

THE

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SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement



Also: What competition for profits means
New Year Party
Labour, Tory, same old story
Anarchism and socialism: What's
the difference?

News from Canada: it's the same
the whole world over
German cultural history and
socialism
Miss Marx



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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'

No capitalism without war

THE YEAR 2024 opens with at least two major ongoing wars in which the most up-to-date weapons of mass (and individual) destruction are being employed, resulting in the deliberate destruction of infrastructure on which societies depend, and in social regression rather than the progress that defenders of capitalism claim it provides.

The competitive struggle for profits is built into capitalism, but that this should require the manufacture of the most sophisticated weapons of war and destruction is in itself a condemnation of the system.

Capitalist competition involves not just economic entities but also states as armed bodies serving the interests of the businesses operating from within their frontiers. The states' external role is to secure and protect sources of raw materials, trade routes, markets and investment outlets for these firms.

When disputes arise, as inevitably they do, states seek to settle them by

diplomacy. The aim of diplomacy is not to find a 'fair' or 'just' solution but to bargain, with the outcome reflecting the relative bargaining position of the sides. 'Might is right', and is the reason why states seek to equip themselves with the most destructive and up-to-date weapons that they can afford.

Even if no war were ever to break out, the nature of capitalism would still require productive resources to be devoted to the manufacture and maintenance of armed forces. This anti-human waste of resources is built into capitalism and cannot be avoided as long as capitalism lasts.

But wars do break out.

The object of diplomacy is to avoid war as each side assesses where the real balance of power is. But diplomacy doesn't always work. When this fails the balance of power between two states is tested by actual war. States don't resort to this lightly as war is risky and expensive. This is why the state that starts it has to feel that it has no alternative but

to make a stand. The rulers of the Russian state evidently thought that the prospect of Ukraine joining NATO represented such a threat.

Israel has been armed by the United States as its proxy in the Middle East where the issue has always been oil. It's to increase its 'might' in the area to counterbalance Iran. But Israel is using these weapons to crush a comparatively weak armed insurgency in defence of its own ambition to rule over an area from the sea to the river.

In both Ukraine and Gaza we are seeing the horrors that result from the use of the most modern weapons of killing and destruction whose development and existence capitalism requires. Their existence is supposed to act as a deterrent to rivals and as bargaining chips in diplomacy, as they are most of the time. But not always. From time to time they are deployed to kill and destroy, adding to the charge-sheet against capitalism.

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The Acali Raft Experiment

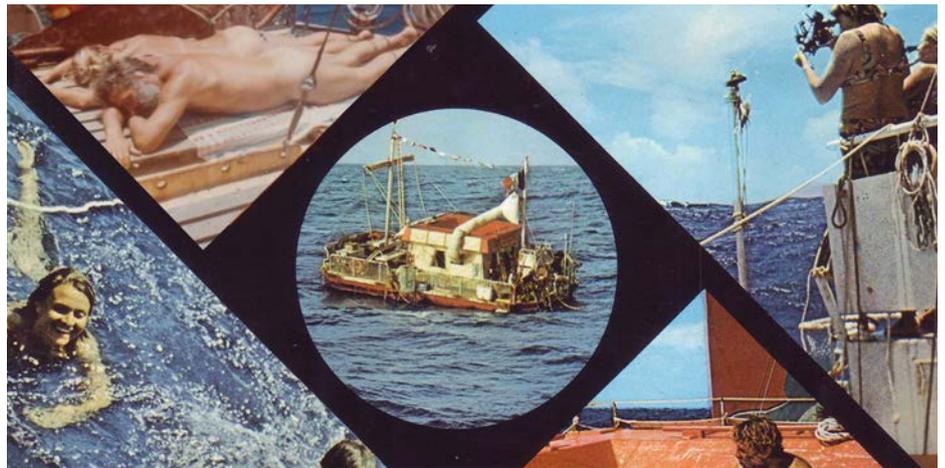
HAVE YOU heard the one about the sex raft? If not, it's a story to cheer the New Year for socialists. It's also a tale that's so bonkers that it really needs some context.

After the horrors of World War 2, the dispiriting conviction grew among dinner party navel-gazers that civilisation was only a skin-deep veneer under which lurked Hannah Arendt's famous 'banality of evil'. A fad arose for novels about innate evil, notably Burgess's 1962 novel *A Clockwork Orange*, and especially Golding's 1954 novel *Lord of the Flies*. This deeply nasty tale about marooned children regressing to murderous savagery immediately became (and still is) a standard UK school study text. It's well written, but so are a lot of books, and the fact that it continues to be shoved down children's throats in the name of education suggests that it is a useful element in ruling class ideology. Humans are feral beasts, it tells us. Rule by force is all we deserve and can ever expect.

Nor was this dark perspective confined to the gentle arts. In an age when ethics committees were not yet a thing, people also tried to demonstrate the inner beast in practice. Thus the world was treated to notorious and pseudo-scientific atrocities like the 1961 Milgram torture and 1971 Stanford Prison experiments, whose supposedly damning but actually rigged conclusions are still the stuff of received wisdom even though they've been pretty comprehensively debunked (see, eg, tinyurl.com/5b6328sf).

Enter at this point the Mexican anthropologist Santiago Genovés, who in 1973 concluded, from reading studies of monkeys, that 'most conflicts are about sexual access to ovulating females' (tinyurl.com/3yu63u2b). Instead of writing a boring and forgettable academic paper, he decided with the élan of the truly deranged to try out his theory in practice. And he knew just how to do it, having previously crewed on Thor Heyerdahl's famous Ra expeditions. He had the 12x7-metre raft 'Acali' built for sailing across the Atlantic with a crew of young and attractive men and women, in the expectation that 100 days of confinement and irrepressible sexual desire would drive them into promiscuity and, very likely, explosions of jealous violence. Genovés would go along as a disinterested observer in order to document the fun.

Nowadays this is reality TV material, but he saw it as serious scientific research, and was highly displeased when the media dubbed his endeavour the 'sex



raft'. Nothing about it was random. He wanted a global microcosm, and carefully selected volunteers from diverse countries, ethnicities and religions. He offered free adventure, and in return made them sign away all right to refuse any instruction from him. To wear on their nerves, he designed the raft to offer them no privacy, even when defecating, wrongly supposing that this would crush their inhibitions leading to rampant sex in the open. He had them sail straight into hurricane season without an engine, having chosen volunteers with no useful shipboard skills. The exceptions were the Swedish captain, the French diver, and the Israeli medic, all of them women, and chosen because he believed this would stir a festering pot of male resentment.

But when the conflict failed to materialise, he began to try to engineer it. He banned book reading to increase the boredom, and when this didn't work, publicly read out confidential questionnaire answers they had given about each other. When the diver proposed to go under the raft to repair the rudder, he insisted on going himself despite having no diving suit or experience, almost drowning in the attempt. His male resentment duly festered when the diver took it upon herself to make the repair secretly at night. When Maria, the captain, wanted to pull into port to avoid a hurricane, he took command himself, imperilling them all. Later, when they were about to be hit by a large freighter, he panicked but Maria kept her head and saved the situation. The crew then mutinied, putting Maria back in charge, and he withdrew in a sulk while she steered the rest of the way.

He succeeded in creating conflict on his epic 'Peace Project' voyage. But it was all directed at him. His manipulative, often abusive and sometimes dangerous

behaviour got so bad that at one point the crew, fearing for their lives, contemplated murdering him and dropping his body over the side, to explain away later as an unfortunate accident at sea.

Aside from this, the crew got on with each other extremely well, and cooperated smoothly and without fuss, even when facing serious danger. So strong were the bonds they formed in adversity that forty years later, when a documentary team came calling, the surviving crew members proved to be still close friends, if somewhat traumatised by what Genovés had put them through. 'He was a master of manipulation, a control freak and a dictator', said the director of the 2018 documentary *The Raft* (tinyurl.com/34revfwc). Despite his megalomania, Genovés simply couldn't make his volunteers behave the way he wanted them to, even when he'd rigged the entire experiment to achieve just that.

The Acali Raft Experiment failed in spectacular and comedic fashion to prove what many people still hold to be an ugly but inevitable truth, that humans resort to primal savagery when under pressure, and that therefore they cannot sustain a cooperative, caring and egalitarian society of the sort socialists describe. It stands as a companion-piece to the equally obscure but true story of the 'Real Lord of the Flies'. This was a bunch of children who in 1965 were marooned on a desert island for 15 months, during which time they 'made a pact never to quarrel', cared for each other, even successfully healing a broken limb, and cooperated until they were rescued. They too remained friends for life afterwards (tinyurl.com/4sz2hmsx). These are the life-affirming stories that schoolchildren really deserve to hear about, not mean-minded and made-up tales designed to make them hate themselves.

PJS

Dear Editors

Edinburgh – then and now

IN THE late twentieth century I moved from Rome to Edinburgh. It was a spur of the moment life-changing decision. I was worried that, after having loved living in the eternal city and being amazed daily at the beauty surrounding me, I might just be a little disappointed in my new surroundings.

But coming out of Waverley station on a cold bright November morning, my breath was taken away, not just by the cold but by the beauty of what confronted me. To my left was the splendid castle on the hill and looking down away from me the most spectacular skyline I had ever seen. It was a mixture of medieval, Gothic, Georgian splendour arranged in a harmonious

descent from the castle to Holyrood – the Royal Mile. In the almost 10 years I was then to spend in Edinburgh I came to know the city intimately. I had no car and every day discovered more architectural beauty. This had truly to be one of the most beautiful cities ever.

In mid-November this year, I visited Edinburgh again for the first time since. I went for the day with my partner to see an art exhibition we had looked forward to for some time. I eagerly described to him the visual pleasure he would enjoy on emerging from the station.

What I found when we did emerge shocked me profoundly. It's something I found hard to take in. The gardens which divided Princes Street from the Royal Mile had all but disappeared under an avalanche of commercial tat. The view of the castle was practically obliterated by

a huge Ferris wheel, a ghastly 'fun fair' with all the attendant noise and clatter. And then, my own personal nightmare, a 'Christmas market'. And so many retail outlets, cafes, bars with all the familiar names. I remembered spending time in what had been a beautiful urban space hand-feeding squirrels.

And then it came to me again, as it so often does, how capitalism will stop at nothing, will, for profit-making reasons, defile and ruin the most beautiful and precious of what makes us rejoice as humans. Yet how much real profit has been gained from this desecration compared to the pleasure and respite this beautiful place gave to residents and visitors to Edinburgh alike? The exhibition was fantastic but my heart was so very sad.

JOY BASZUCKI

Article

What competition for profits means

BUILT INTO capitalism is competition between states and trading blocs for markets, raw material sources, trade routes, and strategic points to protect these. In fact capitalism is an economic system based on a competitive struggle for profits.

Military spending by states is an aspect of this competition as even in diplomatic negotiations might is right, meaning that states have to spend as much as they can afford on weapons of war. This waste of resources on instruments of death and destruction and training people how to use them is unavoidable under capitalism. When diplomacy reaches an impasse, as it tends to when the stakes for a state are high, this competition leads to wars, often proxy wars fought by local puppets of the major powers.

This competition also severely restricts what governments are able to do about the current climate crisis. If a state does too much to combat it while others don't, it risks undermining its own competitiveness vis-à-vis other capitalist states and trading blocs.

It's not just certain capitalist



corporations such as fossil-fuel companies that are, or cause, the problem; it's the whole capitalist system of production for profit. Governments can't adopt policies to bring about a sustainable economy because that would be to go against the nature of capitalism as a system of unending capital accumulation out of profits, as reflected by rising GDP. A sustainable system of production will only be possible in a world socialist system when there will no longer be the economic pressure to make and accumulate profits as more and more capital.

No effective and lasting measures will be able to be implemented until the

Earth's natural and industrial resources have become the common heritage of all humanity. Then we can tackle this problem in a rational way without profit considerations or vested interests. All working people throughout the world have a common interest in getting rid of capitalism and nation-states and their frontiers. In a frontierless post-capitalist society based on the common ownership and democratic control of the world's resources, ie, socialism properly understood, we will all be 'citizens of the world'. Then there will be no waste of armaments or the threat — and reality — of war.

Does **austerity** breed extremism?

IN AN article entitled 'Austerity in Europe has huge consequences for its politics' Mehreen Khan, Economics Editor of *The Times*, cited research by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology which suggested a link between the severity of austerity and votes for 'extreme' parties:

'An MIT study covering more than 200 European elections between 1980-2015 found that deep fiscal consolidation 'leads to a significant increase in extreme parties' vote share, lower voter turnout and a rise in political fragmentation'. . . The researchers noted that centre-left governments paid the highest political price for their austerity drives' (28 November).

This has a certain logic. The mainstream political parties, especially those of the 'centre-left', such as the Labour Party in this country, promise that, if elected, they will make things better. Voters believe them, and when these parties fail to deliver, seek an explanation. Few accept the socialist view that, however determined or competent or honest these governments might have been, they were doomed to fail because they set themselves the impossible task of making capitalism work to serve the interest of the

majority. After turning from centre-right to centre-left and back again and seeing them both repeatedly fail, it would be surprising if there wasn't an increase in the number of voters turning against both of them.

The end of the post-war boom in the mid-1970s brought about what has been called 'the fiscal crisis of the capitalist state'. Governments found themselves unable to maintain the same level of spending on social reforms as before without undermining the accumulation of more capital out of profits that is the driving force of the capitalist economy. Since then, during the slump phase of the boom-slump economic cycle, they try to encourage investment for profit to resume by cutting back on their spending so as to reduce the burden of taxation on profits. This 'deep fiscal consolidation' (aka austerity) involves cutbacks in social benefits and in the provision of public services and amenities.

It is not as if centre-left governments want to impose austerity. They are compelled to by economic forces beyond their control which dictate that priority must be given to profits and conditions for profit-making on pain of making things

worse as it is the pursuit of profits that drives the capitalist economy.

When governments, inevitably due to the nature of capitalism, fail to make things better some voters blame not capitalism but the politicians who have failed to make it work for them and even see politicians as a self-serving elite. Some give up bothering to vote, saying that 'they are all the same' (which, actually, is essentially true). Others turn to new political parties which denounce the conventional parties as rival gangs of professional politicians who are in it for themselves (as, again, many obviously are, not that it would make any difference if they weren't).

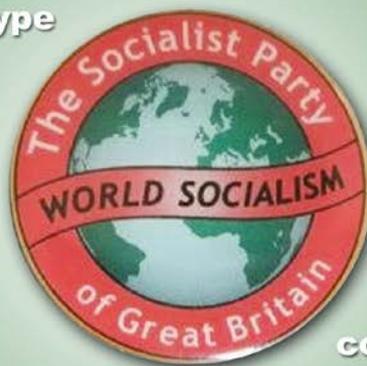
Unlike in the 1930s these parties don't blame political democracy, they blame the conventional reformist politicians who currently operate within it. They are 'extreme' in the sense that, being xenophobic and ultra-nationalist, they are at one end of the nationalist spectrum on which the conventional parties situate themselves too.

It goes without saying that, if ever they become the government, they will no more be able to make capitalism work for everybody than the mainstream reformist parties that they denounce. It is capitalism, not self-serving politicians, that is the cause of the problem.

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Halo Halo

'IT IS a truism that almost any sect, cult, or religion will legislate its creed into law if it acquires the political power to do so, and will follow it by suppressing opposition, subverting all education to seize early the minds of the young, and by killing, locking up, or driving underground all heretics' Robert Heinlein, *Time Enough For Love*, 1973.

As if flying wasn't stressful enough, two instances have been reported of aircraft passengers being subjected to close encounters of the weird kind on American air transportation. Is it a mania brought about by, in their own minds, being twenty thousand feet nearer to the North Korea in the sky to which they aspire? Remember, Jesus and his dad 'love' you, but only if you give them blind, unconditional, fanatical, eternal praise and devotion, otherwise it's 'off to the gulag with you laddie and lassie'.

On Delta airways an American female gospel singer was in an altercation with a flight attendant after she attempted to perform and proselytise to the passengers. 'I'm doing what the Lord is telling me to do,' she said. Voices in the head; isn't there a term for that? At least those who used to stand on the street wearing a sandwich-board that said 'Repent! Judgement is

at hand' could be more easily ignored. As could Jehovah's Witnesses or the Mormons appearing on your doorstep. Two steps backward and a shut door in that instance prevent further unwanted disruption to your life. But imagine if you're captive in an aeroplane and...

...here we go again. A woman is having what's described as a 'huge meltdown' on a Frontier Airline's flight. A beanie-wearing female passenger shouts that the breakdown is being caused by a 'real devil that wants to kill each and every one of y'all including your family members'. Isn't she getting her religions mixed up? 'She's possessed!' The devil is real, beanie woman shouts. 'She needs help! I'll tell you right now, Jesus Christ is the way, there's nobody that's gonna come to God, the Father, without Jesus Christ.' 'Who doesn't have a relationship with Jesus Christ?' (educate yourself; read the surveys, more and more every day), the woman demands as people mutter. 'If y'all don't have a relationship with Jesus Christ, I suggest you find one.'

It's not reported whether this suggestion was politely declined or whether other suggestions of their own came from the



passengers subjected to this unwanted tirade ([MailOnline](#) 12 and 22 November).

These ladies have been missing a trick, which is, this sort of thing with a television audience of many more than a plane full can earn you loads of bucks.

The Guardian (4 November) reports that the new American House of Representatives Republican Speaker, Mike Johnson, has an 'inerrant biblical truth leading him to reject science. Johnson was a 'young earth creationist', holding that a literal reading of Genesis means that the Earth is only a few thousand years old and humans walked alongside dinosaurs'.

DC

Tiny tips

A BOTTLE of Scotch whisky billed as 'the most sought-after' in the world sold Saturday for almost 2.2 million pounds (\$2.7 million), an auction record for a bottle of wine or spirits ([tinyurl.com/bddhj34b](#)).

We often assume that religious beliefs are no different in kind from ordinary factual beliefs—that believing in the existence of God or of supernatural entities that hear our prayers is akin to believing that May comes before June. Neil Van Leeuwen shows that, in fact, these two forms of belief are strikingly different. Our brains do not process religious beliefs like they do beliefs concerning mundane reality; instead, empirical findings show that religious beliefs function like the imaginings that guide make-believe play ([tinyurl.com/2fn4t4zf](#)).

Margot Friedländer, the 102-year-old Holocaust survivor, recently offered a few important words during an appearance on one of Germany's most-watched political

talk shows. 'There is no Christian blood, no Muslim blood, no Jewish blood,' she said. "'It is all human blood. We are all equal.' And further: 'I believe there is something good in every person. Take the good and forget the bad. It's so easy to be human.' Perhaps Greta Thunberg should have a sit-down with Friedländer. It might be a good start for getting back on the right track ([tinyurl.com/yc57wx9h](#)).

'Queers for Palestine' attempts to meld LGBT advocacy with Palestinian liberation, a juxtaposition that has precipitated a whirlwind of criticism and ridicule, since LGBT rights scarcely exist within the Muslim world; and the Palestinian territories are no exception. The slogan has been widely satirized. Variations like 'Chickens for KFC' and 'Blacks for the KKK'" highlight its proponents' basic lack of awareness of just how incompatible the values of the Western left are with those of the Islamic right they so readily champion ([tinyurl.com/mtaj4dvv](#)).

They Survived Hell- but for Some, They're Only a Means of Production

We were shocked to discover that mere days after being rescued, the migrant

workers were pressured to return to work, including through threats to withhold their passports and their salaries. In some cases, they were required to return to work in the Gaza Envelope – near the killing fields they had just escaped ([tinyurl.com/2uj65hwc](#)).

The Pacific Institute, which regularly updates its Water Conflict Chronology, reported that at least 228 water conflicts were recorded in 2022—an 87 percent increase over 2021—driven in large part by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Russian forces attacked water pipelines and supply systems in a number of Ukrainian cities after invading in February 2022, targeting water resources a total of 56 times since the war began ([tinyurl.com/mrypy7yx](#)).

A majority of American adults (72 percent) would not be willing to serve in the military were the U.S. to enter a major war, polling from Echelon Insights found, while public confidence in the armed forces also appears to be waning. It comes as all branches of the armed forces have struggled to meet their recruitment targets. Since 1987, the number of active-duty personnel has fallen by 39 percent ([tinyurl.com/3n4hprka](#)).

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

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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.

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

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

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Glasgow branch. Meet 3rd Thursday of the month at 6pm on Zoom. Branch Social 2nd Saturday of the month at 1pm in The Atholl Arms Pub, Glasgow City Centre. Contact: Paul Edwards by e-mail: rainbow3@btpenworld.com or mobile: 07484 717893

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Shareholder capitalism

IN THE last few decades the growth of institutional investors, in particular, in the guise of various kinds of funds – such as mutual funds, pension funds and, more recently, hedge funds – has been a powerful force in shaping the development of financialisation. Their large size has afforded them the leverage to impose a particular kind of financial logic on corporations with the focus very much on maximising ‘shareholder value’.

The CEOs – Chief Executive Officers – of big corporations have emerged as key agents in this trend, their commitment to the interests of shareholders having been firmly cemented and assured by means of such devices as stock options. This has had the effect of more closely aligning the interests of CEOs with those shareholders and is reflected in the astronomical rise in payouts to the former, an increasing proportion of which is, in effect, unearned income. Thus, whereas in the 1960s, America’s CEOs took home roughly 20 times what the average shop-floor worker made, today the figure is about 400 times or more.

Under increasing pressure to prioritise short-term results, managers are more inclined to make decisions that promote increased share value, such as mergers, acquisitions, and stock buybacks, rather than investment in physical production. Compliance is enforced by the threat of shareholders revolts, takeover bids by rivals or leveraged buy-outs by equity funds. The figures speak for themselves; more in the way of shareholder payouts means fewer funds available for investment, relatively speaking. According to Sam Pizzigazi:

‘Between 1947 and 1999, nonfinancial U.S. companies shelled out an average 19.6 percent of their operating cashflow to shareholders, notes economist Andrew Smithers. The second half of that half-century saw stock options become an ever more dominant source of corporate CEO compensation. The 21st-century result? Between 2000 and 2017, the Smithers research finds, the average corporate cashflow to shareholders more than doubled to 40.7 percent’ (Sam Pizzigazi, Aug 10, 2023 ‘Have Our Corporate Chieftains Become Expendable?’, *Counterpunch*).

Investment in physical production often involves certain immediate cost outlays and delayed benefits. That might require the board of directors to approve a request from the executive team to suspend dividend payouts (to the chagrin of shareholders) for the time being in order



Credit: Theo Wargo/Getty Images

to finance this investment. Their reluctance to do this is a function of the shrinking time horizons (‘short-termism’) that businesses are subject to in an increasingly competitive world. All this has been aided and abetted by computerisation and the use of algorithms that have greatly speeded up decision making and made it imperative to adopt decisions that benefit a business in the short term with little thought of the long-term consequences.

Investing in the ‘real economy’ has the risk that in building up productive capacity one might exceed what the market is capable of absorbing – not least when your rivals might be wanting to expand output as well. Thus, it may sometimes be more prudent to simply buy up existing production capacity via mergers or acquisitions than increase that capacity yourself.

It is developments such as these that call into question the traditional image of the modern corporation as classically set out in Adolph Berle and Gardiner Means’s 1932 book, *The Modern Corporation and Private Property*. This seminal work helped to fix the image of the modern corporation in popular consciousness as an entity in which ownership is dispersed among numerous (and relatively inactive or powerless) and often small investors (thanks to the institutionalisation of laws such as those pertaining to limited liability that supposedly encouraged wider investment among the population by mitigating potential losses) with corporate control being decisively wielded in the hands of non-owning managerial elites.

Recent developments closely aligning the interests of CEOs with those of shareholders via the use of stock options and profit-based performance bonuses – major components in the compensation packages of modern-day corporate CEOs – have put the matter beyond doubt. Moreover, some of these compensation packages are on a scale that would

certainly place their recipients in the ranks of the capital-owning class, even if only the lower rungs of that class, taking into account that a sizeable and growing chunk of that income is unquestionably ‘unearned’.

CEOs may ‘work’ but the mere fact that one works does not, of course, make one working class – any more than the possession of small amounts of capital makes one a capitalist. There is a certain point at which a change in quantity (in this instance, with respect to how much capital one possesses) translates into a change in quality or kind (from worker to capitalist).

In other words, and contrary to what the managerialist paradigm asserts, what we are seeing here is a convergence, not a divergence, of ownership and control. The top echelons of corporate management are, in effect, being steadily absorbed into the capitalist class. Alternatively, you could also see this as a case of members of that class taking on a more (pro)active managerial role in their companies for various reasons.

An extreme example of this would be someone like Elon Musk who, as well as having a personal fortune of \$190 billion to his name, is said to have enjoyed a ‘compensation package’ involving performance-based stock options from the electric vehicle manufacturer Tesla, (of which Musk is the CEO), exceeding US\$10bn in 2021. Clearly, this individual has no need to work whatsoever given the size of his personal fortune. It’s just that he chooses to do so for reasons we can only speculate on but are not, in themselves, important.

In short, then, capitalism has morphed from something like the kind of managerial capitalism that commentators like Berle and Means had in mind back in the early 20th century to today’s full-on ‘shareholder capitalism’.

ROBIN COX

New Year Party

UNUSUALLY FOR an article in this magazine we are going to begin by consulting a god, Janus being the deity in question. Having the supernatural capacity to look backwards and forwards at the same moment he seems a worthy informant.

Actually, it does not require omniscience or 20/20 hindsight to see that 2023 was not a great year for humanity.

Most recently an armed group of self-styled martyrs and freedom fighters demonstrated their military prowess by storming a pop festival and randomly killing teenagers before moving on to kill and kidnap across a wide area.

This provoked regressive nationalist ideologues into their brutal response, a protracted arbitrary slaughter of children, and civilians in general. In the insane gamble of war, atrocity is all too often matched and raised by greater atrocity.

In Britain this moved political leaders of the main parliamentary parties to declare their unwavering support for this 'self-defence'. Does this mean that if you're assaulted by your neighbour it's legitimate for you to burn his house down with his family in it?

Meanwhile young, and perhaps not so young, Ukrainians and Russians continued to kill each other on behalf of their respective capitalisms. NATO countries seemingly have whole orchards of money trees allowing them lavish expenditure on the arms industry to continually supply weaponry freely to Ukraine.

Although the money trees of the USA are seemingly becoming less abundant as politicians of one wing of capitalist government refuse to endorse further funding. This is driven by the search for populist appeal in the forthcoming presidential election. Firm, unwavering support is suddenly trumped (forgive the pun) by pragmatic expediency.

In Britain also there seems to be rather less cash available from the fiscal orchard for growing numbers of families struggling with serious poverty, amassing rent/mortgage arrears along with other debts, becoming dependent on food banks even as actual banks continue to profit massively.

Similarly, the NHS is severely restricted from using technology that could prevent so many premature deaths and cure conditions or, at least, alleviate suffering caused by treatable ailments. With such advances being increasingly expensive in a profit-driven world, cost-effectiveness not diagnosis becomes the deciding cynical, clinical factor.

Climate change continues to demand



attention. Wild fires flare, there's drought and flood, storms rage as never before and the death toll rises. There seems no sense of irony amongst national leaders who fly around the world to attend climate change conferences. And it turns out many of the delegates are actually representatives of fossil fuel industries.

Through the natural instinct for self-preservation, people, individually or as families, flee from hot spots of war, extreme poverty and environmental degradation. At this point, of course, they stop being people and become migrants.

Migrants are subdivided into legal and illegal. Legal migrants can be just about tolerated as long as they accept being cheap labour doing jobs few others are willing to do for such poor wages. Illegal migrants though are anathema.

Underlying all this misery is capitalism that went its merry way unhindered, other than by its own contradictions, throughout yet another year. For a system now long since past its sell-by date, it persists despite the stench of its rottenness, but only because the great majority of world's population, the workers who create the wealth, have yet to choose to dispense with it.

Our consultation with Janus as to forthcoming prospects is not encouraging. Looking forwards it doesn't take a futurologist to foresee that radical change does not appear likely, at least in the short term.

There will be a general election which could be at least an indicator of an upsurge of enthusiasm for and interest in breaking with the established political pattern. The problem is there will be no clear way for such a change of consciousness to be clearly marked.

A significant vote for the few Socialist Party candidates would be a start. Mass spoiling of ballot papers, just writing 'Socialism' or 'SPGB' across them, would be a positive act, rather than just not voting which could suggest apathy rather than engagement.

It is often argued, correctly, that the right to vote is valuable and many people in the past suffered and fought for it, therefore it should be used. Indeed it should, but simply voting for one of the main parties,

or one of their left/right-wing outliers, is truly wasting the vote as nothing will fundamentally change.

If you really consider your vote to be valuable then seriously consider to whom you will entrust it. How can it become the means to bring about significant and profound change? Capitalism lies at the root of the all the misery outlined above as experienced throughout 2023.

The alternative is a worldwide democratic commonwealth in which production is to meet everyone's needs, not a small minority's profit. A society without national borders and armies to defend or attack them. A world that can face up to climate change unencumbered by the need to continually produce commodities for sale.

Politics will no longer be split into rival factions of left and right. Despite the postures of many groups, sects and parties who misappropriate the word, socialism is not a left-wing cause. The left/right split is very much part of the politics of capitalism, originating in the national assembly of the late eighteenth-century French Revolution.

Socialists intend society to move beyond such notions as divide people, rather hoping to unite them in common cause to take control, and thereby improve, their economic, political and social prospects.

The New Year Party is the one that presently stands up and holds out for this change, this revolution including via the ballot box, understanding that it cannot be achieved through compromise. It is clear that people must develop the means to bring this about because no party can do it for them.

No small task to be sure. It will require a New Year resolution of the majority to actively work towards the realisation of socialism. Will it be this year? Next year? Sometime? Never? That depends entirely on what people decide. True democracy.

Or is Janus doomed to find his double vision blurred by tears shed for the suffering of the world at every turn of the year in perpetuity?

DAVE ALTON

Labour, Tory, same old story

A WISE old commentator used to say: 'Governments are not elected, they are dismissed.' And, after Labour's recent by-election wins and the increasing mess the Tories are in, that seems a perfect fit for the likely outcome of next year's General Election. But if Labour do win next year, what difference will it make? A 'man in the street' interviewed by the BBC following those by-elections said 'it will just be different people doing the same things'. The socialist view is that he wasn't far wrong. Of course a Labour government may go a little bit easier than the Tories on, say, refugees and the unions, but in the overall picture of people's lives the difference will be minimal. Experience has shown that, whatever a government's promises or intentions, they are not in control of the system they administer. The market is in control, and the rule of the market is maximisation of profit for the class that owns the resources and the productive capacity of society – the capitalist class. No government, no matter how well-meaning, can get around this.

Democratic decision-making

So we may vote Labour or Tory and think this is part of a democratic process. But it is so only in an extremely superficial sense. That's because, owing to the way 'democracy' operates in the society we live in, none of us are allowed to take the really important decisions, the ones about the distribution of wealth, the environment, education, health, peace, and so on. The one decision we are allowed to take is who shall take all those decisions for us. And this happens only once every few years. In between voting times we have virtually no involvement in the decisions that affect our lives. They are made from on high by governments or leaders of one kind or another, or, at work, by employers. And such decisions, whether political or economic, reflect at bottom the needs of the market – the world market in which both governments and businesses operate – and in that context good or bad intentions count little.

What would a properly democratic system look like? It would be one in which people take all the decisions about the things that concern them – a society without governors and governed, without leaders and led, without employers and employed. Instead of people having to accept the decisions of those in charge, it means cooperating voluntarily to



run society and all its resources and technology in our own mutual interest – no rich and poor, no haves and have-nots. And all this without money or markets. Some would say this is too idealistic, utopian even. But we don't think so and we'll try to explain why.

Ownership and wealth

Firstly, the society of equality we're suggesting definitely isn't possible if a small minority continue to have control of most of the wealth by being employers, landowners or shareholders and the rest of us have to scramble to find employment and then depend on the wage or salary that gives us to get by. All this is unnecessary because the resources, technology and skills that exist in the world today could, if used rationally, provide enough – far more than enough in fact – in the way of goods and services to satisfy the needs of the whole of the Earth's population (8.1 billion). This doesn't happen at present because the economic system that exists the world over – capitalism – dictates that only what can be sold will be produced. It doesn't matter if people need food, even to the extent of starving from lack of it. They won't get that food unless it's 'economically viable' for it to go to them – that is, unless they've got the money to pay for it. The same applies to everything else too – houses, clothing, transport, and so on – meaning that even in an economically advanced country like the UK, for example, millions of people live in poverty and go short of good food, warmth and decent housing because they haven't got the means to pay for it.

Cooperation and competition

Given this state of affairs, what is the objection to our all deciding, via democratic political action, to organise

our resources so that production takes place to satisfy human needs and not to make a profit on the market? All it needs is for us to establish a new system of ownership where we own all the means of production together and take freely from what is produced according to our needs. In such a system, democratic decisions will be taken by everyone about organisation, production and distribution, replacing money as the organising principle of society.

But will it break down in chaos because human beings are naturally competitive and acquisitive and will grab everything they can if it's freely available? We don't think so, since, though humans can certainly be grabbing and competitive, they can also be (and most of us are in our normal day-to-day relations) cooperative and generous. We are in fact what our situation makes us – and if there is enough to satisfy all our needs, we are much more likely to be generous than irrationally acquisitive, to be socially cooperative than selfishly competitive. We're not basing our arguments on an appeal to people to be 'good' or idealistic'. We're simply asking them to see that a fundamental change in the way society is organised is in their interests and in all our interests. The reward will be lifelong security for all as we meet our own and the Earth's basic needs.

Fairness and equality?

There may be much talk of fairness and equality from a coming Labour government, but one thing we can be sure of is that, for the reasons outlined here, they will not be able to deliver that. And we can also be sure that there will be no talk from them of the only possible condition under which fairness and equality can meaningfully exist – the classless, stateless, moneyless society that we call socialism.

HKM

Anarchism and Socialism: What's the difference?

CRITICS OF the Socialist Party have sometimes called us the 'Anarcho-Socialist Party of Great Britain' implying that what we call socialism is actually a form of anarchism. What they are referring to here is the idea that, like some anarchists, we want to do away with the state, we're against the idea of vanguards leading the workers and telling them what to do, and we want a democratic, cooperative society of common ownership.

Of course there are anarchists and anarchists (just as there are socialists and socialists). Some anarchists (so-called 'anarcho-syndicalists'), while wanting to see the end of the wages system, focus on the idea that it needs to come about by workers organising in the workplace and in trade unions to eventually take over production. Others advocate armed risings against the state to bring about common ownership. Then others ('so called 'mutualists') oppose common ownership altogether on the grounds that it stifles individualism, and embrace the idea of a free-market economy seeing democracy and majority decision-making as tyranny. Yet there is undoubtedly a good deal in common between Socialist Party socialists and those anarchists who favour the same kind of classless, stateless,

marketless, moneyless society that we do, a society based on 'from each according to abilities, to each according to need'. If there are differences, these tend to be in the means of achieving this. While we see this change of society as coming through majority democratic action including via the ballot box, anarchists tend to see it being achieved in some other way, maybe a widespread popular uprising or a general strike or mass workplace occupations.

Both these similarities and differences are well illustrated in a recent publication by the anarchist group, Rebel City Collective. Their booklet, *For a Future Made by Us All. Questions and Answers about Anarchism* (PM Press, 2023, 92pp.), is explicitly aimed at young people in schools and colleges and arose, they say, from discussion with and questions from students about anarchism and what it means. It is written in clear and accessible language and structured as a series of 'leading' questions about how a stateless, moneyless society without markets could operate. Examples of these are:

- Isn't anarchism all about chaos and disorder?
- What's the difference between anarchism and socialism?
- How would anarchists organise locally,

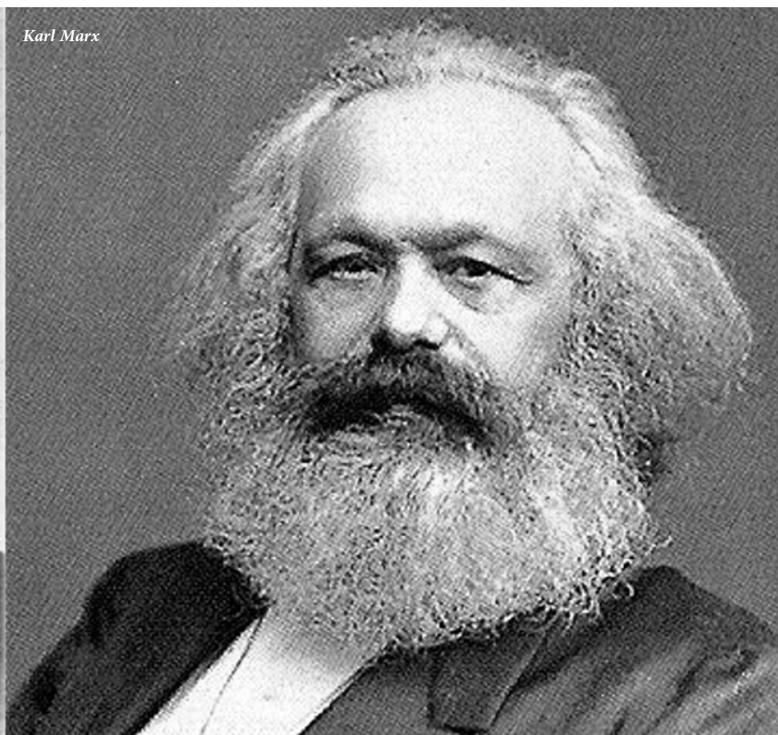
nationally, globally to get things done?

- Without money, what would motivate people to work?
- How would you deal with anti-social behaviour?
- Would people be able to have property?
- How would you deal with the climate and environmental crisis?
- How do we distribute resources fairly?
- Shouldn't we gradually reform what we have rather than changing everything?
- Isn't it 'human nature' to compete with others?
- How would we get the rich to give up their wealth?

Socialists will of course recognise these as some of the familiar questions we often get asked when we put to people the idea of a socialist society without buying and selling based on voluntary work. And, given that it's precisely this kind of society that's advocated in the booklet, it shouldn't be surprising that we find these questions. Any differences are largely of terminology, eg, the society advocated being called 'anarchism' rather than 'socialism'. In fact, the booklet itself explains this different terminology by saying that 'originally there was no difference between them' (ie, anarchism, socialism and communism) and that



Mikhail Bakunin



Karl Marx



only later did authoritarian state rule become known as ‘state-run socialism’ (something we would, however, call ‘state capitalism’). That’s why, although we prefer to stick with the word ‘socialism’ and emphasise its original meaning, we do experience some difficulty with its association in many people’s minds with the Labour Party in this country, and with authoritarian tyrannies like the old Soviet Union or places like China or Cuba or Venezuela, which are in reality just different models of capitalism – and so all diametrically opposed to what we mean by socialism

Of course, this booklet also provides answers – usually illuminating ones – to the questions it poses, and it would be possible to quote at length from these. But just to give a few examples:

- Everybody will have an opportunity to discuss and be part of the decision-making process on anything that is important to them
- Borders are just lines drawn on the world map to separate countries [and] have changed many times as one leader grabs land from another generally by force [and] often ... whole communities get split up and separated into different countries
- We would hope that everyone would see themselves as part of the ‘human race’ not British, Cuban, Nigerian or any other nationality
- Money allows people to hoard resources as individual wealth
- Many things we do as humans are organised without anyone making us or any direct financial motivation
- Presently, different identities or groups are frequently played off against each other

- It does seem strange to us that anyone would want to let a god or gods, priest, master or anyone else tell them what to do or think
- Education ... should be broad, lifelong, non-hierarchical, diverse, person centred and voluntary
- We could design systems for efficient democratic decision making
- Everyone should be allowed to do what they want as long as it doesn’t harm others
- The more people get used to working and organising together, the better placed we will be to create a well organised new society that will be global
- There is increasing evidence, and more people, that question if human nature was ever actually competitive or selfish.

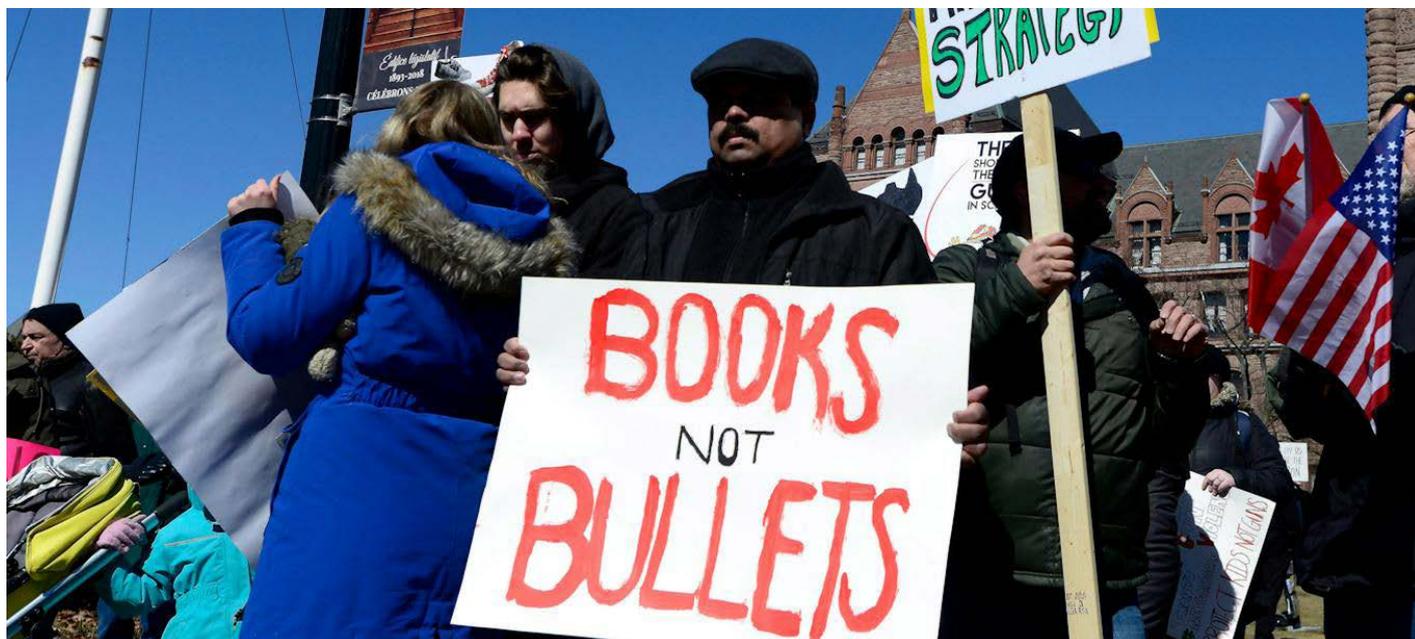
These examples illustrate the striking and welcome similarities to our own case. But it must also be added that there are some parts of their arguments, coming largely in the booklet’s final section entitled ‘How do we get from here to there’, that we would want to question. What is suggested there is that the society they advocate would be established via acts of protest, sharing and local democratic self-organisation and, above all, by ‘direct action’ (eg, taking over workplaces, redistributing hoarded goods, possibly – and somewhat alarmingly – ‘at the point of a gun’) which, it is anticipated, will eventually spread and lead to a situation where a new cooperative society can be brought into being. But what if, at some point and in the final analysis, the rich don’t want to give up their wealth? How are they to be persuaded? Are they to be shot? This needs to be mentioned, since the ‘strategy’ advocated here seems to eschew the kind of democratic political

action via the ballot box that the Socialist Party sees as the most effective route once the necessary spreading of consciousness has been achieved. Without that particular form of direct action (ie, the ballot box), it is difficult to see how a socially conscious working class can take the power necessary to abolish capitalism and set about organising a genuine socialist (or anarchist) society. So, there is a clear difference in ‘strategy’ between anarchists and socialists here, even if the desired result is very much the same.

Despite this difference of view, however, there can be no doubt about the value of this particular booklet, putting centre-stage as it does the idea of dispensing with capitalism and establishing a new society based on collective production for direct use. In spite of certain references, it goes a long way towards dispelling the popular image of anarchists as chaos-mongers and, written in simple and accessible language as it is, with a warm and friendly tone complemented by attractive and useful illustrations, it answers most of the questions it poses with clarity and competence. It will be appreciated not just by the school and college students to whom it is directed but also by the average reader wishing to be enlightened about such matters. So it is, all in all, a strongly recommended breath of fresh air and an admirable initiative. Perhaps we should consider taking a leaf from this book ourselves and produce a publication specifically aimed at the young and presenting in simple terms what is actually a very simple idea – organising the Earth’s resources collectively and democratically on the basis of needs not profit.

HKM

News from Canada: it's the same the whole world over



Credit: THE CANADIAN PRESS/Ben Singer

TO PUT it mildly youth violence in Toronto is on the increase. Violent incidents in schools have spiked beyond pre-pandemic levels, with shootings and stabbings occurring in broad daylight on school grounds. Nor is it just in schools; in the last year a 16-year-old was stabbed to death outside a subway station; a 15-year-old was injured in a drive-by shooting; another 15-year-old shot inside his home, with an 18-year-old charged with second degree murder. A 1,766 page report on youth violence was published by the provincial government in 2008, but little has been done to implement its recommendations. In 2014 Toronto city council voted to develop a 'Youth Equity Strategy', but didn't follow up on it because it was underfunded. If these plans had been acted on it would still be a case of trying to solve the problem within capitalism. In other words, using a band-aid when a major operation is called for.

- The unemployment situation in Canada remains pretty much the same every month. In October 18,000 new jobs were added to the economy, but the unemployment rate went up from 5.5 percent to 5.7 percent. This was due to the population growth as more immigrants, many of them refugees, came here. Stats-Canada said one third of Canadians reported that they found it very difficult to make ends meet when it came to transportation, housing, food, clothing and other necessary expenses. So it never gets better and still most

folk believe capitalism is the best of all economic systems.

- The auto-workers union Unifor has completed a deal for their members that secured wage gains for production workers which will be 28 percent at the end of the contract. Other improvements include better pensions, job security, bonus pay and more vacation days. Sounds good doesn't it? But you know what, many of the beneficiaries of these gains are pissed-off the union didn't do more for them. An example are the workers at Stellantis who voted 54 percent to accept the new contract. According to Larry Savage, Brock University Labour Study Professor, 'Workers aren't content to tread water in the context of a cost-of-living crisis; they expect their unions to do more for them at the bargaining table'. The auto-workers have been badly treated over the last 15 years and they know the gains the union made will soon be wiped out. As long as capitalism lasts the working class will struggle.
- It's a surprising fact that 80 percent of the world's wastewater is discharged into waterways untreated. Some folks may think it would be different in an industrialized country like Canada, but it's only a matter of degree. The average Canadian household uses 630 litres a day, about a third of it goes down the drain. One doesn't hear about it until something goes wrong, which happened

in Hamilton, Ontario in January, when it was found it had been leaking sewage into Lake Ontario for 26 years. In Nova Scotia, 25 percent of the wastewater goes untreated and in Newfoundland and Labrador its 38 percent. The reason is the treatment systems are expensive to build and maintain. In Vancouver the new facility under construction may cost 5 times more than its initial \$700 million budget. That's so typical of capitalism, there has to be a price tag on everything.

- A recent news program informed us that the use of food banks in Toronto has increased 60 percent since Covid and 38 percent more than last year. With the cost of groceries going up, rent hikes and mortgage interest rates increasing some folks have no recourse but to use food banks. Though they're probably grateful to the food bank they use, nevertheless isn't it a case of life being so crummy under capitalism that economic necessity has brought a part of socialism into being? People come in, take what they need and leave without paying. It'll be better when all society is like that.

Food banks in Canada are seeing a surge of international students using them, in fact the manager of one of them in Brampton, Ontario had so many student users he banned them. The number of study permits in Canada has tripled in the past decade, from 300,000 in 2013 to 900,000 now. Through spending and tuition they contribute \$22 billion to the economy. Many work 40 hours a week

to pay tuition, live, and have to work 2 and sometimes 3 jobs to stay afloat. This fall, tuition fees are, on average, \$22,061 for graduate studies and \$88,081 for undergrads. With declining government funding, post-secondary educational institutions have turned to international students to bring in the bucks. Though nearly all of them work, it's at low paid jobs like retail, warehousing, factories and fast-food joints. With rents the way they are it's no wonder they go to food banks. So the lack-of-moral to the story is that the international students are learning what life under capitalism, especially in Canada, is really like.

- On November 3, federal Environment Minister, Steve Guilbeault, signed a deal with the B.C. government and Indigenous leaders to protect 30 percent of B.C.'s land by 2030. The federal government will invest up to \$500 million over the next seven years with B.C. contributing \$563 million, which includes \$150 million to protect old-growth forests. Though the federal funding has yet to be allocated specifically, nevertheless it will include \$104 million to restore the habitats of species at risk. One the one hand it sounds great but on the other we do live under capitalism and therefore must ask what happens after 2030? And what about the rest of this planet? It's just another band-aid reform and like all reforms they don't go far enough rooting the problem.
- Canada's rate of inflation fell to 3.1 percent in October down from 3.8 percent in September, but it didn't feel like it if you're paying for a place to live. The Consumer Price Index showed the cost of shelter rose by 6.1 percent, up from 6 percent in September. Mortgage interests costs rose 30.5 percent from last year, while rent rose 8.2 percent up from 7.3 percent in September. In the lowest earning 25 percent of Canadians, 91 percent of household income goes to shelter, food, transportation and utilities. In the highest earning quarter, 30 percent of their income goes to those 4 necessities. Any comment is unnecessary.
- Saskatchewan's energy minister Dustin Duncan said, on November 21, that the federal government's target to have zero-net emissions by 2035 is just not doable in Saskatchewan. He said it would cost the province \$40 billion to meet those standards, which they could probably reach by 2050. Ottawa would require all electricity to be from renewable sources such as wind or hydro or to be equipped with carbon capture technology by 2035. The provincial Premier, Scott Moe, said earlier this year that Saskatchewan could not abide by those regulations and might



Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland

continue to run some of its natural gas and coal facilities till the mid-2040s. What a laugh; capitalism creates a lousy, stinking problem and its main upholders can't agree how to solve it.

- Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland revealed the federal budget on November 21. The Liberal government is promising \$15 billion in low-interest loans to support the construction of low-rental homes, with new money starting to flow in 2 years. Freeland said the biggest challenge was to deal with people's concerns while not running up the government's bills. This money will be spent over the next 6 years, but \$2.5 billion is money being reallocated from other programs, so someone will have to suffer. Almost \$8.5 billion will be spent on a host of clean economy subsidies including cash for new electric vehicle battery factories from Stellantis and Northvolt. It will spend \$1 billion on non-profit, co-op and public housing initiatives that will build more than 7,000 homes by 2028. The government said they will make changes to the Affordable Housing and Groceries Act, which would strengthen the power of Canada's Competition Bureau to crack down on companies by combating regulatory pricing and anti-competition mergers. The media reaction is that the government are like the rest of Canada, cash-strapped but doing its best. We've all heard that about other governments, but they always find lots of money to finance war. As for the above — we shall see. Miracle making buffoonery!
- International students aren't the only foreign folk having a hard time in Canada. In its issue of November 4 the *Toronto Star* published an article about foreign agricultural workers in farms across Canada. They work 14 hour days for weeks at a time without a day off or overtime pay. If they complain they are threatened with deportation. Thousands leave their homes every year to work on farms in an industry which contributes 7 percent of Canada's GDP. Tomoya Obakata, the UN's expert on present-day forms of slavery, said Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker Programs: 'are a breeding ground for modern forms of slavery'. He was deeply disturbed by the accounts of exploitation and abuse that workers told him about on a recent fact-finding mission to Canada. It's *The Grapes of Wrath* all over again and goes to prove that for all capitalism's amazing technology, for the world's working (wage-slave) class, life doesn't fundamentally change.
- There is a bit of a stink in Canada now that Michael Spavor has accused Michael Kovrig of being a spy for China. These two guys were both imprisoned in China in 2018, days after Canada's arrest of a Chinese executive, Meng Wanzhou, who was wanted in the U.S. on criminal fraud charges. She reached a plea deal with the U.S., after which the two Michaels were released. Spavor now claims he was fooled by Kovrig into giving up information on North Korea, which was, he thinks, the reason he was arrested. Kovrig said his job was to get China to persuade North Korea to stop developing nuclear weapons technology and was never involved in espionage. Spavor was, at the same time, running a non-governmental organization whose function was to promote business and cultural exchanges with North Korea. It doesn't matter to the working class of either, or in fact, any country whether these guys were spies or not. Commercial rivalries between different sections of the capitalist class are something the working class have no stake in. — from *Socialist Party of Canada's December Newsletter*

German Cultural History and Socialism

IN 2019 the German band Rammstein released a single and video entitled *Deutschland* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NeQM1c-XCDc>) and to anyone interested in popular culture and its relationship with politics this has to rate as one of the most powerful and revealing pieces of work. Rather like this band's relationship with Germany my relationship with their music is very mixed. As a lover of power guitar riffs I find them matchless but the grotesque nature of some of their imagery I could do without. However, the insights into German culture that they provide are interesting and show an understanding of the popular zeitgeist. I searched the internet for English subtitles but failed to find a suitable version but this may be an advantage for English viewers because in the ignorance of the German language we can focus on the imagery – which is primarily the subject of this essay.

Here are some of the visual references used in the video. We had the aftermath of the battle of the Teutoburg Forest where the Roman legions were famously stopped from expanding the empire further into Germany; the knights of the Holy Roman Empire and the Teutonic knights; the savage Lutheran monks of the Reformation; the 30 Years War; the Hindenburg disaster; the inflation and decadence of the Weimar republic; the Nazis and the V2 rocket; the East Germans in space; the East German 'communist' regime; the Red Army Faction in the West and lastly the birth of a Leonberger puppy. A typically (in the context of this essay) Germanic bleak view of their own 'history'.

It will be noticed that there are no 'great men' like Frederick the Great, Arminius, Bismarck or Hitler but only a succession of disasters with the implication that these were caused by some inherent characteristic of the German culture and people. A nice touch is that 'Germania' herself is portrayed by a famous black German actress and is the only woman to make an appearance. I say that there were no actual historical characters portrayed but there was one important exception – Karl Marx. He is identified with the East German Bolshevik puppet regime in the form of a looming statue and this is an anachronism to which I will return.

Lastly the closing credits sequence is one of the most poignant I have ever seen with a beautiful piano version of another Rammstein song based on the German fairytale of Snow White.

Many of these myths and images were devised by the nationalist intelligentsia of the new German state in an effort to create a 'German' historical identity. Of course Rammstein has subverted this project by rejecting any heroic or romantic elements but there remains an acknowledgement of just how powerful the myth is by their embracing an antithetical version of it. Like the children of abusive parents there is still a need to love them – as they say in the lyrics: 'Germany, your love is a curse and a blessing. Germany, my love I cannot give you.' I suspect this is how many Germans feel about themselves and their cultural identity. They suspect that they have a darkness of the soul.

This was not always the case. After unification in the nineteenth century Germans were full of optimism for the future as is evidenced by the mass membership of the Second International. But this was to be fatally undermined by the nationalism that destroyed it and made the descent into the madness of the First World War possible. The socialism of Marx and the First International was lost. Many reasons are given for this including the theory that it was the failure of the German revolution of 1848 that enabled the slide back into autocracy and militarism which was to last, with the exception of the short-lived and failed Weimar Republic, until the Nazi defeat in 1945. With the partition after the war the Bolshevik puppet state of East Germany was identified with socialism and since this is where Rammstein originated it's not surprising that we see Marx identified with this state in the video.

This identification with a cultural past is one of the main aspects of nationalist politics and is an important obstacle to socialist consciousness. Of course we are all created by the historical context into which we are born and there are many positive aspects of all cultures that should be celebrated but the reality is that political elites use them to create myths of superiority and exclusivity that form

the foundations of reactionary nationalist ideology. Cultural development depends on the intersection of human communities and a flourishing delight in the novelty and ingenuity of invention and imagination of other people and their language and myths – it is the enemy of the fear caused by ignorance and the political manipulation and creation of suspicion that elites use to protect their wealth and power when they feel under threat.

There has been a long and celebrated aesthetic contrast between the Europe of the north and that of the south. The Mediterranean cultures of Greece and Rome have represented light, logic and democracy whereas the dark forests of the north represent the brooding aesthetic of the Romantic and the Gothic. It was the Goths who destroyed the Western Roman Empire and inaugurated the European 'Dark Ages' where the material culture and intellectual progress of the classical age was lost for hundreds of years until it flickered back into life during the Renaissance. We can enjoy both aesthetic traditions but the political consequences of Romanticism have always been highly problematic. Can we make cultural connections with political evolution? The Enlightenment was the inheritor of the classical tradition of reason and logic but in the hands of the bourgeoisie it became an oppressive and inhuman transition from quality to quantity – everything had to have a numerical equivalent before it was considered to be a 'science'.

From what cultural inheritance does socialism emerge? Perhaps, like capitalism, socialism has primarily European origins – certainly the Marxian tradition is steeped in the tradition of French politics, German philosophy and British economics. German culture gave birth to both Nietzsche and Marx whose legacies still combat each other today. German nihilism still haunts us and perhaps, after Auschwitz, always will. As socialists we must never ignore cultural myths and realities. As this video shows, such identification still runs deep within the working class.

WEZ

Miss Marx

KARL MARX and Jenny von Westphalen had 3 children who survived into adulthood: young Jenny, Laura and Eleanor. This film is about the latter. The film starts in March 1883 with Karl's funeral, and ends in March 1898 with Eleanor's suicide. The film shows Eleanor (nicknamed 'Tussy') meeting the socialist playwright Edward Aveling at her father's funeral, and charts how he neglected her, over the next 15 years.

Miss Marx was written and directed by the Italian Susanna Nicchiarelli and is an Italian-Belgian co-production. The biggest problem with the film is you have to do your homework before watching it. The first time I saw it, I was constantly asking: 'who is that?' and 'how do these characters know each other?' Once I did some research, the film was much more enjoyable on second viewing. The final half-hour of it is too slowly paced, and also features a bizarre scene in which Eleanor smokes opium and dances around her



house to punk-rock music (really). The most glaring omission from Miss Marx is that there's no William Morris and no mention of the Socialist League (the party they helped to found as a breakaway from the increasingly reformist Social Democratic Federation).

Nicchiarelli crosses the creative-licence-line when it comes to (Karl Marx's housekeeper) Helene's son, Freddy. In the film, Engels is depicted as being Freddy's father, however, the former confesses (on his deathbed) that Karl is the latter's real father. While it's up for debate whether or not Freddy was Karl's son, Engels did not adopt him.

Moving on to the positives: the film has an amazing punk-rock soundtrack

(provided by the band the Downtown Boys); the acting is excellent; it's a wonderfully made motion picture; and it includes some great moments of the titular character delivering some of Eleanor Marx's real speeches/writings (either directly to the camera, or to an audience within the film).

The best moment in the film was when young Jenny's son, Johnny, is upset about his grandpa (Karl Marx) dying, so he asks Eleanor if she's sure there isn't an afterlife. Eleanor tells him that there isn't, and, to comfort him, she says: 'Think of it this way, if we're wrong and there really is a life after this one, then Grandpa is surely burning in hell.'

MATTHEW SHEARN

Does voting matter?

EVERY FOUR or five years, you get to vote for some well-meaning individual, who promises to cure unemployment, poverty and homelessness. After that, you have no control over them, no power to influence events. Tony Blair once said that you are at your maximum power when you vote. If this is the most power you have, it's not a lot, is it?

Real power lies in the hands of the owners of the wealth in our society, the capitalists. They control the decisions that affect us most: what food to grow, what houses to build, what clothes to make. They do so on one principle: no profit, no production. Our needs come second to profit.

Voting for a party that works within this principle cannot address the problems of our community. Any party that promises this or that tax or law is leaving this principle intact, and the capitalists in charge. So a vote for them – Labour,

the Tories, the Liberals, the Greens, the Nationalists, etc – is a wasted vote.

Maybe you don't vote at all. Maybe you think voting is a waste of time because it doesn't change anything. Certainly, we'd agree with you that a vote for Labour, the Tories, the Liberals or the others is a waste of time.

It's a waste, particularly, if you leave it there, at the voting, at the nose counting, and take no further part until the next election. Democracy means much more than a cross on a bit of paper; it means organising, debating, discussing and examining the world around us to work out how to change it for our benefit. Democracy is too important to be left to the professionals.

We'd argue, though, that it's still a waste of time unless you see that inequality of wealth means inequality of power. That as long as a minority own society, it must be run in their interest. Labour, the Liberals,

the Tories, none of them want to do anything about that, they're content just to beg the owners of our society for some scraps from the table.

There is, though, an alternative. You can join with your fellow workers with the aim of taking control of society, in which we do all the work anyway, and begin running it directly for our mutual needs. You can have the power of membership in a democratic organisation that does not seek to take power on capitalist terms, but just seeks to abolish this rotten system. You can use your vote to show others where you stand, and proclaim your opposition to capitalism.

That is why we campaign for the common and democratic ownership and control of the wealth of the world. If you do that, you can make democracy and equality mean something, and change the world so that it is run for your benefit, not the tiny minority's. We're asking you to join us in that campaign.

Capitalism: whose bonanza?

‘FEW IDEAS are more unshakable than the notion that the rich keep getting richer while ordinary folks fall ever further behind. The belief that capitalism is rigged to benefit the wealthy and punish the workers has shaped how millions view the world, whom they vote for and whom they shake their fists at.’ So began the editorial in the *Economist*, 30 November (tinyurl.com/23xwsrty).

The editorial went on to argue against this view by saying that the facts showed that income inequality, in the sense of the ‘wage gap’ between the lowest paid and the highest paid workers has not increased and that it is likely to decrease in coming years, describing this as a ‘blue-collar bonanza’. But this is a sleight of hand as it leaves out the incomes of the few who enjoy a privileged, non-work income from owning means of production.

Of course the owners keep getting richer. That is what the capitalist system is all about. It’s about money being invested in production with a view to making a profit. Competitive pressures ensure that most profit is re-invested in further production for profit. So capital accumulates and those who possess what it is invested in come to own more; they get richer. So, yes, capitalism is rigged — structurally determined — to

benefit the wealthy as a class, however the proceeds might be divided amongst them.

Does capitalism ‘punish the workers’? Yes, though that’s a novel way of putting it. The source of profit is what wage-workers produce over and above what it costs them to produce and maintain their working skills. A part of what they produce is kept by their employer and subsequently divided into various privileged non-work incomes. In other words, they are economically exploited. Which could be described as a punishment. In any event, it’s a built-in part of the capitalist economic system.

But does the gap between the lower and higher paid workers have to increase? There is nothing built into capitalism that means it should. Wage differentials exist because the different kinds of working skills that workers sell command a different price, due both to their different costs of production and maintenance and to the varying demand for them. Sometimes the gap increases. Sometimes it decreases. Sometimes it stays the same. It depends on the job structure and labour market conditions in any period.

The editorial itself gives a good example of how changing labour market

conditions can affect wage differentials:

‘At the end of the 20th century the information revolution vastly increased the demand for college graduates with brains and computing skills. From Wall Street to Walmart these stars were put to work transforming how firms did business, making use of new tools including email and spreadsheets. By the mid-2010s, however, the revolution had matured and the college wage premium began to shrink. In 2015 the average rich-world worker with a bachelor’s degree or more was paid two-thirds more than the average high-school leaver; four years later, the gap had narrowed to a half.’

At the same time there is a labour shortage for certain manual jobs. But will this really amount to a bonanza for blue-collar workers or just the prospect of a modest increase in wages due to their being in a better bargaining position? And what about the other section of the wage-working class that is losing out? It could just amount to no more than a redistribution within the broad working class. In any event, it doesn’t put an end to workers’ economic exploitation for profit. Meanwhile capitalism remains a bonanza for those who own the means of living.

Obituary – Ralph Critchfield

Ralph Critchfield, who wrote for the *Socialist Standard* for nearly 70 years under the name of Ivan, died at the beginning of November. He joined the Socialist Party in 1947 at the age of 17 after listening to outdoor speakers on Ealing Green in West London. His two brothers were also Party members. He recounted how and why he joined in an article that appeared in the *World Socialist* in 1985 (tinyurl.com/yt6nea93).

He was born, lived and worked in West London all his life. As a conscientious objector to ‘national service’ he was required to work at Ealing film studio. Later he worked, as many from the area did, for Hoover in Western Avenue. Dissatisfied with a useless office job there, he changed career to become a probation officer.

His first article appeared in 1949, with the others following more frequently. In 1960 he became a member of the Editorial Committee, a position in which he served for a decade or so. From then until his last article in 2018 he wrote at least one every month, a remarkable achievement. An accomplished and skilful writer, his articles were not just straight expositions of the case for socialism — though he did draft a pamphlet of that title that was published in 1962. There were many exposing the horrors of war and what wars mean for ordinary people. He particularly specialised in analysis of politicians, parliament and the main political parties of capitalism, writing columns for the *Standard* on this theme for many years, including ‘Caught In the Act’ and ‘Greasy Pole’. There were also many pieces about daily life, sometimes based on his personal experience. In fact, if you were to go through them you would know that he must have worked for Hoover and later had a job in the criminal justice system. However, he never seemed to have mentioned playing rugby or being a rugby referee.

He stood as the Socialist Party candidate for parliament at two general elections — in Hampstead in 1974 and in Islington in 1979. He was also a candidate on a number of occasions in local elections in Ealing. In addition, he represented the Party in a number of public debates against opponents ranging from the Communist Party to a future Conservative MP.

Ralph Critchfield was a dedicated socialist who was engaged for over 70 years in the struggle for socialism and who made a massive contribution to the cause. A Party member spoke at his non-religious funeral. Our condolences go to his wife and family.



An appetite for profit

THE USUAL template followed by TV documentaries presents issues in a frustratingly simplistic way, reshaping and reducing them to fit the pattern. The format starts with a speedy summary of what's to come, which assumes the viewer doesn't have the patience to see a story unfold. The rest of the programme is still edited in a snappy way which jumps around from one aspect of the topic to another, just at a less fast pace. Scenes of the reporter speaking with victims and experts on the issue are usually short, cutting down their explanations to a minimum in case we lose interest. Statistics aren't very visual, so evidence of wrongdoing is livened up as shaky footage filmed undercover by the reporter with some personal risk of being rumbled. Bouncing between briefly sketched out aspects of a problem doesn't give the subject enough depth, nor help the viewer comprehend it. Watching a documentary which keeps to this template is like watching edited highlights of the start of a more substantial programme. Problems are revealed and questions are raised, but any answers suggested never reach the fundamental causes or reasons. The usual implication is that different state regulation will resolve the issue, although why such reforms have never brought about a capitalist paradise isn't considered. The companies which produce mainstream documentaries are embedded in the system, and so aren't going to look beyond it.

A recent example of this formula being followed was BBC Three's *The Skinny Jab Uncovered*, an investigation into the availability of semaglutide. This is medication which has been developed over recent years to manage type 2 diabetes and which also works as an appetite suppressant. NHS doctors are only likely to prescribe it to help with weight loss for people who are classed as obese. Other people who want to lose weight and can't afford a private prescription can easily find lots of cheaper traders in semaglutide at beauty salons or online who won't ask any questions apart from what their payment details are. Most people hear about it on social media such as Facebook, TikTok and Instagram. Demand grown by online promotion and discussion has outstripped supply, leading to a global shortage.

The product is a white powder which buyers mix with a liquid and then inject themselves with. The people attempting this aren't likely to have had any medical



Credit: BBC

training beforehand, and the packs they receive don't even tend to come with instructions. Buying semaglutide from a salon can be accompanied by haphazard advice from staff about dosage and administration, as revealed by undercover filming. Some packets are stamped with words like 'not for human consumption' or 'for research purposes only', intended as a get-out clause for the seller if anyone makes any complaints after using it. Understandably confused buyers have tried to work out what to do for themselves or have turned to social media groups for guidance, with posts such as 'I'm a bit scared' and 'hopefully I don't die'. Some have experienced unpleasant side effects such as nausea and ended up in hospital. The manufactured desire to be thin makes some people accept or overlook the risks which come with self-administering what's sold as semaglutide.

Reporter Pria Rai buys 12 packs from various suppliers and sends them off to a laboratory for analysis. Perhaps surprisingly, as many as eight were pure samples, with the others being adulterated with sugar or containing no semaglutide at all. Diluting drugs with cheaper substances is a longstanding tactic by dodgy manufacturers and dealers to maximise how much money they make from each dose. Semaglutide made illicitly is likely to come from producers working outside state regulation, which further saves on costs which come with safeguards and testing. All this means that as well as being unsure how to use the product safely, buyers are unsure what they're putting into themselves.

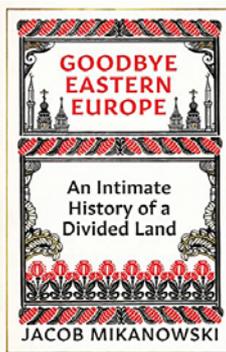
When Pria contacts the companies selling packets containing little or no semaglutide, they reply with flat denials or abuse and gloating. These sellers represent the weight loss industry at its most blatant. While semaglutide suppresses the appetite for food, it has fuelled an appetite for

profit. Making money by encouraging and preying on insecurity about looks is more important to sellers than acting responsibly about a medical procedure. This has led to dubious tactics to reduce production costs and also unreliable and extravagant claims to promote sales of the product. The documentary doesn't explain the weight loss industry in this way, though, and just ends with a quick mention that the government's regulator is investigating.

How would this situation play out in a socialist society? Does the principle of free access to goods and services mean that anyone could have substances such as semaglutide on demand? The practicalities would be for people at the time to decide, but any responsible society would have safeguards around medication which had the potential to be used in a harmful way. Regulation of medication in a socialist society would only be based on the best available knowledge of its properties, a framework to make decisions which wouldn't have to compete with an obsolete need to make money. This means that the current risks with semaglutide wouldn't apply, such as the adulteration of black market supplies to minimise costs, and responsible use being linked to what people can afford. There would be no reason to produce or administer it in a way which encouraged harm. And what place would a substance like semaglutide have in a socialist society, apart from its use to treat diabetes? We don't know to what extent people would crave an appetite suppressant as a dieting technique, but it's likely to be less than today. Attitudes to weight, attractiveness and health would differ, and wouldn't be shaped by an economic market, and in particular by industries which profit from manipulating how we want to look.

MIKE FOSTER

Caught in the Middle



Goodbye Eastern Europe. An Intimate History of a Divided Land.
By Jacob Mikanowski.
Oneworld. 2023. 375pp.

Jacob Mikanowski's book tells of how over many centuries, in what we still commonly call Eastern Europe, people and territories mixed, split and merged and empires came and went. *Goodbye Eastern Europe* is remarkable both for the eloquence and flair with which it is written and for the immensely broad and detailed knowledge it displays of the complex history of so many peoples and so many lands, into which the author also poignantly interweaves the story of his own Polish family. In a wide-ranging and dramatic but dispassionate narrative of shifting frontiers, multi-layered identities and changing nationalities, we view both worlds that have vanished and new cultures and systems of governments that have arisen, from medieval times right up to the present day, with even a perspective on the current war in Ukraine.

In comparing Eastern to Western Europe the author points to major developmental differences. In the West, he writes, 'rulers worked hard to homogenize their states', 'the equation between ethnic and linguistic belonging began very early', and 'the machinery of the state worked like a giant steamroller, ironing out differences wherever they could be found'. In Eastern Europe, on the other hand, empires were much more pragmatic, tending to accept and indeed 'accentuate difference rather than suppress it'. So, for example, Christians of all persuasions and Jews were allowed to manage their own affairs by the Ottomans and the Hapsburgs. A Hungarian king, we are told, 'lectured his son about the usefulness of immigrants' on the grounds that 'a kingdom of one language and one custom is weak and fragile' and newcomers should be treated 'with goodwill and honor', in order that 'they will prefer to live with you rather than inhabit any other place'. So Eastern Europe became a land of diversity and difference and remained largely so until the wars of the last two centuries tore the old empires apart (the Ottoman Empire, for example, 'was crumbling like a mouthful of rotten teeth'), and made it begin to take on the homogenized, nationalistic model of the Western nation

state. At the end of the First World War, in particular, with these new political formations taking shape, the map of Eastern Europe 'resembled a sky full of shifting clouds', as national mythologies (that 'nemesis of the working class', as someone has put it) developed.

Part 3, the last main section of this book, deals with how these clouds shifted and eventually came to rest, via a series of illuminating chapters entitled, respectively, 'Moderns', 'Prophets', 'War', 'Stalinism', 'Socialism' and 'Thaw', and ranging over the whole stretch of what could be called Eastern Europe from Poland and the Baltic states in the north to Bulgaria and Albania in the south. The chapter on war – World War 2 – though magisterially and dispassionately told, is hard to read for its unflinching account of the near extermination of the Jewish people in the Holocaust. Then, in the chapter on Stalinism in particular, while not dwelling on the horrors of the Soviet pre-war period when millions of Stalin's supposed 'enemies' were starved, deported or eliminated, the author presents a stark view of the expansion of the Soviet dictatorship from 1939 onwards, as it initially took in eastern Poland and the Baltic states and then, after the end of the Second World War, completed the process of domination, in which 'every country in the region was a one-party state, dominated by a local version of the Communist Party', with leaders approved by Stalin who 'dictated their foreign policies and determined their relationships with the rest of the world'. This was, as the author so eloquently puts it, the 'dreamworld of High Stalinism', a revolution 'imposed not from below but from above, and not from within but from without'. It was, furthermore, he tells us, not just a model of political oppression but also failed to provide anything resembling decent living standards to its working masses and any claim to be establishing socialism was 'shameless puffery'.

A contradictory and misleading thing, unfortunately, is that, having said this, the title he gives to the chapter that comes next, referring to the Khrushchev-Brezhnev era that followed Stalinism, is 'Socialism'. Misleading both because the reality of this era bore no relation to the classless, stateless, moneyless society of free access that proper socialism is and also because the author himself then goes on to portray that reality as very much the same as before but in a milder version. He characterises it thus: 'Stalinism eliminated its enemies. The socialist regimes that followed neutralized them instead'. Whatever the case, it carried on being, as he puts it, 'a realm of

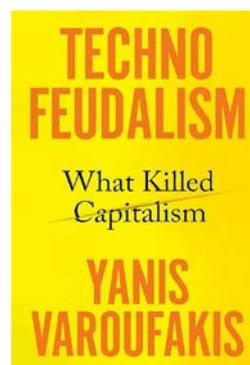
deceit, of empty slogans and meaningless exhortations' as well as 'status and scarcity', where queues were one of 'the defining experiences of life'.

It could not last and, from 1989 onwards, what the author – again misleadingly – calls 'real socialism' began to break up, both in the satellite states and the Soviet Union itself, leading to what he refers to as 'thaw'. He sees this shift as a process of moving from socialism to capitalism, whereas in reality capitalism already existed in the East. It was not the private or 'mixed economy' capitalism of the West but capitalism nonetheless, state capitalism, a system with all the characteristic features of that system – money and wages, buying and selling, an elite class controlling (if not formally owning) the means of production and living off the benefits of this. Something that is still largely the case in countries such as China and Cuba.

The following overview in the book's epilogue provides a fitting epitaph: 'For Eastern Europe, the twentieth century was a century of barely interrupted cataclysms. The old ties that bound people together dissolved, only to be replaced with murderous aggression. As rival armies flooded into the region from east and west, neighbor killed neighbor. When the wars ended, mass expulsions and population transfers unravelled what was left of the old Eastern European tapestry'.

HKM

Technofeudalism?



Technofeudalism: What Killed Capitalism.
By Yanis Varoufakis.
Bodley Head.
304 pages.

Following up on his *Explaining capitalism to my daughter*, this latest book from Yanis Varoufakis takes the form of a poignant imagined conversation with his recently deceased father. It seeks to answer his Dad's question about the internet: 'Now computers speak to each other, will this make capitalism impossible to overthrow? Or might it finally reveal its Achilles heel?' His answer is that they have overthrown capitalism, in favour of what he terms 'Technofeudalism'.

He's not the first to claim the end of capitalism in a form of new class society. In this case, his analysis is based on several

strands. ‘Cloudalists’ (as he terms the owners of social media platforms and web services, like Amazon or Meta) have inserted themselves as an essential part of the market, both in acting as middlemen to merchants, as well as producing demand, and so are able to demand rent from productive capitalists.

To do this, they use the free labour of ‘technoserfs’, ie, all of us who feed the data streams of these cloudalists in our free time through interacting with these platforms and teaching them all about ourselves. The cloudalists, he claims, do not make profits, they rely on asset appreciation, fed by the money creation by governments that cannot afford to let the quantitative easing process ever end.

There are several flaws in this thinking. Firstly, rent is not an inherently feudal notion, although it is the form by which aristocrats managed to convert their assets to cope with the advent of capitalism. At feudalism’s height, an aristocrat did not get his income from owning estates, but because of his rank, and the subordination of people below him: he was free to demand their surplus product (which was anything beyond that which they needed to live on).

As commodity production became more generalised it became easier to accept money payments. The aristocrat’s estates were transformed into a type of property. When commodity production led to capitalist production, it became possible to turn the rental claim into a demand for a share of surplus value produced. This is the type of rent ‘cloudalists’ extract, it still depends on the exploitation of waged labour.

Their position as middlemen is exactly the same as when Woolworths held a prime spot on the high street, and was able to make profits by being the first port of call for many shoppers who, seeing the goods displayed, might find new things they wanted to buy. All the ‘cloudalists’ have done is concentrate this capacity into fewer hands to ensure that the surplus value comes their way.

Similarly, that we are ‘cloud serfs’ is inaccurate, we are not giving a surplus of our product to the owners of Amazon, it is an externality, a primary accumulation, something that has always been a part of capitalism. The search for things that can be gathered for free and turned into commodified wealth has always been a part of the way capitalism amasses wealth (most notably and horrifically in the form of mass enslavement of Africans in the 17th and 18th centuries).

Even the notion that these tech companies don’t need to make a profit anymore is suspect, as we’ve shown in these

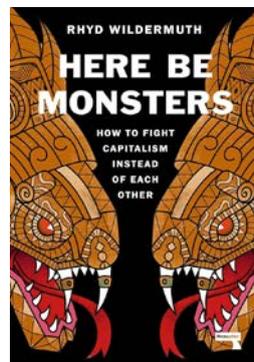
pages before, the likes of Jeff Bezos and Bill Gates arguably structure their wealth to avoid showing any income (and thus avoid taxation), likewise massive companies are adroit at showing little or no taxable profits: that doesn’t mean that surplus value has not been extracted, it simply means the accounting categories can be manipulated to disguise it.

As he shows, this has led to massive concentration of capital ownership: three companies, Vanguard, BlackRock and State Street ‘effectively own American capitalism’. These are investment funds: ‘Together, the Big Three are the largest single shareholder in almost 90 per cent of firms listed in the New York Stock Exchange, including Apple, Microsoft, ExxonMobil, General Electric and Coca-Cola’. They are a vehicle for passive investing, and although they do concentrate the wealth, the competition between firms comes to be attractive to such investment.

Of course, there are political implications to this: concentration of wealth is concentration of political power, and the need for the owners of stock to keep the nominal asset value up does drive the political decisions of governments; but what Varoufakis analyses is just the ongoing rivalry between owners of different types of capital to get their hands on a share of the surplus value. What ‘cloudalists’ do is concentrate and generalise the cloud of surplus value. The tendency of capitalist production is to divorce prices from values, ensuring returns go to those who own the most capital. What Varoufakis is analysing is not the downfall of capitalism, but its purest application.

P.S.

It’s class that counts



Here Be Monsters: How to Fight Capitalism Instead of Each Other. By Rhys Wildermuth. Repeater £12.99.

The idea behind the title is that monsters were once seen as signs that something was wrong in the world, but also as messengers pointing to a solution. However, this aspect of the book is not very convincing, so we will not deal with it here.

The book is basically a critique of ‘social justice identity politics’, a set of ideas that employs the concept of intersectionality.

So a black woman is oppressed in two ways, by being a woman and by being black. The real oppressor is then, apparently, the white, heterosexual, able-bodied, cis-gender man, who subjugates anyone who is black, gay, disabled, transgender or a woman. Wildermuth argues that class has no position in such a system, and that introducing class would in fact undermine the entire framework. A man who matches all the above criteria but is homeless and jobless has little in common with a capitalist who has the same traits. And a black woman millionaire has equally little in common with a black woman struggling to pay the rent and feed her children. Intersectional social justice, he says, is perfectly compatible with the continuation of capitalism, and having more black women CEOs would not alter capitalism at all.

The concept of class employed here is however not entirely clear. There are references to the professional-managerial class, who supposedly ‘share and reproduce the cultural values of the capitalists’ and are ‘guardians of the social order’. They are part of the working class, though are paid more than most, and at one point are roughly identified with white-collar workers. The author is correct to say that both rural and urban workers belong to the same class and are exploited, but more needs to be said on how class is defined.

Wildermuth states that it is unfortunately all too easy for some on the left to dismiss any contrary view to theirs in very strong terms, such as the feminist academic Judith Butler, who considers as fascist the anti-gender movement in parts of eastern Europe (Guardian 23/10/21).

The account is enlivened by the author recounting some of his personal experiences, such as the time a black man in a cafe shouted at him, ‘The only good white person is the one who knows he should be shot and killed because he is incapable of not harming others.’ The book contains a lot of interesting points on how identity politics fails to address the real issues of poverty and exploitation, but (despite the sub-title) says disappointingly little about the real way to fight capitalism. There is a reference to how Lenin’s vanguardism was quite different from the views of Marx and Engels, but nothing about the abolition of the wages system. Wildermuth says at one point that the left had given up on trying to change material circumstances and instead ‘settled for symbolic struggles with no clear end goal’. Sadly, there is little here on end goals, either.

PB

Subsidizing food destruction

ONE OF the first pieces of legislation to be presented to the House of Commons this session has been the Horticulture (Special Payments) Bill. The intention of this bill is to provide for payments to be made to commercial growers of horticultural products, especially growers of apples and pears, facing 'special difficulties' as a result of Britain's entry into the Common Market.(.....)

As we have pointed out before, governments, of whatever political persuasion, exist to protect the interests of the capitalist class (ie, the owners of the means of life). This they do in a number of ways — tariff barriers and subsidies to producers for example — always bearing in mind that by such measures they expect a healthier national capitalism to be the outcome.

The Horticulture (Special Payments) Bill is just such a measure, and has been welcomed as such. Payments are to be made to growers of apples and pears who discontinue production. The scheme is expected to cost £4.5 million to £5 million over the period 1974-78. This figure is far in excess of the £440,000 spent up to mid 1972 under a similar scheme (see *Socialist Standard* January 1973). There are to be checks on the growers who apply for the 'grubbing up' subsidy to ensure that the orchards dug up

are not replanted for at least five years. In effect the government are subsidising the destruction of productive resources.

In this way, it is hoped, the competitive efficiency of British horticulture will be improved by reducing the amount of produce reaching the market. As a result market prices are expected to continue their upward trend after a period during the 'sixties when prices stagnated while costs increased. 'Surpluses', that is more being produced than the market can absorb profitably, could upset this state of affairs. As Roger Moate, M.P. for the Kent constituency of Faversham, pointed out:

'It needs only a small amount of surplus at any moment to disrupt the market entirely, and a grower can quickly lose almost his annual profit because of the disruption' (Hansard, 16 November, 1973).

So once again, in a world where food is short, market considerations get priority over the needs of people. All we need now is for a cynic to point out that the trees dug up could help to alleviate the fuel crisis.

(Socialist Standard, January 1974)

Action Replay

Odds against

THERE ARE over four hundred gambling-related suicides each year in the UK, and far more people suffer from addiction to gambling. In an attempt to deal with such problems, the Gambling Commission is proposing affordability checks for customers of online sites. This has naturally led to a lot of complaints from bookmakers, but also from others involved in the horse-racing industry. If gamblers are discouraged or even barred from placing a bet, bookmakers' profits will go down, and so will the amount they pay into racing (the Horserace Betting Levy Board collects 10% of an operator's profits above £500,000). So owners and trainers may well find themselves losing income too.

Various kinds of triggers are envisaged, such as having a net loss of £125 within a thirty-day period, which could lead to inquiry into, say, whether the punter has a history of unpaid debts. The gambling industry has objected that this would imply perhaps ten times the number involved in problem gambling having their bank statements and so on checked, even though what they are doing is entirely legal.

One view (thesportseconomist.com, 21 November) is that sports betting is an

increasingly important part of gambling in general and it needs to be regulated 'to ensure a fair game, keep bettors safe, and stop illegal acts'. AI and machine learning could be used to, for instance, evaluate a person's betting history and recognise suspicious activities. So clearly a great deal of information would be acquired about both individuals and general trends.

There is also a concern that the checks will be extended from online to betting shops and perhaps even racecourses. The Gambling Commission has said that

this is not the case, but bookmakers are not convinced. They also point out that amounts spent in high-street bookies are far smaller than what may be spent online, and that checks may be sufficiently intrusive to send punters to bet on the black market, where there will be no checks and no guards against scams and frauds.

Some companies are of course in favour of the checks, as it means business for them, such as the GB Group, which helps companies verify the identity of customers. 'Keeping players safe online is right for players and gambling operators', their website (gbgplc.com) states, as it is part of the companies' 'corporate social responsibility'. Bet they'll be happy if the proposals are implemented.

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.

JANUARY 2024 EVENTS

World Socialist Movement online meetings

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

Sunday 14 January 10.00
Central Online Branch Meeting

Friday 5 January 19.30
What capitalism brought in 2023
General discussion

Friday 12 January 19.30
State Constitutions: paper and reality
Speaker: Uther Naysmith

Friday 19 January 19.30
Has the internet enhanced or inhibited the workers understanding of the world?
Speaker: John Cumming

Friday 26 January 19.30
Proposed solutions to climate change
Speaker: Richard Field

Socialist Party Physical Meetings

LONDON

Sunday 28 January 3pm

The War in Gaza: What We Say

Speaker: Bill Martin

Socialist Party premises, 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN
(nearest tube: Clapham North)

MANCHESTER

Saturday 10 February 2pm

Think about yourself for a change

City Centre: Friends Meeting House,
6 Mount Street, M2 5NS.

CARDIFF

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

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

SUMMER SCHOOL 2004

Friday 16 - Sunday 18 August

Venue: University of Worcester.

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.

Lifestyle choices: does it make a difference?

WE'RE OFTEN told that we can help to change things or at least move in the right direction by each of us making changes in our personal lifestyle. We're encouraged for example to make sure we know where our food is grown, how 'sustainable' its production and distribution methods are, and, if possible, to 'buy local'. The idea is that our food buying choices will help to reduce carbon emissions and contribute to the battle against ecological deterioration and global warming. It's also suggested that more radical lifestyle choices like vegetarianism or veganism can play a part in this by freeing up for direct food production land currently used for crops to feed the vast number of animals raised and slaughtered everywhere in the world.

This was the theme of a recent 'opinion' piece in one of the website bulletins from the *Scientific American* magazine which regularly arrive in my email inbox and usually contain items which are both interesting and thought-provoking. This particular piece, written by Sarah C. Hull, assistant professor of cardiology at the Yale School of Medicine, was entitled 'A Meatless Diet is Better for You- and the Planet' (tinyurl.com/ysb5w78c). Its summary states that 'vegetarian and especially vegan diets can promote better health, help mitigate climate change and reduce inhumane factory farming' and it puts forward various, seemingly plausible arguments against certain commonly held beliefs about diet, for example that plant-based food does not contain enough protein and iron for adequate nourishment and that dairy products are necessary to obtain enough dietary calcium. It then goes on to talk about health benefits of a non-meat or low-meat diet referring to scientific evidence that points to a significantly lower risk of cancer and cardiovascular disease.

Further arguments are then presented regarding the inevitable cruelty to animals involved in factory farming, the risk of epidemics or pandemics associated with the overcrowding of livestock, and the often poor conditions of work for the human beings themselves involved in this activity. Finally the point is made that meat consumption

contributes significantly to climate change through deforestation and methane emissions, with food systems making up a third of global greenhouse gas emissions caused by human activity (tinyurl.com/2p9dtht6), and animal-based foods contributing twice the emissions of plant-based foods (tinyurl.com/bde8nzs6). Personal dietary carbon emissions, it concludes, can be reduced by 30 percent with a vegetarian diet and by up to 85 percent with a vegan one.

So do we all go vegetarian or vegan? It sounds a good idea to me personally, but thinking about it carefully, I can't avoid the question of how much difference it would really make within the confines of the buying and selling system we all live in. Professor Hull clearly thinks it would make a difference. She talks about the need for people to adopt at least a 'flexitarian approach to meal planning that de-centers meat as the focal point of meals' and to consider that 'even modest reductions in meat consumption and progress toward a more plant-forward diet can yield significant health and environmental benefits.' She also quotes from the 2019 EAT-Lancet Commission report on 'globally sustainable diets' which states: 'Food is the single strongest lever to optimize human health and environmental sustainability on Earth' (tinyurl.com/m5bb75tt).

Yet while such choices might indeed lead to different methods and types of food production, reduce the mass slaughter of living creatures and also have some impact on climate change, how much difference would they actually make to the day-to-day problems faced by many millions of people throughout the world? I'm thinking here about such problems as poverty, homelessness or precarious housing, and, above all, the need for the vast majority of us to sell our energies to an employer for a wage day in day out or find ourselves without the means to live decently. What I'm saying is whatever the method of production or the goods produced, so long as production takes place with a view to goods being sold on the market and maximising profit and people needing money to buy those things, we will still have the system we call capitalism and all the problems and contradictions it throws up. The major contradiction is that the means do actually exist to sustain all the world's people at a decent level several times over in food and other essentials and this

without polluting the environment or changing the climate. And this is the case whether we are meat eaters or go vegan. Yet, under the capitalist system of production for profit and buying and selling, those who do not have money to buy will go hungry, many more will lead insecure and highly stressed existences, human health will not be safeguarded, and the ecosystem will continue to be in imminent danger of collapse.

To be fair, Professor Hull's apparent solution to this is not just lifestyle changes by individuals but also – and more importantly in her view – what she calls 'large-scale, well-coordinated national and international action' and 'pressure on governments and organisations to enact meaningful change in this direction'. Nevertheless, however much change we are able to implement either in our personal lives or by forms of collective pressure, it stands to reason that, as long as we continue to do this within the constraints of the profit system that is capitalism, any progress will be necessarily limited. It's a little like clamouring for freedom on the basis of slavery. So while we can't deny that, as she says, 'societies change when enough individuals within them alter their behaviour', it's not the kind of behavioural change she is referring to that's needed, but rather change in political behaviour, or put a different way, in consciousness.

So while there's no doubt that magazines like *Scientific American* can teach us a lot about how things work in the world, they are sadly no more advanced than most of those who read them when it comes to seeing beyond the social and political system in which we exist. Isn't it time therefore for workers throughout the world to switch on to the consciousness needed to do that and to vote collectively to change that system and move to a moneyless, marketless society of free access and voluntary cooperation – which we call socialism? In that society people will put their natural human capacity for cooperation and collaboration to work and use the resources of the earth to make sure that everyone – whether they choose to be vegan, vegetarian or otherwise – has enough healthy food to eat and to secure a decent life for all.

HOWARD MOSS