

socialist standard

December 2021

Vol.117 No.1408

£1.50

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

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TANG PING

The New Virus
from China?



Also:
Biodiversity
Stamping Out Capitalism
Christians & Anti -Vaxxers



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socialist standard

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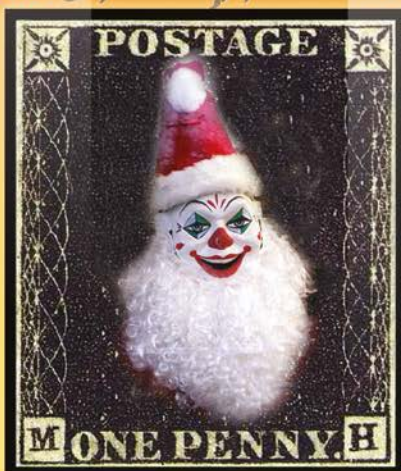
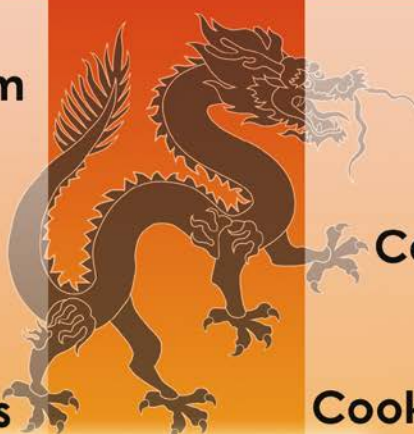
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Introducing the Socialist Party

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

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



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

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

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

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

The trade talks in Glasgow

'A COP26 deal was always going to be a messy business, if world trade talks are anything to go by' commented Larry Elliot, the *Guardian's* economics editor (15 November). It was a shrewd observation as trade was the elephant in the conference room. No one referred to it directly but it was at the back of the delegates' minds.

Global warming has been overwhelmingly caused by the burning of fossil fuels, for transport, heating and generating electricity. The price of electricity is a key cost in manufacturing industry; its price affects all industries in a country, whether producing for the internal market or for export, and so affects its competitiveness. Being uncompetitive is not a situation any state wants to be in as this makes exports more difficult and imports cheaper.

Different countries are in a different position, due to their geography and geology, regarding the cheapest way of generating electricity. None can rely solely on renewable sources. Some have built nuclear power stations. The most used way, however, is still burning a fossil fuel,

either coal or natural gas.

Countries which have an internal supply of coal that can be extracted relatively cheaply use that. Such as China and India. Their objection to 'phasing out' burning coal was motivated by economic considerations; they didn't want the competitiveness of their industries to be undermined by having to switch to some more expensive method of generating electricity.

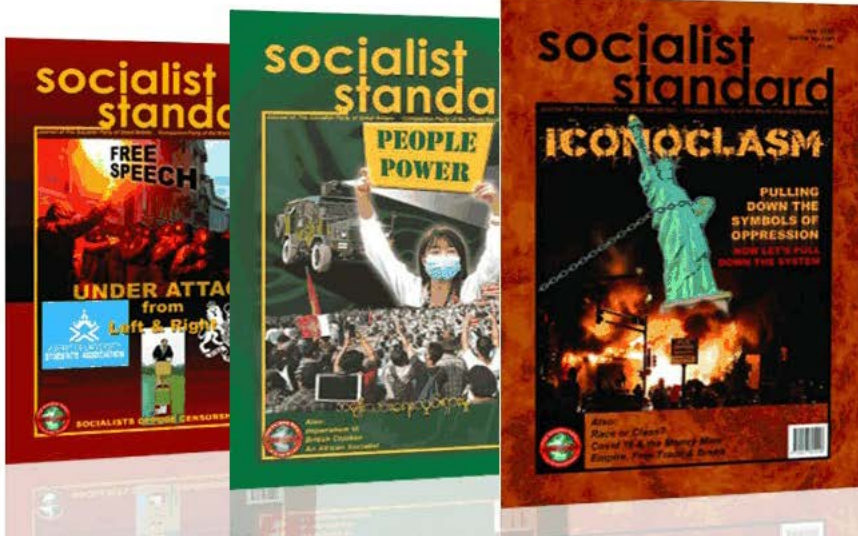
Europe and the US burn natural gas as they have easy access to it, and so have no problem with 'phasing out' coal, especially as this puts China and India at a competitive disadvantage. Throw in the economic interest of countries exporting coal, oil and natural gas and COP meetings are indeed indirect trade talks.

Discussions on the liberalisation of world trade have been going on under the auspices of the WTO for over twenty years now, but have not got anywhere. One reason is that it is not a question of agreeing a text, but of making a commitment under international law with sanctions if you break it. COP deals

are unenforceable and India and China could have signed up to 'phasing out' coal and then not done it. Nobody could have compelled them to comply. The fact that COP meetings are just discussing non-binding commitments is the only reason why a unanimously agreed text called a 'deal' can be reached.

Since there is now a general recognition even amongst those running capitalist states that global overwarming is a problem and is due to burning fossil fuels, something will be done to try to mitigate it, otherwise it will cost states more in the longer term. However, because capitalism is divided into states, each defending the economic interest of their enterprises whether private or state, there will never be an agreement on the world plan that is required to effectively deal with the problem. That will only be possible after the end of capitalism, the aim to which the energies of climate activists would be more usefully directed than putting pressure on 'world leaders' to do something that capitalism doesn't let them do.

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PATHFINDERS

The Theory of Everything



IN ONE lesser-known corner of the BBC website is a section called Ideas, in which is a lovely little 5-minute video featuring theoretical physicist Michio Kaku, on the subject of string theory, a proposed 'theory of everything'. The video represents elementary 'particles' in Pythagorean terms as strings vibrating at different pitches, or musical notes (bbc.in/2YJBXO). It's a nice idea, well presented and accessible. But Kaku also offers a thought-provoking postscript, which is that physics gets simpler the deeper you go.

This rather skates over the awkward detail that string theory only works if space has ten dimensions instead of three. But nonetheless, the basic insight is valid, and not just for sciences.

The same could be said of the world around us. On the surface, it can be baffling, an impenetrable complexity of problems and pressures that seem to contradict each other, with ideas and echo chambers and political speeches swirling and blowing about in all directions to add to the confusion. Small wonder that political activists are tempted to focus on just one small, definable element in all this.

For socialists though, it gets simpler the deeper you go. At lower levels, there are no single issues. Everything is connected. Everything is interdependent. All forces and forms of oppression are interlinked. Drill down, and the more the trace lines converge until you realise that things that seemed to have nothing to do with each other, like for example climate change and violence against women, or big-corporation tax avoidance and what's on the telly tonight, are in fact aspects of the same phenomenon.

At the very deepest level lies a strange contradiction. And it has to do with possession.

To put this in context, we're all familiar with the idea of sharing. Humans are great at sharing. Sharing is fun, it saves individual labour and resources, it's excellent for your mental health, for your

relationships and your social life, and it's been a fantastic collective survival strategy. Anthropologists say that for nine-tenths of the time modern humans have existed – around 300,000 years – communal sharing has been the norm. But in the last fraction of that time something changed. Hoarding arose, also known as private property, because of material scarcity caused by growing populations, or rather, by growing populations outstripping the pace of productive technology. Humans are not devils but we're not angels either. When there's enough, we share. When there isn't, we're driven to hoard, fight and create hierarchies. In other words, scarcity leads to 'bad' behaviours. It led to property societies, and they led to capitalism.

Today technology has more than caught up with material scarcity, and in fact exceeded our wildest dreams. The average person in a developed country has access to information and resources that were unimaginable a few decades ago. The global population is still growing in some areas, but the trend is stabilising or reversing wherever material standards of living have improved. The Food and Agricultural Organisation says there is already enough food to feed everyone in the world, and that's with its current wasteful big-ag methods and bio-crops.

In short, we have the means for material sufficiency, meaning that we can release ourselves from all the 'bad behaviours' imposed on us by scarcity, and do what we always used to do, live communally by sharing the work and the world's resources. In effect, we can make everything free, and get rid of prices, rents, mortgages, bills and wages, and all the problems that go with them.

We can do this, but we haven't yet, and that's the central contradiction. We've come to believe, via subliminal or overt messaging, that private property and its money tokens are really the hallmark of true civilisation, that they are an 'inalienable right', an integral part of our freedom, as natural as breathing.

The fact that a tiny few are allowed to be stupendously rich amid a global ocean of poverty and squalor should be astonishing but is treated as normal and unremarkable. The only thing that excites complaint is that some of them don't pay their taxes. The messaging tells us that the rich 'create wealth', and that they deserve their wealth because, unlike us workers, they worked hard for it. It says that we don't deserve to be equals anyway, we're shiftless and violent and need to be ruled – just look at

all the cop shows on TV!

Where does this messaging come from? From the other side of the class war, the side of the rich. They don't really create wealth – us workers do that – but they do manufacture a relentless and effective self-justifying propaganda which they drip-feed to us via their politicians and their entertainment media.

Somehow, without us even noticing, the idea of living communally and sharing has been reframed as an impossible utopia advocated by idiots which would never work because of something with no scientific basis known as 'human nature'. The vast ages of human communal living are systematically airbrushed out of our collective memory. Capitalism, or something like it, is said to have existed forever. If you want an alternative, treat yourself to the ghastly experiment of soviet-style totalitarianism.

And so, from this central contradiction, emerge the myriad contradictions in which everyone today is enmeshed. We submit to the laws of capitalist markets and prices which make our lives a misery. We despair about climate change while accepting the endless race for profits which is ruining the planet. We suffer constant economic insecurity and mental health problems, and assume it's our own fault. We fight each other in murderous wars on behalf of the rich, and in bitter social wars over race and gender identities. We see everything that humans value, even love and sex, marketed as commodities. We see the hatred, jealousy and rage of the powerless. We see endemic violence against women. We forget our social and hospitable traditions and wallow in nationalist xenophobia and fear of the 'other'.

And all because we permit the private ownership of things that humans collectively need. Once a desperate expedient in the face of scarcity, hoarding has now outlived its time. Yet in a supreme irony, capitalism destroys food and goods in order to artificially maintain scarcity and keep prices high.

Billionaire Warren Buffet once remarked that there is a class war, and that his side, the rich side, are winning it. And they'll go on winning it until we, the vast majority of workers, resolve to end it once and for all. It is in the common interest of humanity and the planet to live cooperatively and share communally. We can do that best by organising peacefully and democratically to abolish the 'right' of anyone to privately hoard what we all need. That, if you like, is the socialist 'theory of everything', and it's as basic as it gets.

PJS

What are the means of production?

Dear Editors

The review of my book *Socialism for Soloists* (October) is — overall — informative and fair. It is correct that the socialism the book defends allows people the freedom to buy and sell stuff and to agree to work for others at a wage.

I don't think it is correct to say that soloists are *libertarians*. Libertarians are wedded to an expansive idea of appropriation and are indifferent to the consequences of property accumulation (whether by 'initial appropriation' or by transactional exchanges). I would rather say that soloists are *liberals* in the John-Stuart-Mill sense: there are limits to what governments may justly do, and people are entitled to be free of unconsented-to restraints except where others would be wronged.

Of course, on my account, 'market socialism' is *not* an oxymoron. Capitalism is a system in which the means of production are privately owned, and those who are not capitalists are faced with the choice of accepting a wage, begging, or starving.

In a socialist society, the means of production are the joint property of everyone, but *other* things may or may not be privately owned. In a liberal socialist society, things other than the means of production may become private property — my bicycle, my penknife, my laptop, for example.

The review characterizes my definition of the means of production as 'peculiar.' I would rather say that it is a definition implicit in the socialist tradition (I attach a paper defending it, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/jopp.12211>). Socialists who object to the very idea of private property need not take care to define what the term means, but (as I argue in the paper) other socialists should.

Bill Edmundson

Reply:

We agree. Terms, especially in this context 'the means of production' need to be carefully defined. We have read your article on the subject (which was also the basis of one of the chapters in your book) and still say that a definition which excludes land and includes banks and online retailers is peculiar.

Land in the broad sense of natural resources is clearly an essential element in production. Production means humans transforming through their work materials that come from or originally came from nature into something they use (or 'wealth'). Neither banking nor selling do this and so can't be included in the category 'means of *production*.' Neither of them create any new wealth.

In your paper you criticise various definitions of the term which you characterise as Marxist. Marx himself, in his published works, was very careful to define the terms he used. In chapter 7 of *Capital* he examined 'the labour process or the production of use-values' and concluded:

'If we examine the whole process from the point of view of its result, the product, it is plain that both the instruments and

the subject of labour, are means of production, and that the labour itself is productive labour.' (The 'subject of labour' being materials that originally came from nature and which humans using instruments fashion into 'use-values'.)

This is why our Declaration of Principles (drawn up in 1904) defines socialism as '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'.

It may seem redundant to refer to both 'means' and 'instruments' of production since instruments are also means of production, but it brings out that it is not only instruments that are to be commonly owned but also the subject of work, ie, natural resources.

This definition applies not just to capitalism but to any human society, including the earliest forms. An instrument of production is anything humans use to transform materials from nature into something they use and so, yes, does include simple tools.

Socialism doesn't mean the common ownership of *all* instruments of production, not of people's hand tools and garden implements (still less of their personal possessions), but only of those instruments that are, and have to be, socially (or, as you put it, severally) operated — large-scale plant and machinery, transport, energy, communications — and which are the means by which present-day society lives. What is to be commonly owned are those means which under capitalism function as 'capital', ie, are used not simply to produce more wealth but to produce more with a view to profit.

Socialism is not so much the common ownership of the socially operated means of production as their non-ownership; they won't belong to anyone but will simply be there to be used. Common ownership is not the same as state ownership since the state is just as much a sectional (and so 'private') owner as a corporation. Common ownership precludes buying and selling as these are transactions between separate owners. In socialism not just the socially operated means of production but also what they are used to produce will be commonly owned; the only question then is how to distribute this, not how to sell it.

Your definition starts at the wrong end by deciding what should be commonly owned and then defining only these as 'means of production', excluding any which you consider should remain privately owned. That your definition still envisages the continuation of a capitalist economy, albeit in a rather unrealistic collectivised form, is shown by your inclusion of banks and online retailing as means of production. These can only be considered as necessary to production where there is production for the market even though they are not necessary for production as such. Also, they could only be state or co-operatively owned, neither of which is common ownership by and in the interest of the whole community. — *Editors*.

COOKING THE BOOKS

Must prices rise?

The Times (22 October) reported Alan Jope, the CEO of Unilever, warning that the price of many household goods would have to go up:

'He highlighted how the cost of palm oil – the Anglo-Dutch company uses a million tonnes a year in its Dove soap and moisturisers – had increased by 82 per cent in two years due to labour shortages in Indonesia. Soya bean oil, used in its Hellmann's mayonnaise, had risen by two thirds due to poor crop production in Brazil.'

To say that in such circumstances sellers are 'forced' to put up their price is misleading. Faced with an increase in the cost of producing their product, a seller cannot simply decide to increase its price to compensate. They could try but, if they misjudged the market, they would end up losing sales and profits. If the market won't take an increase, they have to lump it and take a cut in profit margins.

As the *Times* went on to report, the supermarkets selling Unilever products won't necessarily be able to pass on any price increase to buyers:

'A retail source said that the intensely competitive food retail market meant it was hard for supermarkets to pass on

higher prices, as shoppers might desert them for the likes of Aldi or Lidl.'

In short, when costs go up, it is the law of supply and demand that will bring about any price increase, but only as long as demand is maintained. Businesses do not have a free hand when it comes to fixing prices; it is the market that decides.

There is, however, one circumstance in which prices *must* go up. As long as it is government policy to depreciate the currency, the general price level has to increase. The reason is simple. Prices are expressed in a unit of currency and, if that unit depreciates, then more units will be needed to express a price.

It is government policy, not just in Britain but co-ordinated with the other members of the G7 (USA, Japan, Germany, France, Italy and Canada), that their currencies should depreciate by around 2 percent a year. They don't put it that way but that is what it is. They present it as keeping prices from rising above or falling below this figure.

The justification for this is that a slowly rising price level is the best situation to encourage firms to invest and consumers to spend. Falling prices (which, due to increasing productivity, would otherwise be the case) would mean that firms and people would tend to hold off spending

in the hope of a lower price. This is not always necessarily true as capitalism can, and did until the outbreak of WW2, function with falling as well as rising prices.

But Keynes noted another advantage for employers:

'Keynes expressed, in numerous passages in *The General Theory*, the view that wages were "sticky" in terms of money. He noted, for example, that workers and unions tended to fight tooth-and-nail against any attempts by employers to reduce money wages (the actual sum of money workers receive, as opposed to the real purchasing power of these wages, taking account of changes in the cost of living), even by a little bit, in a way they did not fight for increases in wages every time there was a small rise in the cost of living eroding their "real wages"' (bit.ly/3qBbVbD)

It's not workers that cause rising prices. That's another problem they have to face, forcing them to run fast to try to catch up. Keynes's other policies have been discredited and abandoned but not this one.

So, must prices go up? Yes, in the case of currency depreciation. Not necessarily, in the case of the cost of supplies going up.



World Socialist

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

Summer 2021 edition available to order

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Vol. 2, No. 3 - 40 pages - US Letter size (279 x 216mm)

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LETTERS

We have received the following email from the Anarchist Communist Group on our review of their pamphlet in last month's Socialist Standard.

Dear Editors

We thank you for what is a mostly positive review of our pamphlet, *The Politics of Division*. We are heartened to see that the areas we agree on are many and substantive.

There are some differences, of course, and we are happy to reply to these. Your reviewer takes issue with our support for autonomous groups. As you know, we support working class self-organisation, and our support for autonomous groups is primarily based on two principles. First, these groups come from within the class and are organised on a class struggle basis. Secondly, it cannot be denied that in the past, revolutionary organisations have often been tone deaf to the voices of other oppressed groups within the working class. This is a failing on the part of revolutionary organisations for which we are not prepared to await the outcome of the revolution to address. Our criticism of such organisations attempting to operate without a clear class analysis remains.

Your reviewer also takes issue with our anti-parliamentarism. This must indeed be tangential, since we do not directly address it in the pamphlet. However, it is true that, as anti-parliamentary communists, we do not believe there is a parliamentary road to socialism. In the words of Kropotkin, "The representative system was organised by the bourgeoisie to ensure their domination, and it will disappear with them".

Many in the early Labour Party said capitalism and the laws in place to sustain it could be legislated away once enough working-class parliamentary seats had been won. This didn't work. They were co-opted into the system. We believe that genuine liberation can only come about through the revolutionary self-activity of the working class. Direct action is the political and social intervention of the working class in solving their problems without external mediation. Only this self-organisation, arising out of the social conditions, can end the present social arrangements. This is the social revolution. The current system and its institutions will not facilitate it. Parliament is structurally incapable of representing our interests; it is designed to represent the interests of capital.

For us, this is both a theoretical and operational issue. It is our praxis to continue to encourage and facilitate working class self-activity, and we will work with other anti-authoritarian socialists in furthering this aim whenever interests coincide.

Our Reply:

Since our differences with anarchists have tended to centre on the matter of the use of parliament, it was difficult for our reviewer not to make a connection between the support voiced in your pamphlet for 'autonomous groups', whose activities are distinctly reformist rather than revolutionary, and the rejection by most anarchists of what we see as the most likely path to achieving a liberated society of voluntary association and free

access to all goods and services, i.e. by a class conscious majority voting for it democratically.

You mention the early Labour Party as an example of the failure to achieve socialism through parliament, but the fact is that that was never the aim or intention of those involved in that party. Far from being 'co-opted into the system', they were from the very beginning an integral part of the capitalist system – an alternative team to run it - and even the most militant among them never thought of abolishing that system and replacing it with a moneyless, wageless society of free access. At best they thought to try to make capitalism operate in the interests of workers – an impossibility of course.

As for the role of parliament, we would not dispute that, under capitalism, it is there, as you say, 'to represent the interests of capital', but that does not mean that it could not be used by a class-conscious majority of workers to democratically vote capital out of existence and thereby bring about the social revolution you refer to. This is in fact the only kind of 'direct action' that can bring about the qualitative change in social relations that we all agree is necessary, the only truly 'revolutionary activity of the working class'.

And if not this, what other kind of 'direct action' could bring about that change? A mass insurrection of some kind? We would hope not, since it would be likely to provoke considerable violence – which is capitalism's stock-in-trade – and would be doomed to failure, since governments have a monopoly on the means of violence. But using parliament tackles the problem 'from the inside' so to speak and gives a majority who vote their socialist delegates to parliament an automatic 'legal' right to take over the state machine in the name of the great majority of the population and then to abolish the state itself along with those coercive powers and agencies necessary to the maintenance of class society but superfluous in socialism. Would the capitalist class then attempt some kind of coup d'état? Could they really do this against an organised class-conscious, determined majority committed to establishing socialism once there had been a democratic mandate via the ballot box for the changeover to socialism? We would argue not and we would strongly recommend anarchists and others who share our aim but may be sceptical of our views on parliament to read our short pamphlet on this subject, 'What's Wrong With Using Parliament? The cases for and against the revolutionary use of Parliament', which can be found on our website (<https://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/pamphlet/whats-wrong-with-using-parliament/>). Especially relevant to the matter at issue here is the chapter in that pamphlet entitled 'Anti-Parliamentarian and Anarchist Objections – Editors.

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

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

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

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

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

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NORTHERN IRELAND

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SCOTLAND

Edinburgh branch. Meets 1st Thurs. 7-9pm. The Quaker Hall, Victoria Terrace (above Victoria Street), Edinburgh. Contact: J. Moir. 0131 440 0995. jimmyjmoir73@gmail.com
Branch website: <http://geocities.com/edinburghbranch/>

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

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

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

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

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

WALES

South Wales Branch (Swansea)

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

South Wales Branch (Cardiff)

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

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

Central Branch

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

INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS

LATIN AMERICA

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MATERIAL WORLD

Economic meltdown in Lebanon

LEBANON, a small nation of six million, the host to Palestinian and Syrian refugees, as well as numerous migrant workers, has had an ongoing financial crisis since late 2019. According to the World Bank, Lebanon's economic and financial condition ranks in the top ten, possibly top three, most severe crisis episodes globally since the mid-nineteenth century. The country is one of the most indebted in the world. In the 2016 budget, interest payments accounted for almost half of all government spending.

The Lebanese lira has lost 90 percent of its value against the dollar over the past two years. Political inaction to halt the devaluation of Lebanon's currency has contributed to an ever-growing wave of discontent and desperation. Protests have been driven by anger towards the country's sectarian politicians and the endemic corruption and cronyism. Government officials are perceived to be acting to save the oligarchs (according to the World Inequality Database, in 2020 half of Lebanon's population held less wealth than the top 1 percent). An assortment of religious and political factions have captured the State machine and govern almost entirely in their own interests, through a system of patronage, leaving public services to crumble.

It has become very much harder for the Lebanese to buy basic food and supplies or access public services. The crash of Lebanon's national currency sent food prices soaring. Lebanon has seen a long series of large demonstrations. Everyone is fed up with power cuts caused by fuel shortages with electricity in most places available just an hour or two a day, the sky-high unemployment, the rampant poverty, the missing social safety net, and lack of healthcare. Then there is the cost of living rises because of black-market prices. Food is about five times as expensive as it was in 2019.

Millions of people have been locked out of their savings as the country's banks place the burden of the crisis onto small

depositors who cannot withdraw their wages and pensions. ATMs and bank buildings have been attacked.

Protests have erupted everywhere across Lebanon, with the unrest mounting as the protesters come together, independent of their religious origins and turning away from the sectarianism that politicians have used to divide the population.

Lebanon's economy is in free-fall. According to the UN, 'Almost three-quarters of the population (of Lebanon are) living in poverty'. Almost a quarter of the population was not able to meet their 'dietary needs' by the end of last year. The World Food Programme now provides food assistance to one in four people in the country.

United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Lebanon Najat Rochdi said, 'The situation remains a living nightmare for ordinary people, causing unspeakable suffering and distress for the most vulnerable. Starvation has become a growing reality for thousands of people. Today, we estimate that more than one million Lebanese need relief assistance to cover their basic needs, including food.'

Three quarters of the total population live in poverty according to the *Multidimensional Poverty in Lebanon: Painful Reality and Uncertain Prospects* report by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). An even higher figure of 82 percent lives in multidimensional poverty, which takes into account factors other

than income, such as access to health, education and public utilities.

UNICEF said that 'more than four million people face the prospect of critical water shortages or being completely cut off from safe water supply in the coming days'. The reason for such a water shortage is that there is not enough power to operate Lebanon's pumping stations and wells.

ESCWA last year suggested that the richest 10 percent in Lebanon, who held nearly \$91 billion of wealth at the time, should fund the gap for poverty eradication by making annual contributions of 1 percent of their net wealth.

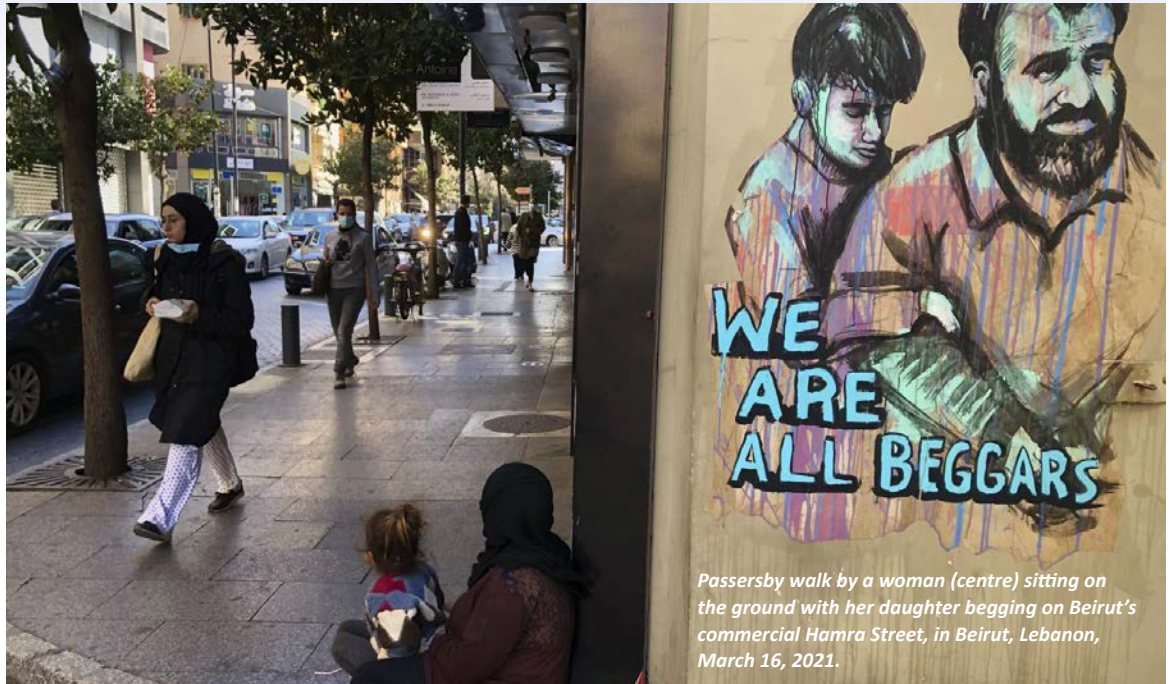
Alas, a forlorn hope. Instead, the export of capital by the wealthy is prevalent. The banks, the politicians and high-level civil servants are accused of facilitating the transfer of colossal amounts abroad.

Lebanon's president Michel Aoun observed that 'The foiling of every plan proposed for financial and economic recovery, or the failure to devise it in the first place, means one thing, which is that the corrupt system that is still controlling the country and the people fears accountability and penalization'.

The president added, 'the people are robbed and are being robbed on a daily basis'.

As if working people all around the world didn't know.

ALJO



Passersby walk by a woman (centre) sitting on the ground with her daughter begging on Beirut's commercial Hamra Street, in Beirut, Lebanon, March 16, 2021.

Credit: (AP Photo)

Stamping Out Capitalism

Banning things in Britain has its antecedents. The Puritans banned Christmas for thirteen years. By the end of the seventeenth century festive parties were back with a swing. The peasants, that's us, have always known how to have a good time. *A Christmas Song*, 1695, lays the scene: 'Now thrice welcome, Christmas, which brings us good cheer, minc'd-pies and plum-porridge, good ale and strong beer; with pig, goose and capon, the best that may be, so well doth the weather and our stomachs agree'. Bad as things may get they're nowhere near as bad as in eighteenth century Scotland: pity the poor inhabitants of Bannshire where it is recorded that they have, 'no pastimes or holidays, except dancing on Christmas and New Year's Day' (*Statistical Account of Scotland*, Sir John Sinclair, 1792).

It's all become a bit of a cliché hasn't it? The encouragement to consumerism that starts earlier every year. There's the accoutrements and 'tranklements' one has to have to provide a 'real' Christmas. Although with the announcement by a major social media player that life in the future will be lived in virtual reality perhaps a lot of Christmas stress and trauma could be removed by everyone just staying in bed with headsets and viewers glued to their faces. Apologies, that sentence was meant to read, a lot of stress and trauma could be removed if capitalism was replaced. For those of a gambling bent there has been the 'will it', 'won't it' spectacle of politicians playing good cop, bad cop as they mess up people's minds with the prospect of cancelling Christmas completely. Or not. When reflecting upon the events of 2021 the lesson that politicians are merely the errand boys/girls of global capitalism will, hopefully, be learnt and absorbed.

A frisson of uncertainty has however been introduced. With the supply chains disrupted and the possibility that the Chinese-made toys requiring a second mortgage to buy are still in a container somewhere on the high seas, the question is: will said commodity find its way onto the vehicle of an overworked haulage driver and then appear at a toy superstore near you? Many who express discontent with the Christmas experience will nevertheless justify their continued surrender to it with the words, 'It's for the kids really' and 'It's tradition, isn't it?'

Traditions. The *Urban Dictionary* has some interesting takes on what a tradition is: 'peer pressure from dead people' and 'reason for doing something for no apparent reason'. Also defined as something that is carried on because people can't be bothered or aren't able to work out for themselves that it might not be a good thing to continue with. How long does it take before a tradition becomes a tradition? We do Christmas because it's culturally ingrained. Certain things have to be done, because, tradition. Should you tip at Christmastide? Plenty of mainstream media articles are giving advice on that.

'Etiquette specialists Debrett have drawn up an official guide to Christmas tipping, suggesting that nannies, au-pairs and cleaners should all receive at least a week's extra wages, while a £5 gift would be appropriate as a thank-you for milk and post deliveries or refuse collectors' (*East Anglian Daily Times*). Tipping of the milkman, postman, dustman, paper delivery boy/girl, coal delivery man was once widespread because these were all regular household visitors and were known personally. Whilst non-East Anglia residents may have missed this particular item, readers of the *Standard* will no doubt be extra generous in their appreciation of the service categories listed by Debrett's. Why no mention of the butler,



one wonders? Does management at all levels still acquire a haul of expensive alcoholic beverages at this time of year from salesmen and company reps? The 'shop floor', if lucky, might be given a bottle of whisky by the management to share amongst themselves (or sherry if the shop floor is mainly female).

'The term "Christmas box" dates back to the 17th century... In Britain, it was a custom for tradesmen to collect "Christmas boxes" of money or presents on the first weekday after Christmas as thanks for good service throughout the year. This custom is linked to an older British tradition where the servants of the wealthy were allowed the next day to visit their families since they would have had to serve their masters on Christmas Day. The employers would give each servant a box to take home containing gifts, bonuses, and sometimes leftover food' (Wikipedia).

In 1843 the first Christmas card for the masses sold at a price of over four pounds in today's money. More affordable cards were produced from 1860 onwards. Rowland Hill's postal services for the masses had begun with the issue of the Penny Black in 1840. In 1830 there were 98 miles of railway tracks in Britain, in 1840 there were 1,498 miles, and in 1860, 10,433 miles of railways. Mail was first moved by railways in 1830 and in 1838 Travelling Post Offices (TPOs) were operating. By the 1870s the cost of postage for a Christmas card (envelope unsealed) was half a penny (pre-decimal).

In 2003, to save Royal Mail ten million pounds a year, TPOs were taken out of service. The last TPO service ran on the night of 9 January 2004.

In 2018 it is estimated that UK sales of single and boxed Christmas cards was £384 million, very nice for that part of the capitalist class investing in the greetings card sector. Up to 150 million Christmas cards are expected to be delivered. One billion seasonal cards are thought to be sold annually in the UK. COP26 neglected among other things to make the decision to ban printed greeting cards. One tree is needed to make three thousand cards, or enough to service the needs of 176 people (GWP Group).

'Stamp collecting! It had started on day one. And then ballooned like some huge... thing, running on strange mad rules. Was there any other field where flaws made things worth more?' (*Making Money*, Terry Pratchett).

Without the postage stamp we would have been bereft of Postman Pat and his black and white cat, or of Cliff Clavin, the hapless mail deliverer and habitué of a Boston tavern in TV's *Cheers*. The adventures of Moist von Lipwig and his efforts to resuscitate the postal services of Discworld's Ankh-Morpork would be denied us too.

It might be debated whether Rowland Hill, the advocate for a cheaper postal service than was in existence in the middle of the nineteenth century, was being completely altruistic in his ultimately successful attempts to persuade the government to allow the population access to a cheaper means of sending mail. Hill made the case that if letters were cheaper to send, people including the poorer classes would send more of them, thus eventually raising profits. The use of adhesive, pre-paid stamps was seized upon by the capital class of various countries, and twenty years after their British debut stamps were being used in ninety countries. In 1840 the Penny Black doubled the number of letters sent.

In 1971 the cost of a Royal Mail first class stamp was 3p and a second class stamp was 2 ½p. Grumbles of a particular generation who accost others in the Post Office queue mumbling 'I remember when you could buy a stamp for sixpence' (old pennies, pre-decimalisation) don't usually complain about the social system that makes them pay for a

postal service in the first place. A little-known law states that comments of this nature must be accompanied by the codicil 'And you could purchase various items for a ridiculously low price too!' Five or ten shillings being the favourite amount quoted. For the majority still it's the cost of living in a capitalist society that enrages, not the system itself. The cost of a first class postage stamp in 2021 is 85 pence. Riddle... why is the working class like postage stamps and railway carriages? Because they're still second class in the society they keep moving every day.

'In socialism posting will be free and rare stamps won't have any value as an asset,' a socialist will tell you. Both observations are decidedly true. In a future socialist society, will the practice of sending greetings cards continue? Will e-cards completely supersede the tree-birthed card? Wouldn't it be much more positive for the environment to reduce the billions of cards currently produced? What would happen to postage stamps in a moneyless society? Would the hobby of philately grow stronger or die out? There's a world of knowledge in postage stamps.

W.H. Auden's poem, 'Night Mail', written to accompany the 1936 documentary film of the same name, describes the myriad types of letters sent and received: 'Written on paper of every hue, The pink, the violet, the white and the blue, The chatty, the catty, the boring, the adoring, The cold and official and the heart's outpouring, Clever, stupid, short and long, The typed and the printed and the spelt all wrong.' Even in this age of instantaneous electronic communication there is still a thrill to receive through the letterbox a missive which is not junk mail or a bill. Auden captured perfectly the delight which accompanied the rattle of the letterbox. 'But shall wake soon and hope for letters, And none will hear the postman's knock Without a quickening of the heart, For who can bear to feel himself forgotten?'

Note to the ruling class: it isn't the Christmas elves who are chopping down the trees, producing cards, designing stamps and running the printing presses, driving trains, delivering post all over the country, and keeping the wheels of capitalism turning.

DC





Usually it's only Christmas, and maybe a week or two in summer, when more fortunate workers get to stay home for a while and put their feet up, though the break from the rat race is always too short to ever get used to.

But then we got the pandemic. Richer capitalist states collectively took a huge hit – the cost equivalent of a world war – by paying their workers to stay at home with furlough schemes. This might look like paternalistic generosity but in reality they didn't have much of a choice. Capitalism has to have an available workforce, even when there's no work, because workers producing wealth is how profits recover after a downturn. That's why there's a welfare system and why, historically, the British capitalist class tried to prevent the emigration of workers even during famines. So it was either a question of continuing to pay wages for nothing and probably bankrupting themselves in the process, or get the state – the executive committee of the capitalist class – to borrow the money and do it for them. From the government's perspective, the enormous furlough bill was certainly more politically survivable than presiding over the wholesale economic and social destruction that would otherwise have occurred, even though it will very likely take generations to pay off the debt.

For workers this has been a true black-swan event, an unprecedented opportunity to stay at home and, basically, find out what it feels like not to be a worker, ie, not be forced to slave away in some dull and shitty job for 40 hours a week just to earn the price of their rent, food and bills.

What was the result? Well of course workers loved it, and now a lot of them don't want to go back to work, or at least

not the same work. When hotels, pubs and restaurants opened up after the lockdowns they found they couldn't get staff, which may be because the hospitality sector is traditionally the least unionised and so generally has the worst pay and conditions. But it's not just hospitality that's suffering. The UK is seeing a record

shortage of workers which economists are struggling to explain with a mixed bag of reasons including a spate of early retirements, Brexit, and people living on savings or starting their own micro-businesses. It's not just the UK either, there's a global labour shortage, estimated by the US government to be around 40 million, which is causing massive supply chain disruptions just as food and energy prices are hitting the roof. Capitalism has rarely looked so close to coming apart at the seams, though there's no doubt it will recover in the fullness of time if workers stand by and let it.

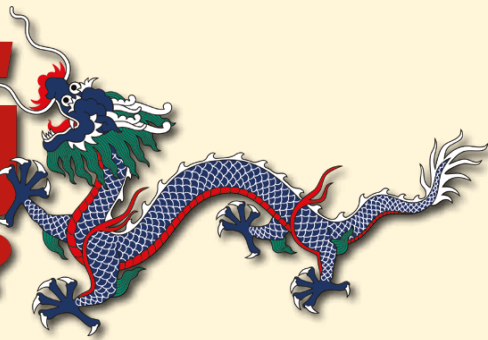
What might not recover though is workers' attitudes to employment after their recent prolonged holiday. For months the western media has been talking in gleeful tones about the phenomenon in China of *tang ping*, or 'lying flat'. Just as the Chinese economy is set to overtake the US to become the most dominant global force, Chinese youth is apparently staging a quiet revolt against the '996' turbo-capitalist culture of working non-stop, from 9am to 9pm, 6 days a week, to get ahead at any price. Instead, young people are proposing the less stressful and more humane option of taking it easy and doing the least amount of work possible to get by, aka 'lying flat' or, as we would call it, being a slacker. Naturally this has alarmed the Chinese 'Communist' Party and is one reason why it is currently cracking down on everything from karaoke to computer games to combat what it sees as a dangerously westernising trend (bloom.bg/3HyhGNd).

What would wipe the *schadenfreude* off the faces of western employers is if *tang ping* inspires workers to start spreading a new global 'lazy virus'. And many post-pandemic workers are just in the mood to do so. Elle Hunt argues in a recent *Guardian* article that people should quit their job and join something called the 'anti-work movement', which questions 'careerist values and the erosion of workers' rights, while celebrating idleness' (bit.ly/32f4NHN). Naturally Bertrand Russell's well-known essay *In praise of idleness* gets a mention, although Hunt seems strangely unaware of the even-better-known *The Right to be Lazy*, by Marx's son-in-law Paul Lafargue. At any rate, the argument is one that's familiar to any socialist: what's the point of flogging your life away solely for the benefit of the rich, when we should all be free to enjoy life and do whatever we want, just as the rich are? Now there is an 'antiwork forum' devoted to discussing the viability or otherwise of such a lifestyle choice in capitalism, as well as the reactions of employers to it (reddit.com/r/antiwork/). The forum has 'gone vertical' in the past year, with subscribers growing by 400 percent to around 900,000. Here you can find a big reading list from the likes of Bob Black, Fredi Perlman and David Graeber, plus little gems like 'The idea of having to earn a living implies that, by default, you don't actually deserve to be alive'. But it also includes opportunistic PC game adverts as well as dubious comments like: 'you shouldn't worry about your career. The world will be completely unliveable within 20 years. Just try and have a good time while



Paul Lafargue

PING INA VIRUS?



you can.' Such millennial fatalism is partly fuelled by climate change anxiety, but is also seen among today's UK students, many of whom are spending their student loans with gay abandon on the assumption that they'll probably never get a job earning more than the minimum £27,295 threshold which triggers loan repayments – which is undoubtedly why the government is proposing to lower the threshold to £23,000. That's right, Rishi, kick the kids when they're down!

On the other hand, the current labour shortages are driving up pay rates, as employers are faced with a seller's market and forced to be a little less Scrooge-like, along with the UK government also raising the minimum wage again, this time by a comparatively whopping 60p to £9.50 an hour. All this ought to be great news for workers but unfortunately in many cases the gain on the swings is being offset by the losses on the roundabouts through the highest rate of inflation in the UK for a decade and in the US for thirty years, leading to a US net decline in wages of 1.2 percent (cnb.cx/3clYFiK).

Even so, employers are currently on the back foot as they try to increase profits with a workforce that stubbornly won't play ball, so we should expect an epidemic of strikes in the next year or so as workers organise to press their collective advantage.

Elle Hunt does not tell us whether she's planning to ditch her job as a journalist, however she does end with 'The key, at this crucial juncture, is for all workers to align as a class of people'. Unfortunately she envisages this emerging class consciousness as serving only to 'keep up the pressure on employers to make work work for us'. This is neither ambitious nor even realistic given that all profit derives from the exploitation of workers' unpaid labour, so capitalist employment can never be made to 'work for us' but only for the bosses. While capitalism exists, workers are always going to be hamsters on a wheel, turning over profits as fast as they can.

So what are we to make of tang ping, anti-work and the mutterings of workers who sense they are in a strong position for once? Well, it's a long way from revolutionary class consciousness. They're not generally talking about getting off the hamster wheels for good, just about turning them a tad more slowly, or insisting on nicer-looking wheels and maybe better quality hamster food. And it may only be temporary. Once capitalism swings back into full operation, employers will return to grinding down workers' pay, undermining class solidarity and stepping up their state and media propaganda against unions and opposition to capitalism. Meanwhile in China, anyone 'lying flat' may well find a tank rolling over them at some point.

But it's all a step in the right direction. Workers need to be doing this, questioning their miserable existence in capitalism and asking what is the point of it all. And the fact that young people are doing just that is evidence for what

socialists have always said, which is that, despite what you might think from the propaganda-wash of the movies and the media and the 'official discourse', capitalism never really wins the argument for capitalism because the everyday experience of it is viscerally hated by workers, even if they don't always recognise or acknowledge the fact and they often have a tendency to blame the wrong things.

Something else we always say, which any aspiring slackers should note, is that work is not the same thing as employment. Employment in capitalism is, largely speaking, a useless waste of our lives in which, if we have any sense, we do as much slacking as we can. Bosses want as much work out of you for as little money as they can get away with paying. It's only logical that you should aim to do the opposite. The class war exists whether you like it or not, and if you're not actively fighting it, you're passively losing it.

But work that you like and choose to do is a very different matter. Humans are not made to be idle. We'd get bored far too quickly. Idleness would be like a prison sentence. Anyone so jaded as to believe that humans hate work should see how eager young children are to help adults by doing whatever little jobs they can. In socialism there would be no lazy attitudes because 'laziness' is a construct of property societies that rely on forced labour and pour judgmental scorn on anyone who resists. And there would be no tang ping either, except at the end of the day when you're lying down for a relaxing snooze after a nice day doing exactly what you wanted.

PADDY SHANNON



Elle Hunt

A Diverse World

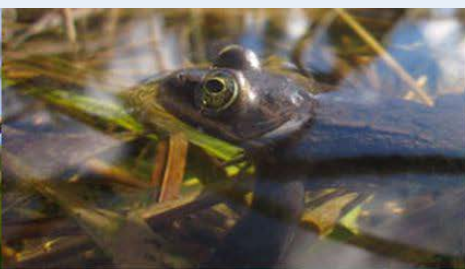
The Big Butterfly Count takes place every year in the UK: volunteers record how many they see in a period of fifteen minutes. The numbers have been going down: an average of nine per count this year, compared to eleven last year and sixteen in 2019. Some species are unable to cope with a warmer climate, and other hazards include habitat loss and the use of pesticides. You may feel that this is a bit of a shame but of no great importance. It is, however, an everyday sign of the global reduction in biodiversity, which has major implications for the future of the planet and of humans.

Elizabeth Kolbert's book *The Sixth Extinction* makes the point that there have been five great extinction events, starting with one 450 million years ago and including the wiping-out of dinosaurs in the Cretaceous period. Something along similar lines is already happening, resulting in a possible sixth extinction. A number of species have become extinct in relatively recent times, or rather been made extinct by human actions. For instance, the last examples of the great auk, a large flightless bird, were killed on an island off Iceland in 1844, after a mass slaughter had resulted in them being extirpated from North America by 1800. They were killed for their meat, for use as fish bait, or so that their feathers could be used for stuffing mattresses. The Chinese paddlefish was officially declared extinct at

the start of last year, the result of over-fishing and dams blocking the route to its spawning grounds.

So there were five catastrophic events over several hundred million years, with seemingly another in progress right before our eyes. But the current one is very different, happening faster than previous ones and caused primarily by the actions of humans. 'Almost half of Britain's natural biodiversity has disappeared over the centuries, with farming and urban spread triggered by the industrial and agricultural revolutions being blamed as major factors for this loss' (*Guardian*, 10 October).

Animal and plant life is of course essential to human



survival and progress, and diversity is crucial, for a number of reasons. Soils need to be protected, nutrients stored, and in general ecosystems maintained. Species depend on each other: crop by-products feed cattle and cattle waste feeds the soil; bees fertilise plants; large carnivores prey on herbivores and so prevent them from grazing more and undermining the environment.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) maintains a Red List of Threatened Species, using categories such as Vulnerable, Endangered and Critically Endangered. According to their website, 'Currently, there are more than 138,300 species on The IUCN Red List, with more than 38,500 species threatened with extinction, including 41% of amphibians, 37% of sharks and rays, 34% of conifers, 33% of reef building corals, 26% of mammals and 14% of birds.'

It is estimated that altogether around a million plant and animal species are at best insecure, around half of these being insects. The causes of all this include the loss of natural habitats, over-exploitation such as over-fishing, climate change, pollution, and the spread of invasive disease and other species. Humans rely on a relatively small number of food crops, and billions rely on just three (maize, rice and wheat); global heating may place these in a precarious position, with greater diversity one way to combat this. The loss of animal pollinators will reduce crop outputs. It is not just food, for many medicinal plants are under threat, and billions rely on them for combatting disease. Snowdrops have been used against headaches, and an alkaloid derived from them is used to treat Alzheimer's. But over-harvesting has led to many snowdrop species, and others, being under threat. Penicillin is one of many medicines derived from natural sources.

Wasps may strike you as a bit of a nuisance, liable to sting you. But in fact they play a major role as pest controllers: they hunt caterpillars, locusts, spiders and flies. More generally, insects pollinate plants, recycle organic material, keep soil healthy, disperse seeds, and are a source of food for many larger creatures. Predators are an essential part of nature, limiting the numbers of animals lower down the food chain. Apex predators, such as wolves, can play an important role in reducing the impact of the animals they prey on, and of those that their own prey consume. Climate change can also have a major impact on biodiversity. Up to sixty percent of coral reefs are dying because of global warming, yet they

support thousands of species and provide both food and medicines to humans.

Many efforts are being made to combat species loss, or at least to discuss how to approach it. In September a big biodiversity meeting was held in Marseille, organised by the IUCN and there will be a UN summit on the same topic next year in Kunming, China, following an online get-together this October.

Many countries have established national parks as one means of protecting wildlife and maintaining biodiversity, but these have not always been straightforward in their effects. In Africa, for instance, many national parks led to the eviction of local people, while in Peru the lives of indigenous people have been transformed in negative ways, such as being forced to use Spanish rather than their native languages and being cut off from their traditional sources of food and medicines. In the words of one Peruvian activist, 'They are oppressed in the name of conservation'.

Many conservation projects have met with some modest success in enabling species to survive, albeit often encountering problems too. Whooping cranes in Canada and the US were down to just twenty-one birds by the mid-1940s, but a captive breeding programme that began in the 1960s has boosted this number to over eight hundred. The Sumatran rhino may have as few as thirty specimens in the wild, and even attempts at captive breeding have proved challenging. In Sicily the Zelkova tree has been subject to much research into how to raise new saplings, but getting them to acclimatise outdoors has so far proved difficult.

What are the implications of all this? The loss of species is not itself a bad thing, as it has been happening for hundreds of millions of years. But the current rate is, to say the least, very concerning. For the fact is that humans and other animals need a diverse planet to live and thrive on, and biodiversity loss is rendering the natural world less supportive of life, less able to feed and cure its population. It is clearly a major problem, of an order of magnitude comparable to global warming, which is itself a contributory factor. There is no simple criterion or goal such as net-zero carbon or being climate-positive, or a target of limiting temperature rise to 1.5 degrees, but the idea of stopping or slowing biodiversity loss is clearly important. We cannot say that a socialist society would be immediately able to solve biodiversity problems,

any more than that it would immediately solve climate change. But a society based on meeting human need and working in harmony with the environment is a far better place for tackling these problems than capitalism, which has been the major contributor to them and is concerned with profit rather than the wellbeing of the planet and its inhabitants.

Resources: *New Internationalist* January-February 2021; tinyurl.com/p77cbkxz; www.iucn.org.

PAUL BENNETT



Credit: Greenpeace.

Logging operations in natural forest in Fentongzhai Nature Reserve, in UNESCO Sichuan Giant Panda Sanctuaries.

Why do some Christians oppose vaccination?

Some pastors call the Covid vaccination the 'mark of the beast', a biblical reference to the apocalypse. A Tennessee pastor who threatens to expel anyone who wears a mask to his church also discourages people from getting the vaccination, which he falsely claims contains aborted foetal tissue.

No wonder that white evangelicals are among the least vaccinated people. And no wonder that many in the vaccinated majority, increasingly angry with their unprotected fellow citizens, conclude that anti-vaccination evangelicals are just tools in the right-wing war on common sense and basic decency.

Yet the roots of vaccination hesitancy are much older and more interesting than that. Indeed, American scepticism of expert knowledge reaches back nearly three centuries, to a rebellion *against* religious authority.

During the first century of English settlement in North America, most colonists listened to university-educated pastors. Whether Congregationalist in Massachusetts or Anglican in Virginia, those pastors based their authority on their knowledge of Latin and Greek as well as of theology. Many dabbled in medicine. They were the experts.

But in the mid-1730s, charismatic preachers without college degrees suddenly drew huge crowds with harrowing tales of a furious God and wayward flocks. Embracing these revivals, the Rev. Jonathan Edwards of Massachusetts delivered one of the most famous sermons in American history, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* (the title pretty much sums it up.)

The revivalists also denounced educated ministers as 'unconverted' impostors whose book learning led people away from real piety. One likened the regular clergy's sermons to 'rat poison'. Distressed by such attacks, Edwards pulled back from the fires he had stoked, calling for 'humility and modesty' in the face of conflicting views.

But the wounds of this religious revolution never healed. Unlike in crowded European countries, where congregants had to coexist, Americans kept spreading apart, moving west after 1800 and forming new churches that reproduced rather than resolved the bitter divisions that had begun back East.

As moderate Protestants began to stress the human capacity for progress with or without God's help, wave after wave of revivals cast fresh doubt on anyone who claimed expert knowledge without divine inspiration.

New forms of fundamentalism emerged in the 1920s in response to Darwinian science and again in the 1970s in reaction to the women's liberation and civil rights movements. While many Americans and Europeans drifted away from

religion, except as a guide to moral conduct or a source of community, religious conservatives sustained the belief in God as an immanent presence in daily life — a power vastly superior to any kind of research or learning.

Some faith communities have embraced vaccinations and other medical breakthroughs, citing God's benevolence and the golden rule. Yet modern evangelicals often see God as more stern than kind, encouraging a sense of epic conflict between the pious and the profane. And over the past few decades, evangelicals' deep-seated distrust of society's experts has merged with the increasingly nihilistic themes of the far right, creating a toxic disdain for science in general and public health in particular.

Covid and anti-vaxxers

Which brings us back to our troubled present. COVID-19 surges again due to vaccination hesitancy and growing hostility to basic safety precautions, while the experts throw

up their hands. How can understanding the long history of anti-expertise help us overcome this deadly impasse?

To start, those of us who are vaccinated must accept that the non-vaccinated aren't just political pawns for religiomanics like Brian Tamaki and Billy TK. Rather, they are bearers of a long and complicated history, one that has often enlivened our culture.

After all, the mid-18th century revivals that tore apart so many communities also helped prepare the colonists to defy the Church of England, and thus the British Empire during the American Revolution. The revivalism of the 19th century often inspired anti-slavery activism.

In non-pandemic times, a healthy scepticism of expertise has made the western hemisphere a place of free-thinkers and rule-breakers.

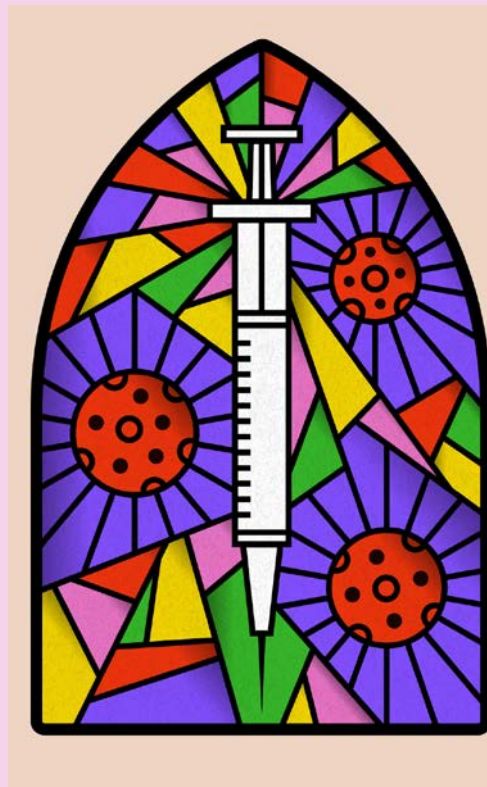
On that note, public health officials should more directly address faith communities, making clear that each church has a right to worship God according to its traditions and to

question science *when people's lives are not in immediate danger*. By taking that vital step across the great cultural divide, the experts can more effectively dispel the wild conspiracy theories swirling around the vaccines. They might even make the case that getting vaccinated is the moral choice, the kind, caring and Christian thing to do.

Many won't listen. But some will, and fewer people will die.

In the end, we can all learn something from the Rev Edwards, who had the wisdom to step back from his longing for spiritual revival and speak instead to the simpler, humbler virtues of coming together in dark times.

BRUCE GREVILLE (New Zealand)



Party News - Glasgow COP26

All the lockdowns of the past couple of years certainly put a dampener on Party activity and turned us all into real armchair socialists for a while, but it didn't stop us making plans, and one of these, for COP26, took shape over several months from June onwards. We knew we couldn't be there for the whole two weeks and we had to make an early decision about what dates to pick, so that we could secure cheap accommodation before all the prices skyrocketed. We thought it better to be there 'en masse' as opposed to in dribs and drabs, so we made bookings for Sunday 7 to Wednesday 11 November.

We also applied for an official pitch via Glasgow council so we could have a proper stall, then designed some leaflets, each with a QR code that people could scan with their smartphone camera to go to a special SPGB landing page on climate change, and liaised over a special issue of the Standard.

Then a national Day of Action was announced for Saturday 6 November, the day before we were due to arrive. Cue further organisation, this time of regional leafleting by other members in London, Manchester, Sheffield, Cardiff, Oxford, Bournemouth, Portsmouth and Frome.

As it turned out, torrential rain in Glasgow on the Day of Action made it nearly impossible for Glasgow members to do much leafleting, and bad weather affected operations in other cities too, but even so, well over 5000 leaflets were distributed overall.

Heavy rain in Glasgow on Monday 8th effectively wrote off most of that day's leafleting, but the weather improved and we fared better on the following two days, distributing around 1,500 leaflets. There were a few desultory marches and rallies, with Extinction Rebellion out in force with their Masque-of-the-Red-Death dancers bringing a creepy Vincent Price vibe to the proceedings. Local businesses cashed in for all they were worth, of course, like the Co-op which rebranded itself with marvellous effrontery as 'Co-op 26'.



So what were the positives? We had a good stall in Royal Exchange Square, courtesy of the council which had only got round to replying days before we were due to go. This was right next to a statue of Wellington on a horse, both of them long-time wearers of traffic cone hats which the council had apparently decided were fine examples of 'Glasgow humour' and which, believe it or not, now feature in official city guide books. We had some well-designed tall banners which made us stand out, so we probably ought to get some more of those. Around ten members were present, and enjoyed a great sense of comradeship that you can only really get by participating in practical activities like this, which is a very good reason for more members to get involved. That pint in the pub afterwards tastes even better when you feel like you've done something to deserve it.

Result-wise, we found that the leaflet called 'Climate on Collision Course' was popular with COP delegates at the



bus stops waiting for the special conference buses. Less predictably, the leaflet entitled simply 'End Capitalism' was well received elsewhere, an indication perhaps of how climate change is affecting people's views of the current social system.

We collected stats to see how many people who had received a leaflet had bothered to scan the QR code to go to our special landing pages on climate change, and found it was around 200, which for a total UK leaflet distribution of around 5,000 was a ratio of one in 25. This was a better result than we expected and one which suggests that the combination of a QR code plus special landing page is the approach we should take with future leafleting events. In fact, given that leafleting is something most members can do without much difficulty, there's a case for making leafleting a bigger part of our general campaigning, perhaps by targeting individual cities one at a time.

PJS



COOKING THE BOOKS

'Sustainable investment'

At COP26 in Glasgow last month Mark Carney, former Governor of the Bank of England and of the Bank of Canada, announced that the UN-sponsored Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero (GFANZ), set up in April, had signed up around 450 financial institutions in 45 countries. With total funds of \$130 trillion, they have pledged to lend or invest only to corporations and for projects that are net carbon zero (matching any CO₂ the activities release into the atmosphere by taking an equivalent amount out).

All the financial institutions involved – banks, asset management companies, pension funds, insurance companies – are profit-seekers. The logic behind the initiative is impeccable. As capitalism is a system driven by the search for profits, private enterprises will not do anything to combat climate change unless there's a profit in it for them.

Banks are in business to generate a profitable income, by sharing, as interest, in the profits made by the businesses or projects they lend money to. They may well set aside money to make loans on net-zero conditions but will only lend if the activity to be financed will bring in a high enough profit. The trouble is that not all projects that will help reduce CO₂ emissions will be profitable enough, or,

in the jargon, will be 'bankable'.

As Xavier Sol, an economist for a coalition of NGOs, has pointed out:

'The approach of turning projects into bankable ones ignores the fact that a majority of the needs for ecological transition will simply not be bankable and offer any return on investment.' (*EU Observer*, 20 October).

Nor does Carney's initiative mean that non-zero projects will no longer be able to find funding. As long as they are profitable, they will find the money – and there are plenty of profit-seeking banks and hedge funds outside GFANZ. As Carney's fellow Canadian, Tariq Fancy, has pointed out:

'As long as it's legal and makes money, the market will find someone to invest in it.' (tinyurl.com/p77cbkxz)

Fancy used to work for Blackrock, the world's largest asset management corporation, as head of their department advising on which investments were and which were not 'ethical' on environmental, social and governance grounds. He became disillusioned and is now a critic of the whole idea. He thinks it's just 'greenwash', done for public relations reasons, and won't work to help bring about net zero carbon.

As he put it in an interview with the *Guardian* (30 March):

'Moving money to green investments doesn't mean polluters will no longer find

backers. The argument is similar to that of divestment, another strategy Fancy says doesn't work. "If you sell your stock in a company that has a high emissions footprint, it doesn't matter. The company still exists, the only difference is that you don't own them. The company is going to keep on going the way they were and there are 20 hedge funds who will buy that stock overnight. The market is the market.'" (tinyurl.com/47t3c8ky)

Asset management companies are even more committed to making a profit than banks because they have a fiduciary duty to their clients to maximise the returns on their money. They are, in Fancy's words, 'for-profit machines'. They invest other people's and institutions' money on the stock exchange and generate a profitable income from the fees they charge their clients. What we are talking about here is stock exchange speculation and gambling. \$57 trillion of Carney's \$130 trillion is in the hands of these companies for this.

Green projects are becoming profitable, so the financial institutions concerned would be investing in them anyway, as will those which have not signed up to GFANZ. Capital always follows profit. That's why Carney's initiative probably won't make much difference either way.

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.

PROPER GANDER

Capturing The Christmas Spirit

CHRISTMAS BEGAN to edge into the shops around August, with the occasionally spotted box of mince pies on the shelves or roll of reindeer-themed wrapping paper by the checkouts. Once Halloween was out of the way, there was nothing to stop retailers going full-throttle with the pre-Crimbo drive for sales, starting with their festive advertising campaigns. Most of the big players launched theirs at the start of November, with online store Very getting in early a full 85 days before 25th December.

There's something of an arms race around Christmas adverts, with each one aiming to be more glitzy or cosy or cute than the others. The most ambitious retailers use their adverts to make themselves seem like an integral part of the season. John Lewis, for example, pitches its campaign as something we're supposed to eagerly look forward to in itself, which pundits are happy to buy into. ITV's *Good Morning Britain* thought a sneak preview of it was worth interrupting a debate about Tory sleaze mid-flow, sparking a flurry of complaints. Advertising campaigns have aimed to make an impact on how we think of Christmas for a long time. The best example is Coca Cola's 1931 campaign across billboards and in magazines, which fixed Father Christmas's coat as being coloured red, whereas before he had a now-forgotten more varied wardrobe.

Many festive adverts don't directly boast about the virtues of whatever's on sale, but instead are little syrupy stories or showy song-and-dance numbers, such as Aldi's condensed version of *A Christmas Carol* with animated fruit and veg and Asda's tightly choreographed ice skating routine. Christmas adverts are meant to invoke a warm yuletide glow, which is then supposed to fire us up to head to whichever shop to buy our gifts and grub. The reasoning behind this strategy is that we don't buy products for the product itself, but instead because

of how the product makes us feel. This approach dates back at least to the work of propagandist Edward Bernays, who in late 1920s America used it to devise an advertising campaign for a brand of 'feminist' cigarettes. Women were encouraged to break the taboo of smoking in public, making an association between ciggies and feelings of independence and empowerment. And ever since, advertisers have been manipulating emotions and aspirations to sell products, and when else would it be more effective to do this than in the run-up to Christmas?



Bernays was a pioneer of the 'woke' advert, as he exploited first-wave feminism to flog commodities, in much the same way as Pepsi's recent campaign insultingly used imagery from the Black Lives Matter protests. This kind of 'woke' advert latches and leeches onto a political issue, cynically using it to attract a target demographic of young socially aware consumers. Advertisers have seen what trends are stirring people up and want to channel some of their energy into purchases. Christmas isn't really the time for getting on a soapbox, though, and so festive adverts are likely to avoid getting too political. Similarly, concerns about CO₂ emissions and wasting resources tend to be put on hold during December's spending spree, and none of this year's crop of ads risked accusations of hypocrisy with an eco-friendly angle. Many were understandably built around the message of looking ahead to better days, with Tesco's one making light of stock shortages and confirming that Father Christmas has been fully vaccinated against Covid. Amazon tried a more serious approach to real life with its mini-movie about a

teenager whose mental health issues are eased when she receives a parcel in the post. Presumably, Amazon chose to present itself as a conduit for wellbeing to push away recent complaints about its hostile stance towards unionisation, its practice of destroying unsold goods and breaches of data processing laws.

The other, more commonly identified kind of 'woke' advert is one which attracts criticism from bitter right-wing trolls on social media because it doesn't only depict white heterosexual people without disabilities. The trolls miss the point,

though, which is that when advertisers emphasise diversity they are doing it to present their product in whatever way will make it most popular, and therefore profitable. These adverts are saying 'Yay! People are different ... but similar enough to buy THIS!' What sales they lose

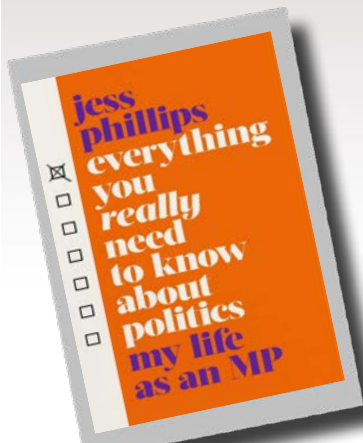
from disgruntled whingers won't matter compared to those they'll gain from people taken in by businesses keen to appear progressive. Of this year's Christmas adverts, John Lewis's met with most online whining because it featured a black family.

Quality time with family and friends is a common theme, being the focus of adverts for Debenhams, Boots and House of Fraser, among others. Of course, there's nothing wrong with enjoying the festive season and its opportunity to spend time with loved ones, especially after the year we've just had. What taints that Christmassy feeling is when it gets twisted round and used to manipulate us, to channel money from our bank accounts to those of the elite. How this is done changes with the times, not only in what attitudes and outlooks are exploited in adverts, but also through the ever-evolving technology which the mass media relies on. TV is now less important to advertisers than social media, which comes with the lucrative advantage of beaming targeted ads straight into the laptops and smartphones we use to do our Christmas shopping.

MIKE FOSTER

REVIEWS

How To Be A Social Worker



Everything You Really Need To Know About Politics: My Life As An MP.
By Jess Phillips. Gallery Books UK.
2021. £16.99

In some ways it's difficult to dislike Jess Phillips. Forthright, sincere, energetic and passionate. Authentic perhaps too, if you can discount a tendency towards attention-seeking.

And this is what you get in this book. It is at times sad, at times funny and nearly always frustrating. Just like its author. How could it be otherwise when you have a politician who dedicates her life to helping other people get their lives back on track without ever seeming to question why their lives might have gone off track in the first place?

If you are homeless, unemployed or have been abused, you would do a lot worse than to have Jess Phillips on your side. Few reading this book about her day-to-day life as Labour MP for Birmingham Yardley could doubt the effort she puts into helping her constituents. Indeed, this is something she revels in as an MP who believes in 'getting things done' and there is a chapter dedicated to this (there's also a chapter on 'People Care About Potholes', as if anyone doubted it).

She links her drive to help people back to her own upbringing and the support she had growing up locally in Birmingham and for initiatives like 'Sure Start' attributed to the Blair Labour government. She says: 'We, the people, can absolutely get the government to adopt the things that we care about, whether these are big broad changes or niche, specific ones' (p.116).

But there is little by way of recognition that this hard work and campaigning is bounded and ring-fenced by the way in which society is organised. You can, say, campaign to double the state pension and the minimum wage until you are blue in the face but the economics of the profit

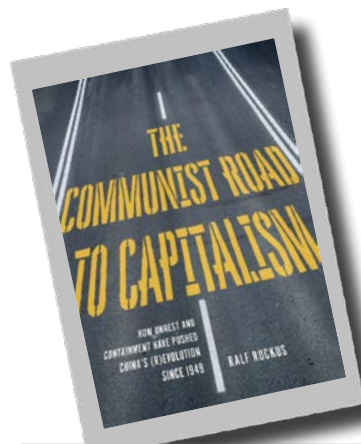
system tells us that these things just ain't going to happen.

Unlike the Corbynistas she derides, Phillips is much more of a practical reformist. But the reality is that practical means small, incremental ('niche') and without fundamental challenge to the way the system works. And even small changes tend to be conceded by governments during periods of economic boom – Labour under Blair being a case in point until the financial crisis and all that came with it shattered their dream, revealing the harsh reality of what the market economy periodically does to purge itself. In doing so, creating unemployment, homelessness, drug addiction and all the other things that got worse when things were only meant to get better.

There are worse jobs than being a social worker, but like many local councillors, that is what Phillips effectively is. A well-paid social worker who gets on telly and social media a lot, trying her damndest to empty the sea of social distress by the proverbial bucketful. Good luck to her perhaps, but don't let it be confused with being a political agent for meaningful change, and you'll find nothing about that here.

DAP

China's never left the capitalist road



The Communist Road to Capitalism. How Unrest and Containment Have Pushed China's (R)evolution since 1949. By Ralf Ruckus, PM Press, 2021. 233pp.

The explicit thesis of this book, expressed in its title, is that post-1949 China was initially a communist (or socialist) society, later shifting to being capitalist, which it is now. This shift, according to the author, began to take place after the death of Mao, from 1978 onwards, and finally led to the firmly established form of

capitalism that China has today under Xi Jinping. Regular readers of the *Socialist Standard* will immediately take issue with this characterisation on the grounds that, while China today is certainly capitalist (state capitalist), it has been ever since the Maoist takeover of the country in 1949 and, though it called itself socialist or communist, it was so in rhetoric alone. All that has changed since then is the way Chinese capitalism has been managed by its rulers and the country's increasing integration into the world capitalist market.

Having said that, there is little in the book's detailed analysis of the social and economic history of China over the last 70 years to argue with. Painstakingly documented and indexed and with an exhaustive bibliography, this 'critical historiography', as the author calls it, chronicles the ups and downs (mainly downs) of the China of this period and the dizzying movements and counter-movements of a state with countless changes of policy and practice in which those ruling it are struggling with one another and with their people for control and supremacy. It also gives us an intimate view of the harsh experience of life for most people in China during the whole of this period. The only trouble is that these people are said to have been living in socialism ('actually existing socialism') in the first part of the period, when it is clear from the author's own account that they were living in a ruthless state-capitalist regime where the privileged few running the system had both wealth and power and the vast majority, both peasants and workers, lived in conditions of poverty and powerlessness, in which they often had cause to fear for their lives and their safety and there was torture, death and suffering for millions. The author himself quotes an estimate that, during the so-called Great Leap Forward (1958-61), anything from 15 to 45 million people died of famine. All this is as far as anything could be from the leaderless democratic society of voluntary work and free access to all goods and services that is socialism.

So why does the author insist that what existed in China in the first 30 years after Mao's revolution was socialism? He does so because he is espousing the view often expressed by those on the left of capitalist politics (and indeed by many who see themselves as Marxist) that socialism can somehow be brought about by a violent revolution in which a minority establishes state control over a country and then rules by some form of central economic plan, even though they then effectively constitute a capitalist ruling class. This ignores the reality (clearly seen and expressed by Marx) that socialism is only possible in a situation of advanced

capitalist development where workers can vote it into existence and then run it collectively and democratically. Just as in Russia in 1917, where workers were not in a position to do that and so all that could develop there was some form of capitalism, so in China too in 1949 it was inevitable that Mao's regime could only develop along similar lines. And it did – and in a brutal and at times particularly horrendous way, as well illustrated throughout this book. It has been especially bad for minorities of various kinds whose treatment is described as 'assimilation, control, surveillance and repression'.

In the book's preface, the author states that his motive for writing it 'is a desire and determination to overcome capitalist exploitation and all forms of oppression, as well as to learn from previous attempts to accomplish this goal (even if they failed)'. This is obviously a laudable aim, even if we would not share his view that what happened in China was any kind of genuine attempt to achieve what we would call socialism. But in the concluding section, entitled 'Getting Over Actually Existing Socialism', he does refer to the need 'to transform and topple capitalism' and to establish 'a classless society without exploitation and oppression'. He heads one paragraph of this section 'destroy national borders' and states that 'abolishing capitalism means abolishing it globally'. So though he insists on calling Maoist rule in China 'socialism', he does seem to be moving in the right direction and as he puts it himself, to be learning 'from the pitfalls of this past experience'.

As for the future of China itself (referred to by its current regime as 'The Harmonious Socialist Society'), the author refers to the regime's 'astonishing ability to deal with social and political unrest, while retaining a certain level of popular support'. However, he seems hopeful, despite increasingly authoritarian rule, enhanced repression and 'the criminalization of open disagreement and discontent' (described by one writer as 'terror capitalism'), that the social unrest this is likely to cause may lead to more enlightened government policies or at least a relaxation of repression. As the author details in the course of this book, such unrest has sometimes had beneficial effects for workers (who now constitute the majority of the Chinese population) and he draws a parallel with 'the late 1980s in Eastern Europe' where 'we have seen other seemingly stable regimes crumble'. What is certain is that 'belt and road' China's increasing integration into world capitalism and the need this generates for the free expression of ideas and invention for economic development to proceed are in the long term incompatible with an anti-democratic, socially repressive, one-party form of government.

HOWARD MOSS

Theatre Review

Ruff And Ready

The Ruff Tuff Cream Puff Estate Agency (Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, October 2021).

The squatting movement has a long history of searching for creative, practical ways to get around capitalism's failure to satisfy needs as basic as housing. One story among many has been turned into an entertaining musical by Cardboard Citizens (a theatre group composed of people who have been homeless), playwright Sarah Woods and Boff Whalley, Chumbawamba's guitarist. *The Ruff Tuff Cream Puff Estate Agency* is set in 1977, when there were an estimated 30,000 people living in squats among 100,000 empty houses in London alone. By this time, the eponymous estate agency had been running for three years, one of several services set up by and for squatters in the city, and the only one which ran as an estate agency, matching vacant buildings to people who needed housing. In an average day, it would be approached by 15 to 20 people made homeless through eviction, poverty or escaping violence who couldn't or wouldn't be supported by mainstream organisations. The police and social services even sent people there occasionally.

The play presents the agency as welcoming and open, and the enthusiasm of its members is warmly realised by an energetic cast. The properties they found or heard about were advertised in their bulletin with descriptions like '36 St Luke's Road. Empty two years. Entry through rear. No roof. Suit astronomer'. The agency's workers would break into the buildings, meaning that those who subsequently moved in weren't committing an offence. The legislation in England and Wales has since changed, though, and squatting in a residential building was made illegal in 2012 (having been against the law in Scotland since 1865). This doesn't mean that squatters in 1970s London were left alone by the authorities, though. The musical features undercover police monitoring the estate agency and officious landlords and council staff, all ridiculed by being played as

deliberate caricatures.

The production could have lasted for longer, to go into more detail over what happened on Freston Road, then in Hammersmith. Supported by the estate agency, a community of 120 squatters were living there, and faced eviction when the Greater London Council planned to redevelop the area. The squatters responded by all adopting the surname of Bramley to support their application to be rehomed together as a family. Then they announced that Freston Road was now independent of the UK, and had become the 'Free and Independent Republic of Frestonia'. The new self-declared country issued its own newspaper and stamps (accepted by the Post Office), ran its own art gallery and theatre and aimed to join both the UN and EEC. During the '80s, Frestonia dropped its aspirations and morphed into an officially-recognised housing co-operative which still runs today.

As the musical depicts it, *The Ruff Tuff Cream Puff Estate Agency* lost momentum when its members had to focus on their own lives rather than their work. Trying to put free access into practice in capitalism would always be an uphill struggle, as it goes against how the economy and property laws operate. Although finding imaginative ways around the system isn't the same as working to replace it, the determination of the agency's staff meant that many people were helped into better situations, at least temporarily. The musical is an enjoyable celebration of them, as well as being an introduction to a lively aspect of working class history.

CLIVE HENDRY



50 Years Ago

Doing the Splits

One notable, but not unusual, feature of the splits over the Common Market is that both the big parties are suffering at the same time. This makes it difficult for either of them to adopt the attitude of pious shock which they affect when only the other side is split. Then they can say that such disputes are evidence of their opponents' irresponsibility. When they themselves are divided on some issue they claim that this goes to show what a lively lot they are, vibrant with debate yet tolerant and united enough to contain the argument and apply it for the benefit of all those voters



Credit: Gettyimages

outside. This is all part of the jolly game of politics.

In this country, it is the Labour Party who have become famous for their splits, very often splashing them into the public eye. This has tended to promote the idea that the Tories are more stable and united but there is some evidence that this is not true. Since the 1929 Labour government, the Labour Party have had only four leaders – Lansbury, Attlee, Gaitskell and now Wilson – and of these Lansbury was never more than a caretaker after the defection of Macdonald. During the same period the Tories have had seven leaders – Baldwin, Chamberlain, Churchill, Eden, Macmillan, Home and Heath – and in almost every case they have changed to the accompaniment of a public dispute.

At the same time, behind those gentlemanly Tory facades, there have been fierce splits over matters of policy. For example, Macmillan was much occupied with persuading his party to move out of the Edwardian (which he was said to personify) and to accept the decline of the British Commonwealth. This seemed to be no more than accepting the obvious and the inevitable, but Macmillan was bitterly fought by a strong section of the Tories headed by Lord Salisbury, who always looked and spoke and thought like an archetypal Tory backwoodsman. For Salisbury, the final blow was the surrender of independence to Cyprus and he resigned to snipe at the Tories for their policies on the old Empire and to mumble about the shocking treatment being handed out to our kith and kin in Rhodesia.

(Socialist Standard, December 1971)

SNIPPETS

Abolish the Rich?

A photo of the disgraced Labour MP Claudia Webbe, with the caption 'Claudia Webbe's plan to beat climate change is as worrying as her conviction,' accompanied Claire Foges column in the *Times* (8 November). According to Foges, 'this year she tweeted a novel idea to solve the climate crisis: 'the rich must be abolished.' We are prepared to believe that Webbe might have had in mind abolishing them because they consumed too much or some other such silly idea. But what's wrong with abolishing the rich or, rather, of abolishing the division of society into the rich and the rest? As a matter of fact, as this can only be done by making productive resources the common property of all the people, it would also create the only framework within which the climate crisis can be tackled with any chance of success. It is more worrying that some people want to keep the rich, and so the society which has led to the climate crisis.

Or just tax them?

Commenting in the *Guardian* (15 November) on the outcome of COP26, George Monbiot wrote:

'Our survival depends on raising the scale of civil disobedience until we build the greatest mass movement in history, mobilising the 25% who can flip the system.'

As he has previously identified capitalism, not just one particular kind of capitalism, as the cause of the climate crisis, we can assume that this is the system he wants to 'flip'. We can agree that this requires 'the greatest mass movement in history' and that if 25 percent want this then we would be more than half way there as most of the rest of the population would soon follow. However, they would need to be clear on what is to replace capitalism (and they'd be better advised to aim to win political control rather than trying to confront the state head on).

Unfortunately Monbiot is very vague on this, having talked merely about a 'wealth tax' and the government spending more money on public amenities. But that wouldn't be an alternative to capitalism, if only because to be taxed the rich would still have to exist and their wealth derives from their ownership and control, in one way or another, of the productive resources on which society depends, the

basis of capitalism. To flip capitalism means establishing a classless society based on the common ownership and democratic control of these resources. Will Monbiot eventually come round to this view or would that be too much of a shock for *Guardian* readers?

Whose government?

Before going in to be sent to prison for contempt of court, the 9 Insulate Britain protestors, who had been alienating people by blocking roads, had a family photo taken with one of them holding a placard saying "Betrayed by My Government" (*Guardian*, 17 November). How naïve can you get? Evidently they think that the government exists to protect the people and that, in failing to do this over climate change, it has betrayed them. But the government exists to protect the interests of the rich owning class, and insulating people's homes is not one of their priorities as it would cost too much. It's *their* government. To call the government 'my government' is to reinforce the myth that governments are there to serve the people. They are not.

A hundred more years?

This year is the centenary of the Royal British Legion. Its press statement on this began: 'For the past 100 years, and for the next, the RBL will always ensure our Veterans get the support they deserve' A hundred more years of wars, no thanks.

World Socialist Movement Online Meetings

DECEMBER 2021 EVENTS

Sundays at 19.30 (IST)

Weekly WSP (India) meeting

Sunday 5 December 12 noon GMT

Central Branch: Regular first Sunday of the month meeting

**Friday 3 December November
19.30 GMT**

Socialists and the Unions

Speaker: Adam Buick

We have always said that workers should join a union. Why do we say this and how do we put it into practice ourselves? What do we do as trade unionists ourselves?

Friday 10 December 19.30 GMT

Alienation

Speaker: Mike Foster

Marx sketched out several ways which capitalism alienates us, or distances us from our work, each other and ourselves. A look at the impact alienation has on society, and on us.

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

Friday 17 December 19.30 GMT

Did you see the news?

General current affairs discussion

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.



Capitalism is the disease

Socialists have long argued that war, poverty and much pestilence are caused by capitalism. 'It has led to the deaths of millions of people, sickened hundreds of millions and dramatically changed the lives of almost every person on the planet' (dailymail.co.uk, 30 October). Indeed, but Matt Ridley's article concerns the origin of Covid-19 rather than the urgent need to establish a post-capitalist world. More than a year after the latest pandemic began, PETA Asia investigators visited live-animal markets in China, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, Laos, and Sri Lanka. Everything is for sale, dead or alive: bats, monkeys, civet cats, and other animals are sold as food or to be used in traditional medicine, in entertainment, or in other ways. 'Carcasses were displayed on blood-streaked countertops, and both live animals and raw flesh were handled without gloves. These markets are cesspools of filth... Most scientists are convinced that the coronavirus originated in a live-animal market in China, where animals of a wide range of species are sold alongside dead animals and produce' (PETAUK, 13 April). Ridley provides a note of caution: '...despite testing markets, farms and no fewer than 80,000 animal samples spanning dozens of species across China, no evidence has emerged for a similar chain of early 'zoonotic' infections — transmitted from animals to humans — in SARS-CoV-2. Hundreds of samples taken from animal carcasses at the market have all tested negative for any trace of the virus', and he concludes 'we can but hope the truth will — one day — come out.' Nearly 5 million deaths due to Covid-19 have been confirmed worldwide. Given that the knowledge and resources exist to reduce the number of epidemics and minimise the possibility of them becoming pandemics, the vast majority of these deaths can be considered premature. The author of *Animal Farm*, George Orwell, commenting on the genesis of this work, stated: 'I saw a little boy, perhaps ten years old, driving a huge carthorse along a narrow path, whipping it whenever it tried to turn. It struck me that if only such animals became aware of their strength we should have no power over them, and that men exploit animals in

much the same way as the rich exploit the proletariat.' This is the truth workers across the world should focus on.

Charity begins at work

The dreadful scenes at Kabul airport in early August would not have looked out of place in the horror film *World War Z*. Now, months after then-President Ashraf Ghani fled, there is a war between the zombies of the Taliban and the zombies of Islamic State. Whoever wins, we lose. 'Afghanistan's Taliban government is pressing for the release of billions of dollars of central bank reserves as the drought-stricken nation faces a cash crunch, mass starvation and a new migration crisis' (reuters.com, 29 October). Every 17 hours a billionaire is created, and every 17 hours 17,000 people

in your dusky holes and not to irritate my tender nerves by exposing your misery. You shall despair as before, but you shall despair unseen, this I require, this I purchase with my subscription of twenty pounds for the infirmity!''' (Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, 1844). Suchchutzpah — the capitalists exploit us and then place themselves before the world as mighty benefactors of humanity when they give back a mere fraction of the wealth generated by our class.

Only zombies need leaders

'Mr Lobanov says the KPRF [Communist Party of the Russian Federation] has been trapped by Kremlin design into a predetermined place within the existing system and, unless it moves more decisively into the streets to stage more convincing forms of peaceful resistance — as happened when millions of Russians protested against election fraud a decade ago — it will lose relevance with Russian voters. In fact, within the KPRF some members have lamented a too-passive reaction by leader Gennady Zyuganov to the results, and are pushing against their leaders' "business as usual" relations with authorities' (ca.news.yahoo.com, 26 October). Zyuganov, KPRF leader since 1993, said in a radio interview with the *Komsomolskaya Pravda* tabloid, that 'the main slogan of communism — "He who does not work shall not eat" — is written in the Apostle Paul's Second Epistle to the Thessalonians found in the *New Testament*. "We need to study the Bible," Zyuganov concluded' (*Moscow Times*, 2 September). 'He who does not work shall not eat.' Compare this biblically-inspired Leninist distortion with the real thing: 'From each according to

George Orwell



die from hunger. World Food Programme executive director David Beasley is calling upon US billionaires to give just 0.36 percent of the increase in their collective wealth since the start of the pandemic to help prevent 42 million people from starving to death. The capitalist class is '...charitable out of self-interest; it gives nothing outright, but regards its gifts as a business matter, and makes a deal with the poor saying: "If I spend this much upon benevolent institutions, I thereby purchase the right not to be troubled any further, and you are bound thereby to stay

his ability, to each according to his needs' (Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha programme*, 1875). Also, the vanguardist Lenin again: 'If socialism can only be realised when the intellectual development of all the people permits it, then we shall not see socialism for at least five hundred years' (from a speech in November 1918 quoted by John Reed in *Ten Days that Shook the World*), compared with early socialist Flora Tristan: 'the emancipation of the working class must be achieved by the working class itself'.