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 flightback 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 Milios, 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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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 one-party dictatorship. Both failures have been 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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**Blackout in Sudan**

LAST MONTH’S BBC Panorama shock exposed 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 Livestream Massacre’, BBC News, 12 July - bbc.in/3vF6kV).

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 can keep its masses 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 organisations to rely on text SMS or land-line telephone, a fridged 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/2H6AWn). No, 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, you’ve been here before. Yeah well, says Pfizer, we don’t really believe our own data anyway.

Alright, you argue, run proper clinical trials then. Voters want low taxes more than happy granddads.

Well, can’t you release the patent and let another drug 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, p8). 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 cappuccino while you may, because setting unaffordable prices or stopping production at source. In socialism you might argue, run proper clinical trials then.

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/2DpPvSc). 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 capuccino while you may, because in a few years time you might only be able to afford re-boiled dishes. How can a world that habitually calls a disaster? That’s capitalist ‘logic’ for you.

P.S.

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 then 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 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 for 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 – however hard and insecure, 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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Mailing bags recycle with supermarket carrier bags

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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 emphasise the inappropriateness of a particular analogy.

This kind of critique always insists on difference rather than the 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 objective approach to understanding narratives is that it can overwhelm the subtle aesthetic differences that make the book, film, or tale meaningful to a contemporary audience. So a balance is needed to prevent modern narratives from becoming the supreme example. An objection to this approach to literary analysis is that it can overwhelm the subtle aesthetic differences that make the book, film, or tale meaningful to a contemporary audience. So a balance is needed to prevent modern narratives from becoming the supreme example. An objection to this approach to literary analysis is that it can overwhelm the subtle aesthetic differences that make the book, film, or tale meaningful to a contemporary audience. So a balance is needed to prevent modern narratives from becoming the supreme example.

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 same conditions of the rich and economic interests of the minority bourgeoisie (immanent) and the working class (futurate) at that moment in history made it imperative that both these minority classes worked together to overthrow the autocracy of the Czarist regime.

Hadsen 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. As a result Russia would probably have progressed to a more traditional form of capitalism. The Bolsheviks’ 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
Nothing should own the Earth

Socialists do not own natural resources. Here’s Marx again:

> “There is only one world…” “The world’s natural and industrial resources must become the common heritage of all mankind. They cannot be used to directly meet the needs of the world’s population…” How did ancient man arrive at this attitude, this arrogance that became so precariously displayed in Genesis? (London Progressive Journal, 8 June - bit.ly/2Gw58tl)

Is the Socialist Party as guilty as accused here in that we share the same beliefs as Old Testament fundamentalists that God gave the Earth to humans to control? If Docksey looked deeper into our case she would have found that we advocate common ownership, which can be defined as a situation in which no person or group has the right to exclude the opportunity to control productive resources. The word ‘ownership’ can be misleading in that when we transfer to all members of the society the power to control the production of wealth, no one is excluded from the opportunity of controlling and benefiting from the use of the means of production, then the very concept of property is redundant, the sense of exclusive possession has become meaningless. This is exactly what she seeks when she later says in her article ‘...Is it too late to ditch our rigid world view, our superiority, our belief in our ‘right to own and control our world?’ She then asserts ‘...There is nothing that makes humanity truly exceptional; our desire to own and control everything, partnered by our horrible ability to destroy what we own, control...’

We don’t share her pessimism. The species homo sapiens, unlike other animals, possesses the ability to change its needs, technologies and social relations. Culture allows humans to adapt to a new or changing environment much more rapidly than any evolutionary biological adaptation through natural selection ever could. The behavior of other animals cannot develop in the same way that humans can. This cultural change is one of the reasons that enables us to engage in human community.

However, there is another aspect to her observation where she declares that ‘... For far too long, humanity has regarded itself as “outside” Nature...’ She certainly never learned that belief from socialists. Here we have the views of a couple of nineteenth-century socialists.

> “... the human population…” “Nobody should own the Earth”

...the nature takes its revenge on us. Each generation in an improved condition... The behavior of... their knowledge to do that. It is the...”

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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 bag rump of a Tory Party; the blue rince and blazed 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 Johnson (I think that’s pronounced puffie) Johnson, an Old Etonian who studied classics at Balliol College, Oxford and was a distinguished member of the Buller!... Buller!...Buller!... Bollingdon 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 whisking 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-pompinjazz, lazy, feckless, dishonest, narcissistic, racist, homophbic 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-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 that it does the opposite. If the number of similar incumbents around the world is anything to go by this vitriol is often intended to demonstrate Boris’s unfitness for high office, it seems that it does the opposite. If the number of similar incumbents around the world is anything to go by this

Boris, the indefatigable, is crowned King

...and therefore business will be as usual. But what if, horror of horrors, that supposed Communist, Trotskyist, Leninist, Marxist, Putin apologiast, racist, anti-Semitic, allotment-gardening Corbyn gets into No 10 after all? The Establishment have already laid their contingency plans in the form of a recalctant civil service. One retired general has mooted if needs be, a military coup, mainly premised on the treasonous conduct of Corby in refusing to unhesitantly 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 be very practical. 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 hypocrisy of Corbynism and the increasing power of hands in the powers 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’ central planning. The theoretical problem is ensuring everyone is engaging in Pareto-efficient activity. Though the numberous 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’. And, indeed, many sizeable, 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 feedback loops that fine-tune the system’s operation. 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’. Unlike the market system, calculation-in-kind enables us to respond to the ever-changing information concerning individual wants in a socialist society. Apart from enabling us to respond to the ever-changing size of the society is completely irrelevant. Second, considering his point about the limits of altruism, one might think that they would impair the operation of society. Yet, just as larger-scale society requires the like can provide useful pointers when it comes to produce innovation and design but it would be impractical to canvas the entire population; only a small sample is required. It is also true that any large-scale society requires information concerning individual wants in a socialist society can be acquired indirectly in an aggregated form via the supermarket etc. 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 purely based 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. Barri argues 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. However, 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. Thus, ‘calculation-in-kind’ does not mean there is no expectation of 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, there is no indication of what the different calculations needed to efficiently allocate resources. As he put it:

“Economic calculation is the factor of production for those other end uses. In either case, the Misesian claim that socialism cannot resolve the problem of how to 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, where necessary, to adjust resource use so as to reflect the quantity of resources available.

Establishing a hierarchy of production priorities (perhaps informed by concepts like Maslow’s ‘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, might make use of such indicators 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 decisions is correct. If decisions are consistently wrong then desires 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, it underlies the possibility of feedback so crucial to the refutation of his entire theory.

ROBIN COX
ARE ALL COPPERS BASTARDS?

During the 1904/05 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 will. 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 have come to be regarded by many on the Left as impermeable to socialist ideas, yet the fact remains, however, that 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 have come to be regarded by many on the Left as impermeable to socialist ideas, yet the fact remains, however, that 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 have come to be regarded by many on the Left as impermeable to socialist ideas, yet the fact remains, however, that 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 have come to be regarded by many on the Left as impermeable to socialist ideas, yet the fact remains, however, that 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 have come to be regarded by many on the Left as impermeable to socialist ideas, yet the fact remains, however, that 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 have come to be regarded by many on the Left as impermeable to socialist ideas, yet the fact remains, however, that 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 have come to be regarded by many on the Left as impermeable to socialist ideas, yet the fact remains, however, that 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 have come to be regarded by many on the Left as impermeable to socialist ideas, yet the fact remains, however, that 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 have come to be regarded by many on the Left as impermeable to socialist ideas, yet the fact remains, however, that 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 have come to be regarded by many on the Left as impermeable to socialist ideas, yet the fact remains, however, that

Many of our fellow-workers have suffered is undone. Our 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 the 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 1,600 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.

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 Deserter 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, 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 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 jingoos, 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 instances of the capitalist society like the police which we have under capitalism today.

We don’t take the totally utopian view that there will be no antisocial acts whatever 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 trade 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 classified 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. Nobody 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.

**ALSO**

For a contemporary account of 1919 police strikes, see the June 1919 Socialist Standard: www.worldsocialism.org/ssp/ socialist-standard/1910/1919/014-no-178-june-1919/hoobys- discretion/
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 uprooting 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 stone deserts. Rainforests, home to many local species, are being cleared to make way for palm-oil plantations. And the fast-growing deforestation of the Amazon, the world’s largest forest, is a major threat to the survival of the Xingu, a tribe of Indians. The collapse of the deforestation of the Amazon recently generated international attention, and the Federal Government of Brazil quickly raised the issue to the level of a national concern. Several initiatives have been proposed to protect the forest and its biodiversity, including the creation of a new national park, the expansion of existing reserves, and the establishment of a program to promote sustainable forestry. However, these efforts have been met with resistance from local communities and government officials who see them as threats to their livelihoods. As a result, the fight to protect the Amazon continues, with both sides engaged in a complex and often violent battle. The future of the forest remains uncertain, but one thing is clear: the destruction of nature is a threat to our survival. It is time for action.
Capitalism is a headless economy which cannot regulate the possession of that object conveys. Capitalism as a mode of production prevails, presents those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as "an immense accumulation of commodities". Capitalism was 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 use value because use values were not produced as commodities, as items for sale, but for people to take and use. McDonnell sees a society in which commodities are still produced and surplus value, at the expense of wages, derived from profits and surplus value, as Marx showed and experience has indeed revealed that under the capitalist mode of production, the system is driven by the pursuit of profit and the accumulation of capital. "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 the various uses of things is the work of history, ie, of economics. Both 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".

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 miss-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 these groups are misinterpreted as Nationalism goes with far-right views. In the drama, the gang talks of ‘standing up for Britain’, which rests on the premise that Britain is a country that is theirs to defend. It’s a case of mistaken identity. The far right, whether as a result of religious or political organisations, see divisions between people in nationality, culture and ethnicity. The real division in society is between the minority who own run things and the vast majority, of whatever nation, culture or ethnicity, who have to cope as best they can with their circumstances. Fortunately, the play only hints at the reasons behind the bigger picture.

The scenario shown in The Left Behind shouldn’t make us jump to the conclusion that living in poverty automatically leads to a right-wing mind. Abhorrent racist and nationalist views are obviously also found among the far right. It’s certainly not only those who live in the out-of-reach housing development uses ‘I understand your frustrations’ and will ‘be working my hardest to take away the pain’. The out-of-reach housing development puts. The play’s director Joseph Bullman says that 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 for demand’ are said thousands of times in real-life council offices. The far right, whether as a result of religious or political organisations, see divisions between people in nationality, culture and ethnicity. The real division in society is between the minority who own run things and the vast majority, of whatever nation, culture or ethnicity, who have to cope as best they can with their circumstances. Fortunately, the play only hints at the reasons behind the bigger picture.

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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 in contingents of local people who then marched together several miles to the centre of Manchester, and in one of the most widely reform movement, they had come to hear ‘Orator’ Henry Hunt give a speech, but primarily to support a wider franchise and ‘right’ of women to work at night or down serving food, as in working 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.

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 or intentional or communist lines. This is what Marx and Engels had called in 1848 in the Communist Manifesto ‘dictatorial 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 destruction and little more’. In his purely political writings Morris was even more critical, accusing those who set them up of getting 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-Socialist, as they withdrew themselves from general society—from political society—and let it take care of itself’. Holland goes on to quote from a lecture Morris gave in 1884 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 Mediæval monastery, withdrawals from the Society of the day, 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 communist communities. In the book as a whole, Holland places Morris’s idea 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 if 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.

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. Wet 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 AWH they are anti-Brexit. In any event, dragging in Brexit will date the book and, in any event, it was a referendum on page 109, odd because if that’s to the trotskyoid AWH they are anti-Brexit. In any event, dragging in Brexit will date the book and, in any event, it was a referendum on
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-earther, must feel a chill of excitement at the thought of men out in black space, circling the shining, stepping out into 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 provide a valuable contribution to weather forecasting, communications, and geology, but 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 countries 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 it is so bad, to try to keep calm amid the hysteria and to wonder whether all technological advance is useful, why none of it happens, whether society has its priorities in order, and what we can do about it. Are we all fall flat on our faces in worship of the 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)

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.

Ortybury

Frank Simkins

We are saddened to have to report the death in May at the age of 90 of our colleague 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 in Clapham in the 1970 General Election. He also represented the Party in elections to the old GLC and was a regular attendant 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 environment-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.

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

Meetings:

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: Firgrove College of Adult Education, 2018 Bristol Road, Sally 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 5JU

CANTERBURY
Saturday 17 August, from 12.00 Noon
Street Stall

Declaration of Principles

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

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments of production and distribution and wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds
1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the domination of the means of living (i.e. land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between the classes who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the organisation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.
5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly of capitalist ownership, and is taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including the armed forces of the nation, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diematically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives the toilers of their labour and that poverty may give place to comfort, privileged equality, and slavery to freedom.

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

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

DEAL
Bank Holiday Monday 26th August from 9.30 a.m. to 11.00 a.m.
Kent Miners Festival 2019
Venue: Betteshanger Community Park, Circular Road, Betteshanger, Deal, Kent CT14 0LT
The Socialist Party will have a gazeb and display and nature stall at this event.

LONDON
Bank Holiday Monday 26 August
Cashshall Environment Fair
Venue: Cashhall Park, Rusklin Road, Cashshall, SMS 3DJ
The Socialist Party will have a stall at this event from 10.30 am to 5 pm

WIGAN
Saturday 7 September from 11.00 a.m.
Wigan Diggers Festival
Venue: Wigan Wigan Stanley Gardens, The Wield, Wigan, WN1 1PF
The Socialist Party will have a stall at this event
REAR VIEW

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 collectivist 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 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).

1928: ‘Earning a wage is a prison occupation’ (Wages, DH Lawrence).

1965: ‘Earning a wage is a prison occupation’ (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 (commodifiedreams.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).

FREE LUNCH

BACK IN HISTORY, WE’VE HAD PRIMITIVE SÁVAGERY, FOLLOWED BY SLAVERY, THEN FOLLOWED BY FEUDAL TYRANNY...

— BUT NOW, THANKS TO MODERN CREDIT AND FLEXIBLE MARKETS...

— WE CAN HAVE IT ALL THREE TOGETHER!