

# THE SOCIALIST STANDARD

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Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

## Your Party: exciting new direction?



**Also:** Socialism cannot come from the barrel of a gun  
Abolish the wages system  
Why we can't support Your Party

Another New Year party  
Income tax and the wage struggle  
A confused professor  
Party News – YP- Labour 2.0?



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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'

# New year, same shit...

LAST YEAR, 2025, could only be considered a success story for capitalism in the sense that the world didn't end in total destruction. For many though, it was a disaster. Think Gaza, where survivors starve among the ruins after a genocidal slaughter that will only cause further wars. No wonder states don't want to pay to rebuild Gaza, just to see it levelled again. Think Darfur and South Sudan, with massacres committed by the Rapid Support Force using weapons purchased by the United Arab Emirates from western states including the UK, and allegedly donated as part of an arms-for-gold deal. The gold mines of Darfur have been a ghastly resource curse. The locals have paid with their lives so that capitalist deals get done.

Two corrupt power blocs on the European landmass continued putting human beings into the meat grinder of war, while the very people elected or appointed to serve the Ukrainian people instead trousered over a hundred million dollars intended to protect energy infrastructure and keep the winter lights on. This is what nationalism gets you.

Workers die in trenches while the bosses find ways to get rich out of it.

Many other wars got less media coverage, including the ongoing multi-sided slaughter in Myanmar, a real-world example of the Hobbesian 'war of all against all'. When a big earthquake struck the country in March, killing around 5,000 people, some rebel groups called for a ceasefire as they sent aid workers into affected areas. The military junta, according to reports, had no such humanitarian concerns and instead bombed and strafed the aid workers.

Despite glimmers of hopeful news as Generation Z protesters overthrew a brutal regime in Nepal, world politics in 2025 seemed to be all about tearing up of the rules-based order, led with orgiastic zeal by Donald Trump and his coterie of talentless sycophants. Seeing the world's politicians cravenly kissing this man's feet in the hope of favours was stomach-turning, and it didn't work anyway. The far-right in almost every country has been given a huge boost as this deluded Caligula lays waste to every human principle of fairness and decency, merit and reason, equality

and environmental safety. No capitalist politician is ever going to 'fix' capitalism, but some seem determined to make it worse. The name of Trump may come to be spat on by posterity as a loathsome icon of narcissism, 'grab 'em by the pussy' sexism, and kleptocratic greed. He's already being sued over his stupid ballroom, so maybe that will be demolished too.

But in a way Trump has done the world a favour, by ripping off the civilised veneer and showing everyone what capitalism really is, instead of what it pretends to be. It was never a rules-based order. It's always been 'might equals right' and screw the little guy.

Meanwhile over in the UK, the fractured left try once again to unite around a vague wish-list of reforms aimed at making capitalism just a tiny bit less awful. What they should be doing is calling for the end of capitalism, because that's the only thing that will work. Instead they clamber back on the carousel horse of reformism to go round one more time, learning nothing, changing nothing, in a perpetual triumph of hope over experience. This year, if you can find a way, help us get the message across: end capitalism, before it ends us.

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# The magic gadget IRL

30 YEARS ago in 1996, some were learning to use email, home computers and the embryonic worldwide web, but most families still shopped in the high street, looked up numbers in the phone book and watched ‘terrestrial’ telly together in the sitting room. Kids who wanted alternative amusement ended up hanging out with mates on park benches or outside supermarkets in the winter cold. Gay teens had no local community of peers to turn to. Neither did those with hobbies, or growing-pain problems. For them, the world in real life (IRL) was limited and limiting.

But, IRL, there was also no FOMO, no sexting, no doxing, no doomscrolling, no cyberstalking or cyberbullying, no revenge porn or ‘nudifying’ of classmates, and no pro-suicide chatrooms. Smartphones and social media (SM) have revolutionised the childhood experience, and not necessarily in a good way, as BBC Radio 4 reported (7 December): ‘Alongside the widespread adoption of smartphones has come a tidal wave of adolescent anxiety, depression, loneliness, and a spike in suicides’. Now Australia has banned access to ten of the biggest SM sites for under-16s. Communications Minister Annika Wells explains: ‘Teenage addiction was not a bug, it was a design feature, and on 10 December there are going to be withdrawal symptoms. [...] With one law, we can protect Generation Alpha from being sucked into purgatory by predatory algorithms described by the men who created the feature as “behavioural cocaine”’ (tinyurl.com/4pps7x2).

Many countries now ban phone use in schools. Australia started doing this back in 2020, with support from teachers and parents alike. All claimed a degree of success. However the bans were not well coordinated, and subjective reports of greater engagement and improved mental health may be the placebo effect at work (tinyurl.com/2m4aw3cd). A Birmingham University study looking at 1,227 students in 30 secondary schools found no evidence of changes in grades, amount of sleep, class behaviour, or even time spent on phones (tinyurl.com/2z2tbdbw).

Australia’s latest action, with popular support, could trigger a global cascade of similar legislation. SM firms already face a landmark US trial this month (tinyurl.com/3wbvs4r6). China, with basilisk totalitarian vigilance, uses spyware to restrict SM use and game playing by its youth, with a 40-minute daily limit for SM and 3 hours gaming per week. The UK 2023 Online Safety Act (OSA)

instead demands that SM companies take ‘reasonable steps’ to protect children. Good luck with that. SM lawyers will have a field day.

It’s not just teens. Ofcom estimates that 1 in 4 UK children aged between 5 and 7 have a smartphone (tinyurl.com/3a3nuuxz). Parents say they buy these phones for safety reasons to do with the child being contactable and trackable (tinyurl.com/54s4uwsc). But satellite-tracking a five-year-old is not the way to keep them safe. In truth, overworked adults managing multiple jobs and kids may well find the magic gadget of infinite games and videos hard to resist, given that it shuts their child up like nothing else and besides, if all the other kids have one, their child runs the risk of being victimised for looking poor.

Radio 4 interviewees speculate that the Australian ban could be a useful research opportunity. That’s if it works, but it probably won’t. One 13-year-old got round the ban in less than five minutes (tinyurl.com/2r39hs85). And if one kid can do it, they all will, because of peer pressure, and because the industry wants to lock them in, not out, and because it will regard regulatory fines as the paltry cost of doing business. The new OSA age-verification rules for porn sites are also probably doomed. There has been a huge increase in downloads of VPN apps which hide the user’s IP address. With a conservatively estimated 240,000 online porn sites, Ofcom regulators face an uphill struggle to ensure compliance. So far they’ve taken action against just 70, leading insiders to argue that the new rules are effectively unenforceable (tinyurl.com/25aeytyv).

And then there is the law of unintended consequences which produced this generational mental health crisis in the first place. Regulating the top SM sites might end up funnelling users to even worse places, like regulation-exempt gaming chatrooms, notorious as extremist rabbit-holes.

But, one might argue, why pussyfoot

around imploring SM firms to take responsibility, why not just ban smartphones for kids altogether? The UK’s Education Select Committee last year recommended exactly that (tinyurl.com/4vmvmsnm). But capitalist governments have bigger things to worry about, and unlike China, are generally leery of voter blowback for ‘nanny-statism’.

Even so, some young self-styled neo-Luddites are opting to downsize to ‘dumbphones’ that have no social media, with a view to clawing back their free time. As one manufacturer puts it, SM entrepreneurs are obsessed with monopolising their users’ engagement time, whereas users should be saying ‘What about me? What about *my* time?’ He continues: ‘The problem is not the device, it’s the business model: the attention economy. Every free app, every social media platform, every browser, is trying to maximize engagement so they can make money collecting data and categorizing people into different groups so they can sell it to advertisers’ (tinyurl.com/y3r2w6ru).

Unfortunately for neo-Luddites, dumbphones offer a near-zero margin, so tech firms ‘have little incentive to cater to dumbphone users, whose revenue potential is relatively miniscule – that is, if they can even make the economics of manufacturing the devices work at all’ (tinyurl.com/exd6h3hc).

It’s a tragic indictment of capitalism that social media started by connecting people, and is now arguably complicit in global disinformation and child abuse. Now, encouraged by Trump, SM firms are even ditching their fact-checkers. Perhaps Gen Z parents, having seen the damage for themselves, will refuse to allow their Gen Alpha kids to go through it. The bigger long-term tragedy for Gen Alpha, whether they’re on social media or not, is that their future IRL will be one of relentless capitalist exploitation and wage slavery. If we really want to stop not just child abuse, but human abuse, abolishing capitalism IRL is the only way.

**PJS**

(Facebook review, see page 20)



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# Dear Editors

## Are business and trade inevitable?

I LIKED the short story (*Socialist Standard* September) even if it was a bit contrived. What this was called in other places in the world before and the decade after the war was industrial sabotage and the offenders would be given a safe passage to a labour camp or shot as an example. Now it's approved government policy in certain countries.

What this does is waste material and man power/labour. It is a pointless activity. What we need are businesses that produce goods to last and to sell other types of goods so that they are never short of work. Also profit by whatever support service is necessary to maintain product longevity. There is competition and there is just plain stupidity.

Business or trade will not and cannot cease whatever type of government we choose to have or win by armed force. It's a matter of maximising trade within countries and between countries, maximising the general benefits. Business must never again run its own affairs. It should have a non-cabinet minister within the wider Trade and Industry Department. Government has a wide range of responsibilities. It isn't only business that serves the people and country. Finance and Taxation and Regulation and everything in fact is to serve not dictate to government. Government is the servant of the whole people.

**Elijah Traven, Hull**

**Reply:** You appear to believe that business and trade are inevitable. This is a common view and understandable given that our entire experience today is one of buying and selling (trading). This assumption, however, is only true of societies which organise themselves around certain private property relations. And these private property relations are not inevitable. Given our modern technological ability to provide for the world's needs they are not even currently necessary.

In modern capitalist societies we have to engage in buying and selling to satisfy most of our needs. This is a recent development over the last few hundred years. Not so long ago buying and selling formed only a small part of most people's economic activity. The majority of those who lived by their work were self-sufficient, and only traded their small surpluses for a few items they did not themselves produce. Neither, at this time, did most people sell their labour power to others in return for a wage. To be sure, trading has existed in many societies since states first appeared some six millennia ago, but not in all. Many societies before and since have existed without private property relations and therefore without any buying and selling. These societies had quite different forms of organisation from those we are familiar with in our own world.

The way forward for the working class today is not private property which produces a multitude of problems for the majority, but common ownership and the free association of all people. Only in these circumstances can we eliminate the negative consequences that capitalism so reliably produces and which are so often mistakenly assigned to 'human nature'. Without capitalism, our current experience of conflict, exploitation, economic instability, the enormous waste of both resources and human labour, the multitude of insecure, unfulfilled lives, the ever present threat and actuality of mechanised warfare and the inability to solve our common problems as one global people, could all become things of the past.

You mention labour camps and the practice of shooting people for engaging in the production of goods designed to have a restricted lifespan – planned obsolescence. You seem to be referring here to states such as the Soviet Union and China which were or are ruled by authoritarian political parties calling themselves socialist or communist. Societies of this kind, just like those in the West, are founded on private property relationships. They trade internally and on the world market. Their goal, like that of Western capitalist societies, is to accumulate capital. While it is true that countries with authoritarian governments and with state control of

capital are more directly able to suppress destructive business practices such as the use of planned obsolescence, we see no evidence that this kind of society is sufficient to overcome the multitude of pressures that capitalism imposes on the working class or upon humanity. Indeed, they add problems of their own. Moreover, as the EU is currently demonstrating, Western style capitalist governments are capable of suppressing these practices, at least in part, whenever they threaten to harm the future of capitalist interests more generally.

Capitalism is capable of functioning under a variety of governmental types. Eliminate capitalism however, and government loses its primary function. There is no need for it to continue to exist. So we don't start by asking what kind of government we want. We start by asking how we want to relate to each other as human beings, and how we want to produce the things we all need. We can then ask: given our current circumstances, what kind of society can we create to meet our needs? The answer is that we can do a lot better than what we have at present.

We are glad you liked the article. You say, though, that you found its short story form 'a bit contrived'. We can agree. All prose forms are contrivances of one kind or another, including those of conventional articles in magazines like the *Socialist Standard*. In this respect, the difference between them is that we are more familiar with some written forms than others and take their contrivances for granted. The short story form of the article in question was in fact based on an incident and two conversations that took place in the real world. The article was, in fact, a slice of real life. The virtue of this kind of storytelling is that it allows us to connect the way a capitalist economy actually works with everyday life as we experience it. This is part of the *Socialist Standard's* purpose: to witness and explain the often less obvious workings of a capitalist economy, its businesses and its trading economy, for those of us who currently have to sell their labour power for a wage or a salary – *Editors*

# The best laid schemes

BEFORE THE budget on 26 November speculation was rife as to what might be in it. In opposition Rachel Reeves, as Shadow Chancellor, had promised that the priority of a future Labour government would be growth, growth, growth.

But what is ‘growth’? She seems to mean a growth in Gross Domestic Product which is a measure of the inflation-adjusted price of all the goods and services produced in a year. The trouble is that this is not something that a government can bring about. As she herself pointed out in her budget speech, ‘private investment is the lifeblood of economic growth’. So, her plan is to create the best conditions for private investment for profit, one of which in her view is government investment in infrastructure projects. This, however, has to be paid for. As she doesn’t want to rely too much on borrowing she has had to increase taxes. Not that increased government investment will necessarily encourage more private investment; it might for a short while but in the end the only encouragement is the prospect of making a profit.

Capitalism is a system of production for profit where the aim is not growth as such

but making profits which, when reinvested, bring about an increase in the production of wealth. It is a result of what Marx called ‘the accumulation of capital’.

Marx himself pointed out that, when it occurs, the more rapid the accumulation of capital, the more jobs there are and the higher are wages due to employers competing for workers. These days, it would also mean an increase in tax income for governments. Reeves seemed to be making the same point when she described ‘economic growth’ as ‘the best means to improve wages, create jobs, and support public services’.

But there is a difference. Marx never expected the accumulation of capital to be continuously onwards and upwards. He saw the process of capital accumulation as ‘a series of periods of moderate activity, prosperity, over-production, crisis and stagnation’ (*Capital*, vol 1, ch. 15, section 7). Despite all the evidence to the contrary, Reeves believes — and not only her but all the parties that aspire to manage capitalism — that, if the government gets it right, there can be a permanent boom.

A government might be lucky and be in office during the ‘prosperity’ phase of

the cycle but not even the government’s own advisers at the Office for Budgetary Responsibility are predicting that. They are currently estimating that ‘growth’ over the next four or five years will be only 1.5 percent a year. Which is slow by previous capitalist standards and won’t bring about many more jobs or higher wages or enough tax revenue to honour Labour’s promises to improve public services.

In any event, the OBR forecasts are little more than a guess. The fact is that economic forecasts, especially over a longer period, are hardly worth the paper they are printed on as nobody can foretell how the capitalist economy will move. If they turn out to be correct, it will have been a lucky guess.

What will happen in practice over the next few years is that the government will merely react to whatever the workings of capitalism present it with. They will just be muddling through, or, to use the nautical language governments do when they seek to explain their failure by having to ‘face strong headwinds’ or being ‘blown off course’, they will just be navigating by sight.



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**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

WHEN SINGER/SONGWRITER John Lennon was penning the 1971 song that envisaged a world with no states, but common ownership of the means and instruments for distributing wealth and no religious societal power, can he have imagined the furore that it would generate in some future quarters? If he had been familiar with the Socialist Party he might have included a nod to a moneyless, leaderless society too but given the strong nod within the song to a rational sane society different to the one we have then we might easily surmise that the necessary elements of a socialist society were contained therein.

Reasonable to say that Lennon was an advocate of Make Love, Not War, and Jaw Jaw is better than War War. As youngsters we were aware that it was far better to engage in a 'verbal' punch up rather than a physical altercation.

'Sticks and stones may break my bones but words cannot hurt me' was the riposte in the school playground when insults or spite were being hurled at one's person. Slightly provocative perhaps if one's adversary was still determined to show that sufficient might does overcome right. As we now know, hurty words can result in hurty feelings. Which may result in a van load of the 'you've hurt their feelings thought police' arriving on your doorstep, or, if you've really shaken someone's beliefs to the core, the arrival of the riot squad or equivalent.

Back in 2006 children at a church-run primary school must have been a little miffed and confused when their headteacher pulled the plug on a particular song they had been rehearsing because some of its lines were, 'not appropriate words to be sung at the Church of England school for four to eleven-year-olds. Was it

'Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll' by Ian Dury?

The local curate fully backed the decision; 'The song was not suitable for the occasion. It has an appealing sentiment of love but its vision is of a world in which people do not need religion.' A school governor said, 'The song expresses longing for a different world and for eternal happiness. But it says you can have this without religion.'

The headteacher said, 'We have not banned the song. We chose not to perform it at our public concert but to perform another song we had practised which better reflected the theme of Songs for A Green Earth. We are a Church school and we believe God is the foundation of all we do. As such we did not feel that was an appropriate song to perform at a public concert' ([tinyurl.com/385zffps](http://tinyurl.com/385zffps)).

Sophistry! It wasn't censorship, but it was. What lesson did the pupils of the school draw from the whole happening? God's a music bigot? A life lived without the constraints that religion implants in it is a much happier one.

'Imagine there's no heaven, it's easy if you try, No hell below us, above us, only sky.' 'No religion too.'

DC

# Tiny tips

IF YOU make \$60,000 a year after taxes, in order to make \$700 billion, you'd need to work for nearly 12 million years. 'The richest 1% own half the stock market (49.9%), while the bottom half of the U.S. owns just 1.1% of the stock market'. 'The richest 0.0001% control a greater share of wealth than in the Gilded Age, an era of U.S. history defined by extreme inequality' (**Consortium News**, [tinyurl.com/fzef8n6e](http://tinyurl.com/fzef8n6e)).

The toilet, by Maurizio Cattelan — the provocative Italian artist known for taping a banana to a wall — went up for auction Tuesday evening at Sotheby's in New York. The starting bid for the 223-pound, 18-karat-gold work was about \$10 million. Cattelan has said the piece, titled 'America' satirizes superwealth. 'Whatever you eat, a \$200 lunch or a \$2 hot dog, the results are the same, toilet-wise', he once said (**Yahoo**, [tinyurl.com/mww89bwt](http://tinyurl.com/mww89bwt)).

Mother Teresa is still praised around the world for her charity work, but her legacy is deeply controversial. Reports

from former volunteers and medical professionals claimed that many of her care homes were unsanitary and neglectful, with patients denied pain relief because she believed suffering brought people closer to God. Despite receiving millions in donations, her organization frequently failed to provide proper medical treatment or transparency regarding the use of the funds. She also accepted money and praise from dictators and was firmly against abortion, contraception, and divorce, even in extreme cases (**Yahoo**, [tinyurl.com/426m38kn](http://tinyurl.com/426m38kn)).

There are still people who say that Marx is outdated because Russian socialism collapsed ... In Russia, capitalism was interpreted as being about private property and private ownership of the means of production, and the Soviets' proposal was, 'What if we nationalize everything?' Then they found that state control ended up being absolute. If you look at the situation of the workers, it didn't change that much from one system

to another. In capitalism, it's the employers who exploit the workers. During Soviet socialism, the workers were exploited by the Communist Party or by the bureaucrats (**ara**, [tinyurl.com/46we5aab](http://tinyurl.com/46we5aab)).

The Russian communist party has awarded North Korean leader Kim Jong Un the "Lenin Prize" for his outstanding contributions to 'socialist construction', praising him for standing up against 'imperialist aggression' by supporting the invasion of Ukraine (**NK News**, [tinyurl.com/ybezewfa](http://tinyurl.com/ybezewfa)).

The cobbled streets of Newport in Middlesbrough survive from the Victorian era. The staggering levels of child poverty here also feel like they belong in a different time. Six out of every seven children in Newport are classified as living in poverty (**Sky News**, [tinyurl.com/438yhx94](http://tinyurl.com/438yhx94)).

It's time to stop settling. 'The working class is going to have to look at itself as a whole and say, "Our divisions in race, politics, religion, sectors of the workforce — all that will have to be laid aside," [Casey] says. "It's a 'workers of the world, unite' situation. We're all in it together against the billionaire class, and it's going to take that in the fight to win"' (**In These Times**, [tinyurl.com/3b87rjdww](http://tinyurl.com/3b87rjdww)).

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



## UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

### LONDON

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

### MIDLANDS

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

### NORTH

#### North East Regional branch.

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

**Lancaster branch.** Ring for details: P. Shannon, 07510 412 261, [spgb.lancaster@worldsocialism.org](mailto:spgb.lancaster@worldsocialism.org).

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

**Bolton.** Contact: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589.

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

**Doncaster.** Contact: Fredi Edwards, [fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk)

#### Yorkshire Regional branch.

Contact: Fredi Edwards, Tel 07746 230 953 or email [fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk)

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

## SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

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

#### South West regional branch.

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**Glasgow branch.** Contact: [spgb.glasgow@worldsocialism.org](mailto:spgb.glasgow@worldsocialism.org)

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

## WALES

### South Wales branch (Cardiff and Swansea)

Meets 2nd Monday 7.30pm on JITS. ([meet.jit.si/spgbsouthwales3](http://meet.jit.si/spgbsouthwales3)). Contact: [botterillr@gmail.com](mailto:botterillr@gmail.com) or Geoffrey Williams, 19 Baptist Well Street, Waun Wen, Swansea SA1 6FB. 01792 643624

#### Central branch

Contact: [spgb.cbs@worldsocialism.org](mailto:spgb.cbs@worldsocialism.org)

## INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS

### AFRICA

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**Zambia.** Contact: Kephass Mulenga, PO Box 280168, Kitwe.

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# Paycheck to paycheck

WE'RE USED to hearing that the overall standard of living in the West is significantly higher than in the countries that make up what used to be known as the 'Third World' but are now commonly referred to as the 'Global South'. For many of these, most sources indicate progress in expanding access to basic necessities such as water, sanitation and health facilities. Yet a recent joint report by the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund estimates that approximately 1 in 4 people globally, or close to 2.1 billion, lack access to clean drinking water and that this contributes to roughly 3.5 million deaths per year, nearly 400,000 of these children under five ([tinyurl.com/bdf77dv9](https://tinyurl.com/bdf77dv9)).

More broadly, according to an Oxfam International report from June 2025, 3.7 billion of the world's population, or around 45 percent, live in conditions of moderate or severe food insecurity with over 700 million living on less than 2.15 dollars per day and 3.4 billion living on less than 5.50 dollars per days. This means that many are unlikely to have the money to eat regularly and so will often skimp on food or skip meals ([tinyurl.com/4b5kbjep](https://tinyurl.com/4b5kbjep)). In addition, the business data website *Statista* has reported on a United Nations estimate that around 1.1 billion people worldwide, including around 50 percent of the urban population in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, are living in slums, described as 'areas of self-built, unsanitary housing where extreme poverty is rife' ([tinyurl.com/yv9myhbj](https://tinyurl.com/yv9myhbj)).

How does all this compare to the standard of living in what is seen as 'the richest country in the world', the USA? We would expect it to be a lot higher overall, and indeed it is. But what are things actually like? Wildly differing figures on living standards, poverty and deprivation are to be found depending on the sources you consult. For example, the CNN Business website recently reported on a Bank of America analysis which estimated that around 1 in 4 (24 percent) of American households are barely getting by – living 'paycheck to paycheck', as they put it ([tinyurl.com/mrn7ztun](https://tinyurl.com/mrn7ztun)).

The bank's statisticians combed through data on millions of customers to track how much they spent on basics such as housing, groceries, childcare and utilities and found it constituted over 95 percent of their income 'leaving little to nothing left over for the "nice-to-have" things like going out to dinner or taking a vacation, let alone saving'. One of their interviewees who had a degree but was working in a



construction business about to shut down is quoted as saying 'to be 34 and living paycheck to paycheck with no savings, things are pretty crappy right now'.

However, a different survey came up with a quite different result, which was that the proportion of workers living paycheck to paycheck was not 24 percent but 67 percent. This figure emerged from the *Financial Wellness in the Workplace Report* by the PNC Bank, based on workers aged 21 to 69 working full time at companies with more than 100 employees. It painted a picture of workers struggling to cover everyday expenses, especially with cost of living currently outpacing wage growth. A *Newsweek* report on this survey quoted Taylor Nelms, vice-president of research and insights at the Financial Health Network, as saying: 'The percentage of U.S. households that say they spend more or the same as they bring in has been remarkably consistent, hovering around 50 percent over the past several years but right now it's compounded by high housing costs, insurance premiums, and the return of student loan payments. These are the areas where households feel most squeezed' ([tinyurl.com/ydzsnjye](https://tinyurl.com/ydzsnjye)).

There's clearly a big difference between these survey results, but whichever figure you take as reliable, it's clear that many millions of people in the world's 'richest country' are not only not rich but are materially insecure and struggling to keep their heads above water, with some in particularly straitened circumstances. The CNN report highlights some of the typical symptoms of this- people falling behind on

their bills, minimum credit card payments being made, an increased percentage of borrowers late on their car loans (referred to as 'a clear sign of financial distress, especially since car loans are historically the last payments Americans are willing to miss'), and people filing for bankruptcy having incurred large medical debts while ill. Nor does any of this take into account the undoubtedly worse conditions of those who have no employment at all or are homeless or not registered to work. The current estimate of the number of unemployed people is 4.4 percent of the workforce, so 7.6 million people living in even worse circumstances than those 'just getting by'.

What conclusions can we draw from this? First and foremost that, though wage and salary workers in what is usually considered the most advanced part of the Western world are undoubtedly better off on the whole than their counterparts elsewhere, this does not prevent many of them from suffering poverty and insecurity. And this in a world which, if it were organised rationally (ie, with a system aimed at catering for the needs of all and not the profits of a few), could provide abundantly for all of its 8.3 billion population. Already in fact the world possesses enough productive capacity to eliminate global poverty many times over. Yet this can never happen as long as we have a system – the market system – which ensures vast wealth inequality between the tiny minority of people who own most of the resources and the large majority who own little more than their skills and energies and their ability to sell these for a wage or salary.

It is no kind of aberration, therefore, that the USA has, according to *Forbes Magazine*, 905 billionaires with a combined wealth of 7.8 trillion dollars and that, according to Federal Reserve data, the top 1 percent of households in the United States hold 30.5 percent of the country's wealth, while the bottom 50 percent hold 2.5 percent. Rather it is the inevitable consequence of a system (production for profit) that has no mechanism for meeting the basic needs of the whole of humanity and will always fail to do that. This being the case, it is as clear as it can possibly be that the majority of the world's workers need to take collective and democratic political action to bring that system to an end and replace it by one that will be cooperative, moneyless, wageless and based on free access and production for use.

**HKM**

# Socialism cannot come from the barrel of a gun

THE NEWS cycle has recently thrown fresh attention onto the ‘Socialist Rifle Association (SRA)’, an American organisation advocating firearms training and ‘training working-class armed self-defence.’ A Democratic Party Senate candidate in Maine was criticised for old posts encouraging people to join the group ([tinyurl.com/38tn2dj5](https://tinyurl.com/38tn2dj5)). Graham Platner had posted on Reddit in 2020 with the handle ‘Antifa Supersoldier’, encouraging users to join the SRA. Now reports suggest LGBTQ and left-liberal Americans are increasingly turning to gun ownership out of fear of political repression.

The Cato Institute (a free-market libertarian think-tank based in Washington) found via a freedom of information request to the FBI that the SRA appears to be the active target of an ongoing investigation. The Trump administration’s proposed ‘trans gun ban’ was only one example of the orange man’s Second Amendment rollback.

The SRA flips the American script: guns on the left rather than the right. Its message, community defence, resistance to authoritarianism, and the right of ordinary people to defend themselves, and it appears on the surface to be a working-class concern.

The rise in left-wing gun interest however is less an ideological shift than a symptom of a deeply anxious and alienated working class. When one section of the population arms itself, others feel compelled to follow. Capitalism created the conditions of this insecurity: economic instability, political polarisation, violent policing, and the billion dollar security industry that keeps you safe but only if you can afford it.

The SRA itself frames gun ownership as an answer to these concerns.

The phrase, ‘Any attempt to disarm workers must be frustrated, by force if necessary’, is used on SRA merchandise, patches, t-shirts, coffee mugs... a misquote from Karl Marx’s address to the Communist League in March 1850. What doesn’t fit on a t-shirt is the full quote:

‘Where the workers are employed by the state, they must arm and organise themselves into special corps with elected leaders, or as a part of the proletarian guard. Under no pretext should arms and ammunition be surrendered; any attempt to disarm the workers must be frustrated, by force if necessary’ ([marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/communist-league/1850-ad1.htm](https://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/communist-league/1850-ad1.htm)).

What Marx was speaking of was a specific political moment in 1850, during



Credit: Adobe Stock

a faltering bourgeois revolution, not of the general conditions of working class life under capitalism, or of a popular democratic working-class revolution.

We can assume many SRA supporters cite Lenin, who wrote at a time of underdeveloped material conditions in Tsarist Russia, and leaned heavily on Marx’s early writings from the 1850s, written before the bourgeois revolutions had run their course. In those texts, Marx had argued that workers should support the bourgeoisie (emergent capitalist class) in overthrowing autocratic rule while pressing for full democracy. Only after the bourgeoisie attained political power he believed should workers organise politically against them.

Marx’s later position was that the emancipation of the working class must be the conscious act of the working class itself, democratically organised, not the work of a professional armed minority or vanguard.

Capitalism, not the lack of firearms, is what makes the working class vulnerable. It is capitalism that pits factions of the workers against one another: nationalist movements, strongman posturings, racism, gender-based violence. Against these systemic woes the possession of rifles is no more a solution than the ownership of a fire extinguisher is a solution to arson.

The SRA’s rhetoric makes much of ‘community defence’ and the image of the armed worker resisting oppression. Historically, this imagery is lifted from episodes of class conflict eg. Paris 1871, Russia 1917, Spain 1936, and further romanticised by those who confuse coups with socialism. As the Provisional Rules of the International Working Men’s Association put it: ‘The emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the

working classes themselves.’ That means consciously organising for political control, not relying on paramilitaries or armed minorities acting ‘on behalf of’ workers.

Socialism cannot be imposed by force, nor defended by pockets of armed militants. The failure of the USSR shows this to be true. A society based on common ownership and democratic control requires an active majority to be politically convinced and politically organised, not a vanguard with guns, bombs and bullets.

Armed groups, whether on the left or right, reflect capitalism’s logic of coercion, alienation and the struggle for dominance. The SRA rejects right-wing gun culture, but it mirrors it and as such it remains bound within capitalism’s framework. It’s a consumerist solution - buy a gun, get training- to combat a structural problem. But, as the Libertarian Socialist Organisation (LSO) in Australia pointed out in 1979 in an essay against anarchist terrorism, ‘You can’t blow up a social relationship’.

Socialism cannot be created by armed vigilantes because socialism is not a change of rulers but a transformation of society. The revolution must be conscious, majority-led, democratic and international. No amount of gun owners can substitute political consciousness and political will.

King Capital will not be dethroned by an armed militia, but by a working class organised consciously and democratically to remove the master class from control of the state.

The SRA is not a revolutionary awakening, but a reaction to a society that offers people no security except what they can buy and carry.

**A.T.**



# Abolish the wages system

CAPITALISM IS based on minority ownership and control of the means of production (land, railways, factories, food distribution, etc), that is, the means to produce what we need to survive and flourish. Production is for profit not human need. If something isn't profitable it isn't produced. Work is done by people who are forced by economic necessity to sell their ability to work for a wage.

How did the wages system come about? Well, it depends on who you ask, and whereabouts in the world you go to ask the question. If you ask the capitalist propagandists they will say it is because human beings decided to trade with one another and money was a way of doing this more efficiently. This is a lie that ignores the numerous indigenous communities from America to Africa to Australia whose land was forcibly and violently taken.

America is a land stolen from a people and built with the labour of other people whose land was stolen from them. In Britain, we had the Enclosure Acts of the 18th and 19th centuries in which roughly 5.5 million acres of common land was forcibly taken and placed into private hands, with mass evictions of agricultural communities. In Scotland in the Highland Clearances between 1750 and 1830 roughly 70,000 to over 150,000 people were 'cleared' from the land.

This story of enclosure and clearances was a win-win for the ruling class: communal land was turned into profit, specifically sheep farming in Scotland, and a mass of dispossessed people was created who owned nothing but their ability to labour, which they were forced to sell to survive. In 1750 Glasgow's population was 32,000. By 1851 it was over 300,000. That's the scale of the operation.

Marx wrote that capital comes into the world dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt. That is the real story of how the wages system came into existence.

Why abolish the wages system? Because it is exploitative. The surplus value of our labour is taken from us by the capitalist parasites in the form of profit. It is also alienating in a number of ways.

Alienation from the product: we don't own or control what we make; it ends up feeling like something outside us — even something used against us. We're forced

to buy back the products of our labour from the capitalists.

Alienation from the labour process: we don't shape how we work; the pace, purpose, and methods are set by others, so our work is disconnected from who we are.

Alienation from other people: we're pushed into competition and treated as commodities, which strains our relationships and weakens solidarity.

Alienation from nature: we're cut off from the natural world; nature is reduced to a resource for profit, creating a rupture between how we live and the environment we depend on.

Alienation from our species-being: we lose the chance to express our creativity and human potential; work becomes just survival, not self-realisation.

Endless economic growth on a finite planet threatens ecological disaster. In 2024 alone, about 8.1 million hectares of forest were lost globally — roughly an area the size of England. Over 47,000 species are currently threatened with extinction. Wildlife populations have plummeted over recent decades: on average, global wildlife populations have dropped by about 73 percent over the last 50 years — a collapse driven by habitat destruction, pollution, deforestation, and industrial exploitation of nature.

War is an extension of the war of the market place involving different gangs of capitalists. Socialists were among the brave class-conscious workers who refused to murder their fellow workers in the first and second world wars, declaring instead the socialist mantra:

'a bayonet is a weapon with a worker at both ends'.

The Socialist Party was formed in 1904 as a breakaway from the reformist and authoritarian Social Democratic Federation. We are a leaderless organisation that holds, like Marx, that 'the emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself'. We, also like Marx, define socialism as a stateless, moneyless society based on production for human need (as opposed to sale on the market) in which people will no longer have to work for wages.

Leftwingers don't offer a real alternative. Lenin combined the state and the wages system into one tyrannical regime. Corbyn and Zarah Sultana claim to be socialists but what they're actually advocating for is an impossibly humanised capitalism.

The only viable and practical solution to the world's problems is socialism, a moneyless stateless society based on production for human need. Apologists for capitalism tell us that we're greedy, selfish, bloodthirsty. Let the parasite class speak for themselves! Workers demonstrate their moral character every day through small acts of workplace solidarity. We can and will organise ourselves into a leaderless organisation of the working class for the working class when, as Marx put it, we take off our banners the conservative motto 'a fair day's pay for a fair day's work' and inscribe instead the revolutionary watchword 'abolish the wages system'.

**JOHNNY MERCER**



Credit: Adobe Stock



# Why we can't support Your Party

OVER THE weekend of 29-30 November some 2000 attendees at a conference in Liverpool founded a new political party called simply 'Your Party'.

After Labour lost the 2019 General Election long-time left-winger Jeremy Corbyn resigned as leader and was succeeded by the man who is now the Prime Minister. During the four years during which he was leader Corbyn had tried to steer the Labour Party towards the left. Starmer decided not just to reverse this but to turn the Labour Party into a mainstream capitalist party, even to the extent of describing itself as a better 'party of business' than the Tories.

Corbyn himself was suspended as a member of the Parliamentary Labour Party (though not of the Labour Party itself). Starmer could have let him stay a member (as Corbyn would have wanted) but he and those around him were adamant. They wanted to completely change the Labour Party by in effect lopping off its leftwing. Corbyn's supporters were expelled. Corbyn himself was not allowed to stand as a Labour candidate in the 2024 general election. They put up a candidate against him; which meant that as he stood against a Labour candidate he was automatically expelled from the Labour Party. He won, easily, as an Independent.

From that point on, there were calls for Corbyn to support the formation of a new left-of-Labour party which would in effect be the Labour Party's former leftwing as a separate political party. Whatever the reason Corbyn dithered and another suspended Labour MP, Zarah Sultana, precipitated things by announcing in July that she was resigning from the Labour Party to co-lead a new leftwing party with Corbyn. This was an announcement that a lot of people had been waiting for and up to 800,000 were said to have expressed an interest in the new party, though by the time of the conference only some 53,000 had actually joined.

## Sortition

A new party cannot be created just like that. It has to have a statement of what it stands for and a constitution. Corbyn and his advisers drew up a plan which, in theory, seemed reasonable enough (as long as the provisional committee played fair).

A provisional committee is set up to draft a statement of aims and a constitution both to be put to a founding conference. These would be subject to amendments suggested by meetings of members. Those attending the conference are to be chosen by lot (now called sortition) from



Credit: Getty Images

the membership. Conference will debate the finalised documents and selected amendments. These will be voted for or against online, not just by those chosen to attend the conference but also by the rest of the membership on the basis of one member one vote.

This — including sortition — seems a democratic way of going about founding any new party whatever its aims. Choosing those attending a founding conference by lot should ensure that they will be a representative cross-section of the membership and reflect the views of the average member and not just of an activist minority. More generally, it is an alternative to election but still a democratic way of choosing people to carry out particular tasks (as it already is today for choosing trial juries) and could have a wider use in a classless socialist society.

This, however, did not go down well amongst the activist minority made up of the various Trotskyist groups that had decided to 'enter' the new party (as in the past they had 'entered' the Labour

Party). They argued that this would exclude experienced activists like, er, themselves.

In the event, it didn't exclude them. It just ensured that they were represented in accordance with their proportion of the new party's members. The Trotskyist groups were pleasantly surprised that quite a few of their militants were chosen to attend, even some from the more obscure grouplets

## Do as I don't

The Trotskyists also objected to a provision in the proposed constitution barring dual membership with another political party. This was in fact already in the application form to become a member and take part in the founding process. This, however, wasn't enforced and members of the SWP, the old Militant Tendency (now calling themselves SPEW) and most lesser Trotskyist groups joined and participated freely in the pre-conference Your Party meetings.

One objection to Trotskyists being in

the new party was set out by the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Britain, Robert Griffiths, in an article in the August issue of their paper *Unity*, where he criticised ‘the readiness of the ultra-leftist sects to infiltrate broad-based mass movements in order to divide them, pose as a “left opposition” to the leadership and recruit from those they influence and mislead’.

Which is indeed what Trotskyists plan, though it’s a bit of a cheek coming from the CPB as it’s what its antecedents used to be good at. (Incidentally, the CPB position is not to join the new party but to vote and campaign for its candidates under certain circumstances).

The Trotskyists lost no time in forming a ‘left opposition’ and campaigning to make the constitution of the new party as democratic as possible. This was not because they believe in democratic organisation but because it would give them a wider opportunity to work and recruit within the new party. They joined a ‘Socialist Unity Group’. One of its constituents calls itself the ‘Bolshevik Tendency’; which would have been a better name for their faction.

They are hypocrites because their own organisations are not organised democratically. Take the SWP, for example. It is run by a Central Committee which is chosen in this way:

‘The outgoing Central Committee selects and circulates a provisional slate for the new CC at the beginning of the period for pre-Conference discussion. This is then discussed at the district aggregates where comrades can propose alternative slates. At the Conference the outgoing CC proposes a final slate (which may have changed as a result of the pre-Conference discussion). This slate, along with any other that is supported by a minimum of five delegates, is discussed and voted on by Conference’ ([tinyurl.com/3p5arvan](http://tinyurl.com/3p5arvan)).

What this means is that the SWP is run by a self-perpetuating group that in effect renews itself by co-option. The slate ‘selected’ by the outgoing committee is virtually assured of winning. It was how the Politburo of the CPSU was chosen in the old USSR. Their constitution also states that ‘permanent or secret factions are not allowed’.

When the SWP led a move to ‘seize control’ ([tinyurl.com/5ffv3sv5](http://tinyurl.com/5ffv3sv5)) of the conference agenda by means of an emergency resolution, the conference organisers took this literally as a call to storm the platform and invoked the paper ban on dual membership to expel the leaders of the SWP (and hire a security firm to guard the platform).

In the end, the conference voted

not to endorse a complete ban on dual membership but to make acceptance of being in another party more difficult. So the Trotskyists are still there.

## What does the new party stand for?

Before adopting a constitution the conference also adopted a Political Statement setting out its general aims. This began: ‘Your Party is a democratic, member-led socialist party that stands for social justice, peace and international solidarity. Our goal is the transfer of wealth and power, now concentrated in the hands of the few, to the overwhelming majority in a democratic, socialist society’.

This is rather vague and says nothing about how quickly — or how slowly — this ‘transfer of wealth and power’ is to take place nor what the end result will be like. It is what the Labour Party promised in its election manifesto for the February 1974 general election. In fact, it is even rather less radical in terms of rhetoric as that manifesto talked about ‘a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of wealth and power in favour of working people and their families’.

The Statement doesn’t go into what they envisage this ‘transfer of wealth and power’ as involving but it will be much the same as Attlee set out in 1932 (*Will and the Way to Socialism*, p. 42):

‘A Labour [read: Your Party] government, therefore, not only by the transference of industry from profit-making for the few to the service of the many, but also by taxation, will work to reduce the purchasing power of the wealthier classes, while by wage increases and by the provision of social services it will expand the purchasing power of the masses’.

So, different private profit-making sectors of the economy are to be gradually brought into some form of ‘public ownership’; taxes on the rich increased; services provided by central and local government expanded and improved, and money wages increased. All this to take place initially within the framework of the existing mixed private/state capitalist economy. The end result — several decades down the line — would be a society where people’s incomes and what they owned would be more equally distributed than now and in which they would be working for some ‘public enterprise’ paying them a good wage and be provided with well-funded public services and amenities.

This is the old Fabian dream of the gradual transformation of capitalism into a more equal society by means of nationalisations and social reforms. It’s

not as if it has not been tried, and failed. It always was impossible because it involves trying to make capitalism work in a way that it cannot.

What drives the economy under capitalism is the pursuit of profits to be accumulated as more capital invested for more profit. If a government interferes with this, the result will be a slowdown in the economy depriving the government of the tax revenues to proceed further towards a more equal society. Based as it is on profit-making, the capitalist economy cannot tolerate a growing increase in the purchasing power of workers and their families at the expense of what is the source of the purchasing power of the rich, profits.

## The last time it was tried

All reformist governments with such a programme have failed everywhere, the most recent, spectacular one being the Syriza government in Greece in 2015. This failure is particularly significant as Your Party has a lot in common with Syriza, whose name is an acronym in Greek for ‘Radical Coalition of the Left-Progressive Alliance’ and which included Trotskyist groups as constituent parts.

Leftists explain the failure of Syriza either by a lack of determination or by a sell-out. In fact, it failed because the leftwing government came up against how capitalism works and realised that if it continued to try to apply its policy it would make things worse (they reasoned that if things were going to get worse it would be better that this should be managed by them, who had some sympathy for the working class, rather than by their political opponents who didn’t). A Your Party government would face a similar dilemma.

It is all very well Zarah Sultana saying, as she did in her closing speech to the Conference: ‘We are not here for tweaks of a broken system. We are not here just to lower some bills and sprinkle a wealth tax. We are here for a fundamental transformation of society’.

It got her a standing ovation and it will on May Day and at the end of the next Conference and similar ceremonial occasions but, in practice, in between, Your Party will be campaigning just for ‘tweaks’ and ‘sprinkles’ and seeking votes and popular support on this basis. It will be yet another reformist party. Support built on that basis will be of no use in furthering the cause of socialism. Which is why we cannot support the reformists who have formed what we can only call ‘Their Party’.

**ADAM BUICK**

# Another New Year party

FOLLOWING THE turn of the year I am pleased to announce the emergence of a new political force, Barnsley Social Action. As I was an enthusiastic biker back in the '60s BSA seems appropriate. The focus for this exciting political initiative will be to fight for Barnsley's independence from the overpowering political behemoth that is Westminster and the regional dominance of Yorkshire. 'Let the Tykes Take Power!'

I am, of course, appreciative of the *Socialist Standard* for so willingly providing an initial platform for this, my ambitious project. The first task will be to ensure that no small boats will be redirected from the south coast to sail up the Dearne.

At this point I consider it most important to state without equivocation that all of the above is utter nonsense. Actually such a statement surely can't have been necessary. Who would set up a political party on such a narrow (minded) basis?

Ex-Reform UK MP Rupert Lowe, now sitting as an independent, has – at time of writing – launched Great Yarmouth First (GYF) with the stated aim of promoting the specific interests of his constituency. This is surely a basic requirement of any MP, whatever the party affiliation, within the considerable limitations imposed by the requirements of capitalism.

Lowe claims 500 residents have already signed up and he has personally funded the fees for all these new members for a year. Quite how committed this cohort of supporters are may well become apparent in twelve months when renewal time comes around.

The specific political purpose of GYF is according to Lowe, 'completely focused on doing what is right for Great Yarmouth, not what is right for Norwich or London'. This new party is needed because not only have national governments let people down, 'the rot extends to local government as well'.

How fortunate for the citizens of Great Yarmouth such an immaculate political messiah was chosen by the electorate at the last election. However, his vision does extend beyond the locally myopic to the rest of the country. Not only does he head GYF, Lowe also leads Restore Britain. The headline aims of this organisation are low taxes, small state, slash immigration, restore Christian principles, fight wokery and so it goes on...and on.

The multi-millionaire Lowe is quoted in the *Great Yarmouth Mercury* saying 'We are building a powerful local movement that will fight for local priorities. No petty national politics, just local politics for local people'. This statement seems to stand

in contradiction to the obviously national and nationalist Restore Britain. The basic premise of both of Lowe's groups is to play up, and on, prejudices unfortunately held by too many people looking for simple solutions to their many political, economic and social problems.

While it might seem an organisation such as Great Yarmouth First must be of limited political significance, it does reflect an underlying feature of more widespread popular discourse. A competitor for Barnsley Social Action would be The Yorkshire Party. The website of the would-be governors of Britain's largest county refers to things socialists recognise, such as: 'This isn't about left or right', 'Our rivers shouldn't be profit streams for offshore companies', 'Subsidiarity – decisions made as close to the people as possible', 'Dignity – respect for every person and community', 'Community – working together', 'Cooperation – shared goals...'

There is also mention of values such as fairer, stronger and more democratic, though specifically in Yorkshire. Most of what is offered is fairly standard social democratic fare that Labour, Liberal Democrat and even reasonable Conservative (if that's not too much of an oxymoron) supporters could subscribe to.

It certainly doesn't read as being rabidly explicitly nationalistic, except, of course, its focus is narrowly on Yorkshire. As often with local political groupings The Yorkshire Party seems fuelled by resentment of a perceived national, for which read Westminster, bias against the county, especially in economic terms.

There is certainly good reason for people to feel economically aggrieved, to rail against the failings of the NHS, to be very much aware of the democratic deficit whereby voting, locally and nationally, changes very little for the better. However justified these feelings, however worthy the aspirations, none of this applies specifically to Yorkshire alone. The social democratic style solutions, along with a Yorkshire parliament to enact them, are aspirations that can never be realised even if the entire White Rose vote went to this party.

The fundamental problem that every party, local, regional or national, cannot overcome is capitalism. No matter how sincere or well intentioned, the scope for positive political action is severely curtailed by market economics, the undeniable drive to realise profits. Even such an explicit adherent to capitalism as former Prime Minister Liz Truss could be evicted from Number 10 Downing Street within about

a month and a half of taking up residence. She wasn't even proposing some wildly radical social reforms. Just showing her Conservative intentions as ill thought-out and economically inimical to market interests was enough.

A perfect example of the democratic deficit in that Truss was toppled from power not by the ballot box, but, in effect, the workings of the market. She wasn't even in power long enough for a conspiracy to be formulated against her. Capitalism doesn't really need conspiracies or coups d'état. If bond prices fall or share prices tumble so do the politicians or policies that are perceived as being the cause. Certainly no requirement for an election.

So for Great Yarmouth First, The Yorkshire Party – you can also read the Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru or similar, Reform UK, the seemingly shambolic Your Party, The Green Party or the three main Westminster parties. Because whatever their political differences they are all the same in one essential feature. They can only act as far as capitalism and its imperatives allow.

The achievement of real change would mean an economic arrangement in which the means of production are held in common to ensure people's needs are met uninhibited by the profit motive, in a truly democratic society in which people freely contribute without any requirement for money. In a word, socialism. Such is only achievable on a worldwide basis. Of course, people will always relate to their localities, but they have no need of being located within national boundaries. A time when communities were fairly static are long passed.

There is a deal of archaeological evidence showing that even in prehistory Neolithic trading links between widely separated communities existed, when the concept of national boundaries didn't exist and wouldn't for thousands of years. Indeed, from the earliest days of the emergence of humankind migration has been a feature. The idea of being defined by location in nation states is but a brief moment in our collective history. So the prospect of a worldwide cooperative community cannot be dismissed as fanciful or a contradiction of human nature.

But people have to want this, have to be actively involved in working through the details, accepting there can be no leader or party that can do it for them.

Until then there is always Barnsley Social Action – no one from Doncaster need apply.

**D. A.**

*Socialist Standard* January 2026



# Income tax and the wage struggle

*Given the recent budget from Rachel Reeves and the debate about income tax rates and thresholds, we reprint this article as it will have some resonance.*

IT IS popularly supposed to be a virtue in a government not to impose income tax on low-wage workers. So each government tries to claim credit for having made alterations in the income tax which have the effect of freeing some workers from tax liability entirely, or at least of reducing the amount of it. This claim was made by the Labour Party following its six years in office after 1945 and was repeated by the Conservatives at the 1959 election. Both the claims are so framed as to be distinctly disingenuous.

It was quite true, as the Conservatives claimed, that the raising of the tax allowance exempted millions of people from tax, but it was equally easy to see that, as wages rise, the exempted millions came into tax range again. And when the Labour Party *Handbook* 1951 claimed that a youth earning £3 a week in 1951 was paying less income tax than would have been levied on a wage of £3 in 1938 it would have been appropriate to point out that £3 in 1951 would buy only about half what it would have bought before the war.

And both governments refrained from stressing the fact that since the war income tax (Pay As You Earn) has been brought down to lower pay levels to take in millions more wage and salary earners than before the war. The number of people paying tax was under four million in 1938, 12 million in 1945, over sixteen million at the end of Labour's term of office, and up to nearly twenty million in 1961-2. The Tory budget of 1963 removed nearly four million from liability but with every wage increase some will be coming into the range again.

So if it is a merit not to make workers pay income tax neither the Labour Party nor the Tories can match up to the performance of the National Government in 1938; and none of them can compare with the governments in the nineteenth century which exempted practically the whole of the industrial workers and clerks from liability. An article in the summer number of *Public Administration*, by Mrs. Olive Anderson, shows that in the middle of the century the minimum level of pay liable to tax was about £3 a week, while the wages of even the most highly skilled craftsmen were under 30s. a week, and clerks' wages were under 40s. a week.

Interest attaches to the comparison because during the Crimean War tax



Credit: Adobe Stock

reformers campaigned to get the taxable level brought down so that the mass of workers would be brought in, one suggestion being to make the tax payable on all wages of 6s. a week and over. One of the arguments was that as it was the town workers who were so keen on the war, why shouldn't they help to pay for it through income tax?

The proposed changes were not adopted, chiefly because of the difficulty and cost of collecting small amounts of tax from millions of individuals, many of whom often changed their jobs and moved to different towns. Below a certain level the tax costs more to collect than the yield to the government.

Later on tax collection became more efficient and more and more people were brought into tax liability by the twofold movement of the lowering of the exemption limit (from £160 in 1899 to £130 in 1915) and the upward movement of prices and wages.)

But what is there in the common belief that the working class as a whole gain from a lowering of income tax and would gain still more if they were entirely exempt? The answer is, nothing at all! The condition of the working class, apart from possible short term effects when changes are introduced, is not the result of taxation whether in the form of income tax or the so-called indirect taxes, Purchase Tax, etc.

To start with, were the working class better off in 1938 when most of them were exempt from income tax and the rate was only five shillings (1s. 8d. on the first £135), than they have been since the war when nearly all of them are within the tax range and tax is at a higher rate? The evidence points to the fact that as a class they were rather worse off in 1938. And to go further back, were they better off in 1900 or 1850 when they paid no tax at all? Again, the answer is No!

In the latest year for which figures are available there were about 23 million wage and salary earners (including company directors) whose total income was about £14,000 million and who paid a tax of

£1,200 million. If we take the industrial workers and shop assistants only, with a total wage bill of about £9,000 million a year, the amount of tax might perhaps be in the region of £300 million to £400 million a year.

Of course those who now have tax deducted would find their take home pay correspondingly increased when the deduction was reduced or ceased, and would for a while be better off; but in the general struggle between workers and employers over wages, this reduction of tax would be a factor in stiffening the attitude of the employers. In the situation of recent years, with fairly continuous low unemployment and increasing prices, such a reduction of tax would operate like any slackening in the rise of prices, it would make it that much more difficult for wage claims to make headway against the employers' resistance.

Conversely, changes which have brought more and more workers into the tax range, or have increased their rate of tax, had consequences similar to rises in the cost of living: they have stiffened the pressure of the workers for higher wages especially when unemployment has been low. In other words now that millions of workers have tax deducted they have come to think in terms of "take home pay" and to struggle for the maintenance or increase of that, rather than to look at the wage before deduction.

Mrs. Anderson, whose article has already been referred to, has found that a similar situation may have existed during the Crimean War. One of the reasons why income tax was not then extended to take in wage earners was that with the shortage of labour caused by the war it was feared that to whatever extent tax was levied on the workers the employers would be forced to raise wages to keep take home pay at its former level.

In short, struggling to raise wages is in line with working class interests, campaigning over taxation is not.

**H.** (November, 1963)

# A confused professor

VIVEK CHIBBER is a well-known figure on the American left. A professor of sociology at New York University, he regards himself as a Marxist and is seen by some as an important social theorist. The April 2023 edition of the *Socialist Standard* carried a review of a book he had recently published with the ambitious title *Confronting Capitalism. How the World Works and How to Change It* ([tinyurl.com/3k57ccp2](https://tinyurl.com/3k57ccp2)). The review recognised the author's clear and accessible explanation of how capitalism works. In particular it endorsed the book's explanation of capitalism's relationship with the state and the struggle it inevitably generates between the two classes in society – capitalists and workers – and how it dictates that governments, no matter what their stated ideology, cannot have a mediating role between workers and capitalists but have no choice but to govern on behalf of the capitalist class and in their collective profit-making interest. In the same way, the review approved the book's further observation that individual capitalists, regardless of their personal character or values, are compelled by the nature of the system they operate in to minimise costs and seek profit, wherever possible and whatever the consequences, the result being that a tiny minority of the population are able to live in luxury while billions struggle to keep their heads above water and experience life as a daily grind.

## Chasing reforms

So far, so good, and, as explanations of capitalism go, pretty lucid. But, as the review then went on to point out, Chibber's prescription for remedying the situation he correctly analyses was not to get rid of the capitalist system and replace it with a different one but rather to chase reforms of various kinds to try and make that system more palatable. And this, puzzlingly, after having told us that the imperatives of capitalism make that impossible. Arguably even more puzzling then was his final call to 'start down the road of social democracy and market socialism', even though, by any standards, 'market socialism' is a contradiction in terms.

Since all book reviews that appear in the *Socialist Standard* are sent to the book's author, Chibber should at least be aware of the Socialist Party's view and criticisms of his ideas. So when an extended interview with him appeared recently in the *Jacobin* magazine on aspects of his



*Confronting Capitalism* book, it could only be of interest to see whether he seemed to have taken on board any of the points raised in our criticism of his ideas ([tinyurl.com/58m6nny3](https://tinyurl.com/58m6nny3)).

Though it's clear from the start of that conversation both interviewer and interviewee see themselves as Marxists and socialists, there is virtually no reference made to what socialism might mean and nothing at all is said about the kind of socialist society that Marx advocated – one based not on the market and buying and selling but on the abolition of the money and wages system and free access to all goods and services. There is, however, an approving reference to two major 20<sup>th</sup> century practitioners of authoritarian state capitalism, Lenin and Mao, which seems to echo the line taken in *Confronting Capitalism* about a Leninist party model with a centralised leadership. So no change here then. But what about

his book's advocacy of reforms of various kinds within capitalism – 'non-reformist reforms', as he calls them? Well nothing seems different here either. He refers to struggles for 'workplace rights, a universal basic income grant, or pensions' echoing the need expressed in his book for 'a combination of electoral and mobilizational politics' and 'a gradualist approach'.

## How many classes?

To be fair, however, the main focus of the *Jacobin* interview is not how capitalism could be improved or what comes after it but rather its class structure. And here, initially at least, Chibber seems to be living up to the Marxist analysis of class explained in *Confronting Capitalism*, ie, the existence of two classes in society – capitalists (a tiny minority) and workers (the overwhelming majority) – with irreconcilable interests, and the state being not some kind of mediating body but

rather an instrument of support for the capitalist class. But then, in the second part of the interview, what can be described as a variation on this perspective emerges. Here he moves from seeing capitalism as a two-class structure to stating the existence of a third class, a 'middle class'. This of course is a term commonly used by social analysts seeking to categorise workers in terms of such things as their backgrounds, outlooks, living styles or levels of pay. But should such a 'third' category have a place in any claimed Marxist analysis of class? Well, it didn't in *Confronting Capitalism*, but now, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, it does here. To be precise, Chibber has this to say: 'So the two "fundamental" classes, workers and capitalists, account probably for around 75 percent of the labor force. What's the other remaining 25 percent? That's what we call the middle class.' But who are this 'middle class'? According to him, they fall into two groups – the self-employed ('owner operators, the traditional petty bourgeoisie', he calls them) and 'the salariat'.

What to respond to this? Well, we can accept – because it corresponds to observable reality – that in capitalism there has always been a small minority of individuals, who wish 'to be their own boss' and to set up their own small businesses of one kind or another. A small proportion of these turn out to be lucrative and may result in their creator becoming rich to the point of not having

to work. But the vast majority of them are not particularly successful. Sometimes they procure a precarious living for those who run them, but more often they fail and plunge their owners into the world of seeking to sell their energies to another employer for a wage or salary. Of course, such people, at least for as long as they are in business, can be categorised as wannabe-capitalists, but the vast majority of them (those, for example, that Chibber calls 'owner-operator shopkeepers') still have to carry out labour on a daily basis themselves in order to survive and to support their families. So it can't be meaningfully maintained that the existence of small 'entrepreneurs' somehow means that there are three classes in society rather than two.

Still less can it be said that there is, in Chibber's words, 'a second group' helping to make up that 'middle class', consisting of those he calls 'the professional classes and the managerial classes'. An example he gives of this is 'a mid-level manager' to whom certain duties are 'outsourced'. 'What do they do?', he goes on. 'They're keeping the books, they're designing the labor process, but they're also managing and supervising labor. Managers are workers but who carry out the functions of capital and whose *own well-being* depends on the successful exploitation of labor. So they are caught between the two worlds. That's why they're *middle class*.' He goes even further, including in this

middle class 'sections of the professoriate and the professional strata', those with 'a lot of autonomy', or 'salaried people in the professions', though 'some are shading into the working class: same occupation, different classes' (eg, teachers or 'a professor working at a community college'). To this we would have to respond that all those in Chibber's 'second group', though they may have more autonomy and more pay than other workers, are no less members of the working class for their position of subordination to a system that makes them dependent on the wage or salary they receive. In addition, despite the greater security their role may appear to give them, they can never be sure that the stresses and strains of the capitalist system will not make them just as expendable in the future as workers in other occupations, ie that capitalism's constant need for cheapness and reorganisation will not make them just as insecure in their jobs or just as surplus to requirements as any other workers.

In short the 'Marxist' theorist and professor not only seems not to have taken on board any of the points made in this journal's review of his book about what replacing capitalism means and about the futility of reformist activity, but to have now rendered his previously 'clear and accessible explanation of how capitalism works' distinctly less clear and less accessible.

**HKM**

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## Party News – YP- Labour 2.0?

JUST TO demonstrate our northern hardiness, members went out in uninviting November weather to Manchester and Liverpool to dish out 500 leaflets on the occasion of the first national conference of Your Party (now its official moniker). Previously, other members had done likewise at YP events in Huddersfield, Bolton, Preston, Stroud, Swansea, Cardiff, Newport, Brighton, Oxford, Gillingham, and London (all compass points).

The Liverpool conference was hastily convened to thrash out questions like its name, its constitution, its aims, and in particular who was going to be in charge of it. All this amid breathless drama after Corbyn's faction summarily expelled Trot entryists from the SWP, on the (actually incorrect) argument that they were registered as a different party with the Electoral Commission and therefore ineligible for membership. At this, Zarah Sultana promptly boycotted the first day of the meeting, which does not bode well

for the future of YP but must have tickled Zack Polanski, the Greens' new 'socialist' snake-oil salesman, who is seeing a significant bump in membership as a result of these antics.

Our leaflet was called 'YP – Labour 2.0?' and argued that even if Your Party was ever able to form a government, it would inevitably suffer the same fate as the original Labour Party, meaning that YP would not change capitalism, capitalism would change YP. It's quite possibly no coincidence that we handed Zarah Sultana a leaflet in person, after which a YouTube video appeared in which she specifically denied that Your Party would turn into Labour 2.0.

One resentful but revealing comment heard from a conference participant was 'SPGB? Oh yes. None of us are ever good enough, are we?' This must have been a reference to our so-called 'purist' reputation among the left, in contrast to their customary 'pragmatic' approach. But

we're not purist, just principled. We've been telling the left for generations not to keep doing the same thing over and over, and expecting a different result, but they keep doing it, and now they're doing it again with Your Party – trying to reform capitalism into something that works for humanity instead of against it. It drives them mad when we tell them that they're wasting their time trying to fix the unfixable. It must drive them madder still that we're always somehow proved right when their strenuous efforts fall apart. We wish it wasn't so, but it will continue to be so until the left, and workers in general, acknowledge the elephant in the room, which is that capitalism needs to be abolished, and replaced with a democratic system of free access for all and collective ownership and control of the Earth's resources.

**PJS**



# Capitalist musings on money

SOME CAPITALISTS have been philosophising recently on their favourite subject — money. One-time investment banker Matt Levine titled his ‘Money Stuff’ column in *Bloomberg News* (24 November) “Leave the Gold in the Ground” ([tinyurl.com/3zum3wwj](https://www.tinyurl.com/3zum3wwj)).

Gold is no longer used as the currency — what Marx called the ‘money commodity’ — as it was for millennia. It is, however, still a store of value. ‘Even now’, Levine pointed out, ‘gold is an important reserve asset, and people hold it in their financial portfolios in the form of gold futures, gold exchange-traded funds, etc’. What is being traded are titles to the ownership of gold. Those who buy and sell these are speculating on how the price of gold will move in the future. The gold itself is stored underground in a safe vault. When these titles are exchanged what happens is just that an entry of who it belongs to is changed in a database. The gold stays where it is.

Levine discusses the case of a group of capitalists who, noticing this, have come up with the idea of selling titles to gold that is still in the ground. They are either fools or knaves as they are assuming that

unmined gold in the ground is as valuable as gold bars in a vault. But, of course, it is not. Unmined gold has no value precisely because it hasn’t been mined, though the land under which it lies will have a price based on what royalties might be received were it to be mined. Gold bars in an underground vault have value only because they have been mined, refined, made into bars and transported, their value reflecting the amount of labour that has had to go into doing all this.

What is perhaps surprising is that this is the explanation put forward in a news site for capitalists, surprising because it is an application of the labour theory of value that pro-capitalist economists teach is nonsense. After noting that ‘that modern finance creates layers of abstraction on top of real-world activity, and sometimes those abstractions become unmoored from the reality’, Levine applies this not just to titles to gold but to the shares in any business. As an example he takes Amazon:

‘A share of Apple Inc. stock encapsulates all of the labor and creativity that went into inventing the iPhone and manufacturing it and selling it and building app stores and everything else; all the factories and offices

and decades of decisions are all reflected in the tradeable electronic token that is a share of stock’.

Another capitalist who has been philosophising on money is the richest person in the world himself, Elon Musk. *Fox News* reported him as telling a business forum on 17 November:

“If you go out long enough, assuming there’s a continued improvement in AI and robotics, which seems likely, the money will stop being relevant at some point in the future,” Musk said. He added there will still be constraints on power, such as electricity and mass. “The fundamental physics elements will still be constraints, but I think at some point currency becomes irrelevant,” Musk said’ ([tinyurl.com/cha35j32](https://www.tinyurl.com/cha35j32)).

Musk seems to be embracing here the FALC — Fully Automated Luxury Communism — thesis. Improvements in AI and robotics will certainly make socialism easier but it is not that which will make money irrelevant. What will is only the conversion of the means of production from the private property of the few into common property of all. And that doesn’t have to wait for ‘full automation’, nor will it come about automatically through advances in technology.

## Ric Best

KENNETH ALARIC Best, who has died after a short illness, joined the Party in 1972 and soon after became a self-described hooligan in Bolton branch, after which he was a founder member of Lancaster branch. His merciless wit as a speaker, honed at a time when adversarial debate was considered a martial art, often left opponents feeling like they’d been machine-gunned. A smart and iconoclastic thinker, he ranged restlessly into all areas of socialist theory. People who spent time with him needed to stay on their toes, because he had little patience for those who couldn’t keep up.

But he also knew how to put the ‘social’ into socialist, with ganja-fuelled parties at his house after every public meeting, which is undoubtedly the reason why Lancaster meetings were so well-attended in the 1980s and 90s. He was an entertaining raconteur with a natural comic timing, and could make even young children laugh. He had a never-ending store of very funny and often salacious stories, sometimes at the expense of other Party members.

Bolton-bred, he spent his formative years in the fire brigade, then later became a computer engineer who embodied the Silicon Valley philosophy of ‘move fast and break things’, running several successful computer businesses. These commitments sadly caused him to drift away from Party involvement in his later years.

Our sympathies go to his wife Kay and children Jo, Jamie and Bill.

**PJS**

### DAP adds:

Ric Best was the first Party member I ever met — it was early 1987 and a meeting in The Liverpool Pub in the business district of the city where what was to become Merseyside Branch gathered. Ric was studying for his Master’s degree in Electrical Engineering at the University as a mature student, and I was a young politics undergraduate. We were different but got on, as we both liked debating. Ric told me he had joined the SPGB as the Party case was the best means he’d ever come across for winning arguments. I can testify that this is something he pursued with great vigour as many other students at the University at the time still vividly remember (as would our political opponents).

Ric was also a great advocate of democratic participation and all it implied. He claimed many times that the best weapon the Party had in its armoury was that it was scrupulously democratic and could — and should — attract people on that basis, being the most democratic political organisation in existence.

There is little doubt Ric was one of the Party’s great ‘characters’ — an overused word perhaps, but rarely more appropriate, and those who knew him will miss him and the energy he somehow imparted wherever he went.

# The luxury gap

Credit: Channel 4



THERE'S A hint of pornography about Channel 4's documentary series *Inside The World's Most Luxurious...* in that it presents an idealised version of something in order to titillate. The first three episodes each show off the highest of high-end vehicles: cruise ships, motor-homes and yachts. These are the most extravagant and technologically advanced ways of getting from A to B available, albeit only to those who can fork out £8,000 a night for a voyage on a liner. On the *Seven Seas Grandeur*, this would get you one of their 'most exclusive' suites, which comes with its own butler. The ship boasts seven restaurants (with Versace-designed crockery), a 470-seat theatre and an art gallery containing 1,600 exhibits, including a doted-on Fabergé egg. More compact are the motor-homes featured in the second episode. These are 'jaw-dropping palaces on wheels', one of which even includes a garage in which you can park your Ferrari. A hi-tech cockpit leads on to a sleek seating area, kitchen, bedroom and bathroom, even a roof terrace. The Element model of motor-home sells for over £2 million, although this sounds like a bargain compared to the £12 million cost for a flat of the same size (732 square feet) in Knightsbridge, London. The third episode showcases 'the super elite's ultimate status symbol': yachts. We're told that 'these floating palaces redefine the meaning of opulence', with one example being the £80 million *Titania*, which runs to 73 metres long and has six decks (containing a massage room, jacuzzi, gym and grand piano) joined by a glass lift. This 'pinnacle of bespoke luxury' is only rarely

used by its owner, the billionaire founder of Phones4U John Caudwell, and otherwise can be hired out for £600,000 per week.

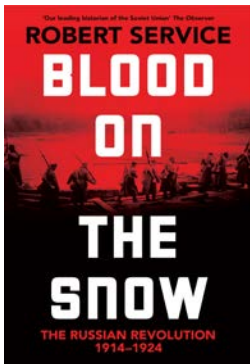
The series describes rather than attempts to analyse the extravagances, not that this means it gives an objective or neutral account, as illustrated by the gushing adjectives used in the narration. While the monetary value of the vehicles is often mentioned, more emphasis is placed on the attention to detail and the skills involved in manufacturing them. The motor-homes and yachts are made to order, with the specifications chosen by the beaming couples who commission them and built by hand by specialist firms. The talents of the designers, welders, plumbers, electricians, and hundreds of others are evident, and the yachts and motor-homes are certainly inspiring as technical achievements. The positive impression the programme engenders also extends to the owners, who seem personable enough, and the creators and crews who want to do a good job in making and running the craft. We are only shown the staff while they're on duty and on camera, though, so we don't hear if their opinions are always so committed. Despite the occasional wry inflection in the voice over, the programme's affirming tone doesn't encourage us to question the context in which these lavish objects exist. Still, it's obvious that the lifestyles depicted in the programme don't bear much relation to those of its audience. The extraordinary feats of design and engineering are tainted by the elitism which the vehicles represent.

In a socialist world, maybe more people

will want to live in yachts or motor-homes or their future equivalents? Without the financial and bureaucratic constraints which in capitalism usually tie us to a particular location whether we want to be there or not, the freedom to travel around would be one of the principles of a socialist society. Some people, groups or communities may prefer to spend time travelling with or without a fixed home, and why not do this in the most comfortable way possible? This leads to the familiar argument against socialism that it is unrealistic and unsustainable because 'what if everyone wanted their own luxury yacht or motor-home?'. An assumption behind this is that given the opportunity, people will tend to choose the most full-on option. Personal greed is an attitude encouraged by the relative scarcities of capitalism, whereas socialism wouldn't create the conditions for an outlook as narrow. Wanting better isn't necessarily the same as wanting more, and even in capitalist society, our aspirations are varied. If an individual or group in a socialist world wanted to produce a top-notch yacht or motor-home, they wouldn't be able to make this happen through financial clout, but only by engaging the cooperation of many others. With resources and manufacturing capabilities owned and run in common, people will have to decide how to allocate them using whatever decision-making processes are most democratic, representative and practical. Without the wasteful production which comes with propping up capitalist infrastructure, a socialist society would be able to focus on satisfying people's needs and wants. Whether or not this would involve behemoths like those featured in the documentary would depend on what provision and motivation are available at the time. A socialist society's early period would have to prioritise ensuring the global population's basic needs are met in a sustainable way. Maybe motor-homes and yachts or their future equivalents could be available on a pool-type basis, with people booking them to use for a while and then being available for someone else. This kind of arrangement would no doubt be alongside networks of more communal travel by land, sea or air. The technology and skills to create efficient, pleasurable means of transport are already here, as demonstrated by *Inside The World's Most Luxurious...*, even if our current society limits this to the super-rich, as the programme also reminds us.

**MIKE FOSTER**

## The Russian Revolution



**Blood on the Snow: The Russian Revolution 1914-1924.**  
By Robert Service ISBN 9781529065855

CONTINUING HIS popular histories of the 1917 Russian Revolution, Robert Service seeks to look more broadly at events, rather than through personalities and political decisions alone. Rather, he seeks to 'explore [...] how 'ordinary' people coped – or failed to cope – with the shattering dislocation of Russian and global affairs' during the revolutionary period.

He utilises the diaries of the likes of Alexei Shtukatur, a worker who was conscripted into the Imperial Army, and Alexander Zamaraev, a peasant, too old to be conscripted. Embedded within the stories of events, their own words reveal frustrations and aspirations. In part, this helps unveil the political sophistication of those often dismissed as ignorant peasants (as Service notes, 'peasant' was a legal, rather than an economic category). Nonetheless, the frustrations of the peasants form a significant backdrop to the events of the revolution.

Zamaraev lived in Totma district, Vologda, where 92 percent of agricultural land belonged to the state, church, and Imperial family. His diaries reveal concern over conscription, support for the Tsar and for the war, and over access to food as the war continued.

Service effectively brings home the conditions under Tsarism during the war, and helps show how common people were far from passive objects during these great events. At this time, one-third of European Russia was placed under martial law, and 13 million men went through the army (Service notes its harsh discipline.) Many others also laboured in the civilian economy. This fact, and the way that previously toothless local government bodies took on increasing responsibility for welfare provision, such as food and medicine, in a co-ordinated fashion (later to be joined by industrial committees) prefigured the kind of state that was to come out of the war.

Service is critical of Tsar Nicholas, especially his war aim of trying to gain Istanbul (or Tsargrad, as they referred to it) for the Russian empire. Service also notes the racist suppression of Jews and Poles within the Empire, the Tsar's failure

to grapple with its massive structural problems, and the way he vigorously resisted the changes needed to fight a modern mechanised war.

He notes that the Bolsheviks did not expect or want the specific revolution that they found themselves involved in, but that the line of party discipline and a one-party state were part of their core ideas from the very beginning: 'They opted for force over persuasion; for central authority over democratic accountability'. They had no more legitimacy than the provisional government of Kerensky, but they were more prepared to use force to get their way.

The book draws out the role of the peasants, economically, politically and legally, and the way their frustrations formed a significant part of the backdrop to the drama against which the political leaders played their parts. In his assessments, though, Service does not look at whether there was any alternative path available which could have led to a different outcome.

P.S.

## Careless Society



**Careless People: Power, Greed, Madness. A story of where I used to work.** By Sarah Wynn-Williams (2025, 4<sup>th</sup> Estate)

Remember the Metaverse? Funny that you don't hear much about it these days. This was going to be the Next Big Thing, the fully immersive virtual reality (VR) heaven where we all spent every waking moment, in our aspirational avatar forms, shopping, meeting people, swanning around in flying cars, and never going outside to see the real sky, or indeed talk to a real person. Unappealing as all this might sound to jaded old cynics and doubters, Mark Zuckerberg was so excited by his own visionary virtual universe that he changed his company name from Facebook to Meta, hired thousands of engineers and invested \$36bn in development. As might be expected, tech firms chucked in plenty of money too, just in case it ever took off, and even manufacturers and high-street businesses like HSBC, Skechers, Bosch, Next and Heineken. Seoul City Council even went so far as to build a VR community space

where people could 'take advantage of public services 24/7 all year round and even visit the virtual mayor's office and library', as well as availing themselves of 'various administrative services such as economy, education, and tax affairs' ([tinyurl.com/pyhx4pyu](https://tinyurl.com/pyhx4pyu)).

It's hard to imagine a duller advertisement for the Metaverse than, 'Hey, you can use it to pay your taxes!' For once, the doubters were on the money. It turned out people didn't want to spend their lives indoors wearing silly Oculus headsets. Sales flopped, followed by investments, until Zuckerberg quietly dropped the whole project ([tinyurl.com/ynyefcab](https://tinyurl.com/ynyefcab)).

One indication of how preposterous the whole thing was, and also why apparently nobody told Zuck this at the time, is the fact that in her tell-all exposé of her five years as a top Facebook executive, Sarah Wynn-Williams doesn't bother to mention the Metaverse once. But she does have plenty to say about Facebook's dirty off-book activities. One of these, which Facebook publicly denied to the consternation of their own marketing teams who were using it as a selling point, was to target vulnerable teenagers who had just deleted a selfie by thrusting beauty ads at them, on the assumption that they must hate the way they look. Though often funny, the darkest part of the book is where Zuck finally realises how the Trump campaign has used Facebook's comprehensive data tools in an ingenious and targeted misinformation offensive in order to win the 2016 election. What's dark about this is that Zuck and the other FB execs are not horrified, they are impressed. Zuck allegedly even begins to form his own plans to use the same techniques to run for president himself. After all, he's so rich he wouldn't even need to fund-raise.

The take-home gist is that, whereas FB starts off as a maladroitness mix of idealists and nerdy technicians with no concept of the political reverberations they are about to unleash on the world, the more wealth and power they acquire, the less they give a damn about anyone or anything, a point rammed home by their casual indifference to the FB-driven massacres in Myanmar. Nobody comes out of this book looking good, including in some ways the author. The corruption, hypocrisy, sexual harassment and megalomania are laid bare for all to see. Some of these people would probably have been jailed, except that capitalism doesn't jail people this stupendously rich. Zuckerberg, increasingly isolated in a protective shell of fawning sycophants, comes across as having had any trace of humanity surgically removed. He is never told that any of his ideas (like

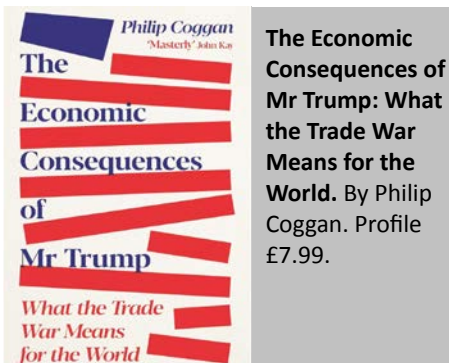


the Metaverse?) are just dumb and won't work, because FB 'ices out' and then fires anyone who dares. He's actually tried to have this book banned in the USA, a truly stupid move because of the 'Streisand effect', where attempts to suppress tend to backfire in spectacular fashion. To no one's surprise, the free-speech champion's attempt at censorship has sent the book to the top of the bestseller list.

But in truth, apart from showing how dysfunctional the business is, there are no real revelations that weren't already out there. Yes, Zuck lied to Congress. Yes, FB are manipulative bastards out to make money out of your data. No, they have no scruples whatsoever. We knew or could guess all that. It's a fun read, but socialists won't be surprised by any of it. It's just the reality of capitalist business with the veneer removed.

**PJS**

## Economic Trade War



**The Economic Consequences of Mr Trump: What the Trade War Means for the World.** By Philip Coggan. Profile £7.99.

A FIRST reaction to this book is that it was likely to be out of date by the time it was published. Given Trump's tendency to change his mind, anything said would probably no longer apply after a month or two. The author does indeed record Trump's decisions about tariffs and his repeated revisions of them, describing him as 'a man without a plan' who based the calculation of tariff rates on an absurd formula. But he also notes some ideas that underlie Trump's policies.

The main reason seems to be the intention to return manufacturing industries (and jobs) to the US, but this is unlikely to be successful. In 2013, as an illustration, Motorola opened a smartphone factory in Texas, but it closed after a year because of high costs. Even when it does pay off, building new factories takes time and the US has a shortage of factory workers; they might come from abroad, but of course Trump is clamping down on immigration. The US will simply not re-enter 'a golden age of manufacturing employment'.

On the whole Coggan adopts an orthodox economic perspective, arguing,

for example, that tariffs interfere with market signals about the causes of rising and falling prices. Tariffs have varied over the centuries and protectionism was more widespread between the two world wars. But since the 1960s tariffs have generally been falling, from a global average of 14 percent then to 10.9 per cent in 2000 and 2.5 per cent in 2021. Free trade, he says, is good for an economy, though there has rarely been completely free trade.

One good point he makes is about the interconnectedness of global production, with long and complex supply chains. An iPhone is based on 187 suppliers across twenty-eight countries, while cars imported to the US from Mexico consist largely of components made in the US. Around eighty per cent of the toys sold in US shops are made in China, so the massive tariffs Trump wanted to impose on imports from China were a non-starter, and they have now been scaled back in a major way. American workers are already complaining about higher food prices as a result of the various tariffs, such as bread doubling in price (*Guardian* 19 October).

The whole world, Coggan suggests at the end of this short volume, 'will suffer the adverse economic consequences of Mr Trump'. But really these are the consequences of the capitalist system, not the result of the idiosyncrasies of one man.

**PB**

## Exhibition Review

### Manchester and the world

THE JOHN Rylands Library in Manchester was founded on the basis of profits made from the cotton industry. It is currently staging an exhibition, 'Cottonopolis: the Origins of Global Manchester', on until May. A number of books, letters and samples of cloth are displayed (one of the

books being Engels' *The Condition of the Working Class in England*).

The population of Manchester grew massively in the 19th century, to over ninety thousand, this increase being mainly in workers in the cotton industry. There were massive increases in production of calico and fustian, especially in the twenty years from 1790, and cotton cloth became Britain's most valuable export. Inventions by Arkwright, Compton and others increased productivity enormously, and there was sizeable growth in companies that made machines, as well as in companies that output the cotton cloth. Steam power resulted in mechanical mills, and new ways of printing cloth were also developed. Mass production meant that the British weaving industry was able to out-compete manufacturers in India.

But, of course, weaving was only part of the story, as the raw cotton came from plantations worked on by slave labour, in the Caribbean and the American South. Some of the cloths manufactured were poor quality 'Africa goods', produced for sale to slave traders to clothe the slaves. One suggestion made in the displays is that the creation of a captive workforce in the colonies changed ideas about how workers in Britain could be exploited under the same industrial machine.

Nor was it just Manchester that profited from the enormous expansion of the cotton trade. Liverpool became an important port for imports and exports, and new canals were built, partly to transport food, coal and so on to the growing industrial hub in the city and its surroundings.

Not a large exhibition, but an informative and interesting set of displays.

**PB**



# Enoch Powell & war

ENOCH POWELL is no friend of the Socialist Party of Great Britain. His divisive views on race are enough to make any self-respecting Socialist shudder. Yet amongst politicians he is undoubtedly one of the more coherent defenders and theorists of the present social set-up. His opposition to government spending, for example, does not extend to the police or prison services. He is in no doubt that crime is an unavoidable part of competitive society and maintains that economies in this field can only hamper the smooth running of that system. On inflation, too, he is uncompromising. He fully understands that inflation is caused by governments having an excess of paper currency printed, an explanation given (although Enoch may not realise it) by all Socialists since Marx.

In a recent edition of the BBC'S Any Questions Mr. Powell "came clean" once again, this time on the subject of war. He expressed the view that, with nations obliged to defend their interests against possible attack by outsiders, all grandiose,



well-meaning schemes to disarm or to abolish war were pie-in-the-sky; the best governments could do was to stave off for as long as possible the wars that were bound to break out sooner or later. This is a bold, objective description of conditions in the world today and we must congratulate Mr. Powell for his frankness and lucidity. (...)

Enoch Powell is simply acknowledging what we have said: in a commercial, nation-divided world, war is inevitable. If the politicians are unable to avert wars, it is quite simply because they are committed to looking after a system that breeds them.

What is our alternative? We suggest a truly united, wholly democratic world with no nations, no money and with the satisfaction of human needs as its first priority. Impossible? We don't think so. All that is in fact needed to bring it into being is peaceful political action by a convinced majority of ordinary people.

*(Socialist Standard, January 1976)*

## Action Replay

### Warming up

THE UN has a programme called Sports for Climate Action, described as 'a global movement harnessing the unifying power of sport to address climate change and build a more sustainable and resilient future' (unfccc.int). Sport can be adversely affected by climate change, pollution and loss of biodiversity, but supposedly it can also be an agent for promoting collective action. Sport, it is claimed, needs to adapt to the impacts of global warming and also to engage its global audience to make their own contribution to fighting climate change.

All very well, of course, but a look at some of the environmental impact of professional sport paints a rather different picture. In motor racing, Formula 1 (F1) will be moving from the use of fossil fuels to an allegedly sustainable fuel from next season, fuel which might then be used in ordinary cars. But, as noted in the November 2025 Science Focus, there are major issues involved here. The new fuels may be low in carbon emissions but still emit many other pollutants, hence not really being sustainable. The synthetic fuels may in fact involve CO2 emissions in the process of producing hydrogen from natural gas, so the overall climate impact is not at all clear. In any case, fuel from races is only a tiny part of F1's total carbon footprint, with massive amounts

of global travel playing a far larger part. Carbon emissions in the logistics side of F1 have already been reduced, but there is still a long way to go to achieve real sustainability.

Another example would be this year's football World Cup, which will be played in the US, Canada and Mexico, in stadiums from Vancouver to Mexico City, so meaning much long-distance travel. It will involve 48 teams and 104 matches (sixteen more teams and forty more games than previous tournaments). Scotland, for instance, will play their group matches in Boston and Miami, which are well over a thousand miles apart. One estimate is that the tournament will generate over nine million tonnes of CO2 equivalent, almost double what previous ones have produced.

In addition, the heat will mean that

many of the venues will be effectively unplayable during the afternoon. Many top players have already suffered while playing in hot conditions in the US, as in last year's Club World Cup, and also there will be hundreds of thousands of supporters, plus backroom staff and media workers who will have to endure extreme heat at many matches, reaching over thirty degrees or perhaps even forty. FIFA are apparently keeping 'an open mind' on all this, which presumably means they won't be making any significant decisions quite yet, if at all.

So global warming can affect not just people's living conditions, but various kinds of leisure activity too. And sport can exacerbate climate change, as well as (just possibly) help to combat it.

**PB**



# World Socialist Movement Online Meetings

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

## January 2026 Events

### World Socialist Movement online meetings

**Friday 9 January 7.30pm • Have you heard the news?**

Open discussion on recent events.

**Friday 16 January 7.30pm • Are we leftwing ...or rightwing?**

Here do others perceive us on the left/right spectrum? Does that spectrum make sense anyway? Speaker: Kevin Cronin

**Friday 23 January 7.30pm • Alienation: What it is. What it feels like. How to end it.**

Speaker: Danny Vogel

**Friday 30 January 7.30pm**

**Art and entertainment in capitalism and socialism**

Speaker: Howard Moss

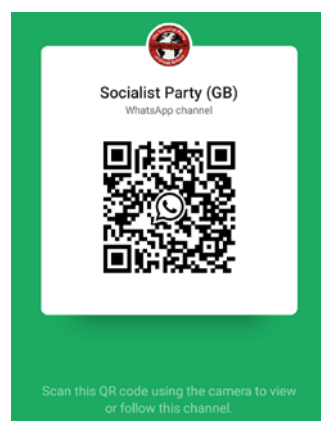
### Socialist Party Physical Meetings

**MANCHESTER**

**Saturday 10 January, 2pm**

**'What does Gerrard Winstanley have to say to us?'**

Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, central Manchester  
The great and good of his day say of Winstanley, 'How knows this man letters, seeing he has never



learned?' And yet he had studied and learned, only not at their feet. A man of the 17th century, he couches his thoughts naturally in religious language, but he makes it plain that if we follow our own reason we can see through the deceit of the world we live in. His knowledge brings a lonely burden to this 'friend to love, wading through the bondage of the world,' yet it gives him hope too, as he can see that the fire of reason can consume the thorn bush, whose ashes will fertilise the ground for the olive tree.

Two words were unknown to Winstanley: 'capitalism' and 'socialism.' Yet he talks to us about both across 4 centuries. .

#### LONDON

**Sunday 25 January 3pm • Who the fuckarewe? What are we worth? What's the point?**

Speaker: Danny Lambert (with an introduction by Marx)  
Socialist Party premises, 52 Clapham High St, London SW4 7UN.

#### 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](http://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](mailto: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.



# Do I Know You..?

I'M STANDING on the concourse at Swansea station. Someone comes up to me. A fellow probably in his forties. He's friendly. 'Hi, how's it going?', he says, 'I haven't seen you for a bit'. I feel embarrassed, slightly panicked in fact. It happens to me a lot. I'm greeted by someone who obviously knows me, but my memory for faces (and names) has become terrible and I can't for the life of me remember who they are. When this happens, what I can't do of course is say something like 'Do I know you?' And sometimes, once we get talking, they say something that reminds me who they are and that I do know them, even if I still can't recall their names. But this fellow, I'd swear I don't know him from Adam – though surely I must.

Anyway I try not to look surprised. 'I'm okay. How are you?', I say. He nods and says, 'What are you doing here?' I reply that I'm waiting for my son and grandson who've gone into Costa Coffee to get a sandwich for their journey home. 'Are you going somewhere?', I ask, as a way of finding something to say. 'No, I'm in a mess', he replies. 'My wife has left me and I'm out of the house. I'm on the street.'

What now? I'm supposed to know him and he's obviously asking for help. So, I need to do something. I need to give him some money. But how much? When someone asks me for money on the street – it seems to happen a lot – I usually give them a pound coin if I've got one in my pocket. But can I give this fellow just a pound? After all he's someone I apparently know- and he's in a real mess, So one pound just doesn't feel right. How much then? If I have notes on me, they're usually in my wallet not my pocket, but somehow I don't want to get my wallet out. But then I remember I do actually have a ten pound note in my pocket – change from something I bought earlier. I feel in my pocket, pull it out and hand it to him. 'Hope this helps', I say. He thanks me and asks me where my son is. I see that they (he and my little grandson) have just come out of Costa Coffee and are waiting for me further down the concourse. I wave in their direction. 'They're there', I say. And I start to walk towards them. He walks with me for a few steps, but then veers off in a different direction. I get to my son and



tell him what's happened. 'My memory's getting worse', I say. As my 'friend' vanishes from sight, my son, with an amused look on his face, says 'you've been conned'. It takes a few seconds for the scales to fall from my eyes. He then adds jokingly: 'I saw you hand the money over. I thought you were doing a drugs deal'.

We both laugh, but how do I actually feel? Well, despite having being conned, I don't actually feel annoyed. I feel a bit sad in fact. Why? Well, though my pretend friend has put one over on me, it won't cause me any great hardship and I can't help feeling sorry for him. Even though most people would probably regard him as at least a bit of a villain, my thinking is that you have to be pretty much on your uppers and probably at your wit's end to do that kind of thing. I couldn't know of course what his real story was and no doubt I wasn't the only one he'd tried the same trick on that day. But how desperate does someone have to be to resort to that kind of deception all the while knowing he's likely to suffer one rebuff after another but just hoping he'll manage to take in the odd unsuspecting fool?

And what might have been this fellow's story? Perhaps he'd had a particularly difficult upbringing he'd been unable to shake off and the only thing he'd known was a life of surviving by one trick or another? Or had he just fallen on hard times, things having come apart for him as happens to a fair number of people

in the wage-slave society we live in- people who maybe lose their jobs and then can't keep up with housing and other costs? Or did he have a mental health problem which prevented him from living most people's 9 to 5 life and getting by on what they earned? Or maybe something else? A recent report from the Centre for Social Justice think-tank found that around 13.4 million people in the UK were living lives 'marred by family fragility, stagnant wages, poor housing, chronic ill health and crime'. Whatever the case, he wasn't one of the many millions of us who manage to keep their heads above water by having a paying job, even if at the cost of keeping the lid on, never being truly free of potential financial insecurity and often paying a high price in terms of self-fulfilment and quality of life. That's the best in fact that the system we live in of buying and selling, monetary exchange and monopoly of wealth by a tiny minority can offer to the vast majority who have to sell their energies for a wage or salary in a society in which everything's for sale. A wageless, moneyless society of cooperative work and free access to all goods and services – ie, socialism- is what we urgently need to cure all those maladies.

**HOWARD MOSS**