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
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 able to plan production in a rational environmentally friendly way according to human need. We strongly urge workers to join us in this urgent task.
Piaoro 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 too ahead of the game is treated poorly, being imprisoned. Wikipedia also attests to this ‘functioning anarchist society’ 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. The BBC article warns us not to ‘over-romanticise how they live. But socialists can easily relate to such remote groups like the Piaoro, 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 Piaoro 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 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 runawasy consumption and waste of fresh permissible goods. But this makes it sound as if consumers are mindlessly greedy, when in reality they’re just trying to pay for all this waste and many are hard-pressed to afford it. The more likely explanation for such waste is that, given endless food-porn TV shows, people are not very good at managing the business of domestic cooking. It’s not taught effectively and, worse than that, they don’t have the time or the facilities to achieve more than a tokenistic effort. And parents who can’t afford to pay for the extra are not going to pass the skills on either. No wonder poor people resort to expensive and environmentally wasteful take-Outs and TV dinners.

The article discusses a new business model which aims to supply meal ‘kits’, containing the exact proportions of ingredients in compostable packaging, however the take-up rate is slow and the value of money questionable. What has not occurred to anyone is the idea of socialising the process. In socialism it would not be deemed sheet 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 that he had achieved an historic landmark but earned general condemnation including from Chinese regulators by announcing that he had achieved a historic landmark but earned general condemnation including from Chinese regulators by announcing that he had achieved a historic landmark. The world’s first human embryos were successfully modified with the CRISPR gene-editing technique, which could be used to prevent or treat genetic diseases. 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 to receive gene therapy 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, the designer babies are here. They are the smart money. It’s only a matter of time before the next move. ‘People with designer babies are here. They will come and they will conquer the world. The children of the 1% of the world’s population will be the children of the future. They will inherit the earth. And they will destroy it’

Dear Editors

It is now obvious 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 fair 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 open veins 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.

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

Personal pardoned to those operating a debit and credit system to deal with our booming and expanding productivity. gained from full employment; servicing 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 inequitable sufferings of innocents.

Resources. In the shape of awned country, space and personal belongings. All furnishing, vehicles, equipment, trappings, accoutrements and servicing appertaining to financial institutions made available to worthwhile social endeavour. Money would now be devoted to the welfare of every individual born by too many in the pursuit of wealth and thus power and the gratification that arises, thereby wasting irreparable time repetitively.

Raise the S.P.E.R. banner. You may well attract far more support than you do now.

E.W. Reynolds, Reading.
Did you get any time for Christmas shopping at all? Hopefully you managed to grab a couple of hours in between another of those whistle-stop tours around the capitals of Europe to see a few relatives or some of those strange 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 just a damp squib as well. You are nothing if not tenacious for a character who often looks like a drowning band of supporters. Although I’m not sure tenacity, of itself, is a desirable quality without a suitable identifier. Hitler was very tenacious, but most people would have preferred that he had been less so.

I dread to think of the corporate media who will do themselves in the curtain finally comes down on the Brexit circus. They will need another good war. Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria. All seeming 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 raising down on those poor people, in large measure, by 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 elite from Brussels, or a plutocratic elite from Westminster. Both are exploiters. In fact, we don’t believe in nation states; without which there can be no immigration problem, or any wars. But a summer! 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 miss the opportunity to read that IPPC 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 enjoy the opportunity to read a bit of the Marxist view on that:

According to Marx the state is the executive force of the ruling class. The state has two main functions: to maintain the general order of society and to control the class struggle. The state has a monopoly of the use of force and coercion. The state is a tool of class domination. The state is the instrument of the ruling class in the administration of class relations. The state is a coercive apparatus of the ruling class. The state is the executive force of the ruling class.

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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 who 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 a minimum and instead we adopt a plant-based ‘flexitarian’ diet.

One thing is clear, socialism will not be a ‘flexitarian’ society. We can endorse the statement of Sylvia Pankhurst that ‘we do not preach a plan of want and scarcity, but of abundance. 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 destruction of health and no more throwaway built-in obsolescence but instead better quality recyclable, reusable andurable products.

ALJO

30 gigawatt hours of electricity. The DoD’s electricity use would supply enough energy to power more than 2.6 million average American homes.

The military consumes approximately 117 million barrels of oil per year. Based on this level of annual fuel consumption, the DoD emits approximately 49 million metric tons 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.

The Socialist Party believes that for limitation of births, we can endorse the statement of Sylvia Pankhurst that ‘we do not preach a plan of want and scarcity, but of abundance. 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 destruction of health and no more throwaway built-in obsolescence but instead better quality recyclable, reusable andurable products.

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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 one 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 smallest province by area. The Moorish occupation, the Nasrid dynasty (711-1492) who introduced elaborate irrigation technology and new crops, left behind a land forever characterised by the ‘ecological transition’ – namely, of ‘comparative advantage’ in support of this development. 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 and exchange for the sake of immediate profit, only the nearest, most immediate results must first be taken into account...

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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 modern economic systems.

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 history. Widespread deforestation occurred to permit intensive cereal farming 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 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...’

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Realities of ‘comparative advantage’

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So it is that particularly remarkable example of capitalist enterprise and innovation: the greenhouses of Almeria.

In the 1950s, under Francisco Franco's dictatorship, a 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 all 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, of extraordinary complexity 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 we have achieved in Almeria... and people who maybe 50 years ago would have only had a herd of goats!’ *Journal of Environmental Management, January 2019*.

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 small plots of somewhat over 2 hectares. This helps to explain the popularity of the greenhouses with the small scale producers who have come to 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 the model of development – not least, as we shall see, in an era of growing concern about climate change.

The ‘ecological transition’

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Rosa Luxemburg, who was murdered a hundred years ago this month, had been a socialist member of the German Social Democratic Party who supported 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 about this change could only proceed 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 one-progressive ‘bourgeoisie’.

Reforms
She also added that, in addition to the ‘maximum’ programme of socialism that society 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 (1899) 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 as 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 parliamentarism:

‘The parliamentary struggle, however, the counterpart of the trade-union struggle, is equally with it, a fight conducted exclusively for the benefit 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 the Catholic or Liberal parties. Luxembourg could see where this was leading. And where in fact it did eventually lead: to the SPD becoming a democratic social reform party as opposed to the old socialist movement 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. Reformism was still to get reforms, what the anarchists call ‘direct action’. Her argument was that reforms obtained in this way would not lead to a change of the basis of society from class to common ownership, because 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 Mass Strike of the 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 and a government, 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 direct social 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 internal social struggle and especially of parliamentarism’ (chapter 1).

The events in Russia confirmed a view that she had already come to some 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 very rich and very poor count more than that of 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 democratic in 1902 by abolishing plural votes had failed despite another general strike. Luxembourg argued that this failure was due to the leaders of the Belgian Workers Party concentrating on making 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 parliament might have been achieved (www.marxists.org/francais/luxemburg/works/1902/ri19020423.htm).

Precisely the same issue came up itself in Germany 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: the middle class and the rich would give more weight to the votes of the rich. The SPD launched a campaign in the Berlin elections: “We demand universal suffrage equally. Luxembourg 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 come spontaneously out 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 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 was in fact the exact opposite of Lenin’s. If she thought that the SPD bureaucracy should not seek to call strikes this would apply even more to Lenin’s. The SPD bureaucracy would be the worst enemy of the working class if 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 the government 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 both through anyway since the actual ‘mass strikes’ that she supported were aimed at obtaining or extending political democracy.

New Pamphlets on Page 22

Rosa’s Grave

Socialist Standard | January 2019

Socialist Standard | January 2019
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 exploited. Yet the working-class invisibility devolves from the very organisation of the great cities of capitalism: spatial segregations being a tried-and-tested method of reducing political margins. 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 avoid the surprising vitality of the shrinking towns of the north. The rash of new closures, the mass exodus of the young, the decline fostered by the scaling back of public services, haphazard retail outlets and so on are problems to the continual economic decline of the smaller towns. Senior 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 (CGS) 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 revotes of the provincial councils are a nod to the possibilities opened up by social media, of course. The internet allowed the distances between the smaller towns to be shrunk down. The new technology transformed a mobility of the kind of commuter that block 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 the majority of the elderly drivers despite the inconvenience. Most of the ‘militants’ seem to be middle-aged with a sprinkling of young people including of public-methods and social media success stories. 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 their counterparts at the Cestas stop, but when the crowds around Paris to the continual economic decline of the smaller rural towns, even those not too far from Paris. Poor access to healthcare or to legal advice, 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 found fluorescent yellow jackets, interrupted the flow of traffic and orchestrated the sudden appearance of 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 wave that is in line with the European elections later this year. However, it is fair to believe that the Italian government is not doing this only to improve its image but also to show the EU at the next elections. They do believe that an austerity policy will help to boost the economy and will promote 1.5 percent of GDP growth (real GDP). The EU, on the other hand, has already clearly stated that they will not impose additional austerity measures on the Italian economy, nor will they provide new funds. The EU's doubts about 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 government bond yields’ media focus obsessively’ (Economist, October). And正是因为意大利的政府债券收益率相比于德国政府债券收益率还高，这使得意大利的政府债券收益率相比于德国政府债券收益率还高。
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 freedom, 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-wide 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 cultural constitution, “crippling of the social consciousness of human intercourse.”

The combination of human activities and the development process itself. (What holds for machinery holds likewise for social development.)

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 got to 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.

There would be many 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 within the IPCCs’ thresholds 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.

HINAY SARKAR

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 haptic 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:

‘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, arises, and even less the road on which it progresses in detail. This road is, rather, disinsection – 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 productive process. 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. HFCs and HCFCs) – 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 got to 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.

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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 from the Brexit – which Theresa May prefers to call an ‘implementation period’ – is a trivial change compared to the social revolution by which political power would be passed from the classes to the state or condition to another’. Socialists with the term ‘transition period’.

Perhaps we should follow Theresa May and call it an ‘implementation period’. Perhaps it’s unfortunate in today’s context that the change to socialism will be.

One reason why this should take any length of time. It just requires a political decision to withdraw state protection – then the change can be made rapidly. This was to move away from Marx’s ‘revolutionary in two senses. It is a radical change in the basis of society – from class ownership 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’ lasting decades. However, once the material conditions for ending the monopoly control, whether in law or in fact, of the means of production, the change can be made rapidly. The contradiction between socialised production and minority ownership can be achieved by ending the monopoly control, whatever in law or in fact, of the minority over the means of production. What is required to do this is a political decision to end 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 ownership ‘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 meaning – one 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 notion of the ‘transition period’ as a temporary short period of social 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.

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 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 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 job 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 jumper. 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 ‘bargain’ running out if we don’t buy quickly enough. It’s a way of being pressured into buying. Again, this 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
Against capitalism

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 argued that it was necessary 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 explores the clash that existed between the ideological facade of self-managing socialism and the real functioning of the power structure.

For socialism

Part Two consists of two excellent essays that in a clear and vivid explanation the key concepts in the Marxist 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 J. Ruben’s Essays on Marx’s Theory of Value, contrasts Marx with Paul Samualson, author of the standard economics textbook used in American colleges. Perlman argues that Marx and Samualson 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 Samualson 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’. This means that revolutionaries 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 Marxist critique of capitalism to assualt 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 Levitation (1983) in Aufbehen (http://libcom.org/library/review-history-aufbehen-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

Socialism and Commodity Production, By Parsh Chatterpady, 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.

The basic mistake of the ‘autonomist Marxists’ of image has been that workers have more power as purveyors of labour power than they actually have.

Despite this, Chatterpady recognises that ‘the 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’ (p238) 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 of 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 higher incomes, 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). He is also assuming that the workers could successfully resist this. That would be in line with the basic mistake of the ‘autonomist Marxists’ of image which is 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).

Beyond the Suffrage

Curate’s egg


Cleaver has a novel view of 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 not between those who want to impose work (the capitalists) and those who resist work (housewives, students and schoolkids 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 ‘revisioning 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 so. 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.

Freddy 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-description ending in -ist that he accepted was celibist.

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 ‘the book’. Each 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 argues that revolutionaries can never 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 the workers could successfully resist this. That would be in line with the basic mistake of the ‘autonomist Marxists’ of image which is that workers have more power as purveyors of labour power than they actually have.
Meetings:

LONDON

Hammersmith Saturday 19 January, 2.00 – 4.00 p.m. “System Change or Climate Change?” Venue: Quiet Meeting House, 20 Nigel Playfair Avenue, London, W6 9JY

50 Years Ago

Rosa Luxemburg and the Collapse of Capitalism

Fifty years ago on 6 January 1919 the hopeless Spartakus Bund rising against the Social Democrat government of Germany failed. 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 Bolshevikism 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 a 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 wage 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. In effect she 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, 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 the 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 CPGF 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 pay packaging. Send cheque for £4 (made payable to “The Socialist Party of Great Britain”) or by paypal to spgb@worldsocialism.org

New Pamphlet

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

Declaration of Principles

This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is on 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 to the following principles:

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 their 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 of the capitalist class, every workman, as the interest of the working class is the same, he or she must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, and the government, must be held as 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 capitalist or overawed by avaricious capitalists, 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.

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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 by [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.