

THE

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# SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

## WORKERS GET DAY OFF!



Old couple get new hats



Also: Get rid of politicians?  
What concerns you?  
Communism as a  
practical alternative

Town and country  
Story time:  
mystery and meaning  
What do you think?



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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'



# Coronation chickens

AS OF 2023 there are still 43 countries in the world with a monarch as head of state. Most of those pampered parasites seem content to stay away from the media and enjoy their exalted status in relative obscurity. Not so in Britain, where the royals are a glitzy public circus act, and this month are staging a huge event that will no doubt grab headlines around the world. Britain seems weirdly addicted to silly medieval ritual. There has never not been a monarchy here, apart from a strange 11-year hiatus following the beheading of one king in 1649. While politicians regularly rise and fall on their swords due to fluctuating polls or appalling performances, it seems that no scandal, internecine row or public disgrace ever dents the popularity of this archaic and anachronistic state institution. It's not that there's no anti-monarchy sentiment. YouGov surveys of 18-24 yr olds since 2020 have shown 53 to 67 percent opposition ([bit.ly/3olmoJe](https://bit.ly/3olmoJe)). But politicians are too chicken-shit to

come out against the monarchy. The so-called democrats of the Labour Party are as sycophantically gung-ho for the royal freeloaders as the Tories, while the supposedly radical tax-the-rich brigade didn't utter a squeak over Chas's £650 million tax-free inheritance. And now the whole country is expected to lose its collective mind as the nobs and toffs convene at Westminster Abbey to plunk a metal party hat on the old plant-botherer.

Socialists will take the free bank holiday hand-out, but otherwise treat the fancy-dress pomp and pomposity of the king's coronation with the contempt it deserves. We're no advocates of a capitalist republic – they exploit their workers every bit as much – but having your nose rubbed in class privilege and entitlement is a bit more than we can stand. In republican countries like the US, disingenuous efforts are sometimes made to background, de-emphasise and disguise class divisions. In the UK they are flaunted in our faces. It would be nice to think that British

workers, sick of the cost of living crisis, of war in Europe, of lying politicians, of global warming, would at least treat the royals with disgust, if not turf them out of their palaces as a prelude to general socialist revolution. But the truth is that many workers lap up the royals like a dog laps up its own sick.

The Republic website is asking people to use the coronation event to protest, on the grounds that 'there is a positive, exciting, democratic alternative' to paying court to yet another gilded idler. They're right, there is, but it's not the alternative they've got in mind. The real alternative to a king is not some other ruling class finger puppet, whether elected or not. It's the abolition of inequality and class privilege through the democratic common ownership of the world's resources, and the collective and responsible stewardship of the planet and everything on it and in it. Not our king? Not our capitalism!

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# Ad Astra

WHAT WITH rocketing bills, mortgages, interest rates and general life stress, most people last month very likely paid no attention to the fact that the European Space Agency launched a satellite to visit the planetary system of Jupiter ([bbc.in/3MYXRnf](https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-56888888)).

The assembled scientists and officials all jumped up and down and hugged each other as the Juice satellite launched successfully and later phoned home to say it had unfurled its 98 square yards of solar panels. They were obviously pleased that their collective investment of time, effort and £1.4bn had not blown up. 'But I do have to remind everyone, there's still a long way to go', the ESA Director General pointed out. Well indeed. Jupiter is a long way, especially for a craft with only the power of a domestic microwave oven, and which has to travel by an extremely circuitous 8.5-year and 4.1 billion-mile route around the inner planets before being slung out to the gas giant in 2031.

But it's not the gas giant itself that they're interested in. The Jupiter Icy Moon Explorer (Juice) is off to take a close look at Jupiter's moons, specifically Europa, Callisto and Ganymede, the three little buggers that got Galileo into such bad odour with the Church back in 1610. If there's life anywhere out there in the solar system, scientists think, it's likely to be beneath the icy crusts of these moons. Juice is just the first step. Nasa is sending its Clipper satellite to Europa next year. After that there's the question of a lander, and lastly something that's capable of drilling through perhaps tens of miles of ice crust. Below that ice, Europa is believed to have an ocean 60 miles deep, ten times the depth of any ocean on Earth, despite only being one quarter its size. That means a relatively small rocky core that could be easily squeezed, scrunched and heated by the massive gravity of Jupiter, with the possibility of volcanic vents generating a rich chemical soup that might be the origin of life, as they are thought to have been on Earth.

There's a lot of 'mights' and 'perhappes' in that paragraph, as there will be with any leading-edge scientific endeavour. What would it mean to find living organisms on one of these moons? In one sense, not a lot. It would make no difference to people's lives on Earth, beyond being an interesting talking point in pubs or over dinner. Nobody is hoping



for anything more than amino acids or micro-organisms at best, and certainly not little green frogmen or intelligent squid. But still, it would be the greatest scientific discovery of all time, proof that life on Earth wasn't some singular anomaly in the universe, and strong evidence that, as most scientists already assume, our galaxy must be teeming with life. If you can find two separate instances of life orbiting one star in a galaxy containing 100 billion stars, and in a universe now thought to contain of up to 20 trillion galaxies, the concept of extraterrestrial zoology becomes a no-brainer.

All that would surely change humanity's perception of itself in the cosmos. Instead of 'us and them' meaning competing nationalities, ethnic groups, gender identities or even warring social classes, we could have a sense of terrestrial unity for the first time, 'us' being all life on Earth, and 'them' being all life on other planets.

But before we get too starry-eyed and visionary, there is the ugly fact that we still live in capitalism, an astoundingly divisive and destructive economic system in which most humans are reduced to virtual slavery in the service of a rich and idle super-elite, and which relentlessly exploits global resources even at the risk of turning the planet into a toxic lifeless desert. Never mind what we humans think or feel about the cosmos, what does the logic of our present social system dictate?

The logic of capitalism is to exploit for profit whatever it can get its hands on. If it can get its hands on life on other moons or planets, it will treat it with the same wanton rapaciousness as it treats everything on Earth.

Humans will try to prevent it, of course.

There will be moratoriums, new Outer Space Treaties, and an agreed respect for the 'rights' of extraterrestrial organisms. But if the potential for profit exists, the moratoriums will be ignored, the treaties broken, the respect disregarded. By hook or by crook, capitalist logic will be exported, virus-like, to new worlds and virgin environments to wreak its mindless havoc.

We have to stop that from happening, before any potential micro-organism is discovered on Europa or Ganymede. Humans on Earth must first put their own house in order. We have a responsibility, as intelligent custodians of our planet, to make sure that the destructive behaviour of our present class-divided society can never infect any other planet. We need to turn our social system upside down, and learn to operate sustainably as an egalitarian global community that collectively and sensibly manages its planetary resources, where things are made for direct use and not to be sold as commodities in a money system, and where the future belongs to all humanity instead of being slowly strangled by a parasitical property-owning elite. The only alternative to a money system is a non-money system. The only alternative to capitalism is post-capitalist common ownership. It's not just a starry-eyed ambition, it's a real scientific necessity. As Carl Sagan famously said, 'If we are willing to contemplate nuclear war and the wholesale destruction of our emerging global society, should we not also be willing to contemplate a wholesale restructuring of our societies?' The time to launch that restructuring is right now, before we launch any more spaceships.

**PJS**



# Get rid of politicians?

'TAXPAYERS FUND radical anti-election lobby group' read the shock horror headline in the *Times* (12 April). It was an article by two journalists about the Sortition Foundation that campaigns (as you might have guessed if you were familiar with the meaning of the word 'sortition') for political decisions to be made by people chosen by lot rather than by elections. This is something that is accepted by governments for at least advising them on some matters. Such 'citizens' assemblies' are chosen by lot in the same sort of way that juries are in court cases. It was also practised in Ancient Athens. As such, it has as much democratic legitimacy as elections, despite what the article suggests.

The Sortition Foundation wants MPs to be chosen in this way. Which would of course eliminate the professional politician. A book by one of the Foundation's founders, Brett Hennig, is called *The End of Politicians*. Naturally this wouldn't be welcomed by the politicians. The journalists pointed out to one of the stupidest MPs, failed Tory leader Sir Ian Duncan Smith, that the foundation had been paid by the government to organise some citizens' assemblies and got him to protest:

'How could they award contracts and pay money over to such an organisation that wants to get rid of politicians?'

Getting rid of politicians might be considered a good idea by many. Being a career politician is a particularly



unsavoury profession — trading on problems that people face and making a career out of making pie-crust promises to solve them. However, getting rid of them won't solve those problems.

The Sortition Foundation argues that getting rid of politicians would make for better decision-making. 'By removing elections', one of its researchers is quoted as writing, 'we remove the need for our representatives to court those with wealth and resources'. It wouldn't, however, remove those with wealth and resources or *their* need to court political decision-makers.

The Foundation is assuming that in present-day society there is a common interest that a national citizens' assembly — a 'House of Citizens' — would be better able to identify. But, under capitalism, there is no common social interest. Capitalism is a society divided into two basic classes — those who own the places where the wealth of society is produced and the rest who can only get a living by selling their ability to work

for a wage or salary — with antagonistic and irreconcilable interests. In addition, different sections of the owning class have different and conflicting interests. MPs chosen by lot would still be subject to lobbying and influence by these sections and would not be able to overcome the antagonism of interests between the owners and the wage-working majority. Capitalist economic reality would give them no choice but to take decisions that gave priority to profit making and taking.

Choosing MPs by election is a better system for capitalism. It enables the support for differing sections of the owning class to be measured and for the section with the most support to have its way. As long as capitalism is in existence, it is also better from the socialist point of view since it enables the socialist movement to send its delegates to the law-making assembly that is the key to controlling political power. Sortition would get in the way of this as there is no guarantee that a Parliament chosen by lot would reflect the degree of support for socialism amongst the population or a majority for socialism.

This said, in socialism, where there would be a common social interest, there would be a wide opportunity to fill some posts by lot, maybe entire local councils, as one aspect of the participatory democracy that will be an essential part of socialism. But under capitalism it wouldn't, and couldn't, work as intended.

## Homes for people, not profits

### Our election manifesto for the local elections in Folkestone.

IF YOU ever need to see the brutal reality of capitalism at work, look no further than the new apartment blocks being built along Folkestone seafront.

According to a County Council report, parts of both the Harbour and Central wards of Folkestone are among the 10 percent most deprived areas of England, so how many residents do you think will be able to afford the multi-million-pound apartments now being constructed in their front yard?

How many Folkestone residents got any real say in what the development would look like?

Of course, we already know the answer to those questions.

Like everything in the capitalist world we live in, profit is the only driving force.

The only purpose in building homes under capitalism is that somebody somewhere makes a big fat profit. So despite the real housing needs of local residents, these apartments are not built for them.

The Socialist Party of Great Britain stands for the common and democratic ownership of the means of producing and distributing wealth in a global community without borders.

This means all of us will actually own the Folkestone Seafront. When we control the resources of the Earth — from the farms to the mines and quarries — nothing will stop us building the best quality houses, with real community participation, for the people that need them. Access to these houses and apartments will be free according to our real needs.

If we own everything, why do you

need money?

Extend that to food production, clean energy, clean rivers and oceans. When we own the world, we will ensure that we live in harmony with nature. Taking what we need to live well and not destroying the planet in the name of profit.

That is why we are asking for your vote. We cannot fix the problems of poverty and conflict within capitalism. And that is why we stand for a world free from borders, free from wars over markets and trade routes — a world where our fellow humans are no longer forced to risk their lives to seek a dignified life.

This is a revolution. A world revolution. And it has to start somewhere — so why not Folkestone on Thursday, 4th May?

## 'Woke capitalism': a contradiction?

'DESANTIS AND other prominent Republicans blame 'woke' politics for Silicon Valley Bank's collapse instead of bankers miscalibrating risk' was the headline in the *Business Insider* (14 March, [bit.ly/3MNFWjg](https://bit.ly/3MNFWjg)).

The claim is that the bank neglected maximising profits by promoting diversity and other 'ethical' issues like protecting the environment and so went under. There is no evidence for this, but attacking not just the Democratic administration for 'wokery' but capitalist corporations as well has become part of Republican politics.

In an opinion column in the *New York Times* (2 December) Jamelle Bouie examined why Republicans were criticising capitalist corporations when they have traditionally been staunch defenders of capitalism and advised, in the words of the title of his article, 'Before he takes on "Woke Capitalism", Ron DeSantis should read his Karl Marx' ([nyti.ms/41n9BEi](https://nyti.ms/41n9BEi)).

Bouie paraphrased the passage in the *Communist Manifesto* where Marx (and Engels) pointed out:

'Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen

relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned...'

He commented that, while Marx was writing here about pre-capitalist social and economic arrangements, this could be taken as a general tendency of capitalism and that capitalism tends to also dissolve the sort of conservative and reactionary attitudes and values defended by the likes of DeSantis. However:

'There are even two competing impulses within the larger system: a drive to dissolve and erode the barriers between wage earners until they form a single undifferentiated mass and a drive to preserve and reinforce those same barriers to divide workers and stymie the development of class consciousness on their part.'

There is certainly a drive under capitalism for employers to be interested in the quality only of the labour-power they purchase, irrespective of the sex, skin colour, language, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, etc. of the bearer. What employers want is an efficient worker and for the pool from which to draw efficient

workers to be as wide as possible. This drive works to end all discrimination on the basis of characteristics that are irrelevant from the point of view of working efficiency. In this sense, the logic of capitalism could be said to be 'woke'.

The second drive has certainly, historically, been a feature of capitalism, sometimes to prevent trade union consciousness though more to promote nationalism. Politically, capitalism is divided into competing states whose ruling class seeks to inculcate and maintain in its subjects a sense of being a nation with a common interest different from other nations. Nationalism, then, is also a feature of capitalism. But this is a drive to divide workers of different states rather than to divide workers within a particular state; it is not necessarily incompatible with the first drive.

Because the first of the two drives Bouie identifies is the stronger DeSantis and the others are on to a loser. On the other hand, there is nothing inherently anti-capitalist or revolutionary in campaigns against discrimination as is sometimes claimed (more in the past than now). That doesn't mean that such campaigns are not worth it, merely that they are not anti-capitalist. Capitalism and being woke are not incompatible.

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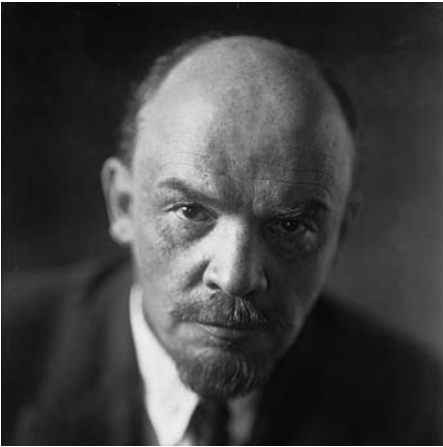
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## Howlers



'Marx partnered with Lenin to launch the Communist movement...' (*American Greatness*, 1 March, [tinyurl.com/2dykk9x](https://tinyurl.com/2dykk9x)). Lenin was 12 when Marx died and they never met! Worse still, we are told 'Communism [is] 'A system, devised by Karl Marx, in which the state controls virtually all economic activity. Private property is outlawed and income inequality is reduced. The theory is idealistic; in practice, communist regimes have been highly authoritarian.' The *Economist's* definition of socialism is equally inaccurate: '... Socialists believe in some forms of collective ownership but not the near-complete abolition of the private sector imposed under communism. They will attempt to redistribute wealth through taxes on the rich and welfare for the poor, but not to eliminate all income differentials' (The A to Z of Economics, [tinyurl.com/mrxanw89](https://tinyurl.com/mrxanw89)). This is somewhat surprising considering the same source is cited not unfavourably by Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852, [tinyurl.com/549aubwf](https://tinyurl.com/549aubwf))! Even the *Association of Mature American Citizens*, a self-described 'vigorously conservative' United States-based advocacy organization and interest group, know that the terms communism and socialism are '...typically used interchangeably by Marxists' (AMAC, 11 March, [tinyurl.com/5yvdz4zz](https://tinyurl.com/5yvdz4zz)). A far better A to Z of economic terms, from 'abundance' to 'zero-growth', 'is available here: [tinyurl.com/3m4m359n](https://tinyurl.com/3m4m359n).

## Territorial Pissings

The entry for Lenin in that A to Z concludes: 'When he died from a stroke in January 1924, most of the main feudal obstacles to capitalist development had been removed, together with all effective political opposition. With his concepts of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and the leading role of the vanguard party, and a transitional society of 'socialism', Lenin distorted Marxism and thereby severely damaged the development of

a socialist movement. Indeed, Leninism continues to pose a real obstacle to the achievement of socialism.'

Bibek Sen in an obituary titled 'Marxist Economist Of Global Fame Dr. Paresh Chattopadhyay Is No More' (*The Arabian Post*, [tinyurl.com/hbma7nrh](https://tinyurl.com/hbma7nrh)) writes along similar lines: 'We were fed with Leninist ideas of two stages of communism, of workers' inability to change the society, of state capitalism as Marx's Socialism. Paresh opened our eyes that Leninism is a complete vulgarisation of Marx'. By contrast, Harsh Thakor's obituary in *Countercurrents* (10 March, [tinyurl.com/2p8tc9xy](https://tinyurl.com/2p8tc9xy)) get its completely wrong berating Chattopadhyay as he '...completely relegated the great advances in Socialist production through collectivisation in Russia, Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution in China, the reasons for the defeat of Fascist forces by USSR in World War 2, the democratic form of power contrived in the Soviets and Communes or how encirclement of imperialist countries or penetration of counter revolutionaries, made it all the more imperative for the vanguard party to exercise its power. He failed to diagnose the symmetrical developments of the teachings of Marx, Lenin and Mao or how they were an integral part of each other'. An echo of Radio Moscow from the time of the state-capitalist USSR.

## The lapdogs of bourgeois society



Mao, like Lenin before him, hastened the development of capitalism. He stated in 1949 'China must utilize all the factors of urban and rural capitalism that are beneficial and not harmful to the national economy and the people's livelihood, and we must unite with the national bourgeoisie in common struggle. Our present policy is to regulate capitalism, not to destroy it' (*On The People's Democratic Dictatorship*, [tinyurl.com/c6tyfsu5](https://tinyurl.com/c6tyfsu5)). That wages have increased since Mao's day is not in doubt. The 1 percent in China and the US, unlike the vast majority of us, are doing very nicely: 'The Chinese Communist Party is thought to have more than 80 billionaire

delegates as part of its ranks this year' (*Daily Express*, 15 March, [tinyurl.com/2p9eu695](https://tinyurl.com/2p9eu695)). 'Xi's government has cracked down on young people who apply Marxist analysis too critically to abuses of labour allowed under China's system of state capitalism' (*Financial Times*, 28 June 2022, [tinyurl.com/2p8skk5y](https://tinyurl.com/2p8skk5y)). Capitalist hallmarks, such as class society, commodity production, profit motive, exploitation of wage labour, markets, etc., are found in China as they are worldwide. By contrast, the socialism Marx envisaged involved 'abolition of buying and selling, of the bourgeois conditions of production' (*Communist Manifesto*, 1848, [tinyurl.com/mrxupfmk](https://tinyurl.com/mrxupfmk)).

## Barking up the wrong tree

'Sanders new book *It's OK To Be Angry About Capitalism* reads like Marx and Engels' 1848 *Communist Manifesto*. The only difference is that in their manifesto, Marx and Engels clearly underline the positive role that capitalism played throughout history. Bernie Sanders, on the other hand, doesn't have a single good word to say about capitalism and – here he resembles Marx and Engels – calls for a working-class revolution to raze the capitalist system to the ground' (*American Thinker*, 10 March, [tinyurl.com/3dxwvw2](https://tinyurl.com/3dxwvw2)).

Hardly! The status quo is safe – Sanders is all bark and no bite. Defining what 'democratic socialism' means to him, Sanders said:

'I don't believe government should take over the grocery store down the street or own the means of production, but I do believe that the middle class and the working families who produce the wealth of America deserve a decent standard of living and that their incomes should go up, not down. I do believe in private companies that thrive and invest and grow in America, companies that create jobs here, rather than companies that are shutting down in America and increasing their profits by exploiting low-wage labor abroad' (*Slate*, 15 November 2015, [tinyurl.com/3dxwvw2](https://tinyurl.com/3dxwvw2)).

The American Marxist Daniel De Leon would have identified Sanders as a reformist lapdog!

'As a poodle may have his hair cut long or his hair cut short, as he may be trimmed with pink ribbons or with blue ribbons, yet he remains the same old poodle, so capitalism may be trimmed with factory laws, tenement laws, divorce laws and gambling laws, but it remains the same old capitalism. These "humanitarian parts" are only trimming the poodle. Socialism, one and inseparable with its "antirent and anticapital parts," means to get rid of the poodle' (*The Daily People*, 2 November 1908, [tinyurl.com/yc2t5rhx](https://tinyurl.com/yc2t5rhx)).



## UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

### LONDON

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

### MIDLANDS

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

### 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](mailto:spgb.lancaster@worldsocialism.org).

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

**Bolton.** Contact: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589.

**Cumbria.** Contact: Brendan Cummings, 19 Queen St, Millom, Cumbria LA18 4BG.

**Doncaster.** Contact: Fredi Edwards, [fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk)

#### Yorkshire Regional branch.

Contact: Fredi Edwards, Tel 07746 230 953 or email [fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk)

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

### SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

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

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

2pm on Zoom. For invite email:

[spgbsw@gmail.com](mailto:spgbsw@gmail.com)

**Brighton.** Contact: Anton Pruden,

[anton@pruden.me](mailto:anton@pruden.me)

**Canterbury.** Contact: Rob Cox, 4 Stanhope Road, Deal, Kent, CT14 6AB.

**Luton.** Contact: Nick White, 59 Heywood Drive, LU2 7LP.

**Cornwall.** Contact: Harry Sowden, 16 Polgine Lane, Troon, Camborne, TR14 9DY. 01209 611820.

**East Anglia.** Contact: David Porter, Eastholme, Bush Drive, Eccles-on-Sea, NR12 0SF. 01692 582533. Richard Headicar, 42 Woodcote, Firs Rd, Hethersett, NR9 3JD. 01603 814343.

**Essex.** Contact: Pat Deutz, 11 The Links, Billericay, CM12 0EX. [patdeutz@gmail.com](mailto:patdeutz@gmail.com).

**Cambridge.** Contact: Andrew Westley, [wezelecta007@gmail.com](mailto:wezelecta007@gmail.com). 07883078984.

### IRELAND

**Cork.** Contact: Kevin Cronin, 5 Curragh Woods, Frankfield, Cork. 021 4896427.

[mariekev@eircom.net](mailto:mariekev@eircom.net)

### SCOTLAND

**Edinburgh branch.** Meets 1st Sunday, 11am on Discord. Contact: Fraser Anderson [f\\_raz\\_1@hotmail.com](mailto:f_raz_1@hotmail.com)

**Glasgow branch.** Meets physically: 2nd Friday of the month; online Discord: 3rd Tuesday of the month. Contact: Paul Edwards, [rainbow3@btopenworld.com](mailto:rainbow3@btopenworld.com) • 07484 717893

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

**Ayrshire.** Contact: Paul Edwards 01563 541138. [rainbow3@btopenworld.com](mailto:rainbow3@btopenworld.com).

### WALES

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Meets 2nd Monday 7.30pm on JITSi.

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# Travesty on the high seas

THE HIGH SEAS — the sea beyond the territorial waters of coastal states — and the seabed beneath them, belong to nobody. They are in effect a ‘global commons’, available in theory to everybody, but in practice only to private or state capitalist enterprises in pursuit of profits. Given capitalism, what happens is a classic example of the so-called ‘tragedy of the commons’ that has been advanced against socialism. This argues that, if there were common ownership, the individual common-owners would use it in their own self-interest to the eventual detriment of the overall interest of all of them, as fishers over-fish today. With free access to what they needed, people would grab what they could and the system would break down.

This has never happened to any historical commons since the common-owners have always followed rules, often customary, to avoid this. Under capitalism, however, the result is indeed the ‘travesty of the commons’. Capitalist enterprises do behave as presumed and put their particular short-term profits before the longer-term general interest of all of them. The high seas are a commons, but one currently effectively commonly-owned by all the capitalist states of the world. Somewhat belatedly (it was in 1970 that President Nixon proposed making the resources of the sea bed, in his words, ‘the common heritage of mankind’ - bit.ly/3KVUYC) the capitalist states have realised that it is in the general interest of all of them to lay down some rules. The timid result is a Treaty, agreed to at the

end of March, to protect the biodiversity of the high seas.

It is not common ownership as such — the absence of property rights — that has been the problem but no ownership rights within the context of the capitalist economic system. Common ownership — the whole Earth, land and seas, as a global commons — is in fact the only framework within which global environmental problems can be rationally and lastingly dealt with. But this has to be common ownership by the whole of humanity, not all capitalist states.

All over the world production is in the hands of business enterprises of one form or another — some private, some state-owned, some mixed (it doesn’t matter which) — all competing to sell their products at a profit. All of them aim to maximise their profits. This is not the result of the greed of the owners or managers, as some suggest, but an economic necessity imposed by the forces of the market. If a business does not make a profit, then it goes out of business. ‘Make a profit or die’ is the economics of capitalism.

Under the competitive pressures of the market, businesses only take into account their own narrow financial interest, ignoring wider social and ecological considerations. All they look to is their own balance sheet and in particular the bottom line which shows whether or not they have made a profit and how much.

The whole of production, from the methods employed to the choice of what to produce, is distorted by this drive to make and accumulate profits. The result is

an economic system governed by irrational market forces which compel decision-makers, however selected and whatever their personal views or sentiments, to plunder, pollute and waste.

All these problems of pollution and the environment can be traced back to the fact that today production is carried on for profit, not to meet human needs. It is the profit system that is to blame. It, not the absence of property rights, is behind the high seas being a capitalist free-for-all. So, if we are going to solve these problems, it is the profit system that must go.

We have to restore to production its original and natural aim of providing things to directly satisfy human needs. But we can’t do this unless we are in a position to control production and we can’t do that unless the means of production — land, industry and natural resources — stop being the private property of individuals and states.

There should be no private property or territorial rights over any part of the globe. The Earth and its natural and industrial resources should not belong to anybody — not to individuals, not to corporations, not to states. They should simply be there to be used by human beings to satisfy their needs. Naturally there will have to be rules and procedures governing their use, just as there have been in all historical commons.

What is involved is the disappearance of the whole idea of property and its replacement by the idea of access and

use. Use in accordance with democratically agreed procedures. Common ownership is the same thing as no ownership — the high seas are a commons because nobody owns them.

Private property and territorial rights over any part of the planet need to be abolished as the only basis on which the human species can organise production — our relationship with nature — in an ecologically acceptable way. The Earth as the common property of the whole of humanity.

ALB



Credit: Marten van Dijk/Greenpeace United Kingdom

# What concerns you?



Credit: Alice Mollon

CAPITALISM IS a society obsessed with 'growth', which had a practical economic purpose at the close of the Middle Ages, but which today can be destructively anachronistic, and since it threatens the future of ourselves and of all fellow beings on Earth, it is understandable that there should be concern. Even if most are not aware that capitalism is the root cause today of ecological and biological destruction and endangerment, the concern of so many involved in activism of this or that kind is proof in itself that the myth of inherent human evil is nonsense. The trouble is that vast majority are imbued with a sense of helplessness.

People are appalled by famine, by poverty, by war, by pollution, by rampant curable disease, by violence of every kind, by the holocaust against fellow animals. Charities prosper as a result, as good people throw money at the situation — which in the end resolves nothing. Most who give money to charity too are imbued with passivity, hoping 'leaders' or 'experts' will do what needs to be done, and not knowing what that is. Such is the fear of taking destiny into one's hands — while a capitalist ideology of 'selfishness', though disproven by the average person's generosity in giving, has convinced them that co-operation to get something achieved is out of the question. 'Other

people don't care; only me; and I can't do anything about it.'

What concerns this or that person most?

*Pollution and ecological catastrophe?*

The accumulation of capital is the priority of capitalism. To survive in the capitalist marketplace costs must be cut and profits maximised. Promises and projects to check global destruction are up against capitalism's main goal. You want to end destruction whilst keeping intact a system which necessitates destruction and cannot do otherwise? Capitalism is by definition a system of growth — and can no more stop growing than a malignant tumour can.

*Famine?* Famine is as unavoidable under capitalism as it is solvable by world socialism. In a world which can easily feed the entire population many times over, the capitalists are obliged to burn tons of food they cannot sell — leaving millions to starve amid abundance.

*War?* You want to end war but keep the system which produces modern war intact? Built-in to capitalism is a competitive struggle between rival capitalists and states supporting them over markets, mineral resources, trade routes, investment outlets, and strategic areas to protect these. Capitalism rules the capitalists, not the other way around. They too would rather not be blown up,

but they are constrained by their own system, from which war is inseparable.

*Unemployment?* Capitalism's boom and slump cycle makes periodic unemployment necessary. The only way to be rid of unemployment is to abolish employment — i.e. abolish the wages system. Produce for use, not profit, and have free access for each to their needs, with the instruments of production available to everyone.

*Animal 'rights'?* The exploitation of fellow animals is just too profitable for capitalism. You want to end this exploitation but keep the system of universal exploitation intact?

*Racism? Sexism? Nationalism?* A humanity at war with itself is what defines a class society such as capitalism, under which the worker is alienated from their work. Alienated from one another as we are from the forces of production, we seek scapegoats, believe in myths, devour our pleasures, hate the world. You want to resolve this alienation while keeping intact the system which causes it?

## The alternative

We can have socialism, with industry, with technology, with all the comforts and bounty our history has made possible. We cannot go back, but we can go forward,



either sanely or insanelly. The latter is sadly the case at the present time, and will remain so while we sit passively, hoping 'they' — our capitalist masters — will 'do something about it.' They cannot. But we must.

It is time for the last ruling class to be toppled and absorbed by the rest of humanity. Then will a humanity that is finally in control of its own destiny consciously make decisions for its present and future.

The individual can then finally blossom, and the human race regain its place in nature — with all our fellow beings who, together with us, live upon and represent planet Earth.

In socialism the obstacle to the fulfilling of needs — the money economy — would be gone, so no one need go without.

Without the obstacle of money, necessary work which is now hindered through lack of money could go ahead, whether it is getting people fed, giving them what they need, projects of conservation, repairing damage caused by capitalism — what today charities and other organisations struggle with because of the obstacle of money.

Bearing in mind that socialism will only come about when a majority want it, then that majority would make it work. We would not be dealing with a helpless population waiting upon 'government' to do things for them, as is the case today, but with an active population knowing and enjoying the fact of themselves being society and of society belonging to them all.

Within socialism production and distribution will be organised to directly to meet needs, with most people happy and wanting to fulfil themselves by contributing their abilities and strengths for the common good, with all enjoying the respect of others for what they do. The labour time involved for each in satisfying the needs of a free society would be a fraction of what it is under wage-slavery, where one is exploited to create surplus value for a minority and where one has no stake in society as a whole. That would all be gone. In the same way as today people enjoy working in their garden or on their allotment, or creating art and doing fulfilling work of all kinds, so in socialism the whole world would be your 'garden'. All society would be your family. You wouldn't need money because everything would be free.

There would no longer be the dichotomy of alienation that we have today, with 'me and my family on one side of a wall, beyond which is the ugly world outside that is the rest of society.' The social animosity that is today's existence for most under capitalism would be gone.

A majority social revolution will have been made with majority enthusiasm, participation, and consciousness of kinship. The present 'strangers versus what is mine' would be gone.

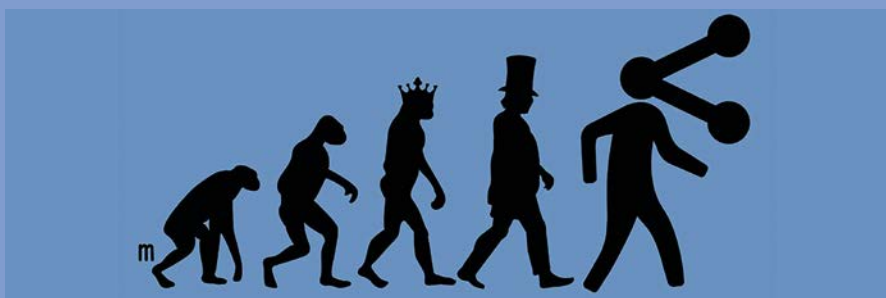
Capitalism has us believing if people had free access to stores there would be a mad free-for-all brawl, with people madly grabbing loads of stuff they don't need, stuffing themselves with food until they are throwing up, charging into houses to grab everything from each other, and ending up at each others' throats. This is the myth put out by our rulers that,

without them to hold us in check, we are all ravenous imbeciles. Then, how to explain all the co-operative voluntary work that people do even today?

With technology likewise emancipated, global needs can be fulfilled as well as regional ones, with regional 'councils' of people co-operating to meet needs over distances, getting together to enact projects, and — with technology freed from monetary restraints — even explorations beyond this planet.

**A.W.**

# Capitalism is not 'human nature'



CAPITALISM IS not humanity's natural condition but is a comparatively recent product of social and economic evolution. Just as the whole of human existence occupies but the last split-second of the history of life on Earth, so the entire history of class society, from priest-kingships through chattel slavery, through feudalism to capitalism occupies but the merest final split-second of human history. Far from being the expression of innate 'human nature', capitalism occupies the merest final two centuries — four at a stretch — of the entire history of class society.

For around 300,000 years, modern humans lived in a condition of communism, at one with themselves and with the Earth. Humans could not have survived without co-operation and mutual aid. Myths of paradise, of gardens of Eden, of golden ages have lived on, reflecting a vague awareness that 'something had changed' in humans' relationship with one another and with the natural world around them.

Unable to analyse this 'loss' scientifically and socio-historically until the nineteenth century with the coming of scientific socialist thought, the best among humans up until then could only

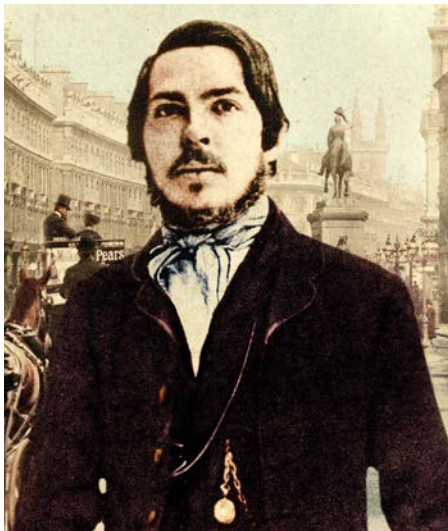
imagine the process religiously and in terms of utopia.

Up to now humans have made their history unconsciously and have struggled to make sense of it. The scientific socio-historical explanation is there now for them to see — yet most do not, because capitalism and reliance upon others to solve problems and think about things for them has conditioned them in passivity.

Neither is capitalism a 'conspiracy'. Capitalism, and class societies as a whole, do by definition encourage 'conspiratorial' behaviour, but they are historically, not 'conspiratorially', produced. It is the product of history, not of some plot. It entertains the myth of an evil human nature (Original Sin rehashed for the modern age.) The cut-throat values of capitalism have us believing in a human cut-throat nature in which everyone is a potential conspirator, a potential thief, a potential brigand. Thus a brigand's ideology leads them to see fellow beings as brigands, to be held in check.

Socialism restores, on the basis of modern technology, the classless and ruler-less relationships of the original communist condition of humanity.

# Communism as a practical alternative



UNLIKE MARX, Engels produced texts much more directly discussing communism. The first were two speeches in his home town Elberfeld in 1845, where he was trying to persuade good German burghers that communism (as socialism was then more generally known) was a good idea. While in them he describes how resources could be rationalised by everyone living in collective homes (showing that, while later protesting against utopianism, in his younger days he wasn't above a little bit of speculation). But they do show part of the practical bent of thinking about how things owned in common could encourage rationalisation and improvement of living conditions. As in this passage:

'if you think about this, you will find that human society has an abundance of productive forces at its disposal which only await a rational organisation, regulated distribution, in order to go into operation to the greatest benefit for all. After this you will be able to judge how totally unfounded is the fear that, given a just distribution of social activity, individuals would have to bear such a load of labour as would make it impossible for them to engage in anything else. On the contrary, we can assume that given this kind of organisation, the present customary labour time of the individual will be reduced by half simply by making use of the labour which is either not used at all or used disadvantageously.'

The context here is Engels noting that the institution of communism would see the abolition of many occupations and jobs created by the capitalist mode of production, which would mean that people could be freed up to do more directly productive work, and unemployment as such could be abolished.

As he noted:

'In communist society it will be easy to be informed about both production and consumption. Since we know how much, on the average, a person needs, it is easy to calculate how much is needed by a given number of individuals, and since production is no longer in the hands of private producers but in those of the community and its administrative bodies, it is a trifling matter to regulate production according to needs.'

This sounds very optimistic, but, as we shall see, he had some basis for this analysis. But note, here information is the key, and the information is knowing what the supply and the demand are, in advance, rather than discovering through the market place. In the first instance, he gives an extended example of getting a bale of cotton from the USA to Germany:

'Such a complicated way of transport is out of the question in a rationally organised society. To keep to our example, just as one can easily know how much cotton or manufactured cotton goods an individual colony needs, it will be equally easy for the central authority to determine how much all the villages and townships in the country need. Once such statistics have been worked out — which can easily be done in a year or two — average annual consumption will only change in proportion to the increasing population; it is therefore easy at the appropriate time to determine in advance what amount of each particular article the people will need — the entire great amount will be ordered direct from the source of supply; it will then be possible to procure it directly, without middlemen, without more delay and unloading than is really required by the nature of the journey, that is, with a great saving of labour power; it will not be necessary to pay the speculators, the

dealers large and small, their rake-off.'

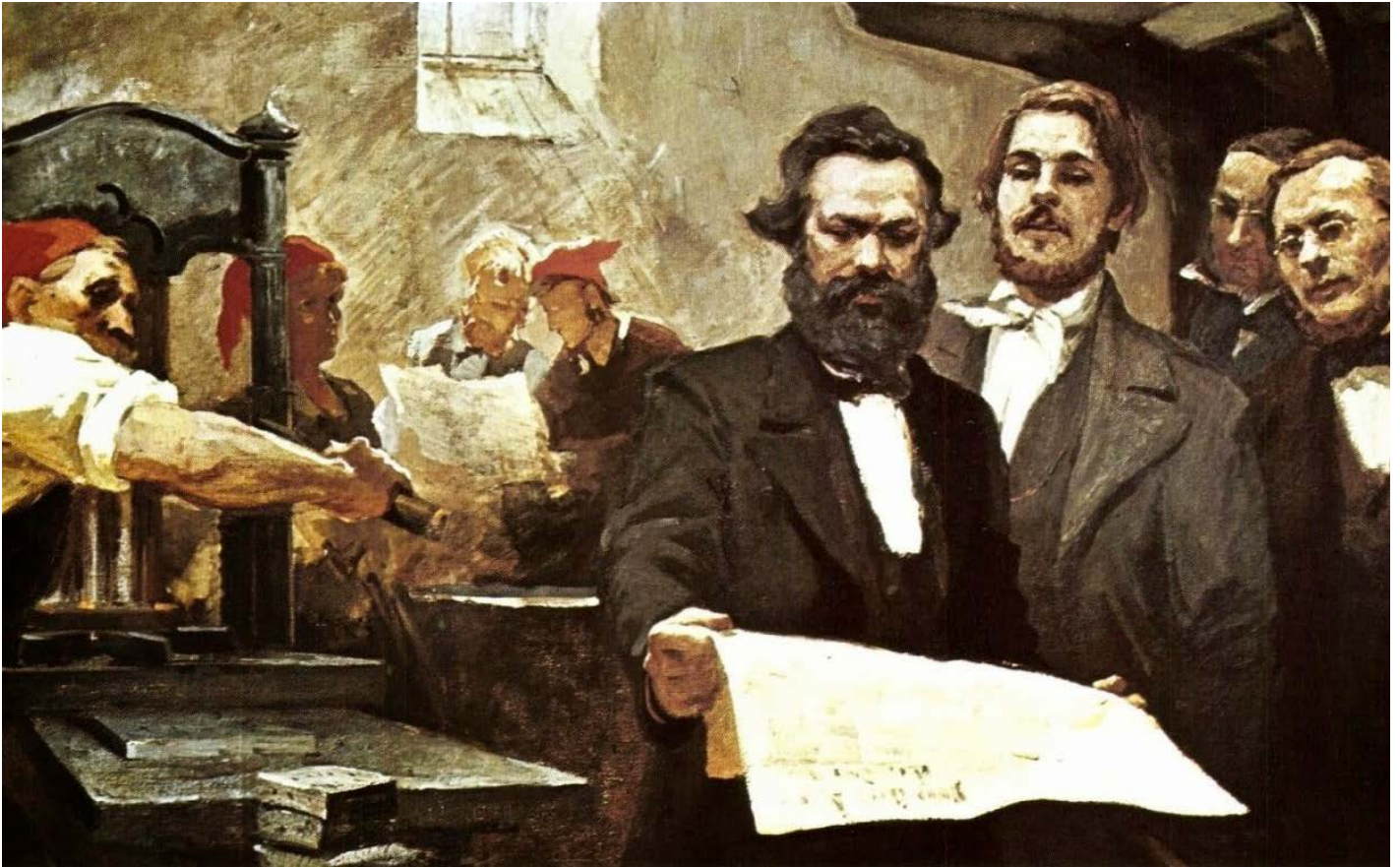
Indeed, he noted the middlemen would then be available for productive work. This text does talk of a central authority, but in terms of seeing statistics and book keeping as the basis for organisation, it seems of a piece with Marx's discussions. Note, also, the assumption of no economic growth separate from population growth.

If Engels seems a bit hand-wavy with his 'this will be easy' approach, it should be borne in mind that he wasn't just talking from abstract ideas, but with practical examples before his eye. In 1845 he published an article with the title 'Description of Recently Founded Communist Colonies Still in Existence' in which he affirmed 'communism, social existence and activity based on community of goods, is not only possible but has actually already been realised in many communities in America and in one place in England, with the greatest success' and that 'all communist colonies so far have become so enormously rich after ten or fifteen years that they have everything they can desire in greater abundance than they can consume.' The accuracy or otherwise of these descriptions is not the point here but that they show how Engels saw the actual practical structure of a communist society.

He began with a description of the Shaker communities of America, noting their religious character is not essential to their communal organisation:

'Each of these communities is a fine, well laid-out town, with dwelling houses, factories, workshops, assembly buildings and barns; they have flower and vegetable gardens, fruit trees, woods, vineyards, meadows and arable land in abundance; then, livestock of all kinds, horses and beef-cattle, sheep, pigs and poultry, in excess of their needs, and of the very best breeds. Their granaries are always full of corn, their store-rooms full of clothing materials, so that an English traveller who visited them said he could not understand why these people still worked, when after all they possessed an abundance of everything; unless it was that they worked simply as a pastime, having nothing else to do. Amongst these people no one is obliged to work





against his will, and no one seeks work in vain. They have no poor-houses and infirmaries, having not a single person poor and destitute, nor any abandoned widows and orphans; all their needs are met and they need fear no want.'

Note, again, the emphasis on abundance. This also relates to his observation that:

'In their ten towns there is not a single gendarme or police officer, no judge, lawyer or soldier, no prison or penitentiary; and yet there is proper order in all their affairs. The laws of the land are not for them and as far as they are concerned could just as well be abolished and nobody would notice any difference for they are the most peaceable citizens and *have never yielded a single criminal for the prisons.*'

The laws hadn't been abolished, but the conditions for their operation had been obviated. In terms of their practical organisation, Engels noted: 'They enjoy (...) the most absolute community of goods and have no trade and no money among themselves.' He quoted a traveller describing their society:

'The board of trustees keeps all the books and accounts in a public office, and the books are open for all members to see, as often as they choose. [...] each family has a separate domestic establishment and lives together in a large, handsome mansion; and *all get every article required, and as much as they want from the common stores of*

*the Society*, and without any payment. A deacon is appointed to each family, whose business is to see that all are provided with every thing they want, and to anticipate their wants as far as possible.'

Furthermore:

'The property of the Society is vested in the board of trustees, which consists of three persons, oversees the whole establishment, directs labour and carries on transactions with neighbours. They have no power to buy or sell any land without the consent of the Society. There are of course also foremen and managers in each department of labour; however they have made it a rule that *no commands are ever given by any one, but all are to be persuaded by kindness.*'

(It should be added that the 'families' of the shakers were arbitrary divisions, as their beliefs forbade marriage).

Engels also discussed the Owenite colony of Harmony in Hampshire. The description is similar to the American colonies, but he notes:

'...the members of the community were not the sole owners of the establishment, but were governed by the Directors of the Society of Socialists, to whom the establishment belongs, misunderstandings and dissatisfaction arose at intervals from this too. [...] these directors are chosen annually by the congress, to which each local Society sends a member, and they have full,

unrestricted powers within the Statutes of the Society, and are responsible to the congress. The community is thus governed by people who live outside it, and in these circumstances there cannot fail to be misunderstandings and irritations; but even if the experiment at Harmony were to fail in consequence of this and of financial problems, which however is not in the slightest degree in prospect, this would only be one further argument for community of goods, as these two difficulties have their cause only in the fact that the community has not yet been fully realised.'

This is an instructive observation when it comes to understanding Engels' notions of communism: the community of goods must be self-organised.

Hence, in his speeches at Elberfeld, he suggested that the community of goods would come about in different ways in different countries, even proposing that colonies such as Harmony might be the way to communism in England, and that different routes might be applied in France and Germany; it would be a conscious and fundamentally democratic decision. Although these colonies came in for a serious kicking in the *Communist Manifesto*, the point remains that they did serve as focal examples for Engels' understanding of how socialism could or would be run.

**PIK SMEET**

# Town and country

*The third and final part of our series on farming under capitalism and in a post-capitalist society of common ownership.*

THE CESSATION of capitalism will signify, amongst other things, the elimination of the enormous structural waste associated with this system. In other words, the elimination of all those numerous, often explicitly money-based, occupations that, whilst being required by (indeed, indispensable to) capitalism, do not in themselves perform any socially useful function whatsoever. They do not contribute in any meaningful way to the enhancement of human well-being. Minimally, we are talking about at least half (though some estimates are significantly higher) of the current workforce today no longer being required to do the work they currently do. In short, the replacement of capitalism by a post-capitalist society will liberate vast amounts of labour (and material resources) for socially useful production.

The implications of this for the future of farming are obvious. There can be little doubt that some of this labour will find its way into the agricultural sector of our future-post capitalist society. With the very idea of private ownership of the means of production (in this case, of agricultural land) becoming redundant, the break-up of large farms into more manageable and human-scale farming units will become possible. Along with this, the opportunities for farm work will be greatly expanded. Farms will then be able to more flexibly adapt their methods of farming to the new circumstances they find themselves in, unencumbered by the need to realise a profit through the sale of their produce.

In particular, the influx of more labour into this sector will enable it to transition to a more organically based and environmentally friendly, but also a more knowledge-based and productive, mode of farming. That, in turn, will transform the very nature of agricultural work into something more mentally stimulating and emotionally rewarding. The point being that all of these different facets of this farming model would be closely interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

It is quite true that, to an extent, organic farming, for instance is already being practised today. Nevertheless, it will always struggle to make inroads in an industry driven and dominated by the ruthless pursuit of profit at all costs. The tendency today is for agricultural land to become increasingly concentrated in fewer hands

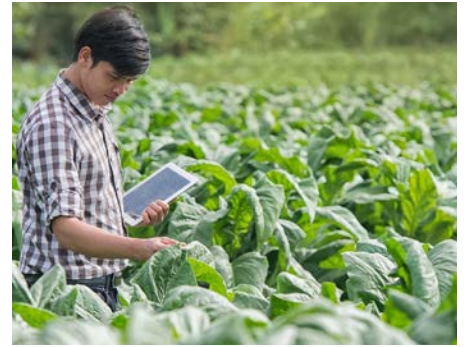
and this is what fundamentally militates against the large-scale application of organic methods even if it does not rule it out completely.

Organic farming, on a small scale, is arguably feasible as a way of supplying some niche market by charging premium prices to mainly better-off consumers who can afford to buy quality food – unlike, for instance, the growing numbers of people now dependent on food banks. This is not to dismiss organic farming as such – if we are able to consume authentically organic food (or, better still, grow our own) then so much the better. However, we need to be aware how the concept itself has all too often been cynically harnessed to the cause of ‘greenwashing’ capitalism.

The illusion is insidiously fostered that a gentler, kinder and more environmentally benign version of capitalism is entirely within our grasp. As consumers we are encouraged to believe that we are quite capable of bringing it into existence simply by dint of exercising our will and opening up our wallets. No need to politically or collectively organise to overthrow a fundamentally rotten system; it can be induced to reform itself through the informed decisions of individual consumers.

Here, yet again, we see how the individualistic ideology that capitalism nurtures in us surreptitiously shapes the political agenda in ways that shore up the very system itself. In the meantime, the marketing of our food continues unabated and, with it, the studied manipulation of images that all too often, belie the ugly reality of food production today: foodstuffs laced with chemicals or pumped with hormones, battery hens suffering under a cruel regime of factory farming and caged Scottish salmon being consumed alive by sea lice in what are euphemistically called ‘fish farms’.

As the saying goes, we are what we eat. Changing society must involve, amongst other things, changing how we go about producing the food that we eat. This is something most of us have little or no control over at the present time. For more and more of us our links with the land have long been severed in a world of exploding megacities. Huge, powerful corporations absolutely dominate each and every stage in the food supply chain – from the field to the supermarket shelf. But, apart from this, you cannot hope to change society – the way things are done today – without having some larger vision of what you would want to put it in its place. This unfortunately is what is conspicuously



lacking today.

Utopian though such a vision might seem from the vantage point today of our (apparent) collective helplessness and political impotence, it is indispensable to reaching some kind of coherent understanding of this world we live in – not to mention, deriving some sense of direction about the way forward. For the direction in which society is currently heading is clearly not one that is conducive to human happiness and well-being.

Part of that vision of an alternative future has to do with the kind of spatial reorganisation of human society that will be required to ensure the sustainable production of food at a level adequate to meet the nutritional needs of humanity in general. Concretely speaking, this hinges to some extent on overcoming or breaking down the distinction between the town and the countryside and addressing the vexed question of how to achieve some kind of suitable or healthy balance between them.

The built environment that is our towns and cities represents the embodied labour of many generations long gone – an enormous monument to human ingenuity. It is a legacy we should embrace, not abandon. Abandoning it would be as preposterous as it would be scandalously wasteful.

Healing the rift between the town and countryside has long been an aspirational goal of utopian thought. However, to be truly realisable and effective, it has to entail a two-way movement – not just some one-way ‘back to the land’ exodus from the towns precipitated by the break-up of large agricultural estates in the countryside itself or the implementation of measures to make farming more attractive and stimulating. We also need to be thinking in terms of ‘bringing the countryside into the towns’ themselves, so to speak, – through the reinvigoration and greening of urban land blighted by dereliction at the hands of urban speculators or by inappropriate and uninspiring urban ‘development’.

**ROBIN COX**

*Socialist Standard* May 2023



# Story time: **mystery** and meaning

WE ALL love a good story with its elements of drama, suspense, comedy and confrontation etc. – indeed it could be said that the telling of, and listening to, stories is one of the defining characteristics of our species. From the tales of Homer and Shakespeare together with the eponymous adventures of King Arthur, Robin Hood, Boewulf and El Cid to the modern-day myths of Batman and Superman, we indulge ourselves in this vicarious catharsis of courage and adventure. There seems to be a deep need in us to understand ourselves and our world in terms of a narrative containing elements of motive, origin, action and resolution. Typically, these events take place within a chronology which may last a day, a year, a lifetime, a century or even the entire span of our species together with the very universe itself! But can this need for stories give us a distorted view of our society and the natural environment within which it resides? May the projection of a narrative onto events sometimes actually prevent an understanding of them? Let us look at two of the most influential stories that have defined and informed human existence to explore their impact in terms of either harmful delusion or insightful truth.

For Europe, and then subsequently the rest of the world courtesy of imperialism, trade and cultural contact, two of the most enduring and powerful stories have been that of the 'Jesus Myth' and its antithesis: the evolution of reason and science. One emphasises a continual battle between the forces of good and evil where human nature remains constant while the other insists on a progression of our species in terms of moral, technological and rational characteristics. They both share unimaginably exotic origin stories

where either a capricious supernatural deity decides to create the universe or, as science has it, everything spontaneously exploded into existence courtesy of a 'big bang'. An equally dramatic resolution is also imagined in terms of a final conflict (Armageddon) for the Christians and a 'big Crunch' or an equally depressing slow death for the universe, if it were to keep expanding, for the cosmologists of science. Most of us attempt to understand our lives and our world in terms of either one or other (and sometimes in an uneasy combination) of these narratives. Of course, it may turn out that both of these stories are equally erroneous but it cannot be denied that they are incredibly imaginative and exciting. This isn't the place to go into the deep mystery of time itself but it is possible that a story or chronology of events might be purely an anthropological phenomenon which tells us little about reality. What does the story of socialism have to say about the two meta-narratives described above? It is undeniable that it shares some elements of both with its insistence on reason and the belief in progression which it shares with science but there is also an element of a final conflict with private property where the socialist revolution is somewhat reminiscent of the Armageddon of Christianity. The redemption of our species has obvious religious attributes although a socialist would argue that religion has obvious purely human roots.

The story of socialism (so far) begins with the 'communism' of prehistoric societies that lasted for many millennia until the invention of agricultural technology that produced a surplus of food which enabled, through its control and ownership, the rise of warrior elites

with the power to enslave the producers. The subsequent history of our species is concerned with the different elites that have relinquished and gained this power. Capitalism is the most recent of these incarnations of economic systems that enslave the majority producers and it is to overthrow this inequality and return humanity to its default communism that socialists have dedicated themselves. Formally the idealists considered the struggle to be primarily based on morality whilst today, after the discoveries of Marx, it is now considered as a class struggle. The narrative of history is at the very heart of socialist consciousness where the changing modes of production formulate our understanding of who we are and what is to be done. It is an overwhelmingly optimistic 'ideology' which, with the help of a Marxian perspective, transforms itself from being merely an idealistic hope into a coherent scientific and non-ideological narrative. It shares with both religion and science the need for a storyline.

Humanity has a deep-seated horror of chaos for many reasons: if everything is arbitrary then there is no possibility of control; that we live and die for no reason is intolerable and only stories seem to give existence any meaning; that all our knowledge is based on narrative illusions. But the danger is that in our need for meaning we have clung to destructive ideologies that have turned our beautiful world into a hell for many – clearly there are different types of narrative, some of which depend on evidence and others solely dependent on faith. Will our stories die when our species does or, for instance, do the laws of nature pre-exist us? Do at least some of our stories provide an insight into reality? Was Marx merely just another example of an Old Testament prophet and is science a kind of secular religion with its white-coated operatives being a new priesthood? Are stories examples of our yearning for a truth that will always evade us? Religion, science and socialism are stories we tell ourselves to help make some sense of it all – only you can choose which the relevant narrative for your life is. To socialists the suffering in life mainly stems from the capitalist mode of production and it therefore must be replaced by socialism. We have nothing to lose but our chains, so let's give it a try – whether or not the revolution will reveal the utility of grand narratives we cannot say. Until then we'll just have to embrace the mystery.

**WEZ**



# What do *you* think?

AS YOU wake in the morning, and go to sleep at night, and whatever dreams may come – so you are. The sum total of your experience. Likewise, we as a species are the sum total of our experience. There is a world beyond the senses, but we are only ever speaking of our experience of it.

We organise that experience in various ways, corresponding to (1) brain structure (2) the geometry of sharing ideas between ourselves, as well as (3) integrating it with past experiences that we already have.

There is no reason to make things more complicated than that. While we look at our life in this way and that way, from different aspects, it is all manipulating this whole. You can look at your world with the eyes of a child, of an old man or woman, or suppress your self-consciousness as the Eastern philosophers try to do and see yourself as an uncarved block, but it's all the same mind. We can create categories to better structure and further our experience, but they are just that – our categories, things that we made rather than things that we found, ways to organise our experience, and things that we may often have to re-evaluate and even overthrow. 'Reality' is not something that we find, but something that we manufacture.

**There is only pulling  
apart and better  
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experience, in cogitation  
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one might knead and  
pull apart dough while  
making bread.**

So while there are socialist theories – you can make as many theories as you like, all scientifically testing the data available – there isn't a philosophy, at least not in the conventional sense. There is only pulling apart and better reforming our experience, in cogitation and conversation, no more magically than one might knead and pull apart dough while making bread.

It would be folly of course, as we said, to think that there was no world beyond the senses. But it is simply not what we are talking about. Everything we think to say about the world, we say about ourselves. We are not gods, looking down upon our own creation. Instead, we come after the fact, back-seat drivers in an organism we will never truly know. We are dragged through the world as if through a thorn bush at midnight, and all we know of it is by examining our scratches and scars. Similarly, we interact with the world according to our own plan, like children on their backs making snow angels in the snow.

Animals evolve: they mutate, and then these mutations are tested against the world beyond the genome, with some prospering and some dying. In a similar way we simply value what we value, with modifications, and act accordingly. These values are then tested for fitness – do we prosper or suffer? – and modified, without ever being true except in their own terms, from the earliest human and probably far further back, up to today. It's like playing that old game Mastermind, where you guess what pattern of colours are behind the screen, except here when you lift the screen at the end of the game there is nothing to see.

## Dialectical thinking

You may by now be firmly grabbing the arms of your chair, testing for your thoughts to be real. You may even, as Samuel Johnson did, kick a stone to show how real your experience is. But these themselves are just more experiences, if in a certain category of experiences that we use to judge the whole. Not just touch: we have many. 'Seeing is believing'. 'I feel it in my gut'. 'It's beautiful'. 'It's mathematically pure'. 'It feels logical'. 'I experience the Divine'. All of these are so many ways of assuring ourselves that this concept rather than that is the right one, is somehow true. But they are no more or less substantial than the rest of our experience, except in that this is how we organise our experiences. Certainty is key to action: but wisdom lies always in doubt.

This is all that is meant by dialectical thinking. Instead of the commonplace model, of a world of objects viewed by an abstract Self with dreams and desires, for us all the parts of our experience are of the same kind. So for example, a factory is a brick building, a place where things

are made, where profit is made, where misery and boredom is experienced, and all are just looking at the same matter from different aspects. You cannot separate the things that a factory makes from the experience of being in it.

**There is a world beyond  
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Rather when we talk  
about iron, or a factory,  
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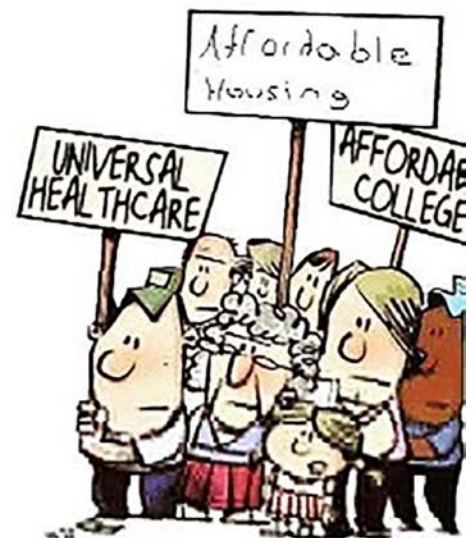
There is a world beyond the senses, but we are never talking about it. Rather when we talk about iron, or a factory, or railways, we have the sense of them being heavy, immovable and, in capitalism, not ours, but we should always remember that it is our experience that we are talking about, and that experience of mass is commensurate with the experience of boredom, of misery, of lost love, of a daytime life from schoolroom to factory to office spent trapped inside out of the sunlight. In capitalism we treat commodities as substantial, and the horror of their production as ephemeral. This commonsensical attitude is the capitalist attitude, the attitude of objectification, that makes us credit what seems heavy and dismiss what seems light. It is the alienation that makes us dismiss our feelings in production, our whole, real lives, and only pursue them in the time granted us to wallow in sentimentality in our soap operas, our fictional lives, before bed.

The socialist revolution lies in the healing of this wound.

## Alienation

It is our current, capitalist – or rather, private property – society, that demands that we think in this more complex manner. As the means of life are denied us, we are not only deprived, we are





alienated from those aspects of our lives. Any organic relationship between our society, our labour, and the things of life and of enjoyment, is now ruptured – part of our world is made violently inaccessible to us, by a group of people alien to us. As that loss becomes timeworn, and children are born to the alienated world, that situation ceases to be a wrong and becomes a social fact – alienation becomes objectification. And the organic world of both social relations and the means of life, that had been violated, becomes divided into things without persons and persons without things. The Self is established and reinforced, as an isolated person devoid of means and of relations, as the afterimage of a world of commodities.

Because this is the most fiendish aspect of capitalism. What is objectified from us is not a thing, distant in space. It is a portion of our own self. Our minds, objectified, are sliced into a myriad pieces, all with owner's marks and price tags on them, all but the bleeding remnant of the Self, which is defined by its dismemberment much as a torso is defined by amputation, and then hyper-sentimentalised by the very lack of its real object. We live as starveling lodgers in our own skulls. Capitalism's daily violations leave constant fresh scars on the psyche, while the world we inherited from our parents is endured as a dull wound.

And cruelty on cruelty, we are offered a way back, on an offering of servitude and pain, to reunite with our lost world, but not as a living thing, only a possession, the commodity – much as some eunuchs would keep their testicles, mournfully, in a separate box.

**Our feudal lords at least had taste, and took the best of what we all desired: but the value of a capitalist's goods lies mainly in the lost lives of those who produced it, with its practical value as a distant echo.**

Companionship is replaced by the television and the internet. Security is replaced by rent paid – this month. And feelings turn in on themselves, finding outlets wherever they may. In the end, the old die alone. And whereas we started

by producing existing values, such as bread and clothes, by valuing them in part according to the misery involved in their production, now that misery is much of what we produce, and what the rich consume. Our feudal lords at least had taste, and took the best of what we all desired: but the value of a capitalist's goods lies mainly in the lost lives of those who produced it, with its practical value as a distant echo.

So while the Self is the starting point for capitalist philosophy, it is not a real start, it is the end point of the capitalist process, of the immiseration process of history to date. It is the internalisation of the class struggle, at the point that it has already been lost, accepting this butchering of the human soul as a precondition for thought itself. Rejecting this start point, demanding the end of a condition where one's own experience is infinitely fragmented and one must go to war with all others in order to regain those objects, even those relations, with force or with money – this is the start point for any revolutionary position. And this is why we are dialectical, because we merely wish to think like human beings and not these one-sided and broken creatures. As Marx put it, the revolutionary cry is 'I am nothing and should be everything!'.

The revolutionary emotion is shame.

**SJW**

# What the market will bear

Some people think that businesses can fix at will the price of what they sell. Among them, it seems, is the Governor of the Bank of England. After announcing on 23 March an increase in the Bank rate to 4.25 per cent, Andrew Bailey asked business to 'please' not increase their prices. As the headline in the Guardian the next day reported, 'Bank of England boss urges firms to hold back price rises or risk higher rates'. His argument was that 'if all prices try to beat inflation we will get higher inflation' and that, if that happened, the Bank would have to increase the Bank rate to an even higher level.

It may seem surprising that the Governor of the Bank of England should not understand how businesses operate, but then finance is a bit isolated from the real world of production. Patrick Hosking, the Financial Editor of the Times, was particularly scathing in his column on 28 March:

'Surely, when first introduced to an economics textbook, Bailey learnt that firms are not driven by altruism or patriotism but by market forces and profit? They will charge what the market will bear. If possible,

they will go further, ever on the lookout for, in Adam Smith's immortal phrase, "some contrivance to raise prices." It's a boardroom instinct as natural as breathing. While modern-day corporations have to consider many stakeholders, they still see their prime duty over the long run to maximise profits for the shareholders'.

In other words, if they can increase prices without jeopardising sales and so profits they will; otherwise, they won't. It all depends on market conditions for what they are selling. Hoskins reckoned that for the time being the market for most goods can still 'bear' a price increase. But this might not necessarily continue:

'Until businesses see more capitulation by their customers, the price escalation will go on. Businesses will stop lifting their prices only if enough customers defect to competitors, trade down to cheaper lines or find near-substitutes. Or stop buying at all. For the poorest households, this has happened already'.

There is some evidence that people have been trading down, buying in Tesco and Sainsbury's instead of Waitrose, or else in Lidl

and Aldi instead of Tesco and Sainsbury's. So, if prices do stop rising so much this will not be because Bailey's plea was listened too, but because the limits of 'what the market will bear' would have been reached.

This, incidentally, explains why businesses cannot automatically pass on a wage increase. Sometimes they can, but sometimes they can't. It depends on market conditions.

In any event, businesses can't cause inflation in the proper sense of the term — a rise in the general price level due to a depreciation of the currency — but Bailey wasn't using the word in that sense but in the simplistic sense in which it has come to be widely used of an increase in the consumer price index. An increase in the price at which businesses sell consumer goods and services, for whatever reason, will cause an increase in 'inflation' in that sense because it will cause the index to go up. But that's by definition. And, equally by definition, if businesses don't increase their prices then there won't be 'inflation'. So Bailey was calling on businesses not to increase prices so that prices don't increase. How very profound.



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 a table-top game night, exclusive publication, exhibition and bookstall.

## The Socialist Party's Summer School 21 - 23 July 2023 Birmingham

Talks include:

Work: Paid and Unpaid - Howard Moss  
The Mysteries of the Pyramids - Bill Martin  
AI and the Future of Work - Paddy Shannon  
And a talk by Richard Field

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 17 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/](http://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](mailto:spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk).



# Flat Broke



Since 1953, BBC One's *Panorama* has been unearthing problems in society, but as it's part of the mainstream media we shouldn't expect it to dig deep enough to reach the root cause of inequalities and inadequacies. In *What's Gone Wrong With Our Housing?*, reporter Richard Bilton aims to explain how our current housing crisis has happened, but focuses on the role of legislation rather than more fundamental factors about why the housing market is as it is.

Bilton visits the Bampton Estate in the part of south London overseen by Lewisham Council. Its tower blocks and streets were built in the 1960s as part of a drive to replace dilapidated slums, with its 290 properties initially being owned and managed by the local authority. Then, one of Margaret Thatcher's flagship policies, The Housing Act 1980, expanded the rights of council tenants to buy their properties at a discounted amount. Since the Act was introduced, 2.8 million council homes have been sold off in the largest privatisation initiative we've seen, according to Rachael Williamson of the Chartered Institute of Housing. For some people, buying from the council didn't lead to the freedom they expected. Properties in tower blocks tend to be leased rather than sold outright, meaning that the council retains ownership and control of the building itself. A consequence of this for Bampton Estate leaseholders Anthony and Gloria is that Lewisham Council imposed new windows on them at a cost of £27,000 which they can't afford.

Around 40 per cent of former council homes in London are now owned (or mortgaged) not by those who live in them but by private landlords. Avril, who bought and then sold one of the flats on the Bampton Estate returns to see what it looks like now it's owned and rented out by a private landlord. She's shocked to see

that the flat has been divided into six tiny bedsits, their tenants each being charged a whopping £960 rent a month to live in what used to be the bathroom or the kitchen. Bilton confronts dodgy landlord Joel Zwiebel who with his wife owns 24 bedsits on one road and receives around quarter of a million in rent a year. Most of this rent is paid through benefit payments by the council which sold the properties off, ironically. Rather than explaining about his substandard properties Zwiebel drives off in his car without saying anything. Lord Best of the Affordable Housing Commission says that the current situation is 'an absolute disgrace', with the right-to-buy legislation leading to a return of 'slum landlords' profiteering.

The housing shortage benefits private landlords because it means there are lots of people hunting for places to live, so landlords have more choice over who to let to and can charge high rents knowing that someone will pay. Rent amounts for private sector properties tend to be greater than the maximum amounts which can be claimed in housing-related benefits, pricing out many people without sufficiently paid employment. Landlords like Zwiebel can easily find tenants because their properties are cheap enough to have rent covered by benefits, with shoddiness being almost expected.

People on lower incomes are likely to aim not for private rented properties but 'social housing', such as that owned by councils, which tends to have lower rent and more secure terms. But local authorities haven't been building enough new properties to replace those they have sold off, leading to a dire shortage of social housing stock. Some properties on the Bampton Estate remain council-owned. Bilton speaks to one council tenant who waited two years after reporting mould and only managed to get some

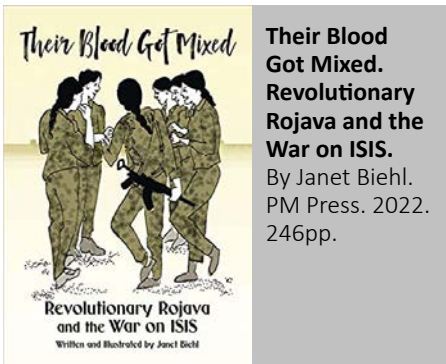
plasterboard replaced after he got a solicitor involved. In 2022, Lewisham Council had a budget of a million pounds for repairs but almost three quarters of this went on legal fees and compensation, leaving not much money to spend on actual maintenance.

Most of the properties on the Bampton Estate which weren't sold off privately are held not by the council but by the L&Q housing association. Housing associations represent the other kind of social housing, not being run to make profits for themselves. According to the English Housing Survey, they are responsible for around two and a half million properties in England, a million more than councils. Housing associations were intended to be more reactive and flexible than councils, to better manage estates in the interests of their residents. Over the decades, though, the original model of the small-scale community-based housing association has been replaced by larger, more corporate organisations such as L&Q, which is the second biggest housing association in the country. Of its 51 residents on the Bampton Estate, 11 said they were unhappy with how it operates, especially its repairs service. Tenants have reported damp and mouldy flats and waited years for a resolution.

Bilton says that 1980's right-to-buy legislation has 'fragmented the estate between tenant and owner'. It's true that the Housing Act triggered a decrease in 'social housing', and that ownership of homes on any estate is a complicated mix of owner-occupiers, leaseholders, and tenants of councils, housing associations or private landlords. But even if the Act hadn't been passed, there would still be a divide between tenant and owner. The 'social housing' model hasn't proved itself to be necessarily better than the private rented sector, as demonstrated by the council and housing association tenants putting up with run-down properties. As always, more investment and new legislation are promised, but never end up solving the problems. Being an owner-occupier isn't an ideal solution either, as it means decades of debt alongside the responsibility and cost of maintenance. So, the real problem isn't the 'right to buy' legislation, it's how properties are owned in capitalism. When ownership is based on who has the wealth to buy a legal right, what people need for a decent life becomes much less important. Money's rationing of resources means that there's never enough to keep homes to a decent standard. 'The system isn't working' says Bilton, but it's just as fair to say that the system is working in the expected way.

**MIKE FOSTER**

## Graphic Novel



**Their Blood Got Mixed. Revolutionary Rojava and the War on ISIS.**  
By Janet Biehl.  
PM Press. 2022.  
246pp.

‘Rojava’ (the Kurdish for ‘West’) is the name given by Kurdish nationalists to an area of Northeast Syria largely inhabited by Kurds but also home to Arabs and Assyrian Christians. It is the western part of their aimed-at state of Kurdistan, incorporating areas from Iran in the east, through Iraq and Turkey to Syria in the west, where the majority population is Kurdish-speaking. It is a de facto independent region of Syria, always threatened but not controlled by Turkey and the Syrian government. Currently it is controlled by the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party), a vanguard party led by Abdullah Ocalan.

In prison in Turkey (where he still is) Ocalan read and was impressed by the ‘communitarian’ ideas of American social theorist, Murray Bookchin. Bookchin, who was also the long-term partner of Janet Biehl, the author of this book, developed the idea that the basic unit of society should be a decentralised, face-to-face participatory democracy, which he called ‘municipalism’, practising ‘community support and solidarity’ as opposed to the way ‘capitalism has organised society for competition and manipulation’. The PKK adopted this policy for local decision-making while keeping a firm hand on major political decisions and its militia.

Biehl explains, in a chapter entitled ‘Why I’m Here’, how she first visited the region in 2014 and was attracted to it by its claim to be putting into practice Bookchin’s ‘communitarian’ vision. She carried on visiting the region, most recently in 2019, and it is on her personal experiences and knowledge of the region that she gained over her visits that much of this book is based.

The system of district and local councils there is often held up as a model of democratic co-operative organisation by those seeking an alternative both to authoritarian centralised rule and capitalist democracies of one kind or another. The region has since been subject to aggression, sometimes savage, as by Islamic State forces, and by the Turkish military, who have effectively taken over part of the region spreading death and destruction. Despite this, it survives as a kind of communitarian experiment, but

constantly teetering on the edge and, as someone has put it, ‘trapped within a spider web of competing Great Powers and local powers’.

Biehl has made a brave effort to make sense of this by producing what is termed a graphic novel (though it is not a novel in the normal sense of fiction or imagined reality) which seeks to represent, in art work, commentary and ‘word bubbles’, the history, social organisation and way of living of the multi-ethnic groups that co-exist and intermingle (hence the sub-title ‘Their Blood Got Mixed’) in this small border area. She does this in a way that displays her admiration for these people while at the same time not being afraid to show the downsides, often bloody, of the path they have taken. A selection of the titles of the 15 chapters into which the book is divided gives an idea of the areas she covers: Islamic State, A Place of Refugees, Women and Men, Economics, Security, Social Ecology, Democracy, Self-Administration.

Her book illustrates both some of the most disturbing things that have happened to the people of the region, part of which she refers to as ‘the long tortured history of Kurds in the Middle East’. But she also describes, with obvious enthusiasm, some of the most positive and optimistic sides of what she considers they have established. So while, for example, on the one hand a piece of her graphic art pictures an ISIS soldier saying ‘The Koran says it’s permitted to take non-Muslim women and girls captive and rape them’, on the other she vividly brings out the joy experienced by the city of Raqqa at being liberated from the terror of the IS caliphate. She also details the suffering of the region’s people when the Turkish army invaded parts of it in 2018 but at the same time waxes rather lyrical about its system of citizens’ assemblies, committees and regional councils and extols Ocalan’s call for ‘gender equality, a cooperative economy, and ethnic and religious inclusiveness’. Yet even the positive side is complex and she is at pains not to portray it without flaws. She expresses a certain degree of doubt about the claim she hears that ‘our revolution is ecological, stateless and of women’, and it is not hard for the reader to join with her in questioning this given that without exception the women we see in her pictures are wearing hijabs, refer to those who’ve died in the fighting there as ‘martyrs’ and seem steeped in religious belief. She also wonders about the reality of the claims that ‘leadership here gets no special treatment ... everyone is a link in the chain’, and recognises that the Bookchin model of a decentralised ‘face-to-face democracy’ and ‘an ecological

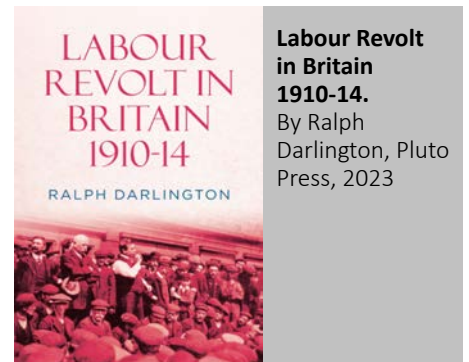
society based on non-hierarchical relations’ may not be being followed as closely as she would like it to be.

A socialist would add that society in the region continues to use a money economy, markets (even though called ‘cooperative markets’) and buying and selling, which are the very essence of the wider capitalist system, and so does not merit the title ‘revolutionary’. So even if the author sees it as a kind of haven attempting to practice ‘communitarian’ principles, it is nevertheless trapped within the capitalist system and forced to rely on ‘protection’ from outside by coercive state regimes at war with one another. Like all other attempts to ‘go it alone’ in the capitalist world, its survival is perilous to say the least.

Small-scale attempts at establishing anything even slightly different (eg, the abolition of money and trade and ‘free consumption’ in some Republican communities during the Spanish Civil War and the ‘horizontal’ social and economic organisation of the Zapatistas in 20th century Mexico) are ultimately likely to fail. For socialists, in fact, as long as the capitalist world system exists, there can be no ‘islands of socialism’. No matter what the wishes or intentions or, no matter how sincere the participants are, eventually the logic and demands of the capitalist state system will prevail.

**HKM**

## Labour Revolt



**Labour Revolt in Britain 1910-14.**  
By Ralph Darlington, Pluto Press, 2023

The period of strikes between 1910 and 1914 was known at the time as the ‘Labour Unrest’. Darlington says that it should rather be described as the ‘Labour Revolt’. Miners, railway workers, dock workers, and many others were involved in bitter strikes, some accompanied by rioting when the police protected ‘blacklegs’ that the employers brought in to try to keep production going. The army was called in too. Workers were killed, either shot by soldiers or beaten by the police, in Belfast (2), Liverpool (2), Tyneside (1), Llanelli (2) and Dublin (2).

Darlington discusses possible reasons for the revolt. Wanting to be treated with more respect will have been an element as he suggests but the rise in the cost of living

*Socialist Standard* May 2023



which eroded real living standards will have been the most important.

The bogey for the capitalist press was 'syndicalism'. Darlington brings out that what was called this was a practice rather than a doctrine and was a revolt against trade union officialdom as much as against employers. He notes that the number of paid union officials had increased faster than the number of union members. These officials prioritised union recognition by employers to negotiate agreements but these involved commitments not to strike without first going through conciliation procedures. An element of 'syndicalism' was workers insisting that their union's officials be their servants and not do deals over their heads; they wanted employers to be treated as the class enemy rather than mere bargaining partners. It was essentially militant trade unionism.

There were doctrinaire syndicalists who advocated more than this and saw the objective as the workers eventually, through 'direct action' and a general strike, taking over and running the industries in which they worked. But there can't have been many activists and strikers who took this seriously or who thought it realistic to expect the government to stand by and let this happen when it even intervened to hinder the ordinary trade union struggle. Most activist workers knew that political action was also necessary; indeed the demand for worker representation in Parliament was another feature of the wider period.

Darlington criticises the SDP (as the SDF became in 1908 and then in 1911 the BSP) for insisting on the need to gain control of political power before taking over the means of production and so regarding the trade union struggle as 'secondary'. But, in a footnote towards the end of the book, he criticises syndicalism because 'it did not explicitly address the problem of how a revolutionary general strike to establish workers' control would overcome the state monopoly of armed force in defence of the capitalist economic and social order', adding 'it did not consider the question of the conquest of political power'.

He also discusses the position of the De Leonist SLP and criticises its 'doctrinaire and sectarian' view that workers should form revolutionary unions to oppose the existing unions. This doctrine, known as 'dual unionism', was also embraced by the IWW and some syndicalists. Other syndicalists favoured staying in the existing unions and trying to make them more democratic and militant.

One contemporary group whose views he does not discuss is the SPGB. There is a single mention, to say that George Hicks, the national organiser of

the Operative Bricklayers' Society, was a founder member. E. J. B. Allen, one of the doctrinaire syndicalists he cites on a number of occasions, was also a founder member, though Darlington has him as a founder member of the SLP. There can be no justification for discussing the views only of the SLP but not the SPGB which was probably slightly larger and was active in more places.

The *Socialist Standard* of the time covered all of the big strikes discussed by Darlington (and one he doesn't — the 1911 London printers' strike). The September 1911 issue carried a detailed 4,600 word editorial on the failed 1911 railway workers strike under the title "Strikers Struck. How the Railway Servants were betrayed" which argued that the strikers should have given priority to demanding the release of all imprisoned strikers and improved hours and wages rather than to the 'recognition' of union officials as negotiators, and concluded:

'The most they may snatch from the ashes of their ruined hopes is the lesson that, whether on the industrial or the political field, their struggles must be grounded upon democracy. Their position must be democratic, their methods must be democratic, their weapons must be democratic. Even under capitalism democracy is no empty word, and its first interpretation is that the representative is the servant, not the leader. Had the railwaymen given this reply to their so-called leaders when the latter sent the fatal message: "All men must return to work immediately," they would not now be chewing the cud of their disappointment, marvelling at the difference between recognition of the unions and recognition of their officials, and wondering if they had not better set about making the unions (which appear to consist of the officials) recognise the men.'

As to the syndicalists and other anti-parliamentarians:

'The final lesson, and the greatest of all, is to be found in the crushed hopes of the Industrialists, the Syndicalists, the Anarchists. These claim that the means of production must be seized in the teeth of the armed forces; the Socialists hold that the preliminary must be to get control of the armed forces by capturing the machinery of government.'

The 1912 strike in the London docks was dealt with in the August issue under the title "Dockers Betrayed" which made the same point regarding union officials. The failure of the rail union leaders to support sympathetic strike action to help the locked-out (by an Irish Nationalist employer) Dublin transport workers was covered in the January 1914 issue under

the title "Sold Again". The August 1911 issue included an eye-witness account, and experience, of police brutality in Manchester (all these articles can be found here: [www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/standard-index-1910s/](http://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/standard-index-1910s/)).

What the articles show is that the SPGB didn't conform to the left-wing calumny that it is 'anti-trade union'. What it was against was not to workers forming unions or even appointing officials but to the control of unions and of struggles over wages and working conditions by officials who regarded themselves as the leaders rather than the servants of their members. It was for democratic organisation of workers to wage the struggle against employers, even if this was indeed 'secondary' to the need to gain control of political power. And it opposed 'dual unionism', working within the existing unions.

It is only on the last but one page that Darlington reveals that he supports 'the Bolshevik doctrine of a revolutionary vanguard party', though this could have been guessed from his earlier analysis that what was lacking in the period was the right leadership.

Nevertheless, the book does usefully describe in detail and analyse the national and local strikes of the period, including those by women workers. It will obviously be on the reading list for anyone studying or interested in the period.

ALB

## Past Imperfect



**The Utopians:  
Six Attempts  
to Build the  
Perfect Society.**  
By Anna Neima.  
Picador £10.99.

The bloodshed of the First World War led many people to think anew about how society should be structured. One particular example of this was the development of 'utopian' communities, designed to show that people could live differently, in a more communal and contented way. Two kinds of such a community are surveyed here. One is spiritual or religious (a commune run by Gurdjieff near Paris, the Bruderhof in Germany, and Trabuco College in California, which in fact did not start until the Second World War). The other is characterised rather vaguely as encouraging 'complete self-actualization' (Dartington Hall in Devon, a community set up by Tagore in

India, and one in Japan). They inspired and influenced each other. In many cases, there was no real blueprint as to how the community would function.

Some were set up by wealthy people, such as Tagore and the founder of Dartington Hall. Others struggled financially: Gurdjieff's, for instance, could never feed itself and had to raise money in the US. Another problem was that many were notionally democratic but in practice not. Tagore, for instance 'often behaved in an aristocratic, even dictatorial fashion'. At Dartington Hall, the founders lived in luxury, while the farm labourers lived more frugally. Unsurprisingly perhaps, most of the communities failed to survive for more than a couple of decades. Tagore's was taken over by the Indian state, Dartington Hall is mainly a wedding and conference centre, and the location of Trabuco College is now a Hindu monastery.

It is the Bruderhof where the original vision has endured best. Founded in 1920, its residents had no private property, with possessions owned by the community as a whole. The daily routine involved long hours of work, whether in the fields or in the printing shop that brought in much-needed funds. However, it was certainly not 'a lived example of radical socialism',

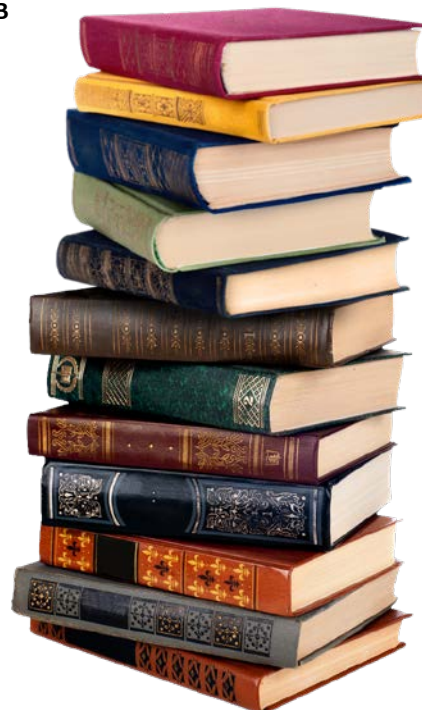
as Neima suggests. From 1930 onwards, it was influenced by the Hutterite religious community in the US, which among other points meant a new dress code, including ankle-length dresses for women and a kerchief over their hair. The Hutterite link no longer holds, but more generally, there was a pretty reactionary attitude to women, who basically cooked, cleaned and raised the children. The original Bruderhof was shut down by the Nazis in 1937. A settlement still exists in Sussex: when Neima visited, she spoke to a teenage girl who missed her family in the US, but 'you go where the community sends you', which sounds considerably less than perfect.

William Morris is mentioned a few times as an influence on some of those who propounded these communities. In fact he criticised attempts along such lines (made by Robert Owen, for instance) as 'withdrawals from the Society of the day, really implying hopelessness of a general change' (see a review in the August 2019 Socialist Standard). In 1844, Friedrich Engels examined various 'communist colonies' then in existence and concluded interestingly that 'the people who are living communally live better with less work, have more leisure for the development of their minds, and

that they are better, more moral people than their neighbours who have retained private property'.

Anna Neima provides an informative study of these utopian communities, with some interesting observations. They are not socialism in miniature, but they do show that accepting the rat race of capitalism is not the only way to live.

PB



## 50 Years Ago

# Black Liberation – George Jackson and Political Violence

GEORGE JACKSON'S crime was not that he complied in the theft of 70 dollars, but that in prison he could not accept the ignominious terms on which the authorities might have released him. For this crime he was imprisoned for eleven years, seven-and-a-half in solitary confinement, and eventually in August 1971, shot to death.

In prison, in spite of the limitations of his personal background, Jackson began to read seriously, gradually seeking an explanation for the forces, social and historical, underlying his plight. Eventually, he devoured such left-wing and Marxist literature as he could get hold of. Jackson did not become a Socialist. It is doubtful whether his views would fit neatly into any political category. He became an inspiration to the civil rights movement in America, and also to the Black Power movement. Although there is much that is perceptive in Jackson's views as expressed in *The Prison Letters of George Jackson*, his understanding of economic relationships and social and political institutions, fall short of a Socialist understanding. If George Jackson was anything, he was a black nihilist.

Jackson claimed to be opposed to capitalism. "The principal enemy must be isolated and identified as capitalism. Our enemy



at present is the capitalist system and its supporters." However, closer analysis would show that in fact what Jackson was opposed to was American-style private enterprise. Jackson sympathized with China and the emerging African states. So he ignored the fact that capitalism is a world mode of production where the means of wealth production are monopolized and controlled either by private owners or a political bureaucratic élite. (...)

Jackson considered that political democracy was a fraud. "Of what value is quasi-political control if the capitalists are allowed to hold on to the people's whole mode of subsistence?" He believed in leadership and elevated violence. "The people who run this country will never let us succeed to power. Everything in history that was of any value was taken by force."

There is no doubt that if in some time of crisis Jackson's views on leadership and violence became practical action, this would lead to disaster. It would compound crisis with death and violence with no possible hope of getting anywhere towards Socialism. (*Socialist Standard*, May 1973)



# 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.

## MAY 2023 EVENTS

### World Socialist Movement online meetings

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

**Sunday 14 May 10. 00 (GMT + 1) Zoom**  
Central Online Branch Meeting

**Friday 5 May 19.30 (GMT + 1) Zoom**

What are you going to do to escape the coronation?

**Friday 12 May (GMT + 1) Zoom**

**Did You See the News?**

Discussion on recent subjects in the news

Host: Dougie Mclellan

**Friday 19 May 19.30 (GMT + 1) Zoom**

Discussion. Topic to be announced

**Friday 26 May 19.30 (GMT + 1) Zoom**

Discussion opened by Steve Finch.

### Socialist Party

### Physical Meetings

**GLASGOW • Friday 12th May 12 noon**

Glasgow University Campus for Leafletting. Followed by Social at The Aragon Bar, 31 Byres Rd, Glasgow (West End). For further information call Paul on 07484 717893.

**MANCHESTER • Saturday 20 May, 2pm**

**Talk on 'Degrowth'**

Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, City Centre.

Economic growth is a central aspect of capitalism, but it has drastic consequences for the environment. In contrast, the idea of degrowth envisages a world with far less use of energy and resources. In this talk we will ask whether degrowth is possible within capitalism, and what its implications are for a socialist world based on production for use.

**BURFORD • Saturday 20 May 10.30am to 4.30pm**

**Levellers' Day**

Warwick Hall, Church Lane, OX18 4RY

The Socialist Party will have a stall at this event.

**LONDON • Sunday 21 May 3pm**

**Who Owns the World?**

Speaker: Adam Buick

Preceded by street stall at noon and London branch meeting at 2pm. Socialist Party Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, London SW4 UN

**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).



## 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.

# Winners and losers

'I WAS drunk when I wrote the messages below and I apologize for the troll-like nature of my comments', wrote Pete from Texas, USA, after filling in the Socialist Party's online membership questionnaire (<https://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/membership-application/>) and receiving a reply from me. I was impressed by his confession and therefore happy to carry on the conversation with him and respond to the further, apparently sober comments he was now making.

Previously he had written such things as 'socialist experiments end with a substantial portion of the population sent off to death camps', 'the idea of no one being in charge and no money, and free goods and services means no wealth will be generated' and 'the party is a direct competitor to religion, as it takes a profound level of religious belief and suspension of rational capacity to convince yourself you actually believe what you say you believe and, when a Christian tells me that they believe Jesus ACTUALLY walked on water, I see the same glossy eyed intellectual vapidity I see when a socialist blathers on about the idiocy of your platform.' Strong and some of it pretty insulting stuff, even if written in an alcoholic haze. However, having apologised and said he appreciated the far more respectful way in which his points had been answered, Pete then went on to make, in several exchanges – and respectfully this time – a number of further points.

He made no bones about the fact that he was a supporter of capitalism, especially of the 'Nordic' type, since he saw it as 'capable of producing innovation and improving quality of life for the vast majority of the population'. With regard to the moneyless, wageless world system that we view as socialism, he did not see how 'a relatively modern society can exist without money and with free goods and services', since how would we know what needed to be produced and how that would be organised? And what if people wanted more than could be produced? So he wondered whether we were proposing a return to 'a pre-technology society ... working together in small groups, sharing with each other, having a leader that was chosen due to respect and ability'. He asked further: 'How

would the democratic process work in a moneyless, wageless, marketless society?' And he also stuck by the idea in his previous message that 'USSR's invasion of Afghanistan, China's Great Leap Forward, The Killing Fields of Cambodia, etc have to be regarded as examples of socialism' and 'resulted in the MOST extreme humanitarian disasters of the 20th century'. He went on: 'My argument is that when such systems are implemented, reality very quickly proves that they don't work. But the people involved are religious zealots to the cause and as such refuse to believe that their theory is the cause of the failure...In the end, the Marxists put on their own version of the Spanish Inquisition.'

In response to these entirely pertinent questions, I first made it clear that, while we might agree that 'Nordic-style capitalism' is arguably relatively benign as the system goes, it's still based on money, buying and selling and the market and so has absolutely nothing whatever to do with what we are advocating. Nor were we advocating 'living off the land'. In fact, we saw socialism as a world that would use the advanced technology developed by capitalism to give a decent comfortable life to everyone – something that capitalism fails to do. This would be possible because production would not be based on the profit imperative as at present but on human need, which would cut out much of the wastefulness of capitalism (administration of the money system, competitive production, weapons of war, etc.) as well as eliminating the insecurity of working for a wage to stay alive, the need to compete with our fellow human beings in myriad ways and the enmity between peoples living in different parts of the planet.

But what if, as Pete had conjectured, more people wanted a Ferrari or a Rolls-Royce than could be produced to go round? My answer to this was that, while in socialism you would be able to take freely what was reasonably necessary for a comfortable existence, you couldn't have absolutely anything you happened to want just because you wanted it. And especially you couldn't have something that society considered essential to its own fundamental collective wellbeing where there wasn't enough of it for free personal access. And this led me on to the essentially democratic nature of socialism.

If it was clear that there was a social need for a scarce product or service to allow society to operate smoothly, efficiently and in the collective interest, then a democratic decision might be taken not to make it available for personal use. How would this be enforced? Well, socialism will be a free-access society but it won't be a society without rules – democratically agreed ones – and also therefore the means of enforcing those rules (no doubt at the most benign level possible). On the matter of how 'demand' will be determined, I made no bones about the fact that this was a big question and I referred Pete to Chapters 4 and 5 of our pamphlet *Socialism as a Practical Alternative* ([bit.ly/43wueji](http://bit.ly/43wueji)). But I made the point that, first and foremost, demand will be real demand based on need not, as now, on ability to pay.

Finally, on to the question of so-called 'past examples' of socialism, the way I put it was that I don't know what I'd need to do to convince Pete that Pol Pot, Mao Zedong and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan were as far away as they could possibly be from the moneyless, stateless society of free access that for us was socialism. I went on (perhaps a little rudely): 'Look. Hitler called himself a socialist (a national socialist, i.e. Nazi) and surely you wouldn't somehow want to tar us with that brush? If you're just looking at labels, you could of course. But if what's in the bottle is piss, even if the label says whisky, you know it's not.'

A further exchange between us got on to America's 'gun culture' of which Pete was a moderate advocate with the argument that there should be as few restrictions as possible on people's behaviour. My reply was that, in a sane society, it would just seem mind-blowing for a person to carry around a weapon which, if something went wrong in the mind of that person, could be used to cause lethal mayhem. But that was when our discussion seemed to peter out. And I somehow don't think Pete is going to become a member of the World Socialist Movement any time soon. You win some, you lose some.

**HOWARD MOSS**