BOJO’s WAR with HIS OWN CLASS

ALSO:
THE NUCLEAR THREAT
CLIMATE VS. CAPITALISM
FALL OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE
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 run counter to the nature of capitalism and run counter to the nature of the capitalist system. The Liberals, most of them are resigned to seeking a softer Brexit rather than reversing it in a second referendum, which would be a festival of xenophobia.

Where do the workers come into this? Good question. We don’t. While a no-deal Brexit would temporarily cause us unnecessary inconvenience and any Brexit will remove our freedom to move throughout the single market area (and cause problems for those who have moved), basically this is not our dispute.

For over three years political debate in Britain has been dominated by the inability of capitalist politicians to agree if, when and how capitalist Britain should leave the capitalist EU. In June 2016 the issue was put to the people and the people voted to leave. However, this didn’t settle matters as it left open the question of what this meant. Did it mean simply leave the EU’s political institutions and its political project or did it mean also leave its single market and customs union which provided for frictionless and tariff-free trade throughout Europe?

As explained on page 6, the capitalist class has been divided over the issue. Most of the ‘business elite’ never wanted to leave and favour as soft a Brexit as possible, one that would maintain free access to the EU’s single market. A minority, mainly maverick financiers, want a clean break in order to avoid any EU regulation of its activities.

This split is mirrored amongst capitalist politicians, with parties and individuals lining up behind one or other section of the business elite. The Liberals, most of the Labour Party and some Tories are behind the mainstream majority and, counter-intuitively, the Tories under Johnson and Farage’s Brexit Party are behind the financiers who funded the Leave campaign and Johnson’s Tory leadership bid. The SNP, who want an independent capitalist Scotland, have joined those opposed to Brexit, while the DUP, still fighting yesterday’s battles in Northern Ireland, initially allied themselves with the Tories until Johnson decided to sacrifice them to get the sort of deal those who financed his leadership campaign want – one where Britain leaves both the single market and the customs union.

However, even this is not in the bag as it remains to be negotiated. The dominant section of the business elite can still get a softer Brexit if there’s a change of government. Most of them are resigned to seeking a softer Brexit rather than reversing it in a second referendum, which is just a LibDem vote-catching ploy and would be a festival of xenophobia.

Where do the workers come into this? Good question. We don’t. While a no-deal Brexit would temporarily cause us unnecessary inconvenience and any Brexit will remove our freedom to move through the single market area (and cause problems for those who have moved), basically this is not our dispute.

As we go to press, Boris Johnson has proposed an election on 12 December. One advantage of an election would be that it would allow other issues to be discussed. Unavoidably Brexit will be an issue, but it won’t be the only one. This will allow socialists to go beyond saying that Leave or Remain is irrelevant as far as the class of wage and salary workers is concerned and to point out that the other issues – climate change, health, schools, transport, etc. – cannot be solved by the reforms to capitalism the other parties will be promising, but only within the framework of common ownership, democratic control, production directly to meet people’s needs, and distribution on the basis of ‘from each according to ability, to each according to need.’
Socialism – there’s an app for that

FUNNY HOW, if you do a column for long enough, you can meet yourself right back where you started. When this column began, in January 2005, I asked if the popular computer simulation game, Sim City, could ever be used to create artificial models of global socialist society in operation. As there wasn’t a computer big enough to do this at the time, we suggested distributed processing using a global network of home PCs crunching data in the breaks when their users weren’t at the keyboard. In theory this might have worked, but in any case we had no suggestion at the time for how to make the model sophisticated enough. Simply consider one average human being, and the range of possible actions open to them in any given situation, and the variables quickly become enormous. Multiply those by the population of the world, and the task was beyond incomputable. We threw the question out there anyway, knowing we were asking in the moon on a stick.

Well, Moon, it’s time to Meet Stick, because things have changed. If 2005 doesn’t seem that long ago, remember that the Sim City article appeared four months before the first ever YouTube upload, ‘Me at the Zoo’. The internet was just a year old and only 5–7 percent of people in western countries used social networking sites. In the same month Microsoft released its XP Professional operating system. Reddit was launched in June. Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram and Snapchat did not yet exist.

Since then, raw computing power has increased by orders of magnitude. The advent of big data, collected through trading sites and social networks, has created a new science of mass behavioural analysis. Artificial intelligence, given the right data, rules and parameters, can now out-think any human on the planet. It’s starting to get thinking and planning tools that are unimaginably faster, and involving data sets that are vastly bigger than anything conceivable even in 2005.

A recent article in New Scientist shows just how far things have come, with a new generation of simulated models which are able to plot predictions at the crowd or market level, with the actions of individual behaviour. Multi-agent artificial intelligence (MAAI) allows ‘predictions to be made with extraordinary precision by testing them in highly detailed simulations that amount to entire artificial societies’ [5 October]. This may sound far-fetched, but it’s being done now. MAAl’s are already being used to build digital societies that simulate real ones with uncanny accuracy.

Instead of primitive top-down social models, MAAl uses agent-based modelling, in which individual ‘agents’ are ‘programmed to interact with one another and their virtual environment and change their behaviour accordingly’ [1]. One early non-AI model was developed to predict the spread of the Ebola outbreak in 2014, using known parameters ranging from demographics to disease pathology to cultural factors such as burial rites. At the same time researchers developed ‘what if’ interventions to see what might impede the disease spread. Without interventions, the model predicted 1.4 million infections. In the event, smart interventions suggested by the model kept the figure down to 28,000. This doesn’t prove the model was responsible per se, or that unknown factors didn’t play a role, but it is nevertheless powerful evidence in favour of this method.

So the model had to be kept simple, with a very limited range of individual behavioural options, because that was all the available computing technology could cope with. Instead of near-zombies, what researchers really wanted were ‘intelligent agents’ able to emulate the behaviour of thinking and acting for themselves.

Even so, the model had to be kept simple, with a very limited range of individual behavioural options, because that was all the available computing technology could cope with. Instead of near-zombies, what researchers really wanted were ‘intelligent agents’ able to emulate the behaviour of thinking and acting for themselves. This is delivering just this. ‘One of the things that has changed is an acceptance that you really can model humans,’ says one researcher. ‘Our agents are cognitively complex. They are simulated people with genders, ages and personalities. [...] They learn social in the way humans do. They learn from each other, react to each other and to the environment as a whole.’ You might be impressed if you could do this at the scale of a village. In fact the technology can already model a city as big as London, and the plan is to scale it up to a population the size of the US, then China, and ultimately the world. Just as so-called Industry 4.0 is introducing the digital twin, individual factory technology can be managed and monitored via its virtual equivalent using a vast array of sensors attached to every moving part, so it should soon be possible to ‘build an artificial society, try things out and see what works’.

Today’s researchers are understandably thinking about models which address questions such as: What would be the possibilities for socialists as are dazzling as they are obvious. What if you could model a real, democratic, non-market society of common ownership? What would it look like? Could there be different but workable versions? What forms of direct or representative democracy would be most feasible and at what scales? Which forms of science and culture might bloom and which might wither on the vine? What might we lose, and what gain, without the cruel driving force of money? People comprehend what they can see with their own eyes. We could potentially bring the world of our day made by a 3D chart brings a table of data to life, and in ways we haven’t even thought of yet. And if we can model what would all this do, would it necessarily convince anyone? However sophisticated the model becomes, it is a virtual equivalent using a vast array of sensors attached to every moving part, so it shouldn’t prove anything in the real world. But socialists, like scientists, know that nothing outside of mathematics is ever really ‘provable’ in scientific terms. The most we can do is amass such a weight of evidence that people are gravitationally inclined towards it. MAAI will help us do this. Make no mistake, other political and commercial forces will use it, for their own manipulative purposes. We can use it too, but with no nefarious objective and our code and parameters open to scrutiny. If our model reveals ways in which socialistism might go wrong, or break down, say in circumstances of large-scale harvest failures, we would certainly want to know in advance. But if we can demonstrate that socialist works as a stable system, without the kind of wild fluctuations you get with market societies and the kind of inequality, wars and environmental damage that also produces, then it will be a lot harder for people to get out of hand. Maybe we could get it on a phone app. Somebody down the pub says: ‘nah, it wouldn’t work, you need a year’s work, years’ run. You say ‘Yeah, really you think? Then have a look at this...’

PIS

Thoughts on Democracy and Brexit

FROM the Chartists, through the Suffragettes, there has always been a consistent demand for democracy. The suffrage vote, has been a focus of that struggle, the measure of just how democratic society has become. The ballot box is the echo chamber for the voice of the people. Except, it isn’t. Should I choose not to cast my vote I am upbraided for betraying those who fought for, perhaps even died for, universal suffrage by not recognising its value. However, the contrarian argument is that in a free democracy we should put the best of a bad lot from a misplaced sense of duty. In the end a valuable asset is all too easily squandered.

So it was for the 2016 EU referendum. Plebiscites have, at best, a poor history. They are the favoured means by which despots seek a thin veneer of popular support for their tyranny. The fundamental weakness is the attempt to present a binary solution to complex issues. And, more often than not, there is insufficient or no factual data whereby a rational decision can be made.

So it was in 2016. Both Brexiteers and Remainers made assertions and shouted loudly, but detail was in very short supply. As economists frequently demonstrate, predicting the economic future is beyond our ken.

In capitalist terms, it is quite possible to suffer short term difficulties if ‘we’ ‘crash out’ of the EU, but then go on to prosper, until the next inevitable recession. The economic miracle will be an economically safer bet in the short term, but if Germany’s manufacturing industry continues to decline, and 30 countries smaller than the rest of the EU with it. Both sides might as well slaughter a chicken, metaphorically of course, in the name of a two-chicken solution.

Therefore, not voting in the referendum was the most rational position to take: hold on to the value of the vote, and don’t give it away to the mountaineers on both sides. Approximately 27 percent of the electorate did precisely that, they didn’t vote. However, that vote uncast, my vote, still counts.

This means that while the outcome has subsequently been presented in binary form, the result was actually a three-way split. In rounded figures: 37 percent voted to leave, 34 percent voted to stay, 29 percent abstained. What is often presented by Brexiteers as an overwhelming result, was in fact a minority position, with 63 percent not voting for it.

Currently the office on the vote of a minority of the electorate. But at least individual constituencies are represented by individuals from various parties. The party accruing the largest minority of votes aren’t then awarded all the seats in the Commons. And that government can, of course, be subsequently voted out if the majority wishes that ‘the people have spoken’ and so there’ll be no need for future general elections.

Staying in or leaving the EU will ultimately solve none of the problems fundamental to capitalism. Trade wars and actual wars will continue to rage around the world, economic crises will periodically haunt us all, the environment will be further degraded in the ceaseless quest for profit. It must be that way whatever the EU or any other trading arrangements decide. ‘Leave or ‘Remain’ – either way capitalism remains intact and dominant.

The solution is achievable through democracy, the vast majority of people consciously choosing socialism. That will involve casting votes, making them even more valuable. But in themselves they will not be enough. True democracy demands a greater commitment than simply turning up at the polling station occasionally. Voting in a majority of socialist MPs will not lead to socialism unless they are the expression of the majority working actively to bring socialism about throughout society, and around the world. The ballot box is an indicator; not the solution. Democracy has become a passive process playing upon false hopes, alienation and, unfortunately, prejudice. It has become an instrument to divide the working class against itself. Brexit being a clear example of this.

The referendum implies that singular issues can be isolated. However, all that actually happens is the political focus of some economic arrangement. People fail to see what really needs to be confronted, to be dealt with in their own collective best interest.

The world has become a complex system and how, climate change, war, low pay and insecure employment, recessions, poverty, housing and homelessness, desperate refugees, and so on and so on, will all continue as features of capitalism. Not because capitalists are heartless, they may or may not be, but because capitalism exists for one purpose only, capital accumulation – the pursuit of profit.

In or out of the EU, this will remain the case. It’s not a matter of leaving or staying, but of transcending the EU and all capitalist economic and political arrangements by the mass conscious choice of democratically establishing socialism. The true proof of democracy is the vast majority actively deciding on and pursuing a better way of living.

So we say it is worth holding on to your vote, don’t squander on it short term solutions that actually solve nothing. It will prove to be far more valuable when used as a palliative, but a democratic cure of society’s present ills.

D A V E A L T O N
A struggle has been going on in these islands for centuries of which you’re only dimly aware!” is a quote from the 1971 movie version of Stevenson’s novel Kidnapped. It is spoken by the Lord Advocate to David Balfour as part of an explanation of his political ideology. He seeks to communicate the idea that his political insight (or consciousness) is superior to that of his young listener. Balfour’s response: “I can’t argue with you; you’ve answered to questions I haven’t even thought of” is a confirmation of this disparity of political knowledge. The historical context of the novel is the struggle in Scotland between the English-backed bourgeoisie and the reactionar...
We can do little in support of our fellow-workers in Hong Kong except to voice our solidarity while at the same time prompt, non-violent resistance is a more effective method. A non-violent movement that challenges a well-entrenched dictatorship must be prepared for a long struggle and numerous challenges. After all, only one side is committed to non-violence. To confront deserts with violence is to cede to them the choice of battleground and tactics. Amateurs using violence against experts is the quickest way to defeat. At the time of writing, China has doubled the number of troops garrisoned in Hong Kong, including specialised anti-riot units. This battle for basic anti-capitalism with anti-Americanism in Hong Kong to advance their own interests, but it doesn't mean that the whole movement is promoted by them. What is disappointing but not unsurprising is that the protests are not resonating with mainland Chinese, who also believe that the protesters are dupes of Western propaganda, with Beijing concentrating its reporting on the violence of the demonstrators.

**SAFETY**

An expression protesters have deployed, a phrase borrowed from Bruce Lee, who used it to describe his kung fu known for its flexibility and creativity to press an advantage and pull back when a strategic retreat is needed. It reflects the flash mob strategy being employed to confront the police. However, the demonstrators need to guard against inevitably self-defeating violence that suffering and resentment are so likely to prompt. Non-violent resistance is a more effective method. A non-violent movement that challenges a well-entrenched dictatorship must be prepared for a long struggle and numerous challenges. After all, only one side is committed to non-violence. To confront deserts with violence is to cede to them the choice of battleground and tactics. Amateurs using violence against experts is the quickest way to defeat. At the time of writing, China has doubled the number of troops garrisoned in Hong Kong, including specialised anti-riot units.

Alex Chow
In late September the climate crisis was in the spotlight. Friday 20 September was the first Global Climate Strike, with four million taking to the streets in 185 countries (reported figures vary). Protests continued over the weekend. On Sunday afternoon our comrades in the World Socialist Party of India held a rally on College Square, Kolkata under the rousing slogan ‘Save the Planet, Share the Earth.’ Then on Monday 23 September the United Nations Climate Action Summit in New York opened with the eloquent appeal of 16-year-old Greta Thunberg, followed by speeches of so-called ‘world leaders’ (‘national leaders’ would be more accurate), including French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. More ‘world leaders’ spoke the next day at the 74th debate of the UN General Assembly.

The ‘world leaders’ proved that Greta was not far off the mark when they told them: ‘All you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth.’ Reporting from ‘inside the mess, desperate chaos of the UN Climate Summit,’ Jeff Dembicki complained that their speeches were ‘blandly inoffensive’ (vice.com, 24 September). None dared name the fossil fuel corporations their speeches were so ‘welcoming’ to. None named the military-industrial complex, which serves the military and the military-industrial complex. None even hinted at the farmers who could be made to grow more feed for the capitalist food corporations. No one named opponents to fossil fuel profits.

**Not just the fossil fuel corporations**

It is right to emphasize the need to accelerate the transition from fossil fuels to renewables. And yet this is by no means the only front in the struggle for human survival, nor are the fossil fuel corporations its only enemies. Consider, for instance, the fires now burning through the forests that serve as our planet’s lungs – in Amazonia but also in other parts of Brazil and in Indonesia. These are not ‘wildfires;’ there is good reason to suppose that they are set deliberately in order to clear the land for commercial activities. In Amazonia arson opens up land for the cultivation of soybeans, for cattle ranching, in certain places for mining. In the tourist area around Pinheira in southern Brazil a state park has been set afame with a view to residential development on what is viewed as prime real estate (The Real News, 25 September). In Indonesia most forest fires are set in order to clear land for palm oil plantations. So capitalists in at least five distinct non-energy fields of profit-making enterprise are involved in laying waste these precious forests.

**Painfully slow progress**

Actual progress in the transition away from fossil fuels is painfully slow. With the aid of a good microscope you can see the fossil fuel industry is still expanding. In Indonesia, for instance, 16 percent of all three fossil fuels is still being consumed. This is true even of coal: output seemed to peak in 2014, but is now again growing at the ‘modest’ annual rate of 1.3 percent, due in large part to expansion of production capacity in India and Indonesia. As for oil and gas, a boom is currently in progress, led by the United States. US gas output ‘surged’ in 2018 by 11 percent, while world output rose by 5.2 percent, twice the historical rate. The boom is made possible by horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing – the notorious ‘fracking’ that if we live nearby destabilizes our suhsoil, poisons our drinking water, and shoots methane flames from our faucets. The filthy tar sands of Alberta, Canada are still being extracted, transported, and processed. And drilling for new deposits continues unabated at numerous locations throughout the world, from the Gulf of Mexico to the South China Sea.

**Up against the ‘growth machine’**

These examples should suffice to show how broad a range of capitalist interests the struggle for human survival will have to confront and overcome. This is not to imply that effective climate action is against the profit-making interests of the whole of the capitalist class. Makers of solar panels and wind turbines obviously stand to benefit. And climate activists have had some success in winning managers of insurance companies over to their side. It does not really matter to the executives of capitalist firms what they make, provided that they can sell it at a good profit. On the whole, however, they prefer to stick to the line of business to which they are accustomed and avoid incurring the costs of shifting to a new line. This is especially so in industries with vast amounts of sunk capital – that is, equipment that can only be used in the industry concerned. Coal, oil, and gas all fall into this category.

In fighting for our survival as a species, we are ultimately up against the mindless and heartless ‘growth machine’ that has come to dominate our world. Socialists call this machine capital. Endless expansion is intrinsic to capital, which Marx defined as ‘self-expanding value.’ Capital is an inhuman and anti-human machine, even though it is human action that originally set it in motion, keeps it running, and will soon – let’s hope – bring it screeching to a halt.

**STEFAN**
Socialist Standard November 2019

Nuclear Threat Back to the 1980s

The nuclear threat is back with a vengeance. The US has maintained its commitment to a first-strike strategy, and other nuclear powers are reportedly considering similar strategies. The nuclear disarmament movement is facing a difficult period, with the United States and Russia reportedly increasing their nuclear arsenals. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which has been instrumental in preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, is under threat.

The nuclear threat is not new, but it has taken on a new dimension. The US and Russia have continued to expand their nuclear arsenals, despite the treaties that are supposed to limit their proliferation. The US has recently increased its nuclear stockpile, and Russia has also increased its nuclear capabilities. This is a worrying trend, as it increases the risk of an accidental or deliberate nuclear attack.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which was signed in 1968, is under threat. The treaty has been instrumental in preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, but it is facing a crisis. The US and Russia are reportedly increasing their nuclear arsenals, despite the treaties that are supposed to limit their proliferation. This is a worrying trend, as it increases the risk of an accidental or deliberate nuclear attack.

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Back to St. Monday?

The Labour Party announced at its annual conference in September that if it were to form a government, it would introduce a 32-hour week for workers within the next decade, a reform that many businesses are prepared to accept, a quarter of business owners having said they would consider introducing a 4-day week.

A recent study by Henley Business School saw 250 firms participate in a four-day week, and nearly two thirds of these businesses saw productivity increase. The firms’ ability to retain and retain staff improved, too. Collectively, these firms now save £92bn each year.

Before the arrival of capitalism and its factory system rural workers were accustomed to sunset and sunrise hours, to the seasons and the vagaries of weather, along with the needs of the crop and animals. Men and women worked in direct relationship to nature. It was an irregular and informal working week. In medieval feudalism there were over 200 holy days a year on which no work could be done, in addition, to numerous trading fairs. Those who worked enjoyed much more free time than they do today. As the dark satanic mills spread, holy days disappeared. It was the factory which brought in clocking in and clocking out. But peasants driven from their small plots of land by the Enclosures had to be broken of their independent spirit and disciplined into wage-slavery.

The new labour regime did not go unchallenged. ‘Keeping St. Monday’ emerged Survivor Monday as a holiday. Many a Tuesday was also observed as a ‘Saints’ day. A rhyme printed in 1639 gives a satirical version of the working week:

‘You know that Monday is Sunday’s brother;
Tuesday is such another.
Wednesday you must go to Church and pray;
Thursday is half-holiday.
On Friday it is too late to begin to spin;
The Saturday is half-holiday again.

Payday was typically Saturday, and therefore workers often had spare money on Monday. They declared Monday a public holiday of sorts (often to recover from the binge drinking that was commonplace on Sunday, the day of rest). Piece work was often the norm, with workers adapting their skills to operate on flexible working periods. If they missed Monday they could make it up by working extra hard at the end of the week in order to have more free time. In London ‘St. Monday’ was commonly observed as a day of an informal working week. Later in the 1750s was clearly shorter than five days, but as capitalism grew in ascendency it led to an increase in annual working hours from 2380 to 3600.

The worship of St Monday had troubled a factory inspector called Edward White who reported in 1844: ‘In Birmingham an enormous amount of time is lost, not only by want of punctuality in coming to work in the morning and beginning again after meals, but still more by the general observance of ‘Saint Monday’, which is shown in the late attendance or entire absence of large numbers on that day. The new labour regime did not go uncontested.

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One employer has on Monday only about 40 or 50 out of 300 attendance or entire absence of large numbers on that day. Observance of ‘Saint Monday’, which is shown in the late attendance or entire absence of large numbers on that day. The new labour regime did not go uncontested.

In line with Karl Marx’s son-in-law, Paul Lafargue, socialists support the right to be lazy. So let’s drink to the health of St. Monday, and in the words of Billy Bragg:

I’m a hard worker,
But I’m working on a Monday.
I’m a hard worker,
But I ain’t working on a Monday.
I ain’t working on a Monday,
St. Monday’s still the weekend to me.

13th century - Adult male peasant, U.K.: 1620 hours
Calculated from Gregory Clark’s estimate of 150 days per family, assumes 12 hours per day, 135 days per year for adult male
(‘Impoverishment, Poverty, and Poor Field Agriculturists’, minos, 1986).

14th century - Casual labourer, U.K.: 1440 hours
Calculated from 1400 man-days per man per year, average 80 days per year

Middle ages - English worker: 2309 hours
Juliet Schor’s estimate of average mediaeval labourer working two-thirds of the year at 9.5 hours per day.

1400-1600 - Farmer-farmer, adult male, U.K.: 1980 hours
Calculated from Ian Bannister’s estimate of 180 days per year. Assumes 11 hours per day of working time. Period Honour as miners, working per miner and mining industry, 1400-1600”, Economic History Review 31, 23 (1978).

1840 - Average worker, U.K.: 3105-3588 hours

Low estimate assumes 45 week year, high one assumes 52 week year.

1850 - Average worker, U.K.: 3105-3588 hours

Low estimate assumes 45 week year, high one assumes 52 week year.

1880 - Average worker, U.K.: 3105-3650 hours
Based on 70-hour week; hours from Joseph Zeisel, “The workweek in mediaeval agriculture”, 1850-1890”, Monthly Labor Review 81, 23-9 (1958). Low estimate assumes 45 week year, high assumes 52 week year.

1897 - Average worker, U.K.: 1940 hours

1898 - Manufacturing workers, U.K.: 1856 hours
Calculated from Bureau of Labor Statistics data, Office of Productivity and Technology.

Towards a Human & Ecological Progress

15
Almost immediately, the Western Allies blockaded Moscow and shut out all information concerning Russian events. British and US armies were dispatched to Russia’s north-west; in the south and east, Tsarist armies terrorised the countryside, while in Moscow and Petrograd (St. Petersburg) Lenin and Trotsky gave into hysteria similar to that of the revolutionaries in Paris in 1793.

In Ukraine, Maklino’s Anarchist cossacks defeated the Tsarist army there and made an alliance with Lenin and Trotsky, which the Bolsheviks retracted on later.

Responding to the conditions of the military blockade, the Bolsheviks cracked down with their own terror, abolishing freedom of the press, arresting and executing political dissidents. In the naval port of Kronstadt, the sailors mutinied, demanding the socialism the Bolsheviks had promised, and bread for the workers at least. Trotsky sent raw young forces and a Red Army recruits against the sailor and many were killed. Finally the Red Army overran Kronstadt and those sailors who were not killed escaped to Finland.

Fleeing Trotsky escape to Georgia and held out briefly there against the Bolshevik government forces. Trotsky then turned his attention to destroying the Ukrainian anarchists as Lenin’s government became more secure.

Having seized control of the Russian state, Lenin found himself faced with the enormous task of transforming a vast peasant economy into a capitalist nation-state. Just as the Mensheviks had told him, Russia wasn’t ready for socialism and had to build a capitalist economy. To carry out this task he closed parliament, outlawed all parties besides his own and established a dictatorship based on tyranny over the working class.

He thus elaborated an ideology which would permit the ruthless development of capitalism under a one-party state and still keep a ‘Marxist’ vocabulary.

He renamed the Bolshevik RSDLP the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, redefined socialism as state-capitalism, and said that this ‘socialism’ must be an immensely long ‘transition period’ before communism (real socialism) can become a reality. A transition period which, naturally, would be ruled over by the CPSU.

By 1918, it was obvious to us that what had occurred in Russia was not a social revolution, but a coup d’etat by a group of opportunists, paving the way for a semi-feudal economy to be transformed into a modern capitalist state. However it took nearly 70 years before Russia finally dropped the pretence of an authentic socialist revolution and admitted to its own and established a dictatorship based on tyranny over the working class.

The Mensheviks, could not jump over capitalism, but this had to be done through. Parliamentary democracy was therefore the best option.

The Bolsheviks didn’t want to wait. They said (like the Leninists parties or say) that the workers will never become aware of the need for socialism, and must therefore be led to it by a vanguard of intellectuals (meaning the Bolsheviks themselves)

So, in November 1917 (October by the old Orthodox calendar), Lenin, Trotsky, and a handful of Bolsheviks plotted and carried out a minority coup d’etat against the provisional government of Alexander Kerensky, and got workers to support them with the slogans ‘Bread’ and ‘Stop the war!’ in the countryside, Bolsheviks put forward the slogan ‘Bread and Land’ as well as ‘Stop the war!’

The Bolsheviks’ campaign to stop the war reached the West, and in 1915 they had attempted to have their anti-war declaration published. Every paper in Britain refused except The Times (17 September). The regulator ‘believes this is being driven by pressure on many to reach profitability, resulting in them taking ‘additional opportunistic risks’ in areas beyond their expertise.’ Two, with the unoriginal names of ‘Lendy’ and ‘Bilateral’ have failed.

But what are they? The Times explains: ‘Peer-to-peer platforms are websites which link retail and institutional investors with consumers, small businesses and property developers who want credit’, ‘Retail’ investors are individuals with money to lend.

A business or individual seeking money for some project applies to a P2P platform for a loan, after checking their credit-worthiness, contacts potential lenders who, individually or as a group, put up the money at an agreed rate of interest. P2P platforms make money from fees for putting the borrowers and lenders in touch and for checking the borrower’s credit-worthiness. The more loans they arrange, the more their income; hence the temptation to take on ‘risky’ borrowers that the FCA criticised. They are relatively new financial institutions, the first one in Britain being established only in 2005.

P2P platforms are, then, financial intermediaries which put those with money to lend and those who want to borrow money in touch with each other. To call them ‘lenders’ is, strictly speaking, incorrect as they don’t actually lend money themselves. Even so, both for lenders and borrowers they are an alternative to banks and, at one point, were encouraged by the government precisely because of this, with the government lending to small businesses via some of them. They do directly compete with banks for the custom of those with money to lend.

Banks in fact are not all that different from P2P platforms. They, too, are financial intermediaries between lenders and borrowers. When someone or some institution deposits money in a bank, what they are doing is lending to the bank, even if they are more usually called ‘depositors’ or ‘savers’. What, basically, the bank does with such loans is to it to pool the money and then use most of it to make loans out of this pool to borrowers. Although there is no direct link between particular lenders and particular borrowers, banks still channel funds from lenders to borrowers. It’s their economic role within capitalism. They clearly has to already exist. Many people mistakenly think that banks can simply ‘create’ the money they lend. But this is an illusion or, in the case of currency cranks, a delusion. Banks can’t do this any more than P2P platforms can. It is just that, in their case, this is not so transparent. However, on closer examination, this can be seen to be the case.

Banks, like P2P platforms, are financial intermediaries, not money or credit creators.
Hardly a day goes by without hearing about someone being stabbed or shot in the UK. More often than not it will be a young person, usually a teenager. According to government sources, in the year ending March 2019, there were 43,516 offences involving a knife or sharp instrument, in comparison with 40,215 in the previous year. 32 percent of this violent crime has taken place in the London area (‘Knife crime in England and Wales rises 8 percent over year’, Guardian, 18 July). Although there has been a drop in gun crime during this period, it is still high in comparison to previous years. What is going on here? Why is there so much bloodletting on the streets of Britain?

There is no shortage of explanations. Street gangs that peddle drugs and the ensuing turf wars between rival gangs. Online squabbles on social media that blow up into deadly disputes. The prestige of handling a weapon. Police claim that young people perceive it is ‘trendy’ to carry a weapon (Yahoo News UK, 13 April, 2017). Fewer police officers on the beat and the decline in the use of stop and search. The fact that a disparity in the number of workers from an ethnic minority are affected has led some to focus on so-called ‘black on black’ crime. Others cite cuts in youth services, the closure of Sure Start centres, reduced funding for youth clubs as a consequence of the government’s ‘austerity’ drive, that is in its attempts over the past few years to restore the profitability of British capitalism and improve the latter’s competitiveness in world markets in the wake of the economic downturn of 2008/2009 by reducing the cost of running the state machine.

What all these explanations miss is the root cause. Capitalism is based on minority ownership of the means of living and production for profit. Wealth is accumulated in the hands of the few and the majority is left in various degrees of relative or absolute poverty. In the poorer areas with high levels of social deprivation, young workers face a bleak future with low paid insecure work and high unemployment. As an escape from this drudgery, the allure of gang life is tempting. For these young people, the lucrative drug trade promises the lifestyles that capitalism encourages workers to aspire to, but at the same time denies them. Young people who have given up knives and have gone on to pursue successful careers in sport and music. This is supposed to dissuade young people from carrying knives. As well as being ridiculous, it is racist in that it assumes that knife crime is a black people’s issue and that young black people spend a lot of time visiting chicken shops. As has been shown, crime is a social issue involving poverty and dispossession, not a racial one.

Restoring public expenditure on youth services may ameliorate the problem, but it cannot eradicate it. Expanding the powers of the state over the working class and initiating silly gimmicks will not solve the problem of knife and gun crime either. Only the working class can do this by organising to take control of their own lives and to end all forms of class exploitation.

ONE FAMILIAR trope of reality TV is to plonk its participants somewhere remote and see how long they can live off the land. Gluttons for punishment not well-exposed enough for me. A Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here could sign up for the likes of Survivor or The Island With Bear Grylls. The latter has six series morphed into Treasure Island With Bear Grylls (Channel 4), with an added twist which interestingly highlights how money shapes our relationships and outlook. Twelve volunteers are left on a smallish Pacific island with some fishing equipment, enough to eat and drink for just a few days and, of course, cameras. They have to make their own shelter, find food and a fresh water supply and learn to survive without things they usually take for granted, like supermarkets, electricity and bathrooms. One important feature of everyday life, though, has been (literally) thrown into the mix, as also dropped off on the island are parcels containing bundles of cash. £100,000 in total is chucked out of a helicopter, with the parcels and their parachutes usually ending up hanging from trees out of reach. The contestants have to find the parcels, and when they do, decide whether to share the money with the rest of the group or keep it for themselves.

Those taking part are largely a likeable bunch, with the enviable enthusiasm to take themselves out of their comfort zones and put themselves to the test. There’s a property manager who unfortunately learns the hard way why you shouldn’t drink seawater, a plumber who gets into the kill-your-own-dinner mindset with gusto, and the star of the show is 75-year-old Irene, who helps knits the group together. The contestants have nothing else to rely on apart from themselves and what the island can provide. So, co-operation and practicalities should be at the front of their minds. How much does the push to get dough get in the way of what should be more important?

The group set up a ramshackle camp, using branches for benches and making use of the rubbish washed up on the beach. When survival guru Bear Grylls sees their efforts at the end of their stay, he isn’t too impressed, and the group realise that they would have built a better home for themselves if they hadn’t been preoccupied with finding the prize money. For food, they get used to a diet of wieners, the occasional iguana and rare treats such as goat, stingray and pineapple. Expeditions for fresh water and anything edible turn into hunts for the money parcels, with the group usually returning empty-handed and with empty stomachs.

As well as the money distracting the group from its practical priorities, it wards off the feeling that the group want to pool any money finds, while the two contestants with closest links to the Establishment turn out to be the most selfish. Lord Ivar Mountbatten and an ex-Royal Marine Commando called Marco establish their supposed ‘alpha male’ status early on, encouraged by the rest of the group, disproportionately. The others’ loyalty isn’t rewarded, though, when the duo finds a couple of parcels and keeps the dough inside to themselves. However, the ex-Marine loses his crown after getting the group lost in the jungle and, following his hoarded money finds being discovered, barely seems to interact with the others. Mountbatten is of the view that those who are less able deserve less, which is easy to say when you’re born into one of the wealthiest families on the planet.

Wondering who has found money and kept quiet about it makes the contestants become secretive and suspicious. Those who find and prepare the food resent sharing it with those who are hoarding money. Those who are hoarding money resent those who expect an equal share of it for providing the food. Some feel that they need the money more than others, and that they have more, which makes them feel that it should all be shared out equally.

Being stuck on a desert island is a situation where co-operation and collaboration are even more important than in our everyday lives. So it’s a shame that the money ends up creating divisions and ill-feeling, but that’s what it inevitably does. Co-operation wins out, though, and as days turn into weeks, the group learns that it’s best to work together and share future finds. However, when the time comes to leave the island, Mountbatten and the ex-Marine have still pocketed the largest amounts.

So, how money affects the group on Treasure Island With Bear Grylls isn’t much different from how it affects us all in real life. We spend our time chasing after cash while it gets in the way of life’s practicalities. And we become distant from those who have to compete with us to get enough in the bank, with the most wealth usually ending up with those who are the most ruthless.

MIKE FOSTER
The first ancient human genomes, involving analyses of DNA, were only published in 2010. But since then ancient DNA has had a revolutionary impact on the study of the past, revealing many surprises in what is known about human evolution. Here David Reich, who has played a leading role in such research, describes the state of the art. We cannot summarise the book’s contents here, just focus on some of the main points.

An important issue which arises is the extent of large-scale migration over the past 10,000 years, and the mixing of peoples: ‘Most of today’s populations are not exclusive descendants of the populations that lived in the same locations ten thousand years ago.’ Most DNA among Japanese people is inherited from farmers who migrated from the East Asian mainland and mixed with local hunter-gatherers. Everyone in India today is a mix, in varying proportions, of West Eurasian ancestry on the one hand, and East and South Asian ancestry on the other. Mixture often involved men who exercised power and women from a subordinate population; thus Thomas Jefferson, third president of the US, had six children with his slave Sally Hemings. For biological reasons, men can have far more children than women and so pass on their Y chromosomes to many more generations. This did not apply to all men, only to a limited number, which implies a lot of male stratiﬁcation.

Reich also confronts the question of race, and to what extent notions of race overlap with race. Some people have objected to research along the lines sketched above, on the grounds that it just reinforces supposed racial ideas and categories. He is emphatic that race and ancestry are not the same, yet accepts ‘the possibility of substantial average differences in biological traits across populations, which would include skin colour, height and the ability to breathe easily at high altitudes. It is hard to see how anyone could object to statements such as this, but claims that some genetic variations are more common in people of African descent, and with more years of education need not deal more support in order to ascertain the role of other possibly relevant factors. But all in all, a fascinating and informative, but fairly challenging read. PB

True Levellers

One simplistic vision of the English civil war has been that it was an early version of the proletarian struggle against the bourgeoisie. It’s an idea that has been especially popular with Leninists. Romantic as it may seem, and intensely brave, and for those who were opposed that ‘man of blood’ Charles I, it is, unfortunately, perhaps not the truth.

Levellers did not want to level, to make everyone equal. As stated in the Leveller document The New Law of Freedom (1649): ‘We therefore agree and declare, that it shall not be in the power of any Representative … to render up … nor level men’s status, or ... propriety … make all things Common.’

In the pamphlet that, for example, attacked for an Irish outlaw – Tony was applied to the group that became the British Conservative Party, the Levellers were given that title by their enemies. William Walfyn, considered to be one of the more radical of the Levellers, nevertheless advocated free trade to the Committee for Trade and Common Affairs, opposing monopolies such as the Levant Company (naturally, the government sided with the Company at the expense of small farmers). It is not easy to tell how many of their ideas were more than just empty words: their platform included a property qualiﬁcation to have the franchise. But it was different with the True Levellers, or Diggers.

Part of their manifesto, True Levellers’ Standard Advanced, ring clear to socialists across three and a half centuries. Once the earth return to the common world.

‘Then this Emnity in all Lands will cease, for none shall dare to seek a Dominion over other Men, nor shall any claim to another, nor desire more of the Earth then another.’

This Pamphlet Tense pamphlet takes in the events of 1649-1650, principally around the attempts to cultivate the common land at St George’s Hill. It starts with the ﬁrst attempts to dig there on 1 April 1649 and ﬁnishes the following April with the death threats and ﬁnal burnings of the dwellings and crops there and in the neighbouring Cobham Heath commune. It details the events between, and includes not only the threats, legal judgements and violence perpetrated against them, but also some extraordinary Utopian pamphlets. For example, from the royalist publication Mercurius Pragmaticus quoted in the pamphlet.

What this fanatical insurrection may grow into cannot be conceived for Mahomet had as small and despicable a beginning whose damnable infections have spread themselves many hundreds years since over the face of half the Universe. In the end, the attempt at holding property in common was defeated. They were fed, they were informed. One criticism is that, although it means the religious dimension of this, it does not reﬂect how central their religion was to them. These were people in a time when many thought that Christ’s second coming was imminent.

It would also have been interesting to have looked at, in particular, Winstanley’s subsequent writings. The Wigan-born cloth merchant Gerrard Winstanley, one of the movement’s main writers, wrote a pamphlet in 1652, The Law of Freedom in a Platform, addressed to Cromwell, containing no ideas unfavourable to socialism:

‘Shall we have no Lawyers? There is no need of them, for there is to be no buying and selling; neither any need to expound Laws.’

‘Shall we say, this will bring poverty; surely they mistake: for there will be plenty of all Earthly Commodities, with less labor and trouble, and to each one only some property.’ They will be there to be ﬁnancially for every man may keep as plentiful a house as he will, and never need to till, for debt, common stock pays for all.

‘If you say, Some will live idle; I answer, No: it will make idle persons to become workmen. There shall be neither beggar nor idle person.’

True Freedom lies in the free enjoyment of the Earth.

A historic twist: St George’s Hill, just outside Woking, is now a gated community. The place where the True Levellers planted their crops is now a local estate agent. Winstanley is now a gated community. The place where the True Levellers planted their crops is now a local estate agent. Winstanley is now a gated community. The place where the True Levellers planted their crops is now a local estate agent. Winstanley is now a gated community.

Notwithstanding the zeal of the estate agent, the pamphlet begins with the ﬁrst line of the song The World Turned Upside Down by Leon Rosselson: ‘In 1649... at St George’s Hill in Surrey, all was Digger... the Socialist Party demonstrates the truth of what they were disposed... an egalitarian society of common ownership.

Where are we now? We, the working class, have no champions, sell our knowledge and abilities to whoever pays for all. ’

Workers were made redundant, small enterprises). This is not to say that this, but claims that some genetic differences in biological traits across populations, which would include skin colour, height and the ability to breathe easily at high altitudes. It is hard to see how anyone could object to statements such as this, but claims that some genetic variations are more common in people of African descent, and with more years of education need not deal more support in order to ascertain the role of other possibly relevant factors. But all in all, a fascinating and informative, but fairly challenging read. PB

Down the Millennia

David Reich: Who We Are and How We Got Here. Oxford University Press. £10.99.

The True Levellers’ Standard

The True Levellers’ Standard

The True Levellers’ Standard

The True Levellers’ Standard

The True Levellers’ Standard

The True Levellers’ Standard

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The True Levellers’ Standard

The True Levellers’ Standard

The True Levellers’ Standard
The Red capitalist class

Any thoughtful person must have realised that opposition to Mao in China over recent years has not been confined to the proverbial ‘handful of top people in authority taking the capitalist road’. A recent issue of the weekly journal of the Union of Soviet Writers carried a letter from a schoolboy in Peking who wrote that ‘... the eyes of a majority of the youth are open. Many no longer believe in Mao Tse-tung. But there are still quite a number who do believe in him and who do not understand that he is the cause of all the difficulties of China.’ This sort of comment comes as no surprise to socialists. Even in the current world situation where the vast majority of people (in China as elsewhere) look upon capitalism as the only practicable method of running society, it is inevitable that sizeable groups of working men and women should come into conflict with the capitalist class in every country. (...)

In China the Maoist representatives of the capitalist class have long been engaged in spurious polemics with their rivals in the Soviet Union and other countries such as Yugoslavia, emphasising that these cannot be socialist since a ‘privileged bourgeois stratum’ exists there. It is hardly surprising, then, that numbers of workers in China who have been fed a staple diet of these sorts of comments in the editorials of the People’s Daily and Red Flag should quite naturally apply a similar analysis to China itself and decide that ‘a red capitalist class’ is in power rather than the official myth that it is the workers themselves who rule. (Socialist Standard, November 1969)

(continued from page 21)

It simply isn’t possible to try to somehow tuck or reform capitalism so that it might somehow work for everyone. That’s been tried before in the likes of Russia, China and South America and it has always been a shambles that turned out to be. In short, the basic rules of capitalism dictate that for it to be successful for anyone, profit has to take priority over people. The way out can only be what we in the Socialist Party understand by socialism. A new world order that will see everyone fulfil their potential, contributing to society what they can, and taking from society what they need to lead a fulfilling and satisfying life. Worldwide cooperation will replace worldwide competition as the overarching source of production, with smaller pockets of local productive forces taking place in local communities in order to meet local needs.

Life within socialism will be a whole new ball game, very different from that under capitalism. The transition or revolution from capitalism to socialism can and will only happen when the majority of the working class throughout the world has developed a clear understanding and consciousness of the need for it.

Paul Edwards

OBITUARY

Norman Deutz

We regret to have to report the death of our comrade Norman Deutz at the end of August at the age of 83. Norman joined the old West Ham branch of the Socialist Party in 1954, shortly after his 18th birthday. At the time men of that age were liable to be conscripted into the armed forces for ‘national service’, Norman refused and spent a short while in prison. He worked as a small shopkeeper in London’s East End and later a pet shop in Redbridge. After his retirement he moved to Billericay in Essex and was a member of East Anglia regional branch. Latterly he was a familiar figure at Head Office, providing much appreciated catering at conferences and other meetings there. Our condolences go to his wife, our comrade Pat Deutz, and their family.

Declaration of Principles

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

Object

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

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

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

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

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

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

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

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

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

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.
Can’t pay, can’t have

The [US] “Ending Homelessness Act”... would give an additional $13.27 billion over five years to create an estimated 400,000 affordable housing units. The funds would go to supportive housing, including homeless shelters and transitional housing, as well as housing vouchers for low-income families and local outreach services to homeless residents’ (huffpost.com, 3 October). Socialists have been saying for the past 115 years that there will never be a solution to the ‘problem’ of homelessness under capitalism. The mountain of evidence supporting our position is ever-growing. Almost all two-bedroom homes available for rent across England, Scotland and Wales are too expensive for families on housing benefit... We contacted almost 200 landlords across the country. Half of them told us flat out that they would not let to anyone on benefits. Only just over a quarter of the rest, most of them wanted further conditions fulfilled, including six months’ rent in advance, or a guarantor – conditions many of those facing homelessness would find it impossible to meet’ (huffingtonpost, 4 October). There is no legislative solution, brutal or otherwise: ‘Officials in Bakersfield just announced that they will be solving their homeless problem by throwing people in jail. Under the plan, homeless people would be rounded up under the ostensible plan, homeless people would be thrown in a cage’ (activistpost, 4 October).

War & want

The official poverty measure is a very poor indicator of economic hardship in this country. In 2018, the Federal Poverty Level for a family of four in the mainland United States was $25,100 — abysmally low standard of living. The problem of people living with poverty and struggling to make ends meet is far more widespread than the official poverty rate – measured with a 50-year old yardstick – would indicate... The truth is, millions more low-income people – defined in many official programs as those living at between one and two times the official poverty level — still hover at the edges of poverty, just one illness or divorce or job loss away from disaster’ (thehill.com, 19 September). The article in question is titled Millions of us are living in poverty – we need investments to raise the standard of living, but one endemic feature of capitalism will not be ended by diverting some funds, as the author suggests, from another – the mighty US war machine. Capitalism cannot be reformed so as to work in the interests of the class of wage and salary earners. It is a class system that can only work for those who own the means of production. As Warren Buffett said: ‘there’s class warfare, all right, but it’s my class, the rich class, that’s making war, and we’re winning’ He is correct: the top 0.1 percent of American households hold the same amount of wealth as the bottom 90 percent and every 38 seconds a U.S. citizen dies of poverty and poverty-related social conditions.

Making a killing

This summer, a pair of Syrian brothers journeyed across Europe. Their story did not begin with a rubber dinghy afloat on the Aegean and a scramble for safety on to a Greek island: a well-worn route for many Syrian refugees fleeing a conflict that has lasted eight years and taken an estimated half a million lives. Instead, these brothers landed in Cannes; their transportation, a plane, then a pair of Ferraris; Mohammad and Ali are the sons of Syria’s richest man, Rami Makhlouf, who also happens to be the Syrian president Bashar al-Assad’s cousin and childhood playmate. “There is a new class of wealthy war traders,” said Mazen, an Aleppo businessman from an old industrial family... These individuals have made fortunes picking clean the carcass of the country’s economy... Their dramatic rise to fortune has also helped the regime to survive by keeping the war going, oil flowing and helping to fund pro-regime militias even as the country lies in ruins around them’ (ft.com, 3 October). We have to take from the capitalist class the means of producing wealth in the use of which they no longer take part, and use it as common property for the satisfaction of the needs of society. Until we do that, all our struggles will be in vain. If in the meantime one section of the capitalist class, the section which is primarily interested in exploiting us, asks us to defend its wealth against another section, act in accordance with the interests of our class, and let them fight their own battles. Join the struggle for socialism against them and their apologists and defenders.