

# socialist standard

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

# WINDORS



## LORD OF THE LIES

also:

The Police

The Destruction of Nature

Socialism & Planning (Part 2)





# socialist standard

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## Introducing the Socialist Party

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

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

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

Gradualist reformers like the Labour Party believed that capitalism could be



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

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

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

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## Editorial

### Syriza: Greek capitalism's repair crew

In January 2015 there was dancing in the streets of Athens as a left-wing anti-austerity party, Syriza, a 'coalition of the radical left', made up of various left and Green groups, Eurocommunists and some Trotskyists, had just won the Greek elections. There was rejoicing too amongst like-minded people outside Greece. The fightback against austerity was to begin. Another policy was possible.

The new government was going to end in Greece the austerity that governments everywhere had been imposing in the slump that followed the Crash of 2008. It would do this, according to John Miliotis, billed as Syriza's chief economist, by promoting growth 'through a fiscal stimulus, targeted at lower incomes in order to boost their spending power' (*Guardian*, 23 December 2014).

They never got the chance to try, not that this warmed-up Keynesianism would have worked. Holders of Greek government bonds, afraid of losing too much of their money, insisted, through a Troika of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the IMF, that the new Greek government continue, and even increase, austerity.

Syriza called a referendum in July on

the terms that they and the previous government had been offered. A 61 percent majority voted to reject them. As a ploy to strengthen their negotiating hand, it didn't work. The bondholders still demanded their pound of flesh, and the Troika called Syriza's bluff.

The government had a choice -- between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea. They could accept the terms or reject them and go it alone. Either way, they would have to continue the imposition of austerity as, if it wasn't under direct Troika pressure, it would be under the indirect pressure of the world market. The government chose the first option on the grounds that it would allow them some wiggle room whereas the second would be an unpredictable adventure.

This wasn't what leftists outside Greece wanted. In accordance with their fanciful view that workers can be bounced in ending capitalism, they urged the government to adopt 'radical anti-capitalist' measures and, in the face of any resistance, to 'mobilise the masses.' But a second general election in September, which returned Syriza to office, suggested that most of its voters accepted the government's choice. The 'masses' were

not for mobilising.

It's a familiar pattern. A left-wing government promising to improve things for people is enthusiastically elected, comes up against capitalist reality that profits and conditions for profit-making must come first, then either changes its policy or continues and provokes an economic crisis and is voted out.

Syriza changed its policy and so avoided immediate eviction. Four years later, however, and with the Greek economy in a less parlous state, enough voters deserted it last month to elect an openly pro-capitalist party to run the country. The Syriza government turned out to be an interlude during which it served as a repair gang for Greek capitalism, stabilising its economic and political situation so that normal service could eventually be resumed. Yet another failure of reformism, to add to the long list. Messrs Corbyn and McDonnell take note.



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# PATHFINDERS

## Blackout in Sudan

LAST MONTH'S BBC Panorama shock exposé of anti-semitism in the Labour Party created quite a stir, but also left a lot of people wondering why the BBC has not chosen to do an equivalent exposé of the rampant and well-documented islamophobia in the Tory Party. Balanced unbiased news reporting, in line with the BBC's own charter? Corbynistas will be fuming about a stitch-up, and not without reason.

The BBC is probably more balanced when reporting overseas conflicts in which the UK government has no direct interest. BBC's Africa Eye has provided some decent coverage of the Sudan uprising, including a fascinating video report which, in another kind of stitching, put together a patchwork of over 300 phone videos of the June 3 slaughter in Khartoum, when the military junta's special forces opened fire on peaceful protesters ('Sudan's Livesteam Massacre', BBC News, 12 July - [bbc.in/30uf6kV](http://bbc.in/30uf6kV)).

The report made the point that, while phones can't stop bullets, the near-ubiquity of mobile phones means that the world has eyes everywhere, and no junta can keep its massacres a secret anymore. Not that public exposure will necessarily deter a ruthless regime, however in the globalised trading era it's bad advertising which makes a country look weak and unstable, and will deter foreign investment.

If the military rulers in Sudan expected a massacre to clear the streets and stop the protests, they were right, but not for long. Within a fortnight the protests were back, and bigger than ever. The junta responded by shutting down the internet, forcing protest organisers to rely on text SMS or land-line telephone, a fiddly and expensive business which could reach only a fraction of its target audience. But while the blackout impeded the protesters, it was catastrophic for the Sudanese economy, costing hundreds of millions in lost trade. Was this nevertheless a pyrrhic victory for the junta, the BBC wondered later that month ('Has an internet blackout killed Sudan's revolution?', BBC News, 21 June - [bbc.in/2FmAYqj](http://bbc.in/2FmAYqj)). No, as it turned out. In July the military rulers climbed down and acceded to partial civilian rule. The point to take from this is that while modern communications technology is a wonderful force for democratisation, it can always be

censored or shut down, and so should not be relied upon. But none of that matters if the courage and determination of workers is strong enough, as in Sudan.

## This is your capitalist brain on drugs

Drug firm Pfizer has discovered that its own arthritis treatment drug Enbrel also seems to cut the risk of Alzheimer's disease by up to 64 percent (*New Scientist*, 15 June, p7). Great, you might think. Over to Pfizer to start cranking out Enbrel by the container load.

Oh but wait, says Pfizer. Actually, our patent on this is due to expire soon, so we won't be proceeding with this.

What, you say, you mean you're not going to make any?

Pfizer shakes its head.

But a 64 percent risk reduction – are you kidding? That blows every other Alzheimer drug out of the water!

Sorry, says Pfizer, no can do. If we don't make the profit, we don't make the drug.

But surely you can get your patent extended, you insist. Old drug, new use, it's been done before.

Yeah well, says Pfizer, we don't really believe our own data anyway.

Alright, you argue, run proper clinical trials then.



Pfizer bites its lip. Thing is, trials cost, and we've all lost a packet on failed clinical trials before. All previous Alzheimer's trials have failed, which is why all the major drug firms have closed their Alzheimer's research units. Basically it's a huge money sink.

Well, you ask in increasing desperation, can't you get government funding to cover this?

Pfizer smiles. Yeah, good luck with that.

Voters want low taxes more than happy granddads.

Well, can't you release the patent and let another firm make the stuff then?

Pfizer looks shocked. But that wouldn't be fair – it's our drug!

Alzheimer's affects 37 million people worldwide. But capitalism says no.

Why not make a cystic fibrosis drug instead? Drug firm Vertex charges £100,000 a year for the treatment Orkambi, which the NHS won't pay for, so kids die (*New Scientist*, 15 June, p9). But because Vertex doesn't have a valid patent in Argentina, a local firm is producing the drug at the bargain rate of £23,000 pa. Vertex is furious, of course, claiming that their sale price is a fair reflection of the billions they sank into R&D. Meanwhile the parents of kids with cystic fibrosis have been forced to create a 'buyers club' in order to buy wholesale and get the cost down further, a move clinicians describe as 'a desperate act'.

Patents in capitalism are intended to reward and defend intellectual effort and financial investment. But the flip side is that patents also kill people either by setting unaffordable prices or stopping production at source. In socialism you might get the kudos for an invention, but you wouldn't get a patent.

## This is your capitalist brain on drugs

Two bumper harvests in Brazil have flooded the international market with so much coffee that the price farmers can get has plummeted to below \$1 a pound (BBC News, 11 July - [bbc.in/2SfP5CV](http://bbc.in/2SfP5CV)). Since coffee is a cash crop that farmers sell instead of growing food they could actually eat, when the price hits the floor farmers will turn to other cash crops or else subsistence. Add in the number of farmers also going bust or abandoning farming,

and you're looking at a massive scaling back of future coffee production. Enjoy that cappuccino while you may, because in a few years' time you might only be able to afford re-boiled dregs. How can a good harvest turn into a disaster? That's capitalist 'logic' for you.

PJS

## Living on Low Wages

In 1865 Karl Marx advised workers to drop the conservative motto 'A fair day's wage for a fair day's work!' and instead advocate the abolition of the wages system. Over a century and a half later, reformers are still ignoring Marx's view, and the Living Wage Foundation campaigns for 'the simple idea that a hard day's work deserves a fair day's pay'. In June the Foundation made a submission to the Low Pay Commission, from which the following information is taken.

The Living Wage (or real Living Wage) is set above the legal minimum, and is intended to enable workers to make ends meet; it is currently £10.55 an hour in London and £9 an hour in the rest of the UK. Over one-fifth of workers receive less than this. Insecure work is a major part of the problem, and it was recently reported that one worker in ten (4.7 million people) now works in the precarious gig economy (*Guardian* 28 June).

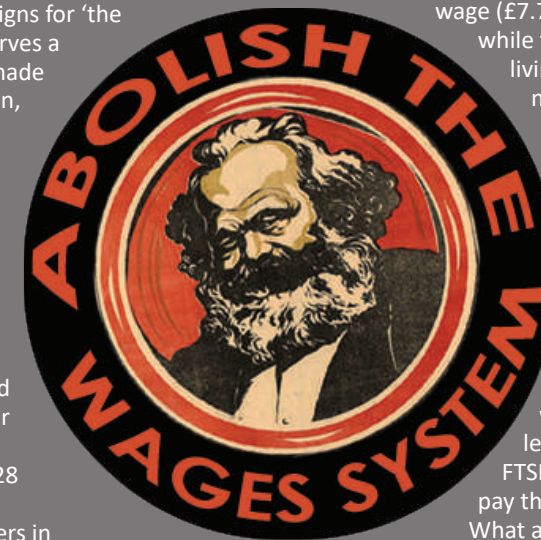
Low pay affects some groups of workers in particular, such as bar staff, waiters, sales assistants and care workers. Some parts of the country (Northern Ireland, East Midlands and Wales) are considerably above the average for the proportion of low-paid workers. More women than men are

paid below the Living Wage, and the figures are also higher for disabled workers and those who are black or of Bangladeshi or Pakistani descent.

Workers aged under 25 are only entitled to the minimum wage (£7.70 an hour for someone aged 21 to 24), while those over 25 must be paid the national living wage of £8.21 an hour. The report makes it clear that paying the legal minimum leaves workers struggling to keep their heads above water: 'A full time worker earning the government's "national living wage" currently earns over £1,500 a year less than they would on the real Living Wage – equivalent to over a year's average gas and electricity or three months' average rent.' It is also claimed that paying the Living Wage benefits employers too, in terms of workers performing better and there being less turnover of staff. Nevertheless, most FTSE 100 companies have not undertaken to pay this rate.

What all this shows is that twenty-first century capitalism cannot provide decent living standards for most workers. Low pay and insecurity, not to mention the risk of unemployment, make their lives a constant struggle to keep going. All those years ago, Marx certainly had the right idea.

PB



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### Monopoly money

In June Mark Zuckerberg announced that in 2020 Facebook would launch its own 'digital currency'. Since Facebook is the F in the GAFA group of US technology corporations that are widely criticised for harvesting private information for profit and/or not paying enough tax (the others are Google, Apple and Amazon), suspicions, not to say conspiracy theories, immediately arose that that there must be some ulterior motive, one beyond making more money that is. Even Ed Conway, Sky News Economics Editor, had an article in the *Times* (21 June) headlined 'Facebook currency will help it rule the world. Mark Zuckerberg's new move is designed to make his company more powerful than any country'.

Is there anything in this? Or is it just sensationalism or the usual left-wing practice of selecting particular capitalist corporations or groups of capitalists to blame for things rather than the capitalist system as such or even the far-right delusion that the Jews are out to rule the world?

What is being proposed is an

international payments system based on blockchain technology. This is a technology that allows any transaction to be both uniquely digitalised and unable to be tampered with. It was the basis of the Bitcoin scheme devised by the so-called crypto-anarchists. But the Libra, as the Facebook money is to be called (the same as the £ in the old I.s.d.), will be different from Bitcoin in several key respects.

First, it will not be that decentralised but run by a central board on which other corporations, such as Paypal, Visa and Mastercard, participating in it will be represented alongside Facebook.

Second, it will be linked to a bundle of state currencies (dollar, euro, yen, sterling, etc) so that, unlike Bitcoin, its value can be stabilised so it can be used as a means of payment.

Third, it won't be secret. Secrecy is not built-in to blockchain technology but was something added by the crypto-anarchists for Bitcoin to avoid states knowing who the payers and payees were.

Fourth, it will be profit-making. The corporations participating in it are aiming to make a profit out of the fees charged to users.

Those using the service – in theory all of the 2.3 billion Facebook users – will be able to open an account in Libra by converting their state currency into it and using this to pay for goods and services

in any part of the world (except China where Facebook is banned). It is rather surprising that the banks themselves have not come forward with such a system. They may well be forced to now. Even the state central banks might have to,

That this is a bid by Zuckerberg to become the ruler of the world is complete nonsense of course. For that, he would have to control armed force, which he doesn't. And his scheme will be subject to the control of states. They are bound to introduce regulations to stop Facebook money being used for currency speculation, money laundering and other dodgy dealings, just as they have done with Paypal and the others and would love to do with Bitcoin.

Ellen Brown, the US anti-banker theorist, has suggested ('Facebook May Pose A Greater Danger Than Wall Street,' *Truthdig*, 25 June) that what should happen is that the international payments system be run as a public service by 'democratised' central banks. That's to miss the problem. It, too, would be a colossal waste of information technology that could be more usefully employed, in a needs-oriented world, in organising the logistics of ensuring that everyone on Earth had access to what they needed when they needed it – without payment.

# WOOD FOR THE TREES

## Same Difference?

ONE OF the less used items from within the dialectical toolbox is the sameness/difference duality. Its paradoxical nature is highlighted in the much used retort: 'but that's like comparing apples with oranges'; a phrase often used to emphasize the inappropriateness of a particular analogy. This kind of critique always insists on difference rather than similarity, a familiar feature of contemporary ideology, but sometimes what is important about apples and oranges is that they are both fruits.

During a discussion about narrative structures within literature and films I found myself more interested in the idea of the 'meta-structure' of the quest storyline. From *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and *The Odyssey* through *The Morte D'Arthur* to *The Big Lebowski*, *Lord of the Rings* and the *Harry Potter* stories we see many similarities. Indeed the rise of 'genre' entertainment has led to an expectation of formulaic similarities within the modern audience.

An objection to this approach to understanding narratives is that it can overwhelm the subtle aesthetic differences that make the telling of the tale meaningful to a contemporary audience. So a balance is needed to produce an insightful and relevant critique of any art form; or, for that matter, of just about any experience.

Consumer capitalism attempts to surround us with novelty; it continually proclaims to have reinvented the wheel. On the supermarket shelves we see what appears to be an endless variety when in fact beneath the bright packaging we find much the same ingredients. The ability to see hidden realities beneath superficial facades has always been celebrated as one of the highest human intellectual achievements – with the scientific adventure being the supreme example.

A great danger of being surrounded by hyperbole is that the truly new and important can be overlooked. This is where a dialectical approach can be a powerful help. Political ideologies come and go with great rapidity: 'monetarism', 'neo-liberalism', 'the third way', 'Leninism', 'Trotskyism', 'populism' etc, all proclaim to be something new and different but for a socialist they are just a tired repackaging of capitalism. Hence we emphasize the

sameness of such ideologies and not any subtle differences that may or may not exist. Our perspective is purely pragmatic – will these 'new' ideologies substantially change the lives of working people? Upon consideration, using the methods explained above, we have reached the conclusion that such minor variations of the capitalist system cannot and will not change the lives of the majority for the better – and, thus far, we have been proven correct in our conclusions.

It might be surprising to some that, given the bitter and destructive nature of the class struggle, we do not emphasize any substantial difference between the vast majority and the tiny parasitic minority in terms of their humanity. The Left love to demonize the individual capitalist as evil and greedy – which he

labour power to them in order to exist but as human beings they also share many of our anxieties albeit in a different form. Life and death, physical and psychological well-being and human relationships dominate their lives as much as they do ours.

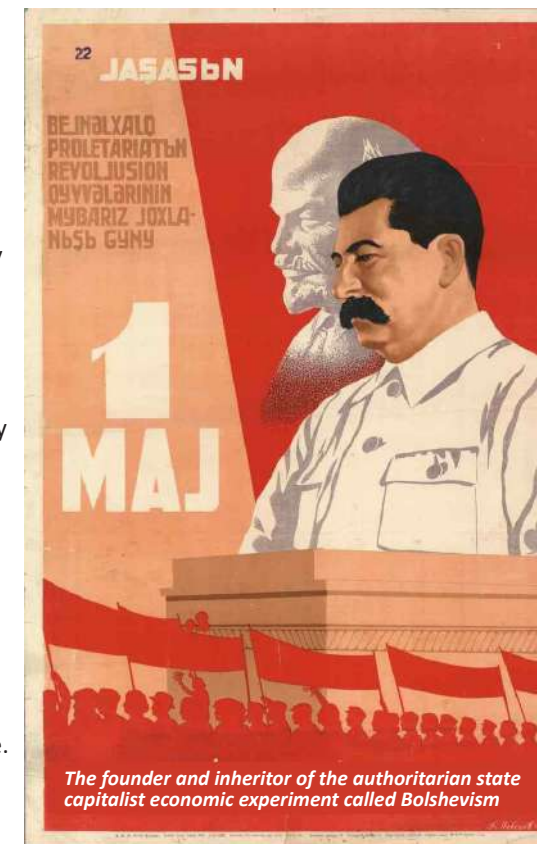
Given the social nature of our species the rich can suffer loneliness (the continual doubt about the possible monetary motivation of friends and loved ones) and the alienation born of privileged social exclusion and the continual quest for more wealth and power that provides status within their peer group. With this in mind we focus our critique on capitalism and not on individual capitalists. We stress the difference in economic and political terms and emphasize sameness in relation to our shared humanity and its deepest needs – a dialectical insight and balance is achieved.

The decision whether or not to emphasize one or other of these elements present in all political ideas is wholly dependent on historical development; for instance given the dominant mode of production in Russia in 1917 (agrarian and feudal) the sameness of the political and economic interests of the minority bourgeoisie (immanent) and the working class (future) at that moment in history made it imperative that both these minority classes worked together to overthrow the autocracy of the Czarist regime.

Had the Mensheviks the wisdom to reject participation in the then raging First World War the Bolshevik coup d'état would most likely never have happened and Russia would probably have progressed to a more traditional form of capitalism. The Bolshevik insistence that their regime was a form of socialism, and the acceptance of this by many intellectuals, is testament to the dangers inherent in wrongly emphasizing the difference of the social origins of a new elite and their confused statist economic experiment rather than insisting on the sameness

of authoritarian structures inherent in all forms of capitalism from the perspective of the overwhelming majority.

WEZ



or she might be – but what is important here is to emphasize that they are trapped in their role just as the working class are trapped into making the lives of the rich possible. Obviously the economic concerns of the rich are very different from those of us who have to sell our







# BORIS, THE INDEFATIGABLE, IS CROWNED KING

After each of Boris Johnson's many gaffs and indiscretions one imagines that he must finally be dead and buried politically, yet he rises from the grave like a zombie in a B-Horror movie. Now he has achieved his life-long ambition and been crowned premier by a reluctant rag bag rump of a Tory Party; the blue rinse and blazered clan of London and the Home Counties, such is the quirkiness of our democracy. It was never going to be that other zombie, in the form of Jeremy Hunt. He simply lacked the star quality and celebrity which is essential for high political office nowadays.

So, it has come to pass that Alexander Boris de Pfeffel (I think that's pronounced *piffle*) Johnson, an Old Etonian who studied classics at Balliol College, Oxford and was a distinguished member of the Buller!... Buller!...Buller! Bullingdon Club, with all its spectacularly lurid debauchery, is the UK's new premier.

Is he the right man for the job? His career has to date included Member of Parliament, Mayor of London and journalist; the assessment of his efficacy in these roles has ranged from undistinguished to catastrophically incompetent. His main claim to fame is his disingenuous campaign to take the UK out of the EU – £350 million a week extra for the NHS etc – and now his promise to deliver Brexit, come rain or shine, upon the witching hour of Halloween this October.

The testimonials as to his character are almost universally damning. Boris de Pfeffel Johnson has been variously described as a: popinjay, lazy, feckless, dishonest, narcissistic, racist, homophobic and lacking in imagination; such moderately pejorative descriptors coming predominantly from his friends and colleagues. Those more hostile to Boris Johnson invariably express their opinions in a more strident manner. One such example being ex-Tory MP Jerry Hayes who summed up Boris as a: 'copper-bottomed, double-dealing, hypocritical little shit' (<https://www.jerryhayes.co.uk/articles/boris-is-a-copper-bottomed-double-dealing-hypocritical-little-shit-the-press-will-destroy-him>). Whilst this vitriol is often intended to demonstrate Boris's unfitness for high office it seems it does the opposite. If the number of similar incumbents around the world is anything to go by such sociopathic/psychopathic tendencies provide him with impeccable credentials for premiership.

Some people have couched their reservations about him in more practical terms, citing the difficulties that Boris will have in working with the business community following his retort 'fuck business' whilst Foreign Secretary when confronted with business concerns regarding Brexit; or the vulnerability of the Special Relationship given Boris's former description of Donald Trump as: 'clearly out of his mind... portraying a quite stupefying ignorance that makes him quite frankly unfit to hold the office of President of the United States.' But all this hot air and hyperbolic rhetoric will be water off a duck's back in the pragmatic relationship of politics. For all the bluster The Boris and The Donald are soul mates. Their respective utterances are indistinguishable without attribution. Boris's comment, comparing women wearing burkas to letter boxes and bank robbers, could just as well have come from Donald Trump; along with many similarly asinine remarks. Both men

share a common penchant for pussy-grabbing, each with his idiosyncratic style. They are like peas in a pod, ideally suited to the bear-pit, come cesspit, of modern-day celebrity politics; adept at pedalling their particular brand of snake oil. They will get on famously so long as realpolitik or self-interest doesn't get in the way.

## What is Boris likely to achieve in office?

So what should we expect from the UK's new Prime Minister? Boris Johnson's unique achievements as premier are more likely to be in chairing the satirical BBC programme: *Have I got News for You*, or becoming the winning contestant on ITV's reality dating show: *Love Island*, rather than solving the environmental crisis, averting wars, or ending world poverty.

To the extent that Boris has set out his stall he has said that he will slash taxes for the rich and for corporations; create more tax- and customs-free zones – effectively creating more legalised tax evasion enclaves – and sprinkle a few billion pounds around on vanity infrastructure projects, similar to when he was Mayor of London; topped with the obligatory rhetoric of: tough on immigration and tough on crime. Nothing surprising there then!

Beyond these fatuous policy sound-bites Boris attempted to introduce some intellectual gravitas to his campaign by penning a tediously long article in the *Daily Telegraph* recently (30 June) where he wittered on about liberalism without really getting to the nub of anything. It turned out that the main purpose of the article was to engage in that popular Western pastime of Putin-bashing whilst trumpeting the UK as an exemplar of thriving liberal democracy; an accolade Boris warns the UK will forfeit if it fails to exit the EU on the 31 October 2019. It will no doubt be a relief to many that, like a Catholic reaffirming the faith, all will be well with liberal democracy once Brexit is a done deal.

If it were someone, other than Boris, would it make any difference?

If it had been Jeremy Hunt, or any of the other non-entity candidates as premier, then it would have been much of a muchness; the usual mendacity and venality would predominate in the execution of the role of chief operating officer; at the beck and call of the capitalist class, under cover of 'democracy'.

What if, as some pundits have postured, Boris's incumbency prompts an early general election? If Labour get in it may well be led by someone other than Jeremy Corbyn – given that few currently seem happy with him – in which case a new New Labour is likely to amount to a Tory-lite government

and therefore business will be as usual. But what if, horror of horrors, that supposed Communist, Trotskyist, Leninist, Marxist, Putin apologist, racist, anti-Semite, allotment-gardening Corbyn gets into No 10 after all? The Establishment have already laid their contingency plans in the form of a recalcitrant civil service. One retired general has mooted if needs be a military coup, mainly premised on the treasonous conduct of Corbyn in refusing to unhesitatingly commit to pressing the nuclear button to render all life on the planet extinct.

But in any case an acclaimed radical Corbyn-led government is unlikely to prove to be radical in practice. The approach of John McDonnell, the Shadow Chancellor, is more akin to Roosevelt than Marx. Despite his declared wish to get rid of capitalism he cautions the need to move slowly to a system of common ownership to avoid the risks; the structural vehicles for such transition comprising variations of traditional state and worker ownership and modest proposals for industrial democracy. Leaving aside the efficacy of such structures, it is hard to understand why John McDonnell considers such measures will work within a capitalist system which inevitably neutralises and/or reverses any minor social gains that threaten its basic ability to make profits. As can be seen by such attempts in the past any changes in wealth and income distribution or improvements in social provision for the working class, are quickly clawed back when the time is right. Given the rampant, uncompromising and unrestrained hyper-capitalism of today and the increasing concentration of power in the hands of the capitalist class it seems unlikely that it will be inclined to make any concessions at all but instead is likely to double down in its quest to squeeze every last bit of surplus value from humanity and the planet, irrespective of the catastrophic consequences.

Gradualism, incrementalism, reformism – whatever one chooses to call it – has proven not to work time and time again. If one fails to confront the fundamentals of the antagonistic relationship between the working class and the capitalist class then politics will continue to go down such blind alleys; the conflicting relationship manifesting itself because of

the appropriation by the capitalist class of the wealth that has been produced by the working class.

If meaningful change is to be achieved this inherent conflict must be addressed head on. Socialism provides the means by which this can be done providing that the imagination of enough people can be ignited in order to visualise it and then to act to bring it about; creating a society where the means of



producing the things needed to live a good and satisfying life are owned and controlled by everyone and distributed for the benefit of everyone. In contrast to the situation now under the defective system of capitalism, where production solely for profit creates false scarcity and thus destroys and impoverishes the lives of the majority of people in the world and, as we now know, jeopardises all life on the planet.

To imagine a different world is a difficult task; a socialist world without war, without privation; an equal and inclusive and socially and materially enriching society in harmony with the natural environment. It is the task of those who can already conceive of such a society to spark that same imagination in the minds of others and to collectively sustain such imagination by continual exploration of the practical constituents of a socialist society in order to create the conditions to bring it about.

**TIM HART**





# Socialism and Planning: The Need for Feedback

Last month we explained why socialism could not possibly be organised on the basis of ‘society-wide’ planning – that is, a single vast plan encompassing everything. Though the numerous production (and distribution) units would obviously all be engaged in planning, the overall pattern of production would be unplanned. Meaning it would be the emergent outcome of many different plans. What would ensure these plans co-ordinated to produce a coherent outcome is something called ‘feedback’.

Any large scale, technically advanced society requires information in the form of feedback to function. ‘Feedback’ is an attribute of dynamic systems, when the ‘outputs of a system are routed back as inputs as part of a chain of cause-and-effect that forms a circuit or loop’ (*Wikipedia*). In this way the system is able to adjust its behaviour to accommodate changing circumstances.

The market is a good example. A contraction in the market for frozen fish fingers, perhaps because of some scandal concerning contaminated fish stock, causes a drop in prices and a decline in profits, resulting in some factory closures and reduced output. Here the relevant information takes the form of market prices. However, there is another kind of feedback system that operates alongside market prices and is, in fact, of far greater significance inasmuch as any kind of large scale society (including capitalism) utterly depends upon it. This is the feedback intrinsic to a ‘self-regulating system of stock control’.

Here, the basic information takes the form, not of prices, but of physical quantities – for example, counting the number of cans of baked beans stocked in your local supermarket. This is called ‘calculation-in-kind’. The supermarket simply tracks how many cans have been removed from the shelf – these days this is often computerised – and calculates the quantities needed to sufficiently replenish the stock to meet future demand, (taking into account the rate at which it is being depleted). That automatically triggers an order for fresh stock from the suppliers.

The beauty of the system is that any shifts in the pattern of demand can be picked up and almost instantaneously responded to, given the power of modern computer technology. This is precisely the kind of feedback system a socialist society can make full use of, enabling it to monitor and respond to the fluctuations in the demand for any conceivable kind of good produced in that society. We don’t need to reinvent the wheel. This system already exists and functions today under our very noses.

## Misunderstanding socialism

In a chapter entitled ‘Understanding the Market’ of his book *The State or the Market* Norman Barry lists three possible ways of ‘organising a society for the production of wanted goods and services’ – altruism, central command and the market:

‘Altruism presupposes that individuals, without either the incentives of personal gain or fear of punishment, will satisfy the wants of others in a system of generalised reciprocity. It is now generally agreed that this places impossible burdens on a fragile human nature and on human knowledge. In a large society, even if people were uncommonly well-disposed towards each other, how could they know what others’ wants were? In fact altruism is only conceivable in very small

communities where there is broad agreement about ends and purposes’ (*The State or the Market*, 1991)

Since socialists reject both ‘central command’ and the ‘market’, it would seem we are left with only ‘altruism’ with all the limitations Barry imputes to it. However, his argument is plainly wrong on two counts.

Firstly, to take his point about not being able to know what other people want, this is simply not true. It seems to naively assume that to do that you have to directly ask them what they want. Now it is certainly true that customer surveys and the like can provide useful pointers when it comes to product innovation and design but it would be impractical to canvas the entire population; only a small sample is required. It is also unnecessary since, as we have seen, the great bulk of information concerning individual wants in a socialist society can be acquired indirectly in an aggregated form via the aforementioned procedure of stock control. Since this is an open-ended procedure, the question of the size of the society is completely irrelevant.

Secondly, regarding his point about motivation, it is misleading to suggest that socialism would be a society based purely on altruism. For sure, people can and do behave altruistically and a socialist society will draw abundantly upon this very human quality of feeling concern for the wellbeing of others. Barry equates this altruistic concern with a ‘system of generalised reciprocity’ but fails to properly comprehend what that means. Yes, it denotes helping others out of concern for their wellbeing without expecting any direct or immediate return (what is called a *quid pro quo* transaction). However, it emphatically does not mean there is no expectation whatsoever of these others reciprocating in due course. It is not purely altruistic in that sense – as the very word ‘reciprocity’ itself suggests.

Actually, ‘generalised reciprocity’ denotes a system of moral, (rather than economic) transactions, governed by the ethos that we should all contribute to the common good rather than free ride on the contributions of others. It implies a generalised expectation that we help each other rather than just one-sidedly sacrifice our own interests for the sake of others. As such, this is a fair description of the kind of social dynamics that would operate in a future socialist society. It is not something completely unfamiliar to us today or necessarily confined to only small scale face-to-face societies. Even under capitalism, there are plenty of examples around. Indeed, the internet itself has been compared to a gigantic ‘gift economy’. ([http://wiki.p2pfoundation.net/Gift\\_Economy](http://wiki.p2pfoundation.net/Gift_Economy))

Ironically, the accusation that socialism ‘places impossible burdens on a fragile human nature’ in assuming humans should expunge any concern for their own interests – can be thrown back at critics like Barry himself. If according to the market ideology they embrace, individuals are purely driven by self-interest, then why do the great majority today put up with a social arrangement that so demonstrably works against

their interests? Why permit a tiny owning class to accumulate vast fortunes at their expense? Clearly, it is not out of self-interest that workers allow this to continue.

## Economic calculation

Apart from enabling us to respond to the ever-changing pattern of consumer wants, feedback in the form of a self-regulating system of stock control will also facilitate the efficient allocation of resources by ensuring these are allocated in a way that economises most on those that are least abundant. Here, we are alluding to the ‘Law of the Minimum’ formulated by the 19th century agricultural scientist, Justus von Liebig, who demonstrated that the total output of a crop is determined, not by the total amount of resources available for plant growth but, rather, by the scarcest resource or ‘limiting factor’ – for example, nitrate fertiliser. Increasing the supply of this input would then mean

some other input becoming the limiting factor – perhaps, irrigation water. The point is that it is entirely possible to grade all the relevant inputs required to produce a given output in terms of their relative availability and determine the degree to which this constrains output.

In 1920, the Austrian economist and prominent opponent of socialism, Ludwig von Mises, published a tract called ‘*Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth*’. In it he set out to prove that socialism was impractical since, without market prices, it would be unable to make the economic calculations needed to efficiently allocate resources. As he put it:

‘It would be evident, even in a socialist society, that 1,000 hectolitres of wine are better than 800, and it is not difficult to decide whether it desires 1,000 hectolitres of wine rather than 500 litres of oil. There is no need for any system of calculation to establish this fact: the deciding element is the will of the economic subjects involved. But once this decision has been taken, the real task of rational economic direction only commences, i.e., economically, to place the means at the service of the end. That can only be done with some kind of economic

calculation. The human mind cannot orientate itself properly among the bewildering mass of intermediate products and potentialities of production without such aid. It would simply stand perplexed before the problems of management and location. It is an illusion to imagine that in a socialist state calculation *in natura* can take the place of monetary calculation. Calculation *in natura*, in an economy without exchange, can embrace consumption-goods only: it completely fails when it comes to deal with goods of a higher-order. And as soon as one gives up the concept of a freely established monetary price for goods of a higher-order, rational ownership of the means of production, rational production becomes impossible. Every step that takes us away from private ownership of the means of production and from the use of money also takes us away from rational economics.’

Mises could not have been more mistaken. His unwarranted belief that calculation-in-kind could apply only to consumption goods and not ‘higher order’ production goods stems from a peculiar blind spot at the very heart of his ‘economic calculation’ argument. This is the taken-for-granted assumption that the allocation of these higher order goods would be undertaken by a single planning authority acting on behalf of society – what he meant by his ‘Führer principle’. As we saw last month, that means establishing, in advance, production targets for each and every one of the millions of different production and consumption goods in the economy within a single giant plan.

However, what that does is to eliminate the very possibility of a feedback system and, therefore, a means of efficiently allocating resources. If, instead, you had a polycentric system of planning in place this would permit such a feedback system to come into play and thus enable you to rationally allocate resources in the light of known stock levels.

Contrary to Mises’ claim, calculation-in-kind is applicable not just to consumer goods but ‘higher order’ production goods too. Thus, if a particular consumer good, M, consists of three components, X, Y and Z, it is entirely possible to calculate how much of M we can produce, given the available supplies of X, Y and Z. If there were sufficient supplies of X and Y, but not enough of Z, to meet the demand for M (thus making Z the ‘limiting factor’ in this example) you then have two options if you want to fully satisfy the demand for M. Either you modify the ‘technical ratio’ (discussed in Part One) involved in producing M so as to reduce the quantity of Z needed or you divert supplies of Z from other end uses. This latter option would entail ‘opportunity costs’ that can be readily quantified in terms of the reduction of output for those other end uses.

In either case, the Misesian claim that socialism cannot resort to economic calculation to efficiently allocate resources is refuted. What remains to be done is to establish the social priorities to guide resource allocation (which Mises conceded was possible) and, also, when to switch resources from one end use to another depending on supply and demand – neither of which strictly relate to the question of ‘economic calculation, as such.

The first boils down to a question of society’s values. Establishing a hierarchy of production priorities (perhaps informed by concepts like Maslow’s famous ‘hierarchy of needs’ model) might, for instance, entail classifying different consumer goods according to a rough-and-ready ‘points system’ to guide resource allocation. The second, concerning when to switch resources, could make use of such indices as the rate of take up of particular lines of stock or planning tools like consumer surveys. In neither case is pinpoint accuracy required; what matters is that the general thrust of decision-making broadly moves in the direction society deems desirable and that we have the means of ascertaining what society desires by fully utilising all the available means of communication.

Mises never really grasped this way of looking at socialism because he was too fixated on the idea that it would be a system of society-wide central planning. However, as we have seen, that precludes the very possibility of feedback so crucial to the refutation of his entire theory.

ROBIN COX





# ARE ALL COPPERS BASTARDS?



During the 1984/85 miners' strike it was the police who were the state's storm-troopers in its assaults upon strikers. The brutal treatment they dished out to the pickets to intimidate them and their families caused an outcry. It drew attention to the extent that the capitalist class would use the powers of the state to protect its own interests. The criminal law was enthusiastically applied against the miners even though their picketing was not an offence.

Those who have been on a protest march and been on the receiving end of a truncheon will share the same perspective as the persecuted miners, that the police are the hired thugs of our class enemy. The police are a class creation. We should know that the police were created by the ruling class to control the working class, not help them. They've continued to play that role ever since. We don't want better policing. We understand only too well that they do not work for us and they never have. We want to get rid of the police in their current form entirely, and we want to live in a world where a repressive force is not necessary.

Among many communities there exists a lack of confidence in the police and little trust in their accountability. The police have come to be regarded by many on the Left as impermeable to socialist ideas, yet the fact remains, however, that the police are made up of members of the working class who, too, are required to sell their ability to work in whichever way they can. Like any other wage slave, the police have to do what their employers – the state – order them to do. The Socialist Party does not seek to pick on the monkey but targets the organ-grinder. The Left see the police as the enemy, but why single out one section of the working class as the source of our problems? The Left advances the idea that any attempt to establish socialism democratically and peacefully through the constitution will result in the police being used, along with the armed forces, to suppress that movement.

This argument assumes that police have economic and political positions apart from the rest of society and hold pro-fascist sympathies. However, members of the police force usually live in the community and seek its approval and respect and will often turn a blind eye to the law if it is in conflict with what the community thinks is right. For sure,

many in the police hold obnoxious political opinions, but consider just how often these reflect the prejudices of other workers. The personal views of the police will not change until the way most people think changes and the indoctrination that many of our fellow-workers have suffered is undone. Our case is that those in the police share much the same attitudes as other workers and when these workers understand and desire the socialist alternative the same ideas will be accepted as much by the police. The police are as susceptible to socialist ideas as any section of our class.

## Police strikes

That police are subject to the ideas prevailing in other sections of the working class has been illustrated recently in other countries such as Bolivia (2012), Brazil (2008/2013), Argentina (2013), Portugal (2013), Iceland (2015) and Ireland (2016) where police have been protesting against their conditions or going on strike.

We have seen similar occasions even here in the UK. In 2008 and 2012 industrial action of sorts took place when police held protest marches. In 2007 police officers in Britain were banned from taking strike action or even discussing it. However, this year the rank and file voted overwhelmingly to explore the option of lobbying for full industrial rights if their claims were not met. 'The feedback from our members is that we are rapidly approaching the situation where they want to bite back,' a spokesperson said. 'If we are to be treated no differently from other public sector workers, we need to explore whether we should have the same rights as other public sector workers.'

A hundred years ago, in 1919, police shared the heightened discontent of other workers.

In the US, Boston police officers went on strike on 9 September. They sought recognition for their trade union and improvements in wages and working conditions. The strikers were called 'deserters' and 'agents of Lenin.' All of Boston's newspapers called it 'Bolshevistic.' The police strike ended on 13 September, when Commissioner Curtis announced the replacement of all striking workers with 1,500 new officers, who were given higher wages. The strike proved a setback for

labour unions. No police officers in the US went out on strike until July 1974, when some Baltimore police, estimated at 15 to 50 percent of the force, refused to report for work for several days as a demonstration of support for other striking municipal unions.

As mentioned in May's *Socialist Standard*, Winnipeg's City police were supportive of the general strike there and were all dismissed for expressing support and for not signing a loyalty pledge not to take part in the strike.

In Belfast in 1907, the local police had mutinied against their instructions to safely escort blackleg strike-breakers during the dock-workers dispute which then led to their own pay rise demands. But as always there was a high price to be paid for that militancy. When the police union was outlawed by the Police Act of 1919 a national strike was called despite the fact that less than half the police were members. In Liverpool 932 out of 1256 struck. Riots took place where looters fought with soldiers and special constables, while a battleship and two destroyers steamed from Scapa Flow to Merseyside. The strike collapsed and every single striker was dismissed, never to be reinstated. Besides unemployment it meant eviction from a home and loss of pension.

A second police strike started on 31 July, 1919. It was a disaster. Only about 1,000 men struck in London, all of whom were instantly dismissed, and although a bitter struggle continued for some time – for example, strikers broke into the Islington section house to force the inmates to join them, eventually being forcibly ejected – the strike was absolutely crushed, and along with it the Police Union.

Mayor of Hackney. Another Islington man, Sergeant William Sansum, who had been arrested and bound over during the 1919 strike, was arrested again for his support of the General Strike in 1926. Sansum, by this time a boot salesman, got three months in prison.

There had been considerable support for the 1919 strike from the labour movement, but many supporters, looking back on police harassment, or police inaction while they got bashed by jingoes, felt a bit awkward – to put it mildly – with their new allies.

## Antisocial behaviour in socialism

If, in a socialist world we do have an organised body akin to the police, then this must be a service working in the interests of the people and be there to protect the people and society against a handful of dangerous individuals, not be there to protect a few individuals against society like the police force which we have under capitalism today.

We don't take the totally utopian view that there will be no antisocial acts whatsoever and everybody in socialism will be angels. Crimes of passion could still take place. There will still be traffic 'police' ensuring safety on the road but it may be undertaken by car break-down rescue or highway maintenance patrols. There may well still be a formal trained organisation for crowd management at public events but they would be more like the stewards we have now. Psychiatric services have certain compulsory powers to prevent self-harm and harm to others for those with mental health problems – those involved can see how their work can be adapted

and applied when cost is no longer an issue. Likewise those currently in the prison industry may raise alternative possibilities for those classed as a risk to society but with no treatable psychological disorder. Maybe some council departments will exercise 'policing' roles on antisocial behavior, just as they do now by mediating between feuding neighbours or sound abatement complaint squads in regards to noisy partying. Some

form of detective/forensic department might well still remain to investigate what antisocial acts occur, but they would be more like accident investigators, sleuths in tracking down the culprit or cause, specialist Sherlocks. Either way, the coercive role of the police would be redundant, and the riot shields and batons would disappear into museums to stand alongside the swords and suits of armour.

## ALJO

For a contemporary account of 1919 police strikes, see the June 1919 *Socialist Standard*: [www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/socialist-standard/1910s/1919/no-178-june-1919/bobbys-discretion/](http://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/socialist-standard/1910s/1919/no-178-june-1919/bobbys-discretion/)



Urban tank ready for use in the front line of the class war

There were numerous arrests during the strike, and there were even a couple of sympathetic stoppages – of railwaymen at Nine Elms, and the tube motor men. One other interesting feature of the dispute was when Inspector Dessent of Stoke Newington Station, the only Inspector to strike, formed his men up in a body and marched them to the main strike meeting at Tower Hill.

The sacked men never got their jobs back, but many of them became active in the labour movement. After the defeat, the Herald League's paper, *Rebel*, noted a large influx of new members from the Police Union. Tommy Thiel, on whose behalf the first strike had been fought, joined the Communist Party, as did a number of others. A local striker, Henry Goodridge, joined the Labour Party and eventually became



# PEOPLE POWER IN HONG KONG

On 9 July, Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam declared that a widely unpopular extradition bill, which had already been suspended by the Hong Kong government, was 'dead' – albeit not formally withdrawn, as most of the protestors against it had been demanding.

And what a protest it has been. Over recent months, hundreds of thousands of people (nearly two million on 16 June) have regularly swelled the streets of Hong Kong in opposition to the legislation, which amongst other things would make it easier for crime suspects to be removed to the mainland. The mostly non-violent demonstrators have faced rubber bullets, batons, pepper spray, water cannons and tear gas from the police, as well as opposition from counter-protestors.

Hong Kong has long been a place of refuge for dissidents and activists fleeing persecution in China. These fugitives include some rich Chinese capitalists who have fled to Hong Kong in fear of losing their wealth. But they also include many political activists. The concern is that those extradited to China could disappear or be subject to vague or trumped-up charges and unfair trials.

Such fears are well-founded. Recently, university students from Peking University who tried to link up with workers have disappeared, a fate that regularly befalls workers and students deemed a threat to China's authoritarian state. To take another example, in 2015 five booksellers specialising in publications critical of the (so-called) Communist Party disappeared. And Hong Kong activists have been detained upon crossing the border. It is unsurprising that many young people fear for their futures.

We can see in these protests an impressive display of people power. With limited electoral means, protests and occupations of public spaces and buildings are the only way that many locals feel they can express their opinions. They are participating in a long tradition of civil protest in Hong Kong. In 2003, for example – just six years after the formal handover of Hong Kong from Britain to China – an anti-subversion bill, Article 23, was withdrawn after half a million people took to the streets. But many of those involved in the recent protests are too young to remember this event or even to have been involved in 2014's 'pro-democracy' Umbrella Movement.

Clearly, these protests – and Lam's apparent inability to contain them – have rattled Beijing. The Chinese government will be deeply concerned that the unrest might spread across the border to Shenzhen or other Chinese cities and connect with the struggles of industrial workers. Predictably, media coverage of the protests in China has been minimal and propagandistic. After all, Chinese state media ruthlessly suppress public discussion of events such as the 1989 massacres of students and workers in Beijing and other

Chinese cities or the recent, massive anti-pollution protests in Wuhan. When Hong Kong has been mentioned, Chinese media have described the mainly non-violent protests as an outbreak of criminality and an affront to public opinion. As is usual in authoritarian states, the media have also blamed the disturbances on foreign meddling. But while there is no doubt that foreign powers are using the situation in Hong Kong as a political football (particularly in the context of the ongoing US-China trade war), the suggestion that such massive protests are the result of Western manipulation is absurd.

There is no doubt, however, that many of the protestors harbour illusions in nationalism. Surveys show that most people in Hong Kong, especially younger age groups, proudly identify as Hong Kongers rather than Chinese. Some protestors are driven by nativist resentment, blaming mainlanders for rising living costs. Others want to take Hong Kong back in time: some of those who stormed

the Legislative Council building on 1 July (the anniversary of Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty) even carried Union Jack flags. Politicians and other nationalists in the UK have made the most of this regressive nostalgia. The British Foreign Secretary even threatened China with 'serious consequences' if Hong Kong's 'freedoms' are not protected.

Of course, the freedom that capitalists are most concerned about in Hong Kong is the freedom to continue exploiting the working-class. The small minority of socialists and anarchists on Hong Kong's streets know that working-class people in Hong Kong (and

elsewhere) cannot be truly free in a capitalist society. The removal of the extradition bill may prevent some of the repression faced by activists, but the basic problems faced especially by younger workers in the region – such as unaffordable housing, falling real-terms wages and relentless gentrification – will not be solved either by 'independence' or a return to the colonial past.

These protests, which are still ongoing, do not express a socialist perspective. But we do not dismiss the participants as naïve idealists, or worse still, as the 'useful idiots' of Western imperialism, as Stalinist organisations like the CPGB-ML do in a direct echo of Chinese state propaganda. We admire the determination of the mainly working-class protestors to stand up to the system. Being 'leaderless', mostly non-violent and massive in scale, these demonstrations display some of the features that will be required of the socialist revolution.

SH

## The destruction of nature

*We publish this translation of a recently uncovered article written by Anton Pannekoek in 1909, not only for its contemporary relevance but also to show that Marx and Engels were not the only socialists to be concerned that capitalism was upsetting the basis of humanity's participation in the Earth's ecosystem.*

There are numerous complaints in the scientific literature about the increasing destruction of forests. But it is not only the joy that every nature-lover feels for forests that should be taken into account. There are also important material interests, indeed the vital interests of humanity. With the disappearance of abundant forests, countries known in Antiquity for their fertility, which were densely populated and famous as granaries for the great cities, have become stony deserts. Rain seldom falls there except as devastating diluvian downpours that carry away the layers of humus which the rain should fertilise. Where the mountain forests have been destroyed, torrents fed by summer rains cause enormous masses of stones and sand to roll down, which clog up Alpine valleys, clearing away forests and devastating villages whose inhabitants are innocent, 'due to the fact that personal interest and ignorance have destroyed the forest and headwaters in the high valley'.

The authors strongly insist on personal interest and ignorance in their eloquent description of this miserable situation but they do not look into its causes. They probably think that emphasising the consequences is enough to replace ignorance by a better understanding and to undo the effects. They do not see that this is only a part of the phenomenon, one of numerous similar effects that capitalism, this mode of production which is the highest stage of profit-hunting, has on nature.

Why is France a country poor in forests which has to import every year hundreds of millions of francs worth of wood from abroad and spend much more to repair through reforestation the disastrous consequences of the deforestation of the Alps? Under the Ancien Regime there were many state forests. But the bourgeoisie, who took the helm of the French Revolution, saw in these only an instrument for private enrichment. Speculators cleared 3 million hectares to change wood into gold. They did not think of the future, only of the immediate profit.

For capitalism all natural resources are nothing but gold. The more quickly it exploits them, the more the flow of gold accelerates. The private economy results in each individual trying to make the most profit possible without even thinking for a single moment of the general interest, that of humanity. As a result, every wild animal having a monetary value and every wild plant giving rise to profit is immediately the object of a race to extermination. The elephants of Africa have almost disappeared, victims of systematic hunting for their

ivory. It is similar for rubber trees, which are the victim of a predatory economy in which everyone only destroys them without planting new ones. In Siberia, it has been noted that furred animals are becoming rarer due to intensive hunting and that the most valuable species could soon disappear. In Canada, vast virgin forests have been reduced to cinders, not only by settlers who want to cultivate the soil, but also by "prospectors" looking for mineral deposits who transform mountain slopes into bare rock so as to have a better overview of the ground. In New Guinea, a massacre of birds of paradise was organised to satisfy the expensive whim of an American woman billionaire. Fashion craziness, typical of a capitalism wasting surplus value, has already led to the extermination of rare species; sea birds on the east coast of America only owe their survival to the strict intervention of the state. Such examples could be multiplied at will.

But are not plants and animals there to be used by humans for their own purposes? Here, we completely leave aside the question of the preservation of nature as it would be without human intervention. We know that humans are the masters of the Earth and that they completely transform nature to meet their needs. To live, we are completely dependent on

the forces of nature and on natural resources; we have to use and consume them. That is not the question here, only the way capitalism makes use of them.

A rational social order will have to use the available natural resources in such a way that what is consumed is replaced at the same time, so that society does not impoverish itself and can become wealthier. A closed economy which consumes part of its seed corn impoverishes itself more and more and must inevitably fail. But that is the way capitalism acts. This is

an economy which does not think of the future but lives only in the immediate present. In today's economic order, nature does not serve humanity, but capital. It is not the clothing, food or cultural needs of humanity that govern production, but capital's appetite for profit, for gold.

Natural resources are exploited as if reserves were infinite and inexhaustible. The harmful consequences of deforestation for agriculture and the destruction of useful animals and plants expose the finite character of available reserves and the failure of this type of economy. Roosevelt recognises this failure when he wants to call an international conference to review the state of still available natural resources and to take measures to stop them being wasted.

Of course the plan itself is humbug. The state could do much to stop the pitiless extermination of rare species. But the capitalist state is in the end a poor representative of the good of humanity. It must halt in face of the essential interests of capital.





Capitalism is a headless economy which cannot regulate its acts by an understanding of their consequences. But its devastating character does not derive from this fact alone. Over the centuries humans have also exploited nature in a foolish way, without thinking of the future of humanity as a whole. But their power was limited. Nature was so vast and so powerful that with their feeble technical means humans could only exceptionally damage it. Capitalism, by contrast, has replaced local needs with world needs, and created modern techniques for exploiting nature. So it is now a question of enormous masses of matter being subjected to colossal means of destruction and removed by powerful means of transportation. Society under capitalism can be compared to a gigantic unintelligent body; while capitalism develops its power without limit, it is at the same time senselessly devastating more and more the environment from which it lives. Only socialism, which can give this body consciousness and reasoned action, will at the same time replace the devastation of nature by a rational economy. *Zeitungskorrespondenz* N° 75, 10 July 1909, Original German, and a French translation, can be found here: <http://pantopolis.over-blog.com/2019/07/anton-pannekoek-la-destruction-de-la-nature-1909.html>

Anton Pannekoek (1873-1960) was a Dutch socialist and astronomer who wrote on scientific subjects from a Marxist point of view. At the time he wrote this article he was a member of the radical wing of the German SPD. He was briefly led astray by the Russian revolution but soon realised that Russia under the Bolsheviks was heading for state capitalism. While holding that socialism could only be established by democratically-organised conscious majority action, he advocated that this be done through workers councils avoiding the use of the ballot box. The picture on the right shows him in 1908.



### Use value and exchange value

In June the media discovered an interview John McDonnell had given last September. It was immediately seized on by the campaign to depict him, Corbyn and even the Labour Party as 'Marxist'. Interviewed by Aaron Bastani and Ash Sarkar, according to the *Times* (24 June), 'the shadow chancellor discussed how Karl Marx's work could help people to alter their priorities, and how the "use value" rather than "exchange value" of goods should dominate the way people think.'

Marx did distinguish between 'use value' and 'exchange value' and McDonnell is correct to say that 'what we have is a society dominated by exchange value' (novaramedia.com/2018/09/27).

However, Marx was not the first to make this distinction. The two terms were introduced by Adam Smith who wrote:

'The word VALUE, it is to be observed, has two different meanings, and sometimes expresses the utility of some particular object and sometimes the power of purchasing other goods which the possession of that object conveys. The one may be called "value in use," the other "value in exchange"' (*The*

*Wealth of Nations*, Book 1, chapter IV).

Marx pointed out, on the first page of *Capital*, that to have exchange value a product had to satisfy 'human wants of some sort or another. The nature of such wants, whether, for instance, they spring from the stomach or from fancy, makes no difference.' So, a 'use value' is something that at least some people consider useful. This was, wrote Marx, socially determined but 'to discover the various uses of things is the work of history,' ie, not of economics.

Both he and Smith were interested in what determined a product's 'exchangeable value'. Both concluded that it was related to the amount of labour-time required to produce it from start to finish. What gave a product of labour exchange value was that it had been produced with a view to being sold. The word both used to describe such a product was 'commodity.'

Marx's *Capital* opens: 'The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as "an immense accumulation of commodities"'. Capitalism was a society in which the products of labour, including the capacity to work of the producers, took the form of commodities. But Marx was not interested simply in what determined the exchange value of commodities but above all in how 'a society dominated by exchange value' worked.

He first noted that, where the

producers' capacity to work was also a commodity, this resulted in them producing other commodities with a greater exchange value than that of the one they had sold to their employer for a wage, the difference being 'surplus value', the source of profits. His conclusion was that capitalism was a society dominated by the imperative to accumulate more and more exchange value, derived from profits and embodied as use values in buildings and instruments for producing more wealth and surplus value, at the expense of producing use values to satisfy people's needs. Exchange value was more important than use value.

McDonnell, who clearly is acquainted with Marx, is right to want to encourage people to think about this. But it is unclear what he thinks should be done. Marx saw the only way out as a society in which there was no exchange value because use values were not produced as commodities, as items for sale, but for people to take and use. McDonnell seems to want a society in which commodities are still produced but in which use value prevails over exchange value. A laudable aim but, as Marx showed and experience has confirmed, unachievable. Where there is production for sale with a view to profit, the making and accumulation of profits will always come first.

# PROPER GANDER

## Mistaken Identity

TUCKED AWAY on BBC3 is a worthy, if a little rushed, drama which aims to explore and explain how people can come to adopt far-right views. *The Left Behind* follows Gethin, a young man living with his sister, along with her husband and child, in a run-down Welsh community. The family is threatened with eviction from their rented home, and approaches the council for help with finding other accommodation. A new housing development is being planned, but the family realises that a place there won't be within their financial reach. When they become homeless, the council doesn't place Gethin with the others in temporary accommodation, as he's not classed as a 'priority'. So he ends up sleeping rough, alongside his father who fell into homelessness after losing his job. Gethin works whatever shifts he's given in a fast food joint, which isn't enough for him to have either enough money or enough fulfilment in his job. His gang of friends live similarly precarious lives, with little prospect of anything changing for the better. They blame their situation on immigrants and Muslims, who they believe have taken 'their' jobs and houses. The gang's growing nationalist, far-right views push them to extremes against a local family who run a halal butcher shop.

*The Left Behind*'s writer, Alan Harris, based the script on research by sociology professor Hilary Pilkington, who has studied what motivates people to espouse far-right beliefs. At only an hour long, the drama doesn't have time to go deeply enough into the reasons, but it tells a sadly plausible story. It's set in a community where most people have to struggle on a low income with the threat of homelessness, and research suggests that these circumstances can breed support for far-right views. The play's director Joseph Bullman says that a feeling of 'hopelessness' drives people to the far right. 'Most of those people, when you read the studies, live ultra-insecure lives in ultra-low wage jobs and they can't have a narrative for their lives. They feel humiliated, excluded and left behind' he said at the film's premiere ([www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-48723274](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-48723274)). Someone who feels

hopeless is likely to believe that they have no power or influence, especially over their own lives. A misguided way of compensating for this is by trying to get power over other people, shown in the drama through the gang trashing and then burning down the halal butcher shop. The gang, and their real-life equivalents, scapegoat Muslims for their own and society's problems. Prejudice against Muslims is a common route for people who adopt far-right views, as found by Professor Pilkington's research. It's easier to blame another group (especially if they look a bit different) than to understand the economics behind issues like low-paid work or the housing shortage.



It's a complete myth that Muslims are prioritised for social housing or jobs. Those who hold this misguided belief don't seem to bother asking themselves why religion would be used as a criterion for shortlisting, whether for a home or a job. Councils and companies just don't work like that. Right wing falsehoods get stirred up by social media, usually as mis-spelt rants on message threads. People of similar views reflect and reinforce each others' beliefs, an 'echo chamber' based on ignorance.

Islam, and other religions, should be criticised for their tenets and practices, but challenging this ideology in a legitimate way requires evidence and rational arguments, best delivered calmly. The far-right takes a stereotypical, alarmist view of Islam, a false starting point which isn't likely to lead to a reasonable debate. Threats,

abuse and violence are used because their arguments are so weak.

Nationalism goes with far-right views. In the drama, the gang talks of 'standing up for Britain', which rests on the wrong assumption that Britain is theirs to defend. It's a case of mistaken identity. The far right, whether as a group of alienated young people or political organisations, see divisions between people in nationality, culture and ethnicity. The real division in society is between the minority who own and run things and the vast majority, of whatever nation, culture or ethnicity, who have to cope as best they can with their circumstances. Unfortunately, the play only hints at the reasons behind the bigger picture.

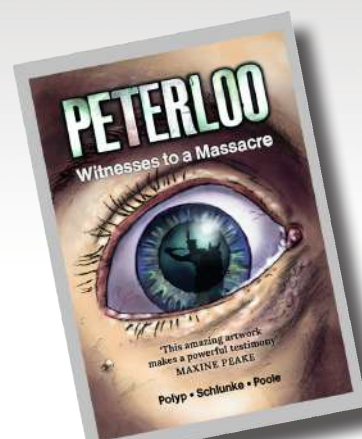
Where the research behind the script comes through clearest are the scenes with Gethin arguing and pleading with the council housing officer. Their replies of 'we have a limited number of properties and we have to prioritise people' and 'there's only so much we can do' must have been said thousands of times in real-life council offices. The other characters representing some sort of authority tend to hide behind bland, hollow turns of phrase when challenged about the system. For example, the councillor at a public meeting about the out-of-reach housing development uses 'I understand your frustrations' and 'I will be working my hardest to take that forward'. Even the manager of the fast food caff pretends his zero-hours-contract staff are 'associates' who 'facilitate our customers' needs'.

The scenario shown in *The Left Behind* shouldn't make us jump to the conclusion that living in poverty automatically leads to being a right-wing numbskull. And while the drama may describe how some people sink to the far right, it's certainly not the only route. Abhorrent racist and nationalist views are obviously also found among the rich and the reasonably well-off, with different causes. What anyone in the far right has in common is not seeing the real reasons behind society's problems, and using this to encourage harmful divisions between people.

MIKE FOSTER



## Eye Witnesses



Polyp, Eva Schlunke and Robert Poole: **Peterloo: Witnesses to a Massacre.** New Internationalist £11.99.

On 16 August 1819, around 60,000 workers gathered in St Peter's Fields in Manchester to demand an extension of the franchise. They came, men, women and children, from all over Manchester and surrounding areas. Many joined up in contingents of local people who then marched together several miles to the centre of the city. Part of a much wider reform movement, they had come to hear 'Orator' Henry Hunt give a speech, but primarily to support a wider franchise and to have an enjoyable day out with their friends and neighbours.

The ruling class, who resisted any reforms, had of course made preparations for the meeting. The local yeomanry, a private militia of the wealthy, were there, also the 15th Hussars. Under instructions from the magistrates, the police attempted to arrest Hunt, but when they were unsuccessful, the mounted yeomanry were sent to help. Not properly trained, in many cases drunk, and with freshly-sharpened sabres, they rode into the crowd, attacking people at will. The Hussars then arrived, in some cases restraining the yeomanry but in others adding to the confusion and crushing. At least fifteen people were killed, perhaps eighteen, and over seven hundred injured. The authorities arrested many of the organisers, including Hunt, who was sentenced to sixteen months in prison.

This book, with illustrations by Polyp, was edited by Schlunke on the basis of evidence and information assembled by Poole. There are some narrative captions by the authors, but the majority of the

text is taken verbatim from reports by direct witnesses, whether reformers, journalists or establishment figures. This lends the story a vividness that is added to by the graphics; not everyone likes graphic novels or histories, but here the format does provide an impression of a continuing series of events that brings home to the reader the violence and desperation of the day. A major of the Hussars is quoted as saying, 'I was very much amused to see the way in which the volunteer cavalry knocked the people about', while a reporter stated, 'There were individuals in the yeomanry whose political rancour approached absolute insanity.' Shortly before he died as a result of being beaten, one ex-soldier said, 'At Waterloo there was man to man, but at Manchester it was downright murder.'

The authorities reacted not just by prison sentences but also by terming the events a 'riot' and blaming the crowd for what happened, as they had supposedly attacked the yeomanry. Yet journalists such as John Tyas of *The Times*, who was no supporter of reform, agreed that no stones or whatever were thrown at the yeomanry, so there was no justification or provocation for their violence. The Six Acts passed later in 1819 were intended to clamp down on further mass protest. The propaganda war continues today, such as in arguments that not enough people were killed for it to really constitute a massacre. An appalling article by Dominic Sandbrook (*Mail Online* 24 August 2018) played down Peterloo's significance and claimed that, compared to the violence of the French Revolution, it 'was not even a sideshow'. Moreover, it was 'almost certainly an accident'. But, while it is arguable to what extent there was an advance government plan to attack the demonstrators, the events of 16 August have to be seen in the context of both previous and subsequent state repression aimed at keeping workers in their place.

The bicentenary of Peterloo is being marked by a number of events and exhibitions in Manchester (see [peterloo1819.co.uk](http://peterloo1819.co.uk)). This book provides an excellent account of what happened and why it remains important.

PB



## Strictly Marxist

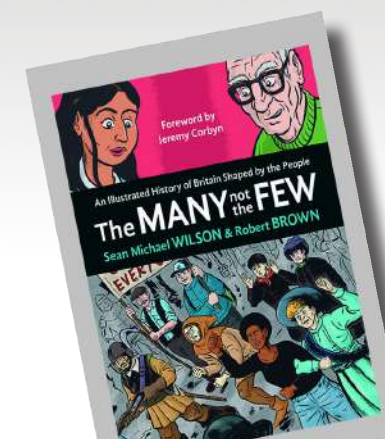


**William Morris's Utopianism: Propaganda, Politics and Prefiguration.** By Owen Holland. Palgrave Macmillan. 300 pages. 2017.

This is an important book that shows that Morris was not a 'utopian' in the sense of wanting to set up small-scale intentional communities run on cooperative or communistic lines. This is what Marx and Engels had called in 1848 in the *Communist Manifesto* 'duodecimo editions of the New Jerusalem', as advocated – and to a certain extent practised – by Charles Fourier, Etienne Cabet, Robert Owen and their followers. Morris was a utopian only in the sense of being the author of a utopian novel about a future communist (or socialist, the same thing) society and how it came about. Even in *News from Nowhere*, there is a criticism of 'utopian socialism' as when Old Hammond says of Fourier's 'phalansteries' that they were a 'refuge from destitution and little more.'

In his purely political writings Morris was even more critical, accusing those who set them up of opting out of the struggle to establish socialism on a society-wide basis. Holland quotes from a book review Morris wrote in *Justice* (10 July 1886), the journal of the Social Democratic Federation, that 'although these communities were experiments in association, from one point of view they were anti-Socialistic, as they withdrew themselves from general society—from political society—and let it take care of itself.' Holland goes to quote from a lecture Morris gave in 1894 entitled *Why I am a Communist* in which he said that 'such experiments are of their nature non-progressive; at their best they are but another form of the Mediaeval monastery, withdrawals from the Society of the day,

## Alright up to a point



**The Many Not the Few. An Illustrated History of Britain Shaped by the People.** By Sean Michael Wilson and Robert Brown. Workable Books. 2019. £9.99.

really implying hopelessness of a general change.'

What Morris favoured was socialists staying in capitalist society and propagating the need for revolutionary action to change the basis of society to the common ownership and democratic control of the means of life, the same criticism that Marx and Engels had made of those they encountered in the 1840s who argued for setting up intentional communistic communities.

In the book as a whole, Holland places Morris's ideas in the context of late Victorian society, as in his examination of Morris's views on the 'women's rights' movement of the time and the peoples of the 'backward countries.'

As a socialist Morris was of course opposed to all oppression of women, but he seems to have thought that women were better, if not naturally, suited to doing certain kinds of work (such as serving food, as in *News from Nowhere*) and unsuited for others (such as working down coal mines or at night). Not that the feminists of the time (now known as First Wave Feminism) campaigned for the 'right' of women to work at night or down the mines. They were more concerned about their property not passing to their husband if they got married. Many, Holland notes, saw the way forward for women in terms of individual personal development rather than a change in the basis of society.

ALB



This is a primer, in the cartoon form of conversations between a retired trade unionist and his granddaughter, of working class, or rather lower class (since it starts with the Peasants' Revolt), history, aimed at those new to trade unionism and 'labour' politics. Wat Tyler, the Levellers, the Diggers, Peterloo, the Chartists, the match girls' strike, they are all there. When, however, it comes to the twentieth century and the formation of the Labour Party it becomes tendentious; which no doubt explains why it comes with a preface and recommendation from Jeremy Corbyn.

However, Corbyn might be embarrassed (or maybe not) by the anti-EU and pro-Brexit stance taken at the end. This, no doubt, is due to the 'history adviser' being Doug Nicholls, a frequent contributor to the *Morning Star* and first chair of Trade Unionists Against the European Union. There is a mysterious reference to a 'Worker's Liberty' website on page 109, odd because if that's to the trotskyoid AWL they are anti-Brexit. In any event, dragging in Brexit will date the book and, besides, has nothing to do with working class history.

ALB



## PARTY NEWS – YEALAND CONYERS SOCIAL WEEKEND

Recently Lancaster branch tried an experiment, organising a social weekend with no talks or other planned activities in it. We wanted to see if socialists were willing to meet up just to be sociable, or whether there always had to be some democratic or educative content, as at a conference or weekend school.

So we sent out a general invite, booked a self-catering hostel out in the Cumbrian countryside, got some food and beer in, and waited. People started to trickle in. We picked some up from a nearby train station, while others drove or made their way, rather heroically, via the rural bus service. We cooked up a big veg curry, and the weekend got started.

Next morning, we got up to picture-postcard weather. We organised a shopping run and a late pickup from the train station, then around noon somebody made lunch butties for everyone. Around 1pm we trooped off up the hill on a collective walk in the countryside.

After weeks of rain, the landscape was lush with a clear view across low fells to Morecambe Bay sparkling in the distance and the blue Lake District hills beyond. A collective sigh of appreciation went round. Out came the OS map, which we lazily left to our map reader (socialists following leaders, we said, what could possibly go wrong?).

Our group became a line, and then a straggle stretching out until the ones at the front could barely even see the ones at the back. Maybe some socialists can march together like a well-drilled platoon, but clearly not us.

Our first map reader was soon joined by a second, and then a third. Conferences over the map then ensued, with much pointing to horizons and scratching of heads. When our 'leaders' resorted to asking directions from passers-by, we suspected that all was not well. After several hours in blazing heat, it was announced that we were lost. As a socialist object lesson this was poetic justice of course. Most of us were too busy enjoying the scenery and the socialising to bother looking at the map or even ask where we were supposed to be going.

Our small supply of water ran out. We wandered right through a bird sanctuary where there was a well-signposted café with a hundred-foot observation tower. We couldn't find them. We did manage to spot the large electric fence warning, so at least that was something.

(continues on page 22)



# 50 Years Ago

## The Moon and Progress

Perhaps it would be better if, after all, we left the moon alone. It is lovely to look at and does nobody any harm, and in any case there are plenty of problems to be tackled here on earth, before we start spreading out into space. Yet even the most fervent Luddite, the most obstinate flat-earthier, must feel a chill of excitement at the thought of men out in black space, circling the moon, observing it, stepping out onto its surface.

There is near-unanimity of opinion that space flights, moon landings, and the rest are a 'good thing' and anyone who has doubts on the matter is immediately classified as a neurotic, reactionary crank. It is true that space vehicles can make a valuable contribution to weather forecasting, communications, and geology, if only because of their unique position for observation. Another result of that unique position is, of course, that space vehicles have distinct, and frightening,



military uses — for both observation and combat. It is no coincidence that the world's two space powers are also the world's two greatest nuclear powers and that the other positions in the league table of space achievements roughly correspond to the positions in the nuclear power league table.

It might seem churlish to point this out, in face of the glamour of the moon shots. But is it so bad, to try to keep calm amid the hysteria and to wonder whether all technological advance is useful, why some of it happens, whether society has its priorities in order, and whether we should all fall flat on our faces in worship of the great god Progress which is supposed to feed and succour us, which we are supposed to rely on and to be unable to deny? (*Socialist Standard*, August 1969)

(continued from page 21)

In the end we retraced our steps home, and retired to the local country pub. This was impossible to miss, and even better, wasn't closed. Overheated and dehydrated, we tumbled into the bar like the last scene in the desert film 'Ice Cold in Alex'. We sat in the beer garden at several benches and gibbered (aka exchanged a wide range of erudite views) for several hours.

Some people wondered how we were going to organise dinner after being in the boozier for so long. However one IWW member had already done the calculation (socialists + pub = chaos), and precooked a pasta sauce, so that dinner was a breeze. Afterwards people busied themselves with the washing up and clearing away without any Monty Python-style debates over who was nominating who to be in charge of what.

Everyone talked to everyone, member and non-member alike, in the kitchen, on the walk, outside on the lawn, in the road having a smoke. Lots of politics was discussed, naturally, but unlike what you sometimes see in formal political debates the atmosphere was inclusive rather than adversarial, so that everyone felt able to speak.

So did we prove what we set out to prove, that you can hold a socialist weekend without any talks or votes and still make it a success? Yes, we think so.

Cost-wise it was pretty affordable too, with people donating what they could. There is a network of almost 400 self-catering hostels in rural locations around the UK which can be booked for around £20 per person per night, by room or full hire, so there's no reason why members couldn't take it upon themselves to organise weekends in their own regions. If our experience is anything to go by, members and non-members value the opportunity to get together, even if it's just to be sociable.

PJS

## OBITUARY

### Frank Simkins

We are saddened to have to report the death in May at the age of 90 of our comrade Frank Simkins. Frank was born in Battersea in South London in 1930. He had been a member of the Labour Party while a teenager but, on returning from conscripted national service (in Greece where the British Army was supporting the pro-West side in the civil war there), joined the old Camberwell branch in 1950 after listening to Party speakers at East Street, Walworth. He trained and worked as a tool-maker in various engineering factories, where he was an active trade

unionist and AEU shop steward and, later until the age of 80, as a storekeeper in his brother's motor business in Stockwell.

Frank was a regular outdoor speaker and occasional writer for the *Socialist Standard* and the Party's candidate in Clapham in the 1970 General Election. He also represented the Party in elections to the old GLC and was a regular attendee at Conference and Delegate Meetings (until his final illness), where he emphasised the need for socialists to support political democracy and warned of picturing socialism as a society without problems. In particular, he often argued that it was 'inconceivable' that every person on the planet would have their own personal car if socialism was to be an environmentally-friendly society.

Rarely seen without his trademark jacket and tie, the word 'dapper' could have been invented to describe him. But above all, Frank will be remembered as a polite, considerate and thoughtful man, with a good sense of humour. He was well-regarded by his comrades and our condolences go to his family and friends.



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

## Meetings: AUGUST 2019

### BIRMINGHAM

Friday 2 August, 5.00 p.m. – Sunday 4 August, 2.00 p.m.

#### Summer School

"Living the Dream: Being a Socialist in a Capitalist World."

Venue: Fircroft College of Adult Education, 1018 Bristol Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham, B29 6LH

### LONDON

Saturday 3 August, 11.00 a.m. – 1.00 p.m. Street Stall

Venue: Crouch End Broadway (near Hornsey Town Hall), London N8 9JJ

### CANTERBURY

Saturday 17 August, from 12.00 Noon Street Stall

In the vicinity of the Parade (a pedestrianised area close to the cathedral)

### DEAL

Bank Holiday Monday 26<sup>th</sup> August from 9.30 a.m.

#### Kent Miners Festival 2019

Venue: Betteshanger Community Park, Circular Road, Betteshanger, Deal, Kent CT14 0LT.

The Socialist Party will have a gazebo, display and literature stall at this event.

### LONDON

Bank Holiday Monday 26 August

#### Carshalton Environment Fair

Venue: Carshalton Park, Ruskin Road, Carshalton, SM5 3DD

The Socialist Party will have a stall at this event from 10.30 am to 5 pm

## SEPTEMBER 2019

### WIGAN

Saturday 7 September from 11.00 a.m.

#### Wigan Diggers Festival

Venue: Gerrard Winstanley Gardens, The Wiend, Wigan, WN1 1PF

The Socialist Party will have a stall at this event



## Joining the Socialist Party

Anyone who agrees with the object and principles of the Socialist Party can apply for membership. Applicants are asked to complete a questionnaire to satisfy themselves and the Socialist Party that they are in agreement with our ideas. Here are the questions:

What are the basic economic features of capitalism?

Explain what you understand by the terms 'capitalist class' and 'working class'.

Do you consider that the working class is exploited? If so, then briefly explain how this takes place

What do you understand by the word 'socialism'?

Why do socialists say that there will be no trade or money in a socialist society? On what basis will wealth be distributed?

Has socialism been established in any part of the world?

Why do socialists say that socialism cannot exist in one country alone?

Why do socialists maintain that democratic methods such as parliamentary elections, must be used to capture political power for the achievement of socialism?

Why do socialists not take sides or willingly take part in wars?

What is your attitude to other political parties? Do any of them stand for socialism?

Why does the Socialist Party not campaign for reforms?

What are your views on religion and its relation to the Party's case for socialism?

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To apply go to: [www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/membership-application](http://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/membership-application)



## REPUBLICANS OR DEMOCRATS: SAME DIFFERENCE

**'The Democratic platform is a political omelette made of stale eggs.'**

The 2020 '...candidates' divisions laid bare in feisty TV debate' (bbc.com, 27 June) resulted in much hot air. The so-called Democratic Socialist (a tautological misnomer) Bernie Sanders added his reformist 50 cents on 'issues' such as Medicare, student loans, and taxes. Unsurprisingly, neither he nor the other would-be mis-leaders spoke of the urgent need for a world of free access and production for use where the best education and healthcare would be available for all. And all this without taxes, which might at first glance please Donald Trump. He actually provided the best summary of the debate by tweet the same day: 'BORING!'

**'The Republican stands for the system as it is; the Democratic Party for the system as it was; the Socialist Party for a new system, the Socialist republic.'**

This remains true, although the past for some of today's Democrats is New Deal America under President Roosevelt. Between the years 1933-36 a series of reforms were introduced as a result of the Great Depression. The Democrats of the time favoured more government intervention, which contemporary Republicans opposed. The Workers' Socialist Party of the United States, today's WSP (US), commented: 'Economic developments are producing conditions that make the case for Socialism more strikingly clear than was possible in the past era of rampant individualism, and collectivistic ideas of sorts are floating around and being discussed in the most unlikely circles. But in the building up of a sound and powerful party of Socialists... a very great amount of work remains to be done' (More about Roosevelt's 'New Deal', *Socialist Standard*, August 1934).

**'In the light of experience, why should you vote for either the Republican or**

**Democratic parties?'**

Indeed, and as true then in 1908 as today. War and poverty remain as does the boom and bust cycle of capitalism. Prior to FDR's election in 1933, our US-based comrades wrote: 'It should be clear to all workers that the working class, if they are to escape from the misery of capitalism, must first understand their class position, and must then build up a Socialist political party for the purpose of capturing the powers of government in order to introduce Socialism' (*Socialist Standard*, October 1932).

**'This is the only solution of the economic problems of the working class. All else will leave them wage-slaves still'.**

The Democrats and Republicans want the 99 percent to take yet another spin on the reformist misery-go-round. Sanders has voted with the Democrats 98 percent of

1928: 'Earning a wage is a prison occupation' (*Wages*, DH Lawrence).

1965: Workers still 'don't realise that they can abolish the wages system' (*Socialist Standard*).

2019: \$15/hour by 2024? (Sanders' Raise the Wage Act).

**'You workers make everything and the capitalists have everything.'**

A recent study shows that the richest 0.00025 percent owns more wealth than the bottom 150 million Americans (commomdreams.org, 10 February). Wealth is the product of human labour, acting upon nature-given materials, that is capable of satisfying needs. We work, they take and pass on. Some of today's capitalists have many centuries of legalised theft behind them. The richest families in Florence got a head start and have been at it for the past 600 years.

**'If the workingmen are to be emancipated, they must emancipate themselves.'**

If the quotations above seem dated yet strangely relevant, it is because they were made by a founding member of the IWW and former Democrat Eugene Debs on the US presidential campaign trail in 1908 for the (now defunct) Socialist Party of America. Notably he also said that year: 'The capitalist system under which we live has about run its historic course, and on every hand we see unerring signs of a change. It has begun to write again its record of bankruptcy and failure, of idleness and distress, of despair and death.' And: 'There will be no trouble about the necessities of life when the working class takes over the machinery. They will have all the best food they need, the best homes that can be built, the best schools — no child labor, no grinding toil — and all the beautiful things will be for everyone' (Source: [www.marxists.org/archive/debs/works/1908/080918-debs-saidbydebs.pdf](http://www.marxists.org/archive/debs/works/1908/080918-debs-saidbydebs.pdf)).



the time. Let us put his qualified support for \$15/hour into context:

1865: 'Instead of the conservative motto, A fair day's wage for a fair day's work, we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, Abolition of the wage system' (Marx, *Value, Price, and Profit*).

## FREE LUNCH

