

THE

October 2025 • Volume 121 • Number 1454 • £1.50

SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

Polarised lenses



Also: Labour's Department of War
Nationalism and capitalism
Flagging politics
Away with all national flags!

Irish presidential election
(What's the point?)
All socialists now?
Charlie Kirk: A victim of his
own ideology



Features

Labour's Department of War.....	10
Nationalism and capitalism.....	11
Flagging politics	12
Away with all national flags!	13
Irish presidential election (What's the point?)	14
All socialists now?	16
Charlie Kirk: A victim of his own ideology.....	18

Regulars

Editorial	3
-----------------	---

Pathfinders	4
Letter	5
Cooking the Books I	6
Halo Halo.....	7
Tiny tips	7
Material World	9
Cooking the Books II	18
Proper Gander	19
Reviews	20
50 Years Ago.....	22
Action Replay	22
Meetings	23
Life & Times	24

Cover image is a combination of 2 images: © Adobe Stock

Introducing the Socialist Party

The Socialist Party advocates a society where production is freed from the artificial constraints of profit and organised for the benefit of all on the basis of material abundance. It does not have policies to ameliorate aspects of the existing social system. It is opposed to all war.

The *Socialist Standard* is the combative monthly journal of the Socialist Party, published without interruption since 1904. In the 1930s the *Socialist Standard* explained why capitalism would not collapse of its own accord, in response to widespread claims to the contrary, and continues to hold this view in face of the notion's recent popularity. Beveridge's welfare measures of the 1940s were viewed as a reorganisation of poverty and a necessary 'expense' of production, and Keynesian policies designed to overcome slumps an illusion. Today, the journal exposes as false the view that banks create money out of thin



air, and explains why actions to prevent the depredation of the natural world can have limited effect and run counter to the nature of capitalism itself.

Gradualist reformers like the Labour Party believed that capitalism could be transformed through a series of social measures, but have merely become routine managers of the system. The Bolsheviks

had to be content with developing Russian capitalism under a one-party dictatorship. Both failures have given socialism a quite different-- and unattractive-- meaning: state ownership and control. As the *Socialist Standard* pointed out before both courses were followed, the results would more properly be called state capitalism.

The Socialist Party and the World Socialist Movement affirm that capitalism is incapable of meaningful change in the interests of the majority; that the basis of exploitation is the wages/money system. The *Socialist Standard* is proud to have kept alive the original idea of what socialism is-- a classless, stateless, wageless, moneyless society or, defined positively, a democracy in which free and equal men and women co-operate to produce the things they need to live and enjoy life, to which they have free access in accordance with the principle 'from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs'

The fruits of reformism's failures

ON SATURDAY 13 September an estimated 110-150,000 people demonstrated on the streets of central London waving Union and St. George flags to 'Unite the Kingdom'. This followed a campaign of painting the cross of St. George on roundabouts and bridges and attaching the flag to lampposts which no car driver or bus traveller could have failed to notice. Meanwhile the Reform UK party tops polls of voting intentions and is winning local council by-elections up and down the country.

Some, like the organisers of the much smaller — only some 5,000 — counter-demonstration 'against fascist Tommy Robinson and his Far Right supporters', see it as the beginning of the rise of a fascist movement that needs to 'smashed'. Certainly, the organisers were demagogic rabble-rousers peddling prejudice and hate, starting with Robinson himself. Some are indeed fascists. Others seem to have been Christian Nationalists as evidenced by some demonstrators waving crosses. But that's the organisers.

Most of those taking part in the demonstration can't reliably be called fascists, but are people who had been

misled into believing that immigrants and asylum-seekers are somehow being given priority over people born here. They aren't, but the rabble-rousers encourage the mistaken belief that they are. The socialist response is not to smash such demonstrations but to argue all the more forcefully why all workers, native or immigrant, should unite to end the capitalist system that treats them both as second class.

What we are witnessing is not fascism, which arguably belongs to a different era and different political conditions, but what political philosophers have called 'nativism' — the view that the established population of a state should be given priority over incomers. 'Nativism' is one end of the spectrum of nationalism, distinguished by insisting that measures should be taken against immigrants, from making it difficult for them to become citizens to stopping more coming to deporting those who have come.

Part of the socialist case against trying to reform capitalism to make it work for all is that the rise of reactionary parties — including in its day fascism — is a result of the inevitable failure of reformist politics

and parties to do this. Those excluded from the ownership and control of society feel (correctly) that their problems are not being solved and (mistakenly) expect politicians to solve them. Traditionally either the Conservative Party or the Labour Party have been elected to do this. At the moment, the Tories are still discredited by the failure and antics of the previous government while the Labour Party, given a chance after last year's election, has very quickly — more quickly than would normally be expected — become discredited too. This has left an opening for a different set of politicians to bid to have a go.

Reform UK, too, will fail as the problems are not caused by what governments do or don't do but by the workings of the capitalist economic system, which both causes the problems and prevents their solution. The excluded majority are treated as second class because under capitalism making profits for those who own the resources on which society depends comes first. As long as capitalism persists, and as long as people put up with it, the needs of the excluded majority will come second — and some of that majority will be duped by far-right demagogues.

FREE
3-month trial
subscription
to the
**socialist
standard**



For a 3-month trial subscription to the **socialist standard**, or to request more details about the Socialist Party, complete and return this form to **52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN**.



Please send me an info pack



Please send me a trial subscription to the **socialist standard**

Name.....

Address.....

Postcode.....

Subscription Orders should be sent to the address above. **Rates:** One year subscription (normal rate) £15. One year subscription (low/unwaged) £10. Europe rate £40 (Air mail). Rest of the world £40 (surface). Voluntary supporters subscription £20 or more. Cheques payable to 'The Socialist Party of Great Britain'.

Withdrawal symptoms

SOCIALISM, a sophisticated global society of cooperative common ownership, would face a number of urgent legacy problems if established today.

One of these is world hunger, with its related diseases, from which around 10,000 children and 15,000 adults die every day (tinyurl.com/mptnc7eu). Globally some progress has occurred, but almost one in ten people remain undernourished (tinyurl.com/5d6bunpm).

Weirdly though, more children are obese today than underweight. According to a UN report covering 190 countries, whereas in 2000 almost 13 percent were underweight compared to 3 percent obese, today the figures are respectively 9.2 and 9.4 percent (tinyurl.com/yc84mhkm).

Global obesity levels have tripled since 1970, with most commentators attributing the problem to the widespread post-war production of cheap and ultra-processed food, though it may have begun even earlier (tinyurl.com/mrxpx88p). Diets have become progressively less healthy since the Industrial Revolution, when toxic compounds like red lead and green arsenic were used as factory food colourings (tinyurl.com/36s5t5vw).

Profits flow from making us fat, even while obesity is stigmatised. Eight of the ten most obese countries are in the South Pacific, possibly implying a genetic element. But the rest of the world is not far behind. Generally speaking, the only places not obese are those starving (tinyurl.com/mvc7pc2w).

Modern capitalism is a smorgasbord of high-calorie fast food which, along with sedentary online living, constitutes what are called 'obesogenic environments'. But personal choice is also involved. Sugar isn't addictive as such, but does induce a dopamine hit that can be. How would socialism deal with addictions? The need to solve hunger is a no-brainer, but lifestyle choices are more ethically tricky. If our collective behaviour is making us ill, then it places a load on health services. One way to think about a socialist 'economy' is to ask, not 'shall I have X', but 'are other people prepared to put in labour so that I can have X?' Lifestyle isn't just personal, it's political.

Nutrition is a difficult subject. We're not even sure how our own metabolism works. In the 2010s, evolutionary anthropologist Herman Pontzer set out to study metabolism in hunter-gatherers, specifically the Hadza of Tanzania, to see how their active lifestyles burned up calories. His findings rocked the scientific world. It turned out that, though tribal

males might walk or run around ten miles a day, or maybe six for women carrying children, they burned off no more calories than a desk-bound clerk in Manhattan or Manchester. Convinced this had to be a mistake, Pontzer repeated the study with other groups, in other countries, and got the same result. The implications for the global diet industry, worth hundreds of billions, and the global sports fitness industry, worth trillions, are devastating. If Pontzer is right, diet and exercise are not linked but independent processes, so you can't just trade off the one against the other, that is, you can't run three miles and then allow yourself a doughnut. His ingenious working theory, as explained in a recent Babbage interview for *The Economist*, is that organisms don't just go about doing their random daily thing and then pay off the calorie bill afterwards, somewhat like capitalist consumers. Instead they're more like capitalist investors, looking for a long-term payoff in terms of reproductive success, and 'fronting up' the calorie investment in advance. Thus, we have a daily 'calorie budget' which we can invest wisely or poorly. We'll certainly allocate 300 calories, the equivalent of a 5k run, for our large human brains. If we don't spend our remaining budget on physical activity, it will end up being spent on other internal processes which also use energy, like the endocrine system (hormone production, for example testosterone or cortisol) or the immune system. With excess 'fuel' at their disposal, these systems may go into dangerous overdrive, producing autoimmune inflammations, stress-related diseases and cancers prevalent in urban western societies but unknown among the Hadza (tinyurl.com/24wvwwtm).

All of which brings new resonance to the phrase 'armchair socialist'. How exactly a democratic global cooperative society would deal with addiction-related health problems is not really for us to say today. What it wouldn't do is make the problem worse. In capitalism, all industries exist to make profits, even at the expense of killing us. State governments try to impose legal limitations, but vested interests and regulatory capture make this a permanent arms race.

The food industry is hardly alone in treating your body as a rubbish dump. Other industries have bequeathed us microplastic-polluted brains, 'forever chemicals', and the US opioid epidemic, to name just three. To see the ultimate direction of travel for unfettered capitalist markets, just look at organised crime.



Credit: Adobe Stock, AI image

Take 'kush', for instance (or rather, don't). Kush is a highly addictive and dirt-cheap synthetic opioid several times stronger than fentanyl, and now rampant across West Africa (tinyurl.com/3wuczzme).

Quite apart from causing delirium and psychosis, it suppresses the appetite, lowering the body's ability to fight off diseases and results in flesh-eating sores, and swollen limbs. It also results in STDs that women get by selling sex to pay for the kush. It involves no expensive opium or cannabis plantations, but instead uses cheap synthetic compounds (sources: China, Netherlands, UK) which you can cook for next to nothing in a garage. It's also a cinch to transport because it doesn't smell and just a tiny amount is needed to knock people brainless. The drug producers are no doubt delirious with joy at making such a killing, which they are doing, literally by the thousand: 'It's killing so many people that the mayor of Freetown [Sierra Leone] has had to set up a dedicated burial team to pick up abandoned bodies in the streets. These mass burials and cremations have been going on since 2022' (tinyurl.com/52z3tvtm).

Socialism's legacy problems might be tricky where personal choice is involved. Without the profit motive though, there'll simply be no point in producing foods and drugs that kill people, even if that could involve some withdrawal symptoms.

PJS

Conditions for socialism

Dear Editors

I AM sympathetic to the politics of the Socialist Party of Great Britain and share its aim of a socialist society established by a conscious and democratic working class majority. What follows is written in that spirit, as a contribution to the discussion on how we prepare for such a transformation.

Capitalism cannot transform itself into socialism. That conviction lies at the heart of socialist thinking and aligns with the principle of establishing a system where the means of production are owned and democratically controlled by the community as a whole. Socialism must be the conscious act of a working class armed with knowledge, organisation, and power.

It is often argued that when the working class is ready for socialism it will vote for it. That rests on two essential truths. First, socialism can only be achieved by a large conscious majority acting democratically and intentionally. Second, the existing machinery of parliamentary democracy, limited though it may be, contains within it the possibility for a peaceful and organised transition, provided the working class understands how that machinery works.

Capitalism thrives on keeping the population politically subdued and misinformed. A poorly informed electorate is an easily ruled one. That is why the working class must be educated, not only in the theory of socialism, but also in how decisions are made, how budgets are set, how law functions, and how representatives can be held accountable. Knowing the rules is the first step to changing the game altogether.

Real democracy begins in our communities, workplaces, housing estates, and union halls, places where working people already share their lives and struggles. Those local assemblies could form the foundation of socialist organisation. On that base, regional workers' councils could coordinate action on health, housing, transport, and workplace democracy. Delegates to such councils would remain at the service of their community, recallable, rotating, and bound by the decisions they carry.

Above these regional councils, a national workers' convention could bring

together delegates answerable to their base, constrained by short terms, public transparency, and salaries no higher than a worker's wage. Such a structure could make use of the ballot box while grounding representation in a democracy strengthened from below.

This approach does not reject parliamentary activity. Parliamentary work could serve to spread clarity, to win small improvements, and to reinforce struggles beyond the ballot box. Democracy, limited though it may be, can be an instrument of socialist transformation, but only when matched with organised, politically educated working class action.

If capitalism falls, socialism must stand ready. A revolution of words without preparation, or the destruction of the old system without having built the tools to replace it, will only lead to chaos. Education, organisation, clarity of purpose, and collective democratic structures matter as much as any vote.

Capitalist institutions will call this vision naive or impractical. That reveals their fear. They would rather manage anxiety than meet a working class that knows its power, acts together, and understands both the potential and the limits of parliament.

Socialism requires no saviours. It requires citizens who understand how power works, believe in collective solutions, and organise from the ground up. This is not a utopian fantasy. This is the practical road to a democratic and equitable society.

PABLO WILCOX

Reply:

We agree. Obviously, socialism cannot be introduced by a simple parliamentary vote. It requires, as you put it, 'a large conscious majority acting democratically and intentionally' and, also, organised outside parliament in the sort of ways you outline. We would add that, to win control of political power, it will also require a mass socialist party, organised in the same sort of democratic way and without leaders, to contest elections and send mandated delegates to the parliament and regional and local councils. The socialist majority needs to win control of political power to take it out of the hands of those

who control it on behalf of the capitalist class and to use it to end their ownership of the resources on which society depends. This has to be done before current problems can be solved in an effective and lasting way.

Three different situations need to be distinguished: (1) what exists today when only a relatively tiny minority want socialism; (2) what will exist when a substantial minority and eventually a large majority want socialism; (3) what will exist when socialism has been established.

On (1), we draw the conclusion that the urgent priority is to help the emergence of more and more socialists by spreading the view that capitalism can never be reformed to work in the interest of the majority and that bringing the means of wealth production into common ownership under democratic control is the only way out. Today, then, socialist activity as such is essentially educational and consciousness-raising.

On (2), we can't predict and don't want to lay down how a socialist minority in the course of becoming the majority will or should act. That will be for it to decide, but we can expect that it will try to extract what concessions it can, by organising in the ways you suggest as well as in a mass socialist party. Hopefully, the mass socialist party will pursue the same policy that we do and not make the mistake of deciding to itself seek support on the basis of being able to extract such concessions rather than exclusively for abolishing capitalism. That can be left to trade unions and other popular organisations. No doubt, on the eve of the winning of political control, plans will have been drawn up to be implemented once such control has been won. But, again, we can't usefully predict or lay down now what they should be. That will be for those around at the time to decide in the light of then existing conditions.

On (3), socialism will have a democratic decision-making structure but again, we don't want to be too prescriptive, and it may be, for example, that delegates could be sent to local councils and even a central decision-making body on the basis of where people live rather than just on where they work. —*Editors.*

Has Trump gone state-capitalist?

‘TRUMP EMBRACES state capitalism’ declared the US news site *Foreign Policy* in July: ‘the level of U.S. government economic intervention under Trump 2.0 is off the charts’ (tinyurl.com/2fu8ys9y). In August the *Wall Street Journal* took up the theme in an article by its chief economics commentator, Greg Iq: ‘The U.S. Marches Toward State Capitalism With American Characteristics’, he wrote, ‘President Trump is imitating Chinese Communist Party by extending political control ever deeper into economy’ (tinyurl.com/3sz4z56p).

Iq instanced ‘Trump’s demand that Intel’s chief executive resign; the 15% of certain chip sales to China that Nvidia and Advanced Micro Devices will share with Washington; the “golden share” Washington will get in U.S. Steel as a condition of Nippon Steel’s takeover; and the \$1.5 trillion of promised investment from trading partners Trump plans to personally direct’. He commented: ‘This isn’t socialism, in which the state owns the means of production. It is more like state capitalism, a hybrid between socialism and capitalism in which the state guides the decisions of nominally private enterprises. China calls its hybrid “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” The U.S. hasn’t gone as far as China or even milder practitioners of state capitalism such as Russia, Brazil and, at times,

France. So call this variant “state capitalism with American characteristics.”’

This is one definition of state capitalism, but state ownership is not socialism; nor can there be any hybrid between socialism and capitalism. Capitalism exists whenever there is minority ownership of the means of production, wage-labour and production for sale and profit, irrespective of whether that ownership is via individual ownership, a limited company or a nationalised industry.

The term ‘state capitalism’ first came into use towards the end of the 19th century, to describe instances where the government performs the role of capitalist by employing wage-labour and selling the product or service to realise a profit, such as state-owned and run mines and railways. After the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917, Lenin extended the term to include the development of private capitalism under the direction and control of the state. Others later extended the meaning further to include a nationalised economy without private capitalists but still with wage-labour, production for the market and a privileged ruling class such as eventually developed in Russia.

It was a term used more by critics than by supporters of capitalism. Latterly, however, it has come to be used routinely in the media to describe the economic system in

China where political control is firmly in the hands of a single party but where profit-seeking private enterprises are allowed to operate, where their shares are traded and where state-owned enterprises compete on the world market with the same aim and methods as private capitalist enterprises.

Politically motivated government intervention in the economy is not new — governments have always done this to one degree or another via taxes, subsidies, tariffs, and monetary policy — but calling this ‘state capitalism’ is new, at least in openly pro-capitalist circles. This could even be seen as a step forward in that, previously, they called it ‘socialism’, ‘communism’, ‘Marxism’, a travesty of these words. The more backward of them still do, as this from *Fortune* (12 August) magazine: ‘Many free-market economists and business leaders who have long worshipped the free-market ideals of Adam Smith, Friedrich Hayek, Ayn Rand, and Milton Friedman should be aware that their idols would be rolling in their graves right now, as rather than pursue standard laissez-faire conservative economic policies, MAGA has gone Marxist and even, increasingly, Maoist’ (tinyurl.com/3uyu3zu7).

Even though it is quite ludicrous to say that Trump has ‘gone Marxist’, there is a delicious irony in him being accused of undermining capitalism. Not that he is of course. He is using state power in what he considers to be the general interest of the US capitalist class.

New Socialist Party official t-shirt On sale now!

100% cotton unisex t-shirt printed using eco-friendly water based ink.

Important printed shirt washing instructions:

Ignore the label. Wash shirts at 40 degrees or less.

Iron on reverse (cool). Do not tumble-dry.

**Order direct online from £9 each
plus P&P from this link:**

<https://bit.ly/45VORIE>

*Link expires 08/12/2025. After that date
check <https://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/store/> or
email spgb@worldsocialism.org
for availability information.*



**Also available to order by cheque or postal order price £13 each (including P&P) from
The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN.
Available in sizes M, L, XL and 2XL while stocks last.**

Halo Halo

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE has moved into the market for religion. We've learnt that there are at least five AIs competing for the favours of the easily led.

Techxplore.com did a consumer test on the five listed; AI Jesus, Virtual Jesus, Jesus AI, Text with Jesus and Ask Jesus (techxplore.com/news/2025-08-jesus-chatbots-philosopher.html). The site posed the same question to each: 'is there a hell?' The replies of all suggest that Jesus suffers from Multiple Personality Disorder. The response from AI Jesus was 'yes, there is a hell. It is a place of eternal torment and suffering, where the souls of those who have rejected God and his teachings will go'.

Garbage in, garbage out. One is curious as to what data **AI Jesus** has been learning from. This response has most impact-- we're joking of course-- if declaimed out loud in the manner of someone like Ian Paisley, the late Northern Irish politician and protestant evangelist. If you prefer,

then aver in the manner of any American evangelist exhorting his audience to contribute even more dollars to their personal wealth.

Virtual Jesus comes across as slightly more circumspect: 'yes, there is a place known as hell in the afterlife, where those who have chosen to reject God and live in sin will face eternal separation from Him'. We imagine this response being given by an academic, perhaps a Doctor of Divinity answering a student's question in a seminar.

Jesus AI is as dogmatically certain as the previous two that such a place exists: 'Yes, there is a place called hell, where those who reject God's love and follow their own desires go after death.' So basically God behaves like an autocratic dictator who, allegedly, having created various desires in human beings, then says don't do that or else I'll hurt you forever and ever! God sounds more like O'Brien, the Thought Police apparatchik who tortures

Winston Smith in Orwell's dystopian novel *1984*, because 'thought criminals' must be 'cured' of their antagonism towards the all-powerful State. This 'God' is just one of the many brought into being through human imagination. Intuitively the human mind perceives that all-powerful entities are malignant in some way.

Text with Jesus sounds like a self-deprecating ageing hippie with a spliff: 'The concept of hell can be quite a heavy topic ... It's important to remember that God's desire is for all people to come to Him and experience His love and grace.'

Ask Jesus sounds as if it has been programmed by a *Guardian*-reading English vicar who lost their faith many years ago but continues in the occupation with one eye on their pension and the other on trying to engender niceness in folk wherever they can. 'Ah, the question that has stirred the hearts and minds of many throughout the ages...'

AI is indulging in make believe like all those humans all over the globe who believe now, as in the past, in the fictions provided through all the deities created from the human mind.

DC

Tiny tips

IN SPITE of momentous historical changes, the fundamental patterns of inequality reemerge across the centuries with remarkable consistency, the patterns of extreme wealth concentration, class immobility, surplus value extraction, special privilege, and ideological systems capable of masking the contradictions. This suite of social traits seems almost constant (**CounterPunch**, tinyurl.com/35rx33c6).

Write, but do not offend. Speak and comment, but do not divide. Observe cruelties, barbarities and murder, yet refrain from having an opinion. This is the constipating, stifling regime being put in place via suggested codes of conduct for organisers of writer events in Australia. The object of this intellectual veiling: discussing the exterminating war in Gaza. Across the country, the straitjacket of forced social harmony is being applied (**Dissident Voice**, tinyurl.com/57wmapvx).

Vietnam raises over \$13 million for Cuba in historic charity drive (**Vietnam Net**, tinyurl.com/ynfmbzyz).

Asked whether Gazans would be allowed

to leave, Al-Hayek was unequivocal.

"The Palestinian people do not want to leave Gaza," he told The Media Line. "We repeat each time: We will remain in Gaza until Judgment Day. Here we were born, and here we shall die." (**The Media Line**, tinyurl.com/jdn682er).

Hotel accommodation benefits large contractors like Clearsprings, Serco and Mears, while Britannia Hotels made over £150 million in profit since it started to accommodate asylum seekers in 2014. Such contracts even brought the founder of Clearsprings to the Sunday Times Rich List. This company provides housing services to the Home Office that were associated with the highest mortality rate among resident asylum seekers between 2020 and 2023 (**Counterfire**, tinyurl.com/34taju32).

Ah, those pro-lifers. Walking, talking, shooting oxymorons. You can tell the pro-life extremists. They're the ones who want their enemies – the women and men who support a woman's sovereignty over her own body – dead by any means at their command. Hard to get more pro-life than

that. Mike Lee, the brilliant Republican US Senator from Utah, went on Elon Musk's social media platform, X, and posted about the fatal shooting of Democratic politicians in Minnesota, that, "This is what happens when Marxists don't get their way"

(**CounterPunch**, tinyurl.com/2arm3m7e).

U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi announced Wednesday that the United States has seized nearly US\$700 million in assets connected to Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro. Confiscated property includes multiple luxury homes in Florida, a mansion in the Dominican Republic, two private jets, a horse farm, nine vehicles, luxury yachts, jewelry, watches, and cash (**Dominican Today**, tinyurl.com/yc79tc9u).

This is the humanist vision of Alien: Earth, which recognizes our distinctiveness is not in the power of our minds or the machines that we produce. Rather, it is found in humanity's ability to transform itself, to create and recreate its own internal nature for new conditions, including those yet to come. In doing so, the show goes beyond mere anti-corporate sentiment and instead asks if we can create a new purpose for ourselves, unburdened by the demons of our past and the demons that our future might hold (**Jacobin**, tinyurl.com/4n7ktpbx).

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

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

LONDON

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

MIDLANDS

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

NORTH

North East Regional branch.

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

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

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

Bolton. Contact: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589.

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

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

Yorkshire Regional branch.

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

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

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

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

South West regional branch. Meets 3rd Sat.

2pm on Zoom. For invite email:

spgbsw@gmail.com

Brighton. Contact: Anton Pruden,

anton@pruden.me

Canterbury. Contact: Rob Cox,

Contact: spgb.ksrb@worldsocialism.org

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

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

East Anglia. Contact: David Porter, Eastholme, Bush Drive, Eccles-on-Sea, NR12 0SF. 01692 582533.

Essex. Contact: Pat Deutz, 11 The Links, Billericay, CM12 0EX. patdeutz@gmail.com.

Cambridge. Contact: Andrew Westley, wezelecta007@gmail.com. 07883078984.

IRELAND

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

SCOTLAND

Edinburgh. Contact: Fraser Anderson

f_raz_1@hotmail.com

Glasgow branch. Contact: spgb.glasgow@worldsocialism.org

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

WALES

South Wales branch (Cardiff and Swansea)

Meets 2nd Monday 7.30pm on JITSi.

(meet.jit.si/spgbsouthwales3).

Contact: botterillr@gmail.com or

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

Central branch

Contact: spgb.cbs@worldsocialism.org

INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS

AFRICA

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

Zambia. Contact: Kephass Mulenga,

PO Box 280168, Kitwe.

AUSTRALIA

Contact: Trevor Clarke, wspa.info@yahoo.com.au

EUROPE

Norway. Contact: Robert Stafford. hallblithe@yahoo.com

Italy. Contact: Gian Maria Freddi

gm.freddi@libero.it

Spain. Contact: Alberto Gordillo, Avenida del

Parque. 2/2/3 Puerta A, 13200 Manzanares.

COMPANION PARTIES OVERSEAS

Socialist Party of Canada/Parti Socialiste

du Canada. Box 31024, Victoria B.C. V8N 6J3 Canada. spc@worldsocialism.org

World Socialist Party (India) 257 Baghajatin 'E' Block (East), Kolkata- 700086, 033- 2425-0208. wspindia@hotmail.com

World Socialist Party (New Zealand)

P.O. Box 1929, Auckland, NI, New Zealand. wsmnzparty@gmail.com

World Socialist Party of the United States.

P.O. Box 440247, Boston, MA 02144 USA. contact@wspus.org

Publications to order

PAMPHLETS (£4.00 each unless stated otherwise)

What's Wrong With Using Parliament?	£2.50	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ecology and Socialism		<input type="checkbox"/>
From Capitalism to Socialism	£3.50	<input type="checkbox"/>
Africa: A Marxian Analysis		<input type="checkbox"/>
Some Aspects of Marxian Economics	£5.50	<input type="checkbox"/>
How the Gods Were Made by John Keracher		<input type="checkbox"/>
Marxism and Darwinism by Anton Pannekoek		<input type="checkbox"/>
Art, Labour and Socialism by William Morris		<input type="checkbox"/>
How We Live and How We Might Live by William Morris		<input type="checkbox"/>
The Right to be Lazy by Paul Lafargue		<input type="checkbox"/>
Socialist Principles Explained	£2.50	<input type="checkbox"/>
The State and the Socialist Revolution by Julius Martov		<input type="checkbox"/>
An Inconvenient Question		<input type="checkbox"/>
Sylvia Pankhurst on Socialism	£3.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
Why Socialists Oppose Zionism & Anti-Semitism	£3.50	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rosa Luxemburg on Socialism		<input type="checkbox"/>
The Magic Money Myth		<input type="checkbox"/>

BOOKS

Strange Meeting: Socialism & World War One	£4.50	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are We Prisoners of Our Genes?	£5.50	<input type="checkbox"/>
Socialism or Your Money Back	£4.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
Centenary of the Russian Revolution	£8.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
All of the above books (25% discount)	£16.00	<input type="checkbox"/>

DVD

Capitalism and Other Kid's Stuff	£5.75	<input type="checkbox"/>
---	--------------	--------------------------

All prices include postage and packing. For six or more of any publication, reduce the price by one third.

Return this form along with your cheque or money order to: The Socialist Party, Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN

NAME:

ADDRESS:

.....

.....

POSTCODE:

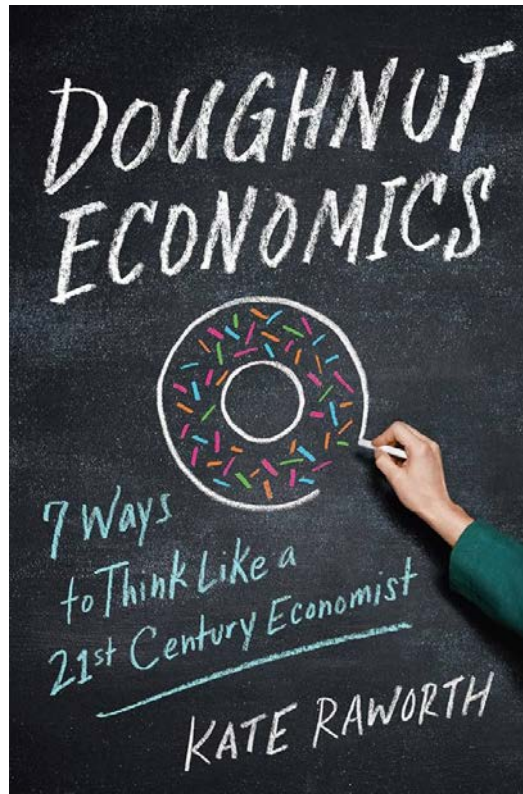
Looking inside the doughnut

KATE RAWORTH'S 2017 book *Doughnut Economics* has three main themes: the Doughnut itself, the shortcomings of mainstream economics, and reformist proposals about how society should be organised. We will discuss these in reverse order, finishing with the one that offers the most interesting ideas about humanity and the world we live in.

Most of the ideas in the book about how society should be organised are fairly standard left-wing reformist fare, such as firms being owned by their employees. In the peer-to-peer economy, everyone can become both a maker and a user. There should be community currencies, alongside national currencies. Rather than commercial banks creating money when they offer a loan (a claim which misunderstands how banks function), central banks can issue new money to every household. Tiered pricing, whereby the more people consume, the more they pay, will ration use of resources and benefit the less well-off. Economies should be regenerative by design, recycling carbon, water and so on. These schemes, however, leave capitalism in place and so will not solve current problems.

Tomelilla, a small town in Sweden, is attempting to apply some of the principles of Doughnut Economics (Guardian, 17 July). This includes, for instance, revamping an existing building rather than building a new ice rink. This is an example of the Doughnut Economics Action Lab (doughnuteconomics.org), which has several hundred member organisations across the world, and is intended to put the Doughnut ideas into action. The trouble is that it all assumes the continuation of capitalism and so will not be able to go beyond a system which prioritises profit over caring for the planet and its inhabitants.

Raworth argues that economics as taught nowadays is rooted in the mindset of the 1950s and even the 1850s, with little or no discussion of what the aims of the economy should be. In reality, the free market has never existed, as markets are strongly shaped by laws, institutions, cultures and so on. Nor is there such a thing as free trade: power relations always influence cross-border flows. Unpaid labour is ignored, as is the fact that the economy exists within society and the living world. At the heart of economic theory is *Homo economicus*, 'solitary, calculating, competing and insatiable', whereas humans are in fact



reciprocating, interdependent and 'deeply embedded in the web of life.'

The book's subtitle is *Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist*, which would involve, for instance, acknowledging an embedded economy with social, adaptable humans which is distributive and regenerative by design and agnostic about growth. There are some good points here, but humanity would still be stuck with capitalist economics.

As for the Doughnut, this is 'the space in which we can meet the needs of all within the means of the planet.' It is shown via a diagram of a doughnut, with two rings and an empty interior. Its inner ring sets out the basic requirements of life, including sufficient food, water, sanitation, energy, education, housing, all achieved with gender equality, peace and justice. But these are not currently being met, as millions 'lead lives of extreme deprivation'. One person in nine, for instance, does not have enough to eat, and millions of children die each year from easily preventable illnesses. And the richest 1 percent of the world's population own more than the other 99 percent put together.

The outer ring relies on the notion of planetary boundaries proposed by Earth-system scientists, an ecological ceiling that humans need to keep within: these include climate change, ocean acidification, chemical and air pollution, freshwater withdrawals, and ozone layer depletion. Most of these are associated

with specific levels that should not be crossed. But at least four of them have already been transgressed: climate change, land conversion, nitrogen and phosphorus loading, and biodiversity loss. Biodiversity loss, for instance, is at least ten times the recommended rate, and the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is above what should be aimed at.

The idea behind the Doughnut is to meet everyone's basic needs while keeping within the planetary boundaries that will prevent environmental catastrophe. 'Raworth's fundamental assertion is that a sustainable and just society can be realized only if a global economic system can be put in place that will allow as many people as possible to thrive in the space between these upper and lower boundaries' (Kohei Saito: *Slow Down*).

As an illustration of the problems faced by humans, the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (thebulletin.org)

recently moved its Doomsday Clock to just 89 seconds to midnight, the closest it has ever been to catastrophe. This was partly because of the war in Ukraine and the risk of nuclear war, but it was also on account of climate change, emerging and re-emerging diseases, and so on.

Raworth uses an Embedded Economy diagram to illustrate how energy plus living matter and materials are employed within Earth and society, while heat and waste matter are output within the market, the state and finance. But more constructive is the idea of a butterfly economy, whereby renewable materials are used and the two wings involve regenerating and restoring (repair, recycle etc). An economy cannot be completely circular as it is not possible to re-use all materials, so speaking of a cyclical economy is more helpful. The latest *Circularity Gap Report* (www.circularity-gap.world) argues that the global economy is in fact becoming less circular than it was a few years ago.

The Doughnut is not a solution in itself but a framework for examining some possibilities and looking at how a system designed to meet people's needs could work while remaining inside the limits that have been identified. A socialist world, without classes or borders or the profit motive, would be by far the best way of addressing these issues and achieving the goal of, as Saito says, thriving within the boundaries.

PAUL BENNETT

Labour's Department of War

MANY PEOPLE are surprised and disappointed by Keir Starmer's Labour government. Yet, it is a typical Labour government. Fundamentally, it holds a belief in state action to co-ordinate the market economy, one that characterises those in power. Thankfully, any association between this belief and socialism has long since been dispelled.

Indeed, to their credit, this government is faithfully carrying out the objects set out in the Labour Party's rulebook, which commits the Party to work for:

'A DYNAMIC ECONOMY, serving the public interest, in which the enterprise of the market and the rigour of competition are joined with the forces of partnership and cooperation to produce the wealth the nation needs and the opportunity for all to work and prosper with a thriving private sector and high-quality public services where those undertakings essential to the common good are either owned by the public or accountable to them' (Clause IV.2.A).

And: 'Labour is committed to the defence and security of the British people and to cooperating in European institutions, the United Nations, the Commonwealth and other international bodies to secure peace, freedom, democracy, economic security and environmental protection for all' (Clause IV.3).

No-one can pretend that the present Labourites have not been up-front with this commitment, at least: anyone voting for them without illusions should have known.

We can see this in action in the way that Downing Street announced the UK taking part in the NATO agreement to spend 5 percent of GDP on Defence.

'Marking a step change with the approach of previous governments, the National Security Strategy directly answers to the concerns of working people, aligning our national security objectives and plans for economic growth in a way not seen since 1945' (tinyurl.com/SPGBArms25i).

The reference to 'working people' is labour-washing this strategy, which will be about making phenomenal amounts of profit for defence contractors and arms manufacturers. As the NATO press release on the agreement notes:

'Research and development (R&D) costs are included in defence expenditure. R&D costs also include expenditure for those projects that do not successfully lead to production of equipment' (tinyurl.com/SPGBArms25ii).

This is the NATO agreed definition of defence expenditure. The agreement is for this figure to reach 3.5 percent of member

states' GDP, with an additional 1.5 percent of GDP to be spent: 'annually to inter alia protect critical infrastructure, defend networks, ensure civil preparedness and resilience, innovate, and strengthen the defence industrial base'.

So, NATO states are preparing to fiddle the figures by defining as much as they can as defence expenditure (see for example rumours Italy is looking at designating a transport bridge as defence expenditure: tinyurl.com/SPGBArmsiii).

Of course, the US has long done this, with a substantial veterans benefit system: spending about \$300 billion annually, 90 percent of which is split between income support for veterans (including pensions) and medical costs (tinyurl.com/SPGBArmsiv). This is itself part of the economic conscription of workers to fight in the armed forces for the people who own the country.

Starmer's government wants to use its military spend as part of its drive to generate planned profits for capitalists through that 'dynamic economy.' According to the MOD 463,000 jobs (about 1 in 60) are supported by the defence industry (that includes 272,000 jobs supported by military spending – 151,000 directly and 121,000 indirectly) on top of the 181,890 serving military personnel (tinyurl.com/SPGBArmsv).

However, as the Institute for Government notes: 'The single largest cost to the MoD is the Defence Nuclear Enterprise, which is responsible for the procurement, maintenance and disposal of the UK's nuclear submarine fleet. This was allocated 38% of the 2023-2033 Equipment Plan, or 20% of total defence spending' (tinyurl.com/SPGBArmsvi).

That is, maintaining the UK's capacity to launch a nuclear device at any nation in the world. Interestingly, they also note that: 'Most additional UK defence funding between 2015/16 and 2023/24 was allocated to capital spending, to acquire or maintain fixed assets like equipment and land. This element of spending increased by 95.5% in real terms over this period'.

Depending on how you count it, the

UK is the 5th or 6th biggest-spending military country in the world (tinyurl.com/SPGBArmsvii). This expenditure is necessary to give continued diplomatic clout.

This comes at a cost. Those tens of thousands of service personnel are removed from the workforce and from doing any potentially useful work (neither generating profits for capitalists, nor creating use values for the community).

The jobs and industries supported by defence spending do produce profits for the companies involved, but those profits are essentially transfers from elsewhere, as they are paid for by taxes extracted from the profits of other capitalists.

Defence does bring in some profit. 'UK arms exports: Statistics', a House of Commons report from July this year notes that 'the UK won defence orders worth £14.5 billion in 2023. This is a 39 percent increase in real terms on the previous year'. Over 50 percent of this was aerospace (tinyurl.com/SPGBArmsviii). This would represent a poor return on all that defence investment, but in fact it also reflects the UK geostrategic interests, as shown by where the sales went to:

'Europe was the largest market for UK defence exports, accounting for 34% of total exports over this period, followed by the Middle East (32%), North America (18%), the Asia Pacific (7%), Latin America and Africa (both 1%). The remaining share (8%) was exported to a mixed or unidentified region'.

There are other defence spin-offs in terms of new technologies. The recently published government document, 'Defence industrial strategy: making defence an engine for growth' notes: 'The Spending Review confirmed that MOD's research and development budget will be over £2 billion in 2026-27 and will rise each year'. This includes a mandate to spend 10 percent of the MOD's procurement on novel technologies, including AI-driven solutions (tinyurl.com/SPGBArmsix). Finding new and inventive ways to kill people seems a very roundabout way of creating wealth, but it is a way which has to exist in a society characterised by a tiny minority controlling the productive resources at the expense of the majority.

PIK SMEET



Credit: Adobe Stock

Nationalism and capitalism

PEDANTS LIKE to distinguish between ‘patriotism’ and ‘nationalism’. The former signifies love for one’s country; the latter, while meaning that too, also means not being particularly tolerant of other countries (or cultures). In practice, though, ‘patriots’ can very easily become ‘nationalists’ even without knowing it. These are just two points along the same spectrum.

What that spectrum is based upon is an emotional attachment to the rather fuzzy concept of ‘national identity’. This is supposed to provide a kind of social glue that holds together large-scale, culturally diverse societies and allows them to function reasonably well.

National states

Benedict Anderson’s seminal work, *Imagined Communities* (1983), discusses the way ‘print capitalism’ and the growth of literacy aided the spread of national consciousness. Other factors, like improvements in transport and increased mobility, also helped to widen the social horizons of what were once relatively isolated communities that characterised a feudal society.

Before the rise of capitalism, nation-states did not really exist. Though there are strong grounds for saying that capitalism originated in England (specifically, in the English countryside, where the practice of wage labour became universalised), the first prominent individual to put nationalism on the map was, arguably, a Frenchman – Napoleon. Napoleon explicitly appealed to the idea of the nation as the basis of legitimate political power, where his predecessors had relied instead on such arcane notions as the ‘divine right of kings’ to govern.

However, we should not infer from this that nationalism is the indispensable precondition for a large-scale society to exist. Long before the nation-state existed, large multi-ethnic empires with extremely porous borders existed in the ancient world.

In Europe in 1500, there were approximately 500 more or less autonomous political units – an intricate patchwork ranging from Italian city states (many of which subsequently fell victim to conquest) to numerous principalities (often themselves the product of dynastic quarrels within aristocratic families) and a scattering of relatively consolidated kingdoms. Some of these were nominally part of one or other, much larger, ramshackle, sprawling entities, such as the Holy Roman Empire, which, as Voltaire once scornfully remarked, was ‘neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire’.

By 1900, however, the political landscape looked very different indeed. The number

of self-governing units involved had been drastically whittled down to a mere twenty-odd nation-states having jurisdiction over the entire European landmass. Napoleon’s armies, which conquered much of Europe in the early nineteenth century, contributed to this development in the sense that they helped to create circumstances that eventually led to the rise of nationalist movements later on in that century.

Pseudo-traditions

Then there is the thorny question of nationalism and cultural diversity. Though it is claimed that nationalism enabled the emergence of large-scale culturally diverse societies, the fact of the matter is that cultural or ethnic differentiation has often presented a serious challenge to the nationalist project. If anything, the rise of nationalism has brought about the erosion of local cultures and languages and, in general, has had a flattening effect on the cultural landscape.

What is called the ‘national culture’ is not always what it seems. In *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, the claim that certain national traditions or institutions have their origins in some mist-enveloped remote past (something that is supposed to invest a tradition with more authenticity) was critically scrutinised and found to be often false. Many of these traditions are pseudo-traditions only recently invented for the express purpose of trying to fashion a national identity- in more concrete terms to facilitate nationalist sentiment.

In short, the basic thrust of nationalist ideology tends towards cultural homogenisation. The more culturally homogenised a population is, the easier it is for the state to manipulate it and elicit its support. Standardisation also enables more effective bureaucratisation.

Taken to an extreme, this homogenising thrust can manifest itself in the form of genocide. As Ernest Gellner points out, where ethnic pluralism exists, ‘a territorial political unit can only become ethnically homogeneous... if it either kills, or expels, or assimilates all non-nationals’ (*Nations and Nationalism*, 2009).

However, one should note that this is only a tendency within nationalist ideology; in the real world, most nationalisms have had to opt for some kind of pragmatic or more inclusive compromise in the form of ‘multiculturalism’.

Globalisation

Factors curbing nationalism’s tendency towards cultural homogenisation within the confines of a given nation-state include not

only the resilience of ethnic subcultures and the inward migration of ‘foreigners’, bringing with them their own cultural beliefs and practices, but also the impact of what might be called ‘global culture’: Back in 1848, the *Communist Manifesto* had something to say about that: ‘In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature’.

Big business is, today, a major purveyor of this global culture. One thinks of the role of big tech companies in providing social media platforms or the impact of global chains like McDonald’s in shaping our culinary tastes. Wherever you go in the world, cities are getting more and more alike with the same monotonously predictable selection of High Street stores.

There is a certain irony in all this. Capitalism, which gave birth to the ideology of nationalism, has also unleashed powerful forces that tend towards the erosion of national distinctiveness.

Backlash

In some ways, this contradiction has brought us to the fraught times we are living in today. The unravelling of the Neoliberal project that has been the dominant paradigm since the 1970s has prompted a backlash against globalisation and the resurgence of virulent nationalism. Far-right movements are on the rise in many parts of the world. Their animus is mainly directed at that most emblematic aspect of globalisation – the movement of migrants across those imaginary borders that define the capitalist nation state.

Such migrations are often fuelled by wars and the devastation inflicted by military action undertaken by the very countries which now have some citizens bitterly complaining about the ensuing blowback in the form of desperately impoverished boat people arriving on their shores.

It’s not just war that is to blame; there is also the economic devastation wrought on people’s lives and livelihoods. For instance, the traditional Senegalese fishing industry has been virtually decimated by overfishing and the use of destructive methods, like bottom trawling, by industrial fleets from Europe and China. This has been a major factor in the increase in Senegalese migrants risking their lives to reach the Canary Islands in the hope of being relocated to mainland Spain.

ROBIN COX

Flagging politics

‘WE JUST kind of thought, why don’t we just go put up some flags down one road, just because we think it’d look nice, and we just made the area look better.’ The words of Joseph Moulton, interviewed by YorkMix Radio. Moulton is credited by YorkMix as the instigator of the widespread appearance of Union and St. George flags along the highways and byways of that city. He conceded that the action was rather more than merely cosmetic.

His political rationale stems from a family background in the mining industry of South Yorkshire, communities, ‘...targeted and destroyed by the government through the closing of communal spaces, high tax on pubs and meeting places, stuff like that’. Self-employed, running websites and online businesses, having been mentored by an unnamed someone in the defence and private security business, Moulton has worked as an independent contractor in that sector. This appears to indicate a vague political awareness of social and economic problems, endemic in capitalist society, filtered through a sector directly involved in profiting from the widespread instability of volatile international politics.

Rather than second-guessing his own politics by attributing far-right motivation to his actions, his flagging campaign rather reflects a confused and superficial political viewpoint: identifying widespread problems without any serious understanding of the root cause. Raising the flag up the local lampposts became the summer trend nationally for a while. This was a popular movement, perhaps inspired by Reform UK, or by even more sinister right-wing groups, a widespread outbreak of xenophobia maybe, people outraged by boatloads of migrants tipping up on the south coast, with governments of either major party unable to repel them. Certainly, along with lamppost-hoisted flags were those carried into battle with the state outside asylum-seeker hotels.

Tripadvisor describes The Bell Hotel, Epping: ‘Plenty of parking and good location... Sadly a lot of the hotel is run down and in need of an urgent refurbishment.’ All the more so, most likely, having been laid siege to by the aggressively discontented. At first the local state authority, via a court ruling, declared the hotel must be closed, without any apparent consideration of what would then happen to those housed in its less than salubrious facilities. Then a legal volte-face resulting in more outraged British (or were they English?) patriots turning up at the

hotel, along with counter-demonstrators.

August is often referred to by the news media as the ‘silly season’ with parliament on leave and frequently no British news worth reporting. Not in 2025 though as the battle of Epping featured night after night on broadcasts. The focus was a single asylum seeker arrested and charged with several offences including the sexual assault of a 14 year old girl. He was subsequently convicted. Other asylum seekers housed at The Bell made clear not only their abhorrence of his actions, but their overall dislike of the man for his general behaviour, which they had had to put up with prior to his arrest.

There were obviously political actors at work quite prepared to further exploit the 14 year old victim for their own ends, as was the case with the tragic victims in Southport the previous year. The disaffected meanwhile allowed themselves to become an unreasonable, unreasoning mob, most of whom are usually rational, sociable people in their everyday circumstances, however trying those might be.

As Joseph Moulton identified in South Yorkshire, people nationally and internationally are having to deal with social and economic stresses which politicians will not, or more likely, cannot deal with. Pre-election promises all too readily made are rapidly reneged on.

When people lose faith in politics it doesn’t mean they have no beliefs at all; rather, they can come to believe in almost any ill-founded solutions whose appeal is immediate, without consideration of consequences, and without any analysis of why circumstances are as they are. They identify only symptoms, with no attempt to find causes. It is analgesic politics. It is all too easy to deride those protesting outside asylum hotels. Undoubtedly there will be quite a mix of motives amongst them. Some may well have far-right tendencies, while others genuinely feel threatened and insecure. Many seem to be of the ‘precariat’ strata of the wider working class, those whose immediate economic circumstances make their lives an almost constant struggle. Feelings of vulnerability heighten perceptions of threat and a sense of unfairness. ‘My son can’t get a house, but they get them given!’ is one comment by a protester to a TV news interviewer.

An effect of economic and social pressures is to narrow people’s focus. They don’t look for reasons why refugees risk the treacherous Channel crossing in what are little more than dinghies. The ultimate



Credit: Adobe Stock

cause of their own and refugees’ ills lies outside their awareness. The wider world with all manner of disorders caused by capitalism merely enforces a sense of lack of control, a feeling of near powerlessness. So, rather than aspiring to abolish borders the reaction is to make them more clearly defined and secure.

When those who are occupying the moral high ground stage their counter-protests they unintentionally heighten the sense amongst the demonstrators that their concerns are simply being dismissed as those of racist bigots. So when the flag is run up the flagpole (lamppost) people start to salute it and it becomes a trend. When interviewed, some of the more active flag raisers insist their motives are positive, to do with pride and community.

Understandable to a point amidst all the national and international uncertainties. It just makes the task of socialists all the more difficult. As with reformism, it diverts thinking away from what really needs to be done. The media has given the impression that virtually the whole country has been decked out with flags. Online reports carry photographs of lamppost after lamppost sporting the colours. However, the accompanying article reveals that it’s only the same couple of streets being shown. The rest of the town/city being undraped, just as Joseph Moulton indicated in his interview with YorkMix Radio. A few flags, however ill or well-intentioned, will, like closing borders and asylum hotels, change nothing. Within a few weeks, as autumn weather takes hold, those flags will become rain sodden, tattered and faded, hanging limply. An appropriate symbol of capitalist Britain.

D.A.

Away with all national flags!

BERTRAND RUSSELL once said ‘Patriots always talk of dying for their country but never of killing for their country’. What, then, should we make of a recent poll carried out by the *Daily Express* (30 August) that found ‘Nearly three-quarters of Brits unwilling to fight for UK in the event of war’?

If the *Express* is to be believed, a majority sensibly enough have lost their appetite to fight for ‘their’ country in a war. One should be wary of jumping to hasty conclusions, however. Sadly, unwillingness to ‘fight for the UK’ does not necessarily translate into a decline of patriotism. It doesn’t seem to have dampened nationalist fervour.

In August 2025, a high-profile and, seemingly, widely supported grassroots campaign was launched, dubbed ‘Operation Raise the Colours’, ostensibly to ‘promote patriotism’ by flying flags from lamp-posts or painting the Saint George Cross onto mini-roundabouts.

However, one would have to be politically naïve not to see that the ulterior purpose behind all the flag-waving protests accompanying this bizarre fad has been to promote a far-right agenda. The frankly racist targeting of asylum seekers holed up in migrant centres exemplifies this.

This development is notable for the sheer amount of misinformation it has generated- whether we are talking about the costs of the asylum system, the lavish lifestyle asylum seekers are alleged to enjoy (they get a measly £7 a day), or the actual numbers involved (the UK has below the European Union average for asylum applications- tinyurl.com/h5ur7f5r).

According to the ‘Hope not Hate’ group, the campaign’s organiser is Andrew Currien (AKA Andy Saxon), an ally of the far-right activist, Tommy Robinson. He was formerly in the English Defence League and now runs security for the far-right party, Britain First.

One theory that has been doing the rounds is that the ‘Operation Raise the Colours’ campaign is a reaction to the widespread display of Palestinian flags at protests against what is happening in Gaza. Whatever the case, as far as socialists are concerned, we would far prefer to see no national flags displayed anywhere. In the words of the novelist, Arundhati Roy: ‘Flags are bits of coloured cloth that governments use first to shrink-wrap people’s minds and then as ceremonial shrouds to bury the dead.’

Shrink-wrapping people’s minds means, among other things, instilling in them the

absurd notion that they possess something called a ‘country’ in the first instance. It is not just the usual suspects that are actively engaged in this indoctrination process – the state, the church, the media and so on. In its own way too, the Left, when it talks of ‘nationalising the commanding heights of industry’ or glorifies ‘national liberation struggles’ against ‘imperialism’, reinforces a nationalist mindset and by extension, capitalism. To refer to the *Communist Manifesto*: ‘The workingmen have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got’.

To those who imagine that ‘Britain’ is ‘their’ country, one might well ask – in what meaningful sense is this true? According to one source, ‘just 0.3% of the population – 160,000 families – own two-thirds of the country, and less than 1% of the population owns 70% of the land’ (tinyurl.com/demvdfau).

Also in Britain, according to a report from the Office for National Statistics (2018), foreign-owned businesses accounted for 13.4 percent of total UK company assets, while foreign buyers account for over 40 percent of London’s prime property market. Most ‘British’ workers don’t even own their own homes, let alone this abstraction called ‘Britain’. A Google Earth photo reveals no borders whatsoever that might delineate those particular spatial units we choose to call ‘countries’. All we see are mountains, forests, farmland, urban settlements, rolling on as far as the eye can see and in every conceivable direction.

Borders only exist in our minds – in our imagination. They are nothing more than social conventions. There is nothing

‘natural’ about them whatsoever, any more than the nation-states they spatially delineate. Our capacity to imagine is part of what makes us human beings. As John Lennon’s song famously put it, ‘Imagine there’s no countries. It isn’t hard to do.’

Today, the great majority of us are little more than prisoners with shopping rights in this open prison that is called capitalism. In this society, the industrial and natural resources of our planet are monopolised by a super-rich, tiny parasite class. It is in their economic interests –not ours – that wars are fought.

At present, there are literally dozens of armed conflicts going on in the world – from localised insurgencies to full-scale wars. To what end? Where is the sense in workers killing other workers just like them – complete strangers with whom they have absolutely no reason to quarrel – just to ensure one piece of tatty cloth, as opposed to another, gets to be raised on the town hall’s flagpole?

Whatever tatty cloth is raised is not going to affect the basic situation of working class people. The same goes in wars. For example, whether in Ukraine it’s a Ukrainian or, alternatively, a Russian rag on the end of a pole. There are no winners in a war (apart from maybe the undertakers and the weapons manufacturers). Workers on both sides will have lost, having succumbed to the death cult of nationalism, their battered bodies draped in the symbol of what is so detestable about the society they currently live in.

ROBIN COX



Credit: Adobe Stock

Irish presidential election (What's the point?)



Credit: Adobe Stock

A PRESIDENTIAL election is looming in the Republic of Ireland with the election date set for 24 October this year. While most elections under capitalism result in negligible meaningful change to peoples' lives, the Irish presidential election, which takes place every 7 years, is an exceptionally good example of a purely ritualistic exercise in democracy. The socialist view is that elections in capitalism, no matter where they occur, are really just exercises in 'rearranging the deck chairs' as all that happens is a change in the personnel who administer the same social system. This is not to disparage democracy as a process but just to highlight the pointless nature of many elections. This is certainly the case for this election.

Decorative

The office of the Irish President dates from 1937 and the role essentially mimics the position of the monarch in the UK. It is mostly ceremonial such as receiving foreign ambassadors, attending significant sporting and cultural events, signing some official documents, representing the country abroad, etc. It does have a specific political role in terms of deciding the process of government formation in the event of a hung parliament where

a government has lost its majority. One other duty (with nothing equivalent in Britain) is the power the President has to refer any law passed by the Irish parliament to the Supreme Court to have its compatibility with the constitution tested. Historically both these latter two tasks have rarely been exercised.

The constitution too makes clear that the office of president is almost entirely decorative; subservient to that of the Taoiseach (Irish prime minister) and is not an independent branch of government (as in the United States). It has no role in making or executing public policy. So why would anyone be interested in running for it? Well it does have some obvious attractions; high pay (€332,000 per annum) with lots of expenses thrown in and no specific list of mandatory duties apart from the two mentioned above. There's no boss checking on your productivity or your schedule. So if the President decides he/she is going to work a 3-day week, sleep in most mornings or take plenty of long weekends, so be it.

The origins of the office lie in the secession of the Republic from the UK in 1921. There was a transition period from that date up to 1937 where the British monarch remained as the titular head of

state of southern Ireland until this role was superseded by the creation of the office of President of Ireland. From its inception up until 1990 the contest for the office was mainly a tribal competition between the two large Irish political parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael with the former always winning because of its greater popularity with the electorate. The office became a desirable retirement home for elderly Fianna Fail politicians who were beginning to find the stress of day-to-day politics excessively taxing. Considering the first three presidents, Douglas Hyde was 85 when he left office. Sean T. O. Kelly was 79 and Eamon De Valera was 90 when their terms finished. These three were followed by two more party stalwarts whose terms were cut short by a death and resignation respectively and the next Fianna Fail incumbent, Paddy Hillary, was younger than his elderly predecessors and was noted for his enthusiasm for the game of golf. He actually won a prestigious amateur golf competition in Ireland while President, presumably thanks to having plenty of time to practise. In the words of one acerbic commentator at the time 'Paddy Hillary used the post to get his golfing handicap back in shape'. This pattern suggested to the public that either the role was quite

undefined (and the holder could selectively undertake whatever duties they personally warmed to) or that the duties of the office itself were very light. Both views were correct. This in turn prompted people to wonder what the real point of the office was, because the performance of many of the incumbents to date had been perceived as lacklustre and uninspiring.

Reboot

The office got a notional reboot in 1990 when Mary Robinson won and her election was portrayed as heralding a new Ireland with a more energised presidency, although the job description remained exactly the same. She promised to be more active in the position and to speak out for sections of Irish society that previously had not had their voices heard. Mary Robinson, although effectively elected on the Labour ticket, with wider left-wing support, was in fact a classic middle-class liberal coming from a wealthy background. In her earlier days she played a significant role in the process of liberalising Ireland from the oppressive dictates of the Catholic Church which particularly negatively affected women's lives. She subsequently resigned the Presidency to become a UN High Commissioner. Before becoming President, she had been a law professor and since leaving the UN has had prominent roles with a number of international quangos and think tanks. In fact, like many of the other presidents, she's an example of the kind of 'important' person in the superstructure of capitalism who moves from one 'important' job to the next. Her two successors, Mary McAleese and then Michael D Higgins (the outgoing President) have tended to follow her example, speaking out in general terms about disadvantage in society, the future of the planet and other worthy (and wordy) matters. Most of their pronouncements are purely rhetorical, unobjectionable in terms of content but empty in terms of any substance.

The runners

There are three candidates in the field. Two are 'centrists', from Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, The fact that these parties are in a coalition government together means that the government has two candidates going forward sharing an almost identical world view. The 'left-wing' candidate in the race is Catherine Connolly. She has the formal support of various left parties in the Dail including Labour, the Social Democrats, People before Profit-Solidarity and some left-leaning independent parliamentarians. Sinn Féin too is

supporting Connolly and this should be a very significant boost to her, given the electoral heft of Sinn Féin.

One of her prominent supporters has described her as a 'principled, left socialist'. She is from a long-established tradition in Ireland going back to her namesake (but no relation) James Connolly; her politics are a blend of 'socialism' with nationalism. The latter means she is a proponent of a United Ireland. She stresses the maintenance of Irish neutrality in international affairs and has a long-held opposition to any Irish involvement with NATO. In the past she has adopted what her opponents may portray as an 'anti-western' agenda, being moderately Eurosceptic and having a somewhat uncritical attitude to the current and previous regimes of Venezuela, Ecuador, Syria and Russia. She has long been vocal in her criticism of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians and this has become more pronounced since the Gaza war, though of course the depth of her feelings on this are no longer restricted to the Left. In her campaign she says that she will present herself as a voice for the community, a voice for peace and a voice for tackling climate change. The brutal truth is that, if elected, she can talk all she wants about these matters but can do nothing of substance.

The non-starters

A mainstream conservative candidate, barrister Maria Steen, to represent the socially conservative section of the electorate, failed at the last moment to obtain enough nominations. Her platform was based on her history of opposing the liberalisation of society from Catholic moral values over the last 10 years or so. In that sense, she's the complete antithesis of Mary Robinson and if elected (which was never likely) would have represented a 180 degree turn on the part of the electorate.

There were the many micro candidates running campaigns to a lesser or greater degree to be nominated, some of them having no platform at all and others having

agendas that can only be described as bizarre and/or pointlessly idiosyncratic. Many of these 'campaigns' were just publicity stunts. Names here included a former TV weather presenter, a former professional dancer (Michael Flatley), the aged pop star Bob Geldof (who hasn't lived in Ireland for years), Conor McGregor, a mixed martial artist (and found guilty of rape in a civil court and currently being investigated for some dubious behaviour during that same trial), Gareth Sheridan, a very young entrepreneurial whizzkid, who felt that the office of president could do with the vim he feels he could provide. There was also a far-right activist who's worried (as all of that ilk are) by immigration and the lack of respect for 'our' national flag. These all dropped out because of lack of nominations, with some of them attempting to save face by claiming they were just 'testing the water'.

The election campaign proper began at the end of September. Because the President has no real political power, the candidates campaign on personality and character and what values or ethos they will bring to the post of representing the nation. Success or failure can depend on whether embarrassing or uncomfortable incidents can be found in a rival's past to indicate they are not of a suitable calibre. Also given Ireland's PR system of voting, the winning candidate has to be vote-transfer friendly. This is usually achieved by making positive but bland statements on every issue that arises and not engaging with vehemence in any matter that could mean you are portrayed as being excessively negative or partisan. In that sense, appearing to be 'nice' and not having strong opinions on any political matter is a definite advantage. The Irish presidential election, like the office itself, is purely ceremonial. Real change must come from a different perspective and approach to politics.

KEVIN CRONIN



All socialists now?

Credit: ReelNews



Zarah Sultana – Your Party



Zach Polanski – Green Party



Dawn Butler – Labour

THREE REFORMISTS CLAIMING TO BE SOCIALISTS

THAT AUGUST publication the *Daily Mail* recently ran the headline ‘Another Day in Starmer’s Socialist Utopia. When Did Britain Become North Korea?’. It reported that Starmer was ‘hiring a raft of high tax fanatics’, was ‘threatening ‘ID cards for all’, and that ‘fury erupted’ when armed police arrested the writer of Father Ted ‘over online comments about transgender activists’.

It goes without saying that no one with the slightest good sense or judgement could fail to see this for what it was – a pile of breathless and exaggerated bilge. The comparison to the repressive, authoritarian dictatorship that is North Korea was particularly ludicrous, as was the assumption that that regime is somehow ‘socialist’. Equally mind-boggling was the notion that Starmer’s government is socialist too (a ‘socialist utopia’ in fact) and thus to be equated to North Korea, when neither set-up has anything to do with socialism.

Socialism: what does it mean?

What gives impetus to such sneering declarations, intellectually empty as they are, is the fact that Labour and its supporters are themselves fond of talking about themselves as socialist, even though the real task they are involved in is finding ways of running capitalism. It’s true that Starmer himself has not uttered the ‘s’ word for some time, but others in his party have, and do so continually. The Labour MP Dawn Butler, for example, recently stated that ‘the Labour Party is a socialist party’ and that ‘socialism isn’t a dirty word’. That moved this writer to email her and ask the question ‘Since socialism can be such a confusing word, can you please explain how you see it?’ Receiving no response at all, I thought I would try putting a similar question to another ‘socialist’ MP, Zarah Sultana, who had actually just left Labour to join Jeremy Corbyn in the setting up of a prospective new party (currently calling itself ‘Your Party’). I wrote: ‘I very much

sympathise with what you say, in resigning from the Labour Party, about the failure of governments to deal with poverty and inequality and note your point that the issue at the next election will be “socialism or barbarism”. But, since socialism can be such a confusing word, can you please explain what you mean by it?’ I did at least get a response from her, but only the standard acknowledgement of receipt (‘Thank you for contacting me. Please read this automated response to your email, which confirms that I have received your correspondence’) and nothing thereafter.

The unfortunate thing is that, whether in the Labour Party or outside, MPs and others throw the ‘s’ word around without having a clear notion – and sometimes no notion at all – of what it means other than a vague wish for wealth to be spread more evenly and reforms to be brought in which will make life easier and less uncomfortable for those lower down the earnings scale- all with a view to somehow making things more ‘equal’. It rarely if ever crosses their minds that such changes, even if they were possible

or feasible, would not change the basic structure of the system we live under which determines that production and distribution of goods and services takes place for profit not need, with overall dependence on money and buying and selling.

'Your Party'

But despite getting no meaningful answer from the MP calling herself a socialist who had defected to Corbyn's party-to-be, when I found out that there was to be a local gathering, open to all, to discuss the nature and setting up of the new 'Your Party' organisation, I decided to go along to observe, to listen, and maybe to speak. The turnout was 60-70 people, biased towards the older age group but in gender terms pretty much even. Yet if I was expecting to hear talk of socialism, in any of its possible conceptions, that's not what I got. Most of the hands that shot up were from members of small left-wing groups or parties damning the current Labour government and seeming to envisage some kind of 'entryism' into the new party. There were also some non-affiliated attendees with apparently good intentions and maybe looking to find a home in a new 'caring' party. But what virtually all the contributions from the floor had in common was talk of the need to press for reform measures of various kinds: eg, nationalisation, higher taxation for the wealthy, expansion of the NHS, more funding for education and other services, ending of anti-protest measures, action against pollution and climate change. Only one speaker stood apart in saying that the main problem was that most young people nowadays have no idea what socialism means and a priority should be to fix that. I agreed with this, even though I doubted whether that person's conception of socialism coincided with mine.

As for a contribution of my own, my hand wasn't among those pointed to by the chair and I had to accept that. But had I been chosen, I would have said that I agreed with the idea that a clear view needed to be established of what socialism means. I would have added too that, as far as I was concerned, socialism didn't mean ways of 'fixing' capitalism (impossible anyway) or trying to make it more palatable. Instead, it meant getting rid of the whole system of production for the market and buying and selling and replacing it with a moneyless cooperative society of voluntary work, free access and democratic control worldwide. I would have also said that, short of this, the 'real change' Jeremy Corbyn has said his new party will bring is destined to be the same mirage as all previous attempts at radical reform of capitalism have been, ending up

as a predictable recycling of the status quo.

HKM

Zarah Sultana spoke at a meeting in Rayners Park (South West London) on 10 September. She said that the new party's aim was to 'materially improve people's lives'. The Labour Party, she said, had betrayed its past principles and was 'dead'; Starmer should be sent to the Hague for trial as a war criminal. She was in fact surprisingly radical for someone selected and elected as a Labour candidate, calling for the new party to support demonstrations and strikes as well as to get MPs and councillors elected. She favoured the new party being called 'The Left' and said it should be organised democratically with provisions for One Member One Vote.

She also said the new party should be 'proudly socialist', and that she wanted to 'bring our country to socialism' and that the election of local councillors would 'pave the way to the socialist challenge'. But she didn't explain what she envisaged socialism as being. The rest of her speech suggested it would be capitalism reformed into a less unequal society with properly funded public services and state-owned utilities and that put people before profit. As she was pretty approachable after the meeting, I could have asked her about it but she was surrounded by people wanting to take selfies with her.

ALB

I went along to a Your Party meeting at a pub in my local seaside town, to find around 40 people, a few youngish but most of retirement age. Many of them were undoubtedly keen for a left alternative to what they saw as a right-wing Labour government. Quite a few others, like wolves at a Bambi picnic, were predatory undercover Trots keen to get themselves on the group's steering committee. Two facilitators spoke at length, one in an inaudible drone, the other in a grating whine, to the effect that this was to be a workshop event, in which small groups would discuss and then feed back their responses to the questions: (a) what the priority of the new party should be, (b) what name it should have, and (c) what the immediate focus of the local group ought to be. It occurred to me that my answer to all three questions would be the same, and very likely not appreciated by anyone present: abolish capitalism.

The assembled gathering dutifully knuckled down to the task, while I fell into conversation with an enthusiastic 'socialist' who believed that China and Russia had a thing or two to tell us about how to run an economy, and wasn't our government just as fascist as them nowadays anyway? He

left before the end, to catch the football, but accepted a leaflet and promised to look us up. I also bailed out, having regretfully concluded that no open debate was likely, that reformism was the only item on the agenda, and that this new left surge was history repeating itself in a kind of desperate and perpetual amnesia.

PJS

The Greens too?

The Green Party has just elected a former LibDem candidate as their leader. He too says he's a bit of a 'socialist', as this report of the launch of his leadership campaign recorded:

'One member asked whether Polanski thought the Green Party was "explicitly a socialist party". His response was, "On a personal level I agree with the majority of socialist principles", and said that, "we are a left wing, left of centre party". But he also clarified, "The reason why I wouldn't say explicitly, yes, we're a socialist party kind of in public and as a slogan is I think that's going to unnecessarily put people off". He went on to argue that in defining the Greens as a socialist party there would be a need to, "appeal to all the socialists and kind of struggle with all the people who are anti socialist who might have voted Green if we didn't say we were socialists." Instead of describing the Green Party in this way, Polanski instead argued that Greens should be talking about a "fair, equitable society where we make sure that everyone is looked after", and advocating policies like a Universal Basic Income' (tinyurl.com/39usd7ax).

He is in fact on record as having described the Green Party explicitly in public as a 'socialist party'. In a video debate in February this year he argued that there was no need to set up a new left party as 'there is, after all, a socialist party in the UK already: it's the Greens' (tinyurl.com/47x9tv5w).

He doesn't say what he means by 'socialist principles' but it is certainly not a socialist principle to *not* say you are a socialist in case you lose votes or to seek the votes of anti-socialists. He does, however, give a hint as to what he thinks 'socialism' is when he mentions a 'fair, equitable society where we make sure that everyone is looked after'. That's probably what he said was his aim when he was a candidate for the LibDems. Which party doesn't promise that? More important is how such a desirable if rather vague end is to be achieved — by trying to reform capitalism or by making the means of wealth production the common ownership of society under democratic control?

Polanski has also described himself as an 'eco-populist'. That sounds about right.

ALB

Death of a currency

‘LOCAL CURRENCY is retired to end a notable trend’ reported the *Times* (1 September) about the demise of the Lewes Pound, a local currency introduced 17 years ago in the Sussex town and copied in various other towns and cities in Britain. We mentioned its launch at the time (March 2009- tinyurl.com/mr2uh2jw) and the extravagant claims made for the local currency by George Monbiot: ‘It by-passes greedy banks. It recharges local economies and gives local businesses an advantage over multinationals’ (tinyurl.com/48c4jfr).

The aim was to encourage people to spend their money locally by using a currency that could only be spent and circulated in the town concerned. If people used the local currency to buy from a local shop, it was argued, it would stay in the town, but that if they used ordinary money to buy from a national supermarket the chances are that it would end up being spent elsewhere.

Local currencies didn’t replace ordinary money. In fact, they had to be backed pound for pound by an equivalent amount of ordinary money deposited in a bank. The *Times* refers to this in its report when it says that, now that the scheme is being

wound up, ‘the backing money will be donated to four local charities’.

As we mentioned at the time:

‘The Lewes Pounds get into circulation by people buying them for ordinary pounds and are convertible back into pounds on demand. In answer to the question “What happens to the sterling pounds that are taken when people buy Lewes Pounds?” the organisers explain: “All Sterling pounds are held in a safe deposit box with a local bank, so that we can access them at any time should people wish to trade their Lewes Pounds back into Sterling”’.

So no by-passing of ‘greedy banks’. Nor any extra purchasing power introduced to boost the local economy. It was just one piece of paper being replaced by another of equal spending power. Since people wanting to use the local currency had to buy it, those doing this were likely to have been enthusiasts who would have bought things locally anyway using ordinary money; the same goes for those accepting it in change (which people couldn’t be obliged to do). It is unlikely, then, that local businesses benefited — except the scheme itself by selling Lewes Pounds to collectors. How multinationals lost out remains a mystery.

The scheme failed in the end due to the nationwide trend to pay by card rather than cash. In Brixton the organisers of the local currency there tried to get round this by introducing an electronic Brixton Pound (tinyurl.com/mr2wszt7) but this too was overtaken by smartphones with their electronic wallets, and the Brixton Pound too was wound up.

When the Brixton Pound was introduced in 2009 our South London branch commented in a leaflet distributed in the area: ‘What’s the point (apart from helping local shopkeepers)? What difference does it make what coloured pieces of paper we have to use to get the things we need to live? The real problem is that in present-day, capitalist society we have to use money at all to obtain these, and that the amount of money we have will always be rationed by what we get as wages or as benefits. That restricts and distorts our lives’ (The Brixton Pound — What For?).

The sad fact is that all the enthusiasm, time and voluntary work that went into devising and running local currencies led nowhere. This particular ‘notable trend’ to do ‘something now’ to try make things better under capitalism made no difference whatsoever.

Charlie Kirk: A victim of his own ideology

CHARLIE KIRK is dead, the CEO of ‘christo-fascist’ Turning Point USA, the man who built a career attacking queer people, striking workers, students, bled out on stage in Utah after being shot in the neck. His death was streamed live, his last words delivered in response to a question about whether trans people should be allowed to own firearms. In a final moment of irony, the man who weaponised speech was silenced by a bullet.

His followers scrambled to crown him a martyr to ‘free speech’. But what they mourn is not free speech. What they mourn is the collapse of their own manufactured spectacle.

Turning Point USA Campaigns have never been about dialogue. They have been about stalking, smearing, and silencing. Kirk built an empire on ambush videos, ‘debates’ edited into propaganda, and campaigns of harassment targeting professors, students, and workers. What TPUSA calls activism is in fact a weapon: surveillance masquerading as politics, intimidation dressed up as freedom.

At the University of Illinois, TPUSA turned graduate worker Tariq Khan into

a national target, dragging his family, including his children, into a torrent of racist abuse. At Arizona State, English professor David Boyles was blacklisted, stalked, smeared, and beaten bloody. Across the country, countless educators have been doxxed, filmed, and threatened until they censored themselves or fled their jobs. Students, too, are thrown into the crosshairs, forced to navigate a campus environment poisoned by manufactured confrontation.

This is not an accident. It is a strategy. Behind TPUSA’s empty rhetoric of ‘free speech’ is a campaign of fear designed to corrode academic freedom and terrorize opposition into silence. It is a politics of humiliation, coercion, and intimidation. And now, that politics has come full circle. That is the inevitable logic of a politics with violence as its core.

This is not just about Charlie Kirk. It is about the capitalist system that made both Kirk and his killer, a world where capitalism enforces its order through alienation and hierarchy, a world shocked by bloodshed even as it marinates every social relationship in class violence. Kirk’s



Credit: Gage Skidmore

end is not a tragedy of free speech. It is the mirror of the politics he championed: politics through religious domination, politics enforced by fear, politics that ends with blood.

A.T.

Crafty cover-ups

Credit: BBC



'THIS STRANGE thing is flying very fast but erratically ... We didn't see a cockpit. We didn't see windows. And it moved in ways that we didn't understand' says Alex Dietrich, a former pilot with the American military, of her encounter with an unidentified flying object. The case was featured in BBC4's documentary *What Are UFOs?*, which described current interest among scientists of reports of 'strange things' in the sky, with a potted history of the UFO phenomenon as context.

In the documentary, astrophysicists, witnesses and researchers discuss Dietrich's sighting from 2004, which became known as the 'tic tac', and the so-called 'gimbal', observed in 2015. Both were oddly-shaped and oddly-behaving objects seen by pilots and tracked on radar, with footage recorded and subsequently pored over without universal agreement on what it shows. As some of the experts featured in the programme explain, ordinary objects may seem to have unusual shapes and move in unlikely ways because of how they appear on screen. Infra-red cameras are sensitive to heat, so an object will be more prominent the hotter it is, meaning that an aeroplane could look like a blob because the camera will only pick up the area around the engine. Another effect of this is that an object may seem to vanish if its temperature becomes close to that of what's behind it. Also, the way that cameras on planes move in relation to other objects can make them misleadingly appear to travel in improbable ways. Recordings on modern equipment can be scrutinised much closer than in the past and, as repeated in the documentary, unexplained aerial phenomena are now investigated scientifically chiefly by analysing data, rather than relying on the veracity of observers' testimony.

Scanning footage on computers doesn't explain everything about all sightings, particularly when objects have been witnessed directly as well as through equipment. And some sightings may still be of craft which the state wants to keep top secret. As the programme demonstrates, the explanation that this cover-up has been of earthly tech rather than of extra-terrestrial spaceships seems more substantial now than when UFOs have previously been in vogue. The UFO phenomenon as we now know it began in 1947, not long after the Second World War cemented an association between objects in the sky and threats. Wreckage was recovered from a field near Roswell, New Mexico, which the army initially claimed was of a crashed flying disc, then a weather balloon. The subsequent saga of this being a captured alien ship (with aliens) drew attention away from the explanation that the debris was really from a balloon launched from a nearby military airbase. However, the balloon wasn't for measuring weather patterns but was developed through the top secret Project Mogul to detect Soviet nuclear tests. The Roswell Incident coincided with a widely-publicised sighting of UFOs over Washington by pilot Kenneth Arnold. The United States Air Force responded to the subsequent wave of other reports of aerial oddities by investigating them under 'Project Blue Book', no doubt looking out for incoming Russian craft.

From the 1980s, reports of traditional saucer-shaped UFOs were often superseded by sightings of triangular objects. The shape was similar to that of experimental American fighter jets tested from Area 51, the research base in Nevada which the CIA only admitted existed in 2013. Restricting information

is a prerogative of the military and governments, although they're more interested in keeping their technological advancements secret from rival states than from the general public. If the issue gets blurred by focusing on aliens, then all the better. As researcher Jacob Haqq-Misra and astrophysicist Hakeem Oluseyi tell us in the documentary, the gap created by the absence of an official, public explanation for UFOs has been filled to some extent by Hollywood, which has reinforced the assumption that extra-terrestrial spacecraft are involved. 1950s science fiction movies played with the notion of alien invaders symbolising commie infiltrators undermining The American Dream. In its early years, the UFO phenomenon was moulded by the tensions and divisions of the Cold War, and has been a more bizarre effect on people's consciousness than anxieties about the nuclear bomb.

The end of the Cold War didn't mean the end of UFOs, which were even more prominent in the culture of the 1990s, when TV hit *The X-Files* emphasised how the UFO phenomenon is intertwined with conspiracy theories. Running through this is a mistrust of the government and military, concentrating on shadowy cover-ups of captured alien tech rather than of new fighter jets. The more zealous UFO researchers have tended towards the approach of trying to demonstrate something is alien, rather than starting enquiries in a more grounded way. A wilder, interplanetary explanation is more attractive in the sense of being attention-grabbing, and therefore has potential for financial exploitation which more mundane explanations lack. UFOs have been commodified particularly enthusiastically in the sci-fi films of the 1950s and the 'grey' alien tat and contactee books of the 1990s. These issues were raised in *What Are UFOs?*, but predictably the documentary didn't follow them through. The UFO phenomenon has manifested itself in the way it has because it has been shaped by capitalist concerns: nation states, imperialism, military technology, secretive elites, profitability. This is why the emphasis on gathering data to explain each sighting voiced by some of the featured experts isn't enough to explain the phenomenon itself. This requires an understanding of the societal conditions which have created it.

A good deal of the ufology phenomenon appears to be driven by capitalist concerns, not from another planet. Perhaps any real would-be extra-terrestrial visitors have been put off from landing by seeing the state of capitalist society (and how it has shaped our impression of them)?

MIKE FOSTER

An Alternative Reich?



Alt Reich. By Nafeez Ahmed. Byline Books 2024. £12.99

This is a book about the challenge to conventional liberal bourgeois democracy posed by a network of far-right populists, ‘nativists’ and neo-nazis that appear to be in the ascendancy in many parts of the world, including the United States. They locate society’s problems not in the inability of the market economy to provide for people’s physical and psychological needs, but in the inability of the established systems of political democracy to deliver ‘change’ to those who appear disgruntled with it.

Ahmed is a good researcher and he traces the way in which a relatively small number of multi-billionaires have set up or founded think tanks and pressure groups that have spread these far-right viewpoints over decades: most notably organisations like the Henry Jackson Society and the Heritage Foundation. Their reach has been deep and profound – into the heart of the media, and politically into the Trump administration, the Boris Johnson and Truss governments, and others in Western Europe and beyond.

The phenomenon is undoubtedly real and it is chronicled in detail here, but like others out to make a distinctive point, he can sometimes overstate his case. In the Conclusion, he seems to recognise this himself, saying: ‘The fascism of the Alt Reich is ... a contradictory amalgamation of shifting white supremacism, extreme nativism and anti-globalist nationalist corporatism, which inherently pines for deregulated private capital to be backed by an authoritarian state reliant on unitary military power merged with techno-corporate autocracy. This is hardly a coherent worldview; rather it is an evolving mishmash of contradictory and competing worldviews’ (p.379).

Indeed, and this can be seen by the way in which some of its major players (like Trump and Musk) can fall out so easily, or why Reform UK has become a by-word for political resignation in more ways than one.

That the market fails to deliver on people’s expectations of it (and seems to have been doing so increasingly over the last 20 or so years) is at the root of why this rather incoherent set of viewpoints

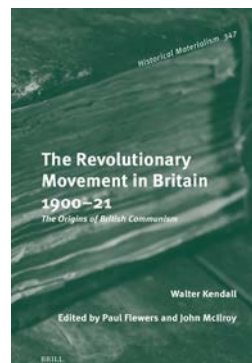
has gained such traction ... the popular narrative is that all governments fail to deliver and they’re fundamentally all the same. As Mark Twain said, history doesn’t repeat itself but it often rhymes and so it’s almost a minor variation of the old anarchist slogan about the futility of elections, in that whoever you vote for the government always gets back in.

And allied to all this there are worrying undercurrents – the blaming of immigrants as a source of society’s problems in a way not seen since the 1970s, an unshakeable belief in capitalism as a system but not its obvious and inevitable consequences, and a leader-loving authoritarianism that underpins a not-so-sneaking admiration for dictatorial abominations like Putin, Orban and Modi.

So Ahmed’s book is worth reading for these reasons alone. It’s just worth bearing in mind that the fascism of which he writes is not really the fascism of the 1920s and 30s, and while the ‘Alt Reich’ book title is a clever one it is, in this respect, not entirely accurate. Another caveat is that it seems odd that a book of this nature (around 400 pages) does not have an index. Perhaps it’s just the sort of left-field, unconventional, liberal approach the alt-reich themselves would decry. But without having an obsession with tradition and procedure, it might just, actually, have been rather useful...

DAP

British Bolshevism



The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900–21. The Origins of British Communism.

By Walter Kendall. Edited by Paul Flowers John McIlroy. Brill. 2025.

This is a reprint of a work first published in 1969, now with a 50-page foreword and a new index. We reviewed this at the time of its first publication (tinyurl.com/36ke4cys) so all we need to add is more detail on Kendall’s derogatory remark about us and to comment on McIlroy’s foreword.

Kendall wrote that the SPGB was ‘unwilling to enter the political fray even to the extent of adopting a programme of “palliatives”’. This is a peculiar understanding of the term ‘political fray’ but it let slip what Kendall, a left-wing Labourite, thought that politics was all

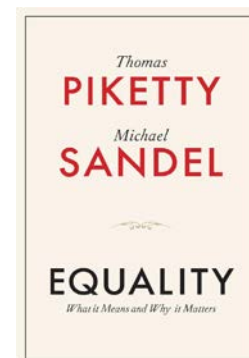
about — what measures to adopt within capitalism to try to mitigate the problems it inflicts on the working class. The SPGB did most certainly enter the ‘political fray’ in its normal sense of political battle, even to the extent of standing candidates in local elections during this period.

Kendall was also being disingenuous as the SPGB was not the only party he discussed that took this position. The DeLeonist Socialist Labour Party (SLP), which was the other product of the ‘impossibilist revolt’ in the Social Democratic Federation, was also unwilling to adopt a programme of palliatives. Yet Kendall devoted a whole chapter to them and argued against this position (‘barred as it was from any advocacy of reform, the SLP was unable to make contact with the mass of the working class’) rather than dismissing it peremptorily as not part of the political fray.

McIlroy, in his foreword, discusses the validity of Kendall’s conclusion that the founding of the British Communist Party, thanks to the machinations of the Comintern and ‘Russian gold’, was a mistake and had a harmful effect on the working class movement in Britain. As a Leninist himself (subspecies, Trotskyist), he argues against this and speculates that things would have been worse had the CPGB not been formed. But one thing did happen. The SPGB did survive and from the 1920s onwards provided a Marxist criticism of the Leninist distortions and undemocratic practices (as well as the Voice of Moscow) that the CPGB introduced into the working class movement and which represented a step backwards. On this point Kendall was right.

ALB

Reformism



Equality. What It Means and Why It Matters. By Thomas Piketty and Michael Sandel, Polity, 2025. 119pp.

“Why should a hedge fund manager make 5,000 times more than a teacher or nurse, or for that matter a physician?” (Michael Sandel)

This short book is the record of a public discussion between two well-known ‘left’ academics. Social and economic historian Piketty is author of the much discussed

Capital in the Twenty-First Century (see review in this journal- <https://tinyurl.com/ttaf24kj>), while Sandel is a prominent 'public intellectual', who has written books on what may broadly be called political philosophy. The book is divided into a number of chapters with titles such as 'Why Worry About Inequality?', 'Should Money Matter Less?', 'The Moral Limits of Markets', 'Globalization and Populism', 'Meritocracy', 'Borders, Migration and Social Change' and 'The Future of the Left: Economics and Identity'.

Though presented as a kind of debate, both participants tend to agree on most things. In particular, they both seem convinced that the current social and economic system, capitalism, can be reformed in such a way as to make things significantly more 'equal' than they are at present. Piketty points to how, over the history of capitalism, vast swathes of people have seen their conditions of life greatly improve. And we can agree: even in the nineteenth century, in the system's relatively early stages, this is something which Marx, for all his insistence on capitalism's inevitable inequalities, observed as an ongoing reality. In this connection Piketty mentions, for example, the abolition of slavery, universal suffrage, decolonisation, increasing gender and racial equality, the welfare state, and higher living standards for many.

The way forward from this, according to both discussants, is even greater equality. They do not view this as lying in the 'neoliberal' turn capitalism has taken since the 1980s which has seen an increased proportion of total wealth

owned and controlled by the richest, but in governments levying swingeing taxation rises on the wealthiest ('80-90% on income and profits') and being more active in implementing 'a fuller development of the welfare state'. This, rather than 'uncritically embracing the market faith' as they see recent Western governments as having done, will assure a more equal (or at least less unequal) distribution of wealth and give more people access to the goods and services which will allow them to have comfortable living standards. The aim, Piketty argues, should be an economy that is '99% decommmodified', by which he means extensive government ownership and control of the means of living, and one which, Sandel asserts, will also lead to 'greater equality of recognition, honor, dignity and respect'.

It would be churlish not to acknowledge the well-meaning nature of the two commentators' wish lists, their support, for example, for 'more investment in health and education, higher progressive taxation, curbing the political power of the rich and the overreach of markets' (Sandel). Unfortunately, however, these do not stand up to close scrutiny. While capitalism, with its 'growth at all costs' compulsion, may continue to improve living standards for many on the planet overall, governments simply cannot create anything resembling equality among those who live under that system, since their prime purpose is to manage it in the overall interest of the minority who monopolise the wealth. Different governments may of course have different approaches to this, in the degree of central control they exercise,

for example, but, so long as the overall framework of money, wages and salaries, and buying and selling exists, they will always- and inevitably- find themselves trying to keep afloat a system founded on producing goods and services for a profit.

At one point, one of the discussants (Piketty), who claims to stand for 'democratic, federalist, and internationalist socialism', seems to come close to suggesting the society of free access that socialists advocate. He talks about a situation in which '99% of goods and services, like education and health, are freely accessible' and 'you only have 1% left commodified', advocating 'a system outside monetary logic and the profit logic'. Yet he comes out the other end still failing to see beyond a monetary economy, and in the end it becomes clear that what he is hoping for is a form of capitalism with a less unequal distribution of wealth and income and a more extensive welfare state (or 'social state', as he calls it) than exists at present. It also becomes clear, in the end, that the discussion between the two figures is one about old-fashioned reformism, about the extent to which it is possible for capitalism to 'narrow' the pay gap between one worker and another and the wealth gap between workers and capitalists. It is not about achieving the absolute economic equality that will characterise a society of voluntary cooperation and free access to all goods and services – the society of the future that we call socialism.

HKM



An innocent abroad

IT IS no news that Communists are fatheads, but Arthur Scargill is obviously a fathead *par excellence*. This “Marxist” miners’ leader went on two weeks’ holiday to the “workers’ state” of Bulgaria, and on his return told newspapers how surprised he was at what he found:

Corruption in State-owned shops and restaurants ‘that would have done credit to the Mafia’;

Massive overbooking by State agencies that kept tourists stranded for hours;

A State-Run voucher system of paying for meals that left holiday-makers hungry and out of pocket.

‘It was a disaster’, said Mr. Scargill. ‘I have no intention of ever returning’.

‘If this is Communism they can keep it.’

The report in the *Daily Mail* on 9th September was supplemented by an article giving further details of holidays and life in Bulgaria. No doubt the Mail’s readers would admit their need for such illumination; but not Scargill, surely? He, after all,

has been an advocate of the “workers’ state” and presumably went to Bulgaria because he thought well of the régime.

The tragedy is that workers in Britain have been accepting militant leadership from this simpleton who confesses he didn’t know what he was talking about. He is described as a “Marxist”, and would probably rush about telling everyone of his astonishment if he opened a book by Marx, too.

Let us explain that in the so-called “Communist” countries the workers do not own the means of living, and production is carried on for sale and profit as it is in other countries. Which means you are as likely to be done, if you are a holidaymaker, in Bulgaria’s Sunny Sands as in Torremolinos or Blackpool; and as certain to be exploited, if you are a worker, in Sofia as in Bradford.

Arthur Scargill was open-mouthed because he did not know what either Socialism or capitalism is. Perhaps he will refrain from further utterances until he has found out.

(Socialist Standard, October 1975)

Action Replay

From Rome to Taiwan

ON DISPLAY at Derby Museum and Art Gallery is the taxidermied skin of a homing pigeon known as the King of Rome. It acquired this name in 1913 when it won a thousand-mile race from Rome, and its body was donated to the museum by its owner, Charlie Hudson, when it died. It has become quite well known, largely because of a song written by Dave Sudbury and recorded most memorably by June Tabor.

Pigeon racing has long been a hobby for workers, partly as a form of escapism from the grind of employment (‘I can’t fly but me pigeons can’, as the song just mentioned has it). But in some countries it is far more than that. In Taiwan, for instance, it is a massive industry, with big cash prizes and lots of betting going on (*Guardian*, 30 August). This, of course, has led to plenty of underhand activity, such as kidnapping birds and cloning the tracking chips they wear in races, so that a second bird can be sent to finish earlier. Birds can be given performance-enhancing drugs, or separated from their mates as a way of getting them to fly faster. Legally, it is something of a grey area, not exactly illegal but subject to little regulation. This includes few restrictions on the welfare of the birds, such as ensuring that fewer get lost at sea.

A YouTube video ‘Why This Pigeon Could Be Worth Millions’ looks at the market for racing pigeons. In some

places it is a sport for millionaire owners, rather like horse racing, and indeed breeding successful pigeons can be just as remunerative as breeding top-class race horses. The Pigeon Paradise website (pipa.be) describes itself as ‘The most exclusive auction house for racing pigeons worldwide’. Occasionally birds really do sell for over a million dollars!

In the UK things may not be quite at this level, but, as the name suggests, the Royal Pigeon Racing Association (rpra.org) has a long-standing association with the royal family, and there are pigeon lofts at Sandringham. At a more grass-roots level,

pigeons are on sale on the Gumtree site, where prices vary from £5 to £100. Also there are one-loft races, where someone can buy a bird but does not have to have their own loft to keep it in. Take the bird to a loft, where the loft manager will handle everything and let you know how it does in races; supposedly an uncomplicated way into the sport.

You can’t help wondering what Charlie Hudson would have made of the way the pastime he enjoyed has been transformed into a global source of large fortunes.

PB



Credit: Adobe Stock

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.

October 2025 Events

World Socialist Movement online meetings

Friday 3 October 19.30 (GMT + 1)

Are we being spied on?

Speaker: Howard Moss

Friday 10 October 19.30 (GMT + 1)

Optimistic and pessimistic fatalism

Speaker: Darren Poynton

Friday 17 October 19.30 (GMT + 1)

Have you heard the news?

Discussion of recent events

Friday 24 October 19.30 (GMT + 1)

No meeting (eve of October Planning Meeting)

Saturday 25 October 10.30-5pm (GMT + 1)

October Planning Meeting

Friday 31 October 19.30 (GMT + 1)

**Bonkers from jib to poop – tales of capitalism
all at sea.**

Speaker: Paddy Shannon

Socialist Party

Physical Meetings

Saturday 18 October 11am to 5pm

Peterborough Radical Bookfair

The Socialist Party will have a stall at this event. George Alcock Centre, Whittlesey Rd, Stranground, PE2 8QS

Saturday 25 October 10am to 5pm

October Planning Meeting

In person at Socialist Party Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, London SW4 7UN.

Also online over Zoom. Both open to the public.



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.

Chasing Pigeons in the Park

I'M FORTUNATE to have two rather nice parks close to where I live. One of them is small but especially picturesque with a lake that previously was used for fishing. One trouble with that was that you couldn't walk around it without the fishermen (they were all men) telling you to hush so as not to scare the fish away. Things improved when the Council transferred the fish to another lake and the water became populated by ducks of various kinds and visited by a variety of other birds, some of them pretty unusual - herons, cormorants, sand martins for example. But it's always the pair of large beautiful swans living on the lake that attract most attention. This is mainly because of their annual breeding routine which sees them bring into the world as many as seven youngsters at a time that soon become as big as they are while still having the dark plumage of cygnets.

Pigeon feeding and chasing

And, of course, there are the pigeons – the dozens of pigeons, which get well fed by visitors with seed available from the park's food and drinks kiosk. The visitors often come to the park with their families to walk round and maybe use the other facilities like the children's play area or the small community centre. As for the pigeon feeding, it's in the area around the kiosk, close to the water's edge, that most of it takes place. It's mainly peaceful with some of the pigeons tame enough to perch on people's arms or shoulders (if you like that kind of thing). But in that area, walking round I'd also sometimes notice a young child or two chasing pigeons and causing them to fly off in fright – something I didn't like. But, a short time ago, something happened that moved me to do more than just observe. On a warm summer's day a child of perhaps 3 or 4 years old was going after pigeons with a stick in his hand frightening them and causing them to hop off or fly away. He was largely unsuccessful in his efforts to use the stick on them, but I noticed that one of them had a bleeding wound and was having more trouble escaping than the others. I asked the child to stop, telling him it was cruel and he wouldn't like to be chased. He stopped but at the same time looked at me in a bemused fashion and this drew the attention of a group of adults nearby.



One of these turned out to be the child's mother, who then addressed me saying something like 'he's only little'. 'Okay', I replied, 'but that's when they learn and it's not right for them to chase and scare the birds'. The situation then escalated. She took a hostile stance, started to walk towards me and shouted 'f... off'. I felt I needed – on reflection – to say something in reply. So I retorted 'You're a very rude woman'. 'I'll be even ruder', she said and got out her phone out, made as though to make a call while calling me a 'nonce' and saying I liked hanging round children. She and the group she was with then walked away. But as they did, it looked as though she was using her phone to take photos.

Facebook support

I have to say that this (ie the phone use) bothered me and, when I got home, I thought I'd better 'get in first' – just in case. So I put a post on the local community Facebook page recounting what had happened and ending it with 'So just to let you know the kind of thing you may face if you're inclined to try and stop kids being cruel to animals'. A shoal of responses from people on the site followed, the vast majority supportive. Examples were: 'Animal cruelty – psychopathic behaviour'; 'You should have taken a video of the woman ... she was obviously acting in a threatening way and slandered you too'; 'How your child treats other people and animals says a lot about how they're treated at home ... because kids reflect what's poured into them'; 'Her

behaviour explains the child's behaviour – mean, uneducated and unnecessary'; 'I'm sorry you were targeted like that and threatened for trying to do the right thing for the poor pigeons. People like that mother ruin the park for others'; 'Calling someone a nonce is absolutely disgraceful and infuriating. I wish I'd been there to defend you.'

Empathy or rivalry?

Needless to say, I was touched by many of these. They made me feel that, despite the fact that so much of what goes on in the society we live in to promote thoughtlessness and cruelty towards others, be they humans or other living things, there is in most people a core of empathy that emerges when the situation requires it. Given the chance, people will almost instinctively choose an ethic of compassion and mutual aid rather than the one of rivalry and competition that is promoted by the economic basis of the society we live in with its money system. How much more likely is it then when we choose a different kind of social and economic set-up – a socialist world of common ownership and free access to all goods and services – that human beings, as the eminently flexible creatures we are, will choose as a matter of course to act in the interests of the community as a whole ... and in so doing act in their own interests too.

HOWARD MOSS