

THE

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SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement



CAPITALIST DIPLOMACY

'Ukraine on the brink'



Also: Hunter-gatherers
Abolish the Wages System
What's in a Word?

Inequality Kills
The rules of capitalism
Where the wealth went



Features

The almost-war in Ukraine..... 10

Hunter-gatherers:
Who are they?
What do they tell us?..... 12

Abolish the Wages
System and 14

What's in a word? 15

Inequality kills..... 16

The rules of capitalism..... 17

Regulars

Editorial 3

Pathfinders 4

Letters 5

Cooking the Books 6

Bird's Eye View 7

Material World 9

Cooking the Books II 18

Proper Gander 19

Reviews 20

50 Years Ago..... 22

Meetings 23

Life & Times 24

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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 cost of living crisis

NOW THAT capitalist society appears to be slowly emerging from the pandemic with its devastating lockdowns and excessive job losses, we are about to be hit by a soaring cost of living crisis. The price of gas on the wholesale market has been rising sharply, which is believed to be caused by a steep rise in demand from countries emerging from the pandemic. As fuel is essential to the manufacture of other commodities, prices of basic items like food will also go up. In the UK the energy price cap, the maximum price suppliers are allowed to charge their customers, is expected to rise substantially in April. At the same time, workers will be facing an increase in National Insurance contributions. Workers on benefits and low incomes may face a choice between eating or keeping warm.

However some groups of workers are not taking this lying down. Academic staff have been on strike for better pay, on top of other issues such as cutbacks to their pension scheme and the casualisation of

the workforce. Workers at the logistics firm Wincanton have gone on strike after rejecting a pay offer of 2 percent. For many workers the latest attack on their living standards is the last straw. Faced with over a decade of declining real wages, worsening working conditions and reduced job security, workers have had enough.

Labour shortages, particularly in the retail, hospitality and construction sectors and also among HGV lorry drivers, have placed many workers in a strong position to press for higher pay rises, although they may still struggle to keep up with the rising cost of everyday items. Employers have even been offering pay increases to retain staff.

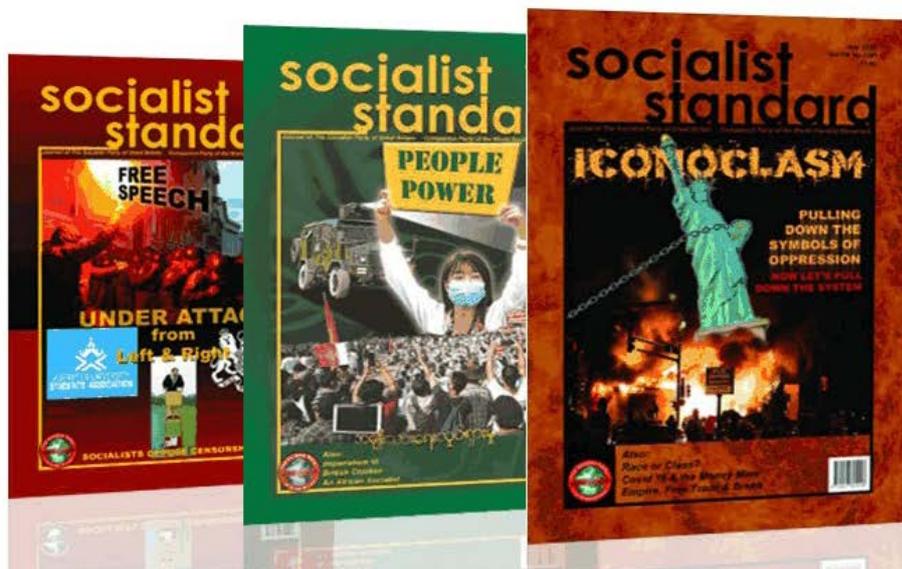
There have been a wide range of proposals to combat this crisis. The Labour Party, supported by some Tory MPs, called for the scrapping of the 5 percent VAT rate on fuel bills. Energy companies and Tory politicians wanted the green levies removed. There were

also calls to abandon the National Insurance rises in April. The government chose to postpone payment of £200 on electricity bills and to cut the Council Tax bills for those in lower band houses.

Of course, none of this addresses the real problem, which is the capitalist system itself. It's an economic system in which the sole reason to produce anything is profit, so that everyday necessities like food and housing are pay-walled and subject to the vagaries of the market place. Profit-driven production is anarchic, making economic crises inevitable. In a class-divided society the majority working class, who depend on a wage or salary, will always bear the brunt of them.

We support workers in making a fight-back against the assault on their living conditions, but we also urge them to go further and organise collectively and democratically to get rid of capitalism and establish a socialist society without markets, money or wages, where production is for human need.

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You are now in Capitalist Economic Time

ON 27 MARCH the clocks once again go forward an hour, in line with the seasonal 'spring forward, fall back' daylight-saving scheme.

But possibly not for much longer. What with Brexit, the pandemic, and Russia and the West playing Dr Strangelove, you may have missed the fact that the European Parliament voted to scrap daylight-saving back in 2019, though recent events have conspired to delay the changeover.

Why are they scrapping it? Because it doesn't make sense anymore. It was first introduced as a war measure in Germany in 1916, to save energy on lighting. Britain quickly followed suit, and many other countries soon afterwards. With modern lighting systems and more efficient energy sources, this reasoning no longer holds up. Many areas of the world, like Africa, east Asia, and most of South America, don't bother with it at all. And there are other concerns. The RAC says that the rate of road accidents increases by 19 percent in the two weeks after clocks-back in October (bit.ly/3oPR9U1), while a 2012 study found a 10 percent increase in heart attack risk after clocks-forward in March (bit.ly/3oPFxQW). But retail businesses like it, as they think it makes people stay out later in the winter so it makes them more profits.

Nothing about time makes much sense. It's hard for computers to work with, because we use minutes and seconds in base 60, and hours in base 24, as inherited from the ancient Babylonians who divided both the year and the circle by the same number, 360. The enterprising French revolutionaries in the 1790s created a decimal metric system for weights, measures and even time. The metric system stuck, but decimal time didn't. It's not hard though. China used a decimal time system for over a thousand years before adopting western time in 1645 (bit.ly/3GQJURG).

UK Prime Minister, party animal and patriot Boris Johnson of course announced that Brexit Britain might refuse to fall into line with Europe if they scrap daylight-saving. But this would put Northern Ireland and Eire in different time zones, no small inconvenience to regular cross-border traffic. People already have to change their watches when crossing from Spain into Portugal, because Spain and indeed France are in the wrong time zone. How come? Because of a weird temporal anomaly known as capitalist politics.

When you look at a world atlas, you

see perfectly straight lines of longitude and latitude. Political entities and physical properties have no bearing on these lines. You might imagine that time too would be immune from such considerations, starting at GMT±0 (aka UTC or 'Zulu time') and proceeding east in hourly increments to the dateline and then in decrements back to zero. You probably picture these zones as being like wide vertical stripes extending from pole to pole, which you only cross when travelling East-West or West-East. But if so, you'd be spectacularly wrong.

Time zones are only regular stripes over international waters. Over land, the clocks melt like a Dalí painting, the zones warping and twisting and contorting as if by some powerful magnetic force, flowing along coastlines, extruding far into neighbouring zones, and even jumping to entirely unrelated zones in little isolated splashes.

If you were to travel due south in a straight line from northern Norway (GMT+1), you would have to set your watch forward an hour to enter Finland (GMT+1). Then an hour again to enter Belarus (GMT+3). Then an hour back for Ukraine and the Black Sea (+2 – although if Russia were to invade as some believe, Ukraine would likely be switched to Russian/Belarus time +3). Still going due south, forward an hour for Turkey (+3) but back again for the Med and North Africa (+2), then forward for Ethiopia down to Tanzania (+3) and finally back again for Malawi and Mozambique (+2). That's a North-South longitudinal line involving three time zones and seven clock changes.

This haphazard zone-bending or jumping is apparent almost everywhere you look on a world map (bit.ly/3oOOyta). The time zone numbers are not always whole integers either. Iran sits at GMT+3 ½, Nepal at GMT+5 ¾. A more awkward and convoluted system could scarcely be imagined, and all to satisfy precious nationalistic sensibilities.

The popular (and free) astronomy app Stellarium has a User Guide which takes a refreshingly high-minded stargazer's view of all this: 'The world is split into political entities called countries. Humans have an unappealing tendency of fighting over the question to which country some territories should be counted. In consequence to much unnecessary and unfriendly discussion we decided to completely drop the petty-minded assignment of political country names to locations in



favour of geographical regions. There is only one known habitable planet, one humankind, and one sky. Stellarium users should overcome borders!' It seems that astronomers and socialists are on the same page. Maybe there's something about staring at distant galaxies that puts this world into its proper perspective.

There's nothing sacred about time zones. They were only introduced in the 19th century to synchronise railway timetables. Theoretically, in socialism, we could abolish them and adopt a Single Common Time. Assuming GMT as the baseline, Australians would simply have to get used to having elevenses at 23.00 hours, just like they have Christmas beach barbecues in summer. But there would be no obvious advantage in doing this, any more than having 100-minute hours or ten months to a year.

Assuming therefore that we retained time zones, we could theoretically make them as straight and regular as a global zebra crossing. But this would be impractical and even downright silly. Can you imagine having to reset your watch when you cross the road to visit a neighbour, because your street happens to cross a notional time zone? No, you'd simply redraw the time line around your town to save such bother, and probably around neighbouring towns and cities too. What would be a reasonable distance to travel before having to reset your watch? In short, how far would you bend time?

That depends on geography. We often say there would be no borders in socialism, aside from natural barriers like rivers and mountain ranges and oceans, because there would be no states and no 'countries' as such. But it's not entirely true. There would indeed be borders, based on time, invisible and yet real in the sense that you'd have dislocate your day to pass them, with what cultural ramifications we can't predict, though of course there'd be no fences, guards or customs. Where exactly we might draw these borders would be a matter of debate, but at least it would be a practical and democratic debate, and a relaxed one at that, not one tainted by any squalid nationalistic, political or colonial interests.

PJS

On the Abolition of Money in Cambodia

Dear Editors

In a recent issue of the *Socialist Standard* Paul Bennett correctly identifies that money was not abolished in Cambodia during the brief regime (1975-1979) of the Communist Party of Kampuchea. Rather, senior members of the CPK suspended currency with the intent to revisit their decision at a later point. The defeat of the Khmer Rouge at the hands of the People's Republic of China precluded any evaluation of their policies; that said, the presumption that currency was abolished remains a stalwart of the historiography of Democratic Kampuchea (as Cambodia was renamed by the CPK). More broadly, Bennett's commentary addresses a fundamental question: What exactly was the economic system established under the Khmer Rouge?

For many scholars, the question is moot. As a self-professed Marxist-Leninist party, the Khmer Rouge were absolutely *communist*; what matters is the supposed variant of 'communism.' However, too often, the terms 'Marxist', 'socialist', 'Maoist', and even 'Stalinist' appear as empty signifiers when assessing the policies and practices of the *Communist* Party of Kampuchea. As such, much of my scholarship documents the 'actually existing' social and structural relations executed—often literally—under the Khmer Rouge. I'm grateful therefore that Bennett calls attention to my recent article on currency in Democratic Kampuchea. By-and-large, we are in agreement; a possible point of divergence, however, pivots on my assertion that the resultant economic order of Democratic Kampuchea resembled more so a hybrid form of state capitalism and nonmarket socialism. You write: 'But there simply cannot be a mixture of state capitalism (or any form of capitalism) and socialism: the former has money, wages, profits, the latter has none of these.' Here, it is helpful to think beyond idealized abstractions of economic systems and consider the historical and geographical material realities of Democratic Kampuchea.

Although some people find the phrase 'mode of production' antiquated, as a concept it effectively underscores the

observation that myriad relations of production can coexist, however uneasily. In the United States, for example, capitalism of a particular sort remains dominant; that does not preclude the co-constitution of localized forms of exchange, for example, the so-called informal economy. So too in Democratic Kampuchea, where senior cadre formulated a spatially variegated economic policy that separated foreign and domestic activities in word but not in practice. To posit Democratic Kampuchea as capitalist *or* socialist presents a false dichotomy, for although capitalism and socialism *in the abstract* are indeed contradictory, such an assertion misses the ambiguities of an economy in violent transformation. And therein lies the crux of my argument. The social relations that comprise productive, distributive, and consumptive activities do not materialize fully formed. And despite rhetoric to the contrary, the revolution that culminated in military victory on April 17, 1975 did not translate into a coherent whole. Whatever was unfolding in Democratic Kampuchea was certainly not a functioning capitalist society; nor was it a socialist society. Perhaps it is best to follow Vilfredo Pareto and conclude that the political economy of Democratic Kampuchea was like a bat, for in it we can readily see both birds and mice.

JAMES A. TYNER

Reply:

You object to our statement that there cannot be a mixture of capitalism and socialism, and point out that within capitalism there can be different relations of production, such as the informal economy. Certainly, capitalism can include workers' co-operatives, but these still have to operate within the overall capitalist set-up, with wages, prices and the need to make a profit.

The question arises, however, whether what existed in 'Democratic' Kampuchea can really be described as some kind of hybrid between state capitalism and non-market socialism. This boils down to: was the domestic economy truly an example of socialism? Our answer is simply that no, it was not. As your original article

notes, the vast majority of Cambodians were subjected to long working hours, high production quotas and insufficient rations, resulting in exhaustion, illness and death. As their productivity increased, the plan was not to increase the food rations they received.

Plainly this was not non-market socialism. If anything, a more apt comparison would be slavery or some kind of forced labour system, where those who perform the back-breaking toil are 'rewarded' with just enough to keep them alive and working away, producing the surplus that the rulers could, in Cambodia's case, export in return for foreign exchange.

The Khmer Rouge takeover indeed 'did not translate into a coherent whole', given the differences between internal and external policies, but there was no connection to socialism. We cannot say what would have happened if they had remained in power for longer than four years, except that they would not have introduced the classless, stateless, moneyless society that you note Marx envisaged. Apart from the fact that such a socialist system will have to be global in scope, Cambodia lacked the essential conditions of being able to produce an effective abundance and having mass support for such a revolutionary change.
— Editors

Sanctioned

I was recently sent on a 'business course' as part of the government 'helping' me back into employment. So after stomaching a week's worth of nauseating bollocks about the virtues of capitalism, I informed the class that 'earning' a right to exist entailed being legally thieved off on a daily basis while making some parasitic cunt rich (not the exact words I used, but the words I wanted to use). For my trouble I was removed from the class and sanctioned. So there you have it. In this country of 'free speech' and 'democracy', it's a sanctionable offence to speak the truth.

JOHN LAKIN, LONDON

Levelling Up

INTRODUCING THE government's Levelling Up White Paper in the House of Commons on 2 February, Michael Gove declared that it 'sets out our detailed strategy to make opportunity more equal and to shift wealth and power decisively towards working people and their families'.

Steve Baker, the Tory MP for 'Singapore-on-Thames', denounced the White Paper as 'socialist' and as a policy 'that would not be out of place in Labour's manifesto' (bit.ly/3Ls1r6f).

Actually, it had already appeared in a Labour Party manifesto, that for the October 1974 general election, which ended:

'We are a democratic socialist party and our objective is to bring about a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of wealth and power in favour of working people and their families.'

So Baker had a sort of point, except it is wrong to describe either Gove's White Paper or the Labour Party as 'socialist'. The Labour Party may stand for political democracy (though it is not organised democratically internally) but it has never been a socialist party. It used to once stand for nationalisation but that was only state capitalism. It

has always talked about standing for redistributing wealth to working people but that's reformism as it assumes the continued existence of the rich, and has never worked for long as the operation of the capitalist economy reverses any moves towards this, geared as it is to continually bring about the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few.

Labour won the October 1974 election but, capitalism being capitalism, they were unable to deliver on that declaration. That was a year after the post-war boom had come to an end and the Labour government's attempt to spend its way out of it led only to stagflation. Far from redistributing wealth in favour of workers the government tried to impose an incomes policy to keep wages down.

What Gove proposes is all smoke and mirrors. Shifting power to working people turns out to be giving local politicians more say in how central government money should be spent in their area, while shifting wealth to working people is not putting any money in their pocket but spending more on infrastructure, education, health and housing in the chosen areas instead of in London and the South East (whose 'working people' are presumably considered to already have enough wealth and power). Anyway,

it's not supposed to happen until 2030, by which time it will be only be remembered as another broken promise.

It is hard to believe that Gove, who had been a well-informed political journalist before becoming an MP, did not deliberately choose to use the phrase 'shift wealth and power to working people and their families'. This would be to rub in the Labour Party's face that the present Tory government had stolen their clothes. Already in an article in the *Daily Telegraph* on 1 January last year Johnson himself had praised the discovery of the AstraZeneca vaccine as an example of a successful collaboration between 'state activism' and 'free market capitalism'. State activism is what the likes of Baker oppose (and mistakenly regard as socialism) but it's traditionally been Labour Party policy.

As, having abandoned state capitalism as their long-term goal, Labour now accepts that the 'commanding heights of the economy' should remain in the hands of private corporations, it too accepts the operation of capitalist market forces. So, it really is 'Labour, Tory, Same Old Story'. No wonder the Labour Party has nothing much else to do than criticise the Prime Minister's personal behaviour.

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Religion – Thy Name Is Superstition

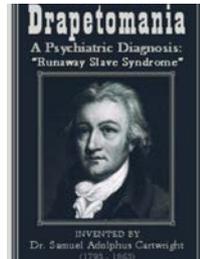


'A Pakistani court has sentenced a Muslim woman to death for committing "blasphemy" by sharing images deemed to be insulting to Islam's Prophet Muhammad and one of his wives, also considered a holy personage by many Muslims. The trial court in the northern Pakistani city of Rawalpindi on Wednesday sentenced Aneeqa Ateeq under the country's strict blasphemy laws, which impose a mandatory death penalty for insulting the Prophet Muhammad' (aljazeera.com, 20 December).

Pakistan is one of thirteen countries, all of a Muslim majority, where blasphemy is punishable by death. The past lies like a nightmare upon the present: 'Two years after Michelle, 15, was kidnapped, sold, forced to convert to Islam and married to a stranger, relatives still ostracise her. "My aunts and uncles have left us, and my two older brothers, till a few months ago, were not even talking to me," said Michelle, talking to IPS over the phone from Faisalabad, in the Punjab province of Pakistan. They believe she has brought dishonour to them. Her captors and even the cleric who officiated the marriage are free despite committing multiple offences, including abduction, trafficking and rape. "There are several laws that can be invoked for tackling offences, such as kidnapping and abductions," lamented Peter Jacob, executive director of the Center for Social Justice (CSJ), a research and advocacy organisation. "But the prosecution has failed to do so"' (ipsnews.net, 19 January). According to one Dr. S. Faizi: 'It is important that Muslims reclaim the Quran, discarding the distorting interpretations by patriarchal men' (countercurrents.org, 18 January). The humanist and feminist author, 59-year-old Taslima Nasrin, who was born in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh, from where she is banished, her books banned and bounty placed on

her head) would likely disagree, having stated: 'The Quran can no longer serve as the basis of our law. A thousand years ago it may have been useful for fending off barbarism. But we live in modern times, the era of science and technology. The Quran has become superfluous. It stands in the way of progress and the way of women's emancipation' (Index, September/October 1994).

Bad science



Believe it or not, religion was humans' first attempt at science. We could not explain the forces of nature, the rising and setting of the Sun, phases of the moon, etc., and ascribed them to the supernatural. Viewed through the lens of the materialist conception of history, it can be seen as a necessary adjunct to our development. Yet religion has long served the interests of the minority master class. Science too. Science itself has become bourgeois and is dependent upon capitalism for its operation and expansion. In 1850s America a Dr Cartwright identified a condition, drapetomania, that caused black slaves to flee plantations. Russian psychiatrists famously aided Stalin by diagnosing dissidents as insane. Contemporary examples include the sociobiology of E.O. Wilson and Steven Pinker's evolutionary psychology. An article titled 'Capitalists Only "Trust the Science" When It Suits Their Agenda' (leftvoice, 21 January) explores this theme further.

'Even when 'good' research is done, the products of that research still exist in a social milieu: not all research or results see the light of day in publication and distribution. That information must still navigate a web of entities with vested interests in the 'outcomes' of science. Often, when a study uncovers information that certain entities (the funding agency, the university, the government, corporations in a particular industry) don't like, they bury or discredit the study. For example, Katherine M. Flegal has been the victim of a 15-year-long campaign to discredit her research demonstrating that being "overweight" is not actually a risk factor for health. Some resistance to her work comes from the weight loss and health insurance industries, but some of

it also comes from another classic abuser of "science": Big Tobacco. When analyzing the data from another study, Flegal found that some of the perceived risks of obesity were actually due to smoking, which had not been accounted for in the original study'.

Reflecting last year on how her 2005 and 2013 papers were received, Dr. Flegal concluded: 'Scientific findings should be evaluated on their merits, not on the basis of whether they fit a desired narrative'. Indeed.

Good science

'In an admirable, longstanding tradition, heedful Americans are taking multiple, pragmatic, science-based precautions against a virus that [...] has killed 900,000 people, [...] and is still infecting almost 700,000 people a day. LOL. Just kidding. In moronic fact, [...] crackpots still roam the land, spewing their crazy. [...] Add to their ranks [...] Christopher Key, who as bonkers head of the Vaccine Police [...] now advocates [...] drinking urine to ward off COVID. He cites [...] "antidotal" evidence, to support urine therapy; he himself has been drinking his own urine for 23 years, evidently proving, "God's given us everything we need," except perhaps a working brain.' (commondreams.org, 12 January).

When you doubt 'our' leaders or science alone can save us, and begin to question the 'alternative facts,' distortions, lies and misinformation of mainstream media, conspiracy cranks and fundamentalist fakirs, consider instead scientific socialism which provides an analysis of the capitalist system that explains how wealth comes to be produced and distributed and who gets what from the pool of social production. It is able to place this in an historical context showing the development of its productive relationships from past systems. It is also able to define the economic limitations of political action within the system and reliably predict the results of various political policies. Another world is possible, one where scientific progress comes hand in hand with societal progress, which is in turn driven by personal betterment of every member of that society. Let's make it so.



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 & West London branch. Meets last Saturday in month, 2.00pm. Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN. Contact: 020 7622 3811. 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.krb@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

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

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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, 11am (UK time) on Discord.

INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS

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Sri Lanka: capitalism unable to provide economic security

ACROSS THE world, workers are enduring the consequences of capitalism's inability to deal with its many problems. Sri Lanka, the island state of 21 million people, is one more country to add to the long list where our fellow workers are facing deep insecurity in the coming months.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa declared Sri Lanka to be in an economic emergency but has done little to ease people's plight. Sri Lankan workers have to bear the brunt of the economic crisis by themselves due to the lack of effective social protection. It is working people who make the Sri Lankan economy. 2020 figures show the garment workers brought in US\$5 billion and tea plantation workers US\$1.4 billion. Yet, most lead precarious lives forced to shoulder the effects of budget cuts on education, health care and public transport.

Sri Lanka is entering a humanitarian crisis caused in part by the impact of Covid. The World Bank estimates 500,000 people have fallen below the poverty line since the beginning of the pandemic. Within the tourism sector, more than 200,000 people lost their livelihoods. Once bringing US\$4 billion to the country, Sri Lanka's tourism industry is struggling to stay afloat. By October last year, it brought in just US\$82 million. From close to 2 million tourists in 2018, the island nation received just 160,000 in 2021.

High government spending and tax cuts eroding state revenues, vast debt repayments to China and low foreign exchange reserves are also important factors.

The government printing money to help pay off domestic loans and foreign bonds has created overall inflation of 12 percent in December and those escalating prices have left many basic necessities unaffordable. Sri Lanka's food prices rose by a record 22.1 percent in December. Supermarkets have for months been rationing milk powder, sugar, lentils and other essentials as banks ran out of US dollars to pay for imports.

A top agricultural official warned of impending famine and requested the government to implement an orderly food rationing scheme to avoid such a scenario. He was fired within hours of making the appeal.

The food crisis was worsened by the government's April 2021 ban on agrochemical imports with an intention of switching agriculture to being organic. The policy was reversed in November after



Credit: © AFP File Photo

crop yield falls and protests by farmers.

Sri Lanka has a huge foreign debt burden. It owes China more than \$5bn and last year took an additional \$1bn loan from Beijing to alleviate its financial crisis, which is being paid in instalments. Struggling to pay back Chinese loans, Sri Lanka has handed over the majority share of the Hambantota port to a Chinese state-owned company on a 99-year lease.

In 2022, Sri Lanka will be required to repay an estimated \$7.3bn in domestic and foreign loans. However, as of November, available foreign currency reserves were just \$1.6bn.

The former central bank deputy governor W A Wijewardena warned the country was at substantial risk of defaulting on its repayments, which would have catastrophic economic consequences. In one article (tinyurl.com/2dsf9rzv), he attributes a reason for the crisis to the acceptance of the now fashionable but fallacious economic idea called the Modern Monetary Theory (or MMT) that argues that there was nothing wrong in governments running budget deficits to create employment, output, and prosperity. Assured by the advocates of MMT that this does not affect inflation or exchange rates, the Sri Lankan government allowed various measures of the money stock to rise excessively, Wijewardena says:

'Credit to Government from the Central Bank and commercial banks – a method of inflationary financing – increased by Rs. 3.7 trillion or by 159% during end-2019 to end-November 2021. Correspondingly,

money supply increased by Rs. 3 trillion or nearly 39%.'

The outcome of the increase in the money stock was an undue increase in the demand for imports, prompting the government to impose import controls even on raw materials. It affected the production of goods and services. Sri Lankans are now going hungry.

Sri Lanka hopes to settle their past oil debts with Iran by paying them in tea, sending them \$5m worth of tea every month in order to save much-needed currency.

The Sri Lankan government has introduced temporary measures, such as credit lines to import foods, medicines and fuel from India, as well as currency swaps with India, China and Bangladesh. However, these loans have to be paid back at high-interest rates, and simply add to Sri Lanka's debt burden.

Sri Lanka's history has shown that capitalism has not provided economic security. In response to the high prices and excessive money-printing, workers are going on strike demanding higher wages to compensate for the spiralling inflation, as in the health service whose strike the government has declared illegal (tinyurl.com/55tw2ayh). Several powerful trade unions in the country, from postal workers to railway workers, from teachers to doctors, have started demanding higher pay and are threatening to launch massive strikes unless their grievances are met.

ALJO

The almost-war in Ukraine

THEY TOLD us that 16 February would be the day that Russia was going to invade Ukraine. But diplomatic discussions continued. What had happened? Did Putin really intend to go to war? Or were what appeared to be war preparations merely a means to exert pressure and win concessions from the West?

Background

Developments within Ukraine

Ukraine has been in the grip of civil war since the coups of 2014 — the Ukrainian-nationalist coup in Kiev and the west and the counter-coup in the east.

The split between western and eastern Ukraine goes back to the 19th century, when Ukraine was divided between the Austro-Hungarian and tsarist empires. Eastern Ukraine, where the country's industry is concentrated, is mainly Russian-speaking and depends on economic ties with Russia, while western Ukraine is oriented toward Europe. Yanukovich, who was president in 2010—2014, tried to hold Ukraine together by developing closer economic relations with both the EU and Russia, but the EU insisted that he choose — he could not do both. As a representative of the east Ukrainian capital and its Party of Regions, he could not afford to break ties with Russia. This placed him at loggerheads with west Ukrainians, who aspired to join an idealized 'Europe', and in 2014 he was overthrown.

The 'Maidan' — the movement that overthrew Yanukovich — began with peaceful mass protests against corruption, but developed into a violent struggle between riot police and extreme Ukrainian nationalists. The regime that emerged, with the support and guidance of Western politicians and propagandists, was semi-fascist in spirit despite a thin democratic veneer (for a fuller analysis see 'Ukraine: popular uprising or fascist coup?' tinyurl.com/mr3m689x). Its hostility to ethnic Russians and citizens of mixed ethnic identity and a massacre of Russian activists in Odessa struck terror in the hearts of easterners, who responded with the 'anti-Maidan' — an uprising against the Maidan.

The anti-Maidan also began with peaceful demonstrations and even

shared certain themes with the Maidan, such as a concern with corruption. But it too was taken over by militaristic nationalists — Russian nationalists in this case. The process went furthest in the two easternmost provinces, where there emerged breakaway mini-states called the Donetsk People's Republic and Lugansk People's Republic, supported and manipulated by the Russian government and Russian nationalist organizations.

The new Ukrainian government conducted an 'anti-terrorist operation' to crush the DPR and LPR and reincorporate their territory. The civil war dragged on spasmodically, without decisive results. Two million people fled the war zone and became refugees.

Whole communities in parts of Ukraine resisted the draft, unwilling to sacrifice their sons in a cause of no concern to them. Immunity to nationalist propaganda is especially characteristic of people with mixed ethnic identities, such as Ukrainians long resident in Russia and children of Russian-Ukrainian marriages. Most people in eastern Ukraine see no contradiction in identifying simultaneously as Russian and Ukrainian (in many places they speak a mixture of the two languages called Surzhyk). When interviewed, residents of the war zone are inclined to blame both the Ukrainian and the Russian government.

Russia and its 'near abroad'

A key security requirement for Soviet leaders was that the USSR be surrounded by a belt of states that were either allies or at least 'friendly neutrals' (like post-war Finland). 'Friendship' entailed willingness to develop economic and cultural ties, consult regularly with the Kremlin and refrain from offensive propaganda campaigns. Above all, it meant not joining hostile military alliances like NATO.

This attitude was inherited by leaders of post-Soviet Russia, except that now the belt of friendly neighbours had to consist mainly of other post-Soviet states. Due to their shared Soviet and tsarist heritage, these states are felt to be less 'foreign' than countries beyond the old borders. The two zones came to be referred to as 'the near abroad' and 'the far abroad'.

It is no longer regarded as essential that *all* former Soviet republics belong to this 'friendly neighbourhood'. It is now accepted as a fact of life that the Baltic states are going to remain 'unfriendly'. However, such tolerance does not extend to the three large inner states of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine. Belarus and Kazakhstan remain 'friendly' but since 2014 Ukraine has not behaved in a 'friendly' manner.

This has an immediate impact on Moscow's approach to border issues. When the Soviet Union broke up in 1991, the internal administrative borders between its 'union republics' suddenly turned into interstate borders, even though they did not closely reflect the pattern of ethnic settlement. The international community nonetheless soon began to treat them as no less inviolable than any other interstate borders.

The Kremlin too accepted these borders, but not unconditionally. Borders with 'friendly' neighbours were accepted, however anomalous they might seem, because border issues were not felt to be important enough to justify spoiling good relations by raising them. Thus, Russia has never objected to the inclusion in Kazakhstan of large areas in the north and east with predominantly Russian-speaking populations, and has lent no support to attempts at secession by Russian nationalists in those areas. Nor did the Kremlin contest Russia's border with Ukraine until 2014, when the overthrow of Yanukovich was quickly followed by the annexation of Crimea, thereby reversing Khrushchev's transfer of the peninsula from Soviet Russia to Soviet Ukraine. For the Kremlin, the anti-Russian stance of the new government in Kiev also justified support of the secessionist 'people's republics' in eastern Ukraine.

NATO expansion

The eastward expansion of NATO, especially when it extends to the 'near abroad' and right up to Russia's borders, is a bitter grievance of Russia's power elite. That is because it violates the security requirement of a 'friendly neighbourhood' deeply embedded in their psyche. It is also because it violates the verbal promises made by Western politicians to Gorbachev that if he allowed Germany to unite and united Germany to remain in NATO then NATO would not expand 'an inch to the east'. These promises were 'forgotten' under pressure from American arms manufacturers, whose sales were flagging due to improved

relations with Russia and who sought new markets in Eastern Europe. (For a detailed account see Andrew Cockburn, *The Spoils of War: Power, Profit and the American War Machine*, Verso 2021, Chapter 6.)

Hence the feeling of Russian leaders that Russia – and they personally-- have been deceived, swindled and humiliated. It is surely understandable that there should eventually come a time when as a matter of self-respect they say ‘enough is enough’ and ‘take a firm stand’ in defence of core state interests as they perceive them.

Russia first ‘took a firm stand’ against NATO expansion when it invaded Georgia in 2008, partly in order to prevent Georgia from joining NATO. As Georgia has still not joined NATO, that war – together with Russia’s subsequent recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia — may have achieved its purpose, although Georgia may have remained outside NATO even without Russian intervention. The invasion of Georgia provided a precedent for the confrontation with Ukraine when it adopted the goal of joining NATO.

The recent crisis

Thanks in large part to Western arms supplies, Ukrainian forces in the east grew strong enough to make it seem likely that they would succeed in breaking the stalemate and penetrate core areas of the DPR and LPR. Residents of these areas feared what might then happen to them, especially as the forces facing them contained Nazi formations like the Azov Battalion. Russian commentators too envisioned a scenario like the massacre of Moslems at Srebrenica during the Bosnian war, in which case Russia would be morally obliged to intervene.

Russian spokesmen often promised that Russia would not be the first to violate the status quo. However, a major Ukrainian offensive against the DPR and LPR would be regarded as a violation of the status quo and Russia would respond forcefully to any such ‘provocation’. Kiev took the view that it has a perfect right to move against secessionists on its own territory. So each side would be able to blame the other for starting a war.

However, there was no guarantee that hostilities would be confined to eastern Ukraine. The concentration of Russian forces in southern Belarus, close to the border with Ukraine and just 120 kilometres from Kiev, prefigured a possible blitzkrieg to install a ‘friendly’ government.

Many signs appeared in recent weeks of a deep division within Russia’s power elite over the expediency of invading Ukraine. Two senior army officers, one retired from the defence ministry and the other from the General Staff, publicly warned against the prospect of protracted occupation of a hostile population. The main threats to Russia, they declared, are internal ones

like corruption and demographic decline. Prominent civilian experts likewise argued – as Andrei Kortunov, director of the Russian International Affairs Council, was quoted on St. Petersburg Online (fontanka.ru) – that ‘any analysis shows that war is to Russia’s disadvantage’.

The prospect of cancelation of Nord Stream, the pipeline through the Baltic Sea to bring Russian natural gas to Germany, is likely to have pulled the huge gas corporation Gazprom into the anti-war camp.

The main advocates of war seem to have been officials of the security services, more concerned with the threat to the regime posed by Colour Revolutions than with broader national interests.

Even the most ‘democratic’ governments, having decided on war, suppress public expression of anti-war opinion. So the fact that it was possible during the recent crisis in Russia openly to oppose any resort to war shows that Putin was not committed to military action. He may have been keeping his options open until the moment when a decision had to be made. (The high level of mobilization of Russian troops could not be sustained for long: they had to be set in motion fairly soon or else demobilized.) Or he may have never intended to go to war at all, resolved in advance to content himself with whatever gains the crisis might yield.

Russian gains

The Ukrainian crisis was accompanied by intensive diplomacy, involving mainly Russia, the United States and major European member states of NATO (Britain, France, Germany). Much of this diplomacy remains secret. But clearly NATO has agreed to take *some* account of Russian security concerns and revive the stalled process of European arms control. On January 12, after a hiatus of two and a half years, the NATO—Russia Council reconvened in Brussels.

Western governments have affirmed the continuing validity of the NATO—Russia Founding Act of 1997 and the Minsk Protocols of 2014 and 2015. Kiev and its unconditional supporters inside NATO

have been lobbying hard to consign these agreements to oblivion, thereby releasing Kiev from such unpleasant obligations as granting a special status to the areas controlled by the People’s Republics.

Russia has obtained no guarantee against Ukraine joining NATO, but it is conceivable that France or Germany, which take pride in maintaining a certain autonomy from the US, secretly promised to block Ukraine’s admission – requiring, as it does, a consensus of existing members.

The Russian parliament (State Duma) is now asking Putin to recognize the breakaway Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics as independent states, maybe as a step towards their subsequent annexation to Russia (as happened to Crimea).

Our attitude

Socialists need feel no great temptation to take sides in disputes between Russia and Ukraine. In both countries wealth is concentrated in the hands of wealthy capitalists known as ‘oligarchs’ who own the mass media and control political parties. (One difference is that Russia under Putin, unlike Ukraine, has acquired a state strong enough to limit the rivalry and political power of the oligarchs.) Corruption remains rampant in both countries, despite the best efforts of Maidan and anti-Maidan activists. Human and democratic rights exist on paper, but just try to exercise them and you will find yourself at the mercy of nationalist vigilantes and paranoid security agencies. Fascist groups are actively engaged on both sides. The anti-nationalist Left is weakened by the depth of ethnic and religious divisions and the continued association of ‘socialism’ and ‘communism’ with the Soviet past.

As always, we urge our fellow workers in Russia and Ukraine to reflect. Where do their true interests lie? With ‘their own’ oligarchs and politicians? With the oligarchs and politicians on the other side? Or with one another?

STEFAN



Locals holding passports of the breakaway Lugansk People’s Republic

Hunter-gatherers: Who are they? What do they tell us?

SINCE THE time of Europe's first extensive contact with indigenous peoples in the sixteenth century, the lives of hunter-gatherers have exercised a fascination over our mind. Who are these people? How do they live? What do they tell us about human society? Anthropologists dispute over how exactly we should define them. Beyond the fact that they live exclusively by hunting and gathering their societies are very various. Some, like the forest dwelling Mbuti of sub-Saharan Africa are nomadic, others, such as the South American Canela, live in settled communities. Several alternate between a nomadic and a settled lifestyle from season to season. Some hunter-gatherers are socially stratified, like the indigenous communities of the Pacific North-West of America who have a class of 'nobles' and a class of slaves. Others, like Australian aboriginal groups are dominated by elders who control young men by limiting their access to women. Others still, like the Nuer of the Sudan, have egalitarian relationships, but only between men. Hunter-gatherers have a multitude of different ways of organising themselves. The one thing we can say with any clarity is what they are not. They are not farmers. They are not tribal peoples who live partly by farming and have complicated clan structures. They are not urban dwellers and they do not live under the rule of complex states. They do not live like us.

Who are they?

Since the mid-1960s, however, a lot of attention has been focused on one particular type of hunter-gatherer, characterised by the anthropologist James Woodburn in a 1982 paper titled 'Egalitarianism' as 'immediate return' (tinyurl.com/yckndut5). 'Immediate-return' societies are those which do not store or preserve food or other items, but consume what they produce more or less immediately. Only a small number of hunter-gatherer groups following this type of economy still survive. The most well-

known examples are the Hadza in Tanzania, groups such as the Mbenjele, and Mbuti in the forests of sub-Saharan Africa, the Ju/'hoansi and !Kung and related groups in Namibia, the Hill Pandaram and Paliyan of southern India, and the Batek of Malaysia. What particularly intrigued Woodburn about all these groups is that, scattered as they were over three continents, they share the same type of social organisation. They are all intensely egalitarian. They live without private property. They have no chiefs, no elders, no shamans, no authority figures of any kind. Each individual is autonomous: no one can tell anyone else what to do. They are not territorial. And though their societies occasionally exhibit low levels of interpersonal violence, they do not make war on their neighbours. And contrary to the practice in patriarchal societies, women live close to their mothers, where they have support at least during their early years of childbirth and child rearing, while their male partners live with them.

// An egalitarian society is one in which people are equal, but equal in what way?

Egalitarianism is often a poorly defined term. An egalitarian society is one in which people are equal, but equal in what way? It is a term that can mean many different things, and if you make people equal in one sense, you will often make them unequal in another. If you give a couple with one child and a couple with four children equal salaries, you make them unequal in their ability to provide for their dependents. Historically, the term 'egalitarian' has been used rather loosely by anthropologists, to describe societies that show egalitarian features in some aspects of their organisation, but not necessarily in others. The Nuer, mentioned

above, were once described as egalitarian for maintaining equal relations among men, but distinctly unequal relations between men and women. It was a sign of the times. More recently, however, the term has only come to be used to describe societies that are egalitarian in more fundamental ways. When speaking of hunter-gatherers, it is used principally to mean two things, political equality and equality between the sexes. Political equality refers to equality of decision-making power. All immediate-return hunter-gatherers exhibit both these types of egalitarianism as well as a number of other features necessary to sustain them. These are principally an absence of authority figures, an equal access to goods and services and an absence of any kind of discrimination. All these societies, in other words, demonstrate a high degree of personal freedom.

Egalitarian, immediate-return hunter-gatherer societies are of particular interest to anthropologists, since it is believed that this was the form of organisation found among early humans. Even though evidence is growing that other forms of hunter-gatherer societies also existed (principally between 40,000 and 12,000 years ago), their numbers are still relatively small and the consensus remains that immediate-return societies predominated. Immediate-return hunter-gatherers are also of interest to socialists since they demonstrate a number of features about our human capacity to live and produce together socially as equals with a minimum of physical conflict.

We are surrounded with ideologies of capitalism which urge us to believe that humans are naturally competitive, aggressive and even warlike, and that capitalist society which promotes these qualities, is therefore well fitted to our nature. Given our prevailing mood of pessimism and the daily experience of living in a competitive capitalist society,

it's not surprising that this story appeals to many. But is it true? It seems not. The mere existence of immediate-return hunter-gatherers gives the lie to this story. If it were the case that we possessed some abstract 'human nature' that compelled us all to behave competitively, then immediate-return hunter-gatherers would never have existed, let alone survived sustainably for tens of thousands of years. And if the evidence holds and it turns out that this is the way we organised our societies during the 250,000 years in which we were establishing ourselves as a separate species, then it might surely be said to be the kind of society to which we are best fitted.

// To survive, we need some degree of large-scale mechanisation and social production requiring significant organisation and coordination.

What do they tell us?

We must be careful, though. One of the things immediate-return hunter-gatherers can't do is provide us with a blueprint of how to live in a socialist society. Even if we desired to live a hunter-gatherer lifestyle, it should be obvious that a pattern of life only sustained by the availability of large tracts of land could not support our current levels of population. To survive, we need some degree of large-scale mechanisation and social production requiring significant organisation and coordination. A future socialist society would look very different from an immediate-return hunter-gatherer one. As it happens, though, we now have a good understanding of the principles by which immediate-return hunter-gatherers maintain their egalitarianism and individual autonomy, and we can see how these are highly compatible with a society of common ownership and free association.

The first and most obvious of these principles is that individual freedom and equality is founded on the absence of private property relations. When everything is shared and every individual has free and direct access to the necessities of life, then no one has the power to stand between anyone else and the satisfaction of their needs. Common ownership, like hunter-gatherer sharing relationships, does not eliminate conflict but it severely reduces it down to the level of the individual or to small groups and prevents it becoming socially disruptive. Just as important for the

maintenance of egalitarian relations and personal freedom in hunter-gatherer society is the ability of an individual or family to move away from any conflict situation or any individual who tries to coerce them. In capitalism our mobility as workers is limited. Moving away to another area means quitting a job, selling a house or giving up a tenancy, and finding another one. Within capitalism's property system, that alone can be an insecure and worrying process, not to say one burdened with a lot of legal paperwork, financial rigmarole and practical hassle. Moving can also mean tearing oneself away from our support networks. In the non-private property environment of a socialist society, however, such restrictions are almost completely eliminated. Even the support we need for ourselves and our families is no longer dependent on particular people but is built into the fabric of a society based on free access and the satisfaction of individual need.

Immediate-return hunter-gatherers can also provide us with useful counter-evidence to many of the claims of capitalist economics. They show, for instance; that market relations are not universal and that human beings have no inescapable urge to 'truck, barter and exchange'. They show that there is no obvious and necessary division between productive activity and social life, or that what a person receives from society must inevitably be tied to her individual work contribution. They show that acquisitiveness and selfishness are not essential features of human behaviour, that external pressures are not required to incentivise individuals to work, and that inequality and class divisions are not indispensable features of human society. They show too, that

the inevitability of scarcity together with all that implies in society is a myth. Most systems of capitalist economics hold that scarcity arises because human beings have unlimited wants and limited means to satisfy them. In reality, however, we are producers as well as consumers of the goods we need to live. This gives us potentially a choice. We can work more and consume more, or we can work less and consume less.

Put in this simple, abstract way such decisions seem straightforward. Yet in a capitalist economy nothing is so simple. Our choices are blocked and distorted by the fact that in between the acts of production and consumption stands the profit motive which drives them both by its own relentless logic. It drives production by the continuous need for capitalists to maximise profit in a competitive environment; it drives consumption by the constant pressure on capitalists to market products, create wants and maximise sales. In the process, profit eliminates choice. Immediate-return hunter-gatherer societies face no such issues. They live at low levels of subsistence and their members require little to lead happy and fulfilling lives, yet even so they often choose to restrict their production in order to maximise their time spent on socialising and other activities. We have the same choice in a socialist society. What immediate-return hunter-gatherer societies demonstrate most clearly is that many of the assumptions made by capitalist economists are no more than a mirage cast by capitalism itself upon us and our relationships.

HUD



Abolish the Wages System and ...

ONE SHORT way of presenting the aim of the Socialist Party is to say that we wish to *abolish the wages system*. Four words of course cannot say everything, but their implications are very wide-ranging in terms of the kind of society we stand for.

This is because the wages system is at the very heart of capitalism. The vast majority of the population have to work for an employer in return for a wage or salary, or have to rely on someone else who does so. Even many so-called self-employed are in practice in a similar situation, as they also need to work for a living. But socialism will do away with this: do away with being forced to perform work that is often boring or dangerous or pointless, and that is undertaken at the behest of and for the benefit of the employer. Instead, the principle of 'from each according to their ability' will apply: people will do work that, as far as is possible, will be made interesting and challenging and rewarding and varied and useful, with working hours reduced from now.

// Under the present system, the reason why most people have to do waged work is that this is the only way they can get access to the money needed to pay for food, housing, etc.

Doing away with employment and working for a wage will also involve a fundamental change to how society is organised. Under the present system, the reason why most people have to do waged work is that this is the only way they can get access to the money needed to pay for food, housing, etc. A small minority of the population (less than one in a hundred) own and control the means of production, the land, raw materials, machinery, factories, warehouses, offices, shops and the rest, while those not in this elite group are forced to work for them. This is known as a class division: the capitalist class own the means of life, as is sometimes said, while the working class do not own them and so must work for the capitalists. Abolishing the wages system will imply putting an end to this class system, with its attendant inequality, poverty and exploitation.

Working for an employer involves working for the employer's profits,

which is how the capitalists become so wealthy. Production, then, takes place to make a profit, so only goods and services that are likely to result in a profit will be produced. That's why there can be unemployed building workers while at the same time there are people who are homeless or living in crowded or substandard accommodation: building homes for these people will simply not be profitable. But ending the wages system, employment and production for profit will mean that houses, along with everything else, will be produced in order to meet human need. It sounds like a simple idea, but it will have major consequences for how society is run and how people relate to each other. It also means that there will be no making goods that are substandard or even dangerous. And with no employment, there will be no unemployment, nobody trying to survive on meagre state handouts.

And if goods and so on are produced to meet human need and wages no longer exist, it will follow that money has no role and there will be free access instead. If you want some fruit and veg, just go along to your local shop (or whatever name is used) and take what you want. Obviously you aren't going to take more than you need. The same will apply to other foodstuffs, clothes, DVDs, books and all the rest. People will not need to pay to use the train or bus, or to visit the dentist or go on holiday. There may — especially at first — have to be

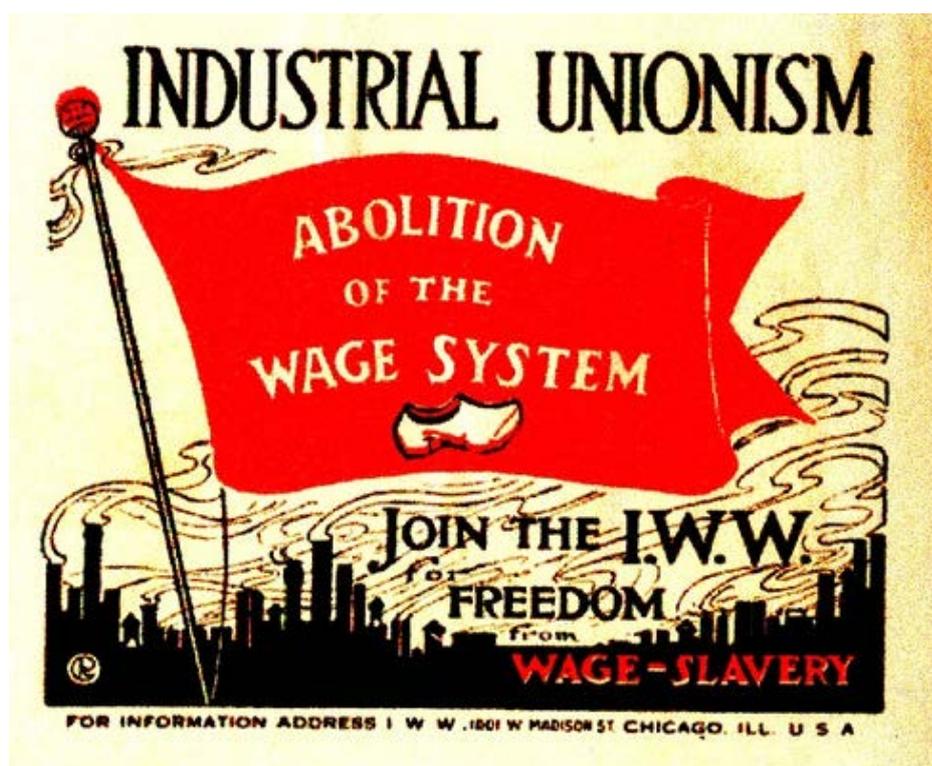
restrictions on free access, perhaps for housing, but ensuring that everyone has a decent roof over their heads will be a priority. The general principle here will be 'to each according to their needs'.

There will also be no role for government, which nowadays exists to serve the interests of the capitalist class. Administrative functions, such as mending potholes or providing public libraries, will still exist, but the vast machinery of armed forces, police, courts and prisons will have no place. Without a wages system and class division, there will be no rulers, no elites or privileged people, no inequality. People will just work together for the common good.

A society such as this will not be able to exist in just one country, but it will not be international either, as this would imply that nations still existed. Rather, it will be global, with no countries or borders or passports or visas. One worldwide system, without wars, where environmental and climate-related issues can be addressed properly, with no interference from considerations of profit.

So abolishing the wages system does not just mean doing away with your wage packet or salary advice. It also means there will be no employment or classes or money or government or countries. This will therefore have tremendous and entirely positive results for the whole planet and all its people.

PAUL BENNETT



What's in a Word?

THE WORD 'socialism' peppers current political discussion. When Boris Johnson was seeking respite from his well-known recent setbacks by announcing a limit to rises in people's energy bills, a Tory MP got up in the parliament to say that the Conservative Party should not be supporting socialist policies. In the United States, right-wing opponents of Joe Biden never cease to refer to his policies as 'socialism'. And when we hear reference to what happened over much of the 20th century in Russia and Eastern Europe and still very much happens in countries like Cuba and China, the word 'socialism' is often used as a quick and convenient way to describe it, whether coming from detractors or supporters. Clearly, when people use the word in these different cases to characterise a form of government or government policy, they do not all have the same idea in their mind. But what unites all these uses is the idea that the state is taking charge of economic matters and attempting to control what would otherwise be determined by market forces.

Giant Ponzi scam

It's also a word that pops up almost as a matter of course when people are trying to describe not just state control of an economy but also state dictatorship over people's everyday lives. This has happened recently, for example, in two quite separate BBC Radio 4 programmes on Albania. A documentary entitled *The Great Pyramids of Albania* looked back to 1996 when a large proportion of the Albanian population fell victim to a giant 'Ponzi' scheme. People sold their houses, land and livestock to buy into pyramid schemes that were doomed to fail. By the end of that year, what was basically a rob-Peter-to-pay- Paul scheme had swallowed up almost 50 per cent of the country's annual income and affected the lives of most of its population. The programme's presenter tried to explain the psychology which hooked people into trusting this scheme, how the mass delusion evolved and then what were its dire consequences (a violent civil war in fact) once it became clear that no one was getting their money back and some had lost everything. But he did not do this without referring on a number of occasions to what had preceded this in the period from the end of the second world war to 1991 as 'socialism' and its end as 'the fall of socialism'. During most of that time, what had happened was that Albania had been

ruled in a direly oppressive way by a ruthless Stalin-style dictator, Enver Hoxha, who succeeded in establishing personal control not only over the economy but also over the country's political system.

The Hoxha dictatorship



// *Lea Ypi, describes how people were conditioned to believe that the one-party rule they were living under was 'freedom and democracy',*

And it was on the Hoxha period of Albanian history that the second recent BBC programme on that country focused, via a recently published memoir entitled *Coming of Age at the End of History*, written by a woman who had lived through it. In it the author, Lea Ypi, describes how people were conditioned to believe that the one-party rule they were living under was 'freedom and democracy', and that this was what 'socialism' was. She describes reinforcing mechanisms such as the loyalty to Hoxha and the Party sworn by pupils in school every morning. But prying ears were everywhere and any hint of non-adherence to the system could lead to dire consequences ranging from dismissal from work, to 're-education', to prison or to execution, and such things happened frequently. The title of the Albanian song accompanying the programme, A

Pickaxe in One Hand, a Rifle in the Other, used as a signature tune by Albanian state radio, captures well the tenor of a regime characterised in the author's memoir as 'an open-air prison'. Once she had finished her schooldays, Ypi tells how she left Albania, studied philosophy and politics and ended up as what she is today, a Professor of Political Theory at the London School of Economics. Yet her memoir suggests that she is teaching her students that what happened under Hoxha was socialism, even though one might think that, with her knowledge of political theory, she would know that to label what happened in Albania in that way is an outright perversion of the word's original meaning.

Was Albania socialist?

Of course, no one has a patent on words, especially those describing ideas rather than concrete objects. Yet, when the word 'socialism' was popularised in the 19th century by such writers as Marx and Engels, it clearly meant an entirely different society from the one that existed then and still exists now based on buying and selling and private or state ownership of the means of living. It meant a society of free access to all goods and services based on the concept of *from each according to ability to each according to need* and presupposed the abolition of the wages system. Yet the dictatorial regimes, run along state-capitalist lines, that later called themselves socialist (and/or Marxist) were the polar opposite of anything Marx and Engels would have recognised as the society of 'freedom from necessity' which they described as 'socialism' or 'communism' (they used the terms more or less synonymously). While we must recognise that many people do not want to see the kind of society advocated by Marx and Engels but instead prefer one of the many slightly different varieties of capitalism that exist at present ('free market' capitalism, state capitalism, 'mixed' economy, etc), it does not seem unreasonable to expect them, if only to achieve some kind of clarity of thought for themselves, not to throw the word 'socialism' around willy-nilly. If the title of 'socialism' is given to any of these varieties, it betrays a lack of understanding of the concept historically and can only serve to mislead those looking for genuine solutions to the many-faceted problems perpetually thrown up by the capitalist organisation of society.

HOWARD MOSS

Inequality Kills

JANUARY 2022 saw the release of Oxfam’s report, provocatively entitled *Inequality Kills* (www.oxfam.org/en/research/inequality-kills). Produced to ‘inform public debate on development and humanitarian policy issues’, the report focused on three broad areas: 1) The unprecedented rise in billionaire wealth during Covid-19, 2) Economic Violence (the impact of inequalities in health, gender-based violence, climate change and hunger) and 3) Solutions (importance of social movements, and policies around pre-distribution and re-distribution).

Although likely using inflammatory language for dramatic effect, *Inequality Kills* is comprehensive and includes multiple, detailed and scientifically researched sources of information. Sixty pages and 321 footnotes are accompanied by a summary and a note on methodology describing how the organisation came to their conclusions and how they decided upon what to highlight and what questions should be asked.

Their message is that we are making an unequal world even more unequal and that the pandemic has pushed us into a yet more grave position regarding environmental damage, a decrease in women’s rights, an increase in gender inequalities and more barriers for ‘racialised groups’.

The forewords feature comment from Jayati Ghosh, a development economist and Professor of Economics at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, USA, but possibly more strikingly, Abigail Disney, a member of the multinational entertainment and media conglomerate family, who is described as a documentary filmmaker [and] activist and lets us know that ‘The answer to these complicated problems is ironically simple: taxes’ and ‘There is more than enough money to solve most of the world’s problems. It’s just being held in the hands of millionaires and billionaires who aren’t paying their fair share.’

As mentioned in the report, Abigail Disney is a member of the ‘Patriotic Millionaires’, an organisation that ‘focus[es] on three “first” principles: a highly progressive tax system, a liveable minimum wage, and equal political representation for all citizens’ (p 5). Do Oxfam consider that both this organisation and the idea of philanthropy are useful to their position?

In *Inequality Kills*, a number of statistics are shown in bold, eye-catching infographics, such as the below.

The authors take a stab at the contemporary issue of the single person or business space-race and Jeff Bezos and his somewhat phallic rocket in particular, in a section entitled ‘The Billionaire Variant’ linking the pandemic to the rise in wealth of the richest on the planet.

‘In July 2021, the world’s richest man launched himself and his friends into space in his luxury rocket while millions were dying needlessly below him because they could not access vaccines or afford food. Jeff Bezos’ own iconic Marie Antoinette “let them eat cake” moment will forever be more accurately quoted: “I want to thank every Amazon employee and customer because you guys paid for all of this.” The increase in Bezos’ fortune alone during the pandemic could pay for everyone on earth to be safely vaccinated’ (pp 9-10).

There is scant mention, however, of how or why this situation came to be. How was it possible for a commercial trader, reminiscent of nineteenth century Britain, to increase his wealth in this way? What is the root cause of the problem? Does it take much discussion after reading the report or do we already know the answer? If we know the answer, what are the friends and associates of the wealthy capitalists going to do about it? By design, there are more questions than answers, but how helpful is this methodology?

The report is around 15,000 words long

and the word ‘capitalism’ only appears twice, with one of these referring to ‘shareholder capitalism’; the other appearing in a section entitled ‘Economic Violence’:

‘That people in poverty, women and girls, and racialized groups are so often disproportionately killed or harmed, more than those who are rich and privileged, is not an accidental error in today’s dominant form of capitalism, but a core part of it’ (p.12)

The report does not explain what today’s dominant form of capitalism is, so how are we to discuss how to improve or solve it?

A cursory search of various social media platforms show that the report is only mentioned by groups linked to Oxfam itself, with a focus on the amount of billionaires compared to poorer people from an Indian perspective, and by ‘green’ groups and relatively small-reach left-leaning individuals and ‘think tanks’. Features can be found in *The Morning Star* (tinyurl.com/4ec9dxvy) and *Socialist Worker* (tinyurl.com/rfajey7h).

It now does not take much searching to find that even the ‘centre-left’ of mainstream politics has woken up to the idea that capitalism is in itself and is the instigator of, damage by design. *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, published by the US Council on Foreign Relations, was founded essentially as a ‘sister’ of Chatham House in Britain and has close links to the Democratic Party. They state that their ‘goal is to start a conversation about the need for Americans to better understand the world’. Their 2013 article, *Capitalism and Inequality, What the Right and the Left Get Wrong* (tinyurl.com/5cyummmk) describes the problem at hand: ‘Inequality is an inevitable product of capitalist activity, and expanding equality of opportunity only increases it.’

The authors would also have done well to closely read Bambra, Lynch and Smith’s *The Unequal Pandemic* (tinyurl.com/4h87un8n), published in January 2021, which describes how pandemic-based and other outstanding ‘inequalities are a political choice: with governments effectively choosing who lives and who dies.’ Oxfam’s report may not be able to change this ever-pervasive fact, even if it was their original aim.

So who is the report *for* really? Are the people that need to discuss the issues raised, going to act on them? Perhaps the most pertinent quote in the report comes from Greta Thunberg, made at the latest pre-COP26 Youth Summit:

‘The climate crisis is of course only a symptom of a much larger crisis. A crisis based on the idea that some people are worth more than others (...) It is very naive to believe that we can solve this crisis without confronting the roots of it’ (p.34).

TJ

Inequality contributes to the death of at least one person every four seconds.²

COUNT THE SECONDS



BOTH THE CURRENT WEALTH OF EXTREMELY RICH PEOPLE AND THE RATE AT WHICH THEY ARE ACCUMULATING WEALTH ARE UNPRECEDENTED IN HUMAN HISTORY.

The rules of capitalism



THE BASIC rules of capitalism are quite easy to understand. And so are the consequences of those rules. It really isn't rocket science. And once you understand what the rules are, you're then in a position to ask yourself a novel question whether you actually agree with those rules.

Let's have a look at some of these rules, or facts of life.

Rule number one: very roughly speaking, five percent of the world's population own 95 percent of the wealth, the land, the resources, the lot. That's one person in 20. One person has all the wealth and power, 19 have nothing very much at all. That's called the unequal distribution of wealth. It might sound unfair. It might seem unjust. But it's a fact of life and it's legal.

Here's another rule, a golden rule. The people who have the gold make the rules. That's why it's all legal, in case you were wondering about that.

Rule 3 is, the more money you've got, the more you can make.

Rule 4 is, the less money you've got, the less you can get.

Rule 5 is, the poorer you are, the more expensive everything is.

Rule 6: the poorer you are, the iller you'll be, the sooner you'll

die, and the worse off your kids will be.

Rule 7: the poorer you are, the worse your education will be and the worse your job will be.

Rule 8: the worse the pay, the harder the job.

Rule 9: the opposite of rule 8, the higher the pay, the easier the job. For example, company directors get paid, say, a hundred times what a warehouse worker gets, but who goes home most exhausted?

Rule 10: if you're really rich, you're a capitalist, you don't need to do any work at all.

Rule 11: the poor pay for every mistake made by the rich.

Rule 12: rich people start wars that poor people have to fight.

Rule 13: most rich people get rich by inheriting. Occasionally there's a rags-to-riches story, but they're vanishingly rare.

Rule 14: most poor people stay poor through hard work, thrift and sacrifice.

That's enough rules. You decide. Have we made these up? Or do they sound like things you've thought too?

Go on, ask for a pay rise

'DON'T ASK for a pay rise, workers are told' was the headline in the *Times* (4 February) referring to the Governor of the Bank of England, Andrew Bailey, who had said. 'While it will be 'painful' for workers to accept prices would rise faster than wages, some moderation of wage rises is needed to prevent inflation becoming entrenched.'

According to the *Independent*:

'Mr Bailey, who is paid around £500,000 per year, reiterated his assertion that workers should show 'restraint' when asking for salary increases. The governor encouraged companies not to give staff big pay rises, warning it could lead to a spiral of higher prices being followed by higher wages, pushing inflation higher' (bit.ly/3sCFkBH).

The assumption here is that wage increases can spark off a 'wage-price spiral', but wages are a price and go up with the prices of what workers need to consume to recreate and maintain their labour-power. Wages follow prices, not vice versa. So, if you want to talk about a spiral, 'price-wage spiral' would be more accurate.

The February report of the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England that Bailey was commenting on estimated

that, due to the increase in price of gas and some other imported goods, by April the annual rate of increase of the Consumer Price Index will be 7.25 percent. The *Times* again:

'The last time that inflation reached the levels forecast for April this year was in 1991, when it hit 7.9 per cent. The committee expects inflation still to be above 5 per cent in a year's time. People will face the worst hit to real incomes since comparable records began in 1990 as take-home pay falls by five times the amount it did during the 2008 financial crisis.'

The report also pointed out that, with unemployment comparatively low at 3.8 percent, there is a 'tight' labour market.

All this means that workers both need a compensatory wage increase and are in a good bargaining position to get one. So why shouldn't they go for it? They would be mugs (or masochists) not to. So good luck to them.

It is significant that, while the Governor told workers not to ask for a wage increase to cover the rise in prices (ie, to accept a cut in their real wages), he did not ask those capitalist employers in a position to do so, not to increase their prices (ie, to

accept a cut in profits).

The effect of workers not getting a wage increase would be to increase profits. Maybe this is what Bailey had in mind. More likely, however, is that he really believes that wage increases can cause prices to rise and that wage restraint can prevent 'inflation'.

These days (as in the quote above from the *Times*) 'inflation' has come to mean any increase in the level of prices as measured by such indexes as the CPI. But this fails to distinguish between two different ways in which this can happen. One is classic inflation where the monetary authority issues more money than is required by the economy, ie, over-issues, or 'inflates,' it. The other is when the index goes up due to an increase in the price of some key good (as currently gas) or in the prices of a whole range of goods. The Bank of England is in fact charged with trying to ensure that prices go up by around 2 percent a year, ie, that real wages go down by that amount, other things being equal.

For socialists there is a wider question. Why is there a 'cost of living'? Why do we have to pay for the things we need to live?

The richest 10% of people own more than 80% of global wealth, and the 10 richest men have six times more wealth than that of the poorest 3.1 billion people combined. These vast inequalities in wealth reflect how society is split into two classes: the capitalist class who get their wealth through owning industries and corporations, and the working class who rely on wages or benefits to buy what is needed.

The Socialist Party's weekend of talks and discussion looks at why capitalism is divided into classes and how the antagonism between them impacts on the way we live. What is 'class consciousness' and how does it develop? To what extent is it meaningful to say that there is a middle class? What classes were there before capitalism, in previous stages of history? And what could a future classless society be like?

THE CLASS DIVIDE

The Socialist Party's Summer School

19th - 21st August 2022

Fircroft College, Birmingham

Full residential cost (including accommodation and meals Friday evening to Sunday afternoon) is £100; the concessionary rate is £50. Book online at www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/summer-school-2022/ or send a cheque (payable to the Socialist Party of Great Britain) with your contact details to Summer School, The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 7UN. Day visitors are welcome, but please book by e-mail in advance. E-mail enquiries to spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk.

Where the wealth went



Credit: BBC

SINCE THE financial crisis and through austerity, Brexit and then the pandemic, we've had to get used to the effects of the economy at its most volatile. Reminding us of the depressing years from 2008 onwards is BBC Two's documentary *The Decade The Rich Won*, which would more accurately be titled 'Another Decade The Rich Won'. This two-part programme has an all-star cast of politicians, economists and government advisers who tell us how they navigated the last decade's fiscal turbulence. Instead of a narrator, captions in block capitals flash up on the screen to pull the story along, accompanied by urgent-sounding ominous music.

The documentary begins with the government's 'bailouts' of hundreds of billions of pounds to banks such as the Royal Bank of Scotland. Without this intervention, we would have faced 'financial armageddon', according to then-Governor of the Bank of England Mervyn King, and with this intervention, the wealthiest got even wealthier. It's explained that this is because the bailout funds stayed with the banks, rather than flowing through and boosting the economy. So, an alternative strategy was tried: quantitative easing. This tactic (credited to King and then-Chancellor of the Exchequer Alistair Darling) is when the Bank of England 'creates money' to buy government bonds from financial institutions, which then have more funds to lend out to people and businesses. Between 2009 and November 2020 the impossible-to-visualise amount of £895 billion went through the UK's quantitative easing plan, with more paid out by other countries' central banks. The effect of this was an increase in the value of assets, and consequently, according to hedge fund head honcho Paul Marshall, the 'owners of assets have all made out like bandits'. Marshall isn't the only city bigshot interviewed for the programme who knows exactly how capitalism works,

and in whose interests. Private equity supremo Guy Hands says it's obvious that wealth attracts more wealth, regardless of what the government recognises. If they and the other economists featured didn't already know this when quantitative easing was used in 2009, then they would have learned it when the same pattern recurred when the strategy was used after Brexit and again when the pandemic hit.

The super-rich haven't only benefited from bank bailouts and quantitative easing, but also from shrewd management of their tax affairs. The tax havens where the elite stash their cash were revealed in the Panama and Paradise Papers, leaked to German reporters Bastian Obermayer and Frederik Obermaier. Alongside these revelations, companies such as Vodafone, Amazon and Starbucks were outed as paying little or no tax to the UK government, which at that time was implementing its austerity measures. Then-Prime Minister Theresa May wagged her finger and said to these corporations 'I'm putting you on warning. This can't go on any more', although nothing was done because her reduced-majority government became distracted by Brexit, according to ex-minister and senior aide Gavin Barwell. A more fundamental reason (not given in the documentary) is that governments see high profitability as good for the economy, and therefore are reluctant to impose a heavy tax burden on corporations which would reduce the amount of profit they make.

While the richest grew and held on to their massive amounts of money, millions of people were struggling because of job losses, insecure 'gig economy' contracts, rising house prices, shrinking wages and cuts to government funding of services. The widening inequalities of wealth led to the normalisation of food banks and global protests. The programme features some of the campaigners with UK Uncut (a direct-action group targeting corporate tax dodgers)

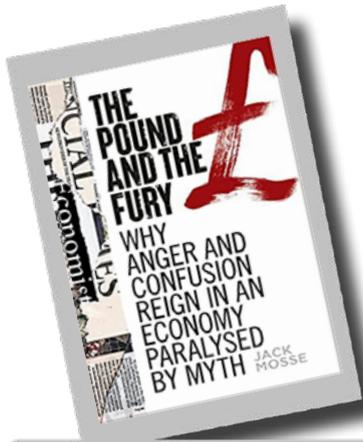
and also the Occupy movement. When asked what the movement achieved, Tina Rothery, one of its members says 'so much... Occupy pulled the conversation back... to real humans', although she also admits they didn't offer solutions beyond this. Another way people reacted to the establishment letting them down was by voting for Britain to leave the European Union. Brexit created more financial instability, responded to with more quantitative easing which again boosted the elite's coffers.

Some of the interviewees who represent the status quo are more candid than might be expected because they've since retired or left their previous careers. For example, Mervyn King (now a life peer) says it's 'deeply unfair' that banks get bailed out when in financial trouble, but other businesses wouldn't. Ex-Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, who looks like he's still recovering from his spell in government, tells us there was no debate about further cuts to public spending, as the coalition agreed they would be necessary, despite his talk of 'difficult decisions'. The Chancellors of the Exchequer (Alistair Darling, George Osborne and Philip Hammond) all seem to be sticking strongest to the decisions made during their tenures. In contrast, Gary Stevenson, a Citibank trader between 2008 and 2014, has shifted his views because of his experiences during those years. As an 'interest rate trader', he discovered he could make a fortune by betting on the economy getting worse and as a result became Citibank's most profitable trader in his area. Realising that economic crises have led to increases in the value of the capitalist class's stocks and assets, Stevenson felt guilty and left his job. He now works as an economist campaigning against inequality, although the documentary doesn't mention his proposal to remedy this by placing a time limit on property ownership, thereby forcing the elite to sell their assets, which no government would agree to.

The Decade The Rich Won shows that the way the economy works has enabled the capitalist class to prosper through the turmoil of recent years. The wealth owned by UK billionaires has risen by 310 percent since 2010, little of which has trickled down to those of us scraping by on low incomes. The documentary is worth watching not only because it's a grim reminder of how capitalism functions but also because it reveals the views of those in prominent positions. Their openness now makes the spin we heard last decade – 'we're all in this together', 'stronger economy, fairer society', 'aspiration nation', 'strong and stable leadership', 'a country that works for everyone' – sound even more hollow.

MIKE FOSTER

Confusion compounded



The Pound and the Fury. Why Anger and Confusion Reign in an Economy Paralysed by Myth.
By Jack Mosse. 168 pages.
Manchester University Press, 2021.

To explain why ‘for decades, our economy has failed to work for ordinary citizens’, Mosse had the idea of asking various groups of people what they thought the ‘economy’ was and how they thought it worked. He interviewed people on a nearby estate, people working in asset management, civil service economists, and journalists on a magazine advising small investors. It worked and makes interesting reading. Those in the estate thought that the economy is a conspiracy of the rich and powerful to keep them poor; the asset managers and civil servants saw it as ‘an autonomous natural entity’; the financial journalists came across as simple comen.

The trouble is that Mosse himself is confused about economics, as revealed by his comments on the answers and in his final chapter on ‘Demythologising the economy’. Early on (p.27) he states his belief that ‘money can be magicked up out of thin air’ by banks. In fact, some of those he interviewed had a more accurate understanding than he does.

He criticises the asset managers and the civil servants for ‘reifying’ the economy ‘as an entity operating according to its own autonomous logic’ with the result that ‘human actors are understood as merely complying with the irresistible base force that drives the economy’ (p. 60-1).

Actually, that is not a bad description of how the capitalist economy does operate. Human actors (capitalists, workers, governments) do have to submit to the logic of the system in the end. The asset managers and civil servants misunderstand the system as an expression of human nature. Mosse calls seeing the economy as an

autonomous natural force ‘reifying’. The word Marx used was ‘fetishism’ – humans attributing autonomous power to and being dominated by something that ultimately they create. Humans could cease to be dominated by the outcome of their activity if they changed that activity from producing wealth for sale on a market with a view to profit to producing directly to satisfy people’s needs. This is possible only on the basis of the common ownership and democratic control of productive resources; with this, the ‘economy’ would then cease to operate and humans would be in control of what they produce.

Mosse’s alternative proposal is just to tinker with the banking system while leaving the rest of capitalism unchanged. He attributes to private banks a power which they do not possess. When he says that ‘governments, as well as private banks, create money out of nowhere’, he is only half right. The government, normally via its central bank, can create money, or at least money-tokens, at will (but this will have consequences). Banks cannot. They can only lend what they have themselves borrowed; they don’t create new money, they only redistribute money that already exists. The myth that they can create money out of thin air arises because modern economics has come to define making a bank loan as ‘creating’ money. Banks do make loans of course but not out of thin air.

Having two different definitions of money creation only causes confusion of which Mosse is a victim. He needs to explain, if banks can ‘magic money out of thin air’, how come that during the crash of 2008 they had to be bailed out by the government? Why did they not use their supposed ability to create money to bail themselves out?

He gets himself into another contradiction when discussing one of the reforms proposed by Positive Money – ‘to ban private credit creation’ (p. 137). This turns out not to be stopping banks lending altogether (as it ought logically to mean if banks create money whenever they make a loan), but to allow them to re-lend only money deposited with them. This would mean that they would no longer be able to use the money market to borrow money from other banks and financial institutions to re-lend. Mosse concedes that this ‘draconian policy’ would provoke ‘a huge immediate shock effect on all kinds of economic activity, which would dwarf any previous banking crisis’. Yes, it would.

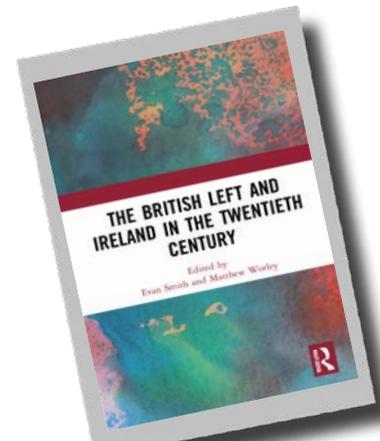
Seeming to realise the impracticality of that particular money reform, he turns to another funny money theory, so-called

‘Modern Monetary Theory’. MMT is based on the fact that governments do have the power to create money-tokens out of nothing. It argues that all a government has to do is to decide what it wants to spend money on and then create the money; governments don’t really need either to tax or to borrow. Given certain unrealistic conditions a government could perhaps do this but the most likely outcome would be Zimbabwe-style roaring inflation.

It is a pity than Mosse has let himself be influenced by monetary reformers and so ends up propagating confused and confusing myths himself. Despite this, the chapters – four-fifths of the book – where he interviews people are worth reading as good reporting.

ALB

Confusing nationalism with socialism



The British Left and Ireland in the twentieth century. Edited By Evan Smith and Matthew Worley.
Routledge. 2021. 186 pages.
ISBN 9780367701468.

From the middle of the 19th century onwards, a view took hold in sections of radical opinion in Britain that support for the Irish separatist movement would promote social revolution in Britain itself and in turn hasten the establishment of socialism there. The supposition was that if Ireland regained its independence from England, then that would significantly weaken the British ruling class. The hope being that the overthrow of British rule in Ireland would deal such a blow to the confidence of the British capitalist class, and particularly its imperialist faction, that it would prepare the ground for socialist change in Britain. The natural extension of this idea was that the Left in Britain should support the campaign for Irish independence. After the Anglo-Irish settlement of 1921, that aim became modified to mean supporting the ending of British rule in Northern Ireland.

As a political theory, the concept doesn’t appear to have passed the test of history, at

least judged from today's perspective. Like Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland has just marked its centenary as a capitalist state. Over that period, it has had times of relative success and failure but its slow evolution to a fully independent capitalist state has never had any permanent or profound impact on left-wing politics in Britain. However as with many of these political theories, a case can be always be made for it at some level, meaning that it has never entirely been debunked and still has its adherents even today. This aspiration helps explain the enduring interest that a variety of left-wing groups have had in Ireland over the past 150 years or so and the book explores aspects of this relationship. At the outset, it must be said that the book is quite academic in nature and seems aimed at the reader with a very specialised interest in this topic. It consists of seven quite disparate chapters; five cover the period from 1900 to 1960 while the remaining two are associated with the more recent troubles in Ulster. The book does lack an overall narrative to put each chapter in a historical context and it is assumed that the reader has a good pre-existing knowledge of radical Anglo-Irish relations.

The classification 'British Left' is taken to exclude the Labour Party so the book just concentrates on what is more conventionally termed the 'British Far Left' consisting of a variety of 'orthodox' Communist parties and Trotskyist groups. The exclusion of the interactions between the Labour Party and Ireland from analysis has the unfortunate result that the more tangible and permanent manifestations of the British Left-Ireland relationship are not analysed. Seminal events such as the Blair Government and the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 and before that the Ireland Act (1949) of the Attlee Government are not discussed. Even the connections between the 'far left' of the Labour Party and Irish nationalism are not examined. This results in the somewhat strange fact that there is no mention of either Jeremy Corbyn or Ken Livingstone in the book, apart from a passing mention at the end of one of the chapters to the former. These must be two of the more well-known, recent left-wingers associated with the cause of Irish separatism and their omission is a weakness. Both men offered a critique of Britain's policy in Northern Ireland which to the Tory tabloid press was equated to full-blooded support for the IRA's campaign of indiscriminate bombing in British cities.

The focus on the operations of small groups from the 'Marxist' tradition of the British Left is mirrored in the book's approach to politics across the Irish sea by a similar focus on very small and now defunct left-nationalist parties that have existed in Ireland over the last 100 years. There is very little analysis of Sinn Fein's relationship with the British Left which is equally peculiar given that party can almost certainly claim to have been the standard bearer of muscular Irish Nationalism in the 20th century. So the most important relationship in this context

existing between the (British) Labour Party and Sinn Fein is not discussed.

The book primarily deals with the very many, small left-wing groups that have existed in Britain over the last hundred years, most of them now disbanded and forgotten except by historians. One of the recurring themes is the uneasy relationship between the official Communist parties of both countries with the Communist Party of Ireland feeling at times patronised by the CPGB and the Dublin comrades being disappointed with the level of support given to them from London in their efforts to link the class and national struggles here. Most of the left parties in Britain did support, to some extent at least, Irish nationalism; this they tended to do with varying levels of commitment and enthusiasm; the orthodox Communist parties were more circumspect than many of the Trotskyist groups. For some of the latter groups, support for the IRA's armed campaign was justified as part of the support given to national liberation struggles of colonised peoples and the idea from Lenin that even exclusively national liberation movements in the colonised world would spark socialist revolution in the home countries.

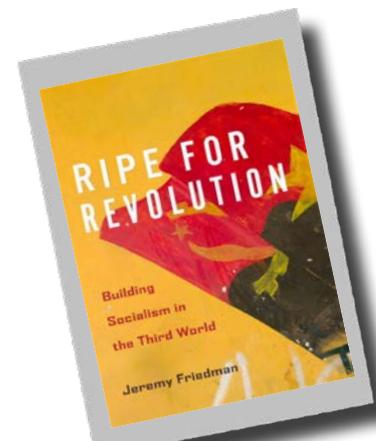
While in the main, the book only highlights the connections between leftists on both islands, there is some tangential discussion on how right-wing or conservative politics responded to this British Left – Ireland relationship. Two chapters explore the operation of anti-communism in Britain and Ireland. The first describes the actions of the Catholic Church and Catholic ideologues in fomenting cold war suspicions of the left-wing Connolly Association which enjoyed some support from politically aware Irish emigrants in Britain in the post-war era. Another chapter, from the same time, discusses the efforts of the establishment on both sides of the sectarian divide in Northern Ireland to dissuade workers from voting for 'communist parties' in the post-war period. One other issue that the book covers is the intersection of socialism and identity politics. Two chapters, separated historically by 60 years or more, deal with the impact of feminism on the relationship. The first considers the attitudes of British suffragettes to the Irish question in the Edwardian period while the second explores the outlook of British feminists to the plight of women republican prisoners in jail in Northern Ireland in the 1970s. Just as the main storyline of the book is concerned with enquiring into the association between national liberation and social change, these chapters include the extra question of whether women's emancipation could or should be pursued separately to both or either national liberation and socialist revolution.

In summary, while the book itself seems scholarly and well-researched and sympathetic to the movements it describes, its remit is very narrow. From our perspective, the book is essentially a

history of the futility of confusing socialism and nationalism in suggesting to workers that nationalism can be a pathway to socialism. The political groups and the actions they engaged in, that are listed in the book, were generally divorced from the concerns of the main body of the Irish people and entered little into mainstream consciousness. There is not much evidence of any lasting impact on politics in Ireland today. Also, the Republican movement itself in Ireland has moved between holding leftist reformist progressive positions to being quite a conservative, nationalist movement and provoking the question why it should be supported by people with socialist opinions.

KEVIN CRONIN

Not Revolution at All



Ripe for Revolution: Building Socialism in the Third World.
By Jeremy Friedman. Harvard University Press £28.95.

This book covers attempts to build so-called socialism in developing countries. Case studies deal with Indonesia, Chile, Tanzania, Angola and Iran, each supported by a great deal of detailed documentation. It is not about socialism at all, of course, but still contains a lot of useful information and interesting discussion, about such topics as rivalry between the rulers in Moscow and Beijing, and the use or not of parliament.

The examples are very different from each other. In Indonesia the 'Communist' Party (PKI) was not in power, but Russian aid was supposed to help build heavy industry and so increase the role of the working class. Sukarno's dictatorship eventually resulted in the killing of perhaps half a million PKI members and supporters. In Chile Allende 'saw himself as creating a completely new model of socialist revolution', but he was not in full control of the Congress and was able to do little more than nationalise the copper industry. The end in 1973 was another coup and thousands of deaths. Nyerere in Tanzania claimed to want socialism without class struggle, but his

agricultural reforms ('forced villagization') led to a drop in production and massive food imports. In Angola there were competing 'liberation movements' and from the mid-70s there was a combination of 'political Leninism with a mixed economy', resulting in a 'Leninist oligarchy' that skimmed profits and preserved its political power. Despite its vast oil resources, the country exemplified 'Leninist capitalism', where a kleptocracy justified itself on the grounds of national development. Iran shared with Indonesia the influence of Islam, but land reform was not implemented, and the idea that an Islamic state would mean a more just economic system proved baseless.

Friedman concludes that the Russian rulers' idea of state-led industrialisation did not deliver what was promised, and so the market had to be re-introduced (not that it had ever gone away). He talks briefly about various definitions of socialism, but does not refer to the idea of a classless stateless global society. He sees the 'Leninist model of politics' as an enduring legacy, and a number of organisations built on such lines still hold power in southern Africa. The Cold War did not end so clearly in the less developed

parts of the world, but the claim in the final paragraph that 'the attempt to build a socialist future in the Global South was real' is simply unsupported. Rather, there were attempts of various kinds to expand the role of capitalism (not necessarily state

capitalism), with Russian and/or Chinese support. The book is a useful reminder that non-Bolshevik efforts to build 'socialism' also existed and failed.

PB



R | 50 Years Ago

The Thirteen Derry Dead

ON SUNDAY 30 January thirteen men were shot dead in Derry as the British Army moved in to halt a march held in defiance of the Stormont government's ban. The immediate result was an upsurge of Irish nationalism, both in the South and amongst the Catholic minority in the North.

The thirteen Derry dead has completed the alienation of the Catholic population of Northern Ireland from the regime there. After fifty years of passively accepting the role of what its first Prime Minister called "a Protestant parliament for Protestant people", they are now actively rejecting its authority—to the extent of regarding the IRA as a useful counter to the British Army which is virtually occupying their ghettos in Belfast and Derry as well as whole towns such as Newry and Strabane where they form the overwhelming majority of the population. (...)

The tragedy of Northern Ireland is that the present

political division of the working class there reflects yesterday's divisions amongst the Irish capitalist class, divisions which now have no relevance even for capitalism since both Britain and Ireland are about to join the Common Market and since the same international companies have investments both sides of the Border.

Our advice to the worker in Northern Ireland is, first: Do not do anything, in word or deed, which might encourage further killings of your working-class brothers, whether Protestant or Catholic or, for that matter, British soldiers. And, secondly:

Think carefully about the situation to see if the issue of a United Ireland versus a British Ulster is worth a single drop of working-class blood. (,,)

Would the working class be worse or better off under one or the other? Would there be anything to choose between the two "solutions"? Surely, in both a British Ulster or a United Ireland, the workers' standard of living would be much the same. So would the slums, the unemployment and the other problems of capitalist society. And world Socialism

would remain the only solution to these problems. The only difference would be the colour of the flag that would fly over the government buildings in Belfast: Union Jack or Irish Tricolour? Is this an issue worth killing and being killed over? No, Socialists reply, a thousand times No! (*Socialist Standard*, March 1972)



World Socialist Movement Online Meetings

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

MARCH 2022 EVENTS

Sundays at 19.30 (IST)
Weekly WSP (India) meeting

Sunday 6 March 11.00 GMT
Central Branch meeting

Friday 4 March 19.30 GMT
British Fascists online

A look at Morgoth's Review, a popular ethno-nationalist social media channel, reflecting on the arguments put forward and raising the question of why such ethno-nationalist poison seems to attract so many followers.
Speaker: Stephen Harper

Friday 11 March 19.30 GMT
Did you see the news?
General current affairs discussion
Host: Howard Moss

Friday 18 March 19.30 GMT
Aneurin Bevan – the Man and Myth
A socialist and ex-Labour Party member living in Wales looks at the part Bevan played

in mid-20th century British political history and the myths that have grown up around him since his death.
Speaker: Richard Botterill

Sunday 27 March 10.00 GMT + 1
Subject to be arranged

Glasgow. Second Saturday of each month at The Atholl Arms Pub, 134 Renfrew St, G2 3AU Let's get together for a beer and a blether. 2pm onwards.
2 minutes walk from Buchanan Street Bus Station. For further information call Paul Edwards on 07484 717893.



**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.

The Beer Festival

ONE OF the frequent objections to the possibility of socialism is that it proposes a moneyless society. After all, no one willingly works for free. This truism runs counter to examples of how, even under money-driven capitalism, a great deal of work is undertaken freely.

I am going to outline one example which centres on a community beer festival. Over the last weekend in November, 2021, such a festival ran in the village hall within the Metropolitan Borough of Barnsley. Running from mid-Friday afternoon through to late Sunday afternoon, it eventually raised, that is made a profit of, over £10,000.

The first thing that needs to be acknowledged here is that this is hardly an exemplar of socialism. The whole purpose of the festival was to raise money to fund local community projects, the motivation was blatantly profit.

How could it be otherwise? There was a time during the prominence of Arthur Scargill and the militancy of the NUM that the area around Barnsley was referred to in the media as the People's Republic of South Yorkshire. More of a nod to Soviet-style state capitalism than anything to do with actual socialism.

Barnsley, just like anywhere else in the world, at present abides by the rules of capitalism. This means community events and projects require money. However, just as the seeds of capitalism were nurtured and gradually grew under the previous system, feudalism, so it is possible to identify a similar sowing of socialist notions under present capitalist conditions.

The thing to note is that apart from myself, none of those involved in organising and running the festival would identify as socialists. Rather the contrary, especially those who are local business men and women. This demonstrates that a willingness to give time and effort for free does not have to be motivated by ideology.

And there was a considerable amount of time and effort given by those involved, beginning with an organising group that began meeting in July. At this point those who were prepared to plan the event came to the fore. They met regularly and identified all the component parts of a festival and the arrangements that needed to be made to realise those plans.



Then the business people came in, the ones involved in the licensing trade and brewing whose direct commercial interests ran counter to the festival in that the local pubs would lose custom over that weekend. Nonetheless, on top of running their own businesses, they worked hard to source and arrange the supply of beers from a wide range of breweries, not just their own.

Other local business people sponsored the barrels, and this at a time when Covid lockdowns had affected them over a long period. Admittedly, as sponsors there was an advertising aspect, but I suspect this brought more local kudos than actual profit.

The event itself was run entirely by volunteers. From those who the day before set up the bars, primed the pumps and cleaned the lines, decorated the hall, arranged the furniture and so on, to those who pulled the pints and generally ran the event and then dismantled it all and cleared it away on the Monday.

On Friday evening the local primary schools came along with teachers and parents to sing carols around the Christmas tree, then on the Saturday, local singers and musicians performed for free.

To reiterate, I am not claiming this as an example of socialism in action. Patently, money remained the driving force behind it all and commercial profits were made by the breweries whose beer was sold.

Yet all of the work required for the

festival to take place was given freely, and in a commercial context. How much more likely is it that people will be willing to contribute their labour in a society without commercial pressures, especially for the common good?

It is surely clear that the motivation was the wellbeing of the community, the common good and this elicited a great deal of local support from the wider community. If this is possible under capitalism in straitened times then there are clear grounds for positing a society where this is the norm.

Also, the wide range of people freely giving what they could of their time and energy is a practical demonstration that 'from each according to their ability' is not just a theoretical aspiration. And even while those people would not necessarily identify as socialists, indeed they probably represent the main political parties in their voting habits, they willingly acted in practical ways that surely encourage the presently small number of socialists.

This is but one of many examples throughout society of people working for free for the common good. There's a long way to go to realise socialism as a worldwide system, but this was one small step, be it, in the circumstances, an unsteady one.

DAVE ALTON