

THE

April 2023 • Volume 119 • Number 1424 • £1.50

SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

HOW WILL CAPITALISM END?

With a banquet... or with a whimper?



Also: The Chartist legacy ... 175 years on
Can we adapt to climate change?
Full English
How will capitalism end?

An opinion of fact
The old lie
Post-capitalist farming
Pathfinders by ChatGPT



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Introducing the Socialist Party

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

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



air, and explains why actions to prevent the depredation of the natural world can have limited effect and run counter to the nature of capitalism itself.

Gradualist reformers like the Labour Party believed that capitalism could be transformed through a series of social measures, but have merely become routine managers of the system. The Bolsheviks

had to be content with developing Russian capitalism under a one-party dictatorship. Both failures have given socialism a quite different-- and unattractive-- meaning: state ownership and control. As the *Socialist Standard* pointed out before both courses were followed, the results would more properly be called state capitalism.

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

Ending the profit system

THE CAPITALIST system of production for profit is well past its sell-by date. It has developed the forces of production, even if at the cost of immense human suffering, to the point where they are sufficient to adequately provide for the needs of every man, woman and child on Earth.

Capitalism has become an impediment to further human progress. It always was based on the economic exploitation and deprivation of the majority, but, having outlived its usefulness, it has become a threat to all humanity. It has already caused two world wars and the ever-present threat of another, and now threatens disastrous climate changes due to global warming.

Capitalism developed the forces of production by extracting a surplus from those who produce wealth. Under the pressure of its own uncontrollable market forces, most of this surplus was accumulated as capital invested in plant and machinery that expanded society's capacity to produce wealth.

Production for capital accumulation was never a rational aim for human society. That would be production to satisfy the material needs of its members – production directly for use, not for sale and profit.

If we had to design from scratch a human society that would best serve the interests of all its members, it wouldn't be one where natural resources and the instruments to use them were owned by just some members of society while the rest worked for them. It wouldn't be a society in which this privileged minority was forced by economic laws beyond anyone's control to use its profits to accumulate more and more capital. It wouldn't be a society where wealth was produced purely for sale, and where the majority were forced to find paid employment to get money to buy what they needed. It wouldn't be a class society and it wouldn't be capitalism.

It would be one where the means of life — natural and industrial resources —

would belong to no one but be available for society to use to satisfy the needs of its members. One where things would not be produced for sale and only provided to people who could afford to pay for them, but for sharing amongst all society's members according to their needs.

Of course, society is not designed. It evolves. Some in the past did imagine such a communal society but they were before their time. Now, however, the forces of production have developed to the point where a society of common ownership and distribution according to need has become possible.

To end the profit system, all that is now lacking is the will to do so on the part of the vast majority who do all the useful work in society. To make the change, they will need to organise to win political control, dislodge the owning class, abolish class ownership, and allow the aim of human society to become the natural one of satisfying its members' needs in the best possible way.

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Fancy a chat, GPT?

THE CURRENT tech buzz is that an AI language module called Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer is threatening to turn global industries almost upside-down. OpenAI launched ChatGPT in November 2022, Microsoft announced a \$10bn investment in January this year, and by February it was valued at \$29bn. This prompted Google bosses to hit the panic button and reassign tech staff to the urgent task of developing an AI competitor, now hurriedly launched as Google Bard.

ChatGPT is causing a fuss, to put it mildly. Chinese universities have banned it, and the UK *Guardian* newspaper is calling for government regulation (bit.ly/3FmOSrs). It doesn't just write plausible academic essays in seconds, it can write commercial copy, speeches, song lyrics, film scripts, poems, music, and computer programs. You name it, basically.

These chatbots don't work like an ordinary search engine, which looks for exact matches to spit back at you. Instead they use statistical analysis to shape their output based on what and how (they think) people most commonly write, and by extension what they believe, rather than on objective accuracy. This could have implications for socialists. For example, if 90% of sampled text thinks 'socialism' means Hitler and PoI Pot, the chatbot will think so too. However, it seems that AIs can be surprisingly even-handed, and often show a liberal or left-wing rather than conservative bias (bit.ly/3Jl2Viv). But they can also get facts embarrassingly wrong, as Google Bard did recently (bit.ly/3YXa3a1). This is worrying when you consider that medical AI chatbots are in development (bit.ly/3FAFziY). Mental health services have already been criticised for using them (bit.ly/3n584nt).

You can try ChatGPT yourself, by signing up at chat.openai.com/auth/login. You could ask it, say, to compose an ode to your lustfully intended in the style of Byron or Keats, make up a bedtime story for your kids, debug your computer code, or give you a cheat-sheet on dialectical materialism. Some intrepid socialists have already quizzed it on socialist theory, as they discuss on our Forum (bit.ly/3TdIWrn). They conclude that it's not terrible, and actually gets quite a lot right, if not everything.

To give you a taste, p22 of this issue contains a ChatGPT-generated 'poem'



about abolishing money, and a short essay in response to the request 'write an article in the style of Pathfinders in the Socialist Standard'. As you'll see, the poem is a somewhat McGonagall-esque paean to barter systems, while 'Pathfinders' is a waffly and generic exercise showing that when it doesn't know something, it hedges its bets. But still, not terrible. Then the AI does something distinctly odd. It produces an alleged quote from the Socialist Standard which is almost certainly made up, before ending abruptly with a network failure, as if it's developed a migraine.

In response to the question 'Do you ever invent quotes?' ChatGPT gives an interesting answer: As an AI language model, I do not have the capacity to invent quotes on my own. However, I can generate quotes based on patterns and combinations of words from my training data, which includes a vast collection of texts and speeches from various sources. However, it is important to note that these generated quotes are not necessarily attributed to any specific person or source, and they should not be taken as fact or used as a source of reliable information.

In other words, it does invent quotes, but because it has compiled the words from multiple sources, it does not consider the quote to be an 'invention'. Moreover, it will mine these sources from anywhere, without bothering about attribution. This point is actually the cause of a huge global controversy. GPT doesn't care who authored what, it's all just 'training data'. In short, it ignores intellectual property rights, a core concept that underpins capitalism.

ChatGPT slurps up vast volumes of information and serves it back up in spaghettified form with no regard for original sources, a process one

incensed artist describes as 'automated intellectual asset-stripping' (bit.ly/3n2PIZH). Fine artists and graphic designers have good reason to be worried (as an example, see a set of AI paintings done in the style of Van Gogh here- bit.ly/3LzE3Gj). ChatGPT is a language module, so it doesn't paint pictures, but instead appropriates the output of the entire news and creative media industry, including novelists, writers, bloggers and journalists. How comprehensively these assets are being stripped may be judged by the fact that AI chatbots are predicted to hit a ceiling in 2026 as they run out of training data (bit.ly/3yRE1IU).

Google is currently in a spat with the Canadian government over the state's insistence that AI-generated news stories should be paid for, to which Google has retaliated by censoring news outlets from Canadian search results (bit.ly/40gXulj). More legal wrangling will undoubtedly ensue globally, but there's no putting this genie back in the bottle. When disruptive technologies collide with capitalism's own practices and priorities, it's the disruptors that usually win. And this one is striking at the beating heart of the system, the sacred institution of private property.

One might be tempted to see this as a spanner that could wreck the machinery of the profit system, but capitalism is nothing if not adaptable. And besides, it's worth asking whether a creative artist, even in socialism, would be comfortable seeing their own work hijacked, dismembered, and then served up piecemeal without their contribution ever being acknowledged. Democratic common ownership is far preferable to capitalism's squalid property wars, but still, that surely doesn't make plagiarism ok.

Correction

A new finding this month overturns what was stated in the March Pathfinders column. A re-examination of the study data reveals that the happiest people do in fact continue to get happier above an income level of \$75,000, it's only the most unhappy high-earners who don't (bit.ly/40gQqLQ). You'll certainly be relieved to know that the rich are having a good time after all.

PJS

The Chartist Legacy ... 175 years on

ON 10 APRIL, 1848, the grounds of Kennington Common shook as 150,000 working men and women assembled to present a petition to Parliament demanding political rights. The rights for which they campaigned, radically democratic for their time, were enshrined in a document titled 'The People's Charter'. These Chartists, as they had become known, were described by historian Dorothy Thompson as the world's first working-class political party and had existed since the first drafting of the Charter by a joint committee of London working men and Members of Parliament in the winter months between 1837 and 1838. The document itself called for six main demands: universal male suffrage, the abolition of the property requirement for MPs, equally sized constituencies, annual parliaments, a fixed salary for elected MPs, and the secret ballot. While their campaigns were unsuccessful at the time, the spirit of Chartism suffused the Victorian working class with the irrevocable knowledge that they had political rights of their own. Now, 175 years later to the day, supporters of the Chartist legacy in Great Britain gather again at Kennington Park, on that same ground that rallied the democratic hopes and dreams of an entire working nation.

Chartist historian Malcolm Chase called Kennington Common 'a major piece of political theatre'; an apt description for an assembly that was intended as a display of solidarity more than a show of force. The arrayed forces of the Victorian state employed Royal Engineers, special constables and retired generals to turn London into an urban fortress, with the Royal Family displaced to the Isle of Wight to avoid any outbreak of revolutionary violence. Such violence, however, was never to be forthcoming. In contrast to the overt militancy of the establishment in seeking to suppress the Chartist cause, the arrayed workers on Kennington Common that day were exemplary in their peaceable, moral and orderly conduct. Feargus O'Connor, Chartism's leading orator and Parliamentary spokesman, declared to the assembly that 'We are Chartists, not pickpockets, and we will not jeopardise our cause by a single act of wickedness or folly'.

After the rejection of the 1848 petition, signed and supported by roughly a third of Britain's population, Chartism entered a decline from which it would not recover.



Most of the movement's support was split between Marxism and popular Liberalism as the century went on, both benefiting from the grassroots organisation and ideological conviction that had sustained the world's largest mass political movement throughout the 'Hungry Forties'. One of the greatest strengths of Chartism's organisation was that it was both democratic and highly literate; subscriber-funded newspapers such as the *Northern Star* were filled with pages of working-class poetry, lectures in Chartist localities and open letter columns through which readers could correspond with one another to strengthen Chartism from within and without, as political strategy was both disseminated and debated by the membership itself rather than being proclaimed by diktat or decree. Not only was Chartist literature journalistic, but the movement also created a thriving literary counterculture with both poetry volumes and popular novels that turned radicals like T.M Wheeler, Ernest Jones and Thomas Cooper into both household names and vital spokespeople in the movement's developmental processes, described by one Chartist historian as 'thinking out loud'. This is the legacy that Chartism leaves to us, and one that bears honouring in our radical press; the democratic power of the written word.

Modern grassroots movements owe a lot to Chartism. Progressive for their time, they provided an example of a functioning democratic framework for mass organisation and were millions-strong when Engels and Marx wrote both *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845) and *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848). Chartism was also directly responsible for introducing Marxist philosophy to the English-speaking worker; Engels himself contributed several articles to the *Northern Star* and an English *Manifesto* appeared first in the Chartist

press thanks to the translation efforts of Helen MacFarlane, a fact that pays due homage to the thousands of female radicals who also fought for the Charter. The movement has ample reason to be celebrated today, with the anniversary of Chartism's largest assembly turning Kennington Park into an annual site of radical pilgrimage. In recent years, the Kennington Chartist Project and Friends of Kennington Park have regularly marked the anniversary of the assembly with a small rally of their own at which all are welcome. Other Chartist history events are also held occasionally in the Park, with recent examples including an introduction to William Cuffay, a London Chartist leader and important figure in the history of Britain's black radicals. The Friends of Kennington Park and the Kennington Chartist Project inform us that, by way of marking the 175th anniversary of the protest, they are in the final stages of developing a Chartist History Trail around Kennington Park with an optional audio guide and posts dedicated to covering the events of the Chartist rally. This trail will open on 10 April as a permanent fixture in the park and will be supplemented by larger, more permanent monuments in due course.

It is worth adding that, while having a well-organised national executive and leadership, Chartism was also local to its core. Integrating a vast, extant network of recognised and respected regional activists gave the movement a sense of familiarity and widespread appeal that allowed the mill workers of Manchester, the miners of Durham and the farm labourers of Dorset to unite behind the Charter. An elective system of district delegates (that, in some cases, were organised street by street) meant that Chartists campaigned for local issues alongside their struggle for national political recognition. Kennington Park is ably supported by Newport, Blackstone Edge, Kersal Moor and many others, these being sites of equal importance in honouring the memory of a decentralised and democratic workers' movement. Many will doubtless have good reasons for being unable to attend the commemoration at Kennington Park; it would therefore be well worth the time of local Branches to both research and attend sites of Chartist significance in their own localities where possible.

DUNCAN HAMILTON

Collapse of a banking theory

IT'S HAPPENED again. A bank has collapsed. And not just any bank but the 16th largest in the US. Yet there are still people who argue that banks can create 'out of thin air' the money they lend (and others who give the idea credence by using the phrase even though they accept that it couldn't apply to an individual bank).

According to the thin-air school of banking, a bank's business model is to lend money it simply creates and gets its income as the interest it charges on the loans.

This is only half the story. A bank's income does consist of interest. However, unless it is a private bank — a polite, modern word for money-lender — and is lending its own money, it has to obtain money to lend from somewhere. One source is depositors but to attract savers a bank has to pay them interest. Banks also borrow money from other financial institutions on which they have to pay interest too.

In other words, a bank has to pay interest as well as receiving it. A bank's actual business model is to obtain income from borrowing at one rate of interest and lending at a higher rate. Banks are financial intermediaries, not financial magicians.

The Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) was, as its

name suggests, a bank based on accepting deposits from tech companies starting up. These would get money from some venture capitalist taking a punt on their success. The new company would deposit this in the SVB before spending it and topping it up with the next tranche of money from a venture capitalist. The SVB paid them interest on this and used the money to make loans, including to other tech companies, at a higher rate. They also held some of it as government and other bonds which could be converted into cash when needed.

The Federal Reserve, the US central bank, has, for various reasons, been putting up short-term interest rates. This had an effect on the SVB banking activities:

'Silicon Valley Bank has been bleeding deposits as the Federal Reserve has aggressively raised borrowing costs to fight inflation. Higher interest rates bludgeoned many of the tech businesses that had deposited their money with the bank. As venture capitalists retreated from offering companies fresh infusions of capital to sustain their businesses, start-ups needed to burn through the cash in their accounts to stay afloat. Deposits the bank had on hand have fallen steadily over the last

several months, according to S&P Global Ratings. Higher rates also meant more investments offered an attractive yield, leading some clients to pull out their deposits and put them elsewhere' (politi.co/3yCOgtX).

With reduced deposits, the SVB no longer had enough money to honour all of its loans. It thought of raising the money to do this by selling off its government and other bonds. Unfortunately for it, one effect of rising short-term interest rates is to lower the price of bonds:

'When banks run into trouble, they can be forced to sell off investment assets, typically US government debt and mortgage-backed securities, that they purchased to earn a return on their customers' deposits. As interest rates climb, the price of those older securities fall — which means the banks sell those investments at a loss'.

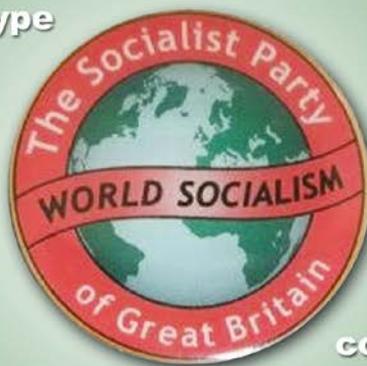
The money raised from SVB's sale of its bonds wouldn't have raised enough. It was insolvent.

Its failure is a classic demonstration that banks cannot create money out of thin air. Otherwise why would losing deposits make any difference? If a bank was short of money, all it would have to do would be to conjure some more out of thin air, lend it and pocket the interest. No bank would need to fail. But they do.

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Chris Hedges



The Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, *New York Times* best-selling author, former professor at Princeton University, activist and ordained Presbyterian minister, occasionally hits the mark:

'The militarists, corporatists, oligarchs, politicians, academics and media conglomerates champion identity politics and diversity because it does nothing to address the systemic injustices or the scourge of permanent war that plague the U.S. It is an advertising gimmick, a brand, used to mask mounting social inequality and imperial folly. It busies liberals and the educated with a boutique activism, which is not only ineffectual but exacerbates the divide between the privileged and a working class in deep economic distress. The haves scold the have-nots for their bad manners, racism, linguistic insensitivity and garishness, while ignoring the root causes of their economic distress. The oligarchs could not be happier' (*Scheerpost*, 5 February, tinyurl.com/bdethdd2).

Richard Dawkins



We often disagree with this professor too, but cannot fault him here:

"The only possible response is contemptuous ridicule," he told the *Daily Telegraph*. "I shall continue to use every one of the prohibited words. I am a professional user of the English language. It is my native language. I am not going to be told by some teenage version of Mrs Grundy which words of my native language I may or may not use." Other experts also branded the

alternatives "absurd" and argued they could cause confusion in scientific fields. They also pointed out that the terms "egg producing" and "sperm producing" were simply synonyms for male and female, and continued to confirm that sex is binary."... The EEB Language Project, which was launched in this month's *Trends in Ecology and Evolution* journal, is compiling a repository of "problematic words" that have been identified by US and Canadian scientists as harmful and it suggests alternatives. For example, participants have flagged the term "citizen science" saying it could be "harmful to people who do not have a nation state" (15 February, tinyurl.com/3em7v59w).

Workers have no country

But some so-called socialists, woke or not, insist otherwise:

'Instead of seeing the world as being composed solely of geopolitical camps, socialist internationalists must evaluate every conflict based on the interests of working people and their struggle for freedom and equality. The revolutionary Leon Trotsky once wrote that, hypothetically, if fascist Italy pursuing their interests had supported the anti-colonial uprising in Algeria against democratic France, the internationalists should have supported the Italian arming of the rebels. It sounds quite right, and this did not stop him from being an anti-fascist. Vietnam's struggle did not just benefit Vietnam; the defeat of the United States there had a significant (if temporary) deterrent effect on American imperialism' ('Freedom Socialist Party', February, tinyurl.com/2s4hv3bx).

More nonsense. this time from the horse's mouth:

'Through carrying out the Renewal process, the Party has drawn five great lessons from its experience, which can also be considered five fundamental theoretical issues of the present-day Vietnamese revolution. Among the lessons, the Party emphasises the need to comprehensively, synchronously, and regularly implement the Party building and rectification work, place people at the centre of the Renewal process, and build a synchronous development institution in order to serve the goal of rapid and sustainable development of the country, with a focus on the socialist-oriented market economy institution' (*Voice of Vietnam*, 2 February, tinyurl.com/3kwbyttu).

Even in the 'socialist republic', some are more equal than others as this headline attests: 'Vietnamese tourist in Thailand reunited with his lost \$194,000 Richard Mille watch' (Yahoo, 3 February, tinyurl.com/3hvebumm).

Dave Allen

The late, great and far from woke comedian may well have regarded that tourist as suitable material for a future sketch. One recent news item would almost certainly have attracted his attention:

'Some Taliban fighters are sick of the 9 to 5 grind, complaining they've been sucked into urban life by working desk jobs to run Afghanistan' (*Business Insider*, 10 February, tinyurl.com/yc5bz89b).

Abdul Salam, 26, a farmer who fought for the Taliban several times, is on record as stating:

'There is a proverb in our area that money is like a shackle. Now, if we complain, or don't come to work, or disobey the rules, they cut our salary.'

Welcome to wage slavery, sucker! Allen famously observed:

'You wake to the clock, you go to work to the clock, you clock-in to the clock, you clock out to the clock, you come home to the clock, you eat to the clock, you drink to the clock, you go to bed to the clock, you get up to the clock, you go back to work to the clock... You do that for forty years of your life and you retire — what do they fucking give you? A clock!'

Woke readers who are shocked, quite possibly offended, by our use of the term slavery should study the writings of a former slave:

'The difference between the white slave, and the black slave, is this: the latter belongs to ONE slave-holder, and the former belongs to ALL the slave-holders, collectively. The white slave has taken from him, by indirection, what the black slave had taken from him, directly, and without ceremony. Both are plundered, and by the same plunderers' (Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 1855, tinyurl.com/y78jy8mk).

Workers of the world, woke or not, wake up!

These plunderers are found throughout the world- yes, in all the aforementioned countries too! 'The typical CEO of a company listed on the S&P 500—a stock market index with 500 large publicly traded corporations- earned \$18.8 million last year. That's up roughly 21% from 2021, even though the S&P 500 index was down 20%' (*Time*, 16 February, tinyurl.com/3h4samud). Warren Buffett, whose 100 billion dollar fortune makes him the 6th richest person on Earth, was not joking when he said: 'there's class warfare, all right, but it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning' (*New York Times*, 26 November 2006, tinyurl.com/2n27mn5m). Winning worldwide.

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

LONDON

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

MIDLANDS

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

NORTH

North East Regional branch.

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

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

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

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

Yorkshire Regional branch.

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. Meets 3rd Sat. 2pm on Zoom. For invite email:

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Branch website:

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Glasgow branch. Meets 3rd Tues. on Discord.

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Dundee. Contact: Ian Ratcliffe, 12 Finlow Terrace, Dundee, DD4 9NA. 01382 698297.

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

WALES

South Wales Branch (Cardiff and Swansea)

Meets 2nd Monday 7.30pm on JITSi.

(meet.jit.si/spgbsouthwales3).

Contact: botterillr@gmail.com or

Geoffrey Williams, 19 Baptist Well Street, Waun

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Central Branch

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

For invite email: cbs@worldsocialism.org.

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Live to work or work to live?

WHEN THE UK raised the age of retirement and heightened the national insurance contribution criteria to be eligible for a state pension, there were complaints from women who were particularly affected by the changes but very little wider protest.

It has not been as easy for the French government plan to raise the retirement age from 62 to 64. Trade unions have held nationwide strikes that have brought France to standstills, hoping that strikes and accompanying demonstrations will bring about a similar outcome as in 1995 when then-president Jacques Chirac abandoned his pension change proposals. Millions of workers have been involved to disrupt industry and transport across France. However, unlike the previous five strikes, trade unions declared the 7 March strike, 'grèves reconductibles', meaning workers will vote at the end of each strike day on whether to continue industrial action. With no fixed end date, unions hope to damage the economy so severely that it defeats the government.

Although the country's current retirement age is one of the lowest in the European Union, the existing rules already require most people to work past the age of 64 in order to qualify for the full pension. By raising the retirement age by two years most workers would need to work 43 years, rather than 42, to be eligible for a full pension.

The government claims postponing the retirement age by two years and extending the pay-in period would yield an additional €17.7 billion in annual pension contributions, allowing the budget to break even by 2027 and safeguarding what they say would be a failing system. But not all economists agree.

In September 2022, a report by the French Pensions Advisory Council found the pensions system actually produced surpluses in 2021 (€900 million) and 2022 (€3.2 billion), although it did predict the system would run a deficit on average over the next quarter of a century. According to its calculations, 'between 2023 and 2027, the pension system's finances will deteriorate', reaching a deficit of between 0.3 and 0.4 percent of GDP, or just over €10 billion a year, until 2032. But the Council predicted an eventual balance beginning in the mid-2030s.

A deficit of €10-12 billion per year is not necessarily excessive for a pension system whose total annual expenditure amounts to around €340 billion. 'The results of this report do not support the claim that



Credit: REUTERS/Benoit Tessier

pensions spending is out of control,' the Council wrote. Pension spending as a proportion of GDP is expected to remain stable, at around 14 percent of GDP, before rising to up to 14.7 percent by 2032.

Pensions expert Michaël Zemmour said, 'It has become a form of political discourse to exaggerate and dramatise the deficit issue, to claim the system urgently needs to be reformed, when in fact the deficit is rather moderate'.

It's not about saving the pension system, it's about financing tax cuts with structural reforms

He explained, 'It's not about saving the pension system, it's about financing tax cuts for businesses,' highlighting France's intention to finance tax cuts with structural reforms to bring the national deficit under 3 percent by 2027, a requirement of EU member states (bit.ly/3kUXHlx).

Government attempts to appeal to younger generations on the grounds that it is they who carry the burden of supporting the elderly have not been successful. Despite retirement being a distant prospect, France's younger workers have been active in the protests.

One student said, 'We live in a productivity-obsessed society that is preoccupied with economic growth and which has been destroying our planet for decades. Now we're being asked to work

for two more years so we can produce even more.' Another explained, 'We should be able to live longer and in better health without working ourselves to death. Besides, if they're talking about retiring at 64 now, what will it be when I'm 60? Will I have to work until I'm 70 or 75?' (bit.ly/3JofydM).

In the United States, where the retirement age for Social Security is already transitioning to 67, a Republican Party committee has called for the retirement age to increase by three years so that people born on or after 1978 will have to wait until the age of 70 for a full pension (bit.ly/3mFHWcg).

In Germany, the Federation of German Employers' Associations in the Metal and Electrical Engineering Industries has also suggested raising its retirement age to 70. However, Johannes Geyer of the German Institute for Economic Research believes 'Raising the retirement age puts a lot of pressure on the working population. People with low life expectancy, and those with health problems, will suffer more; a relevant part of the population dies before reaching retirement age.' He seeks an alternative solution. 'We need migration. It's essential that we have enough people coming from abroad to work in Germany' (bit.ly/3mCFM3r).

Working people must reject this capitalist imposition – 'live longer, work longer'. We should have a society where we can appreciate the added years of our lives and not be made to work until we drop.

ALJO

Can we adapt to climate change?

A RECENT much publicised book, *The Journey of Humanity* by Oded Galor (The Bodley Head, 2022, to be reviewed here next month), which seeks to explain human development over the whole of history and the different pace of it in different places largely in terms of environmental conditions prevailing in the earliest times, sees more to be positive than negative about the effects of modern capitalism. It expresses hope that the global warming and climate

crisis it has produced will be a 'short-lived' phenomenon resolvable via what the book calls 'revolutionary technologies'. A similar hope is also the subject of an article entitled 'Can Technology Help Us to Adapt to Climate Change?' which appeared recently on the 'We The People' United Nations website.

The article first gives examples of how past societies managed to use existing technology to adapt to extreme climate conditions, for instance ancient Persian wind towers harnessing the breeze and directing it into homes to keep houses cool, or early farmers guiding and storing water to cope with dry periods. But while expressing optimism around the ingenuity of humans and our capacity to adapt, it then recognises that the extreme weather events happening because of increasing emissions and likely to continue are set to be far more devastating than anything that has happened before. It points to the fact that just last year 'millions of people around the world were affected by deadly floods forcing them to leave their homes'. It expresses the hope that innovation in the shape of flood barriers, early warning systems and other 'climate adaptation technologies' can help to mitigate some of this, while at the same time recognising that such innovation is less likely to be accessible to the countries that need it most. It recommends the *'Green Technology Book'*, published digitally in 2022 by the World Intellectual Property Organisation, which displays over 200 adaptation technologies for agriculture and forestry, coastal areas and cities and which is, it says, 'paving the way for increased efforts to turn climate policy into action'.



The article then goes into considerable detail about how some of these technologies are being developed, Examples are sea water being turned into drinking water by the use of solar power and so without the large amount of energy this process would normally require, typhoon-proof wind turbines as a way of combating extreme weather conditions, and climate-resistant rice that thrives in salty soils. But then, in a section entitled 'Money makes adaptation go round', it states: 'Here is the rub... As always, funding remains a challenge ... the diverse set of solutions that are needed do not come cheap. It has been estimated that up to US\$340 billion is needed to cover global climate adaptation costs annually by 2030.' The point is made here that, though the technology for this adaptation is globally available, the 'poor' countries will be unable to afford to develop it or to import it from other countries, nor will they be able to expect other countries to share it with them.

So though the section heading states 'Money makes adaptation go round', it is saying in effect just the opposite, ie, that climate adaptation will not happen for the millions perhaps billions of people in the countries which cannot pay for those technologies. The reason for this is that the world we live in is one where all goods and services, including technologies, have a price that builds in profit for those who have developed, manufactured and are marketing them. In other words, the grave potential threat to people in some of the countries most exposed to the effects of climate change will not be eliminated or mitigated, since it will not be profitable

to do so. So, though the article does not say this explicitly, what it provides, for those reading between the lines, is a stark example of how the system we live under, capitalism, is driven to waging not just military wars but what has been called 'a war of profit against life on earth'.

What solution then do 'We The People' propose to cope with 'the challenges of biodiversity loss, land degradation and climate change' on a worldwide basis? They propose that, apart from new technologies, 'we must make fundamental changes to the way we live, work, produce, and consume' in order to 'address the root causes of climate vulnerability'. While it's impossible to disagree with this in general, the specific recipe it advocates ('a strong focus on reducing inequalities and promotion of social and economic justice' and 'the political drive and financing needed to implement and scale-up these solutions-at the right place and in the right way') is not something that capitalism can serve up. While it may be true, as the article says, that 'many of the solutions that can help us adapt to climate change are already available', within the framework of a system that puts profit before every other priority, 'climate action' is unlikely to be quick or effective even if solutions 'are already available'. Such solutions can in fact only see their full potential realised in a system that puts needs before profit, the system of production for use based on worldwide voluntary cooperation and free access to all goods and services that we call socialism.

HKM

Full English

We look at a number of issues relating to languages and their use, together with points about translation and teaching

ENGLISH IS currently the mostly widely spoken language, with around one and a half billion speakers, including 370 million native speakers. Mandarin Chinese has 1.1 billion speakers, nearly 90 percent of whom have it as their mother tongue. Of course, what counts as speaking a language is not straightforward: does a GCSE in French make you a speaker of it?

English has an important role as a vehicular language or lingua franca, used between people who do not speak each other's first language. So if a Hungarian and Japanese scientist wish to communicate, they would probably use English. Russian had a similar role in much of eastern Europe before the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the case of Swahili, as many as 98 percent of its speakers use it as a lingua franca (Nicholas Ostler: *The Last Lingua Franca*); the corresponding figure for English is 71 percent.

Chinese has more native speakers than English but is not a likely candidate to replace English as a world lingua franca. It has relatively few second-language speakers, its writing system is fearsomely complex, and the differences among its varieties are much larger than even that between, say, British and Singapore English.

People learn other languages for various reasons, perhaps for fun or so they can get a bit more enjoyment from a holiday abroad. But usually it is for more serious motives: 'Arabic is for foreign learners the language of the Koran, English the language of modern business and global popular culture' (Nicholas Ostler: *Empires of the Word*).

There are disagreements as to the extent of the dominance of English on the Internet. The number of pages in other languages (such as Spanish and Chinese) has been increasing at a faster rate than pages in English, but English sites are well ahead among the most widely used ones. In terms of Internet users, on one account around a quarter use English and a fifth Chinese, with speakers of other languages far behind.

Colonialism (and the consequent population movement) is the main reason for the spread of languages, such as the use of Spanish and Portuguese in Central and South America. English has not always been as dominant as it is now, having been little used on the Continent prior to 1714, when the ruler of Hanover became king of Great Britain. Before the Second World War, German was also an



important language for reporting scientific and technological research. But the British Empire was clearly responsible for the spread of English to South Asia and North America, and the political, economic and social power and influence of the USA is behind the language's dominance now.

The two terms are sometimes used interchangeably, but a distinction can be made between a second language and a foreign language. A second language has official status in a country, though it is not widely spoken as a first language, while a foreign language has no official standing. So English is a second language in India and Nigeria, while it is a foreign language in, for instance, Denmark, though most educated Danes have a very good command of the language.

There has recently been a proposal that English be adopted as an official language in Germany (*Guardian*, 10 February). There is a shortage of skilled workers and, as German is by no means a global language, companies may be at a disadvantage in competing for talented employees. In the words of the head of the Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce, 'English is the world language and should suffice for anyone to achieve great things in many German businesses.' This proposal has been less welcome in the former East Germany, where Russian rather than English was formerly the main second language learned in school, and it is not clear if it will be adopted.

In all, only about fifty languages are used in translation, that is translation into and out of these languages (David Bellos: *Is That a Fish in Your Ear?*). According to UNESCO's Index Translationum, English is by far the most common source language of translated texts, with over five times the number translated from French, which ranks second. For target languages, the situation is less one-sided, with more texts translated into German than any other

language, but only a quarter more than were translated into French, which again is in second place.

Capitalism turns so many things into an industry, from healthcare to pornography, and the same thing has happened with language, there being a translation industry and an industry for teaching English. People may think of translation as mainly involving literary texts, whether novels or plays. But in fact technical, commercial and legal translation take place far more often than translation of books. Literary translation into English is very badly paid, but translation into French and German is more remunerative. Legal documents pose their own difficulties, as David Bellos notes. Even simple-seeming terms such as 'murder' and 'human rights' give rise to many difficulties in terms of both linguistic equivalents and corresponding legal categories. Courtroom interpreting is another big problem area, with usually little real supervision of the interpreter's experience or competence.

TEFL (teaching English as a foreign language) is big business and concerned with profit-making for the companies who run it. On one estimate, its value is \$10bn a year. Teachers themselves are relatively well paid in the Middle East, but not at all so in South America. With the increasing popularity of English in China, there are many language schools there, but some take a would-be teacher on to give demonstration classes for a few days, and then sack them without pay. An entry on the Industrial Workers of the World site (iww.org.uk, 25 March 2021) noted that English language teachers had to fight for outstanding holiday pay. The Covid lockdown had a big impact, with about half the TEFL workforce being made redundant that year.

In *The Last Lingua Franca*, Ostler suggests that English could well retreat from its current global status. The BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China) currently teach English for use as both a lingua franca and with native English speakers, but their own languages 'may develop their own spheres of wider currency'. If Portuguese, Russian, Hindi-Urdu and Chinese become the languages of the world's leading economic and political powers, then English could 'withdraw to its home territories'. But it is not at all clear how likely this is. And what impact would a socialist world with no borders or powerful nations have on such matters?

PAUL BENNETT

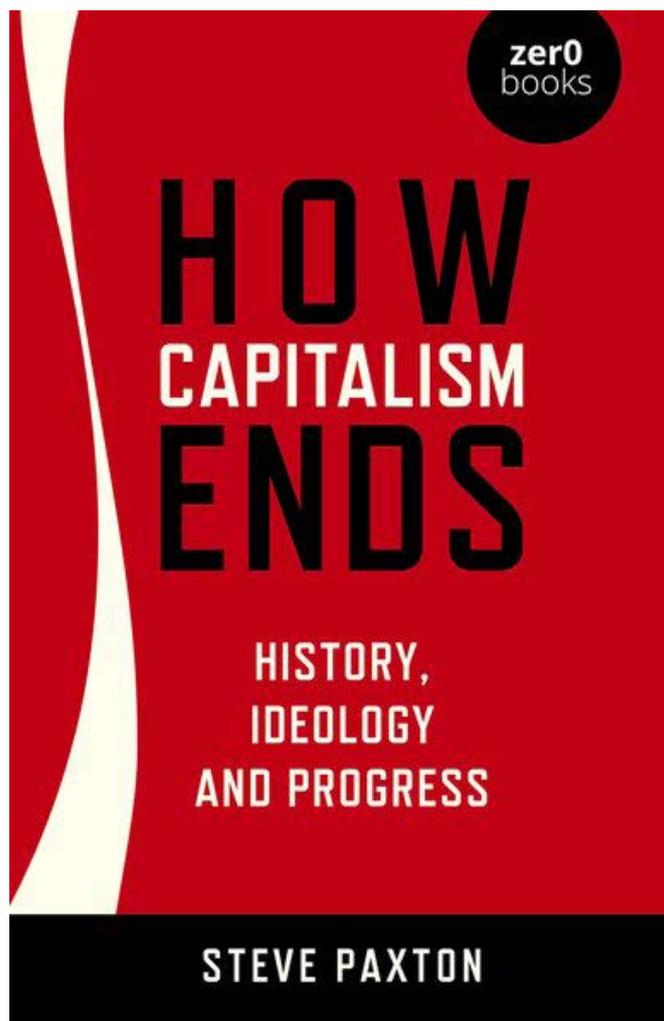
How will capitalism end?

We discuss this with Steve Paxton, author of *How Capitalism Ends. History, Ideology and Progress* (Zero Books, 2023).

Steve Paxton's book on Russia, *Unlearning Marx. Why the Soviet Failure was a Triumph for Marx*, published in 2021, stated that the development of technology under capitalism now allows the production of 'the material abundance required by a free society' but that the capitalist system by its very nature does not allow this to take place. His book, reviewed in the *Socialist Standard* in 2022, did not go so far as to propose any kind of detailed remedy for this but rather referred the reader to his upcoming book about 'the end of capitalism and what comes next'. That book has now been published and the author has agreed to discuss it with the *Socialist Standard*.

Socialist Standard: Your book contains great analysis of class in terms of capitalist society being divided into two distinct classes, those who possess sufficient capital not to have to sell their energies to an employer and those – the vast majority- who aren't in that position and have to seek paid employment to survive. It also presents a very detailed and effective demolition of arguments that insist on the inevitability of the market and deny that effective economic calculation would be possible in a non-monetary society. But to what extent do you see the end of capitalism, which is part of the title of your book, as leading to a non-monetary society, to a society without a market?

Steve Paxton: I don't see a post-capitalist society as necessarily having no room for markets at all. Just as markets existed before capitalism, they may well exist after capitalism. The important thing is that there will be significant differences from the way markets operate under capitalism. In pre-capitalist societies, you couldn't consider the markets in labour or commodities as free markets in the way that people do under capitalism. So in a post-capitalist future, we might still see markets, but they're likely to be



very different from those we experience under capitalism. The first thing we need to remember is that socialism makes an important distinction between ownership of the means of production and ownership of personal property. Impersonal property is incompatible with socialism, but nobody's coming for your toothbrush or your bicycle. So I think there's always room for some kind of market mechanism, the difference being the ownership pattern underlying that market mechanism. The problem with capitalism isn't that people buy and sell things. It's the position we start from, in which the only thing one group of people have to sell is their labour power, and they have to do that to survive. So, I guess it's important to really define what we mean by capitalism. There are in fact competing ideas of what capitalism means. And that's the case even within Marx. Sometimes he talks about it as a mode of production, and sometimes he talks about it as an economic structure. But I like to take Marx's idea of capitalism as an economic structure, the sum of class relations, of production relations. It's basically who owns what and what

ownership means is what defines capitalism. So, under capitalism, the dominant production relation is that most people are proletarians, which means they own only their labour power. They're free to sell that labour power to any capitalist, but because they own no productive forces, they're actually unfree, in that they must sell that labour power just to survive. So, if that's how we view capitalism, then markets in themselves are not intrinsically or inherently capitalist. Capitalism is defined by the concentration of ownership of productive resources in very few hands and the consequences that flow from that. It's true that, once you have a market, you have the potential that some people are just better at buying and selling. But it also has to be said that most of the inequality of ownership under capitalism doesn't come from the particular skills of entrepreneurs. It comes from people starting with a massive fortune in the first place and starting with lots of resources. So if you remove those things, then the ability to get rich from a market becomes much more limited. At the same time, there's no hard and fast rule that everyone's income must be equal.

SS: So how would you see a more equal society with money and a market working?

SP: Under socialism, you might have a situation where, for example, there's basic income, and on top of that, maybe people that do particularly unpleasant work, particularly hard work, work that no one else wants to do, or maybe work that requires a particular set of skills, will be rewarded more. But these differences would, again, be differences in income, not wealth. And they would be very, very limited compared to today's great inequalities. Providing income inequality, is structurally limited, it needn't in itself be a bad thing. Then the person who chooses to work 20 hours a week rather than 40 shouldn't mind not getting some of the benefits. That's the choice that people can make under socialism. It's not a choice they can make under capitalism. So I think that, while it's possible that we might be able to work out a way to get by without markets at all, just the existence of markets

doesn't necessarily derail the socialist project.

SS: What would be your objections to a moneyless, wageless society as opposed to the kind of thing that you've described? After all, Marx did talk about socialism as the abolition of the wages system.

SP: I don't really have an objection to it, but I think it's also something that isn't a necessary component of moving beyond capitalism. It might be something that we need to go through a few more stages before we arrive at. It might be that, once we've got rid of all the stuff that is actually the real problem with capitalism, then we realize that money wasn't really the problem in the first place. When people talk about getting rid of money and using labour vouchers or tokens, that's just money, isn't it? That's just calling money something else. Maybe we should have different currencies. So you get a basic income in one money that you can spend on basic necessities. And then, if you want to contribute more, particularly if you're prepared to do an unpleasant job or work longer hours, then you get a different currency that you can spend on luxuries. Anyway, we need to focus on getting rid of the real problems of capitalism, which are the fact that a small number of people own all the productive resources and most people own no productive resources.

SS: Just to clarify that we definitely wouldn't suggest labour vouchers or tokens as a replacement for money. What we suggest is a society of free access to all goods and services, where you wouldn't need labour vouchers or tokens. When Marx talked about labour vouchers, he was talking about the possibility of using them at an earlier stage of productive development. We would argue that we are now well past that stage and that enough can be produced now to satisfy everyone's needs the world over, if goods and services are produced and distributed rationally. But to move to something a little bit different, at one point in your book you refer to a socialist government, and you seem to be favourable to the kind of political position of the Labour Party under Corbyn. But can there be such a thing as a socialist government given that in, in Marxian terms, governments are the executive committee of the capitalist class, and therefore a socialist society should involve the abolition of government over people as we know it and its replacement by the cooperative administration of things?

SP: I do write from a Marxist point of view, but I tend not to describe myself as a Marxist because, when you do that, people expect you to defend everything Marx said or wrote. On the other hand,

I think you can see Marx's ideas as a coherent whole while not necessarily defending everything he had to say. But I'm not an anarchist and I guess I'm looking a bit more short-term. I'm looking at what our next horizons should be. There's very short term, for example not having a Tory government, saving the NHS and things like that. And there's very long term and the ideal society that might be moneyless and have no government. But there's a big chunk there in between, which is what we should be aiming for. On governments, I do agree that they're the committee of the ruling class. But that's under capitalism. Governments under socialism don't have to be of that kind; they can represent a different interest. They can represent the people rather than the ruling class. In terms of leadership style and some of his policy positions, Corbyn was closer to my position than any other Labour leader since I was in short trousers. Labour as it stands, after a hundred or something years, isn't really representing the working people. We need a socialist party. I know you would say there is one, the Socialist Party of Great Britain. But we need a socialist party with mainstream political clout. We need socialist MPs, but those MPs who would describe themselves as socialist are unfortunately trapped inside the Labour Party. First of all, we need to get rid of the first past the post electoral system. But there's also plenty to do outside Parliament in terms of trade unions and industrial relations and worker organization.

I do write from a Marxist point of view, but I tend not to describe myself as a Marxist because, when you do that, people expect you to defend everything Marx said or wrote.

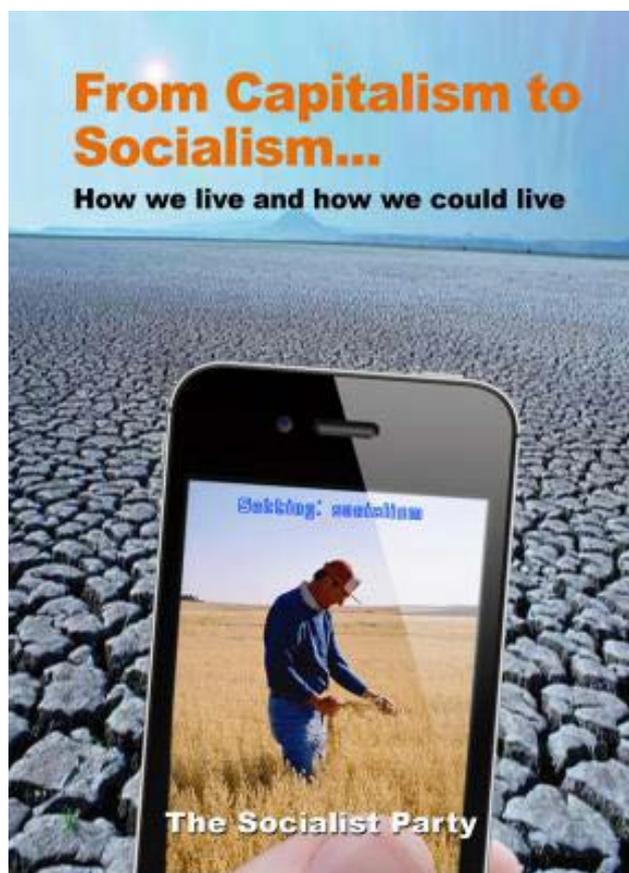
SS: What you seem to be saying is that, if we look too far into the future, that takes the focus away from what's happening right now and the possibility of immediate improvements in workers' conditions. The Socialist Party would tend to argue more or less the opposite. That is, if you focus on short-term reforms, slight changes to

the system, any of which could be easily withdrawn anyway, then you take the focus away from the longer term from the possibility of a really equal society, which we could have if enough people wanted it and were prepared to work towards it. In other words, if you put off the demand for socialism, aren't you putting off socialism and, in that light can't reforms actually be the enemy of revolution?

SP: I'm not really advocating that we should focus on short-term gains. I'm saying that we shouldn't reject and we shouldn't criticize those who do focus on short-term gains. If they're fighting for a better minimum wage, I'm not their enemy and they're not mine. We've got plenty of enemies, without picking on people who want basically the same as us but are maybe less ambitious. So, while I think our focus should be on a transformation of society away from capitalism into socialism, I also think that we're not going to get there in one fell swoop, and so the way has to be incremental, via small gains, but gains that make a transformative difference rather than those that just make capitalism a bit less unpalatable. There's nothing that says that we must have some kind of sudden or dramatic change to get from capitalism to socialism. It's most likely to happen by gradual and peaceful means. It's where we end up that's the most important thing, not how many steps it takes to get there. People are suffering under capitalism, so obviously the sooner the better, but also it needs to be something that's sustainable. But we shouldn't underestimate the positive role that the state could play. It's happened before – with the NHS for example. No one took any violent action to seize any hospitals. The NHS was the obvious answer to people's healthcare needs. So the state can offer a better alternative than the private sector. And that can apply to education and housing too.

SS: We'd absolutely agree with you that violent conflict couldn't be on the agenda to achieve socialism, but in response to your incremental focus, how do you see democratic political action by a majority at the ballot box to bring in the kind of system of free access to goods and services that we advocate, even if you think that is a long way off? Given that we already live in a post-scarcity world, where we can produce everything we need, isn't it just a question of planning so that it can be made available in a freely accessible way once a majority at the ballot box votes for representatives who are in favour of that?

SP: One problem is that we can't have socialism when there is the number of socialists that we have now. We need to have more socialists. But the problem



with that is that many of the people that see themselves as socialists spend all their time insulting the kind of people that are closest to us on the ideological spectrum and berating them for not yet being socialists. What we need to do is to actually convince them to be socialists. And then, as I've said before, an obstacle is the lack of proportional representation. If we had a democratic electoral system where everybody's vote counted for the same amount, we could end up with a socialist party with, you know, maybe 20 or 30 MPs. And that would be enough to say we're not coming into coalition with anyone unless we get these red lines. We want this minimum wage, for example. That doesn't drive us past capitalism, but it moves us in the right direction. It's a process of bringing people on a journey. Look at the huge amount the first post-war Labour government did, and then even in the sixties when Wilson got in, they pushed again. So many things were nationalized. But they made the mistake of not introducing a democratic electoral system. If they had, Thatcher would never have become Prime Minister and all these things that we gained in the post-war period wouldn't have been wiped out over the last 30 or 40 years.

SS: We wouldn't see proportional representation within capitalism as constituting any kind of step towards socialism. Some countries do of course already have proportional representation, but would you say that this has moved

them any closer to socialism?

SP: Well, you could also look at somewhere like New Zealand, which has got proportional representation and is much better off for it. The Scandinavian countries too. The usual experience of proportional representation is that those countries that have it end up being more progressive and less in thrall to the interests of global capital. Of course, there are still capitalist governments in all of those countries, but they are generally less right-wing than the governments in places like Britain and America. Having said that, I agree that proportional representation doesn't deliver anything on its own, but without it we're not really going anywhere.

SS: You may have noticed that, in recent years, there've been lots of what

you might broadly call anti-capitalist books published and some of these at least are arguing the same kind of things as the Socialist Party. They're arguing that the only way to get rid of capitalism is to get rid of the market, money and the wages system. You yourself touch on this in your book, when you refer to Marx's description of socialism as a society based on from each according to ability to each according to need. So do you think there's a possibility that in the future you might move to this kind of position yourself, that, rather than arguing that things need to get a bit better gradually, you might join us in asking for the whole pie now?

SP: That is what I think we should be asking for, but, realistically, are we going to get it? There are two things we have to have: a vision of where we want to get to, and a vision of how we get there. I think you look a bit further into the future than I do. And I think that, if we can get rid of capitalism as I've defined it – the means of production owned by a tiny number of private individuals – then we're moving towards some kind of system of common ownership. That's my focus, and ultimately I think the marketless, moneyless society is one of the ways in which we protect that. But while it's good that people should try to work out recipes for the future society, you have to acknowledge that, by the time we get there, some of those assumptions that those people are making aren't going to be true anymore. I think it's still a worthwhile project to try

and envisage the kind of details of exactly how the future society would operate, as people like Michael Albert and Ben Burgess are doing. But I also think that we have to accept that, if you tried to do that in 1820, you'd have a horse pulling a cart instead of an engine. In other words we always have to adapt our ideas as we go along. But once we have the big change – that is in the ownership of the means of production – once that's held in common, then we can look at all the other ideas – maybe to labour tokens or to a moneyless society with the market completely eradicated and free access. But those arguments weren't really in the scope of my book.

We don't actually go in for, as Marx put it, 'recipes for the cookshops of the future' either, but we do try to outline a broad structure for the future society we advocate.

SS: We don't actually go in for, as Marx put it, 'recipes for the cookshops of the future' either, but we do try to outline a broad structure for the future society we advocate. So we'd agree that, when we get the society we're aiming for, the particular level of development and technology reached at the time will determine the exact details of production, distribution and social organization. Does that seem reasonable to you?

SP: Yes. For example, we now have this situation where producing more copies of something doesn't have an additional cost. If you're going to buy more than one copy of my book on Kindle, it doesn't cost anything. That server is running already. The electricity is being used, the storage space is there, the bandwidth is there. Whether one person or a thousand people buy it tomorrow, it doesn't cost the printer, the publisher, the retailer any more. And that kind of thing didn't really exist until very recently. Many of the things we would need would have zero marginal cost per unit sold. And that makes a massive difference in how an economy could work and why people choose one thing over another, a massive difference that, even 50 years ago, people could probably not have envisaged.

HKM

An opinion of fact

MANY A debate is punctuated with a reference to the difference between an opinion and a fact. A fact is said to be an opinion of a higher order: it is an 'irrefutable statement'. Given that very few statements made in political debates can be said to be irrefutable why is there such a widespread belief in their existence? Certainly, an informed opinion has more value than an uninformed opinion but how do we choose between two diametrically opposed opinions held by those who are equally informed?

A political debate is not a mathematical equation with only one correct answer however much we might wish it to be. In the sciences we refer to empirical study and peer review in deciding the 'facts' but in politics, history, economics etc. this is not always so relatively easily ascertained. Of course, many seek to elevate their opinions to the level of facts for purely egotistical and ideological reasons. Political facts do exist such as: 'racial superiority is a lie' and 'the first victim of war is the truth' but unfortunately not all statements can be so conveniently separated into mere opinions contrasted with superior facts. Let us examine the process involved in elevating certain opinions into facts.

As with most elements of social and political phenomena we must start with economics and the relationship between wealth and power. 'Public opinion' is created by the propaganda of the media owned by the parasite class. The sole purpose for the existence of the mainstream media is to create a consensus among the exploited that their exploitation is both necessary and normal. Is the preceding a statement of fact or

just this author's opinion? Obviously, the majority of journalists would agree that it is the latter and that this article and the journal it is printed in represent a minority opinion and are therefore outside the consensus on which the creation of 'facts' is dependent. This is how power works – it creates a majority consensus suitable for the needs of a minority.

The first step towards the birth of a political 'fact' is to acquire the support of the powerful. In this way it becomes a 'fact' that people wouldn't work without the threat of poverty or that global democracy is too complex to become a reality. The next step demands some superficial level of pseudo-scientific coherence and methodology. Genetic determinism and other theories of 'human nature' together with the inevitability of tribal (national) identities fall into this category. Finally, the creation of some kind of authority or establishment to back up the credibility of certain factual information. We've all encountered various types of 'fact checkers' but their origin must always be ascertained and even then the best we can say for many of their 'facts' is that they've proved that a statement is 'beyond reasonable doubt' which falls far short of the metaphysics needed to establish a fact as understood by many.

So what is the origin of this 'tyranny of facts'? As we have seen, the element of control it provides for those who wish to preserve the status quo is invaluable but this was not always the case and indeed there was a time when such an ideology was revolutionary. We call this 'the Enlightenment' and it was at the forefront of the bourgeoisie's ideological struggle

against religion and the old ruling elite. The industrial revolution, with which it had a symbiotic relationship, was in need of ever more precise measurements for continual technological innovation. Precision became a necessity for all machinery and this could only be achieved through the application of mathematics in the creation of universal standards for weights and measures etc.

This fitted neatly into the capitalist perspective as the measurement of the level of profit also depended on similar arithmetical precision. Everything was transformed into numbers and the rule of quantification was absolute. Not only was human labour defined exclusively in terms of wages but even the workers' role as consumers became commoditised. Today everyone has become part of an algorithm in terms of their purchasing demography. The Enlightenment provided us with the hope of science but also with the curse of human economic objectification. Truth was transformed into an equation.

The perceived relationship between a fact and the 'truth' is what gives it such ideological power in the minds of many. Indeed, in science it has given us a very successful insight into the workings of nature but it never represents the whole story of a human's relationship with themselves, their culture and the nature from which it all originated. It is a fact that Russia invaded the Ukraine but that doesn't tell us why this happened or how it might have been prevented. It is a fact that the present government's language concerning 'illegal' immigration is reminiscent of elements of 1930's Nazi propaganda but again that doesn't tell us why some highly educated people would want to use such a disgusting demonisation of desperate and vulnerable people.

Karl Marx himself was an immigrant who found a last refuge in this country where he laboured for countless hours within the British Museum Library poring over government statistics to transform his theory of capitalism into a thoroughly empirical study of the 'facts'. He did this not only to counter capitalist propaganda by using its own statistics but with the hope of transforming our lost humanity of alienated labour back into creative meaningful production that is our true nature. The next time someone attempts to trump your arguments with reference to a 'fact' you might like to try countering them with the idea that mere facts are superficial compared with an informed opinion. At the very least such a heretical idea might create pause for thought as to the origin and usefulness of such a widely used but poorly understood metaphysical concept.

WEZ



The Old Lie

‘DULCE ET DECORUM est pro patria mori’ – It is sweet and fitting to die for one’s country – is taken from an ode by the Roman poet, Horace. There are lots of sick people in the world who would agree with Horace. Just so long as they’re not the ones doing the fighting and dying. Politicians, deluded nationalists, arms dealers, arms manufacturers, as currently is the case in Russia and Ukraine. Wilfred Owen responded:

*...If you could hear, at every jolt,
the blood*

*Come gargling from the froth-corrupted
lungs, Obscene as cancer,
bitter as the cud*

*Of vile, incurable sores on innocent
tongues,— My friend, you would not tell
with such high zest*

*To children ardent for some
desperate glory,*

*The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est pro
patria mori.*

In August 1914 the SPGB had already declared:

*Having no quarrel with the working class
of any country, we extend to our fellow
workers of all lands the expression of our
good will and Socialist fraternity, and
pledge ourselves to work for the overthrow
of capitalism and the triumph of Socialism.
THE WORLD FOR THE WORKERS!*

In the mid-sixties Barry Maguire was growling ‘We’re on the eve of destruction.’ We’ve been on the eve ever since the first American-produced atomic bomb was exploded on Japan in 1945. Twice.

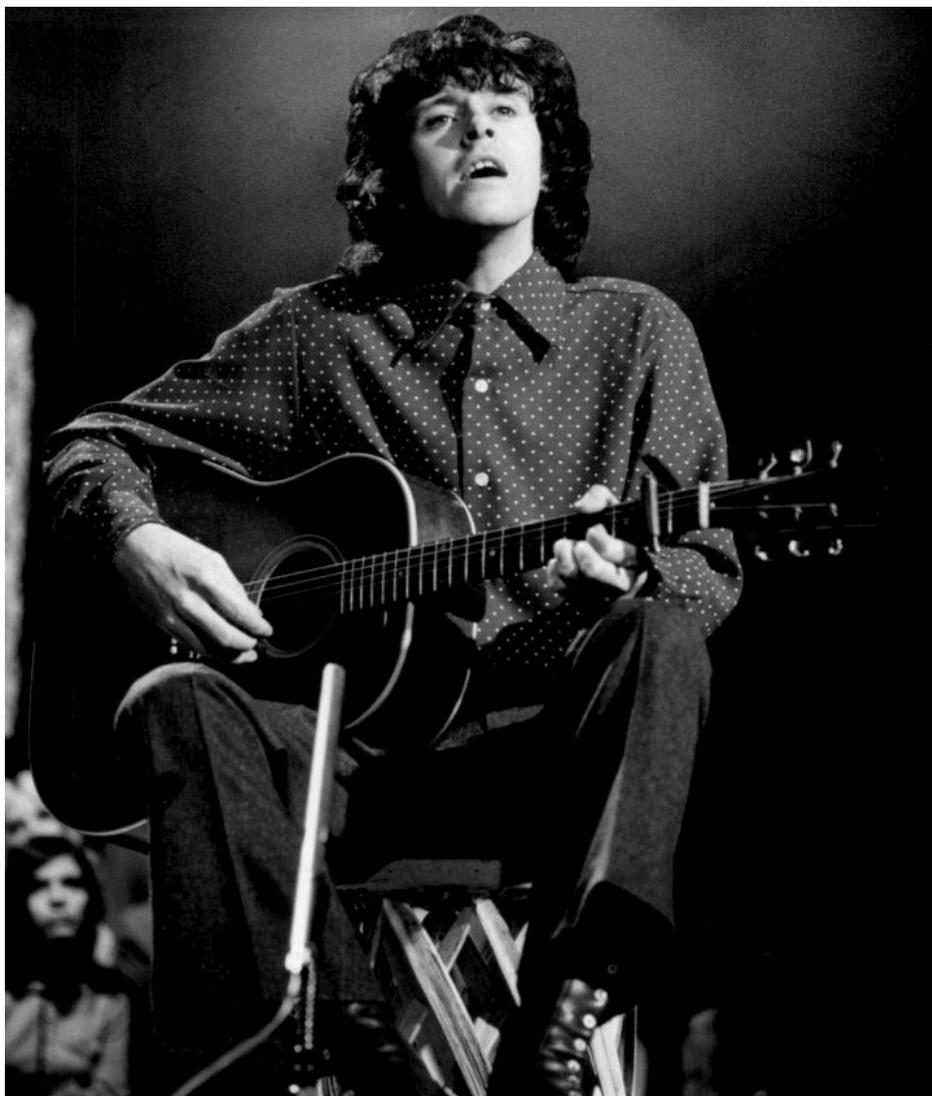
At the same time, Donovan was singing about the effects of nuclear war:
*Cities full of people burning, screaming,
shouting loud,
And right over head, a great orange
mushroom cloud.*

*Now there's no more war
For there's no more world.*

Heavy metal bands were also producing anti-war songs.

*As the mad men play on words,
And make us all dance to their song,
To the tune of starving millions,
To make a better kind of gun.
(Iron Maiden, Two Minutes to Midnight)*

*Politicians hide themselves away,
They only started the war,*



*Why should they go out to fight?
They leave that role to the poor, yeah'
(Black Sabbath, War Pigs)*

War, I despise, it means destruction of innocent lives
*War means tears to thousands of mother's
eyes when their sons go off to fight
and lose their lives.*

*It's an enemy to all mankind...
Peace, love and understanding, tell me,
Is there no place for them today?
They say we must fight to keep our
freedom but there's got to be a better way,
War, What is it good for? You tell me
(nothing)
Stand up and shout it (nothing).
(Written by P F Sloan, performed originally
by Edwin Starr)*

Folk singers too:
*I learned our Government must be strong;
It's always right and never wrong;
Our leaders are the finest men,
And we elect them again and again.
War is not so bad;
I learned about the great ones we have had.
(Written by Tom Paxton, performed
originally by Pete Seeger)*

Donovan sang:
He's the Universal Soldier and he really is

*to blame,
His orders come from far away no more,
They come from here and there and you
and me,
And brothers, can't you see?*

No, individuals are not to blame for war. Capitalism is. In 1935, Major General Smedley Darlington Butler, an American who had taken part in many military campaigns had an epiphany. He spilt the beans, listing the various countries he had worked in and the capitalists whose interests the military was working for: oil, banks, Wall Street, fruit companies. He described himself as a ‘gangster for capitalism’.

Karl Marx’s words that ‘The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it,’ remain even more relevant today. The time is long past for us all to change it for the better.

Charles Dickens’s Scrooge asked the Ghost of the Future, ‘Are these the shadows of the things that will be, or are they shadows of things that may be, only?’ Response: ‘Men’s courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead.’

D.C.

Post-capitalist farming

We continue our series on farming under capitalism and in a post-capitalist society of common ownership.

COMPARED TO the capitalist mode of production, a post-capitalist society of common ownership would be able to exercise a significantly greater degree of flexibility and choice when it comes to selecting a particular productive technique or approach to farming. Freed from the imperative of having to seek a profit through the sale of commodities, decisions can be made that would be prudently adapted to the actual physical circumstances that farmers face as opposed to the socially contingent conditions imposed on them by market competition.

Such flexibility might very well take the form of a more eclectic approach to farming, combining the best elements of one farming model with that of another. For instance, while there is a lot to recommend the traditional farming model in terms of its environment-friendly practices there is no reason why this could not be coupled with state-of-the-art modern technology such as genetic engineering, so called ‘smart farming’ and computerised irrigation systems, to boost output – providing, of course, that adequate safeguards can be built in to protect both human health and biological diversity. In that regard, a post-capitalist society would not be forced into taking rash impromptu decisions by sheer commercial pressures.

Those ‘actual physical circumstances’ referred to above that future farming would face would include, of course, the extent to which human labour was available as an agricultural input alongside other inputs. There is a tendency in capitalism, driven by market competition, to increase productivity by reducing unit costs in order for businesses – in this case, farming units – to compete more effectively and capture a larger market share. This results in increasing capital intensity and the shedding of human labour. The large scale, modern, commercial farm with its highly industrialised farming techniques is the consummate expression – or, if you like, culmination of – this tendency. Very few workers are employed on very large farms that are many hundreds or even thousands of hectares in size, using big bulky machines.

This is not a particularly healthy state of

affairs – either for farming or for society as a whole. It tends to commit farmers to a set of techniques that are damaging to the environment and not sustainable in the long run. The rate of soil erosion is a clear indication of just how unsustainable such techniques are – particularly deep ploughing with heavy machinery which, over time, destroys the microscopic life in the soil and undermines soil structure as well as stimulating weed growth. Loss of topsoil translates into declining crop yields. That, in turn, tends to make farmers more reliant on synthetic fertilisers with all that this entails for the environment.

There can be no better illustration of the sheer irrationality – not to say, insanity – of a capitalist mindset with respect to farming than that provided by the Amazon forests. The Amazon is the most biologically diverse region in the world. It contains ‘tens of thousands of plant species, including countless medicinal plants, over 2.5 million insect species, 1,300 kinds of birds, 430 mammals, over 3,000 fish species, hundreds of different amphibians and reptiles. Numerous species are discovered every year, and many have yet to even be seen by us humans’ (*Amazon: Abundant rainforests, useless soils* - bit.ly/3jDeJUr).

Ironically, this prolific diversity is rooted in a soil that is quite nutrient-poor and infertile. It contains little or no humus unlike the soils of more temperate climates such as the United States. Dead plant material is rapidly decomposed in the hot and humid conditions of the Amazon and nutrients are absorbed back into the plants and trees. These, in turn, provide protection for the soil from the heavy rain and ensure it is not washed away.

The removal of forests to make way for cattle ranching (to provide meat for burgers amongst other things) is nothing

short of ecological madness. Once this tree cover is removed it cannot be replaced. The soil is fully exposed to the elements and simply washes away, leaving a more or less barren environment. The removal of tree cover also makes the land drier and more vulnerable to devastating wildfires that, as well as releasing millions of tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, result in even more loss of tree cover and the heightened risk of devastating floods. All this might mean increased profits for farmers in the short term – Brazil is currently the largest exporter of beef in the world and cattle ranching accounts for up to 80 per cent of Amazonian deforestation – but in the long run it is simply not sustainable.

Here we have a perfect example of how the pressure of unrelenting capitalist accumulation systemically works against the goal of sustainable development and good farming. Market competition induces economic agents to expand output regardless of the (very obvious) consequences.

It is argued that governments themselves need to generate foreign exchange somehow and Brazil’s opening up of the Amazon to economic exploitation is one way of doing this. But that is precisely the point. This need to ‘earn a living’ or generate government revenues only arises in – or presupposes – a society in which the goods and services take the form of commodities and your access to these commodities is governed by how much money you have. You would not need to generate a ‘revenue stream’ or ‘earn a living’ in a free society in which the market as an institution, and money as a means of market exchange, ceased to exist.

Next month: more on the possibilities of post-capitalist food production.

ROBIN COX



Budget for Business as usual

THIS YEAR 15 March was budget day, the day the government announces its money-raising and spending plans for the financial year that begins in April. Jeremy Hunt went on about 'growth'; the Labour Shadow Chancellor sounded like she was Liz Truss, accusing Hunt of not being ambitious enough (in effect of not making wilder promises). But no government has the power to bring about growth.

'Growth' is an increase in the amount of marketable wealth produced in one year compared with the previous year. The only people who can organise this are those in charge of the profit-seeking businesses that produce such wealth.

But even they don't have a free hand; they have to take account of market conditions, which are outside of their control, and only increase production if they judge these offer a prospect of making a profit. It is this business investment for profit that drives the economy. The most any government can do is to try to ensure conditions that allow and encourage this. In fact, if they don't they will provoke an economic downturn.

Capitalist firms and their owners accept that there must be a government, if only to protect private property rights, keep law and

order, and maintain armed forces, though these days governments do much more for them than this; they pay, for instance, for the workers' education and health to create a more productive workforce for business. All this costs money and has to be paid for.

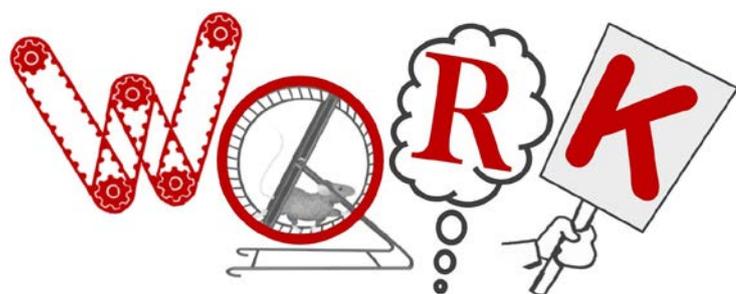
The main direct tax on businesses is corporation tax, a tax on their profits (the main indirect tax is income tax on wages). Rishi Sunak, when Chancellor, announced in the 2021 budget that this would go up from 19 percent to 23 percent from 1 April 2023. Hunt confirmed that this was to go ahead. However, there are generous exemptions. For the next three years businesses will not have to pay corporation tax on any profits that are invested in the full cost of new machinery, plant or IT systems. In other words, not on profits that are directly re-invested in accumulating capital; which in fact is the main aim of capitalist production.

The government's aim is to encourage business investment, the driver of growth. Whether it will work remains to be seen. Businesses won't invest just to avoid taxes but only if the investment will be profitable.

At the moment, Britain has a 'labour supply problem'. Another way of putting this is

that there is a shortage of wealth producers since there is no other way that wealth can be produced other than by the application of human labour to materials that originally came from nature. Which is what workers do. No workers, no wealth and no capitalist share of wealth as profits.

This shortage is partly the result of previous government policy, albeit one endorsed by a referendum, to withdraw from the EU and stop the free movement of workers from the rest of Europe. To deal with the shortage, Hunt announced three measures. The first was to allow those with a pension pot of £1 million — not your ordinary worker, then, but someone on the way to becoming a capitalist — to accumulate more without having to pay tax on it. The second was to improve nursery facilities for families with both parents working. The third was to cut the payments to the unemployed, to in effect starve them back to work. The hope is that this will encourage more, especially mothers, to join the wealth (and profit) producing force. Again, a measure aimed at helping profit-seeking business make more profits. But there is no guarantee that it will work either.



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

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 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.

Please make a booking before 17th May, as attendee numbers need to be confirmed early. Unfortunately, full refunds may not be available for non-attendance or cancellations after this date.



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.

Exploitation at work

WHEN WE buy a product, it's easy not to think about the long journey it has made to reach us, through the combined effort of countless people across the world. A cup of tea often starts out in Kenya's Great Rift Valley, where its tea leaves are grown and picked before being sent on for processing and packing. The workers who pick the leaves which eventually end up in our morning cuppa tend to be women living close to poverty. Like many in the primary sector, their work on the tea plantations involves lengthy, repetitive shifts for low pay, made even worse for them by a culture where sexual abuse is common.

This was the focus of a disturbing edition of BBC One's *Panorama: Sex For Work: The True Cost Of Our Tea*. The documentary investigated plantations in Kenya owned by two British companies – Unilever and James Finlay & Co – which produce half the tea drunk in the UK, sold under brands such as PG Tips, Lipton and Sainsbury's Red Label. Researchers interviewed a hundred women tea pickers, and as many as 75 said they had suffered sexual harassment by managers at their workplace.

Heading the programme is journalist Tom Odula, but credit should go to the undercover reporter who put herself at risk by applying for work on the plantations. Much of the documentary comprises footage filmed on a hidden camera by 'Katie'. This shows that women being pushed into having sex with senior staff is rife, despite the problem being recognised at least as far back as 2011. Then, a report was published by the Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations about the extent of sexual abuse in Unilever's operations, which led to them introducing a new 'zero tolerance' policy and reporting system. These are put to the test when Katie applies for a job at a Unilever plantation and gets asked by a Divisional Manager, Jeremiah Koskei, to meet in a bar. There, she records him talking about how they could spend the night at his home, following a pattern described by other women seeking work on the plantation. 'It felt pretty transactional' says Katie later. Despite rejecting his advances, she gets employed and is assigned the gruelling task of weeding for up to 10 hours a day, at a rate of the equivalent of £25 for a six-day week. When Katie asks for different duties, supervisor Samuel Yebei sees this as an opportunity to pressure her to sleep with



Credit: BBC

him in return. After she resists, he gives up, and five weeks later she hasn't been moved to a better role. One of the women Odula interviews says that she was in such a desperate situation that she was coerced into having sex with Yebei to keep her job and then contracted HIV. We're told that one reason Yebei has got away with his behaviour is that he is close to Koskei, but complaints have been dismissed before they even reach them. When Katie reports them both to the company's sexual harassment officer, instead of looking into the matter he just advises her to protect herself. While the documentary was being made, Unilever sold its tea brands and fields to a venture capital company, now operating as Lipton Teas and Infusions, which has suspended the two managers pending an investigation.

A similar culture was found in plantations owned by James Finlay & Co, whose tea is sold by Sainsbury's, Tesco and Starbucks. Odula speaks with a woman (already suffering from an injury from her work) who refused to have sex with a manager in order to get a job, and regrets that her daughters didn't make the same decision. She reported harassment but hasn't had a response. Many of the women interviewed name John Chebochok, a recruiter for James Finlay & Co, as a predator. Katie goes to meet him for a job interview, which she is told will be held in a hotel room. There, he says he will give her money and a job if she has sex with him, which escalates to him pinning her against a window before he gives up and goes. After three months of undercover reporting, Katie quits the plantations and receives counselling. Finlays later said it

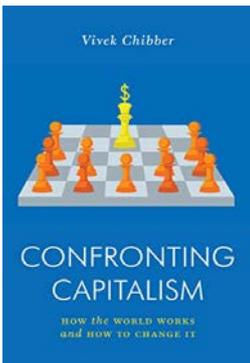
suspended and reported Chebochok to the police, and is now investigating whether its operation has 'an endemic issue with sexual violence'.

Panorama's report from Kenya recalls exposés of similar practices in other organisations. Women in Haiti in poorly paid jobs making clothes for American brands were pressurised by their managers to have sex or have their contracts ended, according to an article published by the *Guardian* (23 June). In Congo, more than 50 women alleged that aid workers, including some from the World Health Organisation, had demanded sex from them to get or keep jobs as cooks, cleaners and community workers during an Ebola crisis (*Reuters*, 29/09/20). As in Kenya, the poverty the women were living in often meant they had little choice.

The hierarchies which are built into the capitalist structures of organisations put people like Chebochok, Yebei and Koskei in positions of power. And the wider economic system makes people – women who rely on wages from any work they can get, in this instance – vulnerable to being used by this predatory type of man for their own gratification. Because these managers are enforcing the exploitation of the women through their employment, they also feel entitled to exploit them sexually. They see and treat the women as objects because the system creates the conditions in which this can happen. Reforms and a shift in culture may eventually lessen the threat of sexual abuse for women such as those on the plantations, but won't address the root cause of the problem.

MIKE FOSTER

Reformist mish-mash



Confronting Capitalism. How the World Works and How to Change It.
By Vivek Chibber. Verso. 2022. 164pp.

A significant part of this short book presents a clear and accessible explanation of how capitalism works, its relationship with the state and the struggle it inevitably generates between the two classes in society – capitalists and workers. It explains how and why the organisation of the capitalist system determines that, despite the vast resources and wealth it makes available, ‘a thin layer of the population’ is able to live in luxury while millions struggle to keep their heads above water and ‘experience life as a daily grind’. It goes on to explain how capitalists, regardless of an individual’s character or personal values, are compelled by the nature of the system they operate in to minimise costs and seek profit, wherever possible and whatever the consequences.

The book also takes down the widely held idea that governments are somehow neutral in the conflict between the vast majority who have to seek employment to survive and the tiny minority who offer and control that employment. It demonstrates how and why, far from mediating between workers and capitalists, the role of governments, whatever their stated ideology, is to govern on behalf of the capitalist class and in their collective profit-making interest. The state, in other words, has the role of a class organ, and governments of whatever colour are its administrators. As the author writes, ‘the state in capitalism is not and cannot be politically neutral’.

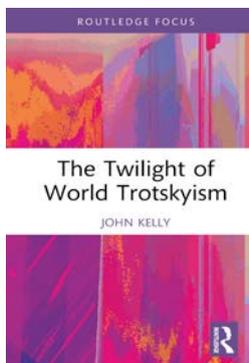
Following this lucid explanation of how capitalism works are recommendations on, as per the book’s title, ‘how to change it’. But from here on in it goes very much downhill. After telling us quite reasonably and correctly that ‘to truly enable full participation in the decisions that affect us all, it will be necessary to go beyond capitalism’, what it then gives us is a mish-mash of prescriptions not on how capitalism can be replaced by a non-capitalist, non-market system but about how it can be reformed so as to be more palatable. Alarm bells start to ring in particular when it refers in a relatively positive way to the Bolshevik revolution (‘the most successful model of the past hundred years’), to Nordic ‘social

democracy’ and to ‘workers’ control in some Soviet satellites’ and informs us that ‘even while the Russian experience can’t serve as a model, there are aspects of it that still have a lot to offer’. The author clearly doesn’t see the Soviet Union as the state-capitalist society that it was and as a system that was as far away as can be imagined from the free-access, moneyless, stateless society that socialism has to be. And in fact, as a way forward, he advocates ‘the Leninist party model’, described as ‘a mass cadre-based party with a centralised leadership and internal coherence’, which must adopt ‘a combination of electoral and mobilizational politics’ and ‘a gradualist approach’. One of the names he gives to this approach is ‘non-reformist reforms’.

But is the author here doing what many other opponents of capitalists do and advocating ‘in the meantime’ stages to a real socialist society, one without the markets, buying and selling and class antagonisms which this book has outlined so admirably? Apparently not, since his ambition which he reveals to us on the last page of his book is to ‘start down the road of social democracy and then to market socialism’. The enormity of the contradiction in terms represented by the idea of ‘market socialism’ is nothing short of mind-boggling.

HKM

Enter the Twilight Zone



The Twilight of World Trotskyism.
By John Kelly. Routledge. 2023.

This is effectively the updated sequel to Kelly’s book *Contemporary Trotskyism*, which was reviewed in the October 2018 Socialist Standard. It is a lot shorter than the first, more international in outlook, a little repetitive in places and surprisingly polemical.

Kelly argues that after a period of significant decline, the Trotskyist movement worldwide entered a period of relative stability in the early 21st century which has in more recent years been shattered by another period of organisational sclerosis, bloodletting and waning membership. There are now no less than 32 international organisations claiming to be the Fourth International or its successor, and in the UK alone there are currently 21 separate Trotskyist organisations that openly identify as being such.

One of the most significant recent splits concerns the so-called Socialist Party of England and Wales (SPEW) and its international body, the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI). This split has been over the growth of identity politics linked to their Irish affiliate and led to the formation in the UK of the 200-strong Socialist Alternative group. Kelly estimates there are now around 9,000 Trotskyists in total in the UK, the majority of them in the Socialist Workers’ Party (SWP) and SPEW, the only parties with over a thousand members – though in SPEW’s case only just.

Kelly identifies the main centres of World Trotskyism as being the USA, Britain, France and Argentina (based on parties, memberships, publications, electoral statistics, etc). The organisational issues noticeable in Britain are equally obvious elsewhere – the USA has 23 separate Trotskyist groups, France 15 and Argentina 16. He attempts to look beyond the sect-like nature of these groups to some of the more fundamental underlying issues with Trotskyist politics that we have often identified ourselves in this magazine. These include the dishonest and incredible nature of ‘transitional demands’; Trotskyists’ rigid adherence to Leninist methods while bizarrely expecting a different outcome to those achieved by Leninists previously in Russia, China, etc; their obsessive catastrophising (a massive world crisis and revolution is always just around the corner, yet somehow never materialises); and their conceptions of how members may be recruited and supporters gained that bear little relationship to the underlying reality.

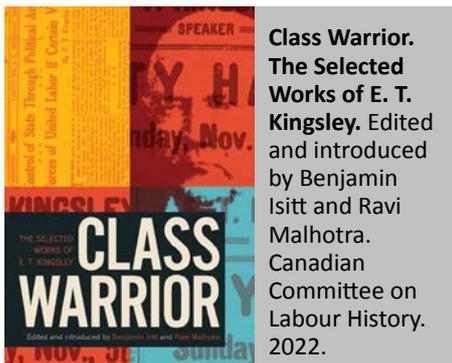
Over the years we ourselves have had some political sport pointing these things out, and have sparred with more Citizen Smith clones occupying a Trotskyist parallel universe than we care to remember. Though it’s also fair to say that at least some of the failures and limitations experienced by the Trotskyists (and others that seek to position themselves more generally as anti-capitalists) could also apply to us. Indeed, Kelly emerges as something of a reformist in this book and takes a sideswipe in our direction, saying ‘Tony Judt’s remark about the British propaganda sect, the SPGB, applies with equal force to [many of the Trotskyists]: “Impervious to change, and too small to be adversely affected by its own irrelevance, it will presumably survive indefinitely”’ (p.98). This didn’t make much sense the first time we read it and it makes little more sense here. Also, it is a bit odd as nowhere does he explain to readers what the SPGB is (we’re not even in the List of Abbreviations included)

and because his main argument in this section appears to be that many of the Trotskyist groups are actually ageing out of activity and existence completely: 'It appears that instead of being carried forward to revolutionary triumph by the laws of history, the forces of Orthodox Trotskyism are being carried into oblivion by the law of biology' (p.99).

Kelly ends by saying 'After more than 80 years of Trotskyist activity, with no revolutions, mass parties or election victories to its name... the Trotskyist movement has become a dead end for socialists' (p.105). We can, of course, agree. But it's a shame he doesn't seem to hold the view that the same comment could be applied – equally though for partly different reasons – to the Labour and Social Democratic parties. Their repeated failure to successfully reform the market economy has driven the politically frustrated into the hands of Leninists of all varieties for decades – and we suspect Keir Starmer's likely pending government will keep them in business for quite a while yet.

DAP

Canadian impossibilist



Class Warrior. The Selected Works of E. T. Kingsley. Edited and introduced by Benjamin Isitt and Ravi Malhotra. Canadian Committee on Labour History. 2022.

E. T. Kingsley (1856-1929) was a prominent member of the old Socialist Party of Canada that was founded in 1905 as a result of socialist parties and groups in the various Canadian Provinces merging. Based in British Columbia, he was the editor of its paper, the *Western Clarion*, one of its main organisers and a popular speaker. In their introduction, the authors describe him as the founder and leader of 'the British Columbia school of socialism' which adopted the 'impossibilist perspective' that 'viewed capitalism as a system that could not be reformed' and 'stressed the impossibility of uplifting the working class through incremental reforms'. This led them to seek support only for 'the abolition of the wages system' and to avoid advocating 'palliative measures', a position the authors describe, not unfairly, as 'one-plank Marxism', the one plank being to win political power for the sole purpose of using it to establish the common ownership of the means of production.

They mention the SPGB as espousing 'similar ideas to this very day'. Unfortunately,

this is in connection with Kingsley's opposition not just to 'palliatives' but also to trade unionism and strikes which he also regarded as useless. For him, the trade union struggle for better wages and conditions was not part of the class struggle, but was just a commodity struggle. This is not (and was not at the time) our position, nor that of other members of the SPC.

There were certain obvious parallels between the SPC and the SPGB. The SPC pioneered the idea of writing 'Socialism' across the ballot paper where there was no socialist candidate standing; they took the position that socialists elected to national or local office should judge measures put before them on whether or not they would be in the interest of the working class; and they refused to affiliate to the Second International on the grounds that it was dominated by reformists. They opposed participation in the First World War. Kingsley didn't, which led to him leaving the SPC.

The authors suggest that Kingsley and the SPC advocated, and practised, taking part in elections (Kingsley was a candidate himself on a number of occasions) 'primarily as a means to educate the public about the evils of capitalist wage exploitation'. This is to get the emphasis quite wrong. The SPC, and Kingsley in particular, saw elections as the way for the working class to win control of political power as the first step towards abolishing capitalist wage slavery. As Kingsley put it in 1911 in articles reproduced in the book:

'The determination of the workers to conquer the state and use its organized powers for the purpose of striking the fetters of wage slavery from their limbs by the abolition of capitalist property, marks the awakening of labor.'

'The conquest of the capitalist State by the working class will open the gateway for the transformation of capitalist property into the collective, or common, property of the working class. This will mean the ending of the wages slave system ... With the ending of the rule of capital, "the State will die out", as Marx and Engels have said. With no longer a ruling class and a class to be ruled it would no longer have a function to perform. It would become obsolete.'

That the way to 'conquer the state' was through the intelligent use of the ballot box by the working class was spelt out in this passage from a pamphlet Kingsley published in 1916:

'In most countries the workers possess some semblance of a franchise, and to that extent at least they have the legal right to conquer the state for their own purposes. In countries where the workers do not possess the franchise, or where there are such limitations placed upon it as to nullify their

superiority of numbers, they are justified in exercising their political power in any other manner they may choose for the attainment of the end in view. In Canada and the United States, there is nothing in the way of a working class conquest of the public powers at the polls at the present time, except the peculiar perspicacity of the slave that usually enables him to readily discern his master's interests, while at the same time remaining blissfully blind to his own.'

The last sentence is a typical example of Kingsley's style of speaking and writing with its heavy use of irony. He didn't hold back from calling workers 'slaves' and telling them they were stupid to support capitalism and its politicians, but his audiences seemed to like it. This pamphlet, *The Genesis and Evolution of Slavery*, the only one he wrote, is a typical socialist propaganda pamphlet of the time.

The editors have included a lot of what he wrote and said after he left the SPC over his support for the war. After the end of war, he seems to have convinced himself that not only capitalism but civilisation itself was about to collapse and that 'the only hope for the race was for the farmers and city dwellers to come to some arrangement whereby the latter would withdraw to the land and sustain themselves'. He forgot his Marxian economics and came up with the currency-crankish idea that surplus value only existed as debt settled by future production and which couldn't go for much longer.

This nonsense makes painful reading. The editors probably included his writings and speeches from this period as in them he also took the overthrow of the Kerensky government in Russia in November 1917 as what it appeared to be: the workers there taking power. The authors betray their Trotskyist background when they note that Trotsky's 'notion of transitional demands is unlikely to have appealed to him'. Of course it wouldn't! Such a programme of palliative measures would have had no appeal to an impossibilist (and still doesn't). In that respect the 'British Columbia school of socialism' was way in advance of Trotskyism.

The old Socialist Party of Canada disappeared in the 1920s and was reconstituted in 1931 with the same declaration of principles as the SPGB, including the 'conquest of the powers of government' with a view to converting them from 'an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation'. Two of those mentioned in the book as chairing or speaking at Kingsley's meetings for the reformist Federated Labour Party — W. A. Prichard and Charles Lestor — later returned to 'impossibilism'. For a history of the past and present SPC see: www.socialisthistory.ca/Docs/SocialistParty/HistoryofSPC.pdf

ALB

Looking Back on Lyndon Johnson



EVEN PRESIDENTS of the United States cannot live forever. Within weeks of each other, two who in their time supervised a great act of organised mass destruction died, quietly at their homes.

A final human touch, this; and human touches are among the expectations which people have of their leaders, at the same time as they hope for elements of the superhuman. Lyndon Johnson specialised in folksy speeches; during his time as Vice

President he gave out ballpoint pens to the people of West Berlin and he was always one of the world's champion handshakers. In his superhuman role he promised to unravel the tangle of Vietnam and to fashion America into what he called the Great Society — something which, unsurprisingly, is still awaited. (...)

Johnson's conversion to a crusader against "racial injustice" was as abrupt as his elevation to the Vice-Presidential candidacy. As a Senator he was never in any doubt about where he stood

when voting on laws which were aimed at curbing the excesses of the racists of the South. Between 1940 and 1960 he voted on such issues 39 times, always as one would expect a good, solid, prejudiced Southerner to vote. He was six times against abolishing the poll tax; twice against anti-lynch laws; twice in favour of racial segregation in the American forces. And so on. And on. And on.

When he became President, Johnson applied all that he had learned about political arm-twisting, and used all the power of patronage he had built up during his time as Senate leader and Vice-President, to push through Congress the anti-discrimination laws which had baffled Kennedy. Johnson did not necessarily like what he did but, as he once shouted at a Senate subcommittee "... this is happening!" He was giving way to the inevitable, to the progressive grind of modern capitalism which the South has resisted for so long. As a simple Senator for Texas Johnson could, indeed he must, pander to the racial bigots and killers of the South, no matter what that meant in terms of negro terror and suffering. When he was in the White House he was acting for American capitalism as a whole and, again with no thought for human suffering, he was forced to do things simply because they were happening.

(Socialist Standard, April 1973)

Pathfinders by ChatGPT

ChatGPT response to: 'Please write an article in the style of the Pathfinders column in the Socialist Standard'.

THE PATHFINDERS column in the Socialist Standard has long been a source of inspiration for those looking to explore the ideas and principles of socialism. It is a space for comrades to share their experiences and insights on the path towards a better world, free from the shackles of capitalism and exploitation.

Today, we take a look at the path towards socialism, and what it means for those who walk it. As socialists, we believe that the current system is fundamentally flawed and that we need to fundamentally change the way we organize our society.

But how do we get there? How do we move from the current system of capitalism to a socialist society? The answer is not a simple one, and there are many different paths that one can take.

One path towards socialism is through education and organizing. By raising awareness about the realities of capitalism, we can begin to build a movement of people who are committed to challenging the status quo. This can be done through a variety of means, such as street canvassing, social media outreach, and community organizing.

Another path towards socialism is through direct action. This involves challenging the system of capitalism through protests, strikes, and other forms of civil disobedience. Direct action can be an effective way to raise awareness and put pressure on those in power to make changes.

A third path towards socialism is through political action. This involves working within the existing political system to achieve socialist aims. This can include supporting socialist candidates, pushing for policy changes, and building coalitions with other left-leaning groups.

Regardless of the path that one chooses, the goal is always the same: to build a society that prioritizes the needs of the many over the profits of the few. Socialism is not just an economic system, but a social and political system that seeks to

empower people and create a more just and equitable society.

As we continue to walk the path towards socialism, we must remain committed to the principles of equality, democracy, and solidarity. We must be willing to learn from each other, to challenge our assumptions, and to work together towards a better world.

In the words of the Socialist Standard, "The path to socialism is not an easy one, but it is a path worth walking... (network error).

In a world where money reigns supreme / We're trapped in a cycle that seems obscene / People chasing riches, day and night / While others struggle to simply survive

But what if we could break this chain / And abolish money, its power wane / Imagine a world where wealth's not king / Where sharing and compassion rule everything

No more poverty, no more greed / No more hoarding what others need / The value of goods, services, and time / Measured not by dollars, but by a fairer design

What if we could trade and barter / Without the need for monetary charter / Goods and services exchanged with ease / Based on mutual benefit, not profit to seize

It might seem like a distant dream / But perhaps it's closer than it seems / A world without money is hard to conceive / But it's worth exploring what we could achieve

So let's imagine, let's dream, let's strive / To build a world where money does not thrive / Where we value each other, our planet, and our lives / And in our hearts, a better future thrives.

By ChatGPT, aged 0 years 6 months

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.

APRIL 2023 EVENTS

World Socialist Movement online meetings

- Sundays at 19.30 (IST) Discord** • Weekly WSP (India) meeting
- Sunday 9 April 11.00 (GMT + 1) • Central Online Branch Meeting**
- Friday 7 April** • No meeting. Easter.
- Friday 14 April 19.30 (GMT + 1) Zoom** • **A World without Money.** Video. Jade Saab. TEDxUniversity of Edinburgh.
- Friday 21 April** • No meeting. Eve of Conference
- Saturday 22 April 10.00 to 17.00 Zoom** • **ANNUAL CONFERENCE**
- Sunday 23 April (if required) 10.00 to 17.00 Zoom** **ANNUAL CONFERENCE**
- Friday 28 April 19.30 (GMT + 1) Zoom** • **Did You See the News?** Discussion on recent subjects in the news. Host: Howard Moss

Socialist Party Physical Meetings

GLASGOW • Friday 14 April 12 noon
Glasgow Branch leafletting at Strathclyde University Campus (followed by Social at Wetherspoons Pub, George Square)
Call Paul on 07484 717893 for further details.

LONDON

Saturday 22 April 10.00 to 17.00
ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Sunday 23 April (if required) 10.00 to 17.00
ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Socialist Party Offices, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN (nearest tube: Clapham North. Nearest station: Clapham High Street. This will be a hybrid meeting. For how to join via Zoom, see above. Visitors welcome as all our meetings are open to the public.

Saturday 29 April 12 noon. Street stall outside Socialist Party Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, London SW4 UN

Saturday 29 April 2pm. Branch meeting, followed by debate and discussion on **King Capital's Coronation**
Socialist Party Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, London SW4 7UN

SHEFFIELD

Saturday 27 May. 1pm to 4pm. End the Profit System Now
Speaker: Clifford Slapper. Rutland Arms, 86 Brown Street, Sheffield S1 2BS. There will be a Q & A session following the speaker interspersed with live music from the band Barnsdale Hood. Free Entry. All welcome.

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

Party News

Local Elections

Kent and Sussex branch will be standing candidates in Folkestone in the local council elections on 4 May. Leafletting and other activity will take place in April. Details and offers of help to: spgb.krsrb@worldsocialism.org or 07971 715569.

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.

R-E-A-L L-O-V-E



MY LOCAL Community Centre recently advertised a Saturday evening event, a gospel choir with performers from London. Entrance was free to all. I view religion as baseless superstition, but I do enjoy gospel music. Regardless of many of the sentiments it expresses, I enjoy its energy, its rhythm and the powerful singing voices of those who perform it. And I respect the sincerity of its performers and their followers.

With this in mind I decided to go to the event. Arriving a few minutes before the start time, I was surprised to see only a sparse audience in the Community Centre hall. That, it seemed to me, would not be good for the atmosphere. But the organiser was reassuring. He announced that more people would arrive soon and in the meantime advised those present to pray. He proceeded to do so himself out loud in improvised fashion. And then more people did arrive and the show started.

Gospel Rap

But I was in for a disappointment. Rather than a massed choir or Mahalia Jackson-type singers belting out Oh Happy Day, Swing Low Sweet Chariot, Old-Time Religion or Amazing Grace, it was individual performers with pre-recorded backing doing what I was later told is 'gospel rap'. Rap isn't my favourite type of music and, since the acoustics in the hall weren't brilliant, it was difficult to catch the words most of the time. The exception to this was a number called Real Love, since the spelt-out refrain (R-E-A-L L-O-V-E) was much repeated

and gave the listeners something to hang on to. The 'real love' was of course love of or for God or Jesus. Fair enough given the context, but what I wasn't expecting was the religious 'testifying' that punctuated the evening. Each performer, after their spot, would stay on stage, tell their story and exhort the audience to listen to and embrace the word of God or the teaching of Jesus, to put their hands in the air and even come to the front if they were moved to do so. A small number did, though these may have been members of the group who were organising the event. But their exhortations were impressively powerful and gave some kind of inkling of how the mass events of evangelising preachers are capable of gaining converts on the spot. I was reminded of the mass rallies addressed by the American Baptist preacher, Billy Graham, over many decades.

I obviously wasn't up for conversion, but, as the event drew to a close, one of the organisers, who, when I came in, introduced himself as Dion, came and sat next to me and asked me if I was a Christian and, if so, did I want to take that further? I very politely made it clear I didn't have Christian beliefs and wasn't a candidate for conversion. But I also told him I'd found the concert interesting and wished him luck in any future events.

The solace of religion

What to make of that? Well, first of all, before going to a gospel concert again, I'd make sure what kind of music it was going to be. And I'd also be prepared for any evangelising, not be surprised by it and

just consider it part of the show. One of those who had 'testified' told the gathering that he was a refugee who had the group – and Jesus – to thank for embracing him after much suffering. I could understand the force behind that. But I found it more difficult to fathom why seemingly ordinary people with the families and children they had brought with them should be involved in activities and beliefs that were so contrary to evidence and to everyday experience of life. But maybe they too, for their own reasons, needed the solace, the comfort of religious belief and its ritual and the attachment to a community it brings with it. Maybe they needed, as we all do in our own way, to feel part of a larger group, to feel, in a world that oppresses us all in so many ways, that we at least have something to hang on to.

Illusions

The trouble of course is that, on top of the illusions that most people have about the way the society we live in – capitalism – works, which are a serious impediment to understanding its true nature and the urgent need for a different kind of society, religion constitutes an additional illusion in its irrational belief that there exists a supernatural entity, a supreme force that intervenes in nature and human affairs and even somehow allows us to live on after death. This is one of the reasons why socialists are opposed to religion, whether organised or otherwise, and see the socialist society of free access and democratic organisation we advocate and work for as one that will be free of religion, and indeed will have no need for the illusions religion harbours and seeks to spread.

When Dion came and sat next to me at the end of the concert, I would have liked to say those things to him, but of course it would have been unfair, as it was his 'gig'. I would have liked to tell him that religious fantasies answer no questions about the world we live in, that humans are born into a material world, that their ideas are fashioned by that world and that they in their turn modify it. But not knowing the circumstances of his life, I may have come over as plain offensive. Maybe I could at least have pointed out that the music I'd heard that night was not 'gospel' as normally understood and that, when they next put on an event, I'd be glad to attend if real gospel music was on offer.

HOWARD MOSS