

THE

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SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

LIES...



... and
what lies
beneath



Also: 'Take me to your leader'
It's that time of year again
Human rights and human wrongs
From ideology to humanity

What drives the capitalist economy
Illustrate to Educate?
A polite reply to Jehovah's Witness
Pro-Palestine or anti-war?



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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'

Last Post for capitalism?

LAST MONTH, on the 11th of November, as usual the bugles sounded the Last Post at the Menin Gate, and on Remembrance Day at the Cenotaph the wreaths were laid for all the millions who have perished in the madness of warfare. The very politicians who were laying these wreaths may have been planning for future conflicts and at a stroke of a pen be quite prepared to spend billions on new weapons of war. This is the outcome of a global economic system which divides humanity into artificial nation states.

War is generally a political means to an economic end. Most wars are fought to capture raw resources, new markets, trade routes and spheres of influence. The competitive divisive economics of this dog-eat-dog race called capitalism which exists in every nation state makes wars inevitable. That is why they regularly break out. Just look at the waste of war. Vast resources and materials are used building the weapons of war such as aircraft carriers, tanks, missiles, bombs.

Thousands of highly skilled workers work to build these hideous weapons of mass destruction. Then great numbers of fit healthy young workers are put in uniforms and trained to be professional assassins in the legalised slaughter that is war.

The global economic system, the monetary/profit system of capitalism, pits worker against worker, factory against factory, business against business, and ultimately nation state against nation state. It is inefficient and destructive of the best potentialities in humankind. Yet it is now obsolete and long past its sell-by date.

There is an alternative to the anti-social destructive system which is ruining this fragile planet in the name of money/profit. It is ready and waiting, but it requires the class-conscious participation of the majority to no longer acquiesce in this outdated divisive system. It is a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production by and in the interest of the whole community.

Its achievement calls for international cooperation not of the world's bankers, but of the world's workers. It is us, the workers, who with our combined skills and talents produce everything from a pin to an oil tanker, so let us all show our support for a world without artificial borders and frontiers which only serve to divide humanity. Beyond capitalism we can build a system based on cooperation not on ruthless competition. We could put the flags of nation states into a museum. They too serve only to divide humanity. We can then move forward to a more fair and just society where human needs and the health of the planet are the driving force. So let us all help to speed the day when this wonderful earth and its rich resources are held in common for the benefit of all humanity. Because once we decide to wave goodbye to capitalism, those bugles could sound the Last Post on war, for the last time.

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The tangled web

THE GLOBAL market system is good at making Gordian knots out of simple problems. Take the replacement of fossil fuels by renewables, which ought to be a no-brainer. The International Energy Authority thinks oil demand will peak by 2030 (tinyurl.com/4jymwhdm). Demand is expected to halve by 2050, though governments would have to cut their greenhouse gas emissions three times faster than they are doing in order to achieve climate targets (tinyurl.com/44db4wdv). 90 percent of coal and 60 percent of oil and gas needs to stay in the ground for an evens chance of sticking to Paris Agreement limits (tinyurl.com/2vsfr6rw). As if to underline the urgency, 2023 is reckoned to be the hottest year on record, just like almost every year for the past decade (tinyurl.com/bddxxmve).

But check the business news and you soon discover that the oil supermajors are paying no attention to such namby-pamby nonsense. This is capitalism, not Kumbaya. Instead, they're looking at the numbers. They project huge new markets among the growing affluent classes of developing countries, and that means cheap fossil energy. And that means staying one step ahead of the competition. Since drilling for new oil is in general a money sink, the cash-rich supermajors are busily engaged in 'inorganic growth', ie, buying up other oil companies using the mega-profits they've gleaned from sky-high oil prices thanks to lucrative wars in Ukraine and the Middle East.

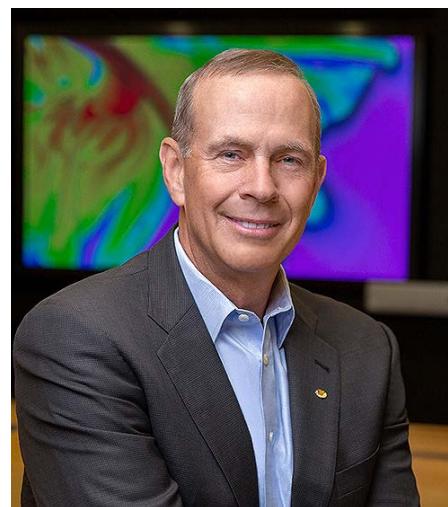
Mike Wirth, CEO of supermajor Chevron, puts it bluntly: 'You can build scenarios, but we live in the real world and have to allocate capital to meet real-world demands' (ie, make real-world profits). Chevron have just bought Hess, the biggest player in the Permian oil basin spanning Texas and New Mexico, for \$53bn, while ExxonMobil has bought Pioneer Natural Resources, one developer of the giant new Guyana oil field, for \$60bn. As the Financial Times puts it, this is a game of 'last man standing', and nothing else matters, not the fury of climate groups, nor of the EU, nor even of US President Joe Biden himself, who lashed out recently that 'Exxon have made more money than God'. The supermajors don't listen to God, or to any other imaginary or state authority, they listen to their shareholders, and their shareholders want what shareholders always want, a return on their investment. Now, other

oil majors will be forced to step up the pace to compete as oil demand climbs inexorably. UK-based Shell and BP may even have to merge, just to stay in the game (tinyurl.com/f8x6bcrh).

Oil companies are also massively expanding their trading arms to profit from volatile market spikes due to geopolitical tensions that are increasingly becoming the norm. Translated, this means there are big bucks to be made as the world becomes steadily more dangerous. The Ukraine conflict has disrupted everything. Global energy has been weaponised.

Russia, banned from selling to Europe, is selling to Turkey, but Turkey is threatening an invasion of north-eastern Syria, partly to crush the Kurds but possibly also to plunder Syria's north-eastern gas fields now that Assad can't count on Russian support. Russia's biggest customer is China, whose sole domestic oil supply is in the Uighur province of Xinjiang, where through no coincidence the locals have been brutally oppressed and herded into concentration camps. China has expansion in mind, and this year enraged its neighbours with a new map redrawing national boundaries to 'claim' Indian, Filipino and Russian territory as Chinese, prompting one Indian lawmaker to threaten 'surgical strikes' (tinyurl.com/suyurbsr). US-backed chip-makers like TSMC are meanwhile scrambling to get out of Taiwan before China invades it, for fear that a Chinese takeover of their world-beating chip industry will scupper western capitalism. China is also funnelling populations and investment into the undeveloped mineral-rich Russian Far East, and could decide to grab (back) the disputed formerly Chinese region of Outer Manchuria, including Russia's vital land corridor for transporting weapons to Ukraine from its biggest arms supplier, North Korea. Keen to avoid reliance on Russian energy, China has been striking deals all over the Gulf states, including Iran (tinyurl.com/mr2pu3bn). This in turn may explain why the US is backing Israel in the current Gaza conflict, to keep its foothold in a region increasingly falling under Russian and Chinese influence.

Back in the UK, the cultural guerrillas of Just Stop Oil continue to get big headlines by, among other things, attacking famous paintings in galleries, but they seem less interested in big pictures. Where is their answer to the real-world realities of



Credit: Chevron

people like Mike Wirth, or the geopolitical manoeuvrings of superpowers? The Green lobby in general wants to hand-wave a renewable world into being with emotive talk of climate 'justice', but without considering how capitalist profits dictate what's going to happen and what isn't. For example, the UK Tories have just defied their own NIMBY supporters by (slightly) rowing back their regulations obstructing new on-shore wind turbines, but investors are finding better profits abroad so no turbines are being built (tinyurl.com/yma2c3by). And the grid infrastructure isn't there anyway. 'In Britain, Italy and Spain more than 150-gigawatts'-worth of wind and solar power, equivalent to 83% of the three countries' total existing renewables capacity, cannot come online because their grids cannot handle it' (tinyurl.com/3pahtcan).

Today's world is a web of clear and opaque connections. Pull on one strand, and a whole lot of others come up, all impossible to disentangle and address separately. What binds it all together is the capitalist system, built on private ownership and private control of resources, in which production is driven by the grow-or-die imperative to be 'last man standing' with no regard for any physical, natural, ethical or even market limitations. Instead of delivering steady benefits to humanity, capitalism convulses through destructive cycles of hyperactivity and collapse, and is quite unable to change this behaviour, or indulge the luxury of being humane, 'just', peaceful or environmentally sustainable. Reformers need to stop wasting their time with non-solutions. We have to end it.

PJS

Dear Editors

Letters on the two ongoing wars

Gaza

LINDSEY GERMAN, the leader and spokesperson for the Stop the War Coalition, was a member for 37 years of a Trotskyist sect, the misnamed Socialist Workers Party, which believed in dishonestly forming 'coalitions' (like the Stop the War Coalition) through which to lead the working class into socialism, rather than engaging honestly and explicitly to win people over.

She was on the pompously titled 'Central Committee' of that arrogant and dishonest organisation and only left in 2010 due to factional disputes which she lost, and not because of any change of heart.

She continues to uphold the Russian Revolution as socialist even though it was in fact a minority-led coup to establish modern state capitalism throughout the Russian Empire and a brutal dictatorship by... another 'Central Committee'. She founded and still leads the 'Stop the War Coalition' which has resurfaced on the outbreak of various wars yet kept its misleading title of 'stop THE war' as if it was a spontaneous response to this specific war. It's actually an 'astrourfing' body and is run by German as a means of recruiting people to her specific, confused

and twisted notion of socialism rooted bizarrely in an obsession with one Russian man who died 83 years ago and who did more to harm the working class and the prospects of genuine socialism than almost anyone in history, Leon Trotsky.

With her decades as a leading member of the SWP and her ongoing commitment to using wars, distress and death as a manipulative means to recruit people into her latter-day, nonsensical, Bolshevism, she is hardly a sincere or straight-acting figure in the current terrifying and cataclysmic crisis in the Middle East. Please bear this in mind as she is now doing the rounds of various big media outlets on behalf of the 'Stop the War Coalition' and speaking as if she is an expert on Middle Eastern politics. She's not, nor is she a pacifist, nor is she a genuine socialist. For her, and her Trotskyist colleagues, the war is a chance for them to recruit people to their very odd brand of 'socialism'. This is a deeply unpleasant lack of sincerity or honesty. It is unfortunate that none of those who have been interviewing her are aware of any of this. She will certainly not reveal her manipulative motives.

CLIFFORD SLAPPER

Ukraine

This is a letter I sent to my local newspaper, which they refused to publish. It is in response to an article they published celebrating Ukrainian Independence Day.

Re: 'Frome honours Ukrainian Independence Day', and in particular this quote from Iryna Ladyzhenska (Frome Town Council's social facilitator for Ukrainian refugees): 'Now Ukraine is fighting for its freedom and values, such as human rights, democracy, and rule of law. It is an existential war.'

Firstly, I am totally against the Russian invasion and bombing of Ukraine. However, Ukraine is one of the most corrupt countries in Europe, and has a well-documented neo-Nazi problem. Sadly, world history has been unfortunate to the Ukrainian people, in that Ukraine is a flag in a tug-of-war contest between East and West.

Most importantly, we must answer the question: what is a country? The answer: countries only exist in class-divided societies, where there is a master class and a servant class. The apparatus of the state exists for the benefit of the former. In the modern world, these two respective classes are the capitalist class and the working class.

When Russia first invaded Ukraine, two cities negotiated to allow the Russian army to take over without armed resistance – Kherson (on the Black Sea coast), and Kupyansk (near Kharkov and the border with Russia). This saved these places from destruction, and their populations from being killed in any crossfire, and was obviously the sensible thing for the local

authorities to have done. But it wasn't to last; last year the Ukrainian military recaptured Kupyansk, and later the Russian army withdrew from Kherson. They were 'liberated', but were now in the front line, and both have since been bombarded with large parts of them reduced to ruins.

In a world socialist society, wars will no longer exist, because countries will no longer exist, because social classes will no longer exist. The Earth's natural and industrial resources will be owned and democratically controlled by the whole of society for the sole purpose of meeting people's needs (that's what socialism truly means).

MATTHEW SHEARN



From Marx to Musk

IN HIS interview with Rishi Sunak on 2 November Elon Musk speculated that the widespread application of AI would usher in an 'age of abundance where any goods and services that you want, you can have'. People would only need work for 'personal satisfaction' (tinyurl.com/yt9p3wtr).

Clearly, this wouldn't be capitalism. It couldn't be as it would mean the end of working for wages and producing goods and services to be sold. This was understood by, of all people, Jeremy Clarkson in a surprisingly perspicacious passage in his column in the *Sun* the following day:

'The fact is, then, that if machines are doing all the jobs, there will be no economy. You won't be able to buy anything because you won't be earning anything. And there's no point going to the government for help because that won't have any money either. Because machines don't pay taxes. They just spend all day making stuff. That no one can afford to buy. This means we will need a whole new economy. A whole new system where there's no such thing as money. And that is the biggest worry of them all because no one has a clue what that might be' (tinyurl.com/yt9p3wtr).

com/bdz2yej2).

The last bit is not true. Socialists have long understood that the answer would be a society where productive resources including machines would be commonly owned and democratically controlled and used to produce wealth to directly satisfy people's needs instead of, as now, to be sold on a market with a view to profit. In such a society there would indeed be no such thing as money.

Clarkson may not have known it but he was describing what has recently been called 'fully automated luxury communism'. But we don't have to wait for 'full' automation to bring about a society of common ownership, democratic control and production directly for use. The productive forces are already sufficiently developed for this. Making the change is now only a question of political will.

As a matter of fact years ago Marx had anticipated the points made by Musk. Writing in the late 1850s he speculated what would happen if the application of science and machinery to production led to such a high level of productivity that not only the value added by direct human labour to each unit produced was reduced

to an insignificant proportion, but so was that transferred to these units from the fixed capital deployed:

'As soon as labour in the direct form has ceased to be the great well-spring of wealth, labour time ceases and must cease to be its measure, and hence exchange value [must cease to be the measure] of use value. (...) With that, production based on exchange value breaks down, and the direct, material production process is stripped of the form of penury and antithesis ('Contradiction between the foundation of bourgeois production (value as measure) and its development. Machines etc.', Grundrisse, chapter 14).

In other words, goods and services would be so cheap — each unit would contain so little labour, both new and that transferred by machinery, etc — that the huge amount of them that could be produced could not be priced but might as well be given away or provided free.

Marx did not expect this point to be reached — he expected that the working class would have put an end to capitalism long before — but he realised that, if it were to be, it would mean the end of capitalism. Production for sale would no longer make any sense.

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Halo Halo

KNOCK ON door. Open to see two very smartly dressed mature ladies standing behind a smartly besuited gentleman. All smiling. Quick appraisal. Decide not Mormons because they only proselytise using males. Politely ask who they are. They offer pleasantries then straight into their sales pitch. Light slowly dawns. Ah, Jehovah's Witnesses. They're trying to fill their quota and sign me up. Haven't they seen *Life of Brian*? Not worried about getting stoned then? Since it's December I naughtily ask about their policies on Christmas and other Christian festivals. Aware it's a no-go because they consider it pagan. Also ask about Easter. Wot, no pressies or chocolate Easter eggs? Even atheists say no thanks matey! Smiles become more strained.

Respond to their proffered leaflet with three copies of *Questions and Answers about Socialism*. After all, exchange is no robbery. Polite smiles quickly change to worried ones. He pulls back leaflet he was offering me. Exit right quickly. Socialism – the antidote to religion.

'Witnesses believe that a "little flock" of 144,000 selected humans go to heaven, but that God will resurrect the majority

(the "other sheep") to a cleansed earth after Armageddon' (Wikipedia). JW have eight and a half million adherents.

On the second-largest island in the Philippines, an obscure religious movement, believed to be promoting an imminent end-of-the-world ideology, has been accused of engaging in sexual violence and forced marriage of its own members, including children. It is thought to have at least three thousand five hundred members. There are several religious groups in the Philippines that are labelled by authorities as cults (*Al Jazeera* 19 September).

In November 1978, 900 Americans, adherents to the *People's Temple*, died in Guyana after drinking poison at the behest of their leader, Rev Jim Jones. 'Temple members were regularly humiliated, beaten, and blackmailed, and many were coerced or brainwashed into signing over their possessions—including their homes—to the church' (Britannica.com).

In Kenya, the Pastor of the *Good News International Church* was said to have told followers they must starve themselves to death. Why would anyone do that? Apparently, in order to 'meet Jesus'. The



Kenyan authorities had found over four hundred bodies. The news report noted, 'Starvation appears to have been the main cause of death, according to government autopsies, but some victims- including children – had been strangled, beaten or suffocated' (*Sky News*, 18 July).

In Britain it used to be the norm when filling in any kind of form that asked for religion to respond with C of E. It often meant ... well I'm not really religious but to avoid social disapprobation I'll go with the flow. After all, if it's good enough for the Queen/King it's good enough for me. But now us 'nones' are coming out of the closet. A 5 October AP report notes that American and Canadian 'nones' are, give or take, a third of the population. Japan, Israel and Uruguay are listed as high in 'nones'. Unnamed European countries qualify too.

DC

Tiny tips

COST OF LIVING crisis, what cost of living crisis? A new breed of uber-luxury hotels in London is breaking records with rooms costing more than £1,000 a night as wealthy visitors flock to the capital for 'experiences' only (a lot of) money can buy. In the Peninsula on Hyde Park Corner, a short walk from Buckingham Palace, rooms start at a kingly £1,300. Despite the startling price tag, the hotel is said to be running at full capacity (tinyurl.com/5yn54c8p).

Pfizer recently announced it would increase the U.S. list price of its patented Covid treatment nirmatrelvir-ritonavir (Paxlovid) to \$1,390 for a five-day treatment course. Experts at Harvard University have estimated that the cost of producing a five-day course of nirmatrelvir-ritonavir is \$1 (tinyurl.com/3rbpt63v).

'[Scientists] created weapons under the protection of St. Seraphim of Sarov because, by the ineffable providence of God, these weapons were created in the monastery of St. Seraphim... Thanks to this power, Russia

has remained independent and free, and, of course, we must all cherish this remarkable feat of our scientists, who practically saved the country, in our hearts and memories', Russian Orthodox Church Head Patriarch Kirill saying that Russia's nuclear weapons saved the nation (tinyurl.com/2s452rr9).

@CraigMurrayOrg. To be entirely plain. I have always viscerally opposed war. I have dedicated my life to conflict resolution and reconciliation. But in the coming Gaza genocide, every act of armed resistance by Hamas and Hezbollah will have my support. If that is a crime, send me back to jail (tinyurl.com/yszshwjk).

Hamas — being a reactionary, exclusivist outfit — has a 'post-Israel' vision that will produce an ethnically cleansed theocratic dictatorship, in other words 'building up yet another system of exploitation'. More, their pogromist violence against Jewish civilians is not "cathartic", or restoring Palestinian self-respect, but instead full-on racist sadism (tinyurl.com/y4r66un3).

More than one million children experienced the 'most extreme form of poverty' last year, said Sky News, according to a new report that slams such 'horrifying levels of

destitution' as a political choice. The report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that the number of people experiencing these levels of poverty in the UK has 'increased by 61%' between 2019 and 2022, with 3.8 million people experiencing destitution. More than half of destitute households have a 'weekly income of less than £85' (tinyurl.com/bde3z9nz).

Coca-Cola has quietly scrubbed references to Hamas-supporting BLM from its website (tinyurl.com/3xpynjvz9).

The founder of a Black Lives Matter (BLM) organization is voicing his support of Jan. 6 prisoners and not shying away from endorsing former President Donald Trump as 'the best candidate we have' (tinyurl.com/2j6me76y).

When Shevek asks the socialists of Nio Esseia what Anarres, which they see as their 'moon', means to them, they respond that every time they look up at the night sky, they are reminded that a society with no government, no police, and no economic exploitation exists and cannot be dismissed as merely a utopian fantasy (tinyurl.com/yvabk3p7).

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

LONDON

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

MIDLANDS

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

NORTH

North East Regional branch.

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

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

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

Bolton. Contact: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589.

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

Doncaster. Contact: Fredi Edwards, fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk

Yorkshire Regional branch.

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

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

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

Kent and Sussex regional branch. Usually meets 3rd Sun. 2pm at The Muggleton Inn, High Street, Maidstone ME14 1HJ or online.

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

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

spgbsw@gmail.com

Brighton. Contact: Anton Pruden,

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Glasgow branch. Meets physically: 2nd Friday of the month; online Discord: 3rd Tuesday of the month. Contact: Paul Edwards,

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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 JITSU.

(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:

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INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS

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Think global, act global

THERE IS an interesting report in *The Conversation* (tinyurl.com/4pjdfy9a) of a recent paper by a group of academics on optimal land use for agriculture and carbon capture (see 'Benefits and trade-offs of optimizing global land use for food, water, and carbon' in the journal *PNAS*, tinyurl.com/2yndxt9t). They 'targeted three key ecosystem service (ES) indicators: total carbon (C) storage (indicative of climate regulation and climate-change mitigation), crop production (indicative of food supply), and available runoff (indicative of freshwater supply)' and produced models to balance these three objectives.

This is interesting to us, because it is an example of how we can look globally at land use, looking at competing objectives (and trying to balance them) and not using money as an indicator: in short, the things necessary to engage in a planned co-operative economy. We don't need to endorse the specific results of this group of academics to see the possibility of this level of global land use planning. But, as they state: 'Results show a potential to increase all three indicators (+83% in crop production, +8% in available runoff, and +3% in carbon storage globally).'

However in the article, Deepa Senapathi points up what this could mean:

'It's also tough to see the suggested land use as feasible or pragmatic when geopolitical and socioeconomic factors tend to drive decisions on what to do with land. For example, the optimisation suggests more cropland in most of Great Britain, with parts of Scotland and southern and eastern England left to nature. But this would require significant policy and socio-culture change in a country where 52% of land is already enclosed farmland and only 11% is woodland.

'Only a very brave politician would suggest abandoning British farms, or taking iconic woodlands or moorland grazed by sheep and turning them into wheat fields.'

She also notes that there are other factors: flood plains, biodiversity and insect life that would need to be taken into consideration. This is true enough. Impressive though the optimisation algorithms are on a global scale, the kind of changes that this paper suggests would be necessary would require detailed local planning and co-operation to achieve. We would not believe for one instant that a small group of academics in Germany could produce wholesale a plan to tell the world how to use its land. Indeed, in our pamphlet



Socialism as a Practical Alternative (tinyurl.com/2asnkn94) we note:

'In socialism a world specialist body like the FAO [Food and Agriculture Organisation] could be concerned with co-ordination, assistance and advice. It would be in a position to provide this service against a detailed world picture of all the problems associated with the need to increase world food production in ways which would be safe within the natural systems of the environment. This is not to suggest that such world bodies would be entirely centralized and operating from a single world location. They could operate regionally and locally and their members could be involved in any scale of activity where the necessity might arise.'

Freed from the imperatives of geopolitical confrontation between property owners and the incessant drive to make monetary profit, information from such studies as this *PNAS* paper could be part of a worldwide debate to democratically agree a common course of action, as well as guidance for local debate on implementation. Indeed, to even make their model work, the German academics had to assume an absence of trade barriers for food and water.

Even land non-use is important, as they note that their 'results further strengthen previous work that highlighted

the importance of conserving tropical and boreal forested regions for their unique climate regulation services [...] and emphasize that crop and fodder production should be focused on temperate and subtropical regions.' The logic of capitalism would see this as a waste, as it demands that everything be put to instrumental use in making profit, deliberately choosing not to exploit a resource is outside the capacity of the market system, no matter how vital it is to human survival.

Still, it is useful to note that the paper tells us that we have scope to increase food production, as well as a useful element in fighting climate change by securing more carbon in plants and soil.

It also shows us how computer algorithms and models can be applied to solving the world's problems, but, again, not in isolation or as a technocratic fix, but as part of an ongoing discussion and democratic decision. That's why it is important that the paper's authors have made some of their data and models available (github.com/slautenb/lpguessOptim) as a part of open science.

At each stage in the debate, to implement this sort of co-ordination would require openness and accountability.

PIK SMEET

'Take me to your leader'

THESE FIVE words became the supposed, and somewhat clichéd, request made by any alien stepping from their flying saucer. This brief statement makes a huge supposition; that a society so much more advanced than ours that it can traverse light-years of space still has leaders.

Not so different to humanity at present then. The implication is that leaders will always be a necessary feature of any society. So, no possibility of socialism anywhere in the cosmos, never mind on Earth.

Fiction is often either reflective of what is, or speculative of what might be. Whilst science fiction has an honourable tradition of posing questions as to possible things to come, in this case, the alien(s) represent the world landed in, not some distant galaxy far, far away.

The role of leader in human society has taken a variety of forms, the monarchs of feudal times eventually giving way to presidential heads of state as capitalism developed. Even if, as in Britain, when there is nominally still a crowned head, the king or queen fulfils the role of president. The only difference is the method of selection, by ballot or birth.

It is not only states that have leaders of course. Industries have CEOs, with boards of directors and their chairmen/women.

The Socialist Party is an unusual political organisation in that it does not have leaders. Parties of the openly capitalist sort, usually locating themselves on the right wing, very much favour strong leadership. Those that would identify themselves as left, even those claiming to be socialist, also have prominent roles for leaders.

An ever-present problem for all leaders is that while they occupy the top spot, there are members of their own parties continually plotting their downfall to further personal ambitions. Even those who have no realistic chance of ever achieving exalted prominence will eagerly conspire against their leader if they feel their immediate interests are served. Never allow principles to intrude on personal advantage.

The recent example of Jeremy Corbyn's brief flirtation with high office is such a case. As Labour Party leader and, therefore, potential future prime minister, he did not exhibit unequivocal loyalty to the British state or its allies.

A toxic mix of media vitriol and Israeli self-interest was unleashed with the added force of his own MPs, fearing for their seats, becoming willing accomplices in his political assassination. The anti-Zionism equals anti-semitism campaign proved, despite its



absurdity in the main, a potent force.

However, as is usually the way with a poisoned chalice, it remains toxic for whoever next sips from it. Keir Starmer, proving his overwhelming loyalty to his own ambition, used the anti-Zionism equals anti-semitism weapon to quell and remove any lingering Corbynites, even expelling the man himself from the party he'd led.

However, what Starmer didn't foresee was the 7 October Hamas atrocities in Israel followed by the savagery of the Israeli response. As the number of dead in Gaza rose beyond 10,000 Starmer found himself politically hobbled by the very weapon that brought him the leadership.

Unable to denounce Israeli military actions or even call for a ceasefire without giving rise to accusations of, by his own use of the term, anti-semitism, his leadership was undermined. Labour politicians at local and parliamentary levels must either resign and undermine him, or deny their own consciences.

Leadership implies control and elevated insight when situations arise. The Boris Johnson Tory administration very quickly began to unravel when his government, based on charismatic populism but with little substance even in terms of its own politics, was confronted by the public health crisis of Covid.

The present inquiry into the handling of that epidemic has revealed self-interested factions vying for influence, but with nothing other than invective to say to each other. At the pinnacle of this maladministration teetered the former Prime Minister who less than a year previously had been lauded for his leadership in turning the 'red wall' blue. An appropriate colour considering the language of choice, or the choice language, of his 'team'.

It has been said that anyone wanting

to become a leader must possess a personality that should debar them from becoming one. It is a role for a human demiurge to create a political world in his or her own image for which the required infallibility is always lacking.

Even a cursory scan of history in the capitalist era demonstrates how misguided it is to place human hopes and aspirations in the hands of leaders no matter what qualities they claim to have to navigate 'their' people to a better future.

The Russian revolution, whatever the claims of Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin, did not, and could not, lead to human emancipation and socialism. A Führer only leads to barbarity via the rhetoric of lebensraum and a Third Reich. The 'Great Helmsman' steered his state vessel onto the rocks of the Cultural Revolution.

Following a leader amounts to an abnegation of responsibility. It is people wanting an individual to deliver a better way of living for them. There is a better way for humanity to live, but it will never come about at the behest of some enlightened leader.

That better way- beyond capitalism and its attendant problems of exploitation, poverty, nationalism and war- is socialism. A moneyless worldwide commonwealth to which people will contribute in the very best way they can and have their needs met. A truly democratic society without need of, or any role for, leaders.

Should a flying saucer or otherwise unimagined vehicle traverse the cosmos and land on Earth, when the being steps from the craft a universal translator may allow a question to be clearly posed: 'You want to take me to your leader? Why are you still inhibiting human progress with leaders?'

DAVE ALTON

It's that time of *year* again

'MANY PEOPLE complain that the Christmas sales campaign starts too early. But as the market is stimulated to grow, and as it grows, so will the effort to exploit it. This might mean an even longer sales drive in the future—wasn't there a story about a business man who said that Christmas was good business as long as they kept religion out of it?' (*Socialist Standard*, December 1965).

Although it appears to have been so three months ago because that's when Christmas commodities started to appear in retail outlets. Even more than the rest of the year the mantra is purchase, buy, consume, spend!

It's no wonder that alcohol consumption soars and family rows escalate in this period of joy and peace. Coping with capitalism creates enough stresses on a daily basis in itself but, at this time of the year, especially for parents, but not just confined to them; they increase many-fold life's everyday pressures.

Sympathy must go out for one to the residents of towns served by Medway Council in Kent because it has 'cancelled all its Christmas lights this year just to save £75,000. Medway Council in Kent announced the "sad and difficult decision" after identifying a potential overspend of £17 million this financial year.' Local folk have labelled the Council 'Scrooge' (*Sun*, 10 October).

Think that can be filed under the heading of 'First World Problems'.

Snowflakes

It's very hard to get through this period without Charles Dickens and *A Christmas Carol* impinging in some way or other. George Bernard Shaw, channelling Scrooge, (before the ghost's visitations) in a 1946 letter to *Reynolds News* expressed his vehement opposition to Christmas:

'I am sorry to have to introduce the subject of Christmas. It is an indecent subject; a cruel, gluttonous subject; a drunken, disorderly subject; a wasteful, disastrous subject; a wicked, cadging, lying, filthy, blasphemous and demoralizing subject. Christmas is forced on a reluctant and disgusted nation by the shopkeepers and the press: on its own merits it would wither and shrivel in the fiery breath of universal hatred; and anyone who looked back to it would be turned into a pillar of greasy sausages.'

Perhaps Santa let him down as a child. Proper pantomime villain, boo, hiss? Did Outraged Christian of Easily Offended



inundate the letters page with their outrage? The latter-day aficionados of Christmas are rushing to social media to express their umbrage at a particular seasonal advertisement.

Speaking of outrage, there's always a competition amongst capitalist enterprises to 'win' the best Christmas advertisement. The purpose being to maximise sales in the 'golden quarter.' Back in November an 'edgy' anti-Christmas advertisement from Marks and Spencer apparently upset some as M & S were forced to apologise because the destruction shown of party hats in an open fire was deemed to be an insult to Palestine. How, you ask? The colours of the hats were also those of the Palestinian flag! Even socialists know that red and green are traditional Christmas colours.

This is surely taking taking offence to the level of the absurd. The events across the world in 2023 are more demanding of offence, outrage and umbrage.

A world of dread and fear

John Donne's 1624 Meditation XVII piece, *No Man is an Island* seems particularly relevant almost four hundred years on:

*No man is an Iland, intire of itselfe;
every man is a peece of the Continent,
a part of the maine; if a Clod bee washed
away by the Sea, Europe is the lesse, as
well as if a Promontorie were, as well as if
a Manor of thy friends or of thine
owne were; any mans death diminishes
me, because I am involved in Mankinde;
And therefore never send to know for
whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee.*

As in other years of mass bloody conflicts the bell has tolled for far too many in 2023 in places other than Europe.

Almost forty years ago Band Aid

released a charity record, *Do they know it's Christmas?* in response to famine in Ethiopia. The lyric included, 'It's Christmas time, There's no need to be afraid, At Christmas time we let in light and we banish shade'. And 'There's a world outside your window, And it's a world of dread and fear'. It is to be fervently hoped that, over the intervening weeks, the chilling prospect of more 'dread and fear' will not have spread to a far wider arena.

In 1961, at his presidential inauguration, John F Kennedy said, 'Ask not what your country can do for you but ask what you can do for your country.' Sixty plus years on this exhortation would seem to now mean ask what you can do for the capitalist state engaged in armed conflict with the full support of the capitalist state where you reside – or else. A reminder that the global working class have no country. Patriotism is the refuge of the scoundrel, even if it is being forced upon many; but many, even if they do not, as of yet, understand that socialism is the only viable solution, are resisting the brainwashing and propaganda. But, without the realisation that socialism is the only alternative, nothing will change.

When the working class of many states were engaged in capitalist wars in the early part of the twentieth century, black humour was much evident as a way of coping with great adversity.

Bairnfather's 1915 cartoon of two British soldiers under fire in a foxhole with the caption 'If you knows of a better 'ole then go to it' is an example.

Well, we do know of a 'better 'ole'. It's a money-free, leader-free, state-free society where conflicts and wars are forever abolished and consigned to the dustbin of history.

DC

Human Rights and Human Wrongs

As the government considers whether to press on with yet another scheme that rides roughshod over human rights law, we must remind ourselves that rights are not really all they're cracked up to be.

WITH THE UK Supreme Court's recent ruling that the government's plan to deport refugees to Rwanda is unlawful, the attention of the political bubble in Westminster has turned once again to the Tory Party's favourite bugbear, the Human Rights Act. Once again, the talking heads of British ideological conservatism have been trotted out to denounce the perceived pernicious influence of foreign judges, and call for the repeal of this allegedly unfair and un-British piece of legislation. The debate over the future of the much-maligned Act, which incorporates the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights into British law, has been brought to a boil in recent times by numerous pieces of government legislation which call into question its hallowed principles.

High-profile and divisive environmental protests by groups such as Just Stop Oil, and Britain's largest wave of strikes since the late 1980s, have both resulted in repressive legislation, in the form of a

Public Order Act and a Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act, both given Royal Assent in July this year. Before this, questions of human rights were raised by the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Act 2021 and the Covert Human Intelligence Sources (Criminal Conduct) Act 2021, both designed to grant immunity to certain agents of the state for infringements of the ordinary law.

Over in the liberal quadrant of the political spectrum, left-wing voices have reacted to such legislation with horror and dismay. For instance, in a recent interview on its website with Oliver Eagleton, Momentum, the ex-fan club of the ex-Labour leader, referred to this slew of new legislation as the 'British State's Authoritarian Turn'. Similarly, in response to the Supreme Court's Rwanda judgment, Akiko Hart, the Interim Director of civil liberties pressure group, Liberty, accused the government of 'dismantling the protections that keep us safe and allow us to challenge injustice' so that 'only they can win.' On its website, Liberty hails the Human Rights Act as meaning that 'you can defend your rights in UK courts' and compel public bodies to 'treat everyone equally, with fairness, dignity and respect.' So the debate goes on.

In the mainstream perception of modern politics, socialists are expected by rote to join the chorus of voices crying out

to protect our rights. There is certainly high pedigree in this expectation. After all, high-profile Labour Party figures have been supporting civil liberties as long as the party has existed; Clement Attlee and Harold Laski were founding members of Liberty in 1932, in response to police violence against hunger marchers. But this common conception of socialists as civil liberties crusaders is, ironically, further proof of these so-called socialists' lack of any real red credentials.

This is not to say that socialists are opposed to the notion that people should be able to protest without being beaten up or arrested, or that individuals should not be dealt with unfairly. Rather, the socialist accepts that to expect such things from the capitalist state is a fairy tale. Human rights law is a noble thing, but under a capitalist economy, nobility is a bourgeois virtue. In reality, human rights rest upon a fundamental – wilful, gleeful – ignorance about the basis of capitalist society.

Bourgeois law, the law of the capitalist state, rests on a fundamental incompatibility between words and deeds, as recognised by all socialists; that the law treats us as free and equal individuals, but the economy treats us as slaves. This contradiction was at the heart of Marx's thesis in *On the Jewish Question*. As Marx argued there, the political state is 'the species life of man in opposition to his material life.' The political realm is based upon citizenship, egalitarianism, and rights; civil society is based upon egoism, cut-throat dealings, and cold-hearted, calculated egoism. Thus we live in a world where voters starve, and citizens sleep in bus stations. We all have the right (at least on paper) to vote and protest our government, but none of us has the right to eat.

The self-proclaimed socialists of today's capitalist left, in the Labour Party and outside it, would do well to remember the words of Evgeni Pashukanis, the Soviet judge and jurist whose seminal *General Theory of Law and Marxism* turns 100 next year:

'The constitutional state (*Rechtsstaat*) is a mirage, but one which suits the bourgeoisie very well, for it replaces



withered religious ideology and conceals the fact of the bourgeoisie's hegemony from the eyes of the masses'.

Pashukanis points to the 'ties of mutual dependence' between, for instance, peasants and landowners, or wage workers and capitalists. To Pashukanis (as to all Marxian socialists), it is these relationships of dependency which form the *real* basis of the state and its law. These ties are material ties, concerning our relationship to the sources of life, and affecting our ability to provide for ourselves as individuals. The law – law of property, law of contract, criminal law etc – are the state's ideological reflection of these material ties. These material dependencies are the core from which the bourgeois state grows, and from which its law emanates. But to the legal theory of the state 'it is as if they did not exist.' To put the point in a more literary fashion, one need only note the wise words of Anatole France:

'The law, in its majestic equality, forbids rich and poor alike to sleep under bridges, beg in the streets, and steal loaves of bread'.

Sam Moyn, an American liberal professor, notes in his 2018 critique of human rights law, *Not Enough: Human Rights in an Unequal World*, that until the late twentieth century 'people were overwhelmingly more likely to utter the word socialism than the phrase human rights in every language'. The growth of mainstream human rights politics has coincided with the death of a politics which, though flawed, sought if nothing else to articulate a vision of human freedom which reached beyond the confines of the bourgeois state and its limited rights; one based not upon legalistic idealism and the daydreams of bourgeois academics, but upon a recognition of the realities of a class-divided society.

In reality, we are not free, and no amount of human rights can change that. The Human Rights Act may sometimes allow you to enforce your rights in a British court, to a limited extent. But it does not guarantee fair treatment or dignity. The bills of rights and international treaties of the world cannot ever hope to accomplish such a colossal task when control of the resources and productive machinery of the world, on which we all depend for our day-to-day existence, is centralised in the hands of a tiny minority of individuals and regulated by the anarchy of a global market whose arbitrary spasms can bring down elected governments and throw millions into destitution overnight.

In reality, human freedom cannot be contained in the narrow and self-defeating

limitations of human rights. Human rights – severely limited in scope, and enforced by capitalist states through gritted teeth or not at all – are merely a slapstick imitation of the idea that humans should live with dignity, respect, and community.

Socialists believe not in the 'human right' of the egoistic individual, but in the human freedom of the entire species. We gain our freedom by abolishing our rights; by abolishing the degrading class-divided economic structure and its authoritarian states which generate rights like a fire generates smoke. So if you wake up every morning to face the daily grind of wage

labour, poverty, or the jackboot and the billy club; if you are struggling to be free in a world which has turned its back on you, stand up not for human rights, but for socialism. Forget the insipid and mealy-mouthed lawyer's justice, and stand for a world where the means of life – the productive machinery of society and the goods it produces – belong not to one class, but to everybody as a community.

'[Y]ou are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody' (Jean-Jacques Rousseau).

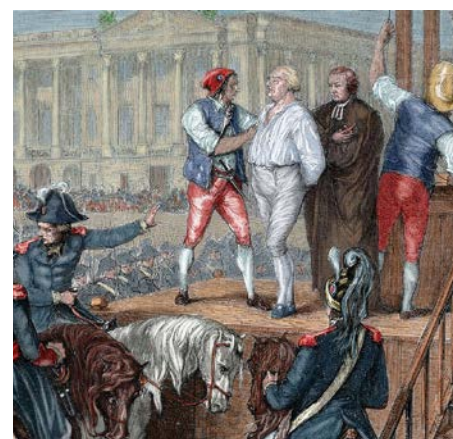
UTHER NAYSMITH

From ideology to humanity

HUMANS MAKE history, but, up to the present, they have made it largely unconsciously – which rules out, really, any so-called 'conspiracy theory'. They respond to social evolution *ideologically*, which is not the same as saying that ideology alone motivates action. Ideology is part of the *conscious* motivation of a largely only semi-conscious (in socio-economic terms) mass of people. This was truer in former times than it is now, at least in the advanced industrialised countries, when today we have mass communication and information bombardment on an unprecedented, global, scale, which unites people from all over the world *in real terms* as never before – even if this yet evades the consciousness of the overwhelming majority.

The bourgeois revolution in Europe alone took a multitude of ideological forms, therefore, from Humanism to Calvinist puritanism, from democratic puritanism to the deism and atheist-materialism of the Enlightenment, from Luther to Lenin, all depending on the epoch and the social circumstances in which people found themselves. All these different ideologies expressed an unconscious movement out of feudalism and into capitalism – *that is the real, but unconscious, motivating factor*. The conscious factors are the ideologies, religious and political, finding expression through polemics and philosophy, literature and art, and also through militarism and (following the emergence of nation-states) the rise of nationalism.

The socialist revolution will be the first – in emancipating *the last class to*



be emancipated – to require full majority consciousness, in that, because of its requirements, it cannot be achieved (unlike former social revolutions) by a minority leading others, but has to encompass a broad population that is fully conscious of its socio-economic tasks. The end of class society therefore marks the end of *ideology as currently understood*, and the emergence of *humanity*. Ideas in socialism will be the expression of individual thought, choice, and action. Where there are no classes, thinking will come into its own, as there will be no class to keep others in an exploitable position through the imposition of an ideology. Classlessness necessarily leads to individuality, as Wilde predicted. Under these conditions, art and literature, and science, will blossom as never before, benefiting from each person's unique and individually rooted contribution.

A.W.

What drives the capitalist economy

ONE THING that cannot change whilst capitalism lasts is the fact that workers, being forced to sell their working abilities to a capitalist by virtue of being alienated from the means of wealth production, will only be employed by the capitalist on condition that the value of what they are paid falls significantly below the value of their labour input – what they contribute in terms of their labour to the product in question. This surplus value is the source of the capitalist's unearned income and is realised when that product is sold on the market.

This system cannot possibly allow that the workers should be entitled to the full fruits of their labour. A business, after all, is not a charity; it needs to secure what in economic parlance is called a financial return. The systemic need for a tiny minority to extract an economic surplus from the great majority makes it structurally impossible for all but this minority to live off an unearned income from what they invest.

By 'need' is not meant the desire on the part of those comprising this tiny minority to surround themselves with the trappings of ostentatious luxury. Self-enrichment is, in any case, more a want or a whim than a need. In this regard, Victor Hugo's famous observation that 'The paradise of the rich is made out of the hell of the poor' could very easily be misconstrued. It is not out of some particularly malevolent, or sociopathic, disregard on the part of the rich for the plight of the poor (though, doubtless, one or two individuals might well live up to this caricature) that we have a problem of working-class economic distress.

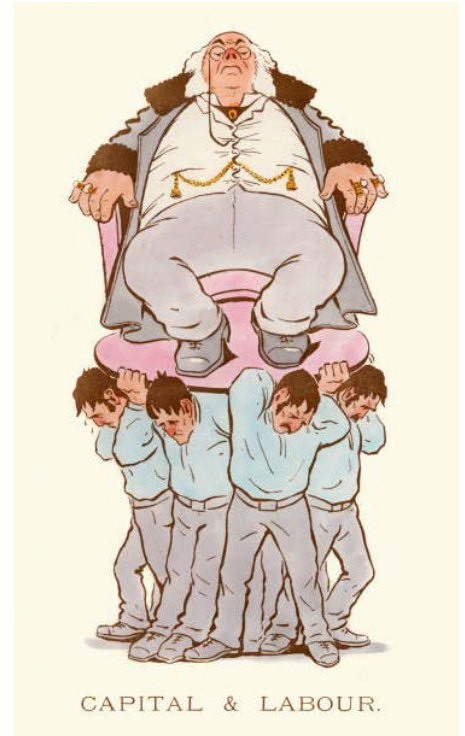
Unfortunately, this way of thinking lends itself to an all too facile – not to say, downright misleading – approach to resolving that problem. According to it, this problem essentially boils down to the moral shortcomings or defects of particular individuals or groups. Thus, it is because of greedy bankers or heartless or uncaring corporations that we have homeless itinerants, grossly polluted waterways and third-world-type sweatshops in which impoverished machinists toil for a pittance in a gruelling twelve hour working day. If only they were more caring, more concerned, these kinds of issues would recede, if not disappear altogether. It is not difficult to

see how such thinking can play directly into the hands of those fervent exponents of modern 'philanthro-capitalism' and its curious belief that the way forward is to harness old-fashioned patronising capitalist philanthropy with the skills and corporate insights of capitalist entrepreneurship.

The point is that whatever may personally motivate the individual capitalist this is really incidental or secondary to what actually drives the system they conspicuously benefit from. The spectacular personal fortunes of the minority are more the by-product of, than the objective behind, the systemic extraction of economic surpluses from the majority. The primary purpose of this extractive – or more precisely, exploitative – process is, rather, the capitalisation of those very economic surpluses that such a process gives rise to. Transforming them into capital ensures a future flow of such surpluses. It is a cyclical process that repeats itself over and over again and it is essentially what has delivered the grotesquely unequal world we live in today.

In capitalism, market competition between enterprises forces each enterprise to seek out ways in which it can enlarge its share of the market at the expense of its rivals. This is not a matter of choice. Just as the worker is economically compelled to seek paid work in order to live in a society in which almost everything comes with a price tag, so capitalists are economically compelled to become competitive (regardless of what her particular moral outlook on life may be). Failing to keep up with the competition means sooner or later, being squeezed out of the market by one's more ruthless and single-minded competitors. In other words, being bankrupted, or maybe asset-stripped and gobbled up, by the latter.

To keep up with the competition you need to hold down your operating costs (and, in particular, your wages bill) as far as practically possible and, at the same, time boost your revenue – the money you receive when you sell your commodity on the market. Boosting your revenue typically involves trying to undercut your competitors pricewise. In theory, this should bring in more customers for you and at their expense. However, being able



to reduce your prices (and keep financially afloat) requires investing in more productive technology, among other things.

That is where the need to have an economic surplus at your disposal is all-important. It is the very lifeblood of the system itself in much the same way that a vampire depends on the blood of its victims for its own sustenance. It allows you to finance the replacement of outdated and possibly worn-out equipment with new state-of-the-art machinery. Increased productivity means being able to reduce your unit costs – and hence your prices – below what your competitors can afford. The desired effect is to push them out of the market altogether, allowing you to capture their share of that market.

It is a ruthless game in which no prisoners are taken, and no holds are barred. If you don't do to your opponents what this dog-eat-dog system bids you to do then you can be certain they will try to do it to you. It's a case of 'natural selection' transferred to the economic domain.

In summary, then, businesses survive in the particular niche they occupy only by constantly striving to expand. Driving this whole process is the accumulation of capital out of surplus value.

ROBIN COX

Video review: Illustrate to Educate?

ILLUSTRATE TO EDUCATE is the overall title of a collection of short YouTube videos (<https://illustratetoeducate.com/>) which try to explain in simple terms and with the aid of colourful pencil illustrations and diagrams a wide range of ideas and topics as diverse as Buddhism, Halloween, Democracy, Easter, Climate Change, and, most recently, the Israel-Hamas conflict. The presenter of these videos, Dan Zimmerman, has been much praised for the clear and non-partisan nature of his videos (viewed by many thousands of people) and for the way he generally strives to present more than one side to a subject or an argument. We can see this confirmed in two of his recent videos, 'What is Socialism' (tinyurl.com/2p9hm2sh) and 'Marxism Explained' (tinyurl.com/bdaxn4a). So definitely a good idea, but what about the actual content of these videos?

Socialism

Well, unfortunately, the content does not always stand up to scrutiny. In the one on socialism, for example, the presenter fails to develop one of the key 'meanings' (in fact the original meaning) of the term itself: a co-operative, moneyless society based on common ownership. He does hint at it at the beginning by stating that socialism 'advocates for the collective ownership and control of the means of production and distribution'. But then he veers off, suggesting that 'socialism' can mean all sorts of different variations of the buying and selling society that we already have. Take your pick – 'nationalisation of industries', 'public-private partnerships', 'a planned economy', 'more equal' distribution of wealth. We are then told that 'socialism' has been 'implemented in various forms in countries around the world'. The examples given here are – perhaps inevitably – the state capitalist systems of the former Soviet Union, of China and of Cuba, all heralded as 'collective ownership' (which it isn't) and as 'a more co-operative approach to economic decision-making' (which it isn't either). But, at least, the presenter does then rightly go on to say that such regimes may create 'loss of individual freedom' and oppression (even while continuing to call them 'socialist').

Marxism

So the educational value of that particular 'Illustrate to Educate' video is definitely open to question, given its only passing mention of the original

meaning of the idea of socialism, the one originally popularised by one of its key advocates, Karl Marx. However, the opportunity to make up for this presents itself in the 'Marxism Explained' video in the series. And this one is certainly a lot better. In it, Dan Zimmerman correctly states Marx's analysis that the struggle between society's two classes, capitalists and workers, defines economic relations in capitalism and goes on to explain that, according to Marx, the imbalance in the monopoly of ownership and control of the means of production and resources by the capitalist class means that workers have little power and are often easily replaceable. He further talks about how capitalism employs social institutions such as government, education and the media to reinforce the status quo.

So far, so good. But then, unfortunately, this video too starts to go astray. For example, it refers to Marx foreseeing two stages of the development of future society, first socialism and then communism – this despite the fact that in his writings Marx makes clear that his use of the two terms is interchangeable and both mean a moneyless, wageless society based on common ownership.

The maker of the video also needs to reassess the question of the possible collapse of capitalism. He presents Marx as arguing for an inevitable collapse of capitalism either through its tendency to monopoly of ownership and consequent stifling of competition or because of the effects of the economic crises or depressions it is subject to. But nowhere in Marx is there a claim that concentration or monopoly of ownership will automatically bring with it the collapse of the capitalist system. As for crises or depressions, Marx did see them as an inherent feature of capitalism – something confirmed by history since his time- but, rather than these signalling the end of capitalism, his argument was that they would simply lead

to a realignment of the existing system. Nothing, therefore, in Marx's writings to support the view that he was in any way an 'inevitalist'. His argument was simply that a new social system would happen only with a conscious and democratic majority ending it to replace capitalism with socialism. Nothing in Marx either to support the view of his ideas on revolution put forward by Dan Zimmerman that a revolution will happen by an 'enlightened vanguard' using capitalism's failures to seize control of the means of production and lead workers to socialism (or communism). Such an idea, common among those on the left of capitalist politics, did not originate in Marx but came much later – from Lenin and Trotsky in fact when they distorted Marx's ideas.

In its final minute, this video does at least make clear that Marx's vision is of a society 'without competition, money and private property' and one in which 'social classes and class struggle would not exist'. But then it spoils things again by expressing the view that such a society 'has never materialised and history suggests it is an unlikely and unworkable concept'. It has not happened so far and so never can – a lame argument to say the least.

Objective?

So, despite Dan Zimmerman's claim to present videos that are 'objective', with this one he is at best only part way there. It is obviously good to be presented with more than one side to an argument, as Dan Zimmerman attempts to do, but you can only be truly even-handed if you have a detailed grasp of the topic you are presenting. This involves consulting, understanding and absorbing the writings of your subject of study, and one can't help wondering to what extent this has happened here.

HKM



A polite reply to a Jehovah's Witness

Dear Mrs J. W.

Thank you for your leaflet and discussion about your view that the answers to today's social problems can be found by reading the *Bible*.

I am a member of the World Socialist Movement. I respect those Christian groups such as yourselves who, like us socialists, refuse to participate in war, and the courage of the Jehovah's Witnesses, together with that of the Hutterites and Amish, during wartime is well known to me.

You are correct in saying that the money is there for governments to choose what to spend it on. But they don't really have a choice. All governments are bound to put profits, and the defence of profit-making (ie, military expenditure), before people and their needs. They cannot help but do so, since the nation-state is the executive arm of the minority who own and control the world's resources with a view to the accumulation of capital – the capitalist class. They cannot act in any other way. While the planet's resources are monopolised by a minority of the population, the demands of profit-making will always come before the needs of people. This is why military expenditure is a priority for governments. The capitalists of each country are obliged to maintain the threat of war in the face of the cut-throat commercial competition which is capitalism. Even though the profit-system is suicidal to the capitalists themselves, and to all of us (modern warfare, including nuclear weaponry, pollution, despoliation

of the Earth, etc), while the Earth remains the property of a minority ruling class this will always be the case.

What you know as the *Bible* consists in fact of only a tiny number of Christian texts which were chosen out of hundreds (which were destroyed) by the established clergy of the Byzantine Empire. These men would hardly be considered Christians by you, yet you take their choice among the Christian canon as your book known as the *Bible* today and which you call the 'Word of God'. While burning the books of the Christians which were unacceptable to the official Orthodox Church at the time of the Council of Nicaea, these same officials who established the *Bible* as it is known today also burnt the Christians whose scriptures were at odds with the state-church alliance of Byzantium. So what you call the *Bible* is but an altered and much tampered-with fragment of a much larger body of Christian scripture, most of which has disappeared.

But that is neither here nor there for me, since I accept nothing on authority, and if some morsels of wisdom are to be gleaned from the *Bible*, the same is true of other books too. It is my experience, and surely yours too, that people can see in the *Bible* whatever they choose to see and expound accordingly. It is in the realm of the natural world and of human society and history in which we must search for the truth, not in that of ancient mythology, nor of ancient mythology rehashed to suit today's people and their own confused imaginings.

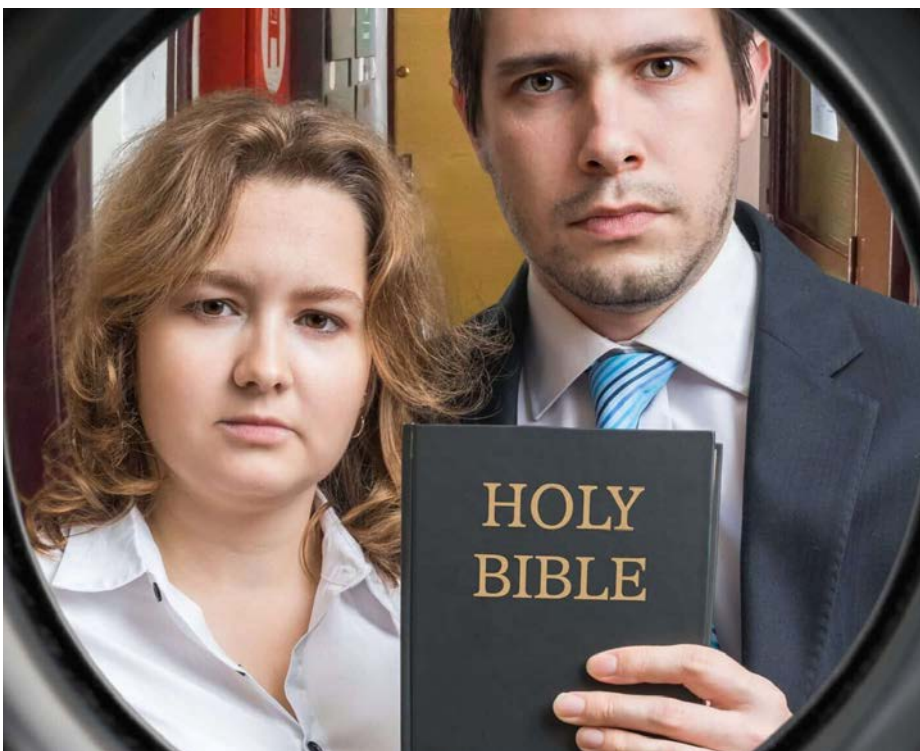
Very many people are opposed to the state of affairs (capitalism, by whatever name they call it) prevailing today. If they weren't, they wouldn't give a sou to charities, yet they do. We see them reaching into their pocket frequently. Thousands of people around the world work actively in charitable organisations, and also in ecological, political organisations, anti-war associations, Red Cross and so on. Others train arduously to be nurses and doctors, earning very little money for doing so and travelling to out-of-the-way places hoping to ease the suffering of others.

All this hardly fits with the picture painted by you of 'self-loving' people with no natural affection, etc. In fact, everyone points to others when questioned about the world's ills, saying 'I would be happy to help others and do this, and establish a world of justice and goodness, but others would obstruct it'. In other words, they all point to other people (never themselves) as the reason why 'things will never change for the better.' As everyone tends to do this, we end up with millions apparently willing and eager to bring about a better world, but each pointing to the rest who, they all say, would 'obstruct' it! The picture is not one of 'evil' or selfishness, but of blindness toward our collective strength and power – a sense of alienation from one another which seems to leave no option but that of apathy and a timid 'waiting for the awful end to come' etc, ... Which serves capitalism very well indeed.

And religion (all religion) assists in this cultivation of apathy and helplessness. Not so much tiny groups like yourselves, who have very little influence, but the whole perverse doctrine of an omnipotent Supreme Being who governs the universe and who urges us (by means of religious books etc) to 'resist our evil human nature'.

Christianity especially, with its doctrine of Original Sin (today rehashed by secular conservatives as 'human nature' – the myth of innate evil) tells us we are helpless in the face of the social evils we have ourselves brought about. It tells us to forget about changing society (above all to forget about expropriating our masters) and set our sights on a future paradise which 'God' has prepared for us after death (no wonder this suited so well the Byzantine hierarchy which established the Christian *Bible* as a 'holy book'! It has suited all ruling classes ever since!).

In short, religion sustains class rule, and the evils arising from it (famine, warfare, poverty and so on) by divorcing



humanity itself from the possibility of real solutions. It condemns humans to prayerful, penitent, charitable acceptance of the existing order of things, and to social and political inactivity and dependence on leaders, whether clerical or secular. Because, religion says, real change is not in the power of man, but of God – that mythical Supreme Being who has ordained things as they are and in the face of which we can but kneel, pray, and try to ease suffering while we await 'His coming'. It is not our job, says religion, to root out the cause of suffering, or to take the Earth into the hands of the majority of its human inhabitants. It is not our job, says religion, because we are, basically, evil, hateful and

good-for-nothing; seduced by the serpent and redeemable only through God's will.

What an ally religion is to the capitalist class! What an enemy and obstruction to human emancipation and self-realisation!

I have no wish to be meek. We cannot afford to be meek. Our task must be, as members of the majority working class, to expropriate the minority who own the world's wealth and resources in the rampant interest of profit. We must organise as a class and dispossess this minority, so that, with the Earth's resources in the hands, democratically, of us all, a society of real co-operation, a society of free access, without nation-states, without frontiers, without wars,

poverty and famine, can at last be established.

Meekness is the watchword of those who would have us meek. Of those whom superstition serves, as a useful tool, for keeping us on penitential knees.

Far from happiness being provided by religion, religion occurs where real happiness is absent. Paradise in the sky is and always has been a poor substitute for real heaven on Earth. Religion is

'... the sigh of the oppressed creature. The opium of the people.'

Sincerely yours,

A. W.

Pro-Palestine or Anti-War?

EVERY WEEKEND there have been protests and demonstrations about what is happening to the population of Gaza. Water, electricity and fuel are cut off. Hospitals, schools and residential buildings are bombed. Hundreds are killed every day and many more injured. Over a million have been displaced.

Naturally people are horrified by what they see on their television screens is happening and, equally naturally, want it to stop. So do we. Despite this, most politicians will only go as far as asking for a 'humanitarian pause' — after which the siege, the bombings, the killings, and the destruction can continue as before.

Some of the demonstrators are openly pro-Hamas chanting 'from the river to the sea.' Maybe some are doing it as an act of defiance as the government and the media have called for the police to ban it. But do they realise the implications of what, literally, they calling for — an Islamic state in the whole of Palestine including what is now Israel? How could that be achieved without further massacres and misery, if only because as much 40 percent of those living there are not Muslims but Jews and Christians who are likely to resist it? In any event, it doesn't reflect the just-stop-the-killings sentiment of most people and even most demonstrators.

Others are calling for a 'free Palestine', by which they mean an independent state either alongside or incorporating Israel. That might reduce the added oppression which the population of the West Bank and Gaza now suffer but it would not solve the basic problem facing workers there of being excluded from the means of living and forced by economic necessity to work for those who own them on condition of producing profits for them. Nationalism is



no solution; in fact, whether it is Jewish or Palestinian, it's part of the problem.

The protests are unobjectionable as a simple protest against the horrors of war and a simple cry that the suffering caused by an ongoing war should just stop, naive as this may be. Given capitalism and the clash of interests between the profit-taking few that is built into it, no side in a war is going to stop just because innocent people are being killed, injured, displaced or otherwise 'collateral damage'. States fight wars to win and will always do what it takes to achieve this, despite Geneva Conventions and so-called international humanitarian law.

As socialists we object not just to particular wars but to all wars and not just to all wars but to the system that breeds them — the worldwide capitalist system of competition for profits between rival capitalist groupings and the states that protect them which brings them into conflict over sources of raw materials,

trade routes, markets and investment outlets. In the present war the greater issue is who controls the oilfields in the Persian Gulf and the trade route out of it, with Israel being supported by the West to counter the threat there from Iran and Iran promoting militant Islamism to undermine Israel.

The solution in Palestine is not to establish a Palestine state nor to demolish the state of Israel. It's not a one-state solution or a two-state solution or any sort of re-arrangement of frontiers and areas of political control. That would still leave the underlying economic system the same. It's a worldwide system, without borders, where the Earth's resources will have become the common heritage of all humanity and used to produce what people need rather than to make profits for the few who currently own and control them. That's the only way to lasting peace not just in Palestine but throughout the world.

ADAM BUICK

Progress and pauperism

ELON MUSK supports capitalism. Well, is the Pope a Catholic? In a tweet on 23 October he recommended a new book called *The Capitalist Manifesto*. 'This book', he tweeted, 'is an excellent explanation of why capitalism is not just successful, but morally right'. We are not concerned here with the contents of the book, by Johan Norbert, subtitled '*Why the Global Free Market Will Save the World*' — another time perhaps — but with a passage in the press release the publishers put out:

'Marx and Engels were right when they observed in *The Communist Manifesto* that free markets had in a short time created greater prosperity and more technological innovation than all previous generations combined.'

Marx and Engels certainly made the second point, almost textually, writing:

'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'.

But there is nothing in *the Communist Manifesto* about capitalism creating 'greater prosperity.' On the contrary. If anything, Marx and Engels went too far in the opposite direction, ending the same section:

'The modern labourer (...) instead of rising with the process of industry, sinks

deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class. He becomes a pauper, and pauperism develops more rapidly than population and wealth'.

The complete pauperisation of the working class did not happen in the long run — at the time Marx and Engels didn't think that capitalism was going to have a long run — but a growth in workers maintained by the Poor Law was an immediate effect of the Industrial Revolution, so theirs was an accurate observation of the situation in 1848.

In exile in England in the early 1850s, Marx and Engels came to realise that they had been mistaken in believing that a working-class communist revolution had been likely in 1848. Marx settled down to studying how capitalism worked, the result being the publication of the first volume of *Capital* in 1867.

Nobody who has read *Capital*, particularly the historical parts, could claim that Marx 'observed that free markets had ... created greater prosperity'. Marx described in detail, on the basis of official government publications, the terrible working and living conditions of workers in a whole series of industries. In section 4 of chapter 25 on 'Different Forms of the relative surplus population', he returned to the question of 'pauperism'.

He now no longer argued that as capitalism progressed all workers would tend to be reduced to below subsistence level, to paupers. However, he still expected that some sections of the working class would be, 'that part of the working class which has forfeited its condition of existence (the sale of labour power), and vegetates upon public alms'; whose labour power was unsaleable because they were old, sick, disabled or industrially injured, but also because during the slump phase of the business cycle there was no demand for it.

Since capitalism needed a reserve army of labour and 'pauperism is the hospital of the active labour-army and the dead weight of the industrial reserve army', it 'forms a condition of capitalist production, and of the capitalist development of wealth'.

Marx has been proved right about this. Ever since his day a section of the working class — at least 1 in 10 — has had to 'vegetate on public alms' (until 1948 the Poor Law, later National Assistance, then Social Security, now Universal Credit) — and will as long as capitalism lasts. Technological innovations under capitalism may have solved the problem of how to produce enough wealth for everyone but as a system it is constitutionally incapable of distributing it so that everyone's needs are even adequately met.

Obituary – Jimmy Moir

Edinburgh Branch are saddened to report the death of Comrade Jimmy Moir in September at the age of 85. He left school at 15 and became a socialist after reading the *Socialist Standard* and listening to outdoor meetings at the Mound in Edinburgh (where he was later to speak himself), joining the Party in 1968. His last job was as a road worker for the Edinburgh Corporation/Lothian Regional Council where he was a NUPE shop steward. He said he never hesitated to put at union conferences the socialist analysis of worker/capitalist class relations and their struggle. He stood for the Party at the first Scottish government elections in 1999. Radio Scotland broadcast one of the hustings debates and he cut through our opponents' Blairite bullshit in his strong East Coast accent and railed against the poverty of the working class. Jimmy was a stalwart of the branch and at the time of his death was the branch secretary and treasurer. Comrades like him are difficult to replace.

Obituary – Peter Hendrie

We are sad to announce the death of Comrade Peter Hendrie following a short illness at the age of 91. A long-standing member of Glasgow Branch, he joined the party in the 1960s along with several other workers with whom he was employed in the painting and decorating industry. They were no doubt inspired by the Robert Tressell novel *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, which he often referred to in conversation.

Married to Anna, they had 2 sons, 3 granddaughters and 5 great grandchildren, and he was a regular attendee at Summer School along with his son Alan. In the days when we still had outdoor propaganda meetings, Peter attended many of these: both in Glasgow and for a while during the 1980s in East Kilbride, where he also lived.

As well as undertaking secretarial and treasurer duties for the branch for many years, he was also a passionate member of the UCATT trade union and held various official roles in his local branch.

The Socialist Party has never found any need for leaders, but throughout its history it has always been fortunate to have had many outstanding members. Peter was one of those.

Glasgow Branch extend their sincere condolences to his family. He will be sadly missed.

Paul Edwards, Branch Secretary



Fashion Victims

ONLINE CLOTHES retailer Boohoo has found its niche as a go-to site for image-conscious teenagers and twentysomethings looking for a bargain. Its business model is that of 'fast fashion': producing versions of the newest clothing trends and getting them on sale cheaply and quickly while the style is still the latest and demand is at its highest. The working practices Boohoo has adopted to achieve a speedy turnaround have attracted complaints which prompted an official review of the company and its supply chain. Published in early 2021, this found that the allegations of poor working conditions were largely true. Boohoo responded by vowing to overhaul its methods, and detailed how in its 'Agenda For Change' plan. An edition of BBC One's *Panorama: Boohoo's Broken Promises* aimed to show that the agenda hasn't been followed and not much has changed.

Reporter Emma Lowther goes undercover at Boohoo's head office in Manchester by getting a job as an admin assistant. Her colleagues' roles are to negotiate deals with smaller companies which make and supply the togs which Boohoo flogs. She uses her hidden camera to film other staff saying they lie to suppliers about invented rival offers in order to secure the cheapest deal. And even after a contract has been agreed, Boohoo staff have later imposed further reductions to the price.

The starting point for a deal would be low anyway. Boohoo's clothes are often made in factories across Asia where workers' pay is lower, conditions are shoddier and methods are more polluting than usually found in Western countries. Reports of workers making clothes for Boohoo in dismal circumstances haven't only come from outside the UK, though. Boohoo and other traders use dozens of suppliers in Leicester, whose staff have held protests for more job security and higher wages. Another undercover reporter gets a job at one supplier, MM Leicester Clothing Limited. He covertly films people being shouted at by a manager who demands that they work late on an order. The rush is due to Boohoo wanting the 'lead' time between when it orders its stock and when it receives it to be as short as possible.

In January 2022, Boohoo opened its own flagship factory at Thurmaston Lane in Leicester, supposedly to demonstrate the reformed practices of its 'Agenda



Credit: BBC

For Change'. Panorama suggests that Thurmaston Lane is more like a PR-friendly front, distracting from how Boohoo still favours different sources for its stock. The 'centre of excellence' which is Thurmaston Lane only makes 1 percent of garments sold by Boohoo, and hundreds of orders contracted from there were really made in other factories in Leicester and Morocco with lower costs and standards. Boohoo says that this doesn't break any rules as although it has banned subcontracting within the UK since 2021, it allows contracting, which it claims is what it's doing, as Thurmaston Lane is part of Boohoo and can therefore contract out.

Boohoo's various tactics for securing cut-price deals from its suppliers mean that one of the brand's dresses costs the company £4.25 each to buy in from a UK supplier. This is then sold on to consumers for £15, making a hefty profit for Boohoo's owners. The documentary features Peter McAllister and Chris Grayer, specialists in the field of 'ethical trading'. McAllister describes this margin as 'completely bonkers', while Grayer calculates that a 'fair' amount for Boohoo to buy each dress for would be £7.23, allowing the supplier to make 10 percent profit. Boohoo's lawyers' justification for the big mark-up in the cost of the dress is that its suppliers still make a profit and their staff are paid at least the minimum wage.

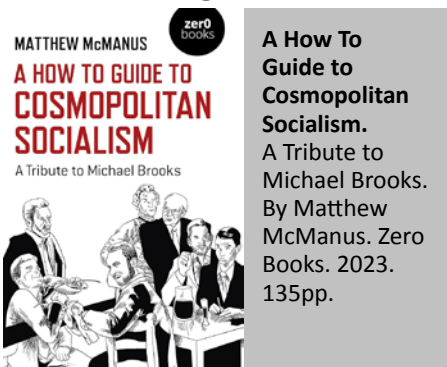
Boohoo's approach has been pushed by its multi-millionaire co-founder and Executive Chairman Mahmud Khamani. Following the review of Boohoo's practices which preceded its 'Agenda For Change' programme, he has meant to be getting less involved in the company's day-to-day running. But he still has an 'iron grip' by

sending out arrogant motivational videos to staff and personally approving all deals with suppliers. He and the other senior staff featured in the documentary share the same sad motivation: to make money by maximising the exploitation of those lower down the chain.

Lowther lasts ten weeks working in Boohoo HQ before getting sacked for making mistakes, and she's even less likely to get a good reference now they know she's a journalist. McAllister and Grayer say that what her footage and research has revealed is 'unacceptable' and 'unethical', flouting multiple rules and guidelines about how companies are meant to function. Regulators, along with professionals like McAllister and Grayer, want Boohoo (and, by extension, capitalism) to be run in a 'fair' way: decent working conditions, sufficient wages, honest trading. This utopian aim doesn't take into account how legislation can only ever try to make exploitation less unpleasant, nor how strong the drive to cut costs and corners to maximise profits is. Boohoo has gone further than other companies with how exploitative its methods are. Its approach has worked, if measured by how in 2022 it had sales of £1.7 billion from 18 million customers. Panorama's investigation illustrated some of the objectionable aspects of the fast fashion industry: misleading deals, appalling workplaces, forced overtime, low wages, which together enable high profits for the few. But the documentary's findings didn't damage Boohoo's standing. Its share price rose a little in the days after first broadcast, suggesting that its tawdry practices fit in well with how the market operates.

MIKE FOSTER

Leftwing academic



A How To Guide to Cosmopolitan Socialism.
A Tribute to Michael Brooks.
By Matthew McManus. Zero Books. 2023.
135pp.

Michael Brooks was an American talk show personality, political commentator and comedian, who died in 2020 at the age of 36. Little known in the UK and Europe, Brooks identified himself as a socialist, a Marxist humanist and an anti-capitalist and was well known for mixing political analysis with comedy and, as George Carlin before him, putting across 'controversial' social ideas with brio and verve.

This volume by left-wing academic Matthew McManus presents itself as a tribute to Brooks and to the ideas he was known for in his writing and public and media appearances. However, most of it contains little reference to the man or his ideas but rather puts forward McManus's own take on history and politics. What we have in the first half of the book is a brief, and not unconvincing, history of political thought from the earliest times to the present day, taking in the Greeks and Romans, St Augustine, the early 'liberals' (eg, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke), Kant's 'pure reason' theories, 19th century socialist 'internationalism', and then different kinds of modern capitalist ideology. At the same time the author discusses the relationship of that theory to social developments and events including war, slavery, religion, class division, and much else. He then presents his own theories on recent developments in capitalism, especially in the US, dividing these up into neoliberalism (seen as beginning with the free-market ideas of such figures as Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman and Thomas Sowell), neoconservatism (described as 'the ideological supplement to neoliberalism'), and then his own additional category, 'post-modern conservatism', ie, capitalism with an ultra-nationalist twist as under leaders like Trump and Bolsanaro.

Following this, in the final 35-page chapter of the book, entitled 'What Would a Cosmopolitan Socialism Look Like?', the author does place some focus on Brooks himself, in particular in a 7-page section sub-titled 'Michael Brooks' Cosmopolitan Socialism'. He explains that Brooks' vision of socialism was of a world that would end 'the division of society into contending

social classes' and in which 'all beings should be entitled to the freedom and well-being necessary to lead a life of flourishing'. At the same time, the point is made that Brooks favoured what the author here calls 'militant particularism', meaning that 'progressives' should not hesitate to involve themselves in reformist activity, since, as he puts it, 'it was Michael's insistence that an injustice anywhere in the world was very much our business'. In this connection the author too advocates 'socialist reforms' such as 'shortening the working week' and calls for 'limiting the influence of money'. Here of course we would part company both with Brooks and with the author of this book, on the grounds that involvement in reformism inevitably means putting the vision of a real socialist world, a democratic moneyless, wageless one of free access to all goods and services, on the back burner and eventually, as unfailingly happens with reformist groups and parties, losing sight of it altogether.

Here too this is precisely what seems to have happened with Brooks, for, despite the occasional references to the need for everyone to have a life of flourishing and to do away with contending social classes, there is no clear view of the democratic majority action that needs to be taken to establish such a society and indeed to the idea that it is even a feasible proposition. Instead we learn, for example, that Brooks was an admirer of Castro's Cuba and, indeed that this tribute to Brooks 'is intended as a quick primer on how the left can begin to think globally, even if we must continue to act locally'.

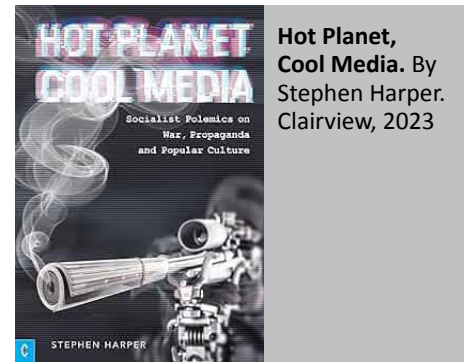
The other observation to be made about this book is that, while some of the time it uses clear, easily comprehensible language, too often it lapses into academic jargon which obscures rather than elucidates, seeming to go out of its way to make simple ideas over-complicated. To give just one example among many, to write that 'neoconservatism is consonant with the paradigm of liberal imperialist adventurism, which includes a long genealogy of Conradian harlequins from Disraeli through Kipling and Bush' is clearly no way to facilitate the understanding of readers. More generally, too, its theorising on the different incarnations or variations of capitalism (neoliberalism, neoconservatism, post-modern capitalism, etc) seems manifestly out of proportion to any practical differences these make to the lives of those who live under the capitalist system and to be irrelevant to the truly important question of how to replace the global system that capitalism is with a new global socialist system. Perhaps it is not surprising then that it fails to establish

a clear meaning at all for 'socialism', with shifting notions ranging from 'welfarism' within capitalism, elements of social organisation within the Soviet Union, and Chile under Allende (one of various 'socialist regimes' mentioned).

So while there can be no argument with observations such as 'the logic of the market precludes the socialization of resources' and the book's concluding call to 'construct a shared world together as equals', this is not matched by the author's take on how that world is to be conceived and on the action necessary to bring it into being.

HKM

Deciphering Disinformation



Hot Planet, Cool Media. By Stephen Harper. Clairview, 2023

As described by its subtitle, this is a compilation of socialist polemics on war, propaganda and popular culture, written between 2011 and 2022. In this near-decade, marked by populism, austerity and the smartphone, 'the morbid symptoms of a decrepit social system and the corresponding expressions of public anger and despair became more acute'.

The book's title, taken from one of its essays, refers to the gap between the state of the world and the media's inapt and inept interpretations of it. A principle which underpins the book is that a constructive way to react to society's grim events is to understand how and why information about them, in all its forms, is presented to us in the way it is. Many of the essays take war as an example: 2013's 'Back To Iraq' examines how the format of a BBC documentary about the war in Iraq enabled Western politicians to promote their account unchallenged, while ignoring economic considerations. Several insightful reviews of war films are included, such as *Unbroken* (2014), which displays a 'national chauvinism' that simplifies war into good versus bad. The formula common across most movies smooths out complications and reasserts traditional narratives, such as portraying the American army as always heroic.

Mainstream media, almost by definition, backs up the narrative most favourable to those with power and wealth: 'Whether

conservative or liberal, the loudest voices in the media are those of the ruling class'. As the essays explain, acceptance of our current social system lies beneath almost all political discourse, whether left or right wing. What are presented as alternatives to the status quo can still only act within the constraints of capitalism, such as when politicians and journalists 'talk excitedly of 'radical' reforms' or when the left lionises 'social-democratic saviour-figures' such as Barack Obama, Aung San Suu Kyi, Jeremy Corbyn and Jacinda Ardern.

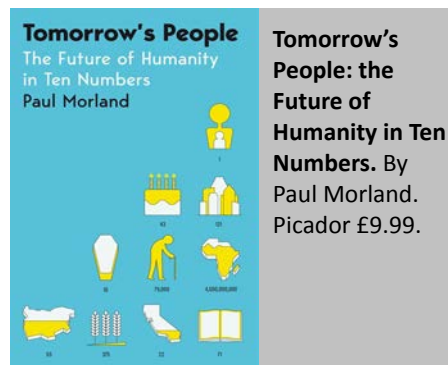
The partiality and misinformation which permeate mainstream and social media impact on us and how we relate to the world. Some people react by turning to 'conspiracy theories' which, as the 2020 essay 'Making A Conspiracy Out Of A Crisis' argues, to dismiss outright is as misguided as fanatically adhering to them. When people act by rioting, this is a reaction to 'the deeply felt but unarticulated experiences of social alienation and inequality', which the media glosses over with talk of 'yobs'. Mental distress is a more widespread response to our circumstances, although its social origins are downplayed when it is regarded and treated as a biological illness, according to the 2013 essay 'Mental Illness And The Media'.

The essays in *Hot Planet, Cool Media* usefully help us see and then see through the narratives dominant across the media. Once the biases of those on our screens are recognised, then the underlying social, economic and political causes of events and trends are revealed. Next is needed 'collective and conscious political action to abolish the system' that generates problems such as racism, war, alienation and climate change. This route to revolutionary consciousness is described with a welcome clarity and groundedness across the book's 66 essays. *Hot Planet, Cool Media* is definitely recommended to anyone wanting to make sense of the previous decade and how it has shaped the world today.

As his focus is on other people's interpretations, Stephen Harper doesn't write much about his own experiences. A lively exception is the 2019 essay Election Reflection, about when he took part in hustings for the Socialist Party's European Parliament Election campaign. He recounts (on p.160) that after one event 'one of the independent candidates turned to me and made a cryptic but intriguing comment: "you're right ... but you're too early". I was tempted to reply that with capitalism destroying the biosphere at an alarming rate, it's not a moment too soon for socialism.'

MF

Tomorrow's World?



Tomorrow's People: the Future of Humanity in Ten Numbers. By Paul Morland. Picador £9.99.

In September we reviewed Hamish McRae's *The World in 2050*, which, inter alia, makes some useful points about likely demographic changes, with ageing populations in many parts of the world but more youthful populations in Africa and India. Here Paul Morland discusses some similar issues, so we will focus on comments which differ from those made by McRae.

Improved education and literacy, particularly of women, have played a major role in reducing fertility rates. An extreme case is Singapore, where on average each woman has just one child. Many countries are becoming more like Denmark, with low fertility, very low infant mortality and long life expectancy. In the US there is a significant correlation between conservatism and high fertility, while in Israel the fertility rate is almost three children per woman. Deaths in childbirth in the US are over three times as high among black women as among white women.

Government policies can often restrict the number of children who are born, but it is much harder to achieve increased fertility rates. In China the one-child policy was relaxed in 2015 to a two-child policy, but the rate now is barely above 1.5 children per mother. It is likely that

by 2050 one person in twelve in China will be over 80. The ageing population and correspondingly smaller workforce in Japan may well be behind the low rate of economic growth, and an ageing population in Russia may have contributed to its economic decline.

Migration is one way of maintaining population and reducing the impact of ageing. In Western Europe for instance, immigrants are often younger than 'locals', and their fertility rate comes to more or less match that of those already living in the country. Younger people are supposedly more rebellious than their elders and more likely to protest, as they are more impulsive and have fewer responsibilities.

One ongoing change relates to urbanisation, with the proportion of town dwellers in the world having passed one half a few years ago, and likely to be around two-thirds by 2050. Urban food production can increase, with hydroponics enabling food to be grown indoors, 'with a regulated environment and perfectly measured inputs, including LED light'. This would mean fewer herbicides and pesticides than conventional agriculture, and less need to transport food over long distances.

As an illustration of the pace of recent changes, Morland records what a taxi-driver in Indonesia said to him: 'My dad and grandpa spent their lives crouching in the rice paddies. Driving a cab is much better than that, and now my son works in an air-conditioned office'. But what about his female relatives?

All in all, an informative and thought-provoking look at likely and possible futures, albeit without going beyond the current socio-economic system.

PB



The Middle East war: a letter to a Kiev cousin

Dear K,

I know that this letter won't reach you. Only if I were to express myself in subtle allusions might such a letter pass the censorship of the State Capitalist Russian Empire. But what I have to say must be said loud and clear. You may not hear me, but others will.

At last you hold an exit permit in your hand, your ticket to the promised land. In struggling for it, you were thrown out of your job by your bureaucratic bosses, who then sent you to a labour camp for a year on a charge of parasitism. It goes without saying, as they say, that you were guilty of being without a job — innocent people are not arrested in the Soviet Union, which has no unemployment anyway — as is well known! But tomorrow you board the train for Prague — destination Jerusalem.

Who can blame you for wanting to get out? For centuries the Ukraine has been the most deeply anti-semitic area of the Empire. Even now a Jew is occasionally knifed to death in the main square of a small market town while the “honest Soviet people” and the police look on. More commonplace are the occasions when your fellow citizens — not all of them, but enough — content themselves with spitting on the ground as they pass and muttering something about the Yids.

But I must admit to being out of sympathy with some of your complaints. While recounting how your kids have been discriminated against in education and work, you bemoan that

since the war the professions of Party bigwig, secret police desk-murderer and high Army officer are no longer open to Jews. But your Old Bolshevik grandfather, who fought in Trotsky's Red Army which suppressed the White pogroms in 1919 and later perished in a Stalinist death camp — your grandfather thought that he was fighting for a society of free and equal comrades, without exploitation or oppression of any kind, in which words like soldier, police, wages, boss would have become the obscure jargon of historians. Yes, but he forgot the technical and cultural preconditions of the Communist dawn, so far removed from the realities of a backward peasant country. In the State Capitalist despotism which arose to carry through industrialisation he was for a time a key administrator. Could he have imagined your strange complaint in his youth?

When you get out, you'll be leaving behind your sister, a convinced supporter of the Soviet system. A Party member, she thinks that the system is basically sound, a bit perverted but objectively progressive and so forth. She prefers to do her military service in a Soviet uniform, as you prefer to do yours in an Israeli uniform. And every four or five years the real thing.

Take care as you make your way to Israel. Young men and women, calling themselves Palestinian freedom fighters, may try to kidnap and shoot you. They know nothing of the Ukraine or of how you lived there. To them you are one more Zionist coming to usurp “their” land.

STEFEN

(Socialist Standard, December 1973)

Action Replay

Try and Try Again

RUGBY UNION has nothing like the global spread or financial clout of football. But the recent Rugby World Cup had twenty countries competing in the finals (including from South America and Oceania) and a further twenty-six in the qualifying matches, with a total TV audience claimed to be near one billion.

Some games were rather one-sided, but in others Tier 2 nations, as they are known, fared pretty well against the top teams. Samoa came close to beating England, and Fiji were indeed victorious against Australia. Rugby is spreading internationally, and union is the most popular sport in Fiji. However, Tier 2 nations claim not to get enough games against Tier 1 sides, which is what they need if they are to make notable improvements.

In many countries, though, the sport is encountering difficulties. Australia did badly at the World Cup, not qualifying for the last eight for the first time. Union is well down the list as a spectator sport there, with Australian Rules Football the most popular, and rugby league, soccer



and cricket all out-ranking union. Of these, only cricket is in the top ten for participant sports.

In England, too, union is facing problems. The top league, the Premiership, recently lost three of its thirteen clubs. London Irish, Wasps and Worcester have gone into

administration and may go out of business altogether. Wasps had moved from London to Coventry in 2014, but this did not solve their financial problems, and they are now exploring a possible move to Kent. One estimate is that Premiership clubs in all have debts of over half a billion pounds. The loss of income caused by Covid did not help, but essentially the problem is that, since going professional in 1995, English clubs' costs have greatly exceeded their revenue. Relying on wealthy benefactors may work for a while, but it is not a long-term solution.

In Wales, the structures for school and youth rugby have been re-organised, but that resulted in fewer and less competitive teams and fixtures. Many of the more promising players have moved to England to train and play, which in turn further weakens the domestic system.

The 2027 World Cup finals will be expanded to twenty-four teams, giving more opportunity to the lower-ranked nations. But it remains to be seen how much difference this will make to both the international game and domestically in countries where it's struggling.

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.

DECEMBER 2023 EVENTS

World Socialist Movement online meetings

Sundays at 19.30 (IST) Discord

Weekly WSP (India) meeting

Sunday 10 December 10.00 (GMT) Zoom Central Online Branch Meeting

Friday 1 December 19.30 (GMT) Zoom Did you see the News?

Discussion on recent subjects in the news

Host: Mike Browne

Friday 8 December 19.30 (GMT) Zoom Is a moneyless society possible?

Speaker: Richard Field

Friday 15 December 19.30 (GMT) Zoom German political culture and socialism

YouTube video commented on by Andrew Westley

Friday 22 December: No Meeting

Friday 29 December: No Meeting

Socialist Party Physical Meetings

BOLTON

Manchester Branch Social 8.30pm

Sweet Green Tavern, 127 Crook St, Bolton BL3 6DD
(opposite Bolton station).

CARDIFF

Street Stall Every Saturday

1pm-3pm (weather permitting)

Capitol Shopping Centre,
Queen Street (Newport Road end).



Declaration of Principles

This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e. land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class

will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

Nice twist: keep them happy – and **screw** them at the same time

AS SUMMER drew to a close, an open-air concert was held in the large park in South Wales close to where I live. The star of the show was the singer and social media personality, Sam Ryder, who last year represented the UK in the Eurovision Song Contest. Sam is popular and the tickets, some of them costing £70, went like hot cakes. The trouble was that the crowd didn't get quite what they expected.

Squashed like sardines

First of all it poured down, so torrential rain and umbrellas made it difficult for fans to get a proper view of what was happening on stage. And then, even in the sheltered VIP area, people, so the local paper reported, were 'squashed in like sardines', with one fan quoted as saying: 'This half-baked shelter resembled an emergency station rather than anything remotely resembling a VIP marquee'. It was an extra £50 if fans wanted a 'sunbed' there, from which, in the words of one of them, 'you got insane views of the stage – you could barely see it'. And the price of refreshments shocked some – £10 for a can of flavoured vodka, £12 for a bag of chips and £40 for a bottle of wine (you couldn't buy a glass). The only concession – don't laugh now – was that entry was free for children under two.

A substitute for life?

So it was essentially a money-making enterprise, or, as one soaked-through, disgruntled fan put it, 'profiteering plain and simple'. But why did people go? And why do people keep going to these events put on by the 'entertainment industry', which so often result in disappointment and dissatisfaction? One commentator has said that it's an integral part of a system that sells 'weekend thrills' to people who have to spend most of their working hours engaged in activity (ie, employment) that they find neither fulfilling nor meaningful. On that reckoning, it's an attempt to substitute for the lack of interest, meaning and satisfaction workers derive from the job they're obliged to do to survive where they're regarded as a resource in the money-making machine rather than appreciated as a social asset.

And, if this is the case for music gigs,



the same could be said about the various sports events, again mainly organised at weekends, where baying crowds shout their lungs out and seem almost to lose their heads when the team they support plays well, scores a goal or a try or wins a match. An extreme example of this was the wild celebrations that took place in Naples at the end of the last football season after its team won the Italian league title, which led to over 200 people ending up in casualty units, more than 20 of them with critical injuries.

Is this all a foil for the normal docility, the unquestioning acceptance associated with the subservient lives most people lead, tied as they are to the absolute necessity of spending most of their waking hours in a job despite the fact that the income it gives them will very likely be peanuts compared to the pay received by those they worship on the stage or sports field?

A substitute for God?

Or another explanation may be one that a former work colleague of mine used to proffer, which was that going to the stadium on Saturdays to support your local football team is a substitute for something that had now gone out of fashion – going to church. The argument went that it offered people the same kind of oblivion past generations found in worshipping a god or a divinity, with the star footballer or the pop musician a replacement for this. This also stood in as a replacement for lack of opportunity to express their own talents freely in their daily lives and offered some kind of exhilaration that was not available in the existence they were tied to. My colleague usually added the less negative point that this weekend activity also served

the purpose of bringing people together in a common pursuit and even giving them some kind of spiritual focus. Not of course that there seems to have been very much that was spiritual in the debacle of that concert in my local park or in the rivalry between opposing fans often played out both in and around football grounds.

Do we need celebrity?

Of course, there's no reason why people shouldn't take pleasure in and appreciate the artistry involved in producing music (of whatever kind) or the skills exhibited by talented sports people. And it is possible to do this – and many do – without the displays of worshipful admiration for their heroes shown by pop concert goers or the near fanatical passion of fans at sports events. Only a pity that, under the system we live in, many others are unable to see beyond attachment to heroes, to fanatical fandom, to worship of celebrity.

In a different kind of society, the kind that we advocate and campaign for, it goes without saying people will have the freedom of choice and the ability to use their talents to the full without being prey to the whims or the dictates of a boss, a production target to be reached, or the next twist and turn of the market. In that society there will no doubt be respect, even admiration, for the special talents and abilities of others. But celebrity there won't be any need for, since people will be their own celebrities.

HOWARD MOSS