

THE

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SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

NERO OF THE HOUR

Fiddling while the Earth burns



Also: If you really want peace...
What's the use of politicians?
Sri Lanka - the limits of workers'
forbearance

The Passing Political Show
Managerial Politics
The Food Crisis
Putin, Power and Women



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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'

Politicians fiddling with climate change

Last month, for anyone broiling in the record-breaking temperatures of western Europe's furious heatwave, or smelling the wood smoke from unprecedented wild fires in east and south London, the question of who was going to be the next Tory leader and UK Prime Minister could not have risen far up their political thermometer. As the temperature tipped 40°C, road surfaces warped, rail tracks buckled, and power went down in parts of England, London Fire Brigade was obliged to declare a major incident with fields, forests and buildings on fire. It wasn't just hot weather for all though, because when the poor can't stand the heat, they generally don't have the option of getting out of the kitchen, literally so for underpaid catering workers, but figuratively too for poor inner-city residents who tend to suffer even worse extremes due to the well-known urban heat island effect.

Indeed, if they thought about the Tory leadership contest at all, they must have seen it as an irrelevant sideshow

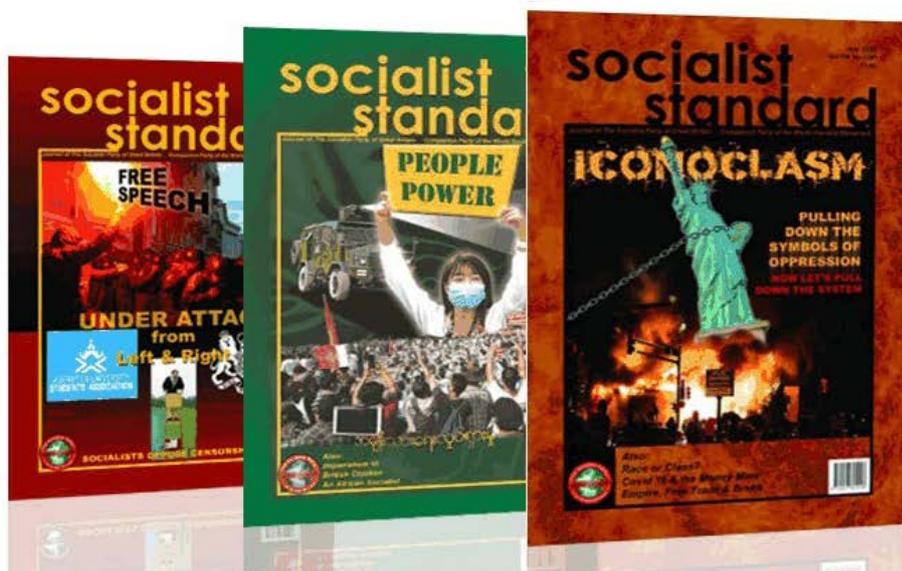
at best, and at worst, a bunch of Nero impersonators fiddling while Rome burned. For climate change scarcely rated a mention in the proceedings and instead all leadership contenders identified the issue of cutting taxes as the one most likely to motivate the venal Tory membership, while incidentally calling each other 'socialist' (big joke), all that is apart from one contender who, mystifyingly, seemed to think an anti-woke agenda was the most pressing political issue of the modern era.

Although posterity has justifiably branded the original Nero as one of the worst emperors ever, no small achievement given how many of them were corrupt, incompetent, megalomaniac or outright insane, in fairness he almost certainly didn't start the Great Fire, and wasn't even in Rome at the time, but did hurry back immediately to direct massive rescue efforts entirely out of his own pocket. But what is posterity going to make of all these modern Neros, who turn up

to COP meetings only to mouth pious platitudes about 'net zero by 2050' which they know, and we know, they have no intention of sticking to? The 1.5°C ceiling has almost certainly been passed already, and the 2° limit is sure to follow, despite all the promises of the 2015 Paris Agreement. Devastating wild fires now rage seasonally in dozens of countries as a dramatic reminder of how little these petty emperors of capitalism have achieved.

And why have they achieved so little, you might ask? Are they corrupt, or incompetent, or possibly insane? If that were so, getting a different set of leaders would solve the problem. But the real truth is, they simply realise what socialists also realise, that to do anything serious about climate change, they would have to pull the plug on capitalism itself. And that's something they can never admit, and never do, no matter how many cities spontaneously combust.

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If you really want peace...

YOU MAY not know what a 9 mm Parabellum firearm round looks like, but you'll certainly have seen one in the movies or on TV, a snubby, often brass-jacketed shell used in ammunition belts or stacked in automatic magazine cartridges. It was designed by Georg Luger in 1901 and is the standard military round for US and Nato forces, because it's cheap, easy to load, has moderate recoil, doesn't excessively wear out the gun, and is readily available just about anywhere. There are heavier calibres, including hollow points – invented by the colonial British at their Dum Dum arsenal in Kolkata – which explode on entering the body, but for general-purpose killing at ranges of 160 feet or more, the 9 mm Parabellum cartridge is considered highly effective by 'the modern science of wound ballistics' (bit.ly/3yORWIS). The name comes from an old Latin proverb, since adopted as the Royal Navy's motto: *Si vis pacem, para bellum* – If you want peace, prepare for war.

A socialist would of course say, if you want peace, prepare for socialism, because you won't get peace any other way. Capitalist rulers constantly prepare for war but they don't like to admit this too baldly, so they call it 'defence' and engage in worthy and much-publicised conferences about what is and what is not a civilised way of killing someone. Thus, in the history of firearms ammunition, we find that there is by implication such a thing as an ethical bullet. The 19th century Hague Convention swiftly pronounced itself shocked by the British invention of the hollow point, and moved to outlaw such exploding bullets for military use on the grounds that they caused an unacceptable (ie, horrific) level of injury. This ban did not apply to civilian use however, and what's possibly even more horrific is the accepted argument made by police forces that, because such bullets fragment inside the body, they don't pass right through and kill some innocent bystander. Believe it or not, this is why police forces to this day are allowed to use these vicious rounds, at least

in certain circumstances.

The question, what is the 'ethical' way to kill someone, reappears every time weapons technology gets an upgrade, or when the opposite side is found to be using some weapon you haven't got (or do not admit to having). Much was made, in the early days of the Ukraine war, about Russian forces using cluster bombs, which are banned under the 2010 Convention on Cluster Munitions. These are indeed nasty because they throw out little bomblets which explode all over the place, and worse, often fail to go off immediately but explode later when picked up by children who think they're bright orange toys. But media talk of Russian 'war crimes' obscured the fact that Ukraine forces were also using cluster bombs, and that neither side in the conflict had actually signed up to the ban. As it turns out, the ban is most heavily supported by countries either having suffered directly from their use or not having any such munitions anyway, and least by countries who have stockpiled them, this latter category including the USA, China, India, Pakistan, Israel, Brazil and Finland. The ugly truth is, cluster bombs are highly effective, and unlikely to blow back unexpectedly on the user, unlike unpredictable chemical and biological weapons, which may explain why the ban on these is more universally adhered to.

Now the debate is moving onto the question of regulating autonomous weapons, so-called killer robots, that can make their own battlefield decisions without any human agency at all. As the Tofflers pointed out years ago (*War and Anti-War in 21st Century*, 1995), weapons development since the Bronze Age has been all about the separation of combatants to ever greater distances, from primitive hand-to-hand stab and slash to modern remote push-button drones, with a consequent desensitisation to the effects of the weapons and, it is supposed, an increasing readiness to use them. Now humans are on the point of

being removed from the picture entirely, as machines decide who to kill and when, or where both sides are equally equipped, what other machines to destroy and when.

The argument for battlefield autonomy follows inexorably from the logic of drone warfare. Drone communications can be hacked or jammed, cutting off the human controller. In such circumstances it's either lose the battle, or allow the drone to make its own decisions. Both sides in Ukraine are already using 'loitering munitions', which can lurk in a vicinity waiting for a suitable target to appear, and then destroy it (bit.ly/3chkSS6). These munitions can easily be made autonomous, though the accuracy of their target recognition remains a work in progress. Here is where the call for regulation becomes loudest, not so much in moral outrage at the idea of being killed by a machine instead of a human, but at the prospect of autonomous drones mistaking a school bus for a tank or a hospital for a missile bunker. What's not up for debate though is that as soon as one country ups the ante with killer drones, the rest will surely follow. Wars are about winning a fight to the death, not storming the moral high ground and hoisting pretty flags.

Where technology is concerned, science fiction can often have profound things to say. In a 1967 Star Trek episode called *A Taste of Armageddon*, two planets are locked in perpetual war, but they've agreed to keep it clean and environmentally destruction-free by computerising the whole business. Thus, citizens are randomly selected as virtual casualties and must then report to termination booths to be killed in reality. This simulation is regarded as affordable and acceptable to both planets and is the reason why the war never ends. As the show pithily observes, attempts to take the horror and destruction out of war are really attempts to perpetuate it.

In socialism, where wealth is commonly owned and thus not something to be fought over, autonomous drones could be used as weather gauges, for crop monitoring, or as solar-powered swarms in large-scale search and rescue missions, criss-crossing thousands of square miles of ocean to look for crash debris. And if society wills it, they could explore other worlds in our solar system, whose distance in light-minutes would make Earth-based decision making impractical. Autonomous drones could be part of a fantastic future for humans, just not as weapons.

PJS



What's the use of politicians?

WE LIVE in the world of capitalism, and everybody knows that capitalism is not perfect, that it has problems. Many of us don't have jobs, or careers, or prospects. Those of us who do work are forced into the regimentation of the workplace, of bosses, of timesheets and production quotas, reports, key performance indicators, the nine to five, the bills, the mortgage, the stress.

Politicians tell us that what we have to do is to try to fix the problems with reforms.

Politicians tell us that what we have to do is to try to fix the problems with reforms. That's why they ask us to vote for them. They're supposed to be fixing it for us.

Capitalism is like a car that's permanently on blocks, with some politician underneath it and another one in the bonnet, shaking their head saying 'Oh dear oh dear, that looks bad, that does.' You keep paying the bills but the car never gets fixed. You begin to think the politicians don't really know what they're doing.

But what can you do? Capitalism may not be perfect but it's the only thing we have and after all it does work, sort of.

'Sort of'? We have the most technologically advanced society that's ever existed. But when it comes to doing



something useful like feeding the people in it, or limiting pollution and global warming, we can only manage 'sort of'.

Does anybody at all ever watch Party Political Broadcasts anymore? The problem is that they're boring and you don't believe a word of what they're saying. They're like soap powder adverts, each citing dubious evidence to show they're better.

Politicians talk about this problem or that issue – within capitalism. The real reason why politicians all sound the same, and why people find it so hard to be interested in politics, is that they all have this same frame of reference.

If you question capitalism itself you

automatically put yourself outside that frame of reference, and that's when the politics of capitalism suddenly becomes meaningless to you.

Politicians make it all sound so incredibly complicated, so complicated in fact that you need them to work it all out for you.

Politicians make it all sound incredibly complicated, so complicated in fact that you need them to work it all out for you. You have a vote every five years, that ought to be enough, what more do you want? You don't really understand, you don't know enough, you're not smart enough, you couldn't really make the decisions.

Well, medicine's complicated. It takes 11 years to train a doctor. We couldn't all be doctors. But who ever heard of Politician College? What qualification do politicians have to have which is beyond the rest of us? There isn't one, is there? Anybody could go into politics, as surely Boris Johnson has proved. The experts in charge of decision-making are not 'expert' at all. No more than any of us are.

We don't need them. What we need is to question the basis of modern society ourselves, think about it, and then think what to do about it.

What is the way-out?

IN CAPITALISM, what we need is produced to make a profit for those with money to invest. The rest of us depend on the pay we get from working for some employer. We have nothing in common with them. They live off profits. We depend on wages. A faster than usual rise in the cost of living is not a crisis for them. It is for us because unless our pay goes up too we are worse off. Money problems dominate our life.

Making profits is what capitalism is all about. It is what drives the economy and why profits always come before needs. It is why not enough resources are devoted to essential public services like health care, education and transport. Competition to secure export markets, cheaper sources of raw materials and trade routes leads to international tensions and to resources being used in

armed forces. Despite warnings about the effect on the climate, the burning of coal, oil and gas has continued because it has been cheaper.

This is how the system works and it can't be changed and is why parties and governments, in spite of their promises, always fail to solve these problems.

There is a solution. But it means getting rid of capitalism. The resources exist to provide everyone with what they need as well as good public services and amenities. For these to be used for this they must stop being owned by a small minority of rich people and become instead the common property of all the people. Production for profit can then be replaced by production to directly meet people's needs.

Structural imbalance

GOOD MORNING Britain (ITV 28 June, bit.ly/3lymiUu) pitted Dave Ward, General Secretary of the Communication Workers Union against Matthew Lesh of the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA). Ward correctly identified Lesh as representing the bosses, the IEA being a free-marketier thinktank funded by big business.

Lesh argued that a large increase in wages would lead to Royal Mail becoming uncompetitive and losing business to other parcel delivery firms paying lower wages. He also claimed that 'there's not enough profit margin for a 10 percent pay rise for all workers'.

He is right about capitalism running on profits but going concerns always have enough profit to pay something if workers are in a good bargaining position. When negotiating, unions take into account whether an employer can pay. They are not so stupid as to insist on a claim that would bankrupt an employer with the result that their members lose their jobs.

Trade union negotiations take place within a system where businesses have to make a profit and this places a limit on what unions can achieve for their members. Ward recognised this, saying that there was a 'fundamental flaw in the system' within which unions had to operate, a 'deep structural imbalance of

power and wealth', a 'structural problem of how the economy is run, how businesses operate that have got to change'.

This would seem to be an oblique reference to capitalism which is based on the owners of the places where wealth is produced and services provided being in a powerful position vis-à-vis the rest of the population. It means that the non-owners can only get a living by selling their labour-power to some employer. Employers hold the whip hand; their employees have to settle on terms which allow businesses to operate at a profit.

Although Ward said 'it is time to challenge some of the fundamentals of how the economy operates' and called for 'a new deal for working people, a new social settlement in the UK', he was rather vague about what this would involve. The only thing he mentioned on the programme was fixing a maximum ratio between the pay of those at the top of a business and that of the workers, to which Lesh responded by making the (valid) point that, although the bosses were paid high salaries, they weren't high enough to be used to pay much of a wage increase to those they employed.

In an article in the *Morning Star* (18 June) Ward was more forthcoming. Criticising the Labour Party for having

'completely failed to set out any coherent vision to end inequality and division – and build real solidarity amongst working class people', he called on the unions to get together with 'local community organisations' to demand 'new democratic models of public ownership to deliver better housing, health care, social care, education and transport.'

These are not improvements that unions have the power to deliver. Governments can't deliver them either, as the failure of reformist governments everywhere has shown. They have all ended up giving priority to profit-making and coming into conflict with workers and their unions. Capitalism is a profit-making system that simply cannot be run in the interest of wage-workers. 'How businesses operate' cannot be changed within it.

The only way to end the 'structural imbalance of power and wealth' within which unions – and reformist governments – have to operate is to make the means of wealth production the common property of the whole of society. Then production can be re-oriented to directly meeting people's needs. If Ward had advocated socialism – as a trade unionist who was a socialist would have done – he could have wiped the floor with Lesh. Instead it was a stalemate with Ward having no answer to Lesh's point about businesses having to be allowed to make a profit.

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?

Friday 19th August

7pm (UK time). Class Consciousness and the Socialist Revolution: A talk by Mark Znidericz

Saturday 20th August

10am. *Let Them Do Yoga!* - Inequality, Mental Health and Social Revolution: A talk by Brian Gardner

1.45pm. The Class Divide and the Role of Trade Unions: A talk by Howard Moss

Sunday 21st August

10am. How Middle Class are you? A talk by Mike Foster

The event also includes *Class or Classless Society?* an interactive session hosted by Ste Finch and Paddy Shannon, and *Take on the Capitalists!* board game evening hosted by Carla Dee.

THE CLASS DIVIDE

The Socialist Party's Summer School

19th - 21st August 2022

Fircroft College, Birmingham

Bookings to attend Fircroft have now closed, but the talks will be broadcast on the SPGB's Discord server. To register for Discord, email spgb.discord@worldsocialism.org. For Summer School enquiries, email spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk.

The pot calling the kettle black



Naledi Pandor, South Africa's Foreign Minister, stated recently: 'As South Africans, we find similarities in our past with the Palestinians, and now I remember the funeral of Shereen Abu Akleh and what happened to her coffin. It reminds me of the gravesites that we had to carry out under the persecution of the apartheid soldiers' (South Africa calls for holding Israel accountable for 'inhumane conditions' Palestinians live under, middleeastmonitor.com, 17 June, bit.ly/3yhwsVk).

In May Nokuthula Mabaso, an Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM) leader was buried following her assassination in front of her children. She was the third activist of the shack dwellers' movement to be killed in less than two months. Members of AbM are well acquainted with the state as a coercive machine of class oppression and likely know the fairytale Freedom Charter adopted by the ANC in 1955 envisaged a post-Apartheid South Africa where 'The police force and army. . . shall be the helpers and protectors of the people', 'the right to be decently housed' enshrined and 'Slums shall be demolished . . .'. AbM are credited with starting UnFreedom Day, which coincides with the official South African holiday called Freedom Day, the orthodox annual celebration of the country's first non-racial democratic elections of 1994. On the 16 August 2012 17 workers were killed and 78 wounded by the police in the Marikana Miners' Massacre, the most lethal use of force by South African security forces against other workers since 1976. Worse still, former President Mbeki's support for alternative remedies such as vinegar rather than antiretroviral drugs saved the state's funds at a cost of at least 300,000 lives. And 'More than two decades after South Africa ousted a racist apartheid system that trapped the vast majority of South Africans in poverty, more than half

the country still lives below the national poverty line and most of the nation's wealth remains in the hands of a small elite' (NPR, 2 April, 2018) led by billionaire Ramaphosa.

Taking the biscuit

'For all his anti-imperialist rhetoric, Chomsky remains a controversial and deeply contradictory individual. Defining himself often as an anarchist—a form of adventurist ultra-leftism—he is prone to criticise in harsh terms Lenin and Stalinism, that is any truly existing socialist government, be it China, Cuba, North Korea, Nicaragua, Venezuela, or the Soviet Union. In that way he ends up denouncing imperialism but canceling the denunciation by also attacking socialist nations under Imperialist attack' (grenvillepost.com, 13 June, bit.ly/3O9uxl8).

Yet Lenin wrote tellingly of Russia in 1918: 'reality says that state capitalism would be a step forward for us; if we were able to bring about state capitalism in a short time it would be a victory for us' (The Chief Task of Our Time). In his Report of an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan (1927), Mao admitted that the coming revolution would not be socialist: 'To overthrow these feudal forces is the real objective of the revolution'. This is what Fidel said when urging Mexican businesspeople to invest in Cuba, in 1988: 'We are capitalists, but state capitalists. We are not private capitalists' (Daum, Walter, 1990, *The Life and Death of Stalinism*; p.232). Nicaragua lags behind North Korea as a family-run cult cum kleptocracy. 'Maduro recognizes Venezuela is still a capitalist-based economy...' (Popular Resistance newsletter, 27 May, 2018). Capitalist hallmarks, such as class society, commodity production, profit motive, exploitation of wage labour, markets, etc., are found worldwide. Chomsky trumps Lenin and Stalin here:

'A democratic revolution would take place when it is supported by the great mass of the people, when they know what they are doing and they know why they are doing it and they know what they want to see come into existence. Maybe not in detail but at least in some manner. A revolution is something that great masses of people have to understand and be personally committed to' (*Linguistics and Politics*, September–October 1969, newleftreview.org)

And here:
'Presupposing that there have to be states is like saying, what kind of feudal system should we have that would be the best one? What kind of slavery would be the best kind?' (*Manufacturing Consent*, 1988).

A sandwich short of a picnic



'The Poor People's Campaign (PPC): A National Call for Moral Revival relies on economic calculations showing that 140 million Americans—which is more than 40 percent of the population—are poor or low-income' (informationclearinghouse.info, 15 June, bit.ly/3NfCBX6).

50+ years after the original Poor People's Campaign of 1968, which set out demands for nothing less than the eradication of poverty, 140 million Americans live in poverty, the top 1 percent has more wealth than the bottom 90 percent, and 'just 1 in 10 black Americans believe the civil rights movement's goals have been achieved in the 50 years since Martin Luther King Jr was killed' (*Independent*, 31 March 2018).

He said 'the prescription for the cure rests with an accurate diagnosis of the disease' yet focused famously on the 'Triple Evils' of poverty, racism and militarism, i.e., symptoms rather than the underlying malady, which is why Taylor Branch, the Pulitzer winning historian, could say of MLK that 'all the issues that he raised toward the end of his life are as contemporary now as they were then' (*NY Times.com*, 4 April 2018). Clearly, what is needed is not a re-launch but rather a rethink. Rosa Luxemburg explains why: '...people who pronounce themselves in favour of the method of legislative reform in place of and in contradistinction to the conquest of political power and social revolution, do not really choose a more tranquil, calmer and slower road to the same goal, but a different goal. Instead of taking a stand for the establishment of a new society they take a stand for surface modifications of the old society' (*Reform or Revolution*, 1900, bit.ly/3QFQQrb).



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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

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Central Branch

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Sri Lanka - the limits of workers' forbearance

SRI LANKA long had a stable economy but the Material World column in March [tinyurl.com/5n7prxbb] drew attention to the economic chaos taking place in there.

Since March the situation has spiralled even more out of control. Its rupee has lost more than 80 percent of its value and is still falling. Sri Lanka's foreign exchange reserves for all practical purposes have been depleted. Without US dollars the country cannot afford to pay for imports. Petrol has run out for non-essential users and is rationed in favour of the emergency services. Without fuel for cars and public transport via buses and tuk-tuks not running people cannot go to work or operate their businesses. LPG gas for cooking is in short supply. Fishing boats can't go to sea, because they don't have diesel.

All attempts to find solutions have failed which has now culminated in political turmoil with the prime minister's home being set alight by angry demonstrators and the president forced from office as protesters occupied the presidential palace.

The financial crisis is also a health crisis. Sri Lanka imports more than 80 percent of its medical supplies. Now medicines are in short supply, including essential, life-saving drugs. Only the most critical patients are being operated upon. Doctors who once could say that the country possessed very fine healthcare, now tell of people dying due to lack of resources. Sri Lanka's hospitals now rely on what charity other nations can offer.

In May a \$1.5 million donation came from Japan so that UNICEF could procure medicines for over 1.2 million people, among them 53,000 expectant mothers and nearly 122,000 children with immediate medical needs. Australia sent food plus essential medicines for women's health, the equivalent of nearly \$5 million.

In June the UN appealed to international donors for more than \$47 million in 'life-saving assistance'. To put it in perspective, the government at the time said \$5 billion was required for the island's economic survival primarily to pay for food, fuel and fertiliser.

Ordinary Sri Lankans continue to bear the brunt of the financial and food crises. Sri Lankans under normal conditions did not lack for food, but the UN World Food Programme reports nearly nine of 10 families are skipping and skimping on



meals, with 3 million requiring emergency humanitarian aid. Inflation of food prices was 22 percent in December 2021, 30 percent in March, and 57 percent in June resulting in people unable to put enough food on the table for their families. Now inflation is expected to go higher to 70 percent in coming months. A kilo of rice now costs 500 Sri Lankan rupees when it previously cost less than 100 rupees. The price of essentials means they are beyond reach for many people. Once unthinkable, Sri Lanka may now be facing food insecurity, if not outright famine, in a few months' time.

Fuel shortages mean electricity cuts, with transport and supply chains being disrupted. Factory closures and unreliable shipment of exports have led many global brands to turn to alternative suppliers, such as Bangladesh and India, leaving Sri Lankan workers without jobs and pay.

Discontent and unrest had been widespread for months across Sri Lanka but the magnitude of the protests that forced out the government, once more demonstrated the latent power of working people. What we witness in Sri Lanka arose to a degree from mismanagement and malfeasance yet it is not unique and similar situations will most likely occur in more and more countries. Global price rises have inflicted similar pain elsewhere.

Lebanon's GDP halved, from \$52 billion in 2019 to \$21.8 billion in 2021. Foreign exchange reserves dropped from

\$30 billion in 2019 to \$11 billion today.

The Lebanese lira has lost much of its purchasing power with salaries no longer sufficient for employees to support their families. Workers are barely able to buy basic necessities. Lebanon's poverty rate is now over 74 percent and nearly 2.2 million of the population are lacking food security. One third of the population in the country is unemployed and according to the International Labour Organization nearly all public sector employees are engaged in various levels of industrial action.

The UN warned that food scarcity and malnutrition in Lebanon would intensify further in the coming months and its representative in the country, Najat Rochdi, expressed concern that the grain and fuel shortages arising from the Ukraine conflict were already affecting the country.

Sri Lanka and Lebanon are not isolated examples of capitalism's failures to maintain stable social safety nets. Global inflation is inflicting economic pain across all continents and we can expect similar civil strife to occur in many more countries, and more governments to topple.

Politicians and the capitalist class in other countries received a warning sign in Sri Lanka that there is always a limit to workers' forbearance. Desperation can so easily turn into rage and revolt. If a country's economy sinks, its working class will not willingly go down with it.

ALJO

The Passing Political Show

Vacancy for a caretaker

SO BORIS Johnson was finally forced to resign. Luck ran out for this 'likeable rogue' who was twice elected Mayor of Labour-dominated London, who delivered Brexit for the dodgy financiers who funded the Vote Leave campaign, and who won over dozens of Labour strongholds in the North and the Midlands to the Tories. In the end his lying, his attempts to protect his cronies in trouble, his partying while the rest of us were locked down, turned him into a 'despicable rogue' – and an electoral liability for the Tories, which of course is why most of his MPs turned on him.

What was it that attracted many members of the working class to this privileged (Eton and Bullingdon Club) member of the ruling class?

As most members of the capitalist class were opposed to the UK leaving the EU, to win the referendum on UK membership he had to adopt a populist pose, presenting the campaign for Brexit as a struggle of ordinary people to take back control, not just from the Eurocrats of Brussels but also in opposition to the London-based British Establishment. With some jingoistic beating of drums and waving of flags, it worked. He successfully plotted to overthrow and replace Theresa May as Prime Minister, and fought and won the 2019 general election under the slogan 'Get Brexit Done'. He appointed a Vote Leave cabinet rather than a traditional Tory one, and only got Brexit 'done' by signing a protocol on Northern Ireland that he had no intention of honouring and which may yet lead to a trade war with the EU.

His flagship policy was the populist one of 'levelling up' the standard of living of Brexit voters in the North and Midlands to that supposedly enjoyed by everyone in London and the South East but that was just the usual, worthless politician's promise. When a shortage of HGV drivers developed, partly due to Brexit, and their wages rose, he said that a high-wage economy had been one of the aims of Brexit. When later, however, the rise in the cost of living led other workers to demand – and strike – to get higher wages, he opposed this. Just as any government of capitalism, including a Labour one, has to, because all governments have to accept that the capitalist system runs on profits and that profits therefore have to be given priority over wages.

This is why the personality – whether

good or bad – of those presiding over the operation of capitalism doesn't matter. No leader, even if they were a saint (which Johnson certainly isn't) can make capitalism work for those obliged to work for wages. It is a profit-making system that can only run, and be run, in the interest of the profit-takers. It is this that limits what governments can do. When it comes to the way the economy works, governments are in office but not in power, they are caretakers for capitalism.

This is why workers shouldn't place their trust in leaders, shouldn't hand over their responsibility to act for themselves to others who promise to do something for them, as unfortunately most repeatedly do at election times. Leaders can't do anything for us. It's the system that must be changed, not those who make up the government. Johnson will be replaced by someone else but it won't make any difference to our everyday life. Conventional politics is 'a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing'. It's time we got together democratically, without leaders, to put an end to the class system with production for profit that is the cause of the problems we face and which the politicians falsely claim to be able to solve.

How irrelevant can you get?



In June Nicola Sturgeon announced that the devolved administration in Scotland was asking the UK Supreme Court if it would be legal for them to organise a referendum on Scottish independence in October 2023, nine years after the last one.

Since the SNP is not even pretending to propose a change in the economic basis of society, where the means of life are monopolised by a minority and used to make goods and provide services for sale with a view to profit, we can conclude that their case is that capitalism administered by a government in Edinburgh would be better than capitalism administered from London.

It is hard to imagine a proposition, made by a party with some degree of electoral support, that is so easy to refute. Since capitalism is the cause of the problems that wage-workers and their dependants face, the SNP's proposed change to the political superstructure of society is not going to make any difference from a working class point of view. The problems faced by those obliged to sell their mental and physical energies for a living will continue under a separate Scottish state whose government will be no more able to solve them than the Westminster government has been.

It can't even be argued that a separate Scottish state would enhance the limited political democracy that exists (and is desirable) under capitalism. Both Britain and Scotland are established constitutional democracies. It is not like a colony seeking independence. In colonies ruled from abroad the struggle for political independence was waged by a native capitalist class with a view to obtaining its own state. In Scotland there is no such class demanding this. The demand for an independent state is put forward just by some politicians and intellectuals. It is irrelevant even from a capitalist point of view.

The struggle to achieve a separate Scottish state only encourages nationalist illusions and prejudices, further dividing the working class. Even the campaign for a referendum, let alone a referendum campaign itself, has this divisive effect.

It is by no means certain that there will be a referendum. The law says that it can't take place without the approval of the UK state. It is difficult to see how the Supreme Court could over-rule this. Maybe that is what the SNP is banking on. There has to be a British general election before 2024 and a refusal to give permission to hold a referendum could be a useful issue for the SNP to rally its voters.

If, somehow, the referendum does take place it remains to be seen if a majority will again vote to stay with the devil they know or take a leap in the dark. Socialists won't be opting for either.

Managerial Politics

POLITICS IS currently infested with a breed of managerialism. We can see the sort of thing on social media, with people crying out for the Speaker of the House of Commons, Lindsay Hoyle, to 'make Boris stop lying' as if he were some sort of manager that could compel Johnson to speak the truth.

This reflects people's experience of living in a society where 'calling someone's manager' is a way to get satisfaction as a consumer, or to resolve a dispute between colleagues at work. Everything can be fixed by an appeal to authority.

The role of such managers, by definition, is to keep the shop, restaurant or office running smoothly and performing its function. Their intervention is meant to stop disputes getting in the way of the mission of the organisation.

For workers who find themselves trapped in these workplaces, it means grievance processes, investigations and the whole soul-sapping rigmarole of official-ese whenever they fall out with someone they can't simply get away from, because they are also stuck in the same office.

Grievance procedures were legislated for by New Labour under the Blair government, and are part and parcel of how they view the world and politics: about fairness and process. There's no intrinsic harm in them, but they are a part of the system that's meant to slot humans into precise functions of a working machine, rather than promote human happiness, and are more about keeping a lid on relations, rather than making people happy or resolving the underlying problems.

This is the problem with managerialism as politics, it is about containing or smoothing over disputes as part of a permanent hegemony, rather than taking sides. The reality of politics is precisely about taking sides and picking winners in disputes. The only political question is: who rules? In managerialism, that question is effaced, there's no dispute about taking sides, no deliberate picking of winners, only the continuation of the management is on the table, with no capacity to re-write the rules or relationships being allowed.

For example, Wes Streeting (seen as a rising star of the Labour

Party right) got in trouble for stating that if he were in the RMT he would vote to strike, but if he were in government, he would be about trying to avert the strikes and bringing the two sides together, as a neutral. The trouble he got in was for going as far as saying if he were a union member he'd support strikes, but in the latter half of his comment he was clearly announcing the Labour Party's ideological position: they will not take sides, and will try to manage the dispute to stop it causing trouble in the overall mission of the organisation.

The problem is, in the world, there are sides to disputes, and any resolution will inevitably mean one side has won and one side has lost, refusing to take sides and 'representing everyone's interest' means, objectively, that when they are not siding with tenants versus landlords, employees versus employers, the weak against the powerful, they are actually battling for the other side.

This leaves Labour trying to win the election through the appearance of competence and responsibility, avoiding any big picture or ideological discussion. They cannot oppose the Tories on any major point of principle, just on personal integrity and ethics. Hence why they are

focussing on the Prime Minister's personal behaviour (as reprehensible as it is: it does not fundamentally question the structures of our society or government).

Whether by design or coincidence, the press are able to effectively reward them for this decision to not question the structures and relations of power in our society, by suddenly discovering a string of apolitical scandals that they have known about for ages, to give an alternative management the chance to show that they can run the machinery of state just as well. Even if they don't go so far as to actively campaign against the Tories, they can use the threat of Labour to discipline them, and keep them in line as well, on behalf of their wealthy friends and backers.

Labour, for their part, are hoping that the Tories will lose the election through their in-fighting. For their own part, they are quietly using managerial/bureaucratic techniques to sideline people associated with the leadership of Corbyn and quietly crush any rival internal factions: again, had this happened under the previous leader, the press would have been in full cry, but as the cause is bringing the machinery of the Labour Party to heel, their silence is now deafening.

As with the Wakefield by-election, they seem to be preferring that people don't turn out for the Tories, and they can win by default, rather than trying, as Corbyn did, to activate new voters and build a new electoral coalition. If some of the Tory vote goes to the Liberal Democrats, then the managerialists will achieve their Nirvana, of ensuring that a change of government can occur without any appreciable change in society.

How long such an approach can keep a lid on things is anyone's guess. But over the Channel, in France, Emmanuel Macron has been trying something similar for five years, using the threat of the old Front National as a means of disciplining the voters into accepting his managerialist bloc, and there are signs that that may be beginning to backfire, with the successor of the FN getting its highest ever number of Parliamentary seats.

PIK SMEET



The Food Crisis

BIBLE-BELT America may be rejoicing the Supreme Court decision to restrict abortions of ‘unborn children’, but there has always been a noticeable lack of concern expressed for the living children needlessly dying around the world from hunger-related causes. According to UNICEF 40 million children in 15 countries are food insecure and of those 20 million are severely food insecure.

The media’s propaganda has been blaming the invasion of Ukraine by Putin’s Russia for the food shortages.

Is it so? The war in Ukraine is not the root cause of the present food shortages. Even before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, many people around the world were already food insecure.

While humanitarian assistance has been rushed to help Ukrainians, the budget to provide foreign aid to others countries is being reduced. The UN and NGOs are now actually cutting the food rations issued to the hungry.

Tens of millions of people across Africa do not receive enough food. Tens of millions are food insecure. Half the population of Somalia, for instance, lack sufficient food. Across the Atlantic, Latin American nations and Brazil also have food-insecure populations in their millions.

International agencies are over-stretched with appeals for funding going unheeded. It means food rations being reduced or eliminated entirely. Three-quarters of all refugees supported by the UN World Food Programme (WFP) in Eastern Africa are now on half-rations. In West Africa, where hunger has reached a record high in a decade, the WFP has significantly reduced rations for refugees living in the Sahel.

Much of the hunger problem is not due to any Russian blockade of Ukraine’s crops but to the effects of global warming and changes in weather patterns leading to increased drought conditions. Somalia is enduring its fourth season of failing rains. It means no harvests, with livestock dying from lack of grass. Many of the armed conflicts blamed on religion are in fact feuds between herders and farmers competing for pasture and water. News outlets feature the atrocities committed by Russia in Ukraine but the almost daily massacres in Africa never attract similar headlines.

According to a May 2022 report by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, the world enjoys ‘a relatively comfortable supply level’ of cereals. The World Bank



noted that global stocks of cereals are at historically high levels and that about three-quarters of Russian and Ukrainian wheat exports had already been delivered before the war started. Ukraine’s 2021/22 harvest yield saw exports up from 41 to over 46 million tonnes.

We are not saying there is no impact from the war but that we should delve deeper into the simplistic superficial explanations offered up by politicians.

So what is causing the global food price inflation? Why are prices sky-high?

Just as it was in the previous food crisis of 2007/8, profiteers have taken advantage of the uncertainty of volatile food supplies to speculate on the world market.

Following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, financial institutions began recommending clients to invest in the rising food prices through commodity-linked ‘exchange traded funds’ (or ETFs). By April, two top agricultural ETFs had attracted net investment of \$1.2 billion – compared to just \$197 million for the whole of 2021, a 600 percent increase.

The University of Bonn concluded that ‘we cannot rule out the risk that excessive speculation already contributes to food price volatility and amplified spikes’. Olivier De Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights commented, ‘Speculative activity by powerful institutional investors who are generally unconcerned with agricultural market fundamentals are indeed betting on hunger, and exacerbating it.’

The *New York Times* reported that ‘in April, speculators were responsible for 72 percent of the buying activity on the Paris wheat market, up from 25 percent before the pandemic,’ hoping to make money out of a self-created shortage. The

corporations that control the bulk of the world’s commercial grain trade hold large stocks of grain in reserve so to as benefit when the prices go up.

The reality is that the world produces far more food than we eat. Over 33 percent of the food produced globally is used for animal feed as well as for other non-food uses, mainly ‘green’ biofuels. Over 40 percent of the roughly 400 million tons of corn – 160 million tons – goes to ethanol production. And the USA, despite the food crisis, insists that it has no intention of reducing its ethanol production. The Green Alliance thinktank found that the land use associated with the production of ethanol for consumption in the UK in 2021 was 107,300 hectares. If this land instead grew grain, 3.5 million people could be fed each year. The land used for biofuels for the EU, China, USA and elsewhere would be far greater and feed far more people.

The capitalist food system is built on volatile commodity markets and financial speculation. Hunger is systemic to a financial system that turns necessities into commodities to be traded so that it threatens the well-being of people. It is easier to make Russia the culprit for the current food crisis rather than accept that it is capitalism itself that is culpable.

2023 may well be a critical year if the situation is not addressed by states cooperating together, which is a very doubtful prospect. Therefore, we can expect that:

Climate change intensifies. People now suffering from food insecurity will face actual famine. Wars and civil unrest spread. Countries introduce policies to restrict their food exports and governments will fall.

ALJO

Putin, Power and Women

AS THE media frenzy concerning another spectacular but predictable demise of a British Prime Minister begins to subside there will be those who will try to divine a meaning in all of the populist bluster of the last few years. Like Trump in the USA his attempt to bypass and disregard the political establishment was a resounding failure. The most powerful office of state seems, in the end, to emphasise its weakness when confronted by the real power of the ruling elite. All of the millions who were conned into thinking that voting for populist candidates like Boris Johnson would change anything are forced to the realisation that their votes are meaningless if they attempt to thwart the ruling class and their need for 'business as usual'. Perhaps Johnson was surprised at just how little power the office of PM brings with it.

A vision of him holed up in a fortified No. 10 defended by the hordes of his northern 'red wall' supporters paralleling the Trump militia's storming of the Capitol building is both comical and disturbing.

A vision of him holed up in a fortified No. 10 defended by the hordes of his northern 'red wall' supporters paralleling the Trump militia's storming of the Capitol building is both comical and disturbing. That the man had no moral compass or political integrity is no surprise to socialists but what we do find unforgivable is his warmongering activities on behalf of NATO in the name of the Ukrainian people. One of his more incoherent statements concerned his assertion that if Putin were a woman he would not have invaded Ukraine. Does he have no memory of the Tory heroine Thatcher glorying in the Falklands War? She may not have instigated the invasion but she loved every moment of it. Indeed many feminists at the time seriously asserted that she was not really a woman at all. So what is the real nature of political power and are female leaders instinctively more benign and less belligerent than their male counterparts?

A friend once insisted that she had no interest in history because it was merely a record of 'boys' power games'. Whilst it is true that the nature of the evolution of private property societies and their warrior ethos has promoted patriarchy there have been examples of powerful and belligerent female leaders. From Boudicca and Cleopatra in the ancient world to queens of England including Matilda, Bloody Mary and Elizabeth I. There is no record of Queen Victoria objecting to her other title as 'Empress of India'. Benazir Bhutto, Golda Meir, Tansu Ciller and Chandrika Kumaratunga are all female leaders of the modern era who could hardly be called pacifists. Condoleeza Rice in her role of National Security Advisor in the US played a significant role in prosecuting the illegal war in Iraq and the instigation of the use of torture. The characteristics needed to be a successful politician within the capitalist context are the same for both men and women and gender seems to make no significant difference. Like leading men within the mainstream political parties their primary role is to protect the power and wealth of the parasitic elite. If war is needed to do this they will have no hesitation in beating the drum.

Vladimir Putin has become demonised in the West as a maniacal imperialist despot. But the truth is that his actions would be duplicated by many other capitalist leaders if they felt they had been systematically lied to and threatened by a rival and enemy. Putin represents the pride that Russia once felt in its supposed imperial heyday as the 'Soviet Union'. Promises undertaken by the US not to expand their empire (NATO) any further east have been broken and rightly or wrongly the Russian elite feel they have been betrayed and insulted. They proclaim that Ukraine was the gateway to the

invasion of their country by Napoleon, the Kaiser and Hitler and that they will never allow this to happen again. Meanwhile members of the working class on both sides continue to murder each other in the name of their respective oligarchs. The idea that this is simply 'Putin's War' rather than an inevitable result of national rivalries and the economic objectives that they serve is just tabloid propaganda.

An unlikely candidate for the role of female peacemaker came in the form of German leader Angela Merkel who, apparently, begged George Bush Jnr. not to continue to pressure Ukraine to join NATO since she plainly foresaw the conflict that this would unleash. The momentum of history has little regard for the illusion of power that leaders try to project. As Merkel's 'illustrious' predecessor Otto Von Bismarck once remarked with unusual humility: 'The statesman's task is to hear God's footsteps marching through history, and to try and catch on to his coattails as he marches past.' If we substitute the word 'progress' for the reference to God this has an almost Marxian quality to it. Bismarck also knew that a united Germany was inevitable and that his efforts to maintain Prussian hegemony were doomed – it seems that those who are most successful as statesmen/women recognise how limited their power really is.

An analysis of the power of individuals and groups through history leads socialists to believe that leaders are a political anachronism that have no place in the modern world. The global working class must act as a united political force to finally eliminate the mythology of 'great men and leaders' and the tribal interests that they represent. Only then can humankind's true historical destiny be fulfilled.

WEZ



Credit: AP Photo/Pavel Golovkin, Pool

A Very British Hit Job

THIS JUNE saw a very British hit job. Charles, the heir to the throne, reportedly made comments that indicated that he considered the British government's policy of off-shoring irregular migrants to Rwanda as 'appalling'. The *Times* reported this, indicating that the remarks were made in private. Nonetheless, this led to banner headlines in many papers. Unnamed government ministers were quoted as saying 'He is in danger of over-reaching himself. He cannot make pronouncements on government policy when he is king. Even in private there is always a chance those remarks will get out and put him in a difficult position'.

Undoubtedly, the government had initiated this policy to get a strong reaction so they could have a storm about taking a strong stance over their handling of irregular migration across the Channel.

Undoubtedly, the government had initiated this policy to get a strong reaction so they could have a storm about taking a strong stance over their handling of irregular migration across the Channel. They probably didn't expect the flak to come from the prince, much less the Archbishop of Canterbury: they wanted to be able to point to soft liberals who 'hate their country' rather than the absolute pillars of the very Establishment itself.

This must have hit home, because, just a week or so later, we saw more banner headlines about Mr Windsor. The *Sunday Times* led with a splash about him receiving large charitable donations from Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber Al Thani, the former Prime Minister of Qatar. The issue being that the €3 million was received in €1 million cash instalments, personally handed to the aristocrat in Fortnum & Mason carrier bags.

These reports noted that 'Each payment



was deposited into the accounts of the Prince of Wales's Charitable Fund (PWCF), a low-profile grant-making entity which bankrolls the prince's pet projects and his country estate in Scotland. There is no suggestion the payments were illegal.'

So, if the donation was not illegal, was not given personally to Mr Windsor, why did it merit a front page splash? The journalists provided weak gruel with questions of 'judgement': it simply looked shady to accept large donations of cash (though, apparently, trustees later said due diligence on accepting the donation was done). Presumably, if the donation had been done by bank transfer, there'd have been no issue.

They also drew in other allegations of courtiers offering cash for honours, which, while shady, were themselves not relevant to the princeling accepting charitable donations.

In his final novel, *Numero Zero* the Italian scholar of communication and meaning Umberto Eco presented an examination of the fictional establishment of a new newspaper: the issue-zero proofs of concept that are a prelude to releasing a newspaper proper. The idea being that an Italian millionaire wanted to 'enter the inner sanctum of finance, banking and perhaps also the quality press. His way of getting there is the promise of a new newspaper ready to tell the truth about everything,' a newspaper that would be abandoned if such entry were granted.

Eco has the fictional editor of this pseudo-newspaper say: 'It's not the news that makes the newspaper, but the newspaper that makes the news. And if you know how to put four different news items together, then you can offer

the reader a fifth.' The simple act of contextualising a story on the page makes the story. Of course, Charles Windsor consorts with rich people, and gifts and favours are swapped all the time, and his simple unearned privilege is an affront to humanity. But, putting a small example on a front page gives it an appearance of impropriety, even when in fact none exists.

It is also an excellent example of 'swiftboating', an act named after the campaign of *Swiftboat veterans for truth*, a move by Republican Party strategists in the United States to neutralise a natural strength of then Presidential candidate John Kelly. He was a decorated Vietnam war veteran, something that is normally an advantage in elections, however, merely raising a question mark about this turned his greatest strength into a liability.

The Royal Firm uses its charitable work as a shield to protect it from criticism of its undemocratic power and unearned opulence and luxury. By turning charitable collection into a point of concern, and even possible malfeasance by the princeling (especially by reference to his Scottish estate which the charity supports), the media 'swiftboated' him.

The message sent was loud and clear: the press could manufacture a story any time they want. And, given how long ago these transactions are supposed to have happened, it also sent the message that they are sitting on an arsenal of stories that they could pull out at any time to trash Windsor in the public imagination – much like the infamous list of 'handsy' Tory MPs that was leaked from the Whips' office in 2017 and contained details of 40 MPs' sexual and other misconducts, including Chris Pincher – the revelation of whose behaviour was just the trigger for the downfall of Boris Johnson.

We have just witnessed the punishment beating of a Royal, with the clear implication that the mass media can destroy the monarchy if it wished, and that if it hinders the agenda that parts of the press want to have the government follow, it will not hesitate to do so.

If that happens, we would not shed a single tear: indeed, given how some members of the Royal firm whine about the unfairness of press intrusion, we'd heartily encourage them to save themselves the bother, and leave the business, and take the whole stinking operation with them.

PIK SMEET

Is it really okay **not** to be okay?

WELL, THE simple answer surely has to be no! But let's dig a little deeper.

Every now and then a totally pompous and pampered privileged prince pops up in the news to reassure us that all is not as bad as it seems. For example, in a somewhat sickening publicity stunt and attempt to distract and limit the damage to their royal highnesses reputation caused by one of the more wayward members of the family firm, cute and cuddly Prince Willy was recently spotted promoting *The Big Issue* magazine designed to help the homeless, before heading back to his palatial home gifted to him by his Granny Liz.

Apparently regarded as one of the more popular members of the royal family, who along with his wife Kate, can often be seen and heard muttering those words 'it's okay not to be okay' in an attempt to persuade us that poor mental health issues are something not to be ashamed of. This is certainly the case, however a more pressing matter surely has to be why so many of us are falling into some of the most desperate states of stress, anxiety and extreme levels of depression recorded in recent times?

Whilst some people may be predisposed to such mental illnesses through biologically inherited disorders affecting the brain, there can be little doubt that environmental factors such as poor and sometimes volatile relationships- be they among family, friends or in the work place - are paramount. All manner of life events, alongside the pressure of trying to achieve good educational grades in order to set you up for the job market, can often leave you feeling low and in extreme cases, losing the will to live.

But fear not, our future King Billy is here to tell us that everything's going to be okay. Just keep taking the pills and you'll be



fine. Somehow, we don't think so.

The current social system most of us have to endure, called capitalism, has an inherently shambolic way of working which is the root cause of most of the ills we have to suffer during our lifetime. Now more than ever we are witnessing in real time the chaotic nature of the production of food and other life essentials motivated by the greed of the profit-hungry capitalists, the prices of which are also being seriously affected by world events such as the war in Ukraine, the fall-out from the Coronavirus pandemic, the instability caused by changes to European trading rules following Brexit and the complex relationship between those competing nation states. Gas, electricity and other rising fuel costs all conspire towards the so-called cost of living crisis.

So what can we do about it? We are seeing so much conflict and antagonism promoted by the class division of those who own the means of production but

do not produce, and those of us who produce, but do not own the means of production. This can often result in the withdrawal of labour through strike action – about the only tool the working class has at its disposal to combat and redress the balance of power. This in turn often leads to animosity and bad will between members of the working class whose lives are often disrupted by, for example, the recent industrial action taken by rail workers, through having to make alternative arrangements (often at much higher costs) in getting to hospital appointments, or perhaps choosing to sacrifice some annual leave rather than risk losing wages through not being able to get to work at all. Again, all symptomatic of the chaos that is life under capitalism.

So can we really believe the bullshit of the royal prince charming us with his words of comfort that poor mental health is just something that's natural and happens to everyone at some stage in our lives? Certainly not. Sure, being mentally ill is not something to be ashamed of. However, it is definitely something that could so easily be avoided if we had an altogether different and more sane way of organising ourselves and society. Now more than ever is the time to come together as a class and take control over our own destiny, with production methods held in common ownership by all and the fruits of our labours shared by all, the satisfaction of being part of the common good will undoubtedly lead to a more positive and healthier state of mind for us all. Anything else just won't be okay.

PAUL EDWARDS



Links in the Chains

CAPITALISM ENCHAINS the vast majority of the world's population, and the chains continue to get tighter. The question is how to bring this to the attention of the majority who haven't yet grasped the enormity of the situation, and then how to address it to the benefit of this vast majority.

Transnational Investment Networks

'The more complex the transnational investment networks become, the more intermediaries and jurisdictions there are, the harder it is to determine who is responsible for violations on the ground. Places sometimes are far away, hours by plane, boat and motorcycle cab – in the tropical forests on the banks of the Congo, the Sarawak and the Orinoco rivers – far away from the carpeted offices of The Hague and New York's Fifth Avenue' (bit.ly/3tg3jaD).

In reality these investment networks are enormous collaborations that are approaching almost complete control of international businesses and producers.

We can begin by taking a look at the numbers of the world's major players in these investment companies alongside population figures across the world.

According to 2020 figures, of the top ten investment groups in the world, eight are based in the US, one in Switzerland (UBS Group) and one in Germany (Allianz). In global population percentage terms, the US represents 4.25 percent, Germany 1.07 percent and Switzerland 0.11 percent. The

top three, Blackrock, Vanguard Group and Charles Schwab Corporation, all based in the US, hold 49.2 percent of global investments. Their various investment management 'products' consist of:

- Mutual funds
- Retirement income and college savings
- Exchange traded funds
- Asset management
- Stocks and shares
- Electronic trading

A vital point to be recognised is the massive 'interconnectedness' these companies have with major supply companies, including for food, which reveals just how tight their control over us as consumers is. This has happened gradually over time, with the majority being unaware of it, tightening the chains even further.

There are adverts for Vanguard and others on various TV channels featuring for instance 'ordinary folk with pensions' telling us how Vanguard have their – the people's – best interests at heart. But look into who the majority shareholders are, and you find that they are, unsurprisingly, most of the wealthiest people in the world.

Tangled web

Food is vital to all humans every day – and the tangled web chaining us all includes food as a major element. Food is now overwhelmingly owned and controlled by major corporations which are also connected to the investment networks.

Attention has been focussed on the

choices of food available, with often heated debate over meat consumption, vegetarianism and veganism, etc. However these are often just 'surface' chats which do not dive deep into the minutiae and possible problems at local and global levels. What needs more attention, especially following the recent and much-criticised COP26 summit, are the supposed changes needed, including reductions in emissions. And the debate needs rooting in a global perspective. The world comprises hugely different cultures and regions with diverse crops, animals and traditional foods. Perhaps the strongest focus needs to be on the important differences in health and local production in relation to organic and/or big-agriculture farming.

In Delhi where millions of farm owners and workers protested the government's decision to instigate three new farm laws, which would put both land ownership and rented land at risk



Last year's demonstrations in India centred on Delhi where millions of farm owners and workers protested the government's decision to instigate three new farm laws, which would put both land ownership and rented land at risk, with farm workers not being able to continue their chosen or inherited livelihood. Unlike most western (so-called developed) countries, the great majority of India's working population work on the land in one way or another, and to be pushed out of the rural areas would mean living on the edges of hugely populated urban areas, searching for work that is simply unavailable. The demonstrations came to an end when the government agreed that they would repeal their decision, but the farmers are looking to restart protests as there has been no progress so far. The big agricultural companies seem to again be

pushing to introduce genetically modified crops which, after some trials a number of years ago (on aubergines), were banned by the government and branded by farmers as another way of getting them off their land.

By far the farmers' biggest grievance is continually crushing debt from seed, and chemicals including herbicides, insecticides and fertilisers, foisted on them by the international agricultural companies. Having to purchase all these items on credit, before the planting season begins, before knowing what weather-related problems to expect, or whether the sale price will cover their costs, has been a major reason for hundreds of thousands of farmers to commit suicide by drinking these same chemicals.

These international agricultural companies are also part of the investment groups mentioned above and have a growing presence globally. India is but one example. Farmers around the globe are being pressed into a system of corporate agriculture against their will and each year thousands of acres on all continents are lost to the giant agricultural corporations.

Healthy Food?

According to scientists at the Francis Crick Institute in London, the growing popularity of Western-style diets is a major reason why such diseases are rising across the world by about 3 percent- 9 percent a year. It seems that changes in our environment are increasing the predisposition to autoimmune diseases. The research team found that diets based on processed ingredients and lacking fresh vegetables can trigger autoimmune diseases. Autoimmune cases began to increase about 40 years ago in western countries and are now emerging in countries that never had these diseases before, diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, Type 1 diabetes, celiac disease, lupus, inflammatory bowel disease and multiple sclerosis.

An estimated 4 million people in the UK currently suffer from these diseases.

The Western-style diet is one of highly processed and refined foods with high levels of sugar, salt and fat, and protein from red meat- a major contributor to metabolic disturbances and the development of obesity-related diseases, including Type 2 diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular disease. Biologists and others have long pointed to modern farming methods following the end of the Second World War as another factor in the growing health crisis. Three generations of industrialised farming have left land poisoned year after year by the use of toxic chemicals.

In 2014 the Corporate Europe Observatory released a report critical



of the European Commission over the previous five years. The report concluded that the Commission had been a willing servant of a corporate agenda. It had sided with agribusiness on genetically modified organisms and pesticides. Far from shifting Europe to a more sustainable food and agriculture system, the opposite had happened, as agribusiness and its lobbyists had continued to dominate the Brussels scene. Consumers in Europe reject GM food but the Commission had made various attempts to meet the demands of the biotech sector to allow GMOs into Europe aided by giant food companies, such as Unilever and the lobby group FoodDrinkEurope. Democracy in action?

The facts are plain, but still the chains tighten.

Food choices, especially for the global poor, are restricted year after year.

The facts are plain, but still the chains tighten. Food choices, especially for the global poor, are restricted year after year. The poorer you are, the poorer your choice of diet, from processed everything, and children not knowing what real food is, to cereals containing proven dangerous levels of Monsanto's Roundup, and myriad nutritionally worthless snack foods, all

reaping healthy profits for investors. Check out the supermarkets and the fast food chains in the lists of the investment companies and note that the money goes where the biggest returns can be made.

This is all about the power of money, the overwhelming power of a system that exists to channel as much money as possible into the pockets of the wealthiest. As Claus Schwab announced recently at a World Economic Forum gathering, 'You'll own nothing and you'll be happy about it.'

Some of the business sectors to be found in the Transnational Investment Networks are: Big Tech (Facebook, Twitter, Apple, Microsoft, etc. all in the hands of the same investment companies), food and agriculture industries, media of all kinds, pharmaceuticals, travel companies, airlines, booking agents, energy and mining, textiles, fashion brands, oil refineries, solar power companies, tobacco, cars, planes, and weapons.

Superficially companies and corporations appear to be in competition with each other while in reality, when digging below the surface, the major investors and the corporations themselves are cross-invested in their rivals. In this way the major investment holders hedge their risks and ensure their grip on the system.

Mission accomplished? Chains permanently locked? Looking at all of this from a socialist perspective where profits are not part of the equation, the matter is at least easier to grasp, if not solve.

JANET SURMAN

An arms economy?

SPEAKING IN June at Eurosatory, a weapons industry fair, French President Macron said that France 'has entered into a war economy' (bit.ly/3AI99pQ).

Strictly speaking, this is not true as a 'war economy' is when a state at war mobilises its economy for the one aim of winning the war. France is not currently at war, even though it is playing its part in arming NATO's proxies in Ukraine. All he seemed to mean was that the French state should devote more resources to equipping its armed forces with the most up-to-date weapons of death and destruction and, as he was speaking at a merchants of death trade fair, selling some to other states.

There is another sense in which the term 'war economy' has been used – 'military Keynesianism'. Keynes argued that there was no tendency under capitalism towards full employment and that the situation could occur, as in a slump, where not enough paying demand was being generated to bring about full employment. His answer was that the state should step in and increase its spending so as to boost demand. 'Military Keynesianism' is if this spending is on arms.

This appeared to work in Germany where the Hitler government's spending on re-armament did reduce

unemployment. In the US, too, the mass unemployment of the 1930s was not eliminated till the US entered the war. When the war ended this was not followed by a slump as many expected (including ourselves). One explanation that was offered for this was the continuing high level of government military spending.

One variety of this was the 'permanent arms economy' theory, espoused in Britain by the SWP's predecessor, the International Socialists, and expounded by its economic expert, Michael Kidron. In an article with this title in 1967 (bit.ly/3c8gEfM) and repeated in his 1968 book *Western Capitalism since the War*, Kidron said he shared 'the assumption that we should collapse into over-production and unemployment were it not for some special offsetting factor'. That factor, he went on to argue, was a 'permanent arms budget'.

He offered two explanations of how this worked to save capitalism. The first was pure military Keynesianism. 'Expenditure on arms is expenditure on a fast-wasting end-product', he wrote, that 'constitutes a net addition to the market for 'end' goods' and that 'one obvious result of such expenditure is high employment and, as a direct consequence of that, rates of growth

amongst the highest ever'.

But he also advanced the opposite view that arms spending *slowed down* the rate of capital accumulation and the fall in the rate of profit this caused and saved capitalism in that way. 'Were capitalism left alone to invest its entire pre-tax profit, the state creating demand as and when necessary, growth rates would be very much higher'. It was this over-accumulation which, if unchecked, would lead to 'collapse into over-production and unemployment'.

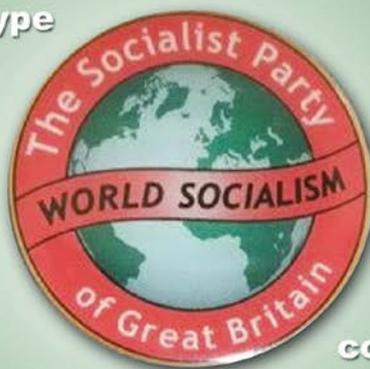
He was right about government arms spending slowing down capital accumulation as, having to be paid for out of taxes on profits, it reduced the amount of profits available for re-investment. But he was wrong that this saved capitalism from collapse. For, while there is indeed 'a permanent threat of over-production' under capitalism this is for other reasons than any long-term trend for too much capital accumulation leading to a fall in the overall rate of profit.

In any event, the permanent arms economy turned out to be not so permanent. It did not prevent the post-war boom, caused by reconstruction and the expansion of world markets, coming to an end in 1973 and replaced by a two-year period of slump that no government expenditure on arms or anything else was able to end. Keynes was wrong and so was military Keynesianism as an explanation of the post-war boom.

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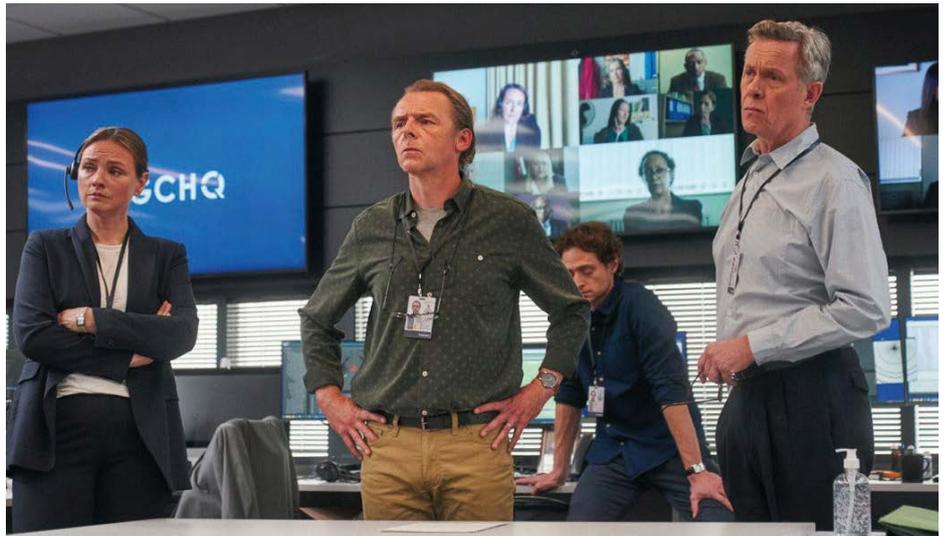
Hack To The Future

A THREAD which runs through the work of film-maker Peter Kosminsky is exploring how people relate to ideologies which defend power structures. For example, his 2017 drama *The State* described the journeys of extremist British Muslims joining 'Islamic State' in Syria, while his latest series *The Undeclared War* (Channel 4) takes a different angle by examining how cyber-warfare is used to drive political agendas.

The drama is a high-tech take on the Cold War thriller genre, set in 2024 when a cyber-war between the UK and Russian governments is escalating. The lead character is Saara, a student on work experience at GCHQ who discovers what her colleagues miss when fighting on the cyber-front against the Russian state's hackers and opinion-makers. Much of the plot relies on characters staring at rows of code on computer screens, which is livened up by being represented as Saara searching through dreamlike tunnels and rooms. Otherwise, the script goes for verisimilitude, unusually referring to many real organisations, not only GCHQ and its Russian counterpart the Federal Security Service (FSB), but also the BBC, Twitter, BT's Openreach, Swift and the main political parties.

It's one of those dramas set in under-lit rooms with tense conversations underlined by sombre music, but it's convincingly acted, carefully structured and grounded in research into cyber-warfare. The fictionalised activities of GCHQ, the FSB and their associates are based on what's been reported in the real world, and given some dramatic licence by the near-future setting. While *The Undeclared War's* plot is driven by hacks and counter-hacks into the Russian and British state's infrastructure, along the way we see strategies used by Russia's authorities which aim to mould people's views and behaviour. The result is an uneasy reminder that events and how they are reported can be manipulated to suit the narrative of power-hungry states. Ironically, this feeling of doubt about what's real is mentioned in the drama as part of what the Russian government wants to encourage.

With social media being a conduit for many people's interpretations of events, it's also an opportunity to shape perceptions. Two of the drama's main characters meet when working at the Glavset 'troll farm' in Russia, sending at least 80 tweets a day, chipping in to chats



Credit: Channel 4

about British politics to stir up trouble. These places do exist, and not just in Russia. In 2017, Freedom House (a think tank funded by the US government) found that 30 states worldwide hired people to 'spread government views, drive particular agendas, and counter government critics' on social media (tinyurl.com/4tdsevez). As anyone who uses Twitter will recognise, its discussions can be easily derailed by crass or provocative comments of the kind knowingly spread by troll farms.

How television is used to push a particular agenda is shown in the drama through the activities of Russia Global News (RGN), with a studio in London and reporters in the open. This isn't a real TV channel, and if it were, it wouldn't be allowed to operate in that way during a cyber-war, given that its closest real-life counterpart, RT UK, had its licence withdrawn by Ofcom following the invasion of Ukraine. One of RGN's staff makes the fair point that criticisms that it's a 'propaganda mouthpiece' are hypocritical when they come from journalists told what to say by the media corporations which employ them. RGN's broadcasts aren't obviously pro-Russian, but convey their message through more devious tactics. Its back-office staff set up two bogus Facebook groups (the lefty 'Luton For Labour' and fascist 'Take Back Control Of Luton'), wait for people to join and then post details of a demo at the same time and place on both groups' pages. RGN's reporter and camera crew turn up and record the subsequent violence when far-right numbskulls meet leftist demonstrators. This plot-point has a reportedly actual precedent. In his 2016 documentary *Hypernormalisation*, Adam Curtis described how pro-Russian state

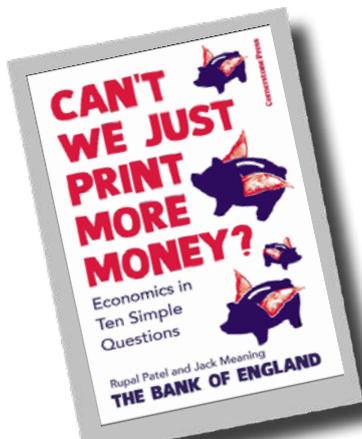
'Political Technologists' sponsored fascist groups, anti-fascist groups and parties opposed to Putin, then let it be known that this had happened so no-one could tell how real those organisations were. As one of RGN's staff explains, the point isn't that their news is false, 'the point is to get people used to the idea that everything's a lie, that there is no truth. And once they accept that, well, biggest liar wins'.

The Undeclared War is set around a future general election, another target for the Russian state's FSB. Databases are hacked, distorting exit poll results reported by the BBC and taking people from ethnic minorities likely to vote Labour off the electoral register. RGN reports this as pro-Tory election-rigging, and fakes footage of an ensuing riot in order to spread unrest. These scenes hopefully aren't based on actual occurrences, although there's evidence that the Russian state has interfered with US presidential elections and the Brexit referendum, and that the US state has a long history of intervening in other countries' elections.

Cyber-warfare as described in *The Undeclared War* is as much about psychology as it is about technology. The script refers to the strategy of 'reflexive control': manipulating an enemy's behaviour, in this case to promote the interests of the Russian state. This approach isn't new, but it finds new applications as technology develops. In the drama, this is shown as attempts to influence the responses to hacks and to create interpretations through TV broadcasts and social media. *The Undeclared War* is set in the future, but much of what it depicts is already here.

MIKE FOSTER

Why they can't



Can't We Just Print More Money?
By Rupal Patel and Jack Meaning.
Cornerston Press for the Bank of England. 2022. £14.99.

This is a very readable exposition of economics as taught in schools and universities and should help students pass their exams. However, the authors are likely to regret having used the terms 'miracle process' (p. 191) and 'out of nothing' (p.171) in relation to banks. This will be pounced on by currency cranks and used to claim the authority of the Bank of England for their mistaken theories.

Even as described by the authors, there is nothing magical about how banks operate. If you define a bank loan as money (as they do), then when a bank makes a loan it will be, by definition, 'creating money'. But it doesn't follow that they are doing this 'out of thin air' (p. 192). Only the government or its central bank can do that as 'fiat money'.

When a bank makes a loan it typically opens a bank account in the name of the borrower and credits it with an amount equal to the loan. Before it is spent the money doesn't have to be covered. But as soon as the borrower begins to spend it the bank will need to have or get money to transfer to the bank account of the person or business the borrower bought from.

Every day, money is flowing into and out of a bank, in as new depositors, payments to existing customers like wages, repayment of loans, etc and out as cash withdrawals, customers paying bills through direct debits or buying things with their debit card and borrowers spending their loan, etc. At the end of the day (literally) what banks owe each is 'cleared'. If after this a bank finds its payments out exceed its payments in it has to cover

this either by borrowing from the money market or running down its reserves at the Bank of England. So, loans when spent do have to be covered in the end one way or another.

When a bank makes a loan it is not creating anything out of thin air. It is transferring money that might not be spent otherwise to others who will spend it. This will have an economic effect by circulating money more but it is not creating money from nothing. Banks are intermediaries whose primary income is derived from borrowing at one or no rate of interest and re-lending it at a higher rate. After paying the costs of running their business (wages, buildings, computer systems) what is left is their profit.

The authors contradict themselves on this point. In chapter 7 they criticise as outdated the view that 'banks take in deposits from a pool of savings that people want to put away and then they find ways to distribute those savings around the economy. They are simply intermediaries' (pp 169-70). In the next chapter they say that banks 'match borrowers to savers. Banks act as middlemen between people who want to save money and people who want money to spend' (p. 188). They got it right the second time, especially when they add: 'Banks' most crucial role is funnelling money to where it can be most productive – and so stimulating the economy, while also making a profit for themselves' (p.190). But they spoil this by adding 'they cause more money to circulate in the system' whereas the correct formulation is that 'they cause money to circulate more in the system'.

Anyway, why can't 'we' just print more money? The authors' reply is more or less right.

'Banks want to be able to make a profit, and that places a limit on how much money they create [how much they lend]' (p.170).

Banks are in competition with each other both to attract new deposits and to make loans. As a result, as another Bank of England publication explains:

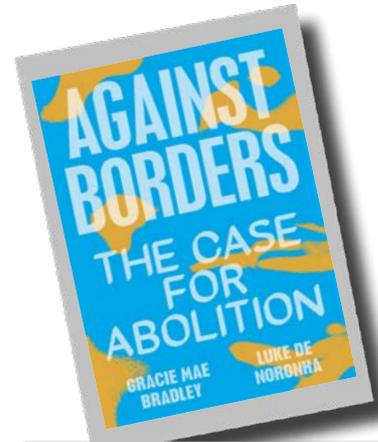
'...if a bank continued to attract new borrowers and increase lending by reducing mortgage rates, and sought to attract new deposits by increasing the rates it was paying on its customers' deposits, it might soon find it unprofitable to keep expanding its lending. Competition for loans and deposits, and the desire to make a profit, therefore limit money creation by banks' ('Money Creation in the modern economy').

As to fiat money: 'If central banks were to continue to print more and more without limit, the result would be too much inflation, with prices rising

uncomfortably fast and eroding the value of the newly printed money at too fast a rate' (p. 257).

ALB

Frontierless World



Against Borders - The Case for Abolition. By Gracie Mae Bradley and Luke De Noronha. Verso. Paperback £9.99. 2022. ISBN: 9781839761959

Where at first glance *Against Borders...* has a single-issue focus, it becomes a multi-faceted explainer of how 'migrants' are seen under the terms of capitalism and how we could interact with our fellow humans in a future, more open world.

The book regularly refers to André Gorz's concept of 'Non-Reformist Reforms' (bit.ly/3z1mXui) but gives socialists something to think about in terms of how borders can be abolished and other related issues solved in a future freed from capitalist constraints.

The book is broken down into chapters on race, policing and prisons and counter-terrorism among others but possibly the most thought-provoking is simply entitled 'Capitalism'. Bradley and De Noronha refer to the 'myth of race and nation' and how these and other similar concepts persuade us to perceive a worker from abroad differently from someone who hails from the same locality. There is discussion around how and to what end migrant workers are criminalised and treated by police forces, and the book includes interesting explanations of how ownership of land and ownership of territories differ.

In a 2018 article (bit.ly/2KeGSgM), author, broadcaster and professor Gary Younge described how when his Barbadian mother came to Britain in 1962 to work as a nurse she was already a British subject - 'My mother didn't cross the border to come to Britain – the border crossed

her.' In *Against Borders...* Bradley and De Noronha include a chapter on race and what it means to be a 'citizen' including critique of the 'hostile environment' (bit.ly/3ALCqju). Why, for example, do we need to be a 'citizen' in order to claim basic human rights from a state and how might campaigns for particular groups of migrants be considered to be defeatist by virtue of their reformist nature, rather than attempting to get to the root of the issue.

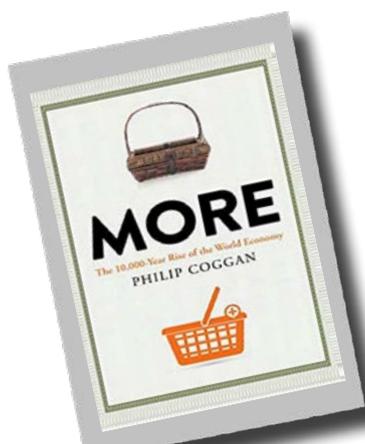
Ultimately, the book could be judged as a modern revision of concepts around the position and power (or lack thereof) of the worker, both regarding capital and people's ability to determine their own lives. The authors explicitly and interestingly leave open some questions about how we may restructure after borders are deemed obsolete. There are two thought-provoking utopian 'interlude' sections with imagined futures of people on the move and how this could play out in a post-capitalist world.

If *Against Borders...* is to be a (figurative) call to arms for a new audience to recognise that a radical change is possible in terms of how a state treats people from other (current) nations and possibilities around the building of a new realm, then the message is a positive one.

'The abolition of borders requires that we challenge all of the social structures underpinning their permanence' (p149).

TJ

More and More



Philip Coggan: More: the 10,000 Year Rise of the World Economy.
The Economist Books £10.99.

This book contains a great deal of useful factual and statistical material on the development of human society, from

hunter-gatherers to the present day, from the origins of agriculture via big increases in productivity to the 2007-08 financial crash. Chapters dealing with chronological periods alternate with those covering specific topics, such as energy and transport. Here we will focus on some of the themes and the main points made.

Coggan is quite open about the role of the state in defending and assisting capitalism. Some level of law and order is needed for businesses to operate, and also the government provides education and various kinds of infrastructure required by capitalism. Britain has never been completely laissez-faire, and more generally the Great Depression of the 1930s led to much greater state involvement in the economy. Many industries have been protected from competition from abroad, and long-term research without short-term payoffs is unlikely to be funded by private companies.

Another theme is the global interconnectedness of production. Cross-border trade involves over half of what the world produces; around ninety percent of this is carried by ship, as can be seen at massive container ports such as Felixstowe and Singapore. Everyday products such as toothpaste contain sizeable numbers of ingredients, which need to be combined in a factory, put in a tube and package and transported to a wholesale warehouse and then to a shop. 'No man is an economic island.'

Coggan makes no bones about the impact of the slave trade, describing it as 'the industrialisation of brutality'. He quotes another writer: 'The African countries that are the poorest today are the ones from which the most slaves were taken.' More generally, the European conquest of the Americas 'had

a catastrophic impact on the indigenous population', with perhaps ninety percent of the inhabitants of Mexico being killed, whether by imported diseases or warfare.

In answer to why Karl Marx's predictions of revolution did not come true by the late nineteenth century, Coggan refers to the benefits of industrialisation being 'sufficiently apparent' by then. Marx was indeed over-optimistic, but surveys of workers' lives in London and York around that time, by Booth and Rowntree, showed that about forty percent could barely keep their heads above water.

The author sometimes puts the word capitalism in quotation marks, on the grounds that it tends to be used in a slippery way, though he does not exemplify this. Yet it does not stop him using communism (without quotation marks) to describe the former system in Russia, which is not slippery, just wrong. And when he writes that 'If anyone needed a post-Soviet illustration of the failings of Socialist economics, Venezuela was it', he just shows that he knows nothing about Socialism. He does, however, describe the current system in China as 'authoritarian capitalism'.

Sadly, the William Morris listed in the index is the owner of a car factory and supporter of Oswald Mosley, not the revolutionary author and designer.

PB

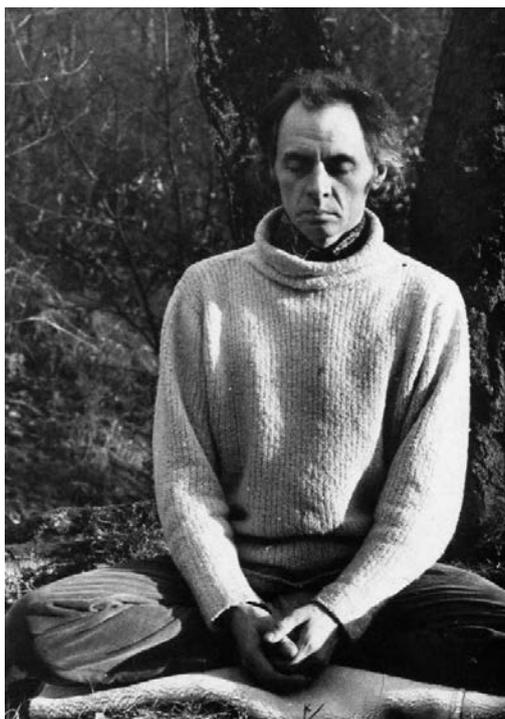


<p>Get your teeth into...</p> <p>THE GREAT EDUCATION FAKE-OFF</p>	<p>Sample dish to try:</p> <p>You need: a) posh outfit, b) exam certificates, c) humility, d) you. Add all ingredients together Bake at high heat in job interviews until you turn into an employee Allow to mature into an obedient butt-kissing wage slave Avoid hot water Get made redundant anyway Repeat until dead</p>	<p>Guaranteed free from</p>
<p>Discover ALL-NEW POST-SCHOOL recipes like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Production-Line Porridge Office Fried Brains Universal Credit Crunch Boss's Daily Roast Gig-Economy Diet Delights Politician's Honeyed Waffle 	<p>Why not enjoy the FAKE-OFFS other exciting courses?</p> <p>Discover how to: Make your boss a new Maserati Blame poor people and unions Worship the Royals Vote for millionaires Stay out of politics that doesn't concern you Teach all this to your own kids</p>	<p>But seriously folks... On behalf of the 1%, the UK government has banned any teaching about radical Marxist or socialist ideas in schools. They don't want you to hear anything that criticises capitalism or that proposes an alternative. They would sooner let the world burn.</p> <p>For a real change, see what's cooking at spgb.net</p> <p><small>Object: The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments of producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.</small></p>

Mind in a cul-de-sac: Laing

IF ONE considers the family in its genealogical image as a tree, today lumberjacks are out. The tree, by various allegations, is blighted and corrupt, the leaves malnourished while society still praises its luxuriance. In the nineteen-fifties Dr. Kinsey showed statistically that monogamy was a stale pretence; in the 'seventies Women's Liberation proclaims it to be a cage. The most trenchant attacks on the family, however, have come from the psychiatrist Dr. Ronald Laing. In a series of writings on the condition of schizophrenia, Laing has shown family groups as circles bent on mental violence, selecting this and that member as victims for destruction. Only the mad are sane, says Laing.

A psychiatric theory may not, in itself, be thought to matter much outside the world of attempted therapy where—as with more palpable physical disorders—the patients are patched to be sent back to the environment where their troubles grew. But Laing's has been popularised as material for social and political dissenters. Contributing to the *New Left Review*, *Peace News* and *New Society* automatically connected him with the cultural Left; in 1967 he was one of the speakers in the "Dialectics



of Liberation" seminar at the Round House, London, with Marcuse, Stokely Carmichael and others. The film *Family Life* is a representation of his view of everyday relationships: an onslaught against the stupidity, unfairness and general motivation of the conventional and a vindication of the young dubbed insane, with the implication that the latter had better run from the former as fast as they can.

It is also a representation of the nature of Laing's popularity. The appearance of cheap editions of his books coincided with the emergence of the "underground", the movement for dropping-out and psychedelia. (...)

In the 1965 preface to an earlier work, *The Divided Self*, Laing speaks of his theories as condemning not only family relationships but the social order at large, because it "represses not only 'the instincts', not only sexuality, but any form of transcendence". The preface was withdrawn from the 1970 edition, and he is now reported to have retreated into mysticism.

(*Socialist Standard*, August 1972)

Article

Thoughts on climate change

A FEW days ago, I saw a drift of *Cardamine pratensis* by the roadside – not pink, not violet, but an indescribable blend of them both. Known to most, and first named when our relationship with plants was much closer, as the Cuckoo flower or Lady's smock, these flowers have never grown there before; certainly the species can be found at the same roadside location each April, but not the same flowers. Each year, new flowers appear, equally beautiful and equally fresh.

Beauty, particularly the beauty of nature, so valuable to us all and yet with no actual monetary value, is transient. Beauty, a universal feature of our natural surroundings, is disappearing gradually and inexorably. Climate breakdown caused by human activity is now a major cause of species and habitat loss. However, climate breakdown (or change) is not the only, or indeed primary, factor leading to the destruction of our environment; it is, rather, a symptom of our means of organising world society – a symptom that sits alongside pollution, warfare, homelessness, poverty and many other inexorable outcomes of a society based on profit and endless growth. We are, in fact, a species at war with ourselves and the very necessities of life itself. This is a needless war, as the system that gives rise to such outcomes can be changed; it only requires individuals to believe that it is not working and to want to change it.

I hope that, if you have read this far, you will not see these words as a pointless 'rant' or feel that by writing these thoughts I am in any way suggesting that the opinions you hold about climate change or the causes of climate change are invalid or wrong. I am, however, hoping that you will agree that the existing manner in which we organise society does not work and is dramatically failing to protect both us as humans and the species with which we share the planet – the only planet available to us. Yes, this is a political problem and politics is a difficult subject, but for a moment imagine that all the political parties, groups and ideas that we know were gone; there was no 'right' or 'left' but instead a new order of things that put nature and people first. No economy, simply the careful and considered organisation of the world's resources to the mutual benefit of all. Would this not be welcomed? In my opinion, 'left' and 'right' political thinking suggests a wall at which you can only turn one way or the other, and at which there is no escape from the system – one which still puts the economy first. I want to get over the wall, look at all the wonderful things the human race can do, put beauty first and allow our children to look back with thanks that we chose a new path into the future.

It is not helpful to focus blame for climate change (or indeed all the other ills of society) on each other or individuals; yes, as individuals it is mutually beneficial to play our part, but no amount of reforms, charities or tweaking will curtail the trajectories we are experiencing. Change is needed – world change – and change is frightening, but is it more frightening than the alternative?

GLENN MORRIS

World Socialist Movement Online Meetings

To join Discord contact the
Administrator on
spbg.discord@worldsocialism.org.

AUGUST 2022 EVENTS

World Socialist Movement online meetings

Sundays at 19.30 (IST) Discord

Weekly WSP (India) meeting

Friday 5 August 19.30 GMT +1 Discord

Regular Friday evening discussion meeting

Friday 12 August 19.30 GMT + 1 Discord

Did You See the News?

General current affairs discussion

Host: Paddy Shannon

Sunday 14 August 11.00 GMT + 1 Zoom

Central Branch Meeting

Anyone wishing to join the meeting contact spgb.cbs@worldsocialism.org to get an invite.

Friday 19 August 19.00 GMT + 1 Discord

Summer School Talk

Class Consciousness and the Socialist Revolution

Speaker: Mark Znidericz

Saturday 20 August 10.00 GMT + 1 Discord

Summer School Talk

Let Them Do Yoga!

Inequality, Mental Health and Social Revolution

Speaker: Brian Gardner

Saturday 20 August 13.45 GMT + 1 Discord

Summer School Talk

The Class Divide and the Role of Trade Unions

Speaker: Howard Moss

Sunday 21 August 10.000 GMT + 1 Discord

Summer School Talk

How Middle Class are you?

Speaker: Mike Foster

Sunday 28 August 11.00 GMT + 1 Discord

No Meeting. Bank Holiday weekend (in England)

To join Discord contact the Administrator on spgb@worldsocialism.org.

Socialist Party Physical Meetings

GREATER LONDON

Bank Holiday Monday 29 August

Carshalton EcoFair from 10.30am to 8pm

The Socialist Party will have a stall at this event.

Carshalton Park, Carshalton, SM5 3DD

(Nearest rail station: Carshalton Beeches).

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

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.

Yorkshire: Discussion group meets monthly either on Zoom or physical meetings. Further information: fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk

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.

Two Ecoreformists

A FRIEND of mine who's a keen vegan recently sent me an email with a Channel 4 podcast link to an interview with someone she greatly admires. That person was Dale Vince, a vegan himself who has become a wealthy entrepreneur through his setting up of the 'green' energy company Ecotricity, even if he's probably best known for his ownership of Forest Green Rovers, a small football club recently promoted from non-league football to the Football League. The other thing about FGR, as they're known, is that, in Vince's image, the club itself is entirely vegan, so that everything sold, eaten and drunk in the ground is plant and not animal based. My friend described Vince as 'an amazing person' and 'a genius' for his espousal of environmental causes and efforts to bring about change in that area. Her view was that 'his involvement in the business world has nothing at all to do with making money'.

The 'Green New Deal'

As all this piqued my curiosity, I couldn't not give the 40-minute podcast a go. It was definitely worthwhile. I found Vince quite a fascinating character, with a 'rebel' past (from the age of 15 he became a traveller for 10 years living from hand to mouth) who hated being constrained and was resistant to living the kind of life dictated by money-based society. He came across as likeable too, not deterred by adverse reactions and of course very clever for the way in which he had personally conceived and set up a highly successful energy business.

So far so good, but, as the interview progressed, what became clear was that Vince, despite his obvious good intentions, was, like so many others, falling into the trap of thinking you could solve the problems thrown up by the system we live in by making certain adjustments to certain aspects of it. The proposed innovation he was especially enthusiastic about was the use of biofuel, in the form of grass, as a way of creating abundant cheap energy. The lines along which he was talking were clearly compatible with what has come to be known as the 'Green New Deal'. This involves, among other things, boosting renewable energy sources and lowering reliance on fossil fuels, using energy-saving appliances, constructing buildings with lower negative environmental

impact and, in Vince's case, campaigning against over-fishing (he funded the *Seaspiracy* documentary) and encouraging veganism.

All this is in a sense to be applauded, yet it is hard to see how this 'greening' of economic activity will not simply be integrated into the global system (capitalism) whose bottom line is always profit rather than human need. Even veganism, on which Vince is so keen and which is definitely on the rise, can only be – and is in the process of being- sucked into the system of profit-making with the problems it produces – and cannot solve – of poverty, inequality and environmental degradation. What was traditionally seen as a subversive and anti-establishment form of resistance to the global food industry and its horrific abuse of animals has itself increasingly become a 'cash cow'.

Decadence?

The friend who expressed admiration for Vince also drew my attention to a pair of articles from the *Guardian* written by another environmental campaigner, George Monbiot. One of these lamented the government's policy of continuing to subsidise farmers despite their anti-environmental practices, while the other, entitled 'Why are we feeding crops to our cars when people are starving?' attacks the widespread and increasing use of crops, grasses, marshes and trees for fuel purposes, so-called 'biofuels', the very thing that Dale Vince advocates and claims to be a form of cheap, sustainable and non-destructive green energy. Monbiot takes aim at Vince by calling Ecotricity's plan to turn huge land areas into feedstock for biogas plant as 'the worst land proposal I've ever seen in the UK'. He goes on 'But we can't use such fixes to solve our climate crisis. To leave fossil fuels in the ground, we should change our energy system: our need to travel, our modes of transport, the fuel economy of our homes and the means by which we heat them. Modern biofuels, used at scale, are no more sustainable than an older variety: whale oil. And burning food is the definition of decadence' (bit.ly/3IAaqRG).

Is there a side to be taken here? As socialists we wouldn't want to do that, since it would involve supporting one plan or another for managing capitalism, even if both campaigners refer to it as 'ecosocialism'. And what we explicitly want is for capitalism to be replaced by



a completely different kind of society organised on the basis of human need not profit. So, though during his interview Vince calls himself a 'socialist', his arguments, well-meaning as they may be, show his ideas about social change to be a million miles away from what we mean by 'socialism'. And he confirms this by ending with the admission that he would like to have a future role in the Labour Party. It's doubtful that Monbiot would want that for himself, but he too shows he is still thoroughly into policies to reform capitalism when, in his article on government policy on farming, he states: 'I want to see Defra diversified and clear lines drawn between private and public interests. I want to see the lobbying power of the NFU curtailed' (bit.ly/3uCZE7J).

Global socialism

In her message to me, my friend, in support of Vince and his plan for producing energy from potential food sources, drew attention to the fact that more food than needed is already produced on a world scale. The only problem, she stated, was distribution 'due to economic and political factors'. And that's exactly right, but the trouble is that those 'economic and political factors' will always exist as long as we have a society with such things as money, banks, governments and states.

So we need more than a vegan football club à la Vince and more than changed government policies à la Monbiot. We need something quite different – a world of planned cooperation which takes advantage of technology in a sustainable way and in which everyone can develop their interests and abilities with full social support and live without the ever-present threat of pervasive material insecurity. That, and not just the tinkering at the edges of capitalism that both campaigners advocate, would be the true 'ecosocialism'.

HOWARD MOSS