

# socialist standard

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

## AUTOMATION

**LIBERATOR OR  
EXPLOITER ?**



**also:**  
*The EU Deal*  
*Imperialism V*  
*How I Became a Socialist*





# 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'



## Chaos on the Capitol

Last month we looked at the chaos that has been engulfing the capitalist world in the twenty-first century. The chaos shows no sign of abating.

On 6 January, at a 'Save America' rally organised in Washington D.C., Donald Trump fired up a crowd of supporters, repeating the fantasy that the presidential election had been stolen from him and calling on them to march on to the Capitol. This they did and then went on to storm the Capitol building in a desperate attempt to prevent the certification of Joe Biden as the next President. They met with little resistance from the police, indeed in some instances they appeared to have been assisted by them, in stark contrast to a Black Lives Matter demonstration outside the Capitol in the summer where the building was heavily fortified by the National Guard. Amid the chaos, five people lost their lives.

The rioters comprised a motley bunch of disgruntled workers, small business owners, armed vigilantes, highly paid professional workers, far-right groups like the Proud Boys, off-duty police officers, serving and retired members of the military. Many were followers of the QAnon

conspiracy group. What had drawn them to embrace Donald Trump's leadership?

Over the years many American workers have seen their incomes stagnate and their places of work and jobs being relocated to countries where the labour costs are lower. The influence of the labour unions has been dwindling and Democrat administrations, which purport to represent working-class people, have presided over this growing power of capital over the workers.

Many small business owners have been losing ground to the big beasts of capital. This has especially been the case since the 2008 financial crash, and now with the Coronavirus pandemic many small businesses have gone to the wall, whereas the large capitalists have gone from strength to strength.

In these circumstances, experiencing growing social powerlessness and, in the absence of an influential socialist movement, many have become attracted to right-wing nationalist populism and some are drawn to conspiracy theories propounded on the internet and social media. White supremacist and vigilante groups provide a sense of community

and belonging. Donald Trump was able to harness this discontent for his opportunist ends by posing as the workers' champion. He promised he would take on the 'Swamp' and bring back jobs to the US. Over the course of his presidency, he built his base by pursuing nationalist and xenophobic policies like beginning the construction of a wall on the Mexican border, implementing tougher anti-immigration measures and aligning himself with far-right groups.

The assault on the Capitol has been described variously as an attempted coup, an insurrection, an assault on American democracy, and an act of domestic terrorism. But it was no workers' revolution, and socialists do not endorse reckless adventurism to try to advance working class interests. We say that, on the contrary, workers must organise globally and democratically to take political power to establish socialism, a worldwide society without classes, money and national frontiers. This revolution will be based on socialist consciousness and not on the leadership of a narcissistic egomaniac.

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# PATHFINDERS

## Gene genies



REVOLUTIONARIES TEND to like science, and science loves revolutions. There's one going on right now in something called proteomics. This studies the structures of proteins, collectively the proteome, which unlike the genome differs from cell to cell. The gist is that DNA makes RNA, and RNA makes proteins, but what do proteins make? That depends on the cell they're in and the 3-dimensional shape they fold into. The hows and whys of this have up to now never been fathomed. But late last year Google's DeepMind AI lab was able to predict the 3-dimensional folding of a protein (BBC Online, 30 November - [bbc.in/2XKu5rR](http://bbc.in/2XKu5rR)).

If this doesn't sound very awe-inspiring, imagine you're a kid with a basic Lego set, and one day your mum gives you a tool to design and create any individual piece you like, for any purpose, in any quantity. The potential limits go well beyond the sky.

But that's building new things. What about debugging what already exists? Another revolution generating huge excitement involves the ability to cut and edit individual strips of DNA. Work is progressing so fast that textbooks, even if they existed, would be out of date as soon as they were printed. And as is so often the case, this breakthrough happened largely by accident.

Life exists in three domains (four if you include viruses): bacteria, archaea (a kind of alt-bacteria), and eukaryota (plants, fungi, slime moulds, us). Eukaryotes have fancy enhancements like a cell nucleus, but the other domains are much more rudimentary. Yet a few years ago it was discovered that the genomes of many bacteria (read also archaea) had strange repeating sequences in their DNA which nobody could account for. Fast forward to the revelation that these sequences were bits of virus DNA left over from attacks by bacteriophages, viruses that 'eat' bacteria. It turned out that the bacterium was able to use these DNA sequences as templates to peel off an RNA replica strand, a bit like an identikit portrait, that could be sent off round the cell to hunt for any matching DNA from other phage attackers, and bind itself onto it. Then came the killer surprise. The RNA strand came with a special weapon, a protein called Cas9, that was able to cut through the phage's DNA at the binding point, thus dismantling the phage. In other words, bacteria and archaea had a hitherto unsuspected search-and-destroy immune system.

Imagine the squid-like blob attached to

the astronaut's face in the film *Alien*, all set to inject its loathsome babies into his innards to eat him from the inside out. But the quick-thinking astronaut pulls out a pair of scissors, aims it at the exact spot, and snips the squid-blob's brain stem. The squid-blob drops off his face, stone dead. Bacteria do this to phages using these repeating identifier sequences. To describe these sequences, someone came up with the wonderfully recondite name of 'clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats', or CRISPR for short.

So far so obscure, but then it was realised that if you could tweak these sequences, you could use the process to quickly cut, or cut out, any bit of DNA, at any point you like. If a single faulty base-pair is known to cause serious conditions, such as sickle-cell anaemia, it should be a simple matter to edit it out. Because genes are passed on to descendants, the edit would be permanent. Other life-crippling conditions and diseases could follow, such as cystic fibrosis or Huntingdon's Disease. Edit the genome of the carrier mosquito and you could in theory wipe out malaria and dengue fever.

CRISPR-Cas9 gene editing has been described as one of the biggest discoveries in the history of biology, potentially allowing us to control and rewrite evolution. The two leading researchers in this field, Jennifer Doudna and Emmanuelle Charpentier, just recently shared the 2020 Nobel prize for chemistry, incidentally the first science Nobel ever awarded to two women.

But what to do with a frontier technology like this, that's the big question, and it quickly becomes a political one. Professor Doudna is upbeat about the potential, especially for agriculture. But with capitalism, priorities are money driven, a trait discernible where the process has already been used - to create low-fat pigs, extra-woolly Cashmere goats, and gluten-free wheat, this last probably not for the few genuine Coeliac sufferers but more likely for the huge narcissistic food-fad market. Slightly alarmingly the professor also talks about creating mythological creatures like flying lizards and even unicorns ([bit.ly/3oSvNtF](http://bit.ly/3oSvNtF)). But, like many others including Professor Charpentier, she is quite aware of the Frankenstein potential, and an intense ethical debate is in full swing.

Genes can have multiple effects on other genes, and so on in cascading effects, most barely if at all understood. What if an edit

causes an unexpected change, and the change 'gets out' and can't be stopped? Home CRISPR kits are already starting to appear on the market, raising the spectre of some enthusiastic schoolkid accidentally creating a terminator gene that escapes into the wild.

Socialist society would also have to weigh up such risks. But capitalism raises the threat level far higher than it needs to be. Its entrenched class-divided nature could lead to this technology being hijacked by the rich in order to create designer babies and widen the class divide at the genetic level, a *Brave New World* scenario. Moratoriums on human genome editing do exist, and a Chinese scientist was jailed for three years in 2019 for carrying out illegal work on twins ([bit.ly/3bH6Oz7](http://bit.ly/3bH6Oz7)). Yet the money and the temptation are there, and covert work is probably continuing in other dark corners. The gene genie is out of the bottle.

Then there is capitalism's compulsion to weaponise new technology. A genetic 'bullet' wouldn't just disable a soldier, it would disable all that soldier's descendants. Fortunately perhaps, work is already underway on how to limit the effects of CRISPR or even stop it in its tracks. Viruses, currently the world's Public Enemy Number One, offer a solution. It transpires that, in the microbial arms race, many viruses have evolved a powerful anti-CRISPR mechanism, which we could exploit (New Scientist, 13 January - [bit.ly/3bMq8Lw](http://bit.ly/3bMq8Lw)).

It's an indictment of capitalism that we even need to worry about weaponisation, or misuse by bad actors for commercial gain. No matter what technological benefits capitalism has fostered, fundamentally it doesn't care about our welfare, only about money. Nobody in their right mind would trust a friend like that. We shouldn't trust a social system like that either.

While science remains trapped in the service and thrall of capital, its revolutions will always be suspect, its achievements monetised and perverted, and its intentions derailed. The revolution needed to emancipate science for our collective benefit is never going to come out of a science lab. It has to come from the rest of us.

PJS

## Turkish nationalists?

Dear Editors,

I have to say that I am absolutely shocked to have come across a piece that subtly spouts Turkish ultra-nationalism in the magazine. I have always thought highly about this magazine but cannot comprehend how the piece 'Candle in the Wind' made it to the January edition? Really, how did that happen?

The author, of whom I have no prior knowledge, calls the founding father of the Turkish nation-state republic Ataturk a 'democrat', while Ataturk is held responsible for ethnic cleansing by millions of Kurds and other non-Turks in Turkey!

The history he has tried to 'shed light on' from a candle, and through which he makes his subtle dark propaganda is also inaccurate. There is no mention of brainwashing of the peasantry to the state's imposed notions of 'one nation, one flag and one language', which led to massacres, we are talking massacre of civilian Kurds, Alevis and others. It was also the preparation of the new generation for massacres at the orders of the military generals in charge of a state, which outright denied the existence of tens of millions of other ethnic and religious communities in the country.

The author shamelessly declares that 'the dream of Ataturk, Ismail Hakki Tonguc, Mahmut Nakal and many others of a secular education, based on the foundations of inquiry, science and rationality that is free and democratic ...' Any socialist with a slightest understanding of modern Turkey's treatment of its workers and peasantry, and the tens of millions of non-Turks, would vomit after reading such lines of subjective propaganda beating the drums of Turkish republican nationalism, which seem to come from a Kemalist fascist apologist rather than ignorance.

Also, what the hell is with the Turkish flag printed with this piece in the magazine, why the hell is that there when the first line clearly states Turkey, Turkish, and Ataturk the father of the nation. And don't sell me any insight into journalistic techniques of illustration which rejects displaying of flags even by its basic liberal standards.

The piece written under the guise of 'enlightenment' is an insult added to the injury of millions of non-Turkish workers and peasants, those whose memories of childhood haunts them to this day for they were forced to stand in line at school yards each day to shout out Ataturk's slogan: 'Happy is he who says I am a Turk'. That motto is to this day imposed at schools on Kurdish children across the country whose right to education in their mother tongue is suppressed with the Turkish state's barrels of guns, drones and other weaponry.

I really did not expect this garbage, I am still shocked. Still can't believe that the Trojan horse of racist Turkish ultra-nationalism has reached this party too. Unbelievable! I hope to see a report in the magazine to make it clear that the party does not share the view that Ataturk and other butchers in his circle were Turkish 'democrats' as the author of that piece had declared.

**ARAM CHYA**

The Writer Replies:

Reading this 'critique' of my article both surprised and shocked me. That anyone could find the story of an attempt to raise a population out of ignorance with a secular, rational, science-based education to be so contentious and nationalistic is puzzling. Being cast as a 'subtle, dark propagandist' for Turkish nationalism is lost on me, I'm afraid.

The use of certain words, in this case 'Turk', 'Turkish', 'Ataturk', etc are always going to trigger an angry, out-of-context response from some corner or other. It is, perhaps, to be expected on social media but here, amongst the thoughtful readers of the *Socialist Standard*, less so. The context of the Village Institutes is a brief period of approx. 10-12 years in the history of the Turkish Republic.

This is indeed a story of a 'Candle In The Wind' - a system of education so radical, so egalitarian, so anti-elitist that the nationalists, the religious conservatives and privileged elites, joined together to destroy this model and those visionaries behind it before it destroyed them. Many of the educationalist visionaries along with many students were persecuted, imprisoned, exiled or fled - their reputations and lives in tatters.

Three minor points: (1) the flag is something that the editorial team should address [*The Turkish flag was indeed just an illustration with no intended political significance; as far as we are concerned, all national flags are just rags on the end of a pole - Editors*]; (2) the article was not addressing the current state of education or politics in Turkey; (3) nowhere did the article claim that Ataturk was a democrat.

The Socialist Party of Great Britain does not need to make any apologist statement - its position on nationalism has been clearly stated and is freely available. Socialism is about people and how they collectively choose to manage their affairs and the resources of the planet. No nation states, no money - from each according to ability, to each according to need.

I respectfully ask our correspondent to reread the article, if necessary substitute other names or another country and try to see it for what it is. In a world filled with bigotry, racism, nationalism, war and suffering we need 'candles' and we need candleholders - people who embrace other people and cultures.

**ALAN FENN**



*Kemal Atatürk*



# COOKING THE BOOKS

## The paradox of cash

On 4 December the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee published a report which accused the Bank of England of not knowing where £50 billion's worth of its bank notes were or what they were being used for. This, despite declining cash transactions as 'cash was used in six out of 10 transactions a decade ago but in 2019 it was less than three in 10'.

The Committee put forward some possible explanations for what it called 'the missing £50 billion': overseas transactions and savings; undeclared domestic savings (as under the bed); and 'use in the shadow economy'. This suggests that some at least of the notes were in circulation and used in buying transactions not counted by the Bank.

Commentators suggested that many of them would be being used in 'the shadow economy' (as to avoid paying VAT). According to David Smith, Economics Editor of the *Sunday Times*: 'Research by HM Revenue & Customs in 2017 suggested that roughly 5 per cent of people were operating in the hidden economy. The Institute of Economic Affairs suggests something larger, between 9 per cent and 12 per cent of gross domestic product, or

roughly £200 billion. Quite a bit of that missing £50 billion of cash is in the black economy' (*Times*, 9 December).

It's the same in Germany where €6 billion worth of old money (the Deutschmark) have still not been converted into euros, some of which the tax authorities think could be being used to 'wipe away traces of illicit deals' (*Times*, 18 December).

To avoid the state keeping tabs on how you spend – or obtain – your money is an obvious advantage of cash for those who don't want the state to know this. With electronic transactions, on the other hand, it is possible to tell how money got into the hands of the seller as there will be an electronic record of the sale somewhere. It was for this reason that some anti-state 'libertarians' thought up Bitcoin as an electronic equivalent of cash. As the mysterious Satoshi Nakamoto put in the original 2007 paper outlining the proposal:

'A purely peer-to-peer version of electronic cash would allow online payments to be sent directly from one party to another without going through a financial institution'.

After it was launched in 2009 it worked but involved complicated computing using large amounts of electricity. In the event bitcoins have been used more as a crypto-asset (held to gamble on its price

rising – at the end of last year the price of one bitcoin had risen to a then record £25,000 and it's now been higher – than a crypto-currency (means of payment), though undoubtedly it has been used for various illicit transactions, not that these are entirely untraceable if they involve conversions into and out of state currencies. Only bitcoins that are 'mined' (those behind the idea wanted to invent not just electronic cash but the equivalent of metallic commodity money) are truly anonymous, electronic cash.

Economists speak of the decline in cash transactions alongside a rise in the amounts of notes and coins as the 'cash paradox'. Socialists can think of another paradox: the existence of computing power capable of helping solve the logistical problem of ensuring that physical goods are available where they are needed for people to take and use, alongside the use of this power to record zillions of individual payments and other monetary transactions. This scandalous misuse of computing power can only be ended in a world of common ownership and democratic control of productive resources where useful things will no longer be produced for sale on a market with a view to profit and where, therefore, money, whether physical or electronic, will have no place.

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# Gnostic Marxist

I am a gnostic. Now, before anyone has an attack of the socialist vapours, this is not going to be an attempt to reconcile Marxism with religion. It is the epistemic principle that lies behind the original esoteric manifestations of Gnosticism that we will consider.

For all the fanciful claims made by Gnostics, the essence is each individual coming to know in such a profound way that the knowledge thus gained leads to action via conviction. The alternative was for salvation to be delivered by the Church, the authoritative body controlling ideology, effectively rendering people powerless.

The material conditions for achieving socialism exist and have done so for quite some time. The political structures also exist through which that goal can be democratically pursued. Yet, in the near 120 years of the existence of the Socialist Party in Britain the vital element, the working class, has not embraced their own cause.

The last general election, just over a year ago, once again demonstrated how divided against itself the working class remains, and how distant it seems from becoming a credible socialist force. The collapse of the 'Red Wall' allowing an insurgency of the Blue Meanies was but the latest example of the dominant acceptance that problems can be solved without really changing anything.

Brexit has been an ongoing exemplar with much heat, but little light, as staying in or leaving the EU was the rancorous issue: which would be best, opting for capitalism or choosing capitalism? Hardly worth the political energy that has been expended on it.

Cue nationalism. With Scotland firmly in the Remain camp, the SNP raised the independence banner for workers to rally around yet again. If they are successful will there be some haven from the travails of capitalism north of the Tweed to Solway border posts?

It's a nonsense of course, but a powerful and a destructive one because while it occupies the minds of Scottish workers, perhaps rouses the antagonism of English workers, they lose sight of the crucial fact that, actually, they are just workers who share common cause with all other workers.

In a song, 'The White Rose and the Red' there is a verse that runs,

'Pennines slope to east and west, / Yet where on the moorland range

Is a line that's clearly drawn / Where the colour of roses change?

By colours men are misled...'

Be they the colours of roses or other divisive symbols such as flags such totems remain potent political narcotics. If there was an election tomorrow there is nothing to stop people voting for socialism, except they wouldn't. It's not simply an absence of socialist candidates, for most who might claim to be socialist voters, their ballots would most likely go to the present-day wearer of the red rose.

The determining factor in socialism becoming realisable is the material conditions necessary being in existence. Without such conditions, the productive and distributive technology, such a society would remain an unobtainable ideal.

History can furnish examples of idealists establishing communities based on common ownership and equality that proved either unsustainable, or, lacking widespread support, were actively suppressed by vested interests.

By the time Marx was writing, those necessary conditions were either in existence or well on the way to becoming so.

There has been no significant material barrier to establishing a socialist society for 150 years or more.

Through those intervening years, despite claims made in disparate countries at various times, socialism has yet to garner the vital mass support needed for it to be realised. What is preventing working people deciding to act in their own best interests?

The answer seems simple, but is proving stubbornly difficult to address. The objective conditions for socialism may well exist, but the subjective conditions presently do not. This is the factor that needs to change to fully realise the vast potential of material reality.

When socialists consider the working class they envisage the majority in society acting collectively to pursue their common interests. However, in Britain for example, that collective is actually so many million individuals and each individual needs to become a socialist for the working class to become socialist.

For socialism to succeed, then it is not just the millions in Britain who must be committed, but also the billions worldwide. Not as followers of a vanguard, but active in their own right on their own behalf. Some task.

Marx famously stated: 'Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.' It is not enough to mount convincing arguments in favour of socialism if they do not become integral in the thinking of the vast majority. Then they can act collectively to change their world.

And this is where being a Marxist gnostic comes in. Actually, all socialists are political gnostics by dint of having become their own authority. There isn't a secular 'Church' to which they can subscribe that will mediate between them and salvation, the achievement of socialism. This is the case whether there be just a few, or vast numbers of socialists.

My tongue may be lodged a little in my cheek, but those who have seen through the miasma of falsehoods that cloud the general view of capitalist society, are the ones who know in a profound sense, why capitalism cannot simply be made better, why socialism is the only viable alternative.

The task of dispersing that miasma remains daunting, but feudal monarch, bishops and barons felt their positions in the world were unassailable, while their peasants largely regarded society as being divinely ordered and beyond change. Yet change it most certainly did, and profoundly so.

We will conclude with a secular (and very, very loose) reworking of the third secret saying in 'The Gospel of Thomas':

If it is said by those who lead you, 'Socialism is in this country, or that country,' you are merely hearing the squawking of parrots.

If it is said, 'Socialism has been tried and failed and is behind you,' they are trying to blind your vision with myopic hindsight.

Rather socialism is all around you in all its productive potential.

And socialism is within you with your ability to embrace that potential.

Then you will realise socialism for what it is.

But until you know, you dwell in the poverty of philosophy and you are that poverty of philosophy.

Here endeth the lesson.

**DAVE ALTON**



## UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

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

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

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

### MIDLANDS

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

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# MATERIAL WORLD

## BANDH AGAINST THE 'BLACK LAWS'

FARMING SUPPORTS half of India's 1.3 billion population, many farms being small and marginal. But farmers are losing their economic influence which once accounted for a third of India's gross domestic product but now only 15 percent of the country's \$2.9 trillion economy. Farmers frequently complain about being ignored and neglected and have repeatedly staged large demonstrations in past years, accusing the authorities of failing to support their livelihood and demanding state help. However, none of those have matched the numbers and variety of organisations involved in the present protests. On 26 November India's farmers plus many other workers took part in a general strike (bandh). If the strikers were a country, they would have been the fifth largest in the world after China, India, the United States and Indonesia. 250 million people across

India participated, making it the largest strike in world history. Ten trade union federations offered their 'wholehearted support to the ongoing united struggles of the farmers in demanding the scrapping of draconian agri-laws...[and] welcome[d] the firm resolve and determination of the united platform of farmer organisations to intensify the struggles countrywide...'

At the time of writing, the resistance of many Indian farmers to the Bharatiya Janata Party's government and its new agricultural laws remains on-going. Indian farmers continue to protest in and around New Delhi, blockading the main highways. Farmers reject the laws, which were passed in September, as in their view these would cause the government to stop buying grain at guaranteed prices and permit private corporations to buy their crops at low prices. This dominance of big business interests and removal of safeguards would lead to increasing difficulties for small farmers and family farms. More than 86 percent of India's farmland is controlled by smallholder

farmers who own less than two hectares (five acres) of land each.

The new laws are seen as contributing to higher costs, more debts for farmers and facilitating the corporations to manipulate policies in such a way as to benefit from the government's farming budget and schemes. Small farmers fear that they will not possess enough bargaining strength, when they negotiate to sell their produce to larger companies, to achieve the prices which meet their need for a decent standard of living.



Credit: Shekhar Yadav

### Farmers Protest

Darshan Pal of the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC) and Punjab president of Krantikari Kisan Union, said 'They [the government] have actually opened the markets, opened the land and opened the commodities of the farmers for the big corporate houses. They will form the *mandis* (agricultural markets), they will get the contract farming done and control the agribusiness. Our basic demand is to scrap all these anti-farm laws and assure the Minimum Support Price (MSP) [the price at which the government buys farm produce] as recommended for all the crops and assured marketing guarantee for all the crops.'

Sukhdev Singh, Punjab's general secretary of the Bhartiya Kisan Union Ekta, accused the government of passing the laws 'to benefit the big corporates... The government didn't find it worthy or important taking us onboard before bringing these black laws.'

The farmers are not Luddites and

acknowledge that the agriculture sector needs reforms but they say the laws passed by the government leave them at the mercy of the private sector as they relax the rules around sale, pricing, storage – rules which have helped protect Indian farmers from the fluctuations of the free-market for decades. This is why the farmers want guaranteed assurance.

The history of the pillaging and plundering of the Raj and the British East India Company has not been totally forgotten although today the target is

the government's corporate-friendly authoritarianism. Already Prime Minister Modi has privatised many nationalised industries. India's inequality is deeper than just its agrarian problems. The top 10 percent of the Indian population today holds 77 per cent of the total national wealth with 73 per cent of all wealth generated in 2017 going to the richest 1 per cent. India's wealthiest person, Mukesh

Ambani, saw his fortune surge \$18.3bn to \$76.9bn in 2020.

This mass struggle perhaps commenced as a sectional farmers' strike but it has transformed into a class battle which demonstrates the power of solidarity and proclaims our slogan, 'an injury to one is an injury to all.' Contrary to the claims of our leftist critics, the World Socialist Movement accepts general strikes as a useful weapon, but best used sparingly to acquire particular and specific gains from the government or employers. The WSM cautions that the strategy of general strikes is no short-cut towards socialism. Today's strikes and protests are the sparks of resistance. That said, there is nothing special about being anti-capitalist. In fact, confronting capitalism is the everyday story of working people. What is more vital is understanding our goals and the means of accomplishing them.

ALJO



So, the shouting is over, and a Brexit deal has finally been agreed. In one sense, credit where credit is due. Boris Johnson and David Frost have achieved what they set out to do: to get tariff-free access to EU market for British goods; to end freedom of movement; and to remove the UK from the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice (the body that enforces the rules of the EU's law and single market policies). Credit where it is due to Michel Barnier and the EU negotiating team, who exacted a measured price for agreeing to the UK's wishes.

The EU came into being because, after the Second World War, the capitalists of Europe found themselves competing with those of the Soviet Union and the United States. The latter could achieve enormous economies of scale and concentration of capital, no single group of European capitalists could match that. In order to expand beyond the narrow horizons of their national arrangements, agreements needed to be struck so capital could flow and investments be made secure.

The European Coal and Steel Community was brought into being to regulate the core resources that can cause war between states and so harm investments. This was supplemented by the European Economic Community, and eventually became the European Union. The goal to harmonise and protect investments led to the creation of a single market and customs union: essentially meaning that all of Europe's capitalists were competing under the same rules.

Rather than have erratic bilateral negotiation of those rules between states, the institutions of the European Union were born to harmonise, implement and enforce those rules. The European Council, the Council of Ministers, the European Parliament and the European Commission were set up to engage in continuous open discussion about how to build the economic community. The European Court of Justice was given the job of interpreting the rules when dispute arose: taking the politics out of matters and turning them into a predictable architecture so that capitalists knew that mere whims of political office holders could not interfere with their interests.

This pooling of national sovereignty necessarily meant power slipping away from the individual state's elites and a weakening of the links between their capitalist class and their

state (and also meant the emergence of a European elite, such as the likes of Stephen Kinnock, son of the former European Commissioner Neil and in turn married to the former Prime Minister of Denmark Helle Thorning-Schmidt).

### Divergence of interests

The Brexit debate in the UK was driven by the divergence between the manufacturers of goods and those engaged in financial services. Different rules and jurisdictions are part of the life blood of financial services, every barrier to trade is an opportunity to make money, whereas for manufacturers they are a cost to be eliminated in the search for profits. As financial services became a more significant part of the UK economy, so the cries to be freed from the regulatory grasp of Brussels rose, and the Brexiteers found their coffers filled with fighting funds.

The deal achieved between the UK and EU, formally styled the *EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement*, sets out the new terms of trade and investment going forward, now the UK has left the institutions of the EU.

Most obviously, it allows tariff-free and quota-free trade between the two market areas of the UK and the EU. This means no tax will be paid on goods moving to or from either market. Customs checks, however, still apply, although the Agreement does mandate that they will be minimal checks and trusted trader schemes will be set up to keep goods moving through as smoothly as possible. However, this only applies to goods.

Services, and importantly financial services, are not covered by the agreement beyond the general WTO terms to prevent discrimination against overseas firms and investors (eg. by having local ownership requirement rights). There is no provision for recognition of qualifications or 'passporting'. The size and strength of London's financial services mean that, given the commitments to the free flow of capital, this should not be a short-term problem, but it does mean there is a gap and both parties are free to try and exploit it.

### Partnership Council

The Agreement will be managed by a Partnership Council



which will contain a UK government minister and an EU Commissioner (meaning the UK no longer can talk directly to the Council of Ministers, as they discovered during the Brexit negotiations, so that scope for trying to talk to heads of government will be limited. The UK will have to deal with the EU as a united bloc). This Partnership Council will be supplemented by a plethora of working groups and specialist committees to implement the various detailed strands of the Agreement. It will have its own secretariat. The Council will meet alternately in London and Brussels.

The Council will supervise and facilitate the implementation of the agreement. It also has the power to amend the agreement and make supplementary agreements. As such the deal is a deal to keep talking, and be in continuous negotiation over terms of trade, much like the EU infrastructure. That this only needs the agreement of a government minister and an EU commissioner means changes can be undertaken quickly and quietly, without transparency of process.

This is even more so, given that the Act of Parliament to implement the deal expressly gives UK ministers the power to make regulations to implement the agreement. Further, the law requires that UK courts interpret all laws in such a way as to make them compliant with the agreement. So much for Parliamentary sovereignty: from now on one minister's deal with Europe can radically change all the laws of the UK without debate and without scrutiny. It also raises the prospect of UK courts effectively striking down any future Acts of Parliament that might be deemed to be incompatible with the partnership agreement.

As European Law no longer applies, when disputes under the agreement occur, they will first be raised in the Partnership Council and if bilateral agreement cannot be reached, a three-person arbitration board will be convened. The UK and EU will maintain a list of people who would be eligible for 'high judicial office' to serve on these tribunals. Only the UK and EU can raise these disputes, private citizens cannot raise them. Their rulings will not directly become law, and courts in the two jurisdictions are expressly not bound by them.

That is, Johnson has expressly removed the legalistic framework that characterises the EU approach to market governance, in favour of bilateral political relations. Instead of imposing fines or other penalties, the arbitration panels will enable the respective parties to raise retaliatory tariffs should the other side not live up to their part of the deal. This includes cross sectional tariffs, ie. being able to raise tariffs



David Frost

on goods outside the immediate dispute in order to inflict proportionate pain, eg. if the EU started to subsidise cheese, the UK could retaliate beyond imposing tariffs on cars.

The fact that these measures are political (and thus discretionary) means they can be used as a threat before they need to be implemented. The mere threat may be enough to deter investors. The lack of predictability will be a significant factor, but that is the price for leaving the court system.

(As a matter of fact, the ECJ does retain a small role, governing the UK's participation in European schemes, and also the rules of Northern Ireland, under the Withdrawal Agreement).

### Toddler's bedtime

Although the UK managed to avoid being bound by the EU's regulations and level playing field rules, this looser formation will leave the UK in the position of the toddler who goes to bed whenever they want to, and it is just a coincidence that that is the same time their parents tell them to.

Rules on country of origin mean that the UK cannot leverage its proximity and access to become a route for third parties to enter their goods into the EU. With car batteries being subject to country-of-origin rules, the UK wouldn't be able to turn itself into a place of assembly for electric car makers, an important future market.

The big loss for workers is the end of freedom of movement. To go and work in the EU will generally require a work visa from a member state (short-term working is permitted under restricted circumstances, but people have already noticed that singers and musicians will find it much harder to tour in Europe now).

What the deal amounts to is an architecture for a managed divergence now the UK has left the EU. What it means in practice is yet to be seen, but a possible example is Ireland, after it achieved independence from Britain. It spent the next fifty years effectively as Britain's farm, bound through infrastructural and economic ties to Britain despite being politically independent. The power of capital knows no national boundaries, and even if a group in Britain has managed to secure their exclusive access to the levers of the British state, it is not guaranteed they will be able to do much with them.

Indeed, it is likely, now the heat has been taken out of the immediate UK/EU relationship, that economic convergence could quietly resume through the mechanism of the Partnership Council.

**PIK SMEET**



Stephen Kinnock



*We discuss two recent books on the effects of automation under capitalism.*

**A**ron Benanav's *Automation and the Future of Work* (Verso) is one of a significant number of books published in recent years offering serious critiques of modern capitalism that tend to have one thing in common. While usually describing themselves as 'anti-capitalist', in the solutions to the problems they point to in the capitalist system they almost always end up with recommendations not on how to end the system but on how to improve it, how to make it run more 'caringly', more 'fairly', more 'equitably'. Lacking a vision of a wholly different kind of world than the current one based on buying and selling, money and wages, and profit, these books advocate action to achieve various reforms, for example – in the most recent popular thinking among authors and activists – what is usually called Universal Basic Income. This idea has been discussed in this journal on a number of occasions and rejected for its inability to bring about any qualitative change in social organisation and for constituting at best a way of redistributing poverty and at worst a sure-fire way of exerting downward pressure on wages and salaries.

Now, however, we have a book that does something different. Not only does it offer an original and thoroughgoing critique of the current social system, but to the never-ending problems it throws up it proposes a truly radical solution: the abolition of the wages system and a 'post-scarcity' society of abundance. Readers of this journal will of course know that this is the very non-market-based remedy advocated by socialists such as Marx and William Morris towards the end of the 19th century and which the *Socialist Standard* has kept alive uninterruptedly since 1904. The author of this book recognises this idea's pedigree in stating that the 'vision of post-scarcity was what "socialism" and "communism" had come to mean before later identification with Stalinist central planning and breakneck industrialisation', and, in his final chapter, entitled 'Necessity and Freedom', he describes it variously as, 'the abolition of private property and monetary exchange in favor of planned cooperation', 'a world of fully capacitated individuals ... in which every single person could look forward to developing their interests and abilities with full social support', 'a world in which democratic associations of women and men replaced the rule of the market with competitive production – and taking advantage of capitalist technologies – reduced the common labors of necessity to expand a realm of individual freedom', 'a new form of life that does not organize itself around wage work and monetary exchange', a society in which 'everyone can go to the social storehouses and service centers to get what they need', and finally 'for most people (...) the first time in their lives that

they could enter truly voluntary agreements – without the gun to their heads of a pervasive material insecurity'. In such a society 'dis-alienating community life – by taking that life under democratic control and collective care – becomes the way to ensure that individual freedom is shared by all'.

While consistently advocating just such arrangements, the Socialist Party has never sought to put forward detailed plans of how the new society of free access will be organised, since we would not seek to dictate now to the majority of socialist-minded workers at the time how to put into practice the plans they will have previously worked out about how to organise production and distribution cooperatively and democratically. Benanav, while not proposing detailed plans either, does, however, have some interesting insights as to how this could be organised or, as he puts it, 'how the pieces of this defunct world can be reassembled into a new mode of social existence'. For example: 'We would divide up responsibilities while taking into account individual aptitudes and proclivities. Some tasks would need to be performed locally, but many could be planned on a regional or global scale, using advanced computer technologies.' Further: 'The realm of freedom would be the one giving rise to all manner of dynamism: that is where human beings would invent new tools, instruments, and methods of accounting, as well as new games and gadgets, rapidly reallocating resources over time and space to suit changing human tastes (...). The world would then be composed of overlapping partial plans, with interrelated necessary and free activities, rather than a single central plan.' He concludes, nevertheless, in a way that echoes closely the approach the *Socialist Standard* has taken in dealing with this subject over the years, by saying: 'But these issues, as well as the related question of what counts as necessity and what as freedom, would be matters for a free humanity to resolve for itself, politically.'

Much of this follows from the 'Future of Work' element in the book's title. Benanav's argument about work in capitalism is that the 'rise of the robots' discourse common to those he terms 'automation theorists' is overblown and that the reason why workers of all kinds, whether in countries of advanced capitalist production or in less developed ones, are seeing increasing pressure on pay, job security and work conditions is not principally that the work is being done by automation (so-called 'long-run technological unemployment') but that capitalism in recent decades has experienced 'deindustrialisation', that is the number of jobs in the service sector consistently outstripping those in manufacturing side by side with global industrial over-capacity, ongoing wage stagnation, rising inequality and a proliferation of 'bad jobs'. He sees this, together with the 'angry ethnonationalisms' it



tends to bring with it, as an inevitable feature of the system's trajectory leading to increasingly worse conditions for workers at all levels, incapable of remedy by vogue ideas such as Universal Basic Income and only capable of resolution by a movement of new social consciousness uniting 'around a new emancipatory social project' to bring in the kind of non-market post-scarcity society outlined above.

Theories of capitalist decay are of course debatable. Capitalism in its history has gone through numerous phases and crises and on the whole has managed, even if in an extremely uneven and irregular way, to improve living standards and conditions for large numbers of its wage slaves. What is not debatable, however, is that, under the current system, as the author puts it, 'even in the richest countries most people are so atomized, materially insecure and alienated from their collective capacities that their horizons are stunted' and that the kind of society he recommends to replace capitalism would be far superior to anything that has so far existed or that capitalism could promise in the future. In addition, though it would be, unlike capitalism and as socialists have always maintained, a society of abundance, it would not be – and would not need to be – a society of super-abundance, and this is something that Benanav captures effectively by stating that 'a literal cornucopia is not required'. He goes on to explain that 'it is only necessary that scarcity and its accompanying mentality be overcome' and how 'abundance is not a technological threshold to be crossed' but 'a social relationship, based on the principle that the means of one's existence will never be at stake in any of one's relationships'.

The sources drawn upon by Benanav in writing this book are wide and diverse with a good number of charts, graphs and tables and almost 40 pages of extensive documentation. Yet none of this weighs heavily on the reader, since both the thrust and the details of his arguments are laid out in a clear, engaging fashion making them easy, indeed pleasurable, to follow and take in, and causing the whole to hang together in a way that makes it a highly satisfying and persuasive read both for socialists and for anyone open to radical ideas about social development.

**HOWARD MOSS**

### Why no abundance or more free time?

One thing that has puzzled academic economists is why, given the spread in recent years of IT, AI and automation generally, productivity has hardly gone up. In *Smart Machines and Service Work: Automation in an Age of Stagnation* (Reaktion Books) Jason E. Smith offers an explanation which also challenges those like Paul Mason who see a society of abundance and leisure as in the process of gradually evolving.

Productivity should mean physical output divided by the amount of labour-time required to produce it. Thus, if output increases while the amount of labour-time remain the same or if output remains the same while the amount of labour-time falls, then productivity goes up. This works for a particular factory or industry producing the same product but can't work for the economy as a whole because what is produced is so different. To get round this, economists measure productivity by dividing the money value of total production by the total number of hours worked. For them, productivity at this level is GDP divided by the hours worked by all workers; which is a pretty meaningless figure, not least because it does not distinguish between hours worked to produce the output and hours worked by workers paid out of the output. It is, however, how 'productivity' is defined in this context.

Smith's explanation as to why the increase in productivity in this sense has been so sluggish in recent decades is that,

while productivity has gone up in the sector of the economy producing material goods, it has not gone up by anything like the same amount in the service sector which now accounts for as much as 80 percent of economic activity in the advanced capitalist parts of the world. Most services are labour-intensive and involve personal attention and inter-personal skills that can't be replicated by machines. In addition, many of these jobs are low-paid, which reduces the incentive for employers to automate them.

Automation since the 1960s, or 'cybernation' as it was called, led neither to the mass unemployment nor to the leisure society that was variously predicted but, says Smith, to the growth of the service sector, many of whose jobs are unskilled and low-paid. Smith expects this to continue to be the trend despite all the hype about AI.

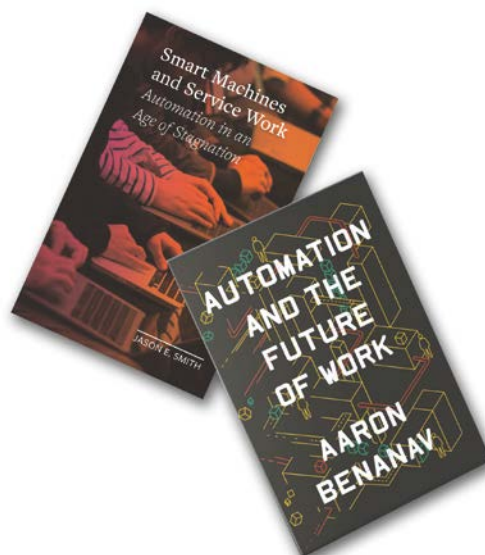
That increased productivity in the sense of physical output per hours of productive labour worked should result in the growth of low-paid service jobs is a perverse outcome. Marx had already noted this in the 1860s as, in a passage, Smith quotes from chapter 15 of Volume I of *Capital*:

'[T]he extraordinary increase in the productivity of large-scale industry, accompanied as it is by both a more intensive and a more extensive exploitation of labour-power in all other spheres of productions, permits a larger and larger part of the working class to be employed unproductively. Hence it is possible to reproduce the ancient domestic slaves, on a constantly extending scale, under the name of a servant class'.

Today the 'servant class' is composed not of domestic servants (these still exists and their number is growing) but of those employed by the state – the appropriately called 'civil servants' and others – some of whom are engaged in very socially useful work such as teaching and health care but who are nevertheless still paid out of taxes levied on the output of the productive sector of the economy.

Taking less and less time to produce material things and the means to produce them does open up the possibility of a world of plenty, better and more extensive public services and amenities, and free time for people to develop their talents or pursue what interests them. However, this is not achievable on the basis of the present-day class ownership of the means of life and their use to produce wealth for sale with a view to profit. It requires what Smith calls 'a non- or post-capitalist society' (and we call 'socialism') in which production is directly geared to satisfying people's needs on the basis of the common ownership and democratic control of society's productive resources.

**ADAM BUICK**



## Unequal exchange: who benefits?

*We continue our examination of theories which claim the workers in the advanced capitalist countries share in the exploitation of those in 'The Third World'.*

In *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916) Lenin suggested that some workers in the advanced countries, comprising a 'labour aristocracy', were bribed out of the 'enormous superprofits' made in the 'colonies and semi-colonies'. While this claim is questionable at many levels he did at least acknowledge such superprofits were 'obtained over and above the profits which capitalists squeeze out of the workers of their 'own' country', meaning workers there continued to be exploited in the Marxian sense.

Not so in the case of modern 'Third Worldist' exponents of the Labour Aristocracy thesis, like Zac Cope. Cope surpasses even Lenin in putting his own spin on this Leninist version of bourgeois trickle-down economics. In his view, workers in the advanced countries generally are not exploited at all:

'It is commonly supposed by socialists that if a person earns a wage she must, ipso facto, be exploited. However, if one worker is able to purchase the product of ten hours of another worker's labour through one hour of her own, then that worker is benefiting materially from the exploitation of the other worker. In other words, where the labour content of the worker's consumption is in excess of the amount of labour (value) she supplies, she partakes in the exploitation of her fellow worker' (*Divided World Divided Class: Global Political Economy and the Stratification of Labour Under Capitalism*, 2012, p.173).

If this worker is not exploited then presumably Cope will agree that her capitalist employer is not making a profit by employing her. Which raises the question: why is she being employed?

According to Cope, producing surplus value is 'increasingly the sole preserve of superexploited Third World labour' (p.176). In short, almost all workers in the Global North are 'unproductive' meaning they are financed out of, rather than produce, surplus value.

True, most workers involved in manufacturing now reside in the Global South. However, productive labour is not limited to producing physical goods – a point Marx made in criticising Adam Smith's overly 'physicalist' approach to the labour theory of value. Many services have been commodified under capitalism and the workers providing them must be considered productive of new value too.

More importantly, Cope departs radically from Marx in assuming that just because a worker is unproductive they cannot be deemed to be exploited. While unproductive labour may not in itself produce surplus value it is still nevertheless absolutely indispensable to the extraction of surplus value. A commodity's value is only realised insofar as it can be sold but the labour involved in selling it is technically unproductive as it adds no new value.

Referring to clerks employed by a merchant capitalist, Marx observes:

'The unpaid labour of these clerks, while it does not create surplus-value, enables him to appropriate surplus-value, which, in effect, amounts to the same thing with respect to his capital. It is, therefore, a source of profit for him. Otherwise commerce could never be conducted on a large scale, capitalistically' (*Capital* Volume 3, Ch.17).

Saying unproductive workers are not part

of the exploited working class is like saying the battalion signallers back in the army's HQ do not belong to the army because they don't do any actual fighting.

## Unequal exchange

Let us now consider the claim that workers in the rich countries allegedly partake in the exploitation of workers in poor countries via a global 'transfer of value'. This is said to involve various mechanisms – some hidden, some explicit.

These include, 'transfer pricing' or 'trade misinvoicing' practised within transnational corporations as a means of tax evasion; income flows in the form of repatriated profits, interest on loans, and property rents; 'seigniorage' and the profits made from circulating banknotes abroad and, finally, profits made from the buying and selling of financial assets abroad.

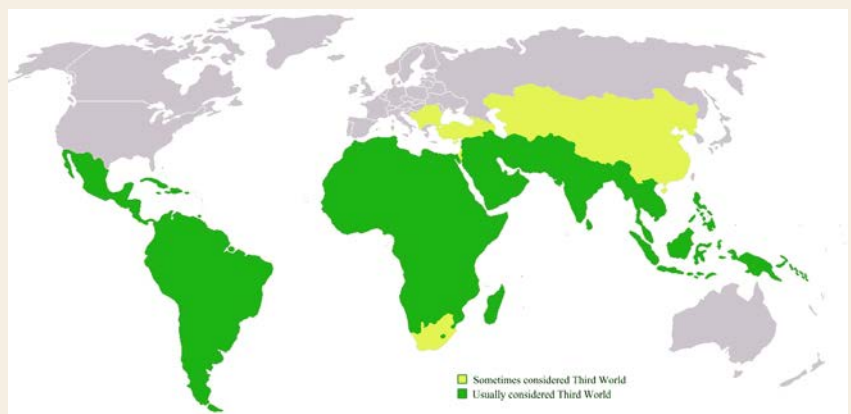
However, none of these examples in themselves seem to hold any obvious benefits for the workers in the rich countries. They all seem to work exclusively to the advantage of the capitalist owners of the businesses concerned. As Marx noted with reference to the repatriated profits made from foreign trade: 'The favoured country recovers more labour in exchange for less labour, although this difference, this excess is pocketed, as in any exchange between labour and capital, by a certain class' (*Capital*, Volume 3, Ch. 14).

But what about the mechanism alluded to by Cope – namely, 'unequal exchange'?

This concept was developed by Arghiri Emmanuel, whose major work, *Unequal Exchange: A Study of the Imperialism of Trade* was published in 1972. Emmanuel saw unequal exchange as being embedded in various processes that were subjected to a tendency for profit rates to equalise under competitive capitalism.

To briefly explain. Just as the prices of particular commodities do not necessarily coincide with their values, so the profits a particular business makes do not necessarily coincide with the surplus value generated by its workforce. According to Marx, it is only at the economy-wide level (these days the global economy) that 'the sum of all profits in all spheres of production must equal the sum of the surplus values, and the sum of the prices of production of the total social product equal to the sum of its value' (*Capital* Volume 3, Ch. 12).

Since living labour is the sole source of profit – the money form of surplus value – a business with a high 'organic composition of capital' ('capital intensive') will tend to have a lower rate of profit than one using labour-intensive technology. Indeed, the falling rate of profit accompanying industrialisation of the advanced countries is often cited as a reason, historically, for the imperialist expansion of those countries into parts of the world where an abundant supply of cheap labour was said to make for higher profits to offset the falling profit rate at home.





However, under competitive capitalism these different profit rates will tend to equalise through the interactions of supply and demand for the goods in question. In so doing, commodities produced in labour-intensive industries (or parts of the world) would sell at prices below their values while, for capital-intensive industries, the opposite would be true. In terms of international trade this translates into a redistribution of surplus value from the Global South to the Global North.

This is one example of 'unequal exchange' but Emmanuel's argument goes further: even if the 'organic composition of capital' was identical across the world, there could still be a transfer of surplus value from the Global South to the Global North. Why?

The reason lies with the sharp differences in wage rates between them which get to be reflected in the prices of goods exchanged in international trade. High-priced goods from the North are exchanged for low-priced goods from the South (whose capitalists then try to compensate for this by further cutting wages – super-exploitation). In this way some of the surplus value generated in the South is redistributed to the North, depriving the former of the 'means of accumulation and growth'.

In a world in which capital is mobile but labour is mostly not – think of 'Fortress Europe' – the normal competitive process by which wages, the price of labour power, tend to gravitate towards value is effectively blocked by national borders which means other contingent factors can become more prominent in determining wage rates.

## Sharing out surplus value

'Surplus value' is the key signifier of exploitation under capitalism. The rate of exploitation –  $s/v$  or the ratio of the surplus product to the overall wages bill – can be stepped up in several ways: (1) increasing 'absolute surplus value' by lengthening the working day; (2) increasing 'relative surplus value' by raising productivity (for instance through mechanisation) and (3) by pushing wages more or less permanently below the value of labour power – 'super-exploitation'.

Marx did not rule out (3) but saw it as being less significant, historically than (1) and (2) in the genesis of capitalism.

While all three modes of increased surplus value extraction can operate concurrently, for modern proponents of the labour aristocracy thesis, super-exploitation (of the Global South) is easily the most dominant mode. However, even if this was the case, it does not follow that super-exploitation is confined to the Global South only; it is arguably to be found in the Global North too, notably in the guise of the low-wage 'gig economy'.

Moreover, it is one thing to argue that super-exploitation in the Global South aids the redistribution of surplus value to the Global North; it is quite another to argue that workers in the latter benefit from this redistribution and not just the capitalists who in Marx's words 'pocket the difference' arising from unequal exchange.

From a Marxian standpoint (which Cope professes to espouse), exploitation can be inferred from the fact that the working class as a whole produces more value than it receives in the form of wages and salaries. However, value itself is based on the concept of 'abstract labour', not concrete labour, and this distinction is absolutely crucial.

A commodity's value is the 'socially necessary labour time' that goes into producing it, from start to finish, which is only revealed in a very approximate sort of way through market prices. It is an industry-wide – meaning global – average. Thus, attempting to isolate one section of the working class

(the Global North) from another (the Global South) in order to calculate their relative contributions to the production of value – even if this was feasible – is methodologically suspect since what is then being measured is no longer, strictly speaking, 'value'. Value is a social construct that only acquires resonance from the standpoint of the economy as a whole.

The point is that you cannot empirically measure a commodity's 'value'. It can only be theoretically inferred or guessed at. It is a constantly fluctuating potentiality that can change even after a commodity has been produced precisely because it is a notional average. So focusing exclusively on the labour contributions of workers in the South vis-à-vis the North strips it of that quality of being a notional average.

According to the labour theory of value it is not so much individual capitalists that exploit their own workforce but rather the capitalist class as a whole that exploits the working class as whole. This is because production today is a completely interconnected and globalised process. The fruits of this collective exploitation – surplus value – are, so to speak, pooled and redistributed to different capitals in proportion to their magnitudes as an average rate of profit.

Cope notes:

'Firstly, of necessity, this essay utilizes statistical data that measure the results of transactions in marketplaces, not value-generation in production processes. GDP, or value-added, figures are obtained by subtracting the cost price of a firm, nation or region's inputs from the proceeds of the sale of its outputs. This equation of value with price ensures that the process of production itself, and the surplus value arising from it, is rendered invisible and value appears to be generated largely through the circulation of money' (p.157-8).

But the 'equation of value with price' is precisely what Marx himself ruled out, arguing that 'The possibility, therefore, of quantitative incongruity between price and magnitude of value, or the deviation of the former from the latter, is inherent in the price-form itself' (*Capital* volume 1, Ch. 3). It is only in their totality that values and prices equate.

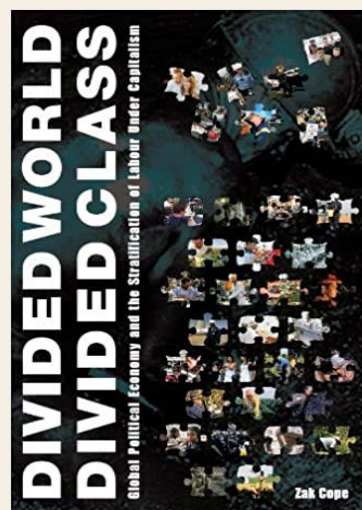
Ironically, the very kind of statistical data Cope is forced to rely upon – 'of necessity' – refutes his claim that workers in the Global North constitute a non-exploited class. Thus, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, US factory workers in 2012 produced on average \$73.45 per hour in output whilst the average hourly wage was only \$23.32 ([bit.ly/3hW62iX](https://bit.ly/3hW62iX)).

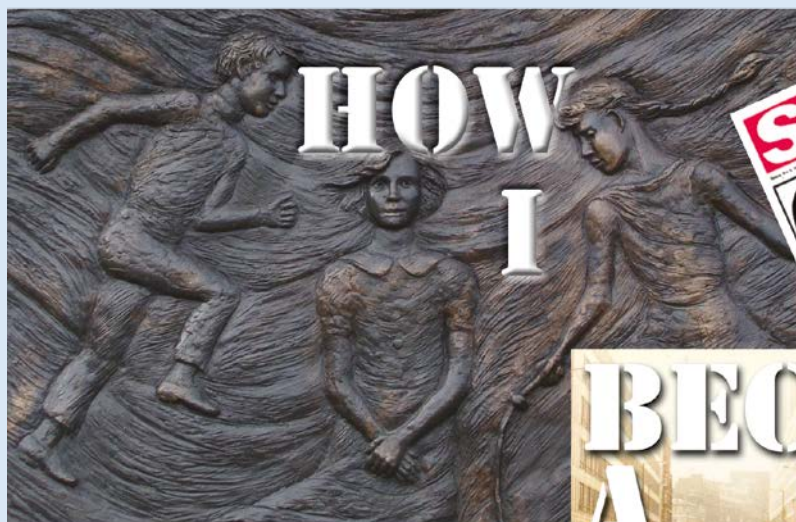
So approximately two thirds of the added value these workers contributed, they did not receive payment for. Indeed, since the 1970s, while productivity of American workers generally has grown by 69.3 per cent, wages have grown by only 11.6 percent ([bit.ly/2LyJAzY](https://bit.ly/2LyJAzY)).

Very clearly, then, not only are these workers exploited but the rate at which they are exploited has been steadily increasing.

*Next month we conclude our series refuting the view that workers in 'Global North' share in the exploitation of those in the 'Global South'.*

**ROBIN COX**





# SOCIALIST

Until Brexit politics didn't really feature much in my life except for a brief time at university. Brexit changed all that, it made me look deeper into current affairs, which made me realise that the system was broken and socialism could be just the thing to fix it.

I was originally from a small mining village in the North East of England. My mum was of Irish extraction, a pious catholic and salt-of-the-earth working-class woman. She married my dad, an émigré from Portuguese India. The house was a 2-up-2-down terrace with an outside toilet that always froze up in winter. I remember the backyard had cobbled stones with an open drain for the sink waste. Dad had knocked it up with old tin cans and it would block up, he never was any good at DIY. Working for the National Coal Board (NCB) Dad received the free allocation of coal. I guess that would be described as a company perk these days but in fact just helped keep wages down for the NCB. The coal truck would dump a ton of coal out the front and mum would wheel-barrow it around into the backyard, where it was stacked. In the 60s when the pit closed and Dad lost his job, he managed to find a storekeeper's job with Wimpey, the house builder, in Birmingham. So we upped sticks, dad, mum and six kids to join the exodus of many other families from the Durham coalfields. I was 8 years old.

As a child and adolescent I didn't have any great political awareness, I was more interested in playing football and cricket with my mates. However, I do remember the Aberfan disaster in 1966; principally because of my mum's reaction to the horrendous deaths of all those innocent children. The political significance of that disaster was lost on me at the time but would come to influence my views of government in later life. Any political awareness I had was probably socialist coming from my mother who described Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* as: 'the best book she had ever read'. My dad had come to the UK in the 1950s and, after a short time as a clerk in the civil service, joined the British army, the first six years in the regulars during the Suez crisis and a further 27 with the part-time territorials. He would often take me along to the territorial pay corps offices on the back of his Vespa 90 scooter, hoping I would join up when I grew up, but I only went along for the ride. I couldn't stand all the uniforms and tipping your forelock to the officers. I remember

dad always complaining that I was always asking 'why' when he would assert some Catholic religious dogma; mystified as to why I didn't share 'the faith'.

I never shared my parents' religious views as I found them impossible to reconcile with science and reason. I was always keen on physics at school and left home to study electronics at Salford University in Manchester. Whilst at university I became involved with student politics and joined the Anti-Nazi League, an offshoot of the Socialist Workers Party. I participated in many demos protesting against the National Front. After graduation I dropped out of active politics and concentrated on my engineering career. In the 80s and 90s my involvement in politics was restricted to just casting a vote.

In the early 80s the company I worked for at the time sent me to Merthyr Tydfil in South Wales to install some electronics in the main telephone exchange. When I arrived I was shocked to find the whole town shrouded in the dark shadow of huge coal slag heaps. It was then I realised that this was just four miles from where the tragedy took place at Aberfan some 20 years previously. I can remember being moved to tears visiting the cemetery seeing so many gravestones for the children that died. I was incredulous that governments could have allowed that to happen and not even bothered to restore the landscape after the horrendous mess the industry had made to the environment. The scruffy terraced housing, run-down shops and impoverished locals left an impression that this place had been forgotten by the powers that be.

Thatcher's assault on the miners, the unions and her profuse use of police violence to break up strikes was shocking to witness. The charade of the Falklands war to bolster her re-election in 1983 just reinforced my opinions of the Conservative Party. The imposition of the Poll Tax in 1989 seemed the last straw, and even I considered joining one of many demonstrations against that unfair tax against the working class. Her fall from grace and replacement by centrist John Major did seem like a change for the better. I didn't have any great understanding of politics, believing Labour to be a socialist party that cared more about the working class; therefore, deserving of my vote.

When New Labour finally regained power with the Blair/Brown regime in the 90s there was great expectation in the



country, which was reflected in the sweeping victory in 1997. However, with the tragedy of the Iraq war, the selling of public utilities, the Private Finance Initiatives, etc it became almost impossible to differentiate between New Labour and the old Tories, so there didn't seem any point in voting.

## Brexit

In 2016 I retired, providing lots of free time and which happened to coincide with Brexit. The propaganda from the Tory Vote Leave side and UKIP had such a ring of xenophobia it was reminiscent of the National Front back in the 1970s. Alarmingly, fuelled by the media this polemic seemed to resonate and rekindled latent nationalistic fervour in a large section of the public. This level of public support seemed perplexing as the arguments didn't seem to stand up to any scrutiny, particularly from an economic perspective. In the media, many commentators were citing neoliberal economics as one of the main causes of this rise in right-wing populism. Not having any idea of what that actually meant I started reading some of the popular political commentators: Robert Peston's *WTF*; Finton O'Toole on *Heroic Failure*; and Ian Dunt's *What the Hell Happens Now?* I discovered Yanis Varoufakis's, *Adults in the Room*, which was a great eye-opener for the workings of the European Union.

## Austerity

The first time I saw the 2015 movie *The Big Short* I found it somewhat confusing with all the references to financial derivatives such as Credit Default Swaps (CDS) and Collateralized Debt Obligations (CDOs). It was only after reading Robert Peston's *How Do We Fix This Mess?* that the shocking reality of what happened in 2008 became clear. The financial system was built on debt and required the subsequent bail out of the banks. Labour chancellor Gordon Brown then embarked on his 'balancing the budget' austerity programme, which continued under subsequent Tory administrations. This has been the main factor in the effective decline in living standards (real earnings) in recent times, particularly for those on low incomes. Brown had constantly claimed that, with his policy of sticking to tight inflation targets, the age of boom-to-bust economics was over – so much for that prediction.

## New Hope

I joined the Labour Party in 2018, attracted by their new manifesto which promised to reverse some of the Tory and previous Labour sell-offs of public utilities. Jeremy Corbyn and shadow chancellor John McDonnell promised a more cooperative and democratic economy starting with a limited programme of renationalisation, a National Bank, increased spending on the welfare state, increasing corporation tax, reducing student tuition fees and scrapping Trident. These seemed at the time to be a great reason to sign up to Labour.

However, as a leader Corbyn came over as indecisive and easily undermined by many on the rightwing of the parliamentary party. This indecision, exemplified with his position on Brexit and accusations of antisemitism, established him as weak in the eyes of the public and an easy target for the media.

The election result in December 2019 and the collapse of the Labour vote in Labour's key heartlands of the North gave the green light for a centrist takeover and the marginalisation of the Left.

I started reading economic theorists such as Stiglitz, Krugman, Piketty and Ha Joon Chang, authors of several texts on the crisis facing neoliberal, free-market capitalism. They

all suggest state interventionist methods to reform the system to prevent this recurrent boom-to-bust cycle and rise in inequality. What they don't seem to want to admit is that these Keynesian reformist methods have been tried many times in the past and as yet haven't managed to prevent the boom-to-bust cycles which repeat every few years.

A social-democratic Labour Party can't achieve its expressed aim of liberty, equality and fraternity by reforming capitalism. The capitalist ethic of dog-eat-dog, grow-or-die is diametrically opposed to a truly democratic, mutual, caring, equal and ecological society.

## Discovering socialism

My awareness of socialism started when an old friend suggested I read some Murray Bookchin. Bookchin, an American theorist from New York, has written copiously on everything Left and has certainly shaped my ideas since reading his books and essays. The material on YouTube from Richard Wolff, *Double Down News* and alternative media like *Counter Punch* and *Byline Times* have also helped shape my views.

Having previously been a member of the Anti-Nazi League as a student I had some knowledge of the SWP and so thought they might be worth having a look at. I attended a few online discussions to get an idea of where the party stood against my view of socialism. It soon came apparent that they have a strict ideological commitment to a Leninist/Trotskyist interpretation of Marx. I didn't feel comfortable with this, being aware that this revolutionary approach of overthrowing the state has always led to state capitalism, not socialism.

On Google using the search string 'list of socialist parties in the UK', then following the most popular result, Wikipedia; a huge list of parties is revealed. Browsing through the list you come across around 20 allegedly socialist (non-capitalist) organisations. I checked out those and found most were in the same mould as the Trotskyist SWP or supporters of the Labour Party.

But the SPGB welcome page is clearly laid out with a straightforward statement of Party goals. The Party's declaration of key socialist principles is clear: common ownership, democratic control and free access to goods and services. This contrasts markedly with other so-called socialist parties where a lot of policy is hidden. The website also had a wealth of well-researched articles and literature; all this encouraged me to join one of the online meetings to find out more.

After attending a few meetings and reading the literature I decided to join. What particularly struck me was the requirement to complete a questionnaire. A little bit intimidating at first compared to entering your address and credit card details to join the Labour Party. However, as an option you can just answer the questions over a call should you so wish.

Having been in the Party for just a few months, I was quite surprised when some of the experienced hands asked me to write about myself and what motivated me to join the Party. However, support and helpful advice was at hand. Just a word too on the informal online group meetings through Discord which are run twice a week. They give you a chance to learn new stuff and discuss current issues with like-minded people in a friendly environment.

The party is democratically organised in small groups and branches rather than being focused on direct action, public demonstrations and confrontation with the state, and I would heartily recommend anyone with like-minded views to join.

**NICK SAMPAYS**

# COOKING THE BOOKS

## All state activists now?

On the eve of Britain's final departure from the EU, Boris Johnson wrote an article in the *Daily Telegraph* in which he praised the development of the Oxford University/AstraZeneca vaccine as an example of collaboration between 'state activism' and 'free market capitalism'. The government, he said, had provided the cash and the scientists while AstraZeneca provided the production facilities and the marketing. This was interpreted as a hint of the economic policy he envisaged his government pursuing.

This praise of 'state activism' does seem strange coming from a Tory prime minister as it has traditionally been more associated with the Labour Party. In fact, combining 'state activism' with 'free market capitalism' has been the economic policy of the Labour Party since it abandoned 'nationalisation' – the state owning and running industries – as its panacea. Since then its policy has been that the main means of production should remain in the hands of profit-seeking private enterprises, so with profit as the motivating force of productive activity and 'state activism' taking place in this context.

When Labour could still be considered a classic social-democratic reformist party,

it envisaged the state being active within capitalism to improve the standard of living of workers through social reforms that brought them some direct material benefit. Nowadays, the Labour Party envisages the state being active to provide cash for infrastructure projects to be carried out by private enterprises and for improving productivity through training schemes.

This was the case even during the Corbyn interregnum. Corbyn himself didn't seem much interested in economic policy. This was left to the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, John McDonnell, who set out to develop an economic policy that Big Business and the City could accept as credible and reasonable.

To this end, he invited the economist Marianna Mazzucato, author of *The Entrepreneurial State: Debunking the Public vs. Private Sector Myths*, to be one of the Labour Party's advisers on economic policy. According to publicity for her book, she argued that 'in the history of modern capitalism the State has not only fixed market failures, but has also actively shaped and created markets'.

This is historically and empirically correct. States can and have done this but the markets they create are not extra markets. They are created by taking

money from sections of the capitalist class (whether through taxes, borrowing or inflation) and giving it to other sections to carry out projects that a state has judged are in the general interest of the capitalist class as a whole.

McDonnell made this Labour Party policy, telling the 2015 Labour Party conference:

'We will create what Marianna Mazzucato describes as the entrepreneurial state. A strategic state that works in partnership with businesses, enterprises and workers to stimulate growth.'

The state itself would not organise production, but only 'stimulate' private enterprises to do this by putting up the money for them to make profits from activity it wanted to encourage. Or, as Johnson put it, a collaboration between 'state activism' and 'free enterprise capitalism'.

In embracing this, he has stolen the Labour Party's clothes. It may just be rhetoric designed to retain the support of ex-Labour voters in the Red Wall constituencies in the North that helped the Tories win power in the 2019 general election. It won't be popular with the hard-line free-marketeers on the 'libertarian' wing of the Tory party who deny that the market can ever misallocate resources.

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# PROPER GANDER *Fame And Fortune*

BBC TWO'S recent documentary series *Celebrity: A 21st Century Story* is thankfully more than just a bunch of talking heads reminiscing about the singers and models who dipped in and out of the spotlight over the last couple of decades. Running for four hours in total, the series has plenty of time to consider the place that 'celebrity culture' has in our society, and what shapes its changing trends. Commendably, the programme's focus is on economics, and how celebrities contribute to the revenue of profit-hungry mass media giants. A famous person will draw in viewers to a TV show, readers to a magazine or newspaper, or subscribers to a social media account, as well as making money through sales of any music or other commodities they directly contribute to. Advertisers are particularly keen to latch on to celebrities, hoping to leech on their popularity to find customers for whatever tat they're marketing. All of this is linked in with whatever technology is currently in vogue across the media, technology which itself is driven by what is profitable.

Narrating *Celebrity: A 21st Century Story* is Diane Morgan (otherwise known for her mockumentaries in the guise of Philomena Cunk), and alongside the archive footage are interviews with journalists, paparazzi and (now-faded) stars reflecting on the highs and lows of their time in the public eye.

The series begins with what could be described as an expansion in the market. When the first set of contestants walked into the *Big Brother* house and onto our screens in 2000, they also marked a shift in what we mean by a 'celebrity'. Celebrity status was no longer just reserved for a distant few, but could also be for 'ordinary people'. The exploits of the *Big Brother* housemates (especially when they found their own pantomime villain in 'Nasty Nick') were soon all over the tabloids and in office water cooler chats. Not

long afterwards, the talent show format was revived, with *Pop Idol* and its ilk feeding on the aspirations of any of us proles to sell out Wembley and top the charts. The new breed of talent shows emphasised the contestants' emotional journeys, and then let the public decide whose dreams would be crushed. The phone-in vote, also used for *Big Brother*, was less an exercise in democracy than a way of increasing revenue for the programme-makers; income from the cost of calls soon generated over £3 million for *Pop Idol*. More money came in from CD sales; combined, runner-up and winner Gareth Gates and Will Young's

Church in Tesco were sold for thousands of pounds to glossy mags such as *OK!*, *Hella!* and *Heat*. Their online equivalents were the even trashier websites like *Holy Moly!* and *Pop Bitch*, which had the advantage of being able to share snaps and titbits with their voyeuristic viewers straight away. The push for more brazen and irreverent content led to many women celebrities being victim to body shaming and upskirting. Even a celebrity's mental health problems and substance misuse (usually fuelled by being in the limelight) have been turned into a spectacle by websites and print. One of the most severe examples was in 2007

when singer Britney Spears (struggling in her personal life) confronted one of the photographers stalking her, and attacked his car with an umbrella. This turned out to be another goldmine for the paparazzi who sold pictures of the incident for \$400,000.

A consequence of the profitability of celebrity gossip magazines and blogs was a decline in newspaper sales, with tabloids losing millions of readers in the mid '00s. One way they responded was by branching out online. A newspaper's

website, unlike its printed version, can be used to find out how many people read each article, just by measuring how many clicks they attract. This data, along with statistics on the demographics of those who clicked, can then determine the interests of readers so that adverts can be targeted to their most receptive audience. This advertising then, of course, provides revenue for the newspaper and the products being flogged. These websites are really just marketing platforms, with articles to draw the punters in. Other tactics used by newspapers have been far more surreptitious and cynical. Journalists found material for stories by digging into the tax and medical records of celebs and their families, and hacking potentially thousands of peoples' phones, most



first singles sold three million copies. *Big Brother* brought in a quarter of Channel 4's advertising revenue in its early years due to its popularity. 'Ordinary people' being elevated to star status had become another source of profit.

TV production companies, record labels, advertisers and agents weren't the only ones keen to make money from this new trend. Celeb-focused journals saw a boost in sales, with *Heat* magazine's circulation doubling thanks to it tapping into the popularity of *Pop Idol* in particular. A gossipy article about any celeb needs to be accompanied by eye-catching photos, and the mid '00s was a lucrative time for the paparazzi. Candid shots of Fern Britton on the beach or Charlotte

notoriously for *The News of the World*.

Celebrities had lost control of what details of their lives were made public. Some, like Britney Spears, suffered under the pressure of being constantly scrutinised and used. Others turned this to their own advantage, such as Paris Hilton and Kim Kardashian, who both became famous through 'sex tapes' being leaked onto the internet. This exposure gave them hundreds of millions of fans, who became the audiences for their newly commissioned reality TV shows. Having a fly-on-the-wall documentary is a tried-and-tested way for celebs to keep on delivering new content to fans; model Katie 'Jordan' Price and the Osbournes had discovered this by 2002. And when broadcasting their usual routines becomes stale, there would be the option of reinventing themselves by signing up for *Celebrity Big Brother*, *Strictly Come Dancing* or *I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out Of Here!*.

Capitalism turns us all into commodities, things to be bought and sold, but celebrities take this to an extreme by commodifying everything about their lives, and turning themselves into a brand. And this brand has to both stand out and be malleable to what the public supposedly wants. Around 2010, this approach morphed into the new genre of 'structured reality' TV programmes like *The Only Way Is Essex* and *Made In Chelsea*. These shows stuck to the template of having cameras follow people round, but with the twists that these are 'real people' and that their lives have been made more watchable by producers giving them scenarios to improvise, such as 'x dumps y after being told y was flirting with z'. The participants' public profiles were raised not just by the shows, but also by their social media accounts, which have become an increasingly important way for celebrities to manage their image, or have it managed for them. When pop band *One Direction* were manufactured from *X-Factor* contestants, each member had their own social media profiles to gauge the views of their fanbase. A Facebook page or Twitter account became a valuable combination of instant market research, an advert which distributes itself and, especially importantly, a means to sell endorsed products. Viewers of matchmaking show *Love Island* use an app not only to vote for contestants but also to buy whichever design of bikinis are being worn on that week's episode. The app has generated £12 million in sales for ITV and its brands. Stars have been endorsing products for decades, but what was emerging was the 'influencer', who uses social media to tie together their fame and what they market. The biggest influencers have had enough clout to

shape trends, and not just in what clothes or jewellery people buy. For example, Kylie Jenner rose to prominence by being part of the Kardashian family on their TV show. By the age of 20, she had over 100 million followers on social media app Instagram. Because of her influence, one message she posted criticising Instagram's rival Snapchat apparently took £1 billion off the latter's stock market value.

Social media isn't just used by influencers, it also helps create them. Bedroom broadcasters became a new type of celebrity from around 2012, when 4G technology had spread enough to enable more people to make their own videos and upload them to YouTube. A gaming or make-up vlogger whose videos get hundreds of millions of views a month represents hundreds of millions of potential customers to target with adverts and endorsements. By 2015, 'YouTube creators' had become more popular and influential than 'traditional entertainment stars', according to a survey carried out by *Variety* ([tinyurl.com/y2vaqb9b](http://tinyurl.com/y2vaqb9b)).

Social media has become the main way for anyone with a public image to stay relevant. The Royal family, who a few years earlier would have thought that such things were beneath one, also jumped on the bandwagon, led by Meghan Markle. Before she married into The Firm she had already used her acting roles to attract readers to her lifestyle blog, which brought her tens of thousands in sponsorship and endorsements. Now, she and Harry have their 'Sussex Royal' Instagram account to promote themselves, while other Windsors also have profiles on Twitter and Facebook. This allows them to shape whatever pronouncements they make, without needing to go through traditional intermediaries like the press. Politicians have done the same, and Donald Trump took full advantage of this, using his Twitter feed to criticise much of the mainstream media and inflict his many deranged thoughts on us.

The rise to power of both Donald Trump and Boris Johnson can be attributed in part to how they celebrated themselves by building their brands through the media. Johnson came from a journalistic background, and Trump was the star of *The Apprentice USA*, so they were both aware of the need for media presence. Before Trump started presenting *The Apprentice* in 2003, his business had been in the doldrums, and the show made his companies and therefore him look bigger than they had really been. As the documentary says, Trump then 'used the tools of reality TV not only to win viewers, but to win votes'. Boris Johnson was keen to use any and every publicity stunt to further his

career, including appearances on *Have I Got News For You* and *EastEnders*. It's nothing new for politicians to use TV to talk at the public, but recent years have seen them using the medium to try and make themselves more relatable. Johnson himself once quipped during a speech 'if Parliament were a reality TV show, then the whole lot of us, I'm afraid, would have been voted out of the jungle by now'. Politicians have seen how celebrities use TV to gain a following and want to ape this for themselves. Jeremy Corbyn went on *Gogglebox*, Ann Widdecombe and Ed Balls rhumbaed on *Strictly Come Dancing*, George Galloway pretended to be a cat on *Celebrity Big Brother*, and even Boris Johnson's family have got in on the act, with his father and sister slumming it on *I'm A Celebrity...* Interviewed for the documentary, ex-Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer Balls says that being a politician put a 'thick prism of glass' between him and other people, and his appearance on *Strictly* broke down this barrier so people could see the real him. He adds that doing Gangnam Style meant that 'I'd done my bit to make the country feel a little bit better'.

While politicians have tried to tap into the world of celebrity to get support, celebrities have also used their status to make a political stand. Kim Kardashian was influential enough to encourage Donald Trump to pardon and release Alice Marie Johnson, who had been convicted of drug trafficking. And actresses attending the 2018 Grammy and Golden Globe award ceremonies wore black and brought Me Too and Time's Up activists with them to the red carpet in support of the movements, given impetus when film producer Harvey Weinstein was revealed as a sex offender.

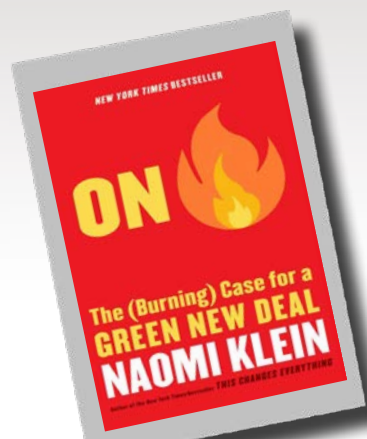
Celebrity status now carries some political power, as well as economic power. How this has been expressed has changed over the years, alongside the developments in media technology, from print journalism and TV through to the internet and, especially, social media. And as technology has become more sophisticated, it has led to more precise ways of analysing us as consumers and pushing us to follow celebrity trends and buy more. Watching reality TV, or flicking through a copy of *Heat*, or subscribing to a YouTube influencer is often just a 'guilty pleasure', a brief escape from our own humdrum, stressful lives. But as *Celebrity: A 21st Century Story* illustrates, celebrity culture has been shaped by what the media industry finds to be most profitable for its owners, and so manipulates and exploits both celebs and ourselves.

**MIKE FOSTER**



# REVIEWS

## Green reformist



Naomi Klein: **On Fire: The Burning Case for a Green New Deal.** Penguin £10.99.

Klein has written previously on climate change; in *This Changes Everything* from 2014, she described it as 'a battle between capitalism and the planet'. Here, in a series of articles and talks dating from 2010 to 2019, she discusses various events (such as the Deepwater Horizon explosion in 2010 and the 'summer of fire' in 2017). She emphasises the interconnectedness of many issues ('climate, capitalism, colonialism, white supremacy, and misogyny') and puts forward the idea of a Green New Deal as a way to solve the problems.

There is much useful material here. Oceans are warming 40 percent faster than the UN predicted in 2014. Hotter, drier weather creates the conditions for wildfires, and there is a feedback loop, whereby burning carbon leads to warmer temperatures and less rain, hence more fires, which in turn release more carbon into the atmosphere. Climate change hits the poor worst, whether in Africa or New Orleans or the refugees who flee war and drought. The factors destroying the planet are also destroying people's quality of life. We are experiencing 'the dawn of climate barbarism', and individual action is simply inadequate.

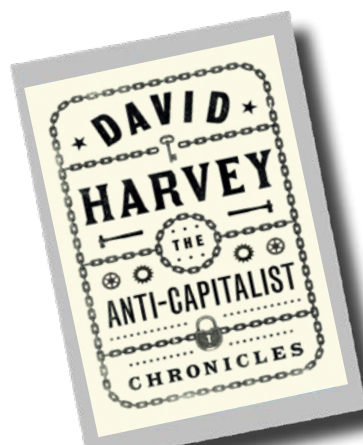
But there is also quite a bit that is less impressive. A disappointing (to put it mildly) speech to the 2017 Labour Party Conference suggests that Klein has uncritically swallowed Labour's reformism and plans for nationalisation. She views incrementalism and moderation as problems, yet does not in fact go beyond these. Her own plan is for the Green New Deal: this is seen as similar in some ways to the New Deal of

the 1930s in the US, though as less top-down and not consumption-oriented. It is intended to address 'the triple crises of our time': ecological problems, economic inequality and white supremacy. It envisages investment in renewable energy and a minimum global corporate tax rate, so combining the reduction of pollution with improving the conditions of the most vulnerable. (For a UK version, see [greennewdealgroup.org](http://greennewdealgroup.org).)

Renewables are seen as job creators, so there would still be jobs (and taxes). And Klein is not against capitalism as such, only its supposed 'unregulated' variety. She says that 'autocratic industrial socialism' has been an environmental disaster, and she clearly equates socialism with the Soviet Union and Venezuela. This is a shame, as she acknowledges that climate science constitutes a powerful argument against capitalism, and discusses the view of some right-wing climate change deniers that the issue is some kind of plot to shackle or even abolish capitalism. They're wrong, of course, but the climate and other ecological issues do provide yet another reason for doing away with the wages-prices-profits system.

PB

## Anti-capitalist



**The anti-capitalist chronicles**  
by David Harvey;  
Pluto Press, 2020

This is more a collection of short essays than a comprehensive book. Harvey remains impressive as ever when explaining the basic ideas of Karl Marx succinctly and effectively, including such things as the operation of the rate of profit and how it relates to technological change.

The intent of the book is to give print

form to Harvey's regular podcast output, and the editors suggest it is a good accessible gateway into Harvey's work and thoughts.

The chapters are thus short, and slightly repetitive, using the same examples (eg. that China has used more cement in two or three years than the US has done in the past 100). But that reflects the bite sized nature of the chapters, the book can be picked up and put down.

The focus across chapters is on the difference between mass and rate. Harvey notes that we should be more concerned about the mass of carbon dioxide we have already put into the atmosphere, rather than think about the rate at which we are adding more carbon. Likewise, he notes the importance of examining the mass of profit rather than just the rate of profit when examining the operations of the capitalist system (and he also gently uses that to criticise the Marxist writers who see the fall in the rate of profit as the key feature of capitalism).

As a geographer, he has useful insights into the geopolitical goals of China, and particularly notes how the brutal treatment of the Uighur may be connected with their attempts to control central Asia and thus cement a position as the predominant power on Earth. This is also joined by useful comments on the 'second nature' of the urban environment, as well as a useful discussion of his notion of accumulation through dispossession.

There is also a useful discussion on the place of the concept of alienation in Marxian thought, which includes a light sketch in how the notion has been examined in the second half of the twentieth century and the usefulness of continuing to apply it as a tool of analysis today. Particularly, there is an interesting discussion of how the notion of alienation might be used to examine the rise of Donald Trump as a symptom of the disaffection of the deindustrialised areas of the United States (he goes into dispiriting detail of the betrayal involved in the closure of a Detroit car plant).

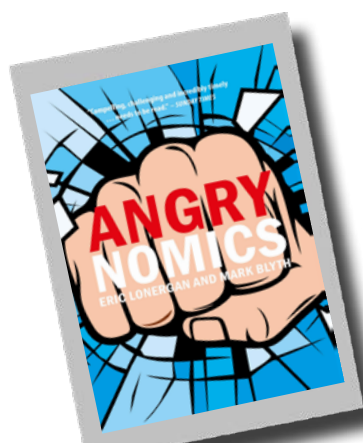
Disappointingly, Harvey sees modern capitalism as too complex and interrelated to be changed wholesale, and instead looks to micro-changes and warm words. The book is thus long on analysis of capitalism but short on actual concrete anti-capitalism.

As a pedagogue, Harvey includes a selection of discussion questions for each chapter and further reading at the end of the book. These are actually good questions, and going through them might

be a useful exercise and worth the price of the book.

PIK SMEET

## Tinkering about



### Angrynomics:

Mark Blyth and Eric Lonergan.  
Agenda Publishing. 2020).  
£12.35

The economist Mark Blyth and hedge fund manager Eric Lonergan postulate that anger takes two distinct forms, public and private. Public shows itself in protests, strikes and xenophobia (tribal),

while private anger shows itself as mental health issues and despair. They assert that policies enacted by most of the current 'neoliberal' governments have failed to address this underlying public anger and that that is the main reason for the recent rise in the popularity of right-wing populist governments. The analogy of hardware and software to describe some of the economic mechanisms to support their arguments is unconvincing. Fintan O'Toole's book, *Heroic Failure*, provided more convincing arguments for the shift in the public mood away from neoliberal ideology and the rise in nationalism.

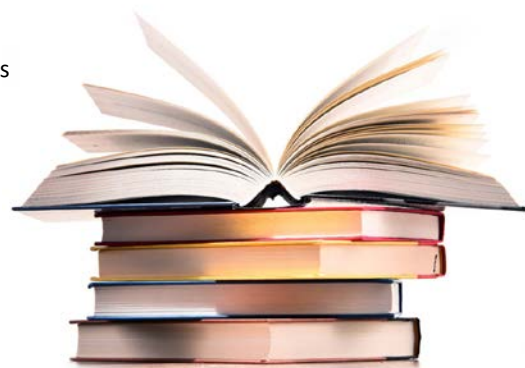
There are references to the French economist Thomas Piketty's *Capital* and his idea of a wealth tax. However, they never get around to properly criticising his ideas, despite the promise in the text. They introduce their 'big' idea of taxing corporations for use of the public's personal data, and then investing this in the stock market. They estimate a high return of 6 percent invested over a 15-year period, which might seem unlikely given the volatility of the market. This scheme seems more likely to increase commissions for the financial services sector while having no impact on the immediate issue of the huge growth in inequality and the dearth of "decent"

jobs, poor public healthcare and lack of social housing.

In the end this is just another tax. Piketty's proposal of a wealth tax on capital is far more straightforward and credible despite the fact that it too would suffer the same recovery problems due to endemic tax avoidance by the likes of Amazon, Apple and Google.

The above ideas are just tinkering around with the capitalist system in a classical Keynesian way. They will not prevent the insatiable advance of capital accumulation and the continued rise in inequality and anger of the dispossessed working class.

NICK SAMPAYS



# 50 Years Ago

## Decimalisation

Whatever difficulties people may meet with in handling the metric currency changes on 15 February the changes themselves will have no effect at all on the main operations of the British monetary system or its standing in world currencies. New names will be given to some old coins, and three new 'coppers' will appear, the new 2p, 1p, and ½p but the total amount of 'copper' coins, about £200 million, will not be altered on D day, nor will the notes in circulation, about £3,660 million. One change has however already been introduced which distorts somewhat the Bank of England's weekly figures of note circulation. This was in November 1970 when £96 million of ten-shilling notes ceased to be legal tender, thus dropping out of the Bank of England's note figures, having been replaced by the same quantity of the ten shilling (50p) 'silver' coins.

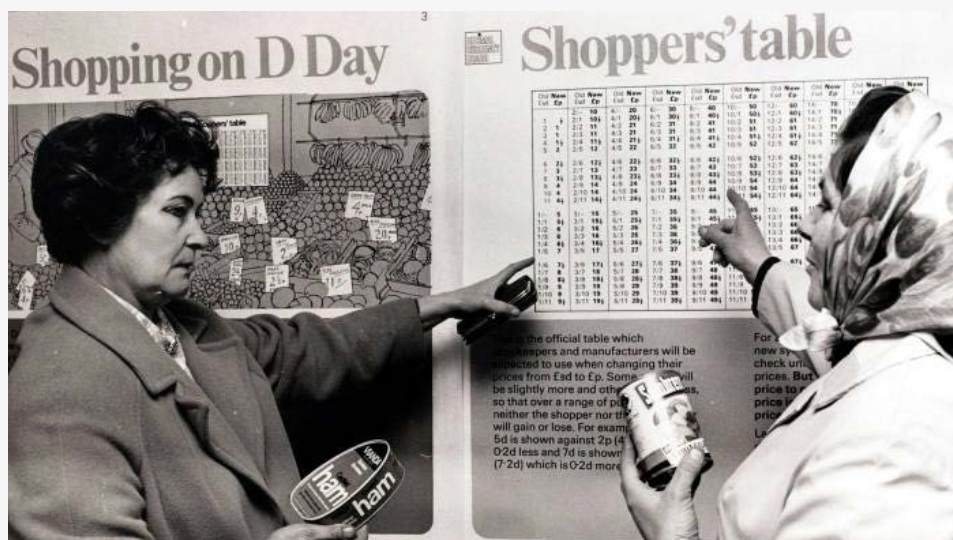
After D day, as before, the pound will still have the same exchange rate with the dollar (about \$2.40), and with the rest of

the currencies inside and outside the European Economic Community.

This does not mean that the changes have no great significance; this will only become apparent some years ahead if Britain joins the European Six and if the Six themselves succeed in setting their, at present deadlocked, negotiations about moving towards a single European currency.

The D day changes are a first step aimed at an eventual situation in which there will be only one currency covering the whole of Europe, just as the dollar covers the whole of the USA and the rouble the whole of Russia.

(*Socialist Standard*, February 1971)





# Meetings

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

## FEBRUARY 2021 DISCORD EVENTS

### Wednesday 3 February

“DID YOU SEE THE NEWS?” 7.30pm  
General current affairs discussion

### Friday 5 February

FRIDAY NIGHT TALK, 7.30pm  
**MURRAY BOOKCHIN AND SOCIAL ECOLOGY**  
Speaker: Nick Sampays  
Bookchin’s basic ideas: Social hierarchy emerged through gerontocracy, priestly class, patriarchy, male hunters and war. Domination of human by human led to domination of nature. Hierarchy preceded capitalism, therefore even in a classless society hierarchy would still remain if not addressed. Political vision – Confederalism: direct democracy through local assemblies, delegates to administrative councils linked together through a network of confederations; bottom-up structure. Has this any relevance or possible utility to the Socialist Party?

### Wednesday 10 February

THE FAQ WORKSHOP, 7.30pm  
**HOW SCIENTIFIC IS SOCIALISM?**  
We talk about the socialist case as an evidence-based theory, as distinct from a moral or religious creed, but it can’t be a

scientific theory in the strictest definition of the term. To what extent are we entitled to call ourselves scientific?

### Friday 12 February

FRIDAY NIGHT TALK, 7.30pm  
**WHAT IS THE INCENTIVE TO WORK IN A SOCIALIST SOCIETY?**

Speaker: Robin Cox  
Why do we so often see work as a mere ‘disutility’ requiring ‘compensation’? Can work ever be organised completely on the voluntaristic principle of ‘associated labour’? In what way might we give according to ability, while taking according to our needs, in a socialist society?

### Wednesday 17 February

SPECIAL FAQ, 7.30pm  
**THE SPEAKER’S TEST Pt 4**  
Concluding our discussion of the questions.

### Friday 19 February

FRIDAY NIGHT TALK, 7.30pm  
**THE MINIMUM-MAXIMUM MUDDLE**  
Speaker: Mark Znidericz  
That a socialist party should have a minimum programme of ‘immediate demands’ to be achieved within capitalism as well as the ‘maximum’ programme of socialism is alluring. It is seemingly practical, blessed by tradition (Marx, Engels, Kautsky, Luxemburg), an

empathetic reaction to need, and offers propaganda opportunities. How we as a party could counteract that allure.

### Wednesday 24 February

THE FAQ WORKSHOP, 7.30pm  
**IVORY TOWER, OR NO MAN’S LAND?**  
The Left commonly accuse us of living in an ivory tower and ‘not engaging in the class struggle’, and even being stuck in a No Man’s Land between two warring classes. What is the justification for this view, and what might we do about it?

### Friday 26 February

FRIDAY NIGHT TALK, 7.30pm  
**UNLIKELY CENTENARY: A HUNDRED YEARS OF NORTHERN IRELAND**  
Speaker: Kevin Cronin  
The imminent marking of the anniversary of 100 years of the existence of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and *Northern* Ireland seems to be passing under the radar. This is strange as under capitalism, most national governments are keen to publicise and celebrate important events in their nation’s historical narrative to legitimise the existence and operation of the state and to reinforce the identity between the state and its citizenry. This talk will explore why this is not the case in this instance and why it may be of interest to socialists.

## 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.



## Dirty

Writing of manual scavenging - 'the age-old unfortunate practice of cleaning, carrying, and disposing human excreta from dry latrines or sewers into the disposal sites' - in India (countercurrents.org, 24 December), Ashish Joshi notes that '...despite prohibitive legislations in place, a government survey from 2019, carried out across 170 districts, found that over 54,000 people actively engage in the practice. In 2019 alone, 110 people died while cleaning septic tanks and sewers. For a job that has been outlawed for years, the manual practice continues without providing even the essential safety equipment that must be provided to the people engaging in this dangerous job. It is regrettable for a country that has been to Mars and back that we still have not eradicated this sordid practice from our societal fabric'. Eclipsing the Mars mission in terms of speed and potential is the development of vaccines against a pandemic that daily kills 10,000 people. Mainstream media, however, largely ignores the 25,000 who die every day from unnecessary starvation, the 3,000 children who die every day from preventable malaria, and the 10,000 people who die every day because they are denied healthcare. Neglected tropical diseases are common in 149 countries, and affect more than 1.4 billion people (including over 500 million children). Their eradication is possible but not profitable.



## Rotten

'There must be something rotten in the very core of a social system which increases its wealth without diminishing its misery...' This comment is as valid today, quite possibly more so, than when it first appeared as part of the introductory sentence to an article penned by Marx in the *New York Daily Tribune* of 16 September 1859. He observed that the 'Irish famine of 1846 killed more than 1,000,000 people, but it killed poor devils only. To the wealth of the country it did not the slightest damage' (*Capital*, Vol. 1, p.658). Fast forward 175 years and we learn that despite the

misery of millions, the 'net worth of US billionaires has soared by \$1 trillion to total of \$4 trillion since pandemic began' (americansfortaxfairness.org, 9 December 2020). 'Their pandemic profits are so immense that America's billionaires could pay for a major Covid relief bill and still not lose a dime of their pre-virus riches. Their wealth growth is so great that they alone could provide a \$3,000 stimulus payment to every man, woman and child in the country, and still be richer than they were nine months ago.' The journalist A R MacLeod tweeted (21 December): 'The word "missile" appears 19 times in the COVID Relief Bill. "Aircraft" appears 208 times. "Munition" 46 times. "weapon" 46 times. "Healthcare" = 24. "doctor"/"nurse" = 5. "masks" = 0.' And asked: 'Who and what exactly is this bill really for?' Indeed.



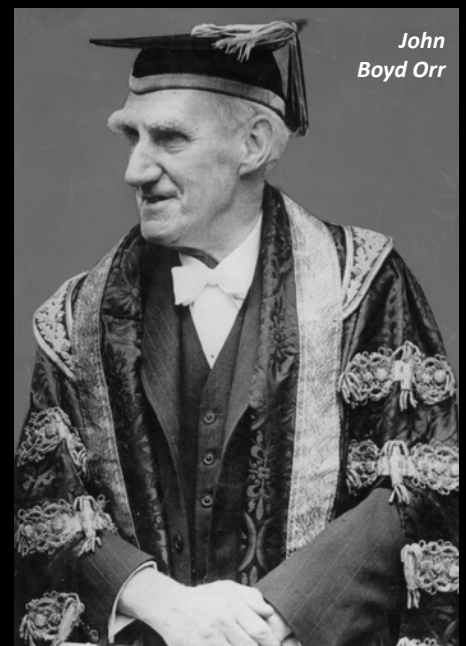
## System

Comparing Boris Johnson's 'incompetence' with that of WWI General Haig, Patrick Cockburn (counterpunch.org, 22 December) writes: 'The estimate for excess deaths in Britain caused by government failings during the first and second waves of the epidemic now total about 50,000 people, adding together the estimates from Sir David King and the *Sunday Times* report, a number that will inevitably increase in the coming months.' Johnson's failings are really those of capitalism at work and are found worldwide. Mexico's excess deaths passed 250,000 in December, and 'Overall, a lower survival from COVID-19 was evident in the poorest population groups. Therefore, combating extreme poverty deserves to be a central prophylactic strategy' (mdlinx.com, 24 December 2020). Mexico is just one of many countries where our class has a worse survival rate because of poverty. Band-aids, whether plasters or pop stars, offer no solution. Neither do platitudes from Oxfam: 'No one should be blocked from getting a life-saving vaccine because of the country they live in or the amount of money in their pocket. But unless something changes dramatically, billions of people around the world will not receive a safe and effective vaccine for COVID-19 for years to come' (medicalnewstoday.com,

18 December). Dr. Rosa Luxemburg offered us a prescription in 1918: 'During the four years of the imperialist slaughter of peoples streams and rivers of blood have flowed. Now we must cherish every drop of this precious juice as in a crystal glass. The most sweeping revolutionary action and the most profound humanity—that is the true spirit of socialism. A whole world is to be changed. But every tear that is shed, when it could have been staunched, accuses us'.

## System change

Professor Riccardo Petrella in an article titled *Health for all?* (wsimag.com, 21 December 2020) writes: 'The fight against impoverishment remains a policy of aid, of charity, not a fight to eradicate the structural factors that cause impoverishment; the countries that signed the Treaty of Paris undertook to allocate 100 billion a year from 2020 to the fight against climate disaster. Well, none of the powerful dare to say where the 100 billion is; we know, however, by whom and where the trillion and 800 billion were spent in 2019 on armaments, 25 percent of which would be enough to cover all the above-mentioned financial needs. Finally, we know that military spending will not decrease in 2020.' John Boyd Orr, former director of the Food and Agriculture Organisation, was candid in stating: 'a world of peace and friendship, a world with the plenty which modern science had made possible was a great ideal. But those in power had no patience with such an ideal. They said it was not practical politics' (*Daily Herald*, 29 July 1948). A post-capitalist world of peace and plenty has long been possible. Let us make it so.



John  
Boyd Orr