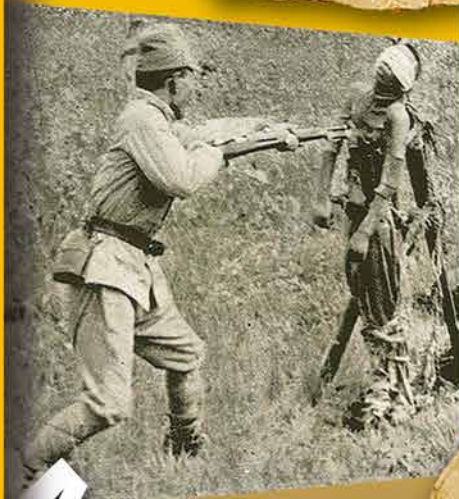
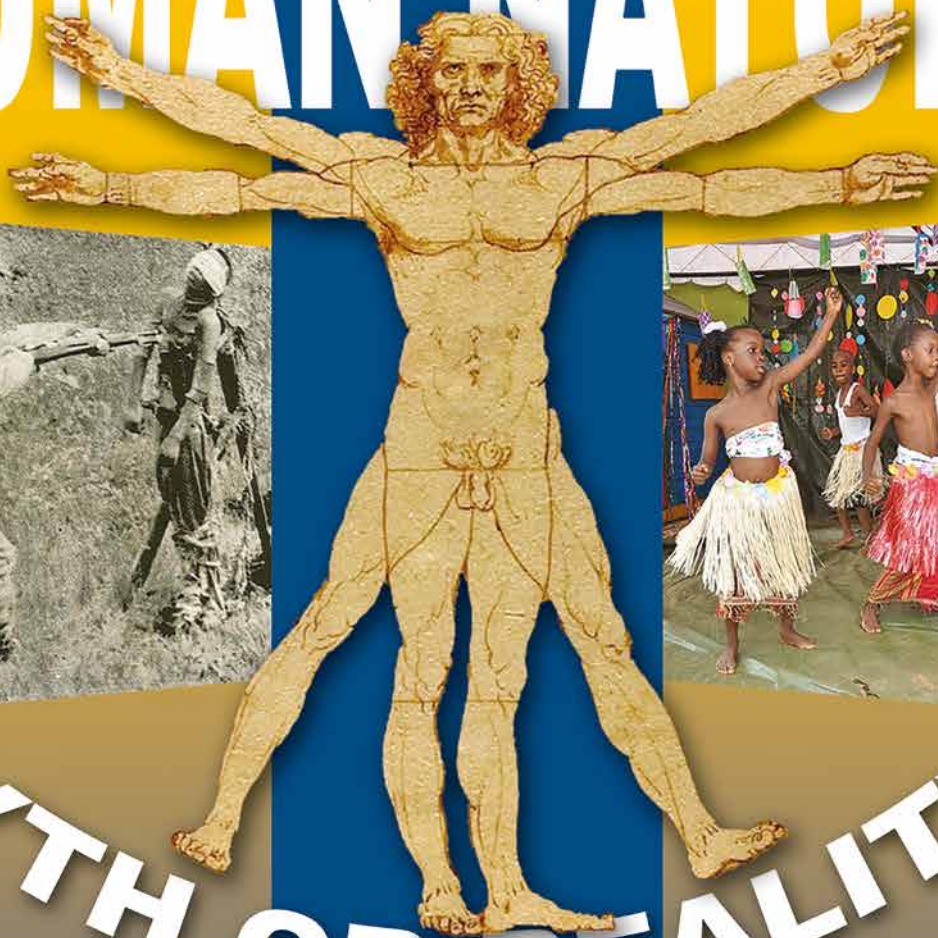


socialist standard

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

HUMAN NATURE



MYTH OR REALITY?



also:
The Gig Economy
The Paris Commune
The Green New Deal

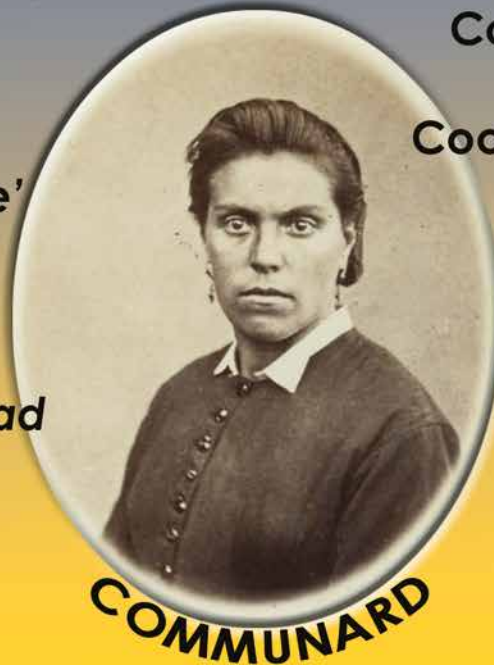


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Introducing the Socialist Party

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'

Humans Being Human

We live in a terrifying time. This is truly the most cliff-edge, make-or-break moment in the history of the world, in the human story.

Since we first emerged as a species, many thousands of years ago, humans have done two things. We have invented and built more and more powerful tools with which to supply our needs. Technology is now developing exponentially, so that even in a matter of months, huge advances occur. Secondly, we have formed different social systems, each giving way to its successor every few hundred years or less.

From early 'hunter gatherer' societies, through ancient slavery, medieval feudalism, early mercantile capitalism, industrial capitalism and today's global, digital capitalism, the structure of society has changed dramatically. New technologies have made it necessary to revolutionise the way work (and every other aspect of society) is organised. Power struggles between different classes have been the mechanism of revolutionary change. Each new social system has had its own social relations, its norms, its priorities... and always at the heart of each system is the key working relationship which defines its way of providing for humanity's survival.

Throughout the world today this defining feature is employment. Wage slavery. Salaried

staff. Ninety-nine per cent of the population having to work in return for payment only meeting their most basic needs for the most part, whilst we devote our energies to creating far greater wealth for the shareholders and/or state plutocrats who own and control major capital resources.

Human behaviour is more diverse than that of other animals. As a species we are extremely adaptable, versatile, changeable – and able to co-operate with one another in highly complex and sophisticated ways – if we feel the need and if we so choose. Each of these successive social systems we see evolving through human history has made humans act in certain ways, has shaped our incredibly changeable human behaviour anew.

The reason we live in terrifying times is that the social system we live under now has reached breaking point. The tension is more than palpable. The way that society has been structured for the past few hundred years is no longer tenable. We have the technology and resources to feed, clothe, house and meet all the needs of several times the world's population. But the social priority is still to generate financial profit for a tiny minority, and if production is not profitable, it gets closed down. Repeatedly. Even whilst people starve.

And that's just the start of it. The world-wide social system we live within also causes,

as inevitable consequences of its in-built priorities: war, crime, poverty, climate crisis, homelessness, corruption, competition, global disharmony and conflict, failure to plan, failure to provide for emergencies...

There is a glaringly obvious solution to all of this, which we set out and explore in the pages of this magazine, and in all of our work as a democratic political movement for genuine socialism: a new, co-operative commonwealth in which we each contribute according to our abilities, and take according to our needs.

Some will object that this solution 'goes against human nature'. They are wrong. It is human nature to solve problems through co-operation, intelligence, hard work and determination. What such opponents of social progress mean by 'human nature' is that positive solutions may challenge much of the human *behaviour* which has been fostered by the current, cut-throat, competitive system we struggle and suffer under. But even within this sick, rotten, outdated system there are constant, incessant reminders of the reality of human co-operation, intelligence, rationality, compassion and solidarity. It is today's world capitalism which is the true enemy of our nature as humans, as it pits us against one another and causes endless unnecessary misery.

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PATHFINDERS

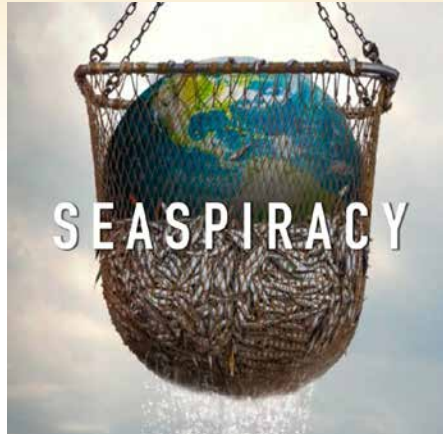
Whales, Scales and Fishy Tales

BIG WAVES were caused recently by the release on Netflix of the documentary *Seaspiracy*, which sets out to harpoon the supposedly sustainable global fishing and aquaculture industry. A furious backlash by industry insiders immediately ensued, accusing Netflix of screening 'vegan propaganda'. Netflix however, keen to drag an increasingly vegan-oriented millennial audience away from YouTube, won't care about treading on a few people's raw sushi.

First-time film-makers Ali and Lucy Tabrizi travel the world to research the documentary, showing at times considerable courage in evading arrest, or indeed much worse. What they discover is shocking and designed to shock. It takes nerve to watch a whole dolphin pod being hacked to death with cleavers, even more to see real footage of humans being shot in the sea. Former slaves in Thailand relate being press-ganged and made to work at gunpoint on trawlers for years, and executed and thrown over the side if they refuse. The filmmakers have to flee in a car chase to the airport with a criminal gang in hot pursuit. An industry spokesperson at a trade show laughs and denies any such nonsense. EU ministers offer bland assurances. Environmental charities dodge the issue. This is an industry which, the documentary makes plain, will stop at nothing to prevent the public from knowing what really goes on.

This is an unregulated and often illegal industry in which vast factory ships trailing miles of floor-scraping nets drag the ocean for everything it contains, including not just the target fish but also 'by-catch', variously estimated at between 10 and 50 percent, which is then thrown back dead. The impact is global and catastrophic. When the Deepwater Horizon oil spill occurred in 2010, instead of marine wildlife in the Gulf of Mexico being destroyed as predicted, it actually recovered, despite all the oil, because commercial fishing had been suspended. The tragedy and the irony is that the oceans would recover easily enough if humans would just leave them alone. More whales would help us too. Marine life is a huge carbon sink. A tree absorbs up to 48 pounds of CO₂ a year. Each dead whale that sinks to the ocean floor sequesters 33 tons for centuries (bit.ly/3eg2pma).

The scale of marine destruction is not common knowledge. Catches are supposed to be 'dolphin-safe', and sustainable, and there are industry-approved labels to certify it. But the documentary makes



clear that none of these certifications mean anything, because there is no way to enforce them. It's too expensive for observers to go out with every boat and check, so they only have the captain's word that no by-catch was destroyed in the process. Issuing agencies get paid by the industry to certify catches as 'dolphin-safe', a clear conflict of interests. 'Sustainable' doesn't mean what we think either, that fish stocks are 100 percent healthy. Some species have seen population crashes of up to 90 percent, and 'sustainable' may only mean that they are being fished at just above extinction level.

Then there's the fact that marine trawling is the biggest food-related carbon emitter after beef and lamb farming, equivalent to global air travel, and dwarfing that from pigs, chickens and grain crops (bit.ly/3teagaa). And while we are encouraged to obsess about plastic straws and cotton buds, a media displacement strategy that George Monbiot, a contributor in the film, describes as 'micro-consumerist bollocks' (bit.ly/3mHku9), fishing produces up to 800,000 tons of discarded heavyweight plastic fishing gear a year, making up approximately half of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch and destroying untold wildlife.

Monbiot lambasts the BBC for making nature programmes that never spotlight the destructive fishing industry (bit.ly/329VSE9). In fact the BBC's own Reality Check journalists went over *Seaspiracy* and failed to find much to criticise (bbc.in/3tiLqGu). There were some out-of-date statistics though, which gave ammunition to the doc's detractors. Yet data is a perennial problem. You can't just count fish in the sea like cows in a field, so fish stocks are guesses. Catches can remain level while stocks plummet, because of greater trawling efficiency. The documentary says

50 percent by-catch, other sources say 10 percent, but with no monitoring there is no way to know. The film perhaps has a motive to paint a bleak scenario, but the industry has an equally strong motive to dismiss all concerns. Who do you believe?

Just before *Seaspiracy* aired in March, *New Scientist* also looked at the global fishing industry (13 February- bit.ly/3a8UDJL). This article was slightly more upbeat, pointing to some small improvements, yet came to the same broad conclusions. Since 1950 the human population has gone up by 175 percent, but fishing by 750 percent. Despite three global agreements to stop the decline in fish stocks, almost nothing has been done to reverse the trend. And fish farming is no solution, because it's a net consumer, not a producer of fish protein. More human-edible fish are fed into the aquaculture system as fish meal than come out as product, at a ratio of anywhere between 3:1 and for tuna, 20:1. And this is quite apart from the 22 million tons of fish – nearly 30 percent of the human-edible catch- fed to domestic livestock for the meat industry, once again with back-to-front protein ratios (bit.ly/3mYpk9H).

So if industrial fishing is so bad, and fish farming is no answer, what's the solution? Don't eat fish, says the documentary. It's true that the health benefits of fish are overrated, despite the NHS advice to eat more of it. Omega 3s aren't made by fish, but by the algae they consume, so we could just make edible foods directly out of the algae.

But telling viewers not to eat fish is meaningless unless you also tell them not to eat animals or keep pets fed on them, or use products made with them, and in any case overlooks the bigger picture. The fishing industry is just one aspect of a spectacularly destructive global production system which operates the way it does because it makes money. And where money leads, destruction follows. As the fish stocks fall and the prices go up, the plundering will if anything increase. Capitalism is a war of profit against humans, profit against wildlife, profit against the planet, all for the benefit of a few billionaires, and changing your diet isn't going to change that. The only thing that will is to get rid of capitalism, and share the world as a democratic cooperative. If you want to save the oceans, being vegan is not enough, you also have to be a revolutionary.

PJS

In a League of Their Own

April is known for showers and fools. The shower presently in charge of six leading Premier League football clubs seemed determined to make fools of the rest. Their stated intent was to form an elite of European teams to secure the largest possible slice of the revenue pie.

As it turned out they were the April fools as the scheme quickly collapsed as all 6 English (geographically, if not by ownership) clubs withdrew from the scheme. (However, even though a Spanish and an Italian club followed suit, according to Real Madrid's president, the European Super League isn't dead, it's 'on hold').

The other 14 Premier League clubs had been joined by the rest of football and publicity-seeking populist politicians, including the prime minister, in condemning this blatant money-driven assault on purported sporting values. Many a pious platitude was solicited from commentators, pundits, former players and supporters.

Whether this was a serious proposal or a high pressure negotiating position remained unclear. It did seem remarkably coincidental that it appeared as football authorities were announcing changes to present structures. Whatever the purpose, money will be the driving force behind it. How could it be otherwise under capitalism?

Those loudly protesting this assault on the values of the game have more than a little hypocrisy about them. The Premier League was formed in 1992 for precisely the same reasons offered in support of the European Super League.

Sky Television offered fabulous amounts of money for exclusive rights and football was reformed for that reason alone. Subsequently, other media platforms have bought into the product, the only value actually realised being the commercial one.

Football has succumbed to modern capitalist financial practices. Clubs are purchased via leveraged deals, whereby the buyers borrow the money they need, but then settle that borrowed amount as debt on the club. Manchester United led the way in this sort of trading, but even smaller clubs are now subject to these methods.

One such is Burnley, recently bought out this way by an American deal, ending local ownership for the first time in the club's history. Burnley was one of the original 12 founding members of the Football League in 1888, when the town was a major centre for cotton textile manufacture.

Of those 12 clubs, 6 were in Lancashire, the rest were in the industrial heartlands of the Midlands. The common factor was economic dynamism. The original Football League was itself a product of the financial circumstances of the day.

Football served an ideological function, encouraging workers to identify with their local team and, by association, the local capitalists who actually owned the clubs. It also encouraged workers into rival groups, sometimes leading to violence.

The link between football and violence of supporters is usually portrayed as emerging in the 1970s. However, a Times report on the 1914 cup final between Burnley and Liverpool made a point that the two sets of supporters did not assault each other, which suggests such events were not unknown.

Capitalism is all encompassing. Sport is not, and has never been, exempt from that. Even amateur football cannot escape:

there's the hire of the ground to play on and facilities to change in, kit to change into and various other expenses. Free it is not.

Whatever the eventual formulation, huge sums of money will be involved. One often-voiced criticism is that footballers are generously remunerated while nurses, for example, aren't. Which are of greater value?

While the word 'value' has various dictionary definitions, for capitalism there is only one significant meaning, and that relates to profit alone. Footballers sell far more media subscriptions than nurses. Which is why the major factor driving the Super League is the production of a commodity that can be marketed around the world.

The big difference between 1888 and now is that capitalism has moved on from the local (as it was already beginning to do even then) to the global. Football must reflect this. If it's not the Super League then some similar formation will be required.

Supporters can gather outside clubs, chant their

dissatisfactions and burn replica shirts all they like, but sooner or later commercial decisions will be the deciding factor in how the game is organised and played. It might be football in Britain, soccer in America, but the name of the game, as it's always been, is profit.

The media has alleged that a deciding factor in making the infamous 6 change their minds was fan power, as supporters outraged at the prospect of their game being threatened by greedy businessmen forced them to abandon their plans. If only it was so.

When the Premier League was first launched a major concern expressed in the media was that the ready availability of televised football would result in fans no longer going through the turnstiles. Indeed, it was posited that entrance to games would

become free to attract a crowd to provide the atmosphere.

Clever marketing sold the concept of glory by association to the point that some clubs had a waiting list for season tickets being sold at inflated prices. Cinemas showed matches live for those who could not afford either tickets or subscriptions.

The elite league as it then was quickly became a financial juggernaut, attractive to oligarchs, Middle Eastern princes and American speculators, among others. The Premier League became the 'promised land', the only worthwhile place for a club to be. A European Super League, by capitalist logic, would have been a reasonable next phase.

That it will not now be realised in its proposed form does not mean some version of it will not eventually emerge. If the financial imperatives require it to happen it will, whatever the opinion of fans, politicians or a media willing to curb their usual enthusiasm for free enterprise to court populist opinion. Not that such enterprise has anything to do with being free.

As with all aspects of life, free development is contingent on freeing society from the obligations of capitalism. Sport in general, football in particular, will mirror the social environment it exists in. Only with socialism and the subsequent absence of money can true sporting values be allowed to develop freely.

DAVE ALTON



COOKING THE BOOKS

Carney rethinks capitalism

'Rethink capitalism to solve the climate crisis' was the title *New Scientist* (20 March) gave to an interview with Mark Carney, who until last year was the Governor of the Bank of England. Carney didn't actually use the word 'capitalism', though he had done in a previous interview in 2019 with Jon Snow on Channel 4 which the *Guardian* (31 July 2019) reported under the headline 'Capitalism is part of solution to climate change, says Mark Carney'.

Capitalism is a system of production for profit under which capital, in pursuit of profit, tends to flow into those lines of production that promise the most. Carney has no objection to this and wants to harness it by pointing to the opportunities for capital to make a profit from investing in alternative energy sources to fossil fuels:

'... people recognise that if they can crack, say, green hydrogen as a fuel for trucks or direct air capture of carbon, there will be an enormous use for those and they or their company will make a lot of money.'

Or, as he told Jon Snow, 'the most important thing is to move capital from where it is today to where it needs to be

tomorrow... there will be great fortunes made along this path aligned with what society wants.'

The same as Boris Johnson blurted out to Tory MPs in March: 'The reason we have the vaccine success is because of capitalism, because of greed' (*Guardian*, 24 March).

For Carney, however, the profit motive is only 'part of the solution'; the state needs to play a role too by using taxes and other measures to make investment unprofitable in fossil fuels and industries that burn a lot of them. He is no free marketeer and has criticised this ideology for turning capitalism from a market economy into a market society where, as he told *New Scientist*, market value 'applies not only to material goods, but increasingly to the whole of life'. He wants 'to get market value and societal values back into an equilibrium'.

But, to return to reality, could capitalism solve the climate problem? One thing is obvious – if it is going to move in that direction it will only be because it is profitable to do so and unprofitable not to. Carney is right to say that the state would have to intervene. Despite what the free-market ideologists say, capitalism could not exist without the state and never has. In

fact, one of the state's roles, as executive committee of the capitalist class, has been to intervene to impose the longer-term general capitalist interest against, if need be, the short-term interest of some capitalists.

This was the situation in Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century. The capitalist factory owners so over-worked their workers that they threatened the future supply of fit workers. The state had to intervene to limit the working day to ten hours. As Marx commented:

'The immoderate lengthening of the working-day, produced by machinery in the hands of capital, leads to a reaction on the part of society, the very sources of whose life are menaced; and, thence, to a normal working-day whose length is fixed by law' (*Capital*, Vol. 1, ch. 15, section 3c).

We are in a similar situation today with the 'immoderate' burning of fossil fuels. We can expect, as happened in 1850, the capitalist state to intervene. So attempts will be made, and are being made, under capitalism to do something about the climate crisis. But what sort of society is it that requires intervention to try to stop its economic system from menacing the very sources of life on which society depends?



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The right to be a wage slave

Over the years we have seen a growth in the number of temporary and part-time workers, many of whom are identified as self-employed. The gig economy forms a significant part of this trend, which covers a wide range of occupations from IT consultants to Uber and Deliveroo drivers. One definition offered is 'it is a labour market characterised by the prevalence of short-term contracts or freelance work, as opposed to permanent jobs' ('What is the 'gig' economy?' BBC News, 10 February 2017). What distinguishes the gig economy is that the workers are paid for a particular piece of work, as opposed to those on zero hours contracts who are paid by the hour. The term 'gig' was coined by jazz musicians in 1915 who were paid for each live performance. It is a term still used by today's rock and pop musicians.

According to a TUC report, the gig economy has doubled in size since 2016 and with just under 5 million workers ('Gig economy in Britain doubles, accounting for 4.7 million workers', *Guardian*, 28 June 2019).

Insecure, casual working has always been a feature of capitalism. At one time, it was common for building workers to be hired on a day-to-day basis. In the US in the 1930s many farmers had to sell their land because of drought and falling prices and ended up as itinerant workers. After the Great Depression, temp agencies sprang up, which supplied workers to employers on a temporary basis (*The History and Future of the Gig Economy, Small Business Trends*, 12 November 2019).

Some claim that the gig economy is a product of the new digital technology. It is the case that firms like Uber use smartphone apps to organise jobs for their workers, but there are employers, such as Hermes, who also employ gig workers, but use more traditional methods to run their businesses ('What is the gig economy and why is it so controversial?' *Wired*, 14 September 2018). This explanation of the rise of the gig economy doesn't give us the full picture. In the last fifty years, Western capitalist countries have experienced a decline in their manufacturing and traditional industries with the concomitant erosion of trade union power and accompanying loss of relatively well-paid jobs. Insecure, casual jobs have, to a large extent, taken their place. In the less developed capitalist countries there is a pool of underemployed workers who are prey to these gig employers. It is probably no coincidence that Uber was founded in San Francisco in 2010 in the aftermath of the 2008-9 financial crash when unemployment was high. Under capitalism, competitive pressures compel businesses to grab a greater share of the market by undercutting their rivals

by offering a product or service at a lower cost.

Supporters of the gig economy insist that its workers enjoy the flexibility and independence that come with being one's own boss. No doubt for some gig workers, such as video producers, working this way can be a relatively lucrative venture. However, for many it is just ruthless capitalist exploitation by another name. Firms like Uber and Deliveroo designate their workers as self-employed so they don't have to

fork out holiday pay and sickness benefits, contribute to their pensions, pay the minimum wage or any redundancy payments, but receive the fruits of their labour like any traditional capitalist. The benefits of flexibility have been illusory as it is their employers that ultimately control the hours they work. Despite the



capitalist spin, more and more gig workers are seeing through the con. They know that they are workers, not independent contractors.

They are fighting back. In 2016 two Uber drivers launched legal action to be recognised as workers. The London employment tribunal ruled in their favour, that they should be classed as workers and be entitled to holiday pay, paid rest breaks and the minimum wage. Uber appealed this ruling to the Employment Appeal Tribunal and when they lost in November 2017, they went to the Court of Appeal which also upheld the ruling in December 2018. Uber made their last stand with the Supreme Court, the highest court in the country, which, on 19 February, dismissed their appeal and upheld the ruling that Uber drivers are workers and are entitled to employment benefits. Uber responded by claiming that the verdict only applies to the small number of drivers who brought this case. However, thousands of Uber drivers are filing claims for compensation.

On 7 April, Deliveroo drivers went on strike for higher pay and better work conditions. This followed similar strike action in August and September 2019. Some gig workers are even organised in trade unions, one is the App Drivers and Couriers Union and another is the Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain.

Despite all the guff written and spoken about living in a postmodern society where the class struggle is a thing of the past and we are now all aspiring individuals, it is evident that workers, even the more precarious ones, are still collectively organising to defend and, if they can, improve their working conditions. We think it is great that some workers are winning their battles. However, we must go on and win the class war.

OLIVER BOND

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, frediedwards@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.

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

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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.

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

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MATERIAL WORLD

Gender oppression in India

IN THE past couple of months we have witnessed a massacre in Atlanta USA targeting Asian women, the New York Governor accused of being a serial harasser of his female employees, police forcibly dispersing a women's protest against femicide in London, and large marches in Australian cities highlighting the violence against women. In Mexico, there have been protests against the government's support for a political ally accused of rape as well as widespread police inaction concerning the assaults and murders of women. While in Turkey nationwide demonstrations took place as President Erdogan withdrew Turkey from an international agreement to prevent violence against women. With such resistance from women against the violence inflicted upon them now featuring in the media, we should not forget other forms of repression and oppression of females.

In India, dowry is another form of injustice done to women and it is an ubiquitous system alongside the pernicious arranged marriages where daughters are traded as property and a commodity. The heavy toll demanded by dowry prices has resulted in female foetuses being aborted to ensure families have boys.

Dowry is the tradition when a new bride from all kinds of families and backgrounds will present the groom and his family with property, gold, money, household appliances, a motorbike or car, and in rural districts, livestock. The dowry system has been prevalent in South Asian countries for centuries. Among the Adivasi tribes and in other nations such as Thailand, the dowry system works in the reverse direction, the

groom's family pays the dowry price.

India has an alarming rate of crime over dowry and great numbers of suicides of women. It is essentially a commercial contract between the family of the bride and the family of the groom. There are countless other stories of abuse, and dowry-related deaths if the contractual agreement is not completely fulfilled. The man's family's honour and status are seen to be impinged.

Statistics show that every 16 minutes there is a rape, one death in each hour and 20 women die in a day. There were 7,000 dowry-related deaths in 2017. However, these are only the reported figures and they do not include deaths from 'kitchen fires' and other suspicious 'accidents'.

Dowry persists as part of India's marriage customs although its form and the damage to women vary according to the norms of the different communities. Dowry in India is not limited to any specific religion. Although dowry is primarily associated with marriages in Hindu society it has permeated over the generations into other religions such as Muslims, Christians and to some extent also the Sikh community. Religions have reinforced male domination where the woman is subject to her husband and her in-laws. In addition, the dowries and consequent elaborate wedding ceremonies bring financial debts that can rarely be paid off.

India has already enacted legislation in attempts to counter the problems of dowry. 60 years have elapsed since the Dowry Prohibition Act was passed to prohibit the practice of giving or receiving

dowry and has been subsequently amended to curb the practice of dowry. To further strengthen the anti-dowry law and to stop offences of cruelty by the husband or his relatives against the wife, new provisions were added to the Indian Penal Code to provide extra protection from dowry harassment. India also passed legislation specifically for Muslim women, while Bangladesh passed a Dowry Prohibition Act in 1980. This law legally banned dowries and imposed sanctions by declaring that accepting dowry could land someone in jail, or a fine, or both.

Those laws have not put an end to dowry. It is an understatement to say that dowry-violence-related laws have failed, as India still has the cruel reality of dowries and dowry-related crime. These laws have been largely ignored or not effectively enforced and when prosecutions do occur the acquittal rate is high with the dowry disguised as a 'voluntary contribution' to the wedding expenses. It is a cultural convention which cannot be eradicated solely by law alone. In India, patriarchal practices have relegated millions of women to mere procreation and performing the household chores.

Legislation is an inadequate tool to ensure that women who marry stay unharmed and alive. Such a conclusion also applies globally with violence against women endemic in every country and culture even where there exists no dowry system. Violence against women can only end with education, empowerment and the emancipation of all humanity. Socialism will be the source of the freedom of a life without fear.

ALJO



Creator: UN Women/ Deepak Malik

Green? New? Or Same Old System?

The Green New Deal is a general name for a set of supposedly radical reforms of capitalism, based on environmental considerations, aimed at generating jobs, combatting inequality and addressing ecological problems. It covers a number of different proposals, though they all have quite a lot in common. Here we examine various ideas falling under this heading.

Let's start with the Green New Deal UK (www.greennewdealuk.org), which includes simple slogans such as creating secure jobs, transforming the economy and restoring habitats. It is intended to rely on the support of both the public and politicians, with local hubs working to develop awareness and support. There will be a transition from fossil fuels to renewables. It will cost billions of pounds, but then climate breakdown and inequality cost far more, they say. Government funding would come from things such as ending tax breaks for fossil fuel extraction and stamping out tax dodging. This organisation has general 'defining principles', rather than policy stances on single issues.

There's also the Green New Deal Group (greennewdealgrou.org). The Green New Deal as they see it 'will deliver an environmental transformation of our economy and society'. Climate and inequality problems will be addressed, with the economy decarbonised. Taxes will be reformed, but government investment will be the catalyst for the plan. Pensions and savings will be more secure, and the UK will show 'real world leadership'. There will be investment in energy conservation and renewables. The Green New Deal Bill (tabled by Green Party MP Caroline Lucas) would introduce legally-binding targets, appoint a New Green Deal Commission, end the supposed fixation on growth, and transform energy supplies and the transport system.

The Labour Party's 2019 election manifesto did refer to a Green New Deal, but spoke more of a Green Industrial Revolution (a term also used more recently by Boris Johnson) to rebuild towns, provide well-paid jobs, cut energy bills and so on, with the costs being borne by the wealthy. A Sustainable Investment Board would oversee investment; there would be 7,000 new offshore wind turbines, with fracking permanently banned but new nuclear power.

One even simpler 'solution' is a carbon tax (Henry Jacobi in the *Guardian*, 5 January), designed to raise the price of coal, oil and natural gas. This would be imposed at the wellhead or mine mouth, so increasing the cost of all carbon-intensive goods and making more environmentally friendly ones more competitive.

Beyond the UK, we can look at the *Blueprint for Europe's Just Transition*, produced in 2019 by the Green New Deal for Europe, an organisation comprising politicians, journalists and academics (www.gndforeurope.com). Working at the level of the EU, it proposes eighty-five specific policies, including funding public taxis, phasing out plane journeys and democratising finance, and is thus rather more detailed than the UK equivalents. These and other policies are intended to address the 'three overlapping crises': economic (rising poverty and insecurity), climate and environmental, and democratic (with people being disconnected from decision-making).

Three new institutions would be established. Green Public Works (GPW) would be an investment programme, financed through green bonds backed by the European Central Bank. Its investments would be aimed at environmental sustainability, for instance by improved insulation in houses, and it would also invest in worker-owned co-operatives. The Environmental Union (EnU) would introduce regulations to ensure that Europe would be 'a global leader on the green

transition'. Fossil-fuel investments would be penalised and agriculture made more sustainable. Finally, the Environmental Justice Commission (EJC) would aim to ensure fairness at international, intersectional and intergenerational levels; the last would look to justice for future generations that will inherit the planet.

In the US in 2019 Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez set out her version of the Green New Deal in the form of a House Resolution. The aim is to make the US carbon-neutral by 2030, with a view to this applying to the whole world by 2050. Almost all power would come from wind and solar energy, buildings would be made more energy-efficient, and steps would be taken to reduce emissions from agriculture. It offers a broad approach, rather than specific legislation on each goal. Among this is the intention 'to create millions of good high-wage jobs and ensure prosperity and economic security for all people of the United States.' The methods include 'building resiliency against climate change-related disasters', 'removing greenhouse gases from the atmosphere', 'ensuring that the Federal Government takes into account the complete environmental and social costs of emissions' and 'guaranteeing a job with a family-sustaining wage, adequate family and medical leave, paid vacations, and retirement security' for all Americans, who will moreover supposedly enjoy high-quality health care, adequate housing, economic security and so on.

In an interview in the *Guardian* (13 February), Bill Gates noted that 51 billion tons of greenhouse gases are emitted each year, and that reducing this to net zero even by 2050 is quite a challenging task. Transport accounts for one-sixth of this, and the slowdown resulting from the Covid pandemic has meant a reduction of just five percent in greenhouse gas emissions. Making a ton of cement (which is more or less essential for much building work) results in a ton of carbon dioxide; one possible solution is to take recycled carbon dioxide and inject it back into the cement. Gates dismisses the Green New Deal (in its US instantiation) as a 'fairytale', as carbon neutrality in a decade is just unachievable: short-term measures will simply be insufficient.

The Green New Deal UK's FAQ notes that 'Currently, the market focuses on short-term profits for shareholders, protecting the interests of large corporations and super-rich individuals.' Which as a criticism is fine as far as it goes, but it fails to see that the problem is capitalism, not just 'the market' and how it works 'currently'. In fact, this is what's wrong with all these various Green New Deal proposals: they remain wedded to a system which, by its very nature, has to prioritise profits and short-term considerations, rather than ecological and human-based issues. It is all very well to speak of 'building resiliency against climate change-related disasters', for instance, but saying that contributes nothing to achieving such a desirable aim. And jobs for all is just impossible under a system based on profit, where the market's need for workers can change according to alterations in consumer demand, price rises, technological changes and the consequences of competition. Most of the aims and policies of the various Green New Dealers are truly utopian, aiming at a goal which cannot be realised under a system of production that simply cannot put the wellbeing of the planet and its inhabitants in first place.

Of course, it is possible to fund public taxis and invest in renewable energy. But going against the grain of capitalism is simply not possible. The various versions of the Green New Deal are just different attempts to make a system based on profit into one built around ecological considerations, and that is just not doable.

PAUL BENNETT

Educating our sons

In the last few years the abuse of women and girls has been prominent in the news and on social media. From the 'Me Too' movement which started in 2016 but gained momentum with the Harvey Weinstein affair, to the highlighted significant increase in domestic violence in the current lockdown, to the Sarah Everard protests where at least one placard read 'Educate your sons'. Well, it seems our sons have been getting the wrong kind of education.

Soma Sara is a 22-year-old young woman and founder of the Everyone's Invited website set up in 2020 and where she shared her personal experience of what she describes as 'rape culture'. In a few days there were over 10,000 posts, testimonies of abuse, harassment and assaults in schools and universities from pupils and ex-pupils. The majority of reports were from girls and young women but a few from boys and young men.

'Rape culture' is the normalising and trivialising of sexual violence, from inappropriate sexual language, misogyny and non-consensual touching through to assault and rape. Many of the posts were initially from posh private schools and mainly in London but reports quickly showed the problem to be country wide and equally prevalent in state schools. Heads have been accused of covering up the problem regarded by some as an 'open secret', and even some teachers have been accused of sexual harassment.

Most incidents of a more serious nature occur outside of school, at friends' houses or at parties, and the stories make disturbing reading. Date rape is not an uncommon experience especially in universities. The vast majority of assaults are not reported for various reasons, embarrassment, not wanting to cause trouble, not being believed or simply accepting that these things happen. Inappropriate sexual behaviour towards others has even been observed and reported in primary schools.

How did we get here? Sex sells. It is a cynical and manipulative exploitation of a basic human need. Pre-teens are targeted and sexualised by cosmetic and clothing companies and dumbed down and mirror imaged on social media. The porn industry is a multi-billion-dollar concern and its most violent and degrading content is readily available to young boys on their smart phones. Gone are the seemingly innocuous images of the 1940s pin-up girls and gone are the porn mags on the top shelf of the local newsagents, embarrassingly purchased and packaged in concealing brown paper. Most likely young boys wouldn't have been able to afford too many and would probably find it harder, with an eagle-eyed parent about, to keep it secret.

Parents who have or have had teenagers know that they are online almost constantly. A 2018 Ofcom report revealed that more than 450,000 children aged 12 to 15 spend between 6 and 8 hours a day online at weekends. A survey commissioned by BBC3 of over 1000 young people aged between 16 and 21 showed that one in four had seen online pornography by the age of 12. Gender differences were clear with one in five of the young women questioned saying they had never seen internet pornography, but only 4 percent of young men saying the same. A common response given in the survey was that young men expect young women to behave like porn stars and that porn also gave young men unrealistic ideas of women's bodies. Often a young person sees online sexual images by accident or through natural curiosity looks it up for the first time, however, thanks to internet algorithms it's not long before sexual content will just pop up without initiation and gradually get more explicit and violent as it goes on.

The online world is giving boys some very clear but

misleading messages about women, sexual violence, feminism and sexism. Anti-feminist jokes, memes and videos on social media can be extremely unpleasant, and peer pressure from messages from online forums perpetuate dangerous assumptions, such as that women are lying about sexual assaults. The boundary between online and offline becomes increasingly blurred.

How are young men supposed to develop healthy, loving and consensual sexual relationships when women are objectified and abused? Trying to choke a girl while having sex, as described by one young woman on the Everyone's Invited site, is shockingly not the way to do it. How far removed is a desensitised attitude to abusing women from the explosion in global domestic violence? Pornography on smart phones has been cited as a contributory cause of rape in countries like India, named the rape capital of the world though cultural attitudes towards women and girls are doubtless also responsible. Despite national poverty most young men there have or have access to smart phones where they can share often violent images.

Sex and relationship education is still not compulsory in all schools and plans to introduce it will give faith schools an opt-out. Hopefully it is not – or will not be – restricted to the mechanics of sex and contraception, but will include education on sexual attitudes to the 'other' and mutual consent. It would seem something is going horribly wrong. A report into the issue of sexual harassment and violence in schools, and overseen by Conservative MP Maria Miller was published in 2016 by the Women and Equalities Commission, but it appears nothing has been done since. Instead we are continuing to see peer abuse in schools with the authorities either ignoring the problem or trying to cover it up.

These issues reflect a systemic power structure whose hegemony filters down and becomes part of our culture almost as if we invented it ourselves. We live in a violent world and a society where everything is for use or sale including men and women. Instead of co-operation and empathy we have competition and exploitation and women and girls seem to be at the bottom of the pecking order. Gender stereotyping and sexist attitudes can start young, boys being seen as stronger and more technical, girls being the weaker and more caring sex. We've all heard the jokes about the mother-in-law and women drivers, and women's aptitude for housework. It seems harmless but it's a drip-by-drip reflection of the power men often have over women in capitalist society.

Until all power structures are dismantled both social and economic, until we live in a world as equals, where buying and selling is obsolete and respect for the 'other' is universal, these problems will not go away. Men and women have to work together but as long as there is distrust and disrespect between the sexes, as long as there is sexism and fear of the 'other', women may not always feel totally included in the struggle for socialism and as women make up over 50 percent of the working class that could mean no socialism for anybody.

CARLA D.



In any conversation about a different kind of society organised on principles of cooperation rather than competition, of common rather than private ownership of the means of living, the subject of human nature inevitably arises. To those who support a society of *from each according to ability to each according to need*, the answer is often given that it could not work, since human beings are by nature selfish, possessive, competitive and always wanting more. It's not an easy argument to combat, as all around us, in present society, we see examples of this kind of behaviour both on a personal and a collective level.

It is backed up furthermore by much written 'authority'. As early as the 16th century the Italian political writer Machiavelli, in his famous essay *The Prince*, stated that human beings are 'ungrateful, fickle, dissembling, hypocritical, cowardly and greedy' and 'never do anything good except out of necessity'. This view of humans has often been quoted since, as has the similar idea expressed in the following century by the philosopher Thomas Hobbes in his *Leviathan* that human beings are greedy by nature and human life is 'a condition of war of all against all'. For Adam Smith too in his late 18th century *Wealth of Nations*, private interest (or 'self-love', as he also put it) was the basis for his argument for the free market. Though, in the two centuries that followed, the rise of views contesting the inevitability of the market and the social and economic inequality that went with it saw some questioning of the fixed human nature theory, it is only in very recent times that such questioning has come to the fore and now seriously contends with the 'original sin' idea, whether religious or secular, of human beings as deep-down selfish, wicked and aggressive.

This change in perception (though not yet a sea change) has come about partly through the arguments put forward by organisations such as the Socialist Party arguing for a cooperative society of common ownership, but more widely through a slew of publications, especially over the last few decades, by thinkers and writers from a variety of fields. The latest of these is a remarkable book entitled *Humankind. A Hopeful History* (Bloomsbury, 2020) by the Dutch historian, Rutger Bregman. This work has already received praise from many quarters and it isn't difficult to see why. It comes at 'human nature' with in-depth scholarly research from a whole variety of areas (an 'immense sweep', as one reviewer put it) and is unfailingly informative, instructive and thought-provoking. At the same time, for the informal 'in your face way' in which it's written, it manages to be highly and consistently entertaining, a page turner in fact. So a real 'good read' for absolutely anyone.

Bregman's main line of approach is to examine the evidence presented for what he refers to as the 'veneer theory' of human nature and to show it as severely flawed. By veneer theory he means the widespread idea that the civilised, communal behaviour which characterises many of the normal day-to-day interactions of human beings only take place because of the pressure social and political authority puts upon us to behave in a civilised way and not tear one another to pieces. But, the theory goes on to say, the pressure that this authority creates is only a thin layer (a veneer) and as soon as it is relaxed or things go wrong, our true savage individualistic nature manifests itself and we are revealed for what we are – self-centred, individualistic and even savage. So, according to this notion (referred to by the writer as 'the zombie that keeps coming back'), evil simmers just beneath the surface in us all. He looks at the various writings and life events that are used to support this theory – e.g: the immensely successful novel *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding about children stranded on an island turning savage; the story of the supposed



HUMAN NATURE WHAT

cannibal inhabitants of Easter Island; the famous 'shock machine' experiment by Stanley Milgram, anthropological works by 'big name' writers such as Steven Pinker, Jared Diamond and Yuval Noah Harari – and proceeds to drill down into the reality of these and show us new perspectives.

So, for example, the only real-life instance known of children being lost on a tiny island (which he calls 'the real *Lord of the Flies*') shows those children to have set up a friendly cooperative way of living before being rescued rather than establishing some kind of cruel hierarchy as depicted in the novel. In the same way Milgram's experiment, which purportedly showed volunteers willingly administering increasingly powerful electric shocks to people in obedience to an authority commanding them to do so, is shown, when examined closely, to have encountered significant resistance from those taking part and the outcome to have been reported in an unbalanced, one-sided way. Again, amidst the carnage of the First World War, Bregman provides evidence that very few soldiers in the trenches actually fired their weapons at members of the enemy they could see and many deliberately fired into the air. Likewise, during the Second World War he quotes research showing that only a very small percentage of soldiers actually managed to fire their guns when they came into direct contact with the enemy despite being under orders to do so. Other real-life extreme situations such as the impact of aerial bombing on populations are also seen in a light rarely considered. For example, one of the expectations of aerial bombing by both sides in the Second World War was that it would cause social chaos with people turning on one another. But, in fact, just the opposite happened. Despite the extreme circumstances and the casualties, there was no breakdown of morale. The communal spirit was actually greater than before. In Britain there was the 'blitz spirit' and in Germany the mass bombing of civilians towards the end of the war resulted in people working harder than ever and actually increasing production of food and other necessities as well as war equipment. The numerous examples he cites of this kind of thing allow him to state that 'catastrophes bring out the best in people' and to regard the 'bad' behaviour frequently seen in human beings and their societies as aberrant. He dates it back to the invention 10,000 years ago of settled agriculture,

HUMAN NATURE IS IT?



seeing it as a 'mismatch' that did not fit the human psyche. Yet it became a game-changer in destabilising and stratifying populations that had previously lived in relative harmony and equality and had not been plagued by the idea of scarcity or the constant desire for more which agriculture introduced.

Though other writers too have presented arguments for seeing 'human nature' in a positive light (a recent example is *Team Human* by Douglas Rushkoff), Bregman goes further than these in a particularly striking way. Like him, most of them reject the notion of an innately self-serving, potentially evil human species, explaining anti-social behaviour as the reaction of hugely adaptable and flexible beings to conditioning and circumstance. Bad circumstances can make us bad people. But Bregman goes a step further. He looks beyond that idea to claim that the innate, fundamental default of human beings is to be friendly, communal, kind-hearted and cooperative, to the extent that he attaches to humans the label *Homo puppy*. This may seem sweeping or extreme and perhaps the jury is still out, but his arguments are certainly compelling. He sees as the main driver of human behaviour the desire to act together even in the most dire circumstances, leading to tolerance and mutual support even when things seem to be falling apart. Apart from the 'blitz spirit' in Britain in the Second World War, he also gives the surprising example of the apparently inexplicable dogged resistance shown by the vastly outnumbered and outgunned German forces as the Nazi regime was falling apart towards the end of the war. They found it impossible not to continue cooperating with one another. More generally, the author points to the plethora of everyday gestures of help, cooperation, solidarity and compassion people in all societies all over the world show to one another on a daily basis and quotes approvingly the statement by historian Tine De Moor that 'History teaches us that man is essentially a cooperative being, a *homo cooperans*'. Another way he puts it is that 'human beings claim togetherness and interaction' and 'our spirits yearn for connection just as our bodies hunger for food'.

On violence too, after presenting the evidence put forward by war historian Samuel Marshall in his book *Men Against Fire* that 'the average and normally healthy individual (...) has such an inner usually unrealised resistance towards killing a fellow

man that he will not of his own volition take life', the author expresses agreement with sociologist Randall Collins that 'Humans are hardwired for (...) solidarity (...); and this is what makes violence so difficult'. In view of all this, it is perhaps unsurprising that one reviewer has seen Bregman's analysis as leading to 'a new understanding of human nature' and lighting 'the path to a brighter future' and another as 'a devastating demolition of the misanthrope's mantra'.

This is truly myth-busting stuff and all good news for socialists who have always argued that there is no 'human nature' obstacle to a society of common ownership and democratic organisation based on *from each according to ability to each according to need*. But what about any political conclusions or prescriptions by the author from the wealth of evidence he presents? Well, he expresses strong support for 'participatory democracy', even if with no clear explanations of its content, and recommends people associating with one another as closely and directly as possible as 'the best remedy for hate, injustice and prejudice', since, once they come into close contact, their *Homo puppy* nature, their innate friendliness, will dissipate any hostility, prejudice or lack of empathy. He doesn't go much further than this, and he had already done that in a previous book, his best-selling *Utopia for Realists* (reviewed in the August 2017 *Socialist Standard*). In political terms that book roundly criticises the market system for its 'bullshit' jobs and the waste of skills and energies it engenders and sees a remedy for this in various reforms such as a shorter working week, a basic income scheme (here now renamed 'a citizen's dividend'), increased taxes on wealth, and open borders. From the socialist point of view, though *Humankind* is an impressive and important book, it's a pity he didn't go any further, since the changes he recommends, apart from being unlikely to happen given the nature of capitalism, would clearly not, even if enacted, get to the root of the problems caused by the money and profit system with its imperative to produce come what may for profit rather than for need.

There is, however, one point in *Humankind* in which the author does seem to make an argument against the money system by pointing out that in capitalist society, even of the Western democratic kind, 'the *threat* of violence is still very much present, and it's pervasive. It's the reason families with children can be kicked out of their homes for defaulting on mortgage payments. It's the reason why immigrants can't simply stroll across the border in the fictions we call 'Europe' and 'the United States'. And it's also the reason we continue to believe in money (...) Money may be a fiction, but it's enforced by the threat of very real violence'. Yet in the end, disappointingly, money and the violence behind it are not something he seems to want to look outside of. As in his previous work, he fails to go beyond recommending anything beyond what would in practice be relatively minor reforms to capitalism, easily withdrawn if the going got tough for profit making. Indeed, he's on recent record as saying that 'sometimes markets work best, sometimes the state has the best solution'. This is a pity, given that he expresses an unequivocal liking for the kind of non-hierarchical social arrangements which characterised the pre-agricultural past of our ancestors, people who were 'allergic to inequality' and 'universally – and all but obsessively – concerned with being free from the authority of others'. What is the objection, therefore, to such arrangements – without the market and without the state and at a secure level of technology – for our own future now?

HOWARD MOSS



May 28 marks the 150th anniversary since the French Army captured the Communards' final positions, officially marking the end of the Paris Commune, the first living example of workers in control of political power. Preceded by the Franco-Prussian War, which ended after Prussian forces besieged Paris for over four months, the Commune began on March 18, 1871, following a failed attempt by the French Army to seize 400 cannons that the Government of National Defence deemed 'state property', even though Parisians themselves paid for the cannons via a subscription. The French Army retreated to Versailles and Paris's National Guard then took control of the city for over two months before the French Army could gather enough reinforcements to return and slaughter the Communards during Bloody Week. Along with the Prussian Army, who'd just defeated the French, they injured as many as 10,000 Communards and massacred as many as another 10,000, with 147 alone being shot at what's now called Communards' Wall in Père Lachaise cemetery the day before the French and Prussian armies fully suppressed the uprising. The French Army captured over 43,000 prisoners during and immediately after Bloody Week, 13,500 of whom were either sentenced to imprisonment, deportation, forced labour, or death.

The Paris Commune arguably stands out as the first peek at what the last phase of capitalism might have looked like, as well as what challenges the working class might face in attempting to surpass it. Though the Commune was ultimately foiled, events like this are always worth analyzing for any lessons that can be learned, whether good or bad, and applied to the future.

The Good

One of the best aspects of the Commune was that it was leaderless. Leaders necessarily imply followers placing all their faith in them, even though no one's infallible. Having a leader also allows an easy target to be picked off, incapacitating their followers at the drop of a hat. Rather than leaders, the Commune had mandated delegates, elected by the Communards themselves, who were recallable any moment the people felt a delegate wasn't carrying out their will — a direct democracy. They also had plans to implement the same structure of self-government across the rural areas of France,

having district assemblies in the central towns and having those send delegates to the National Delegation in Paris — decentralised self-government. Magistrates and judges were elected and immediately revocable, as well.

The Commune also passed a decree which implemented a separation of church and state, as well as another allowing everyone to attend school free of charge, with some arrondissements giving out free school supplies, clothes, and food for children — mutual aid. The police were also made revocable, and they abolished conscription, along with the standing army, declaring the National Guard — which included all citizens able to bear arms — as the Commune's only armed force. Much to the surprise of the bourgeois government, there was no violence between Communards during the entire two months. Pensions were also granted to the unmarried companions and children of national guardsmen killed in active service. The death penalty was abolished and the guillotine was even brought out by the

National Guard and publicly burned as the crowd celebrated.

It's said that the highest salary given to an employee of the Commune was 6,000 francs, though that claim has been contested. Regardless, they abolished child labour, as well as night work for bakers, since it's very difficult to get sleep while you're cooking bread. Employees were given the right to take over and run any businesses that were abandoned by their owners and any fines imposed by employers on their employees were prohibited. All workmen's tools and household items that were given to pawn shops during the siege, valued up to 20 francs, were returned for free and, later, the Commune ordered the closure of all pawn shops themselves, since they were deemed a private exploitation of labour. There was a moratorium on all rents during the siege, meaning they were supposed to be paid back afterward, but the Commune forgave all rent for homes from October 1870 through April 1871, with any amounts already paid counting instead towards future rent, along with a postponement of commercial debt obligations, and the abolition of interest on any debts.

The Bad

It's much easier to play Monday morning quarterback with uprisings rather than actually participate in them, but it's always important to take a critical look at these kinds of situations to parse out any decisions made due to bad circumstances from those made due to bad foresight. One of the first that stands out is the fact that, despite many women playing important roles in the Commune, they weren't allowed to vote in the Commune elections. Only three countries had ever granted women suffrage before this, but — considering the fact that the Communards were seeking economic equality — it wouldn't have been much of an ideological leap to extend that equality to women, too. Another drawback was the fact that they opted to keep the Commune Council's meetings secret, citing war with the bourgeois government as their reason. They obviously should've tried their best to prevent any sensitive information from getting back to the French Army, though perhaps a reasonable middle ground could've been reached.

Aside from those decisions, there were a couple made that were pretty useless. One was the adoption of the French

Republican Calendar. Considering the Commune was still at war, finagling with the date should have been the *last* thing on anyone's mind, if only because it could complicate communications with allies outside the city. Communards also took to burning various buildings and monuments, two of the most prominent being the Vendôme Column and the home of Adolphe Thiers, the chief executive of the French government during the Commune. While individuals may decide to do that themselves, the only things the Commune administration should have been focused on at that time were keeping Parisians alive and surviving as a political institution— and burning buildings assists with neither of those.

As far as the financial decisions go, the Communards decided to take a loan from the Rothschild Bank to cover their expenses, rather than seize the 254 million francs in gold coins and banknotes left inside the vaults of the Bank of France — essentially leaving their greatest bargaining chip on the table. Had the Commune threatened to collapse the French currency, they might have got Thiers to do anything they wanted. Not only did they neglect to exploit that opportunity, but if employees took over a business, they also recognised the previous owner's right to compensation. Employers rob employees for their surplus value and, by virtue of that alone, would have no reasonable right to compensation in this circumstance. That money could instead be used for more mutual aid.

Another big issue was censorship and repression. The Commune banned multiple pro-Versailles newspapers and created a Committee of Public Safety to hunt down and imprison enemies of the Commune, in the same vein as the Committee of the same name which committed the infamous Reign of Terror during the French Revolution. Considering how many times efforts like this had taken a turn for the worse before, the Commune should have avoided them at all costs. They also issued a decree which accused the Catholic Church of 'complicity in the crimes of the monarchy', arresting roughly 200 church officials afterward, along with another decree later called the Decree on Hostages, which stated that for every prisoner of war or Commune official that was executed by the French Army, the Commune would execute three hostages. However, it's worth noting that, despite this decree and the fact that the French Army executed multiple Communards beforehand, the Commune executed none of their hostages until after the start of Bloody Week — and even then it was only 63, which pales in comparison to the roughly 10,000 Communards murdered in cold blood during that same week by the French and Prussian armies.

Arguably, there were also more than a few mistakes made on the military front. A major setback happened when the National Guard tried to march on the French Army in

Marx's considered opinion on the Paris Commune:
 "[A]part from the fact that this was merely the rising of a town under exceptional conditions, the majority of the Commune was in no sense socialist, nor could it be. With a small amount of sound common sense, however, they could have reached a compromise with Versailles useful to the whole mass of the people -- the only thing that could be reached at the time. The appropriation of the Bank of France alone would have been enough to dissolve all the pretensions of the Versailles people in terror, etc., etc." (Letter to F.D. Nieuwenhuis, 22 February 1881) (tinyurl.com/y3nvcfb3)

Versailles. The National Guard took power after the French soldiers refused to fire on them once instructed to during the soldiers' attempted seizure of the cannons. The Communards naively assumed the same thing would happen again and advanced without cavalry, artillery, food, ammunition, or ambulances. Not only that, but they didn't even scout the area ahead, subsequently passing a line of forts on the way that they thought were occupied by more national guardsmen but which had actually just been re-occupied by the French Army, causing the National Guard to suffer heavy artillery fire as a result.

As the French Army was returning to recapture Paris, divisions arose within the Commune about whether to give absolute priority to military defence, or to political and social freedoms and reforms. This decision honestly should've been a no-brainer, considering that any reforms would be undone if the Commune were to be drowned in blood. A key fort, Fort d'Issy, was captured by the French Army and the National Guard left the fortifications undefended by one part of the city wall at Point-du-Jour, allowing 60,000 soldiers to enter the city within a few hours. Without an overall planned defence or many barricades having been prepared in advance, it quickly turned into a bloodbath. To add insult to injury, when the Commune Council found out the walls of Paris had been breached, they were holding a trial for a former General — something that clearly could've waited until the war was over — and the last military commander they'd chosen, Louis Charles Delescluze, was a journalist who had absolutely zero military experience.

Most importantly, though, even if the Communards had done everything correctly, they were still acting prematurely. Not only was the majority of the working class still not socialist, but the majority of the Communards weren't socialists in the proper sense, either. Aside from that, capitalism was still in its relative infancy, far from the complete global hegemony we've reached now and any developments that are bound to

happen in the future. As frustrating as it may be, we have to remember that, no matter how badly a minority of the working class may want to establish socialism, they'll fail until the material conditions have developed for them to succeed — two key conditions being productive forces capable of sustaining a socialist society, as well as a vast majority of the global working class understanding what socialism is and what responsibilities it would entail, while actively wanting to establish it. Nonetheless, the Commune was a noble effort that will surely go down in history as one of, if not the greatest, attempt at liberating the proletariat.

JORDAN LEVI





Tall tales of Biblical proportions ...

Jesus walks on water, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, Jesus feeds the five thousand and, my own personal favourite, Jesus turns water into wine. Just a few acts of magic and mystery performed by the son of God and 'Virgin' Mary that wouldn't look out of place on the Penn and Teller stage show in Las Vegas – although not nearly as entertaining!

But where do all these shenanigans stem from? Did God indeed invent man? Or vice versa? Let's try to find out.

As a child at the tender age of around five, I remember vividly the first time I saw a Church of Scotland minister entering my school classroom. A big tall scary man, dressed in a full-length flowing black gown and white dog collar, resembling a kind of caped crusader from an episode of Batman. With a deep, booming, almost sinister voice, he started to address the assembled children by wishing us all a Happy Easter and proceeding to tell us these amazing tales about a man who could perform all these wondrous acts and miracles, as I sat there both mesmerised and bewildered by his every word. This being my first ever encounter of what I eventually came to understand as organised religion.

This event took place every year throughout my primary education, with each story becoming more and more fanciful. However, the older I became, the more unbelievable I discovered these stories to be. All of these bizarre and absurd events that apparently took place a couple of thousand years ago, mixed in with the minister's personal experiences and anecdotes within his own life, led him to make the most moral and sanctimonious of judgement calls in order to reach the kind of pure and self-righteous standards that he was trying to bestow on the rest of us, in order to stay on the straight and narrow road to becoming good clean law-abiding children who inevitably grow up to be adults.

Now far be it from me to single out this particular man of the cloth or Christian worship in general, as the only demon in the room. Organised religion comes in many different shapes, sizes and guises. From the do-gooding Gods that inhabit heaven to the most destructive of devils and entities that one's imagination can conjure up, with just a little help from those who are only too willing to preach about these worrisome apparitions who might present themselves to us one day should we misbehave and step out of line. The nice ones willing to save your soul to a wonderfully angelic afterlife

spent luxuriating in heaven, others just as keen to have you damned for eternity in a hell-hole of fire and brimstone, all depending upon your behaviour here on earth.

Thankfully nowadays more and more young people are continuing to question the absurdity of these stories that we've all been exposed to from such an early age, in much the same way as we all eventually come to realise that Santa doesn't really exist. So too are we beginning to understand the motivation that lies behind the mask of religion – that a God-fearing society with all of its coercion and control, is a compliant society.

With church attendances dropping year upon year and more people either agnostic or turning to atheism, hopefully it won't be much longer before all such religious preaching and activities become increasingly frowned upon as insane and dangerous indoctrinations that create more problems than they solve. Including acts of violence, war, and all too often,

widespread death and destruction of varying degrees and severity throughout the world.

Middle East

Of course, Christianity is not the only religion with diminishing numbers. Two recently conducted and very comprehensive surveys in the Middle East and Iran, have come to similar conclusions: they both show an increase in secularisation and growing calls for reforms of religious political institutions. With the Arab states having major Muslim populations, varying from around 60 percent in Lebanon to almost 100 percent in Jordan and Saudi Arabia, the countries' religious establishments also serve as governmental bodies, with governments playing a significant role in religious life, as they control prayers, media and school curriculums.

Of the 40,000 people interviewed by the Group for Analysing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran (GAMAAN), which researched Iranian attitudes toward religion, it found that no less than 47 percent reported 'having transitioned from being religious to non-religious'. Tamimi Arab, assistant professor of Religious Studies at Utrecht University and co-author of the survey, sees this transition as well as the quest for religious change, as a logical consequence of Iran's secularisation. 'Iranian society has undergone huge transformations as the literacy rate has gone up spectacularly; the country has experienced massive urbanisation, economic changes have affected traditional family structures, the internet penetration rate grew to be comparable with the European Union, and we see an increase in secularisation and a diversity of faiths and beliefs'. Concluding that, 'the most decisive factor is the entanglement of state and religion, which has caused [much of] the population to resent institutional religion, even though a majority still believe in God'.

Compared with Iran's 99.5 percent Shiite census figure, GAMAAN found that 78 percent of the participants believed in God — but only 32 percent identified themselves as Shiite Muslims. Figures show that 9 percent identified as atheist, 8 percent as Zoroastrian, 7 percent as spiritual, 6 percent as agnostic, and 5 percent as Sunni Muslim. Around 22 percent identified with none of these religions.

The sociologist Ronald Inglehart, Lowenstein Professor of Political Science at the University of Michigan and author of

the book *Religion's Sudden Decline*, analysed surveys of more than 100 countries, carried out from 1981-2020. He observed that rapid secularisation is not unique to a single country in the Middle East. 'The rise of the so-called 'nones' who do not identify with a particular faith, has been noted in Muslim majority countries as different as Iraq, Tunisia, and Morocco' (<https://www.dw.com/en/middle-east-are-people-losing-their-religion/a-56442163bit.ly/3bw0D3z>).

Self-belief

So why do we in the Socialist Party take such a critical view of religion in general? Well, the answer is simple, it is our belief that our fellow workers (the real wealth creators) should have more faith in themselves, rather than in some figment of their imagination that has been planted there through years of indoctrination and brainwashing that usually begins during those early school years.

The reality is that religion is probably the most coercive and damaging instrument of control that the state and the church have on one's ability to think clearly, constructively and open-mindedly about all that is going on in the world around us. And they're not afraid to use it.

There are many negative effects of religion responsible for destroying people's lives that can eventually cause many people to become afraid of life itself. For example, in order to avoid being thrown into hell, religion demands that people prove to God that they are worthy of heaven by following the dogma of religion. Naturally, when they are put in such a situation, they find themselves in a continuous state of fear. They are always afraid of whether their actions are right according to their religion or not, and if you believe that you are being constantly watched by the all-seeing eye of God, you have to act in certain ways to please him. The fear of hell is always on your mind, filling you with worry and anxiety. Religiously indoctrinated people can become neurotic, and in some cases, even psychotic. With often harrowing and dire consequences.

If you fail to do what God has ordered, you start hating yourself. You begin to accept the idea that you are indeed a bad person, corrupted, unworthy. And once you do so, your mind becomes filled with hatred, bitterness and resentment – a true hell on earth.

If you accept the idea that you are a sinner, you start seeing those around you as sinners. You may fear that those you meet want to harm you. They are evil, ill-willed, enemies of yours. You may not tolerate religious ideologies that are different from the one you hold. Identifying with a particular religious ideology and believing it to be the only truth and way to live,



might lead to many negative effects and actions, including prejudice, bigotry, and varying degrees of violence – just think of how many wars have been fought throughout history in the name of God and religion.

So, when you have grown up conditioned to believe what is right and wrong according to religious dogma, and you've been taught that to doubt the religion you were born into means to go to hell, naturally you become afraid of seeking knowledge. You stop searching to find truth, and hence to educate yourself and grow as a human being. Knowledge and wisdom are incompatible with dogmatic religious ideologies. Instead, religion is confining people's minds to the darkness of ignorance, and those who do question reality and the truth, are ultimately condemned by religion.

This way, religion keeps people blinded by all sorts of beliefs that are not based on any factual or scientific evidence, which only serves to stunt their intelligence. To blindly follow religious ideology, simply means to restrict your perception, suppress your thoughts and emotions and leave you in a state of mental angst, misery and subjugation.

Freedom of choice.

Of course, life is made up of choices, and to make the right choice isn't always easy. Once an idea is firmly implanted in your mind, it can be difficult to break free from its grasp, believing that the word of God is the ultimate authority. But until we stop allowing *any* authority to tell us what to do or what not to do, we will never be free to live the way we could and should.

In a world society where we are all equal and able to organise ourselves genuinely democratically and for the benefit of all. One where we are truly in control of our own destiny and not limited or restricted by the irrational ramblings of any religious maniacs who want to control our minds and therefore our ability to think freely and without the fear of some maverick spirit or holy ghost influencing how we think, the decisions that we make, and the way in which we arrive at them. Put simply ... A world socialist society, built by each and every one of us according to our own self-defined needs and abilities. It's there for the taking.

PAUL EDWARDS



COOKING THE BOOKS

Who invented money?

Whenever goods are systematically exchanged and so become 'commodities', one commodity evolves as what Marx called the 'universal equivalent' that can be exchanged for any other commodity. So nobody invented money; it came into being spontaneously. At first this money-commodity was gold or silver measured by weight. The next stage in the evolution of money was coinage, where a state stamped an amount of metal to authenticate its weight. In the European tradition this is attributed to King Croesus of Lydia, an area now in western Turkey, in the sixth century BC.

Historical research now suggests that coins may have been invented in China and at a much earlier date, as pointed out by the Mises Institute in an email note of 15 March:

'China was one of the first countries to develop a metallic money that was valued and exchanged by weight. Evidence suggests that this monetary regime originated during the Shang Dynasty (1766–1122 BC) or the Zhou Dynasty (1122–221 BC). China was also one of the first countries to use precious metals as money and may have invented coined money.'

Also: 'While ideas about the

development of money were expressed as early as the seventh century BC, the most prevalent view of money's origin is attributable to a politician of the sixth century BC. Shan Qi (b. 585 BC) contended that money was invented by one of the ancient philosopher-kings to measure the value of goods. However, several Chinese writers later disputed this story and argued that money originated as a market phenomenon. Sima Qian (104~91 BC), Luo Mi (1165~1173 AD) and Ye Shi (1150~1223 AD) basically argued that money grew out of the trading of commodities and could not have emerged in the absence of commodity exchange. Money was only later adopted by kings as an aid in ruling their countries' (bit.ly/3dc24Sm).

This same debate took place in Europe, with some arguing that coins were introduced by states to enable taxes to be paid in that form and others that they evolved out of commodity exchange. The debate is still ongoing with the proponents of so-called 'Modern Monetary Theory' and David Graeber in his book *Debt* arguing for the former, a position known in the literature as 'Chartalism'. The other view is defended by Marxists and the Austrian school of economics as represented by the Mises Institute – strange bedfellows as Ludwig von Mises

was an arch-enemy of socialism as well as of state capitalism (which he tended to confuse with socialism).

The case for the state being the inventor not just of coins but of money as a 'universal equivalent' is given some plausibility by the fact that today the currency – money as a means of exchange – is entirely the creation of the state, 'fiat' money as it is known. Gold and silver coins have long ceased to be used as a means of exchange; this is now made up of paper notes and metal discs issued by the state and which have no value in themselves. They are just tokens or counters that can be used to buy things.

However, the commodity-exchange origin of money is still there. Commodity production and exchange is basic to capitalism and the ratios in which they exchange for each other are still related to their labour content. The state issuing more money tokens than needed to carry out these exchanges does not increase the amount of values in existence or to be exchanged. What it changes is the unit in which the price of goods is expressed, reducing it and so raising the number of them to express prices, i.e., increasing prices all round. Which is why the 'chartalists' of MMT would come unstuck if ever their policy was to be implemented.

Air Pressure

In the middle of March a sandstorm resulted in orange skies and incredibly unhealthy air quality measurements in Beijing. Sand had blown in from western desert areas in amounts far higher than usual, and this was at least partly due to large-scale deforestation. Meanwhile in the UK, legal limits on toxic air pollution have been broken for a decade, and over nine-tenths of the country (including a quarter of homes) is affected by pollution from roads, much of which consists of tiny particles from brakes, tyres and the burning of fossil fuels; this affects human health and also the wellbeing of wildlife.

These are specific examples of air pollution, discussed more fully in a report *State of Global Air 2020* produced by the Health Effects Institute in Boston, US (see www.stateofglobalair.org). It states: 'Air pollution was the 4th leading risk factor for early death worldwide in 2019, surpassed only by high blood pressure, tobacco use, and poor diet.' Women who are exposed to particulate air pollution are more likely to have babies who are born premature or have low birth weight, both of which may lead to health problems for the children.

Over ninety percent of the world's population experience concentrations of ambient fine particle air pollution (PM_{2.5}) above the WHO Air Quality Guidelines, the highest being in India, Nepal and Niger. Rates are fairly low in North America and most of Europe, and levels have declined in some regions, but not in those which are most polluted. Ozone pollution, which can be caused by and contribute to climate change and mainly results from the burning of fossil fuels, has also been



Credit: Greenpeace

steadily increasing over the last decade, despite decreases in some places, such as China and Russia. It affects food crops as well as human health. Household air pollution results from burning fuels such as coal for heating or cooking; the extent of this has been much reduced, but half the world's population remains exposed, primarily in the least-developed countries, and it particularly affects babies.

Long-term exposure to air pollution contributes to increased risk of illness and death from heart disease, lung cancer, stroke, and so on, with children and the elderly the worst affected. The estimate is that in 2019 it contributed to 6.67 million deaths, largely in Africa and Asia, including half a million deaths among infants who did not survive their first month. Compare the nine million or so who die each year from hunger and just under three million who die from obesity.

The coronavirus pandemic has resulted in cleaner and clearer skies in many locations, but it will take a lot more to restore clean air to as much of the planet as possible. Establishing a society that puts human well-being and the health of the planet first would be a major step in the right direction.

PB

PROPER GANDER

‘She’s part of those statistics now’

‘ALL THE doctors came in. And I knew. ... I felt her leave. And then they told us. What do you do?’, says Naomi Ventour, as she recalls the day her sister Natalie died shortly after giving birth to her second child. ‘She’s part of those statistics now’, Naomi adds, referring to how as a black woman, Natalie was at least four times more likely to die during or soon after pregnancy than a white woman. This disparity is examined by Channel 4’s recent documentary in the *Dispatches* strand, *The Black Maternity Scandal*. Presenter and mother-of-three Rochelle Humes is of dual heritage, and so is three times more likely to suffer a maternal death than a white woman. She speaks with women like Naomi who have been affected, and also with researchers and campaigners aiming to address the problem.

Of the 2.2 million women who gave birth in the UK between 2016 and 2018, 34 black women in every 100,000 died up to a year after, compared with 15 Asian women and eight white women (tinyurl.com/59akcr63, p.1). For every one who dies during pregnancy, a hundred more will suffer a life-threatening complication, and again this affects a disproportionate number of non-white women. One such additional risk is coronavirus: in the UK, ‘black pregnant women are eight times more likely to be admitted to hospital with Covid-19 [than white pregnant women], while Asian women are four times as likely’ (tinyurl.com/n4rba64n, p.17).

What causes these depressing disparities? A possibility not raised by the programme is whether they are due to genetic differences between groups of people which put some inherently at higher risk. The prevalence of a few health issues is related to genes found more commonly in particular ethnic groups, such as sickle cell disease. But maternal death isn’t a single condition, and therefore doesn’t have a single cause which can be reduced to a set of genes.

Maternal deaths are often associated with conditions like heart disease, blood clots and mental health problems, all of which can have multiple causes, including social factors such as lifestyle and environment. So, if women in particular ethnic groups are more likely to have health conditions which contribute to maternal deaths, then this is because they are more likely to lead lives which exacerbate those conditions. Living in poverty comes with increased chances of having a poor diet, depression and inadequate housing, all of which would impact negatively on a pregnancy. Consequently, women in the most deprived areas of England are three

being racist, an explanation is given by Dr Christine Ekechi of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. She says that historically, the institutions of medical care were set up around the needs of white men who had most power in society, and particular needs of women and non-white people were added on, and still don’t always have equal recognition.

So, what is being done to address the issue? November 2020’s report by the government’s Joint Human Rights Committee- *Black People, Racism and Human Rights* - made the blunt admission that ‘the NHS acknowledge and regret this disparity but have no target to end it’ (tinyurl.com/n4rba64n, p.3). The widely

criticised report by The Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities which concluded that the system is no longer rigged against non-white people referred to the disparity, but was vague about any proposed solutions because first ‘the increased rates seen in ethnic minority groups need to be better understood and explained’ (tinyurl.com/t8rrrcy4, p.218).

Hopefully, further research will expand on the social and economic reasons behind the disparity and maternal deaths in general, but where will this lead? Nadine Dorries, Minister for Mental Health, Suicide Prevention and Patient Safety has said that she is ‘absolutely committed to tackling disparities and making sure all women get the right support and best possible maternity care’. If this is more than just a soundbite, there may be reforms or changes to procedures which will help prevent some future tragedies. But whatever measures are put in place will depend on how much funding is politically and financially viable, and how much of a priority the issue has among society’s countless other problems. The deeper causes of the issue – poverty and division – can’t be legislated away because they’re built into how society is structured.

MIKE FOSTER



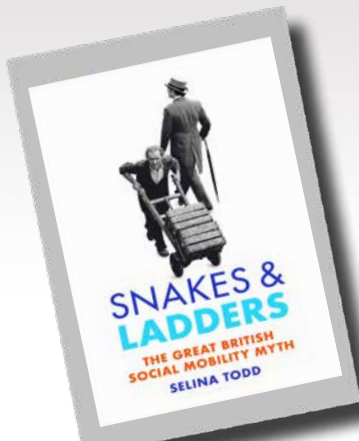
Credit: Channel 4 Dispatches

times more at risk of suffering a maternal death than those in the most affluent areas (tinyurl.com/59akcr63, table 2.10). There are higher proportions of non-white people living in poorer areas, especially first and second-generation settlers who came into the country with little money and few opportunities.

But the disparity isn’t only accounted for by the additional health risks which come with poverty. Another factor is an inconsistency in how people of different ethnic groups are treated by the health service. One study from the USA highlighted a mistaken belief that black people can bear more pain than white people, which led to lower amounts of painkillers being prescribed (tinyurl.com/mjfmuaawn). In the documentary, Humes talks with women who felt that medical staff didn’t take their concerns seriously enough because they aren’t white. When this isn’t down to ignorant individuals

REVIEWS

Not a chance



Snakes and Ladders. The Great British Social Mobility Myth. By Selina Todd. Penguin hardback. 2021. 448 pages.

'Work, boys, work and be contented
So long as you've enough to buy a meal
For if you will but try, you'll be wealthy –
bye and bye –
If you'll only put yer shoulder to the wheel.'

[Harry Clifton, quoted in Robert Tressell's
The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists]

That social mobility in Britain is largely a myth is shown in Selina Todd's book. It's a myth, of course, that's been around a long time, as sung in the mid-nineteenth century music hall song quoted above, or printed in Conservative Party manifestos of recent years, telling us that all you need to become rich is to work hard. Todd notes, though, that this message can run parallel with suggestions that people should know their place, as when the Tory education minister Lord Percy complained in the *Daily Telegraph* in 1925 that scholarship boys from the middle- and working class were encouraged to 'use the school as an escape from their *normal* job' [our emphasis].

A society where success is born out of hard work, talent and ambition, the argument goes, is surely a fair one. People rise up the social ladder to the level of their abilities, and even those without these qualities can benefit from the ingenuity of those that have them. This is the myth: the main influence on success has always been birth and wealth.

That the class structure is seen as a ladder, to climb up or step down, is significant, deriving from early census data. An early incarnation came from the Registrar General in 1911, a time of increasing union power, greater influence

of the Labour Party, the struggle for women's suffrage, and the aristocratic House of Lords concerned with the power of the middle-class House of Commons. The Liberal government posited a 'scientific' census, where the so-called culture of occupations would determine their class position. Professionals and industrialists were on a level with the (often much wealthier) landed aristocracy. Manual labourers and domestic staff, though invaluable, were nevertheless at the bottom. Vital unpaid work such as mothering was just ignored.

But by letting a few rise up, the elite can claim that Britain is a meritocracy, to the benefit of those who gain from the preservation of this class-based society. And social mobility is not only subjective: how particular work is placed in the hierarchy depends, unsurprisingly, upon its value to capitalism. Before WWI, work done by clerks was more valued as industry required more form-filling, regulations to be dealt with and other written analyses. After the war, more of this work involved routine tasks and so their social standing dropped. After WWII and the emergence of the welfare state, teachers and nurses were valued, but, approaching the 21st century, when wealth acquisition is considered to be more important, these occupations fell down the scale.

The book is a fascinating history, documenting the voices of those who lived through these periods. It's a useful resource, showing how societal changes allowed some limited improvements to the social standing of working people and the forces arraigned to prevent this advancement, and the fears of falling down the ladder. It is also refreshing to see class distinction defined as "the tiny minority who live off other people's labour, and the vast majority who do not".

Todd has solutions. People who worked to ascend the social ladder did so, by and large, not for wealth, but to increase security and control over their lives, and in some cases to contribute to society. But these aspirations rarely came to fruition. Todd suggests a change in focus to 'replace social mobility with a commitment to equality and innovation, and on the benefits that this would bring'. An egalitarian shift in education to be state-funded and run by local education authorities, available to people of all ages. For private education, remove its £200 million annual state subsidy, add VAT and subtract its charitable status.

Change the emphasis of education to be more self-selective and not primarily skilling up for work, which will create innovation. Progressive taxation, reward essential workers – notably the front-line workers, usually poorly paid, who have worked through the Covid-19 pandemic. Redistribute economic power from male-dominated London towards regional, without gender discrimination.

Other reviews have considered Todd's conclusions as either fanciful, a result of her prejudices or an ideal to which one can strive. It's perhaps unfortunate that, shortly after the book's publication date, Boris Johnson is reported as saying that the success of the Covid-19 vaccination in Britain is due to capitalism and greed. So much for rewarding those front-line workers who kept society going; it's business as usual. Nor is the offer of a 1 percent pay rise to nurses encouraging.

Todd's sincerity is unquestionable, but, from a socialist point of view, unrealistic. Unfortunately, capitalism cannot cope with equality. Equality cannot exist in a society where wealth is distributed through competition. Attempts in capitalist regimes to ensure that no-one has too much or too little have never been successful. Only a society based upon common ownership can ensure that.

VJ

Metabolic Materialism



A New Introduction to Karl Marx: New Materialism, Critique of Political Economy, and the Concept of Metabolism. By Ryuji Sasaki, translated by Michael Schauerte, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.

This book examines the theories of Marx stated in the above subtitle, particularly their significance to the transformation of society. The focus is on one of Marx's most famous works, *Capital*, but it is not

intended to be an introduction to that work. Marx came to reject the realm of philosophical ideas as an explanation of the world (common at the time) preferring the insight that his basic world-view is 'the actual, given relations of life' and this 'method is the only materialist, and therefore the only scientific one' (*Capital*, Volume 1, 1867). This is what was new about Marx's method and it is a succinct explanation of the relationship between materialism, science and socialism.

The first volume of Marx's *Capital* has the subtitle 'A Critique of Political Economy' and is not merely a work of political economy (or economics, as it would be called today). For instance, in Marx's day many economists accepted 'Say's Law' (after the French economist JB Say) which asserted that production creates its own demand. Some economists today still accept this and argue that any imbalances between production and consumption are temporary and 'self-clearing'. In this view, crises are impossible. Sasaki argues that, for Marx, it is the money economy which makes crises possible. Buying and selling in the aggregate is inherently unpredictable and, Marx wrote, 'crises cannot occur without the circulation of money'.

Metabolism is a concept that became well known in the nineteenth century through the work of the chemist Justus von Liebig, becoming a more broadly encompassing term that included not only the chemical changes that individual organisms undergo but also the interaction between living organisms and their surrounding environment. The term metabolism began to influence not only the natural but also the social sciences, and was used analogously within political economy to refer to the circular, organic activity of human beings involved in production, distribution, and consumption.

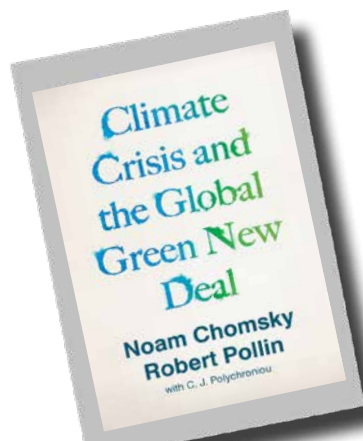
Marx first used the term metabolism in 1851 as an analogy to explain the cyclical activity of society as an organism. All the way through to his writing of *Capital*, Marx continued to use the term in the sense of organic economic activity. However, Sasaki argues that Marx's use of metabolism was not limited to that meaning. Eventually he began to use the term to express the material circulation between human beings and nature. Capitalism is a disturbance of the metabolism; socialism will restore the metabolism. For Marx, socialism will be a society in which the 'associated producers' will 'govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, ... accomplishing this metabolism with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature.'

At the end of this book there are a

couple of lengthy appendices, one on Marx's method and another on his theory of reification. It is encouraging to see a work of this quality being produced in Japan, and congratulations are due to Ryuji Sasaki and his translator, WSPUS member Michael Schauerte.

LEW

Towards Zero



Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin, with C.J. Polychroniou: **Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: the Political Economy of Saving the Planet.** Verso £12.99.

This is not truly a book written by Chomsky and Pollin together; rather both respond individually to questions posed by Polychroniou, who adds a short introduction. Chomsky begins by saying that climate change presents a new 'threat of destruction of organized human life in any recognizable or tolerable form' and then discusses how the US Republican Party has served corporate power, with the Koch brothers supporting the use of fossil fuels, where they made their fortune. But it's not clear if this justifies describing the Republicans as 'the most dangerous organization in world history'.

Historically, the main blame for causing climate change since 1800 falls on Western Europe and the US (i.e. the economic systems there), while the richest tenth of the earth's population are responsible for nearly half of all emissions tied to personal consumption. The poorest are the hardest-hit, such as dry land farmers, who rely on rain for irrigation. Extreme weather events, such as cyclones and hurricanes, have had devastating impacts on some places, including Zimbabwe and Puerto Rico.

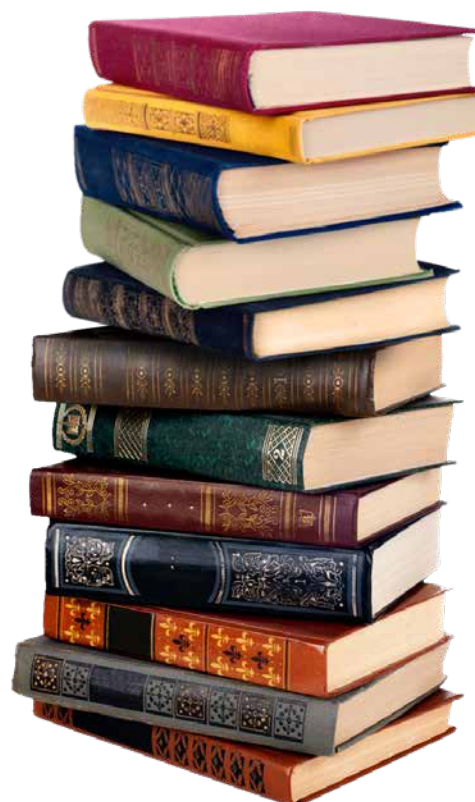
Pollin notes that it is realistic in principle to reduce global CO2 emissions to net zero by 2050, by means of improving energy efficiency and expanding clean renewable energy sources. Existing nuclear plants, which do not emit CO2, could continue for a while, yet cannot be part of a long-term solution. Despite some alarmist claims,

relatively small proportions of land need to be used to generate sufficient solar and wind energy, perhaps three percent of the land in the UK and just one percent in the US, which is less densely populated.

Closing fossil fuel enterprises would mean the loss of masses of jobs and far smaller tax revenues, but use of clean energy can lead to job creation; unfortunately these points show how much the authors are really stuck within the assumptions and framework of capitalism. They do show some scepticism, such as Chomsky saying that we are doomed if profit-making remains the driving force, and that production for profit cannot be sustained. 'Dismantling' capitalism is supposedly not possible in the time frame needed, but doing so should proceed in parallel with averting environmental disaster, though no argument is made that the two together can be achieved in time.

Pollin states that eco-socialism and the Green New Deal are fundamentally the same project, but since the latter assumes the retention of money and employment, it is certainly not the same as our vision of World Socialism. There are some references to 'establishing the basis for a future free and democratic society within the present one', apparently based on Bakunin's ideas, but hardly anything about achieving this in a practical way. After all, it will be much more straightforward to implement carbon reduction in a world without profit and corporations.

PB



50 Years Ago

Another Anti-Strike Bill

The Bill also provides for the families of men on strike to be reduced below the government's own poverty line, at the moment £8.50 plus rent a week for a married couple. (...) The extra suffering this will cause should please employers like Lord Stokes who from their well-upholstered boardrooms have been complaining of strikers being featherbedded. Extreme poverty will once again become an important factor in weakening the workers' side in strikes. How useful financial hardship amongst the strikers can be to the employer was well shown during the Post Office strike and the postmen would undoubtedly have had to give in earlier had this new Bill been in operation.

The government's Social Security Bill is a vicious anti-working class measure which is intended to hurt the wives and children of workers in order to discourage strikes and force strikers back to work. Like the Industrial Relations Bill, it will strengthen the overall position of the employing class in its struggle with the working class over wages and conditions. For this reason the Socialist Party of Great Britain is opposed to this Bill.

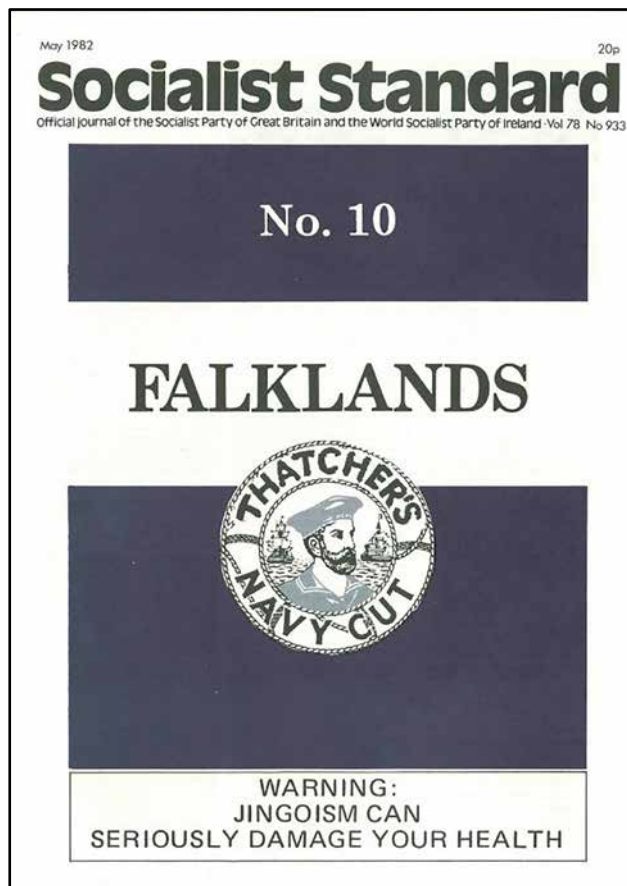
But in doing so, we have no illusions about the role of governments in capitalist society. We do not really expect them to subsidise strikes against their masters, the capitalist class, and are not surprised that

the present government is taking advantage of working class apathy and ignorance to cut back on some social reforms which, however marginally, favour the working class. This apathy and ignorance is partly the result of the failure of reformist parties like Labour and of the propaganda of the capitalist press. The old socialist saying that the best way to get or defend reforms (if that is what you want) is to build up a strong revolutionary Socialist movement remains true. That is our policy for dealing with the current Tory attacks on long-standing social reforms.

(Socialist Standard, May 1971)



Credit: Socialist Worker



Obituary Melvin Tenner

We regret to report that Melvin Tenner died in April after failing to recover from a serious health incident in November. He was 74. He joined the old Paddington Branch in 1973 after meeting a member selling the *Socialist Standard* outside Notting Hill tube station in West London. He had previously been associated with various left-wing groups. He had been at art college but at the time was working at a university bookshop. Subsequently he set up his own mail order bookselling business, the Academic Book Club. He used to recount how on one occasion after innocently selling a collection of difficult-to-get technical books to an Iraqi he was interviewed by MI6. Maybe they mistakenly thought that his politics inclined him to support Saddam Hussein. Whatever, the Iraqis weren't pleased either as the books were old and they thought Melvin had diddled them when they compared the old pounds shillings and pence on the cover with his standard finder's fee.

In the Party he was one of the editors of the *Socialist Standard* in the 1980s both as a writer of carefully crafted articles and as designer. We reproduce one of the covers he designed.

Somewhat lugubrious but with a dry wit that reflected his dexterity and intelligence, Melvin was a dedicated socialist and involved in a range of other Party activities too. These included more recently being a member of the Executive Committee, and, at the time of his death, a Party Trustee and Secretary of West London branch.

Outside the Party he was a lifelong Fulham FC supporter and previously Chair of the Fulham Supporters' Club, leading a

successful campaign to raise money from fans to keep the club going. Our condolences go to his family.

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.

MAY 2021 DISCORD EVENTS

Wednesday 5 May 19.30 (GMT + 1)

“Did you see the news?”

Topical news discussion and quiz

Friday 7 May 19.30 (GMT + 1)

Is class consciousness a thing of the past?

Speaker: Anton Pruden

A sideways look at Marx's distinction in today's world, focussing on historical events that changed the world and how we can apply them to our revolutionary case. Why have all those calling themselves socialists, including us, failed to implement major societal change in a very unstable world? For Socialism to be implemented, do we all need to embrace a whole new paradigm? Lively discussion welcome.

Wednesday 12 May 19.30 (GMT + 1)

FAQ: What if we had to start the Socialist Party from scratch?

The SPGB was born into a gas-lit Edwardian England of hansom cabs and handlebar moustaches. The Russians and Japanese were fighting with coal-powered battleships, the Belgians were committing atrocities in the Congo, and Louis Bleriot had not yet flown across the Channel. Our history is a legacy and an asset, but also perhaps a burden. If

we had to start from scratch today, what would we do differently?

Friday 14 May 19.30 (GMT + 1)

Daily Life in Socialism

Speaker: Paul Bennett

What would life be like in a classless society based on production for use? How could work be organised? How might people spend their time? What would the news consist of? Would things be the same everywhere? Listeners will be invited to propose their own ideas.

Saturday 15 May 9.30 to 17.00 (GMT + 1)
Annual Conference

Wednesday 19 May 19.30 (GMT + 1)

FAQ: Is it true that the rich are not the problem?

We say the system is the problem, not the people who benefit from it. But as the wealth gap continues to widen, could there come a point where individual billionaires and even trillionaires have such iron control of the planet that revolution is no longer possible?

Friday 21 May 19.30 (GMT + 1)

What is Social Progress?

Speaker: Pat Deutz

Looking back we can see that several factors have contributed to improvements

in living standards including state interests, advances in technology and mass production. Yet ongoing social and environmental problems and increasing inequality and insecurity suggest that such social progress is not the answer; a more fundamental change is essential.

Wednesday 26 May 19.30 (GMT + 1)

FAQ – What's it like being a socialist?

Speaker: Glenn Morris

Friday 28 May 19.30 (GMT + 1)

150 Years since the Paris Commune

Speaker: Jordan Levi

150 years ago this day began the assault by government troops on the democratically-organised Paris Commune that had controlled Paris for the previous two months. Why was it considered a significant event in working-class history and socialist theory? Can anything be learned from it for today?

**Cardiff Street Stall,
Capitol Shopping Centre,
Queen Street (Newport Road end).
1pm-3pm every Saturday,
weather permitting.**

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.



Glenn in Wonderland



"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less." A similar disdain for language would seem to be shared by Lewis Carroll's character in *Alice Through the Looking-Glass* and Glenn Greenwald, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist. Glenn "... went on to say that he 'would describe a lot of people on the right as being socialists,' such as former White House strategist Steve Bannon and 'the 2016 iteration' of former President Donald Trump as a candidate, 'based on what he was saying.' 'I consider Tucker Carlson to be a socialist,' Greenwald said of the *Daily Caller* co-founder. He then described an instance where Carlson and Democratic New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a self-identified socialist, agreed in their mutual opposition to Democratic New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo wanting 'to give tens of millions of dollars to Amazon to bring an office to New York.'" (*dailycaller.com*, 3 March). The word socialism, as originally used by the followers of Robert Owen, appeared for the first time in their *Co-operative Magazine* of November 1827 and meant common ownership (not nationalisation or state capitalism). The American Marxist Daniel De Leon understood this and saw socialism as a revolutionary change in society. He explained: 'As a poodle may have his hair cut long or his hair cut short, as he may be trimmed with pink ribbons or with blue ribbons, yet he remains the same old poodle, so capitalism may be trimmed with factory laws, tenement laws, divorce laws and gambling laws, but it remains the same old capitalism. These 'humanitarian parts' are only trimming the poodle. Socialism, one and inseparable with its 'antirent and anticapital parts,' means to get rid of the poodle' (*Daily People*, 2 November, 1908).

Tweedledee and Tweedledum

Helen Keller said of democracy in the US: 'Our democracy is but a name. We vote? What does that mean? It means that we choose between two bodies of real, though not avowed, autocrats. We choose between Tweedledum and Tweedledee.' Will the Marxist Unity Slate save us? They say: 'Thousands of DSA [Democratic Socialists of America] members are inspired by Marxist politics, and we want to unite them around a credible vision for an independent socialist movement in the United States. 'Slate' refers not to a slate of leadership candidates, but to our three-point lineup of (1) Constitutional amendment and (2) Resolutions. We believe our three-point slate will help DSA develop a strong 'programmatic unity': unity based not on theoretical dogma, but on common struggle and a shared political vision. WE NEED 100 SIGNATURES ON EACH ITEM TO PROCEED TO THE NEXT STAGE! With your support and signatures we can begin to build an ecumenical mass socialist party based on Marxist principles' (undated, marxistunity.com). Wait! Here's one that genuine socialists made earlier: the World Socialist Party of the United States. Since its formation in 1916 by 42 defecting members of Local Detroit of the Socialist Party of America (SPA), the WSP has consistently advocated a fully democratic society based upon co-operation and production for use, opposed every single war, participated in working-class struggles, and functioned as a democratic and leaderless organisation. Writing that same year, Keller noted: 'I became an IWW because I found out that the Socialist party was too slow. It is sinking in the political bog. It is almost, if not quite, impossible for the party to keep its revolutionary character so long as it occupies a place under the government and seeks office under it. The government does not stand for interests the Socialist party is supposed to represent' (from an interview written by Barbara Bindley published in the *New York Tribune*, 16 January, 1916).



The (Mad) Hatter



'Deng Xiaoping is famous for the saying 'it doesn't matter whether a cat is black or white provided it catches mice.' As I am an unashamed Dengite in economic theory the equivalent of this is that it is perfectly possible to understand China's socialist economy in terms of either Western or Marxist economic theory...' (undated, learningfromchina.net). The author John Ross is a Senior Fellow in Financial Studies at Renmin University, China. The socialism Marx envisaged involved 'abolition of buying and selling, of the bourgeois conditions of production' (*Communist Manifesto*). Oh, the irony! In his Report of an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan (1927), Mao admitted that the coming revolution would not be socialist: 'To overthrow these feudal forces is the real objective of the revolution.' Writing four years earlier Sylvia Pankhurst stated: 'Socialism means plenty for all. We do not preach a gospel of want and scarcity, but of abundance. Our desire is not to make poor those who today are rich, in order to put the poor in the place where the rich now are. Our desire is not to pull down the present rulers to put other rulers in their places' (*Socialism, Workers' Dreadnought*, 28 July 1923). Does this sound familiar? What follows is almost prophetic: '...We do not call for limitation of births...! Socialism in a post-capitalist world of production for use and allocation according to self-defined need will make finance, including Marxian economics, redundant.

"If you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there."

Socialism with Chinese characteristics is another dead end. *Alice in Wonderland* has been banned in multiple countries including China. 'We are drawn back to Alice's *Adventures in Wonderland* because when we read it, we become the heretics, dreamers and rebels who would change the world' (*theconversation.com*, 16 February).