dictators with violence is to cede to them the choice of battleground and tactics. Using violence against experts is the quickest way to defeat.

Socialists are always spontaneously on the side of the oppressed against the oppressors. As world socialists, we are repelled by the needless and mindless violence going on in the Rakhine state. We sympathise with our fellow-workers, the Rohingya. We condemn and denounce the senseless killing. But let us be frank, as we presently stand, there is little that can be done by the world socialist movement except our constant campaigning for socialism – as the hope of humanity in ending just another one in a series of slaughters taking place within capitalism.

**ALJO**



# WAS RUSSIA EVER SOCIALIST?

We examine the Socialist Party's reaction to the Bolshevik coup d'état and recall the analysis of Soviet Russia the Party pioneered.



The apparent triumph of the Bolsheviks in the backward Russia of 1917 sent the Marxist movement into turmoil. Moreover, previously impotent political organisations across Europe and North America showed themselves to be more impressed by the sudden and unexpected success of revolutionaries in the midst of bloody world war, than concerned for the event's potential impact on core elements of Marxist theory as they had always previously been understood. Contrary to legend, the Socialist Party was initially affected by this feeling like other radical parties, praising the Bolshevik's successful attempts to remove Russia from the bloodbath that was the First World War.

As for what was happening in Russia at a deeper level, the Socialist Party was more sceptical. Indeed, what focused our attention above all were the lavish claims made on the Bolsheviks' behalf by their supporters in Britain about 'Red October' (early November in the Western calendar). The first detailed analysis of the Russian situation, written by Jack Fitzgerald,



appeared in the August 1918 *Socialist Standard* under the heading 'The Revolution in Russia - Where It Fails'. It tackled the claims of the (then) Socialist Labour Party in Britain by outlining why the Bolshevik takeover could not really lead to the establishment of socialism in Russia. The article asked:

'Is this huge mass of people, numbering about 160,000,000 and spread over eight and a half millions of square miles, ready for socialism? Are the hunters of the North, the struggling peasant proprietors of the South, the agricultural wage-slaves of the Central Provinces, and the industrial wage-slaves of the towns convinced of the necessity, and equipped with the knowledge requisite, for the establishment of the social ownership of the means of life?

Unless a mental revolution such as the world has never seen before has taken place, or an economic change has occurred immensely more rapidly than history has ever recorded, the answer is 'No!' ... What justification is there, then, in terming the upheaval in Russia a Socialist Revolution? None whatever beyond the fact that the leaders in the November movement claim to be Marxian Socialists.'

In fact, over time the Socialist Party went on to identify as many as five key reasons why the establishment of socialism in Russia by the Bolsheviks was impossible:

- First, as indicated by Fitzgerald, the mass socialist consciousness needed before a successful socialist revolution could take place was noticeably absent in Russia, as elsewhere. Fitzgerald seized on a remark by Litvinoff which suggested that the Bolsheviks did not really know the views of the entire working class when they seized control, only some sections of it such as the factory workers of Petrograd.
- Second, it was not even the case that the working class was in a

numerical majority in Russia, a society dominated by its peasant economy. How could a majority socialist revolution be carried out when the workers were still in a minority and when the largest social class were the largely illiterate peasantry? While illiteracy did not entirely preclude the spread of socialist understanding, it certainly made it more difficult. In any event, the peasants had long shown themselves more interested in ridding themselves of the heavy tax burden on land, and increasing the size of their plots, than in demanding common ownership.

- Third, socialism could not exist in an economically backward country where the means of production was not sufficiently developed to support a socialist system of distribution.

- Fourth, and crucially, it was not possible to construct socialism in one country alone, given the nature of capitalism as a world system with a world-wide division of labour. Isolated 'socialism in one country' would be doomed to failure, no matter how honourable the intentions of the revolutionaries involved.

- The fifth reason advanced for the non-socialist nature of Bolshevik Russia went to the very root of our political differences with Bolshevism: socialism could not be achieved by following leaders (enlightened or otherwise).

## State capitalism

In the absence of world socialist revolution, there could realistically only be one road forward for semi-feudal Russia – the capitalist road. With the virtual elimination of the small Russian bourgeoisie, it would be necessary for the Bolsheviks to develop industry through the state ownership of enterprises and the forced accumulation of capital. In *The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It*, written before the revolution, Lenin had envisaged just such an approach to the Russian crisis. According to this document, Lenin saw that immediate measures required included nationalisation of the existing banks and the formation of a single state bank, together with the nationalisation of all insurance companies, the nationalisation of the monopolies and all other key industrial concerns. The *Socialist Standard* took the opportunity to again cast doubt on the supposed general applicability of Bolshevik actions in Russia – in this instance, the development of 'state capitalism' as a precondition for the establishment of socialism:

'If we are to copy Bolshevik policy in other countries we should have to demand State Capitalism, which is not a step towards Socialism in advanced capitalist countries. The fact remains, as Lenin is driven to confess, that we do not have to learn from Russia, but Russia has to learn from lands where large scale production is dominant' (*A Socialist View of Bolshevik Policy*, July 1920).

As we took great pains to point out to our pro-Bolshevik opponents, Lenin admitted that the social formation in Soviet Russia was essentially state-capitalist, albeit under the guidance and control of a so-called 'proletarian state' guided by a vanguard party of professional revolutionaries. For Lenin, the nature of the revolutionary polity in such circumstances was the crucial determinant of the type of social system in existence. Without what Lenin termed 'revolutionary democracy', state capitalist monopoly would remain state capitalism. With workers' control of production and control of the proletarian state by the vanguard party of the working class, however, socialism would be a reality. According to *The Impending Catastrophe and How To Combat It*, socialism was merely 'state-capitalist monopoly made to serve the interests

of the whole people'.

More than twenty years after the Bolshevik seizure of power, we remained unconvinced that state capitalism was really socialism even if presided over by those who proclaimed themselves socialist:

'... the chief characteristics of Capitalism [in Russia] have not disappeared and are not in the process of disappearing. Goods are not produced for use but for sale to those who have the money to buy, as in other countries. The workers are not members of a social system in which the means of wealth production are socially owned and controlled, but are wage-earners in the employ of the State or of semi-State concerns, etc. The Russian State concerns are no more 'socially owned' than is the British Post Office or the Central Electricity Board, or any private company... The Bolshevik attempt to usher in Socialism by 'legal enactments' and by 'bold leaps' before the economic conditions were ripe, and before the mass of the population desired Socialism, has been a total failure. In course of time that failure will become obvious to the workers inside and outside Russia' (*Questions of the Day*, 1942).

Capitalism, based on the separation of the producers from the means of production had not been abolished, nor could it have been. Production still took place as a system of exchange involving the circulation of capital. Capital expanded consequent on the exploitation of wage labour, and articles of wealth were still being produced for sale on the market with a view to the realisation of surplus value. Indeed, much of the Party's early analysis of the economic basis of the Soviet system reflected a desire to demonstrate the similarities between Russian state capitalism and the British private enterprise-based capitalism the Party was most familiar with.

## Who are the capitalist class?

Over time, while it was clear that state capitalism in Russia (and then its satellites) retained all the essential features of capitalism, there were some apparent differences, even if superficial. One related to who the capitalist class were in Russia, as the system's supporters often claimed that capitalism could not really exist in Russia as there was no capitalist class in the traditional sense. But in fact, there was a capitalist class of this nature, as the 1940s pamphlet *Soviet Millionaires* by Reg Bishop showed, and always a private sector running in parallel to the major state-owned institutions and corporations – though it was peripheral. Nevertheless, it was clear that real power and control – including economic decision-making – rested with a powerful group of leading bureaucrats who had privileged lifestyles and high incomes as a result of their position at the top of the Soviet hierarchy.

This controlling class could not merely be equated with the supervisors and managers within capitalism referred to by Marx who received a wage based on the amount needed to produce and reproduce their labour power. On the contrary, this class of bureaucrats in Russia was using its position of control to perform the functions carried out by individual capitalists in earlier phases of capitalism's development and to command a privileged income derived from surplus value. Though it did not have legal title to the means of production, and was not able to bequeath property, it was clearly a possessing class of the type mentioned in our Declaration of Principles, exercising a 'monopoly... of the wealth taken from the workers'. This state capitalist class, like the privately owning capitalist



class in the West, was privileged in consumption, receiving bloated 'salaries' that were not the price of labour power but a portion of the total surplus value created by the working class. They were also privileged because of the multitude of benefits and perks open to them, including access to exclusive consumption outlets such as expensive shops and restaurants from which the working class was physically denied access.

The prevailing view in the Socialist Party was that the nature of a class could not be determined simply by legal forms or even by methods of recruitment (the Soviet possessing class was not recruited via inheritance but by other, more meritocratic, methods that have not been entirely unusual for possessing classes in history). So the Party ultimately concluded that although the state capitalist class did not have legal property titles to the means of production, it nonetheless constituted a capitalist class exercising a collective ownership of the means of production and distribution. What was judged to be of prime importance, therefore, was the social reality of capitalism rather than a particular legal form; the opponents of the theory of state capitalism had never been able to see beyond the latter.

### **The theory of state capitalism**

The Socialist Party of Great Britain was the first political group in Britain, and quite possibly the world, to identify the state capitalist direction taken by Russia under the Communist Party dictatorship, though many others came to the same conclusion over time, if not always for the same reasons. Unlike us, most of these groups stood in the Leninist tradition or at least showed a willingness to identify positive aspects of the Bolshevik takeover that could be applied by the socialist movement elsewhere in the future. In particular, the Leninist conception of socialism as state ownership and direction of the economy under the control of a vanguard party operating through the political medium of workers' councils was readily accepted by most of these groups. Hence they only later ascribed a 'state capitalist' characterisation to Russia when they judged that state ownership no longer coincided with 'proletarian democracy' and the power of the soviets. This was essentially the analysis initially put forward by 'council communists' such as Otto Rühle who saw in the crushing of the soviets the rise of 'commissar despotism' and state capitalism (Rühle himself later realized the inadequacy of this position and came to view nationalisation and state regulation as intrinsically state capitalist). The largest 'Left Communist' group in Europe, the German KAPD, developed a similar perspective. It identified capitalism as the private (specifically non-state) ownership of the means of production, and, like the council communist Workers' Socialist Federation in Britain, praised the Bolsheviks for their construction of socialism in the

industrial centres of Russia. Later, the KAPD became critical of the Soviet system with the final crushing of the soviets and the introduction of the New Economic Policy, which it thought heralded a 'reversion to capitalism'.



Despite the initial excesses of Left Communist and council communist groups who invariably let their early admiration for the Soviet political form dominate their analysis, arguably the worst example of the conflation of socialism with state ownership plus 'revolutionary democracy' came from the Trotskyists. Ironically, the Trotskyist theories of state capitalism, being by far the most fragile, are the most well-known. C. L. R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya from the American Socialist Workers' Party were the first Trotskyists to break with Trotsky himself and identify the state capitalist

nature of the USSR though perhaps the most widely known theory was that elaborated by Tony Cliff and circulated as a discussion document within the Revolutionary Communist Party of Britain in the period immediately after the Second World War, before being published as *Russia: A Marxist Analysis*. Cliff – who was the driving force behind what became the British SWP – said his reasons for breaking with orthodox Trotskyism by identifying the Soviet Union as state capitalist were plain enough:

‘When I came to the theory of state capitalism I did not come to it by a long analysis of the law of value in Russia... Nothing of the sort. I came to it by the simple statement that... you cannot have a workers’ state without the workers having power to dictate what happens in society’ (interview with *The Leveller*, 30 September 1979).

In reality, Cliff had been heavily influenced by fellow Trotskyist Jock Haston about the Socialist Party’s view of state capitalism existing in Russia rather than socialism or a ‘workers’ state’, but Cliff could never break entirely with the perspectives of Lenin and Trotsky. Indeed, Cliff’s analysis was firmly rooted in the idea that the USSR was a form of ‘workers’ state’ before Stalin’s first Five Year Plan of 1928 established the bureaucracy as a new class consuming surplus value. Like all the Trotskyists that have followed him, Cliff did not identify the USSR as a society developing along state capitalist lines from 1917 but only from Stalin’s ascension to power. Under Lenin, Russia was supposedly a society in transition from capitalism to communism, based on working class power. For Cliff, a perceived change of political control led to a fundamental change in economic structure, to what in fact amounted to a ‘reversion to capitalism’. Perhaps surprisingly, those Trotskyists who remained faithful to Trotsky’s own view when in exile of Russia as a ‘degenerated workers’ state’ made some of the most pertinent criticisms of Cliff’s analysis, particularly his conclusion that the economic structure of the Soviet system had changed in 1928 and had assumed a capitalist basis. Foremost among these critics was rival British Trotskyist Ted Grant (founder of what became *Militant*):

‘If Comrade Cliff’s thesis is correct, that state capitalism exists in Russia today, then he cannot avoid the conclusion that state capitalism has been in existence since the Russian Revolution and the function of the revolution itself was to introduce this state capitalist system of society. For despite his tortuous efforts to draw a line between the economic basis of Russia before the year 1928 and after, the economic basis of Russian society has remained unchanged... money, labour power, the existence of the working class, surplus value, etc. are all survivals of the old capitalist system carried over even under the regime of Lenin... the law of value applies and must apply until there is direct access to the products by the producers’ (*Against the Theory of State Capitalism*, 1949).

This conclusion was certainly rejected by Cliff and all the other Trotskyist state capitalist theorists, though not of course by us.

Today, many council communist, left communist and Trotskyist political groupings identify Soviet Russia, certainly post-Lenin, as having always been essentially state capitalist, and like us, they have applied their analysis of Russian society to other ‘socialist’ countries exhibiting similar features in Asia, Africa and Central America. That we were not alone in identifying the capitalist nature of the USSR does not of course diminish our position as the one organisation which promoted a state capitalist analysis of the events in Russia at the time of their happening, and not merely with the benefit of hindsight. What is more, we have remained one of the few organisations committed to such a critique of the USSR and similar regimes, that has never sought to adopt or promote the Leninist vanguardism which so clearly led to that state capitalist outcome.

**DAP**

***Next month will see a special issue on ‘The Aftermath of Leninism’ looking at the surviving Leninist regimes today.***



In the socialist tradition a socialist revolution is one that results in a change in the basis of society carried out by and in the interest of the immense majority.

“All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority.” (Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848)

“The word Revolution, which we Socialists are so often forced to use, has a terrible sound in most people’s ears, even when we have explained to them that it does not necessarily mean a change accompanied by riot and all kinds of violence, and cannot mean a change made mechanically and in the teeth of opinion by a group of men who have somehow managed to seize on the executive power for the moment. Even when we explain that we use the word revolution in its etymological sense, and mean by it a change in the basis of society, people are scared at the idea of such a vast change, and beg that you will speak of reform and not revolution. (...) [W]e will stick to our word, which means a change of the basis of society” (William Morris, *How We Live and How We Might Live*, 1888).

### Past revolutions

There have been revolutions that have resulted in a change in the basis of society, but they have been carried out either by a minority or in the interest of a minority. The French Revolution would be a case in point. The 1868 Meiji Restoration in Japan would be another. The Russian Revolutions of 1917 a third.

The revolution in Japan was an example of a revolution carried out just by a minority. A section of the old feudal ruling class seized power with a view to removing obstacles to the development of capitalism in Japan, so as to change the basis of society there from feudalism to capitalism.

The French Revolution and the Russian Revolution, on the other hand, involved a fair degree of popular mobilisation and so fall into the category of a revolution in the interest of a minority, not simply as in Japan one carried out exclusively by the minority itself. The result, however, was the same – the removal of obstacles to the further development of capitalism as a system of production for profit by wage-workers, and the accumulation of capital out of profits.

This, of course, was not how the leaders or the popular participants saw it. In France they thought they were establishing the rule of ‘the people’; in Russia it was to be the rule of ‘the workers’. But, as Marx pointed out, in his summary of the materialist conception of history in the Preface to his *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, ‘just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, so one cannot judge such a period of transformation by its consciousness’. Judging by their actual results, both these revolutions paved the way for the further development of a society based on wage-labour and production for profit.

So, we can leave aside both these revolutions as an example of what a socialist revolution might be like. In fact they could even be used as counter-examples, as examples of what a

# WHAT WOULD A



# REVOL LOOK

socialist revolution would not be like – a minority leading a discontented mass of people.

### The aim

One of the big differences between them and a real socialist revolution is that the change in the basis of society is different. These previous revolutions changed the basis of society from feudalism to capitalism, from a society based on the exploitation of land-workers by a landowning aristocracy to a society based on the minority ownership and control of industrial means of production. The change in the basis of society that a socialist revolution brings about is one from minority ownership to the common ownership and democratic control of natural and industrial resources by the whole community. A society based on ‘the possession of the land and of the means of production in common,’ a ‘community of free individuals, carrying on their work with the means of production in common,’ as Marx put it in Volume I of *Capital*. This is not the same as state ownership, which is still a form of minority ownership by those who control the state.

The socialist revolution is a change, not from one form of minority ownership to another, as in France and Russia, but the end of all minority ownership and so the establishment of a classless society. A society no longer divided into owners and non-owners, capitalists and workers, bourgeoisie and proletariat, the 1 percent and the rest, or however you want to describe it, but a community of equals. Every member of society stands in the same relationship to the means of production as every other member – as co-owners having an equal say in how and for what purpose they are to be used. We are talking about a fully democratic society.

We are also talking about a non-coercive society as, with the abolition of class-divided society, there will be no need for the state as an instrument for maintaining the domination of a ruling class or of the government as its executive committee. Instead, there will be an unarmed administration – or, rather, administrations, world, regional, and local – subject to democratic control.

Nor will there be any economic coercion. People will not be forced to work by individual economic necessity. The wages system, under which one section of society is forced to sell its ability to work to get the means to live, will have been abolished. Some essential work will be necessary of course, otherwise society would collapse, but this would have to be undertaken freely by people who understood this.

So, we are talking about a society involving not just democratic control and participation but also freely-decided cooperation and work.



# REAL SOCIALIST

send to parliament, congress, chamber of deputies or whatever, delegates mandated to further the cause of socialism, not support a government or vote through capitalist legislation.

In fact, the socialist movement can begin to send such delegates to parliaments even before it has majority support. The socialist MPs would still be mandated delegates subject to the democratic control of those outside parliament who wanted socialism. While in a minority, they could use parliament as a megaphone, a tribune from which to denounce capitalism and

advocate socialism.

When a majority, they could use political power to end capitalism by dispossessing the owning class through declaring all stocks and shares, bills and bonds, and other capitalist property titles null and void and that from then on all the means of production belong to the people as a classless community of equals, to be used to turn out what they need both as individuals and as communities. The basis of society will have been changed. The socialist revolution will have been carried out.

Naturally, this assumes that people in their workplaces outside parliament are already organised, ready to take over the means of production and keep production going. The socialist majority would also use its political control to make other changes, in particular thoroughly democratising the central administration body by lopping off its coercive and bureaucratic features, preparing the way for its transformation from an instrument of rule over people into an unarmed organ of participatory democracy. In effect, the abolition of the state as state.

## World Revolution

The revolutionary process just described has been about one country but, capitalism being an international system spanning the world with a network of interlinked production units, 'socialism in one country' is not possible. So, we are talking about a world-wide socialist revolution with the same process taking place in country after country over a relatively short period of time, rather like, for instance, the overthrow of the state-capitalist regimes in East Europe in the 1990s or the so-called Arab Spring.

This is not an unreasonable supposition as, already, economic and social conditions are basically the same in whatever geographical or political areas capitalism dominates. Nor is it unreasonable to suppose that, when the socialist idea catches on, it will spread in all countries. It is the opposite supposition that is unreasonable: that this will be confined to one country or that one country would be way ahead of all the others. This is not how ideas spread today.

Everywhere, production is for profit, people have to work for wages and have to buy what they need. Everywhere they face the same problems that result from this, problems which can only be lastingly solved within the framework of a borderless world society based on the Earth's natural and industrial resources having become the common heritage of all humanity.

**ADAM BUICK**

Production would be organised to directly satisfy people's needs, not for profit; not for sale either. Since the means of production will be owned in common so will the products. The question will then not be how to sell these (which wouldn't make sense since selling is a change of ownership but everybody is already a co-owner). It will be how to distribute them, how to share them out amongst the co-owners. Today, given the tremendous capacity to produce what people need, products can be made available for people to freely take and use, the implementation of the old socialist slogan of 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs'.

The new society based on the common ownership of natural and industrial resources will be a classless, stateless, wageless, moneyless society of democratic control and free cooperation. That's the change in the basis of society that a real socialist revolution would bring about.

## The means

This being the aim – the end – the means to achieve it must be compatible. In other words, it has to be achieved democratically by a majority who want and understand it. The socialist revolution as Marx and Engels put it must be 'the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority'. Not a movement, not even a majority movement, led by leaders who alone understand ('the conscious minority') at the head of masses who are merely discontented (as in the model of those influenced by the French and Russian Revolutions), but one in which the majority too understand, and organise themselves without unaccountable leaders who pretend to know better than them.

This shapes the strategy and tactics to achieve the opening stage of any revolution – the winning of political control, the capture of political power. This implies organisation into a political party, but one quite unlike the reformist and vanguard parties we know today, all of which are based on the leadership principle, in the one case by MPs and in the other by professional revolutionaries. The socialist political party must be a mass, open, democratic party controlled by its members – the class of wage and salary workers democratically self-organised to take political action for socialism.

When once the socialist movement has become 'the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority' the question arises what it has to do to win political control. In developed capitalist countries the means are to hand – the vote. The socialist majority can use the power of numbers to



believe they could claim Marxist credentials? These three revolutions were successful partly because of the motivation that these ideologies provided for those who did the fighting and dying; or rather, the specific interpretation of those ideologies at the time. It might be informative to analyse these ideologies in terms of their origins, their cultural and linguistic reinterpretation and their use as propaganda. All of this can be done in the context of the similarities and differences they represent with the proposed model of a socialist revolution. We begin with the English Revolution of 1642.

### The Reformation

Europe had witnessed the persecution of Jan Huss and John Wycliffe for their opposition to the widespread corruption within the Catholic Church but it was not

until the time of their Protestant progeny Martin Luther that the Reformation became politically important. Many European potentates were tired of the political interference and high taxes that emanated from Rome. One of these, German Prince Frederick III, saw in Luther's protest a way to weaken the political power of the Holy Roman Empire. Thus Luther's protection by the powerful, in contrast with Huss and Wycliffe, made it possible to promote the Reformation which in turn eventually enabled a political formulation of the nation state that was independent of Rome. All of this was accelerated by the new technology of the printing press which made possible the first dissemination of mass political/religious propaganda in the vernacular.

One of the consequences of the importation of the Reformation in England was the dissolution of the monasteries. As a result great swathes of land were acquired by the *nouveau riche* of the merchant class who had become wealthy courtesy of international trade in wool, slaves and coal. They sought to achieve the same levels of profit from their new land by becoming capitalist farmers. This contrasted with the great aristocratic landowners' approach which was still in the feudal tradition; consequently they became increasingly concerned about the wealth of their new neighbours and pressed the king to try to curtail their profits, or at the very least give them a share. To achieve this the King claimed monopoly rights on production which he then proceeded to give to aristocratic cronies at his court together with the infamous 'ship tax' which gave him a share of trading profits. The new 'landed gentry' (capitalist farmers) together with other progressive elements in society were outraged by this and campaigned through parliament for a 'free market'.

*We begin a three-part series on the link between revolutionary social changes and the ideology of those who carried them out.*

A series of discussions with friends of both leftist and liberal persuasions recently uncovered two classic objections to the Marxist perspective. They are essentially derived from the same misunderstanding of the nature of a socialist revolution.

The first objection was in the idealist tradition and centred on the connection between the Enlightenment and the Soviet gulags. It is more common to hear the terror of the French revolution being associated with Enlightenment ideals but not - via Karl Marx - with the Bolshevik concentration camps. The other accusation was that it was naive to expect a socialist revolution to be any different than those that preceded it historically.

To deal with these closely associated criticisms we have to unravel the relationship between the ideologies proclaimed by those involved and the historical context of their actions. As Marx would say - we have to cut away the ideological overgrowth to get to the political reality. Socialists have long believed that to view history as primarily a progression of ideas (idealism) is misleading and politically dangerous. However, it is of significance why certain ideals were used during periods of political upheaval rather than others; not just in terms of propaganda but also culturally and linguistically. Why was the memory and traditions associated with an obscure Jewish prophet of some 2,000 years ago invoked by the Puritans of the English revolution; why did the emperor Napoleon defend his dictatorship with reference to the Enlightenment and why did the Bolsheviks

They saw the feudal lands as being unproductive and the aristocracy as a political barrier to their further enrichment. The scene was set for this class struggle to erupt into the English revolution. This is the Marxist or 'materialist' version of the events of the 1640s. Now let us turn to the ideological explanation.

### Religious ideology

When Constantine adopted Christianity as the state religion of Rome he attempted to make the diverse legends (gospels) into a coherent ideology that would serve his political needs. Although there continues to be some controversy the gospels we have now in the 'New Testament' date from that time. The religion has obvious attractions to an autocrat in that it represents the ultimate authoritarian social structure with God at the top and his representatives (the Pope, Emperor, Kings and the priesthood) in a descending coalition of oppression.

It also has revolutionary elements in terms of its original defiance of Roman hegemony and Jesus being a messiah or deliverer from tyranny. This is the element taken up by the Puritans who were profoundly dissatisfied with the English Reformation and perceived the Anglican church to be still Papist and politically reactionary. This together with the Protestant emphasis on hard work, obedience, thrift and the idea that worldly wealth and success meant belonging to God's 'elect' made them obvious allies for the emerging bourgeoisie. For hundreds of years the priest in the pulpit had been the major political propagandist for the ruling class so it is not surprising that the political debate in the 17<sup>th</sup> century centred on Christian doctrine and the perceived importance of controlling the church.

The pulpit now had a propaganda rival in the printing press and within this revolutionary environment a variety of dissension was expressed. There were some who saw the revolution as a culmination of class antagonisms but the majority understood it in terms of Catholic oppression of their natural political rights with Charles I's claim to Divine Right being an obvious expression of this. Once the revolutionary war started both sides believed that victory on the battlefield was the sign of divine approval.

We can be certain that Jesus of Nazareth (if he existed as an historical individual) would be more than a little surprised by the killing that has been done in his name. It is difficult to find any justification for war in the gospels (with the exception of the book of revelation which seems to be a diatribe of revenge). What Christianity does offer ruling elites, and would-be ruling elites, is an authoritarian universe with everything and everyone in his place. Many, if not most, religions offer this reactionary supernatural scenario and it wouldn't take much imagination to replace it with any other similar religion and, given the same political and historical context of England in 1642, the result would be the same – revolution.

In other words, the ideology that expressed the fears and ambitions of those who made the revolution were relatively unimportant compared with the economic and political forces

that compelled them into violent opposition. It may be said that this represents an unprovable hypothesis because you can never impose retrospective ideological alternatives onto history; what we can do, however, is compare this revolution with others that have also transformed their society from monarchical absolutism to bourgeois rule without the aid of Christian ideology.

In the second part of this article we attempt to do that with an analysis of the French revolution where not only was Christianity absent within the ideology of the victors, it was replaced by a philosophical approach we call 'the Enlightenment' which possessed an atheist trajectory.

**WEZ**

*(Next month: the French Revolution)*



# Why are we *waiting*?

Socialism is a form of society based on mutual aid, in which the peoples of the world help each other and live amicably. Capitalism is what everyone has now. Whether it is private capitalism, which rules in much of western Europe and in the United States, or state capitalism (the system they have or had in Russia, China, North Korea and Cuba), or an uneasy mixture of the two, everywhere it produces the same results. Great riches for a few, gross poverty for many, and a perpetual money-struggle for many more; along with continual international hostility, leading to wars, unrest, shortages, and occasionally outright famine.

And yet human ingenuity means that the goods which everyone requires – food, clothing, shelter – can be produced and distributed, with the aid of modern methods, in much greater quantities than ever before. So much so that the great current fear of politicians is that there will not be enough ‘work’ for everybody, and that therefore there will be vast quantities of goods which everybody wants, but for which there may not be sufficient economic demand (meaning economic activity is derailed by a slump): unemployed people don’t have enough

money to buy the goods which are available.

The people who are now in charge of world affairs – the people who own the factories, the land, and all the world’s productive capacity – together with all the politicians who act for this upper class, and keep this unjust society going, realise that many of the non-owners of the world, the people who do the work, may see the enormous attractions of socialism, and will want to establish it. Some sections of the world’s upper class react to this ‘danger’ (from their point of view) by virulent hostility. They control virtually the whole of the complex machinery which provides the great mass of the world’s ‘information’ – the newspapers, the radio stations, the television, the schools, the religions, the universities. All these engines of propaganda are tirelessly working to persuade the rest of us that our present system is not only the very best which has ever existed or ever could exist, but that it is now and always will be completely inevitable.

But the reaction of other sections of the world’s upper class is much more subtle. They claim to be converted to this marvellous new system, and they then

have the gall to claim that their form of capitalism – whether private or state – is actually socialism, and the workers of the world should strain all their efforts to support it.

Capitalism, of whatever variety, needs money in order to separate the great mass of people from the goods that they produce, but do not own. Socialism will not need money, nor banks, nor stock exchanges nor hedge funds, nor the financiers who spend their entire lives gambling that this or that product, or this or that country’s currency, will rise or fall in value; in fact, it will not need financial institutions of any kind. Nor will it need wage-labour, nor armies, navies and air-forces, nor police forces, nor those many jobs which simply keep a financial check on everyone else – travel inspectors, bank clerks and so on.

All those whose labour is wasted in this way will be able to join everyone else in producing food, clothing and houses. There is no point in tinkering with an economic system which benefits only the few, rather than the many. We could have a rational society tomorrow, if enough of us wanted it. Why are we waiting?



## Answer on a postcard (to Lord Finkelstein)

LORD FINKLESTEIN, in your column in the *Times* (30 August) entitled ‘True socialism always ends with the Stasi’, you invited readers to send you a postcard correcting any misunderstandings on your part. Unfortunately, a postcard is not large enough.

You do correctly understand that in socialism ‘market exchange is replaced by friendly, voluntary co-operation and free provision’. Your misunderstandings begin when you say that, reading Paul Mason’s book *Postcapitalism*, you wondered ‘how he might get someone, for instance, to clean station platforms or do any extra shift without being paid’.

You describe as ‘preposterous’ the idea that people would be prepared to work at such jobs, or any job, ‘for nothing’.

*Misunderstanding No 1.* People would not be working ‘for nothing’. In return, they would be getting free access to the things they need to live and enjoy life instead of a wage that only gives them limited access to these. That’s the

meaning of the socialist principle of ‘from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs’.

*Misunderstanding No 2.* People are not naturally averse to working. People like, even need, to work in the sense of exercising their mental and physical energies. What people, quite rightly, don’t like is doing work that seems pointless or from which they don’t benefit, as is the case with the great majority of jobs today under capitalism. If, on the other hand, work is seen to be socially useful or brings them some satisfaction or benefit, then people are prepared to undertake it. Socialism, which (your words) will eliminate ‘the market competition that makes us ruthless and makes us jostle for position’ (actually, to avoid falling into poverty), will provide ample opportunities for such work, undertaken for more than mere ‘amity’ as there’ll be a large element of enlightened self-interest in it.

*Misunderstanding No 3.* People wouldn’t have to do the same job all day every day. Many routine jobs are ideal for automation (including cleaning platforms). Those that can’t be could be done by different people doing them for short periods on a rota basis.

When you introduce the Stasi you move beyond misunderstanding and enter the realm of lying propaganda. In this you are following in the footsteps of Churchill who, during the 1945 general election,

notoriously declared that socialism would lead to the Gestapo.

You argue that if there was to be a sizeable minority of recalcitrants in socialism, ‘either these people make socialism impossible, or they have to be eliminated on the grounds of their counterrevolutionary position.’

You are right in one sense that, if there were to be such a sizeable recalcitrant minority, then socialism couldn’t work. But why would there be, when a society of free provision in return for working freely would be so obviously better than capitalism that it had led a majority to establish it? That doesn’t make sense. Even less does your alternative of suppressing them by force, for the simple reason that a socialist society will have abandoned the means for doing this. The coercive state needed in class-divided societies would have been replaced by purely administrative, unarmed and democratically-controlled, bodies.

In invoking the Stasi you are assuming that the regime in East Germany set out to establish socialism – with free provision and no market exchange – but failed and had to resort to coercion. In fact right from the start the regime there was the same sort of state-capitalist dictatorship as existed in Russia and was imposed by the bayonets of the Russian Army. The GDR was never socialist any more than it was democratic.

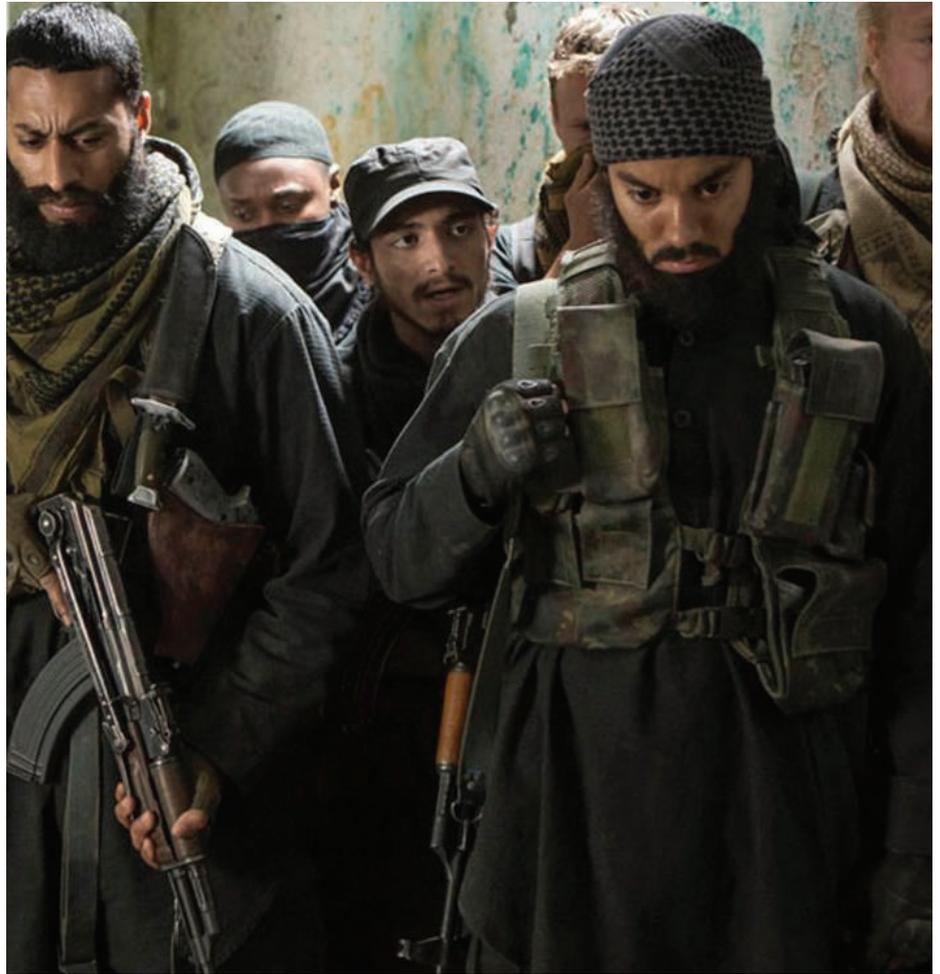


## The Jihadis' Tale

Through the dramas he has written and directed for Channel 4, Peter Kosminsky has explored the impact which war has had on the people caught up in it. *The Government Inspector* (2005) dramatized UN weapons inspector Dr David Kelly's role in undermining the government's attempted justification for the Iraq War, while *The Promise* (2011) was set in Palestine, drawing links between the situation under the British mandate in the 1940s with that in the 2000s. His latest drama, *The State*, tells the stories of young, enthusiastic jihadis who travel from Britain to Syria to fight for ISIS. Over four episodes, we follow the characters from their arrival in an ISIS stronghold to when life under the regime brings disillusionment with what they have committed themselves to.

The characters were based on real people who were interviewed by the programme's researchers. As most British ISIS fighters who have returned are in prison, researchers largely drew on the experiences of people who were not from the UK. Unfortunately, any research into how they came to believe in ISIS' interpretation of Islam enough to join didn't end up in the script. More depth is needed in characters taking up four hours of screen time (including commercial breaks, featuring adverts for enlisting with the army, appropriately enough). Kosminsky explored the journey to becoming a religious fanatic in his 2007 drama *Britz*, so maybe he didn't want to repeat himself. But if we can't understand his characters' motives, it's harder to understand the appeal of a barbaric organisation like ISIS, or the mindset it encourages. 'Radicalisation' is often talked about in the media in the same way as a disease, as if people become infected with extreme ideas which then take hold much like the flu virus. This approach can simplistically ignore how our views are shaped by our experiences in a divided, competitive society. So, a life of feeling alienated and powerless could push someone vulnerable to swallowing ISIS' warped worldview to find an identity and purpose there.

Instead of focusing on radicalisation, the drama concentrates more on its reverse,



the process of becoming disillusioned with ISIS. One character gets frustrated at how her role as a doctor is impeded by having to wear a niqāb while working and being ordered to harvest organs from injured enemy troops, and when her son becomes drawn in to jihad. Another gets disenchanted with the regime because he doesn't want to treat ISIS' prisoners or his slaves brutally. In both cases, disillusionment comes when the characters' more established values conflict with those of ISIS.

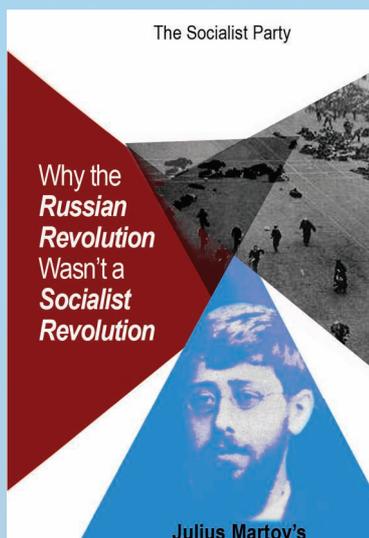
While the lack of background to the characters is disappointing, the programme is more revealing in the details of life in ISIS-run Raqqa. Until they marry off and rent a home with their partners, male and female mujahideen live in segregated, rule-driven shared houses. The men are trained up to be soldiers, while the women are trained up to be wives. The scenes set in and around the women's house are unsettlingly reminiscent of Margaret Atwood's dystopia *The Handmaid's Tale* (see July's *Socialist Standard*). In both, women are taught to be subservient to men, women aren't allowed outside without being accompanied, their clothes have to cover them up almost completely, they're expected to keep to domestic duties, they adopt new names, and are used as sex slaves. And in both, culture is shaped by fundamentalist religion, Christianity in *The Handmaid's Tale* rather than Islam.

Religion has long been a way in which power relationships are expressed. In ISIS' version of Islam, the differences in power between men and women, slaves and owners, believers and non-believers are supposed to be justified by chapters of the Quran. Those in charge choose the quotes which back up their authority. At the same time that it creates divisions between people, the religion can also create a common identity, essential to hold together an organisation as extreme and fanatical as ISIS. It is this blinkered fanaticism towards such a brutal dogma that marks out ISIS adherents as sociopaths.

*The State* is useful to show how oppression can become normalised for the few who accept ISIS' twisted ideology, even if it is lacking in the reasons behind this. The latter point was picked up in several other reviews, including that on *The Arts Desk* website, which summed up the drama's characters by saying 'no one is nuts enough' (21st August). The programme didn't impress the *Daily Mail's* Christopher Stevens, who called it 'poison' in his review of 20th August. He accused Kosminsky of interpreting ISIS' propaganda as an accurate reflection of life under the regime, thereby glamorising jihadis. He adds that 'this is a recruitment video to rival Nazi propaganda of the 1930s calling young men to join the Brownshirts', just like the *Daily Mail* did at the time.

**MIKE FOSTER**

## Marxist refutation



**Why the Russian Revolution wasn't a Socialist Revolution. Julius Martov's The State and the Socialist Revolution.** The Socialist Party. 100 pages. £2.

The Socialist Party has reprinted this classic Marxist refutation of Lenin's distortions of Marx's views on the state.

Lenin, who considered himself a Marxist and did in fact know his Marx, was concerned to justify in Marxist terms the Bolshevik coup and subsequent dictatorial rule in Russia. He claimed that Marx had advocated that the state should be 'smashed' in an armed uprising, that 'dictatorship of the proletariat' meant the dictatorship of a vanguard party acting on behalf of the proletariat, and he justified the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly on the grounds that the soviets were a higher form of democracy.

Julius Martov (1873-1923) was a long-standing member of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party and had been a member of the editorial board of its publication *Iskra* alongside Lenin, Plekhanov and others. However, he and Lenin fell out over the issue of how Russian Social Democrats should organise themselves that was debated at their congress in 1903. Lenin had proposed that the party be organised as a disciplined, top-down body of professional revolutionaries. Martov was among those who favoured a more open party along the lines of other European Social Democratic parties. Lenin's view won the vote and the party split into 'Bolsheviks' (the majority) and the 'Mensheviks' (the minority). Martov was, then, a 'Menshevik' though this was not how he described himself as 'Menshevik' was a Bolshevik term of abuse. Basically, he was an orthodox Social Democrat.

This pamphlet is a collection of articles Martov wrote in 1919 and 1921 and was originally published in Germany in 1923 under the title *World Bolshevism*. Most of it was translated into English and published as a pamphlet in 1939 as *The State and the Socialist Revolution*.

Martov denied that Marx had argued for the violent smashing of the state, but rather for its take-over, peaceably if possible; what was to be 'smashed' was not the whole state but only its 'bureaucratic-military' aspects which were to be 'lopped off' after its capture, leaving a democratised state as the instrument to use to dispossess the capitalist class and usher in socialism.

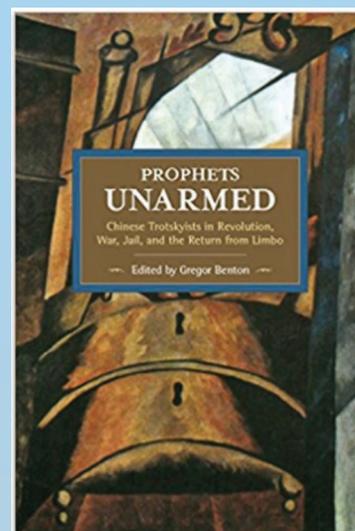
On the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', Martov pointed out that 'dictatorship' meant the exercise of full powers and that 'of the proletariat' meant that these powers were to be exercised, necessarily democratically, by the whole proletariat, not merely by a minority of them. In short, the term meant the rule of the working class, using the democratised state to effect the socialist revolution from capitalism to socialism. His article is a clear explanation of what Marx meant, even if the term itself is unfortunate as in some respects it invites misinterpretation, an aspect Lenin exploited to the full.

The whole Russian revolutionary tradition had called for Tsarism to be replaced in the first instance by an elected Constituent Assembly which would decide Russia's future constitution. An election to one did take place in November 1917, after the Bolshevik seizure of power, but as the Bolsheviks failed to win a majority of seats they dissolved it. Martov, without denying that the soviets were makeshift democratic bodies, dismissed Lenin's claim that they were more democratic than a central assembly directly elected by direct, secret and universal ballot; they were not elected by secret ballot and the only direct vote its members had was at local level, the higher levels being indirectly elected. In practice, it was even less democratic as they were manipulated by the Bolshevik party.

This edition has a new introduction and contains, as an appendix, the first printed translation of the opening chapter of *World Bolshevism* in which Martov sets out to explain the attraction of Bolshevism amongst some sections of the working class in Europe. Also included are two reprints from the *Socialist Standard*: the review of the original pamphlet in 1940 and a review of Israel Getzler's biography of Martov.

**ALB**

## Unarmed and Unforgiven



Gregor Benton ed: *Prophets Unarmed: Chinese Trotskyists in Revolution, War, Jail and the Return from Limbo*. Haymarket \$55.

A 1,200-page volume on a political movement that existed for just twenty-five years and had at most a few thousand supporters (and generally far fewer than that), this is an exhaustive study of Trotskyism in China, from 1927 to 1952. It is based primarily on memoirs written years after the events or interviews with elderly former participants, as there are very few original documents surviving.

In the 1920s, many young Chinese left-wingers spent time in Moscow, being indoctrinated and learning how to organise political activity. Some of them came under 'Left Opposition' influences, especially from Karl Radek, who was one of their teachers. Many of those who sympathised with Trotsky, or were thought to do so, were sent back to China, where they tried to build some kind of movement in opposition to the Chinese 'Communist' Party (CCP). Later, Trotsky-supporters were kept in Moscow, where they could be more easily controlled.

The best-known of Chinese Trotskyists is Chen Duxiu, one of the founders of the CCP and its first leader. He was held by Stalinists to be responsible for the failure of the Chinese 'Revolution' in 1927, when Chiang Kai-shek and the nationalist Guomindang violently clamped down on the CCP and its supporters (though he and others were basically just following the Comintern's line). He was expelled from the CCP in 1929, and died in 1942.

In the 1930s and 1940s, Trotskyists in China were brutally suppressed by, at various times, the CCP, the Guomindang and the Japanese occupiers: imprisoned, tortured, executed. Many CCP members

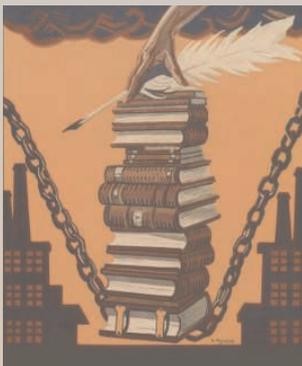
regarded them as Japanese spies. After the defeat of Japan in the Second World War, there was a civil war between the CCP and the Guomindang, during which the Trotskyists were too weak to be anything other than bystanders. In 1948–9 there were two Trotskyist organisations, with just a couple of hundred members in total. A number left the country when the CCP took power in 1949; those who stayed behind were for the most part not politically active.

In December 1952 the remaining Trotskyists in China were arrested and imprisoned, apparently in order to gain more support for the Mao regime from the USSR. These arrests were not publicised or made part of a wider political campaign. Some prisoners were not released until 1979, and they have never been formally 'rehabilitated', even posthumously. Opposition to Trotskyism remains part of the CCP's political line, perhaps because, Benton suggests, such opposition 'is a badge of commitment to political monolithism.'

There are some references to disputes among Trotskyists as to whether post-1949 China was state capitalist or bureaucratic-collectivist, but unfortunately there are no details of what these disagreements involved. Presumably this is because, as the editor states, 'the focus of the volume is on Chinese Trotskyism as an active political force rather than as detached commentary.' But it would have been good to see more on these theoretical issues, rather than so much on long-forgotten doctrinal disputes and splits.

If you are interested in the topic but cannot face a book of this length, reading the editor's forty-page introduction would probably suffice.

**PB**



## PORTRAYING A NATION: GERMANY 1919 - 1933



The Weimar Republic, from Germany's defeat in the First World War to Hitler's capture of power. A time of economic crisis, hyperinflation, massive unemployment, cultural innovation, increasing nationalism and repression. An exhibition at Tate Liverpool, on until the middle of October, attempts to capture some of these dramatic developments by exhibiting the work of photographer August Sander and painter Otto Dix.

Sander (1876–1964) is represented by photos from his project 'People of the 20th Century'. In one sense these are straightforward depictions of people who are looking into the camera; they are nearly all anonymous and described in terms of their work (e.g. farmer, doctor, blacksmith). There are photos of blind people and others who are in some way 'excluded' from society, such as those with learning difficulties. As the years pass, there are photos of Nazis in uniform and, from 1938, of 'victims of persecution'. In 1934 Sander's son Erich was arrested and imprisoned for political activity; he died in prison in 1944. A few photos of political prisoners, taken by Erich, are included.

In 1936 the Nazi authorities had the plates of one of Sanders' books destroyed and copies removed. A similar fate applied to the work of Dix (1891–1969), who had

paintings confiscated and displayed in the exhibition of 'Degenerate Art' from 1937 (though in truth it did not take much to be categorised in this way). Dix had fought in the First World War, and some of his depictions of fighting and the trenches are extremely powerful. He painted some of the many women who had been widowed by the war, also prostitutes, beggars and the rich. Dix refused any political allegiance, and concentrated instead on showing what was going on around him, but, as with Sander, this was inevitably too much for the totalitarian regime he had to live under. His 1937 painting 'The Seven Deadly Sins' (not included in this exhibition), which contains a caricature of Hitler embodying greed (or perhaps envy), is fairly easy to read nowadays, but Hitler's moustache was only added after the war, so it was originally not so clear-cut.

A photo of Dix by Sander links the two, but they are already connected in the visitor's mind by their honest representation of a Germany that was on a path of suffering, from one traumatic war to another.

**PB**



## 50 Years Ago

# Half a million unemployed

AS THE Ministry of Labour's doleful figures come out, let it not be forgotten that it is a Labour government which says that it has created half a million unemployed.

The Labour Party hold the theory that a government can produce, or abolish, unemployment at will. Whether this is true or not is beside the point, which is that Labour are saying they are responsible for the rise in unemployment, that it has come about as a result of their deliberate policy.

It is not convenient, now, for them to remember some of their promises. Like this one, by James Callaghan at their 1965 conference:

'... he had not joined the Labour Party to create unemployment. He was certain that the measures being taken, through regional planning, were the right ones to

maintain full employment' (*The Guardian*, 1/10/65.)

It is not convenient, now, for Labour to remember that the wage freeze was always supposed to be the alternative to unemployment. This was Callaghan, again at the 1965 conference:

'This problem of getting increased productivity would be solved either by unemployment and substantial deflation, or by a prices and incomes policy: there is no other way.' (*The Guardian*, 1/10/65.)

As it turned out, the working class have got it all; a wage freeze, unemployment and what is called "deflation".

Presumably, if they were pressed on the matter, the Labour Party would still say that this is Socialism.

For one thing, their policies seem to be holding the support of a majority of trade union leaders, although what these same leaders would say about the same policies if they came from a Conservative government hardly bears thinking about.

To some extent, then, Labour have had things their way. What it amounts to is that in 1964 there was a dirty job to be done for the British capitalist class and Labour have done it.

(From Review, *Socialist Standard*, October 1967).



Labour Conference 1965

## ACTION REPLAY

### What 'workers' revolution'?

ACCORDING TO Mark Littlewood, the Director General of the market-worshipping Institute of Economic Affairs, in an article in the *Times* (14 August) headlined 'Highly-paid footballers are the purest example of a workers' revolution in action':

'If you remain attracted to the dictum that the workers should receive the "full fruits of their labour", changes in the power structures of English football should be your stand-out example of the world you believe in.'

His argument is that developments in the football business over the last fifty years represent 'a substantial transfer of power away from the capitalist bosses and towards the employees upon whom their industry depends.'

He's being ironic of course as he is not in the least attracted by the idea that workers should receive the 'full fruits of their labour' or that there should be a transfer of power from capitalists to employees. He is having a dig at socialists. But is there anything in what he says?

Socialists don't stand for individual

workers, or even groups of workers, getting the 'full fruits of their labour' even if this could be measured (which it can't). If this happened there would be nothing left for those who, for one reason or another (too young, too old, severely disabled), were unable to work. Marx himself pointed this out in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. Since production is collective today, socialists say that what is produced collectively should be owned collectively. We want a world where the 'fruits of labour' belong in common to society as a whole.

Most professional footballers are simply wage workers selling their particular skill to an employer. As with other workers, their wage reflects the cost of them maintaining the particular type of labour-power they are selling. There has been no substantial change in their position over the past fifty years, certainly no shift of power from their employers to them.

A small minority of professional footballers are, figuratively as well as literally, in a different league. Their very high degree of footballing skill sets them apart. As such skills are in limited supply, the price paid to use them is determined by the demand for them. Those possessing them are in the same position as others owning something that cannot be reproduced, such as land in a

desired location or a picture by a famous painter. As in these cases, the price they get is what people are prepared to pay. This price is not a wage but a monopoly income, or rent. It has nothing to do with the amount of work these footballers do.

The football clubs – or, rather, football businesses – they play for are prepared to pay a high price because they recoup a large part of it by selling the right to televise their matches, and of course because they need to have the best players to stay in the league whose matches bring in a revenue from being televised.

The change that has taken place in football is not a workers' revolution. The most that is true is that football, like other sports and entertainment, provides a way for some individuals from a poor background to escape from this and even to join the ranks of the capitalist class.

A workers' revolution is quite different. It aims to emancipate the whole working class, by making the means of production, currently owned by the capitalist class, the common property of society as a whole. The fruits of society's collective labour will then belong to society, to be shared out amongst all the members of society in accordance with their needs.

# Meetings

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

## OCTOBER 2017

### LONDON

**Sunday, 8 October, 3.00pm**

**Socialism: what it is and how to get there**

An open discussion

Venue: The Socialist Party's premises, 52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 7UN

### CANTERBURY

**Saturday, 14 October from 12.00 Noon Street Stall**

In the Parade pedestrian precinct, CT1 2JL  
Phone 07971 715569 for more information

### CARDIFF

**Saturday, 14 October, 12.00 Noon**

**South East Wales Regional Branch**  
Venue: National Museum of Wales cafeteria, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NP

### LONDON

**Saturday, 28 October**

**London Anarchist Bookfair from 10.00 a.m.**

Venue: Park View School, West Green Road, London, N15 3QR

The Socialist Party will have a stall outside the event from 12.00 Noon

### MANCHESTER

**Saturday, 28 October**

**Life Without Money, 2.00pm**

Venue: The Unicorn, 26 Church Street, Manchester, M4 1PW

## SOCIALISM OR YOUR MONEY BACK

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## Declaration of Principles

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

### Object

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

### Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

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

2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

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

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation

of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

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

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

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

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

### LONDON

**Saturday 21 and Sunday 22 October, 10.30am – 5.00pm both days**

### Autumn Delegate Meeting

Venue: The Socialist Party's premises, 52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 7UN

### EC Meeting

**Saturday 4 November 2017, 52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 7UN.**

Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the Editorial Committee.

### Picture Credits

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**p24:** Gustave Dore – Death on a Pale Horse, 865, Swedish Bible, Gustave Dore, PD

## Nibiru nonsense

If you are reading this, the world did not end. 'This year, a Christian conspiracy theorist David Meade has made an alarmingly specific prediction – not only is the world about to end, doomsday is scheduled for September 23... Meade bases his predictions on an assortment of sources including the Book of Revelation and signs allegedly written in the Pyramids. He says: 'It is very strange indeed that both the Great Sign of Revelation 12 and the Great Pyramid of Giza both point us to one precise moment in time' (yahoo.com, 8 September). Meade will likely join the many fakirs on Wikipedia's long list of dates, stretching back to 66CE, who predicted apocalyptic events. Capitalism continues: it's business as usual – war, famine (amidst plenty) and (often curable) pestilence.

## Half-baked

Religion was humanity's first attempt at science. We could not explain the forces of nature, the rising and setting of the Sun, phases of the moon, etc., and ascribed them to the super-natural. Viewed through the lens of the materialist conception of history, it can be seen as a necessary adjunct to our development. Yet religion has long served the interests of the minority master class. Just as the fundamental change from Catholicism to Protestantism was essential for the rise of capitalism as an ideology – for example, the Calvinist idea that God shows his favour on Earth by making merchants rich – so atheism is fundamental for the 99 percent and the socialist claim that the world is theirs to run, with neither gods nor masters, as they see fit. The evangelist Jim Bakker – once jailed for fraud, involved in a sex scandal, and leader of PTL (better known as Pass the Loot) Ministry – continues to divert the

gullible from their real interests. 'During a segment in which Bakker was selling \$175 buckets of his disaster preparedness food, Tasty Pantry... he revealed that he felt the real issue with the weather and everything else on the earth has to do with sin and wickedness... Bakker added: 'Just remember, God gets the last word. God gets the last word. Be not deceived, God is not mocked' (theblaze.com, 7 September).

## No nonsense Nun

Remarkably, the contents of a 'coded letter written by a 17<sup>th</sup> century nun while she was possessed by the Devil [have been] finally translated using decryption software discovered on the dark web' (dailymail.co.uk, 8 September). There's no crystal ball in sight but this is likely to be of interest to socialists. According to modern scientists, Sister Maria suffered from schizophrenia or bipolar

have agreed with Marx when he stated that 'The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusions about their condition is a demand to give up a condition that requires illusion. The criticism of religion is therefore the germ of the criticism of the valley of tears whose halo is religion' (*Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, 1844). Given the very real threat capitalism represents to our survival – you do not need to be a socialist to recognize the ever-present danger of nuclear Armageddon, for example – reject the pie in the sky when you die of religion and instead worry, agitate now, be happy later.

## Capitalist conflict

What are we to make of the ongoing war between the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army and the state of Myanmar? Mainstream media in the West presents it in religious terms: the persecution of Muslims by Buddhists. Religion is often used to justify conflict as well as to obscure the real interests involved. 'China's concerns over Rakhine State are related to interests in its One Belt One Road Initiative (OBOR), said political and ethnic affairs analyst U Maung Maung Soe. Rakhine plays an important part in OBOR, as it is an exit to the Indian Ocean and the location of a planned billion-dollar Chinese project – an economic zone on Ramree Island, and the Kyaukphyu deep-sea port, which has oil and natural gas pipelines linked with Yunnan Province's Kunming. "Therefore, the stability of Rakhine State is important for this project. The meeting shows China's concerns over its One Belt One Road Initiative," said U Maung Maung Soe' (irrawaddy.com, 4 September).



disorder yet she described God and Jesus as dead weights (predating Marx's 'the tradition of all past generations weighs like an incubus upon the brain of the living' by over 200 years) adding that the former was invented by Man. Maria may well

