

# socialist standard

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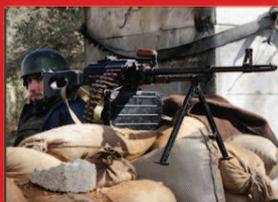
## Egypt



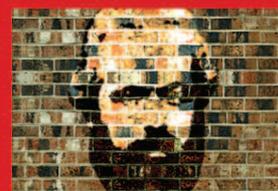
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SEPTEMBER 2013

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# Introducing The Socialist Party

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

We use every possible opportunity to make

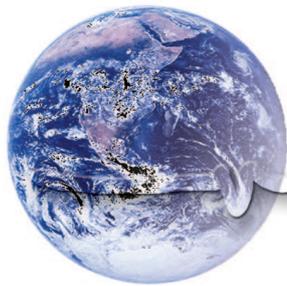
new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest elections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

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

will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

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

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



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SEPTEMBER 2013

## Editorial

### One State, Two States or No States?

TALKS HAVE started between the Israeli State and the Palestinian 'Authority'. In a world where might is right, it will be an unbalanced negotiation between a well-armed occupying power and its virtually unarmed opponent whose population has been quite literally beaten into submission. All the Palestine side has going for them is US pressure on Israel, its client state which it has maintained and armed over the years and which acts as its proxy in the Middle East, an area of strategic importance as well as containing most of the world's more easily-extractable oil.

Israel was set up after the last world war by Jewish nationalists, the Zionists, as a 'homeland' for people of Jewish background. It is an entirely artificial state based on the religious myth that Judaism's tribal god gave the land of Palestine to the Jews to live on. Formally, Israel is a European-type parliamentary democracy and there is more freedom of speech and of organisation there than in any other state in the Middle East. But it is also a sectarian state – 'A Jewish State for Jewish People' – where its non-Jewish subjects, mainly native Arab-speakers who make up 20 percent of its population, are second class citizens. Its rulers, with the support of most of their Jewish subjects, are not going to consent to ending its sectarian character as it is the basis of their power.

This is why one proposed solution – a single, non-sectarian, democratic state made up of the present Israel and the west bank of the river Jordan – is not on the agenda. The most

likely outcome of any negotiations is the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside the Israeli one. This state will be weak and will have to accept that there are limits as to how far it can be independent. But at least its subjects will no longer be subject to direct Israeli rule and oppression.

There is another way of looking at the question. At the end of July Gary Davis, who in 1948 famously renounced his US citizenship and declared himself a 'world citizen', died. Arguing that 'the nation-state is a political fiction which perpetuates anarchy and the breeding ground for war,' he spent the rest of his life campaigning for one world without frontiers with a world government.

He was wrong, but on the right track. It is capitalism, with its built-in competitive struggle for sources of raw material, markets, trade routes and investment outlets, that is the breeding ground for war, but so-called 'nation'-states are part of this. They are instruments of force, acting in capitalist interests, through which this struggle is waged, sometimes by threats explicit or understood ('might is right'), sometimes by military action.

The solution is indeed one world without frontiers and without states, but not a world government presiding over a world capitalist economy. It is world socialism, where the resources of the planet have become the common heritage of all, to be used for the benefit of all Earth's people. A Palestinian state will be one more such instrument of capitalist competition at the service of its ruling class.

## Birthday Wishes

THE UK and other governments have been stepping up efforts to block access to file-sharing torrent sites – those sites which allegedly are responsible for all the evil in the world - but like the game Whac-a-Mole, the legal mallet can't keep up with the elusive pop-up heads, and many of these sites have now been around so long they are starting to look like permanent fixtures. Two of them, Isohunt and Pirate Bay, have been celebrating 10th birthdays recently, and have things to say which socialists will find particularly interesting. First, Isohunt: 'Ideals of the Free Software movement and Creative Commons will face new challenges with 3D printed copies of physical objects, replicated from copyrightable digital designs. We are moving into the world of science fiction. Will copyright or even money be relics like in Star Trek, where all material scarcity and wants are gone, replicators can make anything needed, and holodecks can create any world imaginable?' (Isohunt.com).

Utopian? The writer thinks so, but adds 'if someone from 100 years ago is to look at technologies we have now, a lot of it may be construed as magic too.'

Tobias Andersson, co-founder of Pirate Bay, is clearly reading the same book, if not on the same page: 'The 3D-printing revolution hits us any minute - and the sharing of things. Suddenly, not only music and movie industries will feel threatened, but clothing, weapon and car industries as well - along with nations that depend on them. Everything will change and it'll be fast.'

Overrating the capacity of 3D printers, perhaps, but the principle of the thing is what counts: 'Future copy-fights will no longer be about sharing a tune or a movie, but ultimately about defining who will have the right to produce and if ideas are to be owned and sold or commonly shared. Everyone will be affected by these fights and too much will be at stake' ('The Pirate Bay: BitTorrent site sails to its 10<sup>th</sup> birthday', *BBC News Online*, 9 August).

Of course the industry defenders retort that, call it what you like, theft is theft, but the fact that they keep asserting this shows that it is really the point in question. Is theft always theft? To understand the question, consider how people regard 'fair' ownership in capitalism. I own something, I sell it to you, so now you own it and I don't. That's fair *exchange*, people think. But in the world of computers, I own something, I sell it to you, I still own it and you don't. There has been no exchange. Is this fair? Yes, say software manufacturers, we are selling you a licence to use our product. No, say software users, you are granting yourself a licence to print money. Ownership creates bottlenecks, and piracy is the result. If it's wrong to own, it can't be wrong to steal.

Socialists are not keen on moral arguments, because morality is a game anyone can play. Our best bet as a species is to treat the ownership question as a scientific problem. We are on stronger ground trying to show that ownership is socially *unnecessary*, rather than that it is *wrong*.

But the digerati's challenge to ownership is more than just moral, they've *democratised* the information systems in a physical sense. Traditional computer networks, known as client-server systems, can be thought of as planets orbiting a sun. All the information, the energy, derives from a single central source. Control the source and you control the network. Napster, the first file-sharing site, used a central server which in time the authorities were able to locate and shut down. But it wasn't long before a new system was devised in which the planets could all exchange packets of 'energy' directly between each other, simultaneously and at great speed, without the need for a sun. In this system, peer-to-peer or P2P, there is no central server for the authorities to control or shut down.

Packets of information stream in torrents from anywhere, to anywhere. It's efficient, fast, and non-hierarchical, in fact a revolutionary socialist model of data transfer. Surely the thought can't be far away, if you can run a network like this, why not a society?

### Not all nodes are equal

COMPUTER NETWORKS are often represented by symmetrical physical objects such as chicken wire, with each junction or node of equal size and equidistant from its neighbours. While this may be true of molecular lattice structures, it's not generally the case in 'organic' networks, whether digital, social or neurological. There are minor nodes with few connections, like reclusive people with few friends, while there are grand central stations, equivalent to busy socialites. This organic composition of networks implies that the human 'sociability' gradient is not merely some transient product of unequal social relations in a property-bound society, like distortions in a power grid. This leads to a further speculation about socialism.

It may be that some people are just more sociable than others. This may be worth noting, because a new study has shown that Facebook may actually be bad for you ('Facebook use 'makes people feel worse about themselves', *BBC News Online*, 15 August). The problem, it seems, is the FOMO factor – the Fear of Missing Out, a feeling that you ought to try harder to be sociable even if you don't really want to, because of all the fun everyone else seems to be having.

If human sociability lies along a natural genetic gradient, then in socialism we would see a similar asymmetric gradient in social grouping, some people being highly gregarious and connected, some people introverted and troglodytic. Would this affect the functioning of socialism? Yes, because the connected individuals would tend to exert more influence. Their words would carry more weight with more people. Would this necessarily matter? Yes, to people who don't understand socialism, and who would call this a form of 'power'. To see influential people in socialism as somehow problematical, as if they embody a contradiction to the principle of egalitarianism, is to look at socialism through capitalist eyes. They may influence more people but so what? They also listen to and are influenced by more people, making them more reliable sources of the prevailing consensus.

These questions matter because they affect how we represent egalitarian social relations. Just as our opposition to leadership can be misunderstood as an absurd objection to anyone ever taking the initiative, so our conception of equality can be mistaken for a grey mediocrity in which nobody really shines at anything.

This misunderstanding gives rise to the caricature of socialism as perpetual meetings and votings, where everything is discussed and nothing is done. The likely reality can be guessed, once again, by looking at how science operates. Science doesn't and couldn't work like this. There is simply too much information. Scientists have areas of expertise, and for the rest, rely on the word of others. The system is not invulnerable, but it is robust and self-correcting. Occasionally a fraud is perpetrated, but the scientific method always uncovers it sooner or later. If anything, without capitalist inducements to 'game' the system, socialism will be even more robust than present-day science.

# Propaganda power... in your pocket

**Hooray for People Power!** Faced with a petition of some 35,000 signatories, the Bank of England has caved in and will keep a female face on 'our' banknotes. Elizabeth Fry, currently on the fiver, will still be replaced by Winston Churchill, however, the new face of the ten pound note is to be Jane Austen. The leader of the campaign, Caroline Criado-Perez, said 'This is a brilliant day for women', whilst Zoe Williams in the Guardian celebrated the victory of the 'determined and lethal ... new generation of feminists'.

Will this do anything to stem the world tide of rape, torture and oppression of women? Will it do anything to alter the vast blanket of everyday sex objectification, the portrayal of women as mere products for use, which lies heavy upon us all? Will it do anything for the single mothers, who above all others have been targeted by the current round of cuts of this especially vicious regime? Will it heck. Is this the sort of tokenistic gesture which does nothing but tickle the pleasure centres of the privileged female few? You tell me.

The government-owned Bank of England has promoted national figures on paper currency for some forty years. Since that time the following have appeared:

William Shakespeare	poet	1970-93	£20
Duke of Wellington	military	1971-91	£5
Florence Nightingale	reformer	1975-94	£10
Isaac Newton	scientist	1978-88	£1
Sir Christopher Wren	architect	1981-96	£50
George Stephenson	engineer	1990-2003	£5
Michael Faraday	scientist	1991-2001	£20
Charles Dickens	novelist	1992-2003	£10
Sir John Houblon	banking history	1994-current	£50
Sir Edward Elgar	composer	1999-2010	£20
Charles Darwin	scientist	2000-current	£10
Elizabeth Fry	reformer	2002-current	£5
Adam Smith	economist	2007-current	£20
Matthew Boulton/ James Watt	banking history	2011-current	£50

Unlike America, which has long celebrated its national heroes on paper currency, such crass displays of personalised patriotism were a bit of a departure for Britain, which has mostly relied on the monarchy and its trappings as the symbol of national unity. Generally speaking, however, the individuals portrayed were fairly uncontroversial figures of notable personal achievement. As such the clear purpose was to show the state in a positive light as the guardian of the arts and promoter of science by means of association. The inclusion of reformers is particularly noteworthy, reflecting the 'progressive' colouring of the post-war settlement.

The current F Series marks an interesting turn. Reformers,



**In: Jane Austen**

scientists and engineers are out. Adam Smith, arch-apostle of capitalism, is in. As is Conservatism, in the form of self-publicist and outstanding military strategist (responsible for such strokes of genius as the Gallipoli Campaign) Winston S Churchill. The founders of the modern Mint, representing the banking interest, occupy pride of place on the £50 (not in general use as any poor sucker who

has the misfortune to be lumbered with one soon finds out). As a double sop for culture vultures and the ladies is the mildly critical observer of upper class manners, Jane Austen. The odd (wo)man out, perhaps, but still well within the confines of the privileged elite. So the face of Britain today, as its money reveals, appears to be a nakedly capitalist one with no pretence of utility, boasting of its class domination, proud of its warlike heritage.

In addition to its main function (for the capitalist class as a means of rationing its slaves), money has long been a bearer of messages (see [www.thecurrencycollector.com/pdfs/The\\_Use\\_of\\_Bank\\_Notes\\_as\\_an\\_Instrument\\_of\\_Propaganda\\_-\\_Part\\_1.pdf](http://www.thecurrencycollector.com/pdfs/The_Use_of_Bank_Notes_as_an_Instrument_of_Propaganda_-_Part_1.pdf)). The issuing of money being, by and large, a state prerogative, the ideas transmitted are those the state wishes to transmit. The design of money shows the state as it wishes itself to be seen - an embodiment of common values, promoter of gallantry, endeavour, culture and learning - rather than as it really is - the bastion of unmerited privilege for the few, oppressor of the many.

One of the most prevalent state myths is the myth of national unity - that we are 'all in it together'. As such, in the modern situation, it must be all inclusive. The modern British banknotes have usually included a female figure. Doubtless a gentleman of colour would also be an asset, but unfortunately there are very few suitable candidates, with most historical figures of African or Asian ancestry, such as the Chartist William Cuffay or the brave ultra-Radical William Davidson, being decidedly unrespectable.

By means of a counter to the state's propaganda, individuals and groups have struck back by vandalising money. Defacing banknotes is illegal (traditionally French notes bore hair-raising threats of punishment for 'contrefacteur') and, more importantly, they can be refused as payment if vandalised. Despite this, the Iranian Green Movement has a substantial campaign writing anti-regime slogans on notes. In Canada anti-NDP slogans have been inscribed on banknotes. Many other examples are suspected fakes or have been produced

**continued page 6**



**Out: Elizabeth Fry**



## Religion for Fun and Amusement

TAUNTING THOSE born-again bible-bashers who infest out town centres and High Streets by firing awkward questions at them is probably not as anti-social as bear-baiting or cock-fighting and, if you have the time to spare, can provide hours of harmless fun. Supporters of fox-hunting claim that the fox actually enjoys being tortured, and the same is probably true of those who devote their lives to telling us about Jesus; at least they come back every week for more.

One of the problems the amateur evangelists have is that they tend to make it up as they go along and often end up arguing amongst themselves as they attempt to answer questions such as – why, if this all-knowing god who, we assume, had at least a rough idea of what he was doing wanted us to be good, did he insist that we are all born in sin? Why did he go to the trouble of creating Lucifer, a fallen angel, when he knew perfectly well that he was going to turn into the devil and lead us astray? Why, when he knew that Eve was going to be tempted by that bloody serpent, didn't he create her with a bit more will-power? And why, if he's all-knowing and therefore fully aware of just how wicked we were all going to be, didn't he make us as he wanted us?

'Ah' the bible-thumper smirks triumphantly, 'He didn't want us to be like robots, so he gave us free will, and one day he is going to judge us'.

A slight lack of logic there surely. If this god, who is all-knowing, knows that I am going to be evil next Wednesday, for example, can I, then, exercise my free will and be good instead – and thereby prove him wrong? Watch the bible-thumpers faces as they wrestle with that one. As I said, hours of fun and amusement and unlike other blood sports, there are no laws against it.

It's not just the amateur Holy Joes who struggle with the idea of an all-knowing and unchanging god though. After centuries of

institutionalised sexism and homophobia it's just beginning to dawn on the Roman Catholic Church that these ideas are no longer acceptable in the modern world, and God's previous views, therefore, need to be drastically amended.

'If a person is gay and seeks God and has good will, who am I to judge him' asked Pope Francis recently, trying to get to grips with this about-turn in God's thinking, and conveniently forgetting the Church's previous position. Not wishing to alienate those who prefer God's original plan though, he then insisted that homosexual acts are still sinful, but homosexual orientation was not.

Desmond Tutu, the former Archbishop of Cape Town and anti-apartheid and gay rights supporter, had no such difficulties with God's new politically correct image.

'I would not worship a god who is homophobic' he insisted. 'I would refuse to go to a homophobic heaven. No, I would say sorry, I mean I would much rather go to the other place'.

He's certainly sticking his neck out there. See you in hell, Desmond.

NW



## from page 5

as 'art'. Politically motivated defacement is largely confined to coins. A recent example shows the Spanish King Juan Carlos, whose remoteness from the harsh realities of modern life on the peninsula has generated considerable hatred, rendered as the buffoon Homer Simpson.

In Northern Ireland in the 1970s rival claimants to state power struck their initials on coinage. It is a pity in a sense that the IRA, which defaced UK coins, and the Loyalists, defacing coins of the ROI, could not just have confined their activities to a coin war. The Second World War also had a coinage counterpart with the Free French countermarking Vichy coins with the cross of Lorraine and the Azad Hind counterstamped British India coins (see [www://scintillatingsilver.wordpress.com/2013/03/08/propaganda-on-coins](http://www://scintillatingsilver.wordpress.com/2013/03/08/propaganda-on-coins)).

Before the First World War the Suffragettes also carried out a coin campaign, stamping pennies with the slogan 'Votes for Women'. They may have been inspired by the keepsakes brought back by soldiers who served in the Boer War, a decade or so earlier. British soldiers engraved a top hat and meerschaum pipe on coins depicting 'Oom Pol' Kruger to illustrate their contempt for the leader and icon of the ZAR.

Although American Abolitionists associated with the Free Soil movement are known to have inscribed coins, the origins of the practice seem to lie with the Radical Thomas Spence (1750-1813). Spence famously issued politically motivated tokens. He and his followers also vandalised coins for propaganda purposes. Spence is particularly interesting as he was arguably

the first in the modern era to recognise the need for the radical reorganisation of the economic structure of society, not merely political reform or regime change. Although we may criticise the overly formulaic approach, Spence, his plan and methods of propaganda are worthy of a place in the socialist pantheon.

KAZ



Joining poundland: Churchill



## An easy match for Mammon

ON 25 July the Archbishop of Canterbury, who fancies himself as a bit of a financial expert, said that it was his Church's intention to drive the payday loan company Wonga out of business. He revealed that he had told Wonga's boss that 'we're not in the business of trying to legislate you out of existence, we're trying to compete you out of existence' (*Times*, 26 July). The next day he was left red-faced when it came out that his Church had money invested in a venture capitalist, Accel Partners, that was one of Wonga's financial backers.

His plan is to encourage credit unions by offering them premises in churches and expert advice from Christian businessmen. But the idea that credit unions could outcompete capitalist moneylending enterprises like Wonga is pure fantasy.

A credit union is basically a savings and loan club. People pay in small amounts of money (on which they receive some interest) which gives them the right to borrow small sums of money (on which they pay interest) when they need it. To remain viable by covering its administrative costs, the union has to charge a higher rate of interest to borrowers than it pays to savers. Basically, they are a form of bank, mainly for poor people. Ideally, they are run democratically by their members.

A payday loan company, on the other hand, is a profit-seeking capitalist enterprise specialising in short term (from payday to payday) loans at a very high rate of interest. They don't particularly target poor people, but rather anyone in short-term financial difficulty. In fact they prefer people who have another payday coming. The money they lend is theirs (or put up by backers such as Accel Partners) – and they have to have it in the first place.

It's all about money and getting an income from lending it, but the Archbishop didn't offer to put up any of his Church's money, merely to let the credit unions use his churches as their offices. Even if he had, it is unlikely that the Church Commissioners, who manage the Church's millions, would have approved as the rate of return, though eminently 'ethical', would have been too low. They have to choose investments with a higher rate of return to generate the income to pay the salaries and pensions of the clergy and for the maintenance of the bishops' palaces. They are forced to behave capitalistically too.

If the Archbishop really thinks that local credit unions, operating from churches, can outcompete capitalist enterprises like Wonga (who have the resources to advertise every day on TV) by stealing their customers, he can't be the financial expert he thinks he is. But at least he doesn't think banks can create money out of nothing which if true (but it isn't) would surely solve the problem. A Church bank creating money out of nothing would easily outcompete a payday loan company which has to already have the money to lend.

The only way the Church would have a chance of driving payday loan companies out of business would be to set up its own payday loan company, charging 'ethical' rates of usury and sending polite, 'ethical' solicitor's letters to defaulters.

You can't stand a chance of beating capitalist businesses unless you join them but there's no guarantee that if you do join them you will beat them, as the 'ethical' Cooperative Bank has found to its cost.

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# Mexico

## – The *Disappeared*

IN THE article ‘Mexican drug wars’ (*Socialist Standard*, April) we noted that between 2006 and 2011 it was officially estimated that, in Mexico, the number of deaths related to the drug wars was 39,000. We suggested that up to 100,000 Mexicans have died or disappeared since 2005.

We don’t seem to have been far out. Jo Tuckman, writing in the *Guardian* (17 July) reported that ‘The violence is estimated to have killed more than 80,000 people’ since 2006. It is not just the number of corpses discovered (more than 9,000 unidentified). It is the disappeared.

On Sunday, May 26 this year, 12 young people were abducted in Mexico City from an after-hours nightclub called ‘Heaven’, in the district known as Zona Rosa. About 17 assailants drove up in a number of cars, and just bundled the youngsters into the vehicles, all of whom were from the impoverished neighbourhood of Tepito. None of them has been seen since. But they are far from alone, despite the fact that Mexico City is said to be safer than Washington in the United States.

Oakland Ross, in a feature (*Toronto Star*, 22 June), highlights the disappearances, and known murders, in Mexico from 2006 to the end of 2012. He notes that *at least* 26,121 individuals have vanished. And he adds:

‘During the same six-year period, roughly 70,000 additional people are reckoned to have died in drug-related violence – slain by either the feuding drug cartels, or else by Mexican soldiers or police, or possibly by ‘disorganised’ criminals using the central drug-fuelled fray as a cover to settle scores.’

Ross notes that the likely abductors – police or soldiers – were probably responsible in more than half the disappearances. ‘Convictions have been recorded in only two cases during the past six years’, according to figures released by the Federal attorney general’s office. Duncan Wood, director of the Mexico Center in Washington, says that there is a breakdown of law and order in Mexico. And, continues Wood:

‘People believe they can get away with anything – and they are right! There’s a great likelihood, if you carry out a crime in Mexico, that you will get away with it.’

But Ross notes that the severity of the problem varies from region to region. The

most violent parts of Mexico are, not surprisingly, along the United States border; and, as I have witnessed, such states as Guerrero, where feuds between drug gangs are particularly violent – and not forgetting the activities of the police and army.

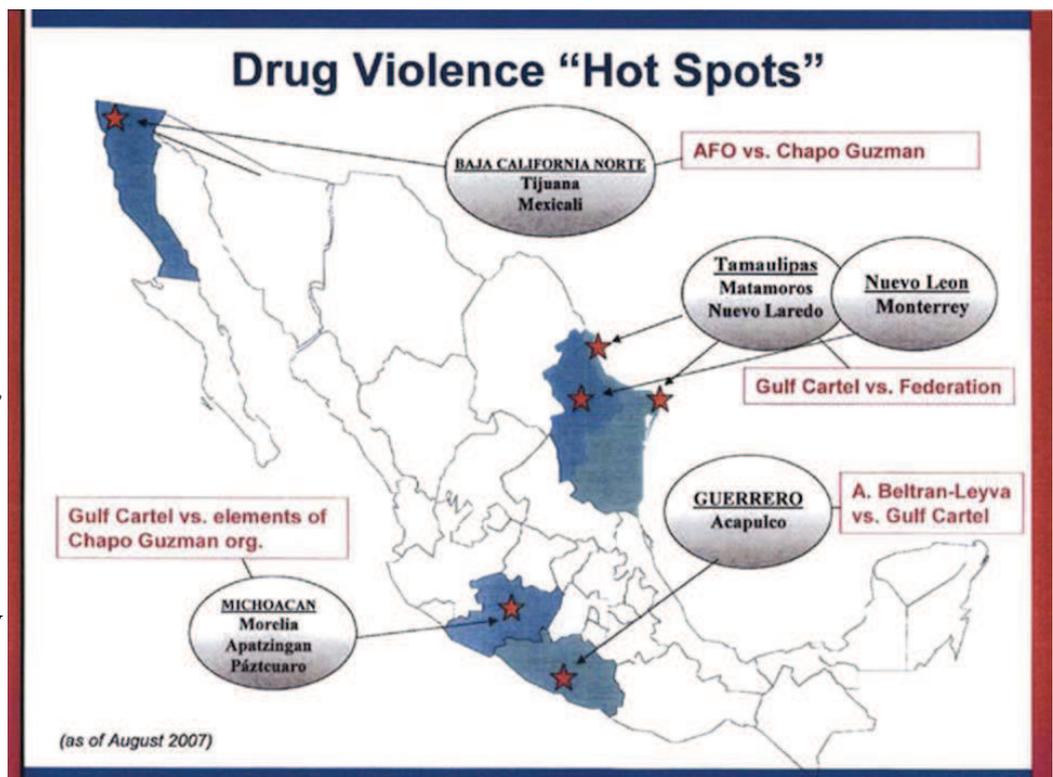
Most of the disappearances are, of course, related to the illegal narcotics trade with the US. But not all. As the *Toronto Star* relates: ‘The exceptions involve migrants – mostly Mexicans, but also people from other Latin American countries or even farther away – all trying to sneak across the border to the United States.’ Most of the human trafficking, however, is mainly controlled by the same gangs that supply the US and Canada with cocaine and other narcotics.

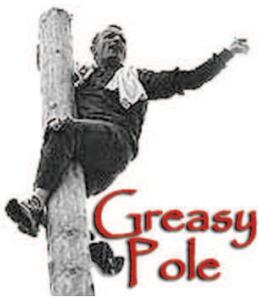
Most of the disappeared within Mexico never reappear. The families are left to conduct the investigations into their vanished relatives – where possible. The government agencies are either overworked or just incompetent; and not ignoring where the state itself is responsible for the missing persons.’ Lopez Portillo of the Institute for Security and Democracy blames ‘slow bureaucratic procedures, as well as chronic institutional divisions between the police and Federal

prosecutors’.

No one, it seems, blames the real culprit – capitalism and the profit system where people are forced to get money, one way or another, to survive..

**PETER E. NEWELL**





# All that stuff - and nonsense

IN THE 1945 election the Labour Party offered a manifesto with the title blazoned across the front cover – *Let Us Face The Future*

–which provoked the more retentive voter to comment that this was because they dare not face their past – Ramsay MacDonald, Philip Snowden, Jimmy Thomas, the 1931 ‘National’ government... Now Ed Miliband is trying the same desperate technique – concentrating on the promised future and ignoring the indefensible past – Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, Alistair Campbell, Iraq, Afghanistan... And if anyone anywhere is still doubtful there is Labour’s paddock of developing talent, presented so as to include A Future Leader Of The Party.

## Epiphany

One of the brightest and most pyrotechnic of these is Stella Creasey, whose present prospects are for a steady whizz up the Greasy Pole – unless she turns out to have gone too far too fast. It all began when she was asked, at school, to join a noisy protest about the export of sheep from the docks at Brightlingsea. She underwent a political ‘epiphany’ leaving her dissatisfied with the idea of shouting and waving posters: ‘you had to get stuff done’. Any excitement for her in this flash of conversion should have been calmed when in 1989 she joined the Labour Party – at a time when it was sliding towards New Labour with its immovable resolve to win votes by keeping stuff as it was and always had been. If she had any reservations on this whole issue she controlled them, taking jobs as a speech-writer for, among others, Douglas Alexander and Charles Clarke. Elected as a councillor in Walthamstow, she wrote herself a speech which unwisely argued that the nascent recession was passing so that ‘We’re already starting to see movement out of it...’ Such loyalty to that fading government justified her nomination for the parliamentary seat at Walthamstow West, which she won in the 2010 election with a majority well over nine thousand.

## Praise

Perhaps she was unaware of the enormity of it but she began her time in the Commons by trying to use a lift. Another MP (Conservative and male), apparently unable to accept that a blonde younger woman could also be an Honourable Member, informed her that the lift was reserved for MPs. Outrageous as this was it should have been useful to Creasey as an introduction to the prejudice and arrogance rife among those who have such power to regulate our behaviour in the interests of a ruling class. How she responded to that fool is not recorded but a guess can be made from the opinions of others. The *Spectator* named her Campaigner of the year 2011: ‘an example of how to do opposition politics’. The *Conservative Home* website rated her as ‘one of the few genuine Labour stars of the 2010 intake’. Even more impressive (and unnerving) Iain Duncan Smith thought

that ‘She has certainly got a bright future. Stella will go all the way’. After some delay, Ed Miliband gave her a minor job – Shadow Minister for Crime Prevention.

## Threats

Any doubts on whether her promotion would devitalise Creasey’s ambitions were answered when she joined Caroline Criado-Perez in her agitation for a female image to appear on the new £10 bank note – which provoked a storm of Twitter abuse and threats of violence, including rape, toward both of them. The consequent panic obscured the fact that the monetary system is a necessary appendage to capitalism’s commodity economy with all that means in terms of poverty and disaster, compared to which the style of bank notes is drastically irrelevant. Creasey has also spoken out about the problem of domestic violence, which on average results in the deaths of two women each week. This is one of the ugliest problems in this society, persisting whatever efforts are made to ease it. But it is not so straightforward; it is often in the confines of a home that the despair, the fear and the frustrations of an impoverished existence overrun all restraints, leading to behaviour which is internal and illegal as distinct from other, more damaging, violence for which people are clothed in uniforms and decorated with medals.

## Incorrect

These are just samples of the ‘stuff’ which Creasey has involved herself in, on the assumption that there was something to be achieved in this way. She regarded Alexander as ‘incredibly intelligent and kind’ but the fact is that during his time in Parliament under Blair he rose through a series of ministries and is now Shadow Foreign Secretary, apparently complacent to have been part of that wretched experience. There is nothing better to say about Charles Clarke, who was Home Secretary under Blair. He made himself notorious for his readiness to undermine some of the most important legal safeguards of people up against criminal charges. He closed down the Stephen Lawrence Steering Group, set up by Jack Straw to oversee the implementation of the recommendations of the MacPherson report on that racist murder, on the grounds that the majority of the Report had been implemented – which Stephen’s mother, did not accept: ‘I cannot believe we have achieved anything near what we should have done in the Steering Group’. Creasey’s overall view of that government’s record was crudely inadequate; on the murderous war in Iraq, and the lies, she ‘...didn’t agree with the decision to go to war. I think, however, that we have moved on and we have a duty now... to both learn from that experience and address where Iraq is...’

To understand the working of this social system, enabling its passage into a sorrowful history, it is not necessary to experience anything like an ‘epiphany’; the case for the abolition of capitalism now is constructive of past systems and human abilities within them. For example animals are exported, often with cruel suffering, for breeding or to be sold for profit. That is part of the nature of capitalism’s wealth, always and everywhere as commodities. This is a fact which does not respond to shouting on the dockyard or elsewhere and it needs more than ‘stuff’ to change it.

## IVAN



Stella Creasey

# Egypt: Workers' Struggles, Trade Unions and the 'Left'



Anti-Morsi demonstration

Workers' struggles were an important aspect of the Egyptian upheaval from the start. While the world media focused on the political demonstrations in Cairo's Tahrir Square, mass protests and strikes erupted, especially in Alexandria and other provincial cities, over such everyday issues as wages, conditions of employment, managerial corruption, bread supply, shortage of housing and grossly inadequate municipal services. For example, people living in the Al-Wahat oasis in the Western Desert expressed their anger at the contrast between the huge sums being spent on tourist amenities, including a luxury hotel carved into the mountainside, and the neglect of their own needs (*New Left Review* 68, p. 24).

## State of insurgency

This remains the pattern today. The run-up to the military takeover at the end of June saw a wave of strikes and protests. In March six cities – Port Said being worst affected – were 'in a state of virtual insurgency, paralysed by mass civil disobedience and ongoing battles between protestors and security forces' (Brian Slocums, thenorthstar.info, 5 March). Altogether there were some 2,000 strikes in 2012. One Egyptian activist, Hossam El-Hamalawy, argues that Morsi's evident inability to 'stabilise the street' was one of the main reasons for his removal (jadaliyya.com).

Although many grievances are specific to a particular firm or locality, certain demands are being pursued across the country:

- a minimum wage of 1,200 Egyptian pounds (£120 or \$180) per month
- the right to strike
- the right to organise independent unions to replace the state-controlled unions of the Egyptian Federation of Trade Unions (EFTU) inherited from the Mubarak regime
- regularisation of contracts for the many workers on

insecure short-term contracts

Workers in firms privatised under Mubarak often demand their re-nationalisation. Other demands concern the special problems of workers in the 'informal sector' (who get no social benefits) and residents in 'informal settlements' – that is, officially unrecognised shanty towns (who get no municipal services). There is widespread opposition to the economic package imposed by the IMF.

## Trade unions under successive regimes

There were several attempts to form independent trade unions under the old regime (in 1990 and during the strikes of 2006–2009), but only the current upheaval has made it possible openly and systematically to organise an independent trade union movement. The Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU) was established in January 2011.

In October 2011 a group of activists broke away from the EFITU to form the Egyptian Democratic Labour Congress. So there are now two groupings of independent trade unions, claiming three million members between them. The reasons for the split are unclear.

The electoral victory of the Moslem Brotherhood was a setback for this process. The military government that



Pro-Morsi dead

succeeded Mubarak had accepted the right of workers to form independent unions, but Morsi tried to reassert state control of the unions by reviving and reforming the EFTU.

Striking transport workers were accused of 'treason'; officials of independent unions were prosecuted for 'inciting to strike' with five from the port workers' union sentenced to three years in prison. The independent unions responded by joining the movement to unseat Morsi.

There is some question concerning how independent the EFTU is of the current military regime. El-Hamalawy accuses its leaders of compromising with the generals, suspending strike action and encouraging workers to increase production. He attributes this to the influence of Nasserite ideas, which make them vulnerable to 'patriotic' appeals.

### Making sense of the Egyptian 'left'

The last three years have seen a profusion of new and revived political organisations in Egypt. Quite a few of them claim to be 'left-wing'. Keeping track of these groups and parties is difficult due to the speed with which they change their names, split and merge, and enter and leave alliances. To add to the confusion, in some cases several different English translations of the same Arabic name are in circulation. Moreover, differences inside a single organisation are sometimes at least as significant as differences between organisations.

That said, it seems possible and useful to make a few distinctions.

First, there is a divide between an 'old left' and a 'new left'. The old left draw inspiration from the initial period of the post-colonial state, when Egypt was led by Gamal Abdel Nasser. Under the old left can be placed openly Nasserite groups like the Democratic Arab Nasserite Party and the National Progressive Unionist Party (Al-Tagammu), and also the revived Egyptian Communist Party.

The 'new left' groups are really 'new' only in the Egyptian context, as they model themselves more or less directly on 'left-wing' tendencies that have long existed elsewhere. The Egyptian Social Democratic Party and the Egypt Freedom Party resemble the European social democratic parties – that is, they advocate very mild reforms within capitalism in the name of 'social justice'. The Socialist Popular Alliance Party (formerly the Socialist Party of Egypt) appears to be a more 'left-wing' version of the same thing – that is, the reforms they stand for are a little bolder.

There is also a Trotskyist organisation called the 'Revolutionary Socialists', which has close links with the Socialist Workers' Party in Britain.

The Egyptian Popular Current, created after the 2012 presidential elections by the 'left' candidate Hamdeen Sabbahi, seems to be an attempt to bridge the old and the new left. It too uses 'social democratic' language while at the same time appealing to Nasserite nostalgia (Nasser's son Abdel Hakim is involved with this party).

### Allying against the 'main enemy'

Another important division concerns the strategy that the 'left' should adopt in dealing with the other three major forces within Egyptian society:

- a) the state and the military institution as its core
- b) the Moslem Brotherhood and Islamists in general

c) private business and the parties that represent its interests.

The crucial questions for Egyptian 'leftists' are these:

- 1) Which of these three is our 'main enemy'?
- 2) Should we seek to ally with the other forces against the 'main enemy'?

A few purists insist that the state, the Islamists and private business are all enemies and the 'left' should consistently oppose them all. But most Egyptian 'leftists' do not consider this a realistic stance.

There is also a view that gives clear primacy to economic issues and asserts that the cultural divide between secularists and Islamists is of secondary significance. The main enemy is therefore private capital and the 'left' should not cooperate with pro-business liberals like the Free Egyptians Party. This too seems to be a minority view.

The 'old left' and especially the Egyptian Communist Party traditionally follow a line that equates Islamism with fascism. This makes the Islamists into the main enemy. The 'old left' is willing to support a military



crackdown on the Islamists (Sabbahi publicly expressed his support on 5 July). Part of the explanation may be that the Nasserites as well as the 'Communists' fully identify 'socialism' with state capitalism. And Nasserism itself, after all, was a movement of army officers.

Much of the 'new left' also consider the Islamists the main enemy. However, this approach is rejected by the Trotskyite 'Revolutionary Socialists', who identify the state as the main enemy. Their slogan is: 'Sometimes with the Islamists, never with the state'.

Curiously enough, this stance reflects the influence of Chris Harman of the British SWP. In his book *The Prophet and the Proletariat*, an Arabic edition of which was distributed in Egypt by the local Trotskyists, Harman argues that 'socialists can take advantage of contradictions within Islamism' and 'on some issues we side with Islamists against imperialism and the state' – examples of such issues being the Gulf War and the 'struggle against racism in Britain and France'. In the current Egyptian context this means that so-called socialists must defend the Islamists against the state – and themselves against the Islamists! (Harman's book is available online at [www.marxists.de/religion/harman](http://www.marxists.de/religion/harman)).

**STEFAN**

# THE CIVIL WAR

★ IN ★

SYRIA



The civil war in Syria, now in its third year, originated in the 'Arab Spring' of 2010-11 when popular revolts in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya overthrew long-time dictators. The 'cradle of the Syrian revolution' was Daraa in the impoverished south of Syria. In 2011 Syrian workers shouted: 'One, One, One, the Syrian People Are One!' but today Islamic fundamentalists are chanting 'Christians to Beirut, Alawites to the Grave!' According to the UN Human Rights Data Analysis Group there have been 92,901 reported killings in the period March 2011 to April 2013 in Syria.

USA and Britain vacillate over intervention in Syria. It was only in July that the USA agreed to 'limited military support for vetted rebel groups', although General Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said at the Senate Armed Services Committee there was a 'risk arming al-Qaeda-aligned extremist forces amongst rebels'. David Cameron observed recently that the Syrian opposition contained 'a lot of bad guys' which means Islamic fundamentalists, Jihadists, and Al Qaeda.

## Ba'athists

The Ba'athist Party have been in power in Syria since 1963 and the Assad family have been dictators of Syria since 1970. The Assad family are Arabs of the Alawite sect of Shia Islam who only comprise 12

percent of the population. The largest ethnic and religious group are the Arab Sunni Muslims who comprise 65 percent of the Syrian population. About 10-12 percent are Christians and 9 percent Kurds.

Modern Syria was born as a League of Nations mandate territory given to France in 1920. Under French rule the minority Alawites were recruited into the Syrian Army as they were not able to buy themselves out of military service. After Syrian independence in 1946 the Alawite Muslims had a large representation in the Officer Corps.

In post-independence Syria, society was still 'quasi-feudal' in nature and dominated by conservative rural landlords and the peasantry. The small industrial capitalist class vacillated between cooperation and antagonism with the landowning class which was ultimately a fetter on the industrialisation of Syria. There were regular political upheavals in Syria with coups and counter-coups, which was not good for capitalist development.

In 1947 the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party of Syria was established which advocated Arab Nationalism and Arab 'Socialism', which in reality meant state capitalism. The word 'ba'ath' is Arabic for 'renaissance' but for the Syrian working class it was still the wages system under new management. A military coup in 1963

by the Alawite Muslim Ba'athist officer corps was supported by the peasantry, religious minorities such as Christians and the Sunni capitalist class. The Ba'athist regime was sometimes called 'Bonapartist' because it rested on 'the conservative peasant' and a radicalised layer of 'petty-bourgeois' Alawite army officers. Raymond Hinnebusch in *Syria: Revolution from Above (2004)* wrote that 'without the peasantry there could not have been a Ba'athist revolution'.

The 'social pact' was the foundation of Ba'ath Party rule which meant land distribution for the peasantry, social welfare for the working class, industrialisation for the capitalist class but no free speech, and banned trade unions. It was a planned state run economy loosely modelled on the state capitalism of the USSR. In 1965 the Ba'ath regime 'nationalised' 106 industries which included electricity, water, industrial plants, the transport system, insurance companies, and commercial banks.

Ba'ath Party rule ensured economic and political privileges were given to Alawite Shia Muslims and in 1970 Hafez Al-Assad, an Alawite, came to power as sole ruler. Assad became known as 'the Lion of Damascus', a personality cult was developed around him and the internal repression meant Syria became known as the 'kingdom of silence'. Assad's regime exploited sectarian divisions in



Syrian society to defend the minority Alawite capitalist and political class from the Sunni Muslim working class majority.

The 1970s in Syria was a time of economic growth with a peak GDP growth rate of 10.2 percent in 1981 but Syria's state capitalism was not immune to the world



capitalist slump and in 1984 GDP was -2.1 percent.

### Crony capitalism

The Assad regime's response was 'Intifah' (economic liberalisation) modelled after Deng's introduction of the market into Chinese state capitalism in the 1980s. In Syria more private economic activity was permitted, state controls were loosened, free trade zones were established, tax exemptions and cheap credit introduced and local traders and merchants were allowed economic freedom to import and export goods. Nationalised industries were 'privatised' which meant state ownership was transferred to cronies of the regime. 'Crony capitalism' meant that by the mid 90s 'an upper class has emerged both greater in number and wealthier than the bourgeoisie of the pre-Ba'athist era' wrote Volker Perthes in *The Political Economy of Syria under Assad* (1995).

In 2000 Hafez died and his son Bashar became leader, and economic liberalisation continued. In March 2009 Assad opened the Damascus Securities Exchange, Syria's first stock market in over forty years. The IMF and World Bank were satisfied with the Syrian economy with its 'privatisations', and cuts in corporation tax for the capitalist class. The wealth of the crony capitalist class was evident when Maserati launched its range of high-priced vehicles in Damascus in 2010. One particular 'crony capitalist' was Rami Makhoul, cousin of Assad who owned Syriatel (telecommunications), a TV network, assets in oil, gas, construction, real estate, banking, airlines, retail, and duty free stores. His assets were worth \$5 billion and he was known to the Syrian working class as 'Mr Ten Percent'. In the uprising his properties and assets were attacked.

The 2011 uprising has its origins in economic inequality, poverty, inflation, unemployment in Syrian society, and 'crony capitalism'. Significantly Syrians abroad who previously sent home remittances returned to Syria following the withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005,

workers returned from the Gulf following the Dubai financial crisis of 2008, and 1.5 million Iraqi refugees poured into Syria following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Also significant was the 'proletarianisation in the countryside' because land redistribution failed as many peasants ended up with holdings too small to support a family and therefore were forced to become wage labourers for larger landowners or forced to work in new factories and mines. The 'privatisation' of state land led to peasant evictions, and the drought of 2008-10 forced tens of thousands of peasants to flee to the cities.

### Underclass rebellion

Hanna Batatu writing in the 1981 *Middle East Journal* is prophetic about the 2011 uprising: 'rural people, driven by economic distress or lack of security, move into the main cities, settle in the outlying districts, enter before long into relations or forge common links with elements of the urban poor, who are themselves often earlier migrants from the countryside, and together they challenge the old established classes'.

An Associated Press Report of 16 October 2012 identified that the rebels were poor, religiously conservative from the underdeveloped countryside who felt economically marginalised, were against elite merchants and industrialists who dominated Aleppo and allied to the

regime. An ex-car mechanic now in the rebel army said: 'those who have money in Aleppo worry about their wealth and interests when we have long lived in poverty'. The report concluded that the uprising was 'as much a revolt of the underclass as a rebellion against the regime's authoritarian grip'.

The Syrian opposition is the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces which advocates a secular, democratic, liberal, bourgeois capitalist Syria. The Vice President of the National Coalition is Riad Seif, a Sunni capitalist who once owned the Adidas franchise in Damascus.

The Free Syrian Army contains mainly Arab Sunni Muslims but also Islamic Fundamentalists, Jihadists, and Salafist militias. The *Wall Street Journal* (16 April) reported that the Obama administration did not want an outright rebel military victory because they believe 'the good guys' may not come out on top, and feared that Islamists tied to al-Qaeda were increasingly dominating the opposition to Assad. The *Washington Post* (1 May) reported 'If things continue as they are, the Syrian government will certainly be the party that has the major advantage in any talks, it is clear the Insurgency does not pose an existential threat to the regime'.

The 'bad guys' include the Jabhat Al-Nusra Front which is very well organised with access to resources and continues to gain control of Syrian oil fields. Jabhat Al-Nusra is a Sunni Salafist Jihadist militia which in April 2013 was incorporated into Al-Qaeda in Iraq and the Levant and is the group of choice for foreign Jihadists coming to Syria. Jabhat Al-Nusra is financed by donations from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Jordan, all allies of the USA and Britain. The *New York Times* (27 April) reported from Aleppo, the industrial and commercial hub of Syria, that the Jabhat Al-Nusra Front controlled the power plant, ran the bakeries and headed a court that applied Islamic Sharia law. The report concluded that 'nowhere in rebel-controlled Syria is there a secular fighting force to speak of'.





### Proxy war

Recently the EU has lifted sanctions on oil exports from the Syrian oil fields (mainly in the eastern part of Syria near the border with Iraq) because they are in rebel-controlled areas although mostly controlled by the Jabhat Al-Nusra Front. Before the civil war, the EU spent \$4.1 billion on Syrian oil imports, in 2010 oil sales generated \$3.2 billion which accounted for 25 per cent of Syria's revenue. Syria has estimated oil reserves of 2.5 billion barrels. With economic liberalisation foreign oil companies such as Royal Dutch Shell, Total SA, Gulf Sands Petroleum, China National Petroleum Company, Stroytransgaz, and India Oil and Gas Corporation went to work in Syria although all operations were suspended by the civil war. In 2008 Syria produced 187 billion cubic feet of natural gas and has estimated reserves of 9.1 trillion cubic feet which led to SunCorp, a Canadian energy corporation that owns Petro-Canada to invest \$1.2 billion in the extraction of Syrian gas reserves.

'The Road to Tehran Goes Via Damascus' is key to western capitalism's view of Syria. Iran is the second largest oil producing country in the world. The USA and Israel view Assad's Syria as a 'rogue state' and part of an 'axis of evil' with Iran. The competitive economic struggle between western capitalism and eastern capitalism (Russia and China) is reflected in Syria where Assad's regime is supported by Putin's Russia and by China while the West backs the Syrian opposition.

Assad's regime has given political

support to Hezbollah, the Shia Islamic group which has been in conflict with the Israeli state. Hezbollah receives large military and economic support from Iran. Hezbollah are fighting alongside Assad's army against the rebels and recently Israel launched air strikes on Hezbollah forces in Syria.

As well as a proxy war between the West and Russia and China, between Israel and Hezbollah and Iran, the USA and Iran, Syria is also a regional proxy war between the Sunni Muslim capitalism of the Persian Gulf states of Saudi Arabia and Qatar allied with the Sunni Muslim state of Turkey against the Shia Islamic capitalism of Assad's Syria and Iran. The *Financial Times* (17 May) reported that Qatar had spent \$3 billion over the last two years supporting the Syrian revolt, and this was only exceeded by donations from Saudi Arabia.

A planned natural gas pipeline from Iran (second largest gas reserves in the world) through Iraq and Syria to the Mediterranean and Europe has had its route through Iraq agreed in May. There is a rival pipeline planned from Qatar through Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Syria which makes the defeat of the Assad regime in Syria all the more urgent.

For the Syrian working class the best likely outcome in present circumstances from an ending of the civil war is a bourgeois capitalist liberal democracy and at worst an Islamic fundamentalist reactionary theocracy. Any group replacing the Assad regime will have to continue to run Syrian capitalism for the benefit of the Syrian capitalist class.

**STEVE CLAYTON**

ownership and democratic control of the means for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community. Common ownership will mean the end of ownership, it will be shared ownership, the earth's resources a common treasury for all to take from what they need to live. Democratic control is essential to the meaning of socialism. Everybody will have the right to participate in decisions on how resources will be used. Socialism has never existed, those countries that claimed to be socialist were in reality state capitalist and still had money, buying, selling, wage slavery, exploitation and production for the market.

Production in socialism would be solely for use not for profit. With the natural and technical resources of the world the common heritage of all, the object of production would be to meet human needs. There would be the end to buying, selling, profit and money. Instead, we would take freely what we had communally produced. It will be "from each according to ability, to each according to needs". In socialism, everybody would have free access to these goods and services. There will be no system of payment for work, all work would be voluntary and would have a direct usefulness bringing about a new attitude to work. Socialism cannot be based on planning from a single centre, this is opposite to local decision-making and would be unresponsive to changing needs. The operational basis for this system would be calculation directly in resources combined with a responsive system of stock control instead of monetary calculation.

Capitalism will not collapse of its own accord, but will continue from crisis to crisis until the working class consciously organises to establish socialism. Socialism will then be a sharp break with capitalism with no 'transition period' or gradual implementation. Social productivity has long since reached a point where free access can be established, the economic conditions are ripe and ready for the next stage in human social development, this will be end of the pre-history of humanity and the real beginning of human history. Socialism will be a dynamic, changing society and we will have the free development of each person as the condition for the free development of all people.

## Capitalism or Socialism?

Capitalism is the economic system which exists today all over the world. In capitalism the production and distribution of goods are owned by a small minority of people - the capitalist class. The majority of people, the working class must sell their ability to work in return for a wage or salary. The working class are paid to produce goods and services which are then sold for a profit which is taken by the capitalist class. This is exploitation of the working class for their surplus value. The capitalists live off these profits and also reinvest some profits for the further accumulation of wealth.

Socialism is the establishment of a system of society based upon the common

# Water, Waste and War

UN data predicts that by 2025 more than half of countries will be either under water stress or have outright shortages. Many rivers are overtaxed, for example the Nile, Jordan, Yangtze and Ganges; and underground aquifers below growing urban areas such as New Delhi, Beijing have falling levels. World population is rising and there is also increased demand by people for water as part of rising living standards. The minimum requirement per person is 1,000 cubic metres per year for drinking, hygiene and growing food (Marlin Falkenburg of Stockholm International Water Institute -and others).

The International Assessment of Agriculture Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) conclusion on worldwide water quality is that conditions appear degraded in almost all regions through extensive agriculture and other developments; with pollution as a growing problem and faecal contamination serious in developing countries. It is estimated that half of wetlands have been lost during the last century. The land has been converted to agricultural or urban use – or filled in to combat diseases – with the resultant adverse effect on flood control, storage and purification of water, and habitat for biodiversity. There were differences in the damage caused by the December 2004 tsunami on shores protected by functional coral reefs, and shores where reefs had been degraded (IAASTD 2008 P36).

It is not just developing countries that

face difficulties. Parts of the United States have suffered severe droughts; northern parts of Georgia and large areas of the South west. Global climate change can increase aridity and reduce supply. Then there is the problem of waste disposal – things like releases of industrial pollutants, fertilizer run off, and coastal influxes of salt-water into aquifers as groundwater is depleted. As has happened in Almeria in the South of Spain where there are some 20,000 hectares of greenhouses in a desert where they consume 5 times more water than the region gets in rainfall (*The Sahara Forest Project* 2008).

There is plenty of information about the problems including warnings about the urgent need to make changes in the way critical resources are used. At the World Water Week in Stockholm in August 2011 a report issued jointly by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) said that water limits are close to being reached or breached in many of the world's breadbaskets (including the plains of northern China, India's Punjab and the Western United States); that 1.6 billion people already have inadequate access to freshwater. The report *An Ecosystem Services Approach to Water and Food Supply* calls for a more sustainable approach to food production requiring co-operation and co-ordination between the various agricultural and environmental interests. However the kind of co-operation called for between 'international, national and local

level' decision makers in order for them to 'embrace an agroecosystem approach to food production' cannot overcome the competitive nature of market production.

International organisations earnestly strive to resolve problems related to food security and the environment – the IWMI and its partners in the CGIAR (consultative group on international Agricultural research) are developing a multi-million research programme that will look at water as an integral part of the ecosystem. However governments act on behalf of their national agricultural and industrial business interests which means concerns about profit and cost have a higher priority than any ecosystem. It is reckoned that up to 90 percent of China's freshwater has been contaminated as have 40 percent of US rivers and lakes – in spite of stricter environmental laws.

Unfortunately within capitalism the solutions are seen in terms of return on investment. The massive spending required on infrastructure in order to cope with the increasing demand for water and resolve some of the disputes over access to water sources is seen as providing 'economic opportunities'. The water industry is worth \$480 billion and is growing at a rate of 6 percent a year (Global Water Intelligence quoted in Money Week 20.04.2012). However analysts have estimated that the world will need to invest \$trillion a year to ensure water supplies through 2030 (Annual military expenditure worldwide is \$1.6



trillion. *globalissues.org*).

It was observed in 2008 that investment in water facilities as a percentage of GDP had dropped by half since the late 90's, and that if a crisis comes it would not be for the lack of know-how but from an unwillingness to spend the money. New technologies do not need to be invented "we must simply accelerate the adoption of existing technologies to conserve and enhance the water supply." (*Scientific American*, August 2008).

### Technologies exist ...

Technologies – ways in which water resources can be better conserved and used – are already known. However the proposed solutions and predictions all assume the continuance of the present system and the calls for better water management that work with nature may only be applied where economic advantage can be demonstrated.

Among useful ideas are the underground storage of water in sub-surface reservoirs to limit evaporation loss. Such 'water banks' are operating in Arizona and California and being proposed for Singapore. Drip-irrigation systems minimise consumption, and there is 'investment' in new crop varieties that tolerate drought conditions and saltish water. Hygiene and sanitation facilities could adopt dry, low water use devices. Technologies exist which not only use less water but can convert waste material into an organic compost. There are pilot projects for example in the Gebers Housing Project in a suburb of Stockholm.

As well as saving water there is also the possibility of desalination to increase supply. Only 3 percent of water is fresh the rest is salty. Large scale desalination plants have been built for example in Singapore. More energy efficient technology has meant substantial savings in the cost, and scientists are working on reverse osmosis filters composed of carbon nano tubes with the potential to lower the costs still further (Experiments are also being conducted on forward osmosis and biomimetics with the same object the results of which are expected to be 'on the market' in 3 to 5 years). Despite improvements the technology is still energy intensive.

A more promising method is The Seawater Greenhouse which uses solar energy, seawater and the humidity of the surrounding air to provide desalination and cooling- and fresh water for plants. It is seen as a sustainable way of cultivating high

quality crops in hot, arid coastal regions. The process produces 5 times more freshwater than is needed for the plants and it is claimed could have reversed the environmental damage caused by the greenhouses in Almeria. There the authorities looked at diverting the Ebra River but have chosen instead to build twenty large scale desalination plants on the



Above: dried-up Lake Allatoona, Georgia.  
Below: the Gebers Housing Project.



coast. Trials have been taking place in Tenerife (1992), Abu Dhabi, UAR (2000) and Oman (2004) and have shown how well crops of salads and vegetables have grown in hot desert areas. The first commercial seawater greenhouse farm is situated near Port Augusta in Southern Australia and is on degraded land that would not be suitable for agriculture. Using only seawater and sunlight the farm produces a variety of vegetables and salt. It has a brine cooking facility which produces 'gourmet salts and nutrients.'

### But profit comes first

Even new technologies will not resolve the problems inherent in a social system where profit and cost provide and qualify the motivation for action, and fuel the rivalry over resources. For example where river systems cross national frontiers countries upstream have the advantage when it comes to harnessing the waters for hydroelectric power or irrigation which can interfere with the access to water for territories downstream. Water is an aspect of Chinese occupation of Tibet – the continent's watershed. China has built many dams on Tibet's river systems, and more large dams are planned and under construction for example on

the Salween. On the Upper Mekong dams have "dramatically altered the flow of the river" affecting five countries downstream (*The Epoch Times* March 22, 2010).

A US intelligence agencies report commissioned by the Department of State warns that during the next ten years many countries "important to the US" will experience water problems that will contribute to instability and state failure. This is seen as a danger threatening American interests (*Money Week* 20.04.2012).

Some of the unstable areas where there is competition for waterways are managed by special commissions.

The Indus Waters Treaty was signed between India and Pakistan in 1960. Water is a core issue in the dispute over Kashmir but the treaty has held good even when those countries have been at war; and the severing of diplomatic relations has not prevented the treaty stipulated Indus Waters Commission having amicable meetings and sharing hydrological data (*Slate newsletter* Aug 4 2011). It remains to be seen how well the treaty can stand up to the pressure of increasing rival demands for the vital resource. An added factor is of shrinking glaciers in the region – at least 30 percent of the Indus waters comes from glaciers. It was suggested 60 years ago that the whole Indus system should be operated as a single unit.

The logical conclusion is for the whole world to be considered as a single unit. The best framework for dealing with the effects of climate change and the increasing pressures being put on water supplies by growing populations, and the demands made by agriculture, is to have resources owned in common and democratically controlled by the whole world community. So that agricultural production, and indeed all production, would be solely for the use of human beings and not for sale and profit. This would mean worldwide co-operation and co-ordination so that sustainable agricultural practices which have proper regard for biodiversity would be the normal way of providing for the needs of people. Measures now suggested for the more efficient use of water in agriculture which include stopping up leaks, and implementing low loss storage would simply be the commonsense way of doing things.

**PAT DEUTZ**

# Marx as our non-contemporary

We review a new biography of Marx.

IN THIS new 600-page biography (*Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life*, Liveright Publishing) Jonathan Sperber states from the outset that he aims to portray Marx as a 19<sup>th</sup> century figure rather than as 'our contemporary.' Fair enough. It is his basic ideas – his analysis of capitalism, his theory of history, and his insistence on the need to win control of political power to change society – that are still relevant, not the details of his personal life or the political stance he took towards the events of his day.

Marx, who was born in 1818 and died in 1883, was, says Sperber, typical of certain radical, university-educated Germans of the period (though his father had been born in a German-speaking part of France and his mother was Dutch). He was born and brought up in Trier, a German provincial town on the Moselle, which was in a part of Germany, the left bank of the Rhine, that had been annexed to France until 1815. Following the defeat of Napoleon it was handed over to Prussia.

Prussian rule of the Rhineland was unpopular with its inhabitants. At university in Bonn and Berlin Marx became influenced by radical, atheist followers of Hegel's philosophy and became one of them. In 1842 he got a job as a journalist and editor of a newspaper in Cologne, the main city in the Rhineland. This was the mouthpiece of the local liberal-minded bourgeoisie, who financed it, and who wanted free trade and a liberal constitution in place of authoritarian rule of Prussia and its Kaiser. When the paper was suppressed by the authorities in 1843 Marx left to live in Paris where he came under the influence of communist ideas (as socialist ideas were then called).

Expelled from France, Marx moved to Brussels, in Belgium, where he was active in exiles' radical-democratic and communist circles until 1848, a year of popular uprisings all over continental Europe. European radicals and communists had seen it coming and Marx had been delegated to write a manifesto for the Communist League of Germany. This of course was the *Communist Manifesto*. The *Manifesto* illustrates the extent to which Marx is and is not our contemporary. The historical part about the origins and development of capitalism and the working class is still relevant, but the practical part about the programme the Communist League would implement if it had come to power at that time and its relations with other parties and movements is of historical interest only.

## Bourgeois revolution

When the unrest spread to Germany Marx hurried back to Cologne where, again with the financial support of the radical section of the local bourgeoisie, he edited a newspaper. It may seem strange that a socialist should be editing a radical-bourgeois paper putting forward their

demands, but this was in accordance with the perspective set out in the *Manifesto* that 'the bourgeois revolution in Germany will be but the prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution.'

Marx insisted on a bourgeois revolution first and fell out with other communists in Cologne who wanted the working class to take a hostile attitude toward the bourgeoisie. Marx had already fallen out in 1846 with another German communist, Wilhelm Weitling, over the same issue. Sperber writes of this incident:

'Weitling, in his letter to Hess, explained their differences: Marx had insisted that 'at the moment there can be no talk of the realization of communism; the bourgeoisie must first take control.'

This is one illustration why Marx is not our contemporary as far as his practical political stances are concerned. He may well have been right that communism was not an immediate possibility in the 1840s and that a period of bourgeois rule (in place of authoritarian dynastic rule) was needed first, but this is not the case today and has not been for at least a century. Even so, at the time, Marx still thought that the period of bourgeois rule would be relatively short.

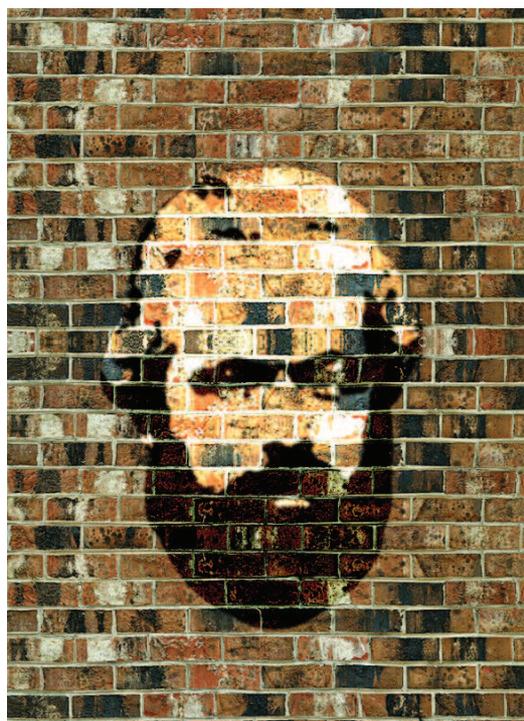
According to Sperber, Marx's conception of two revolutions in a relatively short period of time was coloured by what had happened in the French Revolution: beginning as a bourgeois revolution in 1789 with the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, it developed in a more radical way when in 1793 the Jacobins came

to power, proclaimed a republic and executed the king. Sperber's view is not implausible when you consider that the French revolution had taken place only sixty years previously and that there are still people today who look to the Russian Revolution of over ninety years ago as a model.

Things did not turn out that way in Germany and not even the bourgeois revolution took place. Marx had to go into exile again, first in France but there too the reaction had triumphed and then in August 1849 to England, where he lived for the rest of his life. Within a few years a split occurred in the Communist League, again over the issue of whether or not the aim should be an immediate communist insurrection. Marx was against and eventually gave up involvement in exiled Germans' politics, getting a job as an overseas correspondent of the *New York Tribune*. In fact, in so far as Marx had a profession it was journalism.

## War against Russia

Previously, Sperber points out, Marx had relied on a war against Russia sparking off the bourgeois-democratic revolution that was to be followed by a proletarian one. Now, he looked to an economic crisis to do this. Sperber quotes an amusing anecdote on this (which shows that



for some Marx is their contemporary):

'As Wilhelm Leibknecht remembered, Marx's constant expectation of an economic crisis became a standing joke among his London friends and associates.'

Even so, when the Crimean war broke out in 1853 Marx was an enthusiastic supporter of the Franco-British-Turkish side. Opposition to Tsarist Russia was common amongst European radicals, so Marx was no exception here. It was a position he maintained for the rest of his life. But it became an obsession for him. He even wrote a book, best forgotten, *The Secret Diplomatic History of the Eighteenth Century*, which advanced the conspiracy theory that Palmerston was a Russian agent and that his Whig predecessors in the previous century had been too. Much of his other immediate 'foreign policy' stances were shaped by this: his support for Polish independence and for Austria in its war with France in Northern Italy in 1859. Sperber argues that towards the end of his life Marx had more sympathy for the Tories than the Liberals because of their anti-Russia stance. Certainly, he wrote an anonymous article for the *Daily Telegraph* denouncing what he saw as Gladstone's pro-Russia stance.

### Anti-Prussia

Marx was anti-Prussian too throughout his life (which makes the title of an earlier biography of him, *The Red Prussian*, an absurdity). Prussia for most of Marx's life was only one of a number of German states and statelets. Sperber points out that many non-Prussian German-speakers wanted a united Germany but not under Prussian dominance. Marx, like many other radical Germans, was one of these, and wanted to see a united German democratic republic. To that extent, he was a German nationalist.

This was the basis of his opposition to Lassalle, an early would-be leader of the German workers' movement. Lassalle allowed himself to be used by Bismarck against the bourgeoisie who were demanding a liberal constitution. Marx regarded the bourgeoisie as the lesser evil to Bismarck and the Kaiser, denouncing Lassalle's followers for describing all other classes than the working class as 'one reactionary mass'.

In all these respects, then, Marx was not our contemporary but someone politically active in a period which was quite different from ours today. Socialists today are not called upon to defend the positions taken up by Marx, and we haven't. In fact we have criticised him for taking sides in wars. His actions in the International Working Men's Association, on the other hand, where he encouraged trade-unionism and emphasised the need for working-class political action, are more to our liking.

### Marx the Man

Sperber is sympathetic to Marx the man, defending him against critics who judge his behaviour and attitudes by 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century standards, including his bourgeois life-style and alleged anti-semitism (and indeed alleged Jewishness). As an expert in 19<sup>th</sup> century European and German history Sperber is well-placed to situate Marx in his time. He does this well, to the extent that his book is also a history of the time. His summaries of Marx's philosophical and political views are accurate enough, though when it comes to his economic views there are a few errors (concerning the rate of profit, particularly its averaging and tendency to fall).

All in all, though, this is a good, scholarly biography of Marx, to be read alongside the other recent one by Francis Wheen.

**ADAM BUICK**



## A reply to the New Economics Foundation

*Reply sent to a letter from the Green-leaning thinktank asking for a financial donation.*

Thank you for your letter of 18 July addressing me 'as an owner of the Royal Bank of Scotland ...' I am afraid there has been a misunderstanding. I don't own any shares in RBS.

I expect you have addressed me in this way because at the moment RBS is majority-owned by the government and because you have been taken in by media propaganda that, as the government is financed by taxes and as we are all 'taxpayers' even if only nominally, what is owned by the government belongs to us all. It does not take much thought to see through this fallacy. Or will your begging letter next year begin 'As an owner of the British war fleet ...'?

The basis of the fallacy that what belongs to the government belongs to everybody is the illusion that the government represents all the people, when this is clearly not the case. Governments represent the interest of some 'taxpayers,' only, of those on whom the burden of taxation ultimately falls – the owners of property and the employers of labour. The taxes nominally paid by most 'taxpayers' are passed on to their employers in the form of higher than otherwise wages and salaries. So most of us are not really 'the taxpayers' in any meaningful sense.

This is recognised by an article on, of all places, the UKIP website ([www.ukip.org/issues/policy-pages/tax](http://www.ukip.org/issues/policy-pages/tax)). Discussing 'income tax (and NI) extracted from wages through the PAYE system', the anonymous author says:

'Like VAT there is a general failure to distinguish the mechanics of the tax's calculation from its incidence (who actually bears it). Tax under PAYE is *calculated* by reference to a purely notional figure called 'gross pay', which no employed person in history has ever seen, let alone touched or spent. The employee's real income is of course the *net* pay; and that amount of tax which has been 'deducted' is always the employer's liability, to be remitted by the employer to HMRC in full, every month. As with VAT, the employers are the *de facto* tax-collectors. In this case they are also the tax-payers!'

And it explains how this comes about:

'This phenomenon was clearly set out 220 years ago in Adam Smith's illustration of an employee earning £100. If the state imposes a tax of 20% his pay must rise by 25% in order to re-instate the employee's former purchasing power (£100). He must now be paid £125 so that the 20% tax leaves him with disposable earnings of £100. In practice there may be a time-lag over which purchasing power (or the basic standard of living) is restored ...'

He ends up proposing that, instead, corporations should be directly taxed on a part of their profits on the grounds that 'taxable capacity is a corporate, not an individual, concept. The employed individual has no taxable capacity.'

It seems that not all UKIP members are the know-nothings they present themselves as. At least one has a better understanding of taxation than those you call your 'brilliant banking team.'

I am not advocating that the tax system should be reformed so that only corporations pay taxes (how the rich and powerful distribute the burden of taxation amongst themselves is a problem for them to settle). But at least this would make the situation clearer and in future you ought to address your 'as an owner of the RBS' letters to capitalist corporations. Because it is they who are the ultimate 'taxpayers' and the collective owners of what the government owns, not people like me.

## Ice Age Art

THE RECENT exhibition *Ice Age Art* at the British Museum demonstrates what Marx called 'the vitality of primitive communities' in the Upper Palaeolithic era 12,000 to 50,000 years ago. It is widely believed that human beings in this period lived in 'primitive communism' where women were held in high esteem, sexual relationships were unregulated, and society was based on the maternal clan. Upper Palaeolithic Art includes carving, engraving, and sculpture in baked clay, bone, stone, reindeer antler, and mammoth ivory.

There are many depictions of the female form which as Evelyn Reed describes in *Woman's Evolution: From Matriarchal Clan to Patriarchal Family*, in the matrilineal clan system of hunter gatherer communistic

households there was a belief in women having superior magic, demonstrated by their ability to produce children, men were kept well away from child birth and may not even have known where babies came from. Bertell Ollman wrote 'for the greater part of human history the link between sexual intercourse and paternity was not even known'.

*Woman of Willendorf* is a 24,000 years old limestone statuette tinted with red ochre with large breasts and abdomen and a detailed vulva. *Woman of Dolni Vestonice* is a 30,000 years old baked clay (ceramic) statuette with large pendulous breasts, large abdomen and wide hips. *Woman of Hohle Fels* known as the 'Schwabian Eve' is made of mammoth tusk ivory and because of a perforated protrusion was probably an amulet. At 40,000 years old it is arguably the oldest discovered piece of figurative art.

*Hohle Fels Flute* is a 35,000 years old musical instrument perforated with five holes and made from the wing-bone of a griffon vulture. *Lion Human of the Hohlenstein Stadel* is a mammoth ivory lion-headed figurine 40,000 years old and in a modern experiment using the stone tools available then it took 400 hours to create this highly skilled carving. *Swimming Reindeer*, 13,000 years old, is carved from the tip of a mammoth tusk and depicts two reindeer swimming nose to tail probably on their way to mating grounds or winter pastures. *Head of a Musk Ox* is a rare limestone three dimensional sculpture 18,000 years old. *Hooked Spear Throwers* are 13,000 years old hunting implements to increase speed and the force of the throw, carved from reindeer antler in the form of a mammoth.

*Ice Age Art* is a fascinating glimpse into a period of early human history which ended with what Engels called 'the overthrow of mother-right [and] the world historical defeat of the female sex' and the rise of the patriarchal family, private property and the state.

**STEVE CLAYTON**



## *The Hospital at the Time of the Revolution* by Caryl Churchill

EARLIER THIS year the Finborough Theatre in London staged the world première of Caryl Churchill's 1972 play *The Hospital at the Time of the Revolution*.

Churchill's play is partly based on the chapter, *Colonial War and Mental Disorders* in Frantz Fanon's study of the Algerian war of independence, *The Wretched of the Earth*, described by Sartre as 'the Third World finds itself and speaks to itself'. Fanon's title is taken from the opening lyrics of *The Internationale*. Fanon was a Martinique-born psychiatrist, philosopher, self-styled Marxist, revolutionary and writer who was head of the Psychiatric Department at Blida-Joinville Hospital, Algiers in French Algeria. He resigned to work with the FLN, Algerian National Liberation Front in their guerrilla war for independence.

Churchill's play portrays Fanon treating the schizophrenic teenage daughter of a French civil servant (involved in 'interrogations' of Algerian rebels), and a French police inspector hearing screams in his head who has been beating his wife and children as a result of his 'work' torturing captured Algerian rebels. We also see three Algerian 'patients' in the hospital who are paranoid, delusional, suicidal, or catatonic as a result of the colonial war in Algeria. The bloody conflict for Algerian independence claimed the lives of 100,000 French soldiers and 'colons' and probably 1 million Algerians. The war is vividly brought to life in the 1966 Gillo Pontecorvo film *The Battle of Algiers*.

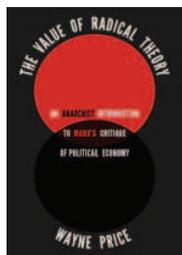
Churchill uses ideas from RD Laing's *Sanity, Madness and the Family* in her portrayal of the French couple and the schizophrenic daughter where a child is subject to the 'double bind' of contradictory commands that places a child in an existential checkmate of an 'untenable position' in the closed family nexus thereby causing madness.

Churchill wrote this year about the play; 'unfortunately it feels more relevant now than for a long time' which is true considering the American use of 'extraordinary rendition' of 'terror suspects' to countries that use torture, not forgetting the torture of 'terror suspects' by the USA at Guantanamo Bay, torture and abuse of Iraqis by the US military at Abu Ghraib prison and the British Army torture and abuse of Iraqis in Basra.

Churchill has explored issues of power since *Owners*, her critique of capitalism through to the sexual politics and colonialism of *Cloud Nine* to her 1987 attack on financial capitalism in *Serious Money*. From *The Hospital at the Time of the Revolution* to her 2009 *Seven Jewish Children*, a charity piece for the Palestinian people of Gaza, Churchill is evidently sympathetic to the struggles of oppressed peoples under colonialism.

**Marxian economics**

*The Value of Radical Theory. An Anarchist Introduction to Marx's Critique of Political Economy.* Wayne Price. AK Press. 190 pages. £8.95.



We often joke that anarchists know very little about economics and that what little they do know they got from Marx. US class-struggle communist anarchist Wayne Price seems to agree

and has written a short book to explain Marxian economics to his fellow anarchists.

He does an excellent job in explaining the labour theory of value in chapter 1 and state capitalism in chapter 6. The views he expresses in the other chapters, while certainly held by some in the Marxist tradition, are controversial. For instance, that crises are caused by the fall in the rate of profit due to a rise in the organic composition of capital and that this will eventually lead to capitalism's demise; and that capitalism has been in a state of decline and decay since 1900 and has only been kept going by arms spending, wars and reconstruction after them, and the creation of fictitious capital (a couple of ICC pamphlets figure in the bibliography).

There is a peculiar attempt to include the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century witch-hunts as part of the primitive accumulation of capital; and also a passage (p. 122) which seems to suggest that 'supervisors' are not part of the working class (which would exclude a large chunk of those forced by economic necessity to work for a wage or salary).

On the other hand, Price recognises that Marx regarded the terms 'socialism' and 'communism' as referring to the same society and that he stood (like Price and us) for a classless, stateless, moneyless society of common ownership and democratic and production for use not profit. His discussion of the differences between Marx and anarchism is intelligent and fair: that Marx tried to ignore morality in presenting the case for socialism; that he envisaged a higher degree of centralisation than anarchists; and that he was not opposed to elections either under capitalism or in socialism.

So, a book that can be useful both for socialists and anarchists.

**ALB**

**Post-Tory world**

*How I Killed Margaret Thatcher.* Anthony Cartwright. Tindal Street Press, 2012.



Anthony Cartwright's novel evokes memories familiar to anyone who lived (or, especially, was growing up) during the early 1980s and the reign of Thatcher. It is the story of 9-year old Sean,

growing up in Dudley, amidst his family as they and their aspirations, hopes and fears evolve under Tory rule. The narrative structure, of Sean as an adult looking back and telling his tale and where he is now, adds to the sense of historical movement.

It starts with a fight between his grandfather and his uncle, who has voted Tory and gets a smack in the gob for his pains. Sean's father aren't admit he voted for Thatcher too. They all live in a heavily industrial area, working in the Midlands' factories. Sean's father wants to move out of the street he grew up on, and own a house of his own, gaining a mortgage that looms, throughout the narrative, foreshadowing the eventual havoc de-industrialisation was going to wreak on the family.

The story shows how some working class voters did support Thatcher, and the offer she made to take them out of the conditions they were living under. Working class people are shown as not monolithic or consistent: Sean's mother, who opposes Thatcher is still aspirational enough to correct his dialect 'yew am' to 'you are'. Chapters are interspersed with quotes from Thatcher that show her trying to appeal to working class sensibilities.

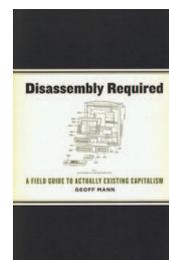
Sean absorbs the antipathy towards Thatcher, blaming her for all his ills, and begins to scheme violent vengeance. He is aware, with each news report, with the family gathered in front of the telly, whose side he is on. Although, as we know now, he never did kill Thatcher, his trajectory through the pain inflicted on his family, into a post-Tory world seems to grasp the evaporation of a clear narrative of the workers' movement. There is no hope at the end of this novel, only a continuation of a hard life.

This is a simple but powerful book, showing where we have come from and where we are now.

**PIK SMEET**

**Actually existing capitalism**

*Disassembly Required. A Field Guide to Actually Existing Capitalism.* Geoff Mann. AK Press, 2012. £9.95



This book succeeds well enough as a description of the way capitalism has functioned in recent years, except that the author subscribes to the view that a bank does not have to have the funds it

lends, not even in digital form. This is unfortunate as he gives as one of the defining features of capitalism 'a monetary system based on the production of bank-credit money.'

Banks are certainly central to capitalism in practice but for collecting unused funds and savings and channelling them to capitalist enterprises as money-capital. Revealingly, when it comes to describing the events that led to the sub-prime mortgage bubble, he does not appeal to the theory that banks create money out of nothing to explain the source of funding for this. He says it came from savers in East Asia. In other words, from previously existing funds.

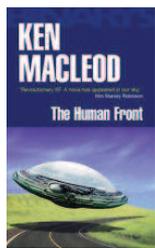
In the final chapter on what to do about capitalism he reveals that 'for a long time I was convinced that we could never get beyond capitalism without getting rid of money' but that 'I am no longer so sure.' He still knows, though, that there is no way out under capitalism, not even if a leftwing government comes to power in Greece or Spain and takes the country out of the EU. But even though he knows this won't improve things (and says it may even make them worse) he still supports this, on the grounds that it is better to have tried and failed than never to have tried at all. Perhaps, but why not try something that has some chance of succeeding rather than setting yourself up to fail?

Mann ends up advocating that what anti-capitalists can best do today is trying to encourage non-money relations between people (which he says does not include LETS or local currencies). So he doesn't seem to have entirely abandoned his previous view.

**ALB**

## Alternative history

**The Human Front. Ken Macleod. PM Press, 2013.**



Alternative history is a strange genre. Its central premise, that small changes in history can lead to radically different worlds is somewhat tenuous: Hitler dying as a small child is

unlikely to have prevented a Second World War (merely changing the cast and their precise lines, instead). It is, though, fiction, and it provides a useful means of exploring 'what ifs', where the route to the alternative history is usually just an excuse to look at a world that might have been or is simply just different from our own. Being able to imagine different societies is a useful skill, in and of itself.

A few are wish fulfilments, and there's a few too many 'If the South won the Civil War' or 'If the Germans won the Second World War' and even 'If the British Empire never fell'. And of course, the less said about Zeppelins, the better.

Ken Macleod's work has featured in our review columns before, often for their interesting examination of the ideas and cultures of the revolutionary left, as well as for his commitment to libertarian (proper sense) causes. *The Human Front* was his first published novella, and it has recently been reissued, along with an essay and an interview that further

flesh out some of its themes.

It begins with the news that the Communist partisan Joseph Stalin has been killed in early 1963. The Soviet Union had fallen in 1949, under assault from Allied super hi-tech secret weapons. As Macleod explains in the essay, this dramatically changes the shape of the post-war world, leading to the unrestrained use of military superiority to maintain the colonial powers' positions. The absence of the Soviet Union and the ongoing Chinese revolution means Maoism rather than Trotskyism comes to predominate on the British left. This leads to several scenes of 'People's War' in the Scottish Highlands, with all the horror and brutality that entails.

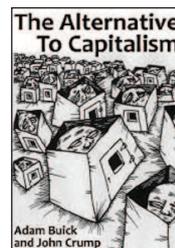
Originally published in 2001, the image of a fugitive Stalin gunned down escaping is now resonant with the fates of Hussein and Bin Laden, and indeed, of our present unipolar world with the unrestrained use of drone strikes. Tens of years on, it seems more like prescience than alternative history. Although the novella soars off into high science fiction for its end twist, its grounding in the Scotland and the Lewis of Macleod's childhood gives it a sense of solidity, grounding it in real history and left wing arguments remembered.

This reissue is an opportunity to not only consider the themes of the original story, but also alternative history itself and the way in which we shape our pasts to try and make our own future.

**PIK SMEET**

## New booklet

**The Alternative to Capitalism. Adam Buick and John Crump. Theory and Practice. £5.00**

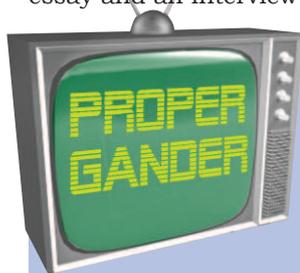


A 100-page booklet reproducing two chapters from the authors' *State Capitalism: The Wages System under New Management* (1986) and the late John Crump's introduction to *Non-Market Socialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (1987). It describes and explains capitalism and its alternative, a world-wide non-market society of no-ownership, democratic control, production directly for use, calculation in kind and free access, refuting the 'economic calculation argument'. Also describes the various currents which have kept alive the concept of such a society as the alternative to capitalism, both private and state.

Copies can be ordered for £6 (including post and packing) from the Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN. Make cheques payable to 'The Socialist Party of Great Britain'.

### **SOCIALIST STANDARD INDEX FOR 2012**

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### **Smoking Woodbines In The Outside Lav**

CLASS POLITICS are all over the TV schedules like a rash, from news updates on the economic downturn to *Downton Abbey*. But like an embarrassing rash, the concept of 'class' is usually kept covered up by programme-makers. Would *Paul O'Grady's Working Britain* (BBC1) be a much-needed exception? Probably not, considering that the title was changed from 'Paul O'Grady's Working Class' by executives nervous about using the c-word. The show gives us a history of the British working class, told through the jobs held by presenter Paul O'Grady's Birkenhead family. He adds that his onetime alter-ego Lily Savage was working class because 'she's had an outside lav'.

Unfortunately, it's too much to ask for the programme to give an economic definition of class. Instead, the 20<sup>th</sup> century working class is described patronisingly and stereotypically as being proud, hard-working, woodbine-smoking racists who went to work for the camaraderie. The show often refers to 'working class pride', but without any economic analysis the question of why someone should feel proud to be

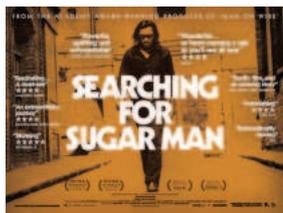
exploited isn't raised.

There's some insight in the discussions of the Jarrow march, 1963 Bristol bus boycott and 1984 miners' strike, rightly shown as examples of people taking action against the powers-that-be. But mostly, this is social history as a pick-n-mix of roles to act out. So, we see O'Grady playing at being a domestic servant and a clippie, and then going down a coal mine. As many of the trades mentioned have dwindled, he then visits a Glasgow call centre as a modern-day equivalent. After being shown the brightly bland office, he speaks to some of its employees about class. As the show has described the working class in the context of tin baths and mangles, it's not surprising that these call centre staff don't regard themselves as working class. For them, class is in the eye of the beholder – you're not working class if you don't define yourself as such, which is a bit like saying the Earth is flat if you believe it is. In lieu of class consciousness, there are some vague misconceptions about everyone being treated equally these days.

The show's final disappointment comes after the end credits, when we learn that this is an Open University production. Two academics involved in research withdrew their names from the credits, understandably unhappy with the result. As a useful primer for students, this programme definitely lacks class. **Mike Foster**

## Film Review

**Searching for Sugar Man (2012).**  
Directed by Malik Bendjelloul.



The American Dream is that anyone can succeed if they try hard enough. That didn't happen for

Sixto Rodriguez, a 1970s Detroit singer-songwriter combining the voice of James Taylor with the lyrical ability of Bob Dylan. Firmly in the American folk-music revival counterculture, his songs spoke of working class struggles, hardship and inner city poverty. Maybe it was his Hispanic name, maybe (and unlike Dylan) it was the humility so uncommon for a performer of extraordinary talent.

A mere six sales of two albums meant he was dropped from his label two weeks before Christmas 1971. As Rodriguez returned to poverty working various construction and labouring jobs, his albums took off in South Africa. There he was bigger than the Rolling Stones and his song's anti-establishment sentiments helped provide the soundtrack for the end of apartheid.

The music industry cheated him of royalties for a reputed half a million sales in South Africa. Unaware of his success abroad, and still living in poverty, Rodriguez made an unsuccessful attempt to become Detroit city mayor, his name was even spelt wrongly on the ballot. Rumours of his on-stage suicide prompted two South African fans to investigate what happened to him. This Academy award winning and Sundance festival winning documentary doesn't tell the whole story, but it is beautifully presented and what a story.  
**DJW**

## 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

## Meetings

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

### Swansea

Monday **9 September** 7.30 pm  
CAPITALISM AND CELEBRITY CULTURE

Speaker: Howard Moss  
Unitarian Church, High St, Swansea, SA1 1NZ (next to Argos).

### East Anglia

Saturday **14 September** 2.00 - 5.00pm  
"I'M A STRANGER HERE MYSELF"

Speaker: Richard Headicar  
Nelson Hotel (opposite the train station)  
Prince of Wales Road, Norwich NR1 1DX  
(The meeting room can be accessed by going through the Costa Coffee Café and down the stairs. The room is towards the Prince of Wales Road end).

All welcome.

### London Chiswick

Tuesday **17 September** 8.00pm  
LEFT UNITY - THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

Speaker: Adam Buick  
Committee Room, Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace, W4 4JN.

### Glasgow

Wednesday **18 September** 8.30pm  
THE CORRUPT AND UNDEMOCRATIC LABOUR PARTY

Speaker: Victor Vanni  
Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road, Glasgow G20 6HT

### Manchester

Saturday **21 September** 2.00pm  
A CARING SOCIETY - SOCIALISM AND THE NHS

The Unicorn, 26 Church Street, Manchester M4 1PW

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

## North London

Saturday **21 September** 2.00pm  
Debate: "CAN THE LABOUR PARTY EVER BRING US SOCIALISM?"  
Bill Martin (Socialist Party)  
Stan Keable (Labour Party Marxists)  
Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Rd, London, City of London WC1X 8JR.

## London Head Office

Sunday **15 September** 3.00pm  
WHAT IS HISTORY?  
Speaker: Steve Clayton

Sunday **29 September** 3.00pm  
FOOD FOR FUTURE: PROFIT OR PLENTY?  
Speakers: Pat Deutz and Eddie Craggs

52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 7UN (nearest tube Clapham North)

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

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

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

# 50 Years Ago

## Mail Train robbery

THE TWO-and-a-half million pound mail train robbery was audacious and glamorous enough to have come from the pen of the most imaginative crime fiction writer.

In that, it was typical of a recent strengthening trend in crime. The big, well planned robbery is becoming increasingly profitable for the crooks and so more and more of a headache for the police.

This is hardly surprising. The existence of private property elevates money into



the key to a secure life. The moneyed man is always the privileged man and he does his

best to make sure that he keeps both the money and the privileges.

There are plenty of such privileged—and honoured—men whose wealth has been amassed from the exploitation of the other class in society. Or perhaps they inherited it from their ancestors' historical equivalent of the Cheddington hold-up.

This sort of wealth is respectable—it has come from what has been well called legal robbery, which conforms to capitalism's needs and so its moralities.

Robbery, forgery, embezzlement, and so on, do not conform and the men who try to get rich by practising them are anything but honoured.

Be that as it may, crime is inevitable as long as capitalism lasts; offences against property make up the overwhelming majority of crimes today. Capitalism without crime, in fact, is simply impossible.

Ironically, it is capitalism itself which asks for some of its crime. Do not the armed forces, so essential to capitalism, encourage just the sort of knowledge and the mental attitudes which are useful in a desperate, quickfire robbery?

The driver of the Cheddington train said that one of the gang advised him to keep quiet because there were some 'right bastards' there. Well, it is the 'right bastard' who makes an excellent Commando or bomber pilot.

All of this is not to justify nor to condone the criminal. Indeed, any one who tried to take away from the Cheddington gang any of the money they have stolen would soon find that, in their own unmistakable way, they are as firm in their support of property rights as any bank boardroom.

Capitalism is an unpleasant social system and crime is only one of its many excrescences.

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

# ACTION REPLAY

## Street Football

THE PROTESTS in Brazil began at the start of June, with objections to some fairly small increases in public transport fares in São Paulo. By the middle of the month perhaps a quarter of a million people were protesting in towns and cities across the country. The themes of the protests widened to include a clamp-down on government corruption, as the police and military responded with violence and yet more people assembled on the streets – over two million on some accounts.

In contrast to recent events in Turkey, one focus of the protests was specific to Brazil: the building and refurbishing of sports stadiums for football's Confederations Cup (held this year during the protests) and World Cup (to be held in June and July next year) and the 2016 Olympic Games. The cost of these projects so far has been enormous, way more than what South Africa spent for the 2010 World Cup, even though half the stadiums are still to be finished.

The corruption allegations extend beyond the government to the Brazilian Football Confederation and to FIFA (football's international governing body,

responsible for organising the World Cup). Fans wonder where the money for the stadiums has really gone, and complain about the likely prices for World Cup tickets: these will be cheaper for Brazilians than for international visitors, but still beyond the means of many local supporters. Moreover, while the stadiums have been (partly) built, the government has not been so generous in providing resources for hospitals and schools.

Brazil is part of the BRICS group of nations (with Russia, India, China and South Africa), who are flexing their economic and political muscles as upcoming powers, possessors of raw materials and large potential markets. This has been reflected in the hosting of sports tournaments, such as the South African World Cup and the 2008 Beijing Olympics. But, like its BRICS fellows, Brazil's economy has not been in good shape lately, with growth in GDP over the last three years being slower than forecast and its currency, the *real*, being generally seen as overvalued. There is massive inequality, and the *favelas* on the fringes of major cities are some of the worst slums on the planet.

Brazil is often described as the most football-mad country on Earth. So perhaps it's not surprising that football has played a part in these mass protests and in sparking demands for greater transparency and better access to services.

PB

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# Voice from the Back

## The Day To Day Struggle

Politicians are always claiming that because of their endeavours we are all better off financially than we have ever been, but the facts disprove this fantasy. 'More than half of UK adults are struggling to keep up with bills and debt repayments, a major survey of people's finances has suggested. Some 52% of the 5,000 people questioned said they were struggling, compared with just 35% in a similar study in 2006, the Money Advice Service said. In Northern Ireland, some 66% said they were struggling' (BBC News, 2 August).

## No Old Bangers Here

The present economic crisis in the UK has been so severe that many workers face unemployment, wage freezes and in some severe cases repossession of their houses. No such problems exist for the owning class. 'Wealthy Britons have spent £91 million buying new Ferraris this year, making Great Britain the biggest European market for the Italian car company. According to Ferrari's global sales figures for the first six months, 415 models have been sold in the UK, an increase of 6 percent, with the average purchase price standing at £220,000' (Times, 2 August).



## If You've Got It, Flaunt It

At a time when many workers are desperately trying to get together enough money for the deposit on a house the owning class are continuing in their usual spendthrift fashion. 'Britain's most expensive parking place has gone on the

## FREE LUNCH



market for £3,000,000, almost twice the price of the average home. The open-air spot is 11ft by 21ft and is in Hyde Park Gardens, London, where many houses cost millions of pounds' (Times, 8 August). If you think that was unusually expensive the same report mentions an underground parking space near Harrods that was priced at £200,000 in 2011.

## Politics And Poverty

Despite the Coalition government's claim to be a family-orientated organisation families are suffering at their hands. Food banks across Britain are being inundated with requests for emergency meals as families struggle to feed their children through the school holidays. The Trussell Trust, which runs the country's largest network of food banks, says this is the busiest summer it has ever experienced, with some of its branches seeing double the number of requests for emergency parcels since the start of the holidays. 'Parents whose children ordinarily receive free school lunches are among those struggling the most, as they now have to find an extra meal every day. The trust says the situation is worse than last summer because of rising food prices – which despite falling slightly in the latest Government figures are more than 4 per cent higher than last year – and the impact of the Coalition's welfare changes that were launched in April' (Independent, 9 August).

## Morality And Money

The British government likes to portray itself as an organisation of the highest moral principles and absolutely opposed to brutality. Except of course when it threatens their master's profits. 'Britain is in talks to sell 12 Typhoon fighter jets to Bahrain, despite the Gulf state's controversial human rights record. The proposed deal with the Gulf monarchy rocked by protests in 2011 is thought to

be worth more than £1 billion and is part of a concerted effort by Gulf countries to strengthen military ties with Britain. .... Amnesty International claimed the arms negotiations showed human rights worries were once again playing second fiddle to British business deals' (Daily Telegraph, 10 August). The deal was one of the main agenda items in a recent Downing Street meeting between David Cameron and King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa. Bahrain's government faced condemnation and accusations of brutality for its repression of protests led by the island's Shia majority in early



2011.

## Misplaced Loyalty

The ideas of nationalism are repugnant to socialists. Which country you are born in is an accident, in fact your birth itself was probably an accident. Despite this many workers sing national anthems, wave flags and identify themselves with 'their country'. Britain like every other country is owned by a tiny handful of the population and recent figures have shown the British working class are becoming even poorer. 'British workers have suffered one of the biggest falls in real wages among European countries over the past three years, with only crisis-hit Greece, Portugal and the Netherlands doing worse. New figures collated by the House of Commons Library show a 5.5 per cent drop in wages after inflation since 2010' (Independent, 11 August).