

# socialist standard

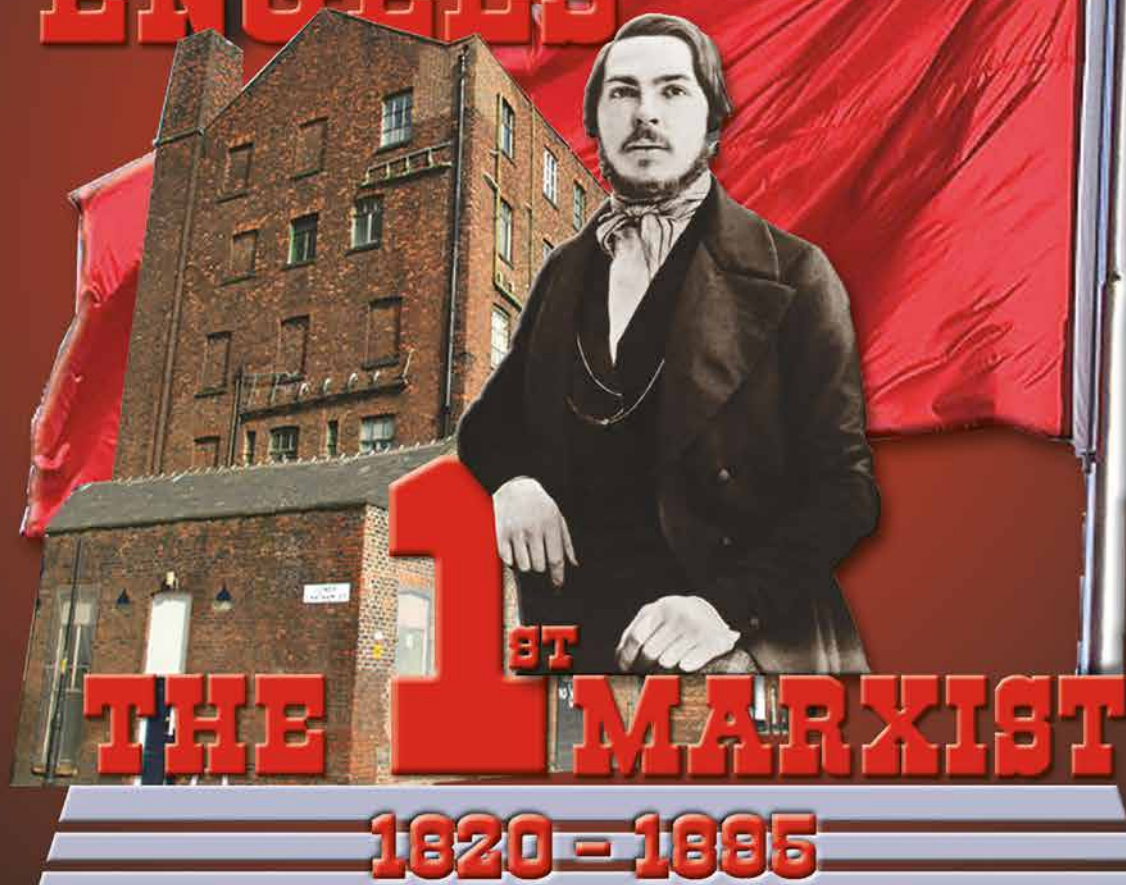
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Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain    Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

## FRIEDRICH ENGELS



Also:

Trump's Lies  
Class Control  
Peace in Capitalism?



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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'



## Science, Politics and Profits

As has long been predicted, the second wave of coronavirus is upon us. All along the government has claimed it has been following the science. On the face of it, this has appeared to be the case. In March, in common with most countries, the government instituted a national lockdown, where all non-essential businesses were closed and the state paid up to 80 percent of the wages of furloughed workers, to suppress the virus. It appeared for once that workers' welfare was being put before capitalist profits. Prior to this, however, the government toyed with the idea of herd immunity, which had the advantage that businesses could stay open and trade normally, where the virus would be allowed to spread among the population. But with the prospect of millions of workers being laid up in hospital, not making profits for their employers and costing the state billions in healthcare, plus an unacceptably high death rate, the government abandoned the idea and reluctantly went for a national lockdown. The fact that it was implemented late likely led to thousands more deaths.

The decision to end the lockdown was based not on the grounds that the virus was beaten but under pressure from businesses that were feeling the squeeze. This and the lack of a functioning track and trace system have, no doubt, contributed to the recent upsurge. Also, the government urging workers to return to their places of work so as to prop up the local hospitality businesses didn't help.

This time, the government has disregarded the scientific advice to introduce a second short-term national lockdown and instead has brought in a three-tier system in England (separate arrangements have been made in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) where different regions are subjected to varying levels of restrictions according to the severity of infections in their area. It is not hard to see why the government preferred this option. Keep as many businesses open as possible and keep the number of furloughed workers to a minimum. However, it has led to run-ins with some of the Northern local leaders. The most notable one is with Andy Burnham, the

mayor of Greater Manchester, who initially resisted the imposition of Tier 3 restrictions in his area demanding more money to compensate workers and local businesses.

The government has also to be mindful of the costs of further restrictions. Its debt is already more than 100 percent of GDP, which is creating unease among Tory MPs and Tory supporters in the press.

Although the government couches its measures in terms of saving livelihoods and jobs, it is really capitalist profits they're worried about. Science is not immune to this priority, so some scientists can always be induced to tell governments what they want to hear. Some scientists have thus signed the Great Barrington Agreement, which argues for 'focused protection' and herd-immunity, an approach the World Health Organization and others have described as dangerous, unethical and unscientific. In socialism, we would simply follow the science to beat a virus. In capitalism, nothing is ever so straightforward.

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# PATHFINDERS

## BURNING RAIN

IN SEPTEMBER the UK Defence Secretary was forced to issue a public denial that the military was proposing to get rid of its stock of 227 Challenger 2 tanks, right after a government review suggested that very thing (BBC News, 12 September - [bbc.in/35O4CTu](https://www.bbc.com/news/defense-50444444)). True-blue nationalists, in love with the idea of rolling over foreigners in 60-ton behemoths, were understandably upset at the prospect. But the truth is that the Challenger is outgunned and obsolete, several times over. The larger truth is that the tank itself is an obsolete concept in an age of armour-busting drones and long-range missiles.

Actually, most of Britain's war capability is obsolete, insofar as it exists at all. Years of budget cuts have reduced personnel and equipment to a fraction of their former strength. The air force has dropped to 119 fighters from 850 in 1989 ([dailymail.co.uk/3333333](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3333333)). The British navy has scrapped all its jets, and seen its warship fleet decline from over 900 warships in 1944 to 115 by the time of the Falklands war and now to around 24 ([bit.ly/2ZTUN2F](https://www.bbc.com/news/defense-50444444)). In 2010 it was still patrolling Somali waters on a pirate hunt, now it can barely patrol UK waters, and has completely withdrawn from the South Atlantic, thus rendering the original Falklands slaughter even more absurd. In 2014 Russia parked an armed cruiser off the coast of Scotland, causing red faces at the Admiralty, as the navy's only available warship was at Portsmouth. Later that year, in the Islamic State crisis, the US and France sent aircraft carriers to the region, but Britain had just sold its last carrier for scrap and just had to look on like the poor relation.

Since then Britain's splashed out £6bn on two new carriers, contracted by Blair's boom-time Labour government, which Cameron's later Tory austerity government couldn't wriggle out of. But as the BBC reported in June this year with unintentional comedy, 'The National Audit Office highlighted concerns over missing key elements such as aircraft and support ships' ([bbc.in/32LRbS2](https://www.bbc.com/news/defense-50444444)). What is the point of buying an aircraft carrier when you don't have any aircraft to carry, you ask? Well quite. But carriers are a mark of prestige and the entry price to the top diplomatic table. If you don't have them, goes the thinking, Johnny Foreigner can bowl all sorts of low balls while you're stuck in the pavilion. Witness China, which had to back down ignominiously, after sabre-rattling at Taiwan in 1996, when the US sent two carrier battle groups to the

Taiwan Strait. But since then China has been building anti-ship ballistic missiles that can sink a carrier from 1200 nautical miles away, which makes the UK's new purchases look even more like shiny white elephants, especially as it doesn't have the sailors to keep both of them at sea simultaneously and only plans to buy enough F35 fighters for one of them ([bit.ly/2RH4Jbc](https://www.bbc.com/news/defense-50444444)).



As so often with today's political and geopolitical scenarios, TV's *Yes Minister* got there first in the 1980s, on that occasion over the question of buying Trident to replace Polaris missiles. 'Trident is beautiful,' declaims Humphrey Appleby, 'it's the nuclear missile that Harrods would sell. Of course we don't need it, but you could say that about anything at Harrods' ([youtu.be/XyJh3qKjSMk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XyJh3qKjSMk)). The purpose of British defence policy, he explains for the benefit of the naïve, is not to defend Britain, because that's impossible, but only to make British people believe that Britain is defended ([youtu.be/9Kld-GgDcGk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Kld-GgDcGk)). The only thing anyone knows about weaponry is that it's ridiculously expensive, so it must be good, and that goes double for aircraft carriers. England's NHS budget is £133bn, after all, so £6bn for a bit of nationalistic feelgood therapy doesn't seem so extravagant.

But war has changed. For one thing, it is increasingly asynchronous, and heavy conventional weaponry is not much use against a guerrilla enemy you can't see. For another, AI is starting to replace people, and can now defeat top fighter pilots in aerial dogfights (*New Scientist*, 25 August - [bit.ly/3hTQx9D](https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-50444444)). Meanwhile in dark fetid corners, state-backed spooks continue to nibble away at each other's cyber security systems. But neither AI nor hackers can do anything without communications, which is why the key arena is now space. Satellites have become the de-facto battlefield weapon, not only for precision-guided munitions but for most other ground-support operations, including knowing where the other side is and what it's doing. Who

wields the big stick on Earth is whoever's got a sat-nav system in space. Today there are four navigational satellite systems in orbit, America's GPS, Russia's GLONASS, China's BeiDou and the EU's Galileo. Britain sank a lot of cash into Galileo before being unceremoniously booted out of the partnership because of Brexit, thus scoring a massive own goal the Brexiteers certainly didn't see coming. Other systems are emerging for India and Japan, and more will follow. The idea of everyone sharing one single system for peaceful purposes is of course silly idealistic nonsense in a world of competitive markets.

Capitalism increasingly relies on satellites for all its communications and financial transactions. Today there are around 2,600 in orbit, but this is set to increase by at least an order of magnitude as more countries and corporations heft their hardware aloft. SpaceX alone plans to put around 42,000 satellites into orbit, in order to provide global internet access. Pretty soon astronomers will barely be able to see for space junk as everyone and his dog scrambles to join the thousand-mile-high club.

In light of all this it's obvious that if you want to take down a country, you need to take out its satellites, thus a war in space looks ever more likely. The US has since 2010 been experimenting with an uncrewed reusable space plane, the Boeing X-37B, running highly secretive space flights of up to two years' duration. India launched a prototype in 2016, and the Chinese recently launched their own secret space plane from a space port in the Gobi Desert (Nasa, 4 September - [bit.ly/2ZSS4Xe](https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-50444444)). What are these uncrewed space planes for? That's anybody's guess, but military would be a good bet. Whoever has planes patrolling space has their boot on the neck of potential enemies. When the shooting starts, the satellites will be the shooting stars.

In a post-scarcity society of common ownership there won't be any reason to fight wars, but in capitalism, war is the logical extension of normal business operations. The technology changes, war doesn't. Generations grew up in the shadow of the atomic bomb, but the next war might be over even faster than it takes for an ICBM to cross a continent. You won't see it, you won't hear it. It'll just be a power cut. It won't seem like a catastrophe, nothing that spells a return to the middle ages. You'll just go outside to ask the neighbours what the hell's going on, and then stare in wonder at a sky full of burning rain.

PJS



# Socialism or Nationalism?

THE LEFT nationalists replace the principle of international class struggle with the doctrine of international struggle between states. As a result 'socialism' has become associated with militant nationalism rather than with the working-class internationalism it had originally been. The political struggle they present as a struggle is not between the working class and the capitalist class, but as a struggle of 'patriots' – workers and capitalists together – against foreign rule and domination. They call upon the entire population, employer and employee alike, to combine in a common struggle to achieve independence. Any supposed socialist who tells workers that they have more in common with their own ruling class than with the workers of other countries is a fraud. Any supposed 'socialist' who argues against the fundamental idea for the workers of the world to unite to overthrow all their exploiters and oppressors is not a socialist.

Nationalism has been a dangerous diversion from the class struggle and led to workers supporting the killing in wars of other workers in the interest of one particular state and its ruling class. The essence of nationalism is that when local businessmen are prevented from 'building up their own wealth' they may well build their own independent capitalist state. Nationalist struggles are class struggles under an ideological smokescreen, but not of the working class. They are either struggles by an aspiring capitalist class to establish themselves as a new national ruling class or struggles by an established but weak national ruling class to garner a bigger share of world profits for themselves. There is no reason why socialists should support independence movements.

Where is the link from the triumph of nationalism to the socialist understanding of the workers, that some left nationalists say should take place? A cursory reading of history shows that capitalism and the power of the capitalist have not been weakened. Has nationalism progressed the cause of the working class one inch over the decades? Or led it down many a tearful false trail?

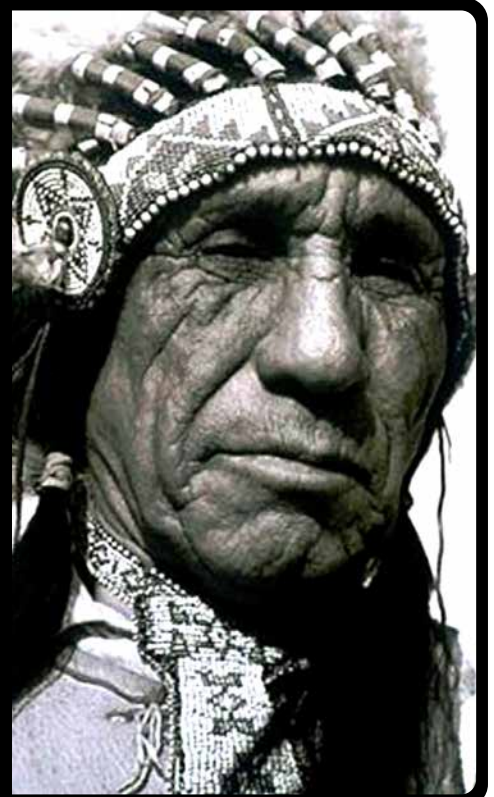
For the socialist, class-consciousness is the breaking down of all barriers to understanding. The concept of nationality is one of these obstacles. The idea that a geographical area controlled by a privileged elite who thrive on the

enforced exploitation of that area's producers, should grant to the latter the right to live there providing they accept their wage-slave status and defend the right of the privileged to live on their backs is offensive to any reasonably-minded worker. Those who promote such nonsense are enemies of our class.

Nationalism means merely that workers get new masters instead of the old ones. Capitalism does not change by a change of management personnel. Political control may well switch locations but multinationals will still maintain their economic stranglehold on the newly independent nation.

**'Before our white brothers came to civilize us we had no jails. Therefore we had no criminals. You can't have criminals without a jail. We had no locks or keys, and so we had no thieves. If a man was so poor that he had no horse, tipi or blanket, someone gave him these things. We were too uncivilized to set much value on personal belongings. We wanted to have things only in order to give them away. We had no money, and therefore a man's worth couldn't be measured by it. We had no written law, no attorneys or politicians, therefore we couldn't cheat. We really were in a bad way before the white men came, and I don't know how we managed to get along without these basic things which, we are told, are absolutely necessary to make a civilized society.'**

**John Lane Deer, Lakota Sioux  
protester and satirist (1903 - 76)**



## LETTERS

### Activist politics

Some truth to it, but wrongly put. I've never adopted the curious new concept of 'lesser evil voting' and have argued strenuously that even raising the notion, as is done here, is a sellout to the establishment. For the left, politics is activism, daily. Every once in a while an event comes along called an 'election'. A genuine leftist asks whether some candidate is so awful that it's worth taking a few minutes to vote against them, and if it is, does so, and then goes back to work.

**Noam Chomsky** in reply to 'Lesser Evil' article in October *Socialist Standard*.

**Reply:** But, unless this is just going to be a private gesture, it will involve much more than just a few minutes, won't it? If you really want to stop the most awful candidate you need to work out who amongst the other candidates has the best chance of winning instead, even if there is another candidate standing who is less awful. And then you need to urge others to vote for your chosen anti-most-awful candidate. Which is what you have been doing, urging voters, at least in the swing states, to vote for Biden and not to vote, for instance, for the Green Party candidate. We would have thought that this is precisely 'lesser evil' politics. If we are talking of gestures, a more principled one would be to cast a write-in vote for socialism – *Editors*.

# COOKING THE BOOKS

## The really big slump

We know that capitalist production moves in ever-repeating cycles of boom and slump and that governments can do nothing to prevent this. But they can produce a slump, either unintentionally through a mistaken policy or deliberately. The present slump is an example in that it has been largely government-induced rather than resulting from the normal workings of capitalism. The lockdown imposed by the government at the end of March and maintained for the next three months led, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) at the end of September, to a fall in GDP during those three months of 19.8 percent, which they described as 'the largest quarterly contraction in the UK economy since quarterly records began in 1955'.

This was a much higher fall than in many other countries:

'Revised figures yesterday from Germany showed that its GDP fell by 9.7 per cent, less than half the UK's decline, while the eurozone and European Union falls were 12.1 per cent and 11.9 per cent respectively ... The United States recorded a similar drop to Germany, just under 10 per cent' (David Smith, Times, 26 August).

Why this difference? Was the government-induced slump in Britain really twice as deep as in Germany and the US? If so, why? It turns out that it was mainly due to the different way that the ONS statisticians calculated the fall compared with those in other countries.

GDP is measured in various ways, one of which is to add up what persons spend, what businesses invest and what the government spends. With only key workers, as in the health service and food distribution, allowed to go to work during the period and the income of some 9.4 million reduced to 80 percent of their previous earnings, private consumption fell by 23.1 percent, manufacturing production by 16.9 percent and business investment by 31.4 percent. Government spending, on the other hand, went up by 14.1 percent. Calculating GDP in this way gave a fall of 14.5 percent.

This way of calculating the fall didn't satisfy the ONS as, while the government spent more, it did not provide the same level of 'service'. In calculating GDP, the government is regarded as providing various services – education, health care, 'defence', 'justice', administration, etc – which have to be priced. Normally this is simply the amount of money the

government spends on them. During the lockdown, however, although the government spent the same amount on education, because schools were closed it didn't provide the same level of 'service'; similarly with normal NHS services. Taking this into account, the ONS reduced government 'output', so increasing the fall in GDP from 14.5 to 19.8 percent. Other countries didn't do this.

We don't want to get involved in the arguments amongst statisticians as to the best way to calculate GDP except to point out that the concept of government 'output' is rather dubious. Governments as such produce nothing; everything they spend derives ultimately from surplus value produced in the profit-making sector of the economy and is obtained by them either through taxation or by borrowing. So all its spending is as much a 'transfer payment' as are benefits and pensions.

In any event, whether the fall – the plunge, in fact – in GDP over the three months was 19.8 or 14.5 percent it was much more than in any slump caused by the normal workings of capitalism. In the previous biggest slump since accurate records began, the one that followed the Crash of 2008, GDP fell by only 4.6 percent and that over a period of 16 months.

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## Class Control

I am dangerous, apparently. School students need protecting from me and my ilk, lest they be seduced into thinking inimical to their well-being, perhaps undermining the very fundamentals of society.

Could it be that I'm stockpiling caches of weapons for armed insurrection? Is it my intention to poison their young minds against democracy? Maybe my intention is to persuade them to adopt some extreme ideology?

Actually, perhaps rather boringly, no!

It is certainly true that I espouse the replacing of capitalism with socialism. That, it seems, could be enough to have my ideas banned from the classroom for, ironically, being anti-democratic.

The Department for Education has recently issued new guidelines instructing schools not to use 'resources produced by organisations that take extreme political stances on matters'.

One such 'extreme political stance' is advocating the abolition of capitalism. The Department for Unwitting Irony goes on to justify capitalism as protecting freedom of speech. Opposition to capitalism is, it seems, an ipso facto denial of freedom of speech.

To be accurate, discussing an alternative to capitalism in the classroom is not forbidden by this guidance. However, using an article from the *Socialist Standard*, advocating such a course of action would contravene the guidelines.

The basic problem is that there are no criteria established as to what an extreme political stance means. Examples are given such as, '...a publicly stated desire to abolish or overthrow democracy, capitalism... to end free and fair elections, opposition to... freedom speech... of association, of assembly... of religion and conscience'.

The implication is that all of the above are equally culpable. So, the overthrow of democracy is identical to advocating abolishing capitalism as both are extreme.

Whereas, defending an economic system whereby the vast majority must sell their labour power for less than the value they create, simply to live, to the few who accrue to themselves the surplus value produced by that majority, is, obviously, reasonable and moderate.

Perhaps the Socialist Party is dedicated to overthrowing democracy in order to engineer a socialist society? The Mandarins of Unwitting Irony either don't understand, or deviously obscure, the absolute necessity of democracy in achieving socialism.

No democracy – no socialism. Such a society can only be brought about by the conscious action of the working class, the vast majority, acting collectively on its own behalf to bring socialism about.

Socialists most certainly have no desire to turn young minds against democracy, rather they want to enhance it to the point where it actually becomes effective.

In his column the journalistic commentator Daniel Finkelstein (*Times*, 30. September) took great exception to those who found the Department for Education guidance troubling:

'All that's being suggested is that organisations which advocate the abolition of capitalism are not suitable providers of teaching material for schoolchildren.'

Finkelstein begins his piece by referring to how, 'Stalin attempted to starve my father to death in Siberia.' He goes on to list, '...more than two dozen attempts to build a socialist society', from Albania to Venezuela, with all the main culprits in between.

Nor will he allow the response that none of these were real socialism. He has a point if he is referring to apologists for

those regimes who find their hopes ultimately disappointed.

However, the response that none of those regimes exhibited real socialism is perfectly valid if they contravened the criteria by which socialism is defined from the outset. The Socialist Party has consistently denounced all such manifestations of supposed socialism for the travesty they've been from their inception.

Indeed, opposition to capitalism encompasses all examples of state capitalism and 'free market' capitalism no matter how barbaric or apparently liberal they may be.

It serves capitalism well to obscure what socialism actually means. Lenin and his ilk have probably been amongst the best servants to the prolongation of capitalism. As Finkelstein's article clearly demonstrates, the popular perception of socialism is dull, poverty-inducing bureaucracy at best, homicidal totalitarianism at worst.

This allows the DoFE and such state institutions to imply guilt by word association. This despite the fact that socialism is not extreme any more than capitalism was an extreme repudiation of feudalism, rather than a natural development from within it.

Socialism is not a denial of capitalism, socialists fully recognise the advances and benefits accruing from it. They also recognise that no economic system exists in perpetuity, but all must give way to the one that supersedes it.

Education has to deal with difficult issues. The transcending of capitalism by socialism is one such. Other issues around controversial topics are surely best addressed by examination and critical analysis of source material. This has to be the way democracy progresses.

It is not the origin of resources, but how they are used. As with all those elements listed as being 'Examples of extreme political stances...', simply excluding them, like disruptive students, does not actually deal with them or make them go away.

Democracy cannot be about banning ideas, and 'freedom of speech' is at best mere rhetoric if it is confined within safe guidelines. Difficult, hurtful, even dangerous ideas need to be confronted, exposed and effectively countered.

It is frequently argued that allowing what is often now referred to as hate speech, we suppose its textual corollary must be hate script, leads to acts of violence against those who are the subjects.

The point, though, must be that all acts of violence, whatever the excusing cause quoted – skin colour, gender, sexuality, sub-group, political persuasion et al – are unequivocally wrong.

It also raises the question as to when hate speech becomes patriotic speech, when the media and politicians demonise a foreign nation in order to bomb it into 'democracy'.

Amnesty International's Head of Policy and Government Affairs, Allan Hogarth commented:

'The only extreme view here is the one which suggests that it's somehow illegitimate to even consider the validity of socio-economic systems other than the prevailing one – a system that has of course only been in existence for a comparatively short period of time.'

The threat to democracy is probably from those who view it as serving the interests of capital, that it should be limited to this end. Whereas true democracy is inimical to capital in that the world's productive resources and means need to be brought under common ownership with democratic control to serve the interests of all.

From the perspective of the Department for Education this probably does appear extreme, but prescriptive guidelines cannot deny the necessity of socialism, even if they would deny school students the knowledge, if they could.

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

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

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

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### IRELAND

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### NORTHERN IRELAND

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The Quaker Hall, Victoria Terrace (above Victoria Street), Edinburgh. Contact: J. Moir. 0131 440 0995. [jimmyjmoir73@gmail.com](mailto:jimmyjmoir73@gmail.com)

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# MATERIAL WORLD

## 'Too old to work, too young to die'

PEOPLE ARE living a lot longer which should be good news but not so under capitalism. Ageing populations are viewed as a threat to prosperity, rather than a sign of human achievement and progress.

With a lower fertility rate (see last month's article), the ageing of the population is inevitable. For the first time in history, the number of people aged 65 years and over will exceed the number of children under 5. With the 'greying' of the world's population, governments are struggling to support the elderly.

As long as women are not willing to return to being baby-breeders to counteract the trend, by 2030 there will be one billion more older people, accounting for 13 percent of the total population. While some of the developed nations are raising the age of retirement, making their old people work for longer, the increased longevity and the growing proportion of elderly are raising serious economic concerns. In particular, population ageing is resulting in growing financial stresses on retirement pensions, health systems and social care programmes. Reluctant

to raise taxes on the capitalists, the state attempts to address the mounting costs by largely adjusting benefits, contribution rates, savings plans and raising the age of retirement. But socialists possess a greater vision: that we shouldn't be aiming to extend the domain of work into old age, but to extend the domain of non-work into young age.

The current pension problems in the advanced capitalist countries will pale into insignificance compared with what is coming for the rest of the world that has no welfare system, where the ratio of elderly people will rise faster than in the industrialised world, casting vastly more numbers of their old folk into poverty. An indication of the rate of this 'population ageing' is the time it takes for the proportion of people over a retirement age of 65 to double from 7 percent of the overall population to 14 percent. In France this process took more than a century. In China, it is projected to take less than a quarter of that time, perhaps just 25

years. In Vietnam 'population ageing' is set to rise even faster with the proportion of elderly projected to double over a mere 17-year period.

Centenarians represent a small fraction of the world's current population of 7.3 billion, about one centenarian out of every 16,000 people. Over the coming decades, however, this rate is expected to increase rapidly and by the close of century is projected to reach one centenarian out of every 425 people. Other studies have been more optimistic about the chances



of becoming a centenarian, estimating that more half of the babies in advanced industrialised nations can expect to live 100 years. Bringing more women into the workforce and lengthening the working years of older workers may well not be sufficient to solve the demographic problem. The other alternatives will be to increase productivity either by automation or with more immigration.

Many believe robotics can help a country overcome the handicap of a fast-ageing population and a declining workforce. The source of all unearned income is what Marx called the surplus value produced by workers over and above what they are paid. It is out of this unpaid labour that not only the rich but the whole non-productive superstructure of capitalist society (the armed forces, civil service, legal system, banking) has to be maintained. What allows capitalism to maintain an enormous non-productive sector is its high level of productivity in the productive sector. Pensioners too are

maintained out of this surplus. Pensions are a transfer payment from the profits of the capitalists, even if ultimately these profits come from what workers produce. It is the increasing productivity that will determine how well society will be able to support the expected increased proportion of retired people in the population.

The data make the case that a general increase in immigration is needed. Migration can offset many of the adverse effects of an ageing population on the

labour market, with the average age of migrants being lower than the host population. Immigration is a sensitive issue in numerous countries. Paradoxically, those countries facing dropping birth rates and increased ageing, are opposed to immigration. In addition to rising public opinion opposing immigration, many governments are tightening border controls, erecting fences and walls, adopting policies to significantly restrict immigration. And it's not just about the numbers – migrants bring new ideas and a new dynamism to a society's culture.

The *Socialist Standard* could fill its pages with articles about the appalling care given to the aged and infirm under capitalism today. Many charities strive to improve conditions for the elderly but ultimately they will fail because they try to reform capitalism instead of changing it. When workers decide to abolish the wages system and produce for human needs instead of profit, then hardship and insecurity in old age could become a memory of capitalism's barbaric past. Join us and help to build a new system of society where young and old can live out their lives with respect and dignity in a world where the true meaning of community prevails. Socialism will abolish the concept of retirement and fulfil the promise of a world providing all the prerequisites of a good life, regardless of age or physical ability.

**ALJO**

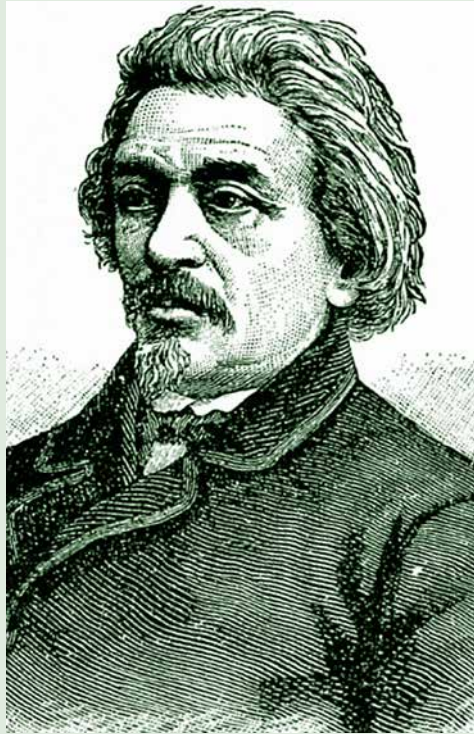
# Engels as Utopian Socialist

Engels became a socialist some time in 1842 after coming into contact with supporters of Robert Owen in Manchester. He contributed to their paper *The New Moral World* and was interested in their scheme to establish a network of communistic colonies. He was also aware of other groups in France with similar ideas. He was what he himself would later call a 'utopian socialist', which was not meant as a criticism of their aim but of why and how they saw socialism coming about.

In February 1845 he took part in a campaign organised by Moses Hess to popularise the idea of communism in their native part of Germany, now the city of Wuppertal. As part of this campaign a series of three meetings was held in Elberfeld. Engels spoke at two of them. In the first, on 8 February, he set out the case against 'present-day society' and for replacing it by communism.

His criticism of the existing system, which he called 'free competition', was that it was based on 'individualism' in the sense that each individual was left to fend for themselves to obtain the money to buy what they needed to live; this led to a war of all against all in which everyone competed against everyone else. The alternative to this 'individualism' was communism (or what Robert Owen and the Owenites he had met in England called 'socialism') where, instead of people competing against each other to get a living they would co-operate to produce and share out what they needed. As he put it:

'In communist society, where the interests of individuals are not opposed to one another but, on the contrary, are united, competition is eliminated. As is self-evident, there can no longer be any question of the ruin of particular classes, nor of the very existence of classes such as the rich and the poor nowadays. As soon as private gain, the aim of the individual to enrich himself on his own, disappears from the production and distribution of the goods necessary to life, trade crises will also disappear of themselves. In communist society it will be easy to be informed about both production and consumption. Since we know how much, on the average, a person needs, it is easy to calculate how much is needed by a given number of individuals, and since production is no longer in the hands of private producers but in those of the community and its administrative bodies, it



Moses Hess

is a trifling matter 'to regulate production according to needs' (his emphasis). Hess spoke the following week and, besides dealing with the objection that communism was against human nature and the question of who would do the dirty work, made it clear that as in communist society 'the aim of the individual to enrich himself on his own' would disappear so would money:

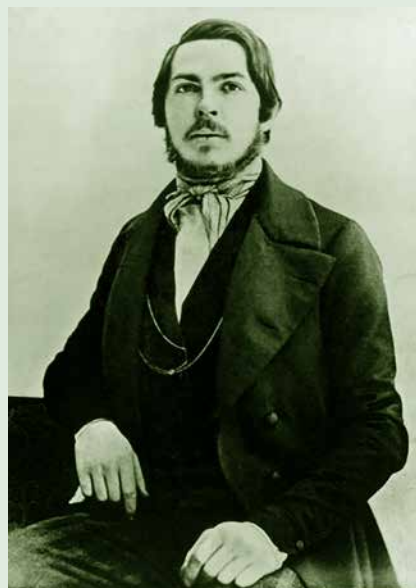
'We all have to peddle our life-activity in order to buy in exchange the life-activity of other men – and what is the sum total of all our faculties and of all our forces, which we throw on the market and which we must turn into money, but our own whole life? It is not our body, which we only touch from the outside, but its real force that constitutes our life. When we sell this force of ours we ourselves sell our very life. Money is the mark of slavery; is it not therefore but human value expressed in figures? But men who can be paid, men who buy and sell each other, are they anything but

slaves? How can we begin to escape from this traffic in men as long as we live in isolation and as long as each person has to work for himself on his own account in order to gain the means of existence? Who gives us the means of life, the means of our physical and social activity if we don't gain them by buying and selling our own life?' ([www.marxists.org/archive/hess/1845/elberfeld-speech.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/hess/1845/elberfeld-speech.htm))

At the time Engels saw a communist society as coming into being gradually and peacefully as a result of social reforms such as education for all workers and communist colonies for

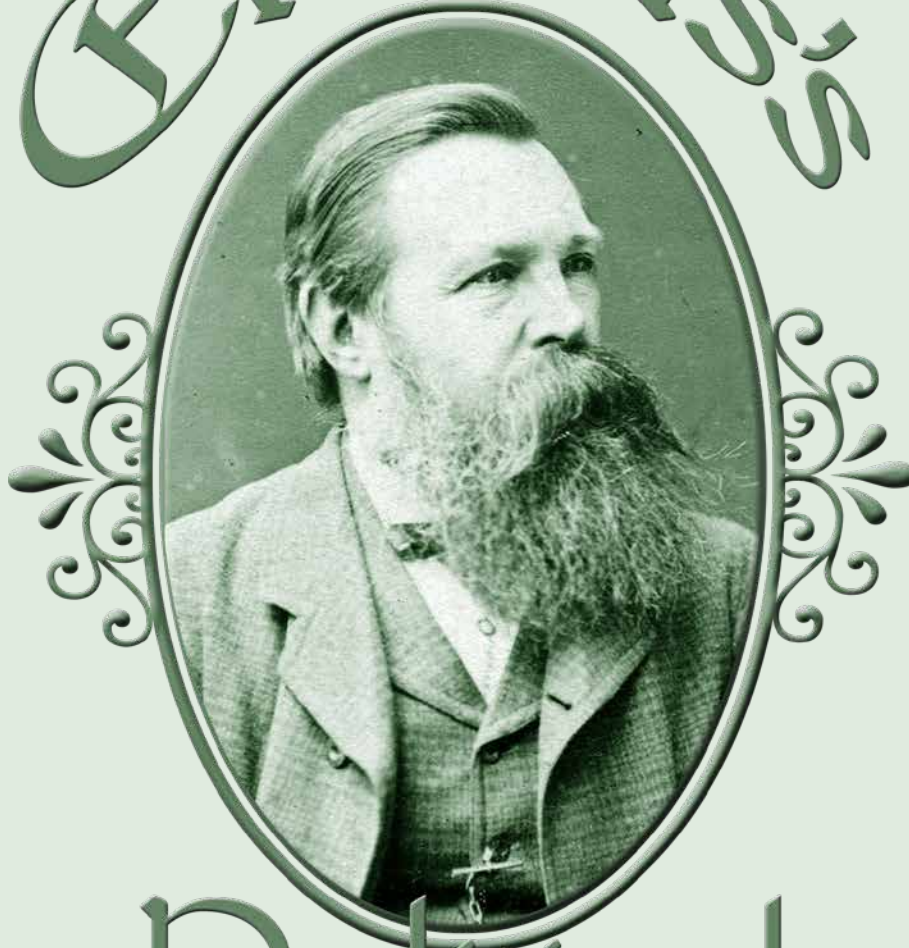
the unemployed paid for by a progressive tax on incomes. Later that year, as he and Marx clarified their ideas, they came to the conclusion that 'present-day society' was not based on everyone trying to exploit everyone else but on the exploitation of the 'proletariat' (the working class) by the 'bourgeoisie' (the capitalist class) and that a communist society would come about as the result of a political revolution in which the 'proletariat' would overthrow the rule of the 'bourgeoisie'.

However, Engels never changed his view that communism was a society based on the common ownership of the means of life with production carried on directly to satisfy people's needs and which by the 1880s he had come to call 'socialism'. The full speech can be found here: [tinyurl.com/y44gjssd](http://tinyurl.com/y44gjssd)





# Engels



## Political Testament

Engels died in August 1895. One of his last published writings was an introduction to Marx's *The Class Struggles in France 1848 to 1850*, a collection of articles written by Marx at the time. Its content is such that it can be regarded as his political testament.

Reviewing the political position that he and Marx had then taken up, Engels wrote that 'history has shown us to have been wrong, has revealed our point of view at that time to have been an illusion.'

Past revolutions, he wrote, had been minority revolutions in the interest of some minority; after the initial victory the revolutionaries split into two sections – those who were satisfied with what had been achieved and those who wanted to go further, but whatever happened the end-result was minority rule.

The illusion, Engels explained, was thinking that, because during the revolutionary wave of 1848 there was already a minority, albeit a small one, which understood what was in the interest of the working class, there was a chance that this minority could draw the majority into carrying out a workers' revolution:

'[W]hat was involved here were not false representations, but the implementation of the most vital interests of the great majority itself, interests which, it is true, were at that time by no means clear to this great majority, but which were bound to become clear to it as their practical implementation proceeded, by their convincing obviousness. (...) [T]he proletariat grown wise from experience had to become the decisive factor — was there not every prospect then of turning the revolution of the minority into a revolution of the majority?'

Engels's reply was unequivocal: 'History has proved us wrong, and all who thought like us.' And, later:

'The time of surprise attacks, of revolutions carried through by small conscious minorities at the head of masses lacking consciousness is past. Where it is a question of a complete transformation of the social organisation, the masses themselves must also be in on it, must themselves already have grasped what is at stake, what they are fighting for, body and soul. The history of the last fifty years has taught us that. But in order that the masses may understand what is to be done, long, persistent work is required...'

He added 'and it is just this work that we are now

pursuing, and with a success which drives the enemy to despair.' This was a reference to the use made of universal suffrage by the German Social Democratic Party, but that turned out to be another illusion as the party's support was being built up for democratic and social reforms within capitalism rather than for socialism.

However, Engels was proved right when a revolutionary minority attempted to apply the tactics of 1848-50 in Germany after the overthrow of the Kaiser in 1918 and to push the revolution forward to socialism. They failed as the rest of the working class didn't come to want socialism in the course of the revolution but remained satisfied with what had been achieved (political democracy).

As Engels correctly concluded, for there to be a successful socialist revolution the majority 'must themselves already have grasped what is at stake' and that, when they had, they could turn universal suffrage 'from a means of deception into an instrument of emancipation', but that to reach this point required 'long, persistent work'.

The full introduction can be found here: [tinyurl.com/y6a6qaac](https://tinyurl.com/y6a6qaac)

**F**riedrich Engels was born two hundred years ago in November 1820 in what is now called Wuppertal in Germany. He was the eldest son of a textile capitalist. Engels was trained for a career as a merchant, but in 1841 he went to Berlin and became closely involved with the Young Hegelians, a group of left-wing philosophers with whom Marx had also been involved. While in Berlin he did his military service in an artillery regiment, and for the rest of his life he took a keen interest in military matters. Later on, in the Marx household he was known as 'The General' and in the socialist movement as 'Marx's General'. In 1842 Engels became a socialist – before and independently of Marx – and went to Salford to work in his father's business.

In England he became interested in the struggles of the English working class. His research resulted in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, first published in German in 1845 and in English in 1887. It recorded the absolute poverty of the families in Manchester and their degrading working conditions. Based on first-hand observation and local sources it is still an important primary source for historians. This book greatly impressed Marx and contributed to what was to be their life-long friendship. In a preface for the 1892 edition, Engels wrote that 'the most crying abuses described in this book have either disappeared or have been made less conspicuous.' This is why 'in 1844' was then added to the book's title. Engels went on to say:

It will be hardly necessary to point out that the general theoretical standpoint of this book – philosophical, economical, political – does not exactly coincide with my standpoint of to-day. Modern international Socialism, since fully developed as a science, chiefly and almost exclusively through the efforts of Marx, did not as yet exist in 1844'.

### **'Historical materialism'**

Engels first met Marx in Paris and agreed to produce a political satire aimed at the Young Hegelians: *The Holy Family* (1845). Engels and Marx then began writing *The German Ideology* in November 1845 and continued to work on it for nearly a year before it was abandoned unfinished, as Marx put it, to 'the gnawing criticism of the mice' (teeth marks of mice were subsequently found on the manuscript). This work contains an attack on the Young Hegelians (the German ideology in question) and in so doing they set out the basic principles of their materialist conception of history:

'The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity'.

These key concepts would provide the guiding thread for their researches of the past and present. Engels would later label this materialism 'historical materialism', but it should be noted that the materialism here is not a philosophy of

knowledge, as it is usually understood in philosophy. It is in the practical sense of the word (not in its acquisitive sense) that socialists are said to be materialists in outlook. This may look uncontroversial now, but at the time it was a revolutionary way of thinking. The widely influential German philosopher Hegel, for instance, conceived human history as the unfolding of an idea.

In 1848 the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (now usually known as the *Communist Manifesto*) was published. Engels was not involved in writing the *Manifesto* but in the 1888 revised English edition he claimed joint authorship with Marx, who had died five years earlier. The revised edition sometimes improves on the original as, for example, this classic statement of the socialist revolution:

'All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority'.

Engels had a better grasp of the English language than Marx, and he put it to good use in the many newspaper articles he wrote, some of which were published with Marx's name as author. In the short book *The Peasant War in Germany* (1850) Engels drew comparisons between an early sixteenth-century uprising and the recent revolutions in Europe. It could also bear comparison between those revolutions and the Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917:

'The worst thing that can befall a leader of an extreme party is to be compelled to take over a government in an epoch when the movement is not yet ripe for the domination of the class which he represents and for the realisation of the measures which that domination would imply'.

### **'Scientific socialism'**

In 1850 Engels re-joined the family firm in Salford, where he stayed until 1870, helping Marx financially and journalistically. Engels also developed his own lines of interest, especially in the natural sciences, and one result of his studies was his notes published in 1925 as *Dialectics of Nature*. According to Tristram Hunt, a few years previously the manuscript was in the possession of Eduard Bernstein, acting as Engels' literary executor, who sent it to Albert Einstein for comment. Einstein thought the science was confused (*The Frock-Coated Communist: The Revolutionary Life of Friedrich Engels*, 2009).

In 1878 he was able to retire and move to London. As Marx







became less politically active due to ill health, Engels took on more responsibility for setting out what was becoming known as 'Marxism'. In 1878 *Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science* (subsequently abbreviated to *Anti-Dühring*) appeared. In an 1885 preface, two years after Marx's death, Engels claimed that the arguments used against the German philosopher Dühring were mainly Marx's 'and only to an insignificant degree by

myself'. Engels then said: 'I read the whole manuscript to him before it was printed'. However, Terrell Carver has flagged this comment as odd (*Engels: A Very Short Introduction*, 2003). The implication of Engels' comment is that Marx agreed with everything in the book. But with a large, closely argued book like this it seems implausible.

In *Anti-Dühring* Engels wrote that the dialectic is 'the science of the universal laws of motion and evolution in nature, human society and thought'. Marx's scattered comments on science and the dialectic could never be construed as making such a bold claim. That there are universal laws of motion in physics and of evolution in biology may be conceded, but it is more contentious to say that there are entirely equivalent laws of motion or evolution in human society. Like some other thinkers of the time, Engels had difficulty in disentangling philosophy from science.

### Populariser of socialist theory

Three chapters from *Anti-Dühring* were published as *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* in 1880. This latter work proved to be immensely popular within the growing socialist movement as a general exposition of Marxism. In 1884 *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* was written and published. This was based on a synopsis Marx had written on *Ancient Society*, a book by Lewis Henry Morgan that was published in 1877. *The Origin* takes an historical view of the family in relation to issues of class, female subjugation and private property. It also contains Engels' classic socialist position on the state:

'The ancient state was, above all, the state of the slave owners for holding down the slaves, just as the feudal state was the organ of the nobility for holding down the peasant serfs and bondsmen, and the modern representative state is an instrument for exploiting wage labour by capital'.

In *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (1888), Engels explained and defended his

philosophy of nature. In his criticism of the German philosopher Feuerbach he wrote that a limitation of his 'materialism lay in its inability to comprehend the universe as a process, as matter undergoing uninterrupted historical development'. Despite his claim to reject idealism, the universe as an unfolding of the idea is a return by Engels to the Hegelian philosophy of his youth in Germany,

After Marx's death in 1883, Engels spent most of his time editing Marx's notes for volumes two and three of *Capital*, published in 1885 and 1894, respectively. He devoted his last few years as an adviser to the parties of the Second International before dying of cancer in 1895. During their working life together, Engels always regarded himself as the junior partner. However, after Marx's death and at a time of massively increased interest in Marxism, it fell to Engels to do the explaining. Most of it was done superbly, but he also produced a tendency towards 'scientism' – the belief that science also explains human political life. The term 'scientific socialism' is really just a philosophical viewpoint, and no less valid for all that.

From the twentieth century onwards, Engels's political status has been raised to the equal of Marx. But there is nothing in the writings of Engels which justifies the existence of the political and social monstrosities erected in the names of Marx and Engels.

LEW



# TRUMP AND LIARS IN A HOUR

**T**he reign of President Trump in the United States has been characterised by open deceit. Many of his opponents berated the media for not calling his lies outright lies, but even when they have, it has not scratched the levels of support he possesses among his millions of followers. A recent example was following the revelations, in the Bob Woodward recorded interviews, that Trump had tried to downplay the seriousness of Covid 19, while knowing full well the danger it posed (as he later found to his cost). His team's response was to announce that Trump had never played down the seriousness of Covid, despite him – on tape – saying he would and the plethora of public statements that can demonstrate that he did. That does not matter, they are sticking by the lie.

As Gary Kasparov, former Soviet chess grandmaster, has had occasion to point out, the purpose of such lies is not just to deceive, but to prove loyalty by seeing who is willing to swallow their pride and utter deliberate untruths that they know not just to be untruths but unconvincing ones at that. Kasparov had experienced this first hand in the Soviet Union and under Putin. It is an exercise in raw power. It promotes the cult-like following President Trump has whipped up.

Of course this is nothing new. As Marx and Engels wrote in *The German Ideology*:

‘The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it’.

Those ideas, necessarily, are going to serve that class (and they are by no means homogeneous and uncontested within the ruling class and between contending classes). To the extent that they present the interests of the ruling class as the interests of the whole of society, they are inherently deceitful (but not necessarily consciously so).

This accounts for so much of the noise around Trump: as a billionaire capitalist who surrounds himself with millionaires, centimillionaires and the billionaire Betsy DeVos, and who took the reins of power from the career politicians, he refuses to think and act like a career politician with the sensibility and decorum usually demanded of a candidate or office holder. The Democrats who find Trump uncouth are precisely the technocrats Noam Chomsky warned about in his essay *The Responsibility of Intellectuals*, who believe that ‘the age of ideology is ended, supplanted, at least in the West, by a general agreement that each issue must be settled in its own terms, within the framework of a Welfare State in which, presumably, experts in the conduct of public affairs will have a prominent role’. ([chomsky.info/19670223/](http://chomsky.info/19670223/)).

Those ‘experts’ dominated the Clinton, Blair and Obama governments. As the late David Graeber pointed out, they represented the ‘peculiar fusion of public and private, market forces and administrative oversight, the world of hallmarks, benchmarks, and stakeholders that characterizes what I’ve been calling centrism is a direct expression of the sensibilities of the professional-managerial classes’ ([tinyurl.com/rmeyu88](http://tinyurl.com/rmeyu88)).

Professional-managerial classes who value procedure over substance, the upshot of which is worth quoting at length:

‘All this also helps explain the otherwise mysterious popular appeal of the disorganized, impulsive, shambolic (but nonetheless cut-to-the-chase, get-things-done) personas cultivated by men like Trump and Johnson. Yes, they are children of privilege in every possible sense of the term. Yes, they are pathological liars. Yes, they don’t seem to care about anyone but themselves. But they also present themselves as the precise opposite of the infuriating administrator whose endless appeal to rules and demand for additional meetings, paperwork, and motivational seminars makes it impossible for you to do your job’.

The anger against the infuriatingly anodyne procedures designed to smother conflict in the workplace and society lies behind much of the willingness to submit to the enthusiastic lies of Trump. Added to this is the conviction that Trump’s Democrat rivals are themselves pathologically dishonest (albeit they prefer more plausible lies).

Some of this stretches back to Trump’s role in ‘birtherism’, the unshakable belief that Barack Obama wasn’t really American enough to be president (despite production of his birth certificate). But it also goes back further to things like 9/11 Truth, and the refusal to believe the ‘official story’.

## QAnon

His most fervent acolytes have been found through incidents like the Pizzagate furore (the belief that high ranking Democrat officials were meeting at a Washington DC pizza restaurant that was a front for human trafficking and paedophilic abuse). It was totally false, but one man decided to take action, and attack the restaurant. There has also been an arson attempt. The man claimed to believe he was freeing the children ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pizzagate\\_conspiracy\\_theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pizzagate_conspiracy_theory)).



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This story has since merged with QAnon. Q is a putative member of the Whitehouse staff, leaking the 'real' agenda to the Trump administration. It is best summarised by the Wikipedia entry:

'QAnon is a far-right conspiracy theory alleging that a cabal of Satan-worshipping pedophiles running a global child sex-trafficking ring is plotting against President Donald Trump, who is battling them, leading to a "day of reckoning" involving the mass arrest of journalists and politicians. No part of the theory is based on fact' (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/QAnon).

Q posts gnostic comments on various right-wing communities boards, and his followers seek to decode them, believing that Trump is playing a long game against entrenched powerful interests, until the day they will all be arrested and tried. His lies are part of that game against the corrupt officials who infest Washington.

Q followers post on Twitter under the hashtag #WWG1WGA ('Where we go one, we go all') as a sort of rallying cry. They also post a lot under #SaveTheChildren. The centrality of the paedophilia claims is curious. Certainly, it is common to impute absolute immorality to opponents. In this instance, partly, it is a method to gain support by finding people who will be upset by the horror of child abuse. It is also likely that this is an imaginary sublimation of the idea that their enemies

are taking something precious away from them, and children are the most precious thing most people possess (as well as being metonymically linked with vitality and the future).

Dan Olson, in his YouTube video *In search of flat Earth* ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTfhYyTuT44](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTfhYyTuT44)), puts forward the analysis that the QAnon believers are actually engaged in a form of violence. Their whacky ideas are not about debate but about forcing people to choose sides (firstly by weeding out adherents who don't buy the theory wholesale, then by closing down debate with anyone who tries to argue with them factually). QAnon is a refusal to see a structural problem, instead believing the system itself is being subverted by infiltration, which must be fought by any means necessary, including outright conscious lying. They want to shut up the critics of the system.

Trump turned himself into a danger to the world by clamping down on US state-sponsored climate science. Lies are a weapon against humanity. They cannot simply be debunked, the antidote is the building of conscious analysis of the way the world really is, and finding a constituency willing to listen to that truth that is bigger and better organised than the QAnon cultists.

**PK SMEET**





To mark the retirement earlier this year of David Krieger, founder and director for 38 years of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation (NAPF), *The Spokesman* published a special issue, *Waging Peace*. *The Spokesman* itself is a publication of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation which was founded in 1963. The general aim of both these foundations is that of maintaining peace in a nuclear era world and to work to bring about the reduction, if not total abolition, of nuclear weapons.

This particular edition offers much good evidence of the need to stop war (of all kinds) but socialists have a number of points of issue to address that can demonstrate the clear need for recognising the imperative of superseding the capitalist system in order to achieve this goal. However, the publication refers to capitalism per se only occasionally as one of the stumbling blocks but never puts it directly in the spotlight.

### Elephant in the room

*Waging Peace* contains twelve articles which have a common view of a world of states accepted as the norm, not questioned. The crying need to explore the reasons of how and why separate states develop animosity towards others is the elephant in the room waiting to present the socialist case. For instance Richard Falk, Senior Vice President at the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation and who has acted as counsel before the International Court of Justice states that geopolitical factors are not generally considered. He states that geopolitics subverts 'the major premise of state-centric world order; namely, the equality of sovereign states' (Article 2.1 of the UN Charter). 'The Organization is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its members.' However, Falk reveals serious flaws in a policy of so-called juridical equality:

'A primary ingredient of sovereignty is the unconditional authority of states to determine their own security policy, especially in response to threats. The irony of the managerial approach is that the two states with the most plausible security justifications for recourse to nuclear deterrence, Iran and North Korea, are the only states under pressure to forgo

or renounce such weaponry[...] Instead of juridical equality, nuclear weapons policy is geopolitically hierarchical'.

Another contributor, Daisaku Ikeda of Japan, founder of several international institutions promoting peace, culture and education, wrote in 2011 that we should abolish and dismantle not just nuclear weapons but 'the war system itself'. He follows this with suggestions of how to measure military spending comparing this with what other, better, things could be done with that money for the good of populations around the world. Two examples: three hours' equivalent worth of global military spending was what it cost the World Health Organization to eliminate smallpox; and three days' worth of global military spending in 2011 could have taught the 275 million illiterate children of the world to read and write. Later he talks of the cold war and the fact that more than half of the world's physicists were engaged in military research in order to manufacture more than enough nuclear weapons capable of annihilating the human race many

times over. And then he declares 'What absurdity! What an incredible waste of human resources!' Well, absolutely, but the socialist answer to this would be that dismantling the profit system would have a much more solid assurance of improving, by abolishing, the various negatives listed in his article. Instead of a cry to dismantle the war system we say dismantle the whole profit system because this is what prolongs the inequalities and inadequacies facing us.

Commander Robert Green served in the British Royal Navy between 1967 and 1982 and was well acquainted with nuclear weapons. After retirement he talks of how, as a former operator of British nuclear weapons, he came to a gradual rejection of pro-nuclear deterrence indoctrination. He is author of *Security Without Nuclear Deterrence* published in 2018 by Spokesman Books. One of the points he raises about deterrence or reduction of nuclear weapons is that of a 'new world role for the UK'. He sets out a case for the UK, as the smallest member of the P5 (the five permanent members of the UN security council which were the first five nuclear states) to claim a new world role by unilaterally declaring a rejection of nuclear deterrence. If they were to do so he writes that 'an overwhelming majority of world opinion would erupt in support' and 'the UK would gain a global role in which it would be welcomed as truly a "force for good."' This may be a great rallying call but hardly seems realistic with the current global hegemonic order as it is.

Possible nuclear Armageddon is hardly something to view lightly but a writer of one of the articles certainly has an optimistic viewpoint offering two lights on the horizon. First, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the achievement of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) 'is an essential and long overdue first step to the total elimination of nuclear weapons.' This treaty is seen as a complement to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and supposedly reinforces the commitment of its parties to non-proliferation.

The second light on the horizon is Global Zero which, among other things, has 'developed a plan for the phased and verified



removal of all nuclear weapons from military arsenals of the nuclear-armed countries by 2030 with continuing verification and transparency requirements for the entire process of dismantlement to total elimination.' Again, no mention of the absolute imperative of capitalism and capitalist companies to continue making profit from sales of these to-be-eliminated weapons and all that goes with them.

An article titled 'If weapons had been the answer' by Fredrick S. Heffermehl addresses the manipulation and distortion over the years of Alfred Nobel's statement on the establishment of the 'Peace Prize'. It appears that Nobel's words were about such things as disarmament, creating the brotherhood of nations and promoting the ideas of the peace congresses of the 1890s and, in fact, Nobel made specific mention of disarmament in his will. Heffermehl discusses the distortion of Nobel's wishes as the prize is given regularly for reasons having nothing to do with his original intentions but is subject to 'political and diplomatic pressure and a decay of justice'. Two examples of individual prize winners who can hardly be listed as peace activists – Henry Kissinger and Barack Obama.

## The Inseparables

Three quarters of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation's existence has been post-cold war and in those years there has been, globally, an enormous proliferation of all manner of weapons of war and especially the most dangerous of them – nuclear weapons. Treaties have been made and treaties continue to be broken, assuring us of negative progress. Why is that? Could it be linked to one of the biggest bugbears of socialists – reformism? So much of 'Waging Peace' is about reforming the system we have into one supposedly more favourable to the whole world's population.

In 1984, during the cold war and just a handful of years before NAPF was established, a book was published addressing just that – *The Futility of Reformism*. The author, Samuel Leight, a member of the World Socialist Party of the US, headed Chapter 13 'The Inseparables (Capitalism and War)' which ably and convincingly addresses all the problems raised above.

The book had an appendix of 36 pages, solely pertinent to this chapter, concerning the statistics of war from 1945 to the end of 1983. Leight gathered together information from encyclopaedias and various other sources including newspapers and listed them in chronological order, some of the events lasting for years, some for days and others going on intermittently. In addition to well-known international wars these include coups, invasions and general hostilities, most of them resulting in loss of civilian lives and wrecked communities with hardly a day going by without conflict somewhere in the world.

Leight drew attention early in the chapter to the month of July in 1983 when an article was published, 'Even in 'Peacetime', 40 Wars Are Going On' and that these hostilities claimed as many as five million lives. Certainly politicians worldwide claim to want peace and abhor war whilst building up their 'capabilities' for *defence*, never for attack, and they are always ready to blame the other party for provocation. Worldwide budgets for defence have risen year on year and international sales of war materiel continue to increase annually assisted by armies of lobbyists – layer upon layer of profit to be made throughout the whole continuous and continuing procedure.

Also in 1983 referencing a *Los Angeles Times* 16-page supplement 'Servants or Masters? Revisiting the Military Industrial Complex' Leight drew attention to statistics

pertaining to the numbers of specialists engaged in Reagan's five-year plan of expansion of 'defence' spending. Workers in the military industrial complex included 30+ percent of the country's mathematicians, 25 percent of the country's physicists, 47 percent of the aero/astronautic engineers and 11 percent of computer programmers. Nearly 40 years later no doubt the numbers in these areas will have changed as technology has changed considerably but it certainly holds true that a huge percentage of the workforce will still be working in this area of research, development and production. And, as in all areas of employment globally, individuals rely on this work to support their lives.

Leight wrote about the various treaties, especially relating to nuclear weapons that have been signed by different countries at different times only to be broken by one or other of the signatories at some future date, just as the contributors to *Waging Peace* also do. Some of his references were to older treaties such as one from 1925 on chemical and toxic weapons which have been broken by one or more signatories over the years as they discover even better (more lethal) options, leading him to point out the fact that 'not only can governments not be trusted but the measures they support are not reliable or practical for their intended purposes.'

With regard to the various nuclear deterrence treaties signed (and reneged on) over the years, there has been a common factor which is that nuclear weapons only make sense as a means of deterring nuclear aggression by a potential enemy (whilst decades go by with increased yields of these weapons – greater deterrence?). Leight pointed out what should be abundantly clear to any thinking person – a nuclear war cannot be planned with the aim of winning it.

A brief look at active wars at the time this book was written – Iran and Iraq, Lebanon's civil war, Afghanistan and USSR, Libya v. Chad, the Basque separatist conflict, Northern Ireland's 'troubles', just to mention some, and all of these 'Even in Peacetime'.

The final words from Samuel Leight: '*As always, capitalism and war go hand in hand. "The inseparables" can never be separated. To get rid of one is to get rid of the other.*'

JANET SURMAN



# COOKING THE BOOKS

## The National Debt: whose debt?

'The UK's national debt hit a record £2.024 trillion at the end of August, £249.5 billion more than the same time last year', reported the Evening Standard (25 September). Presumably seeking to be helpful but actually confusing the picture, the report went on:

'To put the figures in some perspective, the debt level works out at roughly £30,000 per person living in the UK'.

So we are all on average £30,000 in debt, are we? No, it's the government's debt not ours. What is popularly called the 'national debt' is the outstanding debt, accumulated over the years, of the capitalist state and so is no concern of ours. To be fair to the statisticians at the Office for National Statistics (ONS) who compile the figures, their official name for it is the 'General Government Gross Debt'. The total debt owed by persons is called 'Household Debt'. At the end of March 2018 this totalled £1.28 trillion, most of which was mortgages. The two statistics are quite different.

Note that since 1974 a 'trillion' means only a thousand billion (not the billion billion it used to be). But it makes a more sensational headline to say that the government's debt is £2.024 (with a full stop) trillion rather than £2,024

billion (with a comma).

Governments (unless they are directly involved in capitalist production themselves) generate no income of their own. The money they spend comes from two main sources, mostly taxes. If a government wants to spend more than what this brings in it has to resort to borrowing. This is normally done by selling short-term (Treasury) bills or longer-term bonds (gilts). The interest on these has to be paid from tax revenue.

Another statistic we are urged to get worked up about (but needn't) is the 'General Government Deficit'. This is the difference between what the government spends and what it raises through taxes and which has to be made up by borrowing. At the end of June it was £128.8 billion. If, on the other hand, a government's income from taxes is greater than what it borrows, then there is a surplus which can be used to pay off a part of its debt.

Marx had something to say on the origin and consequences of the 'National Debt':

'The state's creditors actually give nothing away, for the sum lent is transformed into public bonds, easily negotiable, which go on functioning in their hands just as so much hard cash would. But furthermore, and quite apart from the class of idle rentiers thus created, the improvised wealth of the financiers who play the role

of middlemen between the government and the nation, and the tax-farmers, merchants and private manufacturers, for whom a good part of every national loan renders the service of a capital fallen from heaven, apart from all these people, the national debt has given rise to joint-stock companies, to dealings in negotiable effects of all kinds, and to speculation, in a word to stock-exchange gambling and the modern bankocracy.' (Capital, Penguin edition, Volume I, Chapter 31).

This is a fair description which still applies today but, unfortunately, is a source of many currency crank theories. Marx was aware of this and warned:

'The great part that the public debt and the fiscal system corresponding with it have played in the capitalization of wealth and the expropriation of the masses, has led many writers, like Cobbett, Doubleday and others, to seek here, incorrectly, the fundamental cause of the misery of the people in modern times.'

The fundamental cause of this misery is not the financial system but the class ownership of the means of life and production for profit. What is required to remove it is not monetary reform but common ownership and production directly to satisfy people's need.

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# PROPER GANDER

## *Rubber Reboot*

LONGSTANDING RIVALS ITV and the BBC have realised they share a common enemy in the online video channels and streaming services poaching their viewers. So they've uncharacteristically teamed up to try and compete against young upstarts like Netflix and Amazon Prime Video. Their 'joint vision' (as they put it) is Britbox, a video on demand channel launched in November 2019 in the UK, having previously been available in North America. Take out a subscription and you'll have access to TV series from the archives which you'd have hoped would otherwise be on the BBC iPlayer or ITV Hub for free. Many of the two channels' well-known dramas, sitcoms and documentaries are on Britbox (along with a little content from Channels 4 and 5), but there's nothing too obscure, unfortunately. The range would be improved if they dug out some *Play For Today*s and *World In Action*s.

Britbox is aimed at fans of familiar old telly, but has recently branched out into premiering its own new material. So it's pitching to its target audience by starting with something nostalgic, a revival of puppet-based satirical sketch show *Spitting Image*. Last seen on ITV in 1996, the series is best remembered for its 1980s heyday, with its increasingly-insane Margaret Thatcher, its tipsy Queen Mother and even chart-topping *The Chicken Song*. It probably got more people interested in current affairs and party politics than more serious-minded fare did, being one of those programmes regularly talked about in offices and playgrounds the morning after each episode.

Will *Spitting Image*'s reboot be as popular? Probably not, as its audience is limited to Britbox subscribers. Its makers are hoping for an international reach, though, and have brought in staff from American TV shows to widen its appeal stateside. As the new series is only a few episodes in, it's too early for the production team to have hit their stride. To keep the sketches topical, they have to be written, blocked out and performed only a few days before transmission, which must be a challenge even without the impact of the pandemic on the TV industry. A lack of material definitely isn't an issue, though, with the government's (inevitable) inability to manage the virus situation, and the US Presidential election being obvious targets, along with celebs like Meghan Markle and 'the husband formerly known as Prince' Harry.

Around a hundred puppets have been made for the series, in the same rubbery, irreverent style as before. To work, the caricatures need to be exaggerated, while still being close enough to how their real counterparts would talk and act. Memorable grotesques include smug Home Secretary Priti Patel as a dominatrix and later as a vampire (not far off from how ex-Tory MP Edwina Currie had been portrayed), and chief adviser Dominic Cummings as a creepy, googly-eyed alien who eats babies.

Just as important as the puppets are the scripts, which need to raise both a chuckle and a serious point. The sixteen writers working on the show haven't yet been able to come up with much that shines,

though. One of the better running gags has Donald Trump trying to make a deal with the Coronavirus, or 'Corony', as he calls the floating spiked blob which talks with him. 'You're everything I like. You're tough, you're sneaky, you're an affront to humanity. I want you in my organisation', coos Trump. In another skit, Boris Johnson wants to buy off the virus by getting it a seat in the House of Lords and then ends up having a fling with it. Other sketches fall flat: recently re-elected New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern is presented as Mary Poppins running the perfect country, but where's the satire in that? Boris Johnson is depicted as an oblivious mop-topped buffoon, so it's hardly a caricature at all. And the slanging match between puppets of Donald Trump and Joe Biden wasn't much different to their real televised 'debate'. Sometimes it's hard to tell whether the show isn't being imaginative enough or if our rulers are too far removed from the rest of us to need satirising.

As its focus is on the puppets, *Spitting Image* ridicules society's figureheads rather than criticises the system itself. And many of the lampooned luminaries haven't minded this, and probably like the publicity. Old episodes uploaded to Britbox are introduced by some of the politicians immortalised in latex, including Neil Kinnock on the one hand and Ken Livingstone on the other. They reminisce about enjoying the show at the time, and add that having a puppet made of you was seen as a badge of honour. So, '80s *Spitting Image* wasn't as anti-establishment as it might appear, and the new series doesn't even push the boundaries as much as its predecessor. The puppets haven't got out of hand. So far, the revival has only attracted any controversy with its mean-spirited caricature of environmental activist Greta Thunberg, rather than by saying anything which challenges the status quo. Satire risks just being a safety valve, where our frustrations about the system can be voiced in a contained, witty way. At its best, and *Spitting Image* sadly seldom gets there, satire highlights the absurdities of capitalist society, and thereby helps undermine it.

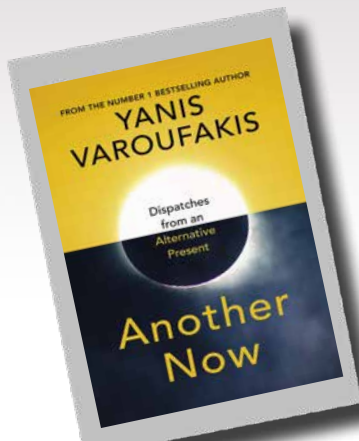
MIKE FOSTER



CREDIT: Avalon/BritBox/Mark Harrison

# REVIEWS

## Not so alternative



**Another Now: Dispatches from an Alternative Present.** By Yanis Varoufakis. Bodley Head. £16.99

At the inaugural summit of the 'Progressive International' (a new attempt to link up various vehicles for left-leaning politicians) Yanis Varoufakis, the former Greek finance minister and the driving force behind the Diem25 portion of this new international, gave a keynote speech: 'Why we need a Progressive International that must plan for today and for beyond capitalism' ([tinyurl.com/y5vvrtnm](https://tinyurl.com/y5vvrtnm)).

The plan he proposes is actually banal, including targeted boycotting of companies such as Amazon and companies that engage in abusive practices in a 'Day of Inaction'. There is no vision of co-ordinated democratic political action. He does say 'while this is neither the moment nor the place to plan for postcapitalism, it is useful to imagine what a postcapitalist world might be like.'

As it just so happens, he has a new book out which addresses this very activity. Its conceit is that a group of radicals get access to their versions in an alternate reality, one in which the crisis of 2008 spurred radical action that dismantled the world financial system and abolished both the labour market and massive financial institutions.

In his *Other Now* (as his alternate world is referred to), the labour market is abolished. There are still firms, and jobs, but once someone joins a firm they can do whatever work they want within the firm, all pay above a basic share of the firm's profits and a universal basic dividend (collected by taxing the revenue of firms, rather than profits) is

democratically allocated by the workers of the firm based on perceived merit. This shares similarities with Michael Albert's idea of Parecon. It is open to the same criticism as Parecon, based on the Yugoslav experience.

Self-management of Yugoslavian firms fell victim to the inequality of the technological differences inequalities between firms: some were more productive and profitable than others, without any difference in skill or effort between the partner-workers and those of a different firm. The workers there would defend their relatively high wages by excluding other workers, and ultimately using the features Varoufakis describes for workers hired for a specific role (as opposed to employees/partners) to exploit the labour of other workers (he calls this the disjointedness criterion – where it is possible to measure an individual's contribution, rather than value created by teamwork). This would create a situational logic and incentive for the restoration of exploitation. That said, his depiction of a firm without rigid division of labour is itself enticing and interesting to think through. He is savvy enough to note that unofficial hierarchies and prejudices may still linger in the *Other Now*, which is worth consideration.

More than a good deal of the book is given over to talking about banking. Given the massive expropriation implied in converting all firms to co-ops and abolishing the labour market, this seems redundant (and wouldn't the banks themselves now be worker co-ops?). This is particularly the case, given he assumes an express ban on buying and selling shares. The workers own the firms, but cannot sell them. But, in great detail, he discusses creating public utility banking that would wipe out the commercial high-street banks, and form a means for handing out the universal basic dividend. He prefers a dividend to a fixed income, since this is then a share in the collective product of society, rather than being perceived as some sort of handout.

He still envisages a banking function, but one, given the ban on investment banking, where banks return to being simple financial intermediaries rather than 'creating money.' (In a slightly more sophisticated version of the usual currency crank narrative, he avers that now banks can create money based on a claim of expected profits, and related to their interventions in the share markets).

Of course, this would only exacerbate the inequality between capitals, since some individuals would be able to harvest interest profits from other firms. So much for ending capitalism.

Consciously, he depicts the continued existence of financial crises in this society: albeit that he adds that swift government action of creating money quickly resolves the matter. Again, this means that so long as there are markets, he accepts there is a situational logic for speculation/fraud and financial instability.

In the *Other Now*, all land titles have been transferred to regional authorities which operate as trusts (quite how this could happen through the sort of minority targeting of companies described in the book is mysterious, such expropriation would require a determined and organised conscious movement, that would surely meet serious resistance) which operate as trusts. The properties would be let commercially, with the community collecting the rent. A permanent auction system would be used to ensure people pay the right rent without excess bureaucracy (essentially, each occupier would assess the value of the property, with the threat that anyone else could 'bid' a higher value/rent to take it off them).

The central thread is that this saves markets from capitalism: and avoids the worse alternative of centralised allocation and rationing in a soviet style, which he rightly deplores. The framing device is of two radicals: Eva, a radical capitalist (who is won over by the workability of this market system) and Iris, a woman who could 'ever conceive of a good market, a noble war or an unjust strike'.

In a strange detour via discussing 'politically correct transactional love', Varoufakis does discuss the idea of a society where people freely give, where commodities are ended. He refers to it as Star Trek Communism, but maintains that until Star Trek style replicators are available, money will remain essential. That does seem a limited outlook as, even where resources are scarce, there are alternatives to both money and centralised allocation that can be used.

The character of Iris is manoeuvred into opposing the *Other Now*, because its market system might hinder her preferred no-commodity society (opposing everything else which is something of a caricature position that some people falsely impute to us, and which, as far as

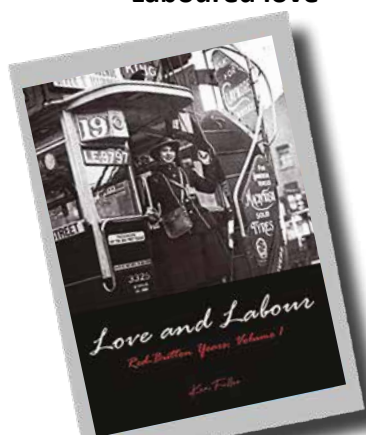


we know, no-one actually holds or ever held). Further, disgracefully, the text also pathologises her position by stating 'raging against the system was [her] only way of being, her loneliness vaccine'. What comes across, is that Varoufakis is wrestling with a notion of moneyless socialism, and finding the ideas attractive, he struggles to dismiss and contain them through an ad hominem dismissal of its proponents.

The book is intelligently written, and none of the characters are mere cyphers. That it opens the conversation to post-capitalism, and because it (unsuccessfully) wrestles with views like ours, it is a welcome addition to debate.

PIK SMEET

## Laboured love



**Love and Labour. (Red Button Years – Volume 1).** By Ken Fuller.  
ISBN: 978-1-6990-9278-1. 2019.

As there is no publisher accredited, we presume this is a self-published book. The author lists seven other books, six being non-fiction. One of them, 'Radical Aristocrats: London Busworkers from the 1880s to the 1980s', published by Lawrence and Wishart in 1985, provided the basis for this story.

Self-publishing has become widely available due to technological advances making it much more affordable. It is an avenue for authors of books, fiction and non-fiction, with such limited appeal as to be unlikely to generate profit enough, or even at all, to interest commercial publishers.

This must not be taken to imply such books are badly written, but rather their appeal is to a limited audience due to the subject matter. The weakness of the process can be the absence of the critical eye of an experienced editor. Such is the overall impression of this novel.

There can be no doubting Ken Fuller's immersion in the subject on which he writes. A former bus driver and full-time

officer in the Transport and General Workers Union, he has dedicated much of his life to exploring and recording the history of this element of trade unionism, with specific reference to London. Perhaps he is too close to his subject.

A basic tenet of writing good fiction is 'show, don't tell', engage the reader, invite the reader to construct mental scenes, challenge those constructs through the story taking unexpected turns. Reading should be an active process.

Unfortunately, this novel does an awful lot of telling. There is page after page of what reads like verbatim minutes of union meetings. Anyone who has been active in a union will recognise how drawn out and, frankly, tedious, even though important, such meetings can be. Especially so for someone on the outside glancing in.

Fuller does not seem clear as to his intention. As a chronicler of London bus workers' history he has undoubtedly a creditable depth of knowledge. He is also keenly aware of the wider contexts in which that history flowed its course.

However, to make sure no research goes to waste, characters find their mouths being over over-stuffed with historical details. They don't so much have conversations so much as swap lectures. For example, George Sanders, a union official, delivers an impromptu potted history of London Transport companies, along with American influence and dividend returns while standing, supposedly chatting, at Hyde Park Corner.

The novel opens in 1913 and works its way through to 1917. Its two main characters are Mickey Rice, erstwhile tram driver in Reading who becomes a bus conductor, then driver, in London, and Dorothy Bridgeman.

Dorothy has fled a privileged, but stifling upbringing, to become a radical socialist in what would become the Leninist sense. Dorothy and Mickey become lovers as well as union comrades and we are treated to a number of their explicitly erotic scenes.

The first of these is revealing (sorry) in that mid-coitus Mickey and Emily, the name Dorothy was using at the time, engage in a discussion on the radical, or otherwise, nature of impromptu sex. Emily (Dorothy) concludes, it is '...no threat whatsoever to the bourgeois order – unless, that is, they also embrace the class struggle.' (Page 52).

Both are fictional characters, but many others are historical personages. As such they serve to give voice to the competing elements within the burgeoning Red Button, a reference to the badge worn by bus workers' union members.

Dorothy takes the story off into London's seriously impoverished East

End when she meets and allies herself with Sylvia Pankhurst, who has split from Christabel and Emmeline who betray themselves by becoming purveyors of white feathers activists as they aid the war's recruiting drive.

Dorothy ends up in Holloway after indulging in the suffragette habit of smashing windows; a hammer being more effective than a rock, Sylvia opines. This leads her to conclude that breaking windows changes nothing.

The First World War does energise the novel, especially the accounts of those trying to stop workers killing each other on behalf of capital. The danger this invites in a jingoistic atmosphere is explored and does point up that the war effort was not universally popular.

Fuller explores how circumstance, especially extreme circumstance, can affect an individual. When Dorothy is killed by a German bomb, Mickey seriously considers enlisting. He is eventually talked out of it by Dorothy's 'ghost' as his own conscience and political consciousness manifest through his memories of her voice.

The politics of the novel focus on the role of the British Socialist Party, the Labour Party and the ILP. There is a Leninist thread represented by the character Rothstein, but the main focus is on the union and competing factions within it.

A familiar story of the left-right dichotomy, still playing out over a hundred years later. The pro-versus anti-war elements give expression to this, and there is some understanding of how capitalism is the root cause of war. There is no mention that in the ten years leading up to the war's outbreak the Socialist Party of Great Britain had consistently voiced this point.

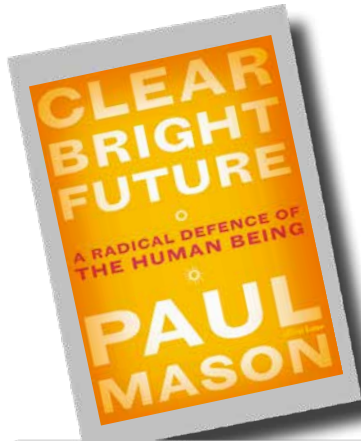
Indeed socialism, as dealt with in this book, is to be achieved via reformism or some Bolshevik-style revolution. That the working class will have to look beyond trade unions and political parties vying for power and achieve socialism through its own conscious action is not addressed.

Any undertaking on the scale of this novel is admirable. It appears to me, though, there is a much better novel in here begging to be revealed. This review began by invoking the role of the editor. If the book was 200 pages shorter it would be 200 pages better.

'Love and Labour' is a labour of love on the author's part, and also the reader's. Dispense with the potted histories, the detailed accounts of union machinations and let the story emerge. Dorothy and Mickey are strong characters, but even they are too often recruited as mouthpieces for the author.

DAVE ALTON

## Not So Radical



**Paul Mason:**  
**Clear Bright Future: a Radical**  
**Defence of the Human Being.**  
Penguin £9.99.

In *Postcapitalism* (reviewed in the September 2015 -Socialist Standard) Paul Mason argued for what he called revolutionary reformism, a gradual transition to a supposedly new kind of social system. There would be a basic income for everyone, while essential goods and services would be made cheaper, with more and more of these

becoming free. Yet there would still be money, markets, profits and banks, so it was hard to see how what he was proposing was really 'postcapitalist'.

In his latest book Mason advocates a similar system, but he goes by a rather roundabout route to get to this proposal and then makes a detour at the end that promises very little. He looks at why people support Trump, a man who thinks facts are irrelevant. Racism and misogyny, he says, are the key factors driving white voters to Trump. We then get a discussion of many topics – including neoliberalism, the alt-right, post-humanism, trans-humanism, postmodernism – and various writers, such as Nietzsche, Arendt and Foucault.

Mason supports radical humanism, which means achieving freedom by transforming technology and society. Artificial intelligence should be placed under human control and made subject to an appropriate ethical code, and information technology (as argued in *Postcapitalism*) can be part of what makes economic abundance viable, as it creates goods that can be copied at minuscule cost. IT 'makes Utopian Socialism possible: the appearance of islands of cooperative production for sharing, the massive reduction of hours worked and the expansion of human freedom and self-knowledge'.

Two chapters are devoted to the views

of Karl Marx, with both positive and negative comments. Marx suggested that humans can set themselves free by changing their social circumstances, which would involve abolishing private property. But he did not give an adequate account of women's oppression or of reproductive labour as a specific form of exploitation. There is something in this critique, but no merit at all in the claim that Marx saw the revolution as 'the blind actions of a single class', as it would in reality be the achievement of class-conscious workers (it is not clear, but it may be that Mason sees the working class as manual workers only). His vision is of the networked individual taking part in collective action, but this differs only in that it would now be far easier than just half a century ago for a revolutionary working class to communicate with each other and co-ordinate their activities.

Later comes a totally pointless chapter which argues that what passes for Marxism in China is nothing like the real thing. The book ends with a chapter on how to 'live the anti-fascist life' that is pretty vague and makes little connection to what has been said previously. More on the supposed 'Utopian Socialism' and how it could be a global system rather than just 'islands' would have been a more appropriate conclusion.

PB

# 50 Years Ago

## Cathy – no home to go to

Cathy – shall we ever forget – was the fair, slim, lovely young girl whose family and life were wrecked simply because they could not find a home. They went from one hopeless situation to another, from verminous slum to wet tent to reception centre. She was parted from her husband and then from the last of her children. In the end she stood by the roadside with the passing lamps of the lorries playing across her face. She was going home, back the way she had come.

The play was an instant success, owing nothing to the fact that it was the work of an ex-Etonian. There were one or two rather half-hearted attempts to debunk it but the author had got in first; all the incidents in the play, it was announced at the beginning, had happened, in London, during the previous year. This was reality. Shocked, everyone agreed; something must be done about the homeless.

That was several years ago. Since

then, there have been countless promises and schemes to deal with the problem. Statistics have been computed, weighted, published. Speeches galore have been made and applauded. And last month the latest figures came out, in the annual report of the grandly titled Department of Health and Social Security. (...) The report said that in 1969 20,820 people lived in emergency accommodation. In 1967 the figure was 16,176. which means that during the past two years the numbers of homeless people have risen by one third. (...)

The same month these figures were announced, saw the launch of Shelter, heralded with a procession of grim statistics: three million families in Britain in slums, near slums or in grossly overcrowded conditions; in Glasgow 100,000 unfit houses, in Liverpool 73,733; a waiting list in London of 150,000 families, in Birmingham 38,000. (...)

Poverty is ineradicable under capitalism but the system's leaders can never admit their impotence to deal with it. They must go on. with their promises and their assertions and their programmes. Meanwhile, the harsh reality remains.

(*Socialist Standard*, November 1970)



Cathy Come Home by Ken Loach (BBC)



# Meetings

All Socialist Party meetings/talks/discussions are currently online on Discord, including the Autumn Delegate Meeting on Saturday 21 November. Please contact the Forum Administrator on [spgb@worldsocialism.org](mailto:spgb@worldsocialism.org) for how to join.

## NOVEMBER 2020 DISCORD EVENTS

**Wednesday 4 November, 19.30 GMT**  
General current affairs discussion  
“Did you see the news?”

**Friday 6 November, 19.30 GMT**  
FRIDAY NIGHT TALK  
**Covid and Civil Liberties**  
Speaker: Dave Coggan

**Wednesday 11 November, 19.30 GMT**  
FAQ Workshop  
**Bread and Circuses**  
Do films and TV have anything useful to tell us about capitalism or are they just part of the capitalist bread and circus act?

**Friday 13 November, 19.30 GMT**  
Friday night talk  
**Attachment Theory**  
Speaker: Tim Kilgallon.  
An environmental explanation of the development of human personality.

**Wednesday 18 November, 19.30 GMT**  
General current affairs discussion  
“Did you see the news?”

**Friday 20 November 19.30 GMT**  
Friday night talk  
**The new atheism**  
What was it, where did it go, and what did we learn?

**AUTUMN DELEGATE MEETING**  
**Saturday 21 November**  
10.00 GMT (for 10.30) to 17.30 GMT

**Wednesday 25 November 19.30 GMT**  
**Open Mic Night**  
We offer a guest slot to a Discord Friend to riff on their perspective, with audience discussion.

**Friday 27 November 19.30 GMT**  
Friday night talk  
**Bitcoin and the Dark Web.**  
Speaker: Paul Edwards.

**OTHER ONLINE TALK**  
**Thursday 12 November 19.30 GMT**  
Oxford Communist Corresponding Society is hosting a series of weekly online talks. They will be posted at 7:30pm each Thursday and will remain up for 24 hours. To listen to them go to: <http://communistcorrespondingsociety.org/audio.html>  
Socialist Party member Bill Martin is doing the 12 November one on: **Belling the cat: Marx and Engels on the practical organization of socialism.**



## 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.



## Everything's for sale



This is the title of a '...shocking film on the privatisation of American public lands. "We've arrived at a moment," Herring says in the film, "where we are going to decide whether we're going to keep the birthright and the legacy of our public lands [system] or whether we simply want to unleash the forces of industry and live in a world where everything is for sale." In other words, the November elections could determine the fate of many of the most iconic and cherished ecosystems in the US, from national forests to wildlife refuges' (theguardian.com, 25 September). This month's election in the US has not changed anything: capitalism continues and everything remains for sale. The National Trust's 2,480 km<sup>2</sup> of land - with its 1,300 kilometres of coast, 500+ historic houses, castles, ancient and industrial monuments, gardens, parks and nature reserves -- might be seen as inalienable, yet Parliament can override this. If capitalism really wants something then wildlife, natural beauty, peace and quiet, or anything else, will take second place.

## 50s-era landfill?

There is one for sale in Wilmington, North Carolina.' The Town paid \$25 for the land, and used it to house hurricane debris and trash. The only thing that now stands between the Beach and a \$1.05 million sale is a snafu involving an N.C. contractor and state regulators, who disagreed on how much it should cost to clean the former landfill' (portcitydaily.com, 25 September). In fact, capitalism does put a value on a summer's day. And on a work of art. On a mosque. A social system which works by profit, whose wheels are lubricated by money, must put a price on everything. It bruises many sensitivities in the process, but capitalism can work in only one way.

## Recycled condoms?

'Police in Vietnam have busted a factory that took recycling one step too far. Some 345,000 used condoms were seized from the factory near Ho Chi Minh city, where they had been boiled, reshaped with a wooden phallus, and packaged for resale,

Reuters reports. According to state media, the 34-year-old woman who owned the factory said it had received a "monthly input of used condoms from an unknown person." Health officials said the recycled rubbers posed an "extreme health risk" to users, reports the AP. The factory was raided after a tip from a local resident. Police said the factory owner told them she was paid 17 cents per kilogram of recycled condoms. She has been detained and authorities are seeking other people involved in the operation' (newser.com, 25 September).

## Escape from Covid-19?

(i) for the gullible 99 percent. According to Dr. Vikas Mishra, 'People are happily wearing these cards and moving around in crowded places which exposes them to the infection. Believing that any unverified and untested product would save one from the virus is foolishness and also exposes people to the danger of catching the infection...' (news18.com, 21 September). Apparently, medical '..stores are earning a handsome amount and owners say these cards are selling like hot cakes.'

(ii) for the 1 percent. 'Starting an overseas holiday with two weeks quarantine may not sound deeply appealing, but a tour operator says well-heeled clients are prepared to do it. Both National and Act party border control policies would allow foreign tourists to stay in privately managed isolation facilities that met strict rules... The package, including two weeks in an isolation facility, would cost \$15,000 to \$20,000 per person, and she said if up to 700 people were allowed in over the coming summer, they would generate \$10m to \$15m in tourism income...' (stuff.co.nz, 22 September).

## Eternal life?



'The super-rich are already living the best lives. Now they're trying to make those lives last forever with a wide array of weird and wonderful ideas from the fringes of science... Ambrosia is one of three outfits looking at experimental "vampire" blood transfusions that put the blood of young people into the veins of oldies. According to commercial finance experts ABC Finance, the cost of the trials currently ranges from £6,000 to about £215,000. The technique has worked well in mice, although as yet there are no positive results from human trials' (dailystar.co.uk, 19 September). Such developments come as no surprise to socialists who have long understood capitalism's voracious nature and how it seeks ever new ways to drain what it can out of the working class. Marx noted: 'Capital is dead labour which, vampire like, lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks' (Capital, Volume 1, Chapter 10). Capitalism causes pollution, war and want, but for the system to continue it must avoid eradicating its source of unpaid surplus value. Indeed, the introduction of basic healthcare, welfare payments and even parks is primarily in the interest of the parasite, not the host.

## Moneyless moonshine?



'Work with us. Do not believe those who tell you any political party, or any "reformers" or any special legislation, can do away with crimes that are only the result of our whole system of society to-day. If you would do away with these crimes, you must do away with their cause. Help us. Help us to save not only yourselves, men and women; not only your little children. Help us also to save the very criminals, who now "drain your sweat and drink your blood." Come to us. Join hands with us; and hand in hand, heart to heart with us, labour in this great cause. Never forget that when once the people will there is no gainsaying them. Once you rise "in unvanquishable number," you are many, they — your enemies — "are few"' (Eleanor Marx-Aveling, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, August 1885).