

socialist standard

December 2020

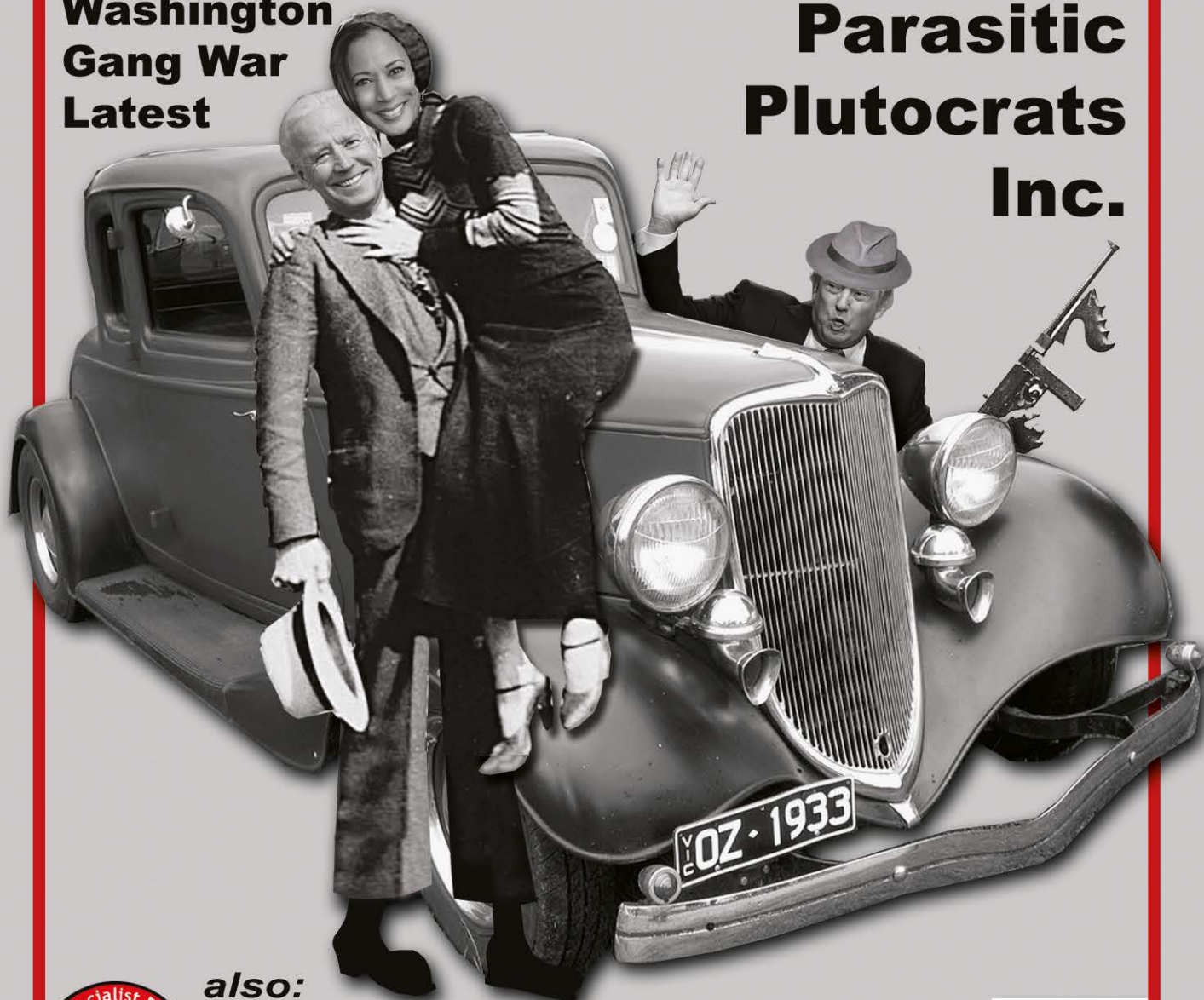
Vol.116 No.1396

£1.50

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

Gangsters 'Steal' Election on behalf of Parasitic Plutocrats Inc.

**Washington
Gang War
Latest**



**also:
Covid
Corbyn
Christmas**



9 770037 825006

socialist standard

Contents December 2020

Features

- 5 Merry Christmas?**
Covid Rules
- 7 Happiness, Happiness?**
What Makes People Unhappy
- 10 Covid and capitalism's unnecessary dilemma**
Wages & Work during lockdown
- 12 US politics**
What to expect from Biden and Harris
- 14 Labour's Internal Conflicts**
- 16 50 Years in the Party**

Regulars

- Editorial 3**
- Pathfinders 4**
- Cooking the Books 6**
- Material World 9**
- Cooking the Books II 18**
- Proper Gander 19**
- Reviews 20**
- 50 Years Ago 22**
- Rear View 24**



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'

Back to capitalist normality

In this US Presidential election, the billionaire hustler who conned millions of working-class Americans into believing that he had their interests at heart has been given his cards. In the spirit of his rather dire TV show – the Apprentice – about 74 million Americans, mainly workers, declared ‘You’re Fired!’ Unlike his contestants who stoically picked up their bags and left the building, Donald Trump has been throwing his toys out of his pram and has chucked lawsuits around alleging electoral fraud. Some fear that this may be a prelude to an attempted coup or even a civil war. It is more likely that he is performing a last bit of theatre for his supporters, showing them that he is prepared to fight the ‘Swamp’ to the bitter end, despite rewarding some of their members with top jobs in his government and handing them a huge juicy tax cut in 2017.

We can safely say that Joe Biden will be sworn in as the next US president. Should we be celebrating? The only ones who have any real reason to celebrate are the US capitalist class. They have tired

of Trump’s erratic style of government, where policies are made on the hoof without any overall strategy, and dislike the disruption in global trade caused by his trade wars. Many of them are prepared to pay higher taxes in return for this capitalist normality. Unfortunately for them, there was no Biden landslide, as had been predicted. About 70 million Americans, again mostly workers, voted for the orange conman. Perhaps some believe, despite all the evidence, that he is working on their behalf; others like his patriotic posturing, while some are attracted by the religious and social conservatism that he supposedly professes. Some even see in him a saviour from ‘communism’.

There will also be a return, or more accurately a continuation, of capitalist normality for the American working class. They will be still be living in poverty, whether relative or absolute. Homelessness will still blight many workers’ lives and many will resort to food banks. That the Democrats are unlikely to secure a majority in the Senate and

that the Supreme Court is packed with conservative judges, which some pundits suggest may limit the ability of the new administration to pursue progressive policies, is beside the point. The real inhibitor is the economic system itself which prioritises profits over human needs. For this reason Biden will not be able to do much about the economic devastation that capitalism has wreaked on the Rust Belt states that provided much of the fuel for Trump’s support, and even if he is more competent in handling the Covid-19 pandemic, the capitalist infrastructure again will provide limits to what he can achieve.

There is much talk about America being deeply divided. This is true, but the real division isn’t, as the media make out, between workers who support Biden against those who support Trump, but between the capitalist class, who own and control the means of production, and the propertyless working class. To overcome this division, we need a socialist revolution not a change in who occupies the White House.

FREE
3-month trial
subscription
to the
**socialist
standard**



For a 3-month trial subscription to the **socialist standard**, or to request more details about the Socialist Party, complete and return this form to **52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN**.


☐

Please send me an info pack

☐

Please send me a trial subscription to the **socialist standard**



Name

Address

Postcode

Subscription Orders should be sent to the address above. **Rates:** One year subscription (normal rate) £15. One year subscription (low/unwaged) £10. Europe rate £20 (Air mail). Rest of world £25 (Air mail). Voluntary supporters subscription £20 or more. Cheques payable to 'The Socialist Party of Great Britain'.

PATHFINDERS

Virus Wars: New Hope and Phantom Menace

SOMETIMES A news story changes so fast that the dailies can't keep up, never mind monthlies like the *Socialist Standard*. So it was with the November announcements in quick succession of impressive early results for a number of Covid vaccines.

As we go to press conclusive results are not yet available, and more results are expected imminently from other vaccines in Phase 3 trials, so the true pros and cons of any vaccine can't yet be assessed.

Many of these vaccines already existed in other forms and have been repurposed, nonetheless the speed of development has been stunning, given that the previous record was five years. The Oxford Vaccine Group, soon to announce results, has a video explaining how the trick was managed (bit.ly/38NV0tv). It emphasises how human cooperation, rather than competition, has accelerated the process. Meanwhile the BBC offers a cuddly video to reassure us that safety tests are paramount and that 'the World Health Organization (WHO) is helping to make sure all countries have equal access to a vaccine, no matter who discovers it or how much money they're willing to pay for it' (bbc.in/2ILYDoR).

So it's almost like socialism, then, with private interests flung aside for the greater good, nation joining hands unto nation in a single humanitarian vision, and never mind the profits? Er, not exactly. Vaccine manufacturers are projected to make billions, while the UK Chancellor, tipped as the next PM, is also allegedly making a fat wad out of it that he refuses to disclose details of (*Guardian*, 17 November - bit.ly/35FuOiA). The WHO is anyway a voluntary body with no authority to make sure of anything. Despite certain pharma companies volunteering to temporarily waive intellectual property (IP) rights (Moderna) or sell at cost (Oxford/AstraZeneca), there's no compulsion to do so, and the WHO's attempts to get countries to sign up to their Covid-19 Technology Access Pool (C-TAP), which would waive all IP rights for all Covid products, has not found a single taker. Meanwhile requests by some developing countries for blanket Covid patent waivers have been opposed by first-world countries for whom IP comes first and cooperation second (*Medicalexpress.com*, 6 November - bit.ly/3nEVG8r).

Still, the results are a blast of new hope, which may help to de-mast support for the notorious Great Barrington Declaration, a 'focused protection and let her rip' charter that emerged in October as a libertarian,

laissez-faire response to the pandemic.

One of the originators of this is a bona-fide professor of epidemiology, while another is a professor of medicine, and their proposal seems motivated by the huge amount of suffering caused by lockdowns, especially among poor people. But the ripples they made in the scientific pond were obliterated by an avalanche of boulders, from the WHO downwards, that branded 'let her rip' as unscientific, reckless, 'amazingly irresponsible', 'a dangerous mix of pixie dust and pseudoscience', or simply 'fucking stupid', to quote only the more temperate responses. One major problem is the possible millions of extra deaths involved, and another, that individual immunity does not necessarily prevent transmission, which would defeat the whole point (*New Scientist*, 14 October - bit.ly/3px4Wxr). Less charitable critics have pointed to the fact that the organisation sponsoring the Declaration is a right-wing libertarian think-tank funded by the climate denialist Koch Foundation (Science-Based Medicine, 12 October - bit.ly/3lFyJRX).

Which brings us to the phantoms menacing in the shadows of this supposedly cooperative global effort. In October a row blew up after the *Times* quoted a whistleblower who claimed to have been involved in a Russian-backed campaign to discredit the UK's Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, which uses a 'cold' chimp virus, by saying it would turn people into monkeys. The aim was allegedly to 'target countries where Russia wants to sell its own Sputnik V vaccine', which is one of those showing early promise despite jumping the gun in order to announce first (*Times*, 16 October - bit.ly/3lAExMG).

The *Times* followed this up with a report that the spooks at GCHQ are using an anti-ISIS toolkit to tackle anti-vaxxer disinformation emanating from the bogeymen in Moscow, which included assertions that 'vaccines were unnecessary and pushed for profit reasons', that vaccines contained 'a brain debilitating agent, or a gene that renders women infertile', or that vaccines were a plot by the Gates Foundation 'to control humans by inserting microchips into them' (9 November - bit.ly/2KhJsV7). How exactly these scare-stories would help Russia sell its own vaccine to the west, the *Times* did not explain.

Anti-vaxxer propaganda, wherever it comes from, could undermine global health strategies now that there are potential vaccines on the horizon, especially when numerous polls have suggested that

a very large minority would refuse to take a vaccine if offered (*Newsweek*, 29 September - bit.ly/2lMRO6c).

In the UK, fact-checking organisations have been gearing up for a full-frontal assault by anti-vaxxers on any national vaccination programme, probably by playing on fears that the vaccines have been fast-tracked and that long-term side-effects are unknown. Full Fact stated that 'due to the magnitude of the pandemic, pre-existing conspiracy theories have now been attached to Covid-19', and speculating that 'we will see many of the same claims being ramped up – the claims that this was part of a plot to force a vaccination on the population' (*ITV news*, 10 November - bit.ly/2Klq49T).

Labour has called for emergency laws to 'stamp out dangerous' anti-vaxxer online content 'exploiting people's fears, their mistrust of institutions and governments and spreading poison and harm' (*BBC online*, 15 November - bbc.in/3f5awSQ). This may be unwise however. Ban anything, and people tend to want it more. Conversely, make a vaccine compulsory, and anti-vaxxer views will skyrocket.

What can socialists make of all these shenanigans, given that we can't necessarily trust what we're being told and we don't know what we're not being told? We can only look at the available evidence and weigh the balance of probabilities. Long-term side-effects may perhaps be a risk, but not as big as short-term death. Yes, big pharma shareholders will profit, but that's the only way capitalism can get anything done. There may be politicians on Orwellian power trips but they were far from welcoming scientific advice for more lockdowns. Globally the places with the fewest restrictions have tended to suffer the most, such as Sweden with a death rate ten times that of its neighbours (bit.ly/3kFTNXl). Capitalism has almost crippled itself in the fight against Covid, including buying up hundreds of millions of potentially worthless vaccine doses, when cold economic logic might have suggested 'let her rip' and let the cards fall as they may.

That there's no conspiracy behind all this is surely demonstrated by the incoherence, incompetence and sheer panic evinced by so many governments. Yet the rosy public narrative of cooperative capitalist nations selflessly working together is in some ways just as much of a phantom.

PJS

Merry Christmas?

Is your stocking hung upon the wall? Are you all pepped up waiting for your fraction of a family (depending on the apparatchiks' latest government edict) to arrive and share the festive fun with you? Or will they be deterred from coming by the incessant government propaganda pouring out of the telescreens – Obey! Disarray! Dismay! Rule of Two Four Six Eight! Or will they be dissuaded by the militarised police cruising up the street on the lookout for unessential food purchases such as Christmas pud? 'Police will enter homes and break up Christmas dinners if families break lockdown rules – and there will be riots, predicts police commissioner' (*Mail Online*, 28 October). Or will they decide to celebrate the event now known as Super Spreader on their own?

Santa's reindeer exceed the rule of six so some two at least are going to lose their jobs, seasonal as they are. They're going to be in company with many many workers whose jobs and industries have been destroyed in less than twelve months. It's still a capitalist society. Until the majority decide to choose socialism, a moneyless society where goods are made for use, not for profit, workers have no choice but to continue to sell their labour power, physical and mental. If you give your heart to capitalism it will break it over and over. With Santa in the sleigh they're pulling they would still be over the limit, so it looks like the Gang of Four will be pulling the sleigh this year. It's not bad news for everyone though: 'Billionaires' wealth rises to 10.2 trillion amid Covid crises' (*Guardian* headline, MSN.com, 7 October).

Put the Third Man in the Moscow Mule and the Streetcar in the fridge. Tis the season to be merry, stuff it, Ma let's hit the sherry! All our troubles we can bury. Let's stay drunk till February! A reliable source provides information that in New Zealand the season's partying begins on December first and continues happily for eight weeks after that. The Antipodeans may well be harking back to early Germanic peoples whose midwinter festival, Yule, took place around a similar period. For the sensible many not of a religious bent there are many party alternatives to help lift the Winter mood. There's Saturnalia, a Roman festival; Koliada, a Slav winter festival or the Iranian Shab-e Yalda.

Somewhere in the world, whether they know it's Christmas time or not, someone is getting slain. Even Madame Arcati's crystal ball couldn't reasonably predict this future. At the time of writing the outcome of events which assume significance for many are unknown. The USA presidential election, Brexit, Covid84, what further level of incompetence the global governments can sink to, the result of Strictly Come Dancing (shudder). Given the negative state of the world it's not

surprising if many decide to emulate the supposed behaviour of the ostrich and 'bury their heads in the sand'. When Rip Van Winkle awoke the American Revolution had occurred. As with most revolutions the net result was a change in the folks telling you what is good for you and a more intrusive state interference in people's lives. Being woke in 2020 means feeling the warm glow that Christmas always used to claim for itself. Now, it's the virtuous satisfaction that comes from unthinkingly subscribing to the latest 'progressive' shibboleth which dissuades independent thinking.

Charles Dickens 'A Christmas Carol, In Prose, Being A Ghost Story Of Christmas,' 1843 (and a progenitor of awful 'feel good' television films that play on a loop once October arrives) set many of the traditions for a post-Victorian Christmas. Despite Scrooge's apparent change of demeanour from a mean, grasping, exploitative loan shark he still remained a member of the capitalist class underpaying Bob Cratchit (a wage slave selling his labour power to Scrooge) even after the wage rise he was given. Upon reading this insight into the plight of the poor

(all deserving) did the Victorian middle classes cry, thank god it's them not me? Worth noting still is the warning of 'Christmas Present' when showing off two of Man's children named Want and Ignorance. 'Christmas Present' admonishes his audience to beware of Ignorance the most. Ignorance needs to be converted to education so that chaotic capitalism can be replaced by a sane socialist society as soon as possible for everyone's sake.



'Eat, drink' depends on whether the supply chains are still intact and irrational locust behaviour hasn't swept the shelves cleaner than vultures on a wildebeest carcass in the Serengeti. Be merry? The human spirit is always able to find something positive in the most dire of circumstances. Acceptance of a bad situation while saying, gosh it's terrible but there's nothing we can do about it, is not acceptable however. After one of the most dramatic years which continuing on may have profound negative societal changes in global society it is no longer good enough to complainingly accept what is being implemented. Contrary to what a Tory leader once said, there is an alternative.

A 1961 British film, 'The Day the Earth Caught Fire', has the planet heading toward the Sun following some drastic efforts caused by USA and Soviet nuclear testing. Awaiting the result of alleviative action, the newspaper, around which the film revolves, has to prepare its headlines for two possibilities: 'World Saved' and 'World Doomed'. Spoiler alert. World saved. Probably. Merry Christmas?

DC

COOKING THE BOOKS

Why capitalists are 'greedy'

'Attenborough: Curb capitalism to save Earth' was how the Times (8 October) reported a podcast interview with David Attenborough on Radio 5 Live in which he said:

'The excesses the capitalist system has brought us have got to be curbed somehow. That doesn't mean to say that capitalism is dead. I'm not an economist and I don't know but I believe the nations of the world, the ordinary people worldwide, are beginning to realise that greed does not actually lead to joy.'

That's a start. Capitalism has got something to do with it. It certainly encourages behaviour on the part of those in charge of capitalist production which comes across as 'greed' but is this an 'excess'?

Marx devoted a section of chapter 24 of Capital to the question. Entitled 'Separation of Surplus Value into Capital and Revenue: the Abstinence Theory', it's an amusing read as it mocks the theory that the capitalists are entitled to a profit on their capital because they abstain from consuming all their profits but re-invest most as new capital.

'Except as personified capital,' Marx wrote, 'the capitalist has no historical value' and went on:

'But, so far as he is personified capital, it is not values in use and the enjoyment of them, but exchange-value and its augmentation, that spur him into action. Fanatically bent on making value expand itself, he ruthlessly forces the human race to produce for production's sake; he thus forces the development of the productive powers of society, and creates those material conditions, which alone can form the real basis of a higher form of society, a society in which the full and free development of every individual forms the ruling principle.'

Hence his conclusion that 'so far, therefore, as his actions are a mere function of capital — endowed as capital is, in his person, with consciousness and a will — his own private consumption is a robbery perpetrated on accumulation.'

In other words, the capitalists' 'greed' for accumulating profits is not a personal choice or a character defect but is performing an essential social role within the capitalist economic system.

In Marx's day that role was filled by

an individual person. Today it is filled by a fictitious legal person — mainly, the limited company or corporation — but which still has to carry out what being a personification of capital involves.

It should be clear, then, that 'greed' for making and accumulating profits as more capital — also called 'growth' — is built into capitalism. It is not an excess but rather the essence of capitalism. Those in charge of capitalist production cannot help being 'greedy'.

This means that capitalism cannot be 'curbed' and, if attempted, would disrupt the system and cause mass unemployment (rather like the measures governments have taken to deal with the coronavirus pandemic). To save the Earth, capitalism will have to be culled not curbed.

Fortunately, the historical role of the capitalist has been completed as the material basis has long since been created for 'a higher form of society, a society in which the full and free development of every individual forms the ruling principle.' To save the Earth we need to move on to this next stage in the evolution of human society.

NOW ON SALE

SOCIALIST PARTY OFFICIAL LOGO BRASS BADGE

This full colour enamel-type badge is made on brass with a secure pin fastening. It measures 25mm in diameter



Price £4 each with inland postage & packing or £3 each if collected from Head Office

To order: write to The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN. Please make remittances payable to The Socialist Party of Great Britain or buy online at: <https://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/product/party-enamel-badges/>

Other merchandise and our extensive range of literature is also available from: <https://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/store/>

For prices for overseas or wholesale orders please email spgb@worldsocialism.org with badges as the subject or telephone 020 7622 3811

Happiness, Happiness?

Many aspects of a person's life can be expressed in numbers: height, weight, income, savings. But what about how happy they are? Can this really be expressed by a score out of ten and compared with how others in the same country felt a year ago or how people living elsewhere feel? That is precisely what is done in the World Happiness Report for 2020, the eighth in the series (online at worldhappiness.report). The period covered is 2017–19, and the main source of data is the Gallup World Poll (www.gallup.com). Typically, a thousand people are asked a set of questions in each country each year, and this smallish number is claimed to give reliable estimates, though no evidence for this is provided.

Let's look at some of the findings. Countries are ranked in terms of inhabitants' happiness, from Finland and Denmark at the top to South Sudan and Afghanistan at the bottom; the UK is in thirteenth place. There have been changes in happiness scores since 2008–12: most positively in Benin and Togo, most negatively in Afghanistan and Venezuela. More generally, in connection with the 2008 financial turmoil, it is noted that 'life evaluations fell sharply during the financial crisis, recovered almost completely by 2011, and then fell fairly steadily to a 2019 value about the same level as its post-crisis low'.

Cities were ranked as well, from Helsinki at the top to Kabul at the bottom, with cities in Scandinavia, Australia and New Zealand receiving high scores. On average, urban populations are happier than rural ones, though this is not always the case in the developed Western world. And 'the urban happiness advantage is considerably larger for higher educated people than for lower educated people'.

The variables used to explain scores include GDP per capita and healthy life expectancy. But perhaps more interesting are some of the other factors seen as leading to increasing happiness. What is termed 'well-being inequality' is of great importance: happiness scores are higher in countries and regions where well-being is more equal, suggesting that people do care about the well-being of others. Also important is the social environment, which involves having someone to count on, trust (as measured by the absence of corruption), a sense of freedom to make key life decisions, and generosity. Strong social environments help protect people against the consequences of adverse events, and reduce well-being inequality.

In general, people are aware of the importance of the natural environment and of the threat posed by climate change. In London, people greatly appreciate green spaces and also blue spaces such as rivers and ponds. Sustainable development has on the whole a positive relationship with measures of well-being. This relates to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (sdgs.un.org), such as eliminating poverty and hunger, achieving gender equality, providing clean water and ensuring clean and affordable energy. But two of the goals (climate action, and responsible consumption and production) were negatively correlated with well-being measures, suggesting that action here may not be so straightforward.

A final chapter asks why the Nordic countries are consistently among the happiest, in spite of the long cold winters. These countries have relatively low income inequality, but this is claimed to have in general no clear link with feelings of well-being. Here's the conclusion: 'The Nordic countries are characterized by a virtuous cycle in which various key institutional and cultural indicators of good society feed into each other including well-functioning democracy, generous

and effective social welfare benefits, low levels of crime and corruption, and satisfied citizens who feel free and trust each other and governmental institutions'.

The report can make no claims about the coronavirus pandemic, but the site's FAQs do note that in the past major disasters have sometimes led to increases in happiness: 'The most frequent explanation seems to be that people are pleasantly surprised by the willingness of their neighbours and their institutions to work in harness to help each other'.

What should we make of all this? What does it show about the way the world is and the lives that people lead? For one thing, it is clear that how rich a country is has no simple relation with how happy its inhabitants are. It is true that countries ranked near the bottom are very poor, many of them in Africa, though this also includes India and Myanmar. But wealth does not explain everything, as the US is only eighteenth, just above the Czech Republic, while South Korea and Japan are 61st and 62nd respectively.

It is also interesting to compare this work with that of Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, in *The Spirit Level* and *The Inner Level*. They emphasised the crucial role of inequality: the higher the level of income inequality in a country, the more problems such as shorter life expectancy, higher rates of mental illness, more obese people and less social mobility. The level of trust was another aspect studied, based on how many people agreed with the statement 'Most people can be trusted'; higher levels of inequality caused lower levels of trust.

Trust is also covered in the World Happiness Report, though perhaps measured in a rather different way. And, as noted above, it is part of the social environment, the strength of which can help protect against difficulties in people's lives, make them feel more secure, reduce the extent of well-being inequality and so increase scores for happiness. The sense of community could be another way of expressing this.

So in plenty of countries the present social system does not deliver reasonable rates of happiness to many, many people. In others, folk fare rather better, but this is more in spite of the competitive and inequality-based system than because of it. Health matters, but also people's relationships with others and their sense of freedom. Many factors combine to make an individual happy, and a person's ability to choose how they live and their relations to other people play an important role, and capitalism reduces people's freedom in this, as in so many other areas.

PAUL BENNETT



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

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

MIDLANDS

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

NORTH

North East Regional branch.

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

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

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

Bolton. Contact: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589.

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

Doncaster. Contact: Fredi Edwards, fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

Kent and Sussex regional branch. Meets 2nd Sun. 2pm at The Muggleton Inn, High Street, Maidstone ME14 1HJ. Contact: spgb.ksr@worldsocialism.org.

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

Brighton. Contact: Anton Pruden, anton@pruden.me

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

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

Cornwall. Contact: Harry Sowden, 16 Polgine Lane, Troon, Camborne, TR14 9DY. 01209 611820.

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

Essex. Contact: Pat Deutz, 11 The Links, Billericay, CM12 0EX. patdeutz@gmail.com.

Cambridge. Contact: Andrew Westley, wezelecta007@gmail.com. 07890343044.

IRELAND

Cork. Contact: Kevin Cronin, 5 Curragh Woods, Frankfield, Cork. 021 4896427. mariekev@eircom.net

NORTHERN IRELAND

Belfast Contact: Nigel McCullough. 02890 930002

SCOTLAND

Edinburgh branch. Meets 1st Thurs. 7-9pm.

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

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

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

peter.anna.hendrie@blueyonder.co.uk.

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

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

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

WALES

South Wales Branch (Swansea)

Meets 2nd Mon, 7.30pm (except January, April, July and October), Unitarian Church, High Street, SA1 1NZ. Contact: Geoffrey Williams, 19 Baptist Well Street, Waun Wen, Swansea SA1 6FB. 01792 643624.

South Wales Branch (Cardiff)

Meets 2nd Saturday 12 noon (January, April, July and October) Cafe Nero, Capitol Shopping Centre, Queens Street, Cardiff.

Contact: Richard Botterill, 21 Pen-Y-Bryn Rd, Gabalfa, Cardiff, CF14 3LG. 02920-615826. botterillr@gmail.com

INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS

LATIN AMERICA

Contact: J.M. Morel, Calle 7 edif 45 apto 102, Multis nuevo La loteria, La Vega, Rep. Dominicana.

AFRICA

Kenya. Contact: Patrick Ndege, PO Box 13627-00100, GPO, Nairobi
Zambia. Contact: Kephass Mulenga, PO Box 280168, Kitwe.

ASIA

Japan. Contact: Michael. japan.wsm@gmail.com

AUSTRALIA

Contact: Trevor Clarke, wspa.info@yahoo.com.au

EUROPE

Denmark. Contact: Graham Taylor, Kjaerslund 9, Floor 2 (middle), DK-8260 Viby J.

Germany. Contact: Norbert.

weltsozialismus@gmx.net

Norway. Contact: Robert Stafford.

hallblithe@yahoo.com

Italy. Contact: Gian Maria Freddi,

Via Poiano n. 137, 37142 Verona.

Spain. Contact: Alberto Gordillo, Avenida del Parque. 2/2/3 Puerta A, 13200 Manzanares.

COMPANION PARTIES OVERSEAS

Socialist Party of Canada/Parti Socialiste du Canada. Box 31024, Victoria B.C. V8N 6J3 Canada. SPC@iname.com

World Socialist Party (India) 257 Baghajatin 'E' Block (East), Kolkata - 700086, 033- 2425-0208. wspindia@hotmail.com

World Socialist Party (New Zealand) P.O. Box 1929, Auckland, NI, New Zealand.

World Socialist Party of the United States. P.O. Box 440247, Boston, MA 02144 USA. boston@wspus.org

PUBLICATIONS

PAMPHLETS (£4.00 each unless stated otherwise)

- What's Wrong With Using Parliament? (£2.50)
- Ecology and Socialism
- From Capitalism to Socialism (£3.50)
- Africa: A Marxian Analysis
- Socialism as a Practical Alternative
- Some Aspects of Marxian Economics (£5.50)
- How the Gods Were Made by John Keracher
- Marxism and Darwinism by Anton Pannekoek
- Art, Labour and Socialism by William Morris
- How We Live and How We Might Live by William Morris
- The Right to be Lazy by Paul Lafargue
- Socialist Principles Explained (£2.50)
- The State and the Socialist Revolution by Julius Martov
- An Inconvenient Question
- Sylvia Pankhurst on Socialism (£3.00)
- Why Socialists Oppose Zionism & Anti-Semitism (£3.50)
- Rosa Luxemburg on Socialism
- The Magic Money Myth

NAME:

BOOKS

- Strange Meeting: Socialism & World War One: £4.50
- Are We Prisoners of Our Genes? £5.50
- Socialism or Your Money Back: £4.00
- Centenary of the Russian Revolution: £8.00
- All of the above books (25% discount) £16.00

DVD

- Capitalism and Other Kid's Stuff: £5.75
- Poles Apart? Capitalism or socialism as the planet heats up: £5.75

All prices include postage and packing. For six or more of any publication, reduce the price by one third.

Return this form along with your cheque or money order to:
The Socialist Party, Clapham High St., London SW4 7UN

ADDRESS:

POSTCODE:

MATERIAL WORLD

Exercise in democracy? Not exactly

LAST MONTH saw the election of the latest American president which was supposed to be an exercise in democracy. Yet there was the disenfranchisement of millions by the suppression of the vote of those eligible to vote, and this, despite the greatest number of votes cast to both candidates in decades.

It was not, as the Trump supporters tried to allege, a problem of voter fraud and deliberate miscounting of the ballots which led to the legal challenges and court battles. It is, as one political commentator, Ezra Klein, explained, '... the biggest problems with American democracy is that it's not democratic' (Guardian, 1 November).

The problem is the way the American Constitution was constructed and then applied. The manner of the election of the president and other federal officers is not determined by federal law or national rules but by the power of individual states themselves. It has always been the aim of the right-leaning politicians to manipulate the vote by promoting 'states-rights' on who, where, when and how citizens can vote. The purpose is to acquire a partisan advantage by limiting the franchise. In all the Republican Party's complaints about the conduct of the electoral process absolutely none involved making it easier to vote. On the contrary, their campaigns have been to raise more barriers to the participation of eligible voters.

The Supreme Court in 2013 struck down a key provision of the 1965 Civil Rights Act that required states to get 'pre-clearance' from the federal government for legislation affecting elections and voting processes. It made it easier for states to gerrymander voting districts, reduce or re-locate the number of polling places, and raise obstacles to the ability to vote. Local legislators could re-draw the voting districts to concentrate or dilute particular voting blocs.

Many media outlets have already reported upon the inconsistencies of the Electoral College which negates the popular vote. American citizens don't vote for the president but are voting for 538 electors who meet in their respective states and it is they who vote for President. It was a procedure designed by the 'Founding Fathers' to stop the possibility of 'peoples' power'.

Another example is how the conservatism of particular rural states counter the influence of the more urban regions. 70 per cent of America is

vote, Florida continues to block them from voting unless they've repaid all fines and fees they owe.

Then there are the voter identification laws widely regarded to be discriminatory. No big deal if you have a driver's licence, some form of state ID, or a passport — but a very big deal if you don't. In July, Kentucky became the 19th state that requires voters to present a photo ID at the poll. The purpose is ostensibly to stop fraud at the ballot but merely adds to the costs of running an election

Lastly there are four million Americans living in US territories who can't vote for any president. Guam, Puerto Rico, the Northern Mariana Islands, US Virgin Islands and other US territories may send representatives to the US Congress who can introduce bills and push for the territory's agenda at the congressional committee level, but they have no actual power to vote.

US Virgin Islands Delegate to the House of Representatives, Stacey Plaskett, pointed out, 'This is a long-standing absurdity in our current legal system... Do you know what it's like to see a bill related to your people, your constituents, and not

be able to vote on it? This lack of equal representation and equal voting power has a direct correlation to persistent poverty across all of the US territories. Americans living in the territories are accustomed to being last in line.'

But it is not just citizens of US territories that are excluded from the democratic process but working people all across America, from the Native American First Peoples to the old and infirm unable to access postal ballots without a complicated application procedure.

America prided itself that the right to vote was enshrined as the foundation of its democracy. But all the evidence suggests that it is not true. Working people are constantly engaged in a battle to protect and exercise their votes.

ALJO



represented by only 30 senators, while the other 30 per cent of the country is represented by 70 senators. California, for example, has a population of 40 million and is represented by two senators — as are the 570,000 people who live in the state of Wyoming.

Highlighted as well has been those citizens struck off the voting rolls for possessing criminal records, facilitated by the Democratic Party in its passing of legislation that criminalised a significant part of the African-American population. An estimated 5 million people are disenfranchised due to a felony conviction, with the disenfranchisement rate highest in Southern states, arising from ballot restrictions enacted during the Jim Crow era in order to prevent black men from voting and holding office. Despite a referendum giving ex-felons the right to

Covid and capitalism's



The crisis provoked by the coronavirus pandemic has brought out clearly the nature of capitalism as a system where most people depend on the income they get as wages from employment. They are in this position because they are excluded from ownership and control of the places where they work and where wealth is produced. These are in the hands of a minority, generally through joint-stock companies, who use them, in fact only allow them to be used, to produce goods and services for sale with a view to profit.

To obtain the money to buy what they need, the excluded majority has to go out on to the labour market and successfully sell their ability to work in return for a money wage (sometimes called a salary). Some, who have a long-term job and so a regular income, are able to convince a bank or a building society to grant them a long-term loan to buy a house or flat, which will be theirs if they keep up repayments and interest for 25 years or so. Others work in precarious, low-paid jobs and have to rely between jobs on state hand-outs or the informal economy to survive. Those who are unemployable, through long-term sickness or disability, have to rely entirely on meagre hand-outs from the state.

When wages stop

One of the measures taken by the government to try to slow down and limit the spread of the virus has been to close down all but 'essential' businesses, defined mainly as those engaged in producing, transporting or selling food and other everyday household essentials. Over ten million workers – some 35 per cent of the employed workforce – have been affected. If the government had not stepped in, all these would have been

without resources within a few months, if not before. Such is the precarity in the end of all those dependent on working for a wage. They can't stop working for much more than a month or so without having to beg for a handout from the state to survive.

A fall in living standards affecting so many people was something that the government could not let happen, if only to maintain public order and avoid widespread civil unrest. The scheme it came up with to avoid this was 'furlough' – enabling employers to keep workers on their books without them working but with the government paying 80 per cent of their previous earnings. On 8 May, 8.9 million workers were furloughed. Some 1.6 million more were not so lucky. They lost their job and had to rely on means-tested Universal Credit, the number claiming this surging from 2.6 million in February to 4.2 million in May. Since Universal Credit only brings your income up to the official poverty line these suffered a drop in income of considerably more than 20 per cent.

The government was prepared to fork out the money – obtained by borrowing it – but only on a temporary basis on the assumption that the business closures would only need to last a few months. Since a government has no resources of its own, it can get money to spend only by borrowing it from capitalists or from taxes that will ultimately fall on capitalists. No government can go on compensating workers for any lengthy period for being deprived of their usual source of income – the wages paid by their employers for the use of their working skills to produce some good or provide some service for profit. It's just not sustainable.

The government has to aim to get the economy – production for profit – going again as soon as possible, with workers

unnecessary dilemma

producing sufficient amounts of new value to provide a profit for their employer and to cover their own consumption. The government did try to do this after a few months but this proved to be too soon and the virus began to spread again, threatening once more to overwhelm the health service, though epidemiologists had been warning that this was likely to happen anyway.

Hence the government's dilemma – which to give priority to: profit-making or public health? Hence, too, a particular problem for the present Tory government under pressure to prioritise the economy from the small businesses, which mainly cater for workers' consumption and many of which risk going under, whose owners are an important support base for that party. In the end, as long as no effective vaccine is widely available and if the virus continues to spread, that is what the government will have to do.

They won't have a choice. Despite the inevitable public outcry and political consequences, the government would be forced to sacrifice the health of the old who, in any event from a capitalist point of view, are a burden as they no longer work to produce the profits that capitalism is all about. It might not come to this – vaccination might become widespread or else the virus might peter out – but if neither of these happen within a year or so this is what would have to happen.

As it might be

In a socialist society a pandemic like the present one could be dealt with rationally without the complications that occur under capitalism due to its production for profit and working for wages. Where the means of wealth production are the common property of society these will be used to produce solely and directly to satisfy people's needs and not for sale with a view to profit.

Even in such a society a pandemic of the kind we are currently experiencing could occur and the measures to be taken to contain it – basically, social distancing while a vaccine is developed – would be the same. However, these measures would be being implemented within a quite different framework. Everybody would already have access to what they need simply by virtue of being a member of society, without having to pay for it out of money wages

obtained by working for an employer. Those able to contribute in terms of work would cooperate to produce what was needed, while everyone would have free access to what they required to meet their needs. In short, the principle of 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs' would apply.

This would be a much better framework within which to deal with any pandemic. To reduce contact between people, some production units and distribution centres might have to be closed and most people expected to stay at home except to collect food and other essentials as now. However, this would not be accompanied by the problems that result from doing this under capitalism. No production unit would 'go out of business' and not re-open; productive units would simply be temporarily closed. No-one would suffer a reduction in what they needed; free access for all, whether at work or not, to food and everyday essentials would continue. It would be inconceivable, indeed incomprehensible, that some children would have to go without a meal outside of term time.

If there was a longish delay in finding an effective vaccine or if the virus continued to spread for a couple of years or more, this would amount to a 'natural disaster' situation and some temporary rationing of non-essentials might have to be introduced. Once again, this would be done rationally, without the complications of maintaining production for profit and workers' incomes, as the context would be a world of common ownership and production directly to satisfy everybody's needs.

ADAM BUICK



US POLITICS: WHAT TO EXPECT FROM BIDEN AND HARRIS

What can we reasonably expect from the election of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris?

An assessment of the likely policy orientation of the new administration would ideally take into account the record of the political careers of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, the sources of finance for their campaign, the appointments that Biden makes to cabinet post, and – last but not least – the political and economic circumstances in which the Biden White House will have to operate.

We do not yet know about appointments. In accordance with customary practice, some key personnel will no doubt be recycled from the Obama administration. However, we do have information about campaign finance. And from the long political careers of Biden and Harris we can learn a great deal about their attitudes and their patterns of behavior. Biden has under his belt 38 years as a senator plus two terms as Obama's vice president. Harris has had four years as a senator; before that she was District Attorney of San Francisco for seven years and Attorney General of California for six.

A useful account of Biden's career is provided by Branko Marcetic, a staff writer for *Jacobin* magazine, in his book *Yesterday's Man: The Case Against Joe Biden* (Verso and Maple Press, 2020). In the November 2020 issue of *Jacobin* the same writer analyses the financing of this year's presidential election campaigns. Another exposé is that written and published by Chris Aclixia under the self-explanatory title *The Biden/Harris Ticket Is The Ultimate in Plutocracy: Screw The Little Guy*.

Biden the compromiser

Two points bear special emphasis. First, Biden has always been a great believer in bipartisanship and consensus. The leitmotif of his recent victory speech, for which he received fulsome praise from the corporate media, was his commitment to national unity and 'healing' after the divisiveness of the Trump presidency. Unity presupposes compromise. Biden's compromises, however, are always with the Republicans to his right. And as the latter are much less willing than he to make concessions, 'compromise' generally turns out to be a euphemism for surrender.

Marcetic sums up the sorry result as follows: 'Biden has spent his career reflexively adopting his right-wing opponents' position as his own... He has repeatedly worked with Republicans to advance [many of] their political goals, dismantling the legacy of the New Deal in the process... Biden has got swept up in every right-wing panic of the last few decades – crime, drugs, terrorism -- often going even further than Republicans in his response' (p. 6).

This brings us to the second point. Both Biden and Harris have made major contributions to the explosion over recent decades in the size of the prison population – a phenomenon that has led many observers to call the present-day United States a 'carceral state.' As district and state attorney in California, Harris was keen to get even non-violent petty offenders locked up and reluctant to agree to their early release, which she opposed on the grounds that they were an important source of cheap labor for the state. But when her subordinates urged her to prosecute a crooked businessman she refused. Later he made a generous donation to her campaign fund.

Who paid the piper?

Now let's follow the money. Who pays the piper calls the tune. Trump *versus* Biden was the most expensive election ever held. The combined spending of the candidates is estimated at \$14 billion – over twice the amount spent in the 2016 presidential election.

Many companies gave money to both candidates. Especially firms in the military-industrial complex. They certainly had no reason to be displeased with Trump, but they wanted to hedge their bets.

Mining corporations and the fossil fuel industries (oil, gas, coal) supported Trump. The high-tech firms in Silicon Valley supported Biden.

The financial sector – 'Wall Street' – backed Biden, as it had backed Obama and Hillary Clinton.

The medical industry gave to Biden, presumably because he has always firmly opposed national healthcare schemes like 'Medicare for All.' Show business supported Biden, as did lobbying and law firms.

Overall, more billionaires gave money to Biden (150) than to Trump (108). Most small business owners supported Trump.

Circumstances

In the American political system, the executive branch governs not alone but in collaboration and conflict with Congress and the judiciary. The Democrats are set to retain their control over the House of Representatives, but the Senate hangs in the balance. Which party controls the Senate always has a palpable impact on the effectiveness of a presidential administration.

Whatever happens to the Senate, the Biden administration will be burdened with a conservative Supreme Court that is likely to rule radical new legislation (if there is any) unconstitutional.

We must also take into consideration budgetary and other economic constraints – some flowing directly from the current situation, others imposed by the general requirements of the capitalist system.

Thus one change that does seem likely to occur as a result of this election is the adoption of serious measures at the federal level to bring the Covid-19 pandemic under control. However, similar measures already taken in states with Democratic governors have proven costly enough to jeopardize other state-funded services. The same problem will now arise in the federal government. Even if taxes on the wealthy are restored to pre-Trump levels, it is hard to imagine a fiscal situation less conducive to maintaining – let alone expanding – social provision.

Policy implications

What are the implications of all this for the policies the Biden administration is likely to pursue?

We can expect some reforms, if only for the sake of appearance, but hardly any with real substance. For example, the United States will probably rejoin the Paris Agreement on climate change, but there will be no Green New Deal (or at least nothing worthy of such a grand name). In the field of healthcare there may be an attempt to revive Obamacare – nothing more.

Those radicals who seek to 'push Biden to the left' under current circumstances have set themselves a truly Herculean task.

STEFAN

A LESSON FROM TRUMP



The day after the outcome of the American presidential election became clear, someone wrote on our party's Facebook page: 'I can't help but feel a lot happier this morning, knowing that the odious vile strange orange man has been sent packing'. There can be no doubt that, on a visceral level at least, many other workers worldwide felt a similar sense of relief that the unspeakable individual in charge of America had been dismissed from office. When I wrote to my sister-in-law the same day to wish her a happy birthday, she replied that 'getting rid of the monster is the best possible present'. On a political level too, many people were relieved, in view of the widely expressed claim that, if re-elected, Trump would have proceeded to establish some kind of dictatorship stamping on all dissent and in particular taking draconian measures, Mussolini or even Hitler style, against all 'progressive' forces.

Yet could this actually have happened? There is no doubt that Trump showed psychopathic traits similar to dictators like Mussolini, Hitler and Stalin – arrogant, narcissistic, bigoted, racist, authoritarian, demagogic, etc. But could he have gone ahead and taken control of the American state in the same way as former dictators have taken over their state and wreaked havoc on those who they opposed or who opposed them even to the point of genocide? Part of the answer to that lies in what actually happened in the American elections. What happened was that Trump, would-be dictator or not, was dismissed from office via that country's constitutional electoral process, in much the same way as many other leaders have often been dismissed from office in advanced capitalist democracies. The point is that the US has a well-entrenched mechanism for doing that regardless of whether the incumbent leaves quietly or, as Trump, kicking and screaming. It also has a mechanism (many mechanisms) for preventing an individual, whether deranged or loathsome or anything else, from exercising personal unrestrained power. This means that, even had the result gone the other way and Trump had strutted on as before, he could not have installed himself as the kind of ruthless dictator who rides roughshod over all opposition as Mussolini, Hitler and Stalin did and as others still do today in places where capitalist democracies have not yet – or not yet fully – emerged.

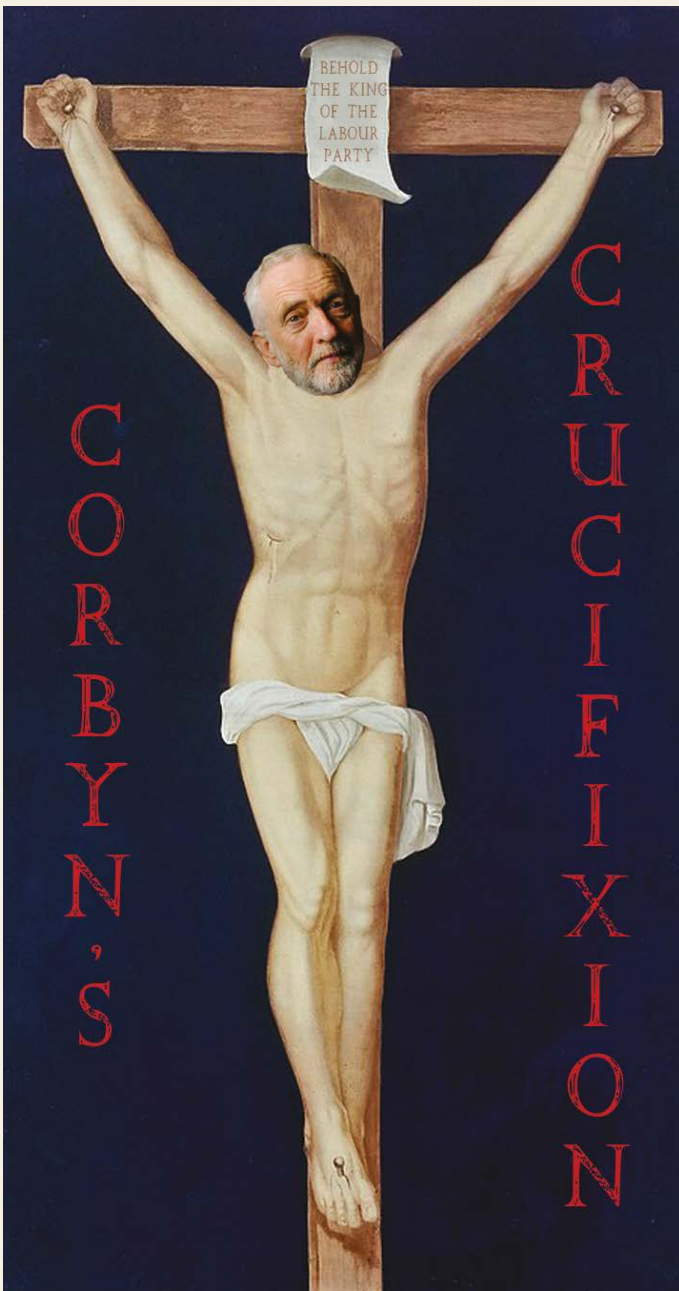
So, continuing the comparison with Mussolini and Hitler, why then were those dictators able to take over in Italy in the 1920s and Germany in the 1930s? They were able to because Italy and Germany had not at that time reached the same relatively secure level of capitalist economic and political development of countries as the US (and others such as the UK, Germany, France, Holland, Sweden, etc.) has today. Italy and Germany in that era did not have the same well-rooted system of political administration that exists today both in those countries and elsewhere and so were always a possible prey to the nationalist demagoguery of a dictator promising to cure all ills while spreading division and crushing opposition.

That same kind of demagoguery has of course echoed favourably with the over 70 million Americans who voted for Trump. And that can only be dispiriting for socialists who see as a prerequisite for the kind of society we advocate – leaderless, moneyless, wageless, frontierless and entirely democratic – the active agreement and support for that society by the majority of the world's workers. What has happened in the US seems aeons away from that, especially as even the half of those voting who opted for Biden were only choosing at best a 'lesser evil'. That 'lesser evil', the Democratic Party, will, by the very nature of the system it is in charge of, continue to run that system in a business-as-usual way, i.e. in the profit-seeking interests of the tiny minority who monopolise the majority of the wealth. And this will continue to be the case as long as most wage and salary workers continue to have a mindset that supports, or at least acquiesces in, capitalism and the profit-seeking force that drives it.

Yet, having said that, what the example of Trump's fall from office has shown is that in the US, as in other advanced capitalist countries, there is a well-entrenched system of voting in place which, when the time comes, can for all its faults be used by a socialist majority to win political control for socialism when the necessary consciousness has spread sufficiently for that to happen. And when it does, no would-be demagogue or dictator will be able to do anything to prevent the majority from making socialism happen.

HOWARD MOSS

LABOUR'S INTERNAL CONFLICTS



The suspension from the Labour Party of its erstwhile leader Jeremy Corbyn initially appears to be of little note for socialists. There can be sympathy for the hounding of an apparently decent man, but hey-ho that's capitalist politics for you.

But actually, this is a little more serious. While Corbyn does not in any sense meet the criteria set out in our principles of what is required to be a socialist, he is identified throughout the media and in the popular consciousness as just that. Indeed he probably self-identifies as a socialist.

During the lead up to the 2019 general election, in a number of BBC Radio 4 vox pops he was frequently cited as the reason for Labour voters of many years standing insisting they would not vote for the Labour Party. Corbyn was too extreme, to the point of being denounced as a 'communist'.

As socialists who state that socialism and communism are synonyms, that the Labour Party never was, is not and never will be a socialist party, such prevalent sentiments as expressed in those vox pops are of concern.

Capitalism's defenders are none too discerning when it comes to identifying perceived socialist threats. The faintest whiff of red smoke and any vaguely smouldering embers are to be stamped on. If possible the word socialist, never mind the concept, is to be anathema.

Socialist understanding of the Soviet Union from its inception is that it was state capitalist and not socialist/communist in any sense. Yet there can be little doubt that Lenin, who thought himself a socialist, found himself through circumstance as head of a ruling regime that had no way of pursuing socialism.

Thus the compromise of state capitalism proved to be no precursor of socialism as perhaps Lenin hoped. However, it did allow for an ideological claim of communism in the making, an iron curtain indeed behind which the ruling '*nomenklatura*' became the capitalist class spawning the oligarchs of Putin's non-Soviet Russia.

By posing as communist for over 70 years, the Soviet regime has been responsible for considerable ideological damage that actual socialists have to deal with. Present-day inheritors of Lenin's legacy continue to serve to obscure the ubiquity of capitalism throughout the world, be it 'free market' or state capitalism.

This serves 'free market' capitalism particularly well politically as those state capitalist countries which continue to don the communist mask tend to the brutally authoritarian, thereby confirming the popular conception.

There is, though, a risk in all this for capitalism in that the concept of socialism may be traduced, but it continues to exist and where that may lead is unpredictable. For example, while the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 could not of itself have led to socialism, had the idea inspired the working class around the world to seriously consider what was possible for it to achieve, then capitalism would have had a problem.

Therefore, any hint of socialism succeeding, however erroneous, must be pilloried and, where possible, crushed. Even politicians who are merely trying to ameliorate the worst effects of capitalism without challenging capitalism itself must be thwarted and shown to fail. All the better if those politicians self-identify, or failing that can be branded, as socialists/communists/Marxists.

Thus the case of Jeremy Corbyn's suspension from the Labour Party takes on a significance of sorts for socialists. On his being elected leader a whole machinery of vilification was slipped into gear. It was his declared support for a beleaguered Arabic people, Palestinians, which ultimately led to his downfall, branded a denier of anti-semitism.

As a case study in character assassination, it should serve as a warning as to the opprobrium that will be manufactured and freely distributed to the public should anyone appear to be gaining influence contrary to capitalism's well-being.

The synthetic outrage produced through blending anti-Zionism with anti-semitism has proved to be powerful. It

PART IV XIX

has placed a brand of aggressive ultra-nationalism beyond criticism and forged a potent political weapon to strike down opponents, leaving them apparently morally, as well politically, compromised.

The wider impact is to identify anti-semitism with socialism. It doesn't matter that Corbyn really isn't a socialist, just another would-be reformer of capitalism. If this is indicative of action that can be so vigorously pursued against a reformer, what can people expect who do wish to replace capitalism with socialism through the agency of a self-aware working class acting on its own behalf?

Once the working class is so motivated, then such a political weapon will be blunted. But until then, those who have accepted the task of propagating socialist ideas need to take heed of what could be the personal consequences of becoming more influential.

There is the further, perhaps more important, point concerning democracy. Socialists do not advocate the suppression of ideas, rather they should be brought out into the open and subjected to scrutiny. Through debate erroneous notions can be exposed and correct ones clearly identified. This does not preclude individuals continuing to expound erroneous ideas, the safeguard being their dismissal by the majority. That is democracy.

This most definitely applies to socialists. If some, or even all, we advocate can be demonstrated objectively to be wrong, then so it must be. It would be utterly pointless finding some mechanism whereby such a demonstration could be

suppressed. This applies to all bodies of ideas and ideologies. Any agency working to frustrate this for self-serving purposes is opposed to democracy.

The Socialist Party was vigorously opposed to Jeremy Corbyn when he was leader of the Labour Party. However well meaning, his ideas would not have brought the benefit of socialism to the working class. This for the very good reason that socialism is not something that can be conferred, it must be achieved by the working class itself.

This opposition was open and political, not personal. His subsequent vilification through the media, and by many of his own backbenchers, has most definitely served the interests of capitalism by casting guilt by association, however vague and erroneous that association may be, with socialism. The juicier story is proving to be the ongoing, and rather laboured (pun intended) anti-semitism row. If there is a strand of anti-semitism running through the Labour Party it would be one of the threads of racism sewn into all societies based around national identities.

Zionism is but one manifestation of this and it is quite possible that those who take a specifically anti-Zionist stand slip into expressions of anti-semitism without recognising they are doing so. While the world continues to be divided by national boundaries, so will the curse of casual, as well as intentional, racist comments and behaviour.

Suspending Jeremy Corbyn from the Labour Party not only won't cure the problem, in a sense it deflects from the root cause. It would well serve those who are celebrating

Corbyn's predicament to examine their own attitudes as to whether they can honestly acquit themselves of ever having had a racist thought. To quote a statement attributed to a Jewish teacher, 'Let he (or she) who is without sin cast the first stone'.

Perhaps Jeremy Corbyn will now take stock and come to realise that the best interests of society are to be served through pursuing actual socialism, not some reformist parody. In which case he may come to realise suspension, perhaps expulsion, from the Labour Party is a blessing, even if initiated by dark deeds.

DAVE ALTON

QUI VIVIT
ET CADENS
GLADIO IN
GLADIO



50 Years in the Party

I first heard about the Socialist Party of Great Britain in 1970 when I was a student in Hull. A couple of fellow students in the house I lived in were always going on about it. Until then I'd followed my parents in being a Labour supporter and saw the nationalisation of industry as the thing to support. But now I was being told that wouldn't make any difference and I needed to look beyond it to an entirely different kind of society – and on a world scale. This was a society of common ownership and free access to all goods and services. No money, no buying and selling, no market – just production and distribution according to need. No leaders, no national frontiers, just one world – and this was to be achieved by majority democratic political action. This, I was told, if looked at closely, was what Marx had originally advocated and what socialism really meant.

I was incredulous at first and brought out all the arguments I've heard countless times since over the years. Human nature, need for gradual reforms, utopianism, over-population, shortage of resources, need for leaders, etc., etc. And I argued for a long time – until I no longer had any more arguments, since they'd all been answered. But I still somehow didn't want to join a political organisation. I'd never been in one before and it didn't seem to fit for me. Since no one actually pressed me to join, I just carried on talking and going to the meetings that the SPGB group organised and then helping to sell its journal, the *Socialist Standard*, in the town centre. But what then finally got me on side was the special edition of the *Standard* in August 1970. It was called 'A World of Abundance' and had articles with titles like 'The World Can Feed Us All', 'Capitalism – Waste – Want', 'Not Too Many People', 'World Administration' and a particular compelling one by Ron Cook with the self-explanatory title 'Progress Perverted: the Technology of Abundance'. With all this it had to happen sooner or later and so, 50 years ago this month, I filled in the membership questionnaire and joined.

In the year that followed I attended meetings in Manchester, where I came from, in Sheffield and in London where, in 1971, the Party held its 66th annual conference. I found tremendous enthusiasm among members, tremendous knowledge of all things social, political and historical and tremendous optimism that the ideas were spreading and the movement growing.

Swansea

When the same year I moved into the world of employment, I found myself in a city, Swansea, with a long-standing branch of the Party, I found myself attending meetings regularly, selling Party literature on the steps of the town's Central Library, helping to organise public meetings and going to other parties' and organisations' meetings to put our case there. A lot was going on at the time. It was the heyday of CND, Anti-Apartheid and Friends of the Earth as well as of those small left-wing political organisations that called themselves 'socialist' (IS, IMG, SLL, etc.) but, as far as we were concerned and despite their 'revolutionary' rhetoric, at the end of the day were (and still are) just going for reforms of the system and so were just part of the capitalist furniture. I was the branch's 'press officer' and often wrote to the *South Wales Evening Post* putting these points as well as other aspects of our case. Many of the letters I sent were published. I found all this activity educational and exhilarating and soon found I was able to give talks and engage in public debate myself.

In the late 70s and 80s Swansea Branch built a core of active members across the age range and organised regular meetings that we advertised in the local press. There were

topics as diverse as 'Marxism and Science', 'Thatcher and Freedom', 'Women are Workers too', 'Animal Rights' 'Youth and Unemployment', 'How Politicians Con You', 'Feed the World', 'Energy for the Future', 'Soap Operas and Socialism', and 'John Lennon'. We got good attendances too, and as a key part of our activity sold the *Socialist Standard* in the city's shopping precinct and set up an outdoor platform where I was one of our speakers. I would shout myself hoarse on a Saturday morning and got a surprisingly small amount of heckling. I was also writing regularly for the *Socialist Standard*. We had record Saturday morning sales with an edition of the journal with the words 'Sex, Sin and Socialism' emblazoned across the cover. It contained an article written by me on the recently published and much talked about book by anarchist Alex Comfort entitled *The Joy of Sex*.

We were hawking our literature on the same pedestrian stretch as Ian Bone, a self-avowed anarchist who was later to set up an organisation called Class War. Unlike most of the others there, he really did seem to want a different system of society even if he didn't quite know what that system was to be and thought the best way to get it was by smashing things. The *People* newspaper later called him 'the most dangerous man in Britain', in which he took great pride. And, perhaps extraordinarily, when some 30 years later he wrote a book about his experiences in Swansea and elsewhere called *Bash the Rich*, I found myself debating with him at a packed meeting at the Party's Head Office on Clapham High St with the subject 'Which Way the Revolution?'. He was still the 'one-off' he'd ever been, but we did manage to agree on quite a few things regarding the revolution, even if we remained apart on others, for example violence and the number of classes in capitalist society.

Then there were the 'speaking tours' when I gave talks at various branches of the Party as far apart as Bristol, Bournemouth, Cornwall, Bolton, Canterbury and Guildford, some well attended, some pretty sparse. A 'highlight' for me was the debate with right-wing guru, Roger Scruton, organised by the Party's Guildford branch. At the time Scruton, who remained a well-known public figure right up until his death earlier this year, wrote a weekly column in the *Times* and had raised debate with his book *The Meaning of Conservatism*. When we met in a pub before the meeting, I found him modest and affable. But he hadn't bothered to find out what we were about and he asked me to tell him. He seemed to get the hang of it but then in the debate kept forgetting and referring to what had happened in Russia.

Another outstanding moment was a debate in Bolton Town Hall with local MP Tom Sackville, organised by the Bolton branch of the Party and chaired by a local cleric. It was a packed meeting and I managed to put our 'version' of socialism on the agenda immediately, after which the MP to his credit didn't attempt to tar us with the Soviet brush.

I was also, together with a fellow member Pat Wilson, able to arrange a Q and A session for the *Socialist Standard* with a then leading figure of the burgeoning Green movement, Jonathan Porritt. It was a friendly occasion with Porritt strangely seeming to agree with most of what we said about the need for socialism.

The culmination of all this activity for me was the local election campaigns Swansea Branch ran in the late 1980s when, with the assistance of members from other branches, we knocked on every door in the local ward – twice. Even though we found a surprising amount of agreement on the doorstep, that didn't really translate into votes, with 92 the maximum number we got in one of the three elections we ran in. An internal Party issue at the time was whether our candidate's picture should appear on one of our election

manifestos. The Party has always eschewed personalities as part of its antipathy to the idea of leaders and so a heated debate took place at the Executive Committee table about whether the candidate, myself, should show his 'human face'. In the end the picture did appear, as it also did in the local press.

Trade union activity

The 1990s were a bit of an anti-climax in Party activity. The main thing was that the *Socialist Standard* kept being published and the case it propagated kept being put to readers. This was a period when I started to involve myself in trade union activity in my place of work. It was something I found extremely satisfying – and still do. That's because you often saw quick results in terms of helping to resolve people's problems at work, both individually and collectively, and felt you were making some kind of immediate difference, however small. For me it complemented the longer-term project of spreading socialist ideas in society at large and fitted well with the Party's view of trade unionism as a necessary form of resistance to the tendency of capitalism to take for itself an increasingly large share of the surplus value produced by workers. It also made me fully conscious, if I was not already, of the need for trade unions to be fully independent of political parties and groups and not to succumb to the will of the union's 'politicos' from the left-wing largely Trotskyist groups who were small in number but could still dominate union decision-making and use their position not for the benefit of members but to promote their own political ends. They would (and still do) constantly seek to bounce members into industrial action, even when such action is more likely to be damaging than successful.

Anti-capitalism

In the first decade of this century, as the Party celebrated its 100th anniversary, capitalism found itself facing the twin crises of terrorism and recession. The recession in particular gave rise to a phenomenon I found first surprising and encouraging but then disappointing, that is the quick spread in use of the term 'capitalism' with widespread discussion about it in books, magazines and the media. The Party had always

freely used the term and, at a personal level, this made me feel a bit uneasy. I wondered whether people would know what we were talking about or would maybe just regard us as cranks or supporters of Russia. Now it was (and still is) everywhere. However, the trouble was, while often calling themselves 'anti-capitalist', critics of the system tended to propose more 'benign' models of capitalism via reforms seeking to achieve less poverty (e.g. universal basic income) and less waste of resources (e.g. the 'green' agenda) without taking into account the fact that reforms, even if alleviating things a little for some, can do nothing to change the basic profit-seeking nature of the system and the inevitable antagonism between what Marx called wage labour and capital.

While the last decade too has been full of proposals for coping with the problems of capitalism within its existing framework, disappointingly it has not seen an obvious rise in consciousness among wage and salary earners of the need for an entirely different kind of society. This is an idea that the Party and the World Socialist Movement have continued to keep alive by publishing literature, holding meetings and seeking to spread the idea in all other ways possible. For example, via our website and, in these pandemic days, the Party's virtual 'Discord' platform.

Looking back over my 50 years in the Party, though a lot has happened, a lot has also remained the same. Capitalism has gone on its merry way with its wars, poverty, unemployment, glaring inequality, environmental degradation, and now a global pandemic. Many campaigns to try and improve it have come – CND, Shelter, Greenpeace, Right to Work, Anti-Nazi League, Child Poverty Action, Occupy, Extinction Rebellion, just to mention a few – and many have gone. But to be fair there have been some changes for the better – racism and sexism for example are definitely on the back foot in many parts of the world, and a whole slew of recent books on human nature have shifted opinion away from the long-held notion that human beings are selfish and competitive creatures rather than naturally cooperative ones.

In addition there is widespread consciousness of the environmental destruction which Rachel Carson pointed to in 1962 but which I only found out about the year I joined. At the same time the 'experts' who two years after this published

The Limits of Growth, predicting ecological breakdown by the end of the century and calling for population control, were proved wrong. The profit system has of course gone on despoiling the planet but at the same time managing to adapt sufficiently not to cause an environmental apocalypse. It has also given better living standards to many wage and salary workers, while however heaping misery of varying degrees on many others. And it has made a very small number of individuals massively and increasingly wealthy, with the richest 1 per cent of the world's population owning 29 times more than the poorest 20 per cent. All of which will continue as long as the capitalist mode of production continues and as long as those with good intentions (and there are many) say they support our aims but somehow think capitalism can gradually be reformed into something better or even into socialism.

I'm not planning to stop any time soon. I'll carry on helping to keep alive the idea of a society I first heard about more than fifty years ago, since nothing I've heard in all that time from either supporters or critics of the present system has discouraged me from seeing the World Socialist Movement's concept of socialism as the most desirable and most feasible next stage in human social development.

HOWARD MOSS



COOKING THE BOOKS

Capitalism with Chinese characteristics

Last month a pro-Beijing think-tank, Anbound, sent us (and others) an op-ed on 'China's state capitalism in the Eyes of the West'. Although the words 'state capitalism' were sometimes in inverted commas, sometimes they weren't suggesting that they had no real objection to the term.

The article was in response to one that had appeared in the Economist on 15 August entitled 'The new state capitalism: Xi Jinping is trying to remake the Chinese economy'. This argued that the head of the Chinese dictatorship, Chairman Xi, 'is presiding over what he hopes will be the creation of a more muscular form of state capitalism. The idea is for state-owned companies to get more market discipline and private enterprises to get more party discipline, the better to achieve China's great collective mission.'

The Chinese think-tank summarised the Economist article:

'China is gradually establishing a commercial legal system, and its response to enterprises is more sensitive. The formulation of bankruptcy and patent regulations has increased fivefold since 2012. Predictable rules make the market run more smoothly

as well as increase economic production. Finally, the last element is to blur the boundary between state and private firms. State-owned enterprises are forced to increase financial returns to attract private investors'.

This sounds like the sort of 'mixed economy' that exists in the West, so why is it called 'state capitalism' and not just 'capitalism'? The answer seems to lie in the sentence that followed:

'At the same time, the state has also strengthened the implementation of strategic control over private enterprises'.

Even this is not that different from what some governments of traditional capitalist states aspire to, though in China's case it is being done more systematically and by a state controlled by a single dictatorial party.

In any event, it is not the same as the state capitalism that used to exist under Mao where most of the industrial means of production were owned by the state, itself monopolised by a bureaucracy whose top members effectively owned them collectively and benefited from this in terms of a privileged lifestyle. When referring to the USSR, which was the same, Maoists called the privileged ruling group a 'red bourgeoisie'. A case of people in glasshouses throwing stones.

What exists today is more akin to the New Economic Policy that the Bolsheviks

were forced to adopt in 1921 and which Lenin described as the development of capitalism under the control of 'the proletarian state', by which he meant a state controlled by a vanguard party (falsely) claiming to represent the working class. For Lenin this was to be a temporary expedient to help overcome Russia's economic backwardness, and the capitalists it generated were small fry. In China it is seen as a permanent situation in which the one-party state controls and directs the activity of large shareholder-owned capitalist corporations, many export-oriented.

Is it a viable alternative way of running capitalism to the multi-party political system that exists in the capitalist countries of the West? It is certainly working at the moment. The new class of private capitalists seem content with the situation and are not campaigning for the end of one-party rule. They probably prefer the stability this brings, just as their counterparts in fascist Italy and Nazi Germany did.

In fact, like them, China is seeking to control and direct private capitalism to achieve the same 'great collective mission' of winning a place in the sun at the expense of the older, more established capitalist states that dominate the world.

Why not free meals for all?

That free meals for children during school breaks was ever an issue is surely a brazen example of the iniquities of capitalism.

The story ran like some synopsis for an updated staging of the musical 'Oliver', only it isn't fiction. Why is it that the sixth largest economy in the world, that has borrowed, and will continue to borrow, many billions of Covid pounds, jibs at a few relatively measly millions to feed children plunged into poverty through no agency of their own?

A more pertinent question is, why should a resource that's as vital to life as air be rationed by the ability to pay? A society that is struggling with the present pandemic to keep people breathing would not tolerate a system denying oxygen to those without the requisite bank balance.

Yet that is the logic of capitalism. Children, many of key workers on pathetically low pay who daily put themselves at risk of infection, are at the mercy of a squabble between national and local governments as to who will provide a meal a day for them.

The logic of socialism is that food will be available to freely supply the needs of everyone, adult or child. As it will be for all necessities of life. People will take what they need because they won't have to take or

hoard more, just in case. After all no one deliberately tries to breath in more air than they need.

Such will be the outcome of socially organising production to satisfy self-determined needs, rather than the capitalist need to satisfy profit taking and the restrictions on access this necessarily entails. Surprise, surprise, this option is not being promulgated in any of the media coverage of children and their inconvenient urge to eat between term times.



PROPER GANDER

Control and Coercion

ONE OF the most disturbing consequences of the pandemic has been an increase in domestic abuse. During the first three months of the lockdown, there were over 40,000 enquiries to the National Domestic Abuse Helpline, mostly made by women. In June, the number was almost 80 per cent higher than usual, according to the charity which runs the helpline, Refuge (tinyurl.com/y4o8f2ob). Working from home and being unable to mix with other households or go to the shops have made it harder for people trapped with an abusive partner or relative to get some distance or escape. And worries about money, health and unemployment have been compounded by the pandemic, and then exacerbate already toxic relationships.

Domestic abuse doesn't just mean physical violence; it often takes more subtle and calculated forms. Several years ago, legislation was changed to more clearly incorporate this. The Serious Crime Act 2015 included a new offence of controlling or coercive behaviour in intimate or familial relationships. This refers to a pattern of behaviour by the perpetrator which makes their victim fearful or otherwise has a substantial adverse effect on them. Such behaviour would involve manipulating the victim or limiting what they can do, possibly by cutting them off from family and friends, taking over their finances or imposing rules on them. So, controlling and coercive behaviour is a combination of psychological and emotional abuse, sometimes with financial abuse, with or without physical violence.

Coercive and controlling behaviour can be difficult to recognise, both from inside and outside the situation. A recent documentary on BBC3 – *Is This Coercive Control?* – looked at whether a group of young adults would be able to identify its signs. Over two days, they watch and discuss a specially made drama about the relationship between two

twentysomethings. Rachel gets fired from her office job and moves in with Alex, her boyfriend of a few months. She fails to find other work and gets increasingly in debt and withdrawn. Alex pushes on her his expectations about what she 'should' wear and how she 'should' keep the flat tidy. The plot then jumps to a courtroom, with each getting interrogated about their now-disintegrated relationship. The show's presenter, journalist Ellie Flynn, asks the group of volunteers about their interpretations of how Rachel and Alex relate to each other, and particularly if

survey by charity Safe Lives, three quarters of domestic abuse support services which responded have had to reduce their capacity due to the pandemic, when there is greater need for them (tinyurl.com/y3chongp).

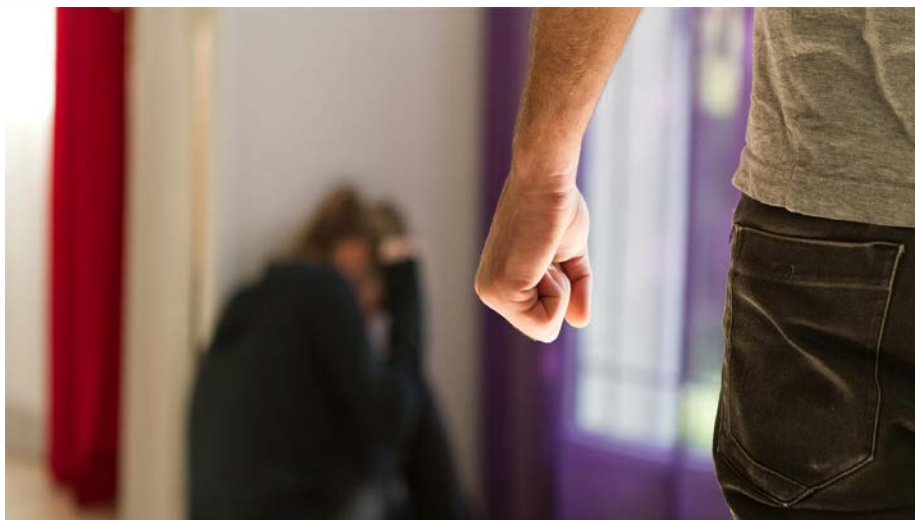
These services, and the law, have assisted many victims with getting support and, less often, a sense that justice has been served. But they can't address the deeper causes of domestic abuse. Each situation is different, but they all happen in a society which enables them. Money is such an important aspect of

capitalism that it's bound to impact on how we relate to our partners and families. In the scenario featured in the documentary, Rachel and Alex's relationship is shaped by money as much as by other factors: when Rachel loses her job she can't afford to do anything but move in with Alex, and her lack of money gives Alex a way

to control her. People who are trapped in a destructive relationship are often trapped partly because they don't have much financial autonomy. This is one reason why women, who tend to have lower incomes than men, are more often victims of domestic abuse. As our society is based on division, and competition, and exploitation, it encourages us to want power or at least an advantage over others, financially or otherwise. For some people, these tendencies take over and come out in their close relationships, pushing out empathy and affection. Perpetrators have usually been damaged themselves in some way, and in turn go on to damage those they can.

Understanding how capitalist society creates the situations where domestic abuse can happen isn't enough, though. Really tackling the problem of domestic abuse means addressing its root causes: the social system we live in.

MIKE FOSTER

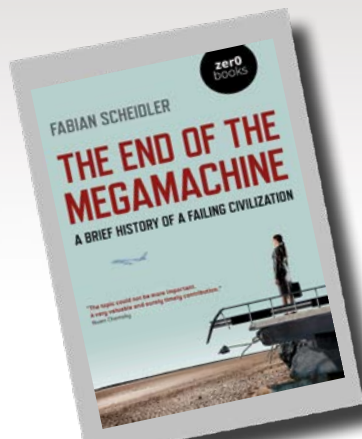


they believe that any behaviour in the scenario constitutes a crime. All the volunteers see that Alex's actions are unacceptable, while nearly three quarters don't think that they're illegal. In the drama, Alex escapes prosecution because of a lack of evidence that he has been abusive. Emotional and psychological abuse is hard to prove, and realistically enough, the court in the drama doesn't get the full picture. It's revealed that Alex engineered for Rachel to lose her job and not get another one, while also isolating her from her friends and leaving threatening voicemail messages, clearly coercive and controlling behaviour.

It's a step in the right direction that domestic abuse is recognised more than it used to be, and many people sincerely try to address the problem. However, the services run to support victims of abuse are sadly unable to help all those in need. There's never been enough funding available, and this year's disruptions have added further pressures. According to a

REVIEWS

Out of control



The End of the Megamachine. A Brief History Of A Failing Civilization. Fabian Scheidler. Zero books. 440 pages.

Whilst this book could be described as a potted history of control and dissent over millennia it is much more than that. It is filled with relevant historical examples which lead to discussion of current global events and the general state of the world. None of the horrific statistics of current deaths in former colonies or empires of the West are new incidents but are merely the long continuation of what began many years ago, have increased, and have become an integral part of the 'system', the 'megamachine'.

Western Christian efforts through history to control and subjugate whole populations to their beliefs continues to the present with, perhaps, a slightly altered emphasis. Now businesses have 'mission statements', governments 'space missions', and 'the market's radical preachers push a universalist ideology'. Structural racism today, the author suggests, comes from colonialism and empire-building which needed justification in order to subject populations to disenfranchisement and exploitation. Hence the Christian religion, along with scientists and philosophers, came to declare 'white' superiority and exceptionalism. The author's point here is that the colonial 'wars' should more correctly be referred to as genocide.

The underlying theme of the megamachine is that of the cycles of gradual development, decay, and renewed development of the economy, the military and the power of authority – but always linking current practices to earlier, similar planned events. And reminding us in different ways that 'modern states

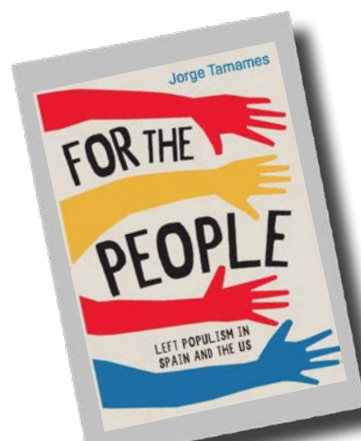
have arisen neither for the benefit of populations, nor with their consent, but as products of physical violence.'

There are far too many threads to mention in a brief review but all are relevant to the societies we are living in today where everything is compacted and concentrated and where we are living with the results of past decisions. The post-WW2 years began 'the rapidly accelerating species extinctions that are now threatening to escalate into one of the greatest crises in the history of life on the planet' but as constant economic growth is an integral part of the machine then that is exactly what should have been expected and was forecast by some more than half a century ago. There is a section devoted to the ills of the current system's approach to the environment, ecology in general, agricultural and industrial methods, the need for constant growth and the warning of what's to follow if the decision is to carry on regardless.

A thoroughly worthwhile read with a wealth of useful and relevant information for a book of this size, plus end notes with references and several timelines relevant to the various topics. What there isn't is a socialist view of the one and only thing to be done to stop the progress of this megamachine. Instead there is a final chapter on 'Possibilities' which, depending on your disposition you could either ignore or write your own.

JANET SURMAN

Not for Workers



Jorge Tamames: For the People: Left Populism in Spain and the US. Lawrence and Wishart £17

Most populist movements and parties are right wing: Fidesz in Hungary, Law and

Justice in Poland, Trump supporters in the US, the Bolsonaro government in Brazil. At the same time, some left-wing organisations are described as populist, such as Syriza in Greece and the former Chávez government in Venezuela. Here Jorge Tamames examines two particular cases of left-wing populism, Podemos in Spain and the support for Bernie Sanders in the US.

Unfortunately it is not entirely clear what he means by 'populist'. He claims to follow the view of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, according to which it involves people going beyond addressing individual problems such as racism, unemployment and evictions, and joining together as a movement. In Tamames' words 'The result is a community mobilising to protest against an entire status quo, not merely asking for a few policy tweaks'. But it is not spelled out just how this is supposed to apply to the movements he discusses or how it relates to the features usually claimed to distinguish populism, the distinction drawn between the elite and the people, and the opposition to pluralism and separation of powers.

Podemos, of which Tamames is a member, means 'we can'. It was formed in 2014 and received over a million votes in the European Parliament elections in May of that year. Despite its supposed populist objections to an elite, on the ballot papers it was not the Podemos logo that was used but the face of its leader Pablo Iglesias, who had become a well-known contributor to TV discussion shows. Since earlier this year, it has been a junior partner in the government run by the PSOE, which is roughly the equivalent of the Labour Party. Podemos' programme has included increasing the minimum wage and raising taxation for the rich, so it is hard to see how they are protesting 'against an entire status quo', as suggested above.

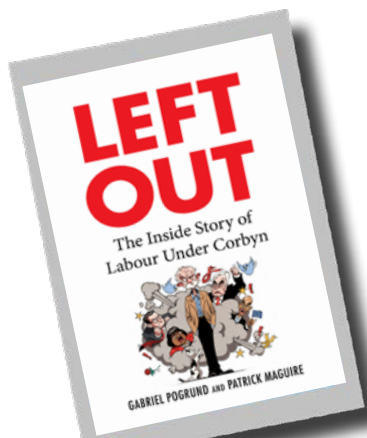
Sanders, who has a fairly positive view of Pope Francis, has said that he wishes to stand up to 'the billionaire class'. His policies included implementing universal health care, raising the minimum wage and breaking up the largest banks. In 2019 he extended this to the Green New Deal and abolishing student debt. All this is probably fairly radical in terms of US politics, and he had more support in 2016 from those under forty-five than Hillary Clinton did, but it obviously remains within the limits of capitalism, and he has twice failed to win the Presidential nomination.

As the author says, 'I refer to Podemos and the Sanders movement as "left" populists because their agenda, while more ambitious than that of

contemporary centre-left parties, is nevertheless reformist and not vastly different from that of a Western European social-democratic party in the early 1970s'. So all the fuss about left populism boils down to it being more or less the same as the Labour Party under Harold Wilson! The book gives some useful background on the impact of austerity and rising inequality, but it unsurprisingly fails to show that populism of whichever brand has anything to offer workers.

PB

Not a LOTO Fun



Left Out. Gabriel Pogrund and Patrick Maguire. Bodley Head. 2020. £18.99

This is billed as the 'inside story of Labour under Corbyn', which says exactly what's inside the proverbial tin. It is at times

insightful, gossipy and scandalous – and as such is hugely entertaining. That the Corbyn project was something of a train wreck by well before the 2019 General Election is now received wisdom and this book shows why. Always an uneasy amalgam of leftist forces (from quasi-Stalinists like Seamus Milne to Bennites, Trotskyists and single-issue campaigners), the surprise was more that the unique circumstances of the 2017 election had enabled them to do so well against the odds. But as one commentator put it, the soufflé never rises twice.

Much of it centres on the machinations of the Leader Of The Opposition's Office (referred to internally as LOTO) and the internal factionalism that developed there enveloping all else, and their parallel and persistently difficult relationship with the official Labour HQ at Southside, still jam-packed with Blairites and Brownites. To say that policy-making and strategic decisions were made on-the-hoof (when they were made at all) is an understatement. What strategy did emerge – including Labour's eventual and painful drift towards Remain – was often at the behest of the 'grandfather' of the Corbyn project, namely former Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, but this was frequently in the face of opposition from other faction-fighters, including Corbyn's Chief of Staff Karie Murphy, Unite chief Len McCluskey, and Milne.

Over time, Corbyn himself cut an increasingly sad figure in many respects, exhausted and irritated by the job in almost equal measure, and especially unable to understand the furore over

anti-semitism in the Party. A backbench campaigner at heart, this attitude never really left him. It was an irony that the backbenchers in the Parliamentary Labour Party, some of whom were to defect to Change UK and/or the Liberal Democrats, ended up being as much a thorn in his side as he had been to Blair and Brown under New Labour – if not more so.

The book also covers the plotting and dynamics behind the succession of Keir Starmer as leader over Rebecca Long-Bailey in the wake of Corbyn's 2019 election defeat and is telling in its analysis:

'... on no subject was [Corbyn] more stubborn than his own sense of identity. The painful compromises inherent in the unusual lives of holders of high office – the encroached privacy, the punishing schedules, the relentless demand for executive decision-making and swift judgement – never felt within his command... Unable to rewrite the rules of the game as he had promised, he preferred to ignore them... By 2019, Corbyn had created a vacuum for others to fill. Keir Starmer in particular has reason to be grateful for Corbyn's squeamishness with power. The Project not only squandered its inheritance from the membership, but left its children without any meaningful bequest' (p.357).

There is a fair chance Starmer will lead Labour to their next election victory, despite his Trotskyist origins, but clearly more as a latter-day Brown from the Party's 'soft left' than as a Bennite like Corbyn. Plus la change...?

DAP

SOCIALIST PARTY OFFICIAL LOGO T-SHIRTS • £12 Including UK P&P*

Printed on 100% cotton and available in black, purple or red with the official Party logo and short web address in white. Available in M/L/XL/XXL (while stocks last). £10 if collected from Head Office.



To order: Send £12 per shirt payable to The Socialist Party of Great Britain, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN (or Paypal as email address below) stating colour and size required with your name, address and phone number. *Overseas orders (and enquires): Please email for a price first with 'T-Shirt Order' in the subject line to spgb@worldsocialism.org

Mailing bags recycle with supermarket carrier bags

50 Years Ago

To workers from Ireland

Many of you will be concerned about what is happening in places like Belfast and Derry. You will probably support the civil rights struggle in Northern Ireland,

We too are concerned about the conditions our fellow workers in other parts of the world have to live and work under. We know that the role of the police and army is everywhere to protect private property and the existing political set-up.

When Ireland got independence in 1921 the North East part for economic reasons, was kept under British rule though given a parliament and government of its own. The government there has since armed itself with various undemocratic powers to use against its opponents. It is against these powers, and against bad housing and unemployment, that the Civil Rights people are protesting.

Protest movements are nothing new and are not confined to Northern Ireland. They exist everywhere and show that everywhere workers are discontented with some aspect of their lot. It is by promising to do something about this that politicians obtain your votes — and it is their failures that lead people to protest on the streets.

The politicians fail not because they are dishonest or

incompetent but because capitalism cannot be made to work for the good of all.

If you accept this, then you will see that direct action is in the end as futile as voting for parties that stand for capitalism. You will see too the uselessness of a United Ireland as a way of solving the problems of workers in the North. This would merely be a political re-shuffle — a change of masters, we would say — that would leave unchanged the class basis of society which is the real cause of these problems. As anyone who has lived in the Irish Republic can confirm, people there face the same problems of bad housing, unemployment and insecurity (indeed this may be why you are now living here in Britain).

The lasting solution to these problems in Northern Ireland, the Irish Republic, Britain and the rest of the world is Socialism.

(Socialist Standard, December 1970)



Capitalism v the Environment

Ever since the dawn of the industrial revolution, capitalism has had a relentless impact on the environment, causing devastating climate change. With production motivated by making money rather than safeguarding the environment or satisfying people's needs wasteful and polluting methods will be used if they minimise costs and maximise profits. Any legislation which aims to curb environmental damage still has to fit into this framework. We in the Socialist Party do not shout for minimum reforms or minor changes to current worldwide production methods in an attempt to mitigate or offset the damage already done. Instead we believe that the only real solution is an end to the root cause of the problem, that is capitalism itself – nothing more, nothing less.

We believe that it is the workers of the world who do all the producing and wealth creation, yet we are the last to realise the benefits when profits are growing. And the first to experience the hardships of downturns, recession and austerity.

The Socialist Party, which is part of the World Socialist Movement, is like no other organisation, insofar as we are the only group calling for an end to capitalism, and for it to be replaced by global socialism. This would be a world based on a revolutionary change of the means of production, from being owned by a tiny minority to being held in common ownership with free access to goods and services according to

individual and self-defined needs.

The Socialist Party has been advocating revolutionary change since its inception in 1904. If you would like to learn more, then please visit spgb.net where you will find all the information you need, including details of points of contact in your local area.

Fred Allen – Obituary

Sadly we report the death on 11 September of comrade Fred Allen, aged 91 years.

He joined the Socialist Party when aged 17 having decided 'there was no god and the SPGB was the best thing he knew of'.

In later years he was a member of East London Branch and then for some years an active member of the East Anglian Regional Branch. He served a short time on the Executive Committee and was an assistant to the Treasurer, taking seriously the collection of dues.

Fred was an enthusiastic supporter of the annual Summer School held in Birmingham probably enjoying the social side as much as the meetings. He was ready to help out wherever he could. A member recalls how a couple of years ago he helped her with the catering for a conference carrying the heavy shopping and spending the day in the kitchen rather than at the delegate meeting saying he was 'not interested in the chit chat, I prefer to get things done'.

Fred would have been at HO for the Conference in April – he rang to arrange that we travel by cab – but sadly the lockdown meant that it did not take place.

We extend our condolences to his wife Barbara and family.
P.D.



Meetings

All Socialist Party meetings/talks/discussions are currently online on Discord. Please contact the Forum Administrator on spgb@worldsocialism.org for how to join.

DECEMBER 2020 DISCORD EVENTS

Wednesday 2 December, 19.30 GMT
General affairs discussion.
Did you see the news?

Friday 4 December, 19.30 GMT
Friday night talk
Universal Credit:
The poverty of chaos
Speaker: Brian Johnson.
How Universal Credit is adapting to the double whammy of an economic crisis and a pandemic.

Wednesday 9 December, 19.30 GMT
The FAQ Workshop, 7.30pm
What do you get out of being a socialist?
Obviously people join the Party because they agree with the ideas, but what do they actually get out of the experience? Are there aspects of being a Party member that we accidentally underplay and that might make membership seem more

appealing to those contemplating the ideas?

Friday 11 December, 19.30 GMT
Friday night talk
Why are Socialists so few in number?
Speaker: Glenn Morris.
A look at why society seems so unable to see the bigger picture and people's reluctance to change.

Wednesday 16 December, 19.30 GMT
Socialist Quiz Night.

Friday 18 December, 19.30 GMT
Friday night talk
Celebrations and Socialism
Speaker: Andy Thomas.
Why do humans celebrate things? Is it a natural impulse or manufactured by class societies? How are celebrations linked to social/economic systems (tribal, feudal, capitalist)? How do religious ceremonies support class-divided social relations? What might we choose to celebrate in a socialist

society, for example, if we are involved in decisions about food and the natural environment will we celebrate 'ancient' change of seasons?

Wednesday 30 December, 19.30 GMT
Talk and discussion
This year, next year
What can we learn from 2020, the year of the virus? What does 2021, the year of Brexit, offer?



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.



Rashford's missed penalty



Credit: Alistar/ROMULUS

Oliver Twist asked for more in 1838. Many more did in 1904: 'We are told that over 100,000 school children in London alone go breakfastless to school. For them there is little hope for a sturdy manhood. Arrest the progress of physical deterioration amongst the children through the provision of meals by the State to all school children and you will do much to strengthen the physique and stamina of the race' (Socialist Standard, September 1904). Fast forward 116 years: '... UK lawmakers voted against a motion that would have extended free school meals to children over school vacations, helping to offset a growing hunger crisis in the country that has left as many as a fifth of children in households regularly beset by hunger. The vote was a disappointment for Marcus Rashford, one of England's brightest young soccer stars...' (time.com, 23 October). We have been used to reformists scoring own goals for two centuries. Any reforms we could win for ourselves on the basis of the capitalist system will always be circumscribed by the need to keep the capitalist system functioning. Mendacious parasites will tell you otherwise. Blair, for example, stated in 1999: 'Our historic aim will be for ours to be the first generation to end child poverty forever, and it will take a generation. It is a twenty-year mission, but I believe it can be done.' Twenty years later, the Daily Mirror ran this headline: 'DWP child poverty figures a 'national scandal' as 4.1 million kids are hit' (mirror.co.uk, 28 March, 2019). 'The Socialist objective is not a society where everything comes right in the end, because kind old gentlemen give away turkeys. What are we aiming at, if not a society in which 'charity' would be unnecessary? We want a world where Scrooge, with his dividends, and Tiny Tim, with his tuberculous leg, would both be unthinkable' (George Orwell, Tribune, 20

December 1943. Published under the name 'John Freeman').

Che? No way!

'Twenty left publishers from around the world release a joint edition including two essential texts by Che Guevara on the fifty-third anniversary of his assassination by the CIA in Bolivia. These texts, with insight from Aijaz Ahmad and María del Carmen Ariet García, provide us with a clear and resolute summation of Che's spirit of conviction, scientific insights, human compassion, and unrelenting will to achieve the victory of the oppressed over the oppressors' (thetricontinental.org, 8 October). Compassion? 'These people [of Cuba] you see today tell you that even if they should disappear from the face of the earth because an atomic war is unleashed in their names ... they would feel completely happy and fulfilled....' (part of Che's address to the First Latin American Youth Congress in July 1959, three years before the Cuban missile crisis). 'What I wanted to stress is that the working class is not putting forth its full effort' (televised speech, 1961). 'By working on the proletariat's sense of responsibility, we hope to greatly improve the quality as well as the presentation of industrial products' (article in Cuba Socialista, 1962). 'The perfect revolutionary, the member of the ruling party, must work every hour and every minute of his life, during these years of very hard struggle that lie ahead of us' (speech to textile workers, 1963). In fact, for each of Guevara's references to the future communist society, he made at least a dozen pleas urging the Cuban workers to increase production.

Leaders get lost!

'Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel highlighted the imprint left on the Latin American progressive forces by the victory of the Popular Unity of Chile, which brought socialist Salvador Allende to power in 1970.... The revolutionary process of the 1970s remained in Latin American history with its painful but unavoidable lessons for future revolutionary processes in our region, he assured. He also said that during his visit to the Palacio de La Moneda during his stay in Santiago de Chile, in 2013, the historical leader of the Revolution, Fidel Castro, told him that there was a spirit in that place and invited him to find it. That invitation, coming from a Marxist like Fidel Castro, was totally devoid of mysticism. He was, without a doubt, calling us to review a history that still has much to teach us' (cadenagramonte.cu, 16 October). Yes, we should learn the lessons of history. Regarding Chile, in her book *Democracy*



Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel

Credit: Getty Images

and Revolution: Latin America and Socialism Today, D. L. Raby writes 'with a president voted in by only 36 per cent of the electorate and a coalition which only briefly achieved a little more than 50 per cent (in April 1971), there was no real mandate for revolutionary change.' And this is what Fidel said when urging Mexican businesspeople to invest in Cuba, in 1988: 'We are capitalists, but state capitalists. We are not private capitalists' (Daum, Walter, 1990 *The Life and Death of Stalinism*). The job of revolutionary socialists, wherever they are, is to make the world socialist revolution and this boils down now to the immediate task everywhere of spreading socialist ideas among the working class.

Nuclear winter or a socialist summer?

'The weapons, known as intercontinental ballistic missiles, or ICBMs, are intended as part of a near-total replacement of the American nuclear force over the next few decades at a total cost of more than \$1.2 trillion.... The nuclear modernization program was launched by the Obama administration and has been continued by President Donald Trump' (apnews.com, 20 October).

