

THE

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SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

Another Middle East war



Also: Dear Editor...
Farage – opportunist supreme
Labour in sickness and health
Freedom as non-domination

Thoughts on the future
Hypocrisy about 'rights'
Vanguards, get lost



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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'

Yet another Middle East war

ISRAEL, THE US's rogue proxy in the Middle East with its own agenda, initiated the current war by attacking Iran with the declared aim of physically preventing it acquiring the nuclear bomb.

According to Netanyahu, Iran's possession of the nuclear bomb would present an existential threat to the state of Israel. The suggestion is that, if Iran had the bomb, it would use it to annihilate Israel. This is just propaganda as Iran wants the bomb for the same reason as the United States, Britain, France, China, India and Pakistan have it — as a deterrent against being attacked. If Iran did have the bomb it would be very foolish of it to use it against Israel as Israel itself is a nuclear state.

The real reason for the war — and why the United States, Britain and the others are behind Israel in practice — is to maintain the balance of power in the Middle East. In relations between capitalist states 'might is right' and Iran's possession of nuclear weapons would increase its 'might' and so shift the balance in its

favour. It's this that the Western states, who currently dominate the area because it is the source of much of the oil and gas they need to power their production, wish to prevent, ideally by diplomacy but Israel has forced their hand.

Who controls the oil, and the trade routes and pipelines to get it out, has been the stake in all the many wars in the Middle East since the end of the last World War. On the surface the issue appears to be the existence of the state of Israel, established in 1948 as a 'Jewish homeland' on land that been the home for generations of non-Jews. This, in itself, was bound to create resentment but it might have worked had not the United States decided to build up Israel's military might as its proxy on the ground in the region to defend its economic interests there.

The rulers of Iran may invoke religion as why they don't want a Jewish state to control Jerusalem but they are well aware of the economic issues at stake. Here is what Ayatollah Khomeini declared on 4 October last year:

'The insistence of the United States and its allies on ensuring the security of the usurping regime serves as a cover for their murderous policy of transforming the [Zionist] regime into a tool to seize all the resources of this region and use it [this regime] in major global conflicts. Their policy is to transform this regime into a portal for exporting energy from West Asia to the West and importing Western goods and technologies to the region, to ensure the survival of the usurping regime and the dependence of the entire region on them' (tinyurl.com/565nxpjj translated from French).

Which capitalist states control the economic resources of the region is of no concern to the workers and other ordinary people living there. The civilians on both sides are being killed and wounded and buildings and useful infrastructure destroyed, as happens in all wars, for an issue that is only of capitalist concern. The interest of workers in both Israel and Iran is to join with workers everywhere to bring to an end the war-prone capitalist system.

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Dark factors and dodgy populists



WITH ALL the far-right demagogues, mad dictators and murderous wars in the news, people may be inclined to lean into their own confirmation bias and say 'What do you expect? People are just evil'. You can't make a silk purse or a functional liberal democracy, much less world socialism, out of a sow's ear. But a new Copenhagen study of nearly 2 million people across 183 countries, as well as all 50 US states, concludes that people are more likely to be nasty, or in the terminology, display 'aversive, "dark" personality characteristics such as selfishness or spitefulness' if they happen to live in 'prior aversive societal conditions' (ASC), which is to say 'societies characterized by corruption, inequality, poverty, and violence' (tinyurl.com/2sfbc9w9).

According to the research authors, there has been a lot of previous work on the various types of aversive behaviour, and 'Recent advances in personality research have provided strong evidence for the existence of a single disposition underlying *all* aversive traits.' They define this disposition, which they call 'The Dark Factor of Personality', or 'D' for short, as 'the general tendency to maximize one's individual utility – disregarding, accepting, or malevolently provoking disutility for others – accompanied by beliefs that serve as justifications' (tinyurl.com/35f9wdxp).

Thus, D is 'the essence of aversive ("dark") personality traits such as narcissism, psychopathy, and sadism', so the study looked at data from multiple countries and states in combination with individual behavioural questionnaires. It found higher 'D' levels in high-ASC countries, ie, 'in societies where rules are broken without consequences and where the conditions for many citizens are bad', such as Indonesia and Mexico, and interestingly also Louisiana and Nevada. D was correspondingly lower in countries or states perceived to have better societal conditions, for example Denmark and New Zealand, and US states such as Utah and Vermont.

They go on to discuss the various ways that this correlation reinforces itself,

through 'customs, daily practices, norms', 'situational affordances and demands', and 'state-behaviour feedback loops that reinforce or discourage certain behaviors'.

So the society you grow up in is a strong influential factor on your character. Well, 'duh', you might say. Everyone knows that a badly treated dog is more likely to be savage and dangerous than a well-treated one. Even those hippy chimps, bonobos, have been known to turn violent when confined in zoos. But from a socialist perspective, this study is worth noting. Last month's Socialist Standard cover feature dealt with that favourite go-to of the anti-socialist, human nature, and the received wisdom that the human 'inner demon' is only kept in check by authoritarian rule. If that were really true, socialism would be impossible.

What the Copenhagen study shows is that humans have what it calls 'adaptive phenotypic plasticity', which is to say that we model our behaviour on our social surroundings. So the correlation of high state-level 'corruption, inequality, poverty, and violence' with high individual levels of anti-social traits must be largely causative too. Individuals wouldn't be antisocial if the society they live in wasn't also antisocial. Even so, couldn't the causation be the other way around, ie, that antisocial people make for an antisocial society? This hardly seems likely, given that antisocial personality disorders are estimated to affect only around 1-4 percent of the population (tinyurl.com/y98ye3yu). Mind you, the capitalist rich elite are probably only 1-4 percent of the population, and they are a walking, talking antisocial disorder.

None of this constitutes empirical proof, of course. The problem with personal questionnaires is that one can't be certain how truthful the respondents are being. Are people in 'nasty' cultures generally more prone to being nasty, or are they simply less inhibited about admitting it, compared to 'nice' cultures where such behaviour is presumably frowned upon and thus potentially more covert? This is the same subjectivity problem that plagues 'Happiness Index' and many

other such lists. A 2016 list of the 63 most and least empathetic countries, based on the same kind of personal questionnaires, revealed that Ecuador was the most empathetic, and Lithuania the least (tinyurl.com/bdds6xrk). This is bafflingly counter-intuitive. Ecuador has experienced years of 'iron fist' authoritarianism, and high levels of drug-related gang violence, whereas Lithuania has low crime, affordable living costs and a high standard of healthcare. Even stranger is the fact that Saudi Arabia, notorious for public executions and judicial maimings, scores second place, and the UAE, another authoritarian monarchy with no democracy and little press freedom, scores fifth. One might attempt an intellectual contortion by proposing that workers in violent or repressive states are more likely to stick together. But Denmark, once again near the top at number 4, is very hard to explain, while its not wildly dissimilar neighbours Sweden, Norway and Finland wallow deep down in the low forties and fifties, along with the UK. Can one really learn anything useful from such studies?

Perhaps more encouraging for socialists and others is a recent Basel study which looked at 30 years of data from 26 European countries to determine the stability or otherwise of populist governments, or those including a significant populist element. They focused on governments whose 'term of office ended prematurely', interpreting this 'as a sign of instability.' The study found 'that cabinets with populist parties break up more often and sooner—regardless of the type of coalition' and that 'The probability of early government dissolution is about 60% to 65% higher for alliances involving populist parties than for those without.' This wasn't about the specific left or right-wing ideologies though, it was about how populists tend to operate. They have a strong centralised leadership, with little internal democracy, and they adopt radical and uncompromising positions that no other groups can work with. 'Populism proved to be a constant indicator of government breakdown throughout the study period, irrespective of other influencing factors such as economic crises' (tinyurl.com/3ja82vux).

To sum up, there is evidence that a prosocial society like socialism fosters prosocial behaviour, and that populist governments tend to collapse. Take that, Nigel Farage.

PJS

Dear Editor...

Arising out of the article in our May issue on Just Stop Oil ('Just Stop Oil: The failure of a tactic'), we received two emails from Tony Marone, XR Public Engagement Working Group, which we have combined into one.

THE SUBTEXT of the disbanding of Just Stop Oil was that their aim had been achieved. If it was misrepresented as them having achieved their aim through their own actions alone, then that of course is not correct. However, you surely have to allow for a little self-encouragement in a world that is unremittingly bleak?

The conflation of JSO and XR through the involvement of Roger Hallam in both movements is poorly judged. The actions of JSO were neither overtly supported nor overtly denounced by XR - XR is XR, JSO is JSO.

Roger Hallam left XR in 2021 when he set up Insulate Britain (which still exists) and then moved on to set up JSO. It has been 4 years since Roger Hallam has been considered anything other than a founder member of XR. He holds no position in XR now.

The 3.5 percent minority theory was something that is closely associated with Roger Hallam, but was based in empirical research done by Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) on political campaigns from 1990-2006.

Roger was a high profile advocate of this theory when he was with XR, however it does not inform our current strategy.

You can read more about it (including links to the Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) paper) here: <https://commonslibrary.org/social-movements-and-the-misuse-of-research-extinction-rebellion-and-the-3-5-rule/>

I personally hold the SPGB in some regard for their educational work. However I am in constant wonder and

puzzlement over how all organisations of the left seem to prefer criticising Fellow Travellers to attacking the pillars of neo-liberal capitalism.

As the saying has it, "the Right looks for Converts, The Left looks for Traitors". Isn't it past time to abandon ideological purity?

Reply:

We never claimed that Roger Hallam was still connected with XR and can understand why XR should want to dissociate itself from him. We did, however, say that both he and XR were committed to the theory and tactic that a minority of only 3.5 percent should try to bring about system change.

We say this is mistaken and undemocratic and that a majority of the population must be in favour of socialism before it can replace capitalism.

Thanks for the link to that article about the misuse of the 3.5% rule. We note that this rule no longer informs XR's strategy. In which case, your website need updating as it still states:

We have a shared vision of change:

Creating a world that is fit for generations to come.

We set our mission on what is necessary:

Mobilising 3.5% of the population to achieve system change – such as “momentum-driven organising” to achieve this.’ (<https://extinctionrebellion.uk/about>)

In passing, your vision of ‘a world that is fit for generations to come’ is a bit vague. So vague in fact that everybody – and every organisation – will share it. Who wouldn't want that? ‘System change’ is a bit vague too; from what system to what other system?

There may be a case for the multitude of reformist organisations to get together instead of criticising each other. That's up to them. But there is no case for us, as an organisation that campaigns for socialism and nothing else, to join them or not to point out their inadequacies. — *Editors.*

White privilege?

THIS LETTER is in response to the Pathfinders article in the May Socialist Standard, titled 'Without Distinction of Race or Sex'.

Firstly, I'm against the author's argument that the capitalist system will always promote whites over more

talented minority-ethnic candidates; it's in the best interest of enterprises to hire the most talented worker for the job. Poor white people don't see talk of 'white privilege' as an attack on their 'rights', they see it as being an attack on them due to their skin colour.

We shouldn't fall into the bourgeois trap of fighting for equality among the proletariat (based on skin colour, etc), not that that's achievable anyway. While certain groups of people (on average) and individuals undoubtedly have harder lives under capitalism than others, the entire capitalist class oppresses the entire working class. Our enemy is the capitalist class (they screw us all over, though some more than others).

None of us are free until we are all free.

MATTHEW SHEARN

Reply:

The article was not advocating but explaining the critical race theory argument that 'disadvantaged groups will never get a fair shake unless a little positive discrimination is introduced' and that 'as things stand, the system will always promote whites over more talented ethnic candidates'. It then goes on to make your exact point, that discrimination is not logical for employers, before adding that 'prejudice is not logical', a view with which you will hardly disagree.

The article refers in passing to 'talk of "white privilege"', but we ourselves don't use the term as it could imply that all 'white' workers discriminate against all 'non-white' workers whereas such discrimination is an historical left-over from colonialist times which many workers today emphatically do not endorse. Much violence is perpetrated by workers scapegoating other workers, and there's nothing 'bourgeois' about saying so. If, as we argue, the route to class emancipation is class solidarity, then the question is how best to achieve that solidarity. So we call out worker-against-worker discrimination and violence for what it is, in effect class betrayal. — *Editors.*

The spending revue

GOVERNMENTS CAN'T control the way that the capitalist economy works. They can, however, decide how they are going to spend the money that they have or plan to have. This is the annual budget. From time to time, in Britain, the government takes a longer view and sets out their spending plans over a period of three or four years.

One such event occurred on 11 June when the Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves stood up in the House of Commons and delivered a 'spending review', a 'comprehensive' one, no less, as it was broken down by government department. For weeks before, the media had been speculating which departments would be favoured and which would suffer cuts.

She announced that the total amount to be spent over the next three years or so was to be £2.2 trillion, a figure that the *Times* (12 June) commented 'may be so large as to be meaningless'. Yes, what is a trillion? A million million? A thousand billion? Anyone know off-hand?

It's the same every time. The Chancellor's statement is followed by the Shadow Chancellor getting up and accusing

the government of double counting or complaining that not enough is being spent on this or too much on that. And asking where's the money coming from (a good question). From time to time MPs join in, cheering or booing.

A spending review, as its name suggests, only covers spending not where the money to spend is going to come from. Since governments as such don't generate any income or wealth, their income has to come from elsewhere, the two sources being taxation and borrowing. This is where the workings of the capitalist economy come in.

Taxes ultimately fall on profits and profits are what drive the capitalist economy. This places limits on what the government can raise without provoking an economic downturn. Governments borrow from capitalist financial organisations at home and abroad and are competing with other capitalist states for loans from these speculators. Any hint that the government may be planning to spend money without credible funding from taxation is seen as increasing, however slightly, the risk of the speculators not getting their money back. This leads to an increase in the rate

of interest they charge a government for lending it money. This, in turn, will mean that the government has to allocate more of the money it raises in taxes towards paying the higher interest payments. Another restriction on how much a government can spend.

Reeves is always tweeting that she is 'fighting to put more money in the pockets of working people' (tinyurl.com/ynw9dbr7) (though not of non-working people; she wants to stop money going into the pocket of many of them). She seems to mean increasing take-home pay.

Nothing in her spending review does this. That's because it's not from the government that she expects the money to come but from employers once the economy is growing. There is an element of truth in this in that, as Marx pointed out at the end of *Wage Labour and Capital*, 'the rapid growth of capital is the most favourable condition for wage labour' as the employers' increased demand for labour power bids up its price. The trouble for Reeves is that the rapid growth of capital is not something that a government can engineer. It is just something that happens from time to time as capitalism moves through its regular boom-slump cycle.

How Labour governed

EIGHTY YEARS ago this month, the Labour Party won a landslide victory in the General Election held on 5 July 1945. Clement Attlee became the Prime Minister of the first Labour government to have had a parliamentary majority.

Labour hadn't fought the election on a socialist programme, but its manifesto did declare — in words that would cause ministers in the present Labour government to throw up their hands in horror — that 'The Labour Party is a Socialist Party, and proud of it. Its ultimate purpose at home is the establishment of the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain'. By 'socialism' was meant the nationalisation of the 'commanding heights' of the economy — coal, steel, railways, electricity, gas, and water.

On this they were as good as their word. The coal mines, the steel plants, the railways and the utilities were nationalised, as was the Bank of England. The previous owners were given generous compensation, with the shares they had held being transformed into interest-bearing bonds. The workers in these industries remained wage-workers and the

interest paid to the bond-holders came out of the surplus value they produced. This was state capitalism, not socialism.

That the Attlee government governed in the interest of the working class is a myth.

It did establish the National Health Service with free treatment and free prescriptions. Although this was introduced in the capitalist interest to provide a fit workforce, it would be churlish not to recognise that not having to pay for medical treatment and medicines was of benefit to workers. Other measures that could be so regarded were the repeal of the anti-trade union laws introduced after the capitalist class victory in the 1926 General Strike, and a democratisation of the franchise.

But it was still a government of capitalism and, as capitalism cannot run in the interests of the working class, the Attlee government inevitably came into conflict with the workers. A leaflet we distributed in a local election in Northern Ireland in 1963 recalled a number of the actions it took as 'part of Labour's black record when it waged war against the workers in the interests of British capitalism between the years 1945 and 1951':

- (1) Used CONSCRIPT TROOPS to BREAK strikes.
- (2) Imposed a 'PAY PAUSE' and 'INDUSTRIAL CONSCRIPTION'.
- (3) Used (in peace time) a wartime Order, 1305, in an effort to have striking trade unionists JAILED.
- (4) Had workers RESISTING BLACK-LEG LABOUR sentenced to IMPRISONMENT and FINES under old PROPERTY-PROTECTION ACTS of 1875.

The Attlee government itself first introduced charges for some health services. It also developed the atomic bomb.

It is not just the present Labour government that is governing in the interest of the capitalist class. The Attlee government, despite its socialist pretensions, had to as well since that is what has to happen if you take on responsibility for running the political side of capitalism. You have to apply its economic laws that prioritise profit-making. It doesn't matter how able, sincere or sympathetic you might be. Capitalism simply cannot be run in the interest of the working class.

Halo Halo

WHICH, IN the long term, is going to damage a child's mind more – the Brothers Grimm fairy tales or the fairy tales implanted from the various so-called holy books of various religions? Ignatius Loyola, said, give me a child for the first seven years of their life and I'll give you the adult. Why? – to imbue the nonsense that is religion into susceptible minds so that when children become adults they will continue to unquestionably mindlessly spout 'religion good, atheism bad'.

The imposition upon young minds of the indoctrination from propaganda sources which use colourful pictures redolent of those used in their media by Jehovah's Witnesses pales into insignificance when compared to the actual physical abuse forced upon the very young by some religions.

In May the *Washington Jewish Week* was outraged against Belgium that it should be apparently mounting a 'vicious attack' upon 'religious freedom'. The report says that Belgium police raided two mohels. A mohel is an individual practised in the

religious 'art' of cutting of a male infant's foreskin at the age of eight days.

'There is no benign interpretation of these events. Armed officers descending upon religious leaders' homes under the pretence of legal inquiry is the stuff of authoritarian regimes, not democratic Europe. The confiscation of ritual instruments used for one of the oldest and most central commandments in Judaism — brit milah, the covenant of circumcision — is to desecrate more than property. It is to trample upon the millennia-old continuity of Jewish life and identity. The demand that mohels surrender the names of children they have circumcised is especially alarming. It represents not only a grotesque invasion of privacy but a potential threat to those families' security. Why do the authorities need those names? What database will they enter? What precedent does this set for religious communities across Europe? When religious practice is policed under suspicion, it is not law enforcement — it is persecution.' (tinyurl.com/bdfb7dtt)

The article then moves on to attack

Belgium for its stance on animal welfare. Belgium has banned kosher and halal slaughter because the methods used inflict unnecessary suffering.

More article shocked outrage voice: 'Now, it has targeted brit milah – a core Jewish ritual dating back to Abraham. Such orchestrated antireligion action by the state is wholly unacceptable'

One can hear them channelling GretaThunberg, how dare you!

In the UK two men, from the other religion that does this have been convicted of 'serious crimes related to non-therapeutic male circumcision (NTMC) of children... NTMC is an irreversible surgical procedure, which is medically unnecessary by definition, believed to be performed on thousands of UK children annually.' (tinyurl.com/yrxyehsb)

Let us not forget the thousands of girls who undergo FGM (Female Genital Mutilation).

Meanwhile In Pakistan the Council of Islamic Ideology is peeved because a federal territory passed a bill outlawing marriage to anyone under eighteen. The peevishness is demonstrated by the Council's response which said that 'the legislation's provision to define underage marriage as rape and impose punishments contradicted Islamic teachings' and is 'contrary to Sharia.' (tinyurl.com/3pwmxzpu)

DC

Tiny tips

THE WATCH is a limited edition of only 150 pieces that's already being delivered to customers. The retail price is \$330,000...prices on the secondary market will get a bit bonkers (**HODINKEE**, tinyurl.com/u59entev).

Pakistan's claims to all of Kashmir are driven by the region's hydrological importance, its majority-Muslim population, and the military's interest in rallying the nation behind it on these grounds. (**Andrew Korybko's Newsletter**, tinyurl.com/cmjxnkme).

'That's where I sleep, under that bridge' he says, pointing to a nearby cluster of tents beneath a highway overpass. 'And the dogs are up there with their own private pool. They probably eat more in a day than we do in a month' (**NPR**, tinyurl.com/4vbt2yhu).

Underage workers, in some cases, have been hired to kill poultry flocks, handle dead carcasses and clean industrial poultry farms. Workers sometimes lack personal protective equipment or receive damaged gear, despite the risk of the virus jumping from

animals to people. Dealing with a federal backlog, some farms have used killing methods considered inhumane, because it can be quicker and cheaper. 'The biggest factor in agricultural safety is the urgency' said Bethany Alcauter, director of research and public health for the National Center for Farmworker Health, a Texas-based nonprofit that advocates for worker safety and health. 'Everything has to get done in a short amount of time, and that really can be problematic because there's not the same amount of time to adequately train workers' (**truthdig**, tinyurl.com/b6suhyzx).

'Trump's view of a man at a desk moving pieces of the economy around like rooks and pawns on a chessboard is what socialism is all about—though the old tyrants in Moscow at least had the humility to assume that a committee of experts would be necessary to manage the economy according to 'scientific' principles or at least the guile to pretend that they believed it, whereas Trump apparently has swallowed his own silly god-

man horsepucky, being, as he is, an ass of exceptional asininity' (**MEDIAITE**, tinyurl.com/49wvprk7).

On July 28, 2024, Venezuelans turned out to vote in large numbers despite more than a decade of systematic repression and human rights violations under President Nicolás Maduro. Hours after polls closed, the Electoral Council declared that Maduro had been re-elected, with over 51 percent of the vote. The United Nations Electoral Technical Team and the Carter Center, which observed the elections, said the process lacked transparency and integrity, and questioned the declared result. The Carter Center said that the precinct-level tally sheets published by the opposition, which seemed to indicate that opposition candidate Edmundo González had won, were reliable and 'authentic'. The Electoral Council failed to release the official tally sheets and did not conduct the required audits or citizen verification processes mandated by law. Thousands of protesters took to the streets in demonstrations, most of them peaceful, demanding a transparent and fair counting of the votes. They were met with brutal repression (**HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH**, tinyurl.com/4t5cybmw).

(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.

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

Bolton. Contact: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589.

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

Yorkshire Regional branch.

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

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

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

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

South West regional branch. Meets 3rd Sat.

2pm on Zoom. For invite email:

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anton@pruden.me

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Contact: spgb.ksrb@worldsocialism.org

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IRELAND

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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 JITS!

(meet.jit.si/spgbsouthwales3).

Contact: botterillr@gmail.com or

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Central branch

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Trade deals – and artful dealers

NOEL EDMONDS has much to answer for. His TV game show 'Deal or No Deal' popularised the idea of 'deals' as being one-time games. Each contestant had a box, which 'The Banker' would offer them money for, based on seeing the contents of other player's boxes. The aim was to either have the £250K prize ticket in the box, or get The Banker to offer more money than the ticket in the box.

Most deals, though, are part of ongoing relationships: especially deals between enduring entities like countries. They are capable of constant and infinite revision. Good contracts allow the parties to vary the terms by agreement, rather than go to the palaver of completely striking a new arrangement. Edmonds, though, was an entertainer, and so could be forgiven for putting drama first; for politicians it is a different story.

Keir Starmer has been making hay out of having signed three trade deals with significant partners: USA, EU and India. Obviously, such agreements are complex, the result of many hours of hard work by professional negotiators and trade experts, and require the key role of a Prime Minister to choose winners and losers. It is right that in a democratic society such arrangements are made available for serious scrutiny and widespread deliberation, since the effects of trade deals are so far-reaching for so many people.

We do not, though, live in a properly democratic society: we live in a propagandised one. The party in government tries to spin complicated deals and draw our attention to what's being won, while cannily hiding what's being lost. They like to big-up the leader, ignoring the officials and their work. In these cases, the trade deals have often been commenced under the previous government and concluded under the current one. It would be interesting to see what difference the change of regime made: Starmer himself brayed in the House of Commons that he had struck deals where the Tory Party could not.

This hoopla is an interesting post-Brexit effect. Over the years, opponents

of the EU tried to rein in the power of the government to strike deals through diplomacy, and the EU itself removed a lot of what goes on in trade deals from the back room and made it part of a public process via the EU Commission and Parliament.

Now that is all over, trade becomes an exclusive province of the executive: all relevant treaties are signed under Royal Prerogative. Other polities require treaties to be approved by their legislature, but there is no such requirement in the UK. Our democratic (such as they are) organs will only be involved in any legislation required to give effect to the agreement. This, in part, makes sense of the desire of the Prime Minister to make a big thing of it: this is an area where he alone can decide and give effect to such deals.

If we look, we can see that the UK actually has formal arrangements with most of the countries in the world. Even for those that it does not have a direct deal with, the World Trade Organisation rules are in place so trade can take place. So, in effect, so-called 'Trade Deals' are just a variance of existing relationships, and the relative formalisation or extension of existing rules (tinyurl.com/spgbTRA5).

The UK, its citizens and companies are currently the second biggest holder of US government debt (tinyurl.com/spgbTRA4). So, there is a natural intertwining of interest between the two economies, and British Prime Ministers love to talk about 'the special relationship', although it is not clear whether it is reciprocated.

'The United States intends to provide certain key UK imports with modified reciprocal tariff treatment, based on our balanced trading relationship and shared national security priorities. Any such modifications will be consistent with those shared national security priorities' (tinyurl.com/spgbTRA1).

So it is clear that joint military relations play a big part of the deal.

It should be noted, even if not written into the deal, that the US signed off on the Chagos Island deal around the same time as making the trade agreement again. Secret diplomacy is back, and great power

politics has its part to play in the trade deals. Diego Garcia helps the US project its force over Pacific maritime trade, and the UK is in a position to assist that.

Shortly after Brexit, then Prime Minister Theresa May hinted darkly that Britain remains a military power. Clearly the UK government is leaning into that, using 'security co-operation' as part of its trading negotiation stance. This can be seen in the UK/EU agreement, where Starmer has been trumpeting getting UK access to the €150 billion Security Action for Europe (SAFE) fund: this will be used to support the UK's armaments industry, which will doubtless, in turn, be used to fuel arms exports for both profit and strategic interests. Likewise, the deal will enable more top-level engagement between British and EU leaders for security co-operation (tinyurl.com/spgbTRA2).

The headlines of that agreement revolved around extending EU fisheries' access to UK waters. This is an example of the government picking winners and losers. UK fishers could have had exclusive access to all the fish, but the UK government traded that for giving agricultural UK products easier access into Europe via the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) regime of the EU. This gives the lie to the so-called national interest: it is the particular interest of specific industries.

Hence, the India deal involves improved tariff terms for luxury goods like whisky and gin, hardly worthwhile to most people, but a significant gain for whisky distillers and distributors (tinyurl.com/spgbTRA3).

Trade deals are the way that capitalism tries to plan the world economy. If we lived in a democratic society, such arrangements would be subject to extensive public deliberation rather than the fiat of one man. We owe Starmer a debt of sorts: his hoopla shows how the system is run in the interest of war and profit rather than human need.

PIK SMEET

Farage – opportunist supreme

‘THAT MEANS less money to cover rent, the weekly shop or a pint down the pub’ (Nigel Farage on the Labour government).

Last month’s *Socialist Standard* carried an article on May’s local election results which saw Nigel Farage’s Reform UK party win hundreds of seats and perhaps present a serious future threat to the traditional two-party Labour-Tory dominance of UK politics. At the same time the article pointed out that this might just be a flash in the pan, and that come the next parliamentary election Reform’s star may have waned, as has happened in the past with other seeming new pretenders to power.

Nevertheless, it also drew attention to the particularly distasteful nature of Reform’s political agenda, with its open and unashamed promotion of xenophobia, calculated to embolden those with racist outlooks and other particularly obnoxious agendas. And though the Socialist Party is not in the business of focusing its criticism on specific capitalist politicians, preferring to see individuals in that role as instruments of the system they are committed to, it would be at the very least disingenuous of us not to put some focus on the politician who is the embodiment of Reform UK and its policies. We are of course talking about Nigel Farage who is the face, we can say the inventor, of that party, without whom it is hard to imagine it could continue being any kind of force in British politics.

In this perspective it is probably useful to point to some aspects of Farage’s previous political attitudes and activities, which led up to and form at least part of the policies now being embraced by his party. We can find the following:

- In the early 1980s, when a student at Dulwich College, he is on record as voicing admiration for Hitler and was reportedly a vocal supporter of the National Front.
- When this was put to him later by a journalist, he admitted to having said ‘some ridiculous things’, but, when asked if these were racist, replied, ‘it depends how you define it’.
- Standing for UKIP at a 1994 by-election, he sought to enlist the support of the figure he called his political hero, Enoch Powell, who had become infamous for his racist ‘rivers of blood’ speech.
- In the years that followed he was associated with figures from the BNP.
- As leader of UKIP from 2006, he advocated dismantling the NHS, declared opposition to gay marriage and made numerous appearances on the Kremlin-run RT television channel, expressing



Credit: Gage Skidmore

admiration for Vladimir Putin and his take-over of Crimea in 2014.

- He has consistently voiced support for Donald Trump, referring to him as his ‘pal’, defending his use of misogynistic language (‘grab ‘em by the pussy’) and, in the run-up to the 2020 American elections, making a speech at a rally in Arizona in which he described Trump as ‘the single most resilient and bravest person I have ever met in my life’.
- He presented himself, in a column in *The Sun* newspaper in April this year, as a modern-day Keir Hardie, stating that ‘when Keir Hardie founded the Labour Party in 1893, he declared it existed to give the working man and woman a voice’, but that now ‘Keir Hardie would be turning in his grave and ‘Labour no longer represents hardworking Brits’.

So now, with characteristic opportunism, Farage, sniffing political power, is seeking to present himself as the leader of a kind of neo-Labour Party who will fix everything Labour has always promised to fix for workers but never has. Statements he has made in the past about privatising the NHS and cutting welfare benefits have ceased, and his focus is on how his party would run things, as he put it in his *Sun* column, ‘in the interests of the working man and woman’.

In reality, he would be no more able to do this than Labour, which, when in power, has always simply carried out the task of administering capitalism in the interests of those who monopolise society’s wealth – as any government must. So the idea that, if elected, Reform would do anything different is manifest tosh. But tosh that, currently at least, seems to be having significant purchase on workers, judging by that party’s recent local election successes.

And another button that Farage is pressing harder than ever in his courtship of voters is the crude nationalism that, as we have seen, has been present in him since an early stage. In ramping up his longstanding scapegoating of foreigners and minority groups of various kinds, he is blaming them for multiple problems suffered by ‘British’ workers which he says the current government is not taking drastic enough steps to remedy. ‘Labour’s biggest betrayal of the Red Wall is immigration’, is how he expressed this in his column in *The Sun*.

From what we have seen, the description of Farage as ‘xenophobic and pandering to racism’ and ‘a disingenuous grifter’ contained in a leaked memo from the Coutts’ bank he was recently and publicly in dispute with really does seem to fit the bill. But we know of course that in the end Farage is only an extreme example of the opportunism inherent in all capitalist political leaders as they seek to control a system that breeds economic chaos, poses the constant threat of war and environmental degradation and can only ever offer workers at best a few crumbs from the table of the rich.

If workers continue to follow the likes of Farage (or any other leader), it will be a long wait before we get the new system we need where the sole motive of production will be to meet the reasonable needs of all in a world society without borders or states or classes. And, of course, before that can happen, workers will also need to throw off their own sense of powerlessness and the illusion that change can only be brought about by certain exceptional individuals.

HKM

Labour in sickness and health

WE ARE told the NHS is a 'national treasure.' That it was built by socialists. That it belongs to us. That if we just had the right funding and the right managers, it could be restored to its former glory.

But we know better. The NHS is often cited, especially by those still enthralled by the Labour Party, as an example of 'socialist' legislation passed during the 1945–1951 Attlee government. Even people who now admit Labour is not socialist cling to the NHS as proof that it once was.

Let's be clear: the NHS was never socialist. It wasn't created to empower workers or take profit out of care. It was built to keep the workforce functional- to patch us up and send us back to work. A healthy worker is a productive worker- and a productive worker generates value for the boss. That's why the capitalist class signed off on it. Not out of compassion. Out of calculation.

Sure, there was high-minded rhetoric at the time. Aneurin Bevan, considered the founder of the NHS, said: 'No society can call itself civilised if a sick person is denied medical aid because of lack of means'. And William Beveridge, architect of the welfare state, said: 'A revolutionary moment in the world's history is a time for revolution, not for patching'. Later he stormed the barricades of the House of Lords as he became a Liberal peer.

The real context was fear. The ruling class had just dragged us through mass unemployment and a world war, and it now faced an angry, armed working class returning home. It saw what had happened in Italy. Reforms were made not to end capitalism but to save it from social and industrial unrest.

Bevan once asked: 'How can wealth persuade poverty to use its political power to keep wealth in power?' He blamed the Conservatives, calling them 'vermin'. But take the party labels off, and the question becomes sharper. The problem isn't just the Tories. It's a system that ensures poverty exists in the first place.

Bevan couldn't see that. For him, the enemy wore a blue rosette. For us, the enemy is the wages system, the class system, the profit system. That's what's killing the NHS. That's what's killing us.

Now, 75 years on, they're not even pretending. The NHS has become a marketplace. Drugs are bought from profit-hungry pharmaceutical firms. Cleaning is outsourced to contractors who cut wages and corners. Just this month, a scandal was revealed over botched cataract operations

performed by private clinics cashing in on NHS contracts.

We used to joke the NHS was held together with duct tape and goodwill – now they've outsourced the duct tape and privatised the goodwill. They say this is a Tory problem. But what has Labour done?

Wes Streeting- dubbed 'Wes the Rat' by campaigners- is Health Secretary and says he's 'not ideological,' which is odd for a politician. He wants to 'use spare capacity in the private sector'. He calls patients 'customers.' He says the NHS is no longer 'the envy of the world'- not because it's been gutted, but because it hasn't been modernised. That's code for markets, contracts, fragmentation. The same failed model, just rebranded.

Starmer campaigned in 2020 on ending NHS outsourcing. That pledge disappeared like a junior doctor's lunch break. Now it's all about 'outcomes,' 'efficiency,' and 'value for money'. In his worldview, health is a product, not a right.

He's cited NHS England as an example of excessive bureaucracy, duplications, and inefficiency. NHS England's functions are now being absorbed into the Department of Health and Social Care. The transition will take about two years- less time than it takes many trans people to get a first appointment on the NHS waiting list.

Around 9,000 jobs are being axed in the process, as AI systems take over. One of the main tech firms involved is Palantir, a data analytics and armaments contractor with deep ties to the American MAGA state.

Palantir's NHS involvement began with a £1 (one pound) trial contract in March 2020, part of the pandemic response. Then came:

- July 2020: £1 million contract
- December 2020: £23 million, two-year deal
- June 2023: £25 million contract
- November 2023: £480 million for the Federated Data Platform (FDP)

Now, the NHS is locked in.

Palantir was co-founded by billionaire Peter Thiel, a Trump backer who once called the NHS a 'monstrosity'. The company built software for the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE), the CIA, and for predictive policing systems. Its platforms- Gotham and Foundry- have been used for deportations, drone strikes, and surveillance. The CEO, Alex Karp, bizarrely refers to himself as a 'socialist' and a 'neo-Marxist,' despite running a firm helping military and police forces worldwide. He studied the Frankfurt School and Marxian



philosophy but now says Western tech should serve national power and defence. In his book *The Technological Republic*, Karp argues that declining interest in Western civilisation has left tech without 'patriotic duty'. Palantir, in contrast, builds tools for ICE and the US military- showing where its duty lies.

This company now runs NHS data infrastructure. There was no public debate. No vote. Just a quiet, technocratic handover, sold as 'integration' and 'efficiency'. It sounds like an IT upgrade. In reality, it's a power shift- from public stewardship to corporate control.

Palantir claims it doesn't own the data. Maybe not. But it owns the system. The architecture. The infrastructure. That's vendor lock-in- like getting a free coffee machine and finding the pods cost £12 each and are only sold in Texas.

This isn't reform. It's enclosure. The same old privatisation, dressed up as innovation. And the outcome? A two-tier system. A burnt-out workforce. A public service run like a business where care takes a backseat to cost-cutting.

They say the NHS is free. But people pay for it- with taxes when they pay them, with our labour and with our time. It's not free. *We* are. Free to wait. Free to suffer. Free to die while shareholders get dividends and algorithms determine care.

The Socialist Party stands for more than better management or fresh branding. We advocate the abolition of the wages system. The end of profit in care. A world where there are no customers, no contracts, no markets- just people, meeting each other's needs.

Health is not a service. It's a condition of freedom. The NHS can't be saved. It must be *superseded*- by a system where care is not rationed, outsourced, or monetised. Where no one waits, no one pays, and no one profits. That's not utopian. That's socialism. And we're not asking for it. We're organising for it.

ANTO

Freedom as non-domination

THE HISTORICAL influence of republicanism upon socialist thinking has been somewhat obscured, though recent works such as William Clare Roberts' *Marx's Inferno* and Bruno Leipold's *Citizen Marx* have done much to help bring this relation back into the light. What is distinctive about the republican tradition is its conception of freedom, which differs from the one most commonly used today. Republican ideas about freedom were picked up and adapted by early socialists.

Freedom from and freedom to

Introductions to political or social freedom often start with Isaiah Berlin's essay *Two Concepts of Liberty*. This article will follow the convention and begin here, not because there is anything uniquely faultless about Berlin's essay, but because it has become the paradigmatic statement of the modern view of liberty. Berlin distinguishes between two ways of thinking about freedom, which he labels 'positive' and 'negative'. In secondary texts this distinction is sometimes explained as being the difference between 'freedom to' and 'freedom from', but this does not really capture two distinct concepts just two different ways of talking about the same thing – for example, the 'freedom to' enjoy a quiet space is also at the same time the 'freedom from' the interference of noisy neighbours.

While freedom in the negative sense can straightforwardly be understood as an absence of constraint or interference, Berlin's positive freedom is a little harder to pin down. If we think of positive freedom as being about self-mastery of our internal life, we still have something that can be collapsed into negative freedom. The mastery of physiological compulsion can still be thought of as the overcoming of interference or constraints, and so a type of negative freedom. Instead of being about self-mastery we can think of positive freedom as being about self-realisation and self-perfection. Positive freedom can be understood as overcoming the constraints or barriers that obstruct us from the realisation of our own full potential. Only by living the most fulfilling version of ourselves do we become truly free. On this account, freedom is not an absence but an end-state or achievement. As summarised by Quentin Skinner in *A Third Concept of Liberty*:

'... what underlies these theories of positive liberty is the belief that human

nature has an essence, and that we are free if and only if we succeed in realising that essence in our lives. This enables us to see that there will be as many different interpretations of positive liberty as there are different views about the moral character of humankind. Suppose you accept the Christian view that the essence of our nature is religious, and thus that we attain our highest ends if and only if we consecrate our lives to God. Then you will believe that, in the words of Thomas Cranmer, the service of God "is perfect freedom". Or suppose you accept the Aristotelian argument that man is a political animal, the argument restated as a theory of freedom by Hannah Arendt in *Between Past and Future* (1961). Then you will believe that, as Arendt maintains, "freedom . . . and politics coincide" and that "this freedom is primarily experienced in action".

Berlin, who was writing during the Cold War and in opposition to Stalinism, highlights how this positive conception of freedom could be open to abuse. It leaves itself open to paternalistic and authoritarian interpretations. If freedom amounts to the achievement of our true potential or real interests, the question arises as to what these 'real' interests really are. If real interests do not have to be something that an agent is conscious of then the coercive interference from a higher social power could be a way of forcing people to be free. Says Berlin:

'... George Orwell is excellent on this. People say "I express your real wishes. You may think that you know what you want, but I, the Fuhrer, we the Party Central Committee, know you better than you know yourself, and provide you with what you would ask for if you recognised your "real" needs.'

This is not to say, as is sometimes claimed, that Berlin thought that every use of the concept of positive freedom was a concealed attempt at manipulation and that we should therefore only use the negative conception. His claim was that historically the positive conception had been misused more often and with more devastating results. The negative conception of freedom was also open to misuse:

'...Negative liberty is twisted when I am told that liberty must be equal for the tigers and for the sheep and that this cannot be avoided even if it enables the former to eat the latter if coercion by the state is not to be used. Of course unlimited liberty for capitalists destroys the liberty of the workers, unlimited

liberty for factory-owners or parents will allow children to be employed in the coal-mines. Certainly the weak must be protected against the strong, and liberty to that extent be curtailed. Negative liberty must be curtailed if positive liberty is to be sufficiently realised; there must be a balance between the two, about which no clear principles can be enunciated. Positive and negative liberty are both perfectly valid concepts, but it seems to me that historically more damage has been done by pseudo-positive than by pseudo-negative liberty in the modern world.'

Ancient Rome

Having a grasp of these two common ways of thinking about freedom we can now introduce a third conception, which is commonly referred to as 'republican' or 'neo-roman' freedom. This way of thinking about freedom has been bought back into the public consciousness largely thanks to the work of historian of ideas Quentin Skinner and the political philosopher Philip Pettit. It can be thought of as 'freedom as non-domination' or 'freedom as independence'. This republican concept of freedom can be directly tracked back to the *Digest* of Roman law. Here it is stated that 'the fundamental division within the law of persons is that all men and women are either free or are slaves' and that 'Slavery is an institution of the law of nations by which someone is, contrary to nature, subjected to the dominion of someone else'. From this we can get a definition of what it means to be a free person within a society. A free person is someone who is not under the dominion of anyone else and can act on their own accord. As Livy, the Roman historian who served as an inspiration for Machiavelli and other 16th century Florentine republicans, put it – to be free was 'to be in your own power' and not dependent on the will of anybody else.

The key difference between republican and negative freedom can be illustrated in this way: On the negative conception of freedom a slave who is not interfered with, and left to do as they please, is free. While on the republican conception what makes someone free is not the absence of interference but the absence of domination. Even though a slave may be left to go about as they please, at any point they could be interfered with according to the arbitrary whims of their master. The knowledge that arbitrary interference can be applied at any point is enough

to be a restriction to liberty, behaviour and comment must continually be self-monitored so as to avoid the sanction of the master. On the republican account, freedom is a status relation within a society that makes it impossible to be the helpless victim of arbitrary interference. As Sidney wrote in his 1698 *Discourses Concerning Government*, 'he is a slave who serves the best and gentlest man in the world, as well as he who serves the worst; and he does serve him if he must obey his commands, and depends upon his will.'

In the English Civil War, disputes between Crown and Parliament drew upon this language of dependency and dominion, drawing upon common-law texts which had their basis in the Roman *Digest*. The effect of Royal prerogative was that those living under the king were reduced to a state of servitude. This was not because of any actual or threatened interference, but because the continuation of rights and freedoms was dependent on the goodwill of the King, and this could be withdrawn at any point. It was this state of dependency, of being under the dominion of the King, that was the threat to freedom. When King Charles was executed, the charge was that he had ruled arbitrarily and so tyrannically. The Act that abolished the monarchy declared that the effect of prerogative had been 'to oppress and impoverish and enslave the subject'.

As well as being central to the English revolution, these ideas would surface again a century later in the French and American revolutions. The central idea was that it was only possible to have individual freedom through being a citizen of a self-ruling republic. To live under the dependence of a monarch, or in the American case under a colonial power, is to be reduced to the status of a

slave. This understanding of freedom as being a state of independence left some controversy as to the normative status of industrial production and wage labour in the early years of the American republic. Wage labour was seen as being a state of dependency and so a form of unfreedom which was degrading to the moral health of the nation. 'Free labour', either in the form of small-scale production where the producers also owned their means of production or that of independent homesteaders was seen as being more conducive to building a strong and resilient nation.

Freedom as emancipation

Reaction against revolutionary and democratic movements in France and America saw the development and spread of the idea of freedom as non-interference. This, together with the irresistible rise of international commerce with its permanent dependence on wage labour, saw a decline in republican ways of thinking about freedom by the late 18th century. The concept of negative freedom, in the form of voluntarist ideas about freedom of contract, was one that was more suitable for the needs of the capitalist class. Though republican ideas about freedom would continue to persist in the labour and nascent socialist movements.

'Something of slavery still remains... something of freedom is yet to come' wrote the labour republican Ira Steward in 1873. Early socialists would continue to use the language of 'wage-slavery', 'self-emancipation' and other tropes drawn from radical republican heritage.

But they did not just adopt republican ideas wholesale; they responded to and

critiqued them. Republican language focussed on an undifferentiated 'people' as the basis for a self-governing republic, socialist language on the proletariat as the group-agent capable of changing society. The first English translation of *Communist Manifesto* was in a newspaper entitled *The Red Republican*, and here the difference between radical republican and socialist ideas can be seen in contrast side by side. Labour republicans, such as the Knights of Labor, sought to lessen the dependence of the working class through the development of workers co-ops, etc. Marx's *Capital* can be understood as an intervention within the labour movement against the prominence of such ideas. Socialist critique argued that it was not enough for individual groups of workers to separately own their own enterprises, market competition would still present itself as a form of impersonal domination. Understanding freedom as non-domination provides a rich foundation for criticising capitalist society. The formally 'free' contract that the wage labourer enters into turns out to be a one-way ticket into a relation of dependency. Employers impose the same kind of arbitrary interference upon workers as kings on their subjects. The importance of non-domination in the foundations of socialism is why it has to be a movement for collective self-emancipation and why authoritarian attempts to impose it on an unwilling or passive population would be doomed to failure. Rather than being the 'real interests' of the proletariat imposed by an authoritarian state, freedom as non-domination is a collective good. The extent to which it is achieved depends on the extent to which it has been secured for others.

DJP



Thoughts on the future

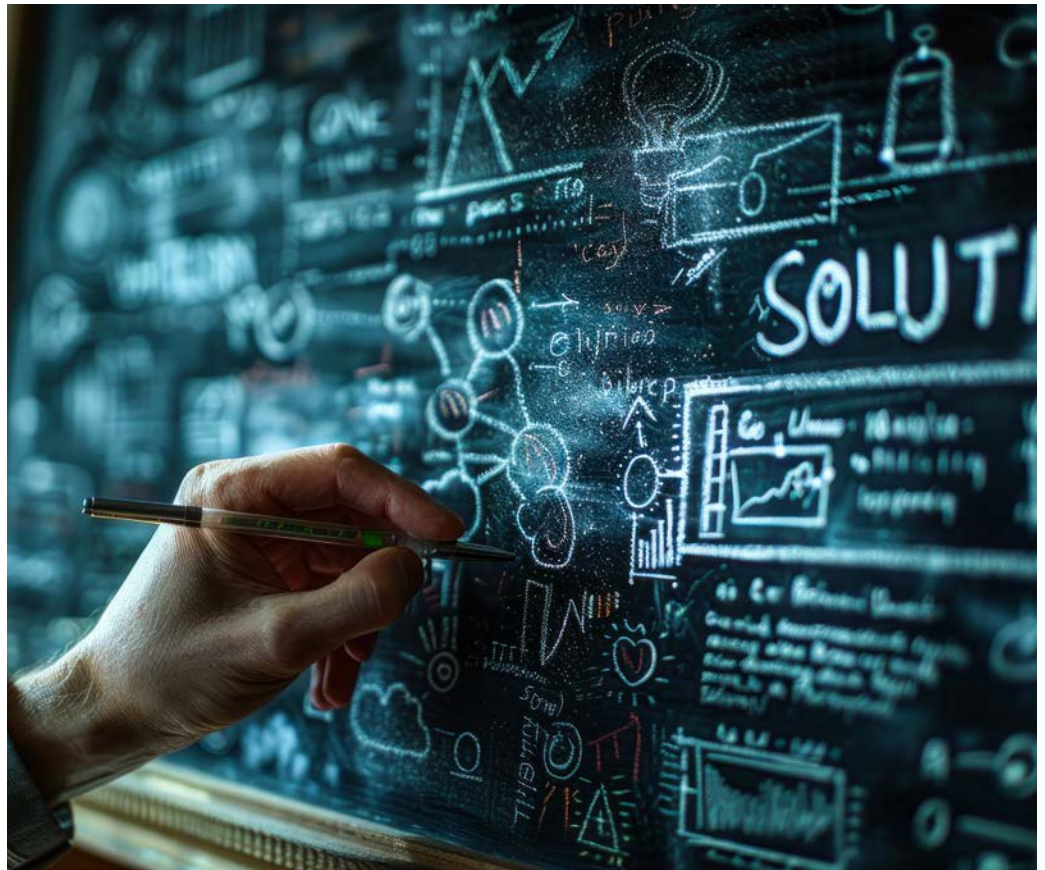
HUMANS ARE both magnificent creators and problem-solvers as well, obviously, as beings capable of incredible stupidity and ignorance and, to quote the title of a New Order album, of power, corruption and lies. We cry at the folly of the human race, which has achieved so much in technological and scientific achievement, as it has in the arts, and yet which still continues to treat humans and the natural world as so much gunpowder to shoot out of the cannon of profit or power.

It is difficult to understand why humans put up with the resulting stress, the inefficiencies, the deprivations, the downright failures. It is as though most people view themselves as passive agents who can, at most, protest the system's injustices in the hope that the powerful will respond, vote for what they believe to be the best alternative or at least the less offensive, and trust that the leaders and experts know what they are doing and will ensure their welfare. However, reality does not seem to conform to such expectations when it comes to protesting, voting and trusting. Instead, the system seems an inherently unstable structure, with its economic booms and depressions, its constant eruption of wars somewhere around the world, its inability to care about or effect sufficient environmental restoration, and the constant explosions of pseudoscience and misinformation that accompany cultural movements and fads, which are like commodities in the realm of ideas.

We are clearly not going to have the better world that the scientific and democratic revolutions promised us. This is because the voices of those who rightly insisted upon our release from the rule of aristocrats and the church ignorantly associated the rise of capitalist production with liberty. There is very little in capitalism to support that contention, even though those democratic revolutions released commodity production from the clutches of feudal privilege. Peasants were also released from the landlords of the ancient regime, and then fell into the equally ruthless hands of the bourgeoisie.

Change of masters

In this new world based on factory



Credit: Adobe stock

production, only the masters changed. The new ones introduced a form of 'freedom' without the prior obligations of the landlord. Living in slums, dressing in rags, suffering fatal industrial accidents, and being paid the least that the capitalists could get away with became the new normal, just as being owned by a master or living off one's master's land were the previous normal. Much of the world still resembles this embryo of a society based on greed and exploitation. Unionisation, technological advances and a degree of trickle-down economics improved the material lot of a greater percent of workers than our ancestors experienced in prior centuries, but the values that govern our system have not changed. We remain, most of us, essentially slaves to a system prioritised not to meeting the needs of the community but to making a profit.

It is amazing that the human spirit persists through this horror show that we live in. Doctors and nurses do incredible work to help the ill by putting the person first and the cost second, but health outcomes remain predicted by poverty and stress. I offer emotional support to local nursing home residents for a half a day per week, and their greatest complaint is not their medical conditions or loss of their home, although these are traumatic and depressing, but just

the fact of residing somewhere that is understaffed. In such a nursing home, the residents wait long periods of time to be changed when they soil their bed. They wait hours for someone to notice they have turned on the light outside their room indicating a request for help. The food is almost inedible, after a life of homemade meals. The few activities offered hardly fill an expanse of time with nothing to do except watch TV. Muscles weaken and stiffen, and bodies waste away because physical therapy is too infrequent to make a difference.

That example is symptomatic of our entire economic system. While yes, bridges and buildings are somehow maintained, and supermarkets for most of us in the western world are stocked plentifully; the entire economic system of capitalism seems to hop along on one leg into an insecure, unstable future because one cannot predict the economy, the availability of jobs, the unemployment ahead, whether the mortgage will be paid without fail over a thirty year period, whether war will strike us, whether our planet will worsen, and how much social services will or won't be financed based on the ideology of the constantly changing governments.

Meanwhile, our system is like a bus being driven by a thousand drivers each

tugging in different directions. Because in capitalism all goods and services are commodities, thousands of companies use up human and natural resources with no intelligent oversight and with no regard for the living planet that is our home. Even the governing bodies that do exist to monitor and make recommendations about health, the environment, poverty, literacy, or other human needs, can only advocate, can only raise so much money, and must always fight cost-cutting priorities, varying ideologies, and think tanks that promote business interests by fighting activism with pseudoscience and misinformation. The needs of business and the needs of the community and of all living beings are almost always antagonistic.

A world without commodities

The one change that could definitively solve many of these intractable capitalist problems is the end of commodity production. The commodity is a feature of all shades of capitalism: moderate welfare state capitalism, state capitalism governed by autocratic left-wing or right-wing parties, or dictatorships run by charismatic narcissists, generals and religious extremists. Every government, whatever its political flavour, revolves around capitalism's defining entity, the commodity. That institution allows the propertyless to survive only by selling their commodified skills. It allows economic production to be defined by the selling of goods and services. It limits access to society's benefits based on priorities such as price, cost, profit and loss. It encourages thousands of companies to strip the planet like so many piranhas in the quest for profits. And its products are not produced primarily with quality, durability, or even need in mind, but mass-produced for cheapness and marketed through advertising to maximise persuasion and create false needs and wants, with oftentimes ill effects on human health, emotional wellbeing, financial security, the living planet, and other 'externalities' that profit cares nothing about.

A world without commodities would be one in which the priority of production would be the meeting of human needs. This would likely incentivise humans to work, to do their best, to maximise their knowledge, education, and skills, and to reduce the endless negative repercussions of the acquisitive nature of capitalism, which often brings out the worst in people. The liberty that capitalism claims to offer, which is really the liberty of capitalists to produce with minimal legal or political restrictions, comes hand-in-hand with all

those externalities which erode human liberty: crime; violent gang or cartel shootings; corruption at all levels of the society; the drug trade; wars, unpleasant workplaces and work itself; rampant pseudoscience and misinformation; a worship of individualism that breeds narcissism; the widespread destruction of our oceans, lakes, rivers, forests, air, soil quality, species, and weather; the huge waste in human energy and resources that goes into managing commodities (banks, advertisers, traders, investors, insurers, ticket inspectors, sellers, buyers, exchangers, the machinery of war, and much more). All these side effects mean that capitalism erodes human liberty more than it promotes it, even in those countries fortunate enough to have some degree of freedom of speech and movement.

A world without commodities will require production under different rules. Production in the modern world merges many sciences, and so the research, planning, and execution of how best to meet human needs is essentially a scientific project. Money too often distorts this. Money is not real, but an entirely cultural and psychological phenomenon that evolved with power and property. Money does not belong in science, in the same way that political ideologies in university settings should not distort the practice and results of science. Our own world community should make use of productive machinery to meet our material needs, allowing us the freedom and liberty to live our own lives as we choose and according to our own values and interests. 'Freedom' will no longer be just an ideological soundbite used to con voters, but a reality, for the first time in human history.

The desire to build a world without commodities goes with the desire to live sustainably, both individually and as a culture. Capitalism, and its repressive antecedents (feudalism and slavery), distorted our concept of nature, essentially objectifying it. The rise in environmentalism represents a fairly recent development in our understanding of nature, even though it often fails to identify the economic culprit behind the objectification of living beings, namely commodity production. Socialists strive for the abolition of commodities, including the wages system, which reduces people to machines who sell their abilities to employers. Technical social questions will then be rid of financial considerations, which are not part of nature, or of our nature.

Such questions could be: Where do I want to live? What kinds of work would I find satisfying? What are the most

pressing local needs that I wish to help meet? What can I do to help beautify my city? Are there realms of knowledge that I wish to contribute to? These, and many more personal questions, may finally be answered by self-knowledge, adventure, imagination, and a profound sense of serving other humans that religions can only fantasise about. A society in which our needs are in harmony with the needs of society as a whole. A society in which the purpose of production and of administration is the meeting of needs, in which we no longer fear poverty, starvation, war, or oppressive state ideologies and their henchmen. These are permanent and durable solutions to the problems that we face today, that may yield a sense of comfort and belonging that we are entitled to as humans who show our giving side each day when serving employers, families, and neighbourhoods.

We should feel that our world is *ours*. We are for the most part good, though imperfect, beings, who deserve a world in which our built-in, vulnerable fears of being emotionally damaged and eradicated by death should be matched by a sense that our community exists as much for us as we do for it. The eradication of the commodity, and its replacement by goods and services produced for free with the aim of meeting our needs, will bring out the best in the human animal, intellectually, emotionally, socially, and in terms of physical and emotional health.

There is no need for a world that encourages violence, competitiveness, ideological rivalry, ruthlessness and greed. Because we are imperfect beings with the potential for both good and evil, it behoves us to establish a social system that will be more likely to bring out the good than the bad. We owe that to ourselves, so that we can continue to evolve emotionally and psychologically, having finally conquered the most basic material needs of existence.

Once we have met those basic needs without unnecessary complication, stress and waste, we may continue to evolve more important qualities that today's psychologically system frustrates or prevents, and which our children deserve to be raised by: generosity, kindness, aesthetics, reason, gratitude, wisdom and, as beings on possibly the only planet that sustains any degree of complex life, awe at life itself, from the quantum level to the breathtakingly huge and beautiful universe, that the consciousness inside our humbly small heads allows us to marvel at.

DR WHO

Hypocrisy about ‘rights’

THE EQUALITY and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) recently moved to secure a High Court injunction banning peaceful protest outside its Vauxhall offices. The aim was clear, to halt a Trans Kids Deserve Better protest encampment calling out the Commission’s anti-trans guidance. Instead, the court firmly rejected the move.

On 3 June 2025, Justice Sheldon dismissed the application, stating the EHRC’s landlord failed to prove a ‘strong probability’ of future trespass or encampment. Campaigners celebrated the decision: ‘Simon Natas of ITN Solicitors, representing campaigners, warned that such so-called “persons unknown” injunctions: “have become increasingly common ... their impacts on freedoms of speech and assembly are far-reaching”’.

The EHRC’s website proclaims that ‘Article 11 protects your right to protest’.

Now, as Good Law Project points out:

‘The EHRC was created to protect our rights. Now it’s trying to quash peaceful demonstrations.’ It’s hypocrisy laid bare.

This is arguably alarming given that the protest highlighted the EHRC’s recent interim guidance, issued hastily after the UK Supreme Court’s April ruling defining womanhood and EHRC Commissioner Akua Reindorf’s call for a ‘period of correction’ for trans people, believing they had ‘been misled for years’.

The backlash was immediate: the interim guidance prompted Labour to scrap its national women’s conference for the next two years and extend consultations, forcing the EHRC to delay updates to its code of practice.

Last month, ‘thousands’ rallied in London and Edinburgh to oppose the guidance ([heraldsun.com.au](https://www.heraldsun.com.au)). In Glasgow, activists scaled the EHRC building, displaying

a banner reading ‘End Segregation, Trans Liberation’ — a direct challenge to its policies ([thescottishsun.co.uk](https://www.thescottishsun.co.uk)).

This affair lays bare a telling reality: the EHRC, ostensibly set up to be a rights champion, now resorts to court injunctions to silence criticism, specifically from the trans community. Claims of institutional independence crumble when it attempts to suppress dissent aimed directly at itself.

Rights under capitalism are conditional. The EHRC’s failed injunction is significant, not because it defends protest, but because it pushed legal limits on dissent and lost. Socialists can never trust courts or quangos. Genuine rights including freedom of assembly, equality, and dignity, rest only with mass collective working-class control. The EHRC’s attempt to ban protest is an attack on that principle. Fortunately, this time they failed.

A.T.

Military indoctrination for school kids

A RECENT headline grabbed our attention: ‘Military gap years for teens and school lessons on defence to prepare UK for war’ (i paper, 2 June- tinyurl.com/4vchs2ds)

Amidst the war hysteria being ramped up by the governments of the UK, Germany and France, and by Brussels, our schoolchildren too are not being spared the fear-mongering.

‘Teaching’ them ‘defence’ and ‘respect’ for the killing forces of the capitalist state is not an education in any sense, but an indoctrination in fear and an unpardonable assault on young, impressionable minds. Whilst capitalism exists war is an ever-present reality which can only be removed when capitalism itself is abolished.

As for ‘teaching defence’, it is a repugnant falsehood to make people believe there is any defence to be had in the event of a nuclear war. The weapons defend nobody. They inflict mutual annihilation. There can be no life following such an exchange, let alone any desire to still be alive.

If the word obscenity was ever to be really defined, it is by the present British



government’s imposition of war panic on the populace and on our children. Not to mention the psychologically and emotionally vulnerable. The taking away of livelihoods and the continual squeezing of the poorest in society is not, it seems, enough for the Starmerite government.

Every year, capitalism shows us just

how low and how anti-life it can sink. It is this defunct and lethal system that needs to be abolished now before it abolishes life on our planet. Only the working class themselves, the vast majority, can and must abolish capitalism — the system of death.

A.W.

Vanguards, get lost

MAYBE IT'S because our offices are situated there and it's done to annoy or provoke us but the street furniture in Clapham High Street in South-West London is frequently the object of posters and stickers adorned with a hammer and sickle saying 'Join the Communists'. Following the internet links given reveals they come from the 'Revolutionary Communist Party' and the 'Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist)'. Recently they have been joined by a third, 'Communist Vanguard', apparently a split from the 'Revolutionary Communist Group'.

All these, and perhaps up to 53 other varieties, claim to stand for an oxymoron they call 'Marxism-Leninism' and use the hammer and sickle as their logo. How oxymoronic they are can be seen by comparing what they say with what Marx and Engels wrote in 1848 in the Communist Manifesto:

'All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority'.

This is how 'Communist Vanguard' introduces itself: 'Our main task is to forge the future Communist Party, the revolutionary vanguard of the working class and the only organisation capable of leading the fight to destroy capitalism. For

a Marxist-Leninist organisation, building the Party is inseparable from organising the working class. Only the proletariat, as the gravedigger of capitalism, possesses both the objective interest and the collective power to carry out a revolutionary transformation of society. To guide this process, we aim to create communist cadres capable of weaponising their theoretical understanding of capitalism and scientific socialism, clarifying central political questions for the working-class movement, establishing roots in labour organisations, and developing the theoretical and practical foundations necessary for revolutionary transformation' (communistvanguard.org/about-us/).

Pure Leninism: workers, incapable of organising themselves to overthrow capitalism, need a vanguard and its cadres ('a small group of trained people who form the basic unit of a military, political, or business organisation') to lead and guide them in this.

So it's 'the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority' (Marx) versus 'the revolutionary vanguard ... the only organisation capable of leading the working class ... To guide this process ... communist cadres...' (Lenin).

The contrast could not be starker and explains why 'Marxism-Leninism' is as

much an oxymoron as a 'square circle'.

The hammer and sickle was the logo of the Bolshevik Party which seized power in Russia in November 1917. This was a typical historical minority movement and led not to socialism but to state capitalism with the section of the cadres who won the internecine struggle that followed Lenin's death in 1924 emerging as the new, privileged ruling class.

Capitalism wasn't overthrown in Russia in 1917. It couldn't have been as, in the absence of a world socialist revolution, it was ripe only for the further development of capitalism. How economically backward Russia was then was reflected in the Bolsheviks' logo of a hammer to beat metal and a sickle to cut wheat.

It is difficult to see why the rival vanguards think that an ideology and logo that emerged over a hundred years ago in an economically backward part of the world could be attractive for workers today living in an advanced capitalist economy. Both ideology and logo are completely irrelevant.

The vanguards evidently have a high opinion of themselves to appoint themselves the leaders of the working class. The workers need them like they need a hole in the head. The answer of the working class to this arrogant pretention is simple: get lost.

Who are the 'People'?

THE PEOPLE, *n.* with *def. article*: a term that arose with the war of independence of American property-owners from the British crown and which came into general international use with the bourgeois revolution in France, where it referred to the 'Third Estate' – a general term for those neither of noble nor ecclesiastical aristocracy, but applying specifically to the revolutionary bourgeoisie, or capitalist (middle) class, as applied to themselves.

'The People' was therefore a capitalist term and indicated that class's political and economic interest. It was mistakenly adopted by the nascent French working class of the French Revolutionary period, in ignorance of the fact that it was their masters' watchword. It is still used today by non-class conscious members of the working class, and also by the representatives of capital desiring to blur

the class struggle and keep the workers believing we share one entity with our exploiters, ie 'The People' of Britain, 'The People' of the United States, 'The People' of China, of Ukraine, of Russia, of Japan, of France, etc.

The People does not exist. There are

two classes under present conditions: the capitalist minority and the working class majority. Each of us belongs to one or the other.

Only with the expropriation of the capitalist class by the working class will *people* come into existence, *the people* of Earth, no more under nation-states, but a real humanity.

A.W.



Did Marx respect the rich?

'EVEN MARX respected the rich more than Reeves' was the headline of an article by *Sunday Telegraph* columnist Michael Mosbacher (18 May). He accused Reeves of putting up taxes on the rich because she believes it immoral to be too rich. And quoted Marx as having written in the *Communist Manifesto of 1848* that 'the bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together'.

It is true that Marx did regard capitalism as historically necessary and, for a while, progressive. He respected – if that's the word – the bourgeoisie not because they were rich (their opponents, the landed aristocracy, were too, even more so in fact) but for when they had played a revolutionary role. Capitalism has long since fulfilled its role of developing the material basis for a world socialist society, so capitalists are no longer revolutionary or necessary.

More generally in his analysis of capitalism, Marx regarded capitalists as essentially personifications of capital whose role was to accumulate more and more capital for re-investment and from which their life of luxury was a deviation. As he put in the Preface to the first German edition of *Das Kapital*: 'I paint the capitalist and the

landlord in no sense *couleur de rose*. But here individuals are dealt with only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class-relations and class-interests'.

Mosbacher went on to say about Marx: 'Marx believed that capitalism's overthrow would come about through its own success. The market – and this is where old Charlie got it spectacularly wrong – would eventually satiate all bourgeois demand. Overproduction, and counter-intuitively mechanisation (he was also quite wrong about this), would reduce the capitalists' profits. Marx's adoption of the labour theory of value – the idea that the worth of any good is determined by the amount of work put into it (...) – meant that the bourgeoisie would only have one option to maintain their riches. And that is scalping a larger share of what the workers' labour has produced. The eventual result of the proletariat's consequent immiseration would be world revolution'.

Did 'Old Charlie' hold that 'the market... would satiate all bourgeois demand'? Mosbacher is not expressing himself very clearly here. He probably meant that production will eventually exceed what can be sold under capitalist conditions, whether to workers or capitalists, and so capitalism comes to suffer a permanent crisis of overproduction.

Marx never held that capitalism would end up in that situation. He did, however, hold

that capitalism would overproduce in relation to market demand from time to time, though not for the reason Mosbacher gives. It was because, when the market was expanding, competing capitalists all plan to benefit from it and end up by producing in total more than the market can absorb. But this would not bring capitalism to an impasse, just to a temporary slump in production, which would eventually create the conditions for a recovery. It was cyclical not terminal.

Did Marx say that 'mechanisation ... would reduce the capitalists' profits'? Here Mosbacher seems to be referring to what Marx called the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. This was connected to mechanisation insofar as mechanisation resulted in proportionately more capital being invested in machinery than in employing wage labour. This would tend to reduce the rate of profit as only the part of the capital invested in wage-labour yielded a surplus value whereas the rate of profit was calculated on total capital.

Marx called this a 'tendency' because there were also counter-tendencies which might prove stronger at times and pointed out that a fall in the rate of profit did not necessarily mean a fall in the amount of profits. It wasn't the iron law that Mosbacher makes it. Capitalism is not going to break down from lack of profits any more than from lack of markets.

What is Marxism?

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.

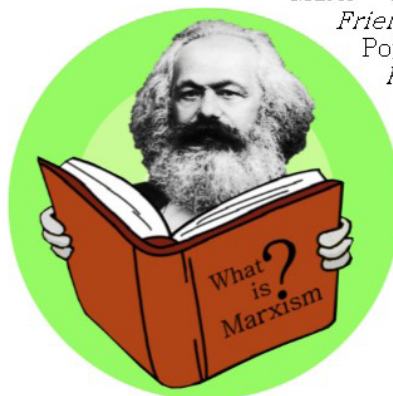
Full residential cost (including accommodation and meals Friday evening to Sunday afternoon) is £150; the concessionary rate is £80. Book online at worldsocialism.org/spgb/summer-school-2025/ or send a cheque (payable to the Socialist Party of Great Britain) with your contact details to Summer School, The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 7UN. Day visitors are welcome, but please e-mail for details in advance. Send enquiries to spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk. Bookings will close on 18th July or before.

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.

Talks include Howard Moss on *Do Socialists Need Marx?*, Keith Graham on *Marxism And Marx – Can They Ever Be Friends?* and Darren Poynton on *Karl Kautsky And The Invention Of Marxism*. More details are online.



Being Informed About Informers

Credit: BBC



IT WAS probably a coincidence that a BBC documentary about the tyrannical Russian state was released on the same day as the government's Defence Secretary John Healey announced increased investment to move the UK to 'war-fighting readiness', especially against Russia. While its timing gave the programme a propagandist tinge, it doesn't consider how the Russian state may be a danger to those of us in the UK, but rather how it oppresses those living under its rule.

The threat of being 'denounced', to the extent it exists in Russia, isn't something easy to empathise with elsewhere. Aspects of what it means to be 'denounced' are found in any country, as all have legislation covering what politically-motivated acts are deemed unacceptable, and anyone risks the consequences for their employment, for instance, of being publicly 'shamed'. However, in Russia, the laws are especially strict and the state monitors dissent from its decrees closely, and so to be 'denounced' for transgressing them can mean particularly harsh punishments. One way which supposedly subversive activities come to the state's attention is through informers. The two featured in the documentary *Informers: Hunting The Enemy Within* aren't employed in this role, which they've taken on like an enthusiastically-pursued hobby. They gather up information online and in the media about would-be dissenters and often alongside targeting them directly, notify the state regulator, who may then further investigate and prosecute.

One of the informers is Valentin Botzvin, an armed forces veteran who has become one of the 'self-appointed guardians of Russia's soul', as the narration puts it. He targets those who he says 'are forming an anti-peace system with different values', including Alisa Gorshenina, who contributed to the design for a video by activist band Pussy Riot. The other

snout featured in the programme – Anna Korobkova – is more prolific, claiming to have written 1,000 denunciations. One victim was Alexandra Arkhipova, a social anthropologist at a Russian university. In 2022, Anna sent Alexandra's employers a letter about her 'immoral act' discrediting the military through her academic work, and some of her friends and colleagues were also similarly accused. Alexandra fled to France and began investigating Anna's real identity, such as by looking for patterns in their style of writing and comparing them with other texts. The camera used for photos on Anna's Wikipedia entry was tracked to a man called Ivan Abaturov. Alexandra found a written denunciation signed by Ivan which resembled one sent by Anna, and both were traced back to one computer IP address. When challenged, Ivan replied denying he was Anna, in the same writing style. He is described as having been a troublemaker while at university and as himself has posted on social media talking about denunciations.

While revealing 'Anna's' true identity gives the documentary a narrative and an air of espionage, Valentin the veteran is quite open about informing. As a member of Russia's military, he had already developed a loyalty to the state, which no doubt gave him the drive to snitch in his retirement. That there are younger people, such as Ivan, who are as keen to denounce others shows how this creed has permeated out. While they may sincerely believe that what they are doing is morally right, this is because they have adopted a belief system which just so happens to align with that of the ruling elite, even if it is against their class interests.

The mindset of those who are at risk of being informed upon is different. As Alisa explains, the threat of retribution for expressing nonconformist views makes her fearful and paranoid. Alexandra felt she had

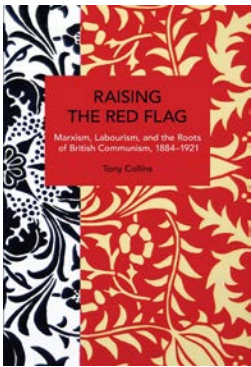
to leave Russia, as did Noize MC, a rapper who was being monitored for his 'sharp, socially conscious lyrics', with some of his gigs being cancelled by officials. Alisa chose to remain in Russia, saying that to leave would be to have something else taken away from her, along with her rights. A caption at the end of the programme says that she was arrested, detained and found guilty of displaying an 'extremist' rainbow emoji and insulting the army, for which she was fined. We're also told that by the end of 2024, almost 3,000 critics of the war against Ukraine were being prosecuted, while almost 300,000 denunciations were registered with the state regulator in the first year of the conflict.

When a state criminalises disagreement with its ideology, this shows a weakness in any arguments for it. But this weakness is eclipsed by the strength wielded by the state through its legislation and punishments. These are applied randomly in Russia, as Alexandra explains, in that one person may avoid any sanctions for writing a provocative social media post, while others may get prosecuted just for clicking 'like' on one. This may be due to gaps in the resources available to the state, but as Alexandra says, this inconsistency contributes to the threat. For those who question the way they have to live, anxiety about being denounced adds pressure to self-censor. Music acts such as Pussy Riot and Noize MC bravely attempt to express some anti-state sentiment, which represents a little optimism. Unfortunately, at the moment, state oppression and limited class consciousness would make any movement for genuine change in Russia difficult to establish.

According to its iPlayer page, the BBC Eye strand offers 'high-impact investigations and in-depth reporting from our award-winning World Service team'. With a running time of only 22 minutes, there's a limit to how in-depth *Informers: Hunting The Enemy Within* could be. So the documentary doesn't consider the context much beyond saying that denouncers threaten to 'bring back ghosts from Russia's past', particularly during Stalin's rule. Throughout the decades between then and now, the state has remained, and even when it has been less autocratic it has still enforced and engendered acceptance to maintain itself. These 'ghosts' may now be more active, but they've always haunted those living under the regime.

MIKE FOSTER

Bolshevising the Red Flag



Raising the Red Flag. Marxism, Labourism, and the Roots of British Communism 1884-1921. By Tony Collins, Haymarket Books.

IN HIS 1969 pioneering work *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-1921: The Origins of British Communism* (reviewed July 1969- tinyurl.com/5f9y2r9y), Walter Kendall advanced the view that Bolshevism-Leninism was something that was alien to the formally democratic traditions of the working class movement in Britain, introduced from an economically and politically backward part of the world where conditions were quite different. Collins, writing as a Leninist, argues that in fact those who founded the British Communist Party were all too much in the tradition of reformist labourism. Both views have some merit.

The main constituents of the CPGB when it was founded in January 1921 were the British Socialist Party (BSP), part of the De Leonist Socialist Labour Party (SLP), *Workers Dreadnought* (Sylvia Pankhurst), and some from the Shop Stewards Movement and the left-wing of the Independent Labour Party (ILP).

The British Socialist Party was the name the Social Democratic Federation adopted when it amalgamated with some branches of the ILP in 1911. It was essentially the same organisation from which the SLP and the SPGB broke away in 1903 and 1904 respectively over its lack of democracy, and its reformism and opportunism. It was to provide the bulk of the original membership of the CPGB and, Collins argues, its political approach too of seeing itself as the left wing of the Labour movement.

Collins examines the origin and practice of the founding factions and finds them all wanting in one way or another from a Leninist point of view. The defect they all (except the Shop Stewards Movement) share, he says, is what he calls 'abstract propagandism' as opposed to seeking to lead a discontented but non-socialist majority in an insurrection against the capitalist state. The Shop Stewards Movement is criticised for restricting itself to purely industrial matters and the 1911 pamphlet *The Miners Next Step* for advancing the slogan of 'no leaders'. His view is that, on the contrary, new leaders were required, but the

leaders of a vanguard party of dedicated revolutionaries. In fact, he argues that it was the absence of this 'subjective' factor that was the reason why there was no workers' revolution in Britain just before and just after the First World War.

Tendentious

Explaining his criticism, Collins writes: 'The SLP's answer to the syndicalists was that a party was necessary to win a parliamentary majority which would then support the workers as they took over industry, whereupon parliament would hand over state power to the industrial unions. ... Shorn of its industrial militancy, this was not very different from the SDF or the SPGB, who believed in the manner of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* that the working class would come to socialism through being educated about its benefits and thus vote for socialists in parliamentary elections' (p. 58).

'The Bolshevik conception', Collins goes on to bemoan, '... did not exist in Britain'.

His criticism is a caricature, and tendentious in suggesting that 'education' meant something other than the action of workers, who had become socialist through their experience of capitalism, persuading their fellow workers to realise, on the basis of the same experience, that socialism was the only solution. It was true, though, that the implication was that a majority of workers who wanted and understood socialism was needed before socialism could be established and that, if that majority existed, workers should, among other things, vote for it. The Bolshevik conception rejects the principle that a socialist majority is necessary, indeed even possible, as it teaches that workers can only reach a trade-union consciousness and so require a vanguard party to lead them politically.

Although the SPGB is mentioned in passing a number of times, as here, only one short paragraph is devoted to our political position:

'By this time the SDF leadership had completed its purge of leftists with the expulsion of the leaders of the London opposition, who formed the Socialist Party of Great Britain in 1904. Once out of the SDF, its leftism proved to be a chimera. The SPGB declared its object to be 'the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery [of government] including [those] armed forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation', and pursued a grim messianic parliamentary reformism for the next hundred years and more' (pp. 30-1).

None of our opponents at the time (and even our honest opponents today)

would have accused us of 'parliamentary reformism', as what characterised us was a refusal to advocate reforms to capitalism (called 'palliatives' at the time). We did advocate using parliament but not to try to reform capitalism but to deprive the capitalist class of their ownership of the means of production and their ability to use the armed forces of the state to maintain it.

Collins's accusation is outrageous, obviously biased and possibly dishonest. It is also ignorant. The term 'instrument of emancipation' was consciously taken from the preamble to the 1880 programme of the Parti Ouvrier Français, a preamble that Marx himself had drafted and which speaks of the working class needing to form themselves into a political party which should use 'universal suffrage which will thus be transformed from the instrument of deception that it has been until now into an instrument of emancipation' (tinyurl.com/bdf7vmj8). Clause Six of our Declaration of Principles which Collins is misinterpreting is saying the same — that to end capitalism the workers need to gain control of the machinery of government (state power) which currently upholds capitalist ownership of the means of production. It is a call for the revolutionary, not the reformist, use of parliament.

It also makes Collins a bad historian as the views of the SPGB are just as relevant, if only in terms of the numbers who held them, to his subject of Marxism during the period he is studying as are those of the SLP, John Maclean and Sylvia Pankhurst. In fact, five of the people mentioned by him either were to become or had been members of the SPGB (Jack Fitzgerald, E. J. B. Allen, T. A. Jackson, Valentine McEntee and George Hicks).

Because he didn't bother to go into the matter in detail, Collins seems to think that the SPGB favoured participation in elections and nothing else. Actually, like the SLP, the SPGB was (and still is) in favour of industrial as well as political action, the difference being over which was the more important. The SLP said industrial, we said political. Ironically, this is the position Collins himself takes up in criticising *The Miners' Next Step* and the Shop Stewards Movement, though, as a Leninist, by political action he envisages a vanguard party staging an armed insurrection to seize state power in a period of acute industrial unrest.

He doesn't list the *Socialist Standard* as among the contemporary publications he looked at. Which will explain how he missed that in March 1915 we published an anti-war statement by the Bolshevik representative in Britain, Maxim Litvinov, when he couldn't find anyone else prepared to do so (tinyurl.com/neybp8b3). He also ignores, while noting that the

BSP, the SLP and Kier Hardie wobbled on the outbreak of the war, that the SPGB immediately denounced it in a manifesto dated 25 August 1914. Nor does he mention that our members were among those imprisoned or going on the run for refusing to be conscripted.

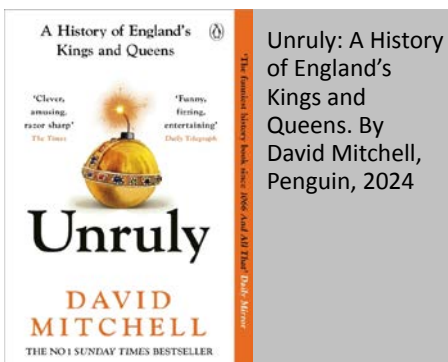
Two issues

The groups which founded the CPGB initially disagreed on two issues which Collins examines in detail — affiliation to the Labour Party and participation in elections. The BSP was in favour of both. Sylvia Pankhurst was against both, while the SLPers favoured electoral action but not affiliation (which would have been our position but we are proud to have had nothing to do with the founding of the CPGB). In the end Lenin and the Communist International decreed that the new party should accept both, which was easy enough to ensure as the bulk of its members had come from the BSP (born SDF).

Collins's point about the early CPGB being a continuation of the reformism of the SDF/BSP is valid, as we recognised at the time from having opposed for the previous sixteen years the views and actions of those involved. However, in the mid-1920s the Communist International decided to 'bolshevise' the CPGB and imposed on it a strictly Leninist organisational form with a leadership that told its members what to do and which way to turn (and which itself took orders from the rulers of state-capitalist Russia). This was, as Kendall had pointed out, quite alien to the traditions of working-class organisations in Britain. Unfortunately, it resulted in the 'Bolshevik conception' getting established here and in Leninist theory and tactics passing as Marxism and revolutionary socialism, as Collins's book itself bears witness. It was left to us, alone for most of the time, to keep the standard of anti-Leninist Marxism flying high.

ADAM BUICK

Kings & Queens



1066 And All That, published in book form in 1930, was a parody on how English history was taught in schools. One of the targets was a history of England as a record of kings and queens, their years of reign and

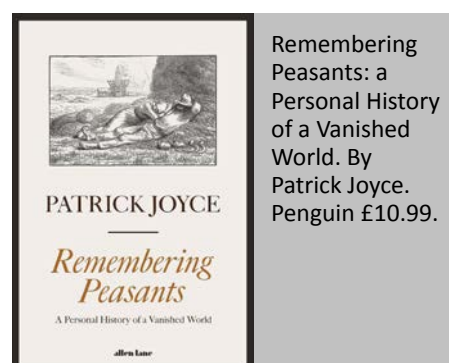
their battles and wars. After the Second World War there was a concerted criticism of this approach from historians — EP Thompson in particular — who argued for a 'history from below'. One consequence of this criticism was the creation of the GCSE history syllabus in the 1980s. This changed the emphasis from memorising the dates of kings and queens to 'key skills' such as empathy. Empathy was an attempt to encourage schoolchildren to imaginatively experience what it was like to live as others lived, such as being a child worker in the cotton factories of mid-nineteenth century Britain. It was controversial, didn't last long, and the emphasis has shifted back in the other direction.

David Mitchell is a comedian, writer and actor. He has no use for empathy in the study of history. He claims that 'it's impossible for a child ... to get their head round how different the lives of the people they're trying to empathise with actually were'. No evidence is offered for 'impossible', not even an amusing anecdote of the sort which peppers this book. 'I'm better with dates, to be honest', he admits. Mitchell went to a private school, so he might not have done GCSE history. In a book with plenty of autobiographical detail, it's curious that he doesn't mention it. So what you do get are a lot of monarchs with a lot of dates and absolutely no history from below. 'It's like a soap opera,' writes Mitchell, 'It never fucking ends'. He doesn't refer to Alan Bennett's *The History Boys*, but Bennett has a student complaining that history is 'one fucking thing after another'. This is what can happen when the subject matter lacks context.

If you are after the historical facts, there's nothing here you can't get from Wikipedia or Google. Apart from the jokes and one-liners such as his summary of Henry VIII — 'He was a cunt', there are some interesting factoids. For instance, according to the Domesday Book of 1086, ten percent of the population of England were slaves. By around 1200, after the Norman invasion, there weren't any.

LEW

Family History and Beyond



The author was 'the London-born child of Irish rural immigrant parents', and here he examines the history and current situation of

peasants, concentrating not just on Ireland (where he discusses his own family history) but also Poland, and in addition with some attention to Italy. It is an eloquent and wide-ranging account, supported by a range of photographs, the earliest dating back to the late nineteenth century.

One chapter deals with the problem of defining who counts as a peasant, but there is no simple answer to this. Peasants are not necessarily serfs; they consume (part of) the products their work creates, with the family and its economy having a central role. They do not seek to maximise their income, and either owned the land they worked or had long-term tenancies. They may produce for the capitalist market, but the extent of this varies according to time and place. They live in 'cultures of scarcity', where prosperity for one person means another going without. Any money earned was not re-invested but kept at home or lent at very low interest rates. And 'peasant societies are societies of the gift, not the commodity ... What is given should be given freely: that which is given without expectation of return feeds the giver again and again.' (The different tenses in this paragraph reflect those in the book.)

Religion often involved various traditional beliefs being incorporated into christian world-views, but 'Religion usually had the law on its side, and so it also had the support of those who upheld the law, the landowners and state.' There was a great deal of 'everyday suffering', and in some places it was the best of the crop that was surrendered in rent. Most years there would be 'pre-harvest famine' from spring onwards.

A powerful chapter deals with peasant revolts and rebellions. Peasants could feud with and even kill each other. There was a code of behaviour, which even the powerful had to recognise, and minor acts of revolt, such as quiet sabotage, could be used to get even. Sometimes this could escalate to violence and murder. In Ireland in 1882, for instance, a land agent was killed after many hundreds had been evicted and an estate converted to a place for fishing and wildlife shooting. There were larger peasant uprisings, such as the German Peasants War of 1524–5, the Romanian rebellion of 1907 and the Tambov Rebellion in Russia in 1920–1. The twentieth century indeed saw much violence inflicted on peasants: 'These barbarities were foundational for the emergence of modern states.' Most of those imprisoned in Soviet gulags were peasants.

Depending on the terminology used, peasants have now largely been replaced by small farmers, and globally over a billion people still do agricultural work, mostly in India and China. But whichever labels are employed, it is clear that peasant history was largely one of struggle, poverty and repression.

PB

Benn's road for capitalism

IN THE run-up to last month's referendum the man who excited most attention was Anthony Benn. The comments on his prophecies of doom and gloom ranged from stabs in the back from his own colleagues such as Roy Jenkins who said he couldn't take Benn seriously as an economic minister (*Guardian* 28th May) to near-hysteria. For example the *Daily Mirror* (29th May) gave him the Draculean headline of "Minister of Fear". An "X" certificate will no doubt follow.

The *Guardian* took the trouble to interview Dracula himself (21st May). The article was headed "Benn's road to Socialism". Benn did not define what he meant by Socialism (no Labour politician will do that), he only mentioned the word once. That was almost by accident when he referred to his package of reforms as "British Socialism".

What concerns Benn is the running of Capitalism. And for those who care to look, it is perfectly obvious that he is determined to run it as efficiently as possible. This means that he is trying to ensure that the workers are exploited as hard as possible —

because that is what efficient Capitalism means.

The source of the wealth of the owning class is the amount of unpaid labour that the working class concede to the capitalist class. This may be called robbery. Benn says "I am for more profits..." That is more wealth to the capitalist class. (...)

The rationale behind Benn's approach is that he can control capitalism by putting into effect his policies. But he plainly admits that it is capitalism that controls the government, and not the other way round. Asked about the best way to use the taxpayers' money he says:

"The government does not dictate the pace of industrial change. It is forced by events to inter-act with reality".

Wilson once said the last labour government was "blown off course". Benn is saying that there is no course to be blown off in the first place. Capitalism acts, and the government reacts.

(*Socialist Standard*, July 1975)

Action Replay

Only Funding

GOVERNMENTS SUPPORT capitalism and its ruling class in various ways, such as the police, courts and prisons. They fund transport superstructure and technological research. In addition, among other things, they provide financial support for sport as a way of boosting national 'pride' and patriotic fervour.

At the 1996 Summer Olympics, the British team fared very badly, winning a solitary gold medal. Not good enough, in terms of inspiring interest in the national team and endorsing flag-waving. The response was the establishment the following year of UK Sport, a government agency that invests money in Olympic and Paralympic sports. The funding comes from the government and the National Lottery, about £370m over the four-year cycle of the Olympics and Paralympics.

That may sound like a lot of money, but at the level of individual athletes it is a lot less generous. Recently the canoeist Kurts Adams Rozentals was suspended from competing by Paddle UK, the governing body. They have not said why, but he reckons it is because of his posts on OnlyFans, a social media site that hosts adult content.

Rozentals has earned over £100,000 from his posts there, which contrasts with the meagre £16,000 he was getting from UK Sport via Paddle UK. He simply couldn't get

by on that, and so started his OnlyFans site, saying, 'I came to the realisation about why I started doing this last winter after years of struggle, years of living on the edge, my mum working 90 hours-a-week, having bailiffs at the door' (BBC online, 29 May).

Some sports of course do better than others in terms of funding, such as over £20m for athletics in 2025–9, but just £700,000 for baseball, which doesn't have anywhere near the same public appeal. The current focus is on the Los Angeles Games in 2028. According to UK Sport's website, 'Olympic and Paralympic sport occupies a special place in the hearts of the British public with more than 80% saying they were proud of Team GB and ParalympicsGB's performances at Paris 2024.'

Besides individual athletes and sports,

the organisation also supports particular sporting events and championships, such as this year's Women's Rugby Union World Cup, to be played at a variety of stadiums in England in August and September, which also has official sponsors too.

Other countries vary in how Olympic and Paralympic sports are funded. In the US it is largely private funding, including sponsors and commercial partners. Earlier this year the 'philanthropist' Ross Stevens made a \$100m donation to the US Olympic Committee; he is the boss of an asset management company, so a wealthy capitalist. The Chinese government has a substantial sport budget, over £2bn a year, mainly for Olympic and Paralympic programmes.

Whether the money comes from the government or direct from capitalists, it is clear that funding for sport is an important part of boosting nationalism and loyalty to 'one's country'.

PB



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.

July 2025 Events

World Socialist Movement online meetings

Sundays at 19.30 (IST) (Discord)

Weekly WSP (India) meeting

Sunday 13 July 10.00 (GMT + 1)

Central Online Branch Meeting

Friday 4 July 19.30 (GMT + 1)

The 1945 General Election

Friday 11 July 19.30 (GMT + 1)

The Rise and Fall of Solidarnosc in Poland in the 1980s

Speaker: Richard Botterill

Friday 18 July 19.30 (GMT + 1)

Hunter Gatherers: from prehistory to today

Speaker: Richard Field

Friday 25 July 19.30 (GMT + 1)

Have you heard the news?

Discussion of recent events

Socialist Party

Physical Meetings

Saturday 12 July

Durham Miners' Gala

The Socialist Party will have a stall at this event.

Details: fredi.edwards@hotmail.com

Saturday 19 and Sunday 20 July

Tolpuddle Martyrs Festival

The Socialist Party will have a stall at this event

Tolpuddle Martyrs Museum, Dorchester Road,

Tolpuddle DT2 EH

CARDIFF

Street Stall Every

Saturday 1pm-3pm

(weather permitting)

Capitol Shopping

Centre, Queen Street

(Newport Road end).



Declaration of Principles

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

Object

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

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

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

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

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

Running scared

I'M ONE of those people who has sympathy for those human beings who have left one country with a view to settling in another – migrants. It doesn't matter to me whether they're fleeing from war or persecution or just looking for a better life for themselves. My view is that that human society everywhere would be much enhanced by people being able to move around the world freely. It would give increased satisfaction with life to those doing the moving and also confer advantages on the cultures receiving them, opening these up to different ideas and different ways of doing things.

Keeping out the foreigner

I could only be dismayed therefore – even if not surprised – at the action of the newly elected Labour government in ramping up the previous administration's policy of hostility to migrants, in particular by introducing new rules for linguistic competence. This will mean that foreigners, whether asylum seekers, 'legal' migrants, students or anything else will not be able to live or work in the UK unless they are able (in the words of the government) 'to express themselves fluently and spontaneously' in English, and speak it 'flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes'. How it might be possible to assess such skills is one matter and is anyone's guess (and many native English speakers would find them problematic), but the idea that that kind of knowledge of English is essential for participating in work or social life is plainly absurd.

So why is the Labour government taking this action as well as laying down other strictures to make it more difficult for people from other countries, whether refugees or otherwise, to live in the UK? The plain and simple answer is that they are running scared. They have only been in office a short time, yet they have tumbled in the polls, performed spectacularly badly in local council elections and already feel beleaguered by the challenge they are facing from that new group of political opportunists, Reform UK, who are banging the racist, anti-foreigner drum as loud as possible with, so it seems, significant

success. They seem to be managing to convince large numbers of workers that the real problems they face – for example insecure employment, making ends meet, fear of crime – are primarily attributable to the relatively small proportion of the population that happens not to have been born in this country. Nothing of course could be further from the truth, but the xenophobic scapegoating of small groups with small differences seems to work well on people who feel under particular economic and emotional pressure.

Uncontrollable system

Add to this the inevitable problems faced by any government trying to control the uncontrollable system that is capitalism – the task the Labour Party has been landed with – and you have the perfect storm. Having placed restrictions on winter fuel payments and made other welfare cuts in the name of 'making ends meet', it is now having to row back on some of that so as not to fall uncontrollably behind in the polls, and is hoping that its anti-migrant stance – craven sop to Reform UK that it is – will somehow help it make up the ground. But there too it is facing opposition – not just from anti-racists but from other perhaps unexpected sources too. We are talking here, for example, about the CBI and other employer bodies who are worried that their members might not be able to recruit workers for 'lower level' employment of various kinds (eg catering, care work, delivery jobs), about the NHS, and about universities who fear the dire financial straits they are already in will be made worse by further difficulties in enrolling foreign students. 'They can't do right for doing wrong' seems the appropriate adage. But this applies to all governments who undertake the task

of running a show that, by its inbuilt chaotic nature, pulls them in multiple different directions. Any principles they may profess before entering office, any 'good intentions' they may have go right out the window once they win power and are faced with the need to keep that show – the anarchic system of capitalism – afloat.

Profit or free access?

As for the plight of migrants, finally I have to declare a personal stake in this. My own forebears were foreigners. My grandparents arrived in this country over 100 years ago, probably speaking no English. But they became part of British society, as my parents were too, with English as their first (and only) language. And the picture has been the same with very many migrant minorities and, regardless of government regulations, will continue to be. But what will also continue, both in this country and across the world, is that migrants and 'native' inhabitants alike will be subject to the contradictions and uncertainties of a system whose prime purpose isn't the wellbeing of the majority of its inhabitants – those who have to work for a wage or salary to survive. Its purpose rather is the production and distribution of goods and services for the profit of the tiny minority who own the means of production and distribution, which process governments have the job of overseeing. The system in question, based as it is on buying and selling, wages and salaries and the market, is by its nature full of unpredictability and is bound to leave flailing any government charged with trying to run it. It needs to

be replaced by a different system – a moneyless, wageless, frontierless society of free access based on the principle of from each according to ability to each according to need. That's what we call socialism, but neither the Labour Party, nor any other party claiming to be aiming for social justice within the framework of the current system, can ever be an instrument for achieving it.

HOWARD MOSS

