

socialist standard

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Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement



**ROBOTS DESTROY
CAPITALISM:
FANTASY
SCI-FI?**



also:
**Drug Legislation
Reality of Trotskyism
Gifts versus Commodities**



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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The Brexit distraction

Brexit is continuing to tear the fabric of British capitalist politics apart. The Conservative Party is deeply divided with the European Research Group (ERG) faction acting like a separate party organising its own leaders and whips. Three pro-Remain Tory MPs have left to join the newly established Independent Group of MPs. Cabinet members openly defy the Prime Minister, whose authority is in a state of collapse. The Labour Party is similarly split between its Remain and Leave supporters preventing it from developing a coherent Brexit policy. Open warfare has broken out between the government and the MPs. The Speaker of the house invoked an old parliamentary ruling to prevent Theresa May from resubmitting her deal for a third vote in the current parliamentary session unless it has been substantially changed. May delivered an extraordinary statement where she presented herself as the people's champion against a recalcitrant Parliament that is thwarting the people's wishes.

This high drama reveals two things. The British capitalist class is deeply split as regards their relationship with the EU. The larger capitalists with greater global

connections tend to favour staying in the customs union and the single market, whereas smaller businesses that rely mainly on the UK market and resent EU red tape prefer to leave the EU. There are also some dodgy City wideboys who want to keep the EU from regulating their financial affairs.

The fallout from the 2008 financial crash and the austerity policies imposed by governments in its wake have created great social discontent. This has manifested itself in popular disaffection with mainstream capitalist politics and anger at what are seen as out of touch wealthy elites. This has provided opportunities for populist movements to flourish where they can pose as champions of the ordinary workers against the political establishments. To varying degrees of success they have been able to channel working class anger and frustration towards xenophobic and racist politics, blaming immigrant workers for the worsening conditions of 'native' workers. Populists have come to power in the USA, Poland, Hungary, Italy and Turkey. The Alternative für Deutschland are the main opposition party in Germany and Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement

National party has achieved a significant amount of support in France. In the UK, populism has manifested itself in the popularity of UKIP and the rise in the Eurosceptic tendency within the Tory party. Its crowning achievement was the vote to leave the EU in 2016. It was with the hope of seeing off these populist tendencies that David Cameron called the EU referendum.

Workers are encouraged to take sides in what is essentially a dispute between capitalists as to how they manage their trading relationships. Unfortunately, this has reinforced divisions within the working class - between 'native' workers and immigrant workers; between Remain supporting workers who tend to be more affluent and Leave supporters, who, in large part, hail from poorer areas.

Brexit is a distraction for British workers. Whether the UK is in or out of the EU, workers will continue to experience the problems of wage or salary employment. They should unite for socialism, a global classless, moneyless society of common ownership.

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PATHFINDERS

Heartland of a heartless world

WHAT CONNECTS next-generation 5G technology with a geographer's theory of world conquest from 1904?

If you enjoy intellectual breakfast snacks delivered in 5-10 minute videos from the BBC, and you can stomach the usual assumptions of the institutional elite, you could do worse than munch through [bbc.com/ideas/playlists](https://www.bbc.com/ideas/playlists), which offers everything from a history of the nipple to an A-Z of -isms (there's a flash-doc on *Is capitalism here to stay?* though at just 3 mins 23 seconds don't expect it to blow your mind).

In the section *Ideas that shaped the world* you can find a two-part mini-doc called *The blueprint for world domination that spooked America*.

This is an exposition of the Heartland theory, first put forward by geographer Halford Mackinder in 1904, which argued that since land transport had been revolutionised through railway networks, classical sea power (in particular British sea power) was no longer the key to world domination. Instead, access to land-based resources and minerals located in Eastern Europe and Russia – the Heartland – would in future dictate politics across the Eurasian continent or 'world-island', and ultimately across the entire world. As Mackinder memorably put it, 'Who rules Eastern Europe commands the Heartland. Who rules the Heartland commands the World Island. Who rules the World Island commands the World.'

Mackinder is credited as one of the founders of the 'science' of geopolitics, and although he wasn't really saying anything that would have been a revelation to the likes of Caesar or Genghis Khan, his cold-blooded big-picture approach allegedly had a profound effect on those convening at the 1919 Versailles peace treaty, who were otherwise being bombarded with idealistic, one-new-world rhetoric from the likes of the US president Woodrow Wilson. At all events, the conference attempted to drive a wedge between Germany and Russia by creating intervening buffer states in order to divide power in Eastern Europe along the lines of the Heartland theory. Of course it didn't work, and besides, Mackinder's theory was arguably soon rendered obsolete by its own reasoning – if sea power was superseded by land-based transport, this itself was also superseded by air power and then by nuclear ballistic missile power. Though America became paranoid about all things Soviet, control of Ukrainian grain and Siberian forestry supplies no longer had much to do with it.

Now, however, the Heartland hypothesis has been revived in a new form.

Huawei kidding?

There's been a lot of hype lately about 5G or fifth-generation internet technology, and bold claims have ranged from it being 'orders of magnitude faster than 4G' to being the next industrial revolution. Donald Trump, pretending far-sightedness beyond the capability of mere mortals, has even been talking about 6G, which has left industry insiders scratching their heads in bafflement as there is no such thing as 6G and probably never will be (this was Trump's fatuous equivalent of the Buzz Lightyear catch-phrase 'To infinity and beyond!').



any significant speed improvements. But it's not really about speed, it's about capacity, and the coming 'internet of things' is going to need a lot of that.

That means every house, domestic appliance, autonomous vehicle, traffic light, industrial component, digital watch, phone, banking system and national power grid, all combined in an interactive network communicating at near light-speed, in the background, for our human convenience, but also fostering our total human dependence.

It's not hard to reapply the Heartland theory to the new territory of 5G cyberspace. Who controls the internet of things controls the world.

Imagine if any or all of this is hacked. It's not just a matter of turning the lights and data off. A hostile hack could theoretically weaponise your house against you, cause traffic pile-ups, drive planes into stadiums, melt down nuclear power stations, you name it.

It's also not hard to see, from this, why the US is so paranoid about the shadowy Chinese telecom giant Huawei (pron. Who are we), which is building 5G core tech for much of the world's emerging 5G networks, and which for all anyone knows is building 'backdoors' into its software for future exploitation by the Chinese military. Huawei is keenly playing the innocent and blaming the West for its 'pride and prejudice' (ie racism), while protesting that they would never give such access to the Chinese government. Founder (and

There are good reasons to think that much of the hype around 5G is complete nonsense, and that in many cases its massive increase in bandwidth won't deliver

Communist Party member) Ren Zhengfei insists that any such skulduggery would be bad for the firm's overseas business. But who is he kidding? Chinese companies are legally obliged to cooperate with state security services, and Huawei like all Chinese companies has a Communist Party committee, whose leader is a senior member of the Huawei board.

There is probably a hint of venerable 'Yellow Peril' racism here, in truth. All capitalist states connive in mutual surveillance and dirty tricks to give themselves a military and market edge. If the US bought all its 5G tech from Japan, Sweden or Britain, there is no reason to suppose firms in those countries couldn't be induced to do the same thing Huawei is being accused of. Indeed, something like this may well have happened back in 2016. When the FBI asked Apple to create an iPhone backdoor so they could hack the phones of terrorists, Apple refused to create the software, and the federal government issued a writ. Apple was lauded for defending customer confidentiality, but was probably bricking it behind the scenes, being caught between a rock and a hard place. Very conveniently however, just a day before the case went to court, the FBI announced that it had found a mysterious third party which could hack the phone, and promptly called off the lawsuit, thus saving Apple's bacon. What seems more likely in reality is that a deal was struck privately whereby Apple gave the FBI what it asked for, on condition the FBI didn't reveal the surrender in public, thereby leaving Apple's reputation intact.

So is Huawei being scapegoated for what all capitalist companies would do anyway? Probably. But western-style countries have good reason to fear Chinese power, because it is not subject to periodic government change, does not tolerate effective unions or political dissent, and is thus able to pursue single-minded market policies more efficiently and over longer terms than any liberal democracy can match. And socialists ought to worry too. If Chinese totalitarianism can be shored up by hi-tech surveillance and control of 5G, other countries might get the idea that democracy is no longer necessary for running capitalism. If that happens, workers could face increasing attacks on basic democratic rights including perhaps even the right to vote. Just one more reason why we need to work for that revolution for common ownership now, before it slips too far out of reach.

PJS

Democracy and delegates

When eight MPs resigned from the Labour Party to form a new political group, the so-called 'Independent Group', the call naturally went up for them to resign and contest a by-election under their new political colours. Equally naturally (since they all expected to lose any by-election) they refused. They were supported in this by most of the media on 'constitutional' grounds – that MPs are not the delegates of those who voted for them. As the *Times* (22 February) put it in an editorial entitled 'Democracy and Conscience':

'In a deliberative democracy, the role of elected representatives is not to implement instructions. Rather, they owe it to their constituents to act on, as Edmund Burke put it to the electors of Bristol in 1774, their unbiased opinion, mature judgement and enlightened conscience.'

That's clear, except that the term 'deliberative democracy' is tendentious as why can't democratically-elected delegates deliberate?

Another opponent of 'the delegate theory of representation,' as he called it, was John Stuart Mill (in chapter 12 of his 1861 *Representative Government*, still taught in universities). He was against this because he thought that, with universal suffrage (to which he was opposed), it would mean 'the exclusive rule of the operating classes'. He openly advocated 'leaving an unfettered discretion to the representative' as a way to prevent the working class imposing 'class legislation' in its interest.

So, the theory that elected representatives should have a free hand to vote as they chose, even if this choice was not what those who elected wanted, and that they cannot be removed if they went against their electors' wishes, originated as an anti-democratic, anti-working-class constitutional practice.

The opposite view – that elected representatives should be subject to control by those who elected them – was the democratic view and, in the nineteenth century, was implemented in some cantons in Switzerland and some of the states of the USA, through provisions for electors to recall those they had elected. Recall votes still take place regularly in the US. The re-election of the US House of Representatives every two years is also a way of making elected representatives responsible to those who elected them (and why 'annual parliaments' was one of the Chartists' six demands, the only one not to have been implemented). It means that electors there can change their representatives if they want after a relatively short period, whereas in Britain they can only do this every five years. Ironically then, had the eight Labour and three Tory defectors been members of the US House of Representatives they would not have been able to hang on for a further three years as they now are.

The *Times*, however, smeared the democratic position by associating it with Lenin:

'The alternative notion that officials are mere delegates does have a philosophical lineage. It is to be found in Lenin's *The State and Revolution*. This revolutionary blueprint was a guarantee that Russia under the Bolsheviks would become a totalitarian state.'

This is wrong on two counts. First, as just pointed out, this view goes back a long way before Lenin and, second, Lenin's endorsement of it was not sincere or followed by any attempt to implement it.

Mill gave an example from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries:

'In the Dutch United Provinces, the members of the States General were mere delegates; and to such a length was the doctrine carried, that when any important question arose

which had not been provided for in their instructions, they had to refer back to their constituents, exactly as an ambassador does to the government from which he is accredited.'

Another example is the arrangement proposed for France by the Paris Commune, a democratic popular uprising that took over Paris at the end of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1. As described by Marx:

'The rural communes of every district were to administer their common affairs by an assembly of delegates in the central town, and these district assemblies were again to send deputies to the National Delegation in Paris, each delegate to be at any time revocable and bound by the *mandat impératif* (formal instructions) of his constituents' (*The Civil War in France*).

This is what anarchists advocate to this day. It was never implemented as the Paris Commune was ruthlessly suppressed in blood by the French government after less than two month's existence. While it existed, as Marx noted with approval:

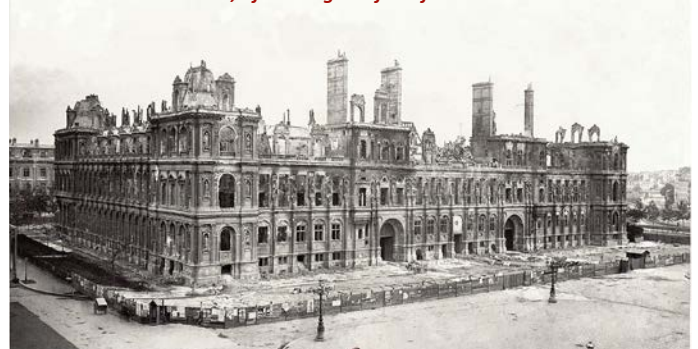
'The Commune was formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at short terms.'

Lenin, who considered himself a Marxist, had to pay lip-service to this and duly quoted in his *The State and Revolution*, written in July 1917, this endorsement by Marx of a body elected by universal suffrage whose members were subject to recall 'at short terms' as the model political form. But he later switched the emphasis from elected councillors to public servants and wrote of these being reduced to the role of 'simply carrying out our instructions as responsible, revocable, modestly paid "foremen and bookkeepers"'. By 'our' he meant the working class, but represented not by elected delegates but by a vanguard party that had appointed itself to represent them. This was quite different from what the Paris Commune practised and what Marx envisaged; it was a blueprint for a one-party dictatorship where any public servant considered to be not carrying out the instructions of the leaders of the vanguard party could be instantly 'revoked', i.e., sacked. After the Bolsheviks seized power in November 1917 one of their first acts was to dissolve the Constituent Assembly that had been elected by universal suffrage and the 'revocation' (and worse, imprisonment and exile) of their opponents began. Lenin wasn't any kind of democrat, let alone a supporter of delegate democracy.

Some form of delegate democracy has to be the basis of the administrative structure in socialism as this will necessarily be a democratic society. Those elected cannot be left 'an unfettered discretion' to decide according to 'their unbiased [oh, yes?] opinion, mature judgement and enlightened conscience' as proposed by the anti-democrats Burke and Mill. That would be a recipe for class rule, as it was intended to be.

ADAM BUICK

The Paris Town Hall, after the great fire of the Commune in 1871.



Dear Theresa

How are things? How is Brexit going? Just teasing you! I daresay our inimitable BBC is still inflicting wall-to-wall coverage upon its hapless audience. I don't get past the headlines myself, but they always seem to be proclaiming another lost vote in your pitiful attempt to cut a deal in Westminster – and you thought Barnier was a hard nut to crack! I wondered whether you were trying to get into *The Guinness Book of Records* as the prime minister who has suffered the most defeats in parliament. It might not be a bad idea. There won't be much else of interest to your legacy. Have you packed yet? Remember to put enough food down for the cat.

What are your plans? Perhaps you could get a job with the BBC. It would be the least they could do for you given your generosity towards them in continuing to facilitate the expropriation of £4bn a year from the licence payer, under threat of fine and imprisonment. I don't think you would be qualified as a political correspondent, even against the undemanding selection criteria of the BBC. I was thinking more of a TV licence enforcement person. If you were to dig out those iconic £1,000 leather trousers and signature black patent over-the-knee boots, and generally ham up your gothic look, you could do quite well. Whilst the terms of employment are a closely guarded commercial secret I would guess that there is a high element of commission in this door-stepping activity. I'm sure you would frighten a number of those miscreants into coughing up the licence fee. Others might respond favourably to the novelty of an ex-prime minister, in costume dress, banging on their door. There are worse jobs. You would be out in the fresh air, meeting new people and getting plenty of exercise. It would be much healthier for you than the putrid atmosphere of Westminster.

If you are doubtful about my suggestion then ponder this: of all the thousands of crimes by which your benign government contrives to bestow a criminal record upon its citizenry, the failure to hold a valid TV licence ranks as the sixth most prolific offence, with 163,000 convictions in 2017. Now that's a wad-full of commission. Of course strictly speaking you wouldn't be a BBC employee, but instead would be working for the private contractor, Capita, the provider of this essential public service, no doubt at an equally essential lucrative fee. I'm sure Capita owe you a favour or two. Don't be coy about using the 'revolving door.' Everyone else does.

If socialism has come to pass by the time of your eviction then life will be altogether more straightforward for you. Our society will be based on the maxim: 'from each according to ability, to each according to need'. You won't have to fret over the consequences of your shortcomings, or to prostrate yourself before an employer under duress of starvation or homelessness. All your basic needs will be catered for without the need for money. It would seem unlikely that the BBC would constitute a 'basic need,' but in socialism this – and other similar matters – will be decided democratically; dare I say it, by referendum, or similar device.

Anyway, I look forward to hearing about the adventures you are planning for yourself.

Sincerely, Tim Hart



Mono - what?

Everybody has heard of monopoly, where there is a single seller, but have you heard of its opposite 'monopsony', where there's a single buyer? When there is a monopoly (from the Greek words for single and seller) the monopolist is in a stronger position than the buyer and so can extract a higher price than otherwise for what they are selling. With monopsony (from the Greek words for single and buyer) it's the opposite – the buyer can buy at a lower price than otherwise. It's what the supermarkets do with their suppliers, and, as an article in the *Times* (19 February) confirms, what some employers can do when it comes to purchasing the labour-power of their workers.

Under the headline 'Workers are paying the price for being less able to stand up to employers', its Economics Editor Philip Aldrick commented on a recent study of monopsony in the UK private sector labour market between 1998 and 2017 (personal.lse.ac.uk/tenreyro/monopsony.pdf). This

period includes the eight years since the beginning of the Great Recession that followed the Crash of 2008 during which, Aldrick notes, 'real earnings have stagnated, the longest stretch since Napoleonic times, as inflation raced ahead of pay'. The normal explanation of this would be that the increased unemployment in a slump weakens the workers' bargaining power. However, the stagnation persisted even though the level of unemployment was lower than in the downturns of 1980s and 1990s and was in fact falling at the end of the period. So what could be an explanation?

Step forward 'monopsony'. Not literally, as there is not a single employer (that only existed under the state capitalism of the former USSR) but where there is a small number of employers who dominate the buying side in the labour market. Technically this is 'oligopsony' (a few buyers) but the term used in the study is 'market concentration' measured by how few employers employ the bulk of workers in an industry or region.

The study concluded:

'We have shown how higher levels of concentration are associated with lower levels of pay for workers not covered by a collective bargaining agreement, and that for those who are covered by a CBA that this negative correlation between pay and

monopsony mostly disappears.'

Since 'collective bargaining agreements cover only one fifth of private sector workers today, compared with half in 1998', Aldrick wonders whether the study's conclusion is a possible explanation for wages continuing to stagnate despite unemployment falling.

In any event, it vindicates the Marxian view that unions can provide a limited protection against employers, basically by banding workers together to in effect form an opposing monopoly of sellers of labour-power, even if in some cases this is just running fast to stand still and even to avoid slipping back so much.

Traditionally, socialists have referred to the capitalist class as having a 'monopoly' over the means of wealth production, based on the accepted extension of the word beyond its literal meaning of 'single seller' to mean 'exclusive control'. This exclusive control of productive resources also puts the capitalist class as a whole in a position of monopsony i.e., a single buyer, vis-à-vis the working class as a whole since, while workers can change employers they still have to find someone to purchase their labour power. In short, the employing class has the whip hand. Which can only be ended by abolishing the wages system.

WOOD FOR THE TREES

Authority

IT IS no surprise that socialists have little time for 'authority figures'. The origin of any level of power within this culture ultimately always derives from the capitalist class and their lickspittles; born of exploitation and oppression this kind of status is worthy only of our contempt. But what of moral and intellectual authority? Whilst discussing the nature of consciousness with the person behind the bar the other evening I commented upon the hubristic nature of our discourse (this is Cambridge remember) by reference to the generations of great minds who had considered the phenomenon before us. She paused and smiled and then resumed her musings on the subject. Philosophers of past and present have the ability to both intimidate and stimulate thought but what 'authority' do they have? Does the implied high level of intelligence together with a lifetime of study invest a person with authority? We might quibble with the usage preferring the word authoritative to describe an informed opinion; indeed such a person might not expect their conclusions to have any importance for others – but should they have? And if they do, of what significance are our own humble conjectures in comparison?

Many often claim to 'have a right to their opinion' and socialists would support that assertion but does the articulation of an unconsidered and therefore unresearched conclusion have any value? When we place ourselves in the dentist's chair we assume many years of dedicated study and the certification to prove it; reassured by this we place ourselves under their authority. Unfortunately even with such advantages a dentist can still be rubbish at their job but this would not dissuade us from the belief that a profound knowledge of teeth is a definite advantage for anyone claiming to be a dentist. Is it the same with other disciplines like politics and philosophy? There are no certificates for intelligence and integrity but we usually recognise it when we encounter it in others. This kind of gravitas is always the result of study and coherent contemplation. Of course they can still be wrong despite all of their endeavours but such a conclusion, even if it is mistaken, has more value than an assertion based merely on ideological prejudice. Phrases like 'the truth of the matter' and 'in the real world' are used frequently with no reference to the profound philosophical implications

of the concepts of truth and reality. So although we may dismiss the relevance of philosophy to our daily conversation it has to be acknowledged that without the concepts it creates we would have a very impoverished language with which to converse and, ironically, it is only by using its logic that we can see that the phrases above are not related to their connotative meaning but rather to ideological prejudice and should really be articulated as: 'this is the truth because I want it to be' and 'this is the real world because I need it to be'.



In the amoral cultural context of capitalism is there any source of moral authority? Are the ethical condemnations of its more obvious injustices just another example of empty ideological rhetoric? In most advanced countries god is dead (or at least dying) and his priests no longer have any moral authority for the vast majority; however when asked about morality many will speak of it as 'a personal matter' as if their code of behaviour is somehow generated by individual free will rather than social conditioning and unfortunately the ghost of Christianity still haunts the European concepts of morality as do many of its hypocrisies. Giving to 'charity' is capitalism's highest concession to any moral sensibility – conveniently forgetting, of course, that capitalism itself is a charity for the rich which directly causes the need of charities for the poor. We may

refuse to buy goods that are created in third world sweatshops or decline to put our savings into banks associated with such companies only to discover that our own jobs might depend on a business which can only survive by using such cheap labour in a cut-throat market place. We might be morally outraged by the destruction of the environment but if it was a choice between not being able to provide for your family or taking the only job available which was to cut down trees in a rainforest we know the (moral) decision we would all, however reluctantly, have to make. This is why socialists believe that an entirely moral approach to politics is impossible and that no genuine moral authority can exist within an amoral world.

There are no individuals, books, ideologies, religions or traditions that can claim exclusive rights to intellectual or moral authority. We are all part of a process of cultural development that both informs us and to which we contribute (to a greater or lesser degree). Authority based on an economic power born of exploitation will seek to inhibit this process but will always fail to do so in the end. Ever vigilant of the lurking seduction of our own prejudices and cultural conditioning we can seek out our own meaning from this rich human reservoir of knowledge. Even then we must subject what we think we know to our peers in debate and conjecture. Only such a democratic consensus (in the full awareness that it might be mistaken in both its method and aims) can claim to have any kind of political and/or moral authority.

WEZ

"I wholly disapprove of what you say—and will defend to the death your right to say it."



UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

LONDON

North London branch. Meets 3rd Thurs. 8pm at Torriano Meeting House, 99 Torriano Ave, NW5 2RX. Contact: Chris Dufton 020 7609 0983 nlb.spgb@gmail.com

South London branch. Meets last Saturday in month, 2.30pm. Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN. Contact: 020 7622 3811.

West London branch. Meets 1st & 3rd Tues. 8pm. Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace (corner Sutton Court Rd), W4. Corres: 51 Gayford Road, London W12 9BY. Contact: 020 8740 6677. tenner@abelgratis.com

MIDLANDS

West Midlands regional branch. Meets last Sun. 3pm (check before attending). Contact: Stephen Shapton. 01543 821180. Email: stephenshapton@yahoo.co.uk.

NORTH

North East Regional branch. Contact: P. Kilgallon, c/o Head Office, 52 Clapham High Street, SW4 7UN.

Lancaster branch. Meets 2nd Sun (Jan 3rd Sun), 3pm, Friends Meeting House, Meeting House Lane. Ring to confirm: P. Shannon, 07510 412 261, spgb.lancaster@worldsocialism.org.

Manchester branch. Contact: Paul Bennett, 6 Burleigh Mews, Hardy Lane, M21 7LB. 0161 860 7189.

Bolton. Contact: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589.

Cumbria. Contact: Brendan Cummings, 19 Queen St, Millom, Cumbria LA18 4BG.

Doncaster. Contact: Fredi Edwards, fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk

Liverpool. Contact: D. Whitehead, liverpoolspgb@gmail.com

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

Kent and Sussex regional branch. Meets 2nd Sun. 2pm at The Muggleton Inn, High Street, Maidstone ME14 1HJ. Contact: spgb.ksrb@worldsocialism.org 07973 142701.

South West regional branch. Meets 3rd Sat. 2pm at the Railway Tavern, 131 South Western Road, Salisbury SP2 7RR. Contact: Ray Carr, Flat 1, 99 Princes Rd, Poole, BH12 1BQ. 01202 257556 or 072962689.

Brighton. Contact: Anton Pruden, anton@pruden.me

Canterbury. Contact: Rob Cox, 4 Stanhope Road, Deal, Kent, CT14 6AB.

Luton. Contact: Nick White, 59 Heywood Drive, LU2 7LP.

Redruth. Contact: Harry Sowden, 5 Clarence Villas, Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 1PB. 01209 219293.

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Newtownabbey. Contact: Nigel McCullough. 028 90852062.

SCOTLAND

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MATERIAL WORLD

BACK IN September 2014, we carried an article on the Chinese government's persecution of the Uighurs, a Muslim minority (worldsocialism.org/spgb/socialist-standard/2014/2010s/no-1321-september-2014/material-world-chinas-wild-west/)

The Uighur are more akin to the Turkic peoples

of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, than to the Han Chinese. Following a policy conducted in Tibet, China has promoted the mass migration of Han Chinese into Xinjiang - the autonomous region in western China, home to approximately 11 million Uighurs, with the effect of trying to reduce Uighurs to a minority on their native land, pre-empting any possibility of independence that many Uighurs seek.

In August 2018, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination voiced 'deep concern' over the situation facing Muslims who were being treated as 'enemies of the state' and held in secret 're-education' camps. The Chinese Human Rights Defenders reported that a fifth of all 2017 arrests in China were made in Xinjiang. According to a Human Rights Watch report, the detention centres are located in specially-built facilities or converted government buildings where detainees are held, unlawfully and without charge, as a result of religious 'offences' such as excessive praying or non-religious acts such as accessing proscribed websites or contacting overseas relatives. Other aspects of the security crackdown include all-encompassing social media surveillance, mass deployment of police and severe regulations against religious practices and dress.

Inmates at those gulags are forced to criticise their own Islamic beliefs and sing Communist Party propaganda songs for hours each day and give thanks to the ruling Communist Party. They are compelled to shave their beards and have been forced to eat pork and drink alcohol. Former detainees described beatings and deaths despite authorities' tight control of available information. Likewise, the government also operates orphanages for Uighur children taken from their parents, in a process to disconnect them from their ethnic heritage, a punitive policy targeting

indigenous peoples seen all across the world at various times in history.

China is an economic superpower which the world relies on heavily for trade and there are signs that economic factors are the reason deterring diplomatic protest or humanitarian intervention from the rest of the world. Many states including Islamic ones fear the economic consequences and possible retaliation they could receive if they challenged or sanctioned China for this blatant ethnic cleansing of the Uighur people. China has invested \$62bn in the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which will connect Kashgar in Xinjiang to the southern Gwadar port in Pakistan. Despite Pakistan highlighting the plight of Muslim minorities, when it comes to Uighurs, Islamabad protests are muted.

'It's quite striking that while Pakistan often laments the plight of Rohingya, Syrian, Kashmiri, and Palestinian Muslims, you rarely hear Islamabad making statements in solidarity with Uighurs', according to Michael Kugelman, deputy director of the Asia programme at the Wilson Center. He says 'The Muslim world on the whole, with a few exceptions, has taken a position of studied silence because of a desire not to upset a key global player that offers investments and other useful benefits'.

Particularly revealing were the comments from Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman who, on his recent visit to China, voiced support for China's campaign against 'terrorists' and its 'de-extremization' camps. Did we really think that China or Saudi Arabia would allow some Uighurs to get in the way of Saudi Aramco's \$10 billion deal for a refining and petrochemical complex or the signing of 35 economic cooperation accords worth \$28 billion? Chinese-Saudi trade reached \$63 billion in 2018. As long

and de-radicalise Islamic fundamentalism. China is taking advantage of the global trend to weaponise Islamophobia to drive its racist programme of state-sponsored Han dominance.

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi justified the 're-education camps', stating, 'the efforts are completely in line with the direction the international community has taken to combat terrorism ... if we can take care of prevention, then it will be impossible for terrorism to spread and take root'.

Other government officials defended the forced detention claim that Islam is an ideological illness, depicting the camps as more like hospitals to 'cure' people from the Muslim infliction. China's ambassador to the USA, Cui Tiankai, stated that the country is trying to turn the Uighurs into 'normal people'. China is instituting the very same calls made by some Western politicians to criminalise expressions of Muslim identity such as the wearing of hijabs in an effort to heal Muslims of their 'sickness'.

Maya Wang of the Human Rights Watch campaign explained that while authorities claimed the camps were about combating terrorism and separatism, they were in fact designed to assimilate Uighurs. Amnesty International described the detention centres as comparable to 'wartime concentration camps'.

The Socialist Party is fully conscious of the sufferings of many of our fellow-workers and we wish to promote a kaleidoscope of cultures but candour compels us to point out that only the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of socialism can put an end to national chauvinism and race prejudice.

ALJO



as economics matter, the Uighurs will not likely find an ally in Saudi Arabia.

Turkey has been the only majority Muslim country to criticise China, with the Turkish foreign ministry calling China's treatment of Uighurs 'a great cause of shame for humanity'.

China is able to disguise anti-Uighur actions under a cloak of the global 'war against terror' to counter



'Capitalism is not destined to go on endlessly accumulating until the sun burns out. Capitalism will collapse of its own internal contradictions within the 21st century, within the lifetime of children born today,' so claims Ben Reynolds, author of *The Coming Revolution. Capitalism in the 21st Century* published by Zero Books last year. The first sentence is true, but what about the second which Reynolds bases on something Marx wrote? Is there anything in it?

Falling prices

Under capitalism wealth takes the form of 'value', the economic value of a commodity (as an item of wealth produced to be sold) being determined by the time it takes to produce it from start to finish (i.e., including to extract and transport the materials, the wear and tear of the machines used to produce it, etc.). Spurred on by competition between capitalist firms in pursuit of more profits, the tendency under capitalism is for productivity in the sense of the amount of wealth produced per worker to increase, or, from another angle, for the amount of time it takes to produce items of wealth to decrease. If it wasn't for currency inflation this would manifest itself as a fall in the prices of commodities; when inflation is discounted the real price of most items of wealth has in fact been falling.

In the *Grundrisse*, some notes Marx made for himself in 1857-8, there is a passage that has come to be called the 'Fragment on Machines' (thenewobjectivity.com/pdf/marx.pdf), where Marx speculated on what would happen if this process of increasing productivity and falling prices continued to its limit. His conclusion was that it would lead to prices becoming zero or as close to zero as to make no difference. It also implied an enormous development of technology and its application to production. But if prices fell to zero, this would undermine the whole basis of capitalism as a system of producing wealth as value measured by labour time. Capitalist development, Marx wrote, was contradictory in that 'it presses to reduce labour time to a minimum, while it posits labour time, on the other side, as the sole measure and source of wealth.' The enormous development of the forces of production to the point where little direct human input was required would bring this contradiction to a head:

'As soon as labour in the direct form has ceased to be the great well-spring of wealth, labour time ceases and must cease to be its measure, and hence exchange value [must cease to be the measure] of use value ... With that, production based on exchange value breaks down ...'

In other words, commodities would be so cheap that they would have to be given away free, which would remove the incentive of capitalist firms to produce them as there would be no profit to be made by doing this. Production for sale with a view to profit would come to a stop.

This, in fact, is the only place in the whole of Marx's

published and unpublished writings where he used the words 'break down' (*zusammenbrechen*) in connection with capitalism as an economic system. Not that this is how he expected capitalism to come to an end. This passage was a thought experiment about what would happen if capitalism were to continue indefinitely and which showed that in fact it couldn't. Marx's view about how he expected capitalism to end is set out at the end of the last-but-one chapter of *Capital* on the 'Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation' where he wrote that the working class would end capitalism by 'expropriating the expropriators', i.e. by human action not mechanical breakdown.

On the basis of this fragment, a whole school of critics of capitalism has grown up. Reynolds is one of them and argues that capitalism has nearly reached the end point in Marx's thought experiment. Hence his prediction that it will collapse before the end of the century, paving the way for

'A state of society in which wage labor and the production of value have been abolished. Each person contributes what they can according to their abilities and each person receives according to their needs.'

What we call 'socialism' but which he calls 'communism', not that we have any objection to that as for us the two terms mean the same and are interchangeable; though not for him as we shall see.

Technological developments

Reynolds bases this prognosis on two ongoing technological developments: 3D printing via the internet, and robotics and artificial intelligence. He points out that already the written and spoken word, moving images and music are, in principle, free for anyone with a computer linked to the internet ('in principle' because in practice states try to prevent this through artificial 'intellectual property rights'). What permits access to these is access to a computer code which, once drawn up, costs nothing to reproduce. The same applies, he emphasises, to 3D printing, to produce physical things; this too depends on a computer code that costs nothing to reproduce. Still in its infancy, this will allow anyone with a computer linked to the internet, and plastic material to work on, to make things of everyday use. He expects this to catch on and then, when it does as he expects it will in the course of this century, a whole range of products will be taken out of commodity production as people will be able to produce them directly and more cheaply for themselves.

The other technological development he sees as undermining capitalist production is robotics and artificial intelligence. He mentions a factory in Japan which operates 24/7 without human presence, known as a 'lights out' factory since, because no humans are there, the lights don't have to be switched on. These, too, he says are going to spread and affect not just the physical production of goods but office work,

teaching and health care as well. Mechanisation has gone on since the beginning of capitalism but, because capitalism continued to expand, the displaced workers were able to find jobs in other or new sectors of the economy. Reynolds says that this won't happen this time due to this 'radical automation' which he defines as 'a long-term decline in the demand for inputs of labor caused by automation', a decline in total hours of labour across the whole economy, that is, not just to produce particular commodities. In other words, the demand for labour-time won't increase through the continued expansion of capitalist production as before; capitalism has reached an impasse, which is manifesting itself in rising unemployment, even if partly hidden by David Graeber's 'bull-shit jobs,' and in a lack of profitable outlets which means that capitalism is in a state of permanent 'overaccumulation' ('when so much capital accumulates in a capitalist economy that there are few possible outlets for profitable investment').

Are we really there?

Is this correct? Is capitalism approaching the end-point in Marx's thought experiment? No, as productivity is nowhere near as high as Marx posited. An appreciable amount of labour-time still has to be spent to produce most goods. Reynolds does not seem to believe it either as he doesn't see capitalism being immediately replaced by communism but by something he calls 'socialism' (defined as 'a socioeconomic system where the means of production are owned by, controlled by and operated for the benefit of the working class'). Under this, commodity production (production for sale) and value measured by labour-time will continue, but organised by workers' cooperatives. As he admits:

"The form of socialism outlined previously is still built on labor, with the workers instead of capitalists reaping its fruits. It still requires forms of money, coercive taxation and meaningful scarcity to function' (pp. 248-9).

The transition to Marx's theoretical end-point of capitalism is to take place under this 'socialism':

'Ultimately, labor-time will be reduced to zero. The means of production will be commonly held, work will be purely voluntary, and goods and services will be provided free for all

who need them' (pp.251-2, emphasis added).

The trouble is he doesn't say how long this is to take. It could in fact take longer than by the end of this century for productivity to rise so high that the labour-time cost of goods falls to zero, even sometime in the 22nd century. So, all he is saying will happen this century is that capitalism (as we know it) will collapse and be replaced by his 'socialism' which is in reality the sort of 'market anarchism' advocated by Marx's contemporary and rival Proudhon, an unnecessary and ultimately futile attempt to create a commodity-producing economy without profits or capital accumulation.

Already developed enough

In any event, it is not necessary for production to be 'fully automated' for a communist (or socialist, in its proper sense) society to be feasible. For this, what is required is that the means of wealth production should be owned in common and production geared to meeting people's needs directly instead of as now for sale on a market. True, it does require the forces of production to be able to turn out plenty to adequately feed, clothe and shelter every man, woman and child on Earth, a point reached years ago.

Despite not being 'fully automated', such a society would not produce wealth as value. As Marx put it:

'Within the co-operative society based on common ownership of the means of production, the producers do not exchange their products; just as little does the labour employed on the products appear here as the *value* of these products, as a material quality possessed by them...' (*Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 1875, his emphasis).

Marx wrote this with reference to an early stage of communist society when the productive forces were not yet sufficient, as they wouldn't have been in his day, to go over to full free access based on the principle of 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their need'. In other words, he for one did not think that a communist society would not be possible until the end-point in his thought experiment had been reached. What disappears in a communist society is not work, but value-producing work, or 'labour' (Reynolds in fact brings out well this distinction between 'work' and 'labour').

People will still need to work in a communist society, only this won't produce 'value' as the products would not be being produced for sale and so would not have an exchange-value. Such work will simply be producing use values as useful things and services.

What is encouraging about books such as Reynolds' is that they represent a return to discussing a society without production for sale, measurement by labour time, and value, as a practical possibility opened up by the continuing development and application of science and technology to production.

ADAM BUICK



In pre-capitalist 'traditional societies' reciprocal transactions tended to take the form of gift exchanges. But a gift exchange is not at all the same as a market exchange. It is driven by a totally different kind of dynamic.

Christopher Gregory in his *Gifts and Commodities* (1982) draws on Marx's insights to pinpoint the difference:

'Marx was able to develop a very important proposition: that *commodity-exchange* is an exchange of alienable things between transactors who are in a state of reciprocal independence [...]. The corollary of this is that *non-commodity (gift) exchange* is an exchange of inalienable things between transactors who are in a state of reciprocal dependence. This proposition is only implicit in Marx's analysis but it is [...] a precise definition of gift exchange.'

In a market economy, the buyer and seller confront each other as two separate individuals having diametrically opposed interests as far as the price of the commodity being sold is concerned. They haggle over it and, once a deal has been struck and a price agreed (which will tend to fall somewhere in between what both would have respectively wanted), they go their separate ways.

Rather than some 'natural propensity' to engage in self-interested economic behaviour giving rise to a market economy, it was the very growth of a market economy that gave rise to this concept of self-interested economic behaviour. The absurdly unrealistic depiction of human beings as '*homo economicus*' who only act to maximise what they individually gain from any transaction is the cornerstone dogma of modern economic theory. It springs from an essentially individualistic worldview (implied in the very concept of 'self-interest') which was largely bound up with the development of a market economy itself.

Where market transactions tend to atomise and separate individuals, gift transactions move in a quite opposite direction – to cement and solidify social relationships between people by binding them together in a whole host of open-ended and continuing rights and obligations (called 'total prestations' in the literature) of which the exchange of material goods plays a more symbolic role. Moreover, the ongoing nature of these rights and obligations is quite different from a market transaction. Once the buyer has bought a commodity from a seller, their relationship to the latter, in theory, ceases forthwith. This is not so in the case of a gift transaction.

In his seminal essay *The Gift*, written in 1925, Marcel Mauss refers to the quasi-mystical explanation for the existence of gift transactions offered by a Maori sage called Tamati Ranapiri. The spirit of the giver called the 'hau', suggested Ranapiri, resides in the gift itself. Though the gift may pass through many hands it always seeks to return to its original source. An example of this was 'Kula ring' described by Malinowski in his *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922). This curious social phenomenon involved the circulation of two sets of ceremonial items – shell necklaces and armbands – each going in opposite directions around a group of far-flung island communities in the Western Pacific, via the mechanism of gift exchange.

Here too we witness behaviour driven by a belief that the 'spirit' of the giver must return to its source. For instance, it would be considered deeply offensive to hang on to a particular item, thereby disrupting the circulation of goods, let alone to haggle over it as one might with an object of commerce. Of course, we don't need to interpret this belief that the 'spirit' of the giver is entangled in the gift itself, too literally. It is really about the entanglement of communities

GIFTS VERUS

with each other. As such, it is better understood as a metaphor or 'motivating myth', fostering a sense of inter-communal solidarity.

Nevertheless, the inalienable character of the gifts being exchanged brings out a core difference between 'gift economies' and capitalist market economies where, in the latter case, we find that the producers – the workers – are permanently alienated or separated from their products. The 'spirit' of the workers is completely expunged from the product of their labour by the capitalists who assume complete ownership of it.

Another difference is that, contrary to explanations offered by the market apologists, not only did gift transactions predate market exchanges but they also involved voluntary contractual relations, not between individuals as such, but social groups. In other words between, '*clans, tribes and families*' as Mauss put it. This runs completely counter to individualistic explanations for the origins of exchange. However, according to David Graeber:

'Over time, Mauss argued, reciprocity can also take on a more competitive cast as assertive individuals - first acting as representatives of clans or other social groups, later in their own capacity (Parry 1986) – end up vying to see which can outgive the other' (*Towards an Anthropological Theory of Value*, 2001 p.160).

This is illustrated by the famous potlatch ceremonies carried on amongst the Kwakiutl people on the Northwest Coast of North America.

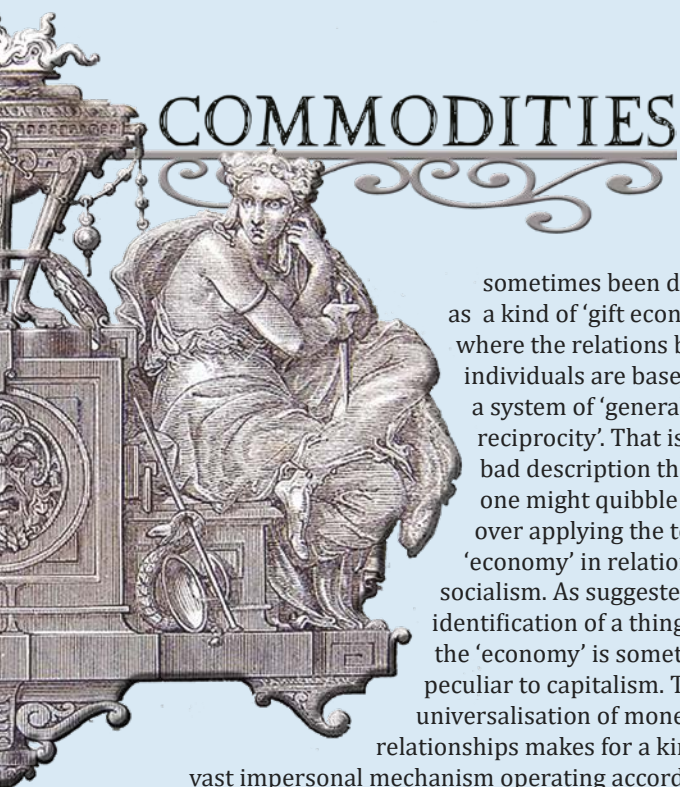
This was no longer strictly a 'gift economy', more a competition over status which became an enshrined principle of 'aristocratic societies' predating capitalism. Some commentators distinguish between this and the modern capitalist notions of status in that while the latter is based on the conspicuous accumulation and consumption of wealth, the former involves the periodic giving away of wealth. If so, the difference is one of degree rather than kind; in capitalism too we find wealth being conspicuously given away in the guise of 'philanthropy'.

The point about competitive gift giving is that it can serve as a means to acquire prestige and hence power within a kind of patron-client set up more typical of pre-capitalist societies. Through it the client becomes indebted and subservient to the patron. This is what facilitates the direct appropriation by a ruling class of an economic surplus from its subjects in a society like feudalism rather than indirectly through the economic mechanism of 'free' waged employment under capitalism.

A socialist gift economy?

What of the alternative to capitalism? Socialism has





COMMODITIES

sometimes been described as a kind of 'gift economy' where the relations between individuals are based on a system of 'generalised reciprocity'. That is not a bad description though one might quibble over applying the term 'economy' in relation to socialism. As suggested, the identification of a thing called the 'economy' is something peculiar to capitalism. The universalisation of money-based relationships makes for a kind of

vast impersonal mechanism operating according to its own laws and 'behind the backs of the producers', as Marx put it. Alienation, the separation of the producer from their product, seems implicit in the very conception of this thing we call 'the economy'. Socialism might be better described as a way of life than an economy.

According to the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, there are three basic forms of 'reciprocal exchange'.

Firstly there is 'balanced reciprocity' where there is expectation of an immediate return on what is being offered for exchange. This is the norm under capitalism. We can take an item off a supermarket shelf and walk off with it but only on condition that we exchange cash for it at the cash till.

Then there is 'negative reciprocity'. As the term itself suggests this involves the use of coercion by one party to a transaction to impose disagreeable terms or conditions on the other. The high prices charged by a monopoly which customers have to accept is one example of this. Another is the generalised system of wage labour intrinsic to capitalism itself. This arose partly out of the coercive dispossession of the majority of their limited means of wealth production, forcing them to depend on wage labour in a process called 'primitive accumulation' which is still going on today in the form of land grabs in places like Africa.

Finally, there is 'generalised reciprocity'. Here there is no expectation of an immediate return at all. Nor is there even an expectation that the person making the return should be the same person to whom the gift in question was first offered. As in the case of the Kula ring, the good can pass through many hands. There are many other examples of generalised reciprocity in both preindustrial and capitalist societies.

The tradition of extending hospitality to strangers in Bedouin and other preindustrial cultures is a form of generalised reciprocity. In modern day capitalism, the internet has often been cited as a working example of a gift economy in practice. Individuals voluntarily, and without thought of payment of any kind, contribute time and effort to the stupendous storehouse of information available to everyone that is the internet. As Genevieve Vaughan notes:

'Actually the market is limited and floating on a sea of gifts. Profit itself is a gift as it comes from the part of the labor of

workers which is not covered by the salary, their so-called 'surplus labor'. But there are also the gifts of housework and of nature which are exploited by the market, which does not have to pay for the reproduction of the workers or the clean-up of pollution. As someone said in the recent movie on the internet gift economy, *Us Now*, the kind of capitalism we are living in has only really been so extreme during the last century' (gift-economy.com/theory-and-practice-of-the-gift-economy).

These kinds of extant non-market relations might be said to validate and further strengthen the case for a completely non-market socialist future which, in a sense, they prefigure. What they highlight is precisely what the ideology of the market seeks to conceal – our mutual interdependence.

Recall Gregory's thoughts on Marx's insights into the nature of commodity-exchange as being an 'exchange of alienable things between transactors who are in a state of reciprocal independence'. This idea of 'reciprocal independence' is a logical extension of the dogma that the market economy is a purely voluntary and non-coercive institution. To be independent is to be 'free'.

But the idea flies in the face of reality and fails to see the wood for the trees – the larger patterns of social interconnections that bind us all. The great majority of us, possessing little or no capital, are economically obliged to sell our working abilities to the tiny minority who own this capital. There is nothing voluntary about this; it is a brutal coercive structural fact arising from the class nature of capitalism itself.

Though capitalist ideology can hardly suppress the empirical fact of our practical dependence upon each other as human beings, what it does is to fall back on a second line of defence, as it were, taking this concept of practical dependency and twisting it into something else. Instead of being universally reciprocal it is presented as being something partial and one-sided: the workers are said to depend on the capitalists. The dependence of the capitalists upon the workers is thus ideologically erased by a sleight of hand.

The essence of the gift relationship is the sense of moral obligation it confers upon the recipient of the gift to give something back in return. In capitalism, it is used to entrench the existing social order by inducing a contrived sense of dependency of one class upon the other. Notwithstanding a market ideology emphasising the 'reciprocal independence' of buyer and seller, capitalism needs to create some sense of community in which individuals are bound together by bonds of moral obligation.

Socialism too will need to do this as must any kind of functioning society. However, the manner in which socialism will do so will be quite different. The very term itself – 'socialism' – springs from the recognition of the completely socialised nature of modern production. There is literally nothing that is produced today that does not involve, directly or indirectly, the input of millions of workers right across the world. Socialism is about bringing ownership of the means of producing wealth into line with the character of modern production.

The recognition that we necessarily depend upon each other will translate into a generalised sense of obligation to contribute to the good of others, as well as ourselves in a society fundamentally based on the principle of generalised reciprocity.

ROBIN COX

'Marihuana is... a violent narcotic - an unspeakable scourge - The Real Public Enemy Number One! Its first effect is sudden, violent, uncontrollable laughter; then come dangerous hallucinations... fixed ideas come next, conjuring up monstrous extravagances - followed by emotional disturbances, the total inability to direct thoughts, the loss of all power to resist physical emotions... leading finally to acts of shocking violence... ending often in incurable insanity. Something must be done to wipe out this ghastly menace...'
(Opening foreword to the 1936 film *Reefer Madness*).

Now that the prohibition against cannabis has been officially overturned in Canada and Uruguay and the smart money predicts a domino-like cascade as other governments follow suit, hindsight will draw its own conclusions about this whole bizarre era. Historians may well look back at the epoch of cannabis prohibition and conclude that there really was a kind of reefer madness going on, only it wasn't the pot smokers who were suffering from it.

Marxist theorists, unlike conspiracy theorists, do recognise that things happen by accident. Not everything has an intention and purpose, and while capitalism has its own internal logic, the human participants in it sometimes ignore that logic and instead follow the volatile whims of cultural prejudice and supposed moral imperative. When you take a walk past the history of drugs prohibition, you smell a powerful whiff of paternalism, racism and class condescension.

Cannabis through history

Cannabis was familiar to ancient societies from Scythia and Assyria to Greece and Rome, but almost forgotten in the West until reintroduced via the good offices of the nineteenth-century East India Company, that paragon of capitalism whose enforced China opium trade on behalf of the British government is too well known to revisit here. Cannabis became popular among upper-class bohemian types on private incomes, but like cocaine and opium it was expensive and hard to get, and thus there was no move to ban it. Indeed the Victorians were avid fans of unregulated free markets, so that cocaine and opium were being enthusiastically shoved into everything from ladies' tonics to baby teething ointments.

But it was another matter when the workers started getting hold of cannabis. Then it was a case of moral panic. For, as everyone knew, the 'worker' was little better than a beast and everything must be done to avoid arousing their basest urges, lest they fall into unchristian vileness (eg. murder each other or, more to the point, fail to turn up for work).

There is a long history of attempts to prohibit everything poor people might enjoy. Easily persuaded of their own moral, cultural and genetic superiority, the European ruling classes for centuries have had a condescending and paternalistic attitude to the labouring classes. For some reason that was obvious to them but never explained to anyone else, the same self-indulgence which made them the cultured and refined jewels of polite society would turn workers into stampeding swine if they ever got their hands on it.



Thus the anti-gin campaigns against 'Mother's Ruin' in the eighteenth-century. Music and dancing had earlier been banned by the Puritans. And it wasn't just drugs and rock 'n' roll. Sex too (known as 'lewdness') was considered a corrupting influence, so that the erotic artwork excavated from Pompeii was kept in a 'secret museum' in Naples to which only 'gentlemen' had access (this exhibition only became permanently open to the public in 2000, albeit still age-restricted).

What made cannabis even worse was that it was seen as a 'black' drug. Coming from the colonies, it became associated in Britain with Asian sailors and black denizens of the demi-monde including actors and prostitutes, and later in the USA with Mexicans who started bringing it across the border. The mix of class condescension and white racism made for a poisonous cocktail.

So it was that Britain started banning cannabis in its colonies from the 1840s onwards, and the process of creeping prohibition spread. It was one thing to sponsor an opium trade in China, after all, but quite another to have stoned workers in one's own factories.

The First World War saw a further moral panic (largely imagined) about drugs in the trenches. This led to a British ban on opium, cocaine and cannabis in 1916, and propaganda-fuelled legislation followed in the 1920s. The post-war mood became more hard-line. Temperance had long been in the air, and wartime propaganda had portrayed the Germans as boozy-beer-barrels-on-legs. Now the opprobrium extended to other drugs. The Versailles treaty stipulated, among other things, a considerable reduction in Britain's continued involvement in the international opium trade.

The rest was laziness. It was easier to blame drugs for social ills rather than look at the social ills themselves. Thus drugs came to be seen as everything that was wrong with society and especially with its disaffected youth. The transcendental evil of illegal narcotics was dinned into the public consciousness by increasingly hysterical propaganda, including the preposterous (and later cult) cinema classics *Reefer Madness* (1936) and *Assassin of Youth* (1937).

The absurdity was that, at that time, hardly anyone could get hold of these drugs anyway. But globalisation changed all that with a tidal wave of cheap product which provided a get-rich-

quick scheme for the enterprising poor as well as fuelling an unprecedented addiction epidemic. Governments were slow to realise the extent of the underground drugs trade, and when they did they simply followed established procedure and enacted ever-more draconian criminal legislation. Arrests and prison sentences rocketed by orders of magnitude, but this only served to push up prices and make the mafia syndicates and cartels ever more powerful. The world sleepwalked into drug prohibition, and woke up to an organised crime economy that today is bigger than Google or Microsoft.

A revolutionary socialist who wants to overthrow capitalism is not interested in advocating reforms within capitalism, or even expressing preferences about how capitalism 'ought' to be run. But it is merely stating the obvious to say that banning drugs, particularly popular ones like cannabis, has been a huge mistake. And it's a mistake that's cost the lives of countless thousands. The average life expectancy in Mexico has actually lowered due to the sheer number of drug-related murders (*New Scientist*, 9 April 2016).

A slice of the pie

If the end is really in sight, there's no great mystery why. What capitalist investor doesn't want to get a piece of a half-trillion dollar pie? When money talks, lawyers listen. For governments too the logic is irresistible. In the UK alone the potential tax revenue is estimated at £1bn a year. And there are savings too. It costs almost £40,000 per year to incarcerate a prisoner in the UK, and prisons are overcrowded. Locking up people for smoking weed – a victimless crime, after all – is simply throwing money away. That's why around 50 percent of UK police authorities have given up prosecuting anyone for possession, and Durham Constabulary has taken the adventurous step of permitting 'official' local home-grower clubs, provided the weed is for personal use only (BBC documentary 'Is it time to legalise weed?', July 2017).

Though now past its use-by date, the UK anti-weed propaganda machine grinds on ('Father tries to murder baby son, judge blames cannabis', *BBC News*, 8 November). UK politicians continue to fear the legalisation argument is a vote-loser. After a century of brainwashing against lifestyle drugs, the volte-face is still considered too hard a sell. And there are other problems. There's no logic for legalising cannabis that

doesn't also apply to every other illegal drug. Most of them are cheap to make, and none of them are as dangerous as alcohol or tobacco. Furthermore, legalising weed alone may turn out to be a disastrous half-measure, like a farmer destroying one crop pest only to make room for another. If the bottom drops out of the weed market, UK growers on £7k a month won't be resorting to welfare cheques. Instead they'll be looking to start shifting other drugs in bulk.

From a socialist point of view, capitalism is a social system owned and ruled by the wealthy through their various puppet governments, with precious little real democracy and even less informed debate. Sure it's unfair, but it's also inefficient, incompetent and unresponsive. It's as if the social train is empty because everybody apart from the guy in First Class has been made to get out in the snow and push. It's not hard to see how mistakes are made, or why they take so long to correct, when only the prejudices of the rich elite are taken into account. If and when cannabis is legalised, it's the corporations and investors who will be partying. Your daily life as an exploited worker is not going to change a whole heap just because you can walk down the street smoking a legal spliff.

But there is a question for socialists, nonetheless. To be clear, socialism is a global system of democratic participation, common ownership and production for use, where property exchange and money will not exist. Think of it as a global volunteer collective. Whatever is done, is done free, and whatever is available, is freely available. Some people imagine this means having no restrictions of any kind. But you can easily see why this is wrong. People in socialism are not going to want stoned airline pilots or eye surgeons, or young children feasting on cocaine or heroin either. In practice some forms of restriction must surely be put in place, even in a society with more freedom than any in history. What these are and how they are implemented is a matter for discussion in socialism. It's possible that, like that other opium of the people, religion, there may be a declining interest in psychoactive drugs when daily reality is no longer the heavy oppressive experience that capitalism offers. It may be that nobody will choose to spend their time making these drugs, given that there will be no 'market' for them anyway. But it seems unlikely that drugs will go out of style, given that they

have been around since humans first learned how to knock two flints together. There's no denying it, drugs can be fun, and that will be true in socialism too. This is just one of the issues a democratic society will have to deal with. But what it won't do, and can't do because nobody will have the right or the authority to do it, is ban them from the face of the Earth.

PADDY SHANNON

(This article first appeared in *Poliquads Magazine*: <https://www.poliquads.com>)

British Iron vs. Chinese Wood during the Opium Wars





Becoming a Trotskyist is an option often considered by those young people wishing to develop an interest in becoming 'political'. Other options do however exist. For those who have a loathing of their fellow human and a deep uninterest in anything other than their own personal advancement, the Young Conservatives may be the appropriate choice. However, if your interests lie more towards activities such as table tennis and playing Dungeons and Dragons the Young Liberal Democrats may be the outfit for you.

One of the advantages of choosing the Trotskyist option is that you can have all the joy of being a member of a major political party by joining a Trotskyist organisation which is in the Labour Party, or you can enjoy the kudos of being in a different, minor party, but supporting the Labour Party anyway. It's a bit like trying to be cool and saying you support Luton Town, but then cheering and whooping every time Chelsea win the league.

A word of warning for you. Although it may seem that becoming a Trotskyist is the ideal way for a socially incompetent individual to suddenly develop a windswept and interesting persona, generally speaking most people will still think you're a bit of a twat.

So many choices

So then which Trotskyist group to join? Well there is no doubt that this is an area where Trotskyism really excels. Trotskyism certainly has the Adam Smith Institute Award when it comes to the issue of choice. You may want to join one of the bigger Trotskyist groupings, for instance the old perennial the SWP, or if you don't have enough UCAS points to join what's left of the SWP you could go slightly down market and join one half of what used to be the Militant Tendency, the Socialist Party of England and Wales (commonly known, quite appropriately as SPEW). For those with more outlandish tastes there are groups such as the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International (which has very few builders in its ranks) or perhaps the Socialist Appeal group (which doesn't seem to appeal to many people). Sadly the option of joining the Socialist Solidarity Group is no longer available, as it appears there was a lack of solidarity.

One thing to make note of is that in every Trotskyist group there is one bloke who is wearing John Lennon glasses, has swept-back hair and a goatee. But please remember the unwritten rule that there can only be one Trotsky lookalike in each Trotskyist group. Also note that if you say to the Trotsky lookalike 'you look just like Trotsky', in an act of faux modesty the lookalike will of course say 'who, me? I never realised' and then walk away as happy as a dog with a tin dick.

Another option is to 'grow your own'. This may appeal to

those with a more environmentally friendly disposition as it allows you to recycle the names of previous Trotskyist sects (and there are loads to choose from) and recycle old ideas from those sects. This option also has the additional bonus of allowing you to be the leader, which means you can claim to be the leading edge of the vanguard of the working class, and you can begin collecting your own small group of devotees who will admire you and if you're lucky elevate you to guru-like status.

This brings us neatly to the idea of internal party democracy within Trotskyist groups. The short answer is that there isn't any. A phrase you will hear very early on in your

quest to become a Trotskyist is 'Democratic Centralism', but don't be fooled by the title, it is democratic in the same way that the Isle of Dogs is an island, i.e. it isn't.

The late, great Brian Clough once said that if he had a disagreement with a player, they would sit down, talk it through thoroughly, look at both sides of the argument and then agree that Clough was right all along. Democratic Centralism works exactly the same way, with the membership taking the role of the player and the Central Committee taking the role of Brian Clough (minus the charisma).

Be an activist

As a young recruit to the ranks of Trotskyism don't think that your life will now all be beer and skittles. One thing that Trotskyists admire above all other things is activism, to be part of the struggle one has to be active. It doesn't really matter what the activity is, it doesn't matter whether it is useful or not, it shows that you are part of the class struggle (as if you had any choice!). One of the activities that must be undertaken is 'selling the paper'. All Trotskyist groups have a paper, usually with a very striking title and a big red banner top. The paper will have lots of angry headlines stating things like 'we demand', 'we show solidarity with' or 'stand up against' and of course the inevitable appeal for donations to the fighting fund. However quite what is done with the fund or who it is actually fighting is never explained.

Alongside 'the paper' Trotskyist organisations usually have a 'theoretical journal'. As a callow recruit to this new world you will probably get the latest copy of the theoretical journal and try and plough your way through it. This may lead you to worry that you cannot read an article all of the way to the end and that the sheer repetitive tedium causes your whole being to begin to fracture, your mind to want to strangle you for putting you through this torment in the first place and that your bowels start to loosen at the thought of reading any more. Don't worry that you cannot finish reading one of these articles; the truth is no one ever has. The theoretical journal is not there to examine intricacies of economic or political theory; no, these journals exist to boost the fragile egos of the authors, who are usually described as 'leading comrades'. These articles will also act as the basis of lecture notes when these 'leading comrades' take up their future careers as part-time lecturers in sociology at the University of Mid-Wankthwaishire (formerly Wankthwaite Polytechnic), where, ironically no one will ever read them either.

Activities are collected by Trotskyist groups in much the way that boy scouts collect badges. It is a kind of bizarre left-wing virtue signalling. Activity that you may well take part in usually involves 'supporting workers in struggle'. What this means in practice is that your group of Trotskyists turns up

uninvited at some local strike or protest group, to be greeted by the sounds of workers welcoming you with words like 'oh fuck, here they come again' or 'shite, pretend you haven't seen them'. You can then spend the next hour or two patronising your hosts by explaining your 'superior knowledge' of their struggle, attempt to extract as much money from them as possible for your fighting fund, and generally get on everyone's tits before fucking off to the pub half-way through the protest.

Another type of activity you will probably be involved in is the rally. This is a chance for you to vent your anger and vitriol at all things and everyone, with chants and heckles galore. Although you may be protesting or angry at the symptoms of capitalism, it is important you don't lose sight of the main focus of your overwhelming hatred and anger, other Trotskyist groups. Because of the schisms and splits that are a regular occurrence in Trotskyist groups most of the Trotskyists at any rally will have at some time or another been in the same party as each other. The rally therefore becomes a bit like a family funeral, in that there are lots of people who used to be in relationships but who now deeply despise each other. For the new recruit to Trotskyism this can be a bit of a social minefield. End up talking to the wrong person and you can be ostracised by your own group for evermore.

Another interesting point about rallies is that this is the only time when the unwritten rule of Trotskyism can be broken. At rallies it is possible for two or more Trotsky lookalikes to be in the same place at the same time. However be warned it is not a good idea to gather all of the Trotsky lookalikes together and take a selfie with them. It might seem funny, but Trotskyism is no laughing matter.

World domination

Let us now turn to the international dimension. In 1938 it was decided by Trotsky and his followers that the way forward was to bring together Trotskyists of all nations to form an international organisation uniting all Trotskyists in a spirit of harmony, cooperation and fraternity, recognising the need to move away from the localised splits and schisms of Trotskyism that had occurred at national level. As a result of that great step forward in harmony, cooperation and fraternity, the last 80 years have offered Trotskyists the opportunity to fall out with each other on an international scale, giving you the same degree of choice at an international level that you have experienced at the national level. As this is a guide, it might be useful to outline some of these 'internationals'. At the last check the list of 'Fourth Internationals' is as follows:

Committee for a Workers' International (CWI)
Coordinating Committee for the Refoundation of the Fourth International (CRFI)
United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI)
Fourth International (ICR), also called FI (La Verité) or FI (International Secretariat)
International Bolshevik Tendency
International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI)
International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) (ICL-FI), previously the International Spartacist Tendency
International Marxist Tendency (IMT), previously the Committee for a Marxist International
International Socialist Tendency (IST)
Internationalist Communist Union (ICU)
International Workers League – Fourth International (IWL-FI)
International Workers' Unity – Fourth International (IWU-FI)
League for the Fourth International (LFI) [split from (ICL-FI)]
Revolutionary Communist International Tendency
Trotskyist Fraction – Fourth International (TF-FI)

Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International (WIRFI)

And if you fancy being a little bit avant-garde there is also **The League for the Fifth International (L5I)**

Do bear in mind however that by the time you have finished reading this there will probably be a few more. Therefore when you join a Trotskyist movement, it is important to check regularly which international they are part of this week, as it can cause embarrassment if you think you're in the wrong international and end up talking to the wrong people.

Having a bit of a swagger when talking about the Trotskyist grouping you belong to is also vital to your image as a Trotskyist. Back in the day members of Trotskyist groupings often claimed to be affiliated to a party in some far-flung corner of the globe which was a 'mass party'. This 'party' was usually in places such as Bolivia or Tanzania, etc. Nowadays, with the advent of the internet, bullshit such as this is easier to sniff out. Therefore being a little circumspect with your claims of mass influence for your grouping is the strategy to adopt. A popular approach to this problem amongst Trotskyists is to make the claim about being part of a mass party, but then state that it is not possible to divulge any further information, so as not to endanger comrades in your affiliate party. This not only adds kudos to your one-man-and-a-dog party, but also adds to the sense of paranoia so vital to the Trotskyist experience.

By this point in the guide you may be thinking to yourself, 'what is the bloody point of all of this Trotskyist nonsense?' This doesn't mean that the issues that made you interested in politics have gone away. You probably still realise that there are huge contradictions between how the world is and how it could be. You're probably genuinely concerned that war and destruction continues despite all of the peace initiatives put forward by organisations such as the UN. You may still find it unbelievable that many people in the world are starving when food is being destroyed and ploughed into the ground and that it is beyond belief that in Britain in the twenty-first century millions of people are relying on food banks. You might start thinking wouldn't it be better to have an open and genuinely democratic approach to politics, one without leaders or led, without posers and factions and schisms? You might then start to look at the socialist case, put forward by the Socialist Party, the case for a world without guns, borders, leaders, money and markets, the case for a system of common ownership and genuine democratic control. If that is the case, why not join with us and join in the real political struggle, the struggle to win the working class of the world to the ideas of socialism and overthrow this hateful system of capitalism.

T.K.



Two Minutes to Midnight

In the 1980s I was not alone in having recurring nightmares of a nuclear Armageddon which might leave the survivors envying the dead. The Cold War upheld a doctrine of 'mutually assured destruction' (MAD) as a fragile protection against the use of weapons which would kill many millions of people. The government issued a booklet, *Protect And Survive*, giving chilling advice about how to act when the time for nuclear conflict came, and CND responded with 'Protest And Survive'. The film, *When The Wind Blows*, based on Raymond Briggs' book (and featuring music from David Bowie, amongst others) was a moving and powerful satire on the fear we lived with. The women of Greenham Common camped by the RAF base there in protest at its arsenal of nuclear weapons. Some of us voiced the view then, as now, that the terrifying drive toward war was a basic feature of the form of society which exists, and could only be dealt with by changing the basis of society.

That view was almost universally mocked by the pragmatists who prefer piecemeal reform. As a result, here we are, forty years later, and the threats facing humanity are even worse. The Trump administration has withdrawn from the INF (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces) Treaty signed by Reagan and Gorbachev in 1987 to limit nuclear proliferation, opening the possibility of a new arms race and the prospect of the US preparing for war with China. Against this background, Theresa May's Defence Secretary, a hideous caricature of a war-monger in the form of former fireplace salesman Gavin Williamson, declared an intention to send warships to frighten China. Unsurprisingly, days later, China indicated it was pulling out of trade talks with Britain. So much for the Brexiteers' diplomacy in wooing new trading partners to replace Europe.

In February last year, this same Gavin Williamson dined

with Lubov Chernukhin, the wife of a former Putin minister, in exchange for £30,000 to Tory funds. Brexit, says Williamson, 'has brought us to a great moment in our history', when we must be ready to deploy 'hard power' against those who 'flout international law'. In addition he wants to build two British military bases, one in Asia and the other 'in the Caribbean'. They are to 'strengthen our global presence, enhance our lethality and increase our mass'. This little weasel is in the worst tradition of jingoistic speechifying to send innocent millions to their deaths. He wants to 'enhance our lethality'. What a shameful blot on the face of humanity he is.

Talking of lethality, the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* states in its longstanding and highly respected 'Doomsday Clock' report for 2019: 'Humanity now faces two simultaneous existential threats, either of which would be cause for extreme concern and immediate attention. These major threats—nuclear weapons and climate change—were exacerbated this past year by the increased use of information warfare to undermine democracy around the world, amplifying risk from these and other threats and putting the future of civilization in extraordinary danger.' Since 1947 they have calculated the level of risk of nuclear apocalypse, and set a nominal clock each year, on which midnight represents peak danger, and midday would be safety. They now put this clock at two minutes to midnight, the closest it has ever been. The report is written by a panel of the world's most senior and accomplished scientists and analysts across all fields, the height of intelligent expertise, and this is their collective conclusion.

CLIFFORD SLAPPER



WTO rules, ok?

The World Trade Organisation, of which nearly all states are members, regulates trade between them. Its basic rule is the 'Most Favoured Nation' clause which lays down that, if a state grants favourable terms to another state, say, by reducing tariffs on imports from it, it has to apply the same terms to all other WTO member-states. This applies to customs unions as well as states.

Tariffs are a tax on imports which increase the price of the imported product. This 'protects' the home industry producing the same product from competition from cheaper imports. The EU, as a customs union, has to follow WTO rules when it imposes tariffs, as it does to protect agriculture, the car industry and much more. If Britain leaves the EU trading bloc it would have to 'trade on WTO terms' but this is merely stating the obvious; it says nothing about what the trade and tariff policy conforming to these terms is going to be.

Some Brexiteers think Britain should abolish all tariffs. 'Liam Fox, the international trade secretary, wants a

move to zero tariffs in as many areas as possible', while for Jacob Rees-Mogg 'cutting import tariffs would lead to cheaper food, clothes and shoes' (*Times*, 18 February). Tim Martin, owner of the Wetherspoon pub chain, wants to 'abolish all the taxes (tariffs) on non-EU imports, like oranges, rice, coffee, Aussie wines and a total 12,651 products. This will reduce prices in the shops, making for a better-off public' (*Wetherspoon News*, Winter 2018/19).

But would workers be better off if the prices of everyday products fell? This is a claim made by free-traders since the time of Richard Cobden who campaigned successfully to get the Corn Laws repealed in 1846. These had been introduced after the Napoleonic Wars to maintain the high war-time prices of wheat, barley and rye and so protect the rents of landlords whose tenants grew these. Industrial capitalists resented this as the artificially high food prices meant they had to pay more as wages.

Cobden's Anti-Corn Law League sought working class support by claiming that cheaper bread would make them better off. Engels, who had been working in his father's factory in Manchester at the time of the repeal campaign, recalled that its aim had been 'to reduce the price of bread and thereby the money rate of wages' which 'would enable

British manufacturers to defy all and every competition with which wicked or ignorant foreigners threatened them' (*Labour Standard*, 18 June 1881). Challenged by a Cobdenite, he explained why the League's theory that 'dear bread meant low wages and cheap bread high wages' was wrong:

'The average price of a commodity is equal to its cost of production; the action of supply and demand consists in bringing it back to that standard around which it oscillates. If this be true of all commodities, it is true also of the commodity Labour (or more strictly speaking, Labour-force). Then the rate of wages is determined by the price of those commodities which enter into the habitual and necessary consumption of the labourer. In other words, all other things remaining unchanged, wages rise and fall with the price of the necessities of life.'

So, insofar as abolishing or reducing tariffs on items of popular consumption reduced the cost of living this would exert a downward pressure on wages. Fox, Rees-Mogg, Tim Martin and other modern-day Cobdenites are wrong when they claim that the end result of cheaper food, clothes, shoes, oranges, rice, coffee and Aussie wine would be that we would have more to spend.

Alice Through The Looking Glass

Alice's first morning involves joining in with the family's exercise routine, then sitting with Sen as he posts online criticisms of Winnie Mandela, signing off with 'warmest regards'. Next, Alice goes for a walk with his wife Natasha, and they chat about her belief that only non-white men commit rapes. Later in the week, Sen takes Alice to Southport town centre for a meeting of other far-right activists, which he says will be 'good fun'. They're a bunch of embittered middle aged men who claim they're not racists because Sen's 'foreign'. They're involved in 'guerrilla warfare', which includes writing 'Labour paedophiles' on a roadsign and making placards with snappy slogans like 'Protect our kids by banning Islamic and rainbow

Sen was a member of UKIP and stood as their candidate for West Lancashire in the 2015 general election. Just before polling day he was expelled from the party for tweeting that the Labour candidate, who was Jewish, would 'send the £ to Poland / Israel', although his profile on Amazon

Sen's background isn't one which we might expect a fervent nationalist and racist to have. Born in Britain to a half-Indian and half-South African father and English mother, he spent his late childhood in America before returning to Britain and marrying a Ukrainian. His cosmopolitan upbringing didn't make him

websites. He's got more exposure through *Sleeping With The Far Right*, of course, although its insights into his repellent mindset presumably wasn't the kind of publicity he wanted.

states that he left because of ‘his honesty, and attempting to broach the subjects of indigenous displacement in Britain and British cultural suicide’. He was later quoted as saying that UKIP was ‘in the pockets of Jewish special interest groups’. After joining and leaving the BNP (who aren’t right-wing enough for him), he went on to set up the fortunately insignificant British Resistance Party and the British



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Greek lesson



A Happy Future Is A Thing Of The Past: the Greek crisis and other disasters. Pavlos Roufos. Reaktion Books.

The mordant title of this book encapsulates the outcome of the collapse of the Greek economy, and the ultimate defeat of the popular protests against the austerity drive forced through by successive governments and driven by the international institutions of the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the ECB (European Central Bank).

It begins with an account of the development of the Greek economy, unpicking the ideological image created during the crisis of a corrupt state where no-one pays taxes and the government lies to fund a generous welfare state at the expense of industrious North Europeans.

It traces the history of the Greek economy back to the ruins of World War II. By Roufos's account, the Greek state had collapsed after its collaboration with the Nazi occupation. This led to a civil war which lasted until 1949, with a right-wing victory supported militarily and financially by the British state. This left a repressive regime, intent on suppressing the left, in charge of reconstruction funds from the US. The key point is that this repression led to a large informal economy, where people relied on family structures to off-set wages that were being held down. 'Wages were seen as a cost, and not an investment,' Roufos notes, and a fully developed labour market did not emerge.

This repression eventually led to the dictatorship of the Greek Colonels, as workers began to resist their poverty. The Greek economy continued to be a low wage economy, dominated by exports. For this reason, Greece was keen to join the European Union at its inception. Greece was thus caught up in the tides of the world economy, battered by storms

such as the end of the Bretton Woods agreement. Particularly, Roufos notes that private capital often had little incentive to invest in developing Greek industry. Further, he notes that the German economy had a vested interest in drawing Greece and Italy into the Euro to prevent competitive devaluations.

The culmination of this was that Greece tended to be dependent on EU development funds, and cheap credit. Politicians mediating the needs of capital responded by holding down wages and cutting corporate taxes whilst also reducing controls on borrowing and financial movements. The seeds of the narrative of Greeks 'living beyond their means' (a statistically disprovable lie) were sown at this time.

When the Great Crash of 2008 came, Greece bore the brunt, and its over-extended banks went bankrupt, threatening the investments of German and French banks. Greece's economy went into freefall, and the Government was required by the rules of the EU and the European Central Bank to take drastic measures to rein in its budgets: the narrative of the bloated public sector workers' salaries and pensions was trumpeted to aid this cause. Roufos notes how this was also used as an opportunity to further liberalise the Greek economy.

Swingeing public spending cuts were put in place, leading to widespread protests and general strikes – most famously at Syntagma Square where the Greek arm of the Occupy movement fought running battles with riot police who knew only violence as a way to preserve the dominant order. Roufos discusses how the Syntagma movement sought to remain a leaderless open movement, refusing interference by organised leftists (even banning flags from the square). He also notes, however, the devolution of the movement into a series of monologues as the voices in the square talked on and on. The only positive he sees, indeed, is in the violence against the police, as the formal movement turned into practical opposition to state attempts to crush it. The text discusses how the organised left and unions seek and fail to mediate the conflict between workers and capitalists.

This is an important point: the fall in living standards experienced in Greece is dramatic, and anyone who has ever expected a crisis to turn into a revolution would surely expect this level of collapse to lead to revolution. Instead there is a series of disappointments. Disappointment in existing state institutions. Disappointment in protest. Disappointment in strikes, and ultimately,

the disappointment of the radical election of Syriza, the leftist party now in power. As Roufos notes, each disappointment contributes to the sense that there is no alternative.

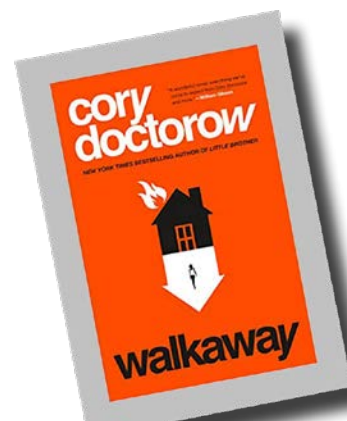
Syriza came to power promising to mitigate and reverse austerity (as the author notes, the small print was if their debt restructuring demands were accepted by the IMF/ECB). Yanis Varoufakis is criticised for taking the logic of the academic seminar room into the world of international power politics, and expecting a rational response. The end result of Syriza's attempt to negotiate, despite the Greek population's resounding 'Ochi', was the final hammer blow to any resistance. Syriza became a party of austerity and capitalist orthodoxy, eventually to be praised for guiding Greece through internal devaluation and out of special measures.

Finally, the book ends on a dismal note: there was no emergence of a sense of international working class solidarity. Indeed, the dominant leftist response is similar to the national restructuring of that of the Corbyn movement, retrenching behind national barriers. Greece has been left where it was in the world economy, after over a decade of suffering.

This tract is worth reading and digesting because the Greek lesson must be learnt.

PS

Steps to a New World



Cory Doctorow: Walkaway: a Novel. Head of Zeus £8.99.

In the not-too-distant future, a form of 3D printing has made post-scarcity possible, so plenty of goods can be produced with very little labour. Some workers are still needed (police, for instance), and there is a small class of super-rich, referred to

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as zottas, the 0.001 percent. But many people, who the money economy has no use for, choose to walk away and live their own lives, adopting a gift economy based on people contributing what they can ('Everything freely given, nothing sought in return').

There are many nice touches. The opening scene is set in a 'Communist party', at which there is free beer. Money is described as the problem, something which 'only works if there isn't enough to go around', and economists are likened to astrologers. The whole walkaway set-up is based on co-operation, with people pitching in where possible. Even asking someone if you can help means deferring to their authority: 'If you want to work, do something'.

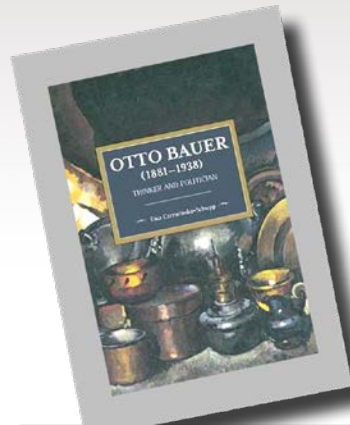
Standard capitalist society is known as 'default', and there is a memorable description of capitalists: a so-called job creator is really 'someone who figures out how to threaten you with starvation unless you do something you don't want to do.' They are naturally not happy with the ideas and reality of the walkaways and, without giving away too much of the plot, make various attempts to undermine and wipe out those who have walked away. These often fail, though, as many of the rent-a-cops brought in to do the dirty work turn out to know at least some of the walkaways and so abandon their weapons. This is on the basis of the theory of six degrees of separation, that we are all connected to each other by a small number of steps.

It may be unavoidable, but much of the dialogue reads like political speeches rather than the way people actually talk to each other. Still, this is a thought-provoking look at a way of life built on rather different principles.

PB



Austrian reformist



Otto Bauer (1881-1938). Thinker and Politician. By Ewa Czerwinska-Schupp. Haymarket Books paperback. 2018. 350 pages.

The inter-world-war European Social Democrats were a stage in the transformation of the pre-WW1 Social Democrat parties, which proclaimed Marxism, to the post-WW2 parties, which openly presented themselves as alternative managers of capitalism. They participated in governments of capitalism while still retaining some knowledge of Marxism.

Otto Bauer, who was the leader of the Austrian Social Democrats after WW1, was in this position. While involved in parliamentary politics and for a short while Austria's Foreign Minister, he continued to write pamphlets and articles with a Marxist flavour. He is mainly known amongst English-speaking critics of capitalism for the polemics against his theory of nationalism in the writings of Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin and Pannekoek. He justified working-class nationalism (and so supported Austria in WW1, though he did practise what he preached and joined the army but ended up spending three years in a Russian prisoner-of-war camp, where he continued to write on Marxism). He was in fact a pan-German nationalist who advocated the incorporation of the German-speaking parts of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire into Germany.

The Austrian Social Democrats controlled Vienna city council and used this to improve the housing conditions of workers there but they never achieved a majority in parliament. The state remained under the control of conservative and reactionary parties and in 1934, egged on by Mussolini, the government sent in the army to suppress the Social Democratic party and its trade unions. Perhaps

surprisingly for Social Democrats, some of its members, against the advice of the party's leaders, tried to defend by force of arms working class districts from the assault. But their rifles and machine guns were no match for the big guns of the army, and they were crushed. Executions, jailings and repression followed.

According to the author, Bauer blamed himself for this tragedy, regretting not having sought a deal with the democratic wing of the Christian Democrats instead of relying on the eventual election of a Social Democrat parliamentary majority. Her book, originally a PhD thesis, provides a comprehensive account of Bauer's life, activities and views.

ALB

New pamphlet



The Magic Money Myth. A Guide to Banking. The Socialist Party. 30 pages.

Since the Crash of 2008, blamed rightly or wrongly on the banks, there has been a renewed interest in how the banking system works, and not just among regulators. At the Occupy Camps that sprung up in 2011 this was a major topic of discussion as those there looked for an alternative to capitalism, at least in its present form. Leaflets circulated reviving money theories of yesteryear and criticising 'fractional reserve banking'. The Green Party too discussed the matter and committed itself on paper to the theory that banks can create money out of thin air. Money theories and denunciations of 'banksters' are all over the internet and get a hearing from those trying to understand why the present economic system doesn't work in the interest of the majority.

Some of these theories are just plain wrong, factually mistaken about what banks do and can do. All assume that

(review continues on page 22)

Russia versus China

The powers of capitalism can never be frank about the reasons for their international conflicts. That is why the official propaganda machines always represent wars as clashes of ideology — clashes between cruelty and mercy, belligerence and amity, or simply between right and wrong.

This applies as much to those states which claim to be socialist as to the rest. The dispute between Russia and China, for example, is represented by both sides as an ideological clash; the Russians say the Chinese are warmongers, the Chinese accuse Russia of betraying a socialist revolution.

During the fighting last month at Damansky Island, in the Ussuri River, both Russia and China accused the other of 'armed provocation'. The Russian protest complained of 'adventuristic policy . . . reckless provocative actions . . .' The Chinese loudspeakers blared out abuse about the 'renegade, revisionist clique' in Moscow.

In fact the fighting started for anything but ideological reasons. The Russian territory around Vladivostok was

annexed under the Tsars in the 19th century. The Bolsheviks swore to return the land but that was one of those vows which were quietly forgotten in the rise of capitalism in Russia.

Since then Russia has poured an immense amount of capital into developing the area's industries and communications. Vladivostok is an important naval base, and Russia's only commercial outlet to the Pacific. And just like any other capitalist class, the rulers of Russia are anxious to protect their investments.

China, however, as a newly rising capitalist power is pressing to re-negotiate the treaties which lay down her frontiers (the reason, also, for the clashes with India in 1962), one of which is marked by the Ussuri. All of this combined to make a delicate and dangerous situation, which is not in any way lessened by the supposed ideological comradeship between the two states.

It is, in fact, a classical dispute between two capitalist powers. Very often these disputes start over something trivial, like a spit of sand in the Ussuri River. But the background is anything but trivial.

(continued from page 21)

banking or monetary reform can improve the position of the majority class of wage and salary workers. But it can't as these problems arise from the capitalist system of minority ownership of the means of life and production for the market and profit rather than to meet people's needs. Monetary reform is a red herring sending in the wrong direction people who are looking for a way out of capitalism. If implemented it would not solve the problems that the majority face as it leaves their cause unchanged.

In this pamphlet we set out, as part of explaining how the capitalist economic system works, to expose factual errors about what banking is and how banks work. There is nothing especially bad about banks compared with other profit-seeking capitalist enterprises. They are merely in a different line of business. Banks are not the cause of the problems that the majority class face. It's capitalism and its production for profit. The way-out is not to reform banks or the monetary system but to abolish capitalism and replace it with a socialist society based on the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production. There would then be production directly to meet people's needs and distribution in accordance with the principle "from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs," and banks and money would be redundant.

Price £4 including postage. Send cheque, made out to "The Socialist Party of Great Britain", to 52 Clapham High St, London SW4 7UN. Or order and pay online at: www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/product/the-magic-money-myth

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 21st 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

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.

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

Meetings:

APRIL 2019

CARDIFF

Every Saturday 1pm to 3pm (weather permitting)

Literature street stall

Queen Street (Newport Road end)

FOLKESTONE

Saturday 20 April from 12.00 Noon

Literature Street Stall

Folkestone Town Hall (junction of Sandgate Road and Guildhall Street, CT20 1DY

(Contact 07973 142701 if there is any difficulty finding the stall on the day)

The Socialist Party is contesting a ward in Folkestone in the local council election on 2 May. Offers of help and further details to the local branch at spgb.krsb@worldsocialism.org or mobile above.

LONDON

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

Annual Conference

Socialist Party's Premises

52 Clapham High Street

London

SW4 7UN

MAY 2019

CARDIFF

Every Saturday 1pm to 3pm (weather permitting)

Literature street stall

Queen Street (Newport Road end)

SALISBURY

Saturday 18 May, 2.00 p.m.

South West Branch has been re-activated and will be meeting on the 3rd Saturday of each month commencing 18 May

Venue: Railway Tavern, 131 South Western Road, Salisbury SP2 7RR.

LONDON

Hammersmith

Saturday 25 May, 2.000 - 4.00 p.m.

Public Debate: "Is the reduction of working time a revolutionary measure?"

Yes: Simon Wigley (Labour Party member)

No: Socialist Party speaker.

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

Nearest tubes: Hammersmith,

Ravenscourt Park.

LOCAL ELECTIONS

Voters in the Harbour ward of Folkestone, Kent will have their fourth opportunity in six years to vote for Socialism, when they go to the polls to re-elect the District Council on 2 May. Previously they have been able to vote for Socialist Party candidates for the UK and European parliaments, the last District poll in 2015 and most recently in 2017, when most of Folkestone was contested by the Party in the county council election. In fact, the 4000+ Harbour ward electors will be able to vote twice for Socialism, as we are also standing for the Town Council in the same ward. Andy Thomas is our candidate for both contests.

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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Trumpland

'Sebastian Gorka, former deputy assistant to President Donald Trump, told attendees at the right-wing CPAC convention on Thursday that nobody should be fooled about the term "democratic socialism," because that's just the politically-correct term for "communism" being used by people that "want to take away your hamburgers." Also your house and your pick-up truck. "This is what Stalin dreamt about but never achieved," Gorka blustered. "You are on the frontlines on the war against communism" ' (commondreams.org, 28 February). According to one of the attendees at the Conservative Political Action Conference, 'the favourite in the Democratic race is Bernie Sanders because the way he makes socialism sound' (theguardian, 1 March). Brandon Morris added 'most citizens don't know how the system works; once I tell them, they see it will fall apart' and that he is against socialism because he sees '...it as a form of slavery. The rich will get richer and the poor will get poorer. Cory Booker and Kamala Harris talk about Medicare for All and that will kill doctors' incentives to work hard. Look at Cuba.'

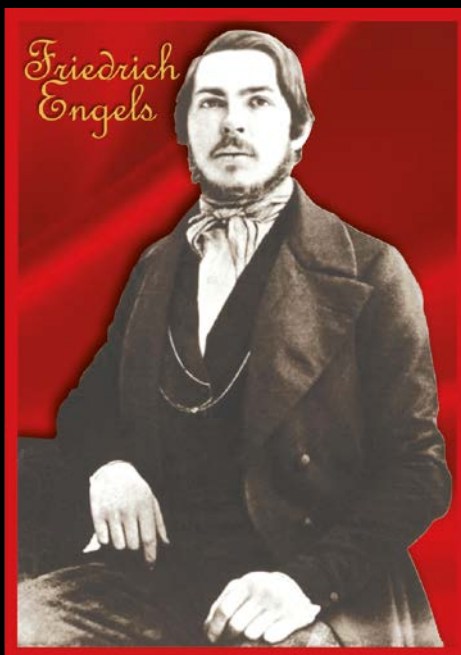
Oceania

Where did these two MAGA men learn such arrant nonsense? They probably, for starters, enjoy the same media outlets, and are likely familiar with - possibly edit - the mine of misinformation known as yourdictionary.com. Here socialism is defined '...as an economic theory, system or movement where the production and distribution of goods is done, owned and shared by the citizens of a society.' This is pretty much par for the course as far as dictionaries are concerned and leaves one unprepared for the load of dingo's kidneys that follows. Under the wholly bogus title 'Facts About Socialism' we are told: 'In theory, citizens have equal access to the products and resources and are compensated based on the amount of work performed. Under the ideals of socialism, there is no motivation for workers to excel at their jobs because

there is no benefit to the worker. Friedrich Engels, a French social theorist, developed modern socialistic theory in the late 18th century when he advocated the elimination of production methods based on capitalism. Karl Marx described socialism as a lower form of communism and held the opinion that socialism was an intermediary step in moving from capitalism to communism... The two largest "socialistic" systems are the former Soviet Union and Mainland China. Each of these began with the ideals of socialism, but ended in becoming totalitarian in nature. An example of socialism is the Mainland Chinese economic system.'

Nowhere

Poor Engels is probably spinning in his grave and not because of being called an 18th century French social theorist! Space does not permit more than a very brief clarification of some points. Verily,



Gorka, Morris (oh, the irony!), the many MAGAs and other supporters of the status quo could all benefit from a free trial subscription to this journal. William

Morris: '...what I mean by Socialism is a condition of society in which there should be neither rich nor poor, neither master nor master's man, neither idle nor overworked, neither brainslack brain workers, nor heartsick hand workers, in a word, in which all men would be living in equality of condition, and would manage their affairs unwastefully, and with the full consciousness that harm to one would mean harm to all—the realisation at last of the meaning of the word commonwealth' (Why I Am A Socialist, 1884).

Getting there

Less than a decade after the deaths of Engels and Morris, the Socialist Party started making a number of distinctive contributions to socialist theory. These include being an open democratic party standing for revolution rather than reform and recognising that political democracy can be used for revolutionary ends without the need for leaders. We opposed WWI and all other wars. In 1918 we recognised the Bolshevik seizure of power as a coup which hastened the development of Russian state capitalism. We identified nationalisation as state capitalism and predicted the inevitable failure of electing Labour and Social-Democratic governments as a way to introduce socialism. We stated that capitalism will not collapse of its own accord and that the state, including the 'welfare state', is ultimately financed by taxation on profits. Further, that as capitalism is a global system its replacement, socialism, will be too, but without borders. There is no need for a 'transition period' between capitalism and socialism: we have long had the resources and technology to establish a world of production for use and free access without the need for money or central planning.

FREE LUNCH

