WHEN RESISTANCE IS NOT ENOUGH

also:
Greta
Who's Afraid of Dialectics?
The Dark Side of Agri-Capitalism
Socialist Standard
Contents February 2019

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Introduction to 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 forms of organised in trade unions to defend their interests. Many gains have been achieved by collective action, but they do not alter the position of workers as an exploited class within capitalism. Trade union and other collective activity cannot eradicate the problems of poverty, unemployment and homelessness. Moreover, gains may be reversed over time; in the 1960s, British banking unions successfully secured the ending of Saturday working, only to find it being reintroduced years later.

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As for the long answer, well technology won’t give us what we need anyway, because what we really need is a change in society and the abolition of class inequality, and you can’t knock that up in a laboratory or a garden shed.

One controversy at CES was the banning of an award-winning innovation, which was a women’s robotic sex toy. Quite why this was banned was unclear. The organisers claimed it was “inappropriate”, although they didn’t see anything inappropriate about the Virtual Reality Porn convention next door to the expo, which saw over a thousand visitors on the very first day. Many of the visitors described the experience as “awesome”, or the words to that effect, and appeared to appreciate it far more than the debut appearance of the creepy AI sex robot that saws off its head, blinds its eyes and talks as if it has had its jaw wired. While the CES organisers contend with an ongoing image of male bias and prejudice, the idea of virtual reality porn suggests a further inspiring notion: virtual reality socialism.

Maybe in the absence of a real global revolution for common ownership we could invite people to put on a VR headset and ‘experience’ socialism in action. A few comments in response to this idea was “You mean you’d put on the headset and all the beggars and rough sleepers would disappear off the streets?” Er, yeah, we guess so, among other things, although in that case we’d better watch where you put your feet.

Nature 3/10 Must Try Harder

Contrary to what creationists seem to think, if evolution was really driven by a conscious designer, that designer would get the sack for negligence and incompetence. No engineer – much less an omnipotent being – would design the mammalian eye with blind spots, or send the giraffe’s laryngeal nerve on a long and pointless route from the brain all the way down its neck and around the heart before looping back up to the larynx. Similarly, why design plant photosynthesis to be 2 or 3 percent energy efficient, when we can already do better than that with today’s photovoltaic cells? Well now a team has figured out how to tweak plant chemistry to increase its energy conversion rate, and first results have shown a 40 percent increase in crop biomass (New Scientist, 12 January). Now that’s what we call useful technology, although there is bound to be a backlash from anti-GM protestors who will insist that what is ‘natural’ is good and what is artificial is bad. The fears of such protestors have not been borne out by experience over the decades GM has been used in America, China and South-East Asia. The world has not after all been sunny uplands and a golden future. Neither will for the simple reason that capitalism does not exist and cannot be made to work, in the interests of the majority. It is a system driven by profit-making that can only work in the interest of the profit-takers.

Which way for British capitalism?

Interviewed on BBC Radio 4 on 17 January Tony Blair explained the dilemma the UK capitalist class face. He pointed out that for the past 40 or so years their governments (even under Thatcher) had pursued the policy of becoming part of a Europe-wide single market (i.e. a market with common regulations and standards and not just a tariff-free trading area) and that they were now completely integrated into it in terms of export markets and supply chains. They could withdraw but this would cause disruption and would be giving up a secure market they already had. A referendum had voted in favour of withdrawal but this could be interpreted in various ways, including just withdrawing from the EU’s political institutions. He said that this (now called Norway Plus) would avoid the economic damage but would leave the UK in the position of a rule-taker, as the extreme Brexiteers pointed out, as it would have no say in drawing up the single market’s regulations. In that case it would be better for the UK capitalist class if the UK stayed in the EU.

This is politically impossible, at least not without another referendum. But if the UK government up its frugality access to the single market this would have to be the first time in the history of capitalism that a capitalist state has voluntarily opted for less favourable access to a market it already has. In proposing this, even via a no-deal, the extreme Brexiteers are in effect arguing that two birds in the bush are worth more than one bird in the hand.

If there is no second referendum and no-deal is ruled out, the only deal that would probably make sense from the point of view of the majority of the UK capitalist class would be Norway Plus, as that would be therefore bad. The fears ofsuch protestors have not been borne out by experience over the decades GM has been used in America, China and South-East Asia. The world has not after all been sunny uplands and a golden future. Neither will for the simple reason that capitalism does not exist and cannot be made to work, in the interests of the majority. It is a system driven by profit-making that can only work in the interest of the profit-takers.

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Thank you for your recent letter. I’m sorry to hear that you are still being tormented by Brexit. You can blame that
nicompoop predecessor of yours for that! I’m sorry, as well, to hear that you received short shrift following your overtures
to Leon Max. It was an poor manner of you. It might have been better coming from a socialist than from someone who has participated in the wholesale destruction of trades union
rights and of their members’ living standards in recent decades. Not that I want to get involved in anything to do with
Brexit. In fact that’s what I’m taking the opportunity to write to you today – whilst the pantomime of the Brexit vote unfully
the ballroomed chambers of Westminster – avoid even a glimpse of that spectacle.

And while I remember, Happy New Year! How are you generally? All piged out on the Christmas food and all maxed out
on the credit cards? You’ll be joining the growing number of poor if you’re not careful. Ha! There seems to be a lot more
poverty around nowadays. It’s a burgeoning industry so to speak, with 120,000 social murders attributed to austerity since
it began in 2010; including 3,000 deaths from hypothermia and 600 deaths of rough sleepers each year, with four million
people resorting to food banks. Given that the UK is one of the richest countries in the world and the fifth largest economy
this is a staggering achievement by your government.

I suppose one should attribute this material contribution which poverty makes to our national economy.

Without those huge corporate charities our GDP would be significantly lower, unemployment would be up and the valuable
opportunity to demonstrate our compassionate national character would be considerably diminished, as pointed
recently out by the National Conscience, Jacob Rees-Mogg. Some liberal-minded MPs are even calling for the
appointment of a Minister for Hunger. How progressive of them.

We in the Socialist Party have what some might regard as a rather quirky approach to poverty. There won’t be any. Under
capitalism poverty is an inevitable, indeed an essential, component, arising out of the very essence of the way in which
the wealth created by the working class is appropriated by a ruling elite, leaving the rest of us to scramble around for the
grains.

Socialism would end this modern day form of chattel slavery by ensuring that wealth is shared according to need and
would benefit everyone, not just the 1%; thus rendering poverty an anachronism to be buried over by besmirched
schoolchildren exploring the history of a bygone era.

Anyway, that’s all for now! I’ll drop you a line again next month. In the meantime, if you change your address please let
me know,

Sincerely, Tim Hart
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Trump: Not Happy with his Lot as World Policeman?

Trump may have entered upon a new relationship with the rest of the world if we are to believe his president, Donald Trump. In a speech to American troops in Iraq on Boxing Day he announced a military withdrawal from Syria and declared that the USA would no longer ‘...continue to be the world's policeman, warning that he was committed to withdrawing troops from foreign wars. “We no longer the suckers, folks.”

Trump's removal of American soldiers from Syria can be seen as belatedly rectifying the inaccuracy in placing them there in the first place. The ‘policeman of the world,’ a mantle taken over from the British Empire during the Second World War, is a benign national interest wherever it may seem a complete waste of taxpayer money to deploy armed forces to any spot in the world to protect national interests wherever they are threatened. Trump is not the first president to advocate an isolationist foreign policy and we doubt he will be the last. But saying something one does not necessarily mean it can be accomplished. Nevertheless, Trump has already cancelled agreements and broken international treaties which he has deemed to be against his ‘America First’ stance. Trump’s policies in the White House certainly show that he is not out of step with many other politicians supporting nationalism, isolationism and protectionist measures. Trump has never been a US president so maverick, so egocentric and so unconcerned about the suffering and misery of other people that Trump has revealed himself to be.

It should not be thought that his fine rhetoric demonstrates a principled commitment. Trump has not any intention of following up on any ‘peace’ dividend by cutting the military budget. Nor does he intend to stop the freedom and economic prosperity, but this is thwarted by the power of the state, an organization that grows robustly at times of war. Hence, war must be opposed not only because of its obvious evils, but as a way to drive back the power of the state which is the way to a better life... The state and the wars it wages may seem a complete waste of taxpayer money to the imperial capitalist... Against such isolationist views, the transnational corporations and international capitalists (now bolstered by populists as ‘globalists’) cannot allow narrow national fragmentation to succeed. The isolationism that is possible for the United States is an illusion, without any connection to political and economic reality. Whether they call their wars humanitarian and defensive, waged for democracy and freedom, the true purpose is to control the resources of the world for declared sections of the capitalist class. Trump will persist with his false claims of effortless victories while the United States’ military domination because he stands for the retention of capitalism. The thought that the United States can remain ‘isolated’ from any vital conflict is absurd, regardless of the president at its helm. The Socialist Party attitude to war is that no matter what state prevails, a war will leave the real problem of capitalism – unsolved and by creating more national hatred, it makes the socialist solution even more difficult than ever to achieve.

‘Isolationism’ in foreign affairs was once seen as a rare phenomenon yet now the ‘isolationist’ sentiment seems to be flourishing. Many working people think the tragedies in other parts of the world are none of their business. Their own problems and issues as workers leave them feeling indifferent, an attitude of ‘isolationism’ harmful to the very people who practise it. The workers of one nation have a common cause and a shared sympathy with the fellow-workers of every other country. If you are neutral in such situations, ‘you have chosen the side of the oppressor’ as Archbishop Desmond Tutu once put it.

ALJ
On the morning of 19 July 1984, a large number of shopworkers at the Henry Street branch of Dunnes Stores in Dublin refused to register the sale of South African fruit. They were immediately suspended by the management and so walked out and took up positions outside the main entrance. However during the day, with the realisation that their actions might lead to the loss of their jobs, many drifted back to work so by the evening only nine remained; eight women and one man. So began an industrial action that would last for over two years, become a cause celebre amongst the Irish Left (I can personally recall the picquets and solidarity demonstrations outside the store) and garner much international recognition and sympathy.

From a socialist perspective it revealed the aggressive and uncompromising nature of certain individual capitalists to maximise profit and the weak and ineffectual response of government; torn between wanting to do what was ‘right’ and indeed popular with the public and the hard-nosed need not to disrupt the operation of capitalism. This story is told in a memoir Striking Back, published last year by one of the leading strike members, Mary Manning.

The strike took place in an Ireland that was quite different from that of today. It would have been hard to underestimate the political power that the Dunnes Stores organisation, headed up by the pugnacious Ben Dunne, wielded at the time. They were by far the dominant retail organisation in the country facing little real competition from any major rival (this was long before Lidl, Aldi, Tesco etc. entered the Irish market in a serious way). The Dunne family cultivated strong links with the upper echelons of both centre-right parties in Ireland, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael. Subsequent tribunals of enquiry (prompted by other public matters) revealed how nakedly and directly this influence was wielded in terms of payments to parties and politicians in return for favours or ‘considerations’. For workers, Dunnes had a well-deserved reputation for being an extremely hierarchical, top-down organisation where successful shop managers were judged by higher management as to how efficiently they worked those at the shop floor. Furthermore Ireland was a much poorer country than it is now and full-time jobs were very scarce so employment in any large company, even in a firm with a reputation of Dunnes Stores, would have been very desirable. It took tremendous courage for Mary and her colleagues to go out on strike and then to persevere for so long. As she says, they were all working class women with no higher education qualifications and limited employment possibilities.

**Trade unions**

The origins of the strike are interesting and explain many of the difficulties that the strikers experienced. The retail workers were members of the IDATU trade union (which has subsequently become part of the MANDATE trade union). Historically it was very much one of those small trade and butter issues’ organisations solely focussing on the day to day employment of its members without any real interest in the broader interests of the working class in society. Then a young, radical individual, John Mitchell, who had been involved in the Irish Anti-Apartheid Movement (now the General Secretary and persuaded the union to endorse resolutions condemning apartheid and specifically directing its members not to handle South African products in their places of employment. His fellow members of the union Executive went along with this, content that this support was meant to be solely rhetorical and probably in their minds indulging his whims. Once the strike started and then continued for such a prolonged period, they became more reluctant to authorise the £21 per week strike pay. To be fair, they were probably more representative of the wider membership of the union. The book discusses how in fact only a small number of the union members in the particular shop on Henry Street went out on strike in line with official union policy and so the union members in all the other stores throughout Ireland joined them until near the very end. Understandably for many of them, the issues in South Africa must have seemed very far away from their local concerns. In fact not only were the Dunnes workers innocent to the cause of the strikers, but as Mary discusses candidly, what she found upsetting was the hostility they experienced from some of their fellow workers who remained inside.

In addition to the union, the strike proved something of a quandary for the Irish Labour Party. As with many organisations that identified with the ‘Left’ they claimed to abhor apartheid and indeed the vast majority of their members surely did. The party formed part of the Irish government at the time and so theoretically at least could have aided the strikers in a meaningful fashion. Some of the senior Labour figures holding full cabinet positions were outspoken in their opposition to apartheid. However, their party was the junior partner with the much larger and more conservative Fine Gael party. Government ministers of that party felt they could not intervene in the action. Their opposition to intervention was either for the ideological reasons of not interfering in the operation of the ‘free market’ or for more pragmatic reasons of trade and employment.

Ireland exported more to South Africa than it imported and South Africa had invested in some industrial plants in Ireland. The government was afraid of retaliatory action from Pretoria if they became involved and the harm the loss of trade with South Africa would do to an already fragile economy here. So Labour was unsympathetic to the strike while simultaneously being embarrassed by it because of its inaction. It’s another small example of how reformist parties find it difficult to ever even minor actions when in a capitalist government.

**Catholic church**

The striking women also sought the support of the Catholic Church, still a powerful institution at that time, in their quest to obtain a successful outcome to their struggle. They wrote to Bishop Eamon Casey who by the standards of the time was regarded as a liberal, people-oriented, member of the Catholic hierarchy with a particular interest (and to be fair a decent track record) in issues of overseas justice. (His private response) proved a particular disappointment where he described their request for his support as ‘impertinent’ and their actions as potentially damaging to black South Africans. Probably the main reason for his dismissal of their cause was that while the Church liked to be involved with progressive issues, it was only when they were in control and when the Church itself would be the ultimate beneficiary of any campaigning action. Most curiously the book also highlights the ambivalent attitude of the Irish Anti-Apartheid Movement itself to the strike. Initially they gave it full support but then their leader Kadar Asmal (later a minister in the first post-apartheid government) privately told them that government was not clarified in the book. It is suggested that the Movement was becoming alarmed at the radical nature of the protest and how they were afraid it might damage their coalition-building efforts with more mainstream politicians and governments against apartheid. The strikers did receive wholehearted support from Bishop Desmond Tutu who invited them to South Africa to witness the plight of the population the first hand although when their plane arrived at Johannesburg, they were refused entry and after a short detention sent home.

The strike at the store lasted for over two years primarily down to the stubbornness of Ben Dunne in refusing any sort of meaningful compromise and insisting to the end that workers in his stores ‘do as they were told’ without any question or debate. He claimed it was management’s sole right to decide what the store did or didn’t stock and made it a principle not to yield to the workers’ ethical reservations. At the time, the other supermarket shops and outlets in Ireland also stocked South African produce but usually the issue was finessed at a local level by allowing staff not to handle the goods if they had moral scruples about it. The strike formally ended towards the end of 1986 in a rather messy fashion though with the strikers ultimately vindicated. Embarrassed by the international publicity and support the strike was garnering, the Irish government finally stepped in and banned the importation and sale of all South African goods from 1987 onwards (one of the first countries to do so). In principle the strikers were free to return to work at Dunnes Stores. Clearly the company didn’t want them back, considering them as troublemakers but they were legally obliged to take them. Some of the strikers did not go back knowing full well the poisonous atmosphere that would await. Some did, including Mary herself, but the company resorted to underhand low-level intimidation in a bid to force them to resign. Within a year Mary felt she had to leave and feeling that her prospects in Dublin would be very limited due to her profile as an ‘agitator’ she decided to emigrate to Australia for a number of years.

As an epilogue, the strikers finally managed to collectively visit South Africa in 2013 for Nelson Mandela’s official funeral which on a personal level was a thrilling emotional experience, though Mary is realistic enough to comment that for many South Africans living in the townships very little substantial change has taken place since the fall of apartheid. Overall this is an interesting account of genuine working-class history conveying the complexity that is involved when individuals become politicised while simultaneously dealing with the threads of family life, personal relationships and hopes for the future.

The book highlights the heavy price that workers can pay when taking political action against powerful interests. It also demonstrates the relatively weak position of a small group of people taking political action without broad support showing that real and substantial changes do need the committed involvement of the majority of the population. **KEVIN CRONIN**
Part Two: Environmental Impacts

While Almeria has an annual rainfall of just over 200 mm, greenhouse production requires something equivalent to 800-1,000 mm of water. The shortfall in water supply has traditionally been overcome by sinking wells and tapping the water trapped in the local aquifers. Hundreds of wells have been dug to support the growing table to drop. Not only has this adversely impacted on the wider region but ‘aquifer drawdown’ also tends to create a vacuum underground which is then filled by another water-source nearby – the Mediterranean.

Sea water is, of course, saline (and the level of salinity in the Mediterranean itself is comparatively high) so the ingress of seawater underground, and then into the irrigation system itself, results in salinisation and, hence, the destruction of crops. This has led to some greenhouses failing into disuse with new ones being erected in the area, along with the sinking of new wells, to get round this problem, thus increasing the area under plastic in a way that mimics the pathology of a spreading cancer.

Technique fixes have been advanced to tackle this problem, including the establishment of several water de-salinisation plants but the water provided is 1.5-4 times more costly in energy terms than pumped water. Relying on the Mediterranean is just exchanging one finite resource for another (Melissa Cate Christ, The Scapegoat Journal, 2013).

Other techniques include the ‘green wall’ (this is not very suitable for young plants) and the development of soilless or hydroponic systems of growing crops, using a substrate like perlite, and computerised drip technology which also delivers chemical fertilisers to the plants. ‘Fertigation’, however, presents a problem with what to do with all the vegetable waste – over 700,000 tonnes per year (ibid) – much of which is just dumped alongside the area – above all, that of falling water tables or, indeed, the leaching of chemicals into the ground or hydroponic systems of growing crops, using a substrate like perlite, and computerised drip technology which also delivers chemical fertilisers to the plants. ‘Fertigation’, however, presents a problem with what to do with all the vegetable waste – over 700,000 tonnes per year (ibid) – much of which is just dumped alongside the area – above all, that of falling water tables or, indeed, the leaching of chemicals into the ground.

Moreover, the close proximity of thousands of greenhouses creates ideal conditions for the spread of pests and diseases. The traditional response has been to blitz crops with chemical pesticides – although, interestingly, Almeria itself has become a world leader in Integrated Pest Management (IPM) involving the use of beneficial insects or predators. IPM is not only more environmentally-friendly methods of pest control. This came about as a result of a 2006 Greenpeace report revealing high levels of pesticide residues in produce from the region. The bad publicity caused a drastic drop in sales and the chemical in question was blacklisted. Nevertheless, pesticides continue to be used with adverse health consequences for those working within the relatively closed environment of the greenhouses.

Another environmental problem is the industry’s ubiquitous use of plastic itself. Not only does the manufacture of plastic sheeting add to the industry’s environmental footprint in terms of the consumption of fossil fuels this requires (the same would be true of the high transportation costs of shifting agricultural products by truck to Northern Europe); there is also the problem of how to dispose of that plastic once it has been used.

Plastic tarps have a relatively short lifespan under the blazing sun of southern Spain. This has led in recent years to the authorities having set up collection points for used plastic, a lot of it – not just tarps but containers of all sorts – ends up being dumped alongside the area. Such rubbish makes its way to the sea where it can harm or kill marine life, including even sperm whales, or else breaks down over time into micro-plastic particles that enter the food chain.

Migrant Labour

The so-called ‘economic miracle’ that is Almeria’s greenhouses would not be possible but for the harsh exploitation of cheap labour. This is yet another externality, along with the environmental costs of production that tends to be left off the capitalist equation: the social costs of production. For Marx, these things were vitally interconnected.

All progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the labourer, but of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time, is a progress towards ruining the last sources of that fertility’ (Capital, Vol 1).

When Almeria’s greenhouse sector began to develop back in the 1960s it relied mostly on family labour supplemented by locally-based seasonal labour. In the 1970s immigrant workers, chiefly from Morocco, began to arrive. Entire families would come to do the harvesting and then return to Morocco. Being paid less than the local minimum wage (they soon replaced the latter as a source of seasonal labour.

In the 1980s, Moroccan labour was supplemented by workers from Sub-Saharan Africa. This marked a shift from the organised annual in-to-ing and fro-ing between countries that had characterised the earlier migrations. Increasingly migrants tended to remain in the area, post-harvest, becoming part of the local community. In 1993, the enlargement of the EU included the enlargement of the EU. Some of this labour, as in the case of Eastern Europe, was officially recruited in the country of origin but increasing use was made of illegal undocumented migrant labour, particularly from Africa. Recent developments in that continent (and elsewhere) have ensured a steady growth in this supply.

While Europe’s so-called refugee crisis, peaking in 2015, initially focussed on refugees from the Middle East and their impact on point-of-entry countries like Italy and Greece, more recently attention has shifted to Spain which, according to a Reuters report, is emerging as a ‘new weak link’ in Fortress Europe’s efforts to stem the inflow of migrants (July 7, 2018). The numbers of asylum applicants arriving in Spain is currently rising sharply. This graphically illustrates how interconnected the world has become and subject to the dynamics of global capitalism. The economic forces that precipitate civil wars over mineral wealth in some distant African state are the same-self same forces that condemn those who flee to a migrant worker’s plastic hell.

Many of these are undocumented illegal; their very illegal status enabling employers to depress their wages to a bare minimum. Like their counterparts in the US, they are little protected. Ironically, the ability of employers to hire large numbers of illegal workers, often with the collusion of the authorities, means that workers applying for a legal contract, supposedly guaranteeing the minimum wage, is paid a lower pay rate for it. According to one source this can amount to several thousand euros (Network for the Promotion of Sustainable Consumption and Production). Even then, there are many ways and means for employers to get round legal requirements – for instance, registering workers for social insurance simply by hiring them for less than the statutory minimum of 180 days per year. All the odds are stacked in favour of the employers and against the workers.

The wages these workers receive fall significantly below even the legal minimum. The average wage is between 33 and 36 euros per day, though there have been cases reported of daily earnings falling well below even this derisory level – of 20 euros per day according to one report in the Guardian (7 February, 2011).

There are an estimated 100,000 migrants working and living in the greenhouses. Work conditions are atrocious. Tenements of greenhouses can rise to above 45 degrees Celsius, the toll is back-breaking and Health and Safety standards are poor. There is little protection against the choking fumes that come into contact with or breathe in.

Given their abysmally low income, they cannot afford even a minimally acceptable level of accommodation. Some live in barracks-like squat in semi-derelict corrugated with hazardous electrical connections and poor sanitary facilities for what is often, under the circumstances, an extortionate rent; others create constructions for themselves called chabolas made out of old pallets, plastic and cardboard erected amongst the greenhouses themselves. There tends to be a rigid segregation between migrants and locals (who live in agro-towns completely surrounded by the greenhouses) which creates a breeding ground for racism. Smuggling tensions have in the past broken out into race riots as happened in the town of El Ejido in 2000.

Contradictions of greenhouse production

Ironically, those who harbour such racist sentiments are sometimes the very people who have prospered on the backs of the migrants, as did the Moroccan employers, as stated above. Another small-scale family based operators – an estimated 13,500 of them – who, over the course of several decades, have come to farm close dependent ties with an army of local intermediaries such as banks, agribusinesses (providing seeds, irrigation technology, plastic sheeting etc.) and the supermarket chains. All of these want their slice of the pie and all have an interest in enlarging the size of that pie.

The result is that there is strong pressure on farmers to embrace technological innovations that enhance productivity. Output per hectare has indeed risen but at the cost of increasing indebtedness to the banks to finance this technology. And therein lies the rub. For while innovation enables the operator to increase output it also leads to falling prices through increased productivity which then undermines the ability of these small operators to pay off their loans. According to the aforementioned NPSGR report, operating costs can be between 30 and 40k euros per hectare, leaving many struggling to break even in stark contrast to the big supermarkets that bulk buy their produce. Such is the contradictory nature of the system we live under that plenty should come to be considered an economic curse.

The squeeze on the region’s margins, exacerbated by the small-scale nature of the greenhouse operators themselves has also a further consequence – namely, that it is likely to increase pressure on them to seek ways to reduce or externalise their costs of production. Certainly, as far as labour costs are concerned, the growing over-supply in relation to demand fuelled by the migrant crisis and augmented by the mushrooming of jobs in construction following the 2008 property market crash, means the prospects of any real improvement in the circumstances of the greenhouse workers themselves seem bleak.

The same might be said of the environmental costs of greenhouse production. Despite efforts by the industry to clean up its act, notably with the adoption of IPM technology, to an extent this is just another example of greening to delay the concerns of increasingly health conscious consumers in Northern Europe. It distracts from the more fundamental issues associating the north-south divide, all of that of falling water tables and future water supplies in the context of global climate change. Rainfall in the region has decreased by 18 percent since the 1960s and water shortages are projected to grow.

A final irony is that the very success that the Almeria greenhouse complex had achieved as an exemplar of high-tech commercialised agriculture has encouraged others to copy it. Though its energy costs are markedly less than in Northern Europe where greenhouses have to be heated, this advantage falls away in other parts of the Mediterranean such as Turkey or Morocco. Here the model of greenhouse production is being aggressively pushed and labour costs are, if anything, even lower. With international competition heating up this will only place relentless pressure to reduce or further externalise costs.

In so many ways, this little corner of the world represents a microcosm of global capitalism, a mirror on the environmentally and socially destructive forces the system unleashes in its pursuit of profit at any price. (concluded)
There are lots of myths, including that the government used tanks against protestors but they didn’t. 10,000 men and six tanks were dispatched to Glasgow, arriving after the rioting was over. No-one was shot, beaten up or forced back to work by the army. No troops faced off against fixed bayonets and there were no tanks in George Square. For years a photograph of a tank making its way through crowds at Glasgow’s Trongate was wrongly identified as dating from January 1919 but the picture was taken in 1918 during a campaign to promote war bonds. The ‘all the troops were English’ myth can be dismissed. The press at the time listed and photographed men from Scottish regiments such as the Seaforths and the Gordon Highlanders plus the 1,600 men from two English regiments (one of them based, in 1919, at Bridge of Allan, near Stirling, the other in Co Durham). Glaswegian troops at Maryhill, however, were confined to barracks as a precautionary measure. The solders stood guard at railway stations, open coal depots, power plants and gas-work, and, with the still fresh memory of the GPO in Dublin’s Easter Rising, the city’s main post office.

The other exaggeration was the revolutionary nature of Clydeside’s Independent Labour Party (ILP). This party was a reformist left-wing party whose vast majority of leaders were far from Bolshevik revolutionaries. The ILP in 1922 returned several MPs, the Clydesmen James Mann, Daniel O’Quigley, John Wheatley, Thomas Johnston, John McGovern and Shinwell. They were sent to Westminster in a wave of left-wing enthusiasm.

David Kirkwood would later reflect, ‘We were going to do big things. The people believed that, We believed that. At our onslaught, the grinding poverty which existed in the midst of plenty was to be wiped out. We were going to scare away the grim spectre of unemployment... Alas, that we were able to do so little!

Clydeside was far more revolutionary in hindsight than it ever was in reality. Iain McLean in The Legend of the Red Clydeside asserted that what took place was neither a revolution nor a class movement; it was an interest-group movement of workers defending their skilled status and their pay differentials.

ALJO

ILLUSSION

‘Had there been an experienced revolutionary leadership, instead of a march to Glasgow Green there would have been a march to the city’s Maryhill Barracks. There we could easily have persuaded the soldiers to come out, and Glasgow would have been in our hands.’ (W. Gallagher, Communist Party)

REALITY

‘This was a widely supported trade union dispute but it was a reformist not a revolutionary gathering and it turned into anarchy only because of political narrowness in London. It could easily have persuaded the soldiers to come out, and the force of our immense majority. But our valiant young girls’ remedial prescription also made us apprehensive. Before the commencement of the summit, as a mode of protest, she was beginning to organise her schoolmates for a school strike on every Friday and sitting in a demonstration outside the Swedish parliament.

The demand of her climate movement is to compel the Swedish government to implement the Paris agreement to reduce carbon emissions to check global warming within a safe range. Till then she will continue to sit and demonstrate in front of the parliament with her schoolmates weekly on a specified day. She also made an appeal to children all over the world to sit and demonstrate in front of their national parliaments to make people aware of the dangers of climate changes. This is no doubt a praiseworthy initiative but we would like to express our concern that she might be used by the capitalist class to channel people’s anguish into a reformist blind alley.

In the first week of October 2018, the United Nations had released an alarming report that we have only twelve years left to prevent a catastrophic climate change that would wreak havoc on the world population and environment. But are the climate changes sudden? Scientists have been warning world leaders from 1977 about the threat, when climate change was not even talked about much. But the corporate businesses that are responsible for most of the world carbon emissions successfully ran a campaign to suppress the climate facts and worked to keep the United States from signing the Kyoto protocol, which helped China and India, two other giant emitters of greenhouse gas, to avoid signing.

The capitalist propaganda machines are spreading the illusion that a ‘carbon tax’ on emissions will reduce the use of fossil fuels and encourage entrepreneurs to use clean energy, but this is not going to work. As long as capitalism persists, the logic of the free market economy is to make money even at the cost of natural calamities.

The exact same class which is actively cranking up the global thermostat that threatens to inundate 20 percent of the global population is actually controlling the United Nations and parliaments of different nations. So we think we, the working class, should expect nothing from the ruling minority capitalist class, but should rapidly organise ourselves into a political party of our own on a global basis with the aim of electing MPs and ministers to take over the parliament and pronouncement: annulment of all property and territorial rights whereby all that is on and in the Earth will become the common heritage of the whole of humanity. This will help clear away the obstacles for the working class movement as a whole and usher humanity into the realm of freedom towards world socialism.

PARTHA PRATIK MURJHEE
Socialist Standard February 2019

One of the many reasons for the misinterpretation of Marx’s writings has its origins in the misunderstanding of his method. His mode of investigation was entirely dialectical. To many of his subsequent readers down the years this has made his work relatively inaccessible.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the analytical school of philosophy had almost entirely eclipsed the dialectical tradition because of the former’s association with the ‘scientific method’. The dialectics of the so-called ‘continental philosophical school’ were only slowly rekindled in the analysis of the ‘humanities’ — it was used at all. When the analytical method was used to create the separate disciplines of economics, politics, history and sociology etc., (something entirely alien to the holistic dialectical approach) its analytical method was used to create the separate disciplines (mental reconstructions of relationships between ideas) and as such they attempt to represent the objective world that we find ourselves within and are not those things in themselves. Language is so seductive that once it becomes indented into thought itself it can be misused for that which it represents (idealisim). We speak here of the Marxist version of the dialectical method which is used in the service of materialism rather than the idealism of Hegel (Marx famously subverted the Hegelian method) but the philosophical technique is the same.

The foremost discovery of any dialectical analysis is that any abstract (concept/phenomena) is in the process of change. This reflects the fact that all of the constituents of the world are becoming something other than they appear to be at any given time. Everything has to be understood in terms of what it once was, what it is now and what it will become. To study anything in isolation is misleading and ultimately futile. This continual change is due to not just external factors but also to the internal structure of the abstract (phenomena) concerned. This is what dialecticians call internal relations. The method seeks to comprehend four relationships between the elements within the idea (phenomena under consideration): identity and difference, the interpenetration of opposites, the transition from the abstract (phenomena) considered to the tension created by internal contradictions. These processes are universal and so reflect the whole within its parts but, as we shall see, the very distinct ‘and part’ quickly becomes philosophically redundant and is only retained as an expository expedient.

Let’s use the humble apple as a subject for a dialectical analysis. The color, shape, taste and texture combine to define an ‘apple’. These qualities are in turn dependent on a process that has changed the fruit and brought it to ripeness. In dialectical terms we see the development of both its difference from other fruits as well as its connection with them as part of the definition of being a fruit. We see in the ripening the interpenetration of opposites in terms of sourness transforming into ripeness. Development from a single cell to a combination of many as it grows is an example of quantity becoming a quality and finally the continuation of the processes of ripening, if the apple is left unpicked, will cause it to rot and die and this represents an internal contradiction. The perspective or vantage point from which we perceive apples will be deeply interested in what it represents in terms of taste, price and wages. The tree’s fruit exists to pass on its genetic code as widely and in a social context. You cannot embrace the universe as a whole so we are forced to abstract it into component parts to intellectually digest it at all; but this is always done with the understanding of the phenomena as representing the whole. With this in mind we are free to choose a point of view that we feel will be most revealing – rather than being restricted in our perspective by ideological conditioning. Marx always had to perfom the difficult task of creating his conclusions and conclusions within a non-dialectical intellectual context. The dialectical method had come a long way since its origins of ‘thesis, antithesis and synthesis’ in the Ancient Greek discipline of rhetoric. It has been said that trying to comprehend the world without the aid of dialectics is like trying to board a moving train whilst blindfolded. Dialectics is a method we can use to investigate the past, present and the future.

Marx’s method

Of all the dialectical tools available Marx considered the investigation of ‘internal contradictions’ to be the most productive when studying history. Unlike most historians Marx analyses history backwards – he seeks out the elements in the past that are preconditions for the present. This is because, as already stated, every concept of the present is rooted in the past and possesses potential for the future. The money in your purse (present) has its origins in the development of an exchange economy (past) and as such is extremely unlikely to remain in your purse for long (future). The rich capital that produced capitalism were both economic and political – Marx was never purely an economic determinist as he so often portrayed. One of the necessary preconditions for capitalism was the economic power of the merchants, capitalist farmers and financiers whose wealth enabled them to replace the feudal lords as the ruling class which in turn accelerated the economic exploitation of coal and iron that started the subsequent industrial revolution. In other words the merchant adventurers, pirates and slavers who flourished under monarchical rule (Elizabeth I and James I) were the very people who would help to overthrow it; late feudalism had nurtured the elements of its own destruction (internal contradiction). Industrial technology facilitated social production which produced one of the famous instances of ‘the negation of the negation’ (when change seems to end up where it starts) because it severed the link between producer and owner (an earlier form of property) and substituted it with the ownership of the producer’s labour power as well as his product (property as capital) – one form of private property had replaced another.

What then, can be seen as the preconditions for the future within capitalism? If we look for the most obvious example of an internal contradiction within the contemporary world one which we can see in the economic production of human history, and it is this individual (or state) ownership of the products of social production. That the majority are only allowed to produce for the profit of a tiny minority is as simple a case as can be imagined. Local or national in the twenty first century as was the political power and wealth of the aristocracy in seventeenth century England. The political recognition of things being done (capitalism) by the people enabled change to end. Just as social production had superseded the individual craftsmanship of the past so will social ownership (socialism) replace individual acquisition in the future. Dialectically we can then look back from this future to the present and thus set out the preconditions for socialism within capitalism. We have achieved the necessary level of production and what we need is revolutionary socialist consciousness which, from the vantage point we have imagined from the future, necessitates the rejection of any reform or political compromise with capitalism. Of course we speak of the future in terms of the probabilities offered by the present but this is no crystal ball gazing because, as has been said, the use of the process of projection and regression is implicit in the conception of whatever we are conscious of doing so or not. A pile of bricks is never just ‘a pile of bricks’; we interpret it either as the remnants of a building or as the potential for a new building; a baby is not just a baby but is hopefully the result of hope and a potential adult. Dialectics can help you understand the probable quality and value of either – a Taj Mahal or an Adolph Hitler.

Given what has been outlined here it becomes obvious why dialectical materialism is feared and derided by those who would have us believe that capitalism represents the best of all possible worlds. The fear is instinctive (ideological) because few ever really attempt to understand it. As Marx said: the ruling ideas are those of the ruling class – a world where everything is frozen in time (we were just as violent and greedy in the past as we are now and the future will be no different) and where the only possible form of knowledge illustrates dead matter imprisoned in its present form and devoid of any inner dynamic that will change it (bourgeois economics and pseudo-science). Marx said the stage of the working class because he understood that only they can create fundamental progress. History chooses a class to exhibit the potential for change; all it has to do is recognise the power of the human development has given it. The theory of internal relations (dialectics) stands as the primary theory that can tell us when and how human agency can bring about a revolutionary political transition.

Joachim Jastram: “In Praise of dialectics”
On Your Way!

There can be few experiences worse than being evicted from your home, but this is a problem affecting more and more people. In 2017, according to Ministry of Justice figures, an average of 169 evictions a day took place in the UK, an increase of over half since 2010. This ignores those who move because they are threatened with eviction or fear they may be, or cases where the eviction is illegal, so the figures underestimate the extent of the problem and how much it impacts on people’s lives.

The effects of course can be devastating. In 2013 a housing association tenant in London killed himself as a result of being evicted, while a study in Sweden found much higher levels of stress and depression among generation Z (New Statesman 28 March 2018). One woman, who had been evicted with her husband and two sons from a London house in February 2019, said the move was ‘worse than a death’, Writing in the Daily Mirror about why the landlord wants to get rid of existing tenants, and other evictions may involve such matters as illness, unemployment, the break-up of a relationship, problems with crime, family disputes or any other reason a landlord may have.

The government’s response to such developments is to say that the evictions are a last resort and cannot and should not be ascribed to problems with Universal Credit. Of course, that does not stop politicians offering simplistic arguments, such as the claim by James Brokenshire, the housing secretary, that the £350 million apparently sent to the EU each week could be spent on Universal Credit. That particular stunt was one among many examples of how the campaign strategists tried to shape opinion in the runup to June 2016’s referendum. The manoeuvres of the Vote Leave campaign team, especially that of its chief strategist, Dominic Cummings, are playing out in real life. The following year Lenin’s section of the Russian Social Democratic Party (‘cosmopolitan’), a name adopted by parties elsewhere that supported the Bolshevik regime. The new term, which Lenin called their regime ‘cosmopolitan’, even Stalin claimed only to have established ‘socialist’ (not ‘cosmopolitan’). But this did not prevent the supporters of capitalism pointing to Russia as examples of a different kind of society. So, his rejection of the latest social media tools, with its messages on the pavement, and he talks in blunt, opinionated aphorisms. Instead, the faces of the Leave campaign have tools like targeted adverts and a big red bus plastered with an extravagant claim? ‘Brexit: The Uncivil War’. Leaver’s chief strategist, and the drama’s central character, is Dominic Cummings. His CV includes running projects to Britain adopting the Euro and ratifying the EU’s constitution, and being Michael Gove’s main adviser during his unsuccessful stint as Tory Secretary of State for Education. Despite having a key role in shaping the Leave campaign, Cummings has had a lot to lose, of, or attracted the attention of many journalists or commentators until now. Instead, the faces of the Leave campaign have been those of Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage, who are hardly glowing examples.

Cummings is portrayed by Benedict Cumberbatch, who plays him as the usual Cumberbatch brooding maverick-type with an annoying amount of self-confidence. He stands on tables, he cycles on a very cheap bicycle, with a cardboard sign talking in blunt, opinionated aphorisms. His manner makes him disliked among the political classes of all stripes. Cummings’ writings had nothing to do with that. The line that led to that was the famous ‘Beyond the pale’ line in the Daily Mail of 23 June 2016. What had been written by Nigel Farage’s chief of staff, Mark Clarke, in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum, had been that: ‘If we leave the EU we take back control. If we stay in the EU we lose control. And our politicians have lost control of our lives. We have to take back control.’

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The GREAT big mess Parliament’s made of leaving the EU wasn’t what the ‘Vote Leave’ campaign told us it would be like. If you want to argue that the whole of the EU, it would be as simple as transferring the £350 million apparently sent to the EU each week to the NHS coffers, that might be a reasonable argument. That particular stunt was one among many examples of how the campaign strategists tried to shape opinion in the runup to June 2016’s referendum. The manoeuvres of the Vote Leave campaign team, especially that of its chief strategist, Dominic Cummings, are playing out in real life. The following year Lenin’s section of the Russian Social Democratic Party (‘cosmopolitan’), a name adopted by parties elsewhere that supported the Bolshevik regime. The new term, which Lenin called their regime ‘cosmopolitan’, even Stalin claimed only to have established ‘socialist’ (not ‘cosmopolitan’). But this did not prevent the supporters of capitalism pointing to Russia as examples of a different kind of society. So, his rejection of the latest social media tools, with its messages on the pavement, and he talks in blunt, opinionated aphorisms. Instead, the faces of the Leave campaign have tools like targeted adverts and a big red bus plastered with an extravagant claim? ‘Brexit: The Uncivil War’.
Socialist Standard February 2019

Scam Exposed


In May last year there was a general election in Malaysia in which the Prime Minister, Najib Razak, was voted out of office. This was the culmination of events dating back to 2009 and involving a massive scam in which billions of dollars were allegedly siphoned off the country’s finances into shell companies and the pockets of Najib himself and others. How all this was exposed is chronicled in considerable detail here by Clare Newswest Brown, an investigative journalist whose blog www.sarawakreport.org played a major role in bringing things out into the open.

The book and the exposé can be quite optimistic about the positive results of this period. These and other events are seen as leading to a new era of anti-corruption in which the ultra-rich defend themselves.

This pamphlet has been published to mark the centenary of the death (murder) of Rosa Luxemburg after the ill-fated and ill-advised Spartacist uprising in Germany in January 1919. The pamphlet examines her contribution to socialist theory, especially her analysis of the so-called ‘right of nations to self-determination’ as the demand of a national capitalist class to have its own state and so undermine of socialist or working class support. It also brings out her insistence that socialism cannot be established by a conscious minority leading a merely discontented majority, whatever its intentions. It led to the perception that council housing was for the most needy, a situation described as ‘sink estates’, reinforcing an ugly concept.


The first council homes in Britain were built in Liverpool in 1869 and the first council estate, in the Bethnal Green area of London, opened in 1900. It was only after the First World War that council housing really took off. ‘Sink estates’ reinforce this view. But Boughton convincingly makes the point that social housing just reflects the wider problems of poverty and insecurity in society, rather than being a cause of these problems. His book is a bit optimistic about the positive results of council housing, but provides an excellent account of its history.

Rosa Luxemburg

Rosa Luxemburg on Socialism. The Socialist Party of Great Britain. 50 pages. £2.50.

This pamphlet has been published to mark the centenary of the death (murder) of Rosa Luxemburg after the ill-fated and ill-advised Spartacist uprising in Germany in January 1919. The pamphlet examines her contribution to socialist theory, especially her analysis of the so-called ‘right of nations to self-determination’ as the demand of a national capitalist class to have its own state and so undermine of socialist or working class support. It also brings out her insistence that socialism cannot be established by a conscious minority leading a merely discontented majority, whatever its intentions. It led to the perception that council housing was for the most needy, a situation described as ‘sink estates’, reinforcing an ugly concept.

There had been previous ‘Right to Buy’ schemes, but nothing on such a scale resulting from the 1980 Housing Act, which gave discounts to long-term tenants; the income from sales could not be used to build new homes (just four hundred council homes were started in England and Wales in 1996–7, for instance). Owner-occupation was seen as a good thing, though the numbers are down since their peak in 2003. Most new council lettings are now for fixed terms of two to five years, so removing the long-term security previously offered. In 2016 1.8 million households in England were on waiting lists for local authority social housing.

Council estates in particular are often seen nowadays as a problem, and expressions such as ‘sink estates’ reinforce this view. But Boughton convincingly makes the point that social housing just reflects the wider problems of poverty and insecurity in society, rather than being a cause of these problems. His book is a bit optimistic about the positive results of council housing, but provides an excellent account of its history.
50 Years Ago

Take Over
Sunday is supposed to be the day of rest and church-going. In fact, it is the day when about ten million British people enjoy themselves by reading in the News of the World all about sex sins of famous actresses and obscure country vicars.

The paper recently described itself as ‘as British as roast beef and Yorkshire pudding’ and perhaps, in a way, that is true. Little wonder, then, that when Pergamon Press launched its takeover bid the shares was a matter of popular concern.

It was one of the hardest fought of all takeovers. The Times of the World warned darkly that ‘Mr. Robert Maxwell, a Socialist M.P., is trying to take . . . over’ and was careful enough to remind its readers that Maxwell [who was responsible for the Back to Britain campaign] was ‘formerly Jan Ludwig Hoch.’

The NOW, it was clear, thought that the worst thing that could happen to British workers would be to have their favourite Sunday scandal sheet taken over by a naturalised Labour M.P.

Maxwell himself has never been famous for a reluctance to join the in-fighting. His delicate description of the man who defeated him — Australian newspaper owner Rupert Murdoch — was ‘a notherean kangaroo’, and after the shareholders’ votes had gone against him he (of all people) mourned that ‘the law of the jungle has won.’

These doughty exchanges should be remembered, the next time Maxwell, or the News of the World, complain about the alleged childishness of striking workers. In the meantime, let us extricate ourselves from the mire of the battle between rival capitalists so anxious to protect their bank balances and take a look at the real issue.

Modern capitalism is a society of unrelenting insecurity and poverty. Such is the degradation of its people that millions of them greedily swallow the muck dished out by rags like the News of the World. It pays to produce this muck. The real issue is not who owns the muck-making machine, but what about the nature of a society which can afford to waste money on something so worthless as to produce it, and which stimulates the need for it?

(continued from page 21)

of inexorable human progress. Some ‘Guardian type’ reviews drew some parallels with today, encouraged by Mike Leigh’s statement that the film highlights the ‘have and have nots’ and thus has some contemporary relevance.

Peterloo was undoubtedly an event worthy of historical note. But not what Maxine Peake [who played Nellie in the film] exclaimed at the premiere in Manchester: ‘Peterloo was an outrage of the rising factor all through the Middle Ages – against barons and king, who controlled the state.

Rights were in the hands of the feudal state to bestow on its subjects. The word implies acceptance of one’s subordination to another, of whom you demand rights – the right to do something, express an idea, and so on. Rights are bestowed or withheld. There are no classes, no rulers and ruled, rights are an absolute common right to be.

When the bourgeoisie stopped requesting its ‘rights’ and, instead, overthrew the nobility (namely in the French Revolution), it kept the language of Rights, and enshrined it in the bourgeois constitution. Now the bourgeoisie grants rights to, or withholds them from, its subject class, the working class.

Everyone thus today clamours about their ‘rights’ – the right to be a wage-slave, the rights of women, the rights of animals, the rights of minorities, ethnic or sexual. Like ‘freedom’, ‘rights’ is bourgeois language. We petition and plead with our masters for our “rights.”

No more rights! No more capitalist system! Abolish class by abolishing the wages system! Let’s get up off our knees and stop begging for treats.

Rights. What rights?

When the bourgeoisie (capitalist class) was struggling with the feudal nobility, it was anxious to secure its ‘rights’ – the ‘rights’ of the towns – the rising factor all through the Middle Ages – against barons and king, who controlled the state.

Rights were in the hands of the feudal state to bestow on its subjects. The word implies acceptance of one’s subordination to another, of whom you demand rights – the right to do something, express an idea, and so on. Rights are bestowed or withheld. There are no classes, no rulers and ruled, rights are an absolute common right to be.

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No more rights! No more capitalist system! Abolish class by abolishing the wages system! Let’s get up off our knees and stop begging for treats.

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

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 product of the struggle of the working class.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly of 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 brought 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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Peaceful New Year?
2019 got off to an unexpectedly candid start with US Strategic Command - 'Peace is our Profession'! - tweeting '#TimesSquare tradition rings in the #NewYear by dropping the big ball...if ever needed, we are #ready to drop something much, much bigger'. The nuclear-armed Command later recanted: 'Our previous NYE tweet was in poor taste & does not reflect our values. We apologize. We are dedicated to the security of America & allies' (@US_Stratcom, 1 January). The video clip accompanying the original tweet prompted Caitlin Johnstone to comment: 'The only way you could possibly encapsulate the US military’s values... more perfectly than cramming it full of footage of $2,000,000,000 warplanes cruising around dropping $3,500,000 GBU-57 bombs would be to also show the human bodies they land on being ripped to pieces. Inflicting death and destruction using unfathomably expensive machinery is the US military's whole job. Of course, it reflects their values' (ahtripne.com, 2 January).

Class war
‘In the first three days of 2019 top bosses will have earned more than the typical worker will earn all year, according to a report. The average pay of a FTSE 100 chief executive is £1,020 an hour, research from the High Pay Centre and HR industry body the CIPD has found. By “Fat Cat Friday” the bosses will have earned more than the CIPD has found. By “Fat Cat Friday” the average pay of a FTSE 100 chief executive is £1,020 an hour, research from the High Pay Centre and HR industry body the CIPD has found. By “Fat Cat Friday” the bosses will have earned more than the typical annual UK salary of £29,574, the report said’ (bbc.com, 4 January). Kautsky saw such capitalists as anarchistic by the late nineteenth century: ‘But however necessary were the capitalist system and the conditions which produced it, they are no longer so. The functions of the capitalist class devolve ever more upon paid employees. The large majority of the capitalists have now nothing to do but consume what others produce. The capitalist today is as superfluous a human being as the feudal lord had become a hundred years ago’ (The Class Struggle, 1888).

‘There never was a good war or a bad peace’
Franklin, one of the Founding Fathers who paved the way for American capitalism, wrote: ‘What vast additions to the conveniences and comforts of living might mankind have acquired, if the money spent in wars had been employed in works of public utility. What an extension of agriculture even to the tops of our mountains; what rivers rendered navigable, or joined by canals; what bridges, aqueducts, new roads and other public works, edifices and improvements, rendering England a complete paradise, might not have been obtained by spending those millions in doing good which in the last war have been spent in doing mischief! In bringing misery into the lives of so many thousands of working people who might have performed the useful labor’ (Letter to Josiah Quincy, 11 September 1783). Indeed.

Benjamin Franklin
Worldstatesmen.org lists 40 major wars since 1700, including WWI, the war to end all wars. Just five years after that mass murder ended, War Resisters League was founded by Jesse Wallace Hughan with a focus on ending armed conflict. ‘Today’s WRL is zeroing in on underlying causes of military tension—including economic inequality, unequal access to resources, imperialism, and racism’ (popularresistance.org, 25 October). How many such groups have come and gone? Innumerable peace treaties, pious resolutions, prayers, demonstrations have been written, passed, uttered, forgotten and staged since the dawn of capitalism. Nuclear weapons remain and cluster bombs are making a comeback. In addition to weapons of mass destruction, capitalism produces poverty, insecurity, disease, and all the vicious things that stem from those, and it gives rise to the wars for which governments are constantly preparing.

World without war
‘The increasing intensity of competition for economic markets must lead to armed conflict unless an economic settlement is found. This, however, is hardly to be hoped for. Talk about peace in a world armed to the teeth is utterly futile’ (W. M. Hughes, Prime Minister of Australia during WWI, News Chronicle, 25 July 1936). Time and time again the socialist has demonstrated that war stems from capitalist struggles for markets, trade routes, sources of raw materials, and places of strategic importance. The 99 percent based in the UK and US face the same problems as members of our class existing elsewhere. Workers have no country. If anybody can really delude themselves into believing piecemeal measures will bring everlasting peace worldwide, their gullibility can know no bounds. We have a job to do, in this century, the establishment of socialism, and while workers are pursuing reform rather than revolution, they are falling down on their historically appointed task.