

THE

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SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

Original Sin? The myth of our warlike nature



Also: Mamdani's election no victory
for socialism
Popularity
Violence and war: Are they inevitable?
The long view

Strangers in our home world
Newport Rising?
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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'

Labour **sinks** even lower

SOMEBODY HAS said, 'What Powell says today, the Tories say tomorrow and Labour legislates on the day after'. There is some evidence for this, going back to 1968, the year Enoch Powell delivered his notorious 'rivers of blood' speech. The Labour government of the day then brought in the Commonwealth Immigrants Act to end the free entry into Britain of people from the old Empire. Extending the colour bar to Commonwealth citizens required careful drafting to avoid keeping out 'white' people. In the end Labour found a solution — that only those whose father or father's father were born in Britain would have free entry.

It was in that same speech that Powell talked of the 'existing population' finding themselves 'made strangers in their own country'. A refrain taken up by Starmer in his notorious 'island of strangers' speech last May, given in response to the rise of the latter-day Powellites of Reform UK. Now, in a bid to stop losing more votes, the Starmer government has decided to steal Reform UK's clothes and

introduce legislation making it even more difficult for refugees to obtain permanent residence; some are going to have to wait twenty years just to apply (instead of five as now) and during this period will be liable to be sent 'back to where they came from' at any time. This, in addition to previously announced measures to make it more difficult for 'strangers' to become a British citizen.

No capitalist state is going to allow free entry — and socialists are not so naive as to expect them to. States seek to control entry in accordance with the requirements of the labour market and so as to decide who can come in and who can't. Most European states, as they have an ageing population, do currently need working-age immigrants to keep production and profits flowing.

They need immigrants, but who? That's where choice — and prejudice — come in. As in 1968, the Labour government has chosen the path of prejudice.

The Home Secretary, Shabana Mahmood, has said it is her 'moral responsibility' to bring in the legislation.

What sanctimonious humbuggery! The Labour leaders and most of their MPs are unprincipled careerists whose main concern is to stay in office or at least keep their seats. Dragging morality into it just makes them more despicable. And then there is the sheer vindictiveness of some of the proposed measures. Why keep individuals living for twenty years in fear of deportation?

It is true that, by clever propagandising and media help, many have become convinced that there is 'mass immigration' and that stopping 'too many' immigrants would lead to an improvement in their life. But it wouldn't, because the problems they face over housing, health care, and education derive not from there being too many immigrants but from the fact that meeting these needs is not a priority under capitalism where the aim and driving force of the economy is to make a profit. Even if all immigration were stopped and all 'illegal' immigrants rounded up and deported these problems would remain.

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Cheating the reaper

HERE'S A dark and ghoulish story for your Christmas-time delight. Back in September, just before the wall-to-wall media orgy of the Charlie Kirk assassination, Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping and Kim Jong Un met up for a big military parade in Beijing, accompanied by their chums Lukashenko of Belarus, Pezeshkian of Iran and Min Aung Hlaing of the Myanmar junta. This self-congratulatory Comic-Con of the Marvel Supervillain Universe was chiefly notable for a 'hot mic' moment in which Putin and Xi were overheard talking about the prospects of human longevity. According to reports, the conversation went like this:

Putin (aged 72 at the time):
'Biotechnology is continuously developing... Human organs can be continuously transplanted. The longer you live, the younger you become, and [you can] even achieve immortality.'

Xi (also aged 72): 'Some predict that in this century humans may live to 150 years old' (tinyurl.com/4d2sc2np).

Ha ha, they wish. One of the few consolations of being an elderly worker in capitalism is that no matter how rich these capitalist bastards are, they can't cheat death any more than you can. This little soundbite reveals that they are keenly aware of that fact too. It's just not fair, is it? You go to all the trouble of demolishing democracy, crushing your opponents, cowering your population, and making yourself dictator for life, only to have death pull the rug from under you just like it does for the little people.

It's not just the autocrats, of course. Donald Trump, while not believing in exercise or healthy food, nevertheless appointed 'longevity enthusiasts' including RF Kennedy to key health posts (tinyurl.com/bdehkvdf). Rich Silicon Valley tech bros like Peter Thiel and Jeff Bezos also harbour Methuselah aspirations, reasoning that if there's any way to extend life, their money will find it (tinyurl.com/348cycmj). There are individuals like Bryan Johnson who are so obsessed with longevity that they will put themselves through the most punishing and joyless regimes in order to wring life out to the very last drop. Instead they are likely proof of the old joke that renouncing all pleasures doesn't make you live longer, it just seems like it (youtu.be/dndwM2ehOdM).

Though it's still considered 'fringe of the fringe', there is a history of research into longevity, from plasma therapy to fusing



Credit: Adobe Stock

old and young mice together, and even injecting pureed monkey testicle into the human scrotum. Instead of seeing death as the great leveller, why not treat it as a preventable disease like any other, for which treatments can be found? The Greenland shark can live for 500 years or more, and only starts dating at 150. There must be sound biological reasons for that, aside from living in a perpetual icebox (tinyurl.com/3r9wcjmr).

The World Health Organization in 2018 included old age as a disease in its 11th edition of the *International Classification of Diseases*, until vigorous protest made them remove it again. For critics, pathologising a universal process involves serious ethical concerns, stigmatising old people as 'having something wrong with them' (tinyurl.com/47536wwj).

And there is the big picture. Death is the reason we exist. If animals didn't die, there would have been no evolution and therefore no us. If humans became immortal, society might ossify, and you'd have to abolish children. But never mind big pictures and bleeding hearts, think of the profits. 'They are interested only in the biomolecular and the monetisable... They seemed strangely uncurious [sic] about the enemy they have declared war on. Ageing to them is simply a technical problem that can, and will, be fixed' (tinyurl.com/4nbem6xj).

In any case, no one wants to make workers immortal, only the super-rich. Putin, famous for his ludicrous bare-chested-on-a-horse publicity photos, is fixated with being a 'healthy strongman', and goes everywhere with 'an army of doctors'. He doesn't drink or smoke, and has put billions into anti-ageing research, stem-cell cloning and organ transplant technology. It's also scurrilously reported that he bathes in deer blood, a traditional Siberian shamanic 'remedy'. In all this he is no doubt encouraged by his inner circle of hangers-on, who warmly appreciate that keeping him alive is their ticket to staying in power.

What's the reality behind the hopeful hype? Professor of vaccine immunology John Tregoning points out that you can't keep swapping out failing organs indefinitely because a) general anaesthetics are a calculated risk that increases with age and each operation, and b) there's a high risk of MRSA infections, including sepsis, with every transplant op. Putin would be playing Russian Roulette, over and over. Cloned organs are not a thing, so you'd need a lifetime of immuno-suppressants, with an ever-present threat of fatal infections. There is not an endless supply of suitable organs, in fact there's a world shortage. There is some state-of-the-art work using genetically modified pig organs, but if you survive six months after a transplant, that is considered an 'amazing feat' (tinyurl.com/ykr45rsb).

Meanwhile, Tregoning adds, the rest of your body would still be ageing. The largest organ is your skin, and how would you replace that? 'Even if you could replace all of the internal organs, you'd need to replace your muscles, your bone, your skin, everything is aging at fairly constant rates.... Just putting a new heart in is like taking a 1980s Ford Cortina and putting a brand new Porsche engine in and expecting it to run fine' (tinyurl.com/p3ud6s2n).

On top of all that, brain connectivity declines over time too, and there's no known way to reset that. There is some horizon research into a class of drugs called senolytics, which eat dead cells and scar tissue and may be a way to reboot the human body from the inside out, but for now they only work with fruit flies and nematode worms, and have toxic side effects.

Happily, today's ruthless autocrats stand no chance of cheating the reaper. But new ones will replace them as long as capitalism survives. The world's workers need to wield the political scythe where it would do most good.

PJS

Dear Editors

I HAVE read *Socialism as a Practical Alternative*, this is very interesting, although I would like it to know more about voting rights and other decision making processes in the political sphere and in the economic sphere, in particular regarding the rights to use capital assets, both for housing and for equipment in small production units vs large production units, etc. I make some practical proposals on my *Brief History of Equality* (see eg, tinyurl.com/5xbapcn5), but of course they are highly imperfect and the only way to make progress is to compare with other proposals and learn from them!

THOMAS PIKETTY

Reply:

At this stage, when there are so few who want a socialist society of common ownership and democratic control of the means to produce what society needs to survive, it is premature to draw up detailed plans as to how things will be arranged in such a society. That is something for those around at the time to decide when capitalism is about to be replaced by socialism; in other words, when a majority of the population want socialism. All we can do is to come up with some suggestions and even then not going into the detail that your proposals do. But we don't doubt that when that time comes detailed plans will be drawn up.

We are approaching the question from a different position from yours. You see a different kind of society coming about gradually through a series of reform measures, to be implemented now under capitalism. Hence the need to come up with a detailed proposal. We don't see that a gradual transition to socialism is possible as, in the end, what decides what happens is the operation of the uncontrollable economic laws of capitalist society which impose that the priority must be profit-making and the accumulation of capital. They rule out detailed reform measures working as planned. Our view is that, before anything constructive and lasting can be done, the basis of society needs to be changed root and branch from class ownership of the means of life to their common ownership and democratic control by society as a whole.

So while you are proposing measures to be implemented now under capitalism, we are envisaging possible measures to be implemented after capitalism has been replaced by socialism.

Nevertheless, to try to answer your specific questions. By 'the rights to use capital assets', by which we assume you mean the physical means to produce wealth. These won't belong to anyone; they will simply be there to be used in accordance with democratically decided rules. We imagine that the day-to-day operation of them will be in the hands of those who operate them, through some democratically chosen management committee. This could be chosen by any number of different voting systems or even by lot (now called 'sortition'). And there is no reason why this needs to be the same everywhere and in every workplace.

Housing: houses and flats won't belong to anyone either. They wouldn't be privately owned, not even by individuals; but this wouldn't rule out people having the right to use a house or flat for a prolonged period. One possible arrangement would for their allocation to be in the hands of a local council in accordance with some democratically agreed criteria. These would have to be fairly complicated, allowing for appeals and settlement of disputes, but we can't say much more today about them other than that they would have to exist and that it will be up to those living in socialism to decide the details which, once again, need not be the same everywhere.

EDITORS

Technofeudalism

IN THE November *Socialist Standard* there is a critique of Varoufakis's work *Technofeudalism*. The author of this article indicates that it is a divergent of classical Marxism, emphasising the statement specifically 'Capitalism is Dead. Welcome to Technofeudalism'. (note the inverted commas). The SP is known for its theoretical adherence to the scientific Marxist interpretation of *Capital*. On reading its magazine, for a while now, I recognise that it is unshakeable in its desire for pure socialism, which in this

period seems distant. Marxism is scientific in its analysis of periods, it therefore assesses that which pervades, whilst recognising the past.

The colossal rise of the IT industry closely followed by the AI industry has not changed the theory of Constant, Variable and Surplus Value (CVS). It has however massively warped it, to the advantage of the owner, even further and it's in cyber space. Compare a labour-intensive manufacturer, where the preceding CVS applies to the vast empires of the cloud and its opaque streams of surplus value.

This is not of course a cloud! It is a vast warehouse of electronic equipment, often set in remote areas with a skeleton of technicians and security (proletarians). This enormous structure consumes vast amounts of power and water for cooling (Constant Value). It has been built so there is now the CVS to apply to that, which, if the workforce is unionised, may give a reasonable return to the V element.

What Varoufakis is emphasising throughout this work is the careful disguise these moguls of the internet and social media are deploying to use billions of unpaid labour, pressing keyboards, to further their Surplus and their empires. It is most significant that recently Trump met the foremost IT moguls, and it would seem no traditional manufacturers.

All Varoufakis books are worth reading and it should be remembered that as a socialist minister the courageous struggle he had with the EU over a more compassionate deal for Greece, which was lost, when the EU showed its true colours, and the masses of Greece lost with it. As socialists we need to be aware of who our comrades are and who are not.

PHILIP CHAMBERS

We don't agree that Varoufakis was a "socialist minister" but at least he had the political courage to resign rather than impose austerity on the working class as the state of Greek capitalism required. Not many leftist ministers do that when faced with the choice of whether or not to bow to capitalism's will – Editors.

How **would** you like your cut?

LIKE LOCAL councils everywhere, the London Borough of Lambeth doesn't have enough money to pay for adequate social amenities such as parks, playgrounds, libraries, and social centres. In fact, to balance the books over the coming years it will have to cut back on these even further:

'Lambeth Council has to make huge savings from its budget, equal to more than a third of its annual spending, and is asking local people to give their ideas about how to save money at this time of unprecedented challenge. Over the next four years the council must find £84 million in savings, on top of £99 million in savings already agreed' (tinyurl.com/3w3wx8r).

Normally, this would be decided by the council's cabinet, made up from members of the political party or parties with a majority of councillors (in the case of Lambeth, it's Labour). This is an unenviable task which makes the council and councillors unpopular. Lambeth Council has come up with a way to try to avoid this, asking people living in the area which services they think should be given priority — and which, by implication, should not. The idea being that, when the cuts are made, the councillors can turn round and

say that they were only doing what the public had suggested.

So, those living in Lambeth were asked to choose where the axe should fall. They had to click their way through an online survey and to choose which 3 out of 18 services they wanted to prioritise, leaving the remaining 15 as targets for cutting. Critics have likened this to giving someone sentenced to death a choice between being shot or hanged. They also question why 'no cuts' wasn't an option. The answer to that question goes to the heart of matter.

'No cuts' is not an option because the council simply does not have the money, and the council does not have the money because the central government has not allocated it enough. Why? Because the central government is responsible for running things in the general interest of the capitalist class. Profits are what drive the economy, and governments must avoid doing anything that impedes profit-making on pain of provoking an economic downturn. Governments are financed by taxes that ultimately fall on profits and so cannot increase taxes just to improve services and amenities for the general public (they can only provide those that directly or indirectly

benefit capitalist production and then at minimum cost). Governments are managing capitalism and have to abide by the economic law of capitalism that decrees that profit-making comes first.

So cuts there have to be, at both national and local level. The only question is who should decide to make them and where they should fall. The national government decides on cuts to national spending while local councils decide on cuts to local spending. Local councils blame the government. So Lambeth's Labour Council Leader talks of '14 years of structural underfunding of local government'. But it's not the fault of national government, whether Tory or Labour. Such underfunding is chronic because meeting people's needs is not what capitalism is about.

The fact is that it doesn't matter who decides to make the cuts; they have to be made. But it is not an extension of democracy to involve the working class in the decision. That's just a way to get workers to act against their own interest and take responsibility for the worsening conditions capitalism imposes on them. Socialists living in Lambeth refused to take part in the charade, as did many others.



WORLDSOCIALISTRADIO.COM

Word Socialist Radio is the official podcast of the Socialist Party of Great Britain. We have one single aim: the establishment of a society in which all productive resources — land, water, factories, transport, etc. — are taken into common ownership, and in which the sole motive for production is the fulfilment of human needs and wants.

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

www.worldsocialistradio.com

Halo Halo

SOME NAMES of Father Christmas/ Santa Claus across the world: Finland: Joulupukki, 'Yule Goat'; Russia: Ded Moroz, 'Grandfather Frost'; Norway: Julenissen, 'Christmas gnome'; Japan: Santa-san (Santa Kurōsu); China: Dun Che Lao Ren 'Christmas old man'; Mongolia: (Övliin övgön), 'Grandfather Winter'; Georgia: tovlis babua, 'Grandfather Snow'; Armenia: Dzmer Papik 'Winter Grandfather'.

A band produced a song in 1970 and sang, 'teach your children well'. Should we presume that parents in the countries listed above taught their children that there was a Santa Claus, a Tooth Fairy and an Easter Bunny whilst knowing full well that these were all made up fictional beings?

What have the children living in these places got in common? Gift receiving obviously, but by the age of eight or so no longer believing that such persons, as they have been taught, actually exist. They may have been disabused of this belief by a peer who has sussed this out and

wants to disillusion others for whatever motive. Once the deceit is discovered, and the knowledge that presents come from those who have to sell their labour power in order to afford them, then the hunt for gifts stored somewhere in the house before Christmas becomes likely. Admittedly, knowing about wage slavery and capitalist exploitation is likely to come a little later in life.

Knowing about Santa generally means that there is an unspoken agreement on the part of both children and parents to maintain the illusion. The fantasy that there is a being in the sky who monitors all behaviour at all times, known as god, usually takes youngsters longer to find out the truth.

Santa can be used to modify the behaviour of children: if you're naughty Santa knows and he'll cross you off his list to bring you nice presents. So behave! Compare that to the threat of gods who demand unconditional 'love' and 'worship'

or else they will cast you into hell to suffer all its torments forever and ever.

Children may eventually come to the conclusion that this is just the reality of life and not blame parents for fibbing to them about Santa. But at what point do children come to realise that being taught that they are getting Yuletide presents because of a virgin birth that supposedly occurred two thousand years ago is also twaddle, baloney, humbug and tosh?

Do primary/junior schools still force the very young to wear tea towels on their head at Christmas and act out a meaningless scenario which they are too young to understand? Turning children against religion may be a positive factor from that event though when the resentment against getting a star part is compared to only being asked to be a sheep or a donkey.

Which is more harmful to teach susceptible young minds? A belief in a jolly bearded guy who can fly through the sky in a sled pulled by reindeers or the deception that there exists an insecure, controlling, vindictive being who demands constant idolisation and validation?

DC

Tiny tips

BRAZIL, RUSSIA, and South Africa top the list for wealth inequality, each posting Gini coefficients around the low 0.8s. These scores imply a highly concentrated distribution of assets relative to the rest of the population. Several energy-rich economies—such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia—also rank high, reflecting significant concentrations of financial and real assets among upper tiers of wealth holders. Country Gini Coefficient 2024: Brazil 0.82, Russia 0.82, South Africa 0.81, United Arab Emirates 0.81, Saudi Arabia 0.78, Sweden 0.75 (**ZeroHedge**, tinyurl.com/3cd4m6s6).

...Latin America remains the only region in the world that has not shown a clear decline in child marriage over the last three decades. Nicaragua has the highest rates within the region and ranks 14th globally with 10% of girls marrying or entering a union before age 15. Among boys, 19% marry or enter a union before

the age of 18. Here are the main reasons for child marriage in Nicaragua... Poverty continues to affect a large portion of Nicaragua's population. The United Nations reports that 48% of people live below the poverty line. Continual climate disruptions devastate the environment and worsen economic conditions. High levels of organized crime and human trafficking also contribute to insecurity. Many families marry off their children to ease financial hardship and improve their economic situation, resulting in increased levels of child marriage in Nicaragua. Furthermore, Nicaraguan society continues to enforce cultural and gender norms that pressure girls to marry young and bear children (**The Borgen Project**, tinyurl.com/wves2yaj).

At the centre of the criminality in Gaza today are armed gangs, whose members are often drawn from the territory's powerful clans. These clans are extended families that have historically played

leading roles in their communities – but have also, at times, operated like local mafia. During the recent conflict, clans have settled old scores with violence. Gangs associated with the clans have expanded into racketeering, drug dealing, kidnapping, robbery and extortion (**The Conversation**, tinyurl.com/bdh6s6kc).

The rally was a good time with a positive vibe, and I'm glad to see Americans coming together in opposition to one tyrant. But until and unless we start coming together in opposition to tyranny itself — the state per se — and in support of liberty for all, the only question is how much more kingly and despotic our next ruler will get than the previous one got (**CounterPunch**, tinyurl.com/bdfbemew).

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

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

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

Yorkshire Regional branch.

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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.

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

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

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Life without money

IT'S AN ambiguous phrase. It can mean trying to survive without using money within or at the margins of existing money-dominated society. Or it can mean a change of society to one in which money would be redundant.

Then there is the question of what is meant by 'money'. There are those who want to replace notes and coins, cheques and electronic transfers by labour credits or consumption vouchers. Others though might regard them as only wanting a different form of money. But then, Karl Marx, a critic and opponent of money, envisaged using 'labour-time vouchers' instead of money in the early stages of socialism before it became possible to go over to full free distribution and full free access.

Nobody is arguing that all that needs to be done is to abolish money and leave everything else unchanged. That would be madness and would lead to a breakdown of production and distribution. If you've got a system based on producing goods and services for profit, you've got to have money. So, no, we don't want to go back to barter.

Socialists want to replace the present capitalist system with a new system based on common ownership instead of ownership by the few and with production directly to meet people's needs instead of production for sale on a market with a view to profits. In such a socialist (or communist society – the two words mean the same) money would be redundant. So we don't want to 'abolish money' full-stop. We want a change to a society with a system of production and distribution in which money would be redundant and so would disappear.

For us, the case against money is the case against capitalism. Capitalism is the system which now dominates the world. No country escapes or can escape from its influence and effects. It is essentially an economic system where the means for producing useful goods and services take the form of 'capital', or wealth used to produce more wealth with a view to profit, where the goods and services produced take the form of 'exchange value'; they all have a price and have to be exchanged for money.

The farms, factories, offices and other places where wealth is produced are owned and controlled by rich individuals, capitalist corporations and states. Under the pressure of competition, those in charge of these 'units of capital' are driven to seek as much profit as they can, not



so much for the personal benefit of the owners (though this does come into it) as to get funds to reinvest in cost-cutting innovations so as to be able to compete with, and outcompete, their rivals. One consequence of this is that more and more capital is accumulated. This in fact is what capitalism is all about: the accumulation of more capital out of profits.

One consequence of this is that over time the means of production and their productive power have built up and society has now become able, in theory, to produce enough useful goods and services to meet people's needs. But the economic mechanism of capitalism does not let this happen. Making profits and re-investing them as more capital always comes first.

It's an irrational system of 'production for production's sake', of 'growth for growth's sake'. There are other antisocial results of capitalism. Such as the recurring economic crises and slumps. Such as the wars and preparation for war that occur as capitalist states compete over sources of raw material, trade routes, markets and investment outlets. Such as putting short-term cost considerations before protecting the environment and respecting a balance of nature. And it does not allow production to be geared to meeting the needs of people for food, clothes, housing, healthcare, education and the other amenities for an enjoyable life.

People's needs are met but only to an extent – to the extent that they have money to pay for them. There are various ways an individual can get money. They can inherit it (be born with it). They can steal it. They can beg for it. Or they can work for it – which is what most people do. We don't criticise those who try to avoid this by establishing rural communes or by living off what they find in skips. That's a lifestyle

choice but not an attractive one for most people. We don't even criticise those who choose to steal money as long as they steal from the rich.

But what sort of society is it where most people have to fend for themselves to get money so they can access what they need to live – and where, even in a developed country like Britain, 10-15 percent can't keep up and are forced to rely on more or less meagre handouts from the state? This when society has the technology to produce enough for all, especially if we get rid of capitalism's artificial scarcity (the need to make a profit holds back producing enough to meet people's needs) and its organised scarcity (not just of wars and preparation for war, but also all of the resources devoted to the counting and transfer of money).

As socialists, we say capitalism must go if we're going to be able to provide a decent living for every man, woman and child on the planet.

What is needed in place of capitalism is for the Earth's resources to become the common heritage of all. Then, they could be geared to satisfying people's needs. If productive resources were commonly owned, then so would what they produced. The issue to be dealt with would be, not how to sell to people what had been produced (how could they buy when they're already the joint owners?). It's how to share out what's been produced. In other words, exchange (buying and selling) is replaced by distribution (sharing out and receiving). For this, money is not needed.

It's possible – right at the beginning or as a result of some major natural disaster – that some useful things might be temporarily unavailable in sufficient quantities. In which case there would have to be a temporary rationing of them till supplies were increased or restored. But, given modern technology and capacity to produce, the general rule (and certainly the aim to be reached as rapidly as possible) would be free distribution and free access, the implementation of the old communist principle of 'from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs'. With free public transport, healthcare, education, gas, water, electricity, telephone, internet access, and other public services and amenities. And people free to take from the stores and distribution centres according to their needs. There would be no need for money. It would be redundant. The notes, coins and cards we now use would find their proper place in museums.

ADAM BUICK

Mamdani's election no victory for socialism

ZOHRAN MAMDANI began his victory speech on being elected mayor of New York City: 'The sun may have set over our city this evening, but as Eugene Debs once said: "I can see the dawn of a better day for humanity." For as long as we can remember, the working people of New York have been told by the wealthy and the well-connected that power does not belong in their hands.' and ended it: 'Together, New York, we're going to freeze the rent. Together, New York, we're going to make buses fast and free. Together, New York, we're going to deliver universal childcare. Let the words we've spoken together, the dreams we've dreamt together, become the agenda we deliver together. New York, this power, it's yours. This city belongs to you' (tinyurl.com/4kpe6rry).

This is a bold claim that his election represented the passing of political power in New York into the hands of 'working people'. In fact, it represented the election of a political leader who promised to improve things for them. No doubt he is sincere and no doubt many are hoping that he will do this, but the question is will he be able to?

Peter Joseph, of Zeitgeist fame, thinks not: 'For 18 years, I've tried to explain that the idea of getting the right person into political power—by whatever means—will never be enough to bring society back onto a sustainable and equitable path. The larger systemic forces, spiraling like a hurricane of negating feedback loops, will devour any fundamentally contradictory personality, policy, or platform. This is not an indictment of democracy as an idea, but of democracy as it exists within the larger construct of market capitalism—a power structure first and foremost. I want everyone to watch, as time moves forward, how this well-meaning man will be completely paralyzed and ultimately destroyed if he truly attempts any meaningful anti-market policy changes, or what he refers to as "democratic socialism." By the end of this exercise, I hope people will realize that if you expect to change society, the political system cannot be the only system you rely on, because it is fundamentally and inherently corrupt by its very nested nature within the confines of market capitalism' (tinyurl.com/3de8ewsj).

We don't know about wanting people to just watch Mamdani fail (they should rather be active in campaigning to replace the profit system with socialism as a society based on common ownership and democratic control of the means of



life) but Joseph is basically right. There are structural reasons why no politician operating within capitalist system can honour their promises to improve things, however sincere or determined they might be.

Mamdani has been elected to run the affairs of a big city but within the framework of capitalism, and capitalism is a system that imposes its priority — the making and accumulation of profits — on political as well as economic actors. That profits need to be made, and encouraged to be made, is something that anyone elected to political office within capitalism has to contend with and, in the end, accept and even impose.

Even though elected as the candidate of the pro-capitalist Democratic Party, Mamdani stated that he was a 'democratic socialist' and is in fact a member of the 'Democratic Socialists of America' (DSA) which proclaims: 'Capitalism is a system designed by the owning class to exploit the rest of us for their own profit. We must replace it with democratic socialism, a system where ordinary people have a real voice in our workplaces, neighborhoods, and society... We want a democracy powered by everyday people. The capitalist class tells us we are powerless, but together we can take back control' (tinyurl.com/3baxfn8e).

The DSA is one of the fragments of the old reformist 'Socialist Party of America' that imploded in 1972, with one part — them — deciding to enter the Democratic Party and pursue their aims there. The SPA was the party of Eugene Debs — hence Mamdani's nod to him in his opening

remarks. Debs stood for President of the USA on five occasions between 1900 and 1920. Launching his 1912 campaign he said of the Republican and Democratic parties:

'They are substantially one in what they stand for. They are opposed to each other on no question of principle but purely in a contest for the spoils of office. To the workers of the country these two parties in name are one in fact. They, or rather it, stands for capitalism, for the private ownership of the means of subsistence, for the exploitation of the workers, and for wage-slavery' (tinyurl.com/yxb7dnwt).

This is as true today as it was then, but if it's reforms you are after (as Mamdani and the others in the DSA are) there is some sense in working within a party that has a good chance of winning political office and so be in a position to implement reforms. Mamdani is now in that position and can (if he can raise the funds) implement this but faces a further obstacle — the capitalist economic system which will not allow people's needs to be put before profit and will undermine his reforms, in particular his flagship ones aimed at reducing the cost of living (rent freeze, free buses, free childcare) as this will exert a downward pressure on money wages. It will be swings and roundabouts.

If, on the other hand, you want socialism this makes no sense at all since, in supporting a party that stands for capitalism, you are supporting capitalism even if you seek to improve it. That's why we say Mamdani's election was not a victory for socialism.

ADAM BUICK

Popularity

JUST HOW popular is populism? Taking the media, social and broadcast, at face value it appears to be the surging political trend nationally and internationally. In Britain, Reform UK are feted as the almost certain next government in waiting. Every small rubber dinghy that braves the Channel crossing to disgorge its cargo of migrants on the Anglo-Saxon shore counts as a clutch of increased votes for the party. Their accommodation frequently features, on the evening news, as the epicentre of patriotic outrage.

For a while that stalwart British icon, the Turkish Saint George, had his banner raised to flutter from many a lamppost. Or it was draped around the shoulders of angry demonstrators traipsing through the streets of the capital to gather and be harangued by demagogues. Certainly those marchers, like most people, have a great deal to be angry about. Lives blighted by inadequate incomes, rising prices, serious failings in health and social services and a growing housing crisis.

Governments come and go, and nothing substantially alters, except often for the worse. Even a desperate grab for a major change, with its promise of significant transformation such as Brexit, quickly proves an illusion, its glister merely fool's gold.

Despite being leading purveyors of this political vacuity in its previous incarnation as UKIP, Reform UK is presently gaining popularity as the prospective saviour of the nation. They have, of course, the advantage of novelty, not yet marked by failure of governance. Reform UK's impressive showing in May's council elections has been tarnished somewhat through a number of resignations by, expulsions and suspensions of, some of their new councillors. There is evidence from a previous seeming breakthrough in local government of similar serious failings.

The British National Party in 2003 made what appeared to be a breakthrough in council elections. This was seen at the time as a harbinger of further success come elections for metropolitan districts, the European parliament and the mayor of London. This expectation was largely frustrated in 2004. Although the BNP did gain 3 council seats in Epping Forest, scene of recent unpleasantness at the Bell Hotel, it lost 7 of its 8 seats in Burnley, but gained one in Bradford. This proved the peak of its success.

Reform UK have certainly exceeded this precedent and might represent the triumph of populism come the next

general election. This then invites the question of how popular populism has to be to succeed.

In the 2024 general election Labour took 33.7 percent of the UK vote (34.6 per cent in GB) to acquire an overall majority of 172. In other words the democratic process as it now is elected a government with a large majority even though around 66 percent of those who actually voted didn't vote for it.

The last electoral showing by a party boasting a popular surge was in 2019. The Labour Party led by Jeremy Corbyn had witnessed a large influx of new members to become by far the largest party, at a time when party memberships were declining and had been for a number of years. Despite this Labour accrued just 32.2 percent of the UK vote, noticeably down from Corbyn's previous effort in 2017. Labour was popular enough to attract those new members, but not to become elected, falling 11 percent short of the Conservative vote on 43.6 percent.

Becoming a government does not require a party to be popular enough to win an outright majority of the vote. Indeed, in the multi-party system we now seem to have, somewhere around a third of votes might actually be enough as Labour showed last time. This then is presumably Reform UK's target. Should it achieve that target it is a moot point as to how long that populism lasts when it is confronted with administering all the problems and contradictions capitalism continually generates. No party to date deliberately sets out to generally make people's lives worse. Yet they inevitably are forced into enacting policies that are detrimental to workers when the economic imperatives of capitalism demand it. As Britain's shortest serving Prime Minister, Liz Truss, quickly found out, economic mismanagement does not even require democratic process to be removed from office.

Populism is commonly associated with right-wing politicians and parties, but the left also make attempts at popular appeal. Following on from boosting Labour Party membership, Jeremy Corbyn has become the focus around which Your Party is being promoted. A loose conglomeration of disaffected Labourites and left-wing reformists, Your Party intends to become to the Labour Party what Reform UK is to the Tories. However, there are signs it is already failing before it has had the chance to present itself to the electorate.

Adnan Hussain, MP for Blackburn, has parted company with Your Party citing a toxic culture of infighting, jostling for position and factional competition. Also, there have been questions raised concerning access to, and deployment of, £800,000 raised in donations. Those who have had any experience of left-wing politics will recognise these as common features figuring in previous incarnations of popular front alliances of left Labour and Trotskyist 'Socialist' groups. Even if, however unlikely it presently seems, Your Party was to succeed in replacing Labour as the left alternative elected to govern the country, it would still face the fundamental constraints capitalism imposes on administrations.

A simple example: the Brexit referendum had two possible results, but only one outcome. A vote to stay in the EU meant capitalism, while a vote to leave meant capitalism. So it is with parliamentary elections; whichever party is popularly voted for – left, right or centre – capitalism remains the determining feature of society.

In a sense, all contending political parties are populist. They vie with each other for the popular vote, that 35 to 40 percent that unlocks the door to 10 Downing Street. All parties that is, bar one, the Socialist Party of Great Britain. There is no aspiration, not even a far-fetched one, to be invited by the monarch to form a government. This is not lack of ambition. Indeed the Socialist Party's ambition goes way beyond the severely circumscribed aspirations of all the others.

Only the working people of the world acting in concert to abolish capitalism and replace it with socialism can see the realisation of the aims of the Socialist Party. The common democratic ownership of the means of wealth creation to establish a moneyless society dedicated to meeting everyone's needs without the imperative to make profits. The election of a popular parliament dedicated to serving the emergence of such a society would be an important element in that process. But it wouldn't be the Socialist Party sitting on the front benches as there would be no front benches.

The socialist cause certainly needs much, much greater popularity than it presently has. That may involve socialist candidates standing in elections, with a view to raising awareness, provoking voters to think beyond the present political offerings.

Socialists do court popularity, yet not for themselves or even their party, but for socialism itself. No matter how unpopular that idea presently is it still remains, and will remain, the only alternative for people who want to take control and refashion society to meet their needs.

D. A.

Violence and war: Are they inevitable?

The long view

IT'S BECOME widely accepted that, for well over 200,000 years, hunter-gatherers, humans like us, lived in egalitarian societies. So why, beginning around 12,000 years ago, did most of them, within a relatively short period of time, give up that lifestyle for settled agriculture and, in so doing, move to a different way of life and new social structures, where a dominance hierarchy of the few began to take over from equality for all, leading to exploitation, slavery, violence and war?

The invention of scarcity

The answer to that is multi-faceted. But, broadly speaking, such a transformation can only have come about as a result of environmental factors pushing people into the imagined greater security that the longer-term and more abundant supplies of food and other materials derived from farming would have been capable of producing. The trouble is that, once that happened, there was no obvious going back, as it brought with it the creation of hierarchies and states and rule by those few who in previous societies would have been considered anti-social for their dominating tendencies. That minority would now have much freer rein for their deviant behaviour, resulting in struggles for power, the development of classes and rulers and ruled, and the emergence of what came to be considered natural orders headed by kings, emperors, pharaohs and high priests, with the majority living at a lower level of subsistence than as hunter-gatherers ('the invention of scarcity', it has been called). This in turn gave rise to full-scale predatory social systems (first slavery, then feudalism, and now capitalism) where the majority have been kept in check by tiny, privileged minorities either by the threat of violence from higher authority and/or by ideological constructs or smokescreens such as tribal loyalty or nationalism.

Original sin and the free market

In the lens of recorded history the result of these dominance structures and of the conflicts over wealth and resources that have arisen between the privileged ruling minorities has been (and still is) large-scale violence and continual wars. And over most of this history, the explanation for this found in writings, both secular and religious, has been that conflict between humans is the natural



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state of things. Christianity, for example, expressed this through the idea of 'original sin', while commentators not dependent on religious doctrine tended to come to similar conclusions. For example, the 16th century Italian political writer Machiavelli, in his famous essay *The Prince*, stated that human beings were 'ungrateful, fickle, dissembling, hypocritical, cowardly and greedy' and 'never do anything good except out of necessity'. Similar views were expressed in the following century by the philosopher Thomas Hobbes in his *Leviathan*, which argued that human beings are greedy by nature and that human life is 'a condition of war of all against all'. The following century, the economist Adam Smith, in his *Wealth of Nations*, also famously insisted that private interest (or 'self-love') was 'natural' human behaviour, justifying a society based on the 'free market', where everyone seeks their own self-advantage regardless of the social and economic inequality that goes with it. Some questioning of these views did begin in the 19th century with the writings of Charles Darwin and early practitioners of the science of anthropology such as Lewis Henry Morgan. But it was only in the 20th century, with the increased flowering of anthropology and the new science of archaeology, that serious doubt was cast on the belief that human beings were deep-down selfish, wicked and aggressive, as new perspectives emerged from growing evidence of how people had lived and interacted in the pre-farming era, the overwhelmingly longest period of human existence on earth.

Not that the traditional 'fixed human nature' view simply went away. It continued to be expressed in much popular writing in particular. Examples of this between the 1950s and the 1970s were books like Desmond Morris's *The Naked Ape*, Konrad Lorenz's *On Aggression*, Robert Ardrey's *The Territorial Imperative*, and imaginative fiction like William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (and arguably

George Orwell's *Animal Farm* too). It also carried on coming from some 'scientific' sources, for example Richard Wrangham's 1996 book *Demonic Males: Apes and the Origins of Human Violence* and, most recently, Richard Overy in *Why War* (2024). Such writers tend to see war as having been constant throughout the whole of human history, suggesting that humans are war prone and have what Overy calls 'a psychological predisposition for warfare'. And this leads that writer to conclude that 'if war has a very long human history, it also has a future'.

But, overall, the last 30-40 years have marked a significant shift in perspectives both among social commentators and scientific experts. Among a slew of studies on this and allied topics (some of them reviewed in this journal), titles like *Beyond War. The Human Potential for Peace*, *Team Human*, *Survival of the Friendliest*, and *Ultra-Social* tell their own tale. The majority of these writings conclude from their authors' investigations not that human beings are non-violent and non-prone to war per se but rather that violence and fighting are not their most natural inclination, even if they are capable of being driven to it by circumstances. Even the widely read *The Selfish Gene* by Richard Dawkins, though often cited as supporting the idea of innate human selfishness, on close examination does no such thing. In fact it is largely a book about altruism and cooperative behaviour. Even its writer is on record as saying that its title may have been an unfortunate one and that perhaps a different title such as 'The Immortal Gene', or even 'The Altruistic Organism', might have been more appropriate.

Highly flexible or pro-social?

Highly relevant in this connection too is the work of anthropologist R. Brian Ferguson, who has spent 50 years researching the origins of war and has

been called ‘the greatest living scholar of human warfare’. In an article in *Scientific American* in 2018, entitled ‘War is *not* part of human nature’, Ferguson notes that the overwhelming evidence on war, which he defines as armed conflict and killing sanctioned by society and carried out by members of one group against members of another group, suggests that it was not always present among humans. Instead it began as a result of societal changes at varying times in different locations but with its earliest signs appearing around 12,000 years ago – so closely coinciding with humankind’s first experiments with agriculture. In a later article (2023) in the journal *Public Anthropologist*, he states: ‘Our species is not biologically destined for war. War is not an inescapable part of social existence’; and ‘Obviously, we are *capable* of war and often choose it. The question is whether evolution tilts us in that direction. I say no.’ His findings, he says, show that: ‘egalitarian mobile hunter foragers generally don’t make war’ and that ‘agriculture and states went along with more war’. His most recent book, *Chimpanzees, War, and History: Are Men Born to Kill?* (2023) reiterates this with the conclusion that ‘Men are not born to kill but they can be cultivated to kill’.

This is a perspective also echoed by Yuval Noah Harari in his best-selling book *Sapiens. A Brief History of Humankind* (2014). Here Harari makes a clear statement about humans as essentially flexible creatures, insisting that human behaviour is shaped by the society into which we are born and become part of. He goes on to say that, if our social arrangements were determined simply by our biology, then there would never have been the wide gamut of behaviour patterns, relationships and cultures which we know about and which can also be witnessed in what we see around us now.

Some studies go even further than this, seeing humans as naturally ‘pro-social’ beings with cooperation not competition, peacefulness not violence as their intrinsic default. In such studies, qualities such as kindness and empathy are seen as existing ‘naturally’ in the overwhelming majority of humans, as long as overwhelming forces don’t get in the way of it. The historian Tine De Moor, for example, in *The Dilemma of the Commoners* (2015), claims that ‘history teaches us that man is essentially a cooperative being, a *homo cooperans*’, that ‘human beings claim togetherness and interaction’ and that ‘our spirits yearn for connection just as our bodies hunger for food’. This kind of outlook is echoed by Rutger Bregman in his book *Humankind. A Hopeful History* (2021) in which he presents arguments many

have found compelling that the innate, fundamental default of human beings is to be friendly, communal and cooperative and that the outstanding feature of human behaviour is the desire to act together and to display tolerance and mutual support even if circumstances are dire. As part of the evidence for this he points to the plethora of everyday gestures of help, cooperation, solidarity and compassion people in all societies all over the world show to one another on a daily basis without any prospect of gain or reward. John Gowdy’s *Ultra Social. The Evolution of Human Nature and the Quest for a Sustainable Future* (2021), though in most ways a quite different kind of book from Bregman’s, echoes a similar message with statements like ‘Our current predicaments are not gene-based. They have risen out of the material base of human economies and the associated cultural adaptations and supporting institutions’ and with an insistence that, if we have a ‘nature’, it is a ‘pro-social’ one, a natural inclination, to be empathetic, associative and cooperative.

Such considerations about human behaviour have been accompanied – and often confirmed – by the more detailed and scientific studies of primeval hunter-gatherer societies that modern technological methods have made possible. A recent study, for example, analysing evidence of traumatic injuries in 189 individuals from 25 different sites revealed healed bone treatment, suggesting a story of mutual aid, patience and dedication among those people (Victoria Romano and others, ‘Bone trauma and interpersonal care among Late Holocene hunter-gatherers from Patagonia, Argentina’, *International Journal of Paleopathology*, December 2025, pp.10-24). It has been estimated that around one in five hunter-gatherers would have been likely to suffer some kind of injury or disability and while most wounds would have been the predictable bruises and fractures of daily life requiring only a short break from everyday activities, others were likely to have been worse, leaving individuals unable to hunt, gather, grind plants, craft tools, etc, for months, or perhaps a lifetime. Here we are presented with evidence that those suffering in this way would have been cared for by the community, even if they were not economically ‘useful’. Such research, therefore, lends weight to the ‘pro-social’ arguments many are making about a fundamentally benign human nature.

But in the end, whether humans are intrinsically ‘pro-social’ or simply highly flexible, the evidence is that, while violence and war are certainly possible forms of human behaviour as both history

and the present show, coexistence without violence or war also presents itself as another possible form of human behaviour. This was a reality recognised as far back as 1985 in Unesco’s ‘*Seville Statement on Violence*’, in the following terms: ‘Biology does not condemn humanity to war ... It is scientifically incorrect to say that war or any other violent behaviour is genetically programmed into our human nature’. And the undeniable fact is that the vast majority of interactions that take place in daily life between human beings are co-operative, peaceful and harmonious, not rude or cruel or anti-social. We do not normally expect to have arguments or experience serious friction with our fellow humans in the course of our daily activities, and most of the time we don’t. And, on the relatively rare occasions when that does happen, it stands out – precisely because it is rare.

Cooperation or competition?

The broader point here is that, while we do not say that the kind of society socialists advocate and regard as eminently possible will be entirely argument or conflict free (no human society could be), we do say that the scope for argument and conflict will be far less than in the competitive, insecure society we live in under capitalism. This society, in both its ethic and its organisation, runs directly contrary to the ‘normal’ human tendency to help and cooperate with others. It drives people to compete with others, to try to get the better of them and even to do them down. It does this by tempting people with the lure of gain or reward, often financial, so pushing them to behave in ways that divide them from their fellow humans and often making the ‘success’ of one into the ‘failure’ of others. Given this reality, what is truly remarkable and significant is that, despite the overwhelmingly powerful pressures capitalism places on people to get the better of others and so not be ‘kind’ to them, in so many of the actions and connections and competitive situations created for us in our daily lives, most of us still manage to be largely kind to others, to cooperate with them and to share. In a new kind of egalitarian society, one of free and equal access, with no buying and selling or wages or salaries, with co-operative endeavour, and with technology and the abundant resources of the planet used to satisfy need and not for profit-making ends, is it far-fetched to believe that such behaviour will come fully into its own?

HKM

Strangers in our home world



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WE ARE alienated creatures living in our very own home world. That alienation stems from workers' relationship to both the product and the process of their work, and has a wide range of unpleasant effects. In his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844 Marx stated eloquently that: 'The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him. It means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien'.

In the very first page of *Capital*, Marx begins to analyze the nature of our capitalist society, and he does this in terms of the commodity, the source of our alienation. We live in a planet-wide dictatorship of the commodity. This means that whether, as workers, we live in a liberal capitalist society or a modern authoritarian state of the left or right makes no difference. The commodity is capitalism's most defining feature, transcending the varied political forms it might take. Our labour power which produces commodities has itself been turned into a commodity and is sold in the marketplace like any other. Although

we live in a world where political ideologies battle it out with each other, capitalism is a global system. It is not defined by those political differences but by its having historically superseded slavery and feudalism.

The commodity is king

The commodity society is a world system in which the working class (that includes you, even if you see yourself as middle-class and educated) must sell its ability to work and produce objects or services in the marketplace for those who own and control the factories, offices, mines, etc. Alienation exists in modern liberal regimes, in the former USSR, in modern China, in the world's many Muslim theocratic states, and in nations run by either left-wing military juntas or right-wing dictators. Alienation transcends all political boundaries, all political differences, and it ravages the minds of all populations of working people without distinction of national or other origin and regardless of the colour of their collar.

As soon as we step into our place of employment, our time is no longer ours. Nor is the object that we produce. Ours is a world where the needs of society are secondary, even though it is one where the ideology of our rulers maintains that

the laws of supply and demand exist to meet them. Ideology is always an upside-down version of both our own experience and the truth. We work because we must earn money to buy the commodities required for our survival, so we sell the only commodity in our possession — our talents, skills, and energies known as labour-power. We do this because everything else is walled off from us: food, clothes, books, medications, offices, factories, land. We live in a prison while desperately believing we are free. Without that belief we would not be able to tolerate our imprisonment.

As prisoners, we live dispossessed of the world we inhabit. We walk streets that are not ours, lined with shops that invite us in to part with our limited money. Shops compete with each other to grab those pieces of paper we carry and to rinse those plastic cards. These pieces of paper and those cards mean everything to them, while we mean nothing. We may be treated like friends by workers trained to provide 'customer satisfaction' but we are really strangers. Here too, appearances are deceptive. They are the mirror image of reality. You walk into a shop where everyone smiles at you, but no one cares about you or, even if they do care, they remain shut in a fake reality, putting on an act that encourages you to

spend your money on their owners' wares. Their care is limited by the hope that their boss will sell enough to keep them employed. These workers are pressured by their bosses to entice you to spend, and with your restricted means you feel pressured having to resist that pressure. There would be no need to tempt anyone if these objects were already ours. There would be no need to feel any pressure at all if all we had to do was to walk into a store and take what we need. In a commodity world, however, we must suffer a psychological stress, and that stress is a key symptom of our alienation. As workers we have only one marketable commodity, labour-power, so the capitalists don't need to coax us to sell it; we'll have to sell it sooner or later if we don't want to starve or become homeless. The community and the commodity are always at odds, each challenging the reality of the other. The days of emperors and feudal landlords have been replaced by the rule of the commodity; tomorrow we hope the community takes its place.

Come Monday

Every Monday, and every morning of the work week, we experience that dreaded anticipation of one more day selling our commodity, our labour power. This is another sign that our work is alien to us. Movies are made about alien invasions which humans join up to resist, but they don't match in scope the reality of the planetary domination of the commodity today as it gobbles up your time, your energy, your health, and the natural world of which you are a part. The *Matrix* may be the best cinematic metaphor for this. Your labour-power, while it is your commodity, is worth nothing to you until you sell it: you are a slave of your very own commodity. It is attached to you like so much dead weight around your ankles. Monday morning blues is the sense of dread that comes with our recognition that we are living the lives of modern slaves. And just as those workers in the shops must feign interest in you with their eyes, and smile as you walk in, you too must work, cognitively feigning harmony amidst disharmony.

You must pretend to fit in, to look happy, to look like you are free, when really only capitalist employers are free. Your band t-shirt, your new shoes, your sharp jacket are all desperate attempts to feel cool, to foster the illusion of your freedom and individuality, even though you know that t-shirt, those shoes, and that jacket are mass-produced. If you recognised your true status and your true predicament, you would find your life just as intolerable as it is to those of us who yearn for freedom now.

Just as you blot out the truth of your mortality, you invest hefty psychological energy in your own personal lie. You work hard to pretend that your work is freely chosen, and you live in a community that is meeting its needs, when the reality of your status and predicament is never far away from your nose. You get a glimmer of that reality each time you pay your rent or mortgage, each time you calculate your savings, each time a country wages war, each time worsening climate change or environmental destruction hits you in another headline, each time the political clowns who run for office beg for your vote. You need to keep this reality firmly out of your awareness for as long as possible. It's depressing (a word that means to push down, as your life is being pushed down or depressed.) So you get lost in your video games and in social media chats, in sport and shopping and other entertainments. Amusements and life are mirror images of each other just like the commodity and the community are. The less real life you live, the more entertainment you feel you need (or are force fed). You know that life is not just breathing, eating, and digesting, that there must be more, but entertainment seems the only way you have of filling up that hole inside, at least temporarily, like a drug.

Everywhere

There is almost nowhere to go in our modern world in which the needs of the commodity do not take priority. You can try to get away to a quiet park for a few hours to enjoy the natural world (itself a vast artificial amusement park created by employed gardeners). You can enjoy a good read, but even then you can't quite forget that you are only temporarily escaping the world outside, a world that is not yours. It's a failed escape, and you are now a failure. Even in that green place, your daily worries about the life you lead, the life of work, bills, prices, savings, are never far from your mind. You are nothing, and the commodity is everything.

You must cope with this alienation. The

commodity world tells you that you must be a rugged individual. It tells you, don't be a ninny who complains, who bursts their bubble; you must be tough; you must not let your alienation bother you or anyone else; stop thinking another world is possible; stop feeling as though this isn't the best possible way for humans to live. Despite everything the commodity world tells you, you are a person with many potentialities, including a potential to create a human-centred world. That is within your power even if you don't identify yourself as a socialist, as a few of us currently do.

In a world of alienation, we have no control over our environment. Commodity society is by nature wasteful. Vast amounts of wealth are extracted from us workers. This is wealth that needs to be banked, sold, exchanged, advertised, invested, and protected. And all that requires a mountain of organisations that each consume precious planetary resources. The gangs who run these rackets in every country also hire workers to protect their fiefdoms. They employ militaries who contribute hugely to environmental despoliation through their waste of resources and their bloody wars. (According to an article from 2022 published in *Inside Climate News*, the US military alone contributes as much to climate change as entire countries the size of Denmark). If we allow ourselves to think about this, it may upset us, but we have no direct control over the problem. Commodity society doesn't care about us or what we think; it only cares about our precious labour-power and what we can produce for our employers with it. Many of us protest commodity society's destruction of nature, and murder of humans, but we only protest because we are powerless and dispossessed. Instead of protesting, it is time for us to build a society of which we feel we are a part, not outsiders as we do now. Such a world is not dedicated to serving the commodity; it is not a world of alienation; it's a world of community, of voluntary action, and one with the simple aim of meeting our needs.

DR WHO



Credit: Adobe Stock

Newport Rising?

LAST MONTH'S *Socialist Standard* contained a listing for an event taking place as part of the Newport Rising festival. It's held every year to commemorate the Chartist uprising of 1839, a large-scale rebellion by workers against their exclusion from the political process and a demand for the right to vote and to have their voices heard. This event was the Newport Radical Bookfair at the Riverfront Theatre and Arts Centre, where the Socialist Party had booked a stall. Unfortunately, just a matter of days before it took place, we were informed by the organiser that our booking had been revoked owing to a ban imposed on stalls for political organisations. We were told that this was due to the event being held in a publicly managed establishment. However, when we enquired further, we were given a different reason, which was that Newport Rising was a registered charity and to allow political organisations to have stalls at its bookfair would compromise its charitable status. When we pointed out that we had been allowed a stall at last year's event, we were told that 'it shouldn't have happened'.

Party members nevertheless attended the bookfair as individuals and, when they did, they found several stalls of a political nature: one, for example, run by the Socialist Medical Association, which is affiliated to the Labour Party; and another seemingly promoting 'trans' ideas but offering a selection of anarchist leaflets and pamphlets, one of which contained the following statement: 'For far too long the masters have convinced us that violence is exclusively their domain, and we have cowered and accepted this as truth. It's about fuckin' time we fight back, and I'll sing the praises of anyone who kills a cop or a military jarhead. Those who end the lives of oppressors should be held in the highest regard as liberators'. So much for the exclusion of politics. We intend to pursue this further with the Newport Rising charity and, if necessary, with the Charity Commission.

Despite this our members who were present on the day were able to hand out some of our leaflets to those entering and leaving the bookfair and to participants on the traditional Torchlit March through the city in the evening which is the culminating event of the celebration of the Chartist uprising of 186 years ago. The text of the leaflet we gave out is reproduced below.



LABOUR HAS FAILED: GIVE SOCIALISM A CHANCE

The Chartists recognised the importance of political power and universal suffrage to enact social change. They rightly saw the vote as the way to political control. Once the workers had the vote, they reasoned, they could use it to send delegates to parliament who would pass laws to improve their social and economic situation. But they soon found, as everyone has found since, that the vote alone cannot alter the capitalist system. It can't change the way the capitalist economic system works, based as it is on minority class ownership of resources and wealth and production for profit.

The last 150 years

For over 150 years now, a majority of the electorate in Britain has been made up of workers in the sense of those who, excluded from ownership of the means to produce wealth, are forced by economic necessity to sell their mental and physical energies to an employer for a wage or salary in order to live. From time to time, as at present, voters have elected Labour governments but, when in office, those governments have always accepted capitalism, at best trying to reform it in various ways. The theory of some who supported Labour was that a series of successive Labour governments would gradually transform capitalism into a more equal society. But this has not happened and Labour is now an avowedly capitalist party, in fact proclaiming itself a 'party of business'.

The Corbyn/Sultana party

Understandably, many who have supported Labour up to now no longer have any faith in it and a new left-wing

party is apparently being set up, with Jeremy Corbyn as figurehead. But if ever it was in government, it would face the same problem as Labour – that of needing to administer a system that exists not to satisfy human needs but to generate profit for the tiny minority. The plain fact is that capitalism just cannot be made to work in any other way than according to its own economic laws that impose themselves on those who run governments as well as on those who run businesses. It is a profit-making system that can only run in the interests of the profit-takers and never in the interests of workers whose labour is the source of profits. No government can overcome these laws and all governments have to apply them or risk provoking economic chaos.

The task now

What is needed is an understanding that capitalism cannot be reformed so as to work in the interest of the majority. That understood, it follows that the only political party worth supporting is one based not on a strategy of trying to tinker with capitalism's effects but on a commitment to abolish it altogether and replace it, in one go, by a society of the common ownership and democratic control of resources with production directly to meet people's needs and not for profit. In a word, socialism.

Once a majority want this, they can use the vote to win political control with a view to carrying out this revolution in the basis of society. The urgent task of socialists is to convince more people that that there is a viable alternative to capitalism - socialism as described above. Hence the need to work to educate and mobilise public support for it. This is the policy we in the Socialist Party have been pursuing since our foundation in 1904.

Obituary – Christopher Butler

CHRISTOPHER (CHRISTY) Butler died in September at the age of 82. Born in Ireland, he was a lifelong socialist and defender of secular education. When he finally escaped from wage-earning more than 20 years ago he established himself in a small town in the rural Vienne region in south-west France. In his living room visitors would notice huge piles of leaflets for the Socialist Party which he enjoyed distributing at demonstrations in the area and occasionally in the Paris region. He had been active in the working-class movement from an early age. He joined the WSPNZ in the early 1970s, taking part in their radio broadcasts and other activities. Before that he had been in the Irish Communist Organisation. When he returned to this part of the world in 1980 he joined the Bolton branch of the SPGB.

Socialist activity is sporadic in France but demonstrations on single issues can be enormous and sustained. French workers are incredibly open to political arguments on the left and Christy was always ready to discuss points at issue. And all this in French.

Christy was very well informed on the history of the party and politics in general. He could more than hold his own in any discussion of the life of James Connolly and he established links with the society which managed the Connolly archive in Ireland. He also made contacts with some of the remaining Wobblies on a trip to the United States. So he was really narked to discover that some leading intellectuals in the French Communist Party had adopted a policy of defending wage-labour (*le salariat*) rather than its abolition. Indeed, Christy tried to get into contact with the

leading historian of Guesdisme to find out why the 'abolish wage-labour' motto had disappeared from membership cards of France's militant C.G.T. union. As a direct result, we found ourselves distributing leaflets on the abolition of wage-labour alongside trade unionists who were defending *le salariat*.

My remaining memory of Christy is when I saw him trying to convince an Irish tourist in Spain of the importance of reading Oscar Wilde's 'Soul of Man under Socialism'. Although I think the young man was mainly interested in relaxing in the sunshine – I have no way of knowing – Christy was doing what he enjoyed the best: making the case for socialism wherever he went.

Our condolences to his family and especially to Clare and Francis his daughters.
M.M.

The Rat, the cage, and capitalism: how environment shapes addiction

IN A YouTube video I watched a few years ago, a group of scientists conducted an experiment involving a rat. The experiment was based on the 'Rat Park' experiment conducted by psychologist Bruce Alexander and colleagues at Simon Fraser University, Canada.

In the first phase, the rat was placed alone in a basic cage. The enclosure contained only a plastic shelter, a chewable object, and an exercise wheel. The rat was provided with two water bottles: one filled with plain water, and the other with water laced with a small amount of cocaine. After several days, the scientists observed that the

rat consistently chose the cocaine-laced water, barely touching the plain alternative.

In the second phase, the same rat was moved to a much larger and more stimulating environment. This new enclosure housed several other rats and was filled with toys and activities. Again, two water bottles were available—one with plain water and the other with a small dose of cocaine. This time, however, the rats, including the one from the earlier phase, showed little interest in the cocaine-laced water and overwhelmingly preferred the plain alternative.

This experiment offers a compelling

metaphor for the impact of social environments on addiction. The first, barren cage can be seen as a symbol of capitalist society— isolated, deprived, and driven by the relentless pursuit of profit. In contrast, the enriched, communal enclosure (the 'rat park' of the title) represents socialism, where the means of production serve human needs rather than capital. Capitalism, by prioritising accumulation over well-being, fosters conditions that can lead to addiction and alienation. Socialism, by centring human needs, offers a much more humane and supportive way of living.

MATTHEW SHEARN

Free Speech – Dear Editors

I WAS quite shocked to read the article about Charlie Kirk in the November issue of the *Socialist Standard* who was murdered on a university campus. The avowed Left is often indifferent about issues around free speech but I was not expecting the same thing to come from the SPGB who have a rich tradition of its defence in both theory and practice. Has the SPGB changed their view on this?

Name and email supplied

Reply: Rest assured that the Socialist Party's position on free speech remains unchanged. We defend (and host) open discussion as essential to the working class's democratic organization. The article did not excuse the violence, but contextualised how groups like Turning Point USA use the cloak of 'free speech' to promote reactionary politics and incite

hostility; including incidents of harassment and intimidation against students, trade unionists and minorities. Actions by TPUSA (and TPUK) show that their defence of 'free speech' is often a cover for silencing opposition and reinforcing existing hierarchies rather than fostering genuine democratic debate. – *Editors*

Capitalism — an irrational system

‘Landowners see more profit in solar farms than growing crops’ read the title of an article in the *Times* (20 October).

‘The largest farm management company in Britain is cancelling 20 per cent of its contracts with landowners because it is becoming harder to make money from arable farming. Industry insiders fear soon-to-be-released farmland could be turned into solar parks, which gives landowners a greater return on their investment.’

Although only landowners can switch from having their land farmed to using it for solar parks, ‘landowners’ is not the entirely accurate word here as it could imply that the management company concerned (the Velcourt Group) is working with those who own the land; in fact, it is with those who farm it whether or not they own it. Some will be landowners who farm their land themselves; others will be tenant farmers who are paying rent to the landlord. So, the ‘returns’ in question are capitalist profits rather than rents paid to landowners.

Land is not used just for growing crops; it can also be used for raising livestock or for growing timber or for quarrying or mining

(or, for that matter, for building houses and factories), depending on the land’s particular characteristics. The article was reporting that investing capital in arable land was, for various reasons, becoming less profitable and that the owners of Velcourt had therefore decided to cut back on their investment in that and to invest in other types of farming.

Capitalism, as an economic system, is based on the resources that society needs to survive being monopolised by a section only of society and being used to produce goods and services for sale with a view to making a profit. Decisions on what, where and how much to produce are made by capitalist enterprises, whether private or state owned, each seeking to make a profit. That, not to meet people’s needs, is the incentive to produce.

Under capitalism productive units do not primarily produce useful things (even if what they produce has to be useful to some person or body, otherwise it wouldn’t sell); what they are essentially doing is seeking to increase the value of the capital they invested in them by making a profit. If those who control the deployment of capital consider that they

can make a bigger profit from investing in some other activity than the particular one they have been investing in, they will withdraw from that and invest in the other.

So it is quite in accordance with the logic and imperatives of capitalism that a capitalist enterprise such as Velcourt should cut back on its investment in an activity that is no longer making enough profit or whose future profit-making is not bright. It is equally logical that the owners of the land should look for other ways of using their land so as to get ‘a greater return’ even if this has nothing to do with agriculture. That’s the way the capitalist economy works.

The change from one line of production to another doesn’t reflect a change in real demand for something, only changes in paying demand. Given that under capitalism about 20 percent of paying demand comes from capitalist enterprises in search of profit — and that that is what drives the economy — and that the smaller your monetary income the less your real needs are taken into account, what results is an irrational use of resources in the sense of not meeting everyone’s needs.

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Manipulated by the **monoform**



THE MASS media is a 'systematically organised, one-way path from the producer to the spectator. Constantly. Constantly. And that is not communication. We should try and find some other word for it. And it's certainly manipulation', according to film-maker and theorist Peter Watkins, who has died at the age of 90. His words come from a 2001 video interview (tinyurl.com/2uhchat6) following the release of his film *La Commune*, through which he aimed to use the medium of film-making to communicate, rather than just present one interpretation. The film re-enacts the Paris Commune of 1871 and was made in a less hierarchical, more democratic way than found in the mass media's usual output, by having non-professional actors improvising scenes and shown discussing the views of both their characters and themselves.

La Commune was the last film Watkins made, after which he honed his theories about how the media industry functions for his 2004 book *The Media Crisis*. His films, in one way or another, focus on conflict between states and between classes. Their subject matter includes nuclear war (*The War Game*, *The Journey*), oppression of political activists (*Punishment Park*, *Evening Land*) and historical flashpoints (*Culloden*, *La Commune*). His two productions of the late 1960s, *Privilege* and *The Gladiators*, share the theme of the elite using the media to divert and channel working class dissent. These films employ a setting of the near-future to examine this, while his theories about film-making investigate how this happens in real life.

Watkins argued that the mass audio-visual media (MAVM) industry moulds the reactions of its audience through the style and arrangement of its products. He called the prevailing template for films and programmes the 'Monoform'. This is defined as 'a formatted and repetitive TV language form of rapidly edited and

fragmented images accompanied by a dense bombardment of sound, all held together by the classical narrative structure' (*Notes on the Media Crisis*, Peter Watkins, 2010: tinyurl.com/3887f694). This is a familiar description of dramas and documentaries with predictably linear plots, scenes too short to explore details and mood-accentuating soundtracks. This style is particularly noticeable in the common practice of documentaries starting with a quick summary of the programme to come, reducing what could be a complex subject into a couple of minutes (before then reducing the subject into only forty-or-so minutes for the rest of the duration). Watkins continues 'Because of its extreme rapidity (especially the version developed over the past 20 years [ie, from circa 1990]), the Monoform gives no time for interaction, reflection or questioning [...]. It is organised to create pre-determined responses, which means that before the audience sees any Monoform film or television programme, its producers already know how they (the audience) will react – or at least such is the intention' (ibid). In emphasising how the format or approach adopted by film-makers can be used to push an agenda, Watkins is echoing Canadian theorist Marshall McLuhan, who said 'the medium is the message' in his 1964 book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. As the MAVM is owned by corporations, their films and programmes are intended to reinforce acceptance of the social framework of which the MAVM is a part, as well as make a profit for their shareholders. The Monoform followed by the MAVM's products reinforces this acceptance by discouraging critical thinking about that social framework. Here, Watkins' views have similarities with those of Frankfurt School luminary Herbert Marcuse, who described how capitalism utilises the mass media as a means of social control, including by stifling anti-

capitalist thought.

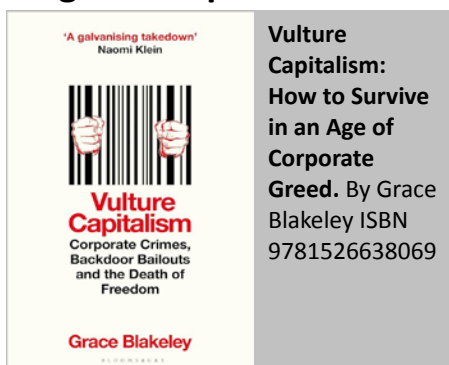
A film or programme's style, music and editing support the priorities of the media industry even if its content appears to criticise society. Watkins says 'The fact that many filmmakers and media intellectuals believe that a radical subject or a powerful theme in themselves create an 'alternative' cinema is another paradox. In most cases it is only the content that could be considered alternative: a radical theme per se does not challenge the over-riding problem of hierarchical form, process and structure. In fact, it only confuses the issue, and is a prime reason why critical thinking on the role of the MAVM has not developed beyond a limited point' (ibid). This may explain why films and TV programmes haven't prompted truly radical political action, even when they often depict capitalism's failings.

Another way that programme-making is shaped by its capitalist context is what Watkins called 'the universal clock'. This refers to how television shows are made in uniform lengths to allow time for adverts within and between them on a fixed schedule. The prerogatives of the marketing industry are important enough to limit the running times of programmes, chiefly those on traditional broadcast channels. YouTube has its own norms for how advertising affects content, with commercials intruding upon videos mid-sentence, and vloggers interrupting their spiel to promote their sponsors, both in a crass way which makes the scheduling of TV commercial breaks almost seem polite in comparison.

Watkins gave a cogent, class-conscious account of how the media industry's role in capitalist society impacts on the nature of its products. Films and TV programmes project the hierarchical structure of capitalism through the way they are edited and paced, regardless of their content. The template followed by MAVM output is intended to present a one-sided view, reinforcing acceptance of the status quo and discouraging critical discussion among the audience. In his own films, such as *La Commune*, Watkins tried to counter these tendencies through his collaborative, improvisational methods, with the consequence that his work became unattractive to major studios, distributors and broadcasters. His marginalisation, to some extent, proves his theories right. He has left us with not only a set of challenging, passionate films but also a valuable contribution to explaining how capitalism's media industry has to operate, by manipulating us, its consumers.

MIKE FOSTER

Age of Corporate Greed



The aim of this book is to demonstrate its idea that 'Life under capitalism means living in a planned economy, while being told you are free'. As such, the author makes a strong case that capitalism is not defined by 'free markets' but by the existence of a class of owners and a class of workers.

As the author notes, most of this is not new thinking, and that she is drawing together well-known texts in academic circles and bringing them to a popular print market. Indeed, a concise bibliography, rather than scattering references in end notes, would have been useful.

Using many examples, such as Boeing, WeWork, Blackrock, she shows the mix of personal perfidy and structural power that characterises contemporary capitalism. She states 'Large powerful firms are able, to a significant extent, to ignore the pressure exerted on them by the market and instead act to shape market conditions themselves'. As evidence, she shows the efforts these powerful firms go to control and influence political institutions to achieve these ends.

The nub of her case is that these corporations are practically monopolies. Monopoly does not mean the complete elimination of competition, but it does mean that price is not the only route to capitalists competing. She notes that monopolies appear not to have a totally free hand on pricing, and would rather cheapen the costs of labour they employ, rather than price-gouge the market.

This is a point she under-develops, and she could have noted that the class competition will always remain within capitalism: the capitalist class collectively exploiting the working class, and then fighting among themselves by various means (legal, financial, criminal) to get a cut of the profits raised. But this would have blunted her emphasis on monopoly capitalism.

She ends by looking at examples of 'democratic planning', finding real world examples of alternatives to the corporate capitalist planning. These range from Allende's 'Project Cybersyne' in Chile, to Preston council, Jackson Missouri and

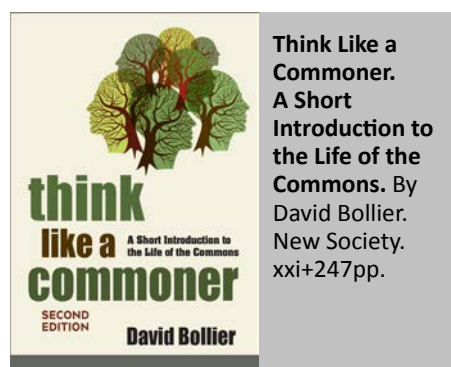
Blaenau in Wales. Unfortunately for her argument, many of these examples rely on isolated powerful individuals, rather than mass movement; but her central point stands that there are real world examples of attempts within capitalism to engage in democratic planning that show how a different world could be organised.

She does acknowledge that, 'More planning does not, then, equal less capitalism. The only way to get less capitalism is to constrain the power of capital,' and that political action would be required to attain that (let alone abolish it).

The book is engaging and entertaining, and provides a useful contribution and perspective to building the case for common ownership. She is commendably clear, in her conclusion, that widespread consciousness of the need for change and our capacity to organise society for ourselves is needed in order to make the change.

P.S.

Life of the Commons



The premise of this book is that, in order to counter the way the society we live in, with its market, its competition, its states and its nationalisms, pulls us apart from each other, we must spread those forms of community and togetherness in art, leisure, agriculture, technology, environmental care and education that are already practised in a grassroots way by many across the world. With clarity and persuasive gusto the author insists that the non-hierarchical, socially cooperative activities, which he calls 'commoning', are, while little recognised, attuned to core human values and correspond to, as he puts it, 'a deep human propensity to cooperate'. They offer, he argues, a practical antidote to the ills of capitalism, a way to mitigate its collapsing ecosystems, its dog-eat-dog ethic, its savage inequalities and much else. He sees such activities as residing in, for example, land trusts, community gardens, indigenous practices of reciprocity, town festivals, open-source learning, collaborative

web initiatives like Creative Commons, blood donation systems, workers' cooperatives, mutual aid networks, indeed anywhere at all where people gather to share and cooperate with one another and to practise reciprocally rewarding relationships without cash nexus domination. The people who practise this he refers to as 'commoners' and the totality of their activity as the 'Commonverse'. This, he claims, 'has exploded in size and variety and works 'outside of both market capitalism and state power'. It is, he claims 'a post-growth world powered by peer governance, respectful engagement with the earth, creative participations and fairness', and 'stewards wealth for everyone's benefit'.

This is obviously a big claim. Does it stand up to scrutiny? Well, what it perceives and proposes is certainly tempting. Steeped as David Bollier is in knowledge and experience both of the capitalist world of markets and states ('the market-state leviathan', as he calls it) and in the history and practices of commoning which are seen as their diametrical opposite, he offers an exhilarating guide to the way humans have managed, and still manage, to fight back and to work together in an egalitarian, empathetic and interconnected manner within the interstices of a system that grinds them down. And he paints a compelling and optimistic picture of this and of the future possibilities of the 'commons' and of the 'bottom-up' ways it can compete with, and perhaps ultimately take over from, the wastefulness, inefficiency, inequality and rank cruelty of the system of production for profit.

Sadly, however, it is not a picture that a visitor from another planet experiencing the earth for the first time would be likely to recognise. They would be more likely to see the rule of capital as the overwhelming force across the planet and commoning as a relatively minor and irregular presence. The author's reply to such a criticism, judging from the thrust of his book, might well be that commoning is far more widespread than any cursory glance might suggest. As he sees it, 'the explosion of commons-based initiatives popping up around the world is creating powerful synergies and opening up rich possibilities for change'. And he sees it as having a future in cumulative and ideally local developments which will force those who currently rule the roost to curb their excesses and adopt more associative and inclusive policies which will make society more equal.

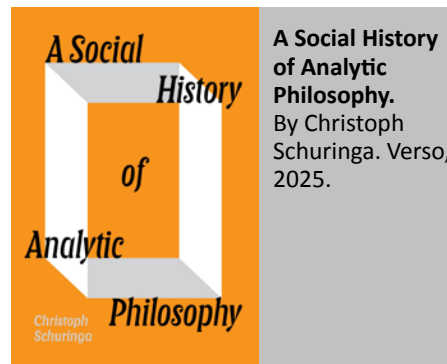
But herein lies the rub. While wishing for 'postcapitalism' and the end of the

current regime of markets and states that humanity lives under, the author does not really see any way out of it. Despite many harsh words about the brutalities of the market and its 'competitive individualism' (eg, 'In the service of private profitmaking, the market machine appropriates our lands, forests and water, genes, seed and lifeforms'; 'Markets tend to care primarily about financial returns and see everything else ... as secondary and discretionary'), he actually sees no real alternative to the market and appears to resign himself to its continued existence. He seems to somehow think it can be put on the right track, becoming more benign and less overwhelmingly anti-human and ecocidal by the spread of a 'parallel' commons economy based on sharing instead of profit. In his own words: 'Private property rights are not necessarily hostile to functioning commons. Indeed I believe the two can be mutually compatible and even work hand in glove.' In a similar way, despite his repeated condemnation of the state which he see (correctly) as an executive body for capitalist interests ('joined at the hip', as he puts it), he ends up declaring that 'state regulation is absolutely necessary', 'state power is not going away' and 'much will depend on finding creative ways to integrate the commons into state power'.

Yet, it is clear from much of what Daniel Bollier writes that his preference, like that of socialists, would be a world of voluntary and cooperative endeavour where each individual can live a life allowing them to satisfy their needs without stress or compulsion and to exercise their nature-given talents for the benefit of the community. Yet he does not foresee or advocate the only kind of social organisation in which this will be possible – one based on the end of private property, the state, the market and the money and buying and selling system through which it operates. Although some time ago, he edited a book entitled *A World Beyond Market and State* (wealthofthecommons.org), the indications from the current volume are that he regards that 'world' as unrealistic or at least too far into the future to contemplate. We would view it differently and would regard abandoning that idea to focus instead on the unfeasible 'half-way house' of a less harsh capitalism as a sure way of pushing it as far as possible into the future.

HKM

Social philosophy?



This book describes the social history of philosophers, not philosophy. It is an interesting, blow by blow account of Western philosophers and their schools, mainly around the turn of the 20th century. But it takes the position of philosophy, that the activity is valid – that there is such a thing as philosophy to be found. This is the most socially historical aspect of the book – that the author, a philosophy professor, must start by accepting uncritically that professing philosophy is a valid thing to do. As Upton Sinclair noted, 'It is difficult to get a man to understand something, when his salary depends on not understanding it'.

In the Western tradition, a society of elite men, nominally confronting each other as equals beneath constitutional monarchs or in republics, felt capable of eyeballing God from their armchair or bathtub. Western philosophy is the sublime arrogance of thinking that one is one, and one can 'know' – that, for example, if all one has is sense perception, then all that exists is sense perception, rather than saying what a less privileged person might say, which is that you just don't know and should instead just write down what you see as such. Just as the hand mill gives you feudalism and the steam mill industrial

capitalism, so the ruling ideas of that epoch are echoes of the experience of elite life under these conditions.

This book contains much material that could be used for such a study of the social history of philosophy: but by taking philosophy seriously, it is not that study. Its relentless disdain of the Bloomsbury group, for example, is just gossip, while the real differences in background of this group, and Cambridge scholars, and Viennese scholars, and women trying to enter the debate, could have been measured against the social conditions of the various states in order to gain real insight. In short, to write this work adequately, one would first have to break with philosophy. Until this is done, all that remains is a discussion of events of the day, and a skeleton description of this philosophical history instead of the real animal.

In the last chapter (the book really needs a conclusion), Schuringa describes one of the most infamous encounters of Marxism with philosophy, that of G.A. Cohen's *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*. In it can be seen everything that is wrong with using analytical philosophy to describe Marx's work. The background of Cohen and the rest of the September group, and their encounters with Marxism: the group's intellectual trajectory, under pressure of the universities they were in, their peers, publication, the development of the idea that 'dialectics is bullshit', and repudiation of Marxism; all would provide data for a fascinating case study, but receive a mere two pages. But this would be to question the validity of philosophical thought, which in the introduction Schuringa says he refuses to do. As such, it's not clear with which Marxist tradition he is in line. Certainly not one that Marx could inhabit.

SJW



I.S. stand for – confusion

"SOCIALIST WORKER", the weekly paper of the International Socialists, regularly publishes a statement of their main principles called "What We Stand For". We would expect this organization to stand for Socialism. Surprisingly, Socialism is nowhere defined in the statement and it only appears as a word upon which various people and organizations have placed many different interpretations. Still it is possible to get some idea of what IS stand for by a careful reading of their statement. It is also possible to get very confused. For instance, the statement starts off: "We believe that socialism can only be achieved by the independent action of the working class."

Whereas, the last part says they are "For the building of a mass workers' revolutionary party . . . which can lead the working class to power . . ." (our emphasis both times)

Now, unless the workers are supposed to be getting power for something other than Socialism, it is simply ridiculous to say that someone who is being led is taking independent action. Could IS tell us which statement they stand for and which is this week's deliberate mistake? It would also be interesting to know just how large a "mass" the workers of this "revolutionary party" are

to be. Presumably, if it attracted too many workers the working class would be leading themselves!

The second part of the statement reads:

"We believe in overthrowing capitalism, not patching it up or gradually trying to change it. We therefore support all struggles of workers against capitalism and fight to break the hold of reformist ideas and leaders."

We would wholeheartedly agree with this although we wonder if they only mean reformist leaders in the last bit. However, IS don't appear to agree with this part of the statement themselves. Later on they say they are: "Against unemployment, redundancies and lay-offs. Instead we demand five days' work or five days' pay, and the 35-hour week. For nationalization without compensation under workers' control."

What is this if it is not an appeal to patch up capitalism? No form of nationalization ever has or could solve the problem of unemployment in capitalism. This is a strange way to fight reformist ideas.

(Socialist Standard, December 1974)

Action Replay

Conversion Problems

THERE ARE currently four professional rugby union clubs in Wales: Cardiff, Dragons, Ospreys and Scarlets (the last three playing in Newport, Swansea and Llanelli respectively). The Welsh Rugby Union (WRU), however, has described this situation as unsustainable. This is partly on financial grounds, with Cardiff going into temporary administration earlier this year and being taken over by the WRU. Also, the Welsh international men's side (once one of the world's top teams) has been faring very badly, losing eighteen matches in a row.

The WRU originally proposed a system of just two clubs, each with a men's and women's team, featuring mainly players who are qualified to represent Wales. But this was then changed to three teams, one in Cardiff, one in the east (Dragons) and one in the west, which would in effect mean only one of Ospreys and Scarlets surviving, whether by means of a merger or a take-over. All this is complicated by the situation concerning Cardiff, with various parties potentially interested in buying the club.

The second tier of Welsh rugby, the semi-professional Super Rygbi Cymru, has called for more investment in their own league and also in women's rugby and the academy structure. With just three full-time clubs, players from the SRC would

find it harder to step up to the higher level. Talk of investment is easy, but actually finding the funds is something else. Rugby generally is struggling financially, with even the English game losing £43m last year.

Elsewhere in rugby union there has been a proposed breakaway global competition called Rugby 360 (R360). It is fronted by Mike Tindall, a former England international married to one of the king's nieces. The idea would be for there to be a number of teams or franchises – eight for men, four for women – who would play in major cities around the world, with matches scheduled to fit in with

international and other commitments. R360 claim to have agreements with nearly two hundred men players and have made offers to some players in the recent Women's World Cup.

But they may have problems putting all this into practice. Most national unions have ruled that anyone who signs up for R360 would be barred from playing international games. Their statement said, 'The R360 model, as outlined publicly, rather appears designed to generate profits and return them to a very small elite.' Sounds just like an ordinary capitalist business, then.

PB



Credit: Getty Images

World Socialist Movement Online Meetings

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

December 2025 Events

World Socialist Movement online meetings

Friday 5 December 7.30pm

Have you heard the news?

Discussion on recent events.

Friday 12 December 7.30pm

**How the capitalist class came to power (eventually):
class struggle in medieval England.**

History is the history of class struggle, and before the capitalist class came to power, they had to fight against the dominant feudal class: this talk looks at a case study of commoners revolt in Medieval London and how it related to capitalism coming into being.

Speaker: Bill Martin

Friday 19

December 7.30pm

**Evolution and the
God Delusion**

Arguments against Jesuits
and JWs.

Speaker: Adam Buick



Socialist Party

Physical Meetings

Saturday 13 December 11am to 6pm

Book Fayre. New and second-hand books, speciality coffee, hot chocolate and music. Talk at 3pm on "The Romantics' Critique of Capitalism".

Speaker: Johnny Mercer.

Socialist Party premises, 52 Clapham High St, London SW4 7UN (nearest tube: Clapham North. Nearest overground: Clapham High Street).

CARDIFF

**Street Stall Every Saturday 1pm-3pm
(weather permitting)**

Capitol Shopping Centre, Queen Street
(Newport Road end).

A nuestros lectores hispanoparlantes

¿Sabe que ya existe un sitio web que explica los argumentos básicos en contra del capital y en favor del socialismo mundial? Por favor, consúltelo aquí www.worldsocialist.org/?lang=es-ES.

Capital reading group

Make a New Year's resolution to learn about the basics of Marx's economics! New *Capital* volume 1 online reading group starting in January. Contact spgb.ed@worldsocialism.org

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.

Bob Dylan in Swansea

I'VE BEEN a Bob Dylan fan for a long time. His music is top of my list, as it is of many people's. I've seen him perform live a number of times – in London, Manchester, Cardiff and Birmingham. So why wasn't I jumping for joy when my local newspaper carried the story that the 84-year old legend was soon to do three concerts (not one but three) in my own little home town – and at a venue a walking distance from where I live? In fact, not only was I not jumping for joy, I didn't even want to go. Why not? Well, because, as I see it, Dylan has been going downhill musically for a long time – since the late 1990s in fact. The bits and pieces of some of the recent live performances by him I've seen on the web have seemed especially dire. So why would I risk spoiling the fond memories I had of him at his best? Don't get me wrong. He's still one hell of a wordsmith and, though there was much questioning of his award of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2016, I was less surprised than many. But my perception was that the current package couldn't be anything but a disappointment – even if the many confirmed 'bobcats' attending wouldn't see it like that.

I relayed news of the concerts to my son, a great Dylan enthusiast too. His quick reply was 'We're going and I'll pay'. So I relented, and on an evening in early November we left the house and walked the relatively short distance along the sea front to see the first concert of the Swansea Arena leg of Dylan's 'Rough and Rowdy Ways' tour.

What was it like? To be frank, better than I expected. 'Mixed' might be the right word – and in more senses than one. Firstly, because he mixed songs from his most recent album (ie 'Rough and Rowdy Ways') with a selection from previous albums. Secondly because most of the songs he performed from that latest album could, in my view, only be described as dirge-like (and to make it worse some of them seeming to go on forever), while his earlier numbers were well performed on the whole, even if with almost unrecognisable arrangements compared to the original versions. But then Dylan has always been known for going against the grain, despite the fact that, in the content of his songs, any explicitly anti-establishment or 'protest' matter is way back in the past. And it must be said that his voice



is still strong and that he was, as always in his concerts, backed by a group of exceptionally good musicians. The other thing is that the sell-out audience of 3,000 – to me a surprisingly diverse gathering in terms of age (teenagers to aged hippies) and gender (very much a 50-50 split) – absolutely loved it. 'What an amazing evening', one of them who'd come all the way from West Yorkshire posted on a Facebook page the following day. And a good many others had clearly come from afar. Before the start, on our row alone, we chatted with fans from Wrexham, Plymouth, Bristol and Milford Haven. Then at 8 o'clock sharp Dylan and his band walked on, the music started and, after performing for a full two hours, with no breaks or banter between songs, they stood up and walked off. The crowd stood up too and clapped and cheered and shouted for more. But they didn't get it and the lights came on.

The show over, the question I had to ask myself was whether this, at bottom, was just another example of the way the entertainment industry sells us thrills (often meaningless) to patch over the uniformity and stress of the wage and salary system most of us are compelled to spend our lives in? Was it part of that alienation from mutually cooperative activity which is inherently an obsession with celebrities (people we do not know personally and we may have little in common with) and which is the direct opposite of a constructive use of the power and potential we all have to think and create for ourselves and to work usefully and collaboratively with others?

There's no doubt that Dylan is some

kind of hero to many of those who go to his concerts. And it must be said that he has something unique to offer that makes people listen to him and want to go. Many of his lyrics present ideas and images which, while often anything but immediately decipherable and sometimes downright puzzling, do at least give food for thought and reflection. But it's the worship of the man rather than of his work that, like celebrity worship in general, I see as questionable and as a symptom of the underlying follow-your-leader mentality that capitalism instils and educates people for. You can like (or love) the music and the lyrics, yes. But to put the individual who produces it on some kind of rarified pedestal seems to me part of that 'superior being' idea, which is seen at its worst in the kind of cult worship to be found around 'charismatic' figures, whether in entertainment, in sport or in politics.

What's for certain, however, is that in the kind of world socialists campaign to see established – one without leaders or led, governments or governed and based on common ownership of resources and democratic organisation and decision making – each individual will have the time and space to cultivate their own talents freely and, while no doubt admiring the talents and achievements of others, will be unlikely to see them as heroes. Rather in fact each person will have the confidence to be their own hero.

HOWARD MOSS