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socialist standard

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THE CHAOS CONTINUES

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NATIONALISM
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The Socialist Party
WORLD SOCIALISM
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socialist standard

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Introducing the Socialist Party

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

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

Gradualist reformers like the Labour Party believed that capitalism could be transformed through a series of social measures, but have merely become routine managers of the system. The Bolsheviks had to be content with developing Russian capitalism under a one-party dictatorship. Both failures have given socialism a quite different -- and unattractive -- meaning: state ownership and control. As the *Socialist Standard* pointed out before both courses were followed, the results would more properly be called state capitalism.

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

Editorial

Capitalist chaos

Looking at the world today there are few words that more aptly describe what is going on than the word chaos. We have seen street protests which at times have descended into violent confrontations. Earlier in the year the Black Live Matters protests erupted in the United States and elsewhere in the wake of the police killing of George Floyd. Many Belarusan workers unhappy with what is seen as the rigged re-election of Alexander Lukashenko as president have taken to the streets to demand his resignation, Violent clashes between demonstrators and police have rocked Paris over a controversial security bill that will outlaw the photographing of police by bystanders. Wars are raging unabated in the Middle East and elsewhere. The US has experienced one of the most acrimonious Presidential campaigns in recent years revealing a great deal of anger and division within American society. Closer to home, we have the tortuous process of Brexit negotiations dragged on. The coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated the turmoil. Is it because we have the misfortune to be ruled by megalomaniacs and buffoons? Is human nature to blame?

In asking these questions we will come up with the wrong answers. What we need to look at is how human society is organised. Globally, humanity lives under capitalism, where the human race is divided into two antagonistic classes, the capitalist class, who own the means of production, and the working class, who have to sell their labour power to live. Capitalism can only exist through the production for profit and competition. This leads necessarily to economic crises and war. When the capitalists are unable to make a profit, as has been the case in the recent lockdowns ordered by governments to combat the coronavirus, businesses close and unemployment soars. Competition between capitalist enterprises in the market place periodically lead to crises of overproduction, as we saw in the 2008/2009 financial crash.

Competition between rival states can and often descend into armed conflict. We have seen this happen in the Yemen and in the recent war between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Unfortunately, there is also competition between workers over jobs and social benefits. Divisions appear among workers on the grounds of ethnicity and culture, between highly skilled and less skilled workers, between employed and unemployed workers. Being excluded from the means of living, workers are alienated and have feelings of powerlessness. This, at times, is manifested in anger and frustration, which leads to political support for populist politicians like Donald Trump and Boris Johnson.

The solution is not a change in leaders, but a fundamental change in how we organise society. The working class need to organise consciously and democratically to take political control of the state and convert the current system of private property into one of common ownership, where everyone has equal access to the social product, without the need of money as a means of exchange. There will be no nation states or classes. Just one world community.

We wish our readers, in the absence a happy, at least a safe New Year.

PATHFINDERS

Magic bullets

THINGS ARE continuing to move fast in Covid-world, as vaccines have started to be rolled out and new uncertainties have emerged about their probable efficacy. More information on the make-up of the various Phase 3 trials shows that, partly for ethical reasons, old and infirm sections of the population most at risk from Covid were least represented among the trial participants. Vaccines are designed to stimulate the immune system, which is much stronger in young people, so whether the vaccines will even work for older people is basically a guess. Moreover, as the British Medical Journal points out, the trials were not designed to test whether the vaccines could (a) prevent or mitigate serious illness or death, or (b) prevent onward transmission (bit.ly/3qSdIGV). Ignoring all this, governments are proceeding as if the vaccines are magic bullets.

This is not the fault of the research teams. If you want a vaccine fast, you're going to have to accept some uncertainties. There just isn't time to wait and see what the long-term pros and cons are. In some ways public ignorance might be bliss. If people believe the vaccines are proven as effective this will encourage uptake, without which no vaccination programme can work. Conversely, if workers dwell too heavily on the uncertainties involved, this could add force to the antivaxxer position and seriously undermine any global health strategy.

Early reports last month about a small number of rare allergic reactions were gleefully seized on by the media, for whom panicky headlines pay regardless of the down-stream consequences. But compared to libertarian 'think-tanks' and private bloggers with conspiracy axes to grind, the popular media are paragons of honesty and integrity. So much bogus information is flying about that it is nearly impossible for fact-checkers to combat it. There is a thing called Brandolini's Law, which says that 'the amount of energy needed to refute bullshit is an order of magnitude bigger than to produce it.'

The problem is not so much fake news, which is often reasonably easy to identify and debunk, as partial truths, which are much harder to disentangle and can look convincing even to a discerning eye. One of the problems with vaccine scepticism is that much of what the sceptics say about Big Pharma is correct.

For instance, it's quite true that Big Pharma exists primarily to make profits and only secondarily to make drugs, so if more money can be made out of bad drugs than good ones, it will make bad ones. But how could bad drugs be profitable, you ask? They're profitable if you own the intellectual rights to them and you have the power to market them, whereas good drugs won't make you any money if you don't own the rights. That's why there's so little research into new antibiotics, despite a global MRSA crisis, because most of the patents were taken out in the 1940s and have long since expired.

So normal working practice is to flood the market with a very large number (one clinical study suggested up to 92 percent) of only marginally effective or completely useless drugs -- in the sense of delivering no extra benefit – in a bid to exploit intellectual property investments. As one pharmacoepidemiologist put it, 'laws designed to encourage and protect meaningful innovation had been turned into a system that rewarded trivial pseudo-innovation even more profitably than important discoveries' (bit.ly/38eQ5Qv). Next time someone tells you that capitalism encourages innovation and that socialism would simply stand still, tell them to go and look at Big Pharma.

Not only that, the profit motive also incites drug companies to try to drive down the time to market by repeatedly inducing regulators to shorten the period of regulatory approval, thus proportionately increasing health risks. How can they do this, you ask? Surely regulators are independent? No, they're not. Drug companies have to pay governments for licences to operate, and for each approved drug. In practice this means that they can fund around half the cost of these regulatory bodies, such as the FDA in America and the MHRA in the UK. That gives them a lot of financial leverage in influencing decisions, or what's known as 'regulatory capture' (bit.ly/37Yvuj3). A proposed solution is to remove industry funding in order to make regulators genuinely independent. But this would mean that drug companies wouldn't have to pay anything towards the cost of regulating their own products. Most workers as well as politicians would regard this as absurd and illogical, not to say immoral. More to the point, as taxes derive ultimately from the capitalist class, it would mean that the non-pharma capitalists would be expected to subsidise the business costs of the pharma capitalists, a one-sided deal they could never be expected to consent to.

What is capitalism's response to this no-win situation? It doesn't have one. So, inevitably, regulators are in thrall to drug companies, who continually rewrite the rules and extort the market for profit through pointless sideways development, while many real global health concerns go unaddressed. Capitalism may have no solution, but what about going beyond capitalism? It should be obvious that if you take the profit motive out of this arrangement by making everything free, as only a post-capitalist common ownership society could do, these difficulties would evaporate, and the way cleared for real innovation, proper regulation, and decent, effective drugs.

Alright, but this is old news, so why now? Because the anti-pharma narrative is currently being blended into antivaxxer propaganda in doses of half-truth, half-placebo. If vaccine sceptics think that because Big Pharma is bent, we should avoid their drugs, they need to take a wider look. The food industry is easily as corrupt as Big Pharma. Does that mean we shouldn't eat food? The oil and gas industry are dishonest propagandists (see October Pathfinders) and have propped up tyrannical regimes. Should we not heat our houses or turn on our lights? Think mobile phone industry, which caused the Congo civil war. Think Apple, where employees threw themselves off buildings in despair. Think clothing industry, and quasi-slave armies of women locked in collapsing fire-traps. Think plastics industry. Think any industry. Which of these should you boycott? Is the only answer to live naked in caves and eat grass?

The truth is, you can't boycott the whole of capitalism when you're still living in it, and you can't change its market and money logic. The one thing you can do is abolish it, and thereby abolish the prostitution of the planet and the public good for the sake of private fortunes. It needn't involve bullets, but it would still work like magic.

PJS

NO BIG DEAL

Britain's decision to leave the European Union must be one of the riskiest decisions taken by a capitalist state – abandoning hassle-free access to a nearby large market (and a say in its rules and future development) in the hope of obtaining more trade through yet-to-be-negotiated deals with states in other parts of the world. A classic case of letting go of a bird in hand for two in the bush.

It was not a decision that any government, charged with looking after the overall general interest of a capitalist class (as all governments are), would normally have taken on its own. In fact it didn't. Plagued by internal conflict within his party, David Cameron's Conservative government decided to put the matter to a referendum in 2016 which it expected to win. It didn't. A campaign to leave the EU, funded by maverick financiers opposed to any EU regulation of their activities and led by opportunist politicians, won narrowly by 52 to 48 percent.


Credit: Getty Images

A rearguard action in parliament, in the interest of the majority section of the capitalist class who wanted to remain, failed and the matter was settled in a general election won decisively by the Conservatives on a Brexit platform. A Vote Leave government came into office and negotiated a withdrawal from the EU on 31 January last year, with a transition period until the end of the year during which a trade deal with the EU would be negotiated.

It was touch and go. Apart from fishing, stumbling blocks were, on the UK side, 'sovereignty', and, on the EU side, a 'level playing field'. Neither of which were matters of interest or concern for the majority class of wage and salary workers.

A political area is constitutionally 'sovereign' when its rulers have the final say in matters concerning that area. They make the laws and sign agreements with other states. They also enforce the laws and have the coercive power to do so. However, when it comes to what they decide, states are in the same position as Marx said humans were in making history. They do exercise sovereignty but not 'as they please', not 'under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already.' Those already-existing circumstances are capitalism, a world system, the operation of whose economic laws means that states are restricted in what they can in practice do. From a political point of view they have the formal 'right' to make the final decision — and exercise their 'sovereignty' in making it – but it will be a decision ultimately circumscribed by these economic laws.

Even apart from this, all inter-state agreements involve surrendering a degree of their decision-making power to some other body to make final decisions on whether or not the agreement has been infringed. In the case of the post-Brexit trade talks, it was never going to be the European Court of Justice but some other body whose decisions both parties agreed to accept – and override their sovereignty.

It should be quite obvious that the arrangements a state makes to exercise its 'sovereignty' are of no concern whatsoever to workers.

The EU's concern was more pragmatic. They wanted a 'level playing field', by which they meant that the UK, no more than its own member states, should not have a competitive advantage in selling on the Single Market by subsiding (state-aiding) any of its industries or imposing less onerous standards on them (as over workers rights or the environment). The main problem was over future changes. The EU wanted a binding commitment from the UK to make roughly corresponding changes. The UK was reluctant to commit itself too much to this in a treaty as it regarded this as limitation on the future exercise of its sovereignty. It probably would have kept up with changes but as a 'sovereign' decision by an 'independent' state, not as something it was obliged to do.

Some pragmatic arrangement was always possible. It depended on how insistent the UK Vote Leave government under Johnson was going to be on having (or appearing to have) full, formal 'sovereignty'. Would they give priority to something symbolic over being pragmatic? Would they be the prisoners of the rhetoric and tub-thumping about 'independence' that helped them win the referendum? We now know the answer.

As far as the working class are concerned, deal or no deal, we were going to be collateral damage in that our freedom to move between Britain and the Continent was to become more of a hassle as visas and stricter border controls are re-introduced and having to face shortages and price rises. Something we could well have done without in the middle of a worsening pandemic.

Profiting from the pandemic

After the first Covid-19 vaccines were announced in November, Mark Littlewood, the director general of the free-marketeer Institute of Economic Affairs, lauded the profit motive for achieving this (Times, 16 November), even liking the suggestion that 'it might be appropriate for us all to stand on our doorsteps at 8pm each Thursday and give a round of applause to big, profit-making pharmaceutical companies'.

Capitalist companies, as Littlewood well knows since it's his job to justify this, only respond to the prospect of profit. The past record of pharma companies in particular shows this. They give priority to the medicines that bring in the most profit and neglect research into treatments and cures for conditions that are not so profitable, such as tropical diseases. This has been described as a typical example of 'market failure', i.e. of the failure of the market mechanism to meet human needs.

There is a huge market for a vaccine against Covid-19 in North America and Europe. This has been created by the state borrowing money to buy the vaccine. So, far from being independent of the state, the 'big, profit-making pharmaceutical companies' that Littlewood wants us to cheer for are hugely dependent on the market that states provide for their products. So much, then, for 'free' enterprise.

Littlewood mentioned that AstraZeneca (the one which bungled their tests and then tried to fiddle the results before having to do more tests) has agreed to sell its vaccine on a not-for-profit basis, commenting that this was 'a welcome reminder that major companies have myriad humanitarian and reputational considerations rather than always and forever focusing on the immediate, financial bottom line.'

He forgot to mention that this commitment only holds for the duration of the pandemic. AstraZeneca is anticipating (even hoping for and banking on) the Covid-19 virus surviving the pandemic and requiring annual vaccinations like the flu jab to keep it at bay, a demand they will be free to meet at a price that brings them a normal profit.

Littlewood also ignores that, far from there being 'myriad' humanitarian considerations for not going for an 'immediate' profit, the directors of a company are legally banned from taking into account humanitarian considerations. They cannot act as a charity as they have a legal duty to get the best return they can for the company's shareholders. Not only is there no such thing as a free lunch, it is not permitted under company law.

'Reputational considerations' are another matter as a bad reputation – such as Big Pharma has – can affect sales, and so forgoing an immediate profit to counter this and going for a longer-term profit can be justified in terms of shareholder interest. As can other apparently humanitarian actions such as paying higher wages than others (to attract the best workers) or providing health care and other benefits (to develop a contented and more productive workforce).

What the rapid development of a Covid-19 vaccine does show is that society has the scientific knowledge and the technological capacity to solve a problem if enough resources are mobilised. This is the exception under capitalism (and normally only for military purposes), precisely because 'no profit, no production' (sometimes misleadingly called the 'profit motive') applies. In socialism mobilising resources to meet a need would be the rule as the common ownership of productive resources by society will allow the motive for production to become the natural one of directly satisfying people's needs.

THE PACE OF CHANGE

Capitalism in England began at 5 pm on Saturday, 14 October 1066, when William the Bastard became William the Conqueror. This, to some, will appear a contentious proposition, after all that was surely the advent of feudal supremacy.

However, while the Norman nobility and church secured their domination behind the daunting walls of castle and cathedral, ensuring the mass of the peasantry remained firmly bound to the land, there was one group of commoners spared such ties.

The Normans liked rabbits. Not fluffy bunnies as playthings for their children, but as the meat in pies and stews. So it was that along with the mail-clad knights came the warreners. Although of common stock, unlike the peasants they were free men.

Warreners, as the name suggests, constructed warrens, the means of production, which was their property not the local lord's, for cultivating rabbits. These rabbits were rare and valuable, not being native to Britain nor adapted to the climate, and they were sold on the market as commodities..

Thus, at the very moment of the triumph of feudalism, an element, a very minor element, of capitalism was introduced. The question is, when did the implicit principle really begin to become the explicit economic tendency that challenged, then superseded feudalism? Choose your own significant historical moment.

The point here relates to a frequently made assertion that Covid 19 marks a fundamental change in society. That people's consciousness has significantly changed. Society must find a new way to go about its business.

Socialists will say amen to that (alright, perhaps not amen) if it means people more generally begin to grasp that their best interests are served by collectively deciding to end capitalism. Replacing it with a system of common, democratic ownership of the means of production and distribution to freely meet everyone's needs is surely an attractive prospect.

Unfortunately, the evidence at the moment seems to indicate no such general ambition. There is a radical change in distribution, but it's from high street and mall to online, a switch from one set of capitalist enterprises to another. The actual production of commodities remains largely unaltered.

This will entail large scale redundancies amongst those employed in the high streets and malls, impacting also on the social environments. Such is the nature of capitalism. What seems like a fixed dominant industry is quickly swept away by those infamous market forces.

For example, coal mining was regarded as a traditional industry in South Yorkshire, but it existed as a major force for little over a century, already well into decline before the 1984/5 strike. Much of what replaced it was lower skilled and lower paid. As with King Coal, so it was with Queen Cotton in Lancashire.

And so it's likely to be with changes today, with zero-hours-contracted delivery drivers and warehouse hub workers replacing salaried (with pensions) shop workers. Consumer capitalism will continue to dominate.

Is this a counsel of despair for socialists, the more things change, the more they stay the same? Not at all. Firstly, it shows people can adapt rapidly to change. It wasn't that long since it was popular to refer to 'retail therapy' as a leisure activity. This arose from the development of the huge out-of-town shopping centres.

They were a change in themselves, drawing huge numbers away from towns. Come a technological advance, IT, add a pandemic, and there is a new retail equation, readily accepted. The point here being that the catalyst of change, in this case Covid-19, cannot be predicted.

It would be all too easy to view a socialist party founded well over a hundred years ago as having failed in its quest to further the realisation of socialism, as capitalism remains ideologically, as well as economically, dominant.

However, as Engels indicated in *The Peasant War in Germany*, a revolution cannot occur and succeed before its time. Any attempt to force the issue ends in disaster, it certainly doesn't end in socialism.

What will precipitate a change in the general economic, political and social views of a significant majority of the world working class cannot be artificially engineered or foretold. Socialists can only persist in maintaining the political resources as widely available as possible for the working class to draw on when ready.

Socialists can also keep up a constant critique of capitalism and all it entails to feed into the general discourses of society. Even hearing the oft-made comment, 'I like your ideas, but they'll never work in practice' is positive. The notion has been planted, the negative can be worked on.

To return to the warreners. It is unlikely they spent much, if any, time fretting over whether or not the free market would eventually become the successor to feudalism. They would have gone about their business looking out for any other opportunities that came their way.

Perhaps there were those who thought it might be more generally beneficial if society adopted their freer way of working. Surely there were peasants who looked to the warreners and thought their lot could be improved by similar social and economic arrangements.

Yet, for hundreds of years, feudalism maintained its ideological grip until a pandemic, the Black Death, loosened its grip. A peasants' revolt notwithstanding, it would be centuries more before the warreners became mill owners.

There is no time scale for, and no certainty of, the achievement of socialism. Whether the Socialist Party ultimately plays a significant or insignificant role in that achievement cannot be known now. For the moment though, today's socialists are the warreners adding the freely cultivated meat to the political stew.

DAVE ALTON

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

LONDON
North London branch. Meets 3rd Thurs. 8pm at Torriano Meeting House, 99 Torriano Ave, NW5 2RX. Contact: Chris Dufton 020 7609 0983 nlb.spgb@gmail.com
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.ksrb@worldsocialism.org.
South West regional branch. Meets 3rd Sat. 2pm at the Railway Tavern, 131 South Western Road, Salisbury SP2 7RR. Contact: Ray Carr, Flat 1, 99 Princess Rd, Poole, BH12 1BQ. 01202 257556 or 07929627689.
Brighton. Contact: Anton Pruden, anton@pruden.me
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: Kephas 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

Blame the old for being alive

SOCIETY'S TREATMENT of many old people is shameful. Shut away in institutions, out of sight and out of mind, treated as expendable and collateral damage. The claim that we live in a civilised society is challenged by the miserable manner present-day society looks after old people. Too often the attitude is that 'senior citizens' are already living on borrowed time as a result of modern medical skills that extend their lives and therefore they should not receive any priority to prolong life.

The callous way that capitalism has developed 'care' of the elderly is shown in the manner where all of those with poor immune systems are placed together in one institution so when an infection strikes, it spreads through the unfortunate residents. As with dementia, take patients away from the one place they know and feel comfortable in, and place them with similarly confused people, in unfamiliar surroundings and then wonder why the dementia then deteriorates.

The number of cases of abuse is projected to increase of the aged whose needs may not be fully met due to lack of resources and insufficiently trained staff. The WHO reports that globally around 1 in 6 people 60 years and older experienced some form of abuse in community settings during the past year with levels of abuse high in nursing homes and long-term care facilities, with 2 in 3 staff reporting that they have committed abuse in the past year.

As many as one in five people in the UK over the age of 65 have been abused. The charity Hourglass, in a survey it conducted, said that more than a third of people did not believe that 'inappropriate sexual acts directed at older people' counted as abuse. 30 percent did not view 'pushing, hitting, or beating an older person' as abuse. 32 percent did not believe that 'taking precious items from an older relative's home without asking' constituted abuse.

And not just the UK. An Australian Royal Commission has uncovered widespread mistreatment. Overall, investigators estimated that over 32,000 assaults – physical, sexual and emotional had occurred in a year in care homes. The abuse was perpetrated by carers as well as other residents. They said about 2,520 sexual assaults had happened in residential nursing homes in 2018-2019, an estimated 50 sexual assaults occur each week. 'Unlawful sexual conduct' is believed to have affected 13-18 percent of aged care residents.

The pandemic has exacerbated problems. Worldwide, the elderly in care homes were initially designated as low priority but it was the continuation of a trend that began with care becoming a for-profit industry.

In the last week of November, Covid-19 has claimed the lives of more than 100,000 people who lived and worked in long-term care facilities in the United States. According to public health expert Michael Barnett, one in 13 have now died as a result of Covid-19. So far, at least 75 percent of Australia's coronavirus deaths have been aged care residents.

When the Covid-19 pandemic arrived, Julio Croda, from Brazil's Department Of Immunisation And Transmissible Diseases, said he experienced a lack of urgency from the government when his department predicted that the elderly would bear the brunt of the coronavirus and would be more likely to die from the disease. Solange Vieira, who helped restructure Brazil's pension system, said the quiet bit out aloud, 'It's good that deaths are concentrated among the old. That will improve our economic performance as it will reduce our pension deficit.' In Britain too the pandemic has been an ill wind, with the Office for Budget Responsibility calculating that:

'The Government will save over £600m in state pension payments this year following a steep rise in excess deaths among the elderly, according to the budget watchdog' (*Daily Telegraph,* 25 November).

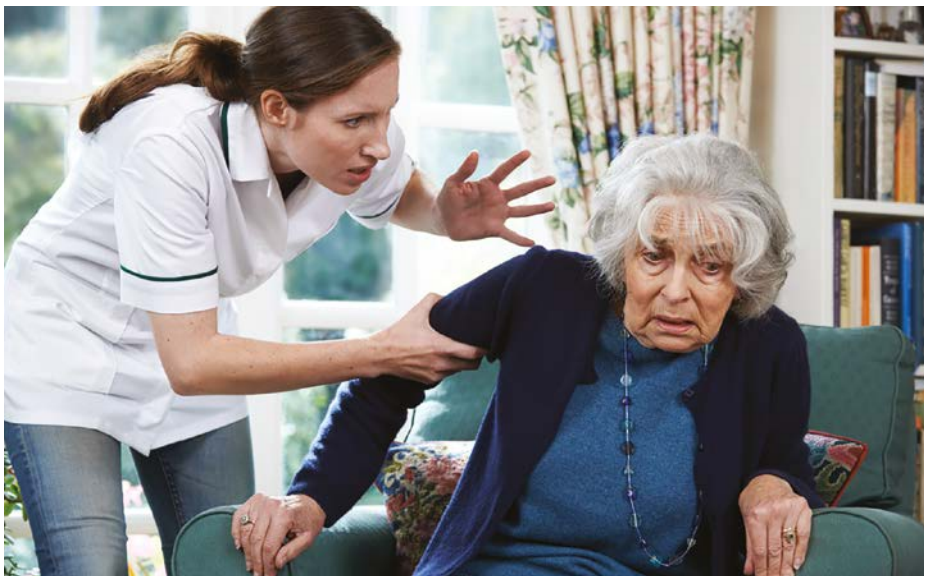
Even in 'progressive' Sweden, its policy of promoting herd immunity led to older people being acceptable sacrifices. *The 'herd' will survive, but what about the weaker and frail members of society?* Anders Tegnell, the chief epidemiologist at Sweden's Public Health Agency, answered, 'Unfortunately the mortality rate is high due to the introduction [of the virus] in elderly care homes.'

Yet long before the present pandemic, back in 2013 the then Japanese finance minister, Taro Aso, at a meeting discussing social security reforms said that the elderly should be enabled to 'hurry up and die' to relieve pressure on the state to pay for their care (*Guardian*, 22 January 2013).

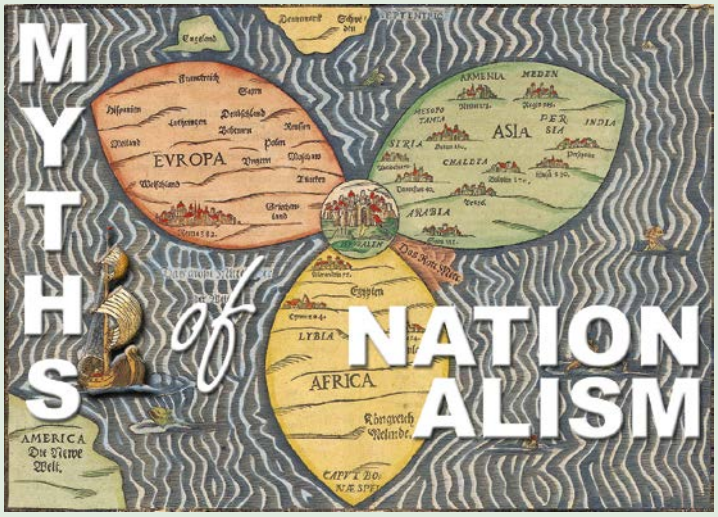
Society traditionally emphasised respect towards the elderly but as families and communities became increasingly atomised, abuse and abandonment has increased and our elders have been more and more stripped of their dignity. Is it really an exaggeration to claim that in today's world old people are seen as disposable, to be discarded when the need arises?

Providing for the infirm and elderly is a social responsibility which all the able-bodied members of working age should share in equally. 'From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs', no matter their age. A socialist world will not treat old folk like machines that have been rendered obsolete and fit only for the scrap heap. Only a socialist society is capable of supporting the increasing longevity of its people and honouring and respecting our aged fellow-workers.

ALJO



If you open an atlas, you will generally find two kinds of map there. Physical maps show land masses and islands, mountains, seas and rivers. Political maps show towns and cities but also borders of various kinds, from counties and provinces to countries. In some ways, it's rather odd that these borders exist: they are not natural phenomena, and even a few hundred years ago, national boundaries would have been very different. Nevertheless, nations and the nationalism associated with them are often seen as essential aspects of the way the world is organised, with people expected to support the 'national interest', which goes well beyond supporting the national team in various sports. But there are good reasons for questioning the whole idea of nations and nationalism, and for arguing that they are all part of a world forced on its inhabitants and based on division, rivalry and setting people against each other.



An article in the November *Socialist Standard* criticised nationalism as 'a dangerous diversion from the class struggle', adding that it would just mean workers getting new masters in place of the old ones. And there are further reasons why workers should reject nationalism, including the fundamental point that the whole idea of a nation is extremely problematic. Whatever definition is adopted, there will always be exceptions, and it is just not possible to say in objective and consistent terms what constitutes a nation.

Let's look at some definitions. Commonly cited is the one by Stalin (in *Marxism and the National Question*):

'A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.'

As far as psychological make-up is concerned, he claims that nations differ 'in spiritual complexion, which manifests itself in peculiarities of national culture'. This is vague enough to be meaningless, and so makes no contribution to the recognition of a nation.

With regard to the language criterion, Stalin notes that the inhabitants of the UK and US both speak English but do not form a nation, as they occupy distinct territories and do not share an 'internal economic bond'. He recognises that two nations can speak the same language but maintains that a nation cannot speak several languages. But there are many countries where more than one language is spoken.

In Belgium there are three official languages, Dutch/Flemish, French and German. Stalin would presumably have to say that (leaving aside the smaller number of German speakers) there are two nations in Belgium, namely Flanders and Wallonia. There are plenty of other examples, from Switzerland and Wales to Canada, Iraq, Afghanistan and India (which has no fewer than twenty-two official languages). In addition, it cannot be claimed that multilingual countries usually have one language used by all inhabitants (in India, for instance, fewer than six in ten speak the most widely used language, Hindi).

Some approaches to nationalism make no reference to language. The following is from *National Identity* by Anthony Smith:

'a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members. '

Note the similarity to Stalin's definition in terms of a common economy, a mass culture and such vague terms as 'common myths'. Smith's definition of nationalism is also relevant:

'an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential 'nation'.'

It should be clear that nationalism is based on totally subjective notions relating to memories and culture and what some believe to be a nation. As was stated at the time of the unification of Italy, 'We have made Italy, now we have to make Italians'.

Open the atlas again and look at a political map of Africa. Many borders consist of straight lines, and it is clear that these are arbitrary consequences of colonialism, of which colonial power ruled which area and where it was convenient to draw boundaries, rather than reflecting any genuine distinctions between nations. Instead, the lines were put in place, and nations were created as a result. Iraq, too, was assembled a century ago as an artificial entity that served the interests of the British ruling class, with special regard to access to oil reserves. Even a supposedly long-existing nation, China, has in fact consisted of different areas over time, often with rulers who were not themselves Chinese but, among others, Mongol or Manchu.

So many will say that a nation has a common culture, but what is not true is that the members of a nation have common interests. This is because all nations are divided into different classes, an elite who have the lion's share of wealth and power in contrast to the great majority of the population. Under capitalism, the division is between the capitalist class and the working class. The capitalists are less than one percent of the population; they own the land, factories, shops, offices and so on; their income derives from rent, interest and profit; they can be immensely wealthy, multi-millionaires or even billionaires. In contrast, the working class form the rest of the population; they have to work for a wage or salary, or else depend on someone who does so; what they are paid does little more than enable them to keep their heads above water, and they are always prey to unemployment and real poverty.

In such a society, there can be no commonality of interests between the capitalists, who want to increase their profits and their power over those they exploit, and the workers. The capitalists wish to protect their wealth and power on an international stage, such as access to trade routes and markets, and they invoke nationalism to persuade workers to go along with this. Even if they share a nationality with their bosses, it is in the interest of workers to defend their wages and working conditions against capitalist onslaught, and indeed to overthrow the rulers and the system, establishing a global society where there are no classes and no borders. Where nations and nationalism are things of the past, like banks and bailiffs and charities and passports.

PAUL BENNETT

Copyrights expire, humanity gains

This month marks the end of an era. The play, *Pygmalion,* written and first performed in 1912, goes out of copyright in the United Kingdom, and much of the world. 108 years as intellectual property comes to an end. It joins all of the works of George Bernard Shaw, along, also, with the works of George Orwell, in the expiry. Both men died in 1950. The antiquity of Shaw's writing is down to his very long life.

At the time both men died, they could have expected their intellectual property, and its income, to live on 50 years after them, however, the law was changed in 1995 to extend copyrights by twenty further years, so that intellectual property had a life of the remainder of the author's life, plus 70 years.

Scene from the 1938 film version of Pygmalion

Copyright asserts that the author has the right to control their own intellectual creations: initially, as the name suggests, over who had the right to make copies of published books. This later extended to the right to prevent derivative works (using characters and instances from the created work). It also asserts the author's right to be identified as the creator of the work.

It is, in effect, an intangible property right, that exists only because the state creates and enforces it. The first copyright law in the UK dates back to 1710, "An Act for the Encouragement of Learning, by vesting the Copies of Printed Books in the Authors or purchasers of such Copies, during the Times therein mentioned". As this title makes clear, the intent was that people could benefit commercially from producing works and publishing them. Initially, this was limited to 14 years.

The reason this sort of protection is necessary is seen in the famous example of Charles Dickens suffering at the hands of literary pirates in America, where his works were not in copyright: within weeks of *A Christmas Carol* being published, pirate copies were selling freely and lucratively in the United States.

In strict economic terms then, copyright is a species of rent, arising from the artificial monopoly created by the state, hence the interest of rentiers to extend and extend the term of the copyright so that they can keep profiting from the use of the intellectual property.

The sort of value involved can be seen in the 2015 Freedom of Information Act request to the British Museum (one of the beneficiaries of the Shaw estate). That showed that the Museum gained £1.5 million from his estate between 2001 and 2014 (tinyurl.com/y596hfkg). It should be noted that this in itself represents less than a third of the income of the estate, split as it was between the National Gallery of Ireland, the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, the British Museum and – in a final quixotic twist, an endowment towards alphabet reform. True to his form as a challenger of received notions, this last part of his bequest had to be overturned in court by the public trustee, demonstrating the limitations to the absolute right of an individual to dispose of his property as he pleases. A very Shavian outcome to Shaw's own life.

These fine institutions will now be bereft of considerable income. This is not the first time. In the 1980s Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) lost the income from J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* works. This led to campaigns on behalf of the hospital to extend its copyright (no doubt encouraged by less worthy owners of intellectual property). In art, this drove the extension from 50 years after the author's death to 70, but in addition, GOSH was granted a perpetual interest in the royalties of Peter Pan performances and publications in the UK (but not full copyright control to authorise performances and publications).

Intellectual property is big business. Corporations like Disney spend a lot of time and effort buying up the rights to characters and stories (like their purchase of the Star Wars franchise). Given that corporations don't die, it is in their interest to keep property rights around for as long as possible. Even more, there is currently controversy, as Disney are apparently maintaining they have gained the benefits of the Star Wars IP, but are trying to avoid paying the author of the novelisations of the films any royalties.

The power of the copyright monopoly came to the fore during the Covid lockdown, as university libraries found that academic publishers were not making electronic copies available (which could, thus, be read by students at home) or were charging very high prices (some publishers did make ebooks temporarily available, but even that generosity could be seen as loss-leading, to get people into the habit of those titles being available). Librarian organisations have called for a review of the ebook market in the UK (academicebookinvestigation.org/).

They note that increasingly the model is for universities to pay for expensive and restrictive licences that have to be bought each year. This is the trend with intangible property, to transform one-off payments into revenue streams. Unlike when you buy a print book, when you buy an ebook you do not own a thing, you are simply granted the right to be able to read a text. This is as true for an ebook on a Kindle as it is for university libraries.

For publishers, the cost of producing a print book and an ebook is pretty much identical (actually printing is a marginal cost in the whole process), but they are struggling to find a business model that allows them to collect revenue whilst at the same time using the infinite reproducibility of electronic distribution of information.

Both Shaw and Orwell claimed to be socialists, and often made useful and important contributions to the debates and arguments for socialism (even if that took the form of needing to disagree with them). Their works becoming more widely and freely available can only be a welcome thing. Humanity gains in general from the increased availability and distribution of ideas and knowledge.

PIK SMEET

In the book about my village here in Turkey, 'Okçular Village – a Guide', that I wrote a few years ago there is a section where our *Yaşlı Çınarlar*, literally 'Old Plane Trees' (a local term of affection for our more senior villagers), tell their stories. As one, Şevket Akgün, related his tale he recalled the following: 'The local education manager then was İzzet Akgül and he said to me, "Şevket, you're a hardworking student, I'm going to send you to the village institute'' and I went in 1941 to Kızılçullu for 5 years, winter and summer to study. In the winters we studied, in the summers we learned trades like carpentry, construction, blacksmithing. I graduated in 1946 and in September at 15 years old, I started teaching at Okçular. However, there was no school then.'

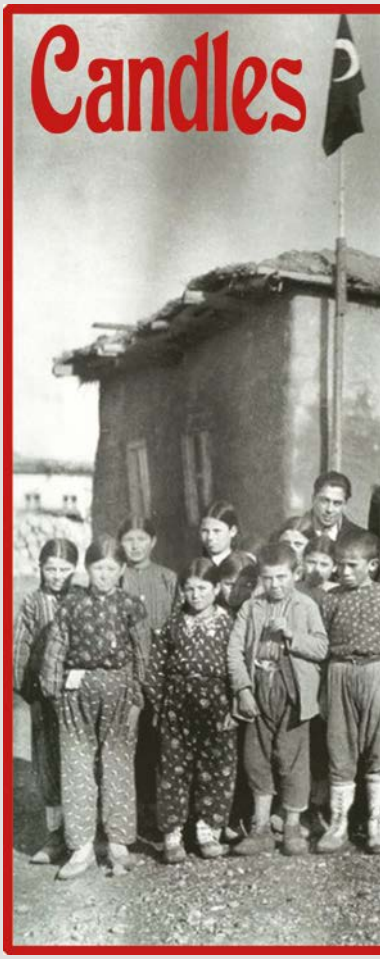
The term 'village institutes' was intriguing – what were they? Over the years I have slowly and not very diligently gathered photographs, together with a little background and history. It is a fascinating and compelling story of vision, social engineering, personal achievement and commitment to an ideal that, within two decades, would have so ruffled the feathers of the establishment that they felt compelled to snuff out the very concept and to discredit the visionary, guiding lights of the movement.

Right from the foundation of the Turkish Republic, Atatürk recognised that to build a modern, secular society those he described as the 'true owners', the villagers, could become the nation's greatest asset but only if the 'light of education' could be passed to them.

By 1935 the process of 'enlightenment' was at a standstill with just 5,400 out of 40,000 villages having primary schools. So it was that Atatürk gave his blessing to a scheme that would take the best and brightest of village children, boys and girls, give them the benefits of an additional, broadly based education (initially for six months but expanded in 1940) for a further five years and then have them return to the villages as teachers. The project was passed to İsmail Hakkı Tonguç, an educational visionary, and the *Köy Enstitütleri* – Village Institutes were born into a world that most of us reading this can scarcely imagine!

The Anatolia of this time had progressed little away from urban centres – electricity, roads and sanitation were virtually unknown. Within the villages literacy was of little value as newspapers were few and far between and radios unheard of. Medical services were unknown or scorned in favour of local folk remedies. In years of drought or semi-drought, when combined with the bitterly cold, harsh winters of Anatolia infant mortality could run at 30-50% of those under 1 year old. The lack of education spawned generation after generation of fatalistic, religiously myopic, compliant villagers who were open to exploitation by corrupt bureaucrats and rogues. Village life was unchanged and unchanging with those showing any spark of intellect discouraged and suppressed under the yoke of drudgery and the fight to survive from one year to the next.

Mahmut Makal and his father



Out of this darkness the Village Institutes gathered together the best and brightest and began an educational process that would transform the perceptions of these students in a way that is difficult to imagine. In addition to the 3Rs the curriculum included history, geography, science, philosophy, practical engineering, welding, sewing skills, tailoring/ dressmaking, dance, drama, carpentry, hygiene, animal husbandry, agricultural science, forestry and music. Sport was also encouraged and practised – the list goes on. Not only was the curriculum wide-ranging it was also avowedly secular and directed towards the awakening of social awareness to the injustices and inequalities that comprised the lot of most villagers because of their ignorance and dire circumstances.

The compassion and desire for change of those who supported and directed the village institutes can be read into every line of this letter sent by Hayri Çakaloz, director of the Ortaklar Village Institute to all newly accepted students:

My dear son/daughter,
You have successfully passed the admission examination and so have qualified to become a student at our Institute. As I congratulate you for this honourable achievement, I am happy to inform you that our Institute family of more than 400 students awaits you with open arms. I kiss you on your eyes.

After receiving this letter, please make the following preparations: Get a closely cropped haircut. Wash your hands, feet and entire body as best you can. If your clothes are dirty, please have your mother wash and mend them.

I can't speak for you, but these kindly and practical words leave me deeply moved. Other directors recall newly admitted students arriving in torn and patched clothing or rags; many came barefoot; some with bellies swollen from malnutrition; most with tooth cavities and few had ever seen a toilet. What did arrive with them was a narrow, village mind-set. *'For these children, life was all about cultivating the field, owning a pair of oxen, getting married, worshipping God and preparing for Paradise . Their recruitment into the Institute shook this vision to its very core.'*

Each of the eventual 21 Institutes were expected to become self-sufficient; to this end, as new establishments were authorised, the students and staff would be involved in the building process. As time went on they became the 'sole contractors' and did it all themselves.

One day, director of Kızılçullu Institute (where Şevket Akgün studied), Hamdi Akman, asked his newly graduated students if they were willing to help construct a new institute at Ortaklar before taking up their teaching posts. Their response was

unanimous and next day 200 male and 45 female graduates set off for the railway station with blankets over their shoulders.

These young men and women had been taught that they were to act not merely as school teachers but as general missionaries of scientific enlightenment and progress – a task that the Institutes had inadequately prepared them for and the social problems they faced would often lead to disillusionment. The spartan regime and relatively remote positioning of the Village Institutes was to prevent the young students from losing all connection with their previous existence and thus becoming unwilling or unable to settle back in the villages. But the result of this system was to teach them about a way of life very different from their own village upbringing, without giving them any first-hand experience of it. They were aware of ideals and values which made some of them despise or despair of the collective ignorance of the villagers, and yet, at the same time, they could have few realistic notions about urban life or about the possibilities of village reform – still less about Western society.

Young teachers were still members of the village and yet they had lost intimate contact through five years of almost continuous schooling. Their new ways and ideas created tensions and a social barrier between them and the village, they came to symbolise the hostile, 'outside'. They were of the village and yet not of it. (When Şevket Akgün arrived back in our village, assigned as its first teacher, he was 15 years old.)

These teachers faced a dilemma. Either they took their modernising mission seriously, caused offence and faced isolation, or they tried to lead a normal social life, yielding to the conservative pressures of the village community, and living as much like a traditional villager as the job of actually teaching the children allowed. Their difficulties are graphically portrayed by one of them, Mahmut Makal, who wrote a series of books, the first of which, *Bizim Köy* (published in 1950 and translated as 'A Village In Anatolia' when he was just 19 years old) remains Turkey's best selling book ever. It is a testament to the abject poverty suffered by many Anatolian villagers in the middle of the 20th century. It is also a testament to the subversive power of education; for once people realise that they are being exploited by others, that poverty and destitution are not the 'will of Allah/God', and that there is no reward in the next life, then they are very likely to turn and bite the hand or arse of their exploiters. Mahmut Makal was part of a group that became known as the Village Institute Authors who shocked and dismayed the elite establishment and the conservatively religious alike. Radicalised by educational enlightenment and the desperate poverty of village life, it was not surprising that progressive political ideas caught on.

Alarm bells rang within the establishment and an unlikely alliance between the religious conservatives who hated the secular co-educational teaching and the political and business elite who hated the idea of educated peasants capable of answering back and defending their rights joined to become a formidable reactionary force. The Institutes and those who advocated them were branded as communists in the age of virulent anti-communism, their reputations were smeared and they faced harassment, suspension and imprisonment. Even that great visionary, İsmail Hakkı Tonguç, was hounded out in 1953 and in 1954 the Village Institutes, one of the greatest experiments in modern education and social engineering, were no more.

The dream of Atatürk, İsmail Hakkı Tonguç, Mahmut Makal and many others of a secular education, based on the foundations of inquiry, science and rationality that is free and democratic has not been totally suppressed. There now exists *Çağdaş Eğitim Vakfı* (Contemporary Education Foundation) established in 1994 that promotes many of the same values from which the Village Institutes evolved.

Marx understood clearly that real revolution (as opposed to bloody revolution) takes place in the minds of men and women when they become truly educated and truly understand the state of the world in which we all live. Men and women struggling to feed their bellies are in no condition to feed their minds, much less struggle to improve the condition of their lives. The threat that an educated population represents to the ruling elite has clearly been recognised by the powers-that-be. Throughout the 'developed' Western world governments are in the process of dumbing down the general population, restricting access to quality education by under investment in the state system and a pricing policy that divides the 'haves' from the 'have nots'.

When we compare the potential contribution of an uneducated Mahmut Makal, and countless others like him around the world, with his concrete achievements after his 'enlightenment', I would argue that denial of education is a crime of such enormity that is on a par with genocide. Condemning human beings, every one of whom has potential beyond their imagination, to life imprisonment in a cell of ignorance for the misfortune of being born on the 'wrong' side of the tracks is a Crime Against Humanity!

I hope you have enjoyed reading and learning about the village institutes as much as I have enjoyed learning and writing about them. Like the proverbial 'Candles In The Wind' young minds need to be nurtured and nourished – the symbol of education is a blazing beacon of enlightenment and in the winds of change presently blowing through the world it is beginning to gutter – it needs protecting.

Alan Fenn

An impoverished new student at a Village Institute

Development to what?

We resume our refutation of the view that workers in the advanced capitalist countries share in the exploitation of the people in the so-called 'Third World' by examining contemporary theories of this.

In the early postwar years large swathes of the world's poor countries were decolonised. Seeking to complement their new-found political independence with a semblance of autonomous economic development, they soon found this was not so easily achieved.

The concept of 'development' has roots in nineteenth century thinking on the supposed civilising mission of the imperialist powers succinctly captured by Kipling's patronising phrase: 'white man's burden'. Cynically, imperialism was justified as a means of uplifting native peoples everywhere - economically, spiritually and culturally – though, in reality, its impact was often the opposite.

The modern understanding of 'development' as a coordinated macro-economic strategy was first clearly associated with a 'structuralist' school of thought that emerged in Latin America in the 1930s centred on the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA). The structuralists argued against the Ricardian concept of 'comparative advantage' promoted by liberals who extolled the virtues of free trade and urged countries like Argentina to specialise in the export of agricultural products, capitalising on that country's natural advantages.

The structuralists countered that there was a long-term tendency for the price of agricultural products to fall against imported manufactures because of the latter's greater 'elasticity of demand'. Meaning Argentina would be shortchanged in the long run due to declining terms of trade if it focused only on producing beef and wheat for the European market. Therefore it made sense to adopt protective policies of 'import substitution' to stimulate the growth of local manufacturing.

Development economics

After the Second World War, however, such economic nationalist thinking found itself increasingly swimming against the tide. While import substitution continued to be implemented in many developing countries, by the late 1970s it was largely abandoned. Ironically, it was instrumental in encouraging transnational corporations (TNCs) to set up – in Trojan-horse fashion – production facilities within the countries concerned precisely as a way of getting round import controls – leaving such countries still essentially at the mercy of external economic players in the guise of these corporations.

Moreover, commencing with the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (1948) there was an increasingly concerted, international push to bring about a 'substantial reduction of tariffs and other trade barriers and the elimination of preferences, on a reciprocal and mutually advantageous basis'. The belief was that free trade would not only mitigate the prospect of war but also promote economic growth. This tendency culminated in the emergence of neo-liberalism (rubber-stamped by the so called 'Washington Consensus' which replaced the postwar Bretton Woods framework) in the wake of the collapse of Keynesianism in the recession-hit 1970s.

Dependency Theory

In the early post-war years, 'development economics' had fallen under the spell of the 'modernisation paradigm'. A leading protagonist, Walt Rostow, argued that development was a process driven by capital investment and that the developing countries, being short of capital, needed to open themselves up to investment from abroad. The Modernists were Keynesian interventionists and, unlike the liberals, accepted the need for developing countries to industrialise and diversify their economies. For them, 'development' basically meant passing through a linear sequence of economic stages, mirroring the economic history of the already developed countries (*The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto,* 1960)

In the 1960s and 70s, however, the modernisation paradigm was increasingly challenged. What had appeared so seductively simple at the outset no longer seemed to fit the facts. In those early post-war years, growth among the developing countries had been comparatively vigorous – though, for the vast majority of citizens, the benefits failed to 'trickle down'. Then, in the seventies, the oil crisis came along – and the mushrooming problem of Third World debt as many countries desperately resorted to IMF (and other) loans to plug the gap between export earnings and the rising costs of imports. With the onset of global recession, growth began to falter. In Africa alone at least 15 countries saw their economies shrink in real terms. The situation deteriorated further in the 1980s, dubbed the 'Lost Decade'.

In this period a new development paradigm emerged – Dependency Theory. This built upon earlier structuralist thinking but also marked a new departure. As Dudley Seers notes: 'The realization that import substitution created new, and possibly more dangerous forms of dependence converted the ECLA structuralists into dependency theorists' (*Dependency Theory: A Critical Reassessment,* 1981).

According to the 'Dependistas', drawing on Lenin's 'law of uneven development', the problems faced by poor countries were not the result of their incomplete integration into the global capitalist economy as modernisation theory suggested. They were already fully integrated into this economy and those problems sprang, instead, from the form of integration to which they were subjected. They were not 'undeveloped' but systematically 'underdeveloped'. This manifested itself in a net outflow of capital from them via such mechanisms as 'unequal exchange' – proof that it was not for any lack of capital that their development was impeded.

The 'world trading system' was conceptualised as a hierarchical order in which the dominant core countries were able to impose their own needs on the dominated countries. Such needs dictated that the latter should remain suppliers of low-value raw materials for processing into high value finished goods within the industrialised core countries themselves, rather than rival producers of such goods, given the latter's complete dominance over global value chains. In short, industrial development and economic diversification was effectively blocked in the capitalist periphery.

Thus, the linear 'stages of growth' model of modernisation was misconceived. It overlooked that the predicament

ECLA HQ Chile

developing countries found themselves was quite unlike the pristine state of affairs already developed countries encountered when they first began to develop since, back then, there were no already-developed economies around to obstruct and distort the development process.

For developing countries, trade liberalisation (which tended to be heavily biased in favour of developed countries) was not the only problem. There was also the growing dominance of the TNCs that not only controlled the great bulk of global trade but, as stated, were becoming increasingly active as producers inside these countries. Their immense economic clout and footloose nature in a world where capital could freely relocate to wherever costs where lowest, gave them considerable leverage in their dealings with poor countries. Finally, there was the ability of lending agencies like the IMF to impose 'structural adjustment' programmes on these countries – like privatisation and phasing out food subsidies – as a condition for receiving the loans they increasingly depended upon.

For some 'Dependistas' the solution lay in 'delinking' from the global economy and pursing a policy of national self-reliance. But in a world in which the global division of labour was becoming ever more diversified and complex, this was not really feasible.

Moreover, though it became fashionable for a while, Dependency theory seemed increasingly out of touch with changing realities. In particular, its core claim that industrial development of the poor countries would be 'blocked' was decisively refuted by the emergence of the 'newly industrialising countries' – particularly, the Asian Tiger economies (like South Korea and Taiwan) and, above all, China which has since become a major imperialist power to rival the US, with business interests right across the globe.

Additionally, there has been a massive shift in manufacturing away from the advanced countries to the Global South which now accounts for 83 percent of the world's manufacturing workforce. Indeed, amongst many large western-based corporations there has been a significant movement towards 'offshoring' production and outsourcing it to local contractors based in the Global South – meaning such corporations are no longer involved in producing commodities as such, solely in marketing and 'branding' them.

Guilt-ridden liberals

Around the time the Dependency paradigm was gaining adherents – the 1970s – an alternative worldview centred on the concept of a 'New International Economic Order' (NIEO) began to be promoted. The impetus came from the nonaligned movement of developing countries. The basic idea was to bring about a more equitable global economy.

Hardly any of the proposals embodied in this concept were taken up as neo-liberalism strengthened its hold on practical policy-making everywhere. However, in ideological terms, the concept gained traction by implanting far greater awareness of the substantial inequalities in economic circumstances and living standards between rich and poor countries.

Along with this has arisen the idea that ordinary people in the 'rich countries' enjoy a standard of living so much higher than ordinary people in 'poor' countries precisely because they live in one part of the world that profits handsomely from the exploitation of the other. They are said, in effect, to share in the fruits of such exploitation and it is this that affords them a lifestyle incomparably more affluent and comfortable than their counterparts in the exploited poor countries.

Sadly, this frankly pernicious and tendentious idea is one that seems to seep into popular discourse with all the ease of a toxin into a watercourse. It is the meat and drink of handwringing liberals everywhere who fret guiltily about how


Walt Rostow

appalling it is that 'we in the West' should enjoy the comforts of life produced by the sweatshop labour of the Global South.

Consider this comment by Jonathan Glennie and Nora Hassanaien in *The Guardian* newspaper, that most formidable bastion of liberal thinking, on the subject of 'Dependency Theory':

'As with most Marxist-inspired tirades, it is not a complete analysis of Latin America's history – it probably exaggerates the villainy of capital and heroism of peasants. But it presents a perspective on the truth that any serious development worker or academic should have intellectual access to. This is as relevant today as ever. It is critical that voters in the rich world learn that their wealth is related to a historic exploitation of other parts of the world, especially when they are eventually asked to readjust their living habits and conditions in order to better accommodate the just requirements of poorer countries' (1 March, 2012).

At a time when many 'voters in the rich world' are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet, when governments are slashing social welfare programmes with the grim determination of a state-sponsored executioner with a quota of severed heads to fulfil, when more and more people seem to have been reduced to ignominious penury of food banks, charitable handouts and even a life on the streets, it must be comforting to learn that they can always depend upon that 'historic exploitation of other parts of the world' to sustain and materially uplift them.

Unfortunately, being 'asked to readjust their living habits and conditions', by which one assumes is meant having to accept a downward adjustment in their real income, is no guarantee whatsoever that the 'just requirements of poorer countries' will be suitably accommodated.

On the contrary, the only beneficiaries of this sacrifice will likely be those who substantially own the means of production and profit from the employment of others who constitute the overwhelming majority of those 'voters in the rich world' to whom Glennie and Hassanaien appeal. There is no getting round this most fundamental antagonism in our existing capitalist society which mediates and conditions everything else that we find so obnoxious and objectionable about it.

In fact, grotesque inequalities are to be found in both the rich world and the poor world alike. Spatial-cum-national inequalities in this respect pale by comparison with class inequalities, something our liberal handwringers seem constantly prone to overlooking. In this, they are joined by Maoist-style 'Third Worldists' who cynically exploit the idiom of Marxist rhetoric to justify their abandonment of a class-based analysis of capitalism in favour of a nationalistic-based 'anti-imperialism'.

In the final two parts of this series we will consider the claims of these Third Worldists and subject them to empirical and theoretical scrutiny.

ROBIN COX

What is going on in Belarus?

An interview with Dmitry Kosmachev, a member of the Minsk Socialist Circle, about the situation in Belarus, the current protests, and where they may lead.

Stephen Shenfield: In the 1990s I made visits to five of the new post-Soviet republics – Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan. I got the impression that the situation for working people in Belarus was relatively tolerable. Only in Belarus did I find no evidence of people engaged in a desperate struggle to survive. The regime was authoritarian but enjoyed wide support. There were no serious ethnic conflicts.

How accurate was my impression? And how has the situation changed since then?

Dmitry Kosmachev: You are quite right. Even today things are better here in Belarus than elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. In Belarus, unlike Russia and other republics, large-scale privatization of factories, land, and farms has not taken place. Soviet-era industry has not been dismantled and is still competitive. Our trucks, tractors, and buses are bought not only by post-Soviet states but also by some Third World countries. We import our dairy products from other former Soviet republics, not from the EU. We even continue to export clothes and shoes to other former Soviet republics, despite the ubiquity of cheap Chinese imports.

This situation is reflected in our social structure. For one thing, we have preserved a large industrial working class. And with industry remaining in the hands of the state Belarus, unlike Russia and Ukraine, has no 'oligarchs' – extremely rich capitalists who influence politics and create their own parties. The levels of crime and corruption are relatively low here, thanks in part to tough measures. The death penalty still exists in Belarus.

SS: Would you say then that Belarus has a more just society than Russia and Ukraine?

DK: No, the preponderance of state capitalism in Belarus does not make it a welfare state. For example, Russia has more progressive labour legislation than we do. In Russia there are several alternative trade union federations, while Belarus has only one trade union independent of the state. It was created and registered under Lukashenko's predecessors. In Belarus it is almost impossible to conduct a strike in compliance with the formal requirements of labour law. Russian law requires an employer who wants to dismiss a worker to provide two weeks' warning and three months' severance pay, while most Belarusian workers are employed on the basis of short-term – usually annual — labour contracts, so that at the end of the year they can be fired without benefits, simply by not renewing their contract.

There has been partial privatization in Belarus. Fully state-owned enterprises have been transformed into joint-stock companies in which the majority of shares are held by the state and a minority by the director. This gives the director a financial interest in the performance of the enterprise, but he remains dependent on the state and can always be dismissed if deemed disloyal.

SS: How has the political situation changed since the 1990s?

DK: Lukashenko did have wide support in the 1990s. He did not need to cheat in order to win elections. People were afraid of what was happening in Russia and Ukraine – the destruction of the Soviet-era economy, the instability, the rising crime, the corruption. In Belarus industrial enterprises continued to operate. Crime was low, as I said.

At that time the opposition did not have wide support. They were nationalist intellectuals with an orientation toward Poland. Nor were they very honest. In fall 2001 the following

Alexander Lukashenko

joke made the rounds:

Who launched the attack on the World Trade Center? The Belarusian opposition, so as not to have to account for grants received from the US government.

In the presidential election of September 2001 Lukashenko inflicted a crushing defeat on the opposition candidate.

But as they say, 'dripping water wears away the stone.' There grew up a new generation of young people. They often travelled to Poland and Lithuania – countries that have close historical connections with Belarus – and there they saw a completely different level of freedom. Meanwhile Lukashenko was coming to resemble a Latin American dictator. He started to take his youngest son Nikolai with him everywhere he went. The boy is now 17 years old. This, clearly, is our Kim Jong Un.

The protests that followed Lukashenko's victory in the presidential election of 2006, influenced by similar protests in Ukraine, showed that by then the opposition had acquired a broader base. Many previously 'non-political' students took part. They set up a tent camp on Kalinovsky Square, one of the central squares of Minsk. It stood there two weeks before being brutally broken up by special police.

SS: What led up to the current protests?

DK: The presidential election of 2020 was carefully prepared. Would-be candidates whom Lukashenko considered serious rivals were barred from standing. Thus he did not allow the registration of Viktor Babariko, former chairman of the board of Belgazprombank (Belarus Gas Industry Bank), which has links to the huge Russian gas company Gazprom. The famous blogger Sergei Tikhanovsky, who also intended to stand, was arrested on farfetched charges.

All the same, Lukashenko needed a sparring partner, a rival whom he would easily defeat. He thought that a woman would be a weak candidate – men would never vote for her – so he allowed the registration of Sergei Tikhanovsky's wife, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya. But it turned out that voters were fed up with Lukashenko and most were willing to vote for a woman. The president and his team falsified the results. According to the

official figures, Lukashenko won with 80% of the vote. But most people were more inclined to believe Tikhanovskaya's claim that she had won at least 60%. She has now been allowed to go abroad.

Falsification of the election results triggered an unprecedented outburst of public indignation.

SS: How do the current protests compare with protests in the past?

DK: First, they are much more massive. The demonstration in Minsk on October 25 was 100,000 strong, which is quite impressive for a city of two million. There have been separate marches of students and women.

Second, these protests have occurred throughout the country, even in the smallest towns. Past protests were confined to the capital.

Naturally, such large and nationwide protests have a broader social composition than earlier protests, the participants in which were mostly students, people in the arts, small businesspeople, and workers in the Information Technology sector.

SS: Have the protests been accompanied by strikes?

DK: In August the opposition managed to organize a quite powerful nationwide strike movement. They tried again at the end of October, after Tikhanovskaya called for a general strike, but this time they failed.

SS: When you mention 'the opposition' I suppose you are referring primarily to the Belarusian Popular Front?

DK: No, no, you remember the Belarusian Popular Front from the 1990s, but today this organization is virtually non-existent. The opposition is now represented by other structures. Since the 90s it has become somewhat less nationalist and more pro-Western and liberal. One of the main points in the economic program of the opposition's presidential candidate was privatization.

SS: Is there a significant section of the population that actively supports the regime?

DK: Lukashenko has many supporters, but their support is passive in nature. When he needs people to attend a rally, he summons school teachers, workers from public utilities, and others who depend on the state for their livelihood.

SS: Should libertarian socialists support the protest movement? What is your opinion?

DK: My opinion is that they should not. Definitely not! Libertarian anti-authoritarian socialists should support neither the dictator nor the liberals.

Unfortunately, however, there are several other groups of self-styled 'anti-authoritarian socialists' who are taking an active part in these protests. This is true of anarchists, the Green Party, and the Belarusian Left Party 'Just World' – former 'communists' who oppose Lukashenko and adhere to the platform of the Party of the European Left [a coalition of 'communists' and 'social democrats' in EU countries–SS].

A band of four anarchists even tried to start a guerrilla war. They crossed the border from Ukraine illegally with weapons, committed several acts of sabotage, and were arrested while trying to return to Ukraine.

SS: The political situation in Belarus is developing against the background of the global Covid-19 pandemic. Is there any connection between them? How is the pandemic affecting Belarus?

DK: The number of people diagnosed with Covid-19 in Belarus is 106,000, of whom 91,000 have recovered. About 1,000 have died. For a country with a population of 9.5 million this is not catastrophic.

Lukashenko has responded to the threat of Covid-19 with much less drastic measures than those adopted in Russia and Ukraine. Throughout the spring and summer no restrictions were imposed on economic activity. On May 9 the authorities even held a national football competition and a military parade to mark the 75th anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany. Planes from abroad were allowed to land at the airport, though passengers were required to self-isolate for two weeks, as were people who had been in contact with Covid-19 patients inside the country.

The relatively weak official response to the pandemic may have contributed to the protests in a small way. Many people have voluntarily limited their contacts and worn masks and gloves as a sort of challenge to the authorities.

SS: Is Russia in any way involved in the situation in Belarus?

DK: Lukashenko has usually tried to maintain his independence by balancing between Russia and the EU. There is tension in his relationship with Putin. On the eve of the presidential election there was even a scandal with the arrest of Russian mercenaries who-claimed the Belarusian authorities – had come to Minsk to stage an armed coup against Lukashenko. In fact, they were just waiting for a plane to Turkey to fly from there to Africa. At Russian airports almost all foreign flights have been cancelled on account of the pandemic, whereas Belarus remains open for flights.

But when Lukashenko faced mass protests he abandoned anti-Russian rhetoric and ran to Putin for help. And Putin agreed to help. Not, however, by sending troops or special police to suppress protests, but by sending political experts – so-called 'political technologists' — to raise the abysmal quality of the regime's propaganda and improve Lukashenko's terrible domestic and international image. It is these experts who are to be congratulated for the fact that the propaganda programs of state television channels have become more professional. The hope must be that Lukashenko can learn from the more flexible political system of Putin's Russia, which provides scope for dissent 'within the system' and is more selective in applying repression.

SS: Are there any countries apart from Russia with which the Belarusian regime has good relations?

DK: Lukashenko considers the Maduro regime in Venezuela an ideological ally. A monument has been erected in Minsk to Simon Bolivar [the anti-colonial leader who is the inspiration for Venezuela's 'Bolivarian Revolution'–SS] and one of the city squares has been renamed in his honour. State-owned Belarusian construction companies have built several blocks of apartments in Caracas.

SS: Please tell us about the Minsk Socialist Circle.

DK: The Minsk Socialist Circle is a group of 30—40 lecturers and students in the humanities at universities in Minsk. It arose out of an optional course of lectures on the history of socialist thought given at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Belarusian State University in 2017 to mark the centenary of the Russian Revolution. Those of us who started the circle shared a felt need to find a new model of society to restart the socialist project that had been discredited by the Bolsheviks. We hold seminars, public meetings, and discussions with representatives of other left-wing organizations.

SS: So the idea is to make people more aware of non-Bolshevik currents in the history of socialist thought, so that they will distinguish between Bolshevism and socialism as such – and not throw out the baby with the bathwater.

DK: As Belarus was part of the Russian empire and before that of Poland, its territory was the scene of the activities of many Russian, Polish, and Jewish socialist parties.

SS: Right. My grandmother, who was from Smorgon in the north-western corner of Belarus, was in the Jewish Socialist Bund. But what about Belarusian socialists?

DK: There were Belarusian socialists as well, but fewer of them. And it was also in Belarus that there arose the first anarchist organizations in the Russian Empire. So our country has a rich tradition of socialist thought – a tradition that was never completely eradicated either through the long years of the Soviet Union or under the Lukashenko dictatorship.

SS: Are you especially inspired by any particular non-Bolshevik tradition?

DK: Yes, we feel a special affinity with those non-Marxist socialists in the tsarist empire who were known in Russian as *narodniki.* There is no satisfactory equivalent of this term in English. It comes from the word *narod*, meaning 'the people,' because the *narodniki* believed in 'going to the people.' In the 19th century thousands of educated young people went to the villages to preach the ideals of socialism. Hoping to gain the trust of uneducated peasants, they dressed in simple clothes and arranged to work as rural artisans, doctors, and teachers. It was the *narodniki* who formed the People's Will Party and later the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries.

By the way, Sergei Stepnyak, at whose London funeral William Morris made one of his last speeches, was a *narodnik*.

SS: They also committed acts of terror, didn't they?

DK: Some did. It was the People's Will Party that planned and carried out the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881. You see, the first attempts to 'go to the people' failed. The peasants distrusted the strangers from the cities and turned them in to the police. That led some *narodniki* in Russia to resort to terrorism. But the *narodniki* in Belarus never did so. There was a separate Belarusian Party of Socialist Revolutionaries, led by a woman teacher – Poluta Bodunova, who died in the Stalinist GULAG.

In any case, there is no longer such a wide gap between conscious socialists and working people. The tradition of 'going to the people' can still serve us as an ethical guide.

SS: How many people do you reach?

DK: Attendance at our meetings has risen to about a hundred people. And lectures on Marxism or on the history of the socialist movement can attract hundreds of interested young students. True, that is not much by comparison with the crowds of tens or even hundreds of thousands at mass meetings of the liberal opposition. But just a couple of years ago a mere handful of people came to our meetings.

Now is a good time for socialist propaganda. More and more people are getting disillusioned with the liberal opposition. At the same time, they realize that the Lukashenko regime embodies all the worst features of bureaucratic society in the Soviet era. We do not want to lead people into a new version of the same sort of impasse. That is the focus of heated debates between us and the traditional left parties and groups, who unambiguously associate themselves with the tradition of the Bolsheviks and the Soviet Union. I hope that the ideas of anti-authoritarian socialism will again take root in our country.

SS: Are the members of your circle affected by the current repressions?

DK: Yes. Lukashenko is demanding that students who have taken part in the protests be expelled from institutions of higher education. Although we have not taken part in the protests, we too are threatened with expulsion. We may also be deprived of access to the premises where we hold our meetings.

SS: What prospects do you see for Belarus?

DK: In our opinion, the protests are unlikely to improve the situation in the country. If Lukashenko succeeds in suppressing them, there will be less freedom and more repression. If the liberal opposition manages to overthrow the Lukashenko regime, there will be more political freedom. However, a liberal government will probably pursue a policy of privatization. Europe is still the liberals' ideal. They do not want to know that capitalism is in a deep systemic crisis and they do not want to learn from what privatization has brought about in Russia and Ukraine.

Privatization will create a new class of powerful and wealthy oligarchs and a new split in society. Industry will be dismantled and asset-stripped. Workers will find themselves out on the street with no chance of employment in accordance with their skills, while productive enterprises are turned into warehouses and shopping malls. Agriculture will also be destroyed.

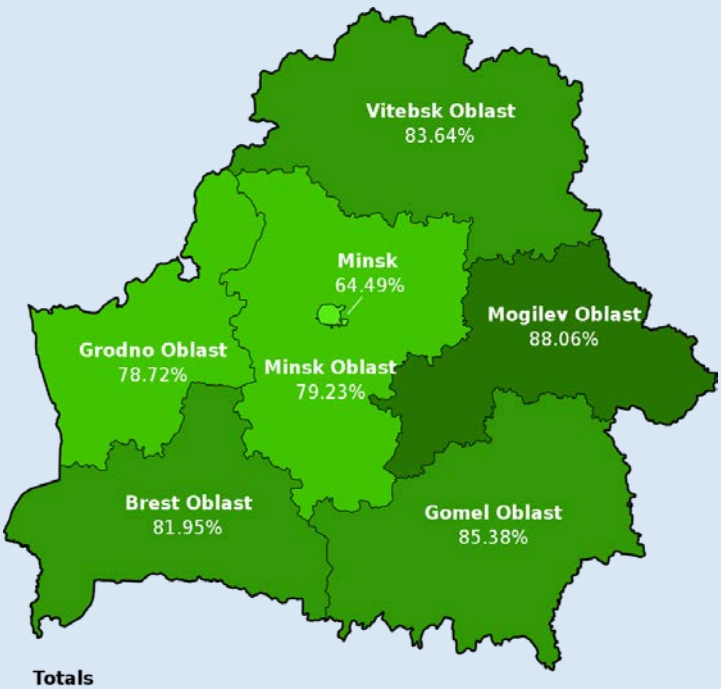
We may then see unfold in Belarus a tragedy similar to what has occurred in Ukraine. The destabilization of society may lead to confrontation between eastern regions connected with Russia and western regions drawn toward the European Union.

SS: But surely Belarus does not have the sharp cultural and ethnic division between eastern and western regions that characterizes Ukraine?

DK: Belarus has a similar division, even though it is not as sharp. In Grodno, in the west of the country, most people speak Belarusian, while in the east – in Gomel and Vitebsk – as well as in Minsk the main language spoken is Russian. Ukraine represents a worst-case scenario for Belarus. There are grounds to hope that it will be avoided. Unlike the protests against Yanukovych in Ukraine, which were almost all in the western and central parts of the country, the protests here in Belarus are nationwide. There is no counter-movement for Lukashenko or for joining Russia.

SS: What is the message of the Minsk Socialist Circle to the citizens of Belarus?

DK: In this situation, we can only appeal to people's reason, remind them of the socialist traditions of our country, and emphasize the need for a system based on social justice, coordination of the interests of all population groups, genuine popular control over public property, and the widest self-government. Our slogan today is: *Neither dictatorship nor privatization, but people's self-government and workers' self-management!*



PROPER GANDER

Cutting-Edge Drama

SMALL AXE (BBC One) is a polished and engaging collection of five dramas directed and co-written by filmmaker Steve McQueen, most well-known for *12 Years A Slave*. As he explains, 'the anthology, anchored in the West Indian experience in London, is a celebration of all that that community has succeeded in achieving against the odds' (tinyurl.com/y5ne35w6). Two of the films, based on actual events, focus on how black people reacted to their suppression by the police between the 1960s and 1980s. Here we find why the anthology is called *Small Axe*, which comes from the Jamaican proverb 'if you are the big tree, we are the small axe'. McQueen's skill is shown in how he authentically recreates the sights, sounds and attitudes of the times, and brings together a talented cast who have the daunting job of portraying real people. He says that the dramas 'are about the past, yet they are very much concerned with the present' (ibid), particularly in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement, given added impetus through the killing of George Floyd by American police.

Mangrove tells the stories of some of those connected with the restaurant of the same name, which opened in Notting Hill in 1968, the same year as the then Tory MP Enoch Powell's notorious 'rivers of blood' speech. Run by Frank Crichlow, the Mangrove restaurant was a lively, friendly hub for the local community as well as a meeting place for activists in the British Black Panthers, including Altheia Jones-LeCointe, Barbara Beese and Darcus Howe. Police soon turned their attention to the venue, as much because of its popularity among black people as through its links to the Black Power movement. Over the years, as many as 12 brutal raids were carried out, ostensibly on suspicion of alcohol and drugs offences, without any evidence of criminality being found. A response to the police's targeting of the restaurant was a rally held on 9 August 1970. The 150-strong crowd, carrying a pig's head and chanting 'hands off black people' made their way to the police station, where they were outnumbered and broken up, with nine arrested.

The second half of the film depicts the subsequent trial in 1971 of the 'Mangrove Nine', including Crichlow, Jones-LeCointe, Beese and Howe. They were charged with rioting and affray, after previous allegations against them had been thrown out of court. The trial was held at the Old Bailey, which was seen as a move to put more pressure on the nine because it was the usual venue for the most severe cases. Some of the defendants represented themselves, giving them the opportunity to directly address their accusers and show up the holes in the police's account of the demo. Most of the Mangrove Nine were found not guilty, although four received suspended sentences for affray and assaulting police officers. When summing up, Judge Edward Clarke QC said that the trial had 'regrettably shown evidence of racial hatred on both sides', which was the first judicial recognition of racial prejudice in the Metropolitan Police, and a comment which the force unsuccessfully attempted to have withdrawn. The trial's outcome is where the film ends, but in real life the police continued to harass the restaurant for many more years. Critchlow found himself in court three times until his name was cleared in 1989 and he received a record £50,000 in damages. The Mangrove restaurant finally closed three years later.

The police in *Mangrove* are largely presented as out-and-out racists, and their mindset towards black people is explored further in another of the *Small Axe* films. *Red, White And Blue* dramatises the beginning of Leroy Logan's career in the force, which he decided to join in 1983 after his father was attacked by two officers. Logan aimed to increase representation of black people among the police and develop the institution from within. He was congratulated by senior staff as the best new starter among the latest batch, and became the face of a recruitment drive for more 'coloured' officers, as they were described at the time. Despite – or because of – all this, he found himself distanced from many others, including the young black people who called him a traitor when he walked past them in uniform, his father (who had good reason to mistrust the police) and his racist colleagues. Logan persevered and rose up the ranks to become a superintendent, as well as co-founding and chairing the Black Police Association.

Both dramas present the police force as dominated by bigoted thugs who were enabled to act out their prejudices by tradition and discriminatory laws. Having the protection of a uniform probably attracted racists to become officers in the first place. While Logan tried to improve the police from inside, the Mangrove Nine challenged them first through direct action and then by careful navigation of the judicial process. Their determination is commendable, and each helped to erode some of the institution's racism, but they didn't threaten the institution itself, because it's part of something bigger. The police force has an integral role in the state, and although it would be possible for it to operate in a non-racist way, it is inherently divisive because it supports the class divide. As such, the 'small axe' is too small to carve out really fundamental change.

MIKE FOSTER

CREDIT: BBC

REVIEWS

All that glitters . . .

The London Dream.
Chris McMillan. Zero Books.
2020. £19.99

Subtitled '*migration and the mythology of the city*', this is a critical look at London and the immigrants who are attracted to live and work there. McMillan writes broadly through a lens of Marxist class analysis, though also draws heavily on some of the ideas of non-Marxists such as Richard Florida, who has written extensively about the 'creative classes' within capitalism and the dynamic turbulence of which they are an intrinsic part. In London's case, much of this is perceived as being centred on the so-called 'flat white economy' and Silicon Roundabout in Shoreditch, though it stretches much further and wider than this.

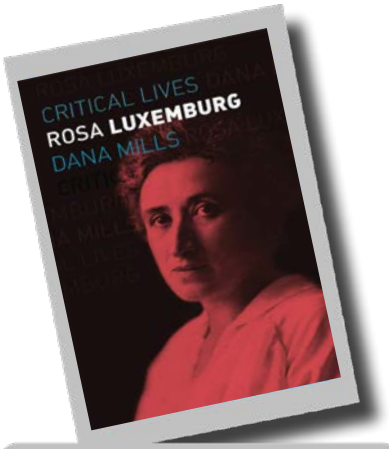
For McMillan, the 'struggle between the hope of the London dream and the exploitation it fuels' is the main focus of his investigation. Through analysing a variety of themes and sectors (the cleaners that service the City of London travelling in on the night buses, to jobbing actors and writers seeking their fortune but struggling to make any sort of living, through to the Uber drivers), McMillan does a good job of laying bare the exploitation that keeps the city going. He interviews a number of people who have come to London to chase their dream and is mature and reflective in analysing their success (or – largely – otherwise). In this respect he knowingly treads some similar ground to Ben Judah's excellent *This is London*, which we reviewed in the Socialist Standard in June 2016.

London is now very much the 'world city' and whereas in 1951 as few as 5 percent of the population was born outside the UK, now the total is well over a third and growing – indeed two thirds of children born in London today have at least one parent who was born outside the UK. The Huguenots and Jewish refugees of earlier stages of capitalism have been replaced by Afro-Caribbeans, Bengalis and latterly eastern Europeans and those seeking their fortune and new experiences from the old colonies like Australia and New Zealand. But it is the low-paid, gig-economy jobs they typically fill – the waitresses, bartenders and delivery drivers. While two-thirds of registered London black cab drivers identify as 'white British' this only applies to 6 percent of Uber drivers, many of whom sometimes earn as little as £2 per hour net pay.

Though the book seems to be marred periodically by an unusually large number of typos and similar errors, McMillan is a good writer and brings the city and its people to life. He ends by saying: 'London is a city of hope, a city of misery. A city where there is always something to do and no shortage of precarious workers struggling to do it. It is all part of the London dream. And still, they come. But for how much longer?' (p.258). True enough, though what the book really lacks most is a re-imagining of the city in a way that transcends capitalism itself and the exploitation it engenders. But it is a stimulating read and a book that demonstrates that all that glitters in not all gold – and why.

DAP

Woman in a man's world



Critical Lives: Rosa Luxemburg.
By Dana Mills. Reaktion Books.
200 pages.

In her introduction Mills says that hers is a feminist biography, as one that concentrates on Luxemburg's life as a woman in a man's world, not just generally but also within the Social Democratic movement in which she was active all her adult life until her murder in 1919 at the age of 47. Hence, a couple of references to 'patriarchal capitalism' (even though not a term that Luxemburg would have accepted) and to Luxemburg as a 'Jewess' (often a term of abuse but one which feminists might be expected to want to rehabilitate).

The book is about both Luxemburg's personal life and her political and economic ideas. These latter are explained accurately enough. There is, however, an odd passage in Mills's account of Luxemburg's Accumulation of Capital where Mills writes:

'Marx took ideas from Malthus (without referencing him), claiming that there was a tendency towards deficiency of demand in the market for commodities that capitalists produce to create surplus value. The question arises: who has the purchasing power to buy those commodities?'

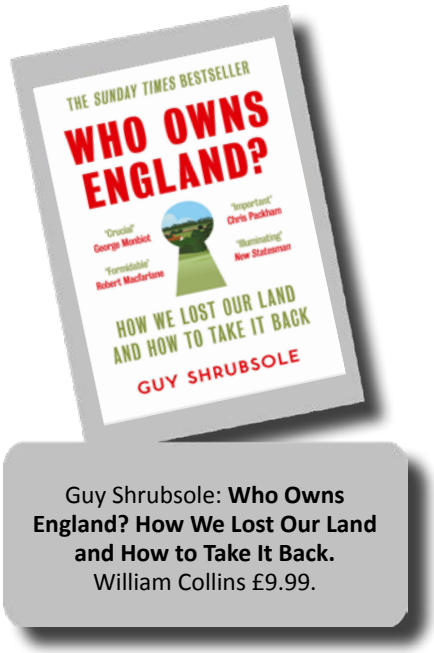
A footnote refers to pages 93-4 of David Harvey's *A Companion to Marx's Capital*. Harvey is not always reliable on Marx, but here Mills has misread him. Harvey was not saying that Marx 'took ideas from Malthus' but merely that he was discussing them (without, apparently, giving their source). In fact Marx never claimed that there was 'a tendency to deficiency of demand' under capitalism and rejected both Malthus's view that there was and his proposed solution (consumption by aristocratic landowners, sinecure holders and other non-producers). Luxemburg didn't think much of Malthus's solution either but she did accept that, among others, he had identified a problem. This set her off on the wrong track as there is no built-in shortage of purchasing power under capitalism; she was seeking a solution to a non-problem.

In her personal life Luxemburg had man friends without getting married; her tastes in music, literature and art were conventional even bourgeois; she had a cat and, as her letters written while in prison for opposing the First World Slaughter showed, a love of nature. A lot of people do but it is rather weak to say that this meant she stood for 'environmental justice' (whatever that is). She was rather more radical than that. She was a socialist.

All in all, the book is an interesting and informative read.

ALB

Ill Fares the Land



Guy Shrubsole: **Who Owns England? How We Lost Our Land and How to Take It Back.** William Collins £9.99.

The answer, of course, is a small number of very rich people. Thirty percent of land in England is owned by the aristocracy and gentry, 17 percent by 'new money', 18 percent by companies, 8.5 percent by the state, and just five percent by homeowners, with another four percent spread among crown, church and charities. Even these figures leave around one-sixth of the land unaccounted for, such is the difficulty of acquiring information about land ownership, as 'concealing wealth is part and parcel of preserving it'. The rise of digital technology has made investigating who owns land somewhat easier, but it is clear that the author has devoted a great deal of effort to uncovering the information provided here. He operates the website whoownsengland.org, and it is also worth looking at whoownsscotland.org.uk, which is separately run but deals with similar facts and figures.

Another way of describing the extent of inequality is to say that just 36,000 people own half the rural land in England and Wales. The origin of this dates back to Norman times, when William the Conqueror handed out land to less than two hundred clergy and barons. Many aristocratic land-owning families can be traced back to those days, such as the Dukes of Westminster, who remain unbelievably wealthy. Male primogeniture has played a large part in perpetuating the wealth and power of a small group of aristocrats. Much of the land they own is given over to grouse moors: apart from grouse shooting being a thoroughly nasty 'pastime', managing the moors can lead to environmental problems, such as flooding downstream.

Aristocrats became wealthy through owning land, but those with new money have bought land as a result of becoming wealthy. An example would be the Vestey family, who derived their wealth from selling cheap meat, purchased country estates and, like so many other landowners, used trusts and tax havens as a means of protecting their wealth. They have been joined more recently by Russian oligarchs and those who reap massive profits from Middle Eastern oil, both of whom specialise in properties in central London.

State ownership of land means primarily the Forestry Commission and the Ministry of Defence. The biggest corporate owners are privatised water companies, and also such as Peel Holdings, which, among much else, owns the Manchester Ship Canal and land adjoining it; Peel's owner is a billionaire who lives on the Isle of Man, and it exercises power via a mass of subsidiary companies. Peel Holdings ranks only 33rd in Shrubsole's list of land-owning companies, though it probably owns much more than the 15,000 acres attributed to it.

The author provides an excellent survey of land ownership and how it came about, though with relatively little on the enclosures that played a major part in the emergence of capitalism. Read his book for what it says about the past and present situations, not for the reforms proposed in the final chapter, such as ending unsustainable uses of land, which will be impossible in a society of private property but straightforward when the land belongs to everyone.

PB

50 Years Ago

Shadow of a gunman – The Irish Republican Army

The events in Northern Ireland since 1968 caused a split in the ranks of the IRA but while the immediate problems posed by the troubles in the North may have triggered off this split it was the growing influence of Leninist ideas within the movement, and the effect these had on dividing the IRA's reaction to events in the North, that formed the core of the division.

The breakaway element, or "Provisionals", as they have come to be known, were led by those who resented the growing influence of "Communist" ideas in the organisation. Not only did such people feel that politics was an irrelevancy within the context of the Republican ideal of a thirty-two county Irish republic but the new political bias in the movement clashed with their Catholicism. When the Catholics of the North were under attack such elements saw the defence of their fellow-Catholics as an immediate priority and when this course was resisted by the official leadership the long-brewing dissension and division came into the open.

The result is that there are now two IRA's in Ireland and to confuse matters still more the "official" group, that has moved away from the uncomplicated formula of a Republic, and now pursue a contradiction-in-terms which they refer to as a "Socialist Workers' Republic", are known as the "Traditional IRA" while the breakaway group still espouse the traditional cause—even if they are, at least in the troubled areas of Belfast, a mere anti-Protestant counterpart of the Ulster Volunteer Force.

The "Provisionals", in an attempt to maintain their claim to the title IRA are beginning to refer to the other group as the National Liberation Front—a title which demonstrates not only the real differences that led up to the split but also places the "traditionals", in the view of their erstwhile ex-comrades, in the position of stooges for the "Communist" Party.

Members of the working class, whether in the IRA or lending support to that organisation should realise that Nationalism is the tool of capitalism. The working class have no country—they have the choice of enduring the miseries of capitalism within the confines of national frontiers or enjoying freedom in a Socialist World.

(Socialist Standard, January 1971)

Poland's Pro-Choice Protests

'When the state fails to protect us, I'll stand by my sister' – protest placard.

Poland is presently experiencing a persistent series of protests, which the police have used tear-gas against, centred around the country's abortion law. When back in October, a constitutional court barred abortions of foetuses with congenital defects, tightening Poland's already stringent law on access to terminations, it resulted in mounting anger among young women and led to many tens of thousands taking to the streets under the umbrella of the Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet (OSK, or All-Polish Women's Strike) or more simply, 'Women's Strike' movement which has a red lightning bolt as its symbol. Demonstrations of unity and sympathy have spread widely among the Polish diaspora across Europe and in the UK.

Poland's right-wing Law and Order (PiS) government was pressured into postponing the implementation of the law although some hospitals are already curtailing abortion procedures.

As often is the case, the immediate reason for the demonstrations has spiralled into demands for the government's resignation. The PiS government has already withdrawn from the Istanbul Convention on violence against women as being 'of an ideological nature, which we consider harmful.'

LGBT activists have joined the demonstrations, angered by the anti-gay rhetoric of Poland's president who has tried to declare his country an LGBT-free zone. The campaign movement is now advocating further changes to Poland's predominantly conservative Catholic culture. Opposition to the church's influence has seen its services being disrupted. Three Polish women face trial accused of 'offending religious feelings by insulting an object of religious worship'. They risk up to two years in prison for blasphemy by putting up pictures of the Virgin Mary with a rainbow halo. This Guardian report (6 November) tried to capture the sentiments of the Polish protests.

'I think it is a whole backlash against a patriarchal culture, against the patriarchal state, against the fundamentalist religious state, against the state that treats women really badly' said Marta Lempart, one of the movement's prominent activists.

Adam Mrozowicki, a sociologist at the University of Wrocław, describes the Women's Strike as 'decentralised, locally based, grassroots...' and says that the protesters have no clear links to parliamentary politics, and their leaders have said they do not want to become a political movement.

Andrzej Kompa, a historian and university researcher, explained that he was protesting 'not just against this hell for women, decided by this so-called constitutional court, but against this government, against church involvement in political affairs, for minority rights. Simply for freedom'.

The protesters have now re-named Roman Dmowski Square with new street signs changing it to Women Rights Square as a commemoration of Polish women gaining the right to vote 102 years ago.

Protesters apologised for their regular disruptions, 'We are sorry for the inconvenience, we have a government to overthrow'. Though as socialists know, overthrowing one capitalist government for a different one, tends to swap one set of problems or issues for another set.

ALJO

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.

JANUARY 2021 DISCORD EVENTS

Wednesday 6 January, 19.30 GMT
General affairs discussion.
Did you see the news?

Friday 8 January, 19.30 GMT
Friday night talk
Unaffordable and Unsustainable Housing in New Zealand
Speaker: Moggie Grayson (WSPNZ).
Description of NZ houses, state housing, design faults, cutting corners, sustainable housing project, basic wage, poverty, Glasgow pre-WW1, extended family, thinking outside the square.

Wednesday 13 January, 19.30 GMT
The FAQ Workshop, 7.30pm
The Party Speaker's Test Part 3.
Looking at the last third of the questions.

Friday 15 January, 19.30 GMT
Friday night talk
The New Normal
Speaker: John Cumming.
Along with the present crisis arising from the Covid-19 pandemic, another spectre is haunting the world: it is called The New Normal. This phrase, whatever it might mean, has now entered common usage. A few months ago, a radio programme asked: "how has the coronavirus pandemic created an opportunity to reshape our world?" Well, has it? Will it? Or is this phrase destined to become just another irritating buzzword in our masters' lexicon of stupid phrases? What do you think? And, whose world is it anyway?

Wednesday 20 January, 19.30 GMT
A talk on Wednesday too this week
Socialism, Free Speech and 'Cancel Culture'
Speaker: Stephen Harper.
For many on the right, free speech really means freedom of speech for me and for the people who agree with me. Some of those on the left of politics are also eager to no-platform or 'cancel' their real or supposed ideological opponents. A look at this dangerous trend.

Friday 22 January, 19.30 GMT
Second talk this week
21st Century Farming – the future of food tech
Speaker: Paddy Shannon.
A modern tractor has more lines of computer code than the original space shuttle, drone swarms will monitor crop pests, micro-bots will electrocute individual weeds, and farmers will get daily health updates for each cow by mobile phone – an overview of how capitalism thinks it's going to meet global food demands with big data and next-gen tech. But is it?

Wednesday 27 January, 19.30 GMT
The FAQ Workshop, 7.30pm
The American Dream
Why are poor workers so angrily insistent that capitalism is a world of opportunity?

Friday 29, 19.30 January GMT
Friday night talk.
Should Animal Rights be part of the socialist case?
Speaker: Howard Moss.

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.

REAR VIEW

Tarred with the same brush

In an essay titled 'Karl Marx was a racist misogynist – do not discuss' we are told: 'When it comes to neo-Marxist inspired cancel culture, rationality and reason fly out of the window to be replaced by politically correct ideology and cant... This latest campaign to rid the British Library of what is condemned as structural racism and white supremacism is part of a larger strategy associated with the death of George Floyd... '(conservativewoman.co.uk, 26 November). Socialists are always keen to debate - anything, anytime, anyplace, anywhere could be our motto! - but those identified as 'neo-Marxists' and, it has to be said, Conservatives less so. Marx opposed racism and always insisted that 'the emancipation of the productive class is that of all human beings without distinction of sex and race' (1880 Preamble drafted by Marx to the Programme of the Parti Ouvrier). There is no doubt that black and ethnic minority workers overall have it tougher when it comes to police brutality and lack of opportunities in employment, education and housing. However, it does not follow from this that racism should be treated as an issue that is separate from capitalism and its class divisions. All racists and some feminists divide workers from each other. Along with reformists, they delay the day when, in the words of Oscar Wilde, one of the famous writers castigated for having links to slavery, 'Socialism, Communism, or whatever, one chooses to call it, by converting private property into public wealth, and substituting co-operation for competition, will restore society to its proper condition of a thoroughly healthy organism, and ensure the material well-being of each member of the community' (*The Soul of Man under Socialism,* 1891).

'It's about bloody time!'

'Scotland becomes the first country in the world to pass landmark legislation offering free period products to anyone who needs them' (dailymail.co.uk, 24 November). This is undoubtedly a positive step, particularly for members of our class experiencing period poverty, yet Scotland is just one of 195 countries in the world and the pace of reform is very slow and uncertain. We are informed that ' ...70% of women in India... say their family cannot afford to buy sanitary pads. In fact... only 2 to 3 percent of women in rural India are estimated to use sanitary napkins as per 2016 data. This results in women resorting to unhygienic practices during their menstrual cycle, such as filling up old socks with sand and tying them around waists to absorb menstrual blood, or taking up old

pieces of cloth and using them to absorb blood. Such methods increase chances of infection and hinder the day-to-day task of a woman on her period' (countercurrents.org 28 October). Affordability, culture, distribution, and paucity of clean water all complicate matters as does the safe, environmentally friendly disposal of used pads. The author fails to address the obvious alternative of medically approved methods of menstrual suppression, where the need for pads, etc., is reduced or eliminated. Such alternatives are not free and do not register on the reformist radar.

Two steps forward, two steps back

Marx wrote, in a letter to Ludwig Kugelmann, dated 12 December 1868: 'Everyone who knows anything of history also knows that great social revolutions are impossible without the feminine ferment. Social progress may be measured precisely by the social position of the fair sex (plain ones included)'.

'Covid has resulted in a 20 percent increase in domestic violence and surprisingly misogyny is not a hate crime' (thenorthernecho, co.uk, 24 November).

'There were 1,575 individual women and girls who had an attendance where FGM was identified in the period between July 2020 and September 2020' (digital.nhs.uk, 26 November).

'Multiple private UK clinics selling intrusive 'virginity tests' and offering 'hymen-repair' surgery' (inews.co,uk, 27 November).

'Trans-women in police custody already suffered sexual harassment and abuse. Then came Covid-19' (theguardian.com, 17 November).

'Female LAPD Officer Details Sexual Harassment, Toxic Work Environment in Lawsuit' (nbclosangeles.com, 9 November).

'One in five men in the UK don't believe that gender inequality is still a reality in society today... ' (independent.co.uk, 10 November).

Finland, under new (female) management

'A year will soon have passed since Finland's new coalition government headed by five women started work. It has dealt efficiently with the coronavirus pandemic, while drafting an ambitious Equality Programme - a programme that states, among other things, that everyone has the right to determine their own gender identity' (bbc.com, 25 November). This is a reminder that women are just as capable of running society as men. Yet under capitalism, women have developed their potential for being every bit as destructive as men; they have become active participants in military carnage, fervent spouters of fake news and 'alternative facts' or superstitious nonsense and avid proponents of reactionary politics. In other words, the female of this species is becoming as brutalised as the male. Socialists know, however, without the support of a majority of women the establishment of a post-capitalist society is impossible. All wage slaves are members of the same class regardless of colour, gender and sexuality. We are a global class with identical class interests in all the 195 countries in the world. Marx's son-in-law, Paul Lafargue, born in Cuba to French and Creole parents, provides this quotation: 'The modern means of production can no longer be controlled except by society, and for that control to be established, they must first become social property; then only will they cease to engender social inequalities, to give wealth to the parasites and inflict miseries on the wage-working producers... ' (*Social and Philosophical Studies*, 1906).

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