

# THE SOCIALIST STANDARD

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Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

## GAME OF DRONES

Winter  
(of discontent)  
is coming...



**Also:** Letters  
Just stop being manipulative  
GB News and Gary's Economics  
A note to a friend

Can there be 'non-reformist' reforms?  
Transgender issues and capitalism  
Socialists and the Left



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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'



# We can put a stop to their games

THOSE WHO like epic dramas have had a good show this year as prime ministers came and went, with other ambitious politicians supporting one or the other and changing sides as they calculated what was best for them in their bid to climb the greasy pole. On the other side of the House of Commons, the leaders of the 'Opposition' couldn't contain themselves at the prospect this in-fighting opened for them to get to enjoy the fruits of office instead. It's been a despicable spectacle.

As would-be administrators of the political side of capitalism — dubbing themselves 'the government in waiting' — the leaders of the Labour Party know that if they were in office their policy would not be, could not be, much different from that of the present Tory government. They criticise the government noisily but mainly for the personal behaviour of some of its ministers.

Even during the brief Truss interlude they agreed with some of what she did but balked at her crass decision, in the midst of a cost of living crisis for most

people, to reduce income tax on the rich and remove the cap on bankers' bonuses. Here too they merely echoed the views of her critics in the Tory party and who are now in office. Can anybody tell the difference between Starmer and Sunak?

The Truss interlude brought out the constraints that the operation of capitalism places on what the politicians in charge of the political machine can do when it comes to economics. They can't do what they want. They must do what the operation of the market dictates. Given a chance to implement free-market ideology Truss failed spectacularly. Perhaps that will make her type less cocky for a while.

A Corbyn government would have failed too. When Corbyn was elected leader of the Labour Party, his opponents within the Party, realising that this ruined their chance of becoming ministers, immediately started to plot his downfall. They got their way and have since restored the Labour Party as a credible alternative management team for capitalism, a profit-driven system that

can only work as such in the interest of the few who live off profits.

The result is that politics has been reduced to a competition between two rival bands of careerist politicians as to which is the more honest, competent and cost conscious. No wonder 'I'm not interested in politics' has become a widespread view. If that's what politics is, we aren't interested either.

Meaningful politics is a struggle about which class — the capitalist few or the wage-working many — should control political power. At the moment the capitalist few are winning. But if a majority wanted, they could do something more than just regard with contempt the politicians of capitalism and their antics. They could stop electing them and replace them with delegates mandated to use political control to help bring in a society based on the common ownership and democratic control of society's productive resources, with production directly to meet people's needs, rather than for sale or for profit.

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# The Baby Bust

THE EXISTENTIAL crisis of global warming as well as rocketing inequality have made many people start to question the viability of capitalism as never before. But you still hear some dismissing the idea of post-capitalist common ownership with the time-honoured objection that ‘there are too many people.’

There’s sometimes a suspicious whiff of racism or Nazi-style eugenics about this argument, but it’s not hard to see why people might innocently believe it, particularly in the crowded urban environments most people inhabit nowadays, and particularly if they remember China’s infamous one-child policy, and Indira Ghandi’s even more infamous forced sterilisation programme in India. Ever since the 1970s (or indeed Malthus in the 1800s) people have been banging the drum of doom about an impending population catastrophe. It’s been a staple trope of Hollywood movies from *Soylent Green* (1973) to *Avengers Infinity War* (2018). And last month, to great fanfare and only 11 years after passing the 7 billion milestone, the world passed the 8 billion mark, with the population still increasing at around 3 people per second, at least according to the population clock at [bit.ly/2UKMS7c](http://bit.ly/2UKMS7c).

But it’s not rising everywhere. Indeed, it’s not rising almost anywhere. If you look at the 20 largest populations on the clock, India is the only one visibly ticking upwards. China isn’t moving. The USA isn’t moving. Globally, almost all populations outside sub-Saharan Africa are either stable or in decline, with fertility rates generally well below replacement levels. At current rates, China’s population, along with that of Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and most European countries, is set to halve by 2100. Japan is ‘super-ageing’, with the oldest median age, 48, in history. Latvia is worried that it’s running out of Latvians ([bit.ly/3hPBvr0](http://bit.ly/3hPBvr0)). Instead of a baby boom, the future looks more like a baby bust. In July this year the UN downwardly revised its 2019 projection of 11 billion and rising by 2100 to a peak by 2080 and declining by 2100 ([bit.ly/3TMMbUx](http://bit.ly/3TMMbUx)), while other studies suggest a peak by 2070 ([bit.ly/3tVZO9D](http://bit.ly/3tVZO9D)). One HSBC economist, following the work of two Canadian demographers, is even predicting a peak in 2040, declining to 4 billion by 2100 ([bit.ly/3ApdoG2](http://bit.ly/3ApdoG2)).

What’s happened to overturn the received wisdom of decades, if not centuries? There are lots of reasons,

including more women in the labour market choosing to delay parenthood, high housing costs, high childcare costs, and understandable insecurity about the future. But the two main global drivers of falling birth rates are better female education, which leads to better prospects and more independence for women, and female access to contraceptives. Regardless of income, wherever women gain control of their own fertility, the birth rate declines, giving the lie to that old saw about poor people deliberately breeding children as insurance policies for old age. Where these drivers are not present, as in sub-Saharan Muslim countries where girls do not go to school and men don’t allow them to use contraception and won’t use it themselves, you see dramatic population increases.

Capitalist states regard declining populations not with enthusiasm but with alarm, because low birth rates combined with longer lifespans mean a relative reduction in the young workforce and hence a reduction in profits, combined with an increasing burden of ‘economically inactive’ old people who constitute a considerable cost to profits, via government taxation. Immigration would in theory solve the problem but has been made politically toxic, so many countries have instead adopted what are called ‘pro-natalist’ policies, involving financial and other incentives to have more babies. In France they give the woman a medal. In Iran they give the man a promotion at work, or a zero-interest loan (yhoo. [it/3TKfPtA](http://it/3TKfPtA)). But such state intervention to increase the birth rate would only yield very long-term results, and is anyway thought to be much harder, and more expensive, than intervention to reduce it, because of the need to incentivise young couples to take on the considerable extra financial cost and loss of personal freedoms. In the UK, the Child Poverty Action Group’s November 2022 estimate of the cost of raising a child to age 18 is £160,000 for couples and £200,000 for lone parents ([bit.ly/3E8zbCU](http://bit.ly/3E8zbCU)).

You might suppose that a smaller population would be better for the planet at least. But many environmentalists now realise that population is not the barrier to sustainable living that many imagine ([bit.ly/3g8r1CJ](http://bit.ly/3g8r1CJ)). Rather it’s resource usage that makes the difference. One 2020 study of the global farming system concluded that the present food production system



could only sustainably feed 3.4 billion people, but that with certain key changes, particularly in reducing meat consumption and food waste, and being smarter about choices of crops, that could be increased to 10 billion ([bit.ly/3gfEb00](http://bit.ly/3gfEb00)). Overall, resource use is wealth related, with the carbon emissions of the richest 1 percent being more than double the emissions of the poorest 50 percent ([bit.ly/3Of1Tqk](http://bit.ly/3Of1Tqk)).

It might upset an anti-abortionist, but it’s axiomatic to a socialist that the only person with the right to say whether or not a woman has a baby is the woman herself. In a socialist society, money and patriarchal power dynamics would not exist to restrict that woman’s ability to determine her own fertility. If the global population fell as a result, which the evidence suggests could well be the case, what would be the result? Not a crisis of care for the old, because care in socialism would be a matter of communal aid, not taxable profits. The world would simply scale down production to suit what was required. And productive work doesn’t require the labour it used to. As a recent Wired podcast pointed out, ‘we can do more today with fewer workers than at any other time in history’ ([bit.ly/3V752uq](http://bit.ly/3V752uq)). Might the population rise, perhaps because of zero financial costs and because socialism offers a life worth being born into? Possibly, but even socialism couldn’t socialise the child-bearing process, so the physical costs to women would likely be the limiting factor. In either case, if the need for social debate did arise, it would at least be done in the open, without competing sectional or state interests intervening to weaponise it.

**PJS**

# Dear Editors

## Your website article

I am in what would be considered 'the working class.'

Socialism obviously makes slaves of the working class with no hope of generational advancement or prosperity, the degree of socialism and communism practised yields a proportional level of poverty and oppression. Arrogant, self-righteous people want to act like the daddy of the working class, who they treat as children in these systems.

People who promote socialism and communism always seem to think somehow that they're going to be part of the decision-making and power-wielding club in the socialist system, rather than oppressed by it. That's because they are delusional in their self-righteousness and think of themselves as somehow special.

Neither of these world views is a friend to the working class.

Your website article claiming socialism is power to the working class is total horse-shit.

Socialism centralizes power and wealth in the hands of far fewer than free-market capitalism ever has.

You guys are either blind, woefully ignorant, or actually malevolent. Grow the hell up.

Ian Young

## Reply:

Are you sure you have been looking at our website and not one with a similar name?

We ask because, unfortunately, there are quite a few who call themselves socialist who do see themselves as an elite aiming to seize power and rule supposedly on behalf of the working class. They really do see themselves, as you say, as a 'decision-making and power-wielding club' and that is how they have acted where they have seized power as in Russia, China, North Korea, Vietnam, Cuba, Venezuela, etc.

That might be an excuse for your hostility to anyone calling themselves a 'socialist' but not for not having read our website carefully, if in fact you read it at all.

We have always made it clear that socialism, properly understood, means a society of freedom and co-operation where the state will cease to exist. It will be based on the common ownership and democratic control of society's resources, with production directly for use not profit and access to wealth according to needs. It can only be established democratically once a majority have come to want it. No

minority – no elite, whether elected or self-appointed – can establish socialism, still less impose it on a majority who don't want it.

What you have taken to be socialism – what the elites claiming to be socialist have established – has not in fact been socialism at all, but a variety of class-divided capitalist society in which the working class have remained oppressed and exploited wage slaves. The correct name for what they established is 'state capitalism' with the minority elite, having previously proclaimed itself as the so-called 'vanguard of the working class,' as the new ruling, exploiting class.

This kind of state capitalism has been put into practice only in relatively economically backward countries to industrialise and to catch up with the developed capitalist countries of western Europe and North America. This has involved driving peasants off the land and into the factories, under conditions that rival those of the early days of 'free market capitalism' when it went through the same process of the primitive accumulation of capital.

You seem to be seeing so-called 'free market' capitalism through rose-tinted glasses, exaggerating the 'hope of generational advancement and prosperity' that exists under it and downplaying the extent to which it concentrates 'power and wealth in the hands of a few'.

Statistics consistently show that social mobility is not as extensive as it is made out to be. The government has even had to set up a Commission to try to deal with the problem. In any event, what we are talking about here is an 'advance' from one section of the working class to another, from blue collar to white collar. When it comes to mobility from the working class to the capitalist class, there is scarcely any; the rich have remained rich and become richer.

Capitalism, whether private or state, is based on the ownership and control by a minority of the resources by which society lives. This puts this minority in a position of power and privilege and compels the rest to seek a living by going out onto the labour market to try to sell their working skills

to some employer for a wage or salary. How workers live is rationed by the size of their pay slip which is never going to be much more than what's needed to create and maintain their particular working skill and sometimes not even that.

By its very nature, capitalism can never provide the majority wage-working class with the full life that the level reached by modern technology makes possible. This can only happen when the ownership and control of society's productive resources have been taken out of the hands of the privileged minority – whether private capitalists or political elite – and transferred to society as a whole, to be run democratically in the interest of all. Socialism in the proper sense of the term

– **Editors**

## Spycatching

Dear Comrades

The excellent article *Spycatchers* in the November *Socialist Standard* called to mind an episode at the Party's Bristol branch years ago in the 1980s. We were delighted to have a new visitor to branch meetings, even though he never said anything and just seemed to spend his time observing members very carefully. Eventually, I suggested to another branch member that perhaps we might drop some subtle hints about wondering if the visitor was there on Special Branch duty.

At the next meeting, ignoring any hints or subtlety, the other branch member said 'Hey Larry, are you a copper?' What is interesting is that the visitor didn't say yes and he didn't say no. In fact, he didn't say anything. He just pulled out his wallet and showed us a photograph of his younger self in police uniform. After that, he didn't come to any more branch meetings. Draw your own conclusions.

Keith Graham





# Rating the Bank Rate

THE BANK Rate has gone up to 3 percent. What does it mean? As the rate which the Bank of England charges or pays the high street banks, it affects the rate that these charge or pay their customers. Those who borrow from them will have to pay more and those who save with them will be paid more on their savings (the first much more quickly than the second).

The Bank of England makes a wider claim. According to its website, this is 'how changes in Bank Rate affect the economy':

'A change in Bank Rate affects how much people spend. And how much people spend overall influences how much things cost. So if we change Bank Rate we can influence prices and inflation. We aim to keep inflation at 2% – this is the target set by the Government (...) Overall, we know that if we lower interest rates, this tends to increase spending and if we raise rates this tends to reduce spending' (BoE as at 7 November 2022- [bit.ly/2ONYCJ1](https://bit.ly/2ONYCJ1)).

The theory is then that if the Bank Rate goes up, people will spend less; a higher interest rate means that those trapped into a mortgage have to pay more to their bank or building society and so have less to spend on other things, the same goes for

credit cards; and, since the interest paid on savings goes up, people are attracted to save more and so have less to spend. The overall result will be less spending on consumer goods and services, which is expected to reduce the rate at which their price goes up.

But does it work? Could it work? By 'inflation' they mean a rise in the consumer prices index which is a measure of how the prices of a typical basket of goods and services bought by a typical consumer change. So, the claim is that a change in the rate of interest can change the way the economy works by increasing or decreasing the overall amount people spend on buying consumer goods and services.

This might make some sense if the purpose of capitalist production was simply to meet the paying demand of consumers, but it isn't. It's to make and accumulate profits to be re-invested as more capital. What drives the economy is what businesses invest, not what consumers spend. This primarily depends on the rate of profit rather than the rate of interest, and that is not something that the Bank of England can affect. Small businesses, dependent on modest bank loans, may be

influenced by a change in the Bank Rate in the same sort of way that consumers are supposed to be, but Big Business is typically not.

Big Business is, if anything, more interested in the prices of producer goods, intermediate goods such as materials, parts and energy, used in the production of other goods, which the Bank of England doesn't even claim to be trying to affect. In fact, the level of consumption is more affected by the level of business investment than it is by the Bank Rate since when business is booming consumption goes up and when there's a slump it goes down.

Nor doesn't there seem to be much evidence that changes in the Bank Rate do have the intended effect on consumption. In his 22 October blog ([bit.ly/3TIsuD8](https://bit.ly/3TIsuD8)) Michael Roberts quotes a study which concludes: 'It is difficult, however, to find empirical evidence that households do indeed raise or lower consumption by a significant amount when interest rates change.' But, even if they did, it is difficult to see how this would affect the general price level. The Bank of England could only do that by inflating the basic money supply.

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## Going Nowhere



'It was once home to some of the world's most celebrated radicals and changemakers including Karl Marx, Charles Dickens and Nelson Mandela, but now the Royal Society of Arts has become the centre of a bitter battle over trade union recognition. Nearly half the workforce below senior manager level at the 270-year-old charity's headquarters in central London have joined the Independent Workers' union of Great Britain, with most staff, in and outside the IWGB, backing unionisation. But the RSA's executive team led by new chief executive Andy Haldane, a former chief economist at the Bank of England and government levelling-up adviser, has refused three times to voluntarily recognise the union, which would give the workers' elected representatives the ability to negotiate pay and conditions' (*Guardian*, 9 October, bit.ly/3ROB64g).

Should we really be surprised? There are clues in the RSA's charitable status and its full name: The Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, *Manufactures and Commerce*. Another clue is provided by reading the list of recipients of the Society's Albert Medal. Scientists feature prominently, but the list is also peppered with parasites including Prince Albert's wife, their eldest son, two great grandsons, QE2, etc., plus Field Marshal Jan Christian Smuts and Winston Churchill. The obvious odd one out, and more deserving than most of the gong given in recognition of the 'creativity and innovation of those that work to tackle some of the world's intractable problems' is Peter Tatchell. For him solving such problems requires us to:

'Be sceptical, question authority, be a rebel. Do not conform and don't be ordinary. Remember, all human progress is the result of far-sighted people challenging orthodoxy, tradition and rich, powerful, vested interests. Be daring, show imagination, take risks. Fight against the greatest human rights violation

of all: free market capitalism, which has created a world divided into rich and poor, where hundreds of millions of people are malnourished, homeless, without clean drinking water and dying from hunger and preventable diseases. Don't accept the world as it is. Dream about what the world could be – then help make it happen (Honorary doctorate acceptance speech, 26 July 2010).

Hear our debate with him at bit.ly/3Cy11HN.

## Tatchell again

'It is quite evident that the Soviet system today represents the exact opposite of almost everything that the left in the West is striving for – obsessive state secrecy rather than freedom of information, centralised bureaucratic control instead of devolved decision making and public accountability, total state power over the individual as opposed to inalienable civil liberties, authoritarian economic management rather than trade union freedom and industrial democracy, and a government-manipulated media instead of greater diversity and choice in news and information sources' (*Democratic Defence*. London, GMP Publishers. p. 36, 1994).

He is not alone here. Writing seventy years earlier, Sylvia Pankhurst observed:

'The Russian workers remain wage slaves, and very poor ones, working, not from free will, but under compulsion of economic need, and kept in their subordinate position by a State coercion which is more pronounced than in the countries where the workers have not recently shown their capacity to rebel with effect' (*Workers' Dreadnought*, 1924, bit.ly/3SZ7kLD).

If Albert gongs were given posthumously, Sylvia would likely be the odd one out. Meanwhile, 'Singer and actress Beverly Knight (MBE!) will star as suffragette leader Emmeline Pankhurst in highly anticipated musical *Sylvia* at The Old Vic theatre. Following its first appearance as a work-in-progress show at the famous London venue in 2018, *Sylvia* will return for a limited run from January 27 to April 1 2023. The funk, soul and hip-hop musical tells the story of Pankhurst and her daughter Sylvia, played by Sharon Rose. It was originally commissioned to mark the centenary of the Representation of the People Act

1918 and the end of the First World War' (*Express & Star*, 6 October, bit.ly/3D0l1ob). Sylvia's mother and sister, Emmeline and Christabel, were supporters of militarism and empire, urged women to aid industrial production and encouraged young men to fight. They became prominent figures in the infamous white feather movement, which was composed of women who handed out white feathers, considered a symbol of cowardice, to men not in uniform during WW1 in order to shame them into enlisting. We can only guess as to which issues will be skirted over or distorted.

## We Come in Peace — Shoot to Kill

Further examples of inappropriately named and/or awarded gongs abound. The Nobel Peace Prize list is littered with them. Abiy Ahmed Ali, the prime minister of Ethiopia since 2 April 2018 won the 2019 Prize for his work in ending the 20-year post-war territorial stalemate between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Yet as early as January 2021 Simon Tisdall of the *Guardian* wrote that the gong should be returned as:

'Despite Abiy's claims that the war is over and no civilians have been harmed, sporadic fighting continues, an analyst familiar with government thinking said. Thousands of people have died, about 50,000 have fled to Sudan, and many are homeless, sheltering in caves. Intentional artillery attacks have destroyed hospitals and health centres in an echo of the Syrian war, the analyst said. Meeting this month in Mekelle, Tigray's capital, aid workers complained Ethiopia's government was still hindering relief efforts and demanded full access. "People are dying of starvation. In Adwa, people are dying while they are sleeping. [It's] the same in other zones," a regional administrator, Berhane Gebretsadik, was quoted as saying. But there has been scant response from Addis Ababa'.

This year's recipient is the Ukraine-based Center for Civil Liberties, headed by Oleksandra Matvichuk. Shortly before the award in an interview with *The Intercept* she stated, 'WHAT WE NEED TODAY IS WEAPONS' (sic) (7 October, bit.ly/3RP28bl).





## UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

### LONDON

**London regional branch.** Meets last Saturday in month, 2.00pm. Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN. Contact: 020 7622 3811. [spgb@worldsocialism.org](mailto:spgb@worldsocialism.org)

### MIDLANDS

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

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**South West regional branch.** Meets 3rd Sat.

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### WALES

#### South Wales Branch (Cardiff and Swansea)

Meets 2nd Monday 7.30pm on JITS!

Contact: [botterillr@gmail.com](mailto:botterillr@gmail.com) or

Geoffrey Williams, 19 Baptist Well Street, Waun Wen, Swansea SA1 6FB.

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#### Central Branch

Meets monthly Sun, 11am (UK time) on Zoom.

For invite email: [cbs@worldsocialism.org](mailto:cbs@worldsocialism.org).

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# Pillaged and plundered for green capitalism

COP27 IN Egypt is done and dusted, promises doomed to be disappointments much to the dismay of the eternal optimists in the ecology movement. However, there are deeper problems for those who seek a new sustainable future of renewable energy.

Many have yet to come to understand that for new technologies to act as substitutes for fossil fuel, lithium, cobalt and other rare metals and minerals that you have never heard of are required. Transitioning to clean energy will lead to a huge expansion in mining for them. The World Bank estimates an additional 3 billion tons of minerals and metals will be needed for wind, solar and geothermal power generation and energy storage.

## White Gold

‘Lithium and rare earths are already replacing gas and oil at the heart of our economy... So we have to avoid falling into the same dependency as with oil and gas’, explained European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen ([bit.ly/3ULz1i5](https://bit.ly/3ULz1i5)).

On 14 September, she announced the European Critical Raw Materials Act, aimed at securing a sustainable supply of critical raw materials for Europe to lessen its dependency on other suppliers

With just five countries controlling 90 percent of world lithium production, the International Energy Agency calls it a ‘quasi-monopoly’ situation.

Since 2015, production volumes of lithium, known as ‘white gold’, have tripled worldwide, reaching 100,000 tonnes per year in 2021, and expected to increase sevenfold by 2030. At the European level, about 35 times more lithium will be needed in 2050 than today. A single electric vehicle battery requires 63 kilograms of lithium carbonate, so 16 vehicles need just over a metric ton.

Olivier Vidal, a geologist and director of research at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) said ‘This will certainly create tensions in the coming years, with expected increases in costs and, possibly, supply difficulties. So, there is a real strategic and sovereignty issue for states’ ([bit.ly/3sSjGtl](https://bit.ly/3sSjGtl)).

Mining projects often face public protest. Lithium extraction ‘produces considerable volumes of waste that must



Credit: Getty Images

then be stored. The waste can also lead to water or air pollution,’ explained Vidal. Today, this pollution already exists, but in other countries, far from our eyes.

## Dirty Cobalt

Cobalt’s use in electronic semiconductors, circuits and lithium-ion rechargeable batteries makes it critical to the global economy and ‘green’ technology. Besides renewable energy storage, cobalt is used in powerful magnets found in wind turbine and as an additive to improve biogas production.

Whereas a phone contains just thousandths of a gram of cobalt, an electric vehicle battery has pounds of the metal. Tesla’s ambition to produce 20 million electric vehicles a year in 2030 will require two times the present global annual supply.

The Congo is referred to as ‘the Saudi Arabia of cobalt’ as it supplies almost three quarters of the world’s cobalt from often hazardous, and exploitative working conditions akin to modern slavery, involving forced labour, debt bondage, human trafficking and child labour.

Those who promote renewable energy technologies such as solar panels, wind turbines and electric batteries risk damaging ecosystems and harming local communities in the extraction of raw materials. Hopes of a low-carbon economy may well replicate the destruction of the environment caused by the fossil-fuel industry. The threat

of resource wars does not disappear.

It has already been suggested that the 2019 coup overthrowing Bolivia’s former president, Evo Morales, was motivated by competition between countries for its lithium supplies.

Do these problems lead to the conclusion that socialism will fail to be sustainable? An alternative, described as ‘green lithium’ exists. Unlike extraction from rocks or salt deserts, which function like traditional mines, ‘green lithium is produced from geothermal sources, with an extraction method similar to that of a well. However, the technique presently remains too expensive to be considered at a commercial level([bbc.in/3SRSAND](https://bbc.in/3SRSAND)).

Also, since lithium batteries are a relatively new development, recycling is not an keeping pace yet. But by 2035, electric vehicle batteries will be coming to the end of their life and therefore will be recycled. According to the studies, 40 to 75 percent of the EU’s lithium needs could be met through recycling by 2050 reducing environmental damage.

All this means that rivalry between capitalists and countries for control of the source and deposits of those elements will continue unabated. Mining corporations will carry on looting the land, with the customary civil strife and proxy wars taking place. Our message to those aspiring to a new green future is that nothing changes if the system doesn’t change, too.

**ALJO**

# Just stop being manipulative



Credit: Damien Gayle

BLOCKING ROADS, throwing paint at buildings, gluing themselves to paintings, what's it all about? It's all in the title. Just Stop Oil. In other words, keep capitalism but just stop extracting and using oil. In itself, it's a completely unrealistic proposition. Even socialist society would have to use some oil for some purposes, even if not to burn on a massive scale to generate electricity or to power trains and planes and cars, vans and lorries. It is essential as a lubricant and can be used to make other products such as plastics, paints and ointments. But under capitalism, taken literally the demand to stop extracting it is way off the scale of unachievable demands.

Capitalist production is not production with the rational aim of meeting human needs. It is uncontrollable production by separate, competing enterprises for sale with a view to profit. The battle of competition is won by those which can keep their costs the lowest, not lastingly by cutting corners but by using the cheapest suitable materials and by installing new machines or adopting new methods of production that reduce the cost per unit of what the enterprise is selling.

At the moment oil is the cheapest practical source of energy, when burned, for powering transport, whether by land, air or sea, and transport is essential for getting goods to market and workers to work. If oil was stopped today from being used for transport, society would literally grind to a halt; millions would die. Nor is any government going to adopt this on its own as currently available alternatives are either not scaled up sufficiently,

not reliable, or would increase costs massively and render enterprises operating in and from its territory completely uncompetitive.

It could be that those behind Just Stop Oil are demanding the maximum in order to get something less such as a more rapid transition to alternatives. That might well be why some look on their campaign with some sympathy. On the other hand, it could just be a tactic to get people to demand something that the campaign's initiators know to be unrealistic and that when their followers realise this they will turn to demanding something more radical than just stopping the extraction of oil. This wouldn't be the end of capitalism since those behind the campaign have explicitly rejected such talk. It is more likely to be questioning 'industrial civilisation' and returning to a 'simpler' way of life, to an imagined earlier stage of production for the market

when this was to meet local needs.

But we know that the leaders of the campaign are more manipulative than this. The campaign was planned before the war in Ukraine when there was an expectation that no more licences would be granted to drill for oil in the North Sea. The leaders' declared aim was to demand something they thought was going to be achieved anyway and to pass this off as a victory for the campaign, so as to build up the confidence of its activist foot soldiers and gain more of them and reach the figure they consider enough to bring about a change that will stop and reverse global warming.

They have declared that figure to be around 3 percent of the population engaging in non-violent civil disobedience. Roger Hallam, the group's chief strategist if not leader, has been quoted as saying: 'You can basically save the next generation with 2 per cent of the American population mobilised, engaged in an intense intra-relationship between high-level disruption and intense mobilisation... If you don't upset people enough, then nothing happens' (Times, 24 October).

Something has happened. The government has brought in a new law to deal with Just Stop Oil's tactics, adding to the state's arsenal of repressive laws. But this, too, will be part of the group's leaders' strategy to attract more activist followers, this time from those who object to non-violent protestors being jailed. Grist for the mill to reach the 2 or 3 percent. As if such a small number could impose its will on the majority or even win majority sympathy. Not even minority insurrectionists believe that.

**ADAM BUICK**



Credit: EXTINCTION REBELLION



# GB News and Gary's Economics

A RECENT slot for the Socialist Party on a GB News chat show ([bit.ly/3Umo53W](https://bit.ly/3Umo53W)) revealed an interesting thing about what socialists are up against: not only do people not agree on what socialism is, they don't agree on what capitalism is either. So when we're arguing with a pro-capitalist, we should not make the mistake of thinking that we know what they're defending, or that even *they* know what they're defending. They might be talking about something else entirely.

The pro-capitalist on the show seemed to be arguing that the less-developed, 19<sup>th</sup> century 'small-business' economy was 'real' capitalism, in which the population supposedly shared in the general wealth and welfare to a far greater degree than today, when the world has been taken over by a hideous monster known as 'corporatism'. As if to emphasise how terrible our modern corporate affliction is, he was perhaps tempted to overegg the pudding in relation to the Victorian incarnation of the profit system. Incredibly, he even summed up the conditions of workers in that age of slums, workhouses, TB, cholera and child labour as 'they'd never had it so good'.

Which all goes to show, as regular readers know very well, the importance of precise definitions. It's such second nature to us that it comes as a surprise to find that other people don't operate that way. 'Socialism' in many people's minds is just this cloudy amorphous notion that can easily mean anything to anyone. And apparently 'capitalism' too can mean anything.

For the record, you can see our definition of socialism in the Declaration of Principles, on page 23 of this issue, or on the website here ([bit.ly/3Umo2Fi](https://bit.ly/3Umo2Fi)). And equally for the record, here is our definition of capitalism: a system of society based on the production of wealth for sale on a market for a profit. Things that are produced for sale are called commodities. Other societies had commodities, but their economies weren't *based on* commodity production. Other societies produced things (of course they did), but those things weren't produced *primarily* for sale so they weren't commodities. Other societies had markets, but the markets weren't the *main reason* for the production.

From this clear and straightforward definition it follows that any society which is *based on* production for sale on a market is a capitalist country, regardless of what that society might say about itself, eg. North Korea, Venezuela, etc. Many other consequences can also be logically derived, including the drive for perpetual growth, the super-concentration of capital, wildly increasing inequality, the tightening



stranglehold of the rich on the machinery of power and propaganda, national and world wars, and global environmental devastation. Without that core definition, the architecture of economics falls apart into a miasma of vagueness and a tendency to discuss each issue in isolation, as if it was unrelated to the others.

An example of this kind of vagueness was evident in a recent Novara Media video ([bit.ly/3TkQJBo](https://bit.ly/3TkQJBo)) where Aaron Bastani, author of *Fully Automated Luxury Communism* (reviewed here – [bit.ly/3UIGI8m](https://bit.ly/3UIGI8m)) and sporting a funky Marx™ t-shirt, interviewed hip street economist Gary Stevenson, whose own YouTube channel Gary's Economics ([bit.ly/3tdDtE8](https://bit.ly/3tdDtE8)) has been getting a lot of favourable attention lately, including from mainstream media.

Stevenson is a likeable, articulate and clearly passionate man who, having previously made a pile as a former top Citibank trader, is now on a mission to explain to 'ordinary working-class people' why it is that they are getting poorer while the rich are getting richer, and that, contrary to what they themselves pontificate about, 'economics experts' in universities and in the media don't know or indeed care why this is. His jargon-free and swear-word rich elucidations of interest rates, inflation, gilt trading and national deficits feel like a breath of fresh air. He is motivated by an obviously sincere conviction that the poor are allowing themselves to be impoverished mainly because they don't understand how economics works, which to an extent is self-evidently true, even if his trader's take on it is not the same as ours.

One of his arguments is that governments make a fatal mistake simply handing money to the rich without having any means to tax it back again. This is a rather more sophisticated argument than the morally-motivated populist Tax-the-Rich agenda we've seen from groups like Occupy or individuals like US Democrat

Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez. He's quite right to point out that governments in general struggle to get money back from the rich through tax. Indeed that's why governments rely largely on stealth-taxing the rich indirectly through the wages they pay to workers. He wants to tax them directly, though, because even though some flight of capital might occur, landed assets don't move, and those assets can be taxed regardless of who owns them. Would the working class benefit if the state taxed the rich a lot more? In the short term perhaps in some ways through more public spending, but not in any way that would significantly transform their lot in life as wage slaves. And the rich would fight such taxes with every influence they can muster, because quite apart from financial considerations, big taxes make for a big state and they don't want a state that's rich and powerful enough to keep siphoning off their profits and interfering with their dodgy dealings.

So what's the vagueness referred to earlier? Bastani, possibly somewhat overwhelmed by Stevenson's charisma and fast-talking economic chops, seemed rather to have forgotten to get to the nub of what, for a Marxist, the conversation really ought to have been about. At one point Stevenson almost invites him to, when he says that, where he comes from in Ilford, people's idea of capitalism is that's it's supposed to be a fair system where hard work, thrift and merit are ultimately rewarded, and they can't understand why this doesn't seem to happen in reality. That should have been the moment to nail down definitions, to identify exactly what capitalism was, and thereby to confront the question that was waiting all along like the elephant in the room – never mind trying to fix the unfixable, Gary, why don't we talk about superseding the capitalist system itself, and having a society with no rich and poor, and no inequality in the first place?

PJS

# A note to a friend

I AM rather hoping that anyone reading this article does not share the views contained within, at least at the outset. If they do, then perhaps they might be persuaded to take a different, and perhaps more challenging, view of how society could be organised. So, with this in mind, whether you are inclined to vote Conservative, SNP, Labour, Green, Liberal or indeed any party that believes that capitalism can be made to work in the interests of people and society, then I wish to share my thoughts with you as a friend, a fellow human being and someone who, if we met by chance, would chat about our families, interests and worries in much the same manner as most friends do.

Friends, at least close friends, tend to share problems – the concern I feel at the moment (and it is increasing year on year) is that I am beginning to lose hope for humanity and society in general. It is rather a ‘dangerous’ state of mind to share with others as they tend to immediately categorise you as a depressive or ‘miserable’ or the new media moniker ‘doomer’ and, to be frank, they probably feel uncomfortable in your company – and who can blame them? Often, and this phrase is conveniently trotted out, they say ‘you’ve got to have hope or what’s the point of living?’. Well, I absolutely love life, but that’s just the point – right now, I feel I am living a life of sorts but being denied the life that I, and I should say every other person in the world, including you, should be living. By most standards my life (or existence) is comfortable enough so perhaps you might think I should be thankful for what I have, but thankful to whom? Society in the past (at least since agrarian times) has allowed those in power – I guess by dint of wealth, armies and the power of religious doctrines – to gain control over the majority of people. The form of society has, to some extent, changed, but this still holds true: in fact, now far fewer powerful and wealthy individuals control the entire world society. Incidentally, and I felt this was a good time to mention this, those that are ‘controlled’ and who are forced by dint of circumstance to obey society’s rules are referred to as ‘workers’ a bit like an insect colony and clearly indicating that another (much smaller) group of people are not ‘workers’ – why should that be? Why do not all human beings cooperate for the general well-being of society as a whole? Yes, work

will have to be done obviously, but people could be doctors, artists or scientists as well as other useful pursuits, but they would be called ‘people’, not ‘workers’.

So why am I feeling a loss of hope? Well, and I hope this doesn’t make me sound too arrogant, but I genuinely believe I know the answer (and I should point out that I am not for one minute claiming that this was my idea) – in fact, there are others that share these ideas for a solution but, as I mentioned, I want to share them with you and not them. But, being confident that you have the answer doesn’t mean that others will agree with you – on the contrary, when I have discussed these ideas, even with people close to me, they can get very agitated even aggressive at times. To be fair, very few people are comfortable with change and when one suggests that the awful things that are hardwired into current society (or to be specific capitalism) could become a thing of the past, they give you a look, either of pity or they immediately spring to defend our current way of living, because not to do so means discarding a lifetime of conditioned thought, whether through schooling, media or by indoctrination through the workplace and clearly they are uncomfortable with this prospect.

Another reaction – when the person says ‘Oh, that’s utopia or just pie in the sky’ is quite odd really, particularly when, on occasion, the very same person will agree that warfare, starvation and homelessness (to name just a few of capitalism’s ills) are dreadful, but still vigorously defend the very system that spawns such abominations. In fact, in the most recent copy of *Resurgence*, Jonathan Porritt stated that for society to change entirely (ie a new world order) was, to quote, ‘Cloud cuckoo land’. Well, for what it’s worth, my opinion is that to think that capitalism can be made to work is cloud cuckoo land on steroids.

Before sharing my solution with you – and I use the term somewhat guardedly as the longer the car-crash that is capitalism goes on, the more difficult it will be to set a form of recovery in motion – I need to open up a little. I mentioned earlier my feelings of hopelessness and despair: I have thought about this in considerable depth and, I have to be honest, it comes down to a complete inability to understand why so many people, the vast majority actually, believe that our current system can be reformed, altered, tinkered with or

somehow adjusted and thereby be made to work in the interests of humanity, the environment and the other species with which we share the planet. To me, the problem always demands the same answer – get rid of capitalism. So why do we not dispose of it?

Well, if there is one amazing thing about capitalism, it is its astonishing ability to ‘self-reinforce’ or to put it another way, to brainwash people into thinking that it is the only game in town. It is, in my opinion, a system that defies logic in as much as it is killing the very people who, with absolute enthusiasm, support and nourish it.

Please allow me to share some examples of things that send me head into my hands and question my sanity ...

In July, BBC news reported that America’s Joe Biden flew to Saudi Arabia to persuade Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to produce more oil. This news item followed an extreme and ‘unprecedented’ weather warning which, with temperatures expected to exceed 40°C in the UK, will lead to many deaths as people are unable to cope with the heat. Scientists tell us (and have been doing so for years) it is a direct result of the burning of fossil fuels. I can honestly say that not a day goes by when the BBC news does not contain an item which, in any sane society, would give rise to immediate and serious concern and trigger action to address the consequences (often major climate-related issues), and that is not then followed by some item of trivia such as a ‘celebrity’ divorce case for example; both are given equal weight and often the ‘divorce case’ more. This was exactly what happened on the Today programme on July 12th, when Sir James Bevan, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency stated on air that ‘the biodiversity crisis joins the climate crisis as an existential threat to our survival ...’. This was followed by coverage of back-stabbing Tory tales as the candidates began the fiasco of bad-mouthing their opponents in the race for leadership of the party, none of whom has made any commitment to addressing the climate or any other existential threat. Incidentally, the biodiversity issue was not mentioned again that day and I could not find it on the BBC website – obviously not that important.

The subject of mental health has, however, over the last few years, occupied regular coverage in the media. As someone in my mid-sixties, I don’t remember this





at all in the past – one would hear about people suffering with mental illness, but certainly not at the level it seems to be happening now. The young seem to be particularly badly affected, and who can blame them? I have to be honest here and admit to really struggling with this myself, to the extent that on occasions sleep becomes a welcome escape from the world and the idea of waking up becomes less and less appealing. Some have suggested that I might be suffering from depression; I am utterly convinced that this is not the case, although I do feel despair, anger and an absolute feeling of helplessness at having to bear witness to the horrific destruction of our very means of survival as a species that is being wrought day in, day out when, so easily, it could all be changed; it doesn't even need a violent revolution – just a simple understanding and belief by the majority of the world's population that capitalism needs to be ended. But it seems my feelings of being alone, apart from a very small number of other people who share these views, continue to feed the sense that perhaps I have been unfortunate enough to have been born into a species incapable of organising itself in a manner that does not put profit and the power of a tiny group before its own well-being – let alone that of the environment.

Maybe I'm being over-sensitive, maybe I should share that sense of confidence and optimism voiced by some that somehow it will all be fine – but I don't, even leaving aside the awful spectre of climate breakdown now playing out before our very eyes alongside whether someone should have had a party or not. Should a society be comfortable with homelessness, extreme poverty or the plundering of the Earth's resources in the pursuit of profit? Indeed, can any society call itself 'civilised' if it needs charitable organisations set up to address these issues? Most of us, I imagine, feel that subtle sense of personal guilt, usually reinforced by the sad and plaintive tone of voice employed by the 'celebrity', when asked on the Radio 4 Appeal to give a fiver for some poor child to help give it education/medicine/water/clothes – it's not dissimilar to our religious leaders (who are also given a platform on the BBC) whose 'Thought for the day' usually points out that 'we' are responsible (personally that is) for various destructive ills, and that by believing in the supernatural these ills will miraculously disappear. There's never a mention of what is actually causing all these awful things to happen, and thus, once more, to the listening public it becomes the 'norm' and 'human nature'.

I realise that by sharing these thoughts,

unlike in a conversation, a reply cannot be given. I apologise for that and in all honesty, I want someone to give me a reason to have hope when all the evidence I see around me incontrovertibly confirms anything but a hopeful outlook. I expect you are thinking 'but what about all the people who are doing good things?' or 'change has to come slowly and we can only do what we can in our own small way' – when I hear these sentiments again and again (and I have for the last 50 years), I do wonder why I bother trying to suggest that a new world order could be created almost immediately; a society where there are no leaders, no money and where all produce, whether food, clothes, houses, medicine, infrastructure, furniture and all other things produced by human effort are made freely available to those that need them, and are of a standard that will last and be of the best that the designer and maker can produce, and as a result be proud of. Just imagine a society when money, an 'economy', profit and everlasting 'growth' were things of the past – can you imagine this? If profit was no longer a motive (or to be more accurate an essential force) driving the creative species that is our human race then, we could, with absolute certainty, make these things history which, in time, we as caring people would shudder to think ever existed (see next page).

## Warfare

There would no longer be 'countries' to fight over, or more specifically the wealth or trade routes contained within their borders. Instead, there would be different regions where people chose to live, happy with their links to the land and proud of the knowledge and skills particular to that place. Neither would they or anyone else be forced into killing their fellow humans in the interest of a money class or 'for their country'.

## Slavery (yes, it does still exist)

Who would feel the need to force someone to travel miles to work for some criminal employer if 'employment' ceased to exist? All of us would work by sharing more menial work with other personal skills that we felt best able to do to contribute to the well-being of society as a whole.

## Hunger

Ask yourself why people are hungry now in this society. Is there enough food to feed all people – yes. So why do they starve then? The simple two answers are:

1. Farmers do not grow food for people to eat. Before you get defensive here, I remember as a child seeing reports of heaps of cauliflowers at the side of fields being covered with kerosene to make them inedible. There had been a glut and so they had been dumped as they could not be sold at a profit, and so people had started helping themselves. Remember, profit comes before hungry people. There have been countless similar occurrences since – pigs recently.
2. Starving people can't afford food. If food was produced for people to eat, no one need go without. It would be wonderful if farmers grew food for people to eat but they don't, they grow food for profit- even the organic vegetables at the 'farmer's markets'.

## Homelessness

Homes would cease to be investments

or stand empty next to people begging on the streets. There would be no need for poorly designed houses crammed cheek by jowl to make the most profit out of a small, often unsuitable space and no need to fell beautiful trees to make room for the last 'executive' house. Would everyone want a palace? Well, would you? Would you not feel a little odd having a place with 20 bedrooms, 6 bathrooms and 4 kitchens? Would such a 'house' be better suited for those who desire a more communal life? Perhaps artists, or others with a shared interest. Anyway, think of all the housework you would have to do. After all, servants would also be a thing of the past.

## Species decline and climate breakdown

It is true that ridding society of the dreadful legacies of Capitalism and the profit motive would, in some cases, be impossible. Extinct creatures cannot be brought back, rainforests or glaciers cannot be replaced, but one could reasonably hope for some sort of recovery; there would no longer be the need to put profit before the environment (which happens now). No more would the 'economy' take preference over acres and acres of ancient woodland to shave a few minutes off a train journey and to provide jobs. Goods would be made to last and not to fail and thus massively reduce waste – possibly entirely.

## Crime

It is unlikely that in any form of society anti-social behaviour would cease to exist entirely, but I would suggest that the vast proportion of 'criminal acts' involve property or the taking of someone's money in one form or another, eg scamming, people trafficking, burglary, fraud, poaching would cease. In a society where goods were made freely available

for use, how could one steal?

## Poverty

Need I say more? If there was no money there would be no poverty. The list could go on. There are so many parts of our current manner of organising society that are dreadful, whilst at the same time totally unnecessary. Humans do not have to live this way. Can we change? If the majority of people, which is how things are right now, believe that an 'economy', profit and the money system is the only way and can be reformed, and thus benefit all humanity, then please tell me how. No past reforms have worked – everything is getting worse, not better. Should we, or can we, just let an abstract idea continue to play out before our eyes while we sit and witness the destruction of beauty and the last vestiges of what makes our planet such a wonderful place? Surely we are more than that. Surely we are now at a time when we can truly cooperate with each other – all people – and share with absolute equality the wonder and wealth of the world. Are we really not able to do this? Many people have said that it will take an apocalypse to bring about world change. That does seem an awful thing to contemplate – countries on fire, trees dying in their millions, people fleeing countries desperate to find safety, people dying in their thousands of starvation, vast areas of the world becoming uninhabitable and children and civilians being blown limb from limb as their fellow human beings unleash unimaginable horrors with weapons of war. Yes, let's hope it doesn't come to that ... Well, I did say I had the answer, arrogant maybe, but it's quite simple really ... you. And if that sounds accusatory, I apologise, it isn't; it's just that I can't change society on my own.

**GLENN MORRIS**



Credit: Eric Parker via Flickr



# Can there be 'non-reformist' reforms?

THE RECENT furore caused by a Tory politician referring to migrants entering the UK as 'an invasion' has brought to the fore the whole question of borders and 'bordering'. Most people of course take for granted the idea that borders are natural and permanent, that we are all 'citizens' of a certain state, which gives us the right to live and work there and also to keep out citizens of other states who may be considered unwanted or undesirable for one reason or another. Few question the idea that a state needs to have borders, often well-policed ones, to enable such exclusion to take place. Disregard of such borders by people from outside seeking to enter provokes vexation or hostility among many and is easily used as part of a political party's agenda to court support and popularity.

## Life for migrants



Those from outside who do manage to get in by irregular means are subjected to a rigorous process of 'assessment' before a decision is taken on whether they are 'genuine' refugees or asylum seekers who might be in peril if they returned to their home country, or whether they are just 'trying it on', ie, attempting to gain entrance simply for economic or other reasons deemed non-legitimate. Anyone who has been involved with trying to assist asylum seekers knows just how precarious an existence they lead in the period of their assessment, sometimes lasting a number of years. They live a life on the edge not knowing from one day to the next whether or when they will suddenly be taken to a detention centre to face deportation to a place where their life may be in danger.

On the positive side, this prompts a significant number of people to come forward and assist these individuals in a practical way and to show them fellow feeling and humanity. And there are others who in a sense go further and seek to make the case more generally against the use and very existence of borders as a way of excluding people and putting barriers in the way of their seeking other and hopefully better lives. An example of this mainly with reference to the US was the 2021 book by Todd Miller, *Build Bridges Not Walls: A*

*Journey to a World Without Borders* (recently reviewed in this journal) and now, focused on the UK, we have *Against Borders: The Case For Abolition* by Gracie Mae Bradley and Luke De Noronha (Verso, 2022).

## Borders and the nation state

Both these books present a powerful set of arguments against the nation state, the system it supports and the suffering it causes, even if neither takes the arguments further by advocating in a specific way not just the abolition of borders and states but, as the Socialist Party does, of money, wages and the whole of the profit system. This is a pity because they are all pieces of the same intricate jigsaw that make up the capitalist system.

There are, however, points in their book in which Bradley and De Noronha seem fully conscious of this. They advocate, for example, 'transformation of the conditions to which borders are a response', 'a world without borders' without 'the false promises of race and nations', and abolition of 'the nation-state system'. They also say that they are for 'rejecting the dreary and paralysing politics of reformism'. But, at the same time their practical recommendations remain on the level of working for certain kinds of reforms within the current system, which they label 'non-reformist reforms', and for 'government policies that are less bad'. They take this 'non-reformist reform' formulation from the French writer and theorist André Gorz, who, in the 1960s, argued for 'revolutionary reformism', ie, seeing some types of reforms as being both of immediate benefit to workers and at the same time somehow laying the ground for revolutionary change (he was an early advocate of the so-called 'guaranteed basic income'). Like Gorz, they see fights for these reforms as 'trials of strength', small wins which would allow movements to build power and momentum. They state that 'the task of distinguishing these 'non-reformist reforms' from reformist ones is vital, while also, however, admitting that there can be a fine line between the two.

## 'Non-reformist' reforms

What are the 'non-reformist reforms' around border control that these writers say we should now aim for as a prelude to a world in which borders are abolished? Examples they give are: equal access for refugees and asylum seekers 'to essential goods and services' and 'labour rights and

protections' regardless of immigration status; an end to deportation for 'foreign' offenders found guilty of crimes; an end to Home Office policing of refugees and asylum seekers; fewer resources expended on immigration control. All this as a prelude to aiming for something more, a world in which everyone has the freedom to move and to stay – something which we can only applaud.

However the obvious comment that these 'non-reformist' proposals prompt is not that, perhaps with much effort, lobbying and the rest, they are impossible to achieve but that, even if they were achieved and this made a significant difference to the plight of refugees and asylum seekers, they would do nothing to address the wider imperative of abolishing the borders between nation states which the authors rightly see as controlling and defining people and fuelling nationalistic and racial divisions. Nor would they do anything to remedy the widely differing levels of access to the necessities of life that make capitalism a profoundly unequal society. What they certainly would do is take up a massive amount of time and energy on the part of those campaigning and almost certainly distract attention from the fundamental task of replacing a society dedicated to profit to one based on the satisfaction of needs. Also, though there is of course no denying that certain reforms can be beneficial to migrants and to workers generally, it is also the case that, just as one government may decide to bring them in, another may decide to revoke them and so take us back to square one.

## System change not reforms

So reforms, even if labelled 'non-reformist' (or, as some may call them, 'progressive'), cannot resolve the basic contradictions of a system organised for the benefit of a wealth-owning minority not for the majority who have to sell their energies to an employer for a wage or salary. Indeed reforms may even serve to perpetuate that system by lending it temporary respectability and acceptance in the sense that it may seem that improvements are being made and that should be enough. Of course it is not enough and it may easily make those involved in such activity lose sight of – and so actually impede – the essential socialist objective of a moneyless, leaderless world society of voluntary cooperative work, free access to all goods and services and truly democratic organisation. Why prolong the agony?

**HKM**

# Transgender issues and capitalism

THERE'S AN issue causing much aggravation in the UK, the 'issue' of transgender people. You will find it in parliament and being talked about in all corners of the country. So, what do transgender people and their supporters argue? Many put a soft-left liberal case against discrimination and for tolerance but there is also a 'gender socialist' theory, based on a part of Marx's analysis of society. This part of Marx's theory to is found in the *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, where Marx divided society into two parts, the base and superstructure; the base is the economic mode of production that creates and informs the superstructure of a society, while the latter is the social, legal and political apparatus that reinforces the mode of production while also influencing it; the base makes and changes the superstructure but the superstructure can also react on the base.

Analysis of prior modes of production and the many superstructural features arising from them implies that Marx's theory was correct: settled agriculture created patriarchy, feudalism created the divine right of kings and capitalism created individualism. None of those societies existed in isolation from one another, and every mode of production so far has retained elements of the society that it displaced. These may be primarily cosmetic features, such as the UK's constitutional monarchy, or they may be more deeply systemic, such as patriarchy. Capitalism too has incorporated superstructural features from prior societies, and just like all prior societies, it may be incapable of ending these features, indeed it may intensify them. Patriarchy has retained its power under capitalism with 88 percent of billionaires being men and 19 CEOs being men for every 1 woman; this isn't said to beg for female representation under capitalism but rather to show that capitalism perpetuates male-dominated societies just as the systems before it did.

## Gender Theory

Patriarchy is not the only legacy that capitalism retains. Gender is one such legacy, an ancient and foundational idea which we've built cultural concepts on and around. Placing these concepts on top of sex started before we can even remember. And capitalist institutions continue this extended delusion because they significantly rely on, and so encourage, gender's continued existence for the sake of economic sustainability. Under capitalism, gender is informed by the roles we undertake to produce the next generation of workers, this is called

reproductive labour. These roles can be anything from the actual act of reproduction to childcare and education; femininity under capitalism has historically been defined by the performance of the role of the primary caregiver to children, while masculinity has been defined by performing the role of both provider and protector. Capitalist gender lazily assigns people these gender roles in part due to its own apathy towards ending these prejudices but also to make working-class people enforce their own oppression under the threat of being considered unfeminine or unmasculine and thus being rejected by the mainstream culture of capitalist society. The effect of this is two-fold, to provide identity and to create the next generation of workers for the capitalist machine. Gender forces an identity on every person, which it attempts to justify by basing itself upon biological sex while imposing cultural roles and expectations that have nothing to do with genitals, chromosomes or anything remotely biological. Gender is based rather loosely on semi-plausible and simplified abstractions, i.e. men are the providers because they are stronger and women stay at home because they are less strong. This is inaccurate for several reasons: some women are stronger than some men, not all work is based on strength especially in the modern world, there's no evidence that women are naturally more able than men to raise children but rather that they're schooled into parenthood, and many more beyond those. Most gender roles are learned, forced onto young children so that they're efficient at producing and being members of the workforce. It would be more logical, efficient and empathetic to the human race as a whole to liberate ourselves from these roles and simply fulfil the roles which we wish to.

## Transgender people revolt

Many binary transgender people (those who transition from male to female or vice versa) often seem to not challenge capitalist gender at all but rather perform its stereotypical features aggressively to make themselves the gender they identify as. While on the surface this seems correct, trans people don't perform gender stereotypes to become the gender they identify as (no trans man believes that trousers make them a boy); rather they perform the stereotypes in order to be seen by capitalist society as the gender they identify as and to protect themselves from the discrimination and violence they might face if they don't fully 'pass' (succeed in being perceived) as that gender. A person who is willing to cross

the lines of socially-conditioned gender, regardless of reproductive ability and conditioning into parenthood, is revolting against ideas of womanhood and manhood as defined by involvement in reproductive labour; the transgender person undertakes the same act of revolt as the lesbians and gays of the 1960s who refused to participate in traditional reproductive labour and the women's liberation movements who refused to define themselves by their ability to reproduce.

But capitalism, as always, sets people against each other rather than acts for the good of humanity. We can see the backlash against the increased awareness of socially-constructed gender through the October 2021 BBC article '*We're being pressured into sex by some trans women*' by Catherine Lowbridge. This article was an attack on trans women, claiming that the alleged actions of a few trans women could be seen as representative of all trans women, based on a study conducted by a dubious group with only 80 online participants (Get the L out, Lesbians at Ground Zero), providing merely anecdotal evidence and including the opinions of Lily Cade, an accused rapist, who would go on to use the attention she got from the article to publish a manifesto calling for the lynching of trans women ([www.them.us/story/lily-cade-violence-terfs-bbc](http://www.them.us/story/lily-cade-violence-terfs-bbc)). In the article (which the BBC has since changed) the writer cited Lily Cade without mentioning that she is an accused rapist (despite being told this by a transgender activist), skims over the unreliable nature of the study and claims not to have talked to a transgender person for an alternative viewpoint. This biased piece of propaganda from the BBC betrays the prejudice in capitalist society against those who attempt to change its superstructure in this way and the fear that this may disrupt and change capitalism.

Every socialist who understands the composition of society should expose and oppose such prejudice, armed with the knowledge that changing just the superstructure would merely be soft-left liberalism, and that changing just the base, without disrupting prior ways of thinking, would not work; a socialist society with a capitalist mindset would collapse in on itself. Socialists are liberationists, liberationists from capitalist ideas of race, gender and sexuality because liberation is incompatible with capitalism as a system and, of course, liberationists should be socialists, to free themselves from wage slavery, gender prejudices and state power.

**SHERIFF**



# Socialists and the Left

MANY PEOPLE don't realise that not only does the Socialist Party deny being part of 'the left-wing', it actively opposes it.

During the last century capitalism saw many profound economic and political convulsions and these gave birth to countless political movements which claimed to either be able to 'fix' the system or to have transcended it in the name of socialism. For various ideological reasons many journalists, historians and other cultural commentators accepted this self-identification by such groups without considering the definition and history of socialism. The upshot was that any 'radical' movement, from the Labour Party to the Bolsheviks and from the Khmer Rouge to the Social Democrats, could call themselves socialist. The term socialist and/or communist had lost its meaning in a swamp of Orwellian double speak. Not that this was the only word to suffer such a fate, as the terms democratic, scientific, freedom, liberation, justice, equality and countless other progressive ideas were also gobbled up and spat out by capitalist culture and its ideologies.

What was left was a choice between so-called right-wing capitalism and left-wing capitalism or, in other words, no choice at all. Through all of this one organisation obstinately stayed outside of this 'mainstream' political consensus – the World Socialist Movement (WSM). It continues to be dismissed for being 'sectarian', 'impossibilist', 'elitist', 'purist' and other even less flattering names. The fact remains, however, that despite the Left's mass following and success in attaining power, both constitutionally and through violent coups, it has changed nothing and in many parts of the world has made things worse for the working class.

## Back to 1789

Anyone who thinks our opposition to the term 'left-wing' is merely semantic should remember the origins of the battle between socialists and the Left. The political designations of left and right go back to the events of the French Revolution of 1789. The French National Assembly was composed of those who supported the king (who sat on the President's right) and those who supported the revolution, who sat on the left. Ever since that time political analysts have tried to fit all ideologies into these binary categories of 'reactionary' (right) and 'progressive' (left).

From the beginning this was not a very helpful tool for understanding political

perspectives and developments as the ferocious debate between the Marxists and anarchists of the First International illustrates, since they were both supposed to be members of the left-wing. It is only recently that mainstream political commentators have started to give up on this simplistic fiction, because of the development of 'populism' and 'environmentalism', both of which refuse to fit neatly within the old categories. The WSM have long since regarded both the left and right as being merely different ways of supporting capitalism and have always opposed both.

Initially most groups calling themselves socialist shared an understanding that the concept referred to 'the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production.' Eventually some groups, unwilling perhaps to abandon capitalist features like money, authoritarian institutions and national identity etc., began to talk of reforming the current system rather than a revolutionary abolition of it. Their elevation of the state as an institution that could serve the working class instead of oppressing it was at the root of the divergence between socialists and the Left. Such was the way that the ultimate political oxymoron was conceived: 'state socialism'.

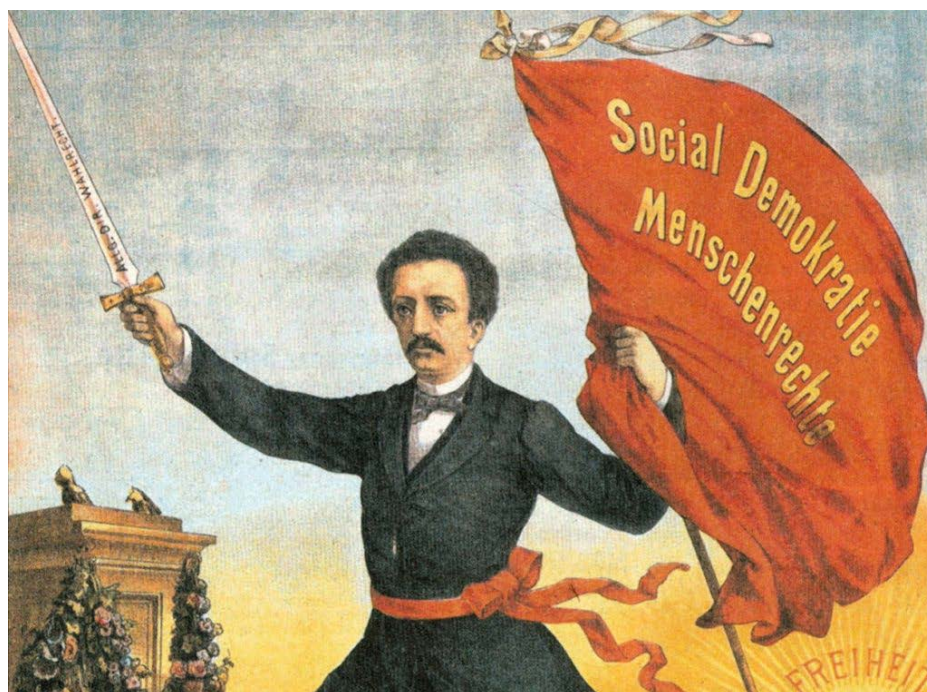
## Bismarck's 'welfare state'

The first champion of 'state socialism' was Ferdinand Lassalle, who was prominent in organising the first socialist party (Social Democratic Movement) in Germany but came to believe, in contrast to Marx, that the state was a politically neutral organisation that could

continue to exist in socialism. Ironically it was Otto Von Bismarck (German Chancellor and bitter opponent of socialism) who, after meeting Lassalle, instituted some of his ideas by creating a welfare system in Germany in the 1880s. He did this to try to stall the growing popular support for the Social Democrats.

Ever since that time the capitalist state in various countries has organised welfare systems (pensions, health care, unemployment benefit, etc.) not because they are an expression of socialism but because they are beneficial to a modern capitalist economy. However, any benefit to the working class is undermined because of the capitalist's hatred of taxation and the chronic underfunding this always causes. The same is true of the state ownership of various businesses mainly connected with infrastructure. To prevent the rise of monopolies within services and production vital to all the parts of the bourgeoisie, state ownership (nationalisation) was and still is a widespread economic necessity for many capitalist states.

The term 'public ownership' suggests that the state is politically neutral and can be associated with some form of socialism when, in fact, the very opposite is true. Those who work in the 'public sector' will be the first to tell you that their wages and conditions are always in the firing line when the frequent calls to curb public spending are heard. What further compounded the Left's misunderstanding of the political role of the state were the events unfolding in Russia in 1917.



## Lenin's state capitalism

THE COMMUNIST  
MANIFESTO

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

The *Communist Manifesto* proposed the state ownership of key industries in order to accelerate the levels of production to those required to establish socialism, but this was never understood by Marx to be socialism itself. When the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia in 1917, this was their main economic strategy to transform the country into an industrial powerhouse. Lenin announced that state ownership was 'socialist' and

argued that it represented a transitional stage to something else called 'communism'. He went further in declaring that his party's coup d'état represented a socialist revolution that had swept away capitalism. To add to the confusion he used Marx's phrase 'the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat' to justify his autocratic regime. Lenin was being dishonest since he knew that the establishment of socialism in Russia was impossible at that time and that what he was creating was state capitalism.

All the crimes and suffering caused by the Bolsheviks continued to be ideologically justified in the name of socialism. Because of the rise of the reformist Left (which had backed the financing of the First World War in Germany) socialist consciousness had already been fatally eroded, so that many of Europe's intelligentsia hailed the Russian Revolution as 'socialist'.

To this day many still believe that socialism means the state ownership of the means of production. It remains a key ideological feature among the Left, who continue to insist that it will help bring about the reform of capitalism, which will benefit the

majority (and even lead to socialism). But it's a fantasy that's detrimental to human happiness and even to the planet. Since 1914, when the Left betrayed the working class and supported the Great War which led inexorably to the Second World War and then the 'Cold War', we have witnessed the constant failure of leftist policies.

In the 21st century the working class are still producing the whole cake while having to beg the rich for a few crumbs. The state exists to prevent the working class from accessing the product of its own labour. This organised theft is legitimised by governments, both left and right, who go through the motions of democracy insofar as this is tolerated by their capitalist masters (as long as their interests are not threatened). The left put on their suits and support business and war to further their political careers whilst leading the world to catastrophe.

Socialists will continue to attack the delusional cul-de-sac of reformism which has failed so miserably, and state capitalism, which usually leads to the gulag.

WEZ

## Cooking the Books

## Who creates wealth?

'Miners put faith in filters to prevent further dam disasters' read a headline in the business section of the *Times* (1 November). You might think that this was an article about mineworkers being reassured that measures were in place to lessen the risk of them being drowned in some mining disaster. But you would be wrong. If you read on, it's about measures being taken by 'two of the world's biggest mining groups', BHP and Rio Tinto.

This distortion of the word 'miner' to mean mining companies and even the tycoons, oligarchs and other multi-billionaires who own them (see 'world's richest miners- bit.ly/3Edg5wK) is standard practice on business pages. Similarly engineering companies are referred to as 'metal bashers' (bit.ly/3tdWXbB). But the owners of these companies don't work in a copper mine and don't operate a machine-tool. They exploit those who do, by turning into profits what their employees produce over and above the value of their wages.

Such misuse of language is not confined to the business pages. It is also common amongst defenders of capitalism. The short-lived prime minister, Truss, declaimed to the Tory conference:

'We believe in making it easier for our wealth creators, doers and makers to get

things done' (*Daily Mirror*, 1 October).

She was justifying the abolition of the highest rate of income tax and the lifting of the cap on bankers' bonuses. Apparently, bankers and other rich people 'create wealth'. They are certainly, in some cases, 'doers' (though not of anything useful from the point of view of human survival) but they are not 'makers' of anything and they don't create any wealth.

So, let's go back to basics. What is wealth and how is it created? Wealth is anything that is useful to humans. Some wealth such as the light and warmth from the Sun is a free 'gift of Nature' but most wealth has to be produced by human activity, by humans exercising their mental and physical energy. The materials on which humans work are, like the Sun's rays, provided by nature. New wealth is 'created' when humans work to fashion or refashion materials that originally came from nature into something useful to them. Doing this is 'production'.

Some of the materials humans work on are extracted directly from nature, as by copper or zinc miners; other materials worked on have already been transformed into wealth, as the pieces of metal that engineering workers alter or assemble.

The work of creating new wealth is not

just physical. Mining is not only the work of physically extracting materials from the ground; engineering is not only changing pieces of metal into something else. Like all work, these also involve planning and designing the best way to do the physical work. All work involves both physical and mental activity, at both the production unit and the individual level. There is no way that wealth can be created other than by humans working on materials that originally came from nature.

Defenders of capitalism confuse wealth with the monetary value that wealth assumes under capitalism and so assume that anybody who makes a profit is 'creating wealth'. This has a certain perverse logic from their point of view since capitalism is not a rational system geared to creating wealth to satisfy people's needs. Its aim is to create monetary profits.

So, let's rephrase the ephemeral Truss's words: 'We believe in making it easier for our profit-seekers to make profits'. Socialists, on the other hand, believe in making it possible for the wealth creators to make useful things to directly satisfy people's needs. This is possible only on the basis of the common ownership and democratic control by society of the materials, natural and industrial, for creating wealth.



# Mindsets and Misinterpretations



Credit: BBC

QUESTIONING WHAT we hear and see in the news and asking why events are presented to us in the way they are is a worthy response when so much of the mass media deliberately or unwittingly supports the interests of the minority who own it. But there's a big difference between reasonable scepticism and rejecting what must have happened because it doesn't fit with a distorted worldview. The latter was the subject of an edition of *Panorama* titled *Disaster Deniers: Hunting The Trolls* (BBC One), presented by Marianna Spring, the BBC's 'Disinformation Correspondent'. Frustratingly, watching the documentary is like catching highlights of a longer, better programme. Half an hour wasn't enough to comprehensively cover the issue of people who broadcast their views that some of the most shocking tragedies of recent years didn't take place.

Alongside interviews with researchers and survivors of terrorist attacks, the programme focuses on two conspiracy theorists: Alex Jones and Richard Hall. Hot-headed Alex Jones owns the far-right Infowars website, and on his radio show claimed that the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in America didn't really happen. His view was that the massacre was faked by the authorities to create a scenario that would push people to want stricter laws about gun ownership. This fitted in with his overall perspective that there's a secret elite acting to exert more control over people. He was subsequently sued for defamation by families of the victims, who won their case in court. A red-faced Jones ended up accepting that the attack took place and faced paying out almost a billion dollars, leading Infowars' parent company to file for

bankruptcy. In Britain, shifty Richard Hall publishes books and DVDs and posts online to promote his view that the bombing of the Manchester Arena in 2017 didn't occur. The documentary doesn't examine whatever reasons he has for this belief, although a shadowy elite is probably involved. He's somehow decided that footage of the bombing shows 'crisis actors' who have all conspired to act out a tragedy and its continuing after-effects. Part of his approach has been to seek out and spy on survivors of the attack with the intention of proving they have faked their injuries.

Although both Jones and Hall's views on the incidents are, at the very least, eccentric, this doesn't mean that they are shared by just a handful of weirdos. Conspiracy theories used to be a fringe interest, but now they are more mainstream, according to Sasha Havlicek of the Institute for Strategic Dialogue think-tank. The programme quotes findings from a survey carried out by King's College in London on the prevalence of alternative views about what's in the news. It found that as many as one in seven people doubt that incidents such as the Manchester Arena bombing or the 2017 Westminster Bridge killings took place. Almost one in five people surveyed say that survivors of these attacks haven't been truthful about what happened. Spring interviews some of the victims who have received distressing and abusive messages from people they don't know accusing them of being 'traitors' and part of a conspiracy.

The ease of using social media to throw around abuse anonymously is one of the less attractive consequences of the internet age, with its near-limitless opportunities to have our say. Opinions and analysis can be published online

without having to adhere to the editorial policy of a traditional news outlet with its own agenda. But because this is happening in capitalism, news and views are a market, and money can motivate some people to use their stance to build a brand and attract consumers. The most bizarre opinions can get the most traction, according to one of the interviewees on the programme. The debate then gets played out online in echo-chamber web forums and social media. According to Sasha Havlicek, 'as we've seen the rise of these kinds of internet subcultures we have at the same time seen the plummeting of trust in institutions, of trust in mainstream media and we've actually seen a complete decrease in support for democracy as a concept'. Her argument is that democracy relies on 'the idea of shared reality', which has been undermined by the polarisation between fringe theories and mainstream explanations. Declining faith in capitalism's structures would be welcomed, but the conspiracy theorists' mistrust has gone astray from reasoned criticism into paranoia and narrow individualism. And to reach that point they have to selectively misinterpret the evidence to match their mindset.

Unfortunately, the documentary doesn't explore further how society's divisions fuel conspiracy theories or the tragic events which prompt them. While the BBC is often critical of the effects of capitalism, it wouldn't promote the idea that the capitalist system itself is ultimately at fault. As this programme was produced by the BBC's own 'Disinformation Correspondent', it would naturally keep the explanations to within BBC limits.

**MIKE FOSTER**

## Marxist Historians (only)



### The British Marxist Historians.

By Harvey J. Kaye, Zed Books, 2022

This is an update to a book first published in 1984. It's a study of an influential group of academic historians, but there are wider lessons to be learned. They were mainly active in the second half of the twentieth century. Kaye's survey is mainly confined to the following writers and books.

Maurice Dobb in *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* (1946) wrote on the transition from feudalism to capitalism. For Dobb the 'bourgeois revolution' of the seventeenth century provided the necessary foundation for the later Industrial Revolution. Dobb emphasised the role of class struggle in this process.

Rodney Hilton focussed on feudalism and the English peasantry. For instance, in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 there emerged a 'positive class consciousness' which 'was initiated from within peasant society.' Hilton argued that 'one of the most important if intangible legacies of mediaeval peasants to the modern world is the concept of a freeman, owing no obligation, not even deference, to an overlord' (*Bond Men Made Free*, 1973).

Christopher Hill wrote extensively on the English Revolution of the seventeenth century, though probably his best work is *Reformation to Industrial Revolution: A Social and Economic History of Britain, 1530-1780*, (1969). The English Revolution was 'the world turned upside down'. In Hill's account: 'Levellers called for political democracy, Diggers for communism, Ranters for free love. Others called in question the common law, the Bible, the existence of heaven and hell, God and the devil' (*John Bunyan and the English Revolution*, 1979).

Eric Hobsbawm wrote on workers,

peasants and world history. *Industry and Empire* (1969) is a commercially successful social and economic history of Britain from 1750 to the 1960s. His examination of the development of the modern world, what he called 'the long nineteenth century', is divided into three phases: *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848* (1962), *The Age of Capital, 1848-1875*, (1975), and *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914* (1987). These books probably made Hobsbawm Britain's most famous 'Marxist' and historian.

E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) is one of the biggest selling non-fiction books in Britain. It is still widely used as a school and university textbook. His statement on the role of the historian was Thompson's contribution to an understanding of class:

'I am seeking to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the 'obsolete' hand-loom weaver, the 'utopian' artisan... from the enormous condescension of posterity. Their crafts and traditions may have been backward-looking. Their communitarian ideals may have been fantasies. Their insurrectionary conspiracies may have been foolhardy. But they lived through these times of acute social disturbance and we did not. Their aspirations were valid in terms of their own experience; and if they were casualties of history, they remain, condemned in their own lives, as casualties.'

In *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (1955) Thompson defended what he called 'Morrisian-Marxism'. According to Kaye, this is 'a Marxism transformed by the concerns and values represented in the work of William Morris'. *The Poverty of Theory* (1978) is Thompson's attack on the then growing popularity of interpreting Marxism as a form of structuralism.

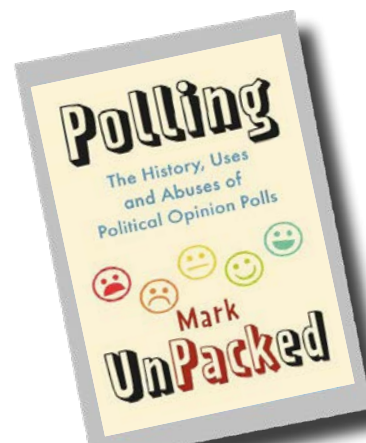
Kaye pulls together a useful survey of some key Marxist historians and how they grappled with Marxism and history. The trouble was, and remains, their politics. Their collective contribution as historians has been called 'history from the bottom up', but their politics can be termed 'politics from the top down', and it calls into question their understanding of Marxism. All the above historians were at one time members of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB).

After the suppression of the uprising in Hungary by the Russian military in 1956 all the above resigned from the CPGB – except Hobsbawm and Dobb. Hobsbawm remained in the CPGB until its break-up in 1991. As a cheerleader for the CPGB and the Russian empire, Hobsbawm defended the leading role of the party advocated by Lenin, and dismissed the view that the emancipation of the working class

had to be the work of the working class itself – the cornerstone of any Marxian politics. Thompson later tried to justify his CPGB membership by claiming it was part of a 'Popular Front' against fascism. But he did not appreciate that his CPGB membership would lend legitimacy to Stalin's reign of terror. His concern for the lives of ordinary workers did not extend to the working class in Russia, Eastern Europe and elsewhere. Later in life, after Thompson had joined the Labour Party, he rebuffed an approach by the Socialist Party to discuss 'Morrisian-Marxism'.

LEW

## Polls apart?



### Polling Unpacked.

By Mark Pack.  
Reaktion Books. 2022.

This is written by the founder of PollBase and traces the history of opinion polls from various 'straw polls' in the nineteenth century that were conducted to test public opinion, to the development of what we now know as modern opinion polling. This was pioneered by the US *Literary Digest* in the early twentieth century, before the game-changing entrance of George Gallup into the sphere, who recognized that the total number of people polled was far less important than how representative these people were.

Opinion polls – as developed over recent decades – have a somewhat mixed reputation, though tend to be more accurate than people often think, at least when the margin for error (typically +/- 3 percent) is taken into account. And of course, sometimes voting systems – especially First Past The Post (FPTP) – throw up vagaries of their own. Trump won the US presidency in 2016 even though he lost the popular vote by a very similar margin to that predicted by the polls, as in 1951 and February 1974 the party with the



most votes in the UK did not get the most seats and form the government, which means that even when voting intention polls are broadly right they can sometimes appear 'wrong'.

But some polling does genuinely go awry, including when Cameron secured a narrow overall Tory majority in 2015 when the polls had predicted a dead heat with Labour and then with the underestimation of the Labour vote in 2017. There are a number of reasons for polling errors and they can be complex, including the wording of key questions, which can provide startlingly differing results based on the smallest nuances (polling on single issues rather than overall voting intention is notoriously problematic for this reason alone). Arguably the most common voting intention issue, however, is the difficulty of getting accurate, weighted national samples when the demographics of society are changing fast. There are also significant allied issues like some types of voters becoming more inclined to turn out (or not) than others, some being disproportionately reluctant to give their real voting intention to pollsters saying 'don't know' or 'won't say' instead, differential willingness among particular party supporters to even participate in polls in the first place, and people being sampled in polls who are not actually on the electoral register for various reasons. Significant polling errors are usually caused not by one factor like this, but by more than one of them working in concert to skew the result.

A new type of polling has recently arisen to address some of these issues for FPTP elections called Multi-level Regression with Poststratification (MRP). This aims to generate constituency-by-constituency predictions from a national poll sample that normally wouldn't be considered large enough for these purposes. It is based on demographic information in particular seats being used as the basis for projecting a result informed by what the national sample has been indicating about certain types of voters and their probability of voting in particular ways (eg, white men over 65, having say, a 55 percent probability of voting Conservative). Its track record so far – both in 2017 and 2019 in the UK – has been pretty good, including YouGov's detailed MRP prediction of parts of the Red Wall going Blue, but it is early days.

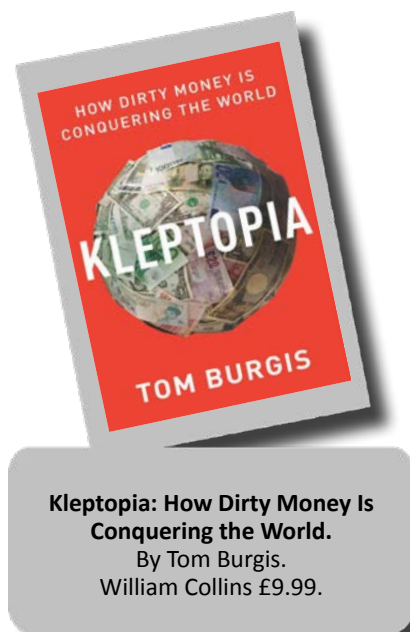
Pack is clearly an expert and does a good job at unpacking all this (pun intended). How useful polls are is another issue of course, and Pack looks at this too. Echo chambers can have a particular but limited use and many argue that polling is given far too much prominence. There can also be a commercial aspect and a distorting element to polling, especially in the United States where skewed 'paid for' polling by political

parties and groups is more common. In some countries, polling is banned completely during election campaigns lest it be deemed to influence the result.

Will opinion polling have a use of sorts in socialism? Possibly, though direct democracy and decision-making is likely to feature much more heavily and so the need for polls may well lessen. And hopefully, to paraphrase the late Tony Benn, we will be busy creating signposts rather than following proverbial weather vanes.

DAP

## Material Interests



Tom Burgis is an investigative journalist at the Financial Times. Here he provides a detailed account, backed up by meticulous referencing (often via interviews), of how some extremely rich and powerful people obtain their wealth and then move it around to ensure secrecy and keep it away from the prying eyes of tax collectors and supposed regulatory agencies.

Much of the action is connected to Kazakhstan, a former republic of the USSR, which became a base of private capitalism, run by oligarchs. Until recently, the president was the authoritarian Nursultan Nazarbayev, formerly boss of the 'Communist' Party. The country has lots of natural resources (oil, uranium, copper, chromium, etc), and much of this is owned by just three capitalists, referred to here as 'the Trio'. They set up the Eurasian Natural Resources Corporation (ENRC), with a listing on the London Stock Exchange and an office in London, though that was later transferred to Luxembourg when regulators started to take too close a look. ENRC is officially a public company, but in practice is controlled by the Trio, who use it to move to the West the profit they

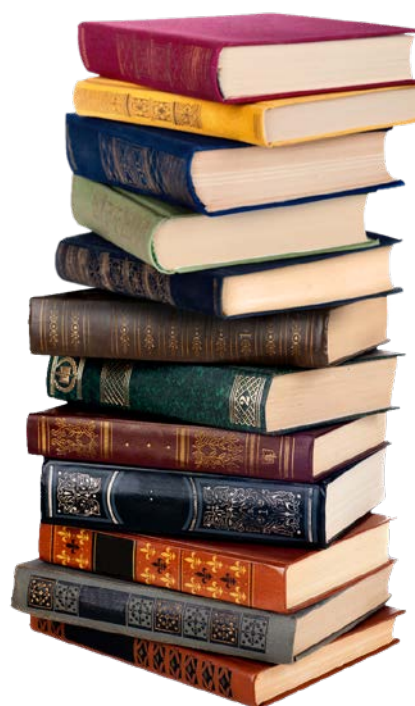
make from exploiting Kazakhstani workers.

Their interests extend to Africa too. In Zimbabwe the resources are platinum, gold and diamonds, while Congo has vast reserves of copper. In 2009, ENRC bought a Zimbabwean mining company for nearly \$1bn. Africa is attractive to investors in mining and raw materials: in other parts of the world, ownership of land and its resources are pretty much tied up, but in Africa they are often available to anyone with the right contacts and appropriate amounts of money. Even Robert Mugabe's departure from power in 2017 had little impact on the tycoons.

Burgis also goes into detail about the armies of lawyers, private detectives and PR people who defend the ultra-rich and their reputations. He himself received a letter from a law firm accusing him of corruption and asking him to hand over details of the 'third parties' who had allegedly paid him to make his accusations. Various other people get a mention too: Tony Blair was a consultant to Nazarbayev for a while, Nazarbayev's son-in-law bought a mansion from Prince Andrew, Donald Trump's property empire was a convenient way of recycling money. More generally, real estate is an effective way of laundering wealth because of the secrecy involved.

Burgis has no illusions about what is going on: 'Around the world, corruption has become the primary mechanism by which power functions' and the kleptocrats aim 'to seize power through fear and the force of money, and then to privatise that power.' Maybe this kind of thing has become, as the book says at its close, 'normal business', but capitalism of all forms is based on power and the influence of wealth.

PB



# Vietnam – again?

IF ONE war can be more depraved and dehumanising than another, then only in these terms is there a winner in Vietnam. For more than thirty years, virtually non-stop, Vietnam has been ravaged by the modern military hardware of rival armies. Back in 1941 the Japanese; then the British, then the French, the Vietnamese themselves, and finally the Americans. The wholesale slaughter and destruction, and the indifference to human suffering has been common to them all. The lying and hypocrisy of the politicians on all sides has been outstripped only by their gory deeds.



Credit: AP

In the name of peace, the war steadily escalated for eight years. In the name of freedom, brutal dictators were installed and people whose "freedom" was denied burned themselves alive in protest. In the name of democracy, elections were suspended. In the name of liberation, many hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children have been blown to pieces or burned alive with napalm. On the ideological pretence of stemming "communism" every conceivable horror and outrage has been practised. Regardless of how many Vietnamese were killed in the process, they had to be "saved". The utter ruthlessness of governments purporting to be champions of the "free" world could hardly be surpassed by those of police-state dictatorships.

America has suffered the humiliation of having to bring members of her armed forces to trial, accused of atrocities against the people they were supposed to be defending, while those atrocities were condoned by the then deputy leader of the British Labour government. We have witnessed the spectacle of returning military personnel denouncing the war and their own brutal conduct. The American Army has had to face the desertion of tens of thousands of its men, while the scale of drug-taking was so vast among those who remained in the war, it

had to be virtually ignored.

There have been massive demonstrations against the war, throughout America's largest cities, with the added irony that the same coercive State apparatus which carried on the war was frequently used against the demonstrators. In Britain, as in other parts of the world, there were also demonstrations. The British "left" which organised the protests here were not opposed to the war as such, but were anti-America, and favoured a Northern victory. They dragged out all the anti-working-class arguments about national independence and home-rule to justify their support for the bloody butchers on the other side.

*(Socialist Standard, December 1972)*

## A day in the life of a Royal Mail worker

**4.00am.** Had to get up an hour earlier this morning. Car failed its MOT and can't afford repair costs. Will have to cycle to work instead.

**4.30am.** Just enough time for tea and toast.

**5.00am.** Set off for work. Strong wind and rain slowing me down.

**6.15am.** Arrived at work 15 minutes late. Drenched! Manager not happy. Told I have to work through my tea break to make up time. Arsehole!!

**10.00am.** Really busy morning. Clothes almost dry now. Gasping for a cuppa.

**12.30pm.** At last. Time for lunch. Can't afford snack van today. Not due to get paid until end of month. Packet of crisps and nice hot cuppa. Still hungry.

**2.30pm.** Regular shift finished, but staying on for a couple of hours overtime. Bills, bills, bills.

**4.30pm.** Extra 2 hours at time and third. Help pay towards car repairs.

**6.00pm.** Home at last. Note from Shirley on table ... "Dinner in fridge .... cheese sandwich and cup-a-soup ... don't overfill the kettle Joe".

**7.00pm.** Fell asleep. Absolutely dead-beat.

**8.00pm.** Fancied a hot bath, but too expensive. Quick shower instead. Watched TV for an hour. Can't remember what was on.

**9.00pm.** Early night. Up sharpish again tomorrow. Zzzzzzz.

**Next day, 5.00am ...** About to set off for work again. Bike has a flat tyre. Totally deflated. Getting too old for all this shit!





# World Socialist Movement Online Meetings

We have shifted our general discussion meetings from Discord to Zoom. To connect to a Zoom meeting, enter <https://zoom.us/j/7421974305> in your browser. Then follow instructions on screen and wait to be admitted to the meeting.

## DECEMBER 2022 EVENTS

World Socialist Movement  
online meetings

**Sundays at 19.30 (IST) Discord**

Weekly WSP (India) meeting

**Sunday 18 December 11.00 GMT Zoom**

**Central Branch Meeting**

**Friday 2 December 19.30 GMT Zoom**

**Did You See the News?**

Host: Dougie Mclellan

**Friday 9 December 19.30 GMT Zoom**

**Class**

Speaker: Paul Bennett

In *Sapiens*, Yuval Noah Harari states that a hard-working factory hand who reinvests part of their income in the stock market is a capitalist. Is this true, or is it rather a matter of whether a person can live well without having to sell their labour power? We will look at various approaches to class and argue that the socialist account is the most useful.



**Friday 16 December 19.30 GMT Zoom**

**Spycatcher**

Speaker: Howard Moss

What kind of lengths do government agencies go to track the activities of organisations they may consider 'subversive'? Is the Socialist Party such an organisation in their eyes? And if so is it likely or possible that over the years, and even today, there have been various kinds of spying or infiltration by the Security Services. Or is it all just myth, imagination? A recent soberly researched book suggests not.

**Socialist Party Physical Meetings**

**LONDON**

**Saturday 17 December 2pm**

**Branch meeting followed by social**

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).

**Yorkshire:** New branch meets monthly either on Zoom or physical meetings.

Further information:  
[fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk)

## Declaration of Principles

*This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.*

### **Object**

**The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.**

### **Declaration of Principles**

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e. land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last

class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

# The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

A GROUP of us recently did some leafleting in my part of the world. We were putting a leaflet through people's doors entitled 'A Different Way of Looking at Things'. It suggested that, though the word 'socialism' might conjure up ideas the recipients did not share, if they took up the leaflet's invitation to click on its QR code and look at the Socialist Party's website, they might find the ideas we were putting across sensible and attractive.

At one house, just as I was about to put a leaflet through the letter box, an elderly man came out and took the leaflet from me. He glanced at it and said: 'The trouble with you lot is that all you see is what's bad, you just don't see the good things. You don't see how much things have improved since I was a kid. You don't know how lucky you are'. I told him I understood what he was saying but thought it would still be useful for him to read the leaflet and, if he could, to look at the website. But going on to the next house, what he had said started to give me food for thought, since I couldn't deny that at a very basic level he was right. Most people's standard of living is definitely higher than it was, say, in the 1930s, 40s or 50s. Most people have a lot more of the everyday things that make life more comfortable now compared to then.

## The Good

And there have been a lot of what might be called 'social' improvements too. I'd recently read, for example, that the Championship football team, Watford, had players of 10 different nationalities in their team. It's surely a step forward for people from so many different backgrounds to be cooperating as a team and idolised by the team's largely British supporters. I'd also just listened to an episode of 'Desert Island Discs' with 'The Repair Shop' man, Jay Blades, talking movingly about the open, unabated and taken-for-granted racism he suffered as a boy – something dramatically less in evidence now. Again a famous footballer has recently been on trial for allegedly exercising 'coercive control' over his partner, a trial that would have been unimaginable in the 40s, 50s or 60s. And, just recently too, ecclesiastical child abuse from the 1960s and 70s has been exposed rather than ignored as it would have been in the past. And there is today, as never in the early lives of many receiving our leaflet, widespread and open coverage of LGBT matters. Who

could have imagined all these things?

And yet, and yet ... Well, there are also so many things which are not right in the world around us and which could not exist in the world of common ownership and free access that socialists advocate and want to see.

## The Bad

In Britain today, for example, according to a recent Money Advice Trust report, people are skipping meals 'just to keep the lights on', and around 20 percent of adults, or 10.8m people, are behind on one or more household bills. A survey by Opinium found that 5.6m people have gone without food in the last months as a result of the cost of living crisis, nearly 8m have 'sold a personal or household item to help cover bills', and there has been a massive increase in the number of people forced to use food banks.

In the USA, the most economically advanced country in the world, 3.5m people are homeless, while 18.6 million homes stand vacant, and the number of Americans dying while homeless has risen dramatically (by 77 percent) in recent years from a variety of causes, but many just succumbing to the cold. The situation is even worse in less 'advanced' parts of the world. In Nigeria, for example, 82m people live on less than a dollar a day, and in Lebanon electricity, clean water, medicine and fuel are in short supply and the currency has lost 90 percent of its value with inflation in triple digits and more than 80 percent of the country's population living below the poverty line.

## The Ugly

But small beer this compared with the suffering in Yemen, where, according to the UN, 8 years of civil war have killed over 150,000 people, with more than 227,000 others having died as a result of famine and lack of healthcare facilities. Then there's the drought in Somalia where the BBC News website reported that 'young children are dying in growing numbers' and told harrowing stories of suffering in which almost two-thirds of young children and pregnant women were suffering from acute malnutrition with the food situation being aggravated by a complex war between the militant Islamist group, al-Shabab, and the government. A 32-year-old mother of four living in a camp is quoted as saying: 'No water, no food, a hopeless life. Above all, my children are starving. They are on the verge of death. Unless they get some food, I'm

afraid they will die.'

More broadly, as reported by a network of charities from 75 countries in an open letter to coincide with the annual meeting of the UN General Assembly in New York, in the world as a whole '1.6 billion people live in inadequate housing (slum conditions) and 100 million are unhoused, a full third of the human population does not have reliable drinking water... and a staggering 345 million people are now experiencing acute hunger, a number that has more than doubled since 2019'. And all this without going into the ongoing and unpredictable effects of climate change, the persistence of deadly diseases such as Covid 19, and the untold terror and suffering caused by wars such as the one in Ukraine.

## The Alternative

One of the signatories to the charities' letter mentioned above, Mohanna Ahmed Ali Eljabaly of the Yemen Family Care Association, wrote: 'It is abysmal that with all the technology in agriculture and harvesting techniques today we are still talking about famine in the 21st century.' Though that is absolutely true, the charities' proposed solution ('Those with the power and money to change this must come together to better respond to current crises and prevent and prepare for future ones'), is a hopeless one. While the techniques and resources are indeed available to prevent famine and satisfy all reasonable needs, in the profit-driven society (capitalism) that exists throughout the world today, human welfare can never be a priority. In the socialist society of free access based on the principle of 'from each according to ability, to each according to need' which we urgently need, any failure of crops, for example, through drought or any such natural calamity will be dealt with by food being made available to those who need it where they need it rather than people being left to die horrific deaths from starvation.

I could not of course say all this to my interlocutor on the doorstep, but I suppose I could hope that he clicked on the leaflet's QR code and read all about it in the *Socialist Standard*.

**HOWARD MOSS**