

THE

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SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

Technofeudalism

Capitalism's new
data barons



Also: Capital vs the environment
Tyranny
Is capitalism dead?

What if there's a shortage?
Rights – a movable feast
The Doughnut revisited



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Introducing the Socialist Party

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

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



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

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

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

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

Socialism defined

LAST MONTH we recorded that two MPs who had said they were socialists had not replied to a request to say what they meant by socialism. In the meantime, one has replied indirectly while Jeremy Corbyn himself has had a stab at it.

Addressing a Your Party rally in Liverpool on 9 October Zarah Sultana declared: 'We're not here for lowering a few bills here and there, and the sprinkling of a wealth tax. We are here for a fundamental transformation of society, the means of production controlled by workers. And another very simple idea, the working class controlling the wealth that they produce. It's called socialism. (www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-1ZitV4JxA)

While Corbyn wrote in an article in the *Guardian* (13 October): "Undemocratic parties produce undemocratic societies, where a small section of society owns

the resources we all need to survive. Democratic parties produce democratic societies; where wealth and resources are owned by us all" (tinyurl.com/pdeven5j).

Both definitions – while not completely wide of the mark – have their weakness. Sultana's because she only talks of 'control' and not ownership; which could leave her words open to being interpreted as 'workers control' of nationalised industry. Also, even if ownership is meant as well as control, socialism is not ownership just by 'workers', but ownership by all members of society including those who for one reason or another are not working. They too will have a say on what is produced and how it is distributed.

Besides the nonsense of what parties of a different type produce, Corbyn's is open to the objection that he doesn't

make it clear that socialism means that *all* the means of production would belong to all of us, leaving open the interpretation that he is talking about the so-called 'public' ownership of just some industries or services; which in fact is how he did mean it to be interpreted.

However, combining the strengths of both we can reach a reasonably good definition of socialism:

'A fundamental transformation of society where the resources we all need to survive — the means of production — will be owned and controlled by all of us'.

However, we have to express our serious doubts that the new party will adopt this as its aim and that, even if it did, this would be nothing more than rhetoric for ceremonial occasions, its practice being the pursuit of sprinklings such as a wealth tax and other reforms.

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Basic skills

A RECENT YouTube essay argues that modern literature is poor quality because young writers don't know how to write. This is because they don't really know how to read, and this is because the US abandoned the century-old and evidence-backed phonics reading system in favour of something called 'critical literacy', which supposedly prioritises personal interpretation over text analysis. Thus, goes the narrative, literary comprehension has cratered, offset by a skyrocketing tendency to react subjectively to texts instead of objectively analysing their meanings. In conclusion, this is what's behind the modern epidemic of cancel culture, where words mean whatever you want them to mean, and anyone is entitled to be 'triggered' by anything (youtu.be/8ynCVmw5AWk).

25 percent of US adults have only a kindergarten reading age, the video says, and 60 percent have that of a 10 year old. This is broadly verifiable (tinyurl.com/47b397sn). The essayist believes that abandoning phonics was a deliberate strategy to dumb people down and thereby make them more compliant. But this overlooks a contradiction. While politicians might love dumb voters, and advertisers love dumb consumers, any industry report will show that capitalist employers want the opposite, smart and productive workers with industry-relevant skills, because their labour is what produces profits. And taxes on those profits finance governments. Worker, voter, consumer, same person.

Conspiracy explanations are lazy. Better to apply the principle of Hanlon's Razor: 'Never attribute to malice what can be adequately explained by stupidity.' Capitalism is chaotic, contradictory and incompetent all the way down, including its education systems. Unlike the US, the UK never abandoned phonics. In fact it's a statutory requirement. Even so, 'the average reading age of adults in the United Kingdom is typical of a child in UK education at 9 years old' while 'some have a much lower reading level' (tinyurl.com/nhd4besh).

Social media means many young people don't read books. Reading test scores have been declining across OECD countries since 2012 (tinyurl.com/nezwjphu). Worse, AI provides a 'frictionless' user experience which is proving addictive, and some evidence suggests that AI-reliant students are losing the ability to learn or retain information (tinyurl.com/4eu368rj).

Sourcing a quote provides an example of this frictionless user experience in action. Back in the 18th and 19th century,



Credit: Adobe Stock

some intellectuals did indeed view the education of workers with abject horror. One remarked that teaching workers to read was 'to tie firebrands to foxes and set them loose amid the standing corn'. Who was it? Google's AI Overview answered at once: 'The quote is by the Russian anarchist Emma Goldman. She wrote, "To teach the masses in a compulsory fashion is to tie firebrands to foxes and set them loose amid the standing corn," in her 1911 essay "*The Americanization of the American Girl*".

Er, no. The idea of Emma Goldman deprecating widespread worker education is preposterous. The essay title also looked dubious, and hyperlinked to this: 'The phrase "*The Americanization of the American Girl*" is likely a misremembering of the title "*The Americanization of Emily*," a 1964 British-American romantic comedy film starring James Garner and Julie Andrews.'

Well, the film is real, but otherwise, nul points so far for Google Overview. Why not ask the AI to check its own answer? 'Did Emma Goldman write an essay called *The Americanization of the American Girl*'? It flashed back: 'No, there is no evidence that Emma Goldman wrote an essay with that exact title [...] "*The Americanization of the American Girl*" does not appear in her known works or bibliographies.'

You don't get internal consistency because current generative AI doesn't remember what it last told you. Next we got: 'The quote is from the conservative politician Marjorie Taylor Greene, who said teaching workers to read was "to tie firebrands to foxes [etc]" to express her view that it would lead to "radical, anti-American, anti-God, and anti-police sentiment".'

A gargling MAGA nutjob could hardly have authored an 18th century quotation. Time for some 'prompt engineering', ie, rephrase question, get different answer: 'Who opposed general education on the grounds that teaching workers to read was 'to tie firebrands to foxes and set them loose amid the standing corn'?

This time Google Oversight gave a more plausible response: 'The phrase was not used to oppose general education, but was a popular quote attributed to the English politician and magistrate Sir Thomas Bernard, who opposed the teaching of reading to the poor in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. He feared that educating the working class would lead to unrest and was quoted as saying, "to tie firebrands to foxes... [etc]".' The AI further assured us that Sir TB, 'a prominent 18th-century English politician and magistrate, was a vocal opponent of educating the poor' who highlighted 'the dangers of educating the poor, suggesting it would lead to social chaos and unrest'.

It seemed prudent to ask 'Who was Sir Thomas Bernard?' In a flash, the multi-hundred billion dollar oracle responded.

'Sir Thomas Bernard (1750–1818) was an English lawyer, philanthropist, and social reformer, best known for ... founding the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor... he [...] dedicated much of his life to improving the lives of the poor and working children.'

Could this philanthropist have worked to improve the lot of the poor while emphatically against educating them? Not unless he was very confused. A clarification then: 'Did Sir Thomas Bernard oppose educating the poor while campaigning to improve their conditions?'

'No, Sir Thomas Bernard did not oppose educating the poor; in fact, he was a strong advocate for their education and included it as a key part of his efforts to improve their conditions.' Acres more text in the same vein.

So, bright, shiny, and useless. 'Frictionless' learning is a delusion. The mind needs friction like the body needs fibre. Reading, writing and critical thinking are vital for workers. They're the basic skills of revolution.

Many expect the AI bubble to burst, as the rampant spending shows derisory returns. The result could be a cold shower all round.

PJS

Beyond Money

Dear Editors

I WANT to thank the Socialist Standard for the thoughtful and generous review of my book *Unchained: Living Without Money* in the September 2025 issue. It is both humbling and encouraging to see my work placed in conversation with such a long tradition of literature and activism envisioning a society beyond money.

Your review captured well the spirit in which the book was written: to help people imagine what it might look like to move from a system based on scarcity and profit to one rooted in cooperation, equity, and access. I especially appreciate your recognition of how *Unchained* seeks to address common objections — from ‘human nature’ to so-called ‘dirty work’ — in ways that reframe the conversation around what capitalism itself conditions us to believe.

At the same time, I want to briefly clarify the ‘non-political’ framing you note. My intent was not to dismiss the necessity of political action, but to emphasize the power of grassroots practice, imagination, and lived experiments in shifting consciousness. Free stores, time banks, mutual aid networks, and community projects may not abolish capitalism on their own, but they expand people’s horizons of possibility. They give form to what many assume is impossible and, in doing so, prepare the ground for larger systemic change.

I understand and respect the Socialist Party of Great Britain’s long-standing position that governments under capitalism cannot be instruments for emancipation. Where I differ is in leaving space for the possibility that policies such as universal housing or healthcare, while constrained, can normalize access-based thinking and open cracks through which movements grow. History is full of examples where small openings in the system gave people the courage and imagination to demand far more. I do not view these reforms as endpoints, but as catalysts.

What encourages me most is the clear common ground between us. Whether we emphasize revolutionary political action

or grassroots contributionist models, the destination we envision is strikingly similar: a democratic world without money, bosses, or exploitation, where governance becomes the transparent administration of things and not the rule of people. I believe the diversity of approaches can be complementary rather than contradictory. Political strategy and cultural practice need not compete; together they can reinforce one another in the shared project of building a society based on need, not profit.

Thank you again for your generous reading. I hope *Unchained* can continue to serve as a small contribution to the broader movement the SPGB has long championed. The task before us is too urgent and too vast to allow our differences of approach to overshadow the deep unity of purpose that animates us both.

JUSTIN FAIRCHILD

Marxism and pigeons

I always enjoy grabbing the Socialist Standard from the local radical bookshop, and read with interest the October Life and Times piece, ‘Chasing pigeons in the park’. Here stalwart HKM finds himself in a fractious encounter with a working class mother, and unsurprisingly, comes off worse for it. I would never advise anyone, Marxist or otherwise, to intervene in the parenting of a stranger’s child. It smacks of condescension, and I’m hardly shocked that she went straight for the jugular.

That aside, while I appreciate the article’s humane spirit and its attempt to connect everyday behaviour to the wider social order, I think it falls into certain traps that weaken the socialist case.

As an anecdote and moral exhortation, one small incident, a child chasing a pigeon, is made to carry the burden of a sweeping claim about capitalist society. What’s needed instead is structural analysis, grounded in class relations and historical development. Otherwise the critique risks idealism, as if cruelty will simply vanish once capitalism is abolished, and empathy will bloom automatically.

The piece also overlooks the way ideology and institutions actively

reproduce capitalist values. Capitalism doesn’t just ‘promote thoughtlessness,’ it systematically manufactures individualism, competition, and alienation through schools, media, and the daily grind of wage labour. Those habits of thought won’t dissolve on day one of socialism, they will need to be challenged through conscious struggle, education, and organisation.

Under capitalism, ‘competition,’ ‘self-interest,’ ‘private property,’ and even what counts as ‘good parenting’ or ‘normal behaviour’ are all suffused with hegemonic ideas.

Finally, the article sidesteps the harder question of how socialism itself will handle conflict, scarcity, or antisocial behaviour. To imply that a socialist world will be one of effortless harmony is to underplay the ongoing, practical work of building and sustaining solidarity in the face of real contradictions.

In short, the piece has a sound moral impulse, but its reliance on anecdote and lack of class analysis blunt its usefulness as a Marxist critique.

Marx himself could well have been a pigeon fancier, though most likely encapsulated in pastry and well baked in a pie. While I can’t cite a specific reference for that, it is at least recorded that he did enjoy a pork and matzah sandwich when he could.

A.T.

Equality

Thanks for sending this (your review of *Equality*, October Socialist Standard). Needless to say, everything I propose and describe about democratic socialism needs to be discussed, amended, improved, discussed again and again. See the longer discussion in my *Brief History of Equality*. From that viewpoint, I am very interested to better understand what kind of organization and institution you are advocating in your own view of socialism.

THOMAS PIKETTY

We comment on your Brief History of Equality on page 9. In the meantime we refer you to our pamphlet Socialism As A Practical Alternative (tinyurl.com/2udnr4p6)– Editors

No such thing as free buses

IN HIS successful campaign to win the primary election to become the Democratic Party's candidate for the 4 November election for the Mayor of New York City, Zohran Mamdani, the left-winger, ran on a promise 'to lower the cost of living for working class New Yorkers' (zohranfornyc.com). He is a member of a group of reformist Social Democrats calling themselves the 'Democratic Socialists of America' who have chosen to bore from within the Democrat Party and among his proposals was 'fast, fare-free buses'.

It is not a new idea. It's been put into practice in some places. In fact, in itself it's a good idea. Fares do restrict people's freedom to travel and fare-collecting, even via plastic cards and ticket-machines, is a waste of resources. More people travelling by public transport and less by car will help reduce air pollution and carbon emissions.

Free transport in a socialist society would be run for people to use as and when they want it. But a distinction needs to be drawn between free transport as a reform within capitalism and free transport as part of socialist society where all goods and services will be free.

Under capitalism, where there is no

such thing as a free anything, the question arises of how free transport would be funded. Mamdani's supporters, like Matt Bruenig, say that his plan will be paid for by increased local taxes. Bruenig explained:

'Most people seem to realize that if we shifted to a fee-funded school system, we'd need to roll back property and other taxes in order to make sure people had the money to pay the fees.' (jacobin.com/2025/06/zohran-mamdani-free-bus-proposal).

By the same token, he argued, introducing free buses would have the opposite effect. It would mean people would save money from which to pay the increase in taxes to fund it. This makes some sense but it rather undermines Mamdani's claim that free buses would lower the cost of living (whatever other merits it might have).

There is in fact a link via the cost of living between free services and wages. Fares are an important item in the cost of living and it is the cost of living which largely determines the level of wages and salaries. Whatever reduces the cost of living will tend also to reduce wages. Anything provided free by someone else

relieves employers of having to pay their employees to cover this, as would be the case if fares were abolished. It would be a subsidy to employers, whatever its other merits might be.

Before everybody can benefit from free transport, the whole wages system needs to be abolished. The means of production must be converted from the class property of a privileged few into the common property of the whole community. This would also create the framework within which the problem of the motor car and its pollution and destruction can be rationally tackled.

Once the means of production are the common heritage of all and are under democratic control, then the profit motive and the price system can be abolished. Wealth can be produced solely for people to use. People can have free access not only to travel facilities but to all the other things they need to live and enjoy life. Goods will not be priced, but will be available for all to take freely according to their needs.



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The podcast has new episodes every Monday morning. All episodes, and platforms where people can subscribe, are listed here:

www.worldsocialistradio.com

Halo Halo

The observation by Doctor Samuel Johnson that, 'Sir, a woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on his hind legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all' was recorded in 1763 in Boswell's biography of Johnson. Well Doctor, you misogynist you, have you got egg on your face now because the first female Church of England archbishop of Canterbury has been appointed to the position? If that isn't worthy of cheering around the flag-post what is? What ...you didn't know that and you don't care? LOL. The only bishops of any value are those on the chess board.

A 2018 survey found that about ten million people identified as C of E. The C of E came into being because the English king at the time was told by the catholic pope that he couldn't marry someone else so he said some rude words to the Vatican and made up his own religion so that that he could have as many wives as he wanted.

A religion that is basically irrelevant to

the vast majority and has no impact on the daily lives of most is – whilst we continue to live in a social system that uses, or tries to use, religion as a method of control – arguably preferable to one that exercises a devastating impact upon the lives of those who blindly adhere to it.

* * * *

'Man's inhumanity to man / Makes countless thousands mourn!' comes from a 1784 poem by Robert Burns, *Man Was Made To Mourn: A Dirge*. History is, unfortunately, littered with examples but what of Man's inhumanity toward women in the name of religion? A September Daily Telegraph report stated that following a 6.6 magnitude earthquake in Afghanistan women were left to die because of Taliban rules forbidding unrelated men from having contact with them so all male rescue teams were forbidden to do so (tinyurl.com/2s3wbazf).

Also in September In Morocco a feminist activist Ibtissame Lachgar was sentenced for

the heinous crime (sarcasm) of 'offending Islam', to 30 months behind bars and a 5,500 dollar fine. She was arrested after posting online a picture of herself wearing a T-shirt with the word 'Allah' in Arabic followed by 'is lesbian' (tinyurl.com/55uj2f5z).

'A fire on 11 March 2002 at a girls' school in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, killed fifteen people, all young girls. Complaints were made that Saudi Arabia's 'religious police', specifically the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, had prevented schoolgirls from leaving the burning building and hindered emergency services personnel because the students were not wearing modest clothing' (tinyurl.com/mzcku99w).

In Afghanistan a few years ago females between the ages of thirteen and twenty-one were imprisoned, for the heinous crime (more sarcasm) of having 'failed' a virginity test. The report said that that more than 200 young women and girls were incarcerated. Their release, it was said, would see them all expecting a future 'full of shame, exclusion and poverty.' 'Although supposed to be imprisoned for only three months, many are held for a year or a year and a half' (tinyurl.com/yz5uw7ke).

DC

Tiny tips

THE UNREST reflected much deeper frustrations, including high unemployment, particularly among young people, growing poverty and anger at corruption and mismanagement. People see public resources channelled into luxury spending and infrastructure deals benefiting a few powerful figures connected to the ruling People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), while basic services and jobs are neglected (**Inter Press Service News Agency**, tinyurl.com/mubsr45w).

In 1978, Clive James reviewed the official biography of Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev (General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1964 to 1982) by the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, CPSU Central Committee. "I read the whole thing from start to finish, waiting for the inevitable slip-up which would result in a living sentence. It never happened." James found it so dull that "If you were to recite even a single page in the open air, birds would fall out of the sky and dogs drop dead." (**MSN**, tinyurl.com/9hw2skvv).

The announced \$7 billion would be the biggest official tranche of funding to

Ukraine's drone industry so far. It's close to the \$6 billion that Ukraine's defense minister, Denys Shmyhal, has said Kyiv needs to cover this year's production of first-person-view drones, interceptors, long-range drones, and missiles. While new, Ukraine's drone industry has increasingly been in the spotlight for producing cheap but effective weapons regularly being used to destroy Russian loitering munitions, armor, artillery, and production facilities (**Yahoo**, tinyurl.com/4y297a7m).

From an anarcho-communist perspective, this moment is not simply about one man's death. It is about the world that produced both Charlie Kirk and the man who killed him. It is about capitalism's ever-present violence, about the state's monopoly on force, about the way political antagonisms are escalating into open bloodshed. It is about what happens when a society soaks every interaction in hierarchy, coercion, alienation, and humiliation, and then acts shocked when someone pulls a trigger... Wage labour itself is enforced by violence. If you refuse to work, you starve, or you

are policed, or imprisoned. The entire edifice of private property rests on threat and force (**The Slow Burning Fuse**, tinyurl.com/4swnp9hw).

North Korea's Kim vows to build a 'socialist paradise' [sic] (**Morning Star**, tinyurl.com/mpha8jxv).

Having a home of our own is essential to leading a dignified life, but in Venezuela, where access to housing is enshrined as a right in the Constitution, renting adequate accommodation is an unattainable luxury for hundreds of thousands of families, and buying property is almost impossible. Not only do market prices far exceed the average household income but inflation has also wiped out home loans, leaving citizens without access to financing (**Equal Times**, tinyurl.com/28k6m2sy).

There is no genetic or biological basis for dividing the human race into distinct "races". There are just groups of human beings — all of whom came from Africa originally — who developed slightly different physical characteristics over time as they travelled to, and adapted to, different climates and environments (**The Conversation**, tinyurl.com/ycyfnpj5).

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

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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.

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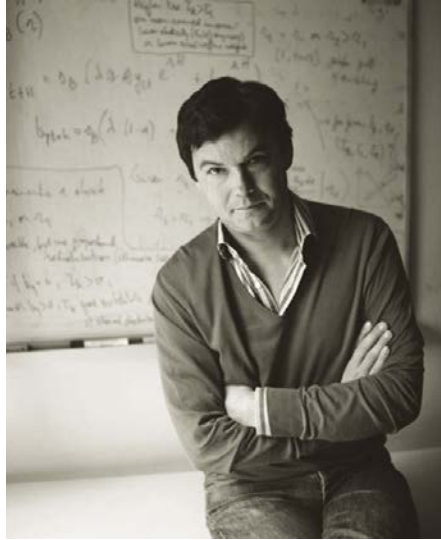
A history of inequality

THOMAS PIKETTY is an academic who specialises in the study of economic inequality and has written a number of books on the subject, the most well-known of which is the 700-page tome *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2013), which we reviewed in 2014 (tinyurl.com/yb6jk628). The most recent is *A Brief History of Equality* which first came out in French in 2021. Based on historical records such as the archives of legacies, property transactions and tax returns, Piketty identifies a trend since the beginning of the 19th century towards less inequality in wealth ownership, income, and access to education, health care and better-paid jobs. Describing himself as a socialist but in the gradualist, reformist tradition, he believes this can continue and lead to 'a systemic transformation of capitalism'.

On wealth ownership, he takes as a measure of inequality the proportion of wealth owned by the top one percent compared with that of the bottom 50 percent. The figures for all forms of property are: 'The wealthiest 1 percent held about 45 percent of total property in France in 1810, and about 55 percent of the total in 1910 Then, in the course of the twentieth century, we observe a very strong deconcentration of fortunes: in the whole of France, the richest 1 percent's share fell from 55 percent in 1914 to less than 20 percent at the beginning of the 1980s, before beginning a slow increase; in 2020, that share was nearly 25 percent'.

But 'this did not benefit much the poorest 50 percent, whose share rose from 2 percent in 1910 to 6 percent in 2020' and 'the richest 1 percent's share of total private property is currently two times smaller than it was a century ago, but it still remains on the order of five times larger than the share held by the poorest 50 percent'.

The beneficiaries have been the middle 40 percent between the top 10 percent and the bottom 50 percent who Piketty calls the 'patrimonial middle class'. Their wealth he finds is 'held mainly in housing'. In fact, the monetary value of housing represents about half of that of all privately-owned wealth. The figures for the ownership of all wealth are interesting but the relevant one for socialists is the one for the ownership of means of production. Piketty usefully defines means of production as 'all the goods necessary to produce other goods and services' ('agricultural land and equipment, factories and machinery, offices and computers, shops and restaurants, salary advances



and working capital'). He doesn't produce figures for this but says that ownership of these is more concentrated than for all wealth. But there is a table which shows that: 'In France in 2020 (as in all countries for which such data are available), small fortunes are composed principally of cash and bank deposits, middle-sized fortunes of real estate, and large fortunes of financial assets (especially stocks)'.

It cannot be denied that the middle 40 percent — the vast majority of whom are members of the working class properly defined — have benefited, but this doesn't mean that this group is not dependent, like the rest of the working class in the bottom 50 percent, on having to sell their ability to work in order to buy what they need to live. If they lose their job, they can survive for longer before they become destitute, perhaps a year or so after selling their house. But it does mean that we socialists should be careful when we say the working class is 'propertyless'. We don't mean that they literally own nothing but that they don't own means of production.

There has also been a reduction in inequality of access to education and health care. But this can't be seen as anti-capitalist, as a better educated and more healthy workforce became necessary as production methods became more complex. As Piketty himself points out:

'During the second Industrial Revolution [chemicals, electricity, the car industry, household goods], it became essential that an increasingly large part of the labour force be capable of mastering manufacturing processes that required technical and digital education, and the ability to understand detailed equipment manuals'.

Nor is the lessening of discrimination over job opportunities for women and minorities incompatible with capitalism.

Capitalism could cope with the abolition of discrimination and even benefit from it by being able to draw on a wider pool of trainable and competent workers.

As a gradualist, Piketty would like to see what he calls 'the march towards equality' continue and completely 'transform capitalism'. Besides steep taxes on wealth and inheritance, he envisages changing company law to allow for more employee participation in decision-making and for a proportion of profits to be set aside for spending to benefit workers. Neither of these will change the workings of capitalism as an economic system which imposes on those who make decisions about production that the priority be making a profit. Widening the circle of those who make such decisions won't alter this; even worker cooperatives have to obey capitalism's basic economic law of 'no profit, no production'. And, of course, from time to time companies go bust and there are no profits to set aside.

He also proposes a scheme to give everyone at age 25 a minimum inheritance equal to 60 percent of average wealth per adult (which is France in 2020 would have been about 120,000 euros, or about £105,000; more today of course). The aim, he says, would be to 'increase the negotiating power of everyone who owns almost nothing (that is, about half the population)': 'Recipients could reject certain job offers, buy an apartment, engage in a personal project, or create a small business. This freedom, which is certain to delight some, may well frighten employers and property owners'.

Which, apart from the cost, is precisely why it will never happen; it would undermine the wages system by putting workers in a stronger bargaining position with employers and enable them to extract a higher wage, meaning less profits. It is rather surprising that anyone should seriously imagine that the capitalist state could be made to give half the working class a lump sum of at least £105k. In any event, such a redistribution of wealth would not affect the unequal ownership of *means of production*.

In short, the trend since 1800 towards less inequality has not undermined the basis of capitalism. Even less has it been an ongoing slow, gradual transition towards socialism. Not that socialism is a society with a more equal distribution of wealth. Its basis is the common ownership of the means of production which will allow everyone access on equal terms to education, health care, work and what they need to live.

ADAM BUICK

Capital vs the environment

IF THE scientists are right, humanity is facing a climate emergency. There has been much hand-wringing at the many COP-out meetings, but little protection has been afforded to the environment. In fact, the damage seems to be increasing. This should come as no surprise, as socialists have long argued that the capitalist system of production prevents rational stewardship of the planet. The five features of the system set out here show why this is so.

1. The economic status quo

The ownership/control of the world's productive resources is in the hands of a small minority – via 'legal title', as with private capital, or via membership of a clique that controls a state. Yet this ownership/control is fragmented, creating a host of competing interests among that minority.

To consider the implications of this fragmentation, let's imagine there's an individual capitalist, Bill, the sole owner of a factory where copper pipe is produced, a standard product sold to industrial customers. All of Bill's money is tied up in the factory, and the business provides him with an income that means he has no need to do any work himself.

This also means that, if he is to maintain his status as part of the minority, he is absolutely reliant on the continuing success of the business (and who can blame him for wanting to maintain his status? Who would willingly swap the relative freedom of the capitalist for the life of a worker?). However, Bill has no monopoly over copper pipe. His factory is competing in a market and, as any capitalist knows, competition means 'expand or die'. So what does Bill have to do to avoid economic death?

Experience shows that competition constantly forces businesses to adopt new technologies to increase productivity, that is, to reduce the amount of labour used in their production processes, and produce more in the same amount of time. So Bill will be obliged to use much of the income generated by his company to bring in modern equipment.

One of the facts of new technology is that it won't be new forever. Sooner or later, there's no telling when, it will be overtaken by even newer tech that will tend to depress market prices. This means that Bill will have to ensure his new tech runs as fast as it will go to get as much of his product out of the door before prices drop, before his now outdated technology becomes relatively less productive or even economically unusable. This of course means an increase in the use of raw

materials and in output – more pipe will be thrown onto the market.

And remember, competitors will be trying to match or better what Bill is doing, so demand for raw materials and output will be multiplied across the pipe-making sector.

A minor detail of new technology is that 'early adopters' expect to undercut their competitors for a while and gain market share. But this advantage will only persist until the new technology becomes the norm. This gives an additional impetus to increase production in the meantime, and of course, increase the use of raw materials.

The increased production in Bill's sector cannot continue *ad infinitum*. Sooner or later, an imbalance, where supply exceeds demand, will occur. This will usually result in smaller, less productive companies being forced out of business. Supply will align more with demand, until competition creates a new imbalance. (The slump phase of the general business cycle would have a similar effect on Bill's sector, but that is beyond the scope of the present analysis.)

2. Production for profit

Nothing is produced under the capitalist system unless there is an expectation of profit. In general, although rates of profit will vary, profits are made most of the time (even in a time of economic crisis when lots of businesses go to the wall, there is money capital around to pick up industrial assets at 'fire sale' prices which can then be exploited profitably). This increases the amount of money capital that, in light of the competition discussed above, has to be re-invested in some sort of productive process. Hence the staggering amount of wealth in the form of industrial assets that has accumulated under the capitalist system. And it is the very same competition that ensures that these assets can never be left idle for any extended period of time. They must always be put to use, putting new demands on natural resources.

3. The scramble for sales

What has been said above applies to every type of company, be it private, a PLC or workers' cooperative. It applies too to every sector of capitalist production, be it ship-building, production of industrial robots or the garment trade. But there is an additional factor that operates when we consider the production of personal consumption goods – furniture, clothing, cars and the like.

As we saw above, capital is always on the look-out for profits. In the personal consumption goods sector, this results in the use of cheap materials, planned obsolescence and rapid turnover of fashions, anything in fact that will result in more sales. And on a more general level, it leads to the promotion of individual ownership when public provision would be a far more efficient use of resources (think public transport and laundries, tool libraries, even clothes libraries – why not, it works for wedding suits, doesn't it?)

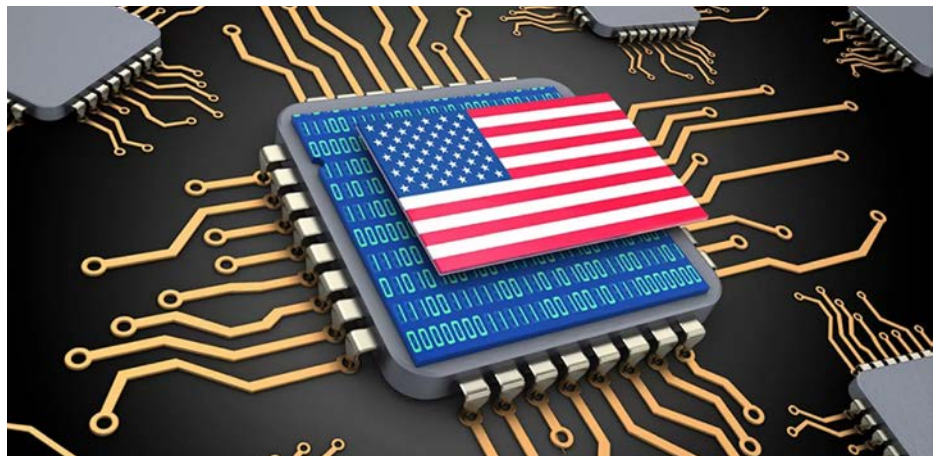
4. Anarchic production

The conflict of interests within the owning class makes the rational planning of production (and hence rational use of resources) impossible under the capitalist system. So at the time of writing, (August 2025) there is world overcapacity in, for example, steel (tinyurl.com/4w384a9r), cars (tinyurl.com/2atkyazj), and chemicals (tinyurl.com/hp6fafa2).

5. A 'political' dimension

Even though capital has now created a world market, individual nation-states, a hangover from capital's early days, still have a role in protecting the common interests of 'their' owning class. So as we are seeing at present, the overcapacity that tends to arise from the economics of capitalist production can also be created or exacerbated by national industrial policies (eg the Chips Act in the US and the 'Made in China 2025' policy in China). Although this feature *appears* to be political, it derives directly from the underlying economic structure.

BUDGIE



Tyranny

TYRANTS ARE surely not difficult to spot. A Hitler or a Stalin are, in hindsight, ludicrously obvious. Yet, in their own time, they garnered popular support, even as their excesses were becoming evident. Even with the clarity of history exposing their misdeeds, there are those who look back on them with political affection.

It is more difficult to evaluate the tyrannous potential of an individual who is in the process of emerging. Especially to those who are looking for, craving for, a leader to cure their individual and national ills.

Take the near veneration of Winston Churchill, despite his political record of disasters such as the Dardanelles campaign in the First World War. It was, of course, his war leadership in the 1940s by which his political sins were largely, if not universally, absolved. Can he be cited for any actual acts of tyranny though? The deaths of an estimated 3 to 4 million Bengalis due to Churchill diverting food supplies makes an argument, especially in Bengal.

A strategic decision in wartime circumstances it might be argued by those more sympathetic. But tyrants usually claim their decisions are strategic, in the best interests of their people. The need to crack eggs to make omelettes.

The point though is not that this or that person is a tyrant. Such would be to identify tyranny solely with individuals. A problem solved by the expedient of choosing leaders who are not tyrants. Tyranny as a personality disorder.

However, if it's the whole political, economic and social system that is tyrannous, then a tyrant is an individual expression, the figurehead of that tyranny. Hitler and Stalin had whole coteries around them as complicit as those individual leaders. The death of Stalin did not lead to the dismantling of the tyrannous regime in the Soviet Union. Indeed, the Stalin period was the continuation of that established by those who assumed power along with Lenin. It is arguable that the Bolsheviks, for all their communist posturing, merely adapted the previous Czarist methods to their own ends. The present Russian incumbent is a continuation barely veiled by a very dubious and threadbare 'democratic' cloak.

Over 2300 years ago Aristotle commented at length on the subject of tyranny, identifying its main features. Tyranny is often the manifestation of political turmoil, unstable government and a disaffected people. It reflects deep social and institutional issues caused



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by economic disparities and political dysfunction. People begin to look for a solution in the form of a leader who seems to embody the promise of resolution. Such an individual though will be looking to exploit these disruptive features for their own political or economic (or both) ends. Tyrants will impoverish their subjects to the point they feel they cannot resist. Aristotle was, of course, addressing individual rule in the political circumstances of his own time. It is feasible to consider his principles of tyranny in the broader context of society at large. In our time this is the continuing predominance and rule of capitalism.

Instability

Instability is a fundamental feature of a system posited on the principle of ruthless competition. The accruing of profit is the motor driving the system and this is achieved at the expense of the wealth creators, the workforce, and competitors.

To best serve capitalism's requirements the workforce is stratified economically by a variety of remuneration levels. Economic disparity between workers creates sectional interests that divide rather than unite workers in the face of the real schism, between workers as a class and capitalists. Political dysfunction then arises when workers begin to identify with different political parties purportedly serving their particular interests, while actually administering the system on behalf of capitalism. This enables the capitalist system, in its role of tyrant, to use these disruptive features for its own economic and political ends. Capitalism's subjects, the workers, are impoverished to the extent of being wholly dependent economically upon capitalism.

Even the seemingly well paid rarely, if ever, achieve economic security that might allow them to feel independent of capitalism. A seemingly luxurious lifestyle can quickly dissipate if the 'generous' salary disappears. Impoverishment is certainly more obvious to those on or near the minimum wage end of the pay

spectrum. They are so insecure and drained by their circumstances they are rendered seemingly powerless to resist. Nor do they readily recognise common cause with those who are financially more comfortable, even (erroneously) called middle class. Indeed, it is this sector of the working class that becomes an object of their dissatisfaction. They feel diminished by the 'middle class elite', readily portrayed in the media dedicated to serving the interests of capital, as espousing 'liberal' or 'lefty' notions from their detached estates. This can manifest as mass street demonstrations against supposed 'middle class' shibboleths such as immigration, even socialism, as ineffective reformism is often misidentified. Would-be tyrants emerge to offer leadership that is actually misleadership.

There are actual tyrants heading brutal regimes as well as those who aspire to being tyrants with their own brutal regimes. These are often not as useful to capitalism as freer societies more compatible with free markets and flexible workforces. The democratic, or at least seemingly democratic, political model largely seems most suitable for capitalism to flourish, or deal with social unrest when flourishing periodically gives way to economic crisis. Should the democratic model become undermined by ineffective governance, with none of the established political parties able to maintain stability, then the implicit tyranny of capital can find explicit form through an insurgent political force.

The only antidote to the tyranny of capitalism, implicit or explicit, is socialism. Until workers can look beyond the immediate circumstances of their particular strata and identify themselves as a class they will remain as subjects of that tyranny. Socialism is the way workers can take real democratic possession and control of the means of life, where use and the meeting of all needs, not profit, is the motive force of society. Then the tyranny will have been truly toppled.

D. A.

Is capitalism dead?



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SOCIALISTS MIGHT seem a bit obsessed with how words are used, not because we consider ourselves to be the special constables of whatever language we speak, but because we are interacting with our fellow members of the working class, engaging with ideas about what words represent and defending and advancing our political tradition, in order to gain working class freedom.

So it is of some interest that we have had a globally known political individual, celebrated by many, stating in bold capital letters on the back cover of his book that 'CAPITALISM IS DEAD WELCOME TO TECHNOFEUDALISM'. It is this assertion, made popular by Yanis Varoufakis with his book *Technofeudalism—What Killed Capitalism* (2023) and its consequences that will be examined here.

Two years before the publication of Varoufakis's book, a French academic published a book titled *Technofeudalism: A Critique of the Digital Economy* which argues along similar lines to Varoufakis' book but with a more philosophical perspective. Durand puts the root of the digital economy's structure in what he calls 'The Californian Ideology' – radical individualism, libertarianism, and neoliberalism emerging from Silicon Valley – but does not go as far as stating that technofeudalism has replaced capitalism. Varoufakis mentions Durand's work in the acknowledgements of his book.

The book by Durand locates the first use of the word 'technofeudalism' to a science fiction role playing game manual

– the GURPS (Generic Universal Role-Playing System) *Cyberpunk Adventures* where it is mentioned once: 'As the world becomes tougher, the corporations adapt by becoming tougher themselves, out of necessity. This "we protect our own" attitude is sometimes called technofeudalism. Like feudalism, it is a reaction to a chaotic environment, a promise of service and loyalty from the workers in exchange for a promise of support and protection from the corporation'.

GURPS *Cyberpunk Adventures* book has an interesting story in itself: the editor's home and publisher's office were simultaneously raided by the US Secret Service who were under the impression that the book was a computer hacking manual and confiscated the disks containing the book. The publishers got them back in the end although the hard drives no longer worked and the book had to be re-written from memory. Several of the people involved in that episode went on to become founder members of the Electronic Frontier Foundation.

Technofeudalism

In the body of Varoufakis's book, the author makes the case for technofeudalism in the form of a conversation with his father, who had recently died. There are lots of interesting examples, anecdotes, bits of history, and the recalling of conversations about current events as they happened in the context of his father nearing the end of his life. The book has

an appendix named The Political Economy of Technofeudalism, where Varoufakis lays out his case in a much more direct way.

In the main part of the book there are lots of sweeping statements made without qualification, and somewhat gross generalisations. The author makes similar statements in some of his interviews. He has said capitalism 'is defined by profits and markets' and left it at that, but in this appendix he shows a greater understanding: 'Under feudalism, the power of the ruling class grew out of owning land that the majority could not own, but were bonded to. Under capitalism, power stemmed from owning capital that the majority did not own, but had to work to make a living. Under technofeudalism, a new ruling class draws power from owning cloud capital whose tentacles entangle everyone'.

'Cloud' here means data centres. That data may be data (information) or it may be code which enables networked software like Zoom to work. Like most resources in capitalism, the cloud is mostly owned by a few capitalists and is thus used to ration access to software and data via subscription services, such as Netflix.

Capitalism

Varoufakis states there are eight keys to understanding capitalism: commodity production; distribution of revenue into wages, interests, rents and profits; circulating money capital; capital accumulation, frequent crises; social

classes (capitalist, middle class, waged labourers); extractive power (inequality and state enforcement); and a 'techno-structure'; marketing and behavioural modification infrastructure.

Varoufakis also has a spin on the Labour Theory of Value to support his view. He states that value in capitalism has an experiential form – which seems to be synonymous with what Marx called use-value – examples given include both commodities such as drinking water and non-commodities like sunsets, or feeling appreciated. Exchange or commodity value, he states, is a quantity at which goods and services trade for one another. Labour is treated as a separate category but in similar terms as experiential labour and commodity labour. He states the 'exchange value of commodity labour equals the sum of experiential labour that other workers have put into commodities that a worker's wage can buy'.

According to Varoufakis two main forces cause capitalism to enter crises – the falling rate of profit and debt crisis (financiers going on credit strike). Rent he considers to be any price paid by a buyer above the price which most closely reflects the exchange value of the commodity. This includes ground rent, financial rent (interest), monopoly rent and brand rent (higher prices associated with in-demand brands, eg Apple computers or Nike training shoes). Varoufakis considers capitalism to be driven by profit and private debt.

Private debt he says is created by financiers from thin air – which qualifies him as a bit of a 'currency crank' – his note on this simply says bankers create loans from thin air by an audacious transfer of future values to the present. In the main text he states: 'Most people think that banks take Jill's savings and lend them to Jack. That's not what banks do. When a bank lends Jack money, it does not go into its vault to check it has enough cash to back the loan. If it believes Jack will return the loan, plus the agreed interest, all the bank needs to do is add to Jack's account the number of dollars it lends him. Nothing more than a typewriter or, today, a few strokes on a keyboard are necessary'.

We would disagree here and state that crises are caused by the chaotic nature of capitalist production that doesn't know when to stop producing. Debt crises are a symptom of over-production in the real economy. The falling rate of profit is a real tendency but is generally negated by the development of new markets and labour market flexibilities. The Thin Air Theory of Debt is debunked (as detailed in the Socialist Party Pamphlet *The Magic Money Myth* – tinyurl.com/4nkv3nsd). There is no

reason to extend the concept of rent to the price paid of money loans (interest) or monopoly prices.

Cloud serfs, cloud proles and cloud fiefdoms

Varoufakis goes on to define technofeudalism. He starts with cloud capital, defined as the agglomeration of network machinery, software, AI-driven algorithms and communications hardware criss-crossing the whole planet and performing a wide variety of tasks. These include inciting billions of non-waged people ('cloud serfs') to work for free at replenishing cloud capital's own stock (eg by uploading photos and videos to Instagram or TikTok, or submitting film, restaurant and book reviews, allowing their every click to be tracked across their social media use). Two further ideas central to his case are introduced here: the industrialisation of marketing to buy goods on platforms ('cloud fiefdoms'), and the enhanced automation of actual physical production of goods by what he calls 'cloud proles'.

Here he replaces the word 'capitalist' with 'cloudalist', and states that because there are major cloud-based services (such as Twitter/X, or Uber) that have not made significant profits but instead are run via continuous speculative investment in the expectation of a return, that profits aren't the sole driver. He also states that Big Tech companies were the main recipients of extra currency produced by central banks during Covid, because 'money follows the path of least resistance' via banks and financial markets, share buy-backs, that the value of 'fictitious' capital increased, which they use to borrow money at very low interest rates, so profit via the exploitation of labour became irrelevant. This will come as news to most people with any involvement in business.

Using social media services is of course not working for Big Tech for free: that is not an obligatory activity for survival based on social class like wage-labour is for most people. In fact, those who are doing the value-creating work are those collecting data – which is a whole industry: it's the bread and butter of Google and Facebook and their thousands of workers. And almost every other firm selling on the internet is using in-house or third party SEO (search engine optimisation) software and expertise to boost sales by exploiting data about potential clients. It's as if shopkeepers don't rearrange their window displays to attract their customers, just because they can now do it remotely tailored for individual customers. Profit is still the driver, and movement of surplus

capital from one section to another has always happened, including via the state's capital which is sourced by skimming off capitalist production by means of taxation.

Many of the trends identified in Varoufakis' thesis are in fact the continuation of long running trends in capitalism. Capitalists in different sectors are in constant competition for access to shares of the surplus value created by work. As the review in this journal stated: 'What Varoufakis is analysing is not the downfall of capitalism, but its purest application' (tinyurl.com/3k44zcp).

Critical and uncritical reception

Publicity material for the book garnered positive comments from a variety of sources: 'The dark scary exciting song of our age' (Irvine Welsh), 'An urgent demand to seize the means of computation' (Cory Doctorow), 'Remarkable' said the *Financial Times* who made it 'Best Book of the Year', 'This is the world grappling with an entirely new economic system and therefore political power' (*Observer*).

Several Trotskyist papers criticised the book on similar lines as this journal. Meanwhile a lengthy review in *Jacobin Magazine* said it was wrong about serfdom and that the economy still relies on a class of wage labourers.

However, for every review that seriously engaged with the idea and agreed that capitalism was not dead and that technofeudalism was not a new form of society, there are a multitude of newspaper reviews and blogs that just repeat the ideas in the book – trading on the excitement of something apparently new, it seems. Whilst not widespread, we have seen the term 'technofeudalism' spring up across social media: in posts by commentators suggesting that it is now the new social system and needs to be escaped from, in adverts for security software that will prevent cloud serfdom, for crypto-currencies, and for introductions to join slightly shady looking discussion groups on Telegram which promise to spill the beans on how to break out of the system.

Viewed generously Varoufakis' contribution in *Technofeudalism – What Killed Capitalism* has put discussion of ideas about capitalism, the system we have now, into the 'Recent Publications' section of bookshops and libraries, both physical and in the cloud. But socialists have not been convinced that capitalism is dead. What it will take to kill capitalism is a politically organised working class that understands capitalism and wants socialism.

PDH

What if there's a shortage?



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FOR A socialist post-capitalist society to come about presupposes two basic things. In the absence of either of these (and, even more so, both), this society would not be realisable.

Firstly, you have to have a majority of people who want it, understand what it entails and are committed to seeing it flourish and succeed. It cannot be imposed from above by a minority, however enlightened or well-meaning.

Secondly, you have to have in place an advanced technological infrastructure that has at least the potential to enable us to adequately meet the reasonable needs of the population. In other words, to more or less ensure 'plenty'. The more output were to fall below the level required to meet these needs, the greater the strain that would be imposed upon the particular kind of social arrangement that defines a post-capitalist society – a society characterised by the free distribution of goods and services provided by the voluntary work of its members.

What is plenty?

Of course, what is meant by 'plenty' is something relative; it depends not just on physical output but, also, on our values. When we talk of 'plenty' the question always arises – 'in relation to what'?

If what you deem to be minimally acceptable as a standard is something so extravagant as a sprawling multi-bedroomed mansion set in its own spacious grounds along with a fleet of luxury cars parked in the garage and outbuildings for the servants then, very clearly, in per capita terms, we are not going to achieve 'plenty' by this yardstick, in a post-capitalist society.

You can therefore forget about achieving such a society in that case. However, by the same token, you can also forget about ever extricating yourselves from the circumstances you find yourself in today which for a great many people are grim and precarious. In short, you will be lumbered with capitalism for the foreseeable future.

To achieve 'plenty,' then, will require us to lower the bar to something rather more realistic. This is precisely why the first of these preconditions of a post-capitalist society cannot be separated or considered in isolation from the second: to some extent they mesh together.

In principle, achieving and maintaining a state of 'plenty' would eliminate the need for any form of rationing – money, of course, being the means by which goods are rationed today under capitalism. However, we cannot entirely rule out the possibility of some shortages arising in a

post-capitalist society, whether in the early days or from a natural disaster. That being the case, we cannot rule out some form of rationing in the sense of restrictions on the consumption of some goods.

Prior to the 20th century it probably would not have been feasible to establish such a society given that the means of production would not yet have been sufficiently developed to materially support it. This is no longer the case. Indeed, it has not been the case for quite a long time now. As a generalisation, one can say that it is fairly indisputable that the technological potential to satisfy most, if not all, of the needs of the population, globally speaking, exists today.

Not erased overnight

The legacy of capitalism's self-inflicted shortcomings would not be able to be erased overnight. We cannot expect universal 'plenty' to suddenly materialise the 'day after the revolution,' so to speak. The apparatus of capitalist production is geared to creating and maintaining artificial scarcity. It will take some time, however short, to restructure and reorganise industry to fully meet human needs as well as ensure it is effectively managed in an environmentally sustainable fashion.

This means that at the beginning, post-capitalist society is likely to have to contend with some shortages of one kind or another for a while. However, this should not present too great an obstacle to such a society functioning properly as intended.

The reorganisation of productive capacity to realise its full potential to meet the reasonable demands of people everywhere would be happening under new conditions in that effective market demand would no longer be the determinant of what gets to be produced, as it is today under capitalism.

In a post-capitalist society, the relationship between our subjective preferences and the products we desire would be a direct one – not one mediated by money or, for that matter, labour vouchers. Insofar as comparisons need to be made between products in terms of their value to us, this would be effected entirely according to our preferences, which would simply be ranked.

Productive activity would be guided by a flexible hierarchy of production priorities, responding to shifts in the pattern of supply and demand. Our values would thus be able to directly engage with, or find expression in, the process of material production itself – by continually informing and guiding it rather than production being dominated or regulated by the impersonal laws of the capitalist market economy.

The single most important way in which productive capacity to meet human needs can be rapidly increased in a post-capitalist society is to convert that large chunk of existing productive capacity currently having nothing to do with directly meeting these needs and diverting enormous quantities of resources and labour away from those needs. This means progressively eliminating the enormous legacy of capitalism's structural waste.

As a result a lot more in the way of socially useful output could be produced while, at the same time, the amount of resources needed overall or in the aggregate would decline significantly by comparison with what is required today. This will alleviate the unsustainable pressures currently being exerted on our global ecosystem.

In post-capitalist society we will see a dramatic shrinkage in the extent of the social division of labour, with many of the socially useless jobs we are obliged to do today no longer being required. This will allow much more labour and resources to be redirected towards socially useful production. The resultant increase in socially useful output will have obvious implications for the question of any shortages.

Dealing with shortages

Given that some shortages are likely to remain in the beginning – even if to a steadily diminishing extent, how would we deal with these shortages under the very different set of circumstances of a post-capitalist society?

In considering what form of limitation on the consumption of some goods might be most appropriate in a post-capitalist society, the possibility, however remote, needs to be taken into account that it might lend itself to the re-emergence of some form of market exchange through the back door, as labour vouchers might. Any system that would need to be implemented in a post-capitalist society would need to be scaled down to only what it was absolutely necessary to limit. It would need to be, in other words, a limited, partial system, targeting only those goods that are clearly in short supply.

What kind of goods are we talking about whose consumption might require limitation in the early years of a post-capitalist society? These would be goods that figure rather low down in our hierarchy of production goals – most notably, inessential or luxury goods. The objective would be to strictly limit or restrict only those goods subject to shortage. This would minimise the adverse psychological, cultural, and administrative costs that any system of restricting consumption unavoidably entails.

Targeting only some goods is exactly what a system of labour vouchers disallows; by its very nature, it is a

universalistic form of rationing. However, the need to restrict the consumption of some good arises only in the case where there is a shortage of the good in question. Consequently, a universal system of rationing, which is what a system of labour vouchers amounts to, would therefore seem to imply, on the face of it, a condition of generalised or widespread scarcity applicable to each and every good.

But how can this be reconciled with the claim that a communistic post-capitalist society is firmly predicated on the real prospect of material abundance? How can we even envisage that such a society might be possible if all around us we see, not the portents of post-scarcity, but a chronic and all-pervading shortage of everything?

While there might well be some shortages in the very early stages of a post-capitalist society, the idea that there will be shortages of everything – universal or generalised scarcity – is hardly credible. Even today under capitalism this is not the case, as for example in food production and housing.

For a system of 'free distribution' to come about, people need to be mature and adult enough to recognise what is and what is not possible. They also need to feel confident that, broadly speaking, all their reasonable requirements for food, shelter, clothing, medical attention and so on are capable of being satisfactorily met under this arrangement, allowing for the occasional shortage of some items.

ROBIN COX



Credit: Adobe Stock

Rights – a movable feast



Credit: Adobe Stock

THE TORY leader, Kemi Badenoch, recently announced that her Party will take the UK out of the European Convention on Human Rights if they win the next election. A big 'if' obviously, but, in stating at the same time that such a move was 'necessary to protect our borders, our veterans, and our citizens', it's clear that what she was trying to do was to steal the clothes of her dangerous competitor on the right-wing of British capitalist politics, Reform UK. She was giving a nod towards the extreme nationalism that currently seems rampant and gets expressed most virulently in the call to 'stop the boats'.

Whether any such move would actually curb immigration is of course open to question, but, if what would seem to be the most overarching of rights – human rights – can be removed at a stroke by a government with a parliamentary majority, is there anything permanent or consistent in the notion of rights at all?

How many rights?

We certainly hear much noise about rights, both from those who want to do away with or weaken them and from others who oppose their removal or weakening. What kind of rights are

we talking about? Well, to give a few examples, there are workers' rights, pension rights, women's rights, property rights, gay rights, the right to free speech, the right to family life, the right to privacy, the right to strike, the right to peaceful protest, the right to education, the right to a fair trial, and so on. A short time ago I found myself attending a lecture given by the Older Persons' Commissioner for Wales on the subject of 'How we move from principles to practice to make rights real for older people'. There are also some 'rights' which, while often talked about in the past, little is heard of these days – for instance, 'the right to work' or 'the right to rest and holiday'. There are also some bizarre 'twists' on the rights agenda, such as 'the right to bear arms' (usually with reference to the US), and 'the rights of the unborn child' (insisted on by opponents of abortion).

Looking at the broad historical context, rights are a feature of the fact that the system we live under has found ways of becoming more benign and less repressive. The overriding reason for this has been the perception by governments and wealth owners that those in society who have to work for a wage or salary

to survive are more likely to do that readily and acceptingly and at the same time be more productive and efficient in their work if their lives are made not altogether uncomfortable. And indeed one of the effects of having the various 'rights' conferred has been to make us feel more comfortable in our position as wage slaves. But it took a long time. Most of today's 'rights' would have been considered unthinkable not just in pre-modern times, where the 'divine right of kings' prevailed, but even in the early years of industrialisation and capitalist development. In the nineteenth century, for example, talk of, say, 'women's rights' or the 'right to education' or 'pension rights' would have been unlikely to say the least. And, until well into the 20th century, even the notion of 'workers' rights' was much contested, and only in recent times has 'gay rights' become part of the vocabulary of English. This kind of thing is of course still very much the case in many 'less developed' parts of the world where dictatorial or repressive regimes hold sway. Examples such as North Korea, Myanmar, China, Belarus and some countries in Africa and the Middle East come to mind.

Different 'rights' in different places

But, despite the existence of many kinds of 'rights' in most of Europe and North America, it would be mistaken to regard these as necessarily permanent or consistent features. They can easily be watered down or removed by the governments that oversee the system of production for profit and buying and selling that we live in (ie, capitalism), if it seems to them to be in the interest of the continued smooth running of that system to do that. A British government deciding to withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights, as the Tory leader has promised to do if her Party comes to power, would be an example of that. A recent example of this actually happening has been the watering down of the right to peaceful protest by the ban on demonstrations by supporters of the Palestine Action group. As for 'the right to strike', it still exists of course, but it has been chipped away at by various different governments, with the overall effect of making striking today markedly more difficult for workers than at times in the past. I have testified to another instance of the watering down of 'rights' in my own place of work, where the contracts signed by employees have moved from specifying a 'maximum' of 35 hours as the standard working week in recognition of 'The European Working Time Directive', to now specifying a

working week of 'at least' 35 hours.

And there can also be striking differences between the most economically advanced countries in the rights they accord. The most 'generous' in this domain tend to be the Scandinavian countries, while in the United States, despite its being the hub of world capitalism, 'workers' rights', for instance, are all but non-existent. To give an example, in Sweden parents are eligible for up to 480 days of paid parental leave from their employment, a policy driven by the idea that children well looked after by their parents are likely to be more productive and better socially integrated later in life when they enter 'the world of work'. In the US, where a different ethic (more of a dog-eat-dog one) prevails, there is no statutory 'right' to paid leave, such being entirely at the employer's discretion. This can create situations, as one commentator has put it, where 'American parents scramble back to work days after giving birth'. To add to this, employment practice in the US regards work as a voluntary contract which can be dissolved at any time by either party without the mandatory right to redundancy pay for the employee.

A slippery concept

The reality is that 'rights' (like reforms) are very much a movable feast easily or not so easily granted but then rowed back on as convenient and also sometimes differing drastically even from

one economically advanced country to another. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserted everyone's right to an adequate standard of living, including the right to food, public services and social security. But everyone knows that, in a world where people may be poorly paid, unemployed or homeless, this is no more than an unattainable wish list. What price such people's right to an 'adequate standard of living' or their 'property rights'? Again, while very few would disagree that people should have the right to free speech and the right to be free from arbitrary arrest or imprisonment, how does that square with the reality of a system where the accumulation of wealth for the already wealthy few dominates and allows authoritarian regimes (Venezuela, Cuba, Russia, etc) to fly in the face of that?

In the kind of world socialists campaign to see established – marketless, moneyless, wageless, leaderless, and based on voluntary work, democratic organisation and free access to all goods and services – the slippery concept that is 'rights' will not enter into the equation. Instead, in a classless society of human freedom, needs, both practical and social, will be satisfied as a matter of course. Above all, the productive machinery of society and the goods and services it produces will belong not to one class, but to everyone as an automatic and inalienable 'right'.

HKM

The Doughnut revisited

IN LAST month's *Socialist Standard* we discussed Kate Raworth's book *Doughnut Economics*. As it happens, on 1 October Raworth and co-author Andrew Fanning published an online paper 'Doughnut of social and planetary boundaries monitors a world out of balance' in the journal *Nature* (tinyurl.com/5h8epawb). This updates and widens the scope of previous work in this framework.

Things have not improved since the original work was done: 'Billions of people are falling short of meeting their most essential needs, whereas humanity's ecological imprint on the living planet is now overshooting at least six of the nine planetary boundaries'. Previously four of the boundaries had been crossed, ecological limits which it was essential to keep within.

The boundaries are measured in terms of indicators, with more than one indicator for some boundaries. Ozone-layer depletion has been stable since the early 2000s, but the other indicators for which



information over time is available show a worsening of conditions. For instance, four indicators have more than doubled the extent to which they exceed acceptable limits: CO2 concentration and radiative forcing (both of which relate to the climate change boundary), and hazardous chemicals and phosphorus (relating to chemical and nutrient pollution).

The inner ring of the Doughnut deals with meeting people's needs. Here two indicators have deteriorated significantly, food insecurity and the existence of autocratic regimes. Others have improved, but only slightly, with 10 percent of the world's population being undernourished

in 2021–2, compared to 13 percent in 2000–1. A rapid improvement would be needed to eliminate this problem by 2030. The proportion lacking access to safely managed drinking water only went down from 39 percent to 37 percent over the same period.

Has there been progress overall? Global GDP doubled between 2000 and 2022, but 'only modest improvements were achieved in reducing social shortfalls worldwide, whereas ecological overshoot increased rapidly, disrupting the critical planetary processes on which all life depends'.

So the Doughnut's method of examining whether society is coping with meeting everyone's needs while keeping the planet in a sustainable condition shows very clearly that the present system, capitalism, is unable to meet either goal. A system based on profit cannot solve these problems, and only a change to a world based on production for use will be able to do so.

PB

Woolly thinking

'THE MONEY is there to make a better society and economy — it's just in the wrong hands. We need to raise taxes on the wealthiest in society, and on those corporations who make record profits while our members struggle to put food on the table. That wealth should then be invested back into our communities — in housing, in health, in education, and in an industrial strategy that creates secure, unionised jobs. And investment must go hand in hand with a just transition that puts public need before corporate greed.' So wrote Sarah Woolley, the general secretary of the bakers' union, in the *Morning Star* (27 September, [tinyurl.com/3jxb8afa](https://www.tinyurl.com/3jxb8afa)).

By money she presumably means the monetary value that is attached to wealth produced in a capitalist society. Money, in this sense, comes into being when the wealth workers produce is sold. This is initially divided into wages and 'surplus value' as the part of what workers produce over and above their wages which is appropriated by the business corporation that employs them. The surplus value then comes to be divided into profits, ground-rent and interest. These are taxed by the

government to get money to spend. What is left is accumulated by capitalists as more capital, with some spent to fund a privileged lifestyle.

So, at the end of a year a given amount of wealth, as measured in terms of its monetary value, is produced. There are also wealthy individuals and corporations who own previously produced wealth.

Woolley seems to accept this set-up and wants the government to change how what is produced under it is distributed. Some of the wealth appropriated by capitalists in the course of a year is to be taxed as well as some of the wealth accumulated by them in previous years. This 'money' is to be spent on better health, housing and education for the wage workers and their dependants and re-invested in providing secure and better paid jobs. She doesn't put a figure on this but presumably the amount the government would spend would be much more than it now does.

She doesn't seem to have taken into account what would happen if this was attempted. Remember we are talking about this happening in a capitalist economy where decisions about wealth

production are in the hands of profit-seeking corporations.

So what would happen? First, the profits that corporations get to keep will be smaller. Since profit-making is what motivates them that incentive will be reduced. Less profit will mean less investment, resulting in less wealth — less money in her sense — being available to tax in the following year. Less investment would also mean fewer jobs, and so less paid out in wages. In short, there would be an economic downturn.

The fact is that a government cannot simply take money from the capitalist class and spend it to improve things for the working class. It cannot put 'public need' before 'corporate greed'.

Woolley could come back and say that in that case the government would have to use some of 'the money' taken from the wealthy and their 'greedy' corporations and itself invest it. That would create other problems as the state investment would also have to yield profits to be sustainable. Maybe she does envisage a state-run capitalist economy as the way out, but it's more likely to be a typical example of the confused rhetoric employed by left-wing trade union leaders — and by the left-wing politicians behind the new Corbyn party — which reflects a lack of understanding of how capitalism works.

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Anti-social media

Credit: BBC



WITH ALL the opportunities which social media offers us in the ability to communicate instantly with people anywhere, it's depressing how much it is used to harm others. 'Sextortion' is one example, being a type of online blackmail which is the 'fastest growing scam affecting teenagers globally'. The number of instances reported to the FBI in America had more than doubled in three years to 55,000 in 2024. In the UK, the National Crime Agency receives 110 notifications each month. In a case of sextortion, someone creates a fake profile on a social media platform such as Snapchat or Instagram and uses it to contact their target, often a teenage boy. Thinking they are communicating with an interested girl, the victim is manipulated into sending naked photos of themselves. Then, the scammer drops the pretence and threatens to share the pictures with the boy's family and friends unless they send money. One victim was 16 year-old Evan Boettler, who was driven to end his own life by the pressure. His story was the focus of BBC Three's documentary *Blackmailed: The Sextortion Killers*. Reporter Tir Dhondy meets Evan's parents in Missouri, America, devastated by his loss. The identity of the person who scammed Evan isn't known, although the IP address of the phone they used is found, located in Nigeria. Tir travels to the country, which we are told is the main source of cybercrime in Africa.

In Nigeria, online scammers are known as 'yahoo boys', who operate in groups under a leader, some of whom have become very rich. Their workplaces are 'hustle kingdoms', a grandiose name for what we see as just a sparse room in a grim hut. Here, the aspiring 'gang-stars' as

one of them calls himself, sit with mobile phones, messaging duped teenagers thousands of miles away. Several 'yahoo boys' agree to speak with Tir, and are surprisingly open about their methods and dismissive of those they con. One says he doesn't feel bad because he needs the money, and he and others think that the people they target in the West can spare the funds demanded. The scammers are distanced from their victims in several ways: by communicating by phone across continents, through the disparity in wealth, and also by how they are alienated enough to see others just as sources of money, without considering the impact of being blackmailed. While the actions of the 'yahoo boys' are reprehensible, these can be explained by how their mindsets and attitudes have been shaped by their circumstances and their culture. Tir accompanies one of them when he visits a priest to buy a ritual which he hopes will bring him more income. This involves him killing and eating a pigeon, one of six or seven rituals the priest says he performs each day, for a price. The priest's lack of enthusiasm in the ceremony could suggest he doesn't believe in it himself, meaning he would be scamming a scammer.

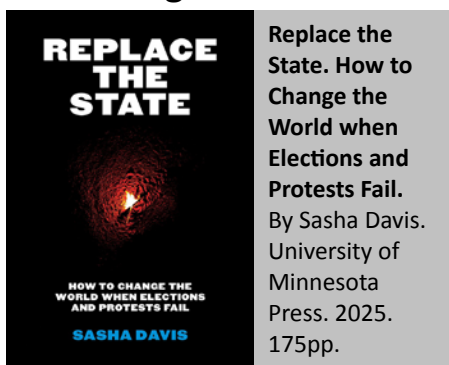
The programme doesn't analyse the conditions in which sextortion arises, dwelling more on the institutions which are supposed to deal with the issue. The representative of the Nigerian state's fraud and cybercrime police who Tir meets downplays the extent of sextortion and admits that investors are less likely to be attracted to the country if it's thought of as having high rates of such offences. Tir doesn't find the person who blackmailed Evan Boettler. Nigeria's

telecommunications provider Glo says they no longer have records of their phone number, and the police's investigation is slow. Evan's parents are frustrated by Instagram's owner Meta not releasing more details which would help with inquiries without a court order, which they believe is convenient for Meta because it would be incriminated by this information. Brandon Guffey, who lost his son Gavin to suicide in similar circumstances to Evan, says Meta has acted negligently and is cynical about its head Mark Zuckerberg's apology and the 'PR stunt' of it pulling 63,000 'sextortionists' accounts on one day. Brandon tried to sue Meta but was scuppered by the law. In the United States, Section 230 is a piece of legislation which generally means that platforms which host online content aren't held responsible for material posted on them by other people. Arturo Bejar, an ex-employee of Meta, says that the company doesn't want to know about the extent of sextortion because it doesn't want to deal with the matter. Social media companies, reluctant to add more safeguards, are 'unwilling to act because it would harm profits'. Brandon says it's 'ridiculous' that the world's richest companies aren't accountable, but the economic weight of these entities gives them this power, backed up by the state through regulations such as Section 230.

The documentary describes how social media companies avoid addressing and highlighting sextortion because this would adversely affect their own interests (a similar attitude to that of the Nigerian authorities). Text statements from Snapchat and Meta at the end of the programme attempt to rebuke some of the criticisms, perhaps recognising that sextortion could damage their profitability. Even if social media platforms introduced more safeguards, or if Section 230 was repealed, this wouldn't remove what causes sextortion and other fraud. Money compels the issue, most obviously in the amounts demanded by scammers, and behind this is the poverty which contributes to them using this approach for an income. Money, ultimately in the guise of profits, also motivates the owners of the social media companies, with the laws they are supposed to work within being shaped by what is deemed financially advantageous. As with everything it underpins, the money system has tainted social media, creating problems like sextortion which the institutions around it aren't in a position to resolve.

MIKE FOSTER

Change the World



Replace the State. How to Change the World when Elections and Protests Fail.
By Sasha Davis.
University of Minnesota Press. 2025.
175pp.

A book with a title like *Replace the State* cannot but catch the eye of an organisation like the Socialist Party that advocates a stateless system of society. Appearances can be deceiving of course. So to what extent does this book live up to the promise of its title?

The first thing to say is that, for the author of this book, replacing the state does not mean establishing a society without a state or states. What it means is small groups taking 'direct action' to manage or take over 'contested sites' where the existing system may be oppressing local communities and causing societal or environmental damage. Many of these sites referred to in this book are 'indigenous', that is to say they are what remains of the local original communities there before they were taken over by governments for use as part of the state and the capitalist juggernaut. The kind of action the writer is talking about is occupation of spaces (the term he uses for this is 'counteroccupations') in which, for example, excluded people can be offered sanctuary, or people can demonstrate their opposition to unwanted local projects (eg military or nuclear bases) and in so doing engage in mutual aid and what he calls 'participatory governance' and 'inclusive and sustainable practices'. Specific examples of this would be, in his own words, 'worker-run cooperatives, community land trusts and farm spaces dedicated to sustainable food systems and social justice'. And examples he gives of successes in this area are the civil rights movement in the US and the stopping of military training and bombing on one of the small islands of Puerto Rico. 'Relational governance' is the umbrella term used here to identify this way of operating, which, the author states, 'arises from a worldview that recognises the fundamental interconnected and interdependent nature of our societies, ecologies, economies, political systems, bodies and minds' and 'contrasts sharply with the view many modern states conceptualize the world and act towards it'.

In terms of 'worldview', there is little

here we would disagree with. But, given the overwhelming planetary presence of the capitalist system and the power of the national states that exist to administer it, we would have to regard the kind of action the author advocates as a drop in the ocean. He seeks to make a clear distinction between the activities and campaigns he would like to see undertaken and those protest movements that demand social change or reforms via petitions or demonstrations or support for one party considered more 'progressive' than others in elections. He refers to such activities (and quite rightly in our view) as 'chasing our tails' since, though they may sometimes have the effect of making life a little more bearable for wage and salary earners, they cannot change the fundamental nature of the system of massive wealth inequality we all live in. But it is hard to see how the kind of activity he does recommend- carving out small spaces in the existing system where he hopes things can be run more fairly, more justly and more sustainably- can make a great deal of difference either, or how any benefits arising from it can be more than short term. The writer himself seems to recognise this at one point when he states that, though in many places activists have managed to carve out 'spaces of self-determination', it is a strategy that rarely works meaningfully in the long-term and rather, as he puts it, 'frequently succeeds only for a short period of time and/or in a relatively small space'. Even so, seeming to share the playbook of Trotskyist groups, he insists that workers' experience of such struggle and striving is essential as it will build to a point of consciousness which will lead them to revolt and to bring in wholesale changes of a radical kind. It can cause, so the author tells us, 'alternative ways of life to be practiced, modelled, and disseminated'. Yet nothing of this, it must be said, is borne out by examples of this happening in the real world.

We would not, of course, want to seem to be pouring cold water on what are clearly genuine and long-term efforts on the part of the author to propose and encourage ways of changing the world for the better in the face of what he rightly describes as 'the cascade of catastrophic problems coming at us from every direction' and of seeking the achievement of what he refers to as a system of 'equality, inclusion and environmental protection'. He shows clearly too that he recognises the class-divided nature of capitalist society ('owner vs wage earner') and the role the state plays in preserving it ('The State Won't Fix Our Problems' is the title of one of his chapters) and sees

no mileage in trying to address social ills through the institutions that have caused them. But we would have to ask him to consider whether activity to secure real, widespread – in fact global – social change which he would no doubt wish to see doesn't rather reside elsewhere. To be precise, whether it doesn't reside in campaigning to change the outlook of the majority who, the world over, have to work for a wage or salary to survive, and to bring them round to the self-emancipatory consciousness that impels them to vote for an equal, inclusive and environmentally sustainable society of common ownership and democratic control, a society that will genuinely 'replace the state' and enable all to fulfil their potential both individually and collectively.

HKM

Yes in My Back Yard



Abundance: How We Build A Better World.
By Ezra Klein and Derek Thompson. ISBN 9781805226055

This book has caused quite a stir. It has even made Chancellor Reeves' summer reading list, and been cited – in passing – by Robert Peston. It is part of the YIMBY (Yes In My Back Yard) trend. Its central theme is that government regulation is choking the capacity for effective action to generate wealth, and that instead the liberal left has been concentrating on the parcelling out of scarcity, rather than trying to improve the overall material wealth of society.

The authors mention the expensive failure to build a high-speed railway in California, citing environmental laws and litigation as the reason: alongside the excessive bureaucracy to plan the route. They also note California has higher rates of homelessness than comparable cities in Texas, and attribute the blame to zoning and to authorities loading environmental, building and labour standards into permissions, making building uneconomic for developers.

In their narrative, they do discuss the nature of landholding and the fact that residents' houses are also financial assets, only to skip blithely over them to discuss bureaucratic complexity again. In so doing,

and returning to their theme that it is the failure of efforts to restrict the power of public authorities that is to blame, they ignore the role of private property.

The state is restricted in order to secure the power of private property. The litigation is there to protect property rights. It's there to protect economic interests (and some firms do benefit from regulation). The complex funding arrangements and financial regulations are there precisely to keep the interests of wealth superior to state power. This is a political choice, and one that those who fund the political parties will continue to demand.

At points, the authors seem to indicate that it would be better to allow constructors to build slum housing than to continue allowing homelessness. They also suggest reducing quality controls and demands on construction: in essence, they are allowing that the working class cannot afford decent housing. Although their 'lens', as they say, is increasing supply, they ignore the lack of effective demand for the majority.

They find time in their conclusion to reference Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* talking about unfettering productive forces to produce abundance. But they ignore what those fetters of capitalist society are: the law of no profit- no production, and the law of no profit- no employment. The growth of income streams alongside the capacity to produce so much that profit margins would be reduced to zero.

Absent an understanding of the role of private property and the class struggle from their narrative, they are reduced to a simple call for de-regulation coupled with bold state action. They do not see that the litigiousness they decry is meant to exclude a thorough-going democratic control that includes all voices. The abundance they seek can only come from the common ownership and democratic control of productive wealth.

P. S.

Deals and Lawyers



Cuckooland:
Where the Rich
Own the Truth.
By Tom Burgis.
William Collins
£10.99.

machinations of the super-rich to acquire and hide their wealth, with special attention to Kazakhstan. Here he looks at similar activities in a variety of countries. The idea behind the title is that a cuckoo has to get another bird to think that the cuckoo's egg is its own, thus relying on an illusion, similar to the way in which some people present two versions of themselves.

Others are mentioned, but the focus is on Mohamed Amersi, who is a 'dealmaker' in the telecommunications industry. In an emerging market (which Burgis defines as a country where lots of poor people live) there are plenty of opportunities for selling mobile phones for the first time. In former USSR provinces, such as Uzbekistan, telecom licences can be obtained through contacts of various kinds, and Amersi charges a Swedish corporation a 'success fee' of half a million dollars. Never mind that the company later paid a massive fine because its partner in Uzbekistan was in fact the daughter of the country's dictator (all hidden in a shell company in Gibraltar). Amersi did very well out of all this, as the company paid him \$63m dollars over six years. As Burgis says, recessions do not happen to the rich.

The second part of the book deals with how the wealthy make and maintain links with politicians and other powerful people ('access capitalism'). For instance, the Conservatives' Leaders Group provides monthly lunches with ministers for a mere £50,000 a year. Or you could pay to attend a cheese-tasting session with Liz Truss

(no longer available, perhaps). A company called Quintessentially satisfies the whims of the global elite, such as a football signed by Lionel Messi. But things do not always work out as planned. Amersi became involved in a dispute with Charlotte Leslie, a former Tory MP, over which organisation should be in charge of Conservative relations with the Middle East. He sued her for 'disseminating false and misleading information', but his suit was dismissed, the judge saying that his actions 'give real cause for concern'.

This is an example of what is sometimes called 'lawfare': the rich and powerful intimidate those who write about them by means of lawsuits which may involve incredibly high legal fees. Even if the lawsuit fails, those who have been subject to it will have undergone a period of anxiety and stress, fearful of being bankrupted, and so may in future decide it is easier not to ruffle the feathers of the elite. Newspaper editors may prefer that their journalists not get involved in such cases. The term used is SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation). So, as in the book's subtitle, the truth is a matter of legal and financial power rather than actual facts on the ground. (Another example would be Trump's recent attempt to sue US newspapers for billions of dollars.)

A well-argued insight into some of the ways in which some rich people acquire and protect their wealth.

PB



In December 2022 we reviewed Burgis' *Kleptopia*, which examined the

Ireland seven years on

IT IS seven years ago this month (October) since the television screens throughout the world flashed their dramatic pictures of that historic confrontation between the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Civil Rights marchers on Derry's Craigavon Bridge.

Seven years! Arson, murder and mass intimidation have prospered in the years between and the vaunted 'reforms' and 'freedoms' that gave courage to the protesters and demonstrators have all fallen victim to the gunmen, military and para-military.

And what was it all about in those heady days of sixty-eight? Well, the various species of loyalist politicians will tell you that it was a devious criminal conspiracy organized by the Irish Republican Army with the ultimate aim of destroying the Ulster State.

That the Civil Rights Association was, in part, the brain-child of the IRA is unquestionably true, but it is equally true that the Provisional IRA who were undeniably the people who 'brought down' the Stormont Government, had not then been invented. In fact it was the political and social posturings of the then IRA that fertilized the egg of discontent within the movement, and it was the subsequent military rapacity of the British Army that played midwife to the Provos as a serious guerrilla force when they attempted a military

solution of the 'no-go area' problem in July 1970. (...)

Whatever the future may hold for us, whether the Unionists get full parliamentary control again or share their ministerial salaries with the SDLP; whether the Province becomes 'independent' or part of an all-Ireland federation, one thing we can confidently predict. The great majority of the people, Catholic and Protestant, will remain 'second-class citizens' with 'a reasonable standard of life' only a pipe-dream for themselves and their children.

Alternatively, of course, there is Socialism and the prospect of a world-wide society of production for use; a society in which people will use their skills and energies to produce an abundance of all the things they require to guarantee every member of society the material basis for a full and happy life and where every human being will have free and equal access to meet his or her needs. In Socialism there will be no need for gunmen or bombers, of either the state or free-lance variety, for there will be no material basis of conflict and the skills of violence will be as irrelevant as those of bankers, salesmen or lawyers.

(Socialist Standard, November 1975)

Action Replay

Ads and roses

IN SEPTEMBER the Red Roses won the World Cup. More fully, England won the Women's Rugby Union World Cup. The tournament was held in England, and England were the favourites, so the result wasn't a great surprise. Nevertheless, it did lead to a great deal of celebration and excitement at the victory, but also at what it showed about the growing interest in women's spectator sport. The final was the most-watched rugby match on TV this year. There has been a lot of fuss about the likely 'legacy' of the success, with more people watching and, in particular, more women and girls playing rugby at the grassroots level.

For a variety of reasons: lacking confidence, having fewer opportunities at school, or spending more time on family responsibilities, for example, women and girls are on the whole less involved in sport and physical activity than men and boys are, hence Sport England's This Girl Can campaign.

The most obvious example of the increased interest is football, where England's national team, known as the Lionesses, have twice won the European Championship, and most professional clubs now have women's teams too. London City Lionesses aren't linked to

another club, but formed as a breakaway from Millwall Lionesses.

There has, of course, long been a media interest in women's sports, but this has been primarily in individual events such as athletics, gymnastics, swimming and tennis. For whatever reason, team sports have lagged behind, with the possible exception of hockey and netball. Only in the last couple of decades have team sports attracted more attention.

Twelve years ago no women's national cricket team had professional contracts, and England players had to fly economy class to major tournaments. This year the fifty-over Women's World Cup was played in India, with a total prize money of nearly \$14m (which was more than that for the most recent corresponding men's World Cup).

A specific indicator of the growing interest in women's sport is in advertising, where many brands have begun to focus more on sports adverts that deal with products aimed at women, from perfume and jewellery to shampoo. And women athletes now appear more often in the adverts, something that sportsmen, especially athletes and footballers, have been doing for some time. Last year's Paris Olympics was a good example of more woman-focused advertising. Nike, for instance, has increased its spending on marketing in order to compete with 'upstart' rivals. And it's not just advertising, as broadcasting rights for women's sports have become more valuable too.

It's good to see more people, whatever their age and gender, participating actively in sport but, as so often, there are other interests at stake too.

PB



Credit: www.rugbyworldcup.com

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.

November 2025 Events

World Socialist Movement online meetings

Friday 7 November 7.30pm

Goliath's Curse: The History and Future of Societal Collapse

Review of book by Luke Kemp

Speaker: Jonathan Chambers

Friday 14 November 7.30pm

Have you heard the news?

Discussion on recent events

Friday 21 November 7.30pm

History or Technological Determinism?

Does the working class have a "historical mission"?

Speaker: Darren Poynton

Friday 28 November 7.30pm

Are we leftwing ... or rightwing?

Where do others perceive us on the left/right spectrum? Does that spectrum make sense anyway?

Speaker: Kevin Cronin

Socialist Party

Physical Meetings

Saturday 1 November 10am to 6pm

Newport Radical Book Fair

The Socialist Party will have a stall at this event. The Riverfront, Kingsway, Newport NP20 1HG.

Sunday 30 November 3pm

Abolish the wages system. Why we need to get rid of capitalism

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

Speaker: Johnny Mercer



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.

Way back when

THERE WAS a ring on the bell. When I opened the door, a smart looking young man wearing suit, collar and tie and carrying a brief case told me he was selling insurance (those were the days when insurance was still sold door to door), but then he quickly added that what he was really interested in was the Socialist Party of Great Britain. He was very polite and said he knew about the SPGB and had found my name as a contact. I was surprised but also pleased to have someone actually coming round to the house to find out about socialism. So I invited him in and we sat down in the front room. He asked me to tell him about the Party and I tried to sum it up as quickly as possible. I said we stood for a moneyless, wageless democratic world of free access to all goods and services, without leaders or led, based on the idea that this will happen when the majority class in society – all those who had to work for a wage or salary – develop the consciousness necessary to democratically take power from the tiny minority in society who own and control the wealth and to establish the new society. Or something like that.

Andrew – that was his name – seemed enthusiastic and I showed him some of the Party's leaflets and pamphlets. He appeared particularly interested in certain ideas and positions – for example our attitude towards the use of violence as a political instrument (I told him we were opposed to it) and what was going on in Ireland at the time (it was the period of 'The Troubles'). He appeared satisfied with this and asked if he could become a member and he would pay the subscription there and then. I told him there wasn't a joining subscription and I couldn't enrol him, but, if he came to our next branch meeting at the Swansea Central Library, he could apply to join then. He kept apologising for being an insurance salesman while patting his briefcase and telling me he needed to do that to keep the wolf from the door for himself and his family. I said I understood and he left, telling me he'd see me at our next Monday evening branch meeting.

I felt somehow exhilarated about this – until, that is, my wife emerged from the adjacent room, where she'd been listening to everything that had gone on. 'He's a policeman', was the first thing



she said. Wow! It took a moment to sink in, but then it dawned on me that his coming to the house and asking questions in particular about violence and Northern Ireland had to be a bit peculiar. It dawned on me that I'd been naïve. But maybe that was to the good, because, if he was a policeman – an undercover policeman – he might have had a weapon in that briefcase for if and when he might be challenged. And that felt a bit scary.

But was that over-dramatic? Well, I never really found out because Andrew never came to one of our meetings. But I did see him again – about a year later when I attended an indoor public meeting in Swansea put on by the organisation called the International Marxist Group. A group of us were selling our magazines and handing out our leaflets before we went in. As we did, I found myself faced with a casually dressed man who seemed to be one of the organisers. He wasn't someone I recognised but he said hello to me, looked embarrassed and then sort of blurted out that he was out of the insurance game now and how was I? I realised it was Andrew and reciprocated his 'hello' before sitting down.

Make of that what you will. Was I (am I) being paranoid in regarding this as confirmation that he was a police spy? Maybe. But when in 2022 I read and reviewed for the *Socialist Standard* a book entitled *Red List: MI5 and British Intellectuals in the Twentieth Century* by David Caute (tinyurl.com/pvvh748c), my mind went back to that time. The book's author had drawn on official but publicly available documents which gave startling insights into the enormous efforts (and massive resources) put into tracking the activities and affiliations of an extraordinarily wide range of people and organisations suspected of being subversive, of constituting a possible

'threat to national security'.

All this was brought back to me by a recent investigative series on BBC Radio 4 presented by Mark Steel and entitled *Shadow World. The People Versus McDonald's* (tinyurl.com/mpms8kan). It was largely about the so-called McLibel case in the 1990s when two anti-McDonald's Greenpeace campaigners were pursued through the courts by that company for making claims about their activities and methods which McDonald's said were libellous. The series was an interesting one in itself, but one of the things that emerged from it was the discovery by one of the campaigners that a member of her group she'd engaged in a two-year relationship with was a police infiltrator. He then vanished, but when she later tracked him down, it emerged that, while he was with her, he was married to someone else. She also discovered that other undercover policemen had had relationships with other female activists (over 60 of them in all) from small 'suspect' groups. One of these policemen had been involved with four different women, with one of whom he fathered a child. Finally, Mark Steel revealed that, as a member of one such 'suspect' group himself in the 1980s, his local branch of the Socialist Workers Party had discovered that one of their members was a police infiltrator, and that records now available showed that, from 1968 to 2008, Special Branch oversaw what he called the 'massive expensive palaver' of spying on more than 1,000 different organisations in Britain.

So why not the SPGB as part of that? Just in case. After all it would only be a small part of the massive expensive (and wasteful) palavers of every description that capitalism is full of.

HOWARD MOSS