

# socialist standard

September 2020

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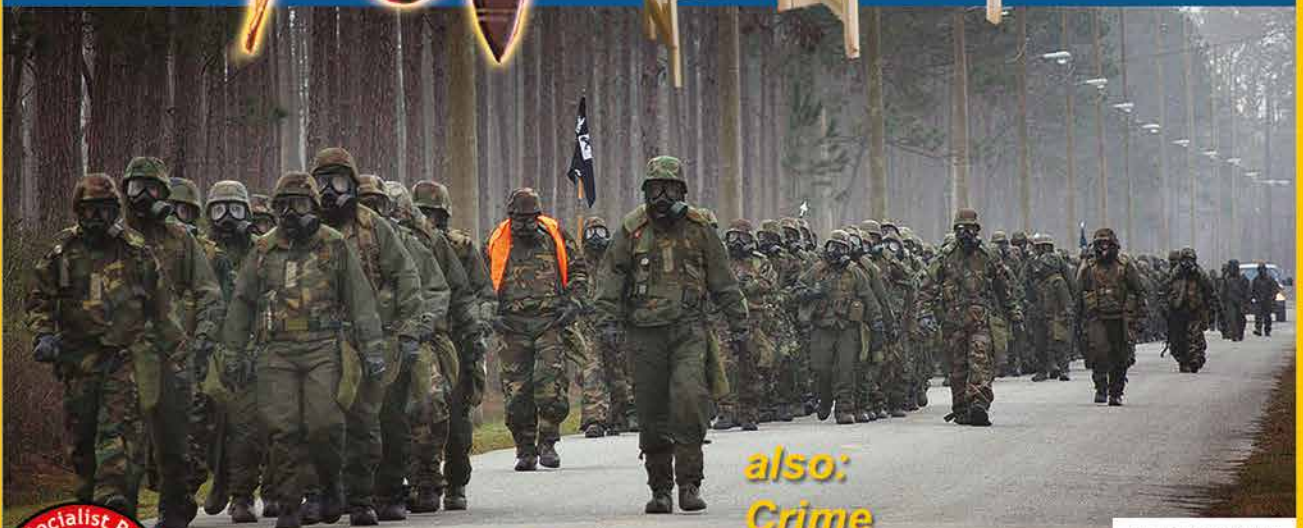
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Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement



## The Myth of Democratic Capitalism



also:  
**Crime  
Protests  
Imperialism**



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# socialist standard

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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'

## How real is democracy today?

A common boast made by capitalism's supporters is that free market capitalism is inherently democratic and that rights, such as the right to vote, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, necessarily go hand in hand with the freedom of the capitalists to invest and make profits. During the Cold War, Western workers were always reminded that whatever grievances they had about life under capitalism, they were lucky to have the vote and have their say, not like in the USSR and the other 'Socialist' countries. The words 'democracy' and 'democratic' are a necessary part of any aspiring capitalist politician's lexicon.

This prominence given to democracy masks the reality of workers' lives under capitalism.

Workers, who have no independent means of living, have to sell their physical and mental energies to an employer in order to acquire the necessities of life. The employers (or capitalists) who own the means of production and distribution will only employ workers if they have a prospect of making a profit. If not, workers

can face periods of unemployment and even destitution. When capitalists do hire workers they will attempt to extract the most value from the use of their labour power that they can get away with and keep their wage costs to a minimum. On the other hand, it is in the interests of the workers to obtain the highest wages they can. In their efforts to achieve this, workers have combined in trade unions and at times have withdrawn their labour to put pressure on the employers. It is the outcome of these struggles that determine the conditions of workers' lives. Although both the capitalists and the workers enjoy the same democratic rights, they do not have the same social power. Clearly, the capitalists, more often than not, are in a stronger position.

However, we must not read into this, as many on the Left do, that capitalist political democracy is a sham and that workers should have nothing to do with it. It needs to be pointed out that the workers were not handed their democratic rights on a plate, they had to struggle for them through their own organisations,

such as the Chartist movement in nineteenth-century Britain.

The freedom of assembly enables the workers to organise politically in their own interests and is invaluable in aiding the development of working-class political consciousness. The right to vote means that workers have the power to choose who will control the capitalist state machine. Up to now, they have used their votes to elect capitalist representatives in the mistaken belief that those representatives can run the capitalist system for the workers' benefit. They are invariably disappointed and in many instances this has led to political disillusionment and cynicism.

We urge workers to find out about the socialist case, which is that capitalism cannot work in their interests and that socialism is the only solution to the problems capitalism creates.

With this in mind, workers can then elect their own delegates with a mandate to abolish the private and state ownership of the means of living and replace it with democratic common ownership.

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# PATHFINDERS

## Two fingers to the virus

THE CONTINUING spikes in Covid cases around the world, in places where it was deemed vanquished or at least in retreat, start to resemble the physical appearance of the virus itself, with little trumpets erupting everywhere from its spherical surface. But what's also erupting is the trumpet fanfares of success as countries like India and Russia announce the mass production of vaccines they have supposedly developed for their home markets. How have Modi and Putin succeeded in leaving the rest of the world straggling behind them? Do they have better scientists than anyone else? Did they just get lucky?

In the case of India, it's just political spin from the nation's prime minister. "Not one, not two, as many as three coronavirus vaccines are being tested in India," Modi announced with a flourish in Delhi in August, as if announcing the breakthrough of the century. But you can describe anything as a vaccine and announce tests on it. "Along with mass-production, the roadmap for distribution of vaccine to every single Indian in the least possible time is also ready," he added with grandiose pomp but again without really saying anything.

Russia's president Putin went further, however, by announcing that a Covid vaccine had been medically approved and would go into mass production by October. They've called it Sputnik V, as a two-finger reminder to the western world that Russia was first into space in 1957 with the Sputnik satellite. Ignoring calls for a global combined effort, the Russian Health Ministry has released no details of the Phase 1 and 2 clinical trials it ran last month. As for Phase 3 trials, apparently they didn't run any.

Vaccine trials go in three distinct phases to check three distinct things: 1) will it kill or damage anyone (small test only), 2) does it do anything useful in any way at all (medium sample), and 3) does it do what we actually need it to do (big sample)? Paracetamol would pass the first two phases of clinical trials for the coronavirus. So would a gin and tonic. Almost anything would, apart from Trump's bleach. Phase 3 is the one that matters. Without that, you've basically got nothing. Or you've got worse than nothing, because you could make Covid stronger (New Scientist, 12 August - bit.ly/2E3t2MT). Diseases

and drugs vie in a constant arms race. If you attack a disease with a drug that's meant to kill it, and the disease wins, it's like Popeye getting a dose of spinach.

Vaccines are already under attack in social media, with anti-vaxxer messages outnumbering pro-vaccine posts on average by five to one, and a recent survey suggesting that, even if a vaccine is produced in the UK, up to 50 percent of the population might refuse to take it (New Scientist, 12 August - bit.ly/346Qsw2). Let the idiots die, you might think, the world has enough fools, but their anti-vaxxer idiocy could kill others if it prevents society vaccinating its way to the long-hoped-for herd immunity. And any vaccine touted as effective which turns out to be the opposite will only strengthen the antivaxxer lobby and risk extending the pandemic.

Of course the Russians might be right about their vaccine, though the lack of transparency is not encouraging. Even by capitalist standards, Putin is not a team player. He will certainly be hoping the vaccine works, so he can use it as an armlock on the West, just as he did with gas supplies to Ukraine. Things in Belarus have been kicking off lately, with the repulsive and patriarchal troll Lukashenko stage-managing yet another 80 percent election 'victory' despite only scoring 3 percent support in polls, and calling on Moscow for support in the face of the gigantic social protests that followed. A working vaccine would be just the leverage (Ras)Putin needs if he's considering an empire-building intervention into Belarus, as seemed a possibility when this went to press.

### Big Bang in Beirut

The August warehouse fire in Beirut had already attracted a lot of media attention. As the smoke plumed up over the dock area, volunteer firefighters and a paramedic went in on the ground. On a balcony blocks away, a French architect live-streamed the fire to his Facebook friends, a bit of excitement on an otherwise dull day. Little flashes in the smoke suggested fireworks going off, which added spice to the event. Then a stupendous explosion, and a shockwave flashed outwards, ringed by a fat white condensation cloud that was eerily redolent of a small nuclear detonation. Cladding and glass flew like autumn leaves off apartment blocks across the

city. The fire team was killed instantly. The architect, who thought he was at a safe distance, was also killed, and two hundred or so other people besides. The docks were obliterated, three hospitals destroyed, ships flipped, sunk or flung in pieces onto the land. The blast measured 3.3 on the Richter scale despite the force going mostly upwards. It was heard 160 miles away. It has been listed as the fifth most powerful, artificial, non-nuclear explosion in history.

Sympathetic city halls across the world draped themselves in the Lebanese flag, including Tel Aviv, though Israel and Lebanon are technically at war. As the fire burned out over the blast area, the recriminations started. How could nearly 3,000 tonnes of explosive ammonium nitrate have been kept for six years in a port warehouse without proper safety precautions, despite numerous warnings and six letters to judges, and without residents knowing about it? The conspiracy vultures descended to feast, but the simple answer was that people fucked up. The Lebanese cabinet resigned. The country's food supply, in a pandemic, had been virtually destroyed.

Ammonium nitrate is quite like potassium nitrate, or saltpetre, and is popular because it's cheap to make, good for fertilisers and, if you mix it with fuel oil, excellent for making bombs. Terrorists love it for this reason, which is why capitalist states are keen to phase it out. It's not supposed to explode by itself but if you don't store it right it will do, and has done repeatedly, killing thousands. Of the ten biggest explosions mentioned above, it was responsible for four.

We can't say people in socialism wouldn't use ammonium nitrate. We don't know. But we can pretty much guarantee that they wouldn't stuff thousands of tonnes of it next to flammable material in a forgotten warehouse for six years just because of a legal dispute over who should pay the port fees after the original shipowner went bankrupt. There are bound to be accidents in socialism too, but they wouldn't be because of arguments between jobsworths about who owed money to whom.

PJS

# ‘Made in Leicester’

People often associate sweatshop conditions in the clothing industry with Bangladesh or Cambodia but one consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic has been to reveal garment factories in Leicester which can very easily be described as sweatshops.

‘Labour abuses’ (breaches of labour laws) and sweatshop conditions are occurring across the UK’s garment manufacturing industries, campaigners warn. In the factories of Leicester, there are as many as 10,000 mostly immigrant workers who are reportedly paid as little as £3 an hour. During the pandemic many have been forced to work with no protective equipment, and it is said to have contributed to a spike in coronavirus cases that resulted in a second lock-down in the city.

Human rights barrister and leading expert on human trafficking, Parosha Chandran, said, ‘I think this is an example of the type of exploitation that has been going on up and down the country during Covid. If that’s the estimate of what’s happening in Leicester, then what’s happening in Birmingham? Or Nottinghamshire? Or Manchester? Or London? Modern slavery is not just confined to one place in the Midlands. It’s going on everywhere...’

A 2018 report found breaches of labour laws similar to those uncovered in Leicester in garment factories across Greater Manchester. Machinists reported being paid £4 an hour and said their payslips were doctored to make it look like they had worked fewer hours than they had actually put in. ‘The way the market is at the minute, it’s the person who produces the good cheapest who gets the order,’ one said.

‘Exactly the same labour abuses that the government and brands are professing shock and horror over in Leicester are happening at scale across the country,’ said Emily Kenway, an adviser at Focus on Labour Exploitation.

‘Again and again we see the same coercive practices impacting on the most vulnerable workers who have no way of getting their voices heard and who are forced to accept whatever conditions are pushed on them by their employers, who have little to fear from the authorities,’ said Thulsi Narayanasamy, a labour rights researcher.

The number of health and safety inspectors employed by the Health and Safety Executive has dropped by a third from 1,495 in 2009 to 978 in 2017, with funding reduced from £239m to £139m over the same period.

‘If employers know that they won’t be inspected, face penalties and lose business then you’re creating conditions for abuse,’ said Dominique Muller, senior campaigner at Labour Behind the Label.

## Downward pressure

There exists a relentless downward pressure exerted by the global fashion industry on the workers at the bottom of the supply chain. The resulting falling price paid to suppliers has led to a substantial decline in pay rates and working conditions over the past 10 years. Garment workers have been kept working in unsafe conditions for low pay by a fashion industry seeking to maximise its own profits. The buying practices of fast fashion include turning a blind eye to sub-contracting and allowing forced and unpaid overtime. These practices have encouraged the erosion of garment worker rights by employers.

The fashion industry profits from these breaches of labour law by their suppliers. Despite decades of government regulation and ‘fair trade’ policies, sweatshops have continued to prevail because of the introduction of a marketing model called ‘fast fashion’,

constantly changing clothes styles, designed for one night-out, destined for the charity shops the following morning. Consumers are buying more clothes and discarding them faster than ever. Clothes have become disposable throwaway products. Shoppers look for the lowest priced clothes and retail outlets look for larger profit margins. The knock-on effects of this in the supply chains are either accepted by consumers or obscured by marketing campaigns peddling ‘ethical’ sourcing.

Anna Bryher, advocacy director for the campaign group Labour Behind the Label, said: ‘Women at the bottom of supply chains bear the brunt of fashion’s unrelenting push to be fast and cheap...It’s obscene.’ She added: ‘Women making our clothes in Bangladesh are routinely and systematically abused and harassed.’

A recent report by a US Senate committee found Bangladesh was backsliding on garment workers’ rights. Union leaders faced intimidation, hampering their ability to investigate claims of threats and abuse, mostly of female workers.

The pressure for brands to get fashions from catwalks on to shoppers’ backs and deliver profits for investors, can lead to a rivalry to secure the cheapest source – a phenomenon referred to as ‘chasing the needle’. If wages rise and conditions improve in one region, companies look elsewhere to keep costs down. In Ethiopia, for example, wages are much lower than the rates paid in Bangladesh and it has led to the Ethiopian government making almost a virtue out of its low labour costs.

## Worker organisation

As shoppers have become more aware of labour abuses, companies have been forced to scrutinise labour practices at the various factories involved in manufacturing their products and committing themselves to addressing problems from fear of consumer boycotts. Such approaches obscure the importance of building worker power to counteract sweatshop conditions. Consumer campaigns are limited in their ability to lessen sweatshop conditions and non-respect of labour laws. Some boycotts have led companies to cancel contracts, leaving workers in a worse position, facing unemployment.

Prioritising projects that promote workers’ ability to organise collectively is crucial for securing better conditions. Worker-led efforts, rather than corporate- or consumer-led ones, shift the focus to the ideas, needs and collective action of the workers themselves. Workers self-organising, both inside or alongside trade unions, is critical to achieving freedom of association and collective bargaining. Instead of relying upon governments, corporations and consumers, worker organisation challenges the relationships of power and authority and lessens the risk of labour abuse.

Rubaiyat Hossain in her film, ‘Made in Bangladesh’ tells the story of Shimu Akhtar, a young woman making clothes for Western clothing companies whose indignation at the working conditions she is forced to endure leads her to try to unionise the factory. Hossain says she wanted to go against the stereotype of the poor, exploited factory worker.

‘I wanted to show that these women are active agents, fighting for their rights and demanding to be heard,’ she says. ‘Too many people think of Bangladeshi women as victims sitting behind a sewing machine, but it is thanks to female garment workers that Bangladesh is now a middle-income country. And these young women are not victims, they are often feisty, young, spirited women who are fearless and brave...’

ALJO

# A is for Alpha

The UK news media always has a bun fight over the annual August A-level results, but this year's turned into a bigger furore than usual. With schools closed due to Covid the exams had to be replaced by estimated grades based on the students' but also the schools' track records, in order to replicate the year-on-year average. Objections rapidly mounted that this 'locked in' existing biases which excluded talented outliers and underprivileged schools that had previously been making fast progress. When Scotland decided to rely on teacher assessments instead, predicted grades shot up well beyond what would normally be expected. Because of this well-meaning but blatant teacher bias, England refused to follow suit, prompting an even bigger row (BBC Online, 14 August - [bbc.in/3kSHsQK](https://www.bbc.com/news/education-57484444)).

It was an intriguing conundrum for the statisticians. There was no way to estimate grades that could be judged 'fair', because no algorithm could account for all biases and assumptions. But who says exam systems are fair anyway?

While disappointed students loudly complained about how they were 'let down by the system', and leftist opportunists immediately started screaming about 'justice for students', nothing was heard from the probably equal number of students who found themselves with better grades by not sitting the exam than they would have got if they'd sat it.

What everybody overlooked in the furore was that, of all the ways to assess what somebody knows about a subject, a competitive exam is probably the worst and the cruellest. Exams aren't a test of knowledge, they're a test of nerves.

Some students are ok with the exam regime. They're the



Alphas, just like in Huxley's *Brave New World*, cool, collected, well-adjusted, organised, and able to cope with competitive stress. They're most likely supported at home by motivated and well-off parents too. The exam system works for them just fine. In fact, it's designed for them.

But it doesn't work for those who dread exams like the dentist, the ones who don't get the emotional support, the private tuition, the helicopter parenting, the ones who come from poor backgrounds and grow up thinking that education's wasted on them, that they're just silly, stupid girls or boys and that they'll never amount to anything. Their main obstacle in any exam is fear of the exam itself. It doesn't matter what they know or how smart they are because they fall to pieces whenever they open an exam paper.

But that's also a victory for capitalism, because what keeps the system fit and trim is a working class who won't fight back because they've been labelled as losers and so they spend their entire lives blaming themselves for not measuring up.

Capitalist education isn't really education, it's a factory system for workers that has no regard for their hopes or passions as it shunts them along its inhuman conveyor belt into its inhuman mincing machine. This year, at least, some of them might have got a free pass because the belt broke.

PJS

## COOKING THE BOOKS

### What is poverty?

'Huge rise in destitution for the poorest' ran the headline in the Times (27 July) reporting on research by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research. According to this think-tank:

'Destitution is defined as income that is so low that a household is likely to lack essential provision of shelter, food, heating, lighting, clothing/footwear and basic toiletries in the immediate future'.

Destitution is a word socialists have tended to prefer to describe the situation of 'the poor' as the word poverty has a wider meaning.

In fact capitalism can be said to be based on poverty in that the vast majority of the population does not have enough of their own resources to live; as a result they are obliged by economic necessity to sell their mental and physical energies to an employer in exchange for money to buy what they need. In this sense all those in the working class are poor; it is part of the definition of the working class.

Other definitions of poverty don't take the analysis as far back as this, but assume that most workers do have a more or less steady job and so do have resources to satisfy their basic needs. This is not entirely unreasonable

as most workers do have a job and the regular income it provides and so are not deprived of some or all of the basic necessities of life. They are not destitute.

Academic, legal and popular definitions of poverty start from this point and define the poor as those who, for one reason or another, do not have enough money to satisfy all their basic necessities. In this sense most workers aren't poor. Only those on very low wages or who are unable to find an employer or who are unable to work are poor. In other words, essentially what the NIESR mean by destitution.

Ever since the sixteenth century the state has had to make some provision for people in this position. For centuries it was called the Poor Law; today it's Income Support as the minimum level to which the state will bring up a person's income. When Marx was writing and right up until the 1920s such people were officially called 'paupers'. Marx regarded one section of paupers as part of what he called capitalism's 'industrial reserve army', i.e., that section of the working class that could be called on to serve as wage-workers in periods of capitalist expansion but which had to be maintained by the state in times of contraction. The NIESR report confirms

that the number of the destitute does rise in a period of contraction (even though the present one is government-induced rather than a part of the boom/slump cycle).

It is not just socialists who feel the need to distinguish between poverty and destitution. Reformists have come up with the concept of 'relative poverty': 'those who can scrape by on the basics but who cannot afford the normal activities and opportunities that average earners have access to' (Big Issue, 21 February 2019). In Britain you are considered to be in this position if you are in a household whose income is less than 60 percent of the median average (i.e., of the mid-point of the range of incomes).

This concept has a number of drawbacks. First, it assumes that those with incomes above this level don't have restricted opportunities. Second, it's a moving poverty line as a household can find itself reclassified as not being (or being) in poverty without their income changing simply because the average income has. It is probably better called 'relative low income'. Still, according to the government's own statistics some 14 million people, or over 20 percent of the population, are in this position. Which is quite an admission and a condemnation of capitalism by its own standards.

# Selfishness

A common objection to the realisation of socialism is that it's a nice idea, but contrary to human nature. This presupposes that there is a human quality fixed for all time acting as a prophylactic to prevent people collectively achieving a more benign society. Motivated by self-interest, individuals will act against the common interest.

There is more than a little anecdotal evidence for this being the case. Many a survey has declared that voters are prepared to pay higher taxes to better fund the NHS. Come election day, secluded in the polling booth, many then vote for the party offering tax cuts.

Infallible proof surely that human nature, a secular version of original sin, mitigates against the possibility of socialism. If people won't countenance a modest tax increase for the general good of society, then they certainly won't storm the citadels of capital.

The raising or lowering of taxes, of course, actually changes nothing in terms of how capitalism functions. A reformist party raising taxes does draw down from surplus value in the short term, while lowering them reduces this social tapping. The economic health of capitalism largely determines which of those policies will actually be pursued.

Socialists point out the human species only survived because for most of pre-history, amounting to hundreds of thousands of years, cooperation was fundamental to survival. Human nature, as with any animal's nature, is posited upon survival, the factor that determines how that nature manifests.

Human nature, therefore, rather than being fixed, is flexible, shaped by circumstances. In a society driven by competition, pitching individuals against each other and driven by the expectation of accumulation, human nature reflects this.

Even acknowledging such being the case does not entail a single, predictable expression. Self-interest may lead a person to say one thing, favour tax increase for the NHS, and yet do the opposite by voting for a tax decrease. The former offers the benefit of social kudos, the latter a perceived personal financial benefit.

Conversely, matching action to sentiment, a vote for tax increase may be a recognition, tacit or otherwise, that self-interest, in this case health care, is best served by having it properly funded and available if and when the individual needs it. A recognition that a social good is a personal good.

Both viewpoints are perfectly reasonable within the context of capitalism. Wanting to move beyond capitalism, though, requires the individual to recognise that their best interests are served through developing a society based on democratic common ownership of the means of producing to meet need rather than profit.

While the NHS is not a socialist institution it does have a social ethos at its base. In principle, people are treated according to immediate need not their ability to pay. That ethos is massively constrained by having to operate within capitalist parameters that limits the availability of treatments and their further development.

It is possible for an individual to be selfish and look only to



satisfying personal needs. Perhaps, if not rich but comfortably off, it can seem there is no real imperative to pursue socialism. A moral case could be made highlighting the poverty of others, but a little charity and the conscience can be assuaged. Hardly an imperative for action.

However, comfortably off can quite quickly become discomfort. Capitalism is persistent but inherently unstable. Economic crisis can very rapidly impoverish swathes of the once well to do. Then there is the constant threat of war as competition between nations for economic advantage becomes bellicose.

Climate change and pandemics are exacerbated by the need for profit overriding the need of people for measures, and expenditure, to deal with them. Is this because capitalists are selfish? Probably some, maybe many are, but even if they weren't it would make no difference. Capitalism can only operate by accumulating surplus value, profit.

In an ideal capitalist world in which everyone had become shareholders they would have to be selfish enough to want the companies their shares were in to prosper at the expense of competitors. Even without a parasitic capitalist class, fundamentally nothing would change while profit remained the driving force behind production.

Not that capitalism could exist without a capitalist class and it is in their selfish best interests to continue making profits. Or is it? Depends on how short or long term a view selfishness takes. Even a trillionaire ultimately does not benefit from the earth succumbing to global warming, increasing occurrences of pandemics or global military conflict erupting from trade wars. Even arms dealers perish.

For the vast majority, the world's workers, it would serve them well to be selfish. If each individual decides he or she does not want to be frazzled by rising temperatures, left gasping for breath by the latest zoonotic virus, blown up by insurgents or air strikes, worried by financial insecurity, fretting about the future for the children and grandchildren et al, then become greedy.

Never mind about fiddling with taxes, decide to take the whole world. Socialist selfishness can only be realised through each selfish individual working in concert with every other one. A person's own welfare and interests, rather than altruism, is a concrete starting point, a foundation on which to construct the socialist case.

Of course, selfishness can be negative and even destructive, but it is not necessarily a barrier to cooperative social progress. Human nature, in so far as it can be identified and defined, is not a fixed determinant of human behaviour. If there is an aspect of it that's a problem for socialists it's not selfishness but caution, a reluctance to leave behind the known, however unappealing, and step towards the unknown no matter how promising it seems.

Socialism has to become more than a nice idea and accepted as a necessity. If self-interest, selfishness, can play a part in that, all well and good. Then human nature can do what human nature does, adapt to a new world of cooperation. Just as it has done for the vast majority of human existence.

DAVE ALTON

## UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

### LONDON

**North London branch.** Meets 3rd Thurs. 8pm at Torriano Meeting House, 99 Torriano Ave, NW5 2RX. Contact: Chris Dufton 020 7609 0983 [nlb.spgb@gmail.com](mailto: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](mailto:spgb@worldsocialism.org)

### MIDLANDS

**West Midlands regional branch.** Meets last Sun. 3pm (check before attending). Contact: Stephen Shapton. 01543 821180. Email: [stephenshapton@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:stephenshapton@yahoo.co.uk).

### NORTH

#### North East Regional branch.

Contact: P. Kilgallon, c/o Head Office, 52 Clapham High Street, SW4 7UN.

**Lancaster branch.** Meets 2nd Sun (Jan 3rd Sun), 3pm, Friends Meeting House, Meeting House Lane. Ring to confirm: P. Shannon, 07510 412 261, [spgb.lancaster@worldsocialism.org](mailto:spgb.lancaster@worldsocialism.org).

**Manchester branch.** Contact: Paul Bennett, 6 Burleigh Mews, Hardy Lane, M21 7LB. 0161 860 7189.

**Bolton.** Contact: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589.

**Cumbria.** Contact: Brendan Cummings, 19 Queen St, Millom, Cumbria LA18 4BG.

**Doncaster.** Contact: Fredi Edwards, [fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk)

### SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

**Kent and Sussex regional branch.** Meets 2nd Sun. 2pm at The Muggleton Inn, High Street, Maidstone ME14 1HJ. Contact: [spgb.ksrb@worldsocialism.org](mailto:spgb.ksrb@worldsocialism.org).

**South West regional branch.** Meets 3rd Sat. 2pm at the Railway Tavern, 131 South Western Road, Salisbury SP2 7RR. Contact: Ray Carr, Flat 1, 99 Princess Rd, Poole, BH12 1BQ. 01202 257556 or 07929627689.

**Brighton.** Contact: Anton Pruden, [anton@pruden.me](mailto:anton@pruden.me)

**Canterbury.** Contact: Rob Cox, 4 Stanhope Road, Deal, Kent, CT14 6AB.

**Luton.** Contact: Nick White, 59 Heywood Drive, LU2 7LP.

**Cornwall.** Contact: Harry Sowden, 16 Polging Lane, Troon, Camborne, TR14 9DY. 01209 219293.

**East Anglia.** Contact: David Porter, Eastholme, Bush Drive, Eccleson-on-Sea, NR12 0SF. 01692 582533. Richard Headicar, 42 Woodcote, Firs Rd, Hethersett, NR9 3JD. 01603 814343.

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# MATERIAL WORLD

## Vaccine development: another market failure

*'There is just not enough profit margin in it for pharma companies. They live by profits and the rules of capitalism. And capitalism has no interest in human beings other than as consumers' (Nobel laureate and immunologist Professor Peter Doherty, Sydney Morning Herald, 13 April).*

THE PHARMACEUTICAL corporations would have us believe that without their investments in scientific research, millions of people would not benefit from the medicine they sell. These businesses are built upon a business model of maximising shareholder value — and hinge on short-term returns to seek maximum profits so their investors can achieve higher prices for their stocks and pursue higher returns for their dividends. We are told that without the pressure from competition and the promise of riches, drug companies would not invest in research.

Capitalists imagine a world in which free enterprise and free markets promote a race to the top but this isn't quite how things are in practice. It may sound counter-intuitive but the laws of capitalism deliberately restrict innovation, information and knowledge. Many in the pharmaceutical industry are bound by non-compete agreements in their employment contracts which prevent employees when switching jobs from using prior experience to make meaningful contributions to a new employer. Patent protection allows the patent holder to charge high fees for the direct use or licensing of their discovery and to sue anyone who doesn't buy this permission. Competitors are discouraged from trying to improve on products, knowing they would need legal permission and considerable time and money is spent on acquiring such permission. So the patent system shrinks the overall pool of innovators, slowing down progress.

Public health experts have warned for years that the world is at risk of a major pandemic, and the drug corporations showed little interest in preparation until this latest outbreak of COVID-19 offered an opportunity to rake in government subsidies and enjoy profits with minimal risk. Governments have eliminated many risks that had dissuaded drug companies from vaccine investments by bankrolling research, sponsoring clinical trials, and reducing liability for drug corporations.

Back in 2016, doctors at the Texas Children's Hospital Center for Vaccine Development created a potential vaccine for one deadly strain of coronavirus which they believed could be effective against the strain we face now but the

project stalled when it struggled to secure funding for human trials. The lead researcher, Dr Hotez, told NBC, 'We've had some conversations with big pharma companies in recent weeks about our vaccine, and literally one said, 'Well, we're holding back to see if this thing comes back year after year.'''

It is business logic which reflects the belief that vaccines for recurring seasonal illnesses, like the flu, are the more attractive investment. They promise a client base that can be mined over and over again. Capitalism steers R&D towards the largest profit in the shortest amount of time.

In 2017 a plan to speed up the development and approval of vaccines for priority diseases such as MERS and SARS, both of them coronaviruses, was put forward by EU officials on the Innovative Medicines Initiative (IMI), a public-private partnership, but it was rejected by industry representatives of the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries. Informed sources commented that rather than compensating for market failures by speeding up the development of medicine, as per its remit, the IMI has been 'more about business-as-usual market priorities' and that the influence of pharmaceutical companies has led IMI's agenda to becoming dominated by industry priorities, and to the sidelining of poverty-related and neglected diseases, including coronaviruses. Drug companies have historically pleased investors by promoting vaccine development projects during disease outbreaks, then quietly dropping them later. Had there been more sustained interest, researchers would have more tools for combating the current outbreak.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the workings of capitalist economics, laying bare the pharmaceutical industry. When faced with a global threat, one would expect worldwide cooperation and collaboration to contain it. The United Nations, International Red Cross and others said it was a 'moral imperative' that everyone have access to a 'people's vaccine.' Sadly, such aspirations are unenforceable, despite the launching of some international initiatives.

While the World Health Organization

has called for a COVID-19 'patents pool' where intellectual property rights would be surrendered so pharmaceuticals could freely share data and technical knowledge and numerous participating countries have begun revising their licensing laws to allow them to suspend intellectual property rights, the response from the industry has been cool. Pfizer and some other major drug makers say they oppose suspending patent rights for potential COVID-19 vaccines.

The UK and the US refuse to support the WHO initiative and are more interested in siding with big pharmaceutical corporations than turning vaccine research into a genuinely collective endeavour. For the British and American governments the patent system is sacrosanct and they appear determined not to upset their own pharmaceutical corporations or the financial sector that makes substantial returns from these companies, which spend more money on share buybacks than on researching drugs. Now, a new term has entered our lexicon — 'vaccine nationalism.'

National governments are neglecting the most effective and safe route to discovering speedy cures for coronavirus: by forgoing corporate profitability and intellectual property rights in favour of global cooperation through open and shared research.

The minority interests of economic and financial groups has placed profits for themselves above the common good. The chaos of the market must be superseded by a more rational system of planning — a socialist system, where drugs are produced to meet the needs of humanity. When it comes to the crunch, pharmaceutical companies treat healthcare as a commodity. For the pharmaceutical companies Covid-19 is a business opportunity.

Our competitive capitalist market is not a suitable approach for solving the problem. Socialism would apply an open, collaborative strategy to coronavirus vaccine development to assure a safe and effective vaccine will be made accessible to all and it would speed up the process of discovery as well.

**ALJO**

# Capitalism: incompatible with democracy

Capitalism's relationship to democracy is similar to a conversation in a film set in apartheid South Africa, where a lawyer addressing a client described the relationship between the law and justice in general as being similar to distant cousins who were not on speaking terms. Capitalism, as we know, is a world-wide system. However, the type of political system that underpins it differs in various parts of the world. In many places it operates on the basis of what are clearly totalitarian regimes, although even here terms such as 'Peoples' Assembly', as in China, try to create the illusion that it contains democratic features. The dominant political system for organising capitalism is the mostly Western mode of liberal democracy (LD). It is this system that we will focus on here as it claims to be the only democratic system on offer, and organisations such as the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and National Endowment for Democracy attempt to export and promote this model to other parts of the world.

It seems that there is a widely held belief that capitalism and democracy go together almost as well as bread and butter and that therefore totalitarian regimes are seen as something other than capitalist. China and similar systems are labelled, quite incorrectly of course, as 'Communist'. This linking of capitalism with democracy seems to be contradictory when one considers that it is based on the minority ownership and control of the means of producing and distributing wealth; meaning of course that the majority are separated from those means and therefore from any real control over their lives. So immediately the system of LD defines democracy in very limited terms. It is clearly undemocratic in terms of wealth production and distribution but claims to be democratic on the basis that on the political level it allows for a multi-party political system where a majority of the population, restricted generally only by age qualification, can vote political parties in and out of government, which normally occurs every four or five years. So the general opinion is that this is more democratic than the parts of the world that are governed by one-party states.

However, it can also be argued that this multi-party system does have advantages for a smoother running of capitalism. To begin with, the state can be described as little more than an executive committee to ensure the overall interests of the minority who monopolise the means of living. If a particular government is seen to be failing in this respect, normally due to some problem with the economy, those who hold economic power have at their disposal an alternative to take its place, and generally they have enough control over the prevailing ideas in existence to persuade the majority to vote in line with their thinking. So a multi-party system is a good arrangement for the minority capitalist class. Secondly, it is probably less costly in economic terms not to have to resort to maintaining the kind of state apparatus needed to support a totalitarian

state. As the majority are convinced that they live in a free and democratic society, control over the population is easier.

## Illusion of Political Democracy

However, it can be argued that even the limited democracy allowed for in the LD system is a sham. Whilst LD does allow for multiple political parties for the electorate to choose between, perhaps there is less difference than many might think between a one-party state and a situation where multiple political parties exist but stand for more or less the same thing. For example, there is little difference in real terms between the Democrats or Republicans in the United States or between the parties who might reasonably be expected to compete for government in places such as Germany, France or Italy. Here we are merely considering differences limited to the running of capitalism and not anything more radical. In the years running up to the election in December 2019

the situation in Britain was arguably somewhat different and so is worthy of examination.

Margaret Thatcher once suggested that one of her major accomplishments had been Tony Blair. It seemed that the Labour Party had been moving rightwards prior to Blair but it was under his leadership that the concept of New Labour really began to take shape. The policies advocated by this seemingly new version of the Labour Party meant that it was now in a position to challenge and perhaps end the Conservative Party's long reign of political power

in Britain. It was now seen by those who mattered most to be a party fit to take power and run capitalism in the right way. Things radically changed in 2015 when, after Labour's defeat in the general election of that year, a subsequent leadership election led, much to the surprise of most people, to the election of Jeremy Corbyn, a long standing left-winger.

Whilst the background to these events is of interest, the relevant point to be teased out here is that the Labour Party under a left reformist programme was a rather different animal and definitely not one the capitalist class would be willing to accept as suitable for forming a government. From almost the moment he was elected there were moves to discredit his leadership abilities and most definitely his suitability to be a prospective Prime Minister; that was apart from personal attacks and for good measure his dress sense. The anti-Corbyn campaign was mainly administered by the mass media but was also supported by many of those close to the top of Corbyn's own party including a substantial number of Labour MPs, so much so that after only about a year as leader Corbyn had to seek re-election. Despite all of this the Labour Party gave the Conservative Party a good run for their money in the snap general election called by Theresa May in 2017.



If a fairly recently leaked report into the internal strife in the Labour Party is anywhere near accurate, the surprisingly good showing of the 2017 Labour election campaign was the last thing that many near the top of the Labour Party wanted. Those who were totally opposed to the elected leader of their own party had to wait until the end of 2019 to achieve their goal when a disastrous election result for Labour signalled the end for Corbyn and led to another leadership election early in 2020. The election of Sir Keir Starmer who has been described as 'soft left' is probably seen as the beginning of the process to return the Labour Party to a situation where it can be viewed by those who matter in the capitalist system as a party fit to form an alternative government if the need arises.

This points out something about the level of democracy within capitalism. LD may be a multi-party system but to have much or even any chance of gaining political power the policies put forward have to be inside a very limited framework. A party needs to operate in very narrow confines even when it is only concerned with running capitalism. Take for example the Labour Party's slogan for the 2019 General election '*For the many not the few*'. That slogan, along with the way in which the Labour Party under Corbyn thought they could administer capitalism, not only sounded the alarm bells for much of the capitalist class but also caused dissent for many in the hierarchy of the Labour Party who saw even this kind of mild reformist programme for running capitalism as meaning they would very likely be unelectable despite the fact that they performed quite well in 2017.

By 2019 the Brexit issue was more at the forefront of the campaigns. Some have argued that the programme put forward in 2019 was much less radical than those of the 1960s and 70s. Following on from the Blair governments the dominant attitude of many in the Labour Party was that to win an election they had to advocate policies that either mirrored or were at least not that far removed from those on offer by the Conservative Party. The important issue now was not even trying to represent the many but who could run capitalism to the benefit of the minority who really mattered. After all, the only time that Labour had been in power in over forty years was the Blair administrations. Elected in 1997, the prime ministerial role was passed over to Gordon Brown in 2007 who was then defeated by Cameron's Conservatives in 2010, following another periodic capitalist economic crisis in 2008. To be blunt, the Blair governments were more or less conservative in everything but name. So the last Labour government that was elected with something close to a traditional Labour programme was way back in 1974. Many of course will blame this on neo-liberalism but that is just capitalism operating in the only way it can.

As pointed out previously, LD has advantages over more authoritarian systems for running a society based on the rule by and for a privileged minority. As it is based on a multi-party political system it manages to create the impression that people live in a free and democratic society, thus making it easier to manage any opposition to it. For people have little to object to as they seemingly have the right to vote governments in and out of power and the right to protest and there exists a media which is seen as being independent of the state.

However, the right to vote on its own is no guarantee of democracy. As for the freedom to protest, whilst as with voting it is an important right, history has tended to show that whilst there have been many protests on many issues they have changed very little and fundamental change needs more than just protest movements, especially as they normally focus on

single issue campaigns. As for the media such as television and the press, whilst it is, in theory, free from the state it is a powerful weapon in the hands of capitalism.

## Managing Democracy

As capitalism operating under LD permits a limited form of democracy it needs to find a way of making sure that it can control the majority who are divorced from ownership. It needs a mechanism to replace the outward repressive state apparatus generally found in totalitarian societies, in order to maintain a compliant society; otherwise the democratic practices it does allow could be used by a politically conscious population to overturn the rule of capital. This is where the work of Chomsky (*Manufacturing Consent*) or more recently a book entitled *Managing Democracy, Managing Consent* edited by Rebecca Fisher come in very useful. This process could also be termed as the Construction of Reality. This is not a form of conspiracy theory where a group of powerful individuals meet and make certain plans to hold the population in check but is the natural outcome of a system of minority control operating with limited democratic rights which need to be controlled within.

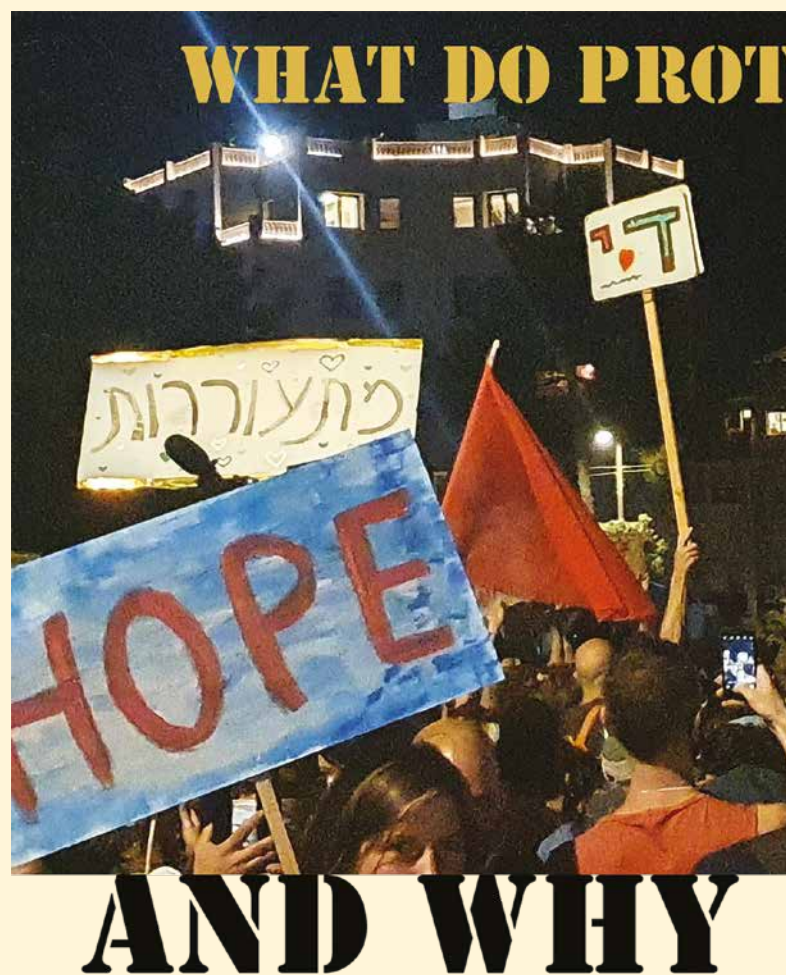
To begin with, it is stating the obvious to say that in a capitalist society the means of communication are owned and controlled by members of the capitalist class who have no interest whatsoever in undermining their system. Not surprisingly as in capitalism the tendency to monopoly is an unstoppable force the media is owned and controlled by very few companies. This is highlighted by a report published in 2019 by the Media Reform Coalition on the ownership of the media in the UK. This states that just three companies, Rupert Murdoch's News UK, Daily Mail Group and Reach, the publisher of the Mirror titles, dominate 83 percent of the national newspaper market. This is up from the figure of 71 percent only four years earlier. When online readership is included it means that five companies – News UK, Daily Mail Group, Reach, the Guardian and Telegraph control nearly 80 percent of the market. To quote from the Media Reform Coalition:

'We believe that concentration in news and information markets in particular has reached endemic levels in the UK and that we urgently need effective remedies. Concentrated ownership creates conditions in which wealthy individuals and organisations can amass vast political and economic power and distort the media landscape to suit their interests.'

From time to time media outlets may question the way that capitalism is operating or favour one particular political party over the rest but any criticism they make within the boundaries which suggest that capitalism is the only game in town. In line with all capitalist companies, the corporations who own the mass media exist on a profit priority basis and much of their revenue comes from selling advertising space to their fellow wealthy corporations. The income from this source is estimated to be around 75 percent of a newspaper's total income, even for the so-called quality press such as the *Guardian* or *Independent*. So there is no wish to bite the hands that feed them. (The source for much of the information on the media is Media Lens).

*(continued next month.)*

RDC



Just what is wrong with the world today, so wrong that there are huge numbers of protests in numerous countries with millions of people crying out for change? Some of these protests get much publicity, others in different parts of the world are rarely heard of except locally. A brief search on the internet for protests will supply reams of information from countries many people from the West will not be able to point to on a map, let alone be aware of the protest and its purpose – but they are there in great numbers and appear to be growing annually.

### Nuclear Weapons

Different generations may have different perspectives as to the significance of any particular protest but as each generation grows older they can look back and possibly/probably have a different view from those of younger generations who are viewing the same events but as historical events. If we recall the early days of CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) and the 'Ban The Bomb' banners, initially started by Bertrand Russell all those decades ago with the aim of stopping development of nuclear weapons and protecting the planet and humanity, and then we give serious thought to the years in between then and now, what do we find? In those six to seven decades research and development of such weapons has continued and a significant number of countries, including the UK, continue to produce and sell them at great profit. The humble atomic bomb of 1945 has now become a bomb of the past, superseded by incendiaries of much greater capacity. Since then waste nuclear materials have become a favoured product for use in depleted uranium weapons as used in Iraq for example.

Following on from the initial CND campaign, which clearly hasn't seen success yet, came more generalised protests such as the Greenham Common women's attempts to bring ongoing attention to the US Airforce base from where nuclear weapons were being deployed.

Year on year since the first atom bombs were dropped by the United States on those two towns in Japan, more countries of the world either developed or simply bought those weapons from countries willing to sell them for great profits.

And where are we now? How has protest affected the decisions of those in power to pay attention to calls for abolishing nuclear weapons? Some talks to limit the kind and size and numbers – talks but no action to speak of.

### Global Warming/Climate Change

Around six decades ago there were strong warnings regarding the coming problems for the globe connected to human-

made global warming. At that time the emphasis of growing movements and writers was on the rape and pillage of the worldwide environment and the urgent need to protect the planet for future generations. The result? A year on year increase of emissions, increased degradation of forests, over use of water leading to the increased disappearance of aquifers and huge increases in the number of migrants having no choice but to move away from such diversities adversities as drought, gradual inundation and loss of land for basic food stuffs.

Recently we have witnessed the Extinction Rebellion and global protests with the expected kick-back from media entrenched with the status quo. This topic now seems to be taken more seriously by many more individuals as time slips by but the action required against it is not being taken. Warning after warning is signalled telling of the enormity of the problem and still production for profit continues regardless whilst continuing to ignore the degradation of the planetary environment and the plight of climate refugees.

### Racism

Surely no one now can be totally unaware of the history of slavery and the following knock-on effects continuously displayed and currently witnessed in the Black Lives Matter protest movement. Whilst the previous two paragraphs related to all life on Earth this topic reveals the division specifically between black and white individuals as a result of the despicable history of European colonialism. The evidence is clear that the legacy of colonialism of one form or another has left indigenous and black and brown people in positions of severe inequality. Both the US and UK's statistics reveal inequalities in employment – from the securing of a job interview to rate of pay, education, housing, stop and search by police and especially imprisonment where numbers by percentage of population are highly disproportionate.

# TESTS SIGNIFY?



# SO MANY?

This protest has been alive for generations. Now we continue to witness an ongoing series of horrific deaths – murders(?) – of black individuals who happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Of course there will be protests. Such an urgent matter does need to be addressed but this isn't what is happening.

## Why are there protests?

It becomes more apparent as time goes by that huge sections of the global population are standing up and shouting because they want to be seen and heard calling for action different from what their leaders are offering. Democracy, so-called, as it is displayed around the world is obviously not democratic enough for many. Voting for a candidate once every four or five years, for example, and then hoping that something will be achieved eventually is surely not how most would want it. They know their voice is not heard and is not likely to be heard or acted upon.

In one way or another all these various voices of protest seek to improve human society. Let's assume that at some point one or more of the objectives are resolved to the general satisfaction of the protest's supporters. Will those supporters be satisfied or will they then discover another problem to be solved? Recognising that any move in the direction of satisfying the protesters is likely to be insignificant, how long are supporters, or even generations of supporters, prepared to continue with their fight against what they consider to be wrong? Many protest movements have evolved over the years and are still unresolved. Some will be prepared to compromise and accept crumbs from the table leaving future protesters to attempt to take the protest further.

Reformism seems to have become acceptable to many as a way to achieve a particular end step by step but consider the track record of another attempt to improve things within the system, trade unions, a collective of workers pressing for

improved conditions, better pay and other concessions from employers. Some will look back at the headier days some decades ago but the reality is that there are fewer union members year by year as new rules and regulations from governments are applied plus the downgrading of the general work force following massive offshoring of manufacturing. The bottom line is profit for employers and companies, not improved conditions for workers.

It should be noted that one of the issues referred to above, that of global warming, has suffered for years now from the added effects of reformism. Recall the long list of COP meetings (Conference of the Parties) established in 1985 supposedly in order to address the pending global climate problem. So many agreements to no avail, so much negative influence from corporations, so many more emissions, including those from the thousands of people attending from all parts of the planet, as delegates, media, protesters – and every meeting registering more annual negative effects.

## Democracy

Current systems of 'democracy' around the world are seen by many citizens as worthless and lacking in what's required of a true democracy, thus leading to increasing numbers of protests annually. All of what we can refer to as 'single issues' have relevance to any debate, however in isolation they face the power of the opposition, that is the power of the wealthy, the corporations, the capitalists and our elected representatives in hock to the capitalists. Many things are not allowed to change because that would affect ongoing profits. The capitalist system is far from democratic and must be overcome. Rather than be divided by all such single issues what is required is that as members of a global population we recognise that all of these issues are just parts of the whole, all should be gathered together under the umbrella of a true and inclusive democracy.

JANET SURMAN



# Super-profits and the labour aristocracy

*We continue our series debunking the view that workers in the First World live off the backs of those in the Third World by examining in further detail Lenin's mistaken theory.*

Lenin's theory of the 'weakest link' led him to believe a 'socialist proletarian revolution' would most likely occur first in parts of the world still transitioning towards full capitalism, not the advanced capitalist countries themselves. Partly, this arose from his belief that a stratum of workers in the latter – the 'labour aristocracy' – had been 'bribed' into supporting capitalism out of imperialist 'super-profits' produced by a super-exploited colonial workforce.

In *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917), Lenin quotes the arch-imperialist, Cecil Rhodes, reminiscing about a meeting of the unemployed he once attended. The discontent he encountered there convinced Rhodes that Britain should expand its empire, thereby improving the economic prospects of British workers, in order to avert a civil war.

Yet, incongruously, Lenin states elsewhere in his book (Ch. 4) that if capitalism could 'raise the living standards of the masses, who in spite of the amazing technical progress are everywhere still half-starved and poverty-stricken ... it would not be capitalism'. This prompts the question – why then would the capitalists go to such lengths to raise the living standards of some workers by 'bribing' them?

Lenin's definitive statement on the subject appears in the 1920 Preface of *Imperialism*:

*'Obviously out of such enormous super-profits (since they are obtained over and above the profits which capitalists squeeze out of the workers of their "own" country) it is possible to bribe the labour aristocracy. And the capitalists of the "advanced" countries are bribing them, they bribe them in a thousand different ways, direct and indirect. This stratum of workers-turned-bourgeois, or the labour aristocracy, who are quite philistine in their mode of life, in the size of their earnings and in their entire outlook, is the principal prop of the Second International, and in our days, the principal social (not military) prop of the bourgeoisie. For they are the real agents of the bourgeoisie in the working-class movement, the labour lieutenants of the capitalist class, real vehicles of reformism and chauvinism.'*

Prior to the First World War, as Eric Hobsbawm notes, Lenin did not really make a connection between the 'labour aristocracy' and imperialist 'super-profits' as an explanation for the reformist outlook of workers. Rather, he seems to have attributed this to the influence of certain 'petty bourgeois' tendencies becoming more prominent due to a changing occupational structure and the development of a purely 'economist trade union movement fragmenting the working class into 'selfish' ("petty bourgeois") segments each pursuing its interest at the expense of others' (*Monthly Review*, December 2012).

It was the impact of the First World War and Lenin's profound sense of shock induced by the various Social Democratic parties (comprising the Second International) abandoning all pretence of international solidarity and aligning themselves with their respective capitalist governments in the cause of an imperialist bloodbath, which jolted him into further developing his idea of the labour aristocracy. That war, he reasoned, was the quintessential expression of the capitalist rivalries inherent in imperialism. By supporting it, the parties of the Second International betrayed their own inadvertent support for the imperialist

project.

Imperialism had been condoned on the grounds that, by imposing capitalist development on the newly colonised countries, this would hasten the advent of socialism. However, behind the superficial rationalisations portraying imperialism as some kind of objectively 'civilising' and progressive project there lurked ulterior motives.

Lenin argued that by materially benefitting from the imperialist project, by increasing their living standards at the expense of the colonial workforce, the labour aristocracy comprising the 'principal prop of the Second International', found their appetite for socialist revolution had been considerably dulled if not altogether extinguished. Thus did they succumb to the politics of 'opportunism' – or reformism – and, in their leadership role as representatives of the wider working class, they set about persuading the latter to adopt this course of action as well, in the process abandoning their earlier commitment to socialist revolution. Indeed, reformism itself could likewise be construed as a form of bribery insofar as it held out the prospect of workers improving their circumstances within the framework of capitalism itself, thereby shoring it up.

## Earlier theories

The term 'labour aristocracy' was originally coined by the anarchist, Mikhail Bakunin, in 1872. Bakunin felt it was not the organised and more skilled workers within the proletariat that were its most radical elements but, rather, those lower down the labour hierarchy: 'To me the flower of the proletariat is not, as it is to the Marxists, the upper layer, the aristocracy of labor, those who are the most cultured, who earn more and live more comfortably than all the other workers' (*On the International Workingmen's Association and Karl Marx*, 1872).

This, in a way, anticipated Lenin's view that revolution was more likely to break out first in the poorer countries of the world. In both instances, the underlying (and rather mechanistic) assumption seems to have been that the more intense the poverty experienced, the more likely are people to revolt.

However, this raises the question – what are the people supposedly revolting for? A violent uprising, however understandable, does not of itself constitute a social revolution if all it does is to replace one ruling class with another. Social revolution means a fundamental change in the basis of society irrespective of how it is achieved.

Bakunin's basic argument has been endorsed by others – like Frantz Fanon, whose seminal work *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), contended that it was the lumpenproletariat and Third World peasantry who, precisely because of their social distance from the capitalist mainstream and its dominant ideology, embodied the greatest revolutionary potential within modern capitalism. Similar sentiments have been expressed with regard to the newly-identified 'precariat' of more recent times.

Marx's opinion of the 'lumpenproletariat' contrasted starkly with Bakunin's. Living largely outside of the constraints of formal wage labour and subject to the vagaries of desperate poverty, the lumpenproletariat, by virtue of its very life situation, was more likely to become a 'bribed tool of reactionary intrigue' rather than a force for revolution. This was a reference to elements of the lumpenproletariat being employed by the French state within its armed forces for the purposes of maintaining order during the social upheavals of



the mid-nineteenth century – the bribe in question being a soldier's wage rather than something received in addition to this wage (*The Class Struggles in France 1848-1850*).

Marx's reference to the lumpenproletariat being 'bribed' is ironic, given Lenin's insistence that it was labour aristocracy, instead, that was the beneficiary of capitalist bribery.

However, this may be a case of over-theorising on both sides. One's own circumstances – be one a lumpenproletarian or labour aristocrat – need not be particularly decisive as far as one's receptivity to socialist ideas is concerned. Indeed, Marx and Engels themselves in the *Communist Manifesto* speculated on the possibility of even some capitalists (Engels himself, being a prime example), cutting themselves adrift from their class and seeking common cause with the workers.

Nevertheless, the weight of historical evidence suggests that the more militant elements within the working class (particularly those who have embraced revolutionary socialism) have, indeed, tended to be drawn from the ranks of semi-skilled and skilled workers.

There is a further irony in Lenin's depiction of the labour aristocracy as a force for conservatism since it was precisely this segment of the Russian working class that formed the social base from which the Bolsheviks primarily drew their support – skilled machinists in the large factories whereas 'Lower paid workers, such as the predominantly female textile workers, were generally either unorganized or apolitical (until the beginnings of the revolution) or supported the reformist Mensheviks' (C Post, *Solidarity* Sept-Oct 2006).

Engels, before Lenin, had suggested a link between capitalist monopoly and the labour aristocracy, in a letter to Kautsky, concerning the political situation in England: 'There is no workers party here, there are only Conservatives and Liberal-Radicals and the workers gaily share the feast of England's Monopoly of the world market and the colonies' (12 September 1882).

However, unlike Lenin, Engels held that the tendency for capital to penetrate everywhere would eventually break down England's global monopoly (and, by extension, undermine the super-profits it derived from such a monopoly), thereby reversing the 'embourgeoisement' of the English proletariat.

## Bribery but how?

For all Lenin's talk of how the capitalists bribe the labour aristocracy in 'a thousand different ways, direct and indirect', it is difficult to envisage even a single way in which this might happen – not if we are to remain faithful to the meaning of

the term 'bribe' as a premeditated act to materially induce the other party to the transaction to do your bidding. For Lenin's concept of a bribe to make any sense, and to work on its own terms, it would need to imply something given in addition to the wages received – meaning one would need to transparently disaggregate the income of the labour aristocracy into a 'legitimate' wage and 'illegitimate' bribe component. This obviously did not happen; all workers received was a wage so any alleged bribe would be hidden within this wage.

This raises multiple problems. If the capitalists of the imperialist countries were so amenable to surreptitiously sharing the proceeds of their investments abroad with (some of) their workforce at home, one might surmise that they would be less resistant to pressure from the latter for better wages than was the case. As Tony Cliff noted: 'No capitalist says to the workers: "I have made high profits this year, so I am ready to give you higher wages"' (*Socialist Review*, June 1957). Workers always have to struggle for higher wages. Indeed, Lenin rather contradicted himself by suggesting that super-profits are obtained over and above 'the profits which capitalists squeeze out of the workers of their "own" country' – implying a systemic need, arising out of market competition, for these capitalists to exert a constant downward pressure on wage levels.

If Lenin's thesis was correct we would expect income differentials between the labour aristocracy and other workers to vary in proportion to a country's level of colonial investment. However, the evidence suggests otherwise. According to Cliff, wage differentials between skilled and unskilled workers were higher in a country like Romania which had very little foreign investment compared to, say, Britain – in Lenin's time by far the world largest source of foreign capital.

Moreover, though wage differentials in Britain did widen significantly between, roughly, 1850 and 1890 because of the growth of craft unions (e.g. the Amalgamated Society of Engineers) dominated by 'labour aristocrats', these differentials narrowed towards the end of the nineteenth century with the appearance of the 'new unionism' which sought to reach out and organise unskilled and semi-skilled workers. The point is that it was precisely then when the age of imperialism commenced (as Lenin saw it) that these differentials started narrowing, thus contradicting what his theory predicts.

There are other grounds on which one might question the theory. For instance, it overlooks that what might theoretically be in the interests of the capitalist class as a whole to collude in bribing workers to achieve some nebulous political objective, may not be a sufficiently persuasive reason for individual capitalists (in competition with other capitalists) to become involved in this stratagem. Meaning it may never take off as a stratagem.

Likewise, workers succumbing to such bribery and seeing themselves as indebted to their employers would probably be less likely to militantly struggle for better wages and conditions. This would probably more than wipe out the value of any hypothetical bribe they might have received.

There are other problems with Lenin's theory which we will consider later in the context of a 'post-colonial' world. While Lenin fondly imagined 'national liberation struggles' would serve to undermine imperialism and thereby strike a blow against 'monopoly capitalism' the outcome of such struggles, as we shall see, has been quite the opposite of what he hoped for.

(To be continued)

ROBIN COX

# Private enterprise pays

At the beginning of July, it was loudly trumpeted in the media that hundreds of people had been arrested in operations across Europe. It was a directed strike at organised crime groups, enabled by French police compromising the communication servers of a company called Enchrochat, which offered secure encrypted communications. Believing themselves safe from police surveillance the criminal entrepreneurs using its services were caught planning drugs deals, kidnappings and murders.

The enterprises engaged in drug production on an industrial scale. Police uncovered '19 meth labs, 1,200kg of meth and 10 tons of cocaine' ([tinyurl.com/yxhxu58k](https://tinyurl.com/yxhxu58k)). This industrialism is complemented by the horrifying fact that Dutch police found a shipping container that had been converted into a soundproofed torture chamber, complete with a chair to strap victims into.

Enchrochat charged £1,500 for a 6 month contract with its dedicated handsets, and it's believed that 10,000 people in the UK availed themselves of its possibilities, out of 60,000 worldwide ([tinyurl.com/yck7u5h5](https://tinyurl.com/yck7u5h5)). The law enforcement agencies consider that this was a bespoke service for criminal enterprises, used by middle tiers and upwards of organised criminals. So this set of police raids, which have netted 800 arrests (so far) has also revealed the extent of organised crime.

Although those numbers sound large on their own, what they reveal is how small the organised criminal underworld really is, and how efficient their business is for so small a number to cause so much pain and mayhem. Just as with most other enterprises, modern industrial technology has increased the productivity of those whose output is crime.

The raids in the UK amounted to over 700 arrests, netting £54 million in cash. This is, though, not the full value of these businesses.

These are early days, and the state agencies have a vested interest in saying everyone who used these machines was a criminal (as opposed to legitimate business people with a need for privacy). What these events show, though, is the professionalisation of crime. Indeed, the root cause of crime is free enterprise, and entrepreneurs would be foolish not to make the best use of available technology to spread their businesses. They co-operate across borders with business partners (the press called them 'gangs') in other countries.

Like any other business, they need to co-ordinate their activities, and although this co-ordination remains hidden most of the time, this communication was used in this case to smash their organisations. They also need secrecy, lest their competitors take their markets from them (their competitors including capitalist businesses that are 'legitimate' and use the law to make their money rather than breaking it). Like the criminals, the police advanced their use of technology. As Joseph Cox (at [Vice.com](https://Vice.com)) explained, there was:

'...malware on the Enchrochat device itself, meaning that it could potentially read the messages written and stored on the device before they were encrypted and sent over the internet' ([tinyurl.com/ycq2r46j](https://tinyurl.com/ycq2r46j)).

Enchrochat themselves boasted that nothing was stored on their servers, and that their phones had an easy wipe feature. The malware prevented wiping and stored passwords.

The loss of Enchrochat has temporarily broken the bond of trust needed to engage in this type of business, but new encryption services are coming forward, and the criminal enterprises will learn and return to their pursuit of wealth and profit without restraint at the first opportunity. After all, isn't that what capitalist ideologues tell us all to do: fill your boots?

## Pandering to the wealthy

Similarly, a criminal enterprise broken apart by state action is Jeffrey Epstein and his associates. His 'little black book' of contacts has been released and while, it should be stressed, there is no reason to think any of the names listed in it are connected with his sex crimes, it is an interesting insight into the connectedness of the rich and powerful ([tinyurl.com/y6mfzsb1](https://tinyurl.com/y6mfzsb1)). Just as criminal gangs organise in international networks, so too do supposedly legitimate businesses.

Jeffrey Epstein famously committed suicide in prison (under murky circumstances that led many to claim he was 'suicided'). He was convicted of sex trafficking, as his Wikipedia article relates:

'Epstein pleaded guilty and was convicted in 2008 by a Florida state court of procuring an underage girl for prostitution and of soliciting a prostitute. He served almost 13 months in custody, but with extensive work release. He was convicted of only these two crimes as part of a controversial plea deal; federal officials had identified 36 girls, some as young as 14 years old, whom Epstein had allegedly sexually abused' ([tinyurl.com/yypd37bt](https://tinyurl.com/yypd37bt)).

His initially lenient sentence after the plea deal was attributed by many to his having influential friends.

He was a wealthy financier from a modest background. He gained wealth in the '80s as a Wall Street trader. Steven Hoffenberg, who served 20 years in federal prison, claims Epstein was a co-conspirator in his fraud, and yet he was not charged. He moved in to managing the investments of the truly wealthy.

He used his wealth to pander to other wealthy and powerful men. It is interesting to see who was willing to be a recipient of his largesse, flying on his private jet – rather tastelessly nicknamed 'the Lolita Express' (apparently because of the number of teenage girls it flew to his private island). The list of those who flew on the jet included Bill Clinton, Donald Trump and Andrew, Duke of York. Epstein's contact list included Prime Ministers like Tony Blair (of course, this just means he knew their contact details, not that they had been in contact).

At his death, he possessed \$112 million in investments, \$56 million in cash and was worth an estimated total of \$577 million, including his Caribbean private islands. As a fund manager he made his wealth looking after billions of dollars of other people's money. To that end, his luxurious lifestyle was part of his means of impressing clients and potential investment partners.

That lifestyle included using his wealth to obtain and sexually abuse young women and girls. While still alive he settled a string of lawsuits with pay-offs. There are allegations he provided girls to his contacts ([tinyurl.com/y547oqnw](https://tinyurl.com/y547oqnw)). More will come out, doubtless, in the upcoming trials of his associates.

Like the Enchrochat criminals, wealth and respectability came to him from the proceeds of criminality. Like them, state intervention shows how the powerful and wealthy organise and connect to each other. The wealth stolen from our labour funds these lavish lifestyles. For the truly wealthy, the law becomes optional, and it took particularly egregious behaviour from Epstein to even get a slap on the wrist.

The connection between his world and the Dutch torturers is wealth and ego turning into impunity: wealth, secrecy and power go hand in hand which in turn enables criminality. Billionaires do not need a lift on a friend's jet, but they like the flattery and affirmation.

**PIK SMEET**



For centuries, women have been denied the opportunities for personal advancement in the name of religion and tradition. Religious and cultural institutions where patriarchal attitudes were legitimised have had a deep effect on the role and status of women. Yet it is now women who are the key drivers in defusing what was once popularly called the 'population bomb'. Everything has changed so much that choosing to have no children, or just give birth to one child, is for women just as convenient as choosing to bear two or three.

Globally, the fertility rate – the average number of children a woman gives birth to -- is falling below the replacement level and this means nearly every country could have shrinking populations by the end of the century, based on the expectation that women will have fewer children. This does not mean the number of people living in these countries is falling, at least not immediately, as the size of a population is a mix of the fertility rate, death rate and migration. It can be a generation before changes in fertility rate take hold. Although fertility rates continue to fall the world population will continue to rise because the fall in fertility rates takes a while to show up, a phenomenon known as population momentum.

Falling fertility rates go hand-in-hand with better education and more career openings for women and the access to contraception and abortion. When more infants survive, fertility goes down and population growth draws to an end.

The more secure and prosperous people become, the lower will be their family sizes.

According to Wolfgang Lutz, of the Vienna University of Economics and Business, one reason for the fertility decline is women's education:

*'The brain is the most important reproductive organ,' he explains. Once a woman receives enough information and autonomy to make an informed and self-directed choice about when to have children and how many to have, she immediately has fewer of them and has them later.*

### **Paid to reproduce**

Some countries are so concerned about their shrinking populations and fear of the alternative – a policy of immigration – has led nationalist and xenophobic leaders to introduce policies that could only be described as a return back to an earlier time when women were viewed as baby-producing machines. Across Europe, governments have introduced benefits aimed at stimulating population growth, implementing baby bonuses for each new child and promoting 'traditional family values'.

Victor Orban of Hungary is heavily investing in such things as cash loans to young married couples. Each time a child is born, repayment is deferred. If the couple have three children within the requisite time frame, the loan is completely written off, otherwise they have to pay it back. Government IVF clinics will offer free treatment for all women who want them (just

as long as they are under 40 and not lesbians). In Poland, the ruling Law and Justice Party introduced the 500+ policy in 2016, under which mothers received 500 złoty (£99) per child per month from the second child onwards, later expanded to include all children. Russia launched a one-off payment of £5,800 to families with two or more children, with Putin explaining that 'Russia's fate and its historic prospects depend on how many of us there are, it depends on how many children are born in Russian families.'

Sweden is one country that used a package of policies including childcare, flexible working conditions and generous maternity and paternity leave packages to reverse its population decline. But the increase to the fertility rate was marginal – just 0.2 children per woman.

As Wolfgang Lutz points out, *'Once a woman is socialised to have an education and a career, she is socialised to have a smaller family. There's no going back.'*

### **Fertility rates**

Just as the Catholic Church's anti-contraceptive dogma was blamed for rises in population only to be punctured by women defying their priests, the argument switched to the Muslims, with its emphasis on strict traditional hierarchal gender roles, and it would be they who would go against the trend of smaller families. But then fertility rates in majority-Muslim countries such as Iran, Bangladesh and Indonesia fell, as well.

Now the blame for over-population has shifted to sub-Saharan Africa, suggesting that African high fertility rates with four or more births per woman will not buck the trend and cause over-population. But even here, there are signs of change in a growing number of countries.

Countries such as Nigeria which are struggling to make progress to provide education and employment opportunities and provide quality healthcare should be seen as the last hold-outs against the global triumph of small families.

International agencies found that over 20 percent of women in this region of Africa want to avoid a pregnancy but have their needs unmet by any family planning outreach. It results in almost 20 million — or 38 percent — of the region's pregnancies each year being unintended. The World Health Organization estimates that globally 270 million women who want contraceptives have no access to them.

Practices such as early marriage, which is associated with an early start to child bearing, are common. In sub-Saharan Africa, approximately 38 percent of women are married by the age of 18. In Niger, three-quarters of girls marry by the age of 18. Child marriage denies girls an education which leads to a lack of ability to find work in later life and so handicaps girls' decision-making power and their right to choose.

The gap between desired and actual family size suggests that women are not fully able to control their own bodies, but choice can become a reality everywhere, including the African

continent. In the past, women in Botswana would have seven children on average. Now they have fewer than three. It was accomplished by enabling women to control their fertility and reducing child mortality rates – moves that almost inevitably lead to them having fewer babies. When more girls attend school, a country's adolescent fertility rates dip, more women wait until adulthood to have children and are armed with much more sophisticated knowledge-tools to make better decisions for their health and future offspring.

It took the UK 95 years to drop from a fertility rate of six children per woman to three, but it took Botswana only 24 years, Bangladesh 20 and Iran only ten years.

## Overpopulationism

Blaming our environmental problems on population pressures is all too common among eco-activists and it has resulted in a sordid history of top-down population control programmes violating women's bodies with such measures as uninformed sterilisations. All women should have full access to contraception and safe abortion as part of overall health services. Family planning, however, is not the answer to our environmental problems. Babies and yet-to-be-born babies are not responsible for today's environmental problems. Reducing population numbers will not stop climate change, nor rising sea-levels. Many environmentalists will cite the fallacious carrying capacity in their argument that we have too many people on the planet but the over-emphasis on individual consumption distracts from industrial and military consumption. Capitalism is the reason for ever-increasing resource depletion, CO2 emissions, waste and pollution. It should be held accountable, not the innocent victims of global warming.

More people bring more ingenuity, more talent and more innovation into the world. Every human born is not just an extra mouth to feed but also another pair of helping hands and an additional thoughtful brain. Yet we are being told by environmentalists that it means less for each of us. We get informed that we will need to radically reduce humanity's carbon footprint on the environment by reducing our numbers, as well as changes to our lifestyles and that until the world's population stops growing there will be an urgent need to squeeze people's consumption.

Does pushing population growth down actually put the environment on a more sustainable path? And if so, what measures would the policy makers have to apply to actually bring about such a change?

The answer to environmentalists attracted to the over-populationist argument is that the birth-control campaigns are, in the end, just one more patriarchal attempt to control women's reproduction, and that improving child survival rates, giving girls access to education, and empowering women to control their own reproduction

(and that means allowing women themselves to make their decisions) are what will sustainably and non-coercively lower birth rates. Family planning and reducing family sizes, however, is not the answer to our environmental problems.

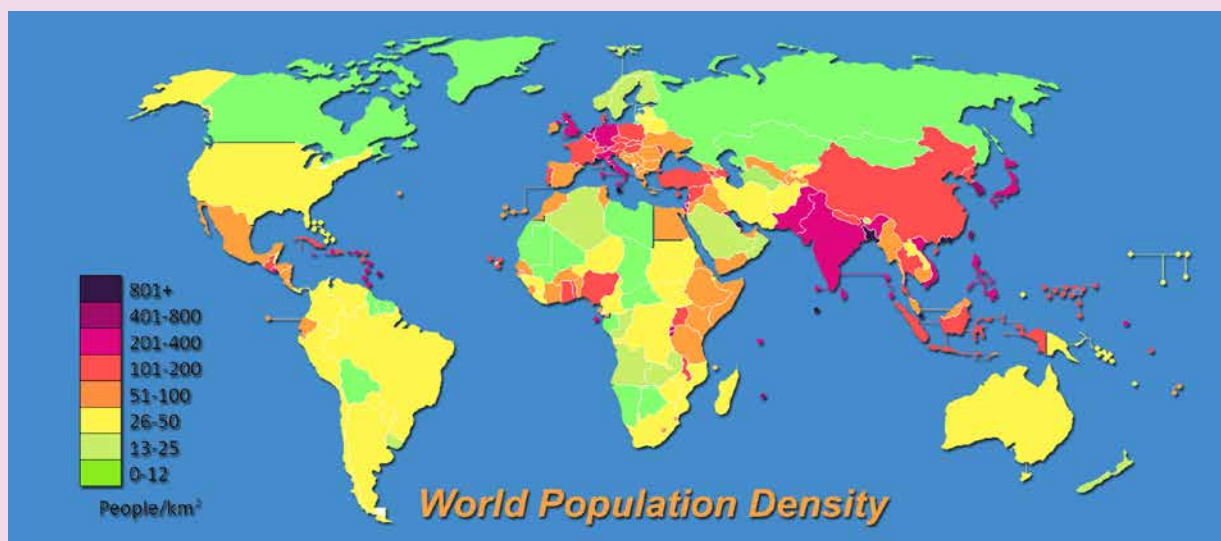
Environmentalist focus on population is mistaken and can lead to equally misguided action. Over-population is a thinly veiled misogynist racist myth that is accepted by both right-wingers and progressives alike. People who claim to be against genocide and eugenics push this myth with no sense of the irony. Those accepting the over-population argument obscure the more immediate causes of suffering under capitalism. Because of its short-termism, its unrelenting drive for profits, and international conflict, capitalism expresses a tendency toward planetary crisis, regardless of the total number of humans living on earth. The amount of waste and pollution under capitalism is enormous, with a preponderance of production and distribution of useless products, wasted labour and the creation of mounting piles of garbage as a result of planned obsolescence and single-use products.

The concentration on so-called over-population confuses symptoms with causes, validating apologists for the system and perpetuating Malthusian anti-poor arguments. The central concept in the ideological armoury of capitalism is the idea that there isn't enough to go around. Hence, we are confronted with the idea that there isn't enough food, aren't enough jobs, not enough housing, or we haven't enough classrooms or hospital beds because there is a certain fixed amount of all these things. People who claim that population growth is the issue are shifting the blame from the rich to the poor.

Those who believe reducing the population to be an answer to global warming say very little about which policies would spare the planet many more billions of people, particularly when the existing trend is already towards smaller family sizes. We should forget all about prioritising population control and instead help each and every woman bear a child in good health whenever she chooses to have a baby. It might sound counter-intuitive for stabilising and lowering the population but giving women control over their lives and of their own bodies controls population growth. We need no more misanthropic pronouncements about too many people or that humanity has somehow exceeded the planet's carrying capacity or that humanity is a parasitic species on the Planet Earth's ecology.

Giving women control of both their lives and their bodies is what will control population growth. The best family planning and contraceptive is the empowerment of women.

**ALJO**



# PROPER GANDER

## 'I've Got Nothing. I Ain't Got No-one. But I've Got The Shops'

THE HIGH Street was already on the financial skids before the pandemic, which has sped up the shift to online shopping. And these days, going to the shops has the added considerations of facemasks, social distancing, arrows on the floor and sanitisers by the doors, making it more of an ordeal than before. Despite all this, slick, brightly-lit shopping malls are still there to tempt those looking for either retail therapy or a five-finger discount. The latter were the focus of Channel 5's recent *Shoplifters: At War With The Law*. This fly-on-the-wall documentary series follows the security guards and their quarries at two interchangeable shopping centres: West Orchards in Coventry and Weston Favell in Northampton. It was filmed pre-Covid 19, so since the cameras left, the guards are presumably on the hunt for people not wearing masks as well as people not paying.

According to the programme's voiceover, last year, there were 400,000 shoplifting incidents reported nationwide, with the number of those that go undetected estimated to be 20 times higher. Of course, we don't see any of these, and the shopping centres understandably want the programme to emphasise the chances of getting nabbed. Regardless of this, the show has plenty of tips for would-be pilferers, such as going with a group of friends to distract the guards while items are slipped into pockets elsewhere. And higher-end goods with electronic tags attached can be dealt with by snipping them off with pliers or hiding them in a bag lined with foil so they don't set off the door alarms.

Watching out for all this are hundreds of HD CCTV cameras, whose footage is relayed back to each shopping centre's control room. When the guard on duty there sees someone acting shiftily or gets a tip-off from one of the shops, they can radio down to their colleagues to find their target. It's all quite sad to watch this game of cat-and-mouse, although a couple of the guards get a kick out of their work. 'I always catch my prey,' boasts one, 'that's why I do my job. I love it'. The guards can only apprehend someone once they've left a store, although they cynically assume 'anybody



that's in the shop is a shoplifter until they go to the till'. Those who are caught are led to a bleak holding room to be questioned and have their bags searched. The police will be called if the person has 'gone equipped' with a foil-lined bag or pliers, or if what they have stolen is valued at over £200. If the goods are worth less than this the police won't usually be involved and instead, a year-long ban from the shopping centre is issued. If the accused says they have no ID, they're asked to bring up their social media profile instead. Their name, address and date of birth are taken, as is a mug shot for the database. If they are seen to return to the centre, they will be trespassing and the police will be called. The guards have had plenty of practice with the procedure: the West Orchards team 'take down' up to ten shoplifters a day, as they put it.

The programme-makers blur out the faces of the people caught, which also has the effect of emphasising how dehumanising the need to shoplift is, and the rituals around it. Some of the people featured have been recruited by gangs, and probably have very little choice in the matter. They tend to be from Eastern Europe, not able to claim benefits and without much chance of securing better paid work, which makes them vulnerable to exploitation from organised gangs. Most of the value of any successfully shoplifted goods is likely to go to the gangmasters, with those who take the risks receiving little back; a more extreme version of mainstream exploitation.

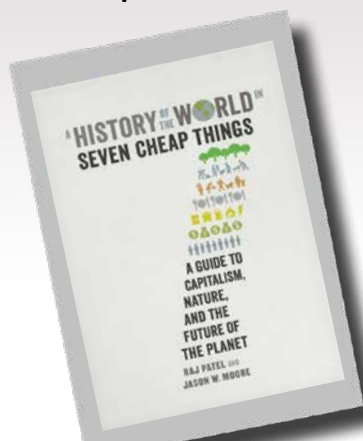
These gangs tend to move between areas once they become too well-known in one place. Nearly three quarters of shoplifting in West Orchards is carried out by a small group of local repeat visitors. Many of these are homeless, with or without a benefit claim, either stealing to get enough food or to fund a drug habit. One man speaks to the camera crew after he's thrown out for the umpteenth time: 'I've got nothing. I ain't got no-one. But ... I've got the shops.' The guards tend to treat those who are pushed into shoplifting by poverty with some sensitivity, as long as they don't get lairy.

But *Shoplifters: At War With The Law* doesn't want us to feel too sympathetic towards people who steal. Its voiceover makes the point that shoplifting 'takes more than £2 million out of tills every day', and that to make up for these losses shops have been 'ramping up prices for millions of honest shoppers'. It's easy to claim that theft raises prices, but this falsely implies that retailers would lower prices below the market rate if people stopped stealing, which of course no retailer would ever do, so it just scapegoats people who shoplift and provides an alibi for inflated prices. The costs of security measures and stolen items do impact on the profitability of goods to some extent, so the chain store owners will be keen to clamp down on shoplifting. But a few pinched bottles of perfume or boxes of chocolates are nothing compared to the billions of pounds creamed off by owners and shareholders.

**MIKE FOSTER**

# REVIEWS

## Capitalism's World



By Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore: **A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: a Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet.** Verso £9.99.

The seven cheap things are nature, money, work, care, food, energy and lives. 'Cheap' does not just mean low-cost, it is a strategy that provides as little compensation as possible in return for transforming production. This is part of the Capitalocene, a term the authors prefer to Anthropocene and which emphasises the way capitalism has changed the relations between humans and the rest of nature.

Each chapter provides a rapid run-through of various aspects of history. For instance, the chapter on cheap nature observes that indigenous people, in the Americas and elsewhere, were often regarded as part of nature and so should be enslaved, ruled and exploited by Europeans. In the seventeenth century, the productivity of labour in English agriculture grew massively, and far more people came to work outside farming; as part of cheap food, they were fed by grain imports from the US. Even a century ago, food made up a far greater proportion of average household expenditure than today. Rural people, as in Ireland and Peru in the sixteenth century, were often forced to move to towns and villages.

Cheap work involved far more than low wages. The spoils of war often involved slaves, including women for sexual purposes, and capitalism imposed longer working hours than people in earlier forms of society had been used to. There was cheap care too: the important work of caring for others was seen as appropriate for women. In the US much caring work is performed by low-paid immigrant workers, and it was recently reported that 4.5 million people in the UK have been forced

under coronavirus to become unpaid carers.

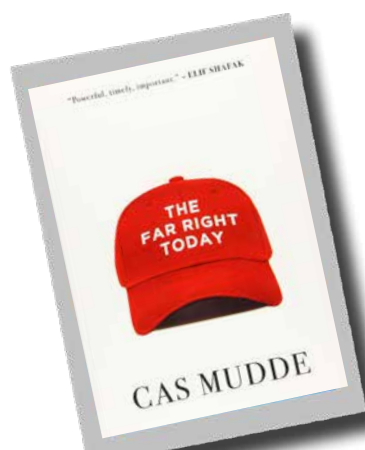
Cheap energy resulted in a big reduction in the cost of producing iron, leading to cheap tools and machines. The sixteenth century saw a transition to large-scale coal mining in England and peat-digging in the Netherlands. Despite environmental objections, burning coal to power sugar refineries was legalised in Amsterdam over a century later, as coal was cheaper than peat. Controlling energy costs was one way of sustaining cheap work. Currently a switch to solar power would require a massive investment, and capitalists prefer to rely on cheap oil.

Cheap lives included racist characterisations of some humans (see above on cheap nature). More broadly, force and ideology combined to maintain cheap labour, cheap care, and so on. For instance, in 1575 Francis Drake participated in the murder of every inhabitant of an Irish island before acquiring greater wealth in the Americas and a knighthood. The nation-state became a technology of social control.

Patel and Moore's book contains a great deal more, which we can't cover here. The conclusion, though claiming to be revolutionary, discusses the idea of 'meaningful, pleasurable work' without saying much about what would be needed to realise such a 'reparation ecology'.

PB

## Right Here



Cas Mudde:  
**The Far Right Today.**  
Polity £14.99.

The term 'far right' as used here refers to organisations which accept that inequalities between people are natural

and positive. It covers both the extreme right (which includes fascism and rejects democracy) and the more numerous radical right (which is mostly populist and opposes liberal democracy, which in turn involves rule of law and respect for minority rights). In the EU, the far right has gained support in recent decades, from around one percent of the vote in the 1980s to seven percent in the 2010s. As Mudde says, they are 'here to stay'. The radical right, in particular, is more or less part of mainstream politics. An example of an extreme right political party would be Golden Dawn in Greece, while the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) would be radical right.

The book deals with a lot of parties and other organisations, in many European countries but also the US, Brazil and India. Thus it is on the whole more of a helicopter tour, though a useful and informative one, than a detailed look at specific movements or individuals. While there are plenty of differences among them, many views common to the far right can be identified.

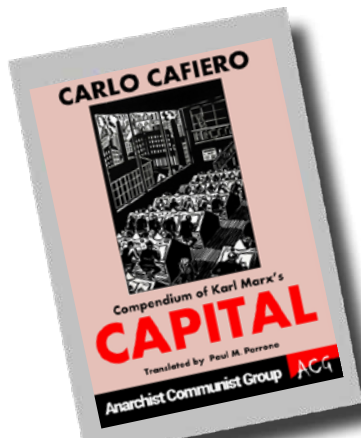
They are nativist, combining nationalism and xenophobia, and often advocate ethocracy (where citizenship is based on ethnicity). They are authoritarian, wanting law and order, a strictly-ordered society where infringements are severely punished, though they are themselves quite often violent. Immigration and the 'refugee crisis' (Mudde's quotation marks) are central issues, with so-called security of nation or race seen as vital and as having a cultural component. They advocate familism, with the traditional family seen as the foundation of the nation and – yet more jargon! – femonationalism ('the use of women and women's rights in support of nativism, in particular Islamophobia'). Their support for the family implies opposition to abortion, but they are increasingly tolerant of homosexuality.

One issue about populism is that its supporters claim to oppose an elite, the definition of which is not usually clear. Mudde states that mainstream politicians are viewed by the far right as a corrupt elite who steal from 'the people'. He says also that much academic research shows that voters for the far right are motivated less by economic anxiety than by 'cultural backlash', which refers to mass immigration and the supposed rise of a multicultural society. So it seems in fact that little support for the far right is based on the existence of inequality or resentment at the power of the one percent.

Mudde describes the radical right

as reformist but the extreme right as revolutionary, though without explaining or justifying this latter label. His final conclusion is that the response to the far right should be the strengthening of liberal democracy. Instead, it would be better to argue for a truly democratic classless society.  
PB

## Popular Marx



**Compendium of Karl Marx's Capital.** By Carlo Cafiero.  
Anarchist Communist Group.  
2020. 100 pages

Marx's *Capital*, first published in German in 1867, is a tome of over 1,000 pages and so not an easy read. As a result, ever since the working-class movement took off in the 1870s its content has been popularised in shorter works. This is an Italian one from 1879. It is accurate enough with long passages from *Capital*, though Cafiero's conclusion expresses a rather romantic view of 'revolution'.

Cafiero was a member of the International Working Men's Association and met and corresponded with Marx and Engels but who in the end sided with Bakunin when the split came and became a populariser for 'anarchism communism', i.e. of those anarchists who stood for a society where the means of life were owned in common and the principle of 'from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs' applied (as opposed to 'to each according to their work' as favoured by other anarchists). His pamphlet *Anarchism and Communism* ([tinyurl.com/y2ubu7ck](http://tinyurl.com/y2ubu7ck)) puts the case for this (which we call socialism) rather well.

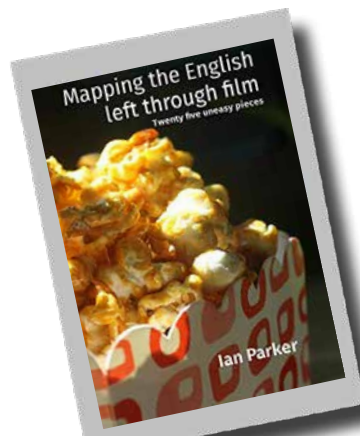
Despite opposing Marx politically, Cafiero accepted Marxian economics, and later anarchists translated his pamphlet into French and Spanish, a tacit recognition that anarchist attempts to develop an alternative analysis of the capitalist economy (as fellow anarchist-communist Kropotkin attempted) had failed. In their introduction the ACG go so far as to describe *Capital* as 'a superb contribution to our revolutionary

understanding' and to recommend it to anyone who wants 'to understand how the system works in order to fight and ultimately destroy it.' We don't disagree of course but it must cause raised eyebrows amongst some anarchists.

Unfortunately, it is not a good translation. Why, for instance, are the words 'currency' and 'salary' used instead of 'money' and 'wages' as in Marxian economics in English? And there is a glaring error on page 58 where Cafiero is made to say 'therefore, salary cannot represent the price of labour power'; which is wrong both in terms of what Marx held (wages are precisely the price of labour power) and of what Cafiero himself had written in the preceding paragraph. Socialist Party members familiar with Italian say that a correct translation of what Cafiero wrote in Italian is 'therefore, wages can represent nothing other than the price of labour power' (they advise that there are other, though less serious, mistranslations too.) It is a bit odd that the ACG did not pick this up and add a correction as that wages are the price of labour power is a basic part of Marxian economics.

ALB

## A Rocky Horror Show for the Left



Ian Parker:  
**Mapping the English Left Through Film.**  
Folrose. 2020.

Older readers may remember an amusing pamphlet from the 1980s called *As Soon as This Pub Closes...* which was a wry (and largely accurate) commentary about the main groups on the British far left. This short book from Trotskyist Ian Parker attempts to do a similar thing, but with the twist that the various groups and parties are deconstructed in relation to a film that is claimed encapsulates their methods and objectives.

In fairness it's a neat idea, but it's difficult not to come to the conclusion that it might have been better done by someone else – someone who can a)

write well and b) who has rather fewer axes to grind. It is subtitled '25 uneasy pieces' and this is a more rounded and accurate description than perhaps the author intended. The sloppy production hasn't helped matters either.

There seems to be a sneaking admiration for the Trotskyist-Feminists of Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century (RS21) but all others get short shrift, including naturally enough, ourselves in the SPGB, ideologically 'mapped' through the film *Lars and the Real Girl* (2007). The discussion of the SPGB seems largely to have been adapted from points made from our entry in Wikipedia, and claims we have a particular vision of socialism that we cling to like a doll.

It also claims we have a 'dwindling membership'. It's difficult to see where this comes from (perhaps it's just wishful thinking) but nevertheless the 25 chapters are said to be ordered in sequence according to the author's personal perceptions of the organisational size and influence of the parties and groups concerned. This sort of approach is always asking for trouble. Indeed, it's not clear why on that basis Socialist Appeal appear several chapters before the Socialist Party of England and Wales (SPEW), as the latter – effectively the parent organisation – is obviously several times the size and prominence of the former, whatever else we might think of them.

The SPGB is once again derided as the 'Small Party of Good Boys' (yes, the book is *that* funny) and, while you'd never know from this text, is actually larger than all the left-of-Labour groups listed aside from the SWP, SPEW and CPB. So the fact we appear in the 'running order' behind the likes of Workers Power, the RCG and the somewhat mysterious Plan C probably says rather more about the author than it does about us. In particular, the obsession Trotskyists everywhere seem to have with leadership cults, would-be leaders and manipulators of the masses.

Talking of which, it is also telling that while the small band of relentless media whores from *Spiked* achieve prominence (presumably because of their regular appearances on the Sky News paper reviews defending whatever contrarian ideas are in vogue this week) there is no mention anywhere of the recent significant interest in Fully Automated Luxury Communism. But then again FALC is without doubt nearer to the SPGB's view of socialism than anything else presented here, and that would be to open up a veritable *Pandora's Box* (1929) for the latter-day followers of old Leon.

DAP

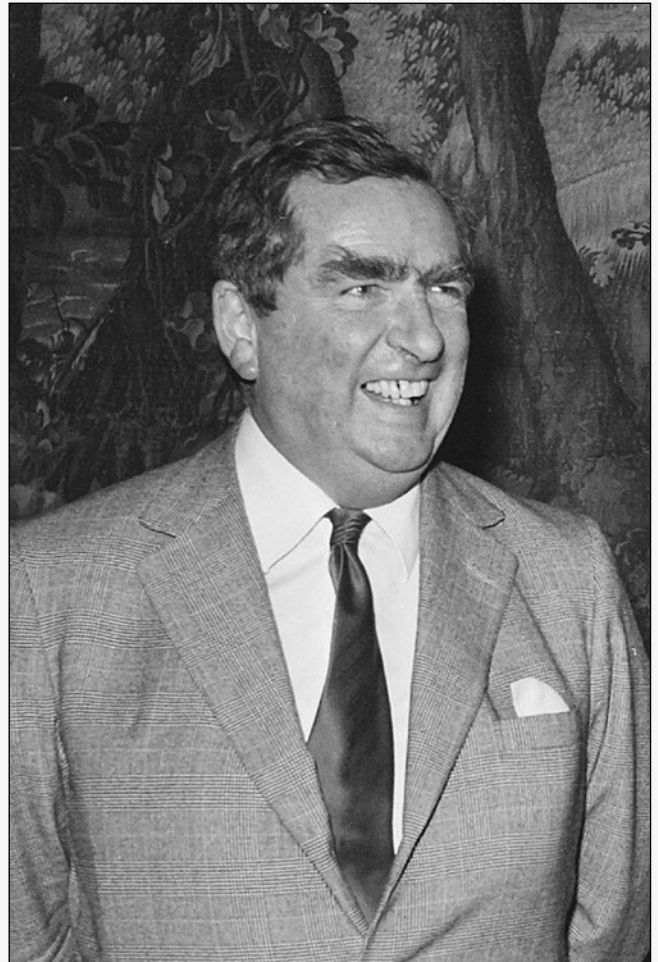
# 50 Years Ago

## Labour Party hypocrites

The Labour Party, now in opposition, has the opportunity to try and rebuild its severely damaged image of being the party with ideals. Their publicity men tried their best with posters and hoardings during the election, but the reality of Labour's record in office was just too much for them to whitewash.

"Arms for South Africa" is an issue which the opportunists in the Labour Party are determined to hang on to and develop this purpose, but their hypocrisy in doing so should be obvious to anyone who has followed the Labour government's foreign policy. It was Denis Healey, Minister of "Defence", who in 1968 proclaimed. "Her Majesty's government and the South African government share the responsibility for maritime security in the South African area". It seems now that he expected them to carry out this function with arms supplied by countries other than Britain. Throughout Labour's period of office the Simonstown Agreement was honoured and joint naval manoeuvres continued. Healey and his colleagues by accepting a ban on arms shipments to South Africa were attempting to gain the best of both worlds: defence of the Cape trade route and continued trade with and investment in South and South-West Africa and, at the same time, expanding trade and influence in the rest of Africa.

*(from front page Socialist Standard, August 1970).*



Credit: Rob Mieremet / CCO

# School Report

PLANS FOR this year's Summer School sadly ground to a halt earlier in the year, as the lockdown came into effect and our usual venue – Fircroft College – had to temporarily close. 2020's Summer School looked like it would be the one that never was. But when Discord came along we realised this could be the way to hold the event after all, much as it's come to the rescue for other talks and meetings. Appropriately, given that Summer School's theme is Technology, the internet and social media enabled us to go ahead. A bonus was that this meant it would be a shorter journey to a computer screen than to Birmingham, especially for people outside Britain.

Summer School was held on the 7–9 August, with over 30 people joining in. The weekend's agenda was more-or-less the same as if it had been at Fircroft, with six sessions discussing technological

progress and its application in the past, present and future. Adam Buick opened the weekend by raising the question of whether Marxism is technological determinism, and reminding us that class struggle also drives change. Next, Bill Martin's talk considered how the way we think is a form of technology, as the ideas behind inventions come from social relations. Mike Foster's talk about philosopher Gunther Anders' views opened up an interesting discussion about many people's often-wary attitudes around scientific developments. More optimistically, Leon Rozanov explored the potential of digital technology for streamlining distribution and democracy in a socialist society. And Paddy Shannon closed the weekend with his talk about what new tech is around the corner and how we can get ready. Paddy also hosted a

discussion session about more effective ways we can engage with others online, whether through memes, messaging boards or podcasts, with many useful suggestions for us to work on. Summer School isn't just about the talks, it's also an enjoyable opportunity to share ideas and catch up with like-minded comrades and friends around the globe.

There was also time for a fun quiz on Saturday evening, a first for ourselves on Discord. For anyone who wants to revisit the event, transcripts of talks and links to related articles have been uploaded to the site, and recordings of the sessions will be added to the party's website soon. Thanks go to everyone who gave talks, chaired discussions and tuned in. Preparations for Summer School 2021 will soon be underway, so keep an eye out for an announcement later in the year.

# 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](mailto: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 13th September at 7.00pm (BST); and, then every second Sunday thereafter. Please, do consider joining in. This is a great opportunity for all.

## SEPTEMBER 2020 DISCORD EVENTS

**Wednesday 2 September, 7.30pm BST**

The FAQ Workshop

### CONSPIRACY THEORIES

At least 50% of Americans believe in one or more conspiracies, from flat earth to moon hoax to an engineered coronavirus pandemic. Religions offer an uplifting experience, but conspiracy theories make believers more depressed, paranoid and fatalistic, all the more so in the fake-news environment of social media. What can we do to talk people out of this no-hope and do-nothing attitude?

**Friday 4 September, 7.30 BST**

FRIDAY NIGHT TALK

### WHY NOT REFORMISM?

Keith Graham throws some light along a political blind alley.

**Sunday 6 September, 3.00pm**

DANGEROUS WOMEN

**Ursula Le Guin**

Author of one of the best anarcho/socialist novels ever. We look at her life and work.

**Wednesday 9 September, 7.30pm BST**

The FAQ Workshop

### IS PROPAGANDA DIFFERENT FROM MARKETING?

Personal communication is a matter of personal preference, but propaganda is communication for a group objective. Marketing is communication for a group objective, using a professional approach with

evidence-based rules about what's effective and what isn't. Many socialists dismiss marketing as dishonest by design and insist that personal preference is valid as we are not in the business of 'selling' the socialist case. But is that true? We are attempting to persuade, just as marketing attempts to persuade. Are we behaving like enthusiastic amateurs when we should be looking for tips from the Mad Men of marketing?

**Friday 11 September, 7.30 BST**

FRIDAY NIGHT TALK

### ROADMAP TO SOCIALISM

Binay Sarkar of the WSP India, live from Kolkata

**Sunday 13 September, 7.00 BST**

CENTRAL BRANCH CHAT

**With CB Secretary Paul Edwards**

**Wednesday 16 September, 7.30pm BST**

The FAQ Workshop

### SOCIALISM AND MORALITY

Socialists generally think morality is a bad way to make a good argument, and some years ago after a big debate we decided that socialism was not, even partly, an ethical case. Despite this, it's arguably impossible to be a socialist without having a well-developed sense of moral justice. Are we doing the right thing by constantly avoiding the moral debate, or do we risk doing ourselves a disservice by making socialism seem soulless and mechanistic? How could we achieve the best of both worlds?

**Friday 18 September, 7.30 BST**

FRIDAY NIGHT TALK

### To be announced

**Wednesday 23 September, 7.30pm BST**

The FAQ Workshop

### THE POLITICS OF ENVY

Some people call socialism the politics of envy, often when they themselves have got nothing that anyone else would envy. Is this fair comment, or egregious insult? We could repudiate the idea and point to the global poor, which makes us look moralistic. Or we could agree that they're right and complain that workers aren't envious enough, which makes us look like wannabes and sore losers. Is there a good way past this argument?

**Friday 25 September, 7.30 BST**

FRIDAY NIGHT TALK

### To be announced

**Sunday 27 September, 7.00 BST**

CENTRAL BRANCH CHAT

**With CB Secretary Paul Edwards**

**Wednesday 30 September, 7.30pm BST**

The FAQ Workshop

### 10 DESERT-ISLAND BOOKS FOR WOULD-BE SOCIALISTS

We all remember books we liked, but which ten would we recommend as absolute must-reads for someone exploring socialist ideas, on a desert island or elsewhere?

## Declaration of Principles

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

### Object

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

### Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e. land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the

working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.



## Sick society

'Many Turkish womens' right groups say the crackdown reflects a wider societal problem. They say many women who are being abused seek — but never receive — proper help. Melek Önder of the *We Will Stop Femicide* initiative told DW that Turkish police, the government and state officials must do much more to protect women at risk: "There were cases where women who were being violently abused asked for help, but nothing happened," she says' (dw.com, 24 July). The crackdown on protests is hardly surprising under the would-be Sultan, Erdoğan. Calling for wife beating to become a priority concern for the police, who prefer not to get involved, and thus give their tacit endorsement, is reformist folly, particularly when there are so many reactionaries such as Ebru Asiltürk, 'the spokeswoman for womens' affairs for Turkey's Islamic conservative *Saadet Party*.' She opined recently that '...the treaty [*Istanbul Convention* to tackle violence against women and domestic abuse, as well as promoting gender equality — which Turkey was, ironically, the first country to ratify!] would be like a "bomb" destroying Turkey's traditional family structure.' Femicide is indeed an indication of serious, wider social and sexual problems that are not confined to a small minority of deviants or reactionary regimes — Poland is another example — but are typical of a sick society. Neither changes in the law and policing policy, nor more prosecutions against wife beaters offer a cure.

## Cultural pain and pleasure

'The UK's only centre dedicated to stamping out female genital mutilation is facing closure after the government pulled its funding, putting women at fresh risk of harm. Cash has been quietly withdrawn from the unit — set up by Theresa May, when she vowed to end FGM "within a generation" [likely as effective as Tony Blair's 1999 pledge to end child poverty] — leaving it struggling to survive...The crisis comes despite hundreds of new victims of FGM being identified every month and just one successful prosecution for the practice, despite laws being on the books for 35 years' (independent.co.uk, 26 July). Women supporting the status-quo or reactionary cultural/religious practices abound, alas.

## Back to the primitive?

There may be some socialists who would like to see the return of the woolly mammoth, but none favour primitive communism over the establishment of a post-capitalist world. 'Lotte Alberg, who owns two sex clubs in Amsterdam's famous red-light district, is relieved to

see her staff back at work. Club BonTon and Club LV both reopened this week after four months of lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic' (pri.org, 6 July). To Alberg and Fuambai Ahmadu, an anthropologist who chose clitoridectomy as an adult, we say the only place for prostitution and FGM in a world freed from the dictates of capital and culture will be at the museum of antiquities. Engels showed that the suppression of women had its origin in the rise of private property. Marx saw sex work as 'only a specific expression of the general prostitution of the labourer' (*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 1844). Rosa Luxemburg and Sylvia Pankhurst shared the socialist vision of Engels and Marx:

'The mass of the proletariat must do more than stake out clearly the aims and direction of the revolution. It must also personally, by its own activity, bring socialism step by step into life' (Rosa Luxemburg, *What Does the Spartacus League Want?*, 1918).

'Our aim is Communism. Communism is not an affair of party. It is a theory of life and social organisation. It is a life in which property is held in common; in which the community produces, by conscious aim, sufficient to supply the needs of all its members; in which there is no trading, money, wages, or any direct reward for services rendered' (Sylvia Pankhurst, *What is behind the label? A plea for clearness*, 1923).

## Mother and daughter



Emmeline Pankhurst

The decade leading up to 1914 and the 'War to End All Wars' was the heyday of the Suffragette movement under the leadership of Sylvia Pankhurst's mother, Emmeline. Some readers may be surprised to learn that we opposed her and the *Women's Social and Political Union* she founded in 1903.



Sylvia Pankhurst

Sylvia Pankhurst is better known for her part in the campaign for votes for all women as well as all men (one third of whom were denied the vote before 1918). Her mother, Emmeline, the authoritarian leader of the WSPU, was against this and campaigned instead only for votes for women on the same terms as then applied to men; which would have resulted in enfranchising more property-owners than workers. Opposing that was a no-brainer.

When Sylvia Pankhurst wrote the passage above she had come to hold the (mistaken) position that the vote didn't matter either for men or for women, arguing that communism (or socialism, she used both words to describe the same form of society) could only be achieved by anti-parliamentary action. A few years later, in 1927, Emmeline, who had been a jingoist in the First World War, was adopted as a Conservative Party parliamentary candidate; not surprising for someone who had stood for votes only for rich women.

Socialism can only be achieved with the majority support of women and of men. This point is so important that it forms part of our *Declaration of Principles*: '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' (emphasis added). This clause along with the other seven dates from the formation of our Party in 1904. Yes, the founding members, all 142 of them from Miss H. Aitken to H. J. Young, were remarkably forward-thinking in their assertion that women's emancipation could only be achieved as part of the emancipation of all humanity through the establishment of socialism as described above by Sylvia Pankhurst.