

socialist standard

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LOCKDOWN



EXIT STRATEGY
FROM CAPITALISM



Also:
Coronavirus Crisis
The Media on the Virus
Socialist Standard 100 Years Ago



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Introducing the Socialist Party

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

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

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

Gradualist reformers like the Labour Party believed that capitalism could be



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

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

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

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Locked down under capitalism

What would have been unthinkable a few months ago has now become reality. Most countries have been placed under lockdown, where the state has closed down large areas of the economy - shops, cinemas, pubs and restaurants in an effort to prevent the rapid spread of the coronavirus. Only food stores, supermarkets and pharmacies are allowed to remain open. Schools have been closed. The police have been given powers to enforce social distancing laws, whereby people are only allowed out for restricted activities, such as food shopping, exercise or attending medical appointments, and they can instruct people to go home and issue on-the-spot fines. For most workers, particularly those in the more developed capitalist states, this is unprecedented.

As the lockdown applies to everyone, then surely we are all in this together? Well, not quite. It is true that it can lead to mental health issues like loneliness and depression. There has been a recorded rise in domestic violence cases. Children being cooped up in the house and unable to play with their friends is not good for their emotional development.

However, like everything else in capitalism, having money can help you

ride this crisis more comfortably. Wealthy capitalists can hop on to their yachts and head for luxury havens such as Palm Beach (Chuck Collins, 'Let's stop pretending billionaires are in the same boat as us during this pandemic', *Guardian*, 24 April). They don't have to worry about losing their jobs, about being furloughed or how they will pay the rent or mortgage. Even better-off workers can get by more easily by working from home and having more savings to draw on. Poorer workers, on the other hand, are more likely to have to travel to work and tend to live in higher-density housing which puts them more at risk. It is certainly more pleasant to self-isolate in a mansion with large grounds than in a high-rise council flat. Moreover, it is workers who are losing their jobs by the millions and seeing their incomes fall.

Although the lockdown has made it more difficult for workers to come together physically, there is evidence of the emergence of groups offering community and social services. George Monbiot has outlined many instances of these happening globally; students in Prague babysitting the children of health workers; volunteers in Belgrade organising online crisis counselling; in the UK and

elsewhere, groups are picking up shopping and prescriptions for the elderly. As these groups are independent of the state and the private market sector, Monbiot refers to them as the 'commons' ('Covid-19 has turned millions of us into good neighbours', *Guardian*, 1 April).

What this reveals is what is most important in society. It is certainly not the wheeling and dealing of the venture capitalists, bankers and other 'movers and shakers' that we are supposed to look up to, but the useful jobs that doctors, nurses, delivery workers, public transport workers and postal workers do.

Perhaps this insight along with the emergence of the 'commons' may provide the seeds of an emerging socialist class consciousness?



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PATHFINDERS

Denialists and Domsayers

STRANGE CONSEQUENCES continue to develop from the virus pandemic. Just when you thought the American right wing couldn't get any more moronic, they've started organising armed protests against the lockdown in defiance of their own state laws, and egged on by tweets from Donald Trump, in what is possibly the first ever instance of a sitting president inciting citizens to break the law, all in the name of 'personal liberty' (bit.ly/2RRmBQW).

Tom Lehrer's famous remark about satire becoming redundant is itself becoming redundant. Their reasoning, if one can be careless with the term, must be that they're not the ones most at risk so what the hell do they care? Let the old and sick die in droves, and save our tax dollars! Maybe they wouldn't be so callous and cavalier if they realised that's exactly the way Donald Trump thinks about them too.

No less astonishing is the number of people who reputedly are still going out and simply not bothering to keep their 'social distance', either in shops or on roads. Despite everything, a sense of unreality hangs over events. Perhaps it's all simply too huge for our feeble monkey brains to comprehend. Perhaps it's easier to take refuge in denial, or unwarranted optimism.

Assisted of course by a media determined to grab headlines with every new drug trial going, no matter how tiny the prospect of success or how far in the future any result can be expected. What the Daily Express does constantly and the Daily Mail does frequently, i.e. prey vampirically on people's health fears, they're all doing now with a relentless snake-oil infomercial they call science journalism.

Things are scarcely better at the other end of the fortune-teller's see-saw, where squats the dead weight of doom in the shape of those predicting a 2-year lockdown for many people with health problems. Unfortunately, as studies of depressives show, the Eeyores are usually closer to the truth than the optimistic Tiggers. Out-morosing everyone in the Hundred-Acre Wood is the prediction that, even after the crisis is over, things could get worse still with a post-viral pandemic of chronic fatigue syndrome (aka ME) disabling the world's working population, as the condition is commonly associated with virus triggers (*New Scientist*, 15 April - bit.ly/2Vp1Dv7).

Given all this, there's something rather tasteless about the amount of articles

saying how good this is for the planet and climate change. This is like condoling you for the loss of your granddad and then pointing out how good his ashes will be for the roses. It's obviously true that the roads and skies are emptier, so UK air pollution is down by up to 60 percent (bbc.in/3eCdPQM), and industrial pollution levels are down as oil prices drop to a 21-year low (bbc.in/2RMsaGX). But according to a NASA study the supposed benefits to the climate are vastly overstated, with a short business break scarcely making up for years of concentrated activity (go.nasa.gov/34NfA9k). Nevertheless, according to some deep greens, this is a clear sign that it's perfectly possible to do all the things the climate lobby and the IPCC have been demanding for years, and which governments seem to think can't be done.



It's not a clear sign of any such thing. Pushing a man off a cliff and saying he can fly doesn't mean you've broken the law of gravity. Subsequent events will soon demonstrate otherwise. The coronavirus has pushed the market system off a cliff alright, but it's falling, not floating, and when it lands, workers are going to get splattered by the dead weight of debt, both their own, and that of governments and employers seeking to redress it through savage cuts in wages and services. And when that happens, you can bet environmentalism won't be high on the agenda either.

Two important things do emerge from the crisis that demonstrate why global common ownership is a good bet compared to capitalism. One is that, when there's a crisis on this scale and it's a question of finding solutions, nobody questions that it's more efficient to pool or 'socialise' efforts across all boundaries, whether economic, political or physical. Anyone arguing that the search for a vaccine should be entrusted to the usual secretive and competitive workings of the profit system would be regarded right now as a lunatic. But drill down into any problem in capitalism and you find the

same phenomenon, competing private interests getting in the way of the really useful work. What the virus demonstrates is that, when push comes to shove as now, capitalism throws aside its own logic as useless and hijacks the logic of socialism!

The second is the snide right-wing prejudice that a cooperative society would collapse through a lack of volunteers. Many people now trapped in idleness indoors because of health vulnerabilities would very likely give their eye-teeth to be able to volunteer for useful work in this crisis. We all applaud the efforts of medical staff, delivery drivers and the like. How many more of us wish we could help, and instead are forced to sit on our hands in an unheroic attempt to keep ourselves from occupying a precious hospital bed? What a monumental insult it is to call workers lazy and selfish, when you see how they rush to other people's aid, even at the risk of their own lives.

Nothing about the current volunteer effort is a surprise to any socialist. We know very well that workers run the world from top to bottom, albeit in the interest of the 1 percent, and from this we conclude that workers are quite capable of running it in their own interest, without the parasitical 1 percent and their corrupt, glove-puppet governments. The only trouble is that workers don't realise this yet.

People always think a major war or disaster is going to change the world, and this crisis is no different. In all the currently hot and mostly hot-air speculations about 'life after Covid-19', one or two people are at least asking the right questions. Taking value and centralisation as the two driving factors of future change, one of these, a researcher in something called ecological economics, presents an interesting choice of four possibilities: state capitalism (which to us is normal capitalism with some state involvement); barbarism (i.e. lawless property society); state socialism (which we would call state capitalism), or 'mutual aid' prioritising human need not exchange value (which is not a million miles from what we call socialism). The way the article presents the options, it's a no-brainer (bbc.in/2zdE8MR).

Does the will to change exist though? Apparently so. A widely reported YouGov poll suggests that 91 percent of people in the UK don't want to go back to the way things were before the coronavirus pandemic (*Independent*, 17 April - bit.ly/2VHs8ej). 91 percent is a good start. Let's hope they mean it.

PJS

Such a thing as society?

Margaret Thatcher once famously said that there is no such thing as society, just individuals and families. It sounds like obvious nonsense, but she claimed that this remark was usually quoted out of context:

‘My meaning, clear at the time but subsequently distorted beyond recognition, was that society was not an abstraction, separate from the men and women who composed it, but a living structure of individuals, families, neighbours and voluntary associations’.

This in effect negates her original statement, and she still seemed to forget the existence of companies, armed forces, the police and so on (though maybe she regarded those as ‘voluntary associations’). And Boris Johnson, while self-isolating in Downing Street, recently accepted that the contributions of NHS and other workers meant that the coronavirus crisis had shown ‘there really is such a thing as society’.

However, there are reasons for questioning the existence of society, not in general but specifically under capitalism. The historian Thomas Carlyle, for instance, wrote in 1843:

‘We call it a Society ... Our life is not a mutual helpfulness: but rather, cloaked under due laws-of-war, named fair competition and so forth, it is a mutual hostility’ (Quoted in E.P.Thompson: *William Morris*).

William Morris was himself influenced by Carlyle, and more than once he returned to this idea that there was no such thing as society. In ‘True and False Society’ (from 1886) he set out three criteria for a ‘successful society’: that work be

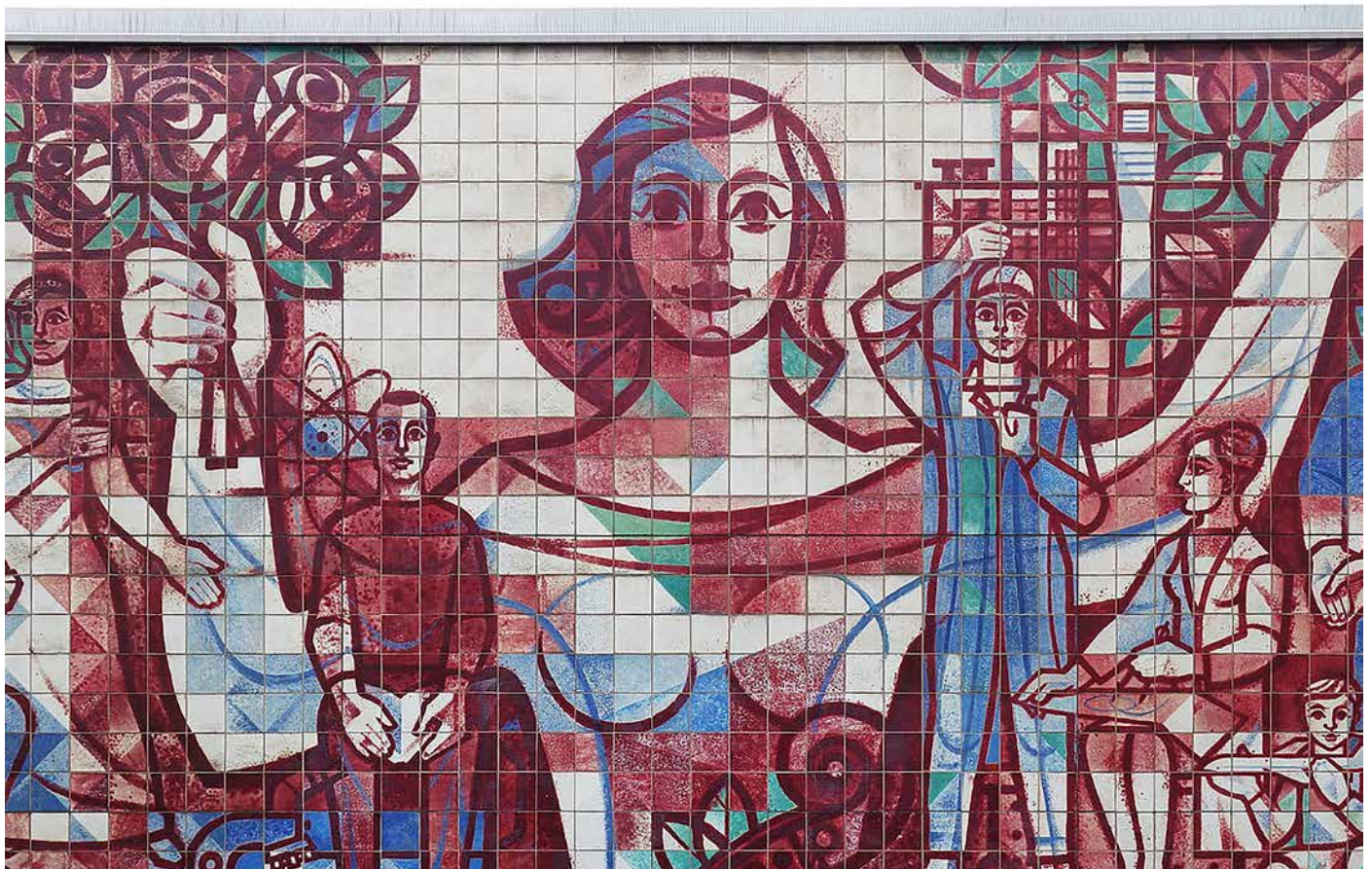
arranged so that each capable person should do a fair share of it and no more; that everyone who did a fair share of work should enjoy a due share of wealth; and that waste of labour should be avoided. None of those, he argued, could be satisfied by capitalism, ‘our present so called society’. Socialism, instead, would be ‘that true society which means well-being and well-doing for one and all.’

He made a similar point in the Statement of Principles of the Hammersmith Socialist Society, written in 1890 after he and others had left the Socialist League. For workers, capitalism ‘has ceased to be a society, and has become a tyranny’. In its place, ‘it is not the dissolution of society for which we strive, but its reintegration’ and ‘it is a true society which we desire’.

If, as dictionaries generally do, we define society as a group of people living together, then, vague though this is, capitalist society certainly exists. Yet Carlyle and Morris definitely had a point, that a society based on division into classes and antagonism of interests between them is not a true community, where people work together for the common good. In connection with our aim, a system of society based on common ownership, our pamphlet *Socialist Principles Explained* states: ‘A system of society alludes to the sum total of human relationships and is meant to distinguish us from those who seek to organise cooperative colonies, islands within a sea of capitalism.’

So yes, there is such a thing as society, but capitalism is not a genuine community or, in Morris’s words, a true society, where people co-operate for the good of all.

PB



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COOKING THE BOOKS

Social distancing and the wages system

Faced with the spread of a highly infectious disease, the obvious immediate response is to encourage social distancing so that fewer people catch it. Should such an epidemic occur in socialism, as it could, that would be the initial response too.

But today we are living under capitalism where social distancing, insofar as it involves people not going out to work at non-essential jobs, creates a serious problem. It is not so much the work not being done as the fact that most people depend on working for an employer to get the money they need to buy the things they must have to live.

This arises from the nature of capitalism as a class-divided society where goods and services are produced for sale with a view to profit. The means of living – the places where wealth is produced – are owned and controlled by a small section of society only; the excluded majority have to get money in one way or another to survive. They can beg or they can steal, but most do so by working. Some are self-employed selling

a service direct to the consumer. The vast majority, however, get money by selling their mental and physical energies to an employer.

The effect on people of not allowing them to work can easily be worked out – they no longer have a money income and so can no longer access what they need. In these circumstances the government has no choice (unless, that is, it wants to provoke riots and rebellion) but to provide them with some money. In Britain the method chosen has been to give employers a grant to pay employees who they have had to send home on unpaid leave.

Some legal draftsman searched through ancient documents and found the word 'furlough' to describe this. Under the scheme employers are to be paid a grant of 80 percent of the labour costs of each worker they 'furlough', enabling their workers to get 80 percent of their previous earnings. Much better than nothing even though a drastic cut in their standard of living but enough to allow them to social distance; which is in effect what they are being paid to do.

Even so, well over a million extra workers have been reduced to applying for

the welfare handout known as Universal Credit. The government even instructed local councils to find housing for the street homeless so as to get them out of circulation.

All this has involved the government spending huge amounts of money, which it will get by borrowing, some it seems from itself. The latter is in fact the equivalent of printing new money and would eventually have the same upward effect on prices as over-issuing money always does. The government is hoping that having to do all this will only be temporary and of course they cannot go on indefinitely paying workers to do nothing.

How much simpler things would have been if we were living in socialism where people's access to what they need wouldn't be linked to working for a wage. If ever social distancing should be needed in socialism, not being able to associate with other people would be inconvenient and difficult for the social animals that humans are, but not made worse by worry about how to get the things needed to live. Every member of society would have direct, free access to this as of right.

WOOD FOR THE TREES

PEER REVIEW

SOMEBODY ONCE asked if writing for a political journal involves the work being 'peer reviewed'. On reflection it's a legitimate question given that we live in an age of conspiracy theories, fake news and media manipulation. Many seek reassurance that the truth can be found through the authority of a consensus guaranteed by experts. It has a scientific patina that can provide confidence in conclusions assimilated and then disseminated by hierarchical institutions like governments and various other agencies of 'the establishment'. Such a procedure does indeed seem to be a legitimate element in discerning truth from falsehood or informed opinion from ignorance but it must be remembered that such experts within a capitalist context can sometimes be handpicked by the powerful to guarantee that these individuals will stay 'on message'. Indeed some of them might never have reached the lofty heights of being recognised as experts if they had not proven their allegiance to the status quo.

Of course not all experts agree with one another and when deciding between them (as pragmatism and a rejection of populist philistinism demands) it is always worth bearing in mind their 'track record' in terms of political allegiance, business links and past accuracy. Recognised protocols of reason and logic under the guidance of a community composed of others dedicated to a field of study does represent an undeniable aid to progress and will be used by a future socialist society but being outside the contemporary consensus (for obvious political and ethical reasons) how can socialists claim any authority in what we say? Are the majority correct in assuming that we are just another cult competing for their attention using unproven propaganda?

Of course it wouldn't be true to say that socialists are entirely outside the cultural consensus since we have a long history that does provide us with continuity and context. Our political fortunes have waxed and waned over the last century and of the multitude of

political organisations calling themselves socialist we are one of the very few who have survived courtesy of our adherence to authentic principles. In their lust and impatience for power many have followed either the Bolshevik model of elitist dictatorship or the reformist route in attempting to humanising capitalism – both of which conform to the consensus model of left wing politics. They are both intellectually 'respectable' and understood within an authoritarian and idealist bourgeois ideological context and are also, of course, thoroughly discredited. If we give such ideologies and those who aspire to them the benefit of the doubt concerning their altruistic motivation we can see that their failure was not due to the weakness of some leader or other or to the lack of moral integrity but rather to a profoundly mistaken understanding of how the world works. Part of the reason for this failure to comprehend reality

then everything will work out fine. The concept of class struggle and revolution is unpalatable to most English historians and for those who do embrace such concepts it is a dynamic confined to the past with no contemporary relevance. Behind such revision and complacency lies the dead hand of ruling class ideology. Those who do not legitimise the status quo in this way are marginalised. The success of any organisation be it scientific, political, religious, aesthetic or charitable depends on it embracing this ideological consensus. This is why a study of history is so crucial to political understanding because it always undermines any attempt to impose a 'steady state' evolutionary theory of political development. In the light of this the role of experts providing authority for a consensus can be seen as primarily ideological. Those who seek truth in this way will be disappointed as in the end every individual has to find their own

political answers because those who represent the status quo will not and cannot provide them. It can be a shocking revelation to many that those who create the consensus can be just as mistaken as any wild-eyed conspiracy theorist – examples of this range from imaginary 'weapons of mass destruction' to the belief that turning cattle into cannibals had no health implications for humans or that cannabis is more dangerous than alcohol.

This has ever been so with ruling elites in history and it is sometimes surprising that any progress is achieved in the light of such ideological

conditioning. But when the point arrives that the propaganda is so patently absurd in comparison with the real lives of ordinary people a paradigm shift occurs. Suddenly those outside of the ideological consensus find a voice that is listened to. The consensus is shattered and true progress is resumed. The only peers that socialists recognise are the revolutionary working class.

WEZ



is a belief in linear progress – the idea that existing social structures continue to improve or evolve until the manifest elements of inequality and injustice disappear.

This 'evolutionary' version of history is one you'll find in most English textbooks. This is emphasised in the description of one of the world's most bloody revolutions (1642) as a 'civil war' and the embracing of a bloodless coup as 'The Glorious Revolution' (1688). The English are somehow immune from revolution and if we continue to trust our ruling class

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AS THE world's attention centres upon the COVID-19 pandemic it is easy to forget that there are many other destructive threats facing people. There has been another plague taking place. Swarms of locusts have ravaged the Horn of Africa, East Africa and parts of Pakistan and India. Since December, billions of desert locusts have swarmed, devouring fields filled with crops such as maize, millet and sorghum, and stripped bare grazing land, devastating pasture and threatening the livelihoods of tens of millions people who depend on farming and livestock for their survival. It is a race against time as each new generation of the insects reach adulthood and takes flight to widen its spread. The United Nations has described the situation as 'a scourge of biblical proportions'. A square kilometre of the swarm contains 40-80 million locusts which can eat the same amount of food in one day as 35,000 people. An average swarm destroys crops that could feed 2,500 people for a year, the FAO said.

One such swarm sighted in northern Kenya was reportedly 2,400 square km and contained up to 200 billion locusts which descend to feed off plants and vegetation. According to the FAO, a locust consumes its own weight in food every day. The swarms can travel up to 150 km in a day. If left unchecked, their current numbers could grow 500-fold by June. Stephen Byantwale, the commissioner for crop protection at Uganda's ministry of agriculture, said of the fast-breeding insects, 'They are spreading like wildfire...'

The infestation poses an unprecedented risk to food supplies in an already vulnerable region with high poverty levels, plunging it deeper into crisis. Locusts are eating their way through Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda and Tanzania.

In Ethiopia, the locusts have devastated more than 30,000 hectares of crops.

Locusts have destroyed over 70,000 hectares of farmland in Somalia. Likewise, Kenya has more than 70,000 hectares of crops under infestation.

The locust plague was the result of recent extreme weather conditions that saw many farmers slowly recovering from three years of drought, which ended in one of the wettest rainy seasons in four decades in parts of East Africa, where floods killed hundreds. Climate scientists suggest that global warming has created the ideal conditions for the insects. The locusts arrived from the Arabian peninsula after cyclones dumped vast amounts of rain in the deserts of Oman – creating perfect breeding conditions.

'The West Indian Ocean, including the Arabian Sea, was warmer than usual during the last two seasons,' said the senior scientist of the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Dr Roxy Mathew Koll, 'This is largely due to a phenomenon called Indian Ocean Dipole [blamed, too, for Australia's forest fires], and also due to the rising ocean temperatures associated with global warming.'

Warmer seas led to more cyclones in the Indian Ocean. It was Cyclone Mekunu, which struck in 2018, and then a second cyclone which came to the area that allowed the conditions to continue to be favourable and another generation of breeding, so instead of increasing 400-fold, they increased 8,000-fold which allowed several generations of desert locusts the moist sand and vegetation to thrive in the desert between Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Oman known as the Empty Quarter.

Keith Cressman, locust-forecasting expert for the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), explained, 'We know that cyclones are the originators of swarms – and in the past 10 years there's been an increase in the frequency of cyclones in the Indian Ocean. Normally

there's none, or maybe one . . . if this trend of increased frequency of cyclones in the Indian Ocean continues, then certainly that's going to translate to an increase in locust swarms in the Horn of Africa.'

One piece of perhaps good news is that the (dining) table might be turned on the locusts. The EU is expected to endorse locusts as being safe for human consumption. Christophe Derrien, the secretary general of the industry organisation International Platform of Insects for Food and Feed says, 'We believe that insects for food is one solution for some of the biggest challenges we are facing on the planet. In the context of scarce resources, and insect production is not too demanding, you have the capacity to produce high-quality protein. That is a very promising solution' (*Guardian*, 2 April).

ALJO





If you were to compile a list of essential workers that your community has been reliant on during the Coronavirus crisis, you'd very likely not include billionaires, CEOs, businessmen, bankers, economists or the royals or that class of people who live off rent, interest and profit. Your list would include workers we encounter every day and whose occupations we had hitherto taken for granted. Your list would undoubtedly include medical workers, shop staff, 'bin men', delivery drivers, those working in power plants or working in front-line maintenance of the technology society needs etc. In short, you'd cite members of the class that sells its physical and mental abilities for a wage or salary in order to live – the working class. In her recent address to the nation about the coronavirus crisis, the queen began her brief message with a recognition of the importance of such workers to a society in crisis and, unwittingly, revealing the utter uselessness of her own institution to society.

We keep the world going

This class, the working class, runs the world and it is important to grasp this fact. It is we, members of this majority class, who build the cities and railway networks, the bridges and roads, the docks and airports. It is we who staff the hospitals and schools, who empty the bins and go down the sewers. It is we who fish the oceans and tend the forests, work the farm and till the land and plantations. It is we, the working class, who produce everything society needs from a pin to an oil-rig, who provide all of its services. If we can do all of this off our own backs, then assuredly, we can continue to do so without a profit-greedy minority watching over us and, more, in our own interests.

To be sure, the ruling class of capitalists and their executive, the governments of the world, have no monopoly on our skills and abilities. These belong to us. Moreover, it is we who are responsible for the inventions that have benefited humanity and the improvements in productive techniques. Most inventions and improvements are the result of those who do the actual work, thinking up easier and faster ways of completing a task, the result of ideas being passed down from generation to generation, each one improving the techniques of the previous. If those who work have given the world so much, in the past say 2,000 years, then how much more are we capable of providing in a world devoid of the artificial constraints of profit? Needless to say, any vaccine for the coronavirus will be the result of the hard work of salary-earning scientists, not some fat-arsed apologist for the profit system.

It is easy to cite the advantages of capitalism over previous economic systems. Many people believe that capitalism, though not perfect, is the only system possible. One thing

is certain, though – if we follow the capitalist trajectory, we're in for some pretty troublesome times. Capitalism has undoubtedly raised the productive potential of humanity and it is now quite possible to provide a comfortable standard of living for every human on the planet. But, to reiterate, capitalism now stands as a barrier to the full and improved use of the world's productive and distributive forces. In a world of potential abundance, the unceasing quest for profit imposes on our global society widespread artificial scarcity. Hundreds of millions of humans are consigned to a life of abject poverty, whilst the majority live lives filled with uncertainty.

Our ability to imagine has brought us so very far, from the days when our ancestors chipped away at flint to produce the first tools, to the sending of scientific probes to the surface of Mars, the setting up of the worldwide web, and the mapping of the human genome. Is it really such a huge leap of the imagination to now envisage a social system that can take over from the present capitalist order of things? Is it just too daring to imagine humans consigning poverty, disease, hunger and war to some pre-historic age?

Do we really need leaders deciding our lives for us, when collectively we are far more capable of deciding what is best? Do we really need governments administering our lives when what is really needed is the administration of the things we need to live in peace and security? Must every decision made by our elites be first of all weighed on the scales of profit, tilted always in their favour?

Can't be reformed to work for us

One thing is certain: capitalism cannot be reformed in the interests of the world's suffering billions, because reform does not address the basic contradiction between profit and need. The world's leaders cannot be depended upon because they can only ever act as the executive of corporate capitalism. The expansion of democracy, while welcome, serves little function if all candidates at election time can only offer variations on the same basic set of policies that keep capitalism in the ascendancy.

Capitalism must be abolished if we as a species are to thrive, if the planet is to survive. No amount of reform, however great, will work. Change must be global and irreversible. It must involve all of us. We need to erase borders and frontiers; to abolish states and governments and false concepts of nationalism. We need to abolish our money systems, and with it buying, selling and exchange. And in place of this we need to establish a different global social system – a society in which there is common ownership and true democratic control of the Earth's natural and industrial resources. A society where the everyday things we need to live in comfort are produced

and distributed freely and for no other reason than that they are needed – socialism.

It is now no utopian fantasy to suggest we can live in a world without waste or want or war, in which each person has free access to the benefits of civilisation. That much is assured. We certainly have the science, the technology and the know-how. All that is missing is the will – the global desire for change that can make that next great historical advance possible; a belief in ourselves as masters of our own destiny; a belief that it is possible to free production from the artificial constraints of profit and to fashion a world in our own interests. And how soon this happens depends upon us all – each and every one of us.

Of course, many, even our detractors, will agree that such a socialist world would be a beautiful place to live in, but that 'human nature' will always be a barrier to its establishment, because humans are 'by nature' greedy, selfish and aggressive. It quickly becomes apparent that what they are describing is not human nature as such, but various traits of human behaviour exhibited under particular circumstances. Socialists maintain that human behaviour is shaped by the kind of system people are brought up to live in – that it is not our consciousness that determines our social existence but our social existence which determines our consciousness. Nobody is born a racist or a patriot, a bigot or with a belief in gods. Nobody is born a murderer, a robber or a rapist, and our alleged greed for money is no more a function of the natural human thought process than were slavery or witch burning.

In general, the ideas the common people hold have been acquired second-hand, passed down from the ruling class above us. This is because the class which owns and controls the productive process also controls the intellectual life process in general. Any anti-social behaviour is likewise influenced by our social circumstances at any given time, i.e., when we are poor, depressed, afraid, lonely, angry and frustrated.

In most cases, those who produce the world's wealth (some 95 percent of the world's population) have had that second-rate education that makes free thought difficult – an upbringing that conditions us to accept without question the ideas of our betters and superiors. Indeed, the education system is geared to perpetuate the rule of an elite, insofar as it never encourages children to question and take issue with the status quo. Children may well recite that 8 times 8 equals 64, but how many will ask about the cause of wars or query the destruction of food?

Socialists hold that because we can adapt our behaviour, the desire to cooperate should not be viewed as irrational. We hold that humans are, 'by nature', cooperative and that we work best when faced with the worst and that our humanity shines through when the odds are stacked against us. There are millions of cases of people donating their blood and organs to complete strangers, sacrificing their lives for others, of people giving countless hours of their free time to charitable work – all of this without financial incentive.

When the call went out for volunteers to help the NHS during the current crisis, over 700,000 offered their services. Elsewhere, in Britain and around the world, countless millions have stepped forward to help the most vulnerable in society and in every way imaginable and with social media flooded with countless acts of selflessness and solidarity and, often, carried out by those with the least to give.

Today, world capitalism threatens the human race with extinction, if not through existential threats to the planet through nuclear war and climate change, then through the threat of pandemics which lays bare the utter incompetence

of the profit system when faced with crisis. The reason this obnoxious system survives is because we have been conditioned to accept it, but we are not born to perpetuate it. Rest assured, no gene inclines us to defend the profit system.

Normality is not normal

It is perhaps 'natural' for people to want to return to something resembling a pre-Covid-19 world, to get 'back to normal', for family and friends to meet up and continue as before, to love and to care and to share, which is the essence of human nature. But let's remember what this normality really means for many of us. It is a world where every aspect of life is subordinated to the worst excesses of the drive to make profit on the part of a minority owning and controlling class.

Normality is a world where almost 800 million are chronically malnourished and where 25,000 children die each day from hunger or related illness. At the same time, the governments of the world order the destruction of vast mountains of food to keep prices high, stockpile food until it rots and pay farmers to take land out of production because the laws of supply and demand insist that overproduction is bad for the market.

Normality is a world where some 150 million of our fellow humans are homeless, many sleeping rough on the streets of the world's cities, with 1.6 billion lacking adequate housing, yet there is no shortage of vacant buildings – countless millions of acres of empty living space in the major cities of the world – and certainly no shortage of building materials or skilled builders and craftsmen presently out of work. Again, we find that the market not only dictates who does and does not eat, but who does and does not sleep comfortably.

Normality is a planet on which over one billion of our fellow humans have no access to clean water and 2.6 billion lack adequate sanitation, and the growing scarcity of fresh water is calculated to spark many wars across the globe in the coming decades. Meanwhile, the technology exists to desalinate millions of gallons each day and to set up treatment plants capable of cleaning the dirtiest water. However, there is not much profit in selling something which covers five-sixths of the planet, so the investment never comes.

While millions of children die each year of curable diseases and while we still await breakthroughs in medical science that can cure the presently incurable, we find there are literally thousands of scientists around the world employed in weapons programmes – paid by their respective governments to devise new methods of murder, including germ warfare, the deaths from which could dwarf those of the current pandemic.

The list is as endless as it is insane. At every turn we find evidence of how capitalism destroys us physically and mentally, retarding real human development. At every turn we come smack up against the iron law of our age – 'can't pay, can't have'. At every turn we find capitalism running wild like a rabid dog, infecting all it comes into contact with, a pandemic that is rarely recognised for what it is.

If we return to 'normality', let's hope it is with an increased awareness of our own worth, capabilities and potential, a recognition that it's the workers who run the world, no matter how seemingly menial the job, and how interdependent we are on each other. Whilst our leaders, in the face of crisis, resemble more each day the character in Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, let us not lose sight of the fact it was the workers who kept society going and rid the world of Covid-19.

JOHN BISSETT

Covid-19 and the Media:

Perhaps I'm not the best person to be writing this article. Quarantined at home for the last few weeks, my media consumption has mainly revolved around my three-year-old son's favourite TV animations. But in between episodes of *Paw Patrol* and *Peppa Pig*, I've been watching the Covid-19 news narrative unfold. Every crisis brings opportunity for a few and recently the news media have benefitted big time from a locked-down public hungry for information. The audience for television news, especially on BBC, has skyrocketed. And while their print circulations have been in long-term decline, the big newspapers have also strongly influenced public debate about the pandemic, providing many of the stories we access through social media.

Much of the mainstream coverage of this emergency has been informative and it's not necessarily true that journalists have simply been fuelling panic or fear about the coronavirus. There is some room for debate about how much 'overreaction' there might have been to Covid-19 and experts are far from unanimous on this question. But this is a genuine crisis, if only because the capitalist states it is impacting have been so badly prepared for it: placing profits before people, they completely failed to invest in the scientific research and healthcare equipment needed to cope with this widely foreseen pandemic.

Nevertheless, there's much to criticise in the media coverage of the emergency. After all, a media system owned and directed by the exploiting class is bound to discuss Covid-19 in ways that reflect capitalist interests and ideologies. Here are just a few of those ways.

Fighting Talk

Many media and political discussions of this crisis have been wrapped in the language of patriotism and war. Trump called Covid-19 the 'invisible enemy' and across the major media outlets, journalists have routinely talked of the 'fight' or 'battle' against the virus. 'WAR ON CORONA' went the headline of Scotland's *Sunday Mail* on 15 March. Other British papers have praised the 'Dunkirk spirit' of the population. Of course, war metaphors are always popular among politicians and journalists seeking dramatic effect, especially when the state perceives a threat to its authority (British newspapers were full of them during the 2011 riots) and no doubt Boris Johnson talked about 'beating' the enemy of Covid-19 in order to project his strength and 'leadership' skills at a time when even other members of his class were questioning his abilities.

All this war talk may have distorted public perceptions of the crisis, however. In one of their online broadcasts in March, Novara media showed footage of an elderly Londoner (a woman clearly in the 'high risk' category) declaring that she would not stay at home to curb the spread of infection because that would be 'giving in to the virus' – as though Covid-19 were a group of jihadists hell-bent on destroying 'our way of life'! Presenting the coronavirus crisis as a 'war' also conditions the public to accept the tougher new policing and surveillance measures being put in place by governments across the world and which many people fear will continue after the lockdown has ended.

Finally, militarist language tends to channel workers' dissatisfaction with capitalism into admiration for the nation state. Before the first 'Clap for our Carers' event which swept across Britain on 26 March (and which then became a weekly

occurrence), Leo McKinstry of the right-wing *Express* came over all Churchillian, asking readers to 'salute our NHS heroes in this their finest hour'. And after the event, the front page of the left-leaning *Mirror* newspaper was given over to photographs of smiling NHS workers being publicly applauded. 'Your country LOVES you, gushed the newspaper, along with 'NATION SALUTES VIRUS HEROES'. Not to be outdone, the BBC's *Breakfast* programme started a daily Hero Half Hour segment, in which viewers were invited to share praise for key workers 'on the frontline'.

But there's something fishy about this newfound love for often low-paid workers and as for NHS 'heroism', perhaps we should recall Albert Camus' novel *The Plague*, whose central protagonist, a doctor called Bernard Rieux, states that his work 'is not about heroism', but about doing what's necessary in an absurd situation. In fact, 'Clap for our Carers' has been a well-camouflaged propaganda campaign. It has certainly tapped into positive public feelings of solidarity with hard-pressed healthcare workers who are saving lives under difficult circumstances; however, those circumstances are due in no small measure to healthcare cuts imposed by successive governments, including the present one. The media's militarist and nationalist framing of the event has tended to obscure such facts, deflecting any criticism of the state with the feel-good message 'we're all in this together'.

China Crisis

Britain's tabloid newspapers have a global reputation for sensationalism and racism and they have not disappointed during this emergency. Back in January, for example, the *Daily Mail* and other mainstream media sources published lurid images of a Chinese woman eating a bat in what some claimed was a Wuhan restaurant, although the pictures turned out to have been taken in 2016 in a restaurant in Palau and were therefore not connected with the recent outbreak. But that did not matter. The 'fake news' story went viral, no doubt because it appealed to racist Western stereotypes of exotic Orientals with bizarre habits.

It's hard to prove that the media affect attitudes or behaviours in the real world, but it seems likely that the anti-Chinese messaging of the tabloids has contributed to the present climate of xenophobic hostility towards East Asian people. This has led to harassment and sometimes brutal physical assaults. On 3 March a Singaporean student was left needing facial reconstructive surgery after being attacked in London. And on 14 March an Asian-American family, including a two-year-old girl, were stabbed in a retail outlet in Texas by a man who apparently feared that the victims were infectious. Being the cynics that they are, politicians such as Johnson and Trump, who has referred to Covid-19 as the 'Chinese



Myths and Mystifications



virus', might be hoping to benefit from this popular anti-Chinese sentiment, as they try to sidestep responsibility for their failures in handling the outbreak by shifting the blame onto China – even to the point of asking for 'reparations'.

In parts of the left-leaning media, meanwhile, the China card has been played in a very different, but equally dishonest way. During an interview on the Kremlin-supporting Russia Today television news channel, Stalin enthusiasts George Galloway and Ranjeet Brar heaped praise on the efficient and organised Chinese response to the outbreak. This is reasonable up to a point. After all, a case could be made that China marshalled its immense state apparatus to deal with the coronavirus outbreak more effectively than many other countries and it seems to have kept

its death toll low. Then again, we surely ought to be suspicious of health-related statistics reported by the authoritarian Chinese state. And Galloway and Brar conveniently forgot that the Chinese government had initially tried to suppress the warnings of medical professionals about the spread of the virus. None of this has stopped left-wing 'anti-imperialist' publications from praising the glorious People's Republic. The *People's Dispatch* even published an article with the title 'How Chinese Socialism is Defeating the Coronavirus Outbreak'. I can only recommend that the authors of this piece actually visit China to witness its obscene wealth gap, rural poverty and hyper-exploited workers. Some socialism!

Corona Communism

Some very odd ideas about socialism have also been aired in more mainstream media. On 20 March, in the right-wing *Telegraph*, Ambrose Evans-Pritchard urged that 'Boris must embrace socialism immediately to save the liberal free market'. But this only shows the capitalist press's confusion about the meaning of socialism. For Evans-Pritchard, socialism means the state taking over control of the economy from private industry. This has of course happened with dizzying speed in recent months, with the nationalisation of the hospitals in Ireland and the suspension of the rail franchise system in the UK, to give just two examples. Genuine socialism, however, means a world without classes, commodities, money and borders. What we have been seeing over recent weeks is not socialism, but the capitalist state putting in place measures to cover a proportion of workers' wages, bail out businesses and keep key services running. The state is simply doing what it must in order to head off any 'social unrest' that might arise during the epidemic and to ensure that the wheels of production can grind back into motion afterwards. To a limited extent, governments have been 'putting their arms around workers' – but only so that they can get their hands back around our necks when normal business resumes. Another, particularly daft media myth has been that the

virus is a social leveller. This idea gained some traction in the major media when, on 25 March, the British public learned that the virus had pulled off its most audacious stunt so far, shamelessly infecting the first in line to the throne, Prince Charles. In the *Express*, Dr Hilary Jones was quoted as saying that the virus 'is a great leveller' that is 'just as virulent for politicians and celebrities and the monarchy as it will the homeless and destitute' (*sic*). A few days later, Clare Foges of *The Times* waxed lyrical on the theme, writing: Coronavirus: the great leveller. Infecting princes and prime ministers, making hermits of most, hushing the concrete council estate and the millionaires' leafy square'.

Fortunately, not many people seem to have been fooled by this sort of twaddle. Sceptics on social media have argued that Prince Charles, who had shown only minor symptoms of C-19, had 'jumped the queue', having been given a coronavirus test despite NHS guidance that only hospitalised patients could receive one. The public have also given short shrift to celebrities claiming to be 'just like us' when faced with the threat of the virus. *Wonder Woman* actress Gal Gadot's attempt to prove that 'we're all in this together' by leading a star-studded singalong to John Lennon's 'Imagine' was widely ridiculed on social media. And megastar Madonna, the world's wealthiest female musician, was mocked for an Instagram video in which she called Covid-19 'the great equaliser' while sitting in a petal-filled bathtub.

Far from thrusting us towards socialism or uniting the celebs with the plebs, the corona emergency has brought the savagely class-divided nature of our world into sharp focus. While it is true that anybody can catch the virus (this is surely one reason why the capitalist class is taking it very seriously), this has been a tale of two pandemics. On the one side, the super-rich have headed for their disaster bunkers in private jets; on the other, workers on temporary or insecure contracts have faced destitution (by early April in Britain there had been a staggering one million new registrations for Universal Credit), while the most vulnerable groups in society, such as refugees, homeless people, those with pre-existing conditions, or the many low-paid key workers who cannot simply 'stay at home', are widely exposed to the virus.

Their Media and Ours

Despite all of these myths and mystifications, the mainstream media are not entirely bad. Tough questions have sometimes been asked of the government. For example, on 26 March the editor of *The Lancet*, Richard Horton, appeared on the BBC's *Question Time* discussion panel, condemning Britain's unreadiness for the pandemic as a 'scandal'. And at the time of writing in mid-April, much of the British media has spent weeks castigating the government's inability to guarantee adequate testing and protective equipment for NHS workers. But it has been primarily through the social media that working-class people have found solidarity via community information and support groups. And only socialist publications such as our own have managed to cut through the nationalist claptrap and geopolitical blame games of the mainstream media to expose the underlying problem: the global capitalist system, which exists to protect profits rather than human life.

S.H.

LABOUR PARTY: NORMAL SERVICE IS RESUMED

Keir Starmer has been elected the leader of the Labour Party with 56.2 percent of the vote. His background is a legal one. He became a barrister in 1987, only being elected MP in 2015, following Frank Dobson's resignation, in Holborn & St. Pancras, a Labour safe seat. He was knighted too, in 2014 (though he still prefers not to go by 'Sir'). While Starmer is no centrist, he will, according to the *BBC*, attempt to 'unite supporters of both Jeremy Corbyn and Tony Blair within the party'. He still describes himself as a socialist, which of course, just means nationalising a few industries and regulation on portions of the private sector. That being said, this is still noteworthy, as the Blairite faction of the Labour Party sees Starmer's victory as a victory for them despite this. Rebecca Long-Bailey, the left-wing (or as some have put it, Corbyn-continuity) candidate, won only 27.6 percent of the vote – not even half of Starmer's.

As some see it, this marks the end of Corbynism and the left-wing policies that the Labour Party has advocated in the last few years. While Jeremy Corbyn's positions were nowhere near as radical as the press made them out to be, Keir Starmer's policies will then be a significant shift back to the centre. Starmer has been described by an aide to Corbyn as 'actually [having] zero politics, which often means he follows the crowd' (*FT*, 22 February). Of course, the business class are significantly happier with this: Henry Mance writing for the *Financial Times* (3 April), a newspaper which, unlike the mainstream press, acknowledges class war, expresses their reaction to Corbyn: 'It's been a surreal time. The threat came out of nowhere. It quickly torpedoed things that we once took for granted. But rest assured, it will end. On Saturday, Jeremy Corbyn's tenure as leader of Britain's Labour party finally expires. It's been five years'.

Starmer's shadow cabinet reflects the shift quite dramatically. Anneliese Dodds, the Shadow Chancellor is no longer interested in 'overthrowing capitalism', as her predecessor John McDonnell was (whether his policies would have contributed to that overthrow is a separate question altogether), but more Keynesian policies. Ed Miliband, an advocate of 'responsible capitalism', returns to the front bench, this time to a position as Shadow Secretary for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy.

The spectrum of debate will narrow more, then. Socialism, a word that has had all meaning already evicted, is now thrown

about with reference to centre-left policies. One of Jeremy Corbyn's successes (or failures, if you're so inclined) in the Labour Party was engaging more extensively with grassroots movements. This at least helped to destigmatise real socialist politics and connect socialism to working class movements and democracy, rather than simply being a synonym for

autocratic state-control. What might happen now is that even Corbyn's trade-unionism and idle class-war rhetoric can be pushed out as 'going too far'. Socialism à la Starmer doesn't even touch on the important talking points – it simply means having a strong public sector. Perhaps on that basis the East India Company, nationalised in 1858, would be an example of socialist enterprise.

Keir Starmer's tenure as leader of the opposition will be many things, but controversial is not one. The faux radicalism is evident. Starmer is keeping some of the policies from the Corbyn-era, including nationalisation of rail, a Green New Deal, scrapping Universal Credit, and so on. However, his support for the EU is notable as a shift back to more neoliberal-friendly politics. The notion of the Labour Party as a 'people-powered movement' will be weakened if not eliminated entirely. Momentum, a pro-Corbyn grassroots pressure

group, will almost certainly be further derided as radicals trying to cling onto the sinking ship of left-wing politics. The most telling thing is how the business press are no longer afraid. Starmer's policies will not get in the way of the private sector, or certainly not as much as Corbyn's policies did.

There isn't going to be a threat to the business elite from within the Labour Party, it seems. At every opportunity, the party turns on radicals and the left and quells talk of genuine democratic change. With any luck, disillusionment with the establishment will be heightened rather than workers being lulled into passivity. If genuine change is going to happen, it won't come through an establishment tool like the Labour Party. With the current coronavirus crisis, whispers of a different social order become louder. It is clear that Keir Starmer isn't offering much in that respect.

MP SHAH



From Lockdown to Basic Income?

The acolytes of the fashionable radical idea of Universal Basic Income (UBI) must have been overjoyed by two recent news items. Apparently, the Pope has endorsed the idea. According to the *Irish Times* (13 April), 'In a letter addressed to popular movements around the world, he expressed solidarity with their aim of bringing change to global systems and structures that exclude the majority'.

They report him as saying in the letter:

'Street vendors, recyclers, carnival workers, small farmers, construction workers, seamstresses, the different kinds of caregivers: you who are informal, working on your own or in the grassroots economy, you have no steady income to get you through this hard time... and the lockdowns are becoming unbearable. This may be the time to consider a universal basic wage which would acknowledge and dignify the noble, essential tasks you carry out'.

This news was coupled with reports that the Spanish left-wing government has announced that it intends to become the first European country to implement UBI:

'Minister for Economic Affairs Nadia Calvino said that UBI would be introduced "as soon as possible" and could be something that "stays forever, becomes a structural instrument, a permanent instrument"' (tinyurl.com/y9mzculd).

Although, as advocates of UBI noted, 'the payments will be targeted to families and will differentiate based on their "circumstances." In practice, differentiating based on circumstances will result in means tests that fall on the poor'.

If it is targeted at families, not individuals, and is based on assessment, it would more closely resemble a Beveridge-style welfare state, than the full-fat version of UBI, something referred to as a Contingent Basic Income.

Redistributing poverty

The idea behind UBI is that every individual in a country is guaranteed a certain amount of income. In its most basic form, the state would simply send a payment to each person (much as the United States has done as part of its response to Covid-19 related unemployment). This sum is irrespective of employment or personal status. Fundamentally, it breaks the link between the sale of labour power and the ability to access necessary resources. It is simultaneously egalitarian and libertarian, since it avoids the need for state bureaucracy to carry out cheeseparing assessments and domination over individuals lives.

It also has the benefit of being easy to imagine, since it has the simple form of keeping commodity relations intact: it keeps the market in place. That is its chief problem: it tries to address the problems caused by a system that defines people by their property through giving them all property. Although it will give people money, those who own other types of property, such as houses, would be able to benefit from rents and market demand for goods they hold.

Hearne and de Ruyter estimate it would cost £540 billion to give everyone in the UK over 16 £10,000 a year (tinyurl.com/y79gum54). In 2017-18 the UK government tax take was £589 billion. It would be possible, but the government wouldn't be able to do much else (which is why right-wing supporters like it).

Employers would be able eventually to lower wages, relying on the UBI subsidy to count towards their employee's cost of living. In those terms, it would be a substantial transfer of wealth from firms that don't need much labour to labour intensive industries (in particular, as

many people focus on, the so-called gig economy of the likes of Uber).

We described this as the 'redistribution of poverty' in our classic pamphlet on the Beveridge Plan (tinyurl.com/uln539r). That criticism stands true for UBI.

Flawed Acquisitive Notions

By concentrating on the surface phenomena of money and commodities, UBI ignores the social relationship behind the form of value production. This comes to the fore when people start whining about 'the incentive to work' and the need to keep UBI so low that the lash of poverty can still be applied (surely if we were talking about incentive, doubling your income should be enough? That people might be assumed to prefer to not work and live on a basic income demonstrates the flaw in acquisitive notions of human behaviour).

People will need to work to make the taxes to pay for the UBI. Society and the employers would then be locked in a struggle over the share of wealth going to labour and the share going to profits. The only difference would be that the state would become a key battle ground instead of the labour market directly.

Likewise, the ideology of people getting something for nothing can cause resentment. We can see this sort of thing when Tories call for unruly families to be thrown out of council housing, as if it were a grace and favour home, rather than a right to housing. If UBI is seen as a gift, with obligation (as per the Contingent Basic Income idea), then it would not be supported by many of the population. Hence, also, why Donald Trump wanted to have his name on all the cheques sent out to Americans to cover loss of income due to Covid-19, he wants them to see the money as a gift from him.

Since some will be net contributors to the UBI, they will not perceive this as a benefit to all but a cross-subsidy, a gift they make to others, with corresponding obligation.

Although the reality is that the burden of taxation comes from profits, the structure of income tax nominally coming from employees creates an ideological value that deceives them into thinking they are paying for the government and therefore have a stake in it. In this case people would believe they were paying the income for those who earn less than them.

Universal Basis Services

Some, such as David Harvey, propose Universal Basic Services instead of UBI. This would be things like the NHS, free at the point of use. This has the benefit of removing the commodity character of the service, and would represent an improvement (though likely, in a capitalist world, to still be wrapped up in the struggles between classes over spending levels and coated in bureaucracy to control those costs). But if we had the political strength to impose substantial gains through UBS, we'd have the strength to abolish capitalism outright.

The post-Covid situation will be that millions will be out

of work, and capital may not be readily available to provide new employment, as many firms go bust. Governments will have to find ways to keep social peace. They will take radical steps, throwing much market ideology to the wind, but they will be doing that to maintain the advantage of the owning class and rejuvenate market society, as they did after the 2008 crash.

PIK SMEET





ONE HUNDRE

In 1920 a Coalition government was in office under Lloyd George between the Tories and the Liberals who supported 'Liar George' and the 'Welsh wizard' as even the *Socialist Standard* called him. Labour was the official opposition. Their leader was a now obscure Scottish trade unionist, William Adamson, who was described as 'the Leader of the Lib-Labs in his comic-opera role as leader of the Opposition' (March). Also in opposition were those Liberals who remained loyal to Asquith, the pre-war Liberal Prime Minister.

The Labour Party had reorganised itself in 1918 as a conventional political party which individuals could join. Many former Liberals were beginning to take up the offer. A review in June of a book on nationalisation quoted its author as saying that the Liberal Party was breaking up and that Liberals of the 'strongly individualist type will go over to the Tories, the rest will form the right-wing of the Labour Party'. A columnist the previous month had already asked: 'Why this sudden conversion to the ranks of Labour? Why this new-found interest on the part of Sir Leo [Money], Lord Haldane, and others of their kind in the ability of Labour to govern?', answering 'Methinks the wind has shifted slightly and sails are being trimmed accordingly'. This was a shrewd observation. It was also a shrewd move on the part of the former Liberals, as

Labour did come to replace the Liberal Party as Tweedledee to the Tories' Tweedledum and provide better career opportunities for career politicians.

On nationalisation itself, the review wrote that 'nationalised industries competing with each other on a world market and paying interest to a class of idlers is merely a modified form of capitalism,' concluding 'the absurdity of working-class action for Nationalisation is apparent ... the supreme objection remains: the wages system is to be retained'.

The Communist Party had not yet been formed, but there were groups and individuals who supported the Bolsheviks. Some of them denounced the Labour Party in the same sort of terms as the *Socialist Standard* did, as 'labour fakirs', 'misleaders' and 'capitalist agents'. They were in for a shock. At the 2nd Congress of the Communist International in Moscow in July, the Bolshevik leaders, realising that the anticipated revolution in Western Europe was not going to come to their aid, changed tack and called for their followers to form a 'united front' with parties like Labour. An article in August, headed 'The Super-Opportunists', analysed:

'Now that it is plain that the workers do not understand Socialism and fight for it, Lenin is pandering to the ignorance of the world's workers. In defence he says that by supporting the pro-capitalist Labour Party and helping to establish a Labour Party government, the workers will learn the uselessness of Labour parties'.

The author commented that 'if that policy is to be adopted, then it is necessary for the workers to follow every false road ... Such nonsense as supporting parties and Governments to gain power to learn their misdeeds is not the way to socialism.' Such nonsense, however, persisted for the next hundred years and is still heard today.

Earlier that year, a speech that Lenin had made in 1918 had been translated into English as a pamphlet. In it, Lenin had declared that 'reality says that State capitalism would be a step forward for us; if we were able to bring about State capitalism in a short time it would be a victory for us'. The July issue commented: 'That Socialism can only be reached through State capitalism is not true' and that it was only being adopted in Russia 'because the Bolshevik government find their theories of doing without capitalist development unworkable - hence they are forced to retreat along the capitalist road'.

There were clashes in the letters column with defenders of the Bolsheviks over whether or not Marx had said that the state could not be taken over but had to be smashed, or held





100 YEARS AGO

that a socialist revolution could not happen in an economically backward country, or whether he stood for democracy or dictatorship in the literal sense – arguments that have gone on ever since, but which were set out for the first time in this period.

The *Socialist Standard* was more opposed to the Bolsheviks' supporters in Britain, with their demands to set up 'soviets' and their claim that socialism was being established in Russia, than to the Bolsheviks themselves. The Bolsheviks were of course denounced for ignoring Marx's views and for being a minority dictatorship, but their working class and even socialist credentials were not challenged. Another article in the same issue said that 'in the special conditions and chaos caused by the war', a 'resolute minority' was able to seize power in Russia despite a majority of workers there not understanding or wanting socialism. They could not establish socialism, but:

'The new ruling minority promised peace and – to their highest credit – established it'. Despite 'the appalling chaos in which they found Russia, they have ... done wonders in the way of reconstruction and reorganisation.'

Reading between the lines, Socialist Party members of the time expected the Bolshevik regime to be overthrown. The concluding paragraph of the article certainly reads like the sort of obituary Marx had written after the suppression of the Paris Commune in 1871 – only fifty years previously. When the real socialist movement takes off, it said, 'the rule of the Russian Bolsheviks will be a splendid lesson, not on the value of "Soviet" or "Dictatorship," but on the ability of the working class to manage its own affairs.'

We wouldn't say this today (and didn't by 1929), partly because we wouldn't need to, but in 1920 there had never been a government made up of workers let alone of people who claimed to be socialists. There had not yet been a Labour government in Britain. Governments everywhere were managed by capitalists or by politicians who looked, dressed and spoke like them. So, the point needed to be made that workers were capable of running society. Not that the aim was to establish a working class government. An article in February on 'Government by Labour' distinguished between 'administration' and 'government': 'the first serves the people and the other represses them.' The article concluded that, once the workers had made the means of production the common property of the whole of society, they would 'proceed to administer them for the common welfare of all'. 'Then', it

added, 'the need for the State, for government – 'Labour' or otherwise – and the "keeping in due subjection" will vanish, and mankind will at last be free'.

The main problem facing workers at the time was growing unemployment, which was attributed to overproduction (and, sometimes, to underconsumption). Labour and trade union leaders were bitterly denounced for telling the workers to work harder and produce more and for going along with the capitalist argument that waste should be eliminated (if the capitalist class wasted some of its surplus value that wasn't bad, it was argued, as this meant work for workers). But the real bitterness was reserved for the capitalist class who were denounced as arrogant, callous and useless parasites living off the backs of the workers and causing them to suffer. It wasn't just class antagonism that was expressed but class hatred.

ALB

All the articles from the *Socialist Standard* for the year 1920 are now online at <https://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/standard-index-1920s/>



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COOKING THE BOOKS

System change not policy change

'Get used to more state intervention, it looks like it's here to stay' read the headline of an article in the *Times* (25 March) by its Deputy Business Editor, Graham Ruddick.

A swing back towards state intervention was beginning to become evident even before the coronavirus crisis led to the massive state intervention in the economy that we have seen has (even more than the Labour Party used to advocate under Corbyn). Before this, failed Tory politician Sir Iain Duncan Smith had told the BBC that 'you need a dose of Keynesianism to restore monetarism' (*Guardian*, 16 February). Ruddick quoted Patrick Minford, who he described as 'one of the Iron Lady's favourite economists' as telling the *Financial Times* that 'fiscal policy was now needed to boost the economy because monetary policy has run out of road.' The final nail in the coffin of Thatcher's economic policy was hammered in by Boris Johnson when he declared in a video message, no doubt deliberately to distance himself from her opposite view, 'that there really is such a thing as society' (*Guardian*, 29 March).

'Laissez-faire' originated as a demand by capitalist entrepreneurs in

eighteenth-century France that the state, then controlled by a landed aristocracy, should leave them alone to pursue their profit-seeking economic activity. Adam Smith took this up and it became the demand of factory-owners in Britain too, backed up by a whole school of 'political economists'. Their theory, that the best economic system was one where the state let capitalist enterprises get on with making profits in response to spontaneous markets forces, came to be known as 'economic liberalism'.

Economic liberalism was the dominant economic policy, backed by academic theory, pursued in openly capitalist states up until the Crash of 1929 and the slump that followed. After the end of WW2, during which the state played a leading role in organising economic activity, state intervention was continued, justified by Keynes's new theory that it was needed to manage the capitalist economy so as to arrange for steady economic growth uninterrupted by slumps such as that of the 1930s. This appeared to work but when the real test came, with the end of the post-war boom in the 1970s, it failed; increased state spending did not stimulate an economic recovery but merely resulted in stagflation (stagnation plus inflation).

Capitalist enterprises demanded, rather, that the state reduce taxes on

them so that they could keep more of their reduced profits. States cut back their spending and a new theory was thought up to justify this. Called 'monetarism', it argued that, as long as the government controlled the (somewhat vaguely defined) 'money supply', left to themselves market forces would bring about steady, inflation-free economic growth. Its opponents saw this as a return to pre-Keynesian economic policy, which to a certain extent it was, and dubbed it 'neo-liberalism'. It, too, appeared to work for a while but then came the crash of 2008 and the slump that followed.

Because its supporters were open and often strident advocates of capitalism, some of its opponents came to see opposition to 'neo-liberalism' as opposition to capitalism. They imagined that in calling for a return to more state intervention they were being 'anti-capitalist' when in fact they were merely calling for a change of government policy under capitalism.

Will a move away from the policy of 'neo-liberalism' improve things? In a word, no. Increased state intervention didn't work last time and won't work this time either. What is needed is not policy change, but system change.

PROPER GANDER

TV AND THE VIRUS

NOW THAT many of us are cooped up at home, the wider world is, even more than ever, filtered through the media. E-mail, teleconferencing apps and social media have enabled us to keep in touch, raising the question of how much harder the lockdown would have been had it happened thirty years ago, with only landlines and the postal service at our disposal. The internet has helped us stay sociable and informed, even if it's also the source of fake news, such as the wacky theory that the virus has somehow been transmitted through the new 5G phone masts.

As for printed media, the lockdown has accelerated its long-term decline. Even before the end of March, newspaper sales had fallen by over half within a few weeks. One bonus of this is that fewer people have been exposed to the likes of the *Daily Mail* and the *Sun*, reducing the risk of being infected with their bigoted opinions.

Television has seen a predictable rise in viewers, with people spending more time slouched on their settees. But what we're watching looks different to how TV was just a couple of months ago, even in small ways. We've had a non-Christmas Queen's Speech. Presenters on *Breakfast* and *The One Show* are making a token gesture by sitting a regulation two metres apart, with the latter feeling the need to prove it with a tape measure. Soap operas now seem even further removed from reality, featuring as they do such impossible scenarios as people in pubs and hopping from one neighbour to another. By early April, the first adverts made during the outbreak started appearing, with cynical and cringeworthy ads from internet providers cashing in on booming demand. Panel shows such as *Have I Got News For You* and *Loose Women* have survived by their participants videoconferencing from home, and seem empty without the studio audiences' reactions. Otherwise, *Breaking Bad* box sets and endless repeats of *Homes Under The Hammer* are a temporary escape from the distressing updates on the news channels.

As the virus claimed more lives and the lockdown became the new normal, the tone and content of TV news changed. Directives must have been issued to producers to manage the messages sent out, to reinforce government advice about social distancing and movements being



restricted, and to emphasise community spirit to maintain morale. A lesson about the influence of what's broadcast would have been learnt early on, when reports about panic buying leaving supermarket shelves empty fuelled more panic buying, leading to a feedback loop. Noticeably, news coverage quickly switched away from disruptions to food supplies, as if a memo went round the newsrooms saying that that they were making things worse. And there's been an obviously thought-through emphasis on 'good news stories' such as Tom Moore raising money for the NHS by a sponsored walk round his garden, people on their doorsteps clapping for health workers Thursday evenings, and volunteers delivering supplies to those who are vulnerable and isolated. We need to watch something a bit more upbeat after hearing about the latest number of deaths and how the system is struggling to cope with the crisis.

The paltry number of people being tested for the virus and the lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) supplied to staff working in appalling conditions have featured prominently in news programmes on all channels. Footage from hospitals and care homes has been heart-breaking to watch. The BBC, being closest to the state, has perhaps been a little less searching in its reporting than journalists from Sky News or Channel 4. The abilities of those in government to manage the system have only been challenged in a too-cautious way by the mainstream TV media. Donald Trump's further descent into being some

sort of Caligula has been reported with a weary matter-of-factness, and there were just a few grumbings by pundits about Home Secretary Priti Patel's non-apology of 'I'm sorry if people feel there have been failings' over PPE distribution. Boris Johnson catching the virus took up most of the TV news for days. Reporters have politely shelved any criticism of him since he went into hospital, although Jon Snow on *Channel 4 News* managed to hint that he might not really have been unwell enough to need to be in intensive care. Presumably the nurses who treated him there weren't among those reduced to wearing bin bags and homemade masks.

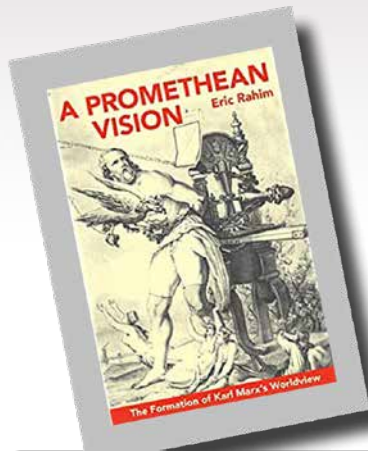
Some wider social problems behind the situation have been raised on TV news, such as how the virus is disproportionately affecting people from non-white ethnic groups, who overall also happen to more often live in overcrowded conditions and have smaller incomes. Emily Maitlis, on 8 April edition of *Newsnight* pointed out that poorly paid and overstretched workers in shops and care homes are particularly at risk from the virus, adding 'what type of social settlement might be needed to be put in place to stop the inequality becoming even more stark?'. But as one David Osland tweeted, 'a couple of offhand remarks mildly praiseworthy of the lower orders does not transform Emily Maitlis into Rosa Luxemburg incarnate'.

Of course the mainstream media can't and won't question the system itself, even though the pandemic is exposing capitalism's many failings. So we haven't heard much on the news about the delay in starting the lockdown being due to the state prioritising the economy for as long as possible over people's wellbeing. Or about how the lack of PPE and other resources is really down to them being commodities, and are therefore always rationed, and isn't just about the state not getting its act together with distribution. Or about how the class divide is behind the inequalities which make those with less wealth more at risk. Still, the TV news gives us the information to draw our own conclusions from, and when we need a break, there's always *Homes Under The Hammer*.

MIKE FOSTER

REVIEWS

Marx's world view



A Promethean Vision: The Formation of Karl Marx's Worldview. By Eric Rahim, Praxis Press, 2020.

In Greek mythology Prometheus defied the gods by stealing fire and giving it to humanity, as a symbol of civilisation. Zeus then punished him by having him tied to a rock with an eagle eating his liver. In the forward to his doctoral dissertation Marx quotes from Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* where Prometheus tells Hermes, the servant of the gods:

*Be sure of this, I would not change my state
Of evil fortune for your servitude.
Better to be the servant of this rock
Than to be faithful boy to Father Zeus.*

In this short book Eric Rahim wonders if the 23-year-old Marx was beginning to think of himself as a latter-day Prometheus. At this stage Marx was not yet a communist. Rahim argues that Marx's communist worldview 'was fully formulated before he was 30 years old', and the focus of this study is on the development of his thought up to that point with his writing of the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848. This is a bold claim. In his defence Rahim cites the economist Joseph Schumpeter who said that, at the age of 29, Marx 'was in possession of all the essentials' that make up Marxism.

Rahim is not the first writer to present Marx's philosophy of history independently of his theory of value, but this creates problems for his conception of Marx's worldview. For instance, in the *Communist Manifesto* Marx tells us that the 'average price of wage-labour is the minimum wage' required 'to keep the labourer in bare existence as a labourer'. This is known as the Wage-Fund theory, according to which there is only a fixed

pot of capital to pay out as wages, and so wages cannot rise above that amount. Marx only began to develop his own theory of value in the 1850s. In 1865 he gave a talk (published after his death as a pamphlet called *Value, Price and Profit*) which emphatically rejected the Wage-Fund theory and argued for a class struggle theory of value, according to which wage levels are determined by 'the respective powers of the combatants'. This is no minor alteration of Marx's worldview and it makes Rahim's focus in this book look arbitrary.

Still, this could have joined the long list of 'What Marx Really Meant' books if it were not for a section near the end entitled 'After the Revolution'. At this point Rahim substitutes Lenin for Marx without admitting it or possibly without being aware of it. Rahim asserts that, after the revolution, there is a long transitional phase of communism in which the state is the dictatorship of the proletariat. For Rahim it follows from this that distribution will be governed by 'the same principles that govern income distribution under capitalism... During this phase we will still have wage labour'. Rahim refers to this as 'to each according to his work'. His use of quotation marks here suggests that he is quoting Marx.

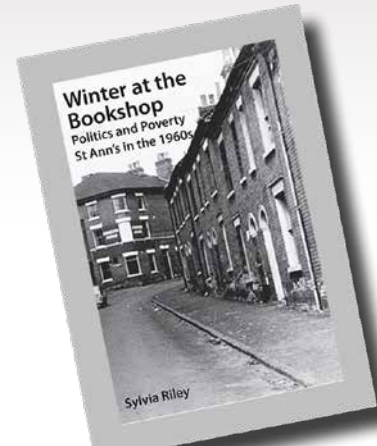
What Marx really said is that when the working class 'win the battle of democracy' (the dictatorship of the proletariat) they will use this political power to establish communism. In the early phase of communism there will be restrictions due to the conditions of the time (1875 when Marx wrote this). With progress these restrictions will fall away in the later phase of communism. It is important to note however that in both phases of *communism* there is no state, money economy or wages system. 'To each according to his work' is a later Leninist fabrication, although Lenin himself, in *State and Revolution* (1917), used the Biblical injunction: 'He who does not work shall not eat'.

This point should be seen in conjunction with Lenin's insistence on the leading role of the vanguard party. This is important because whenever and wherever the Leninist model has been followed it has always ended in a state capitalist dictatorship over the proletariat, and Marx's worldview gets dragged through the mud.

LEW

A Siberian Winter in Trottingham

Essentially a book of short stories and



Winter at the Bookshop. Sylvia Riley. Five Leaves. 2019

anecdotes, this has been put together by the writer of *Switchboard Operators*, which years ago was made into the 1990s TV series *The Hello Girls* starring Letitia Dean.

The bookshop in question was based in the poverty-stricken St Ann's area of Nottingham and was run by Pat Jordan. Riley was one of the volunteers who helped out. Jordan was one of the leading lights of British Trotskyism, founding the International Group which was for a time the section in Britain of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International. This was the current that was linked to veteran Trotskyist writer Ernest Mandel and to Michel Pablo, who argued that the revolutionary struggle should always take as its starting point the particular situation prevailing in each country concerned. This meant in many cases an emphasis on 'Third World' struggles for national liberation and also student revolt, rather than the more usual Trotskyist pre-occupation with the traditional working class.

The International Group – after early dalliances with Ted Grant's Revolutionary Socialist League (the 'Militant Tendency') – eventually morphed into the International Marxist Group and became dominated by Tariq Ali during the student revolts of the late 1960s, which is when the book ends. It is necessarily a highly personal account but generally well written, rather twee on some occasions and moving at others. It tells of a world of backroom

REVIEWS

duplicators and yellowing pamphlets, of student rebellion and fluid relationships. An air of grinding poverty hangs over it all, in an area long overdue for slum clearance (which happened shortly afterwards).

Nottingham at this time was known nationally as a hotbed of Trotskyist activity in a period when the so-called 'New Left' was making its mark as a challenger to the conventional Communist Parties. Pat Jordan and Ken Coates (later to become a Labour MEP) were the most central characters in this milieu and Sylvia Riley writes engagingly about the movement they led, the people in it – and their foibles. Let us say it doesn't entirely align with the more glamorous image the IMG seemed to have cultivated at the time.

The IMG eventually split and its main successor organisation became ensconced in the Labour Party – with several former IMG members going on to become prominent Labour parliamentary figures, including ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer Alistair Darling and Kate Hoey. A long way indeed from Pat Jordan's tumbledown bookshop, with its bare light bulbs, Marvel comics and Trotskyist tracts.

DAP

Sinister story



My Search for Revolution & How We Brought Down An Abusive Leader. By Clare Cowen. Matador. 2019. 350 pages. £19.99

Another book of Trotskyist reminiscences from the 1970s and 80s but with a rather more sinister story to tell, that of the 'Workers Revolutionary Party' ending in the exposure in 1985 of its leader, Gerry Healy, as a serial sex abuser. The author was one of his victims but most of her book is about the frenetic activity required of its 'cadres', the full-time 'professional revolutionaries' of which she was one.

At that time the WRP was arguably the

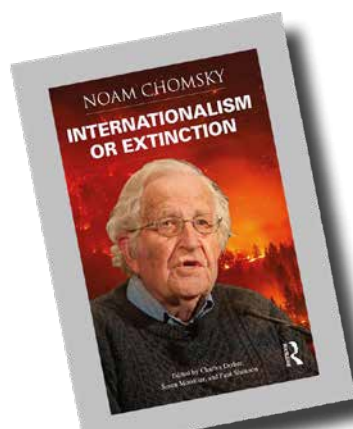
premier Trotskyist organisation in Britain. Funded by Vanessa Redgrave and her sinister brother Corin, and also by the author and later Colonel Gaddafi, the WRP acquired a residential school, a number of bookshops, and a modern printing press on which it printed a daily newspaper. At its height it was able to 'mobilise' thousands of 'youth' and fill large venues such as Alexandra Palace in London for huge rallies.

Cowen's account of how it functioned internally is disturbing and suggests it was more like a cult than a political party; its cadres had to devote the whole of their life to the organisation and accept a rigid discipline that included sessions at which they could be accused of being in error and forced to recant.

Fortunately a 'revolution' led by such a party never happened, nor was likely to despite the WRP motivating its cadres by proclaiming that it (or, alternatively, fascism) was imminent. When, following the defeat of the miners' strike, most of them realised that it wasn't, the whole thing fell apart, though a much smaller WRP still exists on the same basis, putting up 5 candidates at the last general election.

ALB

Fixing the System



Internationalism or Extinction. By Noam Chomsky. Routledge. 2020.

At the age of 91 Noam Chomsky is still writing, speaking and campaigning. This latest book, containing material both spoken and written between 2016-19, has as its theme the idea that society as currently constituted faces imminent extinction from the twin threats of nuclear war and climate change. The remedy

he argues is 'internationalism', seen as people the world over 'mobilising to force governments to meet this unprecedented challenge to civilization's survival'.

His case against the profit system of capitalism is a powerful one. Capitalism is seen as 'penetrating every part of society with the passions of self-interest and profit and breaking down community and the common good' and as 'an intertwined sociopathic system of money-making, militarism and environmental destruction now threatening the survival of all life itself'. To overcome this he calls in this book for a universalised movement of activism and resistance from below to force governments to take a different path and even to bring about 'world government' as conceived for example by Albert Einstein in 1945.

The focus therefore is upon people getting together to put pressure on their governments through campaigns of many different kinds since 'systems of organized power... will not take appropriate action... unless they are compelled to do so by constant, dedicated popular mobilization and activism'. However, while being an advocate of single-issue campaigns, he also shows awareness that this has its limits and, sometimes at least, seems to recognise that the threats to humanity posed by the profit system cannot seriously be addressed until consciousness of the need to change society completely is widespread, with its success depending on 'the steady hard work of developing consciousness and understanding'. He does not see that happening quickly, however, when, in the US for example, a significant proportion of the population are, in his words, 'either culturally traditional or pre-modern' and, for example, either deny global warming or, even if they accept it, do not accept it is happening through human agency.

Two points are worth making here about the way Chomsky approaches his subject. First, despite the 'internationalism' in the book's title, he puts overly strong emphasis on the US and its problems, almost as though this were the single important issue facing the world. Secondly, despite the book's references to the need to develop understanding as a means of bringing about a radically changed society, the overall emphasis is on single issues with 'grassroots' movements such as Extinction Rebellion and Earth Strike mentioned favourably and the hope expressed that such movements can pursue 'intersectionality and solidarity' and can be 'articulated and intertwined

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50 Years Ago

Canada to grow no wheat in 1970

Canada is planning to follow America in its notorious policy of paying farmers *not* to grow wheat.

Last year the world produced more of this essential foodstuff than could be sold profitably. There was what is often misleadingly called a wheat “glut” or “surplus”.

There had been a bumper harvest in 1968 too so that the already huge stocks of wheat were piled up even higher. In Australia there was talk of leaving some of the wheat to rot unharvested on the farms. The International Grains Agreement, under which the five major wheat-exporting countries fix prices and carve up the world market, was threatened as its members tried to sell their wheat below the agreed prices.

Representatives of these five countries — America, Canada, France, Australia and Argentina — met in London last August and agreed that in 1970 there should be a cut-back in world wheat production. The new Canadian policy is part of this bargain, a restrictive practice forced on its government by the economics of production for sale.

The Canadian prairies are particularly suited to growing wheat and in a rationally-organised world (one based on common ownership and production solely for use) could make a major contribution towards abolishing hunger. Even now the 1,300m. bushels of wheat lying unused, some of it going to rot, in warehouses and on farms throughout Canada

amounts to nearly three years’ consumption.

Under capitalism such potential abundance presents a problem, since if profits are to be made output must be restricted. The man in charge of Canada’s wheat sales. Minister without Portfolio Otto Lang, has suggested that *no* wheat should be grown in Canada for at least one year. He told the Canadian House of Commons in Ottawa on 27 February how the government planned to tackle this “problem” of potential plenty.

They would spend \$100m. on paying farmers to take up to 22m. acres out of wheat production in 1970 (...)

So Canada is to pay its farmers \$100m. not to grow 500m. bushels of wheat in 1970. Remember that the next time someone tries to tell you that world poverty is caused by over-population. Tell him it’s caused by the underproduction that goes with capitalism’s profit motive.

(Socialist Standard, May 1970)

(Continued from page 21)

with the struggle against extinction’.

In all this, unfortunately, though there is much talk of the need for enhanced democracy, there is no mention anywhere of the democratic world society of free access without governments, without money and wages, without leaders and led, which, even if it may not be imminent, is the only way to effectively transcend capitalist society. While it is impossible not to admire Chomsky for the lifetime of support he has dedicated to ‘progressive’ causes and for his uncompromising opposition to the status quo, the fact is that capitalism provides an unending procession of immediate issues, and with each one a crop of ‘realists’ who argue that their own pressing problem must be tackled first.

It is true that Chomsky, in his lifelong activism, does at times appear to have seen beyond this. In *Manufacturing Consent* (1988), for example, he says: ‘Presupposing that there have to be states is like saying, what kind of feudal system should we have that would be the best one? What kind of slavery would be the best kind?’ Even more tantalising was his youthful statement that: ‘*A democratic revolution would take place when it is supported by the great mass of the people, when they know what they are doing and they know why they are doing it and they know what they want to see come into existence... A revolution is something*

that great masses of people have to understand and be personally committed to’. Unfortunately there is none of that here and no indication that Chomsky sees that the causes he espouses, even if successful, would amount to any more than a rearrangement of the capitalist system rather than a new and fundamentally different kind of society to replace that system. In the end, attempts to adjust capitalism according to humane criteria are doomed to failure. Without a clear alternative to capitalism, opposition to the way it works and oppresses leads nowhere.

HOWARD MOSS



Online Meetings

In response to the Covid-19 crisis, the Socialist Party is operating an SPGB server on the Discord platform, for running meetings and talks, branch meetings, EC meetings, study group sessions and general chat. Don’t be left out, join in today. Contact spgb@worldsocialism.org for an invite now.

Party News – Discord in the Ranks

It's not like socialists to curl up our tootsies and give up at the first sign of trouble, so we're not likely to let a once-in-a-century global pandemic cramp our style. Instead, like many others during the current lockdown, we are responding to physical restrictions on meeting by going online. We're using the audio-only Discord system to save bandwidth, and because most of us are not sufficiently photogenic to want to look at each other every day. The system works pretty well and we've already held a couple of online talks, as well as several branch and Executive Committee meetings. It's not been entirely plain sailing of course, with some members having to drag headphones or microphones out of attics or cellars only to discover that they last worked efficiently when Sony Walkmans were still a new fad. Others have had computer problems as Discord doesn't work with very old operating systems, or with the super-restrictive Windows S. Actually Discord was originally designed for gamers, who tend to a) be digital natives and b) have state-of-the-art gear. Many socialists, it is fair to say, do not belong to this social demographic, so online conferencing software can be something of an uphill struggle. That's why, for the next few weeks, there will always be someone on the server, ready to talk or answer user questions, at 12 noon and again at 7.30pm, UK BST, unless there's an evening talk on.

Still, we're making progress, with around 50 members online at the time of writing. Companion parties have got involved too, with members from the USA, Canada, Europe, Japan and India. And of course visitors are very welcome too, and are free to join any online Discord meeting just as they would be free to attend any physical meeting by the Socialist Party or its companion parties. This is a great opportunity to chat to socialists from around the world without leaving your house! And if anyone is thinking of joining, having a live chat about it with members is much more fun and informative than simply filling in a form on the website.

If you'd like to drop in and chat to us online, or come to one of our talks or other events, just drop us a line to spgb@worldsocialism.org and ask for an invite.



Declaration of Principles

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

Object

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

Declaration of Principles

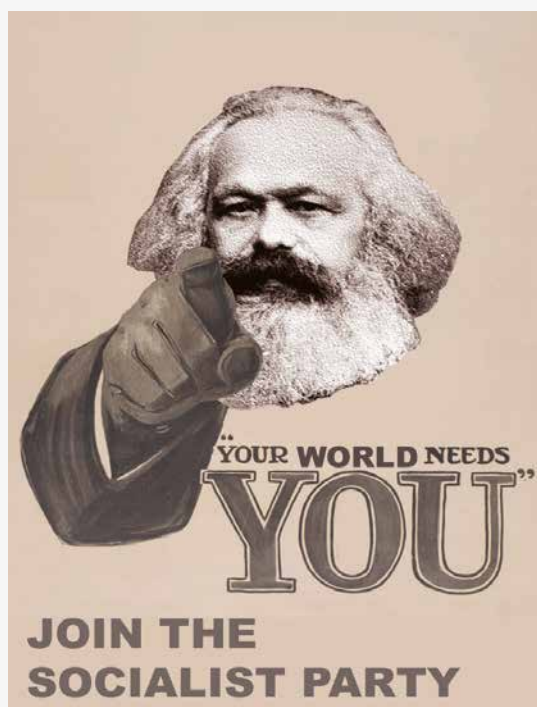
The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e. land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.
5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an

instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

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

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.





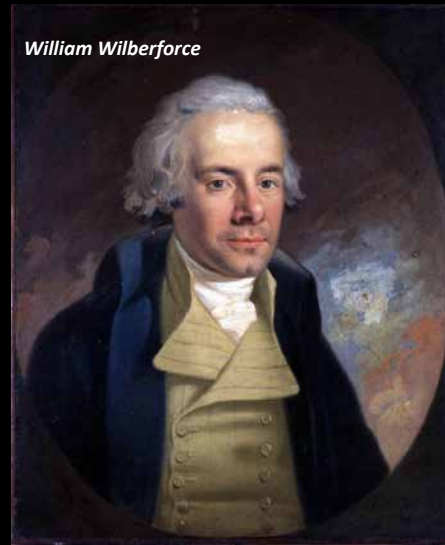
No slaves! No gods! No masters!

Anti-Slavery International, an organisation founded by abolitionist William Wilberforce in 1839, state on their website 'Slavery did not end with abolition in the 19th century. Instead, it changed its forms and continues to harm people in every country in the world'. Indeed. But this organisation's understanding of slavery is very different to ours, as a recent interview reveals. At one point Jakub Sobik, an *ASI* member, says: 'Here in the UK, there are estimates of as many as 138,000 people who are trapped in modern slavery' (dw.com, 25 March). History provides an explanation. Tory MP William Wilberforce was a member of the owning class opposed to chattel slavery as it was considered an outmoded and inefficient method of labour exploitation. He, like *ASI*, did not oppose wage slavery. He also supported child labour and had small children in his employ, opposed Trade Unionism, and was co-founder of *The Society for the Suppression of Vice and Encouragement of Religion*. He preached to the poor that: 'their more lowly path has been allotted to them by the hand of God; that it is their part faithfully to discharge its duties and contentedly to bear its inconveniences; that the present state of things is very short; that the objects, about which worldly men conflict so eagerly, are not worth the contest' (*A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians*). Information concerning their founder on antislavery.org is scant and misleading, e.g. 'William Wilberforce, in his day, achieved much and was widely praised'. Quelle surprise.

World without wages

Selma James who founded the *Wages for Housework* campaign in 1972, is similarly blinkered, alas. Before pursuing this single-issue reform, Selma James had identified herself as a Trotskyist (the young vanguardist joined the Johnson-Forest Tendency at the age of 15), a

black nationalist and supporter of Fidel Castro. She was involved with the short-lived but successful from a reformist perspective Campaign Against Racial Discrimination. Some four years after it was founded, the Race Relations Act of 1968 was passed. Ironically, the racist Commonwealth Immigrants Act came into force, under a Labour Government, that very year – such is the topsy-turvy



William Wilberforce

world of reformist politics. Neither her pamphlet *Marx and Feminism*, based on a talk she gave in 1983, nor a recent interview (theindependent.co.uk, 8 March) support her contention that Marx has been useful to the near 50-year-old campaign. Marx called for the abolition of the wages system, not its extension! '*Wages for Housework*'s first campaign was to keep family allowance (as child benefit was called) in women's hands..'. She also states: 'The climate emergency clarifies much. The *Green New Deal for Europe*, of which we are part, proposes a care income for all who do caring work for people and planet – a welcome update on wages for housework.' And as likely as Wilberforce's early version of pie in the sky when you die!

'Apartheid is against the interests of the South African capitalist class.' (*Socialist Standard*, April 1969)

The Anti-Apartheid Movement, founded in 1959, continued to operate until 1994 when South Africa held elections, generally seen as 'free and fair' and in which all 'races' could vote for the first time. Mission accomplished? Hardly, alas. We read today 'Just 3,500 people – 0.01% of the adult population – own 15% of total wealth in South Africa, according to a new study. And, there has been no decrease in wealth inequality in the 26 years since democracy' (dailymaverick.co.za, 10 March). The first three Presidents there supported the dictator Mugabe. Mbeki is responsible for the premature deaths of up to 365,000 AIDS victims. King Zuma has his palace and shares responsibility for the Marikana massacre with Ramaphosa. Anti-apartheid activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu said of the ANC: 'They stopped the gravy train just long enough to get on themselves.' He went on to describe the Zuma administration as 'worse than the apartheid government' and that he would 'pray for the downfall of the ANC.' Racism remains rife in South Africa, the most unequal society in the world – economic apartheid persists for millions. Yet it would be churlish to deny the *AAM* played a part in bringing about a more inclusive democracy. However, before then, the apartheid system – like chattel slavery – had become a fetter on capitalism's development.

Revolution not reform

Imagine the real change we could bring about if the energies of those chasing reforms were instead directed to establishing a post-capitalist socialist world.

