

THE

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SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement



SOCIALISM: YOUR DIY PROJECT

Why politicians
are useless tools



Also: Letter
Do it yourself politics
Interview with Drew Pendergrass

Political instinct
The Times They Need a-Changin'
Karma and the Bible



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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’

Politicians all **serve** the one percent

IN THE world today, the richest 1 percent now own almost half the world's wealth, whilst the poorest half of the world's population own between them less than 1 percent of the wealth: just 81 billionaires hold between them more wealth than 4 billion of the world's population combined.. In Britain, the four richest individuals have more wealth than the poorest 20 million people combined. Perhaps most significantly, in recent years the richest 1 percent of people have accumulated nearly two thirds of all new wealth created around the world. A total of \$42 trillion in new wealth was created since 2020, with \$26 trillion, or 63 percent, of that being amassed by the top 1 percent, the ultra-rich. The remaining 99 percent of the global population collected just \$16 trillion of all of that new wealth.

This goes to the heart of the social system we live within. You can be sure that the 99 percent making do with only a third of the produce we create

includes all of the most productive and useful people in society: the nurses, builders, teachers, doctors, engineers, programmers, IT architects, transport workers, factory workers, miners, and so on. So we have an all-encompassing global social system in which there are two classes. One class, the vast majority, works to actually create wealth, but then is forced to survive on a fraction of what we have created. The majority of what we create, we are forced (by the current laws of society which we have collectively endorsed and accepted, implicitly) to hand over to a miniscule minority. They then use that wealth to increase their stranglehold over the whole process.

Returning to British politics in 2023, what are Sunak, Starmer or any other of the political leaders or parties on offer proposing to do about this? The core social system stands utterly unquestioned, unthreatened by them all. Jeremy Corbyn was seen by many as standing for a

'socialist alternative', but if you actually look at all of the policies he has ever endorsed, what they really consisted of was a reform, a modification of this capitalist system, in which more sectors would be state-controlled, and a more generous or comprehensive slate of social benefits might be attempted. But like all 'left-wing' regimes which have come to power in various parts of the world, that would also be doomed to fail in chaos. Furthermore, Corbyn never stood for real socialism, which means not state ownership but genuine and democratic community control of all resources. It would also entail the end of the market system and the beginning of production for need, for use, not for profit or sale.

Until we have a majority ready to implement that, by doing it themselves instead of trusting politicians, we are stuck with this rotten system where ninety-nine people do all the hard graft... and one person gets all the pleasure and benefit, week after week, without end.

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Patent nonsense

SUPPOSE THAT, under capitalism's property laws, you could patent the human genome. Then, in theory, you would own the 'rights' to 8 billion people and their descendants, in perpetuity.

You can't, of course, but not because people haven't tried. Almost as soon as the DNA double helix was discovered, its co-discoverer James Watson was asked if he intended to patent it (tinyurl.com/2n6a2vrp).

He thought the idea ridiculous, but was largely alone in that opinion, as every half-baked geneticist that followed saw it as a gold rush and filed patents left, right and centre. Watson, for all his dodgy views on other matters, was convinced this technology ought to be available for the common welfare, and fought the claim-stakers, including through the courts. He couldn't stop the rush though, and about 20 percent of the human genome, around 6,000 genes, were indeed patented. But then, in 2013 the US Supreme Court made a landmark ruling that human DNA could not be patented as it is a 'product of nature', which is to say, a thing which human labour has not appreciably changed or modified. This is, by the way, in line with what socialists say about human labour being the only real source of value. If it's had no human labour usefully expended on it, you can't patent it.

Fast forward to the MRSA antibiotic crisis, which caused over a million deaths worldwide in 2019, more than malaria or AIDS (tinyurl.com/yuasm6zw), and could even lead to a resurgence of plague (tinyurl.com/2ucn7etk).

Antibiotics were such a wonder drug when they were first used in the 1940s that they came to be gobbled up like smarties for just about everything, including as a disease prophylactic in meat, bird and fish farming, and with scant regard for the tendency of bacteria to fight back in a ceaseless evolutionary arms race. Common interest, in a socialist society of democratic common ownership, would very likely have raised the alarm early on but, for the atomised actors of capitalism, this was another *tragedy of the commons* scenario. But the folly doesn't end there – capitalism's patent system, which defenders say drives

innovation, actually prevented crucial innovation, in not one but two ways.

Firstly, the flip side of patents is that when they expire, anyone can use the technology, or copy it, for free, making the patent worthless to the holder. Since most antibiotic patents were taken out in the 1940s, they have now expired, so the big pharma companies – the ones with all the R&D cash – see no prospect of further profit and have abandoned antibiotic research, just when we need them to step up the gears.

At the risk of labouring the obvious, drug companies are not in business to cure people, but to make profits, exactly like the arms industry, the car industry, in fact any industry. If they can make more money out of hair restorer and slimming drugs, that's what they'll invest in. Capitalist logic is what it is, even if it kills us all, which is why we advocate a socialist system of production for needs instead.

Secondly, antibiotics aren't the only way to treat bacterial infections. You could use bacteriophages – viruses that 'eat' bacteria – to target and destroy the offending bacterium. Phages are very specific so you'd need the right one, culled from a huge database. This makes them harder to use than broad-spectrum antibiotics, but the advantage of phages is that they evolve, right along with the bacterium they target, meaning the bacterium can never develop permanent resistance.

Phages are proven and effective, and have been used for a century at the Eliava Institute in Tbilisi, Georgia. The Institute has been treating patients with phage therapies since the 1920s, and is so successful that people fly in from all around the world to get treatment

for bacterial illnesses their own doctors have pronounced incurable (tinyurl.com/m28sfm6e).

So, given this, have phages been enthusiastically seized upon in the West, as the technology that can rescue us from the MRSA crisis? Er, no. But surely the west is planning to use them, and scale up mass phage production? Again, no. Well, there must at least be a million phage studies currently underway by western universities and drug companies? Actually, there are almost none.

WTF?

You see, here's the rub. Phages are a 'product of nature', which means... you guessed it. They can't be patented, and therefore, there is no potential profit.

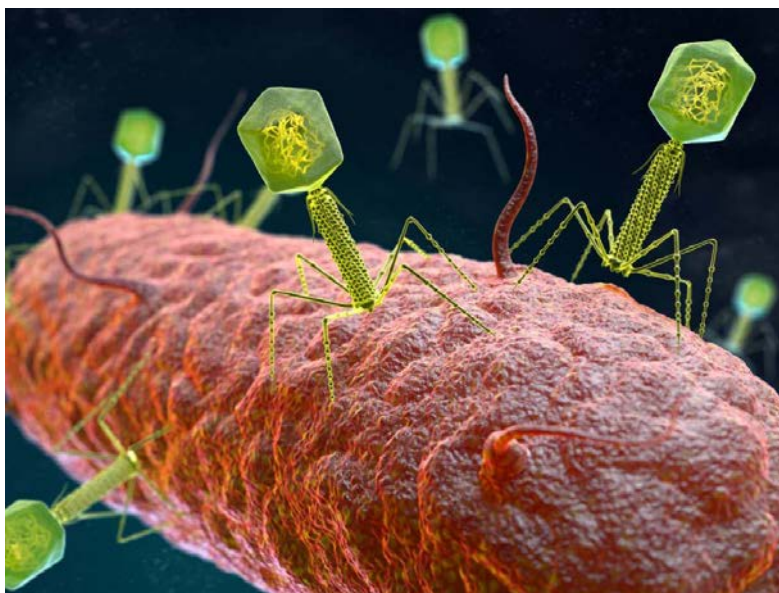
Currently, some western biotech companies are working on ways to get round this restriction, using CRISPR gene-editing to tweak phages just enough to be able to claim that they are a human artefact and therefore patentable. If the tweak does something useful that's lovely, but beside the point. The problem with this workaround is that you can't be sure what effect the tweak is going to have, so there will be all kinds of clinical trials and regulatory hurdles to negotiate. But not to worry, capitalist regulators are not as independent as they pretend. Bodies such as the UK's NICE and America's FDA are subject to a degree of 'regulatory capture' by drug companies, who finance the bodies via required registration fees, and also promise cushy industry jobs tomorrow on the understanding that regulators play ball today (tinyurl.com/537m35am). So tweaked phages might end up being approved by fair means or foul.

Meanwhile it's not entirely game over for antibiotics. A new class of synthetic antibiotics is able to combat drug-resistant bacteria by targeting several key proteins at once, meaning that the bacterium

would have to evolve a defence against all points of attack simultaneously, a highly unlikely feat (tinyurl.com/4evjaryr). Good news, for those who can afford it.

The take-home from all this is that, in the ongoing war on MRSA, insofar as capitalism gets it right, it's doing exactly what socialism would do. But, unlike socialism, it is critically hampered by its own profit-chasing logic, first in solving problems, and second, in not preventing them from arising in the first place.

PJS



Dear Editors

This letter of complaint written by a very disgruntled electric kettle customer was sent to a consumer affairs television programme.

Dear Sirs,

Four years ago I bought a Russell Hobbs electric kettle. I chose this one because this is a popular brand and I thought that it would be reliable and give me years of good service. It came with a 2-year guarantee, so now that it is 4 years old the company that manufactured it is not under any obligation to replace it for me.

The fault is quite trivial. It still boils the water but it has developed a leak. I looked inside the kettle and saw that there is a small nut that needs to be tightened, but it is behind the element so I can't get at it to fix it. I took it to the registered appliance agent who told me that it cannot be fixed because the element cannot be removed. He advised me to throw it away and buy a new one. The kettle is made of stainless steel, a durable material which should last forever. If I bought a stainless steel cooking pot and boiled water in that, it would last forever, but of course, we all want a kettle because it uses less electricity to heat the water than having to put a pan on the cooker. I remember when electric kettles and electric jugs were made with parts that could be replaced, for example, elements could be replaced when they wore out.

My issue is not just, in this instance, with Russell Hobbs, but with the capitalist system which forces manufacturers of all appliances to make their goods so that they have a very short lifespan and have to be replaced every few years.

What a terrible waste of the Earth's resources!

Shall we continue to fill up our rubbish tips with appliances that have been designed to break down after just a few years?

In a capitalist society manufacturers have to be seen to be making a profit. The only way they can do this is to make sure that we have to keep on buying their goods and replacing them on a regular basis. And to hell with using up all the Earth's valuable resources and filling the rubbish tips with stuff that is non-biodegradable!

Until humankind changes the current exploitative system, of both workers and consumers, with one where goods are produced for use, not profit, I think that it should be illegal to manufacture anything

that cannot be repaired.

Yours Faithfully,

MOGGIE GRAYSON

We have dealt comprehensively over the years with the deliberate act on the part of manufacturers to ensure that their particular commodities are made not to usefully last for a long time but to wear out in a relatively short space of time. Why are things not built or made to last? Because longevity is the enemy of profit – which is the *raison d'être* of capitalism.

'In 1960 Vance Packard (certainly no socialist) wrote a book called *The Waste Makers* which caused a minor disturbance at its publication because it dealt with what he termed "planned obsolescence". Packard showed how firms made shoddy goods, designed to wear out quickly so there would be a market for new ones. He wrote of radios, car parts and television sets which their designers and manufacturers knew could easily be made to last longer. There have even been instances of workers being fired because they took the time to do an excellent job, and so were not profitable' ('Waste and want – the insane logic of capitalism.' *World Socialist*, April 1984).

Add computers, mobile phones, white goods, microwaves and electric kettles to the items that Vance Packard described.

'There is no technical reason why solid and reliable electric and electronic appliances with easily changeable and compatible parts and able to incorporate innovations could not be produced. Industrial designers would surely love to do this but under capitalism it is the marketing department that calls the shots, as what is being produced are not simply products to be used, but commodities to be sold on a market with a view to profit' ('Organised Waste', *Socialist Standard*, May 2011).

An update on Packard's *The Waste Makers* was published in 2006: *Made to*

break. Technology and Obsolescence in America by Giles Slade (reviewed in the *Socialist Standard*, October, 2009).

Slade wrote:

'Our whole economy is based on planned obsolescence and everybody who can read without moving his lips should know it by now. We make good products, we induce people to buy them, and then next year we deliberately introduce something that will make those products old fashioned, out of date, obsolete. We do that for the soundest reason: to make money' (p. 153).

Think of the regular introduction into the market of smartphones. Older models work just as well but are eventually made unusable because the operating system becomes unable to support newer applications and support for the older models is discontinued. The same can be said of computers.

The reviewer made the point that the workers, who design and produce these items – and run capitalism on behalf of the elite class – are perfectly capable of making better quality goods and that:

'This provoked a conflict with engineers, who knew they could make solid products that could last for years, but in the end their reluctance was overcome (they, too, are in the end only hired employees who have to do their employer's bidding). It is also enormously wasteful as still useable products, and the material resources that went into making them, are simply thrown away'.

The solution to the problem of built-in obsolescence (and to many others) is straightforward. It's the removal of the cost-saving, corner-cutting, 'must keep profits as high as possible' pressures which, by the economic laws of capitalism, all producers are subject too.

The only way to stop it? The replacement of capitalism by socialism where quality will extend to all areas of life. Why, with production directly for use, would we want to turn out stuff made not to last?

D. C.



Another extinction rebellion?

THIS TIME a pre-emptive strike against intelligent robots before they become too intelligent? This, at least, was the impression given by the front page headline 'AI PIONEERS FEAR EXTINCTION' (*Times*, 30 May). It said:

'More than 350 of the world's experts in artificial intelligence [...] have warned of the possibility that the technology could lead to the extinction of humanity'.

The 22-word statement itself doesn't actually say this. It merely said:

'Mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war' (tinyurl.com/2p8ka9yv).

As this doesn't say what 'the risk of extinction' is we are left guessing. The *Times* speculated:

'Some computer scientists fear that a super-intelligent AI with interests misaligned to those of humans could supplant, or unwittingly destroy us'.

That's a 'possibility' — a lot of things are — but a rather remote one, if only because no such 'super-intelligent AI' exists (if it ever does).

Earlier a number of tech company bosses had called for research on AI to be suspended while regulations were drawn up. That's not

going to happen, even if it was desirable. It's too late. As with nuclear physics, the genie is out of the bottle. The knowledge is there and is already being applied.

Dan Hendrycks, the director of the Centre for AI Safety (CAIS) in San Francisco, who organised the signatures, was himself quoted as saying:

'We are currently in an AI arms race in industry, where companies have concerns about safety but they are forced to prioritise making them more powerful more quickly [...] We're going to be rapidly automating more and more, giving more and more decision-making control to systems. If corporations don't do that, they get outcompeted'.

If that is really the case, as it will be if the use of AI means lower production costs, then it will spread. That's what happens under capitalism. One company finds a way of reducing costs and makes super-profits till its competitors follow suit and the new method becomes the norm.

Actually, there literally is an arms race over AI going on. Another article in the *Times* (1 June), by Iain Martin, was headlined 'To defend the West we must win this AI race'. Arguing against pausing AI research, Martin deployed the same arguments for developing ever more

intelligent AI weapons as for developing the H Bomb — if we don't, they will and then where will we be? If, he wrote, the West fails to win the AI arms race:

'we will be at the mercy of dictators who can swarm us with 20,000 drones, communicating with each other rather than humans, and picking their own targets. Vast computer power can relentlessly seek for weaknesses through which to launch cyber attacks and shut down our financial system or turn out the lights'.

Meanwhile, the West's rivals over raw material resources, markets, investment outlets, trade routes and strategic points and areas to protect these will be making similar calculations. The world has not yet reached Martin's nightmare stage but the line of march is towards it. If capitalism continues that point will be reached, probably sooner rather than later.

All this is not a result of AI as such, but of its misuse under capitalism. In a socialist society, further-developed AI could be of immense help in taking decisions about allocating resources, what, how and where to produce wealth. What threatens humanity is not AI but capitalism, with its competitive struggle for profits and 'might is right' in relations between capitalist states. If only the 350 experts had used their intelligence to make *that* point.

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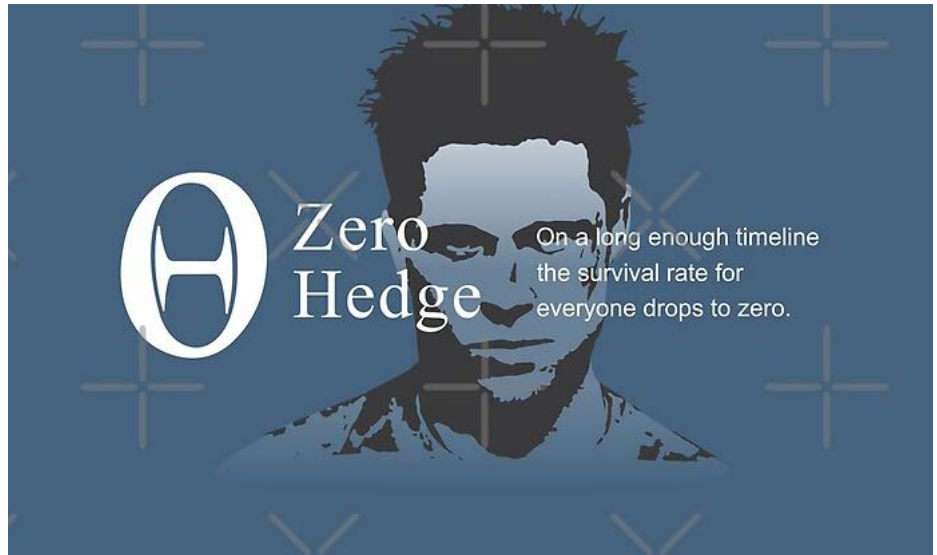
Danger: Capitalism at work

Writing about the factory regime in nineteenth-century England, Karl Marx observed: 'But in its blind unrestrainable passion, its werewolf hunger for surplus labour, capital oversteps not only the moral, but even the merely physical maximum bounds of the body. It steals the time required for the consumption of fresh air and sunlight. ... All that concerns it is simply and solely the maximum of labour power that can be rendered fluent in a working day. It attains this end by shortening the extent of the labourer's life, as a greedy farmer snatches increased produce from the soil by robbing it of its fertility' (*Capital* Vol. I, Chapter 10, 1867, tinyurl.com/9xzpn7p4).

The irony that Zero Hedge, a website home to howling mad libertarian supporters of capitalism (motto: on a long enough timeline the survival rate for everyone drops to zero), reminded us on May Day this year of one tragic consequence of their social system of war and want at work cannot be overlooked: 'It's been 10 years since the Rana Plaza factory collapse in the Bangladeshi capital of Dhaka, where more than 1,100 people died and over 2,600 were injured' (tinyurl.com/y75u85t5).

Workers' rights 1 (sporadic violations) - 5 (no guarantee)

Since Marx's day, the werewolf can be heard baying for blood worldwide. The same Zero Hedge article informs us: '... 87 percent of countries having violated their workers' right to strike in 2022, up from 63 percent in 2014. According to the report, trade unionists were murdered in 13 countries last year, with Colombia the deadliest nation. Last year, the Middle East and North Africa received the worst score of the regions on the Global Rights Index with an average of 4.53. It was followed by Asia-Pacific with 4.22, Africa with 3.76, the Americas with 3.52 and Europe with 2.49. The Asia-Pacific region saw its average rating worsen slightly in 2021 from 4.17 to 4.22 the following year. While the chart considers not only garment workers but all workers generally, ITUC [International Trade Union Confederation] analysts explain that in Bangladesh, the garment industry is one of the biggest sectors, employing more than 4.5 million people. The country received a score of 5, signifying that there is no guarantee of rights to workers. According to the report, workers experienced violence in 43 percent of countries in the Asia-Pacific



region, up from 35 percent in 2021. In Bangladesh, workers strikes were met with brutality by the authorities, with at least five killed, while attempts at forming unions were shut down. India and Pakistan too saw police brutality against workers, while authorities in Hong Kong clamped down on trade unions and pro-democracy organizations and human rights abuses continued in Myanmar. In China, persecuted minorities were detained by the authorities and coerced into forced labor to fuel the garment industry.'

Never-ending struggle

'Every year more people are killed at work than in wars. Most don't die of mystery ailments, or in tragic "accidents". They die because an employer decided their safety just wasn't that important a priority' (University and College Union, 5 May, tinyurl.com/594mtbk5).

International Workers Memorial Day (IWMD), 28 April, commemorates those workers. But Marx was right to conclude: 'Trades Unions work well as centers of resistance against the encroachments of capital. They fail partially from an injudicious use of their power. They fail generally from limiting themselves to a guerrilla war against the effects of the existing system, instead of simultaneously trying to change it, instead of using their organized forces as a lever for the final emancipation of the working class, that is to say the ultimate abolition of the wages system' (XIV. The Struggle Between Capital and Labour and its Results, *Value, Price and Profit*, 1865, tinyurl.com/ye2aszp6).

China, Inc.

The China Global Television Network reminded us on May Day that the dictator Xi in his 2018 New Year Address stated: 'Happiness is achieved through hard work' (tinyurl.com/3jzmehu8). Another article dated 1 May and titled 'One in 5 young

people in Chinese cities is out of work. Beijing wants them to work in the fields' goes on to inform us:

''Chinese students, exhausted by pandemic lockdowns and concerned about China's ever-evolving model of state capitalism, are beginning to realize that a degree may not improve their social position, nor result in some other guaranteed benefit," said Craig Singleton, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies' ([WENY News, tinyurl.com/36pz29z3](https://www.wenynews.com/36pz29z3)).

There you have it in black and white: China as state capitalist. The hallmarks, such as class society, commodity production, profit motive, exploitation of wage labour, markets, etc., are not hidden. Consider, China has the world's highest number of billionaires, many of them in the rubber stamp parliament, with a combined wealth of US\$4.5 trillion. They, like the 1 percent worldwide, have been doing very nicely thanks to us. China Labor Watch has issued many reports detailing workers' countless hours of overtime, contact with dangerous chemicals and missing wages. Their review of 'Dying for an iPhone: Apple, Foxconn, and the Lives of China's Workers' is informative: 'Well-documented in the media and by labor rights groups, those conditions include exhausting work, disciplinary management style, and increasing pressure to produce in short time frames, all for meagre wages' (11 September 2020, tinyurl.com/3epk6nz3). Furthermore, China has more strikes per year than any other country, many thousands. These strikes are often unplanned, spontaneous, even chaotic, and the bosses stop at nothing to suppress them: they lie, cheat, call in the police, and hire gangsters to intimidate strikers or even beat them up.

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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

MIDLANDS

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

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

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

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

Yorkshire Regional branch.

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

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

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

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Contact: spgb.ksrb@worldsocialism.org or 07971 715569.

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

Brighton. Contact: Anton Pruden, 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.

Cambridge. Contact: Andrew Westley, wezelecta007@gmail.com. 07883078984.

IRELAND

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

mariekev@eircom.net

SCOTLAND

Edinburgh branch. Meets 1st Sunday, 11am on Discord. Contact: Fraser Anderson 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 • 07484 717893

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INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS

AFRICA

Kenya. Contact: Patrick Ndege, PO Box 13627-00100, GPO, Nairobi

Zambia. Contact: Kephias Mulenga, PO Box 280168, Kitwe.

ASIA

Japan. Contact: Michael. japan.wsm@gmail.com

AUSTRALIA

Contact: Trevor Clarke, wspa.info@yahoo.com.au

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Denmark. Contact: Graham Taylor, Fiskergade, 90, 1G, DK-8000 Arhus C..

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Why biodiversity matters

BIODIVERSITY IS vitally important to human society and human survival – not just the biodiversity of the wilderness but also the agrobiodiversity of domesticated plants and animals. One has to be constantly wary of the risk to such biodiversity posed by genetic erosion and species loss. These work to shrink the genetic pool – the natural variability of organisms – that breeders rely upon to select the kind of varieties they want to develop. That then reduces their room for manoeuvre. It makes agricultural output increasingly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and the emergence of new diseases or pests.

As José Esquinas-Alcázar notes:

‘The conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources goes far beyond avoiding the extinction of species. The objective must be to conserve and use as much diversity as possible within each species. Plant genetic resources can be conserved *ex situ*, for example in gene banks (facilities that store samples (accessions) of crop genetic diversity, usually as seed and vegetative material) or *in situ*, either on-farm for farmers’ varieties, or in natural reserves or protected areas for wild plants’. (‘Protecting crop genetic diversity for food security: political, ethical and technical challenges’, *Nature Reviews/Genetics*, Vol 6, December 2005).

‘*In situ*’ conservation is being threatened by the spread of a homogenising commercial agriculture both in the form of habitat destruction impacting on native species and varieties as the amount of land farmed expands and, also, via the aforementioned marginalisation of traditional farming practices that maintain diversity. But what of ‘*ex situ*’ conservation in the guise of gene banks?

This is a relatively cheap method of conservation but it has drawbacks:

‘The main drawback, however, is that a genetic resource ceases to evolve as the natural processes of selection and adaptation are halted. In addition, only a small amount of the genetic diversity present in a given population is usually represented in the collected sample. This is further reduced every time the resource is regenerated, owing to genetic drift and natural selective pressures under different environmental conditions. Furthermore, many gene banks do not meet appropriate standards of storage and regeneration, resulting in poor seed viability’.

Genetically modified seeds are not currently allowed (at the time of writing) to be stored in seed banks. One reason



why this is so is because seed banks are subject to legislation contained in the International Plant Treaty whereby they are obliged to agree to multilateral access to their collections. This, in effect, means treating those collections as the common heritage of humanity. However, that is clearly at odds with the status of GM seeds as patented inventions deemed to be the private property of corporations that undertook the initial research. It is yet one more illustration of the way in which private property relations work to impede the effective use (and conservation) of resources at our disposal.

In their article entitled ‘Seed banks: the last line of defence against a threatening global food crisis’, Salome Gomez-Upegui and Rita Liu point out that there are about 1,700 seed banks around the world ‘housing collections of plant species that are invaluable for scientific research, education, species preservation and Indigenous cultures’. They cite Stefan Schmitz, executive director of the Global Crop Diversity Trust, an organization dedicated to preserving crop diversity for food security:

‘At a first glance, seeds may not look like much, but within them lies the foundation of our future food and nutrition security, and the possibility for a world without hunger... Well-funded, well-maintained seed banks are critical to reducing the negative impact of the climate crisis on

our agriculture globally’ (*Guardian*, 15 April 2022).

Without decrying the importance of seed banks for the future of farming it is surely overstating the case to suggest that the ‘*possibility for a world without hunger*’ depends on them. To reiterate – hunger is an economic and political problem; it does not arise from the lack of some kind of technical solution to growing more food.

This fixation with ‘technological fixes’ (at the expense of social fixes) fails to see that technology is not developed in a vacuum; it is shaped by powerful economic forces. A particularly perverse example of this is so-called ‘terminator technology’ – the development of seeds (dubbed ‘suicide seeds’) that are specifically designed to ‘genetically switch off a plant’s ability to germinate for a second time’ – thus compelling the farmer to buy in a fresh supply of seed each season (www.globalissues.org/article/194/terminator-technology).

There is no rational technical reason for the development of such a technology; it seems to be solely designed for the purpose of securing increased profits for agribusiness. More to the point, it undermines the ability of traditional farmers to develop a range of local seeds adapted to local conditions as they have done in the past in time-honoured fashion.

ROBIN COX

Do it yourself politics

THE SOCIALIST Party is pro-real democracy. Real democracy can only be achieved by common ownership of resources and free access to goods and services, because only this provides political equality. The tyranny of money maintains injustice and division world wide. The Socialist Party is thus anti-capitalist.

In capitalism, a minority owning class has vast amounts of extra power that it imposes by financial control. Socialists believe in people being able to do the work that they wish to do and directly for their communities, within a fully democratic system. The provision of goods and services can not only be achieved without capitalism – it can be achieved with a giant leap in efficiency. We will be freed from the shackles of the financial system, and we will be able to reap the benefits of everybody's practical knowledge, because we will all be able to take part equally in decision-making processes.

In capitalism, for most of us, the jobs that we have to do, and/or the way that we do them, and a lot more in our lives *is not freely decided by us. Nor can it be decided by our elected government.* So much that affects so many is decided by the minority of owners, who have the power to set up structures and systems for their limited self-interest and to pressurise all of the rest of us to do their bidding.

For as long as there has been a ruling elite, there has been indoctrination simply by living in such a system, that it is 'normal' and 'acceptable'. This is added to by propaganda that is full of lies and distortions. In 'democratic' countries we have thought that we are 'free' – but democracy has been hijacked by the capitalist class, who, via governments, and just like any other dictators, wield the power of armies and weapons of mass destruction, whilst also controlling most of the information outlets, so they can spin all the news in their favour. Even militarily imposed business expansion with hundreds of thousands of civilian casualties, is now called 'bringing democracy'.

Profit priority

This is not only what capitalism allows, it is what it produces. The victories for sanity that occur are despite capitalism; because capitalism is an insane system which cannot be made fair by reform or regulation. It is a system based on competition instead of cooperation, and its



only real purpose is to capitalize without conscience. If you doubt this, think about how it functions: Can't pay? Can't have! And: No profit? No production! Capitalism is not devoted to or intent upon supplying what we need, efficient use of resources, appreciation of beauty or being humane – its devotion and its intention is to make a financial profit. Where needs are supplied in some form this is incidental to capitalism; it happens to be necessary for the profit making.

Any benefits that are claimed for capitalism actually come from the workers, who could do a much better job without it. The rules of capitalism have been made to serve the privileges of a few over the common good for people and the biosphere. It will always fix the regulations. It will always drown out calls for reforms with loud demands for profit. It will always encourage us to cheat and lie and, faced with the horrors that the system creates, to not care.

As capitalism has become globally established over the last five hundred years, money has become the main controlling and deciding factor in much of our behaviour. The wealthy are the ones with money to invest in new enterprises, and so capitalism generally delivers concentrations of wealth *and thus power.* The profit priority of the capitalist class results, amongst other things, in wages being as low as possible, and thus generally the priority for the workers is to buy the cheapest. This also leads to the dominance of big business producers and suppliers, which has profound and drastic effects on society. One effect has been a

massive increase in the reliance on cars and on road, air and sea transportation of goods using fossil fuels. This is a typical example of something that is considered to be good for the economy – but is not good for communities or the health of individuals – or, as it turns out, for the environment as a whole.

The profit priority results in every form of waste and abuse; from the billions of deceptive three-quarter empty plastic tubs of pills to the carnage of war. People are persuaded to buy stuff that they don't need and/or is harmful to them, money is saved in methods of production by losing quality, by abusive treatment of workers, by cruelty to animals, by pollution of the environment and by squandering resources in manufacturing products with 'built-in obsolescence'. – Not to mention all the useless work involved in just running the financial system.

Very stressful

We are prevented in many ways from doing what is most beneficial and tempted into making unhealthy and unkind choices. This is very stressful, so even those with what is called a 'good standard of living' tend to suffer in this system. The diseases of unhealthy affluence are prevalent. At the same time, a huge and growing proportion of the world's population is malnourished or starving and lacking even clean water. It is a measure of the unhealthiness of capitalist affluence that it is unsustainable; it is destroying the living environment that supplies it. And environmental damage is increasingly a factor in causing poverty and conflict.

This is not democracy failing us – the problem is that we do not have real democracy. What we are getting is clearly not what the majority of people want. Globally, in the twenty-first century, more than ever before, war is conducted in civilian areas. More people than ever before are losing their land and communities and being forced into city slums. More people than ever before live on rubbish dumps. More people than ever before are imprisoned. More young people than ever before are imprisoned. More young people than ever before are abandoned and homeless. More young people than ever before are involved in the sex trade.

These are not just problems that capitalism hasn't got around to solving yet. They are caused by a combination of the effects of capitalism. Neither does capitalism respond to the need to solve problems that it has produced. The issue of global warming is a prime example of this. Global warming is largely the result of the particularly polluting forms of production and organization that have developed in the capitalist system. However, for

instance, large profits are being made from the production and use of oil. It is integral to the cash flow in the present situation. Because of having little choice in how our society functions, yet having to function in it to get money, it is frequently very difficult or impossible for people to have workplaces and homes close enough, or to have alternative transport arrangements, so that they do not need a car. Then society becomes arranged around car use; which ties in with the dominance of big business supermarkets. Thus the whole system ferociously resists making the radical changes that are needed to protect our environment. Instead, we are taken to war to secure more oil supplies.

When it comes to creating profit for a minority, capitalism is extremely efficient. But when it comes to creating sustainable, healthy, friendly communities, capitalism is extremely inefficient. In this regard it is tragically wasteful of the abundant resources of the Earth and of human technology. All that waste to maintain something that we don't really want! Something that is bound to be unhealthy; the undemocratic power of a minority!

This is what we agree to when we vote for any capitalist party.

Majority support

By exploiting the prejudice, separation and general ignorance that capitalism breeds, the capitalist class continues to rule us with majority support. They continue to have vastly disproportionate control over how we live; to force cuts in services, to take the hearts out of our communities, to take us away from our children, to distract us from the truth, to stress us and fill us with rage that we take out on ourselves, each other and our fellow creatures, to make us depressed, to get us addicted, to wreck our environment and to take us to war – and to convince us that there is no sensible alternative! This is not democracy. This is despotism dressed up as democracy. We have to take the democratic systems that have been fought for and won through previous generations and use them to achieve our true desire.

We can change to a socialist system by using the democratic process. As socialists we do not vote for any capitalist party – and that is all of them except the Socialist Party. Other parties may have some good intentions – but in capitalism these will be lost as we have seen before. Socialism will be achieved by majority demand. The working people supply the goods and services in society. We know how to do it and we know how it can be done better, if we are not constrained by financial rules and pressures that do nothing except maintain a harmful system.

Capitalism is a perverting and corrupting influence to whatever degree it is present – and always involves deprivation, slavery and abuse in various forms. It is now in a particularly ubiquitous phase and further deterioration of the situation for humanity looks likely. Many communities and the whole natural world has become more and more damaged. People run gallant campaigns to help others and to protect the environment – but in capitalism, although there are some temporary successes, this is a losing battle.

The battle has to be to overcome capitalism with world socialism. When we remove money from the equation, our priorities can adjust to their healthy natural state. Our priority can be to do what is good. Using truly democratic processes we can find out what is good for us and do that. Our energy will be set free to develop a healthy society and a healthy world – which is necessarily to create freedom and peace.

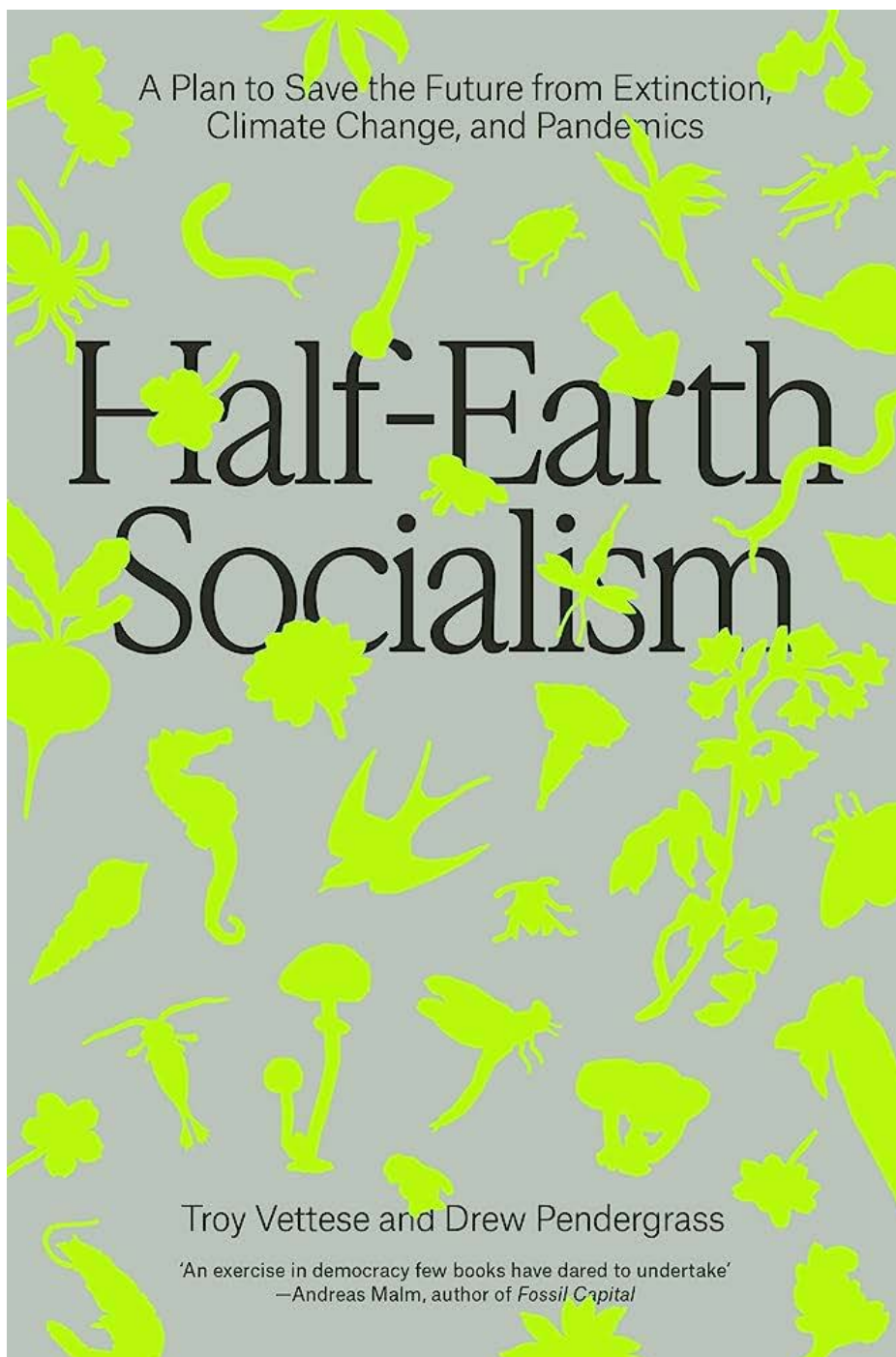


Interview with Drew Pendergrass

Drew Pendergrass, the co-author, with Troy Vettese, of a striking new book entitled Half-Earth Socialism: a Plan to Save the Future from Extinction, Climate Change and Pandemics (reviewed in the March 2023 edition of this journal) talks to the Socialist Standard to discuss why he thinks both human society and the natural environment can only survive through a new model of social and economic organisation, a moneyless, wageless one of democratic planning, voluntary cooperation and free access to all goods and services.

In the book you co-wrote with Troy Vettese, you put forward the idea of a world non-market society and outline how you see it as operating in practical terms. What brought you to this idea in the first place?

By day, I am a climate scientist — in my work, I see how incompatible our current economic order is with an ecologically and climatologically stable planet. Even more radicalizing than this, I am a scientist at Harvard University, a place unafraid to take the status quo to its logical conclusion. People at Harvard don't believe in the possibility of social change, at least not beyond marginal adjustments. However, the scientists there are just as aware as I am about the incompatibility of capitalism and the climate, though they would not use those terms. This is why solar geoengineering, the idea that we could spray particles into the stratosphere to dim the sun and cool the planet, has become a central part of the environmental research and curriculum at this university. Rather than change our society to meet the demands of our planet, it is more realistic to them to change the planet to meet the demands of capitalism. And I think they are right — to keep the status quo, you need geoengineering, even though the risks are profound. I have been a socialist since I was in high school and have no interest in preserving capitalism, so Troy and I wanted to offer an alternative.



There are others who advocate the kind of society you do, but, following Marx, they usually say that you can't write 'recipes for the cookshops of the future'. Why do think it's feasible and useful to try to do this?

During and immediately after Marx and Engels were writing, utopia was in the air. Utopian fiction peaked in the

1880s and 90s with books like Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and Morris's *News from Nowhere*. At that time, even the mainstream thought capitalism really could be supplanted by something new. Although Marx himself does not lay out in one place his vision of a socialist or communist society, this does not mean he didn't have ideas about what that

society would entail: scholars like Bertell Ollman have reconstructed in some detail the outlines of Marx's utopia. More importantly, workers had clear ideas about what alternatives to capitalism might entail — many had memories of non-capitalist lifeways to draw on, such as the peasantry, and a wide-open sense of possibility catalysed by revolutionary moments like 1848 or the Paris Commune.

Now, alternatives are not self-evident. With the failed utopias in the twentieth century and the rise of the world market in the twenty-first, there is not a sense that an alternative to capitalism lies in wait — many doubt that an alternative exists at all. With this recent history, the nineteenth century advice to avoid 'recipes for the cookshops of the future' seems outdated. Certainly, when coming up with proposals for how a socialist society might work, one must remain humble. But the concreteness of this exercise is a necessary corrective to a world that has lost its utopian spark. As Robin D. G. Kelley reminds us, no social movement exists without a concrete vision for a better future as its north star.

You describe the common idea that the earth is over-populated as 'dangerously exaggerated'. But wouldn't some say that there too many people for the resources that the Earth, even in a non-market society, could make available to give everyone a decent, comfortable life? Wouldn't some also say that this is especially the case for the system that you advocate, one that would see half the Earth ('Half-Earth Socialism') being occupied by rewilded ecosystems in order for it to recover and prosper?

One of the exercises we follow in the book is to imagine what it would take to provide the material basis for human flourishing to ten billion people, a fair bit more than live today, while staying within planetary boundaries. We make the point that both sides of this equation — what a 'comfortable' life means, and where exactly planetary boundaries lie — are political questions that can only be answered by reference to values. Science cannot tell us what we should or should not do; it can merely advise on the consequences of certain material pressures on the Earth system.

We argue in the book that it is certainly possible with present technology to provide a comfortable life for ten billion people, rewild much of the biosphere, decarbonize the economy, and begin to repair the damage of centuries of capitalism. The trick is what you mean by the 'comfortable'. If you mean US levels of energy and material use, then you will be dissatisfied by our proposal. Instead, we propose energy quotas and a change in diet towards veganism for most people.

Deep decarbonization is very hard. Fossil fuels are energy dense (lots of energy per unit mass) and can be burned anytime, day or night. Decarbonizing electricity is the easy part, though load management with intermittent renewable sources presents an engineering challenge. Replacing fuels in industrial and transport processes is much harder. Planes, for example, need energy-dense power sources like kerosene so they are light enough to fly. However, replacing fossil fuels with renewable fuels require vast amounts of electricity to transform carbon from the atmosphere into fuels for planes. For example, decarbonizing flights in the UK alone would *require* more electricity than the entire country generates today. The other option would be biofuels, but these require vast swaths of land to grow; in the UK, for flights alone, this would be two thirds of its croplands. Quotas are the only way to make a world without fossil fuels work for everyone.

Similarly, animal husbandry *eats* up 77 percent of agricultural land while providing only a fraction of the nutrients people need. The industry emits gobs of greenhouse gases, including vast amounts of the potent short-lived methane; cutting methane rapidly is a useful way to 'bend the curve' on climate change, limiting near-term warming as we build up our capacity to replace carbon dioxide emitting infrastructure. Abolishing the meat industry and eating mainly plants instead would clean up the atmosphere and free up lots of land for rewilding. Remember that habitat loss is one of the main drivers of mass extinction, and one of the main drivers of habitat loss is animal agriculture — both fodder (soy and corn) and grazing land.

A life with no meat, fewer flights, smaller homes, limited cars, and reduced consumption may seem intolerable for some. But that does not mean such a life isn't comfortable. Guaranteed housing, health care, and education in a built environment that prioritizes sharing and community sounds luxurious to me.

You seem very lukewarm about 'green' solutions to the environmental crisis. But wouldn't some people argue that the policies proposed by mainstream advocates of environmentalism at least contribute to offering some partial remedy to the degradation and despoliation of the Earth that you describe in your book?

Certainly we encourage the development of policies and technologies that can repair the damage to the Earth system. For example, in the book we are bullish on hydrogen for electrifying the industrial sector and management in grid load; lots of capitalists like this investment too. I

spend much of my day as an environmental activist in Boston, pushing for reforms like strict building energy use codes and decarbonizing municipal buildings. None of these reforms are incompatible with capitalism, although we hope that our movement will grow in strength and demand more. The argument we make in the book is that the unconscious force of capital will always be dominant in a capitalist society, and that this force is incompatible with the flourishing of the biosphere because of its metabolic need to ingest ever-increasing swaths of nature. Reforms and technologies that limit the damage are welcome, but we need to do all we can to align these forces towards a larger social transformation.

How close do you think the biosphere is to the 'extinction' you refer to in the title of your book?

Human beings and the biosphere are not in danger of extinction. The extinction in the title of the book refers to the ongoing Sixth Mass Extinction event in the nearly four-billion-year history of life on this planet. Life is robust; it will continue, however damaged. Still, we have a responsibility to maintain biodiversity both as an end-in-itself, but also out of self-interest. Healthy ecosystems are robust to disease, maintain productive agriculture, and sequester carbon.

You talk about how we can run things rationally and sustainably without money and the market and instead by democratic planning 'in kind'. But how do you see this planning taking place? How would you argue against those who might say that a society without monetary accounting would quickly degenerate into shortage and social chaos?

This is a hard question, and certainly I will not be able to answer it to your readers' satisfaction here. I'll also note that Troy and I are continuing to think about moneyless planning and are planning a follow-up book on the topic.

In the book, we present a thought experiment about how moneyless planning in a world socialist society might work. A global parliament would create a few coarsely-resolved global plans, reflecting different coalitions in power; these plans might offer proposals about energy quotas, the energy generation system, food production, and material throughput needs. After debate, a plan would be adopted for a period, subject to constant revisions. The implementation of these economic plans would take place at more local levels of government, which would have wide leeway to decide how to govern themselves so long as they fit within the parameters of the global plan.

Although there should be considerable flexibility, we think that a global plan is necessary. Because humanity has become a planetary species, able to unintentionally alter the climate and biosphere, we argue that we need a form of government that is commensurate with the scale of our power. We want to consciously debate and control our society, rather than let capital blindly trash the biosphere.

We argue that the algorithms and technologies necessary to plan on this scale already exist; in the book we outline the history of linear programming and other algorithms in the fields of optimization and control theory. The challenge is (1) gathering the necessary information to plan effectively, (2) foregrounding democracy, and (3) ensuring that plans are actually implemented. There were experiments in the Eastern Bloc with algorithmic planning as a reform measure, but they failed in these three challenges. Our argument is that these challenges are intertwined and fundamentally emerge from the need for democracy. If planning is carried out by a richly democratic society, with participatory institutions at every level from the workplace to national and global parliaments, then planning will have a legitimacy that technocracy could never hope to achieve. That legitimacy helps with information gathering, at least with enough quality to create passable plans, and with successful plan implementation. No one will work for a socialism they don't believe in.

Although there is a lot to say about this topic, I think that there is no reason to believe well-formed institutions cannot operate a complex society without the mediating power of money. However, more utopias and thought experiments would be useful in working out some first principles in designing such a society. Here, again, there is a need for more 'recipes for the cookshops of the future!'

How would you respond to the argument put forward by some that a society based on voluntary work and cooperation to produce everything humanity needs could not work owing to the frailties of 'human nature'?

I don't believe in human nature as some timeless, unchanging category. One of the useful lessons of history is that people in the past are wildly different from people today. Even the Ancient Greeks, who we in the West see as our ancestors, lived by practices and beliefs and motivations that are incomprehensible to us today. However, I do take your point that human nature as it exists today has been imprinted with capitalism. While Margaret Thatcher's line that "there is no such thing as society" is obviously ridiculous, capitalist

social relations make it more and more true each day. Hostility towards strangers, paranoia, and loneliness all are outcomes of capitalism that, while not part of human nature, nevertheless make building solidarity hard. That said, I've seen people transform when they are brought into genuinely solidaristic institutions like trade unions or activist groups. Being part of a union myself will always make me hopeful about the possibility of socialism.

For socialism to work, you don't need to believe human beings are angels. Instead, you need to believe that people are shaped by the institutions and social situation around them, and that those infrastructures can be changed by humans because they were constructed by humans.

As an additional note, socialism need not be entirely voluntary. Abolishing alienation in labour and establishing social control of the economy will both involve vast new democratic institutions, but vaccine mandates, for example, will remain necessary to protect public health. Coercive measures like these are obviously a risk for any society, but I am confident that robust participatory institutions can prevent necessary coercion from expanding beyond its remit into tyranny.

How do you think it's possible to convince enough people that a world socialist society is possible and feasible? And if that does happen, what practical steps do you think will be necessary to bring that society into being?

I think a great way to convince people that alternatives are possible is to use utopias as a method. Real utopias, in the form of democratic rank-and-file trade unions, show people that participatory democracy can transform lives. Fictional utopias and thought experiments like ours demonstrate that even knotty crises like environmental collapse can be remedied. We even made a video game, available at play.half.earth, that allows people to experience what planning a world economy might feel like. All these things together might convince enough people to form the seeds of a movement, which could grow into a revolutionary moment. Our chances are better if we can unite different splinters on the left into a fighting movement. Of course, the odds are against us, but I think that if we can assemble a large base with a radical imagination, design institutions that prefigure the world we want, and build enough power to achieve real intermediate victories, we will be on our way towards a winning socialist movement.

You seem to see some regimes within capitalism (e.g. Soviet Union, Maoist China, Cuba, Allende's Chile) as genuine but failed attempts to establish socialism.

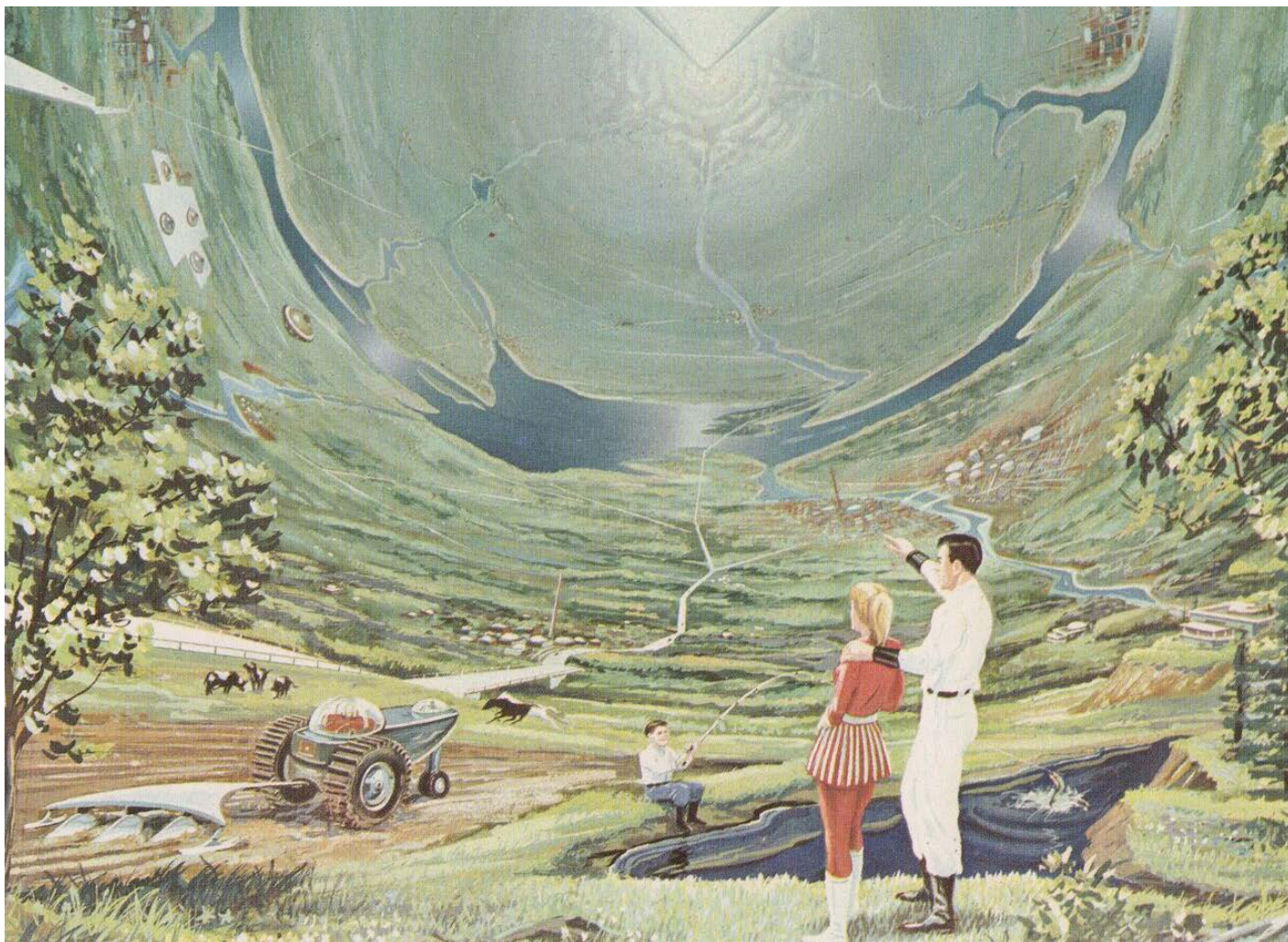
But do these regimes really have any relationship with the socialism that you describe and advocate in your book?

You are absolutely right that these regimes are not socialist. I am sympathetic to interpretations of the USSR and other similar regimes as 'state capitalist.' In particular, I like Moishe Postone's argument that because these societies are still governed by the law of value they have not overcome capitalism, no matter what the party claimed. However, I think it is also important to remember that the people who built these regimes (here I'm thinking primarily of China and the USSR) really were socialists and really did want to build an alternative to capitalism. It is on us to learn from their failures. We may not have the same youthful optimism as socialists from a century ago, but we do have many examples of how not to do socialism — that's useful data as we shape our demands and imagined alternatives today. This is why in the book we engage deeply with attempts to reform the Soviet economy, even as we are strongly critical of the USSR.

You favour veganism as a way of feeding everyone while having the smallest environmental impact. But do you think that humanity as a whole, having been omnivorous throughout their existence, will ever accept the total exclusion of animal foodstuffs from their diet? And, more generally, isn't it hard enough to persuade people to work for socialism without also telling them they may have to give up things they like?

I already detailed why veganism makes sense as an environmental policy, so here I'll focus on the critiques. First, the amount of meat we in the Global North eat today is historically unprecedented. Our ancestors did eat meat, but only a small fraction of what we do today. As a result, there are cultural resources to draw on in most areas to create meatless dishes. For example, I'm from the South in the US, home of barbeque and fried chicken. But my hometown also hosts a large Seventh Day Adventist community, who do not eat meat for religious reasons; my great-grandfather, who was a farmer, lived basically as a vegetarian because he didn't like to kill animals. As a vegan myself, my main practice is to show people that meatless food can be delicious and joyful. In Spain of all places, the minister for consumer affairs Alberto Garzon is working to reduce meat consumption with some success. There are ways to build campaigns around this issue, even though I agree it is a hard sell.

If I may, I'd like to expand your question further. Even if your readers disagree with me on the animal question, there are other aspects of socialism which are



unpopular on their face. For example, fighting neo-colonial exploitation may not poll well in places like the UK. I like this quote from the first pages of the feminist writer Sophie Lewis's *Abolish the Family*: 'All of us—even those of us who own no property, who receive no guaranteed care, and who subsist at the blunt end of empire, whiteness, cis-hetero-patriarchy, and class— will have to let go of something as the process of our collective liberation unfolds. If the world is to be remade utterly, then a person must be willing to be remade also.' One need not agree with Lewis's position on family abolition to recognize the truth of her argument. Even if the world we will build is far better than the one that exists, things will be lost in the process. All socialists will need to confront this challenge, even if self-consciously they only demand what is 'popular.'

Our afterword

Readers will appreciate that many of the ideas expressed in the interview are very much in line with the views the Socialist Party has long been spreading. We would give as examples the fallacy of 'human nature', the myth of over-population, and in particular the need for a global, 'richly democrat', wageless, moneyless, non-market society using advanced technologies already available. We must, however, also

say that we do not see entirely eye to eye with Drew Pendergrass on certain elements of the analysis he puts forwards. In this regard we would highlight in particular: his vision of a future global socialist society as one still to be run by governments, if globally as well as nationally; his view that the Russian and Chinese revolutions of the 20th century constituted, at least in their early stages, an attempt to establish socialism in our terms; and his insistence that, from the point of view of practical resource usage, we can only have socialism if everyone is vegan.

In our view socialism can only be a society without leaders and led, and without national boundaries. It follows from this that it must also be free of governments, whether national or global. Its watchword must be administration of things rather than government over people. Of course we accept that the interviewee may be using the word 'government' in a wider sense than normal and 'national' more in the sense of 'regional'. If so, then his view may equate closely to ours.

Our less than positive view of his seeing the Russian and Chinese revolutions as attempts at socialism arises from the fact that neither country was anywhere close to the advanced form of capitalism needed

for socialism to emerge from them. Lenin famously said that, if the Bolsheviks had to wait for the masses to understand socialism, it would take 500 years (meaning never), while China under Mao was little more than the personal possession of a tyrannical ruler who was prepared to unleash and oversee the most profound atrocities to affirm and consolidate his power.

Pendergrass is open about the need he sees to propose a highly detailed picture of a future non-market society, which he conceives as arising gradually and imperfectly from tendencies within capitalism and being 'ironed out' into complete 'socialism' with time. We, on the other hand, insist on the need for a majority of workers to first win control of political power, probably via the ballot box, at which point detailed plans for running the new society will have already been made and the passage to it can be relatively seamless. As it will be up to those around when socialism starts to be seriously on the agenda to decide on specific details, we see it as arguably undemocratic and even maybe dogmatic to start proposing detailed plans now (speculative ideas perhaps, but not detailed plans), since we do not know at what point society will then be, in particular technologically.

Political instinct

WHEN SPEAKING of the role of instinct in humans, socialists tend to focus on the 'adapted behaviour' element which highlights our species flexibility and ability to learn relevant behaviour in a given natural or cultural context. Our long childhood gives the individual behavioural resources and social skills without which he or she could not flourish. Of course, as animals, we have many other instincts such as fight or flight, self-preservation, sexual desire, cooperation and the maternal bond etc and these are not always compatible with each other in certain circumstances. Socialists would like to add the need for meaningful and creative work to this list but for obvious political reasons little research (to my knowledge) has been done on this by biologists who, like other scientists, are restricted in their studies by the ideology that provides their funding.

The old nurture versus nature debate seems to have reached an uneasy truce but it would seem that the majority in society still prefer to believe in genetic determinism as an explanation for human behaviour – which merely serves as the latest incarnation of the 'human nature' ideology which readily embraces all of the negative aspects of humanity and none of the positive elements.

If we look closely at the cultural concept of instinct we can see that it excludes learnt behaviour. In our admiration for a sports person we might say that their talent is innate or instinctive which is felt to be somehow superior to those whose prowess is primarily the result of perfecting their craft through practice and the application of technique. Strangely many who suffer from 'mental illnesses' seem more content with a diagnosis of a 'chemical imbalance' in the brain rather than one that indicates childhood trauma or environmental and social degradation etc. Similarly, the debates concerning gender identity and sexual preference centre on whether gender and/or sexuality is determined by biology at birth or by childhood experiences.

There seems to be a desire to bypass complex sociological and psychological explanations for our behaviour in an attempt to get 'back to nature' which is felt to be more authentic and free



of intellectual convolution. It's hard to know if this desire is a result of the use of Ockham's razor or just plain old anti-intellectualism. There is no denying that endless psychotherapy is a money cow but then so are the drugs produced by big pharma which claim to be remedies for medicalised emotional distress.

There are some who still believe in the concept of evil but socialists do not recognise this as a force in the world. People may be described as evil but this does not tell us why they behave in a way that qualifies them for this distinction. We would look to psychological explanations for such criminality – but then, of course, we run into the contradictions created by criminal law where the killing of individuals for money or jealousy etc. is considered to be murder but dropping bombs on innocent people during wartime is not.

It would seem that, given the right circumstances, many of us can compromise our moral values and behave in ways we would not think possible during our 'normal' everyday lives. Where does this overriding power for destruction come from? Some psychologists have theorized that usually dormant instincts are at the heart of this terrible behaviour that we see played out in recent history time and again. We might be able to explain wars in terms of the paranoia and greed of ruling classes but why can millions of ordinary people be seemingly so willing to murder each other at the caprice of such parasites?

The fabric of culture and morality sometimes seems to be a very thin

venerer unable to restrain the hatred provoked by propaganda. Some have suggested that this is because of some innate and dormant instinct within humanity that is accumulated because capitalism is unable to provide the basic human need for meaningful work, political equality and social justice. It is reported that many young men happily went off to the First World War because it liberated them from a life of repetitive and meaningless toil. And if you give people hate figures to blame for their unhappiness (the Kaiser or Putin for example) you have a recipe for the mass murder called war.

All of us are initially dumbfounded when confronted by the evidence of the Holocaust; the City of Death called Auschwitz is a continual reminder of what can happen when the forces of hatred, sadism and genocidal madness are unleashed. Political explanations alone are inadequate in the face of such crimes. As soon as we turn from the rational consideration of politics and turn it into an ideological confrontation of faiths we begin to make room for the irrational which, if not checked, can become a full conflagration of madness. Many historians begin their analysis of Nazi Germany by saying how surprising it was that such a cultured and progressive country like Germany could plunge itself into an abyss of cruelty and destruction without considering that it might have been the very capitalist culture that they so admire which provided a fertile context for the growth of death cults like the Nazis.

No historian has given a comprehensive explanation of why the Holocaust happened and we simply don't know if it was partly, or even mainly, the result of unleashing dormant self-destructive instincts. Human instinctual behaviour is a long way from being thoroughly understood. But what we do know was wonderfully articulated by Vanessa Redgrave in her role as Fania Felon in the film *Playing for Time* when one of her fellow inmates at the death camp condemns all the Nazi guards as 'monsters' to which Felon replies calmly and sorrowfully: 'no, they are human beings just like us – that's the problem'.

WEZ

The Times They Need a-Changin'

AT THE recent first public meeting of the newly formed Yorkshire Branch, a Socialist Party speaker presented a well-informed and powerful case against capitalism and for socialism as the only viable alternative for the meeting of all people's needs.

As a social element the folk trio of which I'm one third played a selection of 'Celtic' tunes. As the other two thirds of our group are members of other political parties, Labour and Green, they gave me some insight on the drive home, into the effectiveness of the talk. The Green Party member is from what might be termed the Old Labour tradition. He feels the Labour Party has betrayed its socialist past which is why he joined the Greens. Interestingly, his expressed political views are in many ways similar to those espoused by us.

He is vehement about capitalism being the root of the world's ills, be that poverty, climate change and related issues. For him it's not just love of money that's the root of all evil, but money itself. Unsurprisingly he found himself in virtually complete agreement with all the speaker had to say. However, despite referring to himself, even before the meeting, as a socialist he continues to support the Green Party. While disavowing money he continues to advocate a basic income scheme as a palliative to the difficulties the money system causes. Similarly, he supports environmentalist actions as a response to the climate crisis even though he accepts that capitalism cannot be changed from pursuit of profit with all that entails, to meeting needs.

The reforms enacted by the post-Second World War Labour government remain for him socialist markers that have been, and are still being, undone to some extent by recent Labour policies, and all the more so by pernicious Conservative administrations. This is someone who, despite residual illusions about previous Labour governments, has grasped the socialist case, but cannot take the next step, away from the lure of immediate reforms, the need to feel he is taking action now that might garner electoral support.

The disconnect is a deep-seated disbelief that it is actually possible to motivate people on a world-wide scale to act in concert to profoundly change the way the world is for the common good. For him the principles of the Socialist Party are correct, but in theory only. To stand by them may be principled, but unlikely to be acted on in the foreseeable future. In the meanwhile, and who knows how long that meanwhile may be, what could be done to make life a



little better in the present, rather than some unspecified future?

My Labour Party colleague again had no disagreement with the spokesman's critique of capitalism. Yet, for all its flaws, which he accepts are real, he continues to see Labour as a more benign alternative to the iniquitous Tories, for all the failings of the Starmer leadership. Labour, for him, is the only alternative, in the practical sense, of removing the Tories from office, his primary political objective. It is irrelevant how correct the Socialist Party may be because the party is in no position to actually change anything.

If, very hypothetically, the Socialist Party were to win an overwhelming majority of MPs in a general election, his point is that unless this was repeated simultaneously throughout the world, those MPs would have to compromise to deal with the immediate situation, or stand aside. As that hypothesis is unlikely to be realised, there is no prospect of any realistic change in the foreseeable. There is a disconnect between the analysis of society's present structure and any impending practical solution.

He felt as if he was being asked, by implication, to not participate come the next election. This, for him, would be tantamount, if it became widespread amongst Labour supporters, to leaving the door to 10 Downing Street wide open for the Tories to stroll through again.

While none of this is novel, it does illustrate an abiding conundrum for socialists. That is, while the case for socialism may well be more widely acceptable than it presently appears, the personal may be a huge block against it becoming a mass movement. A casual conversation is not scientific evidence, but still it seems to me that they expressed views that are commonly articulated. The apparent size of the task overwhelms sustained engagement.

After all, no matter how large or widespread a mass movement becomes, its component parts are individuals, and their personal perspectives, whether profound, petty or both, are significant. The influence of capitalist ideology through mass and social media weighs heavily on personal concerns. There is also the not inconsiderable conservatism of preferring to stick with what is known, however disagreeable some of it is.

Socialists are going to have to find ways of dealing with this. Making the case for socialism is difficult enough as large numbers of people do not come into meaningful contact with socialists or their sources of information. It may well be some factor beyond just the general case for socialism, such as the increasing climate crisis, that begins to focus general thinking to consider and act to bring about profound change. This may especially be so if the main political parties are perceived to be powerless in increasingly urgent circumstances.

While socialism may seem a better alternative to what presently exists, it remains in the view of all too many merely an idea that's attractive but uncertain, lacking in anything other than the broadest of outlines. For socialists there remains the painstaking prospect of continuing to make the case, the steady erosion of the ideological wall built by capitalism. Because of the public meeting in a South Yorkshire pub, a few more, including my two band mates, have looked over that wall.

They have seen beyond and like the look of the prospect. Now the challenge is to get them to start demolishing that wall so they can take steps beyond it towards a truly democratic society that meets need not greed.

DAVE ALTON

Was Marx really a reformist?

A CONTROVERSY has broken out between two reformist groups about reforms. It started with an article by Dylan Riley in the *New Left Review* in April which criticised 'neo-Kautskyites' for advocating a green new deal; this, argued Riley, would come up against 'the structural logic of capital' and so wouldn't work as intended ([tinyurl.com/4wy2hc75](https://www.tinyurl.com/4wy2hc75)). Accepting the tag neo-Kautskyite, Seth Ackerman replied in *Jacobin* magazine to try to show that Marx himself believed that reforms could overcome the 'structural logic of capital' and so were worth struggling for ([tinyurl.com/5whj5u8p](https://www.tinyurl.com/5whj5u8p)).

Ackerman's case was based on Marx's support for the 1847 Factory Act which limited the working day for women and children to 10 hours. This had been opposed, not just by most factory owners but by tame economists one of whom notoriously argued that profits were made in the last hour of a day's work and that cutting hours would ruin businesses. Marx refuted this by showing that every minute a worker worked was divided into paid and unpaid labour and so the Ten Hour Bill would not result in a total loss of profits (see section 3 of chapter 9 of volume I of *Capital*). It was also in the longer-term interest of the capitalist class as a whole, as over-working workers

threatened their fitness as profit-producers of future generations of workers. In other words, it was not against the 'structural logic of capital.'

Nevertheless, in his Inaugural Address to the founding congress of the International Working Mens' Association in 1864 Marx did describe (which Ackerman quotes) the passing of the Ten Hour Bill as the first time that 'the political economy of the middle class succumbed to the political economy of the working class'.

Marx's strategy at the time was to get a workers' movement going, even just on a trade union basis, in the expectation that it would later develop into a conscious movement for socialism. So, this was a rhetorical flourish to show that working class struggle, even within capitalism, was not useless. In the event, Marx's strategy didn't work. Working class political parties did emerge but turned out to be more interested in obtaining reforms under capitalism than in campaigning for socialism.

In arguing that this meant 'that Marx knew that the struggle for reforms was part of the struggle for socialism', Ackerman reads too much into Marx's rhetoric for the occasion and ignores his insistence in the same speech on the need for the workers to

win control of political power ('revolution') before anything could be done to end their exploitation. Marx did support certain reforms that benefitted workers, and the Factory Acts did do this, but he never saw campaigns for them ('reform') as part of the struggle for socialism, only to try to get a better deal under capitalism.

Ackerman went on to argue that there is no 'structural logic of capital' that prevents reforms working but chose an easy interpretation of this logic to refute — that reforms will fail due to 'the falling rate of profit'. That is not our position. Ours is that capitalism is a profit-driven system and that any reform that impinges on profit or profit-making won't work as envisaged; the only reforms that are accepted are those that don't go against this 'structural logic', including health services and universal education (which help create and maintain a reasonably educated and fit working class to operate modern industry).

The real argument on reforms is not about the reforms themselves but against reformism, the policy of advocating reforms in the belief that this will somehow help the struggle for socialism. It doesn't and it can't and it encourages illusions that divert from the struggle for socialism.

Halo Halo

Karma and the Bible

KARMA IS a bummer. Karma is a Buddhist concept allied to reincarnation. Be nice this time and your next life will be good. Be an illegitimate so-and-so in this life and look out buddy because who knows what you might come back as.

This column eschews karma and all religious fairy tales but seeing someone get bitten on the bum for previous unkindness is gratifying to the atheistic too. For future reference, we do not endorse schadenfreude. Well maybe just this once. American censors, it's you we mean.

At the mention of Galileo, Freddie Mercury and Queen fans, and others, will start singing to themselves, 'Thunderbolts and lightning, very, very frightening me, Galileo, Galileo, Figaro- magnificoo,' from *Bohemian Rhapsody*. Galileo Galilei was a sixteenth/seventeenth century Italian astronomer who came into conflict with the Catholic Church. His support of Copernican heliocentrism, i.e. the planets revolve around the Sun, and not the prevailing religious view that the Earth was the centre of the universe put Galileo on a

collision course with the Catholic hierarchy. He was fortunate to get out of it without serious bodily injury.

Nobody expects the Roman Inquisition! Whether Galileo did or not expect it, when science contradicted theological mumbo-jumbo, a heap of trouble was the result. Founded in 1542 the Roman Inquisition is still going strong. It's now known as the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. Among other things, Galileo found himself on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, which is a list of books Catholics were forbidden to read. The index was discontinued in 1966. History is littered with examples of censorship of all kinds. It never bodes well for someone or other. Which brings us to the present day.

An American writers' organisation, Pen America (*Guardian*, 20 April) has been monitoring the incidence of book banning and, over a period of six months, has seen a 28 percent increase in such activities within American public schools.

Shades of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. Sounds like the USA is determined to

carry on the fine traditions of the Soviets and the NSDAP to name but a few.

Won't somebody think of the children! Helen Lovejoy, wife of the Reverend Lovejoy, was forever crying out in *The Simpsons*. She sounds like the sort of person who would use that as emotional blackmail to impose their own views upon others.

Pen America says that bans are more common in states that are Republican-run.

A Utah school district — home of the Mormon church and a place that Joe Hill didn't want to be seen dead in after Utah executed him — has banned the Bible (for vulgarity and violence) from school libraries and is considering banning the Book of Mormon too. (*Guardian*, 3 June). That'll teach the proselytising equivalent of the Jehovah's Witnesses! Your fairy story got banned! How'd you like that evangelists? Guess you reap what you sow. Last word to the Simpsons' Nelson Muntz: 'Ha Ha!'

DC

Splashing out on drip

WEARING DESIGNER clothing and flashy accessories to show off wealth is nothing new; it's the particular styles and favoured brands which come and go, along with the terminology used. The word 'bling' became as unfashionable as neon legwarmers once it picked up connotations of tackiness. Since around 2018, 'drip' has steadily come into vogue, meaning blatantly fashionable, proven only by owning eye-wateringly expensive clothes, shoes, jewellery or watches of the right brands. The term comes from 'dripping' with money, enough to fork out £5,500 on a Chanel bag, for example.

Presenter and comedian David Whately, also known as Sideman, explores the 'drip' lifestyle in a documentary shown as part of Channel 4's *Untold* strand. *Addicted to Drip* is aimed at viewers aged 16 to 34, those most likely to be attracted to the trend. The research liberally quoted throughout the show is from a study of 2,000 people in that age range carried out by financial coaching company Claro Wellbeing.

Addicted To Drip follows a usual template for documentaries, starting with a rapid round of clips from the show ahead, patronisingly expecting people not to stay tuned in unless they already know what they'll be watching. The rest of the programme keeps to the familiar pattern of the presenter meeting people affected, serious points made by experts and occasional bouts of worrying stats. The presenter is expected to go on a personal journey while making a documentary like this, which is just Whately finding out whether he becomes inclined towards a drip-fed lifestyle and deciding 'no'.

One of the people Whately talks with is Samantha, who says she tried 'to fill some kind of void' after bereavements with spending sprees on clothes and accessories using her inheritance money. When she reached the point of having thousands of pounds worth of designer gear but not enough funds to buy a train ticket, she came to believe she was wasting money and her life. Others have got into debt in order to buy into drip: one in ten young people are taking out credit at least monthly to fuel their spending on designer brands. Not all of the under-35s surveyed



Credit: Channel 4

would have heard of the term 'drip', but regardless, almost half are in debt from purchasing luxury goods, and almost a third have less than £100 in savings. The kind of pressure this can involve causes problems beyond the fiscal. Although being in debt has been normalised, especially since prices shot up, 58 percent feel stressed about their financial situation. For some, the effects are worse: Whately meets fashion influencer Michelle, whose mental health declined from trying to live up to the lifestyle to the extent of ending up in hospital.

Whately also speaks with some of those who have done well for themselves financially through drip. Drew dropped out of studying medicine, realising he could make more money building up his business as an influencer with his own clothing brand. 'Godfather of Drip' Chiefer has a well-established and lucrative business selling jewellery to celebs. He says that most people who are into drip weren't born into wealth, and wear designer clothes now because they weren't able to have them when they were growing up. Being motivated to have an affluent lifestyle by wanting to escape from past hardship seems to be one of the characteristics of drip.

Drip-friendly brands tend to be pitched at younger people, especially those still living with their parents and who don't have the financial commitments which come with having children. Once a drip product is launched, much of its promotion is put together and spread by its own customers, which is a capitalist's dream come true. Those living the drip life market

themselves and what they're wearing through social media, aiming for an image which will be popular enough to bring in enough of an income.

The up-front role of omnipresent smartphones is what makes the drip lifestyle different to previous niche wealth-based groups, such as 'sloanes'. As Stacey Lowman of Claro Wellbeing tells us, there's a 'perfect storm' of social media, advertising strategies and online banking these days. Technology has been shaped to pair up products with customers, so that their money can easily move, largely upwards, with just a few taps on a screen. Some people have become rich and happy through this, others have suffered both financially and emotionally, as shown on *Addicted To Drip*.

Wanting to have nice things isn't the issue in itself; problems lie with what drives this. In capitalism, 'nice things' get reduced to a series of wealth-related values. The people interviewed by Whately may be bashful about how much they've spent on togs and trinkets, but the exorbitant prices are themselves a selling point, weirdly. Everything else in the process can also be boiled down to a monetary amount, from whatever wages those who make the commodities receive, to the spending power of customers following a social media influencer, to, ultimately, the amount of profit made by those at the top of the food chain. For them, the money's coming in more like a flood than a drip.

MIKE FOSTER

What is Marxism?

CRITIQUE
OF THE
GOTHA
PROGRAM
KARL MARX



Critique of the Gotha Programme
(translated and annotated by Kevin B. Anderson and Karel Ludenhoff, with a new introduction by Peter Hudis and an afterword by Peter Linebaugh, PM Books, 2023)

References to Marxists and Marxism are legion. China claims to be a Marxist state. So does North Korea. In the US many left-wing writers, academics and others say they are Marxists. Movements that don't claim allegiance to Marxism, for example 'Black Lives Matter' and 'Me Too' are nevertheless said by their right-wing opponents to be Marxist. The act of 'taking the knee' by professional footballers is deemed by some to be a 'Marxist' gesture. And Jeremy Clarkson is fond of using 'Marxist' as a term of abuse for just about anyone who disagrees with him on anything. So what do Marxist and Marxism really mean?

It surely stands to reason that such terms should at least have some connection to the individual from whom they derive, the nineteenth-century political philosopher and socialist revolutionary Karl Marx. But in reality, of course, it's impossible to stop them being thrown around at random either as an insult or a beacon of pride, just as it's impossible to stop terms like 'communism' and 'socialism' being used willy-nilly, often in ways far removed from their original meaning. Despite this, it still has to be worth carrying on doing what the Socialist Party and the *Socialist Standard* have been doing for well over 100 years – that is attempting to shed clear light on Marxism in terms of the ideas formulated and laid down by Marx himself in his writings.

In this connection a recent edition and new translation from the original German of one of Marx's lesser known works is a useful aid, since it helps us to identify a particularly important aspect of Marx's thought. The *Critique* is a short work, not much more than 20 pages long, written by Marx in 1875 as a confidential response to a 'Unity Programme' issued by the German Workers Party. Dating from close to 30 years after what is probably Marx's best known work, the *Communist Manifesto*, it sheds light on the thought of the 'mature' Marx, in particular his ideas about the kind of society that he saw as replacing the capitalist system, which he analysed in detail in the three volumes of his famous work of economic theory,

Capital. So what we have in the *Critique* is ideas about future society from Marx's own pen, undisturbed by the later plethora of interpretations by commentators and critics, many of whom read little or nothing of what he wrote.

What stands out clearly from the *Critique* is Marx's concept of 'socialism' and 'communism'. As everyone knows, there have been and continue to be endlessly varying interpretations of what these terms mean. But here Marx describes as either 'communism' or 'socialism' (without making any distinction between the two) a future society based on the common ownership of the means of production and the consequent end of working for wages and producing for sale. This echoes his interchangeable use of both terms in his other writings, so thoroughly belying later attempts by commentators or regimes declaring themselves 'Marxist' to argue that Marxism propounds two stages of post-capitalist development, a 'lower' one called 'socialism' and a 'higher' one called 'communism'.

A second important element that emerges from the *Critique* (and one that continues to be entirely relevant today) is Marx's complete rejection of reformism, nationalism, and attachment to state institutions. He pours scorn on reformist demands such as 'direct legislation' and 'popular rights' and accuses the framers of the *Gotha Program*, the followers of Ferdinand Lassalle, of having 'conceived the workers' movement from the narrowest national standpoint'. All such positions, Marx declares, are 'remote from socialism'.

The editor of this new translation, American academic Peter Hudis, who calls himself a 'Marxist-Humanist', prefaces it with an introduction and some notes, while Peter Linebaugh adds an 'afterword' to the text. Most of what they both write is helpful and difficult to fault. Hudis, for example, makes short work of 'fake' political Marxism by stating: 'Neither the reformist social democratic version of socialism nor its revolutionary variant that was taken over by various forms of Stalinism and Marxist-Leninism succeeded in posing a viable alternative; instead, each morphed into some version of capitalism (in the case of Russia 'state-capitalism', elsewhere 'a more equitable or efficient way of organizing exchange).' Furthermore, he points out, the insistence of many in seeing the socialism talked about by Marx as referring to an earlier phase of social development, distinct from a later final form, communism, has meant that 'the idea of freedom is pushed off to a far-distant future that never comes, while divesting the idea of socialism of its liberatory content'.

In this connection Hudis also explains that, though Marx avoids entering into the specific details of a future socialist/communist society other than seeing it as a moneyless global system of free access ('the free and spontaneous allocation of goods and services') and democratic self-organisation, he does this 'on the grounds that communism is not a utopian ideal that one tried to impose upon the masses but is instead the result of the self-activity of the masses'. Above all, the editor goes on, 'Marx aimed to show that capitalism is not an immutable part of human existence but a transitory phenomenon' and 'makes it clear throughout his writings that socialism or communism is incompatible with the state'.

There is, however, one area where we would call into question the views put forward by Hudis. This relates to his apparently unquestioning acceptance of the labour time voucher system Marx suggested might have been needed in 1875, even once capitalism had been transcended, the market system got rid of, and commodity exchange, alienated labour and classes eliminated, (until, in Marx's words, 'all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly'). In other words that society would have had to wait until the means of production had been built up sufficiently to allow the operation of a complete free access society of 'from each according to ability to each according to need',

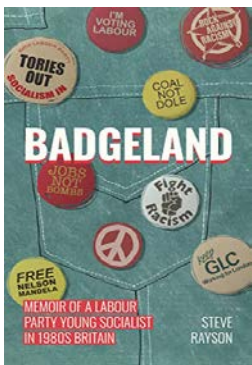
Hudis fails to take into account that Marx was writing at a time which, compared with what came later and above all what exists today, was relatively undeveloped in terms of the resources and technology available. Clearly that has changed radically since Marx's lifetime and there can be little doubt that there will be the means to establish very rapidly a complete free access society once the majority of workers decide to join together collectively to bring it about on a world scale. So no longer any need to go through a period of 'labour-time vouchers' (which, in any event, would have had drawbacks even in 1875).

No need either to spend time on the 'reformist' activities which Marx scorns in the *Critique* and which the editor too seems to agree is unnecessary. After all any such 'in the meantime' activity can only be time wasted, delaying if not putting off forever the ultimate objective. Given this, it is somewhat surprising that in spite of apparent agreement with and encouragement of the views expressed by Marx in the *Critique*, Hudis (also author of the 2012 book *Marx's Concept of the Alternative to Capitalism*) is on record in a recent essay ('Democratic Socialism and the Transition to Genuine Democracy') as supporting reformist activity, referring to

such as ‘a political project that fights for and secures needed reforms while focusing on the long-term need to transcend capitalism’ (reviewed in this journal, April 2021). While we would argue that ‘long-term’ is effectively equivalent to never, at the same time, with respect to the kind of society to be aimed for, we do agree with Hudis that socialism, once established, will, as he puts it, ‘provide the space for individuals to discover themselves and freely pursue their destinies, now that such external impediments as class domination, statist control, and abstract forms of domination no longer stand in their way’.

HKM

Badged and Kebabbed



Badgeland.
By Steve Rayson.
Bavant Press.
2023.

This is an engaging and well-written account of a life spent in left-wing politics during the 1980s, mainly in the Labour Party and also in Militant for a time, referencing a variety of Trotskyist and leftist groups from the era, together with their preoccupations and campaigns. Hence the Badgeland title – from ‘Rock Against Racism’ to ‘Coal Not Dole’.

Rayson starts as a schoolkid with an interest in politics in his home town of Swindon before moving on to be a student radical at Bath University and then after graduation to various management positions, initially at the former Greater London Council (GLC) before its abolition by Thatcher.

He charts an emerging disjunction in his life between the metropolitan sophistication of London and its progressive social liberalism and the visits he makes back to his working class roots in Swindon to visit family. There, the working men’s club frequented by his father and his friends has little time or interest in the radical left. Much to Rayson’s dismay they instead developed much more of an interest in buying their council houses and making a quick buck by joining in the various share-offerings of the privatized utilities. It is a tale that reflects a fundamental and wider shift at the time, when former working class trade unionists became seduced by the alleged benefits of the ‘property-owning democracy’

promoted by Thatcher’s Tories.

The book is funny by turn and sad at others, and in essence charts his frustrations at the failure of most of the campaigns he got involved in, from CND and the Miners’ Strike to the fight to save the GLC. He also traces the parallel tendencies within the left that were to emerge as New Labour, making an accommodation with Thatcherism that Rayson was uncomfortable with.

Eventually, after his time as a manager in local government, Rayson became an entrepreneur himself and in the ultimate irony claims that his life in and around Trotskyist groups prepared him well for the task, incongruous though that may sound. Part of a recalled conversation with a left-wing friend at the time is worth repeating:

‘I think all start-up founders should join a Trotskyist group as a teenager. It is far more valuable than studying for an MBA. They run weekly education sessions, they give you homework and individual mentors. They make you do presentations and coach you in the art of public speaking.

Okay, you have to moderate the hand movements and stop referring to everyone as comrade... But seriously it was Trotskyists who helped me achieve my ‘A’ Level grades to get to university...

Trotskyists teach you sales skills the hard way. They put you outside M & S with newspapers saying ‘Smash the Capitalist System’ and challenge you to sell as many copies as you can. It is the sink or swim school of sales training and better than any selling course...

They demonstrate how to build organisational capacity and communicate a consistent vision to their members. They generate revenues that are out of all proportion to their small size and are incredibly resilient. They create and publish national newspapers. They are also experts at guerrilla marketing which is a required skill for entrepreneurs.’ (pp.352-3).

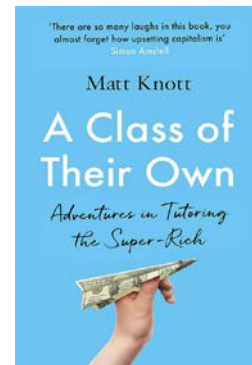
In this he’s not entirely wrong of course, and others have made successful careers in public sector management for themselves based on some of these skills. Rayson has also worked in that sector and as a consultant too, and clearly still has an interest in radical politics.

These days, despite his various campaigning disappointments, he says he tends to vote for the most radical candidate on offer. Perhaps he’s even voted for the SPGB. Strangely enough, there is an argument that our commitment to a society of abundance and free access to wealth without a coercive state means that socialism as we see it could be the

most creative and ‘entrepreneurial’ society of all. But then again, he would never have learnt any of that from Militant or the RCP.

DAP

Lessons Learned



A Class of Their Own: Adventures in Tutoring the Super-Rich.
By Matt Knott.
Trapeze £9.99

After he had graduated from university, Matt Knott spent a few years tutoring children of extremely rich parents. His account of this is very amusing (such as ‘you wouldn’t believe what some of these people call their children’), but it also provides an insight into the lives of the wealthiest.

This is a world where PJs are private jets rather than pyjamas. Where people take a personal chef on holiday with them. Where people have a chalet in St Moritz and a holiday home in Kenya with a privately-owned beach that is only used at Christmas. Where it is acceptable to take a 45-minute helicopter ride in order to go to a restaurant in Rome. Where a family employ a driver (‘I had realised that the word “chauffeur” was terribly common’). Where living in North Kensington is nowhere near as prestigious as living in Kensington. The super-rich apparently have ‘a way of dressing casually which only served to highlight their wealth’. Yet their lives are often empty at their core.

Tutoring really meant being a ‘study buddy’ or a posh babysitter. A tutor is a status symbol, as everyone in a school class has one. Of one boy he writes, ‘How many people had he encountered in his life who were only there because his parents were paying them?’ Knott felt he had been paid to be his friend. In general the kids had no ‘sense of freedom’, having been led to believe that everything is a competition, though clearly they were rather freer than working-class children. One boy gets into the school his parents had chosen for him (but not because his father paid for a new sports centre). International demand – from Russia, for instance – has increased the competition for places at English public schools.

Knott also spent some time volunteering to help state school pupils. He derived far more satisfaction from helping a Muslim girl get into Cambridge than from the mega-rich kids he was paid to teach.

PB

What Socialism Means

THE OBJECT of socialism is to unite humanity and to solve social problems by building a society which can satisfy the universal need for co-operation and material security.

Socialism involves a creative outlook concerned with the quality of life. In association with others, the individual will develop himself as a social being. With enlightenment and knowledge, man will replace the ignorance, false illusions and prejudice from which he suffers in our own day. Socialism is the form of society most compatible with the needs of man. Its necessity springs from the enduring problems, the economic contradictions and social conflicts of present-day society. Socialist society must be based upon the common ownership and democratic control by the whole community of the means of life.

Life will be based on human relationships of equality and co-operation. Through these relationships, man will produce useful things, construct amenities and establish desirable institutions. Socialism will resolve the conflicts which at present divide man from man. Regardless of ethnic or cultural differences, the whole world community will share a common interest.

Under capitalism the whole apparatus of production are either privately owned, as in America, or state controlled by a privileged minority, as in Russia. The economies of some countries combine both private and state control. Both forms are alien to the interests of the majority, since the priorities of trade and commerce, exploitation and profit-making, dominate life. Under both forms, production for sale on the market is organized primarily for the benefit of a privileged minority.

The building of Socialism requires a social reorganization where the earth's resources and the apparatus of production are held in common by the whole community. Instead of serving sectional interests, they are made freely accessible to society as a whole. Production will be organized at world level with co-ordination of its differing parts down to local levels.

In Socialism there will be no market, trade or barter. In the absence of a system of exchange, money will have no function to perform. Individuals will participate freely in production and take what they need from what is produced.

(Socialist Standard, Special issue on Socialism, July 1973)



"This is the ugly face of capitalism."—EDWARD HEATH

Obituary – Stephen Shenfield

We were shocked to learn of the sudden death at the end of April of our American comrade Stephen Shenfield. He was born in England in 1950 and joined the old Haringey branch as a teenager and became an active member, writing for the *Socialist Standard* and serving for a while on the executive committee. However in 1974 he was one of a group of members who were expelled for breaking the then rule about publishing unauthorised material. He didn't rejoin the movement till 2006 when he became a member of the World Socialist Party of the US to where he had emigrated in 1989. In the meantime, as a Russian speaker (he had relatives in Kiev), he had become an academic and expert in 'Soviet studies', publishing many articles and books on the subject. After rejoining he kept in touch with individuals and groups in Russia that were critical of capitalism. He resumed contributing to this journal (as 'Stefan'). At the time of his death he was the general secretary of the American party (an administrative not a leadership post in our parties). The movement has lost an active member. Our condolences go to his wife and family.

Obituary – Trevor Lovatt

Trevor Lovatt, a member of the World Socialist Party (NZ) for many years, passed away last October at the age of 85. He was a hard working socialist who would not under any circumstances compromise his knowledge of the Party's case. Trevor was initially a Social Credit Party supporter. Upon meeting and discussing politics with Peter Furey (a member of the WSPNZ) in the 1980's Trevor's views were forever changed and he joined the WSPNZ. His contribution to promoting and expanding the idea of a 'World of Free Access' was relentless. Trevor would continually question, and supply his views on why the socialist alternative was not being taken onboard by society as a whole. As well as being a regular voice of the WSPNZ's talkback programme on Access Community Radio Auckland (1990s), he was also involved with the WSPNZ's Radio Imagine, which operated for many years from the Party's HQ in Auckland. Trevor was a keen weightlifter and loved country music.

World Socialist Party (NZ)

World Socialist Movement Online Meetings

Our general discussion meetings are currently held on Zoom. To connect, enter <https://zoom.us/j/7421974305> in your browser and wait to be admitted to the meeting. Please note: from September, meetings will be on Jitsi, at <https://meet.jit.si/SPGBFridaynights>

JULY 2023 EVENTS

World Socialist Movement online meetings

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

Sunday 9 July 10.00 (GMT + 1) Jit-si

<https://meet.jit.si/CentralBranchSPGB>

Central Online Branch Meeting

Friday 7 July 19.30 (GMT + 1) Zoom

Statistics : How they are used in capitalism and how they could be used in socialism

Speaker: Richard Botterill

Friday 14 July 19.30

(GMT + 1) Zoom

Did you see the News?

Discussion on recent subjects in the news

Host: Adam Buick

Friday 21 July 19.30

(GMT + 1) Zoom

No Meeting (Summer School)

Friday 28 July 19.30

(GMT + 1) Zoom

Discussion or subject to be arranged

Friday 4 August

No Friday evening Zoom meeting



Socialist Party Physical Meetings

**BIRMINGHAM • Friday 21-Sunday 23 July
Summer School on Work**

Woodbrooke, 1046 Bristol Road, Birmingham B29 6LJ.

For details of subjects and times of talks.

The event will be streamed via Jitsi at

<https://meet.jit.si/SPGBSummerSchool>

For details of subjects and times of talks contact:

spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk

LONDON • Sunday 30 July 3pm

History. Speaker: Simon Wigley

Preceded by street stall at noon and London branch meeting at 2pm (Note change of day from last Saturday to last Sunday of the month).

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

**GLASGOW • Saturday 8 July
1 pm onward**

Social (Second Saturday every month)

. The Atholl Arms Pub. 2 minutes walk from Buchanan Street Bus Station. Call Paul on 07484 717893 for details.

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.

Behind the Crime

WE ALL make bad decisions. Sometimes the consequences aren't that bad, but sometimes they are. That may depend on the circumstances at the time, but it may also depend on the long-term build-up to the decision. This came out clearly in a recent BBC radio programme which looked at the life of a woman whose bad decision – in fact whose series of bad decisions – caused her to end up in prison.

Marriage, abuse and incarceration

Sinem was the daughter of a Turkish family who had fled from persecution in their own country to settle and start a new life in the UK. She told us that, as a young girl, she did well at school but found it hard to fit in with others of her age largely due to the strictures of her home background. This sent her somewhat off the rails. As a teenager she was found in bed with the son of another Turkish family and, given the culture, that meant only one thing – marriage. She quickly had children, which, though it somehow made her feel more secure, did not satisfy her and she managed to enrol on a university course and get a degree. But employment was hard to find and she eventually took a job as a prison officer- in a men's prison.

This is when things really started to go downhill. Her abusive husband was violent to her and she decided she had to leave him. But in doing that she lost the extended family support she had previously had to help look after her children. This meant she had to reduce her hours of work, and this caused her acute financial difficulty. To be able to pay her rent and other expenses she fell into debt. And this triggered another bad decision. She started smuggling drugs into the prison she was working in to raise money. Inevitably perhaps she was found out and arrested.

But it's what happened then that, as a listener to this programme, I found particularly interesting and noteworthy. When her smuggling activity was discovered, she was not shunned or blamed by her fellow workers in the prison but treated with great understanding and compassion. Though she had, in a sense, betrayed them, during her arrest they carried on



supporting her and treating her like the human being fallen on hard times they knew she was. And when she herself was prosecuted and sent to prison, they carried on keeping in touch with her.

Understanding and compassion

This behaviour by her co-workers seems to accord well with the view now widely expressed by writers and commentators that the age-old idea of an inevitably 'nasty' human nature is no more than a myth and that, given half the chance, human beings will be kind to, cooperative with, and supportive of one another – including, and perhaps especially, when someone is 'in trouble'. Rutger Bregman's recent massively influential work, *Human Kind*, for example, argues that the innate, fundamental default of human beings is to be friendly, communal, kind-hearted and cooperative, something that seems to be confirmed by what happened in Sinem's case. And Sinem's incarceration also then turned out positive for her. In the open prison she was sent to, again she found enormous support, especially from the 'mentor' assigned to her. This helped her to recover from being the 'broken person' she said she was and to be then granted a day release arrangement to begin studying for a further degree and afterwards, when released completely, to end up as a university lecturer in criminology.

So a sort of happy ending. But a lucky one too, since, as the programme pointed out, we are all profoundly marked by the string of experiences that constitute our life. And of course in many cases this does not have a happy ending. In Sinem's case the earlier experience of a repressive

culture, an oppressive partner, and then the pressure of poverty led to an act which could have seen her life spiral entirely out of control. The fact that it didn't was, to a large extent, due to the kindness of others. This made her realise that, regardless of the 'crime' she'd committed, some people were on her side. And this made it possible for her to gain sufficient strength to make a relatively stable life for herself and her children, and also to help educate others.

Autonomy and cooperation

If we look more widely, how many times, in the society we live in – a society that is so advanced in technology and productive capacity but oh so backward in the way it makes use of these things – does lack of money and/or lack of the power and autonomy over their own lives (the two 'lacks' often going together) limit or remove an individual's control over their own life, their freedom of choice, their ability to interact cooperatively and, above all, to make the 'right' decision? And how much more likely is it that, in the society organised on the basis of 'from each according to ability to each according to need' that socialists argue for, the cooperative 'nature' of humans will prevail. And how true too is the writer Tine De Moor's statement that 'human beings claim togetherness and interaction' and 'our spirits yearn for connection just as our bodies hunger for food'.

HOWARD MOSS