THE MONUMENT

'LEST WE FORGET'
IN MEMORY OF THE HARD LEFT
THEY GAVE US MILITARISM, THE POLICE STATE & THE GULAGS

also: Kerala
Trotsky
Conspiracies
One thing that all capitalist political organisations, whatever their political complexion, have in common is that they are organised around the leadership principle. At the apex is a leader or a leadership body, who will determine and control the direction of the organisation. Under capitalist democracies, the political leader is usually elected by a ballot of its parliamentary representatives and/or its party members (in the case of the Labour Party, members of affiliated unions can also vote). Although party members have some involvement in the annual Party Conferences, the party programmes that are presented at election time are ultimately determined by the party leadership. Once the party is elected to power, the party leader becomes the national leader. Aside from voting at each General Election and at the occasional referendum, the working class has no say in the running of the government. In political dictatorships, the leader is usually appointed by a governing clique or is selected on the basis of nepotism, as is the case with North Korea. The leadership principle is not confined to the mainstream parties, the so-called revolutionary left base their politics on Lenin’s theory of the vanguard party, in which a body of professional revolutionaries will lead the working class to socialism. Political power rests with the Central Committee who control the decision making process within the organisation.

Not only in politics, but in other spheres of life we have leaders. Shareholders elect the company’s CEO and board of directors who make the investment decisions and have control over the workforce. Trade unions also have leaders. At school, we are taught about the ‘great’ leaders of ‘our’ country. So we are encouraged to believe that the most able and ‘talented’ of the human race are destined to be leaders, while the ‘untalented’ rest of us have to accept our place as followers. Yet history shows that this has not always been the case. In the earliest formations of human society, which Marx described as ‘primitive communism’, there was no private property, no state, no class divisions and people were able to participate without the need of leaders. However, when society developed to the point where a surplus could be produced over and above its basic needs, a minority class emerged that was able to appropriate it. To do this, the new ruling class needed a state machine that would rule over the exploited wealth producing class and keep them in order. Thus a political ideology promoting leadership emerged. Under capitalism, leaders are selected either from the capitalist class or from members of the working class who are willing to manage the economic system, on their behalf, so that the workers continue to produce profits. Under socialism, where private/ state property is abolished and the means of living are held in common, class divisions will disappear, there will be no need for political leaders and people will be able to participate freely in society. As the organisation of the Socialist Party reflects the socialist society for which it is striving, there is no place for leaders and is, therefore, under the control of its membership.

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Introducing the Socialist Party

The Socialist Party advocates a society where production is freed from the artificial constraints of profit and organised for the benefit of all on the basis of material abundance. It does not have policies to ameliorate aspects of the existing social system. It is opposed to all war.

The Socialist Standard is the combative monthly journal of the Socialist Party, published without interruption since 1904. In the 1940s the Socialist Standard explained why capitalism would not collapse of its own accord, in response to widespread claims to the contrary, and continues to hold this view in face of the collapse of its own accord, in response to widespread claims to the contrary, and continues to hold this view in face of the collapse of an illusion. Today, the journal exposes as false the view that banks create money out of thin air, and explains why actions to prevent the depredation of the natural world can have limited effect and run counter to the nature of capitalism itself.

Gradual reformers like the Labour Party believed that capitalism could be transformed through a series of social measures, but have merely become routine managers of the system. The Bolsheviks had to be content with developing Russian capitalism under a one-party dictatorship. Both failures have given socialism a quite different -- and unattractive -- meaning: state ownership and control. As the Socialist Standard pointed out before both courses were followed, the results would more properly be called state capitalism.

The Socialist Party and the World Socialist Movement affirm that capitalism is incapable of meaningful change in the interests of the majority; that the basis of exploitation is the wages/money system. The Socialist Standard is proud to have kept alive the original idea of what socialism is -- a classless, stateless, wageless, moneyless society or, defined positively, a democracy in which free and equal men and women co-operate to produce the things they need to live and enjoy life, to which they have free access in accordance with the principle ‘from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs’.

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Socialist Standard October 2018

Whale Flukes

WHEN PEOPLE ask questions that begin ‘What would socialism do about…?’ we have to be careful how to answer because a) it would be presumptuous of us to make tomorrow’s decisions today on behalf of everyone, b) prevailing circumstances and technology may change unpredictably and c), as a Party wag once put it, socialists don’t have crystal balls.

But you don’t need technical knowledge, or crystal balls, to realise what socialism would most likely do in many cases. Sometimes common sense is enough. But capitalism is far too perverse to be so amenable to evidence or news items illustrate.

The first item is the story that Japan is trying to get its supporters on the International Whaling Commission (mostly small countries with juicy Japanese aid programmes) to vote to lift the long-standing global embargo (‘Japan says it’s time to allow sustainable whaling’, BBC Online, 7 September). The whaling question is bizarre from almost every angle. Japan argues that now that the minke whale population has returned to sustainable levels, the embargo makes no sense. But Japan has famous history of hunting minke whales in defiance of the embargo ever since it was established in 1986, with the rhetorical pretence ‘scientific research’. This activity seems to be what has drawn so much media attention onto the Mekong Delta, while minimising the real world media indifference and without any such ‘scientific’ pretence, Norway and Iceland together hunt even more whales per year than Japan, including the endangered fin whale. Their reason? The IWC embargo was only voluntary and so they have both opted to ignore it. One wonders why the Japanese don’t simply do the same. After all, they would have a point.

The IWC was deliberately crowded out by non-whaling countries (over 70) to permanently out-vote the whalers, so the debate was harpooned from the start. The Japanese are also sure keenly correct in pointing out that most opposing countries support large-scale meat farming, often in cramped and inhumane conditions, and are thus being completely hypocritical. Certainly whales are intelligent animals, but then so are pigs. Moreover it’s a strange kind of moral argument to say that we shouldn’t kill things because they are intelligent, when capitalism regularly kills intelligent humans by the tens of millions, by neglect if not active warfare.

But what’s really odd about the whaling industry is that it doesn’t even make money. Whaling in all three countries is heavily subsidised by their governments. Though populations have been gull into supporting whaling as a mark of national pride, hardly any of them eat whale meat. In Iceland, whale watching is a far more lucrative industry and almost the only people who eat the meat are tourists who think of it as a cultural box to tick (‘Icelanders Don’t Like Whale Meat—So Why the Hunts?’ news.nationalgeographic.com, 27 January 2016).

In Norway fewer than 5 percent eat whale steak (Wikipedia). The rest is sold for dog food or shipped to Japan. Even in Japan there is hardly any taste for it, and the market is on the point of collapse. The reason in all cases is the same: whale meat just doesn’t taste very good. Despite its claims to centuries of tradition, Japan only started large-scale whaling after World War 2 when it was unable to afford lamb and beef imports.

Norway’s only remaining whaling company actively propagandises the industry by visiting schools and sponsoring apprenticeship schemes. Iceland echoes to answer the question ‘Would there be whaling in socialism?’ you only have to ask yourself if you would be prepared to go out on a factory ship and kill whales with grenade harpoons for the sake of something that nobody wants to eat in the first place.

The Green And Pleasant Sahara

The other story is more encouraging, with the suggestion by researchers that planting up to 9m square kilometres of solar panels and wind turbines across the Sahara desert would have the effect of greening it (‘Large-scale wind and solar power ‘could green the Sahara’, BBC Online, 7 September). It turns out that both solar and wind collection systems have the by-product of increasing local precipitation, quite apart from the energy they produce. The effect on local people could hardly be more positive, in turning arid desert into a Garden of Eden, even if such a scheme proved unworkable.

In a socialist society looking for safe and sustainable ways to produce abundant energy, this could well be the decisive factor in proceeding with such a scheme in all haste.

But in capitalism there is the uncertainty of the market to take into account. What rich country or corporation is going to front up the money for this, and towards what projected profit? Local people in the Sahara may well benefit but as they are among the poorest people on Earth they don’t count, economically speaking. What does count is the sale of the energy to other countries, but energy prices can be severely affected by many factors, especially oversupply. Investors are not likely to invest in any system that supplies energy over and above projected demand, because this will lead to lower prices and a loss of profit. So, good as the idea looks, the political factor of capital might not add up capital isn’t the only thing that matters.

Maybe they will, if they apply the fear of ‘getting it wrong’ to their strategy. For instance, if they applied the same thinking to agriculture and the deluge of scientists proposing various crops, they’d find it is a matter of trying different crops and selecting the one(s) which work best. For instance, if the央企 had tried to grow rice where it was too cold, they would have failed. In the same way, whale meat might be fine in some areas, but the Japanese market is booming for whale meat. We can’t do what the Chinese are doing (whale meat, though not to be eaten by the Chinese, but killing it for pets). We might need to do what the Chinese are doing for wildlife.

What would socialism do about the whaling industry? It would be a full-scale campaign to shut it down in all countries, as we have done with tobacco.

Conspiracy-theory, or conspiracism, much of the world today is to be understood in terms of ‘conspiracy’ by a myriad of cranks, extra-terrestrials, masons, or whatever. Currently gaining credence among many is the idea that all accepted science is a conspiracy, for relativity theory and quantum physics are specialised subjects. Einstein is difficult to understand and the majority of us are not astrophysicists, or other types of scientist, but that is no reason to dismiss these theories. Many in society seek solace in pseudoscience, and therefore in conspiracism, whereby we can feel in control over what we cannot understand. Conspiracism absolves us from having to undertake painstaking research where you are not willing to trust those who actually have expertise in a difficult subject. Conspiracism attracts people from an entire spectrum, eager to feel that they belong to something; right or left in their leanings, dependent on what they were before becoming conspiracist. The phenomenon appears to attract ‘truthers’ — those who know the ‘truth’ despite the facts. Some are avowedly Christian, others not. Some daily with other rehashed mythologies, interpreted to fit in with their modern conspiracism. Many are, in fact, as members of the working class, confused and vulnerable, and want to feel significant; which they feel modern scientific thinking cannot help them with.

It is tempting to draw some similarity in all of this to the declining years of the Roman Empire, so brilliantly shown in the film Agora, about the last days of the great Library of Alexandria. Even so, Japan is a Life of Brian parody by demanding the right to eat whale as a symbol of national pride, and nothing is more lucrative, given the health and environmental implications of whaling, to see the majority of us are not astrophysicists, be it by scientists, extra-terrestrials, or whoever.}

Life Sciences

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To order: Send £12 per shirt payable to The Socialist Party of Great Britain, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN (or Paypal as email address below) stating colour and size required with your name, address and phone number.

*Overseas orders (and enquiries): Please email for a price first with ‘T-Shirt Order’ in the subject line to spgb@worldsocialism.org

Mailing bags recycle with supermarket carrier bags

Death of a loan shark

So Wonga, the notorious payday lender, has gone under. Very few will be shedding a tear. As a payday lender, its business model was to make small, short term unsecured (i.e. with no collateral) loans. They charged interest, You could get a loan of £50 for a week if you wanted. Because there was no collateral, e.g. no house or cars to repossess, and no serious credit checks, the risk of default and cost of recovering it was higher and so therefore was the rate of interest.

Since 2015, regulations have limited the maximum interest that payday companies can charge to 0.8 percent a day. That’s still quite steep – 80p per day on a loan of £100 for 30 days is about £24. Before that, companies like Wonga – and Wonga in particular – used to charge more than twice as much, with stiff penalties for not repaying on time.

One reason why companies like Wonga existed is that banks won’t touch poor people in need of short-term loans. But what is the difference between a moneylender and a bank? Some think that when a bank makes a loan it ‘creates’ money. The reasoning behind this is that, as the amount of the loan will be spent, when it is this adds to total spending. But why is this reasoning not applied to payday lenders or to other lenders such as credit card and car finance companies? Their loans also add to total spending.

One reason why loans by such financial institutions should not be regarded as creating new money is given in a short online article ‘Are credit cards a form of money? Credit cards and the supply’. The author gives the example of him borrowing money from his girlfriend to buy a video game, and concludes: ‘[M]y debt to my girlfriend would not be considered money because she cannot use it as a form of money, nor is it trivial to find someone who is willing to pay her cash in return for the loan. The loan is a mechanism in which money will be transferred from me to my girlfriend, but the loan is not money itself. When I repay the loan I will pay her £50 which will be in the form of money. If we consider the loan as money and the payment of the loan as money we’re essentially counting the same transaction twice. The £50 I pay my girlfriend is the shopkeeper’s money. The £50 I will pay my girlfriend tomorrow is money, but the obligation I hold between today

and tomorrow is not money’ (www. thoughtco.com/credit-cards-and-the-money-supply-3146295).

This makes sense. The loan, i.e., the IOU to his girlfriend, is not money. What money is what is used to pay for the video game and that was not ‘created’ but came from the girlfriend.

It’s the same with a credit card. The credit card company pays for what you purchase and you repay by the end of the month. In the case of a payday company, it lends you the money first until your next payday, and when you get paid you pay it back (with interest).

The difference between a bank and other lenders is that they are lending their own money whereas a bank is lending other people’s. This makes following what happens more complicated but is the same. When the borrower buys something out of the bank’s loan, the bank pays for it, normally by a bank transfer to the seller’s bank, just as a credit company does. You pay the bank back later.

How then, is a bank loan different? Good question.

Taboo and Criminality

RECENTLY I WAS very surprised to discover that someone I knew and liked had, at one time, been convicted of sexual offences against underage females. He had been imprisoned for several years and was now hounded out of his job by an internet campaign. Many questions arise from this unfortunate situation including: (a) Can some crimes never be forgiven? (b) Does a completed prison sentence represent a relevant payment to the community? (c) Does the community (primarily parents) have the right to know of the presence of a convicted sex offender in their midst? (d) What is the relationship between taboo and criminality?

Upon reflection I could find no examples of a universal cultural taboo. Murder, cannibalism, incest, paedophilia, abortion and prostitution have all existed (and not sanctioned by authorities at least tolerated by them) in many cultures throughout history. The fact that these activities are taboos within certain cultures at certain times indicates an expression of identity (religious or humanist) that has been derived originally from a perceived communal necessity. For instance the Jewish prohibition against eating pork may originate in the unsuitability of the pig to thrive in an arid climate without access to vast uncommercial amounts of water, and the prohibition against incest has its origin in the need for human groups to forge alliances with others to improve their own survival.

A culture can identify itself as progressive through both criminalising taboos (the abuse of women and children etc.) and decriminalising them (homosexuality etc.). One of the elements nearly always present seems to be that of social power relationships. The client has financial power over the prostitute, the murderer has power (usually through the use of a weapon) over the murder victim, the rapist has physical superiority over his victim and the child abuser has both physical and psychological power over his or her victim. We know that many child abusers were themselves abused as children and so the form of abuse becomes a vicious circle within succeeding generations. In an authoritarian culture like capitalism power relationships are normalised and the family unit often represents a microcosm of this and is where the child first learns of such behaviour. Although the power of parents over their children (derived from either kinship or feelings of ownership) usually keeps them from harm it can also facilitate abuse (dysfunction) and the subsequent fear and resentment within the child can inhibit healthy emotional and social development.

Any contemporary analysis of the origins of the abuse of power in any of its incarnations can only be understood by reference to the authoritarian capitalist context. It would be irrational to single out sick individuals as the cause when the murder of children during war is normalised. Surely the ultimate form of child abuse is to kill them and that would make the likes of George Bush and Tony Blair among the ultimate perpetrators of such a crime.

Socialists despair at the hypocrisy of those who defend war whilst simultaneously exhibiting moral outrage at individual acts of child abuse. There are even some who defend the use of violence (smacking) in their relationship with children. Someone once told me that it was only a way to enforce conformity and that made him

There exists, of course, a counter current to the use of taboos for control and that is exemplified in the struggle for personal and political liberation. The politicisation of sexuality (spurredheadly by feminism) can be understood as the reflection or antithesis of the sexualisation of politics (implicit within authoritarianism in terms of dominant and oppressed sex). Our belief in the potential of our species to create a better world implies both a political and moral historical progression. Unfortunately this demand for liberation is at the moment primarily articulated in terms of individual, gender or racial identities rather than that of class and thus of humanity itself. In some ways this sort of ‘identity politics’ is a kind of consumerism with the perceived right to ownership of the self at its heart – rather than a recognition that the ultimate liberation of the self depends on the liberation of all.

With the confident expectation that a socialist society will be free from prejudice (if not completely eradicate) the incidence of abuse, primarily because of the absence of hierarchical institutions, how are socialists to respond to the questions that began this article in the here and now? The forgiveness of some crimes by the victims and by the community would seem to benefit everyone concerned and is certainly preferable to internment ‘witch hunts’. But of all crimes the abuse of the weak by the strong, whether they are children, the elderly or the mentally and physically handicapped, is particularly hard to forgive and certainly should never be forgotten or hidden. The creation of a human community where such behaviour is inconceivable is one of the goals of socialism. Some may think this to be no more than a utopian dream but even as an aspiration it is surely infinitely preferable to pinning medals on pilots who have been responsible for the mass killing of children – or the state sanctioned murder of anyone else for that matter.

WEZ
UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

LONDON

North London branch. Meets 3rd Thurs 8pm at Torrington Meeting House, 9 Torrington Ave, NW5 2RX. Contact: Chris Duffin 020 7609 0983 nib. spgb@gmail.com

South London branch. Meets last Saturday in month, 2.30pm, Headrow House, 37-41 St Helen’s St, SW4 7UH. Contact: 020 762 3811.

West London branch. Meets 1st & 3rd Tues. 8pm. Chiwuk Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace (corner Sutton Rd & Warrington Rd), W14. Corner of Gaysford Road, London W12 9YF. Contact: 020 8740 6677. tenner@abelgratis.co.uk

MIDLANDS

West Midlands regional branch. Meets last Sun. 3pm (check before attending). Contact: Stephen Shapton 01543 821 180. Email: stephenshapton@yahoo.co.uk

NORTH

North East Regional branch. Contact: P. Kilgarn, 29 Nicholson Terrace, Newcastle, NE2 1DR

Lancaster branch. Meets 2nd Sun (Jan 3rd), 3pm, Friends Meeting House, Meeting House Lane. Ring to confirm. P. Shannon, 075 410 3766, spgb.lancaster@worldsocialism.org.

Manchester branch. Contact: Paul Bennett, 6 Borugh Mews, Hardy Lane, M21 7TU. 0161 860 7189.

Botton. Contact: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844 839.

SCOTLAND

Contact: Anton Pruden, Anton@spgb.org.uk

Centenary Meeting House, 99 Torriano Ave, NW5 1LR. North London branch.

Cumbria

Contact: Rob Cox, 4 Stanhope Rd, Hethersett, NR9 3JD. 01692 6677. tenner@abelgratis.co.uk

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

Kent and Sussex regional branch. Meets 2nd Sun, 2pm at The Mugglton Inn, High Street, Maidstone ME14 1AQ. Contact: Brian Cummings, 19 Queen St, Millom, Cumbria LA18 4BG.

Doncaster. Contact: Fred Edwards, Fred.edward@hotmail.co.uk

WALES

South Wales branch (Cardiff)

May 2nd: 7pm (last Tuesday in May, unless otherwise advertised), The Nuevo Club, Queen Street, Cardiff. Contact: Richard Bottrell, 21 Pen y Bryn Rd, Gabalfa, Cardiff, CF14 3LG. 02920 158262. bottrellr@gmail.com

SCOTLAND

Edinburgh branch. Meets 1st Thurs, 7-9pm. The Quaker Hall, Victoria Terrace (above Victoria Street), Edinburgh. Contact: I. Mccall 031 440 0995. jimmyjmms@gmail.com

Edinburgh branch. Meets 1st Tues, 4pm, The Hub, skatepark, Causewayhead.

Gloucester branch. Meets 3rd Weds. At 7pm in Community Central Halls, 345 Maryhill Road, Glasgow. Contact: Peter File, 75 Larkhill Rd, East Kilbride, Glasgow G75 9GH. 01355 620105. peter.anna.hendrie@blueyonder.co.uk

Edinburgh branch. Contact: John Patillo, 12 Field Terrace, Broughton, Edinburgh, EH7 5HA. Meets 4th Weds. 7pm. Contact: Paul Edwards 01724 820735.

WALES

South Wales branch (Swansea)

Meeting: 2nd Sunday, 7:30pm (last Sunday in the month, January, April, July and October). University Church, High Street, Swansea SA2 8DG. Contact: Geoff Pylkovec 01792 701948.

South Wales branch (Cardiff)

Meeting: 1st Monday, 7:30pm (January, April, July and October). Cafe Nero, Capital Shopping Centre, Queens Street, Cardiff. Contact: Richard Bottrell, 21 Pen y Bryn Rd, Gabalfa, Cardiff, CF14 3LG. 02920 158262. bottrellr@gmail.com

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COMPARISON PARTIES OVERSEAS

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World Socialist Party (India) 257 Baghating E’ 304, Sector 26, Gurgaon 122001, 0124-3242-020. wipinda@hotmail.com

World Socialist Party (New Zealand) P.O. Box 1920, Auckland, NZ, New Zealand.

WORLDWIDE

Chavez’s social policy was based on the rents from oil production remaining high. When oil prices fell, this could not continue and recourse to the printing press and price controls has resulted in shortages, inflation and unemployment, causing discontent.

Venezuelan wealth into social benefits (or ‘chavismo’) – Chavez believed that a substantial part of state resources should go to social welfare. The director of the Ministry of Social Welfare suggested that the objective was to achieve a ‘Venezuelan welfare state’ – a concept which had no real precedent. The state should have been providing these benefits from the state’s own resources.

The IMF predicts that Venezuela’s inflation rate may well hit one million percent by the end of 2018. The situation has grown into a refugee crisis for Venezuela’s neighbours.

The UN has said that more than 7 – 23 million – of Venezuela’s population has left the country since 2015 to escape political violence and severe shortages of food and medicines. More than a million of them have crossed into Colombia since 2015. About half a million Venezuelan citizens have entered Ecuador since January. That is nearly 10 times the number of Venezuelans who crossed the 1998 border with Colombia. This year 117,000 have claimed political asylum in Brazil. Up to 45,000 Venezuelans have crossed the narrow straits to Trinidad and Tobago. Many other countries have humanitarian visas in hand.

According to UN Refugee Agency spokesperson William Spindler: ‘The exodus from one country is one of Latin America’s largest mass-population movements in history. Many of the Venezuelans are moving on foot, in an odyssey of days and even weeks in precarious conditions. Many run out of resources to continue their journey, and left destitute are forced to live rough in public parks and resort to begging and other negative coping mechanisms in order to meet their daily needs.’ He added that ‘knee-jerk reactions to the exodus have been noted in some quarters.’

Venezuelan Vice-President Delcy Rodriguez said the figures had been inflated by ‘enemies trying to justify a military intervention. Maduro has put the number at no more than 600,000 in the last two years.’

Capitalism cannot be made to work in the permanent interest of the working class. There can be some temporary respite with pro-worker reforms. When the price of oil fell these temporary benefits in Venezuela could not be sustained. In the end, the economic laws of capitalism asserted themselves. The problem is that left-wingers never learn from history. They discover what they believe are shortcuts to socialism but which ultimately lead to disillusionment. It is the same mistake they repeat over and over again, resulting in our fellow-workers swinging back and forth like a pendulum from left-to-right and right-to-left.

What is most disappointing for socialists, aside from the despair and misery of our fellow-workers, are the left-wingers who argued that Chavez had brought Venezuela on the path to ‘socialism’ (actually state capitalism, relying on oil rents). Such claims merely offer ammunition for the pro-capitalist apologists to say ‘look at what’s happening in Venezuela – that is socialism for you.’ But it wasn’t. 4
One of the core elements is more fundamental than most of the others and – despite the excellence of the book in other respects – has not been brought out quite as well as it might have been. This is the idea that while the working class is considered to be the agent of social change – as in Marxist theory – it is not the only viable path for the ‘Kommunist’ worker while capitalist rule dominates. This was the view taken by Lenin and the Bolshevists, including both Stalin and Trotsky, and so unites them all.

From this viewpoint much else follows. If the working class is unable to understand capitalist exploitation and overthrow the capitalist system because the dominant ideas are literally always something else, how can a revolutionary event occur? All those in the tradition of Lenin came up with an answer, based on adapting the Russian Bolshevist model of a minority political coup d’état. This idea was to build up a parallel political and organisational rival to the capitalist system (the ‘vanguard’ or ‘advanced guard’ of the working class) that could overthrow the capitalist regime. It then only required the economic and political reform for this to occur – including the desire of the working class for it to happen.

But to build up the vanguard party of professional revolutionaries within capitalism there’s need for the old advocating socialism, as that would be to cast pearls before the proverbial swine. What is needed instead is a tactical approach that can form an ideological bridge between where we are today and where we could end up. And this, in most respects, is where Trotsky and his followers developed a set of theories – most of them really tactics – that have distinguished them from others in the tradition of Lenin and Trotsky. In reality, four: Transitional demands. These are reforms of capitalism advocated with the sole purpose of demonstrating that the system is not deliverable. This was essentially the approach of smashing a structure that needs to be smashed, even if as an act of protest in order to establish the leadership of the vanguard party instead. The ‘united front’ tactic. Like advocating transitional demands, this has been a means of winning recruits from other parties as it involves putting forward specific demands and campaigns that will enable Labour, Communists, Trotskyists, etc to work together on certain issues such as the ‘popular front’ tactic of the old Communist Party tactic of the ‘Popular Front’ which had often involved overly pro-capitalist parties too, like Liberal and Conservative parties.

A critical stance towards the former Soviet Union and its satellites. This is the big issue that has created more disagreement in the Trotskyist movement than probably any other. This is because within the Trotskyist tradition at one time the regime Stalin went on to build up while Trotsky was in exile, they nevertheless held very dear to the political methods that created the party in the first place, especially those of the Russian workers’ state that had degenerated under Stalinist leadership. Some still adhere to this, while others have moved from this position over time to create greater distance, adopting what Trotsky would have rejected as a lists of Trotskyist criticisms of ‘capitalist when Stalinism took hold, adopting a standpoint previously alien to the Trotskyist movement and pursued by non-Leninist organizations like the SPGB. Trotsky categorizes the SWP and most of its offshoots as ‘Third Camp’ Trotskyism.

Trotskyism in Britain

One of the most notable features of the Trotskyist movement in Britain and other countries has been its tendency to fragment over time. From its origins in the tiny Balham Group of former Communist Party members in the 1930s it was united for a short time towards the end of the Second World War in an organization called the Revolutionary Communist Party, but since then has been split asunder many times.

Kelly has identified seven Trotskyist ‘families’ that emerged, that emerged in the tradition of Lenin and Trotsky, and its main tendencies surfaced in Britain in the post-war era after the split of the RCP. These were led by four dominant individuals, the most surprising of whom was Trotsky himself. Kelly himself had claimed that ‘The world political situation as a whole is characterised by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat’ and Trotskyist organizations (like Lenin’s Fourth International) have had to put away any sense of one party to the leadership of the working class, while Trotskyists, etc to work together on certain issues such as the ‘popular front’ tactic of the old Communist Party tactic of the ‘Popular Front’ which had often involved overly pro-capitalist parties too, like Liberal and Conservative parties.

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Staffers

One of the more intriguing details to emerge in Kelly’s book is how much activity is still supported by paid officials. During the Militant Tendency’s peak of 8,000 members it had no less than 250 full-time equivalent staff (a not dissimilar total to the entire Labour Party). More recently, SPEW has the highest number of staffers with 45 full-time equivalent workers, compared to 32.5 in the SWP. Most of these are employed in publications-related work, with some being national, regional or local organizers.

Given all this, and the campaigns both initiated and hijacked by Trotskyist groups (from the Anti-Nazi League in the late 70s to the Stop the War Coalition more recently), it is perhaps surprising they remain as small as they do. Even more surprising perhaps given their relentless work in the trade unions, including trying to gain positions of influence at all levels, again meticulously detailed by Kelly. Similarly, in the last couple of decades there has been a generally increased focus on election campaigns as a means of generating publicity, from Respect to the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). This is maybe long-term enemies like the SWP and SPEG temporarily to bury their differences, but with little practical effect.

Prognosis

The current state of flux in the Corbyn-led Labour Party has seen a number of Trotskyist groups identify a chance to engage closely with people who could be like-minded. The paucity of Trotskyist candidates standing against Labour in the 2017 General Election was a reflection of this; reversing the trend towards greater electoral participation since the 1990s. The evidence presented by Kelly suggests that the far left tends to do better on average (both in terms of electoral support and in party membership) when Labour is in government rather than in opposition. But it still does badly, and even organizations in other countries including some Trotskyist elements within them at various stages such as Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain only succeed when they build far wider leftist coalitions, dwarfing the Trotskyist contribution to the extent that it becomes almost invisible. And almost inevitably these parties have a tendency to end up – like Syriza – being respectable parties of capitalist government.

This is interesting, because Trotskyist groups have long argued that they do this because to do anything differently, such as advocate real socialism (common ownership, production for use, the abolition of the wages system, etc) is a waste of time. If we could do anything different, they argued that they do this because to do anything differently, such as advocate real socialism (common ownership, production for use, the abolition of the wages system, etc) is a waste of time. In fact, most of them only pay lip-service to this as being their long term goal at very best, and most certainly learn lessons from the last century and more, John Kelly’s book has thrown an interesting spotlight on a few things. And one of them is that despite the fact that we in the SPGB advocate the ‘maximum programme’ of socialism and nothing but – and despite all the tactical manoeuverings and reform campaigns of the various Trotskyist groups over the years – there are only two of them (the SWP and SPEG) that are actually bigger than us! Every other party and group from the WRP and Socialist Appeal to the AWL and Counterfire are smaller than we are. And so we are former (and very visible) Trotsky groups like the RCP at their peak in the late 80s/early 90s.

Just think, then – if a few more of them had spent their considerable energies advocating real socialism rather than playing tactical games of footsie with the reformists, the movement for social change in this country could have been a lot stronger than it is. That’s not to crow, as we of course wish we had done this a long time ago.

The social revolution to replace minority class ownership finds a formidable barrier in the guise of reformism to which the Hard Left, every bit as much as any mainstream capitalist political party, is fundamentally wedded. It is important to precisely define what we mean by this term. It is very easy to confute reformism with other forms of activity, notably trade unionism, on the grounds that both seem to have in common the aim of improving the welfare and wellbeing of workers. However; it would be a gross error to see trade unionism as a type of reformism, in the introduction to her pamphlet Reform or Revolution (1900) Rosa Luxembourg, for one, seemed to commit this very error: ‘Can the Social-Democracy be against reforms? Can we contrapose the social revolution, the transformation of the existing order, our final goal, to social reforms? Certainly not. The daily struggle for reforms, for the amelioration of the condition of the workers within the framework of the existing social order, and for democratic institutions, offers to the Social-Democracy an indissoluble tie. The struggle for reforms is its means; the social revolution, its end.’

What underlies this thinking is the understandable fear that the revolutionary goal might seem somehow divorced from the ‘daily struggles of workers’ if it did not appear to endorse the latter. But this fear is misplaced for reasons that have already been touched upon. Reformism entails the state enacting various legislative measures that are ostensibly designed to ameliorate certain socio-economic problems arising from the capitalist basis of contemporary society - without, of course, posing any kind of existential threat to the continuance of capitalism itself. In other words, reformism seeks to mend capitalism. As such it runs completely counter to the socialist goal of ending capitalism. The failure of reformism was no better summed up than by the revolutionary socialist, William Morris, more than a century ago in How We Live and How We Might Live (1897):

‘The palliatives over which many worthy people are busying themselves now are useless because they are but unorganized partial revolts against a vast, wide-spread, growing and ever growing evil; not a revolution against the unbridgeable gulf which instinct a plant, meet every attempt at bettering the conditions of the people with an attack on a fresh side’. Capitalism by its very nature has to operate in the interests of capital, which interests are fundamentally opposed to those of workers. The accumulation of capital, whether in the hands of private corporations or the state, expresses itself in the remorseless drive to maximise the amount of surplus value – ‘profit’ - extracted out of the labour of working people and is, thus, firmly predicated on the exploitation of workers, which is not a matter of choice but of economic necessity. It is the very condition of commercial survival - not to mention, expansion - in a world of ruthless economic competition. Quite simply, any business that did not make a profit out of its workforce would soon go out of business.

Were the Hard Left ever to secure political power it would soon enough find itself politically imprisoned within the constraints imposed by the non-socialist outlook of the majority and thus forced to continue with the administration of capitalism in some form. This follows logically from the very premise of its own vanguardist theory of revolution. Vanguardism is defined as the capture of political power by a small minority of activists, and it is not necessarily the case that this class majority is in advance of the latter having become socialists. Since socialism cannot come about without the latter becoming socialists, this perspective leaves the Hard Left government would have no option but to continue by default with the administration of capitalism. The Hard Left may protest that this is to overlook the whole point of a socialist minority capturing power before a majority had become socialist – namely, to be in a position to be able then to counter the enormous weight of capitalist propaganda in order to infuse workers with a socialist consciousness. How can you do that without this minority first capturing the state?

Actually, this is the cornerstone of the Hard Left shooting itself in the foot. While it is all too ready to scornfully characterise the so-called ‘abstract propaganda’ of the Socialist Party as ‘idealist’, arguing that ‘practical activity’ is the way we become socialists rather than through the dissemination of socialist ideas – as if these two things can ever really be separated – it conspicuously chooses not to apply this very same argument to itself and in its own theory of vanguardism. What, for instance, does it imagine would be the result of widespread retail revolts against a vast, wide-spread, growing and ever growing evil? It is as if we were to imagine the plant, meet every attempt at bettering the conditions of the people with an attack on a fresh side’. Capitalism by its very nature has to operate in the interests of capital, which interests are fundamentally opposed to those of workers. The accumulation of capital, whether in the hands of private corporations or the state, expresses itself in the remorseless drive to maximise the amount of surplus value – ‘profit’ - extracted out of the labour of working people and is, thus, firmly predicated on the exploitation of workers, which is not a matter of choice but of economic necessity. It is the very condition of commercial survival - not to mention, expansion - in a world of ruthless economic competition. Quite simply, any business that did not make a profit out of its workforce would soon go out of business.

Graffiti in Mexico City
of the ‘practical experience’ of a Hard Left government having to administer capitalism. Since capitalism can only really be administered in the interests of capital, and not wage labour, such a government, like any other capitalist government, would be compelled to come out and oppose the interests of the very workers it claimed to represent. In other words it would be compelled to abandon any thought of inculcating socialist consciousness into workers since to do that would defeat or, at least, seriously impede, the very purpose to which it had resigned itself – namely, the effective administration of capitalism. You can’t effectively administer capitalism with millions of people beginning to question, and oppose, the very basis of capitalist society – class ownership of the means of wealth production.

The Hard Left, while fond of rebuking others for their philosophical ‘idealism’ shows its own attachment to ‘idealism’, in its utterly lame attempts to explain away the all too obvious shortcomings of the so called “proletarian states” to which it has historically pledged allegiance from the establishment of the Soviet Union onwards. Even today Leftist supporters of such transparently obnoxious anti-working class regimes as Maduro’s Venezuela or Kim Yong Un’s quasi-monarchical North Korea will perform political gymnastics to justify this craven, not to say cringing, support. Their gullibility seems to know no bounds.

For the regimes in question a few petty, token pro-worker reforms or the ritual bombastic denunciation of that ogre of American imperialism ‘as if imperialism is limited to just the US and its puppet allies’ will suffice to have the Hard Left meekly eating out of their hands and sycophantically trying to rationalise every twist and turn of policy designed to tighten the screws on the workers in these countries.

When evidence of the anti-working class nature of these regimes becomes too overwhelming to ignore, the excuses offered will be couched in terms that do not – and dare not - question the basic tenets of vanguardism itself. The failure of the ‘proletarian state’ to make good its promises to the workers will be attributed to the various character flaws and the betrayal of the Leadership in its ‘drift to the Right’. If only Trotsky had got into power and not Stalin, exclaims our fervent Trotskyist, then things would have been so different and so much better. The irony of rebuking socialists for being ‘idealists’ while endorsing this idealist ‘Great Man’ theory of history could hardly be richer.

Reforms and Reformism

Part of the reason why the Socialist Party comes in for so much criticism for its opposition to reformism is that it seems to suggest an attitude of callous indifference to the plight of fellow workers. Is it not clearly the case that certain reforms can be beneficial to the working class or at any rate, certain groups of workers? Well, yes, of course some reforms can be of some benefit to workers. This is not denied. Socialists are not opposed to particular reforms as such but, rather, to reformism – that is, to the practice of advocating or campaigning for reforms. Once you go down that road there is technically no limit to the number of reforms you might then want to push for. Sooner or later in your bid to push for reforms, the revolutionary objective of fundamentally changing society will be overwhelmed, side-lined and eventually forgotten altogether. The entire history of the Second International, and of the Social Democratic and Labour parties of which it was composed, unequivocally shows this to be the case.

Not only that, any benefits that particular reforms might provide are likely to be transient and provisional and dependent on the current state of the market itself which is always subject to fluctuation. Reforms that can be given with one hand can also in effect be taken away with other - that is, withdrawn in the interests of ‘belt tightening’ or simply honoured in the breach, particularly in the context of economic recession.

Furthermore, insofar as some reforms provide some benefit to some workers they can sometimes be at the expense of other workers. Also, it is not only some workers that might benefit but some, if not all, capitalists too. It is, after all, mainly through the taxes paid by the latter to the state that reforms are financed. Increased taxation can undermine the competitiveness of the businesses concerned unless the advantages accruing to them from the resultant increase in state spending outweigh the costs. This places a structural limit on what reformism can hope to achieve. Tax the capitalists too heavily and you kill the goose that lays the golden eggs that provides the state with its revenue.

In short, then, opposition to reforms as reforms is not at all the position of the Socialist Party though, surprisingly enough, such opposition is something that has, in the past, attracted support in certain quarters. In his book, _Socialism_ (1976), Michael Harrington cited the curious case, in the late 19th century/early 20th century, of the American Federation of Labour, at that time led by the colourful figure of Samuel Gompers.

Gompers espoused a ‘voluntarist’ philosophy and ‘was hostile to all social legislation on the part of the government’. This stemmed from a quasi-Marxian conviction that the state inevitably governed in the interests of the ruling capitalist class and, consequently, any legislation emanating from it was bound to have the interests of that class in mind and thus be injurious to the interests of workers concerned. For that reason the AFL went out of its way to campaign against health and unemployment insurance, old age pensions and even helped to defeat referenda in favour of the eight-hour day.

Now this was obviously a ludicrous position to take but it also provides a salutary warning of the dangers of blurring the distinction between economic and political struggles. As far as political struggle is concerned, the position of the Socialist Party is quite simply that it opposes reformism, not reforms, on the grounds that this is incompatible with the goal of achieving a socialist revolution.

Transitional demands

While the Hard Left goes through the motions of paying lip service to that revolutionary goal it is, nevertheless, fully committed to the struggle to reform capitalism.
A month or so on from the horrific floods and consequent devastation in the state of Kerala, south western India, it is interesting to look back at the commentary being put out by Indian writers at the time. There is blaming and shaming of different varieties, of different parties, with different emphasis depending on the main points raised by each individual commentator. This particular incident though, however serious and shocking, cannot be isolated from the many other such weather catastrophes occurring globally with greater frequency. One has to wonder just how seriously unaffected individuals view such disasters and how long the incidents remain in their minds. Are such disasters even perceived as something that any individual can do anything about?

The government of the State of India called very early and the blame game could be clearly seen as political. Differences in emphasis between the government of the State of India supporters, (the nationalist BJP ,) and those of Kerala State government supporters, (so-called Communist ie allegedly ‘Marxist’) was, as to be expected, widely different and the political discourse must be global. All events need to be seen, not separately, but as parts of the whole.

According to the publication Nature, there has been a 3-fold increase in widespread extreme rain events over central India during 1950-2015, increasing the events of flooding which is linked to rapid surface warming on the northern Arabian Sea which borders Pakistan and NW India. The former advisor and founder of Climate Change Research International says that expected increases in extreme weather events due to climate change reveal India to be more vulnerable (than many other countries) because of its wide geographical and demographic variations.

For instance the local state government called very early on to the central government for assistance with troops, equipment, vehicles, helicopters, etc., but were dismissed on to the central government for assistance with troops, equipment, vehicles, helicopters, etc., but were dismissed. The necessary action must be global. All events need to be seen, not separately, but as parts of the whole.

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Socialism is not some thought-up ideal system but a realisation of a necessity, as defined by the reality of overpowering contradictions of the existing capitalist society of minority class ownership, democratic control, production to directly satisfy people’s needs, and distribution on the principle of ‘from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs’. Only within such a framework can the problems that capitalism generates for effectively as a whole and lastingly overcome. Human social evolution having evolved to where it now is, such a world socialist society is the only practical alternative to global capitalism.

The only way out is to move on from world capitalism to a global socialist society, a socialist state, a socialist common ownership, democratic control, production to directly satisfy people’s needs, and distribution on the principle of ‘from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs’. Only within such a framework can the problems that capitalism generates for effectively as a whole and lastingly overcome. Human social evolution having evolved to where it now is, such a world socialist society is the only practical alternative to global capitalism.

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This is not a brief guide, but it is a very useful and informative one (though it would have been even more so with an index). Hickel’s account deals with the extent and origins of inequality between rich and poor countries, how it is maintained and how it might be removed. This divide has always existed, as around 1500 there were no big differences in living standards between Europe and the rest of the world. But European exploration and colonisation led to massive transfer of wealth as well as large-scale deaths, with around 95% of the population of what became ‘Latin America’ killed between 1492 and 1650. A hundred million kilograms of silver was transferred from the Americas to Europe, and thus boosted the emergence of wealth in Europe, and thus boosted European industrialisation: ‘The emergence of capitalism required violence and mass impoverishment, both at home and abroad.’

In 1820 the income gap between the richest and poorest countries was 3 to 1; around 1850 it was 35 to 1. Furthermore, there was massive inequality within the richest countries: in 1910, the richest one percent in Europe owned 65 percent of the wealth. Abroad some states became nominally independent, but they were still subject to much interference (to put it mildly) from the most powerful countries, from the 1935 coup in Iran to the mass killings in Indonesia in 1965, the coup in Ghana in 1966, the removal of Allende in Chile in 1973 and many more, of which resulted in authoritarian governments friendly to Western interests. Inequality in the West increased from the 1980s, and things came to a head in global terms with the Third World Debt Crisis of 1982, following which countries such as Mexico were forced to repay their loans and euphemistically termed Structural Adjustment Programmes were introduced, which meant countries had to prioritise debt repayments and open their economies to international competition.

The World Trade Organisation is one of several bodies that in effect tell poorer countries how to run their economies. These countries receive much in ‘aid’ from the Western nations, which are all dwarfed by the transfer of wealth in the other direction, via debt repayments, profit repatriation, capital flight, etc.

The result of all this is a world where 4.3 billion people live in dreadful poverty, and the eight richest people have as much wealth as the poorest half of the global population combined.

The account summarised above is an excellent overview of the history of global inequality, but Hickel’s proposed solutions do not really address the causes. He advocates abolishing the debt burden of developing countries, democratising institutions such as the World Bank, making the international trade system fairer, introducing a global minimum wage and having a universal basic income. All this fits in with his odd and unsupported statement that the problem is not so much capitalism as a particular kind of capitalism (presumably its neoliberal version).

More interesting is his final chapter, which tackles environmental issues and the question of whether everyone in the West can live at the standard of the average person in the richest countries. One aim should be to achieve zero carbon emissions by the middle of this century, another to reduce total production and consumption, which can be done and still increase happiness and health. A Genuine Progress Indicator could replace GDP as a measure of wellbeing, though he sees all this as happening within capitalism. We cannot take a stand now on how such considerations would fare in socialism, but Hickel certainly provides here some ideas to think about.

This volume (one of five) says the Preface, ‘looks at the clearances generally, and at some surprising orthodox beliefs about them; and then examines the Highland classes as they were before the Jacobite rebellion of 1745-6, an account which sometimes differs from what is now often affirmed’. For a previous article by the same author on the same subject see: https://tnyr.com/7f5ey96

Exhibition review

Port Sunlight

It is a truism to say that art and commerce are closely related: under capitalism, artists have to earn enough to live, commercial galleries have to survive, and other galleries often need to attract sponsorship from companies. Rarely, though, is the relationship quite as close as that involving William Lever (1851–1925).

Lever was the son of a wholesale grocer, and he expanded the family business by having soap manufactured in pre-wrapped bars. Then he set up the firm of Lever Brothers, which made the soap itself, initially in Warrington but then at a larger purpose-built factory on the Wirral. He used the brand name Sunlight, and the area where the factory was situated was termed Port Sunlight. As his company expanded, both in Britain and overseas, employing 85,000 workers at its height, he became immensely rich.

His initial interest in art was to buy paintings that could be copied and have the word ‘Sunlight’ and an advertising slogan added, so that they could be used as posters. One of the best-known was based on the painting ‘The New Frack’ by William Powell Frith (who objected to the use of his art for commercial purposes). Later Lever acquired a taste for collecting, and built up a substantial collection of paintings, sculptures, furniture, textiles and porcelain. Much of this can be seen at the Lady Lever Art Gallery, which opened in 1921. There are many portraits, such as one of Emma Hamilton as a Bacchante, and a number of works by Pre-Raphaelites such as Rossetti and Burne-Jones (both associates of William Morris).

Many of Lever’s workers were housed in the specially-built Port Sunlight village. A few minutes’ walk from the art gallery are the Port Sunlight Museum and a worker’s cottage. It is often described as ‘an original garden village’, but it was run in a very authoritarian way: for instance, all the houses had gardens but tenants were not allowed to keep chickens in them, and there were strict rules on taking in lodgers. Houses were rented from Lever Brothers, and losing your job meant losing your home. The ideas behind the village were not just philanthropic: it was argued that children who lived in a slum would grow up to be ‘a danger and terror to the State’.

Lever Brothers became part of the giant Unilever company in 1930, and from 1979 houses in Port Sunlight were sold when they became vacant, as Lever’s paternalistic approach to housing his employees had long been unfashionable. The village now looks like a rather anachronistic settlement, though both art gallery and museum are well worth visiting.

Books received

This is an excellent overview of the history of inequality. It is a truism to say that art and commerce are closely related: under capitalism, artists have to earn enough to live, commercial galleries have to survive, and other galleries often need to attract sponsorship from companies. Rarely, though, is the relationship quite as close as that involving William Lever (1851–1925).

Lever was the son of a wholesale grocer, and he expanded the family business by having soap manufactured in pre-wrapped bars. Then he set up the firm of Lever Brothers, which made the soap itself, initially in Warrington but then at a larger purpose-built factory on the Wirral. He used the brand name Sunlight, and the area where the factory was situated was termed Port Sunlight. As his company expanded, both in Britain and overseas, employing 85,000 workers at its height, he became immensely rich.

His initial interest in art was to buy paintings that could be copied and have the word ‘Sunlight’ and an advertising slogan added, so that they could be used as posters. One of the best-known was based on the painting ‘The New Frack’ by William Powell Frith (who objected to the use of his art for commercial purposes). Later Lever acquired a taste for collecting, and built up a substantial collection of paintings, sculptures, furniture, textiles and porcelain. Much of this can be seen at the Lady Lever Art Gallery, which opened in 1921. There are many portraits, such as one of Emma Hamilton as a Bacchante, and a number of works by Pre-Raphaelites such as Rossetti and Burne-Jones (both associates of William Morris).

Many of Lever’s workers were housed in the specially-built Port Sunlight village. A few minutes’ walk from the art gallery are the Port Sunlight Museum and a worker’s cottage. It is often described as ‘an original garden village’, but it was run in a very authoritarian way: for instance, all the houses had gardens but tenants were not allowed to keep chickens in them, and there were strict rules on taking in lodgers. Houses were rented from Lever Brothers, and losing your job meant losing your home. The ideas behind the village were not just philanthropic: it was argued that children who lived in a slum would grow up to be ‘a danger and terror to the State’.

Lever Brothers became part of the giant Unilever company in 1930, and from 1979 houses in Port Sunlight were sold when they became vacant, as Lever’s paternalistic approach to housing his employees had long been unfashionable. The village now looks like a rather anachronistic settlement, though both art gallery and museum are well worth visiting.

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50 Years Ago
Why Socialists Oppose the Vietcong

Vietnam is the latest of the leftwingers’ adopted fatherlands. Before Vietnam it was Algeria, before that it was Cuba, and so on back to Russia. This support for the Vietcong does not depend on what is actually going on in Vietnam, but is rather an expression of the leftwingers’ dissatisfaction with certain aspects of modern society. To that extent it is irrational. Nevertheless those who support the Vietcong imagine that they are Marxists and it is in pseudo-Marxist terms that they rationalise their support for this nationalist movement whose aim is to set up a state capitalist regime in the South similar to that in the North. The Vietcong is not a socialist movement, and by no stretch of the imagination can it be said to have anything to do with Socialism. But since those who shout for “Victory for the Vietcong” have dragged in Marx and Socialism, we must at least refute their arguments and state why Socialists do not support the Vietcong. (…) It is not true that the Vietcong and workers are fighting the same enemy. The Vietcong are fighting American capitalism. The interests of workers are opposed not only to American capitalism but to capitalism everywhere including Russia and China. Victory for the Vietcong, as we have already explained, would shift the world balance of power from America to other capitalist powers. This is not something that is in the interests of workers, or something that they should support. There is no issue at stake in Vietnam worth a single worker’s life. The Socialist Party, then, is opposed to the Vietnamese war, as to all wars. We do not take sides. Nor are we hypocrites like those who cynically use all normal people’s abhorrence of the burning of women and children (as if the Vietcong did not use flame-throwers) to get them to support one side in this war. Such people do not really want an end to the killing; they want it to go on till the side they support has won. Let them at least be honest and stop trying to fool people with their phoney anti-war sentiments.

(Socialist Standard, October 1968)

Obituary
Ron Stone
We learn from comrades ‘Down Under’ of the death in Western Australia in June of Ron Stone. Originally from Dover in Britain, he was an active supporter of the World Socialist Movement in Australia. His cartoons, mocking politicians and royalty, appeared in the Socialist Comment which the World Socialist Party of Australia published in the 1980s as well as, later, in the Socialist Standard. He was also something of a poet:

Wage Restraint
It was a crisis day in Parliament. The House was hushed and still
As a Member rose with a Question:
‘Are we doomed to go downhill?’
‘I am confident of an upturn,’
The P.M. made reply
‘If workers’ pay is held at bay
We’ll all be home and dry.
‘How true! How true!’ cried the workers,
‘Let’s end our silly strike.
We don’t want more money —
You can stick it where you please.’

Thank Heavens! yelled the bosses,
‘There’s faith on the factory floor
And now we have this extra loot
We’ll give it to the poor.
They picked up all the money
And ran on eager feet
And pressed their surplus profits
On the people in the street.
They moved among the dole queues
And boarded every bus
With tear-filled eyes and heart-felt cries,
And boarded every bus
They moved among the dole queues
On the people in the street.
And pressed their surplus profits
We’ll give it to the poor.
And 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 abolish 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
Class war

Next year is the 200th anniversary of the Peterloo Massacre, one of many brutal battles in capitalism’s ongoing class war, which saw a peaceful gathering of radicals in Manchester charged by a gentry militia and resulted in 15 deaths and 400-700 non-fatal injuries. Those attending had come to hear Henry Hunt, who advocated parliamentary reform and repeal of the Corn Laws, and carried banners calling for Parliaments Annual, Suffrage Universal, echoes of the French Revolution’s Liberty and Fraternity. There was, however, a general lack of political clarity, well illustrated when a band played God Save the King before the meeting started. The Times four days after the slaughter was both candid and clear: ‘The more attentively we have considered the relations subsisting between the upper and labouring classes throughout some of the manufacturing districts, the more painful and unfavourable is the construction which we are forced to put upon the events of last Monday... The two great divisions of society there, are the masters, who have reduced the rate of wages; and the workmen, who complain of their masters having done so. Turn the subject as we please, to this complexion it must come at last’. The anniversary is marked early with the release of Peterloo. ‘Mike Leigh’s period drama has immediacy and a sense of anger. It will ensure that the bloody events in St Peter’s Fields nearly 200 years ago are put back on the radar of politicians, historians and cultural commentators alike’ (theindependent.co.uk, 1 September). The film will be released next month, and if it registers with a less exclusive audience, reminding everyone that he was just the tip of the iceberg – and that’s not just to be humble, that’s also true.” Gosling continued to say that he doesn’t think “Neil viewed himself as an American hero. From my interviews with his family and people that knew him, it was quite the opposite. And we wanted the film to reflect Neil.”

Star wars

The dailycaller.com (31 August) is one of many conservative websites lamenting loudly that a MOVIE ABOUT ONE OF THE MOST ICONIC MOMENTS IN AMERICAN HISTORY DOESN’T FEATURE AMERICAN FLAG. “The upcoming film about Neil Armstrong’s and Buzz Aldrin’s iconic moonwalk does not feature arguably the most important moment of the entire event. “First Man,” starring Canadian actor Ryan Gosling and directed by Damien Chazelle, does not feature a scene of the American flag being planted on the moon’s surface because Armstrong’s accomplishment “transcended countries and borders,” according to Gosling. “I think this was widely regarded, in the end, as a human achievement [and] that’s how we chose to view it” Gosling argued. “I also think Neil was extremely humble, as were many of these astronauts, and time and time again, he deferred the focus from himself to the 400,000 people who made the mission possible.” “He was reminding everyone that he was just the tip of the iceberg – and that’s not just to be humble, that’s also true.”

Peace on Earth

‘The task of creating a coherent and free society is the mightiest to which man has summoned himself, and it is the task which now presses urgently upon us” (Professor G. D. Herron, Why I Am a Socialist, 1900). ‘What man has done, the little triumphs of his present state, and all this history we have told, form but the prelude to the things that man has yet to do’ (H. G. Wells, A Short History of the World, 1924).

“You, the people, have the power to make this life free and beautiful—to make this life a wonderful adventure’ (Charlie Chaplin, The Great Dictator, 1940).