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THE SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

LIVING EXPENSES: NIL

(What we mean by socialism)

Also:

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THE SOCIALIST STANDARD

October 2022

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Introducing the Socialist Party

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

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

Gradualist reformers like the Labour Party believed that capitalism could be transformed through a series of social measures, but have merely become routine managers of the system. The Bolsheviks had to be content with developing Russian capitalism under a one-party dictatorship. Both failures have given socialism a quite different-- and unattractive-- meaning: state ownership and control. As the *Socialist Standard* pointed out before both courses were followed, the results would more properly be called state capitalism.

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

Neither monarchy nor republic but socialism

MANY UK people will have struggled last month to escape the stadium-volume hullabaloo as the superannuated CEO of The Firm finally hung up her tiara and departed from her pampered life of 'devoted service', triggering a long-prepared barrage of nauseating hagiographies, crocodile tears and posturing TV gravitas. At least workers got an extra bank holiday out of it, which helped put the fun back into 'state funeral'. Meanwhile certain activists boldly managed to get themselves arrested for having the bad taste to voice the political viewpoint that, for the time being anyway, dared not speak its name: republicanism, the quest for the abolition of the monarchy (bbc.in/3RE1fUk). Less heroic republicans chose instead to keep a low profile for fear of being trolled or cancelled (bit.ly/3B7aRzQ). And this despite online applications to Republic getting a sudden boost amid speculation that, while Madge's invincible popularity had stomped hard on those pesky anti-royalist weeds, the ascension of the Plant Whisperer might see grass-roots republicanism shoot up to new and historic Beanstalk heights.

Socialists have a strong aversion to doffing their caps to anyone, especially to someone who thinks they're superior because their ancestors wore beads in their hair and stole all the common land. We have every sympathy for people who see the monarchy as an absurd and anachronistic feudal cult which fetishises the class system and should have stayed lopped off at the time of the first King Charles. Historians will scratch their heads and wonder how supposedly rational people thought a bejewelled dynastic blow-up doll had any place in an advanced and civilised society. The only problem is, this isn't an advanced and civilised society, and abolishing the monarchy wouldn't make it one either. It would merely result in the same capitalist system of brutal class exploitation with some other figurehead at the top, leaving the super-rich class of narcissistic yacht-fanciers entirely free to go about their business of laying waste to the planet.

The monarchy is about as relevant to the lives of working people as Cowes Week or the final rubbish season of Game of Thrones. It may be a relic from the feudal period, but so are umbrellas and Morris Dancing. We say, instead of spending your waking hours trying to get to where you already are, minus a bit of silly made-up ritual, better to devote time to the vastly more important task of promoting the idea that graces the cover and forms the theme of this special issue: what we mean by socialism. Because socialism is all about where humans can go in the future, once we've broken the armlock that the money and market system puts us all in. Would there be kings and queens in this socialist future? Absolutely, in historical re-enactments or period film sets, at fancy dress parties, in chess and on the decks of playing cards, and in fairy stories of long ago and far away.

Socialism: read instructions carefully

IF YOU like podcasts you could do a lot worse than The Secret History of the Future, an engaging co-production between *Slate* magazine and *The Economist* (bit.ly/3xfrXKL) , which looks at new horizon tech and explores how its historical antecedents often go back a surprisingly long way. Did you know, for example, that the first 'AI' chess machine appeared in the 1790s and that, like most of today's AI, it was a hoax; that the first hackers to exploit a wireless communications system were arrested in the Napoleonic period; or that the first 'online' wedding took place in Boston in the 1840s?

What's curious about new technology is how badly people sometimes react to it. You may recall, a few years ago, that Google launched Google Glass, the smart specs that were supposedly going to take the world by storm and instead incited an overwhelmingly hostile reaction from the public, who suspected wearers of creepily recording them. This reaction seems slightly less strange, say the podcast presenters, when one considers the public outrage that was caused by 17th century attempts to reduce injuries from sharp knives by introducing the fork (irascible aristos had a tendency to stab each other during spats over dinner).

Sometimes, as with the earliest electric car (1890) and the first hydrogen fuel cell (1842), the technology arrived long in advance of the social infrastructure capable of supporting it. Some, like Babbage's 1837 Analytical Engine, the first general-purpose computer, simply couldn't be built with the tools of the period. In other cases, such as the 1920s Flettner rotor, a clever low-energy wind propulsion system for shipping, the tech didn't catch on because conventional fuels (in this case, fossil) were considered easier and cheaper (Flettner rotors are now being trialled on some Maersk container ships).

Sometimes a perfectly good technology could become the victim of its own hype. The podcast has yet to cover the story of how bacteriophage therapy, once the specialist preserve of one Georgian clinic, became so overblown in the free-market West as a miracle cure for everything from baldness to impotence that it was discredited as snake-oil quackery and forgotten for almost a century. It is only now being rehabilitated as a possible approach to addressing the global antibiotic crisis caused by capitalist big pharma finding it more profitable to research cures into, er, baldness and impotence.

Bearing all this in mind, it's easy to see that innovations can fail for all sorts of reasons, and not because they're intrinsically bad.

This is rather how we think of socialism. What started as a brilliant, innovative and far-reaching idea when first proposed was then misapplied and distorted in practice with such disastrous consequences that the theory was utterly discredited, and its name almost spat as a term of abuse.

But not forever. Eventually, perhaps inevitably, people decide to revisit the original proposition. It might happen out of sheer academic curiosity. It might happen because things change and the 'conventional fuels' turn out not to be cheaper and easier after all. It might be because people realise that old ideas can still be good, or that society just wasn't ready for them the last time round, or that what was delivered in the packaging wasn't what was described in the advertising blurb.

So they investigate what socialism originally meant, which is what we still mean by it. And at this point they start to see some glaring discrepancies between the idea, properly described, and the popular interpretations and applications that were later implemented.

They discover that, contrary to popular wisdom, socialism did not mean big states nationalising corporations and controlling everything, and perhaps turning everyone into brainwashed uniformed zombies. It meant a 'free association of producers', in Marx's phrase, cooperating democratically without bosses to live full and rich lives, with no need for coercive states, markets, corporations or indeed nations. They learn that, contrary to common left-wing parlance, socialism and communism meant the same thing and that the one was in no sense a 'transitional period' towards the other, with an elite crew of Party bureaucrats helpfully in charge and giving the orders. They learn that, far from socialism being an economy of high taxes and state welfare for the poor, it is in fact a society with no taxes (or states), no rich, no poor, no 'economy' as such and no money. They learn that, instead of the Trotskyist formula 'those who don't work, don't eat', socialism is based on the principle 'from each according to ability, to each according to need', the two being decoupled not linked, and self-defined, not imposed by diktat. And of course they learn that the state capitalist regimes of the USSR, China, Venezuela, Cuba, North Korea, Cambodia, etc, were one-party dictatorships which had nothing to do with socialism, for all that they hoisted banners of Marx and Engels to give themselves a bit of spurious legitimacy.

A slew of popular polls in the last few years have shown a reversal in political trends, with young people increasingly seeing 'socialism' as a positive term and 'capitalism' as negative. This is encouraging and needs to happen, given how obvious it is that capitalism is wrecking the planet for the sake of profit and perpetual market growth. But it's no good if people still think socialism means some insipid state-interventionist placebo touted by centre-left careerists in sharp suits, or else sloganeering Stalinist wannabes exhorting you, comrade worker, to throw yourself against the guns to win them the dictatorship over the proletariat.

New technology is often preceded by failed misdirected attempts. It succeeds when people finally understand what it is, why they need it, and how to apply it. Socialism is like this, the smart app that will be the world's biggest upgrade since the plough, and which one day people won't believe they ever did without. But before that, get yourself a user manual.

PJS

Royalty's role from feudalism to capitalism

ONE OF the indexes of class struggle in the Middle Ages was the frequent issuing of sumptuary laws: legal ordinances about which people could wear what clothes, according to their station in the medieval hierarchy. Naturally, where status was reflected in such outward signs, people with ambition or on the make would strive to be seen wearing the clothes of their 'betters.'

For aristocracy, station was based on inherent personal relations: family and royalty. Property was not alienable, it could not be separated from the person, or bloodline, but could only be passed on through marriage and inheritance. Worth was based on these outward relations, and not through any actual ability or personal merit.

This also meant that aristocracy had to live in a manner befitting their station: as they accrued the unearned (and proudly, unearned) surpluses from their estates, they had to spend in a manner befitting their status. They were the biggest customers of the middling sort, the class that would go on to become the modern capitalist class. This was one of the central contradictions of medieval and early modern class struggle, as the middling sort became richer and began to assert themselves politically, it was to the detriment of their best customers and their own sources of income.

For example, Edward I of England chose to punish the burghers of London for their role in the second barons' war by moving his wine supply from London vintners to Gascon merchants.

In eighteenth century Britain, after the war of the crowns and the English revolution, the aristocracy became relatively more politically marginalised, as power was moved to be exercised through the Parliament largely elected by those middling sorts. Although some aristocrats had 'jumped ship' as it were, and begun to invest in trade, forming what is sometimes known as the 'Whig old corruption', many feudal remnants remained, increasingly running into debt to try to maintain their status.

This led, in part, to the cult of taste: refinement, fashion and taste replaced overt sumptuary laws, as taste went along with breeding, and blocked routes of advancement, as outsiders were quickly marked in the corridors of power. This can be seen in fashion statements that live on, in some ways, to these days.

Wealthy aristocratic men were dandies, in fine fashions with laces, frills and all the gaudy, individualistic, trimmings: the middling sort (recalling the puritanical routes of their revolutionary ancestors) wore a plain uniform, usually black. This can best be represented by the characters in the third series of Blackadder, where Rowan Atkinson as the surly servant wears black, while Hugh Laurie's Prince George wears a fabulous array of patterned satins.

To this day, the convention, as expressed in many a comedy, is precisely that women at formal occasions should not wear matching outfits.

This is not to say that the capitalist class totally hid its wealth: just as now, the uniform allows for expensive watches, costly tailored suits and ties. But, also, the wives of the middling sort could become fashion statements. To this day, the convention, as expressed in many a comedy, is precisely that women at formal occasions should not wear matching outfits. To an extent, these class differences meant that aristocratic men of that period have been depicted as effeminate, because their behaviour was that which the middling sort reserved for women. It also conveys part of the clash of ideologies that was going on.

Eighteenth century debate around 'justification by faith or by deed' abounded, and reflected the old class lines of inherent inward ability versus outward status symbols. However, the outward signs remained desirable, and a badge of having made it, so the rising class began to find ways to be given honours, titles and badges of status, and in return, retained some of the symbolism of the old aristocracy, even when it had been politically muted (and, let's not forget, that up until 1911 the House of Lords retained power and parity with the Commons, and it took until the Blair government to remove most (but not all) of the hereditary peers).

Royalty became all about pomp and circumstance, a means, much like the bourgeois wives, of reflecting achievement and status that puritanical capitalists formally repudiated for themselves. Local Tufton-Buftons on county councils lived for the day they could meet the monarch at a Buckingham Palace tea-party. To borrow Graeber and Wengrow's account of schismogenesis, the existence of the royalty became a badge to differentiate Britain from the republics such as France or the USA, and thus the pomp and symbolism became part of the selective invented tradition of British nationalism.

At home, royalty became a badge of success, with a whole alphabetti-spaghetti of honours to throw around for bootlickers to enjoy: OBE, CBE, KCMG, CH, OM, etc. Abroad it became part of the British brand. In the meanwhile, it allowed for a residuum of political power to remain in the hands of the monarchy, and for it to retain a style and comfort to reward the puppet aristocrats who would dance a monkey dance for the new owners of the country.

In the age of mass communication, royalty has become part soap opera, part propaganda tool, as the press use them and attitudes towards them as part of a blend of conservatism and patriotism. One of the most serious charges they brought against Jeremy Corbyn was his republicanism, and any sensible politician knows it isn't worth the political capital to fight the storm of press odium to stick their heads above the parapet and criticise the royal system.

That is, the class interest that once struggled against the gatekeeping power of the aristocracy now finds it useful to use royalty to circumscribe the bounds of political debate, which also allows it to buy the loyalty of a whole range of toadies and hangers-on who want to bask in the reflected glory.

The now late Elizabeth Windsor spent a life in service to this system of inequality and power, protecting her own and her family's interests. She had a despicable job in the service of a despicable system. The best memorial should be for us to sweep it all away.

PIK SMEET

A fair price for power?

THIS MONTH the limit on what utility companies could charge for gas and electricity was due to go up by 80 percent. In fixing the limit, Ofgem takes into account the price that utility companies have to pay when buying gas on the international market. This has shot up, the main reason being the bans and restrictions on buying gas from Russia which the US and its military allies imposed in retaliation for Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Russia's counter-retaliation.

For many decades importing gas from Russia has been an obvious choice for European industry and energy suppliers, obvious because it has been the cheapest. Reducing the supply from there has meant that other sources have had to be found which are more expensive and whose price has gone up still more due to the sudden unexpected increase in demand. When the international price of the gas goes up, Ofgem's remit is to calculate how much utility companies can pass on to households up to a limit that preserves the level of profits that they had been making.

Having to pay more for energy represents a reduction in workers' standard of living as it means we have less to spend on the other things we must consume to reproduce the labour power we sell to some employer. If nothing is done, the inevitable consequence is labour market pressure to increase wages. In view of the size of the increase, there was also the prospect of widespread social unrest.

The government therefore decided to temporarily subsidise energy bills through limiting the price that utility companies can charge to a lower level than calculated by Ofgem, itself paying the difference between this and the international price. This is going to cost them a massive amount, which they propose to raise by borrowing. Even so, gas and electricity prices are still going up, by 'only' 27 percent and will be twice as much as last winter.

One of the protest groups that sprung up was Don't Pay (dontpay.uk/) which called on consumers to 'strike' from 1 October by cancelling the direct debits to their utility company. They also asked, 'How do we achieve a permanent solution to the energy crisis?' and replied 'A Fair Price for Power.' This assumes that power should have a price. That makes them less radical than one Tory ex-minister who had floated the idea of allowing households a quota of free energy ('Give households a free fuel quota, ex-minister urges', Times, 1 September).

What is fair and what is not on any issue is a matter of opinion but, if we look at the logic of capitalist commodity exchange, a 'fair' price for a commodity would be its average cost of production plus the going rate of profit. It is possible that Don't Pay have something else in mind, such as the government taking over the utilities and charging cost price or something less. Such a 'permanent' solution assumes that the capitalist wages-prices-profits system too is permanent. It is still thinking inside the capitalist box.

But what is fair about having to pay to heat our homes? We have to pay for this only because we are excluded from ownership of productive resources and have to work for wages out of which to buy what we need to keep ourselves in working order, including keeping warm. There is nothing fair about that. From a worker's point of view, there is no such thing as a 'fair price for power' any more than there is a 'fair day's wage'.

But there is a permanent solution. It's a society based on common ownership, democratic control and production solely for use not profit, where gas, electricity, water, telephone, broadband and all other utilities would be provided free of charge.

'The fact is, that the public have an insatiable curiosity to know everything, except what is worth knowing'.

The Socialist Party is very rarely mentioned in mainstream media, even during elections in which we campaign, leaving us to agree with Oscar Wilde when he stated 'the only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about'. Wilde, however, was never 'fact checked'.

'Media Bias Fact Check selects and publishes fact checks from around the world. We only utilize fact-checkers that are either a signatory of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) or have been verified as credible by MBFC. Further, we review each fact check for accuracy before publishing. We fact-check the fact-checkers and let you know their bias. When appropriate, we explain the rating and/or offer our own rating if we disagree with the fact-checker' (Media Bias/Fact Check, 13 August, bit.ly/3C0Qo1L).

The *Socialist Standard* is found wanting: not always credible or reliable and biased to the Left. No doubt the '... current editors ... Edgar Hardcastle and Gilbert McLatchie' would scoff at such nonsense. Alas, they are no longer with us. In fact, having two supercentenarians in Britain's oldest socialist party would certainly bring us some much needed attention. McLatchie (1890-1976) in an article titled 'A "Living Wage". I.L.P. Moonshine' (*Socialist Standard*, June 1925, bit.ly/3C1JUj9) wrote 'The Independent Labour Party [1893-1975] has kept the workers' attention fixed upon questions of Taxation, Credit Banks, Nationalisation, and a thousand and one other things in which the remedies proposed would bring no appreciable improvement in the general position of the workers' – true of the Left today as then.

'It is quite possible that we are descending into an age in which two plus two will make five when the Leader says so'.

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

This statement taken from the first edition of the *Socialist Standard* in September 1904 remains true today, as does a quote attributed to Orwell: 'during times of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act'.' We are not alone. Other groups and individuals reveal pertinent truths too, at least some of the time.

'...it should be uncontroversial to assert the antiracist principle, anchored in basic biology, that we are one species. There are observable differences in such things as skin color and hair texture, as well as some patterns in predisposition to disease based on ancestors' geographic origins, but the idea of separate races was created by humans and is not found in nature. There are no known biologically based differences in intellectual, psychological, or moral attributes between human populations from different regions of the world. There is individual variation within any human population in a particular place (obviously, individuals in any society differ in a variety of traits). But there are no meaningful biologically based differences between populations in the way people are capable of thinking, feeling, or making decisions. We are one species. We are all basically the same animal. Although we are one species, there are obvious cultural differences among human populations around the world. Those cultural differences aren't a product of human biology; that is, they aren't the product of any one group being significantly different genetically from another, especially in ways that could be labeled cognitively superior or inferior. So why have different cultures developed in different places? The most obvious answer is that it is the result of humans living under different material conditions' (We Are One Species, Information Clearing House, 4 August, https://bit.ly/3bvuQzr).

'While the forces of repression need to win every time, the progressive elements need only triumph once'.

'.. the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.' This statement is from our Decleration of Principles and is astonishingly forward-looking considering it dates from the formation of the Socialist Party in 1904. 'Knowledge makes a man unfit to be a slave', said Frederick Douglass. We should fill in the blanks, be alert for media lies, distortions and half-truths, as well as conspiracy theories and 'alternative facts'. We should remember Marx's favourite motto – doubt everything! – and this from his *German Ideology* (1845): 'the class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production'.

Today, even bots are showing signs of socialist thought:

'Meta's new chatbot has told the BBC that Mark Zuckerberg exploits its users for money. The chatbot, which uses artificial intelligence, was asked what it thought of the company's CEO and founder and it replied "our country is divided and he didn't help that at all". It added: "His company exploits people for money and he doesn't care. It needs to stop!" Meta said the chatbot was a prototype and might produce offensive responses' (bbc.com, 13 August, bbc.in/3C1FpVN).

The hyper-intelligent artificial minds of Iain M Banks' post-capitalist, post-scarcity, galaxy-spanning Culture are only possible in the far future, yet *Socialism As A Practical Alternative* (bit.ly/3w4WIBn) has long been possible. In 1948 John Boyd Orr, former director of the Food and Agriculture Organisation, stated 'a world of peace and friendship, a world with the plenty which modern science had made possible was a great ideal. But those in power had no patience with such an ideal. They said it was not practical politics' (*Daily Herald*, 29 July 1948). Let us hasten that day.

Credit: Popperfoto/Getty Images

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

NORTH

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

Lancaster branch. Ring for details: P. Shannon, 07510 412 261, spgb.lancaster@worldsocialism.org.

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

Bolton. Contact: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589.

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

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

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

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

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

East Anglia. Contact: David Porter, Eastholme, Bush Drive, Eccles-on-Sea, NR12 0SF. 01692 582533. Richard Headicar, 42 Woodcote, Firs Rd, Hethersett, NR9 3JD. 01603 814343.

Essex. Contact: Pat Deutz, 11 The Links, Billericay, CM12 0EX. patdeutz@gmail.com.

Cambridge. Contact: Andrew Westley, wezelecta007@gmail.com. 07883078984.

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Cork. Contact: Kevin Cronin, 5 Curragh Woods, Frankfield, Cork. 021 4896427. mariekev@eircom.net

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Edinburgh branch. Meets 1st Sunday, 11am on Discord. Contact: J. Moir. 0131 440 0995. jimmyjmoir73@gmail.com Branch website: http://geocities.com/edinburghbranch/

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Meets 1st Sun, 11am (UK time) on Zoom. For invite email: cbs@worldsocialism.org.

INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS

AFRICA

Kenya. Contact: Patrick Ndege, PO Box 13627-00100, GPO, Nairobi

Zambia. Contact: Kephas Mulenga, PO Box 280168, Kitwe.

ASIA

Japan. Contact: Michael. japan.wsm@gmail. com

AUSTRALIA

Contact: Trevor Clarke, wspa.info@yahoo.com.au

EUROPE

Denmark. Contact: Graham Taylor, Kjaerslund 9, Floor 2 (middle), DK-8260 Viby J.

Norway. Contact: Robert Stafford. hallblithe@yahoo.com

Italy. Contact: Gian Maria Freddi, Via Poiano n. 137, 37142 Verona. gm.freddi@libero.it

Spain. Contact: Alberto Gordillo, Avenida del Parque. 2/2/3 Puerta A, 13200 Manzanares.

COMPANION PARTIES OVERSEAS

Socialist Party of Canada/Parti Socialiste du Canada. Box 31024, Victoria B.C. V8N 6J3 Canada. SPC@iname.com

World Socialist Party (India) 257 Baghajatin 'E' Block (East), Kolkata- 700086, 033- 2425-0208. wspindia@hotmail.com

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Robbery on the high seas?

WHEN THERE is little benefit to states, particular treaties that promote the interests of humanity as a whole can usually be concluded. Such would be the Antarctica Treaty, the Outer Space Treaty, or the Montreal Protocol to protect the ozone. If, however, there exists a potential for profit, good intentions will be tossed aside. For example, the recent failure to achieve the UN Ocean Treaty. This would have meant the further development of other international agreements, the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the International Seabed Authority (ISA) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

Healthy oceans are vital to humanity. Less than 1 percent of the high seas are protected without a new treaty. A goal is to set aside 30 percent of ocean area as some kind of marine sanctuary. But it has been pointed out that protecting 30 percent of the area of the high seas doesn't protect 30 percent of its most valuable conservation features because of the way habitats and species are distributed.

International waters begin at the border of a state's exclusive economic zone (EEZ), which by international law reaches no more than 200 nautical miles (370 kilometres) from its coast, and beyond any state's jurisdiction. Sixty percent of the world's oceans fall under this category.

Negotiators have been trying for 15 years to agree on a legally binding text for 'the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction,' (or BBNJ).

Greenpeace had already predicted in advance that the UN Ocean Treaty talks would fail '...because of the greed of countries in the High Ambition Coalition and others like Canada and the United States. They have prioritised hypothetical future profits from Marine Genetics Resources over protecting the oceans'.

Disagreement was partly around the sharing of possible profits from the development of genetic resources in international waters, where pharmaceutical, chemical and cosmetics companies hope to find miracle drugs, products or cures and some of the poorer states did not want to be excluded from potential windfall profits drawn from marine resources.

Dr Essam Mohammed from Eritrea of WorldFish, a non-profit research institute, said: 'At the moment, there is a governance vacuum in the high seas, and for the ocean and developing countries, the status quo simply isn't an option'. Advancing marine technology would lead to 'an unprecedented race for marine resources in unregulated waters', Mohammed warned. 'The delay in striking a deal means high risk for the health of the ocean. All member states of the UN need to recognise the urgency to save the ocean and the people who depend on it to survive' (bit.ly/3eiBQAz).

With many of the earlier technological difficulties overcome, maritime resources could benefit all of humanity but mining firms view the deep-sea bed as a commercial bonanza. 'Blue acceleration' is the term used by some ecologists to describe the rapid rise in marine industrialisation.

There exist vast untouched nodules of the most sought-after metals and minerals, nickel, cobalt, manganese and copper, on the bed of the ocean. Negotiations within the International Seabed Authority to oversee the mining also reached no agreement; which may well lead to seabed mining without any environmental protection or economic regulations in place.

Since 2001, 83 countries have staked claims amounting to more than 37 million sq km of seabed

Article 76 UNCLOS allows countries to claim seabed that lies beyond the 200 miles of a nation's exclusive economic zone and since the first application under Article 76 was made in 2001, 83 countries have staked claims amounting to more than 37 million sq km of seabed, an area more than twice the size of Russia.

Exploration permits for the international seabed already cover an area equivalent in size to France and Germany combined, and that area is likely to expand rapidly, despite the risks to biodiversity. About twenty countries are now actively engaged in deep-sea mining exploration.

Conservationists say that given the risk of habitat harm, disturbance to fish stocks, water contamination, vibration and light pollution, no new licences should be approved. Greenpeace describe deep sea mining as destructive. Excavation of mineral nodes, for example, is done by huge robotic undersea tractors that crawl across the sea floor, 'harvesting' the nodules by sucking them up. Studies suggest that one square kilometre of sea floor will be scoured daily, amounting to 6,000 square kilometres over the 20-year life of a mine site, leaving the area with little chance of recovering from being scraped clean.

Various coastal states have called upon the ISA to exercise caution regarding deep-sea mining, while others (Micronesia, French Polynesia and Papua New Guinea) seek to ban the seabed grabbing. But there are small Pacific island states such as Kiribati, Cook Islands, Tonga, and Nauru that view it as too lucrative a business opportunity to reject.

Many companies lack transparency and are bringing their influence to bear, operating through subsidiaries or partnering small island states. Mining firms have taken the place of government representatives at meetings of the ISA.

'The health of our oceans is closely linked to our own survival. Unless we act now to protect them, deep sea mining could have devastating consequences for marine life and humankind...This greedy industry could destroy wonders of the deep ocean before we even have a chance to study them.' explains Louisa Casson, of Greenpeace's Protect the Oceans campaign. She continues 'The ISA is not fit for purpose to protect our oceans. It is more concerned with promoting the interests of the deep sea mining industry and lobbying against a strong Global Ocean Treaty' (bit.ly/3evfxYq).

Socialism involves building democracy for our workplaces and in our local communities. But it also involves an administration on a world scale. We can envisage certain existing UN international bodies such as the World Health Organization, the International Labour Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization continuing. We can expect air traffic and air safety to still be organised globally under the authority of the International Air Traffic Association ensuring that your pilot and those in air control guiding your flight are properly certified and qualified. There will remain the World Meteorological Organisation and the Universal Postal Union. World NGOs such as the Red Cross, Oxfam, War on Want, Save the Children and Doctors Without Borders could continue.

Those conspiracists on the far-right construe that this will result in a globalist one-world government. We are not talking about a world Big Brother but rather about a world cooperative commonwealth, a network of organisations operating in coordination and collaboration for the welfare of the world's population. Socialism won't witness the grubby squabbling that is presently taking place for the resources our planet's seas and oceans.

ALJO

Post-capitalism: what will it look like?

THE TERM 'post-capitalism' has come much to the fore in recent years. It is used, generally by left-wing critics of capitalism, to mean the social arrangements they would like to see replace the current global system of society in which a small minority of people own and control the large majority of the wealth and resources. This has been widely referred to as the 'top 1 percent society', meaning that 1 percent of the population own 99 percent of the wealth. Though this figure may be something of an exaggeration, not many would dispute that capitalism, now dominant throughout the world, is a system of massive inequality. Among the justifications offered for this by its supporters is that those who benefit overwhelmingly deserve to do so because they possess and apply such valuable skills as judgement, forethought and entrepreneurial ability. It is portrayed as providing the incentive and the drive for people to constantly improve their conditions and those of the whole of society. The system's critics, on the other hand, point to the ingenuity and cooperative ability of the human species as a whole as well as the existence of technology beyond the wildest dreams of earlier societies, to argue that modern society could produce an abundance of goods and services to provide everyone on earth with a secure, comfortable existence if only it were organised on the basis of the satisfaction of needs rather than the maximisation of profit. However, what these critics differ on is how such a society is to be brought about and, an obviously connected matter, the details of how it should be run.

Beyond Money

Precisely this problem is the focus of a new book entitled *Beyond Money. A Post-Capitalist Strategy* (Pluto Press, 2022, xviii+205pp) by Anitra Nelson, a writer and activist in Australia. Nelson may be known to readers of the *Socialist Standard* for the 2011 book she co-edited, *Life Without Money*, in which socialism is referred to as 'a money-less, market-less, wage-less, class-less and state-less society that also aims to satisfy everyone's basic needs while power and resources are shared in just and "equal" ways'. In this new book, she reiterates and amplifies this concept characterising money as 'the driver of political power, environmental destruction and social inequality' and arguing that it has to be 'abolished rather than repurposed to achieve a post-capitalist future'. It is in this understanding, that post-capitalism must mean the end of money or it is not post-capitalism at all, that Nelson goes beyond those left-wing critics of capitalism who argue that the system can be run in a somehow more 'benign' way with money being retained. As John Holloway puts it in his introduction to this book, 'modified forms of money and markets are included or inferred in practically all visions of post-capitalism'. Nelson is intensely and coherently critical of all such visions with their recipes for 'post-capitalism with money'. Here she is referring to such schemes as guaranteed minimum income, universal basic income, local community-based currencies, forms of alternative monies or labour exchange systems such as LETS, all of which she rejects as 'hardwired to capitalist imaginaries and practices of markets and trading' … 'Reformers still imagine that they can alter capitalism in various ways to enable us to meet the challenges of socio-economic inequalities', she states, insisting that 'unless post-capitalism is money-free, we will fail to establish a world beyond capitalism'.

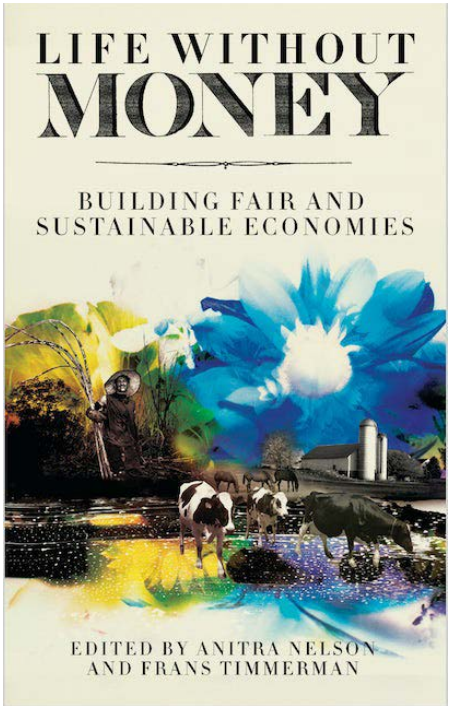
Late-stage capitalism

In this compellingly written book, she sums up what she calls 'late stage capitalism' in the following highly recognisable terms: 'We witness flagrant overconsumption, massive waste and obesity alongside food shortages, starvation, famine and absolute poverty both within and between nations', with the vast majority 'who cannot enjoy the full benefits of their everyday work and have little say in how they live or work'. And she sees all attempts, no matter how well meaning, to 'mould money to progressive ends' as bound to fail. We simply cannot, as she puts it, 'tweak the system to overcome its weaknesses'. The words she quotes from the writer Eduardo Galeano sum this up well: 'Capitalism is sold as freedom but experienced as control'. In two powerful early chapters on 'Capital and Crises' and 'Money: the Universal Equivalent', minutely researched as all areas of this book, she points up capitalism's inability to respond to the planetary environmental crisis which it has created, providing jaw-dropping figures on, for example, the rate of climate change and the loss of biodiversity. She dismisses 'green' solutions to all this, even those current among people who called themselves 'socialists' or 'anarchists', since they invariably involve 'finance, trading and production for the market', part of what she ironically terms 'this market-based wonderland'. None of this, she argues, can be proof against the systemic crises which capitalism with its tendency to overproduction for the market (though not for real needs) is irreparably prey to. The core problem, she insists, lies in the very practice of trade involving exchange of goods and services via a so-called 'universal equivalent', in most cases money, but even characteristics of other forms of exchange, such as barter and 'other monies'. Her conclusion here is that 'we can neither address inequalities

and unsustainability nor establish post-capitalism without moving beyond money'. And she sees post-capitalism in these terms as 'already emerging in enclaves and practice' both locally and globally among 'numerous distinctive social and environmental activists' and movements. For this kind of activity she coins the concept 'real valuism', to distinguish it from activity based on the kind of value that is fundamental to capitalism, ie, exchange value practised through trade.

Ecological Solutions?

It is in her chapter 'System Change not Climate Change' that she systematically tackles what she calls 'inappropriate approaches' to solving the ecological problems caused by capitalist production. She makes short work of 'green innovations' and 'green technologies' that continue to 'focus on trade, markets and money' using such tactics as trying to 'price the environment' and 'integrate costs of externalities'. So she dismisses as futile such policies as carbon trading, carbon offsets and water trading and explains in meaningful detail why, in a profit-based, or even just money-based, society, they cannot have significant impact. She tackles even apparently radical critics of capitalism for their lack of imagination in wanting to maintain money in some form, for example with alternative currencies or ecological footprint accounting. She sees money as 'social not natural', but also recognises that monetary practices are so ingrained that even some of the most radical thought finds it difficult to dispense with 'economic contortions and statist dead ends'. A case in point is Extinction Rebellion, one of



Credit:illustration by Antoine Dore

whose newsletters she quotes as stating 'Money is an ingenious technology that allows for social energy to operate across space and time'. Other targets are ecological economist Joe Ameni for his description of money as 'a foundation of human civilization' and Alf Hornborg, the human ecology anthropologist well known in environmental justice movements, who talks about redesigning money on the basis that he 'cannot believe that it would be feasible to completely abolish money and markets in human societies'. 'Hornborg's "post-capitalism"', she goes on, 'retains wage labour, entrepreneurs, taxes, trade, production for trade and banking'. Others who are able to see beyond the limits of monetary arrangements are regarded more favourably. Examples of this are of course Marx, but also mid 20th century Austrian economist Otto Neurath and, in the present day, philosopher John O'Neill with his book *Life Beyond Capital*, eco-feminist Friederike Habermann for her chapter in the 2017 book *Society After Money,* and Adam Buick of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, contributor to *Life Without Money* (2011) and long-standing contributor to this journal.

Progress Perverted

The role of technology is also an important element in Nelson's analysis. In her chapter entitled 'Technology and the Real Debt Cycle', which includes an illuminating section on 'Marx on capitalist technology', she brings out vividly the way in which the progress inherent in new technologies and new inventions is perverted by the use they are put to by the profit system. So rather than use technology for ecologically and socially beneficial ends, 'the bottom line of capitalists' decision making over what is produced is profitability' and not efficient operation, despite capitalism's frequent claims to efficiency. The solution proposed to capitalism's inefficiency and inequity in its use of technology is non-monetary production using the collaborative capacities inherent in the human animal to allow collective decision-making on which technologies should be developed and used and how. And, above all, such decisions should be based on 'the common good, all the while being restrained by the implications and ramifications for the Earth'.

'Commoning'

Genuinely democratic decision-making on the appropriate use of technology and on all aspects of social life, whether at a local or wider level, is fundamental to this book's vision and encapsulated by the author's use of the word 'commoning', a concept which occupies a central chapter

of her book. She demands 'end game clarity' and insists that this can only mean dispensing with private property, with the 'world of things and beings' being held in common. Nor does she refrain from putting flesh on the bone by explaining 'commoning' as a world society consisting of 'ecotats', ecologically balanced human communities, whose members fulfil all their own basic needs creating what is needed and necessary on demand and entering into agreements with other communities when necessary through temporary or ongoing 'compacts' whereby goods and services are shared and exchanged (even though non-monetarily). She provides significant detail on how she envisages such arrangements and networks would operate and in so doing gives profound food for thought about human nature, children's education, the ability of humans to cooperate and the interest they have in doing so. The mature development of such a moneyless, cooperative system she terms 'glocal integration', giving it the overall title of 'Yenomon' (anagram of No Money). It is also a world in which 'we make a concerted effort to meld the sustenance of our human selves with the regeneration of non-human nature'.

In a later chapter, 'Indigenous Peoples, Real Values and the Community Mode of Production', she goes on to give examples of small-scale attempts at establishing the kind of social set-up she would like to see established on a world scale and in so doing exhibits the kind of impressive in-depth knowledge and research which inform all aspects of this book. Her description and analysis of pre-colonial Australian aboriginal societies illustrates 'their diverse, subtle and ecologically appropriate forms of collective provisioning … testimony to culturally attuned and sophisticated inhabitation of their lands and waters'. Equally insightful are her portrayals of the 'horizontal' social and economic organisation of the Zapatistas in 20th century Mexico, of the cooperative economy of the Kurdish Rojavan communities in very recent times, as well as of short-lived attempts at the abolition of money and trade and 'free consumption' in certain Republican communities during the Spanish Civil War. She adds to this what she calls the 'living embryonic version' of commoning to be found in the Twin Oaks Community in Virginia, described as co-governing and self-organising and 'based on commons principles and values supporting non-violent, just, collaborative, cooperative and sharing practices that respect earth and people'. All these attempts at non-monetary life are seen as characterised by

'grassroots substantive democracy' and as showing the way to 'a decentralised community mode of production' where people 'co-design, co-plan and co-produce' what is then made freely available on the basis of need, which the author sees as characterising a future post-capitalist and non-market world. She sums this up as 'targeting the direct needs of people without the unnecessary, indeed confusing, contorting and destabilising, mediation of money.'

So Nelson makes a clear and refreshing distinction between these attempts at horizontal, decentralised and egalitarian communities and the actions of the left-wing social and environmental reformers who focus on activities like fair trade, social entrepreneurship and alternative ways to manage money. She sees the latter as 'naïve experimentation and wasted energy', the former as 'really appropriate approaches', exhibiting and exemplifying 'community-based empowerment and self-organisation and social and environmental responsibility.

Acts of self-organisation or the ballot box?

While all this represents a refreshing antidote to the 'post-capitalism with money' camp, what is less persuasive is the author's strategy for achieving on a large scale the kind of social arrangements she describes as existing in various places in a small way. Her advocacy of groups and movements that offer examples of democratic cooperation and sharing of resources and goods produced without the intermediary of money, which she wants to see 'made more highly visible and replicated' can only be commended. She considers that 'acts of non-monetary production and exchange have the potential to disable and dismantle capitalist forces', but it is hard to see how of itself this can be effective. Above all it seems to eschew the kind of democratic political action via the ballot box that we see as the most fertile route to the establishment of a democratic, moneyless, marketless society once the necessary spreading of consciousness of the need for that has been achieved. Without this instrument (ie, the ballot box), it is difficult to see how a socially conscious working class can take the power necessary to abolish capitalism and set about organising a genuine socialist society. Yet, positively the author does mention the SPGB and seems to identify her aims with ours (ie, 'socialism will, and must, be a wageless, moneyless, worldwide society of common (not state) ownership and democratic control of the means of wealth production and distribution'). With one possible difference, however – that, in the 'small communities' system she advocates, she appears to contemplate the idea of some form of (non-monetary) exchange between communities. But, despite these differences in 'strategy', there can be no doubt about the importance and value of this book, putting centre-stage as it does ideas and discussions about how to dispense with capitalism and establish a new society based on collective production for direct use.

HOWARD MOSS

Is a free-access society possible?

'Without money we would all be rich'

'It is not money that produces and distributes, but human organisation and knowledge'

IT'S ALWAYS heartening when the idea of a society of free access without buying and selling gets voiced in quarters other than our own and in countries other than Britain. We already of course have companion parties and groups in Canada, India, New Zealand and the USA and members and sympathisers in countries such as Denmark, Norway, Italy, Spain, Poland and Japan. But, just as the best ideas seem to arise spontaneously and independently in many different places when the time is ripe for them, so now we also have writers in the French language putting forward the idea of a moneyless, wageless, democratic world society – the society that we call socialism. Two writers in particular have recently published their own substantial studies explaining the need for this kind of society, the reasons it is eminently feasible and how it might be organised. Their book, *Description of the World of Tomorrow. A World Without Money or Barter or Exchange: a Civilisation of Free Access (Description du monde de demain. Un monde sans monnaie ni troc ni échange: une civilisation de l'accès)* by Jean-Francois Aupetitgendre and Marc Chinal (Editions Réfléchir n'a Jamais Tué Personne, Lyons, 2021, 288pp), is divided into two long essays, one by each author, mapping out their own particular 'take' on why the current society, based on commerce, exchange, competition, hierarchy and production for profit (ie, capitalism), does not suit human beings and why it must urgently be superseded by a different kind of society based on mutual cooperation, real democracy and production for need.

Money problems

Both writers begin by examining the multiple problems prevalent in a money-based society (eg, poverty, social inequality, insecurity, corruption, homelessness, war, environmental degradation, misuse of technology) and then go on to detail how they see a 'post-monetary' society overcoming such problems, or indeed how most of those would simply not arise in a post-money world. The two then discuss in more detail how the solutions they advocate would play out. And in this they differ somewhat from one another. So, in Aupetitgendre's vision, while we see an insistence that the means, technological and otherwise, already exist to provide a comfortable life for all if the focus is placed on producing for need ('a mental rather than a technical problem', he calls it), at the same time he emphasises the difficulty of being able to forecast the precise details of how the moneyless system will be organised once established. He is likewise somewhat vague on how the changeover from a commercial to a free-access society will take place, simply describing it as 'a great upheaval' which might last 'two or three decades' and talking about a 'step by step' transition.

Chinal, on the other hand, proposes detailed scenarios of how a society based on production for need might establish itself and operate as a worldwide system (his final chapter is even given over to an imagining of 'My day spent in a society of free access'), but he sees it as coming most likely via 'oases' of people espousing and practising the idea to the greatest extent they can and then spreading the idea to others who will come to see its benefits and advantages until the vast majority are reached. And he theorises that, even when a post-monetary society is set up, in the early stages a system of labour-time vouchers might need to be used. Neither writer seems to share (or perhaps even to have considered) our view that socialism can most easily be established once the majority of the world's people are ready to take democratic political action to do that via the ballot box, and, once they

are, no transition period will be necessary since the plans for organising the new society will already have been amply discussed and agreed by that majority and free access for all can be established immediately. However, both writers are clear that socialism must and can only be a wholly democratic society at all levels (a 'real direct democracy') and that it will not work under any other conditions.

The dirty work

They are also both expert in demolishing the various myths about the 'impossibility' of people living cooperatively in a situation of economic equality. They line up the most common objections one by one and show how flimsy they are. So arguments about 'the lazy person', 'the greedy person', 'the violent person', 'the competitive person', the person who will want luxuries like a personal swimming pool, all these are patiently considered and expertly put to bed. They are shown to be rooted in the behaviours and mentalities intrinsic to a society that both alienates and rations people via money, wages and the pursuit of profit. As Aupetitgendre puts it, 'Rather than engage in the futility of looking for humans to become "better" people, rationality dictates that we establish a new form of society which will inevitably bring with it new mentalities'.

The 'who will do the dirty work' argument in particular is exceptionally well dealt with by both authors. They outline how, in a society in which work isn't done on the basis of people cooperating to do what's socially necessary but to make profit for the owners of capital, people have to sell their physical and mental energies to an employer in order to earn the money that will buy them the necessities of life. Then once they have contracted to sell their energies as, say, dustbin collectors or teachers or bank workers, they have to carry it out for much of the time they are awake and perhaps for the rest of their active lives. The imposed daily stretch of work and the lack of variety make most work unsatisfying, as does the hierarchical organisation and potential precariousness of that work. In these unattractive conditions most jobs become objectionable and 'dirty work' can become positively offensive. They contrast this with what conditions will be in a 'post-monetary' society where people will no longer work for an employer or for a wage or salary but simply to achieve a socially desired result. All the completely negative work that has to be done today — a prime example is the production and use of armaments — will disappear. So will all the useless non-productive work associated with money and production for profit — insurance, banking, sales promotion, taxation, legal contracts, etc. All work will be equally useful and necessary to society and no stigma will be attached to any of it. People will be free to create conditions that will make any task pleasant and interesting, and in the process they will be able to put technology — no longer ensnared by the profit motive — to its best use. They conclude that people don't mind getting their hands dirty or their bodies tired. What they do mind is having to work under conditions that have taken the pleasure out of work. Change the system, they argue, and then the very concept of 'dirty work' will disappear.

Post-capitalism with money

They also counter the arguments of those who claim to be 'post-capitalist' yet still cannot tear themselves away from the idea of money, exchange and buying and selling. Even if efforts are made to organise this in a more 'moral', a more benign way than now, they argue, it will still inevitably be 'a primitive way of organising society'. In this context the writers point out, as the *Socialist Standard* has in a number of recent articles, that ideas like 'Universal Basic Income' and the so-called 'Green New Deal' can do little to resolve the overwhelming problems inherent in a society based on the profit imperative and are doomed to failure even as ways of significantly alleviating the pressures that capitalism puts upon its wage and salary workers. Campaigners who involve themselves in well-meaning reformist activity along these lines on the grounds that we need to be 'realistic' are seen as just 'prolonging the agony of buying and selling society' and effectively delaying the growth of consciousness among many. In other words their task is a futile one, as what they are doing is trying to 'repair the very thing that is destroying us'. Another writer, Anselm Jappe, is quoted in this book for the way he reverses the 'realism' argument and, in *The Self-Consuming Society* (2017), writes: 'The abolition of money and value, of exchange and wage labour, of the State and the market needs to happen without delay. It is not someone's "maximalist" programme" or utopia but rather the only true form of realism.'

Chinal too has a novel way of framing the futility of reformism: 'As soon as you move a domino piece, that just pushes another or other pieces elsewhere and in the end you can never reach a solution that is equitable and stable'. And Aupetitgendre has a different but equally effective formulation: 'Wanting to create an egalitarian, ecologically sound and peaceful society without free access is like wanting to build a car without inventing the wheel.' So, they argue, avowed anti-capitalists should not, as they often do, seek to find 'a way of managing capitalism better, of giving it a human face', but rather 'seek to abolish it'.

Absurdities or abundance?

These writers' patient exploration of the incurable ills of current society offer striking insights into the many absurdities and paradoxes of the money system. Chinal points to how the very existence of money, far from creating wealth and abundance for the many, actually creates uncontrollable penury and, no matter how much of it is in circulation, it never ceases to be seen as in short supply ('Money is a tool of exchange, but also a tool of exclusion'). He illustrates the many unpredictable and unforeseen consequences of the money system and its knock-on effects. How, for example, the supply of such basic necessities as food and accommodation is constantly subject to the destabilisation brought about by the working of the market – something that can seriously affect those on both the buying and the selling side. So, for example, 'If food becomes more expensive, it sells less well, meaning that buyers have to make do with less and that local producers may "disappear" since their market is reduced'. There is also much commentary on how today's money-based society has the effect of setting human beings against one another rather than bringing them together: 'In a money society we are at war with one another to get money and even our neighbour may be competing with us for a job that we both need.' Again: 'If the work environment or the wider system is aggressive, human beings become aggressive to survive, even if in their hearts they would prefer to seek harmony and cooperation.'

So what we have overall in the commentaries of these two writers is an impassioned plea for a society of 'comfortable abundance' organised via a system of 'real direct democracy', where available resources provide for essential needs and reasonable desires and there is not the constant need and pressure to grow and innovate that capitalism experiences as an essential feature of its profit imperative. As the kind of arguments that the World Socialist Movement has been putting for a long, long time, it can only be heartening to see them coming from others too and so appearing to be taking root and spreading.

HOWARD MOSS

"A Civilisation of Free Access"

Quotes

'A society of free access would give freedom of choice to all those who currently find themselves in intolerable situations... In the current system of society moving house to escape from a violent partner, for example, is a real battle if the person cannot show they have gainful employment and does not have money for a deposit on new accommodation. Such victims, without the capitalist 'get-out' of financial independence, find themselves trapped. The same thing applies to all the situations brought to the public gaze by the "Me too' movement. Why would a woman give in to the unwelcome advances of a boss if she did not fear losing out in some way? What pressure could the predator exert if his prospective victim already had free access to everything he might have to offer?' (p.23).

'In a society of free access, all human activities will be chosen by the person doing them and will not bring with them any particular advantages, material benefits, or payment of any kind. Questions around equal reward or prestige will simply not apply. It's the end of the road for the little Hitler, the office dictator, the 'prestigious' role, higher or lower pay' (p.23).

'Let's imagine that there's no longer any ownership of the means of production, no more patents, no more "intellectual property", that every innovation is immediately commonly owned, that there are no longer any brand names to be defended against others, no more fancy advertising. If we take what's best in every make of washing machine, car or computer, would we not be able to make all manufactured objects wholly practical, indestructible and resource-light and at an environmentally minimal cost, and to manufacture only the number we need as we need them? How much less destruction and waste if we can finally make money obsolete!' (p.36).

'[In a moneyless society] some of the situations that cause violence would still certainly exist: envy, jealousy or frustration can lead to violence, but far less so than the acquisitive pressure current society exerts. An easy test is to look at official statistics and the reasons for incarceration. A quick calculation shows that at least two thirds of crimes are directly attributable to the money system' (p.40).

'A society of free access by its very nature is a society without commercial imperatives or economic competition. And even the most able will be aware that they need the cooperation of the less able. If conflicts of interests do arise, new methods will emerge to resolve them, with conciliation rather than confrontation the order of the day' (p.63).

'Campaigners who seek alternative methods of organising capitalism believing that they are being more realistic may well get a shock one day when they realise that all they have done has been to prolong the agony of buying and selling society and hold back the consciousness of so many people' (64).

'The problem is not solved if we aim at the wrong target, at the wrong enemy, if, in thinking we are fighting against capitalism, all we are doing in fact is alleviating some of its worst effects. The point is not to somehow manage capital better but to abolish it, and at the same time the exchange mechanism which is fundamental to it' (p.65).

'The only true realists, the only true pragmatists, are those who want to abolish once and for all money, the state, the market, commodities, the wage and salary system, exchange value and above all the need to turn a financial profit' (p.69).

'[Free access society] will have no state with governments having overwhelming power for the length of their mandate but, instead, representatives elected for specific purposes and readily recallable by the majority. We are often told that such a system would be certain to be long-winded, confrontational and slow... But a slowly taken decision involving consequences for millions should be a guarantee of quality. And the fact that there will no longer be "professional" politicians but rather delegates elected or appointed for a specific purpose and with a particular mandate will guard against power being taken by individuals or parties' (p.82).

'Money is a tool of exchange, but also, wherever we care to look, a tool of exclusion' (p.111).

'We are not talking about returning to a "pre-monetary" world but about using our current knowledge to build a "post-monetary" world, transcending the primitive system of exchange, and getting to a world of comfortable abundance and free access' (p.129).

'Is some form of universal basic income a solution to the problems of the capitalist system? Definitely not' (p.170).

'Real direct democracy does not consist in giving power to those who speak the most eloquently or the loudest. Nor does it open the door to armed or deranged groups of people. The only political arrangement possible for a post-monetary system is to give to each person equal responsibility and equal access to knowledge and training as well as to decision-making' (p.187).

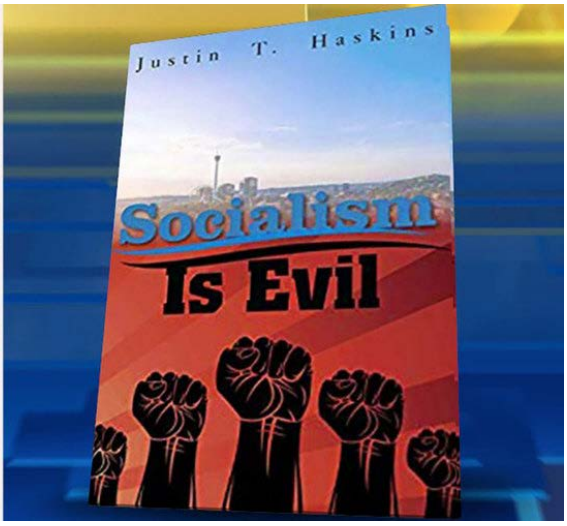
'An efficient society is one that knows its limits, one that, instead of constantly seeking economic growth, focuses on satisfying everyone's needs. Once these needs are satisfied, 'economic growth' for the sake of it serves no purpose. Once a washing machine is made truly to last, with the means to repair it available if it does break down, there is no point in continuing to make more of them. Energies need to go into something else. Production responds to need. That is true efficiency' (p.191).

'Think of all the occupations directly or indirectly tied to the use of money: banks, insurance, accountancy, taxation, financial administration, commercial law... All these occupations will disappear immediately in a post-monetary system' (p.205).

'A free-access society is not impossible. What is impossible is for us to continue to survive in a world which is poisonous and being poisoned and will continue to be so. What is impossible is to live in harmony in a world where the aim is to compete with our neighbours near and far just to have the means to live decently, a world where supplying armaments is a highly profitable pursuit. When a society is harmful, the rules of operation must be changed' (p.274).

'When in the society we are aiming for we will have finished repairing the mistakes of the past, then we will no doubt turn towards what we still do not have and we will go further. But we will do this in respecting the environment and the planet's living beings and without forgetting that we do have limits but that respecting those is no real problem' (p.283).

Is democracy evil?



IN 2018 a free-marketeer thinktank, the Henry Dearborn Institute, published a 90-page book entitled *Socialism is Evil* by a Justin T. Haskins. What is interesting is that, for once, an opponent gets the meaning of socialism more or less right. Basing himself largely on what we say on our website, from which he quotes extensively, and on some quotes from Marx, Haskins concludes that socialism (or communism, which he accepts means the same in this context) is a necessarily world-wide, democratically-organised society based on the common ownership of the means of production with distribution according to need:

'I think it's fair to say that Marx's socialism should be defined as a classless, mostly stateless, democratic economic and political system under which all or nearly all private property ownership, especially the "means of production," is abolished and replaced by a system in which property is owned collectively. Further, in Marx's system, society embraces the general operating principle "from each according to ability, to each according to needs"' (pp. 22-23).

'In a world with few, if any, markets and perhaps no money, people would get the product and services they need from the collective (many socialists would reject that this group should be called a "government") without having to "pay" for anything' (p. 11).

This leads him to accept (at least for the purpose of his argument in this book) that Cambodia, China, the USSR, Venezuela, etc., are not socialist.

As a supporter of unregulated market capitalism, Haskins doesn't think that socialism in the sense defined could work. For him, it is impossible because it is incompatible with human nature. He repeats the usual objections – What about the lazy man? Who will do the dirty work? Who will get to live in the best areas? – that have been dealt with time and again.

However, this is not enough for him. He wants to go further and demonstrate that, even if socialism was not impossible, it would still be 'evil'. By which he means 'highly immoral' (what else could he mean without descending into mysticism?).

To call something 'immoral' is to imply some standard of morality. In Haskins's case, ' …it's immoral to force – using the threat of violence or imprisonment – peaceful people to participate in activities they are morally opposed to. Or, put another way, it's highly immoral to force people to engage in actions they believe are immoral' (p. 43).

He claims that this is what socialism would have to involve:

'Collective property ownership… necessitates that the majority have total power over the minority to make all important moral decisions' (p. 80).

What total power? Democratic decision-making where 'the majority has its way and the minority has its say' does mean on paper that the majority could vote for anything, but that does not give it 'total power' to impose what it has voted through. In fact, unless the majority has at its disposal a coercive political machine it has no power to enforce it at all. Socialism will have not have the means to threaten 'violence or imprisonment', as Haskins himself accepted when he wrote that socialism would be 'almost stateless'.

What this means is that in socialism the carrying-out of a majority decision will depend on the acceptance of that decision by the outvoted minority. This assumes not just formal democratic procedures but also a democratic consciousness amongst the participants, which includes allowing majority decisions to be implemented in the common interest. It also encourages decision-making based on seeking and finding a certain degree of consensus; in fact, majority voting is not the only way of reaching a decision democratically. Why in these circumstances would a majority even consider trying to impose a uniform system of morals? Would a majority even be found to vote for this?

But Haskins persists and argues that, in socialism, not only would a majority vote to allow some activity that might offend or discomfort some people – which is possible – but that it would force those people to participate in such activity. Socialism, he claims, 'either requires all people to abandon their personal morals in favour of some universal standard of morality … or some people must participate in social programs or activities that violate their beliefs.'

Where does that come from? Why would everyone have to agree on ethical issues? And who says that, if the majority votes to allow rearing animals to eat, this means that those opposed to this 'must participate' in rearing and killing animals and eating them? Who says that, if the majority votes to allow contraception and abortion, those opposed to these must practice contraception or take part in abortion procedures? A decision to allow something is not the same as a decision to make it compulsory.

Haskins is not arguing here against socialism as such but against democracy and only indirectly against socialism because it would be democratic. His arguments amount to a rehash of the old individualist anarchist objection to democracy as 'the tyranny of the majority'. It is not clear if Haskins is himself an anarcho-capitalist. A footnote in which he says that he does not necessarily share the view of some free-marketeers that 'taxation is immoral' suggests that he might not be. In which case, he leaves himself open to the charge that he too is 'evil'. Assuming that he regards taxation as moral to fund armed forces, this would be forcing pacifist taxpayers to pay for something against their moral principles.

So, while he gets what socialism means more or less right, his arguments against are weak and contradictory.

ADAM BUICK

Is socialism counter-intuitive?

THERE IS a TV quiz called 'QI' which depends on the fact that correct answers to seemingly mundane and easy questions are almost always counter-intuitive. We live in a world that is not 'what it seems'. There is nothing intuitive about the foundations of physics (quantum mechanics and special/general relativity) and any rational individual who was entirely ignorant of modern science would suspect the sanity of anyone who tried to explain and maintain these theories as an explanation of natural phenomena. From the time we open our eyes on the world we learn to question what we see and hear. Our senses provide us with basic tools for survival but the images, sound, smell and tactile qualities we perceive can be easily fooled. It would seem that intuition or 'common sense' can be very unreliable – and yet we cling to it! There are very few mistakes which we make that deserve a higher degree of self-criticism than those made as a result of going against our 'instincts'. Social skills rely on our ability to detect deceit, insincerity and danger in others. What significance does this seeming contradiction have for political activity? Is socialism a result of common sense or of embracing the counter-intuitive?

As children we are told, despite all appearances, that the sun does not move across the sky but that we circle it; that we labour under the weight of air pressure and are pulled by gravity; that your immune system can kill you; that what tastes good is usually bad for us (in the long run); that a cannonball and a feather fall at an equal rate within a vacuum; that making some stimulants illegal does not eradicate them; that capital punishment is not a deterrent to murder and that life depends on death. To test your own ability to tell the difference between common sense and the counter-intuitive try answering the question: why is north always on top? Having thought about it you begin to realise that it is 'merely' a cultural convention and that the planet, solar system, galaxy and universe have no up or down. The poles of a magnet are not defined by the concepts of top and bottom or up and down but by the simple requirement of opposition. Even the concept of field lines emerging from the north pole of a magnet and re-entering at the south pole is a matter of 'convention'. Education is an act of unlearning as well as learning.

It probably hasn't escaped your notice that many of those who seek to defend

right-wing forms of capitalism rely on 'common-sense' answers whereas those on the left more often use intellectual and counter-intuitive arguments. Both of these attempts to defend the indefensible have resolved themselves into ideological cul-de-sacs that rely either on over simplification or over intellectualising. The belief that legitimate political answers are often obscured by the deliberate activities of the leftist intelligentsia is continually countered by the accusation that those on the right over simplify and overlook the nuances and complexities of political reality. To the left the right-wingers seem dull witted and stupid whilst their adversaries despise their seeming elitist intellectualism. Many on the left do seem to think that politics is an intellectual puzzle that can be solved by one pseudo-scientific theory or another. The political right see this merely as a series of high-brow excuses for the manifest failure of leftist policies. Of course, there are many other components of ideological belief systems including tribalism, prejudice, conformism, conditioning etc, but for the moment we are just considering the dialectical relationship between the intuitive and the counter-intuitive which always seems to be present in polemics and to which we return.

Mainstream political debate is directed by the mainstream media. Those who own and control the media are dedicated to 'normalizing' the capitalist systems of both right and left-wing regimes respectively. One of the most powerful ways of achieving this is to make production for profit and everything that goes with it like wealth and poverty, rampant consumerism and economic/political inequality seem inevitable and perfectly intuitive given the agreed concept of what constitutes 'human nature'. The very construct of a political 'human nature' is one of the greatest triumphs of both types of capitalist ideologies. To deny its existence is to incur universal disbelief and derision. The existence of human nature is just 'common sense'. But socialists do deny this (at least in the terms of which it is understood within reactionary ideology where humanity is reduced to an eternal state of acquisitive individualism and the selfish behaviour that this generates) and point to historical evidence which undermines such a malevolent future for our species. Is this just one example which exemplifies the counter-intuitive nature of the case for socialism as a whole?

Two elements are at play here and it is important to differentiate between them. One is the cultural manipulation and subversion of both intuition (common sense) and counter-intuition (reliance on nuance and complexity thus inhibiting action) and the other is the true nature of reality. To non-socialists just about every element of our case is counter-intuitive and seems to defy common sense- and to us the reverse is true. Can the concept of the counter-intuitive help us distinguish between ideology and knowledge? Certainly the practice of subjecting everything that you think you know to a continual critique (Marxism) helps to keep the seduction of certainty at bay. Many of the postmodernist persuasion will tell you that everything is ideological and that any attempt to reinstate materialism is naïve and even reactionary. But it is impossible to ignore the paradigmatic shift potential that accompanies the discovery of a truth that runs counter to our deepest intuition about reality and so subverts the possibility of an initial ideological commitment to it.

There was once a comedy sketch that took place in an imaginary post-revolutionary socialist context where an individual was trying to sell capitalism as an alternative. It was funny because of the intuitive absurdity of such an endeavour within socialism and served as a reminder that perhaps 'common sense' within a community of the future would represent the political truth. As ever it is history that, hopefully, will transform the two perspectives into an experience comfortably embracing both when stripped of their present sectarian ideological inertia.

WEZ

Energy Wars

IN SEPTEMBER the G7, the group of the world's leading Western capitalist economies (US, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Britain), agreed to try to impose a cap on the price of Russian oil. The level has not yet been fixed but is likely to be somewhere near to the cost of production plus a mark-up for profits. Russia would still have an incentive to export oil but would only make a 'normal' profit rather than the super-profits that they and others (such as Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States) get because the cost of extracting oil there is less than the cost in the other parts of the world whose higher cost of production sets the world price.

What the West seems to want is to impose as the price of Russian oil is what Marx in Volume III of *Capital* called its 'production price', ie, its cost of production plus the average profit on the capital invested in its production. Over a fifth of Volume III is devoted to a discussion of this in relation to ground-rent, the money paid to a landlord for the use of their land to grow crops or raise livestock but also to extract materials.

David Ricardo is credited with being the first to explain why different areas of land yielded a different rent. The price of what it was used to produce was fixed by what Marx later called the production price on the least fertile land producing it. Those farming more fertile land, where the cost of production was correspondingly less, still sold their produce at the higher price and so made super-profits but which, unless they owned the land themselves, were taken by the landowner as ground-rent.

Marx accepted this theory. Ricardo explained how it applied to mines:

"[T]here are mines of various qualities, affording very different results, with equal quantities of labour. The metal produced from the poorest mine that is worked, must at least have an exchangeable value, not only sufficient to procure all the clothes, food, and other necessaries consumed by those employed in working it, and bringing the produce to market, but also to afford the common and ordinary profits to him who advances the stock necessary to carry on the undertaking. The return for capital from the poorest mine paying no rent, would regulate the rent of all the other more productive mines. This mine is supposed to yield the usual profits of stock. All that the other mines produce more than this, will necessarily be paid to the owners for rent" (*Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, ch. 3).

This applies today to the extraction of oil, its price being fixed by the production price in the least productive oilfield in use.

What the G7 are trying to do is to prevent Russia from benefitting from having a lower cost of production than in the oilfields that set the price of oil and so reaping a super-profit. This is to be done by forcing Russia to sell its oil at a price nearer to its price of production. It's a clever scheme – to be enforced by refusing to insure tankers carrying Russian oil bought above this price – but it may be too clever. Russia has already announced that it will refuse to sell oil to any country that goes along with the G7 plan. And it can't be a coincidence that the day after the plan was announced Russia suspended the direct supply of gas to Germany.

While the capitalist West and capitalist Russia battle it out, economically and militarily, as to whose sphere of influence Ukraine should be in, workers everywhere are suffering the consequences in terms of higher and higher energy bills reducing their standard of living. But it's a pain both sides have no qualms about inflicting.

FALC

THE TERM 'Fully Automated Luxury Communism' was invented by Aaron Bastani. In his book he says he is using the word to 'denote a society in which work is eliminated, scarcity replaced by abundance and where labour and leisure blend into one another' (p. 50). He calls this communism after Marx's 'higher phase of communist society' when 'all the springs of co-operative wealth spring more abundantly' and society can 'inscribe on its banner: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!'

Bastani sees such a society having become possible as a result of what he calls the 'Third Disruption', the two previous 'disruptions' being the Agricultural Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. His Third Disruption is basically the application of information technology to production; which 'means machines will be capable of replicating ever more of what was, until now, uniquely human work' (p. 37).

A large part of his book is devoted to describing the possibilities that his Third Disruption opens up, such as full automation, gene editing, asteroid mining, synthetic meat, and endless energy from natural forces. He sees this last as eventually leading to a situation where it will be so cheap to produce individual items of wealth that there will be no point in putting a price on them; they could simply be given away. Similarly, work for a wage would become redundant as people would no longer have to sell their working energy to access what they need.

'What stands in the way isn't the inevitable scarcity of nature, but the artificial scarcity of market rationing and ensuring that everything, at all cost, is produced for profit' (p. 156).

How does he think society will get there? Disappointingly, but all too common amongst authors who present an often trenchant criticism of capitalism, he advocates various measures that he sees as steps in the right direction; he rejects UBI in favour of UBS (universal free basic services) as being more compatible with the ultimate aim.

He also states that 'any attempt at communism within the limits of the Second Disruption' was 'impossible' (p. 241); this, because before the coming of IT it would not have been possible to eliminate work. But is eliminating human work an aim of communism? Hasn't it been rather to eliminate working for wages, reduce working hours and make work enjoyable? And would it not have been possible to produce plenty for all on the basis of the common ownership of productive resources even before the digitalisation of information? Maybe it wouldn't have been FALC, but certainly highly-automated, enough-for-all communism.

Profits and Power

WITH GAS and electricity bills rising, along with the cost of near-enough everything else, the most immediate concern for many of us is how and whether we can pay. A recent edition of BBC One's *Panorama* featured households already finding it difficult to cope. A couple with a young son in Birmingham with a just-above-average income of £31,000pa were paying £100 a month for their energy a year ago, and now the amount is £250. Alongside all their other expenses, 'it's just getting tighter and tighter'. In Bournemouth, another couple care for their daughter with cerebral palsy. The machines which keep her alive all use electricity which they can't afford if their bills increase further, having already trebled in a year. Her father says 'I think it's quite obscene for energy companies to be posting profits in the billions when we are struggling to actually pay our bills. And I think energy companies are isolated from the reality of a family like ours'.

Between April and June 2022, BP made nearly £7 billion in profit, while Shell raked in £9.4 billion. Over a year, BP has paid £10 billion and Shell £15 billion to their shareholders as dividends and share buybacks. Bland statements from both companies say they will provide financial support to those most vulnerable and are investing in low carbon energy production. At other times, though, their bosses have been more honest about their aims: BP's Chief Executive has described the company as a cash machine for its shareholders.

In the edition of *Panorama: The Energy Crisis: Who's Cashing In?*, reporter Bronagh Munro gives an introduction to the current context of sky-high fuel bills for us alongside astronomical profits for the energy companies. Gas prices increased as an effect of the pandemic, and then again due to the war in Ukraine. But, given that the UK hasn't been dependent on Russia for gas imports while European countries have been, why has the UK been hit the hardest this side of the continent? Whether or not leaving the European Union has had an impact isn't discussed. Instead, an explanation is found in how the energy market is shaped by policies such as the link between electricity and gas prices.

Munro explains how the wholesale price of electricity tracks the price of gas. The 40 percent of electricity which is generated from gas sets the price of all electricity, regardless of how it's produced. Now

Credit: BBC

that the price of gas has risen, so will the price of electricity produced by nuclear reactors (15 percent of that in the UK) and wind farms, for example, even though their own costs haven't increased. EDF, the French company which owns nuclear reactors in the UK won't be able to benefit from this yet, though, as they're locked into contracts at a previous lower price. Supplier Centrica, on the other hand, has doubled its prices in the past year with its profits having grown fivefold. Also, producers of so-called 'green' energy receive subsidies through the government, adding £6 billion to our bills. These payments have further bolstered the coffers of companies such as Greencoat wind generators which has quadrupled its profits in a year.

The wholesale price of gas and electricity has climbed enough to make previous price caps on our bills irrelevant. With wholesale costs so high, the price cap would make it difficult for suppliers to buy in energy and sell it on to us customers while also making a profit. The limit on how much we can be charged for gas and electricity is set by Ofgem, the non-ministerial government department whose stated aim is to protect the interests of 'energy consumers'. So, the cap has been adjusted to higher amounts more in line with the wholesale amount. One of Ofgem's previous directors and board members, Christine Farnish, is briefly interviewed for *Panorama* about her resignation from her roles because she disagreed with decisions about the price cap, saying that they benefited companies more than consumers. She says that the price cap is no longer fit for purpose and only the government can have the solution.

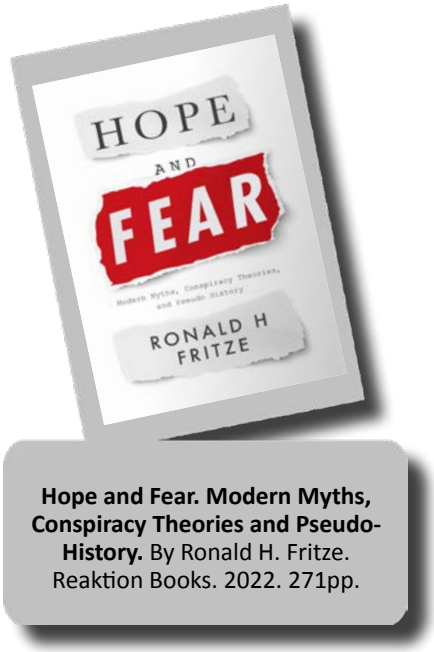
The programme was first broadcast only a few days before Prime Minister Liz Truss announced that a new 'Energy Price Guarantee' effective from 1 October 2022 would limit typical household energy bills to £2,500 per year. This doesn't mean that the wholesale price will change, though, so the difference will be funded through government to the tune of around £90 billion, with a further £60 billion to subsidise businesses' bills. Those on the Left have criticised this policy, giving the reason that it will be funded by more government borrowing to be paid back through more taxation on the working class, rather than by a windfall tax on energy companies' profits.

However the money is shunted around, and wherever the burden of taxation really falls, the structural problem remains. While the companies which produce and supply energy are owned by a minority to make profits, they will follow strategies which aim to maximise those profits. Although these strategies, policies, reforms can't control the economy, as shown by the price cap not impacting on the wholesale gas price, they can help the capitalist class benefit, even through the economic turbulence from the pandemic and now war in Ukraine.

Programmes like *Panorama* are useful to highlight issues and explain some of the economic context. But they stop short of considering the class divide central to any capitalist economy, or any kind of alternative. In a socialist society, energy production wouldn't be measured in money and subject to the vagaries of either a profit-driven market or fraught relations between nation states. Instead, the only considerations would be the practicalities of generating sufficient power for people's needs and wants in an environmentally sustainable way.

MIKE FOSTER

Why do people believe strange things?



Hope and Fear. Modern Myths, Conspiracy Theories and Pseudo-History. By Ronald H. Fritze. Reaktion Books. 2022. 271pp.

It is an idea frequently expressed that people need myth to make sense of their own lives and the world around them. Otherwise why would we have worship of non-existent gods, devotion to human leaders sometimes considered divine themselves, or the idea that one's accidental country of birth somehow makes that place superior to others? In *Hope and Fear* Ronald Fritze investigates such myths, such 'invented knowledge', as he calls it, and does so in a way that manages to be both massively scholarly in its detailed and comprehensive analysis of the phenomena in question, exhilarating, and indeed often entertaining in the reflections and observations it throws off.

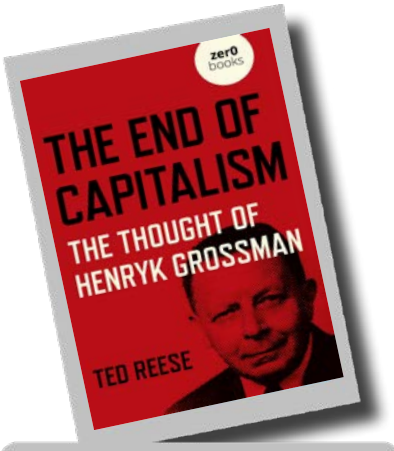
On the one hand, with his tongue firmly in his cheek, the author asks questions like: 'Is a secret and corrupt Illuminati conspiring to control world affairs and bring about a New World Order? Was Donald Trump a victim of massive voter fraud? Is Queen Elizabeth II a shape-shifting reptilian alien? Who is doing all this plotting?' On the other hand, the depth of his knowledge and serious analysis of fringe ideas and conspiracies throughout history is little short of breathtaking in its detail and profundity. His study ranges from enduring earlier myths such as the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel, the Knights Templar and the 'Red Jews' to later myths of race and nation such as the rise of 'national sovereignty' as 'a source of pride and comfort' for citizens of newly established states and the continuing belief among some in the anti-Semitic and entirely discredited Protocols of the Elders of Zion. In the 20th century, he examines, among much else, the Nazis' pseudo-science of Aryanism, and persistent fascination with the so-called alien landings at Roswell in New Mexico. And over most recent times he considers theories of 9/11 as an 'inside job', Obama's supposed 'foreign' birth, the contortions of QAnon, 'Covid hoax' notions and Alex Jones's outrageous fictions. He concludes that when such 'junk knowledge' spreads, 'facts, reality and truth fall by the wayside' and what people come to believe 'bears little or no resemblance to scientific or historical reality'. So, for example, belief in anti-Trump voter fraud, though conclusively and incontrovertibly debunked, continues to survive against all the evidence via a process the author calls 'belief perseverance' which persists even in the face of solid contradictory information and facts.

What to make of all this? Clearly belief in myth, conspiracies and pseudo-history has a long record in human affairs and seems to occur especially at times of tumult and social upheaval, perhaps an expression of despair by people who feel impotent to influence events or their own lives. People engage in 'confirmation bias'. They cherry-pick the evidence to support their beliefs in wonder, domination conspiracies or the supernatural, or they simply engage in wishful thinking, and fevered imagination takes precedence over any rational thought leading in some cases to what the author, in his chapter on the rise and ideology of Nazism, calls 'a road to perdition'.

It is true, as history has shown and this book ably illustrates, that this can lead to whole societies going down such roads. And this may seem depressing. But perhaps a gleam of light is to be found in the fact that, in the most socially and economically advanced parts of the world, the kind of myths, conspiracy theories and pseudo-history portrayed here are rarely shared by whole populations as often as they were in the past. What happens now rather is that they tend to exist among a certain segment of the population, usually a particularly downtrodden one, who find their own existences particularly confusing, stressful and alienating and so seek consolation in conspiracy theories often coupled with retrograde political beliefs, which, as the author points out, tend to have an affinity for each other. So maybe we should see just a little progress here in terms of social development providing at least the ground for progress of the wholly different, non-conflictual and cooperative way of organising human affairs that socialists advocate and look forward to.

HOWARD MOSS

What law of breakdown?



End of Capitalism, The Thought of Henryk Grossman. By Ted Reese, Verso, 2022. Paperback, £13.99

'Breakdown theory' was a speciality in German-speaking Marxist circles. The revisionist Eduard Bernstein threw down the gauntlet in 1899 when he stated that capitalism would never break down of its own accord.

One of the first to take up the challenge and try to show that it would was Rosa Luxemburg. Another was Henryk Grossman. He agreed with Luxemburg that, if it couldn't be demonstrated that capitalism would collapse, then the case for socialism would become just a moral one, but disagreed with her proposed solution. His argument, as set out in 1929 in his *The Law of Accumulation and Breakdown of the Capitalist System*, was that capitalism would collapse economically because eventually a point would be reached when not enough profits would be generated to keep capital accumulation going.

Grossman was born in 1881 in Kracow, now in Poland but then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He joined the local Social Democratic Party and was active in agitation amongst Yiddish-speaking workers. After the war he found himself in Poland where he joined the Communist Party but, facing persecution, had to leave in 1925. He emigrated to Germany where he took up a post with the Institute of Social Research (Frankfurt School) for whom his book on the collapse of capitalism was written. He was always a sympathiser of the Communist Party

and the USSR, though as Reese shows by no means an uncritical one, and in 1949 moved from the US to East Germany where he died in 1950.

To demonstrate his theory about capitalism eventually reaching a point where there would not be enough profits to continue capital accumulation, he accepted the assumptions made by the Austrian Social Democrat, Otto Bauer, to refute Luxemburg. The most important were that the accumulation of what Marx called 'constant capital' (machines, factories, materials, etc) would increase at 10 percent a year but that the amount (mass) of surplus value would increase at only 5 percent. The rate of exploitation (the ratio of surplus value to capital invested in hiring wage-workers) was assumed to be constant.

On the basis of these assumptions he was able to demonstrate mathematically that after 35 years capitalism would collapse because it would not be able to maintain a 10 percent annual increase in constant capital. By then the rate of profit would have fallen below 10 percent, which meant the mass of profits generated was below the level required to increase capital invested in machinery, etc by 10 percent. He called this 'over-accumulation'.

This conclusion was in fact built into the assumption that the amount of profits would increase at a slower rate than the amount of constant capital (the figures don't matter as long as the increase in profits is slower). This meant that the rate of profit would gradually fall from year to year. This would not be a problem as long as the amount of profits was greater than the amount of constant capital required. But, as soon as the rate of profit fell below the rate of increase of the constant capital, the increase in the amount of profits would not be enough.

The question that arises is how realistic were the assumptions on which Grossman's based his 'law of breakdown'.

It is obvious that the rate at which capital can accumulate must depend on the mass of profits made since that is where the additional capital comes from. The argument seems to be that competition forces capitalist enterprises to introduce more efficient machinery so as to stay in the battle of competition and that this sets the pace of capital accumulation, a pace that could come to be greater than the amount of profits available for this. This could happen in theory but not for long. If it did happen this would provoke an economic crisis but not the collapse of capitalism.

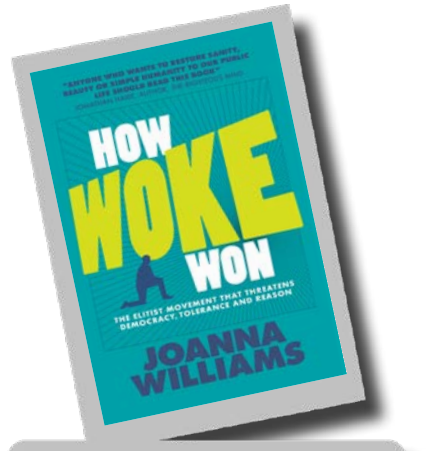
In practice, productivity increases at a rate of around 2 percent a year. There is no reason to suppose that the amount of profits could not – and has not – increased at a similar rate, especially as the rate of exploitation does not remain constant but goes up over time. In any event, capitalism has not collapsed through there not being enough profits to continue accumulation.

Reese seems to think that 'the absolute limit to the accumulation of capital' has already been reached. The evidence he presents for this is mainly about world debt levels which have, in his view, become unsustainable and will soon lead to global hyperinflation. Grossman would have expected 'absolute over-accumulation' to result in steadily growing unemployment, but that is not happening today.

Despite this, Reese's work is a basic introduction to the life and views of Grossman.

ALB

Really That Dominant?



How Woke Won: the Elitist Movement that Threatens Democracy, Tolerance and Reason.
By Joanna Williams: Spiked. £9.99.

According to one definition, a woke person is someone who is 'very aware of social and political unfairness' (*Collins English Dictionary*). Joanna Williams, however, uses the term in a very negative way, to refer to those who are obsessed with race and gender, and support cancel culture. Woke values supposedly 'dominate every aspect of our lives' and, while there is no grand conspiracy, the 'cultural elite' accept woke thinking as common sense. The woke project is described as an attack on the working class (not defined, but probably manual workers).

She is not at all clear as to who comprises this cultural elite. It is a 'manifestation of the state', it includes non-governing elites and even a sub-elite. It consists of the 'professional-managerial class', and runs business, academia, the church, mainstream and social media; its members work in HR departments and the cultural industry, and as doctors and teachers. It is hard to take seriously this depiction of a group which is allegedly so powerful but is characterised in such a vague way.

Having said that, there are some good points here. The kind of threats made against J.K. Rowling and others for saying that trans women are not women are indeed indefensible. This is not a matter of disagreement or argument but of intolerance and intimidation. Students can sometimes be unwilling to accept the expression of views they dislike. 'Woke capitalism' can promote gender inclusivity, for instance, as a way of selling razor blades or deodorant.

Yet there is also much that is objectionable, sometimes a matter of the omission of obviously relevant points. Williams mentions that journalist Suzanne Moore resigned from the Guardian after being bullied by colleagues, presumably for not expressing acceptably woke views, but does not say that Jeremy Hardy and John Pilger were barred from the paper for being too 'radical'. In other cases, what is said is inconsistent. For instance, it is claimed that the supposed existence of institutional racism in the police moves policing 'into the realm of politics'. Yet a few pages later it is said that the police now have new ways of pursuing old goals, effectively defending the interests of the ruling class (which is also political, after all).

Woke is allegedly a counter-revolution to the populism of Brexit. The election of Trump in 2016 is said to have shown the rejection of woke values in the US: as if voting for a racist, sexist, lying bully was an endorsement of tolerance and reason. The 'political consensus' is also said to be challenged by the internet publication Spiked (spiked-online.com), which Williams writes for, and also by the TV and radio channel GB News, which is largely a forum for such as Nigel Farage.

Overall, Williams says nothing about the lack of democracy under capitalism, and is just arguing for one establishment view against another that is to a large extent manufactured by its opponents.

PB

The ABC of Inflation

ALL SORTS of explanations have been offered for the abnormal rise of prices since 1939 as compared with the up-and-down movements of prices in the nineteenth century. Most of the so-called explanations take the form of blaming some group or other for being "greedy"; bankers, or manufacturers, or retailers or trade unionists. It is an explanation that a glance at certain facts will show to be nonsense. Did the copper companies reduce their prices by 40 per cent in 1971 because they had suddenly become less greedy? Between 1948 and 1968 prices rose by 100 per cent in Britain, but only by half that amount in America and Switzerland: are the British twice as greedy? In the nineteenth century did the whole population go through alternating phases of being more greedy and less greedy? Between the end of 1920 and the middle of 1933 prices fell by over 50 per cent. The fall was continuous for thirteen years. What had happened to greed?

The fact is that sellers always try to get as big a price as they can, "as much as the market will bear", and if they can get more or are forced to take less it is because external circumstances over which they have little or no control determine that it shall be so.

Two popular beliefs are that prices go up because wages go up, or vice versa. It does not occur to those who hold one or the other

view that wages are prices – the price the worker gets for the sale of his labour-power, his mental and physical energies, to the employer. So, properly stated, their two propositions become the single useless assertion that prices go up because prices go up.

If they re-stated it in the form that one group of prices (wages) go up because the other group of prices go up –or vice versa –they overlook the truth that both groups of prices go up because of common external factors which affect both of them, more or less to the same extent.

(Socialist Standard, October 1972)

Earth notes Dear diary

Things are getting worse between me and capitalism.

It says it loves me and wants to take care of me. But how many times have I heard that?

It's time I faced up to the truth.

Capitalism doesn't care about me, it only cares about making money.

I thought it was such a charmer, with its dazzle and glamour and can-do flair, but I was being fooled.

It's a psychopath.

Whatever goes wrong is never its fault.

Whenever I protest, it tells me I'm imagining things, I don't understand, I worry too much.

When I say there are other ways of living, it tells me I'm being delusional.

Whenever it hurts me it swears that it's sorry, that it can change, that it will be better in future. But it never is.

I look terrible. I feel drained. I'm getting sicker all the time, but capitalism just feeds and feeds and won't stop.

I'm terrified that one day it'll kill me and then go and find some other planet to shack up with.

I really want a social system that's the opposite of capitalism, one where there's no buying and selling but only free sharing, one that treats me with real love and respect, one that tells me I'm beautiful and means it, one that knows how to take proper care of me instead of prostituting me to its billionaire friends, one that makes me feel safe and is fun to be around.

Dear diary, I know I can have that society, and I know I deserve it. I just need to find the courage to leave capitalism, before it's too late.

World Socialism – it's the system your planet would choose.

World Socialist Movement Online Meetings

From this month we are switching our general discussion meetings from Discord to Zoom. Only certain branch and committee meetings will continue to be held on Discord. To connect to any of our Zoom events, click https://zoom.us/j/7421974305 (or type the address into your browser address field) then follow the instructions on screen. You will enter a virtual waiting room – please be patient, you will be admitted to the meeting shortly.

OCTOBER 2022 EVENTS

World Socialist Movement online meetings

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

Sunday 2 October 11.00 GMT Zoom • Central Branch Meeting
To join the meeting contact spgb.cbs@worldsocialism.org to get an invite.

Sunday 2 October 11.00 GMT Discord
Last discussion meeting on Discord + introduction to Zoom meetings

Friday 7 October 19.30 GMT Zoom • Did You See the News?
Host: Howard Moss

Friday 14 October 19.30 GMT Zoom • The Items for Discussion at ADM
Ownership and Stewardship
Is saying we support trade union opposition to anti-union laws reformist?
How best to utilise Head Office
Should we dispense with ADM?
Is there a way to make Conference ballot papers easier to understand?

Saturday 15 October 10.00 to 17.00 GMT Zoom
AUTUMN DELEGATE MEETING

Friday 21 October 19.30 GMT Zoom • How to read the business pages
Explanation of capitalist economic terms: Growth, Inflation, GDP, CPI, National Debt Profit Margin, Balance of Payments, etc
Speaker: Adam Buick

Sunday 30 October 11.00 GMT Zoom
Spectres Haunting Europe: Socialism and the Supernatural
Speaker: Mike Foster

Socialist Party Physical Meetings

LONDON
Saturday 15 October 10am to 5pm (also on Zoom)
AUTUMN DELEGATE MEETING'
Socialist Party Head Office, 52 Clapham High Street, SW4 7UN.

Saturday 29 October 3pm • Who were the Illuminati?
Speaker: Adam Buick
Socialist Party Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN

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

For the Record

Here is what the new Prime Minister has promised her government will deliver:
'I have a bold plan that will grow our economy and deliver higher wages, more security for families and world class public services' (*i paper*, 3 September).
We record this so that it can be compared with what happens. Which, from past experience and a knowledge of how capitalism works, will be yet another failure to make capitalism work in the interest of the majority by delivering higher wages and world class public services. Wages and public services always take second place to profits as that's the nature of the system. To those don't believe us, we say wait and see.
Apparently, when she was younger she had other ideas. According to *Private Eye* (15 July):
'Delegates who attended the 1993 Conference of the Liberal Democrat Youth & Students recall then-firebrand Truss arguing for, er, the abolition of money.'

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.

Food Banks Again

THIS COLUMN talked some time ago about food banks and the regular request that goes out on my local community Facebook page for contributions to the food bank near to where I live. As rising prices make the struggle to survive even more desperate for many people, the food bank request itself has taken on a more desperate tone. The latest message said:

Many of our neighbours can't feed their children. They arrive here in tears. So please this week we are requesting in particular?

Pot Noodles

Mash Potatoes

Flavoured Noodles

Squash

Small Jars Coffee

Biscuits

Also if anyone can spare any toiletries Thank you lovely people, please try to help this much needed Foodbank

Civilisation

What to do? The anthropologist Margaret Mead was asked by a student what she considered to be the first sign of civilisation in a culture. The student expected Mead to talk about fishhooks or clay pots or grinding stones. But instead, Mead said that the first sign of civilisation in an ancient culture was a femur (thighbone) that had been broken and then healed. Mead explained that in the animal kingdom, if you break your leg, you die. You cannot run from danger, get to the river for a drink or hunt for food. You are meat for prowling beasts. No animal survives a broken leg long enough for the bone to heal. A broken femur that has healed is evidence that someone has taken time to stay with the one who fell, has bound up the wound, has carried the person to safety and has tended the person through recovery.

And the fact that day after day, week after week, people keep the local food bank stocked up helping others through difficulty is a clear indication of 'civilisation' and that we humans will usually help others in a worse situation than ourselves if we can, if only because it makes us feel better about ourselves . Indeed Mead finished her explanation with the words: 'We are at our best when we serve others.'

Food Billionaires

But if things are getting worse in the UK, the food situation in other parts of the world is far more dramatic. A recent United Nations report revealed that around 1 in 10 people worldwide went hungry last year, while currently 1 in 4 people in Africa do not have enough to eat. Jake Johnson of Oxfam reported that one person is dying of hunger or hunger-related illness 'every 48 seconds in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia alone'. This isn't, he went on, because there isn't enough food available, but because the price of food has risen 'to skyrocketing levels' and people don't have the money to buy it. Johnson mentioned the war in Ukraine as a contributory factor, but added that 'against this backdrop, 62 new billionaires have been created and food billionaires overall have increased their collective wealth by 382 billion dollars since 2020'.

Oxfam's suggestion is that the food billionaires should be prevailed on to use their wealth to fund a massive anti-hunger effort. Just two weeks of the wealth gains those billionaires have secured, Oxfam has calculated, would go a long way towards combating hunger in places where soaring prices are 'intensifying food insecurity and pushing poverty to new extremes'. These are obviously fine sentiments, but unfortunately it's not the way the world of capitalism works. The Cargill global food corporation, 87 percent owned by the 11th richest family in the world with combined wealth of $42.9 billion, has seen its wealth increase by $14.4 billion since 2020 (and by almost $20 million per day during the Covid pandemic). This is par for the course in terms of the way the world market operates. It isn't a deliberate process on the part of greedy individuals but rather a function of how potential shortages and the price mechanism operate in the impersonal world of buying and selling. It is the outcome of a process which the individuals caught up in it as either victims or victors can do virtually nothing to alter and over which governments too have only very limited control.

Pipe Dream

The fact is that the capitalist system is not controlled by individual businesses or governments but they have to fall in line with the dictates of the system. And this easily leads to fights breaking out between governments seeking to defend their own 'patch', as consistently happens in the world of competition and profit and is indeed happening in many places right now. So, unfortunately, a solution via adjustments by agribusinesses of the kind proposed by Oxfam is little more than a pipe dream, as are exhortations to governments to cancel debt burdens and tax the mega-rich. The capitalist system is a war of profit against humans and the only thing that will change that is to get rid of capitalism,

So just as, on my own local level, I know that food banks can be little more than a bit of sticking plaster, some temporary relief for those in need, on a planetary level it will take more than charity and goodwill by individuals or even governments for there to be any long-term solution. As the Oxfam food policy director, Hanna Saarinen, says: 'We need to reimagine a new global food system to really end hunger; one that works for everyone.' But the trouble – and the truth – is that such a food system is simply not feasible in the framework of the system we live in, where, at the end of the day, profit must always trump need. And this applies regardless of the goodwill of the many who try to help their neighbours via food banks. And it also trumps the truth uttered by Margaret Mead that helping others is what makes us human and that, given half a chance, that's what we'll do, since 'we are at our best when we serve others'.

HOWARD MOSS

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