

socialist standard

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Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

SYSTEM CHANGE



NOT CLIMATE CHANGE

**ONLY GLOBAL SOCIALISM CAN PUT OUT
THE FLAMES OF CAPITALIST GLOBAL WARMING**



*also: Gilets Jaunes
Rosa Luxemburg
The Italian Economy*



socialist standard

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NO LONGER INVISIBLE

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Introducing the Socialist Party

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

The *Socialist Standard* is the combative monthly journal of the Socialist Party, published without interruption since 1904. In the 1930s the *Socialist Standard* explained why capitalism would not collapse of its own accord, in response to widespread claims to the contrary, and continues to hold this view in face of the notion's recent popularity. Beveridge's welfare measures of the 1940s were viewed as a reorganisation of poverty and a necessary 'expense' of production, and Keynesian policies designed to overcome slumps an illusion. Today, the journal exposes as false the view that banks create money out of thin air, and explains

why actions to prevent the depredation of the natural world can have limited effect and run counter to the nature of capitalism itself.

Gradualist reformers like the Labour Party believed that capitalism could be



transformed through a series of social measures, but have merely become routine managers of the system. The Bolsheviks had to be content with developing Russian capitalism under a one-party dictatorship. Both failures have given socialism a quite different -- and

unattractive -- meaning: state ownership and control. As the *Socialist Standard* pointed out before both courses were followed, the results would more properly be called state capitalism.

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

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Editorial

System change not climate change

In its latest report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a scientific body set up by the United Nations to provide governments with information on climate change, warns that we have about twelve years to limit the rise in global temperatures to 1.5 C above pre-industrial levels and that drastic action will be required to achieve this. Temperature rises above 1.5 C risk catastrophic consequences for life on this planet. Recently, scientists have been warning that global warming has been escalating at a faster pace than previously predicted. Sir David Attenborough has added his voice at the opening of the UN climate change summit in Poland (also known as COP24) by warning that unless decisive action is taken civilisations may face collapse and much of the natural world may become extinct.

Given these and other warnings over the years, this is surely the wake-up call to galvanise governments into action? Well apparently not. Since 1992, governments have come together in periodic summits to attempt to thrash out agreements to combat global warming but have achieved little success. Either they are reluctant to accept carbon emission targets or

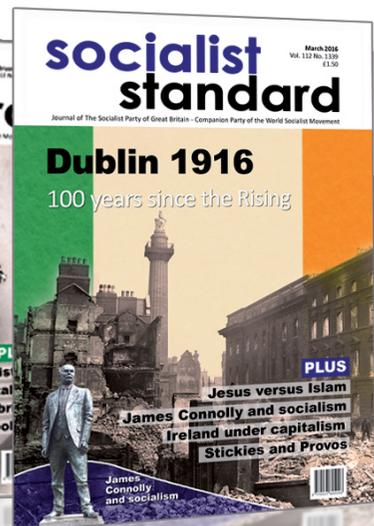
find ways to dodge them. In June 2017, Donald Trump announced the United States withdrawal from the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change. At the COP24 summit, the United States, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait objected to a summit motion 'welcoming' the IPCC report, preferring to 'note' it instead, which would make it easier for them to ignore it. It seems easier for governments to negotiate trade deals than to combat environmental degradation. As intractable as the problem of Brexit is, it is a safe bet that it will be resolved long before the environmental crisis.

What is holding us back? Capitalism depends on the drive for profits, which must take priority over everything else. Capitalists compete with each other in the market place and have to keep their costs to a minimum, otherwise they may lose out to their competitors and their businesses may fail. Green measures that may increase business costs will have to be ignored. Nation-states face the same pressures, as they compete on global markets. Governments, which look after the interests of their respective capitalists, seek to protect their lucrative extractive industries. Hence Donald Trump's reason

for pulling out of the Paris agreement was that it was bad for US businesses and jobs. Seen from this context, prescriptions by environmentalists for people to change their lifestyles – to reduce their consumption of meat, to use public transport rather than private vehicles - will not resolve the crisis. If we are to have an environmentally sustainable future and avoid ecological catastrophe, we cannot rely on the capitalists and their governments to achieve this for us, we, the working class, must organise quickly to rid ourselves of capitalism and establish a society of common ownership of the means of living where we will be to plan production in a rational environmentally friendly way according to human need. We strongly urge workers to join us in this urgent task.



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PATHFINDERS

Missionary positions

“LORD, IS this island Satan’s last stronghold where none have heard or even had the chance to hear your name?” So wrote John Allen Chau, the 26-year-old Christian missionary, just before his last visit to North Sentinel Island in the Andaman chain in November last year. His death at the hands of the Sentineli islanders made world headlines, largely because it was like something out of the eighteenth century. The pious missionary rows his canoe to the shore, brandishes a Bible and starts singing hymns, and the Stone Age natives shoot him full of arrows.

Interestingly, all the media blame for this fateful encounter fell on Chau himself, who was visiting illegally and in defiance of the island’s special protection status. The Sentineli have a history of killing intruders, and Chau himself had already been shot at with arrows on a previous visit, so he knew very well what might happen. The Indian police arrested seven fishermen who had helped Chau get to the island, though no arrests on the island itself were made or even mooted. Some blame should also fall on the organisation that sent him, the All Nations Church of St Louis, Missouri, whose stated mission ‘to do whatever it takes so as many people as possible can see Jesus’ is what got Chau killed. The fact that imported viral or bacterial diseases are the number one killer among newly-contacted tribes does not seem to have occurred to the moronic bible-bashers. What’s worrying is the thought that other church groups will now view the Sentineli as the ultimate challenge.

Billed as ‘the last uncontacted tribe on Earth’, the Sentineli have in fact been contacted off and on since 1867, and received tools and cooking implements as gifts, but encounters have frequently gone badly. Not much is known about them except that they use fire and know how to rework scavenged iron for arrowheads. What can be speculated is that, like most ‘isolated’ tribes the world over, they know far more about the outside world than the outside world suspects. Their hostility is almost certainly due to fear than to some supposed innate aggression.

Inverting the usual colonial assumptions about what such people could gain from the modern world, the BBC instead approached various anthropologists to ask what we might learn from the tribes (BBC Online, 24 November). Apart, that is, from stealing their local medicinal plants and patenting them for the pharmaceutical industry.

Thus we learn that the 14,000-strong

Piaroa of Venezuela are egalitarians who practise individualistic autonomy without hierarchies or private ownership. They see competition as evil and don’t play any competitive sports, and anyone who gets above themselves is treated with pity as being immature. Wikipedia also attests to this ‘functioning anarchist society’



Piaroa Man at Work

and notes that they are ‘opposed to the hoarding of resources, which they see as giving members the power to constrain their freedom.’

Well quite, and what we’ve been saying all along. Not that every remote tribe is so enlightened, of course, and the BBC article warns us not to ‘over-romanticise’ how they live. But socialists can easily relate to groups like the Piaroa, who seem to have hit on the principles of common ownership and equality as a successful survival strategy and would presumably look askance at modern capitalism and its habit of pursuing the exact opposite of a successful survival strategy. Maybe the Piaroa should send out missionaries to the capitalist world. But the world would probably tell them their society is logically impossible because of human nature. Or shoot them full of arrows.

What’s cooking?

‘When we’re confronted with abundance, we’re hardwired to take what we can, and it’s difficult to overcome that impulse’, says the founder of a UK food-waste reduction organisation in a recent article about how to reduce the approximately 30 percent of food that is wasted every year (*New Scientist*, 8 December). The blame for this apparently lies with supermarkets, which pile high and sell cheap, leading to runaway overconsumption and waste in fresh perishable goods. But this makes it sound as if consumers are mindlessly greedy, when the reality is they’re having to pay for all this waste and many are hard-pressed to afford it. The more likely explanation for such waste is that, despite endless food-porn TV shows, people are

not very good at managing the business of domestic cooking. It’s not taught effectively in schools because they don’t have the time or the facilities to achieve more than a tokenistic effort. And parents who can’t cook are not going to pass the skills on either. No wonder poor people resort to expensive and environmentally wasteful takeaways and TV dinners.

The article discusses a new business model which aims to supply meal ‘kits’, comprising the exact proportions of ingredients in compostable packaging, however the take-up rate is slow and the value for money questionable. What has not occurred to anyone is the idea of socialising the process. In socialism it would be deemed sheer lunacy for each individual to do their own cooking in their own kitchen with their own larders and fridges full of their own food stores, when most people would be happy to share the job communally and thereby only need to help cook once a month or so. Think of the savings in space, storage, waste, time, effort, and indeed safety, given the huge potential for burns, cuts and fires. You might call that plain old common sense, but capitalism doesn’t have an abundance of that.

Brave New CRISPR World

In December a Chinese researcher achieved a historic landmark but earned general condemnation including from Chinese regulators by announcing the world’s first IVF twins born after modification with the CRISPR gene-editing process (*New Scientist*, 8 December). The researcher is widely considered a renegade for ignoring international ethical standards, employing an experimental technique for no valid medical reason, and including clauses in his test agreement that compelled participants to continue or else pay a large forfeiture. The targeted gene coded for HIV resistance, however it would only ever be partially effective at best. Meanwhile nobody can tell what side-effect damage may have been caused, and it will be years before this can be known. Ethical oversight aside, designer babies are where the smart capitalist money is. Huxley’s famous dystopia just came a step closer.

PJS



LETTERS

Rose by another name?

Dear Editors

It is good to know that there is still a socialist party for people to join and stay with and encourage others to become party members. So why don't they? What are they looking for? The very same as the bulk of most countries. A fairer share which, under present circumstances, they won't get. How could they? There needs to be a radical change, and that change is the removal of the market economy by a resource economy. The party that marched under that banner would gain votes that would put them into a majority in parliament and the means to enforce it. All the problems that presently assail us would be swiftly dealt with and met away. To put it succinctly, S.P.E.R.T.

Space from empty financial premises converted to housing and medical premises and so on. Namely hospitals asap. Existing ones refurbished.

Personnel pared down to those operating a debit and credit system to deal with our booming and expanding productivity, gained from full employment; servicing our imports with our exports. So many filling our employment gaps.

Energy. In the shape of electricity, gas, water and human, being wasted in inconceivable amounts by institutions manipulating money for profit and pure greed and advantage often leading to global conflict and inevitable sufferings of innocents.

Resources. In the shape of aforementioned space and personnel plus all furnishings, vehicles, equipment, trappings, accoutrements and servicing appertaining to financial institutions made available to worthwhile social endeavour.

Time which could be and should be devoted to the welfare of every individual born is applied by too many in the pursuit of wealth and thus power and the gratification that arises, thereby wasting irrecoverable time repetitively.

Raise the SPERT banner. You may well attract far more support than you do now.

E.W. Reynolds, Reading.

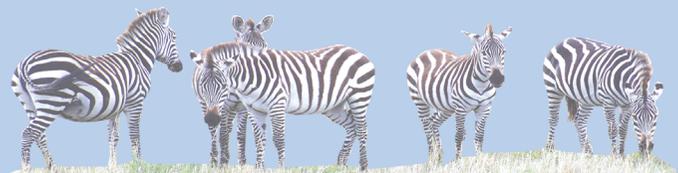
Reply:

We can agree with the gist of what you say – that if the physical and human resources currently devoted to running a market economy's financial and monetary institutions were redirected towards meeting people's needs, then people would no longer need to face the problems they do.

This presupposes that productive resources are owned and controlled by society as a whole and no longer by rich individuals, capitalist corporations or governments. Under these circumstances money would become redundant as goods and services would be produced directly for people to take and use instead of for sale and profit as at present.

In this context the language of your second point – 'debit and credit', 'full employment' – is confusing as these words could be taken as suggesting, contrary to what you say elsewhere, the continued use of money. We assume that what you mean is that organising the production and distribution of wealth will be pared down to calculating and recording the use of physical resources, and that by 'full employment' you mean that everyone will have work to do (as opposed to having an employer who pays them a money-wage).

Similarly, talk of 'imports' and 'exports' implies that you think that a 'resource economy' could exist in one country alone. We disagree. Capitalism is already an integrated, world-wide system of which all countries are a part. So must its successor, socialism, be. We don't agree that calling such a society in which money will have become redundant 'Spert' or whatever rather than 'socialism' will attract more support for it than at present – *Editors.*



The human family can produce abundance for itself without harming nature -- as soon as the world's workers take possession of the human family's home, this planet, in the interests of our species. When the population is in conscious control of its affairs, it will not jeopardise its future or commit mass suicide by destroying its source of sustenance.

It will develop and make use of sources of energy such as tidal, geothermal, solar, satellite solar, and wind power, and nuclear fusion. Experts in these fields insist that the knowledge, technology, energy, and materials are available to produce abundance for today's population and more, with a sustainable environment.

It will use the brains of the 50 percent of scientists in industrial countries that now is tied up in military, mass killing research. It will free the productive talents of the 50 percent of every labour force that is now tied down to occupations only required by the existing insane society, such as money counters, police, armed forces, lawyers, judges, etc.

It will allow the present tiny minority who are the ruling class in today's crazy system to join in to support themselves. It will free the repressed energies, intellectual, physical, and creative, of a population that is now restricted to the requirements of obedient profit producers.

We cannot rely on leaders, who represent the world's minority owners, who cannot even cooperate to save themselves. They can only see themselves as dominant beings, investors, top dogs in a class-divided world.

Their businesses and governments cannot police each other in controlling environmental destruction. Capitalism can no more prevent climate change than it can prevent wars or poverty, because capitalism is the system that's causing them in the first place.

How we act depends on how we think. We must think for ourselves, not let 'great' women or men do our thinking for us.

Dear Theresa

DID YOU have a good Christmas? Was it turkey or duck? I hope that you didn't succumb to any of that vegan nut roast nonsense! Those green terrorists have got a lot to answer for. The next thing you know they'll be trying to cancel Christmas altogether on some flimsy excuse that it is an orgy of gluttonous over-consumption which is destroying the planet.

Did you get any time for Christmas shopping at all? Hopefully you managed to grab a couple of hours in between yet another of those whistle-stop tours around the capitals of Europe to secure a few more crumbs from those stingy foreigners.

I was ready to settle down in front of the telly one Tuesday in December for the Brexit vote, only to find that the show had been cancelled. Then, on the Wednesday, came the announcement of a vote of no confidence in your leadership, but that turned out to be a damp squib as well. You are nothing if not tenacious - a characteristic for which you are often lauded by your dwindling band of supporters. Although I'm not sure tenacity, of itself, is a desirable attribute without a qualifier. Hitler was very tenacious, but most people would have preferred that he had been less so.

I dread to think what the corporate media will do with themselves when the curtain finally comes down on the Brexit circus. They will need another good war. Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria all seem to be losing their puff. Even the War on Terror is getting jaded. The media is rather churlish about covering the war in Yemen; probably because of the genocide, mass starvation, cholera, and such like raining down on those poor people; in large measure compliments of the UK Government. Do you have any concerns about being hauled before the ICC for war crimes? I shouldn't worry. They are a spineless bunch when it comes to prosecuting leaders from rich Western countries. If you could conjure up a fresh war it would also have the advantage of distracting from your problems at home; a tried and tested device for political leaders to boost their flagging popularity.

But let's get back to Brexit. For us in the Socialist Party it is of no consequence whether we are ruled by a plutocratic feckless elite from Brussels, or a plutocratic feckless elite from Westminster. As socialists we don't believe in borders, in fact we don't believe in nation states; without which there can be no immigration problem, nor any wars. What a bummer! We want to create a decentralised democratic society living in harmony with the rest of life on our planet; where everyone contributes according to their ability and takes according to their need. Now there's a novelty for you!

Anyway, time to get into the New Year spirit! There's nothing like the chance to gobble up what remains of our depleted planet to fend off the winter blues. You've already been doing your bit by expanding the fossil fuel industry and reducing incentives for green energy. Did you get an opportunity to read the latest IPCC report? I wouldn't bother. It's depressing stuff. You'd think they could have brought out something more upbeat for Christmas.

And while I remember there's just that little matter of the government's contempt of parliament to put to bed. I think you should go, cap in hand, to Speaker Bercow's study and accept your punishment. I always found that a magazine down the back of the trousers helps soften the blows.

Sincerely, Tim Hart



Who is exploited?

If you work in an office how can you be economically exploited if you don't produce anything that your employer appropriates? That was a question touched on in the *Morning Star* (12 November) in an article on 'What is "surplus value?"' prepared by the Marx Memorial Library. Their answer was that all workers create surplus value. Among the work and workers that the article said produce value and surplus value were those in sales, accountancy and marketing. Marx would have disagreed.

He held that value (and so surplus value) was created only in the process of producing commodities as use-values for sale. He defined production as the fashioning of new use-values out of materials that originally came from nature. This included not just the work of handling the materials but also that of planning their production, so it did include office workers such as designers, draughtspeople and architects. It also included transport as transporting a commodity from where it was produced to where it was to be consumed did make it more useful.

In Marx's view, if work did not add

to the use-value of a commodity then it could not add to its value. The work of selling a commodity, essential as it is under capitalism, does not add to the commodity's use-value. So those performing such work do not produce surplus value. The capital invested in such activities does return a profit, but its source is a share of the surplus value created in the value-producing sector of the economy. It is not created by its employees.

This does not mean that such workers are not exploited. They do perform surplus labour for which they are not paid over and above the labour equivalent of their wages. It is just that this surplus labour does not create surplus value; what it does is reduce the costs to the employer of running their business.

As one exponent of Marxian economics put it:

'The merchant has invested a certain amount of money-capital in a store, equipment, and wage laborers (clerks, salesmen, etc.). These wage workers are unproductive like the merchant himself although they work for him a longer time than he pays for. But their surplus-labour is as unproductive as the capital of the merchant. They merely realize the surplus-value for the merchant, which was produced in the sphere of production, and make profits for him so much quicker, the more their unproductive surplus-labor

is extended and their necessary labor shortened' (Ernest Unterman, *Marxian Economics*, 1903, Ch. XVI).

The same applies to workers in banking, insurance, and other money handling activities.

There is a second category of work and workers that Marx didn't consider produced surplus value. In a comment in Volume 1 of *Capital* on the 1861 Census Marx pointed out that there were as many people employed as domestic servants (1,208,648) as in textile factories and mines together (1,208,442) (ch. 16, section 6). Although he described them as 'modern domestic slaves' he did not consider that they created surplus value; they were an expense paid out of income. This applies also to those called, appropriately enough, civil servants. They are the servants of the capitalist class as a whole employed by their state and paid for out of their income (via taxes). They too perform more work than they are paid for, which economises on the cost of government, national and local.

The fact that commercial and financial workers and civil servants don't produce surplus value does not make them any less, or lesser, members of the working class. They, too, are victims of the wages system and have an interest in working for its abolition.

WOOD FOR THE TREES

THE ONLY good news these days, it would appear, is no news. The rise and rise of populist fascism; the ever-broadening gulf between rich and poor; the degradation of the environment; the multiplicity of wars; all of this seems to leave little space for hope. Is all hope an illusion or is it essential for life to exist at all? Everything we do is motivated by the hope that it will achieve the desired result; without hope we would do nothing because nothing would always be the result of both action and inaction equally. But without some evidence that human agency can achieve the aims hoped for, it becomes an empty faith. Ironically the hope that its absence will bring about a level of contentment courtesy of complacency and cynicism is nothing more than a paradox – the hope that a lack of hope would be emotionally and rationally preferable is also a hope. Unless we are clinically depressed it would appear that we're stuck with hope; and that being the case is there any evidence that 'the glass is half full' rather than 'half empty'?

Famously when Pandora opened her box (jar) and released all of the evils into the world only one thing remained, after she had hastily closed it again, and that was hope. Since that time hope has had a deeply ambivalent quality; was it one of the evils within the box or was it the only incarnation of the good? Were we saved from hope by its imprisonment in the box or does it represent a positive resource preserved to enable us to face the evils? The hope for immortality in heaven and that karma will right the wrongs done to us are examples of the evil nature of hope since they are both represent the negative and impotent 'triumph of hope over experience'. But does the hope that socialism represents the redemption of humanity also fit into this category? Certainly the 'culture industry' of capitalism ceaselessly endeavours to convince us that it does. It is very illuminating that our culture readily embraces a supernatural parental deity but finds the idea of a mature, rational and democratic society completely crazy! Let's have a look at the

hopes incarnate within capitalist ideology.

Happiness, we are told, depends on our ability to find someone to exploit our labour so that he can join the Freemasons and send his children to public school; it depends on us producing everything and then buying a tiny portion of it back to create profits and a 'thriving' economy; it depends on two weeks in a year where we get to work on our skin cancer under a 'foreign' sun; it depends on chaining ourselves to debt and mortgages; it depends on finding a 'significant other' that will give 'meaning to our lives' etc. Those who hope for these things deny the

overwhelming evidence that all they bring is alienation, disappointment, bitterness and anger together with an early grave. The hope for the creation of a community based on mutual love and respect rarely features in the 'bucket list' of contemporary humans. This is the triumph of hope as a consumer durable with built-in obsolescence.

Socialism represents the antithesis to consumerism and its promise that if you have enough 'stuff' you will be happy; it offers a world where meaningful and fulfilling production for and within an egalitarian community provides for our most profound human needs. This is what socialists 'hope' for and believe in; it is not a faith because with faith you have certainty and with certainty there is no need for hope. We are well aware of the alternative which is barbarism; the fear that, as happened in Europe 1600 years ago, we are entering another Dark Age. Once it was thought that God would end the world because of its violence and injustice; today it is the Earth itself that will reject us by heating up and making human life unsustainable. Our species only just avoided a nuclear holocaust and we might never be that lucky again; those who say they cannot 'wait' for the revolution and want to do something 'now' are just prolonging the agony by promoting anti-revolutionary reforms.

Many in the past have been convinced of the imminence of some kind of 'Armageddon' and our contemporary fears are, in some ways, no different to theirs because since the development of private property societies and their violent parasitic elites there has always been much more room for despair and cynicism than hope. But there have also always been minorities who have courageously worked for a better future driven by the hope that humanity will turn its back on the tribalism of property and create a global community worthy of our potential – socialism.

WEZ



MATERIAL WORLD

The military contribution to climate change

THE UNITED Nations Intergovernmental Report on Climate Change last October made grim reading. Our planet is facing a crisis unprecedented in human history, one that some believe to be an existential threat to civilisation itself. We are informed that a series of business and life-style reforms might lessen the worst effects of climate change. But it is apparent that those scientific minds confirm the maxim quoted by Frederic Jameson that 'It has become easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.'

While conceding that the cause of climate change can be attributed to the effects of capitalism, we are told that is simply the way things are and that we people should change, not the economic system, with the media concentrating its commentary on the recommendations that consumption of beef is reduced to a minimum and instead we adopt a plant-based 'flexitarian' diet.

One thing is clear, socialism will not be inheriting a healthy planet but the Socialist Party believes that with the disappearance of the world's military and its

consumed approximately 117 million barrels of oil per year. Based on this level of annual fuel consumption, the DoD emits approximately 49 million metric tonnes of CO₂ into the atmosphere every year, which is roughly equivalent to annual greenhouse gas emissions from 10 million passenger vehicles or 4 million homes.

The DoD uses 4.6 billion US gallons of fuel annually, an average of 12.6 million gallons of fuel per day. The US military alone contributes 5 percent of current global warming emissions. Military fuel is more polluting because of the fuel type used for aviation. CO₂ emissions from jet fuel are larger – possibly triple – per gallon than those from diesel and oil. Further, aircraft exhaust has unique polluting effects that result in greater warming effect per unit of fuel used. Effects from jet exhaust, including nitrous oxide, sulphur dioxide, soot and water vapour exacerbate the warming effect of the CO₂ exhaust emissions.

Electricity usage by the military, which accounts for even more greenhouse gas emissions, is also gargantuan. In 2006, the DoD used almost

are not included in DoD's data.

UK 'military' oil use was 7 million barrels in 2004 which was 1 percent of total UK oil consumption; similar to Namibia's total consumption. CO₂ emissions was 5 metric tons in 2005 (1 percent of total UK emissions; similar to Senegal's total emissions).

To this we must also add all the arms manufacturers who provide the military with its armaments. For Raytheon, the defence contractor, emissions of greenhouse gas in 2011 were 522,000 metric tons, for instance. Shutting down capitalism would not only stop the damage to our planet but all the human energy and endeavour that goes into the military and the arms industries could be transformed into socially useful projects.

Socialists envisage a strategy of re-aligning our allocation of energy so that the rapid upgrading of the poor and vulnerable presently living in misery and squalor is quickly resolved and then we achieve a 'steady-state economy' or a 'zero-growth' society which corresponds to what Marx called 'simple reproduction,' the situation where human needs are in balance with the resources needed to satisfy them. We can endorse the

statement of Sylvia Pankhurst that 'we do not preach a gospel of want and scarcity,



Raytheon

accompanying armament industry, combined with the end of all those auxiliary businesses of the buying and selling exchange economy, may well provide sufficient reduction of the greenhouse gases for the process of fixing our broken planet to commence.

Capitalism drives war. If it were a country, the US Department of Defense would rank 34th in the world in average daily oil use, coming in just ahead of Sweden. The US military consumes as much energy as Nigeria, with a population of more than 140 million. A 2012 Congressional report stated that the DoD

30,000 gigawatt hours of electricity. The DoD's electricity use would supply enough electricity to power more than 2.6 million average American homes. In 2012, the DoD consumed about a billion gigawatt hours of site-delivered energy. While consuming that amount of energy, DoD emitted 70 million metric tons of CO₂. And yet, total DoD energy use and costs are even higher simply because the energy use arising from the contractors

but of abundance. We do not call for limitation of births, for penurious thrift, and self-denial.'

We are not a party of abstinence and reject the view that individuals should consume less while leaving the economic system unchanged. However, we do envisage a new society where less is better. Less duplication of brands and no more throwaway built-in obsolescence but instead better quality recyclable, repairable and reusable products.

ALJO

Almeria's Greenhouses: The Dark Side of Agri-Capitalism

Part One: *Mar de Plastico*

In Almeria province in Southern Spain there is to be found the largest greenhouse complex in the world, an area roughly the size of the Isle of Wight. Nothing quite prepares you for the sheer scale of it all – or the brutal ugliness. Driving through it can be a disorientating experience. As far as the eye can see, covering the coastal plain and lapping the mountain range behind, is a shimmering sea of plastic.

The first greenhouses were erected in the early 1960s. Prior to that Almeria province was considered the poorest region in Spain, a barren desolate place, Europe's only desert and the backdrop of many Spaghetti Westerns and films like *Lawrence of Arabia*. However, it wasn't always like that.



Historical Background

At one time, according to Robert Wolosin, the area had extensive pine and oak forests as well as abundant fauna (including bear, lynx and roe deer), despite its meagre rainfall (2006, *El Milagro de Almeria, Espana: A Political Ecology of landscape change and Greenhouse Agriculture*). Successive waves of human occupation incrementally transformed this landscape to what it has become today. Key to this was the overexploitation and export of local resources linked to the extraction of economic surpluses.

Anthropogenic influences on the environment can be traced back to Roman times and even earlier. After the collapse of the Roman Empire in the 5th century, the habitat largely reverted to its earlier state, only to undergo a further transformation under the Nasrid Moorish dynasty (711-1492). The Moors introduced elaborate irrigation technology and new crops like citrus and almonds. Under them, the city of Almeria itself grew to briefly become the second richest city in Europe after Constantinople, linking the hinterland to the wider world of Mediterranean trade.

The Christian 'Reconquista' (re-conquest) of Spain completed in 1492, signalled a new chapter in the region's environmental history. Feudal lords leased out land for sheep farming to provide wool for the Italian textile industry. The decline of that market in the 1600s and the availability of abundant land, subsequently encouraged a shift towards low-yield, extensive 'dry' farming (mainly cereals) necessitating the removal of yet more vegetation cover. Pastures and woodland were recklessly put under the plough, rendering

the soil vulnerable to erosion, in a manner reminiscent of Dustbowl years of the 1930s when ecologically inappropriate, commercially-driven, farming techniques were introduced on the vast prairies of North America.

The final, and most devastating, blow to Almeria's once forested, if fragile, environment was delivered in the early 19th century when, as Wolosin notes, tens of thousands of acres of vegetation cover was lost and half a million evergreen oaks were felled to, among other things, serve the needs of the local mining industry, then experiencing a boom. The growth of the mining sector - Almeria province at that time accounted for 80 percent of Spain's lead production – also encouraged inward migration and the resultant increase in population exerted additional pressure on the local environment. However, by the late 19th century the mining industry went into a sharp decline because of falling prices but also, ironically, because of a self-inflicted shortage of wood needed to fuel the foundries. With mining in decline and farming adversely affected by centuries of environmental abuse, the province succumbed to significant depopulation.

Such was the parlous state that Almeria found itself in the early 20th century before the advent of the greenhouses: 'An area once known for forests, streams, and a wide array of plant and animal life is now parched, cracked, and shadeless' (ibid).

The 'Ecological transition'

Putting this in a wider context Wolosin, citing the environmentalist Heinrich Walter, remarks that the Mediterranean region, and Almeria in particular, are 'the best and most tragic example of how mankind has removed the foundations for his existence through the overexploitation of natural resources'. How this came about can be usefully understood in terms of the concept of the 'ecological transition' pioneered by John Bennett in his book *The Ecological Transition: Cultural Anthropology and Human Adaptation* (1976).

According to Bennett, there is a spectrum of human adaptations – from a local community completely reliant upon, and adapted to, its own immediate resource base right through to the kind of globalised system of production that characterises modern capitalism. In this latter case, the local community no longer depends entirely on its own resources to meet all its needs but, increasingly, on the ability of other communities to supply some, or even most, of those needs. In other words, environmental adaptation to the immediate constraints of nature gives way to the cultural adaptation of communities to each other.

The classical economist, David Ricardo, advanced his theory of 'comparative advantage' in support of this development. It benefits a nation, he argued, to specialise in what it is best at producing while relying on other nations to supply it with goods it is not particularly adept at producing. This reduces the opportunity costs of producing goods across all nations, leaving everyone better off from the resultant increase in global trade.

Ricardo's theory is based on a number of unrealistic assumptions but, here, we are concerned only with the particular counter argument bound up with the aforementioned concept of the 'ecological transition' – namely, that by reducing the local community's reliance on its own natural resources, this tends to 'desensitise' it to the need to prudently operate within the limits of these resources. This does not mean those limits are necessarily fixed and unchangeable – human intervention can, for instance, sometimes significantly enhance the fertility and hence, 'carrying capacity', of the soil. Nor does it mean a community

will inevitably set about despoiling its own environment if it can rely on others to supply what it needs – there are other factors involved besides this – but this does nevertheless create the conditions which can greatly amplify the environmental impact of those other factors.

The collapse of the Roman Empire is a classic example. In part, the expansion of that empire was driven by the need to secure an adequate food supply to meet the needs of Rome itself - at its height, a city of one million people – and its vast armies. Grain tributes were exacted from conquered territories all around the Mediterranean basin which profoundly altered the region's ecology. Widespread deforestation occurred to permit intensive cereal farming leading to soil exhaustion and desertification. The resultant decline in output, in turn, prompted the empire to further expand its territory, eventually reaching the point at which its supply lines were so over-stretched that it became increasingly vulnerable to external threats.

In modern capitalism, it is not so much tribute as the quest for profit that drives economic activity. But with capitalism, we see also the same preoccupation with short term interests over long term sustainability. According to Friedrich Engels:

'As individual capitalists are engaged in production and exchange for the sake of immediate profit, only the nearest, most immediate results must first be taken into account... What cared the Spanish planters in Cuba, who burned down the forests on the slopes of the mountains and obtained from the ashes sufficient fertiliser for one generation of highly profitable coffee trees – what cared they that heavy tropical rainfall afterwards washed away the unprotected upper stratum of soil, leaving behind only bare rock! In relation to nature, as to society, the present mode of production is predominantly concerned only about the immediate, most tangible result, and then surprise is expressed that the more remote effects of actions directed to this end turn out to be quite different, are mostly quite opposite in character' (1876, *The Part played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man*).

These words have a particularly modern ring to them in the light of the multiple and escalating environmental crises facing humanity today. The underlying mechanism driving this development is plain to see. Business enterprises strive to 'externalise' their production costs as far as possible in order to maximise their commercial gains under a system of market competition – or face commercial ruin. However, just because those costs are made to disappear from the accountant's ledger book, this does not mean they cease to exist. The

burden of those costs is born not just by the wider community but the very physical environment itself upon which we ultimately depend.

In response, capitalism has tended to promote technological 'solutions' to these very problems it has itself engendered. But can such an approach ever truly succeed in ensuring we keep our heads above the water or will the rising tide of 'externalities' eventually engulf us all?

A Spanish 'El Dorado'

This is a question we might well ask in turning to consider that particularly remarkable example of capitalist enterprise and innovation: the greenhouses of Almeria.

In the 1950s, under Franco, a model irrigation project was launched in that sparsely populated zone, now under plastic, with the aim of resettling landless peasants there. It was the peasants themselves who initially developed the basic technology of greenhouse production – including the use of polythene rather than glass, attached to a simple framework of wood or metal – capitalising on the region's natural advantages such as its abundant sunshine and the virtual absence of frost, to give them a competitive edge in the market for early vegetables. At first, it was the local, then the wider national market they supplied but, with Spain joining the EU in 1986, production became truly transnational. Europe, as a whole, now relies for most of the year on Spain to provide almost a third of its demand for fresh fruit and salad crops – a figure rising to half during the cold winter months – much of this coming from Almeria's greenhouses which generate an annual revenue of about €2 billion.

As the industry expanded so did the role of intermediaries in financing, marketing and basic R&D. Indeed, the institutional architecture that has been built up around the greenhouse industry itself is, today, extraordinarily complex and closely coordinated. Downward and Taylor quote Almeria's Director of Agriculture as saying: 'This is the most social level of agriculture in the world, not even the best communist system would have achieved what has been achieved in Almeria... and by people who maybe 50 years ago would have only had a herd of goats' (*Journal of Environmental Management*, January 2007).

Remarkably, given the highly 'socialised' nature of the industry, the ownership of the greenhouses themselves remains firmly family-based with about 13,500 small scale producers operating in the greenhouse belt typically on plots of somewhat over 2 hectares. This helps to explain the popularity of the greenhouses among the locals who widely regard this development as an 'economic miracle' and have prospered as a result. However, it is a miracle bought at a considerable cost which calls into question the sustainability of this model of development – not least, as we shall see, in an era of growing concern about climate change.

**(Part 2 follows next month)
ROBIN COX**



Rosa Luxemburg, who was murdered a hundred years ago this month, had been a socialist member of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) until it supported the German government in the First World War, sharing its basic positions. She advocated that the working class should win control of political power with a view to replacing capitalism with a society based on the common ownership of the means of production by the whole of society, with production directly for use. She held that the exercise of political power to bring this change should take place within the framework of political democracy, and that even under capitalism political democracy was the best framework for the development of the working class and socialist movements; in fact, a consistent theme of her political views was that the 'proletariat' (the working class) had to take up the torch for democracy abandoned by the once-progressive 'bourgeoisie'.

Reforms

She also accepted that, in addition to the 'maximum' programme of socialism, a socialist party should also have, as did the SPD and parties in other countries modelled on it, a programme of social and political reforms to be achieved under capitalism. In her famous pamphlet *Reform or Revolution* (1898) her opposition was not to reforms as such nor to campaigning for them, but to reformism as the doctrine that capitalism could be gradually transformed into socialism by a series of social reform measures enacted by parliament. This was the view of the 'Revisionists' within the SPD and was the target of her pamphlet.

Elsewhere she explained the official SPD (and her) attitude towards parliamentary action:

'The parliamentary struggle, however, the counterpart of the trade-union struggle, is equally with it, a fight conducted exclusively on the basis of the bourgeois social order. It is by its very nature, political reform work, as that of the trade-unions is economic reform work. It represents political work for the present, as trade-unions represent economic work for the present.' (*The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*, chapter VIII).

This is the correct meaning of the word 'parliamentarism'. It does not mean participating in elections and going into parliament but using parliament to get reforms under capitalism.

The Revisionists lost the vote but they won the war as the SPD came to concentrate more and more on parliamentary activity, prioritising increases in its representation in national and regional parliaments and pursuing social reforms, in some places through deals with the Liberal or Catholic parties. Luxemburg could see where this was leading. And where in fact it did eventually lead: to the SPD becoming a democratic social reform party, relegating its maximum programme of socialism to a distant future or to conference rhetoric. Naturally, she was opposed to this.

Her alternative was the 'mass strike', basically extra-parliamentary action, initially still to get reforms, what the anarchists call 'direct action'. Her argument was that reforms obtained in this way would not lead to encouraging mere 'parliamentarism' but would prepare the working class for the mass action that the establishment of socialism would have to involve.

Knowing Marx's insistence on the need for the working class to win control of political power so as to be in a position to change the basis of society from class to common ownership, she was at pains to distinguish her position from that of the anarchists. This was obvious enough anyway since the actual 'mass strikes' that she supported were aimed at obtaining or extending political democracy.

Mass strikes to get the vote

This was how she analysed the uprising in Russia in 1905 in her pamphlet *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions* (1906). She knew perfectly well that a socialist revolution was out of the question in Russia and that what was on the agenda was a 'bourgeois revolution' to establish a democratic republic with a parliament within which the working class could press for social reforms. As she wrote:

'... the mass strike in Russia has been realised not as a means of evading the political struggle of the working-class, and especially of parliamentarism, not as a means of jumping suddenly into the social revolution by means of a theatrical coup, but as a means, firstly, of creating for the proletariat the conditions of the daily political struggle and especially of parliamentarism' (chapter 1).

The events in Russia confirmed a view that she had already come to a few years earlier in relation to the campaign in Belgium for universal suffrage, as not just votes for everybody but equal votes for everybody, i.e., with no mechanism to make the votes of rich property-owners count more than those of workers.

Votes for every man had been obtained in Belgium as a result of a general strike in 1893 but with the rich having more than one vote. An attempt to make this more democratic in 1902 by abolishing plural votes had failed despite another general strike. Luxemburg argued that this failure was due to the leaders of the Belgian Workers Party concentrating on doing a deal with the Liberals in the Belgian parliament and calling off the strike to facilitate this. She argued that if the strike had been maintained the aim could have been achieved (see: www.marxists.org/francais/luxembur/works/1902/r19020423.htm).

Precisely the same issue came up in Germany itself in 1909 in relation to the electoral system in Prussia. Prussia, the dominant state within the German empire and where its capital Berlin was situated, had a three-class electoral system which gave more weight to the votes of the rich. The SPD launched a campaign for all votes to count equally. Luxemburg fully supported this campaign but argued that mass strikes would be the best way to secure this.

Her position was a bit incoherent because she argued, on the one hand, that mass strikes could not be planned in advance and launched by a decree from on high but had to break out spontaneously from below, while, on the other, she was criticising the SPD leadership for not calling for one. Her position seems to have been that the SPD should accept and encourage the general idea of a mass strike as a weapon to obtain reforms and support such strikes when they broke out.

No Leninist

This position of support for 'spontaneous' mass action meant that her views were the exact opposite of Lenin's. If she thought that the SDP bureaucracy should not seek to call strikes this would apply even more to Lenin's much more centralised vanguard party. She had in fact criticised in 1904 Lenin's views



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Pamphlet
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in his *What is To Be Done?* when they became known outside Russia:

'If we assume the viewpoint claimed as his own by Lenin and we fear the influence of intellectuals in the proletarian movement, we can conceive of no greater danger to the Russian party than Lenin's plan of organization. *Nothing will more surely enslave a young labour movement to an intellectual elite hungry for power than this bureaucratic straightjacket, which will immobilize the movement and turn it into an automaton manipulated by a Central Committee*' (Her italics. See: www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1904/questions-rsd/index.htm).

Her reaction to the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in November 1917 was to support the overthrow of the pro-war provisional government and the new government's appeals for world revolution – but she was severely critical of some of the policies the Bolsheviks adopted, including the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly (she said they should have called fresh elections to it) and minority dictatorship:

'Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinion, life dies out in every public institution, becomes a mere semblance of life, in which only the bureaucracy remains as the active element. Public life gradually falls asleep, a few dozen party leaders of inexhaustible energy and boundless experience direct and rule. Among them, in reality only a dozen outstanding heads do the leading and an elite of the working class is invited from time to time to meetings where they are to applaud the speeches of the leaders, and to approve proposed resolutions unanimously – at bottom, then, a clique affair – a dictatorship, to be sure, not the dictatorship of the proletariat but only the dictatorship of a handful of politicians, that is a dictatorship in the bourgeois sense, in the sense of the rule of the Jacobins (the postponement of

the Soviet Congress from three-month periods to six-month periods!).

Yes, we can go even further: such conditions must inevitably cause a brutalization of public life: attempted assassinations, shooting of hostages, etc. (Lenin's speech on discipline and corruption.)' (See www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/russian-revolution/index.htm).

Spartacus League

As it happened, in both Russia and Germany autocratic rule was overthrown as a result of unplanned mass action. By then, following the slaughter of the First World War, Luxemburg had become convinced that socialism itself – the 'maximum' programme – was on the agenda and that the alternative was 'socialism or barbarism.' She was now a member of the Spartacus League, a party formed by anti-war ex-members of the SPD. Introducing its new programme, which she had drafted, to the party's conference on 31 December 1918, she identified what had gone wrong with the SPD as the division of

its programme into maximum and minimum parts and its concentration on parliamentary activity to achieve the latter:

'Until the collapse of August 4, 1914, German Social Democracy took its stand upon the Erfurt Programme, by which the so-called immediate minimal aims were placed in the forefront, while socialism was no more than a distant guiding star, the ultimate goal. (...) Our programme is deliberately opposed to the standpoint of the Erfurt Programme; it is deliberately opposed to the separation of the immediate, so-called minimal demands formulated for the political and economic struggle from the socialist goal regarded as a maximal programme. In this deliberate opposition [to the Erfurt Programme] we liquidate the results of seventy years' evolution and above all, the immediate results of the World War, in that we say: For us there is no minimal and no maximal programme; socialism is one and the same thing: this is the minimum we have to realize today' (www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/12/31.htm).

The programme itself is a 1918 version of the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848. It reads very well and proclaimed:

'Down with the wage system! That is the slogan of the hour! Instead of wage labour and class rule there must be collective labour. The means of production must cease to be the monopoly of a single class; they must become the common property of all. No more exploiters and exploited! Planned production and distribution of the product in the common interest. Abolition not only of the contemporary mode of production, mere exploitation and robbery, but equally of contemporary commerce, mere fraud' (www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/12/14.htm#doc-20).

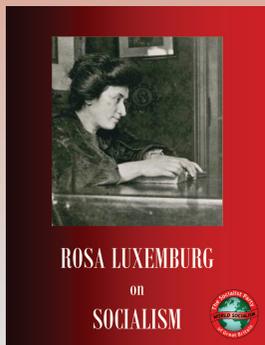
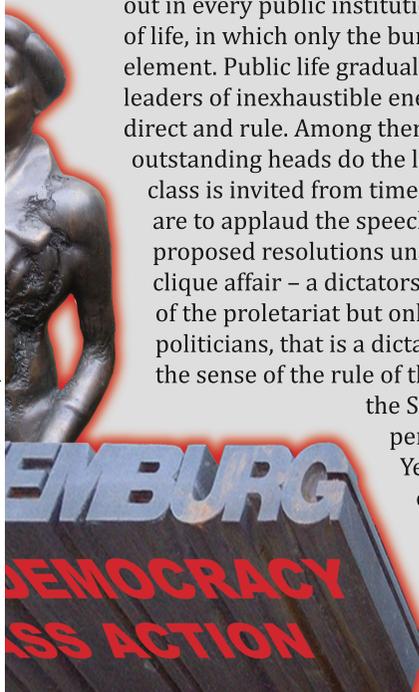
The programme went into more detail about the form that the 'mass action' Luxemburg had always favoured (previously for political reform) would take, at least in the conditions in Germany at the time, when the aim was to overthrow capitalism and establish socialism: workers and soldiers councils which would challenge the capitalist state politically and employers economically. She personally, as in her speech, didn't rule out contesting elections to the National Assembly and using it for 'revolutionary purposes' or as 'a new school of education for the working class', a position rejected by a majority of the League's members. In any event, this wasn't central to the revolution she believed was imminent.

Unfortunately, just as Marx and Engels had misjudged the situation in 1848 in expecting an 'immediately following proletarian revolution', so Luxemburg and the Spartacus League misjudged the situation in 1918. Only a relatively small number of workers supported the League's programme, and their uprising in January 1919 was crushed. Luxemburg had considered it premature but had loyally gone along with the majority decision. It cost her her life.

We can only speculate as to what position she would have taken later had she not been murdered in 1919 but it is unlikely that she would have abandoned her life-long commitment to democracy or her view that socialism had to be established by the conscious mass action of workers themselves 'from below' rather than by the action 'from above' of a parliamentary or vanguardist party.

ADAM BUICK

Rosa's Grave



NO LONGER INVISIBLE



In hi-vis vests France's semi-rural towns get stroppy

Over the last few years French sociology textbooks have been preoccupied with the fraught situation of a new class of worker; workers whose discrete presence in the workplace, low participation in trade union activity and variable hours render them largely invisible to the society they live in. They are, for this reason, very expendable and easily exploitable. Another, much older, type of working class invisibility devolves from the very organisation of the great cities of capitalism: spatial segregations being a tried-and-tested method to organise political marginality. Many 'sink estates' in Britain, for example, are located on the periphery of the big cities and are largely inaccessible given the scanty coverage of transport networks dominated by the privately owned car. Small rural towns with declining industries are also increasingly isolated by the scaling back of public transport and so on. Invisibility is, in itself, an important political issue in modern capitalism.

France, of course, is distinctive in having massive council estates surrounding the larger cities; estates where major social problems can be concentrated and accumulated with little risk to the everyday lives of the more prosperous populations living in the prestigious centres. The largely immigrant population of the suburbs in France gained a massive upsurge in visibility during the violent riots of the early years of this century. For their part, the small towns seemed until recently to have managed to retain a surprising level of political tranquillity despite the gradual accumulation of distinctive social problems. Their material situation seems to have declined in the years following the crisis of 2008 and some of the more perspicacious sociologists have taken to contrasting the lively economic situation of the suburbs around Paris to the continual economic decline of the smaller rural towns, even those not too far from Paris. Poor access to medical care or to legal redress, distant social service provision, haphazard retail outlets and so on are problems that can be found in most rural areas across Europe, of course – in Scotland, for example (which shares a similarly low population density with rural France). The problem then is not why have workers in provincial France suddenly donned fluorescent yellow jackets, interrupted the flow of traffic and orchestrated noisy demonstrations in the distant towns? The real question is not what took them so long but how did they manage to do it. What and who is behind this yellow *jacquerie*?

The emergence of this movement into high visibility started suddenly in November when President Macron's government rolled out its plan to increase the tax on diesel fuel for cars, motorbikes and scooters under the (questionable) pretext that this would eventually limit carbon dioxide emissions. In line with this thinking, motorists were supposed to oblige by selling their existing bangers and buying hybrid or electrical cars, cost being no excuse. The tax was also to be laid on the heavy fuels used to heat houses and out-houses in the smaller rural areas, presumably an invitation to install solar panels.

But this was a tax hike which hit a population far more dependent on the private car than their contemporaries in the large cities. These are people who can rarely rely on the kind of cheap and efficient public transport commonplace in the large metropolitan centres. Financial capitalism, in other words, had finally caught up with those workers who had sought to avoid the off-putting compromises of life in the big cities by resorting

to long-distance commuting to work from one provincial town to another. It was a tax bullet they felt they couldn't dodge. To make things worse, it came on top of the disastrous emptying out of rural life which has accelerated over the course of the last two decades: Rural railway services are being run down for lack of profitability. Doctors are leaving for the bigger towns, hospitals are few and far-between, post offices and banks are closing, cafés, bars and restaurants are being boarded up. Those who remain are often the elderly, seniors or those who have -- as we have seen -- constructed an increasingly absurd life of long-distant commuting. For the elderly, in particular, the current rural set-up promises little more. Pensions were de-indexed a few years ago (thank you François Holland) and not revised upwards by Macron. Indeed, Macron's hike in the Contribution Générale de Solidarité (CSG) took even more money from the poorer pensioners. Even if rural transport was available in the rural areas, many of the elderly would be in no position to afford it.

The revolt of these provincial workers owed a lot to the possibilities opened up by social media, of course. The internet allowed the distances between the smaller towns to be shrunk down. The militants used social media to co-ordinate road blocks disrupting the smooth flow of supply across the various départements, playing cat and mouse with the police. The result was chaos. Surprisingly, these roadblocks encountered massive support from motorists and from a majority of lorry drivers despite the inconvenience. Most of the 'militants' seem to be middle-aged with a sprinkling of young people including many single mothers. Many 'activists' are drawing a pension. There are many wage-earners though some are currently unemployed. There are also many self-employed craftsmen and small businessmen. To begin with exchanges with motorists and lorry drivers were good-natured although there were some violent scenes. This seems to have remained the pattern: that of a friendly movement of people who know each other and who, for the vast majority, are undertaking unconventional political activity for the first time. Here it should be mentioned that small town rural France is generally conservative. It votes for moderate candidates in elections and is rarely impressed by the noisy extremist leftism one finds in the bigger cities. No wonder everyone is surprised.

In response Macron announced a rise in payments to those on the minimum wage and in the income level above which pensioners have to pay the CSG and promised to increase taxes on the 'digital giants' Google, Amazon, Facebook, and Apple. Nothing fundamental will change except perhaps the people themselves; ordinary people on barricades or on road blocks. Or those who have (amazingly) found themselves on television arguing for a fairer taxation regime which pursues the wealthy and counters tax evasion. Then there will be those who have discovered the power they have to co-ordinate political activity via social media. Perhaps that's one reason why Macron wants to increase the tax on Facebook.

M.M. Paris.

On 23 October the European Commission asked the Italian government to revisit its budget plan. This is unprecedented as no EU member state had been asked to do this before. The

Italian coalition government, constituted by the populist Five-Star Movement and the Lega, had proposed a 2.4 percent deficit of Gross Domestic Product, and a structural deficit of 1.7 percent which was far beyond what the member states had agreed back in 2012 under the 'fiscal compact'. The EU believes that the deficit is more likely to be 2.9 percent. The EU has threatened Italy with sanctions, which resulted in concessions by the populist leaders.

The fiscal compact, (not agreed upon by Britain and the Czech Republic) set the limit for a general deficit not exceeding 3 percent of GDP, and a structural deficit (the part of the deficit due to spending programmes and not to how the economy is doing) not exceeding 0.5 percent of the GDP for countries with large debts such as Italy. This is nothing more than an austerity measure mirroring the *debt brake* model adopted by Switzerland in 2003 and by Germany in 2009. This consists of separating the structural deficit from the cyclical deficit, where the latter takes into account the fluctuations in economic growth. In simple words, the state was to not allow deficits when the economy is growing but only when the economy is shrinking. By doing so it would reduce the public debt across the business cycle.

Although this austerity measure has so far worked in Switzerland and Germany, it may have worked because of lucky circumstances, namely strong economic growth at the right time, but this may not be sustainable in countries where the GDP is consistently low. Not allowing for deficits or allowing minimal deficits in a struggling economy may be a recipe for strangulation.

Annual government budget deficits in a country with a huge historic national debt like Italy (138 percent of GDP) are, on average, more likely to be greater than in a country with a smaller national debt (for example, 57 percent of GDP for the Netherlands). For the record, the UK has a national debt equal to 88 percent of GDP. It should be noted that Japan has an even higher national debt than Italy (199 percent of GDP), yet only 11 percent of it is to foreign creditors, while in Italy's case one third of it is owned by them.

The total annual deficit takes into account not only government spending being higher than tax revenues, but also debt interest payments. Thus, it would be unfair to judge the Italian or other governments in a similar situation as necessarily being extravagant. They are, in part, working to pay off the interest on the debt. As we know, government spending does not just supposedly benefit public infrastructures (see the bridges falling down), or education, health and pension systems. Italian spending on those services is in line with, if lower than, the other EU countries. Yet, Italy is stuck with this huge debt. Why?

Out of control

According to many, the Italian national debt spun out of control in the early 80s when the Bank of Italy and the Treasury 'divorced'. Basically, the first stopped buying Italian bonds that were not sold. State bonds are the way the

After Greece, is Italy Next?



government borrows money to finance its spending and to pay back its previous debt plus interest. Unsold state bonds triggered a steep rise in the interest rate. As with loan sharks, the Italian state found itself having to pay out more to borrow money, which in turn increased the accumulated national debt payments.

This 'divorce' was a defensive measure and, although it did mitigate the fleeing of savings and some argued that it helped reduce inflation, it did not help slowdown debt issuance. Yet, if we were to plot Italian public debt over the decades no particularly steep increase is to be seen after the 1981 divorce either. The oil crises in the 70s, political nepotism, which created an inflated state infrastructure, and a money-wasting corrupt administration, are probably more obvious original sins. Nevertheless, the real problem with Italy is the lack of economic growth. If we were to plot Italian GDP over time we can see that after crisis of 2007-8, this has struggled to increase and actually decreased by 10 percent (UK GDP decreased by 7 percent in the slump). Government spending on research and new technologies has also been neglected.

The official version of events for the M5S and Lega is that things started to go wrong in 1981 and that the EU limits and restriction did not help the ever-growing national debt problem. Both M5S and Lega had an anti-EU, anti-Merkel electoral campaign. Now they are continuing to play this card in view of the European elections later this year. However, it is fair to believe that the Italian government is not doing this only for the sake of going against the EU and being successful at the next elections. They do believe that an anti-austerity policy will help to boost the economy and will promote 1.5 percent economic growth (real GDP). The EU, on the other hand, do not trust this plan and are interested only in what Italy can pay back to their creditors. The EU's doubts about this seem to have some validity as the *spread*, that is the 'gap between Italian and German bond yields which the Italian media follow obsessively' (*Economist*, October), is up to 3.2 percentage points.

Past experience shows that the type of 'pump-priming' Keynesian policy as proposed by M5S and Lega does not work. It will not reduce the public debt, and it will not promote research and development of new technologies. As with the Greeks (who the EU and the IMF forced the government there to squeeze), the Italian workers were portrayed as lazy extravagant tax-evading people. This does not reflect the reality, but benefits the ruling class. We workers should look beyond national borders and opt for a society where meeting people's needs is not subordinated to meeting interest payments to international loan sharks.

CESCO





'Invention then becomes a business, and the application of science to direct production itself becomes a prospect which determines and solicits it. But this is not the road along which machinery, by and large, arose, and

The workers of the world are yet to unite to accomplish their over-a-century-long pending task of overcoming what Thorstein Veblen called 'the predatory phase' of human development. They have yet to move on to the phase of 'an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all' (Karl Marx and Frederick Engels), by transforming human society into 'a planetary community of production and consumption' (Albert Einstein). With the disappearance of classes from within liberated humanity, humans will leave behind their prehistory and enter into the realm of free history, as Marx envisaged.

Material abundance has been knocking at our door since about the beginning of the past century waiting for us to accept it and create a fulfilling life for the whole of humanity. What is still lacking is the working class's will, unity, and action country-wise and worldwide. Their social consciousness remains crippled by glorification of power and success and all-pervading competition. This ongoing alienated cultural constitution, 'crippling of the social consciousness of individuals' (Albert Einstein), has kept us arrested in a devastating 'Escape from freedom' or 'Fear of Freedom' (Erich Fromm). In the name of freedom we are preoccupied with 'freedom from' ('negative freedom') – bourgeois freedom, vulgar freedom – while what we need is 'freedom to' ('positive freedom') – socialist freedom, real freedom – a freedom to lead a harmonious and humane life.

Progress in science and technology has given rise to Artificial Intelligence and robotics which is making this freedom more and more viable.

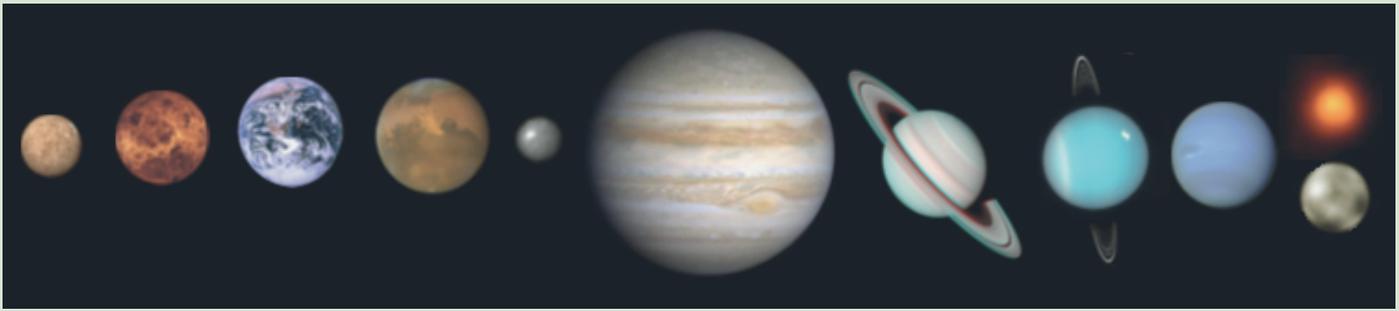
Marx's long-term prediction

Marx and Engels didn't live to see the precise future course of scientific and technological developments and their specific forms of manifestation (ie artificial intelligence, robotics) which would emerge from the hectic pursuit of profit. They were dealing mainly with capital's fledgling period. So in capital's ascending phase when the productive forces were developing within the womb of an expanding and globe-conquering capitalist mode and relations of production, they could only anticipate the forthcoming historical trends. Marx's materialist conception of history had imbued him with penetrating insight and profound predictive power whereby he foresaw the impending state of affairs with their far-reaching consequences. As he observed in 1858:

even less the road on which it progresses in detail. This road is, rather, dissection– through the division of labour, which gradually transforms the workers' operations into more and more mechanical ones, so that at a certain point a mechanism can step into their places. ... Thus, the specific mode of working here appears directly as becoming transferred from the worker to capital in the form of machine, and its own labour capacity devalued thereby. Hence the workers' struggle against machinery. What was the living worker's activity becomes the activity of the machine ... the progress of technology, or the application of this science to production ... Labour no longer appears so much to be included within the production process; rather, the human being comes to relate more as watchman and regulator to the production process itself. (What holds for machinery holds likewise for the combination of human activities and the development of human intercourse.)' (Marx, *Grundrisse*, Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1981, pp. 704-709).

Horrific catastrophe – only 12 years to go?

Now that automation, artificial intelligence and robots are quite capable of performing much of the world's necessary and useful laborious work, humanity is on the brink of a forthcoming leisure society, Marx's all-encompassing scientific society. Once we enter its knowledgeable domain, having emancipated humankind from its perilously degenerating slavery of capital, it will be indispensable for us to counter as far as we can the threat of extinction, especially in view of the catastrophic *survival warning* about having just 12 years in hand to deal with global warming, as reported by the *Guardian*, London: 'We have 12 years to limit climate change catastrophe, warns UN – Urgent changes needed to cut risk of extreme heat, draught, floods and poverty, says IPCC [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change]. Overwhelmed by climate change? Here's what you can do... The world's leading climate scientists have warned there is only a dozen years for global warming to be kept to a maximum of 1.5C, beyond which even half a degree will significantly worsen the risks of draught, floods, extreme heat and poverty for hundreds of millions of people. ... The authors of the landmark report by the UN IPCC released on Monday say urgent and unprecedented changes are needed to reach the target, which they say is affordable and feasible although it lies at the most ambitious end of the Paris agreement pledge to keep



temperatures between 1.5C and 2C. The half-degree difference could also prevent corals from being completely eradicated and ease pressure on the Arctic, according to the 1.5C study, which was launched after approval at a final plenary of all 195 countries in Incheon in South Korea that saw delegates hugging one another with some in tears' (8 October).

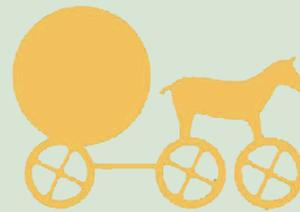
Save Earth's environment

First, we are required to reduce and reverse the currently devastating emission levels of the *greenhouse gases* – water vapour, carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), ozone (O₃), chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), hydrofluorocarbons (incl. HCFCs and HFCs) – in order to avoid the threatening trends of ongoing global overwarming. The hostile climate catastrophe has to be dealt with by discontinuing uses of fossil fuels – coal, petrol, diesel, kerosene etc. and substituting solar and other forms of renewable energy. We have also to get rid of the perilous plastic pollution that exists. We have to discontinue the destruction of forests together with their flora and fauna by substituting all the various uses of timber logs with fibreglass and conserving and restore our lost forests to create an eco-friendly atmosphere which will absorb and retard the swollen carbon emissions. This done, we will overcome the hazards over our present homeland – the planet Earth; we will be free from the fear of our species going the same way as the dinosaurs of extinction from the Earth's environment. Not that global warming to levels, even well above the IPCC's threshold of a 1.5C addition to the current average global temperature compared to pre-industrial times, would threaten the human species with complete extinction. If high enough it would cause many millions of deaths but some humans would survive even if in very difficult conditions.

As necessity is the mother of invention, even if we remove the current threat from global overwarming, circumstances – the exhaustion of the Sun – will eventually prompt us to realise that we need to get out of the periphery of Earth to explore new homes elsewhere and move on to becoming a Universal Community of Scientific Beings – star-trekking beings. As Marx said, 'Circumstances make men just as

much as men make circumstances'. Thus eventually humans will have to make their circumstances anew once again. Of course becoming star-trekking beings is a very long way off as it will be a few billions of years before the Sun begins to burn out. 'Will the Sun Ever Burn Out? Yes, the sun will eventually burn out. But not for a long, long time. The Sun has used up about half of its hydrogen fuel in the last 4.6 billion years, since its birth. It still has enough hydrogen to last about another 5 billion years.' (From space.com) So this wouldn't be a way-out from a more immediate threat from global overwarming. But that time will eventually inexorably come.

BINAY SARKAR



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'Transition period'

One thing Brexit has done is to familiarise people with the term 'transition period'. Dictionaries typically define it as 'the process or a period of changing from one state or condition to another'. Socialists were already familiar with the term in the context of the change from capitalism to socialism. Of course the transition to Brexit – which Theresa May prefers to call an 'implementation period' – is a trivial change compared to the social revolution that the change to socialism will be.

Marx himself used the term in some private notes he wrote in 1875:

'Between capitalist and communist society there lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one to the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat' (*Critique of the Gotha Programme*).

This statement has been subject to various interpretations but its basic meaning is clear. The change from capitalism to socialism (or communism, the same thing), or 'the co-operative society based on common ownership

of the means of production' as he called it elsewhere in the same notes, is revolutionary in two senses. It is a radical change in the basis of society, from class to common ownership of the means of production, and is brought about rapidly and decisively.

This second point is important in that some have imagined this 'transition' as lasting decades. However, once the material conditions for ending class ownership have evolved – once production has become 'socialised' in the sense of being the collective, co-operative effort of the whole workforce – then the change can be made rapidly. The contradiction between socialised production and minority ownership can be achieved by ending the monopoly control, whether in law or in fact, of the minority over the means of production. What is required to do this is a political decision to withdraw state protection (via the law, police, armed forces, and courts) for this monopoly. There is no reason why this should take any length of time. It just requires a political decision and its implementation; which of course assumes that the working class has won control of political power and is organised to implement its decision.

In this quote, Marx called this period during which political power would be exercised to abolish class society 'the dictatorship of the proletariat', a term that was current amongst revolutionary

socialists of his generation, though perhaps unfortunate in today's context as 'dictatorship' has come to have a different connotation to the exercise of full powers that it then had. In the quote Marx prefaced the term by the word 'revolutionary', indicating that its aim was to revolutionise the basis of society. This done – and socialist (or communist) society established – then this period of the revolutionary transformation of one society into another comes to an end together with its corresponding political form.

This was not how Lenin and the Bolsheviks came to see it. Having seized power in a country that was not ripe for socialism, they had to justify staying in power while the conditions for socialism developed. Lenin openly said that this period would be one of state capitalism and that dictatorship meant dictatorship in its modern sense. His follower, the leading Trotskyist Ernst Mandel, went even further and made it a new system of society which he called 'transitional society' and which he expected to last an 'epoch'.

This was to move away from Marx's conception of the 'transition period' as a temporary, short period of rapid change brought about by political means. Perhaps we should follow Theresa May and call it an 'implementation period'. That way it couldn't be misinterpreted as lasting an epoch.

PROPER GANDER

Sold A Pup?

If you've been ripped off by a cowboy builder or scammed by a fraudster, then BBC1's *Watchdog* could sniff around and get to the bottom of the issue. Since 1980 its reporters have investigated suspect business practices and exposed con-artists through undercover filming and foot-in-the-door confrontations. As well as raising awareness of 'consumer rights', the programme has been instrumental in recalls of dangerous products, closing down 'rogue traders' and securing compensation payments. In doing this, it highlights the cynical, exploitative nature of capitalism.

The programme regularly hounds 'rogue traders', firms which leave the job badly done and the customer disappointed. One example featured was a car rental business which hired out uninsured and unroadworthy motors to unknowing drivers, another was a delivery company with a track record of damaging and mishandling its parcels. Deliberately shoddy work tends to come about when the motivation to make a fast buck overrides any motivation to do a job well. So, tasks are rushed, or cheaper, sub-standard materials are used, or corners are cut. The less time spent on labour and the less money spent out, the more profit for the owners. Of course, this approach isn't just found among 'rogue traders' – it's built in to any enterprise within capitalism. A company only tips over into being a 'rogue trader' when it pushes its luck by breaking the law or the contract about what it will do. Some use more complicated rip-offs than just short-changing their punters. Fraudsters trick people into parting with their money, whether by pretending to be from an official organisation or hacking into bank accounts.

Watchdog reported how getting money back after it's been scammed away is far from easy when banks reject fraud claims, adding insult to injury. Banks aren't keen to sacrifice some of their potential profits by paying out, so will place a high burden of proof on the claimant. Only a quarter of the money lost to fraud ends up being refunded to victims, a failing which *Watchdog* attributes to the Financial Ombudsman Service. This organisation investigates disputes between consumers and financial services such as banks, insurance companies and

investment firms, with 250 cases dealt with each week. It's funded by these financial services, so no wonder it appears biased in their favour. People unlucky enough to get scammed often lose out twice, once to the fraudsters and then to the bank.

Watchdog has a bone to pick with unwanted phone calls as well. 'Cold calling', also known as 'direct marketing', is another way that scammers find their

compensation. Registering with the Telephone Preference Service is supposed to remove your phone number from the list which direct marketers can use, although this doesn't stop the most unscrupulous ones. Despite cold calling being widely resented, the tactic must work otherwise the companies wouldn't carry on doing it. If they call thousands of people, it only takes a few to part with their money to make it financially viable.

Older people are targeted as they're seen as particularly vulnerable to being conned. Cold calling sums up how alienating capitalist society can be. It must be a rather sad life to sit in a blandly oppressive call centre somewhere, treating whoever you're phoning as nothing more than an opportunity to claw in money, a fraction of which you'll get back as wages. No-one aspires to work in direct marketing; it's the kind of job which people fall into when they're desperate for cash and don't have other options.

Watchdog also draws attention to misleading marketing techniques. For instance, some online clothes shops have time limited discounts on their clobber. On their websites, the clock which counts down to when the offer runs out just resets itself after the advertised deadline. It might not seem such a huge problem if a cheaper deal is always available rather than only for a short time, but really it's a cynical marketing ploy. The countdown is supposed to give us the fear of missing out if we don't buy quickly enough. It's a way of being pressured into buying. Again, the aim is to squeeze as much money from us as possible. All advertising is a type of manipulation, even if this method is a bit more deceitful than most.

While *Watchdog* highlights problems and doggedly works to improve things for people who've had a bad deal, there's a limit to how much it can achieve. Its bark is worse than its bite. 'Consumer rights' campaigners can help shape policies and reforms, but they can't stop the impetus to maximise profits

by whatever dodgy means possible; it's inherent in capitalism.

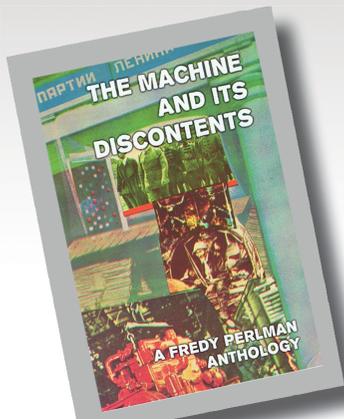
MIKE FOSTER



prey, although the technique can be used by firms working within the law. It's usually just as we're sitting down with our dinner when we get a phone call asking us about the accident we were recently involved in or trying to flog us double glazing or arrange PPI

REVIEWS

Against capitalism



The Machine and its Discontents: A Fredy Perlman Anthology (Theory and Practice and Active Distribution, 2018). Available from www.actedistributionshop.org

Fredy Perlman (1934–85) is perhaps best remembered in connection with the publishing cooperative *Black & Red*. His life story, lovingly told by his wife Lorraine in her memoir *Having Little Being Much* (1989), is a complex one: born in Czechoslovakia and raised in the US, he lived several years in France and Yugoslavia before settling in the Midwest. Equally complex was his development as a radical thinker, influenced at various periods by anarchism, Marxism, situationism and primitivism. However, he never fully identified with any particular school of thought: the only self-descriptor ending in *-ist* that he accepted was *cellist*.

Darren Poynton has brought together, edited and introduced a selection of Perlman's writings that had become difficult to find. They are organised in five parts under the headings: worker-student uprisings, critique of political economy, critique of leaders, critique of nationalism, critique of 'progress'. The book is illustrated with several of Perlman's eloquent photo montages.

The writings in Part One pertain to the social upheavals that took place in France and Yugoslavia in 1968. There is a lengthy excerpt from a text co-authored by Perlman and Roger Gregoire describing and assessing their experiences in Paris in May and June 1968 while members of a 'worker-student action committee'. The detailed account reveals the sorts of things that really happened – and did not happen – in the course of the 'Paris Spring'. The authors discuss why a more fruitful interaction did not occur between student protestors and striking workers at the Citroen car factory. The

crucial obstacle, they conclude, was the fact that the ideas of most participants in the events, students as well as workers, remained within the confines of capitalist reality. In particular, they aspired at most to turn the factory into the collective or group property of its current workforce rather than into social property.

Part One also includes an account of the student protests that broke out in Yugoslavia in 1968 and the reaction of the Yugoslav authorities to them. Perlman exposes the chasm that existed between the ideological façade of 'self-managing socialism' and the real functioning of the power structure.

Part Two consists of two excellent essays that in a clear and vivid style explain key concepts in the Marxian critique of capitalism, with special emphasis on capital, alienation and the 'commodity fetishism' that makes relations between people appear as relations between things. The second essay, originally published in 1971 as an introduction to the English translation of I.I. Rubin's *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*, contrasts Marx with Paul Samuelson, author of the standard economics textbook used in American colleges. Perlman demonstrates that Marx and Samuelson do not give different answers to the same questions; they are concerned with quite different questions. This is because Marx belongs to the old school of 'political economy', which studied conflicting class interests, while Samuelson represents the new discipline of 'economics' that displaced political economy early in the 20th century. 'Economics' focuses on technical issues of resource allocation and is therefore better suited to the justification of capitalism.

In Part Three we find excerpts from a text entitled 'The Seizure of State Power'. This text, which marshals quotations from Lenin, Mao and Machiavelli, purports to be a guide for would-be 'revolutionary leaders' intent upon seizing power. It is really a satire designed to highlight the contrast between the seizure of power by an elite and a genuine popular revolution. Some critics did not realise that it was a satire and took it at face value.

The essay in Part Four exposes the class interests behind movements for 'national liberation' and argues that nationalism cannot play a progressive role in the contemporary world. Perlman's views on this subject fully coincide with those of the World Socialist Movement.

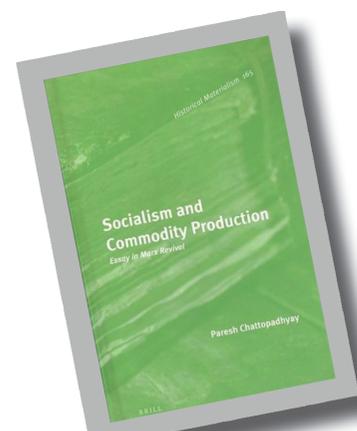
In the last few years of his life Perlman went beyond the Marxian critique of capitalism to assail modern concepts of 'progress' and 'civilisation'. Some have

accused him of rejecting technology as such – see, for instance, the review of his book *Against His-story, Against Leviathan!* (1983) in *Aufheben* (<https://libcom.org/library/review-hisstory-aufheben-4>). The short article on 'progress and nuclear power' that makes up Part Five does not suffice to assess his views at this period.

On the whole, the new Perlman anthology is a very welcome addition to socialist literature.

STEFAN

For socialism



Socialism and Commodity Production. By Paresh Chattopadhyay, Brill, 2018

Commodities are items of wealth that have been produced for sale. Commodities have been produced in pre-capitalist societies but such production was marginal. It is only in capitalism that it becomes the dominant mode of production, where goods and services are produced for sale with a view to profit. Commodities must be capable of being reproduced, and this includes the uniquely capitalist commodity of human labour power, the capacity to work which is sold for a wage or salary.

Because of the incidental nature of 'simple commodity' production in pre-capitalist societies, argued Marx, it would be a mistake to claim there had been a 'simple commodity' production *society*. It is capitalist society which has generalised commodity production. Under capitalism the value of a commodity is determined by the amount of socially necessary labour time needed for its production and reproduction. According to Marx's law of value, generalised commodity production results in money as the 'general

REVIEWS

equivalent' in buying and selling.

In Marx's writings the abolition of capitalism is the abolition of commodity production, and with it the money-wages-buying-and-selling-system, together with all the institutions needed to make it function, such as the state. He called this post-capitalist society variously social-democracy, socialism, communism, a free association, the co-operative society and more -- but they all meant the same thing.

In Marx's time there was a consensus on this view of commodity production. So August Bebel could write in *Woman and Socialism* (1879): 'since in the new society there is no commodity to buy and sell ... There is no money either'. Anybody who regarded themselves as Marxist would have agreed. However, the consensus broke down in the twentieth century as politicians pursued their own political agenda. In 1924 Kautsky wrote: 'a socialist society would not be able to exist without a system of exchange of products', that is, money, commodity exchange and the wages system. Kautsky was a leader of the German Social Democratic Party and although he mouthed Marxist phrases he pursued policies favourable to a state-run capitalism. In 1917 Lenin asserted in *State and Revolution* that socialism was a transitional society between capitalism and communism. In this conception of 'socialism' the state, commodity production and the wages system not only continue to exist but in the years after the Bolshevik revolution their scope and intensity was extended throughout Russia.

In 1936 Stalin declared that the USSR was officially 'Socialist' and in a work published in 1954 spoke of 'the necessity of commodity production under socialism'. For many the existence of commodity production and the law of value in 'socialism' was self-evident. The economist Oskar Lange could confidently write: 'A careful study of Marx's writings establishes clearly that he held the view that the theory of value applied to a socialist economy' and 'In a socialist economy the law of value continues to operate because production continues to be commodity production'. Unfortunately for Lange, Marx never held that view and here are just a couple of his repudiations:

'Only on the basis of the capitalist mode of production do commodities become the general, predominant form of production' (*Capital*, Volume 1).

'Within the co-operative society based on common ownership of the means of production, the producers do not exchange their products' (*Critique of the Gotha Programme*).

Paresh Chattopadhyay does a good

job of showing why and how the establishment of socialism means the abolition of commodity production. Included in this work are detailed analyses of so-called 'Market Socialism' and the 'Economic Calculation Argument' and much more. It is to be hoped that a cheaper and more readily accessible version will soon become available.

LEW

Curate's egg

Cleaver has a novel view of



Rupturing the Dialectic. The Struggle Against Work, Money and Financialization. By Harry Cleaver. AK Press. 2018.

capitalism: that capitalists are not so much interested in profits as in imposing work on people as a means of social control. So, for him, the class struggle is between those who want to impose work (the capitalists) and those who resist work (housewives, students and schoolkids as such as well as wage and salary workers). It's a point of view but not that of Marx.

For someone who has taught and written on how to 'read' Marx, he makes a whole range of classic errors (workers not being able to buy back all they produce as the cause of crises, taxation as a burden on the working class, secondary exploitation of workers by banks). On one point he is open about 'revising Marx' (his words). Marx's theory of interest was that it is a share of surplus value created in the value-producing sector of the economy and which the capitalists there allow to go to banks for performing a function that they would otherwise have to tie up some of their capital in doing themselves. Cleaver's view is that interest is a payment for a service and that it is derived from the surplus value produced by bank workers.

Despite this, Cleaver recognises 'that

getting rid of money and markets entirely is not only a necessary condition for getting rid of capitalism but also desirable in its own right' (page 228) and devotes six pages to arguing well the case for this. But then it's downhill again as in the following sixty pages he describes various ways for gradually marginalising the use of money under capitalism which he thinks wage and salary workers (and housewives and students) should struggle for.

Besides free or subsidised services, price and rent controls, lower taxes on consumer goods, and limits on interest on consumer credit, paradoxically he also includes higher wages and overtime pay on the grounds that the more money people have, either the less time they need to work or the more they can spend on campaigning for the reforms he lists.

Despite having been a professor of economics he appears not to understand the effect of free or subsidised goods and services on wage levels: that if workers don't have to pay the full price of something then they don't need to be paid so much by their employer to recreate their labour power and so their money wage will tend to fall (even if their standard of living won't). Maybe he is assuming that workers could successfully resist this. That would be in line with the basic mistake of the 'autonomist Marxists' of imagining that workers have more power as purveyors of labour power than they actually have.

ALB

Beyond the Suffrage



Sylvia Pankhurst on Socialism. Socialist Party. £1.50 (£2.50 incl p&p inland UK).

(review continues on page 22)

50 Years Ago

Rosa Luxemburg and the Collapse of Capitalism

Fifty years ago on 6th January began the hopeless Spartakist rising against the Social Democrat government of Germany. It led to the brutal murder of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, two well-known and courageous opponents of the first world slaughter. Luxemburg, as an opponent of both reformism and Bolshevism who understood the worldwide and democratic nature of socialism, had views on many subjects near to those of the Socialist Party of Great Britain. However, there were certain basic differences between our views and hers. The following article discusses one of them: the collapse of capitalism.

Rosa Luxemburg was murdered on January 15, 1919. Her head was first smashed in with the butt of a soldier's rifle and she was then dumped in the Landwehr Canal. With her death the uprising of the Spartakus Bund in Berlin collapsed—as it had been doomed to do all along. In fact, the real tragedy of

this affair was not its brutality but the waste of it all. Why had Luxemburg allowed herself to become involved in such a useless adventure in the first place?

The only adequate explanation seems to lie in her conviction that capitalism had been driven to an impasse, that its internal contradictions had brought it to the point of breaking down. (...)

A week before death she was writing: "The masses are ready to support any revolutionary action, to go through fire and water for Socialism." This, of course, was patent nonsense. The working-class in Germany had no clear idea of what Socialism was or how it could be achieved. Not only was there no chance of overthrowing capitalism, but even the limited aim of unseating the government was hopeless. (...) Luxemburg, then, had mistaken the economic dislocation following Germany's defeat for the 'collapse' of the capitalist system and, since to her the choice seemed one of a desperate gamble for Socialism or else "crashing down to a common doom", she staked her life on the former.

(continued from page 21)

'Full and complete Socialism entails the total abolition of money, buying and selling, and the wages system.' So wrote Sylvia Pankhurst in a 1923 article 'The Future Society' reproduced in this pamphlet, an article which makes it clear that she viewed socialism in essentially the same way that the Socialist Party does.

Socialism and communism are the same, she says, and involve common ownership of the means of production, with production for use. Capitalism, in contrast, involves many people engaging in unproductive work such as banking. It also entails such institutions as pensions and the Poor Law, and the wages system makes the worker's life precarious and leads to unemployment. She in effect opposed reforming capitalism, though she discussed this in a rather confusing way as setting up a half-way house to socialism.

In 'Socialism', another article from the same year, also reproduced here, Pankhurst emphasised the idea of abundance, and stated that the aim was not to put new rulers in place of the present ones. Capitalism limits production: for instance, agricultural land is turned into deer forests or private parks, and much land is left vacant. Production is further limited because only a certain amount can be sold at a profit. Workers who could be productive are unemployed, and factories are idle. In socialism, in contrast, the land and other means of production will belong to all the people. Production will be for use, and every effort will be put to supply essentials such as food, clothing and housing. What is produced will be freely available, with no money or exchange.

The pamphlet also contains a review, reprinted from the *Socialist Standard* (November 1999), of Mary Davis's book *Sylvia Pankhurst: A Life in Radical Politics*. The review contrasts Sylvia's position with

that of the 'official' suffragettes led by her mother Emmeline (wrongly referred to as 'Emily'), who advocated votes only for wealthy women. Sylvia supported universal suffrage and then, unlike her mother, opposed the First World War and was for a short while a member of the 'Communist' Party. She later abandoned radical causes and supported Ethiopia against fascist Italy.

The pamphlet's introductory essay traces her political trajectory in a little more detail, including her work in the East End of London, her publication of the *Workers' Dreadnought* and the various organisations she belonged to. The Bolshevik revolution in Russia led her to support soviets rather than the use of parliament and to oppose the CPGB affiliating to the Labour Party. For this she was fiercely criticised by Lenin, and she was expelled from the CP in 1921. She then went on to view Russia as capitalist rather than socialist, and in 1924 described Russian workers as wage slaves.

Sylvia Pankhurst ought to be recalled, not as someone who played a subsidiary but significant role in the suffrage movement or was an object of Lenin's criticism, but as someone who saw through the propaganda of capitalist politicians and the Bolsheviks, and – for a few years at least – stood for the abolition of the wages system. This pamphlet should help to ensure that this aspect of her politics is not forgotten.

PB

To get a copy of the pamphlet above send a cheque (made out to 'The Socialist Party of Great Britain') for £2.50 to Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High St, London SW4 7UN or by paypal

New Pamphlet

The restless presses of socialism have produced a publication to mark the 100th anniversary of the death of a very courageous woman.



ROSA LUXEMBURG
ON
SOCIALISM



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Schirmmütze with Red Revolution cocade, Germany, 1918 AD

For full details of all our meetings and events see our **Meetup** site: <http://www.meetup>.



Sparticists storming a Berlin newspaper office 100 years ago.

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.

Meetings:

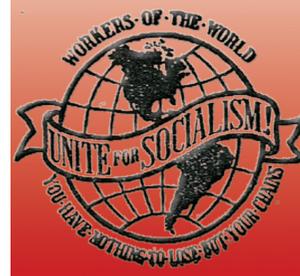
JANUARY 2019

LONDON

Hammersmith

Saturday 19 January, 2.00 – 4.00 p.m.
“System Change or Climate Change?”

Venue: Quaker Meeting House, 20 Nigel Playfair Avenue, London, W6 9JY



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REAR VIEW

Help!

Last year Save the Children issued an emergency alert: 'In war-torn Yemen, 85,000 children may have died from starvation since start of crisis. Families are forced to choose between food and other necessities, like water and medicine. 13 million people face starvation – many of them children. Please help.' Nobody can fail to be moved by the pictures and accounts of the latest group of people starving unnecessarily. It really is an obscene crime against humanity that people should be dying of starvation in a world which is not only capable of producing enough to feed everybody but even has enough food stockpiled to stop it straightaway. Help comes with understanding: food, like every other commodity in the modern world, is produced primarily for profit, as this headline from *Asia Times* (31 October) attests: 'In Yemen, plenty of food but few have the cash to buy it'. And: 'While agriculture and food distribution suffer from the war, food remains available in markets across the country -- but few can afford it. "All kinds of food and other items are available in the market. The problem is not a shortage of food in markets but that we do not have money to buy food that is now expensive," Sofi said' (Middle East Eye, 9 November).

Want

Such analysis by two mainstream media outlets puts that of the Trotskyist International Committee of the Fourth International to shame. An article titled 'At least 85,000 child deaths in Yemen highlight Saudi-US war crimes' (wsws.org, 23 November) blames American imperialism and fails to mention that those with money in Yemen can, and do, have access to food as well as medicine. To be sure, Yemen being the battlefield for one of capitalism's endemic wars

complicates matters -- and whenever war breaks out it is our class which suffers the most -- but famines only affect those whose access to money or land has collapsed for some reason. Famines are a social not a natural phenomenon.

War

Wars are never fought in our interests. War often results when conflicts of interest between states over markets, sources of raw materials, energy supplies, trade routes, exploitable populations and areas of strategic importance cannot be resolved by other means. The article 'Yemen Genocide



About Oil Control' (globalresearch.ca, 20 November) supports this view. 'Yemen is a strategically key geopolitical stretch of land at the critical connecting point of the Red Sea which links to the Mediterranean via the Suez Canal and the Indian Ocean. It's the site of one of the world's most strategic shipping choke points, the Bab el Mandab, a narrow passage a mere 18 miles distance from Djibouti in the Horn of Africa, making it one of the US Department of Energy's Oil Transit Chokepoints. According to the US Department of Energy an estimated 4.7 million barrels of oil passes through Bab el Mandab in both directions daily, including oil bound for China.' The same article concludes: '[Prince Mohammed

bin] Salman not surprisingly claimed it was a war of Iran-led "imperialists" against the forces of Saudi-led "freedom-loving" Sunnis. China now has its first overseas military base across from Yemen in Djibouti, next door to the US whose Camp Lemonnier is the largest American permanent military base in Africa. Former colonial occupier France is also there. There is far more at stake in Yemen than we are being told.'

Peace?

When some semblance of peace is restored and the strategic port of Hodeidah is once again open for business, any food aid which arrives will likely be calculated using capitalism's calculus. Protecting the market for food in Yemen is in fact a key factor shaping the so-called 'food aid' policies of governments and the UN. They know that to make available for free distribution anything but minimal amounts of food per starving person would be to undermine local markets and local market-oriented production, leading to more people coming to lose their access rights to food. And of course they are right. Given the market system this is exactly what would happen. So, quite apart from financial cost considerations, they deliberately limit the amount of free food they supply. Market forces will likely prevent the immediate starvation in Yemen being solved in the way that it would be, almost literally overnight, in a sane society, one that would have to be based on the common ownership of resources: transporting the food from the warehouses of Europe to the towns and villages of the former country of Yemen.



FREE LUNCH

