

socialist standard



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

Activity in captivity



How capitalism made
'work' a dirty word



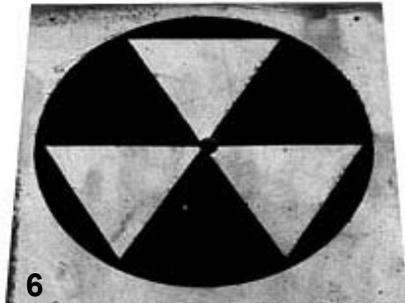
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THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 2 February** at the address below. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the editorial committee at: The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High street, London SW4 7UN.

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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.

Editorial Democracy matters

Recent months have seen power contested across the world. Brutal suppression of fledgling democratic demands in Burma were followed by blatant abuse of elections in Kenya. At the same time the various factions of Russian capitalism have been brazenly playing out in public their private chess game: to control the state for their own economic ends.

Meanwhile in Pakistan, hope for "democracy" apparently dies with the assassination of an unelected political leader at the head of a feudal political dynasty. And while all this happens, in parts of the USA, voters get an early chance to pick the leader of the "free world". A choice, that is, between the \$100 million presidential candidate and the \$90 million candidate (with every likelihood of two dynasties being in power in USA for some 25 consecutive years).

Closer to home, in a "mature" democracy such as the UK's, all the major parties have been pimping up their policies for drooling millionaires to purchase by means of ever-more creative accountancy over donations.

In contrast to this shabby and sleazy reality of democracy in this society, workers are continually spun the convenient tale that democracy and capitalism are intertwined. It is a reassuring thought for some: that the obscene inequalities of the capitalist economic system are justified by the political freedoms the market supposedly enables.

But it's a myth, of course. Around the world the profit system can be found bedding down very nicely with all sorts of political systems. From fascistic religious dictatorships to liberal democracies, from national liberation movements to supra-economic geo-political blocs, they all end up having to accommodate themselves to capital and its unquenchable thirst for profit.

World socialists applaud those workers around the world who fight – at massive risk to themselves – for basic civil liberties and

trade union rights, for the freedom to hold meetings and participate in free elections. The fight for a measure of democracy worldwide is an essential part of the struggle for world socialism. After all, if workers are not able to fight for something as basic as the vote, they are unlikely to be able to work for the transformation of society from one based on production for profit to one based on production for human need.

The World Socialist Movement does not intend playing into the hands of the global ruling class and their political mouthpieces, whether dictatorial or democratic. We don't intend making it easy for them to treat world socialism as an "undemocratic" threat.

But neither are we under any illusion about the nature of democracy inside capitalism. We confront the myth that capitalism and democracy are interdependent. We oppose the practices of so many so-called revolutionary organisations down the years who expect to bring democracy to the masses while unwilling to practise it internally. We challenge the notion that revolution cannot at the same time be democratic *and* planned, cannot be participative *and* structured.

Where it is available to workers we take the viewpoint that capitalist democracy can and should be used. But not in order to chase the ever diminishing returns of reforming capitalism. Instead we see democracy as a (indeed arguably the only) critically-important instrument available to class-conscious workers for making a genuine and democratic revolution.

And in the process of making a revolution the really interesting work can start of course: that of reinventing a democracy fit for society on a human scale. A democracy that is free from the patronage, the power games and the profit motive that currently – from Moscow to Rangoon, Nairobi to Washington – abuses it.

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Emission Control? – We Have A Problem

Socialists have for years railed at capitalist market production for being on a relentless collision course with the environment, and have been more than once guilty of tired clichés like ‘profits of doom’ and ‘merchants of menace’. Nobody expected, twenty or so years ago, that the fat cats in their plexiglass palaces would lift their noses from their account books long enough to notice that, outside the window, the last tree was dying in a desert. Now, mysteriously, we see 150 of the world’s largest corporations, including Nestle, Coca Cola, General Electric and Shell, enthusiastically demanding carbon emission cuts of up to 50 percent by 2050 (*New Scientist*, Dec 8, 07). And in the wake of the recent Bali accord, we have most of the world’s countries behind a global effort to cap carbon emissions and prevent disastrous global warming. What is behind this sudden laudable concern for the environment, and how are they going to achieve it? Simple, the only way capitalism can think of doing anything. By making loads of money out of it.

Now the way you make money out of anything in capitalism is to deprive everyone of it, and then charge them for access to it. Thus, at Kyoto, was born the idea of depriving everyone equally of the right to emit greenhouse gases, and then charging a flat rate for access to metered pollution rights. It would work, so long as all countries signed up to it. This last proviso is of course what has taken so long to resolve, which is why Kyoto never really worked and Bali, which was strong on emotion but weak on hard targets, still might not.

So how do businesses make money out of a carbon tax? By developing ‘green’ technologies that produce less pollution, allowing countries to save money on buying or sell on their spare credits to the belching giants like China and the USA. Hence all the new debate in the UK about nuclear power. Hence also the probable Second Coming to Europe of GM technology, previously scorned but now about to return with a vengeance. Agriculture is the largest contributor to global warming, not through carbon directly but through nitrogen in fertiliser, which, apart from the considerable problems of nitrate pollution, algal blooms and dead zones in coastal waters, has the unhappy effect of oxidising into nitrous oxide, which is a greenhouse gas 300 times more potent than carbon (*New Scientist*, Jan 5). Genetically modified crops which don’t need so much fertiliser, or which can take up more nitrogen and waste less of it, are seen as one way to reduce this huge impact.

And genetic modification of crops won’t stop at a few strains of cereal. Rice feeds half the world, and in a more drought-prone world, rice cultivation will be seriously at risk, so drought-resistant strains will have to be developed. And as with salt-resistance, another important factor in coastal areas more prone to flooding, what happens when modifications migrate, as they are known to do, to wild and weedy cousins? Crops could in the future be strangled by superweeds that can withstand flood, drought or weedkillers to threaten the world’s food supplies.

But one of the biggest money-making production bonanzas is biofuels. Transport is responsible for roughly one quarter of all global human emissions, but the oil is running out and the



Deforestation for industrial crops in Borneo



much-vaunted hydrogen option requires unfeasibly massive infrastructure changes for storage and filling-station delivery. Besides, biofuels are close to carbon-neutral, absorbing as much in growing as they emit in burning. Better still, with some strains such as switchgrass offering up to 540 percent more energy than is required to grow them, leading to a carbon-saving of 94 percent compared to petrol, the smart money is in inedible crop-growing (*BBC Online*, Jan 8). Already large swathes of North America are switching to corn-based biofuel production, both to earn carbon credits and as a future hedge against Arab and Chinese-controlled petroleum, while Latin American countries, in particular Brazil, are gearing up to sugarcane-based ethanol harvesting.

So lucrative is this potential market that, not to be outdone, developing countries like Indonesian Sumatra are hurriedly destroying what’s left of their last vestiges of rainforest in order to cash in on palm oil production for diesel fuel. And who could blame them when, prior to Bali, there was no agreement under Kyoto to recompense ‘green’ countries for preserving such unprofitable natural forest. As much of Sumatra’s richest forest is bulldozed, the peat that it has lived in for thousands of years is ripped up, and this releases more carbon than will ever be saved by the palm oil grown on it (*New Scientist*, Dec 1, 07). The Bali accord hurriedly attempted to address deforestation for the first time, but much of the damage has already been done and it remains to be seen whether forest-rich countries stand to gain more by sitting on their green growth or churning it up for the bio-barrels.

Nor are these the only problems. Subsistence farmers pushed off land to make way for biofuel production, and given no help or financial aid by regional governments, have no choice but to invade natural forest and clear it by slash and burn in order to live. And food supplies are threatened on a larger scale too, as biofuels, though efficient in some ways, are the most land-hungry method of producing energy, many times more than fossil, wind, nuclear, hydro or solar. There is only so much arable land, and the population is rising. What happens to human food supplies as the world’s engines groan ever more hungrily to be fed? According to recent research, the total availability of suitable undeveloped land for biofuels is between 250 and 300 million hectares, but even using the most efficient crops it will take 290 million hectares to produce 10 percent of the world’s projected energy requirement in 2030. But by then, the world will also need 200 million of these same hectares to feed the extra 2 to 3 billion people who will then be alive (*New Scientist*, Dec 15, 07). And this is to say nothing of all the extra nitrous oxide being emitted by fertilised biocrops, if suitable GM alternatives are not developed or are not accepted for use. On top of all that, there is the problem of water supply. Switching 50 percent of transport and electricity requirement to biofuels by 2050 will require up to 12,000 cubic kilometres of extra water per year, close to the total annual flow down the world’s rivers (*New Scientist*, Dec 15, 07). All this and in a drier world too where water wars are already widely predicted.

The truth is, nobody really knows if the pros of biofuel production outweigh the cons. Like all capitalist economics, it is largely guesswork. All capitalism really knows for sure is that, in the words of the aforementioned large corporations, “the shift to a low-carbon economy will create significant business opportunities”, or in plainer language, there’s gold in them thar green hills. Besides, the subtleties of comparative studies may be lost on governments keen to assuage a growing public demand that they ‘do something’ about the environment. Australia, already suffering the longest drought in its recorded history, has recently turfed out its long established climate-sceptic government in favour of one which, within weeks, signed up to Kyoto. As Bob Dylan would say, it don’t take a weatherman to know which way the wind blows.

Letters

Dear Editors,

I would be interested in your answers to the following points:

(1) Massive social improvements have been achieved since WW2 by modifying capitalism. This is a proven strategy for improving the lives of working people. Abolishing capitalism is unproven and so ambitious and unlikely that most people can't even imagine it. Better to play the percentage game and stick with a socially modified form of capitalism along Scandinavian lines.

(2) I work for a company owned by capitalists so why don't I feel oppressed? I make as much money as I want doing a job I enjoy without being an owner or shareholder.

(3) People need a contrast between work and leisure in order to appreciate and enjoy their leisure time. This would be lost if paid work was abolished.

(4) Are NHS workers also wage slaves? If so, why? Since they work for the good of the whole of society not a capitalist's profit.

N. B., Macclesfield.

Reply:

(1) It is true that, compared with their equivalents in 1945, most people in Britain today are better off in terms of what they consume. But this hasn't been the result of Scandinavian-type "social modification" of capitalism since it has also happened

in other countries, such as the US, which have not adopted such a policy. It will have been the result partly of workers working more intensively than they did in 1945 and so needing to consume more to regenerate their mental and physical energies and partly also of their increased productiveness allowing the capitalists – under trade union pressure – to pay higher wages while still extracting more profit. Even so, most people do probably see things like you do, which will be one of the reasons why they have not been interested in socialist ideas. But they still have money problems and they are also affected by wider social problems – wars and the threat of war, pollution, crime – which can only be solved in the context of a socialist society. On the world scale of course it's a different story with record numbers living in absolute poverty.

As to Socialism being ambitious – what worthwhile goal isn't? 99 percent of the socialist revolution consists of imbuing our class with the confidence and ambition to succeed, and a revulsion of living as wage slaves whether pampered or ill-fed: once we have this our numbers will carry the day.

(2) Just because you don't feel oppressed doesn't mean you are not being exploited. Why do you think your capitalist company employs you if not because it is getting more money from what you do than what it pays you? It's certainly not doing

this just to give you money to live on. Wait and see what will happen if the company ever runs into financial difficulties or is taken over.

(3) All that those socialists who have speculated about the disappearance of the distinction between work and leisure in socialism mean is that work, like leisure activities today, could become something people like doing – not an impossibility since even under capitalism today you yourself say you like the job you're doing. Of course, there will still be a distinction in socialism between organised work to be done during set hours, even if enjoyable, and recreational activities carried out at the individual's discretion.

(4) Yes, NHS workers are wage-slaves in the sense that, not having any large unearned income from owning property, to get the money to buy the things they need to live, they have to sell themselves – or more accurately, their working abilities – on the labour market for a wage. They may be employed by a governmental body and be doing a useful job (at least some of them, not those working in accounts) rather than for a profit-seeking capitalist firm, but they are still exploited in the sense of working for a longer time than the value of the working skills they sell and are paid for.

–Editors.

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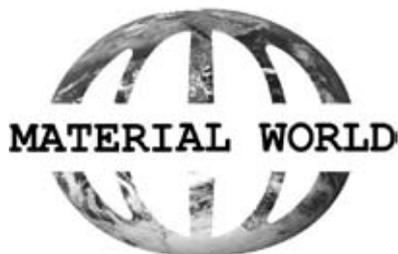
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Nuclear weapons are still there

Who protests against nuclear weapons nowadays? People seem to have half-forgotten them.

But they are still there, patiently lying in wait. In *The Seventh Decade: The New Shape of Nuclear Danger* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2007), Jonathan Schell even speaks of a “nuclear renaissance” in the new century.

True, there are fewer nukes than there used to be. The number of active nuclear weapons has declined from a Cold War peak of some 65,000 to below 20,000. In another decade it may fall to 10,000. But this is scant consolation, for several reasons:

- * Many decommissioned weapons are not destroyed, but only partially dismantled and placed in storage.

- * The 10,000 remaining nukes will still suffice to wipe out the human race many times over. Even the use of 100 would cause disaster on an unprecedented scale. Atmospheric scientists at UCLA and the University of Colorado modeled the climatic effects of the use of 100 Hiroshima-type bombs – just 0.03 percent of the explosive power of the global arsenal – in a nuclear war between India and Pakistan. These countries have fought four wars and now have about 75 nukes each. Direct fatalities would be comparable with WW2, while millions of tons of soot borne aloft would devastate agriculture over vast expanses of Eurasia and North America.

- * Nuclear weapons do not serve merely as status symbols or for mutual deterrence. Resort to them remains an option for the contingency of a serious setback in a conventional war, and new types of high-precision nukes, such as the so-called “bunker busters”, have been designed for that purpose. Nuclear weapons may even be used to stop a state acquiring nuclear weapons, or to suppress nuclear capacity that is in danger of falling under “terrorist” control (say, in the context of a disintegrating Pakistan).

- * Finally, the number of nuclear weapons states has increased and is likely to increase further. The nuclear nonproliferation regime is gradually losing its ability to inhibit the chain reaction. The double standard on which it is based – one rule for members of the nuclear club, another for the rest – is (as Schell argues) no longer viable. If all states with the requisite economic and technological capacity are not to acquire nuclear weapons, then they must all agree to renounce them.

The numerical decline might be cause for optimism if it could be seen as progress toward nuclear disarmament. Unfortunately, there are no grounds for such an interpretation. Nuclear weapon states are determined to maintain and upgrade their arsenals. Total numbers are falling as Russia and the US shed what they consider excess capacity, but they are restructuring their nuclear forces, not giving them up. Once this process is complete the decline in numbers will level off.

The Cold War is dead. Long live the Cold War!

So why have people half-forgotten the nuclear threat?

For one thing, it has been overshadowed by another threat to the human species – global warming.

Even before people became fully aware of this new peril, however, the end



of the Cold War had largely dispelled the fear of nuclear war. A reformist at the time, I was closely involved in the peace and disarmament movements of the 1980s. With benefit of hindsight, I realize now that these movements did not perceive the nuclear threat in its broadest sense because they were too preoccupied by the specific context of the superpower nuclear confrontation of that period. This was especially true of European Nuclear Disarmament (END).

Western governments told us that “we” needed nuclear weapons to deter the Soviet threat. We anti-nuclear campaigners did not believe they were right, but we were naive enough to believe that *they* believed what they told us. We drew the logical implication that they would become favourably disposed to nuclear disarmament if relations with the Soviet

Union could only be sufficiently improved. So we hopefully looked forward to the new and deeper East-West détente heralded by Gorbachev.

Not only did the Cold War come to an end; the Soviet Union itself collapsed. No more “Soviet threat” to worry our rulers! But did they heave a sigh of relief and rush to dispose of their nuclear weapons? No, they started to come up with substitute rationales for keeping the things. Thus Blair, announcing renewal of the Trident program in 2006, explained that nuclear confrontation with another major power “remains possible in the decades ahead.” Schell sums it up nicely: “By reviving and refurbishing their arsenals, the nuclear powers signal that they expect that great-power rivalries will return” (p. 210).

The Cold War is dead. Long live the Cold War!

The unpredictability of the future, they tell us, is itself a good reason to hold on to nuclear weapons. And the future is always unpredictable.

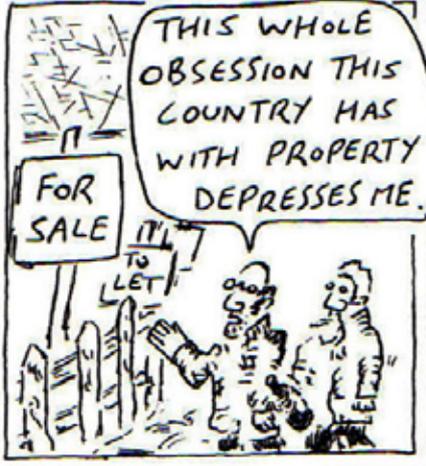
The world is dominated by a system based on conflict – conflict over resources of all kinds, conflict between competing property interests and the states that represent them. Once nuclear weapons were discovered and became tools in this conflict, they were bound to threaten human survival. The threat only seemed to have a necessary connection with the specific *pattern* of global power that happened to exist at the time. That pattern has started to change, there are new potential adversaries, but the conflict-based *system* remains. So does the nuclear threat.

Can nuclear disarmament be achieved under capitalism?

Schell calls for “action in concert by all the nations on Earth” (p. 217) to abolish nuclear weapons, halt global warming, and tackle other urgent global problems. His eloquence is moving, but his vision is only very briefly sketched and lacks substance. True, he has some technical and organizational proposals. Like IAEA director Mohammed ElBaradei, for instance, he would revive the Baruch Plan put forward by Truman in 1946 and place all nuclear fuel production under the control of an international agency. But he fails to consider what political, social and economic changes might be necessary to create and sustain the international trust and cooperation that he seeks.

Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that nuclear disarmament

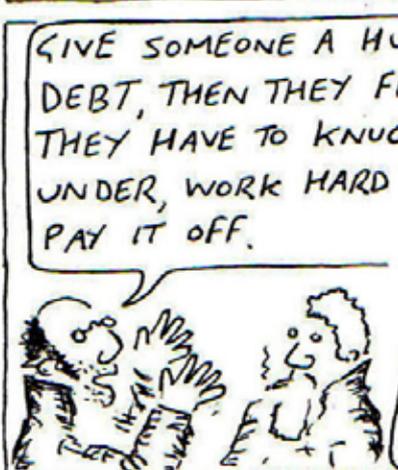
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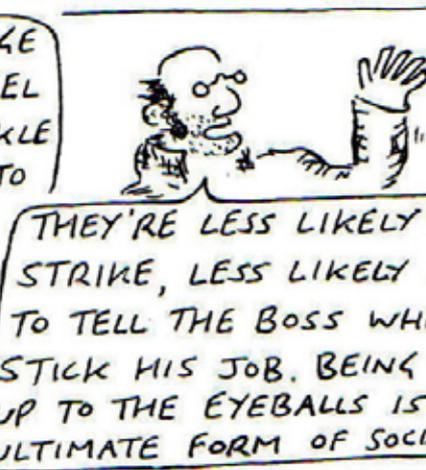
THIS WHOLE OBSESSION THIS COUNTRY HAS WITH PROPERTY DEPRESSES ME.



IF I WAS MORE PARANOID, I'D SAY IT WAS ALL JUST A WAY DREAMT UP TO SHACKLE PEOPLE WITH EXTRA CHAINS. INVISIBLE. THE WORST SORT.



GIVE SOMEONE A HUGE DEBT, THEN THEY FEEL THEY HAVE TO KNUCKLE UNDER, WORK HARD TO PAY IT OFF.



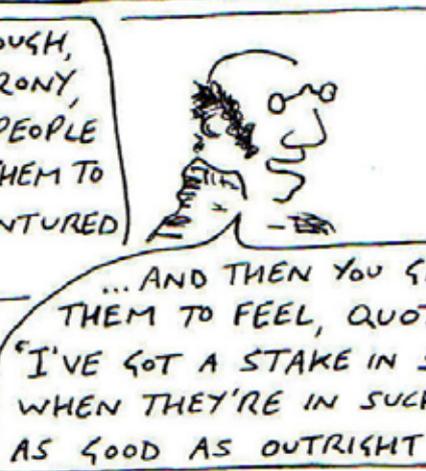
THEY'RE LESS LIKELY TO STRIKE, LESS LIKELY JUST TO TELL THE BOSS WHERE TO STICK HIS JOB. BEING MORTGAGED UP TO THE EYEBALLS IS REALLY THE ULTIMATE FORM OF SOCIAL CONTROL.



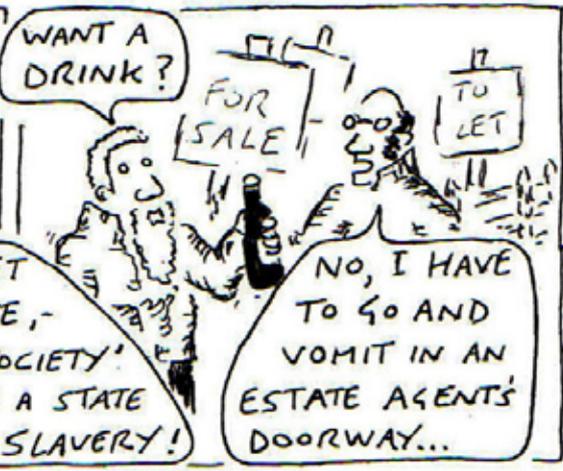
... AND OF COURSE, MORTGAGE-PAYERS ARE INNATELY MORE CONSERVATIVE POLITICALLY. OH, THATCHER UNDERSTOOD THAT. IT WAS THE BASIS OF THE 'RIGHT TO BUY'.



THE WORST THING THOUGH, AND THE GREATEST IRONY, IS THE WAY YOU GIVE PEOPLE MORTGAGES, REDUCE THEM TO A NEW KIND OF INDENTURED LABOUR, BONDAGE ...



... AND THEN YOU GET THEM TO FEEL, QUOTE, 'I'VE GOT A STAKE IN SOCIETY' WHEN THEY'RE IN SUCH A STATE AS GOOD AS OUTRIGHT SLAVERY!



WANT A DRINK?

NO, I HAVE TO GO AND VOMIT IN AN ESTATE AGENTS' DOORWAY...

were somehow to be achieved within the existing conflict-based system. Many states would still have the technological capacity to make nuclear weapons again if they so decided. This is known as the "breakout" problem. It is hard to imagine countries resisting this temptation when at war or even under conditions of acute military confrontation. As we need not just to achieve but to *maintain* nuclear disarmament, we therefore also need to abolish war in general, together with all weapons that can be used to threaten war. A close reading of Schell suggests that he accepts this point, though he does not spell it out.

But take the argument a step further. Wars arise out of conflicts over the control of resources. Doesn't this mean that an end has to be put to such conflicts? And

how can this be done without placing resources under the control of a global community – that is, without establishing world socialism?

Socialists are not *against* nuclear (or general) disarmament within capitalism. We know that the world faces problems of the greatest urgency and we know that the global social revolution is not an immediate prospect. We have no wish to hold human survival hostage to the attainment of our ideals. Please go ahead and prove us wrong by abolishing nuclear weapons without abolishing capitalism. Nothing, apart from socialism itself, would make us happier. The trouble is that we simply don't understand how it can be done. That is why we see no alternative to working for socialism.

STEFAN

Labour, Lib-Dem, Tory



The Socialist Standard examines their case



Work: a dirty word?

Work is a “four-letter word” today under capitalism, but our view of it might change in a society where it is solely a means of improving the quality of our lives.

as it is, work as it could be

“That would never work!”

A typical response, I imagine, to the description of a society where people work because they want to, on a voluntary basis. Such a society would not work, we are told, because no one in it would *do* any work.

However, that view of work as, well, *work*—rather than something enjoyable—tells us more about today’s society, where our motivation to work is primarily the need to pay rent and put food on the table. Immersed as we are in this reality, it is not surprising that it shapes our view of labour in general (past, present *and* future), so the idea of a society based on labour performed willingly, without any form of coercion, seems ludicrous to most people.

Given that typical outlook, it is not easy to convince someone of the necessity and feasibility of a fundamentally

new mode of labour by simply elaborating the description of work in the future (which can never be an exact blueprint). No matter how appealing that future society might appear, compared to present-day reality, it will probably still seem to be a figment of the imagination.

A better approach, I think, is to start with the present, looking at the work-related problems we face and considering their root cause. On that basis it should become clearer that socialism is not an idle dream but the real solution to undeniably real problems, and that the workplace problems we experience today can also be solved by, or will cease to exist in, that new form of society.

Work problems

Most of us have first-hand experience of bad jobs, so there is no need to present concrete examples here. But if we consider why a particular job is unpleasant it generally comes down to one or a combination of the following factors: long hours, low pay, high intensity, monotony, and (for lack of a

more precise category) the boss. We know all of this—perhaps *too* well—but here I want to consider the reason why these problems occur.

That answer is not hard to find if we reflect, just for a moment, on the essential nature of capitalism as a society where production is a means of generating profit for a minority ruling class that owns and controls the means of production. It is no exaggeration to say that those two closely intertwined facts (i.e., the profit motive and class ownership) are at the root of most of the problems we face at the workplace.

The hunger for profit is insatiable; no capitalist will settle for a five percent profit if there is a chance to get six. This is not merely a question of individual greed, but the systematic pressures of competition that capitalists ignore at the risk of ceasing to be capitalists. This drives them—not unwillingly—to squeeze as much surplus value out of workers as possible, whether by prolonging the working day, lowering wages, or increasing the intensity of labour.

All of this goes without saying, I think, and the direct connection to workplace problems is equally clear.

But even setting aside the impact of profit chasing on the labour process, we are still left with the fundamentally undemocratic workplace. Those who own or control the means of production call the shots (and pocket the profits), whether we are dealing with a small company, a corporation, or a state-owned enterprise. The workers, meanwhile, have no choice but to work in the manner assigned to them. No matter how enjoyable the work itself might be, this lack of control over the labour process (not to mention over hiring and firing decisions) contributes to the dissatisfaction we experience at our jobs.

Idle hands?

Considering the fact that the labour process is a means of generating profit for a minority class that directs that process, it is no wonder that a certain gloom hangs over workers on their morning commute. Those looking down on them from the comfort of the executive boardroom might take it as proof of the inherent laziness of people—or at least of *other* people. This idea of a slovenly human nature is ironically (or perhaps naturally) most prevalent among the “leisure class,” who look to the pressure of competition to whip the lazy workers into shape.

It should be obvious, though, that people are far from being lazy by nature. Nearly everyone, except the most demoralized or pampered, is eager to find worthwhile work. And if we cannot find enjoyment or self-fulfilment in the jobs we do to earn a living, we will try to find those qualities in the activities we pursue in our “free” time.

One reason we may underestimate the desire to work is that those leisure time activities come under the category of “hobbies,” even

though they do not always differ in substance from types of labour performed for wages. What tends to make a hobby enjoyable and fulfilling is precisely the qualities so often lacking in the jobs done to earn a living. Instead of being a way to benefit others, performed under their direction, a hobby is an activity pursued for its own sake that can be a means of self-development and self-fulfilment.

The same thirst for and enjoyment of meaningful labour can also be seen in our attitude towards the jobs we must do to earn a living. Despite all of the drawbacks that stem from the profit motive, as sketched above, our jobs can still be a source of satisfaction and self-development and we can find ourselves engrossed in the work itself without always thinking about the end of the working day or the upcoming paycheck. Indeed,

unless we had this capacity to enjoy work—and to seize on those worthwhile aspects of our jobs—the bosses (who complain about “lazy workers”) would be very hard-pressed to obtain any work, and hence profits, from their employees.

A social change

The aversion to work that is not uncommon today is certainly not due to inherent human laziness or the general nature of labour itself; it stems rather from the problems arising from its function as a means of profit making for a minority capitalist class. So as long as the current social system remains in place, we will be stuck with the problem of long working hours, tedium, and high intensity.

The solution to those workplace problems, along with a whole string of other problems, is thus a fundamental social change that establishes a new form of society, where production is no

longer subjected to the logic and tyranny of capital. That is an unprecedented change, certainly, which still seems impossible to most people today, but socialists are convinced that it is both possible and urgently necessary.

I should note, though, that the creation of a fundamentally new society will not take us into the realm of science fiction, as human beings will still be obliged to carry out labour in order to produce the material wealth that makes our continued existence possible. Socialism will not free us from the need for productive activity, but rather alter the form and purpose of that activity. Simply put, production in a socialist society will become a means of satisfying the various needs of the members of society as decided democratically by those members themselves

Work transformed

The fundamental reorientation of society following a socialist revolution will obviously have an enormous effect on the labour process and the personal experience of work.

The first change that seems likely, for a number of reasons, is a major reduction in the length of the working day. This will be possible, first of all, because production will only be intended to satisfy the needs of society’s members, as determined by them, so there would be little incentive to continue working beyond that point, thereby piling up unwanted goods and squandering natural resources. Unlike today, any increase in the productivity of labour, so that more goods

can be produced using less labour-time, could immediately shorten the length of work for individuals. And there would not be the terrible waste of labour we see today under a system where goods are produced for a fickle market, rather than to directly satisfy needs, and may thus rot on store shelves or in warehouses if not purchased (particularly

“the idea of labour performed willingly, without any form of coercion, seems ludicrous to most people”



at the outset of an economic downturn).

Another reason that the working day may become the working morning or afternoon is that the relative size of the pool of adults willing and able to perform the productive labour, which produces the wealth of society, will increase with the addition of the unemployed and those engaged under the current system in unproductive labour (e.g., bankers, lawyers, salesmen, etc.). The entire financial sector, for instance, will no longer have a reason for existence in a society where products are not bought and sold on the market. Other unproductive individuals include gamblers, prostitutes and criminals, as well as the entire capitalist class. All of these people can finally engage in work that is worthwhile.

The shorter working day is only a quantitative change, of course, but it would bring about an immediate improvement in the quality of our lives, as we can easily imagine. Even if we consider our jobs today, a significant reduction in the working day (provided the intensity of labour remains unchanged) would make most jobs, at the very least, far more bearable, and allow us to engage in other activities we find more agreeable.

More significant, however, is the *qualitative* change in

the labour process and in our attitude towards work once labour has solely become a means of improving our lives and production decisions are made democratically by the members of society themselves, who collectively control the means of production and have free access to the goods that are produced. Marx describes this new society as an “association of free individuals, working with the means of production held in common, and expending their many different forms of labour-power in full self-awareness as one single labour force” (*Capital*, vol. 1). In this socialist society, the production process would become transparent; individuals could easily grasp the connection between the labour they and others perform and improvements in their own and other people’s lives. This is a qualitative change not only from the perspective of the labour process of society as a whole, but also in terms of the attitude that each individual would likely have towards work.

Another important qualitative change in the labour process and our view of it stems from the fact that each individual within the “association” or community will be actively involved in making the important decisions regarding production. Those decisions would be made by them *democratically*, according to the simple criterion of improving

the quality of their own lives. That democracy contrasts sharply with the utter lack of influence workers have on the decisions made by capitalists and politicians today that affect them. In socialism, the members of the society will be able to decide on the plans for production (and other aspects of life) and then work together to

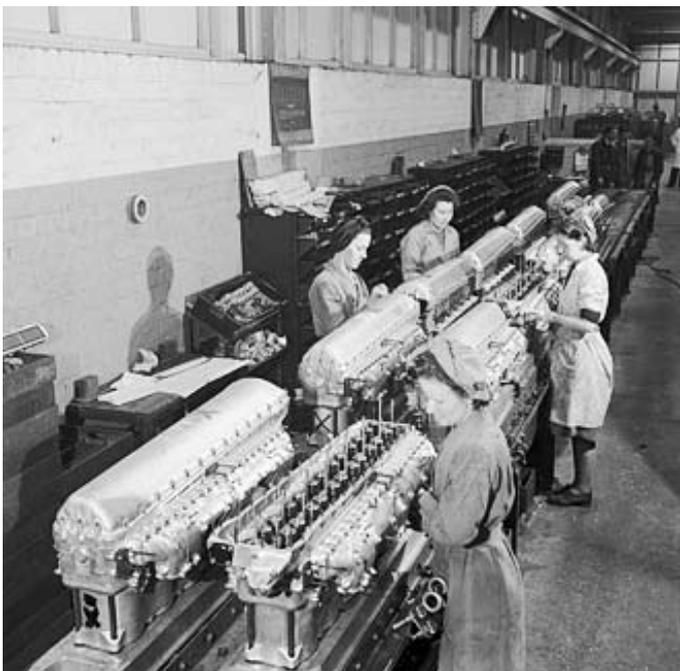
realize them.

In the process of collectively making those decisions one can imagine all sorts of issues that might be debated. Certainly there is the question of what to produce and in what quantity. But in addition to such matters, close attention will also be paid to what might be called the qualitative or even aesthetic aspects of the labour process, reflecting the fact that the entire society is now oriented towards improving the level of human life. This means that there would be an effort to make the experience of work itself as enjoyable and fulfilling as possible. All of the decisions would also have to take into consideration the resources available, both in the present and future, so that a short-term gain in the quality of life does not lead to disaster for latter generations. These are some examples of the big questions that might be considered, but there would be countless others, covering every imaginable aspect and consequence of the labour process.

So, to finally return to the initial question about voluntary work, will people actually work on a voluntary basis in a socialist society? Or would they only take advantage of the free access to goods and not participate in the work to produce those goods?

My answer, of course, is that the vast majority of people would be willing, and perhaps eager, to work in a society where the benefits of their own labour, both to themselves and the community at large, are clear and where they themselves make all of the decisions regarding production. There may be a few individuals who choose to do nothing, or at least nothing that adds to the wealth of society, but I imagine they would be looked on more with pity than anger, just as we might view someone today who has no real interest in life. It seems safe to say that most will participate in work as a way to both develop themselves and improve their own lives through the fruit of that labour. ■

MICHAEL SCHAUERTE



Drudgery, dreary, dull, and not democratic

Profit laundering: what's justice got to do with it?

"Tax Havens Cause Poverty" proclaims the home page of the Tax Justice Network. No, they don't. The profit system does.

The Tax Justice Network (www.taxjustice.net) thinks that world poverty can be effectively tackled by reforming the international system of taxing profits so as to eliminate tax havens and tax dodging – "profit laundering" as they aptly call it – by capitalist corporations.

This would make no essential difference. World poverty is not caused by corporations behaving badly. Their "bad" behaviour as identified and described by the Tax Justice Network is not bad from a capitalist point of view. It is normal, and in fact it is not possible to alter it – either by legislation or by appealing to the "morality" or "ethics" of corporate leaders. It's the way the capitalist profit system works and can only work. As long as you've got capitalism, in the famous – or infamous – phrase, there is no alternative. No alternative, that is, to capitalist corporations pursuing the maximisation of profits above all else. This is not a matter of choice by corporate executives. It is not because they are personally greedy or insensitive and deliberately choose to run their corporations in this way. It's the reflection in their minds of the underlying logic of the system of which in the end they – like the rest of us in fact – are just cogs.

But what is this underlying logic? What is capitalism?

Capitalism

Basically, it's *the market system*. Not just markets – they existed before

capitalism – but a whole economic system where every aspect of the production and distribution of wealth takes place via the market, by means of a vast network of buyers and sellers. This includes the buying and selling of labour – or, more accurately, of labour-power, of a person's ability to work. In fact, capitalism is based on the existence of a class of people whose only productive resource is our ability to work in some capacity or other (whether so-called manual or so-called intellectual) which we are obliged to sell on the labour market for a wage or salary. But sell to whom? To those who own the other resources essential to production: land and natural resources, and mines, factories, transport, communications. In other words, capitalism presupposes the division of society into two classes: those who own the means of wealth production and those who don't. This is not a 50:50 division, more like a 5:95 one. So capitalism is a *class society*. Like everything else under capitalism, the relationship between these two classes is a market one, one of buying and selling.

But there's more to this particular market relationship than to that between other buyers and sellers. In other cases, it is a simple exchange of something of one value for something else of an equal value. Such an exchange of equal values is also involved in the wage contract – we get as our wage or a salary more or less

the value of the labour-power we are selling – but human labour-power has the unique property of being able to create new value. The difference between wages and salaries and the new value added in the course of producing some good or service is the source of profit, which it is the aim of every capitalist and every capitalist enterprise to extract and maximise.

Some of this profit is creamed off by fat cat directors and owners to support an extravagant life-style but most of it is re-invested. If a capitalist firm did not do this with a view to keeping its productive methods up to date so as to be able to produce as cheaply as possible, it would lose out in the battle of competition with its rivals and, eventually, either go bankrupt or be taken over by one of them. So, under the pressure of market competition, capitalist firms are forced to accumulate most of their profits as more capital.

This competitive struggle to make and accumulate profits as more and more capital is the essence of capitalism. It's an impersonal economic mechanism that imposes itself on all enterprises involved in producing for the market, whether they are owned by individuals, corporations, the state or even by a workers' co-operative. The logic of profit always ends by imposing itself, even on governments, and there's nothing that can be done to stop this as long as capitalism lasts.

Taxes

Despite what some ideologists of a "pure capitalism" claim, capitalism cannot exist without the existence also of a coercive state – and never has. In fact, the state helped capitalism come into being, as by establishing trading monopolies like the East India Company and as by driving peasants off the land and into factories. But the state produces nothing (unless it is itself involved in production, as it sometimes has been) and so has to be financed by a levy on those who possess wealth or who control the production of wealth, i.e. by taxes. As the 19th century economist (and MP) David Ricardo showed a long time ago, in the end the burden of taxation falls on property and property-incomes such as rent and profit (any taxes on wages are passed on to the employer). Taxes on profits of course reduce the wealth of capitalists but they generally accept the principle of paying taxes as they recognise the usefulness of the services that the state provides them, not least the armed force to back them up in conflicts with other capitalists supported by their state over markets, trade routes, sources of raw materials and investment outlets. But they are not masochists; they'll only pay the taxes they absolutely have to. And a whole business



Above: Egyptian peasants seized for non-payment of taxes. Above right: Adam Smith

has arisen to advise them how to minimise their tax burden.

Some companies are better able to do this than others, and the Tax Justice Network have a point when they say that:

“The ability of transnational corporations to structure their affairs through paper subsidiaries in tax havens provides them with a significant tax advantage over their nationally or locally based competitors. Local businesses, no matter whether they are technically more efficient or more innovative than their transnational rivals, will be competing on an uneven field. In practice, of course, differential tax treatment favours the large business over the small one, the international business over the national one, and the long-established business over the start-up”. (John Christensen and Richard Murphy, *Development Journal*, September 2004).

Quite true. But why should we, as wage and salary workers, worry about this? Why should we get involved in this dispute between two sections of the capitalist class as to how the tax burden should be shared between them? Why should we take the side of small business as against large business, or national business or businesses in the Third World against international business? Taxation is not our concern as wage and salary workers. Even if multinational corporations were forced to pay more taxes (which is not inconceivable), this would not benefit us, it would only benefit their smaller, national-based competitors. And it wouldn't benefit the mass of the people in the Third World either. Only the business and political elites there who would then have more money to spend on their armed forces and their privileged lifestyles. “Tax Justice” is not our concern.

Corporations

The profit logic imposes itself irrespective of the type of enterprise. In Adam Smith's day – the middle of the 18th century – most enterprises were run by individual capitalists who risked all their money; there was

no distinction between their personal wealth and that of their business. So, if their business failed they were ruined. As capitalism developed more and more capital was needed to start and sustain a business. This problem was partly overcome by partnerships, but this was complicated legally and partners were also still personally liable for the debts of the business; so, if it went under they went under too.

The solution, found and implemented from the middle of the 19th century, was the limited liability company. This was a legal business entity in which people could

“No law will ever be passed that goes against this impersonal logic of profit – and, even if it were, it wouldn't work”

invest money to be used as capital but only be liable in the event of bankruptcy for the amount of their shareholding. Hence the name in Britain of limited liability company. In France it was called a “nameless [i.e. impersonal] society” and in America a “corporation”. Whatever they were called, all had a separate legal personality, allowing them to sign contracts, pay taxes, sue and be sued as if they were real people. Even if, as the recent film *The Corporation* has underlined, they were real people they would be locked up as dangerous psychopaths. No real person is so cold and calculating and so obsessive about pursuing a single aim.

As might have been expected, many of the early company promoters and directors were rogues who swindled and robbed those who put up the money for their companies, i.e. the shareholders. Legislation was therefore introduced to protect

shareholders. Company directors were required to act in such a way as to exclusively further the financial interests of the shareholders, i.e. to make as much profit for them as they could. All their acts as directors had to be justified by this end: they had to try to maximise profits and were not allowed to siphon off money for themselves nor, it could be added, to spend it on “ethical” objectives which they might personally favour.

As Christensen and Murphy noted in their article:

“... tax minimization through elaborate and frequently aggressive tax avoidance is regarded as one of the prime duties that directors are required to perform on behalf of their shareholders.”

“Compelled by the profit logic, and by a legal principle that asserts that tax payers may organize their affairs in such a way as to pay the least tax possible under the law, the majority of large businesses have been structured so as to enable tax avoidance in every jurisdiction in which they operate.”

The Tax Justice Network thinks that this can be changed, both by changing company law and by appealing to corporate executives to behave “ethically”, but they are wrong. Company law – and the legal obligation on corporations to be “a pure money-making machine” – is a reflection of the underlying economic reality of capitalism which, as we saw, is the impersonal economic mechanism of the making and accumulation of profits as more and more capital. No law will ever be passed that goes against this impersonal logic of profit – and, even if it were, it wouldn't work. Any government which tried it would cripple industry within its borders by rendering it less competitive internationally, so provoking an economic crisis and mass unemployment – and the coming into office of a government that would repeal the legislation in question. Within capitalism there is, quite literally, no alternative to corporations being pure money-making machines.

So, if there's no way out under capitalism what are we in the Socialist Party proposing? Basically, to end capitalism, not trying to patch it up or trying to make it work in some other way through tax reforms. Capitalism is a global system. So, we're talking about a world-wide change, a global change in both senses of the term. Both world-wide and thorough-going.

To end the operation of the impersonal economic mechanism of the pursuit and accumulation of profits as capital, the first thing that must happen is that the natural and industrial resources of the planet must stop being the property of rich individuals, corporations or States and become instead the common heritage of all humanity. On this basis, the productive resources of the world can be freed from the tyranny of profit-driven market forces and become available to be used, under democratic control, to simply turn out the things that the world's population needs to live and to enjoy life, in accordance with the principle "from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs".

In the current atmosphere of cynicism, apathy and alienation,



Completing tax forms in an American Internal Revenue office, 1920s

to talk in terms of a world-wide democratic revolution to replace world capitalism with world socialism must seem incredibly utopian. Be that as it may, it is the only way out and until people organise to abolish the capitalist profit system the problems we have been discussing

will continue. The real utopians are not us, but those like the Tax Justice Network who still think that you can do something constructive within the capitalist framework of class ownership and production for profit. You can't.

ADAM BUICK



Cooking the Books 1

Ever heard of tryvertising?

"Your Money's No Good Here" read the headline of an article by David McNeill in the *Irish Times* "Innovation" supplement (10 December). "Tokyo has a shop with no price tags, no cash registers or no paying customers – what's it all about?" No, they haven't introduced socialism in Japan. So what is it all about?

One of the more abstruse objections to socialism is that it would have no means of knowing what new products to make available and so people would have a narrower choice than under capitalism. The critics concede that, with free access to what they needed, people might well take from the common stores and distribution centres only what they needed till their next visit -- just as today, when some things are free, they end up taking only as much water or free travel or free phone calls as they need. But, the objection goes, how would you find out what new products to make available?

Socialists have replied that this would not be a problem in that the same sort of techniques for finding out what new products people might like that are used under capitalism could, with suitable modification, be used in socialism. Of course it could not be called "market research" since there'd be no markets, so it would have to be called something like "new wants

research". But the techniques would be the same even though the aim would be to find out what new products people would take under conditions of free access instead of what they might be prepared to pay for.

Market research has traditionally involved questionnaires and many people have earned some extra money by stopping people in the street or phoning them to ask what they think of some product. The clue to what's it all about is in the name of the Tokyo free shop: Sample Lab. It's a shop where firms provide samples of their products for people to take and try without having to pay for them. According to David McNeill, this is known as "tryvertising".

It's not really like things would normally be in socialism, even though there are no price tags and no cash registers. Those who use the free sample shop have to pay a modest registration and annual membership fee and are expected to answer questions about the products they take away and try, and they can only take five products at a time. The advantage for the capitalist firms who supply the free samples is that they get some feedback on what people think of their new product and how well they are likely to sell if marketed, a feedback that is said to be more accurate than from questioning people in the streets or by phone.

But this technique, at present prostituted in the service of profit, could easily be adopted in socialism. There could still be sample shops where a representative cross-section of people could come and take new products to try in return for answering questions about what they thought of them. It might even still be called "tryvertising".

Social responsibility and corporations

Can corporations be trusted, or even expected, to have any social responsibility?

Millions, billions even, are spent by corporations in PR attempts to green up their images. Not spent to improve conditions for their workers, not spent to find alternative, better methods of production less harmful to the environment, not spent to seriously reduce consumption of the world's shrinking non-renewable resources, not spent to significantly reduce pollution of the planet's earth, air and water; simply spent to present an illusion of green, caring, altruistic, socially responsible business. One may even be lulled into believing that profit is the least of their worries.

Yeah, but – that far too frequent punctuation in what was meant to be a meaningful conversation – there are laws and regulations that outlaw trade in illegal timber and diamonds and there are agreements like Kyoto to reduce pollution and big name companies are now taking responsibility for the level of pay and conditions of their workers in the sweatshops in Indonesia and Bangladesh etc.

Right, of course. There are laws and agreements and treaties but for every one there are loopholes. Agreements are signed and then renege on regularly. The buck gets passed from pillar to post with elites denying knowledge until forced by public pressure to 'take steps' to repair damage done to their image. Business just doesn't work with the best interest of the majority in mind. We have to look at the *raison d'être* of the business world which is not to make or supply goods specifically at the behest of the citizenry, not to provide the services demanded by them. Business makes the goods and provides the services *and* manufactures the need. It is simply and straightforwardly to make a profit. One very simple example is the call-centre. Who do you know who would choose to sit waiting on the end of a phone with mind-numbing music and recorded apologies just to get the answer to a simple question and you know you're waiting while the company is either making money by selling you something or saving money by not employing enough bodies to answer the phones. Where's the responsibility to the consumer there?

Yeah, but we need these products and services anyway, don't we?

Maybe we do need some of them but many products are produced for a created market; stuff to sell to those who have enough money to be in any particular market place. Obsolescence is built in – to cars, washing machines and other electrical gear; fans' football strip needs replacing/updated once or twice a year; fashion is a must in everything, spurred on by advertising and the media, itself a smaller and smaller group of expanding mega-businesses concentrating profit and control into fewer and fewer hands; clothes, furniture, house decoration, garden decoration, accessories of all kinds, creating an unending lust for more, more, more. The other side of this is that millions of people don't have access to most of this stuff because they don't have the resources or the access to earn the resources with which to pay for them. Even sufficient food, clean drinking water and adequate shelter is beyond the reach of many. This surely demonstrates that the over-riding motivation is profit, not responsibility. There is a green-washing, white-washing, brain-washing going on constantly by corporations and their PR departments trying to keep up with or preferably to stay

one step ahead of the watchdogs and activists ready to reveal their next miscalculated step.

Yeah, but the activists and watchdogs do get some changes made . . .

Yes, they do. However, what gains are made are more than made up for by losses in other areas. Ask the activists. Ask them and ask yourself why there are more activists working in more areas than there ever were before. Slavery was abolished generations ago but it hasn't stopped slavery and trafficking. Forcing one clothing company to stop employing children or to pay a minimum wage or to allow their workers some time off the premises or even to accept that these are areas of their responsibility, not just of their sub-contractors' doesn't address the fundamental issue of general social responsibility. 'Social responsibility' and 'environmental responsibility' have become convenient screens to hide behind, theatrical masks behind which amoral, unethical pirates can continue their quest for a larger share of the world's pie untouched by the cognisance of starving millions who can't get close enough to even smell the pie. The fact is, whatever sop a corporation may deign to give, whatever concessions any number of corporations may yield, globally there are more people without work, without prospect of work, who are homeless, who are destitute – and closer to home there are more who work longer hours for less pay, who have reduced pension rights and less bargaining power.

Yeah, but back to public pressure . . .

Public pressure is important but to know, to be aware of what form that pressure should take is more important. Public awareness must come first for any kind of pressure to be effective. First we have to recognise that the corporations are just following their designated route in pursuing maximum profits so it's pointless complaining about them doing their utmost to fulfil their mission. If we focus on this only as a single issue then we are allowing ourselves to be sidetracked. If we truly wish to give people and the environment a fair deal we have to see this issue as one part of a much bigger whole. In this particular issue the only way to positively affect the whole production line from raw material to consumer is to remove the profit involved. By removing money from any transaction along the chain the gains will be for the environment and people's welfare. Similarly with regard to other issues (water – health / big dams / privatisation; wars – weapons and proliferation / numberless casualties; oil the far too frequent punctuation in what was meant to be a meaningful conversation conflict / environmental problems / imbalance in use of resources; farming – cash crop problems / big pharma – seed rights ownership / landless peasants; trafficking – drugs / sex / workers / babies; and on and on...) awareness of the negative effects of the money/profit system reveal that, as it's the capitalist system itself that requires this profit motive at its base to function, it goes without saying, it's the capitalist system as a whole which has to be replaced. And imagine how much more quickly that change could be brought about with the combined effort and energy of all those dedicated people around the world seeking justice and fairness for all through their single issue campaigns; how much stronger and more powerful the whole when all the separate parts work together for the ultimate single issue, socialism.

JANET SURMAN

Thicker than Water / Obituary of a capitalist ?

In the late 1970s a shepherd in Perthshire, Scotland was made redundant. Around the same time the Conservative Party of Margaret Thatcher was starting its privatisation programme, including the deregulation of

public transport, permitting anyone to provide bus services in competition to the council services. The shepherd gave his £25,000 redundancy pay to his two children, Ann and Brian, to buy two second-hand buses.

Accelerate twenty-five years forward and their company (Stagecoach) has grown into an international transport conglomerate extending to bus, rail and airport operations, with holdings in five continents and turnover of £1.5bn.

Brian Souter is now the richest man in Scotland and his sister Ann Gloag is the richest woman. Souter has an explanation for this: "ethics are not irrelevant, but some are incompatible with what we have to do, because capitalism is based on greed". But unknown to many there was a third founder of Stagecoach, way back in the early 1980s. What happened to him ?

In December 2007 a number of newspapers reported on the death of the third founder, Robin Gloag. Who's Robin Gloag to deserve an obituary, you might wonder? He certainly was not well-known, but his was arguably the flip-side of a capitalist "success" story. It would be hard to read his obituary and not reflect on the misery capitalism causes.

Robin Gloag at one time owned one-third of Stagecoach, along with Brian Souter and Ann Gloag – his wife. At the time of his death he still retained one share in Stagecoach the international bus and train company. "They tried to get me to sign it away, but it's still in my name... They didn't push hard enough and I didn't fall off a cliff."

But he was all but pushed off a cliff, being legally shafted within the rules of the market when the thieves fell out. Brian Souter and his sister Ann manoeuvred Robin Gloag out of the business after 3 years. It seemed he didn't have the

necessary personality or willingness to match their ambitions for the fledgling company. He preferred to have his head under the bonnet of the coaches.

He was given £8000 to leave. But when he used this pay-off from Stagecoach to set up a small-scale rival running only one small route near Perth this was still perceived as too much of a threat by his (now ex) wife and brother-in-law . They halved their fares then dropped them to nothing to put him out of business altogether. No love appears to have been lost. After putting his company into administration, Ann Gloag and Soutar purchased it for pennies and sacked him.

"Ethics are not irrelevant, but some are incompatible with what we have to do, because capitalism is based on greed"

Dysfunctional families falling out over money happens regardless of class of course. World socialists aren't interested in individuals – it's the system we oppose. We are opposed to the nice fluffy capitalists just as much as the bastards, the Richard Bransons and Anita Roddicks, as well as the Brian Souters or the Conrad Blacks of this world.

As the business grew, the ultra-competitiveness with which Stagecoach forced Robin Gloag off the roads became legendary in the initial cowboy world of unregulated bus services . One Monopolies and Mergers Commission judgement branded Stagecoach's behaviour as "deplorable, predatory and against the public interest". Investors were delighted however.

While Ann amassed enormous wealth, Robin Gloag continued to work at his small coach hire business. He was no capitalist : "I am far too soft" he said. Ironically, he had planned to run it as long as he was fit enough, reflecting: "It's what I have always done and I enjoy it... I have never been afraid of hard work." Robin Gloag died in December 2007 working at the age of 64; he was covering a shift for one of his employees who was sick.

The Stagecoach story is a lesson in the random nature of business success. Capitalism partly justifies itself on the basis that it is open to anyone to become a capitalist. In reality the vast majority of the members of the capitalist class were born in the right bed to start with. But there are exceptions, including the shepherd's children, Ann Gloag and Brian Souter. But their story is not one of incredible initiative or hard work, just a fair bit of

money to start with and good timing (the launch of Stagecoach conveniently coincided with a national rail strike). Plus of course a willingness to shaft anyone – friends or family – who got in the way.

On the same day that Robin Gloag was killed at work, Stagecoach reported healthy six-monthly results, posting a 9 percent rise in profits to £85 million. ■

BRIAN GARDNER



Capitalism Chinese-style



A five-year congress of the Chinese Communist Party

The 17th Congress of the Chinese ‘Communist’ Party was held back in October. It was five years since the previous one, so this is clearly not a decision-making body that determines how the party — and therefore the country — should be run. Rather it’s a rubber-stamp gathering that endorses what the CCP’s power-holders have already decided. The Central Committee is ‘elected’, but even that meets less than once a year, and it is the political bureau and its standing committee (nine men in dark suits) who really run things.

The CCP has changed over the years. It now has over 70 million members, and another 20 million applicants for membership. The growth of private capitalism in China has led many of the wealthiest people in the country to join the party. In the Hongdou textile group, which has assets of over a billion yuan (around £60 million), all the high-level managers are party members. Another capitalist, Liang Wengen, who has a fortune of three billion yuan (£190 million), was a delegate to the congress. If private entrepreneurs can join the party, he said, it “helps to enhance the brand recognition of our company.” Western companies may promote their brands by sponsoring football teams, while in China they do so by joining the ‘Communist’ Party!

A new party constitution was adopted at the congress. This talks about building ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’, which includes a supposed socialist market economy, i.e. “optimizing resource allocation while giving

play to market forces”. As the balance shifts towards private rather than state capitalism and state-owned enterprises are increasingly listed on the stock market, all pretence at any connection to Marxism has long since been dropped.

Instead, the rich are getting much much richer. According to some reports there are over a hundred billionaires in China, while the average income is less than \$1000 a year. No wonder many Chinese workers, especially in the south, are prey to the ‘snakeheads’ who promise good jobs and decent wages in return for a huge fee for smuggling people out of China and across to Europe. The jobs and pay are never quite what is promised, of course,

but the prospect is better for many than the grinding poverty of life in China. Within China there are 120 million migrant workers who have moved to the cities to find work and yet fail to escape poverty and exploitation.

In December, the China Labour Bulletin published a report on the workers’ movement in China 2005-6 (see http://www.clb.org.hk/en/files/File/research_reports/Worker_Movement_Report_final.pdf). It begins as follows:

“After working repeated overtime shifts for an entire month, Hu Xinyu, a 25-year-old employee at the Huawei factory in Shenzhen, collapsed and died from multiple organ failure on May 28, 2006. Two days later, Gan Hongying, a 35-year-old woman employed in a clothing factory in the Haizhu district of Guangzhou, died after working a total of 54 hours and 25 minutes (22 hours overtime) in the previous four days. A few weeks later, a senior union official publicly admitted that China’s official trade union was virtually powerless to prevent forced overtime in factories across the country.”

So workers endure forced overtime in dangerous conditions while the bosses count their ill-gotten gains and flaunt their membership of the ‘Communist’ Party. It’s still capitalism, and becoming less and less different in any way from the kind found in the West.

PB



The last time the police went on strike

What we said in 1919 about the police unrest and strikes of that time. Ironically today's demonstrations are organised by the Police Federation, the company union set up in 1919 to stop a real union being organised.

Bobby's discretion

So, the bobbies have funk'd it. We are not, for the present, at all events, to be treated to the comic spectacle of strike processions of bluebottles being shepherded through the streets by their own blacklegs, the "specials." The world has lost an entertainment.

Of course, we are not blind to the difficulties of the policemen's situation. Their bosses had got the stranglehold on them. By the simple expedient of stopping sixpence in the pound of their wages, confiscating their fees for the service of summons, and in other dubious ways, the capitalists provide a pensions fund at poor Looby's expense. The loss of this pension, together with the "sack," is the first threat the bosses hold over the bobbies' heads. Bobby is a man with no other trade in his hands in the vast majority of cases. So the threat of losing a regular job has special terrors for him. In addition, the loss of his pension—a pension designed, as most pensions are, to get a disciplinary grip upon the subject which probably no other expedient possible in a "free country" could afford, is a prospect requiring a quite uncommon type of mind to withstand.

The bosses, of course, played the game for all it was worth. They said they were flooded with applications from soldiers and ex-soldiers to take the policemen's jobs. They also talked loudly but vaguely about the arrangements that were being made to meet Buttons' grievances. It was the old game of bribe some and threaten others—the game played from the beginning to the end of the recruiting for the war—the game played to kill the demobilisation trouble after the Armistice. As, in the earlier case, the single and the young were promised jobs and preferment if they enlisted, and the married and the older ones were threatened that they would have to go if they did shove the others in; as, later, the older men were promised early demobilisation if they kept quiet, and detention till the last if they did not, while the younger men were soothed with extra money, so the older policemen were threatened more particularly with the loss of all that was so nearly won,

while the younger men were soothed with promised improvements in the longer road before them.

Meanwhile the policemen played their cards just about as badly as they could. They ~~have~~ climbed down under threats—that which hardly anything could more completely have exposed their weakness and fear. Added to this they have climbed down before their bosses had committed themselves to the vaguely talked-of concessions, and in face of this confession of funk and weakness those concessions are going to shrivel up considerably. The bosses have found out all they wanted to know—that the reward they are offering their bulldogs is sufficient to secure their allegiance to their odious duties. If they dare not decline those duties for themselves they can never dare to decline to perform them for others. So, when labour troubles come Bobby will not, the masters are assured, be a trade unionist, and they have secured this, thanks to their cunning, at about the lowest possible price.

The *Daily Chronicle* in its issue of June 2 tries to point out to the policemen why the Government can never recognise the Police Union, and, as usual, it reveals only half the truth. "The police exist," our contemporary says, "to support the State. That is what they are for. . . They cannot strike and agitate, or even become public politicians, without ceasing to be policemen." Which is true enough as far as it goes, but does not dispose of the not unimportant fact that the policeman is so essentially a member of the exploited class that he cannot get his admitted grievances redressed until he threatens to cease to be a policeman.

The more important matter, however, is the statement that a policeman is only such to support the State. The complement of this half truth is, of course, that the State is only an instrument for keeping the workers in subjection. Directly this position is realised it becomes obvious how far the police are from getting recognition for any police union that could possibly link them with the unions of the industrial world. The position of police force affiliated with the industrial

trade unions would indeed be a tragic one in a time of strife. This the bosses have sense enough to perceive, if the underlings have not. And it is for this reason rather than that they are afraid of being dictated to by the men that the Government will never recognise the Police Union.

It was probably a lie that the police authorities are inundated with blackleg applications from soldiers, but the capitalists have a deep pocket, and, as long as their control of the instrument of the State lasts will have no serious difficulty in obtaining men who will carry out their behests. It is simply a question of the price.

The only thing that can deliver the policeman—as the rest of us—from the tyranny of his tormentors is for the working class to assume control of the State, and to use its forces, including the police, to abolish capitalism and establish the Socialist Commonwealth.

(editorial, *Socialist Standard*, June 1919)

The police v. the police

The capitalist Press has been busy explaining to Simple Simon that the action of the police in “breaking their oath” is not only mutiny, but “a crime.” Of course, it is always a crime when the bulldog turns and rends its master’s hand, notwithstanding that that hand was doing things with a stick. But there is another side to the question.

During the long period when the workers were more somnolent than they are now, and that condition was reflected in a far more incomplete organisation and a far greater trust in and submission to their union officials, the bosses were not so much afraid of the “labour unrest” as they are to-day. Consequently they did not attach the same importance to the bobby as they do now, and they made the mistake of paying him accordingly.

The result was inevitable. Notwithstanding his oath, the policeman was forced to struggle for a betterment of his miserable condition. More even than in other trades—if that were possible—this necessarily meant organisation. A union was formed, and as the aspect of

industrial affairs became darker, a police trade union, affiliated possibly with other trade unions, deriving a certain amount of its strength from those unions, was regarded as an extremely sinister thing.

The bosses got a bit nervous. They made panic concessions, and then they started to cut out the “cancer”—in other words, to smash the union.

Now it is quite clear that the men owed every jot and tittle of the improvement in their condition to the union. Their oath availed them nothing. It was only intended to bind them to vile conditions of pay and tyrannical discipline. They might have stood meekly by it till doomsday, nothing would have been done for them. Only when they seriously threatened to commit the “crime” of leaving their oath to look after itself, as butcher Asquith did his registration and other pledges, and Lloyd George did his pledge concerning sending young boys to the “front,” did the masters deign to give them some measure of alleviation.

It is quite plain, then, where the crime comes in. It is certainly not in breaking their oath, which they had been driven to do by the callous indifference of the bosses to their claims, but in their desertion of the instrument which had gained them so much. To allow that to be crushed out, and those who had undertaken the task of organising them for the struggle, to go down in the hour of victory is both a mean and cowardly crime.

Writers in this paper have previously pointed out how extremely unlikely it was that any sort of union that could be any good to the men would secure official recognition. The forecast seems to be pretty correct. Had the police, however, behaved with sufficient courage and intelligence as to force the question of recognition to a successful issue, the simple and inevitable result must have been the increased use of bayonets instead of batons in industrial disputes. The masters have more strings than one to their bow.

A. E. J.

(*Socialist Standard*, August 1919).



Cooking the Books 2

The price of bread

The price of bread went up by 10 percent last year and is likely to go up again this year. Wheat is a commodity, something produced primarily for sale not use; in fact it is a world commodity traded on world markets and so subject to international speculators betting on its future price going up or down. Its price is fixed by trading in Chicago where speculators as well as genuine buyers and sellers

meet electronically. The *Times* (18 December) reported that “the Chicago wheat price has risen from about \$5 a bushel in the fourth quarter of last year to reach \$10.09 yesterday”.

As wheat is the main ingredient of bread what happens in Chicago in the end affects the price of bread too. That the price of such an everyday item depends on world developments is a striking illustration of the world-wide nature of production today and one of the reasons why socialists say that the basis for a world socialist society already exists today.

The price of wheat is fixed in Chicago because the US is the biggest exporter of wheat, from its highly productive prairie farms. According to estimates by the International Grains Council, in 2007 of the 56 million tonnes produced in the US, 32 million were exported. The other major exporters were Canada (15 million), Russia (12 million), EU (10 million) and Argentina (10 million). (<http://www.igc.org.uk/en/downloads/gmrsummary/gmrsumme.pdf>). Normally Australia would be the second biggest exporter but a prolonged drought there reduced its 2007 output.

The IGC forecasts that world wheat consumption in 2007/8 will be 611 million tonnes whereas production in 2007 will only have been 603 million. So countries have been digging into their reserves and will be looking to replenish them. Hence the current rise in the world price of wheat. There is even talk of this being the biggest wheat shortage in history.

As the price of wheat rises so it becomes profitable to plant more land with it, either by switching from something else or by bringing previously unused land back into cultivation. This latter is what has happened in Europe. Meeting in Brussels on 26 September EU agriculture ministers agreed to fix a zero “set-aside” rate for the autumn 2007 and spring 2008 sowings. The press release went on: “The change comes in response to the increasingly tight situation on the cereals market. It should increase next year’s cereals harvest by at least 10 million tonnes”

Set-aside is the scheme under which EU farmers are paid not to grow food. In the past they were encouraged just to let the land lie fallow but, more recently with the rise of an environmentalist conscience, the scheme has been justified in terms of creating nature reserves and restoring “natural” wildernesses. That the whole scheme is in effect being suspended and previously set-aside land brought back into cultivation, in response to rising world wheat prices, exposes the real reason for set-aside: maintaining crop prices by reducing supply – while the world poor starve.

Which confirms what socialists have long said, that the world could produce more food if the aim of production was the satisfaction of human needs. People are starving simply because they lack the means to pay, not because the food cannot be produced – as this new output demonstrates, there is plenty of scope for increasing supply.

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Against multinationals

Multinationals on Trial. James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer. Ashgate. 2007.

The basic thesis of this book is that multinational corporations (MNCs) are not simply capitalist corporations which have investments throughout the world in search of the highest rate of profit, but that they are also agents of the states in which they have their home base, helping them to build up and consolidate an “empire”.

Their argument is that MNCs investing in Third World countries do not benefit them or help them to develop; on the contrary, through various financial devices and unequal contracts, they are vehicles for extracting and transferring wealth from these countries back to the home country. Further, once established in a Third World



ING House, headquarters of the Dutch multinational ING

country, they outcompete or takeover local businesses and corrupt and co-opt local politicians and officials. The local politicians then come to adopt a foreign policy favourable to the home state and the process of the incorporation of their country into that state’s empire is achieved. The “imperial” state in turn helps their MNCs by using institutions such as the IMF and WTO to facilitate MNC entry into other countries through the imposition or negotiation of measures to encourage foreign investment, tariff-free trade, repatriation of profits, denationalisations and the protection of MNC property rights.

There is a certain amount of truth in this. States do support MNCs in this way, but it is not so obvious that MNCs are conscious agents of a state’s “imperialist” ambitions, especially as Petras and Veltmeyer are not always clear which states are “imperial”: The US (of course) but sometimes they speak of “the Euro-American Empire” or the West generally, so avoiding the problem of deciding whose empire a euro-american MNC would be helping to build.

“Imperialism” is a slippery word as all states seek to channel as much of world profits their way as they can. It is just that some states are stronger – some, much, much stronger – than others and so are better at doing this. In which case “imperialist” would just be another way of describing the successful states. But this does not mean that currently weaker states are not striving to do the same.

Petras and Veltmeyer take the side of the weaker states in this world-wide strug-

gle between all states to grab a share of world profits and offer advice to developing countries on how to combat the policies of the stronger, more successful states. The authors tell them not to rely on foreign investment to develop, but to adopt measures such as nationalisation, state monopoly of foreign trade, protectionism and exchange controls instead. In short, a policy of national state capitalism, although they themselves don’t use this term. They see themselves as “anti-imperialist” and even pro-working class and socialist. Anti-imperialist maybe, but not socialist.

At the end of the first chapter, they grossly distort Marx’s materialist conception of history when they write of “the class and national struggle, which as Marx once pointed out is the ‘motor force of history’” (our emphasis). Marx did indeed see class struggles as the motor force of history, but not national struggles as such. National(ist) struggles are class struggles under an ideological smokescreen, but not of the working class. They are either struggles by an aspiring capitalist class to establish themselves as a new national ruling class or struggles by an established but weak national owning class to gather a bigger share of world profits for themselves. There is no reason why socialists should support them.

ALB

Buying People

Selling Olga: Stories of Human Trafficking and Resistance. Louisa Waugh. Phoenix £8.99.

The Olga of the title is a Moldovan woman who was earning 35p a day working in an outdoor market. In desperation she and a friend replied to a newspaper ad promising well-paid jobs abroad, and were told they would be caring for elderly people in Italy. They ended up being sold to a bar-owner in Kosovo, where they were forced to work as prostitutes. After two years Olga managed to escape and returned to her home town, where she was housed and supported by the International Organisation for Migration. During her time in Kosovo she was beaten so badly that she lost almost 70 per cent of her sight.

Louisa Waugh’s book is full of appalling stories such as this, of women trafficked into the sex industry and forced to ‘repay’ those who arranged their journey and employment. Not all trafficking involves sex slaves, however, and many of those smuggled to other countries work in construction and agriculture, among other industries. The International Labour Office estimates that two and a half million people are caught up in trafficking, though others give far higher figures. In Moldova it has become one of the largest national industries, while Albania is another big source of trafficked women.

And what are the causes of this shocking ‘industry’? One is the fact that many men are willing to pay for sex, so pimps can make a profit from it. But on the sup-

ply side the answer is one simple word: poverty. Waugh quotes the director of an organisation called the Useful Women of Albania: “Women are trafficked from Albania because they are desperate to leave in the first place . . . if women are living here in poverty and they have nothing, then they will sell the only thing they can make money from: their own bodies.” The line between those who are trafficked and those who migrate ‘freely’ is a thin one. A report for Save the Children referred to “a steady rise in emigration for voluntary prostitution abroad in order to escape poverty and bleak futures in Albania.” But prostitution can rarely be voluntary in any real sense, and few of the women who migrate in order to earn money from selling sex are prepared for precisely what awaits them.

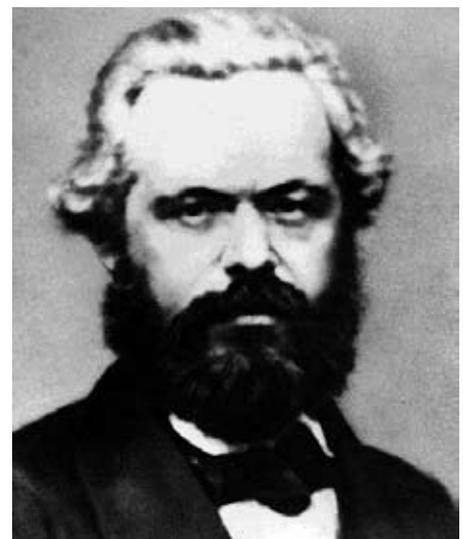
Many governments in Western Europe, including the UK, have addressed the problem of trafficking by cracking down on illegal immigration. But this has only led to the creation of an underclass of undocumented migrants, a group which includes those who died in Morecambe Bay in 2004. Forced labour — not confined to sex work — is an important part of the British economy, for capitalism wants cheap and pliant labour power. The extremes to which it will sometimes go to obtain it, graphically depicted in Waugh’s pages, show why it’s necessary to get rid of this diabolical system.

PB

Marx misunderstood

Economics Transformed. Robert Albritton. Pluto Press, 2007

Classical economics began with the publication of Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* in 1776. It continued with John Stuart Mill’s *Principles of Political Economy*, first published in 1848, which was to re-



main a standard textbook on the subject for nearly a century. After the Second World War, neoclassical economics became the new orthodoxy in academia. The main difference with neoclassical economics is a much greater emphasis on math-

emational formulas. However, what unites classical and neoclassical economics, together with all its various sub-divisions, is a theory of price with explicit or implicit policy recommendations for running the economy – unemployment levels, interest rates, cures for inflation, and so on. Where does Marxian economics fit into all this? The short answer is – it doesn't. Marxian economics provides a theory of profit and doesn't presume to tell the capitalists and their governments how they should run their system.

Profit-making is the life-blood of capitalism, though you wouldn't guess it from the news reports that economic well-being is threatened by a lack of "consumer confidence" – in other words, you're not buying enough stuff from the shops. Capitalist economics is there to explain that profit is untouchable as the reward for waiting for investments to pay off for the capitalists, and as a reward for risking their capital. But these are an attempt at *justification* of profit, not an explanation of the *source* of profit, which is what Marxian economics is concerned with. Waiting and risk in themselves do not create profit. There is only one way that vast personal fortunes and the social accumulation of capital can be satisfactorily explained: as the result of the unpaid labour of the working class being appropriated by the capitalist class in the form of profit.

And then there are the consequences of the profit motive: crises, recessions and mass unemployment; and all the other effects which create human and environmental degradation in its wake. Albritton doesn't deal adequately with any of this, which is unfortunate in a book which claims we can be "Discovering the Brilliance of Marx" in economics. Moreover, Albritton's understanding of Marx is undermined by his claim that we can "democratically manage markets so as to serve the needs of social justice." Firstly, Marx never made that claim and in fact specifically argued against the use of markets of any sort. Secondly, markets presuppose private or class ownership of the means of production and distribution. Students of Marxian economics will need to look elsewhere.

LEW

Bronterre O'Brien

Bronterre O'Brien and the Chartist Uprisings of 1839. David Black. Radical History Network, 2007

James O'Brien contributed articles to the *Poor Man's Guardian* under the pseudonym "Bronterre" and eventually adopted it as his middle name. O'Brien soon became the *Poor Man's Guardian* editor as it campaigned for universal suffrage at the time of the 1832 Reform Act. This Act however merely redistributed the vote amongst the ruling class, leading to the drawing-up of the People's Charter in response ("essentially a program for universal male suffrage," according to Black) in 1838 by the

London Working Men's Association and the Birmingham Political Union. In June 1839 a mass petition was presented to, and rejected by, Parliament. Violent uprisings then occurred around the country, including a fierce battle in Newport, South Wales, in which 24 died and 50 were wounded by gunfire. After the Newport uprising was



Chartist meeting, Kennington Common, 1848

suppressed its leader, John Frost, was sentenced to death (later commuted to transportation for life) and O'Brien was sentenced to eighteen months in prison for making seditious speeches.

Black's short tract on this particular episode reads like a Trotskyist analysis of the event as a failure of leadership (in Trotskyist literature working class setbacks are *always* the result of a betrayal of leadership). Thus Black argues: "if the Rising in Monmouth had not been led by John Frost it might well have succeeded." Succeeded in doing what? Taking and holding Monmouth? Creating a revolutionary situation? Such fantasies were dismissed by O'Brien who had withdrawn from active involvement by this stage. According to Black:

"He explained later that he could not conscientiously take part in secret projects which could only at best produce partial outbreaks, which would easily be crushed and would lead to increased persecution of the Chartists."

The Chartist campaign lasted another 10 years before collapsing in failure.

LEW

Meetings

Chiswick

Tuesday **19 February**, 8pm
RAVAGES OF ECOTOURISM
 Speaker: Brian Johnson
 Committee Room, Chiswick Town Hall,
 Heathfield Terrace, W.4 (nearest tube:
 Chiswick Park).

Manchester

Monday **25 February**, 8.30 pm
 Discussion on Nationalism
 Unicorn, Church Street, City Centre

Please be advised that the next business meeting of **Central London**

Branch will be held on Wednesday, 20 February 2008 at 18:30 at the Shakespeare's Head, 64-68 Kingsway, Holborn. (Nearest tube: Holborn.)

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Old familiar faces



Here it is, then: *Universities and Left Review*. Very well got up, good typography; indeed, the Abbey Press (the people who print it) are to be complimented on having a range of bold, large and display types almost sufficient to keep up with the editors' delight in Names. The cover bears the contributors' names (Isaac Deutscher, Claude Bourdet, Peter de Francia, E. P. Thompson, G. D. H. Cole, Joan Robinson, etc..) in massive black letters, their topics in small ones. (. . .)

What purpose, then, does the *Universities and Left Review* serve? Pretentious, empty of ideas, its material picked from ideological dust-heaps, it has set out to make a splash—or, as the first editorial put it, to take a beachhead. Its avowed purpose is to publish discussion on “the common ground of a genuinely free and genuinely socialist society.” Its way, the editors say, is “to take socialism at full stretch — as relevant only in so far as it is relevant to the full scale of man’s activities.”

If that were true — “the full scale of man’s activities” — it really would be interesting. But, of course, it isn’t. Search the *Universities and Left Review*, and only in a

line here and a phrase there will you find the working class mentioned. Professor Cole has a good word for them, and there is a little lofty patronage from David Marquand (“in the thirties, there had to be an effective mass movement for the intellectuals to join”) and E. P. Thompson (“the experience of rank-and-file political activity teaches us and keeps our ideas on the ground”). The names in the *Universities and Left Review* see themselves (bear witness, the articles on art, the cinema, architecture) as members of an élite: the General Staff on that beach-head, the upper crust of the “genuinely socialist society.” (. . .)

Universities and Left Review seeks comment from the socialist viewpoint. It can be simply made. There is not a word concerning Socialism from beginning to end of the *Universities and Left Review*. Reformist claptrap, yes; pretentious verbiage, indeed; chatter about how things are for the intellectuals, above all. But of the interests of the working class, the great majority of mankind—not a whisper.

The most useful left-winger we ever saw was Tom Finney (above). The day he scored against the Arsenal—now, that was worth three-and-six.

(from article by Robert Coster, *Socialist Standard*, February 1958).



Declaration of Principles

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

Object

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

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.)

by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



The mass debaters

Who will win the race? Which horse is your money on? Will we notice when they win?

The excitement is killing me. Who has seen whiter, glossier, teeth and lies whiter and glossier still than those that were bared on television during the recent debates between Democrats and Republicans? The race culminating in the presidential trophy in late 2008 is solidly on, with these wealthy members of the capitalist class vying for leadership of the world's most prosperous land, brought to them by the generous contributions of our dear readers' unpaid surplus value.

These sellers of capitalist reforms are so impeccably dressed and groomed, so charming and witty, so passionate in their determination to give a structurally exploitative society a new lease on ideological life, that it might well take an Odyssean resistance to temptation on your part to keep from falling for their well-oiled sell, written and rehearsed with a large team of marketing professionals from behind the curtains.

Obama

Senator Obama, for all his oozing liberal rhetoric and strong likeability factor, while an Illinois Democratic senator has always supported a free market system. Isn't that the one in which most of us must work so hard to produce free surplus value for our employers that we don't even have enough free time to ourselves? One of the most popular bills that he signed in 2007, the Shareholder Vote on Executive Compensation Act, also known as "Say On Pay," allowed shareholders to limit the inflated salaries of corporate CEOs but while this was easily and incorrectly perceived as a Robin Hood move, the reality was that studies in the *Wall Street Journal* had previously demonstrated that poorer CEO performance was correlated with more inflated salaries, and also that in economically troubled companies, worker morale suffered the most when CEOs were receiving pay of exceptionally bloated dimensions. In short, fiscal policies and laws must attempt to look after the interests of the capitalist class as a whole, even at the minor expense of individual capitalists. Behind each liberal dream sits a wallet somewhere waiting to bulge.



Obama was further criticized and praised last year for spending \$18 billion on promoting merit pay of the nation's teachers by cutting costs from the NASA Constellation Program, delayed now by 5 years. On the surface, noble and caring, no? Well, in capitalism the only nobility are the ones who still own parts of the land, and even the most caring sentiment finds a way out of the heart and into the coffers of the rich. His plan to improve merit pay for teachers was harshly criticized by the National Education Association (the largest labour union in the U.S.), the Urban Institute and the Cato Institute, on the grounds that merit pay could actually end up favouring schools in better neighbourhoods whose track records were stronger as a result of the inflow of local resources, could lower the morale of teachers owing to the resulting competition between them, and could create a new expensive bureaucratic superstructure overseeing the programme itself. Isn't it sickening that in capitalism resources cannot be directly accorded to those who deserve it the most, our children's teachers, without producing such negative consequences upon the institutions and atmosphere in which our children are learning?

Obama is also on record for stating that he is not opposed "to all wars, only dumb wars" (famous Fall 2002 speech at the anti-war rally at Chicago's Federal Plaza). While urging for a date by which de-escalation of the militarization of Iraq should begin, Obama has also consistently refused to actually cut funding for the Iraq War. Capitalism makes it hard for seemingly honest, intelligent and good-intentioned politicians such as Obama to take a solid stance against the murder of the innocent (who are always the ones in war to die in greater numbers than the intended targets), even for those politicians who would likely come across as largely anti-war in a private conversation (if they too openly challenge the status quo, they may be attacked for undermining the war on terrorism – and as a result of their careful public manoeuvring, their platform always seems unpredictable and inconsistent).

Clinton

Hillary Clinton lost the Iowa caucus but won the Democratic Party primary in New Hampshire. She is thus very much in the race to become her party's presidential candidate at this time, with the biggest next date that may tip the scales in favour of Clinton or Obama

what is dubbed by the press Big Tuesday on February 5th (something to get so excited about when we get home from work that day). Clinton is garnering a lot of support for her life-long struggle to medically insure all Americans, however she no longer advocates a single-payer insurance system as she once did and as all other capitalist nations around the world presently provide. Another example of the compromise she had to make to remain a viable leader of the Democratic Party, and a perfect example of how the needs of capitalism so taint the original ideals of those running for big offices that by the time they arrive there, they look, smell and sound like anyone else in the White Lie House. Indeed, the only Democratic Party candidate who does presently advocate a single-payer insurance plan is John Edwards, who is presently trailing significantly behind the other two in the race.



Hillary Clinton is assuredly not going to be making the world any safer from war, either. It is true that she has worked to improve the medical and psychiatric treatment benefits available to veterans, thus leading one to assume that she is more willing to improve in the patching up of those who fought abroad than in preventing their being massacred physically and emotionally there in the first place. However, as the potential leader of one of the world's great powers, her job will be to make sure that she protects the economic interests of this country's industries and their standing in the marketplace as a whole. Rather than attempting to make the world safer from war, her own website recites the same sort of patriotic dribble one finds frothing out of the mouths of every other leader running for president, in her case: "every member of our armed forces will receive a fair shot at the American dream when their service is over." We all know, of course, how "fair" the American dream is, especially the millions of American presently failing to pay off their mortgages at a landslide rate, and the volunteers at the 51,000 food pantries across our "fair" land that are presently providing food assistance to the millions of extra customers turning up at food banks in recent years (according to America's Second Harvest "2006 Hunger Study").

Ron Paul

Ron Paul, a Republican presidential candidate, actually came out in the recent debates the strongest opponent of the Iraq War. His opposition seemed partially fiscal in nature, as he deplored the \$300 billion spent on it thus far. But it was also ideological, as he felt the arming of groups who later turn against the United States (e.g., the Kosovars who aided Islamic terrorists, or the Afghan jihadists themselves, and their friend Osama bin Laden) had acted to fuel increased national insecurity rather than security, and increased terrorism rather than less. And of course, Ron Paul is probably right on this score, surprisingly coming from a member of the Republican Party, the party that always advocates small government but seems in each office hell-bent on creating a bureaucratic gigantic proto-fascistic war economy state.



However, Ron Paul, like the rest of the Republicans or Democrats, feels that capitalism can somehow behave more rationally than it does – or at least they want us to believe that with our vote they can transform its foul waters to fine wine. The reality is quite the opposite, as history shows again and again. Tensions between nations are always present over shifts in political allegiances between countries that may benefit some better than others. Global politics is a macrocosm of the local economy, with each company vying to get as much of the business as it can, such as trade, material resources and opportunities for future economic growth. From the perspective of a capitalist enterprise or a nation, the planet is a great big hamburger to chow on, with the unneeded parts thrown away on the landfill – children, nature, women, the elderly, education, health, and common sense. It is, at the bottom-line, a violent and wasteful way for humans to treat both each other and their world. It benefits only those in control of the resources and keeps the rest of us in a state of emotional tension about the relative lack of security that exists around the planet, at any time potentially plunging us all into another world war or terrorist attack. It is a world gone mad.

DR WHO (WSPUS)

Voice from the Back

TEN WASTED YEARS

Socialists have always stressed that supporting schemes of reforms will not fundamentally change the nature of capitalism and here comes an official capitalist institution whose findings back up that view. "There are 1.4 million children living below the poverty line in Britain, even though at least one of their parents has a job. Despite the changes to taxes and benefits, and the introduction of the national minimum wage, the number of poor children in working households is no lower than in 1997, a report by the Institute for Public Policy Research says." (*Times*, 3 January)

NO IMMIGRATION PROBLEM

Politicians ever ready to seek the votes of little-Englanders often speak about the problem of immigrants from abroad coming to this country and causing problems such as housing, medical care and education. We imagine these politicians will completely ignore this type of immigration though. "Lev Leviev, who until a week ago was classified as the richest man in Israel, has joined the growing list of Israeli billionaires who have made their homes in London, where wealthy foreigners are not asked to pay tax on income earned overseas. This month, Mr Leviev officially moved into a bullet-proof house in Hampstead, which he bought for £35m. His near neighbours include several other mega-rich Israeli tycoons who prefer UK tax rates. In Israel, they are liable for tax on all their income, no matter where it is from. ...News of his departure has shocked the Israeli business community and created a political headache for its government, because of the drain of wealth from Tel Aviv to London. Among those who have made their homes in London are Zvi Meitar, the founder of one of Israel's biggest law firms; Benny Steinmitz, a diamond dealer and property tycoon; Yigal Zilka, head of Queenco Leisure International; and the real estate developer, Sammy Shimon." (*Independent*, 8 January)

THIS IS COMMUNISM?

Socialists have always maintained that countries like Russia and China that have claimed to be establishing socialism were in fact building up state capitalism, and now a pillar of US capitalism agrees with us that China has nothing to do with socialism. "The spending choices for China's rich are



Bugatti: as driven by China's rich

multiplying as quickly as the world's fastest-growing major economy can mint new tycoons. In the latest sign of China's rising upper crust and its growing appeal to international marketers, Robb Report, a self-declared catalogue of the best of the best for the richest of the rich, is making its pitch here with a Chinese-language edition. The 200-plus-page Chinese monthly, published under the name Robb Report Lifestyle, is packed with news, product placements and advertising that promotes elite brands such as Volkswagen AG's Bugatti sports cars and Lürssen yachts." (*Wall Street Journal*, 9 January)

CHINESE BOOMING DEATH RATE

"Accidents in China's notoriously dangerous coal mines killed nearly 3,800 people last year, state media reported Saturday – a toll that is a marked improvement from previous years, but still leaves China's mines the world's deadliest. A total of 3,786 were killed in mining accidents in 2007 – 20 percent lower than the 2006 toll, indicating the effectiveness of a safety campaign to shut small, illegal mining operations and reduce gas explosions, the Xinhua News Agency quoted the head of China's government safety watchdog as *Chinese miner* saying. Coal is the lifeblood of China's booming, energy-hungry economy. The mining industry's safety, which has never been good, has often suffered as mine owners push to dig up more coal to take advantage of higher prices." (*Yahoo News*, 12 January) The development of capitalism in China has led to more deaths amongst the working class. Surprise, surprise?



Chinese miner

PROPHETS AND PROFITS

The future of global warming is a complex subject, but many experts believe the growth of carbon emissions could lead to disaster. One of the supporters of that notion is the World Bank with its various schemes to halt or lessen these emissions, but their difficulty is that they also support the profit system so they are left in a contradictory position. "The World Bank has emerged as one of the key backers behind an explosion of cattle ranching in the Amazon, which new research has identified as the greatest threat to the survival of the rainforest. Ranching has grown by half in the last three years,

driven by new industrial slaughterhouses which are being constructed in the Amazon basin with the help of the World Bank.



The new global threat?

The revelation flies in the face of claims from the bank that it is funding efforts to halt deforestation and reduce the massive greenhouse gas emissions it causes. Roberto Smeraldi, head of Friends of the Earth Brazil and lead author of the new report, obtained exclusively by *The Independent on Sunday*, said the bank's contradictory policy on forests was now clear: "On the one hand you try and save the forest, on the other you give incentives for its conversion." (*Independent on Sunday*, 13 January)

IN A SANE SOCIETY WE LIVE BACKWARDS

In a sane society technological advances would be looked upon as a step forward for humanity, but we don't live in a sane society we live in capitalism. Simon Caulkin the Management Editor of the *Observer* reveals some alarming outcomes of such technical progress. "More than half of all UK employees – 52 per cent – are now subject to computer surveillance at work, according to research from the Economic and Social Research Council's "Future of Work" programme. That's a remarkable figure, and it has led to a sharp increase in strain among those being monitored – particularly white-collar administrative staff. ... Substantial pay rises for most managers contrast with static or even declining wages for low-end computer-monitored workers, who are working harder, and longer hours, into the bargain." (*Observer*, 13 January)

POOR AND DESPERATE

Men and women because of poverty are forced to work for wages. Inside Europe and North America they have to do as they are told by their masters, to turn up on time to be respectful and if asked to do so cringe, but it is even worse for our African comrades. "Last year roughly 31,000 Africans tried to reach the Canary Islands, a prime transit point to Europe, in more than 900 boats. About 6,000 died or disappeared, according to one estimate cited by the United Nations." (*New York Times*, 14 January) Men and women of the working class are dying to be exploited. Let us get rid of this mad society. 6,000 died last year, how many this year?

Free Lunch

by Rigg



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