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Northern Ireland



Centenary



also:
Gender
GB News
Carrying Capacity



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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'

Neither London nor Dublin but World Socialism

This year marks the centenary of the founding of the Northern Ireland statelet, also referred to as the North of Ireland, the 'occupied six counties' or Ulster depending on your point of view. In April, this anniversary was greeted with serious rioting in Protestant working-class areas of Belfast. Three causes were given - anger at the new hard border established in the Irish Sea by the Northern Ireland 'Protocol' as part of the final Brexit agreement with the EU, resentment at Sinn Féin politicians not being prosecuted for allegedly breaking Covid rules while attending a funeral of an IRA man, and the young rioters allegedly being put up to it by local loyalist gang leaders who wanted cover to protect their criminal activities. There are fears of further rioting during this month's marching season.

But these explanations fail to consider the wider context in which this social unrest is taking place. The new statelet was born in 1921 in the aftermath of the Irish war of independence. In the North, progroms were incited against the Catholic population leaving over five hundred dead, mainly Catholics. Thousands of Catholic workers were expelled from their workplaces in the engineering and shipyard industries.

The Northern Unionist capitalists, anxious that the Northern industries centred around Belfast and Derry stay within the markets of the then British empire, agreed to a separate state in the North remaining in the UK. Not all unionists envisaged a state that marginalised its Roman Catholic minority. Edward Carson declared 'from the outset let us see that the Catholic minority have nothing to fear from the Protestant majority'. James Craig, the first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, had other ideas when he stated 'All I boast is that we are a Protestant Parliament and a Protestant state'. Under his watch, constituencies were gerrymandered to create Unionist majorities, the state forces, the notorious B-Specials and the RUC, were set up to keep the Catholic working class in their place. The Unionist ruling class reckoned that they needed to secure the support of the Protestant working class, by ensuring that the best paid jobs in the shipbuilding and engineering industries went to Protestant workers.

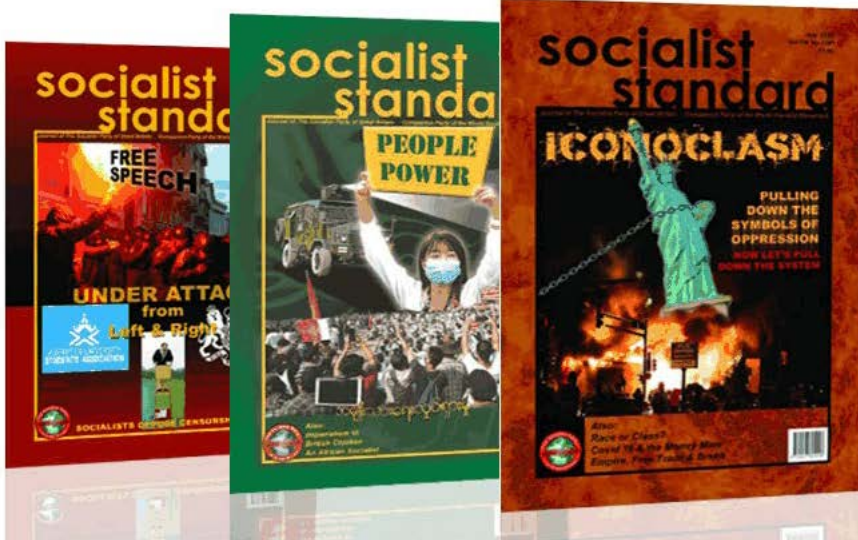
Although Northern Ireland has since been reformed, the religious sectarianism imprinted on its political DNA has not been fully erased.

It has often been pointed out that the Good Friday Agreement assumes a frictionless border between the North and South. Another less visible assumption was that the capitalist economy which was booming at the time in 1998 would continue to do so generating more jobs and higher incomes for the working class. However, this was never going to be the case. The capitalist economy tanked in 2008 with the resulting austerity and again with the current Covid-19 pandemic. Many workers have been plunged into greater poverty. Given the poisonous mixture of systemic sectarianism and economic insecurity, it is no wonder that violent clashes have occurred where workers turn on each other.

The truth is that Protestant and Catholic workers have more in common with each other than they have with the capitalist class. Protestant workers have no interest in a Northern Ireland linked with the UK and Catholic workers have no interest in a united Ireland. They both have an interest in establishing socialism.

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PATHFINDERS

Space Race 2.0

YOU KNOW who the first man on the moon was, right? And the second? Bet you can't name the third, or the next nine. After the initial feat, and an edge-of-your-seat crisis with Apollo 13, the space race quickly got old, and global interest waned. 50 years ago this month, the crew of Apollo 15 made the fourth landing on the moon and drove the first moon rover, and barely anyone noticed. Not long after this, the huge money sink of the Apollo programme was scrapped. For all the sciency hype, the moon's only real purpose was as the finishing line in a space race aimed at putting one over on soviet 'communism'.

Now we're watching Space Race Reloaded, this time as a multi-player game involving the US, Europe, China, Russia, India and others, and including for the first time large amounts of private capital. What on earth – or off earth- is going on?

Space exploration has attracted its share of eccentrics, like 'Mad Mike' Hughes who, in February 2020, launched himself skyward in a steam-powered rocket to prove that the Earth was flat, but died proving instead that it was very hard ([bbc.in/3zwPEOh](https://www.bbc.com/news/health-55444444)). If you're going to be eccentric, it helps to be rich, and the bullish billionaire trio of Bezos, Branson and Musk have not hesitated to vie in what, from a worker's earthbound perspective, are pointless and ecologically egregious vanity projects involving low-orbital flights for rich tourists. The bulbous head of Bezos's Blue Origin rocket inspired an inevitably phallic comparison by the *Daily Star* which talked about the billionaires 'willy-waving' with their 'giant thrusters'.

But it's more than just boys showing off their toys. In May China parked a rover on Mars, and last month launched a crew up to its new Tiandong space station ([bbc.in/3xBWnol](https://www.bbc.com/news/health-55444444)), as well as announcing plans for a joint Sino-Russian moon base. Meanwhile Nasa's new director Bill 'Big Willy' Nelson has 'sought to leverage China's space ambitions as a way to get Congress to fund Nasa's plans to return to the moon' ([wapo.st/3xxHsv4](https://www.wapo.st/3xxHsv4)).

In the 1970s, space programmes relied solely on the resources of national governments. Now things are different. Since 1970 the wealth of the top one percent has grown at 100 times the pace of the bottom 50 percent (bit.ly/35zl9Za), creating mind-boggling resources of private capital that can now be invested in the biggest projects. Nasa has contracted part of its operations to Elon Musk's company SpaceX, including servicing the International Space Station, and that's only the beginning.

SpaceX also won the contract to supply the moon lander for Nasa's new heavy-lift rocket, the Space Launch System, as part of its Artemis moonshot programme. Disappointingly for space nerds, the SLS is an unimaginative repeat of the old Saturn V burn-and-discard 3-stage system. After some notable successes with reusable rockets, SpaceX did hope to win the contract for a Nasa reusable rocket design but its Falcon Heavy rocket isn't anywhere near big enough to get to the moon, and its gigantic Starship rocket – billed as a potential Mars crew shuttle- is still in development.

If the moon wasn't really the point last time, this time it might be. First, there is the matter of helium-3 (see *Pathfinders*, March 2014), a rare isotope on Earth but abundant on the moon and potentially useful in nuclear fusion that might provide up to 10,000 years of cleanish energy. But it's still uncertain whether helium-3 extraction would be economic. Second, there is the fact that the moon, as a satellite, will be out of range of the satellite wars which are widely predicted (*Pathfinders*, November 2020), and which prompted a Nato space war summit just last month (*Times*, 15 June- bit.ly/3iT2vUW). Third, Nasa confirmed in 2020 that there was water on the moon, which was a game-changer. In space shuttle days, the cost of lofting a kilo of water to space was \$54,000. With SpaceX's reusable Falcon 9 shuttle to the ISS, this dropped to \$2,720 (bit.ly/3iRJP88). Yet a permanent moon base is only really feasible if there's a local supply. The water concentration Nasa detected in sunlit areas was 100 times less than in the Sahara desert, however the presence of any at all suggests that there may be vast deposits of ice in the dark polar craters. These would not only enable moon colonies but also potentially supply liquid hydrogen and oxygen fuels in order to make the moon a launch point for further space exploration, and as a staging post for Mars.

But it's not all about ends, it's also about means. China has been making giant technological strides lately, and this is alarming the Americans, because space technology is also weapons technology – 'there are no technologies used in space that aren't dual-use' (wapo.st/35NHBPv). The fear is, whoever gets a lead in space has a lead in perpetuity. Moon bases today, missile bases tomorrow, perhaps.

It need hardly be said that socialists deplore the militarisation of space. But



billionaires like Musk are motivated by an altogether higher purpose, and that doesn't include the silly story about him planning to mine a gold asteroid worth \$700 quintillion. He is well known for tweeting about potential extinction-level asteroid strikes, and how humans need to colonise other planets so all our eggs are not in one basket. Nasa has pooh-poohed the notion of deadly asteroids, however a darker truth could lie behind the prediction. What if the super-rich suspect that climate change is out of control, and that the Earth is ultimately doomed through its own (i.e. their) folly?

What better use for your billions, and what better legacy, than to initiate searches for a viable replacement planet? In this context, the search for extraterrestrial life takes on a new significance. Nasa has just announced probes to explore the supposedly bio-generated phosphine layer in the upper atmosphere of Venus. And just last month the Juno probe did a flyby of Ganymede, Jupiter's largest moon and thought to have a liquid iron core, hence magnetic shielding, and more subterranean water than all of Earth's oceans combined. Next year it will do a flyby of Jupiter's moon Europa, with a thin oxygen atmosphere and, it's believed, a water ocean 60 miles deep under a 20-mile-thick ice crust. Europa is one of the most promising sources of life, if any, in the solar system. The European Space Agency is planning a trip there in 2022, and Nasa again in 2025.

The idea of the capitalists funding an 'exit strategy' to escape the dead Earth they have created is of course the plot of Ben Elton's 1989 novel *Stark*. We say, they're welcome to live on some frozen airless dump, and we hope they rot. But let's hope we get socialism before that happens, and before any idea of exporting capitalism to other planets really gets off the ground.

PJS

LETTERS

My journey to becoming a Socialist

Dear Editors,

One cold Friday night some 40 years ago, I had what I have now come to realise was something of a serendipitous encounter with a complete stranger while enjoying a beer or two in The Horseshoe Bar, Glasgow, just before making my way to London on the overnight train to take part in what was called 'The People's March For Jobs' demonstration at Hyde Park.

As a young member of the Society of Graphical and Allied Trades (SOGAT) printer's union, I felt quite proud to be a banner-wielding protestor against Prime Minister Thatcher's government and their total disregard and contempt for the working class, and somehow felt the need to express my anger the only way I knew how.

There was a good few dozen of us print-workers gathered from all around the multitude of factories based in and around Glasgow, with one particular thing in common – a distinct hatred of Thatcher and her Tory cronies.

Anyway, whilst in the throes of alcohol-induced rage and fury, I was approached at the bar by a chap with a distinct goatee beard who was also enjoying a refreshment or two.

'What you up to young man?' he asked.

'Oh, on my way to London to join the People's March For Jobs,' I proclaimed proudly.

'Whit the fuck ye daen that fur?' he bluntly enquired.

Somewhat taken aback, I was a bit stuck for words. 'Waste o' fuckin time, if ye ask me pal,' he went on. 'Whit difference dae ye think it's gonnae make son?'

'Well,' I said 'that bitch is closing down all the factories, and causing misery for everyone. I'm a socialist and I want to do something about it,' I helpied back.

He erupted in laughter and told me that I had a lot to learn. He bought me a beer and invited me to get myself down to the Stirling Library at Royal Exchange Square in the heart of Glasgow some Saturday afternoon where I will find out 'what a real socialist is'. Somewhat disgruntled by this I vowed to accept his challenge and see for myself just what this guy was talking about the next time I happened to be in the city centre.

The People's March For Jobs came and went, and several months passed during which time I'd actually forgotten about my encounter with this strange man who dared to doubt that I was anything but a bona fide socialist. True to my word, I eventually headed on down to Royal Exchange Square whereupon I did indeed come across a group of mainly men taking it in turns to address a fair-sized crowd who had gathered to listen to them shouting about the forces of 'capitalism' and how 'real socialism' was the only solution to addressing the problems inherent in that disruptive and destructive worldwide system.

I was blown away and more than just a wee bit curious about the concept of this new world order that would revolutionise the way in which we functioned and interacted together as humans. A complete change from the current system of competition, to one of cooperation. From each according to their ability, to each according to their need. I just had to find out more.

There was about an hour or so of questions and answers from the assembled crowd – some of them quite forceful and aggressive, some very supportive and showing genuine interest

– all of them answered articulately with superb confidence and knowledge by the same man who I met in the pub a few months earlier. The meeting began to come to a natural end and I hung around until there was only a handful of guys and a couple of women left. I was approached by one fairly well-spoken chap in a grey trench style raincoat, who asked me if I enjoyed the session and would I like to join them for a beer? Not one to turn down such an invitation, I found myself being made most welcome by this group of strangers in a local hostelry who were only too happy to answer this inquisitive young man's enquiring mind about this thing called 'world socialism'.

What an incredible experience! I left a couple of hours later completely awestruck by what these 'genuine socialists' had described to me as a 'world of abundance' where everyone will be free to live a life of their choosing and for the benefit of all. Instead of the way things are now, whereby we're all enslaved by the wages system, and if you don't have a job, you cannot afford even the basics of human needs. If you do, it's only because you've been forced to sell whatever skills you have to the highest payer, and even then, only just about manage to survive. It all gave me food for thought, and I thought it was corrupt.

A lot has happened in my life since that fateful day. But one thing remains, my absolute conviction and determination to continue along with other like-minded fellow workers and true socialists – not the kind of wishy-washy reformists who think that by accepting piecemeal reforms handed down by the capitalist class and the politicians that they employ, we will somehow reach social equality for all – that's not going to happen.

What I have discovered is that although we may well be slightly better off in terms of material goods and commodities than those of our forebears, this is still a far cry away from what is possible when the majority of us come to understand and realise what can be achieved with the will and determination to make it happen. Then and only then will we realise the true fruits of our collective labours, instead of handing them over to that privileged minority of parasites who feed off of our labour in order to feather their own nests with luxuries. The kind of luxuries that they proudly show off and boast of, while the rest of us look on in despair of their greed and the gross inequality that we have to endure under capitalism. Come join us, fellow workers. You've got nothing to lose but your chains. Who knows, maybe one of these days you too will be writing all about your journey to becoming a socialist in the pages of this journal.

PAUL EDWARDS



COOKING THE BOOKS

Is inflation going to increase?

'Markets were right to be spooked by the threat of rising inflation' was the headline of an article by Philip Aldrick, Economics Editor of the *Times* on 15 May. Nowadays the word has come to mean simply 'an increase in the general level of prices' (David Smith, *Times*, 2 June).

Originally, as the word suggests, inflation referred to an over-issue of a paper currency in the sense of printing more than the economy needed for its transactions; in which case the currency depreciated, resulting in a rise in the general price level.

The price of individual products can go up for various reasons such as an increase in paying demand compared to supply or to a fall in productivity. In fact, for most products, the tendency is for their real price to fall due to increasing productivity, though this is masked by the depreciation of the currency causing the money price to rise.

A rise in the general price level is something different. It is a rise that affects *all* products. The most common cause of this is a depreciation of the currency due to too much being issued. Currently the policy of monetary authorities nearly

everywhere is to bring about a rise in the general price level of about 2 percent a year. This is why prices rise continuously from year to year. Inflation already exists; what is worrying some economic commentators is that it might rise above this level.

Over-issuing the currency is not the only reason why the general price level can go up. It can also go up when, as in a boom, the demand for all goods runs ahead of supply as capitalist enterprises seek to make hay while the sun shines, producing more to sell, so increasing the demand for raw materials and labour (it always ends in overproduction and so a fall – a slump – in production),

Something similar is what some economists are expecting to occur when the Covid restrictions are finally removed. Andy Haldane, the Bank of England's Chief Economist, has written of a 'move from bounce-back to boom without passing "go"' (*Times*, 10 June). Unused consumer purchasing power has built-up because shops have not been fully open and because many people have been working from home, so saving travel and lunch costs. It's going to be a sellers' market, where businesses can put up their prices without risking losing customers. As Smith

put it with reference to restaurants:

'Businesses are responding logically to the release of pent-up demand. If they can raise prices and restrict the special offers they used to need to attract customers, they will do so.'

Aldrick adds that businesses will also be in a position to pass on increased transport and materials costs:

'In the short term, business will want to raise prices. They could absorb higher costs by squeezing margins, but with more debt to service and many cash-rich households able to pay up, why would they?'

The implicit assumption behind both these comments is that businesses don't have a free hand but can only increase prices when 'the market can bear it'. They can't raise prices above this level (at least not without losing customers) even if taxes, wages or other costs go up. If the market won't bear it, then they have to let their profit margins be squeezed. On the other hand, if the market will bear it they can increase their price even if their costs haven't gone up.

What the economists are saying is that, due to the demand built up during the Covid restrictions, the market will be able to bear it and the general price level will rise as a result.



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. 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/ 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.



We can feed the world

Jack Kloppenburg, a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, noted that hi-tech agriculture is frequently justified by the rationalisation that it will feed the world. Kloppenburg says that is the wrong approach. 'People need to feed themselves — they need to be allowed to feed themselves' (bit.ly/3bdxk28).

We should concentrate attention upon the economics which drives agriculture and the food industry rather than disproportionately focus upon specific technologies and techniques.

The farming industry rarely asks 'What do we grow that is best for the land?' or 'What can we grow that will benefit our community the most?' or 'What crop will be most nutritious and damage the land the least?' Those are not questions that the food corporations ask. Instead they usually have just one question, 'How much money can be made out of the land?'

The Malthusian overpopulationists gained popularity with the publication of Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* (propped up by Garret Hardin's later 'Tragedy of the Commons') which claimed that the world population was exploding and food production would fail to keep up with the numbers of people.

It led to what is known as the Green Revolution, and it is a policy still being emulated in modern times by the Bill Gates Foundation. What it did was basically to take fertilisers and pesticides, an integral part of intensified industrial farming methods, and transfer the practices elsewhere to increase production. Today, Gates and the Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa have joined various corporations such as Monsanto, manufacturers of the Round-Up herbicide, to introduce genetically modified crops with the same end of increasing harvest yields.

However, such pessimistic predictions did not materialise because the rate of population growth dropped. The world population no longer is expected to reach the earlier projection of 12 billion. Now the estimate is 9 billion or even 8 billion and the world already is well able to supply sufficient food if wastage is reduced.

Sweet-sounding statements from government ministries are frequently rendered meaningless by businesses bent on maintaining their expansion and growth. Capitalist accumulation is limitless. The purpose of capitalism is endless expansion of production for profits and an ecological nightmare has arisen from irrational, unplanned, undemocratic production, rather than a rational, democratically planned economy. Capitalism will poison and pollute the planet beyond recovery if it is not replaced.

Spurred by UN population projections and its calculation of the degree that food production has to increase, ie that the world must produce 70 percent more food by the year 2050 through yield growth to feed the expected rise in population, many commentators determined that the world needed to upgrade its farming methods with innovations such as genetically modified seeds and foods. We are told that the

agribusiness corporations manufacturing fertilisers and pesticides, and the food processing companies, are the only sector capable of feeding the planet's population and that family-owned, small farms are not equipped to do so. The food industry has no motivation other than to derive more profits from the food chain. Corporations expend a huge budget on public relations in defence of their business plans.

Yet there is no global or regional shortage of food other than some localised supply deficiencies caused by armed conflicts or temporary pest problems like, for example, a locust plague. Many countries are net food exporters. Wherever we look, farmers are already producing a surplus. There is no food scarcity. Food security could be provided for all people, all the time. Currently substantial crop harvests go to bio-fuels to drive vehicles. Crops that could fill the empty bellies of the hungry are diverted to fill fuel tanks or to fatten up cows and pigs. A 2013 estimate is that 4 billion additional people could be fed if animals were absent from the global feed chain, and that figure excludes nomadic pastoral livestock rearing, which often takes place on marginal land less suitable to arable farming and could easily continue to be practised.

Then there are plantations growing cash crops such as palm oil, coffee and tea. Cut flowers are a major export of Kenya's horticulture. These may bring in valuable foreign currency for local elites but has very limited ability to feed the local people. World agriculture possesses the possibility to substitute non-edible crops for nutritious sustenance but Big Ag chases the stock market as well as the food market and states assist by providing generous financial and tax subsidies to it.

We cannot lay out any detailed alternative but we can broadly predict that in socialism the people would likely adopt a more flexitarian diet, supplied by the use of mixed cropping, agro-ecological production systems, and conservation agriculture, using more appropriate soil and watering procedures and requiring much less chemical input. A method called the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) has the potential to feed a further seven billion if universally applied.

The World Socialist Movement long ago determined that increasing production does not solve hunger as it is not a technological issue but a political and economic problem.

An editorial in *Journal of Sustainable Agriculture* agrees:

'Hunger is caused by poverty and inequality, not scarcity... the world produces more than 1 ½ times enough food to feed everyone on the planet. That's already enough to feed 10 billion people, the world's 2050 projected population peak. But the people... cannot afford to buy this food... The call to double food production by 2050 only applies if we continue to prioritize the growing population of livestock and automobiles over hungry people' (bit.ly/3o64l5C).

In anticipation of more people living on the planet, we already have the knowledge and skills to feed those extra mouths. Socialism will exercise these to provide sufficient nourishment and end scarcity whereas it is in capitalism's interest to maintain malnutrition and food shortages to keep prices up.

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

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

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

MIDLANDS

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

NORTH

North East Regional branch.

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

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

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

Bolton. Contact: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589.

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

Doncaster. Contact: Fredi Edwards, frediedwards@hotmail.co.uk

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

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

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

Contact: Stephen Harper spgbsw@gmail.com

Brighton. Contact: Anton Pruden, anton@pruden.me

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

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

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

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

IRELAND

Cork. Contact: Kevin Cronin, 5 Curragh Woods, Frankfield, Cork. 021 4896427.

mariekev@eircom.net

NORTHERN IRELAND

Belfast. Contact: Nigel McCullough. 02890 930002

SCOTLAND

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

The Quaker Hall, Victoria Terrace (above Victoria Street), Edinburgh. Contact: J. Moir. 0131 440 0995. jimmyjmoir73@gmail.com

Branch website:

<http://geocities.com/edinburghbranch/>

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

peter.anna.hendrie@blueyonder.co.uk.

Dundee. Contact: Ian Ratcliffe, 12 Finlow

Terrace, Dundee, DD4 9NA. 01382 698297.

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

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

WALES

South Wales Branch (Swansea)

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

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MATERIAL WORLD

Hamas High Dramas

AS A result of the recent conflict, many supporters of the Palestinian cause portray Hamas as gallant freedom-fighters up against Israel's military might. While, in turn, the pro-Israel Zionist lobby depict Hamas as the super-villains. Many readers will be surprised that Hamas exists through the acquiescence and collusion of the Israeli state which appears to adhere to policies of better the foe you know, keep your friends close but your enemies closer and divide to conquer.

The origins of Hamas have their roots in the Muslim Brotherhood, led in Gaza by Sheikh Yassin. Not only was he allowed to openly spread his Islamist message while Israel was conducting assassinations of members of the PLO, but Yassin was also permitted to form Mujama al-Islamiya as an official charity that would eventually evolve into Hamas (on.wsj.com/3wDFzfV).

Yitzhak Segev, the then governor of Gaza, has said he was in regular contact with Yassin, 'We had no problems with him.' Segev actually arranged for the Muslim cleric to have hospital treatment in Israel. Segev told a *New York Times* reporter that he had helped finance the Palestinian Islamist movement as a counterbalance to a shared enemy, the secular leftists, hoping Hamas would become an alternative to the PLO, a need that grew greater when the PLO started negotiating the two-state solution. The Islamic militants accused it of treachery and this suited Israel at the time who wished to keep building Jewish-Israeli settlements on occupied Palestinian land.

Like Baron Frankenstein, Israel spawned a monster over which it lost control. Sheikh Yassin was assassinated in 2004 by missiles from a helicopter.

Old history? Not so. Israel still indirectly facilitates the funding of Hamas to this day.

'In an interview with Israel's Channel 12 News, former Israeli Defence Minister Avigdor Liberman revealed details about a secret visit to Qatar by Mossad Chief Yossi Cohen and the Israeli military's chief of Southern Command Herzl Halevi to allegedly 'beg the Qataris to keep pouring money into Hamas' (bit.ly/2TfCww2).

A process confirmed by the Reuters report:

'Qatar, with Israeli acquiescence, has provided substantial funding to Hamas in recent years, by some tallies, millions of dollars a month, chiefly to pay administrative salaries, some of which can then be siphoned off... A guy from Qatar comes every month with his suitcases of money accompanied by Israeli soldiers to pay Hamas administrative staff...' said the senior European official (reut.rs/3wFhZiU).



Moshé Machover, a close observer of events in the region, wrote in the *Weekly Worker* how Netanyahu explained why Israel permits the financial support of Hamas:

"...whoever wishes to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state must support the strengthening of Hamas and the transfer of money to Hamas. This is part of our strategy - to separate the Palestinians in Gaza from the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria..." (bit.ly/3i2KsLw).

A common refrain is that it is for the Palestinians themselves to determine the methods of resistance, not ourselves, and they have chosen Hamas as their representatives.

Has Hamas ended the 14-year long siege? Has it provoked Israel to invade with ground forces for Hamas fighters to inflict heavy casualties upon the IDF? Has it overcome Israel's defences when several hundred rockets fizzle out before even reaching Israeli territory and of those that do, 90 per cent are shot being down by Iron Dome? Has Israel's 'self-defence' been a financial cost to it considering that the USA pays Israel's bills?

What Hamas rockets did do was to distract from East Jerusalem and the Palestinian-Israeli protests across Israel. Some critics suggest it was a power-play by Hamas, not an act of solidarity. They want to present themselves as the

leadership of the Israeli-Palestinians and protectors of the holy places.

Hamas could have revived the March of Return to the fences as a non-violent alternative to the very clear suicidal strategy of armed struggle, although even that tactic was not without a likely cost in lives from past experience of Israel army snipers. Regardless, Hamas wanted a media event of Israeli bombings and mass misery and Israel, for its domestic politics, obliged them.

Michelle Bachelet, the UN high commissioner for human rights, has said, referring to the Israeli bombing, 'Air strikes in such densely populated areas resulted in a high level of civilian fatalities and injuries, as well as the widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure'. If deemed to be indiscriminate and disproportionate in their impact on civilians 'Such attacks may constitute war crimes'.

Equally pertinent, Bachelet went on in her statement to say the Hamas tactic of locating rocket launchers in densely populated civilian areas, and firing rockets which were indiscriminate and failed to distinguish between military and civilian objects, '...constitutes a clear violation of international humanitarian law...'

Both sides in this war caused innocent civilians to die and the only difference being that Israel killed far more than Hamas.

People have taken to the streets for the cessation of violence and 'Boycott, Divest and Sanction' has become a popular policy for campaigners, but in many situations, there are problems in this capitalist world that have no solution. The Israel-Palestine deadlock may well be one of those where we have to await the creation of a cooperative commonwealth. In the meantime, for the sake of stopping the killings and destruction, there is an opportunity for the Palestinians and Israeli government to agree to the Hamas offer of the hudna, an Islamic form of a long-term and renewable armistice where both parties mutually accept the pre-1967 borders.

But even that is also a very distant hope according to many informed commentators.

ALJO

How do you like your News?



A new channel, GB News, brought in 336,000 people for its launch (*Guardian*, 14 June) – more than three times the number watching BBC News and more than seven times the number watching Sky News at the same time. It has a distinctive brand – as the name suggests, and as its chairman, Andrew Neil, made explicit, ‘We are proud to be British. The clue is in the name. And while we will never hold back from covering our country’s many flaws and problems, we will not come at every story with the conviction that Britain is always at fault, usually to blame when things go wrong, generally useless. We won’t forget what the B stands for in our title.’

There seems to have been a space in the media market for this, given the popularity it enjoyed at launch. What is more interesting is the quite overtly populist tone of the broadcast. Neil insists the channel is ‘dedicated to covering the news that matters to you and giving voice to those who felt sidelined or even silenced in our great national debates – because if it matters to you, it matters to us. GB News will not slavishly follow the existing news agenda.’ To be sure, there are good reasons for people to take that idea seriously. A significant portion of people in the UK do not trust, for instance, the BBC, to tell the truth ‘at all’ – 20 percent in December 2019 (*YouGov*, 16 December 2019). Contrast that with the 8 percent who took it to tell the truth ‘a great deal’. This will only gain more force since Laura Kuenssberg, the BBC political editor, was singled out by name by the Prime Minister’s ex-adviser, Dominic Cummings, in his criticism of the government’s handling of the pandemic (*Daily Telegraph*, 26 May). This is all good news for GB News, who want to primarily compete with the BBC.

Popular populism

The liberal press reacted as would be reasonable for them to, when faced with any sort of populist rhetoric: strident derision. The *Guardian* (12 June) gave the channel a one star out of five review, calling it ‘Utterly deadly stuff’. Stuart Jeffries continues in his review to ask a ‘philosophical question’ – ‘Can GB News change Britain’s news agenda if no one watches it? The answer, incredibly, is yes. [...] [It] will be a success if it has reach rather than ratings.’ And it seems that it does have reach. His optimistic conclusion, nevertheless, is ‘A year tops.’ While Jeffries is quite right to point out the technical failures and the poor production quality, there does seem to be something important missed in just straightforwardly slating it. Why, if it is so bad, are people interested? There may be a genuine desire for explicitly political populist reporting in the UK. It would be hardly surprising if that were the case.

The political slant, besides the nationalism noted above, is one of focus on ‘woke’ moves made in mainstream politics and standing in opposition to them: ‘We will puncture the pomposity of our elites and politics, business, media and academia, and expose their growing promotion of cancel culture for the threat to free speech and democracy that it is.’ There is certainly a consistent narrative being spun here, and now there are serious questions arising about who exactly the ‘elites’ in question are. Of course, the narrative is helped by corporate advertisers, including Ikea and Octopus Energy, boycotting the channel (*Independent*, 16 June). In what might otherwise be described as the free market deciding to allocate funding elsewhere, Tory MP Craig Mackinlay explains that ‘This is all part of the closing down of free speech campaign

which I am afraid we are seeing across our society. [...] Corporates should do what they do – sell things rather than get involved with political debates’ (*Daily Mail*, 16 June). Of course, this does raise questions of where the funding does come from. It is a well-documented fact that the media relies on advertising much more heavily than it does on readership/viewership counts, money-wise.

Where’s their money coming from?

As one would expect, it is funded primarily by hedge funds, large conglomerates like *Discovery*, based in the UK, and investment firms based in the Middle East like *Legatum*. There seems to be very little that is proudly British vis-à-vis the financing of the programming. As Kevin Rawlinson and Jim Waterson write sharply, ‘Neil lists his main residence as France on official documents’ (*Guardian*, 14 June). And more or less for those reasons alone, it does not matter that there are voices from a range of political positions, including Gloria De Piero, who was a Shadow Minister under Jeremy Corbyn at one point, and Andrew Doyle, who voiced his support for Corbyn.

The ostensibly anti-establishment tone of the broadcast comes down to little if that is going to be sharply restricted by advertiser and shareholder pressures. As James Curran and Jean Seaton note on their history and analysis of the British press, the work that inspired *Manufacturing Consent* (Herman & Chomsky, 1988), ‘[The introduction of market forces] did not inaugurate a new era of press freedom and liberty; it established instead a new system of press censorship more effective than anything that had gone before [succeeding] where legal repression had failed in conscripting the press to the social order’ (Curran & Seaton, 2018, p. 5). Left-wing commentators mean nothing when advertiser pressures hold your programming to ransom any time inconvenient views are expressed. In Orwell’s still-insightful summary of the issues in his article on ‘The Freedom of the Press’, ‘Unpopular ideas can be silenced, and inconvenient facts kept dark, without the need for any official ban [...] because of a general tacit agreement that “it wouldn’t do” to mention that particular fact’. And that is quite relevant when considering how much the anti-establishment rhetoric is substance and how much it is just rhetoric. If they are genuinely against business or the establishment generally, where are they getting their money from? Why would business agree to fund them in the first place?

The tone of the broadcast is highly misleading in two respects. One, just elaborated, that it is highly doubtful anything substantively in favour of the working class is going to be expressible on the platform – even if the viewers it draws are overwhelmingly ABC1 (82 percent). The second is the actual quality of the reporting. The channel insists on ‘character, flair, attitudes, opinion, and, yes, a sense of humour. [...] Along the way we hope to have fun. [...] GB News will aim to inform, inspire, and entertain.’ The blending of entertainment and reporting has complex effects – it cannot be taken as a straightforward good. Any further erosion of rational reflection on political issues, including the explicit introduction of the aim of entertainment into journalism, is likely to do little but distract from the matters at hand. It would be one thing to watch the channel because one agreed with the editorials, it would be another to watch it because it is funny – and be dragged into their narrative on merely that basis.

All of this does still leave the possibility open that the channel is *knowingly* run without regard to profit, just to introduce the narrative into public discourse. This would sound far-fetched, if it were not for the historical precedent. The incentives to do so are clear: further shift the opinion to the right, with the additional benefit of leading the viewership into a false sense of complacency about what is being said and

done against the elite strata of society. Sky News, for instance, operates at a loss (*Wired*, 13 June). If there is anything to be said, then, against the view of news corporations as pure profit-making machines like any other, it is that the view is not cynical enough. Their existence may be justified by elites for ideological functions alone.

Bluster against the elite

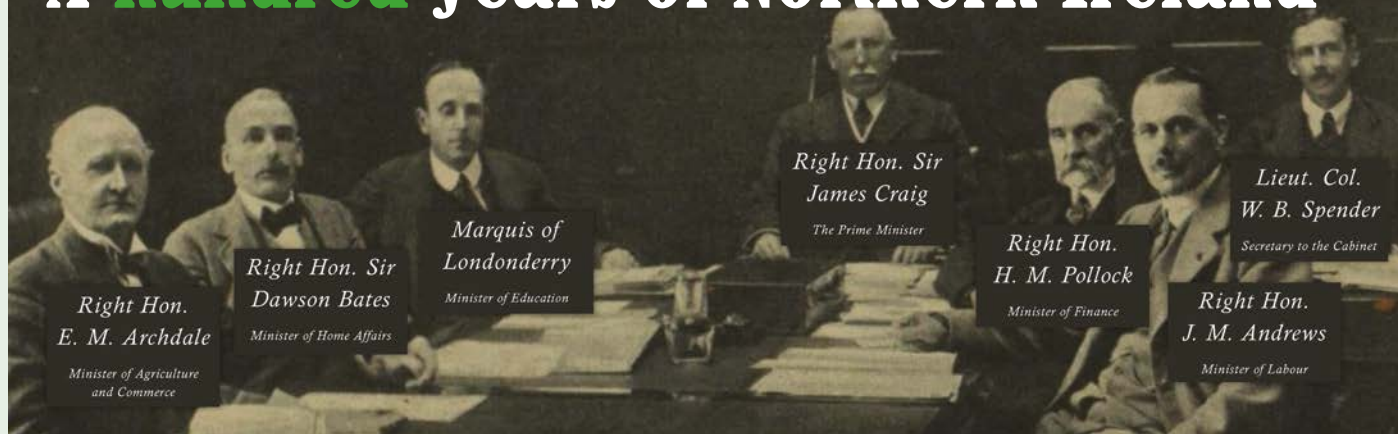
At any rate, this much is clear: for all its bluster against the elites, Andrew Neil, ex-editor of *The Times*, chairman of *The Spectator*, BBC regular, and chairman of Press Holdings, is unlikely to say much of substance against them. That isn’t to be put down to his opinions – left-wingers are around in the ‘GB News Family’ too (gbnews.uk). But that doesn’t matter much when advertiser pressures are the same as any other news corporation, radically restricting the views expressible on air. And if it will have to fight for funding, as it looks like it might, there will be little choice but to pander to the elites. However noble your intentions (granting an enormous benefit of the doubt here), it means nothing if the market forces in question operate to reflect the interests of those who have the money. And they do operate in exactly that way, especially in matters of the media. If it is to last, it can only do so with utterly subservient editorials, carrying on restricting the spectrum of opinion, though it might well maintain all the rhetoric of ‘not slavishly [following] the existing news agenda.’ This doesn’t leave room for Stuart Jeffries’s conclusion of ‘A year, tops’. We should be so lucky.

MP SHAH



Credit: Nick Ansell/PA Wire

A hundred years of Northern Ireland



A country, whose prospects and longevity many people must have doubted at the time of its inception, is set to have its one hundredth anniversary commemorated this year. Northern Ireland is preparing to celebrate its centenary in summer 2021 and by extension, the current version of the British state (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) will also mark 100 years of formal existence. For most countries, plans for such events are generally non-controversial and can engender a range of emotions varying from enthusiasm to indifference in the citizenry depending on how patriotic people feel and the level of identification they have with 'their' country. This is not the case for Northern Ireland and the 'celebrations' are likely to be quite muted. Indeed, for one of the governing parties in Belfast, Sinn Féin, its core, defining objective is the permanent elimination of the state.

Something else that is noteworthy is that in the other three nations that make up the UK, there appears very little awareness or interest in the significance of this coming event with the news agenda and public concerns dominated by COVID and the practical implications of Brexit. Furthermore, the centenary of Northern Ireland must logically mark a centenary for the state existing south of the border but no parallel or corresponding ceremony of any kind is at the moment planned for the Republic of Ireland. The peculiar position of Northern Ireland makes this an issue of interest to socialists. For most countries, there is a tacit acceptance of the legitimacy of the state amongst the population even if for purely pragmatic reasons. Because of the pervading national consciousness, there usually is a consensus of support for these commemorations even if many individuals are not actively involved. Given socialists' antipathy to all nationalist ideologies, the reasons behind the ambiguous attitude to the usual bout of flag-waving and anthem-bellowing that usually accompanies such events is worth exploring.

The invention of the state of Northern Ireland, while not a temporary measure *per se*, was never really intended to result in a permanent new entity. It was set up as a matter of political expediency, as the only solution to the irreconcilable demands of Irish Nationalists and Unionists on the island of Ireland. For the British government of the time, it seemed the only workable outcome to what had been an intractable problem even though its arbitrariness and shortcomings were always evident. The border was never envisaged to be a full international frontier between two sovereign nations but an internal line demarcating two clashing ethnic groups living in a part of the United Kingdom. Its creation had all the hallmarks of a desperate government grasping at any solution to remove, even in the short term, an exasperating irritant.

Origins

The origins and validity of the state of Northern Ireland have been long studied and debated. In the early years of the seventeenth century, during the reign of James I, the organised and large-scale colonisation of a part of the island of Ireland, the northern province of Ulster, by people from northern England and southern Scotland was initiated. By the end of that century, the majority of the people in the province were British settlers and their descendants; Protestant in religion compared to the native or indigenous Irish who were invariably Catholic. However, and a point that would achieve great significance subsequently, the colonists were not uniformly distributed across the nine counties that would constitute the province but tended to be concentrated in the six more north-easterly counties. So as a result of this mass immigration, from the eighteenth century onwards, Ulster began to diverge significantly from the rest of Ireland in terms of economy and society. For a start, the province became much more prosperous than the rest of the country. It was regarded as being more



dynamic and innovative than the South and a seedbed for new technologies, new industries, radical political ideas, and more modern social conventions. In some respects, it occupied a position in Ireland that California is reputed to have in the United States, being the part of the country that leads the way in adopting future trends. Indeed, during the nineteenth century, the local city of Belfast had overtaken the traditional Irish capital of Dublin in population and economic importance.

Because the whole island was governed from London (and became constitutionally united with Britain in 1801 to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland), the divergence between the two parts of the country was initially not a troubling issue for the government in London. However, as the nineteenth century progressed, a growing sense of Irish nationalism began to develop amongst the Catholic population who predominated in most of the southern part of the island. This led to a demand from them for the political separation of Ireland and Britain and the creation of an independent, all-island nation. This was resisted by the local Protestant majority in Ulster who believed their prosperity was vitally linked to remaining within the UK. After a considerable period of political turmoil, that had started in the mid to late nineteenth century, the solution finally adopted by the London government in 1921 was the formation of two regimes on the island of Ireland. The southern state, initially organised as a dominion state in the British Empire, would eventually become the fully independent Republic of Ireland; and the northern state was a devolved administration, with its own Parliament and government in Stormont, but subsidiary to Westminster and remaining within the UK.

The delineation of the border between the two states was a matter of much political passion at the time and fundamentally settled by sectarian considerations. Northern Ireland would consist of those six counties of the nine-county province of Ulster that would ensure a secure Unionist (at the time regarded as being synonymous with Protestant) voting majority and with a large enough land mass to be sustainable and not just to become a small British enclave on the island of Ireland. This meant the borders of the state were defined not by any geographical or historical landmarks but by the religious allegiances of the people. It resulted in a northern state with a two-thirds Protestant population, who generally welcomed its creation and sincerely believed it guaranteed their very continued existence, while simultaneously containing a one third, Nationalist and Catholic minority, some of whom bitterly resented the imposed new arrangement and yearned to be reunited with their southern co-religionists.

For the first fifty years of its existence, Northern Ireland could be regarded as performing quite satisfactorily although having to weather occasional periods of Republican violence against the state from elements of the discontented Nationalist minority. Whilst being fully democratic in terms of contemporary liberal European norms, (regular elections, a free press, independent judiciary, etc.) it had an authoritarian, majoritarian flavour in its conduct towards the minority Catholic population. Its leaders and senior government ministers tended to be drawn from the wealthy, large land-owning, Ascendancy class, many with some military background and intimately connected to the leading members of the Tory party in London at the time. Its single greatest achievement and 'selling point' was that it considerably outperformed the South in economic terms and thus ensured a better standard of living for all its citizens, though Catholics were always relatively disadvantaged. Its improved prosperity was partly due to its own local efforts, the significant amount of funding it received from the British Exchequer and the idiosyncratic and inept economic performance of the South

under the leadership of its anachronistic leader, De Valera. This superior performance was important to the Stormont regime who always recognised the implicit economic rivalry it had with Dublin and realised that its continued secure existence was in part predicated on exceeding its southern neighbour. In fact, both North and South had a superficially antagonistic but mutually beneficial co-existence. In public propaganda, both justified the need for their survival by reference to the religious intolerance and bigotry that they claimed was prevalent in the other jurisdiction while absent in their own. However, the Republic had one trump card in that game of bogus moral high ground of tolerance; while Northern Ireland had a significant and growing Catholic minority who remained a distinct entity, the Protestant population of the Republic was always much smaller and declined so rapidly after 1921 that its remaining residual elements had no choice but to accept assimilation in the state.

While the Unionist leaders in Stormont were aware of the growing challenges posed by the Civil Rights movement that had begun in the mid-1960s, there seemed a certain complacency present regarding the future of the northern state. Coming up to its fiftieth anniversary, preparations were made to mark the event which was to be known as *Ulster '71*. It was planned by then local Prime Minister Terence O'Neill before he resigned in 1969. Like all such ceremonies, its aim was to demonstrate 'progress' and to establish the forward-thrusting modernity of the state to the citizens. Also, it had the long-standing aim for Northern Ireland to showcase itself to Great Britain, to remind the mainland that it was still there and was a useful and important component of the whole nation. Notwithstanding its achievements, some Unionists tended to be defensive and insecure about how Ulster was perceived by the British public and anxious to display their worth to their compatriots in Britain. Looking back there is a poignancy to the events shown in the films that were made of *Ulster '71*. While conveying an air of superficial optimism about the future, that year of 1971 really marked the end of Northern Ireland in the form it was originally intended to have. Within 18 months, the Stormont parliament was permanently prorogued, the Government of Northern Ireland ceased to exist and was replaced by direct rule from London. After 1971, there was 25 years of the Troubles followed by another 25 years of an uneasy peace. Today, irrespective of its formal constitutional arrangement as an integral part of the United Kingdom, the province is more linked to its Southern neighbour than at any time in its history. The UK government currently accepts that it is not possible to rule Northern Ireland without the tacit support of Dublin.

Changing demographics

Looking at it now, Northern Ireland has changed considerably since its creation with the decline of its traditional Unionist ruling class and the underpinning social structures of the Unionist-minded population. Demographically it is now very close to 50/50 between Protestants and Catholics and while this distinction is still important, it is not the all-defining criterion of yesteryear. A recent development is the increasing number of people identifying as 'Northern Irish' rather than the previous binary choice of British or Irish. Partly as a legacy of the Troubles, it is one of the poorest parts of the United Kingdom and also significantly lags behind the Republic in terms of average income per head. It must be an open question as to whether its continued presence as one of the nations of the UK is deemed essential to the capitalist class, as represented by the British government. Moreover, its future is very dependent on the outcome of Brexit in the years ahead. As part of the final arrangement between the UK and the EU,

Northern Ireland remains within the Single Market and this necessitates some checks and barriers to trade between it and the mainland, marking a weakening of the Union to some degree at least. It has the strange feature that British firms are now 'exporting' goods to other firms that are meant to be in the same country! In passing it is ironic to note that this Northern Ireland protocol (undoubtedly a contrived political device that Boris Johnson has embraced for a short-term advantage) has been implemented almost 100 years after the creation of the Irish border itself by a previous London government as a similar stop-gap solution.

More immediately, any move towards Scottish independence will mark a major fracture of the UK and have profound implications for the province which has always had a stronger cultural connection to Scotland than to England. A poll on the border is always a possibility and the outcome of such a referendum is difficult to predict because of the volatility of the situation. Politically, Unionism, at least compared to the early years of the twentieth century, is considerably weaker now than it was then but that doesn't necessarily mean a united Ireland is any closer let alone inevitable.

So what might socialists make of Northern Ireland achieving and marking its centenary? Any anniversary celebration by a state is usually an exercise in promoting the relevance and validity of that state to its citizens and their future and furthering ideas of patriotism. Unlike most countries where (unfortunately) most the workers readily identify with the remembrance of important historical events, Northern Ireland's history means that is unlikely to happen in the usual sense. Traditionally minded Unionists will naturally be eager to celebrate the event while the staunchly nationalist element of the population will probably ignore it. More profoundly, socialists do not accept the division of the world into countries as the most sensible arrangement for society. Fundamentally countries exist to promote the interests of the local (capitalist) elites. Why and how they are 'different' to the countries that adjoin them is in many cases a result of historical events that

now have no contemporary resonance or meaning. Northern Ireland has always been denounced as an artificial state by its Nationalist detractors, created solely to ensure a certain political outcome, but all countries are really just artificial constructs. Their populations are the sum of previous waves of migrations that have occurred and the sometimes arbitrary delineation of their frontiers just reflects the outcome of historical military engagements. For socialists, the fact that they still exist and can successfully claim the allegiance of their citizens shows the power of carefully fostered 'identity' politics. So, while Northern Ireland has its own peculiarities, its predicament over its centenary reflects much wider issues.

Fostering nationalist ideas and inculcating a faithful consciousness in the population have always been central functions of governments everywhere. But they are aware that such activities must be undertaken with care. Capitalists need nation-states to exist but they also need the freedom to trade profitably with the capitalists of other countries. While governments need a loyal citizenry, excessive and unchecked xenophobia can damage the interests of capitalism in that country by promoting a desire for foreign adventurism. History has proven many times that war is a risky business for those who engage in it. This may explain the curious phenomenon that, with arguably the most nationalistic government in London for over a century, there is such a subdued approach being taken to this centenary event. The Johnson government recognises that post-Brexit, the drawbacks in needlessly antagonising the nationalist segment of Northern Ireland and in turn the Dublin government, can have unpredictable repercussions for trade with Europe.

So Northern Ireland has proved the sceptics wrong and got to the big one-zero-zero. Whether or not it makes it to its 150th anniversary or its bi-centennial or whatever is, in a sense, a matter of indifference to socialists. The same sentiment applies to all other countries. We seek a different world system.

KEVIN CRONIN



Pro-Union Loyalists demonstrate against the Northern Ireland Protocol implemented following Brexit, on the road leading to the Port of Larne in County Antrim, Northern Ireland, April 6, 2021.

A Gender Item

Is there a distinction between sex and gender? In the vast majority of cases the sex of a person can be established through physical attributes and these are determined by two sex chromosomes, the X and the Y. Two X chromosomes results in the female, X and Y chromosomes produces the male.

There are exceptions. Human cells usually contain 46 chromosomes, but occasionally, approximately 1 in a 1,000 males have a 47th, an extra Y. This can result in being taller than average, have learning difficulties, speech problems or weaker muscle tone. They don't have distinguishing physical features and their sexual development is normal, although infertility can result.

It is possible for females to be karyotype 46 (usual number of chromosomes) and XY. This is gonadal dysgenesis and results in females with normal female external genitalia, but malfunctioning gonads that are prone to becoming cancerous and are usually surgically removed.

What all this demonstrates is there are naturally occurring variations that may cause physical and psychological issues, but do not alter the basic biological determination of females and males. That would seem to be a matter of material reality and not one of personal choice.

Can the same be stated in relation to gender, or are gender and sex merely interchangeable words in this context? There is an argument that avers sex to be as stated above, while gender takes into account social roles that may be determined by a person's sex, or by personal definition according to subjective awareness.

There are at least eight gender identity terms – transgender, two-spirit, cisgender, non-binary, genderqueer, gender expression, gender fluid, gender neutral – and there may be others. The majority of the population are, in this list, cisgender, that is, their gender matches that which they were assigned at birth.

The question then arises as to what the material basis is for the plethora of alternatives with which a minority identify. People are, of course, free to choose the identity they present to the world, but such a choice suggests gender to be merely a social construct; or is there a genetic basis?

Scientific study of transsexuality appears to be minimal. Transsexuals are individuals born as one sex, but identify as being of the other sex. Studies of twins indicate a genetic basis for transsexuality, although there is presently no clear understanding of what that genetic basis is.

Nor is there an established common terminology used across studies. This means there can be no clear accounting of numbers as to how many individuals are transsexual.



Approximations range from 7 to 9 out of every 100,000 people as being transgender.

Amnesty International estimate there are 1.5 million transgender people in the EU, about 0.3 percent of the population. An Equality and Human Rights Commission 2011 survey in the UK of 10,026 respondents found 1.4 percent were in a gender minority group, of which 1 percent had gone through some part of a gender reassignment process. That process did include actual actions taken, but also thoughts about it.

Everyday speech often uses sex and gender interchangeably, but some academic disciplines reference different definitions while others do not, which is also the case with dictionaries. Languages such as German and Finnish don't have different words for sex and gender, the context of use being the defining factor.

All this indicates a great deal of uncertainty, which makes the possibility of giving offence all too real. A minority, however small, needs to be accepted on its own terms and not become subjected to a despotism of the majority.

Capitalism has done a great deal to break down social barriers and overcome discrimination. Driven by the constant need to realise profit, differences between people, actual or perceived, cannot be allowed to hinder that process. This is not a moral, but an economic imperative, and is a long way from being fully realised.

That prejudice and discrimination continue to exist cannot be denied, but neither can the progress made. A 'No Blacks, No Irish' notice is now utterly beyond the pale even though 'Black Lives Matter' remains pertinent.

In matters sexual, homosexuality has gone from illegality and the subject of barbed humour to celebrated wedlock in half a century. This is not to suggest all is well, far from it. Human attitudes are not fixed and need to be challenged. What one generation regarded as deviant, the next (or



another should dress, deport and generally live? There are, though, women who, to say the least, are uneasy about those born men redefining themselves as women.

Caution should surely be the watchword during adolescence, a period of sexual uncertainty as the brain transitions from childhood to adulthood, which is perhaps the only transitioning that should occur at that time.

After detransitioning, former transgender man Charlie Adams established the 'Detransition

perhaps the next but one) accepts without question.

If this is not the case then we socialists are wasting our time promoting far-reaching changes that can only come about if the generality of popular ideas radically change. If the basis of present society, capitalism, cannot be replaced by a superior system, socialism, then human progress will have stalled.

While accepting that capitalism has allowed a great deal of progress to be made, it cannot go beyond its own economic imperative. For socialists, the free development of one is contingent on the free development of all. For a society in which this is possible, the constraints and divisions engendered by capitalism must be overcome.

Capitalism reduces most if not all aspects of society to commodities to be traded for profit. Sex is certainly a category with many such commodities. From pornography to gender re-alignment, from commercial stereotyping to lifestyle products, no possibility for profit is ignored.

The prevailing ideology of capitalism is individualism: Margaret Thatcher's (in)famous pronouncement that there's no such thing as society was a clear expression of this. No society equals no classes in any meaningful sense. People are free to self-define their identity, and woe betide anyone who might contradict or question.

However, denying society does not mean it doesn't exist. An obvious lesson of the Covid pandemic is that not only does society exist, it must act in concert for the well-being of all. It also cannot be denied that society plays a major role in defining gender roles.

Recent history shows gender roles are not fixed because society is not fixed. There's a continuous dynamic between individuals and sub-groups with society at large that initiates social change. Science plays a huge part in this by bringing new understanding to play.

There are hormonal and surgical ways of physical gender realignment, to match external sexual characteristics with psychological disposition. This patently does not bring about a chromosomal change.

Self-definition has merit: who has the right to decide how

Advocacy Network'. This was in response, Adams claims, to being contacted by a significant number who'd transitioned in their teens and then changed their minds in their 20s.

The claim is that, triggered by gender dysphoria, transitioning seems not to have alleviated the condition, leading to a realisation that the change had not addressed deep-seated issues. These include body image problems, eating disorders and even, in some cases, autism.

However, following a survey in the USA of 28,000 transitioners, the 'National Center for Transgender Equality' reported only 8 percent detransitioned, of whom 62 percent only did so temporarily after succumbing to pressure. Just 0.4 percent detransitioned having changed their minds.

There does not seem to be peer-reviewed in-depth research into transitioning, its causes and consequences. The two examples featured here illustrate in the titles of the organisations the lack of objectivity.

The Adams charity declares its advocacy of detransitioning, while the 'National Centre' is clearly supportive of transitioning. Similarly, much of the comment available on the internet is of a partial nature from right-wing and actively anti-LGBT news outlets to radically pro-transitioning groups, with a plethora somewhere in between.

This is an area of uncertainty that science will undoubtedly continue to help clarify. Meanwhile, minds need to remain open. There cannot be progress if people are silenced by either legislation or social, largely media, pressure.

There is a responsibility to express contrary ideas without malice, with those shown to be wrong exposed through reason. Such is the very basis of democracy, open discussion without fear of censure.

One of the basic misapprehensions of a socialist society is that equality will be achieved through uniformity, when actually the opposite is the case. Diversity is integral to socialism, for it's through the dynamic of difference that progress will continue to be made. Socialism cannot be static, a once and for all arrangement of relationships and roles.

DAVE ALTON



When members of the World Socialist Movement explain that we aspire to a society of abundance where there is plenty for all, it is not a recommendation for some sort of orgy of consumerism, but simply referring to the fact that it is technically possible to produce more than enough to satisfy everyone's material needs and that meeting everybody's needs will indeed likely involve an increase in what people consume. This will certainly be the case for the billions of people who endure horrendous hunger, disease, and squalor. So, yes, socialism will involve raising the personal and individual consumption for much of the world's population.

Surprisingly, some of our most vociferous critics are not conservatives but liberal progressives who decry such a goal as ecologically unfriendly and unachievable. More often than not, they will cite statistics of our planet's carrying capacity and tell us we would require two or three Earths to provide for humanity's needs.

Carrying capacity is a well-known and widely accepted concept. It basically says that sustainability requires balance and goes something like this: Humans need certain resources to survive, food, water and shelter. A sustainable habitat is one in which supply of and demand for these resources are balanced.

Some environmentalists today assert that current consumption limits have already breached or are about to breach the carrying capacity of our planet. This view assumes carrying capacity to be static. Seldom do they question why many carrying capacity calculations often differ. It is because determining a sustainable carrying capacity involves many variables which depend upon various criteria. Estimates vary widely depending on availability of resources and differing lifestyles of people in different parts of the world consuming different amounts of those resources.

The carrying capacity concept is fraught with problems from an ecological point of view. Carrying capacity is an idealised concept not to be taken literally. When applied to ecosystems, and even more, to human society, it falls apart. The fundamental flaw is failure to consider the role of social structure and relationships.

The talk of carrying capacity isn't particularly

helpful and supports the status quo. We are accustomed to the claim of too many people with images of the teeming slums of mega-cities, the bloated bellies of starving babies in the crammed refugee camps, as evidence that the planet cannot support our numbers. To bring the argument closer to home, we hear scare stories that Europe or the United States needs to shut its borders to (non-white) immigration, for having finally got our own birth-rate down to manageable levels, the last thing we now need to do is to open our doors to an invasion of poor (non-whites), who will use up our scarce social services and crowd us out of our neighbourhoods – the racist 'white replacement' theory.

The very concept of carrying capacity is a fabrication designed for social control. The possibility of marginalised populations being subject to eugenics and sterilisation to 'curb' their procreation isn't too far-fetched. It is irrational that the culpability for poverty and hunger is attributed to them having big families and not to today's wealth and resource inequality.

Too many sincere eco-activists buy into the idea that overpopulation is a problem leading to the destruction of the environment. The enemy is people. The poor are being blamed for being poor. The WSM response is that it is capital accumulation which is responsible for most resource use and subsequent waste. It demands increasing levels of consumption and strives toward unending growth and expanding markets. We should ask why advertisers need to spend billions of dollars on marketing if people seek never-satisfied levels of consumption. Under capitalism, there is a very large industry devoted to creating these wants. Capitalism requires consumption, whether it improves our lives or not, and drives us to consume up to, and past, our ability to pay for that consumption. In a system of capitalist competition, there is a built-in tendency to stimulate demand to a maximum extent. Corporations need to persuade customers to buy their products or they go out of business. De-growth as a few radical green proponents propose would destroy the capitalist economy.

'Would the grow-or-die economy called capitalism really cease to plunder the planet even if the world's population were reduced to a tenth of its present numbers? Would

lumber companies, mining concerns, oil cartels, and agribusiness render redwood and Douglas fir forests safer for grizzly bears if — given capitalism's need to accumulate and produce for their own sake — California's population were reduced to one million people? The answer to these questions is a categorical no...' argued Murray Bookchin, who introduced the school of thought called social ecology.

The ideal use of technology is to find ways to make fewer resources stretch far further. Renewable energy is clearly capable of providing large quantities of power for large numbers of people without emitting so much carbon. Adaptive agricultural methods are similarly capable of meeting the dietary needs of many more people than at present. Technology can cope with the growing demands placed on carrying capacity or planetary boundaries, by which we are not referring to greenwashing capitalist techno-fixes such as carbon capture and storage.

Technological innovation under capitalism is overwhelmingly introduced with the fundamental goal of enhancing profits and capital accumulation. So it is not surprising that some technological innovations under capitalism come at the cost of the environment. Capitalism lacks any intrinsic mechanism for regulating negative social and ecological side effects, which are deemed 'externalities.' The most that can be achieved, and then only under the pressure of social movements, is limited regulation.

Socialists are seeking to create a 'steady-state economy' which corresponds to what Marx called 'simple reproduction' — a situation where human needs are in balance with the resources needed to satisfy them. Such a society would

already have decided, according to its own criteria and through its own decision-making processes, on the most appropriate way to allocate resources to meet the needs of its members. This having been done, it would only need to go on repeating this continuously from production period to production period. Production would not be ever-increasing but would be stabilised at the level required to satisfy needs. All that would be produced would be products for consumption and the products needed to replace and repair the raw materials and instruments of production used up in producing these consumer goods.

The existence of the carrying capacity concept is to maintain the ruling class's current stranglehold over the lives of the poor — and to extend this stranglehold into the most intimate aspects of their lives such as decisions over family size and childbearing. Figures for carrying capacity are tied to current technology and practices. Any talk of carrying capacity should start by saying 'If we never, ever do a single thing different than we do today...'

The future of society, and of the environment, relies on whether the global working class can wrest control of society from the parasitic few and commence production for need and use instead of for profit and capital accumulation.

When those in the environmentalist movement offer their ideal future it usually tends towards a pastoral idyll. Marxists have always advocated the greening of the cities ever since the *Communist Manifesto* declared for the 'gradual abolition of all the distinction between town and country by a more equitable distribution of the populace over the country.'

ALJO

COOKING THE BOOKS

The Tories and Free Trade

Defending the proposed free trade deal (no tariffs, no quotas) with Australia in spite of the harm to British farmers, Boris Johnson told a meeting of Tory MPs 'We are the party of Peel' (*Times*, 21 May). Sir Robert Peel was prime minister in the government that brought about the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. These laws, by imposing tariffs on the import of wheat and other cereals, benefitted the landlord class since the high price of wheat encouraged the use of less fertile land, so increasing the rent on all wheat-producing land.

Peel was a Tory but his move split the Tory party and the Peelites eventually became part of the Liberal party. Most Tories followed Disraeli in opposing repeal on behalf of the landlord class. In the early 1900s the Tories were campaigning for Tariff Reform, i.e., the imposition of tariffs on imported manufactured goods.

Johnson's historical ignorance is bad enough, but that of Liz Truss, the International Trade Secretary, is appalling. She invokes not just Peel but John Bright and Richard Cobden. On 3 June last year she tweeted 'Today is the birthday of Richard Cobden, champion of free trade, manufacturing and founder of the Anti-Corn Law League'. Last October, she declared that she wanted the Board of Trade 'to become

the Cobden, Peel and Bright of the twenty-first century'. In an article in the *Sunday Express* (14 February) she quoted Cobden as hailing free trade as 'the greatest revolution that ever happened in the world's history'.

Bright and Cobden were the political leaders of the industrial capitalists in their struggle against the landlord class for political and economic supremacy. They were implacable opponents of everything the Tories stood for (imperialism, military preparations, aristocratic privilege). The repeal of the Corn Laws was a key event in British economic history but hardly the greatest revolution in world history. In any event most Tories opposed it.

Marx lived through these events and naturally commented on them. In January 1848 he gave a speech in Brussels on free trade in which he said:

'The repeal of the Corn Laws in England is the greatest triumph of free trade in the 19th century. (...) Cheap food, high wages, this is the sole aim for which English Free-Traders have spent millions, and their enthusiasm has already spread to their brethren on the Continent. Generally speaking, those who wish for free trade desire it in order to alleviate the condition of the working class. But, strange to say, the people for

whom cheap food is to be procured at all costs are very ungrateful. (...) The English workers have very well understood the significance of the struggle between the landlords and the industrial capitalists. They know very well that the price of bread was to be reduced in order to reduce wages, and that industrial profit would rise by as much as rent fell.'

He ended by stating that he was in favour of free trade but only because it would bring about a more rapid development of capitalism and the antagonism between the working class and the capitalist class and so hasten the social revolution. 'It is in this revolutionary sense alone, gentlemen, that I vote in favour of free trade'.

Johnson and Truss are not justifying the Australia trade deal on the grounds of 'Cheap Food, High Wages'. The deal is essentially only symbolic and any reduction in food prices that it might bring would be very slight. But we can expect this argument to be used to justify other trade deals, especially that with the US. But it will be as invalid as it was in the 1840s. Cheaper food will mean cheaper wages, leaving workers no better off.

PROPER GANDER

Another Problematic 'Class System'

THE PARALYMPICS. A prestigious opportunity for people to challenge themselves and, through hard work and determination, prove what they are capable of, smash records and win tournaments. But in reality? A cynical opportunity to make money by exploiting the way athletes are 'classified', which is 'flawed, easily manipulated and lacking credibility'. This is the claim made by a recent edition of BBC1's *Panorama: Paralympics: The Unfair Games?* Presenter Richie Powell competed as a wheelchair racer in the 1992 Paralympics, only three years after being paralysed from the chest down in a road accident. He speaks with athletes who, like him, have found sport to be a way to empower themselves and not be held back by the conditions they are living with. One of them is para-swimmer Levana Hanson, who explains how her confidence grew after joining a swimming club whose other members 'didn't see the disability, they saw me as a person'. Unfortunately, her enthusiasm was later dented by her experience, echoed by the other interviewees, of being a victim of the Paralympics' system of classifying its competitors.

Taking place soon after the Olympics, the next Paralympic Games are due to start in Tokyo in August, having been postponed from 2020. The event began as the International Wheelchair Games held at Stoke Mandeville hospital in Buckinghamshire, timed to coincide with the 1948 London Olympics. Its founders aimed to use sport as therapy for ex-armed forces personnel with spinal injuries inflicted during the Second World War, and to integrate people with disabilities into wider society. The games as we know them today began in 1960, becoming larger and grander with each event. As more athletes with a wider range of medical issues participated in more tournaments, the process of deciding who should compete against who became more complicated. The current system of 'functional classification' was introduced in the 1980s, regulated by the International Paralympic Committee. Robert Shepherd, the former British Head Classifier explains that this system is based on testing and categorising ability, so athletes with similar capabilities compete against each other. Richie Powell was classified as a 'T53' for track athletes



Credit: BBC

unable to use their core muscles. The lower the number, the greater the level of impairment. Some athletes and coaches manoeuvre their way round the system to get classified as a lower number than they should qualify for, so that they have the advantage of competing against people with more severe impairments.

One tactic is to get assessed by classifiers with a reputation for basing their decisions on negotiation rather than by medical tests. Another technique, apparently widespread among Australian Paralympic wannabes is to have cold showers or over-exercise before a classification assessment in order to emphasise their disability. The ex-Paralympians interviewed on the programme describe how they noticed that they were increasingly competing against, and losing to, athletes with less serious conditions. Hand cyclist Liz McTernan says that her sport is now 'for the least disabled people that can get in the lowest category possible and win as many medals as possible'. In a bland response, the International Paralympic Committee said it found no instances which 'could reasonably allege intentional misrepresentation'.

Of course, the motivation for those who manipulate the classification system to increase their chances of winning is money. Athletes and their associated staff rely on funding from lottery and government grants, and the more medals they win, the more funding they get. Their incomes are boosted by sponsorship and endorsement deals, which again hinge on how successful a sold-out athlete is. Ex-Paralympian Bethany Woodward argues that the drive to make athletes more marketable leads to more able-bodied people participating and winning in the Paralympics, 'cleansing the sport of those very people that it was built

for'. She adds that when she and others complained, the authorities told them not to speak out about classification and repeatedly threatened them with legal action. In a bland response, the International Paralympic Committee said it recognised that some athletes have concerns about classifications but 'sports classes can feature athletes with different impairments' where there is a 'similar impact on ... ability to practice'.

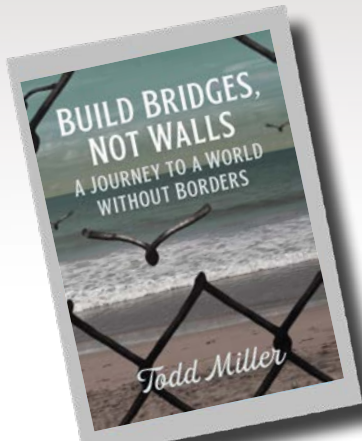
The 'greatest scandal ever to hit the Paralympics', as Richie Powell tells us, was what the Spanish basketball team did in the 2000 games. Shortly after the team won the tournament for people with intellectual disabilities, one of its members revealed himself as an undercover journalist. And his scoop was that most of the team had not undergone medical tests to ensure they had a disability (which in this category meant having an IQ of 75 or less) and were therefore faking their conditions. Following investigations, the team was stripped of their medals and all Paralympic competitions for people with intellectual disabilities were temporarily suspended.

However many bland responses the International Paralympic Committee dishes out, and however the classification process is regulated, the Paralympics, like any institution, can't escape being moulded by the money system, and nor can the athletes taking part. The classification system itself involves reducing people to numbers, appropriately. The lure of financial gain is bound to push some people to find underhand ways to win. Methods such as exaggerating or inventing a disability are particularly dismissive of athletes genuinely striving to prove themselves, a reminder of how capitalism's priorities alienate us from each other.

MIKE FOSTER

REVIEWS

No Borders



Build Bridges Not Walls. A Journey To A World Without Borders.

By Todd Miller, City Lights Books, 2021. 161pp.

A book about a world without borders is always going to be one that interests socialists who themselves envision a borderless, stateless society of free access to all goods and services organised democratically on the basis of each according to ability to each according to need. And in this book, the author establishes his own imaginative credentials from the very first pages by envisioning the world as 'a land without political boundaries' which 'connects us to one another' and stating his intention to 'examine the natural inclination of human beings to be empathetic with one another, to forge solidarities with one another, and how such inclinations contrast with the borders that invoke and perpetuate chronic forms of racial and economic injustice'. His book focuses mainly on the way in which the policing of the border between Mexico and the USA creates immense suffering – violence, dehumanisation, early death – for refugees from Central America seeking but being prevented from finding better lives north of that border. But in so doing, it throws off a large number of reflections on how similar borders throughout the world provoke similar suffering and suggests that the abolition of borders 'could make the world a more sustainable, habitable place for all'.

Both its reflections on the author's personal experiences in reporting on border zones over many years and its analysis of the political system that dictates and enforces border control constitute a powerful indictment of

nationalism and the nation state and the way in which they make life hell for people on the move from one country to another for reasons of war, persecution, crop failure, drought, flood, or just plain old-fashioned poverty. He tellingly makes the point that no such preventions exist for 'people who are very wealthy' or for those associated with the capital which flows from one country to another. And he illustrates how governments are prepared to spend massive resources on 'drones (engineered with locust-like wings and... armed with facial recognition software), high-tech cameras, motion sensors, war technology, night vision goggles and an arsenal of weapons' to keep out those who nationalist fervour considers politically or economically undesirable. Meanwhile, worldwide, he points out that, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, '2.1 billion people suffer from malnutrition'.

So what is to be done? The author makes the point that 'demanding to abolish the border is as unthinkable to many people today as it once was to ask to abolish slavery', but that chattel slavery has been (largely) abolished and so we should use our imaginations to try and step over the new frontier he points to. However, it must be said that the abolition of chattel slavery can be seen to have been in the interest of a system – capitalism – that was always going to be more efficient in the more advanced stages of its development by using another kind of slavery, the kind that exists today – wage slavery. Much less likely is it that the abolition of borders will be seen as being in the interest of capitalism and of the national capitalist classes that own the world, since, as the author himself tells us, '2,153 billionaires have more money than 4.6 billion people – 60 percent of the world population'. Since the small minority is unlikely to give that up of their own accord, it can only be left to the majority of the other class in society – those who sell their energies for a wage or salary – to make that happen and to bring about the end of the wages system, which will also mean the end of the border system and the nationalism that underlies and sustains it.

So the author is right to say that 'building such a world [i.e. a borderless world] means imagining a radically different global order than we have now' and it is heartening that he refers approvingly to the book by Ian Shaw and Marv Waterstone, *Wageless Life: a*

Manifesto for a Future Beyond Capitalism. But after such a powerful set of arguments against the nation state and the system it supports, it is a little disappointing that he does not take those arguments further and make them even more imaginative by openly advocating the abolition not just of borders and states but of money, wages and the whole of the profit system. Instead he seems to remain entrenched in the idea of money as the currency of human interaction ('The resources are there. The money is simply misdirected') and to limit himself to advocating arrangements like 'the bottom-up democracy of the [Mexican] Zapatista movement'. The fact is that, so long as the money and wages system and the profit motive underpinning them continue to exist, it is inconceivable that the competing states supporting their national capitalist classes will be dissolved and their borders taken down. If you stick with that system, you are stuck with the state, and with the plurality of states, in conflict as their political and economic interests rub against one another.

HOWARD MOSS

Myths and News Info War



The Sacking of Fallujah: A People's History by Ross Caputi, Richard Nil, Donna Mulhearn. Massachusetts Press, 2019.

In 2016, the city of Fallujah in Iraq, with a population of around a third of a million, was utterly destroyed. It was the third time that it had been under sustained military assault as a consequence of the United States' invasion of that country. This book looks not at the military tactical 'war porn' side of these pacifications, but at the human cost, and the ways in which power was inflicted on that city.

A large chunk of the book is spent defending the right of the population of Fallujah to take up arms in resistance to the invading forces. It also spends some time distancing them from the fighters of ISIS (according to the authors, although ISIS fighters were present for the third battle of Fallujah, they had interposed themselves in the conflict, rather than the Fallujans particularly seeking to join the cause of the Islamists).

Some of the details of how the US fought in Fallujah are instructive. The first battle of Fallujah was shaped by classic counter-insurgency problems. The US had laid siege to the city, creating the prospect of a humanitarian disaster (they also blamed insurgents for using the civilians as human shields, despite the fact that the US themselves had locked them in). Pictures beamed around the world meant the battle was one of propaganda as much as bullets.

This can be illustrated by the fact that as part of the second attack coalition forces took control of the hospital, because they considered the staff there to be 'terrorist sympathisers' who put out claims of casualty numbers that conflicted with the coalition's own announcements. Uncontrolled journalists were barred from the zone. They were determined not to lose the image war a second time.

The book spends a great deal of time discussing information warfare, and the supposed firewall between the psyops and info war that US forces use abroad, as compared to the image management they use at home. Given that they specifically chose to treat independent journalists as a war enemy, it is interesting to note that that was precisely the tactic later adopted by the Trump regime as part of its propaganda operations. It is unlikely, to say the least, that the skills and techniques of info war are unlikely to be brought home, especially when the info warriors get demobbed. They note that one Associated Press photographer ended up being held for two years for unstated 'security' reasons.

The second battle involved intense bombardment and house to house fighting. Although civilians had been warned to leave, and many did, it's thought around 50,000 remained, caught in the crossfire. The authors note that the US soldiers themselves didn't know much about who they were fighting and why, they simply went into the meat grinder, where many died.

After the second battle, the city was in a ruined state, riven with resentment. The largely Sunni city soon became embroiled in the factional tensions the US (and to an extent Iran) were fomenting in Iraq as part of the ongoing struggle for control of the country post-invasion.

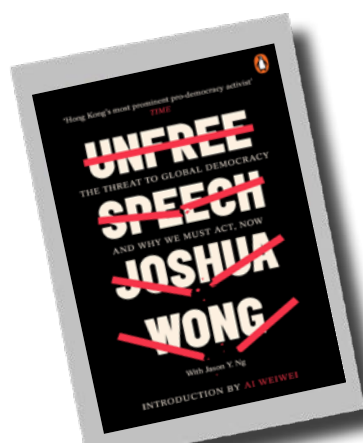
As US forces drew down, the Fallujans rebelled again, and this time their struggle was caught up in the battle against ISIS. It was the turn of the Iraqi government to lay siege to the city, and once again, civilians

were forced out into camps, and bullets and bombs laid waste to whatever hadn't been destroyed in previous assaults.

The clearances of the city, the disruption of services – water, electricity, medicine – were a health crisis within a war. The book deals also with the potential fact that the war has led to ongoing health crises, of high infant mortality, birth defects and cancers. The book is even-handed over the precise cause of these observed trends, but clear that they do exist, and must surely be chalked up to the horrors of modern war being inflicted on that delicate system that is modern urban living.

PS

Oaths and Umbrellas



Joshua Wong with Jason Y. Ng:
Unfree Speech: the Threat to
Global Democracy and Why We
Must Act, Now. Penguin £9.99.

Joshua Wong was one of the organisers of the democracy demonstrations in Hong Kong, having begun his activism at the age of fifteen in 2011. This book has three parts: his own account of these events, letters he wrote while in prison (half the book, and the least interesting section), and general reflections on the situation in Hong Kong and the state of democracy globally.

Wong was first arrested in 2014, after protesting against changes in the way that candidates for Hong Kong's Chief Executive could be nominated. A little while later, the Umbrella Movement began, with large numbers protesting and many others handing them free food and water. Wong became 'a global poster boy for resistance against Communist China', and in 2017 he co-founded the Demosistō Party, with a programme of self-determination, i.e. that Hong Kong people should decide their own destiny once the transition period after the handover from the UK to China ends in 2047. In 2016 one of their members (not Wong, who was too young to stand) was

elected to the Legislative Council. He and a few other council members slightly altered the oath of allegiance they were supposed to swear, and as a result the Chinese government prevented them from taking their seats. The affair is known, of course, as Oathgate.

In 2017 Wong was one of a number of protesters sentenced to prison for unlawful assembly. His sentence was originally one of community service but it was increased to six months' jail time after an appeal by the government. He has been jailed more than once since, and in May this year, while already in prison for earlier 'offences', he was given a further ten months for attending a vigil to mark the Tiananmen crackdown. Others have been charged with rioting and sentenced to six years in prison.

Hong Kong, Wong says, is gradually changing from the rule of law to rule by law, and even a police state, as freedom of assembly and other rights are eroded. The police have become extremely violent against some protesters who wear hard hats and throw bricks at them. The change from British to Chinese rule has just meant being 'handed from one imperialist master to another', with young people in particular increasingly describing themselves as Hong Kongers, rather than Chinese.

Wong suggests that Hong Kong is not as important to China as it once was, as cities such as Shanghai have been expanding their role as financial centres. So perhaps it is more trouble than it's worth. But companies still worry about the economic impact of upsetting the Chinese rulers, and the airline Cathay Pacific sacked a couple of dozen staff for expressing support for protesters. He is aware of the extent of inequality in Hong Kong, but says at one point that all the problems are due to an unaccountable government and a biased electoral system. He sees China as 'the single biggest threat to global democracy', and states that the erosion of freedoms there is spreading to the rest of the world. Imprisonment, though, will simply strengthen the resolve of demonstrators, who certainly show a great deal of courage.

PB



50 Years Ago

The Common Market. In or Out. Does it Really Matter?



Credit: Gemma Keystone via Getty Images

It seems that the government will not have an easy ride into the Common Market, whatever happens at the negotiations. In this country there is a strengthening lobby which is pledged to fight the British entry. One theme which this lobby is playing is the fact that the people have not been consulted on the issue. This is not, of course, entirely true; anyone who voted for either Labour or Tory in the last election thinking that he was opposing Britain joining the EEC must have a serious mental blockage. More to the point, when were the people ever consulted on this kind of issue? When was there a referendum on a declaration of war? When did we have the chance to vote on issues like racist immigration Bills? Anti-trade union laws? So why make an exception over the Common Market? Could it be that the Labour Party are seeing in the issue the chance to grab quite a few votes and know that a middle line policy will grab them all the more and all the quicker? It is not unknown for issues like the Common Market to be obscured by a propaganda smokescreen behind which a capitalist party makes its attack. And the talk about a referendum is no more than a smokescreen put out to hide the essential fact that workers have no interests in the issue; whether Britain goes in or not will have no fundamental effect on our standing as workers.

(....)

How would you suggest we vote in any referendum on the Common Market?

The government don't want to risk one in Britain for fear that the anti-German and imperialist prejudices stirred up in the past might result in a vote for "NO". But in Ireland there's got to be one. We suggest abstention, or rather rejection of the false choice by writing "WORLD SOCIALISM" across the ballot paper. (*Socialist Standard*, June 1970)



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JULY 2021 EVENTS

Friday 2 July 19.30 (GMT + 1)

Is the environment now a better anti-capitalist argument than class?

Speaker: Paddy Shannon

The world has endured class society and rampant inequality for thousands of years, leading many people to see it as an inevitable and indeed sustainable cost of civilisation. But the same cannot be said of climate change, and in particular the paradox that capitalism requires infinite growth on a finite planet. There's no question of abandoning class politics, but is the environment now a better route into the socialist case?

Friday 9 July 19.30 (GMT + 1)

Poverty

Speaker: Paul Bennett

Poverty need not mean destitution: it can be described as people being excluded from what others take for granted, such as decent living conditions. In this talk we will look at the extent of poverty both in the UK (homelessness, food banks, etc) and globally. We will also examine the consequences and causes of poverty. And we will argue that the world can produce enough goods and services for poverty to be completely unnecessary.

Wednesday 14 July 19.30 (GMT + 1)

General discussion on current affairs

Friday 16 July 19.30 (GMT + 1)

The Highland Clearances

Speaker: Alwyn Edgar

Thanks to Marx's mention of it in *Capital*, the Duchess of Sutherland's clearance of her vast estate in the first part of the 19th century is notorious. But it wasn't just her. This talk explains how the Scottish Highlands came to be depopulated in the 18th and 19th centuries and why.



Friday 23 July 19.30 (GMT + 1)

The tragedy of the digital commons: On the expropriation and commodification of social cyberspaces

Speaker: Tristan Miller

Public discourse today is dominated by commercial social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as a plethora of smaller "walled gardens" that individual media companies provide for the discussion of their published content. These forums are tightly controlled, and their participants are shamelessly exploited for commercial gain. But the Internet was not always like this: in the 1980s and 1990s most online conversations took place on Usenet, a worldwide discussion network that was open to everyone and had no centralized structure, ownership, or control. Far from being an anarchic Wild West, Usenet succeeded in coalescing its millions of diverse users into a functional, thriving online society, united through shared culture, conventions, and values. In this talk, I discuss the developments between then and now that led to the free-access "public good" of Usenet being supplanted by privately owned discussion venues, the consequences of this transformation, and what these lessons can teach societies of the future, both online and in the real world.

Friday 30 July 19.30 (GMT + 1)

For and Against Anthropocentrism

Speaker: Mark Z

"In religious fantasy God made man the centre of the universe. In material fact capitalism has alienated him from it." (Ted Wilmott, *Socialist Standard*, October 1959). The concept of a human-centred world is a double-edged sword: it can be an inspiring vision of a society of true equality (contra the claims of religion and capital), but it can also neglect the needs of other sentient beings and the planet itself.

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.



Status quo

'To Beat Covid, Beat HIV, & Beat Inequality, Find the Money'. This is the title of a recent opinion piece by Winnie Byanyima and published on the Inter Press Service News Agency (ipsnews.net, 27 May). Other articles by her include 'Overcoming COVID-19: World Leaders Must Finance a More Equal World to Beat Pandemics', as well as 'Coronavirus Proves Need for Free Healthcare for All – Now' and 'The Next UN Secretary General Should Be a Woman – and Must Be a Feminist'. Such naïvety is echoed by many other writers found on this news site, alas, but at least, unlike the BBC, it is a safe refuge from non-stop coverage of royal funerals, births or other non-events. However, IPS whilst being a useful source of news not covered by mainstream media outlets such as the BBC, suffers from a relentlessly reformist, sometimes even rose-tinted perspective; which can lead to glaringly obvious blindspots. 'Knowledge makes a man unfit to be a slave', said Frederick Douglass. We should fill in the blanks, be alert for media lies, distortions and half-truths, as well as conspiracy theories and 'alternative facts'. We should remember Marx's favourite motto – doubt everything! – and this from his *German Ideology* (1845): 'the class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production'. The BBC and IPS in their different ways support the status quo.

None so blind

Sania Farooqui, author of 'Women Leading Somalia's Health System' (ipsnews.net, 17 May) says 'one of the doctors leading healthcare and currently involved in the fight against COVID-19 in Somalia is Dr. Deqo Aden Mohamed, an obstetrician-gynecologist...'. The doctor explains 'the government runs only three hospitals here, so imagine in Mogadishu we have 4 million people and just three hospitals. The second wave of COVID-19 was much harder than last year. What we lost in one year's time, we lost in one month in 2021'. Farooqui adds: 'currently the country is grappling with the triple threat of drought, COVID-19 and insecurity in Mogadishu which

is driving severe humanitarian needs in Somalia. Somalia has already seen a 48% increase in deaths from COVID-19, doubling of cases from 6,687 to 13,812 cases in just 59 days'. Grim reading, but this is only a partial account of suffering. An article in the *Guardian* last year (19 May) reported that Somalia's coronavirus lockdown led to a huge increase in female genital mutilation. According to Plan International, circumcisers went door to door offering to cut girls stuck at home during the pandemic. Somalia has the world's highest FGM rate with about 98 percent of women having been cut. Sadia Allan of Plan International commented: 'We've seen a massive increase in recent weeks. We want the



government to ensure FGM is included in all Covid responses'. Dr. Deqo Mohamed has apparently made no comment on this matter.

Selective science

'Mauritius' First Female President on Why We Need Science Diplomacy to Address Major Challenges' by Stella Paul (ipsnews.net, 20 May) begins: 'If we want to address the great challenges this world is facing, we have to factor science into all our narratives, according to Dr. Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, the first woman president of Mauritius'. This is a refreshing change from a malady of misleaders promoting 'alternative facts', conspiracy theories and

non-evidence based medicine, yet it should be remembered that Margaret Thatcher, FRS, Prime Minister of the UK for eleven years from 1979, the first with a science degree, graduated from Oxford University as a Bachelor of Science in chemistry. The new president does not mention Thatcher but acknowledges that 'for the past few years, there has been an anti-science sentiment voiced by major leaders on this planet. And this undesigned sentiment has weighed very heavily again when it comes to addressing issues like climate science, for example, climate change and biodiversity. They have weighed in as well in terms of handling this pandemic that we are currently living in. So, I think if you want to address the great challenge that this world is facing, we have to factor in science into all our narratives'. All narratives? What, then, is the scientific basis for male homosexuality continuing to be a crime in Mauritius?

Truth telling

'In The Socialist Party of Great Britain we are all members of the working class, and cannot hope that our articles will always be finely phrased, but we shall at least endeavour to lay before you on every occasion a sane and sound pronouncement on all matters affecting the welfare of the working class. What we lack in refinement of style we shall make good by the depth of our sincerity and by the truth of our principles.' This statement taken from the first edition of the *Socialist Standard* in September

1904 remains true today, as does a quote attributed to Orwell: 'during times of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act'. We are not alone. Other groups and individuals reveal truths too, at least some of the time. 'Neither Israel, Nor Palestine: No War but the Class War' (libcom.org, 22 May). 'For too long our politicians, leaders & corporations have fed us the SAME lies, the SAME broken promises, the SAME too-little-too-late solutions, the SAME destructive fossil fuels' (Jayathma Wickramanayake, @UNYouthEnvoy, 20 May).