

THE

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SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement



THIS IS YOUR BRAIN ON CAPITALISM

(catastrophising doesn't help)



Also: Enough is enough is not enough
The admiral's speech
The best of times,
the worst of times

Are we heading for mass starvation?
Extinction? Rebellion?
Something's lurking around the
corner – but it isn't a World War



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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'

Doom and gloom? Think again

IN 2020 the Oxford English Dictionary's word of the year was 'doomscrolling', ie, masochistically tormenting yourself with an endless diet of bad news. As several articles in this issue show, some groups tend to 'catastrophise' capitalism, which can only lead to a doomscrolling feedback loop.

A recently published 80-year study suggests that 50 percent of our general mood is genetic, 10 percent due to circumstances, and 40 percent within our conscious control (bit.ly/3IOihNZ). Given that depressed people don't go out and change the world, we think it's more useful to be positive.

There are signs that attitudes are finally changing. People are starting to realise that the market system is not some innocent bystander in the environmental, economic and social chaos, it's the cause of the chaos, and it's making the chaos worse. Commentators like George Monbiot and Greta Thunberg make no bones about capitalism's responsibility for climate change and species extinction. If public

opinion were a court of law and capitalism in the dock, chances are it would be found guilty by a thumping majority.

On top of that, there's a slew of new books out in the past few years proposing a life after capitalism and reviewed in this magazine, many of them practically making our case for us. We are no longer the lone voice we once were. Socialism seems to be catching on.

Things we say that used to astonish people are now generally regarded as common knowledge. It's almost a truism to say that wars are about money or resources, not principles. It's a mere commonplace to hear talk of rampant inequality, oligarchs and the 1 percent. Many people now agree that Labour and Tory, indeed all capitalist parties, are essentially the same. No serious person any longer denies that human-caused global warming is a real and serious threat. Even mainstream media sources now accept that China is not really communist, but actually capitalist as we

said all along, and many young people are realising that 'socialism' isn't the dirty word they were told it was. And now, strikes everywhere are proving that the working class has not surrendered in the class war, despite all attempts by capital to crush the resistance out of it.

We're not there yet by any means, but there are plenty of reasons to think the global zeitgeist is shifting in our direction. And with modern technology, it's never been easier for word to spread. So if there was ever a time to stop being negative, get off your butt and start helping to mainstream the socialist case, it's right now, before capitalism really does do something our societies can't survive. Create podcasts or videos for YouTube or TikTok, write leaflets or articles, put out messages or memes on Facebook and Twitter, help organise an online or local town meeting, and get someone you know to read this magazine.

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Sky high and ocean deep

DO WE really need this? Is it sustainable? Two questions that capitalism never seriously asks. At present the only question that matters is, can we make money out of this? All other considerations currently fall outside the projected calculation matrix, as an average CEO might blandly put it. And two recent news stories offer an illustration of this.

British news media were cock-a-hoop last month to report a home-grown 'space industry' story with the planned horizontal launch from Newquay in Cornwall of a suite of satellites via a rocket attached to one of Mad Dick Branson's old Virgin jumbo jets ([bbc.in/3VXUmON](https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-57345678)). 'What people have seen is a small team deliver something quite incredible' puffed the breathless CEO of Spaceport Cornwall, speaking live from the Mission Control shed just before the mission pancaked.

What they were planning on delivering was nine shoebox-sized satellites whose various space-based functions were such that their owners were willing to shell out hefty launch fees. It's a burgeoning market, and other space freight companies in Shetland and Sutherland in Scotland are also keen to get in on the action. If Elon Musk can send mega-rockets to the moon, they ought to be able to manage a shoebox or two. Sadly the mission to hurl yet more space junk into orbit failed on this occasion, but the heroic British pioneers won't be deterred from making future attempts.

As of January 2022, there were an estimated 8,261 satellites orbiting the Earth, of which 42 percent are already defunct ([bit.ly/3irc1kv](https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-57345678)). But that's small potatoes compared to the 'mega-constellations' of miniature CubeSats being planned by firms like SpaceX and OneWeb, which intend to upchuck around 65,000 in the next few years. Space tech is 'dual use', ie, civilian and military, and the key military advantages of CubeSats are cheapness (especially when launched via reusable SpaceX rockets), small size, replaceability and proliferation, making them nearly impossible for an adversary to knock out. Elon Musk's own Starlink system is being relied on by Ukrainian forces, meaning the Tesla, Twitter and SpaceX boss is now also in the war business and with such influence that he has personally vetoed Starlink operations over Crimea ([bit.ly/3ZCiPw5](https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-57345678)).

Being nearer the ground, low-orbit off-



the-peg CubeSats mean lower-latency (ie, faster) connections than high-orbit heavy-duty satellites, while the swarm numbers mean near-comprehensive global internet coverage. A comparatively minor consideration is the predicted increase in visual 'noise' for astronomers ([bit.ly/3W1baEQ](https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-57345678)). But what's sickening from a socialist perspective is that it's not just one constellation to be shared by everyone, as would be the case in socialism, it's multiple duplicate systems, because each competing state wants its own GPS and communications networks in space and does not want to rely on another's satellites any more than on another's energy supplies. One of socialism's medium-term goals will probably be the challenge of hoovering up all this redundant and dangerous space scrap.

Meanwhile, you may be aware that the sea floors of the world are carpeted with small, potato-like polymetallic objects known as manganese nodules, first discovered in the 19th century and in July this year set to become a red-hot-button topic.

Imagine you are out for a walk in the wilds, on a break from your capitalist employment, and you happen across a huge wishing pond that is magically packed with a treasure trove of ancient gold denarii, ducats and dubloons. There is no sign saying Private Property – Keep Out. A quick check on your smartphone reveals not only that this pond doesn't belong to anybody, but also that there is no mention of it in any statutes or local by-laws. Understandably, you're keen to fill your boots with as much plunder as you can carry away. In fact, seeing as there are no rules, you might as well hire a mechanical digger to plough the entire pond right up, and make yourself a fortune. But as you start dialling the machine hire number, strong hands grab you by the arms and a voice says 'Alright matey, not so fast, we were here first'.

Such is the situation with manganese nodules, found in gigantic quantities on sea beds in international waters. They

are a potential bonanza for capitalist manufacturing, containing not just manganese, but also nickel, copper, iron, cobalt, titanium, silicon and aluminium among others, elements of immense importance in steel production, EV car batteries and other green tech. Average metallic content varies (15 – 30 percent), and a ballpark valuation for this content is given as \$484/tonne ([bit.ly/3IOHcAG](https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-57345678)). The

potential global supply of nodules was estimated in the 1980s at roughly 500bn tonnes. At a minimum 15 percent average metal content, one could be talking about an industry worth upwards of \$36tn.

Given this, you may wonder how come the gold rush has not already started. In effect, the lack of rules has resulted in a default Hands-Off stalemate as governments and UN regulator the International Seabed Authority have stalled for 20 years over a common regulatory framework, even though a clause in the existing 2000 treaty gave them just two years to create one. Mining companies are slaving to have at the prize, and equally keen to stop each other getting a head start. Now one company, in league with the Pacific island of Nauru, has announced that, if no regulation is in place by the end of the two-year period in July, they are technically entitled to send in the submarine bulldozers, and devil take the hindmost ([bit.ly/3X5e7p0](https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-57345678)). A strip-mine frenzy will then ensue as the sea floors of the world, whose species, habitats and bio-environments are barely known at all, face a holocaust. The effects of this on global oceanic ecosystems together with the irrevocable loss of species and new science cannot even be guessed at. Governments, who have failed to do anything to fix climate change since the first COP in 1995, have until July to fix this. Don't hold your breath.

This is not to say that a socialist society would never mine seabed nodules under any circumstances, any more than saying it would never launch a satellite. Humans use the resources of nature all the time, and this is an abundant source of extremely useful metals. But first it would ask the two questions we started with. It may be that in socialism we can devise green tech that does not require so much mining, or even devise acceptable social arrangements that don't require so much green tech. But in capitalism, nobody even asks. If it's not about the profit, it's not part of the equation.

PJS

Enough is enough is not enough

OVER THE past decades, employers have been fierce and unrelenting. Companies laid off workers, attacked unions and demanded concessions. Governments of all stripes helped by eroding labour standards, de-regulating industries, privatising services and permitting job out-sourcing. Being in a weak position the union leaders recoiled from the prospect of waging an all-out class war to challenge the employers so they accepted the new contracts, no matter how damaging, in the hope that lost ground could be regained. Emboldened by this, employers demanded workers forfeit more established practices, even as the stock market boomed and profits soared. With few notable exceptions, strikes were defeated, union recruitment drives failed and workers became demoralised.

But now trade union militancy and strikes have returned to the forefront of British politics. The Socialist Party does not minimise the necessity and importance of workers keeping up the struggle to maintain the level of wages and protect working conditions. There are now once again some signs that general combativeness is rising. Unions are the single most effective way organised workers can counter the bosses. Workers who risked their lives during the Covid pandemic and are now suffering from a cost of living crisis not of their making say they deserve substantial pay raises, and are prepared to go on strike to try to get it. Employers can no longer expect their workforce to compliantly roll over and be strong-armed into conceding cuts in wages and conditions. Increasing numbers of workers across all sectors are saying enough is enough. The current labour

shortage means they have a bit more leverage. It has got the bosses worried.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's government intends to introduce new laws that are aimed at trade union industrial action by insisting key workers must maintain essential services during any strike. The government wants to make it more difficult for ordinary working people, firefighters, nurses and teachers to express their democratic wishes and to take industrial action in defence of their jobs and pay. Make no mistake. The government's legislative plans are an assault in the class war on workers' ability to resist the employers' offensive. Trade unions are workers' front line of defence against their employers under capitalism.

The legislation will permit employers to sue unions and sack employees if legal minimum service levels are not met. Union members who are instructed by the employers to work and refuse to do so could lose their jobs. The new law will also back employers bringing an injunction to prevent strikes or seeking damages afterwards if they go ahead with unions facing court actions and possible sequestration of funds.

When workers strike or work to rule, the bosses find out who really runs the workplace, who keeps the machines humming, production going, and the money flowing. But that said, it's important to clarify that the employers have the power of the state behind them and when push comes to shove, they do not hesitate to bring that powerful institution to bear upon the workers. In addition, most workers have practically no savings, so cannot afford to stop working for long.

Hence the strategy of a series of short

strike stoppages. Adapting to match the new reality, rather than calling for a general strike, individual unions seek to coordinate their actions for increased effect. Solidarity is one of the greatest weapons we possess. Many workers are realising that it is the worker and the worker alone who has to take care of their economic interests, as they'll get nothing from the politicians who fill parliamentary seats and cabinet posts or the bureaucrats in their professional union posts.

When the government goes on the offensive against workers on behalf of the capitalist class, this may lead workers' organisations to more radical actions, to the capitalist society exposing its class nature, to the general public opening up to revolutionary ideas, and consequently, to the class struggle becoming conscious and political rather than just defensive and economic.

To be sure, participation in strikes does not automatically make workers class-conscious. Even when workers acquire revolutionary consciousness they are still compelled to engage in the non-revolutionary struggle. As workers we fight in the here and now, where we are and where we can. We don't see such day-to-day struggles as a diversion.

Our preferred trade union strategy is to be active in unions where they exist, but not to do it with a parochial perspective but with a class-wide viewpoint that involves all groups in society that have no opportunity to participate in unions and to engage them as much as possible in a conscious class struggle. The strike weapon is not a sure means of victory for workers in disputes with employers. There are many cases of workers being compelled to return to work without gains, even sometimes with losses. Strikes should not be employed recklessly but should be entered into with strategy in mind.

Socialism demands the revolutionising of the workers themselves. This does not mean that workers should sit back and do nothing, the struggle over wages and conditions must go on. Workers are learning the hard lessons and it is becoming clearer that this is a secondary, defensive activity. The real struggle is to take the means of wealth production and distribution – the factories, farms, offices, mines etc. – into common ownership. That is the larger, political struggle.



Credit: Garry Knight

Taking back what control?

IN HIS New Year speech on 5 January, the Labour Leader, Sir Keith Starmer, uttered the following empty promise about what a future Labour government would bring about:

‘A fairer, greener, more dynamic country with an economy that works for everyone, not just those at the top. And a politics which trusts communities with the power to control their destiny’ (bit.ly/3w3XtKL).

In other words, the same old reformist illusion that a Labour government can change the capitalist economy so that it ‘works for everyone, not just those at the top.’ As if previous Labour governments hadn’t repeatedly tried and failed to do this. They failed because it is a ‘Mission Impossible’ to make capitalism work other than as a profit system for the benefit of the profit-takers and to the detriment of those who work for wages.

Starmer made it quite clear that a future Labour government would accept the profit system, declaring at one point that ‘for national renewal, there is no substitute for a robust private sector, creating wealth in every community’.

He denounced the Tories for practising ‘sticking-plaster politics’ which ‘sometimes delivers relief. But the long-term cure – that

always eludes us’. But that is precisely what the Labour Party has always aspired to do. To try to mitigate the effects of capitalism that confront the wage-working class while leaving the cause — the class ownership of productive resources and production for the market with a view to profit — unchanged. In short, to patch up capitalism by sticking plasters over its effects.

But it wasn’t just the Tories that Starmer said were engaged in ‘sticker-plaster politics’ but ‘the whole Westminster system’.

His solution? To carry out yet another re-organisation of local government in Britain: ‘a huge power shift out of Westminster can transform our economy, our politics and our democracy.’ This would change politics to some extent, if only by providing more paid posts for professional politicians, but how will it ‘transform’ the economy?

The economy will remain capitalist, which will mean that those making political and economic decisions, whoever or wherever they are, will still have to take into account that profits must be the priority as the pursuit of profits is what drives the capitalist economy. It doesn’t make any difference who makes these decisions or where.

Starmer is making the same mistake

here as the Scottish and Welsh nationalists, who think that the problems of workers in those regions are caused not by capitalism but by the decisions about how capitalism has to be run being taken in London rather than in Edinburgh or Cardiff. He thinks that it will make a difference to the way capitalism works if the decisions are made in Birmingham, Manchester, Newcastle, Bristol, etc. instead of in London. But it won’t. And it certainly won’t give those living there ‘the power to control their destiny.’

In a cynical move to win back Brexit voters, he promised a ‘Take Back Control’ Bill that would even be ‘a centrepiece of our first King’s speech’. A stupid title anyway since people never had any control in the first place to take back. Even national governments can’t control the way capitalism works, local mayors and councils even less. It is the other way around. Capitalism controls what governments can do, by obliging them to abide by its economic law of ‘profits first’ on pain of provoking an economic downturn.

It’s why they all fail and why the promises they make are empty. And why changing governments changes nothing, or, to borrow Starmer’s own words, when this happens ‘nothing has changed, but the circus moves on. Rinse and repeat’.

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Many a true word is spoken in jest



'The Islamic religion not only bans pork and booze; Islamic governments are totally anti-LGBTQ. In Muslim countries you are not allowed to eat, drink or be Mary. It was interesting to watch the Qatar team score its first goal. When the players got excited about it and celebrated by hugging each other, it was surprising they were not immediately stoned by authorities. Karl Marx was not right about much, but he hit the nail on the head when he said, "Religion is the opium of the people"' (*Daily Caller*, 1 December, bit.ly/3VQdv5P).

Indonesia today, unlike Qatar, is an example of what passes for democracy under capitalism, yet its recently amended penal code would not look out of place there. Both say there is no room for the proliferation of the LGBT movement. Even worse:

'Spreading communist, Marxist, or Leninist ideologies, or philosophies deviating from the national ideology of Pancasila—five largely secular guidelines for Indonesian life introduced by the country's first president—will be punishable by up to 10 years in prison. And the country's rules on blasphemy will be expanded to include apostasy (persuading a believer of one of Indonesia's six recognized religions—Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism—to become a nonbeliever), punishable by up to four years in prison' (*Time*, 6 December, bit.ly/3iDfpIC).

Verily, the past lies like a nightmare upon the present. Worse still, the growth of socialist knowledge, the mass understanding and conscious change at which we aim, can only be hindered by such legislation. Marx said, 175 years ago in the *Communist Manifesto*, 'law, morality, religion are to him [the working class] so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests'. In other words, the ruling class will employ any moralistic ideals at its disposal to tape over the brutal system of exploitation which we run in their interest.

As a dog returns to his vomit, so a fool repeats his folly

China Miéville, author of *A Spectre*, *Haunting*, *On the Communist Manifesto* (2022) stated recently:



'I constantly look around at the world and I think this cannot be as good as we can do. This can't be as good as we can do and there are only so many times we can say if you just let us tinker with that a little bit, it'll get better. And when that keeps failing, and keeps failing and keeps failing, we have to say to ourselves there is something in this structure that is leading to this. And when the structure itself says our driving energy is profit, not human need, it is not rocket science to think this might be related to the problems of the world' (MSNBC, 7 December, bit.ly/3ULNQu2).

This voice of reason makes a welcome change from what passes for informed comment in, for example the *American Thinker* (sic!):

'On a personal note, I know these clowns don't read the book, because I ask every time I meet one; I have yet to find a "communist" who has actually read the Manifesto. (There's really no excuse given the fact it's basically a pamphlet, and contains an ideology responsible for the deaths of more than 100 million people, so what could they possibly have going on that's more important than getting to the bottom of it, especially if they're actively advocating and voting for communist policies that pave the way for more of the most horrendous tyranny known to man; but what do I know?)' (MSNBC, 2 December, bit.ly/3Bp9eym).

Echoing the Manifesto's 'Society can no longer live under the bourgeoisie, in other words, its existence is no longer compatible with society,' Miéville states in a by far better, earlier interview:

'Marxism isn't about saying you'll get a perfect world: it's about saying we can get a better world than this one, and it's hard to imagine, no matter how many mistakes

we make, that it could be much worse than the mass starvation, war, oppression, and exploitation we have now. In a world where 30,000 to 40,000 children die of malnutrition daily while grain ships are designed to dump food into the sea if the price dips too low, it's worth the risk' (*Science Fiction Studies*, November 2003, bit.ly/3PerFvx).

The pen is mightier than the sword

'In her 50 years of filmmaking, Reichert won two Primetime Emmy Awards and was nominated for four Oscars, winning one with her partner Steven Bognar for "American Factory" in 2020. She quoted "The Communist Manifesto" in her speech, saying "things will get better when workers of the world unite"' (OPB, 2 December, bit.ly/3FAjVAH).

Indeed. But what then, you may well ask, will be socialism's attitude to existing religions?

'All religions so far have been the expression of historical stages of development of individual peoples or groups of peoples. But communism is the stage of historical development which makes all existing religions superfluous and brings about their disappearance.'

And, to be clear for the old trope-believing American Thinkers out there:

'Communism is the doctrine of the conditions of the liberation of the proletariat'.

Liberation, not elimination! To be fair, those Thinkers probably have not read *The Principles Of Communism* in which these passages appear, one of Engels' two early drafts of what would become the *Communist Manifesto* (bit.ly/3hbg3wL). In fact, setting to one side the capitalist measures at the end of section 2 (which Marx and Engels in their joint preface to the 1872 edition declared obsolete) there is still much that socialists today would incorporate into a Manifesto for this century including:

'The working men have no country. We cannot take away from them what they have not got.'

'...every class struggle is a political struggle.'

The struggle for socialism 'is the independent movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority.'

'The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.'

'Workers of the world, unite!'

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

MIDLANDS

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

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North East Regional branch.

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Yorkshire Regional branch.

The SPGB is pleased to announce the formation of a new Yorkshire Regional branch (YRB) of the party. See below contact and meeting venue details.

Contact: Fredi Edwards, Tel 07746 230 953 or email fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk

The branch meets on the last Saturday of each month at 1pm in the The Rutland Arms, 86 Brown Street, Sheffield City Centre, S1 2BS (approx 10 minute walk from railway and bus station). All welcome. Anyone interested in attending should contact the above for confirmation of meeting.

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

Kent and Sussex regional branch. Usually meets 2nd Sun. 2pm at The Muggleton Inn, High Street, Maidstone ME14 1HJ or online. Contact: spgb.ksr@worldsocialism.org or 07971 715569.

South West regional branch. Meets 3rd Sat. 2pm on Zoom. For invite email:

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Glasgow branch. Meets 3rd Tues. on Discord.

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Ayrshire. Contact: Paul Edwards 01563 541138. rainbow3@btopenworld.com.

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South Wales Branch (Cardiff and Swansea)

Meets 2nd Monday 7.30pm on JITS!

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Central Branch

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

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Too old to work, too young to die

WE ARE all getting older and we will be older for longer. People living longer sounds good. But not for capitalism.

Improvements in healthcare have brought extended longevity and longer lifespans mean there are more older people. The population aged 65 and older is growing faster than all other age groups, especially as the global birth and fertility rates have been dropping. Over the past 50 years, the median age of the world's population has increased by 10 years, ie, from 20 years in 1970 to 30 years in 2020. Many countries have attained median ages well above 35 years, such as France at 41 years, South Korea at 43 years, Italy at 46 years and Japan at 48 years. The median ages of the world's populations are expected to continue to rise, reaching 40 years by 2070. In 1970 China's population had a median age of 18 years, ie, half of their population were children. By 2070 the median age of China's population is projected to triple to 55 with the proportion of children declining to 12. By 2070 the world's average life expectancy at age 65 will be 21 more years with many developed countries having life expectancies at age 65 of 25 years or more, ie, people surviving on average to age 90. There is less need for paediatricians and gynaecologists and much more requirement for specialists in geriatrics and care-working. There are not enough nursing home beds to cater for elderly people who need long-stay residential care.

Governments have concerns about the prospect of their populations possessing more grandparents than grandchildren and the burden on pension and healthcare budgets of their ageing populations. An ageing society is viewed as damaging to a state's economy since it decreases the workforce numbers and increases the costs on social services and health. The need for pensions arises from the fact that as workers get older, they become surplus to requirements for the capitalists. State pensions take up a vast proportion of public spending. The capitalist class has to pay to keep workers alive upon retirement and it is one of the non-productive activities that the State has to undertake.

Within the next few decades, working-age adults will need to support a higher number of elderly people than they do now, putting pressure on welfare systems and taking up much of the future economic growth and output unless offset by increased technology delivering gains in productivity. There is also a need



Credit: Getty Images

for greater immigration to boost the labour supply to alleviate the adverse effects of an ageing population as new migrants lower the average age of the host nation's population. The changes in the demographic structure of various societies and the need to replenish the workforce will not be addressed by more older workers (as the evidence is that chronic ill-health is higher with advancing years) and will require a rethink on immigration policies encouraging newcomers from other regions of the world such as Africa.

Government options are to reduce benefits, increase tax revenue or raise the retirement age. Pensions are essentially a tax on the profits of the capitalists, even if ultimately these profits come from what workers produce, and increasing taxes will not be welcomed by businesses. Meanwhile cutting state benefits would only worsen the already existing poverty of old age. So the preferred choice is to make people work for longer by postponing the official retirement age and the payment of state pensions. Similarly, due to mounting costs, employers are currently scaling back their own occupational pension schemes. Pensions and the retirement age are under assault. It has happened in the UK and is taking place nearly everywhere else, despite widespread opposition from working people

Under capitalism the elderly and frail are seen as superfluous, and of little use to employers. Possessing money as consumers in our capitalist society is the only way to maintain any status in one's old age because money has power no matter what age you are. We are seeing an increasingly unequal society with the elderly among those bearing the brunt.

Capitalism leaves its senior citizens unwanted, isolated and invisible.

Growing old is inevitable but the way we get old is not. Although we are living far longer, a significant and increasing proportion of people are managing multiple health conditions and mobility problems from mid-life onwards. Current rates of chronic illness, mental health conditions, disability and frailty could be greatly reduced. The extra golden years of longer life are a gift to enjoy. Socialism will bring forth more social and community networks to build creative relationships, enhancing the quality of life for everyone, both young and old. The contributions of older persons to society are invaluable and cannot be measured in mere material terms. They offer care-sharing and the passing on of knowledge to new generations. The progress of civilisation from our increased lifespan is being squandered by capitalism.

Gulliver's Travels features the Struldbruggs, a people who appear normal in all respects except one – they don't die. But their immortality, instead of being a blessing, is a curse because they continue to age:

'At 90, they lose their teeth and hair; they have at that age no distinction of taste, but eat and drink whatever they can get, without relish or appetite. The diseases they were subject to still continue...'

Socialism will not bestow immortality nor eternal youth but it will permit us all to age with dignity.

ALJO

The admiral's speech



(nominated employees of firms based in the City). As such, it is intimately bound up with the globe-spanning businesses of the financial centre of London. As the journalist Matt Kannard in the muck-raking website *Declassified* has noted (without whose output, Radakin's speech may have gone unnoticed too):

'The Corporation recently blocked *Declassified*'s request for the release of information about the foreign schedule of its leader, the Lord Mayor, but we have managed to see his 2019-20 agenda. This saw him planning to visit an average of three different foreign countries every month, considerably more than the foreign secretary typically does' (tinyurl.com/yehtryxf).

They argued that as the trips were privately funded, freedom of information laws do not apply. Kennard was told: 'It is the role of the national government to lead on foreign policy. It is the role of City of London Corporation to support the City. As part of this role the City Corporation engages with business partners across the world and throughout the year'. That the Lord Mayor of London also liaises with the Foreign Secretary on a regular basis shows just how influential this business clique is.

So, when addressed by the head of the Armed Forces of the United Kingdom, it is unsurprising that an honest and frank description of the state of the world is to be expected.

As he attests, international order and the rule of law:

'matter here in the City of London too, because markets thrive on stability, and our prosperity rests on a world that is safe for the passage of trade'.

'And when the rules are broken, volatility and instability follow. When aggression is left unchecked the costs ricochet through global markets. This affects people everywhere, and especially the world's poorest.'

This is a voice of the very pinnacle of the defence establishment clearly stating that the purpose of having armed forces is to help benefit the commercial relations of capitalists within the UK. He emphasises:

'The role of the United Kingdom Armed Forces, even with a war in Europe, is more than just focusing on defending the nation'.

'It is about a maximalist approach to the military instrument. Using our power and influence in all its guises: both to further our security and prosperity. But especially – when we get it right – to add

to the agency and authority of the British Government and the nation.'

'Agency and authority' are the very arguments Putin uses to justify his approach to foreign policy too. A lot of voters in the UK might sincerely believe that the military exists to protect their lives and their homes, and might, rightly, be expected to object to a notion that the military exists to help corporations make deals worldwide. That, after all, is pure gangsterism. Indeed, the propaganda in movies and TV is exactly that the military exists to ensure we 'sleep safe in our beds', not to make money overseas. But:

'We spend more than £20 billion with British industry every year. And in 2020 we generated almost £8 billion in defence exports, more than any other European country.'

The defence exports are part of the leverage, creating friendly states bound by military ties, and in turn supporting the existence of governments whose own military is there to protect the leaders from the people. But it is still interesting to see the economic aspects of Britain's war machine being so clearly laid out.

Radakin also notes: 'Britain is an expeditionary rather than a continental power'. This might be expected of an Admiral. After all, the rivalry between the services is about funding, and a purely defensive British defence strategy would have less need for the clout of a big navy.

There is an element of hypocrisy too. He notes Putin's 'nuclear rhetoric'. As the Peace Campaigner Milan Rai has noted:

'Daniel Ellsberg, the US military analyst who leaked the Pentagon's secret internal history of the Vietnam War, the Pentagon Papers, wrote in 1981: "Again and again, generally in secret from the American public, US nuclear weapons have been used, for quite different purposes: in the precise way that a gun is used when you point it at someone's head in a direct confrontation, whether or not the trigger is pulled." Britain has used its nuclear weapons in the same way, repeatedly' (tinyurl.com/2cksf6ex).

The armed forces are a gun pointed at the world's head, for the benefit of the owners of society, and it is refreshing to hear them admit it.

PIK SMEET

ONE OF the ways the mass media propaganda system works is through emphasis and de-emphasis of stories. Sometimes a story might be reported, and a piece is put in a small corner of their content (so they can always say later that they did cover it), but if something is emphasised, it becomes screaming headline news. For example, the massacres by the Wagner group in Mali in March this year barely caused a ripple in the UK press (months later, the *Guardian* would report them, as part of an anti-Russian stance). To take another example, the Susan Hussey scandal, indicative as it was of racial and cultural attitudes among the royal entourage, was blasted to full-bore front-page coverage by the BBC and other outlets, presumably because of the potential Harry and Meghan angle. In some ways, it probably deserved a couple of inches in the gossip columns.

A side effect of this, is when insiders are talking to each other, they can safely say scandalous things that many may find objectionable, but they will never be reported (or, in some instances, will be held onto and reported at a later date, when scandal becomes convenient to one faction or other). To take a recent example: Tony Radakin, the Chief of Defence Staff (the highest ranked officer in the armed forces) gave a speech at the Mansion House of the City of London on 19 October last year. The full text is online here: (tinyurl.com/2zx34nn4).

The City of London itself is an interesting body of insiders: although it is a local authority of a kind with the usual powers of such, it has corporate electors

The best of times, the **worst** of times

PERHAPS IT is the nature of 'the news' and its love of drama but most commentators seem to concur that we are living in the worst of times. The 'obvious' decline of this country parallels the disasters endured by many others of past and present. The anarchic reality of capitalism lies behind most of our contemporary problems but remains hidden beneath moral outrage and politically sectarian invective. There has never been a time when the NHS has not been in crisis and where a war has not raged somewhere on the planet; there has never been a time when a child is not dying for lack of clean water and an unpolluted environment; there has never been a time when the rich suffered and the poor did not – this is normal for all class-divided cultures. As the memories of an imaginary 'golden age' fade and are replaced by a shared sense of doom and despair for the future we might ask if our species has a predilection for self-destruction and somehow relishes the thought of disaster.

The Armageddon zeitgeist of popular culture has spawned numerous variations on how the world might end; from zombies and plagues to meteorite impacts and nuclear holocausts it's hard to find an optimistic narrative when it comes to imagining humanity's future. To some degree this reflects the failure of capitalism to deliver its promise of economic progress and security for all – the culture just seems to have run its course with nowhere else to go. After the Second World War there was an optimism that things would change and the baby-boomers of the 1960s were in the forefront of political activism that focused on reforming the economic system to bring some measure of equality and justice, at least in the West. Working-class culture blossomed with innovative forms of music, fashion, film and TV. This was all predicated on the belief that things would change for the better; when this proved to be an illusion and the forces of reaction were brought back to power as the result of reformist failure the road to disaster seemed almost inevitable. Thatcher and Reagan were symbols of this failure – theirs was the politics of atavistic hatred. The neo-con ideology took on the Orwellian

role of turning facts into fiction and vice-versa. We still live with this legacy today only it has accelerated and evolved into the monster of 'fake news' fuelled by the global internet.

Propaganda has always taken advantage of whatever media are available. The Nazis were one of the first groups to see the potential of the mass media of radio and film – we still look back on Goebbels as the paradigm of propagandists. He would have adored the opportunities afforded by the internet. Unfortunately the online producers of 'news' are as in love with dramatic headlines as are the pulp mainstream media – of course many of them are sponsored and produced by the very same people. However if you have the patience you can find authentic voices of dissent who can provide a very different perspective. The world has become a smaller place where the suffering and conflicts everywhere are accessible in your home which only adds to the sense of unease and foreboding created by the tension of events in our everyday lives. Some embrace the cynicism of not believing in anything whilst others are caught up in the shifting sands of the impotent and meaningless debates between Left and Right. All too often these online arguments end up being merely egotistical slanging matches that produce much heat without any light. Is the internet just the latest example of a medium being used as a vehicle for ideological propaganda or has its very quantity of information changed its quality? Instead of relying on your favourite newspaper columnist or TV news show you have to make an effort to

research alternative voices if your opinion is to have any value. The cultural zeitgeist has become irrevocably international.

The voice of doom has become universal and resonates in every corner of the globe. Betrayed hopes fuel the never-ending discovery of new reasons and causes of a seemingly inevitable end for our species. Will the children of today look back on their childhood fondly as a 'golden age' as many of the older generation do? Socialists have optimism built into their DNA but even we struggle to find an upbeat answer to Rosa Luxemburg's question: 'Is it to be socialism or barbarism?' Of course it hasn't come to that yet but we fear that time is running out. Many people in the past also felt an impending sense that 'the end is nigh' but this was based on the assumption that the battle between good and evil would be resolved one way or another. But instead of the dramatic human finale of Armageddon predicted by so many our species might just fade into oblivion within a sea of political cynicism and apathy leaving the rich to count their ever increasing wealth until one day they find they have nothing to buy with it.

The Dickens quote, part of which heads this article, seems to describe my life and times (born in the mid 1950s) as I suspect it would for many of my generation and is worth repeating in full:

'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair' (A Tale of Two Cities).

WEZ



Credit: Getty Images

Are we heading for mass starvation?

THE VERY existence of hunger, and even more so, pockets of outright starvation, has sometimes encouraged the idea that we are witnessing the unfolding of some vast Malthusian tragedy. Inexorably, it is suggested, this will come to engulf a sizeable chunk of humanity. The irreconcilable tensions between the world's haves and have-nots will plunge society into an unending state of barbarism.

Of course, if this truly was the case there would unquestionably be strong grounds for thinking a post-capitalist alternative to capitalism would be closed off completely. Those Malthusian-inspired 'deep Greens' who habitually present us with this bleak scenario, all too often coupled with such startling pronouncements along the lines of Agent Smith's memorable comment in *The Matrix*, that 'Human beings are a disease, a cancer of this planet', would do well to consider the implications of what they are saying. If there is no hope for the future then we are lumbered with the very system that has brought us to this sorry impasse. Unfettered brutal competition would be the only game in town. It is but a small step from uttering such callously misanthropic sentiments to the calculated culling of one's fellow citizens. We might just as well set about building our bunkers, fortifying our gated communities and fatalistically await the coming apocalypse like a scene out of *'The Walking Dead'*.

Way off the mark

In the 1960s and 70s a spate of books, uniformly alarmist in tone, appeared on the scene. In 1967 William and Paul Paddock spoke of this supposed looming global catastrophe and earnestly

recommended applying the medical principle of the 'triage' (practised in the First World War to decide which wounded soldiers should be treated and which left to die) by giving food aid only to those countries that could be saved, while allowing the rest to perish. (William Paddock & Paul Paddock *Famine – 1975! America's decision: who will survive?*). Paul Ehrlich reinforced this message of impending doom in his best seller, *The Population Bomb* (1968), declaring that 'The battle to feed all of humanity is over. In the 1970s the world will undergo famines – hundreds of millions of people are going to starve to death'. And the 1972 Club of Rome Report, *The Limits to Growth*, gloomily predicted in the same vein that the world was rapidly running out of key resources in the face of runaway population growth.

In fact, all these dire predictions of impending disaster proved to be way off the mark. As the free-market cornucopian, Julian Simon, pointed out in *The Ultimate Resource* (1981), the short term price food rises of the early 70s caused by such factors as drought, the decision of the Russians to import animal feed to boost meat consumption, and concerted attempts to reduce the huge food stockpiles of previous decades, did not really tell us much, if anything, about the long-term trends in the price (and, hence, availability) of food. Indeed, the poor harvests of the early 1970s subsequently gave way to gluts with grain prices plummeting to the consternation of US farmers in particular.

Much the same is true of more recent events. In the few years up to 2008, food

prices climbed steadily but then fell back quite dramatically albeit not quite to their earlier levels. Later, from June 2010 onwards, the price of some foodstuffs, like wheat, once again rose – in this case, by nearly 50 percent in two months – following Russia's decision to freeze grain exports after another serious drought ('Global wheat crisis recalls Moscow's "great grain robbery"', *Observer*, 8 August 2010).

Erratic, often speculatively driven, short-term fluctuations of this nature in the price of food are to be expected. Nevertheless, contends Simon, the historical trend is towards a gradual reduction in food costs as agriculture becomes more productive and efficient. This bodes well for tackling the problem of global poverty.

The demand for food is, after all, relatively inelastic – that is to say, it is not going to vary much with changes in food prices. Since food represents a significant component of the cost of living of the global poor (who typically spend at least half their income on food) the benefits of such long-term price reductions would be far reaching. It would mean they would then have more to spend on things like education and healthcare. A virtuous circle of self-improvement would ensue. A better-educated and healthier population will also be a more productive one and rising productivity will, in turn, generate yet more benefits. However, the converse to this argument is also true. The inelasticity of food as a human priority means that any price increases will require people to cut back on precisely these other things that might benefit them in the long run.

As regards the Malthusian obsession with population growth, contended Simon, far



from this growth constituting a threat to living standards, the very opposite is true. It actually helps to raise these standards by increasing the productivity of farming itself – for example, by making it more economically feasible to develop good road networks that then makes it easier and cheaper to transport both agricultural inputs and outputs. Some of the wealthiest parts of the world, after all, also happen to be some of the most densely populated. Just as there are economies of scale in production so are there economies of scale in population size.

Free-market optimism

Simon's Panglossian-like technological optimism and his unabashed faith in the market economy to deliver the goods in due course, is justified in some respects but not in others. For a start, food prices, on the whole, don't seem to be quite following the broad trend he predicted. They tend to be volatile – more so than for other goods – and while many food items have become more affordable over long stretches of time (if you compare median weekly earnings to the average price of selected food items), quite recently food prices seem to have been trending upwards for various reasons and more to the point, setting new records. It is frankly difficult to square this with the idea of a long-term downward trend. It makes the latter seem more like an article of faith than a deduction based on rigorous scientific enquiry.

As Otaviano Canuto noted: 'The world food price index collected for the last 60 years by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) hit its highest record in March, declining gently in April. Pandemic, war and death in Ukraine, and droughts in the last 2 years... Such a combination looks apocalyptic. Now it is adding global hunger risks, because of the food price crisis' (Otaviano Canuto, *'The Global Food Price Shock'*, Policy Center for the New South, May 18, 2022).

Other factors, as the article goes on to point out, such as supply-chain disruptions triggering food stockpiling and bans on exports, as well as mobility restrictions on migrant farm labour negatively impacting on harvests in many parts of the world, have also played a role in pushing up prices to these record levels. What lies behind these various factors is the division of modern capitalism into competing nation-states and giant corporations.

A mere handful of the latter control the great bulk of the global grain trade and these corporations, particularly following the onset of the Ukrainian war (Ukraine being a major grain exporter), have significantly boosted their profit margins

by raising prices (albeit at the expense of profit margins elsewhere in the economy). A similar picture of corporate dominance pertains in the case of agribusiness suppliers of farm inputs like seeds and fertilisers with just three multinationals – Bayer-Monsanto, Dupont-Dow and Chem-China Syngenta – controlling 60 percent of the trade. And among retailers, a mere 10 grocery businesses account for half of all food sales in the EU (Fiona Harvey, 'Food price rises around the world are result of 'broken' system, say experts', *Guardian*, 24 August 2022).

This oligopolistic situation is far removed from the rosy vision of small-scale 'corner shop' capitalism promoted by free-market devotees, like Simon. Indeed, were such a vision ever to magically materialise, one can safely assume it would ineluctably lead us back, sooner or later, to the self-same situation we now find ourselves in. Competition itself, after all, tends to generate monopoly or oligopoly. The strong tend to drive out the weak. In any event, the outcome we now have is a food system that, in the view of many commentators, is irredeemably broken. It works not only against the interest of consumers who have to pay for these higher food prices but also numerous small farmers, struggling to survive in the face of mounting costs.

Enough for 10 billion...

And yet, despite everything, this same food system has also demonstrably created the potential for food abundance – even if it fails to deliver on that promise. According to one often-cited, if somewhat dated, source the world, as it happens, already grows enough food to support 10 billion people – compared to an existing global population of 8 billion (Holt-Giménez, Eric & Shattuck, Annie & Altieri, Miguel & Herren, Hans & Gliessman, Steve July 2012, *'We Already Grow Enough Food for 10 Billion People ... and Still Can't End Hunger'*, *Journal of Sustainable Agriculture*, 36 (6) p595-8).

Furthermore, contrary to the dire Malthusian predictions of exponentially growing populations, population growth peaked sometime in the 1960s and has been slowing ever since then. In 1950, the average birth rate was about 5 children per woman; by 2021 this had fallen to 2.3, according to the United Nations Population Division, with the world becoming increasingly urbanised (*World Population Prospects: Summary of Results*, UN Report 2022). Partly this is because, living in a town, you don't need more children to look after your goat herd or tend your crops. Also, living in a town means you have better access to medicines that

have significantly reduced rates of infant mortality. If people had larger families in the past it was precisely because so many of their children died young.

These declining birth rates have meant an increasing number of countries are now experiencing below-replacement level – or negative – growth and, remarkably, there is more and more concern being expressed about the prospect of depopulation and a steadily ageing population, rather than overpopulation. Some countries, worried about their waning influence on the international stage, have begun to institute pro-natalist policies with a view to reversing their relative population decline. For them the link between power and population is compellingly self-evident: big is obviously better in a competitive global economy.

...so why hunger?

However, despite the aforementioned productive potential to adequately feed the world, hunger seemingly bafflingly, continues to scar the lives of hundreds of millions of people:

'The UN estimates that more than 820 million people are undernourished, a jump of 60 million in five years. Nearly a quarter of all children under five are stunted and 1.9 billion adults are overweight, according to the World Health Organisation' (John Vidal, *Guardian*, 4 March 2021.)

How is this possible? If agricultural output is already more than sufficient to meet the need of the world's people why do so many go hungry? It's because the bulk of food produced today is produced to be sold on a market and so access to it is dependent on purchasing power. If you lack the means to buy food then you are denied it in a market economy. This essentially explains why people go hungry today. They are unable to express enough 'market demand' to meet their needs. It's as simple as that.

If you don't earn much money you face a serious problem. If the price of food goes up your problem gets even worse. That is why rising food prices translate into more and more people becoming hungry. They might choose to allocate a rising portion of their small budgets to food purchases and a shrinking portion on other things, but there will come a point when this will simply no longer be feasible. Something will have to give. When that happens this often results in an explosion of food riots and violence on the streets that can, and has, toppled governments.

ROBIN COX

Extinction? Rebellion?



EXTINCTION REBELLION (XR) was founded in 2018 based on the following:

1. That there is a 'Climate Emergency' due to an imminent threat of extinction from global warming not just of other species but of humans too.
2. That because the government has failed in its duty to protect the security and safety of its citizens, they are no longer obliged to obey its laws.
3. That net-zero carbon emissions should be achieved by 2025.
4. That 3.5 percent of a country's population practising non-violent civil disobedience can bring about political regime change.

Just Stop Oil is an offshoot inspired and led by one of XR's founders, Roger Hallam. In 2021 it was called Insulate Britain. Last year it became Just Stop Oil. The difference with XR is over the immediate aim and tactics. Basically, Hallam is more militant. While they talk of love, he talks of toppling the government.

Extinction

In his *Common Sense for the 21st Century*, that came out in 2019, Hallam wrote of 'the system spiralling out of our control and the likelihood of global collapse within a decade or two' and of '6-7 billion people' dying as a result of climate change 'within the next generation or two' (bit.ly/3jQIFMx).

He repeated this claim in an interview on the BBC Hardtalk programme on 16 August:

'The capitalist system, the global system that we are in, is in the process of destroying itself and it will destroy itself in the next ten years. The reason for this is because it's destroying the climate.'

'I am talking about the slaughter, death and starvation of 6 billion people this century – that's what the science predicts' (bit.ly/2MDBhSZ).

Actually, it wasn't what science said or says. It was just a worst-case scenario should average global temperature rise to 5 degrees centigrade above the pre-industrial level, which no scientist expects to happen. Admittedly, if it did it would be catastrophic. But it is not going to happen, not even those who rule under capitalism are so stupid as to allow that.

XR subscribes to the myth that the government exists to serve and protect its citizens and argues that, in not doing enough to protect them from climate change, the government has failed in its duty and, worse, has betrayed those they are supposed to protect; the government having broken its side of the bargain, they as its citizens are absolved from having to obey its laws.

Rebellion

The political philosophy behind this justification for engaging in civil disobedience, ie, not obeying the law, is surprisingly old-fashioned. It's based on the 'social contract' theory of the origin of government that underlies the 1776 American Declaration of Independence. This famously declares that all humans have 'certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...'

And goes on: 'That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government.'

XR say they are exercising this 'right to rebellion'. Hence their name.

In short, they subscribe to the conventional view of what governments are there to do, whereas in fact governments are there to protect the interests of the rich owning class. It is *their* government not ours.

Beyond politics

Beyond politics

In the beginning they considered themselves to be 'beyond politics' as the situation was supposedly so urgent that politics must be set aside. This included not just the trivia of everyday conventional politics — the Westminster Passing Show — but talk of 'capitalism' and 'socialism' was also part of politics that they were beyond.

They have since come to recognise that they too are involved in politics in the broad sense and now say that they are beyond only 'party politics'. In fact they have gone further and say they want political, economic and social change and spell this out as 'a rapid change in wealth distribution and power structures, preventing a rich elite from perpetuating a self-serving ideology' (bit.ly/3QjCug2).

That should mean that they are now open to discussion about 'capitalism' and 'socialism' as well as discussion of the best means to get to the sort of society they say they want. They still dismiss 'socialism', though, no doubt because of what the word has unfortunately come to mean.

Changing slogans

XR's demand of net-zero carbon by 2025 was unrealisable. Even if socialism had been established in 2019 we wouldn't have been able to reach that by then. Yet this demand is still on their website where — with only two years to go — it is even sillier than it was in 2019.

Hallam didn't think that this was good enough as a slogan to mobilise enough

people to engage in civil disobedience on the scale he envisaged. He thought that what was needed was something felt as more immediate. The first such mobilising slogan he came up with was 'insulate Britain'. Not that this demand would make much difference to global warming as the contribution to this from poorly insulated houses on an island of 65 million people off the north-west coast of the Eurasian land mass will be fairly minimal.

At the beginning of last year this slogan was dropped and later replaced by 'Just Stop Oil'. Originally, it was meant as a slogan for a campaign to stop any further licences being granted to drill for oil and gas in the North Sea.

Hallam's *Common Sense in the 21st Century* – which, subtitled *Only Nonviolent Rebellion Can Now Stop Climate Breakdown And Social Collapse*, is intended as a handbook on how to topple a government:

'We must adopt the most successful model for regime change shown by the social scientific research – the civil resistance model. This involves mass participation civil disobedience: tens and hundreds of thousands of people blocking the centres of cities to demand change. There are a number of tactical options, but the main process is as follows:

- The people conduct mass mobilisation – thousands need to take part.
- They amass in a capital city where the elites in business, government and the media are located.
- They break the law – they cross the Rubicon. Examples include blocking the roads and transport systems.
- They maintain a strictly nonviolent discipline even, and especially, under conditions of state repression.
- They focus on the government, not intermediate targets – government is the institution that make the rules of society and has the monopoly of coercion to enforce them.
- They continue their action day after day – one-day actions, however big, rarely impose the necessary economic cost to bring the authorities to the table.
- The actions can have a fun atmosphere – most people respond to what is cultural and celebratory rather than political and solemn.

After one or two weeks following this plan, historical records show that a regime is highly likely to collapse or is forced to enact major structural change.'

At the beginning of the year XR announced what seemed to be an attempt to implement this 'model for regime change. They are going to organise a mass presence over a number of days of at least 100,000 people in Parliament in London

beginning on 21 April. Describing it as the 'Big One' and part of 'Project 3.5', they declared:

'Gathering peacefully in such large numbers at the nation's seat of power will create a positive, irreversible, societal tipping point.'<https://extinctionrebellion.uk/the-big-one/#>)

If they really think that this way they can topple the government and usher in 'a fair society and a citizen-led end to the fossil fuel era' within a couple of weeks, only one word comes to mind – delusional.

In praise of minority action

The underlying assumption of XR and Just Stop Oil is that political change can be brought about by as little as 3.5 percent of the population practising civil disobedience. The XR website says that its mission involves

'Mobilising 3.5% of the population to achieve system change – using ideas such as "Momentum-driven organising" to achieve this. The change needed is huge and yet achievable. No regime in the 20th century managed to stand against an uprising which had the active participation of up to 3.5% of the population' (for Erica Chenoweth's research, see bit.ly/3Gn0NoV).

XR typically give three instances of this working: the Civil Rights movement in the US, the collapse of the 'Communist' regimes in Eastern Europe, and the Arab Spring. What these have in common is that they were political changes in the political superstructure of capitalism that were not incompatible with the operation of capitalism as an economic system. There are no examples of the economic laws of capitalism being overcome by this kind of action.

Supposing (just for a moment) XR or Just Stop Oil managed to topple the government, what then?

There'd still be capitalism, the cause of the problem and an obstacle to its solution, and to get rid of that requires majority understanding and democratic political action, not civil disobedience by a small minority. The capitalist economic and social system could not be toppled by the determined 'rebellion' of some 2 million activists, as they claim (2.3 million being 3.5 percent of the population of Britain).

Their strategy is not a democratic one. It is an attempt by a minority to impose its will on society by coercion (blocking roads is a form of coercion even though non-violent).

In his *Common Sense in the 21st Century* Hallam openly stated: 'We should not make the mistake of thinking "the people have to rise" in the sense of the majority of the population. We need a few to rise up

and most of the rest of the population to be willing to "give it a go".'

Citizens' Assemblies

He envisages that, once the 3.5 percent had toppled the government, decision-making power should be handed over to a National Citizens' Assembly (chosen by lot) to decide the precise measures that should be taken to deal with the 'climate emergency'.

Leaving what to do to citizens' assemblies is a cop-out. For all the merits of such assemblies, most 'citizens' today will have the same ideas that they express in elections, ie., that they see no alternative to capitalism, and so would come up with proposals to be implemented under capitalism and which in all probability would accept its constraints. A majority of them would still have to change their ideas about society before they could decide what was required to deal with global overwarming.

Helping this change of consciousness to emerge – 'making socialists' – must be the priority as a majority in favour is a precondition for any effective 'change in wealth distribution and power structures, preventing a rich elite from perpetuating a self-serving ideology'.

Hallam himself is still thinking within the capitalist box. His long-term goal seems to be the sort of mixed state/private economy geared to the market that we have today (plus a few social reform measures) 'only there will be no oil, coal or gas industry', as can be seen from the sort of measures he thinks his National Citizens' Assembly would have to take: 'the application of taxes, subsidies and mandates by government. Some examples include: Carbon taxes and dividends to both drive behaviour but also to compensate the poor;' 'taxes on all virgin materials to encourage investment in recycling; feed-in-tariffs to drive distributed energy and storage in homes, schools and factories.'

In claiming that we should give priority to campaigning for 'climate justice' rather than socialism, XR and its offshoots are begging the question by assuming that the threat of serious climate change can be lastingly and effectively tackled without getting rid of capitalism. But it can't. In rejecting the common ownership and democratic control of the Earth's natural and industrial resources – socialism, properly understood – they are rejecting the only framework within which the climate change crisis can be lastingly and effectively tackled.

ADAM BUICK

Something's **lurking** around the corner – but it isn't a World War

A reader in Greece has sent us the article below. We publish it as informative and a contribution to the discussion about whether the war in Ukraine is likely to lead to a Third World War.

THE DEVASTATING one-two punch delivered to the world economy by the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russo-Ukrainian war has fuelled fears that World War Three may soon break out. With no other historical event to compare the current crisis to, many take their cue from how World War One killed the first wave of globalisation in 1914 and conclude that the end of our second wave of globalisation is nigh.

Although world trade as a percentage of world GDP is currently down to 52 percent (the same level as in 2009), we are very far from the nadir of 5 percent registered in 1945 at the end of World War Two. Because of the tendency to conflate or confuse the order of historical events, the decline in world trade is incorrectly seen by many to be a harbinger of world war. Yet it was the other way around with the demise of 'Globalisation 1.0.' Moreover, World War Two did not erupt immediately after 1918. It took twenty-one years of interwar isolationism, protectionism and the Great Depression to trigger it.

How realistic is the outbreak of a major international war in the foreseeable future? The causes of World War One were imperialism, militarism, nationalism and the alliance system. Although present in the equation today, these factors are considerably less dynamic than they were at the end of the long nineteenth century in 1914. Imperialism has been replaced by transnational organisations and multinational corporations. Militarism is also significantly weaker. If the war in Ukraine is the prelude to World War Three, where is the will to fight on the part of the Russian aggressor? It appears that only the Ukrainians possess this quality. The same may be said about the explosion of nationalism in Ukraine, which is the exception that proves the general rule. Nationalism was necessary for capitalism's gestation from feudalism with its myriad tariffs and customs barriers that hindered trade. In our technologically connected world, nationalism is an anachronism that has no lasting power against

large multinational corporations and transnational organisations like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

When Russia's oil-and-gas-fuelled economic expansion wound up in 2008, President Vladimir Putin put everyone on a daily diet of Great Russian chauvinism and idiosyncratic imperial revanchism. Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels had ten years to work their propaganda. Putin has had a good fourteen—and the efforts bore fruit. Ask the average Russian teenager what they know about the 1917 revolution and they'll shrug their shoulders. Yet like parrots they'll repeat that Joseph Stalin saved the planet from fascism in World War Two. Never mind that it was the Soviet people who defeated the Nazis—and not Stalin. The Red Tsar's purge of the Red Army shortly before the war began and murder of the Soviet Union's top military minds, his myopia over Hitler's plans and other blunders that cost the lives of millions of people, make his role in the war much less than heroic, to say the least. Nevertheless, under Vladimir Putin the victory of the Soviet Union against the Third Reich was quickly turned into a hypostasis of the Russian state. Quite tellingly in terms of his intention to attack Ukraine under the pretext of fighting Ukrainian Nazis, Putin had legislation passed in July 2021—just six months before Russian tanks rolled into Ukraine—that make it a crime to equate Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler. In a word, the Kremlin uses Hitler to whitewash Stalin.

Kremlin propagandists speak of a 'sacred national war' in Ukraine but most Russians, particularly in St. Petersburg, Moscow and other large cities, are ceasing to be idiots—to use the term in the original, ancient Athenian sense of '*idiotis*,' that is, an individual who does not participate in the common affairs of the *demos*, or ruling body of free citizens. Russians are waking up from a 22-year slumber. They see that their grey FSB mouse-turned-emperor is naked—and from the waist down this time. Moscow insists that the 'special military operation' in Ukraine was imperative in order to pre-empt an attack from NATO. However, increasing numbers of people understand that Putin's real motive was to distract the public's attention from a tanking economy and gain ratings through a short, victorious war.

The closest parallel in Russian history

to what we are witnessing in Ukraine's snow-covered fields of fertile *chernozem*, or black soil, is Tsar Nicholas I's attempt in 1853 to bolster his regime via a 'short, victorious war' in Crimea. The results were catastrophic. The war lasted until 1856, the Imperial Russian Army was soundly defeated, the treasury was drained (leading to the sale of Alaska to the United States in 1867), and Russia's influence in Europe was seriously undermined. The humiliation in the Crimean War forced Russia's educated elites to recognise that rapid modernisation was the only way to recover the empire's status as a European power. This was a catalyst for social reforms in the 1860s, including the abolition of serfdom and the overhaul of the justice system, local self-government, education and military service.

For a world war to be on the cards, a fight between two opponents must swiftly turn into a fight between many. Russia today is more isolated than she has ever been. The Islamic State in the Greater Sahara has more allies than does the pale moth, as Russians pejoratively refer to their president. China is at best a lukewarm ally and even an engagement of NATO forces against Russian troops in Ukraine will not see the Red Dragon leap to Putin's defence. A war between the United States and China is a non-starter because globalisation has bound the world much more tightly together than it has ever been. Were such a war to start, it would be an armed conflict between a buyer and seller, a consumer and a producer—and all parties would lose. China is a giant with clay feet, as the pandemic of recent protests in cities across the country suggest. Xi Jinping and the elite in Beijing fear worker unrest like death. They know that their privileges—and very survival—depend on their ability to ensure that people are not unemployed.

While a world war may be necessary to kill Globalisation 2.0, it is not an imperative for socialist revolution. In the early 1920s, for instance, a massive workers' movement developed in Germany. Organised in councils (*Arbeiterräte*), these people were devoted to a general struggle against exploiters and the seizure of economic power by associations of worker collectives. They opposed patriotic defensism (defence of 'their country') and were hostile to all governments, including

their ‘own’ leaders in Berlin. The workers’ councils rejected political parties and trade unions, which they regarded as fundamentally anti-democratic because they invariably have leaders who make all the important decisions and followers who do as they are told.

This was also true in Russia, where workers’ councils, or soviets, first appeared in the Revolution of 1905. Unlike political parties or trade unions, they answered to no one but their own collective and their elected representatives were recallable by the majority. The councils held de facto power in working class neighbourhoods in St. Petersburg and Moscow after Tsar Nicholas II was forced to abdicate in February 1917. The rest, as they say, is history. Lenin’s Bolshevik Party came to power on the rising tide of soviets, then quickly swept the workers’ councils off the political stage and replaced them with its own dictatorship—which then morphed in the thirties into Stalin’s personal tyranny. Naturally, the USSR presented itself as anti-capitalist. From the standpoint of capitalists the world over, this was confirmed by the supposed abolition of private property and the free market. From the perspective of Soviet workers themselves, however, their government, though endlessly spewing Marxist phraseology, was in fact a harsh exploiter. This was also felt by the workers in the Communist Bloc, especially when the Soviet Union ordered an armoured division into East Berlin in 1953 to crush a rebellion by East German workers—which set a precedent for the armed interventions in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Whether the Soviet Union was state capitalist or a ‘deformed’ or ‘degenerated’ workers’ state, as some argue, it certainly was no paradise for most people. The USSR had very little in common with socialism, if of course by socialism we mean a society without exploitation and classes. Not for nothing did many Russians call their country the ‘land of the great lie.’ The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was neither a union (Moscow ruled despotically over the regions), nor soviet (the workers’ councils were eliminated), nor socialist (workers’ self-management was destroyed), nor republican (there were no free elections). Every word in this “USSR” was a bald lie.

War is not a necessarily condition for anti-capitalist revolution. Most analysts neglect to mention or are simply unaware of the fact that the revolution in Russia might very well have broken out *before* the guns sounded in August of 1914. Analysis of the extensive data collected by Tsar

Nicholas II’s Factory Inspectorate for the period from 1900 to 1914 shows a sharply rising strike wave, particularly in the empire’s capital, St. Petersburg. In the first six months of 1914 alone some 2 million people went on strike—and their demands were political rather than strictly economic. If anything, the outbreak of WWI seriously dampened the workers’ movement, which picked up again in a big way in 1916 following Russia’s Pyrrhic victory against Austria-Hungary during the Brusilov Offensive.

Recent history is peppered with efforts by workers’ councils to challenge the establishment (both capitalist and ‘communist’) during peacetime. Among others, these include Poland in 1956 and 1980-81 (*radz robotnicze*), Mexico in 2011 (*comités trabajadores*), Hungary in 1956 (*szovjetek*), Italy in 1968 (*consigli di fabbrica*), Spain in 1936-37 (*comités trabajadores*; although formed during a war, this was a civil war), France in 1968 (*comités d’entreprise*), Czechoslovakia in 1968 (*zavodnie rady*) and Iran in 1978-79 (*shoras*).

Neither Moscow nor Kiev can win the war in Ukraine. A prolonged, bloody stalemate is much more likely. This of course is pregnant with grave dangers, and not just for the leaderships of the two belligerent countries. During the early interwar years one hundred years ago, the philosophy behind the League of Nations’ use of sanctions against a recalcitrant Germany was based on the observation during the Great War of how the British naval blockade had led to anti-war demonstrations and strikes in Germany (activities which the Nazis would later deem a ‘stab in the back’). The idea was that by making the Germans suffer economically, they would

rise up against their government—as they had in 1918, when Kaiser Wilhelm II was forced to abdicate and escape to his relatives in Holland. However, the Ruhr Crisis in 1923, and the insane hyperinflation in Germany that ensued, threatened to have quite the opposite result. American trepidation that a socialist revolution might rip Germany asunder and lead to the replacement of the centre-left Weimar government by one openly friendly to the USSR, showed the limits of economic sanctions. In other words, it is far from inconceivable that the current sanctions against Vladimir Putin’s regime may actually trigger unrest and revolution in the West and around the world.

The consequences of this war are enormous and will end up weakening rather than strengthening NATO. The world’s ‘middle class’ is receiving its coup de grace and poor countries will suffer terrible privations, including famine. Social stability will be shattered and there will be anger and polarisation everywhere, especially in China and the United States, where inequality is extreme. Sky-high energy prices and inflation work as a counterincentive to the strengthening of NATO. Most member nations—including the United States, which has clearly forsaken its role as the world’s policeman—do not want to spend more money on keeping the organisation alive.

Instead of the beginnings of a new world war, what we are witnessing is the stage setting for global turmoil and revolution with people in many countries challenging their establishments and demanding drastic change.

VELPIDIS ECONOMAKIS



Credit: Sky

Per Capita

AT THE beginning of December the media reported that Papua New Guinea's population doubled overnight as researchers had worked out that it must be 17 million rather than 9.4 million (bit.ly/3CG6Dk7). The explanation was that the population living in the remote highland interior, where people survive through subsistence hunting and farming, had been underestimated.

The new figure, the *Daily Mail* wrote, meant 'the country's per capita income is slashed by half, making the average salary around £930.'

This suggests that the population of Papua New Guinea had suffered a drastic cut in their living standards. In fact, it made no difference. People's income was not affected at all. All that changed was the statistic for average income obtained by dividing the country's Gross Domestic Product by its population. As the figure for population increased while GDP remained the same, the average fell.

This shows how the figure for a country's GDP per capita can be misleading. In the case of Papua New Guinea, particularly misleading. GDP is a measure of the market price of all

the new goods and services produced in a year and so does not take into account goods and services that are not marketed, such as those produced directly for their own use by the subsistence hunters and farmers in the country's interior. They produce wealth but as this is not sold it is not counted when calculating GDP. Yet their number is taken into account for calculating GDP per capita. Logically, it should not be, but only those who receive a monetary income from which to buy what they need to 'subsist'.

But even that would be misleading as not all the money income from GDP goes to wage-earners. A large part is the income of businesses as their profits. The *Daily Mail* is wrong in saying that the new population figure slashed 'the average salary'. GDP per capita is not a measure of this. It is an average of all money income — profits and income from self-employment and government transfer payments as well, not just income from working for a wage or salary — divided by population.

According to Investopedia, 'GDP per capita shows how much economic production value can be attributed to each individual citizen' (bit.ly/2BJ7p2V). This suggests that it might be a measure of how much each person in a country contributed to the value of what is

produced. But it is not that either. The whole of GDP is indeed attributable to what wage-workers produce in a year. But only a portion of that goes to them and their dependents.

The Economics Help blog says: 'High real GDP per capita indicates citizens are able to purchase more goods and services' (bit.ly/3QzLa2k). Not necessarily, as that will depend on how GDP is divided between profits and income from work. If GDP per capita goes up due to a higher proportion being made up of business profits, then 'citizens' might not be able to purchase more.

Per capita figures are misleading because they ignore that 'the population' includes owners of businesses which bring in a high total income as profits, which distorts the average making it seem that the individuals in the rest of the population get much more than they do.

It is not just figures for new marketable wealth that are distorted but also for other things such as water consumption and carbon emissions. Per capita figures for these, by attributing business's contribution to everyone, give the impression that individuals use more water or have a larger carbon footprint than they actually do.



Work, in all its forms, is what keeps society running. At best, our own work can be interesting and creative, if we're not stuck in an unfulfilling role. Capitalism turns work into employment, with our job roles shaped by how profitable or cost-effective they are likely to be, more than by how useful or manageable they are. Even so, countless important tasks rely on volunteers and other unpaid labour.

Poor conditions and pay have pushed an increased number of employees to go on strike. But how effective can industrial action be when workers don't own or control the places we work in? Alongside the impact of the state and the economy on how we work, technology has had a massive influence, from the most basic tools to the latest advances in computing.

In a socialist society, work would be freed from the constraints of money and the exploitation of employment, and would instead be driven directly by people's needs and wants. This would entail workplaces being owned in common and run democratically. But how could this happen in practice?

The Socialist Party's Summer School 21st—23rd July 2023 Birmingham

The Socialist Party's weekend of talks and discussion looks at different aspects of work, and what they tell us about the society we live in. The event also includes an exclusive publication, exhibition and bookstall.

Our venue is Woodbrooke, 1046 Bristol Road, Birmingham, B29 6LJ. Full residential cost (including accommodation and meals Friday evening to Sunday afternoon) is £200; the concessionary rate is £100. Book online at www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/summer-school-2023/ or send a cheque (payable to the Socialist Party of Great Britain) with your contact details to Summer School, The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 7UN. Day visitors are welcome, but please e-mail for details in advance. Send enquiries to spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk.

Dukes and Rebukes

THE ROYAL family get enough coverage in the media without a need for fictional retellings of its excesses. Netflix's ongoing series *The Crown* has been the most prominent, reframing the dynasty's recent history in whatever way will win the most awards. In what looks like a dig at *The Crown*'s pretentiousness, Channel 4's *Prince Andrew: The Musical* makes a song and dance of the life of the now-disgraced Duke of York, the eighth person in line to the throne. Andrew is played by comic actor Kieran Hodgson, who also wrote the show's deft, droll script. He portrays 'randy Andy' as smarmy and self-aggrandising, enjoying an extravagant lifestyle because he's 'Elizabeth's favourite son' and doesn't have the expectations of being the heir.

The show takes us through Andrew's life with jaunty musical numbers and real archive footage narrated from the character's perspective. We begin with the 2019 interview with Emily Maitlis on *Newsnight*, which Andrew reluctantly realises didn't put him in a good light, before rewinding to his younger years, believing that he was a hero in the Falklands War. His marriage to Sarah Ferguson is presented as a transaction from which Sarah sought to benefit, much like her later attempt at selling access to Andrew to an undercover reporter. A role as a trade envoy gave 'air miles Andy' opportunities to continue his jet-setting ways, no sweat. The frothy format of a musical is supposed to be an impudent way of telling his story, but jars when the subject of sexual abuse comes up. After Andrew's association with convicted sex offender and financier Jeffrey Epstein became known and he was accused of sexual assault by Virginia Giuffre (the latter glossed over in the musical), he 'stepped back from public duties'. He reached a financial settlement with Giuffre which (in a logically puzzling way) did not include an admission of guilt. The programme risks minimising the seriousness of the allegations against Andrew by putting them in the frivolous context of a musical. In it, Andrew makes the point that he's a useful scapegoat to take attention away from the wrongdoings of the rest of the royals.

The show was commissioned as part of 'a collection of irreverent, thought-provoking and hugely entertaining shows that no other broadcaster would air', according to Ian Katz, Channel 4's Chief Content Officer. This may have felt like a last throw of the dice for the channel



Credit: Channel 4

which at the time was planned to be privatised, a decision since reversed.

Prince Andrew: The Musical isn't the only Channel 4 show to present the royals in a cartoonish way, being close in tone to *The Windsors*, a sitcom which has been running since 2016. In both programmes, members of 'the firm' are characterised too loosely to be particularly insulting. In the musical, Munya Chawawa portrays Charles as a stern boss who tries to keep Andrew in line, and who also unfortunately reminds us of his infamous 'tampon' remark. The late queen was immune from being lampooned in either show, though, not appearing as a character. While Elizabeth was treated with too much veneration in the mainstream media to attract much criticism, the caricatures of Charles demonstrate that there's less reverence for him, even now he's the monarch.

Prince Andrew is probably secretly relieved that media attention has largely switched away from him to his mother, brother and now towards the Duke and Duchess of Sussex. The latter's criticisms of the attitudes of other royals towards her were the focus of last December's documentary series, *Harry & Meghan*. This was hyped up enough to attract Netflix's highest number of viewers in the UK for the year, although how many really did endure its almost six hours of self-promotion from the estranged and bitter Sussexes? Harry has since courted even more attention with his tell-all memoir

Spare and another round of interviews, for which he's no doubt received a princely sum of money. But this hasn't bolstered his popularity, as measured by YouGov's Royal Favourability Tracker, which has reported a drop in support for him as well as for the monarchy as a whole. Harry's salacious confessions about drug-taking, being knocked to the floor by William, having frostbitten genitals and killing members of the Taliban have chipped away some of the mystique which the royals have traditionally attracted.

Being born into a life of privilege has damaged Harry and Andrew in different ways, raising the issue of what kind of institution produces lives like theirs. Questioning this can only be a good thing if it's a step towards a wider rejection of the social system which includes having a monarchy. If the figureheads for capitalism are so dysfunctional, what does that say about the system? Presumably, the House of Windsor is hoping that the pomp and pageantry of Charles' coronation in May will push away recent bad press and declines in popularity. Even if it does to some extent, more pointedly, the spectacle will be in stark contrast to the privations much of the country will still be trying to cope with. The coronation will be a reminder of the gulf between how the vast majority have to live and the indulgences of the elite.

MIKE FOSTER

Climate understanding



The Climate Book. By Greta Thunberg (Author and Narrator), Nicholas Khan (Narrator), Olivia Forrest (Narrator), Amelia Stubberfield (Narrator). Penguin Audio . 2022

It has been five years since a shy 15-year-old Greta Thunberg stepped on to the global stage by spending her Fridays holding up a sign reading 'Skolstrejk för klimatet' (School Strike for Climate) outside the Swedish Parliament, calling for stronger action on climate change and battling the forces of climate inaction and denial. During this time, she has written three books including this, her most recent offering, which she has produced and narrated alongside other activists such as Nicholas Khan, Olivia Forrest, and Amelia Stubberfield. With contributions from over one hundred experts, including geophysicists, oceanographers, and meteorologists; engineers, economists, and mathematicians; historians, philosophers, and indigenous leaders, to equip us all with the knowledge we need to combat climate disaster. Alongside them, she shares her own stories of demonstrating and uncovering greenwashing around the world, revealing how much we have been kept in the dark and frequently misled by the powers that be.

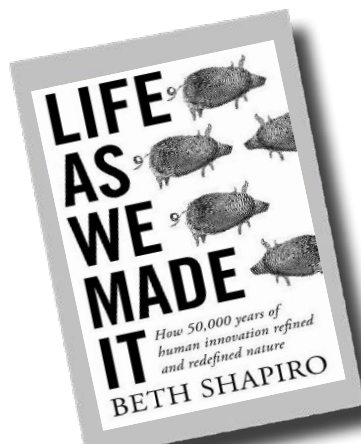
For some time now I have been looking for the type of environmental book that could give me a reasonably good and broad understanding of climate change, including its causes, effects, and what needs to be done to stabilise and hopefully one day reverse it. A book that is factual, easily understood and not too demanding on my mental health in terms of the emotions and melancholy that are all too often triggered by the crazy social system in which we live. Well, I am pleased to say that *The Climate Book* pretty much delivered in all the above. Beautifully written and narrated with great passion and emphasis when needed (a particular advantage of an audio book) it really brought home all the chaos and

destruction that has been inflicted upon the environment and Planet Earth, which the author blames squarely on the productive processes that created the industrial revolution and modern-day capitalism. A common denominator that brings out the overall theme of the book, with every one of the 100+ contributors arriving at virtually identical conclusions is the insatiable appetite for profit taking precedence over the welfare of the planet and its inhabitants, including flora and fauna.

My only criticism is when she describes how every 'ism' including conservatism, liberalism, labourism and – you guessed it – communism and socialism has failed to offer any proper solution to mitigate the ongoing challenges of pollution and its effects on the climate. Meaning that this otherwise intelligent and admirable young woman still has a little bit to learn about the politics of the subject matter. Nothing wrong, though, with her closing statement ... 'Once we are given the full picture, how can we not act? And if a schoolchild's strike could ignite a global protest, what could we do collectively if we tried? We are alive at the most decisive time in the history of humanity. Together, we can do the seemingly impossible. But it has to be us, and it has to be now.'

PAUL EDWARDS

Humans and Nature



Life As We Made It. How 50,000 Years of Human Innovation Refined – and Redefined – Nature. By Beth Shapiro. Oneworld, 2021. 341pp.

The author of this book is an evolutionary biologist with a special interest in the uses of ancient DNA and genetic engineering. She attempts to trace – and to characterise – the ways in which homo sapiens has used and manipulated nature over its history and, with modern biotechnology, can continue, for good or for bad, to do so more than ever. Profound understanding

of how humanity has fashioned the natural environment since earliest times coupled with dazzling technical knowledge and experience in a variety of scientific fields allows her to paint a picture of human social evolution that is as extraordinary as it is often horrifying and to project into the future ways in which the careful use of what she calls synthetic biology can help to fashion what she sees as positive social developments for humanity.

One part of the history of humanity in its relationship with other species is dramatically summed up by the author when she writes: 'Within the last 50,000 years, our ancestors hunted, polluted, and outcompeted hundreds of species into extinction'. A reasonable qualification to this, however, should be that they did most of this in the last 10,000 years or so, that is once settled agriculture took over from nomadic hunter gathering. And whether this move to farming was meant, as she says, 'to improve the reliability of their next meal' is also a matter of debate. A number of recent studies suggest that this transition, very gradual as it was, happened more by serendipity than by deliberate decision, especially as the effect of it was to make the majority of people actually worse off in very many ways than they had been as hunter gatherers. This was then made even worse when the new agricultural societies led to fixed hierarchies and then states with a small number of wealthy and powerful at the top and the vast majority forced to work at their behest and under conditions not of their choosing. This kind of set up remained as agricultural living was transcended by competitive industrial societies leading to colonial rule for millions in the less economically developed parts of the world and the factory system and wage labour as a means of survival for the vast majority elsewhere.

But, if we return to the time, 10,000 years ago, when settled agriculture in its various forms took over, the process of mass extinctions of both people and flora and fauna accelerated to a massive extent. Beth Shapiro, in a highly compelling and readable style, documents much of this history, striking examples of which in recent times are the demise of the bison in North America (from 60 million in the mid 18th century to fewer than 1,000 in 1884), the complete destruction by the end of the 19th century of the billions of passenger pigeons whose ancestors went back 10 million years, and the virtual elimination from the whole of the Americas by the mid 20th century of the pumas and panthers which had once been widespread throughout the continent.

But the author's main purpose in writing this book is not so much to lament the loss of species or human carelessness in

conserving the environment in the past as to propose ways in which humanity can make a better fist of things going forward. As she puts it: 'We must use our increasingly advanced technologies to shape the future into one in which people can thrive alongside other species.' She talks about the need to 'restore ecosystem health and save species from extinction'. These are obviously laudable objectives, but the way she sees them being most effectively advanced is via massive changes – often laid out in enthralling scientific detail – she sees as possible by the use of genetic engineering and synthetic biology. She recognises that many people question this but is not sympathetic to their objections, brushing them aside as either ill-informed or based on conspiracy theories ('cacophony of lies and distorted half-truths').

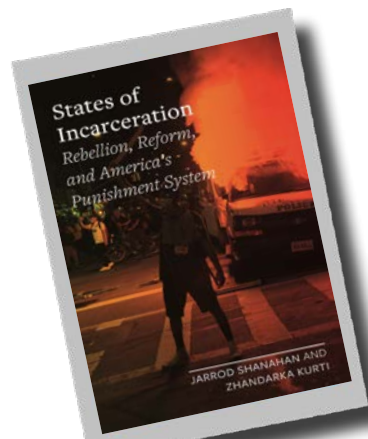
While she may be right about this, what she does however fail to recognise (or at least nowhere mentions) is that, in the society we live in, neither the massive impact human activity is having on ecosystems nor the inability to decently feed, clothe and house many millions of people is caused by a failure to use the most up-to-date well-researched techniques of production to their best potential but is much more to do with production needing to take place with a view to cost-saving and profit rather than human welfare. This means that all attempts to 'green' the environment and benefit flora and fauna in any form face the formidable obstacle of a profit needing to be turned and that feeding people the world over is not a question of our inability to produce sufficient food but rather of people not having sufficient money to buy that food.

So, in referring to the need to develop biotechnologies such as artificial insemination and embryo transfer of animals to increase food production and deal with what she calls 'global food shortages', she surprisingly fails to take account of the wealth of information available showing that enough food is already produced to feed the world but that, in a world system based on the market and buying and selling, food is not available to the millions who need it. She shows no signs of being aware that, even in the USA, the most economically advanced country in the world and the one she lives in, the top 0.1 percent of the population hold as much wealth as the bottom 90 per cent put together and some 47 million people live in poverty. She refers to 'United Nations estimates that farming production will need to increase by 50 percent to feed the projected 9 billion people that will inhabit the planet in 2050', yet this flies in the face of a large swathe of studies estimating that, using current knowledge and techniques,

the world can be fed many times over, up to 23 according to one estimate. So it's not more advanced biotechnology that's needed, nor more industrial agriculture, nor the continuous and increasing use of animal experimentation to improve biotechnology (something the author clearly sees as essential), but rather, and quite simply, a more advanced social system that does away with the market and buying and selling and produces for human need not economic profit.

HKM

Inside the System



States of Incarceration: Rebellion, Reform, and America's Punishment System. Jarrod Shanahan and Zhandarka Kurti. Reaktion Books, £15.95.

The US is characterised here as a carceral state (where 'carceral' is connected to words such as 'incarcerate' and means 'related to prison'). More specifically, it is 'a particular form of capitalist social order managed by a state which prioritizes punishment and repressive social control to safeguard and reproduce itself.' The US prison system is the largest on the planet, mass incarceration having increased massively since the 1970s (as it has in other countries too). This is not a response to any increase in crime rates, and it is mostly aimed at young black men. It is not just a matter of imprisonment but also covers probation, house arrest, mandatory drug treatment and so on.

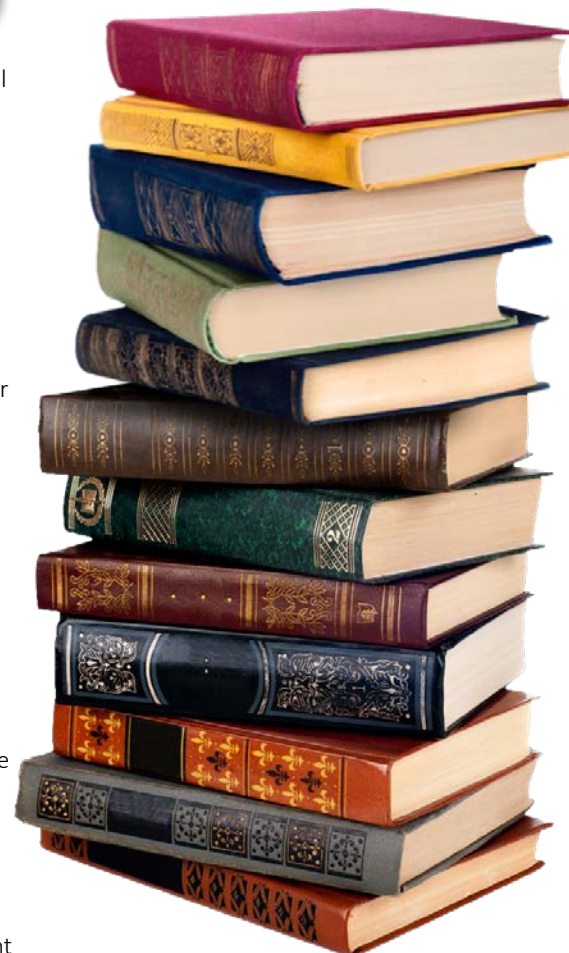
Of the many killings by police officers in the US, the best known is the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis in 2020. This and other deaths led to what the authors refer to as the George Floyd Rebellion, which involved attacking and burning police stations and police cars. It was, they say, not just an attack on the carceral state but 'the proactive rejection of an entire way of life', as the carceral state 'is inextricable from the capitalist division of labor'. The Rebellion died out, partly because of violent

state response, but also, it is suggested here, because it became co-opted into 'the framework of liberal democratic participation' (though the claims on this point are not very clear).

There have been various attempts to reform the US criminal 'justice' system, though many of these just involve making mass incarceration cheaper. In addition there have been moves that the authors regard as more revolutionary, such as defunding or abolishing the police. One activist is quoted as saying, 'You're not going to be able to end policing without ending capitalism', while another argues that defunding campaigns point towards a post-capitalist society, and another refers to the abolition of class society. Sadly, such remarks do not give rise to fuller discussion.

The book's conclusion points to the alleged advantages of combining abolitionism's critique of the carceral state with the militant tactics of the George Floyd Rebellion. But it is not clear how setting fire to police stations makes any kind of contribution to the establishment of a democratic world based on co-operation. This volume gives an informative and depressing account of the vicious punishment system in the US but, apart from a few passing references, says little about how to put an end to it.

PB



Northern Ireland: Unite for Socialism!

Northern Ireland — with its street riots, its shootings, its bombings, its political prisoners — is but one of world capitalism's trouble spots. What has been happening there is only exceptional compared with life in capitalist Britain. On a world scale it is normal. Somewhere, sometime innocent people are always being killed by the forces of Law and Order or by the terrorist activities of their self-appointed "liberators". If it's not Northern Ireland, it's Cyprus. If it's not Cyprus, it's Algeria. If it's not Algeria, it's Palestine ... or India or Vietnam or South Africa. The only difference is that Northern Ireland is a lot nearer home.

Violence is never far below the surface of capitalism, even in comparatively peaceful areas like Britain. The institutionalised violence of the State exists to protect the class monopoly of a minority over the means of wealth production and its agents have continually to contain the frustrations caused by the insecure and deprived existence of the working class under capitalism. But the scarcity the working class the world over have to endure is artificial. The world means of production are quite capable of producing an abundance of wealth from which everybody could freely take according to their needs. Capitalism holds back production because it operates, and has to operate, according to the rule "No profit, no production" and it restricts the consumption of the vast majority to what is needed to keep them efficient wealth — and profit — producers.(...)

Understandably, at the moment, ordinary people in Northern Ireland want peace, an end to the pointless shootings and bombings and the added insecurity they bring. We too want an immediate end to this senseless sacrifice of working-class life to no useful purpose (not even now the interests of their masters, as was once the case). But, over and above this, we want Socialism, a far more worthwhile objective than a mere return to "normal" capitalism with its boring jobs, its dole queues, its slums and its general poverty and exploitation minus only the extra violence.

We urge workers in Ireland to join with us, and their fellow

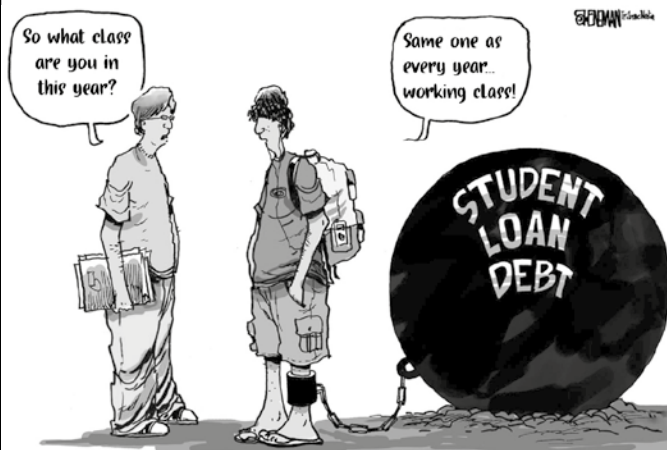


workers in all other countries, in working to establish as quickly as possible Socialism, a world of peace and plenty.
(*Socialist Standard*, February 1973)

Obituary Ivan Corry

We are saddened to have to report the death in December of our comrade Ivan Corry at the age of 90. Ivan was from Dublin and joined the Socialist Party of Ireland (SPI) in his twenties. Like many who had passed through their hands he had an abiding hatred of the Catholic Church, compounded by the experience of priest-led mobs trying to break up SPI outdoor meetings as 'godless communism'. He was part of the large-scale Irish emigration to England in the 1950s, including most members of the Dublin branch of the SPI. Some members found work in the car factories in the Midlands. Ivan went to London where he worked in his trade of upholsterer. He joined the Islington branch in 1956 and became an active member. In fact he was known right up to the 2000s for his exuberant and memorable appeals at Conference for the Party to be more active. When he was younger he had been one of a number of branch members who were amateur wrestlers (Ivan was actually the name he adopted for this and for his Party membership, as his legal name was Sean). On retirement he moved to Worthing on the south coast but continued to visit London from time to time.

**Sick and tired of wondering
what the future holds for you in the job market?
You're not alone. But there is a better way.**



Back in September 2020 the UK Government didn't like what was happening as young people were questioning the sanity of the current social system called capitalism. And so, it decided to ban the teaching of certain materials in some educational facilities that it felt posed a threat to that system.

We in The Socialist Party believe that governments the world over are running scared of a growing number of young people who are questioning capitalism and its wars, poverty and destruction of the environment.

Want to know more? Please read on ...

World Socialist Movement Online Meetings

Our general discussion meetings are now held on 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.

FEBRUARY 2023 EVENTS

World Socialist Movement online meetings

Sundays at 19.30 (IST) Discord

Weekly WSP (India) meeting

Sunday 12 February 11.00 GMT Zoom

Central Online Branch Meeting

Friday 3 February 19.30 GMT Zoom

Enough is enough is not enough

Speaker: Alan Johnstone

Discussion on current strike wave

Friday 10 February 19.30 GMT Zoom

Did You See the News?

Discussion on recent subjects in the news

Host: Howard Moss

Friday 17 February 19.30 GMT Zoom

War! What is it good for?

Speaker: David Coggan

A critical look at armed conflict and the likelihood of Armageddon. As viewed through the lens of culture: verse, song and Socialist analysis.

19.30 Friday 24 February GMT Zoom

What's in a Name?

Speaker: Glenn Morris

A look at how we see our politics in terms of the party names and perhaps how helpful, or otherwise, these names are. Also, how simple words tend to colour our view of each other both in this and other countries.

Socialist Party Physical Meetings

LONDON

Saturday 25 February 3pm

Alternative Medicine

Speaker: Carla Dee.

Preceded by London Regional Branch meeting at 2pm.

All welcome to both.

Socialist Party Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, SW4 UN
(nearest tube: Clapham North)

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

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

Party News

Socialist weekend at Yealand Conyers in Cumbria

After unavoidable interruptions including a pandemic, Lancaster branch is once again organising a socialist residential weekend, from Friday 23 to Sunday 25 June, at the Yealand Quaker Centre in rural Cumbria. This is a sociable get-together for members and non-members in a nice hostel with dorm rooms and self-catering facilities, where we muck in together on the cooking and chores. The last time we did this was in 2019 and it was a pretty enjoyable experience all round (see the report in the August 2019 Socialist Standard- bit.ly/3H9OzKY). The branch will bear the hire cost but is happy to accept pay-what-you-can contributions. You'll also have to fund your own travel arrangements. Spaces are limited to max 16 so if you'd like to take part please let us know at spgb.lancaster@worldsocialism.org.

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.

What A Contrast!

LAST MONTH'S column was entitled 'What an example!' and talked about a striking act of kindness and altruism by a young man working at a car wash (bit.ly/3Zjquze). Round about the same time as this happened, I happened to listen to a play on Radio 4, a drama-documentary on the 20th century American writer and social theorist Ayn Rand, who was renowned for praising and encouraging just the opposite forms of behaviour, that is selfishness and self-interest. The previous column mentioned how several hundred people responded in a strikingly positive way to my relating on my local community Facebook page what had happened outside the car wash. This substantiated the idea, much supported by many recent studies on the topic, that humans, given the chance, are a fundamentally cooperative species. But the Ayn Rand programme (it was called 'Talk to Me') showed a person not just doubting this idea but recommending a completely different form of behaviour among humans and being lauded by many with particular opinions on politics and society.

Greed is good

In 'Talk To Me', we found out how Ayn Rand's Russian parents had been rendered destitute by the Bolshevik regime in the 1920s but had nevertheless managed to send her to America as a teenager for her education. When she left, she said she would become famous, and that's what happened. She never returned to Russia but nursed an abiding hatred of its dictatorial government, and this fed into her entirely anti-collectivist, anti-cooperative theory of society which argued that all interaction should be conducted by what she called 'rational self-interest' and in practice meant advocacy of and dedication to the idea of a society governed by the free market with minimal state intervention. Initially Rand produced books of fiction which, though attracting little attention at first, later became famous and sold in their millions. Her two major novels were *The Fountainhead* (1949) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), the latter famously referred to as 'the bible of selfishness'. These depicted heroic individuals who prospered or won out through egotistic behaviours regardless of any negative impacts their actions might have had on others. In fact, if the weak fell by the wayside, then this could only

make the world a better place. For this kind of depiction, and through her later writings, Rand is often seen as the inspiration behind the slogan 'greed is good'.

A gateway drug?

After these novels she focused largely on works of social and political theory putting forward what is often referred to as her philosophy of 'objectivism', whose essence is that a person's individual happiness via 'rational self-interest' should be the moral purpose of their life and that any consideration of 'society' or altruism can only obstruct this (one of her books was entitled *The Virtue of Selfishness*). Rand's 'objectivism' emphasised **individual rights**, including **property rights**, seeing **laissez-faire capitalism** as the only moral social system, because in her view it was the only system based on protecting those rights. And the radio play showed how appealing these ideas became to a significant number of people and how, in her later years, many – some of them high up in the US establishment – sat at her feet and venerated her. And even though she herself rejected the label 'libertarian', that has not stopped her becoming a kind of cult figure on the libertarian right of American politics. Historian Jennifer Burns has referred to her as 'the ultimate gateway drug to life on the right'.

The radio play also showed how unsatisfactory this view of life and the world made her personal relationships, how she never seemed able to connect on a truly human level even with those closest to her. One scene, for example, showed how, when a close relative spent a significant period in hospital, she never visited, the implication being that to do so would not have served any purpose for her and would therefore go against her philosophy of a human being needing to put their own perceived happiness and pleasure before everything else. Given her view of egoism as virtue, should we be surprised that, in more recent times, she is mooted as Donald Trump's favourite writer?

Car wash kindness

What a contrast then to what happened outside the car wash close to my home a short time ago. There a complete stranger chose to use his specialist knowledge to resolve in an entirely cooperative way a potential dispute between two drivers and then to adamantly refuse



any monetary reward for what he had done. Then, following that, close to 700 people on social media took the time to congratulate him for his act of kindness and human solidarity. Instead of following Ayn Rand's famous dictum that 'altruism is evil' and that all that counts is the interests of the individual (ie, yourself), he had chosen the opposite path, of kindness and collaboration, showing it to be a more 'natural', perhaps a more 'instinctive' human reaction. He refused to accept any material gain, but his gain was that he felt good about himself and no doubt good about seeing the approbation of his fellow human beings.

This kind of helpfulness and generosity without thought of material gain is something we see on a daily basis in so many interactions between people – and this despite the fact that we live in a system of society – capitalism – that has built into it an ethic of competition and individualism. Of course little of these daily interactions gets talked about or considered newsworthy in the information media, and this precisely because it is so common, normal and everyday. Rather what does get reported is the other kind of news, 'bad news', ie, those far less common instances of negative behaviour such as selfishness, unkindness, violence or ruthless maximisation of self-interest.

This is one of the things that socialists are at pains to point out in response to the common objection that the moneyless, wageless, free-access society we campaign for could not work because people are uncooperative, lazy, selfish, violent, etc. Well, actually, they're not, and this is all the more reason why the society we advocate, based on cooperation not competition, would work. The coercion implicit in having to 'get a job' would go and human not monetary transactions would prevail.

HOWARD MOSS