

THE

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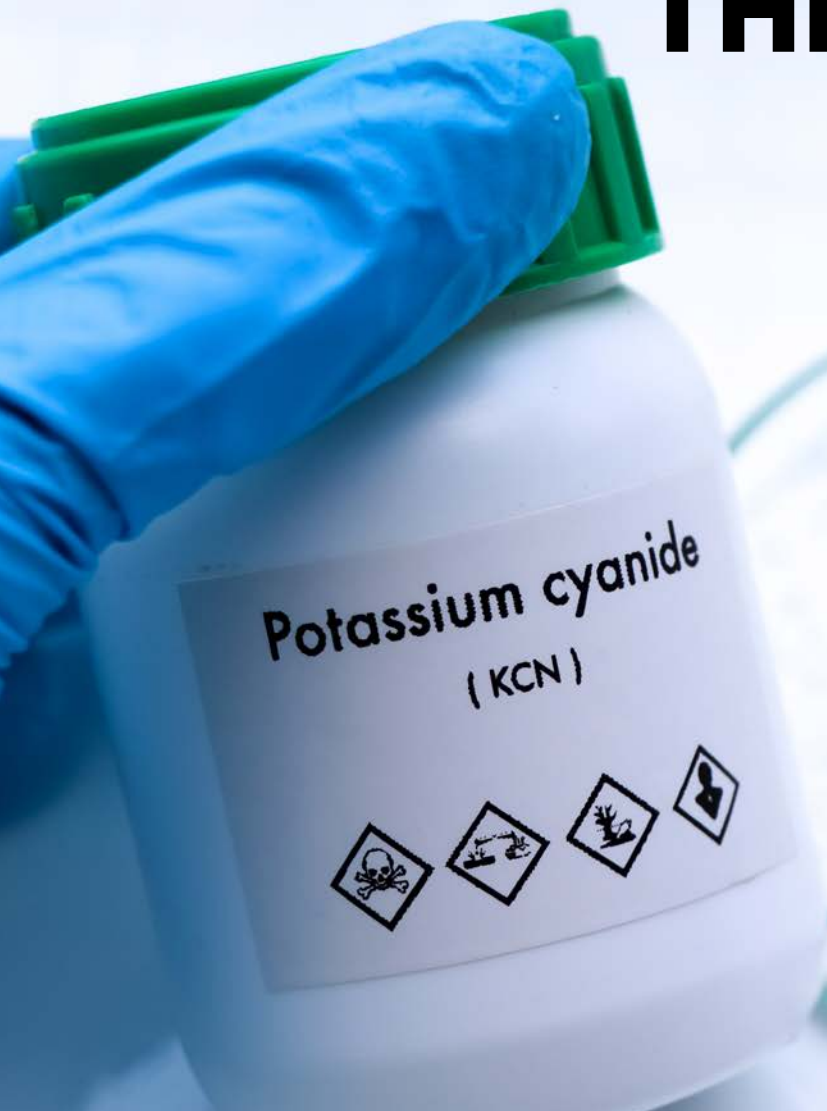
SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

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'Imagine' – Sugar-coated
anti-capitalism?
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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'

All fiscal conservatives now

SO STARMER says he doesn't object to being called a 'fiscal conservative' (BBC interview, 16 July).

The Labour Party used to seek support on the basis of providing social reforms that would benefit workers. That in fact was said to be their reason for existence and why trade unions supported them. Not any more. Starmer could not have been more specific when two days later he declared that 'it was "a big mistake" for the left to equate spending money with radicalism' (*Times*, 19 July).

Quite apart from the fact that this is a betrayal of the views he feigned to hold when seeking election as Corbyn's successor, the economic policy he now espouses is basically the same as Truss's — which both described in the same terms as 'Growth, Growth, Growth'. In other words, to try to force the capitalist economy to expand more. Since governments produce no wealth of their own, the only ways they can get money to fund their activities are taxes or borrowing.

The Truss government tried to encourage growth by cutting taxation on capitalist enterprises while leaving

government spending more or less unchanged; which meant the shortfall would have to be paid for by increased borrowing. The international speculators who lend money to governments were not prepared to play ball and a financial crisis ensued which led to the fall of the government.

Starmer and the Labour leadership realise they have to avoid this. As Yvette Cooper, the shadow Home Secretary, put it:

'We saw what happened with Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng's mini-budget. They ended up promising huge tax cuts for the rich. None of it was funded and they ended up crashing the economy' (*Times*, 18 July).

So as not to spook the international speculators they are not even prepared to offer minor reforms for the workers such as lifting the ban on parents on Universal Credit claiming benefits for more than two children. No, they are assuring the markets that they will be 'fiscally conservative'.

Labour's promise to make capitalism grow is a gamble as experience has shown that governments cannot do this. The most they can do is sustain

conditions that might encourage profit-making but the final decision as to whether or not to expand production — to grow — rests with individual capitalist enterprises and their estimation of whether or not doing so would be profitable. Sometimes it will be; sometimes it won't, but no period of growth is ever permanent.

Unless it is very lucky in that world market conditions bring it about, a Labour government will not see capitalism grow as much as they are promising. When growth stalls they will have to continue to be 'fiscal conservatives' and cut payments to workers, including the poorest, just as all previous governments, Labour as well as Conservative, have done.

Starmer is in effect admitting that reformism has failed (as we always said it would). His conclusion is to abandon reformism and embrace capitalism and its logic. Ours is to go for socialism, the common instead of class ownership of resources and production directly to satisfy people's needs not for profit. The choice is what it always was — capitalism or socialism?

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Bread and butter issues

THE PROPOSAL to upgrade capitalism to socialism, a global system of common ownership where everything is free at the point of use, is based on materialist arguments, not moral judgments about good and bad, right and wrong, fair and unfair, motivating though such considerations can also be. And this proposal stands or falls on a key question: can a world socialist society actually deliver what it promises?

People sometimes ask this in relation to the politics of socialism, for example querying whether, despite socialism's egalitarian ethos, informal hierarchies might nevertheless emerge. Or they might claim 'unintended consequences', such as the idea that science could be retarded by the absence of the capitalist lash of competition. Or that certain antisocial tendencies and attitudes are to some extent genetically built in and will therefore persist. We argue not, in all these cases, but it's not possible to give definitive answers to everything, and in any event we don't claim that socialism is a 'perfect' society, whatever that means, only one that is considerably better and more efficient than capitalism.

One issue however cannot be up for debate, and that is food, the most basic human need. Capitalism depends for its existence on scarcity, whereas socialism presupposes a society where there's enough for everybody. If people don't have enough to eat, the assumption is that the fabric of socialist society might break down in civil strife, spawning some retrograde form of private property society, with all its attendant features including war, oppressive hierarchies, rampant inequality and the like.

There is some reason to think this doomsday view is itself a product of the capitalist mindset, and that historically, and prehistorically, people's response to crisis was often one of cooperation, not mutual fighting. It is well known that people help each other after major disasters (tinyurl.com/37k6s86r) in what has been termed 'catastrophe compassion' (tinyurl.com/2s46p56t). In studies, one-year-old human children display empathy towards other children in distress (tinyurl.com/5d5e6nj4). Prehistoric human societies were largely cooperative and egalitarian (tinyurl.com/mrxcs3sc), but even the Neolithic farming revolution, itself very likely a response to climate catastrophe, depended on large-scale cooperation. Socialism could well be a far



more robust and durable society than even socialists imagine.

Nevertheless, food security is not negotiable, and we have often described socialism as a 'world of abundance'. But the word 'abundance' might conjure up fantastical notions, like the medieval tales of the Land of Cockaigne, where the rivers flowed with wine, the skies rained cheese and ready-to-eat roast chickens flew through the air. A better term might be 'sustainable sufficiency', which suggests the idea of enough without implying an infeasible cornucopia, though this consideration clearly did not worry the people behind the notion of Fully Automated Luxury Communism.

The matter of food would be fairly straightforward were it not for two factors. One is the widely held 'common sense' view that there are too many people, a subject often refuted in this magazine (eg, *Baby Bust*, December 2022). The other is the confusing statements coming out of various UN food-related bodies. Last year, as reported by the Food and Agricultural Organization, the chair of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) declared that 'we have enough food to feed 10 billion people' (tinyurl.com/yejhc3wk). But the FAO has previously stated (2009) that 'feeding a world population of 9.1 billion in 2050 would require raising overall food production by some 70 percent' (tinyurl.com/27sxx4tv). So which is it? Is there enough or isn't there?

The crucial factor in such projections is the model used, whether business-as-usual (FAO) or paradigm shift (CFS). If humans want to carry on as they are, with all the wasteful characteristics of capitalism, a huge increase in food output may very well be necessary. But there is growing awareness that the current state of things is unsustainable, and basically self-destructive. 30 percent of all food is wasted, much of it before it even reaches the end consumer, because of lack of refrigerant facilities in developing countries

to preserve crops which tend to harvest all at once, creating gluts. Plastic packaging also reduces food waste by up to 75 percent, but companies use cheap plastics which maximise their profits but are not biodegradable, causing massive pollution through the food chain and inspiring a self-defeating popular backlash against the use of *any and all* plastics. Meanwhile, food grown is not necessarily food directly intended for humans to eat. 60 percent of European wheat is fed to animals, as is 80 percent of the world's soya crops. 40 percent of US maize goes into cars, while 23 percent of global palm oil is used for diesel (tinyurl.com/3rd4285j). All this on a minority of the world's agricultural land, while the other 60 percent is used for livestock grazing to supply the rich world's meat diets (tinyurl.com/3ew7ncub). And that's to say nothing of the heavy fertiliser use, involving nitrogen run-offs that pollute rivers, cause algal blooms, and exacerbate climate change.

A recent Paris study found that sustainable nitrogen-free organic farming could feed between 3 and 14 billion, depending on the degree to which meat and dairy farming were reduced. Conversely, it concluded that if everyone insisted on a Western diet, consisting of around 55 percent animal protein, feeding 9 billion people would be impossible even with increased nitrogen use and the conversion to agriculture of an extra swathe of grassland the size of Russia (tinyurl.com/bdf6b9kx).

So is there enough food for socialist sufficiency? The answer is yes, but not necessarily without some hard trade-offs. Socialism is a materialist proposition, not a magical fairyland. But if today's exploited and oppressed workers get the opportunity to choose between wage slavery or a truly free life in socialism, we think they're more than capable of weighing up the pros and cons and deciding where their best interests lie.

PJS

Dear Editors

A NEW Marx letter was recently found: tinyurl.com/yc3ejy5r.

It was written in French originally so I thought I'd translate it. It's a letter to Jules Guesde. The latter's response is already known. It doesn't tell us anything new about Marx's thought. Marx affirms a vision of an independent workers' party, distinct both from the Blanquists affirming insurrection is always on the agenda and from the bourgeois tradition of republicanism. It also reaffirms his prediction of revolution in Russia and the inability of the English working class to revolt without revolution on the continent first, because of English imperialism. Here's the translation:

'10th of May 1879, 41 Maitland Park Road, London NW

Dear Citizen Guesde,

No French refugee who has any relation to me would have any doubt about the deep sympathy I feel for you or of the great interest I have in your work. Militant socialism certainly has many partisans in France, but there are few who unite as you do knowledge with courage and devotion. The election of Blanqui due to your initiative, is a first compensation for the sufferings and affronts that the upstarts in power inflict on you.

As for the return of the Legislature to Paris, I have pronounced myself in front of Lissagaray and Longuet in the same vein as your articles. After all, I attached more importance to the debates on this thing than to the thing itself, being well convinced that Messieurs the Gambettistes would rather live in Paris than vegetate in Versailles.

The great task for socialists in France, is the organisation of an independent and militant workers' party. This organisation which must not be confined to the towns, but must extend to the countryside, can only be done by means of propaganda and continuous struggle, an everyday struggle always corresponding to the given conditions of the moment, to current necessities. Only posthumous Jacobins know only one form of revolutionary action, the explosive form. This is quite natural on the part of bourgeois who have only ever raised their shields after having already occupied dominant social positions.

According to my conviction revolution in the explosive form will start this time not from the West, but from the East – from Russia. It will react first on the two other grave despotisms (illegible), Austria and Germany, where a violent upheaval has become a historical necessity. It is of the

utmost importance that at the moment of this general crisis Europe should find the French proletariat already constituted as a workers' party and ready to play its part. As for England, the material elements of its social transformation are overabundant, but what is lacking is the driving spirit. It will only be formed under the explosion of continental events. We must never forget that however miserable the lot of the bulk of the English working class may be, it nevertheless participates, to some extent, in England's empire on the world market or, which is even worse, imagines itself participating in it.

A few words on Longuet. You would be doing him a disservice if you thought he was your personal adversary. It's the contrary, although he was invited by a few coquettish emigrants, he did not allow himself to be drawn into quips. If his opinions sometimes differ from yours in regard to the tactics to be followed, I don't think they differ fundamentally. Finally family relations and friendships could have no influence on my political line from which I have never deviated.

In the hope that you will soon regain your freedom and your health, I am
Your very sincere friend Karl Marx.'

ERWAN MOYSAN, Cardiff

More on Marx

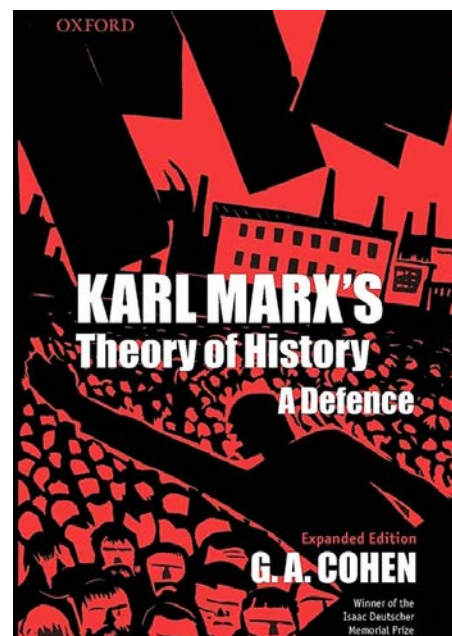
Dear Editors

As a professional philosopher and a socialist I was interested to read the exchange between Brian Morris and SJW in the June *Socialist Standard*.

We cannot simply call Marx a philosopher, or indeed an economist or an historian. He made huge contributions to all three disciplines but more importantly he challenged their orthodoxies. He also had other things on his mind, such as fomenting a global revolution.

What shines through in all his work is a commitment to argumentation and evidence rather than just wishful thinking or arm waving. That commitment is echoed in the practice of current Marx commentators known as *analytical Marxism* (sometimes called by its practitioners non-bullshit Marxism). Whatever their failings politically, they too insist on logic and rigour in contrast to the flashy and obscurantist work of some other currently fashionable commentators.

An excellent example of analytical Marxism is G A Cohen's book *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* (which I reviewed in the *Socialist Standard* in



August 1979). In it Cohen provided a philosophical underpinning for Marx's theory and considered what implications this had for when and how revolutionary change might occur.

I am not a card-carrying member of the non-bullshit Marxism group but I used the same analytical methodology in my book *Karl Marx our Contemporary: Social Theory for a post-Leninist World* (reviewed by Adam Buick in the *Socialist Standard* for October 1992). In it I argued that the welcome collapse of the East European regimes gave us a chance to assess Marx's theories in their own right rather than through the distorting lens of Leninism. What emerges from that analysis is that Marx's theories are remarkably close to the position of the Socialist Party of Great Britain.

KEITH GRAHAM

Dear Editors

I thank SJW for his response my letter. Three reflections.

1. I was surprised to learn that Marx was a postmodern skeptic who repudiated all 'isms'. I always thought that he (and his friend Engels) expressed and defended philosophical materialism as a metaphysic.
2. Contrary to SJW's assertion, I am unable to read other people's minds. I simply *interpreted* Marx as a philosophical (dialectical) materialist through a serious study of his life and works extending over fifty years.
3. I too am a 'worker' and have been so since the age of fifteen when I began work in an iron foundry. But this has no relevance at all to an understanding of Marx's philosophical outlook. Equating philosophical materialism with 'capitalist interests' (whatever they may be) is hardly enlightening.

BRIAN MORRIS, Lewes

The papers learn how banks work

OVER THE weekend of 17/18 June two national newspapers ran the same story. 'Banks rake in £4.8bn extra profits in "appalling rip-off"', said the *i* paper. 'Britain's biggest lenders rake in £44BILLION as interest rates rise while hard-hit families suffer from rising mortgage costs' said the *Mail on Sunday*. They were criticising the banks for being quick – when the Bank Rate goes up – to put up the rate of interest they charge those with a mortgage but much slower to put up the rate they pay to those who have savings with them.

Both pointed out that this leads to an increased 'net interest income' for banks which the *i* paper said was 'the profit made by banks from charging higher borrowing costs on mortgages and loans, compared to what they pay out in savings accounts.' The *Mail on Sunday* defined it as 'the difference between what the companies charge borrowers for loans and mortgages and what is paid to savers in interest'. Theirs was the more accurate description as it's the banks' income. Only a part of this will be their profits as out of it the banks have to pay their costs such as buildings, computer systems and wages. Banks also have other sources of income

which are not banking, for example fees from financial advice and management.

'Net interest income' is the key to understanding how banks work as it shows that they are financial intermediaries making money by borrowing at one rate of interest and lending at a higher rate. Others have suggested a different model, arguing that banks simply create the money they lend by a few keyboard strokes. In that case banks would not be financial intermediaries but money creators. Their income would be 'gross interest income' and their profits greater by the amount they currently pay savers (and others who lend them money). Populist journalists could be even shriller in denouncing them as greedy.

But the papers confined themselves to examining the 'net interest income' that shows that banks are financial intermediaries rather than money creators. The money they lend — the credit they extend — comes from money they themselves borrow. They compete against each other to attract savings in order to get money to lend. Which they wouldn't need to if they could simply create it.

Banks don't borrow just from savers. They also borrow from the money market, where the lenders are other financial institutions

and banks, and, unlike building societies (which are essentially specialised banks), they don't just lend money to buy houses.

The high street banks are not the only financial intermediaries. There are other financial institutions which borrow money to re-lend; in fact, there is a whole 'shadow banking' sector involved in this, less regulated and more risky and dodgy. At the other end are credit unions which nobody dares claim create the money they lend.

There is nothing special about banking. It is just one field of profit-seeking capitalist business enterprise. As their trade association, UK Finance, told the *Mail on Sunday*:

'Banks are commercial organisations and therefore seek to offer the best possible value to customers while also making a profit. This allows them to invest in their business and deliver shareholders a return on their investment.'

Bankers don't control the economy. Banks don't make bigger profits than other capitalist enterprises and don't need to be singled out as 'finance capital' as something worse than industrial capital. There is one difference, though. While the physical assets of industrial capital will be taken over in socialism and used to produce directly to satisfy people's needs rather than for profit, banks will have no place.

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Halo Halo

IN BELGIUM only ten percent of its population now go to church regularly. Dwindling congregations means more socially useful churches. They're being turned into hotels, breweries, libraries, cultural centres, and night clubs (Yahoo News, 22 June).

Think of the uses they can be put to in socialism.

Capitalism damages your health. So do religious beliefs.

The fanatical kind of American Christian believes that Darwin and evolution science is bunkum. They are convinced and conditioned that the Armageddon is imminent and when the Rapture occurs they will be transported up into heaven leaving the rest of us heathens behind.

Who knows if this involves travelling upwards in a space ship? In 1997 thirty nine members of the *Heaven's Gate* cult committed mass suicide in such a belief.

James Ussher (1581-1656), Armagh Archbishop, working from *Genesis* decided that the universe was created on Sunday 23 October 4004 BCE. Though apparently he didn't know what time this occurred.

What's Intelligent Design? Simply put it's a denial of natural selection because you know there just has to be a supreme

being behind it all. There just has! He/she/they created the dinosaurs and fossils as well, you know. Why? Don't question the divine plan!

In 1925 a teacher in Tennessee. John Scopes was prosecuted for teaching evolution instead of creationism – the Scopes Monkey Trial. The Discovery Institute, an American think tank, is now offering American home-schooling tutors 'science' material 'from the perspective that nature reflects intelligent design.'

A writer in *American Thinker*, June 16, 'argues' that the birth, development and growth of children, of plants, and of the brain, is incontrovertible evidence of 'intelligent design'. Maybe he's descended from one of the prosecutors in the Monkey Trial.

The *Reno Gazette Journal*, June 1, reports a research centre's findings that over a third of American parents believe, 'it's extremely or very important that their children have similar religious beliefs to their own'. The 'balance' in the piece comes from Richard Dawkins' warning 'don't force your beliefs on your children.' The RGJ asked its panel if parents should 'pass along' their religion to their children. Their panel consisted of: a rabbi, a Bahá'í,



a pastor, a Muslim, a bishop, a Buddhist, and a Mormon. Bet you can't guess what they all thought?

A scene in the 1979 Monty Python film, *Life of Brian*, satirises the absurdity of someone being stoned simply for uttering the name, Jehovah. To paraphrase Kenneth Williams as Julius Caesar in *Carry On Cleo*, 'Infamy, infamy!' Blasphemy, blasphemy. However, this is no laughing matter. In certain dominions the accusation alone can result in death.

'Succumbing to the demands of a radical Islamist party, the Pakistan government has agreed to try blasphemy suspects under terrorism charges in addition to the other sections of the country's penal code (Rediff.com, 18 June).

Twelve months ago a vicar was discovered, in a public place, having 'relationships' with a Henry hoover. Sexual proclivities are entirely a personal matter. Disseminating fairy stories is far more harmful.

DC

Tiny tips

KLIMT'S *LADY with a Fan*, which became the most expensive work of art sold in Europe. The portrait of an anonymous woman, also known as *Dame mit Fächer*, fetched £85.3 million from a Hong Kong collector at Sotheby's auction house in London (tinyurl.com/279ubrrk).

Mecca pilgrimages are a major source of income for Saudi Arabia, which is embarking on an ambitious plan to overhaul its largely oil-dependent economy. The hajj and year-round umrah rituals generate an estimated \$12 billion annually (tinyurl.com/4cem98ej).

The most tantalizing feature of the ancient Indus Valley remains is what they appear to lack: any trace of a ruling class or managerial elite. This defies the longtime theoretical assumption that any complex society must have stratified social relations: that collective action, urbanization, and economic specialization only develop in a very unequal culture that takes direction from the top, and that all social trajectories

evolve toward a common and universal outcome, the state. Yet, here was a stable, prosperous civilization that appeared to remain that way for centuries without a state, without priest-kings or merchant oligarchs, and without a rigid caste system or warrior class. How did they manage it? (tinyurl.com/2ewf2run).

Decades of social mobility research has come to the same conclusion: we are born into an economic caste system and our future success is largely determined by our parents' income and by the nature of the neighbourhoods in which we grow up. Race is not the determining social factor in individual success: it is, at best, a poor proxy for the real causes. Privilege is very real. But it's based on class, not race (tinyurl.com/4sr9cudz).

The state that absurdly claims descent from the ideas of Marx and Engels anachronistically boasts of 969 billionaires, putting even the epicentre of capitalism in the shade (691 billionaires in the US)... Workers' democracy was never part of the agenda under Mao or any of his successors in the new People's Republic. The post-1949 regime would evolve into a state-

capitalist formation, paying lip service to Marxism but primarily committed to making China a self-sufficient state that could ultimately compete with the other great powers (tinyurl.com/mr24kzye).

'The Russian Revolution' is something of a misnomer as, strictly speaking, there were two such eruptions in 1917: a genuine, spontaneous revolution in February, and the planned coup d'état by the Bolsheviks in October that founded the Soviet state... It was Lenin, not Stalin, who founded the Cheka (the secret police), who first extorted grain from starving peasants and insisted that revolutions could only be made by firing squads. The machinery of repression and mass murder was in place by the time he died in 1924. All Stalin had to do was use it (tinyurl.com/yc3dkb4b).

Zelensky has banned opposition political parties

He arrested political opponents

He banned all unfriendly media

He shut down Orthodox churches

And now there will be no Presidential election next year

At what point we call him what he is?

A dictator (tinyurl.com/2t469msb).

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

LONDON

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

MIDLANDS

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

NORTH

North East Regional branch.

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

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

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

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

Kent and Sussex regional branch. Usually meets 2nd Sun. 2pm at The Muggleton Inn, High Street, Maidstone ME14 1HJ or online.

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

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

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.

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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

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

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

WALES

South Wales Branch (Cardiff and Swansea)

Meets 2nd Monday 7.30pm on JITSI.

(meet.jit.si/spgbsouthwales3).

Contact: botterillr@gmail.com or

Geoffrey Williams, 19 Baptist Well Street, Waun Wen, Swansea SA1 6FB. 01792 643624

Central Branch

Meets 2nd Sunday of the month, 10am (UK time) meet.jit.si/CentralBranchSPGB. Contact: cbs@worldsocialism.org.

INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS

AFRICA

Kenya. Contact: Patrick Ndege, PO Box 13627-00100, GPO, Nairobi
Zambia. Contact: Kephias Mulenga, PO Box 280168, Kitwe.

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No Borders!

SOCIALISTS WANT a world without countries or borders or passports, where people are part of the great human family and can come and go as they wish, with no concept of migration or asylum. This is part of our aim of a global society with no poverty or hunger or war, where people co-operate for the common good and the resources of the planet belong to everyone, are used to meet human need and are subject to democratic control.

Borders, frontiers and walls are usually seen as an essential part of capitalism. The ruling capitalist class determine the laws and policies within the area they control, at least to the extent that capitalism allows them to do so. Among other things, this means laying down regulations about immigration, who can enter the country, where they can come from, which requirements they must meet, how long they can stay, which kind of jobs they can hold. Brexit was in part motivated by the desire to limit immigration and 'control our borders', rather than the EU having the final say in such matters.

However, there are some supporters of capitalism who advocate 'open borders', at least to the extent of allowing migration without any restrictions. For instance: 'if workers could move freely around the world, the market would generally match people and jobs efficiently, but when governments intervene selectively, obstructing some workers from moving while actively encouraging others to do so, the market becomes distorted' (Philippe Legrain: *Immigrants*).

The point is that capitalism often needs to 'import' workers from elsewhere, perhaps because of a shortage of those with the relevant skills or of those willing to do back-breaking labour; in Germany, for instance, a law was passed recently to make it easier for workers from outside the EU to move there. Borders and immigration controls are not compatible with the supposed 'free market', where supply and demand (of workers just as much as cars and chairs) will allegedly match each other by a kind of magic. After all, if you believe there should be no restrictions or taxes on movement of consumer goods or the export of capital, then

logically neither should there be limits on workers moving around the globe.

Other arguments along similar lines can be found on the website of the Future of Freedom Foundation (fff.org), a 'libertarian' US think tank that stands for the more-or-less unfettered freedom of capitalists to exploit workers. A talk in 2014 by its president Jacob Hornberger included the absurd claim that 'immigration controls are nothing more than socialist central planning'. His solution was 'a free market in immigration', with open borders, across which people could move freely. In such a system, 'people would be free to come to the United States and enter into mutually beneficial labor relationships with American employers who would be willing to hire them.' Borders would still exist, separating the world into different jurisdictions, but people would be free to cross them as they wish.

This is of course based on a ludicrous idea of how capitalism works. The relations between capitalists and workers are not 'mutually beneficial' but based on exploitation and a real gap in status between the two parties to the relationship. Wealth and power on one side, poverty and insecurity on the other. Supposedly open borders will not change this in the slightest.

Tim Marshall's book *Divided* also

deals with the issue of open borders. He refers to an article by the American economist Nathan Smith, which argues that ending migration controls would (in Smith's words) 'increase liberty, reduce global poverty, and accelerate economic growth.' Labour would be allocated more efficiently, resulting in 'global increases in productivity, leading the world economy to nearly double in size.' This would 'disproportionately benefit the world's poorest people.'

Marshall objects to this proposal on two grounds. The first is that the initial migrants from impoverished countries would be those who could afford to do so, meaning fewer doctors, teachers and so on in the countries concerned. The second relates to 'human nature' or 'group identity': people tend not to like it when large groups of 'outsiders' descend on them. But this relates to what often happens now, in a society based on competition and shortages and 'us versus them', and is not a general feature of how people live. His book is full of examples of the appalling consequences of walls, such as the 2,500-mile fence that the Indian government has built along most of its border with Bangladesh. Over a third of the world's countries have physical barriers along their borders.

These ideas (Legrain, Hornberger, Smith, and Marshall's doubts too) are rooted in capitalism, a system which is based on dividing people and setting them against each other. Further, in a society

where global heating and environmental damage are major problems, the idea of doubling the size of the world's economy is not attractive. One of the priorities of socialism will be to provide decent food, housing, healthcare and education for *all* the world's population. We cannot say now just what that would involve in terms of committing people and resources, but it will take place in a world where there really are no borders, no classes, no rulers and no governments. Decisions will be made democratically, at whatever level (local, regional, etc) is deemed appropriate. Having no borders does not mean there are no subdivisions for administrative purposes, just that people will not be seen as belonging to some arbitrary part of the Earth and as somehow different from those who 'belong' elsewhere.

PAUL BENNETT



The passing politicians' show

Uxbridge and Ulez

THE BY-ELECTION in Uxbridge and South Ruislip in July, caused by Boris Johnson jumping before he was pushed, provided a chance to observe conventional politics at work and to confirm how empty and irrelevant it is.

Labour's plan

In his manifesto the unsuccessful Labour candidate said 'the Tories have crashed the economy' and that 'since the Conservatives came to power in 2010 real wages have fallen so far that we are now worse off by £1,373 a year'. Labour, he said, 'has a plan to put money into the pockets of local people.' Who wouldn't want that? But when you look closely at how this is to be done it turns out to be a plan not to actually give people more money but to stop them having to pay out so much. 'A Labour government,' he promised, 'would bring your energy bills down by £1,400 by fast-tracking home-grown renewable energy'. Even on their own figures, this would only restore the situation to what it was in 2010, but there is no guarantee that it will happen.

'Labour postpones

£28bn green plan as it

seeks to be trusted on

public finances. Rachel

Reeves says fiscal rule

is priority as she delays

start of promised

investment in eco-

friendly industry.'

Labour Shadow Chancellor, Rachel Reeves, had already rowed back on Labour's 'fast tracking' promise. The *Guardian* (9 June) reported this under the headlines 'Labour postpones £28bn green plan as it seeks to be trusted on public finances. Rachel Reeves says fiscal rule is priority as she delays start of promised investment in eco-friendly industry.'

'Labour would now build up to the annual £28bn plan by halfway through a first parliament. The party had promised to spend £28bn a year on green investment until 2030 from the first year after coming to power. However, Reeves said she could not have predicted the market crash caused by the former prime minister Liz Truss's plans for unfunded borrowing for tax cuts last autumn, which created the difficult economic conditions including higher interests rates affecting the cost of debt repayment' (tinyurl.com/4ha669wh).

But that's precisely the point. No government can predict what the vagaries of the capitalist economic system are going to throw at them. Out of office they can make all sorts of plans and promise all sorts of things, but when in office they can only react to the unpredictable workings of capitalism. Sometimes they might be lucky (and claim this as their own work). More often than not, they will be faced with some economic or financial crisis and then have to impose cutbacks and austerity in order to save profits by not taxing them too much.

Reeves as much as said so when she stated 'I will never play fast and loose with the public finances.' Now that's a promise you can believe.

The Tories

The Tory candidate didn't promise anything. How could he? He couldn't play the anti-immigrant card in this constituency with its large number of voters from the Indian subcontinent and their descendants. Instead he chose to challenge Labour's claim that it would put more money into people's pockets. On the contrary, he argued, the London Labour mayor's decision to extend from the end of August the ultra-low-emission zone from central London to the whole of Greater London would take money out of people's pockets. 'No to Labour's £4,550 ULEZ expansion tax' was his line. It worked.

Owners of more polluting pre-2006 petrol and pre-2016 diesel vehicles will have to pay £12.50 for every day they use their car or van. This will, the Tory leaflet went on, 'hit the poorest in our communities the hardest'. Although it's a bit disingenuous of the Tories to say they are concerned about the poorest, they had a point. Most owners of pre-2006 petrol cars will be people who bought one second-hand because they couldn't afford a new car. Others will have bought diesel cars after Gordon Brown, when Chancellor in 2001, reduced the tax on diesel. As usual under capitalism, it is the

poorest who suffer the most from the extra cost of measures like providing for a less polluted environment.

The Greens

Which brings us to the Green Party. Basically, they want a return to the small-scale capitalism that once existed and from which present-day corporate capitalism evolved. And would again if it was possible to turn the clock back (but of course it isn't).

Their candidate's manifesto called for 'Public Money to be spent on Public Good not profits for the few' and stated that the 'economy is not working for most people'. That's true but the capitalist economy cannot be made to work in any other way. It is a profit-making system that can run — and be run by governments — only in the interests of the profit-takers. It is based on 'profits for the few' and there's nothing that can be done about it except getting rid of the system as a whole and replacing it by one based on the common ownership and democratic control of productive resources. This would allow these resources to be used to directly turn out and distribute what people need to live a decent and satisfying life.

The Greens promised to 'introduce universal basic income to reduce dependency on economic growth.' But how would UBI do that? The relationship would seem to be the opposite as the economy would have to grow to provide the extra things that the basic income would be used to buy (assuming that the level will be somewhat higher than the current poverty line, which is not immediately evident or likely given the constraints and priorities of capitalism).

The Green candidate was again right when she said:

'We all see the global environmental crisis that, if not tackled, will destroy the only known living planet in the Universe. Yes, change is needed on a Planetary scale.'

Indeed it is, but the small-scale changes under capitalism that the Greens promise are quite inadequate even if the workings of capitalism allowed them to be given priority over the 'profits for the few.'

Mistaken assumption

Although the Lib Dems had a candidate he was nowhere to be seen as they were concentrating on trying to win another by-election the same day. Their promises would also have been based on the same, mistaken, basic assumption that governments can control the way the

capitalist economic system works and so could reform it to serve, as the Greens put it, the 'Public Good'.

Experience over the years, under various different governments, has repeatedly shown that this cannot be done, with all governments ending up putting profits first. Yet the conventional parties still make promises to do this, blaming, when not in office, the government of the day rather than capitalism for problems — Labour is doing it now with its mantra of 'thirteen years of Tory failure' — and promising that this wouldn't happen if they were in office. But it always does. The problem is not the Tories (or Labour), it's capitalism.

ADAM BUICK

Somerton and Frome: A socialist elector writes

THIS BY-ELECTION in Somerton & Frome was triggered by the resignation of the Conservative MP (David Warburton) over allegations he took cocaine (which he at first denied, then later confessed) and sexually harassed a number of women (which he still denies). This is an almost pointless election because the constituency is to be abolished at next year's general election.

There were 8 candidates to be Somerton & Frome's final MP. Below are some of their election promises and what I, as socialist elector in the constituency, make of them:

Sarah Dyke (Liberal Democrats) There's not much to write about this one. She blames the cost of living crisis and the NHS crisis on the Conservative government, not the capitalist system. Didn't they make massive cuts to the welfare state during the Conservative/LibDem coalition government? Despite this she got elected.

Faye Purbrick (Conservatives) Again, there's not much to write. There's just the usual phony promises about: securing more investment in transport and better broadband; protecting 'our' green spaces; building more 'affordable homes'; etc., etc.

Bruce Evans (Reform UK) This is a great party to vote for, if you think the Conservatives are too left wing! They want to: lower taxes; 'utilise the UK's fossil fuel supplies'; 'end the costly Net-Zero plans [what Net-Zero plans?] that make our (!) economy uncompetitive'; 'oppose a cashless society and central bank digital

currency'; and 'implement a voucher scheme to provide timely healthcare treatment and eliminate waiting lists [that sounds an awful lot like NHS privatisation]'

Peter Richardson (UKIP) Basically the same as Reform UK.

Neil Guild (Labour) Starmer must be doing a great job of purging Labour of the Left, because the candidate here for the last two elections was a leftist, but they now have a rightist. Of the usual vague promises on his election leaflet, two contradict each other: 'Secure the highest sustained growth in the G7,' and 'Make Britain a clean energy superpower to create jobs'. He is also a trade union official (though it's not clear which union), which goes to show you can't necessarily trust trade union officials.

Lorna Corke (Christian People's Alliance) This is a conservative Christian party that are for 'promoting different points of view in schools', which they feel has been abandoned by 'new age liberalism' which they define as 'promotion of LGBT and the sexualisation of young children'. They have a novel policy on ending corporate tax avoidance, which is to: 'introduce a turnover tax (5 percent initially), which is a seller's VAT'. Two ways they want to use the '£40.5 billion' raised from this tax is to: 'support marriage and the family with significant grants', and 'guarantee everyone sleeping rough a night shelter and free meal'. How generous of them to want make the lives of homeless people slightly less horrible (instead of getting rid of the system that causes homelessness)!

Rosie Mitchell (independent socialist) A member of the Labour Left from 2016-2020, so at least her vague promises on improving society are sincere. She says she is committed to: 'a fairer, less profit driven system that works for society and for the planet'. Which makes me wonder how socialism went from meaning 'a classless, stateless, moneyless global community of common ownership and democratic control of the Earth's natural and industrial resources, where people live by the principle of: from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs' to 'a less profit driven system'. She got 635 votes.

Martin Dimery (Green Party) Firstly, I personally knew Martin from my time in the Green Party (before becoming class conscious). The Greens are by far the most reformist party, so their policies deserve more attention than the others. They want to:

- *Quickly process refugee applications in France (as is permitted)*. Nothing wrong with that. Although, what to do with refugees isn't the problem. The problem

is that world capitalism causes people to become refugees.

- *Build more affordable and council housing, using environmentally sustainable methods*. Homelessness will always be an issue as long as homes are built for profit instead of solely for use. Case in point: the homelessness charity Shelter was set-up in the 1960s when there was a lot more council housing than today. Also, where is the money going to come from to make these homes 'environmentally sustainable'?
- *Create local not-for-profit banks, that will [apparently] re-generate town centres*. This goes to show they don't understand how banks work, or that town centres face a lot of competition from cheaper online retailers.
- *Nationalise 'our' water and energy companies, who have seen bills go up and standards go down*. Firstly, nationalisation won't end the energy crisis. Secondly, it would be much easier to regulate the water companies, forcing them to spend part of their profits to responsibly dispose of sewage (instead of using tax money to do that, which would eat into the profits of the UK's capitalist class as a whole).
- *Re-join the European Single Market and Customs Union because [apparently] 'our' industries and agriculture have suffered enough*. Why don't they just call a spade a spade and say they want to re-join the EU?

To be fair, they do say where they would get the money from. They would:

- *Introduce a "Robin Hood tax" on financial transactions*. Please read this excellent article on what's wrong with that: (tinyurl.com/3jceepk)
- *Reduce loopholes to stop the super-rich from avoiding paying taxes*. They don't say how they would do this; perhaps they should copy the Christian People's Alliance's policy.
- *Generate bigger windfall taxes from the oil companies*. If the oil industry aren't making higher than usual profits, how can they windfall tax them? This shows that they don't mind the oil industry making profits, as long as they pay high taxes. None of them got my vote. I wrote 'Socialist Party of Great Britain. One World – One People' on my ballot paper.

The sources for this article were the election leaflets and this piece from the Frome Times (tinyurl.com/2s4jmb5).

MATTHEW SHEARN

NHS – 75 years of socialism?

JULY 5 2023 was the 75th birthday of the National Health Service. The media celebrated, events were held, paeans of praise for what generally is considered to be the golden public utility. Such was the glister.

All this was tarnished somewhat as medical staff are having to resort to striking in an attempt not just to increase pay, but rather to restore some of the value after years of salary stagnation. As prices have continued rising this has been a period of reducing real wages.

The main story for the media has been and remains increasing waiting lists, the difficulty of securing GP appointments and overwhelmed A & E units. All the while governments of all flavours have pursued an attritional process of privatisation.

However, the NHS is commonly cited, by members and supporters of the Labour Party, as an example of socialist legislation undertaken during the 1945 to 1951 Attlee administration. Even those who now openly admit that Labour is not socialist will use the NHS to convince, perhaps mainly themselves, that it once was.

Certainly there was socialist-sounding rhetoric spouted at the time. Aneurin Bevan, who is usually identified as the politician responsible for the NHS, said, 'No society can legitimately call itself civilised if a sick person is denied medical aid because of a lack of means.'

Previously William Beveridge, whose report instigated what became known as the Welfare State, declared, 'A revolutionary moment in the world's history is a time for revolution, not for patching.' He would go on to be ennobled and leader of the Liberal Party in the House of Lords.

The context for such sentiments was the protracted immiseration leading into the Second World War and a recognition that measures were required to prevent social breakdown, a situation inimical to capitalist prosperity.

Bevan made a political statement that, by removing one word, can be assented to by socialists. 'How can wealth persuade poverty to use its political power to keep wealth in power? Here lies the whole art of Conservative politics in the twentieth century.' Subtract the word 'Conservative' and the piece poses a question relevant then and now.

Bevan's myopic political view could see only the Tories as being the problem, on occasion referring to them as vermin. What he apparently could not see was the real problem, why a 'sick person', or any person, has 'a lack of means'.

Despite Beveridge's imperative his report led not to revolution, but to patching. Wherever the worst traumas of capitalism were diagnosed a welfare state patch could

be applied. A hundred years previous to the NHS a Royal Commission into public health identified the need for the state to act.

Appropriately, acting on the Commission's findings, the Liberal Party played a leading role through the latter nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries. The Welfare State, and the NHS in particular, were further social and political developments of this imperative to develop a functioning capitalist society.

In his report of 1942 Beveridge costed a health service at £130 million annually. By 1948 the actual cost was £400 million, which, in the present, would be £11.2 billion. This represented a significant investment by the state on behalf of capitalism.

Thirty years on, this annual amount had risen to £5,200 million (£38.4 billion present day equivalent), on its way to £160.4 billion in 2023. The figures seem to indicate that the NHS becomes increasingly expensive.

In the 1950s waste and bureaucracy were being regularly identified as contributing unnecessarily to the cost of the NHS, as it continues to be today. While this may well be correct the significance is probably not so great.

The number of nurses employed in 1948 was 125,000 along with 5,000 consultants for 480,000 beds. At present there are approximately 1.4 million full-time employees in the NHS servicing about 140,000 beds.

Far fewer beds but much higher costs, certainly not explained by bureaucracy. 37% of NHS spending is on staffing. How much greater this would be if nurses' real wages, for instance, were restored to 2010 levels. Nurses have effectively involuntarily been subsidising the NHS for over a decade.

Then there are the pharmaceuticals and the impressively wide array of technological devices, scanners and monitors etc., plus food, services such as cleaning and equipment like surgical tools and walking frames, not forgetting buildings. All supplied by capitalist industries with ever increasing potential for profits.

The NHS is effectively a market place which is why the forces of privatisation have increasingly muscled in. This is not being facilitated by the Conservatives alone. The Labour government of 1997 to 2010 launched the Private Finance Initiative of hospital building, along with other tendering measures for services.

It is now an accepted commonplace for NHS procedures to be carried out in private medical facilities by staff employed by both. This is by no means a recent development in thinking about the provision of health care.

Talking of medical provision in a 1943 radio broadcast, the then prime minister

Winston Churchill used the expression, 'From the cradle to the grave', a phrase that can be traced back to the founder of *The Spectator* Richard Steele in 1709.

What Churchill was referring to was the possible development of social insurance to finance individual medical care. He was not advocating state intervention.

While medical provision remains largely, though by no means entirely, free at the point of use, the figures above demonstrate that from the very outset the NHS was not, and most certainly is not, free. This is not to deny the beneficial worth of the NHS. That is also true of many services and features of capitalist society.

To directly address the question posed in the title, the answer is straightforward, no! The NHS is not, and never was, a socialist organisation. A defining socialist axiom is, 'to each according to need', in a worldwide society that does not have money to limit the extent needs can be met.

As medical procedures and technology have advanced so has the amount spent increased significantly from £11 billion in 1948 (at today's values) to over £160 billion in 2023. A figure that continues to be inadequate and, therefore, a limiting factor in meeting need either by delay or even denial of treatment.

When politicians claim to have increased spending on the NHS they are correct. What they, or any of the parties, do not address is that while capitalism continues there cannot be sufficient funds. Ultimately, such spending is drawn from the overall pot of value created by an economic system prioritising profit making. While income tax seems to be a payment by individual workers' wages, that simply means it becomes a factor in each person's salary requirement paid by employers. An extra penny in the pound tax rise for workers is an extra penny in the pound employers have to pay.

A few years ago an otherwise amiable American appeared incredulous that I, and the British in general, could tolerate a National Health Service. Why did we put up with such an obviously socialist, communist, system?

By communist he meant the by-then failed soviet state capitalist system. Inadvertently he had identified something those who equate the NHS with actual socialism have missed. It is the state intervening socially on behalf of capitalism.

There can only be a truly socialist health service in a truly socialist society. For that to be achieved, merely advocating ever greater spending must give way to actively working to abolish capitalism. Then there can be socialism, a really healthy society.

DAVE ALTON

Toothache? Pay private fees or do it yourself

MANY WILL know that, while most people have to pay something for NHS dental treatment, it is still free to a certain section of the community: children and pregnant women and new mothers. But, as George Monbiot pointed out in his column in the *Guardian* on 2 March:

‘Every child in the UK is entitled to free treatment by a non-existent dentist. Some people on benefits, pregnant women and those who have recently given birth also have free and full access to an imaginary service. Your rights are guaranteed, up to the point at which you seek to exercise them’ (tinyurl.com/s7epuzad).

Dental practices, being profit-seeking businesses, consider that what they are paid for treating NHS patients is not enough – they claim that in some cases it doesn’t even cover their costs – and so are increasingly reluctant to offer it and have not been using up all their NHS funding. In February it was reported that ‘Around £400million allocated for dental care went unspent this year because of a shortage of dentists willing to do NHS work’ (tinyurl.com/yrrpakv2).

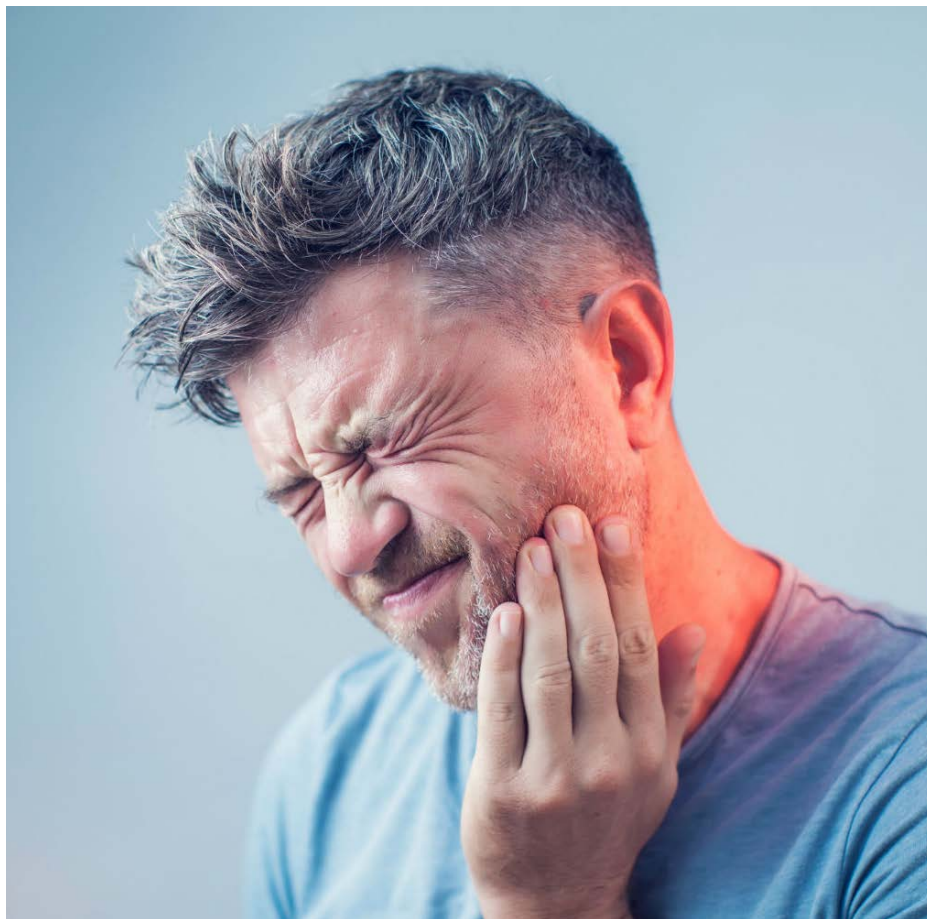
What this ultimately means is that any patient requiring urgent treatment is forced to make a choice between suffering or paying privately for the treatment there and then.

With private dental treatment running into the hundreds, sometimes thousands of pounds, it is obvious that those on lower incomes are really faced with no choice at all.

The system does appear to offer an alternative. Since 2006 the necessity to ‘register’ with a particular dentist has been abolished. What this means is that a patient whose regular dentist is unable or unwilling to provide NHS-funded treatment can shop around for another dentist prepared to treat them under the NHS.

The reason this only ‘appears’ to be an alternative is because it is another of Monbiot’s rights to a non-existent service. You won’t find another dentist prepared to treat you as they won’t find it profitable. So, when you look at those same low-income families and elderly people who can’t afford to ‘go private’, you see that really this is not much of an alternative at all.

In any event, going to another dentist



obviously can involve increased travel costs if the dentist is out of the area. While merely inconvenient for some it could mean the difference between having the treatment and not for others such as the very low-waged who do not have access to personal transport or the rurally housed elderly who rely on poor public transport coverage. When you add the psychological factor of forcing people to see a dentist they are unfamiliar with which, as we know, can have a particular impact on older members of our community, you can see why so many people elect to wait for their own dentist to be able to do the work or forgo the treatment altogether.

There is another option – DIY dentistry – which, apparently, some have been taking. As Monbiot noted:

‘The result, in one of the richest nations on Earth, is that people are extracting their own teeth, making their own fillings, improvising dentures and sticking them to their gums with superglue, and overdosing on painkillers.’

We continue to be forced into a situation

where, when we need treatment which is vital to our health and well-being, we either pay extortionate private fees, are forced to seek out another dentist at our own cost or, if none of the above are possible for us because of our financial situation, simply wait, with our condition worsening.

In socialism dental treatment would be provided freely to anyone who needed it. Unshackled from the financial pressures of the capitalist system, freed from the necessity of eking out an inadequate funding budget, the health services would be able to treat all those in a timely fashion to the best possible standard.

The fact is that no-one should be forced to make such dire choices when it comes to this or any other area of their health. The NHS was originally intended to implement the admirable principle: ‘Treatment free at the point of need’. Where our dental treatment is concerned, this principle has long had a thread tied between it and the door handle, and the door slammed shut.

Let's abolish food banks

THERE ARE various providers of free or very cheap meals all across the country. They may rely on donations from individuals or companies or they may 'recycle' food which would otherwise go to waste. Foodcycle's answer to the question, what is surplus food is that 'Surplus food is designated for people to eat but which has *'no commercial value for the retailer.'*' In the UK, an estimated 12 million tonnes of food is wasted each year at all levels from plough to plate whilst 4 million people are affected by food poverty. At least 400,000 tonnes of this food is thrown away at retail level' (foodcycle.org.uk/who-we-are).

This provider says it wants to 'make food poverty, loneliness and food waste a thing of the past for every community'. Admirable. Who doesn't support that? Other similar providers have similar ideals. The Trussell Trust says '...the stark reality is that too many people are unable to stay warm, fed, and dry right now'. Too true unfortunately. No argument there. 'It doesn't have to be this way', Trussell says. Spot on. Ticking all the right boxes definitely.

They all put forward their solutions for minimising the impact of the underlying conditions that lie at the root of food poverty. The underlying cause is capitalism. Do they realise that?

All these various providers, whether large or small, still have to function within the straitjacket of capitalism. They have paid full-time staff, have to pay for their premises, have to pay their utility bills. Those employed by the charities and those who volunteer also have to live according to the norms of a capitalist society. They need money in order to live too. Check any website in the Third Sector. Capitalism means it will always be channelling Bob Geldof at Band Aid. Give us your money! But generally much more politely than Sir Bob.

The issue is, how is poverty in its many forms to be eradicated?

A solution that appeals to many is, vote for a more society-friendly (sic) party. Kick this heartless government out of office, then things will change for the better! It's not difficult to find examples of the stony attitudes within one of the political parties which is regularly put into the position of running capitalism on behalf of the UK asset-owning class.

The Marie Antoinette of the Tories, ex-Conservative-MP Ann Widdecombe, said a little while ago, 'Britons don't have an automatic right to low food prices', adding that people should simply go without certain items if they are struggling



financially. Widdecombe also advised people who cannot afford to pay for some food items, like cheese, to simply stop buying them:

'Well then you don't do the cheese sandwich. None of it's new. We've been through this before', she said. 'The problem is we've been decades now without inflation, we've come to regard it as some kind of given right' (*Guardian*, 17 May).

Discussing the UK's cost-of-living crisis on the BBC's *Politics Live* show, the former Tory and Brexit Party MEP suggested that anyone claiming unemployment benefits should be made to fill labour shortages by picking fruit.

Under-fire Andrew Bailey told workers to stop asking bosses for unsustainable pay rises- shortly after piling interest rate misery on households. The Bank of England governor battling to bring inflation under control, said the country 'can't continue to have the current level of wage increases' (tinyurl.com/5a78w28s).

In Peter Tinniswood's stories about Yorkshire family the Brandons, Carter Brandon's fiancé Pat opens conversations with, 'Isn't the price of sprouts outrageous'? Yes, and so's the price of nearly everything in the supermarket nowadays. The cost of living has surely superseded the favourite topic of the British, the weather.

The Trussell Trust recently issued a 100-page report called *Hunger in the UK*. It makes sobering reading. One in seven people in the UK faced hunger in 2022 due to a lack of money, they say. The survey equated this to an estimated 11.3 million people.

Why were people being forced to use food banks? Money. Or rather the lack of it due to living in a capitalist society where the price of nearly everything keeps getting higher and higher.

The United Kingdom has the second

largest economy in Europe and the sixth largest economy in the world.

Hunger in the UK: '... insufficient income is the fundamental driver for almost all people forced to use a food bank. The vast majority (86%) of people referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network in mid-2022 have an income so low that they were experiencing destitution when they were supported by the food bank. (They) are further destabilised by a lack of savings and having to cope with arrears and debt'.

The report lists those who are most likely to feel the pinch. This includes a high proportion of people renting, ethnic minorities, the disabled, unpaid carers, those living alone, those with dependent children, and single parents.

In the report's introduction the Chief Executive of the Trust says:

'That means we know what needs to change if we're going to build a more just society where everyone has enough money for the essentials. It is clear that we need a social security system which provides protection and dignity for people to cover the costs of their own essentials, such as food and bills'.

'Because in coming together, and working together, we will build a future where none of us need a food bank, because none of us will allow it' (tinyurl.com/nhhr7evt). We certainly know what needs to change but we need more than to tinker with a knackered engine. We need to replace it. Whilst a capitalist society continues to receive support from very many, including those globally who suffer badly under that system, sticking plaster solutions are not the answer.

Working together for socialism, we can build a future where none of us will need a food bank ever again. Our solution is one that eradicates the problem once and for all.

DC

Starmmer versus the logic of the market

SIR KEIR Starmmer has announced that the Labour Party (looking increasingly likely to form the next government) will set a target rate of 70 percent of all UK households being in owner-occupied homes. This sounds ambitious, but the current rate of 68 percent means that in fact only half a million new owner occupiers would be needed to meet this target.

What it does though, is send a signal about the priorities of Sir Keir and his party, that they will be on the side of property owners. It is as much an ideological expression as it is a practical policy. As Sir Keir said in a tweet: 'Owning your home is not just about having a place to live, it's about having pride and security'. Presumably renters cannot have pride and security.

This is balanced by the claim that 'Labour will introduce a Renters' Charter to give new rights and protections for renters. We will build more high-quality, affordable homes and restore the dream of home ownership'. Quite why having a place to live should be a dream is a strange thing: it's only a 'dream' because it is so unobtainable at present.

As the Office for National Statistics notes: 'Over the last 25 years, housing affordability has worsened in every [Local Authority area], especially in London or surrounding areas' and 'In 1997, 89% of LAs had an affordability ratio of less than five times workers' earnings, whereas only 7% had this level of affordability in 2022' (tinyurl.com/bdfbmmjw).

Part of the problem is that whilst everyone could be housed by simply building more houses, the financial model of home ownership requires constantly rising house prices. To make buying worthwhile, prices need to rise by more than inflation and interest rates, else effectively, the owner is just renting from the bank (alongside shouldering all the liabilities for maintenance and structure). For many people, their house is a financial instrument for when they plan to downsize and retire on part of the difference between house prices (or rent the house out, as a form of pension income).

So, Labour's plans to increase home ownership cannot come at the price of threatening the asset value of those who already own a home, much less those who make their income from letting out houses (which includes a great number of MPs of both parties).

Further to that, any widespread house-building programme will almost inevitably be met with fierce opposition from local home owners who will see a threat to their amenities (as well as the value of their

properties from the increase of supply). Even in such cities as Bristol, where the house prices are overheated and there is massive demand for new housing, every option to build new is met with a storm of protest from NIMBYs.

Land monopolists

Even then, widening the pool of home owners doesn't change the effect of private property in land on the general economy. As Marx notes in Volume 3 of *Capital*:

'Wherever natural forces can be monopolised and guarantee a surplus-profit to the industrial capitalist using them, be it waterfalls, rich mines, waters teeming with fish, or a favourably located building site, there the person who by virtue of title to a portion of the globe has become the proprietor of these natural objects will wrest this surplus-profit from functioning capital in the form of rent' (Chapter 46, tinyurl.com/4fnpkk4j).

The value of houses derives, in large part, from the general growth of the economy, and the expansion of demand of land:

'One part of society thus exacts tribute from another for the permission to inhabit the earth, as landed property in general assigns the landlord the privilege of exploiting the terrestrial body, the bowels of the earth, the air, and thereby the maintenance and development of life. Not only the population increase and with it the growing demand for shelter, but also the development of fixed capital, which is either incorporated in land, or takes root in it and is based upon it, such as all industrial buildings, railways, warehouses, factory buildings, docks, etc., necessarily increase the building rent.'

Merely by holding onto land in the form of property draws a share of the surplus value generated (either through rent on homes or through windfall sales, both of which feed

into raising the cost of wages to the industrial capitalist, without increasing the mass of use values the workers can purchase).

'The mere legal ownership of land does not create any ground-rent for the owner. But it does, indeed, give him the power to withdraw his land from exploitation until economic conditions permit him to utilise it in such a manner as to yield him a surplus, be it used for actual agricultural or other production purposes, such as buildings, etc' (Chapter 45, tinyurl.com/5b8jsz96).

This means that any attempt to regulate landowners could be met with stock being withdrawn from the market to protect their margins: it is the right of ownership that gives them the ability to extract tribute, nothing inherent in the land or the house itself. It's worth noting that in 2021/22 the UK government paid tribute of £30 billion, about 2.5 percent of government expenditure (tinyurl.com/6wj5hh9h). This was in part reduced by the government pressuring social landlords to hold their rent down, which might explain why Sir Keir's plans do include an element of expanding social housing as well.

His plans, though, also run up against another part of the logic of a market society. As empirical research by Warwick University showed, back in the 90s, 'every additional 10 percentage points on home ownership puts 2 percentage points on the unemployment rate' (tinyurl.com/yc76fj8m). Reducing the mobility of labour seems to cause more rigidity in labour markets.

Sir Keir may think he has come up with a low-cost way to win over natural Tory voters, but it is not without risks. The problems do not stem from any technical difficulty in providing suitable housing for all households, but from the nature of property.

PIK SMEET



'Imagine' – Sugar-coated anti-capitalism?

JOHN LENNON'S 1971 song *Imagine* is often hailed as the encapsulation of a true socialist society. It depicts unswervingly and melodically a world where the resources of the earth are shared between its populace with everyone having enough to eat, living cooperative lives and no longer being plagued by war, religion or national divisions. Yet there's no shortage of criticism of it from those who have a different view of the best way for humans to live or from those who just don't like John Lennon.

A recent example of this is in an article - '10 revered classic rock songs that are actually awful' - which recently appeared in *Far Out Magazine*. It places 'Imagine' among those 'actually awful' songs (tinyurl.com/4wpuam45). It describes its words as 'clichéd' and says that Lennon 'treated the populace as idiots'. The article then goes on to describe the song as 'so insipidly idealist that even school kids can see through the lack of sincerity and humanised realism'. It also alludes to Lennon's well-known 'sugar-coated' comment, that is to his having himself said of the song: 'Anti-religious, anti-nationalistic, anti-conventional, anti-capitalistic, but because it is sugar-coated it is accepted. Now I understand what you have to do. Put your political message across with a little honey' (quoted in Geoffrey Giuliani's 2000 biography *Lennon in America*).

*Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky*

*Imagine all the people
Living for today
Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people
Living life in peace
You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one
Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world
You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will live as one*

It's easy to see why someone might see the words of Lennon's song as 'idealistic'. After all, the future world he describes and advocates is, in just about all its features, the direct opposite of what exists today. 'No countries to live or die for', 'no religion' ('above us only sky'), 'no need for greed or hunger', 'all the people sharing all the world'. How far away can you get from the nationalistic, religion-besmirched world that is modern capitalism, a system in which greed is lauded and personal wealth is looked up to while around 286 million people wake up every day not knowing where their next meal will come from? But is Lennon's 'idealistic' vision here something to be scorned as lacking

'realism' simply because it yearns for something different and better?

As for the idea that it is something that school kids will 'see through', will they in fact not be more likely to see the sense in it? After all school kids have spent less time than others living in the system that dominates and enslaves the world and so may be less conditioned by its rules and norms, and therefore more able to imagine a world organised differently. Conversely, for adults, having been subjected to the conditioning process for longer, a greater effort of the imagination may be necessary for them to contemplate a world with 'no heaven' and 'no hell', where people are 'living life in peace' and where there are 'no possessions' (i.e. surely artistic shorthand for no monopoly of wealth). But imagination is what socialists have always insisted is needed by those who own nothing but their ability to work and need to sell their energies to survive (i.e. the vast majority).

Meanwhile those who have difficulty in exercising their imagination will always tend to say of the existing social order that 'there is no alternative'. And this, contrary to what Lennon's critic says about 'Imagine' being clichéd, is the real cliché and summed up so well by the science fiction writer Ursula Le Guin who wrote: 'We live in capitalism – its power seems inescapable. But so did the divine right of kings.' As history has shown, change does come, and, if that change means looking to a radically different way of living, perhaps we should say with Lennon 'it's easy if you try'.

Finally, another part of the criticism seems to be that Lennon doesn't attempt to give any prescription as to how his imagined world is to be brought about. But how could he in three minutes or so? The fact is that he has outlined some of the key features of a socialist world, one without buying and selling, without markets, without rich and poor, without leaders and led, without wars or religion. And, as pop song popularity polls have constantly shown, he has done it in a way that people find appealing and listenable to. And if that's what 'sugar-coated' means, then so be it. Of course, Lennon's *Imagine* doesn't seem to have made a large impact in shifting people towards socialist ideas, but it's not hard to imagine that, as socialist ideas spread, it will be an anthem that people identify with as they take action to plan and bring into being the system of society it depicts.

HKM



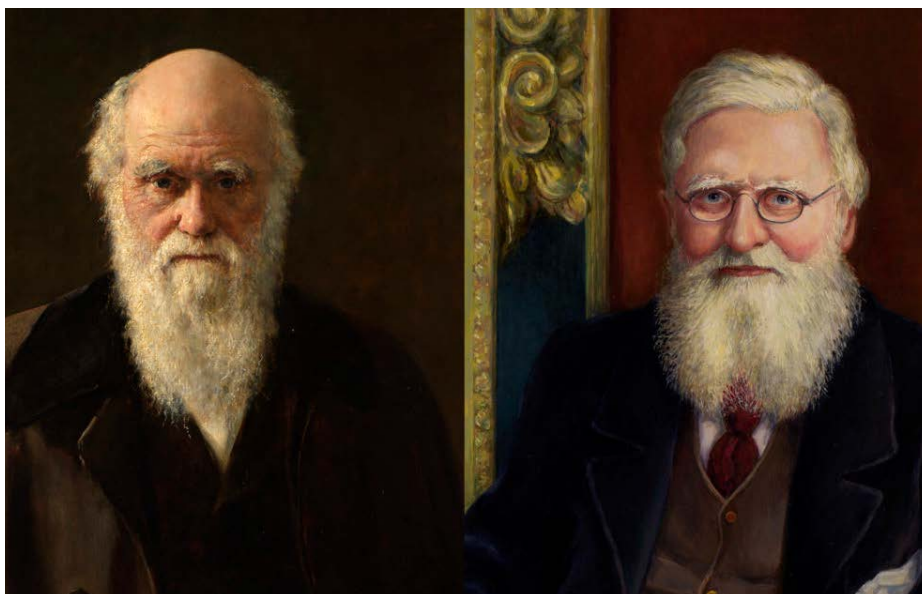
What is 'scientific' socialism?

BY THE middle of the nineteenth century two revolutions in thought occurred. Charles Darwin and Alfred Wallace proved the fact of biological evolution by natural selection. This does not imply 'progress from 'lower' to 'higher' life-forms' as some people still imagine. That was the slant put upon it by Victorian bourgeois progressivism. This pseudo-theory of evolution – the ladder principle – enables capitalist society to retain the anthropocentric mythology Judaeo-Christian religion had inculcated for centuries in a supposedly scientific guise. Rather, Darwin and Wallace disliked the term 'evolution' as too easily open to such misinterpretation.

The other was that the study of human society since the emergence of settled farming communities to modern industrial capitalist society was scientifically enriched thanks to the work of two German thinkers, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Like the biological evolutionists, Marx and Engels had inherited a tradition of social research reaching back in time, and it is no surprise that the two monuments to human self-awareness were published about the same time: Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, and Marx's *Capital*. Marx's friend Engels also produced some excellent shorter works such as *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, and *The Origins of the Family, Private Property & The State*.

In *Capital*, Marx explained the theory of *surplus value* and the *wages system*, which is the basis of capitalist society, and showed how this system grew from its predecessor in Europe, the feudal system. He also showed how, with each move forward in social development since chattel slavery, classes are expunged from society, leaving under capitalism but two classes. The *bourgeoisie*, or capitalist class, lives on rent, interest and profit – the surplus value produced by the *proletariat*, or working class.

The worker must first be deprived of any control of means of production – be it land, industry, means of distribution, factories, railways etc. All of which are exclusively owned by the capitalist class. The peasantry had to be dispossessed of its cottage industries and evicted from the land so as to turn them into a propertyless class obliged to work for the capitalists. Having no access to, nor control of, the means of production and distribution, the worker is obliged to sell their physical and mental energy to the capitalist in return for a wage (call it salary for snob-value if you will). This wage is the price of the



worker's labour-power, and does not cover the value of what they produce. The difference constitutes surplus value, which goes straight into the pocket of the capitalist, enriching him at the worker's expense. The worker thus remains for life in a state of economic dependence on the parasitical capitalist. As for work which is not directly productive, such as the so-called professions, services, and so on, all serve to buttress the system, of which the accumulation of capital, derived from surplus value, is the core.

Just as the slaves of ancient Rome ran the whole of society, so does the working class today.

Just as the slaves of ancient Rome ran the whole of society, so does the working class today. From surgeons to roadsweepers, from astrophysicists to labourers and the unemployed, all are members of the working class. If you are dependent on a salary (wage) in order to live (or on a handout when unemployed), whether your salary is high or low, if you are thus economically dependent, you belong to the working class. It is more likely that small capitalists will be thrown into the ranks of the working class by the machinery of capitalism, than that a worker will become a capitalist. Generally speaking, one is born into one class or the other. Still, it is inculcated in us by capitalist propaganda that 'if you work hard, you 'make good' and that workers who do

manage to switch class by exploiting others and becoming social parasites (capitalists) are to be praised and admired.

The state

The state is the organ of coercion with which a ruling class maintains its rule over the rest of the population. Under capitalism, therefore, the state, of whatever political slant or colour, is the machinery by which the minority capitalist class keeps in subjection the majority working class which is exploited for profit. Under capitalism, only these two social classes remain in existence. There can only be a state where there is a class to rule over others. So, with the emancipation of the working class (the last subject class) from the wages system (capitalism), both classes cease to exist. The state therefore will cease to exist. Marx and Engels believed, and today's genuine socialists (communists) believe, that in order to topple capitalist rule, the working class must seize control of the state and use its forces of coercion (army and police) to dispossess the capitalists of the means of production, placing those means in the hands democratically of everyone. Capitalist and worker both then cease to exist, as does the state, and we have for the first time a society of human beings, in control of their own destiny.

Thus we have *scientific* socialism (communism) – the common control of the means of production – following from a scientific historical analysis, whereas before we only had *utopian* socialism (communism) – usually expressed in terms of common ownership of goods – following from the ancient dream, running through

the Middle Ages and into the 18th century, with only hope as a basis and incapable of an accurate historical analysis.

Socialism and communism are two words meaning the same – a future society in which the workers of today have emancipated themselves as described above.

Socialism and communism are two words meaning the same – a future society in which the workers of today have emancipated themselves as described above. But very soon, pro-

capitalist politicians saw the advantage in misappropriating the terms to confuse the workers. 'Socialism' came to mean Labour Party-type state-ownership, or Leninism, while 'communism' was misconstrued as something again which was different - a Bolshevik-style one-party tyranny (again, see below). But, since the state can only be the instrument of class rule, so state ownership (nationalisation) is not socialism, but merely capitalism run by state bureaucrats. This was the outcome in particular of the capitalist revolutions which took place in the 20th century in the Russian and Chinese empires.

In the 19th century too, anarchism arose within the genuine socialist movement to oppose the Marxian view that the state must be seized by the working class in order to use its coercive machinery to dispossess the capitalists. Anarchists were afraid that this would prove too tempting to socialist delegates doing the seizing, who would then use the state's machinery against the workers. Since 'socialism' has

been perverted by capitalist ideologues to mean 'state-ownership', this concern is understandable. However, unless the state is seized from the capitalists and their politicians, the armed forces remain in their hands and might be used to try to smash any attempted revolution. Hence it is absolutely necessary to take control of the state, thus disarming the capitalist class, which can then be dispossessed of the means of production. Socialist delegates to the parliaments (the law-making part of the state) would have but one mandate: the dismantling of capitalism and the establishment of socialism. They would not attempt to enter office under the capitalist state, and would be instantly recalled and dismissed by the workers if they attempted to do so. Furthermore, the absolute majority of workers would be actively making the revolution – which is why, too, any attempt by a socialist minority to stage a take-over against the wishes of the majority of workers would be doomed.

A.W.

Cooking the Books

What about producer prices?

IN A speech on 27 June, Swati Dhingra, a member of the committee that sets the Bank Rate, described changes in the producer prices index as 'one of the best leading indicators of the long-run evolution of prices in this country' (tinyurl.com/ye2yb5ex). But what is this index that we don't hear much about?

The US Bureau of Labor defines inflation as: 'The overall general upward price movement of goods and services in an economy'. That's alright as far as it goes. In the US, as in most countries, this is generally measured by an increase in an index measuring the price of a basket of consumer goods and services. If the index goes up so many points, that increase is expressed as a percentage of what the index was before and is 'inflation'.

It is hard to see how an 'overall upward price movement' could be measured other than by an increase in some index, but is an index of consumer prices the best way to do this? Consumer goods and services are not the only things that are sold. There are also the goods and services that businesses sell to each other from which to make the final product which consumers buy.

Besides a consumer prices index the Office for National Statistics produces indexes of producer prices. There is an index of 'input prices', which covers the prices of materials and intermediate or semi-finished goods that businesses buy from each other to process into final products as well as the price of fuels used in the course of doing this. There is another for 'output prices.' Also called 'factory gate prices', this is defined as:

'The amount received by UK producers for the goods that they sell to the domestic market. It includes the margin that businesses make on goods, in addition to costs such as labour, raw materials and energy, as well as interest on loans, site or building maintenance, or rent'.

Producer prices inflation (PPI) is an increase in this index calculated as a percentage. This gives different results for the 'overall general upward price movement'. Dhingra pointed to

'a sharp drop in the annual rate of producer price inflation, which was 2.9% in May, its lowest in more than two years and down from a peak of 19.6% in July 2022. Consumer price inflation (CPI), which is targeted by the BoE, peaked at 11.1% in October 2022 and has been slower to fall

than the central bank expected, holding at 8.7% in May'.

The index of input prices is a measure of business costs. The difference between the changes in it and changes in the output prices index can be an indication of the income of business out of which its profits come and so also of how profits are doing. The corresponding figures to those quoted by Dhingra were up 0.5% in May, down from a peak of 24.4% in June 2022. Comparing the two suggests that the hit profits took from rising oil prices as an immediate result of the war in Ukraine (when input prices rose more than output prices) is now being overcome (as input prices are rising slower than output prices). Profits are being restored.

From the point of view of analysing how the capitalist economic system works, the factory gate price index is arguably more useful than an index of the price of consumer goods. It is measuring price increases from the seller's point of view rather than the buyer's, what they get rather than what we pay. After all, capitalism is a system geared to sellers making a profit, not to meeting consumers' needs as so often portrayed.

The State of North Korea

LITTLE INFORMATION about how people live in North Korea has leaked out beyond its borders. The only footage we're likely to see is of tightly managed military parades and appearances by Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un rather than anything more everyday. The lives of the vast majority are kept secret: the country has its own intranet separate to the internet and communication with outsiders is forbidden. Despite the oppressive laws, some North Koreans have been able to share details of their lives, and the extracts of these on the BBC Two documentary *North Korea: The Insiders* are even more grim than we might expect.

Jean Mackenzie, the BBC's correspondent in South Korea, worked with Daily NK, a specialist news organisation which has contacts in North Korea. They found three people there who agreed to be covertly interviewed to raise awareness of their situations. Daily NK sent Mackenzie's questions to them using a 'special device', then interviews would be recorded in 'safe locations that can't be bugged' and sent back. This was done at considerable risk, as if the interviewees were caught by the police they could face execution.

North Korea has been even more insular since the pandemic. Ostensibly to reduce transmission of the virus, the government imposed stricter restrictions on the border with China. An effect of this was to prevent goods being smuggled into North Korea which had previously supplemented the inadequate rations available from within the country. One of the people interviewed sold contraband medicines at a market near the Chinese border, and since the pandemic her income has halved because she can't get as much stock to sell. The lack of imports also means there is now even less food available than before, and for higher prices. A consequence of this is that two of the three people interviewed personally knew multiple people who had died of starvation. Stories of widespread starvation in the country haven't been known since its crisis in the mid-late 1990s.

Alongside the threat of malnutrition is the threat from the repressive state. One of the interviewees says 'If I live according to the rules, I feel like I'll starve to death but just by trying to survive I could be arrested by the state security, branded as a traitor and killed'. The other interviewees also live in fear of the authorities, such as one who was taken in for questioning under the 'anti reactionary thought law'.



Credit: BBC

There's no suggestion in the interviews of any enjoyment at all: no socialising or entertainment. As one of the interviewees says 'people are stuck here and waiting to die'.

Given the dire conditions in North Korea, it's understandable that its government doesn't want the rest of the world to know what's happening. Nor does it want its own subjects knowing about life outside its boundary, in case they make comparisons. One of the interviewees knew a 22 year old man who was sentenced to over 10 years of hard labour for distributing South Korean songs and films. Before 2020 he would have got a year in prison, but now the official line is that 'the perverted and animalistic pursuit of South Korean and Western culture must be purged', and the death penalty is possible. James Heenan, the UN Investigator for Human Rights in North Korea, says that punishments just for watching foreign media are 'very serious violations of human rights' and could be crimes against humanity, not that this would concern the regime. When they were sent a video of the documentary, the North Korean government replied that the interviews had been faked, and claimed that it 'has always prioritised the interests of the people even at difficult times and has an unwavering commitment to the well-being of the people'.

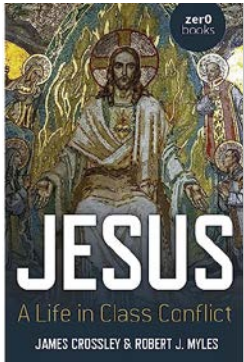
Of the consultants with a view on North Korea featured in the programme, Sue Mi Terry, a previous CIA Senior Analyst on Korea, gets closest to explaining what drives the regime. She says that the government there has always been motivated by preserving its ruling family

rather than protecting the people, which is obvious enough. She doesn't go on to add that all governments work to support the capitalist class, the difference being that in North Korea this class is more compact than in and across most other countries, as its industries and services are all state-owned. The wealth they generate gets channelled into Kim Jong Un and family's no-doubt lavish lifestyle alongside manufacturing weaponry. In case any North Koreans wonder why investment isn't being made in food or medicine production, the official justification is that missiles are needed to defend against hostile powers such as the USA and South Korea. Covid has been used as a further pretext for repression and restrictions.

Mackenzie meets Ryu Hyun-woo, who defected from North Korea in 2019 while working as an ambassador. He says that younger people are more likely to ask of the regime 'what have you done to stop us starving to death?', adding 'if anger and discontent keep building up, one day it will explode'. The documentary doesn't dwell on any action which the people of North Korea could take to improve their conditions: the very real threats of starvation and punishment mean that it's understandable if many can only concentrate on survival. The situation there makes any kind of worker-based organisation seem unlikely, although this is what's needed to change it. The programme suggests a little hope, through what Hyun-woo says and how the interviewees have defied the oppressive laws and propaganda to tell their stories.

MIKE FOSTER

The Jesus movement



Jesus: A Life in Class Conflict.
By James Crossley and Robert J. Myles.
Zero Books, 2023

This book takes a materialist approach to the emergence of the Jesus movement, informed by contemporary texts and archaeological findings. It uses critical historical imagination through a lens of Eric Hobsbawm's ideas on banditry as a form of pre-political (and pre-capitalist) form of peasant resistance. They provocatively describe the Apostles as a sort of *politburo* to this millenarian movement. They defend their category of peasantry as being appropriate for the economic conditions of the time, and against notions that fishermen and carpenters would be of some sort of relatively privileged class.

They paint a picture of the Jesus movement as an itinerant band with a 'mission to the rich'. This is evidenced by the Gospel sentiment 'I have come to call sinners'. The itinerant band was thus supported by wealthy individuals donating to their movement in a form of atonement. The group itself preached that 'he who is last shall be first' and a time would come when the wealthy sinners would be overthrown, and the world rid of landlords, tax collectors and unjust kings. The Jesus movement would then rule.

Certainly, as Norman Cohn noted in his book *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, that was an ideology read into the Gospels repeatedly throughout the Middle Ages as peasant movements led by Beggar Kings and the occasional pseudo-Baldwin would rise up with the promise of the end of work and that landlords, priests and usurers would be put to the righteous sword. 'A dictatorship serving the interests of the peasantry' as Crossley and Myles term it.

They trace the material source of this movement to the upheaval in first-century Galilee. Households were being broken up by elite building projects in urban centres. Antipas was the ruler of Galilee at the time, and he was responsible for rebuilding the town of Sepphoris (which had recently been razed by the Romans after it was seized by rebel bandits) and the town of Tiberius. Such building involved taxing peasants, clearing them from the land and drawing labour from the countryside to the city coupled with unemployment when the project was complete. They note that

Jesus' reputation as a carpenter means he was more broadly a builder, and he may have been involved in such building projects.

Amidst such dislocation, then, the Jesus movement was socially conservative, with hardline views on promiscuity and marriage, and it looked to the restoration and observance of a peasant version of the Jewish law (the authors present an intriguing reading of the parable of the good Samaritan as being about purity laws rather than the goodness of the cultural Other in the form of the Samaritan).

Crossley and Myles suggest that this itinerant band, preaching repentance to the wealthy became a form of family in itself, to give stability in a time of trouble. It also may have spent most of its time in the rural parts of Galilee, avoiding such cities as Sepphoris and Tiberius (which might account for any absence of any contemporary textual accounts, other than a couple of mentions in Josephus' *Antiquities*). When the Jesus group went to Jerusalem during the Passover festival, it would seem their disruption in the temple was, by this account, as much a stand against idolatry and profaning of the Temple (such as with the erection of a Roman eagle at the Temple gate, or with issues around the symbolism on some of the money used there) as it was about the exploitation and avarice of the moneylenders themselves.

Disruption of the Temple during Passover would not have escaped the notice of the authorities, and it seems there is sufficient textual evidence in the record that Jesus was tried and executed as a bandit/rebel for these actions. As is often noted, given the shameful character of crucifixion, the early Jesus movement would be unlikely to make up such a fate for their leader, suggesting that it was such a known and established fact that they had to stick with it.

A major plank of the argument is around the word 'sinners' which the authors argue should be read as a reference first and foremost to the wealthy, but more broadly those without the Jewish law, which would also include foreigners. This mission to the rich sinners also therefore could become a mission to non-Jewish people. This provides a plausible explanation for the ability of the ideas of the Jesus movement to spread on a cross-class basis throughout the Roman empire, gradually losing its regional specificity. Hence why the early movement had to grapple with issues such as observance of the Jewish law.

The chief sources remain the Gospels, however, and the authors spend a lot of time noting the discrepancies between the various accounts, and showing how

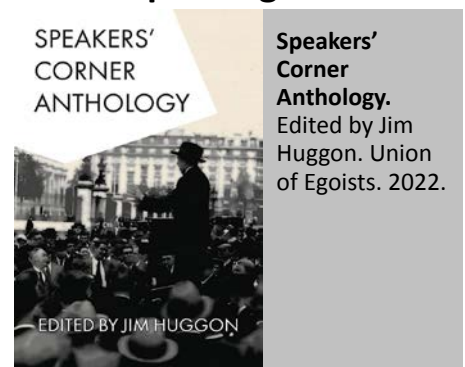
passages were added to the account that might be influenced by the needs of the movement as it developed and in a sort of dialogue with previous Gospels to overcome barriers: Joseph of Arimathea moves from being a member of the Sanhedrin to being a wealthy follower of Jesus, in order to overcome changes of the account of the role of that body in Jesus's execution.

All of the extant texts are from after the time of Jesus's ministry, and the writers show the legend growing with younger texts being more elaborate. They note there is a notional 'Q' text that was the original source material of three of the Gospels. The bare bones of the story is that there was a group preaching around the first century, practising baptism and calling 'sinners' to repentance, and that their apparent leader was betrayed and executed.

This is a plausible and interesting account of the growth of the Jesus movement that does not rely on a miraculous nor charismatic leader, but looks to the social conflicts of the first-century Near East. Although some of its arguments rest on a certain amount of philological knowledge (such as the meaning of the word 'sinners') it is largely accessible and a pleasurable read.

P.S.

Speaking Out



This is a republication (with a new, additional Foreword) of an anthology first published in 1977. It is a collection of excerpts and other written material connected to Hyde Park's Speakers' Corner and there are several references to the SPGB scattered throughout. Jim Huggon is an anarchist who spoke regularly there from 1965 to 1983. He refers to a review by the *Socialist Standard* of the original version which has slightly puzzled us as it appears that no such review was ever published.

The collection also includes a knockabout piece by Harry Young (Horatio) called 'On the Platform' and originally published in the Seventieth Anniversary edition of the *Standard* in June 1974. There are excerpts too from famous Speakers' Corner regular Bonar Thompson's book, *Hyde Park Orator*,

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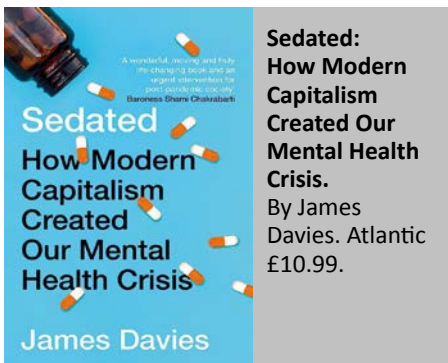
which has also recently been republished with added illustrations.

In addition, there is an interesting if rather pious excerpt from a piece by Lord Donald Soper about his time as an outdoor orator (more focused on Tower Hill than Hyde Park). This is interesting as he tells of encounters with a variety of other regular speakers and his relationship with them, without actually naming them. In particular, he writes of his conversations with a well-known Tower Hill personality and that this man was a scientific socialist, 'breathing fire and slaughter against all religion, sneering at morality [and] despising the consolations of faith' who turned out to be much warmer privately than his public persona had initially indicated. Given Soper's detailed description of him it is highly likely that this was Harry Martin, a regular speaker at Tower Hill and who had left the SPGB in 1911 to found the Socialist Propaganda League (see 'Getting Splinters', in the June 2004 Centenary Edition of the *Socialist Standard*).

Tower Hill no longer exists as a speaking station and Speakers' Corner at Hyde Park is a shadow of its former self, these days a veritable bear garden aimed at tourists with very few serious speakers. This anthology helps capture the spirit of an earlier age.

DAP

Take the Tablets



The basic argument here is that the treatment of mental illness has been medicalised and depoliticised, meaning it has come to be regarded as a problem involving the individual concerned, rather than being part of a wider social situation. Consequently it has been addressed via increased prescription of medication, not by means of talking therapy or sociopolitical changes. This is to some degree due to the lobbying and influence of the pharmaceutical industry (drugs companies such as Pfizer). They aggressively advertise their products and even develop the patient questionnaires that GPs use to diagnose depression.

More generally, though, Davies sees it

as part of a wider societal development, that of 'new capitalism', neoliberalism, based on deregulation of companies and a regulatory system that is closely linked to those it is allegedly controlling. Depression and anxiety supposedly cost the UK economy £12bn each year in lost productivity and incapacity benefits; this figure is from 2005, so the amount is presumably higher now. Reforming the benefit system and getting people into work was seen as vital, hence workfare and sanctions on the unemployed. Not having a job was regarded as some kind of psychological deficit, rather than being related to the ups and downs of the capitalist economy, just as problems at work were viewed as resulting from individual attitudes and difficulties, not the boring and often pointless nature of the job. The Labour government introduced a programme named Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT), but this had far less impact than claimed, with at most one person in five recovering as a result of it. In 2015 it was announced that IAPT workers would be placed in job centres.

There has been a vast increase in recent years in the prescription of antidepressants. This applies in many countries, including the UK, where the

number rose from 25 million prescriptions a year in 2002 to 75 million in 2020. This has not led to an improvement in people's mental health: far from it, as mental health disabilities have risen massively since the 1980s. When taken over the long term, many psychiatric drugs can be harmful, and it can in fact be more helpful to stop taking the drugs, even for the severely ill. Some research suggests that long-term antidepressant use can increase the risk of a person becoming depressed for life. A recent report (BBC Online, 19 June) revealed that in England two million people have been taking antidepressants for five years, despite limited evidence that a course of treatment of that length has overall benefits.

Davies notes that the higher rates of prescribing psychiatric drugs occur in the poorest areas of the UK, and refers to the work of Wilkinson and Pickett (*The Spirit Level, The Inner Level*), which shows that there is more mental illness where there is greater inequality. He presents a powerful and convincing picture of how capitalism defines and treats mental health problems, meaning it avoids having to confront the real causes.

PB



Floating to nowhere: the currency chaos

IF OF course the dollars were convertible into gold at \$35 an ounce as they used to be, nobody would fear to hold dollars. At present the dollar and pound are described as 'floating'. All this means is that instead of being devalued and immediately fixed at the lower level they were devalued and allowed to fluctuate about the lower level.

The pound was devalued in 1967 by the Wilson government and again in 1971 by the Heath government — on the latter occasion with the enthusiastic support of Tories, Labour and the trade unions on the ground that it would make exports cheaper to foreign buyers and thus encourage production for export. The other side of the coin is that devaluation makes all imports correspondingly dearer. So the Labour Party and trade unions which protest against the higher prices of imported goods are protesting against the inevitable result of an action they approved of.

The governments and capitalists are becoming aware of the fact that while the depreciation of currencies may seem to be of short-term advantage, at least to exporters, the competitive



depreciation of currencies such as the dollar and pound creates a chaotic situation which may make all international trading operations more difficult. This is leading some capitalists and economists to see that in the long run capitalism will have to re-learn the need to have stable currencies and that there is no better way than to restore gold convertibility at a fixed rate, in short the end of inflation.

And what does this offer to the workers? In nineteenth-century British capitalism there was no inflation. Prices in 1914 were actually slightly lower than in 1814. In between, prices rose moderately in booms and fell in depressions. And

what the workers got was exploitation and poverty all the time, relieved somewhat in booms and worsened in depressions, with unemployment similarly.

Nobody has produced — or will produce — any policy which will change the nature of capitalism. Those who really do learn the lesson of history will concentrate on getting rid of capitalism.

(Socialist Standard, August 1973)

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World Socialist Movement Online Meetings

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

AUGUST 2023 EVENTS

World Socialist Movement online meetings

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

Friday 4 August 19.30 (GMT + 1) Zoom
Did you see the News?

Discussion on recent subjects in the news

Friday 11 August 19.30
(GMT + 1) Zoom

European Developments

Speaker: Andy Davies

Friday 18 August 19.30
(GMT + 1) Zoom

Poverty's no joke:

**Eva Torf Judd and working
class memory?**

Speaker: Darren O'Neil

Friday 25 August 19.30
(GMT + 1) Zoom

**How big an obstacle are ideas
about 'human nature' to the spread
of socialist ideas?**

Speaker: Howard Moss



Socialist Party Physical Meetings

Sunday 6 August 10am-5pm
Kent Miners Festival

The Socialist Party will have a stall at this event.

Kent Mining Museum, Betteshanger Park, Sandwich Road, Deal, Kent CT14 0BF

Sunday 27 August 12 noon-2pm

Literature stall outside Socialist Party

premises, 52 Clapham High St London SW4 7UN

August Bank Holiday Monday 28 August, 10:30am-8pm

Carshalton EcoFair

The Socialist Party will have a stall at this event.

Carshalton Park, Ruskin Road, Carshalton, SM5 3DD

CARDIFF

**Street Stall Every Saturday
1pm-3pm (weather permitting)**

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.

Romance and Reality

I HAVE a friend who rarely misses the opportunity to tell those around him that he would like to bring his children up in 'a socialist country'. He makes it clear that the country he has in mind is Cuba. And he's not alone in regarding Cuba as 'socialist'. We see this in some of the people who apply online to join the Socialist Party and fill in our short questionnaire. The idea of the questionnaire isn't to catch people out but rather to make sure they understand and are in agreement with what the Party stands for. So to the question 'Has socialism been established in any part of the world?', most applicants answer 'no'. These already know enough about the organisation to understand that we see socialism as a world society without money and wages, without buying and selling and based on economic equality and free access for all to all goods and services. But a few answer in the affirmative and then give examples – perhaps Norway or Sweden (the Scandinavian so-called 'social-democratic' countries), or Venezuela (especially under Chavez), or one-party states like China, Vietnam and, most often, Cuba, the country that my aforementioned friend holds in the highest possible esteem and, more generally, seems to be an endless source of fascination for what might be called the 'left-wing mind'. Why should this be?



are simply asked to ratify those selected to stand by the single legally authorised party, the Communist Party. So the country and its people are in effect simply going through empty motions, a process referred to by one commentator as 'elections without choices'.

State capitalism

Despite this, Cuba continues to call itself a 'socialist'

country, But what it means by this is adherence to a largely state-controlled economy with most of the means of production owned and run by the government and most of the workforce employed by the state. This is not of course socialism in our terms but just another form of capitalism – state capitalism – even if it is, unfortunately as I see it, what many people, including both my friend who would like to live in Cuba and some of those who fill in our joining questionnaire, mean when they talk about 'socialism'. And what's certain is that, whatever they choose to call it, it's a million miles away from the cooperative stateless society of free access and democratic organisation that we call socialism.

Fidel

When Fidel Castro led an armed uprising in 1958 against the repressive US-backed dictatorial regime of Fulgencio Batista and then gained the support and backing of the Soviet Union, it was hailed by many in the West as a successful 'socialist' revolution. But it soon became clear that, rhetoric aside, what had happened was that one dictator had been replaced by another, the only difference being that the new one was

supported and sustained by the Soviet Union rather than the US. Not that this prevented the romance that attached itself to Cuba throughout the left-wing world from continuing. That romance has, it's true, become somewhat tarnished since the death of Castro and the accession to power initially of his brother Raul, but for many the country still somehow remains a living example of socialism in action.

In reality, of course, the widespread poverty for the majority alongside massive privilege for a tiny ruling clique that existed both before Castro and under him still exists, as does a one-party state, suppression of independent thought and harsh punishment for dissent, including the death sentence. As recently as 2021 Human Rights Watch ranked Cuba as 19th out of all nations by the number of imprisoned journalists and the 2020 World Press Freedom Index placed it 171st out of 180.

Elections without choice

As for elections, despite being an authoritarian one-party state, Cuba does hold them, the most recent one being in March this year. But these are elections only in a manner of speaking, more of a ritual than a genuine vehicle for the democratic choosing of representatives. Though the regime tries to present itself as a superior form of democracy, with people summoned to vote to appoint members of the 'National Assembly of People's Power', those people do not choose who those members shall be but

are simply asked to ratify those selected to stand by the single legally authorised party, the Communist Party. So the country and its people are in effect simply going through empty motions, a process referred to by one commentator as 'elections without choices'.

So, given what's known about Cuba and the way people live there, why does my friend like the idea that it would be good for his children to be brought up there? And why do some applicants for membership of the Socialist Party see Cuba as some form of socialism in action? The only answer I can think of is that myths die hard. Long after irrefutable evidence shows a political system not to be what it purports to be or what people thought it was, some of those people still find it too hard to look that evidence in the face. Instead they just carry on believing what they've always believed. In the case of Cuba, as in other cases, romance trumps reality.

HOWARD MOSS