

THE

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SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

WAR RUINS

Massacres on the Med



Also: Palestine: the background
Israel-Gaza war: What we say
Capitalism's structural waste
Why are prices always rising?

Capitalism's Endgame:
a reply to our review
How do we get there?
Driving to distraction



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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’

'God is Great!'

THIS WAS the vitriolic slogan enthusiastically chanted around a truck loaded with bodies. Those killed for being on the wrong side of the fence when it was unexpectedly breached. All too easy to view the unfolding horror of strike and counter strike as an escalating falling out of the faithful: Muslims versus Jews.

Actually it's people killing people, state or quasi-state promoted murder. What divides them is nationalism. Palestinian nationality emerged from the collapsed Ottoman Empire, while Zionism was formed from long-standing hostility to Jews in Europe. Both products of world wars.

The immediate upsurge of violence is but the most recent manifestation of resentments and hatreds ignited by the formation of Israel on land formally occupied by Palestinians. Strip away the religious camouflage to reveal the fundamental cause of this and most, if not all, armed conflicts.

There is no significant difference with the ongoing mutual slaughter in the

Ukraine, with soldiers/victims of both sides infused with nationalism. The flags of both sides flying over land that is the source, actual or potential, of wealth.

Land is the most basic element of wealth creation: for the production of food, the source of raw materials required by every manufacturing process. The labour involved in farming, raw material extraction, and turning those materials into usable commodities, creates the value from which profit is generated.

Therefore, who owns/controls a particular piece of real estate is a matter of financial importance. While it continues to be private concerns, or states on their behalf, workers will be employed to defend one particular plot, or even try to seize the plot of another group.

Such plots are dressed up as nations with defined borders which in reality are no more than lines on maps. Lines that are readily moved or erased and redrawn. So it was that on 14 May 1948 the state of Israel could be declared where, on the 13

May, there was no such state.

Cue 75 years of armed conflict, of full-scale battles and terrorist outrages, with constantly simmering violence just beneath the surface of seemingly quieter periods. There is occasional political talk of one-state or two-state solutions alongside militant groups on either side of the fence whose rhetoric comes close to genocidal.

Atrocity is stacked upon atrocity. Strategic gambles in which the chips are men, women and children wrapped in body bags. Both sides raise the stakes trying to force each other to throw in their hand and withdraw. Meanwhile everyone around them loses.

Except, of course, arms manufacturers. There's never a famine of weapons, it seems.

There are self-proclaimed leftists who celebrate the latest killing spree on behalf of Palestinians. Just as those who cheered on the young men as they marched to their deaths in 1914. Nationalism then, nationalism now is the business, and it is big business, of sacrificing young lives en masse on bloody altars of profit.

God may not be great, but financial returns are, at least for a few.

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Nothing but animals

ONE OF the more depressing clichés that socialists hear, especially in response to outbreaks of homicidal violence like that in Israel and Gaza, or Ukraine, is the lazy claim that humans are just wired that way – just look at chimpanzees.

A recent online comment stated that 'chimps are our direct ancestors, closer than bonobos', two untrue statements that could easily have been checked. Bonobos and chimps are actually so closely related they can interbreed, and both share around 98 percent of their DNA with humans, making them equally close cousins. Yet their behaviour is markedly different, which ought to prove right away that behaviour is not dependent on genetics.

Bonobos are famous for being egalitarian and promiscuous, but chimpanzee violence is what usually gets all the attention. However, according to Jane Goodall, chimps are not the incorrigible hooligans people think: '... it is easy to get the impression that chimpanzees are more aggressive than they really are. In actuality, peaceful interactions are far more frequent than aggressive ones... and serious, wounding fights are very rare compared to brief, relatively mild ones' ([tinyurl.com/4x864sx3](https://www.tinyurl.com/4x864sx3)). In fact, serious and wounding fights are very rare in all species. There's a lot of posturing (what's called 'agonistic behaviour'), but animals are generally not daft, and know when to call it a day ([tinyurl.com/yw6xn63x](https://www.tinyurl.com/yw6xn63x)).

Ethologists, who study animal behaviour, are always learning interesting things. For instance, that animals are very far from being heteronormative. A group of Spanish researchers have recently reviewed previous studies of same-sex sexual behaviour (SSSB) in 1,500 vertebrate and invertebrate species, and come up with interesting conclusions ([tinyurl.com/3p7yvmwv](https://www.tinyurl.com/3p7yvmwv)).

It seems that SSSB is widespread and nearly equally frequent in males and females, appears to have arisen many times, spontaneously and independently, and is more often found in social species. It's been found in 261 mammal species, and 51 primate species, from lemurs to great apes. Other studies report similar findings in birds, reptiles, frogs and fish ([tinyurl.com/yhxdxj42](https://www.tinyurl.com/yhxdxj42)). Nobody is sure why it happens, but many hypotheses exist. In sum, anyone claiming that human violence is natural but homosexuality is not, has a big problem.

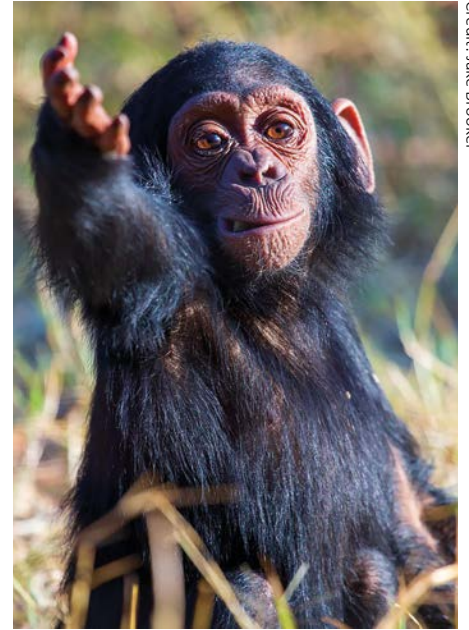
Or take inequality. Human society is naturally unequal, runs the argument, just look at the animal kingdom. Clue's in the word 'kingdom'.

A new study published by the Royal Society gives the lie to this too. Data for 66 mammal species suggest that 'mammalian societies run the gamut from egalitarian to hierarchical' and that while sexual and resource competition are often drivers of inequality, strategies for combating inequality are also common. These include sharing, cooperation, conflict resolution and organised insurrection. It turns out that scientists have extensively studied the evolution of animal hierarchies but paid little attention to the evolution of 'fairness' and how it works. The researchers argue that 'mammals rely upon a suite of mechanisms to balance the costs and benefits of equality for group living, and evolution does not necessarily favor hierarchy... The evolution of fairness has played as big a role in the evolution of mammal species ... but it has been understudied' ([tinyurl.com/49zvhh9a](https://www.tinyurl.com/49zvhh9a)). Could capitalistic bias be the reason for this oversight?

In addition, what's called 'hierarchy' isn't a monolithic construct, but more of a dynamic and shifting gradient, going from the harsh and tyrannical at one end to the mild and benevolent at the other. Primate hierarchies, including chimpanzees and gorillas, generally occupy the middle ground. There is a dominance hierarchy, but it is offset by countervailing trends: 'Factors that work to promote fairness among mammals include food sharing and adoptions, revolutionary coalitions, conflict resolution, and an aversion to inequality'.

Vampire bats share blood-food with weak and infirm relatives, chimpanzees share the produce of a hunt with the whole troupe, and elephants adopt orphaned young. Lionesses gang up on male lions to stop them killing their young. Even baboons, axiomatic as primate Nazis, have been known to adopt more peaceable and egalitarian lifestyles if their circumstances change, as observed by Stanford primatologist Robert Sapolsky in the 1990s ([tinyurl.com/bdd4s5ya](https://www.tinyurl.com/bdd4s5ya)).

The Royal Society report adds that many species, particularly primates, have a sense of fairness, or 'aversion to inequality'. Capuchin monkeys who have to work to get a reward are liable to go on strike when they see other



Credit: Jake Brooker

monkeys getting the same reward for doing nothing. This behaviour makes sense in terms of social species who have to get along together, and has also been observed in dogs, rats and corvids.

It has been fashionable for a century or more to regard animals as remote and unknowable, and any attempt to identify human-like behaviour in animals as vulgar anthropomorphism. This may be a relatively modern phenomenon though, the result of an increasing alienation caused by mass urbanisation as well as by the industrial factory farm system, which encourages a view of animals as 'mere meat'. Darwin however had no problem seeing human morality as an extension of similar social behaviour amongst animals, and the well-known Russian anarchist and naturalist Peter Kropotkin produced volumes of evidence to show that cooperation was as important a driver of animal evolution as competition, indeed he argued in *Mutual Aid* (1902), more so.

But still, it may be argued that animals are animals, and humans are, well, different. And indeed, it's fine to argue that humans are not bound by what other animals do. That means that if we want to establish a cooperative world society of shared resources and mutual aid, there's nothing in our genetic heritage to prevent us. But what our detractors can't do is cherry-pick their arguments, basing human behaviour on animals when it suits them, and ignoring other known animal behaviours when it doesn't.

PJS

Palestine: the background

PEACE — EVEN if it can only be an armed truce as long as capitalism lasts — is always better than war. Wars are never fought in the interests of the excluded majority, the working class. They are always the ones who suffer. In the face of the current war in Palestine, as in all wars the immediate need, from a working class point of view, is for the killings and destruction to stop.

In that artificial subdivision of the old Ottoman Empire known as Palestine, those who are suffering from the misguided attempt to set up a Jewish state there have been both the original population — whether of Muslim, Christian or Jewish religious background — and those who were misled by dreams of liberty into emigrating there.

Socialists and Zionists have been opponents since the beginning, because they represented two incompatible views as to the solution workers of Jewish background should seek to the problem of anti-semitism.

The socialist attitude was that, most Jewish people being workers, they should seek liberation, not as Jews, but as workers. To do this they should abandon their religious ideas — just as Christians should abandon theirs — and become members of a secular human community based on the common ownership and democratic control of productive resources, i.e., socialism. In the meantime, under capitalism, everybody whatever their background should have the same political freedoms in a secular state.

The Zionist movement propounded the opposite view: that the Jews were a separate nation and that as such they were entitled to their own state, in Palestine. People of Jewish background should not seek liberation either as workers or as human beings, but specifically as Jews; they should not seek solidarity with workers in whichever political states they found themselves, but separation in a state of their own.

The battle lines were thus drawn and throughout Europe and America socialists and Zionists vied for the support of workers of Jewish background. Socialists argued against the idea that the Jews were a nation or a race; most Jews were workers

and should join with other workers to achieve socialism which would mean ‘the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex’.

Even though many Zionists were not religious, all they had to go on to justify Palestine as the place for their Jewish state was the religious myth set out in some holy book that an imaginary god had given Palestine to the Jews to be their homeland.

Most Jews rejected Zionism in practice — and still do — by integrating into the countries where they lived. The terrible experience of the Second World War, however, convinced many (though by no means most) European Jews to embrace the idea of a Zionist state.

In 1948 the Zionist dream was realised. Palestine was partitioned and a State of Israel established. Zionist extremists practised what is now called ‘ethnic cleansing’ and hundreds of thousands of non-Jewish inhabitants of the Israeli part of Palestine were driven from their homes. To this day their descendants still vegetate in refugee camps, on minimum rations supplied by the UN refugee agency, in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza.

The establishment of Israel did not end anti-semitism. Quite the contrary. It has actually been partly sustained by the existence of Israel and grows every time the Israeli state clamps down on Palestinian opposition. It is happening this time too.

But to be clear, our opposition to Zionism does not mean that we support the PLO or Hamas. While we can

sympathise with our fellow workers when they are so obviously being oppressed, we cannot support armed uprising — even less massacres of fellow workers — to establish a Palestine state.

It is not just Jewish nationalism that we condemn. We condemn all nationalisms equally. The ‘Palestinian nation’ is just as much a myth as the ‘Jewish nation’, or any other nation. Just like most Jews, most Palestinians are workers and should also seek freedom from oppression through uniting with workers from the other parts of the planet to establish a world of common ownership and democratic control. A Palestine state would be just another capitalist state in which workers are exploited for profit, as they are in all capitalist states.

Nationalism is the ideology which seeks to justify the capitalist division of the world into separate ‘nation-states’, each competing to gain a place in the sun for its ruling class and each with killing machines at its disposal. We utterly reject this view of the way humanity should organise itself.

On the occasion of the latest outbreak of nationalist barbarity in Palestine, we re-affirm as socialists that all oppressed peoples should seek their liberation, not as members of nations or religions or ethnic groups, but as workers. They should unite to abolish the division of the world into so-called nation-states and to establish a world cooperative commonwealth in which we will all be free and equal members — citizens of the world, not subjects of nation-states.



Credit: Getty

Israel-Gaza war: What we say

SOME SAY that the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East would not have happened if the State of Israel had never been founded. But it was and it exists. And the same kind of thing could be said about countless conflict situations in the world today. So we must look at the situation as it is and, if we do, we find that, as in other such conflicts, the underlying cause is not undying enmity between two groups – Jews and Arabs – but a fight between different capitalist factions, via their respective governments, over land, resources and strategic routes.

In Gaza, the Hamas organisation, who are both anti-Israeli and anti-semitic, came to power via elections in 2007 with the stated aim ‘to raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine’. But that was the end of any form of democracy there and, in their time in office, they have crushed multiple protests against them by rivals, expelling their officials to make sure there would never be another round of elections

and killing dozens of their own people, many of them civilians. During that time the people of Gaza have been plunged increasingly into poverty with, for example, 40 percent unemployment, with their leaders enriching themselves assisted by backers from other Arab countries and enjoying multi-million-dollar land deals, luxury villas and black market fuel from Egypt.

The continuing oppression by Israel (a country by the way where 22 percent of its own households live in poverty) has also of course been a significant factor, as its government has sought to facilitate the enrichment of its own capitalist class by grabbing land and keeping a tight lid on protest. Now the lid has come off – and in the most horrific way.

There is no excuse for the horrors unleashed on innocent people by Hamas nor for Israel’s savage retaliation, killing hundreds, depriving a land of food, water and power and threatening to flatten its infrastructure regardless of what

may happen to the inhabitants in the short and long term. Of course Israel’s government will support its own capitalist class to the hilt – after all that is its role.

And it is all part of a play book, which we see played out time and time again

And it is all part of a play book, which we see played out time and time again as governments representing their capitalist classes fail to resolve conflicts by diplomacy and resort to horrifying violence. We can only repeat the same thing we have always said when this has happened – that workers (in this case Arab and Israeli ones) have no interest in fighting one another but have a common interest in uniting with other workers to abolish capitalism and establish socialism.

Cooking the Books

What is productivity?

‘PRODUCTIVITY — the amount we produce per worker or per hour worked — is very important’, wrote David Smith, the economics editor of the *Sunday Times*. ‘It is the ultimate driver of living standards, a key determinant of real wages and a vital component of competitiveness’ (*Times*, 20 September).

On the face of it, this makes sense. If society can produce a larger surplus over and above current consumption then some of it can be used to increase what is consumed, whether by individual persons or as improved collective services and amenities. That is what would happen if the aim of production was to directly meet people’s needs. But it isn’t. It’s to make profits to re-invest to make even more profits. It is this that drives the economy.

But how is the productivity Smith talks about measured? He states specifically that productivity at the level of the whole economy is measured by GDP per total hours worked or GDP per total number of workers. In other words, you take GDP and divide it by the number of workers or by the number of hours they worked. In 2021 the increase was 2 percent per worker and 2.8 per hours worked.

Leaving aside how accurate (or not) GDP is as a measure of ‘what we produce’ over

a period such as a quarter or a year, what about the divisor, the number of workers or the total hours they worked over the same period?

Smith’s namesake pointed out 250 years ago that there were two kinds of work and workers.

“There is one sort of labour which adds to the value of the subject upon which it is bestowed: there is another which has no such effect. The former, as it produces a value, may be called productive; the latter, unproductive labour. Thus the labour of a manufacturer adds, generally, to the value of the materials which he works upon, that of his own maintenance, and of his master’s profit. The labour of a menial servant, on the contrary, adds to the value of nothing’ (*Wealth of Nations*, Book II, chapter III).

Marx inherited this distinction between productive and unproductive labour but modern economists and statisticians have abandoned it; they regard all workers as productive. To divide the value added in a year by total number of workers is absurd as a measure of productivity. It is as if in Smith’s day the new value produced was divided by the number of ‘manufacturers’ (productive workers) plus the number of ‘menial servants’. Whatever this measured, its increase would not be a measure of the extra wealth available to improve living standards.

To measure productivity and its increase properly total value added should be divided by the number only of productive workers. This involves making a distinction between productive and unproductive workers. It is something national income statisticians are capable of doing but don’t because it is not considered useful for capitalism. For a start, they could take out the number of ‘menial’ servants employed by the rich and then the not-so-menial servants who work for the government and parastatal organisations at national and local level. Most of them are essential to the operation of capitalism (and some would be in any society); they are part of the incidental running costs of capitalism and are paid out of capitalist income taxed by the state. They work but they don’t add any new value.

What the statisticians call ‘productivity’ is still useful under capitalism as it is ‘a vital component of competitiveness’. In fact that, basically, is what it is measuring, a vital statistic for capitalism. It can be increased not just by making the productive workers more productive but also by spending less on ‘unproductive’ work. An additional reason why using any extra surplus to provide more and better public services cannot be a priority. Competitiveness is more important.

Halo Halo

RICHARD DAWKINS says, 'I'm phobic'. Apparently the things that trigger his phobia are women being whipped for the crime of being raped, or for being out with a male friend; stoned to death for adultery; subjected to genital mutilation; forced to cover their hair and faces, leaving only a slit for the eyes, and compelled to stay indoors, while boys roam free (Whyevolutionistrue.com 10 August).

The Iranian *Tehran Times* strap-line is 'Straight Truth'. On 30 July an article, written by a female, was published under the headline, 'No other religion defends rights of women as much as Islam'. This is not believed to be a parody on the part of the writer or the publisher.

The Guardian (13 September) has 'Women in Iran face up to 10 years in prison if they continue to defy the country's mandatory hijab law, under harsher laws awaiting approval by authorities. Even businesses that serve women without a hijab face being shut down.'

'The stricter dress code, which amounts to gender apartheid', UN experts said, comes one year after the death in custody of Mahsa Amini, 22, who had been arrested for wearing the Islamic headscarf

incorrectly and then beaten to death by police, which led to the largest wave of popular unrest for years in Iran.'

'A new sculpture, believed to be the first of its kind in the world, has been designed to celebrate women who wear hijabs. The artwork, called *Strength of the Hijab*' – was *Strength through Joy* considered, do you think? – 'will be installed in the Smethwick area of the West Midlands in October. It is believed to be the first sculpture of a woman wearing the traditional Muslim head covering. The sculpture is five metres (16 ft) tall and weighs about a tonne'.

Can you calculate the weight of oppression women face every day?

(BBC News 19 September)

In a *Newsweek* interview, (20 September) Jamileh Alamolhoda, wife of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, said: 'Men in Iran prefer not to ask their spouses to work or bring money home. Women are regarded as persons sharing love with men in the position of mother, spouse or daughter...'

You might find it very exciting and interesting that women in Iran have not fought for their rights because they already enjoy their rights.'

All said straight-faced!



Credit: Kholood Eid

Middle East Eye (29 September) reports that, 'At the beginning of the new academic year, Iran's health ministry told medical students they were banned from having curly hair and wearing bracelets. Female medical students not complying with the Islamic hijab law can find themselves downgraded. They should not wear false eyelashes, have nail extensions, tuck their trousers into boots or wear lace socks. Also banned are visible tattoos and piercings.'

Prohibited as well: 'clothes with printed images of women, love sentences, swearing, comic and meaningless pictures, anti-religious symbols, logos of rap, and heavy metal bands.'

In early November the Islamic Republic of Iran takes over the Chair of the UN Human Rights Council Social Forum.

DC

Tiny tips

PRINCESS DIANA'S sweater featuring a black sheep among rows of white ones has sold for \$1.14 million (£920,000) at an auction by Sotheby's in New York.

(tinyurl.com/398cssps)

Over 330 million children worldwide living in extreme poverty. (tinyurl.com/5xxysyr)

Iranian women face 10 years in jail for inappropriate dress after 'hijab bill' approved. (tinyurl.com/bdhy6c52)

Six out of 10 young South Africans are jobless and more than half of the country's 60 million residents live in poverty, according to the World Bank. Furthermore, South Africa's murder rate is one of the highest in the world, with around 25,000 victims per year. Since Apartheid, more than half a million people have met a violent death...'We live in the most unequal society in the world, and the divides are growing wider and wider' says Notywala. 'It has become even more unequal since the ANC has been in power. Liberators? Don't make me laugh!' (tinyurl.com/mr2mbff8)

A Kurdish-dominated militia moved to solidify its control over resource-rich parts of eastern Syria on Thursday after suppressing an Arab tribal insurgency with US support. Fighting in the area has diminished after the Syrian Democratic Forces on Wednesday entered the Diban stronghold of a tribal leader who had challenged Kurdish control of the east without resistance. The centre of Syria's oil and wheat production lie in the region.

(tinyurl.com/ra2jxv37)

Almost nine out of every ten Ukrainian draftees who enlisted in the army a year ago have either been killed or injured in combat, Ukrainian media reported on Friday citing a senior conscription officer in the Poltava Region. (tinyurl.com/yc3zbhyw)

Zelensky also said in the interview, published on September 10, that anyone who is not supporting Ukraine is with Russia. 'If you are not with Ukraine, you are with Russia, and if you are not with Russia, you are with Ukraine. And if partners do not help us, it means they will help Russia to win. That is it,' he said.

(tinyurl.com/5cr9yven)

The TUC, writes Fred Leplat, has voted overwhelmingly to back Ukraine's right to self-defence against Russia's invasion...'No peace deal should be imposed on Ukraine. As long as the Ukrainians are prepared to fight, we should be in solidarity with them'.

(tinyurl.com/ydcrtkap)

Equality of opportunity is a phrase commonly used by our politicians, even for those too scared to talk about equality more generally. Yet for decades we've been moving in the wrong direction. A recent report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) found that where you are born in the UK, and the income and wealth of your family, now matter more than ever in defining life outcomes, with social mobility at its worst in more than 50 years. (tinyurl.com/4vjrtkct)

Last year, the CEOs of the Big Three automakers received staggering pay packages, fuelling workers' ongoing push for better wages and benefits. Ford's Jim Farley took home around \$21 million, Stellantis' Carlos Tavares pocketed nearly \$25 million and General Motors' Mary Barra — the highest-paid of the group—brought in roughly \$29 million.

(tinyurl.com/y6s4fhup)

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

LONDON

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

MIDLANDS

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

NORTH

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Yorkshire Regional branch.

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

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

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

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

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

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Glasgow branch. Meets physically: 2nd Friday of

the month; online Discord: 3rd Tuesday of the

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Dundee. Contact: Ian Ratcliffe, 12 Finlow

Terrace, Dundee, DD4 9NA. 01382 698297.

Ayrshire. Contact: Paul Edwards 01563 541138.

rainbow3@btopenworld.com.

WALES

South Wales branch (Cardiff and Swansea)

Meets 2nd Monday 7.30pm on JITS!

(meet.jit.si/spgbsouthwales3).

Contact: botterillr@gmail.com or

Geoffrey Williams, 19 Baptist Well Street, Waun

Wen, Swansea SA1 6FB. 01792 643624

Central branch

Meets 2nd Sunday of the month, 10am (UK

time) meet.jit.si/CentralBranchSPGB. Contact:

spgb.cbs@worldsocialism.org

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Insurance: a branch of the betting industry

IT MAY seem oddly Monty Python-esque, but insurance agents have become significant players in the Russo/Ukrainian war. In August it was reported that: ‘Insurance companies have notified charterers of ships operating in Russia’s Black Sea ports of an increase in additional payments known as “war risk premiums”’ (tinyurl.com/4p5rwap9). According to the same report, this could take the cost of an insurance premium for one oil tanker to over \$1 million. At the same time, Ukraine was negotiating with insurers to cover its grain shipments through the Black Sea: ‘Insurers and a local state-owned bank would share the risk, the *Financial Times* reported, with the public portion of the risk backed by Ukraine’s state road fund’ (tinyurl.com/muy64jp8).

Insurance is essential for doing business, especially in a war zone, as the capitalists seek to share the risk of doing business there (and other capitalists try to profit from that risk, taking a share of the surplus value generated through the business in exchange for covering it). In fact, the insurance industry is a branch of the gambling industry. You go up to the insurance broker, and say you want to place a bet that your house will burn down this week, and they bet it won’t.

Of course, they’re not insane, so part of the terms of the bet includes the precise circumstances in which they will pay out, and the steps they expect you to take to avoid a fire starting. Unlike a bet on the horses, though, there is a focus on trying to ensure that the bet would cover the entire cost of replacing the house: that is, the focus is on the property as a value expressed in money.

All societies need a surplus in case of emergency or accident, but capitalism is unique in using a universal equivalent in the form of money. Unlike, say, a granary full of grain, an insurance fund can be infinitely subdivided, so the risk of accident can be spread very far, with insurance firms able to sell slivers of their bets to multiple cash holders, so that no one individual or firm is entirely exposed to all of the risk. They make their profits as a cut of surplus value, matching the perceived risk of having to pay out to how much they can demand as a premium (stake) from the person they are insuring. Their business model is for their customers to compare the cost of borrowing to recover losses, or having enough savings on hand to pay for the losses themselves, with the cost of paying for a premium.

As such, insurance functions as an expression of collective capital. The



decisions about whether activities can or cannot be insured (and the terms on which they can be insured), structures economic activity in very great detail. It limits the rights of individual property holders to behave entirely as they wish with their wealth. Firms wishing to offer contracts for goods and services routinely ask for insurance cover as part of their terms and conditions, so it becomes very difficult for any substantial capital to operate in business without accepting the terms on which insurance may be purchased.

This is worth bearing in mind for the fantasies of so-called anarcho-capitalists, for whom insurance and charity could free everyone from ‘the state’: they’d soon find themselves confronting the same costs and regulations as the state imposes because they are a part of industrial society and capitalism itself, not mere creations of the state.

An example of this is the key role insurance played in enabling the slave trade. Investors required insurance before they would undertake the highly profitable, but risky, business of capturing and enslaving human beings. They could even get insurance against slave revolt (the analogy was that revolts – and their suppression – was like when animals aboard ship stampede in a storm). One of the most notorious incidents of the slave trade, The Zong Massacre (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zong_massacre), in which the captain of the slave ship *Zong* tried to enact an insurance fiddle by murdering his human cargo (on which, running low on water, he was facing a loss) in order to claim that insurance value. The insurers objected, and this led to a series of court cases: which affirmed that it was legal to murder enslaved human cargo, but in this particular instance, the captain of the *Zong* was at fault for navigational errors.

This is, it’s worth mentioning in passing,

a useful example of the notion of base and superstructure which Marx and Engels introduced in their book *The German Ideology*. The insurance industry is part of the superstructure built on the base of material practices of capitalism, but it remains essential and instrumental in enabling those activities to continue. That insurers would provide the means to enable a despicable trade is no surprise, because they were in the business of taking bets to try and make a profit for their investors, but at the same time, their activity influenced the shape of how that horrific trade was carried out.

The influence of insurers will come to be seen in the coming years in discussions about global warming and the climate emergency. The devastating wildfires on Maui have caused an astronomical cost, as the *New York Times* reports (tinyurl.com/4p22tsz3), as much as \$4-\$6 billion in potential claims for destroyed residences. So much that ‘private insurers, already grappling with the costs of climate-related disasters in California and Florida, are also reassessing a home insurance market they had long considered both predictable and profitable, and whether they should charge residents of Hawaii higher rates.’

Aside from raising premiums (or just leaving the market altogether), insurance firms will begin to press politicians to take steps to limit their risks, and just as they demand terms from those they insure to protect their bets, so too will they demand the state step in collectively to protect their interests. This may well manifest as a dispute between insurers (as representatives of finance capital generally) against industrial capitalists who will bridle at their restrictions.

PIK SMEET

Capitalism's structural waste

ONE REASON why we continue to work comparatively long hours, despite the labour-saving potential of modern technology, is the proliferation of many paid jobs that essentially contribute nothing whatsoever to our material well-being. They are, nevertheless, required simply to keep the money-based market economy ticking over on its own terms.

David Graeber in his 2018 book, *Bullshit Jobs* defines these loosely as jobs that, if you were to scrap them completely tomorrow, it would hardly make any discernible difference to the real world or to our standard of living. He noted in an interview that there is a certain delicious irony in the fact that while a Soviet-style system has often been held up by mainstream economists as grossly inefficient because of all those make-believe jobs it created to maintain the pretence of full employment, in a so-called free-market economy that is supposed to root out such inefficiencies, exactly the same thing has been happening.

In that book, Graeber invents a rather amusing and colourful lexicon of terms to describe the different categories of jobs he has in mind. These jobs are everywhere and multiplying like wayward bacterial spores in a Petri dish. There are 'flunkies', paid to hang around, like doormen or receptionists, simply to make their superiors feel important; 'goons' to harm or deceive others for some nefarious commercial interest like the ubiquitous lobbyists or telemarketers; 'duct tapers' to

temporarily fix jobs that would be better, and more efficiently, fixed permanently; 'box tickers' that go through the motions of doing paperwork that appears important but is decidedly not; and, last but not least, 'taskmasters' who are either completely superfluous in the guise of superiors telling you what needs to be done when you already know what needs to be done or are otherwise known as 'bullshit generators' whose job it is to create yet more bullshit jobs and so keep themselves employed in their own bullshit jobs.

A great many of these bullshit jobs fall within the services or tertiary sector. This sector now comprises the great bulk of the workforce at least in the more economically developed countries and as stated, its growth has been linked to the concept of deindustrialisation. Some workers in the services sector – like nurses or teachers – of course, perform socially useful tasks but many others clearly do not.

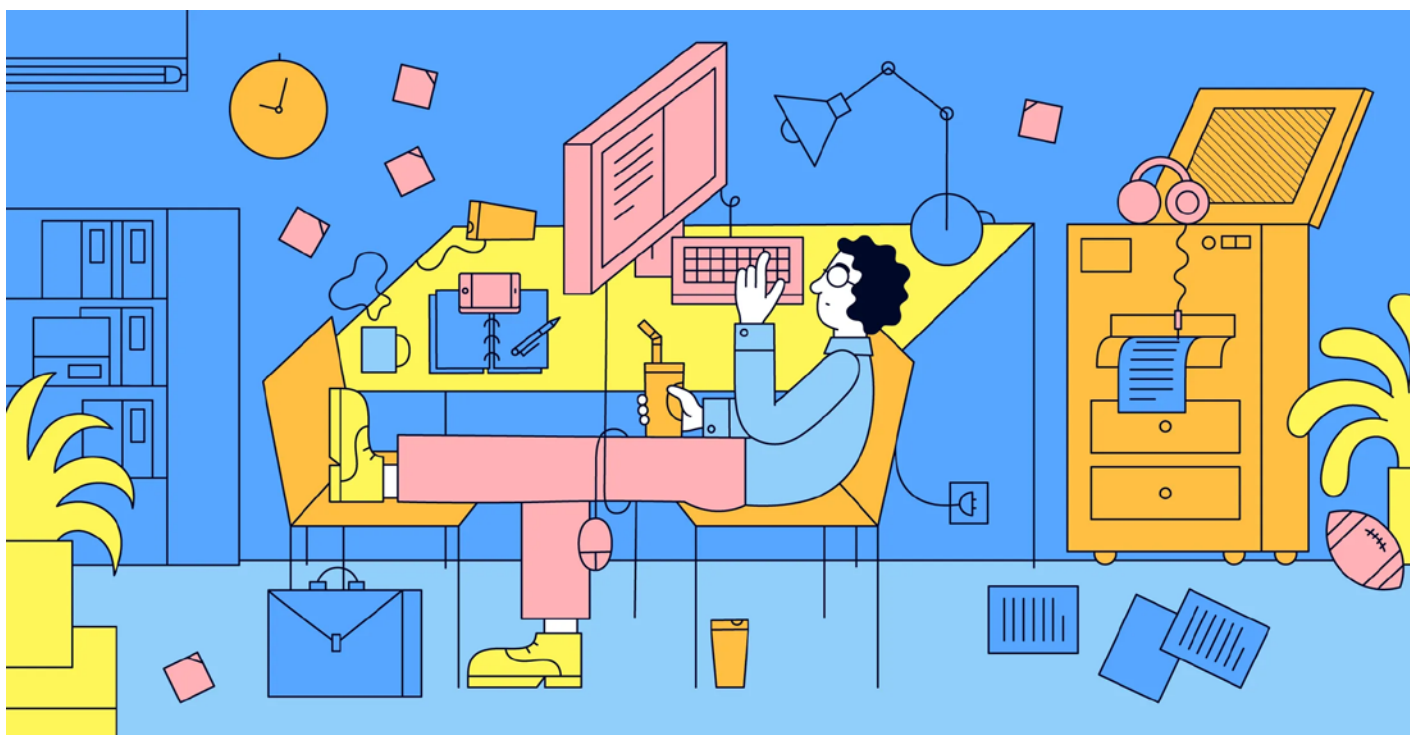
The 'tertiarisation' of the economy strongly associated with the growth of such socially useless industries as commerce, finance and retailing is an expression of the evolving (and expanding) systemic needs of capitalism itself. However, tertiarisation in itself does not capture the full extent of capitalism's structural waste since many apparently useful jobs in the secondary or manufacturing sector (and, by extension, the primary sector) have to do with providing products or physical infrastructure that are then used for socially useless purposes within the

services sector itself.

These jobs don't actually make us 'better off' in real terms. They don't result in more socially useful wealth being produced and distributed around. However, the fact that more and more of us are doing them means that more and more of us are, in effect, dependent on economic transfers from the steadily shrinking part of the economy concerned with producing socially useful wealth to maintain what might be called our 'real standard of living'.

Money is the mechanism by which these economic transfers are effected, but money is also the reason why they are needed in the first place. Bank employees shuffling around bits of paper called money (although these days this is largely digitalised) can't live on the stuff. They have to exchange it for 'real' stuff – like pairs of shoes, takeaway pizzas, or a Toyota to drive to work.

This is equally true whether you possess a wad of cash or an electronic wallet of bitcoins. In both instances what we are talking about is just a symbolic claim to wealth, not wealth itself. Indeed, for all the current hullabaloo over the latter – the cryptocurrency of choice of money launderers and shady operators everywhere – society as a whole is not one jot better off. On the contrary, according to data supplied by the University of Cambridge and the International Energy Agency, bitcoin 'mining' consumes around the same amount of energy annually as the Netherlands did in 2019 (tinyurl.com/3yk9w3zw).



Credit: Illustration by Martha Paukova

What an astounding waste of energy! And to achieve precisely what? Nothing except to boost some individuals' symbolic claim to wealth at the expense of others. For that is all that it can ever logically amount to when you think about it. In themselves, bitcoins – or fiat money, for that matter – are completely worthless. How long would Robinson Crusoe survive on his island if that was all he had to live on?

Actually, the 'Robinson Crusoe' acid test is not a bad starting point for determining what we mean by a real 'human need' as opposed to a fake. We don't 'need' money. What we need in this society is only (some of) the things money can buy – though a lot of other things our money can also buy we don't really need at all either- what the counter-cultural philosopher Herbert Marcuse called 'false needs' in his 1964 book, *One Dimensional Man*. These are systematically and subconsciously instilled in us as a way of better integrating us into a capitalist 'consumer society' that is then able to more efficiently repress and control us by manufacturing our consent, manipulating our inner desires, and generally soliciting our compliance with its core values.

Of course, banking or cryptocurrency transactions and the like are only a tiny visible tip of a veritable iceberg of structural waste that we are talking about. With fewer and fewer people involved in producing shoes, pizzas and cars and more and more people engaged in 'socially useless' (but capitalistically indispensable) work within the economy, it is not surprising that society's overall workload has not diminished but increased. More and more people are employed today than ever before but, at the same time, more and more of these are engaged in work that contributes absolutely nothing to our material well-being. Consequently, from the standpoint of meeting our needs, we are in effect, as a society, having to run faster and faster just to stand still. That is, to maintain our real "standard of living".

Indeed, this is the core argument that runs through Ken Smith's thought-provoking book, *Free is Cheaper* (1988). According to him, capitalism or the 'market economy', from small beginnings at the end of the Middle Ages, has come to dominate life in every corner of the world. However, it has brought with it increasingly unacceptable costs:

'The crime industry, war preparation, bureaucracy, the "sales effort", these and other non-productive activities absorb the efforts of nine-tenths of the working population and are growing faster than productivity itself'.

On the basis of evidence supplied by commentators such as Thorold Rogers (*Six Centuries of Work and Wages*, 1884) and Sir William Beveridge et al (*Prices and Wages in*



England from the Twelfth to the Nineteenth Century, 1939), Smith came up with some quite startling conclusions. For instance: 'it takes longer today for a carpenter or a bricklayer to earn the price of a pound of meat or a house brick than it did five centuries ago'. What accounts for this, he argued, is the ever-increasing on-costs – or transactional costs – imposed by the market system itself.

Smith arrived at a figure of 90 percent of the working population being engaged in one or other form of socially useless activity (from the standpoint of meeting human needs) by carrying out a fairly comprehensive sectoral analysis of the British economy as it was back then in the 1980s. A roughly similar figure has been reached by other commentators such as Buckminster Fuller.

That figure of 90 percent is probably on the high side. Most people who have looked into the matter would put the figure at, conservatively speaking, roughly half the working population or perhaps a bit more.

Much depends, of course, on how stringently you want to define 'socially useless activity'. A luxury good, for instance, might be considered 'socially useless'. Yet it is undeniable that 'consuming' it can afford us pleasure. The problem arises when the production of luxury goods reaches a scale that jeopardises the satisfaction of our more mundane and pressing basic needs by diverting resources and labour away from the latter to the former. So the question of opportunity costs – how much of a given resource should you devote to producing this particular product at the expense of

producing more of some other product – needs to be factored into the equation. Additionally, there is the question of how you define a luxury good. Some goods that were once considered a luxury – like a car or a refrigerator – have over time come to be considered a necessity.

Nevertheless, the basic thrust of Smith's argument is unquestionably on the right track. Even setting aside the example of the production of luxury goods, there is a very large number of occupations that can be unequivocally and categorically classed as 'socially useless' and, therefore, wasteful of society's human and material resources. In fact, the full extent of capitalism's 'structural waste' is truly massive, all-pervading, and steadily growing. However, it will remain completely invisible to the naked eye, so to speak, as long as the viewer adopts a standpoint that simply takes this money-based capitalist system for granted.

To really appreciate the enormity of this iceberg of structural waste, you have, as it were, to step outside of that standpoint, or way of looking at the world, and adopt instead, a standpoint external to the system itself. You have to imaginatively presuppose a hypothetical society in which money itself, as an institution, has completely ceased to exist.

Needless to say, in such a society a great many of the jobs bound up with the existence of money today – or what that existence entails – would likewise cease to exist. They would simply serve no purpose.

ROBIN COX

Why are prices always rising?

IN *The Return of Inflation* (just published by Reaktion Books) Paul Mattick (the son, not the father) gives a potted history (there are only 146 pages of text) of inflation. The word dates from the middle of the 19th century. He cites an American book of 1855 complaining that an 'inflation of the currency makes prices rise' and comments 'here it is the quantity of paper currency that is inflated; later the term settled into its present-day meaning of an increase in prices'. True, but the word still retained its first meaning for a further eighty or so years. The change of meaning from describing a cause to describing its effect doesn't help, especially as a rise in the general price level can result from other reasons such as supply not being able to keep up with demand in a boom or a fall in the value of the money-commodity (when there was one).

He provides a useful section in which he explains how 'inflation' (as it has come to be defined) is measured by a rise in a consumer price index based on the prices of a changing basket of goods and services that consumers typically buy and discusses the limitations of this. In fact, today 'inflation' means a rise in some index of consumer prices, but this can come about for other reasons than an over-issue of the currency; from an increase in the price of something that enters into the cost of production of all consumer goods, energy for instance.

At the end of chapter 4, after explaining that, due to increasing productivity, you would expect prices to fall and noting that in the 19th century this did tend to happen and that even in the 1920s and 1930s prices fell during the slump stage of the business cycle, Mattick poses the question of why this has not happened since WW2. On the contrary, the general price level has continuously increased. In Britain prices today are more than 50 times higher than what they were in 1939 and are still rising. It is similar in other countries. Certainly something that needs explaining.

The Quantity Theory of Money

This monetary theory, referred to by Mattick simply as the Quantity Theory, keeps cropping up throughout the book. It says that the general price level is determined by the amount of money in circulation, so that if the amount of money is increased this will lead to a rise in prices. It was originally put forward when 'money' meant gold (or silver) and paper

notes convertible into it at a fixed rate. Its proponents, known in Britain as the Currency School, based their case on what had happened there when, during the Napoleonic Wars, paper notes were not convertible into gold, and so many of them were issued that prices rose.

They argued that the same thing would happen when convertibility was restored, and framed legislation to restrict the amount of bank notes that could be issued without being backed by gold. They were opposed by the Banking School, whose main proponent, Thomas Tooke, produced evidence, as Mattick notes, that showed that this had not happened after convertibility was restored and could not have happened; if too many notes were issued (if their number was inflated) what would happen would be that gold coins would drop out of circulation and be turned into bullion (demonetised into gold bars) leaving the price level unchanged. In other words, it was the amount of prices to be realised that determined the quantity of money (gold and paper notes together) in circulation, the exact opposite of what the Quantity Theory posited. Marx, Mattick adds, accepted Tooke's findings and rejected the Quantity Theory. He regarded banking legislation based on it as mistaken, such as the 1844 Bank Act which gave a monopoly in the issue of bank notes to the Bank of England and restricted the amount it could issue to not much more than the amount of gold it had in its vaults.

Inconvertible paper money

By the end of the 1930s in most countries gold coins had ceased to circulate and the currency was composed entirely of bank notes issued by a central bank together with lesser denomination token coins. This situation, where the currency was just inconvertible paper notes, was discussed by Marx who accepted that in this circumstance the Quantity Theory could apply: if more such notes were issued than the prices to be realised of goods and services in the economy required, the result would be a depreciation of the underlying value of the notes and a consequent rise in the general price level, ie £1 would buy less than it did. Mattick mentions this but only in passing, even though it must clearly be of some relevance in any explanation of the continuous rise in the general price level since 1939.

An inconvertible paper currency in

itself does not have to lead to a rise in the general price level but does place the onus of getting right the amount to issue on those responsible for issuing the notes. If they get it broadly right there won't be a persistent rise in prices. But the temptation is always there to use their position to issue money to fund government spending, or to passively make it available to commercial banks in a way that still leads to an excess issue.

Keynesianism fails

Another change in usage that has occurred since the 19th century, but which Mattick does not mention, is a change in the meaning of 'money'. Since the 1930s it has commonly been extended to include commercial bank loans.

Keynes went along with this and taught that controlling the amount of the currency (which only the state can do) was relatively unimportant and that the monetary authority could safely make available what was needed including by the government. He argued that the way out of a slump was government intervention to encourage spending, as by transferring money from the rich to the rest and by the government itself spending on infrastructure projects (or even digging holes in the ground and filling them up again). This appeared to work for nearly three decades after WW2 in the sense that no big slump occurred even if a rise in the general price level did. However, put to the test when the post-war boom came to an end in the mid 70s, Keynesianism led to 'stagflation'; prices continued to rise despite slump conditions whereas before the war they would have fallen due to declines in production and trade.

As in his previous writings Mattick is good on why Keynesianism was mistaken:

'From the Keynesian point of view, government spending is just an expansion of demand, or an additional investment in future production (...). Once we remember that the goal of capitalist production is the earning of a return on investment, however, things look different (...). Capital is not produced but consumed by governments; state spending does not solve the problem of insufficient profitability. It is an expense of the capitalist economy' (p.110).

Monetarism too

Following the failure of Keynesianism in the 1970s, the monetary authorities heeded instead the theories of

‘Monetarism’ as propounded by Milton Friedman. This was an attempt to revive the Quantity Theory of Money but since in the meantime the definition of ‘money’ had typically expanded to include bank loans it was, rather, more a Quantity Theory of Bank Loans: that bank loans play a key role in determining the price level. (Already in the 1920s this had been dubbed the ‘Bank Deposit Theory of Prices’ by the Classical economist Edwin Cannan). This was clearly a different theory to the classical formulation but its application in the 1980s arguably did bring the *rate* of rising prices down even if inflation continued, though it certainly didn’t end the slump; in fact unemployment rose to record post-war levels. As Mattick notes, ‘the money supply turned out to be difficult to control, swelling and shrinking in response to the needs of businessmen and bankers’ (p.67).

The objections to the original Quantity Theory of convertible paper currency were seen to apply to Friedman’s quantity theory of bank loans. Bank lending depends on the state of the economy. It goes up in a boom and down in a slump. Neither the state of the economy nor the level of prices is intrinsically controlled by the level of bank lending. It’s effectively the other way around. Governments have tried and are still trying to control bank lending by varying short-term rates of interest (the government can’t control long-term rates); after the crash of 2008 keeping them low in an unsuccessful bid to encourage expansion and, currently, increasing them in the hope that this will reduce the rate at which prices are rising,

Inflation or recession

Mattick’s explanation of the continuous rise in the general price level since 1940 is that ‘inflation ha[s] taken the place of recession’ (p. 123), that ‘all this extra money has provided an alternative to the deflationary depressions of the past’ (p. 120). He is not the only student of Marxian economics to take this position. His argument is that in a slump the price level would normally fall because of reduced overall demand for goods and services (as it did up to the end of the 1930s) but that governments’ monetary policy has prevented this, in his view initially to avoid a workers’ revolt and, later, to keep them happy with jobs, pensions and other payments.

He says the extra cost of providing education, health services, unemployment and sick pay — all needed to maintain a trained and fit profit-producing workforce— will have had something to do with the continuous post-war rising prices because governments

chose to partly finance this by issuing more money. This is sometimes called ‘printing’ more money but the process is not so simple as that, as Mattick explains in regard to what happens in the US (it’s essentially the same in other countries):

‘The Federal Reserve puts money into the economic system when it purchases treasury bonds (and other securities) in what is called “open market” operations (it withdraws money from the system by selling Treasuries). It pays for them with Federal Reserve notes — “liabilities” in accounting talk, IOUs against Federal securities which can always be sold. It is these notes — government debt — that circulate throughout the economy’ (p. 66).

Central bank notes are a part of the government’s debt but only a very small part of it. Although the initiative to create new money comes from the central bank the whole banking system is involved. This gives rise to the illusion that it is the commercial banks that create new money whereas in fact they are only circulating what the central bank created. Unfortunately, Mattick seems to accept that commercial banks can create new money. He writes, for instance, of what a bank can do when an amount of money is deposited with it:

‘The money can be loaned as a note — another form of IOU — or in the form of a new deposit, in the borrower’s name, in the loaning bank; thus the original money lent to the bank can appear in two or more different deposits, each of which can be used to make payments by banknote. In this way ... banks can enlarge the supply of money’ (pp.22-3).

But this can’t be. If \$1,000 is deposited in a bank, the bank can lend most of this, say \$900, in the form of a bank account which the borrower can draw on. There will be now be two bank deposits, one of

\$1,000 and the other of \$900, totalling \$1,900, but one is an asset (the initial deposit) and the other a liability (a loan to the borrower). It should be clear that no more than the initial amount of \$1,000 can be spent. If together the amount withdrawn by both deposit holders comes to more than this, the bank wouldn’t be able to honour the excess. Banking is in fact based on the fact that the initial depositor is not going to withdraw more than \$100. What banks do is increase spending by lending already existing money that might otherwise lie idle — in essence, commercial banks circulate money but don’t invent it out of nothing.

Despite this error, Mattick provides a good description of how capitalism works:

‘The goal of production in this mode of social organization is not actually “growth” — the enlarged production of consumable goods — but enterprises’ competitive accumulation of control over social resources in the form of money: capital accumulation’ (p.145).

He points out that taxation is not ultimately a burden on the workforce:

‘Wages are also taxed, but if we think of wages as the amount of national income that the class of wage-earners accept in return for their work, it is clear that the amount taken as tax could just as well have been retained by their employers’ (pp 89-90).

Mattick is neither a professional nor an academic economist; which is probably why his book is written in simple English and easy to follow, though the last chapter in which he argues that capitalism has become ‘a sort of Ponzi scheme’ differs in this respect from the rest. All in all, though, with some minor caveats it can be recommended for those seeking to learn more about ‘inflation’.

ADAM BUICK



Capitalism's Endgame: a reply to our review

Dear *Socialist Standard*,

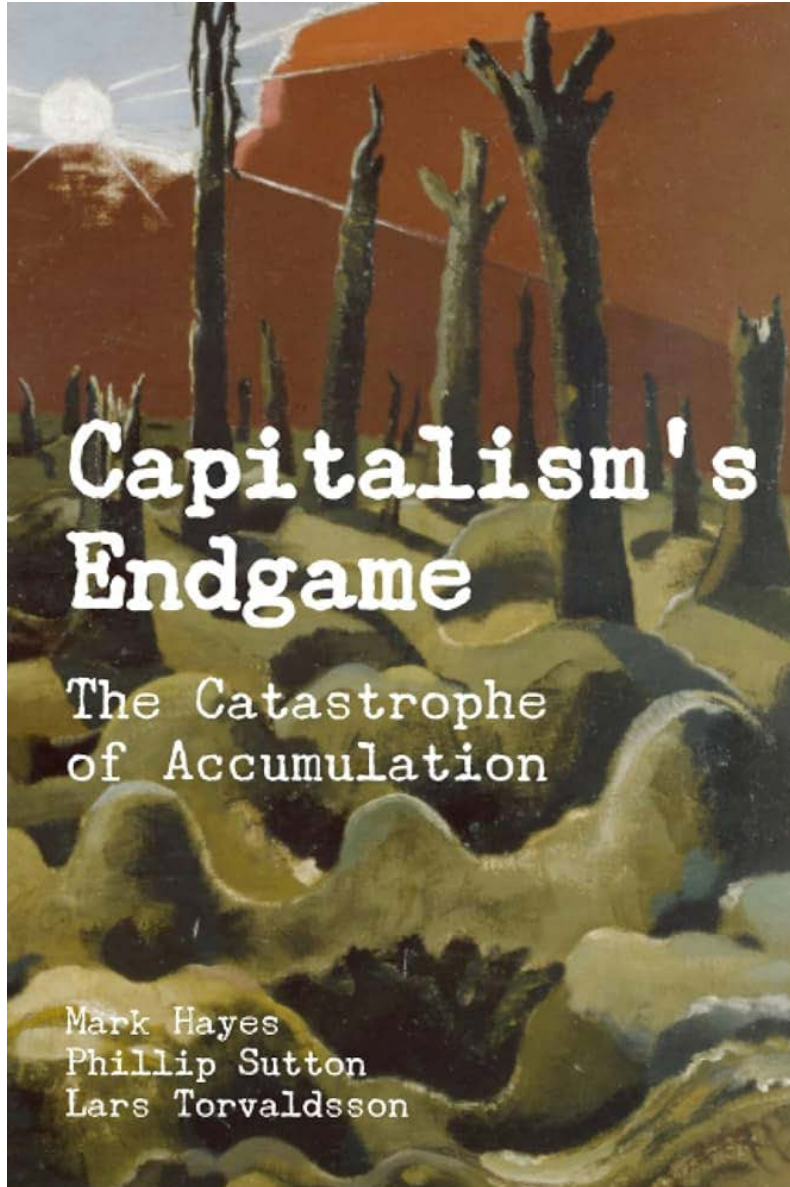
I'm writing in reply to your recently published review of *Capitalism's Endgame*. We all appreciate the time you have taken to read the book, and on the whole – given our political disagreements – it is a fair and balanced review.

There are nonetheless a few points which we would like to take issue with.

Your first two paragraphs read to us more like a settling of accounts with specific groups in the UK rather than a response to the book itself, or indeed to the historical Left Communist tradition which is a far broader current than you seem to suggest. Individually we may have been members of the ICC at different times but we hold no brief for this or any other group.

As for their 'minuscule size'... in the grand scheme of things (a world population of 8 billion) the SPGB is equally insignificant. I would even hazard a guess that there are more model railway enthusiasts in Britain than there are members of the SPGB, but I would hardly draw any conclusions from that as to the SPGB's political importance, or indeed the quality of its writing.

Where we do stand four-square with the whole Left Communist tradition, is in the intransigent defence of internationalism and the refusal to sanction imperialist war under any circumstances, including in Ukraine. You say that 'capitalism's massive and continued expansion in recent decades... has not plunged humanity, as predicted, into another barbarous world war'. Whether or not war actually breaks out will be determined by a multitude of factors,



including whether or not the workers are prepared to fight in it. However, anyone who cannot today see the dangers arising from the growing military tension between the USA and China – which incorporates the Ukraine war – is either naive or asleep at the wheel.

You say that the book is 'not an easy read', and this may be true – but is it relevant? Anyone who wants an easy read can buy a potboiler in the best-seller section. We've tried to avoid unnecessary jargon but nobody should expect it to be easy to understand capitalism today. Nor do we subscribe to the often popular idea that difficult questions need to be 'pre-digested' for the benefit of workers – we

prefer to rely on workers' intelligence and appetite for understanding.

Your reference to 'dead Russians and Germans' is merely a cheap jibe, unworthy of a serious review. Have physicists stopped using Hooke's Law or Maxwell's Equations just because their authors are no longer in the land of the living?

We make no apologies for trying to ground ourselves in Marx. As we state explicitly in the Introduction, 'If we cite Marx extensively it is simply because on almost any subject of social evolution, Marx has thought about it already, and in impressive depth, if only still in outline'. Nonetheless, 'while the immense fertility of this most powerful of social thinkers gives us our starting point, we have no qualms in trying to push his premises further or even in contradicting them should this seem necessary'; we go on to identify three aspects of Marx's premises which seem to us to be inadequate. This, for us, is an integral part of any theoretical, or indeed historical, approach: to build critically on what has been

handed down by previous generations. As Newton said, if we can see further it is only because we stand on the shoulders of giants.

You claim to be 'in the Marxist tradition'. Perhaps a little more 'poring over *Capital* and *The German Ideology*' would do you good.

You consider the last chapter, 'Imagining the Future' to be the weakest, and you may well be right. As the author, I take full responsibility for this; perhaps it was a mistake to try to combine a summary of the previous chapters and what is intended to be essentially an introduction to a more future-oriented effort to come.

That said, I disagree profoundly with what seems to be your approach to how we can envisage a future communist (or socialist, as you prefer) society. While you are absolutely right to insist on the importance of the ‘interconnected world-wide division of labour’, you seem to think that in the end it all comes down to technology (3D printing, AI or what have you), and that ‘mass sufficiency’ and ‘free access’ can be taken for granted.

This seems to me to be grounded in the assumptions common to socialists at the beginning of the 20th century when the world’s population was 1.6 billion. Today, with a world population approaching 8 billion and projected to rise to 10 billion and in a situation where – as Phil Sutton’s chapter on the environment makes abundantly clear – human society is pushing beyond the boundaries of the planet’s physical capacity to sustain it, the whole notion of ‘abundance’ needs to be called into question and rethought.

In two famous and oft-quoted phrases, Marx described communism as a world where ‘society would at last inscribe upon its banners “from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs”’, and where ‘the free development of each will be the condition for the free

development of all’. This may seem like ‘philosophical meandering’ to you. To me, it is a good starting point.

In capitalist society, the sole aim behind the development of technology is to increase profit (or to make war). In communism, it will be to satisfy human need, but this immediately poses the question of what exactly human need is. This in turn is a social not a natural question.

Any discussion about the nature of communism which hopes to go beyond science-fiction, or Utopian dreaming *à la* William Morris, must therefore begin by laying a theoretical, materialist foundation which alone can make such discussion possible. And such a discussion would have to engage not just with ‘luxury communism’, but with the arguably far more popular and influential ‘degrowth socialism’.

The chapter as a whole apparently fails to make this point sufficiently comprehensible. We hope to do better in a forthcoming, more developed volume.

Communist greetings

LARS TORVALDSSON

Reply:

We will let the debating points stand and comment on the more substantial points.

The way we express ourselves

is important as the point of it is to communicate clearly and effectively to aid understanding. The idea that Marxists can only do this with quotations from selected texts on almost every other page is a failure of communication. Marxism is a method for understanding the world and acting on it, not a catechism with sacred texts that are regurgitated, interpreted and reinterpreted endlessly. And we are far from alone in making this criticism of Left Communism generally and the ICC in particular.

We do not accept the view, inherited from the ICC, that capital accumulation has only been possible since 1914 to replace physical means of production destroyed in world wars nor the implication that sooner or later another one will be needed if capitalism is to continue. This flies in the face of the facts. Capital accumulation has expanded immensely since 1914 and has continued now for nearly 80 years without a world war. As long as capitalism lasts there will be wars but a third world war is not inevitable for capitalism to survive economically.

We look forward to seeing how you develop the view that ‘mass sufficiency’ and ‘free access’ cannot be taken for granted and what you are going to propose in the event of them not being possible. —
Editors

How do we get there?

THERE IS a growing realisation among many critics of capitalism that the way to enact radical change in how society is organised is not to recommend or campaign for improvements in or reforms to the way the market system is organised. This is for two reasons. Firstly, the extent to which the capitalist system can be modified to the benefit of the majority, whatever the political setup, is strictly limited by the dictates of the market and its profit imperative. Secondly, policies or action based on the ‘lesser evil’ of reforms inevitably mean putting off the demand for post-capitalism, properly understood as a money-free, non-market society, and effectively pushing it into the background.

Having recognised these ways of acting as pitfalls which, though they may have minor beneficial effects in the way people’s lives are led under capitalism, should be put aside as solutions to most people’s condition of dispossession, disempowerment and alienation. The question is how do we transcend all the false hopes and endless plans for improvements that the ‘in the meantime’

reformists – often with the best of intentions – throw at us?

‘Socialism’ is a difficult word to use in talking about post-monetary society, since it means so many different things to different people. But, defined as 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’, as we have done consistently since our establishment in 1904, emphasising that this will mean the end of production for sale with money becoming redundant, gives it not only a clear meaning but also a clear political focus missing from many of the attempts to see post-capitalism as somehow developing outside politics and political action.

These attempts may involve participation in or support for decentralised small-scale communities seeking to put into practice cooperative non-market activity to the extent that the surrounding capitalist reality allows it. They may involve pushing for reforms which they see as steps in

the direction of post-monetarism, ‘non-reformist reforms’ as they are sometimes called. They may involve seeing the moneyless society as arising from some form of gradual phased transition over several generations as plans for its operation are laid out incrementally.

The difference does not lie in the aim of establishing a moneyless, non-market, democratically run society of common ownership and collective production for direct use but, more specifically, in how to get there. While not condemning small-scale attempts at cooperative social organisation, even if these are not the solution, we stress the urgent need to promote democratic majority political action at society-wide level, ideally via the ballot box, to win political control as a prerequisite for the majority to be in a position to put into practice, in cooperative and democratic fashion, the precise details of the organisation of non-market moneyless system of society. Only then will humanity be in control of its destiny.

H.K.M.

Driving to distraction

PROPOSING THE radical alternative to capitalism is hindered in part by being unable to present a detailed vision of what socialism will look like. The broad features are clear. A truly democratic worldwide, moneyless society base on the principle of meeting everyone's self-determined needs.

This projected society is contrasted with the present in which profit is the motivation for production and also its limitation: no profit, no production, without any consideration as to what people require. The productive process being in the ownership and control of the miniscule minority means the vast majority are dependent for their livelihoods.

They must sell their mental and physical energies for wages and salaries amounting to less than the wealth that labour creates. If it is less than what is needed to buy necessities they must go without. However, not selling is also a disaster for those seeking to harvest the difference between costs and price, the profit.

While production cycles through boom and bust it must be maximised and be as unrelenting as possible. Society has developed to accommodate this, consumerism is the dominant feature. A seeming deluge of new goods and gadgets flood the market. Having the latest... whatever's the must-have.

Freedom has become defined by, and largely limited to, freedom of choice. Products, even the very latest, are often marked by their similarity rather than difference or improvement. Which is why the 'free' society has become the wasteful society all too readily disposing of perfectly serviceable items: around 25 million tonnes being thrown into UK skips at recycling and landfill centres.

The motor car has become an exemplar of this problem. From the early 1960s onwards society has been remodelled around it. An icon of that decade is surely the Mini Cooper. Railways were closed down, urban tramways torn up, a motorway system built along with bypasses and new towns planned around roads.

Freedom of the open road was the advertisers' image, with an implication of individual choice and control. Possessing a car would confer the power to select destinations, who to travel with and when. No more being beholden to timetables.

The difference between the dream and reality was all too quickly realised. Burgeoning car sales favoured the capitalists of the automotive industry to the point that all those newly developed road systems quickly became congested.

Rather than the freedom of the open road there was increasing incarceration in chain gangs of iron cells, inmates fuming with frustration at being rendered near-stationary. Then came a gradual awakening to another profound problem: fossil fuels.

Just forty years or so on from open-road optimism a dramatically changing climate, actual and metaphorical, began to seriously bring into question the practice of continuing to burn oil. That it was unsustainable became ever more apparent, an issue the automotive industry couldn't ignore or obscure behind advertising propaganda.

When a commodity becomes socially and politically unacceptable then a profitable solution has to be found. Simply ceasing to make that commodity is out of the question. A recent example of this is tobacco. Continuing to kill significant numbers of the population couldn't be countenanced, especially in the face of informed opposition of health professionals, scientists and the anti-smoking lobby. Cue vaping.

With impressive alacrity the car industry has responded with technological advances, launching electrical vehicles onto the market. Some, hybrids, offered as a compromise, while increasingly all-electric vehicles have made significant commercial progress.

Problem solved! Except, of course, capitalism does not, cannot, solve its own problems, because it is the problem. Profit was, is and will remain the only driving force of capitalism. Social, political and environmental difficulties all ultimately devolve to economics.

An unacceptable commodity cannot simply be forgone, it must be replaced with another commodity. All the better if that commodity also diverts attention away from the root of the problem, the unending absolute requirement to pursue profit.

The electric vehicle superficially appears to circumvent the fossil fuel crisis. A motorist can, with clear conscience, drive away from the fossil fuel red light and go green. Should freedom of choice fail to result in sufficient swapping from oil to electricity then the state can act by decreeing an end to petrol and diesel car production. The Mini Cooper will become all electric and the sixties dream can be recast.

In typical capitalist fashion, though, the solution of one problem becomes the creation of other ones. These are becoming apparent all too readily. In the USA 60 percent of electricity generation is through the burning of fossil fuel. The increasing demand for electricity caused

by growing numbers of electric vehicles has merely moved fossil fuel consumption from individual vehicles to power stations.

While there is increasing use of alternative generation in Britain, if every petrol/diesel vehicle presently on the roads is replaced with the electric alternative, how great is that increase going to have to be?

Also, wind turbines are constructed using high-quality steel, a product of a process using fossil fuel. Again there is an element of displacing fossil fuel burning rather than eliminating it.

Then there is the very real problem of the battery. Lithium is the key element here, presently being intensively mined, often in more deprived regions where it is environmentally harmful. Friends of the Earth report that communities are having their water resources jeopardised by lithium mining.

In 2021 the *Guardian* highlighted workers being paid the equivalent of 30p an hour mining cobalt for use in electric vehicles.

The batteries themselves pose the problem of charging, a very much longer process than filling a petrol tank. Presently there is an inadequate number of charging points. If all cars become electric there will be a requirement for many more charging points than the present number of petrol pumps because of the extra refuelling time.

There are superchargers that cut the charging time, but they reduce battery life by around 80 percent, meaning more mining and having to dispose of increasing numbers of worn out, and very toxic, batteries.

Undoubtedly, over time, the technology will improve, but problems won't disappear. Neither will congestion on already full roads.

As socialism can only be achieved by the action of the working class consciously working through all the difficulties and details that will entail, how life is organised cannot be predetermined. However, it must surely mean a qualitative change to the way life is generally lived, not just a tweaked version of the present, capitalist, society.

People en masse confined to slow- or non-moving traffic jams for ironically named 'rush hours' everyday, even in electric vehicles, cannot be a socialist aspiration. As the whole nature of work must radically be transformed by socialism there will be no need for such threats to physical and mental health to be tolerated.

The effects of climate change can at best only be minimally mitigated, if at all, by a mass switching from petrol and diesel to electricity. The automotive industry, though, will continue the propaganda blitz, advertising the freedom enhancing, high-tech status-raising qualities of electric vehicles. Distracting attention from what really drives climate change and society at present, capitalism!

DAVE ALTON

The seduction of language

AS YOU read this you're probably completely unconscious of the wonderful genius of the invention of writing and its ability to transform small abstract symbols into words and images that have the potential to create ideas and landscapes both provocative and evocative to produce profound emotion in the reader. We now read silently (once illegal because of its supposed subversive nature) but an internal voice turns the words into utterance before we can comprehend the meaning, giving us a clue as to the origin of language itself.

Many animal species possess limited audible abilities to warn of danger or to attract a mate etc. but, so far as we know, only humankind can create abstractions to record these utterances and so attempt to preserve their meaning. The need for the immediacy of communication has been synthesised into its preservation. What to do and what not to do in certain situations has a long oral tradition but the expansion of knowledge depended on specialism, one of which was writing. As so often happens with human technology, once created, it becomes internalised and defines our perspectives, imagination and aspirations.

We conceive the world, not just through our senses, but through the technology of language. Our languages give our species untold power through the precision of communication and the preservation and evolution of the ideas it helps to create. However, its very success can seduce us into thinking that the words are the very things that they describe – like some kind of magical incantation. Thinking using language is an exercise in abstraction; what was once a mental representation has so often become a totality of reality for many. This has created a fertile space for illusion and its intellectual and psychological counterpart of delusion which thrives at the centre of most political ideology.

In some ways writing is inferior to spoken language as it can lack context and doesn't have the added dimensions of intonation, expression and gesture which can give the same statement completely contrasting meanings. It is said that different languages have varied strengths and weakness: French is the language of love; German the language of philosophy, Italian the language of gesture; English the language of business and war etc. Of course, there are other 'types' of language – mathematics is the language of nature, notation is the language of music, aesthetics is the language of art and even 'dead' Latin is still used by some



sciences. This multiplicity in some kind of synthesis would seem to be preferential in understanding and communication but sometimes much is also 'lost in translation'.

Because of the triumph of analytical thought over that of the dialectical approach many languages devote themselves to categorisation when attempting to describe observed phenomena. We love to put 'things' in boxes with labels on them and this gives us an illusion of understanding. Confusion is expressed in music and movie reviews when the work under discussion refuses to fit neatly into a 'genre' – but, of course, one of the things that art loves to do (if it's any good) is to subvert what we think we know and try to experience the world anew without preconceptions.

We have said that mathematics is the language of nature but, of course, it has also become a fundamental influence on technology especially in its close relationship with the formal languages of computer science, which produce programs for a multiplicity of technological applications. This has led some to speculate on the inevitability of computers producing their own algorithms and perhaps a language superior to the 'lingua franca' that English has become. In the future Artificial Intelligences might well communicate with each other without the need for human input. The consequences of this are imponderable at the moment but it again highlights the power of language to transform our view of the

world and the culture through which we perceive it. Because of the intangibility and opaque nature of technology to most of us we defer to it in the light of its success without any attempt to understand the abstract nature of it all. This matrix of illusion has us trapped both perceptually and conceptually.

The political danger of the delusion that the language of technology can solve our many problems takes its place alongside the faith in markets, gods and messianic leaders within the framework of idealism. Words like democracy, freedom, equality, socialism and justice etc have lost their meaning not just because of the malevolence of propaganda but because of the seduction of language that, in the hands of idealists, begins and ends with its usage and is rarely tested by reference to real social relationships. Any attempt to present language as an abstraction that can be subjected to a dialectical analysis is scorned in the headlong rush to celebrate our scientific and technological miracles. Socialists try to be precise in the use of language but in the knowledge that words are the abstraction of utterance and that in the communication of meaning, which is their only *raison d'être*, much will be lost in translation and the inevitable mismatch between the language available and the observed phenomena it attempts to describe.

WEZ

No magic wand

AT LAST month's Labour Party Conference Starmer's rhetoric went so far as to promise that a future Labour government would be 'totally focussed on the interests of working people'. A Labour government, he said, would remove what 'the age of insecurity [had] loaded onto the backs of working people' but that it was going to take ten years to do this as 'there's no magic wand here'.

How would Labour do this? Certainly not by any direct payments to 'working people' as he also said that under Labour there would not be 'a cheque-book state' and that 'fiscal responsibility is non-negotiable'.

So how? By increasing investment: 'We'll set up a National Wealth Fund. Work hand in glove with the private sector to rebuild this country'. The day before, the would-be next Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves, declared:

'Labour will aim to restore investment as a share of GDP to the level it was under the last Labour government, to bring us in line with our peers. Adding an additional £50 billion to our GDP every single year. Worth £1,700 for every household in Britain'.

So we are all going to get an extra £1,700 a year over the next years, are

we? Not exactly. This is just a statistic calculated by dividing £50 billion by the number of households in the UK (28.2 million in 2002). It doesn't mean that each household would receive that amount of cash. In any event, since it would be investment it would by definition be spent on buying producer goods and so not available to improve individual consumption. As someone once said, there are lies, damned lies and statistics.

It is not clear either where the figure of £50 billion comes from. It seems to be the money the government will borrow to put into the National Wealth Fund plus the amount that it is anticipated private capitalist enterprises will invest in its projects.

Reeves talked about 'catalytic investment' by which she meant government investment designed to attract additional private investment for some project. 'For every pound of investment we put in,' she said, 'we will leverage in three times as much private investment'. In other words, a project would not go ahead unless, for every £1 the government puts up, the private sector puts up a further £3. But there is no guarantee that this will always happen. Whether or not it does will depend on how capitalist enterprises judge

the prospect of making a profit at the going rate or more from doing so. If they won't get a sufficiently high return they won't put up the money.

A future Labour government is going to be completely dependent on the investment plans of profit-seeking private capital. Starmer said as much when he stated that Labour understood that 'private enterprise is the only way this country pays its way in the world'. This contradicts his earlier rhetoric about a future Labour government being 'totally focussed on the interests of working people'. It means that it would have to be 'totally focussed' on those of private capital.

True, growth (as measured by an increase in GDP) is driven by investment but private enterprises only invest if there's a prospect of making profits, and the government – without raising taxes – can only invest money that it borrows. So the growth that Labour (and the Tories and the LibDems) are promising depends on the prospects for private profit-making. Such prospects, however, are not something any government can control; they depend on which stage of the business cycle the capitalist economy is going through.

Labour will find that there is no magic wand either to conjure up business investment.

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Gathering storm

STAYING BEHIND at work to get drunk and tunelessly sing karaoke with colleagues every few weeks isn't in most people's routine, and certainly wasn't during the Covid pandemic. But that's what happened then in 10 Downing Street, the place which issued the restrictions on gatherings for the rest of us. During the lockdowns which began in spring and winter 2020, at least 16 leaving dos, quiz nights and 'Wine Time Fridays' were held behind the shiny black door while the rest of the country was policed for illegal meet-ups. Channel 4's docudrama *Partygate* was a sobering reminder of the Conservative Party's not-so-conservative parties. The programme's dramatised scenes of government staff's boozing, trips to the alcohol aisle in the supermarket and incriminating email exchanges were derived from findings in the inquiry headed by senior civil servant Sue Gray and the police's investigation. Alongside these scenes were clips from past news broadcasts, often of Boris Johnson saying something crass.

The drama focuses on the party-animal team of 'special advisers' working in Number 10, particularly a newcomer to the Brexit Unit when the pandemic hit, Grace Greenwood, played by Georgie Henley. While she and many of the other characters aren't specific real people, they plausibly represent a breed of young, posh graduates from the 'right' establishments who sycophantically support Boris Johnson. He's only depicted in the dramatised sections from behind or at a distance. When he speaks, as voiced by Jon Culshaw, he comes out with embarrassing strings of half-formed quips which his fan club laps up. Other real people portrayed include Johnson's special adviser and head of operations, Shelley Williams-Walker, who was made a Dame in his resignation honours list, perhaps for services to DJing during the parties. Another is Helen MacNamara who, as the government's ethics chief at the time, presumably thought that providing a karaoke machine for a leaving bash was the morally right thing to do.

Cleaners and security guards are the only staff depicted as having any sense of responsibility, but too low down the pecking order for this to count, such as when a guard is given the brush-off after trying to object to one of the get-togethers. The police's response to attending at least one Downing Street gathering hasn't been revealed to the



Credit: Channel 4

public, although details of some of the fines awarded have been. Boris Johnson and Helen MacNamara each paid £50 fixed penalty notices for attending parties, with MacNamara denying any partying. Rishi Sunak, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, was also issued with a £50 notice, along with 80 others, meaning that Downing Street was the address with the most Covid regulation penalties in the country. Between the dramatised scenes we hear from people fined larger amounts, like Xen Watts, the organiser of a snowball fight in Leeds who was issued with a £10,000 fine and Toriano Reed from London who was ordered to pay £14,300 for being held responsible for a gathering in his shed.

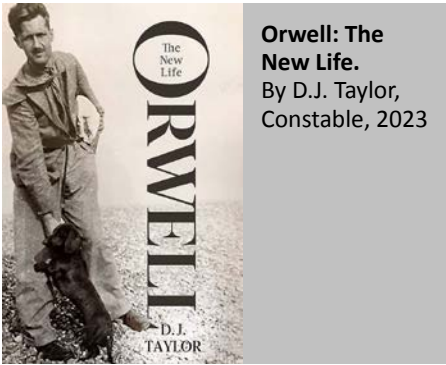
The programme also includes interviews with people who kept to the lockdown rules through their most difficult times. Alan Handley from Tamworth talks about his wife's funeral, which only eight family members could attend, sitting two metres apart. Emma Jones from London speaks about how her daughter couldn't meet with her friends or relatives before she died of cancer. While these, and others, aren't likely to forget how Downing Street staff ignored the rules, after enough time passes, scandals like *Partygate* tend to get pushed away from most people's attention, replaced by different criticisms of the government (such as debates around immigration or the HS2 railway line) and wider bad news. So, the programme was a useful reminder of how the Conservative Party has operated, with a smug

assumption of superiority. The characters working in Number 10 featured in the programme consider themselves above the rest of us, and therefore not subject to the same rules, especially the lockdown laws they devised. They act like this not because they're Tories as much as because of their distance from the populace created by the institution they work (and partied) in. The framework of government comes with a very limited type of democracy, but the special advisers are unelected. Instead, they're selected from a small bubble of objectionable yuppies active in whichever political party is dominant. So, they're even less accountable than voted-in politicians. The *Partygate* scandal drew attention to this aspect of government, behind the polished spin which it prefers to present.

Sue Gray's report was published in May 2022, soon after the police completed their investigation, so Channel 4's dramatisation of their findings has come late to the party, so to speak. Its broadcast was still timely, though, coinciding with October's Conservative Party conference. This scheduling looks like a jibe by Channel 4 at a government which has wanted to review its broadcasting remit but probably won't get the chance before the next general election. But the programme does more than reproach hypocritical Tories drunk on power as much as on red wine. It highlights how they acted as they did because the institution they are part of is so detached from the rest of us.

MIKE FOSTER

George Orwell



Orwell: The New Life.
By D.J. Taylor,
Constable, 2023

Eric Arthur Blair was born in 1903. In 1933 he adopted a pen name for his first book mainly because he thought the seedy subject matter of *Down and Out in Paris and London* would upset his parents. It was George, after the reigning monarch, and Orwell, after his favourite river in Suffolk. Having shown little previous interest in politics, at the end of 1936 he decided he wanted to ‘fight fascists’ in the Spanish Civil War. He travelled independently to Barcelona and served with POUM (Workers Party of Marxist Unification). His service on the front line ended when he was shot by a sniper. His *Homage to Catalonia* noted two years later that the real aim of the military mutiny, backed by the Church and landowners, was not to impose Fascism but to restore feudalism.

In Spain he befriended members of the ILP (Independent Labour Party) and on his return to England he joined the ILP because, Orwell said, they were the only party ‘which aims at anything I should regard as Socialism’. A little later he wrote that he hoped to see ‘something that has never existed before, a specifically English socialist movement’ (Orwell’s emphasis; *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 1941). His conception of socialism was mainly state interventionist: nationalisation, income limitation and reform of education. On this last reform, Orwell had wanted his son to go to Eton, as he had, though eventually he put his name down for Westminster Public (that is, private) School.

Taylor claims that one consequence of his experience fighting in Spain was a newfound pacifism; Orwell wrote about the looming Second World War ‘in which I do not intend to fight’. His wife Eileen commented on the psychological effect of his six months in Spain and that her husband had turned to ‘complete pacifism’. But Orwell was a committed patriot and as the Second World War was near he wrote in his diary that ‘I would give my life for England’. On the possibility of a Nazi invasion in 1940: ‘there is nothing for it but to die fighting, but one must above all die fighting and have the satisfaction of killing somebody else first’. The ILP were now deemed to be hopelessly pacifist: they ‘live almost entirely in a masturbation fantasy,

conditioned by the fact that nothing they say or do will ever influence events’.

Orwell sometimes contributed articles to a small but influential quarterly magazine called *Adelphi*. Founded by John Middleton Murry in 1923, it was self-consciously ‘literary’ in tone. Taylor states that it had ‘unorthodox Marxism’. He doesn’t explain what that means but it’s probably their writers not being members or supporters of the Communist Party. *Adelphi* had an important influence on Orwell and the contacts it provided in the north of England enabled him to do the research which was published as *The Road to Wigan Pier* in 1937. In 1932 Murry had read the Socialist Party pamphlet *Why Capitalism Will Not Collapse* and wrote to us saying: ‘It seems to me I ought to join’. He didn’t pursue the matter and in any case we pointed out that we didn’t allow members of other political organisations to join us – he was a member of the ILP. Later in his life Murry became a Tory and an advocate of war against Russia.

During the Second World War, while serving in the Home Guard in London, a member of his platoon put a direct question to Orwell: ‘Are you a communist?’ To which Orwell replied: ‘It depends what you mean.’ It’s not known whether he elaborated, but Taylor is baffled by Orwell’s response and accuses him of being ‘enigmatic’ and speaking ‘delphically’. However, for many Socialists this exchange will be familiar; we sometimes get asked the same question and we usually give the same answer as Orwell as a start. Like Orwell, we have been bitterly opposed to the Communist Party and its regimes; but we accept a properly understood conception of communism — classless, moneyless, stateless. Orwell never identified as a communist but he obviously knew enough about communism to differentiate it from what he called ‘the smelly little orthodoxies’ of the Communist Party and similar organisations. His response suggests that he saw nothing objectionable in communism, even if he didn’t support it himself.

Orwell mentions the Socialist Party a few times in his work as a journalist. In his *Observer* article covering a few London constituencies in the 1945 general election he claims that the Tory candidate in Paddington North could win, and that if he does:

‘It will quite likely be because Mr C Groves, the Socialist Party of Great Britain candidate (this is the sole constituency the SPGB is contesting) has split the Labour vote’ (24.06.1945).

The Labour candidate, General Mason-Macfarlane, won comfortably. Orwell had made enquiries at the Socialist Party

election office in Paddington North and it’s possible that he took this opportunity to buy Socialist Party literature. His collection of political pamphlets (tinyurl.com/297szbet) is held by the British Museum and it includes these by the Socialist Party:

- The Socialist Party – Its Principles and Policy (1934)
- War and the Working Class (1936)
- The Socialist Party Exposes Mr Chamberlain and His Labour Critics (1938)
- The Next Step for Trade Unionists (1939)
- Socialism (1941)
- Family Allowances: A Socialist Analysis (1943)
- Should Socialists Support Federal Union? (Two editions: 1940 and 1943)

They can be downloaded from our website at worldsocialism.org/spgb/pamphlets-date-order/.

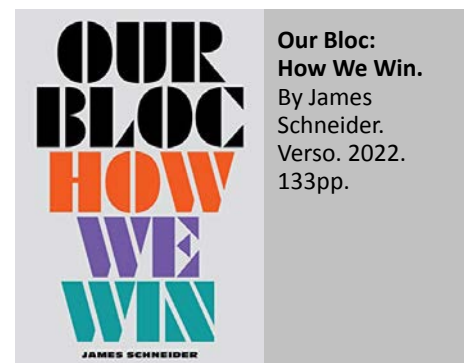
Orwell wrote six novels and he would probably have been considered a minor novelist of the twentieth century were it not for the last two: *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949), which made him world famous. Taylor argues that all his novels feature a rebellion that fails; there could be an interesting link between this and Orwell’s political outlook but he doesn’t pursue it. The last books gave many the impression of being anti-Russian or ‘anti-Soviet’, but Orwell regarded himself as anti-totalitarian; in a letter to a friend he wrote:

‘I don’t think I could fairly be described as Russophobic. I am against all dictatorships and I think the Russian myth has done frightful harm to the leftwing movement in Britain and elsewhere, and that it is above all necessary to make people see the Russian regime as it is.’

Orwell died from tuberculosis in 1950. The title of this book may suggest his reincarnation, but it’s merely a new edition of his life story first published in 2003. Taylor doesn’t mention the Socialist Party.

LEW

Another Call for Left Unity



Our Bloc: How We Win.
By James Schneider.
Verso. 2022.
133pp.

Antonio Gramsci, the Italian political activist and theorist, who spent long years in prison during the 20th century inter-war years for his opposition to Mussolini’s Fascist

regime, developed the theory of the historic bloc. According to this theory, in order to spark revolutionary change, a variety of progressive forces must come together in their ideas and across social and political practice to challenge the dominance of the ruling class over society and its institutions. In *Our Bloc: How We Win*, James Schneider, co-founder of the pro-Corbyn 'Momentum' organisation, takes up Gramsci's idea and seeks to apply it to the contemporary political situation in Britain.

He foresees a situation in which the left of the Labour Party comes together with an alliance of organisations such as trade unions and protest groups (eg, Stop the War, BLM, XR, Make Amazon Pay), referred to as 'progressive social forces', to take over the running of the country either via a revitalised Labour Party or a new political grouping outside Labour that espouses what he frequently refers to as 'socialism'. He is entirely opposed to the current direction of the Labour Party under Keir Starmer, neatly summed up in one of his chapter titles as 'Capital's A and B Team'. He deplores Starmer's attempt to drive from positions of influence all figures that would stand up for the 'wide-reaching reforms', which he sees as fundamental to the 'progressive' elements within the Party. The bloc that stands for those reforms needs to campaign for them, he argues, and, once it has wide support and is elected to office, to put them into action. So, though referring to such a process as 'transformational' and capable of 'overturning the established order', it is clear that the writer's agenda is essentially a reformist one.

Not that this stops him from constantly referring to this agenda as 'socialism' and its supporters as 'socialists'. Needless to say, this does not correspond to the Socialist Party's vision of socialism – a classless, wageless, moneyless society based on common ownership, democratic control and production for use not profit. We do not of course have any kind of monopoly on the word 'socialism', but to use it, as James Schneider does, to mean reforms of the existing system which he deems 'progressive', can only sow confusion and serve to obscure the idea's more far-reaching meaning, of which Schneider shows no sign of having any awareness. Instead, his view of socialism is a collection of various reforms aiming to 'noticeably improve the lives of the overwhelming majority'. He talks of the need for his 'left bloc', once in power, to enact policies like an increase in the minimum wage, a 'universal basic dividend', more money spent on health, education and social security, nationalisation of utilities and making the 'wealthy and big business' pay for that by

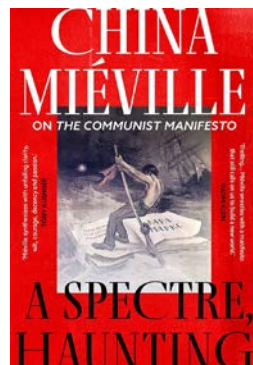
'increasing taxes on the rich'. He has in fact a whole, somewhat breathless, slew of ideas for reformist change, and, in his final chapter (entitled 'Ways of Winning'), he proposes four possible scenarios over the 2020s by which his new grouping might, via 'a progressive surge', gain influence and support sufficient to win an election, establish a 'socialist government' and put its reforms into effect.

In a sense all this is commendable, but it fails to take into account that governments do not control the system they administer, especially the economic side of it. So the potential for reforms depends not just on the will of government - any government - but on wider conditions in the system of the buying and selling of goods and services on the market. And, above all, even if it was possible to implement the reforms envisaged by Schneider via his 'left bloc', they would not (nor could they) change the basic premise on which the current (capitalist) system is based, that is the buying and selling of goods and services, production for profit and, above all, the workings of the world market. They would in fact constitute no more than a tinkering at the edges of the problems the vast majority of wage and salary workers face the world over. They could certainly not form the basis for a genuine socialist movement needing to take the step that would be truly 'transformational' of abolishing the wages and money system and bringing in a democratic, cooperative world system of free access to all goods and services using the know-how, the technology and the resources that now exist to satisfy all human needs – and of course without trashing the planet.

So this is a book that, while closing with the far-reaching, indeed revolutionary, sentiment of 'we have a planet to save and a world to win', in its substance accepts capitalism (even if the word itself does not get a single mention) and chooses rather to propose alternative ways of running its money, wages and buying and selling system.

HKM

175 Years Since



A Spectre, Haunting: On The Communist Manifesto. By China Miéville. Head of Zeus £10.99.

China Miéville is best-known as a science fiction author. He is also a former member of the SWP, and his history of the Bolshevik

'Revolution', *October*, was reviewed in the November 2017 *Socialist Standard*. Here he examines the writing, reception and arguments of the *Communist Manifesto*.

The *Manifesto* was written in 1848. It bears the names of both Marx and Engels, though it is usually ascribed to Marx alone, who certainly authored the text. But Miéville takes the reasonable view that Engels was equally responsible, as he not only influenced Marx but had previously written documents that were 'a crucial concrete foundation' for the work. Its German title is more exactly rendered as *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, but a party at that time was a tendency or current of opinion, not an organised group. The fact that Marx was working against a deadline probably explains why the final section is brief and unfinished.

The first English translation, by Helen Macfarlane, appeared in 1850, but there was rather little interest in the text, in any language, until the 1870s, in the aftermath of the Paris Commune. The standard English translation, by Samuel Moore with support from Engels, was published in 1888.

One point which often surprises those who read the *Manifesto* for the first time is the extent of praise for capitalism in the first section, such as 'The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together', though Miéville sees this admiration as ambivalent, given the suffering that was also caused. The text is understandably unaware of the adaptability of capitalism. The actions mentioned in the second section (including making the means of production state property) were described as already out-of-date by the time the preface to the German edition of 1872 was composed. One reasonable point Miéville makes is that the *Manifesto* does not pay sufficient attention to the status of women, noting that they are oppressed in the family but not saying much about the relation between gender and class.

One chapter deals with criticisms of the *Manifesto*, including of course absurd claims that it is responsible for dictatorial regimes such as the former Soviet Union. Miéville argues that the problems there really began with its isolation in the 1920s, which opened the way to the appalling repression under Stalin. But this conveniently ignores the authoritarian policies under Lenin and Trotsky.

This edition also contains the text of the Moore translation, with a few adjustments. The most important of these is the rendering 'the isolation of rural life' rather than 'the idiocy'.

PB

A gold-filled irrelevance

HOW CONDITIONS have improved! At the time of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, or George V's Silver one, or the Victory Parade, and even the present Queen's wedding, to see any of it meant notable hardships for the workers. Up half the night to get a place; standing in the street for hours; shouting oneself hoarse; then having to get back home through all the crowds. Compare that with what progress has brought us today. This month loyal subjects will be able to sit in comfort at home, watching on colour TV the romance of Princess Anne brought to its consummation (well, not quite, but no doubt that will come).

Should one laugh or weep? On one hand, millions riveted to this idiot's spectacle; on the other, its reduction to only another pattern of moving wallpaper. While the gilt-edged incantations are pronounced, the Golden Oldies of the dirty-joke index are revived for a generation fresh to the ambience of royal weddings. The souvenirs pretending patriotic fervour but representing only fervour for Mammon — cheap mugs and tee-shirts in the High Street, silver and Wedgwood trophies to be hoarded as "investments". And the sight of radicals and make-believe socialists, straight from the Labour conference, bowing obsequious knees and kissing the fat backside of opulence. Ugh! (...)

What is the purpose of it all? Royalty is a pretended ruler long since denuded of power but maintained still in glittering barbaric splendour: a mediaeval survival. In most countries those who really rule have decided they are better without it, and in some they still find a use for what history has left them. If class-divided society is to be believed-in, here is a symbol of it. If privileged riches are a social ideal, here they are personified. And if rulers have to provide bread and circuses, here is the Big Top where the horses prance and the troupers have the style.



To be enthralled by this kind of thing is to be in the clutch of capitalism. Remember, however, that capitalism has alternatives. It does not need royalty — and that is why royalty doesn't matter to the working class either. Working people are no better off in the countries where kings and queens have been superseded or never existed. In the United States the cheering and drum-beating go into presidential election circuses; in the one-party regimes, to ceremonial displays of the State's might. Better to regard royalty as, in John Osborne's phrase, "the gold fillings in a mouth full of decay"; then to see about the reasons for the decay. Of course a sane world would have no place for such nonsense, and it is society we must change first.

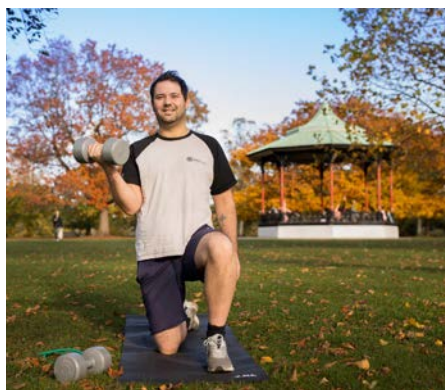
(Socialist Standard, November 1973)

Action Replay

Back to the roots

ONE OF the consequences of the Covid lockdowns was a drastic reduction in the physical exercise that most people took part in. They were encouraged to go out once a day for a walk, run or bike ride, which led many to get to know their local area rather better. But team sports and visits to the gym were not allowed, and this created financial problems for sports centres, firms that made or sold sports gear and so on, quite apart from the effect on people's health.

This applied not just in the UK, of course, and large international organisations are doing their bit to improve things and mitigate some of the effects of Covid: 'Fit for Life is UNESCO's sport-based flagship designed to accelerate COVID-19 recovery, support inclusive and integrated policy making, and enhance the wellbeing of youth around the world' (unesco.org). It is young people in particular who are targeted, with the aim of increasing grassroots participation and reducing inactivity and chronic disease. Focus on women and girls is intended to increase inclusivity.



Nothing at all wrong with boosting people's physical activity and health, but there are economic arguments here too (this is capitalism, remember). The UNESCO page refers to a report produced in 2020 by the management consultancy firm McKinsey & Co (mckinsey.com) which argued that health 'contributed almost as much to income growth as education'. The cost of ill health in 2017 was estimated as \$12 trillion, about one-sixth of global GDP, as those who are seriously ill or die prematurely cannot be economically

active. Covid and its repercussions were forecast to reduce global GDP by up to 8 percent in 2020. Promoting more participation in sport and exercise more generally is only part of improving the health situation, but it is not negligible, and the UNESCO programme is seen as contributing to this.

In an article summarised at sportanddev.org, Ben Sanders and Jay Coakley drew a distinction between elite or performance sports on the one hand and grassroots sports on the other. Elite sports generally receive more resources (from governments and so on), but it is grassroots sports that promote greater participation and, supposedly, 'the application of sport for development and peace.'

Last year's Commonwealth Games in Birmingham received £6.5m in funding via the National Lottery to increase sporting activity by young people (it's called funetics). Let's hope that those who take part in it really do have a good time, but don't forget that capitalism's priorities are really behind it all.

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.

NOVEMBER 2023 EVENTS

World Socialist Movement online meetings

Sundays at 19.30 (IST) Discord

Weekly WSP (India) meeting

Sunday 12 November 10.00 (GMT) Zoom Central Online Branch Meeting

Friday 3 November 19.30 (GMT) Zoom

Did you see the News?

Discussion on recent subjects in the news
Host: Andy Davies

Friday 10 November 19.30 (GMT) Zoom

What is materialism?

Speaker: Simon Wigley

Friday 17 November 19.30 (GMT) Zoom

German political culture and socialism

YouTube video commented on by Andrew Westley

Friday 24 November 19.30 (GMT) Zoom

Proletarian Self-emancipation and socialist freedom

Guest speaker: Darren Poynton

Socialist Party Physical Meetings

LONDON

Saturday 4 November 12-6pm

London Radical Bookfair

The Socialist Party will have a stall

Goldsmith University, 8 Lewisham Way, SE14 6NW. (nearest station: New Cross)

Sunday 26 November 3pm

Subject to be announced

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

CARDIFF

Street Stall Every Saturday

1pm-3pm (weather permitting)

Capitol Shopping Centre,

Queen Street (Newport Road end).

Clarification

In the article 'Best Regards, but Miles Apart' last month the breakup of the First International (International Workingmen's Association) in the mid-1870s was not about maximalism versus minimalism/reformism even if some of those tensions were there in embryo, tensions which rose to the surface much more clearly and starkly during the Second International period (1889-1916).

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.



IN MAY of last year this column dealt with the industrial action that was taking place by staff in universities against their employers. It talked about how lecturers, researchers and administrators in the union I'm a member of (University and College Union) were going on strike on certain stipulated days, not doing any 'extra' work outside the strike periods (action short of a strike) and standing on picket lines, holding banners and giving out leaflets. It also said that the strikes were mainly about changes to pensions and real term losses in pay. I can report now that, some 18 months later and somewhat away from the public gaze, the dispute is still going on. And I can also report that, as is often the case with protracted industrial action, it has not been – and is unlikely to be – successful.

What a mess

How can we sum up? Firstly, despite the strike action, the cuts of up to 35 percent in pensions were formalised last year causing enormous anger and frustration. But then 'market forces' came to the rescue, when there was a sharp rise in the valuation of the pension fund meaning that the previously proclaimed deficit in the fund became a surplus, leaving no reason for the cuts not to be effectively reversed.

This was a relief to most of us, even if union members were still out of pocket from the withholding of pay by employers for strike days. Secondly, despite more or less restored pensions, industrial action has continued on pay, since the union's demand has remained unmet. This has meant further strikes and a new tactic, a marking and assessment boycott (MAB), which the union initially described as 'nuclear', since it threatened to put degree graduation in jeopardy and to lay universities open to legal action by students.

But the MAB tactic has not worked well. Relatively few staff have participated in it and the universities have found ways

round, for example by awarding degrees based on exams and assessments previously marked. So the employers have remained firm, refusing to negotiate, which has effectively brought the union to its knees, with a member consultation now showing a clear majority against further MAB action. Then, when the union gave branches the option to call off a further strike period set for the first week of the academic year, the vast majority did just that. And this despite the fact that the lecturers who had participated in the MAB were not only having at least half their salary deducted but were now also at the mercy of their employers' demand to them to carry out in their own time the missed marking and assessment. A double-whammy if ever there was one. What a mess.

Manoeuvres and delusions

How has this debacle come about in a well-subscribed union with highly intelligent and educated members who one might imagine would be more able than most to assess the likely consequences – positive or negative – of action they decided to take? As pointed out in the previous article, the purpose of industrial action is to force the employer into concessions. Once you think you have done that as much as is feasible then you ask the members to decide if it's enough and they then decide whether to continue or not. But what has happened here is something quite different. When it became clear, as it did at a relatively early stage, that the employers felt no need to offer concessions and so held the upper hand, the members should have been balloted in properly democratic fashion with a clear 'yes' or 'no' question about carrying on.

But this did not happen. What happened instead was that politically motivated activists from the Trotskyists who have manoeuvred themselves into positions on the union's national executive were able to manipulate the union's decision-making processes and achieve results bearing little relation to the views or position of

the majority of the membership. Their main concern was arguably not so much to achieve any immediate benefit for the union's members but to create a situation in which the dispute would continue as long as possible regardless of the outcome. This in line with their deluded view that industrial action serves as some kind of consciousness-raising operation for workers, a rehearsal for bigger struggles to come when the vanguard these groups see themselves as will lead the workers to victory on the political stage.

Alternatives

In last year's article, I wrote that, despite the manipulations which were already taking place then, I had sufficient hope that this particular action was happening for the right reasons, had the backing of the majority of members and would not end up being damaging to members' interests. Unfortunately, as we have seen, things have not worked out like that and the union will now have to try and put the damage behind it and go back to fulfilling their correct role within the system of wage and salary work and buying and selling (capitalism) in which we're all stuck at the moment. That role is to defend their members' interests against the interest of their employers, something that will carry on as the majority class in society (workers) continue to see no alternative but to spend their lives selling their energies to the minority class (capitalists or their agents) for a wage or salary. This despite the fact that there is sufficient potential abundance for the money and wages system to be abolished on a global scale so that the whole of humanity can live fulfilling lives at all levels in a world of cooperative endeavour, voluntary work and free access for all to all goods and services.

HOWARD MOSS