

THE

November 2022 • Volume 118 • Number 1419 • £1.50

SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement



BLUNDERS, BODGES AND BUNGLES

Why leaders always let you down



Also: Selfish by Nature?
According to Need
Urban Mining - E-Waste Recycling
Spycatchers

Manufacturing Reagan
Myanmar and the myth of 'the
national progressive bourgeoisie'



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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'

That's not all, folks!

LAST MONTH the world looked on with bemused fascination as the UK Tory leadership attempted to handle the economy the same way the iceberg handled the Titanic, reminding everybody once again, as if Trump and Bojo were not lesson enough, that it's possible for people to get into positions of power who really have no idea what they're doing.

The markets dived, pundits gaped and soberer heads than Liz Truss, like Putin, Xi Jinping and Kim Jong'un, scratched their heads and wondered if the British state had been taken over by Warner cartoon characters. An anvil dropped on the old Chancellor after he pulled the trigger on his Trust the Market bazooka, Keir Starmer rocketed like Wile E. Coyote into the stratosphere and the Tory PM ran out of road and fell off a cliff. The new Chancellor, who had been hastily whistled up to deploy an Acme Damage Limitation gizmo, started unpromisingly by conceding in his first speech that

'governments do not control markets'.

We've been saying all along that governments can't do this, although never underestimate their ability to make things worse (see *Cooking the Books*, page 6). Markets don't deliver public benefit, they deliver profit for a few and cause misery for many and destruction for the planet. And if they deliver an earthquake, governments normally prefer to blame the opposition, or the unions, or latterly Putin, or their own staff. You can hardly blame the system one minute, and then ask people to vote you into office to control the system the next. The fact that Jeremy Hunt has admitted this shows you what a desperate hole they were in. The only thing they can hope for come next election is a large dose of public amnesia.

Most people will simply shrug and say, that's what happens when you put criminals or idiots in charge. The next lot will be better, they say, because they couldn't be any worse. Experience suggests otherwise. Whole government

institutions, not just leaders, can display surprising levels of incompetence, as we discover with the British intelligence services (see *Spycatchers*, page 12). And why follow leaders anyway? Much better not to put anyone in charge, but instead take collective charge ourselves (see *Pathfinders*, page 4).

The alternative left-wing media outlet Double Down News provided some fun in the form of an exquisitely venomous take-down of Truss and Kwarteng by former *Daily Telegraph* journalist Peter Osborne, in which he argued that the vainglorious duo had sold out common sense and political reality in order to promote the interests of their favourite hedge fund managers and super-rich oligarchs. But one wonders what he thinks political leaders do the rest of the time. Serving the interests of the rich and powerful is what all governments do, no matter how progressive and reformist their speeches might look, because once they're in power they have to run capitalism and that means doing what the rich want them to. And that's not all, folks. Until we get rid of this system, the capitalist cartoon disasters will run and run.

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Ancient wisdom

AFTER LAST month's shit-show by the UK Tory leadership, you have to ask yourself why people believe in following leaders at all, when the consequences of doing so can be disappointing at best, at worst spectacularly awful.

Many scientists think we're programmed to. Leaders perch at the top of hierarchies, and if you look the word up you'll find the common claim that hierarchies are built into us, and not just us but all animals. 'Social groups across species rapidly self-organize into hierarchies, where members vary in their level of power, influence, skill, or dominance... A wealth of evidence indicates social hierarchies are endemic, innate, and most likely, evolved to support survival within a group-living context' (bit.ly/3yOkGCa).

If this is so, how can we advocate a classless and egalitarian social system? Doesn't hierarchy scupper socialism?

If by hierarchy we are talking about royal rulers and the oppressive machinery of class societies, palaces, slaves, and all the rest of it, then it is obvious that these are not built into humans, because good evidence for this highly stratified behaviour is only seen within the last 10,000 years, a mere thirtieth of the 300,000 years that anatomically modern humans have existed.

Prior to this, human activity mainly consisted in immediate-return hunting and gathering (HG), an uncomplicated and egalitarian lifestyle sometimes called 'primitive communism' and based on sharing resources. HG bands were typically small and mobile, though they may have been part of regional and even continental communities, and any property that did exist was little more than tools and trinkets. Interestingly, studies of modern HG groups show that they often find domineering behaviour insufferable, and actively combat it using tactics like 'reverse dominance'. Anthropologist Richard Lee quotes one HG member: 'When a young man kills much meat, he comes to think of himself as a big man, and he thinks of the rest of us as his inferiors. We can't accept this. We refuse one who boasts, for someday his pride will make him kill somebody. So we always speak of his meat as worthless. In this way, we cool his heart and make him gentle' (bit.ly/3yNeWJ9). What this suggests is that an innate tendency to hierarchy might exist but that, other things being equal, human groups have no problem keeping it in check and under control.

What happened to humans 10,000 years ago to disrupt aeons of peaceful



coexistence? This period saw the shift from hunting and gathering to settled farming, a radical change in the *mode of production*. With farming, you have to stay in one place and work it, and investing labour in a plot of land creates a 'value', both in terms of sunk cost and of productive potential. This value might only be notional in a situation of abundance, but it becomes worth preserving and defending where scarcity enters the equation, which may happen with rising populations. At first the 'property' might be shared, but a ruthless warrior elite will have the incentive to monopolise it and then use artificial scarcity as a power base. At this point, whatever social customs exist to keep latent hierarchical tendencies under control are overwhelmed. One way or another, farming historically ushered in all the oppressive apparatus of property ownership including ruling elites, religion, civil administration, money forms, social stratification, massive inequality, slavery and organised warfare.

Today, defenders of capitalist privilege are happy to justify all this, in a kind of broken-eggs-and-omelettes way, by pointing to the modern benefits of civilisation, and by ignoring the role that artificial scarcity continues to make in shoring up these hierarchies. They also may haw with the word *primitive* in the term *primitive communism*, arguing that HG groups were only egalitarian because they were incapable of anything more complex, and that any non-hierarchical alternative to capitalist inequality must necessarily be a retrograde step that would undo civilisation and take us back to living in huts.

In the first place, we have seen that egalitarianism is not some passive factory default but an active process of collective social management. HGs like it that way, and work to keep it that way.

Secondly, archaeology has some bearing on this. If HG groups were primitive and incapable of complex culture and social

organisation, then large-scale projects such as monument building were clearly out of the question. But excavations at the 12,000-year-old site of Göbekli Tepe in Turkey are overturning this assumption (bit.ly/3MFGS7z). Not only does it appear that HGs were indeed able to build monuments, but also that large-scale organisation and interaction were possible before the mechanisms of settled farming, property and social stratification existed. Bottom line: you don't need hierarchies to do fancy stuff.

If a 'dominance drive' is universal and innate among animal species, it seems to be more like a dial than an on/off switch. In some animals, like elephants, manatees, bonobos, bats, the dial is set low. In others, the dial is turned right up to despotic. Some interplay of genetic and environmental factors is clearly at work. Humans don't have just one behaviour, we're very adaptable, and as a highly social animal, good at cooperating. But hierarchies don't help, if anything they get in the way. A study cited in *Nature* suggests that hierarchies actually hinder the process of cooperation: 'Compared to a condition lacking hierarchy, cooperation declined in the presence of a hierarchy due to a decrease in investment by lower ranked individuals.' And it doesn't matter whether the hierarchy is deemed justifiable or not: 'hierarchy was detrimental to cooperation regardless of whether it was earned or arbitrary' (go.nature.com/2sellkc).

And this is to say nothing of the strong case, eg, Michael Marmot's 2004 *Status Syndrome*, that hierarchies cause massive stress, ill health, low fertility and high mortality. Rather than being a rocket booster to civilisation, hierarchies hobble us, make us ill and piss us off. Hunter gatherers weren't daft. They always knew hierarchies caused trouble, and were best avoided. Socialism would simply apply the same ancient wisdom.

PJS

Selfish by nature?

ABOUT 30 years ago, I was feeling a bit pleased with myself. My tiny donor booklet told me that I was on my tenth visit to a mobile blood donation unit. I can't remember if I was still on the bed or having my brew and biscuit but I'll never forget the spontaneous acclaim from everyone in that hall when a nurse announced that a donor had turned up to give blood for the fiftieth time. The contribution of most of us there must have paled into insignificance against that of the newcomer. So what? We were all there doing a Good Thing. And it felt good too.

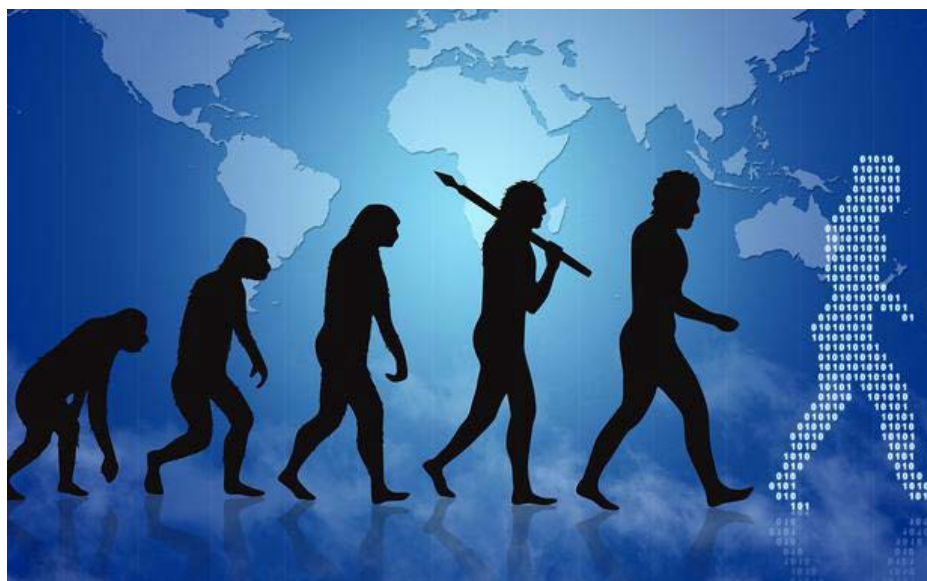
I think we can safely assume that the 10,000 who responded to October's blood supply alert (bbc.in/3S80fap) were acting out of a sense of solidarity, public duty, call it what you will. They did a Good Thing, and will rightly feel good about it too.

Such behaviour sits very badly with the tale that we're all hard-wired for selfishness and competition rather than for cooperation, that capitalism is our natural state.

Solidarity is no new thing either – a recent report in *Nature* (go.nature.com/3CDVEXM) reveals that, 31,000 years ago, one of our kind, probably in childhood, had part of a lower leg surgically removed. Apart from the wow! factor of the approximate date (previous evidence for surgery dated to 'only' 7,000 years ago), what's significant is that the amputee survived for at least 6 years in mountainous terrain which, the archaeologists infer, could only have been possible with 'a high degree of community care'.

Our close relatives were at it too some 50,000 years ago. A 2017 study of a Neanderthal's skeletal remains (bit.ly/3TtvHRk) shows that he survived into late adulthood despite a missing forearm, profound deafness – unhelpful when there are loads of predators around – and other severe physical problems. Again, the only inference that the researchers could draw was that his survival would only have been possible with continuous social support. In other words, Neanderthals could care for each other too.

Cooperation and sociability appear to have even deeper roots in the history of our species, as Penny Spikins, an archaeology professor at York University, argues in her newly published book *Hidden Depths: The origins of human connection* (bit.ly/3TuD0lq). We shall be reviewing this book in future no doubt but here is a taster



from her conclusions:

'We are innately wired to care for living and non-living things, to seek emotional comfort and to reach out to form connections. When the going gets tough, we tend to help each other.'

So it's not just 'human nature' that

capitalism's supporters have got wrong – they misunderstand (or distort) what it means to be part of the genus Homo.

Increasingly, scientific research shows that 'the way we are' is no barrier to socialism.

SF

Socialist Stewardship?

THE QUESTION 'Who should own the Earth?' is a common one in political theory. To the capitalists, their private ownership of the land and the wealth they've stolen from the workers justifies their class collectively deciding the fate of the planet. The socialist response to the capitalists' private ownership is that the Earth should be commonly owned by all and managed in the best interest of all. However, common ownership doesn't solve all the issues which capitalist private ownership of the planet has created; profit over the welfare of the Earth has created a climate crisis (which at this point might be too late to reverse regardless of the system) but, under a misguided interpretation of the idea, common ownership in the interest of all could lead to this same crisis. If you understand "in the interest of all" as meaning maintaining the ease of travel by car or plane you could justify maintaining the current rate of use of fossil fuels which is destroying the ecosystem.

This is the greatest flaw of the general understanding of common ownership, no group can truly own the planet. As humans we're merely a part of nature and we have a duty to care for the Earth for future generations; this idea is known as stewardship. If we wish to maintain our planet for us and future generations, we must integrate it into our ideas of common ownership. If we as a species collectively own everything then it must be understood that ownership comes with the priority of maintaining and improving its condition. Simply put, private ownership is killing our planet for economic profit and common ownership can't make the mistake of killing our planet for short-term conveniences or improvement in our material conditions; instead socialists must embrace the duty to protect the environment and repair the Earth after the ecological trauma of private ownership.

SHERIFF

‘Ignorant and mistaken’

THE IRONY of it! A government with a free-marketeer Prime Minister and Chancellor punished by ‘the markets’. This normally happens to reformist governments that have promised to spend money on improving conditions for the workers. The 1929-31 Labour government was said to have been brought down by a ‘bankers’ ramp’. In France the term used was that such governments came up against a ‘wall of money’. Harold Wilson in the 1960s blamed ‘the gnomes of Zurich’.

The villains in question are international speculators – sometimes politely called ‘international investors’ – who buy and sell the bonds issued by different governments. Governments borrow money by selling bonds. These have a face-value and a rate of interest fixed as a percentage of this. Say, £100 at 5 percent. However, while the amount of interest payable remains the same (in the example, £5), the price at which the bonds are bought and sold on the bond market varies. So, if the price falls to £90 the interest is still £5, but 5/90 is 5.56 percent. If the price rises to £110, this ‘yield’ (interest/selling price) is 4.5 percent. When the government sells new bonds it

has to take into account the yield on existing bonds and offer that as the rate of interest.

When on 23 September Kwarteng announced tax cuts to be funded by borrowing, the speculators perceived the new government as behaving like a reformist one. Cutting taxes without reducing government spending and covering the extra deficit by borrowing was seen as no different from increasing government spending by extra borrowing. So they sold UK government bonds. With more sellers than buyers, the price of these fell and the ‘yield’ went up, meaning that government has to pay a higher rate of interest to borrow.

This had an unintended side-effect. Some pension fund managers had been persuaded by clever City financiers to borrow money by effectively betting on the price of government bonds they hold not falling significantly. They lost the bet and were required to pay cash to settle. This they could only get by selling some of their bonds, so driving their price further down. To prevent the pension funds becoming insolvent and the risk of this leading to a wider financial crash, the Bank of England stepped in to buy bonds and keep their price up.

This was a classic case of how a central bank has to deal with a dash for cash – it makes more cash available to prevent the whole financial system clogging up. Marx came across this in his time. Under the 1844 Bank Charter Act, the Bank of England was allowed to issue money not backed by gold in its vaults only up to a certain amount. However, in the financial crises of 1857 and 1866 the Act had to be suspended to permit the Bank to make more cash available. Gordon Brown thought he had invented the wheel – and saved the world – when he followed this long-established practice during the Crash of 2008.

Marx’s comment was: ‘Ignorant and mistaken bank legislation, such as that of 1844-45, can intensify this money crisis. But no kind of bank legislation can eliminate a crisis’ (*Capital*, Vol 3, ch. 30).

Governments can’t make things better but they can make things worse, as we have just seen. Starmer tweeted that ‘the government has lost control of the economy’ (2.02pm, 28 September). But governments don’t control the economy. It’s the other way around, as he will find out if ever he gets the chance to have a go.

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Socialism: Democratic



'The curtailment of the rights of local government began back in the 1990s. In 1993, liberal reformers, represented by President Boris Yeltsin, came into conflict with the system of councils that was left over from revolutionary times and given a new lease of life during Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika' (Jacobin, 11 September, bit.ly/3SeQozN).

Actually the rot set in over a century ago with the forceful dissolution of the Constituent Assembly in 1917. Ironically, one supporter of this measure provided an excellent account of why the Social Revolutionary Party, representing the peasants, who were in a large majority, should be denied their victory:

'It may certainly appear as a monstrous crime against democracy on the part of a regime which regards itself as Socialist to have suppressed an institution which had been the dream of generations, which the Bolsheviks themselves had been championing ever since the first revolution of 1905 with more enthusiasm than any other party... What better proof could have been furnished that the Bolsheviks were trampling on the people's will in a manner hitherto exhibited by the worst tyrants in history, that they were afraid of the verdict of the nation gathered through its representatives in the highest assembly known to democracy ...?' (*The Bolshevik Revolution*, Maxim Litvinoff, 1918, bit.ly/3LoLDkY).

For a contemporary account, see our article 'The Revolution in Russia: Where it Fails' (*Socialist Standard*, August 1918, bit.ly/3xw7lbM). With regard to Gorbachev and life in state capitalist Russia post 1917, this candid comment from journalist Vitali Vitaliev is worth repeating:

'The main mistake of Western analysts trying to assess Gorbachev's career is the attempt to treat him as a kind of God-sent Messiah who emerged to save Russia

from 'socialism'. Nothing can be further from reality. Throughout his political career Gorbachev was part and parcel of the apparat. He came not to dismantle 'socialism' but to preserve it. I am putting 'socialism' into inverted commas because there has never been anything of the kind in Russia. No other country is so far from the ideas of equality and fraternity as the Soviet Union. If there was a socialism, or even a Communism at all, it was only for the ruling elite who lived and are still living in a separate world. It is a world of privileges, starting from birth (special maternity homes) going on all through their lives (special shops, hospitals, hairdressers' salons, canteens, toilets and what not) and not ending even with the end of their physical existence (special cemeteries). Yes, yes, special cemeteries for the rulers of 'the first working-class State in the world', where workers are not supposed to be buried' (*Observer*, 11 March 1990).

Stateless



Margaret Thatcher in a meeting with Gorbachev reportedly argued at one stage about the merits of capitalism versus 'communism' and she told him "'We are all capitalists. The only difference is that for you it's the state that invests, while for us it's private individuals.'" Gorbachev was apparently flummoxed' (Mission to Moscow, *Sunday Times* 5 April 1987).

She was correct. Capitalist hallmarks, such as class society, commodity production, profit motive, exploitation of wage labour, markets, etc., exist in Russia, both pre- and post-Gorbachev, as they do worldwide. The very idea of socialism in one country is akin to being a little bit pregnant! People who insist otherwise are living in a world of make believe, which is home, alas, to billions, including fans of the so-called Democratic People's Republic of North Korea.

'The North Korean Supreme People's Assembly gathered for its first session on Wednesday. According to state news agency KCNA, the chamber agreed to adopt laws on landscaping and rural development. However, it also pledged to help turn the nation into a "beautiful and civilised socialist fairyland". The two laws are intended to help advance efforts made by the governing party to bring about "a radical turn in the rural community

and its policy on landscaping to achieve a rapid development of the Korean-style socialist rural community and spruce up the country into a beautiful and civilised socialist fairyland". Kim Jong-un, who did not attend the parliamentary event, also promised to improve people's livelihoods and boost rural development amid spiralling economic crises. Economic difficulties have been blamed on self-imposed Covid-19 lockdowns, international sanctions over the country's nuclear weapons programme and also natural disasters' (*Daily Express*, September 8, bit.ly/3DqG2c3).

The February 2012 *Socialist Standard's* cover features a young-looking 'Great Successor' under the title 'Kim, All Ye Faithful. Leaders in the Land Time Forgot' and related article 'Death of a Dictator' (bit.ly/3QTpvR3).

Commonwealth

'Everything seems to tick in "Unrest" the latest effort from Zurich-born writer/director Cyril Schäublin. "Unrest" depicts the working lives of 19th century anarchist watchmakers in the Swiss mountains, laying bare the absurdities of the wage system' (Roger Ebert, 12 September, bit.ly/3xwa2Qe). During the interview, Schäublin states: 'Kropotkin, contra Karl Marx... believed in the abolition of any kind of wage labor whatsoever.' Au contraire. In *Value, Price and Profit* (1865) Marx stated:

'At the same time, and quite apart from the general servitude involved in the wages system, the working class ought not to exaggerate to themselves the ultimate working of these everyday struggles. They ought not to forget that they are fighting with effects, but not with the causes of those effects; that they are retarding the downward movement, but not changing its direction; that they are applying palliatives, not curing the malady. They ought, therefore, not to be exclusively absorbed in these unavoidable guerrilla fights incessantly springing up from the never ceasing encroachments of capital or changes of the market. They ought to understand that, with all the miseries it imposes upon them, the present system simultaneously engenders the material conditions and the social forms necessary for an economical reconstruction of society. Instead of the conservative motto: "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work!" they ought to inscribe on their banner the revolutionary watchword: "Abolition of the wages system!"'

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A pox on capitalism

VACCINE SHORTAGES in poorer countries have revealed the callous nature of the capitalist profit system and its inability to protect the lives of vulnerable people and avert unnecessary preventable deaths and suffering from health inequality. Shortages of vaccines are endemic to capitalism. One would have thought the mistakes made during the Covid-19 pandemic would have improved the distribution of vital medicines. Apparently not when it comes to the recent spread of the monkeypox virus.

According to Christian Happi, director of the African Center of Excellence for Genomics of Infectious Diseases, 'Our lives are not the same; their lives are worth more than ours...' Happi continued, 'Any outbreak anywhere should concern the whole world, which is not how they are dealing with it now' (bit.ly/3QhwnOy).

'In the Covid-19 pandemic, world leaders have allowed pharmaceutical companies to place extraordinary profits ahead of saving lives,' said the People's Vaccine Alliance's Mohga Kamal-Yanni. 'And we have seen the huge impact on life and livelihoods in lower-income countries that is far more than in rich countries. Unless we change course, the world's response to a crisis like monkeypox will be just as brutally unequal' (bit.ly/3AOfvAr).

Prof Chris Beyrer of Johns Hopkins University and a member of the medical journal *Lancet's* commission on health and human rights, pointed out that 'It turns out that monkeypox emerged out of its central African endemic zone into west Africa in 2017, five years ago, and that outbreak has been ongoing for five years with no urgency, no response, no WHO engagement around vaccines in those countries. Now that it has gone from six endemic countries to 76, and is the new emerging global health threat in the wealthy world, we have this sense of urgency' (bit.ly/3BGyls3).

Meg Doherty, WHO's director of Global HIV, Hepatitis and Sexually Transmitted Infections Programmes, said, 'We can't have a monkeypox response that's only responding to the UK, Canada, the United States. We need a response that also addresses what's happening in the DRC right now; in Nigeria where cases are going up.'

Are the limited supplies of vaccines



being rushed to Africa?

Unlike when COVID first spread, vaccines for monkeypox already exist. A new vaccine called Jynneos is available, plus millions of doses of ACAM2000, an older smallpox vaccine that also works against monkeypox. Of the 16.4m doses of Jynneos that existed in July, low-income countries are already losing the race to buy sufficient doses.

The American government has the world's largest stockpile of monkeypox vaccine, which includes stored vaccine bulk that could be converted to more than 10 million doses. In addition, the US holds nearly 80 percent of the Jynneos vaccine used to fight monkeypox, despite having only 36 percent of the global monkeypox cases, even as many countries go without access to any doses. The US has 22 times more doses than the EU and the UK. For every monkeypox case reported in the US, sixty-six doses are available. No countries in Africa have any doses (bit.ly/3pXOI1E).

Naïké Ledan, associate director of international policy and advocacy at HealthGAP protested at the 24th International AIDS Conference in Montreal, 'We're demanding immediate equitable global sharing of supplies of testing, treatments, and vaccines. We're demanding rejection of any and all intellectual property, because it's a global crisis, not an opportunity to make money again' (bit.ly/3QhxuYa).

While rich countries have ordered millions of vaccines to stop monkeypox within their borders, none have announced plans to share doses with Africa.

'The mistakes we saw during the Covid-19 pandemic are already being repeated,' said Dr. Boghuma Kabisen Titanji, an assistant professor of medicine at Emory University (bit.ly/3P23nmo).

'Africa is still not benefiting from either monkeypox vaccines or the antiviral

treatments,' said Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, WHO's Africa director (bit.ly/3LO4kyK).

If only the problem was just monkeypox.

Politicians and pharmaceutical CEOs boasted of the speed at which the Covid-19 vaccine was developed, put into production and distributed. Much less has been said on their tardy roll-out of a new malaria vaccine.

A new vaccine R21 could eradicate malaria. And has already shown to be 77 percent effective after the initial doses and maintains its high efficacy after a single booster jab. It could help to reduce deaths from the disease by 70 percent by 2030 and eradicate it by 2040. Good news. The bad news is, delivering it to millions of African children who most need it is presently without sufficient funding.

And, of course, deaths from HIV/AIDS still persist. In Africa 460,000 people died from HIV-related causes in 2020. A new long-acting drug called Cabotegravir works by blocking the HIV genome, which means that the virus is prevented from integrating itself into human DNA and that stops it from replicating. So, it can't spread and take hold in the body. Yet, WHO notes it is too expensive for poorer nations to afford.

'While many in the global north are getting access to long-acting HIV prevention tools and medicines, Africans are overwhelmingly denied the opportunity... As long as the price is unaffordably high for our governments and for funders to purchase, we will continue to be locked out from being able to access them. They are vital to preventing new HIV infections and they could become transformational in treatment. Our message is simple: all of our lives matter,' said Lilian Mworeko, regional coordinator of the International Community of Women Living with HIV Eastern Africa (bit.ly/3d8X96Z).

Socialists say it is possible for the world to cooperate and collaborate for the common good. The basic networks such as the WHO already exist. Once socialism is established, it and similar agencies can re-focus and re-prioritise to serve communities and not corporations.

ALJO

According to Need

‘FROM EACH according to ability, to each according to need’ is an old socialist slogan. Both parts of it prompt further questions, and here we will look at the second half: what are needs? How are they determined? Do people differ in what they need?

Simply put, a person’s needs are what are required to live a secure and fulfilling life. This would include at least access to adequate food, housing, healthcare, education, clothing, travel, leisure, entertainment. This is not meant to be a complete list, just an initial indication of some of the needs that people have. Poverty is sometimes defined in terms of social exclusion (see the October 2014 *Socialist Standard*), which means being unable to access what most people take for granted. This would cover decent housing, healthy food, good-quality healthcare, buying warm clothes, affording fares on public transport, going to the cinema, having an annual holiday. Doing useful work could be included too. These are people’s essential needs, and capitalism is often unable to ensure that they can be met. In a socialist society, nobody would be excluded in this way.

It may be said that there is a lot more that people need, or at least want, from a fast car to a top-notch stereo system, from a season ticket to their favourite football team to a luxurious second home in the countryside. In socialism people will define their own needs, and they will surely vary between individuals. But things like a fast car and a second home are really reflections of a capitalist society that puts emphasis on people’s status and showing off. Free access does not mean that people will take home with them large amounts of potatoes or toilet paper or light bulbs, as they have far more common sense than that.

A more elaborate theory of needs was outlined by the American psychologist Abraham Maslow, in an article first published in 1943. He revised his views somewhat over the years, and his work has been subject to a number of criticisms (eg that it is based primarily on consideration of white men in relatively prosperous countries). Nevertheless, it is a reasonable place to start a fuller consideration of human needs.



Maslow’s original theory involved five kinds of need. Physiological needs enable the human body to function, and include food, drink, shelter, warmth. Safety needs include protection from the elements and security from danger, whether diseases or wild animals. Love and belongingness would include friendship, intimacy, affiliation to a group. Esteem needs involve respect from others and a personal feeling of dignity and independence. Lastly, self-actualisation would cover personal potential and fulfilment. Importantly, he argued that these needs were set in a hierarchy, with more basic needs having to be satisfied before higher ones can be. Thus, we clearly have to be able to survive before we can worry about self-esteem. But, as has been pointed out, some people may struggle to meet some of their physiological needs but still have close and supportive friends and family. His later work added other kinds of need, but here we can just consider his original scheme.

A socialist world would clearly have to give priority to meeting physiological needs for the whole of the earth’s population. Nobody should go hungry or homeless, and the planet’s resources (from raw materials to machines and technology and human skills) are more than adequate to achieve this. Producing enough food to feed everybody adequately is fairly straightforward, and will be perfectly feasible in a society where the profit motive has been confined to the rubbish bin. Decent housing for all will be an essential aim, with production no longer having to worry about mortgages or affordable rents, or to directing resources to building banks or aircraft carriers.

Meeting safety needs will be a crucial issue too. If we include healthcare

under this heading, there will need to be a focus on providing adequate medical care for all, from doctors, nurses, pharmacists, etc. Reducing as far as possible the number of women who die in childbirth, for instance, may well require immediate ‘investment’ in appropriate people and equipment. Depending on the extent of global warming and other aspects of climate change by the time socialism is established, there may need to be attention to supporting people who live in areas with unbearable temperatures or in danger of flooding or prone to hurricanes.

As for love and belongingness, satisfying these in socialism can hardly be guaranteed now. People may want a range of friends, a loving partner, perhaps an affectionate pet cat or dog. Friendship and relationships cannot be ensured by a social system, but a society based on co-operation rather than competition will make it far more likely that people will relate to each other in friendly and egalitarian ways. In the case of esteem, people who are no longer at the beck and call of capitalism will surely feel more independent and in control of their lives. Self-actualisation is harder to discuss, though we can say that people in socialism will be able to enjoy education, perhaps at different stages of their life, that makes them happier and better-informed, rather than fitting them for a life of wage slavery. The availability of good-quality childcare will help parents to spend time learning. People may discover skills they did not know they had.

An article in the August 2019 *Socialist Standard* argued that in socialism it would be possible to establish a hierarchy of needs (perhaps using Maslow’s ideas) and so classify different consumer goods to guide resource allocation. This would not mean just accepting Maslow’s views but adapting them to the situation at the time. It would also be necessary to take environmental problems into consideration, and determine whether growth should continue or whether the state of the planet would impose restrictions. But satisfying human need would be the key criterion for socialism.

PAUL BENNETT

Urban Mining - E-Waste Recycling



THE MORE modern neo-Malthusians disparage the idea that a post-scarcity society of bountiful abundance is possible by insisting that the world's resources are finite and such a vision is unsustainable. Economic growth and calculating the planet's 'carrying capacity' are conceived in their capitalist context. One of socialism's aims will be to reduce waste of all kinds where the goal will be conservation. Quality goods will replace built-in obsolescence. Cleaning up their mess robs corporations of their profits, the costs in human health and environmental problems are not their worry. With socialism, resources will no longer be frittered away and instead people will devote their energy and skills to healing a sickened poisoned planet.

Mining is a dangerous, dirty, destructive and damaging method of extracting metals and minerals. It is harmful to the environment and to the local communities. Yet it is viewed as the inevitable price to be paid to supply the world's industry and technology.

Could it be different?

Some of the richest deposits of valuable elements necessary for manufacturing are found in refuse dumps and landfill, ranging from gold in smartphones to cobalt in electric car batteries.

Tons of disused electronic equipment are wastefully dumped every year. According to UN research, 50 million tons of e-waste were produced in 2018. Discarded mobile phones, televisions, computers, car parts and countless other items contain varying

amounts of gold and silver, lithium, nickel, cobalt, copper and zinc. They can be reused if processed properly.

The annual production of electronic goods worldwide requires 320 tons of gold and 7,500 tons of silver. Yet only 15-20% of the world's electronics are recycled annually.

The US generated an estimated 6.92 million tons of e-waste in 2019. To put that into monetary terms, the value of the materials contained in those electronics is estimated to be around \$7.49 billion. But in terms of labour, it is millions of hours of toil.

If we look at cell phones alone, one ton of cell phones produces 150g of gold. Not a lot but consider that one ton of ore excavated from a gold mine produces only 5g of gold. The Environmental Protection Agency estimated that for every million units recycled, one could extract: 75 pounds of gold, 772 pounds of silver, 33 pounds of palladium and 35 thousand pounds of copper.

'...we need a circular economy for these materials. At the moment, we're just mining them out of the ground constantly,' Elizabeth Ratcliffe from the Royal Society of Chemistry has explained (bbc.in/3SMz2KV).

Prof Richard Herrington, the head of Earth sciences at London's Natural History Museum, has suggested that '...by 2035, we'll have sorted out a good source of recycled metal; we'll need to continue some mining. But hopefully, by 2050, we would have built a truly circular economy

so that most if not all of what we need can come from metals that we've already mined and are already being used in products and technologies' (bbc.in/3y7QDFc).

However, the Socialist Party doubts such optimism. Costs of recycling deter investments in urban mining. Currently, companies choosing to skirt the regulations around how e-waste is processed means more money for them in the short term.

In the name of profit production, capitalism depletes an enormous amount of the world's resources and its people's abilities. We've got the technology to reduce, repair, reuse, and recycle much of what we throw away, but its use isn't encouraged enough by our current system. Before we can apply more sensible and practical approaches to using our resources, capitalism itself needs to get thrown onto the rubbish dump. Production can be geared to meeting needs in an ecologically acceptable way, instead of making profits without consideration for the environment.

The Socialist Party is not appealing to individuals or governments to launch lifestyle campaigns to recycle more. We want systemic change to make a real difference.

"Not enough is being produced, that is the root of the whole matter. But why is not enough being produced? Not because the limits of production have been reached — even for today and by present-day means. No, but because the limits of production are determined not by the number of hungry bellies, but rather by the number of purchasers with full purses. Bourgeois society has no desire, and can have no desire, to produce more. Those impecunious bellies, the labour which cannot be utilised with profit and is thus incapable of purchasing, fall prey to the mortality figures. Let us assume that there is a sudden boom in industry, such as is constantly occurring, to enable this labour to be employed with profit, then the labour will acquire the money with which to purchase, and the means of subsistence have as yet always been found. It is the endless *circulus vitiosus* [vicious circle] in which the whole political economy revolves. One takes bourgeois conditions in their entirety as one's premise, and then proves that each separate part is a necessary part thereof — ergo, an 'eternal law' (Marx, letter to F.A. Lange, 29 March 1865).

ALJO



Spycatchers

A GOOD number of years ago the branch of the Socialist Party I'm a member of was holding its meetings in a room in a pub on the edge of Swansea town centre. We would advertise our fortnightly Monday meetings via posters, leaflets and in the local daily paper. When I arrived at the pub early for one of the meetings and stood at the bar, the landlady informed me, quite innocently, that a detective had been there asking what we were doing. I thanked her for telling me and suggested that, if he came again, she might tell him that our meetings were open to everyone, nothing was hidden and he was perfectly free to find out by attending. She thanked me and we heard nothing more, but at the time it reminded me of conversations members sometimes had about being spied on, either by having their telephone tapped or by someone from the Special Branch attending meetings covertly or even infiltrating the Party by becoming members.

I'd always wondered about this, but on balance thought it was unlikely to be happening. After all, if even a small number of such people had attended our meetings or otherwise found out what we were about, surely they would quickly realise that we didn't pose a threat to 'national security' in the sense that the Security Services understood it. While it's true that we are 'dissidents', we have never supported one government or state against another and we have never advocated any kind of violence. Yet that incident couldn't but shift my thinking a little and what

now, many years later, has shifted it even more is a recently published book entitled *Red List: MI5 and British Intellectuals in the Twentieth Century* by David Cauter (Verso, 2022, 404 pp.). It's a book that draws on official MI5 documents released to the National Archive and so publicly available which provide startling insights into the enormous efforts (and massive resources) put into tracking the activities and affiliations of an extraordinarily wide range of people who, over most of the 20th century, were suspected of being sympathetic to or interested in regimes deemed to be enemies of the British state (largely the Soviet Union) or were seen as constituting a possible 'threat to national security'.

Threat to national security?

The main thing that switched on the light of suspicion in the minds of the security men and women (mainly men) of MI5 (or Special Branch, as its police service was called) was any connection whatever to the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) or to anyone associated with it. While it's true that the Communist Party was in thrall to Moscow and in effect the British arm of the Soviet regime during most of the years of its existence and some of the individuals targeted by MI5 were members of the CPGB, many were not and some had only peripheral connections to it or to any of its members or sympathisers. But MI5 did not, as David Cauter's book shows, stop at the CPGB. It extended its investigations to any other organisations it considered potentially

'subversive', for example to small left-wing groups who were not actually supportive of the Stalinist Soviet regime and in fact were disciples of Stalin's arch-enemy, Leon Trotsky. Their investigation also extended to trade unions, to anti-colonial national independence supporters, and, from the 1970s onwards, to the IRA. Given MI5's apparent failure, as made clear in this book, to distinguish between different kinds of potential 'subversives', it seems quite likely that not just those small Trotskyist groups but any group with the word 'socialist' in its name was being targeted, and perhaps still are today- even if, as the author points out, much more of their attention nowadays is likely to be focused on newly perceived threats to national security such as militant Islam and, maybe, a resurgent non-Soviet Russia.

But what of the Socialist Party of Great Britain and the detective asking questions in that Swansea pub? Surely anyone attending a single meeting or reading just one Party pamphlet or issue of the *Socialist Standard* would have understood that we didn't pose an immediate, violent, non-democratic threat to the British state but that our aim was to openly spread socialist ideas among workers with a view to a socialist society being established democratically through the ballot box once the majority had come to understand those ideas? Yes, but what emerges from the pages of this book is that neither the security system nor its operatives stood out for their brightness or intelligence. Despite countless and ongoing phone taps, mail interceptions, buggings,

burglaries, physical surveillance and even infiltration by 'moles', the released papers investigated by David Caute show that they seemed to find it difficult to work out whether individuals or organisations constituted genuine, plausible threats to 'national security' or whether they just happened to be friends or associates of those who might have 'subversion' in their minds and might quite innocently have found themselves in particular places at particular times. So, as we learn, 'the net cast was incredibly broad' and 'guilt by association was paramount', even if that association was sometimes imagined rather than real. In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that the Socialist Party and its members, though they could not be sensibly categorised as any kind of immediate threat to national security, should be (and probably still are) lumped together with those who perhaps could be seen as some kind of threat- even if of course most of them weren't.

Incompetence and bungling

The result of all the glaring incompetence recorded in this book (referred to by the writer with typically entertaining wry commentary as 'the stumbling confusion of M15 minds') is that most of the targeting of potential spies came to nothing, simply because they weren't spies and never constituted any feasible threat to the British state, while the real spies, such as Burgess, Maclean, Blunt and Philby, operated for many years before their activities became known. The lenses of MI5 were clouded partly because it was staffed at the top by out-of-touch former military and colonial officers and its agents on the ground, the 'Special Branch' operatives, were, as already noted, simply not very bright. They often included manifestly irrelevant and sometimes unintentionally comic details in their reports. Surveillance of the home of poet C. Day Lewis, for example, produced such vital information as 'seldom wears a hat, not altogether smart appearance in dress', and the agent reporting from Harwich on the historian Christopher Hill returning from Russia wrote: 'He has the appearance of a communist; but his baggage, which was searched by HM Customs, did not contain any subversive literature.' Charlie Chaplin came under investigation but was deemed to be 'a progressive or radical rather than communist', even though it was widely known, as the book points out, that 'Chaplin had long been an out-and-out fellow-traveller of Stalin's Russia'. The contents of the papers examined here

also reveal MI5 culture as highly bigoted and in particular, perhaps predictably, racist and anti-semitic. One memo quoted states that 'the chief Bolshevik leaders are not Russians but Jews who carefully hide their real names'. Another report talks about a suspect's home being visited by 'a number of young men who have the appearance of Communist Jews', while an uncle of the historian and Communist Party member Eric Hobsbawm is described as 'sneering, half Jew in appearance, having a long nose'.

Intellectuals and others

Yet what we have in this study is only a small taste of everything MI5 has got up to over the years. That is firstly because the records made publicly available only cover people already deceased, and secondly because this study focuses only on 'intellectuals', (eg, writers, artists, scientists, historians, politicians, actors, musicians, lawyers), for the most part well-known ones (eg, John Berger, Benjamin Britten, Jacob Bronowski, Cecil Day-Lewis, Michael Foot, Eric Hobsbawm, Doris Lessing, Ewan McColl, George Orwell, J.B. Priestley, Paul Robeson, Stephen Spender, E.P. Thompson). Yet, despite the 200+ suspect 'intellectuals' covered, many records relating to deceased individuals have, as the author tells us, not been released (without any reason being given) and there is significant redaction of some of those that have been. So who knows how much other bungling, how many other dead ends would be revealed if the totality of security records were available, especially if those also included people still alive? And who knows whether, if the net were cast wider than those the authors see as 'intellectuals', suspicions many other people have had about being spied on over the years would be confirmed? And who knows whether there would not be reference to the Socialist Party and any covert investigations carried out over the years on both the organisation and its members, living or dead? From what we find here, there very likely would.

It should be added that, despite the vast majority of this activity leading nowhere in particular and being a pale shadow of the McCarthyite witchhunt that took place in the US in the 1950s where intense persecution took place of anyone deemed to be or to have been in any way associated with 'communism', MI5 spying did nevertheless have negative consequences for some in the shape, for example, of difficulty in finding or keeping employment or being refused entry to or residence in Britain if you were a non-British subject. And in some cases, when

spying was proved, prosecution did lead to prison sentences, such as the 10 years given to physicist Alan Nunn May (he served 6½).

All this took place and was sanctioned under both Conservative and Labour governments, with Caute's book highlighting the particular emphasis put on this work by the immediate post-war Labour government under Clement Attlee, who in 1947 introduced a new more stringent vetting system. One of the results of this – perhaps ironic- was that a not insignificant number of Labour Party politicians, even leading ones such as Harold Wilson and Tony Benn, found their way on to the 'red list' and the author of this book has discovered that others still living (eg, Harriet Harman) have unreleased files against their names.

The BBC and democracy

The BBC was complicit too. David Caute dedicates a whole chapter, 'The BBC Toes the Line', to illustrating how, until recent times at least, the BBC was 'up MI5's armpit', functioning as a servile collaborator of the Secret Services. It was, as he calls it, 'a semi-covert department of state', which even carried out its own extensive vetting procedures on those within it or seeking to enter it to check whether there was any sniff of 'subversion' about them. This led, for example, to the BBC cancelling a planned series of radio talks on atomic power scheduled to be given by a listed MI5 'suspect', the celebrated scientist Jacob Bronowski.

Finally any security set up, any 'spy industry' involves a colossal squandering of resources, human and material, and, as David Caute's book uncovers, MI5 was no exception. It should be added however that this kind of waste is an inevitable function of a social system that pits capitalist classes and governments of whatever kind (even those that may falsely call themselves 'communist', 'socialist' or 'Marxist') against one another in the battle for political and economic control of the world's resources. But it also throws significant light on the severe limitations that the system, even in so called 'liberal democracies', inevitably imposes, via institutions like MI5, on freedom of speech and free exchange of ideas and thought. In the end capitalism, whether it takes the form of state control or a relatively unfettered market, needs state secrecy to assist the national interests of each country's wealth holders in their never-ending quest for profit as they compete on the world market with those elsewhere who own and control the world's wealth.

HKM

Manufacturing Reagan

AT THE end of the 1976 presidential campaign, Ronald Reagan's political career and particularly his presidential aspirations were widely regarded as being washed out. He was looked upon as being too elderly and his opinions too right wing for contemporary America. Particularly his old-fashioned, patriotic views came across as quaintly anachronistic in a post-Watergate, post-Vietnam America. Also for many Americans, his background in Hollywood as an actor, in amiable but bland 'B movies', met with some derision. The consensus was that he was 'past it' and that his time had come and gone. Yet four years later, he beat the incumbent president Jimmy Carter and went on to win a very convincing re-election contest in 1984 to become the first two-term president since Eisenhower. Even today, more than 40 years later, his name still resonates and for people on the right of politics, he along with Margaret Thatcher is credited with leading the movement away from the post-war expanding government and social democracy consensus to a free-market, small-government, society. Since his time, all aspiring Republican candidates for high office in America name-check him in their campaigns to assure the party faithful of their true political credentials.

The book 'Reaganland' (*Reaganland: America's Right Turn 1976 – 1980* by Rick Perlstein) explores this transformation in Reagan's standing between 1976 and 1980. Its central message is that he was transformed from being an electoral liability to a popular vote-winner, not by changing his conservative views and shifting to the centre as conventional wisdom would have suggested, but rather by being a figurehead for a movement that deliberately and successfully set out to 'move the dial' and propel America rightwards. The book is also a socio-political history of the United States in the second half of the 1970s and weaves together many interacting issues of the time. While the book is not directly concerned with socialism (although clearly written from a 'progressive' perspective) it does offer insights into key issues for us in terms of how powerful forces within capitalism can come to dominate the political agenda.

The New Right

After Carter's election in 1976, conservative activists on the right began to organise and stir up discontent about

a number of social issues such as the proposed Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the Constitution, the recent Roe versus Wade ruling on abortion, the demand for gay rights and calls for better treatment of minority groups. They also raised fears about rising crime rates and the need to ensure the death penalty remained on the books. Later on in the decade, as the economy faltered, they began to agitate about over-regulation of business and accompanying high taxes. These New Right activists or Neo-conservatives (a term they liked to use to distinguish themselves from the East coast, traditional Republican establishment) learned to harness disparate movements such as evangelical Christians, free-market libertarians, American nationalists and disgruntled white workers with the illusion that some imaginary past, viewed through a nostalgic lens, could be recreated.

The movement though needed a figure to coalesce about as its leading spokesman, someone who could then become its candidate for the Republican nomination for president. There were a number of possibilities but eventually Reagan became the favourite. Ronald Reagan was easily underestimated as a lightweight politician and his former acting career in mainly kitsch movies viewed as a drawback for someone planning to hold 'the most important job in the world'. But for capitalist politics in the age where television had become by far the most important means of communicating ideas, he had some inherent strengths. He could deliver a speech, written by someone else, to camera with a skill that only someone who spent many years professionally practising this art could. So it came naturally to him to be able to pose as being warm and generous or coldly statesmanlike as each passage of the speech required.

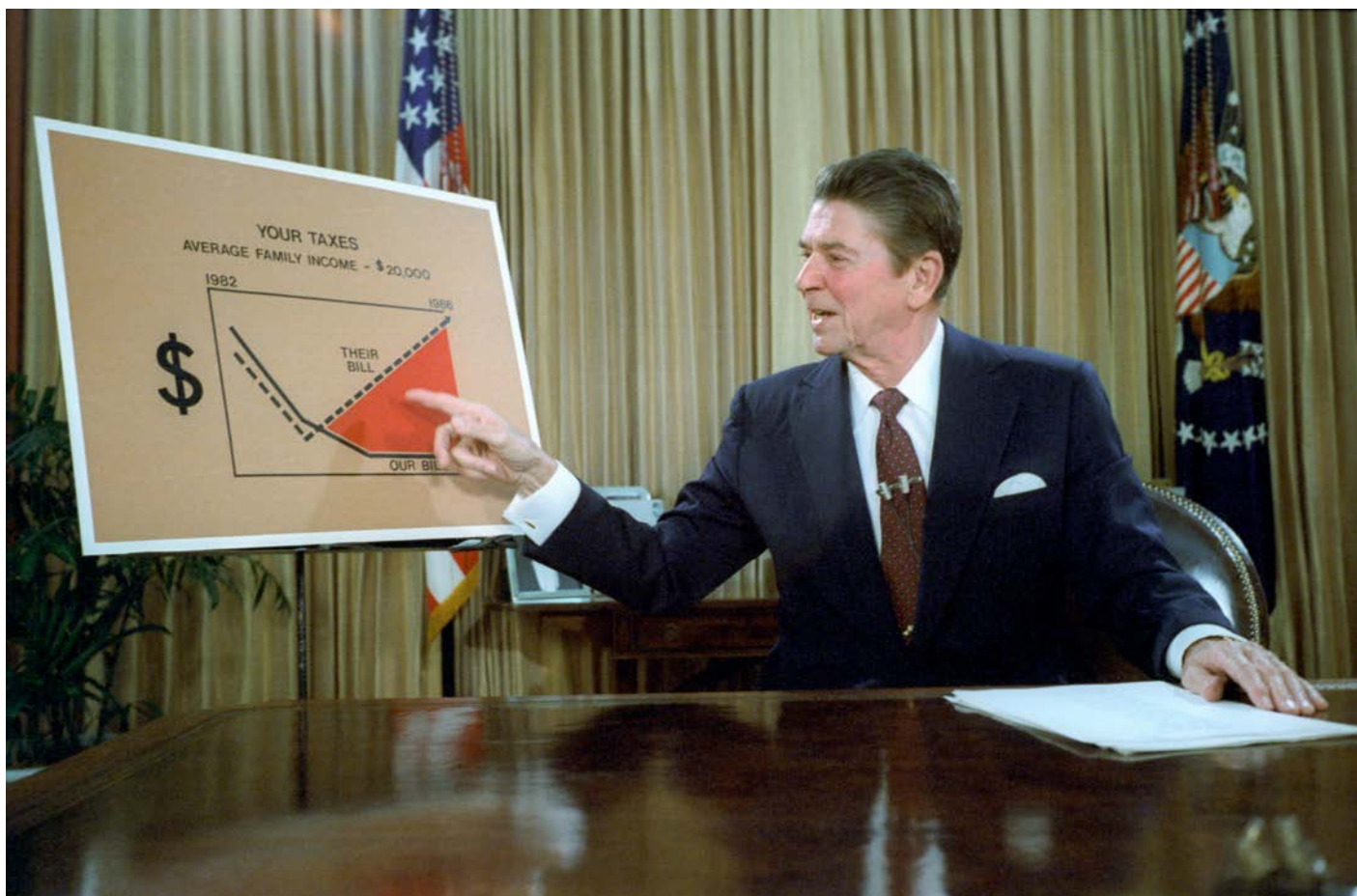
Moreover, he had a sound track record in politics. He won the election for governor of California in 1966, beating the established Republican favourite in the primary, and also had a convincing win over the popular Democratic incumbent in the main election. This is what cemented his position on the national map. A conservative Republican winning an important Democratic state showed he had that priceless quality for a politician: an ability to win elections against the odds. He was re-elected in 1970 for another four-year term. Over his

eight-year governorship, in spite of his sometimes hardline rhetoric, he ruled as a pragmatic conservative and was astute enough to avoid any traps that could result from a dogmatic insistence on ideology. As California led the way in identity politics, Reagan was artful in terms of the associated culture wars. He made sure to let his audience know his sympathies lay with traditional social values when issues such as abortion, gay rights, minority advancement, etc. were raised but never publicly identified with the more bigoted opponents of these movements.

Spokesperson for corporate America

Reagan's own political views had evolved with time. As an actor and then head of the Screen Actors Guild (in effect the union for film actors) in the 1940s, he supported the Democratic Party and could be loosely regarded as a 'left-centrist'. As his movie career declined, he steadily moved to the right through the 1950s and by the 1960 election was officially a Republican supporting Nixon against Kennedy. His views never changed subsequently. Throughout the decade of the 1950s, he became a public speaker and a paid company ambassador for the huge industrial conglomerate, General Electric. He would reprise this role later as President, being a spokesman for corporate America as opposed to just GE. Reagan also spent this time on a frenetic round of giving speeches at conservative, fundraising events. He spoke against the spread of communism, the increasing interfering role of 'Big Government' and the need for economic individualism. Profit, private property and freedom were inseparable. Importantly this period also brought him to the attention of a group of western, wealthy, conservative businessmen who were prepared to fund the political campaigns of proponents of this new conservatism.

During the 1970s one very potent theme that the New Right played on during the Carter presidency was the perceived weakness of America, internally and on the international stage. A narrative developed (or more accurately was deliberately contrived) that the country was in decline and could be entering a terminal malaise. It wasn't just that the economy wasn't working well which a dose of low taxes and deregulation would fix; it was more profound. Something



was wrong with America itself; crime was becoming rampant, schools weren't as good as they had been, discipline in society was lax. There really wasn't much hard evidence for any of this but it was effective in convincing people that it was time for radical change. In fact, there was an underlying background of reality to this myth. After the Second World War, the US economy grew continuously but this had stalled in the early 1970s and the increasing costs of legislation tightening up on environmental standards, labour rights, consumer protection, etc. could no longer be easily absorbed. Market confidence began to drain and corporate America started to get interested in the advantages of small government. Formerly it funded both Democrats and Republicans but now donations became more explicitly tied to pro-business agendas. Reagan as the standard bearer for the Republican right became a recipient of this. On the International stage, two issues particularly rankled. The proposed return of ownership of the Panama Canal to Panama in 1977 was met with dismay by the right wing of the Republican Party even though it met with a bipartisan consensus and both corporate America and the military establishment were comfortable with it. For the activists, it was given as a concrete example of a third-rate country pushing around America and taking advantage of Carter's weak leadership. This was exacerbated by the taking of American

embassy staff in Tehran as hostages by the Iranian students in 1979. This proved a particularly fertile grievance to cultivate as it played on popular patriotism.

Populist rhetoric

Reagan and his conservative allies used another tool very effectively to persuade American workers of the validity of his case and to win them over to his cause. This was a populist rhetoric aimed specifically at a very important section of the working class; ethnic white voters. This part of the electorate had traditionally voted Democrat (although Nixon had successfully tapped into them in 1968) and thus converting them was a very powerful election tactic. A major effort was made to convince these workers that they had an interest in and would benefit from a well-run capitalist economy; a variant of the rising-tide-lifts-all-boats fable. Reagan tapped into their discontent. High taxes were portrayed as unfair and as stealing from what had been honestly earned by hard work. He claimed reducing taxes would benefit workers. It was continuously implied that money was being transferred from hard-working whites to undeserving minority groups although Reagan was careful never to overtly stray into racism. In that sense, he craftily used his knowledge of identity politics to divide workers into white versus black, men versus women, gay

versus straight, northern versus southern and to play one section off against the next. Simultaneously with this strategy, the evils of inflation, unemployment, high energy prices, were said to impact on minorities more than mainstream America. So Reagan could claim his low tax, small-government agenda was in fact progressive in some way. He was helped in this deceitful ruse by the fact that traditional class consciousness was never as strong in the United States as in Europe and many workers vote on where candidates stand on single-issue social affairs and not on economic issues.

Reagan further courted the labour vote by reminding them that earlier in his career he had been 'a union man' and that he could help them. He did receive endorsements from some labour leaders and organisations. He did that time-honoured right-wing routine of saying that the Democratic Party had strayed from its roots and while at some unspecified time in the past it may have been good to support them, this was no longer the case and they had been taken over by extremists and special-interest groups. He exploited the innate patriotism of many American workers by making a big play that America needed more 'defence' spending to ensure peace, and claimed 'world peace' was something he desired more than anything else and could be obtained by increased Pentagon budgets to deter potential aggressors.

What message for us?

Apart from its detailed analysis of the power-play in American politics more than 40 years ago, what message does the book have for socialists? As workers in Europe and other western countries, we are constantly being told how fortunate we are to live in democracies while our less fortunate brothers and sisters have to endure totalitarian conditions in countries such as China, Russia, Saudi Arabia etc. Of course, we do enjoy fundamental political freedoms in the West but as the book highlights, the situation is not that straightforward. Classically in democracy, people with political ideas engage in debate with their fellow human beings to outline their views and persuade them of their merits. This of course does occur in politics under capitalism, where candidates for office speak at public meetings, get interviewed by journalists and engage in televised debates. Reagan himself did this throughout the 1970s. But as the book outlines in detail, the real key activity to ensure electoral success lies elsewhere. These are the meetings with the money men (ie, the wealthy funders of political campaigns), the political fixers, the party power brokers, the campaign strategists with their advertising gurus, the proprietors of important media holdings and the nationwide opinion formers. Money is key and raising large amounts of it meant you

could hire people to carry out the political ground war, pay for newspaper and TV advertisements, pay for promotional pieces in the media, etc. That gave you momentum and in turn meant that you could set the agenda for the campaign.

The book thus illustrates the relationship between capitalism and politics. The Socialist Party has never bought into the conspiracy theory where corporate leaders select their preferred candidate who then progresses through a wholly bogus electoral process. They too cannot control the uncertain outcomes of mass politics with the universal franchise. However, they do wield significant influence behind the scenes and their role is important. They may have no specific positions on particular policy matters but they do want candidates who can engender a stable business and investment climate. In America they have funded Democratic (left) and Republican (right) politicians at various times in the past because both (whatever the minutiae of their policy planks state) fundamentally support capitalism. Corporate leaders do not care about candidates' positions on social issues as mostly these do not significantly affect the business climate and profitability. In fact, the very large corporations do not tend to align themselves with individual candidates. Rather they fund think-tanks and foundations that support and promote

capitalism as the best system and do not have a position on the transient affairs that constitute the culture wars of identity politics.

Summing up, the book tries to explain how a staunchly right-wing figure like Reagan became electable in that period as the mood of the American people changed; or more accurately was encouraged to change. However, the book also has a general message for all countries to illustrate the somewhat fraudulent nature of elections under capitalism and highlights the phoney nature of many political campaigns. To the election strategists, the electorate is nothing more than an amorphous entity, consisting of a large number of individuals, each who have an asset (the right to vote) that must be harvested. Campaigns are only judged by their success in achieving the desired outcome and genuinely important matters such as the debate of ideas, the argument over rival policies are just a transient and insignificant means to obtain the important outcome. Thus an 'anything goes/winner takes all' philosophy prevails in the design and execution of an election and campaign promises can be freely discarded as soon as the polls close. Ronald Reagan wasn't the first and won't be the last capitalist politician to achieve an election victory using these means.

KEVIN CRONIN



Credit: White House Photographic Office

Myanmar and the myth of 'the national progressive bourgeoisie'

CHINA HAS financial interests in Myanmar and is demanding their economic zones be secured from the military conflict. For this, China had to maintain diplomatic relations with the current military junta, but is still supplying weapons to the ethnic armed groups that are fighting against the junta. China is also demanding to meet with Aung San Suu Kyi for political discussion. So, it can be concluded that China hasn't chosen a side so far. However, since China is only interested in its imperial power and economic advantage, the conclusion can be drawn that it will bet on the winning horse in the future.

Russia, on the other hand, has chosen its side. Long before the coup, Russia had been a steady supplier of weapons and maintained a stable relationship with the Myanmar military. Russia still exists as the sole steady weapons supplier for the military junta even during the coup and revolution era. The Moscow leadership also welcomed Min Aung Hlaing, the military junta leader, and some ultranationalist monks to Russia even after the coup. In September, General Min Aung Hlaing and Putin confirmed their strategic alliance at the Moscow-organised Eastern Economic Forum. Since Russia's imperialism has chosen to support the reactionary military regime, the anti-imperialist idiot Stalinists who are only opposed to Western imperialism are currently facing backlashes from the working class and the public.

Theoretically, the young Mao Zedong was for federalism, according to his article in Ta Kung Pao. However, hypocritically, the authoritarian Mao Zedong in power rejected the self-determination of Tibet, Mongolia, and some other provinces. The hostility to federalism by Myanmar's military junta is in fact rooted in the anti-federal arguments of Stalin in the first place. Therefore, advocating for federalism while maintaining 'Marxism-Leninism-Maoism' as a revolutionary tactic is irrational at its core and opportunistic. Such opportunism can be found in the Communist Party of Burma and its military wing, the People's Liberation Army.

Since the Communist Party of Burma is mainly influenced by Mao Zedong's thoughts, they still buy into the idea of a revolutionary national bourgeoisie. In an article Mao Zedong wrote the following:



'The national bourgeoisie is a class which is politically very weak and vacillating. But the majority of its members may either join the people's democratic revolution or take a neutral stand, because they too are persecuted and fettered by imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism'.

Karl Marx, in contrast to Mao Zedong and his revisionism, introduced the principles of perpetual revolution in his 1850 letter 'Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League,' written in the course of the abortive German bourgeois-democratic revolution:

'While the democratic petty bourgeois want to bring the revolution to an end as quickly as possible, achieving at most the aims already mentioned, it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent until all the more or less propertied classes have been driven from their ruling positions, until the proletariat has conquered state power and until the association of the proletarians has progressed sufficiently far – not only in one country but in all the leading countries of the world – that competition between the proletarians of these countries ceases and at least the decisive forces of production are concentrated in the hands of the workers'.

In other words, Marx was advocating a revolutionary method in which the working class must maintain and defend the democratic revolution as much as they can until state power has been seized. In contrast, Mao Zedong substituted the class struggle with his 'new democracy' concept, which is revisionist at its core. Mao Zedong's new democracy states that the

political revolutionary alliance between the working class, the peasants, the intellectuals, and the national bourgeoisie should be accomplished and protected at all cost. Here, Mao Zedong even distinguished the national bourgeoisie into two camps. According to his article 'On the Question of the National Bourgeois and the Enlightened Gentry':

'The few right-wingers among the national bourgeoisie who attach themselves to imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism and oppose the people's democratic revolution are also enemies of the revolution, while the left-wingers among the national bourgeoisie who attach themselves to the working people and oppose the reactionaries are also revolutionaries'.

Nevertheless, Karl Marx had warned that a kind of political sabotage could be potentially done by the petty bourgeoisie in his letter 'Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League'. They, Marx wrote:

'seek to ensnare the workers in a party organisation in which general social-democratic phrases prevail while their interests are kept hidden behind, and in which, for the sake of preserving the peace, the specific demands of the proletariat may not be presented. Such a unity would be to their advantage alone and to the complete disadvantage of the proletariat'.

Instead of maintaining this socialist tradition of class struggle, a revisionist party, the Communist Party of Burma, betrays the class war by forming an alliance with the national bourgeoisie.

HEIN HTET KYAW

Profits, profits, and profits

'A LABOUR government's priorities would be "growth, growth and growth"' (Keir Starmer speech, 25 July, labour.org.uk/press/keir-starmer-speech-on-labours-mission-for-economic-growth).

'I have three priorities for our economy: growth, growth, and growth' (Liz Truss speech to Tory Conference, 4 October, Times, 5 October).

Growth is generally measured as an increase in GDP, or Gross Domestic Product. This can be calculated in a number of ways. The main one is to work out, for each industry, the difference between what was paid for materials and intermediate goods and what the product was sold for, and to add these all up. This is what statisticians call 'value added' (and is what VAT is levied on). It is not the same as cost of production, but is wage costs + the profit margin. Conventional economists are less keen to use this term as they have banished the concept of 'value' from economics (even if here it is only market price). On the other hand, it corresponds more to what Marxian economics would understand by the term – the new value created in production, which is divided into wages and profits.

Adding the income from work or from

property ownership that individuals receive is a second way of calculating GDP. It gives a share of 'labour' in what is produced (though this also includes income from self-employment as well as from wages).

The third way is by adding up how this 'National Income' is spent: on business investment, consumer spending, and on government spending.

If GDP in one year is higher than it was the year before then there has been growth. GDP doesn't always go up. It also goes down. In fact, statisticians and economists define a 'recession' as a fall, however small, in GDP in two consecutive quarters.

Most of GDP – around 80 percent – is consumed in the course of the year, by individual consumers or the government. The rest is invested mostly by businesses, with some by the government (as in infrastructure projects). The statisticians call this 'gross fixed capital formation'.

'Net fixed capital formation' (which is the gross – or total – amount less the part used to replace the wear and tear of fixed capital) is the nearest to what Marx understood by the 'capital accumulation' which he saw as the aim of capitalist production. The source of this accumulation is the profits that come from business investment (including what

the government invests, as this ultimately comes from taxing business profits). It is this pursuit of profits to accumulate as new capital that drives the capitalist economy and results in 'growth'. It means that there can be no growth without a growth in profits.

Growth as such is not the driving force of capitalist production, but capital accumulation of which it is a consequence. The call for 'growth, growth and growth' is, therefore, a call for 'profits, profits and profits'. The Truss Tory government made no bones about this. Starmer is more mealy-mouthed but he too accepts that growth can only come about if the profits to sustain it are allowed to be made or, as he put it in his 25 July speech, if the government has a strategy that 'builds confidence for investors that will boost long-term growth and productivity'.

Governments cannot bring about growth. They can try to create conditions favourable for profit-making but, beyond that, they have to wait for business investment to increase as capitalist production moves through its boom/slump business cycle. Sometimes they are lucky as Blair was and can claim the boom phase of the cycle as a result of their policies (though this went to Gordon Brown's head and led him to claim that he had eliminated this cycle, not long before the Crash of 2008). Sometimes they are not so lucky, as both Truss and/or Starmer look like being.

The Amazon Revisited

IN THE July 2020 Socialist Standard, we discussed the Yanomami indigenous people in the Amazon. Over the decades they have suffered enormously from diseases brought in by outsiders, who have also committed killings as a way of gaining access to resources such as gold. Earlier this year, a report 'Yanomami Under Attack' was published (socioambiental.medium.com). This details the further destruction of their land by mining.

The price of gold has increased, making mining it even more profitable, and in 2021 the extent of wildcat mining increased by almost half on the previous year. Over half the Yanomami population have been directly affected by this mining, and this involves both violence and the spreading of diseases such as malaria. More than 3,000 hectares of land has been destroyed by mining, to say nothing of land adversely impacted, much of it in close proximity to Yanomami villages. The Brazilian government under Bolsonaro is essentially on the side of the mining companies, expressing very negative

and dismissive attitudes to indigenous peoples. He is a climate change denier who supports profit-making and has no regard for protection of the Amazon rainforest.

One of the most appalling aspects of the invasion by miners is their behaviour to young Yanomami women. They regard the women as 'rewards' for giving food to the indigenous families. One miner is quoted as saying, 'If you have a daughter and give her to me, I will bring a large amount of food that you will eat! You will eat!'

A recent documentary film, *The Territory*, directed by Alex Pritz, deals with the Uru-eu-wau-wau people in a different area of the Amazon, further south. There are only just over a hundred of them now, and they are being confronted not by miners but by would-be settlers who have grandiose plans for building new towns in places they have claimed. The settlers are depicted in a not unsympathetic way in the film, as men who want to work on their own land rather than toiling away for a pittance on land belonging

to others. The trouble is that this means clearing land used by the Uru-eu-wau-wau; drone photography is used to show the extent of the deforestation. The settlers have little understanding of the society they are attacking.

Ari, a man involved in surveillance of the invaders, is found murdered (his death is still unsolved). The Uru-eu-wau-wau fight back by destroying temporary homes built by the settlers, who react by saying that every time a building is destroyed, they will rebuild it. There are threats of violence against a non-indigenous woman who tries to defend the locals.

The Amazon rainforest is the world's largest, and its gradual reduction in size has very serious implications for environmental issues such as biodiversity and global heating. The demand for profit risks not just the communities and lives of its indigenous inhabitants but the wellbeing of the planet and its people more generally.

PB

Hard Labour



Credit: Al Jazeera

THE ONGOING shambles of the Conservative Party's leadership has overshadowed the recent shambles among the leadership of its Labour Party competitors. Although the downfall of Jeremy Corbyn after the 2019 general election was explained by many as due to his regime's stance on Brexit and managing the economy, it has also been tainted by accusations of antisemitism among members. Al Jazeera's four-part documentary series *The Labour Files* examines the party's toxic culture over the last couple of decades, through how these allegations arose and were handled.

The programme came about from what Al Jazeera describes as 'the largest leak of documents in British political history'. Hundreds of thousands of internal Labour Party emails and records along with audio and video clips dating back to the late '90s were received (by whom? From whom?), and the programme-makers focus particularly on details of the party's disciplinary proceedings against its members. These cases resulted in hundreds of party activists being suspended or expelled, some of whom appear on the documentary to speak about what happened and be shown for the first time correspondence about them. The allegations are revealed to follow a similar pattern, whether in Brighton, Harrow or Wallasey in Merseyside, with party officials searching through members' social media accounts to find posts critical of Israel and then launching disciplinary procedures on the grounds of antisemitism. Those accused were supporters of Corbyn, who said that if his party got into power it would recognise the Palestinian State towards a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict. Their accusers tended to be pro-Israeli backers of then-leader-in-waiting Sir Kier Starmer, with some even shown to have links to the far-right English Defence League. Corbyn's spell as leader and its aftermath have brought to the fore nasty divisions between members supportive of Israel or Palestine.

The Labour Files' claims that actions against Corbynites were unsubstantiated and unscrupulous have been denied by Labour itself, along with some of the individuals criticised. The documentary is also critical of how some branches of the media fuelled the original allegations, especially an edition of the BBC's *Panorama* from 2019 titled *Is Labour Anti-Semitic?*, which invited a reply of 'yes'. This is cited as an instance of how the predominant narrative in the mainstream media has been anti-Corbyn. Starmer (against the advice of Labour's lawyers) later agreed to pay out a six-figure sum to *Panorama*'s lead journalist and seven previous Labour employees, apologising for them being defamed by claims that their actions were motivated by opposition to Corbyn. Corbyn then said in a Facebook post that this payment risked 'giving credibility to misleading and inaccurate allegations'. A few days after Al Jazeera released its criticism of the edition of *Panorama*, the BBC reported on allegations that bullying and harassment among Al Jazeera's staff went unchecked. The dispute within the Labour Party has spilled out into a spat between the two broadcasters.

The mainstream view promoted by the *Panorama* episode and elsewhere was that Corbyn didn't adequately tackle antisemitism in his party, with the implication that this is due to his pro-

Palestinian outlook. It's argued in *The Labour Files* that Corbyn was damned either way: if he tried to speed up the processing of disciplinary cases he then would be accused of interfering in them. Lawyer Martin Forde's report about racism in the Labour Party (commissioned under Starmer's leadership and published in July 2022) said that there was no evidence that Corbyn's administration hid or didn't deal with allegations of antisemitism, and that antisemitism was used as a weapon by both factions in the Labour Party. The report also describes a 'hierarchy of racism' in the organisation, meaning that attitudes towards prejudice differed depending on which group was the victim. Examples given of this include how complaints of antisemitism were addressed but Asian members were treated with suspicion by others who believed they were infiltrating branches, and how black people and those in other ethnic groups were side-lined so that Labour could instead court their traditional 'red wall' voters. So, while *The Labour Files* casts doubt on the widely accepted extent of antisemitism in the party, it also highlights other discrimination its members experienced.

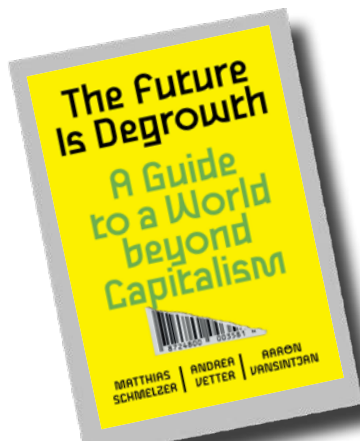
The documentary shows us that the Labour Party isn't the saviour of the working class which many people still want it to be. According to the original allegations it's been contaminated by anti-Semites or, as the programme argues, it's contaminated by people (some with far-right connections) willing to trump up charges to discredit their rivals.

Al Jazeera is funded by Qatar's government, and in return for its money it would want the channel's output to support its own narratives. The Qatari government is critical of the Israeli state's actions and backs Palestine. *The Labour Files* reflects this stance by being critical of a pro-Israeli tendency in the Labour Party who stirred up concerns about antisemitism to discredit pro-Palestine Corbyn and his supporters. This doesn't disprove what the programme claims, but it reminds us that viewpoints in the media are there to support the perspective and priorities of entities with enough funding to promote them widely.

Despite the weight of the claims made against the Labour Party in Al Jazeera's investigation, it has been scarcely commented on elsewhere in the mainstream media (and the Forde Report was also covered less than may be expected). While there's a lot else happening in the world for journalists to report on, this suggests that many media outlets want to avoid upsetting Starmer's Labour now that the Tories are increasingly discredited.

MIKE FOSTER

Is This Enough?



The Future Is Degrowth: a Guide to a World Beyond Capitalism.
Matthias Schmelzer, Andrea Vetter
and Aaron Vansintjan.
Verso £18.99.

Degrowth – also referred to as post-growth – can be described as putting an end to economic growth in the conventional capitalist sense and replacing it with sustainable methods of production (for more information, see degrowth.info and degrowth.org). This is an expanded version of a book originally published in German; it surveys the sizeable academic and activist literature on the subject, and examines a range of possible alternatives.

Under capitalism, growth is usually seen in terms of increase in gross domestic product, but there are a number of problems with GDP. It does not examine how useful the products and services it measures are, and it has no room for unpaid labour, such as voluntary work and much care work. Growth is fundamental to capitalism, but is criticised here on various grounds, having led to the catastrophes of global heating, species extinction and genocide of indigenous peoples. Growth destroys the environmental foundations of life, is based on exploitation, devalues reproductive work and relies on domination of ‘developing’ countries by the ruling class in the wealthy countries. Degrowth, however, does not mean recession and austerity: rather, it can open the way to a world of equality and ecological justice.

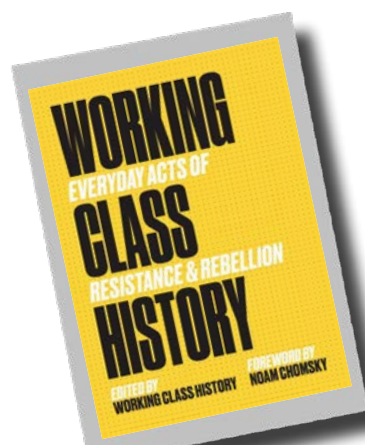
At the very least, degrowth would probably include use of renewable energy and use of longer-lasting consumer products. The authors recognise that degrowth is not a blueprint, rather it is ‘a broad set of principles and ideas, a path whose twists and turns have yet to be taken’. It is promising that they refer to *News from Nowhere* and *The Dispossessed* as depictions of moneyless stateless societies, but other views set out here are not so radical. They discuss Universal Basic Income, and also advocate that such goods

and services as housing, food, energy and healthcare ‘be made available to all regardless of the current rate of economic growth or individual income’. But they also refer to ‘the creation of a democratic international monetary system’ and ‘a non-capitalist market economy’. All this reflects the varied views found in the degrowth literature, but it does suggest that what is envisaged is not truly ‘a world beyond capitalism’.

For socialists, the book provokes some interesting ideas. We cannot say now what would happen in terms of degrowth in a socialist world, though we can agree that caring for the environment will be a central concern. Initially, a lot of effort would have to be put into providing food, housing and so on for the global population, and this could at least in part be met by using resources and labour now employed in the money system and the military. In the medium to longer term, there will need to be a balance between satisfying human need and taking account of ecological issues, and growth vs degrowth may well be one issue discussed and debated at length. A society based on common ownership and production for use will surely be the best framework for addressing such questions.

PB

Hidden Histories



Working Class History. Everyday Acts of Resistance and Rebellion.
Edited by Working Class History.
PM Press, 2020. 328pp.

This book, described as a ‘history of grassroots movements’, goes through all 366 days of the year picking out and briefly summarising either one or two events that have taken place on each of these days in the last 200 years or more in which workers (or peasants) have in some shape or form rebelled against their masters. It does not claim to record all such events, but simply to ‘give a snapshot of the people and movements that have helped improve our world’ and to ‘counter dominant narratives

that sanitize the history of capitalism and colonialism’. Given that several hundred of these are recorded, this does not present itself as a cover-to-cover read but rather a book to be dipped in and out of as the reader sees fit.

From the earliest stages of capitalism, workers began to unite in voluntary organisations to negotiate the built-in antagonism of interests between themselves and their employers. The idea was to resist the pressure of the capitalist class on workers’ pay and conditions and to enable workers to get as good a deal as possible (a larger share of ‘surplus value’) in selling their energies and skills to employers. Some examples recorded here, many of them little known, are: the mutiny (successful) of sailors of 15 Royal Navy ships in Plymouth to demand improved pay and conditions (April 26, 1797); the strike (unsuccessful) of 5,000 female cotton mill workers in Pittsburgh for a maximum ten-hour workday and an end to child labour (September 15, 1845); the walk-out (successful) by 1,400 women and girls at the Bryant and May factory in East London in solidarity with a worker fired for criticising appalling working conditions (July 5, 1888); the setting up of the Union of Rural Workers in Hungary which enrolled 75,000 members but was then banned after strike action (December 13, 1905); the strike by black African railway workers across the whole of French West Africa lasting 6 months and leading to numerous concessions from the employer (October 10, 1947); a Maori land occupation near Auckland which was attacked by police, who evicted the protesters, arrested many people and demolished buildings (May 25, 1978); a two-month occupation by 150 mainly female garment workers of Mansoura-España textile factory in Egypt leading to concessions on job losses and unpaid wages (April 21, 2007).

As can be seen from these examples, these largely untold stories (often reinforced here with stark images) present themselves as anything but simple triumphalism. There are certainly instances of relatively successful attempts to resist oppression or exploitation by workers or peasants but also details of many failed actions and of violence and atrocities carried out by the authorities or by the rich and powerful to counter or crush protests. Indeed the book warns of the ‘disturbing nature of much people’s history’ and that many entries ‘include descriptions of violence, racism, genocide, homophobia, torture and death, and some of them include mentions of sexual violence’.

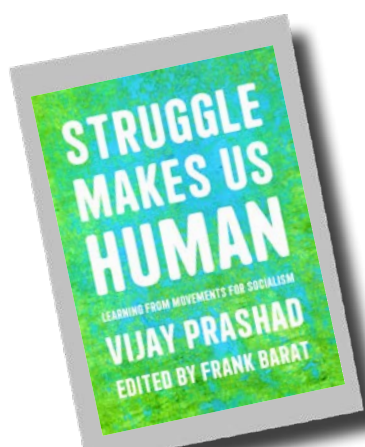
This panoramic compendium of acts of resistance is accompanied by a foreword by Noam Chomsky and a brief introduction by the compilers of the Working Class History project. Chomsky sees it as part of the fightback for an area of study- labour history- that has been ‘virtually effaced’

in the American educational system and part of the lifting of a 'veil from central parts of history that had been concealed or sidelined in the standard patriotic version'. The book's introduction is notable for something rarely found in discussion of 'class' in society, that is it supplies a clear and correct definition of 'working class'. There is no imaginary 'middle class' mentioned here but the working class described as referring 'to those of us who do not own factories, farms, offices or stocks therein (also known as "means of production") and so need to sell our ability to work to people who do'. So we have the class struggle front and centre here, 'history from below' in its true sense. The introduction is also effective in highlighting the 'myriad of ways' in which the capitalist system seeks to divide workers (eg, employed v unemployed, one nation against another, 'natives' against 'migrants'), to prevent them from uniting to exert their potential power.

It should be added, however, that most of the 'hidden histories' recorded here do not arise from the idea of transcending the class divide, ie, doing away altogether with paid employment and the employer-employee relationship and establishing the classless free access society that socialism must be. They are rather understandable (and often courageous) attempts by workers to resist the downward pressure on their pay and working conditions and if possible to make their conditions of life less harsh. The next step in human history is of course for workers to go beyond workplace resistance and beyond single-issue social protest or demands for 'social justice', and to organise, as Chomsky has it (and as is the goal of the Socialist Party), 'to change popular consciousness and understanding'.

HKM

Movements for socialism?



Struggle Makes Us Human.
Learning from Movements for Socialism. By Vijay Prashad. Edited by Frank Barat. Haymarket Books. 2022. 162pp.

'An incisive and inspiring call to look

beyond capitalism and chart a road map for a planet ravaged by pandemic, climate crises, and wars'. This is how this book, made up of a conversation between two long-term left-wing activists, Vijay Prashad and Frank Barat, is described on its back cover. It takes the form of a series of brief questions by Barat on a wide range of subjects followed by answers at some length by Prashad. Subjects include 'The capitalist use of crisis', 'Resistance and rebellion', 'The real meaning of unemployment', 'History is a series of experiments', 'Transition to the future', 'Confidence comes from building movements', 'The long effect of the fall of the Soviet Union', 'Utopia is not a place but a project'. One of its main concerns, as suggested by the book's title, is to examine and evaluate what are seen by Prashad as 'movements for socialism', those having taken place historically and others taking place now. So he traces, for example, in broad brush strokes and largely admirably, the Haitian Peasant Revolution of 1804, the Paris Commune, the Bolshevik Revolution leading to the Soviet Union, the Vietnam War, Castro's Cuba, the Venezuela of Chavez and Maduro, and modern Kerala, referring to them all as 'pro-people' movements. But can all or any of these truly be called 'movements for socialism'?

There is no doubt that some of them at least can only elicit admiration for the attempts they constitute to combat naked oppression and to move the status quo in a progressive direction. But others not so. The Bolshevik state, for example, authoritarian and oppressive from its very beginnings, bore no relation to socialism (a democratically organised stateless and leaderless society of free access to all goods and services). In the same way, Cuba, Vietnam, China and Venezuela, all of which the author is a strong supporter of, are essentially 'top-down' regimes integrated into the world capitalism system of markets, trade, money and wages, buying and selling. And they are more oppressive than more 'liberal' capitalist states in that they keep a closer check on their populations and in some cases don't even offer them meaningful elections to vote in. The book puts the poor economic conditions in some of these countries (eg, Venezuela) down to political plotting and economic pressure by the Western powers ('immense sanctions and hybrid war'), in particular the US. And any view of them as autocratic and oppressive is said to be 'a fiction of the information war' against countries which are said to be 'socialist experiments'. However, whereas the US government may indeed see it in its interests to disparage a country like Venezuela as much as possible, there is still a patent blindness on the part of Prashad and others with similar views, to the manifestly oppressive, kleptocratic nature of the Maduro regime. It cannot just be the influence of America that has caused 6.8 million out of Venezuela's population of 28

million to flee the country in recent years.

Kerala, on the other hand, a state in Prashad's native India, governed by a left-wing coalition which the author also lauds, is clearly rather different. It has a government democratically elected and much more representative than places like Cuba or Venezuela, and it has a more advanced capitalist economy than almost anywhere on the Indian sub-continent. Yet the fact that its government is left-wing and may claim to be socialist does not, in any sense, make it some kind of experiment in socialist organisation, or as Prashad would have it, 'a socialist state project'. At best it is a more advanced, less oppressive and arguably more humane form of capitalist administration than found in most other parts of the Asian continent.

Two sections of this book deal specifically with the future as seen through the author's lens ('The Future is Here' and 'The Future Will Contain What You Put into It Now'). They talk about ways forward but limit themselves to what can only be described as small beer, suggesting such things as 'cooperatives', 'neighbourhood committees' and 'land reclamation' as well as referring admirably to the 'universal housing planning' of the former USSR and proposing that medicines, food and education should be 'non-commodified'. A truly utopian wish, this last one, within the framework of capitalism and something again that could only happen in the context of a complete change in the structure of society to free access rather than buying and selling on the market. All the more surprising this, as Prashad is an acute observer and often good at providing incisive commentary into the workings of the capitalism system. His comments on the atomising effects of 'platform capitalism' for example, are apt and thought-provoking, as is his analysis of the predatory workings of the IMF and, as a kind of case study, the way in which the mining of copper for iPhones by children in Zambia affects the lives of those children and how that copper then does various commodity journeys around the globe to be transformed into smartphones and packaged for sale. But rather than the 'impassioned and studied case for socialism', claimed in 'praise' comments from one of the author's supporters at the beginning of this book, what we have rather are recipes for reformism ('to defend the gains of modest reforms and even fight for greater reforms'), a suite of proposals for managing capitalism in a less harsh, more worker-friendly way. All this, though referred to as part of the struggle for socialism, is in fact tinkering at the edges and does not get us any closer to the real qualitative transformation needed to establish a society in which all goods and services are truly 'non-commodified', ie, freely accessible to all according to need.

HKM

'Beyond Money: Yenomon'

Anitra Nelson,

<https://vimeo.com/722765718>.



THIS SHORT 7-minute film echoes and reinforces a number of aspects of the views expressed in Nelson's book and we would strongly recommend it to readers of this journal.

The introduction to the video outlines its aims and intentions: 'What might a world without money look and feel like? A way forward addressing the two great challenges of our time – economic unsustainability and socio-economic inequities.' And it manages to say a lot in its 7-minute length, beginning with an economical and effective statement of the human and environmental damage and wastefulness that goes hand in hand with the current system. For example: 'Producing for trade damages nature, increases carbon emissions, destabilises weather and leads to more fires and floods', 'Markets are wasteful and inefficient causing social and ecological conflicts and injustice', and 'Capitalism

elevates banks, budgeting and prices as it degrades people and nature'. The video then goes on to elaborate on the alternative to this, as proposed by the author's book: 'a world without money, a world based on real values, social and ecological values, a world where we co-govern all together deciding what we do, make and get'.

Nelson sees that world as a global network of small democratically organised communities which are more or less self-sufficient and autonomous but also interact with one another as necessary to satisfy the fundamental aim of 'lifelong security of communally meeting our and Earth's basic needs'. She goes into a certain amount of detail on how she sees this as working, more than is possible to cover in a short review, but the article on her book in last month's *Socialist Standard* says more about this, as of course does the book itself.

So what about Anitra Nelson's vision of the moneyless society? Is it one we can enthusiastically share? To a large extent, yes. The Socialist Party's vision of socialism in all the 118 years of our history has been one of a democratic wageless, moneyless world based on the principle of 'from each according to ability to each according to need'. However, we have always been reluctant to put forward precise organisational details on the grounds that this will depend on the level of material and technological development that has been reached at the point the majority of workers decide they want to establish socialism. Of course we do not discourage

visions, such as laid out here, of what that society may be like for those who set it up and live in it. But they are precisely that – visions. They are not – and should not, in our view, be – blueprints to which those who advocate a moneyless world feel it necessary to adhere. We have ourselves on occasions attempted to explain how a wholly democratic world society based on the principles mentioned above might be organised, for example in our pamphlet, *Socialism as a Practical Alternative*, (www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/pamphlet/socialism-practical-alternative/), but that as material for thought and discussion more than any kind of hard and fast principle.

What we would insist on, however (and this is perhaps our main 'argument' with Anitra Nelson), is the need for the vast majority of workers globally to take democratic political action, via the ballot box if possible, to establish socialism – and this as a prerequisite for the establishment of the marketless, moneyless society, however that majority decides to organise it. Once humanity has got rid of capitalism and the operation of its economic laws acting on humans like uncontrollable laws of nature, we will be in control of its destiny and can decide what we want. Then we would truly be in a position, as the author puts it, to 'collectively satisfy everyone's basic needs' and to fulfil our real human potential as creative active beings, with real freedom, real liberation, real power'. Who could argue with that?

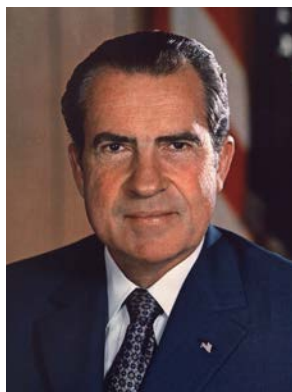
HKM

50 Years Ago

The Presidential Election: "As Long As It's Black"

WHAT DOES Nixon claim as he goes to the polls this time? American capitalism has made, or is about to make, a deal with China and North Vietnam which will carve up anew a piece of South-East Asia and probably halt the war in Vietnam. The diplomatic burrowings of Kissinger have brought home to the American ruling class that they cannot hope to win the war there, only to finish it. As in 1968, Nixon is promising to end the war, by which he means to provide an interval before the next conflict and to set up the battle lines for it.

At home, Nixon can draw comparisons between 1968 and 1972 which are to his advantage. When the Democrats met at Chicago in 1968, they did so within a barbed wire stockade and behind a tight security screen while outside tear-gassing, troops with fixed bayonets and rioting police were accepted sights. Although this was a heavy over-reaction by Mayor Daley, it was also a climax of years of protest in which pitched gun battles and deaths were common. The conventions this year went off with hardly a whiff of tear-gas or swing of a truncheon. Symbolically Bobby Seale, who was gagged at the trial which followed the Chicago 1968, is now standing for Mayor at Oakland, California. The figures say that



violent crime is increasing in America and New York (which is not the worst city) recently notched up a new record for the number of murders in a single day. But there is enough scope in the statistics to enable the Administration, with a bit of juggling, to claim that the increase in violence is slowing down and it is with such material that successful election campaigns are fought.

During Nixon's term American capitalism has been faced with the customary economic problems which, in the customary way, he has promised to control with some "fine tuning" of the economy. In a nation of car owners, this phrase is easily understood and accepted. In August the American government "floated" the dollar, slapped a duty surcharge on imports and declared that they were going to control prices and wages. Such measures in fact have no effect on capitalism's economic crises, which are a matter of cycles out of the control of politicians or anyone else. At the crucial time in terms of his re-election, Nixon can claim that the rate of inflation is slowing and that unemployment has fallen; the cycle is running his way and should help him to victory. (*Socialist Standard*, November 1972)

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.

NOVEMBER 2022 EVENTS

World Socialist Movement online meetings

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

Sunday 13 November 11.00 GMT Zoom • Central Branch Meeting

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

Friday 4 November 19.30 GMT Zoom • Did You See the News?

Host: Paddy Shannon

Friday 11 November 19.30 GMT Zoom • Communism in America

Speaker: Bill Martin

Should we all just club together and buy a Scottish island and build a commune on it? This talk will look at the history and role of communes in America, and how they helped shape the socialist movement worldwide.

Friday 18 November 19.30 GMT Zoom • What about the World Cup?

Speaker: Darren O'Neill

Sunday 27 November 11.00 Zoom

Regular Sunday morning discussion meeting

Socialist Party Physical Meetings

LONDON

Saturday 26 November 3pm

How Miss Marple caused the financial crash.

Speaker: Bill Martin

Socialist Party Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, SW4 UN

(nearest tube: Clapham North)

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

Shock, horror, Chancellor tells it like it is!

On Monday 17 October Jeremy Hunt faced the truth and declared that 'No government can control markets' (bbc.in/3yMdtmI).

We could quibble with the accuracy of what he went on to say 'but every government can give certainty about the sustainability of public finances' (think pandemics /'surprise' wars, etc.) but it's not our job to argue about the way the capitalist class funds state functions.

The fact is that markets eventually control any government elected to administer these functions. Those markets in turn are governed by the capitalists' drive for profit, and when Hunt talked about maintaining or restoring confidence, he meant that the capitalists need reassurance that states won't hinder that drive. Building 'confidence for investors' is part of Starmer's 'mission for economic growth' too (tinyurl.com/2sd2ukdu).

Workers should remember this when reformist parties (right or left) promise to introduce order to the system. They won't. They're liars or they're deluded.

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.

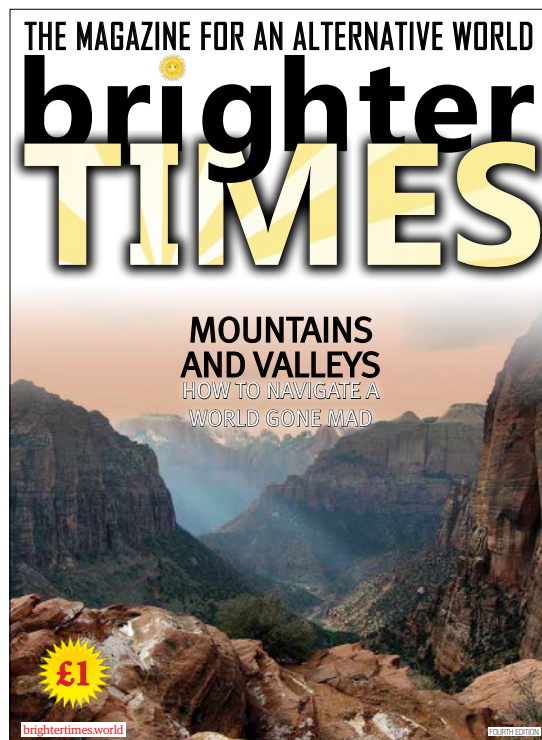
Brighter Times?

I WAS doing some house painting the other day and called into my local ironmongers for a bottle of white spirit. I picked some up from the shelf, went to the counter to pay and was surprised to see something unexpected there – a pile of entirely non-DIY magazines with main title ‘Brighter Times’ and sub-title ‘Magazine for an Alternative World’. My curiosity piqued, I picked one up and had a quick look through. It was a well-illustrated professional-looking publication with a cover charge of £1. I decided I could afford it, but when I tried to add it to the cost of the white spirit, Jane who serves in the shop told me the magazine was free. ‘Good’, I said, even if it gave me a slightly odd feeling that they should be giving it away. While it’s true that every minute of every day people do countless things for others without the intervention of money, in the buying and selling society we live in actual products usually have a price tag that must be paid. If there’s no price tag, it tends, perhaps sadly, to make you suspicious about them, to make you think that, if the product is free, it can’t be much good or that there’s some other underlying reason why it’s being given away.

A World Gone Mad?

Anyway I took it home and, when I had some spare time, sat down for a read. The front cover said ‘How to navigate a world gone mad’, which had probably been one of the other things to draw me to it, since, as a socialist, I can’t but see that the world is in thrall to a kind of madness, the madness of the capitalist system. The first two or three short articles gave me a feel for where the magazine was coming from. There was an advertisement on page 2 for a book entitled ‘The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment’ whose author Eckhardt Toller is described as a ‘spiritual teacher’. It told us that his teaching came about ‘as a result of a profound inner transformation at the age of 29 which radically altered his life’, prior to which ‘he had suffered severe anxiety and depression but this shift in consciousness saw his suffering dissolve away’. Then there was an editorial that, while denying adherence to ‘conspiracy theories’, expressed doubt about Covid vaccination and advised resistance to ‘the mainstream narrative’ and to ‘the

darker forces that seek to dominate us’. And there was also a report of the inaugural conference of ‘the World Council for Health’, which characterised itself as an organisation of ‘Covid dissidents’ looking to a ‘future of integrative healthcare and wellbeing rooted in sovereignty, informed consent, and personal empowerment’. Other articles highlighted the apparent dangers to health of 5G technology, ‘Frankenstein foods’ produced using genetic technology, the World Economic Forum described as ‘an unaccountable corporate body which wishes to impose outright tyranny upon the world’, the ‘outdated practice of water fluoridation’ called a ‘Class 2 poison’, and the ‘controversial science’ of man-made global warming.



Virtuous Activity

We can see where this is going. But it’s also only fair to say that, when I read on, I didn’t as a whole find the same kind of standard conspiracy theory publication (eg, ‘The Light’) that relentlessly and crazily pushes the button of conspiratorial global domination by a small group of ‘elite’ individuals. It did veer towards that but sugared the pill with its generally more ‘moderate’ language and ‘nice’ articles on, for instance, the need for camaraderie, soil regeneration, community-based food production, and ‘healthy love’ between couples, much of which appeared laudable even if the dog-eat-dog attitude the society

we live in drives us to makes such cooperative activity difficult to carry out in any kind of overall and consistent way. The back page of the magazine was given over to what it called ‘The ABCs of Life’, which were short, ‘virtuous’ suggestions for living, beginning with each letter of the alphabet. Examples included: ‘accept differences’, ‘give freely’ ‘harm no one’, ‘open your mind’, ‘reciprocate’, ‘value truth’, zealously support a worthy cause’.

Helplessness and manipulation

Reading this magazine, I couldn’t not ask myself what drives the people who produce it and, read and support it, and manage to get it placed in shops such as my local ironmongers? It seems to indicate on the part of those involved an attempt to give meaning to a life situation in which they feel fundamentally helpless, a ‘world gone mad’, as the front page had it. They feel trapped in a system that dictates what happens to them and those around them, and the apparently far-out theories and ‘regenerative’ activities they advocate are attempts to have some say in that situation, to reach for some kind of control over their lives and their futures. It goes without saying of course that the system that traps them is not one engineered by some shadowy group of conspirators controlling the world and manipulating events from afar, even if such an idea may seem to make things easier to grasp. Rather what the ‘brighter lives’ people are trapped by – as we are all – is the world market, an unplanned, chaotic, wasteful force that no individual or group controls.

So, yes we need ‘brighter times’, we need ‘an alternative world’, but that can only meaningfully come via majority democratic political revolution to establish a system of common ownership, democratic control and production for use. And before we can get that, we need clear understanding on the part of the majority of workers (ie, all those who have to sell their energies for a wage or salary) of how the current system works and what can be done to change it. Without this, the helplessness so many feel in the face of seemingly uncontrollable forces will continue to lead them down the same kind of blind alley as frequented by the ‘Brighter Times’ community.

HOWARD MOSS