

THE

May 2024 • Volume 120 • Number 1437 • £1.50

# SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

## April showers War flowers?

Weapons hot in  
the Middle East



Also: Cannon fodder needed  
Does veganism help?  
Socialism through the looking glass,  
or wage-labour as liberation

Worker co-operatives in the  
capitalist system  
Zionism – A case study in  
nationalism



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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'

# The Middle East: capitalist powder keg

THE TIT for tat rocket attacks between Israel and Iran have brought to the surface the real issue in the Middle East — whether the US and its allies should or should not control the fossil reserves and the trade routes in the area, which are vital to the operation of capitalism in their parts of the world.

The US position was clearly spelt out in 1980 by President Carter in his State of the Union message:

‘An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force’.

This wasn’t just words. In 1991 the US waged the Gulf War after Iraq invaded Kuwait and in 2003 the Iraq War that led to the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime there. This allowed the US to establish bases in Iraq to add to those in the Gulf states. The civil war in Syria

allowed it to establish one there too. Its main asset in the region, however, has been Israel, its support for which has been ‘ironclad’ and which it has armed to the teeth.

With the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq, the threat to US domination has come from Iran where, in 1979, the pro-US regime was overthrown and replaced by a brutal theocracy. The economic system there remained capitalist and the new regime aggressively pursued Iran’s national capitalist interests against those of the US. Iran, too, has its ‘bases’ throughout the region in the form of ‘proxy’ militias, in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen. Iran is opposed to Israel ostensibly on religious grounds but essentially because Israel is US’s main asset in the region that needs to be destroyed if US control is to be ended.

Israel, as a capitalist state in its own right, has its own agenda. Its present rulers aspire to protect its existence as a separate

state, to establish its rule over the whole of the former Ottoman province of Palestine; which involves the permanent political repression of the non-Jewish population living there. As far as the US is concerned, this is a diversion from why it supports Israel and undermines Israel’s usefulness to them.

In this sense Israel’s savage war of retaliation on Hamas and the whole population of Gaza for Hamas’s massacre of Israeli citizens on 7 October is a horrific sideshow.

Where all this will end is unclear. But one thing is not. The Middle East is a powder keg as a result of a conflict between capitalist states over who shall control raw material resources, and the trade routes to transport these out of the region. Capitalism’s competitive struggle for profits breeds such conflicts. Wars, the threat of war, and the waste of armaments will exist as long as capitalism does.

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# Death by algorithm

THE WORLD held its breath last month as April showers of Iranian missiles descended on Israel, only to be blown out of the sky by Israel's Iron Dome defence system. Would regional war flower as a result? Iran has around ten times the population of Israel, but Israel has an elite air force, courtesy of the USA, and some of the best technology in the world. Now insiders have revealed that it has been using AI in the war in Gaza.

According to a non-profit magazine run by Israeli and Palestinian journalists, Israel has been using AI to identify 'tens of thousands of Gazans as suspects for assassination, using an AI targeting system with little human oversight and a permissive policy for casualties' ([www.972mag.com/lavender-ai-israeli-army-gaza/](http://www.972mag.com/lavender-ai-israeli-army-gaza/)). According to six Israeli intelligence officers involved in the Gaza war, some of them actually in the targeting rooms, the AI system, known as Lavender, is designed to remove the 'human bottleneck for both locating the new targets and decision-making to approve the targets'. The officers say that, in the early stages of the war, the Israeli Defence Force almost completely relied on Lavender to identify the domestic homes of up to 37,000 high to low-ranking Hamas and Islamic Jihad military personnel for potential drone strikes. Such was the cursory nature of IDF oversight, which is demanded by international law, that Lavender's outputs were treated 'as if it were a human decision', and the kill lists given 'sweeping approval' without anyone checking the raw intelligence data. This was despite it being known that the system had a 10 percent error rate.

Moreover, the AI system was designed to target militants at their most vulnerable, when they had returned to their domestic dwellings to be with their families. A second AI system, chillingly known as 'Where's Daddy?', identified when the militants actually entered their family homes. 'We were not interested in killing [Hamas] operatives only when they were in a military building or engaged in a military activity,' one intelligence officer said. 'It's much easier to bomb a family's home. The system is built to look for them in these situations.'

For lower-ranking militants, the army decided not to use smart bombs, which can take out an individual or a car, but unguided 'dumb' bombs which destroy entire buildings or apartment blocks on top of the target individual. 'You don't want to waste expensive bombs on



unimportant people — it's very expensive for the country and there's a shortage', said one officer. Two others added that the army had also agreed that 'for every junior Hamas operative that Lavender marked, it was permissible to kill up to 15 or 20 civilians', while for a battalion or brigade commander, the permissible civilian deaths could be over 100.

This explains why the number of women and children killed has been so enormous. In previous operations, the IDF had strict rules of proportionality, in compliance with international law, and requirements to cross-check, verify, incriminate and confirm the target's presence in real time. Because human targeting generated limited results, it was feasible to stick to these rules. Since October 7, targeting has been given over entirely to AI, which has produced gigantic kill lists, and all the verification rules have gone out of the window. Who the system identifies as a target depends on where the users set the bar. It could be little more than changing one's address or mobile phone. 'There were times when a Hamas operative was defined more broadly, and then the machine started bringing us all kinds of civil defense personnel, police officers, on whom it would be a shame to waste bombs.'

To call this unprecedented is an understatement. Nothing like it has been known before in Israel's military operations, nor that of anybody else's including the USA, not even against high-ranking targets like Bin Laden. A US general and former commander of operations against ISIS said, 'With Osama Bin Laden, you'd have an NCV [Non-combatant Casualty Value] of 30, but if you had a low-

level commander, his NCV was typically zero. We ran zero for the longest time.' For the Israeli Defence force however, things were different. 'There was hysteria in the professional ranks,' said one officer, 'They had no idea how to react at all. The only thing they knew to do was to just start bombing like madmen.'

What will be the long-term upshot of this policy of indiscriminate, AI-assisted slaughter? The Israeli whistleblowers are under no illusions: 'In the short term, we are safer, because we hurt Hamas. But I think we're less secure in the long run. I see how all the bereaved families in Gaza — which is nearly everyone — will raise the motivation for [people to join] Hamas 10 years down the line. And it will be much easier for [Hamas] to recruit them.'

So, never mind rules, never mind international agreements, this is the shape of wars to come, where the critical factor is not law but LAWS — lethal autonomous weapons systems which track, target and destroy human life with no human oversight at all. The irony is that capitalism's technological revolutions have created a global productive capability that could put us all beyond any need for outdated capitalist trade relations, where we could live in peace without markets, prices, wages, debts — or wars. Yet capitalism's internal logic is to compete for profit, to grow or die, and the inevitable extension of that logic is war. Now AI targeting and LAWS are genies out of the bottle. If we don't abolish capitalism soon, the human race could end up being obliterated by its own technology.

**PJS**

# Cannon fodder needed

IN *The Big Engine*, by sci-fi writer Fritz Leiber, the protagonist posits his theory that people were ‘just machines, set to do a certain job and then quietly rust away.’

So no surprise to find a capitalist-supporting politician appealing to the hang ‘em, flog ‘em brigade who begrudges ‘their’ taxes keeping the ‘work-shy’ in supposed idle luxury whilst they themselves resent their wage slavery drudgery.

‘Young jobseekers who repeatedly turn down work should be conscripted for two years’, a Tory MP has said. Richard Drax, a member of the Commons Defence Select Committee, said there is a growing issue with work-shy youngsters: ‘In some cases, particularly among some of the young, they have got to a point where, for whatever reason, they’re not prepared to contribute to our country and to serve their country. If they can’t be encouraged to do that, then maybe we’ve got to a point where they should be told to do so.’

What would, once upon a time, be surprising is that Labour Party politicians, (not even making a pretence at being a working-class party any more), is as evangelistic in its support for the capitalist system and for capitalists.

Not only does capitalism need bodies, to produce and to be exploited, but it also needs cannon fodder.

The ‘war machines’ are becoming more vociferous and more insistent. Many more establishment voices, here and abroad, are ingraining the idea of a forthcoming war – probably with Russia and the necessity to protect the Motherland, ie, capitalist interests, either through voluntary swelling of the military or through compulsion. Understandable if, as an exploited class, you ask, in the manner of the The People’s Front of Judea, what’s the motherland ever done for us?

Richard Drax lays it out plainly – ‘And if they’ve refused three offers of a job, or whatever the number would be, and they say ‘I’m sorry, I’m not doing any of that’, you then say – in which case you must go and do two years in the Armed Forces’ (*Daily Express* 12 March).

Sir Alex Younger, an ex-head of MI6: ‘Britons have been “infantilised” since the end of the Cold War and the Government should consider having the power to “compel” people to serve’ (*MailOnline* 5 April).

General Sir Patrick Sanders, the outgoing Chief of the General Staff opined that ‘British citizens should be ‘trained and equipped’ to fight in a potential war with Russia – as Moscow plans on ‘defeating

our system and way of life.’ It’s not known if he was pointing his finger Lord Kitchener style when warning that ‘increasing army numbers in preparation for a potential conflict would need to be a ‘whole-of-nation undertaking.’

*SkyNews* said the comments are being read as a warning that British men and women should be ready for a call-up to the armed forces if NATO goes to war with Russia. It comes after Defence Secretary Grant Shapps said in a speech earlier that we are ‘moving from a post-war to pre-war world’ and the UK must ensure its ‘entire defence ecosystem is ready’ to defend its homeland.’

The Estonians, no friends of Russia given their history, are also adding fuel to the conflagration. The Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas said in a BBC interview: ‘We have a reserve army of 44,000 people. That would equal for Great Britain around two million people. Two million people who would be ready to defend their country, who know what they have to do’ (*Daily Express* 4 April).

In Ukraine at the beginning of the year, the former Commander-in-Chief of Ukraine’s army Valerii Zaluzhnyi said that the army needed another 500,000 soldiers: ‘Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has signed a law that will lower the country’s minimum conscription age from 27 to 25, potentially boosting the number of men available to fight Russia’s invasion. A statement published by Parliament upon passing the law in 2023 said it was “inappropriate” that “a significant number of citizens” who were fit for military service could not be called up, despite the present need, under martial law. Martial law also prohibits most men between the ages 18 and 60 from leaving Ukraine, unless they are deemed unfit for military service for health reasons or have an exemption’ (*CNN* 2 April).

Sensibly following the example of many American young men who, during the Vietnam war, chose to absent themselves from America, many Ukrainians have adopted ‘flight not fight’: ‘Approximately 650,000 Ukrainian men aged 18–60 have left Ukraine for Europe since the start of Russia’s illegal invasion of Ukraine in February 2022’, BBC Ukraine reported. Citing data provided by Eurostat a report notes over half a million male refugees are currently residing in the 27 EU member states, as well as Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and Norway, many of whom are undocumented. In Germany, it is estimated that 100,000 unregistered individuals are residing in the country, while in Austria at least 14,000 Ukrainian men arrived using forged documents or the services of smugglers.

Under martial law, Ukrainian men between the ages of 18–60, with some exceptions, are not allowed to leave the country because they could be called up for military service. As Ukraine faces the challenge of maintaining adequate military personnel, recent reports indicate that nearly 20,000 Ukrainian men have managed to evade conscription, finding various routes to leave the country’ (*Kyiv Independent*).

John Richards’s song, *Don’t Despise The Deserter*, about a soldier who is executed by his country, has historical precedents. Three hundred and six British and Commonwealth soldiers were executed by the state in World War One. ‘So I ran from the fighting, and I threw down my gun, I ran by the moon, and I slept with the sun. Arrested by government, charged by the king, To be shot, ‘cause I can’t kill in order to bring Peace to a foreign land.’

Less about peace and more about capitalism.

Don’t let yourself be persuaded to become cannon fodder for the capitalist class.

**DC**



Credit: Dan Kitwood/AFIP/Getty Images

## Uninvestible

THAT WAS the word used by Chris Weston, the CEO of Thames Water, to describe how the business was regarded by its shareholders in the absence of the water companies' regulator, Ofwat, allowing an increase in the price charged to customers (*Times*, 29 March).

It's an odd word, not to be confused with 'uninvestable' (with an a) which refers to some item of value that cannot be invested because it cannot be money-capital. 'Uninvestible' (with an i) refers to a project which those with money-capital won't invest in.

Last year the US Commerce Secretary said that businesses had told her that China had become 'uninvestible' because it was too risky due to interference from the government there. In the case of Thames Water it is simply a euphemism for 'not profitable enough':

'Thames Water Plc said its £18.7 billion (\$22.7 billion) plan to strengthen its finances won't get funding from investors unless the regulator changes the rules to allow fatter returns. The UK's largest water company said delivering on its full business plan, published belatedly on Thursday, rests on getting £2.5 billion additional equity from shareholders for 2025 to 2030.

However, it warned that investors can get better returns in UK gilts and investment grade corporate bonds. It called on the Water Services Regulation Authority, Ofwat, to make significant changes to the rate of returns allowed for regulated water companies. (...) Thames Water called for a "material move up in the allowed rate of return" set by Ofwat in its initial guidance' (Bloomberg, [www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-10-05/thames-water-says-it-can-t-get-2-5b-needed-without-rule-changes](http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-10-05/thames-water-says-it-can-t-get-2-5b-needed-without-rule-changes)).

There is little sympathy from other capitalists for the shareholders (one of which is, ironically, the Chinese sovereign wealth fund). Jacob Rees-Mogg, a capitalist as well as an MP, tweeted:

'Thames Water ought to be allowed to go bankrupt. It would continue to be run by an administrator, the shareholders would lose their equity but they took too much cash out so deserve no sympathy and the bond holders would face a partial loss. This is capitalism, it won't affect the water supply' ([twitter.com/Jacob\\_Rees\\_Mogg/status/1773417565240357367](https://twitter.com/Jacob_Rees_Mogg/status/1773417565240357367)).

Monopolies such as the essential utilities —there can only be one national grid for electricity, gas or water — present capitalism with a problem. If left in private hands, the capitalists who own the distribution system are in a position to hold

the rest of the capitalist class to ransom by charging a monopoly price. The way the other capitalists found round this has been either nationalisation, where the state runs the industry keeping prices down, or regulation, where the state imposes a limit on the amount of profit that the privately owned utilities can make.

Historically, the US chose regulation while Britain chose nationalisation until, that is, the Thatcher government in the 1980s switched to regulation. One reason for this switch was to attract outside capital to invest in them, which made the change as much 'internationalisation' as privatisation. This part worked, as illustrated by the fact that, besides China, another of the owners of Thames Water is a Canadian pensions fund.

With regulation, the private owners are not in a completely weak position as they can, if they are not allowed to make enough profits, simply walk away, as the owners of Thames Water are threatening to do.

There is a lesson here for the future Labour government whose plan for growth relies on offering private capitalist enterprises an incentive to invest in some project by the state part-financing it. These enterprises, too, will be in a position to put pressure on the government by dubbing some project uninvestible unless they are allowed 'fat returns'.



### Talks include:

Keith Graham on *Political Consciousness:*

*What Can We Learn From Marx?*

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



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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

SOCIAL MEDIA shorthand SMH means 'shakes my head'. When the German Hindenburg airship caught fire landing in New Jersey in 1937 the radio commentator cried out, 'oh, the humanity!' The current seventh-century rulers of Afghanistan cause both of those reactions. The *Telegraph*, 25 March, reports that a Mullah there has declared, 'we will soon implement the punishment for adultery. We will flog women in public. We will stone them to death in public.' Words fail.

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Fulcrum7.com in a book review says the author posits the ridiculous theory that Noah carried dinosaurs onto the Ark as juveniles or even as eggs. Because obviously think of the space a pair of eighty-foot dinosaurs would take up! The reviewer says, rubbish! Well of course. That's like the old comedy routine where someone claims to have two lions, a giraffe and an elephant in a shoebox they're carrying. The reviewer then says,

'I believe the dinosaurs were among the "confused species", which were the result of genetic engineering and one of the reasons for the Flood was to destroy those animals'. Words fail.

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In June 1812 Napoleon Bonaparte and his French army invaded Russia. In 1812 Mary Anning and, initially, her brother dug the skeleton of an unknown seventeen-foot-long creature from the cliffs of Lyme Regis. Now it's known that it was the skeleton of an ichthyosaur from the Jurassic period. Mary Anning was aged twelve when she discovered this.

With hindsight, which of those two events was the most important? It's not known if this is one of the animals that the Flood failed to destroy.

Mary Anning and her family were avid fossil harvesters selling their finds to tourists. Oxford professor William Buckland teamed up with Mary. Peal writes that Buckland was a committed Christian who

had difficulty in reconciling Mary's finds with Bible stories. To maintain his delusion Buckland said that the skeleton must have come there as a result of the Flood.

Mary also discovered a plesiosaur and a pterodactyl. She is quoted as saying that, 'great men of learning had taken advantage of her.' 'They 'sucked her brains' of her knowledge, and stole the glory of her discoveries for themselves' (*Meet the Georgians*, Robert Peal, 2021).

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The protagonist sees a group of flagellants in St James's Park. He converses about it with his chauffeur who says; 'I find it ridiculous. If God exists and He's decided He's had enough of us, He isn't going to change his mind because a rabble of no-hopers dress up in yellow and go wailing through the park.'

'Do you believe He exists?'

'Perhaps His experiment went spectacularly wrong. Perhaps He's just baffled. Seeing the mess, not knowing how to put it right. Perhaps not wanting to put it right. Perhaps He only had enough power for one intervention. So He made it. Whoever he is, whatever He is, I hope He burns in His own Hell' (*The Children of Men*, P.D. James, 1992).

DC

## Tiny tips

'The princes are nothing but tyrants who flay the people; they fritter away our blood and sweat on their pomp and whoring and knavery.' These were the words of Thomas Müntzer at the head of the massed ranks of a peasant army in the year 1525. Ranged against him was the might of the princes of the German Nation. How did Müntzer, the son of a coin maker from central Germany, rise in just a few short years to become one of the most feared revolutionaries in early modern Europe? (**Penguin Random House**, [tinyurl.com/ytj8wzrj](https://tinyurl.com/ytj8wzrj)).

Like many of Myanmar's young men and women, Ko Naing said he had no intention of answering the call and would instead do whatever it takes to avoid the draft. 'The one sure thing is I won't serve. If I'm drafted by the military, I will try to move to the remote areas or to another country,' Ko Naing told Al Jazeera from Myanmar. 'Not only me, I think everyone in Myanmar is not willing to serve in the military under the conscription law', he said (**Al Jazeera**, [tinyurl.com/mwk76z2w](https://tinyurl.com/mwk76z2w)).

The 'one land, two peoples' analysis of the situation is nonsensical. The land does not belong to the people [proletariat], anywhere in the world. It belongs to those [bourgeoisie] who own it. This might seem very theoretical, but the mere existence of social relations on the ground shows to whom the idea of two camps belongs, ie, the ruling [bourgeois] class (**libcom.org**, [tinyurl.com/mrprshp9](https://tinyurl.com/mrprshp9)).

South Africa's Western Cape is known for its dramatic coastlines and acres of wineland. But behind the blue skies and rolling hills, the province is grappling with a heartbreaking health crisis. The area has the highest rate of foetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) in the world – a group of debilitating and life-long disabilities caused when a mother drinks during pregnancy. Whilst FASD affects about 0.7 per cent of the world's population, in the Western Cape rates are as high as 31 per cent, and across South Africa, it's estimated that 11 per cent of all newborns are affected each year (**The Telegraph**, [tinyurl.com/sd6xsnb5](https://tinyurl.com/sd6xsnb5)).

As BBC Ukraine reported in November, 650,000 Ukrainian men aged 18 to 60 years old have left Ukraine for Europe since the start of the war. Zelensky's former adviser Alexey Arestovich recently claimed that 4.5 million Ukrainian men, nearly half of the Ukrainian male population, had fled abroad to avoid military service, and that 30 to 70 percent of military units consist of 'refuseniks' who have gone absent without official leave (**AWOL**) (**WSWS.ORG**, [tinyurl.com/43w42rvj](https://tinyurl.com/43w42rvj)).

'And if they've refused three offers of a job, or whatever the number would be, and they say 'I'm sorry, I'm not doing any of that', you then say – in which case you must go and do two years in the Armed Forces' (**Daily Express**, [tinyurl.com/4fbr4r6y](https://tinyurl.com/4fbr4r6y)).

'Universities should be havens for robust debate, discussion, and learning—not sites of censorship where administrators, donors, and politicians squash political discourse they don't approve of' said the head of the NYCLU (**Common Dreams**, [tinyurl.com/3k25wc8b](https://tinyurl.com/3k25wc8b)).

(These links are provided for information and don't necessarily represent our point of view.)

**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](mailto:spgb@worldsocialism.org)

**MIDLANDS**

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

**NORTH**

**North East Regional branch.**

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**Lancaster branch.** Ring for details: P. Shannon, 07510 412 261, [spgb.lancaster@worldsocialism.org](mailto:spgb.lancaster@worldsocialism.org).

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

**Bolton.** Contact: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589.

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

**Yorkshire Regional branch.**

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

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

**SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST**

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

Contact: [spgb.ksrb@worldsocialism.org](mailto:spgb.ksrb@worldsocialism.org) or 07971 715569.

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

[spgbsw@gmail.com](mailto:spgbsw@gmail.com)

**Brighton.** Contact: Anton Pruden,

[anton@pruden.me](mailto:anton@pruden.me)

**Canterbury.** Contact: Rob Cox, 4 Stanhope Road, Deal, Kent, CT14 6AB.

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# Will technological innovation lead to a post-capitalist society?

THAT CAPITALISM'S vast and ever-growing structural waste is a major practical impediment to the realisation of a post-scarcity society should be obvious. This is because of the extent to which it diverts human and material resources away from the goal of mitigating scarcity itself. But what of technology? Could the very thrust and momentum of technological innovation, in itself, somehow usher in a post-scarcity society, despite this impediment? Might we expect the impact of new technology on society that, capitalism notwithstanding, might yet transform our prospects and beckon a life of material comfort, security and ample leisure for all?

Yes, according to Jeremy Rifkin, author of a best-selling book, *The Zero Marginal Cost Society*, in which he wrote that the 'emerging Internet of Things is speeding us to an era of nearly free goods and services, precipitating the meteoric rise of a global Collaborative Commons and the eclipse of capitalism'.

The core of Rifkin's argument appears to be that thanks to technological innovation, prices are set to decline as the marginal costs of producing things – the cost of producing one extra or additional unit of the product in question – plummets to zero. A 'Great Deflation' in other words. Self-replicating machines, powered by solar energy and hooked up to an intelligent network called the Internet of Things will increasingly displace human labour and, in due course, overwhelm us with plenty. All this, in turn, will undermine the need for private property, along with an old-fashioned top-down hierarchical model of social organisation, while ushering in more horizontally organised forms of collaboration beyond the market: the so-called 'sharing economy'.

Falling prices presuppose, or are made possible, by the declining marginal costs of production. This, for Rifkin, represents an inexorable trend that, by a process of extrapolation, will reach the inevitable endpoint characterised by the widespread availability of 'nearly free goods and services' when prices can presumably fall no further.

At this point capitalism will succumb to an existential crisis – a victim of its own remarkable success in having inadvertently laid the foundations of a 'zero marginal-cost society' (so called).

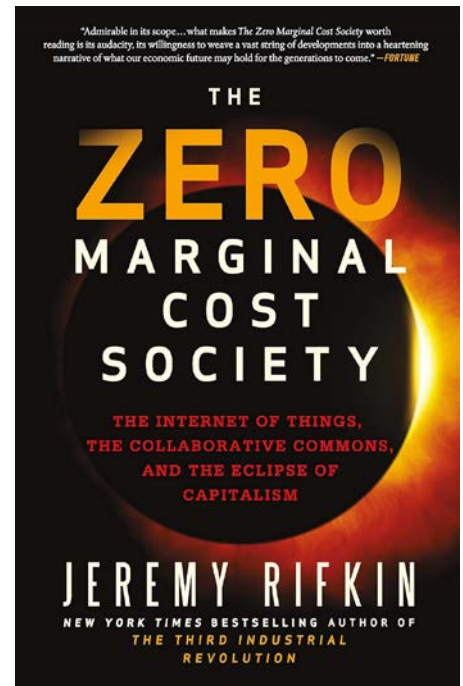
This will signify, in effect, the extinction of 'investor-based capitalism' – the very essence of capitalism, as we know it, with its insatiable lust for ever greater financial returns – leaving behind merely some residual commercially based activities that would carry on alongside, and help to support, the sharing economy. A hybrid system perhaps, but essentially a post-capitalist system.

Could all this really happen? It is certainly a tantalising vision of the future and one that might be said to derive from an extrapolation of certain trends we already see around us. However, the problem with relying on extrapolation is that those trends we are talking about can sometimes turn out to be reversible.

Rifkin is focusing on the observable phenomenon whereby businesses seek to undercut each other pricewise through cost-cutting technological innovation, and arguing that further technological developments are supposedly 'speeding us to an era of nearly free goods and services'. But how would this be possible? After all, if goods and services were to become so cheap one has to wonder how those businesses supplying them might secure a sufficient revenue to remain in business. Some of them sooner than others would go out of business. By doing so, they would stop producing. As a consequence, the supply of the goods in question would contract in relation to demand. Its price would begin to rise.

In focusing narrowly on the concept of marginal costs, Rifkin seems to have overlooked the wider concept of total production costs (including the wages bill) that businesses face and, not least, the transactional costs involved in the whole business of financing production – for instance, the repayment of bank loans or the payment of rent.

If there was any truth in his claim that we are steadily moving into an era of 'nearly free goods and services' produced by the 'Internet of Things', one has to wonder why, then, people are continuing to work comparatively long hours (or getting further and further into debt) to obtain the money they need to purchase all these (supposedly) soon-to-be free (or nearly free) goods and services in the first place. Not only are they still working long hours but the employment rate (defined as the percentage of population,



aged 20 to 64, in work) in places like the (technologically advanced) European Union has actually increased slightly – from 66.8 percent in 2005 to 72.4 percent in 2020.

The problem with his argument, apart from its fundamentally faulty economics, is its crude, technologically determinist assumption that capitalism will somehow mechanically disappear, or wither away, of its own accord without any need for human or political intervention. Rifkin himself has apparently denied he is a technological determinist and has argued that he sees the role of technology as merely enabling. Maybe. But, even so, it is difficult to see how he can evade the charge of, at least, inadvertently endorsing technological determinism.

This is not to deny that the kinds of technologies Rifkin has in mind could indeed prove to be enormously beneficial to a post-capitalist society. But we have yet to arrive at such a society and we are still a long way off from achieving it. This is not a matter of us closing some imagined technological gap but rather, of opening minds to the possibility of achieving that society. It won't happen otherwise. It is human volition (and understanding), not the technological potential to produce more, that is the missing ingredient today.

**ROBIN COX**

# Does **veganism** help?



THE TERM ‘greenwashing’ is often used to describe attempts, often by big companies, to convey the false impression that their goods are produced in an environmentally friendly and sustainable way – and this sometimes with a view to distracting attention from their involvement in other environmentally damaging practices. Some, in fact, see the whole of the current ‘green’ agenda as, under cover of support for the environment, actually extracting from it resources it cannot afford to lose and, no matter how good the intentions of the ‘deep’ or ‘bright’ greens, as no more than a sop to capitalism’s growth. This consists of regarding the Earth only as a target for producing goods for sale on the market and of being unable by its nature to do other than subordinate real care for flora, fauna and climate to the imperatives of growth and production for profit. In the words of one writer: ‘Our way of life doesn’t need to be saved. The planet needs to be saved from our way of life’ ([tinyurl.com/yt2cb98x](https://tinyurl.com/yt2cb98x)).

## Plant-based

As part of ‘greenwashing’ in production and consumption via various ‘green’ solutions (eg, solar panels, wind turbines, green energy storage, recycling, LED lights, electric cars, hydropower, biomass, geothermal energy, etc.), some now add a particular lifestyle often presented as a way to reduce climate change and

human impact on the environment: plant-based eating or veganism. In a recent article in *Monthly Review* entitled ‘The Case for Socialist Veganism’ ([tinyurl.com/22e93kb4](https://tinyurl.com/22e93kb4)), Benjamin Selwyn and Charis Davies point to the fact that many of the companies and corporations that have embraced the plant-based market use this as ‘cover’ for the damaging environmental impact they cause with their other production (‘meat, dairy and other environmental ruinous activities’). This, they say, represents ‘attempts at corporate brand greenwashing’ and is aimed at continued expansion of their sales and markets. It includes fast-food chains such as McDonald’s and Burger King, whose products are still overwhelmingly meat-based but who have developed plant-free product lines in an attempt to cash in on growing concerns for the environment or animal welfare. A chart the authors have put together demonstrates that plant-based brands not readily associated with big corporations often turn out to be owned by large non-vegan parent companies (e.g. Vivera by JBS, the world’s largest meat company; the Vegetarian Butcher by Unilever; Alpro by Danone, one of the biggest dairy companies in the world). And all these companies continue to have a massively damaging environmental impact in such areas as support for deforestation, mass-scale meat and dairy production, high levels of

plastic pollution and damage to natural water sources. So JBS, while promoting Vivera under the flag of promoting ‘the wellbeing of the planet’, slaughters 8.7 million birds, 92,600 hogs and 42,700 head of cattle every day of the year, thus making an appreciable contribution to climate breakdown via deforestation, greenhouse gases from cattle and cultivation of massive quantities of feed crops. Unilever, for its part, was, in 2022, named as one of ‘the top ten global polluters’, and Danone too is a leading plastic polluter and, despite its stated aim to encourage ‘healthy eating trends’, is largely focused on cow’s milk production, which produces three times more greenhouse gas emissions than plant-based milk and, like for like, uses ten times more land.

The charge here is that, however much veganism may have the potential to reduce human impact on the environment, the relative monopoly held by the big food producers makes that impossible. Focused as they are on animal-based production, any positive effect of vegan production is likely to be small and may in fact be negated completely if it simply increases the profits and investment power of the big producers and so aids their continuing focus on producing meat and milk as cheaply as possible, and so paradoxically increasing animal suffering and exploitation.

## An ethical marriage?

So what to do? The solution which the authors of this article propose is to move the food system towards what they call 'socialist veganism', also described as 'an ethical marriage between veganism and socialism'. This, they tell us, would involve the hundreds of billions of dollars currently spent on so called 'green transitioning' being directed towards what they call 'an ecosocially transformative political-economic agenda'. This, they maintain, will help to 'shift the balance of class power away from capital to labor' and can be achieved, as they see it, via movements 'from below', largely, that is, through collective action by unionised workers to 'alter the balance of class power between capital and labor in favor of the latter'.

The kind of development they see as necessary is an extension of 'welfare provision', through which 'services are provided across an *expanding array* of social life as part of the transformation and increasing equalization of society', and what they call a 'decommodification of food'. This would mean, they say, that 'food production itself could be increasingly brought under democratic control by workers, their communities, and consumers'. And this would be part of a 'broader process of managed degrowth' and 'a socialist green transition', which would include, in the words they quote of John Bellamy Foster, 'growth in such areas as regenerative agriculture, food production, decent housing, clean energy, accessible health care, universal education, community welfare, public transportation, digital connectivity, and other areas related to green production and social needs'.

They also have other indisputably admirable ambitions, such as various alternatives to chemical-intensive farming assisted in part by use of computerisation and robotisation, hydroponics with plants growing without soil in vertical farms, and precision fermentation producing a whole range of tasty foods that mimic meat and milk products but do not come from animals. Precision fermentation could, we are told, 'produce the same amount of protein as soy production does in the United States on 1,700 times less land', which in turn 'could, through reducing cropland, enable large-scale rewilding (to expand the world's carbon sinks and restore the diversity of plant and animal species), through restoration of grasslands, wetlands, forests, and savannas'. Part of this transformation would, as the authors see it, allow 'animals to be raised in more compassionate and ecologically sound ways', and 'with reductions in the role of meat in the overall Western diet'. So,

the authors, while having a soft spot for veganism, do not necessarily advocate its universal adoption. They say, rather, that 'vegan food production can, through decommodification and democratization of social life, contribute to providing good quality and affordable food for the many, mitigating climate breakdown, and contributing to mending the metabolic rift'.

## Powers of government

Overall, an extremely positive and optimistic case is made by these authors for what they term 'socialist managed degrowth', even if, with its only 'partial' veganism, it is not what many socialist vegans, especially if coming from an ethical standpoint and favouring universal veganism, would want to hear. But it's also a proposition that needs to be looked at through the lens of the operating procedures of the society we live in and of what it will take to move to the different operating procedures of a socialist society. Two beliefs seem to underlie the picture painted by the authors. The first one is that the shift to a different kind of society can take place bit by bit via a series of struggles by workers who gradually impose on governments their demands for greater fairness and more equality. The second belief is that governments have the power to bend and flex at will the capitalist system they administer and regardless of the profit imperative that underlies it. For all the good intentions of the authors, these beliefs are untenable, since the role of governments is to be the executive committee of the small class of people who own the productive forces, against whom they cannot act in any substantive way. It's true that governments sometimes can and do intervene in the running of the system in the wider interests of its survival, such as in the case of

America's 'New Deal' of the 1930s (referred to in some detail here by these writers) and in the recent Covid crisis. But they do that to keep the system working not to make it fairer or more equal, even if sometimes reforms they bring in may turn out to give some relief to those suffering most from its effects. But they simply cannot regulate to their heart's content the system of production for profit and buying and selling.

## Tweaks or consciousness?

So what needs to happen to establish the kind of society that no doubt the authors of this article would ultimately want to see- a leaderless, stateless, marketless society which will recognise the necessity to produce and distribute sustainably while being sensitive not just to the needs of the human species but to the whole environment of which we are a part, including its geology and its flora and fauna? What needs to happen is not just some tweaks to the way we live and work today brought about by pressure on governments (which would usually be reversible anyway) but the growth of a democratic movement expressing a majority will of the world's people which will win control of political power, probably via the ballot box, and then collectively organise that new society. This can only happen of course once the necessary spread of consciousness has been achieved and plans to democratically organise that society are in place. It will be then be up to that conscious majority to make all sorts of choices about how they live, including whether humans should continue using animals for food and other purposes and, if so, how and to what extent.

HKM



# Socialism through the looking glass, or wage-labour as liberation

ANYONE ON the left in France during the past two decades cannot help but be struck by the constant references to the need for the Labour Movement to defend, yes defend, wage-labour (*le salariat*.) The problem here is partly that of translation. For English speakers, a 'salaried worker' is an 'employee', often someone who has a certain security of employment. Salaried staff were paid monthly by direct payments into a bank account. *Le salariat* retains something of this flavour. In Britain in the sixties, indeed, parents were happy if their offspring could get the qualifications needed to work in a bank, earning a salary; regular work, a permanent contract, good pay, and the chance of finding accommodation. Salaried work was what got you out of the uncertainties of hawking yourself around for factory work in return for low earnings paid in cash. Those old enough to recall the sensation caused by Clive Jenkins when he succeeded in recruiting white-collared *salaried* staff into the trade union movement know all about this. However, that was *then*. Nowadays, insecure and poor pay has made massive inroads into the world of white-collar employment.

Similar considerations hold for France of course. But in this case the increasingly frequent inroads into employment conditions undertaken by the capitalists have led some Communist Party intellectuals to openly defend *le salariat* notably against the promotion of the pseudo-independence of workers in the so-called 'gig economy'. As a result, calls for '*l'abolition du salariat*' have become inaudible, if not incomprehensible. The CGT trade union literature which once considered the elimination of *le salariat* as tantamount to the abolition of capitalism now call for the former's consolidation. Take for example, the 2002 leaflet by Bernard Vasseur *Vers l'après capitalisme* ('Towards post-capitalism'). Or the very popular writings of Bernard Friot, very much the leading expert of social security on the left. In these publications there is the idea that *le salariat* represents something of a power independent of capitalist relations of production, French workers having succeeded in imposing preconditions on the employment of labour which have not only improved the bargaining power of workers but largely conquered a bulwark against exploitation.

They have done this collectively by partially socialising the wage itself through reforms based on the contributory welfare system, unemployment insurance, family allowances, municipal housing and so on. In all this, the building of the *code du travail* has been a major vector in this progressive tendency.

Doubtless, the popularity of the notion of *le salariat* is due to the massive entry of women into paid work and the expansion of the service sector. This has undermined traditional trade union practices largely centred on manual workers or their French equivalent, *les ouvriers*. In France (but not exclusively) *ouvrièrisme* tended to be heavily gendered even when practised by the so-called Marxist left and white-collar workers were seen as doubtful class allies. The notion of *le salarié* by contrast encompasses both white and blue-collar work irrespective of gender and is clearly a step towards the notion of a wage-earning class. Nonetheless it creates its own peculiar difficulties. For example, it implies that militants have to wrestle with the intricacies of social policy given that the state is necessarily more heavily involved in the social reproduction of this class than in the simple cash nexus of nineteenth-century exploitation. The remaining confusions probably derive from the difficulties involved in capturing the reality of an exploitation which was once exclusively identified with noisy factories in the private sector.

True, however, to their often eccentric reading of Marx, the French Communists of this tendency have signally failed to rise to this challenge, their confusions over the centrality of exchange value production leading them to badly fudge its relationship to wage-labour (see Alain Bihl '*Universaliser le salaire ou supprimer le salariat. A propos de "L'enjeu du salaire" de Bernard Friot*'). As a result, when wage-labour is identified with the separation of the worker from the means of production and subsistence, they are surprisingly silent. Perhaps this is a tribute to the all-encompassing nature of the French 'welfare state', now up for grabs. For whatever reason, students of *le salariat* on the French side of the Channel are more prompt to mask the reality of lack of property than English social historians. Hardly surprising then that the former civil servants enjoy an almost

legendary status as exemplary *saliariés* largely because they benefit from the security of lifetime employment. It's surely not an accident that many of the policy recommendations outlined by Friot and his collaborators read like an extension of the terms and condition of public service employment into the private sector. With politicians tending increasingly to move the cursor in the *opposite* direction, it is surely important to devote some effort to understanding the link between capitalist growth and the reality of dispossession.

## So what then is *le salariat*?

Much of the conceptual groundwork for this thinking is to be found in Robert Castel's *Les métamorphoses de la question sociale. Une chronique du salariat* published in 1995. The American edition, which heroically translates 'salariat' as wage-labour, tends to over-determine the notion but is fairly uncontroversial. Castel usefully traced the development of wage-labour from its origins on the fringes of medieval society where (artisanal) work took place in organised guilds operating in parallel to peasant production. Such forms of labour were gradually supplanted by employment in its modern form as factory work although semi-artisanal forms of labour persisted and indeed still do. Marx, of course, concentrated his attention on the situation of those who begin their working lives as the sellers of labour-power on the open market. Similarly, in constructing his own particular genealogy, Castel (rightly) laid stress on the long transitional phase where a certain class of workers were pitchforked into vagrancy as a result of the dissolving of feudal relationships. Here propertyless workers emerged as vulnerable vagabonds and marginals; the despised scum of a traditional culture.

The singularity of Castel's approach to this historical development is the emphasis he placed on the long period in France wherein semi-artisanal forms of labour co-existed with the continuation of small and medium-scale peasant holdings. Because the French economy was less subject to the large-scale enclosures typical of English agriculture, the mobility of the French working class tended to follow seasonal patterns of inter-sectional mobility. Much of the large-scale economic development



took place in the rural hinterland where wannabe capitalists tended to rely upon sub-contractors and worker-peasants, classes which defy easy definition. The sharp cut-offs and sudden take-off into capitalist industrialism of the English case are not so evident in France.

In this context, employers were often sub-contracting entrepreneurs hiring members of peasant households. But there were also forms of labour involving skilled artisanal workers in the urban areas and a fluctuating group of nomadic semi-artisanal workers who dovetailed seasonal patterns of work in agriculture with occasional remunerative work in the urban areas. With the advent of industrialisation French workers managed to transform what could have been an unpromising situation of economic dependence by mobilising what civic advantages were available.

Following the French revolution, the existing *code civil* was extended to produce the famous *code du travail*. This was a movement towards a legal framework which clearly identified employers as the agents responsible for undertaking the tasks outlined in a work contract based on legal equality. (In England, of course, the relations between workers and their employers were governed by the class-biased Master and Servant Acts backed up by the severely repressive Poor Laws.) Although the emphasis placed upon *legal égalité*, took the form of an explicit recognition of the subordination of the wage-earner to the employer, this subordination was limited by co-managed industrial courts.

In the case of some workers, a very varied population of workers (*ouvriers*) recruited by sub-contractors into piece-

work were increasingly paid time-wages and identified as *salariés*. The employers were obliged to accept their legal responsibilities towards their workers and could no longer rely upon management through intermediaries. Over time, the collective power of the working class has consolidated around trade unions which have skilfully used these legal structures to good effect. This has meant that in France permanent contracts still operate as the standard of employment in industrial tribunals and employers often have difficulty in opting out of their obligations in this respect. This is very much the reality that the notion of the *salariat* (or the *société salariale*) seeks to capture.

## The current situation

This being said, Castel later traced the unremitting efforts of the French capitalist class to weaken the collective strength represented by *le salariat* with legislation aimed at creating a more precarious class of hired hands. (The list is long.) Against this the French Communists involved in promoting the *salariat* are really all involved in defending the way wage-labour has been constructed around integrative measures. This is a good way to avoid welfare-statism, or the patronising idea that wage earners as helpless workers need protection against poverty. After all, many of the measures identified with 'welfare' were constitutive of wage-labour and its reproduction. To a large extent, their elimination is often not at all on the agenda. On the other hand, de-naturalizing is more often than not the objective sought after.

Thus, for example, the existing pension schemes in France were better defended

against budget cuts by arguing that they were in fact a continuation of the salary of the worker rather than depicting them as deferred savings granted to the elderly poor. In the same way, unemployment insurance can be seen as nothing more than a continuation of the salary during the inevitable downswings of economic activity and redeployment. Similar things can be said about family allowances which, for all their shortcomings, constitute a real salary capable of replacing the haphazard pseudo-equality of nominal wages. These are some of the more interesting points contained in the notion of the *salariat*, students of Titmuss would do well to note.

These points being made, does all this mean that wage-earners should be satisfied with their current position within global capitalism? Obviously not. Interestingly, Friot himself promotes measures aimed at the abolition of what he describes as 'lucrative property' presumably meaning private ownership of the means of production. But this is precisely the axis around which the relationship between capital and wage-labour turns, the workers being obliged by their slim grasp on the means of subsistence to sell their labour-power to employers bent on the expansion of capital. This is the point we already raised. At the moment, the impersonal forces operating within the sector of finance capital are imposing conditions of work which have more to do with profitability than with the preservation of *le salariat*, however defined. So to some extent the fraught relationship between capital and labour is being dragged backwards towards the conditions of the nineteenth century.

**M. M.**

# Worker co-operatives in the capitalist system



PROponents of capitalism would have you believe that there is no alternative, that the free market provides the most efficient system of exchange and that any deviation risks endangering freedom and prosperity. This is a falsehood, for humans have demonstrated throughout history a remarkable capacity to co-operate without private ownership and the insatiable need for profit. Closer examination of worker co-operatives, despite their long-standing orientation towards generating wealth within the capitalist system, offers a glimpse at how humanity may one day succeed in recasting incentivisation to meet people's needs rather than to make a profit.

The history of worker co-operatives and self-management is deeply rooted in the 19th-century efforts to address the socio-economic challenges brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Robert Owen, a visionary social reformer and industrialist in the early 1800s, laid the groundwork for the co-operative movement. Owen championed the idea that workers should collectively own and manage the means of production to ensure fair wages and better working conditions. His experiments at New Lanark in Scotland and later at New Harmony in the United States provided early models of co-operative living and working. Others like Charles Fourier, a French social theorist, contributed to the co-operative movement by proposing the concept of phalansteries – self-sustaining communities where individuals could live and work co-operatively. Although Fourier's ideas were not widely implemented, they inspired later developments in the co-operative movement.

Elsewhere, the Rochdale Society of

Pioneers, formed in 1844 in England, played a pivotal role in shaping the co-operative principles that persist today. They established a successful consumer co-operative, emphasising open membership, democratic control, and distribution of surplus based on patronage. Indeed, the so-called 'Rochdale Principles' became a blueprint for subsequent co-operative endeavours.

The modest successes of the co-operative movement led Marx to pronounce that worker self-management proved the superfluousness of capitalist managerialism; a statement ostensibly corroborated decades later during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). Worker co-operatives and self-management gained prominence across the Republican zone as a means for labourers to assert control over their workplaces. In Catalonia, particularly in the city of Barcelona, workers took over factories and implemented self-management practices. Notable examples include the textile industry with enterprises like *Fabrica de Hilaturas Fabra i Coats* and the metal industry with companies like *Talleres Roca*. These initiatives were characterised by worker assemblies, decision-making through consensus, and the elimination of hierarchical structures. The success of these worker co-operatives during the Spanish Civil War was evident in increased productivity and improved working conditions. The textile co-operative, *Fabra i Coats*, for instance, not only maintained production levels but also witnessed enhanced efficiency under worker control. Similarly, in the metal industry, *Talleres Roca* thrived under self-management, showcasing the viability of co-operative principles in sustaining economic activity during a tumultuous period.

## Contradictions

However, the existence of worker co-operatives within a capitalist system has inevitably led to certain contradictions. Notwithstanding the inculcation of workplace democracy and equality, the necessity to compete and accumulate in the broader system persists, and in face of these structural demands, worker co-operatives have often proven ineffective

and unreliable.

Despite his visionary ideals, Owen's experiments at New Lanark and New Harmony faced internal strife and financial difficulties. The co-operative model struggled with issues of governance, as decision-making by consensus often led to slow and inefficient processes. In New Harmony, the lack of a clear organisational structure and the imposition of Owen's communal ideas contributed to the ultimate failure of the experiment.

Similarly, during the Spanish Civil War, worker co-operatives in Barcelona faced both internal and external challenges. While some co-operatives thrived, others struggled with management issues, as decision-making by assembly sometimes hindered effective responses to rapidly changing circumstances. Even the relatively successful *Fabrica de Hilaturas Fabra i Coats* faced difficulties due to disagreements among workers on key decisions, highlighting the challenges of implementing democratic practices in high-stakes situations. External factors too, such as wartime pressures and political instability, also impacted the sustainability of these initiatives. The Barcelona co-operatives, despite notable successes, faced challenges in the broader socio-political context of the Spanish Civil War, ultimately contributing to their limitations and demonstrating the complexity of implementing worker self-management in tumultuous times.

## Mondragon

That said, worker co-operatives endure today. The Mondragon Co-operative Corporation, based in the Basque region of Spain, is an often-cited example. Founded in 1956 by a group of visionary individuals led by Father Jose Maria Arizmendiarieta, Mondragon has grown into one of the world's largest and most successful co-operative networks. Proponents point to the active participation of employees in decision-making processes through a system of co-determination, where major decisions are made collectively by the workers and management, as well as the commitment to equality of income. While wage differentials exist based on skills and responsibilities, the ratio between

the highest and lowest-paid worker is significantly lower than in traditional corporations. This approach promotes a more equitable distribution of wealth among the co-operative members. In terms of profit distribution, a portion of the profits is reinvested in the co-operative, another portion is allocated to social and cultural activities, and the rest is distributed among the members.

Critics, however, argue that Mondragon, while often lauded as a successful worker co-operative, still operates within the broader capitalist system, raising concerns about its limitations and contradictions. One major criticism is that, despite its co-operative structure, Mondragon has adopted certain hierarchical elements, resembling a conventional corporation. While the co-operative members elect management, there exists a professional managerial class that holds considerable decision-making power, potentially diluting the essence of true workplace democracy.

Additionally, Mondragon's global expansion has led to accusations of replicating conventional corporate practices, including outsourcing and wage differentials, especially in its international subsidiaries. Critics contend

that this compromises the co-operative's commitment to equality, as the wage gaps between the highest and lowest-paid workers have widened in some instances.

Furthermore, the co-operative has faced challenges in maintaining its founding principles as it expanded. In certain situations, Mondragon has implemented cost-cutting measures and layoffs, contradicting the ideal of job security within a co-operative framework. The co-operative's financial structure has also been a subject of scrutiny, with some arguing that it still operates within the capitalistic framework, reliant on traditional banking and financial institutions. These criticisms highlight the complexities and challenges of attempting to establish a fully co-operative model within the capitalist system, revealing that Mondragon, despite its successes, does not represent a complete departure from capitalist structures and practices.

## World co-operative commonwealth

Thus, it is evident that simply introducing a system of worker co-operatives cannot expunge capitalism. The worker co-

operative in its current form is not a panacea. Like other workplaces it is geared towards the generation of wealth within the capitalist system. However, the worker co-operative endures as an ideal, an alternative framework where decision-making is collective and understanding one's role in a larger societal context becomes paramount, fostering a spirit of co-operation and shared responsibility.

If humans across the globe were to adopt worker co-operatives within the confines of capitalism, it would likely serve to mitigate *some* of the exploitation associated with the current economic system by redistributing wealth and cultivating workplace democracy. That said, an integral component of the capitalist system would remain in the form of surplus value and money exchange, and so there would persist a means to profit through the exploitation of workers. The ideal of a global system of co-operatives could only reach its full potential on the basis of world socialism, a system in which production is geared not towards sale and the accumulation of private wealth but towards using one's abilities to meet both individual and community needs.

**JOHN ELLISTON**

# Warnings and alerts

THE FUND for Peace, as it is called, is supported financially by a number of donors, including various US government agencies and companies such as Exxon and Chevron. Each year it publishes a Fragile States Index ([fragilestatesindex.org](http://fragilestatesindex.org)). A total of 179 countries are assessed on the basis of a range of criteria, with four kinds of 'indicator' being employed, in order to measure their supposed vulnerability to collapse. Cohesion indicators deal with areas such as the extent of organised crime and how much trust people have in domestic security. Economic indicators include inflation and productivity, while political ones cover whether elections are considered as free and fair, how corrupt officials are, and so on. What are termed social and cross-cutting indicators include infant mortality, food supply, environmental policies etc.

The 2023 report divides countries into eleven categories, from 'Very sustainable' via 'Warning' to 'Very high alert'. This last category had just one member, Somalia. The highest-ranking included Norway and Iceland, with Germany and France in 'Sustainable' and the UK and US in the fourth category of 'More stable'. The UK has been slipping down the ratings since 2010, while France has been improving a

bit recently, despite the regular protests and the unpopularity of President Macron. Under 'Stable' came Kuwait and Cuba. China and Saudi Arabia were classified into 'Warning', with South Africa and India in 'Elevated Warning'. Russia, North Korea and Rwanda were in 'High warning', Venezuela and Iraq in 'Alert' and Haiti and Syria in 'High alert'.

One of the more interesting aspects of the work is the list of countries that have worsened or improved since 2022. A few have improved slightly, such as Yemen and Bolivia, while others have become worse, headed by Ukraine, Sri Lanka and Russia. Russia has become more authoritarian and thousands have fled conscription: 'While Russia's expansionism was an attempt to consolidate power and influence, the effect has been a weakening both domestically and abroad'.

Ukraine of course is given plenty of attention. It moved in a year from being the 92nd most fragile to the 18th, and its situation is having a major impact on global food supply chains. Energy prices generally have risen, and there has been a massive outflow of Ukrainian refugees. Funding and supplies may be redirected to Ukraine from countries such as Yemen and Ethiopia.

Sudan has consistently been ranked

in the ten most fragile countries, and the 2021 coup led to a military-run government, though protests continued in the capital, Khartoum. Since it became 'independent' from Britain and Egypt, Sudan has been subjected to various conflicts between the government and regional groups, the result often being 'peace agreements that are in fact power-sharing agreements that benefit the top ranks of the armed groups'.

What does it matter? What does it reveal? Governments and various members of ruling classes often need to know how volatile a country is, for both military and economic reasons. How reliable is this place as a trading or manufacturing partner? What are the chances of it descending into civil war, or some kind of coup taking place? Is there any possibility of no longer being able to access resources or products? More generally, what impact might it have on profits? Questions like this are no doubt very worrying to those who seek to ensure their continued exercise of wealth and power.

For the rest of us, though, it shows, not so much how fragile particular countries are, but what a state the world is in, that things are not simply getting better, as some claim, and how so many people live dangerous and insecure lives. And how urgent a major change is.

**PB**

# Zionism – A case study in nationalism

Credit: Shutterstock



IN THE nineteenth century there were conflicting views in Jewish communities as to how their best interests might be served. Some opted for a liberal view that assimilation was possible in an increasingly enlightened Europe.

Those favouring a reformed Judaism considered it best for the religion to be confined to the private sphere. The resolutely orthodox strove to maintain a traditional faith.

However, Europe was witnessing the emergence of an ideology that appealed to an increasing minority of Jews: nationalism.

Wider European society was embracing notions of national histories, distinctive cultures and languages, and self-determination. Jews found themselves faced with a choice between their Jewish or national identities. The latter was often compromised by persistent anti-semitism.

The concept of a Jewish national state began to emerge. Auto-emancipation was the term coined in the 1882 pamphlet of

the same name written by the Russian Leon Pinker.

Twenty years prior, in *Rome and Jerusalem*, Marx's 'communist rabbi' Moses Hess proposed an independent Jewish socialist commonwealth, a blending of socialism with the nationalist ideas of Giuseppe Mazzini.

These declarations of Jewish nationalism did not initially attract widespread support. This began to change following the 1881 assassination of Tsar Alexander II, the subsequent pogroms, the development of pan-Germanism voicing racist myths about all-powerful Jews, and the anti-semitism in the 1890s exposed by the Dreyfus affair.

Theodor Herzl, an Austrian journalist, began observing developments. Assimilated and relatively prosperous, he had little or no interest in the culture or religion of his forebears. His influences were Bismarck, Wagner and the pan-Germanists. However, he could not ignore the rising anti-semitic trend and came to the conclusion that

assimilation had failed due to economic competition between Jews and gentiles. Liberated from physical ghettos, Jews were becoming confined socially.

Determined to free Jews from this emerging ghetto, Herzl considered both mass conversion to Christianity and socialist revolution. He eventually settled on the prevailing nationalist concept of self-determination.

In *The Jewish State* (1896), he argued for founding a European Jewish homeland that would remove the competition between Jews and non-Jews. Subsequently, both Argentina and East Africa were considered as possible locations. The Holy Land, Palestine, became the dream.

Palestinian Arabs, unsurprisingly, opposed this prospect. Herzl though regarded non-Europeans as backward, arguing that a Jewish homeland would be 'a rampart of Europe against Asia'. In 1897 he organised the First Zionist Congress in Basel that established the World Zionist



Organisation (WZO).

When Herzl died in 1904, his ideas were not universally accepted by all Jews. Another strand of Zionism aimed at renewing Judaism rather than confronting anti-semitism. Herzl's supporters were accused of furthering assimilation, rejecting their forebears' faith. This Zionist strand favoured a country that was uniquely Jewish, not a Jewish state on a European model.

Despite its disparate beginnings, Zionism gathered a momentum focused on Palestine, both as a reaction to anti-semitic nationalisms in Europe and as a nationalism in its own right.

Via the Balfour Declaration of 1917, made as the Ottoman Empire was crumbling, and the Nazi-instituted Holocaust, the Zionist cause achieved its objective in 1948 when David Ben-Gurion proclaimed the state of Israel.

However, this was by no means the beginning of Jewish settlement in Palestine. There had already been a small Jewish community in that predominantly Muslim Ottoman area. The first formal Jewish community that can be considered an expression of Zionist aspirations was a kibbutz founded in 1910. This was followed by dozens more across the area that would become Israel. The kibbutz movement is significant as it was an expression of an ideological link that was destined to become horrifically problematic. That is the linking of nationalism with socialism.

From its early days Zionism was associated by some advocates with socialism. Moses Hess regarded it as an amalgam of socialism and Italian-style nationalism. Then Theodor Herzl introduced the notion of revolutionary socialism as a potential element of Zionism. Certainly, the kibbutz movement claimed Marxist influence in its organisation of communities. The goal was collective living. There was no private property, as all of it was held collectively by the community. Meals were even taken together.

Stanford economics professor Ran Abramitzky has stated, 'Jewish immigrants who founded kibbutzim rejected capitalism and wanted to form a more socialist society.' The paradox the professor seems not to have realised is that socialism is not something that can become the private preserve of one ethnic group, even if they do hold their property in common.

Herzl certainly made no secret of his view of the racial superiority of a Jewish homeland as a bastion against the barbarians beyond. The exclusive nature of the kibbutz reflected this attitude.

There is also the seemingly unquestioned acceptance that taking already occupied land for living space is justified. This is

an idea that can be traced back to the very earliest days when humans began to develop a stratified society.

Certainly, in modern times the European conquest and settlement of the Americas paid little regard to any sense that indigenous populations had any rights.

For European Jewry, the concept of national exclusivity tied to 'socialism' and *lebensraum* became a monumental tragedy.

Before that tragedy could fully unfold, the seemingly antagonistic nationalisms had a moment of common purpose. In 1937 two SS officers, Herbert Hagen and Adolf Eichmann, visited Palestine and met with Fevel Polkes, an agent of Haganah, a Jewish paramilitary force formed to protect Jewish communities in Palestine from Arab attacks. After 1948 it was incorporated into the Israeli Defence Force.

Polkes took the two Nazis to visit a kibbutz. In 1960 Eichmann wrote, 'I did see enough to be very impressed with the way the Jewish colonists were building up their land... had I been a Jew, I would have been a fanatical Zionist.'

It would be a grievous mistake to equate Zionism with Nazism. But one thing all nationalisms have in common is that they pit what they see as their national collective interest against that of the 'other', those beyond, outside, excluded.

Whatever socialist pretensions Zionism had they have been subsumed into reformist politics that makes no claim to abolishing capitalism. Kibbutzim now only account for about 3 percent of Israel's population. Collective living has been abandoned and the kibbutz has turned into village life.

Antagonistic nationalisms and competing economic interests are at the root of

Hamas atrocities in Israel and Israeli atrocities in Gaza. While the outpouring of support for Gaza by Palestinian flag-waving demonstrators is an understandable reaction, the solution to the ongoing conflict is surely not to counterpose one nationalism with another.

A one-state or two-state solution will not remove the underlying tensions. It may ameliorate the situation for a while, but only until the next time competition flares into conflict.

To simply oppose Zionism could be interpreted as being anti-semitic. It would invite the question, why just pick on Jewish nationalism? The socialist response has to be opposition to all nationalisms.

The oxymoron 'National Socialism' is particularly mistaken. The definitions are mutually exclusive. Not only in the Nazi formulation, but also in such seemingly reasonable and moderate forms as 'Scottish socialism', a variant of Scottish nationalism.

Whatever label is attached to it, nationalism, as it arose variously in the nineteenth century, persists as an ideological shackle for the workers of the world, keeping them bound as wage slaves to capitalism. While workers continue to identify themselves with their countries of birth they will deny themselves the worldwide possibilities of socialism, without borders and the wars fought to maintain them.

The irony is that while Herzl thought Jews had been confined to an invisible ghetto, Zionism is confining them to a very visible one, Israel, even for those choosing to live beyond its borders. The way forwards is not assimilation, but socialism.

**DAVE ALTON**

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## End capitalism

CAPITALISM - IT'S the system that, for now, rules throughout the world, in either private or state forms.

The driver and fundamental characteristic of this system is capital accumulation, or put more simply, profit.

If the bosses have no expectation of profit, there is no production.

And the result? At an economic level, continuous instability and pressure on workers' employment conditions.

And the inevitable capitalistic competition leads to a struggle for the control of natural resources and markets, Hence so much energy wasted in military preparations and the perpetual threat of war.

On top of that, the system requires constant expansion which explains the

threat of environmental catastrophe.

No reform can make a difference to the fundamental characteristic of capitalism. None.

So if we want real, permanent progress for everyone we have to replace capitalism with a system in which the economic driver is the satisfaction of the material needs of every person.

And on a worldwide level too. A cooperative society, without bosses, without frontiers, with free access to the social product.

This is what we call socialism. With the tremendous productive capabilities that have been developed under the rule of capital, the new society is within reach. All that is lacking is the will of the majority of the workers to bring it into being.

# An April Fool

ON THE First of April the *Guardian* seemingly pulled off a good April Fool as many people wouldn't have recognised it as such. They published an article by a 'Stuart Kells' who argued that banks can create money out of thin air and that governments don't need to tax or borrow money.

'Stuart Kells' begins by criticising a scene in the 1946 film *It's a Wonderful Life* in which: 'depositors demand their money from a small town building society. Its manager, George Bailey (in an unforgettable performance by James Stewart), explains that the money is not in the building society's vault; it has been lent to other people in the town. "The money's not there," Bailey pleads. "Your money's in Joe's house ... and in the Kennedy house, and Mrs Macklin's house, and a hundred others."'

The joke consisted in claiming that this explanation of how a bank works is incorrect:

'Banks don't lend out money from reserves or deposits or other sources of pre-existing funds. (...) When you borrow money and your bank credits your loan account, the account is created anew, "from thin air" ...'

If by this point *Guardian* readers hadn't

realised that the article was an April Fool, they just needed to consider how a building society operates. If it could create a mortgage out of thin air why would it need to attract depositors? Why do building societies compete with each other by offering savers an attractive rate of interest on their deposits? And why did Northern Rock go bust?

That James Stewart was correct was confirmed when in 2022 central banks raised the bank rate, as the rate of interest at which they lend money to commercial banks. As a result, the rate at which banks lend to each other via the money market, if at the end of the day the money they have paid out is less than the money that came in, also went up. As banks were paying more to borrow 'wholesale' they had to raise the rate of interest which they charged those they lent money to. They were slower to raise the money they paid savers who lent them money 'retail' but eventually they had to as borrowing from savers is cheaper than continually borrowing from the money market.

The financial media rediscovered the concept of 'net interest income' as the

difference between the income from the interest the banks charged borrowers and the amount they had to pay those they borrowed money from. That banks — and, more obviously, building societies — are basically financial intermediaries borrowing money at one rate of interest and re-lending it at a higher rate was evident for anyone to see.

Perhaps the *Guardian* was relying on this for its readers to realise that they were dealing with an April Fool. In case this was not enough, 'Stuart Kells' went on to claim that governments don't need to impose taxes or borrow money and that they should simply create and spend it. Governments have been known to try this, as in Zimbabwe, but the result has not been quite as intended. And, why do governments borrow money and pay interest for it when they don't need to?

Maybe it was us who were fooled as it turns out that Stuart Kells is a real person and the author of a book entitled *Alice TM: The Biggest Untold Story in the History of Money* from which the article was extracted. Knowing how the *Guardian* allows funny money merchants free range in its columns — in this case, MMT, which stands for Modern Monetary Theory and Magic Money Tree — we should have realised it wasn't intended as a joke after all.

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# Going public about going private

THERE ARE several connotations with the word 'private', in relation to 'private hospitals' or 'private healthcare'. The description means that they are privately owned companies with the purpose of generating profits for their shareholders, with medical treatment as the product they sell. The word 'private' also suggests that these hospitals are select, and separate from the NHS and the majority who use it. This isn't always the case, as shown in *Panorama's* investigation *NHS Patients Going Private: What Are The Risks?* (BBC One). The word 'private' also implies being reluctant to reveal too much, so the documentary was of some use in highlighting issues which private hospitals would sooner be made less public.

One of the symptoms of the ailing NHS has been increasing delays for treatment, with more than six million people in England in the worrying position of coping with a worsening condition while they wait their turn. In an effort to reduce the length of waiting lists, some of these patients have been referred to private hospitals for surgery, with the costs paid from NHS funds. In 2023 around 800,000 NHS patients were handled by private hospitals in this way. Many of these went to one of the 39 hospitals run by Spire Healthcare Group plc, the second-largest private provider in the UK. Since 2021, Spire has treated more than half a million NHS patients, contracts for which have made up around 30 percent of its revenue. Reporter Monika Plaha looks at two aspects of how Spire runs which have had a devastating effect on some of its patients: staffing and arrangements for dealing with emergencies.

Spire's management of its staff was questioned after two surgeons they employed were separately exposed as dangerously incompetent. Since then, concerns have focused on low staffing levels, especially at nights and weekends, and how alert people can be during back-to-back shifts. Resident doctors have been contracted by Spire for up to 168 hours a week including nights on call, whereas doctors' working hours in the NHS are capped at 48 a week. Almost all the ex-Spire doctors interviewed for *Panorama* were worried about the consequences of their high workloads and protracted shifts. Hiring insufficient numbers of staff is one of the most obvious ways of minimising costs to maximise profits, regardless of the more obvious risks to patient safety. For the documentary, Spire provides a bland statement that it now has 'robust safeguards' and resident doctors only work



Credit: BBC

'when adequately rested'.

The programme also describes failings in how private hospitals have dealt with complications during surgery, whether suffered by referred-in NHS patients or those paying directly. Most private hospitals don't have intensive care or high-dependency units, so when a patient's condition deteriorates or a procedure fails, they have to be transferred to an NHS hospital for emergency treatment. Moving a patient during a crisis carries risks, made worse by having to rely on an ambulance which could take hours to arrive, even when the hospitals are close to each other. The programme features interviews with people who have tragically lost loved ones due to complications which Spire hospitals couldn't cope with and which weren't dealt with by an NHS hospital in time.

Private hospitals don't have facilities to deal with crises because they tend to treat medical issues less likely to have serious complications which require care in a high-dependency unit. And they tend not to deal with high-risk operations because these come with additional costs for specialist surgeons or equipment, and would therefore be less profitable. In other words, patients with complex conditions aren't financially attractive. As Sally Gainsbury of the Nuffield Trust points out, around a third of NHS patients have health issues too complicated to be managed in private hospitals, so they must wait longer for NHS treatment. This is exacerbating a two-tier system where healthier people can be treated quicker privately. One way of reducing this disparity would be for private hospitals to have adequate intensive care facilities, avoiding the risks with transferring patients back to NHS hospitals in emergencies. But this requires investment, raising costs which will mean that fewer people will be able to afford private treatment, whether funded through the NHS or not. So far, private healthcare

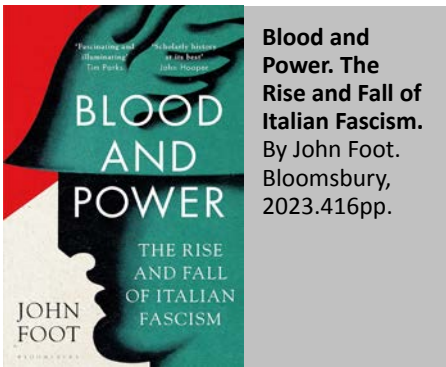
organisations like Spire have been reluctant to invest in facilities for crises, or sufficient numbers of staff. Despite this, and the criticisms made of it, Spire is aspiring to carry out more complex procedures and have longer-term contracts with the NHS. This isn't with the aim of helping out the beleaguered 'public' sector, but to extend its market share. Last year, Spire's profits increased by over 30 percent to £126 million, and any expansion will be guided by what's likely to generate further profits rather than by meeting need.

Reformists call for the NHS to have more funding so it doesn't need to refer patients to private hospitals, but there will never be enough money for the utopian NHS they want. Even if a government wanted to adequately fund the NHS, other economic imperatives would prevent this, especially the need for profit which guides the system overall. The 'public' ownership of the NHS means that it isn't directly profit-driven, but it still has to survive in the profit-driven system, alongside and interdependent with private healthcare.

Every day, skilled and dedicated staff in NHS and private hospitals perform life-saving operations which would have looked like miracles just a few years ago. Somehow, they carry on despite the obstacles put in their way by the system they work in, such as the routine of long shifts in understaffed wards because this minimises costs, or having to gamble on surgery being straightforward because other hospitals with facilities for dealing with crises are overstretched. Trying to overcome these obstacles with reforms or revised contracts or reallocated funding is a never-ending struggle because this approach can't change the system which creates the problems. It only addresses the symptoms without curing the cause.

**MIKE FOSTER**

## Historical fascism



**Blood and Power. The Rise and Fall of Italian Fascism.**  
By John Foot.  
Bloomsbury, 2023.416pp.

It has become common for the cry of ‘fascism’ to go up, from both right and left, every time a government or political party enacts or proposes policies which seem destined to increase state control over the system we live under. Some even argue that western capitalism itself is in fact fascism, if a cleverly dissimulated form. One thing historian John Foot’s new book on Italian fascism does is to give the lie to all this. It shows, in the starkest possible terms, how different fascism, in its original incarnation anyway, really was from what many idly give that label to today.

*Blood and Power* takes the reader on a harrowing journey of violence, torture and murder, without which fascism could never have taken hold of Italy and then ruled the country for over 20 years, only finally collapsing when its leader, Mussolini, made the fatal mistake of allying himself with Nazi Germany and being brought down when Hitler was brought down. Otherwise, the author speculates, the regime may have lasted longer, as did the similar set-up in Spain under Franco. But this book is not just a conventional, linear account (of which there are many) of Italy’s *ventennio nero* (‘black 20 years’), but rather an excavation of that period ‘from below’, seen in large part, that is, via the on-the-ground experiences of many ‘ordinary’ individuals who lived, and not infrequently died, under fascist terror.

And terror it truly was, some of it stomach-churning as we see it depicted on the page. From as early as 1919, those who opposed the politics of fascism, either through declaring themselves ‘socialists’ or ‘communists’ or just voicing opposition to its ‘lawless’ approach, were subjected to brutal and terrifying treatment at the hands of increasingly large and merciless bands of fascist thugs. They were intimidated, beaten, tortured, maimed and often murdered, while the ‘democratic’ state and its authorities (ie, police and military) looked the other way, allowing a sort of ‘state within a state’ to develop. As the author writes, ‘fascism eliminated its opponents with gusto or reduced them to a state of fear’ (...) ‘it was fundamental, visceral, epochal and life-changing: both for

those who experienced it, and those who practised it’.

Nor was there any redress for victims, and once the fascist party had taken full power from 1925 onwards, after which elections and any semblance of democracy ceased, it became all the more implacable. So, for example, as the author tells us, ‘it became nigh on impossible to print or distribute any kind of newspaper that wasn’t in full support of Mussolini and fascist rule (...) prisoners were often ‘disappeared’ or ‘committed suicide’ in prison (...) ‘torture was common, ritualised and sanctioned from above.’ The regime relentlessly pursued all its opponents, having no compunction about even sending its spies and agents abroad in pursuit of those who had fled the country and wreaking vengeance on them there. In all, according to the author, Italian fascism was ‘responsible for the ‘premature deaths’ of at least a million people, in Italy and across the world’, including of course many thousands of Jews who were transported from Italy to the gas chambers in the latter part of the war.

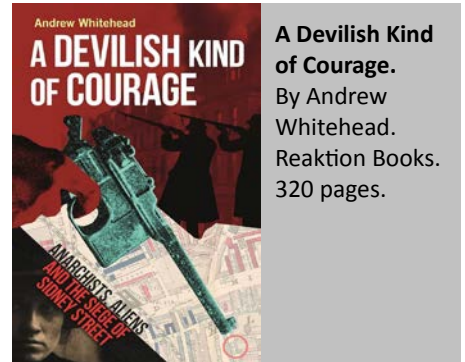
How does all this compare to what is often referred to as fascism, or at least potential fascism, nowadays, in particular the ‘populist’ politics and regimes that have risen up in recent times? How, for example, does it compare to the current right-wing government in Italy, often labelled ‘neo-fascist’? How does it compare to the politics of Donald Trump in the US and the foreboding about what might be to come if he wins the 2024 presidential election? How does it compare to attempts by the Conservative Party in this country to undermine trade unions or criminalise certain forms of expression or to the apparently racist and ultra-nationalistic policies of right-wing groupings such as the Reform Party? The knowledge that this book imparts of the reality of Mussolini’s one-party state makes it clear that, however retrograde and undesirable it may be, the kind of modern-day populism exemplified above does not bear comparison to the vicious, ultra-repressive, anti-democratic nature of fascism in its original Italian form.

What, however, Italian fascism does share with today’s ‘populist’ ideologies or governments and indeed with the more ‘enlightened’ administrations in most Western countries is that the purpose of them all is to manage the profit system (ie, capitalism). And, broadly speaking, this takes place most effectively, as far as capitalism is concerned, in a political environment where there are democratic elections and scope for relatively free circulation and exchange of ideas. Regimes that do not allow this (eg, China and Russia today), while by no means impregnable in the longer term, inhibit

such development and, in the way they operate, are the closest things that exist today to the kind of system excavated and characterised so expertly by John Foot in his exploration of Italian fascism. It should be added that such regimes also inhibit the spread of consciousness necessary for the establishment of the alternative system of society beyond the system of wages, money and profit which this journal calls socialism.

HKM

## Propaganda of the deed



**A Devilish Kind of Courage.**  
By Andrew Whitehead.  
Reaktion Books.  
320 pages.

Andrew Whitehead recounts here the events and background to the ‘Siege of Sidney Street’ in the East End of London in January 1911 in which two Latvian revolutionaries, wanted for the killing of three policeman in a botched attempt to rob a jewellery shop the previous month, were cornered. After a shoot-out the two were burned to death when the house they were holed up in caught (or was set on) fire and no attempt to extinguish it made. The supposed ringleader, dubbed ‘Peter the Painter’ by the police, became a legend but was never found.

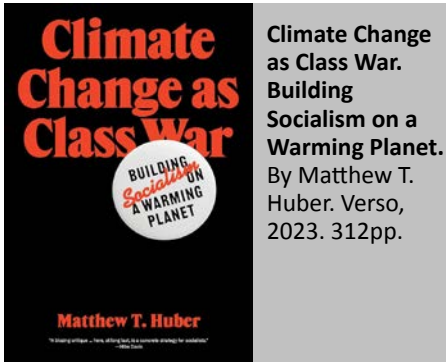
It was a sensation at the time and led to an (unsuccessful) campaign to stop the immigration of ‘aliens’ from Tsarist Russia. This was often openly anti-semitic, even though those involved were Latvians. The Russian revolution of 1905, after an initial success in extracting concessions from the Tsarist regime, was brutally suppressed. Some of the revolutionaries turned to bank robberies to obtain money to finance revolutionary organisation and activity (and survive). Exiled to Western Europe some continued this, including those involved in the attempt to rob a jewellery shop in December 1910 and a wages robbery in Tottenham in January 1909. They were described as ‘anarchists’ and were certainly acquainted with anarchist ideas. The three most well-known anarchists living in Britain at the time — Kropotkin, Malatesta and Rocker — repudiated their tactics. However, ‘propaganda of the deed’ was advocated and practised, in the form of assassinations and robberies, by other anarchists at the time.

Whitehead examines the milieu in which exiles and immigrants from Tsarist Russia in the East End of London moved, mainly

Yiddish-speaking Jews but also others including Latvians from the Baltic region. He also identifies who Peter the Painter most likely was. His well-researched and detailed book looks like being the definitive study of what the Socialist Standard of the time described as ‘the recent world-stirring East End melodrama’ (as well giving a socialist analysis of it and its repercussions) ([tinyurl.com/2k6fk4x5](https://tinyurl.com/2k6fk4x5)).

ALB

## Reforming capitalism



**Climate Change as Class War. Building Socialism on a Warming Planet.**  
By Matthew T. Huber. Verso, 2023. 312pp.

American geographer Matthew Huber has produced a thought-provoking book on society and climate change. It examines in wide-ranging and immensely knowledgeable fashion how history (and in particular the history of capitalism) has got us where we are as a species and offers considered proposals for addressing the current planetary environmental crisis in a way the author sees as benefitting the majority of the population, ie, those who have to sell their energies to an employer for a wage or salary in order to live.

He makes it clear from the start that his concern is for this latter group, ie, the world’s workers. And his aim – his ultimate aim anyway – is a non-class-divided society. Then of course there is the perennial question of how to achieve that, and this – in part at least – is what this book is about. However, since in the author’s view post-capitalism in terms of a classless society is not on the immediate horizon, he sees immediate action of some kind as essential, otherwise the climate crisis will engulf humanity and nothing will be left to save.

The action he advocates (focusing almost exclusively on the US situation – something he recognises) is the strongest possible pressure on government to adopt and implement ‘Green New Deal’ policies (described as ‘a working-class environmental program’). Such policies would involve the government taking over the energy sector completely and instituting drastic policies of decarbonisation to achieve a ‘just transition to a clean energy economy’. One of the keys to this he sees as the overwhelming adoption and use of electricity to replace fossil fuels for the purpose of producing and supplying energy and so, in his view, avert the dire climate consequences and

environmental degradation we see at present. This is because, in the author’s words, ‘electricity is at the core of almost everything we do in an increasingly digital world (...) economic activity is impossible without electricity’. He sums up his vision by saying that ‘the politics of the Green New Deal seeks to conjoin working-class and ecological interests into one, under the umbrella of a politics of life’. How will this pressure be placed on government? The author sees it as happening via sustained trade union action by workers from ‘a broad and diverse working class’, but especially those in key industries with ‘strikes and disruption at the point of production’.

Is this possible or likely? Of course, the author is perfectly right in arguing that, when trade union action is sufficiently solid and well-focused, employers and governments have no choice but to listen and may make concessions. He gives certain examples from the experience of industrial action in the US to show that ‘strikes can build power and win’. But the question then arises, what would be the consequences if such a strategy were successful in the key sector of energy and the government moved to take over the sector?

To answer this, it is worth mentioning a book possibly dating from after when *Climate Change as Class War* was written. This is *Bright Green Lies* by Derrick Jensen, Lierre Keith and Max Wilbert (reviewed in the January 2023 issue of this journal), which explains how any Green New Deal agenda, even if implemented, would be no less harmful than the fossil fuel use it might seek to replace. This is because, with the money and market system still operating (even if under government supervision), the Earth would still be a target for commodification, and the process of production and setting up and maintenance of infrastructure even for ‘green’, ‘renewable’ sources of energy would continue to extract from the environment resources it could not afford to lose and in this process carry on causing climate change and destroying the Earth’s geological fabric.

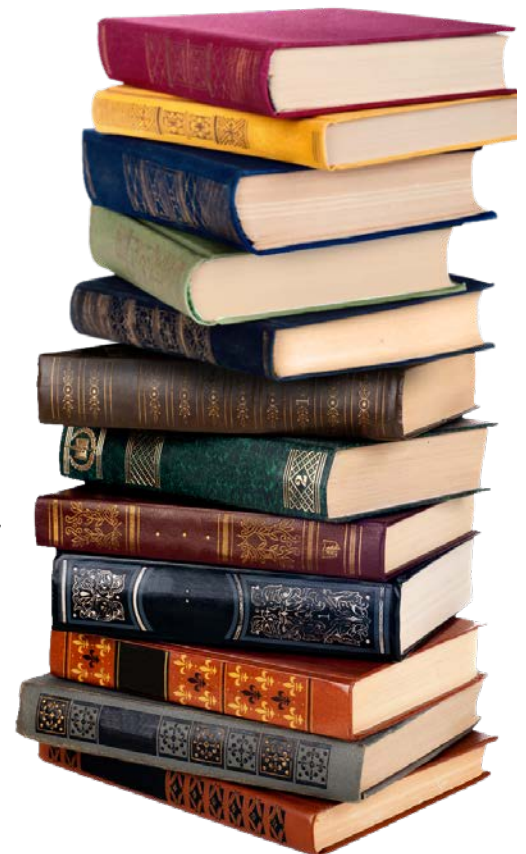
So though, as already stated, Huber’s book is extraordinarily wide-ranging in the many areas and sources it draws on, would it be possible for governments, whose very function is to be, in the author’s own words, ‘committed to private capital and anarchic market competition’, to somehow change their nature and the role of managing and supporting the market system, to truly recognise ‘the inherent antagonisms between capital and the climate’ and to no longer act as an executive committee for their national owners of capital?

Then there is the author’s focus on trade unions. While unions are necessary institutions for workers to try and resist the

encroachments of capital and get what they can in terms of pay and working conditions, they are by their nature defensive bodies, whose purpose is not, nor can be, ‘political’ as such. Trade unions may of course be places where political ideas circulate and where socialist consciousness may spread, but they cannot in themselves offer solutions to the fundamental inequalities inherent in the class-divided society, which the author rightly sees as fundamental to capitalism and its market system. Still less can unions be a tool for some kind of quick solution to the problems of ecological breakdown that threatens the whole planet.

So rather than look to the short-term ‘fix’ (which isn’t actually a fix at all) of action to try and force governments to take control over energy, a far more practical purpose would be served if all those who, like Matthew Huber, have striking and often subtle insights into how the world is organised, recognise the class-based nature of society and understand its highly detrimental effects both for human life and the biosphere as a whole, campaigned as part of a democratic political movement putting forward the case for majority action of the world’s people to collectively organise for a leaderless, stateless, marketless society – one that will emancipate the human species, protect the environment and look after the Earth’s ecology as a whole. That will be the real ‘just transition’.

HKM



# Students against democracy

LIVERPOOL WAS proud of The Beatles and its connection with that Cunard Line. What the city thinks of the conference of the National Union of Students held there early April is another thing. Hundreds of delegates from universities, polytechnics etc. assembled for their annual jamboree. Over the years, this conference has endorsed some pretty queer ideas, but 1974 will go down as a vintage year.

This assembly debated students' grants; elected a new President (a political loner we are told) by 21 votes; didn't agree to send a delegation to Czechoslovakia to see if the Czech students' union were democratic enough to form links with the NUS (would their journey have been really necessary?). Then came the body blow to democracy and the right of people to express their views. The outcome of this debate intimated they had a lot in common with the Communist-Party-dominated Czechoslovakia.

A majority of the delegates "voted yesterday to take whatever measures were necessary, including disruption of meetings, to prevent members of racist or fascist organizations from speaking in colleges" (*Guardian*, 5th April, 1974).

(...)

The Socialist Party of Great Britain has personal experience

of what happens when such a decision as that of the NUS is operative. We arranged a debate in North London against the National Front. An opportunity for the audience to weigh up the two conflicting schools of thought — socialist or nationalist. We were of the opinion that the audience would be able to judge for themselves the validity of the arguments. But our dear "lefty" types thought otherwise. They broke up the meeting. Did they consider the audience to be such a bunch of morons that they could not judge? Obviously they did, and this might just be the reason why these "revolutionaries" wish to appoint themselves as leaders of the masses. They know what is good for us — they know what we should hear.

Democracy, never a favourite word in their vocabulary, means a method of conducting affairs where a majority decision is reached on the basis of all information being readily available. Who are these self-styled dictators, who in the name of democracy, wish to decide what we shall or what we shall not hear? The suppression of "unpopular views" by violence does not eradicate these ideas. This can only be done by a free exchange of ideas.

(*From Socialist Standard*, May 1974)

## Action Replay

# Abuse of Position

IT STARTED with a kiss, when in August last year the head of the Spanish FA kissed one of the players, Jenni Hermoso, on the lips at the award ceremony for the Women's World Cup. This led to a great many protests, with the president (who has been the subject of other complaints) being forced to resign, being banned from football activities for three years and then being charged in a court. Except of course that it didn't start there at all, as women athletes have frequently been subject to discrimination and sexual harassment.

Many women coaches in football, for instance, have encountered prejudice of various kinds, including verbal and physical assaults, and even being completely ignored by the male coach of the opposing team at a match. Only about one professional coach in ten in UK sport is a woman.

Swimming is an area that is particularly problematic. From girl swimmers who have problems with periods during a training session to those who just don't want to appear in a swimming costume in front of the whole school, young female swimmers can encounter all sorts of difficulties. The appearance of women swimmers can lead to body shaming if they have big shoulders. Last year two

Italian TV presenters made sexist remarks at an aquatic championship, describing a Dutch woman diver as 'big', adding, 'They're all equally tall in bed'.

Women who are swimming just for fun and exercise often encounter sexist behaviour too: being followed into the showers, having their bottom pinched or being leered at from the public gallery, and men swimming slowly in front of them or taking up excessive space,

Prejudice in sport doesn't just affect women, of course, as male swimmers can also be subjected to remarks about

them gaining weight. In football there was an appalling scandal involving sexual abuse by coaches and scouts of young male players, starting in the 1970s. The true scale of this only emerged from 2016, with fourteen men being convicted. However, it does seem to apply to women more often, and girl gymnasts have been starved and body-shamed by coaches, with the ostensible aim of improving their performance, and very many have described physically abusive behaviour,

It's not just in sport: in education, entertainment, business and so on, people in authority can harass and even abuse those they have power over. All in a society based on hierarchy, with pervasive sexism.

**PB**



Credit: Getty Images

# World Socialist Movement Online Meetings

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

## May 2024 EVENTS

World Socialist Movement  
online meetings

### Sundays at 19.30 (IST) (Discord)

Weekly WSP (India) meeting

### Sunday 12 May 10.00 (GMT + 1)

Central Online Branch Meeting

### Friday 3 May 19.30 (GMT + 1)

May Day Meeting

### Friday 10 May 19.30 (GMT + 1)

What is politics?

Guest speaker: Darren Poynton:

### Friday 17 May 19.30 (GMT + 1)

**Sinn Fein: Will being in government on both sides of the border unite Ireland**

Speaker: Kevin Cronin

### Friday 24 May 19.30 (GMT + 1)

**The SPGB and the Spanish Civil War**

Guest Speaker: Keith Scholey

### Friday 31 May 19.30 (GMT + 1)

**Did you see the news?**

Discussion on recent subjects in the news

## Socialist Party Physical Meetings

### BURNLEY • May Day Festival 11am onwards

Towneley Park BB10 4PJ

The Socialist Party will have a stall at this event.

### LETCHEWORTH • Thursday 9 May 19.30

**How We Live and How We Might Live: Capitalism, Poverty and Global Crises.** Speaker: Richard Field  
Spirella Building, Bridge Rd, Letchworth SG6 4ET

### MANCHESTER • Saturday 18 May 2pm

**Myths of Nationalism**

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

### BURFORD • Saturday 18 May 10.30 to 15.00

**Levellers Day**

Warwick Hall, Church Lane, Burford OX18 4RY

The Socialist Party will have a stall at this event.

### LONDON • 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.

### Sunday 26 May 3pm • Subject to be announced

Socialist Party premises, 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN (nearest tube: Clapham North). Preceded by stall from 2pm.

### 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.

# Trump v the Binman

RECENTLY, AT enormous risk to himself, a binman rescued a family and their dog from a burning house in the West Midlands. He had a cup of tea in Greggs and then carried on with his job ([tinyurl.com/575554vj](http://tinyurl.com/575554vj)).

How does this tie in with Donald Trump? Well, a recent *Guardian* article by George Monbiot pointed to the theory among psychologists that human beings can be broadly divided into two groups – ‘extrinsics’ and ‘intrinsic’ ([tinyurl.com/2vpxzbeh](http://tinyurl.com/2vpxzbeh)). What they mean by ‘extrinsics’ are Trump types – people attached to ‘prestige, status, image, fame, power and wealth’. They are a group that tends to ‘objectify and exploit other people’, to be rude and aggressive, to ‘have little interest in cooperation or community’, to dismiss social needs and care of the environment, and at the same time to be likely to exhibit ‘frustration, dissatisfaction, stress, anxiety, anger and compulsive behaviour’. ‘Intrinsic’ on the other hand are ‘inclined towards empathy, intimacy and self-acceptance’, open to change and reasoned argument and ‘protective of other people and the living world’.

## Winners and losers

If this theory is valid – and it does seem to correspond very much to the reality we see around us – how is it that different groups of human beings can be so different? How is it that Donald Trump can seem so manifestly uncaring about anyone other than himself while a binman can risk his life to save the lives of others who are complete strangers? Monbiot points out that, according to the theory, we are not born with either of these tendencies but rather pick them up from the environment- personal, social and political- in which we are nurtured. So ‘if people live under a cruel and grasping political system, they tend to normalise and internalise it, absorbing its dominant claims and translating them into extrinsic values’. In the same way, if they live in an environment ‘in which social norms are characterised by kindness, empathy, community and freedom from want and fear, their values are likely to shift towards the intrinsic end’.

This would seem to account for the widespread support enjoyed by an openly ‘bully’ politician like Trump, who divides humans into ‘winners and

losers’, among not just some of the wealthy in the US but also among some of the poorest, most insecure and disadvantaged members of that society. Such people will blame their plight and vent their anger and frustration either on those they see as slightly better off than themselves or on those even worse off than themselves who they see as somehow sponging off society by claiming ‘welfare’. And they will be particularly hostile towards the ‘intrinsic’, those behaving in a kind, cooperative way, labelling them as ‘woke’ or ‘snowflakes’ or the like. Monbiot suggests that, in the US in particular, this mentality has been engendered by ‘toxic myths about failure and success’ and the importance given to the idea that wealth needs to be acquired at any cost, solely by individual endeavour and without concern for other people or for social or environmental consequences (the so-called ‘American Dream’).

The same kind of mentality is of course widely found, if perhaps in a less overt and brutal way, in other countries too, subject as they are to the competitive ethic and the ‘sink or swim’ imperative of capitalism. In fact, everywhere we look, the system we live under pressures workers (ie, those who form the vast majority of all populations) to ‘get on’, to make money, to compete against others and, if necessary, to blame others if they fail to do that satisfactorily.

## In trouble

Yet, as this column has often pointed out and is demonstrated by such acts as the rescue by the binman, people are on the whole powerfully inclined not to behave in selfish, self-seeking ways but to assist, support and be cooperative with their fellow humans where and when necessary. Such interactions are absolutely intrinsic to everyday life, be it in such everyday acts as giving others right of way in traffic, making contributions to and organising food banks, doing simple favours for others, but also in helping others who suddenly and unexpectedly find themselves ‘in trouble’. The fact is that we, as humans, will usually choose to help others in a worse situation than ourselves, if only because it makes us feel better about ourselves and, as has been shown by scientific research, gives us higher levels of well-being. Such examples of help and cooperation without the prospect of material gain or



advantage abound but are taken for granted and are rarely reported or commented on precisely because they are so numerous, so common and such a perpetual feature of everyday life. Of course, human beings are also capable of the most horrendous antisocial acts, which may involve selfishness and brutality, but these are not the norm. This is so much the case that, when they happen, they stand out, leading to the ‘if it bleeds, it leads’ scenario whereby we seem to be constantly bombarded by ‘bad news’.

## Ultra-social

This says something about how human beings, though their behaviour is extremely flexible, are fundamentally ‘ultra-social’ creatures, who, given the opportunity, are only too ready to make common cause with their fellow creatures unless influenced into doing otherwise by circumstances or deeply embedded conditioning. This is the default, that, despite contrary ideas common in the past, is now widely accepted by those qualified in the subject of human behaviour. Of course, as exemplified by the Trump cult in the US, where the conditions of society push many people into behaving in unkind, uncooperative ways and in seeking to maximise their own self-interest, there is still a long way to go. Yet in a society organised in an entirely different way from the current capitalist one, it is clear that people will not have the slightest problem in behaving as ‘intrinsic’, ie, in operating in a harmonious and cooperative way most if not all of the time. In such a society, a socialist one of common ownership, free access to all goods and services and democratic organisation, the natural human tendency to share and cooperate will surely be its guiding principle.

**HOWARD MOSS**