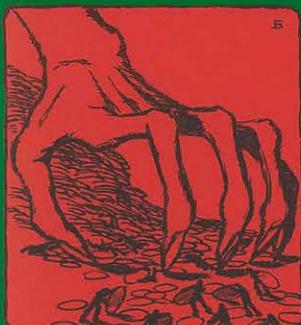


June 2021  
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# socialist standard

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



## WORK, WASTE &



## WAGE SLAVERY

### Making a living or making a life



Also:  
Oscar Wilde  
Multiculturalism  
The Labour Party



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# socialist standard

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## Introducing the Socialist Party

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

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



of the natural world can have limited effect and run counter to the nature of capitalism itself.

Gradualist reformers like the Labour Party believed that capitalism could be transformed through a series of social measures, but have merely become routine managers of the system. The Bolsheviks had to be content with

developing Russian capitalism under a one-party dictatorship. Both failures have given socialism a quite different -- and unattractive -- meaning: state ownership and control. As the *Socialist Standard* pointed out before both courses were followed, the results would more properly be called state capitalism.

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

## The Middle East – A Capitalist Flashpoint

To live in a region like the Middle East that is abundant in natural resources and with its easy access to the world's main waterways would, in a rational society, be a blessing for its inhabitants, but under capitalism, with its ruthless and competitive quest for profit, it is an unmitigated curse. Greedy and hungry capitalist vultures are continually circling ready to pounce on their prey. From Iraq to Syria to Yemen, hundreds of thousands of lives have been sacrificed in wars dedicated to the god of profit, more powerful and blood-thirsty than any Sumerian deity.

Palestine was a focus of rivalry between imperial powers long before Israel was established. The Ottomans ruled there until their defeat in the First World War, whereupon the British received a mandate to rule Palestine as part of the spoils of war. In 1948, after facing a guerrilla campaign by Jewish settler groups, the British rulers relinquished their rule over Palestine and the Israeli state was born. Once in power the new regime set about expelling the Arab population (the Palestinians), from their homes and villages. They were exiled to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and many found themselves in refugee camps in neighbouring Arab countries.

Given its strategic location, Israel was

always going to be courted by the major capitalist powers. The USSR was one of its earliest supporters until about the mid-fifties when it became an ally of the United States. During the Cold War, the US backed Israel and the Arab states were supported by the USSR. The workers in the region, including the dispossessed Palestinians, were the pawns in this geopolitical power struggle.

Conflict between the Palestinian population and the state has dogged Israel since its inception. A resolution appeared possible when the Oslo accords were agreed in 1993 which proposed a two-state solution. However, in the last 20 years, more stridently nationalistic Israeli governments have encouraged illegal Jewish settlements in the West Bank. The tensions arising from this led to military conflicts between the Israeli state and Hamas in 2009 and again in 2014. The United States government has continually backed Israel, including supplying arms. Donald Trump, when he was the US President, ramped up the tensions by recognising Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

The triggers for the current violence have been the attempt to evict Palestinian families in East Jerusalem to make way for Jewish settlers and the firing of stun

grenades by Israeli police at worshippers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Reacting to this provocation, Hamas fired rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory. The Israeli military retaliated with airstrikes against buildings in Gaza. As in previous military confrontations, casualties fell more heavily on the Palestinian side, including the deaths of many children. However, an ominous new development has been an outbreak of sectarian violence between Jewish and Arab Israeli workers.

Hamas, would-be capitalist rulers of the Palestinians with links to Iran, are vying to wrest control of the Palestinian areas from their Fatah rivals in the Palestinian National Authority. The odious Mr Erdogan of Turkey is weighing in pretending to be a champion of the Palestinians.

Despite the media narrative, this is not a conflict of interest between Jews and Arabs, but an aspect of a wider geopolitical struggle between capitalist states over Middle East oil resources and strategic routes. Jewish and Arab workers have no interest in fighting each other, but they have a common interest in uniting with other workers in abolishing capitalism and establishing socialism.

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# PATHFINDERS

## Climate Change – Somebody Else’s Problem?

IN MAY the International Energy Agency released a report entitled *Net Zero by 2050: A roadmap for the global energy sector* (<https://www.iea.org/reports/net-zero-by-2050>). The 224-page report describes itself as ‘the world’s first comprehensive study of how to transition to a net zero energy system by 2050 while ensuring stable and affordable energy supplies, providing universal energy access, and enabling robust economic growth’.

Universal energy access? Stable and affordable? Even someone supportive of capitalism would be inclined to say ‘pull the other one’. If a commodity is to make a profit, it can’t be so cheap that even the poorest can afford it, so the idea of universal affordable energy is already a non-starter before you’ve got past the introductory blurb.

But the roadmap is nothing if not ambitious, ‘setting out more than 400 milestones for what needs to be done, and when, to decarbonise the global economy in just three decades.’ A forest of charts and graphs are there to underline the gigantic strides that capitalism needs to make, each one liable to have the supporter of capitalism once again muttering sceptically, especially given the admission at the start that global state commitments are ‘well short of what is needed to limit the rise in global temperatures to 1.5°C and avert the worst effects of climate change’.

Even if we had socialism – a global society of democratic and cooperative common ownership where the imperatives of profit and commercial growth would be absent – this might be a tall order given the time frame, although doable because we wouldn’t have to battle with private competing interests. More to the point, if we had socialism already, the world wouldn’t be in this situation in the first place. The independent behaviour of private actors seeking profits regardless of ‘externalities’ has driven us to the brink of a global tragedy of the commons that would not have occurred if the commons were truly owned in common. Now, even the International Monetary Fund is starting to talk in shrill terms about a potential extinction-level event: ‘There is growing agreement between economists and scientists that the tail risks are material and the risk of catastrophic and irreversible



### Net Zero by 2050: A roadmap for the global energy system

International  
Energy Agency

disaster is rising, implying potentially infinite costs of unmitigated climate change, including, in the extreme, human extinction’ ([bit.ly/3hKMP5z](https://bit.ly/3hKMP5z)).

We don’t take this view, as it’s hard to imagine anything short of a planet-busting asteroid taking out all of humanity, and we don’t subscribe to a counsel of despair because we say there is a solution – urgently getting rid of capitalism and letting socialism off the leash. Failing that, capitalism is going to have one hell of a job slamming on all its brakes simultaneously in order to stop short of the abyss. Can it succeed in doing what looks like the impossible? We don’t know. We’ve learned not to underestimate capitalism’s ability to adapt, and in the past year’s pandemic we’ve seen it do things that previously people would have said was impossible, albeit it at a staggering cost to itself. And that’s just the trouble. Capitalism has been knocked for six, having just paid out the equivalent of a world war due to the pandemic. If you think that’s an exaggeration, the Second World War is thought to have cost around \$23 trillion in today’s money. The IMF estimates the cost of the pandemic to the global economy as \$28 trillion ([bit.ly/3bOEU3g](https://bit.ly/3bOEU3g)). So not only does capitalism have to do the seemingly impossible, it has to do it under the worst possible economic circumstances.

This desperate task becomes all the more farcical when you realise that ‘net zero by 2050’ is not actually good enough, because it’s aimed at limiting global temperature increase to 2°C, not the 1.5°C target as specified by the Paris agreement and which would require ‘net zero by 2030’. What difference does half a degree make? Maybe not much, maybe all the difference in the world. The Energy Watch Group, often highly critical of the IEA in the past for being too soft on fossil and for being a poodle of the USA, issued a report last December entitled ‘The path to climate neutrality by 2050 misses the Paris climate targets – The rocky road to

truthfulness in climate politics’. It quotes the IMF ‘extinction’ scare cited above and goes on to explain why 2°C might be too close for comfort: ‘It is widely scientifically recognised that a global temperature increase by more than 2°C threatens to lead to a so called Hothouse Earth scenario in which human civilisation as we know it can no longer exist’ ([bit.ly/3hKMP5z](https://bit.ly/3hKMP5z)).

Is that true? Well, it’s true that +2°C ‘threatens’ to do so, because of tipping points and feedback loops following each other ‘like a row of dominoes’, at which point ‘we see that the Earth system tips over from being a friend to a foe. We totally hand over our fate to an Earth system that starts rolling out of equilibrium’ ([bbc.in/3bJNAb6](https://bbc.in/3bJNAb6)). But it’s an unquantifiable threat and nobody really knows for sure. On the one hand, the Earth has certainly been hotter in its history than it is now, without turning into Venus. On the other hand, there have also been five mass extinction events involving upwards of 80 percent of life forms, and climate may have been a factor in some of them. As a researcher from York University reported to *Scientific American* in 2007: ‘There have been three major greenhouse phases in the time period we analyzed and the peaks in temperature of each coincide with mass extinctions’ ([bit.ly/3f9nX50](https://bit.ly/3f9nX50)).

One might wonder then if there is any point in the IEA issuing a so-called roadmap for the Paris Agreement, given that the likelihood of capitalism being able to follow it looks so remote, and given that it’s not ambitious enough anyway. But if there is an agreement, there has to be a roadmap, however rocky and untruthful it is. Whether or not the planet is facing an existential crisis, capitalism is certainly suffering a credibility crisis. It has no answer to the environmentalist’s well-aimed charge of requiring ‘infinite growth on a finite planet’, and more and more people are waking up to that fact. But the policy makers have to say something, and look as if they’re doing something. US climate envoy John Kerry was held up to ridicule recently for saying that the climate would be stabilised using technologies that don’t exist yet ([bbc.in/3v7oEIE](https://bbc.in/3v7oEIE)), but he illustrated a fundamental truth about how today’s politicians think about the future. By 2050, all this will be somebody else’s problem.

**PJS**

# LETTERS

## For the fans?

Dear Editors,

I was interested to read Dave Alton's article in the May *Socialist Standard* concerning the proposed European Super League.

As a football fan for many years, I have seen numerous proposals of this nature come and go. The only variable seems to be how long they take to collapse! The latest fiasco was particularly gratifying as the whole thing fell apart in barely 48 hours.

I am firmly of the opinion that any future similar proposals will go the same way. Indeed, I suspect many of the club owners involved are fully aware of this and are just looking to see how far they can go as a bargaining ploy to obtain a bigger slice of the cake from existing and future TV deals.

Why? Well, as Dave writes, 'Whatever the purpose, money will be the driving force behind it.' This money comes from the TV companies who show the matches, and therefore ultimately from their advertisers.

But the 'elite' clubs behind such proposals are only 'elite' in any meaningful sense in their own countries, where their wealth virtually guarantees success. Put 15 or 20 of them together on an equal basis, and ultimately someone has to finish bottom. Take away any meaningful threat of relegation and the matches between the 'under-performing' clubs become meaningless. So you end up with the same handful of clubs playing each other year after year in sterile, pointless games. Once the novelty has worn off (or even before then for me and most other fans I

know), no-one wants to watch this.

So what then is the likelihood of advertisers continuing to fund inflated TV deals for something with a minuscule audience? Er, zero! This is the reason why I do not believe such a 'competition', in whatever guise, will ever take off. To that extent, fans DO still have power. Dave is right to suggest that impotent rage does not achieve anything, but refusal to watch their product, whether in person or on TV, most certainly will.

**SHANE ROBERTS, BRISTOL**

Dear Editors,

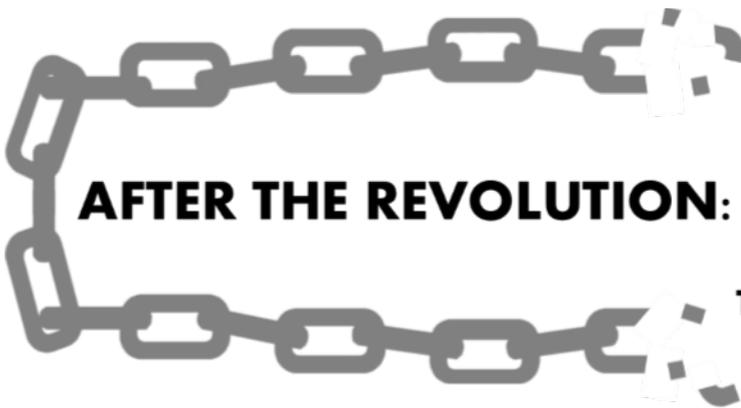
'Leeds United head coach Marcelo Bielsa says the fundamental problem is that the rich always aspire to be more powerful without considering the effects this has on the rest'. This is the caption that should have been attached to this post-match interview (you can see the caption they actually use on the website - [bit.ly/3fprp1m](http://bit.ly/3fprp1m)).

Bielsa is in no doubt that football works just the same as the rest of society. Addressing the issue of the European Super League, he says that the big clubs are ready to dump the smaller ones when they no longer need them to make money, and that structures intended to limit inequalities in the sport are going to break down.

He says this should come as no surprise: 'The logic that rules the world, and football isn't outside of it, is that the rich get richer at the cost of the poor becoming poorer.'

Football is for the fans? Hmm, think again!

**S. FINCH, BOLTON**



## AFTER THE REVOLUTION: Life in a Socialist World

The Socialist Party's Summer School

6th—8th August 2021

Fircroft College, Birmingham

**A socialist society will only come about when a sizeable majority of people worldwide want it and democratically and co-operatively work towards it. As such, it can only happen after many of today's attitudes have changed, once people have rejected capitalism and its institutions of states, employment, money and classes. Instead of the dead-ends of reformism and division, society will be working together to make a world which satisfies everyone's self-determined needs and wants.**

**We can't say anything certain about what life would be like in a socialist world. That's for the people at the time to decide, and would vary between communities and regions. How things run will also be shaped by future advancements in technology, and also by what environmental damage has been inherited from capitalism. Although we can only speculate, we can say that a socialist society could only succeed by being based on the principles of equality, democracy and voluntary co-operation.**

**This weekend of talks and discussion is an opportunity to imagine some of the possibilities of this new world. How might decisions be made? What kind of job roles would we have, and what would motivate us? How might friends and families spend time together? How would free access to goods and services work in practice? And how would we balance a world of abundance with safeguarding the environment?**

E-mail enquiries to [spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk). Full residential cost (including accommodation and meals Friday evening to Sunday afternoon) is £100; the concessionary rate is £50. Book online at [www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/summer-school-2021/](http://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/summer-school-2021/) or send a cheque (payable to the Socialist Party of Great Britain) with your contact details to Summer School, The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 7UN. Day visitors are welcome, but please book by email in advance.

# COOKING THE BOOKS

## What the market does

'No politician', John Kerry, told a virtual climate summit called by the US President, 'no matter how demagogic or how potent and capable they are, is going to be able to change what that market is doing' (i paper, 24 April).

As Biden's climate envoy he was expressing the view that investment in technologies to combat global over-warming had now become so profitable for capitalist enterprises that no government would be able to stop it happening. He may have been over-optimistic or premature but his reasoning was based on a more general assumption – that no government can change what the market is doing.

Applied more generally, it is what socialists say. It's even the basis of our case against trying to make capitalism work for the benefit of all instead of, as it does, as a system geared to making and accumulating profits. So it is rather strange that a long-standing reformist politician – Kerry was the Democratic Party candidate for President in 2004 – should be saying this.

He could come back and say that he

only meant it to apply to the particular case of investment in anti-climate-change technologies. But why would governments not be able to change what the market is doing in this case but would in others? Such as when market conditions mean building luxury flats rather than decent homes for those who need one; or not producing food for malnourished people who can't pay for it; or cutting back on the production of needed useful things when there's an economic depression?

Capitalism is an economic system based on the ownership of productive resources by rich individuals, capitalist enterprises or states, where production is carried on for sale on a market with a view to profit. It is driven by the economic imperative not just to make profits but to accumulate them as more capital invested in production for profit. This imperative is enforced via the market.

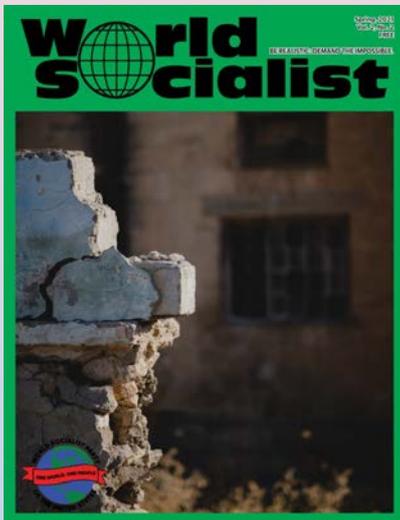
A capitalist enterprise won't make a profit unless it can sell what it produces. To do this, it needs to keep its costs down. This involves keeping up with the latest methods of production, installing technologically more advanced plant and machinery. The market obliges

capitalist enterprises to do this just to stay in the game. If they don't, they will be out-competed by rival enterprises and eventually go out of business, either through bankruptcy or being taken over.

This is the context within which governments have to operate and which constrains what they can do. The main constraint is that they don't have resources of their own and have to get them, directly or indirectly, from the profit-making sector. They must take care not to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. Or even discourage it. Just the opposite; they have to positively encourage it, by maintaining or creating favourable conditions for making profits.

How much they can take from the profit sector depends on how that sector is doing, whether it is expanding, contracting or stagnant. They can't stop the boom/slump cycle that is built into capitalism, so they can do not much more than navigate by sight. They can't control capitalism but are at the mercy of its vagaries.

Kerry is right. No politician can successfully buck the market. As he said, they have to go with its flow.



## World Socialist

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

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# WHAT SORT OF STATE IS ISRAEL?

*After its armed forces once again bombed the hell out of Gaza we look at the nature of the state they are defending.*

There appears to be more of an understanding that the state of Israel seeks to establish a form of religious apartheid but which supporters of Israel vigorously deny.

In our analysis of the South African regime of racial apartheid, we were perhaps unique in our hopeful anticipation of its dismantling because we considered that the capitalists running the country's industry themselves found such a strict racial divide an obstacle to their profits. It was not because of any global boycott but rather the need to fully integrate the nation's black population into the economy as productive workers and lucrative consumers.

We pointed out in one of our pamphlets: 'Apartheid is essentially a pre-capitalist form of oppression; it is an attempt to impose the colour patterns of a frontier farming community onto a modern industrial economy. It will never work properly because what the government is trying to separate the economy keeps bringing together... South Africa's big capitalists want to encourage this tendency of capitalism so that they can make more profits on the basis of a modern wages system and a stable, integrated urban working class. They recognise apartheid as an obstacle to this and oppose it' ([www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/pamphlet/racism/](http://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/pamphlet/racism/)).

However, the situation in Israel is not the same. When the first Intifada in 1987 exposed the vulnerability of a reliance upon daily West Bank workers for Israel's business, the policy of importing migrants from the Far East and Eastern Europe was adopted to bolster the labour supply, all hired on temporary contracts, denying them any chance of permanent residency. There are currently over 300,000 migrant workers in Israel who were described in 2003 by the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network and the International Federation for Human Rights report as 'contemporary form of slavery' ([fidh.org](http://fidh.org)).

Similarly, the outright rejection of 35,000 or more, mainly African, asylum-seeking applicants demonstrates a bias against non-Jewish newcomers who are nevertheless employed in menial jobs replacing West Bank Palestinian workers who are increasingly superfluous to the labour needs of Israel's capitalist economy.

In March 2019 we reported on how the Israeli government is displacing (to use the polite word for ethnically cleansing) its own Bedouin second-class citizens. How much worse it is for those who are considered captive civilians.

In 2003, the former Italian prime minister, Massimo D'Alema, said that former Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon told him that apartheid South Africa's 'Bantustan' system was the best solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In 2006, former American president, Jimmy Carter, wrote a book called *Palestine: Peace or Apartheid?* and remarked in an interview:

'When Israel does occupy this territory deep within the West Bank, and connects the 200-or-so settlements with each other, with a road, and then prohibits the Palestinians from using that road, or in many cases even crossing the road, this

perpetrates even worse instances of apartness, or apartheid, than we witnessed even in South Africa' ([bit.ly/3f640f4](http://bit.ly/3f640f4)).

In 2011, the Russell Tribunal on Palestine 'found grounds to conclude that Israel's rule over the Palestinian people under its jurisdiction, regardless of their zone of residence, collectively amounts to a single integrated regime of apartheid' ([ohchr.org](http://ohchr.org)).

Then in 2017 a report ([bit.ly/3f640f4](http://bit.ly/3f640f4)) was published by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) which described Israel as an apartheid state. The diplomatic pressure from Israel's allies very quickly buried that report and it disappeared from the public discourse.

The Israeli human rights organisation, Yesh Din, published a legal opinion in 2020 where it argued that apartheid was being practised. 'The crime of apartheid is being committed in the West Bank because, in this context of a regime of domination and oppression of one national group by another, the Israeli authorities implement policies and practices that constitute inhuman acts as the term is defined in international law'.

Another Israeli human rights campaign group, B'Tselem, issued their findings in January 2021, *A Regime of Jewish Supremacy From the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. This is Apartheid* ([bit.ly/3xTCn1c](http://bit.ly/3xTCn1c)). It said 'B'Tselem rejects the perception of Israel as a democracy (inside the Green Line) that simultaneously upholds a temporary military occupation (beyond it). B'Tselem reached the conclusion that the bar for defining the Israeli regime as an apartheid

regime has been met after considering the accumulation of policies and laws that Israel devised to entrench its control over Palestinians'.

The report describes how Israel systemically privileges Jews over Palestinians: permitting immigration for Jews only; appropriating land for Jews while crowding Palestinians into enclaves; restricting Palestinian freedom of movement, and denying Palestinians the right to political participation. The report also points to the 2018 nation-state law, which establishes 'Jewish settlement as a national value' and enshrines the Jewish people's 'unique' right to self-determination to the exclusion of all others.

The international rights body, Human Rights Watch, in its April report ([bit.ly/3ezhAbF](http://bit.ly/3ezhAbF)) is the latest to level the charge of apartheid against Israel. HRW stated that:

'Israeli authorities use a series of policies and practices to methodically privilege Jewish Israelis and repress Palestinians. The severity of the repression carried out in the OPT [occupied territories] amounts to 'systematic oppression' by one racial group over another, a key component for the crime of apartheid as set out in both the Rome Statute and Apartheid Convention.'

Answers are not found in segregating peoples and enforcing separation by decree such as with the American Jim Crow laws. Nor do solutions lie in the creation of sovereign states, nor in retaining them, but rather in their complete elimination.

ALJO



**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](mailto:nlb.spgb@gmail.com)

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

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

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**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.

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**NORTHERN IRELAND**

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# MATERIAL WORLD

# Climate Refugees

CLIMATE CHANGE is reshaping our planet. Coastlines are encroaching further inland, deserts are expanding, the range of plant and animal species are declining. The climatic change that is making parts of the world unliveable is another example of people in poorer parts of the world paying the price for capitalism.

Scientists forewarned that the effects of global warming would result in massive migrations of peoples. No nation is immune from the consequences of climate change but it is the poorest and most vulnerable communities – those least culpable for the environmental crisis – who are being the hardest hit. We are already witnessing the number of climate refugees rise.

Being a migrant involves risks and costs yet the media's attention is centred upon the effects upon the host nation rather than the harrowing experiences of the migrants themselves and, worryingly, because of the absence of focus upon the reasons families uproot themselves from familiar surroundings, sympathy and understanding is lacking. Instead of welcoming the opportunity to help fellow human beings, hostility is shown towards newcomers, particularly if they are of a different colour or religion. The World Socialist Movement explains that we are one planet, one people, a human family, and as brothers and sisters we must look out for one another.

In 2014, there was a rise in migration from Central America due to drought and the spread of crop disease. The mass exodus has continued unabated with the USA militarising its southern border to halt the desperate fleeing the intensification of climate change upon what is termed the 'Dry Corridor.' In Africa there has been an escalating conflict between the contending cultures of herders and farmers as they competed for dwindling resources.

The problem has become worse as drought conditions persisted and many of the Sahel nations are now engaged in civil wars.

If it is not drought and crop failures that force large numbers of people to flee, it will be rising sea levels.

In Bangladesh, we have seen frequent typhoons and flooding of the country's low-lying coastal districts. *National Geographic* describes the reason for the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshi from their homes to the cities as driven by climate change

and experts expect that figure to rise to millions as water levels rise (on.natgeo.com/2Q3p5hy).

Likewise, high tides will submerge much of Vietnam's Mekong Delta, now home to 18 million people, by the latter half of the century.

The climate refugee emergency is here and capitalism's system of nation-states is incapable of addressing the crisis of climate refugees, sadly a status not legally acknowledged by governments or the UN, preferring to describe those fleeing the impact of environmental destruction as economic migrants.

Accepting that models of future migration are based upon educated guesswork and informed assumptions, full of possible pitfalls, the only way to efficiently mitigate the detrimental effects of mass migration is to prepare for the worst.

Breaches of their national borders may be what the developed countries fear the most, requiring them to fortify their frontiers, but the problem begins when people abandon their farms for the city. Most people don't want to leave their homes so initially they relocate to larger towns and cities. Mega-cities are multiplying in number and urban services have broken down. When that strategy fails, they then take hazardous journeys to re-settle in a foreign land where they are treated as economic parasites and pariahs by the locals.

In 2018, the World Bank estimated that three regions (Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and South-east Asia) will generate 143 million climate migrants by 2050. A

worst-case scenario by the Institute for Economics and Peace thinktank suggests that perhaps a billion people by 2050 will be subjected to the pressure of global warming to relocate even if not all will act upon it. The pessimistic predictions of some scientists predict that heatwaves and humidity will become so extreme in various parts of the world that people without air conditioning will simply die.

A report based on interviews with senior US military experts concludes that climate change will create far more refugees than have fled the Syrian civil war.

'What we are talking about here is an existential threat to our civilisation in the longer term,' Brigadier General Stephen A. Cheney observed. 'In the short term, it carries all sorts of risks as well and it requires a human response on a scale that has never been achieved before. If Europe thinks they have a problem with migration today, wait 20 years and see what happens when climate change drives people out of Africa – the Sahel especially' (bit.ly/3heX3uF).

The need for socialist ideas is greater than ever, and we can only urge people to look deeply into the problems of capitalist society, deeper than the slogans on their banners. Socialists combine two remarkable human capacities, the emotional and the rational, in order to take things into our own hands and run our own world, in the interest of all humanity. Peoples' histories may be different but we all share our future in common.

**ALJO**



Creator: Ezra Acayan / Getty Images



Diane Abbott, have not been afforded the sort of positions they were earlier. A lot of that was to be expected. Rebecca Long-Bailey was briefly on the front bench until she was sacked in June. If there has been one thing that defines the Starmer shadow cabinet, it's the repeated message that it is not a continuation of the Corbyn shadow cabinet.

Quite interesting is how the reshuffles and sackings have been treated. Jeremy Corbyn was often accused of 'Stalinist' purges (*Times*, 22 October 2015; [politicshome.com](http://politicshome.com), 24 March 2018), but the media response to Keir Starmer's responses to the Labour Left does not at all call back to Red Scare smear tactics. On the contrary, one need only look at the sort of line taken by the London *Times* on the issues: Starmer must 'face down the left of his party' (11 May). The leading article goes on to admonish the leader: 'He ought to have realised by now that the left of the party wants him to fail. That would allow them a perverse sense of vindication in believing that voters yearn for full-blooded socialism.'

Whether the left of the party wants him to fail or not, it seems he is doing so by his own lights.

Starmer himself claims Labour has 'lost the trust of working people', and that he takes 'full responsibility' for the defeats (a day before sacking Angela Rayner). Much of the discussion is about 'trust' and 'reconnecting'; very little is about the actual policies proposed, or the lack thereof.

The case is quite well illustrated by tax policy. Quite different to the Corbyn-era manifesto's 'harshes tax regime on business income among large advanced economies' (*FT*, 22 November 2019), Labour said it would oppose any raising of corporation tax, and didn't rule out voting against a windfall tax on supermarkets, though those were proposals by the Conservative Party (*Independent*, 24 February).

The platform Starmer ran his leadership campaign on was a radical platform – the 10 Pledges, still on his website, promise as the very first priority 'economic justice', including a reversal of cuts to corporation tax and 'No stepping back from our core principles' ([keirstarmer.com/plans/10-pledges](http://keirstarmer.com/plans/10-pledges)).

The about-face is far reaching. New Labour notwithstanding, the party has historically been intimately linked with the trade union movement – indeed, was once regarded as just the extension of the movement into parliament. Starmer refused Unite's letter demanding an end to fire and rehire tactics (*Skwawkbox*, 6 May). This extends even to NHS worker demands: the Royal College of Nursing is preparing for a strike over the government's promise of a 1 percent pay rise. They demand a 12.5 percent pay rise for all nurses, but Starmer has offered support only for a 2.5 percent increase (and promises negotiation 'up from there'). Polling has reflected this. 32 percent of 1,843 healthcare workers intended to vote Labour in the 2021 local elections, whereas this figure was at 82 percent in polling for the 2019 general election. Other breaks include security policy – unions and campaign groups demanded the party vote against the 'Spy Cops' bill, which grants state organisations freedom to commit serious crimes, but the Labour leadership ordered abstentions. As a result, an amendment proposed by Shami Chakrabarti that would have denied undercover agents immunity was defeated 309 to 153 (*Guardian*, 13 January).

The Labour Party suffered something of a defeat in the 2021 local elections. The Conservative Party gained 13 councils, 235 councillors, where Labour lost 8 councils, and 327 councillors. That a party which has been in continuous power for over a decade keeps making gains is surprising, to say the least. It seems the last year – despite promises of a new Labour (though, assuredly, not New Labour) – has been more of the same for the party. Why? Certain commentators have offered their speculations. Typically, they're what you'd expect – Labour is still in the claws of the radical left (viz. trade unions, 'Corbynistas', and other public enemies), and unless Keir Starmer steps up and frees it, it faces an existential threat.

In an article about the leadership elections in May last year we wrote that the radicalism Starmer campaigned on seemed even then to be vacuous, but what was hard to foresee was just how harsh the crackdown on the Labour Left would be. The business press weren't afraid then, and they certainly aren't afraid now. So, if the explanation that Labour is failing because it's trying to pander to the radical left is incorrect, what is happening? The facts of the matter seem quite clear: voters believe Labour has nothing to offer them. People have no idea what the party stands for, to say nothing about the leader in particular, and there has been little to no attempt to lay out any concrete policy, beyond flat-footed attempts to get votes, like flag-waving and 'dressing smartly' (*Guardian*, 2 February).

### The new leadership

The shadow cabinet has taken a number of stances that represent (and they are keen to emphasise this) a break from what came before. A defining feature of the current opposition was characterised by Starmer himself in his victory speech: 'Under my leadership, we will engage constructively with the government. Not opposition for opposition's sake. Not scoring party political points or making impossible demands' (*Independent*, 2 April 2020). The campaign slogan was 'A New Leadership', another attempt to emphasise that this is no longer the party of Jeremy Corbyn, who has been stripped of the Labour whip since the end of October 2020. Many MPs regarded as on the left of the party, like John McDonnell and

### Speculative pieces

Mainstream commentary inverts the issues precisely. The

BBC reports that 'a prominent politician who spent some time campaigning in Hartlepool blamed the hollowing out of the party during the Corbyn era, with strong organisational, as much as political expertise and experience, lost' (*BBC*, 7 May). The figureheads of political expertise and experience are speaking up, as it happens – both Peter Mandelson and Tony Blair have written extensive speculative pieces about how they think Labour should have acted and why it has faced yet another defeat. Mandelson criticises the 'power of hard-left factions that abuse [the trade union link]', such as Mick Whelan and Len McCluskey, who 'use Labour as a political plaything to pursue their ultra-leftism, which is completely unrepresentative of both their own members' and Labour members' views.' Blair's reflections are equal in their force and content. On Good Morning Britain, he emphatically places the 'Far Left' seizing the leadership of the party as the cause for its defeat (*Independent*, 12 May).

To look at the more liberal end of the discussion, for commentators who don't want to be quite as harsh on the party as Blair and Mandelson, another explanation has to be conjured up to deal with Labour's defeat. Naturally, a new term is coined: 'Pasokification'. After the Greek centre-left party, PASOK, haemorrhaged votes from 2009 to 2015, losing them to the left-wing party Syriza, the term was coined to refer to the decline of moderate social democracy. This has supposedly been 'a continuing problem for Labour' (*Guardian*, 8 May). There's something to this, to be sure – there looks to be less and less room for centrism in politics, contra Blair. Yet it's not so much the pursuit of centrist policies that voters are sceptical of, in this specific case, it's more the lack of pursuit of *any* specific policies, easily confused with centrism. Blair and Mandelson are in a particularly apt position to make the sorts of claims they make, as they don't have to come up with any concrete policies – none are mentioned or even gestured towards. Starmer's problem seems to be that he touts this sort of rhetoric without any policies to back it up, and of course, unlike Blair and Mandelson, he can't get away with that. And this is exactly what voters recognise.

Mandelson and Blair both make the claim that it is being out of touch, or unrepresentative, that led to Labour's loss. Factual claims should be assessed as such: polling rules that analysis out conclusively. Based on a survey of 775 people, a lack of policies is by far the biggest reason people did not vote Labour in the local elections ([jlparkers.co.uk/local-elections](http://jlparkers.co.uk/local-elections)), and the biggest reason voters defected is the leadership itself. Unions were mentioned in the former survey but were as significant as the word 'joke', and less significant than the word 'useless', both quite low in the ranking. The most popular reason for voting Conservative was 'job', and one of the most popular reasons people didn't vote Conservative was corruption. Those are all good indicators of where Labour went wrong.

There has been a lot of criticism of government sleaze, from flouting lockdown restrictions to simply handing over huge amounts of public funding to private power. Sir James Dyson simply needed to ask for no change in tax status for his staff, and Boris Johnson vows to 'fix it'. Of course, this is nothing new – fresh allegations of lobbying in favour of financial services company Greensill have come out about David Cameron. Yet, what criticism Labour has made of Tory sleaze seems to be too much for establishment journalists. A column in the *Times* (4 May) warns Labour that 'Starmer is making a big mistake on sleaze [...] It could tarnish Labour, as antipathy rises towards politicians in general rather than the Tories in particular.' There is an element of truth to that, but as mentioned above, the electorate is much more sensitive to

Tory corruption than Labour's. That may be partly explained by the fact that the Tories happen to be the incumbents, but it hardly amounts to an argument that opposition parties must tread lightly. This being said, the point about disillusionment with politicians and the democratic process as it stands generally is one worth pursuing, even if it is not seriously taken up by the commentators themselves.

As is often the case, *none* of the liberal discussion has any mention of voter turnout. In England especially, voter turnout for local elections is often low – as low as a third in many cases. The only concern is the ruthless drive for a higher vote share. People do not feel motivated, and especially so in local elections, to vote. And why would they? It's been a well-recognised fact for a while that local government has been largely incapacitated for the last decade or more, and that this is a serious threat to a well-functioning democracy. To take one example, the LSE Democratic Audit reported in 2018 that 'The cumulative adverse impacts of austerity [... on ...] local government have rapidly increased since 2015. Civil service efficacy has radically declined, the quality of public services has significantly worsened, and local government has been hollowed out' ([democraticaudit.com](http://democraticaudit.com)).

The tack Labour has taken does little to change that. What strategies they have are pursued out of a narrow interest in increasing vote-share by appealing to aesthetics and emotion, viz. 'patriotism' and 'dressing well'. A cynic might easily draw the conclusion that this is really a sort of condescension towards the working class, who are taken to be unable to differentiate substantive positions from mere play-acting. Whether one chooses to follow the cynic in that or not, the problem remains that a campaign that rests solely on the principle of 'We aren't Corbynistas,' can't work. It still can't work if you add the principle 'We aren't the Tories', either, especially when the rhetoric of the campaign revolves crucially around co-opting Conservative talking points about patriotism, traditions, so on.

Does Labour face an existential crisis? Perhaps something not quite as strong as that, but an identity crisis, certainly. It may end up turning back to anodyne centrism and wearing that on its sleeve – certainly if Tony Blair's ideas are followed – and nothing said so far rules that out completely. However, it's clear the immediate situation is that no one, including the party itself, seems to know what Labour stands for anymore. In some cases, it's easy to tell what the party leadership opposes, but very little has actually been offered in terms of concrete policy proposals. It is losing funding from unions, and according to Andrew Fisher, the small donations, which poured in during the Corbyn era, 'have dried up' (*iNews*, 11 May). Perhaps the only option left is pandering to business, or turning back to Corbyn-style leadership. A good deal of the most important facts are left out by the commentariat. For instance, it is not that Labour simply is out of touch with its base – they genuinely do not feel like there is anything coherent in the programme as it stands (insofar as a programme exists). Vilification of 'ultra-leftist' unions and 'public ownership of industry' as outdated reflects a particular political stance more than it reflects public opinion, and claims that 'All the evidence is that [Labour] can only [find a coalition] by building out from the centre ground' are all well and good as spirited liberal discussion go, but ultimately amount to speculation from the armchair (despite the mention of evidence). Though the path that the opposition leadership will follow isn't quite clear yet, it does seem that whatever is going to be left of Labour after this, it won't be the Left.

**MP SHAH**

# Capitalism & Socialism

The moment of history we all currently live in is called capitalism, a time when people are constrained to spend a good part of their waking day working for an employer for a wage or salary in order to live. We are 'constrained', because for most of us our work in the form it exists is not what we'd choose to do if we didn't need to get money to live and to provide for ourselves and our families. That is not to say that, in a different kind of society, we would not choose to do a day's work as such. In fact we would, because work is an important human need, but we would certainly not choose to do it for an employer in a job under conditions of take it or leave it. We would choose to do work we genuinely wanted to do under reasonable conditions and without the gun of material insecurity at our head. Under a different social system than capitalism, we would do a day's work that was meaningful to us, that suited us and also suited and supported the collective social effort to produce and distribute goods for human need rather than for profit.

Profit is in fact what underlies and generates the production and distribution of goods and services over the whole planet – in the UK, in the rest of Europe, in the USA, in Russia, in China, in Cuba, in India, in Africa, in fact everywhere we look. The rule is no profit no production. And that's what ties us down to the kind of working day that we've not chosen and that most of us would not do if we were free to choose. To take a small example, who would choose to do the job a man does at a supermarket I go to shop in which consists of sitting looking at a screen at the entrance to the store all day and checking to see if anyone is stealing or looks as though they're stealing? The obvious answer is that no one would freely choose to do that. Yet we can be sure that, if such a job were advertised, the wolf from the door imperative would mean there were many applicants. As Noam Chomsky recently put it: 'You are allowed to rent yourself to survive. It's called taking a job'.

To give another example which says even more about the way society is organised and its priorities, a recent Channel 5 television programme illustrated the reality not only of having to take whatever work is available but also of the grotesquely wasteful way in which this society expends human energies and resources. The programme was about the efforts being made to catch people who use the London Transport system without paying their fare or at least without paying their full fare. A huge network of computers and other machinery filling a whole building has been set up employing large numbers of people to catch out the offenders and present them for punishment. One of the programme's focuses was on two of the employees at the sharp end, those whose job it was to approach suspected offenders, especially those who've found a way of underpaying their fare on the underground and have been identified on the computer and camera system. As the suspects exit their train or station, it's the job of these employees, who are obviously very apprehensive themselves after waiting around sometimes for several hours, to pounce and to try and stop or apprehend the fare dodgers. Some of the scenes, of the encounters, are not difficult to imagine. They prompt the question: Who would want to do a job like that if they didn't have to? And, of course, the waste of energies and resources involved in the whole operation are quite mind-

boggling. And this is the kind of thing that's repeated many millions of time over across the whole planet – a microcosm of the waste of talents, energies and resources that the market and the profit system generate. How correct is the observation once made that the waste of all kinds generated by this system is so vast and complex that, were anyone to attempt to measure it precisely, they'd be doomed to failure.

## Life after capitalism

But how would work be different in the kind of moneyless, wageless society of free access and voluntary cooperation that the Socialist Party has been advocating consistently for well over 100 years? Is it possible to give a detailed account of what it would be like? Probably not, since, as Marx put it some 150 years ago, to attempt to explain in detail what that future society would be like would be akin to writing 'recipes for the cookshops of the future'. Others have tried to do this however, for example William Morris, in his late 19<sup>th</sup> century novel, *News From Nowhere*. But inspiring as Morris's book was in concept, social development soon made its detail look precisely what it was – speculation. In the same way, if, say, 50 years ago – so before the age of modern electronic communication and production, someone had tried to set out a typical day's work in socialism, it would be sure to seem obsolete now.

In the same connection, the Socialist Party's pamphlet *How We Live and How We Could Live: from Capitalism to Socialism*, published in 2006, contained a list of 150 products and occupations associated with money that would not be necessary in socialism. While it's true that these would be obsolete in a moneyless socialist society, the fact is that even now in capitalism, only some 15 years after the list was published, a good many of the terms in it already seem old-fashioned. This is because capitalism has evolved quickly with the changes and technology advances it incessantly brings into being. So words from that list which are now all but obsolete because the functions and activities they describe have all but disappeared, are, for example, football coupons,

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cheque cards, telephone meters, overtime payments, pension books, travellers' cheques, Christmas clubs, luncheon voucher schemes, rent collectors – and that's to name just a few. Of course, many of the products and tasks listed still do exist, but who knows how many of them will in, say, 10 or 20 years time and how many others we've never heard of will have come into being by then?

So if it's difficult to give an accurate detailed picture of what life will be like in capitalism in say just a few years' time, how could attempting to describe the precise details of a future society based on completely different premises be any more than speculation? What we can say for sure, however, is that, as long as capitalism continues, worker will continue to compete with worker for jobs, business will compete with business for sales and profit, and nation will compete with nation over sales of goods and services, spheres of economic and political interest, control of trade routes and sources of raw materials. And what we can also say is that the environment will continue to be despoiled instead of conserved. And in all this the individual worker will continue to be a passive spectator swept along by economic forces over which he or she has no direct control.

However, if we can't give a detailed account of life in the socialist world that urgently needs to be established by the world's workers, what we can state with certainty is that it will consist of people carrying out meaningful and personally and socially fulfilling tasks in which they realise their potential as human beings. And this will be part of the broader planned organisation of a social system that the population as a whole will have decided to adopt in place of what exists at present. It will be, as one writer has put it 'a new form of life that does not organise itself around wage work and monetary exchange', a society in which 'everyone can go to the social storehouses and service centres to get what they need'. And how will all this be planned? The pamphlet, 'Socialism as a Practical Alternative', puts forward some interesting ideas on this. For example, it suggests the following: 'We would divide up responsibilities while taking into account individual aptitudes

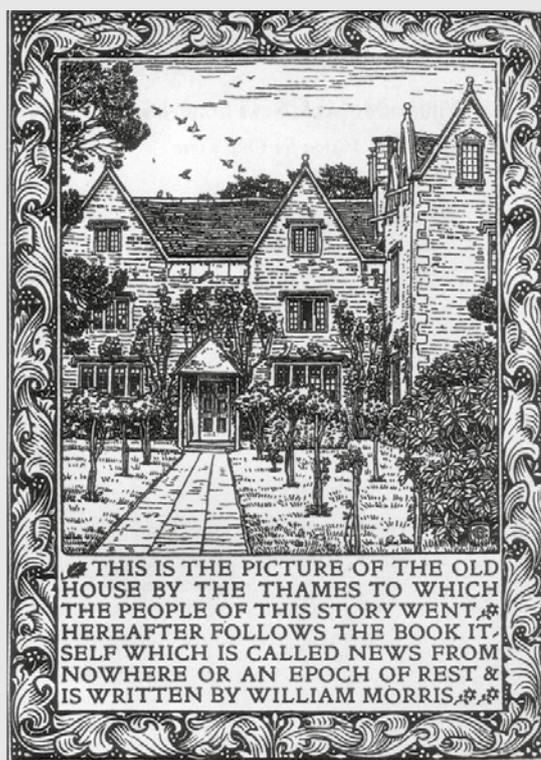
and proclivities. Some tasks would need to be performed locally, but many could be planned on a regional or global scale, using advanced computer technologies.' But this too, in the end, is also speculation and has to be seen as falling into the realm of ideas rather than prescriptions.

What is patently clear is that human beings are doers and that, when the whole structure of capitalism and the colossal waste of energies and resources associated with its money system – banking, insurance and finance, the accompanying military apparatus – cease to exist, those energies and resources will be released for all of us to involve ourselves in being doers in a truly meaningful way and to fulfil our needs at all levels, to engage in what's been called 'useful labour'.

This kind of world has been excellently outlined in a recent book highly sympathetic to the socialist objective (*Automation and the Future of Work* by Aaron Benanav), which refers to a world of 'fully capacitated individuals, in which every single person could look forward to developing their interests and abilities with full social support'.

A final point worth making – and one that has been advanced by many articles in the *Socialist Standard* over the years and by many books on the subject – is that human beings are essentially a cooperative species. We enjoy reciprocating, working together – even under the constraints of a non-cooperative system like capitalism – and all these cooperative energies will flourish and allow us to flourish in the new society we bring into being. Martin Luther King, not a figure often easily associated with socialism, was surely spot on when he said: 'Profit forces people to be more concerned with making a living than making a life.' And it's only socialism that will allow all of us, on a world scale, to set about making that life.

**HOWARD MOSS**



# CULTURES, MULTI



# AND OTHERWISE

Back in 2011, in a speech at a security conference, then Prime Minister David Cameron discussed extremism and Islamist terrorism. He noted that Islam and extremism were not the same, and saw the issue of identity as crucial to why some young Muslims were drawn to extremist views:

‘In the UK, some young men find it hard to identify with the traditional Islam practised at home by their parents, whose customs can seem staid when transplanted to modern Western countries. But these young men also find it hard to identify with Britain too, because we have allowed the weakening of our collective identity. Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream.’

State multiculturalism was thus seen as implying separation, with people from different cultures living in their own distinct ways, perhaps with little integration with those from other cultures. Society, Cameron went on, should not just be passively tolerant; rather it should pursue ‘a much more active, muscular liberalism’, promoting freedom of speech, the rule of law, equal rights and so on. What was needed, he claimed, was ‘a clear sense of shared national identity that is open to everyone.’

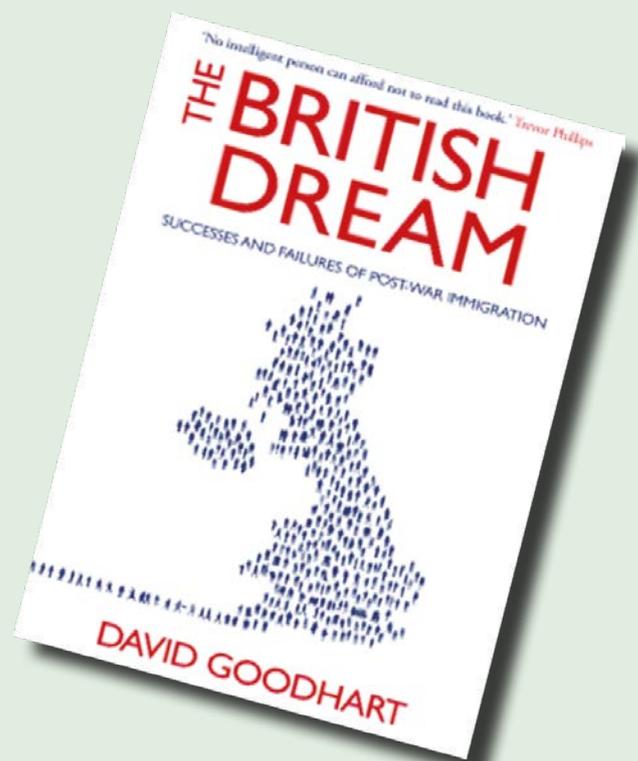
But just what is multiculturalism (state or otherwise)? And how do politicians and others use this concept to construct arguments and policies? And what might a shared national identity consist of?

In *Keywords*, Raymond Williams describes *culture* as ‘one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language’, due to both its complex history (related to *cultivation*, among others) and its variety of current uses. On the one hand, it involves such activities as cinema, theatre, museums, music, and so on. But also it can refer to the kind of topics studied in cultural or social anthropology: a way of living, covering religion, language, kinship and family structure, work and production, food and diet, rural vs urban, and customs in some general sense. It is this last meaning which the idea of multiculturalism takes up: the position that a society consists of a number of different cultures, and it would be preferable if that were not the case or the differences were much reduced.

A detailed critique of multiculturalism is found in *The British Dream* by David Goodhart. The concept, he says, ‘has come to refer to the arrival of non-European, “visible” immigrants in western countries in recent decades and their political and social interaction with the majority society’, but

apparently it ‘also implies a favourable and accommodating attitude to the arrival on the part of the majority society’. There are two versions: liberal multiculturalism expects immigrants to integrate into mainstream society, while the separatist version ‘privileges minority identities over common citizenship’ and thus slows down integration. The separatist variety in particular states that immigrants do not need to adapt, other than in relatively minor ways, to the society they now live in. As usual in such accounts, immigrants are not just those who have themselves migrated but their children and grandchildren at least too (second- and third-generation immigrants).

Opponents of multiculturalism, of whichever version, usually emphasise the lack of integration by immigrants and their descendants. At one level, this encompasses support, or at least toleration, for practices such as forced marriage and female genital mutilation. It can also extend to segregation in terms of residence, with towns such as Bradford and Oldham being highly segregated, with immigrant populations living in particular areas where most of the residents are



immigrants from the same region, Pakistan and Kashmir serving as examples. Eric Kaufman (nationalreview.com, 6 February, 2019) identified a supposed contradiction at the heart of multiculturalism: 'White majorities are compelled to be cosmopolitan, urged to supersede their ascribed identity. Minorities are enjoined to do the reverse.' Multiculturalism was thus asymmetric, making different demands on 'natives' and immigrants, with the latter getting an easier ride. This is seen as one of the main reasons behind the rise of populism, which often views immigrants as not truly part of 'the people'.

According to the Fabian Society, Blair's Labour government from 1997 was the most multicultural in Britain, if not in Europe, introducing faith schools, bringing Muslims into governance and passing the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, seen as a positive step. This made it illegal to discriminate in immigration matters on grounds of race or colour but, as Maya Goodfellow points out in *Hostile Environment*, it permitted discrimination on grounds of nationality or ethnic origin. New Labour, she says, also dehumanised asylum seekers, and all in all their policies and rhetoric 'helped to embed anti-immigration ideas into British politics'. So the 2000 Act and Labour's policies more generally were by no means all their supporters claimed them to be.

Opponents of multiculturalism seldom identify specifically what counts as British culture. Perhaps it is such things as having a sense of fair play, keeping a stiff upper lip and not pushing in at the front of a queue. Or football, the pub, Christmas shopping, holidaying in Spain, a Chinese or Indian takeaway, talking about the weather, and so on.

The socialist view is that multiculturalism is a misplaced and irrelevant idea, that being for or against it really misses



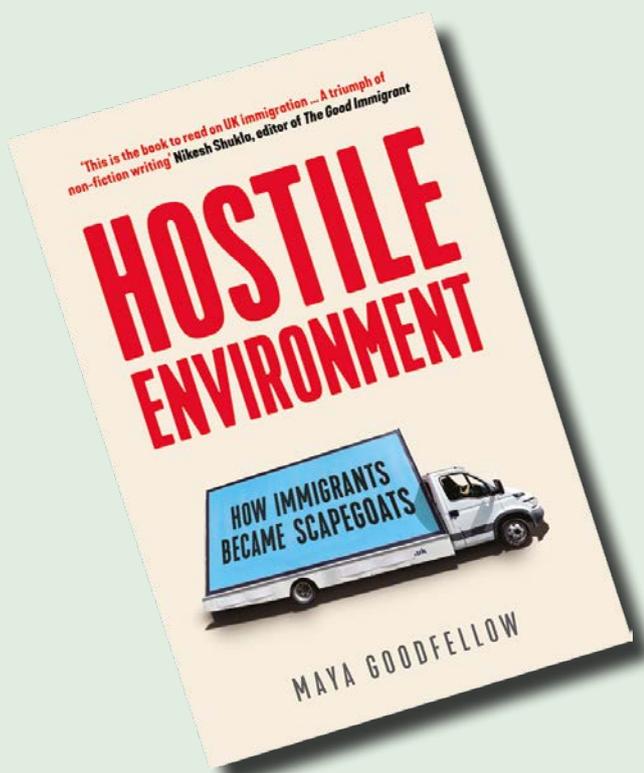
George Monbiot

the point. Putting people into categories (Muslim, immigrant, whatever) ignores the fact that people have far more in common than these labels suggest. We are all human beings, and under capitalism most of us are members of the working class, forced to work for a wage or dependent on someone who does so. Thus we are all subject to the exploitation of capitalism, and to varying degrees to its inequalities and discrimination. People differ of course: gender, sexual orientation, abilities, interests, but allotting people to pigeon-holes disguises what brings us together. Nations are artificial entities, and the 'shared national identity' mentioned by Cameron would have to be invented and constantly reinforced by propaganda.

Goodhart identifies a trend he terms 'post-nationalism', which he ascribes to George Monbiot and Danny Dorling: a view which supposedly rejects all national borders and emphasises universalism and support of the interests of everyone globally, not just those of one nationality. We need not concern ourselves with how accurately this reflects the actual views of Monbiot and Dorling, just point out that in this sense socialists are post-nationalists. Socialism will be a global society, with no countries or borders or passports, where the whole idea of migration, if it exists at all, will be purely geographic. As for culture, it will be up to people in socialism to organise their lives as they wish. We cannot predict now, but there are likely to still be differences such as language, diet, sport and so on. This of course does not mean permitting such barbaric practices as FGM. Aspects of climate will result in differences in how people live, with some finding ways to pass the long winter nights while others will spend far more time outdoors, with some places perhaps having siestas.

In the words of the Chinese saying, 'Let a hundred flowers bloom'. Though later hijacked by Mao Zedong, this expresses well the idea that people in a socialist world will be able to live as they wish, as long as it does not infringe on the freedom of others.

**PAUL BENNETT**



# The daily class struggle

The rough life expectancy of a person in Britain will be about 28,800 days. Those twenty eight thousand days are the only ones we will ever have, we never get refunds, we never get do overs, at best we can increase our allotment of days: with a bit of help from medical science. For someone who works full time, assuming a full career from 18 to 65 working five days a week, they will give over 12,220 of those days to their employers.

That's just at the raw level of days. Of course, not every second of each of those days is given over: but usually, the best hours are, the active alert able to perform hours. Eight hours of each of those days is given over to sleep (preparing for another day of work), another couple of hours each day are spent travelling to and from work, leaving the rest for eating, relaxing or meeting up with friends and family. But all the other activities are conditioned by being able to turn up to work the next day.

So, here we have the idea of the class struggle. When we give our time over to our employer, we give it to them to achieve the ends they desire. In a capitalist society that means producing commodities: good and services, which they can sell with a view to making a profit. The longer we work for them, the more they can use us, the more we do for them, the more goods and services they can sell for more profit. Thus, they will want as many days from us as they can get.

But, here's the thing, the struggle isn't just over days as such, it is about the very definition of 'day': what amounts

to a day's work? The number of hours we spend working for them increases how much they can get us to do for them. The fewer hours we work for them, the more time we have for ourselves, for our friends, families and communities.

But it's not just the length of the day: it can also be about the intensity: working harder during the hours we give over also increases the amount of work and profits we produce for the day buyers. The harder we work at work, the less we can do in our own time, the more it becomes a time for recovery to return to work. Employment contracts are written in the language of abstracted absolute hours, but the reality is that it is what we are capable of doing – or being made to do in a day – that defines what happens to us and our employers.

Just look, for example, at the recent struggle over unionising Amazon warehouse workers. The accusation was that they were worked to such a strict regime that the staff there had to micturate into bottles because they weren't allowed adequate comfort breaks. The intensity of the class struggle is played in

the bodily functions of the workers. Amazon leads the way in the scientific study of efficiency, making sure that every ounce of effort they obtain from their employees is usefully turned to their profit. Making sure that not a second of the day's work is wasted.

The class struggle, between the people who sell their days and the people who buy them is a struggle to define what happens to the very time we have on Earth. No amount of a rock spinning gets to define that.

Let's make this a little more concrete. There are roughly 31 million people who are in employment in the UK. Not all of these people are full time – for instance about 3 million are 'underemployed' and would like more hours. That might seem strange, but given that our society makes selling your days a condition of getting access to the goods and services you need to live (and that we have to buy from the people who are buying all the days), people want to sell their days. To put that in perspective, about 9 million would like fewer hours (but preferably with the same pay).



(Just as an aside, the 31 million in employment doesn't encompass the whole of the working class, their relatives who depend upon their sale of days are just as caught up in this system of robbery: we are looking at the vast majority of society being enmeshed in this dispute over days and what to do with days).

But, let's go back to that 31 million. Each of them will sell about 12,000 days of their lives to an employer. 31 million multiplied by 12

thousand leads to a number with more zeroes than it's worth the breath to say: do the sums yourself, if you want to use a portion of your life on such a thing.

Think about what could be done with that number of days: our ancestors built marvels like Stonehenge with nothing more than deer antlers and lots of days of work: the benefit of all those days' labour goes not to us, the workers, but to the owners of the world. They need us. Without our days of effort, nothing would get done; but the rewards for all that hard work goes to them, not us.

And, just to be clear, this isn't about them under-paying us for those days or settling a fair price for them. The very fact that we sell our lives means that the priorities, the decisions about what to make and do with our time are taken away from us, and it is the priorities of the buyers that decide what goes on in the world.

**PIK SMEET**

# The Soul of Oscar Wilde

I had often seen Oscar Wilde described as a socialist for his essay 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism', but I'd never read it. So when it was published in a recent selection of Wilde's works (*Oscar Wilde. In Praise of Disobedience*, edited by Neil Bartlett, Verso, 2020), this seemed to me an opportunity to fill that gap. I was more familiar with the works Wilde is much more famous for – his plays (e.g. *The Importance of Being Earnest*), his poetry (e.g. *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*), and his novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and of course with his spectacular fall from grace when he was imprisoned for sodomy in an age that criminalised homosexuality and brought the writer to poverty and exile before he died in 1900 at the age of 46.

In a beautifully written introduction to this collection, the editor describes 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism' as 'the writing of a man who knew all about being wounded, worried, maimed, and in danger'. And there's no doubt that this is a tormented piece of writing. Its main theme is the quest for better social circumstances in which artists and all people can express their being freely and openly and without fear of outraging existing norms or incurring interdiction or punishment. But, given the essay's title, I was rather surprised that a good deal of it is not specifically about socialism or indeed about any kind of politics at all. As much as anything else it's about the role of art in human society and in particular the position of artists in Wilde's time and the problems they faced. The connection of this to socialism is that, in what Wilde sees as a socialist society, artists would not have to abide by the strictures and constraints imposed on them in his own society. So we can agree with the editor of this volume that what we have here, at one level at least, is 'an aesthetics of radicalism'.

But what is the 'socialism' of the title that Wilde sees as being necessary and through which man's true 'soul' would be capable of free expression? In many ways it does seem strikingly close to the Socialist Party's version of socialism – a world of common ownership, voluntary cooperation and free access – summed up as follows early in the essay: 'Socialism, Communism, or whatever one chooses to call it, by converting private property into public wealth, and substituting cooperation for competition, will restore society to its proper condition of thoroughly healthy organism, and ensure the material well-being of each member of the community.' There is much else along these lines – from 'the proper aim is to try

and reconstruct society on such a basis that poverty will be impossible', to 'it is only in voluntary associations that man is fine', to 'the true perfection of man lies, not in what man has, but in what man is', and 'when private property is abolished there will be no necessity for crime, no demand for it; it will cease to exist'. On issues like authority and human nature too, Wilde is strikingly 'modern' in his thought: 'All authority is quite degrading (...) It degrades those who exercise it, and degrades those over whom it is exercised' (...) 'The only thing that one really knows about human nature is that it changes'.

But Wilde also has another axe to grind, one which at first sight may seem to run contrary to the vision he initially outlines. He tells us, repeatedly, that he prizes above all what he calls 'individualism'. In a different context this could of course appear a way of describing the 'every man for himself' ethic which is at the heart of capitalist society. But Wilde sees 'individualism' not as the war of each person against the other, but rather a way of realising and releasing human energies in each individual to allow them to fulfil their personal potential in building a free cooperative society, a society in which 'every man must be left quite free to choose his own work'. In Wilde's view 'private property has set up an Individualism that is false', crushing true individualism, which for him is not egotism, since 'the egotist is he who makes claims upon others, and the Individualist will not desire to do that'. But, he goes on, 'when man has realised Individualism, he will also realise sympathy and exercise it freely and spontaneously'. And his exaltation of individualism ends on the most exalted of notes: 'With the abolition of private property, then, we shall have true,

beautiful, healthy, Individualism. No one will waste his life in accumulating things and the symbols for things'.

This is Wilde's vision, but what of the means to achieve it? As the editor of this collection quite rightly points out, 'the thing (...) that will surprise a modern reader most – given its title – is that it proposes no political or politicised action of any kind'. In other words, it contains no prescriptions on how the 'adjustments' to the society Wilde advocates would take place. So though he seems to be advocating socialism in the Socialist Party's terms, he does not follow the Socialist Party's proposal to achieve it, i.e. through political action via the spreading of socialist consciousness followed by democratic action through the ballot box. But though Wilde proposes no specific means of achieving socialism, he does

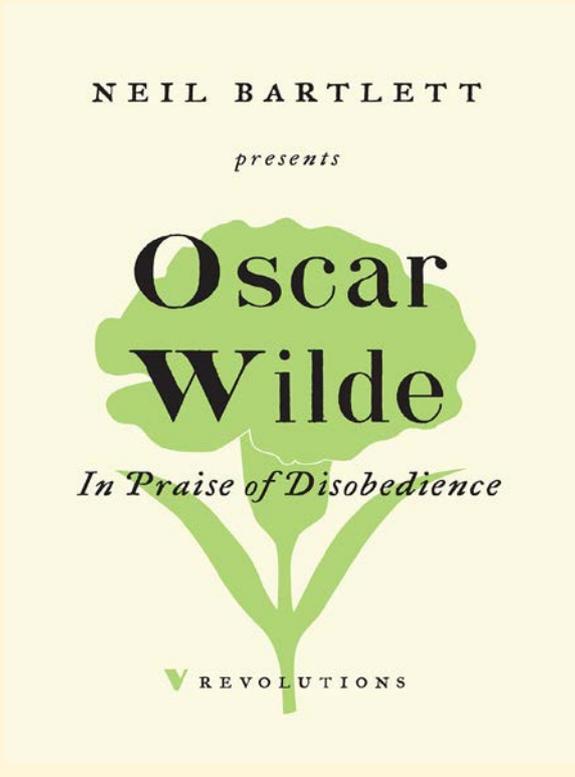


make clear that he is not looking for the 'socialism' of state control ('It is clear, then, that no Authoritarian Socialism will do.'). And so of course in adopting such a position, Wilde would not have found favour with many of the so-called 'socialists' of his day, for example the Fabians, who advocated state legislation to change social conditions. It must be said, however, that there is some residual attachment to the state in Wilde's thinking, perhaps stemming from the same kind of failure of the imagination to be found in many of today's 'anti-capitalists', a failure to imagine radically enough. In Wilde's socialism, the state still does seem to have an existence, not apparently as a governing body, but, as he puts it, 'a voluntary association that will organise labour, and be the manufacturer and distributor of necessary commodities'. But, there again, this may be a question of terminology and what Wilde is describing is socialist organisation under another name.

So, what was my impression on reading this much-mentioned work for the first time? Was I enthused about

Wilde's vision of socialism or was I disappointed? Definitely more the first than the second and, especially given the time at which the work was written and the circumstances of that time, I would want to forgive certain flights of fancy by the author (for example something of an attachment to Christianity or at least to the figure of Christ), a tendency towards sweeping statements (part of what the editor describes as Wilde's 'firework display of opinion') and the occasions on which he does not seem to entirely share the vision of a socialist world and how to achieve it of other socialists of his day (e.g. Marx or William Morris), a vision which continues to be entirely relevant today.

**HOWARD MOSS**



## COOKING THE BOOKS

### Lights Out

Arising out of our review in February of Aaron Benanav's *Automation and the Future of Work*, in which he mentions companies like Tesla 'pushing toward "lights out" production, in which fully automated work processes, no longer needing human hands, can run in the dark', a reader has asked:

'How can a production facility without human labour power (variable capital), as the only commodity capable of adding surplus value in production, possibly be profitable?'

Although in Marx's day a 'lights out' factory was not an issue, it is an extreme case of something that he did consider when, in chapters 8-10 of volume III of *Capital*, he dealt with the emergence of an average rate of profit which all capital would tend to make.

Our reader is correct. Labour power, when activated, is the only source of surplus value, and so of the profits capitalist enterprises make. Thus Marx called the capital invested in buying it 'variable' capital as its value 'varied', increased in size, in the course of the production process. The value of the capital invested in plant, machinery, materials, power, etc was transferred unchanged into the value of the product; so Marx called it 'constant' capital.

But there was a problem. Assuming that the productivity of all labour power

was the same in that any given amount produced the same amount of surplus value, this would mean that industries using more would make a larger profit than those employing less.

To illustrate this point Marx compared five different industries with different average combinations of constant and variable capital. Two will suffice to illustrate his point: one 60 constant and 40 variable; the other 90 constant and 10 variable. The surplus value produced in the first would be 40 and in the second 10, meaning that, if each retained the surplus value produced in it, the rate of profit in the first would be 40 percent and in the second 10 percent.

However, this is not what happens. Industries with a lower proportion of variable capital do not make less profits and, if they did, there would be no incentive for capitalist enterprises to adopt the less labour-intensive, more technologically advanced production methods that is one of capitalism's observable tendencies.

What happened, Marx explained, was that, as capital flowed into the industries producing more surplus value and out of those producing less, this led to changes in amounts produced and their price that meant in the end that capital of the same size invested in any industry would tend to make the same rate of profit. It was as

if all the surplus value produced was pooled and shared out in proportion to the size of the total capital (constant plus variable) invested. In our example, with the total capital invested of 200 and total surplus value produced of 50, the rate of profit in both industries would be 25 percent.

As Marx put it,

'However an industrial capital may be composed, whether a quarter is dead labour and three-quarters living labour, or whether three-quarters is dead labour and only a quarter sets living labour in motion, so that in the one case three times as much surplus labour is sucked out, or surplus value produced, as in the other, ...in both cases it yields the same profit'. (Chapter 9, Penguin edition, p.270)

The same would apply to capital invested in a 'lights out' factory. The fact that it would be composed of 100 percent dead labour would be irrelevant; it would still tend to attract the same rate of profit as any other industrial capital of the same size, despite not contributing anything to the pool of surplus value as it did not use any value-producing, living labour.

# PROPER GANDER

## Track and Trace

THERE'S A long, long, list of things which are accepted as part of today's world and which will sound barbaric and bizarre to those living in a sane future society. One of these is 'tagging' people convicted of a crime – ordering them to have strapped to their ankle a box which traces their location. Tagging, or 'electronic monitoring' as it's officially known, is seen as a cheaper alternative to jail for some of those judged guilty of crimes such as shoplifting and fraud who are still required to be monitored. In a society based on free access to goods and services and with production owned and run in common, shoplifting and fraud wouldn't be possible, and the reasons why people turn to crime today wouldn't be there. And so people wouldn't have to be subjected to something as dehumanising and demeaning as being fitted with a tracker.

Tags have been used by the UK's enforcement agencies since 1999, having been introduced in America during the early '80s. They record data about the movements of their wearers, checking that they are avoiding areas proscribed by the court, attending necessary appointments and keeping to a curfew. The tag sends a regular signal to a receiver unit installed in the wearer's home, with alerts generated if the equipment is disconnected or if the wearer is not inside when they are required to be. An alert means that the wearer is in breach of the conditions of their sentence or bail, which could lead to them being sent back to prison. Since

2019, GPS technology has been used to more precisely identify a tag wearer's whereabouts, with this newer generation of devices having cost £60 million. Each year, 60,000 people in England and Wales are ordered to wear a tag. 7,000 of these are women, three of whom were followed around by cameras for a recent documentary in BBC Three's *Tagged* series: *Women on Tag*.

Amy and Stacey, both in their twenties, are living on tag in a stark bail hostel in Greater Manchester. Amy was placed there after a prison sentence for fraud, theft and shoplifting, while Stacey is awaiting trial for an assault charge. Jody, living in a flat in Cambridgeshire, has been convicted of burglary and is also wearing a tag until an upcoming trial. She and Amy both have children who were taken away from them when it was decided that their drug use and criminal behaviour meant they couldn't provide adequate care. All three have a history of problematic drug use, which, as they explain, was a method of blocking out past traumas but which soon led to the routine of stealing to fund their habits. As the programme mentions, 49 percent of women arriving in prison have a drug problem, which is likely to continue inside. Little money and few opportunities pushed them into breaking the laws which are part of the system which put them in that situation. Jody describes her unsettled upbringing, guessing that by the age of 29, she's had over 50 bedrooms through moving home so many times. Already

pushed down by the system, she and the others now face the additional humiliation of being tagged. Stacey says 'I feel like a robot' while she stays by the wall for over two hours until her tag charges up from the mains. The documentary also finds a parallel with how animals are treated, when Amy and Stacey see a field of goats with tags stapled to their ears to denote who they belong to.

By the end of the programme, only Amy is looking forward to a better life, having been allocated a rented flat of her own. Stacey gets evicted from the bail hostel, loses hope and eventually gets authorisation to stay at a friend's house while she waits for her trial. Jody is arrested for a breach of her conditions and returns to prison, with her daughter's placement in care made permanent. So, the tags haven't been as successful in controlling behaviour as they're supposed to be. Figures show that over half of people fitted with a tag in 2018 didn't comply with their curfew or tampered with the equipment ([tinyurl.com/jkxvn353](https://tinyurl.com/jkxvn353)). Tags, along with prison and other punishments, aren't able to prevent criminal behaviour because the people most oppressed by capitalism sometimes can find no other way to survive.

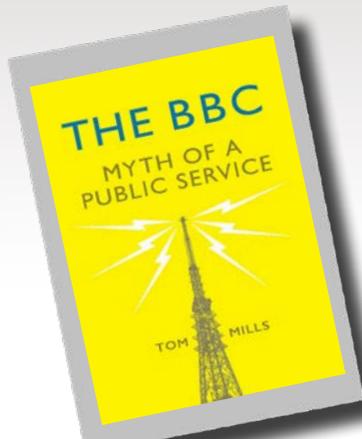
Regardless of their 'effectiveness', tags have been a money-spinner for the private companies which operate them under contracts with the Ministry of Justice. Senior staff in these companies have been much more audacious with their law-breaking than the people wearing their tags, motivated by greed rather than poverty. The Serious Fraud Office investigated Serco and G4S for attempting to defraud the state, and together they were fined nearly £178 million. Both companies hid the true extent of the profits generated by their tagging businesses, in the hope that the Ministry of Justice wouldn't notice how favourable their contracts were and then try to decrease their revenue. Serco and G4S were stripped of their contracts, and in 2020, some of G4S's senior executives were charged with fraud. If the justice system has a sense of irony, at some point they'll be fitted with the tags they used to profit from.

**MIKE FOSTER**



# REVIEWS

## Myths and News



**Tom Mills: The BBC: Myth of a Public Service.**  
Verso £9.99.

Some people think the BBC is so left-wing and anti-British that they call it the Bolshevik Broadcasting Corporation. On the other hand, its recent fawning coverage of the death of the Duke of Edinburgh and the consequent disruption to TV and radio programmes attracted so many complaints that a special on-line form was set up to make it more straightforward to object. But of course that also led to comments such as: how dare the BBC make it easier to complain about the treatment of a deceased member of the royal family.

As Tom Mills shows here, though, the BBC is very much part of the Establishment. Formed in 1922 as the British Broadcasting Company Ltd (it became a public corporation in 1927), it clearly took the government side during the General Strike. Many of its early top brass had military and/or intelligence backgrounds, and there were fairly close links with MI5. Security vetting of staff began in 1937 and continued till 1985, when it was exposed in the *Observer*. The World Service in particular was seen by the Foreign Office as an instrument of 'soft power'. The BBC motto is 'Nation shall speak peace unto Nation', but its coverage has generally been pro-war, much more so than that of commercial television.

Down to the 1970s, it was 'broadly tied to the social-democratic consensus', but under the impact of Thatcherism it became 'a neoliberal, pro-business, right-wing organisation'. There was far more reporting on business, with less

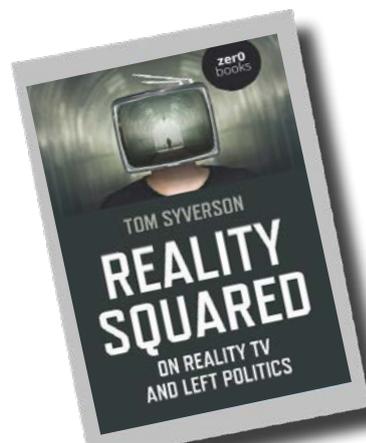
attention to the concerns of workers: fewer industrial correspondents and fewer interviews with union representatives. Working at the BBC has itself become more casualised and precarious, as the Corporation has added more bureaucracy.

None of this is probably very surprising, but Mills gives a clear account of the development of the BBC and how it has been subjected to pressures from the government and other power-holders. The BBC News is dominated by Westminster politicians, and there is to some extent a revolving door with politics, which sees reporters going on to become MPs and ministers. Of course, the Establishment is not itself a monolithic entity, and the BBC reflects disagreements within it, being 'an arena of conflict and contestation between different groups, especially rival factions of the elite'. In 1987, for instance, Alasdair Milne was forced to resign as Director-General, as the governors did not trust him to introduce the neoliberal overhaul they wanted.

The BBC is not directly a state broadcaster, but the government sets the licence fee, and this gives it a great deal of influence and power. Mills suggests it be placed on a statutory footing to avoid the periodic negotiations with government about its future, but that would make little if any difference to its role as a mouthpiece for capitalist interests.

**PB**

## Squared Eyes



**Reality Squared: On Reality TV and Left Politics,**  
by Tom Syverson,  
Zero Books, 2021

Why bother watching 'reality TV'? For Tom Syverson, there's more to the genre than just the convoluted relationships

among the latest set of pampered exhibitionists being followed by a film crew. He argues that we can watch 'reality TV' to reveal how our ideology, views and understanding of 'truth' have changed in these media-dominated times. 'Reality television is reality squared; it's a form of representing social reality that says something about social reality itself' (p.14). In exploring the subject, Syverson draws on the writings of Jean Baudrillard, Slavoj Žižek, Fredric Jameson and David Shields, among other thinkers.

To underpin his discussion of particular 'reality TV' shows, Syverson maps out the ideological conditions within which they and the wider media sit. Following political theorist Jodi Dean, Syverson says that 'the left was so effective in shaking the foundations of conservative social values, in trading sclerotic public morals and trust in objective truth for progressive social liberalism and postmodern relativism, that the entire landscape shifted' (p.114). What the left felt were victories were assimilated into the mainstream: neoliberalism has turned ideals about diversity, feminism and gay rights into a source of profit for media pushing a 'woke' agenda, and the right has embraced postmodernism, which denies grand narratives and attracts conspiracy theories, fake news and 'alternative facts'. Through this culture, 'we relate to each other only by interfacing with our own fragmented, interlocking personal narratives' (p.113). With reality seeming unreal, 'reality TV' is 'the shade of popular entertainment that best conveys how living life seems to us right now' (p.50).

Syverson explains how several American series highlight where leftist ideology has gone. An example of where postmodernism has taken us is *The Hills*, a docusoap about a group of friends in Los Angeles which ran from 2006 to 2010 and was revived in 2019. Unusually, those who appeared on the show acknowledged that their on-screen relationships were faked. As well as saying something about the performative nature of real relationships (p.65), for Syverson, this adds more layers to the question of how real 'reality TV' is: 'as lies contradict and reinforce each other, a dialectic of deception unfolds between the characters, transferring them to higher and higher levels of simulation' (p.57). He then applies Baudrillard's views to say that this kind of postmodern media has changed the nature of our acceptance of what is 'true' or not. 'Understanding reality television isn't simply a matter

of negotiating a conflict between fact and fiction; rather, the genre is about generating their synthesis' (p.12).

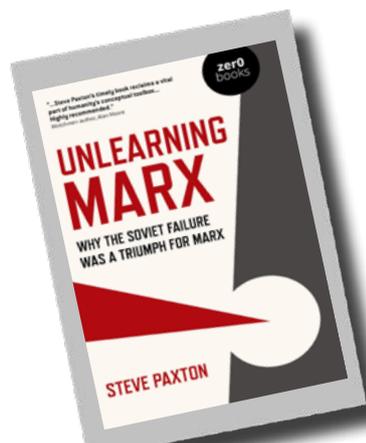
Syverson's discussion of other shows is related more closely to our everyday attitudes. Considering dating competition *The Bachelor* (2002 - ), he points out that behind its 'decadent pageant of polyamory, deception, and performative melodrama' (p.69) it enshrines the conservative view that love is a process towards marriage. A sizeable proportion of *The Bachelor's* audience are young leftists who, on some level, feel guilty about watching it because they're ambivalent about wanting to abolish or reclaim the institution of marriage. Watching the show acts as a release for this tension: 'it provides the same psychological function as patriarchy, but rather than having to play it out in our real lives, we can do so using the hyperreal frame of reality television' (p.81).

Syverson says that other questions about feminism are raised by *The Real Housewives* franchise (2006 - ). This series' characters are examples of a type of feminist who has compromised by 'shedding her radical tendencies and realigning her goals to fit more neatly with those of neoliberal capitalism' (p.84). These 'power feminists' claim to be liberated by successfully balancing a career with domestic duties, even though their 'freedom' is to be exploited in employment well paid enough for them to outsource childcare and cleaning. The show expresses what is an 'unattainable aspirational fantasy' (p.89) for most women struggling to balance childcare with a 'career' which is low-paid and unfulfilling. The women on *The Real Housewives* are shown as 'having it all', and they, like the ideal, aren't quite real or imaginary.

Unsettled because of how its values have been used, the left is left 'to embrace the fantasies of popular discourse rather than to take up concrete political struggle' (p.115), Syverson says, returning to Dean's arguments. He sits within the left, but with a viewpoint wide enough to be critical of where its stance has ended up. It might seem odd to use 'reality TV' as a barometer for political ideology, but in a sense this is no different to the approach taken by capitalism's critics since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They developed theories by studying the functions and effects of the major industries around at the time. Syverson and the other writers he quotes in his interesting book are doing the same, focusing on mass media and communications technology rather than mills and factories.

**MIKE FOSTER**

## Marx vindicated



### Unlearning Marx: Why the Soviet failure was a triumph for Marx.

By Steve Paxton,  
Zero Books, 2021

In August 1918 the *Socialist Standard* carried an article which made this argument about the recent revolution in Russia:

'Is this huge mass of people, numbering about 160,000,000 and spread over eight and a half millions of square miles, ready for socialism? Are the hunters of the north, the struggling peasant proprietors of the south, the agricultural wage slaves of the Central Provinces, and the industrial wage slaves of the towns convinced of the necessity and equipped with the knowledge required, for the establishment of the social ownership of the means of life? Unless a mental revolution such as the world has never seen before has taken place, or an economic change has occurred immensely more rapidly than history has ever recorded, the answer is "No!"'

Following Marx, the Socialist Party's contention that Russia's revolution could not be socialist was twofold: that the number of people who wanted socialism anywhere was extremely small, and Russia being predominantly feudal was economically underdeveloped. At this time, anyone who regarded themselves as Marxist would have agreed that socialism was not possible in one country.

The Socialist Party went on to argue that the Bolsheviks oversaw the eradication of feudalism and the development of capitalism in what became known as the 'Union of Soviet Socialist Republics'. The USSR was replaced by the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1991. The Socialist Party has always argued that the best analysis of the former USSR is a Marxist one: it reveals its exploitative nature with a ruling class drawn from the 'Communist' Party. It was a dictatorship over the proletariat and it was always going to fail. It is a vindication of Marx and

the position taken by the Socialist Party.

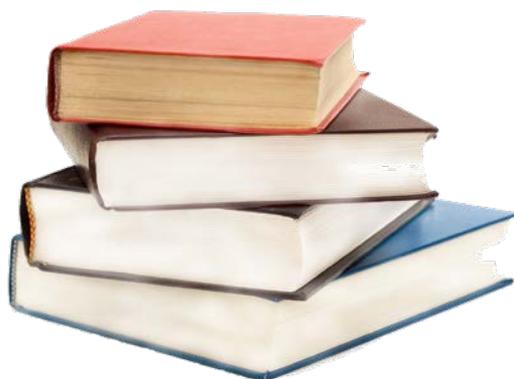
For some this will involve 'unlearning' or learning what Marx had said. Steve Paxton doesn't mention the Socialist Party's Marxist analysis of the former USSR. He bases his book mainly on GA Cohen's *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*, first published in 1976. Cohen's book has been accused of presenting Marx's theory of history as a form of technological determinism, though Paxton rejects this interpretation. But when Cohen wrote in his book that 'high technology was not only necessary but also sufficient for socialism', it certainly looks like technological determinism. And in the final sentence of Paxton's Conclusion he writes that he is:

'advocating an overthrow of capitalism by changing the economic structure in the only way it ever really changes – slowly, and in response to changing circumstances, by utilising technological developments created within the existing system.'

So, we sit back and wait for the gadgets to overthrow capitalism. Paxton's error (and Cohen's) is in supposing that the socialist revolution will be like previous revolutions, such as the change from feudalism to capitalism. The socialist revolution will be crucially different in that 'All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority.' (*Communist Manifesto*). The objective is uniquely different too: common ownership of the means of life, with the consequent abolition of wage labour and capital.

It's a pity that Paxton has allowed himself to be misled because there is much here that is worthwhile. He provides a wealth of data on why Russia under Communist Party rule couldn't be socialist. Some of it closely parallels arguments the Socialist Party has used for over a century.

**LEW**



# 50 Years Ago

## Ecology: The first decade

Ten years ago, anyone who spoke of the 'balance of nature,' or claimed that our food was being poisoned on a mass scale, would have been classed along with nudists, vegetarians and socialists. Such talk identified the crank and the weirdo. As for ecology, few could even spell it.

Today fad has become orthodoxy. The language of the crank has become the language of the Pope, the Prince of Wales and President Nixon. Every school-child knows the meaning of ecology.

Now we have Doomwatch, the biologist's Dixon of Dock Green. We have advertisements based on ecological appeal, like the one for Natural Gas. Establishment magazines like *Time* and *Reader's Digest* incessantly remind us of the threats to our natural environment. (...)

Why does pollution occur? A small amount is due to ignorance or miscalculation. A small amount is unavoidable given present technology and population. But the immense majority is due to the economic network. *People pollute because it is in their economic interests to do so.*

It is sometimes claimed, though, that the problem arises from a wrong attitude to nature. This has some truth, though it will not do as a complete explanation.

The attitude to nature, and the economic system, are interlinked. The present growth of ecological awareness is full of hope, for it encourages a mentality which considers total processes rather than isolated fragments. The vast majority of specialised scientists did nothing to warn us of the menace to our environment, and when people like Rachel Carson raised the alarm, many of the 'experts' were more horrified at this usurping of their oracular role than at the gravity of the crisis. In the pesticide controversy, as in the earlier fallout controversy. The authorities were wrong and the 'faddists' were right. You cannot trust the powers that be.

**(Socialist Standard, June 1970)**



Credit: Gary Miller/Documerica

# Party news: election results

The Socialist Party stood 4 candidates in last month's regional and local elections. In Wales we contested Cardiff Central constituency in the elections to the Welsh Assembly (now called The Senedd), as we did in the 2019 General Election, with ten others standing for capitalism in one form or another. Some 43,000 election manifestos were delivered free by Royal Mail to households there. In Kent we stood two candidates for the County Council, as we had done four years ago, and one in a by-election for Folkestone town council. As there is no free postal distribution for local elections, some 20,000 were distributed commercially and by members of Kent and Sussex branch.

The results are:

**Cardiff Central:** Labour 13,100; LibDems 5,460; Conservative 3,788, Plaid Cymru 3,470; Green 1,552; Abolish Welsh Assembly 440; Propel 268; Freedom Alliance 156; Reform UK 151; Socialist 82; Gwlad 65.

**Folkestone East:** Labour 1324; Conservative 1132; Foundation Party 561; LibDems 361; Socialist 89.

**Folkestone West:** Conservative 2105; Labour 1782; LibDems 541; Independent 264; Reform UK 127; Socialist 55.

**Folkestone Town Council Central Ward:** Conservative 1119; Labour 916; LibDem 255; Independent 218; Socialist 61; Independent 44.

# Meetings

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

## JUNE 2021 DISCORD EVENTS

**Friday 4 June 19.30 (GMT + 1)**

### Coronavirus and vaccination in India

Speaker: Abhishek Chowdhury (WSP India)

What has been happening in India? Have Socialists a position on whether or not workers should get vaccinated?

**Friday 11 June 19.30 (GMT + 1)**

### THE SOCIAL NATURE OF MUSICAL TASTE

Speaker: Wez

Deconstructing the idea that musical taste (or any art form) is purely subjective. (The use of headphones or good speakers is advisable).

**Friday 18 June 19.30 (GMT + 1)**

### Capitalism, Contradictions and Crisis

Speaker: Mike Schauerte (WSPUS) (recording)

For the past 200 years capitalism has been prey to periodic crises. Marx thought that a crisis was an eruption (and temporarily resolution) of the

fundamental contradictions of capitalism. What are these contradictions and how do they drive capitalism (and productive power) forward? And what does all this have to do with the state of the capitalist world in 2021 and the way we make the case for socialism?

**Sunday 20 June 11.00 (GMT + 1)**

### Capitalism, Contradictions and Crisis (reprise)

Opportunity for further discussion of Friday's talk with Mike Schauerte live from Japan

**Friday 25 June 19.30 (GMT + 1)**

### "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways. The point however is to change it"

Speaker: Fredi Edwards

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

**Discord** has been a lifeline for party members during the protracted national lockdown. Diverse subjects ranging from the environment to a music quiz night, from animal rights to what life could be like within socialism have been discussed/debated. These and other subjects have undoubtedly been vastly informative, entertaining and on occasions amusing with some funny anecdotes. Now with the lockdown substantially eased, it might be time to examine what else can and should be done to propagate the Party case.

## 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

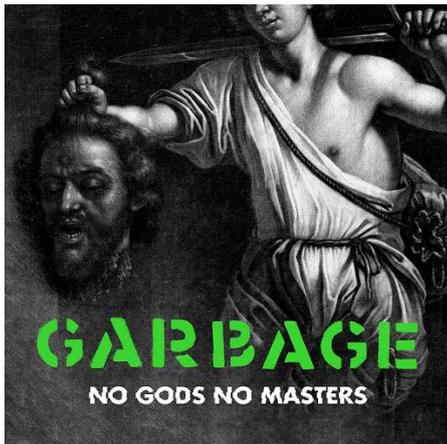
1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e. land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is 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.



## Bin capitalism



The rock band Garbage have a new album out this month. The title *No Gods, No Masters* will likely bring a smile or nod of agreement from socialists regardless of their musical tastes and is attributed to Louis Blanqui, a contemporary of Marx and Engels, and described by the latter as ‘...essentially a political revolutionist. He is a socialist only through sentiment, through his sympathy with the sufferings of the people, but he has neither a socialist theory nor any definite practical suggestions for social remedies. In his political activity he was mainly a “man of action”, believing that a small and well organised minority, who would attempt a political stroke of force at the opportune moment, could carry the mass of the people with them by a few successes at the start and thus make a victorious revolution’ (*The Programme of the Blanquist Fugitives from the Paris Commune*, 1874). Shirley Manson, the band’s vocalist, when she was 12 or so told her Sunday-school-teacher father ‘religion’s a sham and I’m not going to church anymore, it’s just bullshit’. Speaking recently (spin.com, 30 March) of the album she declared: ‘It was our way of trying to make sense of how fucking nuts the world is and the astounding chaos we find ourselves in’. Further, it is ‘a critique of the rise of capitalist short-sightedness, racism, sexism and misogyny across the world.’ Evidence of which abounds.

## Myopic measures

‘On Feb. 21, Modi’s ruling Bharatiya Janata Party passed a resolution unequivocally hailing the “visionary leadership of Prime Minister Modi” in turning India into a “victorious nation in the fight against COVID”’ (time.com, April 28). ‘There is a shortage everywhere at the peak of the crisis. This government defines shortages,

shortcomings, and short-sightedness’ (nationalheraldindia.com, 23 April). ‘Experts have long raised the alarm about shortages of medical oxygen in India and other poor countries to treat pneumonia, the world’s biggest preventable infectious killer of children under five years of age. But the government has for years failed to invest enough money in such infrastructure, experts say. Does India produce enough oxygen? The short answer: yes. Experts say the vast nation of 1.3 billion people is producing enough oxygen – a little over 7,000 tonnes a day. Most is for industrial use but can be diverted for medical purposes’ (aljazeera.com, 29 April). Religion thrives alongside such (preventable) suffering: ‘In March 2020, a Hindutva group, the Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha, held a cow urine drinking party as a means of providing protection against the virus’ (scroll.in, 1 May). Yet, as Marx noted, ‘To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo...’ Atheism alone is another dead end.



## Race or class?

‘Nothing has exposed the role of structural and institutional racism as starkly as the disproportionate effects of covid-19 on ethnic minority communities. Public Health England’s report identifies racism and discrimination as key contributors to infection risk, outcomes, and life chance’ (bmj.com, 21 April). ‘Poor British people in 2020 are healthier than those born into poverty 100 years ago, a study has found’ (dailymail.co.uk, 20 January 2020). Workers who don’t understand why capitalism condemns them to impoverished lives are all too ready to blame their problems on other workers, from other towns or from other countries or of other ‘races’. This is an exercise of blind futility for after all the misconceptions, after all the efforts to

reform capitalism into a problem-free system, it is clear that the need is for a radical change; nothing less than the abolition of class society will do. This is perfectly possible but it requires a united resolve among the world’s working class, reflecting the fact that their interests are as one, to establish a society based on common ownership of the means of life. Race has no scientific basis. Racism needs to be rejected as a destructive, anti-social force. There is a better way; we have a world to win and little time to lose.

## Dead slow



The World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report 2021: ‘At the current relative pace, gender gaps can potentially be closed in 52.1 years in Western Europe, 61.5 years in North America, and 68.9 years in Latin America and the Caribbean. In all other regions it will take over 100 years to close the gender gap: 121.7 years in Sub-Saharan Africa, 134.7 years in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 165.1 years in East Asia and the Pacific, 142.4 years in Middle East and North Africa, and 195.4 years in South Asia.’ (weforum.org, 30 March). Socialism will include the liberation of women as part of its project of human emancipation. This will not come about in an automatic or inevitable way. A political organisation whose object is socialism cannot permit sexism within its ranks on the grounds that nothing can be done now and that the problem will be resolved ‘after the revolution’. For a political organisation to be credible, it must embody the attitudes, values and practices that it seeks to institute in society at large. Socialists believe that all people, men and women, are equally worthy of respect. This is enshrined in our Declaration of Principles (1904-present), specifically Clause 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’.