

THE

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SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

ALCHEMY IN THE CITY



How the trading
system weaves its spells



Also: The economic is impersonal
The rise of fictitious capital
The royal ceiling
Working together

Which Socialist Party are you?
Mad Monx
Best regards, but miles apart



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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'

World poverty, boats and borders

THE GOVERNMENT has pledged to stop the flow of people crossing the channel in coffin boats, with little sign of success. The opposition, anxious to rebuild its Red Wall, is accusing them of doing nothing about it for too long.

How are the boat people to be described? The government calls them 'illegal immigrants'. Charities prefer 'refugees' on the grounds that people will have more sympathy for them. Some will be (anybody from Afghanistan, for instance — who wouldn't want to flee that hell-hole ruled by religious fanatics?). For others, they are 'economic migrants'. Many, perhaps most, will be. For us as socialists, that doesn't make any difference — they are fellow workers moving in a bid to find a better economic future under capitalism. They still have our sympathy.

We are living under capitalism which is a worldwide economic system, but divided politically into states (some 200 at the last count), and it is unrealistic to expect them to allow unrestricted immigration into their territory. It would

cause them all sorts of economic and political problems. That doesn't mean that they are against immigration as such. What they want is to control it.

The United States is known as a 'nation of immigrants'. Britain is one too, with a population and working class that includes descendants of migrants first from Ireland and then from the other parts of its former empire. The Prime Minister and the Home Secretary are obvious examples. Even today, 40 percent of the population of London was born outside Britain.

With a declining birth rate, most European states still need, and actually want, more workers so as to keep and step up the flow of profits. What they don't want is unregulated, disorderly immigration. But with conditions in other parts of the world so dire they can't do much to stop it. In theory it might help if they stopped bombing or imposing sanctions on selected countries but geo-political rivalries rule that out. It's a global problem to which there are no national solutions.

The slogan 'No Borders' is good in expressing an aspiration but is unrealistic under capitalism. It can be achieved only when we get socialism. As long as capitalism lasts there will be borders and border controls. The most that can be expected is capitalism coming to be organised into bigger and bigger political units within which there is free movement, as in the US and the EU.

Gary Lineker got it right. There is some scapegoating going on like in Germany in the 1930s. But not just like then. The same thing happened in Britain in the 1960s and 70s to scapegoat (legal) immigrants and, going further back, the anti 'alien' agitation of the first decade of the last century. Nationalism has never had anything going for it. It's not only divisive but stupid.

As socialists we denounce all nationalist ideologies and the borders between so-called 'nation states', while pointing out that only a socialist world of common ownership can provide the framework within which global poverty can be eliminated once and for all.

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Vanity projects

SCIENCE FICTION often presages science fact. In the 2013 Hollywood film *Elysium*, the super-rich live in luxury on an artificial utopia floating in orbit above a devastated Earth populated by desperate survivors attempting to scratch a living amid the dirt and ruins.

It's a dystopian horror story that rings true. One can easily imagine the rich building something like this in reality, albeit not necessarily on a space satellite. They've always had landed estates and gated communities. They perpetually fantasise about escaping entirely into private little worlds, untouched by the brutal consequences of their own capitalist behaviour.

For instance, there are the 'preppers', who plan to 'save themselves from the apocalypse' by building luxurious bunkers complete with military security in order 'to survive a societal collapse they helped create'. Author Douglas Rushkoff has met these preppers in person: 'More than anything,' he says, 'they have succumbed to a mindset where "winning" means earning enough money to insulate themselves from the damage they are creating by earning money in that way.' Interestingly, he adds that their biggest worry is how to stop their own security forces (ie, workers) turning on them after Doomsday has rendered their money and titles worthless (bit.ly/3BcpsyX). It's a valid concern. If these preppers end up being hog-roast on their own barbecues, there won't be anyone around to protest.

Other billionaire moguls have set their sights higher than simply hiding in an underground James Bond film set. Elon Musk has said for years that he plans to die on Mars – 'just not on impact'. In the event that he and his megalomania do rocket off together on a one-way trip to Mars, one expects that his son, XÆ A-12, will lose no time in changing his name by deed poll, just as Zowie Bowie did.

An altogether loftier, though Earth-based vision, was announced in 2021 by the former president of Walmart, billionaire Marc Lore, in the form of Telosa, a proposed \$500bn 'utopia' in a yet-to-be determined area of American desert, and intended as a home to 5 million people by 2050. Far from being an exclusive Elysium for rich people, Lore envisages the project as a 'reformed version of capitalism' which embodies something called 'equitism'. Based on the tax-reform ideas of Henry George, which saw something of a revival



Credit: NEOM

in the 2010s with the Occupy movement, this is supposedly a way of allowing workers to 'share in the prosperity that they help create' while not unduly taxing the profits of the rich (tinyurl.com/r495rxd). Quite why this hare-brained have-your-cake-and-eat-it economic vision needs to be in a brand new futuristic city, rather than in an existing one, is unclear. At any rate, plonking it in a desert may save on land prices, but it will create one hell of a utility connection problem. Still, they did it with Las Vegas.

Hot desert is even less of an impediment to the Saudi Royal Hand-Choppers who, awash with oceans of cash thanks to ongoing stratospheric oil prices, are embarking on an eye-popping trillion-dollar scheme to build Neom, a gigantic 'utopia' on the Red Sea in the country's north-western Tabuk Province, featuring beaches lined with marble, fleets of drones forming an artificial moon, and robots doing the menial work. Located 111 miles from the regional capital, Neom will apparently be an independent enclave free from Saudi government oversight and not subject to its laws, labour regulations or tax rules. Local Tabuk inhabitants are less than enthusiastic, however, as they are currently being evicted and even executed by Saudi forces, while foreign workers may also be reluctant to flock to this utopian oasis free of all labour regulations, especially when they find out what Neom CEO Nadhmi al-Nasr has said about driving employees like slaves, gleefully remarking that 'when they drop down dead, I celebrate' (tinyurl.com/yvrtx3az).

Neom is planned to consist of 10 regions, of which 4 are currently known. Trojena is an outdoor ski resort (yes, in a hot desert, you've read that right), while Oxagon is an octagonal floating industrial complex. There's also a luxury yachting island called Sindalah, a name unhelpfully reminiscent of Sinaloa, home

of the notorious Mexican drug cartel. Most gobsmackingly of all is The Line, a car-free, smart city-building 130 miles long but only 200 yards wide, a structure so enormous that 'the curvature of the Earth becomes an engineering challenge' (tinyurl.com/2ta2hn8d). It is intended to house 9 million people, with a high-speed rail line that can allegedly go from end to end in 20 minutes. Presumably passengers are shot out into nets as it rockets through stations at nearly 400 mph.

This is not the only folly currently gracing Middle Eastern regimes keen to squander their oil fortunes on pointless and ill-considered vanity projects, including golf courses, World Cups and Formula 1. Dubai, already famous for splashing out billions on a still-deserted archipelago of tourist island resorts shaped like a map of the world, is planning a \$64bn answer to Disneyland, called Dubailand, plus a \$5bn replica of the moon, for use as a hotel where guests wearing astronaut suits can enjoy lunar-rover taxis and, in some unexplained way, 'low-gravity' moonwalks. As if that's not wacky enough, the UAE has also bought Mark Zuckerberg's Kool-Aid by sinking billions into the Metaverse, while Bahrain plans to artificially extend its landmass by 50 percent.

In H G Wells's seminal 1895 novel *The Time Machine*, beautiful, golden-haired Eloi enjoy carefree lives of idleness in above-ground pleasure gardens, while the stunted, troglodytic Morlocks do all the hard work. It's a powerful metaphor for class war that has spawned many subsequent works, including the film *Elysium*. But, in a sort of ghastly quid pro quo, the Morlocks do at least get to eat the Eloi. No such luck in real-life capitalism, where the rich continue to consume us, body and soul, in the vainglorious quest to build their future fun palaces.

PJS

Dear Editors

Food Rescue

IN A world gone mad where tons of good, fresh food is sent to rubbish tips instead of being given to hungry people, it is refreshing to find organisations who are dedicated to trying to put a stop to this unnecessary waste and channel food to where it is needed. We, as socialists, should be applauding their efforts. We already know that in a socialist society there would be no such thing as food poverty. There is enough of everything to go around. We live in a world of abundance. Of course food should be made available to everyone, free of charge, but how difficult is it to do this under the constraints of capitalism? It is very easy to say that we should not support charity organisations but many thousands of people would die of starvation while we are waiting for worldwide socialism.

One group of dedicated volunteers, including qualified chefs, have taken this idea a step further. In New Zealand we have a couple of restaurants, one in Wellington and one in Auckland, called 'Everybody Eats' where anyone can go along and have a free meal. I have been along to the Wellington one a couple of times to enjoy their excellent fare. This is no soup kitchen. The restaurant is warm and cosy with flowers on the tables and a delicious 3-course meal is served. How

can they do this in a capitalist society? Money has to come into it somewhere, surely? They have to pay rent for the building and electricity bills for the kitchen. They also have to buy cleaning products and disinfectants, tin foil, etc to meet Health and Safety regulations. The qualified chef and the manager need to be paid enough to meet their own living expenses, but everyone else works as volunteers. The volunteers work part-time so they are at liberty to take on paid work elsewhere. They open 4 evenings a week and need to prepare up to 180 meals each evening. Diners can make a voluntary donation. This is called a 'koha' in New Zealand. Those who can't afford to pay anything eat for free and still enjoy the same delicious meal.

I contacted the manager, Jack, to find out how it all works. He invited me along to a meeting with the G.M. who was down from Auckland and over a cuppa and piece of cake I was able to ask questions about how they operate. All the food is sourced from supermarkets or from a food rescue service called Kaibosh. The chef then plans the meal from what is available on the day. There is only one meal planned, so everyone gets the same thing. They do, however, cater for special dietary needs. Diners just tell the waiter or waitress if they require vegetarian, vegan or gluten-free food and it will be provided. People don't need to be presented with a menu with 40 choices on it. We should all eat what is plentiful and seasonal. This, of

course, cuts down on wastage and it also means that all the food is ready to be served as soon as the doors are open at 6pm. There is no alcohol and no bring-your-own. That's the only rule. They don't even waste time with tea and coffee.

There are jugs of water and glasses on each table. Diners are in and out of there in about 20 minutes, which is just as well because there is always a queue waiting to be admitted. It is comforting to see so many people, rich and poor, sitting down together, all enjoying the same wonderful food. High-wage earners are happy to pay what they would normally pay in any other restaurant, whereas those who can't pay eat free of charge.

Maybe this wonderful restaurant is giving us a glimpse of what all restaurants would be like in a wageless socialist society. Would we still need restaurants in a socialist world? Well yes, I think so. Even though food and everything else would be free of charge, it is still a real treat to go out and enjoy a meal that has been prepared by someone else. Of course, there would be no koha and no problems of having to pay rent or electricity bills etc. There is a similar organisation in England called the Long Table, and maybe other countries are offering the same for their low-wage earners and unemployed.

I left our friends at Everybody Eats with some *Socialist Standards* to read in the hopes that they will see how easy it would be to feed everyone once we have got rid of this evil capitalist regime which creates poverty and wastage in a world of abundance. Maybe they will join us in our struggle for a better world for all.

**MOGGIE GRAYSON,
Wellington, New Zealand**



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AI in perspective

'VINOD KHOSLA, the businessman, venture capitalist and co-founder of Sun Microsystems, told the On Technology podcast that AI would lead to fewer jobs but would increase productivity so greatly that it would lift economic growth. There would be greater redistribution of wealth to even out income equality and he predicted that in 25 years' time, 64 per cent of all jobs would be capable of being done by AI: 'There will be enough to afford a minimal standard of living for everyone, to pay them to live and do things that are useful, but not in today's jobs.'" (*Times*, 22 August)

We have been told this before. Nearly 60 years ago an article in the January 1965 *Socialist Standard* on 'Automation in Perspective' noted:

'A writer in *Sunday Citizen* (6 Dec. 1964), Mr. Stanley Baron, after he had talked "to the top brains in Britain" made the forecast that before the end of the century, "in every industrial country, certainly in the West, most of the essential work will be performed by about 20 per cent of the people—chiefly the most intelligent. The rest of us will work only as much as we wish—or as much as society requires"' (tinyurl.com/yxcr4w28).

So what went wrong? Basically, a failure to take into account that we are living under capitalism.

Capitalism is an economic system geared to the accumulation of profits as more capital invested in production for profit. It is not a system geared to improving the life of the majority.

New wealth, when it is produced, is initially divided into wages, which essentially cover what workers need to consume to recreate their ability to work, and profits. Profits are the part that in theory could be used to improve living standards. Some is taxed by the capitalist state to maintain itself, some is consumed by the capitalist class to maintain and improve *its* standard of living, but most is destined for re-investment in production, so expanding productive capacity. This is what drives the capitalist economy.

Given this, what Baron predicted was never going to happen. Profits were never going to be diverted to provide workers with a standard of living above what was necessary to maintain them as workers. Any attempt to do this would have clogged up the capitalist economic system by undermining its driving force.

Productivity did increase but not by as much as implied, once again because of capitalism where automation is only introduced if it is cheaper than employing workers, not as soon as it reduces the total amount of work involved. There was a redistribution of work from the

manufacturing to the service sector including the capitalist state.

Baron's figure of only about 20 percent doing 'essential work' — producing useful things and services — could be accurate. However, instead of this resulting in 80 percent being able to lead a life of leisure, the number of jobs that don't produce anything or anything useful increased. These jobs, such as all those concerned with buying and selling, paying money, and providing buildings and hardware for this, are essential for capitalism to function, but not for society to survive.

Khosla will fare no better. AI will increase productivity but not by as much as he says, and certainly not spectacularly. The fact that 64 percent of jobs 'would be capable of being done by AI does not mean that they all will be. And, are the capitalists going to allow their profits to be taxed to pay everybody a state income appreciably above the poverty line? Will any government even try to do this in the knowledge that it would undermine the driving force of capitalism?

Only on the basis of the common ownership and democratic control of productive resources can production be geared to satisfying people's needs, all the easier given the disappearance of inessential capitalist jobs, and automation and AI allow a reduction in work-time all round.

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Halo Halo

‘THE FACT that a believer is happier than a sceptic is no more to the point than the fact that a drunken man is happier than a sober one. The happiness of credulity is a cheap and dangerous quality of happiness, and by no means a necessity of life’ (George Bernard Shaw *Androcles and the Lion*).

La République est laïque. The Republic is secular. French women want to play football. Bon. They petition to continue their religious repression by wearing hijabs when playing. Not bon.

French Football Federation says Non! If you want to play, remove them. Bon. The decision has to do with separatism rather than the obvious one, if in situ, how are they going to head the ball? How are you going to slow a forward who’s got a yard in pace more than you, with no hair to grab? Female basketball players are also prohibited from same. Who knew basketball was played in France? (*Bitter Winter*, 30 June)

Is female Islamic sport haram (forbidden)? An ‘expert’ says no, providing no men can see it, participants wear modest, covering clothing and the sport does not lead to any argument or conflict.

Also, don’t copy female unbelievers’ hairstyles, clothing or names (*Islam Question and Answer* 18 September 2015). Some good stuff from the Imam there; no arguments or conflict. Pity religions don’t follow their own advice.

It’s not all levity at Halo Halo. ‘A German woman who joined the Islamic State (IS) group has been jailed for nine years for crimes including keeping a Yazidi woman as a slave. She was also found guilty of crimes against humanity and membership of a foreign terrorist organisation. A Koblenz court said the 37-year-old had abused the young Yazidi woman for three years while they lived in Syria and Iraq and that encouraged her husband to rape and beat the woman. “All of this served the declared purpose of IS (Islamic State), to wipe out the Yazidi faith,” said prosecutors. In 2014, IS fighters stormed into Sinjar and thousands of men and boys over the age of 12 were summarily killed after being given the ultimatum to convert or die. Some 7,000 women and girls were enslaved and subjected to brutal abuses’ (BBC 22 June).

Isn’t it odd how some religions eschew ‘love your neighbour’?

A devout young female Mormon relates



Joseph Smith

how, at age nineteen, she was sent to Argentina as a missionary, and was ecstatic to do so. Whilst there she says she developed horrendous health issues. She claims that indifference was shown to her health problems by the Mormon official in charge. When she asked for proper medical help the response given was, we’ll say a prayer for you. An acolyte of Mary Baker Eddy, do you think? She, and her family, are no longer members of the Mormon organisation ([tinyurl.com/36xfsu49](https://www.tinyurl.com/36xfsu49)).

The Mormons were founded by Joseph Smith following a visitation from an angel. Information regarding their wealth is hard to come by but like all ‘churches’ it’s beyond the dreams of avarice.

DC

Tiny tips

THE OWNER of OnlyFans took home a hefty paycheck last year. Leonid Radvinsky, a Ukrainian-American businessman, received more than \$338 million in dividends in 2022, according to financial statements filed by the adult-content platform’s parent company, UK-based Fenix International Ltd, and obtained by PEOPLE. Radvinsky’s nine-figure bonus equates to roughly \$1.3 million for each of the 260 working days in 2022 ([tinyurl.com/7kax535y](https://www.tinyurl.com/7kax535y)).

It is no good targeting isolated faults within this society and attempting to fix them one by one. Many of its core structures, procedures, assumptions and values are mistaken and the focus must be on replacing the system with one that does not generate the present range of problems leading us to destruction. A satisfactory alternative must be some form of simpler way. We will get nowhere unless and until this is widely understood and willingly accepted ([tinyurl.com/2tkr49fx](https://www.tinyurl.com/2tkr49fx)). A harsh custom courses through rural China.

If a woman marries a man from outside her village, she becomes a wajianü, or “married-out daughter”. Tradition deems married-out women can be stripped of their rights to land that legally belongs to them. The Communist Party came to power promising to emancipate women from feudalism. Today, the collective financial losses suffered by married-out women are growing ([tinyurl.com/bdfkrjre](https://www.tinyurl.com/bdfkrjre)).

Almost thirty years after the end of formal apartheid ANC rule has come to a point of economic devastation with unemployment at over 40% and youth unemployment at over 70%. There has been no significant land reform. Hunger is endemic, there is pervasive violence, crises in schools and health care, collapsing electricity, water, rail and port systems, corruption on a staggering scale and ruthless political repression of struggles for urban land ([tinyurl.com/4sz7kah7](https://www.tinyurl.com/4sz7kah7)).

Danish film-maker and provocateur Lars von Trier has defended himself from backlash after writing a social media post that criticised Denmark’s donation of F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine. “Russian lives matter also!” he wrote on Instagram on Tuesday after Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s

visit to Denmark, where he and Danish prime minister, Mette Frederiksen, inspected the F-16s to be delivered to his country. Von Trier addressed his post to “Mr Zelensky and Mr Putin, and not least Mrs Frederiksen (who yesterday, like someone head over heels in love, posed in the cockpit of one of the scariest killing machines of our time, grinning from ear to ear)” ([tinyurl.com/3fj7k4x5](https://www.tinyurl.com/3fj7k4x5)). More than 1,300 people died while homeless across the United Kingdom in 2022, marking an 85 percent increase since 2019 ([tinyurl.com/3ftb3y66](https://www.tinyurl.com/3ftb3y66)). Ryan Knight @ProudSocialist ·The cruelty of disaster capitalism on full display in Maui: “We can’t get aid yet they are serving evictions” ([tinyurl.com/nj5favbp](https://www.tinyurl.com/nj5favbp)). As Staughton Lynd’s speeches, writings, statements and interviews demonstrate, there were coherent and persuasive arguments against the war in Vietnam based on U.S. and international law, precedents from American history, and moral and ethical considerations based on conscientious objection to war and an internationalism embraced by American radicals which said: “My country is the world, my countrymen are all mankind” ([tinyurl.com/btdr2t2](https://www.tinyurl.com/btdr2t2)).

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

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

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

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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.

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

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

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WALES

South Wales Branch (Cardiff and Swansea)

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The world of commodity trading

CLICKING THROUGH to the commodities news section on the internet (such as [reuters.com/news/archive/GCA-Commodities](https://www.reuters.com/news/archive/GCA-Commodities)) is like taking a glimpse into the future. The stories there detail the raw stuff of life and the struggles to come to secure access and control over those things. Headlines such as ‘Gold eases as US dollar bumps higher before Powell’s speech’, ‘China’s biggest salt maker urges public not to panic buy after Fukushima discharge’ or ‘India’s food price surge forces government measures to improve supplies’ (to take just one day’s offering) prefigure the social and political events to come.

While we would normally understand a commodity, in Marx’ words as any ‘object outside us, ... that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another’ produced for sale, when discussing commodity markets journalists and traders understand them as ‘a market that trades in the primary economic sector rather than manufactured products, such as cocoa,’ ([wikipedia.org/wiki/Commodity_market](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commodity_market)). So, that is food cereals, oil, metals and the like. The firms that trade in these goods are, as Blas and Farchy relate in their book *The World for Sale*, an ‘international clearing house for essential goods.’ As they explain:

‘Commodity traders are arbitragers par excellence, trying to exploit a series of differences in prices. Because they’re doing deals to buy and sell all the time, they are often indifferent to whether commodity prices overall go up or down. What matters to them is the price disparity. By exploiting these price differences, they help make the markets more efficient, directing resources to their highest value in response to price signals.’

Or, put another way, they make use of information disparities to make their money, making use of networks of knowledge and connexions in industries to predict and find price disparities to target. The advent of the internet and modern computer communications technology has revolutionised the industry, removing some of the advantages some of the older trading houses had.

Trading water

Such trading is oblivious to human need, and is contrary to the quoted section above, only driven by effective demand. So, news reports that: ‘Water has joined gold, oil and other commodities that are traded on Wall Street, as worries about the uncertainty of its availability in the future rises. The US’s water trade market, the first of its kind, launched on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange with \$1.1 billion in contracts tied to California water prices’

(earth.org/water-trade/) is alarming.

This will enable spot markets and futures markets over the price of water.

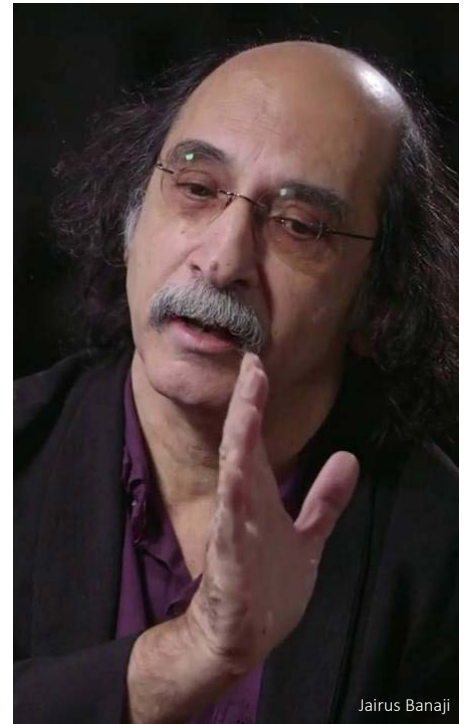
There have been instances of commodities firms cornering the supply of a commodity (such as aluminium) in order to maximise their profits. Commodity markets put social power into the hands of the commodity traders, and give capital power over society. Further, the traders seek to take control of the supply chain, seeking competitive advantage by integrating all the stages of bringing the commodity to market.

In this way, they are recreating the way industrial capitalism emerged, as Jairus Banaji notes in his *A Brief History of Commercial Capitalism*:

‘Next to monopoly of the raw materials (wool of different qualities, dyestuffs, alum), integration of control over all these separate processes was the true basis of the merchant’s dominance in capitalistically organized domestic industries. (...) By compressing the chain of circulation ... vertical integration increased its velocity and re-appropriated a part of the surplus-value that accrued to middlemen.’

Banaji also observes generally through his text how the physical presence of the merchants, and their contacts with political and military power, secure and control their markets, hence the movements and reports about commodities markets ripple out into the political and international realms, driving the actions of governments. This had led to many corruption scandals among the commodity trading world, as they slosh money around to their contacts to secure favourable terms. But, also, they are able to make quick agreements, accepting commodities in lieu of cash, as well as the converse of supplying cash when other financial bodies will not.

For example, in the 1980s, Marc Rich & Co. was able to cut a deal to supply Jamaica with \$10 million worth of oil (without even a formally signed contract). In return his firm secured favoured access to Jamaica’s bauxite and alumina. Further, the firm was able, through creative accounting, to bypass international financial institutions such as the IMF. The flip side of this was when local politicians started to suspect the traders were taking advantage of them, the traders were able to bring to bear international pressure to deter investigation. Similarly, the commodity traders were interested in profits, and would work with (and prop up) regimes of any stripe as long as they could get access to the goods.



Jairus Banaji

Such manoeuvring allowed a relatively small circle of firms, such as Vitol, Phillip Brothers, Cargill, Trafigure and Glencore (who, for example, made \$3,408 million net profit in 2018), to dominate many commodities markets.

For the billions, not the billionaires

These firms do provide a useful role in worldwide production in bringing agents in the productive process together, but they make their profits, essentially, from taking advantage of gaps in information. Opening up the information of stocks, orders and production would enable a co-operative community to carry out its own production. As we say in our pamphlet *Socialism as a Practical Alternative*:

‘On the smallest local scale, information centres could monitor the position of stocks and productive capacity to meet local needs. By collating these statistics, regional information centres would be in a position to know the complete picture throughout the region. This could be achieved by also monitoring the position of stocks, productive capacity and needs among regional production units.

A world information centre could collate regional statistics in a similar manner. This would be a connected but decentralised world information system providing any combination of information that people required’.

The commodities news – as it is – is a record of the minority rule of billionaires. It could become the means of self-control for the lives of billions.

PIK SMEET

The economic is impersonal

THE LIGHT is a monthly free newspaper aimed at winning people over to a particular point of view. It's been going since 2020 and champions various conspiracy theories, in particular that the Covid pandemic and the climate crisis are hoaxes designed to get people to accept restrictions on their freedom imposed by a secretive, self-serving elite. It is also a place where various other eccentric theories, as against conventional medicine, 5G, 'transgenderism', MMR and other jabs, are aired as well as for 'natural' cures and currency reform. It doesn't seem to be antisemitic, as has been alleged. According to Wikipedia it has 100,000 copies printed each month, and so will have some influence.

The front page article in March this year sets out its basic position. Headlined 'Agenda of lies to control us. World is awash with disinformation', it begins:

'People often ascribe failures and disasters to incompetence, greed or corruption. And while these play a part, there is a plan in place to continue to degrade everybody's standard of living to the point where we will be grateful for handouts — a universal basic income'.

The next page explains who it thinks is behind this plan:

'It should now be clear that a cabal of corporations, bankers and non-governmental organisations, aided by progressive political leaders (the Davos set) is really running the world. They care not for the ordinary people, but for their own elevation to an elite-run technocracy. The contrived climate crisis is the means by which citizens are held in a tightening ratchet of supposedly ecological policies'.

Its language can be quite radical. Its aim, the editorial in June declared, is 'to help raise awareness of the evil agenda to control the entire population, and all the world's resources, by a tiny few.' And from the same issue:

'Wage/Debt Slavery. While we all need money if we want a roof over our heads and food in our bellies, spending our entire lives working for a government bureaucracy or corporate kleptocracy is as soul-destroying as it is a waste of a life. No-one was born to just drudge by and pay the bills. That's why they give you cheap entertainment and let you get drunk and high — so you don't explode with boredom and meaninglessness and start raging against the machine'.

And 'The Owners do not have enough real power to control the 99% through overt force, which is why they must trick us



with deception' (March).

There is some truth in what they say. There is a privileged elite in whose interest governments act and the economy functions. And our standard of living has been under attack and has in fact been reduced over recent years. So their message could appeal to those who resent both of these. Those behind *The Light* are latching on to this discontent and resentment, offering an explanation and, less frequently, what they see as the way out.

But there is much more that is wrong in what they say. Indeed, the charge of 'disinformation' could be levelled at them. The threat from global over-warming may be exaggerated by some but it does exist. The Covid pandemic could not just have been left to run its course (it would have been irresponsible for any central administration, even a capitalist one, to let that happen). Their basic mistake is assuming that everything that happens in society and the economy has to be 'planned' by some group.

Unplanned

The capitalist economy is by its nature unplanned; its working gives rise to impersonal market forces that governments cannot control and which, on the contrary, exert pressure on them to give priority, over meeting people's needs, to profit-making and capital accumulation by the minority class who own the means of production. Because governments do not have a free hand but have to act in line with the economic laws of capitalism, the impression can arise that the world is controlled by some 'cabal' that plans what happens and instructs governments what to do. But once it is understood that the economic laws of capitalism act as if they were a force of nature then the

need to have recourse to a cabal with a plan disappears. There is no cabal. There is no plan. There is just the operation of capitalism's impersonal economic laws.

Until the Covid pandemic and the lockdowns that were imposed those with such views were confined to theorising about the coming of a 'new world order' that was going to suppress the individual's freedom to act as they chose. The lockdowns, and the demonstrations against them involving many thousands of people, gave them a chance to acquire an activist base. This still exists. *The Light* is distributed free by volunteers. Street stalls are held. Protests are organised to resist what they see as the cabal's plan. Like the anarchists and Trotskyists their emphasis is on 'resistance'; they even use the same slogans such as 'the power of the people is stronger than the people in power'.

However, unless they are simply what someone once called 'mindless militants' who just 'resist' without having any idea of an alternative (which of course is entirely possible), presumably they want the 'plan' to be defeated and the 'elite-run technocracy' to be overthrown. So, what do they envisage should take its place, where we will all be 'free', our standard of living won't be degraded and we won't be a drudge 'working for a government bureaucracy or corporate kleptocracy'? What will be its basis?

Individualists

Here they fall back on the philosophical views of intellectuals who are in the American tradition of individualism, 'libertarians' as they are called over there. There is also an overlap with individualist anarchism. The April issue had an article advocating the ideas of Henry Thoreau, including not taking part in elections

(contradicted by an appeal a couple of pages later for candidates to stand as independents in local elections). In the same issue there was an interview with a freelance illustrator, Lee Simpson, who echoed the anarchist Proudhon:

‘My suggestion is an old idea called mutualism, where people freely organise into worker co-operatives, using a money backed by labour (the only thing we have a monopoly on) and take part in a legitimate free market’.

But mutualist anarchists are not the only ones who laud the ‘free market’. So do out-and-out defenders of capitalism in the tradition of a reactionary like Hayek and his polemic *The Road to Serfdom*. An article in May against paper money was subtitled ‘Free exchange of goods and services is bedrock of freedom’ and ends

‘... those who value liberty know that personal ownership and the unfettered exchange of goods, services and ideas remains the bedrock of those free nations that refuse to be enslaved.’

Like, presumably, the United States.

An article in the previous issue on ‘How to build a resilient economy’ answered ‘Keep using cash and resist digital currencies’, arguing that:

‘Cash provides the opportunity to build a robust, resilient, and inclusive economy. An

economy in which high streets prosper and in which towns aren’t some identikit version of each other. An economy in which goods and services are mostly produced locally. And most critically: an economy which doesn’t collapse every time there is a minor contraction in the money supply. The use and re-use of cash is the key to realising this sound economic foundation’.

The article went on to give as one of the advantages of cash that ‘it tends to be spent locally’ and that ‘it is more frequently spent in small independent businesses than large multinational chains’.

Exactly the same argument that Greens use to advocate local currencies. In fact, the author evidently shares the Green Party’s ideal of going back to a smaller-scale capitalist economy with no Big Business and no Big Banks.

Against ‘communism’

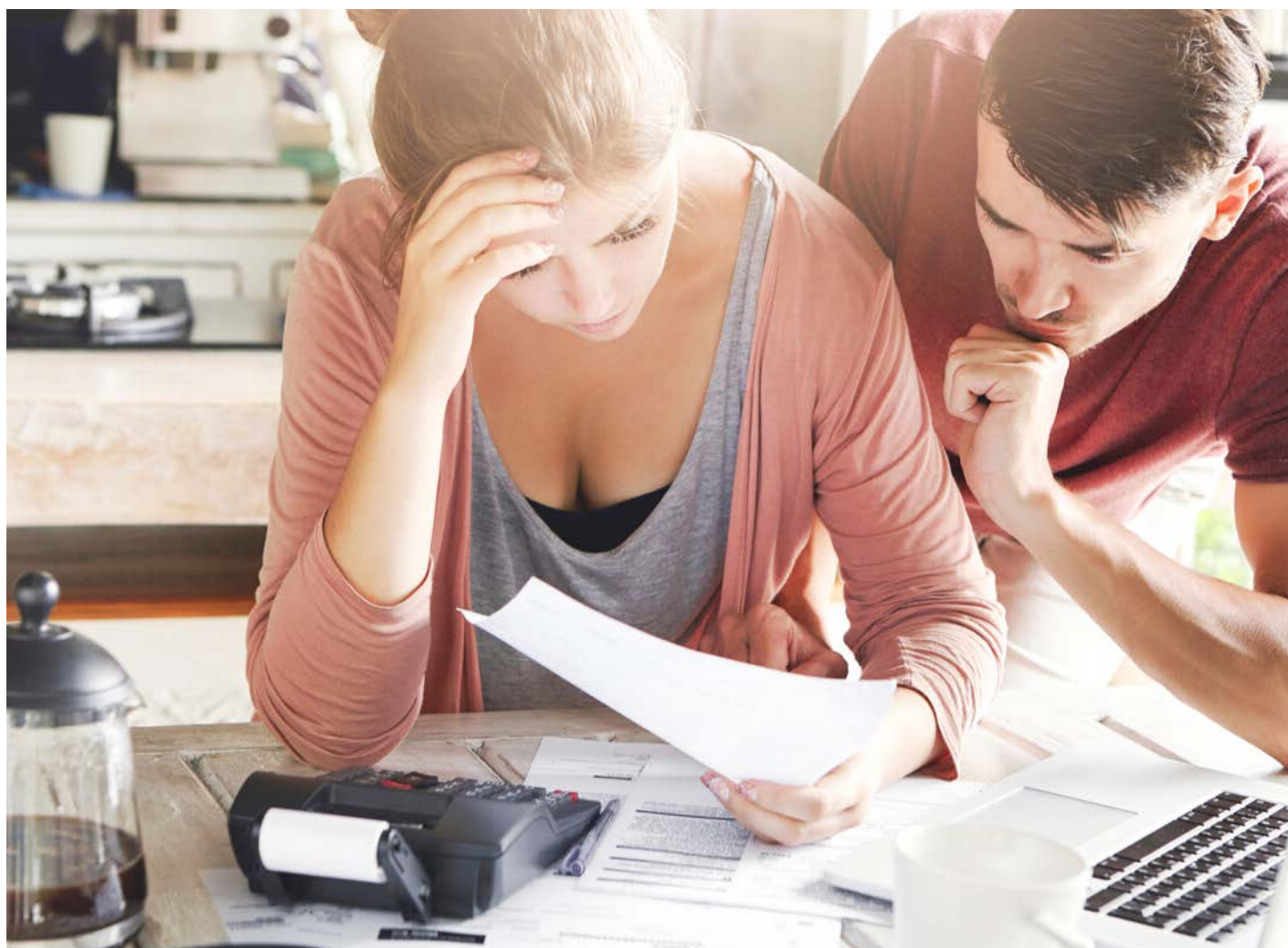
There is a tension, even a contradiction, between the different supporters of the free market, between those who appear near to the anarchists and Greens and those who think that the US is a ‘free nation’. The former won’t normally be attracted either to views expressed by other contributors against ‘transgenderism’ and refugees. All that unites them is a belief that a ‘free market’

will make things better and opposition to state capitalism that they misidentify as ‘communism’ and ‘authoritarian socialism’.

But, properly understood, communism (or socialism, the same thing) is not state capitalism. It is the negation of capitalism in all forms, and means the end of the whole market economy, whether ‘free’ or regulated by the state. A return to the smaller-scale capitalism of yesteryear, even if it were possible, would not solve the problems faced by ‘wage slaves’; the whole process which has led to the corporate capitalism we know today would start all over again and we would eventually end up where we are now.

The only way to stop people being subjected to economic forces that dominate them is to end capitalism with its class ownership of resources and its production for sale with a view to profit. To replace it with a society based on the common ownership and democratic control of productive resources, so allowing them to be used to directly turn out what people require to satisfy their needs. That, not an idealised free market, would put an end to the impersonal market forces that *The Light* mistakenly takes for the machinations of some imaginary cabal.

ADAM BUICK



The rise of fictitious capital

BY 'REAL CAPITAL' Marx meant money capital invested in physical means of production and the workforce itself with a view to producing commodities to be sold on a market in the expectation of realising a profit – or financial return – from selling them. However, what has become increasingly salient in recent decades is another form of capital that Marx dubbed 'fictitious capital'.

Fictitious capital does not involve the transformation of money into commodities. It is not about investing in means of production to produce commodities for sale on a market. In this respect it is distinguishable from interest-bearing capital in the form of bank loans to businesses that produce commodities. The latter do not constitute fictitious capital as such.

Bank loans become fictitious capital when they are used for some other purpose than financing the production of commodities. For instance, you might borrow money from a bank to purchase a new car or, indeed, pay off another debt. The bank advances the loan on the understanding that it will be repaid, plus interest, over a certain period; it expects to make a 'financial return' no less than a factory producing widgets expects to make a financial return. Marx represented this formulaically as $M-M'$ where M represents the sum loaned out – the principal – and M' represents the principal returned to the lender plus interest paid by the borrower out of her wages or savings.

In this scenario no new or additional value has been created – unlike in the case of the $M-C-M'$ circuit where C is capital invested in physical means of production. There has simply been a net transfer of money from the borrower to the lender. The lender has gained money at the expense of the borrower. While, for Marx, the $M-C-M'$ circuit quintessentially defines the capitalist mode of production, it is the $M-M'$ circuit, which starts and finishes with money, that most directly, or overtly, expresses what motivates capitalist production – namely, to make money. In this instance:

'The production process appears simply as an unavoidable middle term, a necessary evil for the purpose of money-making. This explains why all nations characterised by the capitalist mode of production are periodically seized by fits of giddiness in which they try to accomplish the money making without the mediation of the production process' (*Capital*, Vol. 2, Ch.1).

The desire to make money by bypassing the production process, as it were, has

become increasingly apparent with the growing 'financialisation' of the economy. What financialisation does is to drive investors to seek out and promote every conceivable kind of revenue flow – from student debt to mortgage repayments and much more besides – that can be turned into financial assets and bundled up in ways that make them appear more reliable and attractive as a source of future income.

Fictitious capital can be characterised as an outgrowth of the credit system.

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Traditional bank capital did indeed aid industrial production through the provision of credit to industrial enterprises as Marx noted, even if the banks themselves took a cut from the resulting increase in industrial output. With fictitious capital there is a difference. The tendency is to make money, not out of increased physical output but out of money itself in the form of various revenue streams. The financial instruments available to do this are diverse and evolving and include not just collateralised debt obligations or loans but also bonds, equity stocks and various kinds of derivatives.

If one were to identify a convenient starting point when financialisation began to seriously take off as an economic trend this would probably be the collapse of the Bretton Woods monetary system in the 1970s that had formally linked international currencies to the US dollar (itself convertible into gold up until 1971 when President Nixon abruptly abandoned convertibility). The new system of floating exchange rates paved the way to a sharp rise in currency speculation. In money value terms, the ratio of foreign exchange transactions to the global trade in commodities was 2:1 in 1973. By 2004 it had soared to 90:1 and has since grown even more, making the speculative trading of currencies the world's biggest market

(Firat Demir, 'The Rise of Rentier Capitalism and the Financialization of Real Sectors in Developing Countries', *Review of Radical Political Economy*, September 2007).

Subsequently, financialisation was boosted further by the Big Bang reforms of the late 1980s that deregulated financial markets and made London the leading financial centre in the world. In the wake of these reforms came various technological innovations which have also contributed to the astonishing growth in financial capital. The introduction of computers has given rise to the phenomenon of high frequency trading (HFT) employing digital algorithms to buy and sell financial assets by predicting short-term price movements in shares and identifying potentially lucrative arbitrage opportunities.

Since then, financialisation has, as it were, spilled over and penetrated even what is loosely called the 'real economy'. Everyone is seemingly getting in on the act – from large retail establishments to manufacturing giants. Financial speculation and the provision of in-house credit are just more arrows to put in their quiver, so to speak – an additional means of making more money in an increasingly competitive world. That has made for a huge expansion in the role that financial intermediaries play within the economy and a notable diversification of the kinds of financial instruments at their disposal. Indeed, this has advanced to such an extent that, according to Ravi Bhandari, there is 'no longer a purely financial sector (banks, insurance companies, etc.) on the one hand, and a 'productive' sector on the other' (tinyurl.com/3d254kmy).

The stock market has been dubbed a market *par excellence* for fictitious capital, representing the capitalisation of property rights (as opposed to the capitalisation of production itself in the case of real capital) and, as such, constitutes a market for the circulation of these property rights. These rights, suggested Marx, represent 'accumulated claims, legal titles, to future production' and any income resulting from that production:

'Gains and loss through fluctuations in the price of these titles of ownership... become, by their very nature, more and more a matter of gamble, which appears to take the place of labour as the original method of acquiring capital wealth' (*Capital*, Vol.3, Ch.30).

A corporation might well raise funds for investment (real capital) by issuing shares on the stock exchange. By purchasing a share, one then has a claim on the future earnings of this corporation. However, this share does not function as real capital. As

Marx explained, the money advanced by investors for the purpose of being used as real capital does not exist twice, 'once as the capital-value of titles of ownership (stocks) on the one hand and on the other hand as the actual capital invested, or to be invested, in those enterprises'. Real capital 'exists only in the latter form' and a share represents merely a 'title of ownership to a corresponding portion of the surplus-value to be realised by it' (*Capital*, Vol 3, Ch 29).

The shareholders will hope that, in addition to receiving dividends, the value of their shares will appreciate over time, enabling them to realise a capital gain if and when the shares are sold on the stock market (in the case of a 'public' company). The rise or fall in the value of this fictitious asset – the shareholder certificate – representing the capitalisation of anticipated income streams can sometimes bear little apparent relation to current movements in the real economy. The secondary market in the buying and selling of these financial assets is essentially driven by market expectations of future profitability, and this can have a speculative element.

That helps to explain the rather puzzling coincidence of a buoyant stock market with

**Speculative activity
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share prices sometimes reaching record highs alongside a real economy that shows every sign of being in the doldrums. A different kind of logic applies in each case. 'Autonomisation' is the buzzword to describe the tendency for fictitious capital to strive to transcend or unshackle itself from real capital in the business of money making.

Though ultimately fictitious capital cannot sever itself from developments impacting on real capital, there does, at times, appear to be a certain disconnection between them. Speculative activity that grew out of the very system of credit that financed industrial development can, at times, become frenzied and take the form of speculative bubbles – from the Dutch tulipmania bubble (1634-38) through to the

internet-based Dot-Com bubble of the late 1990s, and many more besides. Inevitably these burst at some point when, as Marx noted, the magic of compound interest breaks down as, indeed, it eventually must.

In the meanwhile, as far as these paper claims to future income that constitute fictitious capital are concerned:

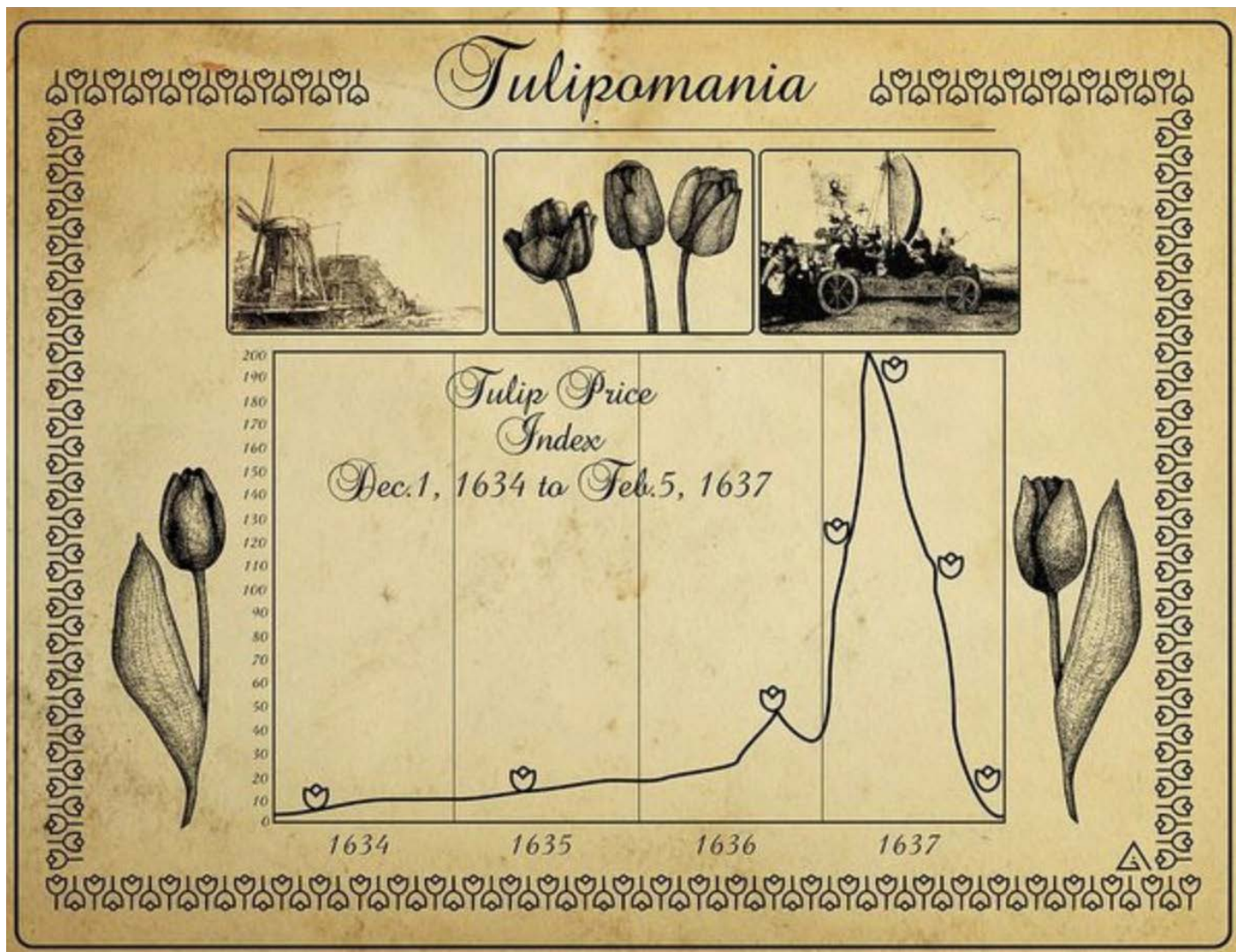
'To the extent that the depreciation or increase in value of this paper is independent of the movement of value of the actual capital that it represents, the wealth of the nation is just as great before as after its depreciation or increase in value' (*Capital*, Vol. 3, Ch. 29).

The belief that wealth can be created merely by making money from money is akin to the medieval belief in alchemy – that you can transform base metals into gold.

It is the investment of this 'real capital' that generates the surplus value the system fundamentally depends on. This presupposes the employment of wage labour to create the surplus value out of which such capital originates in the first place.

Fictitious capital, on the other hand, does not and cannot create surplus value at all but at best merely redistributes it amongst fractions of the capitalist class.

ROBIN COX



The royal ceiling

THE LABOUR Party is currently promising to ‘smash the class ceiling’ (although, with the way things are going, they may have quietly dropped this slogan by the time this article sees press). This is part of their ‘5 missions’: ‘These missions will only be achieved through relentless focus. They require government departments working together. Business working with unions. The private sector working with the public sector. And a common partnership between national and local government’ (tinyurl.com/y7z84czd). So they are committed to ‘break down the barriers to opportunity for every child, at every stage and shatter the class ceiling’.

The strange thing, though, is that they continue to support the existence of the monarchy. After all, if a kid from Bradford dreams of one day being head of state, there is absolutely no opportunity for them to do so precisely because of the sort of ‘entrenched class system with low socio-economic mobility and opportunities to develop skills available to just some’ that they are objecting to.

With the identities of the UK head of state being known for the next, possibly, hundred years, with a whole host of jobs and roles at their discretion to appoint, you’d think that it would definitely be in line for smashing as part of the class ceiling.

Starmer himself has been confronted by historic comments about supporting the abolition of the monarchy, but the current Labour Party strategy is to continue to support the crown as part of winning over the Red Wall seats, where support for the monarchy is presumed to be strong.

The process of crowning a new king demonstrated in part how that majority of support is aggressively built: wall-to-wall propaganda for the monarchy filled the airways, backed up by physical force of the police. The campaign group Republic found that out as they got arrested for trying to organise a protest against the coronation (later found to be baseless arrests: even though the organisers had been working with the police to arrange their protest, they were still picked up).

The police have form on this, they had previously lawlessly arrested a group called Movement against the Monarchy (made up of avowed anarchists) to stop them potentially disrupting the Golden Jubilee of Elizabeth II (they were compensated for unlawful arrest, but the police clearly felt it was worth the cost to protect the image of the Jubilee celebration).

But the Republic protest group is a nice liberal campaign group, so its members

were probably surprised to find themselves on the receiving end of state repression. If their republicanism is about making the idea of a liberal democracy real, the reality of Labour’s smashing the class ceiling is to make inequality real. The content of their detailed document on their mission makes clear that ‘Smash the class ceiling’ is just ‘education, education, education’ striking back undead from the tomb we all hoped it was imprisoned in forever. Skills and training to give people opportunity: Starmer wants to leave the social edifice intact, complete with inequality, but simply give the impression of a fair chance at the starting gate.

Just as with the obsession that economic growth can deliver fairness without having to make any difficult choices about changing social structures, so the idea is that handing out better education will give people better chances of higher paying jobs (but someone will still have to do the unskilled manual and clerical work, and as we saw during the last Labour government, their share of the national wealth stayed static even as the economy grew).

We, of course, don’t want to smash the class ceiling, we want to dismantle the class tower, to sweep away aristocratic and plutocratic privilege and live in a society where everyone is comfortable and has an equal say in how their community should be organised. We stand against Kings and Presidents alike.

PIK SMEET

Working Together

SOME OF you may remember that earlier this year an event took place – it was called ‘the Coronation’. Up and down the country ‘loyal’ citizens organised celebrations, street parties, cup cake sales for charity, and so on. But one of the things that took place in my neck of the woods was a ‘yarn bombing’.

A group of women of all ages and backgrounds, who get together regularly to knit, crochet, have tea and cake and just chat and socialise, this year decided to celebrate the Coronation by knitting, embroidering and crocheting a fantastic array of exhibits to adorn the village of Oystermouth just to the west of Swansea.

To say that the items produced were amazing would be an understatement. Imagine, for example, a knitted Beefeater, Charles and Camilla’s rescued Jack Russells from Battersea Dogs Home, not to mention a tropical rainforest complete with wild life decorating the bollards along the pretty

sea front. So much work went into this enterprise. Ladies were working into the night to finish their contributions. Some were defying the authorities and sneaking out after dark to bedeck trees with colourful crocheted flowers. All was done with such enthusiasm and love.

But what struck me more poignantly and powerfully was something else. Nothing to do with the patriotism or nationalism of the moment, but rather the sense of communal purpose and cooperation which invested this activity. They were loving doing something together as a group.

Matilda, for example, widowed in her 80s after 50 years of happy marriage, had previously lost all her sense of purpose. She no longer felt she had any role in society, until a chance notice in the local free sheet brought to her attention a knitting circle which she joined. And it gave her not just a purpose but also a sense of community.

Then, Sharon, in her mid thirties, who

had suffered from mental health issues for nearly all her life, found a group of people who loved and accepted her for who she was and loved her innate creativity. This had turned her life around and shifted her thoughts from suicidal to joyful, as well as easing her lovely mother’s anxiety for her child’s future.

Another member of the group, Jean, had an adored sister who died very young from cancer. The sister is now remembered by all the group with lovely knitted flowers which decorate a bench dedicated to her name and where anyone can sit, look out over the bay and remember their own loved ones

Finding out about this made me remember, if I needed to, how working together for no profit or gain enhances our lives as human beings. It also brought it home to me, if left to our own devices without the worries of bills, mortgages and debts, what a fulfilling and useful life we could create. Not only do we want to be ‘happy’ but innate in most of us is the desire to make others happy. Freed of financial chains we are a great species.

JOY BASZUCKI

Which Socialist Party are you?

ARE THERE two Socialist Parties? If you type 'Socialist Party' into the internet, you might think so. That's because you come up with our own organisation, the one that's been advocating a world without buying and selling with free access to goods and services since 1904 and that's also known by our full name the Socialist Party of Great Britain (SPGB). But you also come up with a 'Socialist Party' that's been around since 1997 and was previously called 'The Militant Tendency'. Historically it was an 'entryist' group on the left-wing of the Labour Party and even had its own Labour MPs. One of those MPs was Dave Nellist, who's still active in this post-1997 'Socialist Party' who took part in a debate this May at the Oxford Union Debating Society with the title 'This House believes that class defines British politics'. His party's website has published a condensed version of Nellist's speech at the debate (tinyurl.com/3pv4a78d).

Stealing a name

When, in 1997, the Militant Tendency changed its name to the Socialist Party, we, the SPGB, objected vigorously. We said they were duplicating, in fact seeking to steal, our long-held name. But to no avail, since they went ahead regardless. The only (truly laughable) argument they could summon was that the name wasn't really the same, since they were 'Socialist Party' (ie, without the definite article) and we were 'The Socialist Party' (ie, with the article). Of course we were aware that anyone looking closely at the two organisations and what they stood for would quickly see the difference. We were arguing for a completely different kind of world society to replace the market system of profit, money and buying and selling, while they were campaigning for reforms of the system with more state and less private ownership, but still with production and distribution based on money and buying and selling – and solely within this country too. However, for people not looking too closely, it was likely to cause confusion, especially as this new Party was calling itself 'Marxist', even if they were (and are) a million miles away from Marx's demand for a society of 'from each according to ability, to each according to need'. Nor has any of this changed in the 25 plus years since the Militant Tendency changed its name.

Class in society

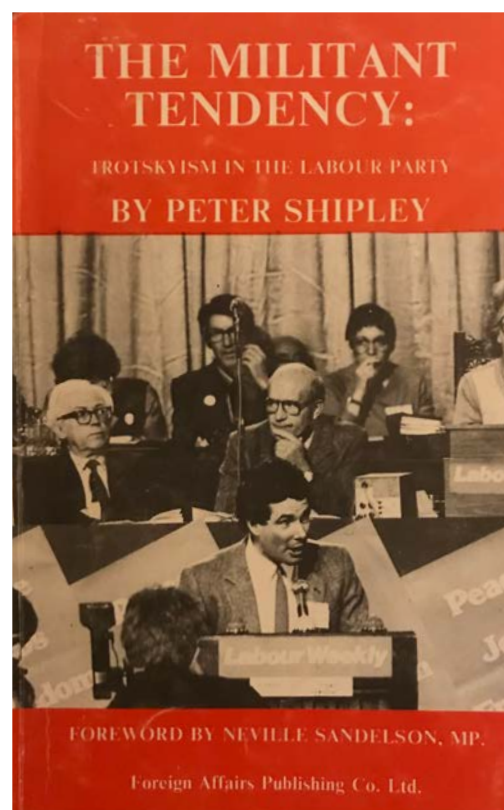
Nevertheless, reading the summary of Dave Nellist's speech at the Oxford Union,

there is undeniably a certain amount in it that we might agree with. This applies in particular to what he has to say about class in capitalist society. He states, for example, that modern capitalism is 'a class society based on the market' and that 'the two main classes are those with ownership and control of production, the capitalist class, and those who only sell their labour power, the working class'. He also goes on to say, quite rightly, that the capitalist class who dominate the wealth in society constitute a tiny minority and the working class, who are the overwhelming majority, hold only a tiny proportion of that wealth. He further tells his listeners that the 'system of politics ... serves the interests of the minority capital-owning class within society, not the majority' and that Labour governments are just an alternative team ('a reliable second eleven') for running that system with similar agendas and policies to the Conservatives and are 'wedded to the profit system'.

State ownership

So far so good. We can share the analysis of how class is the overriding feature of the way capitalist society is organised. But from there on Nellist's 'Socialist Party' starts to part company with the socialist (and Marxist) idea of a society based on the satisfaction of universal human needs rather than production for the market. First of all, he suggests that it was Margaret Thatcher's government that brought about a fundamental change in wealth ownership and she was the one who then drove Labour, via Tony Blair, away from socialism. He seems to attribute at least some of this to the fact that more Labour MPs had Oxford or Cambridge educations and that somehow 'leads them naturally to defend the current market system, not fundamentally challenge it'. He then goes on to talk about Jeremy Corbyn, for whom he has nothing but praise. In his words, 'a Labour challenge under Jeremy Corbyn was different' and it was 'a brief period when Labour was seen, paraphrasing Shelley, as "for the many, not the few" – fundamentally different from the Tories, and promoting a political alternative for the working class'. If Corbyn had been successful, he argues, it would have led to 'the public ownership of essential industries'.

And this is the key to that organisation's 'socialism'. It is not the completely



different kind of society that we in the Socialist Party argue and campaign for – a society of common (not state) ownership, without markets, without money, without governments or leaders and without borders or states, where the production and distribution of goods and services takes place cooperatively to satisfy human needs. The 'socialism' of Nellist and his organisation is infinitely more limited than this. It is, in his own words, 'an anti-austerity political agenda that talks unashamedly about planning the economy through public ownership and transferring wealth far more equally across society'. In other words, a less unequal form of capitalism and one in which the state rather than private companies or individuals seeks to manage economic activity. Essentially it is not the abolition of capitalism, its markets and its system of buying and selling. As to whether such reforms (since 'reforms' is what they are) are even possible within the market system, that is entirely open to question. But, even if they were and they somehow had the effect of 'transferring wealth far more equally across society', it would still be a case of tinkering at the edges of the endless and manifold problems capitalism throws up and would come nowhere near to abolishing that system and establishing a real socialist society. We said in 1997 that Militant were impostors to call themselves the 'Socialist Party'. impostors they still are.

HKM

Mad Monx



IN 1327 a Benedictine monastery in northern Italy suffered a calamitous fire which destroyed a magnificent collection of irreplaceable books and manuscripts. It was determined that the cause was arson. The perpetrator was an aged fanatical monk who sought to keep certain knowledge hidden away. Oh, that was fiction, Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*.

Marx was one of those whose books were destroyed by the Nazis, also keen to keep knowledge hidden. Burnt too were the works of Heinrich Heine. Heine's 1821 play, *Almansor*, contains the line: 'Where they burn books, they will, in the end, burn human beings too'.

Science-fiction writer Ray Bradbury was also queasy at the repression being practised by the Soviet Union. Russians resorted to manual copying of literature (*samizdat*) and passing it from hand to hand.

In 1953, Bradbury's dystopian novel, *Fahrenheit 451* appeared. *Fahrenheit 451* refers to the temperature at which books burn. Set in a future America, it was the job of firemen not to extinguish conflagrations but to initiate them for the purpose of book burning.

'Sticks and stones might break my bones but words cannot hurt me' goes the old anti-bullying children's rhyme, but publishing words can certainly lead to the violence it rails against.

Recent burnings of the Koran in Denmark and Sweden, which have freedom of speech enshrined in their constitutions, have led both countries to contemplate introducing laws to stop such actions. This is not the first time that such events have occurred and the consequences have, in some cases, resulted in extremely violent protests. Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson warned that a spate of Koran burnings in the country has triggered 'the most serious security situation since the Second World War'. One cannot believe he is referencing the Religion of Peace (sic).

Violent protests followed the publication in 1988 of Salman Rushdie's novel *Satanic Verses*. Ayatollah Khomeini, then leader of Iran, called for the death of Rushdie. In August 2022 a stabbing attempt was made

resulting in Rushdie losing the sight of one eye and the use of a hand.

A Pew Research Center analysis found that 79 countries and territories out of the 198 studied around the world (40 percent) had laws or policies in 2019 banning blasphemy, defined as speech or actions considered to be contemptuous of a god or of people or objects considered sacred. Twenty-two countries (11 percent) had laws against apostasy (abandoning one's religion).

In March 2023 the *Spectator* wrote: 'No religion ought to be given the power to constrain political discourse or behaviour in order to protect its adherents from being scandalised, and no government should help it by silencing its critics. If a Wakefield resident was to burn the Quran publicly in protest at the pretensions of the fundamentalists (something, incidentally, that can now cause you to be arrested on serious public order charges by police increasingly desperate not to appear anti-Islamic, as happened some years ago), we should fight to protect his right to free speech in the same way as we would if he had been a secularist or left-winger who had burnt a Bible or an American flag' (tinyurl.com/bdebukkd).

Theory at odds with reality?

Earlier in 2023 an American Tennessee pastor live-streamed a book-burning event urging his flock to throw their *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* copies into a bonfire. Because why? Because, he said, 'IT'S WITCHCRAFT 100 PERCENT! All your *Twilight* books and movies. That mess is full of spells, demonism, shape-shifting and occultism. Stop allowing demonic influences into your home'. Does he know it's 2023 not 1933? Or perhaps he thinks it's 1633.

Whatever the literary merits, or otherwise, of J K Rowling's works – *Harry Potter* has sold over 500 million copies since 1997 – in an example that modern heresy will still get you burned at the stake, metaphorically, Rowling's defence of biological women has seen her banned from events celebrating her own books and films. The three main actors whose

careers were kickstarted in the Potter film series have been vocal in condemning her.

Not much support for Voltaire's 'I don't agree with what you say but I will defend with my life your right to say it' there. Nothing is free under capitalism but free speech increasingly comes at a price.

'Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past'. In George Orwell's *1984* the protagonist Winston Smith is employed in the Ministry of Truth's Records Department. Here he altered historical newspapers and photographs to concur with whatever the Party line was at the time. The removal of 'unpersons' was often carried out in this manner in the Soviet Union.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union statues of Lenin were systematically removed from the state the Soviets had previously controlled. Understandable if you've been subject to repression for many years but the removal of literary figures seems churlish.

As part of its de-Russification, Ukraine has been removing monuments to Alexander Pushkin the Russian poet, playwright, and novelist, thought to be the greatest Russian poet and founder of modern Russian literature.

A few years back Iran was, allegedly, (the report comes from the American-supported Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty) considering removing Persian astronomer, mathematician and poet Omar Khayyam from its education curriculum. Changes were because 'Officials believe that in order to attract the younger generation they must increase the intensity of their religious and ideological propaganda in schools. They think that a large proportion of young people are turning away from religion and government ideology because of the weakness of propaganda in the education system and the mass media'. Shades of Goebbels?

When William Caxton introduced the printing press into England in 1476 he would have been unaware of the law of unintended consequences. Pity that so many are now experiencing them.

DC

Best regards, but miles apart

Sometimes people in other groups and countries contact us with a view to some kind of joint venture or activity. As a recent correspondence illustrates, such well-intended invitations can often expose deep and unsuspected difficulties. It would be unfair to quote our correspondent directly without their permission, but you may surmise their arguments from our own responses below.

Hi there,

I've just been forwarded your invite, and sure, happy to have a chat online. If you know anything about us though, you'll know we're all about global common ownership now, with no money or markets, and we don't go in for piecemeal progressive reforms, eg, housing, so I don't know how much you'd get out of our involvement.

Best regards

Hi there

To be honest I'm reluctant to take part if the purpose is mainly to 'raise awareness' about housing issues. The way I interpret this is 'promoting positive things we can do about housing', and I'm not convinced there are any. I would be obliged to object that over a hundred years of housing reforms have done nothing to cure the homelessness problem, and in my opinion never will do anything, because housing is like any other commodity that's produced for profit, not for need, and entirely subject to the laws of the capitalist market. Poor people simply don't matter in this system, but it's arguably even worse than that. The more workers are ground down by exorbitant rents and mortgages, the more desperate they get, and the more employers can screw them with low wages, zero-hour contracts and anti-union rules. In this view, homelessness is actually great for capitalism, just like unemployment, and unaffordable health systems. They are not problems it has any intention of solving.

I'm guessing you want to stress the positives, as in these two paragraphs from *Jacobin magazine*:

'Certain reform-oriented struggles, especially those around rent control and expanded provision of social housing, offer important opportunities for on-the-ground socialist organizing. But we also shouldn't be shy about our big-picture diagnosis.

Socialists have to make the case, loudly, publicly, and globally: capitalism can never meet our needs for high-quality, affordable housing. The reason is straightforward: the profit motive' (*Jacobin*).

com/2018/11/capitalism-affordable-housing-rent-commodities-profit).

This is the age-old dilemma of action now or revolution later. It's always claimed that you can do both, but in practice one is always pursued at the expense of the other. To me it's like trying to redecorate while your house is on fire. I also can't go along with the idea that housing reforms could be some kind of step on the way to socialism. You could make the same argument for virtually every charity under the sun, with the result that the steps on the way to socialism rapidly multiply to infinity. And reforms can be undone, and frequently have been, by successive political regimes, so that sadly, reformism is rarely a forward path, more often a circular loop. How many times has Oxfam proposed to eradicate poverty since they were founded in 1942?

I'm replying at some length just so you can see what position I would be obliged to take, which I fear would have the effect of undermining whatever you want to put across. I heartily sympathise with you over the undeniable fact that the working class does not seem interested in socialism right now. But I don't think the solution is to offer them something else. Part of the reason the working class is not interested in the single socialist step is that they're too beguiled by the plethora of reformist routes being offered to them.

If you're happy to proceed on this basis then fine, but I perfectly understand if you don't think it would be helpful.

Best regards

Hi there,

Based on what you've just replied, I'm afraid I have not made myself clear at all. You say you '100 percent support radical socialist reforms'. We don't, because we don't believe they exist or that they would work. You ask for socialist ideas (I suppose meaning 'reform measures') that I support. There are none. You ask what policies I think are best. There are none. Key issues? Just one, getting the world to abolish capitalism. That's all. No interims, no small steps, no 'in the meantime'.

Your approach is: the working class won't listen, so propose progressive things they will listen to instead. In this view, socialism is more of an ongoing process than an end goal.

Our approach is: the working class won't listen, so make them listen. Socialism is the only goal. There is no process.

You may regard this as an absolutist, rather than a relativist position, and

you'd be right. This is not a new debate, it's as old as the history of socialist thinking, and caused the breakup of the First International. On the one (majority) side, the gradualists, reformists, Fabians and 'minimalist' socialists who thought you could introduce socialism by degrees, through progressive government measures. On the other side, the 'maximalist' socialists, also called Impossibilists, who demanded the immediate abolition of capitalism, and nothing less.

We are in that maximalist tradition, which is nothing if not uncompromising. We would be the first to admit that we haven't got what we wanted. But capitalism still exists, and workers are still suffering, with the world possibly on the brink of self-extinction, so we would argue that the minimalists didn't get what they wanted either. We're no closer to socialism now than we were a hundred years ago, for all their progressive ideas. In fact, because of all the 'faux socialism' being put about, we are arguably even further away.

I admire your energy and initiative in setting up your own political group, obviously in the hope that you can make a difference. The world needs people like you, more than ever. But I would suggest that you take a closer look at these 'socialist reforms' you advocate. There are very few genuinely new concepts floating around. Have these reforms been tried before, and if so, what happened? Do they make sense in terms of economics? If you're not sure, feel free to ask me. If I don't know, I can find out. A little bit of homework now could save you spending a lot of energy later.

Why not tell me what measures you want to promote, and I'll tell you what I think?

Best regards

I'm sorry you think I'm being 'pointlessly hostile' and wasting your time with 'idiotic squabbling'. I only wanted you to understand my position and now I guess you do. I suppose you will consider it a waste of time communicating with me, but I will take the trouble to reply anyway. To me, this sort of exchange is not some alternative to the revolutionary process, it's part of it.

Believe me, I would love nothing better than to get round the table with a united revolutionary socialist movement and form a united plan. If I had the magic power to make that happen I would. I don't want a divided opposition to capitalism any more than you do.

But if you think that movement is divided by nothing more than petty superficial squabbles, you don't understand revolutionary politics as well as you think. The divisions go all the way down.

There are two main fault lines:

(1) Minimal versus maximal – the two poles, as already explained. Minimalists are driven by a desperate sense of expediency, but what happens in practice is that they always get drawn into managing capitalism on behalf of the rich. This has happened with every supposedly labour or socialist party that's ever been in government. In the UK, many of their grandees end up in the House of Lords. What usually happens to the supporters is that, over time, they forget all about socialism and become garden-variety liberals.

(2) Vanguardists versus libertarians – on one side, the Leninists, Stalinists, Trotskyists, etc, who believe the working class is basically stupid and needs an elite

revolutionary leadership, who alone are capable of understanding socialist theory. If successful these groups, in the process of imposing their new order, have become a new totalitarian ruling class, very often murderously so. Against them stands an assortment of libertarian socialists, anarchists, syndicalists and some left or council communists, who reject leadership as an inherently weak and undemocratic form of organisation, and insist like Marx that only the whole working class can emancipate itself.

The above presupposes that, at heart, they all want 100 percent socialism, at least at some distant point in the future. Actually, many of the minimalists and vanguardists don't even want that, or understand what it is. They think socialism is just capitalism managed by the state, or by a revolutionary dictatorship.

I need hardly add that there are other, more minor differences. The vanguardists

all hate each other, like the fighting dogs they are. The minimalists (who are often also vanguardists) all promote competing and often infeasible reforms (like UBI) simply to get votes and/or members. Even the libertarians are divided, with most apart from the SPGB being anti-parliament.

I'm not making any of this up. These divisions existed well before you or I were ever born. If you're going into revolutionary territory, you need to know where the cliff edges are. It doesn't mean we have to be uncivil with each other, but unity between groups who don't want the same thing is out of the question. Our solution, whether you agree with it or not, is to specify exactly what we mean by socialism, and then seek out only those people who fully support that aim, so that the revolution can proceed on solid rather than nebulous foundations.

Best regards

PJS

Cooking the Books

An anarcho-capitalist president?

IN AUGUST the media reported the success in Argentina's presidential primary elections of Javier Milei, 'a self-described 'anarcho-capitalist'' (*Financial Times*, 31 August), 'the ultra-right libertarian and 'anarcho-capitalist' who represents angry Argentina' (*El País*, 14 August).

If they now have a chance of one of theirs being elected as president, the anarcho-capitalists have come a long way since we debated them in the 1980s and 1990s, challenging their argument that socialism (as a society based on common ownership without production for sale) was impossible and refuting their spurious 'economic calculation argument'.

The theory, the *Financial Times* noted, was the brain-child of Murray Rothbard (1926-1995) who 'developed a radical version of libertarianism that he called 'anarcho-capitalism'. In this worldview, states are 'organised banditry' and taxation is nothing but 'theft on a gigantic, and unchecked, scale'. As Quinn Slobodian points out in his recent book *Crack-up Capitalism*, in Rothbard's ideal polity, 'contracts would replace constitutions' and people would not be citizens but 'clients of a range of service providers' (tinyurl.com/484hr8b8).

We can confirm this from the many debates we had with them. They did argue that capitalism can, and should, exist without the state; in fact that as long

as the state existed there was not real capitalism but 'statism' or 'corporatism'. Capitalism, they said, had never been tried. In their view, the functions of the state, including the courts, the police and the armed forces, should be exercised by competing private enterprises whose services individuals could buy according to choice. In fact, everything should be dealt with by buying and selling contracts between individuals and groups of individuals.

This includes the sale of body parts. They are divided over whether parents can sell their children. Milei, who is evidently a loud-mouth who speaks before he thinks, confirms both. According to *El País*,

'In June of last year, he referred to the sale of organs as 'just another market' during a radio debate. 'Who are you to determine what [a person] does with his life?' Milei questioned. (...) Days later, a journalist asked him if he subscribed to another theory that suggested 'the sale of children.' Milei replied, 'It depends,' and further got himself tangled up. 'Shouldn't the answer be no?' the journalist pressed. 'If I had a child, I would not sell it,' Milei said. 'The answer depends on the terms in which you are thinking; maybe 200 years from now it could be debated' (tinyurl.com/ykvn5baj).

Capitalism in Argentina must have reduced workers there to the depths of

desperation if so many are prepared to vote, even as a protest, for a person with such crazy ideas.

Anarcho-capitalism is a dystopian nightmare that, if it could be implemented, would make capitalism even worse than it is now by subjecting everything, literally everything, to being bought and sold. It would reduce us all to isolated atoms only interacting in the market place.

Capitalism has never existed without the state and never could have. It was helped into being by the exercise of coercive state power both to accumulate the first money invested as industrial capital (colonial plunder, slave trade) and to create a propertyless proletariat by driving peasants off the land (enclosures, clearances). As Marx put it, capitalism came into the world 'dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt' (*Capital*, vol 1, ch. 31). Once established, capitalism still needed a social organ of coercion to maintain the monopoly over the means of production by a few and to exclude the working class from them except to work for wages and produce profits.

In any event, if Milei is elected president, there is no chance that he will abolish the state in Argentina. 'Anarcho-capitalism' — capitalism without a coercive state — is a contradiction in terms.

SSRIs and Side Effects

AS MANY as one in seven people in the UK are prescribed antidepressants. While undoubtedly, medication helps lift many out of a debilitatingly low mood, for others, unexpected and unpleasant side effects have outweighed any benefits. *Are My Antidepressants Worth It?*, an episode of the documentary series *Disclosure* (BBC iPlayer) looked at the downsides of the medication, especially among young people in Scotland. Presenter Anton Ferrie and his team spoke with over a hundred people prescribed antidepressants about their experiences, along with doctors and researchers. The programme gave exposure to an important issue but predictably only gave hints of the wider context which explains why the problem has arisen.

The most commonly prescribed antidepressants in the UK – sertraline, fluoxetine and citalopram – all fall under the category of SSRIs (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors). As the name suggests, SSRIs impact on serotonin, a neurotransmitter involved with regulating mood, with each type working on the brain in a slightly different way. Doctors therefore need to make sure they prescribe the most appropriate type for each patient's situation, particularly when the patient is a young person who is still developing. The programme includes a sad example of when the wrong decision has been made: Dylan Stallan was switched from fluoxetine to sertraline after he turned 18, and he ended his life two months later. An increased risk of suicide among young people associated with SSRI use is one of the concerns voiced by, among others, Dr David Healy and Prof Bernadka Dubicka in the documentary. As well as the risk of suicidal thoughts, other side effects of antidepressants can include insomnia, sleepiness, dizziness, headaches, fatigue and sexual problems. Thousands of people have reported the latter persisting even after they have stopped taking SSRIs, enough for the complaint to have its own name: Post-SSRI Sexual Dysfunction. PSSD isn't recognised as a separate condition by the NHS, though, partly because it's not understood how much its symptoms (which can be as extreme as a numbing of all sexual feeling) are an aftereffect of the medication or are due to depression returning.

For some people taking antidepressants, it's difficult for them to tell whether what they experience is a side effect or not. Rachel Coburn, the producer of the documentary, talked about being prescribed antidepressants for as long as 12 years,



Credit: BBC

since she was 18. She said that she can sometimes be forgetful and is troubled by not knowing whether this is because of the medication or is just how she is. After taking the pills her whole adult life, she wondered 'what lies beneath the citalopram'. Radio presenter Katie Thistleton asked herself the same question, and struggled through withdrawal symptoms when trying to come off her medication.

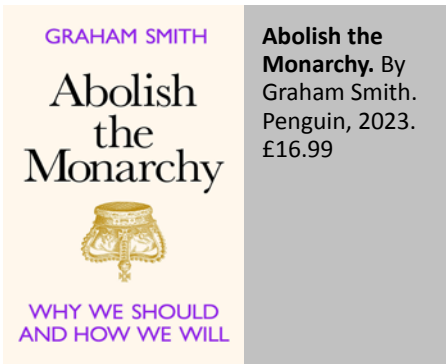
As the focus of the programme was on the general lack of awareness of the side effects of antidepressants, it only touched on other aspects of their use. Dr Ben Davis, a GP, made the point that a brief chat with a rushed doctor isn't the best basis for a decision about long-term medication, especially for an issue as individual and complicated as mental health. An obvious conclusion from this is that the NHS doesn't have enough funding to employ more GPs, counsellors and other specialists to meet need. A more fundamental issue is why that need is there, and growing. The numbers of people feeling depressed have been increasing over the decades, particularly among children. A study by the Nuffield Foundation published in 2012 ([tinyurl.com/kf2xtxk2](https://www.tinyurl.com/kf2xtxk2)) found that the proportion of 15 and 16 year olds reporting that they frequently felt anxious or depressed had doubled since the early 1980s, from one in 30 to two in 30 among boys and one in 10 to two in 10 among girls. By 2021, as many as one in six children in England aged six to 16 years had a probable mental health

disorder, according to the NHS ([tinyurl.com/mr29j8k9](https://www.tinyurl.com/mr29j8k9)). Partly, this rise is because of more awareness and less stigma around mental health issues than in previous decades, so more people now feel able to access help. In this way, the normalisation of mental health issues has had a positive effect, but looked at from another angle, this increased awareness has come about because societal factors are pushing more people into this state of mind. It's not surprising that depression is a likely reaction to the privations and alienation which come with life in our society, amplified in recent years by the Covid pandemic and the cost of living crisis.

And so the big pharmaceutical companies have come to our rescue by manufacturing the SSRIs to meet the expanding need. The way our healthcare system functions buys into the clout enjoyed by profit-hungry organisations like GlaxoSmithKline and AstraZeneca. Dr Healy has revealed how drug companies fund research into medicines, creating a bias towards their products which gets disguised by the studies' academic credentials. The end result is that brands of antidepressants are promoted as the go-to option for busy GPs who realise that a prescription is a more prosaic option than to make a referral to join a lengthy waiting list for counselling. As Katie Thistleton says, antidepressants can be a sticking plaster but they can't really solve the underlying problem.

MIKE FOSTER

Capitalist Republic



Abolish the Monarchy. By Graham Smith. Penguin, 2023. £16.99

This book by the campaign group Republic's CEO makes clear that its formal aspirations are for a liberal republic. They see the monarchy as something of left-over business (indeed, at one point in the book he actually argues that the rump of royal powers cannot be exercised because of the lack of legitimacy of the Crown, but that a president could deploy those powers: a cry for more executive power seems an odd stance for democrats).

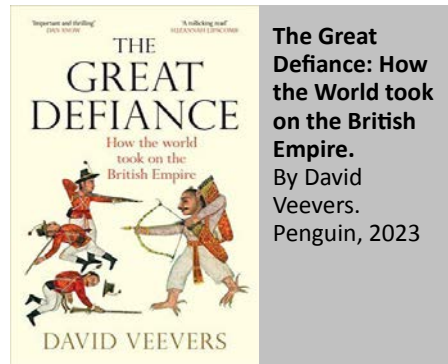
In fact, the liberal fantasy gripping his work is on full display while he segues into discussing an elected House of Lords. Despite bemoaning the lack of imagination of those who can't think past having a monarchy, he likewise cannot imagine a state without a bicameral legislature (albeit wanting all parts to be elected). Smith's republicanism is simply wanting to continue the liberal project and sweep away the last vestiges of feudal power.

His book is worth reading for two features, though. The first is for his accounts of being a campaigning activist outside the political machines, and secondly for his attempts to describe a process of big reform to society, such as a wave of activism that sweeps away the monarchy. Unfortunately he doesn't have a motor, beyond hope, for how this could come about, but nonetheless there is a certain, well, nobility in his continuing to plug away.

Smith, noting the predilection for the BBC to propagandise on behalf of the monarchy, says he is not suggesting a conspiracy, yet for the first half of the book he describes the very real secretive way the monarchy act and the determined way it protects itself. It is an organised conspiracy against the public, and by misunderstanding the nature of power beyond the formal and public roles, he is missing the real class nature of monarchy. Despite this, he is interesting on the actual real wealth the monarchy wields, and the way in which that buys considerable sway alone (especially as it has special access to the laws around which it can operate its businesses).

P. S.

Resistance to Empire



The Great Defiance: How the World took on the British Empire. By David Veevers. Penguin, 2023

This is an account of the rise of the early British Empire that counters the 'War of the Worlds' style idea that Britain spread out to conquer the world based on some sort of natural or technical (or even providential) superiority. It puts centre stage the resistance to the rise of the empire, and shows how the British were often thwarted, or their victories curtailed.

For instance, the book begins with Ireland, making the point that the conquest took over a hundred years, and nearly ended up bankrupting the English state. Mostly, the English had to rely on a network of local lords who would ally with the Irish cause as much as support the crown, as their interests depended. The Tudor state thus adopted 'an innovative strategy of colonial expansion. Withdrawing the crown's claims to territories beyond the Pale, Elizabeth stepped aside and opened up the colonisation of Ireland to private enterprise.' Backed up by the violence of the British state, using such weapons as induced famine and atrocious slaughter, rebellious Ireland was brought to heel.

This became the operating method of the expanding English colonialism, and indeed, the colonisation of the new world was linked by some of the people who colonised Ireland: the name Walter Raleigh keeps recurring through this book. Veevers deploys the indigenous people's names for themselves, thus what is now Carolina in the United States was Ossomocomuck and the people were the Algonquian. Likewise, in the Antilles, the people were the Kalinago, and what is now called St Vincent was Hairoun.

In part, the expansion into the Americas was made possible by the conquest of Ireland, providing a substantial market for imported sugar and other goods, and also providing people to export to work in the colonies, in the form of indentured labour (which, as the author emphasises, and contrary to some claims today, is not comparable with the slavery that followed. Indeed, the book deals with the slave trade extensively, and notes how the Dahomey kings tried to take control of the trade in enslaved people from the Bight of Benin.

Many Africans were not passive victims but agents, warts and all. And, again, it shows how the pieces of the jigsaw came together, and the tobacco and sugar trades drove the demand and thus the qualitative change in the slave trade to the new world.

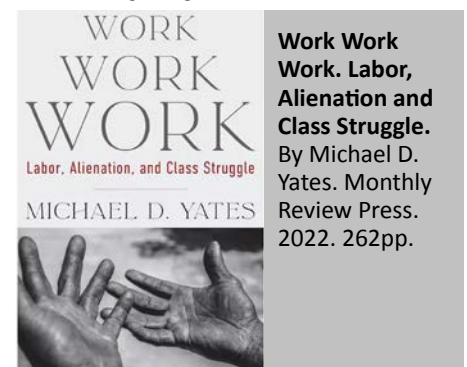
The book also covers what happened when the English arrived as supplicants, such as in India or Japan, and found themselves confronted by powerful empires in their own right. The English were able to offer revenue to the emperors in the form of trade as well as military support (especially seaborne). Much of the history of the English presence was shaped by trying to escape taxes.

It's not easy to come across accounts of how the English (later the British) came to dominate in India. My memory of schoolbooks is there was a blackhole in Calcutta and then Clive won the battle of Plassey (actually, he didn't, but that's a longer story). Veevers explains the interactions between the English merchants, the settled Portuguese community and the Mogul nawabs and princes. This book is worth reading for this account alone.

The book ends with the point that the history of the British Empire is as much an act of forgetting and airbrushing the subjectivity and substance of the wide variety of the world's people. As he points out, in a very real sense, the British unmade the world.

P. S.

Employment as hell



Work Work Work. Labor, Alienation and Class Struggle. By Michael D. Yates. Monthly Review Press. 2022. 262pp.

This is a passionately written book by a lifelong critic of capitalism. Yates has an intimate knowledge of how that system works and this collection of essays, extraordinarily wide-ranging in its scope, covers key elements of social and economic development from the organisation of hunter-gatherer societies to the pressures exerted on human society and planetary ecology by 21st century capital.

It reminds us that, for around 95 percent of the 200,000 years or more that human beings have walked the earth, social relationships were relatively egalitarian and non-hierarchical and the 'earth was a commons, the property

of all', in which people 'managed their existence in ways harmonious with nature and kept the earth's metabolism in balance with their own'. It was only when hunter-gatherer societies came to be replaced by permanent settlements of farmers from round about 10,000 years ago that inequality and hierarchy began to set in, resulting in societies based on rulers and ruled, rich and poor, and above all divisions into classes. This led ultimately to the apotheosis of class society under capitalism, to a polarisation where one tiny minority class owns and controls the vast majority of the wealth and the vast majority of people have to work for that minority, selling their energies to them day-by-day in order to survive and often suffering significant tribulations and a pervasive sense of insecurity. His rhetoric in describing this polarisation is often powerful. For example: 'Workers get a wage in return for converting their life force into a commodity owned by those who have bought it'; and 'Only profit rules us and those with money will beat down those with none, without mercy or remorse'. And there is much visceral description of the conditions suffered by workers at the cruellest end of the market process, as, for instance, his reference to the more than 800 million farm workers in the world who 'suffer short-life expectancies, pesticide poisoning, and state-sponsored violence whenever they attempt to organise, and whose working conditions are extraordinarily harsh, and their prospects for decent lives non-existent'.

It is work or, more precisely, employment in modern capitalist society which a large part of this book examines critically and informatively. Chapter titles such as 'Labor Markets: The Neoclassical Dogma', 'Work is Hell', and 'The Injuries of Class' give a flavour of the areas focused on and the author's approach to them. The author explains how capital's single-minded need to realise profits necessarily leads to the exertion of managerial control over work and, in the way it is implemented and enforced, often sets up competition between those who carry it out, making work in capitalism 'a traumatic affair' and leading to a profound sense of alienation. And he is overwhelmingly critical of this way of organising work – and society – and of the notion that this is the best or only possible way for human society to manage itself. He also points to the insidious role of education systems and their promotion of ideas like individualism and nationalism among people at an early age, causing them to internalise the idea that the existing organisation of society is inevitable. This, he says, makes it 'easier for capital to

control the labour process' and less likely that workers will collectively challenge that control.

The alternative to all this is what Michael Yates focuses on in the later essays of his book, in particular the final chapter entitled 'Waging Class Struggle: From Principles To Practice'. He has previously stated that 'either explicit or implicit in the essays is the belief that both capital and the working class itself must be abolished if we are to achieve a society free of alienation, one marked with substantive equality in all spheres of life'. He has condemned those on the left who think that somehow a fairer and more just society can be established within capitalism, of those who 'believe that markets are not inherently destructive to social well-being' and think that something called 'market socialism' can 'embrace markets but control them in the people's interest'. He has also described the programme of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) led by Bernie Sanders as a 'social democratic pipedream', labelling it 'pathetically utopian' for the way it limits itself to organising campaigns, electioneering and trade union action in the vain hope that this will encourage 'a deeper understanding of capitalism' and lead to 'full socialism' via gradual and incremental reforms. What is needed, he commendably argues, is a clear understanding of the need for 'a more radical perspective', in which 'the anarchy of the marketplace should be replaced by conscious planning of what is produced'.

Yet at this point his argument goes unfortunately awry, as, in apparent contradiction to his condemnation of the DSA's politics, he sets about recommending, in somewhat breathless fashion, a whole slew of 'radical' reforms

to be fought for and brought in under the existing system: eg, shorter working hours, free universal healthcare, bans on fracking, abolition of student debt, local low-price food production, vertical farming, reparations for slavery, unions and political parties funding 'eco-socialist' production, no government support for 'oppressive regimes' – to name but a few. And, to make things worse, there is also a significant positive reference to oppressive state capitalist regimes and organisations, past and present, whose policies bear no relation to the socialist objective the author claims to espouse. Here we are talking, for example, about China under Mao, Castro's Cuba, the USSR under Lenin and Trotsky, the present regime in Vietnam and Maoist rebels in India.

These disjunctions seem difficult to explain. But part of it may stem from the author's statement of the Leninist notion that workers must be led to socialism ('new parties must be built (...) leading the working class') rather than achieving it via democratic action based on majority working class consciousness and understanding. Despite these significant differences, however, there is a great deal we would share about the ultimate vision of the new society the writer articulates in his closing words:

'What we are, as human beings, is a species that can thoughtfully produce what is needed for survival and enjoyment. There should be no workers, no wages, no bosses, no capitalists (...) – only cooperative and beneficial production, with substantive equality in all aspects of life. (...) We will take for granted that most profound maxim: From each according to ability, to each according to need. When this necessity is realised, only then will we be free.'

HKM



Chile: Myth and Reality

THE EVENTS in Chile are already a myth. There, according to left and right-wing commentators alike, a democratically-elected Marxist government was overthrown by the armed forces, so proving the impossibility of establishing Socialism peacefully by using the existing machinery of limited political democracy.

Let us try to scotch this myth now by showing that the failure of the so-called Chilean experiment has absolutely no relevance to the question of whether or not Socialism can be established peacefully and democratically.

Allende and his Popular Unity were not Marxists and were not trying to establish Socialism. The programme of the Popular Unity, an alliance whose main elements were the so-called Socialist Party and the so-called Communist Party, was essentially one of state capitalism for Chile. It called for the break-up of the big landed estates, for the nationalisation of foreign-owned and some Chilean-owned industry, and for various social reforms. Even if implemented in full this programme would have left the basic position of the working class in Chile unchanged: they would have remained propertyless wage-workers forced to sell their mental and physical energies to an employer (even if the State) in order to live; production would have remained geared to the market; and the government would still, under pressure from the world market, have had to restrict the consumption of the working class in order to allow the maximum amount of surplus value to be extracted for re-investment.

Secondly, not only was the Allende government not trying to establish Socialism, but it did not even have majority support for its programme of state capitalism. Allende was elected President in September 1970 in a three-way contest, but with only 36 per cent of the vote. Subsequent elections showed that his

government never did manage to acquire majority support. The last elections in March this year still gave its opponents 55 per cent of the vote.

Thirdly, because of this limited electoral support, the Popular Unity did not completely control the State machine. Parliament remained in the hands of its opponents who, although they did not have the two-thirds majority needed to impeach Allende himself, harassed his Ministers and delayed and altered his proposed laws.

For three years those whose vested interests were threatened by the coming of state capitalism to Chile—the American corporations, the Chilean landowners and big capitalists—sabotaged and plotted against the Allende government, but the fact remains that the conflict in Chile was between private capitalism and state capitalism, not between capitalism and Socialism.

That the limited democracy that existed in Chile has been a victim of this conflict can only be a matter of regret for Socialists. For, whatever its limitations, capitalist political democracy at least allows the working class to organise to defend its everyday interests and to discuss differing political views, including those of Socialists. Its suppression in Chile by a military junta represents, in this sense, a step backward for the working class of Chile—not that much of it would have survived had the Popular Unity's full state capitalist programme been implemented, if the experience of Cuba is anything to go by.

But it still remains true that, in the quite different political conditions (which have never yet existed) of an immense majority of workers in all the industrialized countries of the world being Socialists and organised to win and control political power, Socialism could be established peacefully. The overthrow of a minority state capitalist government in Chile by forces acting on behalf of private capitalist groups will not deflect us from this position into urging the working class to adopt the futile and dangerous policy of armed insurrection. (*Socialist Standard*, October 1973)

Action Replay

Running into the Sand

TOP FOOTBALLERS nearing the end of their careers have various choices when their legs begin to go and their skills start to fade. The US is one popular destination, and Lionel Messi, for instance, joined Inter Miami in July from Paris St Germain, and will be earning at least \$50m a year.

But recently a new alternative has emerged, of players going to Saudi Arabia. At the end of last year, Cristiano Ronaldo signed for Al Nassr, at an annual salary of \$200m; not bad for a 38-year-old. This August, Neymar left PSG for Al Hilal, for a transfer fee of €90m. There have been plenty of other examples too, with Saudi clubs having spent £753m on players from European sides this year, and the latter want guarantees that they will be paid on time.

One of the more controversial moves was that of Jordan Henderson from Liverpool to Al Ettifaq, which is managed by Steven Gerrard, who moved there in July after a rather mixed managerial career in the UK. While in Britain, Henderson frequently spoke out in support of the LGBT+ community, which made many people



Credit: messinews

wonder why he had moved to a country where gay and lesbian sexual activity is illegal. His response was that the situation might change, and that 'having someone with those views and values in Saudi Arabia is only a positive thing.' Which might charitably be described as wishful thinking.

In 2022–3, the average attendance in the Saudi Pro League was just over nine thousand, though some clubs draw much larger crowds. Matches are broadcast on TV in various countries, though not by Sky or TNT. All this activity and spending has taken

place since four top clubs were taken over by the Public Investment Fund, a 'sovereign wealth fund' (a kind of state-owned version of the likes of Blackrock). It's part of Saudi Vision 2030, a project intended to increase various kinds of diversity in the country. In leisure terms, besides football, it also includes wrestling and live music concerts. It is run, of course, by the de facto ruler, Mohammed bin Salman.

The venture into football has created various kinds of controversy. The Fund owns Newcastle United, and there have been claims that when a Saudi club bought one Newcastle player, it inflated the price in order to help United's finances. So the transfer market may be being disrupted, but then it's never been, well, a level playing field.

Above all, the sporting side of Saudi Vision has been described by many as sportswashing, using sport to disguise nasty practices of one kind and another and promote the reputation of an individual or an organisation. And this time that goes even further, supposedly boosting the standing of a whole country, or at least its rulers.

PB

World Socialist Movement Online Meetings

Our general discussion meetings are now held on Zoom again. 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.

October 2023 EVENTS

World Socialist Movement online meetings

Sundays at 19.30 (IST) Discord

Weekly WSP (India) meeting

Sunday 8 October 10.00 (GMT + 1) Zoom Central Online Branch Meeting

Friday 6 October 19.30 (GMT + 1) Zoom

Language and Society

Speaker: Paul Bennett

Friday 13 October 19.30 (GMT + 1) Zoom

Did you see the News?

Discussion on recent subjects in the news

Host: Paddy Shannon

Friday 20 October 19.30

(GMT + 1) Zoom

Discussion on subject to be arranged

Friday 27 October 19.30

(GMT + 1) Zoom

No Meeting

Saturday October 28 October

10.00 to 17.00 (GMT + 1) Zoom

Autumn Delegate Meeting and Workshop (**hybrid meeting**)

Socialist Party

Physical Meetings

LONDON

28 October 10.00 to 17.00

Autumn Delegate Meeting and Workshop (**hybrid meeting – see above**)

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

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.

A bit of your own back?

SOMEONE I'VE known for a long time recently surprised me. He told me he was a shoplifter – a regular one. I say he surprised me because he's got a regular job and it shouldn't be something he needs to do to make ends meet. So why does he do it? 'I'm just getting a bit of my own back', he told me. What did he mean by that? Well, he explained that, while he had to do a job he didn't particularly like to keep his head above water, those 'damned shareholders' were raking it in for doing nothing. 'Legalised theft', he called it. But, I objected, didn't that mean other people who didn't shoplift were losing out because the shops would just recoup their losses by putting up prices? No, he said. He'd thought and read about that and his conclusion – which actually seemed to make sense to me – was that they couldn't put their prices up willy-nilly, because they were having to compete with other shops and stores as well as online retailers and would risk losing customers if their prices were higher than their competitors. It might affect their profitability a bit and their shareholders' dividends, he said, but he didn't care about that. So, he insisted, those who said he was penalising 'honest' shoppers were advancing spurious arguments.

He also explained that he didn't shoplift from small shops, since that wouldn't be fair. Most small shopkeepers, he said, were struggling to make a living and having stuff stolen from them would likely push them over the edge. In fact he told me he despised people who stole from small shops, since it was just poor people stealing from one another.

Trouble in store

What to make of all this? Well, I had a look into it myself and discovered that in recent times there has been what I saw described in one report as an 'explosion' in shoplifting. Figures issued by the British Retail Consortium showed thefts across the sector in England and Wales had risen by 26 percent in 2022. In an online article entitled 'The cost of living started my shoplifting: why stealing goods is on the rise', BBC business editor Ez Roberts interviewed a number of self-confessed shoplifters and concluded that, while many of them did it because they couldn't afford food, others who could manage financially just saw it as an easy way to get something for nothing. And



easy it is apparently, since, according to a supermarket manager interviewed, 'little can be done about it'. 'If staff intervene', he said, 'it can lead to violence'. He added that it was hard to get the police to come. 'We don't call the police anymore', he said. 'They won't come. Unless the thief has stolen around £500 worth of items the police aren't interested.' But police obviously do turn up – sometimes – since their figures from March this year, the most recent available, show forces recording almost 33,000 incidents of shoplifting.

Too many offenders

Having said that, this is obviously only a tiny proportion of all the shoplifting that takes place. Most offenders 'get away with it', and even when they do come onto the police radar, they are unlikely to be prosecuted – and increasingly so. That's because recent reports have shown that the potential prison population is growing faster than the jail cells and other space available, and the knock-on effects of this are that sentences are getting shorter, fewer people found guilty are being sent to prison and fewer people are actually being prosecuted. An increasing number are being given cautions, even for relatively serious offences. In these circumstances, therefore, it looks increasingly unlikely that shoplifters caught by police will get anything more than a ticking off.

The surge

As for the recent surge in shoplifting, though it's mainly due to the rise in the cost of living and the inability of many people, even those with regular

employment, to make ends meet, it seems also to be the case that at least some of the increase is not down to desperate hard-up individuals but to other factors – in particular the sense of insecurity even among those who have a steady income. It will always be a temptation to people living from one pay cheque to the next to steal to make that cheque go further. And then of course there's the acquisitive ethic the system we live in imbues people with. An example of this came from the BBC report where an Oxford University student interviewed said she shoplifted because she wanted to use her own money to buy the more expensive products her fellow students were able to get.

Disobedience

There are of course other causes too, for example the need of some individuals to obtain drugs or alcohol and also the fact that an increasing number of people feel less intimidated by the 'rules' of private property society and the authority it seeks to exercise.

Unfortunately, while disobedience to the authority of the private property system by the act of shoplifting may give some personal satisfaction to individuals, it is not a particularly positive or constructive way to help do away with that system and replace it with another one in which the stores of the world can be made freely available to them – and to everyone.

HOWARD MOSS