DISUNITED KINGDOM?
No putting the nationalist genie back in the bottle

also:
Machine Learning
Another Resource War?
The Labour Theory of Value
The Socialist Party advocates a society where production is freed from the artificial constraints of profit and organised for the benefit of all on the basis of material abundance. It does not have policies to ameliorate aspects of the existing social system. It is opposed to all war.

The Socialist Standard is the combative monthly journal of the Socialist Party, published without interruption since 1904. In the 1940s the Socialist Standard explained why capitalism would not collapse of its own accord, in response to widespread claims to the contrary, and continues to hold this view in face of the notion's recent popularity. Beveridge’s welfare measures of the 1940s were also dissatisfied with Labour governments. North Sea oil seemed to promise higher living standards. In these circumstances the SNP was able to position itself as the workers’ party. With the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, the then Labour government thought they had seen off the nationalist threat. However, in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, many workers turned away from the mainstream capitalist parties. In Scotland, this helped the SNP to secure a majority in the 2011 elections for the Scottish Parliament and a landslide in the 2015 General Election.

The spectre of Scottish independence is nothing new. Scottish workers were badly affected by the economic downturns of the 1970s and 1980s which hit the traditional industries (shipbuilding, coal, steel) particularly hard. Many workers were also dissatisfied with Labour governments. North Sea oil seemed to promise higher living standards. In these circumstances the SNP was able to position itself as the workers’ party. With the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, the then Labour government thought they had seen off the nationalist threat. However, in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, many workers turned away from the mainstream capitalist parties. In Scotland, this helped the SNP to secure a majority in the 2011 elections for the Scottish Parliament and a landslide in the 2015 General Election.

The Irish border has been in contention since 1921. However, with the repression of the Civil Rights movement in the North of Ireland in the late 1960s, Irish republicanism experienced an upsurge of support. In the 1980s Sinn Féin was able to capitalise on the outrage that the British government’s response to the hunger strikes elicited in Catholic working-class areas. It also managed to gain a foothold by providing welfare services to Catholic workers. With the peace process and the IRA laying down its weapons, Sinn Féin was able to reinvent itself as a workers’ party.

In last December’s general election, the SNP increased its seats in Scotland, whereas the pro-Brexit Conservative Party prevailed in England and Wales. In Northern Ireland, for the first time, Nationalists won more seats than Unionists. Sinn Féin has made a significant breakthrough in last month’s general election in the Irish Republic.

The turmoil of the Brexit process has exacerbated the fissures within the UK, which threaten to tear it apart. The Scottish National Party leader, Nicola Sturgeon, seized on the fact that the majority of Scottish voters opted to remain in the EU, and is demanding a second independence referendum. The border between the North of Ireland and the Irish Republic which appeared to be invisible since the Good Friday agreement became a stumbling block in the Brexit negotiations. Sinn Fein wasted no time in pressing for a border poll which they hope will lead to the reunification of Ireland.

Do the working class have any interest in whether or not the United Kingdom remains intact? Or should they, as the Left urges them to, support an independent Scotland and a united Ireland? We say no on both accounts as, wherever the boundaries are drawn, workers will still be subject to the vagaries of the global market system and will continue to experience problems such as unemployment and low wages. Workers will need to organise for a socialist society which will abolish borders rather than rearrange them.
Stories from the city
People ask a lot of questions about socialism in practice, some we can answer, some we can’t. But nobody ever asks what the architecture would look like. It’s not a pressing social issue, after all, like food or disease prevention. In fact, it’s rarely discussed at all, except to complain about some new local monstrosity. When you think about it though, there’s something a little strange about this. People who live in rural areas often have a great familiarity with their landscape and its features, regional flora and fauna, local rivers, trees, and plant species. They know the language and vocabularies of flora and fauna, and this knowledge undoubtedly adds to their appreciation of it.

The majority of the world lives in cities, and the built environment has its own language and vocabulary, that of architecture, but most of us don’t know much about it. We know ‘floor’, ‘wall’ and ‘roof’ but not ‘quoin’, ‘corbel’ or ‘soussier’. We rush past buildings every day without really noticing them. We might acknowledge that some grand buildings are beautiful, but we can’t really understand or appreciate what’s interesting about them because we don’t have the words or the ideas. Architecture is applied art on a grand scale, and it’s immersive, because you live in it. Some structures are beautiful, others are terrible. It’s also a living historical record of the past, its moods and crazes and fads. It has function, obviously, but it can be prosaic too, sometimes grandiose political or aspirational statements, that tell us how ruling class ideas have changed over the centuries.

If you know how, you can read these messages as plainly as words on a page. Learning even the rudiments of this language can be a revealing experience. Your own city reveals itself in a whole new light.

It’s not hard to pick up some basics. Just four category words virtually encompass the past thousand years of building in Britain. They are Gothic, Neo-classical, Vernacular and Modern.

Gothic stems from the Normans and became de rigueur for churches and cathedrals, and often for colleges and legal institutions. It’s the other side of the power of God, so it features a lot of pointed arches, lofty verticles and spires reaching heavenward like arms in supplication. The point was for cowans to gaze upward and have a sense of the heavens above. But never, ever, to argue with the beings who could create such soaring marvels.

Neo-classical is anything that looks like ancient Greece or Rome, with a triangular ‘pediment’ on top, or rounded triumphal arches. Empires didn’t come more bad-ass and macho than Rome, which is why the growing empires of the Renaissance revived its styles and it finally arrived in Britain with Inigo Jones in the 17th century. Instead of piety, it was all about muscular statements of state power. You often see it on banks or theatres or museums, as well as government buildings. Not surprisingly, the Georgians and the Victorians, who had a high opinion of themselves as rulers of an emerging globally dominant power, couldn’t get enough of the neo-classical style, and neither could Mussolini later in his charging political rallies. The style could change tastes. When the Houses of Parliament burnt down in 1834, a discussion ensued about what to replace it with. Neo-classical was the obvious choice, however the Americans had just finished rebuilding the White House in the neo-classical style after the British had burnt it down in 1812. Relations were still somewhat frosty, so to avoid any complaint of republicanism the architect Charles Barry was tasked with producing a Gothic design, which in turn kick-started a Victorian Gothic revival.

The Victorians, incidentally, were exuberant mash-up artists who would throw caution to the winds and chuck in any feature from any style they liked without the least concern for artistic or historical integrity. The more you learn to read their architecture, the more you start to understand their mindset. They were world conquerors in matters military and scientific. Rules were for other people.

‘Modern’ architecture is a catch-all for anything post-World War 3, when looking forward started to seem better than looking back, so that revivals went out of the window and modern capitalism was anyway more interested in making money than making grandiose and costly monumental projects. Trends did exist, like the short-lived futurism of the 1920s, which swiftly looked dated, and the Brutalism of the 1960s, a doctrinaire Orwellian statement that said unassertive things about encasing populations in inhuman concrete boxes and grisly architects a notoriety they’ve never really recovered from.

What’s always gone on in the background is and is also hot today is the ‘vernacular’ style, which is designing buildings in local materials and in the local or regional style, so that they fit harmoniously into their surroundings instead of clashing horribly with them. In theory anyway.

When you start thinking about the socialist architecture of the future, you realise that all bets are off. First you would have to ask how people wanted to live. Would they stay in the same localities as now, or move around constantly, exploring the entire world and ‘working their passage’, in the sense of helping out with odd jobs wherever they happen to be? Would the current globalisation trend continue, or go into reverse, with cities becoming depopulated? There are pros and cons to this question. Would there be a need for public buildings, perhaps to house representative decision-making bodies, or is this an obsolete democratic methodology when everything can be done directly and online? What weight would be given to aesthetic statements, if it meant more expenditure of work and resources? Perhaps socialist architecture would be plain and functional as we have no money in things like the built environment, or perhaps it would surpass the exuberance of the Victorian and Neo-classical style, with no effort spared in reflecting the magnificence of a new and free social era. Would we use natural building materials, like stone and wood in the simple dwellings we are about to build? The question of having separate rooms for specific purposes is not really started with the Victorians. Would people still want to live private and secluded lives in their little walled space, or would sharing of lives and living space become the new normal? There might be a revival of something like the ancient Roman model, where people use public baths and eat out, and only go home to sleep. Perhaps even the concept of ‘home’, in the sense of a permanent personal abode, could become obsolete.

All of these questions will certainly shape the architecture of the future. And let’s not forget emerging technologies like translucent wood for windows, hydro-ceramics for zero-energy air conditioning, light-generating sulphur concrete and self-repairing concrete, high-intensity bioluminescent glow-sticks, phase change building materials, gels, carbon-fibre, aluminium foam mouldings, clear solar panels and phallic solar panels and all the stuff of the radical socialists of the 1960s. But it would be dishonest to ask the question we started with, what socialist architecture would look like. Maybe when you’ve realised what for you is acceptable is the response we can give is: what would you like? PIS

Islands of socialism?

Dear Socialist Party,

I’m a big fan of yours. I used to be a liberal, but you guys have opened my eyes to things, so I would like to thank you for that. I have realized that the only solution to our problems and the way to a better life for all is through socialism. But, having read the replies under your tweets, I’m aware there is still a long road ahead.

However, there’s also something else that I’d like to address: what do you guys think of the Free Territory of Ukraine that existed from 1918 to 1921? Was that a real example of socialism working? They couldn’t get enough of the neo-classical style, and neither could Mussolini later in his charging political rallies, saying by saying that ‘there was a war on’. But that war didn’t stop the Makhnovists, who were under attack from both the White Army and the Bolshevik Red Army, from, as you say, trying to set up an egalitarian social system, although given the constraints they were under operating under, whether we could call this ‘socialism working’ is somewhat debatable.

What it does show is that the Leninist justification is meaningless, and that the main reason Bolsheviks employed authoritarian repression was because that is the nature and mentality of Leninism. This vanguardist mentality is one of the things that makes Leninism quite different from the socialism/communism/marxism that Marx and Engels understood, and that we understand.

Ultimately the anarchist endeavour was defeated by armed force, and the same can be said of other famous attempts to establish such libertarian communities within capitalism, such as the 1871 Paris Commune. Such ‘islands’ will always be swamped by capitalism as long it remains globally dominant.

When we talk about socialism we mean a worldwide sustainable society of common ownership, with no leaders, so by our global definition socialism has never existed before. Temporary or small-scale experiments have certainly occurred at different times in history, but we tend to question their usefulness because we lack anyone of the viability of socialism. If the very thing, that they didn’t last long can be trumpeted as proof that socialism is not viable. Of course it’s not proof of any such thing, but neither is it proof that socialism could work. Besides, none of our friends finds any political history debates either attractive or relatable. Perhaps what such attempts do show, however, is that the human desire for social equality, real democracy, free access and so on is very real and very strong, and the fact that people have acted on that desire in the past is a very good reason to think they will act on it again in the future, next time we hope with happen results. –Editors.
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Same difference
So, the UK left the EU at 11 pm on Friday 31 January. Well, not exactly. The UK left the EU’s political institutions (Parliament, Commission, Council, Court) but remains in its economic arrangements (customs union, single market, free movement, trade deals, etc) until at least the end of this year. No wonder nobody noticed the difference.

‘Independence’ and ‘sovereignty’ are political concepts, but politics is one thing and economics another. A state can make what ‘sovereign’ one thing and economics another. No state can make what ‘sovereign’ it will confirm that Brexit has been a fuss about nothing, just about how a decision was made not about what it is.

THOSE WHO might be unaware of it can be confident assured that we live in a ‘Golden Age of Rock Music’. The music of bands like Disturbed, Ghost, Godsmack, Rammstein,Epica, Kamelot, Nightwish and Band Maid represent the evidence for this. The last two bands have released new singles that have rekindled the old debate between the cynical and the hopeful. Some see Nightwish’s ‘Noise and Band Maid’s ‘The Dragon Crises as merely profiling from the environmental zeitgeist whereas others hope that these tunes represent the political integrity of the respective bands and will help create political change. Obviously these videos and the music that they promote are extremely costly and can only be made within the capitalist context because they represent a commodity that will, for the investors, sell at a profit. However this fact, beloved of the cynics who choose to believe that nothing will ever change, does not exclude the possibility that the nature of that commodity might itself become subversive of the system which helped create it. Change, for good or ill, is inevitable and will, in political terminology, shape the music and the arts play within our culture’s restless history.

Nevertheless, having a long track record of using their music to communicate a political perspective. It is only recently that the Finnish band’s ‘ferry off the internet, has started reaching a global mass audience. They have become commercially powerful enough to only create the music that they want to make rather than bow to the commercial pressures incurred by studio execs, producers and owners of record companies. The Japanese Band Maid, although very popular with the rock cognoscenti online have not reached a similar stage of commercial ‘independence’. Their single ‘The Dragon Cries is their first overtly political song but because it was produced in the USA and is sung in English some suspect it of cynically exploiting the environmental and political concerns of its intended youthful listeners. What is beyond dispute is the quality of musicianship that produces the aesthetic catharsis so essential to great rock music (or any art form). Another possible avenue for a cynical critique is the appearance of the band. They wear doll-like house maid uniforms which emphasize the extreme feminine quality of many young Japanese women. Again whether this is purely a commercial decision to attract male audiences or whether it represents an intriguing antithesis to the macho posing and costumes of the traditional purveyors of heavy rock music is debatable. If we like a band we feel the need to defend it against criticism, whether justifiable or not, but is it necessary or important to do so?

Art, as with all concepts, is full of dialectical contradictions; it can serve the powerful or it can subvert their power. It can also, if it’s any good, contradict the intentions of the artist through the interpretation of its audience. Born in the USA by Bruce Springsteen became, famously, an anthem for patriots despite the composer’s opposite intentions. In this respect it is ironic to communicate with a global audience Bob Marley, according to some, sold his soul to Island Records. Art seems quickly to become independent once it leaves its creators hands. We use the word zeitgeist to emphasise this phenomenon in an attempt to understand why some art becomes iconic whilst other art, despite being of equal aesthetic quality, drifts into historical obscurity. Of course without the artist, recording technology, capital investment, the record company etc. we wouldn’t have any art to discuss but although the motivation, inspiration and integrity of those concerned in its creation is intriguing it is not the most decisive factor in the political and historical fate of any work of art.

One thing the music of Jimi Hendrix, Marvin Gaye, The Doors and Credence Clearwater Revival all had in common was the anti-Vietnam War zeitgeist that helped to end the conflict. The music of James Brown, Gil Scott Heron, War, the Temptations and Harold Melvin all strengthened the Civil Rights movement in the US. Not that this represented the cause of any political improvement but it would be foolish to deny that it helped create a cultural background for change. Perhaps the reason that we see such a flourishing of rock music is because of another surge of political discontent? Another irony is that many of these bands no longer come from rock’s birthplace (the USA) and oppose its economic and cultural triumphalism. The German band Rammstein have said that they will never use English in their lyrics for this reason. Ironically since the fall of the Berlin Wall from the end of the Second World War we see a young band from Germany’s old W.Germany who wish to confront (like Rammstein) the contemporary icon of capitalism and its destructive values or try to subvert it – that is if they do indeed possess the political integrity one might wish to have. It has always been challenging to believe that those with extraordinary talent might have no moral integrity or political good will and would sell themselves to the highest bidder but, to misquote the lyrics of a great rock band, ‘we’ve all been fooled before’.
This is compounded by overly generous trade policies that enable corporations to minimise tax costs and under-reporting production costs. Such practices are known as transfer pricing, and transfer profits into tax havens. Trade imbalances and transfers of wealth across borders are often used to under-report the extent of wealth transfers and tax havens.

African countries received $162bn in trade, which is 10% of the total value of goods that enter it. It was calculated that Africa has a trade deficit of $2.5trn. The World Bank has noted that the world's arable land is estimated at 670 million ha, of which 200 million ha are already cultivated. The remaining 470 million ha have the potential to be cultivated. Of these, 400 million ha are in savannahs. The potential for restoration and agricultural intensification is enormous.

Famine and Economic Crisis in Africa

Africans are currently facing a crisis of food insecurity. Many parts of Africa are experiencing severe droughts and food shortages. This is compounded by the effects of climate change and the increasing demand for land for agriculture. The crisis is exacerbated by the lack of investment in agriculture and the lack of access to modern technologies and innovative farming practices.

Wealth andPoverty

There is a stark contrast between the wealth of Africa's natural resources and the poverty of its people. Africa has the land, water, and people to feed itself and help other regions. Nevertheless, Africa has the potential for restoration and agricultural intensification. Yet Africa has considerable riches. Africa has the land, water, and people to feed itself and help other regions. Nevertheless, Africa has the potential for restoration and agricultural intensification. Yet Africa has considerable riches. Africa has the land, water, and people to feed itself and help other regions. Nevertheless, Africa has the potential for restoration and agricultural intensification.
What about Ireland?

Sinn Féin, recycled from being the political wing of one of the physical-force Irish republican groups into a left-wing reformist party, did surprisingly well in the elections in Ireland last month. They got the most first-preference votes (24.5 percent) and ended up with 37 of the 160 seats in the Dáil. The result was to effect a tie between them and each of the two other rather absurdly named traditional Irish political parties, Fine Gael (‘Tribe of the Gaels’), the party of the outgoing Prime Minister, Leo Varadkar, and Fianna Fáil (‘Soldiers of Destiny’), founded by Republican hard-liner De Valera, which got 35 and 37 seats respectively.

When the original Sinn Féin was founded in 1905 it was an Irish nationalist party (‘We Ourselves’) catering for small-scale Irish capitalists eager to break away from the rest of the UK so as to be able to erect tariffs to protect them from the competition of big British capitalists. Its first leader, Arthur Griffith, proclaimed that, if an Irish capitalist firm was being undercut by an English competitor, ‘it is the first duty of the Irish nation to accord protection to that Irish manufacturer’ and that ‘under the Sinn Féin policy... no possibility would be left... for a syndicate of unscrupulous English capitalists to crush out the home manufacturer and the home trader’ (Arthur Griffith, The Sinn Féin Policy, 1907).

This was the policy that the De Valera Fianna Fáil government that came to power in 1932 began to implement, involving a tariff war between Britain and Ireland.

Now it’s a different story. In a 2019 policy document, Ownership Matters, Sinn Féin states that it wants ‘an economy that works for workers’ (mind you, don’t they all, given that workers make up the vast majority of electors?). After citing figures for wealth inequality and poverty in Ireland, SF went on: “Sinn Féin believes that this wealth inequality is a result of our economy being detrimentally ‘short-termist’ in its outlook – with private firms, through financial intermediaries, weighing near-term profit outcomes too heavily at the expense of longer-term sustainability. This has become the hegemonic strategy for private enterprise. The reality is that ownership shapes purpose. If we allow our economy to be owned and controlled by a small group of elites whose objective is that of profit, then that will be the purpose of our economy. If, however, we agree as a society that our preference is to establish an economy based upon productivity, sustainability and equality then ownership of our economy must be equitably spread across society” (www.sinnfein.ie/files/2019/Workers_Co-operatives.pdf).

Then came the punch-line: “This new economy can be achieved through alternative models of ownership. Sinn Féin believes that the Worker Co-operative Model offers an exciting and innovative alternative. Not to be achieved in one go, but, in the words of a slogan the document coins, ‘Own the Change: Building Economic Democracy One Worker Co-op at a Time’.

Those who voted SF are unlikely to have voted for this, but merely so that something should be done about growing inequality and poverty. However, it does illustrate the illusions of SF’s policy makers. They criticise traditional private enterprises for concentrating on short-term profits, but if worker co-ops are to compete against them with any chance of surviving they, too, would have to pursue the same economic objective of profit. They would have to make profits as they would be operating within the context of a capitalist economy, which is based on competitive profit-seeking.

The capitalist economy

The capitalist economy – which SF would leave unchanged while launching ‘one worker co-op at a time’ – is based on separate enterprises competing to meet paying demand in their sphere of activity. The weapon used in this struggle is to produce more cheaply than your rivals but, to do this, you must re-invest the major part of the profits you make in machinery and other ways that reduce the cost per unit produced. The first enterprise to adopt some cheaper production method reaps extra profits, but this encourages, in fact obliges those that can, to follow suit and the price of the product falls, with the innovator’s profits falling back to normal. If an enterprise were to distribute all the profits it made to its owners for them to spend on their consumption, then its cost of production would not fall and its products would become uncompetitive; eventually it would go under and its owners would lose their money. Very few private enterprises are that short-termist.

The point is that the same pressure to give priority to profit-making and re-investing most of it applies whatever the legal form and internal structure of the enterprise. A worker co-op would have to operate on the same basis. Internally it might be more democratic and less hierarchical but the decisions that have to be taken, whoever takes them, will have to be the same. And of course a worker co-op can also go under, with the workers losing not only their jobs but their savings too. Some succeed but those that do end up behaving like any other business enterprise, even employing non-members as wage-workers.

In any event, given the nature of Irish politics, SF will never govern on its own but only as part of a coalition. Its openly pro-capitalist partners may well induge it by allowing it to fund setting up a worker co-op or two but that will be as far as it goes. And if the experience of those set up by Tony Benn in Britain when he was minister of industry in the 1970s is anything to go by, their chances of succeeding wouldn’t be that high; all those he patronised eventually folded.

Up the Border?

Sinn Féin still stands for a 32-county Irish Republic – as did, at one time, the more fiercely named Fianna Fáil party – but this has come into prominence, not as a result of SF’s election successes north and south of the Border but as a fall-out from Brexit. Which is rather ironic in itself since Sinn Féin, as an isolationist nationalist party, opposed Ireland joining the EU and urged a No vote in all the referendums to amend and extend the EU’s powers.

People in Northern Ireland voted 56 to 44 percent in favour of Remaining in the EU and the EU insisted – and Boris Johnson acquiesced – that the political border on the island should not become an economic border again. It never was until De Valera and Fianna Fáil came to power in the ‘Free State’ as it then was and pursued a policy of independent capitalist development before they eventually gave up and signed the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement in 1965. In 1973 Ireland and Britain joined the European Economic Community (as the EU was then called and still essentially is) together.

So, the north and south of Ireland will continue to have frictionless trade. As with the EU itself, there are those who think that a single market will be a preload to a single political entity, especially as in the case of Ireland the Good Friday Agreement provides for a referendum on uniting with the Republic to be held if it is judged that a majority might favour this. But this does not necessarily follow, as the co-existence in Ireland for years of the political border with the economic unity of the single market and customs union showed. Even if a majority were to favour political unity, holding a referendum would risk igniting ‘the Border’ as a burning – and completely irrelevant and dangerously divisive – issue again, with a significant minority likely to be fiercely opposed to it, even to the extent of taking up arms. It would be better from all points of view to let sleeping dogs lie.

But even if it did happen without re-igniting political violence, it wouldn’t make much difference to the life of ordinary people. Capitalism would remain, and they would remain excluded from ownership and control of the means of life and so obliged to work for a wage or salary for those who own and control them. The pillar boxes in the North might be painted green – or maybe the settlement would allow them to remain red – but that would be all.

ADAM BUICK
In everything from bin collection timetables to Brexit policy, questions that could benefit from a more mathematical take.

He'd change and dynamic modelling of viral information. As Noam Chomsky has pointed out:

A future social order is in turn based on a concept of human nature. If in fact man is an indefinitely malleable, completely plastic being, with no innate structures of mind and no intrinsic needs of a cultural or social character, then he is a fit subject for the “shaping of behavior” by the state authority, the corporate manager, the technocrat, or the central committee. Those with some confidence in the human species will hope this is not so and will try to determine the intrinsic human characteristics that provide the framework for intellectual development, the growth of moral consciousness, cultural achievement, and participation in a free community (Language and Freedom).

Indeed, some would argue that the world is still reeling from the consequences of mathematical equations gone awry, both during the time leading up to the 2008 financial crash and Facebook failing to consider the consequences of its newsfeed cooling. She also explained, however, how algorithms are being taught to learn, through deep reinforcement learning, being ‘rewarded’ for successfully finding the correct result in their task and ‘punishing’ for failing. She demonstrated this via a pile of matchboxes that had been ‘taught’ to play noughts and crosses.

The capacity of such algorithms, Church points out, brings into play the possibility for them to handle resource allocation, to actively supply human wants in a real-time fashion: ‘Over the last few decades, researchers have developed a range of pretty effective mathematical solutions that can allocate resources across a variety of industries and scenarios so they can attempt to keep up with the daily demands our lives place on them. But when an allocation made at one time affects subsequent allocations, the problem becomes dynamic, and the passing of time must be considered as part of the equation. This throws a mathematical spanner in the works, requiring these solutions to now take into account the changing and uncertain nature of the real world’.

Amazon is already using the data it collects to train algorithms to anticipate what it needs to stock and ship. Amazon has to solve optimisation problems, trying to maximise use of its warehouses, while minimising its delivery routes and matching that with courier availability and flights, trains, etc. The trick with such immensely complex problems is not to solve them absolutely, but to approximate as closely as possible in a computationally realistic amount of time. It is this non-absolute characteristic that enables algorithms to steadily improve. The solution to the millions of variables in a delivery system is to look for good enough, not the perfect. The algorithms that YouTube and Amazon use to recommend content to customers are changing and evolving in an ecosystem that drives them to improve and ultimately provide us with the goods and services we want. Effectively, producing a profit-driven, private planned economy.

Algorithms are unhuman, as per Searle’s Chinese room (see: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_room) they can learn to follow a set of rules and respond to inputs, but they lack intentionality and the inherent structures of feeling and humanness that people possess. Humans are essential to working with algorithmic artificial intelligence to make it serve our needs, rather than that of the special form of Artificial Intelligence that is the capitalist firm. The computing resources are there to enable us to better model and predict chaotic systems, but they need a political determination on the part of us all to avoid them being used to service the needs of the ruling minority. We don’t need Cummings’ technocratic weirdos to change and shape our world, but we can use their ideas to improve our lives: only if we are running society on our own behalf.

In the words of D.H. Lawrence: ‘For God’s sake, let us be not monkeys minding machines or sitting with our tails curled while the machine amuses us, the radio or film or gramophone.

Monkeys with a bland grin on our faces.'
A Bad Criticism of Marx's Labour Theory of Value

**Pena's criticism**

Pena begins by identifying what he believes is a basic flaw in Marx's theory:

"Abstract human labor," according to Marx, is the "value forming substance" that is "materialized in commodities. ... But how can an immaterial element (an abstraction) become materialized and take up residence in a physical commodity (like the word becoming flesh)? What a confusion of categories!"

This is making rather heavy weather over what is, after all, just a metaphor. That Marx saw value as something immaterial is quite true (even if he used a 'material' metaphor). As he put it 'the value of commodities is the immaterial is quite true (even if he used a 'material' metaphor). Marx does not have in the proper exchange. As Marx explained: 'Social labour-time exists in these commodities in a latent state, so to speak, and becomes evident only in the course of their real social labour is consequently not a ready-made prerequisite but an emerging result.'

"A Negro is a Negro. Only under certain conditions does he become a slave. A cotton-spinning machine is a machine for spinning cotton at a particular rate. Under certain conditions does it become capital. Torn away from these conditions, it is as little capital as gold is itself money, or sugar is the price of sugar.'

Pena describes 'value' in much the same vein: 'value in its original and grounding manifestation, the dual form of matter and energy, pre-exists human and all other life forms. The worker is an arranger and discoverer of values, not a creator. Nature is the source of all values, not use values, as Marx erroneously believed.'

"Rationally expended energy is the "common substance" that is "materialized in commodities. The amount of expenditure represented by the finished commodity is its objective exchange value."

Pena thus wants to make 'energy' the fundamental metric of exchange value: 'exchange value is the common substance of commodities. The amount of expenditure represented by the finished commodity is its objective exchange value.'

"We see this in his claim that value, 'pre-exists human and all other life forms' and so the context in which it is used is necessary to understand. If that is the case, then the capital is the source of all value except the source of capital.'

"Value as a social relationship"

Pena does not see this because he does not grasp that value is essentially a social relationship based on economic exchange. This physical reductionist approach to the whole subject also infers his absurd claim that Marx's theory is 'for ecological socialism'. Since the theory posits only labour as the source of value it overlooks and devalues, he supposes, the contribution of Mother Nature to our material wellbeing.

"We want to bring about a society in which the exchange values no longer exist and use values are the sole consideration. It is the very existence of exchange that gets in the way of our fully appreciating, and acting upon, the latter and is incompatible with 'ecological socialism'."

"Ironically, Pena himself calls for the retention of exchange value and even argues ‘If we cannot understand and measure value...we cannot have socialism!’ but you cannot divorce exchange value from the system of generalised commodity production called capitalism. And you cannot divorce capitalism from the relentless accumulation of capital it entails.

When Marx and Engels talked in the Communist Manifesto of the need to ‘increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible’ all they meant by this was that these need to be developed to the point where human needs could be adequately met as a precondition of socialism itself. This was emphatically not a recipe for infinite growth, as Pena seems to think, or some Prometheus desire for ‘production for its own sake’."

Unfortunately, by arguing for the retention of a system of economic exchange (and exchange values couched in units of energy), Pena himself is unwittingly helping to promote the very thing that increasingly imperils our global ecosystem about which he is (quite rightly) concerned.

ROBIN COX

**Socialist Standard** March 2020
Another Regional Resource War?

For decades the relationship between Turkey, Greece and the divided island of Cyprus has been volatile. Now with the discovery of gas fields and the development of pipelines to supply the lucrative markets of Europe, the eastern Mediterranean is growing increasingly more unstable. The gas field off the southern coast of Cyprus is called Aphrodite, named after the Greek goddess of love, but there is no love lost between the rivals for possession of that energy.

Cyprus was divided in a Turkish invasion in 1974 in response to a Greek-inspired coup. Turkey is the only nation to recognize a breakaway state on the island, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Cyprus’s internationally recognized government subsequently discovered offshore gas in 2011 and has granted licences to multinational companies for oil and gas research, commissioning international energy companies, including the French multinational Total.

The December deal, which would expand Turkey’s influence in the region, has been deeply criticised by Libya’s neighbours in the Mediterranean. A maritime border agreement between Turkey and Libya’s UN-backed government is ‘unacceptable’, violates international law and ‘unfairly’ affects the rights of other countries, Luigi Di Maio, the foreign minister of Italy, declared. Egypt called it illegal, denouncing the Turkey-Libya deal as infringing on waters where the countries claim economic rights.

Fuat Oktay, Turkey’s Vice-President, answered that ‘Turkey will not permit any activity that is against its own interests in the region’, adding that ‘any plan that disregards Turkey’s absolute chance of success.’

So once again the world is faced with the possible threat of war. The Socialist Party maintains that modern war is an inevitable consequence of capitalist competition for the domination of markets, trade routes, favourable treaties, and possession of valuable resources. Our opposition has a simple basis: wars are fought over issues of interest to the capitalist class while it is workers, either in uniform or in civilian clothes, who are the cannon-fodder. The global working class has no interests at stake worth shedding a single drop of blood. Why should we die defending what is not ours and which we will never benefit from? The only war that need concern us is the class war between the parasites who possess and the workers who produce. Mere moralising against the war is not enough. What we advocate is a war on war to be waged on the battlefield of ideas, for the hearts and minds of the world’s people. And once we unite there will be no force that will stop us.

Aljo

France is also planning to enlarge its naval footprint in the eastern Mediterranean and last year signed an agreement with Cyprus to use the Evangelos Florakis naval base in Mari, on the island’s south coast.

Turkey retaliated in early December, 2019, by signing a maritime border deal with Libya’s internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA), making a military commitment to send military support in the form of Syrian mercenaries to help in the fight against forces loyal to General Khalifa Haftar who has the aid of Sudanese mercenaries plus the diplomatic support of several foreign powers such as France, Italy, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

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Aljo

The SNP are making a none too subtle point. The antidote to the referendum they don’t like is to be... another referendum. It would seem the political ‘logic’ is that the best way to counter leaving a union is to leave a union. It is somewhat ironic that the clash between Holyrood and Westminster stems from a single shared source, nationalism, albeit competing nationalisms. The cause is perceived sovereignty, as if Scotland, or England, or Britain can stand alone, or at least break away from a power portrayed as inhibiting its freedom.

However, what would the SNP do in short order should they achieve independence? Give it up to the EU of course. Similarly, should Britain shake off the last vestiges of EU influence, then treaties will be sought and signed with such as the USA.

Not only will the USA want untrammelled access to the NHS for its big pharma, for example, there will be a demand for any arrangements to be subject to America’s legal system. For the USA substitute any other major trading nation bloc and something similar will apply.

What is ‘independence’ means in a global capitalist world. Significant change cannot be achieved by a binary vote in a referendum. At best there is some reordering of the arrangements, but essentially, adjustments made, capitalism continues unhindered other than by its own contradictions.

The SNP has previously stated its intention of retaining the monarch as their country’s head of state, continuing the use of sterling and joining NATO. Presumably unaware of any contradiction, they also want to be rid of the Trident submarine bases.

Do they really think that if capitalism degenerates to the point where international warfare results in the use of nuclear weapons, the removal of Trident bases will somehow insulate Scotland from the consequences?

Should the SNP decide the monarch was not to be their head of state, then a president or some such would fulfill that function. Has being a republic lessened the grip of capitalism, or is it only a facade? What was the SNP, or the SNP’s ancestors, doing in 1945, fighting for independence? In 1945, the SNP, or the SNP’s ancestors, were fighting to save the British armed forces, because they are a threat to the capitalist class.

This is what ‘independence’ means in a global capitalist world. Significant change cannot be achieved by a binary vote in a referendum. At best there is some reordering of the arrangements, but essentially, adjustments made, capitalism continues unhindered other than by its own contradictions.

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Should the SNP decide the monarch was not to be their head of state, then a president or some such would fulfill that function. Has being a republic lessened the grip of capitalism, with its extremes of war, inequality and crises, on the USA? If Scotland was denied the use of submarine or sea-launched cruise missiles that would mean embracing the euro with all its financial hazards and, more importantly, subservience to, not independence from, the European Union. If sterling is retained, then economic policy would, ultimately, continue to be determined in London.

The formation of Britain enabled the industrial revolution to create a dynamic economy in which Scots, Welsh and English played full parts. This also led to the formation of the working class with interests transcending those of constituent regional and national parts. Workers in Scotland faced the same exploitative capitalism as they did in England and Wales and expressed their voice through their own organisations, the trade unions.

And nothing has changed. Workers on any side of a border, wherever it is drawn, face the same fundamental problem, capitalism. To exist, capitalism must exploit workers to make profit. Painting your face blue with crossed white stripes alters this not one iota.

Whatever the outcome of another referendum the people of Scotland will continue to live under a parliamentary system designed to preserve the interests of capitalism. If they have opted for ‘independence’ they will find ‘sovereignty’ surrendered to the EU.

The parliamentary system has evolved to serve the interests of capitalism, not democracy. It does not matter if a parliament is situated in London or Edinburgh, nor if its benches are upholstered in tartan and populated by nationalist MSPs, it will remain subservient to the needs and preservation of capitalism.

Referendums are designed to give apparently simple solutions to complex problems, they are the chosen way of despots and demagogues attempting to garner some semblance of popular support of their self-serving programmes. The ballot box can indeed be part of the response of the working class to taking economic and political power away from the capitalist class. But this will have to be just one element of a much wider movement in which the working class consciously acts for itself.

No referendum can solve problems for the working class, not in Scotland, not in Britain via Brexit (or re-joining the EU at some point), not anywhere. There is no Tartan alternative to socialism.

D A V E A L T O N

16 Socialist Standard March 2020

17 Socialist Standard March 2020
Dear Greta,

I wish to write to you on just my own part, first of all to express my support for your courage and your message, and also to present some ideas. Although I am a member of a political party, I am here writing alone. I wish to write to you on just my own part, first of all to present some ideas. Although I am a member of a political party, I am here writing alone.

STACEY DOOLEY has an open-minded, ground-up approach to her documentaries, with an engagingly genuine interest in the contentious subjects she chooses. Her latest programme, Stacey Dooley Investigates: The Whale Hunters (BBC3), follows on from her previous series where she went into women suicide bomber and sex offenders, among other topics. Stepping out of her comfort zone, she goes out on a Norwegian boat hunting minke whales, and watches as one get harpooned and dragged aboard. Most of her programme, though, is taken up by her meeting families on the Faroe Islands, where eating long-finned pilot whale meat has been part of their culture for a thousand years. Hunting pilot whales is called the ‘grind’ (grindadrap) in Faroese, where a pod is sighted out at sea, fishing boats herd the whales towards the beach where they are killed by hand. The recommended method claims not to cause any suffering: a sleek-looking tool called a ‘staal’ is thrust into which is monitored and regulated.

The Faroese live a rural life, close to nature and therefore not as distracted from where their food comes from as most of us. When we load our supermarket trolleys with fruit or any food, we scarcely think about how it was produced. The Faroese see pilot whale hunting as ‘taking food from nature’, which is their ‘duty’ to do. They emphasise that they don’t catch any endangered species but choose more environmentally friendly than rearing cattle, which carries a significant ‘carbon footprint’. The grind is run on a small-scale subsistence farming, with the meat just distributed among the islanders rather than being for export. Pilot whale meat remains popular among the Faroese, despite the islands’ official recommend 20 years ago that it should be avoided. This is because it contains high levels of mercury, DDT derivatives and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). Stacey shows an adviser to the Faroese prime minister, ‘I think it’s feasible’. However, the precautionary principle demands that species be avoided until the risks are fully understood.

The grinding, and whaling in general, has been traditions for centuries, and could continue for hundreds more. How would the issue of whaling be handled in a socialist society? Of course, we can’t say with any certainty, as it’ll depend on whatever the situation is at the time. But the practice is still likely to divide opinion and represent bigger questions about cultural differences, animal ‘rights’ and sustainability. A socialist society would make its decisions democratically, rather than through hierarchies, commercial interests or laws, as we have to in capitalism. All sides would be able to have their say, and all relevant facts regarding the health and well-being of whales, the potential benefits and drawbacks of whaling, and not run through states (as states would be obsolete). So, it’s possible that such a society would have some decision-making structures with a global reach, more accountable and accessible to the people today and not run through states (as states would be obsolete). So, it’s possible that something like the International Whaling Commission could remain in a socialist society, albeit structured differently and more democratically. Whichever way any decisions regarding whaling would be made in socialism, they would aim to directly meet the people’s needs and wants, in balance with nature. There are no easy answers with controversial issues like whaling, but a socialist society would enable us to make decisions in the most reasonable way.

MIKE FOSTER

[Image 315x441 to 544x747]
In a world full of euphemisms, the term ‘hostile environment’ really does describe the government’s policies towards migrants. The Immigration Acts of 2014 and 2016 made life much tougher for those who had migrated to the UK, threatening to deprive them of health care and housing or even deport them, if they could not provide the right documents. But, as May Goodfellow shows here, complemented by examples of the plight many migrants find themselves in, it is all just part of a much longer history of hostility towards immigrants.

Britain, she says, was made by migrants (see ourmigrationstory.org.uk). The first inhabitants came from southern Europe, and there were plenty of people of different origins here before the Anglo-Saxons arrived in the fifth century. Migration did not always result in prejudice and opposition, but this began to change, especially as many Jews arrived in the nineteenth century, fleeing prejudice and opposition, but this began to change, especially as many Jews arrived in the nineteenth century, fleeing the riots and the robots it is creating, will indeed mean that the demand for human work will ‘wither away’. He argues convincingly and with many salient examples that the potential of AI is such that even the many tasks which are highly important for human society to operate efficiently involving feeling, empathy and judgement will, contrary to commonly expressed views, soon be able to be done by machines. Such machines, he insists, are already in use or in the process of being invented, even if they are not yet commercially available; carrying out important tasks is, capable of achieving equally (or more) efficient outcomes. The results done by the manual or brain power of human beings. And if no action is taken to handle the situation, it will be necessary to reformulate the term he uses to describe this process) the resulting ‘technological employment’ is likely to bring about ‘technological unemployment’. So what action does he recommend? Certainly not efforts to prevent technology from taking over human jobs. He quite understandably sees that as an impossibility in a system where the criteria for judging between human work or automation is which is more profitable and where the increasing trend is for the cost of automation based on AI to fall. Instead, accepting that in the future there will be far less work for people to be employed in, he recommends an increased role for the state. He argues that the state (the ‘Big State’ as he calls it) will have to intervene, to regulate and to effectively prop up the living standards of workers by what he calls a ‘conditional basic income’, a variation of the currently much discussed idea of a ‘universal basic income’.

Automation & Unemployment

Will there be enough work to go round? That is the fundamental question discussed in detail by Oxford University economist and former government policy adviser, Daniel Susskind. His main concern is whether or not the rapid spread of automated work, most of it based on the use of artificial intelligence (AI), will, in the near future, threaten the ‘trickle-down unemployment’ and if so how that future society can cope with this. In a compellingly written and clearly argued narrative, his thesis is that, even if in the past, fears that new technology would lead to unemployment have proved unfounded, the nature of current and ongoing technology, especially AI and the robots it is creating, will indeed mean that the demand for human work will ‘wither away’. He argues convincingly and with many salient examples that the potential of AI is such that even the many tasks which are highly important for human society to operate efficiently involving feeling, empathy and judgement will, contrary to commonly expressed views, soon be able to be done by machines. Such machines, he insists, are already in use or in the process of being invented, even if they are not yet commercially available; carrying out important tasks is, capable of achieving equally (or more) efficient outcomes. The results done by the manual or brain power of human beings. And if no action is taken to handle the situation, it will be necessary to reformulate the term he uses to describe this process) the resulting ‘technological employment’ is likely to bring about ‘technological unemployment’. So what action does he recommend? Certainly not efforts to prevent technology from taking over human jobs. He quite understandably sees that as an impossibility in a system where the criteria for judging between human work or automation is which is more profitable and where the increasing trend is for the cost of automation based on AI to fall. Instead, accepting that in the future there will be far less work for people to be employed in, he recommends an increased role for the state. He argues that the state (the ‘Big State’ as he calls it) will have to intervene, to regulate and to effectively prop up the living standards of workers by what he calls a ‘conditional basic income’, a variation of the currently much discussed idea of a ‘universal basic income’.

In this connection, as pointed out by the writer, even today, in a situation in which most people have difficulty in imagining how society could be organised differently from the way it is, in the UK 15 million people still volunteer regularly, already half as many as are in paid work, and are engaged in the kind of activity referred to by the author as ‘work in pursuit of purpose rather than productivity’. In this they achieve, as he puts it, ‘value through community recognition rather than through the market’. And towards the end of his book, the author quotes with apparent approval the description of work in Marx’s Critique of the Gotha Programme as ‘not only a means of life but life’s prime want’. So this is a book well worth reading not only for its knowledge of and insights into likely developments in the field of work within the capitalist system but also for its reflections on the nature and purpose of work generally. While the author does not imagine a society structured fundamentally differently from the current one, he clearly sees that work could, and should be more than just the grind of employment that it is so many and as helping to fulfil the basic human need for personal fulfilment and social interaction. H. M.
The mad world of capitalism

Once again bricks are piling up, brick-workers are being laid off and brickworks closing down. All because the manufacturers can no longer find a profitable market. There are about 1,800,000 houses in England and Wales officially classified as “unfit”. But the fact that millions of people need better homes does not affect brick production for the simple reason that it is not profitable to produce bricks to build houses for people who would not be able to pay for them. Meanwhile, in France the government are worried about there being “too much food”. According to the Times (23 January 1970), the solution advocated by a group of academics and civil servants is that one-third of the present cultivated area of France should be taken out of food production. The Vedel Commission recommended:

“Whatever rate of modernisation is adopted, agriculture will continue to build up surpluses if it continues to exploit the same area as today. Whatever happens, the excess land that will have to be withdrawn will be at least 10m. hectares.

To do this would be in line with what other governments, notably the American, have already done in a bid to prevent the production of food that cannot be sold profitably. It is not that people do not need the food—the Food and Agriculture Organisation estimate that up to half the world’s population go to bed hungry—but that because they cannot pay for it there is no profit in growing food for them.”

Stockpiles of bricks beside slums; proposals to cut back food production in a hungry world—just two more examples of how capitalism cannot serve human needs. (Socialist Standard, March 1970)

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 producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declarations of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

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

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

3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion of the common property of society into the possession of the whole community.

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 of 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.

Meetings:

MARCH 2020

CARDIFF

Every Saturday (weather permitting), 1.00 p.m. – 3.00 p.m.
Street Stall
Venue: Queen Street (Newport Road end), Cardiff, CF10 2HJ

APRIL 2020

CARDIFF

Every Saturday (weather permitting), 1.00 p.m. – 3.00 p.m.
Street Stall
Venue: Queen Street (Newport Road end), Cardiff, CF10 2HJ

LONDON

Clapham

Saturday 18 – Sunday 19 April, 10.30 a.m. – 5.00 p.m. both days
Annual Conference
Socialist Party’s Premises, 52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 7UN

Full residential cost (including accommodation and meals Friday evening to Sunday afternoon) is £300, and the concessory rate is £150. Day visitors are welcome, but please book in advance. For full details of all our meetings and events see our Meetup site: http://www.meetup.com/The-Socialist-Party-of-Great-Britain/
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profit in the coronavirus. ‘The virus and want in its wake. There is potential wherever it can be made and leaving war Capitalism is parasitic, seeking out profit Do no homeopathy

the working day, so as to suck out every last drop of surplus value. By contrast, the Conservative Shapiro believes ‘consumers determine the value of products; producers do not. The diffuse informational system of the free market, which rewards the power of entrepreneurship, rather than punishing it...’ Socialists assert that profit can be traced to the additional value generated in the production process. Consider, a US factory worker’s output $73.45/hour vs. hourly pay of just $23.32 (huffpost.com, 6 December 2017) and ‘Almost 80% of US workers live from paycheck to paycheck’ (theguardian.com, 29 July 2018). This ‘surplus value’ is the difference between the labour time workers actually expend in the production process and the amount of labour time embodied in the commodities the workers themselves must consume to reproduce their capacity to labour, which Marx terms ‘labour power’. Even a ‘fair wage’, or co-operatives, which AOC supports, do not change the source of Shapiro’s ‘rewards’. He actually quotes approvingly from the Guardian with regard to the Spanish Mondragon Cooperative Corporation, whose worker-owners have ‘learned to think like the shareholders of any other global business.’ Exploitation of labour as the basis of profit accounts for the merciless drive of capitalists to extend the working day, so as to suck out every last drop of surplus value.

Do no homeopathy

Capitalism is parasitic, seeking out profit wherever it can be made and leaving war and want in its wake. There is potential profit in the coronavirus. ‘The virus appears to have originated from a Wuhan seafood market where wild animals, including marmots, birds, rabbits, bats and snakes, are traded illegally’ (wired.co.uk, 30 January). Imagine the conditions for animals and workers involved with illegal farms and markets. The Indian government is doubling down on the damage done by promoting homeopathic treatment. ‘Far from being a “prophylactic medicine,” as the ministry suggests, this miracle concoction is, in reality, a super-diluted form of arsenic trioxide. Not only is the compound known to be fatal if improperly used, but there’s also no evidence to suggest it works on the coronavirus, or any other condition for that matter. If it weren’t for the Dalai Lama recently telling his followers to chant a mantra as protection, India’s purported tips to fend off the coronavirus might be the least effective advice offered yet. Now, the two will have to battle for that top spot, and India’s ministry of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa Rigpa and Homoeopathy) has even more nonsensical suggestions to offer in the fight... a drop of sesame oil in each nostril upon waking, and a “light and soft” diet.... Ayurveda and other traditional medicines, like Unani, are seen as a legitimate and burgeoning industry. The Prime Minister... wants to make them “a way of life”... and as holistic medicine becomes ever more profitable, the government has started promoting traditional remedies more and more’ (sciencealert.com, 30 January).

A world to win

We live in a sick society, yet a small minority continue to thrive. ‘The richest Americans are set to inherit a staggering $764 billion... The study noted the US has one of the lowest levels of upward mobility, which now “heavily depends” on the circumstances of birth’ (markets.businessinsider.com, 28 January). Who runs things from top to bottom? Who grows the food, who builds the houses, who mines the minerals, who transports them, who processes them, who fashions them into useful things, who does all the administrative work for this, orders the supplies, draws up the designs – who other than the working class? The shareholding capitalist and the fat-cat company director are completely redundant as far as the actual work of wealth production is concerned – and new wealth can only be created by the application of human labour to materials that originally come from nature, not by speculating on the stock exchange or planning take-over bids. Their social role is purely parasitic - a mosquito that banks the blood it extracts, part of the wealth created by the rest of us. This is the system which AOC and Shapiro, with more or less governmental intervention, support, and which only a majority of us can end.

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