

socialist standard

April 2021
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Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement



FREE SPEECH

UNDER ATTACK

from

Left & Right


ABERDEEN UNIVERSITY
STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION

Also:
Warring Windsors



The Dasgupta Review
Questioning Nationality



SOCIALISTS OPPOSE CENSORSHIP



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'

A woman's lot

Every so often a terrible event takes place which reveals the inhuman nature of the capitalist system. In May last year, the killing of George Floyd shone a spotlight on the racism inherent in capitalism. On 3 March this year, the abduction and murder of Sarah Everard, while she was making her way home from a friend's house in South London, laid bare the misogyny and sexism that is rife in modern society. This triggered an outpouring of anger among women at what they see as a society that engenders violence directed at them. This anger was further fuelled when the police roughly handled women attending a vigil in Clapham Common on 13 March, and by the revelation that the alleged killer is a serving police officer.

In the UK last year 118 women were murdered by men. The pandemic has witnessed a spike in instances of violent abuses. According to a YouGov poll, 86 percent of young women in the UK have said that they have experienced sexual harassment, with 71 percent of women of any age reporting the same (Four-fifths of young women in the UK have been sexually harassed, survey finds, *Guardian*,

24 March). There have been rises in the incidence of rape. As the perpetrators are invariably male, the focus has been on male behaviour. So there are suggestions that young boys should be educated at a young age to respect women and girls. The government has proposed sending plain-clothes officers into nightclubs and Jenny Jones of the Green Party advocated a punitive curfew on all men after 6 pm. However, none of these measures address the root of the problem.

If we are to combat misogyny and sexism, we need to look beyond individual male behaviour. With the rise of private property society, descent was traced through the male line, which allowed mainly men to accumulate private wealth and become dominant in the emerging ruling classes. The nuclear family, with the man at its head and the woman's role mainly as mother and housekeeper, became the basic unit of social organisation. As social production moved away from home-based cottage industries to large-scale industry and manufacturing, women's social power was further eroded. Although women have made advances in the better-paid

'professional' occupations and some have become political leaders, women are still disproportionately employed in the lower-paid and less secure jobs and usually earn less than their male counterparts. Under capitalism, women's bodies have been sexualised through the pornography industry and are frequently used for the promotion of commercial products.

This does not mean that women and men have interests that are diametrically opposed to each other. On the contrary, working-class women and men have more in common with each other than they do with their counterparts in the capitalist class. They are both exploited by the capitalist system.

Therefore, working-class women and men must work together, not to work for palliative reforms that only treat the symptoms of the problem, but to get rid of the capitalist system altogether and establish socialism, where everyone, regardless of gender, can participate equally. A political movement where women are not treated as equals is not a revolutionary socialist one.

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PATHFINDERS

THE PRICE OF EVERYTHING

LAST YEAR, you will not be astonished to learn, a great many peer-reviewed research papers on Covid-19 were published. Upwards of 75,000, to be exact, with another 10,000 or so available on pre-print servers, i.e. awaiting peer review (*New Scientist*, 16 December - bit.ly/2OwgvqM). Great, you might think. The brainiacs of the world rolling up their sleeves and getting down to business on a somewhat pressing matter. The world of science should be delighted.

Er, not exactly. Papers are being shunted out at the rate of 4,000 a week, and who can possibly read all that? Scientists say they're not reading but drowning, and they want new smart tools to wade through it all (bit.ly/3bNJIGD).

But still, it's been an unusual year, so you'd expect a tsunami of research papers, wouldn't you? Actually, this is no different from any other year. Scientists have for a long time been decrying their 'attention decay' in the midst of an ever-increasing flood of academic studies (*Independent*, 11 March 2015 - bit.ly/3eEQiB0). And their libraries need a lot of magazine subscriptions too. No one knows how many scientific journals there are, but several estimates point to around 30,000, with close to two million articles published each year (bit.ly/2OrH4h4).

Alright, but presumably all this stuff must get read eventually?

Again no. A 2007 study estimated that half of all academic papers are read by only three people, their author, and two journal editors (*Smithsonian Magazine*, 25 March 2014 - bit.ly/3csJpiG).

Yes, but all the same, it's all worthwhile research, isn't it?

You'd presume so. But a recent discussion with a friendly in-house editor in the field of epidemiology sheds a somewhat different light on things. It seems that much of what gets sent to high-impact journals is, basically, pretty low grade. An editor's job is to decide which papers are worth sending out for peer review, but this editor says that 85-90% of the papers she receives effectively 'go in the bin', with only around 10-15% going out to peer review. Some journals save money by not bothering with an in-house sifting process, and send everything straight out to review, but this inevitably creates a bottleneck. And reviewers, it needs to be borne in mind, don't get paid, their motivation being assumed to be keeping abreast of new developments in

the field. If they have to provide detailed recommendations on papers that should have been 'binned' by the journal's editor, that's less overall incentive for the reviewer and more useful research time wasted.

That might just be one overworked and jaded view though?

Not according to psychologist Stuart Ritchie: 'We think of science as being this objective thing that [...] produces all these scientific papers, which are almost sacred things. But a lot of people don't see how the sausage is made. [...] In a lot of cases, the science is useless, not worth the paper it is written on' (*New Scientist*, 19 August 2020 - bit.ly/3qLYDoZ). In his view, the review system isn't up to much either.

Even if reviewers try to check, they usually can't get access to the raw data, so they can't really verify what they're reading. And on top of that, they can often guess where a paper has come from, despite the supposed anonymity, so bias can creep in.

But even so, it can't be right that people are writing useless papers, surely? What incentive is there to do that? Are they simply incompetent? Here the in-house editor becomes especially illuminating. To paraphrase the conversation: 'You have to understand how the system works. The way academics are judged is in terms of publications. These days, most staff in university departments don't have tenure, they have to write funding bids to cover their wages. If they are managing research projects, they have to write even more extravagant funding bids to cover their workers' wages as well as their own. Funding agencies get their money ultimately from the government, and they are also under the cosh to justify what they have funded. How do they do that? By promising the government 'deliverables'. What are these deliverables? Generally, academic papers. Government bean-counters aren't best placed to tell good papers from bad, so it becomes a matter of 'never mind the quality, feel the width'. The upshot is that researchers pay the rent by writing vast numbers of papers, many of which will never be read. The whole thing is a funding merry-go-round, driven not by the needs of science so much as the needs of people to chase their next pay cheque.'

To make matters worse, there's a growing trend in doctoral education to dispense with the traditional PhD dissertation and replace it with the requirement for doctoral students to

publish several articles based on their research in academic journals, in effect moving responsibility for evaluating doctoral research from university committees to journal editors and reviewers' (bit.ly/2OwkAv6). So much for the appliance of science.

Well ok, but papers are at least reliable because they're full of citations of other work, right? Right, but 90 percent of papers are never cited at all (*Smithsonian*, above), so citations tend to come disproportionately from a very few papers. Then these citations in turn spawn further citations, in an ever lengthening and uncritical chain, until the original paper can end up all but forgotten.

To give one example, low-fat diets have been a nutritional shibboleth for decades, yet when the lo-carb craze kicked off a few years ago and sent seismic shocks through the weight loss industry, some researchers actually looked again at the published research on dietary fat. It turned out that all the established 'knowledge' about fats in diets, and the official advice given by the US and UK for decades, stemmed from just 6 studies in the 1970s. Even those studies were heavily qualified by the researchers at the time, with some saying dietary advice based on them should never have been issued (bit.ly/2Nilfzl). What everyone assumed was rock-solid science in reality stood on very shaky foundations.

Wasted effort is bad enough at the best of times, but when humans are faced with a crisis on the scale of the Covid pandemic, capitalism's cash-fixated approach to science reveals itself as hopelessly inept. It's a no-brainer to say that researchers should not write bad papers in the first place. But for that to happen, the pressure for funding would have to come off, so that they could stop chasing their own tails. Could capitalism do this? Unlikely. It hates unquantifiable returns. As they say about cynics, it knows the price of everything, and the value of nothing. But socialism, by making everything free, would do it at a stroke, scrap the entire byzantine funding hierarchy, from government down, and scrap the capitalist money system that engenders the whole ludicrous business. Then researchers would be able to focus on the real work of expanding our knowledge, instead of churning out sops to fulfil the next funding bid.

PJS

Was Trump a fascist?

Dear Editors,

I subscribe to the *Socialist Standard* (and in former years to the *Western Socialist*) and reside in Boston, US. I am writing in response to articles in the Standards of Sept, Oct, and Dec 2020 concerning the Tweedle-Dee and Tweedle-Dum ness of the US presidential candidates.

As soon as I was old enough to vote I enthusiastically voted for Democrat Lyndon Johnson for president and two years later for Republican Ed Brooke for US senate because both had proclaimed themselves peace candidates while running against open warmongers. Shortly after the votes were counted both turned into war candidates. I grew wise to the shell game and between 1966 and 2020 never voted for a Democrat or Republican for any but the most local offices. Over the years I cast ballots only for candidates promoting socialism of various sorts.

This election I voted for Biden with no illusions that he would other than avidly promote the interests of the capitalists and likely engage in more antagonistic relations with Russia and maybe the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The reason I cast that ballot was that Trump was openly indicating that he was moving towards creating a fascist dictatorship. Hardly a joking matter.

In your editorial 'How real is democracy today?' you state '... we must not read into this that capitalist democracy is a sham that workers should have nothing to do with ... the workers were not handed their democratic rights on a plate, they had to struggle for them...' These rights: speech, assembly, religion, freedom from unreasonable search & seizure and the rest are extremely valuable and deserve being protected – to that end I have membership of the American Civil Liberties Union. The state is regularly engaged in attacking these rights but the system of capitalist democracy allows workers space to organize. Hitler, Mussolini, Franco showed us what fascism is. When a Trump is openly threatening such a thing I decided a vote for Biden was a wise thing.

Fraternally

STEVE KELLERMAN

PS For a stunning depiction of life in a free society I recommend the novel *Bread and Wine* by Ignazio Silone.

Reply:

You say that Trump was 'openly indicating that he was moving towards creating a fascist dictatorship' and that this was 'hardly a joking matter'. Apart from the fact that little that capitalist leaders do is 'a joking matter' and indeed can sometimes be a matter of life and death for workers, this does not mean that one of these leaders can at will take over the state and set up a fascist regime, Hitler or Mussolini-style. As recent articles in the *Socialist Standard* have pointed out, the US, as a developed capitalist state with a longstanding electoral process, has a well-entrenched mechanism for preventing an individual from exercising unrestrained personal power. The result of the November election helps to illustrate that, but, even had it gone the other way, Trump, despite his rhetoric and all else, would still not have been able to set up his own autocratic rule. In fact he would have stumbled on, attempting, always unsuccessfully, to tame the capitalism system and the anarchic market forces which dictate its ups and downs, much the same as Biden is doing now. You are right to say that capitalist democracy, limited as it is, 'allows

workers space to organise', and this is important and essential so that workers can plan for a society to supersede capitalism and be able to vote to set up that society when they decide to do so. However, we cannot agree that Trump could have seriously carried out threats to remove workers' space to organise (i.e. their long established democratic 'rights') and to close down the American electoral system. Did he even make such threats? So, given that such a thing was not seriously on the agenda, a vote for Biden was indeed a vote for Tweedledee.

You are right to say that Biden's policies may well be more anti-Russian and anti-North Korean than Trump's, but all this is part of the international capitalist power game to gain influence over trade routes, raw materials and markets. And since the rulers of all these countries are playing that same power game, we should neither support or sympathise with any of them and certainly not suggest, as you seem to be doing, that there is anything in the least 'socialist' or 'democratic' in the horribly misnamed 'People's Democratic Republic of Korea'.

As a long-time reader of the *Socialist Standard*, you will obviously know about the kind of socialist society we advocate – moneyless, wageless, marketless and based on common ownership, social cooperation and free access. In view of this it seems a little surprising that you should view Ignazio Silone's novel *Bread and Wine* as 'a stunning depiction of life in a free society'. Our reading of it is that it is the story of a brave individual desperately struggling to survive in the genuinely fascist society that was Italy in the 1930s. – Editors.



Credit: Alisdare Hickson

COOKING THE BOOKS

Tories increase tax on profits

One of the surprising measures announced by Rishi Sunak in his budget on 3 March was the increase of corporation tax from its current level of 19 percent to 25 percent in 2023. Corporation tax is a direct tax on profits, so not something to be expected from the traditional party of Big Business.

Rumours that this might be on the cards completely wrong-footed the Labour Party. Keith Starmer had asked Johnston at PMQs on 24 February whether he would not 'agree with me today that now is not the time for tax increases for families and businesses'. This led to an article in *The Times* the following day headed 'Tory rebels and Labour ready to block corporation tax increase'. To be fair, this brought protests from some Labour MPs who remembered that in its manifesto for the 2019 general election the Labour Party had proposed to increase corporation tax to 26 percent.

Starmer backed down but the fact that he was prepared to present Labour

as a defender of Big Business and its profits showed the extent to which the Labour Party is committed to maintaining capitalism more or less as it is (as well as assuring the capitalist class that their interests will be in a safe pair of hands if he becomes Prime Minister). Given this, Starmer's position was not without logic: if you support capitalism, driven as it is by the pursuit of profits, and wish to take on the responsibility of administering it, you have to accept that profits have to be allowed.

Sunak's defence to business for raising the tax on their profits from 2023 was that in the intervening two years they could get a generous tax break on new investment in equipment and machinery. According to another cabinet minister, Oliver Dowden, businesses 'are sitting on very large amounts of cash' (*Times*, 11 March); in other words, on profits that have not been re-invested. The aim of the so-called 'super-deduction' is to get business to invest these, a recognition that what in the end drives growth is business investment rather than consumer spending. With the lifting of the anti-covid restrictions, consumer spending will grow next year but, as Philip Aldrick, the

economics editor of *The Times*, pointed out very pertinently:

'The rescue should ensure that the consumer, who accounts for two thirds of national output, is able to start up the economic engine. The more difficult bit is keeping it going. That requires business investment. There, the chancellor unveiled a big new policy – a temporary two-year capital 'super-deduction'. For every pound spent on machinery or equipment, a company will be able to get 25p back in lower corporation taxes. Unlike any previous recession, businesses, in aggregate, have built up a £100 billion cash buffer. The government wants them to spend it' (*Times*, 4 March).

No doubt they will spend some of it, but this 'big new policy' is yet another measure to try to get a horse to drink. Just as horses won't drink unless they are thirsty so businesses won't invest unless there's a prospect of profit. The super-deduction might not work, any more than low interest rates or quantitative easing have. Business will invest but will it be more than they would have done anyway? That depends on the prospect of profit which no government can control.



World Socialist

The new quarterly journal of the World Socialist Party of the United States is being printed in London

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Socialist Election Activity

In the elections on 6 May the Socialist Party is contesting the Cardiff Central seat in the Welsh Assembly and two wards in Folkestone in the Kent County Council elections. Some 43,000 election manifestos will be distributed in Cardiff by Royal Mail while in Kent about 26,500 electors will be offered the choice of voting Socialist.

'Great Resets'

The pandemic has led to much thrilling talk about Great Resets and rethinking the future. Wales's 6th election since devolution is taking place on 6 May. Do you think that's going to cause a Great Reset or even much change at all?

You know very well it won't.

And why not?

Because most of the candidates don't want change. Instead they will be wittering on about how they propose to fix the faulty system we live under - capitalism - so it's maybe a tiny bit better for you and yours. But every politician says this. In every party. In every election. And they never really fix anything.

The reason they can't fix capitalism's problems is because capitalism IS the problem.

If you want to vote for these hopeless 'fixers' on 6 May, go right ahead. If you expect change, don't hold your breath.

But one of the candidates isn't saying any of this. Brian Johnson of the Socialist Party of Great Britain says you can't fix capitalism, because it only works for the tiny minority who possess most of the wealth. And if you can't fix it, you certainly shouldn't vote for it.

Especially as there's an alternative.

Capitalism has revolutionised our science and technology so that we can now produce a global sufficiency of the basics of life. That means we could abolish buying and selling, take the world back from the rich, and run it collectively as a communally owned resource.

It's not 'human nature' that's causing poverty, inequality, wars and global warming. It's the fact that we have a 21st century planet being trashed by an obsolete 19th-century economic system that gives all the power to the tiny minority.

Universal free access would be simpler, cheaper, faster, smarter, a genuine Great Reset.

Vote for Brian Johnson if you like the idea of real change.

Alternatively, there's always your trusty 'fixers'.

Further information and offers of help: botterillr@gmail.com Phone: 02920-615826.

We can do better than this!

The residents of Folkestone know all too well the powerlessness of life under capitalism. The system that demands that nothing is made, built or planted unless someone, somewhere can profit from it.

The construction of monstrous blocks of 'high end' apartments along Marine Parade – with the harbour next - have nothing to do with solving Folkestone's housing crisis, and everything to do with raking in huge profits for developers. Developers are not paid to care about the homeless, those living in sub-standard accommodation or the young struggling to afford rocketing private rents at a time of rising unemployment and economic crisis.

But it's easy to blame developers. They are as much at the mercy of the profit system as the rest of us - although their wealth cushions them from its worst effects. Doubtless they would much rather build beautiful homes that fit the scale of Folkestone and meet the needs of local people. But that's not why houses are built under capitalism.

Now imagine a society where all of us, not just in Folkestone but across the world, actually own the resources of the world. Where we decide together what we build based on people's needs, not just the demands of the profit system. Then what could Marine Parade, the harbour and Princes Parade look like?

In this election only the Socialist Party stands for the total abolition of the profit system and its replacement by a global society based on the common ownership and democratic control of all the resources of our amazing planet.

It's time to consign capitalism to the dustbin of history.

Further information and offers of help: Email: spgb.ksrb@worldsocialism.org Mobile: 07971 71556

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

All meetings online during the pandemic.
See page 23.

LONDON

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

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

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

MIDLANDS

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

NORTH

North East Regional branch.

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

Lancaster branch. Meets 3rd Mon, 3pm, Friends Meeting House, Meeting House Lane. Ring to confirm: P. Shannon, 07510 412 261, spgb.lancaster@worldsocialism.org.

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

Bolton. Contact: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589.

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

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

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

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

South West regional branch. Meets 3rd Sat. 2pm at the Railway Tavern, 131 South Western Road, Salisbury SP2 7RR.

Contact: Stephen Harper spgbsw@gmail.com
Brighton. Contact: Anton Pruden, anton@pruden.me

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

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

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

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

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

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

IRELAND

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

NORTHERN IRELAND

Belfast Contact: Nigel McCullough. 02890 930002

SCOTLAND

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

The Quaker Hall, Victoria Terrace (above Victoria Street), Edinburgh. Contact: J. Moir. 0131 440 0995. jimmyjmoir73@gmail.com
Branch website: <http://geocities.com/edinburghbranch/>

Glasgow branch. Meets 1st and 3rd Tues. at 7pm in Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road, Glasgow. Contact: Peter Hendrie, 75 Lairhills Road, East Kilbride, Glasgow G75 0LH. 01355 903105. peter.anna.hendrie@blueyonder.co.uk.

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

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

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

WALES

South Wales Branch (Swansea)

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

South Wales Branch (Cardiff)

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

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

INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS

LATIN AMERICA

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Zambia. Contact: Kephass Mulenga, PO Box 280168, Kitwe.

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

EUROPE

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Germany. Contact: Norbert. weltsozialismus@gmx.net

Norway. Contact: Robert Stafford. hallblithe@yahoo.com

Italy. Contact: Gian Maria Freddi, Via Poiano n. 137, 37142 Verona.

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

COMPANION PARTIES OVERSEAS

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

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

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

PUBLICATIONS

PAMPHLETS (£4.00 each unless stated otherwise)

- ☐ What's Wrong With Using Parliament? (£2.50)
- ☐ Ecology and Socialism
- ☐ From Capitalism to Socialism (£3.50)
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- ☐ An Inconvenient Question
- ☐ Sylvia Pankhurst on Socialism (£3.00)
- ☐ Why Socialists Oppose Zionism & Anti-Semitism (£3.50)
- ☐ Rosa Luxemburg on Socialism
- ☐ The Magic Money Myth

NAME:

BOOKS

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MATERIAL WORLD

The 'Polar Silk Road'

GREENLAND IS a self-governing territory of Denmark, and has a Gross Domestic Product of around \$3 billion – similar to the Faroe Islands, another semi-autonomous Danish possession. That GDP is about to change if the multinational mining corporations have their way. Various mining companies are vying for mining rights. Greenland's royalties expect to be around 1.5 billion Danish crowns (\$245 million) each year from a Chinese-linked corporation – equivalent to roughly 15 percent of Greenland's public spending, such revenues could give it leverage over politics in Greenland. Already disputes on policies towards mining have caused ructions within Greenland's government.

Greenland possesses vast resources of metals known as 'rare earths,' the world's biggest undeveloped deposits, according to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). They are crucial in modern technology manufacturing and the renewable energy industry. The prices of many rare earth elements have jumped in anticipation of rising demand for electric vehicles. China accounts for about 90 percent of global supply and back in 2010 China threatened to cut off its sale of rare earth metals to Japan so there exists concerns about the need to reduce reliance upon China. Other states require a counterbalance to any market control that could be exerted by a single large producer and Greenland's huge deposits could secure a solution for many years to come. Always with an eye for valuable real estate, Trump in 2019 offered to buy the island (In 1946 Harry S. Truman offered Denmark \$100 million for it.) A year after Trump's failed bid, the United States announced a \$12.1 million economic aid package for Greenland to increase its influence.

Apart from its potential assets another reason for American renewed interest is that China is expanding its interests in Greenland. China views Greenland as a part of what they call the 'Polar Silk Road' and one of the interested mining companies happens to be partly Chinese-owned. China may be a thousand miles away but as the second largest economy in

the world, it has no intention of being left out in the cold. Klaus Dodds, professor of geopolitics at Royal Holloway, University of London, explained 'The Chinese have made no secret that they have their eyes on the Arctic's fish and minerals.'

In 2016, Denmark reversed plans to sell a former naval command centre after a Hong Kong-based company, General Nice Group, emerged as a bidder. Later in 2018, the then US Defense Secretary James Mattis successfully pressured Denmark not to allow China to finance three commercial airports on Greenland, over fears they could give Beijing a military foothold.

'China can access Arctic resources through foreign investment,' Michael Byers, an Arctic expert at the University of British Columbia said. 'And foreign investment is a lot cheaper than trying to conquer something.'

Whereas environmentalists fear large-scale mining could harm the remote island's pristine eco-system, many of the 56,000 Greenlanders, while worried about pollution, see mining as the key to develop their economy which will end the economic dependence upon Denmark and set Greenland on the road to full sovereignty. Long before the UK's Brexit, Greenland held a referendum and subsequently

withdrew from the EU in 1985.

'An independent Greenland could, for example, offer basing rights to either Russia or China or both,' said Fen Hampson, head of the international security programme at the Canadian Centre for International Governance Innovation think tank, noting the desire by some to fully secede from Denmark. 'I am not saying this would happen, but it is a scenario that would have major geo-strategic implications, especially if the Northwest Passage becomes a transit route for shipping, which is what is happening in the Russian Arctic.'

The melting ice means long-distance sea passages, such as the Northern Sea Route (NSR) from eastern Siberia to the North Atlantic, are increasingly navigable. Sailing a container ship from China to northern Europe via the NSR can substantially shorten the journey time via the Indian Ocean and Suez canal.

All this competition over territory, trade routes, resources and mining rights are disputes about the division of spoils between our masters. It is they and not us who exercise power. Our Greenland fellow-workers will eventually come to comprehend that their 'independence' will be in name only and should not be fooled by extravagant promises and lucrative pledges.

ALJO

China's polar extension to Silk Road



NOTE: September is the end of summer in the North Pole when the frozen lid of sea ice tends to shrink to its smallest. Unlike the Antarctica, there is no land under the frozen Arctic ice.
Sources: CHINA'S NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND REFORM COMMISSION, THE ARCTIC INSTITUTE, NATIONAL SNOW AND ICE DATA CENTRE, REUTERS STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

WARRING WINDSORS

Some socialists will have loftily ignored last month's media frenzy over the Meghan and Harry interview, dismissing it as puerile celebrity trivia of no concern to socialist revolutionaries. Quite right too. But some of us were probably glued to our TVs, agog for scurrilous gossip, just like hundreds of millions of others around the world. Everyone loves a bit of scandal.

Socialists will not be surprised to find ruling class families with their knives stuck in each other's backs. If history for workers has always primarily meant the history of inter-class struggle, for the dominant class it's been a history of intra-class struggle, involving war, betrayal, adultery, child murder, gluttony, poisonings, incest, rape and every other depravity by which they fancy themselves our social betters. Maybe the UK royals don't murder each other as much as they used to but make no mistake, underneath each Windsor breast beats the icy heart of a Plantagenet or a Borgia.

But two things really do baffle socialists. The first thing is how they, with the backing of their fawning media admirers, can possibly carry off the effrontery of describing themselves as 'working royals'. This audacious bit of stagecraft can surely only succeed through a collective willingness to redefine the word 'work' out of all recognition. These coddled, self-important parasites are given everything they could possibly want, riches, luxury, sycophantic adulation at every turn, and yet it's still not enough for them. Now they have to take from us the only thing they don't possess – the right to call themselves workers. Never mind that they live on rent from land ownership and interest from investments, and in some cases profit from business deals, to say nothing of the roughly £100m a year for the 'Sovereign Fund', and never mind the untold

(literally, because it's a secret) private royal wealth and assets.

Nope, just like anything's a poem or a piece of art nowadays if somebody says it is, and anyone's a woman if they say they are, a royal is a worker if they self-identify as such. Perhaps us workers should all self-identify as royals in that case (probably true, genetically speaking), and demand to be treated as their social equals in turn.

The other baffling thing is why we are still having this discussion, in an advanced capitalist country in the 21st century. There are hardly any royal families left anymore as countries around the world have sensibly dispensed with such archaic mediaevalisms. But not the UK. When King Farouk of Egypt was overthrown and forced to abdicate in 1952, he is supposed to have remarked that soon there would only be five kings left in the world, the kings of England, Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds and Spades.

This is something socialists find genuinely hard to understand. Of course we know it's all wrapped up with rabid nationalism by red-top readers and those of the *Daily Heil*, but you don't need royalty for rabid nationalism, as shown

by Trump supporters in the US or those of Marine Le Pen in France. And incidentally, tourism seems to rub along just fine in those two republican countries.

The anachronistic 'batshit' of it all was entertainingly summed up by Patrick Freyne in the *Irish Times*: 'The contemporary royals have no real power. They serve entirely to enshrine classism in the British nonconstitution. They live in high luxury and low autonomy, cosplaying as their ancestors, and are the subject of constant psychosocial projection from people mourning the loss of empire' (8 March - bit.ly/3l5dXvL).

Even so, this hardly explains the global fascination with the UK royalty. Joking aside about the average intelligence of the UK royal-lover, what's in it for the gawping masses in other countries? Presumably the Hollywood fairytale of it all. In capitalism, in theory, anyone can get rich through hard work. In practice everyone knows that's a load of hokum. But in a fairytale, anyone just might fall in love with a handsome prince or princess, and be swept off their feet to an orchestral score and a shower of Disney fireworks, and what's not to love about that?

What's also intriguing is what the rest of the ruling class get out of the royals, given that the 'taxpayers' money that

pays for them really derives from the business owners. No doubt the British state, having little overseas influence and even less since Brexit, and virtually no military capability worth talking about, relies heavily on the prestige of old tradition, and UK industry too sees a commercial virtue in being touched with the fairy dust of royal patronage. The prestige of a thousand-year rule is a marketable asset that Trump, for all his money and self-aggrandisement, just couldn't buy. Next to the British royals, even the most respectable global politician looks like a

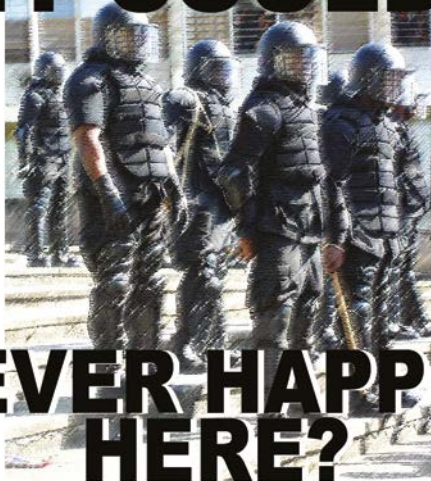
jumped-up used-car salesman. But are they really worth the considerable fortune the capitalist class pays them every year to perform merely light ceremonial tasks?

Well, it doesn't really concern socialists either way, in one sense. Republican countries are just as capitalist and just as brutal to their workers as monarchical ones, and sometimes more so, which is why we wouldn't bother advocating republican reform. A commodity is no more socialist for being royalty-free. But it makes you think, doesn't it? If workers are so mesmerised by tinsel and glitter that they can't even agree to put a bunch of pampered parasites out to grass in favour of someone who, for all their capitalist faults, is at least electable, they're probably not going to support a socialist revolution anytime soon. At the moment, the republican voice is fairly quiet, despite these latest public squabbles by the royals, and egregious accusations of child sex that have done the rounds lately. But if the voice grows again, and swells to a chorus, socialists can at least see that as an encouraging sign.

PJS



IT COULD



NEVER HAPPEN HERE?

It may not have not escaped the notice of some, the irony of the police response to the vigil for Sarah Everard on Clapham Common. There were scenes of big burly policemen man-handling women, peacefully gathered to mourn the death of Sarah a 33-year-old woman snatched from the street and murdered, allegedly by an off-duty police officer. Women not only came to mourn but to express their anger over domestic violence, street harassment and sexual assault, mainly perpetrated by men against women and girls. The protest had been ruled unlawful due to the restrictions of the 2020 Coronavirus legislation, but women obviously felt that this was too important to adhere to the rules. Also in March a 61-year old nurse was issued with a £10,000 fine for organising a demonstration of about 40 people protesting against the government's paltry 1 percent pay increase for NHS workers.

Governments need to keep control, even if this means quashing dissent and stifling anti-establishment ideas. States are passing ever more draconian laws, whittling away perceived freedoms workers think they have. Laws that are rushed through in response to calamities like the attack on the USA Twin Towers and the Coronavirus pandemic were and are supposed to be temporary, however, these laws so often never get repealed.

The USA Patriot Act, designed to counteract terrorism, was signed into law by George Bush in October 2001 six weeks after the attack on the towers. The Act expanded the abilities of law enforcement for surveillance, including the tapping of domestic and international phones, and abuses of the Act led to government spying on innocent individuals. It had to be periodically reviewed because of concerns that certain provisions could be used to violate privacy rights. Most of the Act, however, been written into permanent law.

In 2020 the UK Coronavirus Act over-rode Articles 10 and 11 of the Human Rights Act which refer to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly and association. *The Guardian* (3 November) commented:

'Protections for protestors are set to be removed from the Coronavirus rules under the second national lockdown. An exemption that permits demonstrations to take place with additional conditions to mitigate the spread of the virus is expected to be omitted from fresh regulations being drawn up from this Thursday. The police had allowed and facilitated some demonstrations, however there have been questions as to whether the prohibitions on demonstrations were impartially and proportionately policed.'

Once the pandemic has subsided and we go back to no restrictions as promised, one wonders whether these laws will be repealed or will they be dragged out every time there is a

demo or protest, citing health concerns.

Under the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, currently going through parliament, protestors causing 'annoyance' could theoretically be jailed for up to 10 years. The government has passed almost 400 new laws and regulations in the past year, only a few of which have been approved by parliament.

Online social media groups are now being censored. The Department for Education has instructed schools not to use materials from organisations working to overthrow capitalism.. There have been state shut-downs of the internet all over the world. Protestors have been using the internet to organise online and to assemble and protest offline. Governments are increasingly resorting to shutdowns in times of crisis, arguing they are necessary for public safety or curbing the spread of misinformation. Misinformation potentially meaning information contrary to what the government wants you to have. The worst offender is not some openly authoritarian state but India, the so-called 'largest democracy in the world'. In Germany Netz GD is a network enforcement law which compels social media companies to remove 'hate speech' and other illegal content, illegal content as defined in the 22 provisions of the criminal code. This has been criticised by the Human Rights Watch saying 'this law sets a dangerous precedent for other governments to restrict speech online by forcing companies to censor on the government's behalf'.

In China the citizen identification number system or ID card is the only acceptable document used for everything from opening a bank account to registering for a mobile phone. It is used to buy train tickets and pass through security checkpoints and can be inspected by police for any reason; these cards also state the holder's ethnic identity. Boris Johnson had at one time scoffed at the idea of ID cards and referring to China said it would never happen in Britain. At the moment we have to have special permission by way of a form or permit to travel out of the country, reminding one of the old USSR. There is the ongoing debate in parliament regarding the introduction of health passports which seem highly likely now despite murmurings to the contrary.

How long before these 'ID' cards carry more information than our supposedly private health status?

At the moment surveillance technology is mostly used for law enforcement and selling us stuff but information could theoretically be shared with companies or departments without our permission and used to monitor us.

An article in the *South China Post* (18 November) tells us:

'Facial recognition technology has been increasingly deployed by countries to secure access and improve surveillance especially during the pandemic. The technology is controversial not just because data leaks are common but because of its potential to exacerbate racial or gender biases' (bit.ly/30VRHeD).

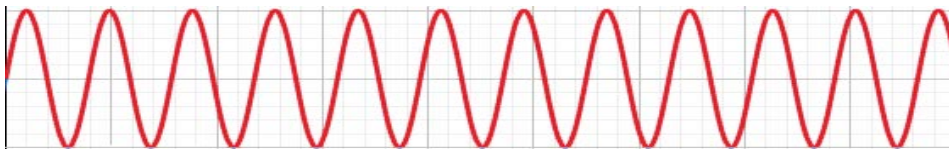
In the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests, several companies including IBM, Microsoft and Amazon announced they would either pause selling their facial recognition technology or stop producing it entirely.

We are now encouraged to snitch on our neighbours for not following the rules, snitching on those in receipt of 'undeserving' benefits or lately on Covid 'non conformers'. Workers turning on workers leaving the establishment unfettered.

The Socialist Party does not advocate reforms but we do denounce the worst excesses the state can dish out. What we cannot afford is complacency and the conviction that it could never happen here.

CARLA D

SOCIALISM, F



'CANCEL

Ten years ago, I found myself the recipient of several angry emails, all sent to my work email address. My crime had been to write a letter to a student newspaper in which I criticised a student's proposal to make it compulsory for university staff to wear a red poppy. The details of this affair aren't relevant here and my opinions about the red poppy are easy to find elsewhere (in summary: no communist or socialist should have anything to do with the thing). Presumably unaware of the irony, one outraged nationalist emailed me to say that the Second World War was justified, since it guaranteed 'the freedoms that we enjoy today', and also wrote to my line manager recommending that I be disciplined for asserting otherwise. For many on the right, this is what free speech really means: freedom of speech for me and for the people who agree with me.

But some – perhaps an increasing number – of those on the left of politics are also eager to no-platform or 'cancel' their real or supposed ideological opponents. Weaker manifestations of cancel culture include ostracism, blanking, ghosting and gossip-mongering – the tactics of an online left that often seems hellbent on plumbing the depths of infantilism, narcissism and moralism. Sometimes leftists go even further, attacking the validity of free expression itself and seeking to curtail it. In the 'wokest' corners of the web today, appeals to the principle of free discourse are often mockingly parsed as 'muh freeze peach' and the essential foundation of radical political debate – being able to write or say what you think in dialogue with (or opposition to) others – is more and more ridiculed as the outdated obsession of centrist squares, out-of-touch boomers, or, to use the argot, 'literal fascists'.

Left-wing suspicion of free speech is nothing new. To cite a classic example, Herbert Marcuse's essay on 'Repressive Tolerance' (1965) attempted to justify the denial of freedom of speech and organisation to 'groups and movements which

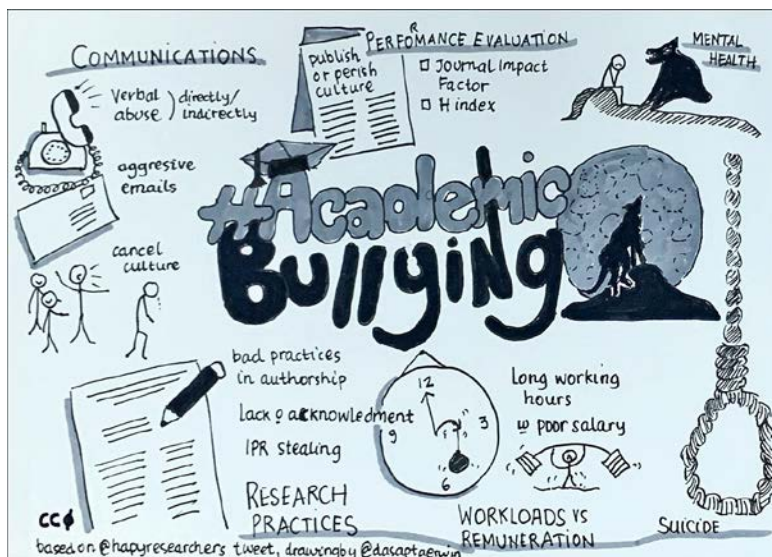
promote aggressive policies, armament, chauvinism, discrimination on the grounds of race or religion'. Such groups and movements are still with us, of course, and they should be countered

at every turn. But we would argue that for socialists, it doesn't make sense to suppress repellent social and political views – something Marcuse himself recognised would be 'undemocratic' (albeit, in his view, a necessary step towards achieving a more genuine democracy). In general terms, expressions of prejudice and hatred should be permitted, not because there exists some ideal 'free market of ideas', but because it is only by discussing and debating them that their vile nature can be exposed. As John Milton famously put it in his *Areopagitica* 'Let [Truth] and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter? Her confuting is the best and surest suppressing'.

We understand the appeal of cancel culture. After all, many of the most prominent free speech advocates in today's public sphere are unpleasant conservatives such as Toby Young, who seems to pop up every five minutes on a British television channel to complain that *you can't say anything these days*. But we should not embrace cancel culture just because right wingers oppose it. For one thing, free speech, as Thomas Scanlon argued long ago, is a good in itself, regardless of any consequences its exercise might have: this is because freedom of expression – including the freedom to hear *others'* speech and make judgements about it – is important to us as rational, autonomous persons who can and should be able to make up our own minds about particular issues.

Moreover, it's not clear that cancelling even works very well. The conservative and alt-right wingnuts and hatemongers who complain the loudest about being no-platformed – we're thinking here of Young, Katie Hopkins and Tommy Robinson – are actually well-connected and powerful operators who, when cancelled, usually have little difficulty in finding alternative outlets for their opinions. Depriving such characters of their platforms is therefore generally counter-productive: all too often, it only allows them (and their deluded working-class supporters) to posture as the victims of a left-wing PC purge before trotting off to their next lucrative media gig. Cancellation does not starve these toxic edgelords of the oxygen of publicity; quite the opposite, in fact.

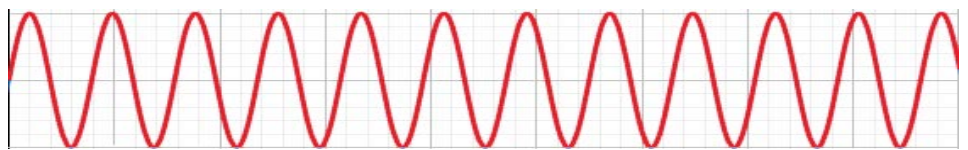
And what about the less elevated targets of



FREE SPEECH



CULTURE'



cancel culture? Cancellation can be devastating for the less well-connected. It is becoming quite commonplace for ordinary people who offend against dominant public opinion on issues such as trans

rights or Brexit to suffer reputational damage or to lose work and income. And there is little doubt that such personal and financial ruination is often intended by the cancellers. Indeed, the hostile environment created by cancellation aligns perfectly with the individualist, aggressive, competitive dynamics of contemporary capitalism – the ‘abyss of failed sociality’ as Axel Honneth has so cheerily put it – and the social sadism and ‘humiliation’ that now mars large parts of mainstream media culture.

On social media, cancel culture often involves the vicious policing of speech, pile-ons and denials-of-service for the most minor of offences against political orthodoxy by relatively powerless individuals. As Kristina Harrison has put it, cancel culture, in its dismissal of nuance and dissent, tends to elevate ‘not debate and politics but moral absolutism, authoritarianism and hysteria, the tools of the witch-hunter’. Like the witch-hunter, the canceller moves readily between criticising the ambiguous behaviours or statements of her targets to making essentialist assertions about them, so that public figures or social media influencers who make misguided, ambiguous or problematic remarks about, say, racial or trans issues automatically *become* racists or transphobes. This point was made well by the late Mark Fisher in his critique of left-wing call-out culture, ‘Exiting the Vampire’s Castle’. Veteran BreadTuber Natalie Wynn (aka. Contrapoints), herself a prominent cancelllee, makes the same and many other points in her far-reaching critique of the same.

And it should go without saying that Karl Marx himself would not have been impressed by no-platforming and cancel culture, although some leftists seem to be confused about this. A meme recently on Facebook consists of a four-panel cartoon depicting alt-lite rent-a-gob Milo Yiannopoulos moaning to Karl Marx about violations of his freedom of speech. In the final panel of the sketch, Marx silently picks up Milo and throws him over a cliff-top. It’s a fun image, to be sure; but it’s also misleading. In reality, Marx fiercely defended freedom of speech. In ‘On the Freedom of the Press’ (1842), for example,

Marx, with his usual sarcasm, ventriloquised the Prussian press censors of his day, mocking their hypocrisy: ‘Freedom of the press is a fine thing. But there are also bad persons, who misuse speech to tell lies and the brain to plot. Speech and thought would be fine things if only there were no bad persons to misuse them!’ In fact, Marx opposed censorship throughout his life. And anybody suspecting Marx of capitulating to liberalism in this regard should think again. As Eric Heinze argues, Marx defended free speech not as a bourgeois right, but as something more fundamental: a foundational philosophical praxis that makes possible the very discussion of rights.

Today, we socialists make up a tiny minority of the population and we have very little political and social clout. To change this situation, we need to be able to explain to other members of the working class what socialism is and why everybody will benefit from it. Sometimes this seems like an impossible task: even in relatively ‘open’, liberal societies, the major media organisations, as well as all the other institutions of capitalism, are overwhelmingly ranged against us and communist ideas are vilified, marginalised and misrepresented in both right- and left-wing media. But we must make use of whatever relatively democratic spaces and opportunities do exist to shout about socialism. To attempt to deny free speech to our opponents simply on the grounds that they hold repellent or false views, meanwhile, would be unprincipled and counter-productive; ultimately, it would only make it even easier than it already is for those in power to silence us.

S.H.



Biodiversity Loss and the Capitalist Economy



The Dasgupta Review: 600 pages on how capitalism destroys Nature, with no mention of capitalism

In February a 600-page review commissioned by the Treasury titled ‘The Economics of Biodiversity’ was published. The author — Sir Partha Dasgupta, Professor Emeritus of Economics at the University of Cambridge — set out to analyse the effect of the economy on Nature, describing how, at current rates of consumption, the loss of biodiversity will soon be too expensive for us and may likely kill us, and suggested that the way out of the crisis is to give up GDP as the measure of economic progress.

Global warming enjoys a lot more attention than biodiversity loss but, as beneficial as slashing greenhouse gas emissions is, underestimating the likely impact of biodiversity loss could prove to be a deadly mistake. As the Dasgupta Review points out, many ecosystems, including tropical forests, wetlands and coral reefs, have already been degraded beyond repair, which ‘could have catastrophic consequences for our economies and well-being’.

Humanity’s impact

Humanity’s impact on the natural world is severe: animal populations have dropped by around 70 percent since 1970, and only 4 percent of the world’s mammals are wild; in effect, we are living during the sixth mass extinction of life on the planet. And it is not only about living beings: according to the Review, only in the last two decades, the stock of ‘natural capital’ per person fell by 40 percent. What Dasgupta means by ‘natural capital’ is not only the share of animals and plants per global citizen, but also their share of breathable air, drinkable water and soil in which to grow food; so the rapid reduction of these most basic prerequisites for life is truly alarming. Fringe high-tech solutions or short-term financial fixes that do not tackle this problem head-on would just squander the valuable resources we urgently need for our very survival.

The Review states: ‘Our economies and well-being depend on our most precious asset: Nature. Our demands far exceed Nature’s capacity to supply us with the goods and services we rely on’, so that to keep the present rate of consumption, we would need 2 to 4 Earths by 2050 (depending on the speed of population growth). Once an extinction tipping point is reached, it is exceedingly expensive or impossible to reverse the damage; which fundamentally calls into question the prosperity of future generations.

So far so good, and these are all valid and important points. But what does the Review say about what lies at the heart of the problem, and how to solve it? According to Dasgupta,

the problem is two-fold: the first part is market failure, as most natural assets are undervalued or even free, and so we do not invest in them; in addition, it is an institutional failure because governments subsidise the destruction of Nature

(for example by supporting fossil fuel companies) at the rate of ‘US\$4 to 6 trillion per year’, while giving only US\$68 billion (or about 1 percent of the ‘destruction fund’) for its protection.

This formulation of the main problems, however, raises several questions. It assumes that the market is somehow unable to cope with this particular problem, so it needs to be regulated by governments, and that the governments in turn are not doing their jobs well — which is why we have this crisis on our hands. Calling this a market failure means assuming that the market normally takes into account real costs of materials and services. Yet in our globalised economy, where one person’s wages are hundreds of times higher than another’s; where you can get millions for making your computer perform incredibly complex calculations (like bitcoin mining) that help nothing or nobody at all and require enormous amounts of electrical power; where it is cheaper to ship ‘sustainable’ clothes from around the world, only to trash them into ‘recycling’ containers that will be shipped all the way back to never get recycled; where the price of oil went negative last year — in this economy, undervalued assets are not an error or an exception. In fact, it is rather a common occurrence that we must acknowledge if we want to understand the forces influencing the current crisis.

Of course, government subsidies to fossil fuels facilitate exploitation of Nature, but what Dasgupta fails to see is that the driver of this exploitation, and the motivational principle at the very foundation of the whole current economic system, is making a profit. It is simply profitable to exploit Nature, and this is why it is being exploited. Yet somehow professors of economics and company CEOs go out of their way to make up excuses, thinking up complex theories and explanations — all this only to avoid facing up to the truth. As long as we have a monetary, for-profit economic system that makes growth and accumulation of capital the biggest impetus for productive activities, we will continue to be plagued by wastefulness, perverse luxury, inequality, dehumanisation, and, yes, rapacious exploitation and loss of the very natural environment that gives us life and nurtures us.

Set up to fail

What should we do then in order to solve this “market and institutional failure”, according to the Review?

Dasgupta notes that the very first step is to ‘understand that our economies are embedded within Nature, not external to it.’ The almost exponential economic growth in the last 100 years, with all the resources it has been devouring, does

not seem very likely to be sustainable for much longer, as we would run out of forests to burn and fish to catch. He is aware that capitalist theory has been debating a way out of this conundrum by devising various schemes to reroute almost all economic growth from resource-intensive activities such as heavy industry into the virtual and services areas (like software development, entertainment, etc), so that it would get decoupled from resource use, and we would be able to happily continue to invest in the market and make more and more money, *ad infinitum*.

He takes a bold step in his Review when he explains, with some calculations and copious literature citations, that this is not likely to be possible. Simply put, increased profits inevitably lead to increased spending, and that almost always involves the use of raw materials. Even virtual activities are not 'free'. For instance, data processing centres require increasingly large amounts of energy (for perspective, Bitcoin has a carbon footprint comparable to that of Argentina), and over 60 percent of the world energy still comes from burning fossil fuels.

Dasgupta emphasises that the current path presents extreme risks, and that truly sustainable development would need a 'different path, where our engagements with Nature are not only sustainable, but also enhance our collective wealth and well-being, and that of our descendants'. He offers three broad recommendations of solutions, not one of which, however, directly addresses the clear logic of capitalist, for-profit destruction of Nature.

Ineffective recommendations

The first recommendation is to reduce demands on Nature by increasing efficiency and utilising so-called 'quantity restrictions' rather than pricing mechanisms. In other words, Dasgupta advises against relying on the market because using the usual interventions of price controls is unlikely to work. What will work now, according to him, is to ban certain practices, for example to fence off more and more natural habitats and prohibit any kind of commercial activity there. While it is encouraging that the Review acknowledges that markets are not the key to solving this problem, government regulation — even though there are several examples of successful species recovery or habitat restoration — will not be able to reverse the effects of the overall economic system that is fundamentally based on the principle of resource consumption and growth. Such restriction measures are akin to attempts to stop the flow of a river with an obstacle — the water (or money) will inexorably find its way around, as we have seen happen time and time again.

The second recommendation is to 'change our measures of economic success' from GDP, which does not take into account things you don't directly use for profit-making, like rare animal species or human happiness, to something Dasgupta calls 'inclusive wealth'. This new measure of economic success would include natural assets, so if you gain a monetary profit while decreasing the pool of available natural resources, your overall measure of wealth would not grow. This new concept, however, is proposed as a means to improve national accounting systems. What happens when you eat into another country's natural wealth? It is common practice nowadays that developed countries import raw materials for their technologically sophisticated exports from poorer countries that have little else to offer the globalised market (and trade agreements and IMF loans make sure it stays that way). To really work, this system would have to have all countries in the world agree to it, and so far even a seemingly straightforward worldwide tax agreement that would help alleviate the burden of tax evasion seems beyond reach. Maybe the

reason it has been so elusive thus far is this very disconnect between the powers-that-be, on the one hand, demanding a fair distribution of wealth and, on the other hand, actively promoting and rewarding the accumulation of capital.

In his third recommendation, Dasgupta proposes to create supra-national institutional arrangements to charge for the use of Nature, and to then use this money to support these arrangements. He calls on businesses and financial institutions to integrate Nature-related considerations into their strategies. Finally, he suggests that the ultimate responsibility for sustainability lies with us as individuals.

Conclusion

All in all, there are definitely many valuable points in the Review, especially considering that they come from an established economist. At the same time, the proposed conclusions and recommendations show that, functioning for so long within the system, Dasgupta is unable to see beyond its borders, to think outside the box, and so is oblivious to the underlying imperative of capitalist logic that demands profits above all else, and at the expense of everything else, and which is leading us all on the march to devour the planet itself. That would explain why in the 600 pages of the Review the word capitalism is only mentioned once, and even that referred to a description of some academic economics theory that had nothing to do with our current biodiversity crisis or its underlying processes.

In his article 'The Non-Monetary Economy', Edgar S. Cahn estimated that, if valued in monetary terms, non-monetary components of the economy, such as household labour and civic activity, would be equivalent to almost 50 percent of GDP (bit.ly/38oxVfY). This shows that, as social and intelligent animals, we are happy to work for what we believe is necessary and will help our loved ones and our communities, even when we are not getting paid.

If we are serious about surviving and leaving our planet to our descendants in a liveable state, without a huge environmental debt impossible to settle, what we really need is not just to abandon GDP as the measure of economic success, but to urgently abandon altogether the monetary, for-profit economy itself and to embrace the socialist system of resource administration as the truly humane, sustainable and fair system of social and economic organisation that respects Nature and the scientific principles of its management.

ROY AUSS



Questioning Nationality

The ten-yearly census once again literally poses the question of nationality. The *Socialist Standard* runs the occasional article on 'How I became a socialist' to which this is a companion piece, 'Why I am an internationalist'.

I begin with a report of migrant labour being used to undercut wages and actually displace local workers from their employment and eviction from their homes. This, naturally, caused resentment and a reaction that became violent resulting in the authorities responding with decisive force.

If this incident seems to have been missed in these days of all-revealing social media, that's because it occurred in 1832 on the south bank of the Tyne at Friar's Goose. The mining community there had been in a protracted dispute with the local coal owner who determined to break the strike.

To this end migrant labour was brought in to replace the local workers, some from as far away as Derbyshire and Cumberland, where lead mining was in sharp decline. With the benefit of historical perspective it is clear that both sets of workers were victims of a common foe, capitalism.

Lead mining had ceased to be profitable while coal, at the very heart of the burgeoning industrial revolution, promised rich dividends. All the more so if labour costs could be minimised. Unemployment and the prospect of poverty were wielded to pitch one group of workers against another, keeping them divided and thus effectively powerless.

One hundred and twenty years or so after this event the world was blessed by my emergence, in a maternity hospital named for the local pit. Not on Tyneside though, where I would move to a couple of decades later, but in a Lancashire town ruled by King Coal and Queen Cotton.

However, those two economic monarchs were already relinquishing their power and both had largely been deposed by the time I deserted their realm in the early 1970s. By which time a sizeable community of migrants, on this occasion textile workers from the Indian sub-continent, had settled in the town.

Economic decline fostered resentments and would eventually lead to the election of British National Party members as town councillors. They proved to be so spectacularly useless as councillors their moment was brief, but again indicative of how capitalism, whether consciously or not, can stimulate misdirected resentment and anger.

As already indicated, I moved away from the town and settled in the North East. However, I maintained my allegiance to the football club, a curse I eventually visited on my Gateshead-born son. So was I merely a Lancastrian living in economic exile, all the more so now that I'm domiciled in South Yorkshire?

A reason I was born in Lancashire is that one great granddad migrated from the then North Riding of Yorkshire in search of work. His son, my granddad, married a woman whose family hailed from the Trough of Bowland which was split between Lancashire, and the North and West Riding of Yorkshire.

On the maternal side, my grandmother was many generations Lancastrian, but her husband was of Devonian stock via Wales, another example of economic migration. So, I am the offspring of migrant labour.

This is by no means an unusual story, rather it is the norm. To say I am a (please add your

own label) is merely to identify an accident of birth. It is no more significant than that. I have a friend who, by his own admission, is vertically challenged and of a placid demeanour. With a beaming smile he informed all he knew that a DNA test revealed he was, at least in part, of Viking stock.

To return briefly to Friar's Goose, the only difference between the reluctantly itinerant lead miner migrants and those of today who cross continents, is distance having to be travelled. The cause of migration remains constant, in the modern era it is capitalism.

Direct economic necessity, such as brought sub-continent workers to the Lancashire and Yorkshire textile towns, lays the imperatives of capitalism bare. People largely don't uproot themselves and their families without good cause and capitalism exploits the imperative of need for its own profitable ends.

However, capitalism, driven by its absolute need to pursue profit, can manifest its competitive nature in extreme form, war. Whether cross border or civil, the root of armed conflicts

is economic. Trade routes, resources, control of the levers of state and/or corporate power all too often lie at the bottom of martial conflict.

Not unreasonably, people will move away from battle zones if they can. But, even if the prospect of being killed or injured recedes, the local devastation of homes, workplaces and basic services can make life virtually untenable, especially in the short term. And for the poor the short term is all they have.

Whether it's your lead mine being closed two hundred years ago or your village/town bombed out yesterday, you essentially face the same dilemma, to stay and try to survive, or move and try to survive.

For all that racism manifests itself, capitalism is ultimately equitable, it will exploit any and all whatever their skin tone, language, dialect or point of origin. For its own purposes it will encourage people to consider how their apparent differences make them somehow special, unique, perhaps in some undefinable way superior to others.

After all, it would be disastrous for capitalism if (when) people realise that their differences are superficial, determined by circumstance not race or ethnicity. Cultural diversity can be a positive, but even culture is not a fixed thing, setting people apart.

I will continue to look at the results for the football team I was born to follow, which is about as deep as my support goes these days. It is an example of how capitalism has become transnational. The club was one of the founders of the football league reflecting the economic power of local capitalism in the 1870s and 80s.

One hundred and fifty years later it is a minnow in (to mix my fresh and saltwater metaphors) in the soccer shark pool, recently bought out by an American deal using leveraged finance to raise the capital. My club? Rather like my country, it seems.

For the vast majority of people, the working class of the world, there needs to be a recognition and acceptance of the one answer to the surely hackneyed question of, what race am I? The human race!

The national question, as posed by the census, merely confirms the limits of capitalism. To push beyond those limits, to socialism, means making that question is as obsolete as a Cumberland lead mine.

DAVE ALTON



Giants Unslain

In 1942 Sir William Beveridge published a report under the unexciting title *Social Insurance and Allied Services*. It has become famous as the founding document of the post-war welfare state, and has supposedly led to major improvements in the lives of most British citizens. In fact, it achieved very much less than this, as the report itself just referred to 'a redistribution of income within the wage-earning classes', and stated that its proposals for social insurance should merely 'aim at guaranteeing the minimum income needed for subsistence'. The following year the Socialist Party published a pamphlet Beveridge Re-Organises Poverty, which concluded that the proposals would 'level the workers' position as a whole' and so would indeed be 'a redistribution of poverty'.

Beveridge identified 'five giant evils', which were capitalised as Want (i.e. poverty), Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness. How has the battle against these fared in the nearly eighty years since the report was produced? On its 75th anniversary, Stephen Armstrong wrote in *The Guardian* (10 October 2017) that, after the period of relative prosperity that lasted till the late 1970s, the giants were now 'creeping back into the mainstream of our daily life'. Not very much has changed in the short period since then. Let's look at each giant in turn, combining general points and statistics with specific examples.

At the end of last year it was reported that more than a million of the UK's poorest people are regularly struggling to pay for food. Independent food banks reported a doubling of the number of emergency food parcels handed out in 2020 compared to the year before. The Trussell Trust stated that 'half of all households visiting food banks struggled to afford essential goods such as food and clothes because they were repaying Universal Credit debts' (*Guardian* 1 December). This is a welfare system which is supposed to keep people above the level of going without, ensuring that they do not have to choose between eating and heating. But it clearly fails to provide even 'the minimum income needed for subsistence', in Beveridge's words.

Covid has increased the numbers in poverty, but it is not the underlying cause. According to one analysis, an extra 700,000 people had been thrust into poverty by the pandemic. In all, over 15 million people (nearly a quarter of the population) were living in poverty, and for the great majority of those the disruption caused by Covid was not responsible.

Turning to disease, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has stated that, among the poorest and second poorest fifth of the population, more than one in four children between ten and fifteen experienced moderate or severe mental health difficulties. The poorest fifth have at birth a healthy life expectancy around fifteen years less than the least deprived fifth. More generally, life expectancy is increasing in Western Europe, but in the UK the rise slowed dramatically between 2011 and 2015; austerity and reduced spending on health services are at least partly to blame for this, according to a 2017 article in the *British Medical Journal*. The same article noted that there were major disparities between health care in the north and south of England, with economic disadvantages being responsible for the north being left behind.

A 2019 report from the World Health Organization noted that five-year cancer survival rates are worse in the United Kingdom compared to other high-income countries in the EU. Over a million people experienced 'catastrophic spending on health services', primarily on over-the-counter medicines.

Last year the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health published a report *State of Child Health 2020*. This noted that there had been improvements in some areas, such as better health checks for those with diabetes, and improved oral health,

but in other areas there were problems. The rate of infant mortality increased slightly in England in 2017, while over a third of children aged 10 or 11 in England were obese or overweight. And again it was the poorest areas that had the most problems. Further, it was recently reported that black women in the UK are four times more likely than white women to die in pregnancy or childbirth, with those in deprived areas more likely to die.

Ignorance was described by Beveridge as something that 'no democracy can afford among its citizens'; after all, capitalism needs a reasonably educated workforce. In the 1930s the vast majority of children left school at age fourteen with no formal qualifications, and the proportion of the population attending university was well below that in other countries, such as Germany and the US.

Things have changed since then, of course, but many problems remain. The National Literacy Trust states that one adult in six is functionally illiterate, with 'very poor literacy skills', and so has difficulty reading on unfamiliar topics. In England in 2019, one in thirteen of those aged 16–64 had no qualifications. Many students from poorer backgrounds struggle with parts of the education system, especially the transition to university.

By squalor was meant primarily housing conditions. Shelter reported in 2019 that 280,000 people were recorded as being homeless in England, i.e. one in every two hundred people (and one in 52 in London). And 220,000 had been threatened with homelessness that year. It is generally accepted that these figures are an underestimate, as so much homelessness is undocumented. People are forced to sofa-surf or live in dire hostels or B&Bs. Living on the street has an appalling effect on a person's mental and physical health, reducing their life expectancy by many years.

It is not just being without a home that causes problems. A recent article in *The Guardian* (12 January) dealt with a block of flats in Islington where residents went without water for four and a half days after the mains pipe exploded and the PFI consortium that managed it simply failed to carry out the necessary repairs. More widely, an estimated 8.4 million people in England are living in a home that is unaffordable, insecure or unsuitable, according to the National Housing Federation.

But squalor (or unsafe living conditions) need not just be a matter of housing, and the growth of large cities is another factor. It was recently ruled by a coroner that the death of a nine-year-old girl in London in 2013 was partly caused by air pollution, specifically nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter pollution in excess of WHO guidelines, mainly the result of traffic emissions.

Idleness, Beveridge said, 'destroys wealth and corrupts men'. The depression that began in 1929 had led to mass unemployment, with one-fifth of the workforce being unemployed in 1930. Reducing this was widely seen as essential for the health of the economy.

Unemployment figures go up and down over time. In the three months to October 2020, the UK unemployment rate was 4.9 percent, 1.2 percentage points higher than a year earlier. The rise is partly due to coronavirus, of course, and there were a quarter of a million fewer vacancies than a year before. The annual decrease in employment was the largest annual reduction since 2010. In all, 8.6 million people were economically inactive, and a record number had been made redundant. Moreover, many jobs nowadays are zero-hours. So idleness has certainly not been overcome.

The point here is not to over-emphasise the dire conditions so many face now, or to understate the appalling situation in the 1930s. Rather, it is to show how little has been achieved in nearly eight decades despite the best efforts of reformers, and to point out how many problems remain. The giants of the 30s and 40s still haunt present-day society, and it will take a revolutionary change to do away with them completely.

PAUL BENNETT

COOKING THE BOOKS

Profit-sharing Aussie-style

When in February Facebook temporarily stopped Australian users seeing, posting or sharing articles from Australian newspapers there was widespread condemnation, and not just from Australia. Most presented it as a case of the people versus a tech giant. Julian Knight, the Tory chairman of the House of Commons Digital, Culture and Sports Committee, declared 'We represent the people and I'm sorry but you can't run a bulldozer over that', adding, sounding like a left-wing activist, 'and if Facebook thinks it'll do that it will face the same long-term ire as the likes of big oil and tobacco companies' (reut.rs/38n7cQJ).

The GAFA (Google, Amazon, Facebook and Apple) tech giants are unpopular in left-wing circles for a number of reasons: being multinationals, their tax-dodging, and for the way they mine their users' personal information to attract advertisers by allowing these to aim ads tailored to the individual user. So, many anti-corporation activists joined in the dispute on the side of the Australian government. In fact, however, the issue was not the people versus a tech giant

but a conflict of interest between two groups of capitalists over sharing out the revenue and profits from advertising.

Facebook depends for a large part of its income on selling space to advertisers. So do newspapers. As Facebook and Google's audiences are larger and growing these tech giants have been more successful than newspapers whose sales have been dwindling. Some, however, of the advertising is placed alongside articles produced by newspapers. Newspaper owners have long complained about this:

'For years, news organisations around the world have been pushing for fairer profit-sharing between themselves and the likes of Facebook and Google on news content distributed on social media platforms. Some of the industry's leaders, like Rupert Murdoch's News Corp, have won government support to propose relevant regulations' (bit.ly/3qty4F9).

It was no accident, then, that the first move to try to force Facebook and Google to share some of their profits should have come from Australia as who there says 'newspapers' also says 'Murdoch'. In April last year the government responded by proposing a law to force Facebook and Google to share some of their advertising revenue with Australian news corporations. Google complied but Facebook put on

a show of strength. The government compromised by amending the legislation to provide for voluntary revenue and profit-sharing agreements to be tried first. The first one that Facebook negotiated was with Murdoch's News Corp. The details have not been disclosed but no doubt Murdoch will be satisfied with his share.

That the issue was not one of the people versus a tech giant but one capitalist group against another should have been evident from the fact that the legislation was introduced by an openly pro-capitalist government which had no particular 'ire' against big corporations. Far from it. It was acting on behalf of one. Just as governments in Britain, Canada and other countries will be if/when they introduce similar legislation.

The Australian government made no attempt to disguise what it had in mind:

'Australian authorities say they drew up the legislation to 'level the playing field' on profits between the tech giants and struggling publishers. Of every A\$100 (£56; \$77) spent on digital advertising in Australian media, A\$81 goes to Google and Facebook' (bbc.in/3kWcVSI).

Activists who joined in the chorus against Facebook were being used to help pick chestnuts out of the fire for the newspaper corporations, while Julian Knight is just a windbag.

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PROPER GANDER KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON WITH THE CLICHÉS

WHEN OUR leaders want a quick and easy way to try and boost our morale they often lazily turn to invoking 'blitz spirit'. Predictably, the notion has been stirred up during the pandemic by, among others, the Queen, Health Secretary Matt Hancock and Labour head Keir Starmer. BBC One's recent documentary *Blitz Spirit With Lucy Worsley* aimed to uncover the meaning behind the platitude. As Worsley says, 'blitz spirit' is a 'benchmark of Britishness – something we can call upon in times of crisis', a jingoistic mix of stoicism, rule-following and optimism.

The phrase glosses over the fear and pain suffered during the blitz, the campaign of air raids on British cities by the German state's forces during the Second World War. Between September 1940 and May 1941, over 40,000 people were killed and more than two million houses were damaged or destroyed. Britain's wartime government thought that public morale would suffer without its propaganda, so the idea of 'blitz spirit' developed. And it's lasted through the decades, despite the myths around it being exposed in many books and articles before this latest documentary.

'Blitz spirit' has connotations of everyone pulling together amid the bombing, but society's divisions meant this couldn't happen. One way that people were literally divided was through their nationality: at the start of the war, 27,000 foreign nationals living in Britain (80 percent of whom were Jewish) were arrested and held in camps amid suspicions of spying. Another division was by wealth: not only were people in poorer areas more likely to be hit by bombs, but the most well-off had better safeguards than the shoddily-built public surface shelters. London Underground stations were a preferred option to these, although the government banned their use as shelters until angry crowds persuaded the authorities to open the gates. Despite the protection they offered, the stations soon became overcrowded and unhygienic. As the *Socialist Standard* reported in November 1940, 'while one reads of cocktails drunk in comfortable deep shelters by well-to-do people, one sees

the crowds of poverty-stricken with their bundles besieging the shelters and tubes, and the appalling conditions under which multitudes of people spend the greater part of their time in the Underground stations have to be seen to be believed'. The cocktail drinkers were using shelters in places like the Savoy hotel, where the Communist Party organised a protest against the disparity of provision.

The 'blitz spirit' myth has endured by its folk memory ignoring the uncomfortable details which go against its narrative. It has also been manufactured through several striking images from the war, all of which are distortions of what really happened. Photographs (and reports) printed in newspapers were subject to strict rules to avoid revealing the extent of the destruction. Those published were carefully selected to manage people's perceptions, such as the image of St Paul's Cathedral untouched while smoke drifts around, proudly displayed on the front page of the *Daily Mail*. The picture was held up as a symbol of London's 'indomitable spirit', but it had been cropped to downplay the damage to nearby buildings. The uncropped version appeared in a contemporary German newspaper, with the opposite intention. Another memorable photo shows a milkman casually carrying a crate of bottles over the ruins of a street. This was staged, with the photographer's assistant posing with a borrowed coat and crate, and contrived to be acceptable to the censors. The 'Keep Calm And Carry On' poster was one of three designed in 1939 by the Ministry of Information with the aim of raising spirits. It was never distributed and millions of copies were pulped due to the view that the slogan was patronising. The poster was forgotten about until a surviving copy was unearthed in a bookshop in 2000. In a canny commercial move, it was licenced to be reprinted and subsequently appeared on mugs, t-shirts, cushion covers and other tat as the last decades' favourite cliché. 'Keep calm and carry on' is supposed to mean a patient resilience, but it really translates as 'put up and shut up'. A sentiment which wartime propagandists

realised they couldn't get away with turned out to be profitably popular 70 years later.

Rather than suggesting that 'blitz spirit' doesn't exist because of its shaky foundations, the documentary says that the idea is better expressed through the stories of how 'ordinary people' coped during the air raids. These are recreated by actors presenting the diary writings of six Londoners. Nina Masel went from shop work to a paid job with the Mass Observation project to record people's experiences, until she resigned, incensed that her contributions were being turned into propaganda. Frances Faviell, an artist and socialite, received just a week's training as an auxiliary nurse before finding herself having to treat the terrible injuries caused by the bombing. Two air raid precaution wardens are featured: Ita Ekpenyon, who moved from Nigeria to study law, and Barbara Nixon, an out-of-work actress. Also included is Frank Hurd, a full-time firefighter who was killed while tackling a burning building. The sixth person is Robert Barltrop, a teenage warehouse porter who volunteered as a firewatcher when the war started. The programme doesn't go into his life after the blitz, when he enrolled with the RAF until a bout of tuberculosis prevented him from taking part in conflict. Rejecting the military and what it represents, Barltrop joined the SPGB in 1946, having first heard about the party before the war through conversations in his local shoe repair shop. During his many years as a member he was an editor, writer and illustrator for the *Socialist Standard*, and his 1975 book *The Monument* is a readably anecdotal history of the party.

How these six, and millions of others, dealt with the horrors of the bombing was indeed brave and often selfless, if that's what's meant by 'spirit'. But the notion of 'blitz spirit' is different, meant to evoke a warm, patriotic reassurance during a crisis, keeping calm and carrying on without asking questions or looking beyond the propaganda. As such, it remains a useful myth for capitalism's apologists.

MIKE FOSTER

REVIEWS

Reformist essays



An Inheritance for Our Times. Principles and Politics of Democratic Socialism. Edited by Gregory Smulewicz-Zucker and Michael J. Thompson. OR Books, 2020. 412pp.

This book announces itself as ‘a reader that includes essays in the form of both personal accounts and intellectual arguments from activists and theorists advocating a democratic socialist outlook’. The essays, 30 in number, are written mainly by American academics, but the language used by most is not overly academic making it a fairly readable collection and with a political range far wider than just the USA.

The editors’ introduction sets the scene trenchantly: ‘The mass-consumption society erected over the course of the twentieth century for the purpose of generating never-ending surplus for the few and political quiescence for the many has metastasised into a global form of life’. The society they are talking about here of course is capitalism and most of the contributions that follow are directed at proposing ways in which capitalism can be improved on or replaced by something better, usually referred to as socialism.

The trouble is, as we all know, there are many ‘versions’ of socialism and most of the contributors, however well intentioned, propose ‘socialisms’ that most *Socialist Standard* readers would not recognise as the society of common ownership and democratic organisation that the Socialist Party has put forward over the 117 years of its existence. What the essays mainly argue for is a variety of more or less radical reshaping of capitalism but not its abolition with the establishment of a moneyless, marketless system of production and distribution based on ‘from

each according to ability to each according to need’. So though framed in terms of, for example, the replacement of ‘production for profit with production for social need’, when looked at closely what is usually envisioned is a ‘fairer’, more ‘equal’ form of the money system.

So while in his essay ‘Essential Socialism’, Fernando Gasparin argues correctly that struggles over reforms are, in Rosa Luxemburg’s words, ‘a labour of Sisyphus’ and that ‘each reform successfully rolled up the hill can roll back down again’, this does not prevent him arguing that ‘socialism needs a constitutional provision providing for public democratic control of banks and financial institutions’. Nor is it uncommon in the collection to find references to socialism coexisting with the market, as in the chapter by David Schweickart entitled ‘Marxist Market Socialism’. In another chapter, ‘Socialism and the Democratisation of Finance’ by Fred Block, there is reference to ‘a democratised financial system’ as part of the ‘regulatory apparatus of socialism’. Most of the contributors find it difficult to envision the stateless society that socialism must be. For Lester Spence, for example, in his essay entitled ‘The Democratic Socialist Imaginary’, ‘democratic socialism’ is defined as ‘a state form that combines public ownership of the means of production with a form of government based on popular elections and popular means of creating government policy and state institutions’. Elsewhere the currently popular concept of a guaranteed basic income figures strongly, as do other ‘socialist’ ideas such as ‘worker cooperatives’ and the ‘model’ of Scandinavian social democracy.

On the positive side, there seems at least to be general agreement among contributors that what happened in Russia in 1917 and developed from that was a bogus, or at least distorted, version of socialism (‘state domination, a hierarchically organised command economy, ruthless industrialization, antidemocratic political institutions’, as one writer puts it) and that those groups on the Left who still see some virtue in Lenin’s Bolshevik takeover and put the failure of the Soviet system down to Stalin prevailing over Trotsky are also barking up the wrong tree. And in a number of these essays, the modern-day supporters of Lenin and Trotsky who still insist on the need for a vanguard party to lead

workers to overthrow capitalism are given short shrift. In his chapter, ‘What is Socialism?’, Stephen Bronner explains how Leninist ‘democratic centralism’ can only lead to authoritarian rule by a minority. Smulewicz-Zucker (‘Democratic Socialism contra Populism’) sees Leninism as calling for ‘an elite party leadership to determine the working class’s true interests’.

A number of writers too remind us that Marx, regardless of how his writing has been used and abused over the last 150 years, did not see socialism (or communism, and we are reminded that the words were used interchangeably by Marx) as state ownership but as common ownership, entailing the abolition of the wages system and free access to all goods and services. Rohini Hensman, in her ‘Marx and Engels on Socialism’, correctly points out that in Marx’s concept of socialism ‘all class divisions will have been abolished... Products will not be sold as commodities, and there will be no money. Labour time will be minimised and free time will be maximised. Since capitalism is global, it follows that socialism would be global too’, and ‘Marx and Engels repeatedly make it clear that there will be no state in a socialist society’.

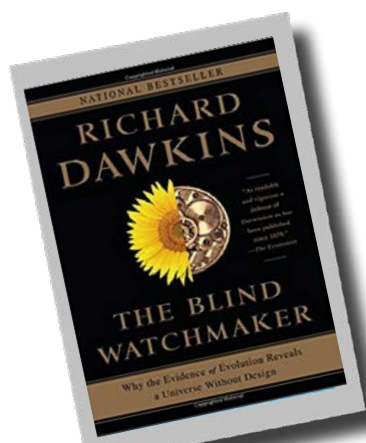
Support for this vision seems to be present in some of the essays in this collection. For example, Barbara Epstein, in ‘What Socialism Means’, states: ‘Socialism refers to the goal of an economically egalitarian society based on cooperation rather than on competition and the exploitation by some of the labour of others.’ Peter Hudis (‘Democratic Socialism and the Transition to Genuine Democracy’) reminds us of Rosa Luxemburg’s dictum that ‘there is no socialism without democracy and no democracy without socialism’ and makes it clear that socialism needs ‘a global transformation’. Yet that writer, like others who seem to express support for this view of socialism, tend in the end to fall back on ‘in the meantime’ or (as one writer puts it) ‘incremental progress’ reformist prescriptions of one kind or another. This ‘in the meantime’ mentality (which is in fact a prescription for never getting to socialism) is well encapsulated by Hudis himself when he states: ‘Democratic socialism requires involving masses of people in a political project that fights for and secures needed reforms while focusing on the long-term need to transcend capitalism.’

In the midst of all this, however, the book does contain some strikingly

pitiful insights into the pathology of capitalism and also into the essential features of socialism. Examples are: Lester Spence's description of schools as 'spaces designed to inculcate market behaviour in parents, students, staff and administration'; Wilson Sherwin's ('Less Work For All! Reclaiming a Forgotten Socialist Aspiration') characterisation of an increasingly brutal workplace as 'hustle culture'; Steve Fraser's standout piece in the collection ('Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy') where he states: 'No matter what its form, capitalist democracy commodifies its world and first of all its human inhabitants. They live as vessels of labour power and as empty receptacles of the goods and services and delusions of consumer culture'; and finally Smulewicz-Zucker quoting Kautsky's description of socialism as 'the abolition of every kind of exploitation and oppression, be it directed against a class, a party, a sex, or a race'.

HOWARD MOSS

Evolution explained



The Blind Watchmaker. Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design.

By Richard Dawkins. Audiobook narrated by: Richard Dawkins and Lalla Ward.

This is an audio version of Dawkins's well-known book, narrated by Dawkins and his wife, actor Lalla Ward. The watchmaker idea belongs to the 18th-century theologian William Paley, who argued that just as a watch is too complicated and functional to have sprung into existence by accident, so too does this apply to all living things with their far greater complexity. Charles Darwin's discovery that challenged the creationist argument through natural selection – the unconscious, automatic, blind, yet essentially non-random process Darwin discovered – is brought to life in this book.

Dawkins and Ward provide a highly engaging read of Dawkins's critique of creationism. The audiobook follows an updated edition of the book from 2006 and provides intricate explanations, by way of witty examples, of why random,

infinitesimal gene changes over millions of years have produced us and the world we live in. Dawkins's writing contains a self-deprecating, dry sense of humour that comes to life as he reads the book aloud. Alternating voices between Dawkins and Ward provides a nice listening contrast while also setting apart examples, clarifications, and segments of greater detail. Dawkins and his wife live in a world that is perhaps more scientific on a daily basis than most of us, so the book takes great care to vary the delivery of information for greater emphasis and easy understanding.

Dawkins's goal in *The Blind Watchmaker* was to remove any doubt that anything but scientific fact is behind the origin of the universe. Just because something – like human beings or the universe – is complex does not mean that it cannot be explained. Dawkins works hard to help listeners understand the smaller-than-microscopic changes that evolved through staggering amounts of time. To paraphrase the author, do not draw conclusions from your own inability to understand something. The truth of Darwinism comes in its acceptance of physics, probability, and the unending march of time. The author (and speaker) helps listeners out by using examples that are easy to grasp: for example, the evolution from wolves to domesticated dogs. Or how echolocation in bats clearly shows the evolution of a trait necessary for survival of a species.

It is an altogether interesting read that particularly comes to life when listened to in audio format. Highly recommended for anyone who would like to learn more about the origins of the universe and the existence of life on Earth.

PAUL EDWARDS

All rentiers now?



Philippe Askenazy: Share the Wealth: How to End Rentier Capitalism. Verso £16.99.

(Translated by Gregory Elliott)

As the subtitle suggests, this focuses on one kind of capitalism, the rentier variety, based on the receipt of rents. Askenazy adopts a broad definition: 'rents

are advantages that can be extracted on an ongoing basis by certain economic actors ... via economic, political or legal mechanisms potentially open to influence by them.' The list contained in the ellipsis in our quotation contains not just capitalists but also wage-earners, so it is clearly a very broad definition. The original French edition had the title *Tous rentiers!*, suggesting that everyone is a rentier.

As an initial example, pharmacists in France are paid about three times as much as their UK counterparts, since the French government has very strict regulations about where new pharmacies can open, and disallows pharmacy chains such as Boots. So the extra income derived from the lack of competition in France is an instance of rent. For a case more in keeping with the profits of companies, consider the cost of medicines, some of which are a thousand times more expensive in the US than in France, owing to the power of US pharmaceutical companies in enforcing patent and property rights there. More generally, in the US the top one percent's share of national income is now back to the level at the start of the last century.

Real estate prices in London and Hong Kong far outstrip other cities, even New York and Tokyo. This is an example of propertarianism, whereby income derives from two kinds of property: land and real estate, and knowledge (the latter being exemplified by the medical patents mentioned earlier). This is part of the 'new phase' of capitalism that Askenazy claims to have identified: rents from property rights and rents from the labour of the 'unproductive'. But it is not entirely clear what is meant by this last point (other than how low many people's wages are), though the author does argue that employment is being increasingly divided into low-wage and relatively high-wage types, with medium-wage jobs being cut and people with degrees more and more finding themselves in low-paid jobs; this is known as job polarisation.

In addition, it has to be asked to what extent rentier capitalism is really a new development, and whether it is truly a different kind of capitalism. The book sometimes seems to imply that 'ordinary' exploitation by the extraction of surplus value no longer exists or has had its scope much reduced. But after all, capitalists have always benefitted from 'economic, political or legal mechanisms' to enforce and increase their profits. And Askenazy offers no real ideas on how to end capitalism, rentier or otherwise, beyond strengthening trade unions, which may help workers defend their wages and conditions but cannot transform the system.

PAUL BENNETT

50 Years Ago

Up in arms

If the success of a movement is to be judged by the amount of popular misconception about it, then Women's Liberation Movement have almost won. Discontented women have traditionally been a target for lewd contempt from gentlemen, and any dissatisfaction with their social conditions is often treated as a projection of sexual frustrations. Thus any woman who has ambitions above being a shorthand typist at work, a housewife at home, or a sexual vehicle in bed, is liable to be dismissed as a shrivelled spinster, or a hairy lesbian, or at any rate someone in need of a good, cleansing orgasm.

It was this sort of contempt which gave such licence for the maltreatment of the Suffragettes, who could be kicked and punched and mauled by the police and subjected, by the gentlemen of London, to such indignation as would under other circumstances have earned a court appearance for indecent assault. When the last Miss World contest was disrupted by a few Women's Lib members Bob Hope, who is not a famous anthropologist or psychiatrist or sociologist, but who was earning a few bucks as compere to the flesh parade, could attribute the incident to the only possible cause that the demonstrators were junkies. Of course, Hope was in trouble; his gag writers had not supplied him with material for such an eventuality. (...)

The aims of the Women's Liberation Movement—a free association between men and women, pure of the contaminations of capitalist society—can be attained only when capitalism is no more. Conditioned as we are to capitalism's degradations, it is difficult to imagine what the freedom of socialism will be like. How it will feel, for a woman and a man to associate only because they like and respect each other. How it will be when sexual activity is not a matter of conquest and possession, not a suppressive



Credit: Jenny Turner

neurosis too easily exploited to sell cars, hair sprays, washing machines, suitcases, toothpaste, politicians—but a pleasure. To reach that we need all of us to be conscious of our role in society and the reasons for it. From there we will not be far from the will to change our roles by changing society.

(Socialist Standard, April 1971)

Obituary

Pat Bentley

After a long illness, sadly our Comrade Pat Bentley died at the beginning of March. Pat, along with her husband Philip Bentley, was an enthusiastic member of Bolton Branch, having joined in 1978. On moving to Shropshire, they remained Bolton Branch members, attending meetings whenever possible. Along with other Bolton members, Pat and Philip later transferred to Manchester Branch, where she continued to attend meetings.

At this sad time, our sympathy goes put to Philip and their daughter Eleanor.

MANCHESTER BRANCH

Socialist Party official logo Cotton Bags—on sale now

Price just £3.50 (£5 including UK P&P)



These stylish cotton bags come in black with the Socialist Party logo screen printed in white on one side and with a shortened web address.

They measure 38 x 42 cm and have two shoulder length cotton handles.

On sale now from The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN.

Price just £3.50—add £1.50 for UK P&P. Sent in cardboard packaging. Please supply name and address. For bulk or overseas orders please email spgb@worldsocialism.org or phone 0207 622 3811.

Wash bags if used frequently, but only in cold water and do not iron over design or tumble dry.

Meetings

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

APRIL 2021 DISCORD EVENTS

Wednesday 7 April

“DID YOU SEE THE NEWS?”

19.30 GMT + 1

General current affairs quiz and discussion.

Friday 9 April

FRIDAY NIGHT TALK 19.30 GMT + 1

**UNWRAPPING DEMOCRACY:
WHAT AND HOW?**

Speaker: Leon Rozanov

With digital technologies as a core of social organisation of the future, a look deeper into what democracy really is, and why it often fails. Can we reinvent the concept of the rule of the people?

Wednesday 14 April

THE FAQ WORKSHOP, 19.30 GMT + 1

**WHAT REFORMS MIGHT SOCIALISTS
WELCOME?**

We oppose reformism, but keep an

open mind on reforms which might benefit the working class. What are some past examples, and are there any today which we welcome?

Friday 16 April

FRIDAY NIGHT TALK 19.30 GMT + 1

**THE SOCIAL NATURE OF
MUSICAL TASTE**

Speaker: Wez

Deconstructing the idea that musical taste (or any art form) is purely subjective.

Wednesday 21 April

THE FAQ WORKSHOP, 19.30 GMT + 1

**RE-IMAGINING THE SOCIALIST
STANDARD**

What would give it wider appeal, or perhaps make it more fun, without dumbing down its ideas?

Friday 23 April

FRIDAY NIGHT TALK 19.30 GMT + 1

**THE CLIMATE AND
BIODIVERSITY CRISIS**

Speaker: Glenn Morris

Wednesday 28 April

THE FAQ WORKSHOP, 19.30 GMT + 1

SOCIALIST DESERT ISLAND FILMS

We've done books, we've done music, now it's cinema's turn. Films don't just entertain, they also portray social realities. What films would you recommend to someone interested in socialism?

Friday 30 April

FRIDAY NIGHT TALK 19.30 GMT + 1

VIRTUAL MAY DAY RALLY

Speakers to be announced



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.

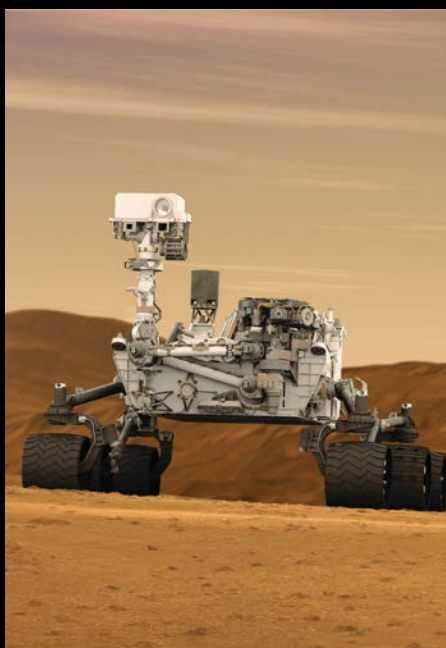


We Come in Peace, Shoot to Kill

'Despite the damage coronavirus lockdowns did to the world's economy, 2020 marked a record high in global military spending, according to a new report. As always, the US was in the lead, accounting for 40.3 percent of the world's military expenditures at \$738 billion. The report, released by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), says total military expenditures added up to \$1.83 trillion in 2020, a 3.9 percent increase from 2019 (news.antiwar.com, 25 February). This news comes as no surprise to socialists: we have said for over a century that war is endemic to capitalism. We recall that the Obama-Biden Administration promised to do away with nuclear arms once and for all, but instead committed \$1 trillion to building the nuclear stockpile and modernising nuclear production facilities. Commenting on an earlier administration, the late Carl Sagan, a visionary and humanitarian scientist, observed: 'For me, the most ironic token of [the first human moon landing] is the plaque signed by President Richard M. Nixon that Apollo 11 took to the moon. It reads, 'We came in peace for all Mankind.' As the United States was dropping seven and a half megatons of conventional explosives on small nations in Southeast Asia, we congratulated ourselves on our humanity. We would harm no one on a lifeless rock'.

What about life on Earth?

Another (probably) lifeless rock has been invaded by a swarm of robots. Of multiple attempted Mars landings by robotic, unmanned spacecraft, ten have to date been classed as successful. Did any



science fiction writer envisage a race to Mars? There is, indeed, kudos to all the thousands of workers across the world – these multiple landings are collectively an achievement on a par with the launching of Sputnik 1 just forty years after the fall of the Czars. Returning to the present, we are informed: 'Internet sleuths claim to have decoded a hidden message displayed on the parachute that helped Nasa's Perseverance Rover land safely on Mars.... They claim that the phrase "Dare mighty things" – used as a motto by Nasa's Jet Propulsion Laboratory – was encoded on the parachute using a pattern representing letters as binary computer code' (theguardian.com, 23 February). The phrase is used in an 1899 speech by Theodore Roosevelt, in which he said: 'Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat.' Oscar Wilde described us 'poor spirits' more accurately and succinctly when he said: 'To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all'.

War without end?

'Humanity is waging a "senseless and suicidal" war on nature that is causing human suffering and enormous economic losses while accelerating the destruction of life on Earth, the UN secretary-general, António Guterres, has said. Guterres's starkest warning to date came at the launch of a UN report setting out the triple emergency the world is in: the climate crisis, the devastation of wildlife and nature, and the pollution that causes many millions of early deaths every year' (theguardian.com, 18 February). Such news would not have surprised the astronomer and Marxist Antonie Pannekoek. Writing in 1909 he observed: 'Natural resources are exploited as if reserves were infinite and inexhaustible. The harmful consequences of deforestation for agriculture and the destruction of useful animals and plants expose the finite character of available reserves and the failure of this type of economy. Roosevelt recognises this failure when he wants to call an international conference to review the state of still available natural resources and to take measures to stop them being wasted. Of course the plan itself is humbug. The state could do much to stop the pitiless extermination of rare species. But the capitalist state is in the end a poor representative of the good of humanity. It must halt in face of the essential interests of capital'.

Don't Panic



Commenting on billionaire Elon Musk's SpaceX's Starship project which may someday send humans to Mars, Shannon Stirone, in an article titled 'Mars Is a Hellhole: Colonising the red planet is a ridiculous way to help humanity' (theatlantic.com, 26 February), writes: 'Legitimate reasons exist to feel concerned for long-term human survival. But I question anyone among the richest people in the world who sells a story of caring so much for human survival that he must send rockets into space.' Neither misleaders nor multi-millionaires can save us. Sagan says: 'Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves. The Earth is the only world known so far to harbor life. There is nowhere else, at least in the near future, to which our species could migrate.' Yet more positively he also stated: 'Humans have evolved gregariously. We delight in each other's company; we care for one another. Altruism is built into us. We have brilliantly deciphered some of the patterns of Nature. We have sufficient motivation to work together and the ability to figure out how to do it. If we are willing to contemplate nuclear war and the wholesale destruction of our emerging global society, should we not also be willing to contemplate a wholesale restructuring of our societies?' (Cosmos, Futura, 1987, p. 358). Pannekoek, who died in 1960 just as humanity entered the space age, would concur: 'It is time for mankind to ensure itself of material abundance by establishing a free, self-managed world-society of productive labor, thereby freeing its mental powers for perfecting its knowledge of nature and the universe' (A History of Astronomy, 1951).