

# socialist standard

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

## SANCTIONS:



## AS LETHAL AS WAR



also:  
**Venezuela**  
**One Big Union**  
**Climate Change**



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# socialist standard

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## Introducing the Socialist Party

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

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

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

Gradualist reformers like the Labour Party believed that capitalism could be



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

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

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

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## Editorial

### Lethal Might Before Needs

As the calamity of Brexit continues to engulf British capitalism, its representatives and supporters indulge in all manner of fantasies and delusions. We are assured that once the UK leaves the EU, the rest of the world would be falling over themselves to negotiate trade deals with it. Now we are told that the UK can again become a great global military power as it was in the good old days of the British Empire.

As Gavin Williamson, the Defence Secretary, put it in his speech to the Royal United Services Institute on 11th February, 'Brexit has brought us to a great moment in our history. A moment when we must strengthen our global presence, enhance our lethality and increase our mass.' However, this speech was not well received in certain quarters. His boss, Theresa May, was none too pleased with his plans to send an aircraft carrier to the Pacific, a move that the Chinese leaders would interpret as being provocative, as she hoped to establish closer economic ties with Chinese capitalism. Provoking other countries militarily is generally not seen as the best way to form advantageous trading relations

with them. Indeed the Chinese leaders were so incensed by this, they cancelled a proposed visit to Beijing that Philip Hammond, the Chancellor, had intended to make with the hope of forging trade deals with them.

It is also ironic that Williamson proposed to take 'action to oppose those who flout international law' when the UK government has done that on several occasions.

However, the speech was more than posturing by a Churchill wannabee trying to promote his career. When he said the Western powers must be prepared to 'use hard power to support our interests', he was not just laying bare the current real tensions between Russia and China on one side and the Western Powers on the other, but was also revealing the essential nature of capitalism as a system whereby nation states need to compete with each other over global markets and that for this purpose vital trade routes and sources of raw materials need to be safeguarded. Thus they need to be constantly armed to the teeth and prepared for war. As too often when all else fails, war inevitably breaks out.

Perhaps the Labour Party in its response called out Williamson for ramping up the pro-war rhetoric? No, actually, Nia Griffith, the Shadow Defence Secretary, took the government to task for running down the armed forces over the years as part of their cost-cutting programme. The Liberal Democrat defence spokesman, Jamie Stone, also made a similar criticism that the armed forces had been 'hollowed out'.

It must be borne in mind that this speech was made at a time when there have been cutbacks in welfare and local services -- more people using foodbanks and local libraries closing. Therefore, what Williamson has also shown is that the priority of the capitalist state must be to advance the interests of its capitalist minority, even at the risk of war, over the needs of the working class majority.



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# PATHFINDERS

## Getting Twitchy about copyright

IT'S A well-known fact that a new TV or fridge doesn't spring fully-formed from a hole in the ground but is usually produced in stages, from ore extraction to delivery, with different parts constructed by different people, often on different sites at different times. Thus the UK jobs impact of the recent Airbus decision to stop producing the underselling A380 superjumbo, whose wings (but not the rest of it) are made in Britain.

When describing how capitalism works, Marxists talk about the value of products as containing embodied or 'dead' labour which has to be accounted for in the final price. For instance, so much for resource extraction, refinement, power, distribution, parts manufacture and shipping, and so forth. Socialists don't pretend that you can separate and cost out all these elements of dead labour from the finished product. That would be like trying to unbake a cake back into its starting ingredients. The argument only stipulates that the final price has to reflect all this labour otherwise the continued production and sale of this good, at this price, will not be viable.

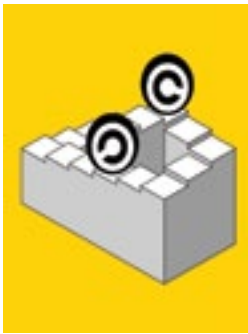
Where this gets interesting is new developments in EU copyright law, which is in the process of being revised because of the internet revolution, and specifically the impact of hosting sites like YouTube and the various social media giants.

One element of the proposed EU Copyright Directive, Article 13, has Google positively gargling in horror: 'Article 13 of the EU Copyright Directive states services such as YouTube could be held responsible if their users upload copyright-protected movies and music' (BBC Online, 14 February). Think how many times (come on, admit it) you've wasted hours watching old excerpts of *Monty Python*, *The Good Life*, *Citizen Smith*, *Yes Minister* and *Fawlty Towers* on YouTube. All of that stuff, and a billion other things, are of course copyrighted, but so far nobody has raised too much of a stink about it. Article 13 could scupper all that.

But here's the twister. What if someone films themselves playing a computer game and then uploads the film to YouTube or Twitch as an original publication for others to watch? Yes, people really do that, and they have millions of followers. They own the copyright on their film, but what about the copyright belonging to the game owners? That is embedded or 'dead' labour which the EU Directive is expecting to 'unbake' and price up, which as we've seen above, is going to give EU policy-makers a severe headache.

Technology has so far superseded European law that currently there exists

only a state of unofficial consensus whereby copyright is not enforced in cases of what's considered 'fair use' (eg for criticism, reviews, satire etc). But this consensus has no legal status in Europe, unlike in the USA, and so far there have been no court cases to establish a precedent. Hosting companies could be in the situation of having to buy licences for any copyrighted content their users upload, perhaps as well as any other copyrighted material contained within it. No wonder they're horrified.



The point of all this? Not only is property society a terrible arrangement from the perspective of the 99 percent who don't own any, it's sometimes damnably

difficult to apply its rules to figure out exactly who owns what and who should be paying whom. That at least is one arcane and intractable problem that socialism could laughingly throw to the winds.

## Cause and effect

A recent metastudy has shown a significant link between depression and teenage cannabis use, with 'robust' evidence showing that 'using the drug in adolescence increased the risk of developing depression in adulthood by 37%' (BBC Online, 13 February). The wording here is, unusually for the BBC, careless and misleading, because it states baldly that the one directly causes the other, which is not shown by the evidence at all, as the article goes on to admit. Tabloid journalists in particular ought to be dragged outside and beaten with the mantra 'correlation is not causation'. Instead the line should have read 'using the drug in adolescence is associated with an increased risk of developing depression...'

Anyone alive today in capitalism has multiple reasons to get depressed without even reaching for the Rizlas, and that probably goes double for young people, who generally have a worse time of it economically, socially, psychologically and sexually than older people with settled lives and paid-for houses. Maybe that's why they say life begins at 40 – because it's mostly sheer hell until that point, if not after as well.

It certainly could be that cannabis has a deleterious effect on young developing brains. It could also be that depression-

prone teens are more likely to resort to cannabis in the first place. Perhaps heavy cannabis use among teens is associated with a raft of other, depression-inducing social behaviours and circumstances. Anyone with long experience of poverty and unemployment knows that skinning up a spliff with mates is a lot cheaper than almost any other social option. Far from causing depression in this situation, cannabis may be the only silver lining in an otherwise black cloud. Ganja-bashing continues to make good headlines, but that doesn't mean journalists should let their critical faculties go up in smoke.

A recent article in the webzine *Dissident Voice* also plays fast and loose with causation, when it claims that our serotonin system fuels aggression and so means that a socialist or anarchist non-hierarchical society is impossible ([dissidentvoice.org/2018/07/social-animals-have-two-modes-of-being/](http://dissidentvoice.org/2018/07/social-animals-have-two-modes-of-being/)). Despite pronouncing in impressively sciencey terms about the metabolic biochemistry of the monoamine neurotransmitter, the author Denis Rancourt (who by the way is not a neurobiologist but a retired physicist) offers not a shred of evidence for his argument that the hormone 'locks' humans into either dominant or subservient roles, and indeed his example of dominant social climbers who 'kiss ass' to get up the corporate ladder seems to flatly contradict his own case. Too much is wrong with his discussion of serotonin to go into here, but in a nutshell it comes down to correlation and causation again. He cites several academic studies in support of his case, but if you read what they say they don't support his claim either. In fact one luminary, Robert Sapolsky, is scathing of such thinking in a fascinating YouTube lecture, where he says within the first few minutes that because genetically humans are almost identical with all other animals even including fruitflies, 'Genetics and neurotransmitters etc tell us nothing about what makes humans humans' ([youtube.com/watch?v=YWZAL64E0DI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YWZAL64E0DI)). He then drives home the point that we are not genetically fixed by citing his own study of a troop of baboons who, after all the aggressive males accidentally died of TB, exhibited an astonishing change in behaviour, becoming socially friendlier and more affectionate, with males even grooming each other – unheard of for wild baboons. One wonders if Sapolsky and the other cited authorities realise they are being cited in support of an argument they would heartily oppose.

PJS

# LETTERS

## A Writer Writes . . .

1) First, I never argue (book review of Cleaver's *Rupturing the Dialectic - the Struggle Against Work, Money and Financialization* in January *Socialist Standard*) that capitalists are not interested in profits, on the contrary precisely because I argue their system is based on putting people to work, profits are essential to maintaining and expanding the imposition of work. Second, writing 'It's a point of view but not that of Marx' is simple assertion but makes no argument to convince the reader. It also smacks of sectarianism: all Marxists whose interpretations differ from mine are not Marxists at all.

2) First, the superficiality of the reading is apparent in ascribing to me the 'classic error' of underconsumptionism (i.e., 'workers not being able to buy back all they produce as the cause of crises') given that the inadequacy of consumption demand is clearly treated as only one of many causes of ruptures in the circuits of capital, not 'the' cause of crises. Second, saying that I make the mistake of seeing taxes as simply a burden on workers, while ignoring the discussion in the book of how some of what taxes pay for is not only of use to workers but are programs and services we have fought for, is another misrepresentation.

3) First, it's odd that you seem to accept the idea that getting rid of money and markets are essential elements in getting rid of capitalism, but dismiss efforts to marginalize money. In the absence of an actual argument against 'marginalizing money' I'm left with the impression that the dismissal is based on the oh-so-revolutionary rejection of 'reformism'. Second, leaving aside evaluation of your list of reforms as accurate representation of the struggles I discuss in the book, I must say that simply dismissing struggles for reforms of use to workers with no rationale hardly constitutes an argument. At least Weston – mentioned on page 235 of the book, in the section on 'Reform or Revolution', made a case for dismissing struggles for higher wages – a case that Marx refuted with counterarguments as to why such struggles were important. Arguments with which I agree in the book – one of those many moments that you would have to counter to make a *convincing* argument that what I have written is 'not Marx'. Third, there's no 'paradox' in supporting both lower costs of living and higher wages, they are complementary and both buy time (and energy) for struggle.

4) First, the assertion that success in lowering consumer prices or making some goods and services free automatically implies that wages will fall just doesn't hold water. This assertion ignores how both the value of labor power and the level of wages/income are determined by struggle. I do not 'assume' workers 'could successfully resist' efforts to lower wages, only that they generally try to resist. There are plenty of historical examples in the book of workers failing to resist as well as of successful resistance. Second, the last line about one idea of autonomist Marxists contains, once again, only pure assertions with no demonstration or argument that might lead the reader to take them seriously, ie, the assertion about what they think/imagine and the assertion about the idea being a 'mistake'.

Had I been editor of your newsletter, I would have sent the published text back when still a draft along with comments like the above – and suggestions about how to do the job in a more convincing manner.

HARRY CLEAVER

## Reply:

1) We never said you argued that the capitalists weren't interested in profits, only that you said that they were more interested in controlling workers and that making profits was a means towards this end. The particular passages we had in mind were these: '... socially and politically speaking, profit making is merely the capitalist means to its social aim of controlling us by forcing us to work' (p. 83) and 'Marx focussed on the dialectical character of the struggle within capitalism between those who impose work and those who resist' (p. 72). There is no evidence that this was Marx's view on what the struggle was and who it was between, and there is nothing 'sectarian' about pointing this out. It's a question of fact, not opinion.

2) On p.55 you do indeed use the workers-can't-buy-back argument, which can't be an explanation of crises since it is the case that the workers cannot buy back out of their wages what they produce all the time, even during a boom. And how can it be 'misrepresentation' when we didn't represent anything about the conclusion you draw from the notion you accept that taxes are a burden on workers as well as on capitalists? We willingly grant though that you draw the logical conclusion from this mistaken premise that workers should get involved in disputes within the capitalist class over which section of them should bear more or less of the burden of taxation.

3) You seem to have missed our point completely. While free services and free access to use-values even under capitalism show that people adapt to this by only taking what they need (rather than grabbing and hoarding), under capitalism these measures have the economic effect of reducing the cost of reproducing labour-power and so exercise a downward pressure on money wages. Our view is that the best way to combat this is the trade-union struggle. We don't accept the view of 'Citizen Weston', which Marx refuted in his talk to British trade unionists in 1865 later published as *Value, Price and Profit*, that struggles to increase wages are pointless as they merely lead to a rise in prices leaving workers no better off. That is a fallacy. For us, the struggle to get the highest price possible (what the labour market will bear) while not revolutionary is not 'reformist'. We say workers should wage this struggle and our members take part in it, even if it is purely defensive and never-ending.

4) We always thought that so-called 'autonomist Marxists' criticised what they imagined was the 'economic determinist' position of those who argue that there are narrow limits to what workers can achieve under capitalism by their struggles. Are we wrong about their/your 'voluntarist' position on this question, not dissimilar to that of common or garden reformists, that this is not the case and that your disagreement with them is instead only over method (direct action rather than parliamentary action)? – **Editors**





# Dear Theresa

Apparently, at exactly 11.00 pm on Friday 29 March 2019, Brexit will descend upon us. I am wondering whether I should stay up and watch it as I do when there is a total eclipse. If a deal is not struck by this time then hell-fire and damnation is forecast to rain down upon the people of the British Isles, as alluded to by the ignominious EU President, Donald Tusk. I suspect that, if I wake up on Saturday morning 30 March to total darkness, it is much more likely to be due to the onset of Nuclear Winter than a failure to renegotiate a variance of the Irish Backstop.

I was wondering if, in all the hoo-hah and razzmatazz of Brexit, you have had the chance to consider the latest development on our path to Nuclear Armageddon. In case you haven't I'll just remind you. Your partner in crime, The Donald, has given notice that the United States will withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, claiming that Russia has violated the terms of the Treaty, whereas Russia claims that the United States violated the terms of the Treaty first. I love an adult conversation, don't you, especially when the outcome may well determine the survival of our planet.

As a result of the dispute over the INF Treaty Russia has announced the reactivation of its Perimeter System which was de-commissioned following the end of the Cold War; that is the first Cold War ending in 1991, not the current one. The Perimeter System is a nifty little arrangement to counter the United States posture of First Use of nuclear weapons by anticipating that such a pre-emptive strike could destroy Russia's command and control systems; in which case a cluster of SS17 ICBMs will launch automatically on detection of seismic activity, compatible with that caused by a nuclear explosion. As these Russian SS17 missiles fly over the nuclear armed ICBMs in their silos they will transmit a launch signal to them. If the United States doesn't already have a similar defence system no doubt it will feel it prudent to build one and, hey presto, planetary annihilation without any need for fallible human intervention!

I find it strangely reassuring, in a psychotic sort of way, that MAD – Mutually Assured Destruction – has been fully restored after faltering in recent decades and without even the need for a mad man or mad woman to press the button. Given that the UK is a major player in this ultimate game of chicken with its – soon to be dazzlingly new – Trident nuclear submarines I hope you will find time to give this matter a few minutes of your attention amid the Brexit fever. From our perspective we in the Socialist Party have a rather simple solution. We advocate a world devoid of imperialism, nationalism and all sabre-rattling murderous manifestations of warfare which emanate from such pathologies: a world where there are no nation states, no borders and no private property, where resources are held in common for the benefit of all; which will leave very few things to fight over.

*Sincerely, Tim Hart*



## Trump and anti-socialism

'Here, in the United States,' President Trump declared in his State of the Union message to Congress on 5 February, 'we are alarmed by new calls to adopt socialism in our country. America was founded on liberty and independence – and not government coercion, domination and control. We are born free, and we will stay free. Tonight, we renew our resolve that America will never be a socialist country.'

The United States was founded on capitalism and so involved government coercion, domination and control from the start. The American 'war of independence' was a classic bourgeois revolution in which a class of rich merchants, landowners and slaveholders mobilised enough popular support to set up an independent capitalist state on the east coast of North America. A state is a coercive institution and, when controlled by a capitalist class, is used to dominate and control the subordinate working class, as it has been throughout American history.

When it came to imposing controls on individual capitalist activity in the overall or long-term interest of the capitalist class as a whole, however,

it has been a different story. Individual capitalists, defended by their ideologues, resented this and were able to minimise it due to the relative weakness of the US central state compared with its European counterparts.

Without ideological leftovers from feudalism such as honour and duty, American capitalists could devote themselves exclusively to profit-seeking and money-making, idealised as 'rugged individualism' and 'free enterprise'. As far as they have been concerned, the 'liberty' and 'independence' that Trump spoke about has been their liberty to pursue profits and capital accumulation unhindered by state interference, with attempts by the government to restrict their activities in the general capitalist interest being denounced as 'socialism' and later 'communism' and, more ridiculously, 'Marxism'. Hence Trump's rhetoric.

Even so, the US state has intervened to curb individual capitalist excesses – to save them from themselves – as with trust-busting before WW1 and, then, in the 1930s with Roosevelt's New Deal. In fact, before WW1, genuine socialist and Marxist ideas did circulate amongst a section of the American working class, as a rich body of literature bears witness to. After WW1, however, these were swamped by Bolshevik ideas from backward Russia and working class

understanding regressed. After WW2 'anti-communism' ruled supreme.

Now, especially since the Crash of 2008 and the Great Recession that followed, more and more people, in particular young people, are no longer afraid of the word 'socialism'. There is even one Senator and one member of the House of Representatives who openly call themselves 'socialists'. It is this that has alarmed Trump (or that he feigned to be so as to take a dig at the Democrats). But he has no need to worry as they are merely reformist Social Democrats who are no threat to US capitalism. They may want to rein in the activities of individual capitalists that are harming the long-term interests of the US capitalist class, as for instance over carbon dioxide emissions, but they don't want to get rid of capitalism as a system.

We don't want to be too churlish about the revival of interest in the word 'socialist' not being an interest in genuine socialism in the sense of a society based on common ownership and democratic control with production directly to satisfy people's needs. The very fact 'socialism' is no longer a dirty word means that real socialism can be discussed too, bringing closer the day when what used to be the United States of America becomes a part of the world socialist commonwealth.

# WOOD FOR THE TREES

## Nostalgia

AS ADULTS almost all of us have memories from our childhood and adolescence that produce intense emotion; for this reason they cannot to be relied upon as representing some kind of accurate chronicle of the actions of the self and others in the past. They are, however, essential for the development of the identity of the individual. It is the synthesis of the emotional development of identity and these memories of the past that produce the bitter-sweet phenomena we call nostalgia. It seems that as we get older this particular emotion becomes ever stronger until, with some, it almost entirely eclipses the ideas and emotions of their contemporary experience. This can be seen as one of the reasons

for the political conservatism of the older generation within any population. Memories that have been selected and processed are, of course, safer and far more stable than the continual confusion and challenge that everyday life confronts us with. We find comfort in the illusory feelings of safety and structure that some memories provide; but there are also other memories that can pose a threat to this illusion and for this reason we process them in a very different way – we usually repress them.

We tend to choose the memories that sustain the identity we want to believe in rather than those that can reveal another side of our character that we are not so comfortable with. This complex internal struggle is often at the very core of our political beliefs and can be revealed by the nature and type of nostalgia that we embrace.

My father's nostalgia for the kind of football played in the 1960s that allowed England to win the World Cup was very different from my own – he saw it as a triumph for the old-fashioned authoritarianism of the England manager (Alf Ramsey) and I saw it as an expression of the cultural liberation inherent in the 'swinging sixties'. The decadence that he perceived (in contrast to his belief in the authoritarianism that, for him, had won

the Second World War) was to become my 'golden age' of nostalgia. Conversely I also have a nostalgia associated with his work as a union shop steward and his role within the working class community that flourished at that time. It would seem that most cultures, like individuals, have a memory of a 'golden age' that generates part of its identity. Of course the cultural and the individual are engaged in a reciprocal relationship which enabled my father to embrace his 'Englishness' and me to reject mine. Listening to the music and watching TV shows from that time will always evoke nostalgia in me but I'm very aware of the danger of an uncritical and quasi romantic embrace of what they represent. I love the hope and confidence

a German officer who is about to be shot as an enemy of the Reich looks up at the sky and seeing aircraft he asks: 'Ours or theirs?'. The SS attending officer replies, 'Enemy planes, sir!' 'But *who* is the enemy?' muses the officer – surely a sentiment born of the many wars of 'national liberation' that were raging during the making of the film.

In contemporary TV we see a stranger kind of nostalgia that reaches back even further to the pre-war Edwardian period. In shows like *Downton Abbey* and *Berkeley Square* we see an undisguised enthusiasm for portraying the rigid class system of the time when everyone knew their place. The English working class seems to indulge and even delight in the excesses of the

aristocracy. There is certainly an element of class envy but it goes much deeper to the very essence of the identity of what it is to be English; the contemporary casual dismissal of the importance of class identity hides a deep obsession with it. The royal family has become the paradigm of celebrity soap operas due to nostalgia and its obsession with class – there still lurks a suspicion

that there must be some reason for their 'entitlement' other than the accident of birth. Theirs is the most celebrated 'family tree' and many who research their own family history secretly nurse a deep longing to find a connection with it.

Undoubtedly there were periods in history that possessed elements superior to our 'post-modern' social context but this is not really the origin of the intense emotion we call nostalgia. It is much more akin to religion where what is absent (justice, moral integrity, meaning, structure etc.) are projected into a supernatural realm; nostalgia likewise finds a place for such a longing in a non-existent past.

**WEZ**



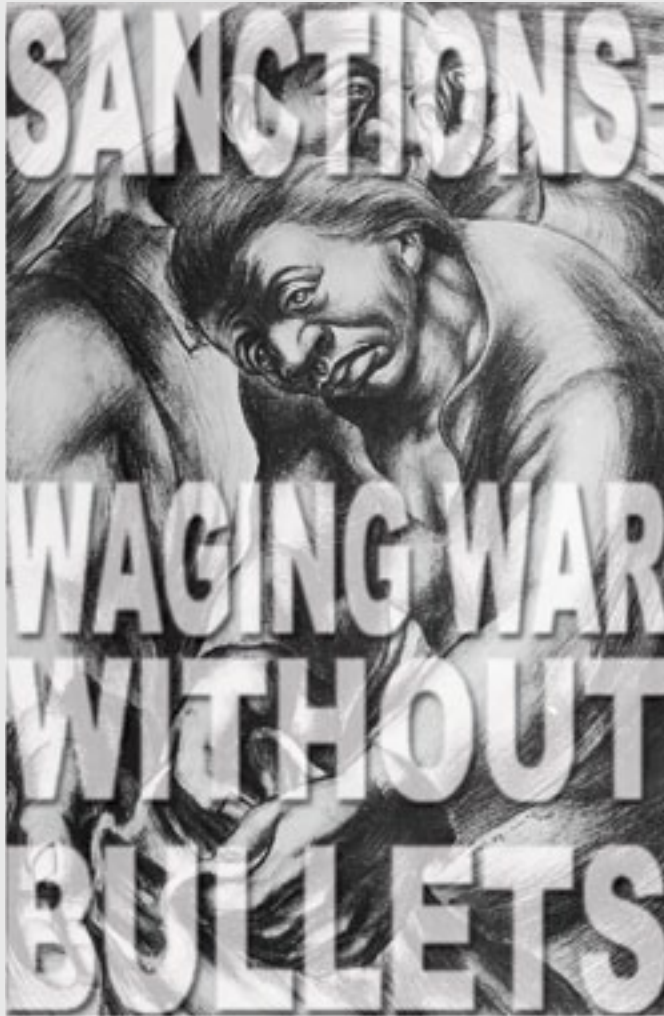
but dislike the naivety and superficiality.

In retrospect one of the most obvious elements of naivety can be seen in the narratives that many of the films and TV of that time possessed. There always had to be a resolution that punished the wrongdoer and rewarded the 'good guys'. Undoubtedly this fed into the politics of the time and seemed to render a 'black and white' solution to the problems of the age. This moral illusion lies at the heart of a lot of nostalgia – a belief in a simpler time when there was a shared consensus in terms of social values. The moral 'high ground' that had justified the militarism used to defeat fascism was now utilised to defend the use of violence against the much more ambivalent 'enemies' of the moral morass that was the 'cold war'. In the 1969 movie *The Bridge at Remagen*









The Western powers promote sanctions as an alternative to war, holding that if sanctions can impose costs that exceed the benefits of objectionable policies of another country, there will be a change of those policies and if the targeted government declines to change, the affected population will protest, forcing their government to change. Economic sanctions are viewed as a useful tool to apply pressure on another country to mend its ways or as a punitive measure for its behaviour which avoids outright war. No matter how devastating the detrimental effects on the economy and the civilian population, sanctions are not as successful as claimed in achieving its objectives.

Who now recalls the cost on ordinary people of the UN-imposed sanctions against Saddam's Iraq? Who remembers when the then US Ambassador to the United Nations, Madeleine Albright, was asked, 'We have heard that half a million children have died. I mean, that's more children than died in Hiroshima. And, you know, is the price worth it?' Albright answered, 'we think the price is worth it'. The half million figure has since been judged as inflated but at the time it was seen as a credible figure.

Denis Halliday, United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator, resigned after a 34-year career explaining he no longer wished 'to be identified with a United Nations that is... maintaining a sanctions programme ...which kills and maims people through chronic malnutrition... and continues this programme knowingly', saying 'I don't want to administer a programme that satisfies the definition of genocide'. Halliday's successor, Hans von Sponeck, subsequently also resigned in protest, calling the effects of the sanctions a 'true human tragedy'. The resignation of Jutta Burghardt, head of the World Food Program in Iraq, soon followed, stating, 'I fully support what Mr von Sponeck was saying. It is a true humanitarian

tragedy what is happening here and I believe any human being who looks at the facts and the impact of the sanctions on the population will not deny that he is right.' Agam Hasmy, Malaysia's UN Ambassador, remarked at the UN Security Council in 2000 'How ironic is it that the same policy that is supposed to disarm Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction has itself become a weapon of mass destruction!' Throughout history, starvation and disease have killed more people than all other weapons of war.

Too often sanctions are applied to soften up a foe and is a precursor of war. Sanctions can even be used as a justification for war such as when Tony Blair, in his testimony to the Chilcot Inquiry, argued that ending the sanctions was one of the benefits of the war.

Economic warfare has been part and parcel of conflicts since time immemorial with city sieges and naval blockades. We can date economic sanctions back at least to the Megarian decree of Athens in 435 BC, before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War. But later we had the Napoleonic Wars, the World Wars, the American long-enforced trade embargo on Cuba and the anti-apartheid boycott of South Africa. Presently there are sanctions against North Korea, Iran and Venezuela. This article is not concerned about bans on financial transactions of named individuals but those that inflict suffering on the general population. Sanctions are viewed as an instrument of diplomacy, designed to pressure and to undermine a ruling regime. The purpose of sanctions is to cause a breakdown in the fabric of civil society.

On 23 March 2018, the Human Rights Council condemned unilateral coercive measures by a vote of 28 in favour, 15 against and 3 abstentions, because economic sanctions created economic crises, disrupted the production and distribution of food and medicine, and resulted in refugees.

Alfred De Zayas, a former secretary of the UN Human Rights Council, has said 'Sanctions kill' and that they fall most heavily on the poorest people. 'Modern-day economic sanctions and blockades are comparable with medieval sieges of towns with the intention of forcing them to surrender. Twenty-first-century sanctions attempt to bring not just a town, but sovereign countries to their knees. A difference, perhaps, is that twenty-first-century sanctions are accompanied by the manipulation of public opinion through "fake news", aggressive public relations and a pseudo-human rights rhetoric so as to give the impression that a human rights "end" justifies the criminal means' ([undocs.org/A/HRC/39/47/ADD.1](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/39/47/ADD.1)).

### Siege economy

John Pilger's conclusion was that the sanctions were 'One of the greatest acts of aggression: the medieval siege of Iraq.'

Patrick Cockburn wrote on the sanctions affecting Syria: 'Economic sanctions are like a medieval siege but with a modern PR apparatus attached to justify what is being done. A difference is that such sieges used to be directed at starving out a single town or city while now they are aimed at squeezing whole countries into submission. An attraction for politicians is that sanctions can be sold to the public, though of course not to people at the receiving end, as more humane than military action. There is usually a pretence that foodstuffs and medical equipment are being allowed through freely and no mention is made of the financial and other regulatory obstacles making it impossible to deliver them' ([zerohedge.com/news/2018-01-23/patrick-cockburn-rages-its-time-call-economic-sanctions-what-they-are-war-crimes](https://www.zerohedge.com/news/2018-01-23/patrick-cockburn-rages-its-time-call-economic-sanctions-what-they-are-war-crimes)).

The difficulty in processing SWIFT transactions, the banking system's clearing house for international money transfers,

has hindered the import of medicines and other necessities so many of the biggest pharmaceutical companies refuse to do business with the country.

The Spanish economist Alfredo Serrano, head of the Centro Estratégico Latinoamericano de Geopolítica, drew attention to the reluctance of banks to process Venezuelan international transactions, creating an obstacle in obtaining insulin and other medicines such as anti-retroviral and anti-malaria drugs.

The *Lancet* medical journal reported in July 2018 that sanctions against Iran jeopardised cancer patients and cancer research.

Sanctions have a snowballing effect. Foreign businesses, fearing they might unknowingly cross a line into impermissible activities, prefer to shy away even from authorised trade. Transaction costs particularly related to food and medicine escalate, while access to foreign currency to trade has diminished. Sanctions lead to unprecedented levels of inflation and spikes in the price of basic goods like milk and vegetable oil.

Sanctions can and do kill the innocent. Sanctions rarely harm the decision-makers but have caused extreme hardship to those who are the weakest, the most vulnerable and the least political. Members of the elite with greatest access to government privileges are best positioned to survive and can even thrive. Under the sanctions, there are those who are savvy enough to exploit others' deprivation for a profit. They function as middlemen and brokers becoming wealthy. Smuggling and clandestine networks arise and result in a shadow economy in which corrupt officials are fully complicit.

Between 1945 and 1990, the UN had imposed sanctions only twice but now sanctions are being imposed with increasing frequency, with the United States either the key player in instigating them or taking the initiative by imposing its own sanctions unilaterally. The United States uses its global economic power as leverage to pressure other nations into compliance with its sanction policies. The United States has the 'sovereign right' to refuse to enter into commerce with other states, but not to exercise pressure on third-party states in order to harm their targets, and attempting to do this is a violation of the United Nations Charter. But as always 'might is right.'

Obvious Vengeyi from the University of Zimbabwe makes a direct comparison with siege warfare:

'The desperate conditions that the besieged populations of Samaria and Jerusalem were exposed to are similar to what Zimbabweans experienced as a result of sanctions... Similar to the sieges of Samaria and Jerusalem therefore, the Western siege of Zimbabwe through economic sanctions affected the ordinary people more than the so-called targeted individuals... As the military siege on Samaria and Jerusalem, Western sanctions were imposed on the ordinary people of Zimbabwe. The intention was to starve the ordinary people of Zimbabwe in order for them to vote out the ruling party... The logic was to incapacitate the state to provide basic services to the ordinary people in order to instigate a revolt against the government... As observed with ancient Near Eastern military strategy of siege, this is usually the intention of the besieging aggressor; to create tensions in the besieged society in order to weaken it'.

### Collective sanctions

There exists a glaring anomaly. It is illegal in war-time, a violation of the Geneva Convention e.g. the 1977 Additional Protocols to the 1949 Geneva Conventions prohibit any wartime measure that has the effect of depriving a civilian

population of objects indispensable to its survival; Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention on the protection of civilians in wartime, for example, prohibits 'collective penalties'. Yet under peace-time conditions economic sanctions are perfectly valid. Economic sanctions inflict collective punishment upon ordinary people when they have no connection to or control over the actions of the government whose actions have led to them being punished. Sanctions are inherently anti-humanitarian. As in siege warfare, it is the population and those least responsible for the state's action – children, the elderly, the sick – who bear the worst consequences. When countries are called 'rogue states' or 'the axis of evil', Western countries proceed to put economic sanctions on them. But the victims are invariably the common people and not the ruling dictator they have been complaining about – whether it was Saddam Hussein then or Assad or Kim Jong-Un now.

Economic sanctions imposed on authoritarian regimes often fail to bring about the political change they are meant to create even though the people had to bear the pain of sanctions.

Lee Jones, a senior lecturer at Queen Mary University of London, stated that according to the accepted figure, sanctions succeed in about one third of instances. But a political scientist, Robert Pape, looked at these figures and argued that often the outcome was not caused by sanctions; it was caused instead by domestic insurgencies or by military threats, and if you take away those cases, then sanctions only succeed in fewer than 5 percent of cases. The 'success' story of South Africa is often cited to show that sanctions can work yet many commentators have suggested that the end of apartheid was due to internal political movements as much as to international sanctions. Politicians employ economic sanctions despite the evidence that they do not work – simply because the cost of military action is too high a price to pay. Cheaper to incite the civil population to revolt by driving them to take desperate measures.

It is generally accepted that you should not be a judge in your own case; that the law must be clearly stated, and consistently applied; that individuals can only be punished for their acts, not their nature or their potential acts. However, states interpret and impose the law as they wish, without restraint. This means that a whole population is harmed with the approval of 'international law'. Sanctions imposed on a whole nation share all the characteristics of siege warfare such as blurring the distinction between the battlefield and by-standers, engulfing civilians in the violence of war through the destruction of society's infrastructure. Those who defend sanctions share the same belief as a kidnapper who refuses food and water to his victim because the victim's family declines to pay the ransom demand. The siege tactic deliberately targets a civilian population with fatal consequences by withholding supplies and starving them yet it is a form of warfare which is considered legal and acceptable.

ALJO





On 23 January the president of the Venezuelan National Assembly, Juan Guaidó, declared himself 'Interim President' of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, denouncing the elected President Nicolas Maduro as an illegitimate dictator. The US government immediately announced its support, followed by a declaration from the Group of Lima, which is an institution embracing several countries of Latin America, all supported by the US government. Canada and a number of European countries also declared their support for Juan Guaidó. They all asked Maduro to step down or face imprisonment in Guantanamo Bay.

The US government, Juan Guaidó, Canada and the European countries indicated that they were supporting the interim government on the grounds that Maduro was a dictator who has reduced Venezuela to a situation of hunger, unemployment, repression, corruption, and lack of freedom. They asked him to call a fresh presidential election in eight days. In response, the government of Venezuela decided instead to call for a new election to the National Assembly, while the Supreme Court of Venezuela declared the self-proclaimed Interim President illegal.

The popularity of Nicolas Maduro has decreased since he was elected due to the government's authoritarian measures and corruption. Others blame him for the economic and political crisis and the violence that exists in the country. Many workers have taken to the streets to protest against his government. During the last presidential election other candidates did not participate and there were a large number of abstentions.

## US opposition

Since the election of Hugo Chavez in 1999, the Venezuelan government has been opposed by the US and sections of the capitalist class in Venezuela, but during his initial period he had the support of the majority of the Venezuelan workers and most of the governments of Latin America. His popularity was so high that in 2002 the US was forced to back away from a coup d'état that they had orchestrated with certain sectors of the military forces.

Due to the then high international price of oil – which is the country's main source of income – and as a member of OPEC, Chavez was able to implement certain social reforms, such as housing for the poor, medical services, educational programmes and a food programme. The level of poverty of the country decreased. And all these measures were considered by his supporters to be the implementation of socialism by the Bolivarian Revolution, or so-called Socialism of the XXI Century.

Chavez also helped create many cooperatives around the country and expropriated several corporations and turned their assets over to state ownership; others became joint ventures. Oil and gas were sold to China at a lower cost to compensate for the cost of transport and to penetrate the Asian market, and several agreements were signed with the Iranian government. Oil and gas were sold at low cost to the Cuban government in exchange for medical services using Cuban-trained doctors.

Social conditions in Venezuela have since deteriorated enormously due to a drop in the oil price and the embargo and sanctions imposed by the US, and also due to the largely

state capitalist mode of production – which is the real system of production that exists in the Venezuela.

The US and Canada will also have their eye on the large deposits of oil and natural gas, and also on the oil and large deposits of minerals that exist in the Orinoco Belt, such as lithium, nickel and iron ore. Several of these resources have been given to the Russian and the Chinese corporations, and the ecological impact in that region has been enormous.

The US government has indicated that all options are on the table including military intervention. The government of Venezuela has responded saying that it might turn into another Vietnam and has called for a dialogue including the members of the National Assembly. All have refused to have a dialogue with Nicolas Maduro, and the US government has frozen all Venezuela's international accounts and sources of income; they have taken over Gitco which is Venezuela's international petroleum corporation situated in the US, and Britain has held back \$550 million of gold that the Bank of England had been keeping in trust for the Venezuelan government. In addition, the US is going to transfer all the oil proceeds - more than \$7 billion - to the interim president. According to some economic statisticians, the loss from the embargo on Venezuela has cost the country more than \$350 billion in total.

Due to the measures taken by the US government against Venezuela and the implementation of new sanctions, the Venezuelan government is going to transfer all the proceeds of their oil sales to a Russian bank in Moscow as Russia has lent more than \$50 billion to Venezuela in military aid and for mining. China has lent more than \$60 billion in exchange for oil. Both countries have opposed the actions of the USA at the United Nations and have indicated that they reject the new government and support Maduro as president.

A possible military confrontation with the US and alliances of military forces of other Latin American countries, such as Brazil, Colombia and Argentina, against Venezuela would become a very bloody battleground, due to the fact that all the armies have been heavily armed by the US, Russia and China, and most of them have modern armaments. It would be a war where many class brothers and sisters would kill each other



defending one or other side in the conflict.

## Not socialism

Since the very beginning when Hugo Chavez was elected President of Venezuela and declared himself a socialist, we have shown that he was just a left reformist, not a revolutionary socialist, and that socialism cannot be introduced by

a leader in the name of the working class, by implementing reforms within the framework of a capitalist society and nationalising enterprises to be run by the state apparatus. We added that the problems that Venezuela was confronted with and its failures could not be blamed on socialism because a form of state capitalism was the economic model that was going to be established by the leaders of the Bolivarian revolution; that Chavez, Fidel Castro, Peron, Cardenas, and other Latin American leaders were bourgeois nationalists who were opposed to the influence and domination of the US ruling class in the region. They wanted to expand their own markets and capitalist interests there, as was reflected by engagement with Mercosur which is a Latin American version of the European Market, by the Bank of the South, a Latin American version of the IMF, and showcased by the Cooperatives in Bolivia which are joint ventures between the state and the peasants of Bolivia based on a capitalist mode of production and run as typical capitalist corporations.

The USA and its president have used the crisis in Venezuela as a pretext to blame its problems on socialism and to attack the emergence of socialist ideas within the youth and some sectors of the US working class. Both are confusing social democratic reforms with socialism such as: Medicare for all, increase of taxation on the rich, better housing conditions for the poor, elimination of inequality, renovation of the country's infrastructures, more state regulations, and better programmes for the elderly and the veterans. Most of these measures were implemented by Roosevelt's New Deal during the Great Depression and none of them are an indication that socialism was established in the USA.

For many years the Socialist Party of Great Britain and its companion parties, including the World Socialist Party of the US, have established a clear distinction between social democratic reforms, state capitalism, and socialism. Our aim is socialism-communism as a post-capitalist world society

based on the common possession of the mean of production administered democratically, which is a stateless, moneyless, wageless society of free access to available wealth. This cannot be established by a leader, or a vanguard party acting in the name of the working class within the framework of the capitalist mode of production; capitalism is an economic system which cannot be reformed to work in the interest of the workers.

Whatever is taking place in Venezuela has nothing to do with socialism or communism, and all the failures of the Bolivarian Revolution, its leaders and the so-called United Socialist Party of Venezuela, cannot be blamed on socialism or communism. Venezuela is a capitalist society where workers are economically exploited to produce surplus value and are wage slaves like in any other capitalist country, as in all other parts of the world. It is a state-run capitalist system similar to the ones established in the former USSR, Eastern Europe, China, Cuba, North Korea and Vietnam adapted to their local circumstances.

**MARCOS**





# CLIMATE CHANGE: CAPITALISM CAN'T CODE

Last October the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published a report on what they consider would have to be done, and by when, to avoid average global temperature rising by the end of the century by more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. They concluded that carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions would have to be stabilised by 2030, in the sense of no more being released into the atmosphere than can be absorbed by nature or by human action. Hence the headlines about only twelve years left to avoid disaster. Then, in December, a full-scale two-week conference on climate change, with delegates from the 190 states that had signed the 2015 Paris Agreement to take measures aimed at limiting the rise to 2°C, was held in Katowice in Poland.

## The facts

That the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere has gone up since pre-industrial times (from 280 parts per million to 410 ppm today).

That the average global temperature has also gone up since records began in the 1850s (by about 1°C, to about 15°C or 59°F today).

That this is not just an accidental correlation but that the first has caused the second. CO<sub>2</sub> is a greenhouse gas, i.e., a gas that absorbs heat from the Sun; in fact without it and the other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere (especially water vapour, i.e. clouds) the Earth's temperature would be -18°C.

That most of the increase in CO<sub>2</sub> is the result of human activity, in particular the burning of fossil fuels (coal, oil and natural gas) since the mid-nineteenth century to generate energy and power transport. In one sense this is a good thing because it means that it is easier for humans to stop it than if it were some natural phenomenon.

That a rise in the average global temperature has various effects, the main ones being:

(a) a rise in sea levels as oceans warm up and so expand and as the polar icecaps begin to melt;

(b) more stormy weather in some regions due to more energy being in the atmosphere;

(c) changes in regional agriculture conditions and ecology, disastrous in some places though not necessarily negative everywhere.

## Guestimates

We know definitely that, unless the rate of emission of CO<sub>2</sub> is stabilised, average global temperature is going to continue to rise and that this will affect sea levels, the weather, and regional agricultural and ecological conditions. (In fact it will continue to rise for a while even if emissions were stabilised tomorrow, as an effect of past emissions). The question is by how much and to what extent. This is where the speculation begins.

Not, however, wild speculation but speculation based on certain assumptions. In drawing up scenarios of what might happen in the future, scientists have to make two basic assumptions. First, about the link between a rise in CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere and the rise in average global temperature. Second, about what humans do, or do not do, to reduce or compensate for CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

As to the first, nobody knows with certainty what it is. The standard that scientists have chosen is an estimate of by how much the global average temperature would rise if the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere doubled. This is not easy to calculate as there are feedbacks. Once these have been taken into account, the figure they come up with is anything between 1.5°C and 4.5°C, variously described as 'the best estimate', 'most likely', or even 'the best guess'. It is in fact a 'guestimate', albeit an informed one.

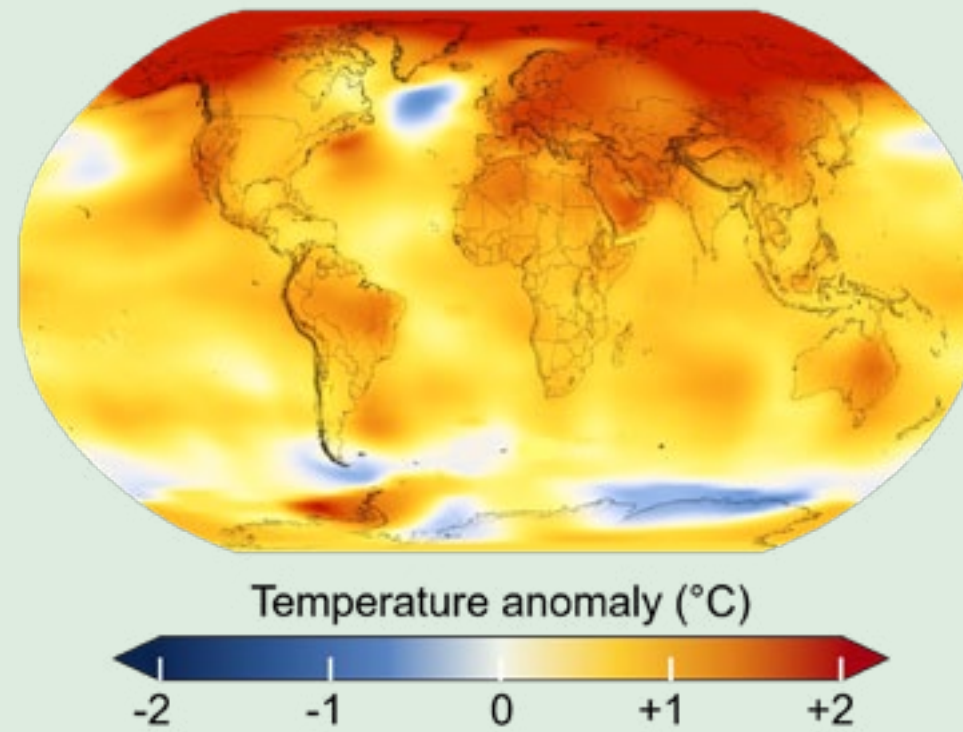
Polar ice-core records show that in the pre-industrial past the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere was for centuries 280 ppm.

Today it is 410 ppm. If present trends continue it will reach 560 ppm, i.e., double, by 2050. In that case, in the period after that date until the end of the century average global temperature would gradually rise to 1.5°C or by 4.5°C above pre-industrial levels or by anything in between.

As average global temperature has already gone up by about 1°C since pre-industrial times we are talking about a possible further rise by the end of the century of between 0.5°C and 3.5°C. That's as accurate as you can get. The trouble is that there would be a huge difference in effects between the lower and the higher figure. All we can safely say is that if CO<sub>2</sub> emissions continue to increase, so global average temperature will go up and so the effects of this will be felt. Since most of these effects will be negative, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions should be reduced in any event.

But how? One suggested way focuses on individuals changing their individual behaviour, as by not driving a car, not travelling by air, eating less or no meat, turning the temperature of their home down and wearing a sweater, etc. Clearly this would not be sufficient, quite apart from the fact that the level of popular consumption is linked to the state of the economy which in turn is linked to the prospects for making and accumulating of profits as more capital. The tail can't wag the dog. What is required is action at global level to deal with production methods that involve directly emitting CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere.

Temperature Change in the Last 50 Years  
(2014-2018 Average vs 1951-1980 Baseline)



produced within the frontiers of a state. This is why states are particularly concerned with the cost of energy and its security of supply. At the moment coal, oil and natural gas are still cheaper than alternatives such as renewables and nuclear, which is why they were used in the past and continue to be used.

When Trump says that he is not going to accept any measures that are 'bad for business' he is expressing the position that all states take and have to take. No state is going to decide unilaterally not to use its cheapest source of energy, even if it is one that emits CO<sub>2</sub>, as that would increase its energy costs and undermine its competitiveness internally as well as on world markets. So the states into which the capitalist world is divided have agreed that the United Nations should take the initiative. However, the various climate change conferences that the UN has organised have shown that the 'nations' are far from being 'united'. They have proved to be a veritable nest of vipers as each state tries not only to advantage itself but to disadvantage its rivals.

The only agreement that has been possible – in fact, given capitalism, the only one that is possible – is one which disadvantages no one compared to everyone else. This was the outcome of the 2015 conference in Paris which agreed that all states should commit themselves to reducing emissions so as to avoid average global temperature rising 2°C above pre-industrial levels (a further 1°C from today) by the end of

## Nest of vipers

Co-ordinated global action is what is needed, but capitalism impedes this. Capitalism is a world system under which capitalist enterprises and states compete against each other to secure markets and sources of raw materials. It is driven by an economic imperative that imposes itself on those organising production to use the cheapest available methods so as to survive in the struggle to make and accumulate profits. 'Growth' of production is built-in to it.

Energy is a key input of all production; its cost affects the competitiveness on both home and world markets of goods

the century. However, as the UN is toothless and can't impose anything on states, it left to each state to decide, in the light of its particular circumstances, what measures it would take to contribute towards this.

In November the journal *Nature Communications* published an article analysing the measures pledged by states in pursuit of the Paris Agreement ([www.nature.com/articles/s41467-018-07223-9](http://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-018-07223-9)), one of whose conclusions the *Guardian* (16 November) summarised as:

'Under the Paris agreement, there is no top-down consensus on what is a fair share of responsibility. Instead each nation sets its own bottom-up targets according to a number of different factors, including political will, level of industrialisation, ability to pay, population size, historical responsibility for emissions. Almost every government, the authors say, selects an interpretation of equity that serves their own interests and allows them to achieve a relative gain on other nations.'

The conference in Katowice didn't alter this but just worked out common rules for verifying whether the self-determined measures were being implemented and to what extent. It left unchanged a state's right to decide what measures to adopt.

## Lowest level consensus

Under capitalism, the best that can be achieved is some non-binding inter-governmental agreement that would disadvantage nobody commercially. Clearly, this is pretty minimalist, a consensus at the lowest level. The promised measures, if adopted, will have some effect in slowing down global warming, which should mean the IPCC's worst case scenario of a further rise in average global temperature of 3.8°C by 2100 won't be realised, even if they are not enough to limit the rise to a further 1°C (making the rise 2°C since pre-industrial times).

It is looking highly unlikely, if capitalism continues, that the rise in average global temperature this century is going to be held to this limit. This would bring other problems which would be more acute the more the limit is exceeded and which capitalism would be equally incapable of coping with, in particular the population displacements due to rising sea levels and worsened agricultural conditions in some parts of the world. Co-ordinated global action would also be required to deal with this, but once again capitalism's division into competing capitalist states will impede this.

The lesson is that those concerned about global overwarming should direct their efforts to getting rid of capitalism and replacing it with a system where the Earth's natural and industrial resources will have become the common heritage of all humanity. This will put a stop to the operation of the current economic imperative to seek and accumulate profits and will provide the framework for co-ordinated global action to deal not only with global warming but other current problems such as world poverty and constant war somewhere in the world.

ADAM BUICK



## The One Big Union

*‘The One Big Union, therefore, seeks to organize the wage worker, not according to craft, but according to industry; according to class and class needs. We, therefore, call upon all workers to organize irrespective of nationality, sex, or craft into a workers’ organization, so that we may be enabled to more successfully carry on the everyday fight over wages, hours of work, etc., and prepare ourselves for the day when production for profit shall be replaced by production for use’* (One Big Union Constitution).

In late 1918 Western Canadian unionists placed a number of radical resolutions before the delegates at that year’s Trades and Labor Congress Convention. In particular, they wanted the Congress to abandon craft unionism for industrial unionism, but their criticism extended to such difficult questions as conscription, censorship and the war effort. Every one of the proposals was defeated. Before returning home, the western delegates agreed to hold a special western Canadian labour conference in 1919 to discuss ways that they could have more impact on the TLC. By the time the delegates from western Canadian unions arrived in Calgary for this meeting in the spring of 1919 they were no longer interested in fixing the TLC. Instead, they believed the time had come to create a new industrial union that would not discriminate between skilled and un-skilled, foreign-born or Canadian-born workers

On 13 March a conference of trade union activists was called at Calgary who had grown discontented with the TLC. The 237 delegates who attended agreed to secede from the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada and the American Federation of Labor and to form a new industrial organisation. They adopted the name One Big Union, along with various economic and political resolutions. Delegates called for ‘the abolition of the present system of production for profit.’ A central committee was elected, that included five Socialist Party of Canada (SPC) members and which provided many of the activists of the OBU. However, those from the SPC did not abandon their own project of building the party for an anti-political syndicalist dream. The OBU, unlike the Industrial Workers of the World stressed class organisation rather than industrial organisation. The OBU in Canada was structured more on organising workers geographically than by industry (which caused an early dispute within it). In pursuance of this class policy it did not condemn political action, but rather declared that the only hope for the workers was ‘in the economic and political solidarity of the working class, One Big Union and One Workers’ Party’ (*The OBU. Bulletin*, 20 December, 1919). The founding members of the OBU were determined to create a union that was opposed to capitalism itself.

‘The OBU was not expected to free the workers from wage slavery any more than the trade union were. There was no question of industrial vs. political as in the IWW 1908 schism. The two were seen as complementary phases of the working-class movement. The One Big Union and the general strike were limited weapons in a battle which was ‘defensive as well as offensive,’ explained an *OBU Bulletin* editorial.

The concept of the One Big Union was that all workers

should be organised in one union – one big union, the OBU. Most notable was the attempt of the Industrial Workers of the World to organise in the United States, Canada, Australia, and other countries. The debate was over whether unions should be based on craft groups, organised by their skill, the dominant model at the time, carpenters, plumbers, bricklayers, each into their respective unions. Capitalists could often divide craft and trade unionists along these lines in demarcation disputes. As capitalist enterprises and state bureaucracies became more centralised and larger, some workers felt that their institutions needed to become similarly large based on entire industries (industrial unions). The One Big Union movement supported the ‘entire industries’ model over the ‘craft groups’ structure:

‘it is not the name of an organization nor its preamble, but the degree of working class knowledge possessed by its membership that determines whether or not it is a revolutionary body... It is true that the act of voting in favour of an industrial as against the craft form of organization denotes an advance in the understanding of the commodity nature of labour power, but it does not by any “means imply a knowledge of the necessity of the social revolution”, Jack Kavanagh, union activist and SPC member, explained. “There can be no question of industrial vs. political. The two are complementary phases of the working class movement” he concluded in the fall of 1919’ ([journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/LLT/article/view/4851/0](http://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/LLT/article/view/4851/0)).

### Unholy alliance

The weakness of the members of the OBU was not in daring to dream and to act on those dreams, but not realising how many and how powerful the guardians of capitalism were. The OBU would be broken by an alliance of the officials of the mainstream unions, the employers, the federal government and the Communist Party.

Naturally Canada’s various federal and dominion governments were not friendly towards the OBU and most definitely not the employers who would regularly blacklist OBU workers and refuse to negotiate.

The Canadian Labor Congress LC and its affiliate the United Mine Workers was anti-socialist and against militant industrial unionism and the OBU stood for everything it opposed.

Lenin argued against dual-unionism and against the setting up of revolutionary unions so in the Communist Party, in accordance with Comintern instructions, the party-line was to work in the mainstream unions to oust the various labour leaders and this meant rejoining the CLC. The Communists began a campaign of disruption to pressure the OBU members back into the CLC unions, even if it meant destroying the organisation outright. But the OBU nevertheless endured.

The OBU at its peak had 101 locals and 41,500 members—almost the entire union membership of Western Canada. The OBU faced very powerful opponents. Nevertheless, in 1925 the membership was 17,000 and grew slowly throughout the 1920s to reach a maximum of 24,000 members. The year they joined the Canadian Labor Congress the membership stood at 12,000.

Today, union activists continue to strive for collective forms

of organisation capable of superseding bureaucracies and cumbersome legalistic procedures. Driven by the same dreams that mobilised the generation behind the OBU, contemporary workers can learn something from the possibilities and pitfalls of the OBU. The OBU did not have all the answers but what they represented was a tendency that was stopped short by so-called revolutionary proponents of Leninism and the reformist apologists of labourism. Who knows what might have resulted had this development not been cut short.

Jack Houston the founding editor of the *OBU Bulletin* wrote:

‘The O.B.U. was not created out of pure thought, but from the objective industrial situation. Craft unions have grown obsolete... The O.B.U exists not only because some labour leaders determined to bring it to birth, but because the workers would not remain in the old-style unions. This is a fact and not a theory’ (*OBU Bulletin* Editorials, [mhs.mb.ca/docs/houston/index.shtml](http://mhs.mb.ca/docs/houston/index.shtml)).

Houston went on to explain in more detail that:

‘The official ‘impossibilism’ of the SPC guaranteed the party’s political purity and proletarian principles, but did not prevent the socialists from participating in non-revolutionary working-class struggles as well. As it is usually understood, syndicalism implies the creation of worker-controlled economic structures within industry, opposition to the use of political parties and the political system as a means to further the workers’ cause, and, finally, the withdrawal of labourers’ services in a great general strike which would topple the capitalist system.’

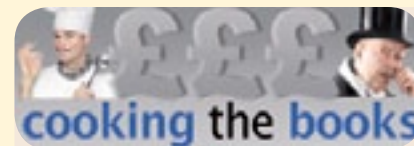
He pointed out that:

‘The Socialist Party of Canada rejected the idea that a socialist society could be created by workers’ councils or

soviets. The SPC did not regard the general strike as the ultimate weapon in the class struggle. They never promoted sabotage as did the Industrial Workers of the World. They sought, instead, to build an inclusive united working class movement as the next stage in the class struggle. They decided to reduce their emphasis upon political action, formerly their major weapon, because the new militancy of the union membership demanded new strategy—a better union movement... Unions would confront the real rulers of society, the owning class, in another way. Socialist Party members understood that a shorter work week and the creation of a new union organization would not topple the capitalist system. But, as a first step, it would provide an example and a base of operations. The object was to continue the education of the worker, to secure badly-needed immediate improvements in working conditions, and, thus, through organization, to further the solidarity of the working class and to prevent premature violence. The workers’ revolt could begin on a regional basis, the socialist revolution must be national, continental, and, ultimately, world-wide.’

We in the World Socialist Movement can envisage a socialist party growing in the future along with many other expressions of working class organisation including trade unions and workers’ councils. We have never stood aloof from the industrial scene and class struggle, as our critics keep repeating until such claims have become an urban legend for many on the Left. However, what we strictly adhere to is that decisions about industrial disputes and work-place agreements are to be made by those directly involved and not by outside-the-union political parties.

ALJO



### What are normal profits?

In his column in the *Times* (7 January) Oliver Kamm gave both a description of how the profit system works and a defence of profit-seeking as ‘a benign and socially useful activity’:

‘Businesses are run with an eye to generating profit... Expectations of higher profits will induce businesses to invest.’

Yes, but, equally, expectations of low or no profits induce businesses not to produce even if there is a need for their product. They only respond to paying – what economists cynically call ‘effective’ – demand, as Kamm admits:

‘If companies are confident about future demand, they will invest in plant, machinery and labour. If they’re not, they won’t – and this will accelerate an economic downturn. In an efficient economy, there’s no way of avoiding this.’

Kamm went on to describe another feature of capitalism – the averaging of the rate of profit across all sectors of the economy:

‘... if profits are abnormally high then other companies will enter the markets. This added production will constrain

prices and cause profits to be no greater in one sector than in other industries.’

This is indeed what tends to happen and was noticed by Marx too. He devoted a whole section of Volume III of *Capital*, comprising five chapters, to ‘the transformation of profit into average profit’:

‘Capital withdraws from a sphere with a low rate of profit and wends its way to others that yield higher profit. This constant migration, the distribution of capital between the different spheres according to where the profit is rising and where it is falling, is what produces a relationship between supply and demand such that the average profit is the same in the various different spheres.’

So there is no disagreement between Marx and Kamm on what happens. The disagreement is over the source of this average, or ‘normal’, profit. Kamm argues:

‘A ‘normal’ profit is not, contrary to critics of the market system, exploitative of either consumers or workers. It is a genuine contribution by businesses and investors to public welfare. By deferring consumption and taking on risk, investors are expanding the possibilities of future production. They deserve a reward for this.’

This is not an economic explanation of the origin of ‘normal’ profits, merely an attempted justification for capitalists

receiving a profit. It’s moral preaching not economics. And it doesn’t explain how its level is determined. Marx provided the economic explanation: the normal rate of profit is determined by the total amount of surplus value produced in the whole economy divided by the total amount of capital invested. Competition between capitals, embodied in companies, in their quest for higher profits leads to each capital tending to receive a share of profits pro rata to its size.

Noting that ‘the various different capitals here are in the position of shareholders in a joint-stock company, in which the dividends are evenly distributed for each 100 units,’ Marx concluded that:

‘... each individual capitalist ... participates in the exploitation of the entire working class by capital as a whole, and in the level of this exploitation; not just in terms of general class sympathy, but in a direct economic sense, since... the average rate of profit depends on the level of exploitation of labour as a whole by capital as a whole.’

Kamm’s claim that a normal profit does not arise from the exploitation of workers could not be more wrong.





We've been hearing a lot about traditional politics being 'broken'. There is deep dissatisfaction and disillusionment with all political parties, with their failed promises, their increasingly transparent dishonesty, the personal ambition of their representatives, and their idiotic circus of privileged shouting matches in the Palace of Westminster. But beneath the surface, our discontent is really a frustration at the social system itself, and its perpetual inability to deliver genuine comfort and security for all, regardless of which party has its hands on the wheel.

This is an era of profound social crisis, both culturally and economically. We are witnessing new levels of corruption, decadence and mendacity in public life. Decades of intelligent discourse and positive social evolution seem to be unravelling in front of our eyes. Frustration with the way things are is leading to a new surge in irrationality and abuse. The past year has seen a dramatic increase in the number of violent racist attacks in the USA, Britain and throughout Europe. The gap between rich and poor widens, and the rich and powerful are succeeding in persuading large numbers of the impoverished to scapegoat those even poorer or more vulnerable, rather than focus on their actual exploiters.

More and more the issues facing us are global and deadly in their urgency. In that context, the petty squabbles within the British Labour and Conservative parties are irrelevant and absurd in their self-importance and pomposity. There is an increasing risk of major and possibly nuclear conflict, which could kill millions. Even though Britain is one of the world's most developed states, the figures for poverty are chronic and worsening. Confidence in the democratic process is plummeting to new lows. There is evidence of the French *gilet jaunes*, who started by protesting against fuel price rises, now being partly hijacked by expressions of anti-semitism, whilst groups of political thugs in Britain have also donned high-vis tunics in a crude, confused and blunt protest against the so-called 'liberal elite'.

The social problems which have vexed us throughout modern history could have been solved long ago, by a radical and imaginative change in the basis of society, but true radicalism has at each turn been dismissed, as much by the Left as by conservatives, in the name of 'realism' and reasonable expectations. We inhabit a social system of brutal capital accumulation and dehumanisation which can only get worse, and periodically implode as it is doing now. This could be a time for a great positive change, if we question and replace the underlying economic system – or for a plunge into the abyss, if once again we don't.

Whilst Labour and Tory seem to be falling apart at the seams, the new groupings are essentially no better. There was a very telling moment when Kirsty Wark interviewed Anna Soubry for Newsnight about the new Independent Group. Wark pressed her on what they stood for and she had absolutely no answer. Eventually, she actually paused and laughed patronisingly at Wark, pityingly saying: 'You see, *you're* still in the old way of doing things. This is something new!' However, she then admitted that they had 'no policies' yet. Pushed again, she said they 'believe in *sound* economic policies, and a *sound economy*'. So, that's clear, then! That moment when she tried to reverse roles and criticise the

reporter questioning her was similar to what Trump does, attacking reporters for asking the right questions, turning the question back on them, switching roles in order to avoid scrutiny.

Within three hours of being formed, one of the Independent Group, Angela Smith MP, referred

to 'people of a funny tinge' in the context of saying that discrimination against minority ethnic groups was not just about colour, and had to apologise for her offensive phrase.

On a much more positive note, February saw the beginnings of a new global movement for change from school students, with strikes and protests about the lack of action on climate change. Inspired by Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg, who protests every Friday outside her country's parliament, the British action (Youth Strike 4 Climate) was swiftly condemned by Theresa May and others as 'wasting time!' – wanting to avert global catastrophe is clearly sneered at by these dinosaurs of political depravity. These advocates of a rotten and murderous system, who would herald a new dark age if we let them, should be held in utter contempt.

There is one thing which ties all of this together, and overshadows the petty, parochial politics of Britain, Brexit, Labour, Tory, Independent Group and all of the other intellectual pygmies bleating to sell us into slavery on the altar of the profits of a few. The uniting thread running through all of these crises, of climate change, militarism and war, insecurity, racism, violence and political cynicism is the unspoken, open secret of ownership and control. On this, Karl Marx was spot on, and the clarity of his observations is even now becoming more and more compelling. Capitalism is still the social system which exists throughout the world and its effects get worse every day that it staggers on. Wealth concentration is now even more extreme than it was in his day, increasing the already extreme social power of a tiny and largely anonymous elite, which cuts across every country and culture.

Such an absurd system can only continue to cultivate support and acceptance by persuading us to see a world divided into rival states, cultures and religions rather than realise that the absolutely fundamental divide, between the billionaire class and the rest, between capital and labour, in fact cuts across such cultural contrasts and is blind to them. British billionaires like James Dyson and James Ratcliffe of Ineos (Britain's richest man) supported Brexit, but have recently both moved their headquarters and assets away from Britain in order to protect their value. This simple point is often missed. For example, why do so many industries, businesses, and governments resist the need to reduce carbon emissions? Because they believe that to do so might cut into certain profit flows. Because we inhabit a system which depends, regardless even of the greed or kindness of individual investors, on maximising profits.

To resolve the climate change crisis will absolutely necessitate ending the economic system of minority ownership and of profit. Likewise, wars are fought between rival groups of those who own and control the planet's resources. More than 99 percent of us have no real stake in any country. We are already 'the dispossessed'. All of our problems in society will be solved by dispossessing the tiny but all-powerful global minority, and replacing private and/or state ownership of the world and all its resources with a new and thoroughly democratic system of common ownership, democratic control and production not for profit, but instead purely to meet needs.

**CLIFFORD SLAPPER**

# PROPER GANDER

## The Hand-Made Tale

WHEN WE'RE stuck at work, stressed out and fed up with the usual hierarchies and procedures, who hasn't daydreamed about doing something more imaginative and fulfilling? Days spent not being a small cog in someone else's machine, but doing what we're passionate about to make an end product of which we can be proud.

The Arts and Crafts movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries recognised that work could be more satisfying than what it has become in capitalism. This movement was a reaction to the growth of industrialism, which at that time meant ever-increasing numbers of smoky, dirty mills and factories. Its prominent members were artists and socialists who railed against how industry, and mass production in particular, churned out both dull, impersonal commodities and alienated, exploited workers. It harked back to a romanticised view of mediaeval times, when production meant individually-crafted pottery, furniture and ornaments. Emphasising how making things by hand brings us closer to what we produce, it aimed to encourage people to find pleasure again in being creative. Arts and Crafts designs were simple, light and airy, in contrast to the dominant fashion for wealthier Victorians' homes to be cluttered, dark and stuffy. Patterns were often inspired by nature, such as in the floral motifs of William Morris' wallpaper and William De Morgan's pot and tile designs.

Trying to recreate both the artworks and the working practices of the movement was the premise behind BBC2's *The Victorian House Of Arts And Crafts*. In this show, six craftsmen and -women spend a month living and working together, each week using traditional methods to make Arts and Crafts-inspired items for a particular room of the house.

The idea of craftspeople working together as a community comes from The Guild and School of Handicraft, founded by Charles Robert Ashbee in 1888. This was a collective of workshops run with the aim of seeking 'not only to set a higher standard of craftsmanship, but at the same time, and in so doing, to protect the status of the craftsman'. The programme aims to reconstruct such a place, where artists can bounce ideas off each other, share knowledge and experience, and find ways of working well together.

Although they are already skilled in trades such as metalwork, woodwork, pottery and textiles, the show's six participants will only be using materials, tools and techniques from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Through the weeks their tasks include manually printing wallpaper from carved blocks and making a chair by weaving its seat from reeds and using a pole lathe to turn wood for the legs.

As well as using practical methods most of us are unfamiliar with, the Arts and Crafts movement also championed styles of work which differ from that which many of us endure. For example, rest was



important to the movement, as it makes work more dignified and allows time for ideas to develop. In capitalist workplaces, where time is money, any breaks we don't end up working through are usually just long enough to gather up enough energy to last out the rest of the day.

Unfortunately, the programme imposes tight deadlines on the artists to complete their pieces, so they have to work with more intensity and less leisurely enjoyment than the Arts and Crafts ideal. And it predictably uses another TV trope

of picking a winner each week, which again seems to go against the movement's ethos. But despite this, the participants are in the enviable position of being able to sketch their ideas while sitting in the garden before heading to a workshop to make them real. Having the opportunity to collaborate, experiment and be creative is a nourishing experience for them, echoing the movement's belief in the therapeutic benefits of crafting by hand.

Inevitably, the programme focuses much more on art than on the movement's political ideas. Rather than just being nostalgic for previous ways of working,

the movement aimed for a new society where work could again be personal and satisfying. This doesn't have to mean only using old techniques. As Charles Robert Ashbee said, 'We do not reject the machine, we welcome it. But we would desire to see it mastered'. The movement's political views were shaped particularly by John Ruskin and William Morris. Ruskin criticised the alienating nature of employment during the industrial revolution, but naively believed that society's ills could be cured by a 'noble' class of philanthropic industrialists (see *Socialist Standard*, June 2000). Morris' views were more imaginative and perceptive, recognising that the drudgery and exploitation of employment will remain as long as employment itself exists. His vision of the future, detailed in *News From Nowhere* (1890) is of a world where work is pleasurable and voluntary, as it would be if services and industry were owned and democratically run by the community as a whole. The Arts and Crafts movement remains relevant today, not just for anyone who wants to design and print their own wallpaper, but for anyone who wants a better way of living and working. *The Victorian House Of Arts And Crafts* was a welcome reminder

of a movement which isn't just stuck in the past.

**MIKE FOSTER**



*Bowl designed by Charles Robert Ashbee*



## Not Changing the world



**Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World.** Anand Giridharadas. Alfred A. Knopf, 2018.  
**The Ideas Industry.** Daniel W. Drezner. Oxford University Press, 2017.  
**The Givers: Wealth, Power, and Philanthropy in a New Gilded Age.** David Callahan. Alfred A. Knopf, 2017.

The capitalist class controls not only the means of production but also many other important spheres of social life. The authors of these books give us close-up views of how capitalists, aided by servitors of various kinds, control two of these spheres: the formulation and dissemination of ‘new’ ideas and the activity that goes by the name of philanthropy (from the Greek words for ‘love’ and ‘human’). Drezner examines the ‘ideas industry’ and Callahan philanthropy; Giridharadas provides an overview of both.

By and large, these authors focus on just one of the two wings of today’s capitalist class – the so-called ‘globalists’ – cosmopolitans who constantly move around the world, believe in open borders and the free movement of goods, capital and labour and profess liberal views on issues like race, gender and religion. For corresponding portrayals of the other – nationalist, protectionist or ‘conservative’ – wing it is necessary to look elsewhere.

The ‘globalist’ plutocrats and their sidekicks inhabit an ‘intellectual cocoon’ that Giridharadas dubs MarketWorld. In MarketWorld there is endless and mostly vacuous chatter about ‘changing the world’ that never contemplates changing the world (at least not in any very significant way). ‘You can talk about our common problems, but don’t be political, don’t focus on root causes, don’t go after bogeymen’ (i.e., don’t blame anything on anyone in particular). For instance, you can talk about poverty but not about inequality.

MarketWorld elevates to stardom charismatic ‘thought leaders’ whose superficial mantras supplant the debates of public intellectuals. Their ‘charade’ fills a space that might otherwise be infected with systemic criticism. At the same time, it salves the consciences of the ‘winners’, encouraging them to ‘feel that they are change agents, solutions rather than the problem’. MarketWorld also provides a few jobs to young careerists who want not just to make money but to feel good about themselves while doing so.

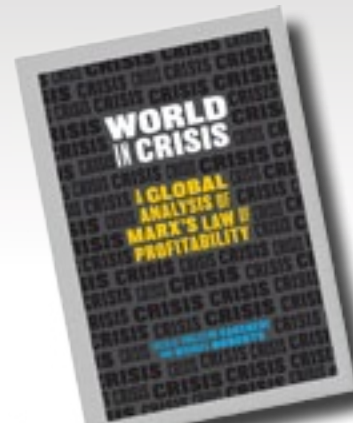
The image that emerges of the capitalist is decidedly one of dual-identity, with abrupt alternation between Dr. Jekyll the benevolent philanthropist and Mr. Hyde the ruthless and rapacious tycoon. The theoretical basis of this mental disorder was first presented by steel magnate Andrew Carnegie in his 1889 essay *The Gospel of Wealth*. According to Carnegie, the ideal capitalist accumulates as much wealth as he can, using whatever means may be necessary, but he accumulates that wealth not for his own benefit – he himself lives modestly – but rather in order to redistribute it in the best interests of society – interests that he is uniquely equipped to judge (after all, he has proven himself a brilliant organiser). That is why Carnegie made his workers toil such long hours at such low pay in the heat of his steel mills – in order to fund public libraries.

Capitalists evidently do not mind being told to do more good. What they do not like is being told to do less harm. Some of the most celebrated philanthropists do the most harm in their role as businesspeople. One example is the Sackler family, owners of Purdue Pharma, whose highly profitable painkillers allegedly fuelled the opioid addiction crisis (they also stand to profit from addiction treatment).

Perhaps, however, these authors place too much blame on capitalists as individuals and focus too little on capitalism as a system. As Giridharadas points out, a company that is not run solely in the interests of shareholders risks lawsuits from its investors. Even in the handful of jurisdictions where new corporate laws have been passed to permit the creation of ‘socially responsible’ firms (B companies), such firms have difficulty in attracting and retaining capital and remain few and far between.

STEFAN

## Profit crisis?



**World In Crisis: a global analysis of Marx’s law of profitability.** Edited by Guglielmo Carchedi and Michael Roberts. Haymarket books. 2018.

The stated purpose of this collection of essays is to advance the theory that the tendency of the rate of profit is to fall within the capitalist mode of production, according to Marx. More specifically, that the fall of the rate of profit is an observable long-term trend, and that the rate of profit is the key factor in economic crises. Roberts notes that there is disagreement within Marxian economics as to whether the declining rate of profit can be empirically observed. This book is premised on the fact that it can be.

For Marx the rate of profit is the excess of value of a commodity over its cost price, which he expresses as the formula  $s/(c+v)$  (‘s’ is surplus value, ‘c’ is constant capital, the cost of machinery and components, ‘v’ is variable capital, the wages of workers whose labour adds value to the product).

Competition between capitalists tends towards equalising this rate of profit, as each capitalist seeks to invest in those branches of industry that are generating the highest returns. Technological improvement gives a competitive edge to capitalists, so there is a tendency to increase the ‘c’ part of that formula. In the long run this means that the total capital will rise in proportion to the surplus value being produced, and the rate of profit will tend to fall.

What Roberts, Carchedi and their contributors observe in their data is that this is precisely what is happening. There are problems, though, as many of the data tables/graphs are attributed to ‘author’s calculation’ and there are no links given to data sets or any indication of how these

representations were derived.

It is difficult to observe the working of these Marxian formulas in the real world, because, even leaving aside any political incentive to misrepresent the reality of the situation, the categories Marx described may not correspond with any specific data set. For example, some surplus value manifests itself as inflated salaries for directors, and ‘profit sharing’ schemes would manifest as profit, rather than being part of wages, as they really are.

This is not necessarily fatal, so long as the data used is consistent, and then at least it is showing some real world trends from which the Marxian categories can emerge as shadows. An observable, consistent decline in the empirical rate of profit, though, does not necessarily mean that Marx’s tendency is observed in action. Other factors may be in play (which these essays sometimes mention, without exploring).

There is little or no discussion of primary accumulation – what the Marxist geographer David Harvey describes as accumulation by dispossession. That is, wealth that is acquired not by market rules, but by fraud or force (the great historical example being slavery). This gap is puzzling, especially as the central plank of the crisis theory presented is that the fire sale of the capital of bankrupts is necessary to restart profitability and accumulation. The nearest any articles come to addressing this matter is by hand-waving mentions of ‘imperialism’. The point is, though, that the logical effects of falling profitability would be for capitalists to abandon market accumulation and resort to other forces, rather than continue to let profits fall through the floor.

One other force is rent seeking. Incredibly, rent is not even mentioned in the index of this book. Carchedi does partially address rent, discussing monopolies as a potential response of capitalists to falling profitability. He correctly notes that the underlying effect of technical compositions of capital (the ratios of capital to labour) means that real surplus profit rates will vary among monopolies. What he misses, however, is that such differential surplus profits will be often invisible, and that the monopolists would lack the means to observe different rates of profit, or to pursue improved ones. This was essentially one of the significant problems historically encountered by Eastern Bloc state capitalism.

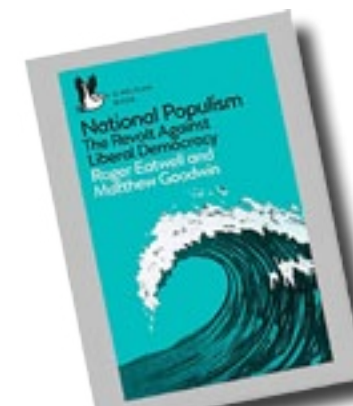
The power of the idea of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall lies not in the observed phenomena of declining

profitability, but, like the dog that didn’t bark in the night, in the steps the ruling class may take to avoid its effects. Rather than simply pointing to periodic crises of capitalism, we are in some ways better pointing to the inevitable need to periodically disrupt society and dismantle existing social relations in order to engage in a new spurt of profitability for one faction or another of capitalists.

Notwithstanding this, there are useful chapters on derivatives and algorithmic trading which do some useful work in dismantling the idea that crises are caused by bankers and spivs in the city. It also provides a useful overview of the state of worldwide capitalism.

P.S.

## Popularity Contests



**National Populism: the Revolt Against Liberal Democracy.** Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin. Penguin £9.99.

‘National populism,’ the authors tell us, ‘is an ideology which prioritizes the culture and interests of the nation, and which promises to give voice to a people who feel that they have been neglected, even held in contempt, by distant and often corrupt elites.’ The word ‘national’ is added to distinguish it from left-wing populism, as seen in Podemos in Spain and Bernie Sanders in the US. (For a socialist take on populism, see the March 2018 *Socialist Standard*.)

The book is, however, not mainly concerned with the views of populist politicians, and certainly not with how they fare when in government. Rather, it emphasises the characteristics and opinions of those who support them. The authors have little difficulty in showing that national populism is not backed solely by the poor and the unemployed, or by angry old white men. Many people under

forty support populists, but one significant point is that people without university degrees are more likely to vote for populist candidates (Trump, for instance).

The reasons why increasing numbers side with national populist candidates are said to include distrust of politicians and other elites (who are rich and had expensive educations) and the weakening of links to mainstream parties, which also lies behind the growth of the Greens and parties like the SNP. The increase in inequality over recent decades is also seen as a major factor, with a feeling of relative deprivation giving rise to political action.

But what marks national populism out from the less successful left-wing populism is its attitude to immigration and what Eatwell and Goodwin call ‘hyper ethnic change’. This is where national populists really tap into many people’s concerns that their way of life is undermined by large-scale immigration, especially of Muslims. And here the book becomes rather unpleasant: racism is defined in narrow terms (so discrimination is not in itself racist), and is contrasted with xenophobia, ‘a distrust and rejection of that which is perceived to be foreign and threatening’. Blatant racism is said to be less successful than appeals to culture and values, yet national populists accept ‘the critical importance of ethnic ancestry’ and want to ‘stem the dwindling size of their group [and] advance its interests’. This is just a euphemism for white people wanting to discriminate against non-whites, or general discrimination against those from abroad.

The authors accept that national populism has a dark side, on which they say very little, but also maintain that it raises ‘uncomfortable but legitimate issues’. However, they do not clarify who counts as a national populist, and, for instance, say little about Latin American populists. Many writers would regard Recep Erdoğan in Turkey as a populist politician, but here he is seen as part of a Muslim plot, arguing that Turkish families in Europe should have lots of children. His repressive rule can therefore be overlooked, as is that of the uncontroversially populist Viktor Orbán in Hungary, where a law was recently passed increasing the amount of overtime that employers can demand from workers.

Above all the book provides no evidence whatever that populist leaders can in any way deliver on their promises. They have allegedly ‘set out an alternative to the status quo’, by which is meant higher pay and more infrastructure projects. This is

(review continues on page 22)



# 50 Years Ago

## The Catholic Church and the Pill

Mussolini's massacre of the Abyssinians, Hitler's systematic murder of the European Jews, the American slaughter of Vietnamese—none of these atrocities, or others like them, caused more than mild rumblings in the Roman Catholic Church—and yet Catholics were deeply involved in all three. But the use of 'the pill' has caused a series of explosions which threaten to blow it apart at its rotten seams. The contrast would be laughable if it were not so tragic. The Pope's ruling on oral contraceptives has caused more Catholics to question the authority of their church than any other event this century. It has called forth more jokes than the Profumo affair. And the jokes and arguments have arisen because people are struggling to understand and digest a seemingly absurd situation. For thousands of Catholics it was a shock situation, because the pill seemed to offer the answer to all the objections that the church had raised to mechanical or chemical contraceptives. Many of them were already

using the pill in expectation that the Pope would bless it, and there was a powerful lobby of bishops and influential lay Catholics urging the Vatican to take this decision. When finally, after long delay, and against the majority advice of his own Commission, Pope Paul's encyclical forbade its use by Catholics, the reaction by Catholics and non-Catholics alike was close to incredulity.

That was seven months ago. Many non-Catholics have already forgotten it—or at least they would have done if it had not been for the way Catholics are still reacting. For many, particularly in countries like Holland, France and Britain, the resentment and disappointment have led to a continuing series of minor rebellions on other issues such as the celibacy of priests, the virginity of Mary, and the dominance of Rome. It is plain now that the Vatican must prepare for many years of dissent and controversy.

(*Socialist Standard*, March 1969)

(continued from page 21)

no alternative at all, for populism, national or otherwise, accepts the existence of capitalism and its elite – the capitalist class – and combines this with intolerant and authoritarian policies.

PB

## Materialism for children

**Everything Is Connected.** Jason Gruhl. Illustrations by Ignasi Font. Shambhala, 2019. Hardback £12.99

As a materialist I am thrilled to see this publication of a book for children, impressing them with the importance of openness to all life and the truth that all life is connected and all living beings part of a rich kaleidoscope. As Carl Sagan pointed out, we are all star stuff.

The publishers regularly make available works from a Buddhist perspective, and if Buddhists generally dislike what they think of as materialism, it is because the word is associated mostly with the mechanism and reductionism of traditional post-Christian western thought. Materialists, in fact, should oppose such reductionism, and be consistent – embracing the liberating realisation that all of us *are* the universe, that nothing is separate or outside of it, and that our atoms have made up trillions of living beings before us, and will make up trillions after us. All organisms are relatives, and the atoms that were once part of a T-Rex or a blue whale are now part of you!

For socialists too, the universe as here presented for children can help us show that physical reality can be more beautiful and wondrous than myths, and truth more colourful and resplendent than fiction.

A.W.



## SOCIALIST PARTY SUMMER SCHOOL



Our political views are shaped by the circumstances we find ourselves in and how we relate to our situation. How does a socialist understanding of capitalism and the aim for a free and equal world compare with other political stances and belief systems? Why should we have a socialist viewpoint? And how does it impact on our lives? Our weekend of talks and discussion looks at what it means to have a socialist outlook in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Full residential cost (including accommodation and meals Friday evening to Sunday afternoon) is £100. The concessionary rate is £50. Day visitors are welcome, but please book in advance.

To book online go to [spgb.net/summer-school-2019](http://spgb.net/summer-school-2019)

To book by post, send a cheque (payable to the Socialist Party of Great Britain) with your contact details to Summer School, The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 7UN.

E-mail enquiries should be sent to [spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk).

For full details of all our meetings and events see our **Meetup** site: <http://www.meetup.com/The-Socialist-Party-of-Great-Britain/>

## Meetings:

### MARCH 2019

#### LONDON

**Saturday 23 March, 2.00 p.m. – 4.00 p.m.**

**Public meeting on Brexit**

Speaker: Bill Martin

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

#### MANCHESTER

**Saturday 23 March, 2.00 p.m.**

**Poverty**

Venue: Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, M2 5NS

### APRIL 2019

#### LONDON

**Annual Conference**

**Saturday 27 – Sunday 28 April,**

**10.30 a.m. – 5.30 p.m. on**

**Saturday 27**

**10.30 a.m. – 5.00 p.m. on Sunday 28**

Socialist Party's Premises

52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 7UN



## Declaration of Principles

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

### Object

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

### Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e. land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Trump the Saviour

Given that we the people have elected the likes of Viktor Orban, Rodrigo Duterte, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Daniel Ortega, the fundamentalist Islamic Salvation Front, even Adolf Hitler, it's little wonder that some people have turned to prayer. Well, for many Christians, including Sarah Sanders, the Whitehouse Press Secretary, those prayers have been answered and we have been blessed with Donald Trump. 'I think God calls all of us to fill different roles at different times and I think that He wanted Donald Trump to become president. And that's why he's there. And I think he has done a tremendous job in supporting a lot of the things that people of faith really care about' (cnsnews.com, 31 January). One contributor to the site, MJ, went so far as to state: 'I definitely agree that God chose Donald Trump to be our president! The devil and hordes of his demons have done everything they know to try and hinder and stop him from accomplishing God's purposes, yet he remains in office. Why? Because he has given his life to God and desires to restore Christian values to our nation to make it great again. Bless him, Lord!'

American people understand their value and vote for them.' Surprisingly, there is a kernel of truth here: genuine socialism can only come about through majority understanding. But, religion, be it of the Left or Right, supports the status quo. Quotations from the Bible are offered in support of healthcare for all, a fair wage and a minimum one for all, as well as fair treatment of workers. The real message is, however, you'll get pie in the sky when you die!



So the fight continues on two fronts, to replace religion and supersede atheism through socialist understanding.

## No Gods, no Masters

Marx (1847): 'The social principles of Christianity have had eighteen centuries in which to develop, and have no need to undergo further development at the hands of Prussian consistorial councillors. The social principles of Christianity justified the slavery of classical days; they glorified mediaeval serfdom; and they are able when needs must to defend the oppression of the proletariat, though with a somewhat crestfallen air. The social principles of Christianity proclaim the need for the existence of a ruling class and a subjugated class, being content to express the pious hope that the former will deal philanthropically with the latter. The social principles of Christianity assume that there will be compensation in heaven for all the infamies committed on earth, and thereby justify the persistence of these infamies here below. The social principles of Christianity explain that the atrocities perpetrated by the oppressors on the oppressed are

either just punishments for original and other sins, or else trials which the Lord in His wisdom ordains for the Redeemed. The social principles of Christianity preach cowardice, self-contempt, abasement, submission, humility, in a word, all the qualities of the canaille; and the proletariat which will not allow itself to be treated as canaille, needs courage, self-confidence, pride, a sense of personal dignity and independence, even more than it needs daily bread. The social principles of Christianity are lick-spittle, whereas the proletariat is revolutionary. So much for the social principles of Christianity' (Otto Rühle, *Karl Marx: His Life and Works*, 1929).

## Cortez the Redeemer

The religious Left is no better. In a commentary titled 'The Biblical Values of Ocasio-Cortez's Democratic Socialism' (sojo.net, 31 January) we are informed 'The Bible envisions a just and equitable social order. As King explained, "God never intended for some of his children to live in inordinate superfluous wealth while others live in abject, deadening poverty." Democratic socialism seeks to build a more humane society, not by force or compulsion, but by way of the age-old democratic practice of "one person, one vote." For this reason, democratic socialist policies can only move forward if the

## Worship Me or Die

'Christianity is virtually outlawed in North Korea, where dictator Kim Jong Un is the subject of a personality cult that treats him like a god. The possession of Bibles, open religious services and any attempt to build underground church networks could mean torture, lengthy prison terms or execution' (cruxnow.com, 1 February). If you have ever seen North Korea from the heavens, thanks to a satellite image and technology developed by the 99 percent, the contrast with the South is astonishing. Schopenhauer wrote that 'religions are like glow worms; they shine only when it is dark'. Atheism, whether state sponsored or not, is ultimately another blind alley.

## FREE LUNCH

