

THE

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# SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

## CRIME SCENE INVESTIGATION



CRIME SCENE DO NOT CROSS



Watch as the CSI team uncovers a serial killer and then does nothing about it.

Also: New year, old notions  
 'Defence diplomacy'  
 Will information goods undermine capitalism?  
 How democratic is 'Democracy'?

Poverty and the causes of wealth  
 What has capitalism ever done for us?  
 Try thinking



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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'

# Gangs and counter-gangs

BRITAIN IS a peace-loving country, so the claim goes. It just happens to always be at war. It can't help it. There's always bad people in the world, and Britain needs to fight for freedom, human rights and against an endless supply of Hitlers. So the pro-war camp from the Balkans to Iraq, to Libya, to Syria have always said. So, this time, when Britain and the United States bomb Yemen, it is refreshing to hear the powers that be say that it is to protect trade routes.

It is appropriate that this happened in the same month that General Sir Frank Kitson, GBE, KCB, MC & Bar, DL died at the age of 97: a man who effectively killed for Britain all over the world, including Malaya, Kenya and Northern Ireland. His writings on the role of military force in the modern world were clear-eyed:

'Countries are obliged to fight where their interests demand they should, and this is not necessarily along their geographical frontiers.'

So, of course, when the flow of shipping is being re-routed away from the Red Sea, when the insurance cost of shipping is increasing by 10 percent with the consequence that everything that has been shipped will naturally cost more, it will be natural for our masters to turn to violence in order to protect their interests.

The protection, in this case, is from the Houthi rebels in Yemen, who are backed by Iran, a regional power itself trying to extend its interests by asserting control of the sea lanes. The US and its allies have been seizing Iranian ships and their cargo, and this month Iran has taken to boarding ships and has recaptured the St Nikolas (formerly the Suez Rajan) laden with oil which had been taken from them last year in a US 'sanctions' operation that confiscated 980,000 barrels of oil.

This is the hypocritical background to the UN Security Council resolution passed to condemn the Houthi rebels that asserts as universal values the navigational

rights and freedoms of merchant and commercial vessels, which, in accordance with international law, must be respected. The Security Council also affirmed the right of UN member states to defend their vessels from attacks in accordance with international law. Navigational rights and freedoms, but on terms that suit powerful groups, and 'self defence' meaning the right to defend property and profits at the expense of human lives.

The slogan 'none are free until all are free' is resonant in this situation. While the only way the world is run is through force of arms seizing and controlling wealth, no one can be free from coercion and fear of violence. This is, perhaps, best summed up in the title of one of Kitson's books *Gangs and Counter-gangs*.

Socialists are opposed to gangsterism and counter-gangsterism and for the common ownership of the world's wealth so that co-operation and creation can replace conflict and destruction.

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# Capitalism unplugged

LAST MONTH Norway announced a huge ocean-floor mining project, doubtless the first of many such endeavours and probably not a huge surprise to Standard readers (Pathfinders, February 2023) or anyone following the halting progress of the green energy transition (GET). Capitalism is not about meeting real needs but about making profits, so when it comes to personal mobility, free mass public transport is not on the table. Instead, the market has fixated on electric vehicle (EV) production, and the bigger the EV the bigger the profit, with what's been called the 'EV obesity epidemic' largely cancelling out the environmental gains of having an EV in the first place. And big cars need big batteries - the battery in a GMC Hummer EV weighs the same as a Honda Civic. ([tinyurl.com/yv5a7x6a](https://tinyurl.com/yv5a7x6a)). Meanwhile, since the cheapest battery materials are in China, by which no manufacturer wants to be held hostage, or Congo with its child-labour practices, it makes good economic sense to dredge up the ocean floor and devastate an unknown virgin ecosystem instead.

The difficulties of obtaining lithium are well known, however there are many competing designs of EV battery which don't necessarily rely on sensitive and volatile liquid lithium, or on nickel or cobalt. But there are pros and cons with each. Solid-state batteries won't explode, but production is hard to scale up. Sodium-metal is readily available, but heavy, and subject to electrode corrosion. Hydrogel operates at -20C and is robust enough to be run over by a car, but offers lower performance. Even quantum batteries are being proposed, though theoretical for now. How all this pans out will be instructive. In socialism it would be a matter of picking the overall best. In capitalism it's the market that will decide, based on a variety of fluctuating economic and political factors that often have little to do with the technology. 'The GET doesn't just depend on the right tech, or metal availability, but is also about supply chains, government incentives and business plans - these will determine the market for which batteries can be implemented at scale' (*Economist*, 25 October, [tinyurl.com/5n7fba7](https://tinyurl.com/5n7fba7)). Currently China is poised to sweep the world with cheap EVs, but major regional markets may respond with tariff-barrier protectionism, as the US is already doing.

In any case there's a bigger problem. Where is all the clean electricity to come from? There is a paradox here



in that decarbonising transport means decarbonising electricity, but rapidly increasing electricity demand will make that decarbonisation more difficult. In countries like Norway, where hydropower is a major part of the energy mix, the break-even point for EVs over combustion vehicles is around 8,400 miles, whereas in coal-dependent Poland and China, it's around 78,000 miles. Even when the electricity is supposed to be green it sometimes isn't. The Drax power station in Yorkshire supplies 12 percent of the UK's supposedly clean energy by chopping down and burning trees ([tinyurl.com/2292b6k7](https://tinyurl.com/2292b6k7)).

Globally, electricity generation will have to triple or quadruple if COP28 fossil phase-out pledges are to be honoured. Thus far, the capitalist world is not coping very well. New renewable power stations are not keeping pace with the retirement of old fossil plants. Already the regulatory body overseeing the North American power grid is predicting power outages in most regions of the US and Canada, starting as early as this year ([tinyurl.com/6js9nkzp](https://tinyurl.com/6js9nkzp)). If the world's richest country is coming unplugged, it doesn't bode well for the rest of us.

As an aside, one thing driving the recent and unsustainable surge in electricity demand - and this will infuriate socialists if nobody else - is Bitcoin mining, which requires vast amounts of electricity to generate useless virtual currency for greedy investors to speculate over. Bitcoin mining also sends 30,000 tonnes of used hardware to landfill every year, and wastes precious water too, for cooling the server farms, with just one Bitcoin transaction using a swimming pool's worth ([tinyurl.com/yt5jy6h](https://tinyurl.com/yt5jy6h)).

Apart from such capitalist silliness, there is a massive grid bottleneck, where extra renewable sources can't come on line because the current grids aren't designed to support them (December

Pathfinders). Existing transformers get hot and need to cool at night, but overnight EV charging, domestic electric heating or A/C on hot nights mean they won't get the chance, so they will blow, causing outages. Heavier transformers are needed but the poles aren't designed to carry them, and power lines also need upgrading to allow EVs to feed back into the grid. To meet 2050 climate targets, the US would need a million miles of new lines, but only installed 18,000 miles in the decade 2010-2020, meaning they would have to increase installation rates by a factor of 20. Overall, upgrading all this is estimated to cost tens of billions for the US, and globally around \$20 trillion ([tinyurl.com/4kbn8s5d](https://tinyurl.com/4kbn8s5d)). And that's without considering the slow roll-out of charging infrastructure by governments under intense pressure from other priorities, like health provision, domestic subsidies or arms for Ukraine. And then there's the fact that many roads, multi-storey car parks and bridges aren't designed for much heavier EVs.

The word 'omnishambles' comes to mind, but for capitalism that's really just normal business practice. A cooperative socialist society of democratic common ownership would still have to undertake a green energy transition, but it would only have to deal with the technical problems. With no markets, no trade and no money, it wouldn't have to put up with the GET staggering, pausing or going into reverse every time the oil price went up or down, some country started a war, or looming elections motivated careerist politicians to pander to their pet NIMBY supporters. And with no salaried employment, the highways wouldn't be crammed with miserable wage slaves forced to commute every day in order to pay for food, housing, and the electric vehicle they've had to buy just to get to work. Once we get rid of the obsolete market system, things will become so much simpler.

**PJS**

# Dear Editors

## Will anything good come out of the war in Israel?

I REMEMBER dancing and singing Hava Nagila with my two Jewish roommates in our college dorm in 1978, when Israel and Egypt signed the Camp David Accords. Time has shown how naïve we were to rejoice. Sadly, decades will pass again, and it will probably not matter whether or not the current fighting ended with the signing of a major ‘two-state’ accord.

The broad mass of the public is not galvanized either way by what is happening in the Middle East and Eastern Europe. The weak and underprivileged, the working poor and the lower middle class aren’t taking sides. They know that the wars are taxing their pockets and that nothing positive can follow if they balloon into regional wars and the price of oil exceeds 150 dollars a barrel.

The ideological battle lines around the wars in Israel and Ukraine do not follow class lines. Most people on either side are white. This is an identity crisis at the top of society. These fissures and divides reflect the declining international strength of the United States and its inability to guarantee that Globalization 2 does not crumble and collapse. This is a conflict between those who support Palestinians against Israeli apartheid, and those who are attracted by Israel’s apartheid treatment of non-Europeans (never mind that most Israelis today are Mizrahi with origins in the Middle East and North Africa rather than Ashkenazi, or European Jews). Incidentally, the supporters of Palestine must be very careful around their new political bedfellows. A person carrying a Pride flag at a recent pro-Palestine rally in London was angrily chased away by other demonstrators.

Proponents of the idea of statehood for Palestine are drawn to the cause as one of ‘national liberation.’ They forget that the bourgeois revolutions ended in the mid-nineteenth century and that although numerous new nations emerged in the twentieth century, their significance was no longer a struggle against a pre-capitalist mode of production. The so-called ‘national liberation struggles’ and ‘anti-colonial’ or ‘anti-imperialist struggles’

of the twentieth century all turned out to be wars between capitalist powers. Every ‘liberation’ movement since the early 1920s has been harsh on all forms of democratic and autonomous groups, particularly among workers. And ‘liberation from imperialism’ always seems to involve subjugation to the imperialism of another superpower (in today’s world, that is the United States on the one hand, and China, Russia, and Iran, on the other).

The backers of Netanyahu’s Israel tend to be connected with the military industrial complex and traditional sectors of the economy. Among them are radical conservatives like Elon Musk and Donald Trump, who do not want to succumb to the authority of the politically correct supporters of Palestine. Also supporting Israel are far-right groups. Who would have thought this possible? Does this mean that anti-Semitism – racism in general – is a by-product of the disease, and not the disease itself? Holocaust or no, right-wing fanatics around the world are openly voicing their support for Netanyahu’s government because they appreciate the harsh way it deals with non-whites. But doesn’t a class aspect usually lie behind any manifestation of racism? The Nazi hatred of the Jews, for instance, can be seen as a socio-psychological transformation and generalized expression of the fear the German middle class had for both large capital and labor.

What advantage can simple Palestinians derive from the existence of a homeland for themselves? The worst calamities befall simple people during periods of enforced

national unity in war. What can they gain from the existence of a Palestinian state other than more war, death, and destruction? The champions of a two-state solution— which includes many liberal Jews, particularly in North America—are unwittingly supporting the freedom of simple Palestinians to be exploited by their Hamas masters or whatever replacement is found for them in the future.

Is a lasting peace in the Middle East possible? Theoretically speaking, yes. It’s a long shot, but it’s out of the box and obvious. It requires no war, no blood, no creation of a Palestinian state, and no Israel as we know it. Naturally, the starting point would have to be the ouster of the Netanyahu government in Jerusalem and the end of the rule of Hamas in Gaza. Peace will remain a pipe dream until the corrupt monster states in the region—and that includes Netanyahu’s government—fall and are replaced by something new and truly democratic. Only resistance by the people of the Middle East (and Eastern Europe) against their own governments can lead the way to permanent peace. It is impossible to predict what exact form this new ‘people power’ might take. Who knows? Perhaps it might be something along the lines of a unitary republic of workers’ councils. That might work.

**Evel Economakis, Greece.**

*Reply:* Yes, but only if we are talking about democratically elected popular councils on the basis of the common ownership of the means of living; which of course couldn’t exist just in one province of the former Ottoman Empire. *Editors.*



Credit: Beal Khaleel/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

# Entrepreneurialism

IN AN article in the *Sunday Telegraph* (2 December) appealing for Tories to vote Labour, subtitled 'My party extends the hand of friendship to those who voted for the Tories but feel let down by their failure to act', Sir Keir Starmer praised Thatcher for having 'set loose our natural entrepreneurialism'. Entrepreneurialism, what's that?

One dictionary defines it as 'the ability to start new businesses, especially when this involves seeing new opportunities to make money'. This is not what most people remember the Thatcher government of the 1980s for. Selling off nationalised industries and council houses, cutting social benefits, mass unemployment and hammering the miners come more readily to mind.

Thatcher is on record as declaring:

'I set out to destroy socialism because I felt it was at odds with the character of the people. We were the first country in the world to roll back the frontiers of socialism, then roll forward the frontiers of freedom' (tinyurl.com/mus4fr9v).

By 'socialism' she meant of course the sort of restrictions on the workings of private capitalist enterprises that the Labour Party used to preach. Private capitalist enterprises supported her because they

wanted more 'freedom' to choose how to make profits. In writing of 'our natural' entrepreneurialism Starmer even agrees with her ridiculous claim that this accords with 'the character of the people'.

Entrepreneurs are people who invest money in producing something or providing some service with a view to making more money in the form of profit. This is not necessarily their own money but is frequently money borrowed from a bank or some venture capitalists or even the state who reckon that the entrepreneur has identified a potential way to make more money in which they can share.

In chapter 23 of Volume 3 of *Capital* on 'Interest and Profits of Enterprise', Marx discusses how this extra money is divided between the lender of capital and the entrepreneur who actually uses it:

'The functioning capitalist is here assumed as a non-owner of capital. Ownership of the capital is represented in relation to him by the money-capitalist, the lender. The interest he pays to the latter thus appears as that portion of gross profit which is due to the ownership of capital as such. As distinct from this, that portion of profit which falls to the active capitalist appears now as profit of enterprise,

deriving solely from the operations, or functions, which he performs with the capital in the process of reproduction, hence particularly those functions which he performs as entrepreneur in industry or commerce. (..) [P]rofit of enterprise appears to him as the exclusive fruit of the functions which he performs with the capital, as the fruit of the movement and performance of capital, of a performance which appears to him as his own activity.'

Entrepreneurs, especially those who succeed in making lots of profit, have a high opinion of themselves. They see themselves as 'wealth creators'. They are certainly more involved in this than the mere owner of capital but only because they identify some new way of making money by organising workers to produce wealth.

Entrepreneurs are obviously more useful from a general capitalist point of view than mere coupon-clippers living off dividends or interest as they are an active section of the capitalist class identifying new ways of making profits, the driving force of capitalism. Which is why governments, as the guardians of the overall general capitalist interest in a particular country, seek to encourage them. It is part of their remit. Thatcher recognised this. So does Starmer. Labour is now more than ever an avowedly capitalist party and is openly saying it will govern as such.

**Our venue is the University of Worcester, St John's Campus, Henwick Grove, St John's, Worcester, WR2 6AJ.**

**More information, including details of talks, ticket prices and how to book a place can be found on the Socialist Party's website. Scan the QR code or visit [worldsocialism.org/spgb/event/spgb-summer-school-2024/](https://worldsocialism.org/spgb/event/spgb-summer-school-2024/) Email enquiries to [spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk).**



**Our understanding of the kind of society we're living in is shaped by our circumstances: our home, our work, our finances, our communities. Recognising our own place in the economy, politics and history is part of developing a wider awareness of how capitalist society functions. Alongside an understanding of the mechanics of capitalism, political consciousness also involves our attitude towards it. Seeing through the ideologies which promote accepting our current social system requires us to question**

**and judge what we experience. Realising that capitalism doesn't benefit the vast majority of people naturally leads on to considering what alternative society could run for the benefit of everyone.**

**The Socialist Party's weekend of talks and discussion explores what political consciousness is, how it arises and what we, as a class and as individuals, can do with it.**

# Halo Halo

RELIGIONS, WELL some anyway, amongst other things, preach tolerance don't they? Not in Kansas, USA, apparently. A new after-school club is causing such a kerfuffle that a petition has been raised against it. The petition says: 'Satanism has a strong history of persecution and violence towards the church and those who believe in God.' And goes on 'Whether you believe in God, are a Christian, Catholic, Mormon, Hindu, Buddhist or even atheist you should see that ending this club is not just because it opposes Christianity but because what they stand for and the actions they will make are wrong and immoral. This isn't an argument over religion and Christianity but of right and wrong.' (*Newsweek* 27 December). It's a Satan Club. Are young folk setting out to wind up their parents and authority?

In Iowa, 'the Satanic Temple of Iowa placed with state permission a small altar on the first floor of the Iowa State Capitol. It displays what are described online as the seven fundamental tenets" of Satanism, including the statement that "the freedoms of others should be respected, including the freedom to offend"' (YahooNews 13 December). The incensed

State Representative wants to bring in a law to display 'the Ten Commandments in all state buildings, including the Capitol, and in Iowa public schools', but admits 'few people think there is much that can be legally done about it because of free speech and freedom of religion.'

Richard Dawkins in his 2009 book, *The Greatest Show on Earth: The Evidence for Evolution*, notes that in 2008, a Gallup poll, in response to three questions regarding the origin and development of humans on this planet, found that 36 percent of Americans thought that evolution had taken place over millions of years but that God had kick-started it; 14 percent thought yes, millions of years of evolution but definitely no god: and a staggering 44 per cent thought (rather believed because thought implies rationality) that God was responsible for the creation of humans within the last ten thousand years. The percentage of the latter who favoured October or some other month is not known.

A Gallup poll along similar lines in 2019 appears to show that the 44 percent is down to 40; the 36 is down to 33, and the 14 has seen a large jump to 22 percent. A 2021 Pew Research Center survey found



that 60 percent of Protestants consider themselves 'born-again or evangelical Christian.' Opiates are hard to kick.

Now the stepmother of US House of Representatives Speaker Mike Johnson has called out his extremist Christian beliefs (LBTQNation 13 December, quoting a Guardian interview). She says that Johnson, who is a creationist, has an indifference to environmental issues because he believes that 'God will take care of you.' So stuff the environment. An ideal capitalist politician given the damage capitalism causes.

Besides refusing to fight climate change, Johnson's religion has fuelled his virulent anti-LGBTQ+ beliefs.

**DC**

## Tiny tips

A billionaire bungalow boss is bankrupt months after boasting about his bursting bank account. Entrepreneur Bob Bull, at No.88 in *The Sunday Times Rich List*, owes £725million. ([tinyurl.com/shc5uezf](https://tinyurl.com/shc5uezf))

Over 1 in 5 children live in poverty in 40 of world's richest countries.

([tinyurl.com/35umy5t7](https://tinyurl.com/35umy5t7))

In a recent interview, Speaker Mike Johnson's (R-LA) own stepmother called out his extremist Christian beliefs and blasted the House speaker for using religion to justify his indifference to environmental issues. 'It speaks to those religious beliefs', Janis Gabriel told *The Guardian*. 'Don't take care of the environment because we have a finite amount of time here and God will take care of you. It's crazy.' ([tinyurl.com/2sr2zt53](https://tinyurl.com/2sr2zt53))

Scientists Warn That the Dubai Climate Conference Is Full of Crap.

([tinyurl.com/yc2vft9](https://tinyurl.com/yc2vft9))

Communist China survivor blasts UN 'eco-socialists' for hypocrisy on eating meat:

'From the Marxist playbook.'

([tinyurl.com/59h8scs9](https://tinyurl.com/59h8scs9))

122 killed by a fire in a wedding hall. 82 killed by a fire in a Covid-19 hospital. Three months later, another hospital fire claimed the lives of 92 more. Though they may seem to be freak accidents, these fires were preventable tragedies sharing one common theme:

gross negligence. Government investigations into these fires found that local authorities were negligent in their failure to enforce safety regulations and conduct inspections. Contractors used cheap, highly flammable construction materials to cut cost.

([tinyurl.com/ykcmrw2d](https://tinyurl.com/ykcmrw2d))

'There is no democracy in Gaza when you want to speak against Hamas or its de facto government. We fear they will arrest us during the war, or after the war if we spoke against them. They can easily kill us even, and tell the world we are spies', said Hasan Ahmed, 39, who was in the hospital with his injured brother. ([tinyurl.com/yxc6nndd](https://tinyurl.com/yxc6nndd))

...I see a possible change coming through 'the slow rise of solidarity between the Palestinian citizens of Israel and the Jews opposing the all-destructive war'. As a pragmatic realist, I am well aware that such

a solidarity is difficult to imagine today. But it is here that we should resuscitate the famous motto of the May 1968 protests in Paris: Soyons réalistes, demandons l'impossible. Be realistic, demand the impossible. The truly dangerous utopia is the idea that the solution to the Middle East crisis can only be achieved through military force. ([tinyurl.com/mhrs6r98](https://tinyurl.com/mhrs6r98))

A progressive Thai MP has been sentenced to six years in prison for insulting the country's powerful monarchy on social media. ([tinyurl.com/5n8wmv4n](https://tinyurl.com/5n8wmv4n))

Sex can be bought for as little as £30 before 9am and £10 after midnight on the streets of Leeds due to the cost-of-living crisis. ([tinyurl.com/y3rfmdnd](https://tinyurl.com/y3rfmdnd))

This food was made by the People and it should fill the bellies of the People...Don't fall prey to the myth of scarcity!

([tinyurl.com/2bthwu2r](https://tinyurl.com/2bthwu2r))

'It's time for humans to become aware of the new reality and to collectively move where we want to as a species. We have the capability to do that and are already seeing signs of such movements. We can break out of dead ends', concludes Søggaard. ([tinyurl.com/3n6c64cb](https://tinyurl.com/3n6c64cb))

**UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS**

**LONDON**

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

**MIDLANDS**

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

**NORTH**

**North East Regional branch.**

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

**Bolton.** Contact: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589.  
**Cumbria.** Contact: Brendan Cummings, 19 Queen St, Millom, Cumbria LA18 4BG.

**Doncaster.** Contact: Fredi Edwards, [fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk)

**Yorkshire Regional branch.**

Contact: Fredi Edwards, Tel 07746 230 953 or email [fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk)

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

**SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST**

**Kent and Sussex regional branch.** Usually meets 3rd Sun. 2pm at The Muggleton Inn, High Street, Maidstone ME14 1HJ or online. Contact: [spgb.ksrb@worldsocialism.org](mailto:spgb.ksrb@worldsocialism.org) or 07971 715569.

**South West regional branch.** Meets 3rd Sat. 2pm on Zoom. For invite email: [spgbsw@gmail.com](mailto:spgbsw@gmail.com)

**Brighton.** Contact: Anton Pruden, [anton@pruden.me](mailto:anton@pruden.me)  
**Canterbury.** Contact: Rob Cox, 4 Stanhope Road, Deal, Kent, CT14 6AB.

**Luton.** Contact: Nick White, 59 Heywood Drive, LU2 7LP.

**Cornwall.** Contact: Harry Sowden, 16 Polgine Lane, Troon, Camborne, TR14 9DY. 01209 611820.

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**SCOTLAND**

**Edinburgh.** Contact: Fraser Anderson [f\\_raz\\_1@hotmail.com](mailto:f_raz_1@hotmail.com)

**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](mailto:rainbow3@btpenworld.com) or mobile: 07484 717893

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

**Ayrshire.** Contact: Paul Edwards 01563 541138. [rainbow3@btpenworld.com](mailto:rainbow3@btpenworld.com).

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# Technology, capitalism and war

MODERN WARFARE entails the destruction of both means of production and workers themselves, as we all see on our TV screen at the moment in Gaza and Ukraine. It represents quite the opposite of any progression of our productive potential — a drastic regression — and poses a massive threat to everyone.

What we are referring to here is the technology devoted to the art of killing human beings on a potentially industrial scale and reducing their habitat to an utter wasteland. The very thought of it strikes us as repulsive and inhumane. Little wonder people feel so ambivalent about ‘technological progress’. Little wonder that, for so many, the future has come to look so bleak.

While some innovations have provided us with both benefits and disadvantages, the same most certainly cannot be said of certain other technological innovations one can think of — like, say, a Tomahawk cruise missile costing about \$2 million apiece. There are thousands of Tomahawk missiles at the disposition of navies around the world, not to mention all those other kinds of missiles in service. The destruction they could inflict on the planet does not bear thinking about. One cannot even pretend that there is any real benefit to be gained from any of this — unless you count employment for workers in a factory producing such weapons as a ‘benefit’. But then, these same workers could have been far better employed producing something socially useful.

There is an argument that is sometimes made that for all the sheer waste of human talent and material resources that the military establishment represents, technological innovation in the service of this establishment has had important spinoffs that benefit us all. According to NATO’s website, for instance:

‘Our militaries have one paramount duty: to keep us safe from any threat. Over the years, countless inventors from NATO countries have created new technologies, big and small, that contribute to that ultimate goal. The spill-over effects of this innovation are all around us and have laid the foundations of our modern world. NATO has supported science and innovation for more than 70 years. The Alliance not only provides direct funding to researchers, but also maintains networks that bring together thousands of scientists from around the world to collaborate and build on each other’s work. Military innovation in science and technology has helped to create some of the most iconic



Credit: Getty Images

and essential items in our streets, offices and homes. Here are seven of the most interesting inventions pioneered and popularised by NATO militaries that are now common in everyday life’ ([tinyurl.com/2mw4amdm](https://tinyurl.com/2mw4amdm)).

The article then goes on to list the more well-known inventions initially intended for military purposes, such as the internet, GPS satellite navigation, microwaves, duct tape and so on, plus a much longer list of ‘honourable mentions’ only cursorily referred to.

If this is not an example of special pleading then one wonders what else it could possibly be. Reading this, one might be forgiven for having overlooked that NATO, like any other military bloc, is a huge killing machine that consumes massive quantities of resources and manpower for the purpose of waging war. How is that a socially beneficial use of resources and manpower? Satellite navigation is great if you want to find the shortest route from A to B. But satellite navigation can also deliver a Tomahawk missile to its intended destination resulting in appalling destruction and lives lost. That is not so great.

The spurious reasoning in the NATO piece lies in the apparent implication that but for the existence of the military establishment we wouldn’t have at our disposal something like that handy roll of duct tape to seal our leaking pipe. But who is to say this would be the case at all? It seems presumptuous to make such a

claim. Maybe someone would well have invented duct tape or, indeed, something superior to duct tape had there not been any capitalist nation states around or military establishments built up to defend them. One might also note in passing that every military establishment claims its role is purely ‘defensive’ but obviously this cannot be the case otherwise wars would never have occurred in the first place.

The potential for war, however, does not exist because we just happen to possess the means of waging war. On the contrary it is wired into the very system of global capitalism that created these means. Since the so-called Great War of 1914-18, dubbed the ‘war to end all wars’, there has not been a single day when there has not been a war going on somewhere in the world.

War is the military expression of capitalism’s competitive struggle over resources, markets and trade routes where other methods of securing these things have failed. This is notwithstanding attempts to rationalise or justify this conflict in terms of supposedly irreconcilable religious or ethnic or whatever other differences one can conjure up between the warring parties concerned. That, however, is just the froth on the surface of things — the whipped-up pretext for war, rather than its fundamental cause. Dig deeper and you will always find an ulterior, economic motive.

**ROBIN COX**

# New year, old notions

AS MIDNIGHT chimed fireworks sparked and people held hands, hugged and wished each other Happy New Year. Meanwhile in far too many places rather more dreadful pyrotechnics continued being unleashed.

Rockets erupted with fire and shrapnel in heavily populated built up areas, the deadly crackle of assault rifles continued to exact an inexorable toll of civilians and soldiers alike. The recently screened BBC series *Vigil* is being repeatedly realised in awful reality as military drones are launched by leaders utterly unconcerned about casualties, mere collateral damage.

While Russia and Ukraine continue their internecine conflict, their place in the headlines has been temporarily usurped by Israel's determination to out-atrocify Hamas, apparently quite prepared to risk provoking Hezbollah into some futile act of bellicose response.

Two bombs in Iran have been exploded, amongst a crowd assembled to pay respects to a military man assassinated by an external power, seemingly by Islamic State. Muslims slaughtered by Muslims. The Middle East is demonstrating that the three Abrahamic religions, whatever they might profess otherwise, are no promoters of peace.

American evangelical Christians even claim the conflicts in and around Palestine have a divine purpose. Their government is seemingly prepared to continue supplying weaponry and support to those deemed politically righteous. Ukraine has even moved the birthday of Jesus, from their orthodox point of view, into line with their allies.

There is a common feature in all these conflicts; that is, the fundamental competitive nature of capitalism being expressed as nationalism. Zionist state, Palestinian two-states, Islamic State, or the states essentially created by the Bolsheviks now fighting it out.

In Britain, amongst those whose 'socialism' is in the Leninist tradition, there are arguments favouring one side or another in the conflicts. There are those who claim groups such as Hamas must not be criticised for their actions because they represent the oppressed.

How representative they actually are is debatable as there is no way of objectively assessing how many in Gaza actually lend Hamas their support. But even if they do it is hard to see how the seemingly random killing of a 1,000 plus Israelis advances Palestinian well-being. Especially as the response of Israel's government was wholly predictable.

Political leaderships and their military ultimately will prioritise their nation's state over the lives of the citizens. The common man, woman and child, are an expendable resource, self-replicating in the longer term, in the struggle for competitive advantage.

It is worth pointing out to those who profess their anti-imperialism through their partiality for this side or that in these armed conflicts that history is against them. A half century or so ago anti-American imperialism's activists marched the streets chanting, 'Ho! Ho! Ho Chi Minh, Vietcong are going the win'. They did, and fifty years later Vietnam is securely capitalist and well favoured by America.

However, in 1965, General Curtis E. LeMay, US Airforce Chief of staff, referring to North Vietnam said, 'We're going to bomb them back into the Stone Age'. Subsequently, an uncounted number of Vietnamese were killed by frequent bombing from altitudes so high there could be no pretence that military targets were identified, or that civilian casualties were unfortunate, but unintentional. There was also the widespread use of Agent Orange, a defoliant that caused widespread birth defects at the time and also in those conceived long after the war ended.

This campaign was conducted on behalf of the nation whose representatives are presently calling on Israel to moderate its action in Gaza, while continuing to supply the munitions.

Dresden, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Iraq subjected to 'shock and awe', Ukraine and Russia, Hamas and the IDF, all justified by national interests. It also raises the question of what constitutes terrorism. If it means inflicting terror on those on the receiving end, then terrorism is the default position of all nation states when pursuing their interests militarily, either actually or by threat.

Peel away the publicly stated rationales offered in justification, then competing nationalisms are exposed. Putin can accurately point to NATO expansion, but it's Russian interests opposed to Ukraine's, which has its own self-identified 'national interests' to defend, that have led, once more, to war.

In the Middle East, Iran and Saudi Arabia look on the present conflict with their own competing national interests in mind. One antithetical to Israel, the other perceiving benefit from a possible working relationship with Tel Aviv.

And so the behind the scenes discussions revolve around the one-state and the two-state solutions for



Credit: AP

Palestinians. As if by drawing more lines on maps nationalist divisions can be ameliorated if not wholly overcome.

Meanwhile British politicians continue to invoke Israel's right to self-defence as if that mitigates somewhat the humanitarian tragedy being enacted. The moral high ground may seem an exalted place to stand, looking down on those seemingly too benighted to look up and see beyond their errors. But it is a cold, isolated place.

Not that the UK is exempt from nationalism, rather it is riddled with it. From coronations to Brexit to political divisions, its competitive nature all too apparent. This year's general election will be promoted by the SNP as a de facto referendum on Scottish independence.

This demonstrates an essential feature of nationalism, which is that it is pitched against 'the other'. The other in this case is England, as if there is something elemental to being Scottish that is fundamentally different to being English.

Surely, a denizen of Edinburgh has more in common with a Londoner than a crofter on Orkney, as the Londoner compared with a North Yorkshire hill farmer. Neighbours living next door to each other have similarities and differences. But their best interests are served by sharing their commonalities and their individual attributes.

Far better than killing each other over which flag should be saluted is ditching all the flags and working together to realise human potential throughout the world. A truly international commonwealth in which competition has been replaced by cooperation.

Gaza will be the present iteration of terror inflicted by the bellicose until the slaughter is put on pause before being unleashed elsewhere. Unless and until, that is, people decide, as we are well capable of doing, to abolish capitalism and its attendant nationalistic notions.

**DAVE ALTON**

# 'Defence diplomacy'

ON CHRISTMAS Eve the Ministry of 'Defence' announced that a Royal Navy warship, HMS Trent, would be deployed to Guyana in South America. Sky News described the ship as one used for 'defence diplomacy' ([tinyurl.com/cysxnpyf](https://tinyurl.com/cysxnpyf)).

What, then, was the diplomacy that required the deployment of a gunboat in support? The one-word answer is 'oil'. *The Harvard International Review* (27 September) noted:

'In 2015, the oil giant Exxon Mobil discovered 11 billion barrels of oil off the coast of the small Latin American country. The discovery promises to change Guyana forever, catapulting the country and its people to new heights of power and wealth. Oil already generates US\$1 billion in revenues annually for the government and will produce an estimated US\$7.5 billion by 2040. By these forecasts, Guyana—the impoverished, rainforest-covered country of just 800,000 people—will become the fourth largest offshore oil producer in the world ([tinyurl.com/yvkudmuc](https://tinyurl.com/yvkudmuc)).

The discovery was off the coast of a part of Guyana which has been the object of a territorial dispute with its neighbour, Venezuela, since the middle of the 19th century when Guyana was part of the British Empire. In 1899 an international court of arbitration awarded the disputed area to Britain. It's an area comprising some 75 percent of present-day Guyana. Venezuela never accepted the decision, alleging that it was rigged, but didn't insist too much in pursuing its claim until now.

On 3 December the Venezuelan government, under Hugo Chávez's successor, Nicolas Maduro, held a referendum throughout the country about whether or not to reject the 1899 ruling and to incorporate the area as a new province. The result was a huge majority for, but on a low turnout, and the government duly established the new province, on paper.

Venezuela, much as it would like to acquire control of the new oilfield, is unlikely to try to actually annex the disputed area. The referendum had more to do with the presidential elections later this year and as a way of trying to win votes for Maduro by beating the nationalist drum. In any event, it is not the land, mainly tropical forest with a few gold mines, that Venezuela really would like so much as the territorial waters off the area's coast where the oil is. Diplomatic talks have begun, with the US and Britain backing Guyana. Hence the dispatch of the Royal Navy warship to carry out its role in



Credit: Alex Ceolin / Royal Navy

'defence diplomacy'.

Diplomacy is not a matter of working out what is the fair solution to a dispute between states. An important factor affecting the outcome is the relative strength of the two sides. In relations between states might is right. Venezuela may be stronger than Guyana and so could seize the land it claims. But Guyana is backed by the US and Britain, because they don't want a state with a nationalist anti-American government to control the new oilfield (they want a friendly state to) or to extend its territory (in fact they have been working to overthrow the government there), and Venezuela is in no position to take them on any more than it was to challenge the British Empire in 1899.

## The cannons roar

In another part of the world another Royal Navy warship, HMS Diamond, has also been engaged in 'defence diplomacy,' in the Red Sea. In fact it actually used its weapons. As the Royal Navy's website boasted on 19 December:

'Diamond's actions in the small hours of Saturday morning is the first time a Type 45's Sea Viper missile has been used in action and the first such shootdown by the Royal Navy since the 1990-91 Gulf War' ([tinyurl.com/yc2vt5x9](https://tinyurl.com/yc2vt5x9)).

The British Minister of War, Grant Schapps, later threatened more 'direct action' than shooting down a few drones (*Daily Telegraph*, 1 January). On 11 January Britain carried out this threat by joining the US by bombing Yemen, escalating the war in the region.

What is going on in the Red Sea is an aspect of the question of who controls the Persian Gulf, its oilfields and the trade route out of it. In 1980 President Carter laid down the Carter Doctrine that: 'Gulf oil reserves were of vital interest to the US and the US would therefore be justified in preventing outside domination of the region by military intervention'. This was

invoked against Iraq in 1991 and in 2003. Now the threat is from Iran, with the US relying on Israel to counter this. Indeed Israel has already bombed Iran on a number of occasions.

Israel is currently engaged in a war of revenge against the Hamas administration in Gaza. The West supports this because Hamas is an enemy of Israel, its asset in the region, only cynically advising Israel not to kill too many Gazans.

Iran and its allies and proxies see the Gaza war as a chance to weaken Israel as the West's asset. The pro-Iran government of Yemen has been attacking ships bound for Israel or owned by Israeli capitalists. This has led major shipping companies to re-route their ships round Africa, with serious consequences for international trade.

As the Royal Navy's website explained:

'An estimated 23,000 merchant vessels pass through the Bab-al-Mandeb choke point – with Suez the gateway to the Middle East and beyond for shipping from Europe... and for Europe from shipping from the Indo-Asia-Pacific region. Vice-Admiral Brad Cooper, the US officer commanding the Combined Maritime Forces from their headquarters in Bahrain, underlined that safe passage of the Red Sea was "crucial for the world economy". He continued: "More than 10% of global trade transits the waters anchored by two globally strategic waterways – the Suez Canal and the Strait of Bab-al-Mandeb. Regionally, it has even greater impact, channelling trade across more than half the globe, ranging from Europe to Asia.''

HMS Diamond's commanding officer was quoted as saying: 'The Royal Navy has always been committed to the protection of maritime trade'. By force if necessary. In this case in the context of the wider conflict of economic interest in the Middle East between the West and Iran.

**ADAM BUICK**

# Will information goods undermine capitalism?

INFORMATION GOODS are goods whose value derives not from physical characteristics but from the information they convey. In many cases they can simply be copied or downloaded without any cost to speak of (apart from the time spent doing this). Moreover, there is no obvious upper limit as far as the volume or quantity of these goods is concerned. They are intrinsically non-scarce or non-rivalrous and, also, 'non-destructible' – unlike a physical good.

For instance, by accessing a piece of music on YouTube or an article via Google, you are not denying anyone else the possibility of doing the same. This may very well not be true of a physical good. If I take the last loaf of bread off the supermarket shelf you will, sadly, have to go without at least until the next delivery.

A further characteristic of information goods is that while they have very low or zero marginal costs, their fixed or amortised development costs tend to be particularly high. This cost structure is rather different from the traditional cost structure pertaining to physical goods and, thus, calls for a somewhat different pricing strategy.

Given the non-rivalrous nature of information goods, their zero marginal costs, and the technical ease of capturing or pirating such goods (perhaps in contravention of copyright law), an internet-based business might decide that the most pragmatic thing to do would be to simply abandon the idea of charging for the information goods or service it makes available to its customers. However, while it costs you nothing to have a Facebook page or use the Google search engine this does not mean these commercial entities don't generate enormous revenues (and profits) for themselves in some other way. In fact, both these entities currently make billions of dollars in profits and even more in revenue. Primarily their revenues derive from advertising (and the copious use of algorithms to more effectively target individual users to benefit their advertisers) though there is also a growing secondary source of revenue in the form of various 'virtual goods' or Cloud-based services.

The point is that unless a business like

Google was able to make a profit under capitalism it would simply not exist. You and I would not then be able to use its search machine. Being able to freely make use of this facility is contingent upon Google making a profit in the first instance.

As a matter of fact, making this facility free to its users is actually a rather clever way of generating a massive revenue flow through advertising and thus securing a handsome profit into the bargain. People using this facility are a captive audience as far as the advertisers are concerned with adverts being tailored via algorithms, as mentioned, to our own particular tastes and online viewing habits. How many of us would even consider using a Google search engine if we had to pay for it? One suspects only a minuscule fraction of its current users.

## Dominated by Big Tech

It is not difficult to see why this kind of commercial activity based on the provision of information goods has come to be absolutely dominated by a tiny handful of very large corporations that have nearly all become household names in their own right. These corporations have the wherewithal to afford the very high development costs incurred. They have the economic clout and reach to shape the industry to suit themselves. For advertisers too, the large size of these corporations has distinct advantages; it provides a platform that enables them to cast their net much more widely – and efficiently – than would otherwise be the case.

Of course, not all information goods are free to the public. Far from it. Internet-based corporations, like Meta (Facebook) and Alphabet (Google), may be able to provide a free service to the public but only because they can cover the enormous, fixed costs all this involves, and make a profit, by making an even larger sum of money primarily in the form of advertising revenue.

However, in the case of other internet-based businesses we see a somewhat different model in place. The information goods and services they provide are not free but are commodified. This is apparent in the case of paywall sites for some online journals or newspapers or else,

streaming services like Netflix or Disney. Still other internet-based businesses such as Amazon are engaged in the retailing and distribution of actual physical goods and thus depart even more from the conventional cost structure of businesses purely concerned with the distribution of information goods and services.

However, regardless of the kind of business we are talking about or the type of good it is peddling, the bottom line for any business in a capitalist economy is the need to make a profit. There is no such thing as a free lunch in capitalism. Somebody somewhere ends up having to pay the bill.

Developments like artificial intelligence, the internet of things, robotics and even 3D printing and desktop manufacturing are revolutionising the costs of doing business and shifting the emphasis from tangible to intangible assets. Physical goods are, so to speak, increasingly taking on or incorporating more and more of the qualities or aspects of information goods even though they obviously can never transcend their essential status as physical goods. Or to put it in a nutshell – you can't have software without the hardware that goes with it.

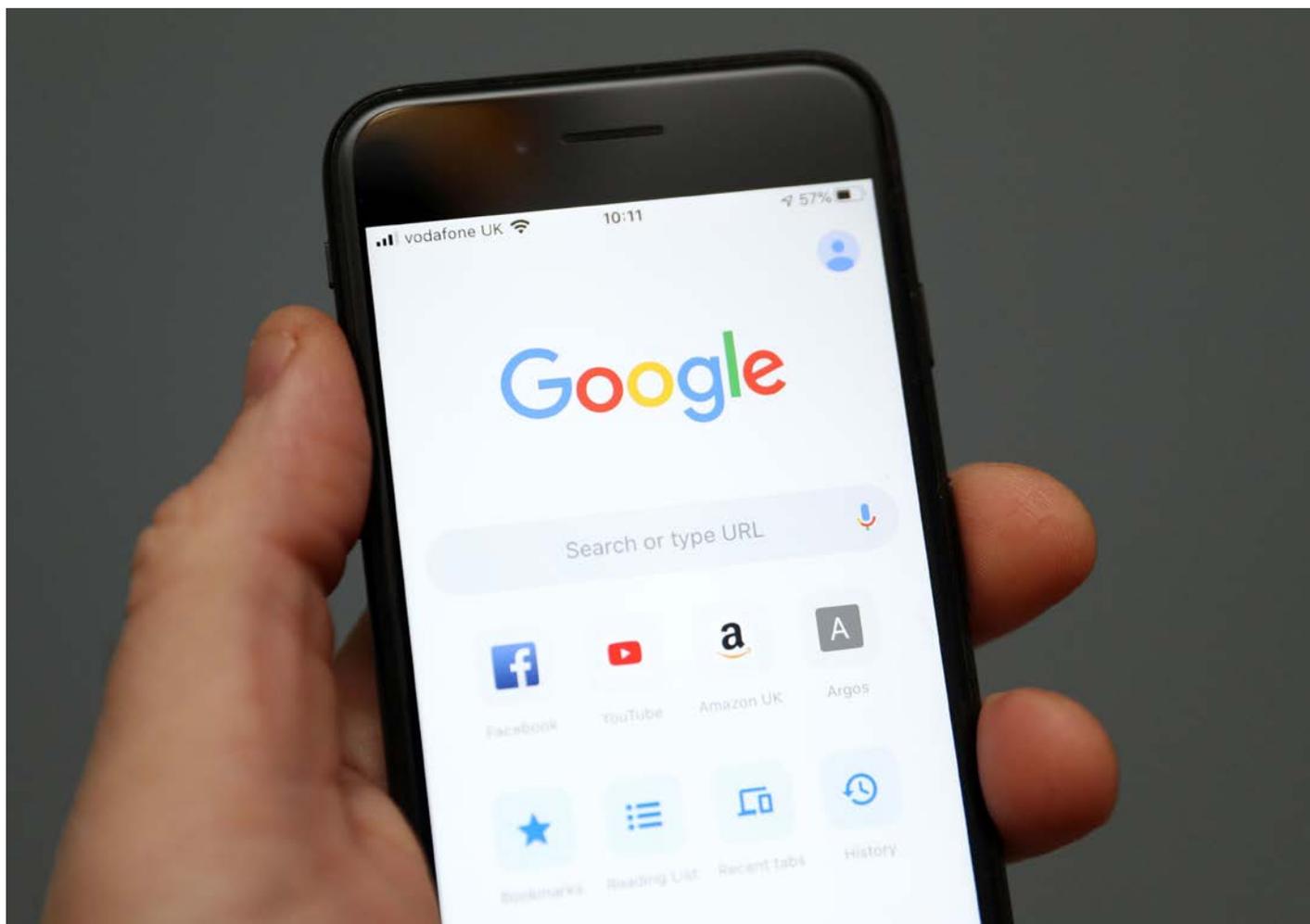
For this reason (and others) information goods are not, and can never be, free in some absolutist sense in a capitalist society as might be inferred from the fact that they – or some of them – can be downloaded effortlessly and without cost to your computer screen; they come with a price (even when the price is not necessarily paid by the consumer but the advertiser in this case).

## Too easily beguiled

Some are too easily beguiled by the notion that we are moving, or already have moved, into something called an 'information-based' economy. It is the very nature of such an economy, they imagine, stemming from the intrinsic nature of information goods themselves, that has somehow supposedly changed the basic rules of the game, so to speak.

Tom Stonier, for instance, argued in *The Wealth of Information: A Profile of the Post-Industrial Economy* (1983) that:

'Whereas material transactions



can lead to competition, information transactions are much more likely to lead to cooperation. Information is a resource which can be truly shared’.

Superficially, this sounds all very plausible. One thinks of the crucial role of R&D in industry. A lot of the work of scientists involves collaborating with other scientists and sharing information through peer-reviewed journals and so on. This comes across as all very cooperative and civilised, indeed. Being a ‘non-rivalrous good’, information can be universally shared at virtually no cost. No nasty competition is required.

Its very abundance, goes the argument, means that an information good fundamentally breaks with the logic of the market itself. ‘Plenty’ undermines the rationale for attaching a price tag to a product and, thus, the idea of exclusively owning this product – in this case an information good. Insofar as a price tag is still attached to such a product this can only be explained, it is argued, by the fact that the provider is seeking to perversely, and quite unnecessarily, exclude others from freely using it. The motive of the provider is simply one of self-gain to be achieved by such means as patents and copyrights. In other words, they are asserting an unjustifiable monopolistic hold over the product in question in an age

of potential plenty.

Indeed, this, it is sometimes suggested, is precisely why ‘late stage capitalism’ is today dominated by the existence of virtual monopolies – or, more precisely, oligopolies. Prices are no longer explicable in the conventional terms of supply and demand. Rather they are imposed by diktat by the price makers – namely, those industrial giants striving to enlarge their share of the market in which they operate – to the detriment of price takers, the consuming public.

The basic idea that information technology is – allegedly – more and more bent on subverting the rationale for a market system is a recurring theme in books like Leigh Phillips and Michal Rozworski’s *The People’s Republic of Walmart: How the World’s Biggest Corporations are Laying the Foundation for Socialism* (2019). Capitalism, according to them, is being progressively hollowed out from within and what remains of it is but a brittle shell that seeks to needlessly confine and imprison the new life forms it has given birth to. These represent its arch nemesis: in particular, information technology.

Such technology, goes the argument, by enabling the application of so-called ‘centralised planning’ within the corporation and, by extension, the

suspension of market principles – has the potential to transform society along ‘socialist’ lines or at least, provides us with a model of what such a future society would look like. This in itself is a questionable proposition in some ways, but it is also one that seems fundamentally at odds with the pre-eminent role of big corporations today in promoting market imperialism and commodity fetishism.

We should be more cautious in our assessment of the potential impact of information technology and not get too carried away with fanciful notions of the imminent arrival of what has been dubbed ‘fully automated luxury communism’ (FALC). There is no reason to think that information technology or the enhanced role of information as a factor of production, will somehow in and of itself pose some kind of existential threat to capitalism.

This should be obvious from the standpoint of capitalist businesses. The idea that they would somehow resign themselves to economic suicide seems inherently implausible. Under capitalism, generally speaking, technological innovations tend not to be taken up and developed by businesses if there is no prospect of making a profit by doing so.

**ROBIN COX**

# How democratic is ‘Democracy’?



WRITING IN his 1946 essay, *Politics and the English Language*, George Orwell made the following remark about democracy:

‘In the case of a word like democracy, not only is there no agreed definition, but the attempt to make one is resisted from all sides. It is almost universally felt that when we call a country democratic we are praising it: consequently the defenders of every kind of régime claim that it is a democracy, and fear that they might have to stop using that word if it were tied down to any one meaning’.

As Orwell noted 78 years ago, democracy is felt to be a political system that is good, and therefore when people wish to imply that a political system is good, they call it democratic. The question of democracy, however, like all political buzzwords, is in need of detailed and sober scrutiny by socialists, both for its connection with the capitalist society of today, and with the future socialist society to which we aspire.

## Democracy in context

In considering democracy, we must be clear not to confuse fact and fiction. The ideas of the age do not represent reality, but are just that: illusions we tell ourselves (or are told about ourselves by others). As Marx and Engels cautioned in *The German Ideology*, we must not allow the ‘idea’ to become the ‘active force, which controls and determines [our] practices’. In this sense, socialists do not believe in democracy in the same way we do not believe in god.

In speaking of democracy we are thus talking not about a philosophical ideal, a utopian vision towards which we should

be constantly striving, but an actual system existing in reality. It is not the job of socialists to perfect ideas, but to critique ruthlessly all that exists.

Democracy is often said to have originated with the Ancient Greeks. Certainly ideas of voting and the consent of the governed have existed throughout history. However, we must remember that for most of its history, democracy in the form of voting has been merely a method of sharing power between members of the ruling class. Ancient Greece was the democracy of slaveholders, and the English Parliament was the democracy of landlords.

It was not until 1832 that the vote in Britain began to be extended – rising from 1 percent of the population to 7 percent. Universal suffrage was not achieved until 1928, after a political conflict lasting over a century to fully extend the vote to working-class men and women. In America, blacks were excluded from voting until the 1960s under Jim Crow laws. Swiss women did not gain the right to vote in federal elections until 1971.

For most of its history, therefore, democratic forms of government have gone hand in hand with highly repressive and authoritarian political systems, in which the majority of the population have been prevented from voting even under republics and parliamentary governments.

## Liberal democracy

The current form of democracy – liberal democracy – is based upon an idea of a separation between the private sphere and the public sphere. The public sphere is the realm of politics, civil rights, law-making;

the private sphere is that of economic transactions between free individuals. At the risk of oversimplifying, we may say that Enlightenment philosophers such as Thomas Paine and John Locke saw a free society of individuals based on mutual agreement as the natural state of humanity. To them, the public sphere of states and laws was a necessary mechanism where people surrender some of their natural freedom to join forces and protect themselves and their property by mutually submitting to a central authority, namely a government.

This idea lies at the heart of modern democracy: the bills of rights and written constitutions that exist in almost every country on the planet, limiting (at least in principle) the powers of governments, flow directly from this philosophical idea that Private individualism is good and natural whereas Public collectivism is at best a necessary evil.

What liberal democracy fails to address, however, is the power individuals hold over each other. Individuals do not exist freely in relation to each other on a level playing field; even without the presence of a state, inequality and injustice would still exist in any society where ownership and control over resources is limited to a single class. Under a class-divided system, freedom in practice means the freedom of ‘man to exploit man’. The ‘rights’ to own property and make contracts protected by constitutions mean, in practice, the right of the capitalist class to hold us hostage to their economic power. Marx wrote at length on this dichotomy between liberal democracy’s promise of freedom and its reality of class exploitation, for instance in

On the Jewish Question:

‘Practical need, egoism, is the principle of civil society and shows itself [...] as soon as civil society gives complete birth out of itself to the political state. The god of practical need and personal self-interest is money’.

Under capitalism, political democracy provides the fig-leaf of economic dictatorship.

## Something worth fighting for?

Socialists look to the ballot as providing a secure way forward for the transformation of society and the dissolution of class distinctions. At the same time, however, we must not shy away from the uncomfortable realisation that democracy does not mean freedom. Far from it, the history of democracy shows that it is not only compatible with, but comfortably well-suited to, sustaining class dictatorship.

As the German Social Democrat legal scholar, Herman Heller wrote in 1928:

‘Through financial domination of party, press, film, and literature, through social

influence over schools and universities, [the rulers] are able, without using direct corruption, to influence the bureaucratic and electoral apparatus in such a consummate fashion that they preserve every democratic form while achieving a dictatorship of content.’

Herman Heller died five years later in exile in Madrid. The Weimar Republic in Germany was overthrown by the Nazis, with the backing of Junker landowners and the big industrial bourgeoisie. Before all else, the Nazis ruthlessly suppressed the leftist Social Democratic and Communist parties; arresting their politicians, closing down the left-wing press, and ransacking the offices of trade unions.

Since the invention of universal suffrage, every person has one vote, and each vote is counted once. This does not mean that all votes are equal. The capitalist class own the media, the movie studios, the printing presses, and they sponsor the universities and research institutes. They have far easier access to scholastic qualifications and government jobs, and unlimited publicity through

advertising, pop culture, and news media to reinforce the sanctity of the capitalist mode of production. As Marx and Engels outlined in *The German Ideology*:

‘The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it’.

There are no easy answers to how socialists should navigate past these obstacles. However, in grappling with difficult questions of democracy and class conflict, we must remember what is at stake. On the one hand stands a ruling class which history shows to be violent, amoral, and ruthless. On the other stands the mass of the world’s population, robbed of the value they create by this class, and living in or just above destitution, and ultimately, it is to end this that we fight for. Not for the democracy of the ruling class, but for a socialist world free of exploitation and the violence its maintenance necessitates.

**UTHER NAYSMITH**

# Poverty and the causes of wealth

JUST BEFORE Christmas, the Herald columnist Lennie Pennie wrote a piece that looked at extremely rich people who hoard resources ([heraldscotland.com](https://www.heraldsotland.com), 23 December). She took particular aim at the royal family, who are apparently described by some as ‘thrifty’ and ‘down-to-earth’ because, for instance, they wear items of clothing more than once!

She wrote: ‘We should never look at an unequal society within which devastating poverty and extreme affluence are allowed to co-exist as anything other than a structural, governmental and societal failure which demands our immediate attention to resolve.’

Homelessness and food banks exist, while ever more people just cannot meet their basic needs. The UK government spent in one year almost as much money providing temporary accommodation for homeless people as it would apparently take to eradicate homelessness completely.

Unfortunately, Pennie’s approach puts far too much emphasis on celebrities, and the royal family especially, for posing with homeless people rather than really doing something about the problem. Better, she says, to ‘use more of the excessive hereditary fortune to redress the balance.’

The article is entitled ‘Poverty: We need



to tackle the causes of wealth’. But it says disappointingly little about the real causes of wealth and poverty. Clearly the two go hand in hand under capitalism. It is not just a matter of the rich hoarding their wealth, but of how they obtained it in the first place and how that implies poverty and destitution at the other end of the scale.

Pennie quotes Oscar Wilde about

making poverty impossible, but says little about how to achieve this. The rich, she says, might distribute as much of their wealth as possible to those they wish to help. But that is really not the point: let’s do away with money and inequality and establish a system of society geared to meeting human need.

**PAUL BENNETT**

# What has capitalism ever done for us?

SOME WHO read Marx's seminal work *Capital* are quite surprised, or even shocked, to encounter the great revolutionary extolling the virtues of the capitalist mode of production. We even encounter reactionaries using this to somehow justify their faith in the contemporary version of capitalism and its corrupt and destructive nature. They seem to believe that this shows even capitalism's greatest enemy to be complicit in their admiration for exploitation, inequality and injustice.

For socialists this merely illustrates their ignorance of the evolution of the productive forces and the historical context it creates. Just as the Left continually point to the promotion of the state ownership of industry in *The Communist Manifesto* as still being relevant as a policy today we see a complete misunderstanding of how history proceeds and how it decides what political strategies are relevant at a particular time and place and not the ideological needs of the radicals of either the Left or Right.

It goes even deeper than this because for many, and unfortunately this includes the great majority, it is inconceivable that although humanity has created the economic systems we cannot control them – they control us. Just as in nature the evolutionary forces are beyond the control of any particular species so the cultural and economic manifestations of human productive activity have been a matter of mystery and so elude those who seek to understand and so control them. Ironically, we only realise this now because economic evolution's current historical context has made this possible. Marx wasn't born with a specific genius to understand capitalism but capitalism created the possibility that someone like him could understand it. Everything depends on historical context – and here's why.

The success of our species is entirely due to our technologies – from bone axes to nuclear power and from the invention of language to its abstraction called writing our frail bodies have been protected, to a great degree, from the murderous rigours of nature. The eventual symbiosis of humanity and its technologies evolved into a total synthesis where it became

meaningless to speak of one without the other. An understanding of humanity and its cultural evolution became the study of modes of production and the specific classes that became politically dominant because of this.

Any dissection of the propaganda/ideology of these dominant groups always reveals an economic foundation. In this country in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the struggle between capitalism and its representatives and the reactionary forces of feudal autocracy was bloody and without pity. The superficial religious ideologies of either side were promoted as the cause of the conflict but we see it now as the climax of a great class struggle created by emerging and old forms of production and their economic and political prerequisites. We also see that the attempted establishment of socialism by the True Levellers or Diggers was premature and only happened because of the political anarchy of the time. Not only were Cromwell and his bourgeois followers extremely successful at war but also at commerce, trade and exploitation. With the exception of a brief attempt at a counter-revolution in 1688, which was easily crushed, capitalism was established and the liberation of the productive forces was unleashed.

This 'Industrial Revolution' is what Marx refers to in his praise of capitalism. To him the creation of an educated working class together with the explosion of production (which made such education necessary) were the requisites of socialism. Capitalism was, for him, just a stepping stone towards socialism. Those who thought that socialism could be imposed without going through this capitalist stage have only to look to the tragedy of Bolshevik Russia to find their answer.

Today after unprecedented acceleration and change we find that capitalism has developed to a stage where automation, computerisation and organisation have the potential to liberate humanity from hunger, disease, ignorance, superstition and cultural isolation but instead we see food destroyed because it cannot be sold at a profit, medicine being priced beyond the means of those who need it most, systematic subversion of education into

ideological conditioning, rising religious intolerance and the turning of information into fake news on the internet. Why? Because capitalism, like feudalism before it, has become a fetter on production. Production for profit necessitates buying power to create viable markets but also partly negates this consumerism by continually seeking to hold back the wages of those who produce the commodities that they are obliged to buy back! Today's historical context renders capitalism irrational and anachronistic.

In the movie *Kingdom of Heaven* the character Balian asks Saladin: 'What's Jerusalem worth?' The Saracen leader turns and says 'Nothing' but after a pause he turns again and says, with a smile, 'Everything'. The same reply would be relevant to the question that is the title of this article. Capitalism and socialism are not involved in an eternal struggle resembling positions of 'right or wrong' or 'good or evil' but rather one of the recognition or otherwise of historical inevitability. The tiny parasite class and their ideological lickspittles of the mass media would still have us believe that in the midst of economic crises, war, pandemics, poverty, racism, genocide and crime that capitalism is still 'the best of all possible worlds'.

**WEZ**



# Try thinking

LIFE'S A BAG OF SHITE and then you die. I wonder how many times you've heard that.

One of my mates even goes a bit further. He says you're dead lucky to get the bag with it.

Well anyway. I was walking past a church close to where I live a few months back and I saw they'd put up a banner that reads Try Praying. Turned out that the slogan had been thought up by some folk near me. So I thought I might give it a go. After all, times are pretty rough for loads of people round here, not just myself.

It was a well-produced banner too, and hanging outside quite a nice building that gets a modest amount of footfall of a Sunday. Not as much as the boozier down the road but that's another matter

So for a while I gave it my best shot. I dredged up a few phrases that I remember from my schooldays and even threw in a few of my own making. I didn't ask for anything for myself, mind, I wasn't after a 49-inch telly or a big house. Just general things like world peace and an end to hunger and poverty, the type of thing that all the religion bigwigs like the Pope and the Dalai Lama bang on about.

If you've seen the news recently, you'll know how effective my praying was... because bugger all happened.

My mates said I shouldn't have expected anything else. Things are as they are because that's how they are, that's life so stop your whingeing.

I can understand how easy it is to go along with that attitude – there's so much stuff in the world that looks so complicated that you don't even want to try to get your head around it.

But I'm not giving up that easily. I reckon things can be changed. I'm even tempted to put up my own banner outside my house, one that

reads Try Thinking.

Now, I reckon there's a good chance that like the vast majority of people on this planet, me included, you chose to be born in the wrong bed. Now I don't necessarily mean that your family was really skint, although that could be true as well, I mean a family that has to work to earn a living. If you did, that was a crucial mistake. It probably means that you're going to be a human resource, lumbered with boring work/unemployment/zero-hours contracts/insecure tenancies or stranglehold mortgages – I could go on but you know what I'm talking about – that bag of shite I mentioned just now.

Consider this for a moment, will you? All around the world, most real wealth is in the hands of an increasingly small minority. And what do they do with that wealth? First answer, they make damn sure that they keep their mitts firmly on it, and out of your reach. And who can blame them?

But that's not the issue – the important thing is the effect of their ownership or control on production. It means that, by and large things are only ever made if there is a potential for profit. Seems crazy, but the latest fashion wasn't produced to make you look fabulous, it was made by a human resource working in some crap-hole, maybe Leicester, maybe Vietnam, so

that an employer can make some brass by flogging it on to you. Now producing for profit has all sorts of insane results. One of its minor faults is that it buggers up the planet – you know all that – if you don't, go on Google. And every so often.... the markets come grinding to a halt and loads of people end up out of a job.

And you must have heard the joke about there being too much month at the end of the money. Producing for profit relies on keeping us not quite so skint that we can't manage to go back into work next week, and skint enough to ensure that we bloody well do go back.

And then the sort of stuff that we can afford out of our wages is designed down to a price so it usually turns out to be a load of tat anyway, soon to be binned or fobbed off on a charity shop. Well, that's what real life is like for us human resources.

There's nothing natural about a situation where a minority can live it up while the rest of us just scrape by. This may have been going on for many years but there is no physical law that says that society has to be this way. The fact is that there is no longer any need for the capitalist system that has now taken over almost the entire world. My mates are wrong, change can happen, but it needs you and your mates to make it happen.

**BUDGIE**



## Communism is socialism

TO PROMOTE his book, *Mute Compulsion, A Marxist Theory of the Economic Power of Capital*, Søren Mau contributed a piece to the publisher's blog last July in which he asked 'What should the communism we fight for look like?' ([tinyurl.com/y9vd8uw7](https://tinyurl.com/y9vd8uw7)).

He starts by defining communism (what we call 'socialism'):

'The fundamental condition of communism is that the basic conditions of the life of society are brought under democratic control. The state would be abolished, all private companies would be dissolved, and all privately owned means of production—land, buildings, machines, etc.—as well as the wealth of the upper class would be expropriated'.

Like land originally was, they would 'belong to no one, and thus to everyone'.

He envisages this society being divided into a 'public sector' and a 'private sector', the latter being productive activities that people carry out in their free time after working in the public sector.

He argues: 'Everything produced in the public sector would be distributed without the use of money. Housing, healthcare, medicine, education, childcare, public transportation, and meals in public cafeterias would be free of charge and available to all, without control'.

That sounds like socialism. But then:

'Consumer goods associated with varying individual preferences ... could be "purchased" with digital coupons' which everyone would receive 'each week to use for services and products available from public warehouses'.

But why? If enough of what people might want can be produced, why could these consumer goods also not be made 'available to all, without control'? Does he share the popular prejudice that people would otherwise take more than they needed?

It is conceivable that in the very early days there might not be enough of everything to permit this and that some sharing-out system might have been devised (by those around at the time) for any goods in short supply, but this would only be a temporary, stop-gap measure. It wouldn't need to be a permanent feature of a communist society; free access to consumer goods would be the norm. In any event, to set up and run a coupon system (which would have to include putting a coupon price on consumer goods) wouldn't be the appropriate answer; in fact it would divert resources that could be used to overcome the problem.

Mau says that technically the coupons wouldn't be money as they wouldn't circulate. When, however, it comes to his 'private sector' he does envisage money as such:

'Here, everyone would produce and trade as they wish, keeping within certain democratically determined

limits (no production or exchange of humans, weapons, or hard drugs, for example). [They] would also be able to create institutions and technologies that could ease and regulate exchange—for example, creating some sort of money'.

Once again, why? No doubt in communist society people, after having contributed to production 'according to their ability', would produce some things in their 'free time'. They might want to grow vegetables for instance but why would they want to sell them? Why would they not simply give them away without asking for anything in particular in return, as happens even now under capitalism? People would continue too to do things for each other but why would this need to involve money?

Mau seems to realise that he is on shaky ground here as he himself asks 'But isn't this private sector merely another form of capitalism?' His answer is that it wouldn't be since 'land, housing, and labor power would never become commodities. Money would exist purely as a means of exchange and couldn't be used to give certain people power over others'. It wouldn't be capitalism, but it sounds suspiciously like that contradiction in terms known as 'market socialism'.

Inadequate as Mau's contribution is, it at least shows that the idea and implications of a communist (socialist) society are beginning to be discussed seriously as the alternative to capitalism.

## Obituary – Ron Elbert

We are saddened to have to report the death in November of our comrade Ron Elbert of the World Socialist Party of the United States. He joined the WSP in the 1980s and became a regular writer for their journal *The Western Socialist* and its successors as well as contributing to the *Socialist Standard*. For a period he served as the party's Secretary General, an administrative post in our parties. Our condolences go to his family and friends.

Sara Ellenbogen writes: As Ron Elbert's stepdaughter, I am deeply saddened to report his passing last July. Besides being a wonderful stepfather, Ron was a long-time dedicated member of the World Socialist Party and became one of its vital organizers along with my mother, the late Karla Rab, whom he met through the Party.

He was a gifted and passionate advocate for socialism. He lectured in public forums such as Community Church of Boston and when I taught a course on business ethics and asked him to present an evaluation of a passage in the textbook to the effect that capitalism was the most rational system, his analysis was brilliant. As a Masters student in history at the University of Massachusetts/Boston, he wrote a thesis on the history of the Socialist Party of Canada which he planned to publish, traveling to British Columbia to interview members. He could always be found at local progressive gatherings, such as the Bread and Roses festival, sitting behind a table laden with World Socialist Party literature, engaging passers-by in conversation about the movement.

Ron cared as much he did about social justice because he cared so much about people. Social change was what he wanted to dedicate his life to. I remember one time I asked him to look at a cover letter I'd written for a job in a homeless center. He added one sentence to it. He wrote 'The poor are often only able to get services at the expense of their dignity. Our community is greatly in need of people to provide them services in a way that respects their dignity'. That was the way he treated people.

Ron always ended his email messages with a quote from the socialist writer William Morris below his signature. I think he might have liked me to conclude with that quote.

'We who were once fools and dreamers then shall be the brave and wise  
There amidst the world new builded shall our earthly deeds abide  
Though our names be all forgotten and the tale of how we died.'



# Lights... Camera... Political Action?

THE RESPONSE to *Mr Bates vs The Post Office* was a surprise reminder that TV programmes can still have an impact, even with so much else on our screens competing for our attention. The four-part series shown on ITV dramatised the campaign by ex-Post Office staff against their convictions for theft, fraud and false accounting. Between 1999 and 2015, hundreds of subpostmasters and mistresses were prosecuted, with thousands more suspected of fiddling their accounts. Consequently, many lost their homes as well as their jobs, fell into debt and some ended their own lives because of the pressure. Their convictions were based on discrepancies and shortfalls recorded on their Post Office branch's accounting software, Horizon. When some of them realised there was a pattern of innocent people being convicted, they grouped together and formed The Justice For Subpostmasters Alliance to co-ordinate their campaign. In 2019, England's High Court ruled that the Horizon system was faulty, acknowledging the real source of the accounting discrepancies. So far, only 93 have had their convictions overturned. In 2020 the government established a public inquiry which was ongoing while *Mr Bates vs The Post Office* was being broadcast.

Toby Jones portrays Alan Bates, who founded the campaign group and persistently worked to persuade lawyers and MPs that the convictions were unjust. The story is one of 'skint, little people' as Alan says, who found themselves victimised by the rules, procedures and economic prerogatives of powerful institutions, and who are fighting back. The Post Office is represented and defended by then-Chief Executive Paula Vennells and Head of Partnerships Angela van den Bogerd, both played as shifty and conspiratorial. The IT company behind Horizon, Fujitsu, is depicted as a cold, shadowy institution, but perhaps with less emphasis than might be expected. While the drama ends with a call for the government to take more responsibility, it puts Conservatives such as James Arbuthnot and Nadhim Zahawi (who appears as himself) in a very good light. Blame is placed on the Post Office rather than the economic and legal framework which allowed for the whole situation.

While *Mr Bates vs The Post Office* has raised awareness of the scandal beyond its 10 million viewers, it has been reported extensively before. Problems with the Horizon system were first highlighted in 2009 by *Computer Weekly* magazine, which has since published hundreds more



Credit: ITV

articles, alongside investigations by *Private Eye*, *Panorama* (see Proper Gander June 2022) and journalist Nick Wallis, whose 2021 book *The Great Post Office Scandal* was serialised in the *Daily Mail*. The issue has been in the background for years, but *Mr Bates vs The Post Office* has managed to give it unprecedented attention. After its episodes were first screened in early January, a different angle on the topic was reported on news media each day: the way that suspects were interrogated, the millions paid to Fujitsu, the petition to strip Paula Vennells of her CBE, new legislation to quash the convictions, and Prime Minister Rishi Sunak supporting a knighthood for Alan Bates.

Why has it taken *Mr Bates vs The Post Office*, rather than any of the previous exposés, to galvanise this action? As Marshall McLuhan said, 'the medium is the message', and the docudrama format of *Mr Bates vs The Post Office* enables it to have more of an impact than a straightforward documentary or written article. All these formats are interpretations of research into what happened, with the difference between them being in how this research is presented. In re-enacting what happened, a docudrama can employ the techniques used in filmed drama to engage the viewer. Dialogue is carefully chosen by the writer and rehearsed by the actor, often working with the real people being portrayed. Scenes are lit, filmed, scored and edited in ways intended to draw in the viewer to how the producers want the story to be told. When this is done proficiently, the re-creation of an event can have more of an emotional impact than being told about those events or even watching real footage. This gives docudramas an advantage in making the viewer feel emotionally invested in an issue, which is needed to fuel any political action. Only knowing that something is wrong or needs changing isn't enough.

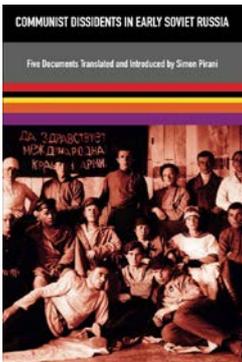
Previous docudramas have succeeded in shaping prevailing attitudes to events. The most well-known remains 1966's *Cathy Come Home*, which showed a family becoming homeless and then being further persecuted by the state machinery and

lack of adequate support services. The script was based on thorough research and largely filmed on location (a rarity at the time) with hand-held cameras and improvisation, giving additional authenticity. While *Cathy Come Home* drew attention to homelessness and led to the formation of the charity Crisis, the only reform to legislation it prompted was to allow husbands to stay with their wives and children in homeless hostels. As for wider change, director Ken Loach said that the film hasn't achieved this: 'it all gets smothered in this bear-hug of approbation, so that the energy of it is dissipated' ([tinyurl.com/3uasacat](http://tinyurl.com/3uasacat)). A docudrama which had a particular impact on policy was *The Day After*, broadcast in America during 1983. This prediction of what a third world war would be like convinced then-president Ronald Reagan to pull back on nuclear proliferation. *Hillsborough*, shown on ITV in 1996, took a different approach to these by portraying real people, as does *Mr Bates vs The Post Office*. *Hillsborough* dramatised the campaign by the families of those who died during the Sheffield Wednesday football disaster to overturn the official verdicts of accidental death. When the deaths were instead ruled unlawful in 2016, MP Steve Rotherham stated the docudrama was 'massively influential' in the outcome ([tinyurl.com/yeyucap4](http://tinyurl.com/yeyucap4)).

The momentum generated for a couple of weeks in January by *Mr Bates vs The Post Office* looks like it will speed up a resolution for the subpostmasters and mistresses which will hopefully improve their situations. However, the government's apparent enthusiasm for the convictions to be overturned is perhaps due more to them wanting to attract support in a general election year than to them being concerned that the campaign will develop further if they don't take action. Still, *Mr Bates vs The Post Office* has reminded us that TV has some strength, especially in the format of a docudrama, and the programme also optimistically shows how people driven by a common cause can self-organise and co-operate.

**MIKE FOSTER**

## Blast from the past



**Communist Dissidents in Early Soviet Russia.** Five Documents translated and introduced by Simon Pirani. Matador, 2023.

When the state-capitalist one-party dictatorship in Russia finally collapsed in the early 1990s the state's archives were opened to the public. Researchers have since dug out material from the period immediately after the end of the civil war in 1921 when working-class discontent was high and some freedom of discussion was still allowed inside the Communist Party.

None of the documents here have been translated into English before though one was published in Russian, outside Russia, in 1923. They reveal the personal and political disappointment of some Communists that the Russian revolution had not lived up to its claims and their expectations that it would bring about 'the emancipation of the working class' but had led, rather, to the emergence of a corrupt and self-serving 'new bourgeoisie' made up of full-time Communist Party officials.

The most interesting analysis here is that of the 'Collectivists', a group inspired by the ideas of the Old Bolshevik (and old opponent of Lenin) Alexander Bogdanov. Their basic position was that the working class had to have prepared itself 'culturally' to run a socialist society before it could be established. Starting from the position that the Russian revolution had been an attempted workers' revolution they came to the conclusion that it could not have led to socialism since this condition for it was not present:

'We accept that before the war the proletariat in its majority was not socialist, but began to change under the impact of the war. The socialist revolution began in the working class; the revolution arose in the formation of its consciousness of struggle; the proletariat found the will to overthrow the bourgeois order and to try to seize power. But that socialist revolution in the proletariat is far from complete. Not all of it has a consciousness of struggle. And the organisational consciousness of the whole proletariat has not been formed. New organisational methods, the entirety of which is a product of proletarian culture, still have to be worked out and integrated into working-class consciousness. Without this and before this, a socialist revolution in

society is in our opinion impossible'.

Basically, no socialism without socialists. This was part of a wider argument that classical capitalism was collapsing and that the world was heading for a state capitalism ruled by a technical intelligentsia (what was later called 'the managerial revolution'). This, they said, was what was happening in Russia under the Communist Party. Socialists there should personally take part in developing or implementing modern technology, another essential precondition for socialism.

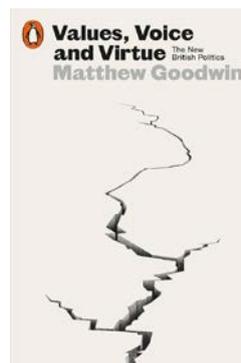
The two other groups whose views are presented here — the Workers' and Peasants' Socialist Party and Workers' Truth (Workers' Pravda)— made the same analysis, though in a less worked-out form, that Russia was developing towards a state capitalism ruled by a new bourgeoisie.

The two personal views are only interesting as providing some context. It is striking how many of those mentioned in the book were, according to the footnotes, murdered by the Stalin government in the 1930s.

It's a pity that such criticisms from inside Russia were not widely available during the time when 'the nature of the USSR' was a burning issue; they were way ahead of Trotskyism. Today they are only of historical interest. Pirani, in his introduction, hints at this when he writes that 'social revolutions in this century may have as little in common with the Russian revolution as it had with the French Revolution of 1789.'

ALB

## Vague and Vacuous



**Values, Voice and Virtue: the New British Politics.** By Matthew Goodwin. Penguin £10.99.

Goodwin was co-author of *National Populism*, reviewed in the March 2019 *Socialist Standard*, which was largely an unconvincing and unpleasant defence of a xenophobic form of nationalism. His latest book is no better.

The basic argument is that, since the 1970s, there has been a revolution or realignment in British society and politics. Thatcher supposedly emphasised family values and individual responsibility, but also 'ushered in the new era of hyper-

globalization', as if this was government policy rather than part of the way that capitalism works; this involved, for instance, selling off 'many of Britain's assets'. The former ruling class of industrialists and landowners was replaced by 'a new middle-class graduate elite'. The latter attended top universities, and were not just journalists, politicians and broadcasters, but also academics, doctors and architects. They have allegedly made it much harder for white boys from a manual working-class background to get into university. They control Britain's main institutions, and a third of MPs have postgraduate degrees. Many of the elite are radical 'woke' progressives, a group that apparently constitutes about one in six of the population.

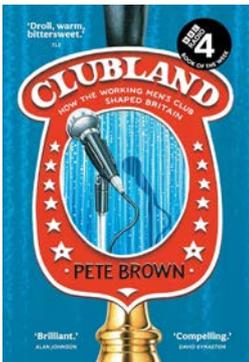
It is noted that Britain has become more unequal, and there are some passing references to very wealthy people, such as the 'international jet-setting elites' who have homes in London but also in New York and so on. Yet overall the author has not the slightest idea of how capitalism operates, of the division between a tiny minority who own and control the planet's resources, and the rest, who have to work for them. The decline in manual jobs is noted, and much is made of the geographical divide between London and the rest of the country. But in London a quarter of the population live in poverty and one in fifty are homeless, though the reader would not gather this from Goodwin's treatment.

It is correct to say that choice was reduced in politics as Tories and Labour grew closer together. However, the book's focus is very much on England, with no discussion of parties such as Plaid Cymru or the SNP. The claimed counter-revolution against the new rulers involved three revolts: populism, Brexit and Boris Johnson. Brexit, we are told, was intended to reduce immigration and 'restore Britain's national sovereignty' (whatever that is). Despite his privileged background, Johnson was 'a renegade member of the elite' and became leader of the non-graduate majority who supported the counter-revolution. But Partygate derailed this, and Truss's 'small-state, low-tax' vision of Brexit failed as it had little popular support (nothing to do with market reactions, then).

The whole book is a fantasy, with no arguments to show how the supposed former ruling class have been replaced by the graduate elite, and no understanding of how politics under capitalism is driven by economic interests and the need for profit.

PB

## Clubbable



**Clubland: How the Working Men's Club Shaped Britain.**  
By Pete Brown.  
HarperNorth  
£10.99.

The author describes working men's clubs as 'the biggest ever working-class social movement'. He provides an entertaining description of their history, enlivened by accounts of visits to specific clubs. One of these is the Red Shed in Wakefield, where the Wakefield Socialist History Group has hosted talks by Socialist Party speakers.

Clubs originated under paternalistic attitudes of people who wanted to provide male workers (industrial workers, originally) with an alternative to the pub. The Club and Institute Union (CIU) was established in 1862, and had a number of rich and often aristocratic patrons. Gradually, though, clubs became more democratic, run by committees of their own members, and in many cases it was the members who maintained and refurbished the buildings, without being paid for this work.

Clubs benefited from the licensing laws that applied to pubs but not to private clubs. They were not just about serving beer, as they also provided facilities such as snooker tables, reading rooms, concerts and lectures by invited speakers. In 1887 William Morris spoke on 'Monopoly' at the Borough of Hackney Club, but was taken aback at all the coming and going in the audience, waiters serving food and so on. Brown describes the Bloody Sunday demonstration that year, which was attacked by the police, as being held by 'the London radical clubs' (though some accounts mention others that contributed to organising it). Political activity gradually shifted to other locations, however. Many well-known names began their careers performing in clubs, such as singer Tom Jones, racist 'comedian' Bernard Manning and snooker-player Steve Davis.

An obvious question is the status of and attitudes to women in these working men's clubs. Women were originally not allowed to join, but gradually things began to change and by the 1950s most clubs had 'lady members'. The clubs could hardly survive without the income from and practical contributions by women, but it was only in 2007 that women achieved equal rights in clubs, after various

campaigns and shortly before the 2010 Equalities Act. Bingo made clubs even more appealing to women.

The clubs have of course had their ups and downs over the years. The breathalyser and the smoking ban hit attendance and bar takings. Musical styles such as glam rock and punk were hardly suitable for them. In 1922 there were 1,150,000 members in over two thousand clubs. Nowadays 1500 clubs are affiliated to the CIU, with around a million members, though there are also clubs which are unaffiliated. The north-east of England is 'the undisputed heart of clubland'.

An informative account of an institution that figures little in most social histories.

**PB**

## Exhibition Review **ILP, old and new**

The Independent Labour Party (ILP) was founded in 1893. To mark the 130th anniversary, the Working Class Movement Library (WCML) in Salford ran an exhibition 'That Impudent Little Party' in the final months of last year. It comprised original pamphlets, handbills and photos, supplemented by posters discussing the party's ideas and history.

At its founding, Keir Hardie, who was one of the ILP's leading lights, stated that it was an expression of a principle rather than an organisation, as it had 'neither programme nor constitution'. In fact it did have an aim, 'collective and communal ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange', but this is contradictory, as ownership in common excludes exchange. In reality it stood for a series of reforms, such as abolishing the monarchy and the House of Lords, and doing away with indirect taxation.

The ILP was officially pacifist in the Boer War and the First World War, but many members did join the armed forces in the latter conflict. In the Spanish Civil War it was an ally of the Trotskyist POUM, which naturally brought it into conflict with the 'Communist' Party of Great Britain. The ILP was opposed to the CP, as it thought there was no need for a revolution, but there were informal links between the two parties, and some ILPers (members of the so-called Revolutionary Policy Committee) left to join the CP.

The ILP lost influence after the Labour Party adopted Clause 4 in 1918, which also inconsistently combined common ownership and exchange. In 1932 the ILP disaffiliated from the Labour Party and, in the words of a WCML poster, this left it 'caught between' the Labour government and the CP. Many people were now wondering what the ILP was for. In 1945 it decided not to rejoin Labour, and many members resigned. It struggled on to 1975, when it was eventually disbanded. Its successor is Independent Labour Publications ([www.independentlabour.org.uk](http://www.independentlabour.org.uk)), which rejoined Labour that same year and campaigns pointlessly for a more left-wing Labour Party.

The first issue of the *Socialist Standard* argued that 'the working class should have nothing to do' with the ILP. Socialists continued to criticise it as a left-wing reformist organisation throughout its existence (see the October 2009 *Socialist Standard* [tinyurl.com/42uvh77t](http://tinyurl.com/42uvh77t)). Like other attempts to push or pull the Labour Party leftwards, it got precisely nowhere and eventually disappeared.

**PB**



THE FIRST NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE I.L.P.  
Back Row (left to right)—A. Field, J. Kennedy, J. Lister (Treasurer).  
Centre Row (left to right)—G. S. Christie, J. W. Buttery, Joseph Burgess, W. H. Drew, E. Aveling, Alf Settle,  
W. Johnson, W. Small, Chisholm Robertson, George Carson.  
Seated (left to right)—Pete Curran, Shaw Maxwell (Secretary), K. St. John Conway.

## Oiling the Works

COMMENTATORS HAVE been getting good mileage out of North Sea oil. Not only will it, in a few years, be replenishing the petrol-pumps and generators of Britain. It will bring "prosperity". The suggestion is of a good time coming, when the working class will be more than compensated for the hardships of the three-day week and wage restraint.

Whoever believes this should read the financial pages. The good time is being had already — but not by the workers. On 4th January the Guardian's "City Comment" reported the "windfall" which has come to the merchant bank group Edward Bates.

"The principal part of the \$12 million deals announced by Bates for the acquisition of working interests and royalties, was negotiated when oil was selling at \$4.20 a barrel in the U.S. It is currently being sold at \$8.30. As a result, the Bates projection of oil and gas income for 1974 jumps from \$2.6 millions to \$4.8 millions, not to mention the substantial capital gains which will result in property values."

The next day the Technology Correspondent told of the prosperity resulting from the latest North Sea find: "£180 millions added to the values of BP and Burmah Oil". The Guardian writer calls the Bates acquisition "an example of the pickings to be



had in the American market" over North Sea oil. Incorrect. The "pickings" are had out of the exploitation of the workers — for whom windfalls from capitalism remain elusive. (*Socialist Standard*, February 1974)

## Action Replay

# To a Tee

IT MIGHT be thought that golf is a rather straightforward game: hit a ball with various clubs until it finishes in the cup. But behind that is a great deal of controversy and power play.

For one thing, the design of golf balls will be modified so that they cannot be driven quite so far. Tee shots are likely to be about fifteen yards shorter for top players and less than five yards shorter for recreational players, with the changes not being introduced for a few years yet. According to the chief executive of the R&A (which runs the game in the UK), 'the sport has to take its responsibility and be cognisant of our environmental and sustainability impacts. Making golf courses ever longer, we start to run out of property and it is not environmentally responsible.' Good to see that they are taking things so seriously.

A far more thoroughgoing change to professional golf, though, is the emergence of the LIV Tour (the name refers to the Roman numerals for 54, the number of holes played at LIV events). This may well have an influence similar to that back in the 1970s of World Series Cricket, set up by tycoon Kerry Packer,

which had a big impact on television rights and players' income. LIV Golf is financed by the sovereign wealth fund of Saudi Arabia, and is aimed at establishing a new golf league to rival the PGA Tour. It is all part of the attempt to present a positive view of Saudi and its rulers (see the October 2023 Action Replay).

The biggest recent signing for LIV is that of Spanish player Jon Rahm, ranked number three in the world, who had previously said he would not be joining it. He is, according to some reports, going to 'earn' £450m or more in the deal. He says he plays golf for the love of the

game, and that he is ambitious but not greedy. If Rahm is indeed going to be paid that kind of money, then it will certainly not come from the LIV circuit's income from golf, which was less than \$100m last year. Clearly the money to pay him will be sourced from Saudi coffers.

There was originally a lot of argument and criticism between LIV and the more 'traditional' game. Joining LIV means a player cannot take part in the Ryder Cup international team competition, but no doubt that is a rather minor consideration. LIV golfers are now being allowed to play on the European tour, despite being previously barred. So perhaps the conflict is gradually settling down and a way of existing alongside each other will be arrived at, one that benefits the power-holders, and maybe the players too.

**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.

## FEBRUARY 2024 EVENTS

### World Socialist Movement online meetings

#### Sundays at 19.30 (IST) Discord

Weekly WSP (India) meeting

#### Friday 2 February 19.30

##### Did you see the news?

Discussion on recent subjects in thr news

#### Friday 9 February 19.30

##### Some ideas on socialist activity

Speaker: Johnny Mercer

#### Sunday 14 February 10.00

##### Central Online Branch Meeting

#### Friday 16 February 19.30

##### Myths of nationalism

Speaker: Paul Bennett

#### Friday 23 February 19.30

##### Human Beings: ultra social or vicious predators?

Speaker: Howard Moss

#### Friday 1 March 19.30

##### Did you see the news?

Discussion on recent subjects in the news

### Socialist Party Physical Meetings

#### MANCHESTER

##### Saturday 10 February 2pm

##### Think about yourself for a change

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

#### LONDON

##### Sunday 25 February 3pm

##### Labour — the Party of Business

Speaker: Adam Buick

Socialist Party premises, 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN

(nearest tube: Clapham North)

#### CARDIFF

##### Street Stall Every Saturday 1pm-3pm

(weather permitting)

Capitol Shopping Centre, Queen Street

(Newport Road end).

#### SUMMER SCHOOL 2024

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.

# Poverty amid Plenty

SOME TIME ago, while visiting my son and his family in the London area, we called in to see Ollie, one of my son's friends who he's known since his schooldays. Ollie has done incredibly well in conventional terms, in fact he's become a multi-millionaire, living in a penthouse overlooking Park Lane. I hadn't been there before and it sort of took my breath away – the sumptuous décor, the maid, the children's nanny, the original Bob Dylan sketches on the wall. It was my first brush with this kind of wealth. Ollie's background had been pretty humble, but after his education he'd got into trading in oil pipes, the ones that send oil from the Middle East flowing in all directions to fuel cars, heating appliances and much else. He was immensely wealthy, but to me he was the same young lad I'd known as my son's school friend. He didn't behave any differently either and I couldn't envy him or begrudge him his wealth.

But, when after a couple of hours we said our goodbyes and went down in the lift to the street below, the first thing I saw hit me like a sledgehammer. At distances of around 100 yards apart, there were three dishevelled young men sitting on the pavement with signs in front of them asking passers-by for money. One, I remember clearly, said 'Lost job, lost home, need money for food'. Of course I already knew the absurdity of a society that was actually wealthy enough in terms of resources and productive capacity to feed, clothe and house everyone on the planet to a perfectly comfortable level, yet still divided its wealth up in an insanely unequal way. But that was sort of in the abstract. Here was the absolute concrete reality, immense wealth and absolute destitution in virtual plain sight of each other.

## Trickle-down, my foot

Given that this happened a few years ago and the 'growth' imperative of the society we live in means that the amount of wealth and goods and services available has actually increased since then, one might have expected that at least a small part of that wealth might have 'trickled down' to the lower end. But far from that happening, it seems, from various recent sources, that the very opposite has taken place.

To start 'from the bottom', so to speak, that is with homelessness and 'rough sleeping', a BBC news website report entitled 'Cardiff's homeless community

grieving death of friend', revealed that Richard O'Brien, 'nicknamed Paddy', had been the third rough sleeper to die on the streets of Cardiff in 2023 and that the city's hostels were full and housing waiting lists were 'absolutely unprecedented' – the latter caused mainly by people being subjected to so-called 'no fault' evictions by landlords wishing to sell their properties or to bring in new tenants with higher rents.

Then, as we climb up the chain to what might be called 'lesser deprivation', the numbers get much bigger. A report by the Barnardo's charity stated that 'more than a million children in the UK either sleep on the floor or share a bed with parents or siblings because their family cannot afford the "luxury" of replacing broken frames and mouldy linen' and that 'the rise in "bed poverty" reflects growing levels of destitution in which low-income families already struggling with soaring food or gas bills often find they are also unable to afford a comfortable night's sleep'.

Slightly higher up the chain, a report by Ian Aikman of Which? Magazine, conducted at the end of 2023, showed a sharp increase in the number of households defaulting on 'essential payments' (eg, loans, credit cards, energy bills) and eight in ten being worried about energy prices, food prices and fuel costs. One in six had skipped meals due to high food costs and a quarter went without at least some food. And the 2023 Autumn statement from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation reported that two million households in Britain had in recent months turned off their fridge or freezer in order to save energy and money.

## Can governments help?

Why is all this happening and why aren't governments, who most people think should serve their populations, doing anything about it? Well, the simple fact is that, even if they wanted to, they couldn't, since the economic system we live in, capitalism, distributes the means of living based on who owns the means of production and who has the most market power, rather than according to any principle of rationality, fairness or human need. The job of governments is just to oversee that system. So the recent suggestion by John Bird, founder and editor-in-chief of the Big Issue, that the government should tackle the issue by setting up a Ministry of Poverty, is just as doomed to failure as the pledge by the Shelter charity, when it was first set up in



1966, to end homelessness in Britain within 10 years. Shelter is of course still 'going strong' and, in 2023, it stated that 'the number of people living in temporary accommodation has risen by an alarming 74% in the last 10 years'. The centre-right think-tank, the Centre for Social Justice, confirmed something similar when it found that 'the most disadvantaged people in Britain were no better off than they were 15 years ago', with around 13.4 million people living lives 'marred by family fragility, stagnant wages, poor housing, chronic ill health and crime'. Of course millions of workers do manage to keep their heads above water, some living reasonably comfortable lives, but even this is usually at the cost of working hard for an entire lifetime, never being truly free of financial insecurity and often at great cost to the quality of their lives.

## Decent lives?

The complaint is not that the very rich, whose wealth comes from ownership or control of resources, have so much more than everyone else but that it comes at the expense of everyone and everything else. Without any personal condemnation of people such as Ollie, or even of those wealthy tourists who the Guardian recently reported as queuing up to book into 'London's £1,000-plus a night super-luxe hotels' (some of them actually costing £10,000 or £20,000 a night), what the scenarios we have described above show is that we cannot trust the anarchic, irrational, market system we live under to fulfil even the most basic human needs such as clean, dry, warm, decent housing for everyone. That system, dedicated as it is to producing profit for the tiny minority of the population, is simply not designed to cater for the needs of the majority, let alone for the most deprived members of that majority.

**HOWARD MOSS**