

socialist standard

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

WHERE THEY MAKE A DESERT

THEY CALL IT CAPITALISM



Also:
*Economic Growth
Shining Path to Nowhere
Nature, Production & Change*



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'

Fiddling while the planet warms

The Socialist Party has always said that capitalist society is based upon the exploitation of one class by another, the capitalist class who own the means of production and distribution and derive their wealth from the unpaid labour of the working class, who have only their labour power to sell to the capitalist class for a wage or a salary. This accumulation of social wealth in the hands of a minority class inevitably makes for huge disparities between the living conditions of the two classes. Richer capitalists live lives of luxury and opulence, while many workers struggle with various degrees of relative or absolute poverty. That we live in an inherently unequal society is obvious and the media provides plenty of material to back it up.

The recently leaked Pandora papers are a case in point. They comprise 11.9 million files from businesses that set up offshore companies on behalf of their wealthy clients to avoid paying tax on property deals, hide financial assets from regulatory bodies and use shell companies to own luxury items such as yachts. They lay bare the financial

dealings of many public figures.

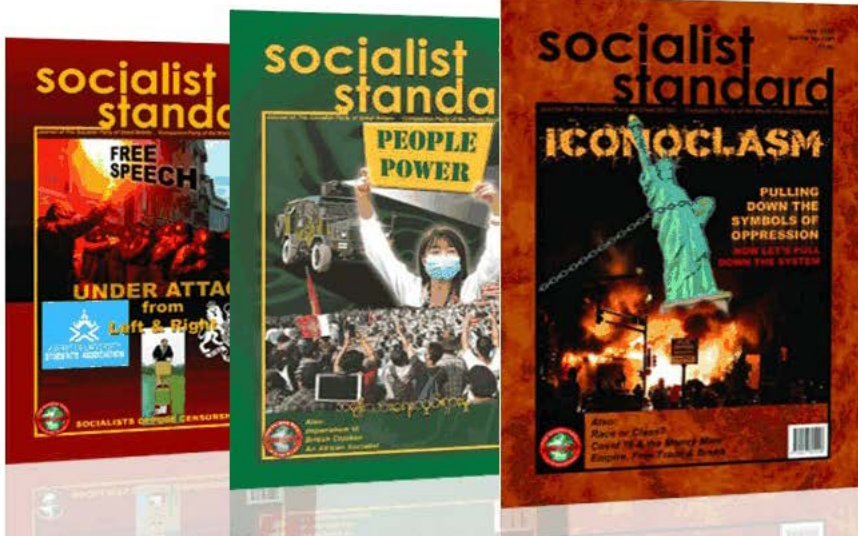
One prominent client is King Abdullah II of Jordan, who rules over a country whose inhabitants suffer from widespread poverty and which is a recipient of international aid, including from the UK. However, this hasn't stopped him from accruing a secret \$100 million property fortune, much of which, ironically, is invested in the London property market. There is Andrej Babis, current prime minister of the Czech Republic, who used an offshore company to purchase a chateau in the south of France for \$22 million. Funnily enough, he came to power on a populist anti-corruption ticket. We have also found that Tony and Cherie Blair were able to avoid paying £312,000 stamp duty when purchasing a London office property through an offshore company. It is worth remembering that it was Tony Blair's government that, in 2001, launched a series of ads targeting so-called 'benefit cheats' and encouraging workers to grass on them. Tina Green, Sir Philip Green's wife, went on a spending spree buying property for millions of pounds while BHS,

owned by the Greens, was going under, wrecking their workers' livelihoods.

The working class, on the other hand, have had to struggle with the effects of the pandemic, many have lost their jobs or got reduced wages while being furloughed. Millions of workers are facing a £20 cut in their Universal Credit payments. This is on top of ten years of austerity and a fall in real wages. The Tories like to lecture the workers that there is no 'magic money tree', while Pandora reveals they're happy to take huge bungs of cash from dodgy Russian oligarchs via 'magic offshore funds'.

People right now are desperately demanding radical action on climate change. The problem is, capitalism richly rewards its political leaders for *not doing anything*, for maintaining the status quo, for allowing the ruling class to continue making money without interference or even public scrutiny. Given this, we say it is simply unrealistic to expect governments to do anything serious about capitalism and the problems it causes – like climate change. What is needed is a democratic revolution to get rid of capitalism.

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PATHFINDERS

LET'S START THE REAL DEBATE ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE



ANYONE WHO cares about the environment and global warming (which ought to be everyone) must have been appalled by news stories late last month that illustrate how the vast majority can want one thing while governments do the complete opposite. The fact that global fossil fuel production is not going to go down but up in the next decade, despite all the IPCC reports, the Paris Agreement, and all the pledges, shows that when it comes down to it, there's no stopping the juggernaut of capitalism. Oil, gas, even coal use are expected to rise to double the level required by the Paris Agreement, making the 1.5°C threshold look increasingly like a bad joke.

But what are countries that derive their income largely from fossil extraction supposed to do? Of course they will mouth platitudes at COP meetings but they're not seriously going to gut their own economies for the sake of the global common good. Quite the opposite, they're going to increase production if there's money in it, with the result that 'governments continue to plan for and support levels of fossil fuel production that are vastly in excess of what we can safely burn' ([bbc.in/3vubcZZ](https://www.bbc.com/news/3vubcZZ)).

Even the Queen recently felt compelled to note how irritated she was that politicians do a lot of talking about the climate but don't DO anything, a point that would have been fair comment from anyone else but is a pretty staggering piece of hypocrisy from someone who, as Marina Hyde pointed out in the *Guardian*, travels everywhere by helicopter and private jet and 'whose lawyers very recently lobbied the Scottish government in secret to change a draft law to exempt her private estates from a major carbon-cutting initiative' ([bit.ly/2Z8VVla](https://www.bbc.com/news/3vubcZZ)).

Not only is no country on track to meet its climate targets, no country has any credible way of doing so. The UK's best-case scenario is to achieve about a fifth of what it needs to do. If it even manages that it will be miraculous.

Is this just because governments are

clueless and don't care? No, it's because capitalist economics is clueless and doesn't care. Its logic is straight out of Alice in Wonderland. As an example, the UK is a world leader in offshore wind and has pledged to quadruple capacity to 40GW by 2030, potentially supplying electricity to every UK home (at least when the wind is blowing). Great, so what's the problem? Well, the more there is of something, the lower the price falls, thus wind companies face a declining incentive to invest in more capacity ([bbc.in/3vrBhc8](https://www.bbc.com/news/3vrBhc8)). Abundance is great for people but terrible for business. That's why there's a gas shortage. That's why oil prices are high. Capitalism depends on keeping things in short supply, even to the extent of destroying food and burning clothes. And when oil prices are high, people invest in alternatives like renewable energy, which you might think is good, but it also means more Arctic oil drilling and more deforestation. In climate terms, there is no 'ideal' capitalist situation. A win is always a lose somewhere else.

While climate campaigners have the luxury of making absurdly unrealistic demands, like net-zero by 2025, governments know they have to manage a system that puts profits first, and simply cannot back any reform which endangers this. So the UK government – so keen to position itself as a global leader on climate action – has recently defanged its own 'landmark' Environment Bill by rejecting virtually all the changes that environmentalists wanted, such as protection for ancient woodland, legal pressure to stop water companies polluting rivers, and not exempting the armed forces (a huge source of GHG emissions) from environmental restrictions ([bbc.in/30NyVJH](https://www.bbc.com/news/30NyVJH)). Perish the thought that the army can't drive its obsolete tanks or the navy its plane-less aircraft carriers because of namby-pamby climate concerns!

Governments exist to keep capitalism going, not to undermine it. Just as the poorest find their Universal Credit being cut in the name of the gigantic Covid deficit, chancellor Rishi Sunak has announced he's cutting corporation tax surcharge on banks from 8 to 3 percent to keep the City competitive ([bit.ly/3aV7Sxl](https://www.bbc.com/news/3aV7Sxl)).

Meanwhile, as if to add insult to injury, the media is full of news stories about how you yourself can 'save energy at home and help the planet' with meaningless little gestures that George Monbiot describes as 'micro-consumerist bollocks', and expensive domestic modifications that none but the well-off can afford. Now the government has announced a ban on new gas heaters from 2035, which means

that if you're a young couple now, even in the unlikely event you can afford a house, your gas boiler will be just about ready for replacement when the ban comes in. Then the poor who can't afford the approximately £6-18,000 for a heat pump will presumably have to dance all winter to stay warm (not to mention run all the way to work because they can't afford an electric car either). But fear not, the government's recent announcement of a £5k subsidy for heat pumps means that anyone with a spare £10k to spend will be quids in.

Capitalism isn't going to change how it operates for anyone. Instead governments rely on greenwash announcements about what increasingly cynical Greta Thunberg calls 'fantasy-scaled, currently barely-existing, negative emissions technologies.' Or, as she puts it even more succinctly, 'blah blah blah'.

The 2007 Stern Report called climate change 'the biggest market failure the world has seen'. In September this year even the UK business secretary admitted that it was a 'market failure' ([bit.ly/3AYHQUI](https://www.bbc.com/news/3AYHQUI)). Is it so hard, in the light of all the above, to conclude that markets simply don't work, that capitalism is a 'weapon pointed at the world', as Monbiot says? The alternative isn't soviet state capitalism or living in caves, it's democratic common ownership where there is no out-of-control growth caused by the perpetual race for profit, because there will be no markets and no money system. Capitalism's greatest success is that it has made itself obsolete by delivering the technology, the communications and the know-how for us to actually turn the world into a giant volunteer cooperative, with no rich and poor, where we can all be free of the worst that capitalism dishes out and instead enjoy the best that life can offer. Why buy when you can just have? Why sell when you can just give? That's not a utopia, it's a practical and sustainable alternative to a system that is doing its best to destroy everything. There are a huge number of things we could do right now to limit climate change, halt species extinction, stop wars for oil or profit and stop terrible human misery and deprivation. But first we need to get real about the thing that, above all else, is driving these problems in the first place. It's not human production, it's human production *for profit*. We need to get real about capitalism. Instead of appealing to useless governments to 'fix' it, we need to start mainstreaming the debate about progressing beyond it altogether.

PJS

LETTERS

What happens when there is a **socialist** majority?

Dear Editors

My early political education as a child came partly from listening to SPGB speakers – notably Harry Baldwin – on the corner of East Street in South London. I enjoy reading the *Socialist Standard*, which often feels like an island of relative sanity in a sea of media hysteria. I've never joined the party, much as I learnt from and sympathise with many of its views. I'm afraid I wandered off into anarcho-syndicalism. But one thing I have often wondered. If the Socialist Party were to gain a majority in Parliament what would come next? I realise this would not happen without a majority of workers having come to see the sense of moving from capitalism to socialism. I realise too that nobody can – or should – paint a detailed picture of the future choices the working class will make. But I still wonder – what will happen when the first SPGB majority House of Commons meets?

Harry Harmer, Shrewsbury

Reply:

It won't be the Socialist Party as an organisation separate from the working class that would have a parliamentary majority, but the socialist-minded working class. It is they who will have won political control and the socialist MPs will be their delegates. This presupposes, as you say, a socialist majority outside parliament, one which will have organised itself not just into a socialist political party, but also in places of work ready to keep useful production going. Also, there would be similar movements in control of political power or about to be in other advanced capitalist countries.

So what would the majority of socialist delegates do? The main reason for going into parliament, as an elected central law-making body, is to be in a position to control the machinery of government; not for the purpose of forming a government as under capitalism but, as a minimum, to prevent the powers of the state being used against the movement for socialism. But, as the state is not just the public power of coercion but also the centre of social administration, to use this aspect to co-ordinate the social revolution from capitalism to socialism as well as to keep essential administrative services going.

There is no need to create from scratch a central co-ordinating body – as the syndicalists and others have proposed, whether based on industrial unions or some central workers' council – when one that can be adapted and used already exists. In our view, winning control of the existing political structure is the most direct route to socialism. Trying to smash it would be suicidal; trying to ignore it risks violence and unnecessary disruption. Why try to set up alternative central departments to deal with such matters as agriculture, education, energy, health and transport? The same at local level: why can't existing elected councils continue to administer local services?

So a socialist majority in parliament would have to decide to adapt the existing central administrative structure to make it fully democratic. The main measure, though, would be to withdraw the state's sanction and backing for the capitalist class ownership of the means of production. Because most productive resources are vested in limited liability companies this will be relatively straightforward. Companies are legal institutions created by the state which gives them an artificial legal personality that can own property. All that would be required would be to declare that all companies are dissolved and that henceforth their physical assets are the common property of all the people. The capitalist class will have been dispossessed and all their legal titles, all their stocks and shares will have become useless, unenforceable pieces of paper. As an immediate measure, those working in places producing something useful or providing a useful service would continue running them, producing for direct use and no longer for profit.

Assuming that there is no attempt by some minority to try to thwart by force of arms the democratically expressed will of the people for socialism, the working class's use of the state would then be over. The state would in fact cease to exist as such and its administrative side would become an unarmed, democratic administrative centre. Socialism will have been established

– Editors.

While charging you for your own education, the UK government would also like to ban ideas against capitalism



COOKING THE BOOKS

Greed or Necessity?

'Wake up XR, you're not going to kill capitalism', was the headline in Hugo Rifkind's column in the *Times* (31 August). According to him, XR 'wants to save the world by ending capitalism'. That's not what they say. Their position is that talk of 'capitalism' and 'socialism' is 'politics' and that the urgent need is to go 'beyond politics'. As they put it on their website, 'we have a moral duty to act – whatever our politics.' This makes them a political pressure group, employing direct action and civil disobedience tactics, to try to get capitalist governments to do more to combat climate change. At most, they are proposing a purely constitutional change – decision-making citizens' assemblies – which, given that most 'citizens' today still vote for capitalism in conventional elections, would come up with measures to be implemented in capitalism.

Maybe some in XR blame 'human greed' for the present situation and see the solution as people consuming less or there being fewer people. This seems to be Rifkind's assumption. In any event, *he* equates capitalism with greed and argues that you can't abolish capitalism because you can't abolish greed as

that's against human nature. 'Extinction Rebellion protestors need to get real about human nature,' he says:

'Abandon capitalism? Come off it. Do humans really care about the planet enough to give up on the fundamental human desire for more, and more and more? Have you ever met any?'

Actually, it is quite common to meet people who might want more but not 'more, and more and more'. But why, at present, do people want more money? It's because they need it as capitalism is a system where you must have money to survive; for most people it's also a system where you can't be sure that you will get a regular supply; if you lose your job it dries up. In these circumstances getting as much as you can is a reasonable precaution for you and your family against this economic insecurity. In short, such behaviour is a product of capitalist society, not an expression of human nature.

In his article Rifkind reveals that he had recently interviewed George Monbiot, who he describes as 'an unabashed proponent of the whole environmentalism-entails-anticapitalism worldview'. Monbiot has indeed come out and stated that capitalism is the cause of environmental damage.

He does not blame human greed as such for damaging the environment. He blames

the way in which capitalism allows the rich to do what they want with their money, on the greed and irresponsibility of the rich in 'the pursuit of private luxury'.

Capitalism does, as explained, encourage, in fact obliges, people to seek to acquire money. The rich have to as well, not so that they can wallow in luxury but because this is what capitalism dictates. As Marx wrote of the capitalist:

'So far as he is personified capital, it is not values in use and the enjoyment of them, but exchange-value and its augmentation, that spur him into action. Fanatically bent on making value expand itself, he ruthlessly forces the human race to produce for production's sake... As such, he shares with the miser the passion for wealth as wealth. But that which in the miser is a mere idiosyncrasy, is, in the capitalist, the effect of the social mechanism, of which he is but one of the wheels' (*Capital*, Vol. 1, ch. 24, s. 3).

In other words, what we are dealing with here is not the personal greed of the rich but a 'social mechanism' which obliges those in charge of capitalist corporations to accumulate more profits as more capital to make more profits, to make more capital, and so on. This, not human greed, is why capitalism as an economic system is geared to infinite growth in a finite world.



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Same the whole world over



‘The Green Party, the Socialist Left and the Marxist-inspired Reds – all pro-environmental – are all expected to make gains and will seek to influence the next government, as will the rural Centre Party. Climate, wealth gap in focus as Norway go to polls’ (yahoo.com, 9 September). A similar Red-Green Coalition ruled 2005-2013 with Labour Party leader Jens Stoltenburg as Prime Minister. He has since become NATO’s General Secretary. The party’s current leader is the capitalist Jonas Gahr Støre. Once upon a time, Labour was considered ‘radical’: in 1919 it joined the Third International which had its headquarters in Moscow. Similarly, the Green Party was once concerned with alternative economics (who remembers BD Brochmann?), alternatives to military service, alternative energy, partial opposition to whaling (whale meat is still for sale) as well as going some distance towards the decriminalisation of certain drugs. The Socialist Left, formed in 1975, has its origins in a group which left the Labour Party over NATO membership. Interestingly, they were predictably against the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq but the Party leadership favoured NATO air strikes against Serbia over that country’s role in Kosovo (killing thousands and causing as many as 1.5 million people to flee as refugees). The ‘Marxist inspired’ Reds are, as history shows, anything but. The Red Electoral Alliance was formed in 1973 as an electoral front organisation for the Workers’ Communist Party.

Much can be said about the WCP, but the Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten*’s headline from 28 August 2005 probably cannot be bettered: ‘They worshipped Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot’. And one Vidkun Quisling was a Minister in government for the populist Centre Party’s earlier incarnation as the Farmer’s Party. He later led Nazi-occupied Norway. Eugene Debs’ WW1 remark remains apposite: ‘Yes, a change is certainly needed, not merely a change of party but a change of system, a change from slavery to freedom and from despotism to democracy, wide as the world’.

A Better World is Possible

This is the title of an essay by Dr. Cesar Chelala, which concludes: ‘We have the resources. What we need is a new look at life and its wondrous possibilities. I may be called naïve. But those who are not naïve are the ones that have led us into these wars. We can create a better world, if we truly want it’ (counterpunch.org, 3 September). Indeed. This call echoes others made in the past:

1859: ‘There must be something rotten in the very core of a social system which increases its wealth without diminishing its misery...’ (Marx in the *New York Daily Tribune*, 16 September). He observed that the ‘Irish famine of 1846 killed more than 1,000,000 people, but it killed poor devils only. To the wealth of the country it did not the slightest damage’ (*Capital*, Vol. 1, ch. 25).

1898: ‘Hence it has happened that the development of steam navigation, of railroads and telegraphs, of mechanical and chemical science, and the growth of the population, while enormously increasing productive power and the amount of material products—that is, of real wealth—at least ten times faster than the growth of the population, has given that enormous increase almost wholly to one class, comprising the landlords and capitalists, leaving the actual producers of it—the industrial workers and inventors—little, if any, better off than before’ (Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Demon of Greed*).

1923: ‘Such a great [socialist] production is already possible, with the knowledge already possessed by mankind’ (Sylvia Pankhurst).

1948: ‘A world of peace and friendship, a world with the plenty which modern science had made possible was a great ideal. But those in power had no patience

with such an ideal. They said it was not practical politics’ (John Boyd Orr, former director of the Food and Agriculture Organisation).

1951: ‘It is time for mankind to ensure itself of material abundance by establishing a free, self-managed world society of productive labour, thereby freeing its mental powers for perfecting its knowledge of nature and the universe’ (Anton Pannekoek, *A History of Astronomy*).

All that is missing from achieving this is ‘the conscious will and action of the majority of the proletariat’ (Rosa Luxemburg).

Comrade Speaker?

‘You cannot have a system where the success of some springs from the exploitation of the workers and springs from the exploitation of the environment and the rest, and we have to correct that’ (yahoo.com, 17 September). Indeed, but our fellow socialists in the WSP(US) do not expect Nancy Pelosi to join them anytime soon as she makes clear elsewhere that she wishes to reform capitalism, not replace it. Other, sadly long-dead Democrats stated: ‘All men are brethren. We denounce all political and hereditary inequalities and distinctions of castes... We believe the earth, with all its natural productions, to be the common property of all... We believe that the present state of society, which permits its idlers and schemers to monopolise the fruits of the earth and, the production of industry, and compels the working class to labour for inadequate rewards, and even condemns them to social slavery, destitution, and degradation, to be essentially unjust... We condemn national hatreds which have hitherto divided mankind... Convinced that national prejudices have been, at all ages, taken advantage of by the people’s oppressors to set them tearing the throats of each other when they should have been working together for their common good, this society repudiates the term ‘foreigner.’ We recognise our fellow-men, without regard to country, as members of one family, the human race, and citizens of one commonwealth, the world’ (Manifesto of the Fraternal Democrats, 1845).

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

All meetings online during the pandemic.
See page 23.

LONDON

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

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

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

MIDLANDS

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

NORTH

North East Regional branch.

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

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

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

Bolton. Contact: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589.

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

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

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

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

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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.

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

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

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

WALES

South Wales Branch (Swansea)

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

South Wales Branch (Cardiff)

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

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

Central Branch

Meets 1st Sun, 12 noon (UK time) on Discord.

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MATERIAL WORLD

Coal Nationalism versus the Climate

IN CHINA there have been well-publicised electric outages that have led to a contraction in factory output, a failure in fulfilling new orders, a slow-down in exports and rising manufacturing costs. The cuts in the electric supply have been the unintended consequence of the shift away from coal to meet its CO2 emission targets. Despite China being one of the dominant players in alternative energy sources it cannot fully substitute for the need for coal. So high is the demand from industry that mining companies are now increasing coal supply (tinyurl.com/a92x87s4).

In October the National Energy Commission met. Afterwards, the Chinese prime minister, Li Keqiang, presented a statement which declared:

‘Energy security should be the premise on which a modern energy system is built and the capacity for energy self-supply should be enhanced. Given the predominant place of coal in the country’s energy and resource endowment, it is important to optimise the layout for the coal production capacity, build advanced coal-fired power plants as appropriate in line with development needs, and continue to phase out outdated coal plants in an orderly fashion. Domestic oil and gas exploration will be intensified.’ (*Guardian*, 12 October)

According to Michael Meidan of the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies: ‘The short-term reality is China is still going

to double the size of its economy, it’s still urbanising, energy demand is still increasing. There is still an imperative for growth.’ Isabel Hilton of the think-tank China Dialogue describes China’s recently approved five-year plan as ‘a great disappointment’ as regards its carbon-intensity targets (a measure of emissions per unit of electricity generated) and its continued coal power expansion.

China is not alone. **India** too struggles to achieve the balance between meeting the demand for electricity and calls to reduce burning coal for its power. Power cuts have taken place there too. India already has plans to boost its domestic coal production to 1bn tons by 2024. 55 new coal mines are planned and expansion projects for 193 existing mines are to be increased.

Indonesia, the world’s top exporter of coal for power stations, generates 60 percent of its power by burning coal. It is also the world’s eighth-biggest carbon emitter. It has brought forward its goal for net-zero emissions from 2070 to 2060 and announced plans to stop commissioning new coal-fired power plants. It faces the dilemma of how to balance its environmental targets with the cost of phasing out an industry that contributed \$38 billion in export earnings in the first seven months of 2021 (tinyurl.com/3vs3377j). It will be under economic pressure to follow China and India’s lead.

In **South Africa**, Gwede Mantashe, the Mining and Energy Minister, has said that it must manage its transition away from

coal-fired power generation systematically and not rush to renewable energy sources: ‘We are not a developed economy, we don’t have all alternative sources, ...we must not collapse our economy...’ (tinyurl.com/cteddxy).

The United Nations is imploring all OECD nations to phase out coal from their power grids by 2030, and for non-OECD countries to do so by 2040. Nevertheless, **Australia** has rebuffed this call to phase out coal, their Resources Minister Keith Pitt declaring ‘The future of this crucial industry will be decided by the Australian government, ... not a foreign body that wants to shut it down, costing thousands of jobs and billions of export dollars for our economy’. He has proposed setting up a government-run US\$180 billion lending facility for the country’s coal industry so the government can be the ‘lender of last resort’ to the mining sector to fund and underwrite the industry.

All these coal-rich states are going to be reluctant to agree to or to comply with any international agreement that risks the prosperity of their coal industry. They will reason like China that ‘given the predominant place of coal in the country’s energy and resource endowment, it is important to optimise the layout for the coal production capacity, build advanced coal-fired power plants as appropriate in line with development needs.’

If they didn’t do this, they would be placing themselves at a disadvantage in terms both of energy security and of competitiveness.

So for years to come coal will continue to be burned.

In this way, competition between capitalist states, with different energy mixes, is going to prevent the rational, world-wide response that is required to deal with the climate change crisis.

ALJO



Credit: A coal-fired power plant in China's Jiangsu province. XU CONGJUN - IMAGINECHINA

Nature, production and system change

System change not climate change. Yes, but how and why do social systems change? What is behind this?

What do we mean when we say we 'produce' something? What are we doing? Basically, we are changing the form of something that originally came from nature (or, rather, the rest of nature, since of course we are part of it ourselves). We are changing nature, with the ultimate aim of surviving better within it. All animals, in fact all living things, do. Nature is not something static. Like everything else, it is changing all the time – not just through physical forces like the weather, volcanic activity, solar activity, but also through the activity of living things, both plants and animals.

All living things work, in the sense of expending energy, to extract from the rest of nature what they need to survive. Humans are no exception. We have to as well.

Although other animals are better at doing many things with their bodies than humans are (better eyesight, hearing, sense of smell, but also other abilities we don't possess), our particular nature as an animal (symbolic thought, vocalisation, writing, prolonged maturation and passing on knowledge) gives us one advantage over all other animals. We are not dependent just on our own bodies – our hands, arms, legs, etc – to extract what we need from the rest of nature. We can make instruments (from materials found in nature) to help us do this:

'The use and construction of instruments of labour, although present in germ among certain species of animals, is characteristic of the specifically human labour process, and Franklin therefore defines man as 'a tool-making animal' (Marx, *Capital*, Vol 1, ch 7).

Benjamin Franklin's definition is a good one. We are tool-making animals, i.e. we are animals, but specifically animals which make and use tools. These tools have evolved and developed over time:

'Darwin has directed attention to the history of natural technology, i.e. the formation of the organs of plants and animals, which serve as instruments of production for sustaining their life. Does not the history of the productive organs of man in society, of organs that are the material basis of every particular organisation of society, deserve equal attention?' (Marx, ch 15, section 1).

It does, because:

'Technology reveals the active relation of man to nature, the direct process of the production of his life, and thereby it also lays bare the process of the production of the social relations of his life, and of the mental conceptions that flow from those relations.'

This is the 'materialist conception of history'. Today, all serious theories of history are 'materialist' in the sense that they analyse history in terms of material causes. The idea that history is the working out of some god's plan or that some god

intervenes in history – what might be called 'the creationist conception of history' – is as absurd as creationism is in biology.

The 'matter' of the materialist conception of history is how humans are organised to meet their *material* needs, how they are organised to produce these from the rest of nature. The different technologies used by human societies to obtain from nature what they need give rise to different forms of society and as technology changes so does society; in fact as technology develops and progresses so does human society.

But how exactly do changes in technology – changes in the way humans interact with nature to live – lead to a change in the structure of society?

Chapter 1 of the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 famously opens with: 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.' How, then, are class struggles related to changes in technology?

'It is the development of tools, of these technical aids which men direct, which is the main cause, the propelling force of all social development. It is self-understood that the people are ever trying to improve these tools so that their labour be easier and more productive, and the practice they

acquire in using these tools, leads their thoughts upon further improvements. Owing to this development, a slow or quick progress of technique takes place, which at the same time changes the social forms of labour. This leads to new class relations, new social institutions and new classes. At the same time social, ie, political struggles arise. Those classes predominating under the old process of production try to preserve artificially their institutions, while the rising classes try to promote the new process of production; and by waging the class struggles against the ruling class and by conquering them they pave the way for the further unhindered development of technique' (Anton Pannekoek, *Marxism and Darwinism*, 1909, Chapter II).

The materialist conception of history explains the change from one system of society to another, not just in terms of slow technological changes, but in terms also of a class struggle, with one class championing a new technology against an entrenched class benefiting from institutions relevant to an outdated technology. Such a disconnect exists today, and has done for some 150 years, between already 'socialised' methods of production, a vast cooperative effort linking people working in different parts of the world, and property institutions dating from a time when production was still local and individual. Before humanity can organise its current relationship with the rest of nature in a rational and sustainable way this contradiction has to be ended.

ADAM BUICK



To Grow or Not to Grow?

Growth' is defined by Investopedia as 'an increase in the capacity of an economy to produce goods and services, compared from one period to another'. What's wrong with that? Isn't it a good thing for society to be in a position to produce more? It certainly has been in the past – if it hadn't been for growth, the world would not be capable, as it now is, of satisfying adequately the needs of every, man, woman and child on Earth—but it is also a question of *what* is produced, *how* it is produced, and *why* it is produced.

Much of what is produced today is waste as far as satisfying people's needs is concerned. Think of the resources that go into maintaining armed forces and equipping them with the most scientifically advanced weapons of destruction that a state can afford. Think of the resources that go into maintaining and using the infrastructure to deal with buying and selling and all other financial activities. Guestimates suggest that these two ends might use up as much as half of what is produced today.

Production today is carried on by firms, whether private or state, competing to sell their products and convert into money the new value added in the course of their production. This puts them under economic pressure to produce goods as cheaply as possible, to use the cheapest raw materials and the cheapest sources of energy, even if these are non-renewable and irrespective of whether or not they harm the environment, as burning fossil fuels has been, and still is, doing.

Production today is not carried out to directly satisfy people's needs. Its aim is to make profits for the private or state enterprises that control production. People's needs are met, even if not adequately, but only as a by-product of their economic role as workers, whose consumption is limited by the amount of wages they are paid. This is why goods are not made to last as long as they could be. If they were most people would not be able to afford them.

Production today is geared to increasing productive capacity – or growth. This is not a voluntary decision on the part of business owners, but something forced on them by the nature of capitalism as a competitive struggle between different firms for profits. To stay in business, firms have to invest in reducing the cost of production of what they are selling; to increase output per worker by having those they employ work with more up-to-date machines. The first firm that innovates in this way reaps a surplus profit but this will only be temporary as other firms soon follow suit. The result, across the economy, is an increase in productive capacity. This – growth -- is not something that can be avoided as long as capitalism continues.

It is built-in to the system.

Quite an indictment of the capitalist economic system. This has led many of those concerned about the environment to question growth as unsustainable from an ecological point of view. Some call for 'sustainable growth' (as growth that doesn't waste resources or harm the environment); others want 'no more growth', and yet others even 'de-growth'. But none of these can be realised within capitalism because, under it, production is in the hands of competing private or state enterprises responding to market forces which nobody, not even governments, can control.

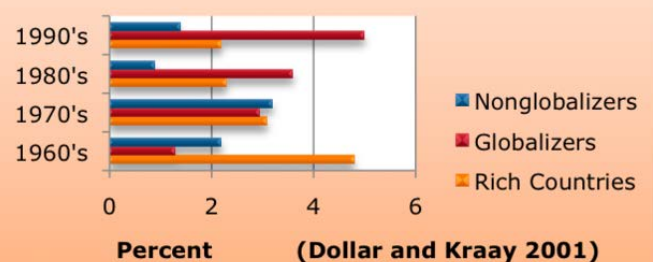
The issue can be usefully debated and publicised under capitalism but campaigns for any of the options to be implemented while capitalism still operates are a waste of time. The most that can be expected is some timid and belated moves towards 'sustainable growth', but only when this has become profitable due to the rise in the cost of obtaining diminishing non-renewable resources or of having to deal with the effects of global over-warming.

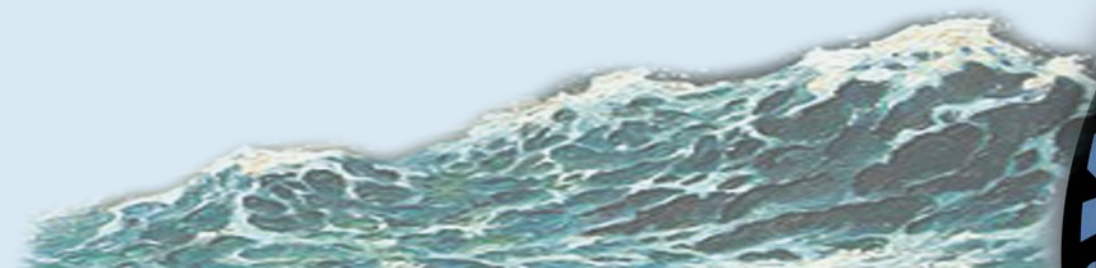
Before any of these options could be implemented there has to be a revolution in the basis of society making the Earth's natural and industrial resources the common property of whole of humanity. No longer owned by rich individuals, corporations or states, they will simply be there to be used, under various forms and levels of democratic control, to directly produce what people need. Only then will humanity be in control of its productive activity.

ADAM BUICK



Growth Rate of Real Per Capita GDP





Much is being written at present both in this country and elsewhere about the evils of capitalism and the need to do away with that system and establish a different kind of society. Indeed, capitalism deserves blame not just for the massive economic inequality between people and peoples, but also for the wars and violence that constantly blight so many lives, the refugee problems often caused by those wars, the Covid pandemic and other epidemics that have broken out affecting millions and which almost certainly have as their root the quest for profit and, of course, the world's climate and environmental crisis which threatens to devastate life on the planet. That's why socialists try to spread the idea of an entirely different kind of society to replace capitalism, one which we call socialism.

Unfortunately very few of those who argue for 'system change' actually share the idea of socialism that we have been putting forward since 1904. What we want is a moneyless society of free access, without buying and selling, which is based on *from each according to ability, to each according to needs*. Many people who also call themselves 'socialists' come close to this notion, but do not follow it through to its revolutionary conclusion, and instead end up arguing for and advocating something less, essentially a different, more 'benign' kind of capitalism, which is both futile and unachievable.

An example is in the arguments put forward by a group of 'anti-capitalists' called System Change Not Climate Change: An Anti-Capitalist Ecosocialist Network (bit.ly/3mq8TTA), whose focus is on the ecological damage caused by the capitalist system and the need to organise society differently to save the planet. One of their most recent expressions of this is in a well-written article by mathematical physicist David Klein called *What Might an Ecosocialist Society Look Like?* (bit.ly/3uAWHNg). This is especially interesting for socialists who are often asked about how a future society based on needs not profit would be organised, and who are always open to ideas on this topic.

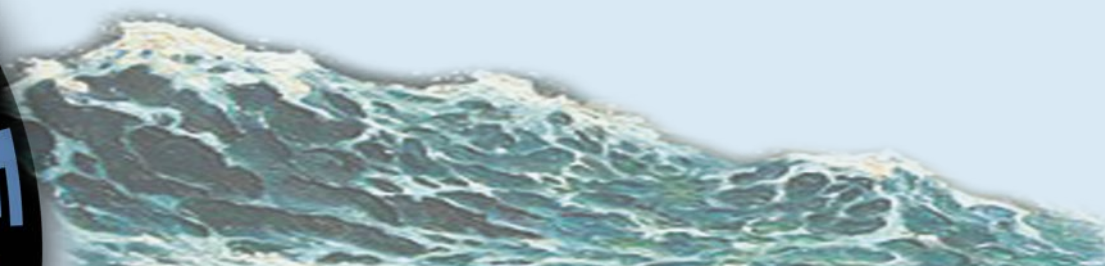
Before attempting to portray what 'ecosocialism' would look like, the author seeks to explain why a different kind of society is needed in the first place. This he does this with both clarity and brio. He focuses on the 'threat to life on Earth posed by the climate and ecological crises' due to the use of fossil fuels and to global warming. He points to 'habitat destruction,

toxic dumping, plastic pollution in the oceans, radiation poisoning, and other customary products of the global capitalist economy' all taking place despite widespread knowledge about it and despite 'the flood of warnings from scientists'. He talks of food production for the advanced capitalist world relying on 'heavily exploited human beings brought in from poorer countries' and capitalism's profit drive leading to 'a system of animal slaughter and sequestration through factory farms of unprecedented efficiency, volume of production, and unspeakable cruelty', while all at the same time failing to give decent food and shelter to large swathes of the global population. Nor is this due to lack of technology allowing people to be fed, housed, kept warm, transported and all else that provides a decent, comfortable life, in ways that are sustainable both for humanity and for the biodiversity of the planet. It is due rather, Klein argues, to capitalism's built-in need for 'unending economic growth', consisting of 'commodity production, escalating resource extraction, increasing trash and toxic dumping, and ever-increasing energy production'. Capitalism cannot solve the environmental crisis it has caused and in fact 'can only make matters worse'.

So far we agree. But what of David Klein's solution to the situation he describes? 'Ecosocialism' is the name he gives to what he calls his 'vision for the future'. He states from the outset that there is 'no universally agreed blueprint', but he does suggest certain fundamental elements that could form the basis of the system he proposes. These include zero economic growth, 'free' services of certain kinds (eg, health care, education, transport), widespread community facilities, energy efficient housing, government control and coordination of large-scale industry, 'publicly owned banks', free basic foods and a 'certain small income' for all. He also sees such a system as doing away with fossil-fuel-driven industrial farming and the processing of unhealthy foods, and reducing the carbon footprint by 'moving food production to the perimeters of cities, establishing urban and vertical food farms, promoting cuisines based on locally produced foods in season, and making food preservation a part of these systems'.

How will this vision be realised in practical terms? According to the author, by using a 'Green New Deal' approach





involving policies like nationalisation of fossil fuels, renewable and energy conservation programmes and 'a federal public-works program, similar to FDR's 1930 depression programs', all leading to 'a new sustainable economy with higher wages and benefits'.

Some elements of the prescription outlined above (eg, local food production with a low

carbon footprint) coincide with our view of how a post-capitalist society would work, but a good many others do not, and for good reason. The notion of certain kinds of 'free services' clearly implies that there will be some services that are not free, whereas socialists insist on free access to *all* goods and services. Then the mention of 'government controlled banks' and 'higher wages and benefits' makes it even clearer that what is in fact being proposed is not a different kind of society at all, but a variation of the present capitalist one, in the hope that it will be more benign. This is not a socialist society, since socialism is a society (and a world society, not the US-centric one the author seems to be presenting) without governments, without buying and selling, and certainly without banks. So long as these elements exist – money, banks, buying and selling – then as David Klein himself recognises, the core of capitalism, which is surplus value, will also exist, even if it is the state rather than private corporations that extracts this surplus from workers and invests it as capital.

We can of course agree with Klein – as with others who write in similar vein – of the need for 'a revolutionary struggle to overturn capitalism and build a survivable system of human relations'. We also agree with him that this needs to be done by a united class of wage and salary workers and not by a focus on identity politics or the like. But we cannot agree that this can be done by campaigning for smaller or

larger reforms within the existing system of money and wages, buying and selling, states and governments or by joining with some of the reformist organisations he recommends support for – Democratic Socialists of America, Food and Water Action, Sunrise Movement, System Change not Climate Change. Supporting the aims of these organisations within capitalism as a 'meantime' strategy can only prolong the agony that the system inflicts and postpone indefinitely the moment when a working-class majority democratically votes capitalism out of existence and brings in a genuine socialist society. In the end a genuine socialist (or ecosocialist) society can only be a moneyless society of free access without buying and selling, a society in which, as another commentator has written 'everyone can go to the social storehouses and service centers and take what they need'. Anything else is a pipe dream. Socialism has to be a world of planned cooperation which takes advantage of existing technologies in a sustainable way and in which everyone can develop their interests and abilities with full social support and live without the ever-present threat of material insecurity – a true realm of freedom. A system that includes money, banks, governments and states can only mean more of what we've got already – inequality, rich and poor, environmental degradation, and antagonisms of all kinds.

HOWARD MOSS



Sharing, But Not Alike

Share the World's Resources is an interesting-sounding name for an organisation. Their website is sharing.org, and it contains a lot of material, reports, blogs, and so on. However, what they have in mind is not a society where people in reality share the Earth. Let's look first at the document A Primer on Global Economic Sharing, dating from 2014.

This begins positively, by pointing out that people are not selfish by nature and that humans are predisposed to co-operate and share. Increasing use is now being made of collaborative consumption, which is based on sharing rather than ownership, whether of cars or office space. Sharing cannot be national, but must take place on a planetary scale, and bridging the gap between rich and poor countries is advocated. The UN (once it has been made properly democratic) is seen as a major means for introducing the supposed world of sharing. The failure to share is responsible for conflict over land and other resources. Either the 'environmental commons' should be shared more equitably, or there will be increased competition for resources, accelerated climate change, and maybe even another world war.

Further, the report goes on, action absolutely needs to be taken, as each day forty thousand people are likely to die from 'avoidable poverty-related causes'. In a world of massive inequalities of wealth and a barely credible extent of poverty, there is a need for a 'fairer distribution of wealth, power and resources on a worldwide basis'. More than enough food is produced to meet the needs of every human being, yet famines still occur. This is because food is grown for profit, not human need. Natural resources are 'part of our shared commons', and what is needed is neither private nor state ownership but a form of management 'based on non-ownership and trusteeship'. The 'global public' must participate in a reform that 'extends beyond national borders'.

Yet the report undermines some of the reasonable claims made by lamenting that no 'global community of nations' has been created, which implies that a world divided into countries is still envisaged, as does the reliance on the UN. Also, the response to the current food situation is a call for 'fairer regional and global trade arrangements', and a demand that governments accept responsibility for guaranteeing access to food for all. Market mechanisms are supposedly rejected, along with charitable giving, to be replaced in part by redistributive government policies. Sadly, all this shows little awareness of the real aims and purposes of governments, which are to defend the interests of the rich and powerful.

This report, then, is a mixture of some good points in criticising the current world system and a very unrealistic

view of the future, largely owing to the fact that STWR does not truly reject the present system, only its most obviously unacceptable consequences. Sharing is fine, but a world still divided into countries cannot be genuinely based on sharing, nor can one which retains trade and money.

There is only one passing reference to capitalism in this report, but for more on this we can turn to another STWR document, *Heralding Article 25: a People's Strategy for World Transformation*, by Mohammed Sofiane Mesbahi, the organisation's founder. The reference in the title is to article 25 of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that everyone has a right to an adequate standard of living, an idea that is said to be meaningful even to those who have never heard the word 'capitalism'. But what is said there about capitalism is, to put it mildly, bizarre. It is, the reader is told, a divisive term, and there is really no such entity, 'only people in the world who hide behind ideas or abuse principles for their own devious intentions.' The principle of capitalism,

Mesbahi argues, is not synonymous with inequality, for what we see around us is not capitalism but the consequences of some people's motivations. Communism, too, has been corrupted by authoritarian regimes, thus wrongly equating communism/socialism with the state capitalist Bolshevik systems. It is not principles that are to blame for the world's problems, but 'man himself'.

Mesbahi also argues that we should look at the ideas underlying

different social systems 'with a more spiritual understanding'. He rejects the notion of a revolution, and, in order to put less emphasis on antagonisms, prefers to say 'not with' rather than 'against' (but what difference would that make?). Do not be conditioned by 'isms and ideology', instead choose a 'spiritual revolution' (so he is not against all revolutions).

It is hard to make sense of something expressed in such woolly terms, let alone discuss and evaluate it. Being charitable, we might think that his spiritual revolution could mean a change in people's ideas, akin to a growth in socialist consciousness among workers. But there is nothing here about what the supposed future society would look like in concrete terms, nor any conception of just how to get there other than holding demonstrations in support of article 25. This would achieve precisely nothing, and the vaguely described world of sharing that STWR advocate does not begin to address the real problems or to show how they can be overcome. The organisation is asking some of the right questions, but providing little if anything by way of viable answers.

PAUL BENNETT



The Passing Labour Show

Lord Michael Spencer, a London billionaire and Conservative Party donor, notes that conference speeches are a particularly good time for ‘theatre’, rather than genuine politics (*Financial Times*, 8 October). He was referring to Boris Johnson’s anti-business rhetoric at his party’s conference, but a similar consideration applies to Keir Starmer’s performance at Labour’s conference a few weeks before. Starmer could not have asked for a better show – there were plenty of opportunities to ridicule hecklers from the Labour Left, demonstrating beyond any doubt that Starmer has decisively moved the party to the centre, in both rhetoric and policy.

No substitute for power

The priorities of the current shadow cabinet are, supposedly, getting ‘serious about winning’, as opposed to ‘thinking protest was a substitute for power’, as shadow foreign secretary Lisa Nandy put it. This is meant to stand in contrast to whatever frivolities took place under Jeremy Corbyn (whose party took down a Tory majority in 2017 and who beat Margaret Thatcher’s record for most government defeats as opposition leader). In practice, ‘getting serious’ means shedding the ‘democratic socialist’, due to the view that the British electorate is consciously moderate and so more centrist politics amount to being in touch with them. A number of attacks on the left have been affected, with absolute impunity. Rather than the ‘ten pledges’ that Starmer campaigned on, which promised, in essence, the 2017 Corbyn-era manifesto, the Corbyn shadow cabinet has been rejected and Blair-era rhetoric dug out.

One of the most controversial attacks was a change to the election mechanisms, now requiring the support of double the MPs to stand for election, and giving MPs a disproportionate say in leader selection. Before, it was ‘one member, one vote’, but as that led to landslide elections of a left-wing Labour Party leader, the policy cannot be allowed to continue. The surprising aspect is how overt the motivation is – every mainstream journal (often explicitly) recognises the move for what it is: an anti-democratic ploy to beat down the Labour Left. Of course, that means it was roundly praised by the commentariat, with the *Observer* (3 October) view on the policy being that it ‘indicated that [Starmer] is a leader who will put country before party factionalism’, one among many ‘achievements [that suggest] Labour is not an entirely spent political force and offer a glimmer of hope for the future of the British centre-left’.

Blair, Blair, Blair

There were also a number of overt gestures towards Tony Blair’s (recently mentioned in the Pandora Papers) rhetoric; about the Tories being ‘soft on crime, soft on the causes of crime’, and Starmer’s quip that education is ‘so important that I am tempted to say it three times’. There is something of an oddity in the commentary: the Labour Left are routinely criticised for ‘wanting to return to the 1970s’ or being ‘devoid of fresh thoughts’ (*Financial Times*, 28 September), but a return to Blair’s rhetoric is ‘serious’ and ‘electable’. Labour Left MP John McDonnell criticised the move as a result of panicking, and as ‘no longer relevant’. He is unlikely to be listened to, as left and centre party unity is not on the agenda anymore.

Starmer also responded to hecklers by saying that Labour is now about ‘changing lives’ and not ‘chanting slogans’ – a memorable slogan itself. Yet the concrete policies needed to change lives are scarcely heard of. It is easier to pin down Starmer’s politics by what he is opposed to than what he is for. The push for a £15 minimum wage has been rejected in favour of £10, and rejection of nationalisation as a way forward. Andy Burnham and Ed Miliband, who have suggested that public

ownership may be viable, are causing frustrations.

Pro-business rhetoric

On the other hand, the Party has lurched towards a different attitude to business, leading to a striking contrast between Labour and the Conservatives. Johnson has been explicit on inequality and has blamed businesses for low wages, something which has worried donors, who are ‘nearly universally Thatcherite free-marketeers’ (*Financial Times*, 8 October), and he has criticised the austerity programmes of previous Conservative governments. Starmer’s position has been pretty much the opposite. Indeed, the business press recognises that Johnson’s own rhetoric might help Starmer position himself as a ‘more serious political figure’, ie, one that business can take seriously.

Turning to broader issues of foreign policy and the climate, Starmer simply ignored a young activist asking about his opinion on the motion on a Green New Deal, calling for public ownership of energy, bans on fracking, improved and electrified public transport, and unionisation laws. The motion passed at Conference, with 59.2 percent in favour (*LabourList*, 26 September). The activist later wrote that ‘Keir Starmer’s stonewalling is a fitting metaphor for Labour’s treatment of its young members, whose generation used to be at the core of its voters’ (*openDemocracy*, 29 September).

This hasn’t been the only divide between members (particularly the youth) and Starmer and his cabinet. Delegates turned on the party line when it came to two important foreign policy issues: the position on Israel, and AUKUS, the Australia, UK, US military alliance. Starmer said that ‘Britain must look after our most important relationships or our influence and security quickly declines. So, Labour welcomes [AUKUS]’, but the alliance was described as ‘a dangerous move that will undermine world peace’ in a motion that passed with 70.4 percent of the vote. Likewise, Conference heard a motion that condemned ‘de facto annexation of Palestinian land’ and an ‘arms trade used to violate Palestinian human rights’, and described Israel as an apartheid state. The motion passed, but Starmer and many shadow cabinet members distanced themselves from it immediately, and doubts were raised about whether it would ever be reflected in party policy.

No Dove

Divisions are becoming clear. The moves to restrict the power of party members have some justification from the perspective of the shadow cabinet – the members, many of whom joined during the Corbyn era, want the party to head in a very different direction to the way Starmer is pulling. Whether a return to Blairite politics will work will depend more on how the Conservatives act than on Starmer’s own merits. It seems the only thing he has been effective at is the quashing of the left. Yet, the movement built up over the last few years still has a say, especially on foreign policy – this will be an important distinction between him and his party members, many of whom are impressed by Corbyn’s credentials on war. This was taken to be a decisive factor against him in the eyes of the electorate (though much of that may have to do with the ‘terrorist sympathiser’ media spin). Starmer seems to be no dove, even if not as hawkish as Blair. This may cost him the support of many of his members, but they will matter less and less to the party’s politics. Foreign policy has been, traditionally, where left-wing politics consistently distinguishes itself from centre-left liberalism. The shadow cabinet, even if not the Labour Party, has, almost across the board, chosen the latter.

MP SHAH

Can we panic now, Captain Mainwaring?

In the halcyon summer days of 1914 when all was right with the world and God was in his place in the British empire, dependent upon your social status in the scheme of things of course, the shock caused by the assassination of some minor Austrian prince was seen as an opportunity to bare Albion's teeth to Johnny Foreigner, and everywhere the cry echoed down the expansive avenues and the meanest back alleys: 'It will all be over by Christmas!' Plus ça change, plus c'est la meme chose. Isn't it just?

We all know Marx's remark that history repeats itself, the first time as tragedy and the second time as farce. Marx had in mind the tragedy of Napoleon's regime and the later farcical reign of his nephew Napoleon III. Back in the 1960s, Herbert Marcuse remarked that the lesson of Nazism seemed to be the opposite way round: first as a farce (throughout the 1920s, Hitler and his gang were mostly taken as a bunch of marginal political clowns), then as a tragedy (when Hitler effectively took power). Unfortunately, Karl, old boy, history seems to be in a place whereby it's repeating constantly, like a three-week-old pickled egg. It's doesn't feel the least bit humorous this time round.

Crystal balls are not *de rigueur* for writers in this journal, but, this from the *Socialist Standard*, December 2020, seems a little prescient: 'Eat, drink' depends on

whether the supply chains are still intact and irrational locust behaviour hasn't swept the shelves cleaner than vultures on a wildebeest carcass in the Serengeti. Be merry? The human spirit is always able to find something positive in the most dire of circumstances. Acceptance of a bad situation whilst saying, gosh it's terrible but there's nothing we can do about it, is not acceptable however. After one of the most dramatic years which continuing on may have profound negative societal changes in global society it is no longer good enough to complainingly accept what is being implemented. Contrary to what a Tory leader once said, there is an alternative'.

At present the supply chains seem to be under considerable strain and there are apocalyptic warnings that toys, electricals and luxury goods all the way from China may not be lining the shelves of those stores and outlets which rely on the Christmas period in a 'normal' year to provide them with a hefty addition to their annual turnover. Had they but known then, the *Ypres Times* would have been running op-eds on how much better off they all were stuck in the trenches at Christmas, rather than the terrible deprivation of not getting your overpriced disposable trash-trinkets delivered in time.

The *Mail Online*, September 2021 has: 'Panic buying is back! Shoppers queue to fill up trolleys with toilet roll and other essentials after one in six couldn't find what they wanted on the shelves as supermarket bosses are told to co-operate to save Christmas and petrol shortages continue' and 'Shelves

empty across UK on sell-out Saturday as supply crisis leaves one in six Britons claiming they have been 'unable to buy essential food' - and a third start Christmas stockpiling - ahead of winter squeeze'.

The sense of déjà vu cannot have long left the memory. As the Institute of Economic Affairs noted in sanguine tones, in the days when we didn't even need to wait until Christmas because this would all be well over within three weeks: 'No-one can have failed to notice the half-empty supermarket shelves and long queues for essentials. Loo rolls even rivalled flowers as the Mother's Day gift of choice. Fortunately, this is one phase of the coronavirus crisis which should be over soon' (March 2020). Up to a point, Lord Copper, up to a point. The IEA didn't borrow the services of Corporal Jones in order to tell us all 'Don't panic! Don't panic!' A stiff-upper-lipped 'Keep calm and carry on' seemed to be their advice. What have we here? Were they employing the economic tenets of Adam

Smith or Malthus?

Panic buying? Fine

chaps, no problem!

Carry on, as you were.

The IEA: 'To be fair, panic buying is not necessarily irrational, for two reasons. The first is that the fear of empty shelves may be correct because it is self-fulfilling. Panic buying is similar. It would be best if no-one does it. But if you are worried that supplies might run out because other people will beat



you to it, then it makes sense for you to rush to the shops too... However, there is also a second factor to consider here: even if there are plenty of goods in the pipeline and shops will soon be well stocked, some people may be unable to get to them. As the new coronavirus spreads, any household in the UK could be obliged to self-isolate for a period of several weeks, or even longer, at a moment's notice. It may then make sense for every household to buy several weeks of essentials, just in case.'

Hang on there Jack, as the economists have it, 'ceteris paribus,' we're not on an equal and fair playing field here are we? If you've the sufficient disposable income, the transport, the freezer space, the storage space for your six months or more supplies, plus the utter contempt for the plight of others less fortunate, then good for you Jack. That's a rational capitalist economic decision. Foxtrot Uniform, I'm alright. This form of economic selfishness no doubt has opponents of socialism (who generally misunderstand what that is anyway) leaping about like the ten lords in the Christmas carol, waving their fingers and chanting in E flat Major, human nature! human nature! The Socialist Party's demolition of this spurious straw man is amply demonstrated elsewhere. 2021 was certainly another year seeing profound negative societal changes in global society. And as amply demonstrated by us, there is an alternative.

DC

DEATH (IN PRISON) OF A GUERRILLA



In September the ex-Maoist guerrilla leader Abimael Guzman died in a prison in Peru where he had been for nearly thirty years. He has been portrayed by the Peruvian and world press as one of the most criminal and brutal 'Marxist' leaders in the world, blamed for the death of more than 80,000 people and the destruction of private and government property

He was the founder of 'Gonzalo Thought' (after 'Mao Zedong Thought') and he created his own cult of personality, seeing himself as one of the 'four swords' of Marxism, after Marx, Lenin and Mao. He travelled to China in 1966 and 1967 during the Cultural Revolution and was part of a split from the Communist Party of Peru (Red Flag). Mao's *Little Red Book* became his Bible. When he returned to Peru, he formed a guerrilla group called Shining Path with some of his professors and young students who came from peasant families,

The name Shining Path (*Sendero Luminoso*) was taken from José Carlos Mariategui, a Peruvian Marxist-Leninist who had founded Peru's first Communist Party in 1928 and who advocated a peasant/indigenous people's 'socialism'. His maxim was: '*El Marxismo-Leninismo abrirá el sendero luminoso hacia la revolución*' ('Marxism-Leninism will open the shining path to revolution'). Many political movements were inspired by his writings including the Tupamaros in Uruguay and Evo Morales' indigenous peoples' movement in Bolivia. Three ex-leaders of these guerrilla movements later became presidents in Latin America and allies of the ruling class and the corporations.

Was Guzman really a communist? Was he a Marxist? Were Mao and Lenin genuine Marxists and socialists? Are Leninism and Maoism valid socialist/communist currents? Can the crimes that were committed by Guzman and Shining Path be blamed on Marxism and socialism?

The Socialist Party and the World Socialist Movement have

said for decades that Leninism, Stalinism and Maoism have never been Marxist or socialist conceptions; that, instead, they were representative of an economical current described by Engels as State Capitalism; that the concept of a violent uprising was a tactic created by Lenin and the Bolsheviks to overthrow the government of Russia, an idea borrowed from the French Blanquists. It was not a Marxist conception. Shining Path's first action was to attack a polling station and burn it down, in defiance of Marx's insistence on the political education of the working class, the revolutionary use of the ballot, and universal suffrage among the working class.

In Latin America Maoism was a complete failure from the first, having been adopted by several organisations that had abandoned Castroism. It sacrificed the lives of many young people who became members of the urban guerrillas and infiltrated themselves into workers' unions, or went to the mountains or jungles of several countries in Latin America and were assassinated by the police or the armed forces, along with many peasants and members of the workers' unions, university teachers, and young professionals.

Maoism's failure in Latin America is a clear indication that a minority group of individuals will not liberate the working class and humanity. It suggests that Marx was correct when he wrote that only the working class can liberate itself. Maoism was a tactic, earlier criticised by Engels, of a conscious minority acting in the name of an unconscious majority. But socialism cannot be established without a class-conscious working class

Mao Zedong Thought attracted many young people in different countries in Latin America including the Caribbean islands as an ideological replacement for Castroism, but in essence it was the same adventurist programme advocated by Régis Debray who had been in Bolivia with Che Guevara. The main attraction was the concept of 'anti-revisionism' started by China and Albania against the 'Khrushchevites'. It claimed to be a restoration of true socialism and true Marxism, but it was just a variety of Leninism and Stalinism. Maoism was Chinese nationalism, just as Castroism was Latin American nationalism.

Latin American Maoism was basically a nationalist/patriotic movement, and all the so-called Communist parties that were created were nationalist parties of the countries where they were formed. None of them had a socialist programme; their programme was for reforms, statism and the nationalisation of natural resources.

It was mainly a movement among young people and university students. It never had any support among the industrial working class. Although many Marxist-Leninist parties sent their best cadres to work with the peasants, it never became a peasants' movement; it was capitalist governments that provided the peasants with what they wanted – land reform, agricultural equipment and supplies. They confronted a force which was stronger than them, the forces of the capitalist state, and suffered the consequences.

When China openly opted for state-run capitalism and collaboration with Western powers and Western corporations, all these organisations collapsed and disbanded themselves. Some of their leaders were killed or deported; others later became government ministers. The USA wanted them to leave and provided visas for them to emigrate, but they were no threat to capital and to capitalist society; they were anti-imperialists, but they were not anti-capitalists.

The new government of Peru refused to bury Abimael

Guzman's body, citing so-called national security. So his body was cremated and the ashes scattered at a secret location. Maoism and Shining Path are no longer popular within any section of Peruvian society nor a threat to security. At first they had some support within the peasant class, but then the peasants were caught in the cross-fire between the Maoist guerrilla fighters and the



government's armed forces and many were killed. Maoism is a dead movement in Peru today. Most of the members of Guzman's group became part of some gang or drug trafficking.

Many of the deaths blamed on Shining Path and Guzman were not committed by them. The police, the paramilitary and the armed forces should be blamed for most of the killings, like most of the killing committed in Colombia in the fight with the Maoist/Castroist guerrillas known as the FARC – another group which is not socialist or Marxist, as the media alleged. Being connected to and armed by Cuba does not make a group socialist. Nor were the Tupamaros in Uruguay a socialist or Marxist movement (one of their ex-leaders later became

president) but were more like a Robin Hood movement, taking money from the rich to give to the poor.

Maoism in Latin America showed its terrorist and anti-working-class nature, and was a total negation of the revolutionary nature of Marxism and socialism. It was only the capitalist press and the anti-communists who labelled Guzman and those like him

'Marxist', just as they did with FARC.

Maoism could not have been applied in developed capitalist countries like the USA, Britain, or Germany. It was basically a theory for a peasants' movement, similar to the Russian anti-Tsarist Narodniks who, similarly, had no support among the peasants and ended up using terrorist tactics. It could only be applied in Third World countries, but even so was a complete failure in all the economically backward countries where it attempted to take control of the nation and the state apparatus. It turned out not to be a shining path to anywhere.

MARCOS

COOKING THE BOOKS

Capitalism: No Paper Tiger

'President Xi was facing the most serious test of his approach to Chinese capitalism last night as Beijing decided whether it could allow a corporate giant burdened with hundreds of millions of debt to go bankrupt' (*Times*, 21 September).

The Chinese government still occasionally calls itself socialist, though this is more common amongst its supporters abroad. Everybody can see it isn't, even the Western media as in the news item above. Its economy is 'state capitalist' even in the Leninist sense of the development of private capitalism under the aegis of a supposedly 'socialist' state. Lenin, however, envisaged only small-scale capitalist enterprises. The Chinese government has allowed and encouraged big corporations to develop and so finds itself in the position of having to cope with problems caused by the workings of a market economy involving big capitalist corporations.

The 'corporate giant' that risked going bankrupt was a property company with the wonderful name of Evergrande that epitomises what every capitalist enterprise has to aim at – growing bigger and bigger through the re-investment

of most of its profits as new capital. Founded in 1996, it expanded rapidly in response to a housing boom, borrowing heavily to meet the demand for new apartment blocks. Then, as always happens sooner or later, the boom turned to bust.

The anarchic expansion of the market led to an oversupply of residential property:

'Supply of apartments exceeds demand and many new apartment blocks stand empty or unfinished' (*Times*, 21 September).

'By some estimates, China now has 90 million units of empty houses' (Simon Nixon, *Times*, 23 September).

The oversupply is in relation to paying demand not need:

'...there are the very high vacancy rates in China with high prices. In cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen property values are "very extreme" relative to average incomes' (Patrick Hoskings, *Times*, 21 September).

Evergrande has been left with huge debts that it cannot meet. The fear amongst stock exchange speculators is that its collapse would be China's 'Lehman moment', as in the US in 2007-8 that provoked the Great Recession from which the world has still not fully

recovered. They are afraid that the failure of Evergrande would spread from it to its suppliers and from them to their suppliers and so on, and of the impact of the resulting generalised economic crisis in China on the rest of the world capitalist economy.

It might not come to this, but the point is that it could. This shows that the Chinese government, despite being a one-party dictatorship, is as much at the mercy of unpredictable, anarchic market forces as any elected reformist government in the West.

It also shows how much capitalism in China is part of the world capitalist system. Socialism in one country was always impossible, but events have shown that so is 'state capitalism in one country' (what the Stalinists and Maoists call 'socialism' and the Trotskyists 'a transitional society'). No one part of the capitalist world can isolate itself from the rest of the world capitalist economy, as the rulers of the former USSR found out to their cost, a lesson Chairman Xi's predecessors learned and decided 'if you can't beat 'em, join 'em'. But this involves taking the rough with the smooth, as Xi is finding out.

PROPER GANDER Police And Abuse

IN SEPTEMBER, police constable Wayne Couzens was sentenced to spend the rest of his life in prison for the horrific rape and murder of Sarah Everard. Couzens, employed in the division which guards government and diplomatic buildings, used his position as a police officer to falsely arrest Sarah while she was walking home, under the pretence of breaching Covid-19 regulations. Not long after Couzens' sentencing, *Dispatches documentary Cops On Trial* (Channel 4) highlighted the wider problem of police who use their role for twisted motives, in particular their own sexual gratification. Reporter Ellie Flynn interviewed victims of predatory officers, and also looked at research showing the extent of the issue. Requests using the Freedom of Information Act brought in responses from 39 police forces (out of 45 in the UK) stating that in four years nearly 2,000 officers, special constables and PCSOs were accused of sexual misconduct. Bournemouth University also collated 514 proven cases of sexual misconduct by police officers in 33 forces over the last five years.

Couzens' actions were particularly vicious and didn't follow the usual pattern found when police officers target women. The research cited in the documentary showed that the most common type of abuse is when an officer uses his role to instigate an ongoing sexual relationship. This tends to happen when a woman reports a crime and is then visited at home by an investigating officer who pretends to be empathetic and understanding while being motivated by his own sexual gains. The perpetrators exploit how their police uniform gives the impression both that they can be trusted and that they have authority. The women they target are all in vulnerable situations: according to the research 40 per cent were victims of previous domestic abuse, 20 per cent had mental health issues and a quarter had suffered sexual assault. The perpetrators find those who are most susceptible to being manipulated, meaning that although the subsequent relationships are apparently consensual, they're abusive. This inevitably causes the women to be traumatised further, when abuse escalates and when the relationship is exposed and investigated.

While *Cops On Trial* is timely in



highlighting how Wayne Couzens wasn't alone in misusing his position, it isn't revealing the problem for the first time. In 2016, a report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary identified 436 claims of sexual abuse against police officers over two years. Less than half of these incidents were referred to the Independent Police Complaints Commission and, as the report worded it, there was a 'disconnect' between the numbers of alleged cases and sackings (tinyurl.com/kynyucty). Across Police Scotland, for example, 166 officers have more recently been accused of sexual misconduct, and none have been dismissed. One way which many perpetrators have avoided the consequences of their actions is to resign before they get sacked, which also means they keep their pensions. Those police officers arrested and charged with domestic abuse are a third less likely to be found guilty than other people, with a conviction rate even lower than four per cent. Police know how the investigation procedure and legal system work, and they can use this to their advantage. They can also protect each other, using connections and contacts with the investigators. As Nogah Ofer from the Centre for Women's Justice points out in the documentary, the system is on the side of the abuser.

One way in which abusive behaviour has been perpetuated has been by other staff missing 'red flags' or not taking sufficient action when there are concerns about an officer. According to Bournemouth University's research, of more than 500 proven cases of sexual misconduct by police, each of the officers involved had an average of six disciplinary or allegations on their records, and half had warning markers about their sexual behaviour. Couzens had previously been reported for

indecent exposure and was nicknamed 'the rapist' by colleagues. That these warning signs didn't lead to action which prevented behaviour from escalating indicates that the police force hasn't taken risks to women seriously. Susannah Fish, formerly the Chief Constable of Nottinghamshire Police, says that she worked in a culture which was testosterone-fuelled and macho, and therefore not able to resolve or even recognise the problem.

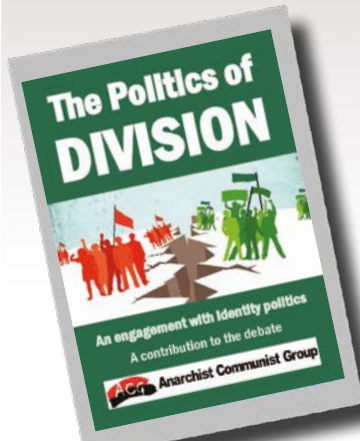
Unfortunately, *Cops On Trial* doesn't spend enough time on the questions of why this culture persists and why some officers use their role to abuse others. Assistant Commissioner Louisa Rolfe, the National Police Chiefs' Council Lead for Domestic Abuse, gives a succinct enough answer by saying that 'a small number of people are attracted to policing because of the power, the control and opportunity it affords them'. Police are there to exercise power and control on behalf of the state, according to the laws which are supposed to keep our unequal, divisive society in order. So, even when police stick to the law and the code of conduct for their role, they are working in a framework which involves coercion. The minority of predatory police officers have used this framework as an opportunity to abuse others, and found that it's enabled them. Tighter vetting, training and disciplinary procedures could weed out some of the predatory officers and prevent some future tragedies repeating what Sarah Everard and other women have suffered. Measures like these will no doubt be recommended by the inquiries which have been commissioned to examine the standards and culture of the Metropolitan Police, where Couzens worked. But reforms can only tweak how the police force runs, they can't change what it is: an institution with built-in opportunities to exert power and control. So it's always going to attract a number of people who want to exploit these opportunities for themselves. The more fundamental issue is what causes some people to act in abusive, manipulative ways, a problem much too wide to be affected by any future changes to how the police operate.

MIKE FOSTER

Credit: Getty

REVIEWS

Misidentity



The Politics of Division. An Engagement with Identity Politics. Anarchist Communist Group. ACG/ Stormy Petrel, 2021. 26pp.

The introduction to this short pamphlet states: 'We want to create a society in which exploitation is abolished and all resources are held in common. We also struggle for a society without a State and in which no group oppresses another: a society without hierarchies. We envisage a society of co-operation, mutual aid, equality and freedom.' This clear expression of the Anarchist Communist Group's aim mirrors very closely the kind of society we seek to see established. We are also in agreement with what ACG have to say about the system we currently live under, capitalism, in which 'only a few own and control the earth's resources' and the vast majority (ie, the working class) 'need to sell their labour power in order to survive', with the explanation that they 'use the term working class to include all those of us who cannot live on the proceeds of their property or capital'.

And the point of this pamphlet is to explain how, if progress is to be made towards establishing that completely new society, the common interest of that vast majority must override the divisions and diversions that are constantly arising within it associated with race, gender, disability or any other type of so-called 'identity politics'. It gives a readable account of how capitalism has, in its development, used those divisions to its advantage and how, even today, 'identity politics sets us against each other' and divides us as a class. It points out how 'cultural diversity' is used to divert attention from the shared working-class issue of wage slavery and insecurity and to divide workers from one another, when, in a different kind of cooperative, materially secure, tolerant society, diversity between different people

or peoples would be a cause for interest and celebration among everyone. The pamphlet sums up the situation well: 'Class is the fundamental division in our society, not because it is more important in terms of affecting people's lives than oppressions such as racism or sexism, but because it is the one thing that unites us into a potential revolutionary movement.'

It follows from this that it is in the interest of the class of wage and salary workers (ie, the vast majority of us) to be as free as possible to spread the idea of a revolutionary change of society, not to be hampered by fear of the kind of censorship that seeks to silence discussion in case it may offend a certain identity group. This is an argument summed up in a section of the pamphlet entitled 'Identity politics kills freedom of expression and suppresses debate', which then however goes on to say that 'a more effective approach is to support the self-organisation of oppressed groups into autonomous groups'. And it is here, in its closing pages, that the pamphlet somewhat loses its way.

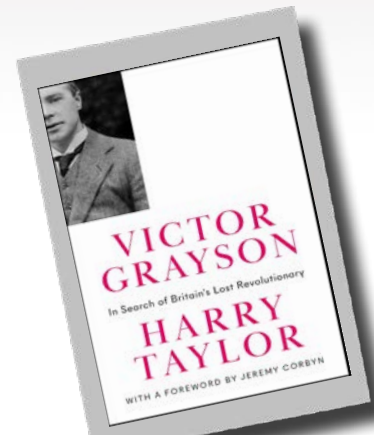
Its attempt to argue that 'autonomous groups' are less of a diversion from the united interests of workers than identity groups, because the latter focus 'only on the oppression of the group', while in the former 'there is no anti-capitalist perspective that may see other workers as the enemy' is far from convincing, drifting as it does into discussion of how these autonomous groups might go about influencing, for example, trade unions or the operation of professions, such as the legal one. A far cry this from the earlier call for 'a completely new society'.

This drift into a focus on relatively minor details of how the capitalist system operates flows, one suspects, from a refusal, endemic among anarchists (even those who share our ambition of a stateless, world society without frontiers, without leaders and led, without money and buying and selling, and based on free access to all goods and services), to contemplate using parliament and the ballot box as democratic revolutionary instruments. The fact is that, as socialists, we cannot reasonably see any other way of achieving the end that both we and many anarcho-communists envisage and we fear that the anarcho-communist rejection of the ballot box marks them out as a tendency which misunderstands an important element of how capitalism works and thus removes credibility from their arguments about how socialism (or anarcho-communism) can be achieved. Our basic point is that the ballot box is a sort of genie that has been let out of the bottle and, though currently used to run and bolster capitalism, once socialist consciousness is widespread, it cannot

be put back in but instead can be the tool for getting rid of capitalism, 'legally' so to speak.

HOWARD MOSS

Labour legend



Victor Grayson. In Search of Britain's Lost Revolutionary. By Harry Taylor. Pluto Press. 2021.

Victor Grayson is still a myth in some left-wing circles, as evidenced by Corbyn writing a foreword for this book. He came to fame when in August 1907 he sensationally won a by-election at the age of 26 while standing as a 'socialist' without the backing of the Labour Party. A member of the ILP, he was a protégé of Robert Blatchford, author of *Britain for the British*, and his paper *The Clarion* which campaigned for Labour candidates to stand explicitly as 'socialists'. This, in opposition to the policy of the ILP's leaders, Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald, of getting working men into parliament through deals with the Liberals.

Grayson went into parliament as a rebel and didn't join the Labour Group. He got himself suspended on a number of occasions. The most famous was in October 1908 when he caused a scandal by insisting in the middle of another debate that parliament discuss the plight of the unemployed as a matter of urgency. The Speaker refused and Grayson was escorted out of the chamber by Black Rod. The Labour Group accepted this, some even voting for his expulsion. Outside he made fiery speeches saying that, as the unemployed couldn't get attention in parliament, they should get it outside, by rioting armed with broken bottles. Naturally, the *Socialist Standard* commented on this, in a 2,700-word front-page editorial in November 1908 entitled 'Revolution: The Problem of the

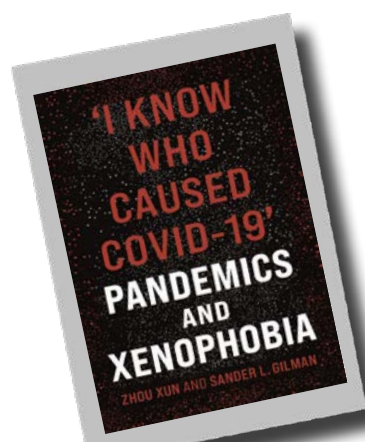
Out of Work', saying that if incidents like this exposed the Labour parliamentary group as anti-working class 'it will be of some satisfaction'. It went on to say, however, that 'Grayson is a man who has no very clear idea of where he stands on questions of economics, who certainly does not understand the Socialist position, and who cannot, therefore, be accepted as in any adequate sense a representative of Socialism.' The article agreed that rioting might work to get more crumbs from the capitalist state but didn't advise it. We weren't the only ones to see him as a bit of a showman and dandy – the March issue had noted him turning up for a debate with a Tory leader 'in immaculate evening dress (which we suppose is typical of his revolutionary views)'. He lost his seat in the January 1910 general election but continued to oppose the strategy of the ILP leadership and in 1911 was instrumental in a number of ILP branches breaking away to join the Social Democratic Party (as the SDF had changed its name to by then) to form the British Socialist Party, which was supposed to unite all those calling themselves 'socialists' in a single party but just turned out to be SDF 3.0.

When the First World War broke out he took a pro-war stance and was sent by the government to Australia and New Zealand to persuade workers there to join in the slaughter. He himself joined the NZ contingent and fought at Passchendaele, so at least put his money where his mouth was. After the war there was some talk of him re-entering politics but in 1920 he mysteriously disappeared and was never heard of again, and so became the subject of various conspiracy theories. Taylor recounts his life from his manual working-class background in Liverpool – he was trained as an engineering worker – to his disappearance in 1920. The explanation he offers for this is that he was blackmailed because of past homosexual behaviour into retiring from politics, changing his name and going to live somewhere in Kent where he must have died in the 1940s or 50s. One conspiracy theory is that this was done to prevent him becoming a radical Labour politician. However, in view of his pro-war stance and the arguments he put forward for it, if he had stayed in politics this was arguably more likely to have been as a Tory, as at one point Taylor hints at. The Socialist Party gets a couple of mentions. A letter (in full) published in the *Brixton and Lambeth Gazette* (2 December 1910) when Grayson was a candidate in Kennington in the general election that month, stating that he was not the socialist candidate. The second is a quote from an article in August 1912 (the footnote mistakenly says September) commenting on a passage in Grayson's book *The Problem of Parliament*. The article quotes the definition he gave there of socialism which confirmed that his 'socialism' was the same elitist state capitalism advocated by the Fabians and the Labour Party.

Socialism, he had written, was 'merely another and better form of government... The ruling of a State or municipality is the highest form of industry and commerce, and must be put in the hands of the most experienced and highly trained men of business who can be discovered... Control by expert officials... that is the ideal before Socialists.' It is rather strange that left-wing Labourites should still see him as a hero. True, he was a firebrand orator who had called himself a 'revolutionary socialist' at one stage of his life, but then so did Mussolini (who also gave up on parliament). Taylor's biography is worth reading, especially for those interested in the period up to WWI. It is unfortunate that at one point he seems to suggest that William Morris was a 'Christian Socialist'.

ALB

They Caused It



**'I Know Who Caused COVID-19':
Pandemics and Xenophobia.**
By Zhou Xun and Sander L. Gilman
Reaktion Books £16.

Many pandemics have been blamed on minority groups. Jews, for instance, were widely held responsible for the Black Death in the fourteenth century. Here Zhou and Gilman look at a number of examples of 'outgroups' (or just 'them') being blamed for Covid or its spread, with xenophobia a common response to public health problems.

China was the source of the coronavirus, and recent responses have been similar to nineteenth-century views of Chinese immigrants bringing plague and other diseases to North America from the 'sick man of Asia'. The source appears to have been a market in Wuhan, a megacity where many rural migrants have congregated, where the health system has struggled to keep up, and which is located in an area where previous diseases have been transmitted from animals to humans. The Chinese government's reaction has included attaching blame to Africans and Muslims, who supposedly previously

brought swine flu and AIDS to China.

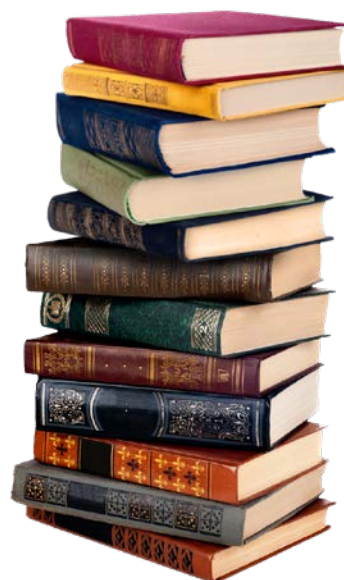
In the US and Israel, the ultra-orthodox Jews, the Haredim, were accused of spreading coronavirus. They often objected to vaccination, the wearing of face masks and the forced closing of synagogues. Their communities in Israel had very high levels of infection and even accused the government, when it tried to enforce measures, of being Nazis. On 6 January, there were Haredim among those who stormed the Capitol, and also anti-semites who wore T-shirts stating 6MWE (for 'Six Million Wasn't Enough')! In the UK, vaccination was sometimes compared to the medical experiments carried out by the Nazis.

Black people in both the US and UK have suffered high levels of infection and morbidity, but the reasons for this are complex. They have poorer health in general than the population as a whole, understandably lack trust in government pronouncements, and were initially reluctant to be vaccinated, though this resistance lessened over time. In the US black people were often unable to get jabbed because vaccination sites were pretty inaccessible, requiring a car to travel to them.

Black Trump supporters were anti-vaxxers, and more generally Trump fans saw themselves as victims of the medical and governmental establishment. Masks were viewed as a sign of weakness, and became for many on the extreme right and other populists a symbol of what was supposedly wrong in the US, with people no longer being able to choose for themselves.

Unlike wars, pandemics do not leave tangible physical reminders behind, but they can result in many different kinds of loss. Setting people against each other is one unfortunate effect.

PB



50 Years Ago

Now they say there's too much electricity

Capitalism is facing another problem linked with the coming of potential abundance, this time in the field of electricity supply.

Nuclear power stations—which at present use the heat of nuclear fission to raise steam to drive the turbines generating electricity — can produce so much electricity that as more and more of them are built the problem is arising of what to

do with the “surplus” produced during the hours of off-peak demand.

According to Keith Richardson, Industrial Editor of the *Sunday Times* in an article “Will they have to give electricity away free” (26 September), this was one of the matters discussed at a recent conference in Geneva on the peaceful uses of atomic energy. Since, apparently, nuclear power stations cannot be easily damped down from time to time in the way coal and oil-fired stations can, two possible solutions were discussed. One was to quite literally give away the ‘surplus’ electricity free during off peak hours; the other was to waste the heat produced during this period

by releasing it into the atmosphere. If capitalism’s past experience is anything to go by, there should be little doubt as to what will happen.

Free electricity, free transport, free goods and services generally—this is the way modern technology points. But all this is impossible under capitalism with its class monopoly of the means of life and its profit motive. Capitalism cannot digest abundance and has to seek ways to prevent and pervert its progress. Only when all the resources of the earth, natural and man-made, are owned in common by all the people of the world can they be used in a rational way – to provide an abundance of goods and services which people can take and use freely as and when they need to.

(Socialist Standard, November 1971)



Socialist Party official logo Cotton Bags—on sale now

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



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

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

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

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

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

World Socialist Movement Online Meetings

NOVEMBER 2021 EVENTS

Sundays at 19.30 (IST)

Weekly WSP (India) meeting

Sunday 7 November 12 noon GMT

Central Branch: Regular first Sunday of the month meeting

Friday 5 November

No Discord Meeting (but see below)

**Saturday 6, Sunday 7, Monday 8, Tuesday 9, and
Wednesday 10 November 7.30pm (19.30 GMT)**

We are holding introductory online meetings to coincide with COP26. We'll be explaining how democratic common ownership will allow us to live sustainably. If you are new to the party, there'll be plenty of time for your questions and views.

You don't need to download anything to attend, just enter <https://meet.jit.si/COP26SPGB> in a browser, then click the blue 'Join meeting' button.

Members and sympathisers, unable to attend COP26 in person, can support these meetings to help the efforts of the comrades who will be in Glasgow and elsewhere handing out leaflets advertising them.

Friday 12 November 19.30 GMT

To be announced.

To join contact the admin at
spbg.discord@worldsocialism.org.

Friday 19 November 19.30 GMT

Did you see the news?

Host: Howard Moss

General current affairs discussion

Sunday 28 November 10am (GMT).

Reading Capital as Crisis Theory

Speaker: Mike Schauerte

Marx never completed a planned book on crisis, but the three volumes of Capital can be read as a theory of crisis that reveals the fundamental contradictions that explode (and are temporarily resolved) in a crisis.

Yorkshire Discussion Group

Party members, sympathisers, readers of this journal, we are pleased to advise the formation of a Yorkshire Discussion Group. If you are living in the Yorkshire area and are interested in the Socialist Party case you are invited to attend our forums which currently alternate on a monthly basis either on Zoom or physical meetings in Leeds. For further information contact: fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk

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

Declaration of Principles

This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e. land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is

the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

We say system change is the only way out. But what about a Green New Deal?

Why doesn't the government adopt and finance a grand plan to deal with climate change: to make and erect more wind turbines, better insulate all homes, replace gas boilers, subsidise electric cars? That would kill two birds with one stone – stimulating the economy and providing jobs as well as combating climate change.

Such a Green 'New Deal' seems simple common sense. Something needs to be done. We know what it is. So why not do it?

Unfortunately that's not the way the present economy works. The capitalist economic system is not geared to producing what is needed, but to what is profitable, and what is profitable depends on market forces beyond the control of governments.

Given capitalism – and none of the politicians proposing a Green New Deal envisage ending capitalism – the first question that arises is: where is the money to come from? Governments have no money of their own. Anything they spend they have to get from taxes or borrowing. As all taxes ultimately fall on profits this places a limit on what governments can spend, at least if they want to avoid provoking an economic crisis, where capitalist corporations don't invest as much since so much of their profits are taxed away.

It is not as if this hasn't happened before. Government spending, whatever it is spent on, cannot stimulate economic activity for any length of time. This was shown in the economic downturn in the 1970s when it led to 'stagflation'. Stagnation continued but with inflation added (at times double digit). A Green New Deal can be expected to end up the same way, with the government forced by economic circumstances to cut back its spending on green projects, just as the Labour governments of the 1970s had to on social spending.

Basically then, given capitalism, a Green New Deal wouldn't work and couldn't work. The only framework in which the projects needed to combat climate change could be carried out in a planned way is where there is production directly for use not profit. This can only happen when productive resources stop being owned and controlled by capitalist corporations and states and have become common property under the democratic social control of everyone in society.

Lifestyle changes?

It's often said that we can help to change things or at least move in the right direction by each of us making changes in our personal lifestyle. We are encouraged for example to make sure we know where the food is grown, how 'sustainable' its production and distribution methods are, and, if possible, to 'buy local'. Would that work?

Millions throughout the world face the need to sell their energies to an employer for a wage month in month out, day in day out, or find themselves without the means to live decently. Some face additional problems such as poverty, homelessness or precarious housing. They cannot afford to change their lifestyle if this is going to

cost them more. Maybe some lifestyle changes, if they could be widely practised, could lead to a change in the method of production or the goods produced and so have some impact. However, so long as production takes place for the market and so long as people need money to buy those things, we will still have the capitalist system and all the problems and contradictions it throws up.

The main contradiction is that we now have the means to produce enough food and all else to sustain the whole world at a decent level several times over and to do so without recklessly polluting the environment or changing the climate, yet under the capitalist system of production for profit this cannot happen. Instead millions go hungry, many more millions live insecure or highly stressed existences and the ecosystem is in imminent danger of collapse. It's time therefore to act collectively to change

the social system and move to a society of free access and voluntary cooperation without money or markets. In this socialist system people will put their natural human capacity for cooperation and collaboration to work and use the resources of the planet to secure a decent life for all its inhabitants.

