

THE

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SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

Capitalism

Can't mend it,
so let's end it



Also: GLA elections
Galloway's Workers Party:
A sheep in wolf's clothing
Labour and 'the lower-working-class'

Capitalism and the fallacy of reform
A fair day's pay for a fair day's work?
Your home as 'fictitious' capital
Horrorscope revisited



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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'

Tinkering will not fix things

CHANGE IS needed, urgently. But we need to remember what we are dealing with. The profit system is worldwide. This means that the actions of all national governments are limited by the need for the system to yield profit. No matter what politicians promise, in or out of office, in the end they always have first to look to the needs of the capitalists, the privileged elite who own the means of living.

This doesn't mean that funding cannot be found for cleaner air, education or subsidised childcare – provided this meets the needs of 'the economy'. And that it is kept it as cheap as possible to avoid scaring 'the markets'. And any improvements that are achieved will always be threatened when the next slump or recession occurs, as it inevitably will.

Capitalism has solved the technical problem of producing enough to ensure a comfortable standard of living for everyone on the planet. It has brought the world's population together to cooperate in a massive network of socialised production,

by and large organised and operated by the excluded majority, us the workers. The disjoint between this and capitalism's class basis and profit motive prevents the needs of the world population being properly met and leads to want, waste and war.

The revolutionary change that socialists propose is nothing more than a re-purposing of the global production system. In other words, stop cooperating on behalf of the capitalists and cooperate instead to meet human needs. This presupposes that the means of living are no longer monopolised by a few.

Of course, we'll still have to mine, grow food, make machinery, and the like. After all, that is the human condition. But working just to meet needs means that we will be able to plan and produce rationally – making everything to the best of our technical ability, with as much regard for the rest of the natural world as is reasonably possible.

It means an end to any form of exchange – what we produce will be available for

anyone to use/consume as they wish.

This will mean that everything to do with buying and selling will be scrapped. And with no bosses, we'll all be able to take as big a part as we wish in decision-making. The material conditions for socialist production already exist. Just one thing is missing – class consciousness. Class consciousness is the understanding that capitalism will always work against the economic interests of us as workers. It is the understanding that our class position ensures that we will, inevitably, never get much more than enough to keep ourselves in working order.

It follows from this we should not seek to reform, mend or tinker with capitalism to try to make it work in our interest. Rather should we organise to ditch the profit system once and for all and bring in socialism, the common ownership and democratic control of the means of living as the only basis on which things can be fixed.

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Attack of the zombies

THE US presidential election campaign is set to move into high gear this year with both sides attacking the mental capacities of the other side's leader, one as senile and the other deranged. There is something zombie-like about Biden and Trump, the one peering through screwed-up eyelids as if half-asleep and always baffled, the other pontificating on his own magnificence in the strangled voice of hubris at full stretch. But it's not as if US workers would be any better off if two different capitalist zombies were battling it out for leadership, the whole concept of leadership itself is a kind of zombie cult.

New research from Queensland University has identified a problem of 'zombie leadership', a set of ideas about leadership that remain popular while being generally 'poisonous for organizations and society'. 'It's known as 'zombie leadership' because despite being demonstrably false, these claims refuse to die,' says Professor Haslam, of the University's School of Psychology. 'One example is the assumption that leadership is exclusive to people with special qualities which set them apart from the masses' (tinyurl.com/2s4b833z).

This is self-evidently a false assumption, when you look at the calibre of most political leaders. The only special quality many of them have is a narcissistic sense of Divine Right which is impervious to criticism or even rational thought. But zombie leaders make for zombie followers, who refuse to believe the evidence of their senses and remain convinced that leaders in general are a superior species.

The researchers point to other noxious but unchallenged preconceptions, like the idea that people can't manage without leaders, and that leadership is somehow good by definition. They argue that these ideas have no evidential base but persist because they flatter ruling elites (of course) and also appeal to anxious people who feel they have no control in the world, with the result that they help to 'justify inequalities of esteem, recognition, and reward.'

They are correct on all counts. But they don't say that all leadership is bad. They see 'good' leadership as an inclusive group process in which people feel appreciated, 'grounded in relationships and connections between leaders and those they influence.'

Recently the *Economist* ran a podcast series called *Boss Class*, which aimed to offer useful advice to managers trying to improve their game and get better results out of their workers. Much of the discussion revolved around similar ideas



of democratic participation, listening, appreciating, and recognising what individuals are good at and what they're not good at.

The problem with all this, from a socialist perspective, is that it's largely pious bullshit which either does not understand or refuses to admit the basic realities of capitalist employment. While it's undoubtedly better to have a nice boss than a nasty one, the fact is that workers are not there by choice, they are coerced by economic necessity into labouring to make someone else rich, and no amount of smarmy management-speak can disguise the conflict of interests between workers and management that is an integral part of the class war. Many workers instinctively recognise this, and are not fooled into working harder or for free just because the boss smiles at them and calls them by their first name. Unfortunately though, many other workers are conned into thinking that the boss is their friend, and they are consequently hit very hard when the cost of living goes up but their wages don't, or when they suddenly face redundancy after years of loyal service.

It really doesn't take much to find examples of people cooperating perfectly well without leaders. One recent news article looked at a Suffolk commune that's been going successfully for fifty years with everyone pitching in and nobody feeling the need to be Napoleon, although the place looks palatial so the buy-in would no doubt exclude the average *sans-culotte* (tinyurl.com/3xpdhjr). Even without doing any reading at all, most people can probably call to mind incidents from past experience where they worked cooperatively with other people on a common goal without anyone taking a leadership role. It's really not hard. People do it all the time. That's why socialism will work.

Surprisingly, there are even some capitalist companies which have got rid of management structures and have no actual bosses, like the Morning Star tomato processing company in California (tinyurl.com/mstnuhdr). But these tend to work in practice like cooperatives, where workers essentially have to exploit themselves if the entity is going to compete successfully in the marketplace against other companies with no tender scruples about screwing their own workers. And screw their workers they must, even if they're nice and polite bosses who know everyone's name, because the logic of capitalism is to grow or die, and that means skinning the workforce every chance they get.

Socialists have an understanding of leadership which is somewhat different even from that suggested by the Queensland study. We don't have leaders and we regard hierarchies as intrinsically anti-democratic. But to say we don't believe in leadership under any circumstances is not accurate. In fact, as Engels pointed out in response to some people fetishising anti-authority, there are times when it would be damned silly and even dangerous not to have an expert in charge, like on a ship at sea (*On authority*, 1872- tinyurl.com/33dcr52w).

In fact we think leadership should be encouraged in everyone – if by leadership we mean a willingness to take the initiative, problem solve, show others the way, and inspire them to take part in a collective cause or a project. That's how we'll get socialism, after all, by you and everyone else having the courage to stand up and be first, not sitting and waiting like a zombie for someone else to tell you what to do.

PJS

Greater London Assembly elections, Thursday 2 May 2024

THE GREATER London Assembly is composed of 25 members, 14 elected by a party list system and 11 from geographical constituencies. In the elections on 2 May the Socialist Party is contesting 2 of these constituencies — Barnet & Camden in North London and Lambeth & Southwark in South London.

This will give some 870,000 electors the chance to indicate whether they want to replace capitalism with socialism,

the profit system with a system where goods and services are provided directly to satisfy people's needs on the basis of the common ownership and democratic control of the means of living. Those in the other constituencies, and for the election of the Mayor and the party list members, can indicate this by casting a write-in vote for socialism by writing "Socialism" across their ballot paper.

The campaign will take place in April and

will consist of street stalls, leafletting door-to-door and at tube and overground stations, contacting the local media, and attending hustings and opponents' meetings. If you want to help in this, let us know at spgb@worldsocialism.org. If you wish to contribute financially, cheques should be made out to "Socialist Party London Branch" and sent to 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN or by bank transfer to account 53057170 at Santander (sort code 72-06-00).

Let's work for ourselves instead

You're being asked to vote in the London elections for an Assembly that will watch a Mayor ask a government to ask the people who own the country for the money to run the region.

They will only get that money on terms that will help the owners keep on owning and making profits.

Confusing, isn't it?

This is a long way from democracy.

In London 200,000 people are unemployed. Half a million work for less than a living wage. Nearly 5 million people spend their lives working on behalf of the owners, making their profits and the money that the politicians try to beg out of them.

That is about 9 billion hours of work done in London each year.

But we are not benefitting from all that hard work. The rewards go to the employers, the owners, the already wealthy who are first in every queue and whose interests always come before those of the working majority.

If instead we owned the world in common, that amount of work could go directly to improving the lives of the people without needing to send leaders to ask for scraps.

Democracy would extend into our daily lives and we could have meaningful control of our workplaces and communities.

We wouldn't need leaders. We'd all be decision-makers.

Creating this common ownership depends on the conscious decision of the majority of people to work and co-operate in their own interest. No leader could bring this about for you. Only you, your neighbours and colleagues could make it happen.

We are standing candidates in this election, not to become bosses or administrators in the owners' empire, but to enable you to send a message to your neighbours and colleagues that you want a world of common ownership and democratic control.

Our candidates:

Barnet & Camden:
Bill Martin

Lambeth & Southwark:
Adam Buick



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.

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Be they dragons?

IN THE November/December issue of the *Skeptical Inquirer*, Benjamin Radford dealt with a question 'What do you make of the memes going around comparing billionaires to hoarding dragons and monkeys? Are billionaires hurting the world by hoarding their obscene wealth?' He answered that billionaires were not like the dragon Smaug in *The Hobbit* who slept on a hoard of gold as they did not literally 'hoard' their wealth. Although he appears to be a supporter of the world as it currently is he made a couple of valid points.

First, that much of the wealth of billionaires is not actual, tangible wealth like gold.

'Ultra-rich people don't literally own billions of physical dollars in the way that Smaug physically sits on gold and treasure. Instead, owning five billion dollars and being worth \$5 billion on paper are two different things. That's because the value isn't tangible. It's not a zero-sum game in which if you have something (say a house, car or \$100 bill) that, by definition, means someone else does not have it. In the case of wealth, a person can (and usually does) get rich when the value of a company's stock increases. But that increase doesn't mean that someone else loses money or value if the value of your stocks goes up by \$100.'

Radford presents this as a difference between 'money' and 'wealth', between money as a store of wealth and the price of what a person owns. There is a difference here but between wealth (properly understood as physical things that have a use) and its price. The price of some item of tangible wealth can go up (or down) without affecting the ownership of that wealth. If it goes up, this is a 'capital gain' for the owner.

In the case of stocks and shares, what is being bought and sold is not even anything tangible, but the right to draw an income from the production of future tangible wealth, more precisely the expected profits to be made from this. Marx called this 'fictitious capital' but a more immediately understandable term might have been 'notional capital'.

The riches of super-rich individuals like Musk and Bezos is mainly in the form of stocks in the corporations they own. If the price of these goes up then they get richer. Recently, due largely to the quantitative easing, there has been a boom in the price of stocks and shares, resulting in the rich and super-rich getting richer. Thus, calculations have been made of how much Musk's riches have been increasing per day. It's \$49,439,601 (tinyurl.com/msf5tjf8).

These capital gains don't represent any increase in real, tangible wealth. Radford is correct in pointing out that they don't represent wealth that can be hoarded or could be redistributed to others. They don't deprive anybody of anything. But this doesn't mean that all the wealth of billionaires exists only as 'notional capital'. They also have a share of property titles to real tangible wealth, the physical assets (buildings, equipment) of the corporations that they have shares in. They are part of the class that monopolises the means that society needs to use to survive.

Which brings us to Radford's second point, that hoarding is 'the last thing that they want to do with their money':

'They neither have nor hoard treasure but instead invest their wealth in businesses, which in turn buy equipment and hire employees'.

Exactly. What they want to do with their money is to invest it with a view to making more money. Which is the opposite of hoarding. Unlike 'capital gains', profits represent real wealth, a monetary reflection of one part of the real, tangible wealth that employees produce.

Billionaires can be acquitted of the charge of behaving like dragons. But not of being part of the class that monopolises the means of production, to the detriment of the rest of us.



Talks include:

Keith Graham on *Political Consciousness: What Can We Learn From Marx?*

Darren Poynton on *Socialist Consciousness, Solidarity and Democratic Virtues*



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

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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

NAUTILUS, 28 February, reviews a book by a Professor of Psychiatry at the American University of Yale. The article is titled, 'Evolution Is Going According to God's Plan'. The reviewer says its author believes 'evolutionary theory is, in fact, theologically reaffirming; natural selection, is purposeful and guided, and provides both evidence for a creator.' Double *quelle surprise!* The Prof is a lifelong Mormon and is now a Latter Day Saints bishop.

It seems it's not only Christian evangelicals who have problems with reality other religions do too. The *Yetkin Report*, 23 February, notes that those in charge of education in Turkey, having their country's children's best interests at heart, banned Charles Darwin's theory of evolution from being taught in schools several years ago. Now 'The Ministry of (Turkey's) National Education, under the title of the biology curriculum, has introduced the notion of creationism into the 2024-25 schedule'.

Atlantic Council, 16 February, reports

an elderly Iranian gentleman has seriously upset the Iranian authorities and has quite rightly (ahem) been taken into custody to undergo rehabilitation. George Orwell's 1984 wasn't just a work of fiction but a manual used by totalitarian regimes for the suppression of dissent. Totalitarian? Did someone mention Julian Assange? The heinous crime of this individual? Posting himself singing and dancing on social media. 'The hardline Islamist worldview of the Islamic Republic, and its small but powerful constituency, subscribes to outlawing public dancing and singing as "un-Islamic" practices.'

American politician Mike Johnson again. *Windytimes* (14 February) notes that he flies three flags outside his office. The national flag, the State flag and 'a white flag with a green tree in the centre and the words "An Appeal to Heaven". This flag, which originated in the American Revolution, today is associated with a religious movement, New Apostolic Reformation, a rapidly growing force

among various evangelical and charismatic groups that seeks to conform society's seven spheres—education, religion, family, business, government, arts, and entertainment—with their interpretations of Christian scriptures and history'.

Any extraterrestrials who arrive to check out the third rock from the Sun would, if they have any sense, turn right around and avoid it like the proverbial. It is to be sincerely hoped that such visitors are not Vogons intend on demolishing the planet to provide an interplanetary space bypass. Douglas Adams in his series of books beginning with *Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* was using his imagination. There have been many who have insisted that they have indeed been abducted by aliens or who have been taken up into a UFO and had unspeakable things happen to them.

A Frenchman named Claude Maurice Marcel Vorilhon who purported to have met with ET's and who, in December 1973, formed the Raëlian Movement and changed his name to Raël. Perhaps these alien visitors possess a twisted sense of humour because the number of times that various religious/cult founders have had revelations conveyed to them through hearing or meeting with 'other worldly' beings is quite a coincidence.

DC

Tiny tips

Worldwide, 1.4 billion children aged under 16 lack any form of social protection, leaving them vulnerable to disease, poor nutrition and poverty (**TRT Afrika**, tinyurl.com/4s7uj2rz).

With church attendance falling, many Belgian churches are being given a new lease of life instead of being closed down. In one church in Mechelen, visitors now raise a glass instead of raising a prayer (**DW**, tinyurl.com/5n6thwfp).

'It is important to understand aspects of human evolution so that you feel a part of humanity,' Black says. 'So many people feel isolated, excluded or discarded because of the way they look or what culture they practice. By understanding human origins, people will see that we are all more united than divided in so many ways' (**Fair Observer**, tinyurl.com/9rszmdau).

According to Mohammad Esmaeili Mahjoub, head of Tehran Municipality's department for managing social issues, there has been a concerning rise in cases of abandoned elderly individuals. He revealed that since the start of the year, approximately 25 cases have been

encountered by their organization in the capital alone. Fatemeh Abbasi, deputy responsible for rehabilitation affairs at the national welfare organization, has also voiced alarm over the surge in homelessness, particularly among the elderly and mentally ill. She stated that many of these vulnerable individuals are left on the streets by families who can no longer afford their care (**Iran News Update**, tinyurl.com/2y2v8wnx).

Nick Hurley... said his firm had seen the number of businesses seeking advice on what to do about unexplained absences more than triple since the pandemic. Mr Hurley told *The Telegraph*: 'What we have noticed is in those sectors where perhaps wages and skills are a little lower, there is a definite increase in the number of employees who are just not showing up to work – and leaving the employer in the doo-doo, as it were. (**Yahoo Finance**, tinyurl.com/ycyjpsc5).

Prince of Wales to build homes for the homeless on his Cornish estate (<http://tinyurl.com/msdepskj>).

The Trump administration's neglect and incompetence helped put half-a-million Americans in the ground, dead from COVID-19. Joe Biden was elected president in part on the promise of setting us on a

science-driven course correction, but, a little more than a year later, another half-a-million Americans were killed by the virus. What happened? (**NYU Press**, tinyurl.com/9j7az7k3).

According to Federal Reserve data, industrial production in the US defense and space sectors has surged by 17.5% since the war began, and administration officials say 64% of the \$60.7 billion designated for Ukraine in a \$95 billion supplemental military package will come back to the US defense industrial base (**International Clearing House**, tinyurl.com/577azdhe).

The Houthis have recruited thousands of children since the start of the conflict in Yemen in 2014. The United Nations has verified at least 1,851 individual cases of child recruitment or use by the Houthis since 2010 (**Human Rights Watch**, tinyurl.com/4kpzxxv6c).

...the criminal court in Dhamar in northern Yemen sentenced nine individuals to death – with seven sentenced to be executed by stoning, and two by crucifixion – while 23 others were handed prison sentences between six months and 10 years on charges including 'homosexuality', 'spreading immorality', and 'immoral acts' (**Amnesty International**, tinyurl.com/yospz4k4f).

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

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

MIDLANDS

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

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North East Regional branch.

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

Yorkshire Regional branch.

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

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

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

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

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

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

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Glasgow branch. Meet 3rd Monday of the month at 7pm 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@btopenworld.com or mobile: 07484 717893

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WALES

South Wales branch (Cardiff and Swansea)

Meets 2nd Monday 7.30pm on JITSi.

(meet.jit.si/spgbsouthwales3).

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Central branch

Meets 2nd Sunday of the month, 10am (UK time) on Zoom <https://zoom.us/j/7421974305>.

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Pollution pays

IN ENVIRONMENTAL legislation the ‘polluter pays’ principle is an attempt to force businesses to bear at least some of the costs resulting from their polluting activities. However, this runs up against the logic of market competition. That logic encourages businesses to seek ways of externalising their costs as far as possible and to resist any attempt to compel them to internalise them that would have the effect of reducing their profits.

Thus, the problem with calling on governments to take stronger measures to protect the environment (or the interests of workers for that matter) is that what governments can do, even with the best will in the world, is limited. When they do act out of sheer necessity, the response is often ‘too little too late’. Objectively speaking, the interests of governments and those of the business community (that ultimately finances governments) are inextricably intertwined and closely aligned. Penalising businesses too harshly will rebound against the government itself.

It is precisely these fundamental economic realities that make the posturing of governments in relation to such pressing issues as anthropogenic climate change, at best tokenistic and, at worst thoroughly deceitful. There can be no hope of resolving such an issue through international agreements or strident appeals to world leaders to ‘do the right thing’. That is a timewasting and pointless endeavour, doomed to disappointment and despair.

Concerted attempts to get countries to comply with international agreements concerning emissions of greenhouse gases to combat climate change have frankly descended into farce. Periodic COP summits to discuss the issue have become little more than photo opportunities for politicians to convey the impression that they are actually doing something worthwhile and to placate their critics. In the meanwhile, the problem just gets steadily worse.

A holier-than-thou attitude on the part of some richer countries that have historically contributed most to the emission of these gases and still do so to some extent, sits uneasily with poorer countries wanting to industrialise and develop themselves and feeling they are somehow being prevented from doing so by other countries that are already industrialised and developed. Accusations of hypocrisy and double standards fill the air, contributing more heat than light to the ongoing debate. As the backbiting continues so does the global temperature gauge continue to inch its way upwards. In a ruthlessly competitive market economy the chances of its rivalrous participants cooperating for the common good appear increasingly slim if not non-existent.

In the meanwhile, as the scale of the environmental costs mount so does the room for manoeuvre diminish. These costs will incrementally impact on profit margins yet, paradoxically, the more they do so, the more resistant do businesses

and governments appear to become towards taking affirmative and effective action to mitigate them. In a competitive market economy the temptation is always to want to offload the costs of dealing with the problem onto someone else, rather than yourself.

This is the perverse logic that informs the system we live in. The potential, or actual, ‘resource wars’ it gives rise to over such things as mineral reserves, water supplies and fertile farmland not only exacerbate the unfolding environmental disasters but provide a further distraction from, or an excuse for not, doing anything about it. Who is going to be overly concerned with environmental quality when heavily militarised states become fixated with carpet bombing the cities of their sworn enemies?

The truth is that in a capitalist society there is nothing quite like economic distress to focus minds on the priority of profit making. Environmental standards will be surreptitiously eased by default, if not by design, for the sake of promoting economic growth.

Corporations may well fall back on that well-documented ruse called ‘greenwashing’, feigning concern while simultaneously promoting sales of their products amongst their more ‘environmentally enlightened’ consumers, even though the underlying imperative that drives them – getting consumers to consume more and more – is itself fundamentally antithetical to what a sustainable world stands for.

‘Consuming more’ is precisely what has been happening. Of course, in itself, this is not necessarily a bad thing at all if you are talking about individuals in desperate need. However, ‘consumption’ covers a multitude of things, many of which have nothing whatsoever to do with meeting human needs. What is ‘environmentally friendly’ about an M1 Abrams battle tank or a Boeing AH-64 Apache attack helicopter?

The point is that we need to disaggregate the very concept of ‘consumption’ itself instead of just vaguely talking about the ‘greening of consumption’. Consuming what and to what end? For all the growing concern about the environmental costs of consumption, consumption itself is growing.

The solution to our problems cannot lie in technology alone. It has to involve also changing our social priorities and that can only really come about by changing the kind of society we live in.

ROBIN COX



Galloway's Workers Party: A sheep in wolf's clothing

FOLLOWING THEIR leader George Galloway's victory in the Rochdale by-election, the Workers Party of Britain (WPB) is making a bid to be the standard-bearer in the coming general election of the anti-Labour left. But what do their stand for?

They claim to be a socialist party but nowhere do they clearly define what they mean by socialism.

They are 'committed to the redistribution of wealth and power in favour of working people' (which is what the Labour Party committed itself to in its manifesto for the February 1974 general election; in more emphatic terms in fact, as 'a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of power and wealth in favour of working people and their families'). This 'redistributive economics', however, assumes the continued existence of a wealthy class some of whose wealth is to be transferred to working people. So, they are talking here about a change within the capitalist system. Its reform not its abolition. Socialists, by contrast, stand not for a less unequal ownership of wealth but for the common ownership and democratic control of the places where what society needs to survive is produced.

The WPB 'believes in an economy that works for the working class people, the vast majority'. All parties say that, and not just the Labour Party either. The question is what is being proposed to try to make 'the economy' work in this way. Perhaps surprisingly, the WPB does not envisage the widespread nationalisation of productive industry that the Labour Party's old Clause Four did. Not that nationalisation — the state take-over of some industry or business — is socialism. It is state capitalism under which workers still work for wages and are treated in the same way as by private employers, as many workers have learnt from experience.

Their position on this is that 'we are not afraid of selective nationalisation especially of dysfunctional utilities and for strategic assets':

'Our nationalisation policy is based on a simple proposition that anything that is a monopoly or essential to the functioning of the country, especially those businesses strategically required in times of crisis, should be considered for re-nationalisation or nationalisation'.

These are precisely the reasons the Labour used to give to justify nationalisation when it supported this.

They go on:

'We say 'considered' because full nationalisation may not be necessary in every case, such as national logistics, if the industry concerned is prepared to operate constructively in line with national planning guidelines and places the nation before investors. If we have to legislate to give the national interest priority over the market, we will not hesitate to do so.'

Since there aren't any monopolies outside the railways and the utilities and since the Bank of England is already nationalised, the most that is envisaged would be a return to the pre-Thatcher situation in the 1970s which would still leave most productive industry in the hands of profit-seeking private enterprises.

They want 'the state to guide the economic life of the country.' Given their position on nationalisations, this means the state directing and trying to plan an economy in which large sections of productive activity remain in the hands of profit-seeking private enterprises. Reformist parties have tried this many times and have always failed since such a mixed economy means the government is at the mercy of the private sector which will refuse to invest unless there is enough profit in it for them and no 'direction' or 'legislation' can compel them to do so. This is why all previous Labour governments have ended up accepting that profits have to be made and themselves applying this capitalist imperative. A Galloway government would be no different.

Like Old Labour, the WPB sees its goal as being achieved gradually: 'It may take many years to transform Britain into a secure democratic socialist state.' In the meantime, there are 'some things we can do immediately.' There is a 'Ten-Point Programme' of immediate demands full of vote-catching reforms (but which doesn't include any nationalisation measures) such as:

'Useful, secure jobs for all in decent conditions, with living wages, paid holidays, sick leave, maternity leave, etc.

Decent, cheap, secure housing for all.

Free and comprehensive healthcare with no waiting lists.

High-quality, free provision of all necessary support services for the disabled, as well as the elderly.

Universal access to a cheap or free fully-integrated public transport system and all essential amenities: water, sanitation, heating, electricity, post, telephone, internet'.

Apparently, they believe that capitalism could be made to provide all that, but these free or subsidised services would have to be paid for out of taxes which ultimately fall on profits. In fact, profits would have to be taxed so much that it would undermine capitalist enterprises' incentive to produce, provoking a slump in economic activity.

To be fair, they do get a couple of things right.

They define the working class as:

"It is the 99%. The workers are anyone who has to *sell their labour power for wages*. What does that mean? It means that if you have to earn wages, do jobs for money, you are a member of the working class.'

And they have seen through the Labour Party (as we did right from its start in 1906):

'Labour are Labour in name only. Labour do not represent the workers, they serve the elite, the class that does not work: the ruling class. But Labour likes to pretend it is on the side of the workers. It has stolen the name "Labour". *Labour is the wolf in sheep's clothing.*'

On the other hand, they commit themselves to defending the state-capitalist regime in the old USSR.

"We defend the achievements of the USSR, China, Cuba, etc."

"We shall defend the positive historical legacy of the Soviet Union".

The Communist Party of Britain and the Scargill Labour Party (SLP) take the same position. It hasn't done them any good. Quite the reverse. It is more likely to put people off as there is already a widespread understanding that the USSR wasn't socialist but, as in the West, a class-divided society ruled by a privileged elite.

In short, the WPB is not the 'socialist alternative to the corrupt Labour Party' that it claims to be. It is just a return to failed, Old Labourism.

ADAM BUICK

Labour and 'the lower-working-class'

'The upper class desire to remain so, the middle class wish to overthrow the upper class, and the lower class want a classless system.'
(George Orwell)

IN HIS 1937 book, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, George Orwell, describes what it was like to be born into a family that saw itself as of a superior class to that of the working class 'I was born into what you might describe as the lower-upper-middle class... In the kind of shabby-genteel family that I am talking about there is far more consciousness of poverty than in any working-class family above the level of the dole.'

Back in 1966 class differences were much more obvious to everyone. In a television programme of that year, *The Frost Report*, John Cleese, Ronnie Barker and Ronnie Corbett acted out a class sketch. Using the differences in their heights, Cleese was upper class, Barker middle and Corbett lower. Lines include middle class saying, "I look up to him because he is upper class, but I look down on him because he is lower class." Ronnie Corbett: "I know my place." After describing the advantages of their two 'superior' classes, Corbett, looking upwards at both ends the sketch with, 'I get a pain in the back of my neck.'

Speaking of pain, Labour are at pains to persuade UK Capitalism that it need have no qualms about a Labour government. Labour will indeed do its utmost to carry on from the Tories the position of

government as the executive committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.

At Davos, in January, the Labour shadow chancellor, Rachel Reeves let it be known that, 'With Labour, Britain will be open to business. We will restore stability and security into our economy. We will restore Britain's reputation as a place to do business. And we will be a trusted partner with business in delivering the change our country and our economy needs' (*Guardian*, 16 January).

A few months on, they are letting it be known that they are going to sort out those pesky proles who can't or won't be active wage slaves. Social welfare costs the capitalist class as a whole money that they would much rather benefit from themselves rather than subsidise the, in their eyes, undeserving poor, scroungers and economically useless.

Labour's shadow work and pensions secretary Liz Kendall has laid out their intentions:

'Under a Labour government there would be 'no option of a life on benefits', the Party has said, as it set out plans to reduce the number of young people not in work, education or training.'

'Under our changed Labour party, if you can work there will be no option of a life on benefits,' she said in a speech to the centre-left Demos think-tank in London, where she sought to outline Labour's commitment on "investing" in young people.' (*Guardian*, 4 March).

Ten years ago this year, Channel Four aired a series of five programmes which looked at the lives of people living in Winson Green, Birmingham. The series was entitled *Benefits Street*. The programmes have been called 'poverty porn' as they portrayed those featured in the worst possible light. Allegedly ninety percent of the street's inhabitants were on benefits.

The *Socialist Standard*, February 2014, carried a TV Review of *Benefits Street*.

'*Benefits Street* (Channel 4): yet another tawdry docusoap which reveals how some people just leech off others. The real parasites here are, of course, the programme-makers – feeding off the lives of the people they film... The producers of *Benefits Street* have maintained that the programme is 'fair and balanced', but in reality it's as fair and balanced as a broken see-saw. The editing, title and format of the show aim to exploit, rather than express the participants' struggles. The producers have been taken in by the prevailing mood among the elite to demonise those victimised most by capitalism' (tinyurl.com/4m9d95at).

The Labour Party appear now to have the same detestation and contempt for those in society on benefits as did the Channel Four producers of *Benefits Street*. You won't hear it from them but the only solution to capitalism's ills is its replacement by socialism.

DC



Credit: Channel 4

Capitalism and the fallacy of reform

RECENTLY, Sir Keir Starmer announced his ambition for a 'patriotic economy' through the championing of home ownership and the building of new model towns. Evidently, the Labour leader is attempting to harness the middle ground, by blending Thatcher and Attlee. Many recall the faux revolution of 'right to buy' which, forty years on, has spawned a social housing crisis. Throw in the legacy of the 1946 New Towns Act, which sought to construct model towns in the aftermath of the Second World War, and you have yet another Social Democratic fudge to reform capitalism.

Starmer is not alone in seeking to reinvent the wheel. Every Labour leader has bound themselves to the yoke of the system. Ramsay Macdonald all too willingly succumbed to the protracted economic crisis of the interwar years, content at playing establishment bank manager in a period of decline. The Attlee Government, despite the strides made in welfarism, struck the rocks, and yielded to the rules of capitalism, laying the course for twenty-five years of *Butskellism*. Harold Wilson had us believe that a new Britain could be forged in the white heat of technology, but this fire burned in the hall of capitalism, prostrated by markets and a depreciating pound. James Callaghan surrendered what vestiges of leftism remained, implementing the kind of monetarism Thatcher later claimed as her own. Need anything be said of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown – the would-be heirs to the Iron Lady?

No, the British labour movement, like so many Social Democratic movements the world over, has always been a willing hostage to capitalism, engaging in a futile quest to reform it, rather than introduce socialism. In some respects, they cannot be blamed, for the boom-and-bust integral to the existence of capitalism has attracted many in vainglorious quests to improve it and acquire the eternal elixir of socioeconomic harmony. Many also point to the idea that capitalism has in fact undergone transformations as justification for reform, such as the shift from industrial capitalism to the information age. The rise of technology and globalisation

has apparently altered the dynamics of production, trade, and employment. Some have also claimed the attainment of adaptation within capitalism – the Nordic model, exemplified by countries like Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, supposedly combines capitalist elements with a strong welfare state. This model allegedly seeks to prioritise social equality, education, and healthcare, challenging the notion that capitalism must follow a rigid, laissez-faire approach.

However, reformist approaches are an illusion and cannot ameliorate the structural antagonisms which provide the fundamental basis for capitalism. Even in the venerated Nordic economies high inflation and interest rates, youth unemployment and poverty persist. Finland is in recession while the Swedish economy is weakening. Norway, propped up by oil and gas exploitation faces fiscal challenges with high public spending. The message is clear: under capitalism, boom will always lead to bust.

The system requires inequality and the exploitation of workers, else there would be no profit or incentive to accumulate. Over the past hundred years, Social Democratic efforts to introduce welfarism and redistribution have failed to eradicate this inequality and exploitation. Today, the rich are richer and the poor poorer. The gap has widened, and reformism has served only to pacify the masses so that the top one per cent can acquire more. Today, the poorest 50 percent hold only 8 percent of global wealth, while the richest 10 percent earn over 50 percent. The top 1 percent alone owns 35 percent of global wealth, takes 19 percent of income, and emits 17 percent of global carbon emissions. (International Monetary Fund, *Global Inequalities*, tinyurl.com/3vsuz9px) This has occurred despite the founding of welfare states in some countries, free healthcare, state education, social security, and the 'redistribution' of wealth.

It appears the capitalist system has assimilated Social Democracy and turned it into a weapon to perpetuate exploitation. Harold Macmillan once said of Britons in the 1950s that they had never had it so

good – (hardly an accolade considering decades of economic instability and destructive war). In truth, any semblance of prosperity is nothing more than the offering of more crumbs off the capitalist plate. You may receive sustenance, but the people at the top still get a hearty meal. If anything is true of today it is that the rich have never had it so good.

Alas, Social Democrats have been hood-winked, in no small way thanks to the Social Democratic theorist Eduard Bernstein (1850-1932). In *Evolutionary Socialism: A Criticism and Affirmation* (1899) Bernstein did not believe in capitalism's inevitable destruction; he accepted the strength of its capacity to adapt and advocated reform so that humanity could transition from capitalism to social democracy. He contended that as workers attained greater rights, their grievances would diminish, making revolution implausible. In this, he is perhaps accurate. The extension of rights and the offering of the 'crumbs' have pacified the masses and encouraged social democrats to continue along the path of reformism. However, his call for reform contradicts his appraisal of capitalism's adaptational strength. Everything promulgated within the system is consumed by the system. Nothing changes.

Like Bernstein, today's Labour and Social Democratic parties do not champion any meaningful alternative – in fact, they are complicit in the perpetuation of capitalism. As Bernstein's contemporary, the socialist revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919) contested: '...people who pronounce themselves in favour of the method of legislative reform in place of and in contradistinction to the conquest of political power and social revolution, do not really choose a more tranquil, calmer and slower road to the same goal, but a different goal'. Consequently, their goal is 'not the realisation of Socialism, but the reform of capitalism.'

She did not mean workers should not fight for mitigations within the system – indeed we cannot suspend ourselves nor exist outside of it – but we must acknowledge that meaningful change



can only be attained by *transcending* the capitalist system. Once this has been achieved and socialism established, humanity must then work to continually improve socialism so that it fulfils its basic mission of meeting the needs of all. Here, and only here, is where socialism truly becomes *evolutionary*.

Socialists can take some comfort from the fact that, notwithstanding the futility of Social Democratic attempts to reform the system, capitalism is by no means an eternal fact, nor inherent to human nature. Closer examination reveals that it is more accurately understood as a phase in human development. Throughout history, economic systems have undergone significant transformations, and capitalism is just one stage in this ongoing progression.

The advent of capitalism brought forth key principles, such as private ownership of the means of production, free-market competition, and profit motive. The transition from feudalism to capitalism was not without conflict, as evidenced by the social upheavals and labour movements of the 18th and 19th centuries. These movements sought to address the challenges posed by the industrialisation of society, including issues of worker exploitation and poor working conditions.

There is, therefore, hope that humanity can transcend capitalism. It requires a widespread global consciousness, an acceptance of the truth that the system we currently perpetuate is harsh and damaging to us all, and that reforming that system equates to nothing more than that perpetuation.

While capitalism has undoubtedly played a significant role in shaping modern economies, it is not a reflection of human nature, as its apologists, ignoring the historical and cultural evidence, have claimed since the time of Adam Smith, if not before.

Human societies have demonstrated adaptability and a capacity for diverse economic systems throughout history, and while no thinking socialist can dispute the transformative impact of capitalism; the extent of technological advancement and human dominion over the environment,

one would do well to remember that it does not symbolise the culmination of all conceivable endeavours to organise as a species. To rest on the laurels of capitalism is to commit the mistake of previous generations, specifically those who held up religion, imperialism, feudalism, and slavery as essential preconditions for civilisation. We must take what we have learned under capitalism and use it to build a better version of the world – one of peace, community, and equality. In short, a socialist world.

JOHN ELLISTON

Them and us

What the politicians say

An economy based on production for sale and profit can be made to work for everyone.

The workplaces where useful things are made and useful services provided should be owned by rich individuals and private enterprises.

The owners of these places should alone decide what is and what is not produced.

The rule for this should be 'no profit, no production'.

Profit should have priority over public services.

The essential rule should be 'can't pay, can't have'.

What we say

The present system cannot be reformed to work for the benefit of all.

Natural resources and workplaces should be owned in common by all of us, not just by a few.

We can produce enough to provide everyone with a decent standard of living.

The resources exist to provide decent public services and amenities.

The aim of production should be to meet people's needs instead of to make a profit.

The operating principle should be 'from each their best, to each their needs'.

Access to health care, utilities, food, transport, housing, public services etc. should be free.

A fair day's pay for a fair day's work?

THE EXPECTATION, within an exchange economy like capitalism, is that products and services are exchanged in a like for like measure of value. The money you pay for anything is a contract of exchange based on the promise of equal value. Your money is a universal commodity that legally ensures this and, for the most part, it will be a reality of economic activity. Although universally accepted this description of a transaction makes a rather naive assumption about the nature and definition of 'value'.

Economists have long pondered on this phenomenon and continue to disagree as to its nature and even its efficacy in describing financial activity. There are deep ideological reasons for the attempt to divide the disciplines of politics and economics but anyone genuinely seeking to understand the history of this most basic, and important, social activity will quickly discover the impossibility of doing so.

The defenders of capitalism will go to great lengths to try and prove that the system has coherence, equality and fairness built into its transactional process so that any hint of irrational and exploitative elements will be described as originating in 'ideological extremism' or be completely ignored. Such is the grip of this economic propaganda that very few are willing to concede the possibility of the establishment of a non-exchange economy called socialism.

Let us consider the meaning and implications of the title of this article in the light of what socialists believe to be the most glaring example of an irrational and unequal economic exchange within the capitalist system – the exchange of labour for wages. We have all heard the phrase: 'He knows the price of everything and the value of nothing'. This hints at both an economic suspicion and a moral criticism of the system based on a notion that price and value are not the same things. As described above we usually experience an assumed parity of value when we buy anything and, despite the vagaries of supply and demand, this is indeed the case. But if we describe wages/salaries as the price of labour power we see immediately a disparity of value that this represents in terms of the value produced

and the profits enjoyed by non-producers.

The only possible conclusion is that wages do not represent the full value of what a worker produces – if it did there would be no profit and no capitalism. Labour-power is the only commodity that can produce more value than is represented by its price (wages). If this is a correct analysis it condemns the capitalist system as one of exploitation and theft which is why, as mentioned above, those who defend the system could never acknowledge this obvious truth and go to such great lengths to obfuscate it in their tortuous economic theories.

This doesn't imply a massive conspiracy theory against the truth but merely a profound ignorance of the reality of economic activity. How has this come about? Socialists contend that it is because of the confusion and misunderstanding of the relationship between price and use-value. To try and untangle this we have to go back and understand the concept of value.

It is a fascinating study to understand what different societies in different times have considered valuable. Other than human qualities like intelligence, courage, moral integrity and compassion we have attributed value to objects of our and nature's creation such as gold, silver, gem stones, art, music, antiques etc., etc. Phenomena of great utility like oil, gas, water, metals and wood have enjoyed varied levels of prestige through the ages but one thing above all others has been valued the most- social status through the accumulation of wealth together with the political power it generates.

To overcome the impracticalities of direct exchange via barter one item of wealth ultimately evolved into currency (money), something that could be exchanged for anything else. As trade expanded it became necessary to produce such coins in a universally acknowledged medium of value such as gold or silver which was in turn superseded by a legal attachment to these material incarnations of value and then merely to the prestige and power of the state (fiat money). But at the root of all of these commodities is human labour. Gold and oil are not valuable because they are rare but because of the labour-time needed in finding and



extracting them (due to their rarity).

The price of the labour-power expended to do this is determined by the amount of labour needed to create (training, etc) and maintain it (means of life/standard of living). But the price paid for labour power is always much less than the price paid for the results of labour like gold and so on. Those who produce wealth only get in return the value incarnated in the price of their labour power (wages) and not the price incarnated in the value of what they produce.

Surplus value is the difference between the wealth represented by the wages of producers and the wealth generated by their labour. When the products of this labour are exchanged (sold) this magnitude of difference becomes profit – part of which can be resurrected as capital which is used to expand this whole cycle of exploitation over again and again. Capitalism depends on the fact that a day's wages do not represent the value of a day's work. No 'redistribution' of wealth can overcome this essential fact of capitalism. Exploitation occurs at the point of production and is immoral, irrational and a relic of the past. No form of exchange economy within an advanced technological culture is needed – indeed capitalism represents a fetter on production. It is a remnant of class inequality and has no shred of economic coherence or relevance for the 21st century.

WEZ

Your home as 'fictitious' capital

IN MORE recent times the opportunities to 'make money from money', so to speak, have expanded for the ordinary person. For example, the 1980 Housing Act introduced by the Thatcher government in the UK gave council house tenants the legal right to buy their council homes at a discounted price. This, combined with the introduction of mortgage interest relief, significantly impacted on the property market and widened popular participation in it. Around the time of the First World War three-quarters of the UK population rented their homes; by the early 2000s the situation had reversed with over 70 percent of the population nominally owning their homes – although the percentage has since declined due to the increasing difficulty of would-be first time buyers to get on the housing ladder.

While rising house prices might put the idea of owning a home beyond the reach of some would-be first time buyers it is, paradoxically precisely these rising house prices that make the idea of buying a house such a financially attractive proposition. While house prices as a multiple of average earnings fell during the late nineteenth century (which explains why rented accommodation was such a widespread phenomenon in early twentieth century Britain), that trend has reversed in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, boosted by the relative stagnation in wages. The benefit of owning a home, steadily appreciating in value, instead of paying 'dead money' for some over-priced rental property is all too obvious.

A few people with the financial resources to engage in the 'buy to let' business might find themselves in the position where they can comfortably live off the rents of their tenants. However, for the vast majority who have purchased a home, renting it out is simply not an option. Even taking in lodgers would be impractical in many cases.

Consequently, most homeowners continue to depend absolutely on some form of paid work since, with home ownership, come financial commitments such as mortgage repayments. True, you might manage to sell your home and realise a capital gain (particularly if the property market is booming) but you still have to find somewhere else to live.

It is this that makes the idea of treating one's home as (fictitious) 'capital' – as some commentators do – somewhat problematic. You cannot be without a home since it is a basic human need (unlike other forms of fictitious capital).

If you do sell your house at a time when house prices are rising then you have the problem of having to pay more for some other house. On the other hand, as well as going up, prices can also come down as occasionally happens after a property boom. Having to sell your property in a slump could very well plunge you into dire financial difficulties that you may never recover from, financially speaking.

The above qualifications notwithstanding, it is nevertheless the case that a fairly large percentage of the working class do indeed engage in the speculative buying and selling of property at some point in their lives. Normally, the primary means of purchasing a property is via a loan (mortgage) from a bank. Bank loans (in this case for consumption as opposed to the production of commodities) are, as we saw, a classic example of fictitious capital.

In the past, at least in the UK, it was building societies (or 'mutuals' controlled by their members) that had a virtual monopoly in the issuance of mortgages. This changed in a big way in the 1980s with banks entering the mortgage market and offering a variety of different mortgages to suit different customers. Mortgage loans as a percentage of total bank loans have subsequently grown very significantly.

These are 'secured' loans inasmuch as your home serves as collateral, meaning that if you fail to keep up with your mortgage repayments the bank can take possession of your home. The same is true of car loans. However, there are also various kinds of unsecured loans where collateral is not required, such as personal loans, student loans and credit cards. These are riskier from the standpoint of the lender and for that reason sometimes attract a higher rate of interest. With the growth in both the volume and diversity of consumer debt the exposure of working people to the machinations of fictitious capital has increased greatly in recent years.

However, when we are talking about fictitious capital what more likely springs to



mind is not so much our monthly mortgage repayments or our credit card bills but an institution like the stock market. Most ordinary people would have little, if any, direct experience of dabbling in the buying and selling of shares. Essentially the stock market is the domain of the wealthy private investor or else (and to an increasing extent), institutional investors.

The stupendous wealth that can be made on the stock market rams home the point, again and again, that it is not through hard work that one can become incredibly wealthy. This breeds a kind of cynicism towards work born out of the belief that what is officially supposed to motivate us to work is precisely the lure of money. If we go along with that belief, how could we not feel cynical when we see fortunes being made by others who don't have to lift a finger to do it? When we struggle to pay the bills on the meagre wages we earn it is perhaps understandable that some might feel resentment.

Sometimes, this can be misconstrued as 'envy'. However, the 'politics of envy', as it is called, is an ideological snare and a trap for the unwary. To 'envy' someone is to covet what they have and, indeed, to want to become like them (and hence to perpetuate the very system they benefit from). However, it is structurally impossible, not to say nonsensical, for the majority in a capitalist society to find themselves in the same economic position as the minority of being able to live off the unearned income that the majority, after all, provides them with. It is not envy that this majority should feel but, rather, outrage.

ROBIN COX

Coal face-offs

CONFLICT HAS always been integral to capitalism. The contradictory relationship between employers and employed erupts periodically into often bitter, at times deadly, conflict. Workers have banded together to fight for their mutual interests only to be met by intimidation and even physical force on behalf of employers, often by the forces of the state.

2024 is the 40th anniversary of the most recent protracted struggle against a blatantly determined government bent on nothing less than breaking the power of trade unions in general, the National Union of Mineworkers in particular.

Miners have long been at the forefront of struggles for better wages and working conditions. An industry bedevilled by very obvious dangers benefitted from the close communities generated. However, such social, and political, solidarity was always perceived to be a threat by mine owners and state alike.

One hundred and fifty years previous to the Great Strike, in 1832, the Durham and Northumberland coalfields were riven by collier strikes and belligerent responses to those industrial actions. An instance of this was the Battle of Goose Green in Gateshead. A strike by miners was met by a direct attempt to break it by employers bringing in unemployed lead miners from other areas of the country. They needed to be housed, so the owners resorted to evicting the striking miners and their families from their tied housing. Unsurprisingly there was determined resistance which resulted in armed special constables being deployed to enforce the evictions.

When some of that force were disarmed by miners, who then had weapons they could use, they became a significant threat. This resulted in troops from a barracks in Newcastle being sent to extinguish this act of rebellion. A clear example of the state deploying its forces to protect the interests of capital, in this case, mine owners.

In the same year, Cuthbert Skipsey, a pitman at Percy main colliery, near Tynemouth, was shot and killed outside The Pineapple, a pub in the village of Chirton, North Shields. It was an incident highlighting the difference in treatment a miner might expect from the authorities, compared with when a victim was of the authorities, such as a magistrate.

Cuthbert Skipsey was generally regarded as quiet and inoffensive. A meeting of

striking miners taking place in Chirton was confronted by special constables and what was described as an affray ensued.

It seems that Cuthbert stepped forward intending to diffuse an explosive situation. Whether his action was genuinely misunderstood or there was malice, one of the constables, George Weddle drew a pistol and shot Skipsey.

The death of the respected collier, and the subsequent plight of his wife and eight (or 6, accounts vary) children was, unsurprisingly, the cause of outrage in the community. This resulted in Weddle's arrest. His trial, on 3 August, and conviction for manslaughter lasted 12 hours and led to a sentence of six months imprisonment with hard labour.

Previously, on 1 August, another collier, William Jobling, was found guilty of killing Nicholas Fairless, a magistrate. He was sentenced to death, his body to be hung in chains near the location of the crime.

The death of Cuthbert Skipsey had a rather unlikely outcome. His family was plunged into poverty, his children being expected to do whatever they could to ease their dire circumstances, such as gathering nettles for the cooking pot.

Newly born around the time of his father's death, Joseph Skipsey, aged 7, became employed, in what had been his father's workplace, Percy Main Colliery, as a trapper. Twelve hour shifts underground opening and closing trapdoors used to control air flow to, hopefully, prevent the build-up of gases.

As it was just hewers digging the coal, the only work activity that was actually, directly, paid, at the face who had any light. So a trapper would spend his or her shift in complete darkness. A situation from which a phrase was coined that is still in use; 'so-and-so' is not worth the candle.

From such an unpromising beginning Joseph went on to become a poet, friend of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, Oscar Wilde and others of the literary world. He became secretary of the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society, Custodian of Shakespeare's Birthplace in Stratford upon Avon and recipient of an annual pension awarded by Queen Victoria.

There was a somewhat tenuous link between Joseph and the Queen. On 16 January 1862 at Hartley Colliery, near Whitley Bay, the huge arm of the steam pumping engine sheared off and fell into the single shaft of the pit, effectively sealing it.

204 men and boys were trapped and perished. Joseph Skipsey marked this tragedy by writing 'The Hartley Calamity', a 25 stanza ballad poem. He toured the area giving readings to raise money for the widows and orphans. Queen Victoria, on learning of this tragedy, pressed her ministers to legislate to outlaw single shaft pits. From then all mines had to have at least two ways in and, more importantly two ways out.

A life that began in tragedy commemorated one tragedy amongst so many in that industry. Coal mining serves as an exemplar of the impact of capitalism on working class lives, too often the premature losing of those lives.

Of course, the situation in mining changed from the nineteenth century to the twentieth, as it did in wider society. Engels had recognised when he wrote about the condition of the labouring masses that the state would have to intervene to bring some stability to capitalism by curbing its worst excesses.

While the depredations of capitalism were mitigated they have not been, and cannot be, erased altogether. The nationalisation of coal mining did a great deal to improve the conditions in which miners laboured. However, the portrayal of nationalisation as a socialist act was and is grievously mistaken. It could not be possible for miners to take strike action in 1972, '74 and then 1984-5 if they, as workers, were the owners of the industry. They would have been striking against themselves.

Even if miners had become the mine owners, the rest of the working class would have been excluded from that ownership, which would have been effectively private. A non-mine worker wanting coal to meet a need for fuel would not have had free access to it.

The miners' strike laid bare how the state and its legal system will always be stacked against the working class acting on its own behalf. Until that is workers realise that only by dispossessing capital of the means of wealth production and deploying those means mutually to meet their own needs.

Until that happens, then, in the words of Joseph Skipsey,

*Not rest or peace, but toil and strife,
Do there the soul enthrall;
And turn the precious cup of life
Into a cup of gall.*

(From 'The Stars are Twinkling')

DAVE ALTON

Horrorscope revisited

(Updated from a short story in the February 1984 *Socialist Standard*, tinyurl.com/2ckxa3ua)

Right behind the headlines of the papers there's a space entitled Horoscope

Do you think I'm some sort of dope?

Because it's always there I turn to first of all to help me cope.

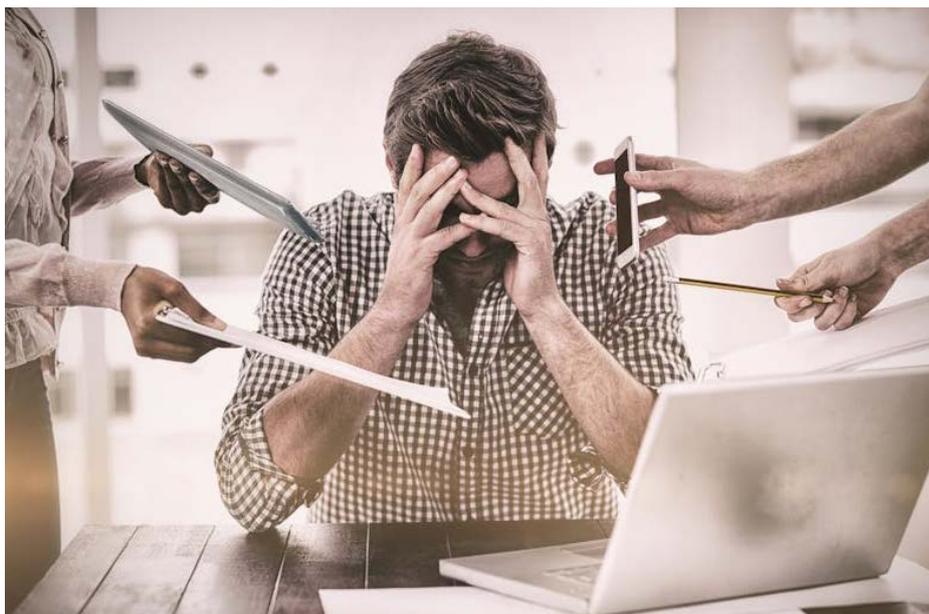
(With apologies to Jake Thackray)

GOOD NEWS and bad news. The bad news is that the government has increased the retirement age yet again. You're now expected to continue to work until you're 81. Or until you fall down dead from exhaustion. Whichever comes first. The good news is that as part of the government's compulsory mobilisation plans you are in the third tier of those awaiting the call.

A tall stranger will appear on your doorstep today. You immediately realise that he is not someone who swiped right on the dating app. Although uniforms are something that can be a turn on they are not so when the dark blue also wears at the hip a Sig Sauer P250. You have been accused of offending someone by your use of mean hurty words. You are strongly advised not to criticise the government. Bear in mind, Big Brother is watching you at all times. Or else.

You will have trouble at work today. You are summoned to appear before Human Resources. HR is run by the boss's daughter. Are you happy working here, is the first question put to you. Your bat senses immediately perceive that you are not here to be given a pay rise but that instead the proverbial is about to hit the fan. Miss Otis regrets to inform you that it has come to their attention that you have been making disparaging remarks on your private social media about working conditions at the company, and further, you have made extremely rude comment about the boss, her father, but she wants you to know she is being very objective in dealing with this matter. Describing your boss as a mean grasping slave driver of a capitalist will not be tolerated. Perhaps you would not only like to delete those comments but you should post something very positive about him and the company too. She is deeply concerned and strongly suggests that you are much more careful what you post privately in future. Or else.

Beware of turmoil in the home. Your private landlord notifies you that given the continual interest rate rises his property empire is faced with extra costs that are seriously reducing the amount of unearned



income that he is able to extract from his tenants. He says that next month's rent will be double what you are paying at present. Failure to comply with these new terms blah blah blah will result in the eviction of you and your family. Your partner has a complete meltdown at the effect eviction would have on you all especially the children. He points out that there are plenty of desperate people looking for accommodation who are prepared to pay whatever exorbitant rent he might charge. Remember, before you start complaining that landlords provide a public service, and their altruistic motives should not be at all questioned blah blah blah. Further, don't you know we live in a capitalist system which means never give a sucker a break and if you and yours end up on the street then it will be your fault for being such a tight-fisted git.

A letter bearing bad news. Dear Patient, as a result of the government having privatised the National Health Service we wish to inform you that every appointment made with a doctor at this surgery will now incur a cost of twenty pounds. If you are taking regular medication please be aware that all drugs will have to be paid for at whatever price is levied by the drug manufacture.

A slight bit of bad luck. You're a single mother. Your child minder says they can no longer look after your child. What to do? Basically, you're screwed.

You receive a summons. You are alleged to have transgressed the Public Order Act. What's it going to take to make you realise that you can't go around demonstrating in favour of things the government disapproves of? Are you one of those freaks who believe in democracy? It might

go easier with you if you snitch on those who imbued you with such insidious beliefs. You've already been warned about saying mean hurty things. You need to learn to keep quiet about things that don't concern you and to kowtow to your betters.

A marvellous time for you.

You're dreaming.

You are in a spending mood. Spoiler alert: Unfortunately, you do not possess the wherewithal to indulge such ridiculous fantasies. You decide to cheer everyone up so you say, how about a treat? Let's have three pennorth of chips! At the fish and chip shop you peruse the prices on the board and wonder how food could have become so expensive since your last sojourn there. As you didn't have a win on the national Lottery that week you reluctantly leave there empty handed.

You are developing some strange habits. Resolve never to believe in astrology ever again. You have come to realise that what politicians and the media tell you has as much credence as the pseudoscience of star signs which may or may not be taken seriously by very many. Please temper your greatest heresy which is no longer believing that capitalism is the best of all possible worlds which benefits the majority as opposed to the minority ruling class who continue to have power over your everyday life. You are treading on a slippery slope. If you let these invidious thoughts get the better of you, you will be challenging the prevailing heterodoxy and before you know it you will be confronting capitalism and saying that it should be abolished. Cleanse your mind of such thoughts. Or else!

DC

What would 'good' capitalism be?

'PET CARE rip-off is a case of bad capitalism' ran the headline of Emma Duncan's column in the *Times* (15 March), subtitled 'Profiteering by vet chains and children's homes will only bolster appeal of socialism to the young'. Let's hope so.

Earlier that week the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) had announced that it had identified 'multiple concerns' about what it called 'the vets market', including that pet owners were being overcharged and that the concentration of the firms operating in the sector put them in a position to do this.

'In 2013, around 10% of vet practices belonged to large groups, but that share is now almost 60%, and many of the large groups have expressed an intention to continue expanding their business through acquisition of independently owned practices. To illustrate this another way, since 2013 1,500 of the 5,000 vet practices in the UK have been acquired by the 6 large corporate groups (CVS, IVC, Linnaeus, Medivet, Pets at Home and VetPartners)' (tinyurl.com/5y4x2xf4).

This is a manifestation of the trend that Marx identified under capitalism towards the 'centralisation of capitals' — the 'concentration of capitals already formed, destruction of their individual

independence, expropriation of capitalist by capitalist, transformation of many small into few large capitals' (*Capital* Vol 1, Ch 25, section 3). In the particular case of the market for pet care this has been facilitated not only by the greater amount of capital needed to invest in advanced equipment but also because of the prospect, as noted by Duncan, of making a bigger profit.

'The rise in insurance has made pet owners largely indifferent to the prices that vets charge. Private equity firms — companies that buy up businesses they reckon could be more profitable — spotted this, and poured money into buying up individual practices.'

The same sort of situation, she notes, has arisen in the children's home sector where 'the CMA has calculated the average profit margin in the sector to be 19.4 per cent — "materially higher than we would expect".'

Echoing Tory Prime Minister Ted Heath in 1973 who described some shady business practice as 'the unacceptable face of capitalism', Duncan sees this as 'bad capitalism'. But is it? Is it not rather capitalism functioning as it is supposed to, with money-capital, such as that gathered by private equity firms, seeking out the most profitable investment outlet and then going for it?

It is all very well for a supporter of capitalism like Duncan to argue that the market 'works properly only if toughly regulated', but this is saying that it doesn't work, in fact can't work, properly. William Morris once pointed out that laws against adulteration wouldn't be necessary if there wasn't an economic incentive for firms to adulterate. Similarly, there wouldn't need to be regulations to prevent rip-offs by capitalist firms if there wasn't the incentive to do this.

If she wishes to win over the '53 per cent of 18 to 34-year old Britons' who she cites as regarding 'socialism as the ideal economic system' (alright, most won't know what socialism is but they will know that it's not capitalism) she will have to come up with a better argument than she advances here.

'Good capitalism', apparently, is an economic system that requires (tough) government intervention to try to mitigate the effect of its basic economic imperative to seek and make profits. The 'acceptable face' of capitalism would be profit-seeking in accordance with Marquess of Queensberry type rules, rules that wouldn't be necessary unless there was a tendency not to respect them. Socialists have a better solution. Produce directly to meet people's needs, not for the market or profit, and there wouldn't be any need for such rules.

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Presenting the past

HOW ACCURATE do we expect or want historical dramas on TV and film to be? Fiction, by definition, isn't factual, and even when a story is based on real events, it can't be an exact recreation. There will always be liberties taken to fit the events into the drama's running time and conventions about plot and character development. Depictions of the past are always infused with the *mores* of the time when they were made. A drama produced in the 1970s and set in the 1870s has 1970s interpretations of Victorian styles of dress and furnishings, as well as of the attitudes and motivations of the characters. Anyone watching *Upstairs Downstairs*, for example, would instantly know whether they were watching the 1970s or the 2010s version.

One prominent trend in recent years is to place more emphasis on diversity in how historical dramas are produced. Previously, the media has been guilty of neglecting non-white people's experiences and perpetuating negative stereotypes. A notorious example is the 1915 film *Birth of a Nation* for its racist depiction of black people in 19th Century America, while 1939's *Gone with the Wind*, set in the same period, gave a distorted impression of relations between black and white people. Of course, many historical dramas have aimed to bring attention to issues affecting black people and communities by recreating what happened as realistically as possible, two examples being *Roots* (1977, 2016) and BBC One's *Small Axe* (2020). Authenticity hasn't been a priority for Netflix's ratings hit *Bridgerton*, which revolves around an aristocratic black family in early 19th Century London. Series creator Chris Van Dusen acknowledges the unlikelihood of this scenario, saying that *Bridgerton* 'is a reimagined world, we're not a history lesson, it's not a documentary. What we're really doing with the show is marrying history and fantasy in what I think is a very exciting way. One approach that we took to that is our approach to race' (tinyurl.com/56xwdv8h). The series was inspired by the largely debunked claim that Queen Charlotte (1744 – 1818) recognisably had some black African ancestry. In 2023 spin-off *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story*, she is played by India Amarteifio, who has part-black African heritage. Channel 5's 2021 miniseries *Anne Boleyn* has Jodie Turner-Smith, of Jamaican heritage, cast as Henry VIII's second wife. These are examples of one of the bugbears of right-wing online commentators, which they would call 'race-swapping'. Criticisms of the casting in

Netflix's 2023 docudrama *Queen Cleopatra* weren't only limited to social media posts, though. Egypt's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities issued a stern statement that Adele James of Jamaican and British heritage portraying the Egyptian queen was a falsification of history in that she actually had 'white skin and Hellenistic characteristics' (tinyurl.com/62rapzjw).

The reverse was more common in old dramas, with white actors often playing non-white historical figures. As recently as 2014, director Ridley Scott said that he cast white actors in his Biblical epic *Exodus: Gods and Kings* because 'I can't mount a film of this budget, where I have to rely on tax rebates in Spain, and say that my lead actor is Mohammad so-and-so from such-and-such' (tinyurl.com/2xnkkj2v). While the landscape has changed a lot even since *Exodus*, what has remained the same is that those working in the media have to follow whichever approach will attract the most investment and viewers, who also represent income. The recent emphasis on diversity and inclusion is hoped to fit in with the values of those (mainly younger) people in the target market. This is shown most clearly in the increase of non-white people in TV adverts. A more diverse cast is intended to reach a more diverse audience, to attract a more diverse range of people to part with their money to make profits for the elite.

Another motivation is that films need to be made by or cast a set proportion of people from hitherto under-represented groups to be considered for some Academy Awards and BAFTAs. Awards don't just give recognition for talent; they also confer financial advantage in being another advert for the film, and award-winning artistes can attract more revenue.

So, the emphasis on diversity on TV and in film has economic explanations, alongside sincere attempts to improve the profile and opportunities of groups of people who have traditionally been disadvantaged. This disadvantage has itself stemmed from economic circumstances, when non-white people have been seen as less attractive in the labour market.

Right wing commentators on social media have been particularly vocal with their view that representations of ethnicity on TV and film demonstrate that 'woke' leftists have infiltrated the industry. This discussion generates attention, and therefore more publicity. Hardly anyone would have heard of Channel 5's *Anne Boleyn* series if it hadn't provoked blather about its lead actor. Predictably, much of the left and right's discourse is bitter and



Credit: Netflix

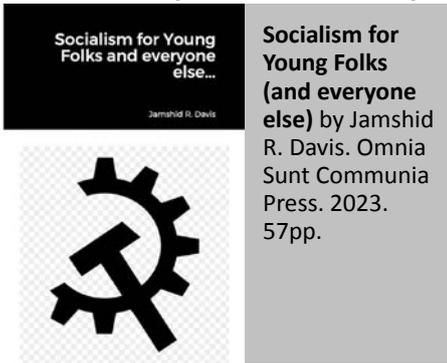
combative in tone, casting aspersions and fuelling division.

Does it matter if the past is depicted on our screens in a way which doesn't accurately reflect what it was like? A drama showing non-white characters in improbable positions of status for the time risks dismissing the actual societal restrictions which have been imposed on some groups. While there were a small number of privileged black people in Regency era Britain, such as Ignatius Sancho and Dido Elizabeth Belle, a black family wouldn't have been as wealthy and powerful among the English elite of the early 1800s as the fictional *Bridgertons*. Their lifestyles would bear no relation to those of the people from Africa still trapped in the slave trade at the time. Another drama set in the same era which gives a misleading impression is 2022's *The Woman King*. This film retells the story of the Agojie, a female warrior unit of the West African kingdom of Dahomey (now Benin), as an example of empowered black women, downplaying the patriarchal and slave-based system of which they were part. The inaccuracies undermine the strength which the messages of emancipation or equality aim for.

An important distinction between these dramas is in how they are pitched. With *Bridgerton*, *Exodus: Gods and Kings* and *Anne Boleyn*, there's a stated or unstated understanding that what's on screen is not historically accurate, with this looseness giving a wider range of actors the chance to explore roles. With *Queen Cleopatra*, *Queen Charlotte* and *The Woman King*, there are some claims for authenticity, which invite more scrutiny. Unfortunately, the way the 'culture war' over historical dramas is usually fought online distracts from recognising the economic context in which the debate has arisen.

MIKE FOSTER

Next Step for Humanity



The *Socialist Standard* recently reviewed a booklet about anarchism aimed specifically at young people. The review was largely favourable and ended by suggesting that the Socialist Party might itself consider producing a similar publication about socialism ‘presenting in simple terms what is actually a very simple idea- organising the earth’s resources collectively and democratically on the basis of needs not profit’. We now discover that Jamshid Davishas actually got there first with a publication (*Socialism for Young Folks*) that comes extremely close to our own critique of current society and our proposals for changing it.

At the very start, he defines socialism as ‘an economic system where the means of production (how goods are made) and distribution (how goods get into the hands of those who need them) are socially owned in common’, and where ‘distribution is not through markets but by free access’. Having established what socialism is, he then proceeds to explain (and denounce) what it is not. It is not nationalisation or state ownership or control, since that is simply state capitalism, where ‘government managers take the place of the regular capitalist bosses’ and ‘wage labour, markets, and money still exist and there is no free access to needed goods or services’. An adamant ‘no’, therefore, to the dictatorships in places like China, Cuba, Vietnam and North Korea. Nor do so-called ‘national liberation struggles’ have anything to do with socialism, since they ‘never were anti-capitalist in the first place’ and ‘socialism is by its very nature a world system’.

The class nature of the capitalist society we live in and that dominates the world is then analysed succinctly and effectively (‘a class is a group of people united by their common interests within the economic order’; ‘those who own property or manage it have all the power within a society, while those who do not own property suffer, powerlessness, economic exploitation, and poverty’; ‘the working class is composed of folks who must sell their labour power to capitalists or to the state to be able to support themselves and their families’). The solution to such inequality, we are told, is the abolition of class society and ‘the construction of a classless society’. The

Socialism for Young Folks (and everyone else) by Jamshid R. Davis. Omnia Suntu Communia Press. 2023. 57pp.

historical perspective that then follows about the rise of capitalism as a social and economic order and in particular how it overcame feudalism is also interesting for the added dimension it gives to the situation the world’s workers find themselves in today and what they need to do to bring about change and create a new system of society. It points to how past systems of society have changed, even though, while they existed, they may have seemed permanent and everlasting. Attention is also paid to the variety of noxious effects of the capitalist system on all who live under it. This includes a short but penetrating analysis of the various kinds of alienation it visits on its subjects and the way it stymies creative potential, the inevitability of crises of overproduction known as recessions or slumps, and the system’s tendency to cause military conflict through the struggle for markets’ (‘the First and Second World Wars can best be seen as a struggle between the various capitalist blocs over the division of the world market’).

What we have here, therefore, is an analysis and prescriptions found relatively rarely among who label themselves socialist but who are in fact using the word to mean variations, proposed or otherwise, on how to run capitalism. Having said that, there are, nevertheless, certain aspects of this booklet’s thesis that we would find it difficult to agree with. These occur largely in the section entitled ‘The Road Yet Travelled’, where a fairly detailed recipe for bringing about socialism and then organising it is put forward. It would be established, it argues, by acts of workplace protest, local democratic self-organisation and, above all, by direct action, which is likely to involve violence, since, the author insists, the capitalist class will never willingly give up their wealth and their protectors, the state, will never allow the system to be overturned and a new one established democratically via elections. So the strategy advocated here rejects the kind of democratic political action via the ballot box that the Socialist Party sees as the most fertile route to the establishment of a democratic, moneyless, marketless society once the necessary spreading of consciousness of the need for this has been achieved. Without this particular form of direct action (i.e. the ballot box), it is difficult to see how a socially conscious working class can take the power necessary to abolish capitalism and set about organising a genuine socialist society. Nor is it a given, as suggested here, that, once the overwhelming majority of class-conscious workers have indicated their desire to establish socialism, there will be armed resistance from the capitalist class and their governments. So there is a clear difference in ‘strategy’ here between the author’s view and that of the Socialist Party on the

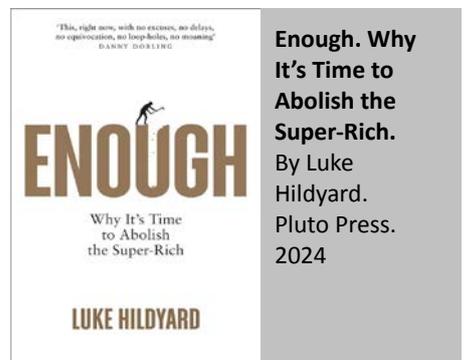
establishment of socialism, even if the desired result seems very much the same.

In addition to this, the author goes in for a fairly detailed blueprint for how the new non-market, free access society will be organised, stating firmly, in the tradition of ‘Council Communism’, that it will be based on ‘workers’ councils’. Again we would see this as no more than one hypothesis out of many other possible ones and would argue that, once a majority of workers opt for a society without money, buying and selling, and wage and salary work, they will formulate their own way of organising it. All we can say is that they will do this democratically, via voluntary cooperation and using the knowledge, resources and technologies available at the time.

Despite these differences of view, however, there can be no doubt about the value of this publication both for the ideas it puts forward and for the clarity with which they are stated. It is helpful, above all, in putting centre-stage the idea the Socialist Party itself has been propagating for 120 years – that of dispensing with capitalism and establishing a new society based on collective production for direct use. As the author himself puts it – and we could not agree more –, ‘a world community is now possible and is necessary for the further development of humanity’.

HKM

Limitarianism



Enough. Why It's Time to Abolish the Super-Rich. By Luke Hildyard. Pluto Press. 2024

Luke Hildyard, director of the think-tank the High Pay Centre, shows that the super-rich (the top 1 percent) don’t need most of their income and refutes all the arguments that they deserve it all. He also shows that, if they were reduced to being merely rich (a maximum income of £187,000 a year), then there would be enough money available for other uses, in particular improving the standard of living of others. This, he says, could be done both by redistribution (taxation) and by what he calls ‘pre-distribution’ (preventing too much income going to them in the first place). An average figure of around £2,500 a year per adult for everyone else is floated at one point. The money is definitely there but could it be diverted in the way he wants?

He favours the money going mostly to those currently with the lowest incomes. In fact, he sees the amount available being

enough to 'eliminate poverty pay at a stroke'. This would be done by raising the minimum wage, which, by reducing profits, would prevent so much income flowing to the super-rich.

But that's not how the capitalist system works. It runs on profits and any reduction in profits would reduce the incentive and the amount to invest and risk proving an economic slowdown if not a recession. On the other hand, the aim of capitalist production is not the consumption of the rich owners of productive resources. It is the accumulation of profits as more and more capital invested for profit. In this sense, a disproportionate amount of profits going to the super-rich to spend on a personal super-luxurious lifestyle (yachts, private jets, bunkers, 40-bedroom mansions, lavish parties, etc) is a drag on capital accumulation. This in fact is what Hildyard argues in chapter 3 on 'The Economic Case for Equality', though a better title would have been 'The Capitalist Case for Less Income Inequality' since that's what in effect he is arguing for.

Two other 'pre-distributive' measures that he advocates are worker-directors and profit-sharing. He thinks that workers on the board is likely to mean less exorbitant executive salaries. Maybe, but that wouldn't mean that the money saved would go to increase wages. Profit-sharing is a snare which, besides tying workers to their employers, also means that they have an unpredictable income from year to year rather than a secure contracted amount.

As to the money raised by taxing the consumption income of the super-rich, this could in theory be used to provide improved public services and amenities but, capitalism not being geared to meeting people's needs, is more likely to be used to reduce taxes on businesses or spent on capitalist priorities such as the armed forces.

Capitalism is based on the exclusion of the vast majority of the population from the ownership of productive resources, thereby obliging them to get a living by working for the tiny minority which does own them. Inequality in the ownership of productive resources is thus built into the system. This results in inequality in incomes too since profits are shared by a small number, giving each a high income. As capital accumulates, through the reinvestment under the pressure of competition of most profits, so does the wealth and income of the owners. The tendency, then, is for the rich as a whole to get richer. Reformist measures to redistribute wealth and income are up against this tendency which wins out in the long run.

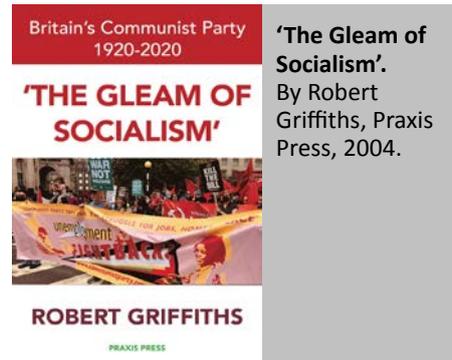
Despite its naive reformism, the book is very readable and, as you would expect from the director of a think-tank devoted full-time to the issue, is well researched and referenced and so a useful source of

information on the inequality of income and wealth ownership built into capitalism.

ALB

The Gleam of Socialism

Why is there still a Communist Party?



'The Gleam of Socialism'. By Robert Griffiths, Praxis Press, 2004.

Good question. After all, the main role of that party throughout its history was to win support amongst workers for the foreign policy of the old USSR and its rulers. In fact, that's why that state helped the finances of the party until the late 1970s, either directly or by buying thousands of copies of the old Daily Worker and its successor, the Morning Star.

No doubt, the leaders of the party weren't just useful idiots but had sincerely convinced themselves that Russia was on the road to socialism and that in serving the interests of the USSR they were furthering the cause of socialism. But it wasn't socialism. Far from it. It was a one-party dictatorship, the aim of whose rulers was to develop capitalism, in the form of a state capitalism, as rapidly as possible; which inevitably involved the economic exploitation of the workers there through the wages system and the extraction of surplus value. But this is the view of those Griffiths describes as 'ultra-left anti-communists'.

Griffiths is the current general secretary of the 'Communist Party of Britain' (CPB), formed as a breakaway in 1988 from the historic 'Communist Party of Great Britain' whose leaders were indeed coming to the conclusion that there was no longer a need for a party dedicated to taking a lead from the rulers of the USSR. When the state-capitalist regime there finally collapsed in 1991 they decided to change the party's name, to Democratic Left. Confusing matters, a grouplet, opportunistically, immediately took up the name and still exists under that name, publishing the *Weekly Worker*. This current CPGB has nothing to do with the historic party of that name. The original CPGB's legitimate political successor can be said to be the CPB and the *Morning Star*.

There is also a previous breakaway, for the same sort of reason, in 1977 to form the still extant 'New Communist Party' which might have been able to claim this

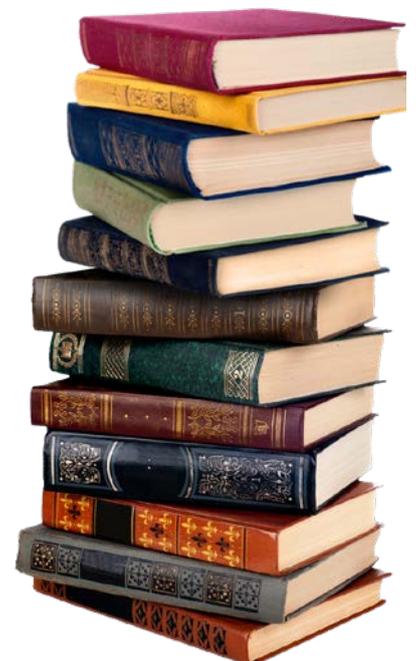
if they had not decided to link up with North Korea.

Griffiths's book is a collection of articles, some of them published previously including short pieces on various well-known past CP members, mainly from Wales, from where he himself hails. The more substantial part is a history of the old CPGB — and its various policy twists and turns — and is accurate enough factually. It's the explanation for them that is at fault as he presents them as being made in response to changes in conditions in Britain rather than at the behest of Moscow. Nor is there any reason to doubt the accuracy of his blow-by-blow account of the struggle in 1980s between the Old Guard CPers, centred around the *Morning Star*, and the 'Eurocommunists' who had won control of the party apparatus and who wanted to turn the party into a coalition of social movements, a sort of democratic green feminist left, and who were indeed 'revisionists' and 'liquidationists' from the Old Guard's point of view.

The main reason for accepting the CPB as the political successor of the old CPGB is the continuity of political analysis which Griffiths illustrates. The CPB still sees the old USSR as having been socialist and still analyses present-day capitalism as 'state-monopoly capitalism' and still sees the way forward as a broad alliance of all anti-monopoly elements led by the 'united working class movement' to elect a left-wing Labour government. The aim, in other words, is an economy with a state-capitalist sector and a fairly extensive private non-monopoly sector under a reformist government.

Perhaps surprisingly, Jeremy Corbyn is described as a 'longstanding friend of the Communist Party'. Maybe he just sees them as general Old Labour left-wing reformists like himself.

ALB



Labour Government: The Worst of Illusions

IN *THE Observer* on 3rd March, under the heading “Myths of the Election”, a Professor King proposed and praised the syllogism “I am working class, Labour is for the working class, therefore I am Labour”. The logic is fine; the premise is false. Certainly the Labour Party was built on the blind hope of working men and women that something better than the capitalist system offers could be obtained from the capitalist system. But for those who are not blind, it has done untold harm to the working class. First, by simply administering capitalism (whenever it gets the chance) determinedly to show it can do the same as the Tories. Second and more important, by its debasement of the word Socialism to a hucksters’ slogan — turning the true answer to working-class problems into a synonym for worthless reform and compromise.

The Labour Party is anti-working-class, but let the position be clearly understood. Intentions good or bad do not come into it: indeed, they are determined by capitalism. Some Labour politicians know what they are doing, others do not. Some begin

with ideals, others with the desire for a parliamentary career. The forming factor, however, is that Labour sets out to be a governing party — that is, to take on running the capitalist system. Given that, all the failures and “regrettable necessities” follow. Because there is no way capitalism will run except its own way, and whoever tries to direct it is directed by it instead.

Nevertheless, it is impossible not to be appalled by the sheer charlatanism of the Labour Party, the mixture of cunning and stupidity which all its life has characterized it. (...)

There is a literary phrase: “the willing suspension of disbelief”. That seems to be the condition for supporting Labour. Granted, they could do no better if the utmost probity were their rule — the capitalist system is intractable. But, on the evidence, there must be a willing suspension of disgust too. This is the party no Socialist would join or vote for.

(from Socialist Standard, April 1974)

Action Replay

Kitted Out

WHO WILL today’s game be between? Nike vs Adidas? Puma vs Umbro? Or maybe Castore will be potential giantkillers? All professional football teams have shirts and so on belonging to a particular brand, with the logo (the Nike swoosh, the three Adidas stripes, whatever) prominently displayed. Even official referees’ outfits in England are from Nike (farefereestore.thefa.com), but in Scotland they’re from Adidas.

And it’s all big business. Nike is the biggest sports company, with revenue of over \$50m last year and over eighty thousand employees. It has been criticised for using sweatshops and child labour to make its products, and similar complaints have been made about Adidas, which has a minority share in Bayern Munich football club, and has revenue less than half that of Nike. Nike can count more Premier League teams as wearing their gear than Adidas, but in fact they have the same number as Umbro.

Both Nike and Adidas are long-established, but Castore, a British company, was only founded in 2015, and has just 500 workers. Yet it has been making progress, with three Premier League teams wearing

its kit, together with Rangers in Glasgow, the England cricket team and the US national rugby team. They were involved in controversy towards the end of last year, with some of their shirts clinging to the wearers’ bodies when they became sweaty, which was particularly embarrassing for women players.

The kit manufacturers have contracts with the teams so as to ensure sales to supporters. Puma supply just one club, but that’s the champions, Manchester City, so their sales are pretty high. And, of

course, it costs more to have a shirt with a particular player’s name and number on the back. Clubs also have at least one alternative kit in case of clashes, and change the details of their shirts every two or three years.

Nike and so on don’t just make sports gear, but also trainers, jackets, backpacks, etc. More specialist equipment, such as tennis and badminton rackets, is made by companies like Yonex, rather than Adidas et al: maybe there’s not enough profit in them, or perhaps it’s just that there’s free publicity for the company if you appear in public wearing and so advertising a flashy pair of trainers or a football shirt, but you won’t usually be carrying a badminton racket around with you.

PB



World Socialist Movement Online Meetings

Our general discussion meetings are held on Zoom. To connect to a meeting, enter <https://zoom.us/join/7421974305> in your browser. Then follow instructions on screen and wait to be admitted to the meeting.

APRIL 2024 EVENTS

<https://zoom.us/j/7421974305>

World Socialist Movement online meetings

Sundays at 19.30 (IST) (Discord)

Weekly WSP (India) meeting

Sunday 14 April 10.00 (GMT + 1)

Central Online Branch Meeting

Friday 5 April 19.30 (GMT + 1)

Did you see the news?

Discussion on recent subjects in the news

Host: Doug McLelland

Friday 12 April 19.30

Ukraine and Poland 1918-1947

Speaker: Mark Zneiderwic

Friday 19 April 19.30 • Questioning Nationalism

National identity is a nebulous concept that's almost impervious to rational argument. For example, questioning Israeli nationalism triggers an automatic accusation of anti-semitism, closing the argument down. Nationalisms in the UK are seemingly more benign, but are they?

Speaker: Dave Alton

Friday 3 May • May Day Meeting

Socialist Party Physical Meetings

LONDON

Saturday 27 April 10.30am to 5pm

Annual Conference

All welcome (also on zoom)

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

(nearest tube: Clapham North)

Wednesday 1 May 12.00 to 15.00

May Day 24

Clerkenwell Green, EC 1 (12 noon) (nearest Tube: Farringdon)

Trafalgar Square (13.00)

The Socialist Party will have a stall at this event.

MANCHESTER

Saturday 18 May, 2pm

Myths of Nationalism

Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, City Centre, M2 5NS

CARDIFF

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

Capitol Shopping Centre, Queen Street

(Newport Road end).

Declaration of Principles

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

Object

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

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

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

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

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

Horror in the Middle East. Choosing sides

IN THE community centre where I play bowls, on a Thursday evening the room next to the bowls hall is used for meetings by the local branch of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). They have talks, show films, engage in discussion, and I've often thought that I might be better occupied in with them discussing politics rather than playing bowls next door. But I've never done that, and recently, when I looked through the window on the door from their meeting room to the bowls hall, I was all the more tempted. I noticed that, though they only had a small attendance, there were banners, posters and leaflets about the current Israel-Hamas conflict strewn everywhere. They carried predictable slogans such as Stop the Genocide, Free Palestine, Stop the Attacks in Gaza, Defeat Islamophobia.

Antisemitism?

I didn't attend the meeting, but I did look in to buy a copy of their newspaper, the Socialist Worker. And all that made me reflect not just on Israel and Gaza but also on the attitude of left-wing organisations like the SWP towards the situation there, on the fact that they are all, without exception, staunchly supportive of the Arab side and profoundly hostile to Israel. From many quarters it is being said that this is a form of the oldest hatred, antisemitism. But I find that hard to accept, since I know personally a number of the people who attend those meetings in the community centre and nothing I know about them suggests to me they are antisemitic. In the same way, I find it hard to accept the claim made recently that London has become a 'no-go zone for Jews' during weekend pro-Palestinian marches (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-68508351>). I have observed these marches at first hand myself on two occasions and, despite the anti-Israel slogans, I have seen no display of antisemitism. I don't of course doubt that some of those on the marches who are Muslims do not distinguish between Israel and people of the Jewish faith, nor do I doubt that many others in society with antisemitic prejudices are using the situation to indulge their hatred of Jews. But nothing I saw among the large number of likely non-Muslims on the demonstrations, despite their obvious anti-Israel fervour, led me, Jewish by birth and upbringing as I am but of no



religious faith, to attribute to them anti-semitic motives.

Crime scenes

But if it's not antisemitism, what is it? What makes them (and the left generally) want to give such unique prominence to horror and injustice in this one particular situation rather than talk about any of the other comparable or manifestly worse situations that exist in many other parts of the globe?

A recent issue of the *Socialist Standard* gave voice to this very question. It featured on its front cover the caption 'Crime Scene Investigation' and listed six horror scenarios taking place in the world at the moment – Yemen, Gaza, Ukraine, Congo, Syria and Iraq. It could have listed many others examples of groups of people, many of them minorities, being horribly oppressed and downtrodden (e.g. Kurds in Turkey, Rohingya in Myanmar, Uighurs in China, civil war in Sudan). Yet we see no particular protest about these scenarios by the groups and individuals demonstrating about Gaza. So why the focus on Israel alone? And why, when a situation like the current one arises, do they harden their already existing anti-Israeli stance and dedicate themselves to campaigning solely against that country and its government?

Anti-Americanism

As previously indicated, I see no evidence for anti-semitism as the motive. I attribute it rather to the anti-Americanism on the left of Western politics which dates back a long way and, despite all changes in circumstances, still survives. It goes back to the old nostalgic belief that there was somehow something good and positive about the first country to call itself 'communist' or 'socialist', i.e. the old Soviet Union, and therefore more or less automatically something bad and negative about those countries and their governments that opposed it, and in particular the United States which had the most power and influence and to a large extent dominated and dictated the policies of the Western world. America was therefore the major enemy of the left and,

despite everything that has happened since the end of the Soviet Union, that remains as a residual, almost visceral, feeling on the left and resurfaces with a vengeance whenever a situation arises in which a country is seen as being supported by the United States or is, in any sense, one of its clients. And this is the position of Israel today. And so, almost instinctively, without anti-semitism needing to enter into the equation, Israel and whatever action its government may take has to be opposed by those on the left because in it actions the hand of the American oppressor is seen.

So, no anti-Houthi demonstrations despite the fact that the Houthi terrorise the Yemen, operating stringent policies of repression against all who oppose them and against women and gay people; no demonstrations against Russia's bombing of civilians in Ukraine; no demonstrations against mass slaughter and rape in the Congo; no demonstrations against China's brutal treatment of the Uighurs; and no demonstrations against the vicious slaughter and expulsion of the Rohingya by the military government in Myanmar. The common denominator of all these situations is that there is no obvious American hand in or support for the repression taking place.

Socialism as it really is

This is the kind of thing I would have tried to say if I'd attended that SWP meeting in my community centre. I would not have accused those present of antisemitism, since I do not believe them to be anti-semitic, but I would have challenged them to examine their motives for such a disproportionate focus on only one of capitalism's crime scenes compared to the very many others. And I would have invited them to consider joining with the Socialist Party to campaign not for better or 'fairer' conditions within capitalism (which at bottom is what they do) but for getting rid of the system that gives rise to those conditions and replacing it by a leaderless, borderless, moneyless world of voluntary cooperation and free access to all goods and service based on the principle of from each according to ability to each according to need – which is what 'socialism' really is.

HOWARD MOSS