

THE

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SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

HALF-EARTH SOCIALISM?

Engineering a
new planet



Also: A winter of discontent
Revolving corruption
A plan to save the future
The ballot strike in Tunisia

Communism and socialism:
is there a difference?
Farming under capitalism
Nations and borders



Features

Letters	5
A winter of discontent	10
Revolving corruption.....	11
A plan to save the future	12
The ballot strike in Tunisia.....	14
Communism and socialism: is there a difference?	15
Farming under capitalism	16
Nations and borders.....	17

Regulars

Editorial	3
Pathfinders	4
Cooking the Books I	6
Bird's Eye View	7
Material World.....	9
Cooking the Books II	18
Proper Gander	19
Reviews	20
50 Years Ago.....	22
Meetings	23
Life & Times	24

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'

The **alternative** pro-profit government in waiting

THE LABOUR Party leaders regard themselves as a government in waiting in the expectation that, after the next general election, they will be the ones driven around in ministerial cars on ministerial salaries.

If they do win that election it won't be on the basis of their election promises. People know these are worthless, whichever party makes them. It will be because they agree without illusions with ageing pop-star (and Tory millionaire) Sir Rod Stewart that it is time to 'give the Labour Party a go at it' (tinyurl.com/dwpjwckh).

This is a view shared by business people too, fed up with the corruption and incompetence of recent Tory prime ministers and convinced that Labour is sincerely pro-capitalist. The Independent (14 February, tinyurl.com/5n7h7a3a) carried an article by ex-CBI chief Paul Drescher in which he praised Labour for having 'set about convincing business that they are

encouraging entrepreneurs and enterprise (and, whisper it quietly: profit)' (which the paper interpreted as him saying that Labour was 'the party of profit'), adding 'I know a lot of influential people in business who feel the same as I do.'

All previous Labour governments have ended up encouraging profit-making but, until Blair, only after failing to impose some other priority on capitalism. In any event, since the Labour Party intends to leave the commanding heights of the economy in private hands this will continue to be driven by private capitalist enterprises seeking to maximise their profits. In this circumstance any government has to be pro-business and give priority to profit-making and maintaining the conditions for this or risk provoking an economic downturn.

This wasn't always what the Labour Party thought. At one time they believed that a Labour government would be able to control the way the economy worked

by having an important nationalised (state capitalist) sector. Nationalisation proved to be a failure both from this point of view and for the workers in them. Under Tony Blair, even a paper commitment to this was abandoned; which left the Labour Party as firmly committed to the existing capitalist status quo as the Tory party, as in fact the alternative management team for UK plc. Business now considers it time for the 'Outs' to become the 'Ins' for a while. Alternating governments has the advantage for them of preventing entrenched cronyism at their expense.

Who is in and who is out doesn't make any difference to the wage-working class. There is no lesser evil. They are both as useless as each other. Come the general election, we shan't be saying Vote Labour but 'A plague on both your houses'. Capitalism can't be humanised or made to serve the interest of the majority. It can't be mended. It has to be ended.

Socialism, the common ownership and democratic control of productive resources, with production and distribution directly to meet people's needs and not for sale or profit, remains the only way out and the only goal worth voting for.

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Shut up and take the pill

SOMETIMES, INSTEAD of trying to chase down the causes of a particular medical problem through extensive (and expensive) lab research, it's easier to change the environment the problem flourishes in. This is especially true of environments like the human gut biome, in which very little of the bacterial load has been studied or is even known to science. Nobody really knows what's in there or what any of it does. Following the much-publicised success of faecal microbiome transplants (FMTs), which have proved to be often stunningly effective against sometimes fatal *Clostridium difficile* and other conditions previously thought untreatable, vaginal microbiome transplants are now being proposed as a holistic approach to certain poorly understood but common vaginal disorders, by effecting a wholesale change to the vaginal environment (*New Scientist*, 13 February- [bit.ly/3XEapCo](https://www.newscientist.com/article/10385-faecal-transplants-for-vaginal-diseases)).

From a socialist perspective there is a certain irresistible analogy to be drawn here, human society as a *macrobiome*, containing a complex ecosystem of unique and discrete agents whose interactions work in concert to make the whole thing function. In common parlance we talk about 'good' and 'bad' bacteria, although we understand that this is not some moral verdict on the bacterium itself, which is neither good nor bad, but merely a handy way to describe individual bacterial behaviours that are either helpful or at least neutral, or deleterious for the whole macro-organism. Thus, in a healthy and balanced macrobiome, one would expect a preponderance of good bacteria, displaying socially advantageous behaviours that help the various functions work in harmony to create a stable and disease-free environment for the whole community.

Most people would probably agree that what we see in capitalist society is not healthy and balanced, by any stretch of the imagination. Instead we see a toxic load of bad bacteria that result in a dysfunctional, polluting environment, a sick and convulsive macrobiome that is frequently at war with itself and therefore has a poor general survival prognosis. No surprise that such a hostile environment generates a wide array of severe clinical symptoms that are dangerous and even deadly for the individuals who experience them.

The prevailing *medical model*, darling of the profit-driven pharmaceutical industry, usually treats these symptoms in isolation



via some form of targeted medical therapy or intervention. It may be added that the capitalist state, the darling and administrative apparatus of wealthy elites, actively promotes certain bad behaviours it likes, ie, ones that made the elite rich, while weaponising the medical model into its dark twin, the criminal model, to target extreme antisocial individual behaviours it doesn't like, using a range of 'interventions' including sequestration (and in some countries, execution) to try to curb them.

Whether any of these therapies or controls actually work depends on a large number of factors, but in no case is anything done about the environment which, in all likelihood, produced this symptom or behaviour in the first place. Of course not. The ruling elites owe their position to the prevailing social ecosystem. They would be mad to consider any *social model* of change that threatened their power base.

A good illustration of all this is in the treatment of mental illness. Ongoing clinical research into depression has tended to raise as many questions as it solves, for instance debunking long-standing generalist assumptions about neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin to explain why, in studies, Prozac-like drugs only seem to work for some people and not others, yet only succeeding in adding further layers of mystery to the picture (*New Scientist*, 18 January- [bit.ly/3Z22BeP](https://www.newscientist.com/article/10385-faecal-transplants-for-vaginal-diseases)). Meanwhile a seeming epidemic in the popularity of conspiracy theories is prompting new research into paranoia, once thought to have been the sole province of people with schizophrenia-like conditions but now seen as more of a gradient affecting up to 1 in 6 people (*New Scientist*, 6 February- [bit.ly/3SkvjWc](https://www.newscientist.com/article/10385-faecal-transplants-for-vaginal-diseases)).

There will certainly be some genetic factors at work, perhaps even some remote evolutionary legacies, so this type of coal-face research is always worthwhile,

but only up to a point. Given that around 1 in 4 adults over 18 suffer from some diagnosable form of mental disorder in any given year (bit.ly/3IEpWho), it's tempting to say: let's cut the techno-crap and look at the real common denominator, which is not chemicals but your class position. Being in the working class, and thus poor, powerless and oppressed, is more likely to make you ill than any genetic or evolutionary influence.

The link between financial and mental health is so strong as to be axiomatic. 44 percent of respondents in US surveys report that money is the main stressor in their lives. 70 percent have 'cried about money at some point' while 56 percent have done so in the past year (bit.ly/3Z6DQOn). Not surprisingly, clinical psychologists say 'money is a top cause of stress for many Americans' (bit.ly/3xGciDO). Meanwhile the Mind UK charity (bit.ly/3kc3HWt) has a helpful page of advice on money troubles that lists ways that lack of money can impact your mental health, like for example not being able to afford housing, food, water, heating or medication. To which it's tempting to respond, Oh really, no shit?

This is not to draw some simplistic conclusion that the more money you've got, the happier you'll be. A study published in *Nature* suggests that there is a sweet spot at around \$95,000 a year (£79,000), at which point your general happiness hits a plateau, and above which new stressors enter the picture which adversely affect your life satisfaction and sense of wellbeing (bit.ly/2CR8Asx). But the vast majority of those having mental health problems are unlikely to be earning anywhere near that golden plateau. Instead they experience life as a perpetual fight for survival in the face of debts, deprivation, damaged relationships, bullying bosses and institutions, and feelings of futility and personal inadequacy.

There isn't a pill for any of that. Instead, capitalist society performs its own bowdlerised version of FMTs, by supplanting one shit government by another, one set of micro-policies by another, in the pretence that these might achieve something for a change, but very likely in the full knowledge that nothing but a wholesale system change would ever really work.

PJS

Dear Editors

I CAME to your site seeking modern socialist writers and thinkers. My landing page was about Marcuse, lacking author and date. According to the article, Marcuse was born in the 19th century, but is alive and possibly well in 2022. I doubt that.

I read similar things about other historical socialists, written apparently by various writers and edited subsequently. There is a voice of a modern editor in some places, not much in others. There is even some 'but we know now' commentary without any discussion of 'who we are and when.'

I then allowed myself the distraction of discerning who your group proposes to be and could only develop a negative image of what and who you are not. I hold religion, for example, much as you do, I think. Yet I read a claim that all religion is founded on a capital or leadership/control impulse which is false: religion and most all original magical thinking is a human response to death and emotional loss. Organized religion is a way of leading, purifying, and socializing those emotions and with rites and rules to help people move beyond grief. It has also served to join in the times of oppression and war. Yet the costs of organized religion, at least Christianity, exceeded benefits after it joined and assimilated into the all conquering, all powerful Roman Empire, which it still acts as successor having destroyed local paganism in Europe, controlled doctrine by punishment, exile and assassination, wars killing millions and inquisition. When rulers didn't do its bidding, mobs were activated.

Religion will not disappear, nation-states will not dissolve, and value exchange tools like money will not disappear. As much as all absolute power corrupts absolutely, leaders are needed by nearly everyone. Structure is needed by mostly everyone and laws and authority must be used to keep us all civil.

So socialism taking hold may come, but from what I read here it will be the day after thermo-nuclear war and last about a day.

My critique, to return, is the absence of all you disown does not define something many humans can believe in or even hope for. It remains undefined as you have left it. It seems it can survive only in that form, since any definition, scope, methods or limns subject it to the realities of human nature, human needs and desires, and the reality that much of our structures and norms you discard, even those as outdated and counterfactual as superstition-religion.

Mark Bonine

Reply:

Nostra culpa on Marcuse, it was an old text we should have revisited, and you're right that there are different texts with different writers. We're in the process of revising the website but it's a big job.

You say that religion is a product of human magical thinking, and thus inevitable. It may be human, but that doesn't make it inevitable. Science is also a product of human creative thinking. Wherever knowledge prevails, science advances and magical thinking retreats.

You also seem to argue that nation states and hierarchies are necessary evils to 'keep us all civil'. This is a ruling class narrative element derived from Thomas Hobbes which, like the Bible story of original sin, has no science behind it and exists only to make you do as you're told without question. It's also an abnegation of individual power. The first act of a revolutionary is to ditch that subservient mindset.

Moreover it's a feat of mental gymnastics to describe the global slaughter and planet-threatening destruction of the past hundred years as 'civil'. These institutions don't prevent or mitigate murder, wars or repression, they instigate and drive them, just as they are currently driving climate change, species extinction and possibly the next nuclear war. With 'protectors' like the capitalist ruling elites, nobody needs enemies.

As for socialism, if we tend to define it by what it doesn't have, i.e. markets, states, leaders, money, etc, it's because any attempt to be too prescriptive or predictive could easily be wide of the mark. When we started in 1904, the world was still using gas lamps and Hansom carriages. We can't really guess what the world will look like even 30 years from now. Socialism is a global non-market society of free access and democratic common ownership. What more can we say? — **Editors**



The Moral Mess

THE SUBJECT of the *Moral Maze* on BBC Radio 4 on 8 February was billed as 'Would the World be Better off Without Money?' It turned out to be mostly about whether it was moral for the rich to have lots of money. Charlie Mullins, the proletarian founder of Pimlico Plumbers, said it was, because most of them reinvested it and so provided people with jobs and the government with taxes. Ash Sarkar said it wasn't, because all wealth was produced by workers who were robbed of most of it by the rich. Darren McGarvey, the Scottish rapper, said there was nothing wrong with money as such; it was just that it wasn't distributed fairly. He favoured Universal Basic Income. Sarkar seemed to favour cooperatives in which workers all got the same pay, missing the chance to argue for the 'fully automated luxury communism' she is supposed to be in favour of.

Up to this point, the assumption was that money was part of 'the world as it is' and the best that could be done was to distribute it differently.

A Czech economist, Tomas Sedlacek, finally addressed the question, arguing that the world would not be better off without money: the failure of past attempts to live without it showed that there was no practicable alternative to using money.

He and the Rev Giles Fraser got into an argument about the difference between price and value. But this was not about value in the economic sense of exchange-value but about use-value. What is useful is a matter of opinion or moral judgement. Sedlacek, who was an out-and-out defender of capitalism, made the point that price and use-value can never be the same — the buyer always places a higher (use) value on what they were buying than the seller does; otherwise there would be no sale.

This is a valid point which Marx made in chapter 3 of *Capital* on 'Exchange' where he wrote of the owner of an item for sale:

'His commodity possesses for himself no immediate use-value. Otherwise, he would not bring it to the market. It has use-value for others; but for himself its only direct use-value is that of being a depository of exchange-value'.

An argument between an economist concerned with exchange-value (price) and a priest more concerned with use-value was never going to get very far. It did, however, bring out the contradiction between exchange-value and use-value that is a feature of the money system where goods are produced to be sold and not directly to be used.

The case for a world without money was put by Anitra Nelson, author of *Beyond Money*. She pointed out that 'production for trade' led both to people's needs

being neglected and to ecological upsets. She envisaged a world of relatively small-scale and more or less self-sufficient, democratically-organised moneyless communities, where households would be asked what their needs were going to be over a given period and then the community would organise itself to produce or acquire what was required, with people being able to access them without having to pay.

The right-wing journalist Melanie Phillips came up with the original objection that this was against human nature: it wouldn't work because humans were naturally greedy and aggressive. *Spiked* editor Ella Whelan meanwhile denounced Nelson's proposal rather unfairly as 'austerity' and 'middle class miserabilism' which the working class would never accept.

That was the problem. All those taking part seemed only to envisage a moneyless society as existing in small-scale communities, not even at national let alone world level. In some ways though, Nelson was on the right track. Organising production and distribution without money is essentially a question of assessing needs and then organising to produce to meet them. Given the level of development attained by the forces of production, this is only possible today on the basis of the common ownership and democratic control of the Earth's natural and industrial resources.

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Marxism without myth



140 years ago Frederick Engels in a eulogy to his lifelong collaborator said: 'Marx was the best hated, and most lied about, man of his time. Governments, both absolutist and republican, deported him from their territories. Capitalists, whether conservative or ultra-democratic, vied with one another in heaping slanders upon him. All this he brushed aside as though it were cobweb, ignoring it, answering only when extreme necessity compelled him; and he died, beloved, revered and mourned by millions of revolutionary fellow workers - from the mines of Siberia to California, in all parts of Europe and America- and I make bold to say that, though he may have had many opponents, he had hardly one personal enemy. His name will endure through the ages; and so will his work! (Frederick Engels' Speech at the grave of Karl Marx, Highgate Cemetery, London. March 17, 1883, tinyurl.com/2ykz4zc4).

Their work has endured, been enriched and refined. The Socialist Party contends that the three main Marxist theories relating to class struggle, the labour theory of value and the materialist conception of history remain valid, whereas those concerning struggles for national liberation, minimum reform programmes, labour vouchers and the lower stage of communism do not. Dogmatism is the very antithesis of Marxism. Assorted myth makers of the Left and Right contend otherwise, but the dead hand of Leninism with its anti-democratic elitism and its advocacy of an irrelevant transitional society misnamed 'socialism' is truly deserving of the hostility of workers everywhere.

The State and Revolution

'This fairly short and accessible work by Lenin contains the Marxist critique of the capitalist state and theorizes what a socialist state might look like' (*Indiana Daily Student*, 4 January, tinyurl.com/37f2t7us).

There is a commonly held view that Marx believed the working class would only be able to come to power by smashing the state in a violent uprising. Lenin's myth-making is evident in this dishonest pamphlet. Throughout his political life Marx insisted that the working class must capture the state before trying to establish socialism and that socialism would be a society without a state, e.g: 'The existence of the state is inseparable from the existence of slavery' (*Vorwärts!*, No.63, August 7, 1844, tinyurl.com/4m5z9r7s). The 57 varieties of Leninism, including Maoism, Stalinism & Trotskyism, are together an abomination of socialist understanding.

Private or state control? Neither!



'There is a consistent long-term consensus among rail users and the general public alike for an integrated, publicly owned railway' (*Red Pepper*, 5 January, tinyurl.com/dwr2fm6m).

State ownership of Britain's railways was first proposed in the 1840s, not as you might suppose by proto-leftists but by the Conservative Party. There is a myth that nationalisation has something to do with the socialist order of society which Marx stood for. Marx, like Engels, regarded Bismarck's policies of state control as 'a spurious kind of socialism' not socialism at all. What Marxists want is a society in which the machinery of wealth production and distribution is commonly owned and democratically controlled. Nationalisation is state capitalism and does not differ from private capitalism as far as the exploitation of the workers is concerned. They still need their trade unions, and the strike weapon, to protect themselves from their employers. The Socialist Party has never supported nationalisation. It is not socialism, nor is it a step towards socialism.

Doctor of Philosophy

Marx was awarded a PhD for a thesis titled

The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature, but, contrary to some myth makers, a degree in this subject is not necessary to understand his better known works. Indeed, the *Indiana Daily Student* article cited earlier recommends *The Communist Manifesto*, *Wage Labour and Capital* as well as *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. The author writes that the latter '... was the book that took me beyond Bernie Sanders-style politics. While it is perhaps the most difficult text here, it's also very rewarding. This text contains an in-depth criticism of classical economists, as well as Karl Marx's theory of how capitalism alienates workers. It also contains some beautifully poetic passages about a possible society in which money doesn't rule over us, and we all have the freedom to seek self-realization.'

Worth noting too: 'Philosophy stands in the same relation to the study of the actual world as masturbation to sexual love' (*The German Ideology*, 1845, tinyurl.com/mschy959) and on his tombstone 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it' (*Theses on Feuerbach*, 1845, tinyurl.com/aznt5thh).

'Mother attempts to sell kidney as last-ditch effort in poverty'

We can make the blind see, the deaf hear, and the lame walk. We can cure many diseases once considered fatal and grow an increasing number of body parts including a mini kidney. We can perform many other miracles, but capitalism, rather than lack of ardent prayer, gets in the way. Treatments are developed with profit not people in mind. Can't pay, can't have. Capitalism has created a potential abundance of wealth, capable of satisfying human wants on a scale heretofore undreamed of. Myth makers claim that the squalid poverty of Marx's time no longer exists. They claim that a majority are now happy with their lives under capitalism. But can anyone really believe that, while millions are unemployed, millions are starving to death, millions are homeless and millions of pounds are spent daily on armaments? Capitalism is now more than ever a problem-producing society and the cause of the problems is still as pointed out by Marx. Capitalism cannot realise its own potential. This is because the capitalist economic system is best suited to rationing scarcity by means of the market, legal or not, as the headline from the *Jerusalem Post* (5 January, tinyurl.com/5n7rvpht) attests.

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

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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

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

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.ksrb@worldsocialism.org or 07971 715569.

South West regional branch.

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Disasters, natural and unnatural

ONCE AGAIN the world shudders at the news of another 'natural' disaster, as the death toll climbs from the Turkish-Syrian earthquake. It is again apparent that even a 'natural' disaster can be mitigated. Similar misfortunes are invariably presented in the media as unavoidable and to a certain degree, this is true. But it ignores the consequences of the pursuit of profit at the expense of prevention and it is not a coincidence that the number of victims of various disasters such as tsunamis, hurricanes and earthquakes is clearly related to the extent of their poverty. What all the casualties share is that they are mostly poor and it was their apartment blocks tumbling down and reduced to rubble.

It is necessary to understand why the poor suffer more even in natural calamities. Earthquakes are inevitable, but the accompanying casualty figures are not. It is falling buildings that take lives, not the tremors in the ground. No matter how severe an earthquake is on the Richter Scale, if buildings were correctly constructed many people would survive. This does not happen in the poorer countries of the earthquake-prone regions because precautionary guidelines to make them more resistant are seldom followed.

The world is structured in such a way that poor people are and will always be the most susceptible to disasters. They are unable to prevent disasters and lack the reserves to recover when they hit. Poorer communities take far longer to rebuild and are far more likely to be affected by subsequent disease outbreaks such as cholera. They grow further impoverished because they cannot afford to rebuild.

Many modern buildings have been equipped to withstand seismic shocks. In wealthy countries, architects have designed 'active' buildings, some mounted on top of massive rubber shock absorbers or other systems to counteract seismic shaking. What's the likelihood of such sophisticated technology being used for dwellings in poverty-stricken areas? Using elaborate building methods and materials, there is no reason why there should be any undue loss of life or major destruction after experiencing even the most powerful of earthquakes.

Having witnessed the tragedy unfolding in Turkey and Syria, we see how people are endowed with the ability to sympathise and empathise with others and even in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis contribute to charities to alleviate some of the suffering being experienced. People are at their best



Credit: Getty Images

when things are at their worst. When a major catastrophe strikes, we can always rely on people responding with whatever they can give towards the relief of the survivors. Volunteers are never lacking nor slow in coming forward to offer whatever help they can.

If there is any good that comes from this catastrophe and other calamities it is that human beings show themselves as an inherently caring species. One reason capitalism persists is that it fosters a lack of confidence and conviction in working people's deep compassion for others. It seems our society has been influenced to believe that nothing can be done. That big death tolls from quakes, volcanoes or floods are inevitable. Unlike the media, socialists strive to explain capitalism's culpability and socialism's solutions.

Being poor means having very little control over your own existence. While some disasters cannot be avoided, others are completely preventable. Is it controversial to argue that capitalism, with its emphasis on profit, means that any disasters which do happen are likely to be more serious and harmful than would otherwise be the case?

Most dangers from Nature are well known and there is no need to leave communities exposed to them. Earthquakes are natural phenomena. It is known where they are likely to happen but not when. So society could take action to minimise the impact and it makes no sense deliberately to court disaster.

One reason earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes and floods kill so many people is that people live and work in known danger zones. Under capitalism, it is a question of necessity which stops people from moving to safer lands.

It must be clear that nobody would voluntarily live alongside a ticking

time-bomb, and given the freedom of movement implied by the abolition of private property, we can surmise the largest contribution to protecting lives in a socialist world will come from populations changing locations away from high-risk areas. A massive mobilisation of people to other regions would be inconceivable today but not necessarily in socialism.

Contingency plans should exist throughout the world for the relief of any catastrophe. Saving lives could become a new 'un-armed forces' *raison d'être*. Bodies of fit, well-trained, well-resourced, motivated men and women available to deal with the effects of natural disasters and unexpected calamities would be one of a number of ways to deploy willing volunteers, for humanitarian intervention. Emergency stocks of food, clean water, and medical supplies would be maintained at strategic points whilst machinery, equipment and helpers would be moved quickly to the area of crisis. Appeals for money are an insufficient substitute for releasing real resources. Capitalism exacerbates supposedly 'natural' disasters. The best disaster relief is offered through solidarity.

The best disaster preparedness we can have is to build the kinds of communities we want and seek to live in anyway. What kept many alive after floods, hurricanes or earthquakes, and is keeping them alive today, is a culture of solidarity and mutual aid. Social solidarity is a strategy through which marginal communities survive, and through which relationships thrive. Volunteers, neighbours and strangers alike from the community come forward as first and second responders.

ALJO

A winter of discontent

MEDIA COVERAGE of the various industrial disputes taking place at present is quite revealing. That the much vaunted impartiality of reporters and reports is more apparent than actual. This is not to impugn the motives of interviewers and correspondents.

Rather, it reveals an inequality that is unavoidably ever present in capitalism. Radio 4's *Today* programme has a reputation for posing searching questions, some claim over-aggressively, to interviewees. There are politicians who suggest this often reveals bias within the BBC and hint at measures to mitigate this.

What is usually the case is that a government minister has been found wanting in explaining or justifying some policy or decision. During recent interviews with ministers and trade union officials, concerning ongoing and mounting strike action, the questioning superficially appears equally probing.

However, listening to a reasonably well-paid presenter effectively questioning the ethics of a nurse or paramedic whose wage, and standard of living therefore, has actively depreciated for over a decade, is at the very least uncomfortable.

If emergency call handlers go on strike then there must be an impact on those wanting to summon aid. Similarly, teachers walking out of the classroom impacts on pupils and working parents. If the trains don't run then travellers can't travel.

This does not require an inquisitive interview to establish. It is, to quote the vernacular, 'a statement of the bleeding obvious'. Only it is rather more than that. It poses an unspoken moral condemnation. The strikers may have a case, but they are pursuing it at the expense of the even more vulnerable.

A minister faced with questions such as, 'Don't nurses deserve better pay and working conditions?' only has to answer that he or she agrees, but unfortunately the country can't afford such a rise at the moment and anyway it would fuel inflation.

The next interview, with someone from the nurses' union, raises the possibility of lives being put at risk, vulnerable people suffering pain or long-term consequences. No matter how fair-minded that interviewer might think he or she is being there is no equivalence between the contending parties.

The minister is in a position of power to allocate resources. Those resources are constrained by the nature of capitalism

to ration the portion of created wealth that might be directed away from profit making/taking to meet the needs of patients and health workers.

Those health workers have no power other than, like all workers throughout capitalism, the withdrawal of their labour. The one question the interviewer will not pose is, 'Doesn't the basic problem lie with capitalism?'

The actual implication of the moral case posed by questioning the action of striking nurses is that they should passively accept their increasing poverty and workloads so that capitalism will not be further financially encumbered with having to meet their, and their patients' needs.

The media presentation is biased, not through the personal opinions of correspondents, but by limiting the context by which the issue is addressed. Even if a minister is given a rigorous grilling and then a trade union official's position is treated with much greater sympathy, the fundamental problem and wider context, capitalism, is not even considered.

It may well be the government at present does not have the financial wherewithal to fund a large pay rise for nurses. That, though, is not due to a lack of wealth. There seems no similar restriction on supplying very expensive military equipment to Ukraine: there always seems to be resources available to fight the wars capitalism's competitive nature causes.

A glaring example of media imbalance is surely the recent episode of the Windsor soap opera. Prince, or is he Duke, Harry gets almost unlimited air-time to broadcast his grievances both here and in the USA. Ninety minutes or so in a Sunday evening prime time slot on a major TV channel for what was effectively an extended promotional slot for his book. Except, of course, it's not his book in the sense he didn't write it in the main. Rather it is the product of a ghost writer who reputedly was paid anything between one and five million pounds, a substantial fee his publishers were rewarded for paying by sales of 400,000 copies on the first day alone.

Many of those will end up in charity shops half-read or not even opened, but it matters not to the publisher who has produced a profitable commodity. It also is an ideological reinforcement of the celebrity culture that is a successful distraction for so many who limit their own aspirations.

There is certainly no equivalent media

outlet for a nurse or paramedic to state their case on prime time television. If for no other reason than it cannot be packaged and turned into a profitable commodity.

The question of fairness doesn't really arise. The media is not there to be fair. Like all aspects of capitalism it ultimately must serve the promotion of its values. This might be directly through selling of advertising space during a royal interview or promoting a best-selling book. Indirectly, as on radio news and current affairs programmes, it confines the tensions and disputes capitalism inevitably engenders in ways that do not question the means and structures of capitalism itself.

Political rhetoric about regional powerhouses, levelling up, tackling inequality, even 'Education! Education! Education!' and 'Sure Start' schemes can be no more than fine words at best. Even if sincerely meant they quickly become linguistic anachronisms.

**'Fine words butter no
parsnips' as the old
saw insists.**

'Fine words butter no parsnips' as the old saw insists. And when it is realised the promises of the present incumbent office holders will not, cannot be fulfilled, workers react. Industrial action to address immediate concerns; through the ballot box come election time.

The present disputes may, at some point, culminate in the present government being voted out of office. Then the Conservative Party might point an accusatory finger at the BBC for contributing to its loss of power.

However, it will have been replaced by a government that, for all its grand words and promises, will have to act under the same constraints as its predecessor. This will lead almost inevitably to confrontations over pay and conditions with nurses, paramedics, teachers, et al. And another round of interviews on the *Today* programme.

Unless, of course, the working class finally draws the conclusion it's not a change of government that is required, but a complete transformation of society, using its democratic power to replace capitalism with socialism.

DAVE ALTON

Revolving corruption

FOR YEARS, *Private Eye* magazine has been banging the drum about the Westminster 'Revolving door' of ex-ministers and civil servants taking up posts in private industry that rely on their knowledge and contacts within government. This engenders conflicts of interest, with firms that deal with the government implicitly being able to offer the inducement of a high-paying job down the line to any officials that they deal with. From the point of view of capitalist rivals, this is a threat, and something that they would want to prevent.

But, it doesn't even need to be so naked a form of corruption, it is enough that politicians know that if they present themselves as sound, a remunerative non-executive directorship could be found to see out their days with minimal effort. The rewards for loyalty to capital are there.

Boris Johnson, of course, is providing us with a great example of this sort of reward for service. At the time of writing he is estimated to have earned £3 million over and above his MP's salary, largely through speaking engagements. Johnson considered his Prime Ministerial salary (about £160,000) as insufficient; but then, he had been earning in excess of £200,000 per annum as a columnist for the *Daily Telegraph*. He has always benefitted well from being a mouth-piece of the rich and powerful.

In office he managed to contrive to be the recipient of the largesse of others. Tales filtered out about him receiving thousands of pounds worth of donated takeaway dinners and help with redecorating the Number 10 flat (via a donation to the Conservative Party). He almost makes it seem that his main qualification for high office was his capacity to bend rules and accept money from other people. Even now, we are hearing that he got help from the man he appointed as Chairman of the BBC to get an £800,000 loan.

To set the scale of this, it's worth noting that over in Ireland, Taoiseach Bertie Ahern lost his job because some business friends gave him a €25,000 loan to help him out with his divorce. That led to a full-scale inquiry, and ultimately saw his party thrown out of office. The behaviour of Boris Johnson makes him look like a rank amateur.

Even then, his behaviour isn't new. He enjoyed his time at Chequers, the country house of the Prime Minister that was given



to the nation in 1917 because people who weren't themselves country gentlemen were becoming Prime Minister, and it couldn't be done for them not to have the outward style appropriate to their station. When the son of a Scottish crofter, Ramsay MacDonald, became Prime Minister, the biscuit millionaire Alexander Grant (who MacDonald made a Baronet), gave him the use of a Daimler (and the interest on some shares for its upkeep and running cost). He felt that it was unseemly for a Prime Minister not to have transport of the appropriate style. At his death, MacDonald was worth £25,000 – which, according to online calculators is the equivalent of £2 million today.

More recently, Tony Blair has been able to transform himself into a multi-millionaire after leaving the political stage. According to newspaper reports, he found work with JP Morgan Chase and Zurich Financial Services (two financial behemoths). He also advises governments around the world. On top of which, he has cannily invested in property. By way of contrast, Harold Wilson and Margaret Thatcher were only worth half a million each at their deaths. Jim Callaghan did well for himself, with a wealth at death of about £2 million.

It's not just those at the very top, take the example of Anna Turley, the voted-out Labour MP for Redcar. She has found work as a consultant for the Betting and Gaming Commission, which involves writing articles about why honest working class folk don't like gambling restrictions. It's fair enough: she lost her job and had to find work, and it'll keep the wolf from the door until the next election when she might get returned to Parliament once more - it allows her to stay in the game.

Likewise, David Miliband, when he left politics, managed to find a berth at the

International Rescue charity, worth about \$300,000 a year. Whilst this is at the extreme end, other politicians have been able to move from their political roles and into the charity sector, which also keeps them (sort of) in the game, interacting with government and lobbying. It's not for nothing that when the Tories brought in an anti-lobbying act, they targeted charities heavily, perceiving them to be part of the wider Labour establishment.

One of the chief means by which Johnson has cashed in is through speaking fees. Here he has followed such luminaries as Hilary Clinton and Joe Biden, who can command hundreds of thousands of dollars per speech. Whilst it can be argued that such fees represent some value to corporate executives who book such speeches for their events (and compares, say, with the actual market cost of booking an entertainer or a celebrity) it's hard to avoid such fees looking corrupt: an inflated price to be given for an essentially valueless service. Again, to be clear, there does not have to be an explicit *quid pro quo*, simply being admitted to the circuit is a sign of past good behaviour.

Nothing can be done against this sort of thing: short of freezing former politicians in ice. They love to bring it up, and paint the other side as sleazy, yet they all know that the rewards are there (even before we get onto the need to agitate for donations to run their offices and campaigns). The point is, it isn't personal moral turpitude, these are the effects of a widely unequal society, where those with personal wealth can dispense it to buy loyalty, they will. Regulation will fail, because the incentive is always there to find creative ways around it. We don't need to throw the scoundrels out, we need to throw the scoundrel system out.

PIK SMEE

A plan to **save** the future

AN INCREASING flow of books is being published on the necessity of establishing a real socialist society, moneyless, wageless, leaderless and planetary. This would be a society with free access to all goods and services based on voluntary cooperation and the principle of from each according to ability and to each according to need. Many of these books have been reviewed and evaluated in the *Socialist Standard*. But now going qualitatively further than all the others, we have a new one proposing a detailed plan of how a world non-market society could operate in practical and organisational terms. *Half-Earth Socialism: A Plan to Save the Future from Extinction, Climate Change and Pandemics* by Troy Vettese and Drew Pendergrass (Verso, 2022) (see review page 21) is founded on profound knowledge of and reflection on the scientific and technological problems that such a society would need to deal with and overcome. As such, it constitutes a thrillingly imaginative leap into the fundamentals of a world organised for the common good of humanity and the natural environment.

What if?

It adopts a novel structure framed by two 'what if?' chapters. The first of these is entitled 'Looking Backwards: 2047' (à la Edward Bellamy) and describes the 'dystopian future' with 'environmental collapse and feudal levels of inequality' seen as inevitable if the present system of society, based on the market and

'price signals', is allowed to continue. The second of these chapters, entitled 'News from 2047' (à la William Morris'), offers a kind of day-to-day outline of what a future society 'without money or a market' could be like and how it could operate once humanity collectively decides to take steps to reverse the decline of the biosphere, to 'simultaneously create a just society', and 'to provide the basis for socialism in our lifetime'. In this the authors consciously eschew Marx's warning against writing 'recipes for the cookshops of the future'. In fact they attempt to do just that, to describe what they call 'a total alternative to capitalism', ie, how 'economic co-ordination' would function in socialism, 'a society where the economy is consciously and democratically controlled' - a definition of socialism that we would fully accept. The book offers, as the authors put it, 'everything from a plan for resource allocation to an outline of what life will *feel* like'.

Controlling capitalism?

In between these two chapters the authors do a number of other key things. Firstly, they examine some of the major ideas and schemes put forward over the centuries in which capitalism has existed and grown to understand that system and bring it under control. They look at a range of 'competing philosophies of nature and social and economic developments': for example Malthus, with his dread of the still commonly held

idea of 'overpopulation', described here as 'dangerously exaggerated'; Hegel, with his 'humanization of nature' theory; Mises and Hayek who saw the market as the only feasible way to organise an advanced society and as a self-organising system which humans interfere with at their peril; and Marx and Neurath, both of whom see capital as 'blindly steering the ship of fools towards ecological disaster' and destroying 'the world it cannot see'. This part of their analysis leads to the conclusion that what is needed is an end to what they call 'the capitalization of nature' and 'a new relationship between humanity and nature'. Failing this, they see humanity facing a future of 'ever greater inequality, disease, climatic disaster, and ecological impoverishment'.

They then go on to examine various current solutions on offer, mainly those 'green' ones that are presented as ways of stemming the degradation of the environment (eg, geoengineering, carbon capture and storage, nuclear power, biofuels). They reject these as feasible remedies in their own right, since their advocates tend to envision their use only within the context of the market and its production and distribution of goods and services as commodities. As the authors put it: 'Mainstream environmentalists approach the environment crisis as a set of discrete technical problems, addressable through piecemeal reform, while leaving the capitalist foundation of society untouched'. The authors are particularly hostile to animal husbandry, referred to



as ‘the Earth-eating livestock industry’, taking up as it does ‘40 per cent of earth’s inhabitable land’ and creating ‘massive mammalian extinction’. Their solution, which they start to outline here, is to practise ‘natural geoengineering’, drawing down carbon and allowing rewilded ecosystems to occupy half the earth’ (hence the book’s title), and so restore biodiversity and create ‘a fully renewable energy system’. They are also advocates of veganism, considering it capable of satisfying ‘the requirement of feeding everyone with the smallest environmental impact’. All of this, however, they see as impossible under the capitalist system, which by its nature produces goods and services for profit.

Is socialist planning possible?

It is in the following chapter, entitled ‘Planning Half-Earth’, that the proposed solution they have already outlined is fleshed out. Details are given concerning how the earth’s resources can be used in a rational and sustainable way under world-wide arrangements that eschew money, the market and exchange and instead use ‘another kind of global model’ based on ‘integrated assessment models’ (IAMs) and ‘linear programming’. These methods, they tell us, already exist but their real potential can come nowhere near to being properly realised within the market system. Referring to their proposals as ‘scientific utopianism’, after the term coined by early 20th century theorist, Otto Neurath, they claim that such a model needs no universal equivalent such as money but can function effectively via *in natura*’ (ie, ‘in kind’) world-wide planning. This, they contend, can consistently and in an ongoing way ‘combine multiple goals’, pulling together all the necessary information regarding resources, skills and needs to ensure that production and distribution meet all the reasonable democratically agreed requirements of a cooperative planetary population. In this way humanity can ‘provide a good life for our abundant species and still protect the environment’. This is eminently possible, they go on, given that ‘the data density of the contemporary world, paired with the algorithms climate scientists have designed to handle it, greatly expands planning capacities’. Having explained all this in impressive detail, they do then advise that the precise set-up they advocate for a socialist society should at this stage be considered ‘a thought experiment’, but nevertheless one which will ‘allow us to imagine what socialism

might look like in practice’.

There is no doubt, however, that this recipe they dare to write for the cookshop of their future is a highly encouraging one, providing much in the way of effective counter-argument to objections that a society without monetary accounting could not be organised efficiently or that it would quickly degenerate into shortage and social chaos. The insights they provide in the ‘Limits of Planning’ section of their ‘Planning Half-Earth’ chapter, and in the day-in-a-life type ‘News from 2047’ chapter, also give helpful and fascinating food for thought about how ongoing democratic choice could take place within a socialist society among a population free to express that choice.

Setting up socialism

All this adds up to a meticulously researched and documented work, which will, in its broad lines at least, convince any fair-minded reader both of the urgent need for a different kind of society and also of a viable way in which it could be organised if workers throughout the world were to take action to establish it. This would be a kind of society organised without money and without the ‘embedded form of coercion’ that is forced employment. Yet, while the book is also effective in debunking, as the authors put it, ‘the delusions of the political centre and Left’, what it is somewhat short on is much to do with the mechanism of precisely how the society they advocate can come about. Yes, socialism will have to be planned in advance, as the authors make clear, but, as the Socialist Party argues, that can only seriously begin once the majority have begun to espouse the concept and can only work if the plans are fully developed before the change takes place. The authors seem to think that it can be sort of half-planned in advance, but that it will take some time after it has been established for it to be fully operative. Yet, once the necessary spreading of consciousness of the need for socialism has been achieved and plans for it have been made, there seems no reason why a democratic, moneyless, marketless society will not be able to be voted in via democratic political action (ie, the ballot box), and then be set up and be operative virtually immediately. The political control needed to coordinate the change will already be there. Yes, some tweaks, some forms of trial and error, some ongoing revisions are bound to be necessary, but none of this will prevent the basic structures of socialism from operating fully both for the benefit of humanity and of the environment. And, who knows, perhaps it will even be along the lines of the ‘integrated assessment

models’ and ‘linear assessment’ envisioned by the authors?

Their main objection to socialism being established in this way via the ballot box seems to be that the capitalist class will not allow it. To support this they paraphrase (rather than quote directly) Engels’ 1886 introduction to the first English translation of Volume I of Marx’s *Capital* as ‘if a dedicated socialist party were to ever win [elections], the ruling class would unleash a “pro-slavery rebellion” against a “peaceful and legal revolution”’. Yet the main evidence they adduce that this would happen, ie, the toppling of the Allende government in Chile in 1973, is hardly relevant, since that regime was in no way socialist in the sense that they (or) we advocate the idea. And, in fact, Marx’s views on this were far more nuanced than the authors suggest and do not exclude a peaceful, democratic takeover by a majority via the ballot box. In addition, they also seem to show a certain naivety in being prepared to recognise recent or current oppressive state-capitalist regimes (eg, Soviet Union, Maoist China, Cuba) as somehow being attempts at socialism or on the way to it, when any connection of these regimes to socialism is purely rhetorical. Their unfortunate blind spot in this area even leads to them referring to Trotsky and Stalin as ‘20th century socialists’ and the ANC in South Africa as a party of ‘modern, internationalist socialism’.

Humanity and nature

But these are relatively minor points of contention for us in an important book that packs an enormous amount of knowledge and reflection into little more than 200 pages. It advocates basically what the Socialist Party advocates: a wholly democratic society of meaningful work which frees all humans from the threat of poverty and where the government of people is replaced by the administration of things. It also deals convincingly with the ‘motivation’ argument (part of the frequently heard ‘human nature’ objection), characterising socialism as a society in which ‘motivation’ will be provided by ‘positive incentives’ such as ‘social obligation, personal satisfaction, pride’. And, finally, with its strong focus on the ongoing degradation and possible collapse of the natural environment, it emphasises the need for what it calls ‘a new relationship between humanity and nature’ and looks forward, as we do, to ‘the prospect of a unified humanity ... with an economy built around, care, health and unalienated labour’.

HKM

The ballot **strike** in Tunisia



IN 2011, discontent and unrest in Tunisia spread and ignited wider discontent in what became known as the Arab Spring. Now, more than a decade later, protests have returned so that Tunisians may once again put food on their tables.

Tunisia's president, Kais Saied, assumed almost total power in 2021, having sacked the prime minister, suspended parliament and enacted a constitution that gave him, as the head of state, supreme control and command of the military and granted him the ability to rule by decree.

In December's election for the new, mostly powerless, legislature most of the opposition political parties announced an election boycott. It resulted in only 8.8 percent of the nine-million-strong electorate voting in the parliamentary elections. A required run-off election was held in January 2023 after only 21 candidates out of 161 Assembly seats were elected in the first round. Just 88,000, or 11 percent of the 7.8 million entitled to vote in the run-offs cast their ballots.

People, rather than feeling cheated of their right to vote, have understood that the election was not a sincere engagement in democracy.

A non-voter explained, 'He promised serious reforms but we haven't seen anything. People have had it with these promises and that's why they boycotted the last two elections. They don't believe this regime is going to find an answer to their problems, especially their economic problems' (bit.ly/3ll6WuX).

Another said: 'We don't want elections. We want milk and sugar and cooking oil' (bit.ly/3XipR6Q).

Despite losing legitimacy and credibility, Saied has remained in power, retains the

loyalty of the army officers and continues to be recognised as the head of state by foreign governments and international institutions.

For example, he can still negotiate and secure from the International Monetary Fund a \$1.9bn loan to finance his 2023 budget and accept the accompanying austerity conditions that will likely lead to ending food and fuel subsidies, cutting public spending on public health, education, social services and the privatisation of state enterprises (bit.ly/3llybAV).

When in Hong Kong the people were deprived of a say in electing the Legislative Assembly, they saw that the district council elections, previously akin to neighbourhood council elections, offered them an opportunity to express their political preferences. Hong Kong's pro-democracy candidates won close to 60 percent of the total vote, 347 of the 452 taking control of at least 17 of the city's 18 district councils.

But once again, as we see with Tunisia, as long as political power is not in the hands of the people of Hong Kong, change will not happen. The election boycott strategy still preserves political power for the government and although its validity is questioned, it remains intact.

There are differences between boycotting elections, abstaining from voting and what is described as the Sinn Féin voting strategy of standing but, if elected, not taking the seat in Parliament.

What is important is capturing political power to exercise the will of the people. Simply abstaining from voting – or not taking the seat – is not sufficient

When there is no genuine socialist

candidate, we favour going to the polling station to cast a write-in vote for socialism rather than merely abstaining as this shows that we attach some significance to the existence of the universal suffrage that our antecedents struggled to gain. In this country, where there is a stable political democracy, we favour using it to win political control. In other countries where this is not the case a socialist majority there would be obliged to adopt a different method. There will also be occasions, as in Tunisia, when a parliamentary process will be purposefully gerrymandered to deny the possibility of the people's will.

We have never held that a merely formal majority at the polls will give the workers the power to achieve socialism. We have always emphasised that our fellow workers must be knowledgeable in the essentials of socialist ideas and be democratically organised.

A socialist party's role is to strive to be educators, agitators and organisers, to act as catalysts and not to substitute the party for our class. Without an educated and organised working class as the motor for achieving socialism, we cannot have socialism.

William Morris put it well, '*It should be our special aim to make Socialists by putting before people, and especially the working classes, the elementary truths of socialism... [B]efore any definite socialist action can be attempted, it must be backed up by a great body of intelligent opinion — the opinion of a great mass of people who are already socialists...*' (bit.ly/3YDLlqs).

It is not just the quantity of the votes but the quality of the voters behind them that will be decisive.

ALJO

Communism and socialism: is there a difference?

A RECENT series of programmes on BBC Radio 4, 'Britain's Communist Thread', looked at the fortunes of a political party established in Britain in 1920 with allegiance to the government calling itself 'communist' that had recently seized power in Russia. That party was the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and the government it supported was the Bolshevik one, led first by Lenin and Trotsky and later by Stalin. By the 1930s the CPGB had 60,000 members drawn from all parts of the British working class, from intellectuals to manual workers, and managed to get a small number of its candidates elected to parliament. Many of its members were convinced that a better and more equal kind of society that they called communism (or socialism) had or was being established in Russia under Stalin and they wanted the same in Britain. Most of them remained in the Party until the 1950s, for the most part unaware of the maniacal brutality that took place in Russia under Stalinism, since that only began to become widely known after Stalin's death in 1953 and Khrushchev's succession to the leadership of what had become the Soviet Union. Many drifted away, especially after the brutal suppression of the 1956 uprising in Hungary, and then, even more, after the Russian tanks rolled into Czechoslovakia in 1968 to put an end to the so-called Prague spring.

Eurocommunism

Among those who remained, some still hung onto their support and admiration for the Soviet regime and slavishly followed the Moscow line, but others in the CPGB began to look elsewhere, to the kind of 'communism' advocated by parties in countries like Italy and France, so-called 'eurocommunism'. In reality eurocommunism was a thinly disguised version of the kind of politics practised by the Labour Party in Britain and just an alternative 'left-wing' way of administering capitalism. But it led to a split in the CPGB and eventually its dissolution in the early 1990s, after the Soviet Union itself had given up on its own 'communism' and moved to what looked as though it was going to be a Western-style parliamentary 'free market' capitalism. But some in Britain, despite the overwhelming evidence of the horrors of Stalinism and the dead end it constituted, could not let go of their attachment to the Soviet model

and, with the CPGB falling apart, set up a new party along the old lines, though with a much smaller membership than before, the Communist Party of Britain, which still exists today with an estimated membership of 1,000.

Many of the people interviewed in the radio series had participated in these events and had first-hand knowledge of the mindset (or perhaps one might say the pathology) of those who stuck with the CPGB through thick and thin. But, whatever their current views, most of the interviewees now saw 'communism' as a compromised term, contaminated through its associations with what had happened in Russia. And this was the case even if they were not prepared to disavow some of the ambitions underlying what they saw as the 'communist' idea. Indeed, the CPGB itself, at a relatively early stage, seemed to have got that message and had begun to favour the term 'socialism' rather than 'communism' to describe its ideas, as in its standard pamphlet 'The British Road to Socialism'.

Interchangeable

But despite any associations that these two terms may have, do they actually mean the same thing? Well, historically the answer to that must be yes, even if neither was necessarily used with the content often attached to them today. In the 19th century the two terms were widely used by political thinkers such as Marx and Engels interchangeably to mean a moneyless, wageless, classless world society of free access to all goods and services, characterised by voluntary cooperation and democratic organisation. A society based on the principle of 'from each according to ability, to each according to need' was how they described it. So a million miles away from anything that came to exist in Russia during Bolshevik/Soviet times (or more recently in countries like China or Cuba). Which is why, when such regimes or their supporters describe themselves as 'Marxist-Leninist', what we are seeing is a simple contradiction in terms. But none of this prevented the labels of 'communism' and 'socialism' being commandeered by the leaders of the Bolshevik takeover, in particular Lenin and Trotsky, who falsely claimed to be basing their politics on Marx's ideas. When Stalin took over from Lenin, he confused things even more by not only using these

terms to describe the regime he was the absolute ruler of, but by seeking to differentiate them with the claim that what was currently happening in Russia was 'socialism', which, once it had gone through the necessary stages, would lead to 'communism'. It never did of course and couldn't, because the whole premise of a dictatorship leading to any kind of classless democratic society was entirely flawed (and indeed Stalin, if he knew anything, must have known that).

Connotations

However, the label of 'communism' stuck to the Soviet regime, so that, when that regime collapsed in ignominy, the label itself was, as one of the radio programme participants put it, 'contaminated'. Of course, in terms of the substance of what passed as 'communism' in Russia, the Socialist Party would regard its demise as a positive development. But that also meant that it was a problematic term to describe the kind of society we advocate and so we tend to shy away from it. The same fate has not befallen the term 'socialism', at least not to the same extent. Though socialism may mean many different things to many people, at least it does not tend to automatically send out connotations of one-Party rule, autocracy and suppression of thought and ideas.

And this is perhaps a lucky twist of fate for the Socialist Party of Great Britain (SPGB), since, from our establishment in 1904, 'socialist' is the word we have normally used to describe our organisation and the society we exist and work to see established. It has often been suggested to us that, to be noticed more widely, we should change our name and use a different term to describe our objective, since, though not as compromised as 'communist', 'socialism' still does have negative associations in many people's minds. We have resisted this both on the grounds that it has a historical significance that has not suffered the same fate as 'communism' and also because we take the view that, the more we make its meaning absolutely clear, the more its positive significance and content will become evident, especially as social development makes the need for the kind of society it points to increasingly urgent and necessary.

HKM

Farming under capitalism

We begin a three-part series on farming as it is under capitalism and how it could be in a post-capitalist, socialist society.

AS AGRICULTURE globally is already able to produce enough to comfortably feed the entire world then the exhortation to increase the productivity of (mainly small-scale) farmers, particularly in the Global South, through the adoption of modern commercialised methods of farming would, on the face of it, appear redundant. Why would we need to go down that road?

True, the individual farmer might benefit by increasing their output but it does not necessarily follow that farmers in general would. We should avoid committing the fallacy of composition. What is true of the part is not necessarily true of the whole. A different dynamic applies at the macro-level vis-à-vis the micro-level. A single farmer growing more potatoes might benefit from the increased revenue it brings in. However, an increase in output among potato farmers in general to the point where the market for potatoes is glutted only results in generalised economic distress.

In a competitive market economy one economic agent not infrequently tends to gain at the expense of another. Indeed, this principle is enshrined in the very heart of a market-based mindset itself. It is enthusiastically endorsed as an example of the 'creative destruction' that the market process thrives upon. Technological innovation and modernisation under capitalism, it is argued, depends upon this. It is only by cutting out the deadwood that the green shoots of economic growth can be encouraged to appear.

A rising tide does not necessarily lift all the boats; some will sink. In this metaphorical vein, we will now turn to consider the make and model of those that remain afloat and assess their comparative durability in the choppy waters of the high seas. In other words, the different farming regimes that make up our global system of agricultural production.

The type of farming some of us would probably be more familiar with is the modern industrialised capitalist agriculture that tends to be found in the more economically advanced parts of the world. This farming model is increasingly, and stereotypically, one dominated by often very large-sized farms, practising monoculture – growing a single cash crop or specialising in rearing one or other kind

of livestock – and employing very few workers, the entire production process being highly capital intensive from start to finish. These different features tend to go together. For instance, you cannot effectively operate a large farm with just a mere handful of workers unless you have heavy machinery at your disposal. Similarly, in order to justify the purchase of such machinery you need to have a pretty sizeable farm and a substantial cash flow in the first place. The one thing sort of presupposes – or necessitates – the other.

In terms of output per agricultural worker, large-scale industrial farming is certainly highly productive but as a yardstick with which to measure 'efficiency', this can be quite misleading. A single worker operating a giant combine harvester (which might cost half a million US dollars or more) can harvest a field of wheat at a rate that would have taken probably scores of farm labourers a century or two ago to match. However, it is not simply the labour of this single operator that we have to take into account in making comparisons. We have also to take into account the labour involved in producing this highly sophisticated piece of machinery, in mining the ores that will later be fashioned into its component parts, in maintaining and servicing the harvester and ensuring that it is in a state of readiness come harvest time and so on. From that point of view, the great bulk of the workforce implicated in one or other way in what is called the 'farming industry' are, strictly speaking, 'off-farm' workers employed in factories.

In any case, output per worker is not the only criterion with which to judge 'productivity'; output per hectare is another and this latter criterion is bound to count for more in a world that is more heavily populated (and where, consequently, land is less abundant). From this point of view large-scale commercial farms do not score as highly as might be imagined. In the Global South especially – though less so in the developed countries – these perform poorly by comparison with more traditional, labour intensive, small-scale farmers adopting what might be called a more organic approach.

In developed countries, too, there is some evidence to favour an organic approach over a conventional chemical-based approach to farming. The problem lies in transitioning from the latter to the former when a loss in yields can be expected in this transitional period. In

today's highly commercialised environment where the emphasis is on short term results, this may be too great a hurdle to surmount; for a struggling farmer it could be just too financially risky. How do you cope with the unavoidable temporary decline in yields, and therefore revenue, and still cover your financial costs?

We tend to associate conventional farming with big industrial farms. Their big size almost calls for a capital-intensive and, along with that, a heavily chemical-based approach to farming. This is precisely what makes it rather difficult for them to switch over to a more organic approach.

The problem for small farmers is that, despite being more productive per hectare and being able to fetch higher prices for their produce by cutting out the middlemen, they can barely survive on such a low overall income whereas the big farmers with so much more land at their disposal can manage to get by with a comparatively much lower return per hectare. In the capitalist market, it is those who survive who will drive out those who cannot. Hence the tendency for agricultural land to become more concentrated in fewer hands.

A recent example was the Sri Lankan government's (over)hasty decision to ban the importation of agro-chemicals from April 2021. Ostensibly, this decision was made to save \$300-\$400 million in foreign exchange. But the farming community there had not been sufficiently prepared for the changeover and supplies of organic fertiliser were woefully inadequate. As a consequence the government had to backtrack on that decision later that same year. ('Lessons from Sri Lanka's agrochemical ban fiasco', 25 November 2021, Grain.org- bit.ly/3JKTeVl).

This is precisely the kind of problem that will cease to exist in a post-capitalist society. Individual farming units will no longer be faced with the need to ensure their own economic survival in a harsh and unforgiving commercial environment. They will no longer be competing with each other in the market to realise a profit through the sale of their produce. So there will be no penalty or handicap in transitioning to a more organically-based form of farming if this was desired. That makes for a much more flexible approach to food production altogether.

Next month: farming in a post-capitalist society.

ROBIN COX

Nations and borders



SO IT would appear that the USA and its allies were rather premature in claiming to have won 'the cold war'. Once again Europe is convulsed in violence as the Russian and American warlords continue their bloody rivalry. This time it is Ukraine that has become their chosen battlefield as one side seeks to defend its global hegemony against the threat from the East. Only the propaganda has changed as the US can no longer pretend that it is the threat to freedom posed by 'soviet communism' which is the cause of the conflict. They have reverted to an older and much more corrosive hypocritical form of rhetoric based on the myth of nationhood and 'sovereign states'. The very chaotic instability of capitalist nation states makes this myth-making vital for the oligarchs of all countries since to protect themselves and their power from any perceived threat they must convince those who will murder and die for their interests that to do so is a noble fight for their own 'freedom' from foreign dominance. This is the only reason that the lie of nationhood and the myth of a shared interest of all those within given borders continues to survive in the 21st century. The working class would seem to have learnt few lessons from the dark age of the preceding century as they continue to believe that war can solve their problems. Let us consider the origins of the transformation of community into tribalism and of cultural interaction into racist and xenophobic hatred.

Our species has always been intensely social because for us to survive in nature we had to form communities. As these communities evolved they acquired diverse cultural behaviours and values. When private property first came to acquire significance, the warrior elites who owned the surplus produced by settled agrarian communities were always fearful that another foreign elite might

seek to take it from them. They needed an ideology (religion) that contained an inbuilt suspicion of the other cultures that surrounded them. Although such elites were usually well acquainted with these other cultures they needed to fill the void of ignorance shared by their uneducated exploited majority with stories of immorality and cruelty that might one day serve as an excuse to go to war with them. Thus the love of community was subverted into a suspicion of those with other traditions. It wasn't long before these city states and then principalities adopted a policy of pre-emptive strikes which could, if successful, create an empire. The imposition of one pantheon, one culture and one ruling elite spawned the nightmare of imperialism of which the 'Pax Romana' is a prime example. The destruction of cultural diversity was the price for peace. All ruling-class ideology has this element within it from the dominance of Catholicism in the Middle Ages to the promotion of 'democracy' (plutocracy) today.

The transformation of hundreds of petty principalities into consolidations of nation states was accomplished through the weakening of the Holy Roman Empire during the reformation followed by capitalism's destruction of feudalism. As the 'wars of religion' and then the Napoleonic wars drew and redrew the map of Europe, borders changed with a rapidity that mixed the diverse cultures profoundly. The age of European imperialism had a similar effect around the world. By the end of the 20th century and its unending conflicts only very few regions of the Earth with a purely indigenous population were left unaffected. It became impossible to define a 'national character', which in turn made the need for a creation myth even more acute for ruling classes; hence the endless books on the quest for an English identity etc. As the reality

of cultural, ethnic, racial and religious differences retreated before the rise of global capitalism so their myth advanced. To dilute any possibility of international class consciousness the culture of capitalism became increasingly obsessed with national identity. But why is the global working class still so easily fooled by this anachronistic nonsense?

A friend once declared that it would be an advantage if any discussion of history pertaining to current political events should not go back further than 50 years. His reasoning was that we should not be dragged down by the past and its grudges and bitterness because this inevitably inhibits progress. It is true that many seek to endlessly refight the battles of the past but it is equally true that an ignorance of history makes it so much easier to repeat its mistakes. The mass media of any nation have a very selective memory and use history as propaganda which only a deeper understanding of the subject is capable of refuting. Indeed, historical ignorance is the corner stone of all reactionary ideology. In understanding why the majority still identify with their respective nation state we must point to this profound lack of any meaningful historical education. Of course this is only part of the ideology of the parasite class that always seeks to subvert any subject to its own advantage: you are told that your poverty is your own fault, that wars are fought because of evil men, that criminals are born and not made, that greed and violence are the natural human state – all of these lies are dedicated to one end: that capitalism itself can never ever be blamed for anything.

Socialists think the evidence is overwhelming that private property society and its present incarnation (capitalism) is the real cause of wars. Not just in terms of ruling class greed and paranoia but because of the impoverishment of 99 percent of the world's population who, in the desperation to find a reason for their daily feelings of alienation, meaninglessness, cynicism and political impotence, will grasp at the evilness of a Putin or the invasion of illegal immigrants as an explanation. In the search for secure borders we increase our own insecurity. As we cling to this tiny rock in space there is no room for those who would seek to divide us into tribes of mutual hatred – they do this not because they are evil but because they're born into an inhuman economic system that demands it of them.

WEZ

Supermarkets and sub-profits

THE COST of living crisis has presented supermarkets with a problem. They depend for sales on what workers spend in their weekly shop but, with workers having to spend more on energy, they have less to spend on other essentials. This is why supermarket bosses have been pressing the government to reduce the amount workers have to spend on energy and to increase the money it pays to those on benefits. Prominent among these has been Richard Walker, the owner and boss of Iceland, which specialises in selling cheap frozen food to the lower-paid and those on benefits.

Last year, in an interview on BBC Radio 4, besides calling on the government to increase universal credit, he called on supermarkets to accept making less profit. Under the headline 'Iceland boss suggests supermarkets should be willing to make zero profits during cost of living crisis', Yahoo News reported:

'A supermarket boss has said businesses like his should commit to making fewer, or even zero, profits during the cost-of-living crisis as food prices continue to rise (...) Richard Walker, managing director of Iceland,

has urged supermarkets to show "responsible capitalism" and reduce prices – even if it means a hit to company profits. "I think [there should be] responsible capitalism, I think businesses [should be] accepting lower or no profits"' (tinyurl.com/9e6ru542).

Actually, this was making a virtue out of necessity. Forgoing some profits is not a case of 'responsible capitalism' but something imposed on supermarkets by the state of the market for their wares. As workers are having to spend more on energy and so have less to spend on their weekly shop, if supermarkets put up their prices in line with the increase in the price of their supplies they would lose sales and so profits anyway. No wonder they are calling on the government to give workers more to spend — in their outlets.

But there is another side to the story. In another, TV, interview, he told Laura Kuenssberg:

'... we pay minimum wage at £9.50. I'm not proud of that and I wish we could pay more, but the reality is to pay £10.90, the Real Living Wage would cost us £50 million, and that's money we don't have' (tinyurl.com/2ca8f7fv).

The minimum wage is already a government subsidy to employers as workers on or just above it with family dependents can get their income topped up under the tax credit scheme.

Capitalists firms catering for the weekly consumption needs of the workers who buy from them are asking to be further subsidised by the government or, rather, ultimately, by other sections of the capitalist class.

This brings out a conflict of interest within the capitalist class. Supermarkets want other capitalist firms to pay more taxes to provide their customers with more money to spend. They would even like them to pay higher wages, but they are not prepared to do this themselves. What they are out to protect is not the pockets of their customers but their own profits, short and long-term.

Richard Walker wants to become a Tory MP. If elected, he will be able to continue to campaign to further the sectional interests of his section of the capitalist class. He might not get his way, though, as governments are there to look after the general interest of the capitalist class as a whole.



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.



Exploring Englishness

ARTIST GRAYSON Perry's latest side-job as a documentary presenter treads similar ground to his previous investigations into what makes up people's identities. His focus this time is how and how much people feel 'English'. He asks if there is 'a shared identity that binds the English together? Or is Englishness just a fantasy that's keeping us stuck in the past?' and to find out, he gets in a van and goes on a road trip around the country. Over one episode each for the South, the Midlands and the North, Perry meets and chats with various people, his amiable and direct style drawing out how they define themselves as English. *Grayson Perry's Full English* (Channel 4) has enough flavour, but doesn't satisfy an appetite for explaining everything about what a national identity is. He mentions the context of the UK having left the EU alongside calls for Scotland to secede, and points out that English culture has been shaped by a history of empire and immigration, but the programme's remit doesn't stretch to covering the political and economic structures behind a sense of 'Englishness'.

'Englishness' is bound up with nationalism: having allegiance to a state in the mistaken belief that it runs in our interests. In recent decades, nationalism has acquired more negative connotations when associated with England than with other parts of the UK. Perry says that for many people, English pride comes with the caveat 'I'm not racist, but...', because 'Englishness' has a baggage of knuckle-dragging bigotry. The programme doesn't feature the stereotypical racist skinhead; although shaven-headed interviewee Ian has St George's flag tattoos, he emphasises his view that Englishness can be for anyone. However, another person featured, long-haired Jeremy, spends his spare time reminiscing about the Second World War and patrolling the sea in his boat looking for unofficial crossings, to defend what he sees as his country. Other people Perry meets in the South, like Jeremy, tend to have 'Englishness' embedded in their character more so than those elsewhere, and they show this in a more theatrical way, whether taking part in a Druid ritual in the woods or styling their life around previous decades. In comparison, those in the Midlands and the North tend to be more down to earth. The people he meets in the Midlands demonstrate that associating 'Englishness' with 'whiteness' is increasingly out of date. Younger people in particular, such as Birmingham-based



Credit: Channel 4

rapper Jayekae, have grown up in diversely populated communities, and so have a wider understanding of who can be English. Those Perry meets in the North relate more to their local area than to England as a whole. His driver Kirk and musician Paul Heaton both say that growing up in hardship means you identify with people around you in the same situation, bringing a sense of belonging.

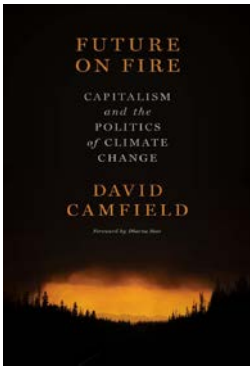
A shared struggle through adversity is one way that living in capitalism distorts the basic human need to feel part of a community. Nationalism is another, which for many people has turned to patriotism, which emphasises identifying with a nation's culture rather than with a nation in itself. As the programme demonstrates, patriotism is often towards a mythical vision of England, whether seen through Druidism's reinvented folk traditions or an impression of the 1940s, 50s or 60s either with the rough edges smoothed away or as 'nostalgia for the bad times'. This aspect of 'Englishness' looks backwards and therefore doesn't point towards creating a different future. Perry sees the emotional appeal of this, but he's more excited by how 'Englishness' has been changing through the impact of people whose families came from overseas. When cultures dialectically rub up against each other, something from both is created: the Northern Soul scene, Desi pubs, the only halal tea room in the Peak District, Grime music, or the domino club at the West Bromwich African Caribbean Resource Centre. This fluid,

diverse notion of 'Englishness' promoted by the programme doesn't have any room for the racist, flag-waving connotations of the term.

The mixing of people and cultures has tended to dilute nationalism, apart from during football or cricket World Cup tournaments. Nationalism has shifted to patriotism for those who reinvent traditions or yearn for the past. 'Englishness' as shown on Grayson Perry's *Full English* often means something more personal yet. Perry asks those he meets to each lend him an object which represents what England means to them, to be part of a tie-in exhibition. Most of the items donated tell part of their owner's story rather than being attempted symbols of England itself: a refugee's ticket into the country, a body-building competition medal, a fur coat and knickers. If the people Perry meets are representative (and they tend to be on the eccentric side), then this suggests that 'Englishness' is changing its meaning to something more subjective than it may have been defined in the past. And many of those featured in the programme understandably relate more closely to their immediate community than to an abstract idea of 'Englishness'. While this isn't the same as rejecting nationalism because it's part of a wider system which works against us, the programme optimistically suggests that nationalism is becoming less important as society evolves.

MIKE FOSTER

Ecosocialism



Future on Fire. Capitalism and the Politics of Climate Change. By David Camfield. PM Press. 2022. xiv+96pp.

This is a strange book which houses apparently conflicting viewpoints by the same author. It begins with a chapter ('The Path We're On') focusing on the threat to life on Earth posed by the climate and ecological crises due to capitalism's use of fossil fuels, its unstoppable focus on 'short-term growth of profits', and its inevitable failure to ensure that the abundance of food produced does not reach all those who need it. The author then goes on in three further chapters to talk about how he considers this threat could possibly be averted or mitigated by various actions within the framework of capitalism. Finally, in a short closing chapter, he explains, in apparent contradiction to what came before, how the only means of averting 'environmental calamity' is actually to get rid of capitalism altogether and set up what he calls 'ecosocialism', described as 'an ecologically rational society founded on democratic control, social equality, and the predominance of use value' and 'a self-governing society with a non-destructive relationship to the rest of nature', as well as providing 'the context for a flourishing of human diversity'. He also points out that such a society has nothing in common with the so-called 'communism' of the Soviet Union, China and Cuba, which he describes as bureaucratic capitalist dictatorships with no aim of satisfying human needs, in the same way as all 'existing states are capitalist states and 'changing governments may lead to reforms, but it doesn't alter which class rules'.

We can have no argument with analysis like this, yet, as already observed, it seems, strangely at odds with the rest of the book. Its longest chapter, for example, entitled 'Mass Movements: Our Only Hope', talks about how 'collective action by large numbers of ordinary people' can force governments into reforms, and 'prepare people for future struggles', since 'the experience of defensive fights can change those who take part in them'. This, it goes on to say, can 'open up possibilities for more far-reaching societal change'. All this smacks of the Trotskyist mantra that, if you engage people in 'struggle', this is likely to make them more radical

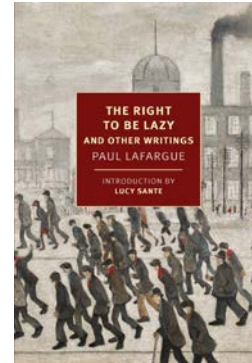
and the whole thing will tip over into a mass revolutionary movement led by those who sparked the struggle in the first place. There is of course no evidence that engagement in 'single issues' struggle actually makes people more radical and prone to look more widely at societal change. The effect is in fact just as likely to be the opposite (ie, disillusion), especially if the 'struggle' is unsuccessful. So, for example, the widespread *gilets jaunes* protests in France in 2018-19, which the author dwells on as a kind of model that could be followed, seem to have left little trace on the French or the wider political scene. And, in positing a scenario where capitalism completely loses control of the climate situation, he talks about the likely need to fight for reforms such as 'sharply progressive taxes on profits, savings, and income as well as the expropriation of wealth'.

All this seems a million miles away from the 'ecosocialist' society of the author's final chapter. And this is so, it seems, because the author eschews the possibility of a majority of workers (ie, all who have to sell their energies for a wage or salary) democratically voting capitalism out of existence and bringing in a genuine socialist (or ecosocialist) society. This society can in the end only be a moneyless system of free access without buying and selling. It can be nothing less than a world of planned cooperation which takes advantage of existing technologies in a sustainable way, a society in which everyone has available to them the means to satisfy their needs and contributes freely and voluntarily to the production and distribution of the goods and services necessary for that. And perhaps the key to the apparent gulf between means and ends in this book is to be found in its constant use of the expression 'just transition'. The author seems to see the 'ecosocialism' he would like as something which, if, it ever comes, will be somewhere in the far-flung future. That being the case, it is saying, we may as well try and achieve something in the 'transition' period (Green New Deal, 'direct action', free access to priority goods, etc). This 'in the meantime' approach is of course classic on the political left, but, as experience has shown, it can serve only to prolong the agony of capitalism, a society which, whatever the name it gives to itself, always produces inequality, rich and poor, environmental degradation, and antagonisms of all kinds. And to accept the continuation of this in any form, on the grounds that socialism can only be achieved in the very long term, shows both a failure of the imagination and an unwillingness to engage in the real 'struggle' of spreading consciousness

of the need for that society the author himself eloquently characterises in his final chapter as 'self-governing', 'ecologically rational' and 'founded on democratic control and social equality'.

HKM

Being Lazy



The Right to be Lazy and Other Writings. By Paul Lafargue. Selected and translated by Alex Andriesse. New York Review of Books. 2023.

Paul Lafargue's classic satire on the obsession with work and the working class's demand that they should be given work as a 'right' was first translated into English by the left-wing publisher Charles Kerr in 1907, so a modern translation is not out of place. This one, by Alex Andriesse, reads better in general than Kerr's, if only because today is 2023 and language changes.

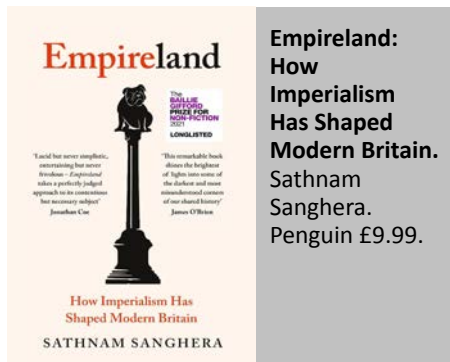
Not all the changes are improvements. Why, for instance, 'preachings' into 'preachments', 'idleness' into '*otium*'? Other changes reflect a lack of understanding of socialist terminology as when 'wages' is changed to 'salaries' and, on two occasions 'working class' to 'working classes' (Lafargue wrote '*classe ouvrière*'). While Andriesse's 'peacefully if possible, violently if not' is the more literal, Kerr's 'peacefully if we may, forcibly if we must' reflects how this view was expressed in the English-speaking working-class movement.

The Right to be Lazy is a pamphlet and only takes up 39 pages of this 120-page book. The rest is made up of *A Capitalist Catechism*, a skit based on the Catholic church's catechism, *The Legend of Victor Hugo*, a demolition job on the author of *Les Misérables* who at the time seems to have been known just as much for his poetry as for his prose writing, and *Memoires of Karl Marx* (Lafargue was married to one of Marx's daughters and so knew Marx well).

As this edition is published by the prestigious New York Review of Books it should reach a new audience and have a wider circulation than versions and selections (such as ours) published by small radical or socialist groups. Which can't be bad.

ALB

The Sun Never Set



Empireland: How Imperialism Has Shaped Modern Britain.
Sathnam Sanghera.
Penguin £9.99.

Sanghera was born in Wolverhampton to Punjabi immigrant parents. Here he provides an examination of the impact of the British Empire on both the UK and the various colonised countries. The emphasis is on South Asia, but there is plenty of discussion of other areas too. The empire is seen as having consisted of two stages. Down to the 1780s, it was based on sugar plantations in the West Indies, but after the American War of Independence it involved 'a more concerted power grab of India and Africa', dominated at first by the East India Company.

There is no hiding much of the violence involved in building and maintaining the empire. In India, the Amritsar Massacre of 1919, also known as the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, involved troops firing on an unarmed crowd, and may have led to over a thousand deaths. In one 'battle' during the invasion of Tibet in 1903, 629 Tibetans were slaughtered; large sums were paid by the Tibetan government as indemnities. Many invasions and occupations resulted in the stealing of artefacts and their transport to museums in the UK: the word loot comes from the Hindi for 'spoils of war'. There were objections to such theft, though, such as from William Gladstone after the invasion of Ethiopia in 1868.

Taking items for museums or private collections was not the only way that Britain's ruling class benefited from the empire. Many country houses were built from laundered colonial booty. The dogma of free trade (invoked when it suited) justified the lack of government action to alleviate the Irish Potato Famine of the 1840s and the many famines in India (in which perhaps ten million died). Armed force was employed to compel so-called free trade on colonies, so that they would export cheap goods (mostly food) to the UK. The much-lauded Indian railway system was built to allow faster movement of British troops and to enable easier access to the Indian countryside for British exports.

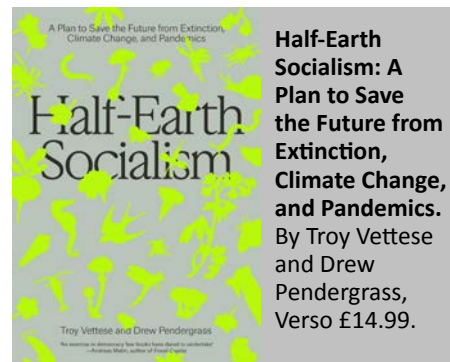
Other legacies of empire for Britain supposedly include wild racial stereotypes, the public school system, jingoism, and the

alleged distrust of cleverness. Above all, one result is the immigrant communities in Britain, which 'is a multicultural, racially diverse society because it once had a multicultural, racially diverse empire'. The term 'racially diverse' is objectionable here, but Sanghera does argue that concepts of race and racism were not really a driving force behind the empire (racism is more likely to have been a result of slavery, rather than a cause).

All in all, a useful and informative survey of the British Empire and its consequences, both historically and today.

PB

Half and Half



Half-Earth Socialism: A Plan to Save the Future from Extinction, Climate Change, and Pandemics.
By Troy Vettese and Drew Pendergrass,
Verso £14.99.

The point of the first half of the title is the idea of rewilding half of the planet in order to preserve biodiversity and the likely massive loss of species in the Sixth Extinction (compare the COP15 target of protecting 30% by 2030). This would help to remove atmospheric carbon and prevent the emergence of new diseases transmitted from animals to humans. The concept originated with the entomologist and sociobiologist E.O. Wilson (see www.half-earthproject.org) but, as Vettese and Pendergrass point out, it could hardly be introduced, in the face of entrenched economic interests, without a big change in how society is organised.

Their solution is 'Half-Earth Socialism', involving 'natural geo-engineering', a fully renewable energy system, and widespread veganism (which implies much less land use and emission of carbon). However, their ideas on this are not fully consistent. They refer to Cuba and Chile under Allende, as if these had anything to do with socialism, and appear to think that Eastern Europe pre-1989 was socialist. The last chapter, though, is a kind of homage to Morris's *News from Nowhere*, transferred to Massachusetts in 2047. As in the original, William Guest 'wakes' in a dream in a new kind of society, the inhabitants of which explain it to him. People's basic needs (housing, food etc) are all covered, but there are still credits and such perks as priority housing and transport and extra vacation time for those who undertake less

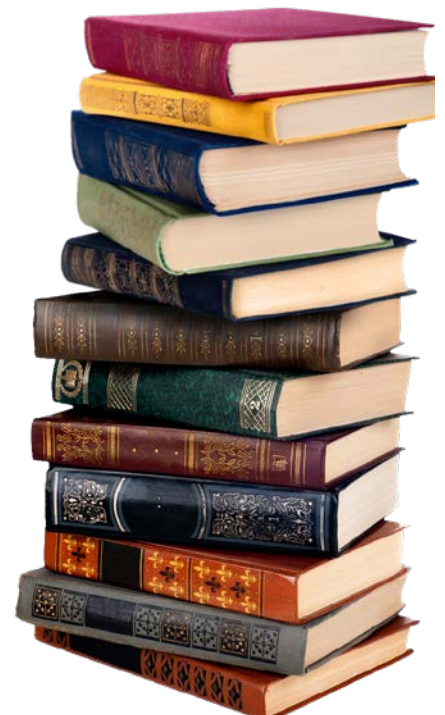
pleasant work. There are vague references to 'a bit of a market socialist system' involving prices.

A crucial part of the proposed solution consists of a way to plan production without prices, in response to the calculation argument of von Mises. This makes use of linear programming, a method proposed by Leonid Kantorovich in the 1930s; the fact that this was in the context of state-capitalist planning in the USSR does not in itself invalidate it. The 2047 vision has a central planning bureau housing massive supercomputers, which 'make a series of global plans simulating snapshots of the future'. This supposedly combines 'the strengths of both democratic and flexible centralised planning'. Regional and local planning offices produce more specific plans, and then people choose: 'An informed citizenry would be well equipped to choose among the competing plans devised by the planners.' This is all interesting, and a socialist world would also need plans of various kinds, but we cannot say now whether something along the lines envisaged here would be adopted, other perhaps than to note that this approach seems overly centralised. The Socialist Party pamphlet *Socialism as a Practical Alternative* offers some ideas on how to plan and organise a world based on production for use.

So a thought-provoking book which contains some misleading ideas about what constitutes socialism and overly-prescriptive ideas about the future society. There is an associated planning game you can play on-line at <https://play.half.earth>.

A more detailed discussion of the authors' plan can be found on pages 12 and 13.

PB



Crisis and Revolution



THE LEFT is saying the crisis is coming; and from that crisis the workers will rise to overthrow, cast off the yoke, destroy the juggernaut of capital, et cetera. There comes to mind, irresistibly, the futile drama of all the times before. The Communist speaker of the 'thirties, proclaiming that civilisation now stood at the brink, imparting to his hearers that the capitalist system was tottering and all that was needed was a good push. Syndicalist doomster in the post-war years, impressively pointing to the approaching crisis as one of *capitalism itself*: the phrase conveying certainty that the machine would now grind to a halt, its cogs gummed-up with (probably) an excess of the seeds of its own decay.

This continual resurrection of old beliefs is one of the many chronic diseases of the Left. Each generation rediscovers the theories which proved sterile for its predecessors. The failure

is never attributed to the error of the theory itself. Those who followed it were "betrayed", or the time was unforeseeably

not ripe; but now it will be written on banners to make the revolution. Yet this theory of the climacteric crisis—"the death agony of capitalism"—and its revolutionary consequence is perhaps the most hopeless of all. What is involved is dual misunderstanding: of the nature of economic crises and the nature of the socialist revolution.

The form of the argument today is as follows. Capitalism is now acutely pressed between a falling rate of profit and workers' wage demands (...)

The easy assumption is that extreme poverty will make workers rebel against capitalism and flock to "revolutionary" leaders. All the evidence is against it.

If it were true the Gorbals, Liverpool, Falls Road and the tied farm cottages of England would be full of revolutionaries. (...) Unpalatable as it may be, what the unemployed worker seeks is work and relief from his acute immediate problem, not to be assaulted further in an ideological battle. (...)

That does not mean conditions are irrelevant. Socialist consciousness starts from indignation at the consequences of capitalism; but until feeling has given way to understanding, consciousness does not exist. The aim of the crisis-struck Left is to foster blind revolt, from which not Socialism but only defeat and disillusionment can result. The real need is for working men and women to comprehend that, in or out of crisis, the capitalist system must always frustrate hopes of a satisfactory life. (*Socialist Standard*, March 1973)

Just Stop Capitalism

AT THE 'Just Stop Oil' public meeting advertised at Swansea University, the speakers argued for 'direct action' to halt the use of fossil fuels. To a rapt, mainly student audience they listed a series of direct action campaigns, for example Civil Rights, Anti-Apartheid, Occupy, Extinction Rebellion, Insulate Britain, which Just Stop Oil was following in the wake of. Supporting their campaign was, they insisted, the only way to deal with climate change, to save the environment and to save the world.

The first thing to say is that single-issue actions like this are nothing if not commendable for their concern for human welfare and their sincere intentions. They really are trying to make the world a better place. But can a campaign like Just Stop Oil hope to succeed in its objectives? And, if it does, how much will actually be changed? It may be said that some of the previous protest activities mentioned by the speakers have had some impact on society and on social attitudes and it is possible that the changes advocated by Just Stop Oil, if adopted, might help to alleviate climate change. However, sad as it may be, that will not happen with the aim of saving the world but only if the system of production for profit which rules the world sees it as necessary for its own survival and entrenchment.

This same rule applies to all the 'single issues' that groups of people get together to try and resolve within the system

we live in. This is a system which exists to make profits for the small minority who own and control the bulk of the wealth with the vast majority owning nothing but their energies and skills which they need to sell to survive. So all the time, effort and energy expended by the speakers at the Just Stop Oil meeting will have one of two inevitable outcomes. Either they will be unsuccessful because, whatever the rationality of their arguments or the sincerity of their cause, the system continues to privilege the use of fossil fuels rather than other forms of energy as a way of making profit. Or they will be successful in the sense that the use of oil may be moderated or even halted because the capitalist system itself dictates the necessity of doing this for its own survival. But whichever of these outcomes prevails, the system which has produced this problem and produces the manifold other problems which beset humanity will continue and the end of fossil fuels will just be the latest in a list of never-ending reforms that capitalism has always needed to implement to facilitate its operation.

A wider view of how society works than adopted by single-issue campaigners is needed. One that focuses not on individual social or economic change but on a complete change from a society of production for profit to one of production for need based on common ownership of the world's resources and free access to all goods and services. So don't just stop oil, stop capitalism.

SOUTH WALES BRANCH

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.

MARCH 2023 EVENTS

World Socialist Movement online meetings

Sundays at 19.30 (IST) Discord

Weekly WSP (India) meeting

Sunday 12 March 10.00 GMT Zoom

Central Online Branch Meeting

Note earlier starting time.

Sunday 5 March 11.00 GMT Zoom

Questions about Socialism

Discussion with enquirer from India

Friday 10 March 19.30 GMT Zoom

Did You See the News?

Discussion on recent subjects in the news

Friday 17 March 19.30 GMT Zoom

The Rewards of Competition: A prize worth fighting for?

Speaker: Richard Field

We are told that competition is good but is it natural and how does it affect relations between people?

19.30 March GMT Zoom

Sustainability before and after the Revolution

Speaker: John Cumming

Media people are always trying to spread the blame concerning the environment and thus turn it into just another 'moral panic' in which we should all 'do our bit'. But the effect of what we can do as individuals is limited compared to what might be achieved when we really are 'all in it together'.

Socialist Party Physical Meetings

MANCHESTER

Saturday 18 March, 2pm • Socialism: Nothing less will do

Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, central Manchester.

Capitalism will always be unstable and dangerous to people's well-being. Its very structure operates against workers' interests, all the time. Time to stop putting up with it and to replace it with a classless society.

Saturday 25 March 12pm

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

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

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.

Being Homeless



THE SCENE is the Uplands shopping centre close to where I live and it's a rainy winter night. I've come out to get a few things from one of the supermarkets along the road, the Sainsbury's Local. Outside there often sits a bedraggled young male asking people for 'change'. But this time it's a bit different. It's a woman sitting there and she's not looking in the least bedraggled. I give her a pound coin and she thanks me. We get talking. I find out that, until a short time before, she had a rented flat and a steady job in a nearby town. Then it all turned sour. The firm she worked for folded, she couldn't pay her rent, got evicted and, before she knew it, she was on the streets. That night she was trying to collect enough money to stay in a B&B that gave homeless people rooms for £25 per night. She told me there was another cheaper one but the people there were always either very drugged or potentially dangerous. She was trying her best to be on her own and away from those who were on drink and drugs, so she needed enough money to go to the better place. In all this she (Rhian was her name) made no effort to ask for any more than the single pound coin I'd already given her. She was extremely polite, well spoken and definitely not trying to make you feel sorry for her.

'It always ends badly'

Maybe I should have given her the £25 she needed. I had enough money in my pocket, but it didn't really occur to me. Instead, what preoccupied me was that she was sitting there in the bitter cold and wet and needed a decent warm place to go. So I took the plunge and asked her

whether I could offer her accommodation for the night adding, that she'd be entirely safe. She thanked me in a clearly sincere fashion but said that, though she didn't doubt what I was saying, she didn't know me and so couldn't accept, the reason being that, when such things had happened in the past, it had always ended badly. I said I fully understood and hoped things turned out all right for her that night. I walked away not really knowing what to think, but later that evening began to bitterly regret not having given her the full room money – especially as I was sure as I could be that it would have been used for that and not for anything else.

That week I went back several times in the evening to see if Rhian was there. But she wasn't. One of the thoughts that came to me was 'there but for fortune', but, as a socialist, other thoughts came too of course – mainly how every country in the world, no matter how 'rich', suffers the scourges of poverty and homelessness for at least some (and often many) of its inhabitants. And how fundamental these problems are to the system we all live under- capitalism.

Charities

I also thought back to how, when I was a much younger man, the charity Shelter had not long been founded with the promise to get rid of homelessness in Britain within 10 years. That was 1966. Today of course Shelter is still going strong. It is still campaigning, as its website says, for 'a safe, secure, affordable home for everyone' and appeals to us with the headline 'One child waking up homeless is a tragedy, 120,000 is an outrage'. Shelter even now has a weekly lottery – a sure sign that the problem it campaigns about is endemic. In fact, since Shelter was set up,

the organisations dedicated to solving homelessness have proliferated. The day after my encounter with Rhian, I bought a Big Issue and found in it an article by Greg Hurst of the Centre for Homeless Impact. The article began: 'It's easy to despair. But we must not. We must hold on to the belief that homelessness can be ended and look for evidence of proven or promising approaches that could be tried or tested right now.' Fine words, and no doubt genuinely meant, but the article ends by fearing that 'we are condemned to repeat the cycle of ebbs and flows of homelessness'. All this at a time when, according to a recent report, there are 257,331 homes in England classed as 'long-term empty', meaning that they have been left vacant for more than six months.

If we look more widely, in December 2022, the government of the 'richest' country in the world, the US, published a 'roadmap', referred to by social commentator Kenny Stancil as 'a plan that seeks to eventually eradicate homelessness in the United States, starting with a 25% reduction in the number of people suffering from a lack of reliable access to safe housing over the next two years'. We know from long experience of course that the chances of such a plan succeeding are minimal, especially given that, in the US, at least half a million and, according to some estimates, over a million people are currently suffering homelessness, even though, according to recent research, the country has 16 million vacant homes. More widely, across the globe, according to World Bank figures, more than half a billion people were living in 'extreme poverty' in 2022.

Can't pay can't have

Why is homelessness and the poverty it bespeaks endemic just about wherever we look? It's clearly nothing to do with lack of housing, but rather with the fact that people haven't got the means (ie, the money) to pay for it. In the system of 'can't pay, can't have' that is capitalism, people can be denied even the most basic necessities. How powerfully does seeing Rhian sitting in the cold and rain outside Sainsbury's Local bring that home and how much ammunition for change does that give socialists who campaign for a society where nothing is bought and sold, production is for use not profit and there is free access for everyone to all goods and services.

HOWARD MOSS