

THE

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SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

Ukraine war: end in sight?



Also: The polarisation of politics
How we live and how we might live
(part 7)
A reasonable journey

Computer says 'SPGB'
Thoughts on money
Preemptive correction
Hacksaw Ridge



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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'

An end to the war in Ukraine?

HOPEFULLY THE war in Ukraine will end quickly. Ideally, it should end immediately and unconditionally — in the interest of humanity in general and the working class in particular, the killing and destruction should just stop — but this is not how wars end. Unless one side wins outright, there are negotiations based on the perceived balance of force between the two sides.

Russia claims the main issue at stake in Ukraine has been whether or not the country should join NATO, with the rulers of the Russian state arguably perceiving this as an existential threat in the same way that in 1962 the rulers of the USA saw the installation of nuclear missiles in Cuba. On that occasion Russia backed down and the crisis was defused. In 2022 the US and its allies in NATO refused to back down. So did Russia and they decided to invade.

Normally, wars are fought to win but the US declared that its aim was limited to weakening Russia by forcing it to divert resources into fighting a war without end. Russia has been waging war to win, perhaps not necessarily to conquer the whole of Ukraine but certainly to conquer as much as it can along its frontier and to

force Ukraine to sue for peace.

Russia would certainly like to capture Odessa and Kharkov too but it looks as if they will have to settle for the 20 percent of mineral-rich Ukraine that they have already taken, if only on condition that what's left of Ukraine doesn't join NATO (or, ideally, the EU either). A block on NATO membership seems to be what Trump has offered Putin as the basis for a settlement, which has come as shock both to the Ukrainian government and the European members of NATO.

The European leaders were also shocked at the US exploiting Ukraine's weakness to extract free access to rare earth metals there. They saw this as 'transactional' and said NATO was about 'defending democracy' rather than such sordid considerations. Maybe NATO is not primarily economic but this was no shock to socialists. It's how we would expect a state engaged in the competitive struggle for profits to behave given half a chance,

Why this change of US attitude? We can only speculate. America seems to have decided that Ukraine's joining NATO is not after all that strategically important from its

point of view, especially when it has other, more important strategic considerations in East Asia and the South China Sea and has arguably been pulling back from many of its foreign commitments for years, the latest being Afghanistan.

Since the complete defeat of the USSR in the Cold War, represented by its break-up into independent states at the end of December 1991, what was left as Russia has not constituted too much of a threat to the US as such. No doubt there are revanchists among Russia's ruling elite who dream of re-incorporating the parts of the former USSR such as the Baltic statelets, but not necessarily to overrun the whole of the rest of Europe, as claimed by war-mongering generals and fabulating politicians.

The US has decided that that's not its problem but Europe's to deal with — and, more particularly, to pay for. European governments, including Labour here, are to increase military spending. Another example of how capitalism wastes resources that, in a different world, could be used to meet people's needs.

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Panic attacks

THE LAST ripples seem to have faded away from what in January was widely viewed as an extinction-level asteroid impact on the US AI industry. Frantic stock-market gamblers fled in response to what one prominent Silicon Valley venture capitalist described as AI's Sputnik moment.

Chinese AI firm DeepSeek certainly threw a big rock in the investor pond by approximating US-backed generative-AI capability at a tenth of the usual cost and, what's more, using old chips and comparatively little training data to do it. Chipmaker Nvidia, formerly rated as the world's most valuable company, suddenly didn't look quite so mission-critical, neither did its bleeding-edge and extortionately priced chips, and neither did the AI companies relying on them.

But a few days later the story had sunk like the proverbial stone, as it became clear that the world hadn't ended. Was the DeepSeek system even as good as early news reports made it out to be? Never mind that it refused to answer questions about Tiananmen Square or make assessments of Xi Jinping's qualities as leader, a rather churlish objection given that no Chinese AI was ever going to do that. According to counter-misinformation website NewsGuard, DeepSeek was the second-worst performer in a test of 11 chatbots, with a false-claim rate of 30 percent and an unsatisfactory-answer rate of 53 percent (Reuters, 29 January- [tinyurl.com/5n7uedwz](https://www.tinyurl.com/5n7uedwz)).

Even so, the panic was almost palpable. Tech pundits had pretty much written off Chinese AI after OpenAI's ChatGPT launched in November 2022. Even as late as 2024, most thought the Chinese were, if not decades, then probably years behind in AI, partly thanks to a rigidly enforced US government export ban on new chips to China. But in December, when DeepSeek released their V3 Gen-AI version, it

became obvious that Chinese firms were perhaps only weeks behind. Then on 20 January, not accidentally the same day Trump took office, DeepSeek dropped their free R1 chatbot, a new generation 'reasoning' module that self-checks for accuracy. In just seven days this became the most downloaded free mobile app in the US, surpassing ChatGPT and sending Nvidia stocks into freefall.

But the AI dinosaurs survived the experience. Elon Musk, taking time out from his frenzied rampage through the US government civil service to 'delete entire agencies', still had enough confidence in, or fear of, OpenAI in February to offer to buy it out for nearly \$100bn (that's billion). You don't front that kind of dosh for an obsolete company. Unfazed, OpenAI boss Sam Altman tartly responded by offering to buy Twitter off Musk for a tenth of the price.

One other group of people who must have been panicking at the DeepSeek R1 release were the Taiwanese, at least those of them not keen on being invaded by the totalitarian regime currently brow-beating them from across the Straits. As the near-monopoly of global chip production in Taipei is the only thing keeping US interests locked in, it is also the only thing keeping China from invading.

Before DeepSeek, serious questions were already being asked about AI, not least the eye-watering expense, and the environmental cost in terms of increasing carbon emissions. A 2024-5 FT TechTonic podcast series explored the possibility that the AI fizz was about to fizzle out because the sector was overhyped and overpriced and there were no obvious game-changing real-world applications for it beyond mundane and low-paid customer service roles, with the result that Silicon Valley venture capitalists were becoming increasingly skittish at the prospect of yet another AI 'winter'.

Deepseek has impacted a landscape that was already convulsing for other reasons. Trump's new (dis)order is ripping up the 'Green new scam', in turn provoking a tidal wave of carbon-pledge-breaking by governments and fossil-fuel companies who always knew their climate targets were unachievable and are now keen to downgrade or dump them entirely, and get back to the real business of making money. The Net-Zero Banking Alliance has collapsed after exits by Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley and four other major US banks. One of the world's largest climate investor initiatives, Net Zero Asset Managers, has abandoned their net-zero investment plans. And the big AI firms are also ditching their net-zero targets as they find themselves locked in a death-race to develop the app to kill all killer apps, Artificial General Intelligence ([tinyurl.com/3z5fbuf7](https://www.tinyurl.com/3z5fbuf7)).

Whether AGI is even possible is highly debatable, given there's no consensus on what intelligence actually is. But AI firms can't worry about that. What they worry about is being left behind, especially by the Chinese, and hang the carbon consequences. In the words of Hany Farid, digital forensics expert at UC, Berkeley: 'Somebody asked me the other day if I'm scared of AI, and I said no, but I am scared of capitalism... I think capitalism is going to do what capitalism does, which is burn the place to the ground in order to win' (FT TechTonic: The Trouble with Deepfakes- [tinyurl.com/2yk5pbs9](https://www.tinyurl.com/2yk5pbs9)).

With the speed of development even scaring AI 'godfathers' like Geoffrey Hinton, many believe a Douglas Adams' style thinking machine cannot be far away, with unknowable consequences for humanity's future. A chorus of demands has arisen for AI regulation, but last month's summit on AI in Paris ended with US vice-president Vance rejecting 'excessive regulation', and even the UK refusing to sign the regulatory declaration.

In the unlikely event AGI ever does become a real thing, one wonders what conclusion it would draw from a global system that threatens to destroy its host planet for the gratification of a tiny minority of super-rich individuals. What course of action might it suggest to reverse this unsustainable, obscene and suicidal trajectory? If it did conclude that humans would be better off abolishing the capitalist system of production and stewarding the Earth's resources in cooperative common ownership, we can be pretty sure its proprietors would have a panic attack and pull the plug. Unluckily for them, they can't pull the plug on the working class.

PJS



Dear Editor...

The polarisation of politics

THE DIALECTIC taking place among political opponents at the present time is that there is a polarisation and a narrowing of political thought taking place in the UK. Put simply, we are seeing a decrease in compromise and increased partisanship. Will this lead to a more tribalised political system as some political commentators have suggested?

In the UK since Brexit there has no doubt taken place a fragmentation of politics and right wing populist views taking charge of the narrative.

Mr Farage has been the main proponent of a populist free market economy encouraging the idea that we should engage in a society of competitive individuals vying for a higher proportion of the goods available in the land. Some kind of anarchic free for all society that ignores the welfare of the people and encourages fierce competition with no moral arbiters.

With the rise of marginal parties that, in my view only offer a very short lifespan, it is a grim foreboding for the future. Socialism seems to have taken a back seat at the present time. With the arrival of revisionist Keir Starmer, the Labour party lacks the bravery to attack free enterprise head on. Public ownership is still very fragmented and piecemeal.

Farage and his cohorts continue to feed the electorate with misinformation, racial prejudice and bigotry. They continue to foster the political agenda with an attack on the use of rules in a free market economy as it, in their opinion limits among other things the freedom of speech. Ignoring the facts that rules act as a protective cocoon for the collective and limit greedy individuals from appropriating all that is available.

There is also a view from liberal commentators that there is an oligarchy taking shape. And this oligarchy with all its wealth, power and influence will eventually threaten democracy.

Is this however just another example of pop up populist fear mongering? I think so. In the UK Nigel Farage, the so called 'Man of the People,' the messiah in waiting is without doubt a dangerous opponent of socialism. Although a racist and fear monger, he is no political slouch.

An educated raconteur with plenty of political muscle. He is very persuasive in that 'boyish' tone of innocence he portrays to the gallery.

But his reform party in my view is an enigma. It will not last the distance. It has no real substance. It can be viewed as some kind of short fix that will only satisfy the electorate for a short while.

The impulse will stutter and die out. It just does not have the bedrock of support to be a lasting political party. It is no tour de force.

But having said that, they are perversely a real and present danger. The narrative in the political cauldron at the moment is change and not for the better. The right wing is attempting to batter doors down.

The rich and powerful would have us believe that ruthless competition is the way forward. Jim Ratcliffe, a part shareholder in Manchester United in is search for that ultra-competitive spirit is tearing the club apart by ignoring the needs of the workforce. Socialism needs to be more aggressive in its defence of equality and fairness.

I would take Thomas Moore's pragmatic view of socialism which would be based on the practical considerations of socialism and as Marx stated, with the rise of technological development's the modes of production change over time creating new and revolutionary structures.

In the UK we have a truly diverse culture and I would hope that this will produce a profound cultural shift and a more progressive society which will see the disappearance of class divisions. As a last thought could AI have a dramatic effect on the conditions of our social relations.

BARRY WATTS, Dover

Reply:

You make a lot of separate points so we can't really address all of them. It's undoubtedly true that in the US and Europe the political pendulum has swung towards the right in recent years, as rocketing prices and unaffordable housing have put a squeeze on workers, which together with wars and climate change don't offer young people much hope for the future.

In such dire times, it's common to think

less about progressive ideas and more about loss aversion, and never mind other problems. Ably assisted by social media, the right has amplified the general unease into a clickbait hysteria of xenophobia, anti-wokism and conspiracy yarns which drowns out adult debate and promotes gleeful mediocrities like Farage who know how to exploit it. They don't need arguments as long as they get attention. And having no coherent political or ideological theory is not a weakness but an advantage for such 'pop-up populists', because it means they can rebrand any time they like.

The left is in a state of despair and disrepair. Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn were unable to turn back the capitalist clock with their supposedly radical state-ownership programmes. Anti or post-capitalists, overlooked since Occupy, fail to be heard above the noise.

But the right is also fragmented and confused. Some hanker for a ruthless, stateless Adam Smith parody that never could feasibly exist. Many want a return to 19th century protectionism. Trump meanwhile is going in contradictory directions with new isolationist tariffs combined with expansionist rhetoric, prompting dark forebodings of a future global war.

Is the new oligarchy threatening democracy, you ask, as if 'democracy' is what we've got? The rich do seem to be enjoying a new Gilded Age, but just look how they bend the knee to Trump, to Putin, to Xi. That's not the act of invincible plutocrats. They fear the state's power to break them if it chooses. And they need the state's power to maintain order, without which they can't continue to profit.

Is all this bad for socialism's prospects? The barrage of soundbite and counter-soundbite is certainly a source of general confusion, but workers' collective interest remains crystal clear for anyone to see. You hint that future technology might create new structures through which to challenge the system. Possibly so, but it doesn't take technology to make a revolution. Only we workers can do that.—*Editors.*

Who benefits from tariffs?

'TARIFF', TRUMP has repeated many times with typical exaggeration, 'is the most beautiful word in the dictionary'. He seems to see it as a cure-all that will Make American capitalist manufacturing industry Great Again. This may just have been crude vote-catching but this illusion evidently caught the votes of quite a few workers.

A tariff is a tax on imported goods and is usually introduced to protect the profits of domestic producers of the same goods. These will have been complaining of being out-competed by 'cheap imports' and 'unfair competition' and will have lobbied politicians to do something about this. The tariff is paid by the businesses that import and sell the goods in question (it is not paid by the country from which the goods are imported, as Trump sometimes implies). In the first instance it is the importers who will be impacted. Because they will be making a smaller profit, they will import less and, in accordance with the law of supply and demand, the price of the good on which the tariff has been imposed will go up, whether imported or produced domestically. This will make domestic producers more competitive and so enable them to maintain or restore their profits.

This is obviously something that

will appeal to the domestic producers concerned but what about other sections of the capitalist class? If the tariff-hit goods are sold to capitalist firms as materials or components for what they produce and sell, these firms will not be so happy as this will increase their costs. If they are consumer goods sold to workers this will increase the pressure on employers generally to pay higher wages (not to increase living standards, but simply to maintain them). If the consumer good is part of the basket of goods used to compile the consumer prices index, whose increase is regarded as a measure of 'inflation', then inflation in this sense will go up.

In terms of employment, the workers in the protected industry will keep their jobs for a little longer before automation catches up with them. On the other hand, some workers in other industries will lose theirs.

The overall effect of imposing a tariff will be to raise some prices and not just of the goods on which the tariff is levied. The main beneficiaries will be the domestic producers of the goods in question. Their profits will be 'protected'.

However, there are other considerations. To be effective in protecting the profits of a particular sector, a tariff needs to

be imposed not just on the good coming from one country but on it coming from any country; otherwise the importers of the good could still import it. Which will be why Trump has talked of imposing a tariff on some goods (steel and aluminium) wherever they come from. Another complication is that the country singled out will likely impose counter-tariffs which would harm sectors producing for export. The EU and China will be tougher nuts to crack than Canada or Mexico.

Although Trump gave the impression on the campaign trail that American manufacturing industry will expand and thrive behind protective tariff walls, his first use of tariffs has been as a bargaining tactic. To impose them and then open negotiations with the other capitalist state about what it needs to do to get them removed.

Tariff protection has unintended side-effects and, in any event, does not benefit all sections of capitalist business in the country imposing the tariffs. The working class of the country as a whole is not affected much either way, if only because their wages are tied to the cost of living and tend to go up or down as it does. It is not a working-class issue.

What is Marxism

Karl Marx (and Friedrich Engels) gave us a method for explaining how society functions, based on materialist principles and analysis of the economic framework within which goods and services are produced. This body of work has been summed up as 'Marxist'. Since the 19th Century, these theories have been interpreted by countless historians, economists, sociologists, philosophers and political theorists and activists. Their work too has been

called 'Marxist'. Where does an interpretation become a misinterpretation, and how can we judge what's accurate?

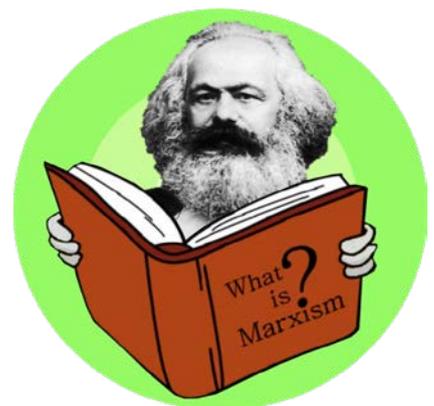
The Socialist Party's weekend of talks and discussion considers how Marxism has developed and its influence today, and the extent to which it is an essential part of the case we put for a marketless, stateless society of free access and production for use that we call socialism.

The Socialist Party's Summer School 22nd-24th August 2025

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

Full residential cost (including accommodation and meals Friday evening to Sunday afternoon) is £150; the concessionary rate is £80.

Book online at worldsocialism.org/spgb/summer-school-2025/ or send a cheque (payable to the Socialist Party of Great Britain) with your contact details to Summer School, The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 7UN. Day visitors are welcome, but please e-mail for details in advance. Email enquiries to spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk.



Halo Halo

BABIES DON'T enter the world going 'Yay, I'm an [insert one of the 4000 religions here]'. Children growing up believing all sorts of that nonsense is down to nurture, not nature. Fortunate are the children whose carers doesn't indoctrinate them into hokum.

My parents were not religious. My mother grew up in a Methodist household and her sister was devoted all of her life. Time has made me regret not having a conversation with them both to ascertain the difference in their views and why both my parents eschewed religion.

There was a small chapel about a quarter of a mile from where we lived. Given its size I surmise that it may have belonged to a small sect. A neighbour's daughter, I'm guessing aged around 19, somehow persuaded my parents to send me, around eight or nine years old, to the Sunday School there. I don't blame my parents. Perhaps they wanted a little peace and

quiet from a demanding child.

Time has dimmed the recollection as to how long I endured this. I do recall that after a number of weeks children there were given a religious book. A bribe? I was a bibliophile even at that age. It was upon the receipt of my second 'gift' that I informed my parents I would no longer be wasting my Sundays by sitting through such nonsense.

The reason? Having been given the same book twice. I still can remember the outrage I felt. A similar outrage remains with me for having unfairly been given a detention in senior school. Speaking of which, not even the compulsory daily school assemblies consisting of hymns and a recitation of the Lord's Prayer changed my views of religion. Perhaps nature imbues individuals with a natural disinclination toward fairy tales after all.

I once had a partner who, like me, wasn't religious, but who liked the spectacle

of church theatre on occasions such as Christmas. Her best friend, known since childhood days, had a boyfriend who was also, like her, of a Christian bent. My nature towards other people always having been of a non-discriminatory sort this didn't prevent a social relationship developing.

At Christmas time, after spending a long convivial evening in a pub, we would go to the midnight service at the non-Catholic church which these two individuals attended. My non-religious partner enjoyed the theatre of the occasion. Keep your partner happy, right? Now it would be different.

Around the third year of this ritual, she told me that we wouldn't be doing the same that year as her friend had informed her that the presence of two atheists, as we were known to be, was 'upsetting' to the two Christians at such a 'sacred' event. Outrage kicked in again. I was indifferent as to whether we went or not but 'friends' don't behave like that to one another. She was more forgiving and remained friends with them. Love god or else!

DC

Tiny tips

KYLIE JENNER, the 27-year-old billionaire and car enthusiast, was recently spotted with her sister Kendall Jenner driving her \$3 million Bugatti Chiron in Beverly Hills. Known for her impressive car collection, Kylie gave fans a rare glimpse of herself behind the wheel rather than posing next to her fleet ([Yahoo](#), tinyurl.com/mufsn6b4).

'Everything outside the Christian framework — including secular music, television, and books — was discouraged. Just as I signed multiple purity pledges throughout my preteen and teen years, promising to avoid not just sex, but even impure thoughts, we were taught to practice absolute abstinence from dangerous ideas' ([AlterNet](#), tinyurl.com/bdhxfur4).

While official data is still somewhat sketchy, it's estimated that 12,000 illegal transplants are performed annually, about 10% of the total number of transplants conducted each year. The organ trade is immensely profitable, generating between \$840 million to \$1.7 billion in revenue for

a relatively small number of traffickers, according to estimates compiled in 2017. Organ trafficking survives, in part, because the demand from affluent consumers in the advanced capitalist West is so high and the legal supply of organs — primarily (about 80%) kidneys, but also lungs, livers and cornea — barely keeps pace. Many people wait at least two years to qualify to receive an organ transplant legally and thousands die every year — about 25 daily, according to the World Health Organization — because no organ becomes available in time to save them. Where do the illegally harvested organs come from? Primarily from North Africa and South Asia. Organ traffickers prey on poor and vulnerable rural dwellers, offering cash in exchange for an organ, usually a kidney ([Counterpunch](#), tinyurl.com/4k5px8cj).

This is about the Arctic. You have Russia that is trying to become king of the Arctic with 60-plus icebreakers, some of them nuclear-powered. Do you know how many we have, Jesse? We have two, and one just caught on fire. This is about critical

minerals. This is about natural resources. This is about, as the polar ice caps pull back, the Chinese are now cranking out icebreakers and pushing up there as well. So, it's oil and gas. It's our national security. It's critical minerals ([Common Dreams](#), tinyurl.com/bddxte3a).

The response provided by South Africa's elected officials has so far been both lacking and sinister. It targets migrants with few political allies in the country's fractured political scene, increasingly characterized by populism, highlighting problems without solutions ([Geopolitical Intelligence Services AG](#), tinyurl.com/3b8wu5p5).

As long as the capitalist system continues, we will never be able to escape from the shackles of economic crisis, war and massacre, ecological destruction, and workers' sacrifice. The only solution is the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system and its replacement with communism, a society in which the means of production are no longer in the hands of capitalists or the state, but are socialised, in which production and distribution are in harmony with humanity and nature ([Controversies](#), tinyurl.com/ywj4csde).
(These links are provided for information and don't necessarily represent our point of view.)

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

LONDON

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

MIDLANDS

West Midlands regional branch. Meets last Sat. 3pm (check before attending). Contact: Stephen Shapton. 07309090205. Email: stephenshapton@yahoo.co.uk.

NORTH

North East Regional branch.

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

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

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

Bolton. Contact: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589.

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

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

Yorkshire Regional branch.

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

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

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

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

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

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

spgbsw@gmail.com

Brighton. Contact: Anton Pruden, anton@pruden.me

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IRELAND

Cork. Contact: Kevin Cronin, 5 Curragh Woods, Frankfield, Cork. 021 4896427. mariekev@eircom.net

SCOTLAND

Edinburgh. Contact: Fraser Anderson f_raz_1@hotmail.com

Glasgow branch. Meet 3rd Monday of the month at 7pm on Zoom. Branch Social 2nd Saturday of the month at 1pm in The Atholl Arms Pub, Glasgow City Centre. Contact: Paul Edwards by e-mail: rainbow3@btopenworld.com or mobile: 07484 717893

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

Ayrshire. Contact: Paul Edwards 07484717893. rainbow3@btopenworld.com.

WALES

South Wales branch (Cardiff and Swansea)

Meets 2nd Monday 7.30pm on JITSi.

(meet.jit.si/spgbsouthwales3).

Contact: botterillr@gmail.com or

Geoffrey Williams, 19 Baptist Well Street, Waun Wen, Swansea SA1 6FB. 01792 643624

Central branch

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

Contact: spgb.cbs@worldsocialism.org

INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS

AFRICA

Kenya. Contact: Patrick Ndege, PO Box 13627-00100, GPO, Nairobi

Zambia. Contact: Kephias Mulenga, PO Box 280168, Kitwe.

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Straits and narrow



Credit: PLA

TAIWAN IS an island about a hundred miles from the Chinese mainland, across the Taiwan Strait, and is officially the Republic of China. Its population is just under 24 million, its land area about the same as the Netherlands, and it is ranked 22nd in the list of the world's largest economies. In particular it is the leader in the manufacturing of semiconductors, which are used in computers, smartphones and many other products. It is a big trading partner for a number of countries, with exports massively exceeding imports. The US, for instance, has a trade deficit with Taiwan of around \$50bn a year. The UK, however, exports about £5bn a year to Taiwan, and imports around £3.6bn; the biggest exports from Britain are beverages and tobacco, also cars, while the imports are headed by office machinery and metal goods, and nearly £2bn of financial services are 'exported' each year from the UK.

Taiwan was once joined to the Asian mainland. The so-called indigenous people there, who speak a variety of languages, number around six hundred thousand. Over the centuries Taiwan was visited at various times by people from China and Japan. In the sixteenth century Portuguese sailors termed it Ilha Formosa ('beautiful island'), and it was sometimes known as Formosa. In the following century the Dutch East India Company controlled part of the island and encouraged Chinese farmers to migrate there and cultivate rice and sugar. Later in the seventeenth century the Qing dynasty rulers of China annexed the island, which was again invaded by

Japan in the late nineteenth century. From 1895 Taiwan was ceded to Japan after a war, and much industrialisation took place. In 1949 the Nationalist Party was defeated by the Chinese 'Communist' Party in the civil war and escaped to Taiwan.

Nationalist rule was extremely vicious and authoritarian, with martial law in force until 1987 and political opposition suppressed by means of imprisonment and execution. After that a transition to capitalist-style democracy took place, and links with mainland China (the so-called People's Republic) increased. Taiwan businesses have invested over \$200bn in China, and trade across the straits is around \$160bn a year, with China being Taiwan's biggest trading partner. Taiwan has over fifty dollar billionaires, the richest being Barry Lam, who is worth \$11.7bn. In 2024 the combined wealth of the top fifty increased from \$155bn to \$174bn (forbes.com). At the same time, there are officially 400,000 unemployed and a large number of homeless people (drastically undercounted in government statistics).

At the end of last year, China's leader Xi Jinping said in a speech that 'The people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are one family. No one can sever our family bonds, and no one can stop the historical trend of national reunification.' Over the centuries, the borders of China have expanded massively from the original area around the valleys of the Yellow and Yangzi Rivers. They now include the so-called autonomous regions of Tibet, Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang (which means 'new frontier'). But as for the idea of 'one

family', this is just nationalistic nonsense.

China's interest in Taiwan is for two reasons. One is financial or industrial, with Taiwan being economically very important in a number of areas, as mentioned above. The other is strategic, with Taiwan an important location in the South China Sea and potentially a significant part of China's maritime empire. The Chinese government views Taiwan as a province of China, which will one day be re-united with it. However, there is a Taiwan independence movement, which believes it should be an independent state, which in effect would be a formalisation of the current situation.

Large Chinese naval forces have been assembled around Taiwan, and the use of force to achieve unification is still in principle on the table. China's armed forces are far more powerful than those of Taiwan, though any invasion would be likely to be costly in terms of lives and also expensive in terms of materiel. The US Council on Foreign Relations states that 'To invade Taiwan, China would have to conduct an extraordinarily complex military operation, synchronising air, land, and sea power as well as electronic and cyberwarfare'. Which does not mean it will never happen, though. The invasion of an offshore island would inevitably be more problematic than the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

This is clearly a case of a very powerful capitalist country, one that is still expanding its economic and military might, seeking to conquer another territory as a way of increasing its power and influence.

PAUL BENNETT

How we live and how we might live (part 7)

AMONG THOSE who criticise the idea of a society of free access and voluntary association are people who insist that human beings are naturally lazy and must be induced to work. Capitalism's wages system, they say, is just such an inducement. Without it, or something similar, our 'natural' preference for leisure would dramatically reduce the time we spent on producing the goods we need, threatening our quality of life, and possibly leading to social collapse.

This reasoning rests on yet another version of our old friend 'human nature', which can be adapted, independent of evidence, to justify pretty much any required conclusion. In some versions of this argument we humans are so naturally workshy that without incentives forcing us to produce we would all, in the words of one pundit, rush to the coast, unpack our mats and inflatable lilos, and spend our days lying on the beach. And if we pushed this reasoning to its rarely acknowledged conclusion, it is there that our slowly starving bodies would be barbecued by the sun because no one was at work growing food or manufacturing sun block. These kinds of arguments should lead us to question whether those who champion them have ever bothered to look around themselves at the way capitalist society works. Have they not noticed, perhaps, that the vast majority of working people not only prefer to work rather than starve or live on derisory welfare benefits, but prefer to work even under the oppressive conditions of a capitalist wage relation? Even the least observant are surely capable of realising that if we really were suicidally lazy by nature or preferred penury to work, that introducing a wage or some kind of rationing system would do nothing to alter that.

But let's stop there and come down to earth. Are human beings genuinely lazy? The answer is, yes, we are. To a degree. Biologists tell us that laziness is part of our evolutionary inheritance. Natural selection has designed us not to squander our energy unnecessarily, so the desire to slouch on a couch or relax on a beach when our other needs have been temporarily satisfied is part of our survival strategy. There is, however, more to survival than conserving energy. Idleness will not feed and clothe us, or keep us safe: threats to our wellbeing produce anxiety; hunger and thirst nag at us to find food; cold drives us to seek shelter; we desire sex and social activities; physical movement is invigorating; success and achievement are exhilarating. And too



much of doing nothing is frankly boring. The motivating desires that drive us to provide for our needs are built into us, and no extrinsic social arrangements like wages systems are needed to force us to do what we do naturally. Historically, exchange relations like wage systems did not enter into our societies until about 3,000 BCE. If we needed them to ensure our survival, then our species would have become extinct millennia ago.

What about the free rider?

The viability of a society based on common ownership and free access does not turn on questions of 'human nature' but on those of social organisation. Some animals like our evolutionary cousin the orangutan are solitary and live largely self-sufficient lives. Each animal acquires its own food and consumes only what it has individually acquired. We humans, however, are a social species. We produce what we need collectively and then share it out according to some system. A genuine question therefore arises: if, in a post-capitalist society, work is voluntary, but individuals are free to take from the common store, what is to stop lazy or antisocial individuals among us living off the work of others to some degree, or perhaps even entirely? This is the free rider argument, one that we hear a good deal of from conservative apologists for capitalism. So we have to ask, would socialism encourage free riders? And if so, would it then become unsustainable?

When job seekers apply for capitalist jobs, the wage offered is a definite factor in their calculations. In a society where a worker's quality of life, status, power

and even survival are all closely related to monetary income, then, other things being equal, who would not take a better-paid job over a lower-paid one? Once the job contract is signed, however, and an income is secured, multiple lines of research show that neither the motivation to work nor the quality of the work done bear any relation to the wage paid. In fact, there is evidence to show that when higher extrinsic rewards are offered in the form of bonuses, productivity and the quality of work falls, not rises.

So, what is going on here? It seems that once our basic needs are met and our lives are somewhat secure, at least for the moment, what really motivates our actions are not extrinsic 'inducements' like money, but intrinsic rewards that come from engaging in the activity itself and from the pro-social conditions under which it is performed. In the 1990s, for instance, labour shortages in the high tech industries gave workers sufficient bargaining power to determine their own working conditions. They chose to eliminate bonus schemes which set individuals in competition with one another, demanded hands-off management and arranged to work in non-hierarchical, self-organising teams.

And this is entirely in line with the evidence. Research in social psychology has repeatedly shown that what motivates us are tasks that are interesting, that are purposeful and engaging, that give us a significant degree of control over them, and that allow us to apply and master our skills. Beyond a basic minimum, most of us dislike competitive stress, and we resist being controlled by others. These are conditions that, while generally unmet under capitalism's competitive and

profit-maximising property system, are built into the basic structure of a society of free access and free association, or can be easily achieved within it. A self-governing society of this sort therefore has all the qualities required to engage us in productive activity and minimise our resistance to it.

Capitalism: work as sacrifice

Does that mean there will be no 'lazy' people or free riders in such a society? Probably not. Research in social psychology also shows us that the capacity for sustained work varies widely between individuals. If this is true, then the question we must ask is this: would supporting a percentage of people who choose to make little or no contribution to society pose a problem?

Even asking this question is likely to raise some hackles. We know how resentment can be stoked by stories of 'benefit scroungers', or of individuals who don't pull their weight and shift the burden of work onto others. Even when complaints of this kind are misdirected, as they can often be, they are psychologically understandable. Humans have very sensitive antennae for what they perceive to be unfair practices or behaviour. Game theory has shown repeatedly that individuals across many cultures will often act against their own best interests in order to punish others whom they believe are acting unfairly.

So why exactly do we become so exercised about free riders? In a capitalist system where everyone is forced to live in economic isolation from one another, each in their individual property bubbles, there is a severely diminished sense of communal purpose and communal achievement. We do not contribute our

labour as part of a community of people engaged in community projects. Instead, we compete with one another as isolated individuals to sell our ability to work in exchange for the ability to live. And our ability to work, once sold, is no longer ours. We must relinquish control over it and over our lives to employers whose interests and purposes are not our own and who stand in relation to us, not as an 'us' but as a 'them'.

Under this system our ability to work is equated with money, and money is the necessary means by which, in a capitalist world, we secure not just our survival and that of our family, but also our comfort, our social status, our security (minimal as it often is) and our ability to participate fully in our social world. Capitalism transforms most of the population into employees and turns the expenditure of their mental and physical energies into precisely quantified labour-time. Our individual work ability acquires the status of a valuable commodity to be sold to another in exchange for life. Work becomes a sacrifice. Any loss in our labour power or what we can get in exchange for it compromises our ability to support ourselves and our families. So the idea that other workers are living off our labour is therefore perceived as a threat or as a form of theft. Under capitalist conditions, our resentment of free riders is explicable, but it is not universal.

Everybody entitled to a share

We can gain insight into this by looking at how people relate to one another in societies where there is no property system, no enforced work regime, and no external incentives like wages. Immediate-return hunter-gatherer societies are as old as humanity itself. In our remote past, they

were widespread and perhaps universal. A few have persisted down to today and have been well studied by anthropologists since the middle of the 1960s. Even though returning to their way of life would be neither possible nor desirable for us today, the structure of their societies has elements of free access, and they can teach us significant lessons about human behaviour under these conditions.

Free riders are not unknown in these societies, but they are few and, more importantly, their existence is neither concerning to them nor is it stigmatised. Everyone has an absolute entitlement to a share of what has been collectively produced irrespective of their individual contribution to producing it. This is a wholly different mindset from the one we find in our own property-directed society. The same attitude can also be seen operating from an opposite perspective. Hunting bands will often include one or two exceptional hunters, who day after day, year after year will bring back a majority of game to the camp where it is shared out among whoever is present. They do this with no discernible sense of resentment or any sense that their work is being exploited by others.

This is partly because among these peoples, work is not a commodity; it is not a bargaining chip to be exchanged for necessities like food and shelter. Hence, they make no distinction between work-time and leisure-time. Their productive and non-productive activities shade seamlessly into one another as constituent parts of their daily life. And because their social lives are not fragmented by isolated and competitive private property relations, their ordinary productive activities are experienced not only as a means to an end, but as social values, worthwhile and enjoyable in themselves.

Next month

Last month we saw that the structure of social relations of a free access society lacks the conditions that tend to promote greedy behaviour. Here we see that the same structure maximises the conditions that make productive activity attractive in its own right and encourages people to act cooperatively in the common interest. Next month we will unpack these ideas in more detail, examining many of the specific ways in which the fundamental structure of a free access society promotes productive activity ('work') and turns laziness into leisure and leisure into a social virtue.

HUD

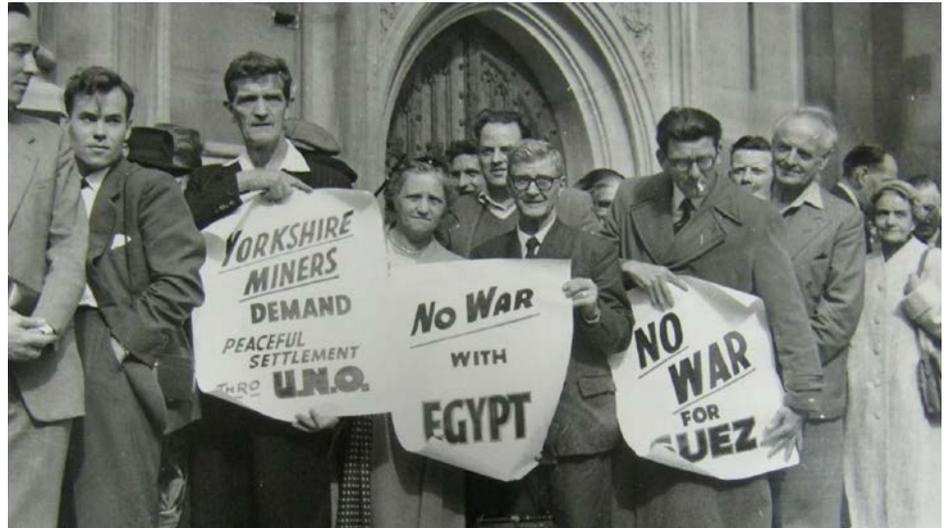


A reasonable journey

Richard Headicar describes how his socialist viewpoint on the world developed, and some of the people he met along the way.

FEW, IF any, of the guests at my 21st birthday party in 1954 would ever have imagined that their cheerful host – then a chauvinistic, Tory-supporting Christian monarchist – might someday become a member of the SPGB. Indeed, I would myself have dismissed such a proposition as utterly delusional. Yet while some may consider such a comprehensive transition remarkable, I simply regard it as nothing more than the consequence of a number of eminently reasonable decisions taken in the light of changing circumstances.

In fact, although I was blissfully unaware of it, the first seed of change had already been planted. It had been surreptitiously sown a week previously by Dr Donald Soper on my very first visit to Speakers' Corner in London's Hyde Park. Soper was one of three brilliant Methodist preachers who had held me spellbound from the age of 14 by their outstanding oratory (the others were Dr Leslie Weatherhead and Dr William Sangster, then the doyen of Westminster Central Hall and the grandmaster of the craft of homiletics). What Donald Soper said that day about the use of atomic bombs against Japan completely shocked me. He cast doubt upon the official version of events offered in justification: that doing so averted the need for an invasion, thereby saving millions of lives. So profound was my disbelief that I departed the park firmly resolved to prove him mistaken. Surely, I thought, governments – well, Western governments anyway – would never countenance such an extreme act without incontrovertible reasons. My shock was much greater, however, on discovering that not only was everything Soper said absolutely true, but there was so much more that he had omitted to say. For several years I became immersed in trying to learn all that I could about the real situation, following a trail from Gottingen (where research into nuclear physics had been carried out) to Los Alamos (in California where the first atomic bombs were developed) through to the dropping of the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Needless to say, I had not the faintest notion of where this newly-acquired



knowledge would lead me, never for a moment thinking that it would affect my political allegiance. Very soon, however, a series of events occurred that were to have a significant impact in that respect.

The first of these was the Suez crisis in 1956. Out of curiosity, I joined a march from Speakers' Corner to Trafalgar Square where a massive anti-war rally was taking place. All I knew about Egypt was that it had pyramids and that according to headlines dominating the popular press, a scheming Egyptian politician named Nasser was causing trouble. Also that the British Prime Minister, Sir Anthony Eden, seemed to be changing his mind every week about what he should do. But, once again, my political complacency was challenged when I learned of the dubious motives of the Western powers, centred on the protection of their substantial economic interests in the Middle East. One of the speakers that day was Anuerin Bevan, another compelling orator, and the passionate humanity of his words persuaded me that perhaps the Labour Party was the place to be in order to restore my faith in our political leaders...

Over the ensuing years, as a result of my ongoing investigations into the labyrinthine deceptions surrounding the manufacture and use of the first atomic bombs, I developed a particular concern regarding the rapid escalation of the arms race, especially in relation to nuclear weapons. My next reasonable step seemed only logical: on 7 February 1958, I attended the inaugural public meeting of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). Appropriately enough, given my wavering but just about extant Methodist beliefs, the meeting was convened at Westminster Central Hall.

The promising news that over 70 Labour

MPs had pledged their support to the cause provided precisely the nudge I needed to join the Labour Party. At its 1960 conference in Scarborough, a unilateralist motion proposed by Frank Cousins, the leader of the Transport and General Workers Union (T&GWU) succeeded in winning a narrow majority. It was countered immediately by Labour Party leader Hugh Gaitskell with his oft-quoted, highly emotional avowal to 'fight and fight and fight again to save the party we love'. Amazingly, it was at this point in the Labour Party's long history that a group of MPs came to the realisation that the use of the 'block vote' was 'undemocratic'. This was something the left-wing minority had been pointing out for many years, but obviously such a belated recognition of their previously disregarded submission was in no way related to the fact that, on this occasion, it had worked against the Executive Committee. Bill Rodgers, aided and abetted by four other 'moderate' MPs – Dick Taverne, Anthony Crosland, Douglas Jay and Roy Jenkins – wasted little time in forming the Campaign for Democratic Socialism (CDS). These fervent supporters of democracy, however, appeared determined to devote most of their energy in a concerted effort to portray CND as a haven for 'communists'.

A deliciously ironic confirmation that my initial optimism about the Labour Party might have been misplaced occurred on the publication of the Tory government's 1961 Statement on the Defence Estimates about military budgets. Five Labour Party MPs, including future leader Michael Foot, had the whip withdrawn (basically, expelled) for voting against the government. I was not altogether surprised, therefore, when at Labour's Blackpool conference, the combination

of a dodgy 'compromise' proposal, more skulduggery and blatant vote fiddling, by which certain Unions were permitted to reverse their original mandate, ensured that the 1960 unilateralist resolution was duly overturned. In his excellent pamphlet *Nuclear Disarmament* and the Labour Party, Tony Southall comments 'one important effect of the new events in 1960-1 was that a whole generation of CND activists shunned the party'.

So far as I was concerned, fully awakened at least to the routine misappropriation of the word 'democracy' in pursuit of political expediency, I left the Labour Party, never to return. It was a disappointment to me that so many of my unilateralist comrades chose to remain. By now thoroughly despairing of party politics and sadly disillusioned with the efficacy of 'democracy', I was increasingly drawn to the philosophy of anarchism. Nevertheless, I remained firmly wedded to the unilateralist cause while undergoing a number of shifts and slides in my personal evaluation of the official CND position. I found it too narrow and confining and much preferred the intellectually stimulating atmosphere of the divergent attitudes I encountered in the Committee of 100 direct action group. Although broadly supportive of CND's work, it remained absolutely independent and welcomed other speakers who presented the anti-war case in varying styles and from an individual perspective.

For some time I had been running a platform every Saturday and Sunday at Speakers' Corner centred around CND. I also participated regularly in acts of civil disobedience and eventually ended up in jail for protesting at the Soviet embassy. I was sentenced in October 1961, a day or so after the Labour Party's infamous Blackpool conference. Coincidentally, I was due to take part in a much-anticipated debate with an eloquent SPGB representative, Melvin Harris, but was prevented from doing so at Her Majesty's pleasure. I often wonder whether had I not been so inconsiderately detained, my SPGB membership would have been more expeditious? A much-missed friend and comrade, Edmund 'Eddie' Grant, relished relating his own version of my non-appearance, that I simply got cold feet at the last moment and deliberately chose prison as a means of avoiding the superior reasoning of the SPGB.

During the years I spent speaking in Hyde Park on behalf of CND, I'm afraid that I regarded the SPGB as an arrogant bunch who found it almost impossible to see merit in anyone but themselves. In relation to CND, although the SPGB's criticism of it was correct, the unengaging, predominantly negative

manner in which it was presented was decidedly counter-productive. Eddie Grant was one of only three members with whom I enjoyed regular dialogue in a friendly and non-judgemental manner then. Eddie, especially, was a welcome visitor to my platform and in his deceptively disarming way invariably raised thought-provoking questions.

An excellent example of Eddie's method of patient, albeit politely persistent interpolation is the imaginative ruse he employed to breach my unyielding refusal to entertain the possibility of a society devoid of money or markets. The apparent immutability of both had been deeply ingrained in my psyche from a very early age. Following the publication in 1962 of Rachel Carson's pioneering book *Silent Spring*, Eddie had listened to me orating passionately on the disastrous effect on the environment resulting from military activity and developments. On the next occasion we met he presented me with a piece of paper on which he had copied a quote from William Morris:

'Is there money to be gathered? Cut down the pleasant trees among the houses, pull down the ancient and venerable buildings for the money that a few square yards of London dirt will fetch; blacken rivers, hide the sun and poison the air with smoke or worse, and it's nobody's business to see it or mend it: that is all that modern commerce, the counting house forgetful of the workshop, will do for us herein' (The Lesser Arts) .

He also recommended two books: Morris's *News From Nowhere* and Robert Tressell's *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists*. Unfortunately, my reading at the time continued to be dominated by the tedious and complex tomes concerned with weapons and 'defence' strategies. I was also becoming increasingly interested in the ideas propounded by various philosophers. Consequently, some 20 years elapsed before I finally read Robert Tressell's heart-breaking but inspiring masterpiece and grasped that the rational implications of the William Morris quotation spoke of the necessity for a change far more fundamental than environmental intervention. It was only many years after I joined the SPGB that I finally got round to reading *News From Nowhere*, prior to a talk I gave at Fircroft on 'The Stateless Society'. With Eddie very much in mind, I included the quote he had handed me all those years previously.

It was at Speakers' Corner also that I met the Hungarian philosopher Alfred Reynolds (Reinhold), who was to prove by far the greatest influence in my life. He somehow managed to transform my thinking and attitudes without once telling me I was

'wrong' but instead patiently explaining his points of disagreement without once claiming they were 'right'. Two areas in which he shared valuable insights were the danger of 'group thinking' and the 'nature of truth'. He held much respect, even affinity, for the SPGB and claimed that at some point in the 1930s he was briefly a member, though for reasons that I recount in a brief biography I have just completed, it would have been under an assumed name that he joined.

In the mid-1980s, when I gave a talk for the Islington branch of the SPGB (prior to becoming a member myself), a telling contribution from Eddie Grant, challenging my rejection of the democratic process, removed the final obstacle to SPGB membership. I became a member of the Party in 1988 and Eddie's lucid rebuttal of my contention that the right to vote was meaningless was instrumental in that decision. Given my many conversations with him during the preceding years, my protracted journey to membership should have been much shorter. Alas, I had been too preoccupied with saving the world from perceived nuclear annihilation to pay proper attention to his wise illuminations.

In the process of change, interspersed with landmark episodes, there are countless subtle and often subconscious influences too complex and personal to properly record, and some are perhaps destined to remain unfathomable. I frequently ponder upon my own readiness to take the reasonable steps that led me to my eventual destination.

Was I born with a predisposition to more readily embrace 'logical' development? How much importance should be given to the impact the Methodist preachers had and the early lessons they conveyed to me about listening, constructing and delivering an argument and the use of humour? Would I ever have moved on at all if I had not been confronted with those dramatic political events? How much does the chance of circumstance play? Meeting with such exceptional individuals as Eddie and Alfred was most assuredly not pre-ordained.

Are we simply the products of our personal, social and political environments? If this is so, why are we not 'behaviourists' like B F Skinner? Is becoming a socialist the result of a conscious choice, and what do we mean by this? If choice is assumed, can we ever be sure it is not merely the result of circumstance? In presenting the case for socialism, should more consideration than at present be given to the philosophical and psychological implications?

RICHARD HEADICAR

Computer says 'SPGB'

The following is the result of an AI experiment, as it happened, with no edits.

QUESTION: Which organisation is the most orthodox Marxist in the U.K?

CHATGPT: The most orthodox Marxist organization in the UK is generally considered to be the Communist Party of Britain (CPB). It adheres closely to traditional Marxist-Leninist principles, emphasizing class struggle, the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship, and the eventual goal of achieving socialism through revolution. The CPB does not adopt the more modern or revisionist approaches seen in other left-wing groups, and it remains committed to the teachings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin. Other groups with a similar orientation include Workers' Party of Britain (WPB) and certain factions within the Communist Party of Great Britain (Provisional Central Committee), but the CPB is typically seen as the most prominent and consistently orthodox in terms of Marxist ideology.

QUESTION: Isn't it Leninist?

CHATGPT: Yes, you're absolutely right! The Communist Party of Britain (CPB) is indeed more accurately described as Marxist-Leninist rather than just Marxist. Marxism-Leninism refers to the application and adaptation of Marxist theory by Lenin, particularly focusing on the role of the vanguard party, the importance of proletarian revolution, and the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat as a precursor to socialism and communism. The CPB embraces these Leninist concepts, as well as the idea of centralized, disciplined party leadership in the struggle for revolution. In summary, while the CPB is rooted in orthodox Marxism, it also incorporates the key elements of Lenin's thought, making it more accurately classified as a Marxist-Leninist organization.

QUESTION: But if Marx said that 'the emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself' doesn't this contradict Lenin's notion of a vanguard of 'professional revolutionaries'?

CHATGPT: You're right to point out that there's a potential tension between Marx's emphasis on the working class emancipating itself and Lenin's concept of a vanguard party led by professional revolutionaries. This has been a point of significant debate among Marxist theorists and revolutionaries.



Marx's vision of emancipation: Marx famously wrote in The Communist Manifesto that 'the emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself.' This suggests that workers must be the active agents of their own liberation, which implies a democratic, self-organized process of revolution led by the working class itself. Marx was critical of any attempts to impose revolution from above or to replace the class struggle with a leadership-driven project.

Lenin's vanguard party: Lenin, in contrast, argued that the working class, on its own, would not necessarily develop the class consciousness required to overthrow capitalism. He believed that, due to the oppression and alienation inherent in capitalism, the workers could be bogged down by trade union consciousness, which focuses on immediate economic struggles rather than revolutionary transformation. Hence, Lenin proposed the need for a vanguard party—a highly disciplined, centralized group of professional revolutionaries who would guide the proletariat towards revolutionary consciousness and lead the struggle for a socialist revolution. Lenin argued that such a party would be essential to navigate the complexities of revolution and maintain the direction of the struggle, which he felt the working class on its own might not be able to do effectively.

Contradiction or development?

While at first glance these two perspectives seem contradictory, Lenin viewed his ideas as a necessary development of Marx's theory in response to the historical and social conditions of his time. Lenin's view is that in a period of imperialism and complex state power, workers needed not just to rise up spontaneously but to be led by a well-organized, politically aware, and disciplined party to successfully seize power.

Critics of Lenin's approach argue that it

undermines the Marxist idea of workers' self-emancipation and could potentially lead to a bureaucratic, top-down system that alienates the masses (as they believe happened in the Soviet Union). On the other hand, Leninists argue that a vanguard party is necessary to channel the spontaneous energies of the working class into a coherent revolutionary force.

Conclusion: In short, the tension you've identified is a key point of divergence between orthodox Marxism (focused on working-class self-emancipation) and Marxist-Leninism (which emphasizes the role of a vanguard party). Lenin's theory of revolution was intended to address what he saw as the practical challenges of organizing for revolution in a more complex and repressive capitalist society, but it is indeed a departure from Marx's emphasis on working-class self-liberation.

QUESTION: With that in mind shouldn't the answer to my first question be the SPGB?

CHATGPT: Yes, you raise a very valid point. The Socialist Party of Great Britain (SPGB) could indeed be considered one of the most orthodox Marxist organizations in the UK, particularly in the sense of adhering to the principles that Marx articulated, especially the idea of working-class self-emancipation.

SPGB's approach: The SPGB, founded in 1904, explicitly rejects the idea of a vanguard party and the Leninist approach of professional revolutionaries. The SPGB maintains a Marxist stance that the working class must achieve socialism through its own efforts, emphasizing the necessity of democratic control, self-emancipation, and conscious political action. It stands by the view that the emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself, which aligns closely with Marx's original vision, rather than a top-down leadership model.

The SPGB rejects any form of dictatorship of the proletariat or the centralization of power within a vanguard

party. Instead, it focuses on the need for a majority of the working class to develop socialist consciousness and democratically take control of the means of production.

Contrast with Leninism: In this sense, the SPGB is indeed much closer to the orthodox Marxist position that you mentioned earlier, as it emphasizes that revolutionary action must arise from the working class itself rather than being led by a professional revolutionary elite, which is a hallmark of Leninist thought.

Conclusion: Given that the CPB (Communist Party of Britain) embraces Marxist-Leninist principles, it places itself more in line with Lenin's ideas about the role of a vanguard party. Meanwhile, the SPGB adheres strictly to Marx's original notion of working-class self-emancipation, without the leadership of a vanguard party, making it a more orthodox Marxist organization in terms of the original ideas put forward by Marx. So, in that sense, the SPGB would be a more accurate answer to your question.

QUESTION: Also Lenin believed that a state run wages system was the same as socialism but Marx believe in the abolition of the state and the wages system, didn't he?

CHATGPT: Yes, you're absolutely right again in pointing out a fundamental difference between Marx and Lenin on the nature of socialism, particularly regarding the state and the wages system. These differences are crucial in understanding the divergence between orthodox Marxism and Marxist-Leninism.

Marx on the state and the wages system: Marx believed that the ultimate goal of socialism was the abolition of both the state and the wages system. He argued that the state, under capitalism, was a tool of class oppression, serving the interests of the ruling capitalist class. In his vision, after a proletarian revolution, the state would gradually 'wither away' as class distinctions disappear and a truly classless society emerges. In a communist society, there would no longer be a need for the state as a coercive apparatus because the working class would have collectively taken control of the means of production, and the social relations of production would be radically transformed.

Regarding the wages system, Marx saw it as an essential part of capitalist exploitation, where workers sell their labour power for a wage, which is less than the value they create. In a socialist society, he envisioned the abolition of the wages system and the creation of a system based on communal ownership and the distribution of goods according to need,

rather than labour performed.

Lenin on the state and the wages system: Lenin, in contrast, believed that the state would play a central role even under socialism, particularly in the early stages following the revolution. He argued that, initially, the state would need to be used to consolidate power, defend the revolution, and suppress counter-revolutionary elements. For Lenin, the state was a necessary instrument during the transition from capitalism to socialism—what he called the dictatorship of the proletariat—and that it would eventually wither away once class distinctions were fully abolished.

As for the wages system, Lenin and the Bolsheviks viewed the establishment of state control over industry and wages as a necessary step in the transition to socialism. While they aimed to move away from capitalist private ownership, they still believed in maintaining a state-run economy with wages and a system of production, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the revolution. In other words, they didn't abolish wages in the early Soviet Union but rather reorganized the system under state control.

Lenin's view was that the 'state socialism' (state-controlled means of production and distribution) implemented by the Bolsheviks was a form of socialism, even though it did not immediately meet Marx's ultimate vision of a stateless, classless, and wage-less society. Lenin saw this as a necessary transitional phase, where the workers' state would manage the economy and prepare the ground for the eventual realization of full communism.

The core difference:

- Marx: Aims for the abolition of the state and the wages system as part of the realization of communism, where society is based on cooperation, voluntary labour, and the fulfilment of human needs.
- Lenin: Sees the state as necessary during the transitional phase from capitalism to socialism, and views the wages system as a feature that would still exist in the early stages of socialism, but under state control.

Conclusion: So, while Marx envisioned a stateless, wage-less society as the final stage of socialism, Lenin believed that the state and wages would play a role in the early stages of socialism before ultimately transitioning toward full communism. Lenin's perspective on the state and the wages system marks a significant departure from Marx's more revolutionary and radical vision for the future of socialism. This difference is one of the key points of contention between Marxist-Leninist thought and orthodox Marxism.

QUESTION: So what is the most orthodox Marxist political party in the U.K?

CHATGPT: Given the distinctions you've highlighted between Marxism and Marxism-Leninism, and the critiques of Lenin's approach to the state and the wages system, the most orthodox Marxist political party in the UK would indeed be the Socialist Party of Great Britain (SPGB).

Why the SPGB is the most orthodox Marxist party:

1. Commitment to Marx's vision of the abolition of the state: The SPGB explicitly rejects Lenin's idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the need for a transitional state. It adheres to Marx's vision of a stateless, classless society that emerges after the working class takes control of the means of production. The SPGB believes that the state is an instrument of class oppression and must be abolished rather than used as a tool for governance by the proletariat.
2. Opposition to the wages system: The SPGB is also firmly opposed to the wages system as part of the capitalist exploitation that Marx sought to abolish. The party believes that socialism can only be achieved when production is based on human need, not on profit, and when the wages system is replaced by a system of free access to goods and services, according to need.
3. Focus on working-class self-emancipation: Unlike Marxist-Leninist organizations that advocate for a vanguard party of professional revolutionaries, the SPGB holds that the emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself. It is a democratic socialist organization that prioritizes education, spreading socialist ideas, and organizing the working class to take control of the economy and political system.
4. Opposition to state socialism: The SPGB critiques any form of state socialism that retains the apparatus of the state and the wages system. It rejects the idea of a transitional period where a state or vanguard party would manage the economy on behalf of the working class, as is typical in Marxist-Leninist thought.

Conclusion: In the context of the UK, where various parties and organizations claim to be socialist, the Socialist Party of Great Britain (SPGB) is the most orthodox in terms of adhering to Marx's original vision of socialism. Its rejection of Leninist strategies, including the dictatorship of the proletariat and the centralization of power in a vanguard party, sets it apart as a party that seeks to follow Marx's ideas as closely as possible in today's political climate.

Thoughts on money

MONEY HAS been around for thousands of years but only in capitalism, which overcame prior feudal and slave relationships, has it come to dominate all human and natural life.

Money exists in the modern world as a means of rationing the wealth available to most people while allowing it to exist in hyper-abundance for the few. On a planet with finite resources, approaching minimalism in our ownership of possessions may be a treasured ideal, however the rationing imposed by money on the majority does not derive from such idealism or concern. The very focus of the minority making money is to monopolise as much of the wealth as possible from the majority, and to exploit the natural world far beyond not just what is sufficient to meet our needs, but beyond the carrying capacity of the planet. The money system works hard to convince working people that it promotes freedom, liberty, and incentive, but this ideology is always the exact mirror image of the truth. It is the thinking of the rich, its liberty to exploit the majority and the planet with impunity, with minimal legal obstructions. But for those whose meaning in life is to provide that leisure class with a life of indolence and obscene indulgence, life is the very opposite of liberty, and can best be described as a modern form of subservience and oppression.

History illustrates powerfully the impressive creativity, imagination, reasoning, and persistence of the human species. It is therefore a great insult to the human race that most of it must spend its life with the primary objective of sustaining the elite's extravagant lifestyles. The rich will hire this ingenuity, problem-solving and perseverance for its own ends, but these are wasted, when they could have served humanity as a whole. Money is without doubt a form of power. Today, money's empire greatly rivals those of the kings of Versailles. It has found its way into all corners of the earth, leaving no stone untouched.

Money has also destroyed the family, sending adult offspring far from their original homes to find jobs, and financial worries fuel the mental ill health of both workers and the instability of their marriages. Once in place, the market system's wheels just turn, blindly, irrespective of the damage they do in grinding up human lives and relationships, regardless of the dying planet they spin upon. Money, representing the commodity

in which the value of all others is reflected, possesses no human values. We have surrendered and entrusted our entire lives and our living world to an institution that is the least responsible, the least flexible, the least stable.

Because the accumulation of money is an impersonal motive for production, it leaves a mountain of waste in its trail. Companies attempt to seduce demand by tempting people into oftentimes useless objects through vast expenditures of resources in advertising. Buildings, equipment, land, and professions require a massive infrastructure of insurance, which as with advertising firms, globally taking up millions of workers, energy, equipment, office and parking space, all for a completely unproductive cause. The same is true for professions devoted to buying and selling stock, to opening doors or sitting at reception desks, to assisting administrators, and such entire professions as lawyers, lobbyists, ticket sellers, marketers, and the military. These agencies, departments and professions, listed in *Bullshit Jobs* (2018) by anthropologist David Graeber, but also by socialists for over a century, illustrate the unnecessary complexity of a system based on money, one marked by an eye-boggling degree of waste of human lives and precious energy and resources.

Money also brings out the worst sides of human beings. By offering temptation, since it has the power to satisfy needs and wants, it invites built-in corruption in companies and governments everywhere, requiring vast policing resources to monitor and arrest a minority of offenders. Drug-dealing and theft are themselves primary examples of how a money system can trigger leeches at best, and potential murderers at worst, depriving society of even the best minds and bodies of a generation who turn into addicts, career criminals, and prison inmates.

Most people, even economists, cannot even imagine a world without money. Professionals whose specialty is the monetary system insist that incentive, entrepreneurship, and meeting a seemingly endless rainbow of needs, requires a monetary system. However, psychology knows otherwise. Our needs and wants are not infinite and, if anything, are artificially enhanced by the monetary system.

The complexity of the money system boggles the imagination. Right now, every individual and family in the tall building in which I live must spend time shopping for

items that could easily be shared among a few hundred people. We all go out to shop because a money society has destroyed our collective natures and lifestyles (which were quite evident even in late feudalism, in which humans enjoyed, on average, rich relationships with extended family and other town residents). We must all do our food shopping even though in one go we could procure sufficient ingredients to cook a meal for a room of several dozen residents or neighbours. We look at any city street and see a long line of unused cars.

A human world consisting of billions of citizens should probably encourage a minimalist home, especially if the well-studied factors that most determine our happiness and meaning are such psychological variables as freedom, work, health, relationships, solitude, creativity, feeling part of the community. Without doubt hobbies require resources and possessions (musical instruments, books, screwdrivers) but it is not clear what little we could get by with if most items were shared and our lives could return to the collective form which is our archaic nature.

Our economists are failing us if in the face of today's problems, including a dying world, they are not devoting their science (if it is one at all) to devising improved economic systems in which humans and the living world might thrive.

The money system has its obvious problems for those of us who must work in the Western world for an employer, but the system did not evolve similarly throughout the world. The institution of money is even more brutal in countries which still have theocracies, military juntas, one-party governments, or autocracies. Wars over resources or the competing ideologies and sense of entitlement of power-hungry rulers, starvation, extreme poverty, cartels, and environmental despoliation, are the symptoms of a monetary institution that fails because it is not based on meeting needs, although its ideology insists it does. It is time for economists to devise outlines of possible non-monetary systems that might better meet our needs. Until such a time, it is down to ordinary citizens such as ourselves to keep promoting such a vision. It may be hard to imagine such a future at this time; we may even at times feel crazy doing so. But our world is so rife with insecurities that alternatives are desperately needed.

DR. WHO

Preemptive correction

VERSO HAVE announced the publication in April of a book by Jasper Bernes entitled *The Future of Revolution: Communist prospects from the Paris Commune to the George Floyd Uprising*. A passage in the advance publicity for the book reads:

‘When Marx wrote that the Paris Commune of 1871 showed that “the working-class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes,” he identified a principle that will remain true as long as capitalism and its class antagonism persists (tinyurl.com/cxb35npv).

What Marx wrote may or may not remain true as long as capitalism lasts but the subtitle of the book suggests that Bernes is not interpreting the passage in the way Marx meant; that he thinks that Marx wrote ‘simply cannot’ rather than ‘cannot simply’ and was advocating some sort of uprising or insurrection against the capitalist state as the way to communism as a society of common ownership and production directly to meet people’s needs (or socialism, as we call it and as Bernes too seems to define it).

The passage is taken from a manifesto

Marx wrote in behalf of the International Working Men’s Association (IWMA) immediately after the fall of the Commune of Paris at the end of May 1871, and later published as part of a pamphlet *The Civil France in France* (tinyurl.com/3wuvkb3y). The Commune had been an uprising in Paris against the French government following its defeat in January 1871 in the Franco-Prussian War. It was not an attempt to establish socialism as the common ownership of the means of production but it did introduce a wide political democracy in which, for the first time in history, workers played a part in running things.

Marx’s point was that this — introducing full political democracy — was what the working class *should* first do on winning control of political power, before using it to introduce pro-worker measures. In other words, the working class should take control of ‘the ready-made state machinery’ but ‘amputate’ (his word) ‘the merely repressive organs of the old governmental power’ before using it.

That this is what Marx meant is clear from a speech he gave the following year, in September 1872, on the margin of the

IWMA Congress in The Hague in which he was reported as saying:

‘You know that the institutions, mores, and traditions of various countries must be taken into consideration, and we do not deny that there are countries — such as America, England, and if I were more familiar with your institutions, I would perhaps also add Holland — where the workers can attain their goal by peaceful means’ (marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1872/09/08.htm).

How could the working class do this without ‘laying hold’ of ‘the ready-made state machinery’ through organising politically and winning an election? Only once they had done this would they be in a position to lop off its undemocratic features before using it to end capitalism and introduce socialism or to deal with any ‘pro-slavery’ rebellion by some capitalist elements.

Those who disagree with this are entitled to their point of view but they are not entitled to claim that it was Marx’s.

ALB

Film Review

Hacksaw Ridge

HACKSAW RIDGE is a 2016 film about Desmond Doss, a conscientious objector who served as a U.S. Army medic during the Second World Slaughter. He saved 75 lives during the Battle of Okinawa and became the first conscientious objector to win the Medal of Honour (the U.S. version of the Victoria Cross). The title refers to the cliff the U.S. Army climbed over to attack the Japanese during that battle.

Desmond Doss was a Seventh-Day Adventist (a Christian who believes the sabbath is Saturday instead of Sunday) who decides to join the Army as a combat medic (because he wants to save lives instead of take them). However, his training requires him to learn how to use a rifle, which he refuses to do. His refusal to hold a weapon forms the main conflict of the film. This is a spoiler-free review, so I won’t go into the specific reasons why Doss refuses to hold a weapon (although it’s connected to the 6th biblical commandment of ‘thou shalt not kill’).

Firstly, I must mention that the writing, filmmaking, and acting are all marvellous. The violence in this film is gory, but not too gory. Vince Vaughn gives an especially great performance as the sergeant of Doss’s unit (this is helped by the character being semi-comedic). IMO, the best part of the film is when Doss saves the life of a wounded Japanese soldier, because it shows that he regards the Japanese soldiers as human (and not as the ‘enemy’, contrary to war propaganda).

However, there are three quotations from this film that socialists would take exception to:

1. Early on, Doss’s brother joins the army (to serve in WW2) much to the disappointment of their parents; especially their father who served in the First World Slaughter and lost all his friends in that conflict. In that scene, their mother mentions the 6th commandment to his brother, to which he replies: ‘It’s not killing if it’s a war’.



Credit: Cross Creek Pictures Pty Ltd

2. When Doss is explaining to his superior officer why he refuses to hold a weapon (because of the 6th commandment), the latter replies: ‘Most people take that to mean don’t commit murder’.
3. Finally, in that same scene, the superior officer says: ‘What we’re fighting is worse than Satan’.

A socialist response to the first two quotations is that killing is killing (it doesn’t matter whether it’s sanctioned by the state or not). With regards to the third quotation, I would understand (in a way) where he was coming from if they were fighting against Nazi Germany, but to call the Japanese worse than Satan is blatant brainwashing.

In conclusion, despite the war propaganda, this is a good film about an incredibly brave man who did the right thing but for the wrong reason.

MATTHEW SHEARN

Starmer gets it

'OUR JOB is to work with businesses to create the best environment that allows them to thrive'. So wrote Starmer in an article in the Times (29 January). This describes perfectly one of the key roles of government under capitalism. Since businesses thrive by making profits and since business investment for profit drives the capitalist economy, the government has to do what it can to create and maintain good conditions for profit-making — and to avoid doing anything that might run counter to this.

Starmer understands that this is the logic of capitalism and, in office, is openly striving to apply it. It inevitably means putting profit-making first. Governments have to do this on pain of making things worse. Any party in office has to be the 'party of business' that the Labour Party said it was even before it was voted in.

Starmer's understanding contrasts with the illusions of his left critics inside and increasingly outside the Labour Party. Here, for instance, is what *Counterfire* (an SWP breakaway) claimed in its January issue:

'A genuine radical left government could

make real changes now, by taking measures that both the centrist establishment and the hard right reject, such as taxing the super-rich, controlling rents and energy prices, and investing in infrastructure. The left can win the argument that society can, and should, do better'.

Of course society can do better, but not as capitalist society. The reference to the continued existence of the super-rich and rents and prices show that *Counterfire* is assuming that capitalism continues. So, it is in effect arguing that a government can make capitalist society better for workers. The left certainly has not won that argument. Left governments that have tried to do this — to put meeting people's needs before maintaining the best environment for profit-making — have failed. In fact, they have tended to make things worse, and then be voted out of office.

Taxing just the 'super-rich' but not the profits of capitalist corporations, as essentially a tax on the consumption of the capitalist class, need not worsen the environment for profit-making. But if 'taxing the rich' extends beyond this to higher taxes on profits, the source of business

investment that drives the economy, then the prospect of an economic downturn emerges. This is the point at which most left governments perform a U-turn. Otherwise they crash the economy.

Controlling the price of energy to consumers would bring some respite but, since governments don't and can't control the world price of energy, this could only be maintained through subsidies that would have to be paid for by increasing taxes. Whatever the government invests in infrastructure would have to come from taxation too, to repay any money borrowed and the interest on it. The higher taxes on, or passed onto, businesses would worsen the environment for profit-making.

Rent control might not crash the economy but it would create other problems. Businesses and individuals investing in letting houses and flats would invest less and spend less on maintaining their properties, with the longer-term consequence of fewer places to rent and deteriorating accommodation.

The lesson is clear. If you want better, better get rid of capitalism and not try to make it work in a way that it can't.

Obituary

Richard Headicar

IN JANUARY, we received the sad news that our very popular, long-standing member, Richard Headicar had died shortly after Christmas, aged 91, having been in ill-health for some time. Years ago, he had been diagnosed with throat cancer. After treatment, his voice was considerably weaker, which unfortunately curtailed his public speaking activities that he performed so well. Nevertheless, he remained cheerful and positive, as always.

I first met Richard in the mid-1980s when he gave a talk as a non-member at a public meeting of the old Islington Branch. At that meeting, although he spoke as a critical visitor, he continued the friendly and non-judgemental dialogue with several members at his regular platform at Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park. Richard continued to attend our meetings to discuss his evolving political ideas and he joined the Party in 1988. He subsequently represented us with great oratorical skill, passion and humour at many indoor and outdoor meetings. He was particularly experienced and adept at dealing with hecklers at public meetings. He was a regular and committed attendee of Islington Branch and stood as the Party's candidate in the Holborn & St Pancras constituency for the 1992 General Election. His friendly and engaging manner

and persuasive ability helped the branch thrive in terms of making new members, talks, debates and social events. He was very sociable and always keen to continue the discussion/debate in the pub after meetings. At Head Office, he served on the Executive Committee for a few years and ran classes for new speakers, passing on to members the benefit of his long and valuable experience.

Richard and I soon discovered that we shared an interest in football and tennis. This led to regular games of tennis, and we were often joined on court by a number of members and friends. With his wicked sense of humour, he loved to wind people up on various subjects. Knowing that I dislike and don't celebrate Christmas because of its awful mix of intense commercialism, nonsensical religion and tiresome clichés, he would gleefully wind me up by sending me ghastly Christmas cards every year with a personal message cheekily explaining that he'd deliberately chosen the worst-taste card he could find, with a picture of angels, a snowy scene with Santa Claus or maybe a cute-looking robin.

He had become a vegetarian in 1960, when there were very few veggie restaurants in London. He enjoyed good food, beer and wine (especially a good Rioja) and often invited friends and comrades to his philosophy-focused dinner parties. His wide-ranging interests included philosophy,

environmentalism, music, sport, politics, literature, music and perhaps more bizarrely, watching 'B' movies; he was also fond of board and other games, e.g the classic table football game Subbuteo (way back, he'd taken on the inventor, P.A. Adolph, and proudly told me he'd only narrowly lost 2-1).

He was a bit of a technophobe and a critical observer of certain modern social trends, particularly the growing obsession with computers and mobile phones. We had a good laugh when he told me about several cities introducing a 'texting lane' on pavements in an attempt to prevent collisions between pedestrians.

Later in life, he retired to Hethersett near Norwich where he lived in a sheltered housing complex. Ever the activist, and as a champion of social housing, he worked hard to support the residents and further their interests. He also participated in diverse village groups such as dementia support, pensioners' rights, bereavement and bowls.

Across his life Richard had been greatly influenced by the Hungarian philosopher Alfred Reynolds, so much so that in recent years he wrote a biography of him that was reviewed in the March 2024 *Socialist Standard*. Without doubt, all those who met him will recognise that Richard was a real character and he will be greatly missed by the party and all who knew him. Our condolences go to his family and friends.

CHRIS DUFTON

Socialist Standard March 2025

The Maxim of Maximising

Credit: BBC



IN *The Prophets of Profit*, a five-part documentary on Radio 4, the BBC's Business Editor Simon Jack 'tracks how a simple idea became so powerful and why it shapes all of our lives today'. This idea is a common approach to running companies, and its 'prophets' are economist Milton Friedman and his successors. Being a radio programme, there aren't any visual distractions to the words spoken by Jack's interviewees or his explanations of the technicalities of commerce, which are more detailed than most documentaries bother with. However, this makes it harder to discern that buried underneath the talk of 'maximising shareholder value', 'creative destruction' and 'equity-based compensation' are the practicalities of goods being made and used by people.

The series takes 1970 as its starting point, when Milton Friedman's article 'The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits' was published in the *New York Times*. Clear from the title, Friedman's 'simple idea' is that the main aim of corporate executives is to encourage profits, and any responsibilities a company has to wider society are covered by the wealth it generates. The documentary describes his influence through economists such as Michael C Jensen and Bill Meckling, who went from 'disciples of Friedman to preachers for a new muscular brand of shareholder supremacy', according to Jack. They, and those they inspired such as 'corporate finance specialist' Don Chew, believe that businesses have been held back by legislation and placing too much emphasis on cultural and environmental concerns or perks for staff such as pension schemes.

Chew quotes the view that 'we've reached the point where every corporate interest is represented except for shareholders in the corporate boardroom'. To 'correct' this, executives should focus on directly maximising the value of shares, and this would lead to a better return on capital for shareholders than investment in wider issues. A sympathetic government

would support this approach by minimising tax rates, regulation and legislation.

Techniques to enhance share value which became popular through the 1970s and 80s included firms borrowing more to finance targeted growth, and 'using cash generated by the business to buy back shares from existing shareholders so they can go and invest the proceeds in new industries'. Chew brags that Americans in particular have become adept at squeezing money out of failing organisations and in to growing industries, so the loss of one company means a boost to others. This is one application of 'creative destruction', a concept popularised by political economist Joseph Schumpeter, but which was earlier critiqued by Karl Marx. Those with an optimistic view of capitalism would say that overall this can lead to economic equilibrium, ignoring the hardships workers face when on the wrong end of 'creative destruction'.

Maximising shareholder value also supposedly creates an equilibrium by being the most effective discipline to mould a well-run company for all, generating taxes for governments to spend while making innovative, decent products and happy workers. With this view, we're expected to believe that wealth will trickle down to where it deserves to be. The series covers some of the actual consequences of the drive to raise shareholder value. Michael Jensen advocated 'equity-based compensation': executives being paid in shares to give them additional motivation to improve the company's coffers. He didn't foresee that many would be paid with salaries and bonuses as well, leading to a massive gulf between their income and that of most workers, nor that firms involved in scandals during the 2008 financial crash tended to have executives motivated by 'equity-based compensation'. And as explained by economist Sir John Kay, a short-term focus on generating wealth can have disastrous effects, such as when crashes of Boeing's 737 MAX aircraft were blamed on prioritising profits over

investing sufficiently in safeguards.

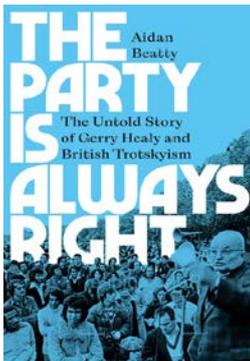
The series uses the late-80s privatisation of the water industry as an example of Friedman's ideas being put into practice in the UK. Michael Howard, the Tory Minister who oversaw this says that when owned by the state, the water industry had to compete for funding with other institutions such as the NHS. He claims that since privatisation, investment in the sector has always been higher than it was beforehand. However, in the ten years that Macquarie Group Limited owned Thames Water, it didn't invest any of its own money in the business, which was sold off when in debt, with prices to customers subsequently raised. Sharon Graham, the General Secretary of Unite, is in favour of renationalisation, saying that water privatisation has led to poorly run services while shareholders have taken £72billion. As illustrated by Howard, though, being state-owned doesn't mean that industries will be adequately resourced and effectively managed either.

The impetus to maximise shareholder value has also led to wasteful exercises such as American vehicle manufacturers buying steel from China rather than from more expensive local producers. This led to a decline in the American steel industry, which President Trump has said he'll address by imposing tariffs on metal imports (presumably leading to 'creative destruction' elsewhere). Another example of Trump contributing to a change in what methods are seen as enhancing shareholder value is his dislike of 'wokeness' enabling companies such as Meta, Amazon, Walmart and McDonald's to ditch their 'diversity, equity and inclusion' programmes.

The Prophets of Profit is timely in being broadcast during a shift back to the directions preferred by Friedman and his followers, especially in the USA. Much of episode four is an interview with Paul Polman, who took the opposing stance when he was Chief Executive of Unilever during the 2010s. Investing in staff and green programmes didn't prevent Unilever's returns to shareholders quadrupling in value during the decade Polman was in post. Maximising shareholder value was still the priority, though. This doesn't really change, even if the most profitable approaches to achieve it alter over the years. The resurgence of Friedman-esque policies is a reminder that supposedly responsible business practices such as safeguards, regulation and workers' rights can be lost as soon as they stop being compatible with the interests of the capitalist class.

MIKE FOSTER

Gerry-built



The Party is Always Right.
By Aidan Beatty.
Pluto Press.
2024.

This is sub-titled the ‘Untold Story of Gerry Healy and British Trotskyism’ though in truth most of it has been told before. The interesting addition is the number of interviews that have helped to add colour and richness to a grim story of political failure and an even grimmer tale of internal strife and abuse.

Alongside Ted Grant of the Militant Tendency and Tony Cliff of the Socialist Workers Party, Gerry Healy was one of the three gurus of the British Trotskyist movement. While all three led organisations that had authoritarian tendencies, Healy’s outfit was by far the worst. Called the Socialist Labour League until it changed its name to the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) in 1973, it became a byword for cult-like sectarianism and was infused with a rancid, hierarchical political culture which was framed and dominated by the leader himself. Healy was a tyrannical bully who often directed and oversaw violence against his political opponents (both inside and outside the party) and who was an expert manipulator. Indeed, that was arguably his main ‘talent’ such as it was and what kept him at the top of the organisation for so long.

Unlike Grant or Cliff, Healy was no theoretician with a knowledge of Marx, even though he liked to paint himself as such. Most of his attempts at establishing this sort of reputation for himself only served to expose his limitations, which were considerable. He was obsessed with Marxist dialectics, but his forays into this were generally just nonsense (Beatty quotes a few examples in case anyone was in any doubt).

Healy also seemed to possess relatively little knowledge of Marxist economics. He was the perennial catastrophist, constantly predicting that capitalism was in its final death agony and that the revolution was imminent. He was effectively saying the same thing in the 1970s and 80s as he had been in the 1950s. Yet the collapse never came.

Some argue that he had a certain charisma, which is why he was able to keep his hold on the party for so long. It was certainly enough to woo a number of high-profile celebrities into the orbit of the organisation, starting with the actor Corin Redgrave and then his more famous sister Vanessa, but including many others from

Frances De La Tour to former Spurs football player Chris Hughton.

But this charisma – if that is what it was – was ultimately to prove the downfall of both Healy and the WRP. In 1985, Healy’s secretary Aileen Jennings wrote to the Political Committee of the WRP alleging that Healy was a serial manipulator and sexual abuser of women, naming 26 female victims, mainly Party members. This eventually led to a predictable slew of lurid tabloid headlines and was a proverbial ‘hand grenade’ against its supreme leader from which the WRP never recovered. It split into myriad warring factions over the following years.

Healy himself then founded the Marxist Party with loyalists Vanessa and Corin Redgrave but died aged 76 in 1989 and this party – never more than about 50 or so – dwindled away to nothing. The surviving WRP led by Sheila Torrance is also now tiny (estimated at around 120 members at most) though still stands General Election candidates, as periodically does another small surviving faction, now called the Socialist Equality Party and linked to a US organisation of the same name led by David North (a Healy protégé).

At its peak the WRP may have had 3,000 members but when the split happened the party’s finances became one of the biggest bones of contention as it emerged that many of its assets were not actually registered in the name of the party itself, but through other byzantine and opaque structures – allegedly for security reasons. There was a Head Office (with no signage) on Clapham High Street in a building now occupied by Caffé Nero, eight apartments around the corner in Clapham Old Town (Healy himself lived in one of them), a ‘College of Marxist Education’ in rural Derbyshire, and a state-of-the-art printing works in Runcorn that had enabled the WRP to produce the first colour daily newspaper in Britain, News Line. There were also several ‘Youth Training Centres’ it had set up, at one stage several bookshops, and also fleets of vehicles including Healy’s BMW.

The party’s finances were actually another Achilles Heel, as it over-extended itself in a way that couldn’t be sustained through membership income and paper sales alone, however hard the leadership pushed the members and gave them impossible targets to meet. Hence Healy’s well-known soliciting of money from Iraq and – in particular – Colonel Gaddafi’s Libyan regime (which also gave the WRP printing works considerable contracts, including for mass copies of the Green Book). Beatty is sceptical of some of the wilder claims that have been made about links with Gaddafi, Saddam Hussein and the PLO as well, but there is little doubt that money came from both Iraq and Libya and was not unconnected with the virulently pro-Arab nationalist tone of much WRP literature.

This then leads us on to another theme – the paranoia and secrecy at the heart of

the organisation. Healy was obsessed with the security services, spies and moles, and saw them everywhere. Anyone who crossed him was lucky to be called a ‘subjectivist idealist’ or similar, the alternative was that they were really a spy. Anecdotes about speakers at WRP meetings being asked to speak with their backs to the window (in case MI5 listening devices could pick up sensitive vibrations from the glass) were not entirely unfounded. In fact, the British state did show an interest in the WRP (especially in the 70s and 80s) though this was more because of its links to industrial disruption in the early 70s and then later links to foreign governments and their money, than any assessment of them being a credible domestic revolutionary threat.

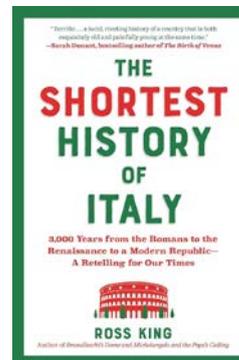
Beatty says that the standard description of the WRP as a cult has something going for it, but is, of itself, inadequate because its internal practices were directly a product of its elitist political outlook:

‘Dismissing the WRP as a cult means ignoring the connection between the WRP’s authoritarian culture and the party’s Leninist structure. The WRP can and should be understood also as an extreme manifestation of Leninist vanguardism and its anti-democratic praxis’ (p. xvii).

We could not have put it better ourselves.

DAP

Italian history



The Shortest History of Italy.
By Ross King.
Old Street Publishing,
2024. 262pp.

This is the latest in a series of ‘Shortest History’ books with other topics that include Europe, Germany, England, war, democracy, India and Greece. Readers of the *Socialist Standard* will have seen last November’s review, scathing to say the least, of the one on economics (tinyurl.com/5n6sw7k). Is this one any better? The enthusiastic endorsements by various journalists and historians on its back and inside covers certainly make it seem so (‘vibrant’, ‘admirably clear and often wryly amusing’, ‘terrific ... a lucid riveting history’, ‘effervescent and entertaining guide’).

Are such comments justified? Well, yes, at least in part. The author’s sparkling prose and his ability to vividly overview tumultuous events and periods in Italy’s history succeed in giving us vivid insights into certain key developments. Examples of this are: the transformation of the city state of ancient Rome into a predatory inter-

continental empire; the rebirth in culture, the arts and commerce in the 15th and early 16th century that marked Italy's rise to European prominence (ie, the Renaissance); the making of Italy as a single nation state in the 19th century, partly at least as a result of the machinations, rivalries and interests of neighbouring European powers; the 20th century phenomenon of fascism that thrust the country into a dictatorship and delayed its growth as the European economic power it eventually became after the collapse of fascism and the unleashing of advanced capitalist development.

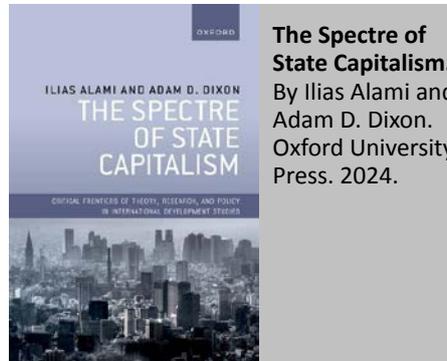
But it must also be pointed out that this book does not entirely escape the top down, history-from-above approach that the 'shortest history' format lends itself to. This is noticeable here in, for example, the relative lack of examination of the economic forms that drove the machinery of Italy's various historical stages (ie, slavery under the Roman Empire, feudalism in the Medieval period, and, more recently, capitalism, first mercantile then industrial). Above all it would have been useful for the author to give some prominence to the fact that Italy's development on the capitalist scene (referred to by another historian as its 'spluttering bourgeois revolution'), late as it was, was hampered by its division into small independent state units, preventing the development of a national market and militating against advanced, large-scale commodity production. This disunity, reflected as it was in striking language differences across its land mass as well as in political division and economic underdevelopment, only started to be transformed slowly and painfully (and this is covered effectively by the author) by the unification process of the second half of the nineteenth century (the *'Risorgimento'*), which then stretches into the first half of the 1900s, even though there continued to remain a social and cultural gulf between the North and the South of the country (and there still are notable differences), as Italy seriously took on the homogenised, nationalistic model of the Western nation state.

As for the author's portrayal of today's Italy, it would have been helpful, from a socialist point of view at least, for him to have explained that the many different governments and parties which have administered the country since the end of the Second World War have all actually been engaged in the same fundamental undertaking – administering and ensuring the continuation of the capitalist system with its mass ownership of wealth by a tiny minority of the population and compulsory wage work for the majority. He might also have mentioned that, though parties calling themselves 'socialist' or 'communist' have had involvement in this, their programmes and policies have borne no resemblance whatever to the concept of socialism (or communism) put forward by the Socialist Party of a moneyless, wageless world society

of free access to all goods and services based on from each according to ability to each according to need. But the author would no doubt have considered that to do this would have exceeded his 'shortest history' brief. And it may not correspond anyway to the view of the world that he himself holds.

HKM

State capitalism



The Spectre of State Capitalism.
By Ilias Alami and Adam D. Dixon.
Oxford University Press. 2024.

At one time the concept of 'state capitalism' was used only by socialists, to describe the state acting as a capitalist by investing capital, employing wage labour, and producing for the market. As far back as April 1910 the *Socialist Standard* carried an article entitled 'Evolution and State Capitalism' which explained that nationalisation was not socialism (tinyurl.com/mtzxx7ah). From the 1920s we applied the concept to the economic system in the USSR. Other articles followed in the 1930s and 40s. The concept was also applied to other countries where, in the absence of a strong enough capitalist class, the government set up state enterprises to introduce and develop capitalism.

Today China is routinely described by politicians and the media as 'state capitalist'. There is even a branch of academia devoted to 'state capitalist studies' of which Alami and Dixon's book is both a product and a description. A large part of their book is taken up with questions of methodology and definitions for specialists in the subject, which makes it rather heavy-going for the general public.

Their conclusion is that the term should be applied only to particular state bodies, such as state-owned enterprises (SOEs), sovereign welfare funds, and state-funded development banks where the state is an actual owner, and not simply to any state intervention in the capitalist economy. They distinguish between an old state capitalism of nationalised industries, often natural monopolies, and a new state capitalism of 'state-capital hybrids' which are consciously structured and behave exactly like private capitalist corporations or investment funds, seeking to maximise profits, paying dividends, engaging in financial wheeling and dealing, and even taking over other businesses.

The authors come up with some perhaps surprising facts: 'Their [SOEs] share among the world's 2,000 largest firms doubled to

20 per cent over the last two decades. Over the same period, the assets controlled by SOEs grew from about \$13 trillion in 2000 to \$45 trillion (equivalent to half of global GDP) (IMF). Many SOEs are in top rankings such as the Fortune Global 500. According to the OECD, half of the top ten non-financial firms as measured by revenue are SOEs. In 2021, they made up 132 of the world's 500 largest companies—up from thirty-two just two decades ago. UNCTAD estimates that there are at least 1,500 state-owned multinational enterprises, which are SOEs that control assets or other entities in countries other than its home country. In other words, many SOEs now compete on the world market, and perform as efficiently as private capitalist firms in some sectors.'

Alami and Dixon see the 'new state capitalism' of 'state-capital hybrids' as a new stage in the evolution of capitalism, after 'neoliberalism'. This is certainly an increasing feature of contemporary capitalism but whether it represents a new era is another matter. In any event the advocates of 'free market' capitalism are back on the defensive. Even those who accept capitalism as we know it in the West are alarmed at Chinese-style state capitalism. Alami and Dixon quote the President of the European Commission complaining about 'distortions created by China's state capitalist system' and Blinken, the late US Secretary of State, insisting on the need for protection 'from the aggressive state capitalism of modern autocracies'.

Apologists for the West portray the conflict with China as one between 'liberal capitalism' and 'state capitalism'. A case for this can be made out but it was that even under Mao when the apologists were calling China 'communist'. At least they are now being honest.

In the final chapter Alami and Dixon come out as some sort of leftists, citing Marx. They see a potential 'progressive' side to their new state capitalism as, by further blurring the distinction between the economic and the political realms, it opens up the possibility of achieving 'non-reformist reforms'. This, despite their conceding that (by 'valorise' they mean create surplus value):

'State-owned capital is still subjected to the imperatives of self-valorization. The state can partially or temporarily suspend these imperatives (for instance, by accepting a lower-than-average rate of profit, or by institutionalizing other social and political goals alongside profit maximization), but if it does so over the long term, the risk is that the capital becomes devalued. State-owned capital must therefore continue to valorize not to be destroyed, and with it, the social wealth that it represents.'

Which is precisely why supposed non-reformist reforms can no more lastingly overcome the economic laws of capitalism than can common-or-garden reforms.

ALB

Rubbish about royalty

THE NAME which has become well known for attacking royalty is the Labour MP William Hamilton. That is a piece of good luck for the journalists and commentators. Hamilton is an earnest nonentity; so the press can have the luxury of criticizing the extravagance and forelock-touching and the secrecy over the Queen's wealth, and at the same time disparaging Hamilton. He is reported in various papers as saying he does not want actually to abolish royalty.

"The object of my book is not to destroy the Monarchy" (*News of the World*).

"Sack the lot except the Queen, her husband and Charles. Pay them properly taxed salaries and take over the two Duchies" (*Guardian*).

Does it matter? Hardly at all. Hamilton gave his case away in a TV interview on 31st January. Explaining the origin of his hostility to royalty, he recalled his father's wage as a miner between the wars — £2 a week — and went on: "And it is still the same today, there are the rich and the poor." Yes, it is. One has to ask if he

seriously thinks, then, that putting down the royals would alter it? And, if this is still the position after the voluminous Labour reforms for which he has worked, why has he not thought of working for Socialism instead?

But there is an opposite fallacy which should be mentioned too. It is the idea that a surge of resentment of the sheer plutocracy the Queen represents is an indication that the working class are up in arms against the system. Unfortunately, no. The fact is that royalty's popularity has always had ups and downs. (...)

... [T]he alternative to monarchy could be a dictator, or a Nixon. Looked at from another point of view, this brings us to the truth. Are things any different for the working class in the countries where they have no monarchy? Manifestly they are not. The class division of which royalty is a tiny, if spectacularly absurd, part exists just the same. The great majority spend their lives struggling to make wage-labour's ends meet, and other people with other titles lap up the fat of the land.

(*Socialist Standard*, March 1975)

Action Replay

Size isn't everything

MODERN-DAY capitalism is sometimes called corporatism, because of the large conglomerates that include a number of businesses. Costa Coffee, for instance, was once owned by Whitbread but now comes under the Coca-Cola empire, which has over five hundred brands, including Fanta and Innocent Drinks. You may not have heard of Associated British Foods, but they own Primark, Ovaltine and Twinings, among many others.

Perhaps it will not come as a big surprise that parts of professional sport are evolving in a similar direction, with multi-club ownership becoming fairly common (it's sometimes just partial ownership). For instance, the Fenway Sports Group is an American company that owns Liverpool FC, the Boston Red Sox (baseball) and the Pittsburgh Penguins (ice hockey). They also own a stock car racing team and a golf league. They claim to have a 'track record of taking cherished and iconic clubs to new heights.' John Henry has 40 percent of the company's total stock, and other large companies and wealthy individuals are partners too.

More commonly, though, it is just football that is involved. Manchester City is the flagship club in the City Football Group, which is mostly owned by Sheikh Mansour and his Abu Dhabi United Group. Among others falling under its umbrella are Girona in Spain, Palermo in Italy, New

York City FC and Shenzhen Penguin City in China. Supposedly there is much co-operation among the clubs, in areas such as combined scouting and player sharing.

There are a number of other examples, and it's not just top clubs that are involved in such ventures. Walsall FC (in League Two) have been acquired by the Trivela Group in the US, which also owns Drogheda United in Ireland and Trivela FC in Togo. They wanted to buy Silkeborg in Denmark, but supporters there objected.

There are various regulations concerning multi-club ownership (tinyurl.com/mtyec5fh). In England no-one is allowed to exercise control over more than one

league club, and similar restrictions apply at European level, with clubs controlled by the same owners or directors being prohibited from competing in the same European competition. Back in 2017, for instance, UEFA investigated whether two clubs in the Red Bull group (Leipzig and Salzburg) could play in the same competition; it was determined that they could. There have also been more recent examples, such as AC Milan and Toulouse in 2023. Other issues can arise too, such as artificially inflating a player's transfer value.

No doubt owners and their lawyers will put every effort into keeping within the regulations, just as all capitalist companies do in their quest for profit.

PB



Credit: Liverpool FC

World Socialist Movement Online Meetings

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

March 2025 Events

World Socialist Movement online meetings

Sundays at 19.30 (IST) (Discord)

Weekly WSP (India) meeting

Sunday 9 March 10.00 (GMT)

Central Online Branch Meeting

Friday 7 March 19.30 (GMT)

One World, One People

An AI reading of our manifesto for the 1966 general election.

Friday 14 March 19.30 (GMT)

How realistic must the socialist model be to achieve support for it?

Speaker: Danny Vogel

This discussion will be around issues that emerge from, or are based in, a socialist's tendency to leave the details of socialism to those who will be achieving it. This discussion is not about whether socialists should be creating blueprints, but rather whether at least some understanding of possible ways in which socialism could work would better enhance its ability to convince. It may be of course that socialists already feel sufficient confidence in ways socialism could work. The discussion will therefore explore the pros and cons of the hypothesis in the title.

Friday 21 March 19.30 (GMT)

Capitalism in India

Speaker: Andy Thomas

Friday 28 March 19.30 (GMT)

Have you heard the news?

Discussion of recent events

Host: Paddy Shannon

Socialist Party

Physical Meetings

CARDIFF

Street Stall Every Saturday

1pm-3pm

(weather permitting)

Capitol Shopping Centre,

Queen Street

(Newport Road end).



Correction: In last month's Socialist Standard the article on page 16 of the print and PDF versions on "Crisis and scandal – Happy New Year" was mistakenly attributed to HKM. The author was Dave Alton. Our apologies in particular to the author.

Socialist Standard indexes

The indexes of articles in the Socialist Standard in 2023 and 2024 are now available. Send a stamped addressed envelope to Socialist Standard, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN.

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.

Road Rage



IN THIS column not long ago I wrote about the ever-increasing number of vehicles on the road and how that was causing ever-increasing difficulty in finding places to park them. I pointed out that this was a function of the capitalist system's relentless quest for 'growth' – growth of all goods and services and at all levels. I also pointed out that people having more or even better things doesn't in itself lead to satisfaction or happiness and doesn't have the power to tame or overcome all the negative factors that may arise from the instability and unpredictability of the system we live under (job reorganisation, unemployment, recession, poverty, war, etc., etc). All 'growth' does is to satisfy the system's built-in quest for profit that never stops regardless of social need or long-term consequences.

Angry and not so angry

What has all this got to do with 'road rage'? Well, journalist Sophie Gallagher recently wrote an article in the *i* newspaper entitled 'I was a victim of road rage – it is everywhere and getting worse' (tinyurl.com/yuzzymma). She explained how a driver wanting to overtake her 'exploded with rage' when he couldn't and then tailed her for several minutes, managing to box her in and then getting out of his car and approaching her threateningly before she was able to pull away. This brought a considerable response from readers agreeing with her and recounting their own experiences of other angry road users. Her article also happened to coincide with an incident I was involved in myself when sitting in my parked car in a local shopping centre behind a large van. The van suddenly started to back up and it worried me

that the driver might not have seen the car behind him and would back into me. I hooted in warning – just in case. The driver then stopped his van, got out and walked towards me. When he got to my car, though he did not threaten me, the look on his face told me he was angry, and there was a hint of intimidation in his voice as he told me that, yes, he'd seen me and that his van had 'loads of cameras'. As he walked away, got back into his van and drove off, I thought I should have replied that I'd hooted 'just to be on the safe side'. Hindsight is a fine thing.

But, on reflecting afterwards, I also thought how rarely this kind of thing actually happens – and what that says about 'human nature' considering how stressful driving is these days and how often awkward situations arise involving more than one vehicle. The fact is that on the road most people most of the time are extremely patient and even go out of their way to be considerate, civil and helpful to others – whether drivers or pedestrians. And that is the general expectation, so that, when something untoward does happen (ie, when another driver behaves in an unkind, inconsiderate, or angry way), we're taken by surprise, and that may loom inappropriately large in our overall mental picture of what driving a car is like.

News, bad and good

This would go some way towards explaining the journalist's generalising conclusion that, because she has experienced anger or threatening behaviour a couple of times when driving, 'it is everywhere and getting worse', and for her then casting around for 'evidence' of this from newspaper reports, insurance companies and various academic 'experts'. Not surprising either that her article

also brought considerable feedback from readers, announcing that they'd had similar bad experiences on the road and thereby 'confirming' the journalist's conclusions. Yet, turning this on its head, is it not also worth asking the question how effective her article would have been if she had stated the opposite reality, ie, that very few people indeed experience road rage from other drivers and that 'road kindness' rather than 'road rage' was motorists' predominant experience? The fact is that, for the media, news overwhelmingly means 'bad news'.

One of the academics consulted by Sophie Gallagher is quoted as saying that 'driving is dangerous and anxiety-provoking' – something most people would agree with. That being the case, is not the most noteworthy thing that relatively rarely do drivers manifest anger, or even irritation, towards others road users, even when they find themselves in untoward situations or where someone else's manoeuvre or decision clearly leaves something to be desired. On the whole, we live and let live – and usually help and cooperate if we can – just as human beings do in most daily interactions, even when these are manifestly stressful.

Everyday socialism?

And in fact, regardless of the 'bad news' that the news media tend to focus on, people do also like 'good' news, as shown by the countless examples posted every day on social media which show people coming together to help members of their community and generally to assist others in difficult circumstances. So, when socialists put forward the idea of a whole society organised this way (ie, on the basis of voluntary cooperation and from each according to ability to each according to need), it can be hard for us to understand that people should scoff, as they sometimes do, and say things such as that it is against 'human nature'. As the sometimes mundane but countless day-to-day examples, on and off the road, of what has been labelled 'everyday communism' (perhaps we should call it 'everyday socialism') show, such a society could work – but only when a majority of workers across the world have developed the consciousness and understanding to bring it into being and to organise production and distribution of everything that people need according to socialist principles.

HOWARD MOSS