

# Socialist Standard

November 2005 Vol. 101 No. 1215 £1

Treason  
Hugo Chavez  
Professional Revolutionaries  
Do We Need Money?  
Disappearing Languages  
Doubtful Benefits  
A Sense of Respect

## The Age of Treason

400 Years after Guy Fawkes,  
a capital charge comes to life.



Tough on treachery...Page 6



"Reverend" Jim Jones, page 10



Better off without it? Page 12

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**“Having respect for people and our environment - acknowledging and caring for each other's strengths, needs, weaknesses, ambitions - is not compatible with capitalism's competitive, repressive nature”**

Greasy Pole, page 19

## Forget, forget the 5th of November - and Trafalgar Day

The only man to enter Parliament with good intentions". So some describe Guy Fawkes, though this isn't the official line on the Gunpowder Plot which was uncovered four hundred years ago this month. Actually, this saying is wrong on two counts. Guy Fawkes did not enter Parliament with good intentions, and to wish to blow up Parliament can't really be said to be a good intention (blowing them up wouldn't achieve anything; voting them out is the intelligent thing to do).

Four hundred years ago the English ruling class was engaged in a life-and-death struggle with Spain which, with the backing of the Pope, was trying to incorporate England into a revived Holy Roman Empire. Capitalism had only come into being in the previous hundred years or so and the English ruling class was in the process of transforming itself from a serf-exploiting feudal nobility into a class whose wealth and power would be based on producing for and trading on the world market. To achieve this it was essential to avoiding being incorporated to an economically stagnant Absolutist Empire such as Spain was trying to establish in Europe.

The ideological smokescreen under which this conflict of economic interest was fought out was Protestantism versus Catholicism. Henry VIII had broken with the Pope in 1529 and Protestantism became the ideology of that section of the English ruling class striving for a national capitalist state. Catholicism that of its enemies. Throughout the 16th century in England, Catholics and Protestants were successively burned at the stake. Guy Fawkes was a Catholic and had entered Parliament with a view to blowing it up in a bid to re-establish a Catholic regime in England.

From the point of view of the English ruling class, he was a traitor, and has traditionally been portrayed as such in school history books. In fact, anti-Catholicism remained a key feature of

English nationalism right up until the end of the 19th century. By then it had become an anachronism. England - since the union with Scotland in 1707, "Great Britain" - had long since established itself as the leading capitalist power in the world and was no longer under even the remotest threat of being incorporated into some backward-looking Absolutist Catholic Empire.

In view of the anti-Catholic aspect the media didn't know quite how to mark the 400th anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot.



Fawkes

They had no such doubts about how to mark the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar - by an obscene display of jingoistic nationalism.

The ground had already been prepared by London's successful bid to stage the 2012 Olympics and England's regaining of the Ashes from Australia, both of which saw a mindless mob gather in Trafalgar Square to sing jingo songs known to socialists as "Fool Britannia", "Land of Dopes and Tories", "God Save the Queen (and all who sail in her)" as well as - though quite it's out of place - Blake's "Jerusalem".

Socialists are utterly opposed to such manifestations of nationalism. In fact, we find disturbing the revival of nationalism in Britain in recent decades, as seen in the acceptance into the mainstream of things

which once had fascist connotations such as the term "Briton" and the flag of St. George. At one time, British patriots used to call on people to die for their "country", i.e. for the state which for accidental historical reasons happened to have jurisdiction over the geographical area where they lived. Nowadays, the appeal is to the "nation", i.e. to an imaginary community. But there never can be any real community under capitalism. A "nation" is a false community, and a dangerous illusion because of its divisive nature.

Britain, like every other country or state in the world, is class-divided: a minority of rich owners and the rest of us. We have no interests in common with them and anything which encourages the illusion that all the people of Britain form a community with a common interest can only serve their interests. They need us to believe this because their rule and privileges depend on our acceptance. They are few but we are many. They know this but most of us don't, yet.

When we do then we will see that the only community possible today, given the integration of the world economy, is a world community. But to be a real community there must be no class division. There must be common ownership of the globe's resources so that they can be used for the benefit of all the members of the human race. We will then recognise ourselves, not as British, French, American, Australian or any of the other labels our rulers impose on us, but as members of the human race, citizens of the world, Earthpeople. Then the sort of narrow-minded nationalism orchestrated on Trafalgar Day - and let's hope it's not going to become an annual event - will be looked back on with a shudder as a manifestation of a barbarous past when ruling classes incited people to regard themselves as members of rival, competing "nations". ■

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# Bird flu: how capitalism could make it worse.



to contain it, and the government in any case has rejected plans to curtail population movement as largely pointless.

Capitalism is no more to blame for bird flu than for the recent earthquake in Kashmir; however, it can be criticised for its way of dealing with natural disasters and threats. In capitalism, whatever the urgency, nothing can happen until agreement has been reached over money. As one example, the EU is currently unable to spend any money on purchasing vaccines and antiviral drugs because, according to officials, Britain is blocking agreement on the overall EU budget for 2007 to 2013 (*Guardian*, Oct 15). In another less publicised example, scientists have expressed horror that the team which has recreated the 1918 virus, 'one of the deadliest viruses of all time' have been testing it in live mice at only the second highest level of containment, and without wearing protective suits. The obvious question, when it is known that Soviet scientists in the 70's accidentally released a mild member of the 1918 family of viruses into the environment, is: why not the highest level of containment? The answer can only be cost. If there is a chance to keep cost down, even if it involves a risk, capitalism will exert pressure to take that chance. It would be an incredible irony if H5N1 turned out to be a case of mild sniffles but we all died anyway from an artificially recreated laboratory virus because somebody

tried to save a few quid from their research budget.

It could also be argued that capitalism's peculiar and illogical ways of working can conspire to make a deadly pandemic more rather than less likely. The secrecy of the Chinese state-capitalist regime has already held back study on H5N1 as, like the SARS epidemic before it, China has refused to allow researchers access to samples or to reveal actual mortality statistics. Then there is the incentive for poultry farmers to allow isolated cases of flu to go unreported rather than see their entire stocks destroyed, as has happened in South East Asia, where billions of birds have been culled. The manufacture of an effective antiviral drug, once the infectious strain has been identified, would be enormously accelerated if the drug company making it were to provide the details to other drug companies, but in view of the money to be made by not doing so, we may not be able to rely on such public spirited cooperation. And if the worst happens, and governments give out the useless advice to stay indoors and not travel, how are workers supposed to make a living? Will bosses look kindly on any worker who takes a day off sick every time she sneezes or her kids have a temperature? Will banks look kindly on businesses that curtail activity because of staff absences? Will capitalism look favourably on anyone who falters in their perpetual and relentless pursuit of money because of an altruistic concern for social health and welfare, or will it instead reward those who have no such concerns?

Capitalist governments are gambling that H5N1 won't mutate to humans, or that if it does mutate to humans, it won't be deadly, or that if it is deadly, it won't spread fast, or that if it spreads fast, it will be treatable with an antiviral, or that if no antiviral can be developed in time, that it won't kill anyone rich or important. Workers, as so often in wartime, appear in this calculation in the section at the end, under the heading 'expendable assets'. We're just not worth spending too much money on, provided some of us survive to keep working.

Diseases among social animals are common, and since the agricultural revolution brought humans into close and sustained contact with other social or herd animals, we have acquired many of their diseases (over sixty from dogs, for instance). Many of these now harmless childhood diseases started life as epidemics that brought empires to their knees and destroyed civilizations. A new virus strain unleashed on a virgin population is a more terrible event than any volcano, any earthquake or any tsunami, and yet capitalism is content to gamble that it won't happen, just as it did over the tsunami, or that it won't be that serious, just as it's doing over global warming. Capitalism is always gambling with our lives in this way, without giving us any say at all. If the gamble comes off, the rich win. If it doesn't, we die.

Nature can sometimes do worse things than capitalism. But to fight them and protect ourselves, we need something better than capitalism.

Nature can sometimes do worse things than capitalism. An earthquake kills 40,000 in a few minutes. A tsunami wipes out 200,000 in hours. And now the Department of Health contingency plan for bird flu in Britain is contemplating a 'not impossible' 750,000 deaths if the H5N1 virus goes pandemic. The government is buying up 14m doses of Tamiflu, a general-purpose antiviral and probably not very effective prophylaxis against a virus strain that hasn't evolved yet, which in any case won't be available until April next year and is only enough to treat 25% of the UK population. Meanwhile the United Nations is facing wildly varying estimates of the death toll, from 150m from its own advisors to a paltry 7.4m from the WHO, while newspapers range from tabloid 'We're all doomed' sensationalism to an 'It'll be all right on the night' conservatism from the better informed but possibly more complacent qualities.

A pandemic may well be on the way. The government Chief Medical Officer, Sir Liam Donaldson, has announced his estimate of 50,000 'excess' deaths (over and above the average annual death rate of 12,000 each flu season), stating: "We can't make this pandemic go away, because it is a natural phenomenon, it will come." However, other scientists dismiss the figure of 50,000 as a complete guess. "It could be worse, it could be better. I think initially it could be worse than that", says Dr Martin Wiselka, consultant in infectious diseases at Leicester Royal Infirmary (*BBC News Online*, Oct 16).

The problem is that everybody is guessing, and governments are not willing to spend money on hunches. Currently H5N1 has an exceptionally high mortality rate of 50%, but is very hard to transmit, especially from one human to another, which is why only 60 people worldwide have so far died. The current guess is that the most likely threat is from H5N1 recombining with ordinary flu during the annual winter flu season. This is known to have happened during the Spanish flu outbreaks of 1957 and 1968, when the hybrid strain was much less deadly but spread very rapidly and thus killed more people. On the basis of this guess, a best-case scenario, the government plans to rely on its standard seasonal vaccination programme for at-risk groups including children, old people and asthmatics, with the additional purchase of the Tamiflu antiviral drug just in case. However, new research is showing that the 1918 pandemic, the deadliest ever recorded, which killed between 20 and 40 million people, was a pure bird flu, not a hybrid, and that H5N1 is evolving in ominously similar ways. The 1918 virus infected almost everyone on the planet within a year of its appearance, and without the aid of modern transport and cheap mobility (*New Scientist*, October 8). Donaldson dismisses comparison with the 1918 pandemic because antiviral drugs and other advanced medical practices were not available then, yet many scientists are worried that the disease could spread so rapidly that it will outrun any attempt



## Animal testing

Dear Editors,  
I am pleased to see you state [October issue] that the abolition of the savagery of capitalism will undoubtedly do its part to abolish all unnecessary suffering by non-human sentient creatures. Yet you say that the socialist approach to animal testing is pragmatic. What suffering is necessary? On what grounds? How many animal deaths equal one human life?

Animal testing is anything but scientific. Thalidomide tested safe on animals but when given to humans was a disaster. Drugs for arthritis were harmless to animals but proved to greatly increase heart attacks in people. Blue sky testing where animals are harmed and killed in the vague hope that something useful, and profitable, to humans is both daft and cruel.

I hope a socialist world would be more compassionate with people trying to live in harmony with the environment and animals rather than seeing them as assets to be exploited and plundered for the financial gain of vivisectionists and drug monopolies. Socialism should abolish these as well as the many other horrors of capitalism.

I am sure there are many people suffering from ailments capitalism can't cure right now (I would be one) who would volunteer to try new drugs and thereby save animal lives while perhaps improving the quality of their own.

TERRY LIDDLE, London, SE9

## 'Health' system

Dear Editors,  
I become annoyed when I hear of the increasing numbers of retired workers (hence unexploitable) who are being reminded by their GPs that their ailments are age-related and are told "what do you expect at your age?" instead of being offered proper care. Precious 'health care' is then devoted to those that capitalism is able to continue to exploit.

But can multi-million profiteers in drug companies be trusted to be more interested in population health than the profit to be made? Who is able to double-check their laboratory tests and results and how can study statistics be guaranteed not to have been exaggerated or distorted? With such vast wealth at stake would even a capitalist government really care about working-class health under such rewarding (for them) conditions? It has to be faced that no capitalist government assists the really needy - that task is left for charities to do and prop up a system that benefits only the wealthy ruling class.

If the health system is unable or unwilling to properly test and cure working-class patients then I personally believe being ignored and left to suffer or being officially kept alive to suffer is not good enough. The obvious third option of being allowed access and advice on how to quickly and efficiently terminate life should be made available.

The utter independence and freedom to choose the time and place of my own demise certainly appeals to me and is a right I am keen on exercising. If you can

help out with attractive suggestions on how this can be accomplished it would be appreciated and I can depart - when the time comes - thumbing my nose at officialdom who have dictated in life what I can and cannot do. It would be a great way to go!

RON STONE, Gelorup, Australia

## Blinkered Nationalist

Why on earth are you standing in a Scottish seat? Smacks a little of imperialism to people up here. "Great Britain" is a state founded for empire - the centre colonising the island - it is outdated so anyone with the slightest knowledge of politics now sees "Great Britain" as outdated, hence supporting independence. You are the only party with "Britain" in the title apart from the BNP!

ANON, Livingston, Scotland

Reply: As far as we are concerned, "Great Britain" is merely a geographical name. And we were the only party standing in the Livingston by-election without "Scottish" on the ballot paper - that's because we don't stand for an independent Scotland any more than we stand for an independent "Great Britain" or even "Little England". We stand for world socialism, a world community, without frontiers, where the resources of the Earth, industrial and natural, will have become the common heritage of all humanity - Editors.

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**Cambridge.** Andrew Westley, 10 Marksby Close, Duxford, Cambridge CB2 4RS. Tel: **01223 570292**

**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**

#### NORTHERN IRELAND

**Belfast.** R. Montague, 151 Cavehill Road, BT15 1BL. Tel: **02890 586799**  
**Newtownabbey.** Nigel McCullough. Tel: **02890 860687**

#### SCOTLAND

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

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

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#### AFRICA

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Contact SPGB, London.

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

**Uganda.** Socialist Club, PO Box 217, Kabale. Email:

wmugyenzi@yahoo.com

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#### EUROPE

**Denmark.** Graham Taylor, Spobjervej 173, DK-8220, Brabrand.

**Germany.** Norbert. Email:

weltsozialismus@gmx.net

Tristan Miller. Email:

psychonaut@nothingsreal.com

**Norway.** Robert Stafford. Email:

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,

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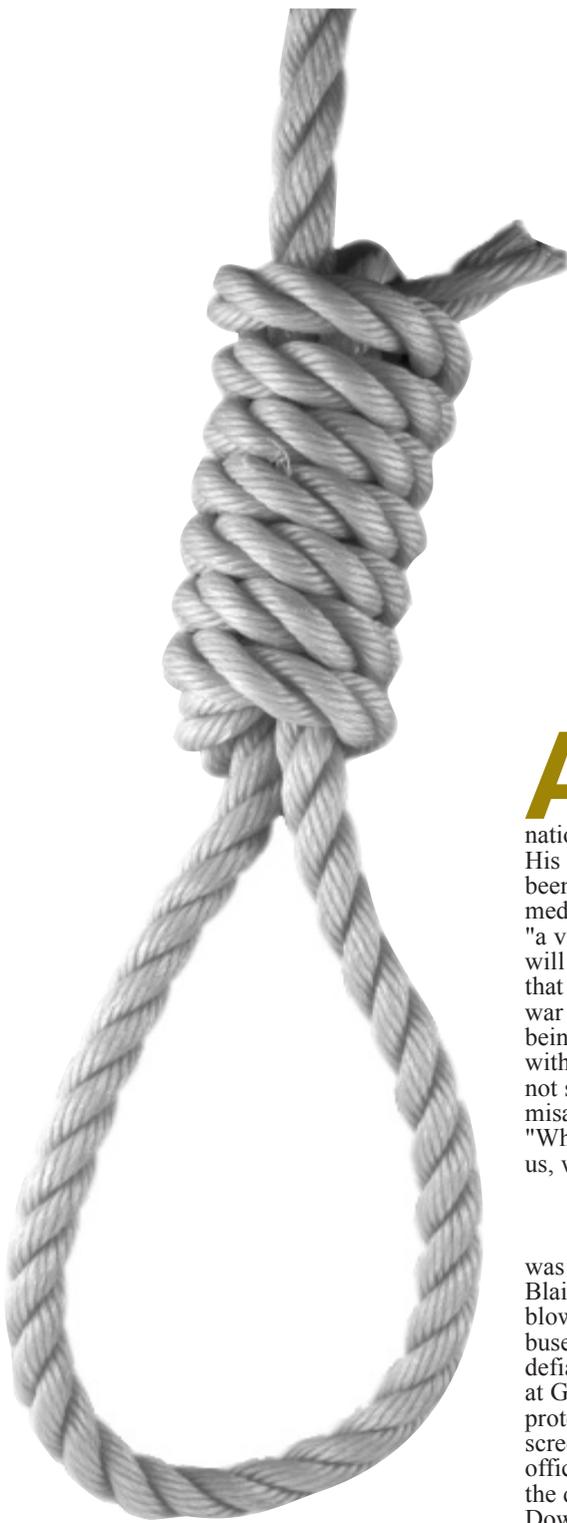
wspnz@worldsocialism.org

**World Socialist Party of the United**

**States** P.O. Box 440247, Boston, MA

02144 USA. Email:

wspboston@mindspring.com



# If this be Treason...

**A**s soon as he could after the bombs went off in London on 7 July Tony Blair came on the TV to address the nation, as is expected of all great national leaders at times of crisis and danger. His message, in the sense that it had already been largely worked out for him by the media, was unexceptional. "This is" he said, "a very sad day for the British people but we will hold true to our way of life". Whether that "way of life" was represented by waging war on a country on the basis of lies about it being an immediate threat to world safety with its massively powerful weapons he did not say. But in case there were any lingering misapprehensions about it he plunged on: "When they [the bombers] try to intimidate us, we will not be intimidated".

## Protection

This use of the words "us" and "we" was designed to create the impression that Blair was facing the same dangers, of being blown to pieces on the London Tube or buses, as the rest of us. In fact he made his defiant speech on a brief break from the G8 at Gleneagles, where the participants were protected by a high, impenetrable metal screen backed up by a few thousand police officers. When, back in London, he travels the quarter mile or so between his home in Downing Street and his workplace in the Houses of Parliament he does not face the same risks as working Londoners because he is whisked on his journey in a bullet-proof car, among a swarm of police on motor bikes, through streets which have been swept clear of other people. By most reasonable standards anyone who behaves in that way can be described as "intimidated". Not that Blair lives by the same standards as the rest of us, who are merely expendable members of the working class.

But after his intimidated bravado Blair had to give some attention to tracking down the bombers' organisation and being seen to be actively working against another such incident. During this it leaked out that in future our "way of life" may be subject to the decisions of secret "anti-terror" courts, ruled over by "security cleared" judges with the accused being represented by "special advocates" who had also been vetted for "security". Other news revealed that some of the defendants before such courts, if British subjects, may find themselves charged with

the offence of treason. It seemed fairly obvious that these proposed changes, in the panic after 7 July, were designed to induce a retributive thrill among those whose enjoyment of our way of life made them grateful for the protection of such a stoutly unintimidated government.

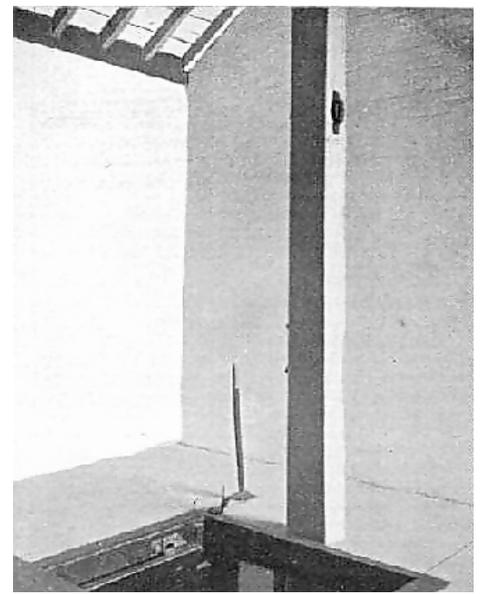
## Treason

Treason is defined as a violation or betrayal of allegiance which is owed to a sovereign or a country, usually through joining, or giving support to, enemy in a war or attempting to overthrow the government. This definition is more comprehensive and more complex than it may at first seem to be. There have been cases when the person accused of treason has argued that they were not of the alleged nationality and so did not owe allegiance to that country or its sovereign. Anyone who regards the world's population as a mass of human beings may marvel at capitalism's need to disastrously complicate what are essentially simple matters - for which many a lawyer is grateful. It may be taken as an example of this that of the four categories of treason remaining from the Treason Act of 1351 there is still the offence of "violating" the wife of the king's eldest son, which may have caused some lost sleep among the men who consorted with Princess Diana while she was still married to the Prince of Wales.

For a long time treason was a capital offence and to satisfy the thirst of the population to witness that traitors had got their just deserts the sentence was often to be hung, drawn and quartered in public. (In fact this sentence was not formally abolished until 1947 - one of the reforms for which the Attlee government did not, for some reason, claim any credit.) After capital punishment was abolished in 1965 treason remained as one of the few offences which could still "attract" (as lawyers are fond of putting it) the death penalty. Wandsworth prison in London, just in case anyone was in need of being hanged, kept a scaffold in good working order.

## Casement

One of the more famous examples of treason trials, which came to its appointed grisly end on the scaffold in 1916, was that of Roger Casement. He was an Irish man who at the turn of the century had been



From left: Roger Casement, William Joyce and Wandsworth prison gallows

employed as a consul of the British government in what was then the Belgian Congo. There he was appalled by the slave conditions and the butchery imposed on the Congolese people by the Belgian rubber companies, under the authority of King Leopold II. Casement's character was summed up by his manager, who complained that "He is very good to the natives, too good, too generous, too ready to give away. He would never make money as a trader". He retired in 1911, with a knighthood and a British government pension and two years later he returned to live in Ireland where, not entirely justifiably, he drew parallels between what he had seen in the Congo and Irish problems. In the cause of Irish nationalism he helped to form the Irish Volunteers, an armed militia.

When the First World War began he advised Irish men against joining the British Army, on the grounds that the war with Germany was no concern of theirs. On a false passport he went to Germany with the intention of persuading Irish prisoners of war to fight against Britain. This was not as welcome as he might have hoped; the Germans found him an embarrassment and hastily shipped him, in a submarine, back to Ireland where he was quickly captured. At his trial he tried to argue that he was an Irishman, a case which was fatally weakened in law by his accepting employment as a British consul, a knighthood and a pension. He was quickly convicted and executed at Pentonville on 3 August 1916. After his death his diaries came to light, providing evidence that he was not only a traitor but also a homosexual, which was enough to provoke popular satisfaction that it was entirely appropriate to do away with him. It was not a time notable for rational assessment of such issues.

### Joyce

There were similarities between that case and of William Joyce, whose broadcasts from Germany during the Second World War eventually earned him the name of Lord Haw Haw and a death sentence at the Old Bailey. Joyce was accustomed to dazzling people with his somewhat undisciplined knowledge and his oratory. Organisations found it difficult to

cope with him and he had to leave the Army, the Conservative Party and then the British Union of Fascists. All of this was expressed in his virulent anti-semitism; typical of his descriptions of Jews was as "submen with prehensile toes". But for this he might have done well in the Tory Party (he was once close to being their parliamentary candidate in Chelsea) and in the BUF he held a position only a little below that of Oswald Mosley. Joyce was ejected from the BUF in what Mosley described as an economy drive; he went on to form the National Socialist League, which was closer to the Nazis (their meetings ended with shouts of "Sieg Heil") but the NSL never made any headway and was about to be wound up when Joyce went to Germany just before the start of the war.

Although there is little evidence that Joyce's broadcasts had any significant effect on the war morale in Britain, he did provoke a kind of bemused fascination and became the stuff of myths and rumours. At all events his pro-German activities were enough to ensure that when the war ended he would be arrested and brought to England to be tried for treason. Anticipating by some 60 years the Blair government's manipulation of the legal system, Parliament rushed through the Treason Act of 1945, which replaced the elaborate and prolonged trial procedure which had been in force in cases of treason with a simpler and brisker style, similar to that of a murder trial.

It soon emerged that Joyce had a serious defence against the charge. He had been born in the USA of Irish parents who had become naturalised Americans in 1894. But as a young man he had come to England and had applied for a British passport by lying about his place of birth. His defence argued that, however he had described himself, he was in fact not British but the prosecutor - handsome, brilliant Hartley Shawcross, Attorney General in the 1945 Labour government - persuaded the jury, with a little help from the judge, that "common sense" should override procedure. The long queues which had formed overnight to witness Joyce's trial were hungry for a guilty verdict and it took the jury only 23 minutes to agree. A little over three months later Joyce, having exhausted all the avenues of appeal, was executed at

Wandsworth prison. Popular revenge had been satisfied.

### Class and Patriotism

Among his admirers Joyce had a reputation as a relentlessly logical thinker. It was a strange kind of logic which accommodated his support of Germany's war effort against Britain with his rabid British nationalism. ("The white cliffs of Dover! God bless old England on the lea" he exclaimed to his guard when he was being flown across the Channel to his trial). At the end he tried to escape the hangman by claiming to be an "alien", which was the kind of accusation he was accustomed to make, in suitably contemptuous invective, about Jewish people. There was - and still is - nothing exceptional about such inconsistencies, which expose the fallacy of patriotism, with its essential creed of "my country right or wrong". Workers, who make up the majority of capitalism's people, have no country; however the system arbitrarily divides them according to ruling class rivalries, the workers are united in their poverty. For example it was not a coincidence that the number of victims of recent disasters such as the Asian tsunami and the Katrina hurricane was clearly related to the degree of their poverty. If you could afford it you got out in time; if you could not afford it.

That its workers should be patriotic is vital to each national ruling class and this, fertilised by official lies, is exploited by all governments. Following the 7 July bombs in London one politician after another rushed to denounce the bombers for killing innocent people, as if the British and American forces in Iraq were not also doing that, on a much larger scale. The response of the Blair government was very much as we have come to expect - distortions of facts, the creation of new offences and the revival of the treason charge, designed to stimulate a panic under cover of which the politicians could feel free to do what they would. The strategy in all this was to cement the workers' patriotism, their loyalty to British capitalism. But as the smoke of the bombs cleared and the dead were counted the central fact remained that for workers to accept such a weary, discredited case is treason against their class. ■  
IVAN



*For years, the Left in Britain and elsewhere, have sung the praises of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, ready always to defend the "gains" of the Cuban revolution as that country withstood everything the US had to throw at it. Now there is a new revolutionary on the block, cast in the Castro mould, flicking the V's at Western imperialists as he implements social reform after social reform and, like Castro, winning the applause of radicals around the world.*

## Hugo Chavez: revolutionary socialist or leftwing reformist?

**H**is name is Hugo Chavez, President of Venezuela, and he is the mastermind of the country's "socialist" revolution, presenting the "threat of the good example" that continues to panic the USA.

It is understandable why the left love him when he is regularly heard mouthing slogans and making the kind of demands you normally see in

papers like Socialist Worker. Addressing the 2005 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, earlier this year Chavez said:

"It is impossible, within the framework of the capitalist system to solve the grave problems of poverty of the majority of the world's population. We must transcend capitalism. But we cannot resort to state capitalism, which would be the same perversion of the

Soviet Union. We must reclaim socialism as a thesis, a project and a path, a new type of socialism, a humanist one, which puts humans and not machines or the state ahead of everything. That's the debate we must promote around the world, and the WSF is a good place to do it."

By all accounts, Chavez was not inebriated or stoned when he made this statement. He was sober and deadly serious. He had never talked about much socialism before, only about being a "Bolivarian", a humanist and a supporter of the Cuban revolution. But now he bandies the word "socialism" around with the glee of a five year old learning a new schoolyard profanity, and regularly mentions Marx, Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg.

"Socialism" is the buzzword of Venezuela's "Bolivarian Revolution" (so called after Simon Bolivar who led the army that freed Venezuela from Spanish rule). It is a word Chavez is keen to expunge of what he sees as its negative connotations, namely state capitalism - despite the fact that he seems unclear just what is meant by the term. Speaking recently to senior heads of the country's military, Chavez asked that they carry the question of socialism "into the barracks", to initiate debate and to reassess everything they had hitherto been told about socialism and to help strengthen the ideological offensive.

In the TV programme *Alo Presidente*, broadcast on 1 September, he pleaded for Venezuelans to "leave to one side the ghosts with which the idea of socialism has been associated" and revealed the result of an independent opinion poll carried out in May and

June. He informed his country that 47.9 percent said they preferred a 'socialist government', that 25.7 percent said they preferred a capitalist government and that some 25 percent were yet to respond.

Since Hugo Chavez declared that the way forward for Venezuela was to steer towards socialism, this has turned into the main debate within the "revolutionary Bolivarian" movement, and

society generally

### Reforms

Chavez's heart may be in the right place, even if he is somewhat muddled as to the meaning of the word "socialism," and he may well have decent intentions. But his "socialist" agenda amounts to little more than one vast reformist programme that is largely being financed by the country's oil, which is currently selling for five times its 1999 price.

The generous profits from oil price rises have gone into financing programmes to improve health, provide cheap food, extend educational access, and to organise some land reform. Chavez has initiated operations aimed at ending poverty and improving the economic and cultural lives of Venezuelans. He is keen on educating the population via literacy drives. He is re-nationalising universities and building new housing. The state has taken over some sections of industry and a TV station has been set up to transmit the "socialist" ideas of the Bolivarian "revolution".

While Chavez faces a lot of opposition in urban centres, it is clear why, in the poor working class shanties surrounding the city, support for the government is vocal and widespread.

### Cooperatives

Chavez, is also keen on workers' cooperatives. In his 1 September TV broadcast he pointed out that the kind of cooperative he is proposing is one that "generates collective wealth through joint labour, going beyond the capitalist model which promotes individualism". If company owners found the going difficult, he said, the state was prepared to come to their aid with low interest credit, though on the understanding that "the employers give workers participation in management, the direction and the profits of the company." And which capitalist could resist that offer? Chavez observed that 700 closed companies had been identified with a view to expropriation; that many had assets and the machinery ready to start producing.

Expropriation comes at a cost to worker organisation however. The first company to be taken over was the paper mill Venepal, now renamed Invepal. There, union leaders broke up the union - against the better advice of others in the trade union movement - and now look forward to buying out the state's stake in the company so they will have sole control over

company and profits. Overnight, former militant trade unionists have turned into aspiring capitalists.

As far as the US is concerned with Venezuela, the "good example" that the "Bolivarian revolution" poses is the least of their problems at the moment. The real concern stems from the fact that Venezuela has considerable oil wealth. Venezuela is the fifth largest oil exporter in the world - 13 per cent of the world's oil comes out of the country - and Chavez controls the largest oil supplies outside of the Middle East.

At a time of rising oil prices, instability in the Middle East, and with China emerging as a major challenge to US economic interests in the near future, Chavez earlier this year signed an agreement with China's vice president Zeng Qinghong, smoothing the way for the Chinese National Petroleum Corporation to invest in the development of Venezuelan oil and gas reserves. Chavez further agreed to sell fuel and crude oil to China at reduced prices to compensate the high shipping costs of oil to East Asia.

Moreover, Caracas recently signed up to a much publicized agreement for a group of sales reps from the Venezuelan state oil company to be trained by

return Cuba has sent an army of professionals to Venezuela to help the ongoing social programmes, inclusive of 14,000 doctors, 3,000 dentists, 1,500 eye specialists and 7,000 sports trainers.

And then there are Venezuela's recent arms purchases - 40 helicopters from Russia, attack light aircraft and 100,000 Kalashnikovs from Brazil - which will no doubt provide the Bush regime with the excuse to channel still more weaponry to neighbouring Colombia, escalating regional tension and the likelihood of future instability.

Little wonder the US is becoming a mite anxious at the ongoing antics of the Latin American upstart Chavez. And just to make matters a little more precarious, Chavez has repeatedly made it plain that if the US starts flexing its muscles at Venezuela then he would not hesitate to cut off all oil exports to the USA.

Pat Robertson, televangelist, entrepreneur, one-time presidential candidate and close friend of the Bush family, undoubtedly expressed the sentiments of many US neocons when, speaking on his TV show on 22 August, he referred to Chavez as "a dangerous enemy to our south, controlling a huge pool of oil, that could hurt

continued: "I think that the time has come that we exercise that ability. We don't need another \$200 billion war to get rid of one, you know, strong-arm dictator. It's a whole lot easier to have some of the covert operatives do the job and then get it over with."

Robertson's "un-Christian" outburst quickly brought condemnation from the Republican hierarchy, keen to keep Bush away from further criticism. Whilst Robertson may claim not to know "about this doctrine of assassination", the simple fact is that consecutive US governments have attempted, arranged or supported the elimination of scores of leaders around the world. That Chavez has lasted so long is undoubtedly due to the international attention he has attracted of late.

Venezuela is no nearer socialism than Russia was when it claimed to have established it. Not only is it the case that it is impossible to establish socialism in one country, but it could never be established by a leader. If Chavez can take his country into socialism, which is downright absurd, then some other leader could just as easily lead them out of it again. Similarly, the reforms he has implemented could be taken away the moment he is removed from office.

Despite his popularity amongst the poor that could well carry him to another electoral victory next year and assure Venezuela of another six years of Bolivarian reformism, Chavez is compelled by circumstances to govern within the confines of capitalism.

The country still has a monetary system. The banks and big business, particularly oil interests, are still in private hands. There have been no seizures of land. International oil companies have bent over backwards to provide new investment, in spite of Venezuela having increased the royalties that they have to pay. There is still commodity production, still exploitation, still trade on the terms laid down by international capital and still armed forces ready to defend the economic interests of Venezuela's capitalist class. ■

**JOHN BISSETT**

## Things can only get worse



### Cooking the Books (1)

Although Labour was elected to office in 1997 to the sounds of 'Things Can Only Get Better', Blair is now singing a different tune. In the past the Labour Party used to argue that the state could, and should, be used to protect people from the worst effects of world market forces, through such measures as import controls, tariffs and subsidies to protect home industries and the employment they provided, and bans on the export of capital so that it was invested at home. Such views are still held by trade unionists, Leftwing reformists and the Green Party (which has taken over the Labour Party's discarded policies in this area).

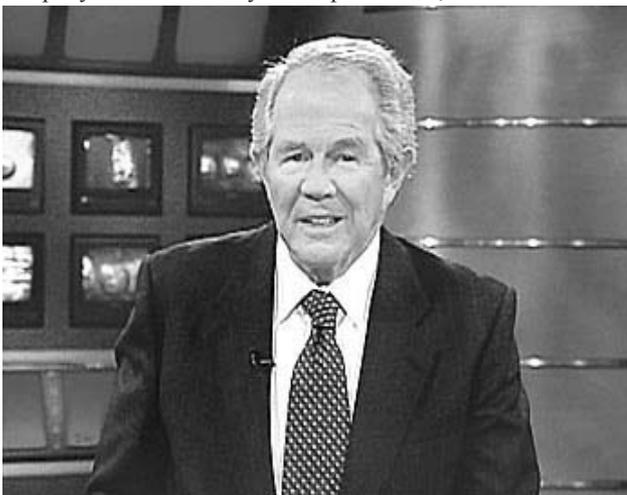
Blair now derides this as "the European social model of the past" and is actively campaigning to get other EU governments to abandon it too. In his Leader's speech to the annual Labour Party Show in Brighton he told the audience (they can hardly be called delegates since the resolutions they pass count for nothing):

"In the era of rapid globalisation, there is no mystery about what works: an open, liberal economy, prepared constantly to change to remain competitive. The new world rewards those who are open to it. ... The temptation is to use government to try to protect ourselves against the onslaught of globalisation by shutting it out - to think we protect a workforce by regulation, a company by government subsidy, an industry by tariffs. It doesn't work today. Because the dam holding back the global economy burst years ago. The competition can't be shut out; it can only be beaten" (*Guardian*, 28 September).

In other words, as the other member of the Thatcher-Blair Mutual Admiration Society used to put in: TINA. And, given capitalism, they are right; there is no alternative. What Marx called the "coercive laws of competition" can't be overcome; they have to be applied, not just by capitalist enterprises but by governments too.

But at what cost to workers and society in general? It means running fast - in fact, running faster and faster - just to stand still, continually introducing new methods of organisation and production so as to be able to keep down costs and ward off or beat the competition. It's a race to the bottom, involving, for those who actually produce and distribute the wealth of society, speed-ups, stress, precarious contracts, deregulations, redundancies, retraining, changing jobs - and the scrap heap for those who can't keep up.

And, despite Blair's optimism, there is no guarantee that, even with these changes, British capitalism will come out on top - who says competition, says losers as well as winners. Capitalism really is a rat race, or rather a treadmill, from which there's no relief.



**Soldier of Christ: Pat Robertson says 'kill the unbeliever'.**

Iranian experts on strategies for penetrating the Asian market.

And who else does Chavez cosy up to? None other than arch enemy of US conservatism Fidel Castro. In the past two years, Venezuela has supplied Cuba with vital shipments of subsidized oil to ease the country's perpetually faltering energy and transport systems, and in

us badly". He went on: "You know, I don't know about this doctrine of assassination, but if he [Chavez] thinks we're trying to assassinate him, I think that we really ought to go ahead and do it. It's a whole lot cheaper than starting a war, and I don't think any oil shipments will stop."

Acknowledging that the US had the ability to bump Chavez off, Robertson



# The Cult of the Professional Revolutionary

**“Marriage and children are discouraged so that the professional revolutionary has only a loyalty to the group”**

**A** cult is generally considered to be a group that indoctrinates its members into regarding themselves as a select group different from the rest of society. Some, but by no means all, such groups seek to isolate themselves. A typical example would be the closed Plymouth Brethren who avoid association with "the ungodly" (you and me). But others, such as the Scientologists and the Moonies actively engage with the rest of society in order to gain new recruits.

Cults are organised around a charismatic leader whose views are regarded as authoritative. The leader is surrounded by a group of seconds who transmit his or her views to the other followers. New members are encouraged to break off all relations with their previous life, often to change their name and surrender their property to the group; they are encouraged to identify totally with the group and to subordinate their individuality to it.

In some cases so total is the identification that the followers can be

persuaded to voluntarily follow their leader in committing suicide, as notoriously in 1978 when some 900 members of the "Reverend" Jim Jones' People's Temple cult committed mass suicide in Guyana and in 1997 when 39 members of the Heaven's Gate cult did so in California. The 7 July suicide bombers in London could be another example.

But how can humans be persuaded to kill themselves for what most people can see is a delusion? A recent attempt to explain this has been made by Janja Lalich in her book *Bounded Choice*, subtitled 'True Believers and Charismatic Cults' (University of California Press). Her explanation is given in the book's title: by means of a number of psychological techniques to which the cult members voluntarily, and often eagerly, submit, they come to so identify themselves with the cult that their freedom of choice becomes limited - "bounded" - to those offered by its ideology, however bizarre this might be.

Thus, for instance, in the Heaven's Gate cult, which is one of her two case

studies, the members came to believe that they really were aliens who had assumed human form and who were striving to return to their previous higher level of existence. Given this core belief, it was a logical - "bounded" - choice to decide to leave their human bodies, considered as mere "vehicles", to await rescue by an alien spaceship their leader told them was hidden behind the Hale-Bopp comet that was then passing by the Earth.

From 1975 to 1985 Lalich was a member of a Maoist group in San Francisco called the Democratic Workers Party. This is her second case study. Having ourselves been many times labelled a "sect" we are naturally wary about the concept of a cult being applied to political organisations. But Lalich makes out a good case for describing the DWP as a cult - in view of the type of organisational and psychological techniques employed, as by some religious groups, to weld the members to their organisation and its leaders - though one, of course, more like the Moonies than the Closed Brethren. And it is true that the Leninist principle of a vanguard party of professional

revolutionaries does, outside the political context of an openly repressive regime, lend itself to the would-be professional revolutionaries being organised as a cult.

We are of course opposed to Leninist organisational methods but we can see how, in the context of Tsarist Russia, a vanguard party organised on hierarchical and secretive lines would be one political option for anti-Tsarist revolutionaries, even if not a socialist form of organisation. The Bolshevik Party could not legitimately be called a cult; it was a political organisation. But why, in conditions of relative political democracy allowing people to organise openly, would some want to organise on such a basis? Why would anyone want to organise a corps of professional revolutionaries when there was no political necessity to do so?

The DWP aimed to be a party of disciplined, full-time professional revolutionaries under a strong leader, dedicated to serving the cause of "the proletariat" (perceived, in accord with Leninist theory, as being incapable of acting by and for themselves). The party was organised on a hierarchical basis with the Leader at the top surrounded by a small staff, an intermediate level of department heads (appointed and revocable by the top leadership) and the ordinary rank-and-file members.

There were three levels of membership: trial, candidate and general: "All General Members had full voting rights and were considered full-time, which meant they were to be on call, at the Party's disposal, twenty-four hours a day. Trial Members had no rights; they were to learn. If the Trial Membership stage was passed (based on study, level of participation and good behavior), then appropriate leadership personnel commended that the young militant be moved up to the status of Candidate Member, with partial political rights".

As in the Heaven's Gate cult, all members had to adopt a new name:

"Once a Party name was chosen, only that name was to be used; and immediately new members learned others' Party names. Militants were never to reveal their real name to other members, not even to roommates. Party names were used in all meetings or gatherings, in all DWP facilities and in all houses where members lived. For the new member, taking on a name was the first stage in losing his or her pre-Party identity and assuming a Party-molded one".

And to sacrifice their income and property:

"The dues structure was set up so that each militant gave over all monies received above a group-determined living amount, set at approximately poverty-level standards. All monetary or substantial gifts (such as a car), job bonuses, legal settlements, and inheritances were turned over to the Party".

The poverty-line income forced members to live together in communal houses, thus making them even more dependent on the party and its leaders. Its leader (one Marlene Dixon) did not have to live on the poverty line, but had other members assigned to cook and clean for her.

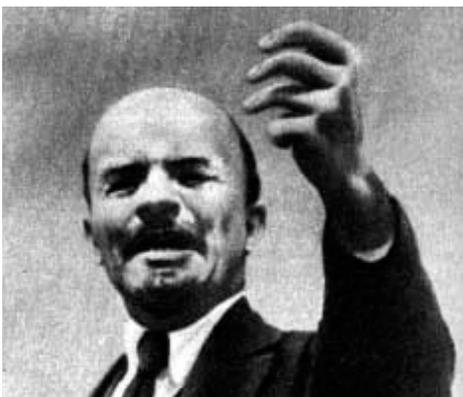
The DWP was committed to the Leninist concept of "democratic centralism". On paper this means that there is a full discussion of some policy document but that, when it has been

adopted, all members, including those who voted against it, have to be committed to carrying it out. Some Leninist groups do try to operate on this basis, allowing the preliminary democratic discussion, but not the DWP. According to Dixon, in a document entitled 'On the Development of Leninist Democracy':

"[D]emocracy is a method for the selection of leadership and a method of assuring that the most developed and tested comrades, the cadre, the bones of a Leninist party, govern the party".

What this meant in practice was:

"[T]he leaders would give a presentation on a change in direction of some work, or would open a denunciation of a militant for some error. Each militant



Vanguardist: Lenin

present was expected to say how much he or she agreed with what was just said".

Members were subject to public sessions of criticism and self-criticism in which they had to confess to any "petty bourgeois" failings or lapses the leadership pointed out to them. There were also sanctions for breaches of discipline (and even a security service trained by an ex-Marine):

"Given the emphasis on obedience and discipline members understood that they could be sanctioned for not following rules or for in any way breaking the discipline. Militants were 'punished' in a variety of ways besides submitting to collective criticism sessions and writing self-criticisms. More practical sanctions, for example, were increased quotas, extra work duty, demotion from a particular position or function, removal from a practice, and instructions to leave a workplace or cease contact with a particular person. In more serious cases, there were periods of probation, suspension, or even house arrest (which could mean being confined and guarded by security forces)".

It might be wondered why the members put up with such a regime. Lalach's explanation is, once again, "bounded choice" in that they had convinced themselves, and had had this conviction continually reinforced by the group's practices, that such a hierarchically-disciplined party was necessary to further the cause of the proletariat. In the end they didn't put up with it. When Dixon was away on a trip to Europe in November 1985 the other leaders, including Lalach, met and decided to expel Dixon and dissolve the organisation.

It's a disturbing story but is one consequence of the application of the Leninist theory of a vanguard party of professional revolutionaries in conditions other than a political despotism. All

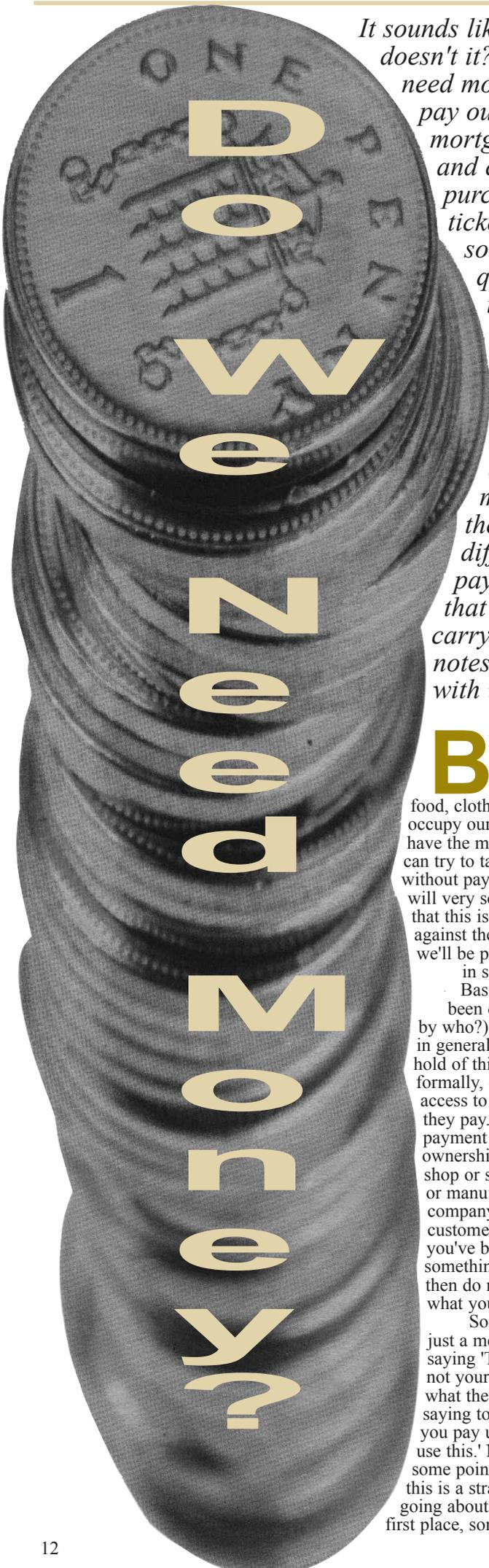
Leninist groups engage in some of the practices described by Lalach, for instance, different levels of membership, leadership-dominated meetings and a willingness on the part of the members to be told what to do. That doesn't mean that all Leninist groups are cults in the sense that the DWP was. But some are. It is clear, for instance, from their external behaviour that the Spartacist League (who publish *Workers Hammer*) must be and there is documented evidence that the French Trotskyist group *Lutte Ouvrière* and the 'left communist' International Communist Current are. In his 1999 book *La vraie nature d'Arlette* ('The True Nature of Arlette' - Arlette Laguiller, LO's permanent presidential candidate) the journalist François Koch describes LO militants as "soldier-monks", because of their self-imposed life-style (marriage and children are discouraged so that the professional revolutionary has only a loyalty to the group). In 2000 a group of ex-members of the French section of the ICC published a pamphlet *Que Ne Pas Faire?* ('What Is Not To Be Done?') which exposed similar practices to some of those described by Lalach in the DWP (an older, charismatic leader; adoption of a new name; an order-giving hierarchy; interrogations; a security service).

Because these organisations use some of the same terminology as we do - even to the extent of allowing us to engage in an apparently rational debate with them over the best way to get rid of capitalism - this sort of thing discredits the whole idea of socialism and organisation for socialism. Fortunately, a Leninist vanguard party of professional revolutionaries is not the only way that those who want socialism can organise. There is another way, which we in the Socialist Party have adopted and practice: an open, democratic organisation in which all members have an equal say and in which policy is made by a conference of mandated branch delegates or by a referendum of the whole membership; in which there is no leadership and where the executive committee's role is merely to carry out policy decided by conference or the membership, apply the rulebook, deal with correspondence, pay bills, etc without having any policy-making powers.

With such an organisational structure it is simply inconceivable that anything remotely like what happened in the DWP could happen nor indeed like what happens in non-cultic but still leadership-dominated Leninist organisations such as the SWP.

Leninists imagine that workers are only capable of reaching a trade union consciousness and flatter themselves that their consciousness as a vanguard is higher. Actually, it's the other way round. Most trade unions have democratic constitutions, even if largely these days only on paper. The Leninist theory of organisation is a throw-back to political conditions such as existed in Tsarist Russia, and its introduction into more politically-developed Western Europe following the coming to power of the Bolsheviks in Russia has been an unmitigated disaster for the working class and socialism. As a theory of leadership it is anti-socialist and to be rejected on political grounds. In practice it can easily lead to such aberrations as the DWP and so is to be rejected on grounds of human dignity too. ■

ADAM BUICK



*It sounds like a silly question, doesn't it? Of course we need money: we need it to pay our rent or mortgage, to buy food and clothes, to purchase cinema tickets and DVDs, and so on. There's no question that, with the world organised the way it is, we do need money, and we couldn't live without it. Credit cards and cheques make no difference, they are just different ways of paying by money, so that we don't have to carry huge amounts of notes and coins around with us.*

**B**ut let's step back a bit and ask ourselves, why do we need money? It's because we can't get hold of the food, clothes, tickets or DVDs, or occupy our house or flat, unless we have the money to pay for them. We can try to take food or whatever without paying, but if we're caught we will very soon be told that this is theft and it's against the law, and we'll be punished for it in some way.

Basically, it has been decided (but by who?) that people in general cannot get hold of things (more formally, cannot gain access to them) unless they pay. The payment transfers ownership from the shop or supermarket or manufacturing company to the customer. Once you've bought something, you can then do more or less what you like with it.

So the money is just a means of saying 'This is mine, not yours'. And that's what the shop is saying too: 'Unless you pay us, you can't use this.' Now, from some points of view, this is a strange way of going about things. In the first place, some areas of

our lives aren't arranged like this at all. Many people do things for other people - lend or give them something, or perform some service - without expecting any payment: they do this out of friendship or for their neighbours or family members. Furthermore, not everything we want to have access to requires payment. Usually we can all go to the local park without having to pay to get in. Many towns have free shuttle buses to transport people around the town centre, or to and from the local railway station. But try to travel on the train without a ticket and you'll be in trouble.

However, let's just imagine that the world was run differently, that everything was free (though in that case the concept of 'free' presumably wouldn't mean anything!). Suppose you could go to the supermarket, collect the food you wanted for yourself and your family, and then just leave without having to queue at the checkouts. You'd probably choose the best-quality food without having to worry about its cost. In fact, since nobody would have to buy cheap and nasty food, all the food available would be top quality. There'd be no point in taking more than you needed, because you'd always be able to go back and get more if you ran out, and it's just wasteful (and, in fact, daft) to take lots of milk and bread, say, if you know you won't be able to use them.

This probably sounds like quite a good idea, but would this same principle work with clothes rather than food? Wouldn't people just want masses of clothes, and always from the top designers and brand names? Well, let's just think a bit about the implications of a world without money along the lines I've just begun to describe. Nobody will be able to show off by flaunting an expensive dress or tie, and nobody will want brand names or designer labels since anyone can have them (if they still exist) so a brand name won't mean anything. Quite probably people will still want to look smart and attractive, but this won't be by wearing clothes that 'cost a fortune'. And like food, there would be no point in having lots of clothes lying around in a wardrobe gathering dust: people





**On the Road to Nowhere**

would just take from the shops or warehouses what they wanted for their personal use, not what would be intended to impress others. Also, since nobody would profit from selling more clothes, there would be no relentless pushing of new fashions each year.

So it's not difficult to imagine a world without money, a world where what people consumed and enjoyed would not be limited by the size of their wage packet, where everyone could gain access to the best of everything. But again, questions arise. Would there, for instance, be enough to go round? Well, think firstly, about how much effort, and how many people's work, goes

into money and all its paraphernalia. It's not just the shopworkers whose work is mainly or entirely concerned with money. There's everyone who works for a bank or insurance company, who deals with accounts and prices, who issues or collects tickets. In a world without money, these people and many others (those who manufacture guns, for instance) would devote their labour to producing goods that people need. The money system doesn't just prevent people gaining access to what has been produced, it also seriously reduces what is produced.

But then again, would people work in a world where there was no money and they were not getting paid? Yes, they would. The alternative, after all, would be a life of idleness, which may be great for a two-week holiday period every summer but soon becomes very boring. Work, too, would be made as enjoyable as possible, which means it would be safe, satisfying and fun. People would enjoy working with each other, never doing one kind of

things is pleasant in itself.

You can see that a world without money wouldn't just be like today except that there would be no price tags on anything. Rather, it implies a completely different way of organising things. For a start, production would be carried on for use and not for profit. This means goods would be produced because they satisfied people's wants and needs, rather than because they produced a profit. In such circumstances, dangerous, unhealthy and shoddy goods would never see the light of day, as there would be no reason to produce them. In addition, the factories,

offices and land would not be the exclusive property of a small number of millionaires, which is what happens now. Instead, they would be owned by everyone (which is equivalent to saying they would be owned by no one). And they would therefore be controlled by everyone, not by a small bunch of owners.

But it doesn't stop there. There would be no need for governments either, because governments exist to run the system on behalf of the small number of people who own the lion's share of the wealth. It's the government, for instance, that runs the police and court systems that will teach anyone who takes without paying a lesson about who owns what. Along with governments, there'd be no countries either, because the division of the world into countries simply suits the interests of the owners in particular parts of the world. Nor would armies be needed, as they fight for the owners against the armies of the owners from other countries, in disputes over access to raw materials like oil.

A world without money also means a world without poverty, because that's the flipside of money controlling access to things. 'No money, no chance' is the current

**"No money, no chance' is the current motto, but one that results in the obscenity of destitution and starvation in a world that could easily provide plenty for all."**

motto, but one that results in the obscenity of destitution and starvation in a world that could easily provide plenty for all.

So doing away with money would also mean doing away with governments, countries and armies, as well as the

division into rich and poor. We, the human inhabitants of the planet, don't need money - it gets in the way and stops us from enjoying this world and what we could make of it. One word for the world without money is socialism, but it's not the name that matters, it's the idea. If the idea sounds attractive to you, then you should find out more about the Socialist Party and our views. ■

**Paul Bennett**



**Cooking the Books (2)**

**More conservative mottos**

That wage increases cause price increases is an old lie. This assumes that capitalist firms can raise the price of their products at will. But they can't. They can only charge what the market will bear. Workers are in a basically similar position. But the market for products and the market for labour power are two different markets. Assuming that firms are charging what the market will bear - and they'd be foolish not to - then, if the labour market allows the workers a chance to push up wages, firms just have to live with increased costs and lower profits for the time being.

It is because wage increases eat into profits - not because they supposedly cause "inflation" - that employers fight them and, as far as they and the media are concerned, any old argument, even one that's not

true, will do to oppose and discredit groups of workers demanding a wage increase.

In any event, even if a wage increase in a firm did lead to an increased price of that firm's products, that would not be inflation, which is an increase in the general price level. Such an increase can come about for various reasons - increased demand for products in a boom, a fall in the value of gold when it's the money-commodity, and an overissue of an inconvertible paper currency. Even though the double-digit inflation of the 1970s is over, inflation still exists today and is mainly caused by inflating the currency. The Bank of England has a remit to inflate the currency by 2 percent a year. Which is why both prices and wages tend to increase annually by more or less this amount, depending on conditions in particular markets.

The view that wage increases cause price increases has long been argued over. In 1865 the General Council of the International Workingmen's Association in London devoted

four meetings to discussing it. At the last of these Marx decisively refuted the argument in a lecture that was published after his death as a pamphlet Value, Price and Profit. This has now been republished, under what was its original title of Wages, Price and Profits, by the Communist Party of Britain, which publishes the Morning Star and which is the real political successor to the old Communist Party of Great Britain (and not to be confused with another group which has usurped this name and which publishes a paper called the Weekly Worker).

After explaining why workers should always press for the highest wages they can get, Marx famously urged the unions:

"Instead of the conservative motto, 'A fair day's wage for a fair day's work!' they ought to inscribe on their banner the revolutionary watchword, 'Abolition of the wages system!'"

In his introduction, Robert Griffiths of the CPB's Economic Committee can't ignore this and

has to pay lip service to Marx by writing that he held that "workers would forever be commodities to be exploited until capitalism and its wages system were abolished". But he then ignores this completely, going on to advocate that unions should aim at, as well as higher wages, "statutory price controls", "better state benefits and pensions", "more public services", "controls on the export of capital". All of which assume the continuation of capitalism.

If Marx returned today we know what he would say: Instead of the conservative motto 'statutory price controls/better state benefits, etc, etc' the unions ought to inscribe on their banners the revolutionary watchword 'Abolition of the Wages System'.

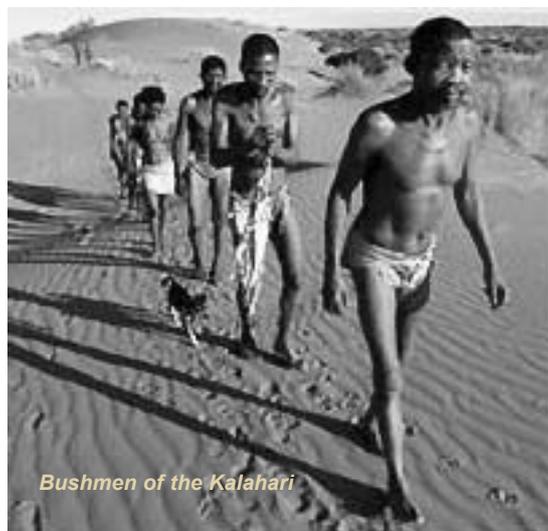
## BUSHMEN AND THE PROGRESS OF CAPITALISM

It has been estimated that the so-called Bushmen of the Kalahari have lived in southern Africa for at least 20,000 years, but that cuts no ice with the zealots hell-bent on the development of capitalism in that part of the world.

"The Bushmen of the Kalahari - among Africa's last indigenous peoples - are on the verge of losing their ancestral homeland after the Government of Botswana stepped up a campaign to force them into squalid resettlement camps" (*Times*, 12 September). The government has sent heavily armed wildlife guards into the Central Kalahari Game reserve - an area that had been promised to the Bushmen "in perpetuity". Their aim is to remove some 200 to 250 Gana and Gwi who have returned there from the resettlement camps. The *Times* report continues: "Stephen Corry, director of Survival International, which has been highlighting the Bushmen's plight, said: 'The Government seems hell-bent on finishing them off this time. The situation is very urgent. Unless circumstances change through outside intervention, this could very well be the end of these particular people'".

The plight of the Gana and Gwi people is by no means unique. The development of capitalism crushes all the tribal

societies it comes into contact with. In the past we have had the slaughter of the native Americans in the USA, the butchery of the Australian aborigines and more recently of the Yanomami in Northern Brazil. The concept of a tribal society that lives by gathering and



Bushmen of the Kalahari



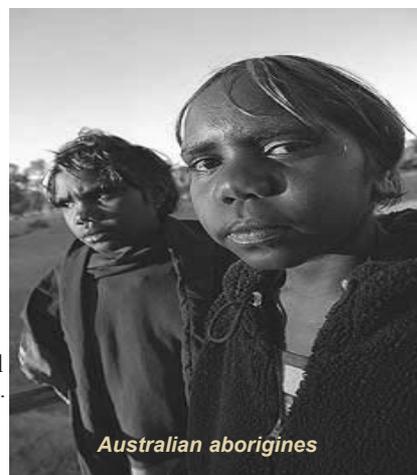
Yanomami of Venezuela

hunting with no recourse to capitalism's markets is anathema to a property-based social system.

The Botswana government has destroyed the tribal wells and banned hunting in its efforts to restrict tribal groups. The growth of farming and diamond mining probably lie behind the government's recent actions. Some government ministers have hinted that the evictions are needed because deposits of diamonds have been found in the area, although the state diamond company, which is an offshoot of De Beers claim they are uneconomic to mine.

"However, De Beers does not rule out mining them at a later date."

The development of capitalism in Africa must crush tribal communities just as it did in Europe and America. The only hope for a communal life-style is not a return to primitive tribal society, but the transformation of present day private property, profit-producing society into the new social system of world socialism.



Australian aborigines

## There Are Words for It...

Around five thousand languages are spoken at the moment, a number likely to be halved by the end of the twenty-first century. This is partly due to the impact of the world's 'major' languages, such as Spanish, Russian and (above all, of course) English. As English becomes a truly global language, the main language of films, popular music and the internet, not only do its words find their way even into languages like German, but it completely displaces many local or minority languages. The decline in numbers is also caused by the growing role of 'national languages', those taught in schools and recognised as a country's main language of communication. Tupac, for instance, once widely spoken in Brazil, is now down to a few hundred speakers, pushed out by the expansion of Portuguese (though it will live on in words it has given to English, such as jaguar).

Endangered languages like this have existed throughout history, but are now far commoner than previously. The reasons for this are usually seen as straightforwardly political:

"large centralized political units (both the old-fashioned empire and the all-modern nation state) cause the total number of languages in their territory to decline. In so

far as the world goes on being apportioned in such units, the total number of languages in the world will go on falling." (Andrew Dalby: *Language in Danger*)

This statement is correct as far as it goes, but it plays down the economic factors behind language death. Languages decline and die when the communities of their speakers are disrupted (by conquest, exile, disease, and so on) or when children grow up speaking in daily life a language other than that of their parents. This can happen for various reasons, one being that the 'new' language is seen as a means of economic advancement, perhaps just because it has more speakers and can offer better employment prospects or a bigger market. Languages with a few thousand, or even a few million speakers, can hardly 'compete' with English, the language of international business.

Even the way a language is written can be affected by political and economic considerations. After the collapse of the



Russian Empire in 1991, the governments of the new countries of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan decided to switch from the Cyrillic to the Roman alphabet to write their respective national languages, which are all related to Turkish. This was partly due to anti-Russian nationalism - the Cyrillic alphabet, which is used to write Russian, having been imposed by Stalin in the 1940s. But it is also clearly motivated by a desire to attract tourists and business visitors and to make it easier for people there to learn English. Returning to the Arabic alphabet (which was used in these countries before the Cyrillic) would have been possible, but would not have served the new rulers' westernising aims.

Besides undermining the status of languages, economic factors can lead to the creation of new languages. In *The Power of Babel*, John McWhorter traces the origins of Russenorsk, a kind of mixture of Russian and Norwegian, which came into being in the nineteenth century when Russian traders brought timber to Norway every summer to sell. Russenorsk was a very basic kind of language, useful for bartering and various other kinds of social interaction, but not usable for political debate or discussion of any abstract ideas. Languages like this are termed pidgins, and they usually arise when two groups of speakers come together in specific circumstances. Many Native Americans at first spoke Pidgin English



when speaking to white people, while maintaining their own languages too. Unlike Russenorsk, which was a genuine mixture, this Pidgin English consisted almost entirely of words from the language of the dominant group - English - since English-speakers rarely had any desire or motivation to learn a local language. This is the usual situation: the language of the conquerors or colonists provides the vocabulary of the pidgin, which the conquered people have to use to talk with their new masters.

Pidgins often die out after a while: the subordinate group may well adopt the

language of their conquerors, as happened in North America. Russenorsk ceased to be needed when the Russian Revolution put an end to the timber-trading. But sometimes a pidgin is expanded to become a full-fledged language, not one just used for a few special purposes, but one with its own individual structure and a vocabulary as large as that of any 'normal' language. A pidgin which has become a full language like this is called a creole; formation of a creole usually happens when people speaking different native languages and only sharing a pidgin are brought together. McWhorter mentions the case of Sranan, a creole spoken in Surinam, on the northern coast of South America. This was a British-owned slave colony, and slaves from various parts of Africa who were brought there had only Pidgin English in common at first. This eventually expanded to become Sranan, which is widely spoken in Surinam nowadays, alongside Dutch.

In fact the slave trade is the commonest causal factor in the origins of creoles. This appallingly cruel and immensely profitable system of trading in human beings resulted, among other things, in millions of people being uprooted from their homes and families, transported across the world, and set to work in desperate and scarcely-believable conditions. It should come as little surprise to learn that many

languages of the West Indies are creoles (Jamaican creole, for instance), as is Tok Pisin, one of the official languages of Papua New Guinea. As creolised forms of pidgin Englishes, these still have vocabularies that are partly derived from English, but they are absolutely not debased forms of English. The languages of other colonising nations have also given rise to creoles, such as a Portuguese-based creole in the Cape Verde Islands in the North Atlantic, and the French-based creole spoken in Haiti. As McWhorter says, "most creoles have arisen amid conditions of unthinkable stark and ineradicable social injustice."

One, rather controversial, claim is that the development of agriculture about ten thousand years ago led to the wiping out of many languages, as cultivators expanded their territories and settled down, thus overrunning existing groups of hunter-gatherers, who may well each have spoken their own language. Be that as it may, there is no doubt that capitalism, with its globalisation and its tendency to make everything homogeneous, is now killing off languages like nobody's business. An examination of the current state and historical development of the world's languages shows how capitalism leaves its ugly footprints everywhere, even in the way we speak. ■

**Paul Bennett**

## Is Marxism dead?

**S**urely before we cheer or weep over the bier of Marxism we should clearly identify the corpse. What exactly do we mean by Marxism?

Marxism is a materialist method of interpreting history; an explanation of social class and a labour theory of value. However, rather than getting involved in Marx's rather complicated theories, it is simpler to look at his vision of a proposed alternative to capitalism, which he called socialism (following Robert Owen) or communism - he and the pioneers of the socialist movement used the terms 'communism' and 'socialism' interchangeably.

Marx saw wage labour and capital as two sides of the same relation and affirmed that one could not exist without the other. He advised workers to remove from their banners the conservative slogan of a fair day's pay for a fair day's work and instead inscribe 'Abolition of the wages!' He saw the state - by its nature - as an executive committee of a ruling class and held that in socialism government of people would give way to a simple, democratic administration of things.

In other words, Marx's vision of socialism was of a social system of common ownership of the means of production, the resources of nature and the means of distribution essentially achieved by a conscious democratic process and administered necessarily by the widest possible forms of participative democracy.

It is important to emphasise - however obvious it should be - that the wageless, classless, moneyless and stateless world he envisaged could not be established by other than the conscious democratic action of a majority.

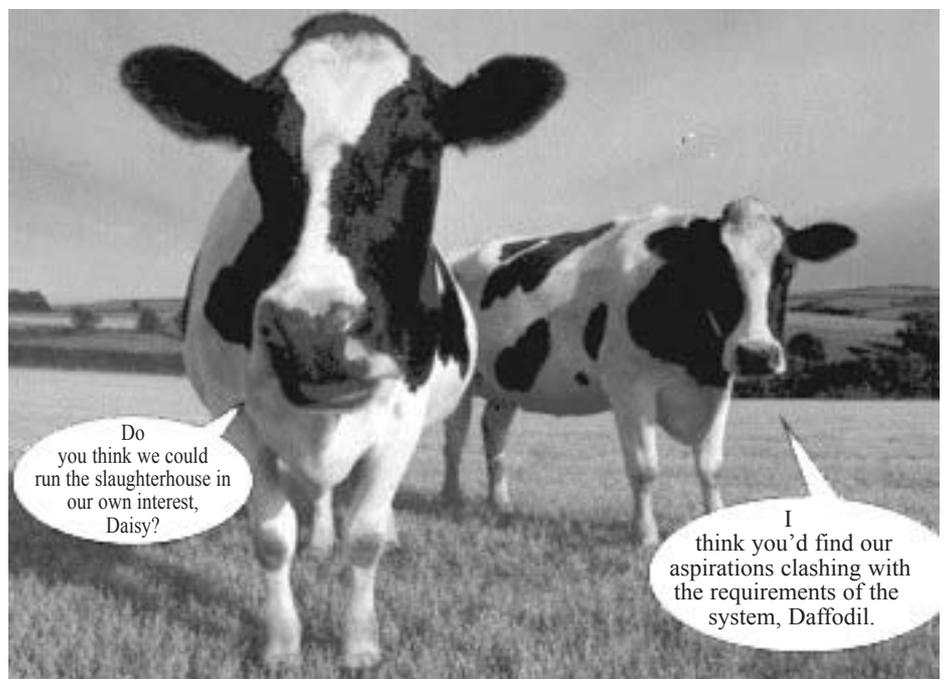
Today Left and Right are meaningless terms; each is one side of the spectrum of capitalism; and, because both accept to take on the political stewardship of capitalism, economic and political necessity frequently means they adopt each other's positions. Always when the Left gains power it creates dissidence within its own outer ranks when its aspirations clash with the requirements of the system and the capitalist ruling class.

In Britain today, 'Old Labour' - with a very short memory of old Labour governments! - bemoan the activities of Blair, Brown, Straw,

Blunkett and Clarke. We should remember that most of these men were Lefties and CNDers and that none of them invented 'Blairism'. Blairism and its outcrops are simply the logical application of the illogical reformist thesis that capitalism can be made to function in the interests of the working class; a bit like saying that the slaughterhouses can function for the benefit of the cattle.

Socialism/communism has never existed anywhere, nor could it exist in just part of the world, because it is the global alternative to a decadent global system. Socialists in open debate with upholders of capitalism will shatter their arguments and throw its philosophers to the wind. But the political agents of capitalism have learnt never to attack socialism as Karl Marx envisaged; instead they attack a perversion of Marxism which they call Marxist-Leninism - a contradiction in terms - or the limping incompetence of Left reformism in government.

Those who want to see socialism must first unequivocally delineate what they mean by the term, as all scientific practice calls for. Once this is done, it can be seen that socialism as advocated by Marx is still very much alive. ■



# Doubtful Benefits



Ministers try to portray the people dependent on benefits as somehow culpable for the whole cost of the benefits system.

It's another day with a 'Y' in its name, so the government must be attacking benefits scroungers again. The routine pieties of the modern political age are to talk about 'helping people' out of 'the benefits trap' and 'back into work' - joining the perennial political duties like cutting red tape and reducing government spending. The reason why these problems never go away is because they are problems caused by the very system which puts the politicians in power, and which they cannot resolve without destroying themselves and their own elevated statuses.

David Blunkett - now returned to the cabinet after resigning last year for abusing his office for personal gain in helping his lover's nanny get a visa quicker - has been making loud noises about the 'crackers' Incapacity Benefit system. It is Blunkett's role to sound like a bruiser, to talk tough and act tough, seen by many as appealing to Labour's core constituency - former Tory voters on council estates. He bemoaned the continuing rise of people on incapacity benefits (many driven there by previous efforts to try and cut benefits claimants, helped by staff driven by targets to reduce certain types of benefits).

There are currently 2.7 million people on incapacity benefit in the UK, with something like 29 million people in employment (possibly the highest UK figure ever). According to the BBC, that is four times the number of IB recipients compared to 30 years ago. Of course, many things have changed since then, not least the structure of the benefits system as a whole. Blunkett, however, still wants to drastically reduce the numbers on incapacity.

Revealing his new status as a medical doctor, Blunkett pronounced that getting out to work is a better cure for depression than staying at home watching daytime telly. This startling revelation must have shocked his fellow healthcare professionals who had been labouring under the impression that depression is a medical ailment of the brain as much as a break is a medical condition of the leg. Perhaps Blunkett will now advise a brisk walk as a cure for that.

Behind the tough rhetoric, though, as ever with the modern Machiavellian Labour Party, is some old-fashioned Old Labour-style reforms: plans to make the benefits

system 'a ladder to self-reliance' and to give assistance with training and finding jobs to people who are on IB. Simplification of the system may actually help people who are supposed to be too ill to work but have to be well enough to run from pillar to post to fill in their 2,000 page benefits claim form signed in triplicate in blood. Or something like that.

This is cut from the same cloth as the New Deal and all their previous schemes to 'help' the unemployed back to work by badgering them and managing them into being full-time professional job seekers. Of course, this runs counter to any notion that they can quickly cut costs. This month also saw the National Audit Office reveal that only 5% of people on IB were able to access back to work schemes. To assist more people through such structures will actually increase the cost of managing the benefits, not decrease it, as massive expansion would be required.

This is the central conundrum for governments: caught between a real problem beyond their control, trapped by their own eternal propaganda of cost cutting, they cannot pursue their eternal propaganda of getting people off benefits. Instead, all we have is a Groundhog Day of pronouncements and denouncements as the Ministers try to be seen doing something, usually by trying to portray the people who are dependent on benefits as somehow culpable and at fault for the whole of the costs of the benefits system.

Politicians are struggling to define the typical benefits recipient, to legitimise the idea of welfare so they can attack it and reduce costs and also increase downwards pressures on wages and the labour market. Most people in the UK are probably only two pay cheques away from needing to call on benefits, but rather than portray it as a system to help people and prevent catastrophe it is universally presented as a location of cheats, frauds and scroungers, riddled with layabouts and other undeserving poor types. Benefits and being on benefits is to be despised and feared.

Despite this, though, people are compelled to claim them because of the wages system, because they are too ill to work or because work is not available. The benefits system actually benefits employers

who otherwise would face the costs and disruption of having to keep on people whose illness makes them turn up to work irregularly, who would lie in desperation to get jobs about their illnesses, and push much of the cost currently borne generally through taxes directly onto capitalists who employ many workers.

Herein is the rub of the £3 billion lost from the system by fraud and 'error' - much of it will have been small sums given to people which will have made their lives easier. Some of it will have contributed to the real living needs of claimants. The real tragedy is not the fraud or the overspend, but that much of the £109 billion budget is wasted assessing people, categorising people and cheeseparating their entitlements. There is enough food, clothing and housing to go round. The world today is not short of wealth. In order, though, to maintain labour discipline, to keep the labour market in existence, a massive welfare budget must be expended to deny access to the things people need.

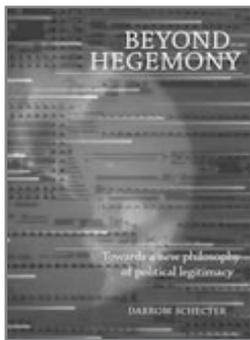
The simple fact is that we live in a society overripe for socialism. The material possibility has been around the corner for years. When we remove the barriers to the access of wealth, we also remove the barriers that make some people unemployable, that make socialising and community a cost that has to be scraped out of local authority and social services budgets. We would remove the binds, the need to support a restrictive welfare system but simultaneously to attack it and try to reduce its budget, by the principle of producing freely together.

Socialists, unlike leftists, do not support the welfare state, do not see it as a way to socialism, but as an inevitable part of capitalism, of administering poverty. The abolition of poverty - not in far-flung imagined foreign fields where poverty is vividly drawn by the masters of propaganda, but on the very streets where we walk and it is painted out by those same illusionists - will mean an end to the welfare ideology. With luck, it will also mean seeing less of David Blunkett's face revelling in his own 'stern compassion'. ■

PIK SMEET

**Gilded Socialism**

**Darrow Schechter: Beyond Hegemony. Manchester University Press. £55.**



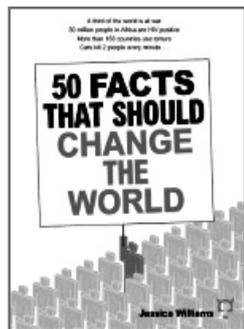
This turns out to be an attempt to work out a philosophical and sometimes nearly incomprehensible (at least outside the little world of academia) basis for an alternative to liberal democracy (free-market capitalism), social-democracy (regulated capitalism) and what Schechter calls "state socialism" (state capitalism).

Schechter identifies that what is wrong with these is that all three of them involve commodity production and consumption ("production for exchange and the generation of money and capital rather than direct use"), and that the alternative has to be a system where there is production directly for use. Unfortunately, he sees the answer in the Utopian scheme devised in the 1920s by the Labour historian (and Labour Party activist) G.D.H. Cole, which he called "Guild Socialism". Although Cole's blueprint did provide for close links between consumers and producers which could be interpreted as "production directly for use", it still envisaged the continuation of finance, prices and incomes. And it was to come into being through the guilds eventually outcompeting capitalist industries in the marketplace (though, to be fair to Schechter, he doesn't explicitly endorse this and may well not support it).

But if Schechter stands for "Guild Socialism" why doesn't he just campaign for it? Does it really need the elaborate philosophical basis he has constructed for it? Perhaps it's just that university lecturers have to publish to justify their jobs.  
**ALB**

**Dreadful Catalogue**

**Jessica Williams: 50 Facts that Should Change the World. Icon £6.99.**



The obvious reaction to the title is to say that it's people that change the world, not facts. But Jessica Williams begins by claiming that the facts she has assembled can change the way people think. The information gathered here does indeed provide many reasons why the world needs to be changed.

Much of what is said will probably be familiar to readers of the Socialist Standard. One in five of the earth's population go

hungry each day, for instance, while one British child in three lives below the poverty line, and life expectancy is strikingly low in many countries, especially in Africa. Others are perhaps not so appalling: is it really so bad that Brazil has more Avon ladies than members of its armed forces? But many will find much that is new and enlightening here. For example, far from slavery having been abolished, there are more slaves in the world today (27 million) than at any time previously. More people die from suicide than from armed conflicts: in 2000 around one million people killed themselves and at least ten times that number tried to do so. What sort of world is it in which so many find their lives insupportable to this extent?

Or where over two hundred million child labourers exist? In nine countries, same-sex relationships are punishable by death, while over 150 states make use of torture. One third of the world's population live in countries involved in armed conflict, and black American men stand a one-in-three chance of going to prison at some time in their lives. Two million women are subjected to female genital mutilation each year, while over one million people are killed in road traffic accidents.

The book presents a dreadful catalogue of poverty, violence, degradation and waste, a vivid picture of 21st-century capitalism, all backed up with useful references. Williams adds commentary of her own, together with ideas for solving the problems. Some of this is OK - she recognises that famine and malnutrition are not caused by food shortages. But far too much of it is concerned with what governments should do and how 'we' should influence them. The real lesson to draw, though, is that we truly do need to change the world, not just get the rulers to behave in a more enlightened way.  
**PB**

**The Measure of All Things**

**Postmodern Humanism. By Jack Grassby. TUPS books. 2005. £9.95**

Until the 1960s Secularists, Rationalists and Free Thinkers as they were variously called had a reputation, rightly or wrongly, of being negative god-killers, bible-debunkers and priest-baiters. Then, in 1963, a group which felt the need to appear more positive set up the British Humanist Association. They still seem to be working out what their positive case is beyond promoting a non-religious but still ethical approach to life. Recently they set up a working group to examine their core values. Jack Grassby is a member of the North East Humanists and his book is intended as a contribution to this debate.

It is not certain that it will appeal to his fellow Humanists as he embraces two approaches most of them would not normally like any more than we do: sociobiology (with its biological determinism) and postmodernism (with its rejection of any universal human values). Also, it contains a number of embarrassing howlers, such as stating that homo sapiens emerged from the Neanderthals and that Socrates preached that "man is the measure of all things" whereas this was the view of the Sophists that Socrates set out to rubbish. Come to think of it, "man is the measure of all things" could

well be the core-value that the Humanists are searching for.  
**ALB**

**Simply Odd**

**A Rebel's Guide to Lenin. Ian Birchall. Bookmarks. £2.**

This is an odd, 58-page top-pocket-size pamphlet. Odd because it is written in very simple language and seems to be aimed at schoolkids who might be influenced by anarchist ideas.

Thus, Birchall tells us, "Lenin's goal was the same as the anarchists", but he recognised that the path it would be complex". Yes indeed, by means of the dictatorship of a vanguard party which would last for years and which would, supposedly, in time give up its power and privilege and abolish the state.

Birchall quotes from ex-anarchists who came over to the Bolsheviks such as Alfred Rosmer and Victor Serge and tells us that Lenin "spent hours discussing with anarchists such as Emma Goodman from the US and Makhno from Ukraine" and argued that "the syndicalist idea of an 'organised minority' of the most militant workers and the Bolshevik idea of the party were the same thing".

This may have worked in the aftermath of the first world war and the Russian revolution to temporarily win over a number of anarchists and syndicalists, but it is hard to see it working today to get any budding anarchists to join the SWP.  
**ALB**

**Correction**

Two mistakes found their way into the article "Why They Dropped the Bombs" in the October issue. The date of the Potsdam ultimatum to Japan was 26 July not 21 July as stated and there was a reference to a comment of the Joint Intelligence Committee in "March 1940". Readers will have realised that this cannot have been since the US and Japan were not even at war at that point. It should of course have read "March 1944".

**Africa: a Marxian Analysis**

A 30-page pamphlet written by socialists living in Africa consisting mainly of reprints from *The Socialist Standard*. Marx's materialist conception of history and analysis is applied to:

- State and class in pre-colonial West Africa
- Tribalism
- Colonialism and Capitalism
- Religion, Race and Class
- Sharia Law in Nigeria
- Early 20th Century South Africa



Available from **The Socialist Party**, 52 Clapham High St., London SW4 7UN. £1 (£1.35 by post). Cheques payable to "The Socialist Party of Great Britain"

## Meetings

### CENTRAL LONDON DAY SCHOOL

Saturday 12 November, 13.30 to 17.00

### THE HUMAN REVOLUTION

13.30 Welcome. Tea. Coffee. Biscuits.  
14.00 Guest Speaker: Chris Knight  
(Professor of Anthropology, University of East London)  
Chair: Bill Martin (Socialist Party).  
16.00 Tea break  
16.30 More questions and discussion

Room 7, Friends Meeting House, 173 Euston Rd, London NW1 (opposite Euston mainline station; nearest tubes: Euston, Euston Square).

### CENTRAL LONDON BRANCH

Monday 14 November, 7.45 pm  
Carpenters Arms, Seymour Place, W1 (near Marble Arch)

### 'DON'T TAKE ME TO YOUR LEADER'

A discussion meeting on socialist views on leadership will be opened by Stan Parker

### MANCHESTER BRANCH

Monday 28 November, 8pm

### DISCUSSION ON PREJUDICE

Hare and Hounds, Shudehill, City Centre

### NORWICH

Saturday 5 November

Welcome and informal chat for new visitors

1pm: Meal

2pm: Discussion/possibility of forming an East Anglian branch

3pm: Discussion of ADM items

3.45-4pm: Recent and future activity.

The Conservatory, back room of The Rosary Tavern, Rosary Road, Norwich



## Fifty Years Ago

### TROUBLE IN SCHOOL

Few of us have seen a jungle but all of us know, from the adventure stories we read in childhood, what a jungle is like. It is a dark, dangerous agglomeration of weird flora and horrid fauna, where the natives are permanently hostile. Fang, claw and poisoned dart lie in wait and savage, malignant creatures leap, crawl and slither everywhere, all the accompaniment of war-whoops and gibberings.

And that, according to recent accounts, is how things are in school these days. At the same time as "The Blackboard Jungle" was first shown in this country, the News Chronicle (early in September) published "Jungle in the Classroom," a series of three articles in which Dr. John Laird reported on London's secondary modern schools. Five of these schools comprised Dr. Laird's jungle: they are, he claims, typical of the rest. In them

children run amok; teachers are resisted, ridiculed, even assaulted; educational standards are almost incredibly low. About 30 per cent of the children leave school "unable to read much beyond the level of an eight-year-old child, and unable to write a letter that would be easily deciphered."

Not surprisingly, there were indignant denials. "Sensational and one-sided," wrote Sir Ronald Gould, of the National Union of Teachers; "fantastically distorted . . . absurdly untrue." The Secretary of the London Head Teachers' Association. An official of the London County Council affirmed their view; so did most of the teacher who sent letter to the News Chronicle. Few, however, dealt with the facts, and certainly none mentioned that Dr. Laird is not the first to have said all those things: little more than a year ago a novel called "Spare the Rod" painted a similar picture of secondary modern schooling and wrung from the Times an admission that "it probably has some truth

in it."

The secondary modern school is the lowest, most prolific unit in the State educational system of this country. It looks after the children between 11 and 15 who have not passed scholarship examinations, whose parents cannot afford private school fees or don't care anyway. It sets out to impart the minimum of necessary knowledge and inculcate a number of basic social attitudes. To say that is not to accuse the ruling class of conspiracy, but simply to point to what education means in any society: the equipment and adjustment of the young for what they have to do.

(From an article by R. Coster, *Socialist Standard*, November 1955)



## Declaration of Principles

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

### Object

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

### Declaration of Principles The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



## The Respect That Makes Calamity

**W**hen was it that Tony Blair decided that Respect would be an attractive, vote-catching election theme? Was it a long time ago, before he had felt the first stirrings of political ambition and was merely a rebellious, disrespectful schoolboy? Or later, when he was safely ensconced in Downing Street and his son was collected from a West End gutter after disrespectfully celebrating the end of his exams? Whatever the truth of this, the theme now looks about to become another New Labour obsession. Here is Blair, speaking on the steps of Number Ten after his victory in the 2005 election, vowing to bring back "A proper sense of respect in our schools, in our communities, in our towns and villages". And here is Charles Clarke, a Labour Home Secretary doing his best to forget his past as a stropky left winger: "Tackling disrespect in our society is an absolute priority for the government".

Blair has made it clear where he thinks the blame lies for any shortcomings in this matter: "it is in the family that we have to come to terms with the idea of give and take and respect for other people". And what if the family does not come up to these expectations? Well, "People need to understand that if their kids are out of control and they are causing a nuisance to the local community, there is something that is going to happen". And that "something" is to apply Parenting Orders, now to be extended and strengthened, which force parents to be instructed in how to bring up their children - teaching them to respect others, give up their bus seat to an old lady, stand up when the national anthem is played, always wear their full school uniform and obey the general laws and orders of capitalist society. If the parents succeed in this and their kids behave in an orderly, respectful way, Blair will be a happier man and, the argument runs, New Labour will win yet another election.

### Straw

This is all very well, but as a spokesperson for the children's charity Barnado's pointed out, it is not only children who are the cause of nuisance behaviour and it is not only in family homes and schools that the problem reveals itself. There was the recent example of Labour Party member Walter Wolfgang, who was so lacking in respect for figures of power and authority that he recklessly called out, slumped in his seat at Labour's conference, that Foreign Secretary Jack Straw was a liar. At the time Straw was only doing his job, giving the conference (which was very sparsely attended at the time) the Labour Party line, perhaps flavoured by a Foreign Office brief, that Iraq was attacked in order to get rid of Saddam Hussein and establish a modern democracy there, whatever the Iraqi people thought about it. Now, the Foreign Secretary holds one of the great offices of state, is a person of considerable influence and standing in society (although in the unusual case of Jack Straw his standing, for reasons connected with the ruthless game of politics, is rather lower than is the custom) who should command respectful silence when he is telling lies. It is no excuse for Wolfgang to argue that he was carried away by the contrast between Straw's original doubts about the invasion of Iraq and his passionate support of it now. It is an essential of being respectful to keep extremes of emotion - like outrage at a blatant, cynical betrayal - strictly under control.



Walter Wolfgang

It was especially unwise of Wolfgang to interrupt Jack Straw who, when he was Home Secretary, was liable to become excited in discussing the symptoms of social disturbance. It was Straw who first publicly condemned the "squeegee bandits" - people who, without the driver asking, cleaned the windscreens of cars which were halted at traffic lights. We never did hear what happened to all those dangerous criminals who went about their nefarious business with wet sponges in their hands - and Straw forgot about them as well. Then he complained about his evening drive home from the office being marred by the spectacle of young people out on the streets later than a respectable Home Secretary thought they should be. That particular neurosis lingers on, in the ASBOs and the campaign about respect. And it was Straw who had to take his son to a police station after he had been exposed by a tabloid newspaper for offering controlled drugs for sale. Not, in other words, someone for Wolfgang to tangle with. It is just as well that Straw was so effectively protected from him.



### Casey

Unfortunately, when Wolfgang embarked on his one-man campaign to wreck Labour's conference there was not enough time to refer him to his local branch of the new anti-social behaviour units (of which more later), with a view to cracking down on his parents who, as Blair has told us, must be held responsible for raising so disruptive a character. This was clearly considered an unrealistic option when Labour's

Former ASBO tsarina Casey

spin doctors were told about Wolfgang's age. So it was entirely appropriate - indeed there was no other way - for a couple of impressively beefy, enthusiastically respectful, Labour Party members who had volunteered to police the conference, to eject him from the hall. Along with another member who was disrespectful enough to protest at an 82-year-old man having his collar felt in that way. Perhaps now Wolfgang, like other offenders against the law, will be taught to keep his place by being deprived of his state benefits under the rules dreamed up by David Blunkett, who used to be Home Secretary but is now in charge of the Department of Work and Pensions.

Meanwhile the new task force with the job of teaching respect to people who heckle government ministers is getting down to its vital work. At its head is Louise Casey, who was already in charge of the Anti-Social Behaviour Unit. Her new job requires her to "focus" (a word much loved by New Labour hopefuls) on "working together on the neighbourhood renewal and anti-social behaviour agendas, highlighting respect for others and respect for the community." Whatever talents Casey can bring to this task, sensitive public relations is not among them. A few weeks before her new appointment, when she was merely the ASBO tsarina, she informed an audience of Home Office staff and senior police officers that "Doing things sober is no way to get things done...I suppose you can't binge drink any more. I don't know who bloody made that up. It's nonsense...There is an obsession with evidence-based policy. If Number Ten says bloody evidence-based policy to me one more time I'll deck them and probably get unemployed."

### Questions

All over the country breath will be bated while we learn what kind of "respect" Casey will introduce us to. Wolfgang will probably be particularly apprehensive. Meanwhile Labour has been most generous in its response to his deplorable lack of respect for one of their senior politicians. One minister after another queued up to offer their humblest apology to him. Party chairman Ian McCartney went so far as to promise to take him out for a meal - a traditionally pacifying treat for stropky pensioners - although whether eating in company with the myopically loyal Labourite McCartney would be nutritious and mollifying, or further punishment, was not clear. As the dust settled it had to be asked whether the apologies and the threatened dinner with McCartney were motivated by the fact that the Labour stewards had so clumsily committed their assault on Wolfgang in full view of the TV cameras. For some viewers it was reminiscent of Mosley's infamous fascist rally at Olympia in 1934. If there had not been the same damning TV exposure, would all those ministers have been so eager to grovel?

There are other questions which need to be asked in the whole matter of "respect". What kind of "respect" was shown by Jack Straw when he changed his mind over something as important as the war in Iraq? What sort of "respect" is shown by the Blair government's drive to undermine the established legal rights of people who are arrested by the police? And on the other side, what degree of "respect" do we find in the attitude of someone like the heckling Wolfgang, who undisturbedly keeps his membership of both CND and the Labour Party, although he must know that there is no prospect of this government, or any future Labour government, agreeing to throw away their nuclear weapons? Let it be clear. Having respect for people and our environment - acknowledging and caring for each other's strengths, needs, weaknesses, ambitions - is not compatible with capitalism's essentially competitive, repressive nature. Capitalism makes heroes of those who rise to the top, no matter how ruthlessly they achieve that. Tony Blair, for example, did not get where he is by allowing himself to be diverted through any respect for truth and human interests. And then what about the people - the working class - who in their millions support capitalism's political parties through thick and thin, disaster and triumph, contempt and respect? They need to understand that in the mouth of a politician "respect" is a fine but meaningless word. Unhappy and disillusioned people like Wolfgang should know this because they have experienced "respect" at the sharp end. ■

IVAN



# Voice from the Back

## THE RICH GET RICHER

"The US's richest tycoons increased their personal wealth in the past year, with the top 400 worth \$1.13 trillion (£640bn), says Forbes magazine.... To make this year's list of the top 400 fortunes in the US a minimum net worth of \$900m was required - up from \$750m last year." (BBC News, 23 September) The old popular song "Aint We Got Fun" cynically stated "The rich get rich and the poor get children", but it is no laughing matter.

## YOUR TWO CENTS WORTH

An analysis of the gap between the rich and poor in Manhattan by Dr Beveridge of the City University of New York is revealing. "Income Disparity in City Matches Namibia. Trump Tower on Fifth Avenue is only about 60 blocks from the Wagner Houses, a public housing project in East Harlem, but they might as well be light years apart. They epitomise the highest and lowest earning tracts in Manhattan, where the disparity between rich and poor is now greater than any county in the country. ... The top fifth of earners in Manhattan make 52 times what the lowest fifth make - \$365,826 compared with \$7,047 - roughly comparable to the income disparity in Namibia. ... Put another way, for every dollar made by households in the top fifth of Manhattan earners, households in the bottom fifth made about 2 cents." (*New York Times*, 17 September)



## BIG SPENDER

"The minute he walked in the joint, they could tell he was a real big spender. ... By the time he left the Aviva bar in the five-star Baglioni Hotel in Kensington, West London, on Thursday night, he had spent nearly £36,000. He bought 851 cocktails, emptied the place of



Louis Roederer Cristal champagne, and gave a waitress a £3,000 tip. (*Times*, 1 October) This hedge fund manager from New York spent £16,500 on champagne and £6,000 on a variety of cocktails. It can be safely assumed this high-roller does not live in the Wagner housing project in East Harlem.

## DOUBLETHINK

According to George Orwell in 1984, doublethink is the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them. This spectacular mental gymnastic feat seems to have been accomplished by Karen Hughes, a public relations spokesperson for President Bush in her recent trip to the Middle East. Trying to sugar the pill for her Turkish listeners she came out with this classic of Doublespeak. "To preserve peace, sometimes my country believes war is necessary." (*Observer*, 2 October)

## PROGRESSING BACKWARDS

Some years ago the press and TV was full of conjecture about the wonderful leisure-based life we would have inside capitalism. Futurologists and other media pundits speculated that with the advance of technology we would all be working fewer hours and fewer days per week. The big problem of the future would be how to spend all our leisure hours. Such scenarios have proven completely wrong with many of us now working longer hours and now it seems probably working for many more years. "The state pension age should be raised to 70, the Confederation of British Industry says in light of new figures detailing extended life expectancy." (*Times*, 4 October)

## THE DIGNITY OF LABOUR

In an edited extract from *Maxwell's Fall: An Insider's Account* by Roy Greenslade we learn something of the contempt the owning class feel for the working class. When Maxwell took over *The Daily Mirror* he wanted to speak to Kelvin MacKenzie then the editor of *The Sun* but his secretary reported that MacKenzie would not accept his call. "Maxwell demanded that the secretary relate the conversation in full, but she

was hesitant. "No, no, no," screamed Maxwell. "Tell me everything he said." She said she would prefer not to, but Maxwell shouted: "You will not get into trouble, Patricia. But if you refuse, you will be in trouble." "Well, Mr Maxwell, he said, "I don't want to speak to the fat Czech bastard." Two weeks later Patricia left in tears, escorted from the building by a security man (*Times*, 6 October).



## THE DECLINE OF RELIGION

It used to be an argument of supporters of capitalism that socialism was impossible because of the working class's adherence



to religion. A recent article by the columnist Magnus Linklater seems to give the lie to that notion. "Whereas in 1851 between 40 and 60 per cent of the population went regularly to church, today that figure is less than 7 per cent. In recent years the trend has accelerated - by 28 per cent in the last 20 years for the Catholic Church, and 24 per cent for the Anglican Church; in Scotland, the fall has been so dramatic that the once all-powerful Kirk reported recently that it could well be extinct as an organisation within the next 50 years." (*Times*, 13 October) Any other arguments against socialism?

## Free lunch

by Rigg

