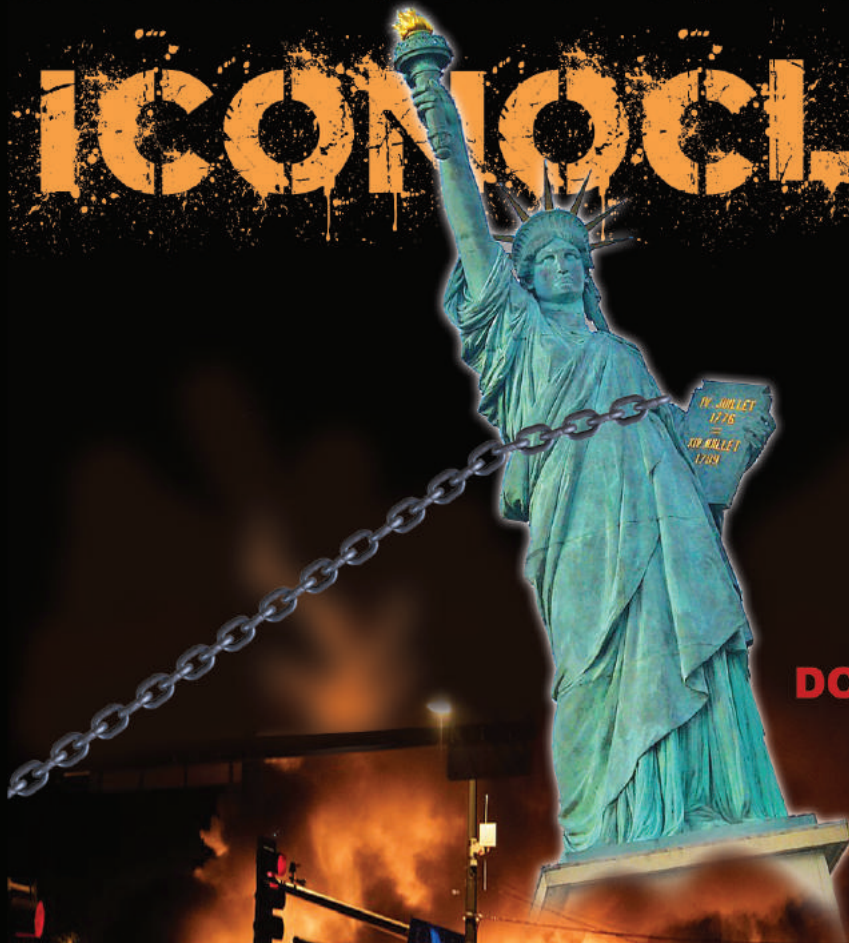


socialist standard

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

ICONOCLASM



**PULLING
DOWN THE
SYMBOLS OF
OPPRESSION**
**NOW LET'S PULL
DOWN THE SYSTEM**



Also:
Race or Class?
Covid 19 & the Money Mine
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Introducing the Socialist Party

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

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

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



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

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

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

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Editorial

Working class lives matter

On 25 May, George Floyd, an African American working-class man, was brutally slain by a police officer on the streets of Minneapolis. This killing unleashed a massive wave of furious protests and demonstrations across the US that had not been seen since the 1960s. It brought into sharp relief the police brutality and systemic racism that many black working class people face in their everyday lives. Compared to the Civil Rights protests of the 1960s, the demonstrations have brought together more people from different ethnic backgrounds.

The protests spread rapidly across the globe. Demonstrators in London, Paris, Berlin and elsewhere did not just come out in solidarity with the US protesters, but they found that the issues raised by the protesters resonated with their own experiences. The UK, for example, has its own roll-call of black and ethnic minority people who have died in state custody. Black and ethnic minority workers face discrimination in the employment market and in housing. There is the hostile environment instituted by the UK government which gave rise to the Windrush scandal.

These protests have to be seen against the backdrop of the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting economic crisis in which black and ethnic minority workers make up a disproportionate number of the victims.

By appearing to be sympathetic with the demands of the protesters, capitalist political parties such as the Democrats in the US are trying to channel their anger into safe reformist ends. Donald Trump is trying to rally his base by playing the Law and Order card, and is threatening to bring in the military to quell the protests. A grim reminder of the lengths that the state is prepared to go to defend capitalist private property.

There is no doubt that black and ethnic minority workers overall have it tougher when it comes to police brutality and lack of opportunities in employment, education and housing. However, it does not follow from this that racism should be treated as an issue that is separate from capitalism and its class divisions.

Indeed we can see that racism is rooted in the history of capitalism. The use of African slaves in the American plantations to produce cotton to be shipped to the

mills of Lancashire. The colonisation of whole swathes of Africa, Asia and the Americas, where the western capitalists ruthlessly exploited the local populations and looted their resources. To justify these heinous and inhumane acts, the ruling class had to characterise the victims as subhuman and belonging to an inferior race, and hence the emergence of ideas of white superiority. So it is little surprise that many white workers absorb these ideas, including those who are employed as police officers, from the wider capitalist society. Racist ideas are used to divide workers from each other.

As the primary function of the police force is to preserve capitalist order, police officers are tasked to keep workers in their place, including workers like George Floyd. Many US police forces have their origin in slave patrols, which had the job of ensuring that black slaves did not escape. The only sure way to do away with racism and police killings is to do away with the social system that creates them, and to bring about socialism.

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PATHFINDERS

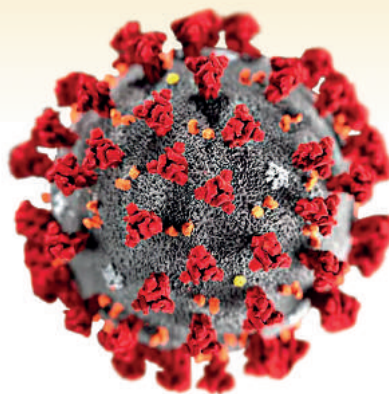
Virus pandemonium

THE PANDEMIC grinds on, the death toll mounts, and politicians parrot platitudes that ring as hollow as their heads. The clueless UK government continues to pursue its pro-economy, sod-the-facts lockdown relaxation policy despite having made a balls-up of practically everything including transparency, contact tracing, keeping to their own lockdown rules and listening to the scientific consensus. The bombastic chutzpah of Boris Johnson strains credulity given that he has presided over the world's worst death rate after only bollock-brained Trump in America and Bolsonaro in Brazil. No wonder that the chief editor of The Lancet has called for a public enquiry (New Scientist, 15 June - [bit.ly/3fECIL8](https://www.newscientist.com/article/2153331-the-lancet-calls-for-a-public-enquiry-into-the-uk-lockdown/)). No wonder too that one virologist commented 'I worry that policy is being motivated by the need to come up with good news rather than evidence' (New Scientist, 9 June - [bit.ly/30Vk2mg](https://www.newscientist.com/article/2153331-the-lancet-calls-for-a-public-enquiry-into-the-uk-lockdown/)).

And the British media seem happy to play the government's game by promoting news stories about virus breakthroughs that look distinctly dubious. The latest of these is dexamethasone, which the BBC claims saves a third of patients on ventilators and a fifth of those on oxygen. The trouble is that the same article goes on to say that it will actually save one in 8 of those on ventilators and one in 25 of those on oxygen (BBC, 16 June - [bbc.in/2Ncg6pn](https://www.bbc.com/health/2020/06/200616_bbc_dexamethasone)). You don't have to be a mathematician to realise that 1/3 is not 1/8, and 1/5 is not 1/25. But it's good enough news for the government, because dexamethasone already exists, and it's cheap, and it works a little bit.

Meanwhile the search for a vaccine also grinds on, with over a hundred currently under investigation. It's not the lab work that takes the time, it's the field trials, since the only way to be sure a vaccine works in the long term is to wait a long term. That wait-time is further complicated by the fact that by the time vaccines are ready for trials, the pandemic could be naturally declining anyway, affording vaccinated test subjects little chance of contracting it. This is what happened with Ebola and why so many drug firms lost money.

One idea that's been mooted, to get round this, is to vaccinate young people and then deliberately give them the coronavirus to see if the vaccine works. The chance of them dying is reckoned at



around 1 in 3,000, yet no government has yet expressed a willingness to step over that ethical divide. Despite this, socialists will be warmed by one statistic. Even though the risk of death is small, it's not nothing, yet 26,000 young people have stepped forward as volunteers (New Scientist, 6 June - [bit.ly/2AFxBMh](https://www.newscientist.com/article/2153331-the-lancet-calls-for-a-public-enquiry-into-the-uk-lockdown/)).

Statues of non-liberty

After months of nothing but virus news, the recent international protests over racism seemed to explode out of nowhere, yet of course they were decades and even centuries in the making. Perhaps nothing underscored the depth of feeling and the determination for change so much as the way in which statues were targeted, from those representing a slave-runner in Bristol and Cecil Rhodes in Oxford, to George Washington and Columbus in the US. In London, Churchill's statue was boarded up and protected by a police armed response vehicle after Prime Minister Boris Johnson described supposed threats to it as 'absurd and shameful', although New Statesman considered this a 'straw statue' argument as there were no serious calls for its removal in the first place ([bit.ly/2ANymmj](https://www.newstatesman.com/2020/06/20200620-uk-statues)). 'We need to tackle the substance of the problem, not the symbols', he also said, while demonstrating that he had no intention of tackling either, by announcing in a classic Yes Minister ploy the launch of yet another new commission on racial inequalities. When a government intends to sit on its hands and ignore the recommendations of all previous commissions on the subject, it launches a new commission.

Symbols are a big deal to a species that communicates in symbols, and people have been pulling down or defacing statues as long as sculpture has been an art form. Many churches in England have statues with the heads struck off by Cromwell's soldiers.

Many Roman statues of former emperors had their heads removed and replaced with later emperors. Ancient Egyptians destroyed the images of previous unpopular pharaohs. There is a timeless and understandable impulse to purge oneself of the past and its bad memories by vandalising its physical symbols in the present.

In a connected world where information is overloaded and attention spans are short, symbols matter even more. Now they are 'memes', image-based morsels, videos or 'flash-poems' that use humour and wit to convey at a glance something we never quite realised we also wanted to say. And clever ones can spread like wildfire. There are several online meme databases too, if you feel like catching up. Just compare the zesty ingenuity of the working class to the stodgy pomposity of the ruling elite, and ask yourself who the future really belongs to.

Perhaps that's why capitalist businesses are increasingly indulging in 'virtue signalling' in order to loudly proclaim their supposed ethical bona fides, because they know how easily and how powerfully they can be damaged in today's febrile social media world. Now Greene King and Lloyds of London have anticipated getting a pasting in the racist debate by apologising for their historic links to the slave trade (BBC, 18 June - [bbc.in/2YG1TGk](https://www.bbc.com/news/2020/06/200618_bbc_greene-king)). It didn't matter to them when the masses couldn't talk back. But now every voice is a megaphone and every message multiplies at light-speed, any company with a dark past has a reason to be afraid. And socialists are in on the act too, with flash-mob-style meets on our Discord server to generate news-based memes for Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. It's small-scale as yet but it's what we need to be doing, because if enough good socialist memes get out there, things might start to swing our way. As socialists often say, the rich have to win every day, but the dispossessed only have to win once. And that's a meme for starters.

The Memento Park in Budapest. Maybe in socialism there would be similar parks and galleries devoted to archiving the artefacts of humanity's primeval and superstitious past, like a long night of insanity and terror that must not be forgotten on awakening, lest it one day be returned to.

PJS

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COOKING THE BOOKS

UBI – Useless Baseless Initiative

'Coronavirus has united left and right on value of universal basic income', was the headline of an article in the *Times* (2 June) by Philip Aldrick, its Economics Editor. This is the reform to capitalism under which the state would pay each of its citizens an unconditional minimum income.

The 'right' favour it to take the place of free and subsidised services provided to the poor; they want to give them instead the money to buy these services from private capitalists. The 'left' see it as a desirable social reform, some as a way to break the link between income and work. The Scottish First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, has endorsed it, on behalf of the 'centre'. Socialists are not keen on it at all.

On the face of it, giving people more money to spend seems a good idea. Who doesn't want more money? But it won't work, at least not as intended; for two reasons.

The first is that the payment from the state is never going to be much more than 'basic', something near the poverty line such as the level to which in Britain a person's income is made up under

the Income Support scheme. This is in part because the capitalist state will want to keep the amount spent on UBI down, but also because, if the income was too high, it would undermine the economic coercion that is behind the wages system.

If people could live, even if rather sparsely, on the income there would be less pressure on them to go out and find an employer. Some advocates of the scheme say this would strengthen the low-paid workers' bargaining position and see it as a reason why it should be introduced. But this is precisely why no capitalist government would introduce it at any level other than around the poverty line.

So, if introduced, it would only be as a tweak to the welfare or tax systems, with the basic income replacing other benefits, amounting to no more than a 'redistribution of poverty'. The results of the Finnish experiment (tinyurl.com/y93baxxv), on which reformists placed such hopes, showed that it did bring some benefit to the unemployed who received it in that they no longer had to submit to what even the Economics Editor of the *Times* called 'intrusive and dehumanising' means testing, nor trying to find a job that wasn't there (capitalism needs a certain

level of unemployment, so there are always going to be some unemployed), nor going on useless courses about how to fill in a CV. On the other hand, those receiving it didn't show any extra inclination to seek out a job; which was why it is not going to be adopted.

The other objection to the scheme is that, as it would be paid to every citizen, whatever their situation and even if they were employed, it would be bound to have an effect on wages; it would strengthen the employers' hand in bargaining over wages as the price of people's working skills. Wages reflect the cost of reproducing these skills. So, if wage-workers are paid an amount by the state, the employer will not need to pay so much. This wouldn't happen immediately but it would exert a pressure for money wages not to rise in line with the general price level. In the end, what the right hand gave the left hand would take away.

The only viable way to break the link between income and work is on the basis of the common ownership of productive resources; that will allow the principle of 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs' to be implemented.



Credit: Christian Caron

One indication of the global spread of the coronavirus was the report (Guardian online, 10 April - bit.ly/3cTUxUJ) that a member of the Yanomami indigenous people in Brazil had died after contracting Covid-19. It was not clear how he had become infected but it was entirely possible that it had been through direct or indirect contact with the gold-miners who have flooded the territory of the Yanomami (also known as the Yanomamo).

This was of course by no means the first Yanomami casualty resulting from contact with non-Amazonians. It is difficult to establish firm figures, but a great many have died from contracting diseases to which they had no immunity. In 1982, more than half the children in one area died from whooping cough, and there have been plenty of epidemics of other diseases too, such as measles, smallpox and malaria. More widely, only 800,000 in Brazil classify themselves as indigenous, out of perhaps as many as 15 million prior to European contact (though estimates vary greatly), with many peoples having become extinct or suffered drastic reductions in population. For instance, the Nambiquara numbered twenty thousand when first visited by Europeans in 1909, but are now just twelve hundred.

Nor was it just a matter of death through disease, as there have been many wars and invasions aimed at indigenous peoples and their defenders. There have also been targeted assassinations, the best-known being that of Chico Mendes in 1988, after his efforts to protect peoples and forests. He was killed by a rancher after receiving many death threats.

The main aim of the government and other 'outsiders' is to exploit the vast resources of Amazonia. This began with the rubber boom in the late nineteenth century, centred on the rubber tree that is native to the area. By 1910, four-fifths of the Brazilian government's income came from the rubber trade, but the bubble burst after that, as rubber seeds had been smuggled out of the country and taken to plantations in Asia. More recently, the interest has been in metals such as tin and, especially, gold. Prospectors have moved into the Amazon area in vast numbers, disrupting the lives of local people and polluting rivers and ponds. Thousands work as modern slaves, on farms, construction sites and so on. From the late 1980s, the Brazilian government developed a plan for building massive hydro-electric dams, implying long-distance transmission lines to convey the energy to industrial centres on the Atlantic coast. This was partly aimed at reducing the

country's dependence on oil imports, but entailed large-scale borrowing and occupying land traditionally settled by indigenous peoples (and, again, spreading disease). At least a million people, indigenous and others, have been affected by dam construction.

The Yanomami, who live on both sides of the Brazil-Venezuela border, are among the most-studied of all tribal peoples, and anthropologists often refer to them as 'the fierce people', on account of the extent of the fighting that takes place in many of their villages. They practice female infanticide, which leads to a gender imbalance and much conflict over women. Marvin Harris (*Cannibals and Kings*) argues that population and ecological pressures, not any innate aggressiveness, are the main reason behind their fighting: villages break up as a way of dispersing population when game resources are too limited.

Yet the Yanomami are not just fierce warriors: they share food as a way of showing friendship. They have no interest in possessions, and the goods of a dead person are systematically destroyed as a way of cancelling their memory, rather than passed on to other family members. 'The Yanomami are warriors; they can be brutal and cruel, but they can also be delicate, sensitive, and loving' (Jacques Lizot: *Tales of the Yanomami*).

They have also had to withstand massive changes to their lifestyle:

'What cultural earthquake in the West could possibly let us experience change on the same scale as the sudden and simultaneous arrival of shotguns, malaria, helicopters, writing, land ownership and political autocracy among people who had never seen any metal object only one generation ago?' (Dennison Berwick: *Savages*).

Berwick notes that change is an inevitable consequence of meeting between Westerners and indigenous peoples, and may be beneficial to both, with, for instance, many forest plants having medicinal value. But conquest and genocide are the likely result of contact aimed at exploiting land and resources. The transmission of disease may be unintended but can be just as destructive, and the coronavirus has led to many of those working to protect people and environment leaving the area, allowing loggers and miners to move in.

As on so many occasions, considerations of profit and power outweigh any regard for human health and well-being and for the good of the environment.

PB

LETTERS

Why was slavery abolished?

Dear Friends

Comments on 'No slaves! No gods! No masters!' (Rear View, May 2020).

The organisation now called Anti-Slavery International (ASI) was not, as you state, founded by William Wilberforce in 1839; he had died in 1833; the founder was Thomas Clarkson. The role played by William Wilberforce had been to lead the parliamentary campaign of the ending of the trans-Atlantic slave-trade and the freeing of slaves in the 'British Empire', which was achieved by legislation in the year he died. You don't give evidence for your assertion that the reason for the owning class agreeing to the abolition of slavery was that 'it was considered an outmoded and inefficient method of labour exploitation'; well – it persisted in capitalist America for several more decades! Surely the long campaigning by Wilberforce, Clarkson and others in stirring public opinion against the treatment of slaves had some impact on the eventual result in Parliament?

Yes, it was and is incredible and appalling that Wilberforce, while campaigning to free slaves in America, could also at home employ child labour and preach to the working class to 'know their place'. Nevertheless, there must have been many thousands of freed slaves whose lives were, to some extent at least, improved by their no longer being, literally, the property of their owners, to be bought and sold and ill-treated, without impunity, at a whim. This is surely not the case with those you now call 'wage slaves'. Anti-Slavery International works still to campaign on behalf of people, here and internationally, who remain, literally, the property of owners. (Would it not be better for you to use some word other than 'slaves' to describe those of us who are employed – not owned?)

So, ASI campaigners are your despised 'reformists' – but, may they not also be socialists? Why do you insist that it is an either/or situation? Why not both/and? Do you suppose that reformists are in every case going to rest content at the achievement of their particular reform? Or may it not be that such an achievement, if it gives some improvement in the lives of some human beings, is a step – even if only a small one – towards socialism? 'From each according to their abilities', we say, - and if Tory William Wilberforce's persistent and persuasive oratory (as appallingly blinkered as he was in other respects) led to better lives for wretched slaves, then so be it!

Must socialists be 'absolutists', refusing involvement in well-meaning reform campaigns, in order to maintain clean-handed ideological purity? Or, even worse, are we allowed to enjoy the relative material comforts brought to many of us by capitalism in our part of the globe, while engaging in merely cerebral 'holier-than-thou' argument, as we await a 'big-bang' revolution? Ought we not to be living now as if we really believed in socialism as a way of life, contributing willingly, as we can, to our fellow human beings, and taking in return just what we actually need? Would not our actions, however compromised and seemingly pathetic, speak louder than words alone?

Andrew Durrant, Norwich

Reply: You rightly takes us to task for stating that Anti-Slavery International was founded in 1839 by William Wilberforce, who died in 1833 (see May's Rear View). To be sure, the group has undergone several name changes since its origin as the Anti-Slavery Society in 1823. Campaigning by Thomas Clarkson, Wilberforce and other abolitionists likely did lead to the passing of the Slavery Abolition Act a decade later, but it should be remembered that William Pitt the Younger, the prime minister as far back as 1783, was not alone in thinking

that the trade should be abolished as it was more expensive than using workers. However, you are on shakier ground when you write 'there must have been many thousands of freed slaves whose lives were, to some extent at least, improved by their no longer being, literally, the property of their owners, to be bought and sold and ill-treated, without [sic] impunity, at a whim.' In his autobiography *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1892), the former slave writes: 'The old master class was not deprived of the power of life and death, which was the soul of the relation of master and slave. They could not, of course, sell their former slaves, but they retained the power to starve them to death, and wherever this power is held there is the power of slavery. He who can say to his fellow- man, You shall serve me or starve, is a master and his subject is a slave....Though no longer a slave, he is in a thralldom grievous and intolerable, compelled to work for whatever his employer is pleased to pay him..'

You go on to ask if socialists must 'be absolutists, refusing involvement in well-meaning reform campaigns, in order to maintain clean-handed ideological purity?' To be clear, socialists oppose reformism, not necessarily individual reforms. Indeed, it would be incorrect to deny that certain reforms won by modern wage slaves have helped to improve general living and working conditions. There are examples of this in such fields as education, housing, child employment, work conditions and social security. Yet as William Morris remarked in a lecture: 'the palliatives over which many worthy people are busying themselves now are useless because they are but unorganized partial revolts against a vast, wide-spreading, grasping organization which will, with the unconscious instinct of a plant, meet every attempt at bettering the conditions of the people with an attack on a fresh side' (*Art & Socialism*, 1884). Reforms, if passed, have in reality done little more than to keep workers and their families functioning and while providing some temporary relief only rarely managed to remove the problem completely -- as the 170,000 UK registered charities, of which Anti-Slavery International is one, attest. -- *Editors*.

Marx or Proudhon?

Dear Editor,

Thank you for your very generous and thoughtful review of my book, *Sitopia, How Food Can Save the World*. I am delighted that your reviewer liked the book so much and feel that there is much in it with which socialists could agree. I do consider myself a socialist at heart and clearly the metaphor of society being a place in which everyone eats well – and by implication has the means of leading a good and meaningful life – is, I believe, at the heart of socialism. We are clearly agreed that capitalism has proved itself unable to deliver such an outcome – and I accept your point that one cannot lay the blame for totalitarian regimes such as those of modern China and Russia at the feet of Marx – although I found myself very taken with Proudhon's argument that his optimism in vesting all power in the state had its own inbuilt pitfalls! In any case, I welcome your comments.

With all best wishes, Carolyn Steel

Reply: Thanks, but we have to point out that neither Marx nor us want to vest "all power in the state". Marx envisaged, as we do, socialism/communism as a classless, stateless, moneyless community based on the common ownership of productive resources. Proudhon did envisage the end of the state as a centralised coercive power centre, but wanted to retain production for sale even if by co-operatives, which we don't agree with – *Editors*.

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North London branch. Meets 3rd Thurs. 8pm at Torriano Meeting House, 99 Torriano Ave, NW5 2RX. Contact: Chris Duffton 020 7609 0983 nlb.spgb@gmail.com

South London branch. Meets last Saturday in month, 2.30pm. Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN. Contact: 020 7622 3811.

West London branch. Meets 1st Tues. 8pm. Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace (corner Sutton Court Rd), W4. spgb@worldsocialism.org

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North East Regional branch.

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Branch website: <http://geocities.com/edinburghbranch/>

Glasgow branch. Meets 3rd Weds. at 7pm in Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road, Glasgow. Contact: Peter Hendrie, 75 Lairhills Road, East Kilbride, Glasgow G75 0LH. 01355 903105. peter.anna.hendrie@blueyonder.co.uk.

Dundee. Contact: Ian Ratcliffe, 12 Finlow Terrace, Dundee, DD4 9NA. 01382 698297.

Ayrshire. Contact: Paul Edwards 01563 541138. rainbow3@btpenworld.com.

Lothian Socialist Discussion @Autonomous Centre Edinburgh, ACE, 17 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh EH7 5HA. Meets 4th Weds. 7-9pm. Contact: F. Anderson 07724 082753.

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South Wales Branch (Cardiff)

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MATERIAL WORLD

The Military Police

TODAY, IN the USA, its police have come to resemble – in appearance, weaponry, and tactics – infantrymen in the US Army who see certain city districts as war-zones to be occupied and subdued, where the confrontations are described in terms of ‘battles’ in what some politicians say are ‘wars on cops’. The War on Drugs and the War on Terror, many will claim, have created such units as the paramilitary SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics) teams which have gained a reputation for excessive force in their military-style ‘counter-insurgency’ strategies for the inner-city ghettos. Many police units are better equipped to fight terrorists in foreign lands than serve and protect civilians at home. Even small-town America is acquiring wartime weaponry. When police are equipped like soldiers, trained to be like soldiers, why are we surprised when they act like soldiers? To expect demonstrators to welcome being confronted by riot-police dressed head-to-toe in military gear, alternatively dispersing them and then kettling and corralling them, is delusional.

Some in the US Congress have long endeavoured to curtail police departments’ access to military equipment which the Defense Department have in abundance and have been providing to the civilian police. Billions of dollars of surplus kit has been supplied to law enforcement agencies. The militarisation of America’s police has been on full display during the widespread protests against the recent killing of George Floyd.

Senator Brian Schatz of Hawaii,

introducing an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act to discontinue the 1033 programme that transfers military weaponry to local police departments, explained, ‘It is clear that many police departments are being outfitted as if they are going to war, and it is not working in terms of maintaining the peace.’ Obama had placed limits and restrictions on the transfer of ex-military weapons. Trump rescinded those restrictions in 2017, permitting once again the flow of equipment to police departments such as armoured vehicles.

Research shows that the police are more likely to respond with force when they are the subject of protest, and that they respond more aggressively towards younger crowds and black people than they do towards white and older people. ‘There’s deep resentment on the part of the police that so many people are angry at them, and they’re lashing out,’ said Alex Vitale, a sociologist at Brooklyn College who studies the police response to protest and coordinates the Policing and Social Justice Project.

As Schatz said, ‘it is clear many police departments don’t train and supervise for restraint and de-escalation, and some officers are just plain racist and violent.’

In its 2014 report, ‘AR COMES HOME: The Excessive Militarization of American Policing’ the American Civil Liberties Union contended, ‘American policing has become unnecessarily and dangerously militarized, in large part through federal programs that have armed state and local law enforcement agencies with the

weapons and tactics of war, with almost no public discussion or oversight. Using these federal funds, state and local law enforcement agencies have amassed military arsenals purportedly to wage the failed War on Drugs, the battlegrounds of which have disproportionately been in communities of color. But these arsenals are by no means free of cost for communities. Instead, the use of hyper-aggressive tools and tactics results in tragedy for civilians and police officers, escalates the risk of needless violence, destroys property, and undermines individual liberties.’

A 2018 study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences supports much of what the ACLU found, in that, ‘Aggressive policing strategies have historically been disproportionately applied to citizens of color in ways that serve to preserve race- and class-based social hierarchies.’ The study also found that ‘militarized policing fails to enhance officer safety or reduce local crime.’

Socialists take a class view of law and order and do not accept the idea that policing is somehow ‘broken’ and is in need of reforms. We do not have a nostalgic memory of a romanticised past with the friendly ‘bobby on the beat’. We look, instead, towards a future society where community harmony can be maintained without the intervention of armed representatives of the state and the abolition of the social conditions which lead to unacceptable disorder and harmful violence.

ALJO





Capitalism has not directly caused the covid-19 pandemic. This coronavirus is by no means the first, and will not be the last, species-jumping outbreak. Nor could socialism guarantee to prevent something like this happening as it is a natural process. However, its rapid spread to ill-prepared recipient societies is most certainly exacerbated by capitalism.

Capitalism has become global while retaining national structures. It is this contradiction that allowed the virus to wreak the havoc it has. The competition engendered by those national structures restricts coordinated international action to temper the worst effects of the disease.

Presently, there is some supra-national cooperation into antiviral and vaccine research, no doubt spurred on by inhibited profit-making caused by national lockdowns. But, stable doors and bolted horses come to mind.

Of the 18 major pharmaceutical companies, 15 had withdrawn from research and development in vaccines, antivirals and antibiotics. There just wasn't sufficient profit to be generated, unlike from addictive painkillers, tranquilizers and impotence drugs.

Similarly, ventilators and PPE equipment could have been manufactured and held in storage. That a pandemic of some sort was more than likely, and its effects devastating was shown by the Cygnus flu simulation exercise in 2016, and a similar exercise in Scotland in 2018, but the logic of capitalism dictated that no preparations were made.

Why go to the expense of manufacturing, purchasing and storing equipment for something that may not occur? A question and logic that does not seem to apply to the insurance business. Health services, such as the NHS, had endured over a decade of restricted funding that would have made buying preparatory materials beyond their means. And governments wedded to austerity most certainly wouldn't provide the funds.

Here is the crux. Capitalism has been in a financial crisis of sorts for over a decade. It seems the international debt, which had increased from \$84 trillion in 2000 to \$173 trillion in 2008, now stands around \$250 trillion. A debt more likely to rise than ever to be paid off.

This is the context in which national governments operate. They must protect capitalism, as they did by intervening during the financial crisis of 2008 to prevent banks becoming insolvent. It is imperative that interest rates are kept as low as possible so as not to exacerbate debt levels.

Central banks, through quantitative easing, supply 'new money' and indulge in purchasing debt. The major beneficiaries of this policy are the largest national capitalist concerns because, being already relatively rich, means they are safer havens for that 'new money' and cheap credit. Those teetering on the brink of bankruptcy, countries as well as companies, can go to the wall.

Meanwhile, the working class, through whose labour power all value is created, face increasing impoverishment. New and increasing debt causes governments to pursue austerity. Those who advocate using government spending to satisfy the needs of the majority and so increase consumption run up against the danger of provoking inflation driving interest rates up.

As prime minister, Theresa May declared there was no magic money tree. The pandemic, though, seems to have opened up a money mine, and deep mining there is taking place. Just as capitalism didn't create covid-19, so covid-19 didn't create the capitalist crisis, but it has made it a whole lot worse.

The measures governments have been forced to take to prevent economic and social collapse means the money miners are going to be digging deep for some time to come. The aim must be to restore production as quickly as possible by easing the lockdown and directing spending towards increasing profitability.

Capitalism demands the primary defence of national capital at the expense of the working class. If capital sees only declining, or vanishing, profitability production will be limited or it will cease. The ruthless logic is that the most effective fiscal policy is to supply money to the wealthy, no matter how loudly reformists bleat.

Every time capitalism stands on the ledge, it takes huge infusions of money to entice back inside, money raised at the expense of the satisfaction of human need. Health and social

care, pensions, rising standards of living, the whole social wage is regarded as a drain on profitability, to be restricted and reduced.

Response from workers

How does the working class respond? During the pandemic largely magnificently. Many have literally given their lives to bring medical care to those afflicted with the virus. The penny-pinching lack of PPE has had dire consequences. To see the prime minister, and others of the complicit cabinet, standing behind a lectern declaring, 'Defend the NHS' has stretched irony beyond satire. It seems such a defence doesn't entail trying to keep them alive.

Unlike the volunteer workforce that toiled to supply what the government has not, face masks, scrubs and scrubs bags, vital for health and care workers. The tired canard set against socialism is that people are selfish, greedy even and certainly won't work without the lash of the money whip. Except, in large numbers, they have.

Capitalism provides precious few opportunities for demonstrations of social solidarity, but covid-19 has. The dedication of health and care workers, way beyond their contractual obligations, has been inspiring. As have the efforts of shop workers, delivery drivers et al. While government has fallen disastrously short of fulfilling its responsibilities, people, without requiring direction or material incentives, have stepped forward.

Workers now need to assess what best serves their futures. Brief applause on a Thursday evening was a sign of social solidarity, but also served as a shield that government wielded to fend off scrutiny. How long will ministerial lauding of the NHS last once austerity resumes its principal role?

The treatment of teachers serves as an example. They were praised for remaining at their posts for vulnerable children and to free up essential workers (what percentage of the workforce is deemed non-essential one wonders?), risking their own health in the process. Now they are being portrayed as a self-interested impediment to opening the schools again. Nurses, take note.

There is much talk of how, as lockdown is rescinded, there will be a new normal. A green future perhaps. A benign state, having demonstrated its willingness to intervene economically and socially, may play a positive, 'socialist-ish' role to some. Labour and Conservative parties will vie to portray themselves in this guise, the Greens will perhaps promote schemes such as the basic social income. Then capitalist reality will impose itself.

The phrase 'logic of capitalism' has been used above. However, there is also capitalist cognitive dissonance. A government that will gamble on leaving the EU without any trade agreements as if nothing has actually changed since the pointless referendum of 2016 seemingly fixed things for all time.

Schemes such as basic income may have an appeal, but they can only be paid for ultimately by drawing money from the total value created for capitalism. Wages, taxes and profit all originate from this source: higher wages, lower profit. Add in the basic income, along with the cost of its administration, and

profits must be affected.

Of course, value is created by the working class, so, by whatever means, they are only receiving in part what is actually theirs. Except capitalism does not exist to return to its workers the value they create, only that part they need to live, and work. Right-wing politicians know and accept this, left wing ones either pretend they don't know this, or delude themselves (and, unfortunately at the present, most of the working class) that it can be otherwise without fundamentally changing society.

Covid-19 has caused a pause for reflection. Politicians have been found wanting, but ultimately the responsibility for their failures rests with all who keep voting for them. The bottom of the money mine is being scraped at the moment, and the ore brought to the surface turns out to be pyrites.

The huge majority, collectively the working class in all its wide variety of roles and manifestations, has the intellectual and creative resources at its disposal to transform the world. There will be future pandemics, but with democratically owned production to satisfy need not profit, a moneyless society to which people freely contribute their talents and abilities, such eventualities may be prepared for and attenuate.

Socialism cannot abolish disease, but it can mitigate its effects without having to be concerned about profits and share prices. Then, and only then, will we all be in it together.

Stood at the kerb of capital,
Striving not to be misled,
Do not look to the left or right,
Keep your vision straight ahead.

DAVE ALTON



"WHEN THE LOOTING STARTS"

Miami, Florida – December 26, 1967: just a few months removed from the 'long, hot summer of 1967', in which rampant unemployment, poverty, and police brutality in black America reached a boiling point, sparking almost 160 race riots across the country. Ironically, that same summer was referred to as the 'Summer of Love' by hippies due to their rapid concentration in San Francisco. Miami's Police Chief, Walter Headley, held a press conference regarding a spike in violent crime in the city's 'Negro district' that past holiday weekend. Miami narrowly avoided race riots that summer, with Headley saying 'We haven't had any serious problems with civil uprising and looting because I've let the word filter down that when the looting starts, the shooting starts' (snopes.com/fsact-check/trump-wallace-looting-quote). We'll leave aside the fact that this statement contrasted with a recent comment from Sheriff Purdy, saying that his department's community relations programs and specialized training projects successfully prevented the civil disorders. This statement encouraging police to murder irreplaceable citizens for looting replaceable commodities – valuing commodities over human life – was predictably criticized by several civil rights leaders.

As Karl Marx once said, history repeats itself '...the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce'. More than 50 years later, the president of the United States, Donald Trump, made the same statement regarding looting in various cities across the country due to George Floyd's recent murder (bit.ly/3debedI). After liberals had yet another field day of moral grandstanding, he tweeted to clarify his statement the next morning, but this was just an attempt to save face.

George Floyd was a former athlete, rapper, Christian, and proud father. Originally from Houston, Texas, he moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota around 2014 for a fresh start after serving four years in prison. Floyd was looking for another job after recently being laid off due to the pandemic, just like millions of other Americans. Shortly before his death, he'd purchased items at a local corner store with what the clerk believed was a counterfeit bill, which made them call the police. The police arrived, and the situation escalated to another unarmed black man being strangled in broad daylight as they repeatedly said, 'I can't breathe!'

This incident resembles far too many to name. Fatal police shootings have been rising every year, and the victims are disproportionately black. An estimated 76.5 percent of Americans were white, and 13.4 percent were black in 2019, but victims of fatal police shootings were 36.85 percent white and 23.4 percent black that same year (the rest being unknown or Hispanic - bit.ly/2zMHWWc). What's worse, roughly 1,000 people are killed by the police every year, but only 98 officers were arrested and only 35 convicted for it from 2005 – 2019.

Outrage over these incidents happening so often without officers being held accountable understandably led to widespread protests. There are countless videos of protests happening peacefully until police officers with more gear than Robocop assaulted citizens first, agitating them and leading to riots. It's hard not to question the government's priorities when they're more prepared to attack its citizens for condemning murder than to protect them against a



pandemic – whether the equipment was a free military surplus or not. You're forced to wonder why using tear gas against foreign armies is an international war crime, but somehow not illegal to use against American citizens – or why rubber bullets are being shot directly at them when they were initially intended to be bounced off the ground.

Trump unsurprisingly condemned the riots, but not the police brutality that sparked them, nor did he call for any of the officers who've committed recent murders to be convicted. He says it's due to the looting, but he couldn't care less about corporations looting the 'Not-So-Democratic' Republic of the Congo. He hasn't called for any of their CEOs or members of their Boards of Directors to be shot, just domestic workers looting products made by other workers abroad. What's more concerning is that he's decided to blame most of the looting on 'Antifa' and called for them to be designated as a terrorist group.

We'll set aside all the terrorist groups backed by the United States and pretend that matters to Trump. What's important, for one, is that we currently only have laws that allow us to designate international extremist groups as terrorist organizations, so an entirely new law would need to pass to classify domestic extremist groups as terrorist organizations. (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_and_state-sponsored_terrorism).)The question would then be why that kind of legislation hasn't been passed yet to designate at least the KKK as a terrorist group after all the murders they've committed – but it's pretty clear once you realize that Trump's dad was arrested at a KKK rally, although neither his exact charges nor the exact circumstances could be confirmed (bit.ly/3hC47PP). For two, and we'd argue

IS, THE SHOOTING STARTS"



most importantly, Antifa isn't even a cohesive organization. Unfortunately, that could work in his favor. He probably knows this, but it could be incompetence at best or an excuse to charge dissenters as terrorists at worst.

Often people throw around the term 'fascist' too loosely and this waters down fascism's actual meaning. Some might concede that Trump could be considered something of a 'fascist-lite'. However, blaming a loose organization for the looters and calling for police to shoot them admittedly seems like he's creeping into that sort of territory – especially once you consider the implications of the 'EARN IT Bill' (bit.ly/3dafwmE) and jokes he's made about staying President for life.

The real question here is what we should do about this? In some ways protesting, signing petitions, posting on social media, etc. are all great activities to bring awareness to the issue. But we've done that countless times and know it'll take much more than that to bring about any fundamental change. Attempts to hold law enforcement accountable have failed many times before, with two recent examples being a bill watered down in California and another blocked altogether in Utah. As Martin Luther King once said '...a riot is the language of the unheard'. Until justice is served, riots are guaranteed to continue happening. But the question is, can systemic racism and police brutality be prevented within our current system?

A fundamental change would require this system to work in the interest of the majority in the first place, which it doesn't. It works in the interest of the capitalists. And we don't mean your bootlicker, wage-slave Facebook friend that only comments on your statuses to defend Jeff Bezos. We

mean the actual capitalists, the ones with mansions the size of Vatican City that still lobby to keep their taxes lower than anybody else's. We've seen time and time again that, when it comes down to it, the state and the police won't protect and serve the people; they'll protect and serve the rich and their property. Police will hesitate to arrest their colleagues for murdering unarmed civilians, but if anyone peacefully protests in response? They'll tear gas pregnant women in a heartbeat – knowing it's been linked to miscarriages – arrest legal observers just for being there, then shoot people who riot or loot because of it. Police and the state only value your life if you're part of the ruling class.

Private property, being different than personal property, inherently leads to competing classes. In the words of Adam Smith, 'Wherever there is great property there is great inequality. For one very rich man there must be at least five hundred poor, and the affluence of the few supposes the indigence of the many'. Capitalism perpetuates systemic racism so well because it's much easier to justify this inequality when those poor tend to be a particular race. It makes them easy to dehumanize, whether consciously or unconsciously. This perpetuation couples with the fact that private property requires a means to legitimize and protect it. In the quote mentioned above, Adam Smith also says, 'The acquisition of valuable and extensive property, therefore, necessarily requires the establishment of civil government. Where there is no property, or at least none that exceeds the value of two or three days' labour, civil government is not so necessary'.

That doesn't mean it necessarily has to be democratic. Dictatorships have still been capitalist; all it needs is a monopoly of force. Even in an anarcho-capitalist dystopia where a traditional state wouldn't exist, there'd still need to be private security forces. But once we understand that capitalism necessitates inequality and a defensive body and how that perpetuates racism, then we see why systemic racism would be a rampant problem and why trying to end it without ending capitalism is futile.

As long as we have private property, we'll have trigger-happy, racist police hired to protect it at the expense of human life. I'm not saying never to speak out and protest against systemic racism, but to do that without keeping abolition of capitalism as the primary goal would be like hacking at a tree's branches, rather than its trunk. To end police brutality and systemic racism for good, we need to establish socialism: an economic system based on common ownership of the means of production and production for use. Classes, class antagonisms, and systemic racism would thus be done away with once and for all.

JORDAN LEVI (World Socialist Party of the US)



Race or Class?

The killing of George Floyd has contributed hugely to the worldwide consciousness of police brutality, but also to some important points about class. There has been a spontaneous response to Floyd's murder, more or less united, organised around principles of solidarity, that has taken the world by storm. In less than a month, protests tens-of-thousands strong have popped up, making the call for increased consciousness of race issues. Revealingly, it is this aspect of it that is focused on by most left-liberal analysis.

Race is undoubtedly an important aspect of the present issues in society. However, it is not the only aspect. Class plays a fundamental role in capitalist society. With ever increasing talk of 'identity politics', we see the class issue being diminished in favour of other problems. The other problems are very real and very important, without question, but they are underpinned by class. What is espoused by identity politics is that there is no fundamental problem but multiple, overlapping issues: everyone has a unique perspective to offer; a white working-class person cannot understand the issues faced by a bourgeois person of colour, or a female CEO will not know the problems of male workers. There is something to be said for this, but where the issue arises is their view that these are fundamentally distinct issues that simply *happen* to overlap.

What is not appreciated is that some issues are more basic than others in capitalist society and may be resolved without resolution of the others. Socialism cannot exist while racism exists, but capitalism can exist even when racial tensions are at an end (the plausibility of this is another matter, it is simply a possibility). This isn't to denigrate the problems of racism, but simply to understand that they are underpinned by a more deeply rooted issue: class. The issues are related, of course. The working class cannot achieve its full consciousness unless it recognises that the international working class is its ally and not its competitor. Much of capitalist propaganda revolves around turning the working class against its migrant allies by use of language like 'the immigrants stealing the jobs'. We can dismiss this as a straightforward case of racism, but that would be a very superficial analysis of the matter.

A more rigorous inspection leads us to believe that the act of the working class co-operating would be devastating to capitalism, and, consequently, all that can be done to fragment the workers and to pit them against one another must be done.

We can see, even in current demonstrations, something of this streak. To take a concrete example, people in Seattle have declared an autonomous zone, the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone, with mutual aid systems and community organised demonstrations. Police are not allowed to enter. It has been praised by prominent left-wing institutions (such as the Industrial Workers of the World) and met with great optimism

by many leftists. Donald Trump tweeted that 'these ugly Anarchists must be stopped IMMEDIATELY [sic]'. Some of the

optimism is merited, insofar as it gives us a glimpse of what socialism may look like. Of course, nothing can be planned in any great detail, but the spontaneous actions of workers in times of crisis shows what the natural human instincts for social organisation are. Therein lies the real benefit of crises.

The brilliance of such organisations is that they give a small insight into what a society without class divides might be like, and demonstrate concretely the feasibility of such a society. They spring up from all sorts of crises: Occupy Wall Street following the crash of 2008 had similar institutions. In this case, it is a crisis prompted by racial tensions that has led to increased consciousness of class tensions.

We must appreciate the connection between the two and the fundamental nature of capitalist society if we are to make serious progress.

MP SHAH



From the development of the first tools and the wheel through to the invention of the printing press, the steam engine, the microprocessor and beyond, technology has always shaped how we live. Scientific developments take place in the context of the social and economic conditions of the time. In capitalism, technological progress and how technology is used are driven by what is profitable and cost effective more than by what is really needed and wanted. This means that technology is often used in ways which go against our best interests, whether through environmental damage, the development of ever-more destructive weapons or the misuse of data gathered online and through social media. In a future socialist society based on common ownership and democratic organisation of industries and services, technology could really be used to benefit us, in harmony with the environment.



The Socialist Party's 2020 Summer School looks at technological progress and its application in the past, present and future. This weekend of talks and discussion is an exciting opportunity to share and explore revolutionary ideas with others, through the SPGB's Discord server. To join in or for further information, e-mail spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk.

Friday 7th August 7.30pm

Is Marxism technological determinism?

Adam Buick

"In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production, in changing the way of earning their living, they change all their social relations. The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist." (Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, 1847)

"It is the development of tools, of these technical aids which men direct, which is the main cause, the propelling force of all social development. It is self-understood that the people are ever trying to improve these tools so that their labour be easier and more productive, and the practice they acquire in using these tools, leads their thoughts upon further improvements. Owing to this development, a slow or quick progress of technique takes place, which at the same time changes the social forms of labour. This leads to new class relations, new social institutions and new classes." (Anton Pannekoek, *Marxism and Darwinism*, 1912) To what extent, if at all, is this a theory of technological determinism? How do changes in technology lead to a change of society?

Saturday 8th August 10.00am

How the Socialist Party can use technology better

Jake AWOFA

Socialist Party sympathiser Jake AWOFA's site 'A World of Free Access' has a following of 17,000 on Facebook, and he joins us from Western Australia to open a discussion on ideas about how the Socialist Party can make better use of technology. How can our online and social media presence be improved? Can technology help us be (even) more democratic? What are our views on Discord?

Saturday 2.00pm

Ideology as technology

Bill Martin

This talk looks at the how the way we think is

a form of technology. Starting with mundane objects, like a bicycle, it looks at how the ideas behind inventions are not the outcomes of lone geniuses and inspiration, but are connected to social relations and practices. It discounts the idea that history is driven by simple technological changes, and looks back to the age of conquest to show it was how technology was applied, rather than the possession of technology itself, that was behind the establishment of the European empires. It concludes by looking at the implications for socialism and how a future society might use technology.

Saturday 4.00pm

How we feel about technology - the views of Günther Anders and beyond

Mike Foster

'Philosophical anthropologist' Günther Anders' theories about our attitudes towards technology were formed in the middle of the last century, when television and the nuclear bomb represented the latest in human achievements. He argued that technology makes us feel ashamed, not because of the impact of the mass media or the threat of nuclear war, but because we have become inferior to the technology we have created. Since Anders' time, technological progress has given us smartphones, artificial intelligence and the world wide web, feats which he would argue further humanity's obsolescence. This talk gives a Marxist perspective on Anders' theories and their implications in today's hi-tech world.

Saturday 6.00pm

Quiz night

Saturday 7.00pm

Social

Sunday 9th August 10.00am

Digital technologies as a core of social organisation of the future

Leon Rozanov

Direct democracy may have worked well in ancient Greek city-states with thousands of decision-makers. Now with most modern

states having millions of citizens, the most widespread form of democracy is representative, and it is easily hijacked by the interests of capital owners or political figures who serve them. Even if socialist ideas were to become more widespread, it remains a question, how exactly would democratic principles that we all consider indispensable be put to work for a socialist society to function efficiently?

One of the earliest markers of human societies differentiating themselves from other animals was language, and later its written form, text. We have learned to pass knowledge on to future generations, and the earliest texts are almost exclusively collections of rules and laws that helped organise societies according to their commonly shared values and beliefs. If we want to create a successful future society based on socialist principles, we need to cement these principles in the text of modern technologies - software code - that will have principles of equality, fairness and resource- and need-based economy built into the digital technologies specifically designed to help run this society.

Sunday 11.30am

The 4th Industrial Revolution, what it is, what it means, what capitalism is doing with it, and what socialism could do with it

Paddy Shannon

Just as people didn't stop using stone as a material when they learned to use bronze, then iron, and then plastic, industrial revolutions have also overlapped, with first-generation steam turbines still producing second-generation electrical power, controlled by third-generation digital computer interfaces. Now a tsunami of new acronyms including AI, IoT and VR is breaking over the top of all that, the so-called 4th industrial revolution. If you're still having trouble figuring out how to do online shopping on your home computer, you'd really better strap in and hold onto your hat, because capitalism is about to go to warp speed.

EMPIRE, FREE TRADE and BREXIT



The people in the driving seat of the Brexit project love to talk about free trade, looking back to the glory days when free trade was the ideology Britain spread to the world through its empire. This doctrine was so important that the Grun's *The Timetables of History* lists the British penetration into South American markets as one of its significant events in that chronology. Freed from the restrictive barriers of the EU and its protectionist ideology, so the doctrine goes, Britain will be able to spearhead its way into genuine free trade around the world, and a new golden age of prosperity will begin.

This ideology is based upon purposeful forgetting built upon purposeful forgetting. The core of the British Empire was most certainly not free trade. As William Dalrymple, in his book *The Anarchy*, notes, the East India Company – the core of Empire building in India – included waging war in its founding charter. Force, more than free trade, characterised the rule of the British in India. India, in its turn, was the foundation upon which the Empire was built. As per David Graber's observation in his *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*, the origin of capitalism is an alliance of interests between the merchant and martial classes.

Dalrymple notes, the East India Company was a private company, and its rule in India was the rule of the bottom line. It was the corporate take-over of a subcontinent. Marx, in Volume 1 of *Capital* observes:

'English East India Company, as is well known, obtained, besides the political rule in India, the exclusive monopoly of the tea-trade, as well as of the Chinese trade in general, and of the transport of goods to and from Europe. But the coasting trade of India and between the islands, as well as the internal trade of India, were the monopoly of the higher employees of the company. The monopolies of salt, opium, betel and other commodities, were inexhaustible mines of wealth. The employees themselves fixed the price and plundered at will the unhappy Hindus. The Governor-General took part in this private traffic. His favourites received contracts under conditions whereby they, cleverer than the alchemists, made gold out of nothing.'

In turn this was the basis for the primary accumulation of wealth that allowed sufficient capital to be freed up to be invested in industrial production. This is the process that the Marxist geographer and theorist David Harvey refers to as 'accumulation through expropriation' the emphasis is not on market exchange, but the direct forceful seizure of wealth.

This was the situation through the period of the rule of the East India Company, and after through the direct rule of the British government. Eric Hobsbawm in his *Industry and Empire* tells us that the doctrine of free trade never applied to India, and the planned extraction of rents and taxes formed

a massive basis of the transfer of wealth from India to the British ruling elite throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries.

Included in that rent money was the opium trade, which the British peddled to their subject Indian population (in part as a form of control) and forcibly exported to China (leading eventually to wars in which Britain sought to use violence to continue selling those drugs to China). No wonder that late nineteenth and twentieth century pulp fiction was filled with the fear of the opium being forced back onto the British public.

Direct extraction was not the only role India played. According to Hobsbawm, India came to be an important market for British cotton textiles. The industrial revolution helped Britain to smash the advanced Bengali cotton industry, but British rule also helped, and the laws of commerce and trade it imposed to give itself the advantage. As Shashi Tharoor in his book *Inglorious Empire* notes, this also happened to India's merchant shipping and ship building industries. Perhaps the Brexiteers are haunted by this historical spectre, and the fear that being entangled in Europe might mean that the trick might well be reciprocated upon them one day (they are fond enough of appropriating the language of decolonisation and 'independence' for their cause of tearing away from the EU trade club).

India was permitted some exports: human beings were exported to labour in different parts of the empire, such as building the railways in Africa, and later serving as implanted populations to play off against other communities such as in the West Indies. It also helped to export force, since India was compelled to pay the upkeep of the massive army that ensured British control, and allowed them to send forces from the Indian army overseas: particularly in World War One where India sent over a million men out to France, the Middle East and to garrison the Suez Canal, allowing Britain to check the rise of its rival Germany.

India was a far from backward or underdeveloped land when the British arrived, although it was wracked by factional wars which weakened it politically and which the East India Company exploited to gain the upper hand. The looting by the British contributed to substantial underdevelopment that it has taken a long time since independence to begin to address. Of course, pointing such things out is seen as anti-British by the forgetting machine that wants to block out the real memories of empire.

It is unlikely that this link between force and Britain's position in the world has escaped the minds of the more serious members of the government. After all, Theresa May tried to focus on security co-operation as a bargaining chip in her dealings with the EU, a sign that people at the heart of government were aware of this. Britain remains a significant military power, but it is unlikely to be able to repeat the conquest of the world by military means, at best it will only be able to exploit its position in worldwide organisations and as an ally of the United States to try and draw off a share of profits and exported ill-gotten gains of despots the world. From the pirate island of empire to being a well-armed tax haven is not an inconceivable trajectory.

The most significant take away is that free trade has never been the reality of Britain's rise to power in the world, and as its formerly colonial possessions assert their strengths on the world market, short of resorting to insane warfare, British capital can only look forward to a subordinate position in the world league tables. Those other capitalists will have learned the lesson of Britain's former success, and will use all their might to bend the rules to their advantage. Trade is inextricably tied up with the state and power.

PIK SMEET

The Case for Socialism

The basic case of the Socialist Party can be set out in three parts: a description and criticism of present-day society; a proposal for a new social system to replace it; and a way of moving from the present to the future society.

The system that dominates the world today is capitalism, which has a number of central features. There is a class division: the vast majority of the population have to work for a wage or salary in order to survive, or are dependent on someone else who has to do so; in contrast, a small number of people, probably well under one in a hundred, live off income from rent, interest and profit, and are immensely wealthy. The former are the working class, the latter the capitalist class. The wages system is a basic feature, as workers have to sell their ability to work, their labour power, to an employer in return for a wage, and are exploited by their employer, as they produce more in value than what they earn in wages.

Under capitalism, goods and services are produced for sale at a profit and will generally not be produced unless there is a prospect of a reasonable amount of profit resulting. Workers who cannot be profitably exploited will be unemployed and have to live on various kinds of handout. The state or government exists to defend the interests of the employers, the capitalist class. It does this by protecting their property, by making it difficult for workers to fight for better wages and working conditions, and by defending the interests of the capitalist class abroad, such as attempting to guarantee access to raw materials and trade routes. The police, courts, prisons and armed services are the central aspects of the state machine. There may be some limited show of democracy, such as elections and the ability to organise political parties and publish dissenting views, but in reality workers have little control over their lives and are dominated by the anarchy of the market and the power of the capitalists.

Capitalism has not always existed. We could argue about when it began, but it is best seen as being less than three hundred years old. Capitalism has changed in some ways since its early days, when there was nothing like the massive international companies that exist today. The state interferes much more in the economy than it once did, and there is a variety known as state capitalism, where the state is the main employer and those who control the state form the capitalist class. But all versions of capitalism have the basic properties of wage labour, class division, production for profit, repressive state and lack of true democracy.

So what are the consequences of capitalism being structured the way it is? One is a barely-credible degree of inequality. There are many statistics that could be cited to illustrate this, but here we will content ourselves with just two. Last year, the richest two thousand people in the world had more wealth than the poorest 4.6 billion combined. Bosses in the UK's top hundred companies took just 33 hours to be paid more than the typical worker's annual wage.

Equally, there is poverty and even destitution for many workers. It may be said that, in a world of smartphones and overseas holidays, there is little real poverty left, but the facts show the falsity of such an argument. More than one person in five in the UK is classed as living in poverty, including four million children. Over half of those in poverty are in a household where at least one person is working, so having a job is no guarantee against poverty, especially in a society reliant on zero-hours contracts, precarious work and the gig economy. When there are food banks and people sleeping on the street, clearly extreme poverty still exists.

Capitalism does not just force masses of people into poverty, it actively reduces the amount of useful goods and services produced. This is partly on account of the profit motive, as, for instance, there is no profit to be made in building houses for those who cannot afford to buy or rent them. But also the whole paraphernalia of the money system means that so much work is just wasted: everything to do with money, banks, credit cards,

accounts, insurance and so on makes no contribution whatever to meeting human need. Nor do the armed forces and most of the functions of the government.

Politicians of all stripes have over the decades attempted to reform capitalism, but this inevitably cannot do away with its basic features. In its place, socialists advocate an entirely new form of society. We call it 'socialism', but it could also be called 'communism', or 'post-capitalism'. We can describe socialism briefly as a classless moneyless stateless world community based on common ownership, production for use and democratic control. Let's look at each of these points.

A classless society would not have a division into the capitalist class and the working class; the resources of the planet would belong to all the people, so they would be owned in common. There would be no rich and poor, indeed no concept of poverty. There would be no money, no credit cards, no chequebooks, no prices, no wages; goods and services would, as far as possible, be freely available to all. There would be no government, no organised means of coercion, as there would be no ruling class whose interests would be defended. It would be a true world community, with no countries or borders, no passports or visas. Production would take place to meet human need, so there would be no motivation to produce substandard or dangerous goods. Production, and society as a whole, would be under the democratic control of the people, giving them proper control over their lives.

This is all completely feasible. For one thing, there is nothing in human nature that stops people from co-operating and volunteering to do things together. Further, with the artificial limits of capitalism removed, it would be possible to produce far more, so that nobody need go hungry or be homeless. Building houses, for instance, would be undertaken to provide homes for people, decent homes with efficient heating and insulation; architects and building workers already know how to do this, without having to cut corners, skimp on costs and make a profit. Food, too, would be produced to feed people, not to make a profit for agricultural mega-corporations. Health care would be the best that could be provided.

We must emphasise that socialism will not be a perfect society where absolutely everything runs smoothly, just that it represents the best, indeed the only, way of solving the problems that beset humanity. Some, such as poverty and hunger, will be solved more or less immediately on the establishment of socialism; in the case of others, especially environmental problems, socialism will offer a framework in which they can be addressed, based on considerations of meeting human need rather than producing for profit.

But how would we get from here to there, how could a socialist society be established? The essentials of an answer to this spring from the nature of future society. It would be democratic and based on co-operation, and it is simply not possible to force people to behave democratically or to co-operate. Socialism, then, can only be established when an overwhelming majority of people want it, when, in other words, a class-conscious working class are determined to set up a society of common ownership and to make it work. There are various aspects to how this will be done, and part of it involves capturing control of the state, probably via elections, to ensure that the machinery of government cannot be used to prevent the establishment of socialism. It would also involve being organised to maintain production and ensure that nobody was forgotten about or left behind in the changeover to a new society. Socialism would not be established in parliament but by socialists taking the responsibility to remake how the world is organised.

That, in brief, is the case of the Socialist Party. If you agree with it or want to learn more or wish to ask about any aspects you don't agree with, get in touch with us, whether online, by post or by contacting your local branch.

PAUL BENNETT

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.



DISCORD

COOKING THE BOOKS

Negative interest rates

Last month the question of 'negative prices' came up. Now, there is talk of 'negative interest rates'. This would be where the lender, instead of receiving at the end of the loan period more than they lent, would end up with less. It is hard to imagine a bank lending on such terms. As interest is the source of income which, after paying their expenses, bank profits come from, this would be to run at a loss. The bank, instead of increasing its capital in accordance with the economic logic of capitalism, would see it diminish.

This, however, has often been the fate of other lenders, especially small savers. It occurs when there is inflation and the price level rises by a higher percentage than the rate of interest. In that case, at the end of the loan period the purchasing power of the amount lent will have fallen; the amount by which it has fallen could be described as 'negative interest'. Governments have been known to deliberately inflate the currency in order to reduce their debt in real terms. However, this can't be done too often as lenders will soon cotton on and lend only if the rate of interest is tied to the rate of inflation ('indexed').

Current talk about negative interest rates is not about this, but about the Bank of England fixing what used to

be called the Bank Rate (but is now the 'base rate') at a minus figure. This would not be much of a change as the rate is currently only 0.1 percent (1p on every £1,000 lent). The Bank Rate is what the Bank pays commercial banks on what they deposit with it. This is therefore a policy aimed at banks, to discourage them from holding money and make them lend more.

The banks are sceptical as they know from experience that bank lending is not governed by the supply of money to lend. There are plenty of entrepreneurs who want money for some project but banks will only lend for projects that they consider viable, i.e., will turn out to bring in a profit sufficient to repay the loan with interest. This depends on the state of the economy and the general prospects for profit-making; in other words, on the likely rate of profit. It is this rate, not the rate of interest, that drives the capitalist economy. Which is why monkeying about with the rate of interest over the past decade or so has failed to stimulate the economy (but only the stock exchange).

A negative Bank Rate would also make banking less profitable. As Stephen King, HSBC's Senior Economic Adviser, reflecting his paymaster's point of view, put it in the Evening Standard (1 June):

'Banks traditionally make money

through the "spread" between the interest rate offered to depositors and the interest rate demanded from borrowers. With negative interest rates, banks would effectively have to take money out of savers' bank accounts, a deeply unpopular outcome. In the face of this banks might end up letting lending rates fall more than deposit rates, in effect cutting the "spread". That, however, would lower bank profitability and reduce the volume of lending, the opposite of what policymakers would be hoping for. Borrowing costs would be lower, but a dwindling proportion of people would actually be able to get access to credit.'

He went on to add that, with inflation still happening even if at a low rate, reducing the amount paid to savers would reduce the purchasing power of their savings as in the first type of 'negative interest'.

Note the matter of fact way in which King writes about a bank's income coming essentially from the difference between the rate of interest it pays to those it borrows from (depositors and others) and the higher rate at which it lends money. No nonsense here about banks having the power to create out of thin air the money they lend.

PROPER GANDER

Luxury LEGOLAND

MONACO IS a strange country, a haven for the super-rich on the Côte d'Azur, where the excesses of modern capitalism mix with old hangovers from feudalism. Filmed one year BC (Before Covid-19), *Inside Monaco: Playground Of The Rich* (BBC2) showed us inside its casinos, government offices and black-tie events. This particular playground costs a fortune to play in – keeping out the riff-raff – and its swings and roundabouts are all gold-plated.

Being not much bigger than Hyde Park in London, Monaco is the world's second smallest state, after the Vatican City, and the most densely populated. It's a constitutional monarchy headed by Prince Albert II, who can see more than half the country he rules from his office window. Albert's ancestors captured the area disguised as monks nearly 800 years ago, and he's still defended by soldiers (the 'Carabiniers') today. The affable prince has allowed the cameras to follow him on his tightly-choreographed official duties and time off, joking that 'spontaneity has to be scheduled'. We also meet others who live and work in the pocket-sized principality, such as those who clean and organise hotel rooms which cost tens of thousands of Euros a night to stay in, and staff in air traffic control and the harbour who manage the influx of wealthy visitors' yachts and helicopters. The streets and buildings of Monaco are sleek and pristine, but soulless, like, as someone points out, a 'luxury legoland'.

Monaco's demographics are different to those of other countries. Monégasques, or inhabitants with citizenship, are in the minority at just over a fifth of the population, which mostly comprises European ex-pats. There are strict rules around non-natives gaining citizenship, which is granted personally by Prince Albert for those who have lived there for ten years and satisfy other criteria. Citizenship confers benefits such as subsidised rents and priority for employment over foreign nationals. Non-citizens can only last there if they're sickeningly wealthy. So, another difference between Monaco's population and that of other places is that as many as a third of its inhabitants are millionaires, often identifiable by their self-satisfied, surgically-enhanced smiles. Proof that wealth is strongly linked to health is shown by the country having the world's

highest life expectancy, at around 90 years. This means that many of its inhabitants are elderly, leading to efforts to court younger super-rich people. These include the social media stars invited to Monaco's Influencer Awards, whose president is Princess Camilla of Bourbon-Two Sicilies. At the gong-giving ceremony, one 'influencer' is asked 'what are you doing here?' and quips back 'looking fabulous'; another is wearing a t-shirt saying 'make money not friends'.

Proportionate to the number of its inhabitants, Monaco has one of the largest police forces in the world, and they have a zero-tolerance attitude to any misdemeanour and also the right to question anyone at any time. There are strict rules and laws: Monégasques can't use the country's casinos and the paparazzi are banned. Even camper vans, uploading photos to social media and walking down the street barefoot are forbidden. But rather than all this stirring up concerns about living in a police state, it's welcomed among inhabitants as it protects their wealth and privacy. If you can afford to walk along the High Street (not barefoot) wearing millions of Euros' worth of jewellery, you want to be reassured that you won't get either mugged or papped.

Monaco isn't large enough to accommodate industry or agriculture, and so its economy is based on commerce, and especially gambling. In the mid-nineteenth Century, its state was in the financial

doldrums until the opening of the Monte Carlo casino, which drew in punters and their money from France, where gambling was then illegal. Since then, Monaco has also hosted money-spinners like the Influencer Awards and, more traditionally, the Grand Prix car race. During this event, Prince Albert hosts a reception at the Royal Palace for 700 guests, who enjoy wine priced at thousands of Euros a bottle and dishes with ingredients including a truffle worth £35,000. There's enough money flying around that the state doesn't need to charge income tax, a move which has attracted more millionaires and billionaires to the principality.

Monaco hasn't found a way of managing capitalism which could be replicated anywhere and everywhere. Despite its sovereignty and quirkiness, Monaco's economy is tied in with that of the rest of the world, even more so than other countries' are. Its wealth relies not on the spin of a Monte Carlo roulette wheel or spectacles like the Grand Prix and the Influencer Awards, but ultimately on countless people elsewhere, whose work produces the profits which eventually end up being bet on red or invested in a bespoke super-yacht. All countries are concentrations of capital, and Monaco is also a concentration of capitalists. The lack of common ground between their lifestyles and ours highlights the extent of the class divide.

MIKE FOSTER



REVIEWS

Classification



Cédric Hugrée, Etienne Penissat and Alexis Spire: **Social Class in Europe: New Inequalities in the Old World**. Verso £16.99.

Written by three French sociologists, this volume is based on studies carried out under the aegis of the European Union Statistical Office and makes use of the standardised European Socio-economic Groups classification of employment. This leads to the distinguishing of three classes: working class (including unskilled manual workers, nursing assistants and farmers); middle class (office workers, police officers, IT technicians, teachers, etc); and dominant class (doctors, senior managers, lawyers, journalists, CEOs, and so on). Probably the most surprising aspect of this is the identification of a dominant class, and it is claimed that the one percent, the super-elite, 'need allies to ensure that their orders at work will be transmitted and fulfilled, and ultimately to secure their hegemonic position in society' and that the dominant class 'encompasses all workers who have the power to impose rules in professional, social and even political life' (so it seems they are workers too).

It is true that many people in this 'dominant class' are in charge of managing and supervising others (as are some of the 'middle class'), but this is hardly enough to make doctors and engineers 'dominant' in any sense. And when it is stated that CEOs on average have less disposable household income than teachers and nurses, it does raise questions as to how reliable the classifications are. The dominant class includes entrepreneurs, but since this label applies to street hawkers as well as factory owners, its usefulness appears limited.

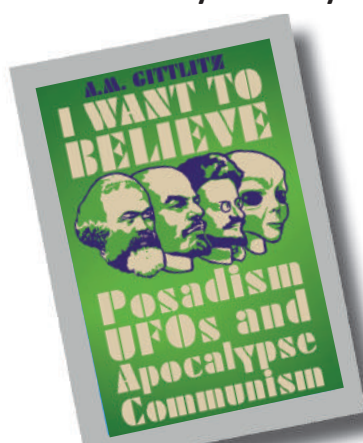
Nevertheless, there is a lot of interesting information here (in this paragraph we use the book's terminology, without implying that we agree with it). In Central and

Eastern parts of the EU, the dominant class is much smaller than in the North and West, on account of the control of the economy there by some Western firms. Industrial production has a greater share of the economy in the East and Centre and in the Baltic countries. The ageing of the population in the North and West, plus the greater number of women at work, has led to increased demand for childcare, care of the elderly and so on. Over one-fifth of the working class live below the poverty line (earning less than 60 percent of the median wage in the country concerned). Members of the dominant class are far more likely than others to attend a live performance such as a play, and to speak an international language such as English or Spanish. Trade unions find it harder to operate and negotiate at an international level, partly because of language difficulties.

The conclusion states that 'experience of hardship and suffering at work is the common ground between members of the working and middle classes', and argues for transforming work to make it less hierarchical and pay more attention to health and the environment. But it will take more than this to do away with the inequality and poverty that are described, if not convincingly analysed, here.

PB

A Trotskyist Oddity



A.M. Gittlitz: **I Want To Believe: Posadism, UFOs and apocalypse communism**. Pluto Press, 9780745340777.

The Argentinian Trotskyist J. Posadas is mostly known among left trainspotter circles for his belief in UFOs and advocacy of nuclear war. This book reveals a different story. Rather than a crankish outlier, he is revealed as pretty

much a typical guru of a Trotskyist sect, with policies and positions typical of mainstream Trotskyism.

Born Homero Cristalli, in 1912 in Buenos Aires, he was the child of Italian immigrant shoemakers, who were themselves involved in left-wing politics. He grew up malnourished, and became an entertainer, and (briefly) a professional footballer. Football would be an enduring feature of his life, and his cadres at conferences would be required to have a match, leading in one instance to the French police being called to their supposedly secret meeting place because neighbours heard the shouting.

He became involved in the radical Buenos Aires milieu, and came to the notice of a group of Trotskyists after a short poem calling for unity with the Spanish government (during the civil war) he wrote was published in a left newspaper. The group, the International Communist League (LCI) had been typified as 'coffee-bar wankers' (the author, incorrectly, attributes this to Trotsky himself), and were seeking to break out of their intellectual ghetto and connect with the working class.

Cristalli proved to be an enthusiastic and energetic organiser, and made successful work with the shoemakers union. His working class authenticity made up for his limited theoretical grasp of Trotskyist positions. J. Posadas was a collective name of the group's leadership, and Cristalli began to join in writing Posadas's editorials. Eventually, he would possess the name entirely (the 'J.' was never defined).

Although Trotsky is venerated in many parts for his theoretical subtlety, in reality, his plans amounted to 'go back to your constituencies and prepare for civil war'. His orientation was to try and form the command/control of a military force that could win that civil war, hence his and his followers' focus on leadership. In practice this usually meant small groups trying to orientate towards and piggyback on bigger movements. In Argentina, this meant the strongman Juan Peron, who successfully co-opted the workers movement for his own ends.

Cristalli became a full time revolutionary, depending on the income his faction could bring in from its membership in the Fourth International, and he came to prominence in the internecine manoeuvring of the factions in the international, and became a supporter of Michel Pablo, who ostensibly led the International after Trotsky's murder. This position, along with his energy and charisma, led him to being among the pre-eminent Trotskyists

in Latin America, eventually with groups in Cuba, Brazil and Ecuador.

When the Second World War failed to bring about the revolutionary wave Trotsky predicted, the Fourth International's leadership veered between trying to enter mass communist parties or supporting anti-colonial guerrilla movements. Cristalli visited Cuba after the revolution there and ended up being singled out as a leader of the Fourth International by Castro as he denounced and suppressed Cuban Trotskyists.

It was the Cuban missile crisis that developed Cristalli's position on nuclear weapons. He was, though, not alone in wanting a nuclear confrontation with America: Che Guevara and Castro both wanted the conflagration. Cristalli's position was that the imperialist states would not surrender to socialism without using their nuclear weapons, such a confrontation was inevitable; but that with the greater population of the communist world, only communism could emerge from the aftermath. This was simply a logical continuation of the basic position of Trotskyism to a world with nuclear weapons.

His other famous position, on extra-terrestrials being communists, was in fact not his position. Gittlitz reveals that his notorious essay, 'Flying saucers, the process of matter and energy, science, the revolutionary and working-class struggle and the socialist future of mankind', was in fact written to close down debate from an enthusiast for UFOs in his party. In some senses his argument 'We must appeal to the beings on other planets, when they come here, to intervene and collaborate with Earth's inhabitants in suppressing poverty. We must make this call to them' (<https://tinyurl.com/p3rut6m>) is simply a continuation of the notion of appealing to powerful figures to try and make changes.

The UFOs simply became a distinguishing feature by which other Trotskyists could deride him and distinguish themselves from his organisation.

The secrecy of Cristalli's organisation was essential in the face of real repression (some of the cadres were arrested and murdered by repressive regimes in Latin America). This, coupled with stern sexual moralism (including seeing homosexuality as degenerate) led to Cristalli controlling the sex lives of his cadres, separating married couples to work in different areas. He abandoned 'democratic centralism' in favour of his personal rule of the organisation, or 'monolithism'.

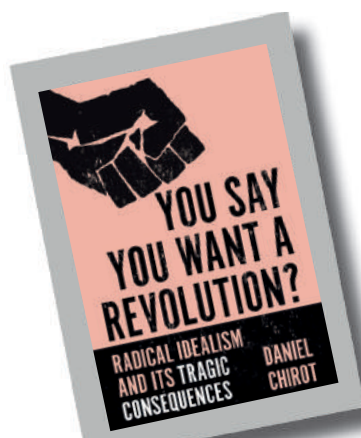
It comes as no surprise to discover that he was caught receiving oral sex from a young female recruit. He responded in a fashion we are becoming accustomed to from the US president, of accusing all of his colleagues of being sexually promiscuous. He expelled them all, and then fathered a child with the recruit. As Gittlitz notes, this situation is not unique, and other Trotskyist sects had similar stories (Gerry Healy and

the WRP springs to mind).

The book ends with an essay on the birth of the Posadas meme as a generation of young leftists rehabilitate the Ufological legend for the slogan 'Fully automated space communism', used ironically but still indicating a search for hope in a time of fallen ideas. Gittlitz points out that for a short period, references to Posadas outranked Trotsky himself in Google searches thanks to the memes.

PS

Minority revolutions



Daniel Chirot: *You Say You Want a Revolution. Radical Idealism and its Tragic Consequences.* Princeton University Press. 2020

This is a history book whose very title makes no bones about its purpose. The author's stated aim is to warn against the 'radical idealism' which he sees as underlying many attempts at political revolution, since such action almost inevitably has 'tragic consequences' in terms of death, destruction and social disorder and rarely leads to worthwhile gain even in the longer term. As he puts it, 'a strong revolutionary utopian ideology held as an absolute faith, if its believers come to power, will lead to immense human tragedy'.

Starting with France in 1789, the book takes us through the numerous risings that have convulsed societies in the last two hundred years, right up to the 'Arab spring' events of the present century. On the way he takes in the Meiji restoration in nineteenth century Japan, the Mexican and Russian revolutions, the Nazi takeover in Germany, Maoism in China, the anti-colonial wars in Algeria, Vietnam and Angola, Khmer Rouge rule in Cambodia, and the coming to power of Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran. What, he argues, characterizes all these episodes is that they were either brought on by radical ideologies that failed to live up to their promises of social and economic improvement and in fact had disastrous

results for the people of the countries involved.

This is an argument the author makes compellingly, providing abundant, well documented evidence of the mayhem wrought by many in these chapters both in the short and long term. He dwells in particular on the horrors of Stalin's rule in the Soviet Union and of Mao's leadership in China, both of which caused the deaths, through famine, disease or extermination, of tens of millions of people. He shows too how many other countries with smaller populations suffered similar fates following violent uprisings or radical political change.

However, this book has little notion of any historical forces that might have been driving these events and even less of the idea that, in many cases, for all their disruption and bloodiness, they were the signal of a new form of production, capitalism, taking over, even if under a one-party government, from more antiquated social and economic forms. The author sees much depending on 'the personality of leaders' and on 'chance events', this being reflected in the title of one of his earlier books *Modern Tyrants: The Power and Prevalence of Evil in Our Age*. In so much as he has a sense of historical development, it is the belief he expresses that things progress best if those leading change can be, as he puts it, 'gently liberal', and there can be 'gradual change, compromise and flexibility'.

A greater deficiency, moreover, for those likely to be reading this journal, is the author's insistence that many of the revolutions he deals with were driven by the ideas of Marx and by socialist or communist ideology ('the Russian, Chinese, and other successful communist revolutions were inspired by Marxism and killed tens of millions in order to achieve an impossible egalitarian ideal'), when in fact they were not aimed at establishing socialism but state capitalism, as happened in Russia and China. There is no warrant in Marx for state capitalism, even if those setting it up and running it call it socialism or communism, as has often been the case. Though no one has a patent on the word, socialism in Marx's writing clearly involves abolition of the wages system and a worldwide society of from each according to ability, to each according to need, not state control of the economy, which is in fact just an alternative form of capitalism – state capitalism.

HOWARD MOSS



50 Years Ago

Debate with “International Socialism Group”

Edinburgh branch have sent us the following report of a debate on “Which Way Socialism — International Socialism or the Socialist Party of Great Britain?” held in the Freegardeners Hall, Edinburgh, on before an audience of 70. (The local IS branch have seen this report and raised no objections to it) (...)

S. Jeffries opened for the IS by saying that he agreed with the SPGB’s Marxist theory but that there was a failure to link up theory with practice. He went on to quote Engels on the need to build the revolutionary movement within the trade unions. It was stupid to rely on the vote. He preferred the overthrow of the system by non-parliamentary means, and said that Marxists should always be prepared for the revolutionary situation when this overthrow would be possible.

Comrade Vanni replied that

revolutionary phrase-mongering did not make a socialist and invited the floor to look at the dismal history of the IS. Using back numbers of the *Labour Worker* (now *Socialist Worker*) he drew attention to their lack of socialist understanding giving instances such as IS having urged workers to vote for the Labour Party in the 1964 and 1966 elections instead of

fighting the real enemy — capitalism. It was not a Leninist elite that would bring about the revolution but capitalism itself by the contradictions inherent in it. IS far from being a vanguard, were in reality politically backward. They considered the workers too dull to learn from history but instead that they had to be taken through the struggles and learn from strikes. He went into some detail on the bankruptcy of their political theory, such as the permanent arms economy and their belief in the collapse of capitalism. IS did not even understand what Socialism was, as they saw a need for money, banks and the like, saying that instead of being sacked by a boss you would be made redundant by a ‘Workers Council’. In reality it all boiled down to a sophisticated state capitalism.

(*Socialist Standard*, July 1970)



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Meetings

All meetings/talks/discussions are currently online on **Discord** (unless it is stated that the meeting or talk is on Zoom). Please contact the spgb@worldsocialism.org for how to join.

Members of Central Branch are advised that there is an informal discussion group hosted fortnightly on a Sunday by Paul Edwards at 7.00pm (BST) in the Discord online server. The next date for your diary will be Sunday July 5th at 7.00pm (BST); and, then every second Sunday thereafter. Please, do consider joining in. This is a great opportunity for all.

JULY 2020

Thursday 2 July, 3.00 p.m.

FAQ Workshop, "What about the army?"

Friday 3 July, 7.30 p.m.

Friday night talk

Tuesday 7 July, 3.00 p.m.

FAQ Workshop, "Why aren't there more women in the SP?"

Thursday 9 July, 3.00 p.m.

FAQ Workshop, "Would there be laws?"

Friday 10 July, 7.30 p.m.

Talk: Who was J Posadas, and does it matter?

Speaker: Bill Martin

Sunday 12 July, 3.00 p.m.

Dangerous Women – Marge Piercy

Tuesday 14 July, 3.00 p.m.

FAQ Workshop, "How much Marxist theory do workers really need to know?"

Thursday 16 July, 3.00 p.m.

FAQ Workshop, "What do we think about charities?"

Friday 17 July, 7.30 p.m.

Talk: How Party democracy works.

Saturday 18 July, 10.00 a.m. – 5.00 p.m.

Online Party Conference (this will be held on Zoom)

Details on how to take part or listen will be published in due course on the Party's website www.worldsocialism.org/spgb

Tuesday 21 July, 3.00 p.m.

FAQ Workshop – "The Joy of Sects"

Wednesday 22 July, 8.30 p.m.

Talk on Sylvia Pankhurst (this talk will be held on Zoom)

Thursday 23 July, 3.00 p.m.

FAQ Workshop – "Good idea but it'll never happen"

Friday 24 July, 7.30 p.m.

Talk: How they solved the street homeless problem (for a while).

Sunday 26 July, 3.00 p.m.

Dangerous Women – Harriet Tubman

Tuesday 28 July, 3.00 p.m.

FAQ Workshop – "Just eat the shit: the working class and diet"

Thursday 30 July, 3.00 p.m.

FAQ Workshop – "Six things to know about Lenin – a checklist"

Friday 31 July, 7.30 p.m.

Friday Night Talk

AUGUST 2020

Friday 7 August, 2.00 p.m. – Sunday 9

August 5.00 p.m.

The SPGB Summer School on Technology (for full details see page 15)

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

Fred Hallows – Obituary

West London branch regret to report the death in his 90s in March of longstanding member Fred Hallows. He joined the old Ealing branch after the war (during which, before he became a socialist, he had been in the RAF as a glider pilot) and was one of the branch's stalwarts until his retirement and move to Towcester in Northamptonshire. He worked as a draughtsman and was a founder member in 1950 and president of the Grasshoppers Rugby Club in Isleworth which is still going. During his long retirement he continued to take an interest in Party affairs and vote in Party ballots. Our condolences go to his family and friends.

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.



Disaster capitalism

'The Covid virus has been a gift from God, began Ken Eldred. The kingdom of God advances through a series of glorious victories, cleverly disguised as disasters. In response to the coronavirus pandemic, Eldred noted, millions of Americans are turning to Christ, Walmart is selling out of Bibles, and online church broadcasts have hit record numbers' (theintercept.com, 23 May). The Roman poet and philosopher Lucretius saw religion as a disease born



of fear and as a source of untold misery to the human race. His view remains apposite some two thousand years after his death. Eldred's god supposedly created a world where at least 40 percent of animal species are parasites, and over 99 percent of all species that ever lived are extinct. Actually, the five mass extinction events took place long before we arrived – at 23:58:43 if Earth's history is pictured as a 24-hour clock. Capitalism is the cause of many disasters, some ongoing, and religion supports the status quo. Conspiracy theories, which have faded in and out of history since Greek and Roman antiquity, also serve to delay the establishment of a post-capitalist world. But progress is being made. 'In the 18th and 19th centuries, around 90% of the population probably believed in some kind of conspiracy' according to Michael Butter, professor of American Literary and Cultural History at the University of Tübingen (dw.com, 29 May).

Capitalism at work

'The works of the roots of the vines, of the trees, must be destroyed to keep up the price, and this is the saddest, bitterest thing of all' Steinbeck wrote in *The Grapes of Wrath*, his 1939 novel of the Great Depression. 'Carloads of oranges dumped on the ground... a million people hungry, needing the fruit — and kerosene sprayed over the golden mountains.' During the H5N1 bird flu in Hong Kong in 1997, the government sought to kill 1.3 million chickens to eliminate the virus. 'After the financial crash of 2008, hundreds of millions of dollars flowed from New York to industrial meat production in China as bankers at Goldman Sachs hunted for safe investments. Partly as a result, large-scale industrial agriculture pushed smaller Chinese producers out into dangerous terrains where their animals came into contact with bats, which carry coronaviruses' (mronline.org, 28 May). Have you spotted the connection? A wrathful god? A cabal of Jewish bankers? Neither: it is capitalism at work. Some US farmers are once again destroying food, pouring their milk down the drain, killing their livestock and dumping their eggs. COVID-19 has disrupted capitalism's *can't-pay, can't-have* food supply chains. Farmers in China have been unable to sell their produce at closed wet markets or replace stocks of animal feed. And in the UK and Germany, there has been a shortage of largely immigrant workers to help with the spring harvest because of lockdown and self-isolation measures.

Pandemic of profit-seeking

'... the men upon the floor were going about their work. Neither squeals of hogs nor tears of visitors made any difference to them; one by one they hooked up the hogs, and one by one with a swift stroke they slit their throats. There was a long line of hogs, with squeals and lifeblood ebbing away together; until at last each started again, and vanished



with a splash into a huge vat of boiling water. It was all so very businesslike that one watched it fascinated. It was porkmaking by machinery, porkmaking by applied mathematics' (*The Jungle*, 1906). Little would seem to have changed since Upton Sinclair's time: 'Iowa's largest pork producer, Iowa Select Farms, has been using a cruel and excruciating method to kill thousands of pigs that have become commercially worthless due to the coronavirus pandemic. As is true for so much of what the agricultural industry does, the company's gruesome extermination of sentient animals that are emotionally complex and intelligent has been conducted entirely out of public view' (theintercept.com, 29 May). Worth noting too: 'A Tyson Foods pork processing plant in Iowa is shutting down after officials revealed an astonishing 22% of workers tested positive for COVID-19' (huffingtonpost.com, 29 May).

Post capitalism

The author of *Animal Farm*, George Orwell, commenting on the genesis of this work, stated: 'Men exploit animals in much the same way as the rich exploit the proletariat.' In the global capitalist system which robs, slaughters and degrades, socialists say: 'Cruelty to animals will go the way of all forms of cruelty, when a real civilised existence becomes a possibility to everyone' (*Socialist Standard*, February 1926).

Free Lunch

by Rigg

