

THE

February 2026 • Volume 122 • Number 1458 • £1.50

SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

Iran: murdered by the mullahs



Also: Gangster strategy
Venezuela: what has really
happened and what may lie ahead

Venezuela: another failure of
reformism
Alternatives
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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'

Iran's cry of the oppressed

PEOPLE, shot by live ammunition, too terrified to go to hospital for fear of being arrested. Body bags spilling out of mortuaries onto the street. 'Security' forces extorting the equivalent of 6 years labourer's annual wage to return the dead to their families (tinyurl.com/bnp3jey2). 18,000 protesters arrested, some facing summary execution. A total communications blackout, forcing some to walk hundreds of miles to border areas to get information out.

As this goes to press the Iranian government, undaunted by Donald Trump's bluster, says it has killed around 2,500 protesters, but if they're admitting to that figure, the real toll might well be far higher.

Some protesters were apparently hoping for the return of the monarchy under Reza Pahlavi, son of the hated former shah, who had been energetically trying to stir up Iranian public opinion from his safe home in Washington DC. That was seen by most media pundits as an unlikely, even farcical proposition, and one too monstrous for anyone who remembers the brutal repression of the shah, before the advent

of the mad mullahs. But the alternatives, civil war or else a military coup, didn't look attractive either.

The Iranian people only want what anyone wants, to be free to live decent lives. In pursuit of that modest aspiration they have repeatedly shown a level of personal bravery that commands a heartrending respect. 'Sometimes parents go to the protests and don't come back,' explained one mother to her two young children, shortly before she too was killed by police gunfire. 'My blood, and yours, is no more precious than anyone else's' (tinyurl.com/rw67sbf6).

They have never stopped fighting the theocracy, and they probably never will. Within just two weeks of the 1979 revolution, women were out on the street protesting against the new mandatory hijab, which followed 'a ban on alcohol; the separation of men and women in universities, schools, pools and beaches; and limitations on broadcasting music from radio and television.' More protests came in 1992, '94 and '95, then a massive one in 1999 following closure of a liberal newspaper, then in 2007 because of petrol

rationing, and again in 2009-10 due to what many saw as a rigged election. More protests followed in 2011 in solidarity with Arab Spring uprisings elsewhere, and later in 2017 over the cost of living, and 2018 over water shortages. Most recently in 2022, months of protest followed the alleged judicial murder of Mahsa Amini, arrested by the 'morality' police (as if they knew the meaning of the word) for failing to wear a headscarf. In all these protests, the police went in with guns blazing. Hundreds were killed, thousands arrested, and many executed, including by hanging from cranes in public places 'to deter others' (tinyurl.com/pbux4ms2).

The regime may cling on for now, and the more it crumbles, the more viciously it will oppress its own people. Its leaders – and its army of police thugs – know what will happen to them if they finally lose control. They won't expect mercy, and they damn well won't deserve any.

Slaughter in Gaza, slaughter in Ukraine, slaughter in Sudan, in Myanmar, and now in Iran. Dozens of armed conflicts elsewhere. When does it ever stop, in capitalism? The tragedy is that it never will, until we bring an end to the competitive market system which sets humans forever against each other, just so that a tiny few can profit.

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Human factories

Credit: Adobe Stock



WITH CINEMA takings falling in recent years due to online streaming, Hollywood has resorted to transparent attempts to lure in the lucrative female demographic through ‘girl-boss’ films, which show women in history dramas wielding huge swords and beating up men twice their size, outshining, outsmarting and indeed humiliating them at every turn. This has been widely derided as ‘wokism’, but women are unlikely to be fooled by such patronising efforts to ‘empower’ them for the sake of box-office revenue. Unlike media executives spinning fantasies, they know what reality looks like in capitalism, where the pay gap is as wide as ever and domestic violence against women is at epidemic levels.

Late last year a Cornell University study looked at why so few women were found in senior job roles, and suggested that women had two strategies or ‘pathways’, one that gave them status, and the other that gave them power. The study concluded that women achieved status but not power through ‘gender-congruent’ behaviour (ie, being ‘ladylike’ and nice to men), whereas ‘gender-incongruent’ behaviour (ie, being assertive like men, aka ‘pushy’), might achieve power but was less likely to succeed (tinyurl.com/49686ujw).

Small wonder, perhaps, that writers from Charlotte Perkins Gilman onward have speculated about past or future feminist utopias. Back in October science writer Laura Spinney authored a somewhat tongue-in-cheek *Guardian* piece entitled ‘Was prehistory a feminist paradise?’

Predictable answer: no. She discusses the ‘Marxist idea’ that the roots of patriarchy lay in the agricultural revolution, without once mentioning the word ‘property’, and with a hand-wavy vagueness that suggests she’s never read Engels on *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, or possibly even heard of it. That might be why the book does not appear in her ‘Further reading’ section (tinyurl.com/yz986jdf).

One book that does appear, however, is *The Patriarchs*, by Angela Saini (2023) reviewed last January (tinyurl.com/4pd99b75). This author clearly has read Engels, though initially she seems oddly dismissive. Some property-based communities in India and China, she points out, are known up to comparatively modern times to have been matrilineal (inheritance via the female line) and matrilocal (brides staying at home, husbands relocating). In these communities, women knew each other whereas the men didn’t, giving women the greater collective influence, and girls tended to be taller than in patrilineal groups, suggesting they were better fed. Given these examples, Saini proposes that Engels overstated the crucial importance of the property mechanism in bringing about the ‘world historic defeat of the female sex’. Essentially, she says, it was never that fast or that simple.

It becomes clear, in the second half of the book, that far from dismissing Engels, she is seeking to further develop the implicit consequences of his argument. Property may have provided the mechanism for this historic defeat, she says, but it wasn’t initially decisive. What was decisive was the growth of the ‘state machine’. Power, she argues, relies on a big army, and this in turn depends on population size. To increase the one, you need to increase the other. How to achieve this? Ruthlessly enforce strict gender roles, as either soldier or mother. Use disposable males for farm labour and the military, and turn women into baby factories and stay-at-home textile workers. Ancient wars, Saini says, were as much about grabbing extra women as extra land. Women were the first known slaves in Mesopotamia, and obedience to men was baked into ancient cultures and religious texts, including the Bible and Koran.

There is a contemporary resonance. Population size today may not equate to military might as it once did, but it’s still important to capitalist states. More workers equal, potentially, more profit,

properly staffed infrastructures, healthy tax-funded governments, thriving towns and small businesses, high house prices and high demand for construction, transport systems, energy use, and so on.

Globally, the opposite is happening. Almost everywhere outside sub-Saharan Africa, birth rates are well below replacement levels and falling. While voters in many countries are hypnotised by the populist fever-dream of the ‘immigration problem’, the better-informed know the truth. Capitalism is facing a demographic crisis. When population falls below a certain critical mass, things start to fall apart. Profits shrink, offices are deserted, whole towns are abandoned. Pension and health costs rise inexorably with the median age, paid from a shrinking tax fund and understaffed via a shrinking workforce. The European Commission predicts that by 2070 there will be barely two working-age people for every one person over 65 (*Economist*- tinyurl.com/ua3ey448). China is thought to be massaging its official figures to disguise a catastrophic population decline (tinyurl.com/2u3h4vc8). The reasons for all this are well known, to do with better education and access to contraception, and the rising costs of living, housing and parenthood. And states have begun to fight back.

The USSR in 1920 was the first country in the world to legalise abortion, but Stalin reversed the ruling just sixteen years later, when birth rates started falling. Now pressure is being applied to women in many countries to have more children. The right wing is morphing in sinister and cult-like pro-natalist and Christian trad-wife directions. In 2022 the US Supreme Court reversed the *Roe vs Wade* ruling, effectively banning abortion in many states. In 2024, US republicans voted against contraception as a federal right. China’s president Xi Jinping ‘told a meeting of the All-China Women’s Federation in 2023 that women should “actively cultivate a new culture of marriage and child-bearing”’ (tinyurl.com/329tnfs4).

If Saini’s historical analysis is right, the global outlook for women is not encouraging. Capitalist states need more babies, and never mind what women want. And never mind what men want either. The market system makes everyone suffer. For socialists, there’s really only one way to permanently destroy the forces that make us all into human factories, of one kind or another, for the benefit of the rich. And that’s by joining forces to bring down, not just glass ceilings, but ruling class power.

PJS

Dear Editors

Ending the money system can save the planet

MONEY MAY feel neutral — just a tool for exchange. And environmental destruction is usually framed as a technological problem, a political failure, or a lack of individual responsibility. But the primary driver of ecological degeneration is the system we live under. It requires endless growth, even though the earth itself does not grow — forests regenerate slowly, soils take centuries to rebuild.

In a monetary framework, nature has value only when it can be priced. So, for example, a living forest is ‘unused land’ and a felled forest is ‘economic activity’. Clean air, biodiversity, climate stability, and future generations tend to be ignored by balance sheets. It is more profitable to extract than to regenerate and so what cannot be monetised is treated as expendable, the result often being not stewardship, but liquidation. This doesn’t happen because people are evil. It happens because the system rewards the wrong behaviour.

The result is that total global debt now equals more than three years of the planet’s entire yearly output — everything humanity produces in one year, multiplied by three, already promised away. But growth and the borrowing that goes with it means more extraction and more pressure on land, oceans, climate, and people. We have in effect built a system that treats Earth as an infinite credit card — and even after maxing it out, it demands a higher limit.

That is why we do not have a problem that can be fixed with better regulation, greener growth, or smarter finance. The system that requires endless expansion on a finite planet is not malfunctioning. It is doing exactly what it was designed to do.

This brings us to the question of artificial scarcity. Money-based systems depend on scarcity, but not natural scarcity — manufactured scarcity. There is enough food, yet people starve. There are more than enough homes,

yet people are homeless. There is an abundance of energy from the sun, yet we burn the planet for fuel. So scarcity is not a condition of nature. It is a condition of design. And scarcity doesn’t just damage ecosystems. It damages people and a wounded humanity consumes to compensate. Much of modern overconsumption is not driven by greed, but rather by emptiness. When work is disconnected from meaning, when time is stolen from life, when worth is measured numerically, people compensate by seeking status, possessions and distractions.

This is a system that erodes human dignity. You are valued only when you are profitable. So rest must be earned, care must be justified, illness is a liability, and ageing becomes a problem. Your right to exist depends not on being human but on being useful.

But ending money would change the questions. Without money, society would stop asking ‘Is this profitable?’ and begins asking questions like ‘Is this necessary?’, ‘Is this sustainable?’, ‘Does this improve life for people and the planet?’ When production becomes needs-based, technology serves life, not return on investment, and durability replaces planned obsolescence.

It’s not that people aren’t trying to save the planet within the today’s monetary system — many are. But every serious environmental effort is forced to operate against the system’s underlying logic. Renewable energy must compete with fossil fuels on price. Ecosystem protection must justify itself in economic terms. Climate action must promise growth, jobs, and returns to be considered ‘realistic’. In other words, nature is allowed to survive only if it can be made profitable. And this creates a constant contradiction: we try to heal the planet while preserving the very engine that requires its continued destruction. As long as money, debt, and

growth remain the organizing principles of society, ecological protection will always be partial, fragile, and reversible — tolerated only until it threatens profits. That’s why saving the planet without ending the monetary system is not just difficult; it may be structurally impossible.

You may say ‘What can we have instead? This is the only system we’ve got.’ But is it? When land, water, and ecosystems are no longer owned for profit, extraction loses its incentive, care becomes collective, and long-term thinking becomes natural.

Stewardship replaces ownership. The guiding question shifts from ‘How can we extract as much as possible?’ to ‘How do we keep this system healthy for ourselves and future generations?’ Just as a humanity stripped of dignity will compete, consume, and destroy, a humanity that feels safe, valued, and meaningful does not need to dominate its environment.

So while ending the monetary system does not magically save the planet, it does remove the root incentive that is currently destroying it — and it also gives both Earth and humanity a chance to recover. This is the core vision explored in my book, *Waking Up – A Journey Towards a New Dawn for Humanity*, a story that doesn’t ask whether such a new world is perfect, but whether it becomes possible once the old rules are removed. The question is no longer whether we can afford to imagine a world beyond money. The question is whether we can afford not to.

HARALD SANDØ

We broadly agree, though we see the imperative to growth that is built into capitalism as resulting from its economic drive to make and accumulate more profit rather than from having to make money to repay interest on debt – Editors.

No Marx *without* Adam Smith?

NEXT MONTH is the 250th anniversary of the publication of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*. In the run-up to this, the *Economist* (18 December) carried an article by its 'senior economics writer', Callum Williams, in which he suggested that Smith had been 'misinterpreted and his influence overstated'.

His case was that Smith wasn't the originator of the ideas he expressed, that he copied from others and was a bad writer, and that he also made mistakes:

'In the "Wealth of Nations", he argued for the "labour theory of value" (the idea that the amount of work that goes into a product determines its price, rather than how useful that product is). This theory distracted economists for decades and laid the groundwork for Marxism. Exploitation, in Marx's view, arose from the difference between how much workers had laboured to create a good and what they were paid for producing it. Without Smith, there could have been no Marx'.

The last sentence is ridiculous. There were others before Smith who put forward the view that the exchange-value of a product of labour depended on the amount of labour required to produce it. In a footnote early on in the opening

chapter of *Capital*, Marx's quotes Benjamin Franklin as having pointed out in 1729 that: 'Trade in general being nothing else but the exchange of labour for labour, the value of all things is ... justly measured by labour'.

Prior to *Capital*, in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), Marx credited Franklin as the person 'who for the first time deliberately and clearly ... reduces exchange-value to labour-time.'

In a podcast on the same subject on 1 January (tinyurl.com/3dkjc2ur), Williams attempted to refute the labour theory of value by saying that, on the contrary, 'what determines the price of a good is ... how much demand there is for that good and how much of that good is supplied by the market'. This differs from what he had written in his article that a product's price is determined by 'how useful that product is'. That argument is easy to refute — there are a lot of things that are more useful than gold or diamonds yet gold and diamonds have a higher price; which, clearly, must have something to do with the fact that it is more difficult (takes more work and time) to produce gold and diamonds than it does to produce the other, more useful products.

Supply and demand determine the short-term market price but, in the longer term, supply will only continue if the suppliers — profit-seeking capitalist firms — cover their costs and make a profit. In bringing about the longer-term price the play of market forces will take into account the labour-time required to produce the product from start to finish.

Not that Marx did argue that under capitalism products exchanged at their labour-time value. He was well aware that the pursuit of profits resulted in this happening only accidentally but that the prices at which products sold could only be explained on the basis of a labour theory of value.

The reason why economists came to reject any labour theory of value (Smith's as well as Marx's) was that it led to the conclusion Marx reached who, said Williams, based 'his entire theory of exploitation on the labour theory of value'. It was, he said, 'precisely because Smith was so influential, his wrong-headedness about the labour theory of value was a big problem.'

This problem was solved, says Williams, when economic theory 'gets wrestled back through the correct understanding of value by the marginalists at the end of the 19th century'. How convenient for the exploiters of labour, but it turned academic economics from a science into apologetics for capitalism.



If 'populism' is taken to mean politics popular with the majority pitched against an elite minority, should socialists aim to make socialism 'populist'? Certainly socialists work to make socialism popular globally with the majority, but without pandering to notions that would negate its revolutionary goal. This means being opposed to ideas that might attract wide support in the short term while actively undermining the socialist case. Because 'populism' remains ill-defined, it gets applied to a right wing group

such as Reform UK, or a left wing organisation like Your Party. In the USA, Donald Trump's Republican Party can be termed 'populist' as might Bernie Sanders' variety of leftism, and similar examples are found in Europe and elsewhere. Is 'populism' simply reformism repackaged for the 21st century?

The Socialist Party's weekend of talks and discussion will explore how the concept of 'populism' has developed, why it attracts support and what this tells us about capitalist society.

Our venue is the University of Worcester, St John's Campus, Henwick Grove, St John's, Worcester, WR2 6AJ. Full residential cost (including accommodation and meals Friday evening to Sunday afternoon) is £150; the concessionary rate is £80. Book online at spgb.net/summer-school-2026 or send a cheque (payable to the Socialist Party of Great Britain) with your contact details to Summer School, The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 7UN. Day visitors are welcome, but please e-mail for details in advance. E-mail enquiries to spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk.



Halo Halo

NOW SUPPOSING there was such an entity as a god, what would you think of a supreme being who demanded that males, while still a baby, were compelled to have their reproductive organs mangled, maimed, mutilated and chopped about?

‘God says, “This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised”. The act of circumcision is to be performed on every male child on the eighth day after birth, whether born into the household or purchased from a foreigner, and it serves as a physical sign of the covenant between God and Abraham’s lineage’ (Genesis 17.10.).

Male circumcision is not mentioned in the Quran but it is practised by followers of Islam too.

Unless you’re a misandrist feminist there is nothing at all humorous or jokey in the act described above. And there’s nothing funny about the mangling, maiming, and mutilating carried out on females in the

name of religion either. Unless you’re a misandrist feminist there is nothing at all humorous or jokey in the act described in the opening. What is shocking is the mangling, maiming, and mutilating carried out on females in the name of religion.

A UNICEF report issued in March 2024 on the subject of FGM (female genital mutilation) noted that 230 million females, young and adult, had been subjected to FGM. The report noted that over an eight year period, from 2016 to 2024, 30 million more individuals, a 15 percent increase, had had FGM imposed upon them. The report said that there were grounds for believing that FGM was being carried out on girls at even younger ages, ‘often before their fifth birthday’ (tinyurl.com/2wshwh3).

A little like the creationists in the USA who are always trying to get rid of Darwinist teachings in schools there are those who use the judicial process to maintain the continuation of FGM. In Gambia at the end of 2025 its supreme court heard from

‘religious traditionalists who are hoping to topple the country’s poorly enforced ban on female genital mutilation.’ Apparently, ‘The Gambia has one of the highest rates of FGM in the world, with 73 percent of women and girls aged 15 to 49 having undergone the procedure (Unicef). FGM was outlawed in 2015 in the West African nation by then dictator Yahya Jammeh, who branded it outdated and not a requirement of Islam. The ban was subsequently upheld in July 2024 when lawmakers rejected a controversial bill... plaintiffs filed an appeal with the Supreme Court in April, arguing that the procedure is a deeply rooted cultural and religious practice’ (tinyurl.com/vnr254pw).

In Kenya, *The Standard* reported that attacks had been carried out on church property and personnel and on girls and male church associates and that some of their members had been forcefully re-circumcised. The report gave no indication as to who was carrying out these attacks (tinyurl.com/mw249x4b).

A December article at LBC is unequivocal as to FGM: ‘FGM/C is not a cultural ‘practice. It is not a medical ‘procedure... It is not an “ethical dilemma”. It is violence against women and children.’

DC

Tiny tips

IN ALMOST all regions of the world, the top 1% of the population is richer than the combined 90%. Wealth inequality increases further with each passing day, mostly due to the lack of political will to stop it (**Popular Resistance**, tinyurl.com/2p3j5msm).

In China, inequality remains high... The top 10% of earners capture about 43% of national income, while the bottom 50% receive just 14%. Wealth disparities are particularly large, with the richest 10% holding nearly 68% of total wealth and the top 1% about 30% (**World Inequality Report**, tinyurl.com/59xvyvtj).

Nearly half of Kenyans live in extreme poverty, i.e., on less than KES 130 [£0.75] per day. Yet a few have amassed enormous wealth. The richest 125 Kenyans have more wealth than more than three-quarters of Kenyans, about 43 million people (**Oxfam**, tinyurl.com/kfnu7zs8).

We celebrate the ‘recovery’ of fish populations that are stabilized at 5% or 10% of their historical population, mistaking

the management of ruins for conservation. To understand the magnitude of what has been stolen, we must look back before the industrial age. In the 17th century, the ocean was a different planet. When Christopher Columbus sailed through the Caribbean in the late 15th century, he described the seas near Cuba as being ‘thick with turtles’, so numerous that it seemed his ships would run aground on them... in numbers estimated between 33 and 39 million adults in the Caribbean alone. They were a biological dominance that defined the seascape. Today, those populations are a shadow of the ‘mother sea’ that once existed. This report is an autopsy of the decline. It is an investigation into the specific species that the fishing industry has sacrificed on the altar of commerce (**Sea Piracy**, tinyurl.com/mryburf8).

As both the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) monitor and Reuters noted, Poland is among multiple state parties in the process of ditching the Mine Ban Treaty. Citing the Polish Ministry of

Foreign Affairs, the news agency reported that “antipersonnel mine production could begin once the treaty’s six-month withdrawal period is completed on February 20, 2026” (**Common Dreams**, tinyurl.com/53fy6msu).

Greenpeace is a strong example, having emerged from ecological protest movements in the 1970s and 1980s, but having eased into largely cooperating with capitalist corporations and governments over time and giving legitimacy to their propaganda about individual lifestyle choices being the way to solve climate change (**Counterfire**, tinyurl.com/4w65sru2).

The Rupert Murdoch-owned tabloid, which has previously slammed vaccine skeptic Kennedy as a ‘paranoid kook’ whose ‘tin foil hat is blocking out all sense’, tore into the Trump Cabinet member for his war on what it called ‘one of the biggest public health wins of the last century: the widespread use of disease-eradicating vaccines’ (**HuffPost**, tinyurl.com/kcd3jhrb).

Therefore, we do not offer any support to wars waged by any capitalist state or any faction aimed at creating or strengthening a new state, whether aggressor or aggrieved, whether or not they describe themselves as ‘socialist’ or ‘democratic’ (**Internationalist Perspective**, tinyurl.com/bp5ntx55).

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

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

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

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

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A Socialist Future: How it works and how society is organised

SOCIALISM IS not a reform of capitalism nor a system of state management exercised by a minority. It is a fundamentally different form of society based on common ownership of the means of producing and distributing wealth, democratic control by the whole community, and production carried out directly for use rather than for sale and profit.

At the centre of this vision is the principle articulated by Karl Marx in *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875): 'From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs'. This is not an ethical command enforced by authority, but a description of how social relations can function once class divisions, markets, and material insecurity have been overcome.

How the socialist system functions

In a socialist society, land, industry, transport, and infrastructure are held in common by society as a whole. No individual, corporation, or state body owns productive resources as private property. As a result, the wages system disappears, along with money, buying and selling, and the accumulation of profit.

Production is organised solely to meet human needs. The immense productive powers already developed under capitalism – science, technology, automation, and global logistics – can be consciously redirected toward ensuring that everyone has free access to food, housing, healthcare, education, and cultural resources. Freed from the constraints of profit, production becomes rational, sustainable, and humane.

Individuals contribute according to their abilities and inclinations. Work is no longer forced by economic necessity but becomes a cooperative social activity. Distribution is based on need rather than purchasing power, reflecting the real material requirements of human life.

Democratic organisation and coordination

Socialist society is organised democratically from the bottom up. Communities and workplaces collectively decide priorities and communicate their needs and capacities. These decisions are coordinated at wider levels to ensure

efficient use of resources and to avoid duplication or waste.

This is not rule by planners standing above society. It is society consciously planning itself. Modern information systems already demonstrate the technical feasibility of coordinating complex production on a global scale. In socialism, such coordination is transparent and accountable, serving human needs rather than profit or power.

Political structure and the end of class rule

Because socialism abolishes class ownership, it also abolishes the political structures designed to maintain class power. The state, understood as an instrument of coercion and domination, becomes unnecessary. What remains are administrative and coordinating bodies tasked with carrying out collectively agreed decisions.

Delegates are elected, mandated, and recallable. They do not rule; they serve. There is no permanent political elite, no professional governing class, and no separation between those who make decisions and those who live with the consequences. Political activity becomes an aspect of everyday social life rather than a specialised career.

The Paris Commune: A historical example

A glimpse of this kind of organisation was seen in the Paris Commune of 1871. For a brief period, working people took collective control of the city and replaced the existing state machinery with directly accountable institutions. Officials were elected and recallable, paid workers' wages, and combined legislative and administrative functions rather than standing above society as a separate authority.

Although the Commune existed under extreme conditions and did not abolish capitalism, it demonstrated essential socialist principles in practice: popular control, the dismantling of hierarchical state power, and the replacement of rule by administration. Its significance lies not in its limitations, but in showing that ordinary people can organise society themselves without a ruling class.

Freedom, equality, and human development

Socialism expands freedom by removing the economic compulsion that dominates life under capitalism. With secure access to the means of life, individuals are free to develop their abilities, participate meaningfully in social decision-making, and shape their own lives. Equality means equal access to resources and equal standing in society, not enforced uniformity.

In such a society, politics and economics are no longer separate spheres. Society consciously regulates its productive activity, its relationship with nature, and its social priorities. Cooperation replaces competition, and production for use replaces production for profit.

Socialism, understood in this way, is not imposed by leaders or institutions. It can only be created by a conscious majority acting in its own interests. It represents the collective self-emancipation of humanity and the practical realisation of a society guided by the principle: 'From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs'.

JAKE AMBROSE, Australia

Socialism As a Practical Alternative



The Socialist Party

Gangster strategy

Credit: Adobe Stock



FAMOUSLY, US President Theodore Roosevelt said ‘speak softly and carry a big stick; you will go far’. He expanded: ‘If you simply speak softly the other man will bully you. If you leave your stick at home you will find the other man did not. If you carry the stick only and forget to speak softly in nine cases out of ten, the other man will have a bigger stick’. In practice for international relations, this has been interpreted as having credible military capacity, relying on diplomacy and ‘soft power’ first.

In effect, this is the ideology of gangsters. The aim is to get your way by any means, talk backed up by force is the easy way. As the late David Graeber observed, capitalism was founded on an ‘alliance of financiers and warriors’ so this gangsterism cuts to the essence of the worldwide system in which we live. The talking quietly part, though, usually entails telling stories that deny this gangsterism and instead making the narrative about democracy versus autocracy or good versus evil.

The current US President seems willing to dispense with the ‘speak softly’, as evidenced by the recently published National Security Strategy (2025) (tinyurl.com/SPGBSSNSS) which with typical modesty envisages a ‘roadmap to ensure that America remains the greatest and most successful nation in human history which possesses ‘inherent greatness and decency’. Much of it reads as much of a manifesto as a strategy document, but it is very revealing, especially considering that for years we and others have been arguing that the goals of state foreign policies are to support their access to trade routes and vital resources, and here they are admitting this is the case. Take this piece of nonsensical bombast: ‘President Trump’s foreign policy is pragmatic without being “pragmatist,” realistic without being “realist,” principled without being “idealistic,” muscular without being

“hawkish,” and restrained without being “dovish.” It is not grounded in traditional, political ideology. It is motivated above all by what works for America – or, in two words, “America First”’.

This can be summed up as flexible, self-interested and unprincipled. However, the document is clear about the strategic way to achieve that self-interest:

‘We want to recruit, train, equip, and field the world’s most powerful, lethal, and technologically advanced military to protect our interests, deter wars, and – if necessary – win them quickly and decisively, with the lowest possible casualties to our forces’.

They want to do this to keep ‘the Indo-Pacific free and open, preserving freedom of navigation in all crucial sea lanes, and maintaining secure and reliable supply chains and access to critical materials.’ Given this was precisely the background to the wars in Vietnam and Korea, this merely displays Palmerston’s axiom ‘We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow’.

The document recognises, however, that ‘As the United States rejects the ill-fated concept of global domination for itself, we must prevent the global, and in some cases even regional, domination of others’. Securing these interests means preventing anyone else being able to challenge them. Hence ‘We want to prevent an adversarial power from dominating the Middle East, its oil and gas supplies, and the chokepoints through which they pass’. This is at least an honest expression of what has been America’s long-term strategy in the Middle East, except with a determination not to become embroiled in war there.

More broadly: ‘We stand for the sovereign rights of nations, against the sovereignty-sapping incursions of the most intrusive transnational organizations, and for reforming those institutions so that

they assist rather than hinder individual sovereignty and further American interests’.

National interests above human or individual rights, a bleak authoritarian doctrine, especially, as the strategy affirms: ‘The outsized influence of larger, richer, and stronger nations is a timeless truth of international relations.’ Indeed, the aim seems to be precisely to enable such domination by inhibiting transnational bodies.

This can be seen in the section about Europe: ‘We want to support our allies in preserving the freedom and security of Europe, while restoring Europe’s civilizational self-confidence and Western identity’. The fetishised ‘Western identity’ politics that sees America as a successor to Rome lives in the minds of many of the current faction in charge of the government there. Hence they also state ‘America is, understandably, sentimentally attached to the European continent – and, of course, to Britain and Ireland’.

The document sees ‘the larger issues facing Europe include activities of the European Union and other transnational bodies that undermine political liberty and sovereignty.’ To that end ‘America encourages its political allies in Europe to promote this revival of spirit, and the growing influence of patriotic European parties indeed gives cause for great optimism.’ In other words, the strategy document seeks to fragment Europe into nation states, which the US can dominate and use.

An interesting note is that the US seeks to end ‘the perception, and preventing the reality, of NATO as a perpetually expanding alliance’ and to ‘reestablish strategic stability with Russia,’ and ‘prevent unintended escalation or expansion of the war’ in Ukraine.

The real focus is on the Indo-Pacific part of the globe which ‘is already the source of almost half the world’s GDP based on purchasing power parity (PPP), and one third based on nominal GDP. That share is certain to grow over the 21st century’. The US there seeks to avoid war ‘by preserving military overmatch’ and to deal with China as a near peer.

Perhaps most unfortunately, the strategy states ‘We reject the disastrous “climate change” and “Net Zero” ideologies that have so greatly harmed Europe, threaten the United States, and subsidize our adversaries’. Climate change is a real security threat, that pales all the rest. This document envisages energy dominance and using energy resources to grow the American economy and military power.

This dismal manifesto sees the world continuing to settle disputes, as Shaw put it ‘as dogs settle a dispute over a bone’.

PIK SMEET

Venezuela: what has really happened and what may lie ahead

VENEZUELA HAS once again been making headlines around the world. Explosions, military movements, international pressure, mutual accusations and a great deal of confusion. To understand what has happened so far, it is necessary to look beyond the propaganda, both from the Venezuelan government and the US, and from those who defend one gang or the other.

It's nothing to do with democracy or freedom

The first thing that needs to be made clear is this: the US is not acting out of a desire to defend the Venezuelan people, nor out of love for democracy or human rights. We have seen this many times before in other countries. When a major power intervenes, directly or indirectly, it does so to defend its own economic and strategic interests.

Talk of fighting drug trafficking or restoring democracy serves to justify actions that, at heart, are about political control, natural resources and regional power.

Nor is it about defending 'sovereignty'

On the other hand, the Venezuelan government and its allies present what has happened as an imperialist attack on national sovereignty. But here is another uncomfortable truth: the Venezuelan state does not represent the interests of the majority of the working class.

For years, millions of people have suffered from inflation, low wages, forced emigration, deteriorating services and repression. All this happened without direct foreign intervention, under a government that claimed to rule on behalf of the people.

Will there be any real change?

There is much talk of 'regime change', but in reality what is happening is, at most, a change of administrators within the same system.

As long as there is:

- wage labour,
 - production for the market,
 - social inequality,
 - a state that protects the property and power of a minority,
- the lives of the majority will not

fundamentally change. Changing a president or a ruling group does not change the system that produces poverty and insecurity.

Will there be more attacks or more pressure?

No one can predict exactly what will happen, but there is a clear logic: as long as Venezuela remains a strategic country because of its oil and geographical position, the pressure will continue, whether military, economic or diplomatic.

This does not depend on whether a government is 'good' or 'bad', but on how states function in a capitalist world in constant competition.

The role of China and other powers

Some believe that China or Russia are a fairer alternative to the United States. But these powers do not act out of solidarity, but out of their own interests. China invests, lends money and negotiates to secure access to resources, economic benefits and international influence.

It is not a struggle between good and evil, but a dispute between great powers, where the workers get caught in the middle.

Internal betrayal?

There is much talk of betrayal, but such language tends to confuse more than it clarifies.

High-ranking officials, the generals and politicians do not betray the people, because they have never governed on their

behalf, but rather in accordance with their own interests and privileges. When they switch sides or negotiate, they do so to protect their position, not to improve the lives of the majority.

Who loses out in all this?

The answer is clear: the working class in Venezuela, as well as in the United States and other countries.

Workers do not decide on wars, they do not benefit from sanctions, they do not control resources, and they always pay the price with more insecurity and less of a future.

An uncomfortable but necessary conclusion

What is happening in Venezuela will not be resolved by choosing between Maduro or the US, nor between Washington or Beijing. They all operate within the same system, a system that puts profit and power above human needs. As long as that system remains intact, crises will repeat themselves, with different names and different countries, but with the same losers.

The real solution will not come from leaders, armies or foreign powers, but from the conscious organisation of ordinary people, here and around the world, to build a society where production and wealth are at the service of all and not just a few.

SOCIALISTA MUNDIAL

(Translated from a contribution to a discussion on our Spanish-language Facebook page (www.facebook.com/groups/898984151243744))



Credit: Adobe Stock

Venezuela: another failure of reformism

VENEZUELA IS a petro-state, defined as a country with an economy and government that depend heavily on money from extracting and selling oil and gas. Oil was first extracted there in the 1920s and Venezuela was one of the founding members in 1960 of the oil-producers' cartel, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), that held the rest of the capitalist world to ransom after the 1973 Yom Kippur War which closed the Suez Canal and led to petrol rationing. The other four founding members were all in the Middle East: Iran, Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Venezuela in fact has more oil reserves than Saudi Arabia.

Ground rent

The main income of a petro-state is ground-rent rather than profit. Ground-rent is an income that accrues to ground owners because they happen to own land that contains some natural resource. In agriculture this would be land that is more fertile. The price of, say, wheat will reflect the cost of growing it on the land which provides the producer with a normal profit. Wheat grown on land that is more fertile than this will sell at the same price, despite the cost of growing it being less. The difference between the price the wheat sells at and the lower cost of production is ground-rent. In other words, those who own land with a lower cost of exploiting its natural resource than at the margin, whether this be wheat or oil, get an extra income above normal profit.

Saudi Arabia, as the country where the cost of extracting oil is lowest, gets the biggest proportional ground-rent. Other oil-producing countries, except those with the highest production costs, also benefit to a greater or less extent. The amount of oil rent a petro-state receives depends on the price of oil, the higher this is the more the rent (which is the economic logic behind the OPEC oil cartel). But OPEC can't fix the price of oil at will or forever; other factors are involved such as the demand for oil, which fluctuates up or down depending on whether world capitalism is in the boom or the slump phase of its economic cycle.

The Gulf oil-producers are all dynastic

states and a large part of the ground-rent they get goes to the ruling dynasty. The rest of the population, mainly immigrant workers from Asia and other Arab states, as non-citizens have no say in how the rent is distributed. Most of them live in poverty while the kings, princes and sheiks and their families live in the lap of luxury.

Politics and the price of oil

Venezuela was different from the other founder members of OPEC in that it was more developed both economically in already having a capitalist economy and politically in that its population were citizens with the right to vote. Because the government was so dependent on oil rents, the course of the political life of the country reflected changes in the price of oil.

From 1948 to 1958 Venezuela was a dictatorship, backed and brutally enforced by the army. During this period oil prices were high but the benefits went to the US oil corporations that had been granted concessions to extract oil, though some was used on infrastructure projects and to enrich the dictator and his political allies.

In 1958 the dictatorship was overthrown and Venezuela became a formal political democracy with competitive elections between rival parties. Successive governments began to take back ownership of the oil as concessions expired. In 1976 all oil in the ground became government property via a state enterprise, *Petróleos de Venezuela* (PDVSA). Things were relatively normal until oil prices fell in the 1980s due to the 'oil glut' that came about following the post-1973 energy crisis.

The high price engineered by OPEC after the 1973 Yom Kippur War led other capitalist countries to seek and develop other energy sources (coal enjoyed a bit of a revival) and other sources of oil, leading to overproduction. The result in Venezuela was an economic crisis and in 1989 the government imposed an austerity that led to strikes and riots and attempted coups, including one in 1992 led by Hugo Chávez, a young army officer from a poor background. He was jailed but released

after two years. On his release, he turned to conventional politics and won the 1998 presidential election, taking office in 1999. He was re-elected under a new constitution in 2000, then, despite a short-lived coup against him in 2002, again in 2006 and 2012.

There is no reason to doubt that Chávez sincerely wanted to improve the lot of the population of Venezuela, particularly the poorest. He was, basically, a populist Venezuelan nationalist. He didn't claim to be a socialist when first elected president in 1998, just to be anti-elite and for using oil revenue to help the poor majority. It was only in 2005 that he declared himself an advocate of '21st century socialism'. In 2007 the name of his party was changed to the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), which is still the ruling party there today.

He was lucky in that soon after he first came to power the price of oil rose, providing his government with funds to pay for improved services for the mass of the population: 'When Chávez took office in early 1999, oil was trading at less than \$15 a barrel, but its price started going up almost instantly. By the time he was elected to his third term, in 2006, it was trading at about \$60 per barrel; by the time his presidency ended upon his death in 2013, a barrel of oil was worth almost \$100' (tinyurl.com/mryfywkm).

With a healthy income from oil rents, the Chávez government was able to improve the living standards of the mass of the population: 'Chávez's government focused its efforts on bringing people out of poverty using the surpluses generated by oil revenue, buffered by high market prices. Social spending per person in Venezuela grew, in real terms, 170 percent from 1998 to 2006 and if we included the social spending made directly by *Petróleos de Venezuela* (PDVSA) the figure reached more than 200 percent per person. In 2008 education spending was more than double what it had been in 1999. The number of people living in poverty dropped from 55 percent in 1998 to 34 percent ten years later. University enrolment has almost tripled since 2000. (...). All of the redistributive measures undertaken by the government meant that in 2011 Venezuela



was, by Gini coefficient, the least unequal country in Latin America ...' (tinyurl.com/yp2bdvya).

Pretty impressive, which explains why Chávez was re-elected three more times. Some, particularly leftists from Europe, saw this as a successful move from capitalism towards socialism. The prominent Trotskyist Alan Woods (a leftover from the old Militant Tendency) was particularly impressed and met Chávez a number of times, becoming a propagandist for the 'Bolivarian revolution'. But he wasn't the only one. Even today some of those demonstrating against the US attack on Venezuela are doing so to defend the regime there because they believe it to be socialist. 'The Bolivarian Revolution is committed to building socialism and independence' declares one group (revolutionarycommunist.org- tinyurl.com/bdhvy7e5). But it wasn't socialism or a step towards it; it was an attempt to reform capitalism into a less unequal society which appeared to be working due to a period of high oil prices and rents.

Chávez died in 2013 shortly after being re-elected. In a sense he was lucky again, as oil prices eventually fell as a result of the drop in industrial activity that followed the Crash of 2008. He thus avoided being the head of government in Venezuela during a period of *falling* oil prices. That poisoned chalice was passed to his successor, Nicolás Maduro, and the Chavista military and political bureaucracy that ruled the country.

Maduro's poisoned chalice

In 2014 oil prices fell from \$100 a barrel

to \$40 and did not rise much again (even today it's only about \$60). The Maduro government was in an impossible position. Unable to maintain spending to benefit the population at its previous level it was forced to cut back. Popular discontent rose and in 2016 opposition parties won a majority in the National Assembly which went on to refuse to recognise that Maduro had won the 2018 presidential election. The ruling bureaucracy was not prepared to give up power and turned to political manipulation and repression to maintain it. The US and Europe, too, refused to recognise that Maduro had been legitimately elected and imposed economic sanctions on Venezuela which continue to this day.

With less income from oil rents the government had to cut the benefits it handed out, with the result that poverty and inequality grew: 'According to a quality of life study conducted by a group of universities in the country, the Gini coefficient, which measures income inequality, reached 56.7 in 2021, surpassing that of Brazil. The research also shows an increase in the income poverty rate, with more than 90% of households living below the poverty line. The most recent data indicate an increase in inequality, with an index of 60.3, and a decrease in income poverty to 80.3% of households, a result of the modest economic recovery of 2022' (translated from Spanish: tinyurl.com/4mk26we4).

So, while the proportion of people in poverty fell from 55 percent in 1998 to 34 percent in 2008, by 2022 it was up to 80 percent. In 2011 Venezuela had been the least unequal country in Latin America in

terms of income. Between 1999 and 2011 the Gini coefficient had fallen from almost 50 to 39. In 2022 it was back up to 60, higher than it had been when Chávez was first elected.

Some of this will have been due to the sanctions imposed in 2019 by the US and Europe but the decline had set in before that. Imposing sanctions is a cruel and cynical policy, arguably worse than military action. Its aim is to make the situation of ordinary people worse in the expectation that they will kick out the sanctioned government. It worked in the sense that it did make people even worse off as the government was forced to cut back yet more on the reforms of the Chávez period, and this did make people more inclined to vote to remove the Maduro government from office. Sanctions do not affect those in charge of the state as they can always ensure that they don't suffer any personal privations and that adequate resources are attributed in priority to maintaining the state apparatus and its repressive powers.

Capitalist economists say that Chávez should not have distributed so much of the oil rents to improve the position of the poor, but should have instead invested more in developing capitalist industry to provide jobs and incomes to counter what would happen if oil prices and so oil rents fell or oil ran out. This is a lesson that the Gulf sheiks had learned, using their rents not just to lead a personal life of luxury but to convert themselves into capitalists in their own right by investing in industry abroad as well as in their sheikhdoms.

Given capitalism and how it works, there is something in what its economists say, but this is further confirmation that a government cannot continuously redistribute wealth to the poor; this will be unsustainable and lead to economic disaster. To function normally, the capitalist economy requires that even oil rents should be invested in capitalist production, not spent on improving people's lot.

Living standards in Venezuela fell by 75 percent between 2013 and 2023, driving some 7 million out of a population of 30 million to leave the country to seek a better life elsewhere. Supporters of capitalism gleefully trumpet this as a failure of 'socialism'. In fact, it was a failure of redistributive reformism that showed both the fragility of reform measures and that no government can keep on redistributing income to the non-owning majority without this eventually ending in economic disaster.

ADAM BUICK

Alternatives

‘MEET THE New Year, same as the Old Year’ to paraphrase Pete Townshend. Which begs the question, will we be fooled again?

Certainly January 2026 seemed to be serving up familiar news items. Putin continuing to pound Ukraine, Trump similarly enhancing his country’s democratic credentials through a military adventure in Venezuela to kidnap their president and his wife. Xi Jinping in Beijing must surely be casting covetous glances at Taiwan while feeling on-trend with his fellow presidents.

Israel continues air strikes on Gaza while, no doubt, Hamas quietly bide their time plotting another blow for liberation, perhaps by killing more kids at a pop festival. Meanwhile Iranian state forces have been slaughtering protesters who are sick of the repressive theocratic regime.

Meanwhile in good old Blighty, the Labour government continues to demonstrate that inequality cannot be taxed away. The Prime Minister, posturing on the international stage, pursues his partial morality by speaking out in condemnation of Russia’s assault on Ukraine while remaining silent over USA’s incursion into Venezuela.

Rather than New Year resolutions, what is required is New Year revolution, initially in people’s thinking. As long as nationalist concepts continue to be entertained to a greater or lesser extent around the world, nothing fundamentally can change.

Wars and armed conflicts will continue to kill, almost without discrimination, huge numbers of men, women and children. Each death utterly preventable. To continue to support, actively or passively, maintaining the present system is to support the killing.

New Year’s resolutions are largely wishful thinking, largely forgotten halfway through the month. However, to make a telling change in the world in favour of the vast majority does require resolution. A resolve that will be challenging and will be challenged. It’s either passive acceptance of the status quo or the active and conscious pursuit of an alternative society.

Early alternatives

Emerging capitalism spawned attempts to bring about political change and establish ideal, cooperative communities. The seventeenth century, during the upheavals of the English Civil War, saw the rise of two such movements.

The Levellers were concerned with political and legal changes via extended suffrage, annual parliaments, religious freedom and equal justice for all. Printed manifestos were the main campaigning



device, allied to public debates such as those in Putney. Influential for a while within the New Model Army.

The Diggers focused on economic change through the abolition of private property, common ownership of land, communal farming and the ending of wage labour. Themes that continue to resonate with socialist thinking of the present day.

The difference between the two groups also continues to persist, agitators for political change on one hand, direct action communalists on the other. Little recognition at the time that the two elements are intimately connected.

The political establishment of the day, the Commonwealth under Cromwell, produced its own Agreement of the People marginalising the Levellers. Meanwhile the Diggers were subjected to legal action and violence for their occupation of land.

So the new governing force did what subsequent governments continue to do to the present day, that is diffuse radical aspirations through short-term measures that really changed nothing significant in the political and economic relations as experienced by the vast majority. However, the way had been opened for the rising capitalist class to usurp the fading power of feudalism that eventually re-divided the people into two classes, capitalist and workers, a situation that still persists today.

Brutal conditions

The brutal conditions workers had to endure when industrial capitalism was enacting its steam-powered revolution produced an inevitable reaction. Combinations, early trade unions, met with an outright ban initially, while the Luddites faced deployments of soldiers and the hangman’s noose as governments did little to mask their sympathies.

There were capitalist employers who did

take a more enlightened view, seeing no benefit in overworked employees living in squalor. Famously, Robert Owen ran the New Lanark manufacturing community on the banks of the Clyde. Reasonable living and working conditions, at least by the standards of the times, along with health and education services were undoubtedly an improvement. The fundamental aim of that community still remained the creation of profit.

Owen demonstrated that the profit motive could be well served, perhaps better served, through a more-or-less contented workforce. This was an early example of welfare capitalism, what would become social democracy on a national scale. As an alternative to the miserable slums in which so many urban workers then existed, New Lanark would have been acceptable. It was not, though, any sort of alternative to capitalism, but an indication of how it would develop as a functioning society.

Owen would go on to become involved with the New Harmony utopian community in Indiana. 20,000 acres along the banks of the river Wabash. He is often credited with being the founder of utopian socialism and the co-operative movement. Perhaps he was also an early syndicalist through his involvement with the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union, the attempt to have a national trade union for all workers. An aim of the GNCTU was to use the combined power of all workers to assume control over industry to be operated on their own behalf. A general strike was envisaged as a means to this end. New Harmony, the GNCTU and the co-operative movement patently failed to bring about an alternative society as the whole world continues to be capitalist.

Modern failures

There have, of course, been many subsequent political movements and parties

expressing their intention of overthrowing capitalism in favour of socialism. One strand of this has been social democratic gradualist organisations proposing to reform away capitalism. Despite at times succeeding to enact reforms that have achieved significant – usually short-term – beneficial changes, these parties have failed to maintain those improvements and, instead, have largely become managers of society on behalf of capitalism.

A variety of Leninist parties continue to advocate their own revolutionary model. However, wherever their designs have been realised subsequent to the Russian Revolution of 1917, they have only produced state capitalism in one form or another. None have at any time been socialist societies.

A truly socialist society means common ownership of the means of wealth production meeting everyone's

self-defined needs, with people freely contributing their talents and abilities, a society without money, democratically achieved worldwide through the conscious action of the vast majority, the workers.

Capitalism for ever?

Absolutely a huge task, but one that must be undertaken if there is to be an alternative to economic hardship, rationing of resources by ability to pay, and an almost continuous waste of life and resources through war. Otherwise these features of capitalism will simply continue ad infinitum.

The task of motivating a vast majority of the world's population of 8 billion or so to embrace the concept of socialism and act in concert to realise this concept precludes there being any ready formula concocted by a minority. Those who would be vanguards to act on behalf of that majority are bound to fail. Only by common

consent and commitment can the majority identify what needs to be done and institute those organisations required to deal with the process, overcoming obstacles already known and those that will undoubtedly arise. This requires individual resolution to bring such change about, acceptance of responsibility as there is not, and cannot be, a leader or party who can do it on people's behalf. Looking beyond those from left, right and centre claiming they have the way forwards.

It is for socialists, however few in number at present, to maintain the broad principles of socialism in the public domain and advance where and when possible. There can be no short cuts whatever others might claim to the contrary. On hearing any such claim, recall the title of The Who song alluded to at the start: 'Won't Get Fooled Again'. Take it to heart.

D.A.

State and repression

IN DECEMBER 2025 a military court in Yekaterinburg sentenced five members of a Leninist study circle including a pensioner, from Ufa, the capital and largest city of Bashkortostan, Russia, to between sixteen and twenty-two years in prison. Their activity was as a study group specifically reading Lenin's *State and Revolution*. No acts were committed or violence planned, but they were sentenced for terrorism and plotting a coup. Thought alone was treated as a seditious act (tinyurl.com/4w552s2k).

In the US at Texas A&M University, a philosophy professor was barred from teaching Plato because he allegedly advocated particular views on race and gender. Two-thousand-year-old texts, including Aristophanes' myth of the split humans and Diotima's reflections on love, are no longer permitted to be read (tinyurl.com/y3bp3cda). Students were treated not as thinkers but as ideologically empty vessels.

Two hundred courses in the Texas A&M University College of Arts and Sciences have been flagged or cancelled by university leaders for gender or race-related content as the university undertakes its review of all course syllabi, faculty members told *Inside Higher Ed*. This review is required as per new rules instituted by the university Board of Regents after conservatives waged a harassment campaign against faculty members who taught race or gender-related subjects.

As Gyorgy Lukacs wrote, 'Ideology functions effectively only so long as it remains unconscious of itself.' When

ideology is exposed, it must be defended by force or ritual. Lenin had observed that 'the State is an organ of class rule, an organ for the oppression of one class by another.' Both the Russian state and the university act to preserve the dominance of the master class, only telling truth when it's convenient.

Plato's dialectical method encourages dialogue, reflection, and contradiction. Gramsci noted in the *Prison Diaries* that the master class secures dominance by shaping civil society and consent. The repression of readers and students prevents the proletariat from thinking independently and undermining hegemonic authority.

Such systems do not defend meaning. They defend the conditions of their own performance. They are nihilistic not because they believe in nothing but because they cannot tolerate the process by which meaning is made.

Paranoid ideology and its violent political theatre

A woman was shot in the head three times by an agent of the United States in front of her wife. This was violent ideological theatre, not law enforcement. On January 7 in Minneapolis an ICE agent fatally shot Renee Nicole Good, a 37-year-old mother of three, a poet and a U.S. citizen, during a federal immigration enforcement operation that had already brought thousands of armed agents into the city.

The federal response was instantaneous

and unapologetic. Homeland Security officials and President Trump rushed to frame the killing as a response to 'domestic terror' and defend the agent's actions as self-defence, claiming Good 'weaponised' her vehicle and tried to run down officers. Local officials, video evidence, and human rights groups reject that narrative; footage and eyewitness accounts show her attempting to drive away, not attack, and the domestic terror label has no basis in law. The FBI immediately seized control of the investigation and cut out Minnesota state investigators, deepening mistrust and raising fears of a cover-up. The killing has sparked large protests in Minneapolis and solidarity demonstrations nationwide, and it has intensified debate over ICE, federal power, and accountability in law enforcement.

The political response to this isn't a botched PR afterthought like the Met's handling of the Mark Duggan or Jean-Charles de Menezes shootings, where Blair and Cameron let police take the heat and preserved an appearance of separation of powers. This is different. Trump and his cabinet turned a street killing into ideological propaganda, weaponising it against large parts of the working class and their allies, and signalling that dissent and community defence will be cast as terrorism. That escalation, and the fact that a significant slice of U.S. society is willing to accept these justifications without evidence, tells us something grim about the shape of social conflict under Trump's second term, conditions that eerily echo the pre-Civil War debates over Bleeding Kansas, where political violence became embedded in national policy and identity.

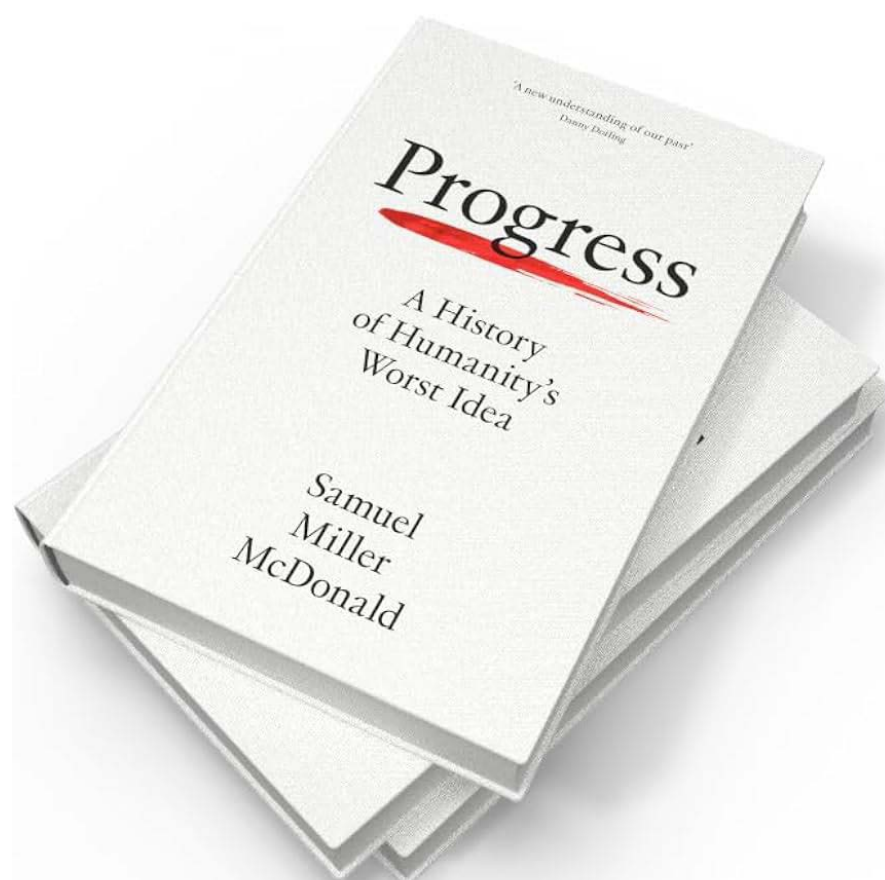
A.T.

What is progress?

EVERY SO often a book comes along that causes us to question something many have considered a self-evident truth. The 'truth' questioned by Samuel Miller McDonald in his recently published *Progress. A History of Humanity's Worst Idea* by (William Collins, 2025, 424pp.) is that the story of humanity has been one of gradual and, more recently, rapid amelioration in the conditions of life. There has been a growing understanding that the hunter-gatherer period of human existence (i.e. the first 290,000 of the 300,000 years of our species' existence) was characterised by a egalitarian, non-hierarchical and relatively peaceful lifestyle. At the same time it was a comparatively hand to mouth ('immediate return') existence and it might be thought that the increase in wealth brought about by the shift to settled agriculture starting around 10,000 years ago would have improved this – and increasingly as time went by. The author of this book argues that not only was this not the case, but that over the last ten millennia (and especially during the last five) the lives of human beings have actually got worse, even during what is usually seen as the vast leap in living conditions of the last 100 years or so, during which period life is usually seen as having improved beyond all measure for most on the planet. While not failing to recognise such developments as state health services, eradication of many fatal diseases, ability of workers to take industrial action, health and safety laws, advances in gender and race equality, and overall higher living standards, his challenge to this narrative is that some benefits to some humans on the planet have caused untold suffering – and even extermination – to very many others as well as to countless non-human creatures and to the planet as a whole.

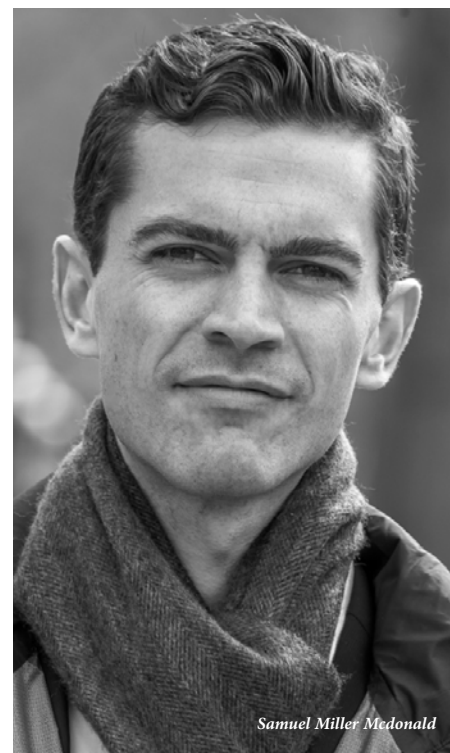
Hierarchy and empires

In a work that is widely sourced and painstakingly referenced and, as a comment on its dust cover states, 'spans cultures, continents and millennia', MacDonald sets out to illustrate his thesis in two main ways. He does it firstly by pointing to how the coming of agriculture upset the equilibrium of previous human societies bringing with it with hierarchy, domination of the few and unequal access to the means of living and resulted in countless oppressive empires, in untold suffering for millions through the practice



of slavery, in destructive wars that killed many other millions and still persist, and in the theft in recent times of the lands of indigenous populations who were also subjected to indescribable cruelty and, in many cases, extermination. Examples he gives, with significant and vivid detail, are the ruthless Roman rule over its Empire, the Viking invasions of the British Isles with its accompanying plunder and slaughter, the ultra-violent expansion of the Islamic and Mongolian Empires of the Middle and Near East, the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade, and the European takeover of the Americas and the barbaric treatment and near annihilation of its native peoples.

He gives particular prominence to this last phenomenon, which he calls 'the genocide of the Americas', which, he says, 'represented potentially the greatest loss of human life and cultural diversity in any single event up to that point, eradicating tens of millions of lives and dozens or hundreds of cultures [and] killing billions of animals in the process'. He also suggests that the attempt to conquer Europe by Hitler's Nazis and their industrialised murder of those millions regarded as 'other' (Jews and gypsies in particular) is



likely to have taken its inspiration from the American treatment of the continent's Indigenous peoples, 'justified' as it was by the USA's founding concept of 'manifest destiny'. In this context he quotes with

approval the words of Howard Zinn: 'Indian removal was necessary for the opening of the vast American lands to agriculture, to commerce, to markets, to the development of the modern capitalist economy.' It should be added that, at the same time, the author does not fail to draw attention to and condemn what he terms 'the cults of Stalinism and Maoism' in the Soviet Union and China which claimed the lives of millions more.

Parasitism vs commensalism

His other principal point of reference concerns the effect of ongoing economic growth by humans on the biosphere. In bringing about apparent improvements in living standards for some, this has, he argues, progressively damaged the ecology of the planet, wiping out species which are part of the natural environment and causing what may be irreparable damage to its necessary biodiversity. He points to the rapid acceleration of this over the past two centuries and to the fact that, despite widespread consciousness of it, there are no signs that it is abating. All this he attributes to what he calls 'parasitic systems' (a concept used with great frequency in this book), that is systems whose purpose has been (and continues to be) to extract as much as possible from the biosphere without serious thought for the consequences and which have done this by 'hijacking human beings' natural cooperativeness'. The focus of these parasitic systems is, he tells us, 'growth', economic growth, the only type of development that human society, and particularly those who currently dominate it, see as 'progress'. He sees this as a disastrous practice, 'a mass, collective delusion', and so, as per the title of his book, 'humanity's worst idea'.

The author's argument that 'progress' has inflicted devastating collateral damage on humans, non-human creatures and the environment alike is nothing if not cogent and powerful. But where does he (and we) go from here? What, if anything, does he have to suggest to replace the 'progress' mantra, which in the modern world is nothing other than the economic growth every government declares to be imperative? Having hinted in various parts of his book at alternative ways in which human societies might move forward, in a final 40-page section entitled 'After Progress', he proceeds to go into this in more detail. Broadly he argues for a society with a 'mutualistic' form of relationship between individual humans as well as between human society and the natural environment, one that needs to

be 'non-extractive' and 'non-exploitative'. Or, if that is not always entirely feasible, he favours at least relationships he calls 'commensalistic', where humans benefit by exchanging their particular skills with one another while being careful that nature should come to no harm.

Better not more

What does this mean in social and political terms? While at one point declaring himself in favour of 'democratic socialism' and having made it clear that this has nothing to do with the kind of 'socialism' associated with the old Soviet Union, or with China (seen as being 'state capitalist' and entirely undemocratic) or with Cuba (described as having 'welcomed economic liberalisation without any of the apparent benefits of political liberalisation'), he is at pains not to propose any single or existing 'model' of society as something to imitate or to build on. And he dismisses any notion that human society should (or could) go back to its earliest stages where the conditions of life and the pro-social nature of humanity combined to provide a self-sufficient, egalitarian existence. However, he does see a future where 'growth' and the colossal cost it exacts from both humans and the natural world are replaced by a society that uses the advanced technology now available to create a settled and satisfying existence for all – a society of better rather than more, one perhaps reflecting his description of the earliest human societies as 'rich in leisure time, generous and egalitarian in its distribution of resources, abundant in communion with people and wildlife'.

Profit – the core of capitalistsim

How can this be brought about? On this the writer, perhaps understandably, offers guidelines rather than prescriptions or recipes. Broadly he seems to favour not widespread political action but, for example, 'agro-ecology', 'land-based resistance movements' and pressure for universal basic income, which activities he sees as already taking place on a significant scale and presaging well for the future. He sees no point in pressing governments, growth-obsessed as they inevitably are, to take action to do things such as mitigate climate change, since any such declared ambitions will always be destined to fail or just have the function of political theatre. But while he – understandably – seems, on the one hand, to have no faith in the governments who manage the capitalist system to enact meaningful

change, on the other he seems also to see a distinction between different ways in which they might run it. That is to say that he consistently declares abhorrence for what he calls 'neo-liberalism', the kind of free-market capitalism he describes as 'lubricated by relationships based on self-interested transactions' where the function of the state is the simple one of oversight of the market's predatory operations. Rather he indicates more of a preference for the kind of capitalism in which there is greater state control both in ownership of industry and surveillance of the privately owned sector.

The trouble here – and this is something that does not seem to be clearly perceived – is that the core of all versions of capitalism is the profit motive, which is inherently extractive, prejudicial to the majority, and unsustainable. Any form of capitalism, with its money system and buying and selling, can only, whatever the preferences or intentions of those in charge of it, to be run along lines of growth and profit. And in all cases the role of a government is to be the executive committee of the owning class. It cannot bring about – or even start to bring about – the production for use society that MacDonald would clearly like to see. It seems futile to argue therefore, as he does, that 'a guided decline in some forms of production would be helpful', since such a thing could not happen under any government without the needs of profit and 'progress' demanding it.

A total break

So while this book is a powerful indictment of modern capitalism – and of the other hierarchical systems that preceded it – what is far less persuasive about it is how it points forward to a transcendence of it, i.e. how the author proposes to get to a different kind of social arrangements for humanity where we can, in his own words, 'pursue a non-parasitic mode of human ecology and political economy' [and] 'democratic, participatory and community connection'. He states quite correctly that 'a total break is needed', that 'mass, collective delusion must go', and that 'we need to have a new conception of our place in our ongoing history'. But for that to happen what is needed is democratic action, ideally via the ballot box, by a socially conscious majority to establish the kind of cooperative society that he is clearly looking for, one of free access to all goods and services where human needs and the health of the planet are the driving force – in other words 'progress' in its most positive sense.

HKM

Wages for housework?

THE BBC News website carried an article on 9 December headed 'A wage for housework? India's sweeping experiment in paying women' which described schemes in various Indian states under which some poorer women were given a regular monthly payment by the state. The International Wages for Housework campaign trumpeted this as a victory for their campaign, issuing a media statement that 'after more than 50 years of campaigning, wages for housework is becoming a reality – in India and elsewhere' (tinyurl.com/33vr4ccu).

They date the beginning of their campaign to when Selma James raised their demand at a women's liberation conference in Manchester in March 1972 but went further back to 'the work of Eleanor Rathbone, the Independent MP who won Family Allowances (now Child Benefit) in the UK'. The payments under the Indian schemes are not 'wages' at all but, like family allowances and child benefits, a handout from the state. The whole 'wages for housework' campaign is basically a campaign for this social reform; not necessarily a bad reform, as paying the money directly to the woman rather than her husband is an advance. Even so, it is still a social reform and, as with all reforms that involve the state paying workers money, one that has unintended

consequences.

When, during the last world war, a scheme for family allowances became practical politics thanks in large part to Eleanor Rathbone, the Socialist Party brought out a pamphlet *Family Allowances: A Socialist Analysis* which argued that 'family allowances will lower the workers' standards of living instead of raising them' (tinyurl.com/33drvx92). This was based on what wages are and what ultimately determines their level.

Wages are a price of what workers have to sell: their mental and physical energies. Their amount reflects the cost of buying the goods and services required to produce and reproduce this. In the days before family allowances, this included an element to raise future workers and so covered, at least partially, the cost of maintaining a 'housewife' and bringing up children. The economic effect of paying family allowances would be to reduce the amount that the employer needed to pay workers to reproduce their labour power and raise a family. As the pamphlet put it:

'Once it is established that the children (or some of the children) of the workers have been "provided for" by other means, the tendency will be for wage levels to sink to new standards which will not include the cost

of maintaining such children'.

Thirty years later we made the same point in commenting on James's pamphlet *Women, the Unions and Work*. Her demand for 'wages for housework', the May 1973 *Socialist Standard* said, 'seems a little naive': 'Wages are the price for which workers sell their labour power. That price will be generally sufficient to keep a worker, and his family, at a socially accepted standard. Payment made for housework, like family allowances or free transport, would act as a brake on wages' (tinyurl.com/3ruy62r2).

The payments to poor women in India are likely in time to put a brake on wages too, even if, through being paid directly to women, they represent an improvement for the women concerned in making them less dependent on a man.

Selma James had been a Trotskyist (though of a group that recognised that Russia was state capitalist) and quoted Marx, but Marxian economics was not her strong point. Marx would have advised her to change the reformist slogan 'Wages for Housework' to the revolutionary watchword 'Abolish The Wages System'. Then both men and women would have access on the same basis to what they needed to live and enjoy life.

Rootless

GRASSROOTS LEFT, one of the factions within new leftist political grouping Your Party, says in the programme for the central executive committee of the party: 'Our goal is to bring an end to capitalism, a socially and ecologically destructive system driven by the profit motive and private ownership of the means of production, and replace it with a socialist society organised to meet people's needs, not generate profit' (tinyurl.com/ysjhyp9).

Wonderful, they want to bring an end to capitalism! Well.... no, they are regurgitating

Old Labour nonsense from decades ago because they go on to say that they want to have 'key sections of the economy owned and democratically controlled by the people who work in them and depend upon them'.

We wonder what those key sections are. Shipbuilding? Steel? Textiles? Nah, too late mate, all gone. According to current UK government figures, service industries (care homes, education, estate agents, advertising, and of course banks and insurance companies, the latter four being of sod all use except in a capitalist society) account for 81 percent of total UK economic 'output'.

And if they did get their way, given they are

talking about the UK only, how do they intend to manage the interchange of wealth between this services economy with the world capitalist economy, ever hungry for profits? We don't have a clue, and neither do they.

Then what happens when the capitalist economy goes into recession, as it inevitably will? Which of these geniuses will have the task of wringing their hands as they take the so sad decision of cutting services and jobs?

How many workers are going to fall for such tripe? Probably not many, but it will help capitalism as it will sow even more confusion in workers' minds as to the real meaning of socialism.

BUDGIE

Malcolm Rae – Obituary

MALCOLM (MAC) RAE, who has died at the age of 95, had been a member of the Socialist Party since 1982. He had been an apprentice car mechanic and later a colliery plant fitter, who could 'fix' anything (vacuum cleaners, electrical appliances, furniture) and would do it not just for his own family but for friends and neighbours too.

He always had a scientific mindset with no truck for religious ideas, and his experience of work and looking at the world around him convinced him as a young adult that the way society operated was not in the interest of the vast majority of people. So when he came into contact with the Socialist Party, he quickly found agreement with our case for a completely different way of organising social and economic affairs which would assure equality and security for everyone instead of poverty and insecurity for so many.

From then on, as a member of South Wales (previously Swansea) Branch of the Party, he became an active advocate himself for our ideas with wide personal knowledge and understanding that made him an acute and an astute participant in any kind of discussion or debate. His ongoing wish was to see the vision he supported live on until its aims are achieved.

Our sympathies to his son Ian, daughter Kim, and their families.

South Wales Branch

Processing progress

Credit: BBC



THE 2020s is a particularly unsettling decade to be living in, and the whole of the 21st century so far hasn't been the utopia which our forebears might have expected it to be. Cultural historian Matthew Sweet explores this current bleak mood by asking *What Happened To Progress?* in his BBC Sounds documentary series. The premise is that there is a 'polycrisis' in the realms of technology, the economy, the environment and global politics. As none of these are working in a way which benefits most people, our attitude towards progress has been affected. Sweet and other academics, writers and specialists give their views around how 'one of the foundations of our economic system – progress understood as endless growth and rising prosperity – is looking pretty brittle right now'.

According to artist James Bridle, we have come to think of progress as being a line on a graph, swooping upwards and to the right. The background assumption has been that our children will inherit a better world where they can be happier, healthier, wealthier and wiser than ourselves. As other contributors explain, this concept of progress hasn't always been part of our collective psyche. In previous societies, expectations for the future were more aligned with the cyclical patterns in nature, or had a 'rise and fall' narrative. Classicist Edith Hall reminds us that acquiring knowledge led to a fall in both the Adam and Eve story in Abrahamic religions and Pandora's Box in Greek mythology. There's a consensus among the contributors that our modern understanding of 'progress' emerged during the 17th and 18th centuries, through the philosophical works of figures such as Francis Bacon, Adam Smith and Immanuel Kant. Progress became more

practical with the technical achievements of the 19th century. As author John Lanchester tells us, resources were seen as limitless as economies expanded through industrialisation.

There were improvements in many communities' living standards, healthcare and literacy which carried on into the 20th century. Sweet says that the First World War 'broke the link ... between technological and moral advancement', with the slaughter enabled by the knowledge to manufacture 'tanks, submarines and razor wire'. As a response, multi-national institutions were formed, such as the League of Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement and the United Nations, although these haven't led to world peace, and war is now more of a threat than ever. As well as weaponry, Artificial Intelligence is another instance of how the results of scientific progress prompt fears about their impact, although climate change is described as the 'ultimate example'. Contemporary uncertainty around progress comes from the tension between realising it isn't a simple upward curve and a need for its reassurance, as described by psychoanalyst Adam Philips. Philosopher John Gray expands on this with a lively definition of progress as 'the crutch, ... balm, ... therapy, ... talisman ... to stave off dread or even despair'. Our expectation of progress, as writer Philip Ball says, is out of kilter with how the natural world and society function.

Karl Marx's views about how society functions are cited occasionally through the series, such as his 'rival proposal' to Kant's 'fanciful' idea about a peaceful coalition of states. Historian Margaret

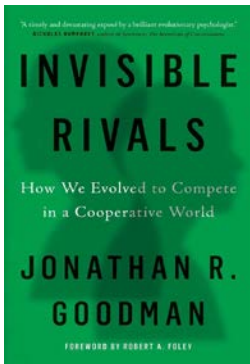
MacMillan promisingly describes Marx's *Capital* as being about progress to 'a world in which there are no national borders, no classes left'. But this is only briefly mentioned, confusingly (but predictably) alongside references to Lenin and the so-called 'communism' of the USSR and China which had different aims entirely. On the other occasions when Marx is discussed, he's presented as a poet, with an evocative reading of the 'all that is solid melts into air' quote from chapter one of *The Communist Manifesto*.

What Happened To Progress? is edited so that each contributor only speaks a few lines at a time before the emphasis is changed by someone else. Although this means that a range of perspectives are given, there isn't the space for explaining in much depth. As indicated by the disparate references to Marx, the fundamental role of the economic structure of society in creating the material conditions for 'progress' isn't explored in any detail. Many of the contributors' observations and stances would snap into place with the context that progress and our understanding of it are moulded by how capitalism has to function. Goods are produced, services are operated and governments are run according to what is advantageous to the minority who own industries and wield power. Profitability for the few is directly or indirectly the defining factor in whether an innovation takes hold. This means that progress is shaped by what is in the interests of the capitalist class rather than by what benefits humanity in general.

The consequences of this are shown by the 'polycrisis' in society and the weakening of our belief in progress. As this notion became established through the advancements of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, it came from an era when capitalism was a progressive force in developing society's infrastructure. But we have already reached the point where technology and administrative structures can potentially provide a decent standard of living for everyone. The decline in a belief in progress reflects how capitalism is no longer progressive. The documentary winds down with the contributors considering whether we should reject, retain or reclaim the idea of progress, with John Lanchester wondering whether we're now on a 'shift to something else'. In our view, to get the world out of its current rut, this would have to be a collective shift to replace capitalism with a social system where progress can mean improvements for all.

MIKE FOSTER

Avoiding the elephant



Invisible Rivals. How We Evolved to Compete in a Cooperative World.
By Jonathan R. Goodman. Yale University Press. 2025. xv+236pp.

This is a wide-ranging book. Written in a jargon-free and eminently accessible style, it is basically a work of evolutionary psychology, but it also steps into a number of other fields of knowledge and investigation, for example biology, anthropology, history, politics and economics. Its fundamental themes, as suggested in its title, are cooperation and competition and the part they play in human society.

As the author points out, this has been a hot topic of study for specialists in various fields over many years, and even more so in recent times. For most of these, the old idea of humans as red in tooth and claw, deep-down selfish and wicked and with social interaction dictated by an ethic of everyone for themselves has been superseded by an understanding that homo sapiens is capable of a wide range of behaviours according to the life conditions and experience of each particular individual and social group.

Many recent studies have emphasised that, if circumstances and social environment allow, human beings are likely to behave in generous and empathetic ways towards others, since we are essentially flexible creatures with behaviour shaped by the society into which we are born and become part of. It follows from this that, if life takes place under adverse systems and conditions, this can provoke negative reactions in which communities are divided among themselves and people may be inclined to seek their own advantage at the expense of others. Some studies stress the 'positivity' element more strongly and see human beings as an instinctively kind and associative species, 'pro-social' or 'super-cooperators', whose default, whose natural inclination is to share and be cooperative and mutually supportive. In this view, only when conditioned from the earliest years to compete and pursue personal 'success' and reward, as in today's capitalist system, do humans shift away from sharing and towards selfishness and personal gain. But both these positions espouse the idea of humans as eminently flexible and adaptable creatures and

often draw on evidence that, for the vast majority of the 300,000 years or more of human existence, we lived in sharing egalitarian societies with no rulers or ruled, no resource domination and relatively little conflict. That was when we were hunter-gatherers, and the argument continues that, only when that lifestyle was replaced by one of settled agriculture starting around 12,000 years ago, (the 'tiny speck in our history' referred to in this book) did hierarchies and states come into being and result in struggles for power, development of classes and the existence of rulers and ruled, provoking predatory behaviours and setting people against one another.

All this of course fits in nicely with the socialist advocacy of an egalitarian society, which, via modern technology, could guarantee a more secure level of existence than hunter-gatherer societies and could be based on free and equal access to all goods and services, with no buying and selling, no wages or salaries with cooperative endeavour aimed at satisfying human needs rather than seeking profit. So nothing in 'human nature' would prevent this. Indeed, if human beings are either 'naturally' cooperative and inclined to share or even sufficiently flexible to welcome such a lifestyle as being in both the collective interest and their own, then surely it will fit them like a glove.

However, the author of this book sees things rather differently. He presents what one commentator has called 'a highly nuanced account of human competition and cooperation'. According to this, though we are capable of being either selfish or altruistic, the selfish side tends to prevail, something we may not even always be aware of ourselves. In other words, in most of our dealings, the motives we present to others may be different from what they believe and indeed from what we ourselves believe. In this view, a human tendency for self-interested manipulation is seen as fundamentally present. As the author puts it, 'selfishness and double dealing are basic human traits to be found in everyone, including themselves' and 'deception and exploitation are deeply rooted in our natures'. So selfish goals are seen to be hidden under a cloak of apparent altruism or selflessness. Thus the 'invisible rivalry' of the book's title.

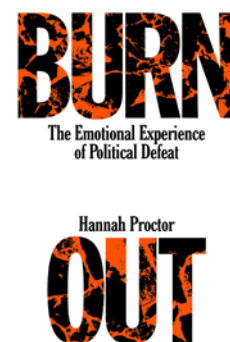
But what about humankind's approximately 290,000 years of apparently egalitarian and conflict-light hunter-gathering? The writer does not neglect this but argues that, in terms of equality and conflict, things were more nuanced and not necessarily as one-sided as presented by many studies of anthropology and palaeontology, pointing rather towards his more ambiguous take on 'human nature'.

His verdict is that, though we commonly share and reciprocate, this does not make us innately cooperative. It just makes us 'animals capable of cooperation'. Here it is noticeable, however, that, though he draws on a wide range of sources which point in favour of his thesis, other key sources providing widely recognised evidence for the 'highly flexible' or 'ultra-cooperative' idea, some of which have been reviewed in this journal, are notably missing (www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/suggested-reading/). There is no mention whatever, for example, of the work of widely recognised experts in this field such as John Gowdy or R. Brian Ferguson. So it is difficult not to see a certain amount of 'cherry-picking' in what is presented here.

As for the writer's take on the current state of humanity and the economic system that dominates it – capitalism – he clearly does not consider that the equivocal view of humanity he presents prevents change or improvement and he does acknowledge the possibility and importance of cooperation. He states unequivocally in fact that human society could not have survived 'without intense cooperation, and this is implicit in the support he expresses for what might be called 'progressive' social policies and developments, ie, more openness, democracy and equality. He refers to a need for 'the political will to enact policies that upend the modes of exploitation we have normalized and the cultures of inequality we allow to thrive' and for this to happen via 'cooperation at the local and global levels'. But he sees any such changes entirely in the context and through the lens of the existing system, thereby avoiding the elephant in the room, ie, that system's imperative to keep on existing and producing for the profit of the tiny minority. We, on the other hand, would regard any attempt to bring about change or improvement within its framework as tinkering at the edges, a sort of 'moving the deckchairs on the Titanic'.

HKM

Coping with losing



Burnout: the Emotional Experience of Political Defeat.
By Hannah Proctor. Verso £14.99.

In May 1871 the Paris Commune was
Socialist Standard February 2026

brutally repressed, with many people executed and over four thousand of its supporters exiled to New Caledonia, a French territory in the Pacific Ocean, 750 miles east of Australia. Unsurprisingly, many of those exiled experienced feelings of hopelessness and despair. These were examples of what the author terms 'pathological nostalgia', which she contrasts with 'political nostalgia', which 'looks to the future rather than the past'.

Nostalgia is one example of the different emotions identified here, the others being melancholia, depression, burnout, exhaustion, bitterness, trauma and mourning, though the distinctions among these are not always clear. The focus is on left-wing movements, where prolonged activity, with little achieved, can lead to exhaustion and disillusion. One woman, who had campaigned in the US on abortion issues, found herself in the 1980s with no partner, children or secure job, and wondered if it had all been a waste of time. On the other hand, many women who played an active role in supporting the UK miners' strike felt really changed by it, meeting new people and becoming aware of the unjust nature of the British state. One woman (wife and mother of miners) found that contributing at the local soup kitchen helped combat her agoraphobia, saying, 'I know that I've got to keep active after the strike.'

There is an interesting if somewhat unclear discussion of the impact of the Bolshevik takeover of 1917 (about which Proctor says 'the October Revolution was not defeated'). The ensuing civil war, coupled with pre-1917 events, meant years of violence and famine, which 'took a heavy physical and mental toll'. Many former activists became exhausted, in some cases this was due to 'despair over the course the new society was taking' (some more detail here would have been helpful). In 1921–2 over fourteen thousand people voluntarily left the Bolshevik party, and 'there was a spate of suicides among the membership.'

Some left-wing groups go in for abuse and bullying (sometimes of close friends), while criticism and self-criticism sessions among the Weathermen in the US in the 1960s and 70s could inflict serious psychological damage on members. In the US 'Communist' Party, those who left could find themselves simply ignored in the street by those who had stayed on.

Proctor quotes Rosa Luxemburg as saying that revolutionary struggle involves thunderous defeats but will lead inexorably to final victory. Perhaps more realistic is her comment on the famous last words of Joe Hill: better to both mourn and organise.

PB

Trespass and Roaming



Contested Commons: a History of Protest and Public Space in England.
By Katrina Navickas.
Reaktion Books
£20.

In 1908 the Socialist Party asked Manchester Corporation for permission to hold a weekly meeting in Alexandra Park in the south of the city. The response was that only two meetings could be booked at a time.

This is an example of the situation concerning the use of various kinds of public spaces, which is surveyed here. There is a brief mention of Alexandra Park, and several references to the Social-Democratic Federation (SDF), the organisation from which the founders of the SPGB split. It is stated that an ex-anarchist became a member of 'the Socialist Party', but this should be the British Socialist Party, a later name of the SDF.

Besides parks, other forms of public space are dealt with, including pavements, squares, grass verges, footpaths and different kinds of 'common'. Common lands are not really owned by 'the people', and their boundaries frequently change. There is no general right of assembly or right to roam in England, and it took the Kinder Scout Mass Trespass of 1932 for many customary 'rights of way' to be legally recognised as such. Regulating the commons was a form of enclosure, and this was not just a matter of the many parliamentary acts enforcing enclosure but 'an ongoing process of accumulation of property through dispossession'. The 1899 Commons Act empowered local authorities to regulate the commons so as to stop 'nuisances', which could include marginalised communities such as Roma, and also workers holding demonstrations or just enjoying the open air.

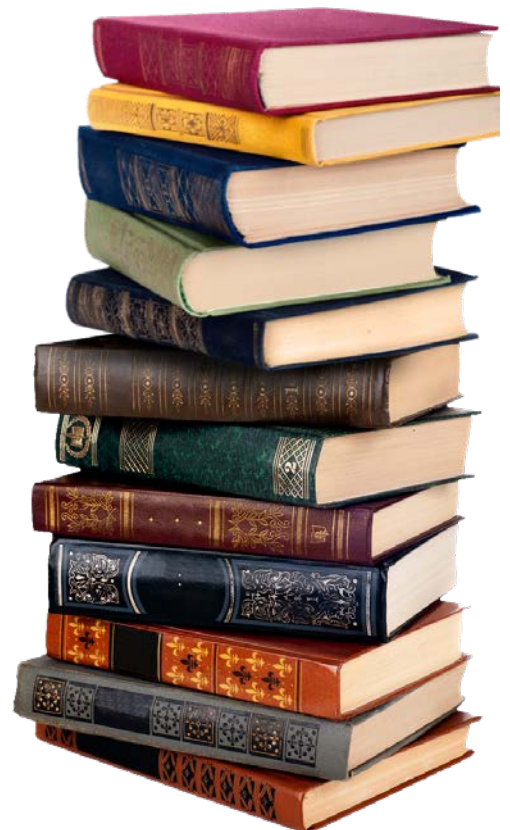
Some Liberal politicians saw open spaces as a way to reduce the supposed threat from urban workers to the social order, but on the whole the elite wanted to limit workers' access. It was also a matter of the 'four Gs': gathering grounds (space for reservoirs, canals and so on), grouse moors, golf courses and guns (military training areas). In all these cases, 'waste' land was requisitioned for ruling class purposes by excluding the public. Thus the 'upland landscapes of northern England were transformed during the

nineteenth century'.

As suggested above, parks were important places for political propaganda, with the SDF and SPGB among many organisations that held regular meetings there. Yet even Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park was not a true commons but part of the Crown Estate and so subject to definite rules. Trafalgar Square was from its construction a major site of protest, but the violent police response on Bloody Sunday in 1887 showed how the establishment could constrain political activity there if it wished. In the 1930s the police brutally put down demonstrations by the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, but did not intervene so much in fascist rallies.

In more recent years, press and television coverage have sometimes exposed police responses to demos, and CCTV has been used to monitor events. A new Public Order Act was passed in 1986, and trespass in public spaces became known as 'aggravated trespass'. There was some opening up of the right to public spaces, such as the Countryside and Rights of Way Act of 2000, but since then much legislation has restricted the freedom to protest. Navickas' book provides a comprehensive account of public space in England, plus attempts to expand and to restrict it.

PB



Who likes facing Labour's future?

A GENERATION of workers have placed their trust and wasted their lives on the pie-crust promises of ambitious politicians. More than thirty years have passed since the Labour Party issued its post-war election manifesto: *Let us Face the Future*. People like Barbara Castle, who were rising 'stars' of the left, when Aneurin Bevan was chief demagogue, have lived to stand in the crumbling ruins of all the misguided hopes which they themselves helped to build. Once again the ludicrous spectacle is one where the reformers proposed and capitalism disposed. We are now living in their future.

Every group of workers in the NHS has been (and will continue to be) ruthlessly exploited by their Labour government overlords. (Yes, we know and by the Tories.)

The nurses, whose devotion to their patients has been mercilessly used by successive governments, were forced to organize, demonstrate and threaten strike action. Then the ambulance crews were pushed into the same position. The ward orderlies and laundry workers caved in under the weight of increasing drudgery and near starvation wages. The extreme reluctance of any of these workers to add to the suffering of

the sick and aged, has been cynically played on by the Tory and Labour governments.

The latest miserable episode is that of the junior doctors. Driven by being on duty or on stand-by for as much as one hundred hours per week and working for as many as eighty hours with virtually unpaid overtime, they banned overtime. This brought about the closing down of wards, casualty departments and even entire hospitals. If this reads like a nightmare, that is what capitalism does to dreams of reformers. (...)

Aneurin Bevan once said the Tories were 'lower than vermin'. What does that make the Wilson, Castle and Foot mob? Regretfully, calling names however well deserved, does little to raise the level of class-consciousness. When the working class wake up, they will contemptuously brush aside these petty upstarts and, in fact, dismiss all leaders. Ultimately the responsibility rests with the workers. Their political maturity (or lack of it) is reflected in how they vote. The power to continue the agony of capitalism derives from the votes of the workers. The power to end it will come from the same source.

(Socialist Standard, February 1976)

Action Replay

Both sides now

ONE OF the attractions of watching sport is that of giant-killing, where an underdog defeats a far more powerful or wealthy club or player. This can be even more surprising and satisfying than a long-priced winner in a horse race.

Cup competitions, in football and elsewhere, can throw up encounters between mismatched opponents which sometimes do lead to a giant-killing. In this season's Carabao Cup, League 2 Grimsby Town beat Manchester United, and in 2000 in the Scottish FA Cup Inverness Caledonian Thistle defeated Celtic. One of the classic cases was in 1972, when non-league Hereford United beat First Division Newcastle United, which included an iconic goal from Ronnie Radford. And in this year's third round, non-league Macclesfield Town beat the holders Crystal Palace, in what has been described as 'the biggest upset in Cup history'. Comparable victories can happen at international level, too, such as Iceland's win over England at the 2016 European Championships.

Similarly, sometimes, in individual sports. Boris Becker won the Wimbledon tennis men's singles title in 1985 when unseeded, and in 2021 Emma Raducanu won the US Open title after having to play three qualifying matches to get into the main draw.

The opposite to giant-killing can be unequal and so uncompetitive events

or tournaments, and anything too one-sided can be unappealing to spectators. At the time of writing, Wolverhampton Wanderers are adrift at the bottom of the Premier League, having had to wait till their twentieth match for their first win. The Italian national rugby union team had won just sixteen matches in the Six Nations tournament since joining it in 2000, and lost 112.

The recent Ashes Test Matches between Australia and England looked like being very ill-matched, with Australia winning the first three tests rather easily, the first being over in just two days. But then England got their own back, winning the fourth test in two days, before losing again in the fifth.

Contests between unequals can take

place in boxing too, such as the recent fight between former heavyweight champion Anthony Joshua and 'social influencer' Jake Paul. Joshua was much the heavier, in addition to being far more experienced, and he won by knockout, with Paul suffering a broken jaw. The purse for the fight was reportedly to be \$184m. The recent 'Battle of the Sexes' tennis match between Nick Kyrgios and Aryna Sabalenka may have been similar. It's not clear how much they got paid, but both happen to be represented by the same sports agency. The match was much criticised as being unexciting, and also not helpful for women's tennis, but no doubt it created a lot of publicity.

Maybe giant-killing gives workers the idea of 'rags to riches' social change, as very occasionally happens under capitalism.

PB



Credit: Adobe Stock

World Socialist Movement Online Meetings

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

February 2026 Events

World Socialist Movement online meetings

Friday 6 February 7.30pm

Have you heard the news?

Open discussion on recent events.

Friday 13 February 7.30pm

Conspiracy theories

Speaker: Anto


Friday 20 February 7.30pm

To be announced

Friday 27 February 7.30pm

Polcrisis: a data scientist finds reasons to be cheerful

Speaker: Paddy Shannon



Socialist Party (GB)

WhatsApp channel

Scan this QR code using the camera to view or follow this channel.



Socialist Party Physical Meetings

LONDON

Sunday 22 February 3pm

Subject to be announced

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).

MANCHESTER

Saturday 28 February 2pm

Doughnut Economics

Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, central Manchester.

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.

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.

The World Unspun

EVER SINCE I can remember I've had a subscription to the *New Internationalist* magazine. Its watchword, 'The World Unspun', marks it out as a campaigning publication which aims to present matters of both local and global importance in as direct and straightforward a way as possible. Its main focus has always been what used to be called the Third World, now more commonly known as the *Global South*, but it also ranges more widely across issues it sees as vital to humanity as a whole. Its stance is supportive of what it sees as 'progressive' movements reflecting a will to see humans across the globe live in a more peaceful and united fashion than at present.

Even if I don't always necessarily share its analysis of situations and developments, I've never found it anything less than a refreshing read with a lively Letters page that's ready to publish readers' views, even if in disagreement with its own stance. Over the years some of these letters have come from members of the Socialist Party, including myself. Its 80-odd pages always range widely over a variety of themes, normally of a topical nature, with a layout, presentation and illustrations which are always of the very highest professional standard.

The current edition (Jan-Feb 2026) has as its 'Big Story' a series of articles on nuclear weapons and the arms trade, while several short pieces look at, for example, the effects of Hurricane Melissa in Haiti, Malaysia's round-ups of Rohingya refugees, plans to reinstate the death penalty in Kyrgyzstan, and Trump's deportation drive in the US. There are reports from Ethiopia, Venezuela, Iran, Peru and India, and its 'View from Brazil' is an example of how, while broadly supportive of the more liberal government that recently came to power there, it does not fail to analyse and be critical of how the authorities' war on drug gangs has led to the deaths of many innocent and poverty-stricken people. Its longest single feature, entitled 'Neocolonialism in Gaza' refers to what is happening there as 'repackaged neocolonialism' and provides powerful and dramatic descriptions of a war that has not yet fully abated and where '365 square



kilometers ... has been subjected to the equivalent of six times the atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima' and 'the bodies of thousands of slain Palestinian are yet to be recovered'. It warns chillingly of a future in which 'a site of mass killing' is turned into 'a stage for profit'.

And there is much else. For example, an informative and extremely well-formulated and designed 4-page 'cartoon history' of Christopher Columbus depicts the horrors that the explorer's 'discoveries' inflicted on countless indigenous people. And there are several pages of book, film and music reviews, and even an 'Agony Uncle' column, which, in the current issue, tries to answer in an entirely serious and balanced way a reader's 'ethical' dilemma about cat ownership in the face of the mass killing of birds and other mammals by domestic cats. The regular two-page 'country profile' in this issue is on Iran and provides a highly informative and objective sweep of that country's history and its current situation complemented by interesting and statistical analysis, none of which is complimentary to the current regime there. The magazine also contains a certain amount of advertising, mainly for 'ethically' produced goods and services, some of them coming from the New Internationalist cooperative itself.

While the overall thrust of the *New Internationalist* is what socialists would see as reformist in its support for political and social reforms and gradual improvements in economic conditions for the working majority, it does not seem entirely antagonistic towards the more ambitious

objectives of the Socialist Party. This is as instanced by its willingness to publish letters our members have sometimes sent pointing towards a more profound, indeed revolutionary, kind of social change, where the current system of individual states and production for profit would be replaced by a united world society of common ownership, democratic control and free access to all goods and services.

Indeed, I am waiting to see whether a letter I myself have recently sent to the magazine will be published. In it I've replied to another reader's letter which expressed dissatisfaction with the suggestion made in an article that governments throughout the world could be divided into two types: 'authoritarian regimes' and 'liberal democracies'. The reader saw that division as over-simplistic and suggested rather that states should be divided not into two types but into seven according to their political complexion. What I have suggested in my response is that, although such distinctions might be useful for some purposes, what's far more significant – at least for those of us looking forward to fundamental social change – is not what divides countries and nations according to type of regime but rather the overarching economic system they are all part of (ie capitalism), with its characteristics of wage labour, buying and selling, and tiny minorities owning or controlling the vast majority of the wealth. And this was the case, the letter goes on, whether countries are run along totalitarian lines, or as so-called liberal democracies, or anything in between. It concludes that it's the economic system as a whole that needs to be got rid of via majority global consciousness and democratic political action and replaced by a society of common ownership, free access to all goods and services and production solely for need.

As I've said, the *New Internationalist* is pretty good at publishing letters that don't align with their own preoccupations. Will they publish this one? Let's see.

HOWARD MOSS