

# socialist standard



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

## Fifty M.A.D. years

Mutually Assured Destruction -  
still living in the shadow  
of the Bomb

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#### THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 1 March** 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 The Disarming Truth

Fifty years ago this Easter the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament was effectively born from demonstrations held outside the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment at Aldermaston. Twenty-five years on from Easter 1958, CND (and similar movements) had risen again, able to mobilise millions onto the streets of capital cities throughout Western Europe in response to a return to cold war US/USSR rhetoric.

During the 50 years of CND's history some things have changed: Trident has replaced Polaris and Faslane submarine base has replaced Greenham Common cruise missile base as the focus for protest. Meanwhile the global nuclear stockpile is now double what it was in 1958, and the number of nuclear states has also more than doubled.

And it wasn't just the badges with the distinctive CND logo that were recycled from the 60s to the 80s: the same kilogrammes of uranium or plutonium from scrapped and ageing warheads have been thoughtfully reused ten years later in the next generation of killing technology.

Despite the laudable aims then – as embodied in their title – the reality of CND is that it has been a front: a cover for the little-known CPPTSARNP (Campaign for Possible Partial, Temporary and Reversible Slowing of the Rate of Nuclear Proliferation). A bit more accurate, if a little clumsy when put on a banner, and hardly a good rallying cry for supporters of course. But CND has, by whatever measure you wish to use, failed. Not through lack of effort of course – no other issue dominated politics throughout the 60s, 70s and 80s.

The parties of the World Socialist Movement are unique in opposing all war – not just certain types of war or certain situations. This is based on a recognition that the interests of the working women and

men who usually make up the cannon-fodder and collateral damage of war can never be aligned with states and governments. We oppose the monopoly that the global owning class have over ownership of the earth's productive resources that are the usual spoils of armed conflict. We see little value therefore in pleading with our rulers to continue their capitalist battles, but to request that they use only this or that weapon.

In the Socialist Party we were sometimes told by CND supporters that there just wasn't enough time to work for socialism: there were only weeks or months left to stop nuclear annihilation and that objective had to be the priority. Thankfully that prediction proved to not be the case. But it is a common objection to the case for socialism, that there is some immediate more pressing campaign that – with just one final shove – will be won, and only then can we start to look to changing the basis of society.

The history of movements to reform one part or another of capitalism has been a history of failure in the main part. We can choose to tinker at the margins or to get to grips with the problem. We can complain about the symptoms, plead with our rulers, or make the decision to address the cause. The history of CND should give us no confidence that reformism is fit for purpose – certainly not with regard to trying to do away with weapons.

We predict that unless the war machine that is capitalism is politically challenged by a majority – armed with nothing more or less than an understanding of how it works – then in another 50 years we will still have wars raging round the globe, with ever more sophisticated weaponry. And of course, we will still have CND. The choice is between a world to win and a world to lose.

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## The Socialist Gene?

Is there a gene for socialism? Are we hard-wired to organise a communal society, share everything and live a peaceful and democratic life in harmonious coexistence with nature and other species? Is anybody asking this question? If not, why not?

Let's face it, people have asked much sillier questions. Recent examples have included: is there a gene for aggression, or obedience, or homosexuality, or whatever human behavioural tic is currently inspiring tabloid copy-editors. Usually they are on the lookout for ways of explaining away character traits which their readers regard as undesirable, and which through cod-genetics can be made to look like evolutionary flaws or dead-ends, or else alibis by which the readers can avoid taking any personal responsibility. Serious researchers do ask questions about cooperation, altruism, sacrifice and other socially more admirable traits, but of course, 'serious' research is all a matter of what funding bodies are willing to pay for, so while the military will certainly be interested in studies which show aggression to be innate, and which thereby affirm the importance of the military, it is hard to see who, in a capitalist world, would be very keen to bankroll research pointing to the desirability of abolishing banks.

What's odd about these questions is that they run counter to the trend of all the evidence, which suggests that genes do not operate in isolation but in matrices, and that one single gene can never be identified as being attributable to one single and discrete characteristic, either mental or physical.

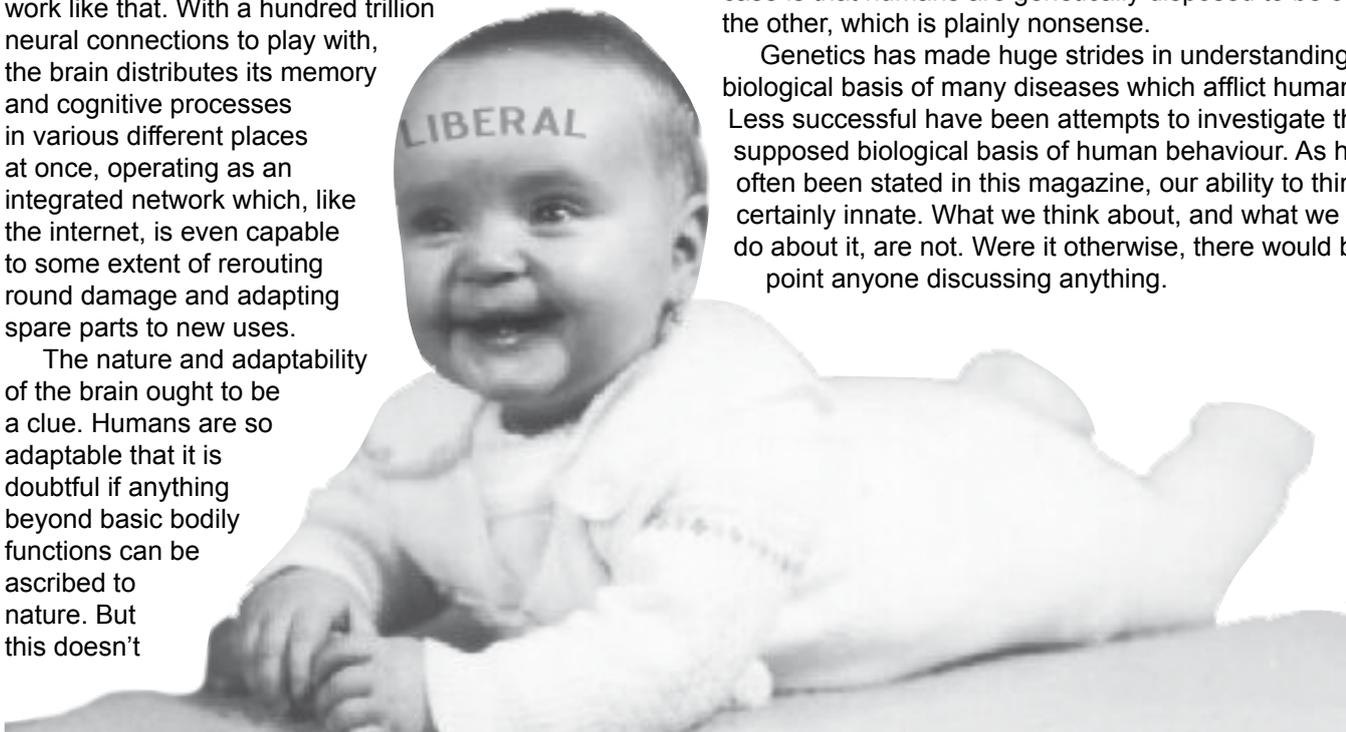
This is strange when you consider how the brain works, and how it is popularly supposed to work. Nobody expects to be able to extract a single brain cell and find, encoded within it, a phrase from *Romeo and Juliet* or a picture of a Ford Mondeo. We realise the brain doesn't work like that. With a hundred trillion neural connections to play with, the brain distributes its memory and cognitive processes in various different places at once, operating as an integrated network which, like the internet, is even capable to some extent of rerouting round damage and adapting spare parts to new uses.

The nature and adaptability of the brain ought to be a clue. Humans are so adaptable that it is doubtful if anything beyond basic bodily functions can be ascribed to nature. But this doesn't

stop the speculation, because there is a small window of opportunity, via the study of identical twins, to explore the 'nature' side of the nature-nurture debate. For, argue people like Steven Pinker, we are not born a 'blank slate', so something must be genetically already in there. Something, but what? That's the trouble. Until some intelligent life form is discovered in the cosmos, which can be studied and compared, there is no way to guess what is natural and what isn't.

A recent article in *New Scientist* illustrates the problem, when it asks whether political leanings are encoded in the genes (Feb 2). Some disparity between voting habits of identical twins is cited in support of this outlandish claim, which is being seized on by political scientists as a potential magic key to unlock the voter's brain. Identical twins, it seems, are more likely to give the same answers to political questions than non-identical ones. While interesting, this is hardly 'startling', as the article puts it. If identical twins are truly identical, and if they are brought up together, it is not very surprising that they would develop the same views. The article does not mention identical twins who were brought up separately, however. If one twin is brought up in an impoverished mining town and the other in a mansion, would they still hold the same political views? If they did, this really would be startling. And where non-identical twins hold different views, no mention is made of a comparison with non-identical non-twins and whether the two correlate. This is significant because different siblings within a family experience that family differently, and differential experiences of attention, affection, expectation and responsibilities may well affect their subsequent political development. Lastly, we are told that identical twins tend to give the same answers, but we are not told what these answers are. Logically, of the 30,000 twins studied over two decades in Virginia, one would expect by random chance a greater number either of Democrats or Republicans. This information is not provided, possibly because the obvious conclusion to be drawn from either case is that humans are genetically disposed to be one or the other, which is plainly nonsense.

Genetics has made huge strides in understanding the biological basis of many diseases which afflict humanity. Less successful have been attempts to investigate the supposed biological basis of human behaviour. As has often been stated in this magazine, our ability to think is certainly innate. What we think about, and what we then do about it, are not. Were it otherwise, there would be no point anyone discussing anything.



**Work and leisure**

Dear Editors

Although I agree with much of what the editors write in reply to the letter by N.B. (February *Socialist Standard*), I think there is more to say about work and leisure in a socialist world.

N.B. writes “People need a contrast between work and leisure in order to appreciate and enjoy their leisure time.” The editors comment on this: “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.”

Both N.B. and the editors assume that the line commonly drawn between work and leisure by people in capitalism will also be drawn by people in socialism. I question this. A few people today—some retired workers and some capitalists who are more than non-employed parasites—are able to live productive and enjoyable lives which they don’t divide into work and leisure segments. In socialism I expect many more such people and society will be the better for having them.

In capitalism it is understandable that workers do divide their lives into work (paid employment) and leisure (mostly as customers of the leisure industry). In socialism there won’t be employment or the leisure industry. Instead there is likely to be a division (though not a hard and fast one) between *socially committed* activities and *individually chosen* activities. Both types of activity will straddle what we today call work and leisure.

Most of us will commit some of our time to being, for example, train drivers, classroom teachers, members of orchestras or football teams. Most of us will also spend some of our time doing things that don’t require being with other people at a specified time and place—for example, handicrafts and individual sports.

Michael Schauerte (in the same issue) writes of the socialist revolution: “The first change that seems likely, for a number of reasons, is a major reduction in the length of the working day.” Michael shows too little creative imagination about what work will mean for us in socialism.

Certainly we won’t want to spend more time than we have to on activities or in circumstances that we find unpleasant, boring or damaging. But why should we be concerned with “the length of the working day”? Some activities and interests—socially committed or individually chosen—may be so absorbing, thrilling or delightful that it wouldn’t make sense to long to reduce time spend on them.

People will have much more choice about their lifestyle than they do now. Some may choose Marxian multi-tasking: hunter, farmer, critic, philosopher, blogger, all in one day. Others may devote their whole lives to one interest or activity, bordering on the obsessive. I guess most of us will be somewhere between these two extremes.

**STAN PARKER, London NW3.**

**Northern Rock**

Dear Editors

The Tories have always presented themselves as the party of low taxation, and with another ‘former left’ turned New Labour Cabinet Minister carcass for them to succulently devour (Peter Hain over allegations of sleaze), are naturally revelling in the government’s current dilemma over whether to either nationalise completely Northern Rock or initiate a cobbled up tax funded financial scheme that acts as a veneer for doing something.

The principal question therefore for a party which is allegedly in opposition and whose fundamental tenet of ideology is low taxation to promote free enterprise (albeit also rigidly upheld by New Labour) is why don’t they let this tenet do the talking, by insisting that Northern Rock is an unequivocal market failure and should, like other failed firms, go into liquidation to save the billions of pounds of taxpayers’ money necessary to prop it up?

The reality is, despite all the hype and bluster between both, neither they or New Labour could possibly allow this to happen because if a financial institution of this magnitude were allowed to collapse it would expose to the voting public at large the underlying fragility of the entire capitalist system. Hence this is why most mainstream financial commentators seem reluctant to emphasise that Northern Rock is the first obvious symptom in the UK of a far greater endemic problem of the global financial system where borrowing and speculation has basically outweighed actual economic growth. Indeed the term ‘credit crunch’ is simply a useful euphemism that conveys the myth that it was all down to politicians or financial gurus failing to exercise foresight beforehand. In fact the majority of mainstream politicians in parliament today simply oversee these inept ‘fat cat’ policies as a formality, regardless of the detrimental effects they have on the livelihoods of millions of their constituents particularly if they are working class or homeowners with mortgages.

So for the Tories, as long as New Labour carries the can for this Northern Rock debacle the better. However for the average voter, where the whole fiasco and the billions that are conveniently found to save it should be precipitating a public revival in socialist thinking in some shape or form, the chronic ideological vacuum that exists in British politics today is comprehensively exposed.

**NICK VINEHILL, Snettisham, Norfolk**

**Reply:** Good point. The ideological supporters of capitalism like to preach the virtues of competition eliminating lame ducks, but the government – guardian of the interests of a national capitalist class as a whole – doesn’t always let this happen, especially not in a case like Northern Rock which could have a domino effect and even if this costs “the taxpayers” (i.e., the rest of the capitalist class) money. The Tories nationalised Rolls Royce in 1973 for similar reasons (it remained nationalised till 1987) – *Editors.*

**The Hull Floods**

Dear Editors

Last year’s floods were the widest spread, if not the worst on record, in Britain. Great swathes of the country were affected including the West Country and Yorkshire. Worst affected, however, was Hull, my home town. Local events did not attract much attention in the national media. Hull is a visually uninteresting town, off the beaten track, with few rich people to make a noise (it is the ninth most deprived area in England). The death toll was low, with only one person killed, and, unlike in Gloucester, the floods did not generate any stunning aerial views. However in terms of human impact the northern port was certainly in the front line as can be seen in the recent “The June 2007 Floods in Hull: Final Report by the Independent Review Body” (<http://content.thisis.co.uk/hull07/Complete%20v7.pdf>).

Stated simply the rainfall on the 25 June was exceptionally heavy and followed in the wake of another heavy storm ten days earlier. The soil was already completely saturated and the drains filled to capacity. There was just nowhere for the water to go. This is a matter of some concern for the area is completely flat with much of the built up area below sea level. Nearly 9,000 homes and 1,300 businesses were affected and 91 of 99 schools in the area damaged, 43 severely so. Institutions affected included the University, where the library (once run by poet Philip Larkin) was badly damaged. As might be expected, the poorer areas, including Bransholme (said to be one of the worst estates in Britain), suffered most. Some 6,300 people had to seek temporary accommodation; around 1,000 are still living in caravans, upstairs or in lodgings. The trauma of being flooded out has been considerable and, with repairs badly backlogged, long lasting.

Immediately after the event great play was made in local papers over the state of the roadside drains. Undoubtedly in some cases these were blocked due to reductions in street cleaning budgets. However the official report largely negated claims of any major impact. The Independent Review Body did find there were “serious issues” with the drainage facilities, specifically a failed pumping station on Bransholme, and commented “detailed information about the performance and operation of water utilities’ drainage systems should be in the public domain”, a clear condemnation of the damaging privatisation undertaken over the past quarter century. It also picked up on insurance problems faced by many, recommending that the state underwrite flood risks.

Ironically given these proposals of intervention by the state (which clearly isn’t interested), it was the community response which provided back up to most people: “The people of Hull showed extraordinary levels of goodwill, comradeship and willingness to help neighbours during the floods”. So much for selfish human nature.

**KEITH SCHOLEY, HULL**



# Still In Chains: South Africa After Apartheid

*"They never freed us. They only took the chain from around our neck and put it on our ankles." Anti-apartheid activist Rassool Snyman to Naomi Klein.*

The fight against the system of racial segregation and white supremacy called apartheid ("apartness" in Afrikaans) was one of the great liberal and left-wing causes of my generation. It was a fight not only for political democracy in South Africa but also for socio-economic reform. The Freedom Charter, adopted by the African National Congress in 1955 ([www.anc.org.za](http://www.anc.org.za)), called for "restoring national wealth to the people" (understood as nationalization of the mines, banks and "monopoly industry"), "re-dividing the land among those who work it to banish famine and land hunger," improved pay and working conditions, free healthcare, universal literacy, and decent housing for all.

Apartheid as a political and legal system was dismantled in the early 1990s. South Africa's capitalists did not on the whole object. Apartheid had brought them immense profits from the exploitation of a cheap captive labour force. But it had its drawbacks. By denying training and advancement to a large majority of the workforce, it created a growing shortage of skilled labour. Capitalists are often willing to accept a measure of social change, provided that they can set its limits.

## Little change

Although apartheid is gone, economically South Africa is still one of the most unequal countries in the world. Almost all the land, mines and industry remain in the same (mostly white) hands. Almost half the population lives below subsistence level. Unemployment is widespread; children scavenge on dumps and landfill sites from sunrise to sunset seven days a week. Life expectancy is falling (a drop of 13 years since 1990) as AIDS, drug-resistant TB and other diseases spread.

Even segregation still exists in practice. The wealthy take shelter in "gated communities" from the violence pervading the shantytowns. As the wealthy are no longer exclusively but only predominantly white, the proper name for this is class rather than race segregation.

True, efforts have been made to improve living conditions. Close to two million new homes have been built. (Whether they count as "decent housing" is another matter.) Water, telephone and electricity networks have been expanded. But while millions were rehoused, millions were also evicted for rent arrears. Nine million people were connected to the water supply, but during the same period ten million were disconnected as the price rose out of their reach.

## Caught in a web

How did the main reform goals of the Freedom Charter come to be abandoned? Political journalist William Mervin Gumede tells the story in his book *Thabo Mbeki and the Battle for the Soul of the ANC* (Cape

Town: Zebra Press 2005).

While political negotiations, conducted in the glare of publicity, moved the ANC toward government office, parallel and almost unpublicized economic negotiations, led on the ANC side by Thabo Mbeki (now president), ensured that when the ANC did take office it would be unable to act against white business interests. A new clause of the constitution made all private property sacrosanct. Power over economic policy was ceded to an "autonomous" central bank and international financial institutions.

"The ANC found itself caught in a web



made of arcane rules and regulations... As the web descended on the country only a few people even noticed it was there, but when the new government ... tried to give its voters the tangible benefits they expected the strands of the web tightened and [it] discovered that its powers were tightly bound" (Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine* pp. 202-3).

## Relentless pressure

The ANC hierarchy came under "relentless pressure" from local and international business, the (business-controlled) media, foreign politicians, the World Bank and IMF, etc. It was "an onslaught for which the ANC was wholly unprepared" (Gumede, p. 72). This does not mean that crude demands and threats played a crucial role. It was a process more of seduction than intimidation, aimed at integrating a set of new partners into the institutional structure and social milieu of the global capitalist class.

This meant providing opportunities for ANC officials to go into business or train at American business schools and investment banks. Leading figures were lavished with hospitality: "Harry Oppenheimer [former chairman of Anglo American Corporation and De Beers Consolidated Mines] was eager to entertain Mandela at his private estate, while Anglovaal's Clive Menell hosted

him for Christmas (1990) at his mansion...

While separated from his wife, Mandela's home for several months was the palatial estate of insurance tycoon Douw Steyn... His daughter Zinzi had a honeymoon partly financed by resort and casino king Sol Kerzner, and Mandela spent Christmas 1993 in the Bahamas as a guest of Heinz and Independent Newspapers chairman Sir Anthony O'Reilly" (Gumede, p. 72).

It seems churlish to begrudge Mandela a little luxury after 27 years in prison. But what were his benefactors' motives?

## The markets: stern taskmasters

Nevertheless, the most effective form of capitalist influence was the impersonal pressure of "the markets." As Mandela told the ANC's 1997 national conference: "The mobility of capital and the globalization of the capital and other markets make it impossible for countries to decide national economic policy without regard to the likely response of these markets" (Klein, p. 207). And the markets punished the slightest sign of deviation from the "Washington consensus" with capital flight and speculation against the rand.

Mbeki was the first to grasp what was needed to win the markets' confidence. Precisely in order to live down its "revolutionary" and "Marxist" past, the ANC leaders had to prove themselves more Catholic than the pope. "Just call me a Thatcherite" – quipped Mbeki as he unveiled his new "shock therapy" programme in 1996. South Africa could not afford the protectionist measures with which Malaysia, for instance, warded off the Asian financial crisis of 1997. Orthodoxy, however, was never rewarded with the hoped-for flood of foreign investment. The markets are stern taskmasters: they demand everything and promise nothing.

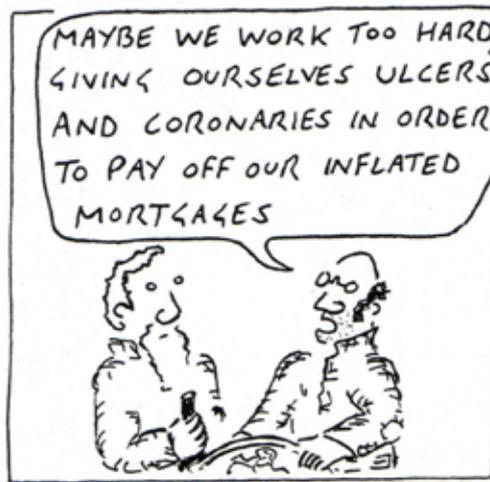
## A sell-out?

It is not altogether fair to say that Mandela or Mbeki "sold out." They simply saw no escape from the "web" spun by global capital. Indeed, at the national level there is no escape. Reformers in other countries, such as the Solidarity movement in Poland and Lula's Workers' Party in Brazil, have gone through much the same experience on reaching office. Socialists have long said that socialism cannot be established in a single country. Now we also know that under conditions of globalization even a meaningful programme of reform cannot be implemented in a single country.

Capital is global. That is its trump card against any attempt to defy its dictates that is confined within national boundaries. The resistance to capital must also be organized on a global scale if it is to have any chance of success.

STEFAN

# IRE OF THE IRATE ITINERANT



## LONDON ELECTIONS

The Socialist Party will be contesting one seat in the elections to the Greater London Assembly on Thursday 1 May, the same day as the election for the mayor of London. The seat is Lambeth & Southwark and our candidate will be Danny Lambert. This is the constituency in which our Head Office is situated. Members and sympathisers who wish to help distribute our election leaflets, please contact the Election Dept at 52 Clapham High St, London SW4 7UN or phone 0207 622 3811 or email [spgb@worldsocialism.org](mailto:spgb@worldsocialism.org).

## Labour, Lib-Dem, Tory



**The Socialist Standard examines their case**



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### Tough at the Top?

"A study by the Bow Group, a centre-right think-tank, found that 27 per cent of FTSE 100 chief executives have contracts that continue to pay bonuses if profits rise by as little as 1 per cent above inflation. Nearly one in ten firms will still pay bonuses if profits fail to beat inflation." (*Times*, 4 February)

### Smile, Damn You Smile

"Microsoft is developing Big Brother-style software capable of remotely monitoring a worker's productivity, physical wellbeing and competence. ... The system would allow managers to monitor employees' performance by measuring their heart rate, body temperature, movement, facial expression and blood pressure." (*Times*, 16 January)

### Words Of Wisdom

David Attenborough in an interview said: "Every society that's ever existed has felt it necessary to have creation myths. Why should I believe one? People write to me and say: 'You show us birds and orchids and wonderful, beautiful things - don't you feel you should give credit to He who created those things?' My reply says: what about a parasitic worm that's boring through the eye of a four-year-old child on the bank of an African river? It confuses me that I should believe in a god who cares individually for each and every one of us and could allow that to happen" (*Observer Magazine*, 20 January)

### This is Progress?

"Josette Sheeran, the head of the World Food Programme (WFP) in Rome, said: 'We're seeing more people hungry, and in greater numbers than before. We're seeing many people being priced out of the food market for the first time. We're seeing less crop production in many places; shorter harvest times.' ... According to the UN world food index, prices rose by 40 per cent last year. Ms Sheeran said oil prices were driving up costs because oil was used for planting, fertiliser and delivering food." (*Times*, 13 February)

### Labour's Sorry Record

"Poverty affects 3.8 million children in the UK, making ours one of the worst rates in the industrialised world. Children living in poverty are likely to have lower self-esteem, poorer health, and lower aspirations and educational achievements than their peers. Poverty also shortens lives. A boy in Manchester can expect to live seven years less than a boy in Barnet, North London." (*Times*, 12 February)

### A Brave New World?

"Here's a vision of the not-so-distant future: Microchips with antennas will be embedded in virtually everything you buy, wear, drive and read, allowing retailers and law enforcement to track consumer items — and, by extension, consumers — wherever they go, from a distance. A seamless, global network of electronic 'sniffers' will scan radio tags in myriad public settings, identifying people and their tastes instantly so that customized ads, 'live spam,' may be beamed at them. In 'Smart Homes,' sensors built into walls, floors and appliances will inventory possessions, record eating habits, monitor medicine cabinets — all the while, silently reporting data to marketers eager for a peek into the occupants' private lives." (*Yahoo News*, 26 January)

## Contact Details

### UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

#### London

**Central London branch.** 2nd Weds. 6.30pm. The Shakespeare's Head, 64-68 Kingsway, Holborn. (Nearest tube: Holborn.) Tel: Tristan 0207 6223811  
**Enfield and Haringey branch.** 2nd & 4th Monday. 8pm. Angel Community Centre, Raynham Rd, N18. Corres: 17 Dorset Road, N22 7SL. email: julianvein@blueyonder.co.uk

**South London branch.** 1st Tues. 7.00pm. Head Office. 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN. Tel: 020 7622 3811

**West London branch.** 1st & 3rd Tues. 8pm. Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace (Corner Sutton Court Rd), W4. Corres: 51 Gayford Road, London W12 9BY

**Pimlico.** C. Trinder, 24 Greenwood Ct, 155 Cambridge Street, SW1 4VQ. Tel: 020 7834 8186

#### Midlands

**West Midlands branch.** Meets every two months on a Sunday afternoon (see meetings page for details). Tel: Tony Gluck 01242 235615

#### Northeast

**Northeast branch.** Contact: Brian Barry, 86 Edmond Ct, Ryhope, Sunderland SR2 0DY. Tel: 0191 521 0690. E-mail 3491@bbarry.f2s.com

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**Bolton.** Tel: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589

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**Carlisle.** Robert Whitfield. E-mail: rewcb13@yahoo.co.uk tel: 07906 373975

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**Skipton.** R Cooper, 1 Caxton Garth, Threshfield, Skipton BD23 5EZ. Tel: 01756 752621

#### South/south east/south west

**South West branch.** Meets every two months on a Saturday afternoon (see meetings page for details). Ray Carr, Flat 1, 99 Princess Road, Branksome, Poole BH12 1BQ. Tel: 01202 257556.

**Bristol.** Shane Roberts, 86 High Street, Bristol BS5 6DN. Tel: 0117 9511199

**Canterbury.** Rob Cox, 4 Stanhope Road, Deal, Kent, CT14 6AB

**Luton.** Nick White, 59 Heywood Drive, LU2 7LP

**Redruth.** Harry Sowden, 5 Clarence Villas, Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 1PB. Tel: 01209 219293

#### east anglia

**East Anglia branch** meets every two months on a Saturday afternoon (see meetings page for details). David Porter, Eastholme, Bush Drive, Eccles-on-Sea, NR12 0SF. Tel: 01692 582533. Richard Headcar, 42 Woodcote, Firs Rd, Hethersett, NR9 3JD. Tel: 01603 814343.

Richard Layton, 23 Nottingham Rd, Clacton, CO15 5PG. Tel: 01255 814047.  
**Cambridge.** Andrew Westley, 10 Marksby Close, Duxford, Cambridge CB2 4RS. Tel: 07890343044

#### Northern Ireland

**Newtownabbey:** Nigel McCullough. Tel: 028 90852062

#### Scotland

**Edinburgh branch.** 1st Thur. 8-9pm. The Quaker Hall, Victoria Terrace (above Victoria Street), Edinburgh.

J. Moir. Tel: 0131 440 0995 JIMMY@jmoir29.freereserve.co.uk Branch website: <http://geocities.com/edinburghbranch/>

**Glasgow branch.** 3rd Wednesday of each month at 8pm in Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road, Glasgow. Richard Donnelly, 112 Napiershall Street, Glasgow G20 6HT. Tel: 0141 5794109. E-mail: richard.donnelly1@ntlworld.com

**Ayrshire:** D. Trainer, 21 Manse Street, Salcoats, KA21 5AA. Tel: 01294 469994. E-mail: derricktrainer@freeuk.com

**Dundee.** Ian Ratcliffe, 16 Birkhall Ave, Wormit, Newport-on-Tay, DD6 8PX. Tel: 01328 541643

**West Lothian.** 2nd and 4th Weds in month, 7.30-9.30. Lanthorn Community Centre, Kennilworth Rise, Dedridge, Livingston. Corres: Matt Culbert, 53 Falcon Brae, Ladywell, Livingston, West Lothian, EH5 6UW. Tel: 01506 462359 E-mail: matt@wsmweb.fsnet.co.uk

#### Wales

**Swansea branch.** 2nd Mon, 7.30pm, Unitarian Church, High Street. Corres: Geoffrey Williams, 19 Baptist Well Street, Waun Wen, Swansea SA1 6FB.

Tel: 01792 643624

**Cardiff and District.** John James, 67 Romilly Park Road, Barry CF62 6RR. Tel: 01446 405636

### INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS

#### Africa

**Kenya.** Patrick Ndege, PO Box 56428, Nairobi.

**Swaziland.** Mandla Ntshakala, PO Box 981, Manzini.

**Zambia.** Marxian Education Group, PO Box 22265, Kitwe.

#### Asia

**India.** World Socialist Group, Vill Gobardhanpur. PO Amral, Dist. Bankura, 722122

**Japan.** Michael. Email: worldsocialismjapan@hotmail.com.

#### Europe

**Denmark.** Graham Taylor, Kjaerslund 9, floor 2 (middle), DK-8260 Viby J

**Germany.** Norbert. E-mail: weltsozialismus@gmx.net

**Norway.** Robert Stafford. E-mail: hallblithe@yahoo.com

### COMPANION PARTIES OVERSEAS

**World Socialist Party of Australia.** P. O. Box 1266 North Richmond 3121, Victoria, Australia.. Email: commonownership@yahoo.com.au

**Socialist Party of Canada/Parti Socialiste du Canada.** Box 4280, Victoria B.C. V8X 3X8 Canada. E-mail: SPC@iname.com

**World Socialist Party (New Zealand)** P.O. Box 1929, Auckland, NI, New Zealand.

**World Socialist Party of the United States** P.O. Box 440247, Boston, MA 02144 USA. E-mail: wspboston@covad.net

# To Campaigners for Nuclear Disarmament



*The first ban-the-bomb march from Aldermaston to London took place at Easter 50 years ago. We reprint here a leaflet we put out for the 1961 CND March.*

**W**riting only a few years after the end of the second world war and witnessing on every hand the active preparations for another on an even more gigantic scale, it is not necessary to emphasise that war is literally an issue of life and death for men, women and children in every part of the globe. Nor is it necessary to prove at length that another war may be immeasurably more destructive of life and the means of sustaining life than were the wars from which the human race has suffered already during the present century. Everybody who takes even a casual interest in news of the atom and hydrogen bombs and other weapons of mass destruction of cities and peoples has received some impression of the agonising fate that may be in store for all the centres of civilisation if the Powers again come into armed conflict." (From *Socialist Party and War*, June 1950).

Ten years ago the writer stood on a Socialist Party platform in a North London suburb, flourishing a copy of the "Bulletin of Atomic Scientists." The atomic scientists had written with concern – many with disgust – about the horrible effects of the weapon (conceived in 1942), which in desperate haste, the American Government was developing in an attempt to maintain its atomic supremacy – the "Hydrogen Bomb."

Few stopped to listen. People did not want to hear about nuclear weapons

or war or politics. They had had their fill. The piteous agonies of the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were relatively unknown and their import not understood. Such knowledge tormented only an insignificant few who lacked the resources to make known all the terrors of the past and the perils of the future. Others even more knowledgeable, such as the Labour Cabinet, under Mr Attlee, whose representative was present at the bombing of Nagasaki, quietly arranged the making of a British atomic bomb – thereby smoothing the way for nuclear weapon development under the Conservatives. The so-called Communists who in 1945 had called for further attacks on Japan, were engaged in nullifying the Western monopoly of atomic striking power by a hypocritical "Ban the Bomb" campaign.

Later, in 1954, the tragic incident of the Japanese fishermen aroused the anger of millions in Japan and stirred many thousands in other countries to protest. In Britain information about the nature of atomic weapons was gradually assimilated and after a number of false starts, the National Campaign for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapon Tests came into being. From it, in 1958, sprang the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). Long before the emergence of the anti-nuclear movement, members of the Socialist Party had become aware of the problems associated with nuclear warfare and weapon tests. Did the use

of testing of nuclear weapons make it necessary to modify our political standpoint in any way? Must we deal with the nuclear menace first in order to make the world safe for Socialism? Much discussion ensued and in this article, therefore, we put forward a point of view which is neither a dogmatic response to a new situation nor a hastily conceived compromise designed to gain political support.

As there are still a number of "Campaigners" who are attempting to change Labour Party policy, it may be useful to comment briefly on the Labour Party's actions in the past. In its history it has supported several major wars; it was in office when the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan. It has supported the testing of nuclear weapons and in fact, is committed to the use of hydrogen bombs in an "all-out" war.

Those who support the Labour Party – which is alleged to have been struggling for Socialism and the "Brotherhood of Man," are now reduced after fifty-four years of "Socialist" thinking and re-thinking, to seek CND support on grounds which, were the issues not so tragic, would be laughable. After having played a vital part in the making and using of atomic weapons they have the effrontery to claim a sympathetic hearing from "Campaigners" on the grounds that a minority of the Labour Party are now wholly or partly opposed to nuclear weapons – and this is

supposed to be a "Socialist" Party!

In 1950, the writer recalls asking a Labour Party member how he could reconcile his party's support of atomic weapons with its professed concern for human brotherhood. After a very apologetic defence, his parting words were. "Ah! Wait for the Conference! We'll show the right-wingers!" Every year we have heard the same pathetic tale. Now, when pressure from CND and elsewhere has made an anti-nuclear weapon vote a possibility at the Labour Party Conference, the Parliamentary Labour Party is considering ways to avoid implementing such a decision! It is a tragedy that so many well-meaning people spend their lives attempting to build a more sensible world through the Labour Party. If they pondered deeply they would see that in the early days of this century, when Labour Party supporters chose to disregard the sounder theoretical (and therefore more practical) position of the Socialist Party, the path was taken which eventually led to Labour Party support of the trench massacres, the deliberate saturation bombing of working class dwelling areas, the atomic bombings, nuclear weapons and their testing and other chemical and bacteriological weapons. May we say to those young people who seek to use the Labour Party as an instrument of social change, that the problems which now confront us are, in fact, the result of the allegedly more practical policies of those parties prepared to administer capitalism. It would be quite illogical to assist those who bear a share of the responsibility for a world where our innocent children play in the shadow of deadly rockets, as yet unaware of the insidious strontium in their bones.

Do not fall under the spell of left-wing orators who one minute talk feelingly of a world socialist community and who, in the next breath, admit that the Labour Party is hardly 'socialist'.

Whenever the deeds of the Labour Party give rise to dismay among its active minority, wherever there is the possibility that numbers may break away, there always appears to be on hand, a 'militant' left-wing leader to challenge the leadership, to thunder against capitalism or "the Establishment" and to give fresh hope to the doubtful.

When, however, it is time for voting, it is not unknown for these 'militants' to seek support for the Party whose policy they had bitterly opposed!

We do not question their sincerity. We merely point out that this kind of action is inevitable while these left-wing leaders give their support to parties which are prepared to administer capitalism.

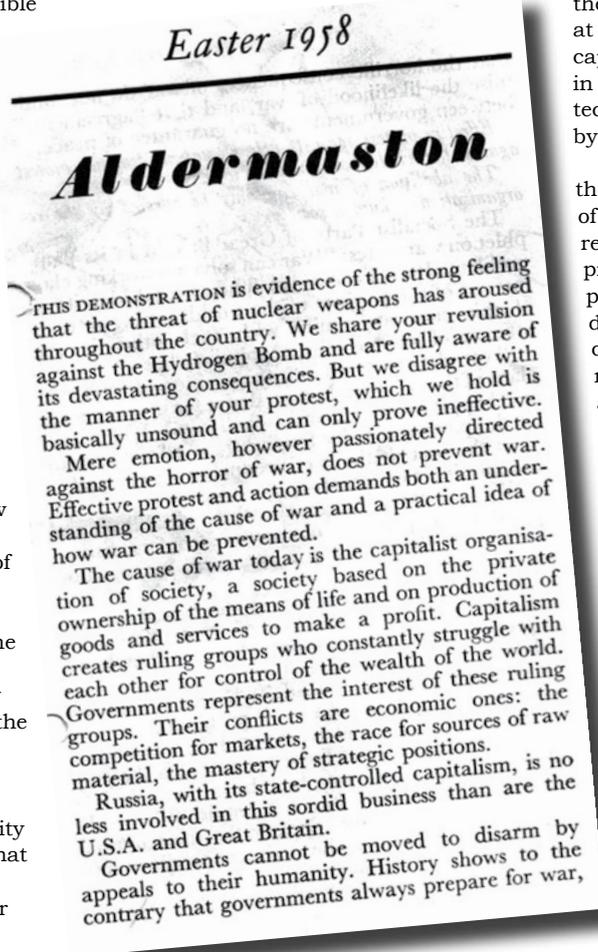
What is required is not a trust in leaders and their promises but an attitude of self-reliance and a determination on the part of ordinary people to understand the nature of world problems.

### **The Communist Party?**

In 1945, two days after the bombing of Hiroshima, the Russian Rulers fearing,

perhaps, a belated American attempt to deprive them of some of the spoils of Yalta, hastened to declare war on Japan. A right to participate in the final share-out of the Far Eastern loot; a desire to safeguard their sphere of influence, these were the real concerns of the Russian Government. No protest at a sickening outrage. No sorrow expressed at the agonies of the Hiroshima victims, the seared, stunned survivors; the radio-active remnants of what had been men, women and little children! So much for the party of Lenin and Stalin in the glorious fight for Peace!

The Russian Government has not hesitated to test high-yield nuclear weapons when it has



### **Socialist Party leaflet distributed at the first Aldermaston March**

considered this necessary, and it has contributed its share of Strontium 90 to the atmosphere. It is obvious that the major H-Bomb Powers have carried out sufficient large-scale nuclear weapon tests for their immediate needs - this is the main reason for the suspension of such tests. It should be noted, however, that in common with the Western Powers, the U.S.S.R., in spite of its propaganda sallies, did not commit itself to unconditional, unilateral cessation of these tests - it reserved the right to resume if it deemed that its security was in jeopardy. Time-honoured diplomatic double-talk!

It must not be thought that Russia comes into conflict with the other powers because of ideological reasons; because its social system is alleged to be "Socialist."

Russia is a capitalist country. All the basic features of capitalism exist there; class monopoly of the means of production, backed up by a powerful state apparatus, the dominance of commodity production and the profit motive, the subjection of the majority to wage-labour, the "anarchy of production" called "state planning;" all are there.

All modern nations have these basic attributes. They may have particular features arising from the different national and economic backgrounds from which capitalism developed in each country. Each emerging capitalist class was born into a certain historical situation. The new industrial capitalists of England in the nineteenth century had the world at their feet; the later arrivals to the capitalist jungle, while having advantages in being able to learn and apply the latest techniques, found themselves surrounded by already entrenched rivals.

It is not what men think or say about themselves that is crucial to the analysis of a social system. It is how they are related to other men about the means of production, what role they play in the productive process, what, in fact, they do. In struggling with the traditional capitalist groups of the world, the top representatives of Russian capitalism, are different in no fundamental way. They are all as helpless to prevent war, and all as ruthless in its prosecution when diplomacy has failed.

### **The Campaign?**

What have we to say about the Campaign itself? To Socialists, to see so many people expressing their displeasure, after a long period of political inactivity, at the stupidity and recklessness of their rulers, was a refreshing change. Discontent, however, if it is not to undergo an eventual decline from determined idealism to a hopeless cynicism, must partake of sound theory. What has held "Campaigners" together, so far, has been a common revulsion against one of the weapons of mass-murder and a belief that even if the movement was divided in its aims and methods, it was the only means by which the semi-apatetic majority of ordinary people, on whom the pro-Bomb parties relied for support, could be shaken from their dangerous lethargy.

When one examines the propositions of the Campaign ("Sanity or Suicide" Page 8), its inadequacies can clearly be seen. CND says that all wars, even if they did not start as nuclear wars, would become nuclear wars, because the losing side would use nuclear weapons. If it accepts that all wars are going to be nuclear wars, then it follows that it should oppose all wars. It does not take up this position, however, at no time has it advocated opposition to conventional programmes.

The fundamental weakness of the Campaign is emphasised in one of its own comments on the subject of nuclear weapons, for it says: "Even if they had been outlawed and stocks destroyed, the

continued on page 19

# War: the socialist attitude

*Since our formation in 1904 our response to the problem of war has clearly distinguished us from other organisations claiming descent from Marx and Engels and the early socialist pioneers.*

We analyse social affairs in *class* terms. We approach problems in the field of economics and politics from a consideration of what we see as being the real interests of the world working class. It is our contention that there are only two classes in present day society. Firstly, the working class, who collectively produce the wealth of society and who, in order to live, have to sell their ability to work for a wage or a salary. Secondly, the capitalist class who accumulate profit through the economic exploitation of the working class.

This situation leads to an inevitable conflict of interests and the generation of social and economic problems that cannot be solved while capitalism of whatever form continues. Commodity production (production of wealth for sale with a view to profit) inevitably brings conflict over access to markets and sources of raw materials, and for the control of trade routes, and for strategic point around the globe. Attempts are made to resolve these conflicts through discussion and diplomacy. Where diplomacy fails there remains the threat of force of arms to get what is wanted. From time to time this clash of interests breaks out in armed conflict. For the Socialist Party “capitalism and war are inseparable. There can be no capitalism without conflicts of economic interest.” ( SPGB: *War and the Working Class*. 1936. p.1)

Within a year of our founding the Party published an article putting forward our view on war. In it the author wrote:

“I do not think it will be questioned by any socialist that it is his duty to oppose the wars of the ruling class of one nation with the ruling class of another, and refuse to participate in them.” (‘The curse of national prestige.’ *Socialist Standard*, August 1905.)

This has been our consistent view ever since. So long as the working class continue to support capitalism so long will its wars, and preparations for war, continue. Before the mass slaughter of the First World War we argued that because wars were the outcome of economic and strategic conflicts between the capitalists of the various nations any attempt to abolish war while those economic conflicts remained was bound to be futile. International meetings passing pious resolutions aimed at achieving “universal disarmament” were doomed to failure. This is what one early member wrote in December 1910 about a pre-World War I peace campaign:

“[That] the ‘anti-war campaign’, as such, is, from the working class standpoint, absurd. Just as the class struggle cannot be abolished save by abolishing classes, so it is impossible for capitalist nations to get rid of the grim spectre of war, for Capitalism presupposes economic

conflicts which must finally be fought out with the aid of the armed forces of the State.” (‘Socialism and the anti-war campaign.’ *Socialist Standard*, December 1910.)



The only solution to war and the myriad other problems that face the workers of the world is to abolish capitalism and replace it with socialism. This involves democratic political action by a majority of the working class who understand the need for change and know how to bring it about.

We do not call for people to love one another (though we are not opposed to that of course) rather we appeal to the workers of this and other countries to recognise their common class interest and to organise consciously and politically to gain the political power necessary to dispossess the owning class – to strip them of their right to own the means of life – and to put in its place a system of common ownership and democratic control of the means of wealth production – socialism.

Socialism will be a classless, propertyless and moneyless world community of production directly for use without the mediation of buying and selling. Nothing else will suffice. Abolition of class ownership will result in the abolition of conflicts of interest both between the owners and the non-owners and also between competing national groups of owners organised politically into armed nation states. We

can conceive of no situation in which we would give our support to either side in any of capitalisms armed struggles.

The role of the Socialist Party in helping bring socialism about is one of agitation and education. We are an instrument to be used by a conscious working class once the need for a revolutionary social change is recognised. Because they don't stand for socialism, we are “hostile to every other Party”, even to those which claim to have socialism as their goal.

Much of our argument with the left-wing revolves around their demands for reforms. Most radical left-wing parties say (or in the case of the Labour Party used to say) that their goal is “socialism”. However they also pursue reforms of capitalism as “stepping stones” to socialism. Any political party doing this soon find themselves saddled with the problems inevitably associated with the running of capitalism.

In an article written in the *Journal of Modern History* on the eve of the Second World War the historian Harry J. Marks dealt with the collapse of the German Social Democratic Party as a revolutionary party in 1914. He encapsulated and highlighted the dangers to a working class movement inherent in the pursuit of reforms. The author wrote that:

“By accepting the policy of the German Government on August 4, 1914, as fundamentally its own, the role of this enormous organisation as an independent factor in world history sank to insignificance and became no more than that of a cog to gear the labour movement into the German war machine.” (Harry J. Marks: ‘Sources of Reformism in the SDP of Germany 1890-1914.’ *Journal of Modern History* XI (1939) p. 334.)

Our hostility therefore is no mere semantic quibble. It goes to the heart of our case against adopting the “something now” approach to problems, including the problem of war. Unlike those on the left who are choosy as to which wars they object to, we in the Socialist Party are against all of capitalism's wars. Nor do we single out one or two aspects of war – atomic weapons, or land mines, or poison gas, or the use of child soldiers – we oppose the system that give rise to these things.

Both the established capitalist class and those intent on joining them by force of arms need these weapons to defend and advance their interests against threats from competing groups of capitalists also armed to the teeth to defend *their* interests. The working class on the other hand have no such interests to defend. The workers *have* no country. What they do have is a common interest in making the world the common heritage of all who live in it.

**GWYNN THOMAS**

# Basic Income: a dangerous reform

*The Green Party's idea of paying everyone a minimum income whether or not they are working might seem attractive, but it won't necessarily leave us better off.*

In 1795 the magistrates of Speenhamland in Berkshire started a system under which farm labourers on poverty wages had their income supplemented from the poor-rates. The result was predictable. Farmers were encouraged to keep, and even to extend, paying low wages. The payment from the poor-rates became a wage subsidy to employers. Today, the Green Party wants to revive this under the name of "Citizen's Income", which they describe as "an automatic, unconditional payment sufficient to cover basic needs of every individual, working or not".

This is more commonly called a "Basic Income". Daniel Raventós, whose study (and advocacy) of the proposal has just been published by Pluto Press, goes into more detail:

"Basic Income is an income paid by the state to each full member or accredited resident of a society, regardless of whether or not he or she wishes to engage in paid employment, or is rich or poor or, in other words, independently of any other sources of income that person might have, and irrespective of cohabitation arrangements in the domestic sphere" (*Basic Income: The Material Conditions of Freedom*).

He lists various things in its favour: that it would abolish poverty, enable us to better balance our lives between voluntary, domestic and paid work, empower women, and "offer workers a resistance fund to maintain strikes that are presently difficult to sustain because of the salary cuts they involve".

Maybe it would do some of these things, but two linked questions arise. Where's the money going to come from, and how likely is it to be introduced in the form its advocates want?

Abolishing means-tested benefits such as income support (in Britain) and paying every citizen a state income equal to the official poverty line (of 60 percent of average after-tax income) wouldn't be cheap. Raventós, basing himself on income tax returns in his native Catalonia, calculates that it could be done by means of a 50 percent flat-rate tax on all incomes. Others have suggested that it might be financed by a wealth tax or by a tax on pollution, but Raventós wants to show that his scheme could be financed merely by redistributing the money the state already collects and spends on family allowances, pensions and means-tested benefits, without any extra taxes. In other words: that the total amount of money paid by the state either as benefits or tax concessions would remain the same, merely distributed differently amongst workers. As we said of the 1943 Beveridge Report that laid the foundations of the post-war "Welfare State" in Britain: it would be "a reorganisation of poverty".

Raventós lists various objections to the Basic Income scheme, basically that it would reduce the incentive to work, an argument he is able to refute; but he misses the main objection that, like the Speenhamland system, it would be a wage subsidy to employers. To understand this, we need to look at the economics of wage labour in some detail.

Labour market forces bring it about that the income of workers is more or less what they need to keep their

working skills up to scratch and to raise a new generation of workers. At one time, in the early days of capitalism, workers' incomes were made up exclusively of what their employer paid them. Since the introduction of pay-as-you-earn income tax and the "Welfare State" matters have become more complicated. The income of many workers is now made up not only of their take-home pay from their employers but also of various payments from the state, mainly family allowances but also tax credits for the worst paid.

If a basic state income of say, £200 a week (or £10,000 a year), was brought in, this would upset the balance: market forces would tend to bring about a new equilibrium, with those workers who currently get no extra income from the state (those without a dependant family) seeing their take-home pay from employers tend to fall by £10,000. Of course it wouldn't be as simple as this since in many cases the extra state payment would be compensating for the abolition of family allowances, but there would in general be a strong downward pressure on wages and salaries.

That there would be a tendency for something like this to happen has been recognised by less naïve advocates of Basic Income than Raventós. C. M. A. Clark, who wrote a study of the effects of the introduction of a partial Basic Income scheme in Ireland (*The Basic Income Guarantee: Ensuring Progress and Prosperity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 2002), admitted this was a possibility. In a previous article in the *American Journal of Economic Issues* in June 1996 he and fellow author Catherine Kavanagh had gone into more detail. They described part of the "conservative case for a Basic Income" as follows:

"By partially separating income from work, the incentive of workers to fight against wage reductions is considerably reduced, thus making labour markets more flexible. This allows wages, and hence labor costs, to adjust more readily to changing economic conditions" (<http://hss.fullerton.edu/sociology/orleans/basic.htm>).

And "the liberal argument against Basic Income" as being that:

"if a Basic Income policy is seen as a substitute for a full employment policy in the traditional Keynesian sense, then it is a major step backward and would harm all workers. The Basic Income would, in effect, subsidize employers, allowing them to lower wages . . .".

Clark and Kavanagh conclude, rather over-optimistically: "Whether a Basic Income policy would weaken or strengthen workers' power in the labor market is a more difficult question to answer. It would depend on the context in which the Basic Income policy was instituted and the support workers already received from the state. The existence of a minimum wage, strong unions, and enforced pro-labor legislation might be essential to preventing the Basic Income from becoming a wage subsidization policy".

Clark and Kavanagh are being over-optimistic because no union can be that strong and because no state could sustain "pro-labor legislation" for any length of time that adversely affected profits.

Unions do have some power, but it is limited to working with favourable labour market forces to get higher wages and better working conditions. When, however, labour market conditions are against them the most they can do is to slow down the worsening of wages and working conditions. If all workers got a basic income from the state of £5000, let alone £10,000, a year, this would change labour market conditions in favour of employers. In pay negotiations they would point to the state payment as evidence that they did not need to pay so much in wages or salaries to maintain their employees' accustomed standard of living. The workers and their unions would realise this and the negotiations would be about what the reduction in wages and salaries should be. If the reduction was less than the Basic Income then the unions would be able to cry victory, but a reduction there would be. It is just inconceivable that a state payment to everybody in work would not adversely affect wages and salaries.

As to "pro-labor legislation", this presumably means that the state should take the side of workers against employers. Many Labour and similar governments have come into office promising to benefit wage and salary earners, and all of them have left office without doing this; most in fact have done the opposite and have ended up restraining wages and cutting state benefits. Why? It is not because they were sell-outs or were not determined or resolute enough. It was because they were attempting the impossible: to make capitalism work in the interest of the wage and salary working class.

Capitalism runs on profits, derived from the unpaid labour of workers, and can only run as a profit-making and

profit-accumulating system in the interest of those who live off profits, i.e., the capitalist class who own the means of production and employ others to operate them. Any government has to accept this and that, if it's not to provoke an artificial economic crisis, it has to give priority to profit-making over "pro-labor" legislation. This is why Labour and similar governments have always failed.

In fact, insofar as Basic Income is seen as a "pro-labor" measure as it is by Raventós, then that is a reason why it is never likely to be introduced, at least not in the form that people like him want. As we saw, Raventós puts forward as an argument for Basic Income that it would "offer workers a resistance fund to maintain strikes that are presently difficult to sustain because of the salary cuts they involve". But can anyone realistically imagine that any government would bring in a measure that would make striking easier for workers? Already, today, there are provisions to cut state benefits paid to strikers. No state is going to shoot itself in the foot by undermining in this way the profitability and competitiveness of enterprises operating from within its borders.

So, if a Basic Income scheme is ever introduced, it's not likely to be more than some limited reform of the tax and benefits system. But even it were to be introduced in full it could turn out to be counter-productive for the working class by leading to an across-the-board decrease in wages.

**ADAM BUICK**



## Cooking the Books 1

### Marx and corals

In his latest book, *Coral, A Pessimist in Paradise*, the biologist and popular science writer Steve Jones attributes to Marx the statement that "we see mighty coral reefs rising from the depth of the ocean into islands and firm land, yet each individual depositor is puny, weak, and contemptible". Marx was something of a polymath, but an expert on corals?

These words do appear in *Capital* – in chapter 13 of Volume I on "Co-operation" – but were not written by Marx. He was quoting a passage from a book by Richard Jones making the point that by working together humans can construct things which they would not otherwise be able to.

The Rev. Richard Jones (1790-1855) was the Rev. Malthus's successor as Professor of Political Economy at the East India College in Haileybury. Marx held Jones in fairly high esteem – a whole chapter of *Theories of Surplus Value* is given over to a discussion of his views – because he did not regard capitalism as an ideal system deduced from assumptions about human nature but as just one historically evolved way of organising the production and distribution of wealth.

But to return to Jones the Biologist. After misattributing the quote to Marx, he continues, believing himself to be summarising Marx's view: "Every atoll proved that collective action, by polyps or by people, was a natural law. Society had been ruined by an altogether artificial medium called cash, which matured into capital and led to exploitation. In an ideal world all would give what they could and get what they needed. In time the state – and money – would lose its *raison d'être* and a global system of mutual aid would begin" (chapter III).

Although Marx did want a society without state or money in which people "would give what they could and get what they needed", he did not base the case for this on what happened

in nature. That was the position set out by the anarcho-communist Peter Kropotkin in his 1902 book *Mutual Aid, A Factor in Evolution*.

Kropotkin's position has an obvious attraction for socialists as it would turn the tables and make socialism natural and capitalism unnatural. His book has always been popular amongst socialists as an answer to the Social Darwinists who argued that Darwin's "struggle for existence" and "survival of the fittest" applied to human society too and that any attempt to limit it would lead to the degeneration of the human race.

Kropotkin sought to counter this argument by bringing forward evidence that the struggle for individual survival was not the only factor in biological evolution but that co-operation and mutual aid both within and between species were too. Kropotkin was a scientist in his own right – he had done some pioneering work on the geography of Siberia – and Jones says his contribution was taken seriously by biologists who called his theory "mutualism" (not to be confused with the market anarchism of that other anarchist Proudhon). It is now called "symbiosis" (literally, living together) and is a recognised fact of nature.

The trouble is that, whereas there is agreement on this fact, there is no agreement on its interpretation. While Kropotkin saw this as an argument for a co-operative, communist society, others have argued that it is not really mutual aid but rather mutual exploitation. As a self-confessed pessimist Jones tends to agree, but he does make the point that the science of biology can't contribute anything to what he calls "philosophy" beyond supplying facts. He's basically right, though we would express it differently: that conclusions about how human society should be organised cannot be derived from the behaviour of other organisms. The Social Darwinists (and their latter-day incarnation, the Sociobiologists) are wrong to try to do this but so, even if unfortunately, are Socialist Darwinists like Kropotkin. Marx was right to steer clear of such arguments and base the case for a stateless, moneyless communist society on an analysis of human society not biology.



# Can the media be made democratic?

*That there was once a press free from commercial or governmental influence is a myth.*

Since the early twentieth century American journalists have been fascinated by the uneasy relationship between democracy and a media industry that has grown immensely powerful and profitable. The opinion that the democratic process has been undermined – epitomised by declining electoral turnout – by an industry more concerned with increasing corporate profits than the meaningful dissemination of information has repeatedly led to demands for media reform.

In the first part of the twentieth century the American writer and journalist Upton Sinclair drew attention to the corrosive influence of advertising that led newspapers to adapt content to suit powerful sponsors and encourage editorial self-censorship. Sinclair's book *The Brass Check* (1919) was a scathing attack on a monopolistic press, in which he said that commercial journalism had become "a class institution serving the rich and spurning the poor," with the task of "hoodwinking of the public and the plunder of labour". Brought in some years after the publication of Sinclair's book, the Federal Communication Act of 1934 was widely seen as the first real attempt to curb media monopoly and reinvigorate the supposedly democratic values embodied in the American Constitution through "public interest, convenience and necessity." But these and later reforms failed to consider one possibility: What would happen if the government ever saw public information as secondary to free market economics? What would happen if the government actually joined forces with the media to communicate a common ideology that devalued "democracy"?

## Media deregulation

According to Bill Moyers, one of America's best known and respected post-war journalists, this is exactly what happened

under the banner of media deregulation. Beginning with Ronald Reagan, deregulation sowed the seeds for a consolidation that eliminated much of the independent media and prompted editorial policy to downgrade the importance of news. But the crowning achievement in the demotion of meaningful news came later with the 1996 Telecommunications Act, which was passed with the support of both political parties. This legislation allowed communications conglomerates and advertisers to join forces to dismantle competition safeguards and devise "new ways of selling things to more people" across the full array of digital and conventional media. Within the media corporations the strategy eliminated remaining divisions between editorial and marketing functions to "create a hybrid known to the new-media hucksters as 'branded entertainment.'" (Bill Moyers, *Journalism and Democracy*, Alternative Radio, 8 November 2003).

Moyers' assessment of the American newspaper industry is equally gloomy. Here, according to a study by the Consumers Federation of America, two-thirds of today's newspaper markets are monopolies. Not satisfied with this stranglehold, the major newspaper chains have combined with the trade group representing almost all of the broadcasting stations to lobby for further autonomy to extend cross-ownership of media, claiming that this will strengthen local journalism. Moyers notes that in typical fashion none of the organisations involved felt it necessary to report this news, remarking, "they rarely report on how they themselves are using their power to further their own interests and power as big business, including their influence over the political process". He draws further evidence from the book, *Leaving Readers Behind: The Age of Corporate Newspapering*, which concludes that the "newspaper industry is in the middle of the most momentous

change in its three hundred year history – a change that is diminishing the amount of real news available to the consumer”.

Looking back over American history, Moyers says that during the War of Independence freedom and freedom of communication were the “birth twins in the future United States”, but that today freedom of communication has become an obstacle to corporate profits and has been abandoned. He says that the media that once championed democracy now works hand in glove with government to intentionally undermine democratic values. He identifies certain developments that have ambushed democracy. These include censorship by omission, government refusal to disclose or debate in public, and the overarching power of media giants that “exalt commercial values at the expense of democratic values” to produce “a major shrinkage of the crucial information that thinking people can act upon”.

But according to Moyers perhaps the most repugnant development is the rise of a “quasi-official partisan press ideologically linked to an authoritarian administration that in turn is the ally and agent of the most powerful interests in the world”. This convergence, he says, “dominates the marketplace of political ideas” promoting the “religious, partisan and corporate right” to engage “sectarian, economic and political forces that aim to transform the egalitarian and democratic ideals embodied in our founding documents”. He goes on to provide examples where investigative newsgathering and scrutiny over government, police and the courts has been abandoned to cut costs, avoid institutional embarrassment and maintain this coalition of vested interests. In the absence of a strong opposition party to challenge this hegemony, the task of defending democracy, he says, falls to a reformed media.

The recurrent theme that runs throughout Moyers’ account of the American media is a yearning back to a romanticised “Golden Age”, when a free and independent press kept its subscribers fully informed with important news that enabled them to act. He points to the newspapers at the time of the American War of Independence and in particular to Tom Paine’s pamphlet *Common Sense* that helped mobilise opposition to the British. Moyers says that as a journalist Paine practised a principle in need of restoration: “an unwavering concentration to reach ordinary people with the message that they mattered and could stand up for themselves.” But was this really a “Golden Age” of democracy or was it, as Sinclair believed, just another instance of the press propagating a class interest under the guise of democracy? Put a different way, has a press free from political or commercial influence ever existed?

### Romanticised past

For many, a belief in the abstract democratic ideal is closely linked to the myths surrounding the origin of the Constitution and the founding of America as a separate country. But far from being a revolutionary event that encouraged a genuine development of democratic values, the War of Independence was a strictly conservative affair. The colonial rebellion was not the work of enraged peasants but of landed gentlemen, who argued their case on the principles of the British constitution by demanding free assembly, trial by jury, and no taxation without representation. Despite pretensions of being “enlightened” – sweeping aside monarchy, aristocracy and the established church – the new republic was never designed to be anything other than a oligarchic state. The political institutions and Constitution mirrored instincts of conservatism and constructed an array of checks and balances motivated by paranoia, suspicion of central government power, and religion that laid the foundation for *laissez faire* economics.

The expulsion of the British eliminated the constraints of the feudal social order substituting in its place the abstract principles that “all men are created equal” and that power is derived from “the will of the people”. The desire to protect and then extend private property rights sanctified by religious superstition led to a type of liberty intended to allow the pursuit of individual aims and wealth unconstrained by government interference. To those who took up the reins of power, government was to be judged not by its ability to promote prosperity but by its capacity to leave people alone to pursue private ends. The principle that personal opportunity should be maximised also struck a chord with Puritanism that saw the acquisition of money as the just result of hard work and “the Lord’s

blessing”.

This moderate civic liberty was deemed more important than any tendency towards democracy, and the architects of the Declaration of Independence – the land and property owners – were quick to construct a system of government based on the division of power that would guard against the “excesses of democracy”. They adopted a definition of “the people” which excluded women, non-landowners and slaves.

While it is undoubtedly true that writers like Tom Paine were influential in pushing the colonial revolt further than originally intended, it is also clear that the real beneficiaries of the break with Britain were the landowners and wealthy traders who were able to expand their own wealth without interference. Although Paine’s call to arms, based on abstractions and ideals, appealed to the ordinary person, the benefits accrued were material and went to the wealthy.

The “democracy” practised today in America is usually held up as the ultimate symbol of “liberty”. But from its outset this system was not envisaged as a condition in which individuals would be kept informed and use the knowledge acquired in the decision making process. On the contrary, this type of “democracy” was constructed as the institutional means to *exclude* the people from this arena by limiting involvement to the periodic election of someone, normally submissive to a political party, who would make decisions for them.

In capitalist society the media has always had a role to play in the promotion in this kind of vision. The production of a successful newspaper, for example, has always meant that journalistic integrity and editorial objectiveness have been subordinate to the institutional requirement of production for profit. From the moment that newspaper became a commodity and subject to advertising patronage and market forces, the genuine dissemination of information was always going to be the first casualty.

### Prevailing ideas

So the media, in America as elsewhere, has a vested interest in driving out all but the most benign opinions and instilling a set of values and a code of behaviour that integrate people into class society. But this does not mean that the media are necessarily part of some conspiracy. While the media’s role is to circulate information presented in the context of society’s prevailing ideas, which have a strong influence over the way people think, this does not mean that the media originate these ideas. In general, the ideas presented by the media are rooted in the social milieu and are traceable, in the main, to the material conditions and the economic relations of society. The class that controls society’s economic structure shapes the institutions that arise in order to manage the economic conditions in its own interests and perpetuate its ascendancy over society. As well as its control over society’s coercive powers and the means by which the wage and salary earners live, this class also exercises persuasive powers, based on legal rights, traditions, customs and, as in America, historical myth that works its way into the consciousness of the working class. In a society divided by class, based on economic interests, the prevailing ideas are therefore a reflection of the needs and aspirations of the dominant class, which explains why many members of the working class often think and act in ways that are in contradiction to their real interests. The media therefore speaks not just for itself but for the whole of the capitalist class.

There are two reasons why Moyers’ belief that a reformed media can resurrect an abstract vision of “democracy” conjured up from a romanticised image of America’s past does not stand up to scrutiny. Firstly, the type of democracy he seems to want has never really existed, and secondly he fails to appreciate that capitalism and genuine democracy can never co-exist. Moyers does not criticise the economic system that compels the media to act in the way it does and does not see that in this system the media cannot operate in any other way – as if in a vacuum, uninfluenced by market forces. Media reform, which tinkers with the detail but leaves the underlying causes firmly entrenched, is, it could even be argued, actually dangerous because it reinforces the belief that capitalism can be made to work in the interests of the working class, when the opposite is patently the case.

**STEVE TROTT**



# LABOUR IN HELL

## MINING SULPHUR IN INDONESIA

*“A man labours in hell.” So opens an article on the work of artist Darren Almond (Guardian Weekly, 25 January), referring to his video about workers who extract sulphur from the Kawah Ijen volcano in eastern Java.*

Imagine the scene. We are standing on the inner slope of the volcano’s crater. Below lies a spectacular and extremely acidic turquoise lake. Hot sulphurous gases (300° C+) rise through an opening in the earth’s crust (a solphatara) and hiss through fissures into the crater. Some of the gas passes through pipes that have been driven into the solphatara. In the pipes it starts to cool and condense. Molten sulphur trickles out of the pipes and solidifies on the slope.

Here the miners, working with hammers and metal poles, break the deposits up into chunks and load them into baskets. Balancing a pair of baskets on a bamboo pole over his shoulder, each man makes his way over the crater rim and down 3 km to the collection point on the road below. The sulphur is then weighed and awaits delivery to the processing plant 19 km away. Near the collection point is a row of shacks, which are used by miners who live too far away to return home every night.

A load is typically 50 – 70 kg., though according to some sources it may be 80 or even 100 kg. The purchasing cooperative pays 350 rupiahs (almost 2p.) a kilo, so for delivering two standard loads a day – some deliver three – a man earns the princely sum of 42,000 rupiahs (£2.31).

### **Worse than tear gas**

Miners have a life expectancy of “not much over 30 years.” Carrying heavy loads up and down steep slopes progressively cripples them. They are constantly exposed to sulphur – both the solid sulphur on the ground and in their baskets and the acidic sulphurous fumes that intermittently waft their way. Their only protection is a rag stuffed in the mouth and the temporary shelter offered by a few big rocks along the path.

Sulphur is a corrosive irritant. It smells of shit – though a chemist would say that shit smells of sulphur. It gets all over the skin and into the eyes, mouth, teeth, nose and lungs, damaging everything it touches. It makes you dizzy, so maintaining your balance is a constant struggle.

**“These jobs are comparable to the worst of the tasks imposed on prisoners in Nazi and Stalinist labour camps.”**

So is breathing. A tourist remarks in a blog that his exposure inside the crater was worse than getting tear-gassed.

Miners’ reports of day-to-day changes in the severity of these effects are used in assessing the risk of an impending eruption.

### **Hell and volcanoes**

Why does the metaphor of hell come so readily to mind when describing this environment? I strongly suspect it is because the very idea of hell has its origin in people’s experience with volcanoes. The bible refers to hell as a place of “fire and brimstone” and it was with a rain of fire and brimstone that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. Brimstone is just an old name for sulphur.

### **A tourist attraction**

The conditions of many jobs are rarely if ever witnessed by outsiders. Many people from various countries, however, have seen the miners of Kawah Ijen at their labour. The volcano is a tourist attraction and tour advertisements mention the miners as part of the exotic scenery of the place. When they get the chance, miners take time off to act as tourist guides: they are hired for 20-30,000 rupiahs (£1.10-£1.65) for half a day.

A fair bit can be learnt from the accounts that tourists place on the internet, though perhaps more about the tourists than the miners. An Australian student has posted an unusually sensitive essay. He recounts his conversation with a young man reluctantly going to the volcano for the first time. He has no choice, he explains. His family is poor and landless. His father, apparently already dead, had also mined sulphur, leaving home well before dawn to walk the almost 20 km. from their village – although sometimes he would rent a place in one of the shacks and stay at the volcano for two weeks at a time. As a child he used to see his father in daylight only on days when he was too sick or tired to work. Now the young man is taking his father’s place.

### **The origin of landlessness**

The student does not think to ask when or how the family had lost its land. Landlessness in Indonesia has its origin in the nineteenth century, under Dutch rule, when the land of farmers who could not pay the land tax was stolen from them and handed to colonists for

plantations of export crops. The tax, of course, was imposed precisely for this purpose. (The British played the same trick in their African colonies.)

When Indonesia gained independence in 1945 the land was not returned but claimed by the state, which took over the role of the plantation owners. That is why the bus to the volcano passes by coffee and mango plantations. Now the government is promoting the cultivation of an oilseed plant called *jatropha* for biofuel exports, despite its toxic nuts and leaves. The landless will labour in hell in order to keep filling the voracious maw of the motor car as the oil runs out.

#### Why not mechanize?

Why, in our high-tech age, does a horrible job like sulphur mining have to be done by such primitive means, by the hard labour of “human donkeys”? Surely it could be mechanized? I see no technical barrier. A socialist society, to the extent that it needed to mine sulphur at all, would certainly mechanize the process.

One possibility that springs to mind is the use of specialized robots. A major advantage of robots is that they can be designed to function in environments hostile to human beings, such as the surface of another planet. And being inside a volcanic crater is rather like being on another planet. In both cases the atmosphere is unsuitable for human respiration. In fact, there are thought to be “solphatara-like environments” on Mars.

Probably sulphur could be extracted from volcanoes perfectly well by much less sophisticated mechanical means. It would suffice to extend the pipes over (or, if necessary, through) the crater wall and empty them into sealed tanks mounted on trucks. Possibly some pumping would be required. The engineers installing the system would be properly equipped with protective clothing and oxygen cylinders.

Such an investment is evidently considered unprofitable. That reflects the low value – close to zero – that the profit system places on the health, welfare and lives of the poor.

#### Technological regression

Despite its enormous and growing potential, the scope for applying technology within capitalism is limited. A key constraint is the availability of cheap labour, which reduces the savings from mechanization below the level of its costs. When operations are transferred to regions where labour costs are lower, the result is likely to be regression to more primitive technologies.

One striking example is shipbreaking – the dismantling of decommissioned vessels to recover the steel. In the 1970s this was a highly mechanized industrial operation carried out at European docks. Ships are now broken at “graveyards” on beaches in countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Turkey, where workers labour with rudimentary tools, wearing little or no protective gear despite exposure to toxic fumes, gas explosions and fires, asbestos dust and falling pieces of metal.

#### The illusion of freedom

In the May *Socialist Standard* I wrote about another group of desperately poor people (men, women and children) engaged in hellish labour – scavenging for saleable items in a radioactive dump in Kyrgyzstan. Clearly it is not an exceptional situation.

For me the most remarkable thing is this. Although these jobs are comparable in horror to the worst of the tasks that were imposed on prisoners in Nazi and Stalinist labour camps, people do them of their own “free” will, without the least hint of physical or legal compulsion. They can leave at any time. No one will stop them. But they don't.

Their freedom, of course, is illusory because the consequence of leaving would be starvation for themselves and their families. And yet the illusion – the economists' fiction of the “free market actor” – suffices to dull perception of their plight. If the miners at work in the crater were prisoners labouring under physical compulsion, the tourists observing them would surely be a little less complacent. Perhaps some human rights organization would even get angry on their behalf.

And so the sulphur miners keep going. Because capitalism denies them all other access to the resources they need to live. And they want to live. Even knowing that they will be dead by their early thirties. Even if their lives seem – to those of us whose choices are less stark – hardly worth living. The survival instinct is strong!

STEFAN

## Who would work for nothing?

“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”. So began the lead article in last month's *Socialist Standard*.

The article was about the transformation which work would undergo in a society where it was no longer a source of income for workers and a source of profit for employers, but a means of producing useful things and providing needed services to improve the quality of our lives. But even under capitalism, these critics might be surprised to learn, many people already perform voluntary work.

According to nfpSynergy, a research group for charities, almost 19 percent of people do unpaid voluntary work in Britain (*Times*, 21 January). This – nearly 1 out of every 5 people – is fairly consistent across all age groups. People volunteer for all sorts of jobs: driving people to and from hospital appointments, helping out in hospital shops, looking after people just out of hospital, teaching school kids to read or do maths, teaching English to immigrants, mentoring new parents, serving in charity shops.

If the critics of socialism were right in their view that it is human nature to be lazy and that nobody would work unless compelled to by economic necessity, this would not happen. Most volunteers under capitalism will be doing so because they want to do something useful and help other people. But even if their motivation was to overcome boredom or to meet and be with other people, that would still be a practical refutation of the view that people are naturally lazy. The reasons why people work, even for an employer, are much more complex than the simplistic assumption that that it's just for the money.

In fact, the government has adopted a policy of actively encouraging “volunteering” as it is called, as a means of saving money on providing certain services. In 2001 Gordon Brown, then the Chancellor of the Exchequer, launched an initiative to encourage more over-55s to volunteer. As it happens, according to nfpSynergy, this proved to be a bit of a flop. But 16 percent of the 55-64 age group – nearly 1 in 6 – volunteering in 2007 is still fairly impressive. It is certainly enough to refute the view that, if the whip of economic deprivation was removed, nobody would do any work.

But capitalism distorts everything, even the readiness of people to work for no monetary reward. A whole paid profession has grown up – for which an organisation like nfpSynergy provides reports – of people employed to motivate and organise volunteers. And a large proportion of volunteers are engaged in fundraising for charities, a pretty useless activity in itself only necessary under capitalism even if done on an unpaid basis.

The widespread existence of volunteering shows that people are prepared to work for other reasons than individual economic necessity. Of course, as in any form of human society, in socialist society too arrangements will have to be made to provide what its members need to live. *That* will still be a necessity, but that does not mean that these arrangements cannot be based on people volunteering to work, for all sorts of reasons (pleasure, social recognition, wish to do something useful, social contact, even a sense of duty). Socialism could work without economic coercion.



Cooking  
the  
Books 2

# Nationalism and culture

*Nationalism is a perversion of a shared identity in the interest of some local elite.*

**H**ome – where the heart is; the place with overtones of permanence, belonging, security, comfort, childhood memories, bonds between people, familiarity with how things are done, habits and customs taken for granted. People go home, go back to family, village, mountains woods, familiar streets, smells, sounds, to the things that framed them and in doing so strengthen the impressions of who they are and what they stand for. Different worldwide communities share a culture of ‘going home’ for high days and holidays, religious festivals or annual visits. Airports, seaports, train and bus stations are crowded at certain times with passengers loaded with their symbols of how good it will be to be together again. Home is where differences and similarities are known; not automatically accepted, respected or approved but understood without explanation; the background culture, the very fabric of the culture being so second nature that words aren’t necessary to express fundamental emotions.

For millions living in exile with only memories of home, painful memories of seeing family members taken away, tortured, killed, for children born in refugee camps and now old enough to be parents themselves in the same camps, never having seen anything of their homeland, home conjures up images of lost and stolen lives, physical pain and deep emotional scars. Traditions and places only heard of now and little expectation of ever being able to reclaim them. In these situations home for the child is not the home of the parent. However hard the parent tries, however passionate their ties to their original life, the child’s impressions can only be second hand, severely lacking in emotional sustenance, expectations manufactured out of hope. For migrants, both forced and voluntary, ‘home’ may be different for parents and children. Having emigrated or relocated internally the parents’ notions of home are ‘there’ but for the children born in a new place it is ‘here’. Which team shall they support? Where shall their allegiance lie?

In a broader context home may be perceived as a wider geographical area, a country, a homeland standing for something more than a family’s local community. The ‘one-world’ home, in common to all of the human species, has 200 or so artificially created entities called ‘nations’, almost all armed and ready to arrest or attack anyone who crosses a boundary without permission, the same boundary showing little or no obstacle to trade or capital or wealth. What is it a nation offers its individual inhabitants and what is their offering to it? What do they require from their country and it from them? The country is a geographical, physical place; large, small, populous or sparse, barren or lush, mountainous, coastal, frozen, earthquake-prone, temperate, fertile or harsh, requiring nurture, husbandry, protection. Physically it can offer minerals and crops depending on its situation and in proportion to the care given it. The shared identity of the inhabitants of the nation will be as has developed over generations – history, customs, religion, community relations, occupations, way of thinking – something impossible to enforce as empire builders and nation creators have been reluctant to accept. A shared identity with universal, mutual respect and acceptance cannot be enforced. It is surely the shared identity, that elusive quality, love of one’s birthplace, hopes, dreams, aspirations, that people feel when they talk of ‘their country’, the tangible and intangible connections.

Mark Twain said that the country is the real thing to be watched over, cared for, that the institutions, the government are extraneous. Confusion of the country with its institutions brings the problems of nationalism and patriotism, “my country, right or wrong”. One of the (ill)-effects of nationalist thinking is a loss of sense of proportion as in the justification of the invasions responsible for the killing of tens of thousands in Afghanistan and Iraq because around 3,000 people died in U.S. on 9/11/2001. Fighting for a country, dying for what? – the pursuit of happiness?, brings grief and despair to both sides. One nation’s moral purpose, promoting democracy, saving lives,

eliminating threats, is recognised by another nation merely as expansionism, access to vital resources, a way of diverting attention from domestic issues. One side’s vision of globalisation for humanity’s sake is felt as rape, plunder and aggressive war by the other. Nationalism, whilst a powerful tool of oppression, was created in part as a defence against imperialism and colonialism, against dominance from outside and in fear of being denied the rights of self-determination. It manifests itself like a sophisticated tribalism, with pride, tradition, attitudes of superiority, patriotism, national security, enemies real and imagined, flag-draped buildings, glorification of all things military and biased history tying populations into misconceptions of themselves and others.

Xenophobia becomes a useful ally in promoting nationalism. In the early 1700s Jonathan Swift recommended it in “The Examiner” thus – “the first principle of patriotism is to resent foreigners.” This method, of setting one section of population against another, has been used ultra-successfully all around the world – so successfully that great swathes of people can now rouse themselves, with no apparent external cue, against the newest threat, the most recent immigrant group, asylum seekers, anyone who looks or sounds like they may be from a group that’s not their own. In one part of the world Arab look-alikes are held to be suspicious – in another an American accent is not welcome. Groups engineered to see themselves in opposition to others, in manufactured fear. Or fear of fear. And those who dare question the status quo become unpatriotic internal defectors. Enemies are required by the state elites. Enemies within and without, social, cultural, economic enemies to keep the population vigilant against all possible threats, to keep them fully occupied, suspicious of each other, divided, protecting the national interest against any wayward individual or group – including themselves.

Under constant construction are barriers of one sort or another, the US/Mexico wall mostly through desert where hundreds die every year seeking a better life but where the wealthy aren’t hunted by vigilantes; the Israeli/Palestinian wall and multiple check-points favouring one group and harassing and humiliating the other; the entry to countries at airports, ports and road crossings. Stand in line, don’t step over this line. For some apply weeks in advance for a visa – or just for an interview to seek permission to apply for a visa – the rich may pass, for the poor it’s a lottery.

Within our communities are guarded apartment blocks, electronically monitored residential enclaves, embassies on distant, secure sites, schools with guards and alarms, tourist sites with armed guard protection, 5 star hotels with walled-in grounds denying visitors the view to the local residents in their shanty towns on the other side of the wall, living in the seeping filth from the hotel sewage system.

Chop up society into more and more pieces, more separate entities, create more divisions, more fears and suspicions and when the globe is totally criss-crossed with walls, fences, barricades and border posts shall we allow ourselves to become so paranoid, afraid and suspicious of each other that we finally close the door to our minds? What hope for humanity when imaginations are so closed to the others’ humanity that they can’t even see, aren’t even aware of, the physical barriers all around them? Ill-considered rhetoric needs to be confronted, contested at any and every opportunity. Self-replicating, regurgitated mantras built on lies, fears and hatred need overturning without hesitation.

The frontierless world begins with frontierless minds, the challenge is to dismantle the barriers which deafen, blindfold, shackle and dehumanise us. A mind without barriers can step over any line, has endless possibilities, unlimited potential, can acknowledge and appreciate the diversity and congruent value of humankind. The frontierless mind can value the vision in which all have their own, inalienable home.

**JANET SURMAN**

**From page 10**

knowledge would be there in the heads of the scientists and they'd be made again." In other words, even if the Campaign achieved its aim it would soon have to start all over again . . . and again! If, as it suggests, however, society would not survive another war, it would be wiser to take sound political action rather than wait to see the awful results of an admittedly futile policy.

Some "Campaigners," while agreeing that capitalism is the cause of war in the modern world, maintain that although a new social organisation may be necessary, a nuclear war would prevent the establishment of this, perhaps for all time, and therefore the anti-nuclear movement should be given priority over Socialism. This argument is logically unsound; it assumes that which has yet to be demonstrated. It presupposes that the campaign will be able to prevent a nuclear war occurring. For the Campaign to "succeed" it must have a majority of people who are opposed unconditionally to nuclear weapons, in the major countries of the world. These majorities must be prepared to oppose their own governments, to put aside all nationalistic or racial feeling, and be immune to all attempts of their rulers to influence them during periods of international crisis and tension. Is it possible that such international solidarity could be achieved by a movement which is composed of so many fundamentally diverse elements and which lacks any clear conception of an alternative to our inhuman social system? Only a revolutionary Socialist consciousness could ensure such a united unshakeable attitude and in that event the question of opposition to nuclear weapons alone would be redundant.

Some members of CND are conscious of its lack of a positive social policy and they have devoted much effort to examining the causes of war and other current social problems. It does not seem, however, that the depth and value of the genuine Marxist analysis of society have yet been understood. The leaders of the Campaign still have many illusions about the effectiveness of the United Nations Organisation as an instrument for peace, although they are not unmindful of the economic and political pressures which can be brought to bear on it by the two great power blocs. Sincere attempts to initiate a serious discussion within their movement seldom go beyond a humane liberalism; even the contributions of its associates in the New Left movement are devoid of any ideas radically different from their political predecessors of past decades.

**The Vote**

It is worth recalling that, during the last General Election, the CND was reluctant to demand of its members that they should abstain from supporting candidates who were not unconditionally opposed to all aspects of nuclear weapon policy.

The S.P.G.B. is opposed to war, and is opposed unconditionally to all weapon tests of any kind by any government. We do not seek support at election times on specific issues other than that of Socialism in the sense that we mean, i.e. a world-wide system without frontiers, where the means of production and distribution are held in common and production is carried on solely in order to meet human needs.

In our election literature we write to ensure, as far as possible, that only people who agree with our fundamental position will vote for our candidates. No advantage can ever accrue to a genuine socialist party from vote catching.

Members of the S.P.G.B. vote only for S.P.G.B. candidates or, where there are none, they abstain or spoil their voting papers. Our view is that there is no way out of the contemporary dilemma other than by the building of a new kind of society.

Conditions favoured the rapid growth of the CND. Who could foresee the results of active, determined, knowledgeable support of genuine socialist ideals, by those who have become disenchanted with the political parties and groups that sought to lead them?

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### Anarchists against democracy

***Anarchy Alive! Anti-Authoritarian Politics from Practice to Theory.* By Uri Gordon. Pluto Press**

There are many currents of anarchism; some, often called anarcho-communist, hold political ideas not so different from our own. The course of the twentieth century, however, saw these currents fade, and by far the most common 'anarchist' today is the individualist or libertarian.

Because they start from the premise that individuals exist independently of society and that the freedom of the individual ego is the most important thing in the world, these anarchists have always had a problem with democracy. They have never been able to see why anybody should be bound by a majority decision; the individual must be free to ignore or even defy such a decision if he or she wants to, otherwise they would be being oppressed. That would be "the tyranny of the majority". Some anarchists have been able to overcome this prejudice and try to practise democratic forms of organisation: but not Gordon, who launches a head-on attack on the whole concept of democratic control and accountability.

"Democratic discourse assumes without exception that the political process results, at some point, in collectively binding decisions. That these decisions can be the result of free and open debate by all those affected does not change the fact that the outcome is seen to have a mandatory nature. Saying that something is collectively binding makes no sense if each person is to make up their own mind over whether they are bound by it. Binding means enforceable, and enforceability is a background assumption of democracy. But the outcomes of anarchist process are inherently impossible to enforce. That is why the process is not 'democratic' at all, since in democracy the point of equal participation in determining decisions is that this is what legitimates these decisions' subsequent enforcement – or simply sweetens the pill. Anarchism, then, represents not the most radical form of democracy, but an altogether different paradigm of collective action".

Socialism, on the other hand, does represent the most radical form of democracy. The socialist justification for accepting majority decision-making is that people are not isolated individuals but only exist in and through society, and that when there is a genuine community (either society as a whole or some collectivity within society) the best method of deciding what it should do, on matters of common interest to it as a community, is by a vote of its members after a full and free discussion. Of course the field of community activity has its limits and some decisions should be left to the individual (what to wear and eat, for instance), but we are talking about matters which concern the community as a community with a common interest.

Capitalism resolves the problem by leaving common goods (basically, the means of production) in minority hands, so there is

no popular debate about their use; socialism holds these goods in common, under democratic control; the anarchist trend is to minimise these common goods by wanting them small scale and being anti-technology, which as we can now see is more to do with a failure to resolve the democratic issue than a particular dislike of technology per se. Why do these anarchists like laptops but hate computer factories? The answer is a dislike of democracy.

Gordon's book is an attempt to give some theoretical coherence to the tactics and ideas of the anti-authority wing of the amorphous anti-capitalist and anti-globalisation movement. He openly admits they do not function democratically and is proud of it. They come together loosely – organise wouldn't be the right word – in networks which do hold meetings with each other from time to time to discuss some activity. But those attending are not mandated delegates from their group, and no group is bound by any decision that might be reached; they are free to take it or leave it. Some do, some don't. At demonstrations some will give out leaflets to the general public arguing a case, others will throw stones at the police. Hence the "pluralism" which Gordon celebrates but which is really a cop-out

Gordon goes further and argues that no individual anarchist or group of anarchists should be held accountable to anyone for what they do; they are quite free to take any action they like and that is how it should be. In answer to Jo Freeman's important 1970 pamphlet *The Tyranny of Structurelessness* in which she argued that the absence of formal, democratic structures leads to domination by informal elites, Gordon says "Freeman's proposals run against the grain of anarchist priorities". He sees nothing wrong with some informal group of anarchists taking the initiative, it being up to others to decide whether or not to go along with it. The latter seem suspiciously like followers to us but in Gordon's eyes they are merely showing "solidarity" with the unaccountable group. He doesn't seem to realise that the same might be said of those who vote for some capitalist politician or party.

Gordon also discusses other matters such as the attitude of anarchists towards violence, technology and nationalism, which are just as confused – or "pluralist" – as over decision-making. But his book is well-written and can be read on a know-your-opponent basis.

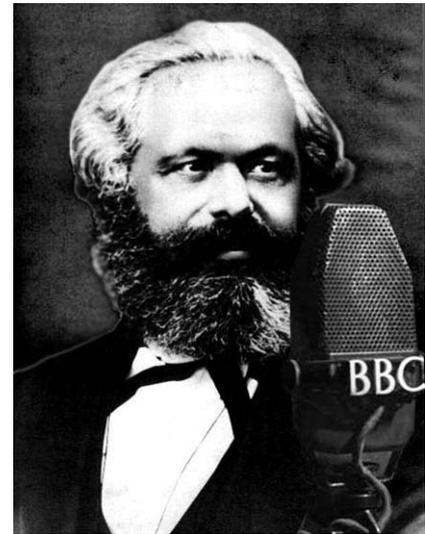
**ALB**

### Marx and the BBC

***A Socialist Critique of the BBC, Albert Einstein, Amartya Sen and Muhammed Yunus.* By Binay Sarkar, Avenel Press, 2007. 80 Rupees**

Don't be put off by the title; when you read it – as you should – it all makes sense. In 1999 Karl Marx was voted the "Greatest Thinker of the Millennium" in a BBC online poll. Then in 2005 he was voted the "Greatest Philosopher" in a BBC poll. And yet the BBC has always had a problem in

dealing with such a great thinker and philosopher, perhaps because he didn't win a Nobel Prize. In the philosopher contest they invited Francis Wheen on to a BBC radio programme to explain Marx's theories but he said they were a form of economic determinism, in that economic relations



determined all other features of society, including ideas.

It's a popular misinterpretation, one which Albert Einstein didn't repeat when he declared to the world that he was a socialist in an article entitled *Why Socialism?* in 1949 (available online at [www.monthlyreview.org/598einst.htm](http://www.monthlyreview.org/598einst.htm)). Einstein's analysis of capitalism is still broadly acceptable today even if his conception of socialism is not, being essentially a form of state capitalism. Amartya Sen, a professional economist, also has a state capitalist view of socialism but his understanding of present-day capitalism looks muddled when compared with the analysis of the Nobel Prize-winning physicist Einstein.

Sen won the 1998 "Bank of Sweden Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel" (not to be confused with the Nobel Prize, which is awarded by the Nobel Foundation) for his contribution to "welfare economics." Sen correctly saw that famines were caused by poverty and not an inability to feed starving people. However, he put forward a set of "market entitlements" which were meant to combat poverty; but as this left the class monopoly of the means of life untouched it should not be surprising that this could not reduce poverty or famines.

Binay Sarkar exposes these and other reformist illusions, along with Muhammed Yunus's plans for "Banking for Peace." Yunus was awarded the 2006 "Nobel Peace Prize" (given by the Norwegian parliament, not the Nobel Foundation) for his "commitment to the Grameen cause." This envisaged fighting poverty by lending money, mainly to women, to facilitate self-employment projects and promote women empowerment. But as Adam Buick points out in his Introduction to this book, banking "is an integral part of the capitalist system of production for profit which is the cause of modern wars." Despite the excessive use of quotations, this book deserves to be in every socialist's collection.

**LEW**

## Guys and Toys

**The Real Toy Story.** By Eric Clark.  
**Black Swan. £8.99.**

It is probably not very surprising to learn that the toy industry is very competitive, is driven by marketing considerations and is threatened by children's growing interest in computers. However, Eric Clark does add some interesting further considerations.

The US toy and doll industry is a \$22 billion business and is by far the world's largest. Two big manufacturing companies (Mattel and Hasbro) and three big retailers dominate the industry, independent manufacturers and toyshops having mostly gone bankrupt or been taken over. The big retailers include Toys R Us and Wal-Mart, the supermarket chain that sells masses of toys as a way of getting kids and their parents inside the shops. Manufacturers are desperate for Toys R Us to survive, since without it Wal-Mart would be so powerful it would drive down even further the prices it paid to the toy companies.

Toys and dolls are also used to entice families into fast-food restaurants; McDon-



*Bare-faced competition*

ald's is now the world's biggest distributor of toys. Girls are apparently less keen on fast food than boys, hence the emphasis on toys aimed at girls being given out with meals for kids.

Toys are relatively resistant to ups and downs in the economy, as parents are reluctant to cut back on buying for their children. A rising divorce rate helps sales too, as both parents will be buying separately. Yet the toy industry has one great fear: KGOY, kids getting older younger and so losing interest in toys. This has been the case, for instance, with Barbie, the doll that now falls out of favour by the age of six or seven. A rival, Bratz, is aimed at pre-teens and features ever-skimpier clothes. As Clark says, this 'is all part of the sexualizing of younger target groups for marketing reasons'.

Games are mostly made in the US and Europe, since their manufacture is highly automated. But toy production overwhelmingly takes place in China. This is partly

because labour power there is cheap, of course: in the case of one electric toy that retailed in the US at \$45, just 81 cents were paid in direct labour costs. But it also means that the suppliers, not the US-based toy companies, have to undertake the investment in factories and equipment and bear the risk of idle capacity at quiet periods. All this has backfired recently, however, with reports of toys made in China being dangerous and having to be removed from retail shelves.

Clark also observes that toys nowadays tend to 'do everything' and leave less and less to the child's imagination and creativity. Under capitalism the innocence of childhood takes second place to the demands of marketing and profit-making.

**PB**

## Peasant revolt

**Symond Newell and Kett's Rebellion.**  
By Peter E Newell. Past Tense (c/o  
56a Info Shop, 56 Crompton Street,  
London, SE17). 2007.

Mostly family history is a rather tedious collection of meaningless names and dates, occasionally however genealogical research can provide one with a true insight, a personal link to historical events, thus demonstrating the reality of what would otherwise be just a story. Thus it is with Peter Newell's excellently researched pamphlet. The essentially economic causes, the rather alarming course of events in and around what was then England's second city, Norwich, and outcome (none too good) of this peasants' rebellion are clearly illustrated. All in all this is an interesting and informative account of a little known incident in English history.

**KAZ**

**2007 SOCIALIST STANDARD INDEX**  
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## Meetings

### East Anglia

Saturday 15 March, 12 noon to 4pm. All welcome.

12 noon: informal chat/branch business.  
2pm to 4pm: Discussion of Conference Agenda and future branch activity.  
The Conservatory, backroom, Rosary Tavern, Rosary Rd, Norwich.

### Manchester

Monday 31 March, 8.30 pm  
'Discussion on Developments in China'  
Unicorn, Church Street, City Centre

## Annual Conference

Socialist Party Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, London SW4 (nearest tube: Clapham North).

Friday 21 March 10:30–17:30.

Saturday 22 March 11:00–16:30.

On Sunday 23 March there will be a guided walking tour of Marx in Soho and Fitzrovia (meet Goodge Street Underground Station 2pm)

## Central London Dayschool

Saturday 5 April, 1pm to 5pm  
POLES APART, CLIMATE CHANGE, CAPITALISM OR SOCIALISM?  
Speakers: Glen Morriss (Artic Voice), Brian Gardner (Socialist Party)  
Small Hall, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1 (nearest tube: Holborn).

## Manchester Branch School

Saturday 19 April, 1pm  
The Sick Society  
Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, City Centre  
(More details in next month's issue)

**AND on the eighth day God created Summer School**  
18<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> July 2008  
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## The Uses of Monarchy



The present Royal Family comes as close as any capitalist politician could desire to the modern monarchical ideal. No interference in politics, but a worthy interest in science; admirably suited to gather prestige abroad; most of all, a continual and absorbing attraction to the working class. There have been hints recently that the publicity has been overdone, that there have been too many chambermaids' reminiscences and news items like the *Sunday Pictorial's* announcement that the Queen's bust-line had improved to maintain the essential dignity of royalty. Nevertheless, the Crown today as never before embodies the national ideals—the ideals, that is, of the national ruling class.

But does monarchy serve any interest for ordinary people, beyond giving a holiday and a pageant now and then? It may be said that if it does them no good, it does them no harm either. If it were true that to fill people's heads with nonsense did no harm, that might be so; and most of it is nonsense. There is no reason for thinking that the Queen and her husband are

not pleasant, decent people. If things were otherwise, however, the truth is that they would still be presented as paragons. Some monarchs have been cruel, irresponsible and contemptibly low, but their subjects have still been asked for reverence. Within a week of Edward VIII's abdication his shortcomings were common knowledge, and Sir Charles Petrie (in the book already quoted) hinted at a strain of abnormality in Edward from the Hanover ancestry; *would* those things have been said if Edward had remained the King?

It is not the monarch that is at fault in all this, but the social system which needs a shining symbol; where there is no monarch, something else has to be held up to dazzle the dispossessed. The man with the flag and the girl admiring the pictures in her magazine have the light full in their eyes just now—but they need only look away for a moment to see who holds it up, and why.

(From front page article by Robert Coster, *Socialist Standard*, March 1958)

## SOCIALISM OR YOUR MONEY BACK

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## Declaration of Principles

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

### Object

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

### Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



# Flint's Hard Line

"She prefers to ignore the real complications hampering so many people when they must face the need to survive through employment"

Anyone with a surname like hers will need to become insensitive to pedestrian jokes about it so we shall not risk adding to Caroline Flint's irritation with feeble cracks about her being hard and unyielding or liable to strike sparks to light your fag. In any case it is clear that her confidence is more than enough to brush off such attempts at humour; for example on a recent episode of *The Politics Show* she showed herself to be a match for the suffocating conceit of Andrew Neill, persisting in making her point – albeit a typically weary New Labour one – in spite of the presenter's contemptuous interruptions. Obviously, this Blair Babe will not easily be shaken off her ascent of the Greasy Pole. So it was significant that, as the newly-promoted Minister of State for Housing and Planning she should choose to make her first serious bid for self-publicity with a proposal that unemployed council house tenants who fail to display the appropriate energy in looking for work should risk eviction. This was serious stuff, a challenge to the crustier of Labour's dogmatists.

## Housing

In any effective sense, council housing originated just after the 1914/18 War, when councils were able to build on a large scale by access to government subsidies. Massive slum clearance was encouraged by the 1930 Housing Act and the housing shortage after the Second World War saw the peak of council building, including huge inner-city estates some of which have acquired such grim reputations. Flint acknowledged that her speech was likely to stimulate a "strong debate". That should be a warning to us all for in the mouths of New Labour leaders "debate" does not mean a free discussion culminating in a popular, constructive conclusion. Rather it serves notice that, to keep favour with as many voters as possible, there will be an enforced policy change emphatic enough to amount to a denial of what once stood as the party's inviolable, defining principles. Council housing was originally designed to provide homes built to standards way above those of profit-hungry private contractors to be available at rents, set by the democratically elected council, affordable by the ordinary, working people in their area. This article of faith for Labour supporters encouraged numerous architects' fantasies of sensitively designed estates where the lucky inhabitants could take their ease in safely pedestrianised areas beneath lush green trees. For the tenants an estate address was not supposed to act as a status symbol; but more a badge of communal security.

## Unemployment

As she is the Minister for Housing, it has to be assumed that Flint is aware of councils' statutory duty to provide for homeless people (although the exact definition of "homeless" can vary from one council to another and from time to time). In fact this legal obligation has caused families and individuals with what are known as "multiple problems" – mental and physical illness, addictive personalities, a history of institutional care – being placed by councils in their own, more easily available, accommodation, thus creating the dreaded "sink estates". It is common for unemployment to be a contributory symptom of those other problems, which may be behind Flint's sneer at the "no one works around here" culture which she said takes a grip on some communities. The most casual of visits to some estates can impress with the aimless apathy there, too often taken out in assaults on the fabric of the area. In one such high-rise hell in West London people hang dazedly around as the entrails of telephone junction boxes lie strewn across the pavement. A tenant who had just emerged from a long prison sentence was welcomed home by a TV set aimed at him from an upper level balcony (it missed – he later beat up the person responsible).

Such places have a stigma of their own, often originating in the very sense of a supportive community which the estate pattern of living was supposed to encourage. A recent letter in the *Guardian* recalled that when the writer first moved to York she was advised that to try for a job with her address on the Tang Hall estate was to ensure that her application would be ignored; much more hopeful to say she lived in Heworth, which had a happier reputation.

## Contracts

Flint suggests that this can be dealt with by making new council tenants sign a "commitment contract" to seek and participate in skills training programmes with a view to employment. She did not say whether the opposite process would apply – whether anyone who had demonstrated their commitment by training and getting a job would then be entitled to council housing. She prefers to ignore the real complications hampering so many people when they must face the need to survive through employment. Her argument was effectively exposed by Adam Sampson, chief executive of Shelter:

"The government wants to return Britain's unemployed to the workhouse by throwing them onto the streets. What is being proposed would destroy families and communities and add to the thousands who are already homeless."

In many cases a worker who is unemployed, untrained and aimless, finds their situation complicated by their making unwise life choices. Flint herself should be aware of this and should

take it into account when she is ranting about the unemployed and the homeless. When she was 23, a trainee manager at the Greater London Council who had been through college where, like so many other prospective Labour ministers, she smoked cannabis, she met a man while on holiday in Tunisia. Perhaps it was his commitment to training and employment, and that of his family, which impressed her; his father was Tunisia's Attorney General and he himself was a high earning stock market dealer. At any rate, she said he swept her off her feet; two children were born to them but the man's family disapproved and eventually the couple married hastily in London where the reality of family life in poverty confronted them and essentially destroyed their relationship. Alleging that he had two convictions for violence, one of them against the police, Flint obtained a Restraining Order against him and soon afterwards he was arrested and deported on the grounds that he had no permanent home in this country. A year later they were divorced, leaving Flint to brush off the experience as an event which "unfortunately didn't work out".

## Blears

In any case the episode did not hamper her career, which took her through jobs in local government and the GMB trade union until she was elected for Don Valley in the Labour landslide of 1997. In the Commons she voted as the whips required on matters such as Trident renewal, ID cards, the war in Iraq, justifying Andrew Roth's assessment of her in the *Guardian* as a "loyal Blairite with a soft line in stooge questions" – which shows just how hard an operator she really is. She held a series of minor jobs until in the reshuffle of January this year she was appointed to Housing and Planning, a job which entails her attending the Cabinet. She may prefer to forget her victory in a 2007 poll to find "The Sexiest Female Politician" as well as her experience as Campaign manager for Hazel Blears's attempts to become the Deputy Leader, in which Blears came sixth. Unless she takes consolation from the fact that this may have opened the way for her own attempt at a top job some time in the future.

IVAN





# Voice from the Back

## The Obscenity Of Capitalism

The columnist Richard Morrison, in an article mocking the ridiculous prices paid for modern art, refers to Don Thompson's book *The \$12 Million Stuffed Shark* and brings to notice the obscene wealth enjoyed by a handful of billionaires. Remember we are dealing with the social system of capitalism where many exist on a \$1 a day. "He looks at the buyers for 'trophy' art; billionaires such as the American asset manager Steve Cohen, who bought the shark with what, for him, was loose change (it would have taken him five days, Thompson estimates, to have earned the \$12 million price tag)." (*Times*, 16 January) Overlooking the term "earned", we are talking about someone whose income is over 2 million times that of another. Doesn't capitalism make you sick?

## Not So Primitive

Daniel Everett once was a missionary in Brazil dealing with so-called primitive tribes, but his experience of the Piraha people made him give up that calling to become a linguist. When asked how he had changed his views he replied: "They lived so well without religion and they were so happy. Also they did not believe what I was saying because I did not have any evidence for it, and that made me think. They would try so hard to understand what I was saying, but it was utterly irrelevant to them. I began to think: what am I doing here, giving them these 2000-year old concepts when everything of value I can think of to communicate to them they already have?..." (*New Scientist*, 19 January)

## Toothless Watchdog

The sole purpose of capitalist society

is to make profits, so we can imagine the following report will come as no surprise to anyone who knows anything about how it operates. "The government will be publicly castigated this week over its failure to help poor people – by the watchdog that ministers set up to monitor fuel poverty. Ofgem, the energy regulator, will also be criticised for not stopping energy companies from making excessive profits at the expense of consumers. Peter Lehmann, chairman of the Fuel Poverty Advisory Group,

of their superior intellect. That seems invalid thinking when we see how much the extremely rich will pay for a stupid pointless motor car licence plate. "But nowhere is the craze for a unique plate more intense than in the United Arab Emirates, the oil-rich Persian Gulf nation that holds the world record for the six most expensive plates. Here, it's all about how low you can go -- with people battling it out at auctions to win the chance to show off license plates with the lowest digit. The numbers "5" and



"7" have already been snapped up, sold for 25 million dirhams (\$6.75 million) and 11 million dirhams (\$2.97 million) respectively." (*CNN.Com*, 5 February) By the way kids are dying from lack of food and clean water, but so what, look at my license plate. No wonder we are socialists. Why aren't you?

## Transcendental Materialism

The death of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi led to many newspapers rehashing the stories about the Beatles contact with his Transcendental Meditation, but it has transpired that his TM could have more properly stood for Transcendental Materialism. It seemed the great man had sited his HQ in a Dutch village for tax reasons. "As ever, the business-savvy guru was ahead of the game: the big draw is a financial regime that has made the Netherlands the EU's top tax shelter. Among those who have set up holding companies there are Ikea, Nike, Coca-Cola and Gucci." (*Guardian*, 7 February) Like many religious leaders before him this guru told his followers not to be concerned with the material things of life, but in practice was very shrewd about the way capitalism operated.

will criticise the government over its record on fuel poverty, which he labelled 'incomprehensible, unjustifiable and shocking'. Consumers now pay more than 50 per cent more on utility bills compared with five years ago, yet energy companies' costs have risen by only a fraction of this. In the past month, four of the biggest suppliers have announced substantial rises in the price of gas and electricity." (*Observer*, 3 February)

## Loaded But Stupid

We are constantly being told by supporters of capitalism that the extremely rich got that way because

## Free Lunch



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