

THE

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# SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

## Zack the Juggler Would Green economics work?



Also: Peter Mandelson:  
arch Labour Party careerist  
Myths of race and nation  
Zackonomics — how green  
can you be?

The cost of money  
Britain's energy trilemma  
Throwing custard over the Crown  
Jewels and shoplifting at Waitrose



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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’

# A more dangerous place

NOW THAT the world has become a yet more dangerous place with states with nuclear weapons throwing their weight about, bullying weaker non-nuclear states and preparing for war with each other, some are suggesting reviving a campaign for nuclear disarmament so that at least the next world war won't threaten the future of humanity.

We are all in favour of making the world working class aware of the dangers of nuclear war, but it is futile to expect capitalist states which possess nuclear weapons to agree to give them up, and so it also is futile to support a campaign to demand that they do. To campaign for this impossible demand would divert time and energy from campaigning for world socialism, the only framework within which disarmament, non-nuclear as well as nuclear, will ever be achieved.

Wars are built into capitalism. Preparations for war, the threat of war and actual wars will remain one of capitalism's features as long as it lasts. Wars are fought between capitalist states over sources of raw materials, trade

routes, markets, investment outlets, and strategic points and places to acquire and protect these. Initially, such disputes are dealt with through diplomacy.

However, in such diplomatic negotiations, the military strength of the sides plays an important part in the outcome. In international relations between states, 'might is right' and always was even before Trump openly admitted this to be the case. All states, therefore, have an interest in equipping themselves with the most up-to-date and most destructive weapons that they can afford, including nuclear.

As long as capitalism continues, it can be expected that more and more states will seek to arm themselves with nuclear weapons. Some will succeed despite the efforts of the current nuclear-armed states to try to prevent this, in their own interest to deprive weaker rivals of the added bargaining strength that possessing such weapons would give them.

Even if nuclear weapons were to be outlawed (which they won't be), wars would still continue and cause the

immense destruction and mass killing that they always do, as can be seen from the current non-nuclear wars going on in Ukraine and Gaza.

The only way to get rid of nuclear weapons and the threat of a nuclear war and its consequences for the future of humanity is to get rid of capitalism. This means that the efforts of socialists should be aimed at persuading workers to take political action to end capitalism and bring in its place a world society without frontiers in which the natural and industrial resources of the planet will be the common heritage of all. In short, worldwide socialism.

Then, and only then, will the threat of war, non-nuclear as well as nuclear, be removed and humanity be in a position to set about re-orienting production away from seeking profits and accumulating capital to solely and directly meeting human needs on the basis of 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs'.

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# Big Red Button

Credit: Netflix



LAST YEAR Hollywood director Kathryn Bigelow caused a minor stir with *A House of Dynamite*, an earnest and compelling warning against nuclear war in the tradition of *Fail Safe* (1964), or its comedy twin *Dr Strangelove* (1964). Unlike her other films it probably won't win any gongs though, because it annoyed a lot of people.

Note, this paragraph contains spoilers. Critics complained that the film wasn't a 'proper' story, with a beginning, middle and end, but instead was a looping repeat of the same chain of events from different character viewpoints. Nor did it have an ending. The viewer is just left hanging. Does the missile blow up the city? Does the US launch a retaliatory strike, and against whom? We don't find out. But that's ok, because the ending wasn't the point.

The point of *Dynamite* is how we got ourselves into this situation in the first place. 'We all built a house filled with dynamite... and then we just kept on livin' in it,' says one character. *Jacobin* magazine sniffily objected that the film doesn't really say anything, and is essentially an 'impotent and unserious exercise in handwringing' ([tinyurl.com/9pbzrw9f](https://www.tinyurl.com/9pbzrw9f)). We might sniffily object in turn that anyone who doesn't advocate the immediate abolition of capitalism is also merely handwringing. Which would include all of the left including *Jacobin* magazine.

Because while capitalism has done a lot of good things for humanity, it's also an out-of-control profit-making machine that comes with some catastrophic downsides. Runaway global warming isn't even the worst of these. We can probably survive that, as a species. But who would survive nuclear Armageddon? Who would even want to?

For all the Boomer generation's supposed privileges, like free higher education, affordable houses, job security

and career advancement, they still had to grow up in the Cold War under the shadow of the Bomb, not knowing whether each day would be their last. Now Gen Z and Gen Alpha, on top of their other problems, may come to know what that feels like. 'On January 27, 2026, the Doomsday Clock was set at 85 seconds to midnight, the closest the Clock has ever been to midnight in its history' ([thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/](https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/)).

## Who's got nukes?

Nine countries today have a total of around 13,000 weapons, down from the Cold War's 60,000, but arsenals are increasing again. You can see the distribution at a glance at [armscontrol.org](https://armscontrol.org) ([tinyurl.com/yxndpwt](https://www.tinyurl.com/yxndpwt)). Most belong to Russia and the US, but China is fast playing catch-up. These are not just nukes, but BIG nukes. 'For example, the warheads on just *one* US nuclear-armed submarine have seven times the destructive power of all the bombs dropped during World War II, including the two atomic bombs dropped on Japan. And the United States usually has ten of those submarines at sea' ([ucs.org/nuclear-weapons/worldwide](https://ucs.org/nuclear-weapons/worldwide)).

## Who wants nukes?

Basically, every country's ruling elite, following the National Rifle Association's argument that in an armed society, you're safer if you're packing heat too. Ukraine gave up its nukes in 1994 and what happened? It got invaded. Iran keeps being bombed by Israel, but who dares bomb nuclear North Korea? The lesson is obvious and unavoidable. Disarmament is for losers. To paraphrase Mark Carney at Davos, if you're not at the nuclear table, you're on the menu.

There are fewer total nukes than in the Cold War era, so why is the threat worse

today? Because treaties are easier when there are only two sides to negotiate. After the panic of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Cold War finally settled into stasis with arms control treaties. Now there are three major nuclear powers, and more on the way. In February this year the 2010 START nuclear non-proliferation treaty expired, and no nuclear power shows any interest in reviving or replacing it. Instead, with Russia fighting in Ukraine, China threatening Taiwan, India and Pakistan having cross-border skirmishes, and the US under Trump threatening to remove the 'extended deterrence' umbrella from its own NATO allies, the gloves are off. Any country that can get its hands on nukes and more nukes is going gangbusters to do just that, and never mind other internal costs like health and social welfare.

The upshot is proliferation. Now even America worries that, despite its gigantic arsenal, it won't have enough to go round if adversaries like Russia and China decide to join forces. There is a terrifying escalatory logic at play, as the *Economist* points out. A country may opt for 'minimal deterrence', having just enough nukes to survive a first strike and still deliver unconscionable devastation on enemy cities. But beyond minimal deterrence, military planners aim for 'damage limitation', which means having enough missiles to take out *all* the other side's nuclear silos, submarines and mobile launchers. If this capacity is achieved, it only drives the other side to acquire further weapons, and so on indefinitely ('Nukes of Hazard' - [tinyurl.com/4umftaff](https://www.tinyurl.com/4umftaff)).

Even if war is not the immediate result, this multi-sided arms race makes the prospects of any binding arms treaty look more remote, and the chances of a *Fail Safe*-like accidental launch greater than ever. But we, the vast majority of the world's people, didn't do this. We are merely the grunts who do all the work of maintaining what we like to call civilisation. It's the rich who have built a world of dynamite and are sitting on top of it, smoking fat cigars. Our only mistake is continuing to support and vote for the market system which created the rich, and their nukes, in the first place.

J Robert Oppenheimer, the self-styled 'destroyer of worlds', was along with Einstein a founder of the Doomsday Clock that now ticks perilously close to midnight. There's still time for humanity to claw its way back from the brink, and use its miraculous science and technology purely for the collective benefit, but only if it stops deluding itself. Capitalism is not sustainable, nor our best option. It's a death cult with a Big Red Button.

PJS

# Dear Editors

## A View from the Hospital Basement

I WRITE to you as a 53 year old working class logistics porter for NHS Scotland, and someone who has recently come to terms with a lifelong reality: I am autistic. Having spent my younger years in the frantic 'activism' of the far left, I find myself now, in the quiet of my fifties, looking at the world through a lens sharpened by both my diagnosis and the consistent logic of socialism.

For the autistic worker, capitalism is not merely an exploitative system; it is a sensory and social assault. The 'wages system' demands a specific type of human raw material, one that is flexible, socially performative, and capable of enduring the chaotic, profit driven environments of modern industry. If you cannot 'mask' your traits, if you cannot navigate the arbitrary social hierarchies of management, or if your nervous system recoils at the bright, loud, and disorganised nature of the capitalist workplace, you are branded 'inefficient'.

In my eighteen years within the NHS, I have seen the machinery of the state attempt to patch up a broken population. We are a class of 'repair men' trying to fix the damage caused by a system that prioritizes the accumulation of capital over human well being. My job as a porter relies on lists, logic, and routine, elements that suit my autistic mind. Yet, the overarching system is one of irrationality. We see the 'crisis' in our hospitals not as a failure of funding, but as a failure of a system that treats health as a commodity and workers as mere expenses on a balance sheet.

The Socialist Party's 'Impossibilist' stance, the refusal to advocate for the mere 'crumbs' of reform resonates deeply with the autistic need for systemic consistency. In my youth, I chased the 'immediate demands' of reformism, only to find that every hard won 'right' can be stripped away by the next budget or the next shift in the market. For my daughters, one who shares my neurodivergent wiring,

I have no interest in fighting for a 'better' version of their exploitation.

A socialist society, one based on the common ownership of the means of life and production for use, is the only environment in which the neurodivergent person can truly thrive. Consider the logic: First, the abolition of the 'interview' and the 'personality test'. In a world of voluntary labour, the social ritual of 'selling oneself' to a master disappears. An autistic person's focus and 'special interests' cease to be a commodity and become a direct contribution to the community.

Second, the end of sensory exploitation. Capitalism builds cheap, high stress environments because they are profitable. A society producing for human need would, for the first time, design spaces for human comfort, accounting for the diverse sensory needs of all its members.

Third, the removal of social hierarchy. My alexithymia and my struggle with social cues are only 'disabilities' because capitalism demands a specific type of social compliance to maintain the master servant relationship. In a society of equals, where no one has the power to command another's labour, the 'unwritten rules' of the workplace vanish.

I have stopped apologising for the way I am wired. I have realised that my autistic brain, with its preference for facts over rhetoric and systems over leaders. We do not need charismatic leaders to tell us we are exploited; we need only to look at the ledgers of our lives.

Socialism offers a 'case' that does not shift with the political winds. It is a list of principles that holds up to the most rigorous logical scrutiny. For the worker in Scotland, for the porter in the basement, and for the autistic child yet to enter the fray, the message must remain clear: the system cannot be mended. It must be ended.

Yours for the Revolution,  
**Pablo Wilcox, Scotland**

### Engels

There's a certain irony in being accused of not having read Engels when my point (very much a side point) was that Engels' arguments were based on no evidence of how people organised themselves in prehistory. My main point was that no, prehistory was not a feminist utopia, but there was a huge diversity of relations between men and women of which, until recently, we were completely ignorant. My reason for not including Engels in Further Reading was not that it was old hat, though perhaps even the author of this piece would agree that Engels' ideas have been around a while, but that the rule for that particular section of The Guardian's books pages is that it should be inspired by recent thinking and recent books- which are then cited in Further Reading. If this author were himself better read, he would know that I've written on this subject in greater depth, with a less restrictive word count, for New Scientist – written and he would, I hope, feel a little ashamed of his groundless (rather like Engels') statements. Best wishes,

**Laura Spinney**

### Reply from the writer:

As a *New Scientist* subscriber for twenty years I've appreciated many of your interesting articles, but I must have missed the one you wrote on Engels. You say there's no evidence for his hypothesis on the subjection of women (actually derived from pioneering anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan), even calling it 'groundless'. This seems a little harsh given that whole theoretical edifices are sometimes constructed based on one finger bone. The evidence of patriarchy is all around you and everywhere in history. Is the alternative origin story simply that 'it's complicated?' To discuss Engels' argument while omitting the crucial role of emerging property relations is a bit like discussing gravity without mentioning mass, or Newton, or relativity. That's why your representation of Engels came across as woolly, hence the speculation that you might not have gone to the source. Angela Saini, as the article points out, instead takes the argument and runs with it in a way that sheds further light rather than confusion on the subject.

**PJS**

# What Epstein reveals

EPSTEIN WAS not just a pimp for the more dissolute members of the global elite. As Gerard Baker wrote in his column in the *Times* (6 February), headed ‘Epstein saga is a fable of modern capitalism’, ‘sexual scandal aside, the attraction of the financier was that he ran a global network of the rich and powerful’.

Epstein’s email contacts, Baker suggested, would be a representative sample of those in top positions in government, finance, law, media, academia and big tech, ‘the most advantaged individuals [who] moved around a borderless world’ and ‘who have wielded the controlling influence over our lives, our culture, our jobs and much else for most of the last quarter century’:

‘Thanks to Epstein’s crimes, we have been given a glimpse into the way the liberal capitalist global order has worked. And in the process, perhaps, we can see even more clearly why so many people want to sweep it away.’

There is a temptation, amongst those who want this, to see a network like Epstein’s as part of some set-up whereby some global elite make decisions about what happens in the world. Some have

not resisted this temptation and have concluded that the world actually is run by a global elite who plan what to do at their meetings in Davos or at the Bilderberg group or on Epstein’s island. Baker adds some credence to this when he wrote of them ‘wielding the controlling influence over our lives’.

In reality, they are not fundamentally in control of what happens under capitalism. They don’t plan booms and slumps or wars or revolutions. Some of them, in their role as the government of a state, do secretly organise — conspire, if you like — to bring about political changes in other countries in the interest of their particular state or group of states. Stock exchange speculators conspire to influence share prices. But nobody controls, or could control, the way the capitalist economic system works; that depends on impersonal market forces which impose themselves, even on the members of the global elite. That’s ‘the controlling influence over our lives’.

Baker corrected himself when he went on to write that ‘Epstein enticed them into his web not with his harem of adolescent girls but ... the chance for a few words in the

ear of someone who could make you even richer, even more powerful; a little inside info, a potential deal...’ That is the limit of what goes on, not some grand conspiracy.

To some extent the situation resembles that described by Marx on the eve of the overthrow of French monarchy in 1848 when under the dominance of the ‘finance aristocracy’: ‘the same prostitution, the same blatant swindling, the same mania for self-enrichment — not from production but by sleight-of-hand with other people’s wealth — was to be found in all spheres of society, from the Court to the Café Borgne. The same unbridled assertion of unhealthy and vicious appetites broke forth, appetites which were in permanent conflict with the bourgeois law itself, and which were to be found particularly in the upper reaches of society, appetites in which the wealth created by financial gambles seeks its natural fulfilment, in which pleasure becomes debauched, in which money, filth and blood commingle. In the way it acquires wealth and enjoys it the financial aristocracy is nothing but the lumpenproletariat reborn at the pinnacle of bourgeois society’ (*The Class Struggles in France: 1848 to 1850*).

But even if people like them were swept away (as they were in 1848) there would still be capitalism, the real problem and controlling influence.



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 21<sup>st</sup> 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](http://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. Bookings will close on 19<sup>th</sup> July or before. E-mail enquiries to [spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk).



# Halo Halo

IN THE sixth century Pope Gregory the First sent monks to Britain to convert the pagans. The pagans worshipped nature and believed that animals, plants, trees and other things in nature had souls and a protective god. The pagans were not so readily seduced by snake-oil salesmen. Greg, not wanting to miss out on the corporate opportunities offered by expanding the business and potential for increasing cash flow through tithes, land ownership and so forth, sent another vanguard across the channel a little while later.

This time, through guile, the pesky pagans were placated with the promise that pagan festivals would basically remain but under the new ownership of Christianity. Over a few hundred years the takeover was complete and Christianity was now top dog.

The Venerable Bede, Anglo-Saxon monk and historian, wrote in the eighth century, *De Temporum Ratione*, of Eostre, pagan goddess of Spring, fertility and renewal,

and noted that feasts were held in Eostur-monath which was the equivalent of April. Eggs and hares were associated with her.

With Eostur-monath on the horizon the question is, what does it mean to people in the UK anymore? For a child brought up in a strictly non-religious household it offered a break away from school, hot cross buns, and lots of sugar-addictive chocolate. The Easter Bunny didn't put in an appearance at all, or it would have found itself in the cooking pot in no time. Neither was time wasted having to hunt for eggs.

Fast forward to adulthood and the realisation that features of Easter, were, like many other Christian festivals, knock-offs from the previous various faiths which had been... expropriated. And the recognition that despite the 'goodies' associated with that 'celebration' there were various elements that should have been withheld from children for a very, very long time.

Learning that hot cross buns symbolised

crucifixion and embalming fluids, the spices and dried fruit occasioned a distaste for that food which has long lasted. If you're okay with Catholic communion and transubstantiation, the belief that bread and wine is transformed into the actual body and blood of JC, then nothing probably strikes you as distasteful.

Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's writings were the basis for Krafft-Ebing coining the word masochism. Might not even Leopold have found the actions of modern-day penitents in places like the Philippines, southern Italy, Mexico and Spain who engage in self-flagellation and ritual crucifixion, a case of going a bit too far?

In the internet market place there are thousands of children's religious books for sale. These cover a multitude of faiths. Grab a bundle, such as a child's first bible, something about Noah's Ark and JC's disciples. A wide taste is catered for, including colouring books, sticker books, and Easter story books. But at what age is the 'cuddly' stuff ditched in favour of learning of punishments imposed by the Romans and what a cross really represents?

One wonders whether the works of Donatien Alphonse François, aka the Marquis de Sade, wouldn't be less harmful?  
**DC**

# Tiny tips

A YOUTH panel at the conference examined how Germany's political establishment is pressuring young people into the armed forces not only through direct reforms, but also through policies that attack livelihoods. The situation imposed onto young workers and students today amounts to 'economic blackmail' for those without wealthy families to support them, argued Max Radtke of the trade union ver.di...The reintroduction of conscription should be understood as a question of class interests, added David Christner of Junge Linke (Young Left). He emphasized the need for a sharper analysis of 'who is being sent to kill and die, and for whose interests', saying that the political imperative at this point is to develop a 'practical alternative to repression and militarization' (**peoples dispatch, tinyurl.com/mr3a4dv3**).

How Does Yoga Alleviate Child Poverty in India? Yoga classes can offer several benefits, particularly for children living in poverty. They: 1. Provide mindfulness and resilience. These sessions provide a break

from daily life, where minds are taken off of hardship outside. Students gradually develop inner strength and willpower that they can take home with them. 2. Build a community. Children feel safe making friends and coming out of their shells. They will feel less alone and it makes the day-to-day that little bit easier. 3. Improve physical health. By building physical strength, students are less likely to contract illnesses and injuries, thereby increasing attendance at school and reducing stress on health care systems (**The Borgen Project, tinyurl.com/55rjww2u**).

Wide-scale desertions and 2 million draft-dodgers are among a raft of challenges facing Ukraine's military (**AP, tinyurl.com/4rac8b5w**).

People are now openly confronting the authorities, with a few lucky ones escaping conscription. Sadly, other videos show men being forced into vehicles by recruiters or beaten to death. This past summer, József Sebestyén, a Hungarian from Transcarpathia, died during his forced

conscription. The Ukrainian authorities tried by all means to cover up his case. In the video, recorded in Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine, a crowd of civilians surrounds a police car in which a man has been placed. In the recording, people can be heard protesting, standing in front of the car, and preventing the vehicle from leaving the scene. Ukrainians are fed up with war and even more fed up with having to see their loved ones die for it. They are now openly speaking out against family members, friends, and neighbors being dragged away (**ZeroHedge, tinyurl.com/yhfv4m8u**).

...one of Beckert's more arresting contentions is that for most human beings, through most of history, the idea of working full-time, not for their own provisions but for cash, was utterly alien: the proletariat almost always had to be forced into being. Sometimes this involved slavery or indentured labour, but just as often it was accomplished by undermining the traditional basis for subsistence production. By enclosing, for example, common lands in Georgian England, or indeed through more recent restrictions on access to the plains of Ethiopia or the forests of Indonesia (**Prospect, tinyurl.com/y332abzs**).

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

**UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS**

**LONDON**

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

**MIDLANDS**

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

**NORTH**

**North East Regional branch.**

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

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

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

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

**Yorkshire Regional branch.**

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

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

**SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST**

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

**South West regional branch.** Meets 3rd Sat. 2pm on Zoom. For invite email: [spgbsw@gmail.com](mailto:spgbsw@gmail.com)

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# Right, left and fake communism



Credit: Adobe Stock

MODERN POLITICS is often presented as a battlefield between two irreconcilable forces: the right and the left. However, this opposition is more apparent than real.

Both currents are internal factions of the capitalist mode of production. The right defends the market, private initiative and competition as the engine of the economy; the left, for its part, advocates nationalisation, a regulated economy and state control. Two different paths, yes, but both leading to the same destination: the perpetuation of capitalist relations of production.

Many people, out of ignorance or historical unawareness, believe that nationalisation is equivalent to socialism. They confuse the presence of the state in the economy with the abolition of class struggle. But authentic socialism is not reduced to the state administering companies or nationalising strategic sectors. Socialism implies that workers directly control the means of production, that exploitation disappears and that society is organised consciously and collectively.

In countries that proclaimed themselves socialist — the USSR, China, Cuba, Venezuela — what was actually established was state capitalism. There was no disappearance of property or wage labour. Individual private property was replaced by collective ownership by the state bureaucracy, not by direct management by the workers.

The worker continued to sell his labour

power in exchange for a wage, while the surplus value was appropriated by the state. The fundamental difference is that, in private capitalism, exploitation is exercised by one individual over another; in state capitalism, exploitation is exercised by the state over the individual.

Lenin himself acknowledged in his pamphlet *The State and Revolution* that the USSR had not achieved communism, but was in a phase of state capitalism. What was established there was a system where the state absorbed the economy, centralised production and organised exploitation more efficiently, but without abolishing fundamental capitalist relations.

China repeated the same pattern. Under the slogan of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics,' it merged private and state capital. Today it is a capitalist power that competes in the world market with the same rules of value, competition, and exploitation as any other country.

In Cuba, massive nationalisations created the appearance of a society without a bourgeoisie, but state bureaucrats enjoyed privileges far superior to those of any worker. Centralised planning did not eliminate exploitation, it simply reorganised it under an omnipresent state apparatus.

Venezuela, for its part, used socialist rhetoric as a political banner, while keeping capitalist relations of production intact. Oil, the engine of its economy, was administered by the state as national capital, not as the collective heritage of

the workers. Inequality, corruption and dependence on the world market are proof that communism was not built there, but rather a variant of state capitalism.

Authentic communism, understood as the abolition of social classes and the direct management of production by workers, has never existed in these countries. What has reigned is a hypertrophied, cold and bureaucratic state that devours civil society and presents itself as a saviour while perpetuating exploitation. State intervention is not a rationalisation of capitalism, but a manifestation of its decadence. It is a desperate attempt to sustain a system that can no longer spontaneously organise human relations and needs violence and bureaucracy to stay afloat.

In conclusion, the right and the left are two sides of the same coin: one defends the market, the other defends nationalisation. Both reproduce the same exploitative relationships. Countries that proclaimed themselves socialist have never been so; they are examples of how state capitalism can disguise itself as revolution, appropriate symbols and words, and construct one of the greatest mystifications in history. True socialism remains a pending task, yet to be realised in any corner of the planet.

(Translation of an article by Juan Morel Perez published in *El Nuevo Diario* in the Dominican Republic. [tinyurl.com/EDDMJMP](http://tinyurl.com/EDDMJMP))

# Peter Mandelson: arch Labour Party careerist

Credit: Getty Images



A FRIEND and former Labour councillor reported to me how Peter Mandelson spoke at an online seminar. He had been impressed by one comment, summed up as: 'If you have a good idea, don't bother asking everybody, just go ahead and do it'. This seems to sum up all that was wrong with the New Labour project, even if you are achieving good results, not asking people makes them feel divorced from the outcomes. Even worse, it can lead to disastrous and unintended consequences, as those who know more could warn you about in advance.

Mr. Starmer thought appointing Mr. Mandelson as ambassador to Washington was a good idea, and he just went ahead and did it. The consequences have been disastrous for him.

Mandelson's biography is well known. Grandson of wartime Labour Home Secretary Herbert Morrison, he had a natural 'in' into the Labour Party and movement, beginning his career (much like many Labour figures, including Jeremy Corbyn) as an employee of the trade union movement, working for the TUC.

It's not necessary here to reprise his whole biography: it is widely available. Suffice to say that, apart from a short stint working in television, he worked as a Labour movement staff member, specifically in charge of communications. Once in parliament and then in government, he twice stepped down as a cabinet minister: once for taking an unsecured loan from a cabinet colleague, Geoffrey Robinson, for a house worth (at the time) £475,000. The second

scandal was around him intervening in the passport application of billionaire businessman Srichand Hinduja. Although in both instances formal inquiries cleared him of any wrongdoing, the perception was that he was into palling around with – and getting favours from and doing favours for – very wealthy people.

It's notable, now, that he lives in a £12 million house. This was paid for by the infamous revolving door of government ministers going into private lobbying and well-remunerated directorships after leaving office. While a well-known phenomenon, thanks to the publication of all of the notorious paedophile Jeffrey Epstein's correspondence, we now get a glimpse of the process working in practice.

Epstein advised Mandelson on how to apply for directorships, including with Deutsche Bank, that could have been worth \$4-10 million per year. In the end, Mandelson didn't want to work full time, and so got a job with a firm called Lazard for one day a week, worth a mere \$1 million per year ([tinyurl.com/SPGBEP2](http://tinyurl.com/SPGBEP2)). He also set up his own lobbying firm, Global Counsel, which, as Mandelson said in one email to Epstein, paid his expensive mortgage. Epstein advised him on how to find clients for that firm. Global Counsel has had firms such as JPMorgan, Palantir and Anglo-American as clients.

These roles sought were, in part, to avoid regulation around former ministers taking jobs that relied on their former political roles or were intrinsically linked with them: and it is clear that what was for sale was general political, not financial advice, how to get things done, including introductions and network access. This is clearly not an uncommon situation. Epstein, it seems, also gave similar advice to former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak. After all, as we have written in these pages before, this was Epstein's business, helping manage other people's wealth, for a cut ([tinyurl.com/SPGBEP1](http://tinyurl.com/SPGBEP1)).

## Itch to live like them

It is, perhaps, not surprising that people who find themselves rubbing shoulders with the fabulously wealthy should not feel the itch to be able to live like them, especially as, when entering the room as government officials they are functionally treated as peers of the wealthy: individuals of power and respect. It is equally understandable that the wealthy should want to encourage such feelings and throw a few crumbs to the politicians to win their loyalty.

As the case of Mandelson demonstrates,

it does not have to be the naked bribery of plain brown envelopes. Continued loyalty (in his case as Business Secretary in the UK, and Trade Commissioner of the EU) can be generally rewarded by these advisor roles, directorships or other supposed jobs where the ultra-wealthy can name the price. We've noted before that the book-publishing and speaking-tour game is a simple way to transfer substantial sums to former politicians in ways which no set of rules could ever stop. Any attempt to ban such channelling of funds will always simply be circumvented, as Mandelson and Epstein managed to do.

Epstein gives us a great example, in one of his emails, where he leadenly says 'supporting [Gordon Brown] will be seen as bad form commercially': Mandelson's own interests in the subsequent selling price of his skills and contacts depended on him being seen as helpful to commercial interests. That he had the lack of sense to forward secret and commercially sensitive government documents to Epstein will certainly come to be seen as bad form commercially. It is inconceivable that other ministers through the ages have not, in private conversations and communications, given wealthy friends and acquaintances tips and winks about what was coming up, but that would never be provable. There have just never been email dumps like this one before to let the cat out of the bag. And even if, again, Mandelson is formally cleared, his misjudgement in leaving evidence behind will be remembered.

What should also be remembered is that all of this flows, not just from personal cupidity, but structurally, from a society of immense inequality. A society in which a handful live in luxury, and can spare some of their wealth to tempt and buy whomsoever they please. Journalists have come out, after Mandelson's fall, with stories of how he would threaten their jobs because he knew their boss (shades of the Savile playbook). Where people depend for their livelihood on their job, such threats have power.

His wealth of money and connections fed back into his ability to influence the machinery of the Labour Party, and restore it as a party safe for capital. But, again, it is not him alone as some sort of cuckoo in the nest – any party that seeks to manage an unequal society will inevitably end up being run for the benefit of the people who benefit from that inequality.

**PIK SMEET**

# Myths of race and nation

‘NATIONALISM TEACHES you to hate people you never met and to take pride in accomplishments you had no part in.’ So said the American comedian, author and actor, Doug Stanhope. Given that this dictum appears to state something obvious and irrefutable, we might expect it to be widely accepted and so for nationalism to get overwhelmingly rejected by the large-brained creatures that we are. Yet we know that this is not what happens. Almost wherever you look in the world, nationalism is alive and well, and in fact, with the rise of populism, an increasing number of people seem to be openly espousing it together with its brother-in-arms, racism.

Why? The simplest explanation is to be found in the word ‘insecurity’. The system of society that dominates the world – capitalism – by its very nature makes most of those who live under it feel insecure. It forces the overwhelming majority of us to sell our energies to an employer for a wage or salary throughout most of our lives. And we never quite know whether the living provided by that wage or salary will continue, become precarious or be thrown into disarray by the uncontrollable market forces that govern the capitalist system. The instability this generates makes most of us easy prey to the idea, often spread or at least bolstered by governments (or by those waiting in the wings who would like to govern), that people who don’t appear ‘native’ to a particular country are somehow to blame for that insecurity. The idea prevails among many that it is those non-natives that cause it, that make things go wrong by taking ‘our’ jobs, consuming ‘our’ resources, and even committing most acts of criminality.

Of course such a notion is not just recent. It has been present throughout the history of capitalism and indeed, despite its apparent surge via ugly right-wing populism in recent times, it has actually been far worse in past times. In the recent news has been the outcry over the alleged blatant anti-semitism exhibited by Nigel Farage in his youth, and all Jewish people will know that in those years such anti-semitism was widespread and almost ‘normal’. This writer has a clear memory of such incidents in his own school years, for example an occasion when in front of the whole of the class one pupil turned to someone and loudly addressed him as a ‘big fat yid’. No one batted an eyelid then. Now they certainly would. In fact such an incident would be far less likely to happen at all today or, if it did, would

cause significant consternation and lead to consequences for the person responsible.

Of course, even worse humiliation and discrimination was suffered by people of colour in those years. Older generations sometimes talk about the open, unabated, taken-for-granted racism they suffered. In a recent BBC ‘Profile’ programme, for example, about the black screen and stage actor David Harewood, we heard of him being chased through the streets by skinheads and bricks being thrown through the family’s windows ([bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m002nh74](http://bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m002nh74)). Such open racism is clearly far less virulent today. And even if the clock may seem to be turning backwards in certain ways and in certain countries, the fact is that not long ago the US had a black president, it currently has a Moslem mayor in its major city, and in recent years in the UK too, many major political figures have ethnic minority backgrounds, including the current leader of the Conservative Party. All this would have seemed unimaginable just 40-50 years ago.

Further evidence of this increased acceptance of ‘others’ and diminution of racism is to be found in the UK’s most popular sport, football. People from a great diversity of backgrounds play together on the pitch and are often idolized by supporters, themselves often of diverse origins and skin shades, who mingle together in the stands. Again this is something new compared to previous years when teams had few foreign or black players and football fans from ethnic minorities even avoided going to matches for fear of abuse or attack. One incident among others that this writer remembers from the 1980s (so a relatively short time ago) was being in the crowd at a match between Manchester United and Norwich

City and hearing the one black player on the pitch, Ruel Fox, repeatedly having the word ‘coonie’ shouted at him – something that no one seemed to find unusual. One could almost rule out such a scenario today.

Overall, therefore, despite the fact that those with racist notions and tendencies may feel emboldened by phenomena such as the Brexit vote, the rise of Reform UK, the election of Donald Trump, and the emergence in Europe of right-wing populist parties and governments, it remains very much the exception rather than the norm for racism and nationalism to be expressed crudely and publicly. Such expression tends to exist rather in the echo chambers of social media. That is not of course to say that the divide and rule weapons of nationalism and racism are likely to be put aside by those governing – or aiming to govern – a system that is by its very nature riven with insecurity and instability. It serves the purpose of distracting attention from the real reason for that insecurity and instability, which is the division of society into two classes – on the one hand the minority who own most of the wealth (the capitalist class) and on the other the overwhelming majority who own little and can only survive by selling their energies for a wage or salary (the working class). Divide and rule will only be transcended when the members of the majority class decide to act collectively and democratically to win the political power which is needed to shift society from production for the profit of the few to production for the needs of all. Then we will be free of the divisions of ‘race’ and of ‘nation’ that afflict humans across the planet. Then we will be able to focus on what unites rather than divides us.

**HKM**



David Harewood

Credit: BBC, David Harewood

# Zackonomics — how green can you be?

Credit: Getty Images



IN THEIR party political broadcast on 22 January ([tinyurl.com/yhd3vxx2](https://tinyurl.com/yhd3vxx2)), the Greens' new eco-populist leader Zack Polanski ran through the various problems people face and pointed out that a lot of the wealth they create ends up in the pockets of the super-rich. But went on: 'This isn't just an economic failure. It's a failure of leadership. The people we elected choose to serve the wealthy. And, yes, that is obscene. Good leaders put people before profit'.

## Self-styled good leaders

So what does Polanski, as a 'good leader', propose that a Green Party government would do? Its manifesto for the 2024 general election promised 'the public ownership of public services' and talked about 'taxing wealth fairly and borrowing to invest', in particular

'a Wealth Tax of 1% annually on assets above £10 million and of 2% on assets above £1bn'. This is the sort of thing the Labour Party used to advocate and will be one reason why the Greens have had some success in winning over people disillusioned with the Labour Party after Starmer (with a little help from Peter Mandelson) axed its leftwing.

In this sense, the Green Party is reviving the illusion that the Labour Party once entertained that capitalism could gradually be changed, through 'public' ownership, tax changes and social reforms, into a less unequal society. The only difference is that the Greens think that 'good leaders' should put the environment as well as people before profit (and sometimes before people). All the arguments that socialists have made against Labour Party reformism apply equally against the

Greens. Capitalism is an economic system driven by firms, whether private or state (or cooperatives), seeking to make a profit and to accumulate this as more capital to be reinvested for more profit. Putting profit-making first is imposed on those making economic decisions, including governments, as an external coercive force that they ignore at their peril.

Polanski and the Greens, if ever they got to form the government and tried to put people before profit, would be 'bad leaders' as far as capitalism was concerned. They would put a spanner in the way capitalism works and provoke an economic downturn, forcing them into a U-turn, as has happened many times to Labour and similar governments in other parts of the world — punished for refusing to put profits before people.

What this means is that, contrary to

what Polanski claims, a ‘good leader’, for capitalism, is someone who *does* put profits before people, someone who applies rather than challenges the economic laws of capitalism. Those individuals who workers elect to govern have no alternative. The nature of capitalism, as a profit-making system that can only work for the profit-takers, *obliges* them to do this on pain of provoking an economic slow-down.

Replacing them with self-styled ‘good leaders’, like he imagines himself to be, won’t change things despite good intentions. They, too, would end up having to serve the wealthy as that’s the only way that the system can work. What is needed is not a change of leaders, but a change of system. But that’s not what the Greens want.

## Cranky economics

The Green Party accepts capitalism. It doesn’t challenge the ownership of the means of life by a minority nor that goods and services are produced primarily for sale on a market with a view to profit. At most, it seems to want to go back to an earlier stage of capitalism in which production was in the hands of small and medium-sized enterprises.

To tell the truth, the Green Party is all over the place when it comes to economics which, anyway, is not the primary interest of most of its members. That — and it’s a perfectly legitimate concern — is to protect and save the environment, which they imagine can be done by pursuing policies and passing laws without changing the basics of the present, capitalist economic system.

The Greens’ relative lack of interest in economics has left them open to all sorts of cranky theories. For instance, their manifesto for the 2015 general election declared that ‘the power to create money must be taken out of the hands of private banks’ and that ‘commercial banks should be no more than the custodians of publicly created money in current accounts’. This reflected a resolution on ‘monetary and financial reform’ carried at their 2013 Conference: ‘97% of the money circulating in the economy takes the form of credit that is created electronically by private banks through the accounting processes they follow when they make loans ... The 1844 Bank Charter Act will be updated to prohibit banks from creating national currency in the form of electronic credit. To finance their lending, investment or proprietary trading activities, banks will have to borrow or raise the necessary national currency from savers and investors’ ([tinyurl.com/y4mmbkr](http://tinyurl.com/y4mmbkr)).

This would considerably limit what

banks would be able to lend, even to individuals let alone to business. But loans to profit-seeking firms are essential to the workings of capitalism as it means that capitalist entrepreneurs do not have to have accumulated all their own money before they can start a business. The role of banks is to make available money for investment that would otherwise lie idle or be scattered in small amounts.

To make up for the fall in bank lending that their scheme would bring about, the 2013 resolution proposed that ‘all national currency (both in cash and electronic form) will be created, free of any associated debt, by a National Monetary Authority (NMA) that is accountable to Parliament’ and that ‘any new money created by the NMA will be credited to the account of the Government as additional revenue, to be spent into circulation in the economy in accordance with the budget approved by Parliament’.

Imagining that banks create money out of thin air and wanting to devise a debt-free money is classic currency crankism. Banks don’t create new money when they make a loan; they lend out money that they have (from deposits and loans) or can quickly acquire (from the money market or the Bank of England) and the interest they receive comes from the future profits of loans to business and from the future wages of those to individuals. The 2013 Green Party resolution and 2015 Green Party general election manifesto were proposing an imagined solution to a false problem, a solution which if applied would lead to financial chaos and roaring inflation.

These days the Green Party does not push this policy much. It wasn’t in their 2019 or 2024 general election manifestos. However, it remains part of their official policy and is included in their *Policies for a Sustainable Society* ([tinyurl.com/kb873h5d](http://tinyurl.com/kb873h5d)). Polanski, who knows a thing or two about selling false remedies and so about what sells and what doesn’t, doesn’t mention the banking reform part and talks only about some National Monetary Authority providing the government with whatever money it needs to pay for a Green Deal and social services.

## Magic Money Theory

This has led some, such as Jonathan Prynn, business editor of *The Standard* (formerly *Evening Standard*), to accuse Polanski of embracing another mistaken monetary theory ([tinyurl.com/5n7vxwsc](http://tinyurl.com/5n7vxwsc)) — self-styled ‘Modern Monetary Theory’, or MMT (which also, appropriately enough, stands for Magic Money Tree). This teaches that the government doesn’t need to borrow money but can simply create the money it needs and spend it;

this will stimulate the economy and the government will eventually recover the money as increased tax receipts.

It is not clear that Polanski has embraced MMT. He may just be using the naive (and, therefore, good populist) argument that if the resources are there to save the environment or eliminate poverty (as they are) and the government has the power to create as much money as it wants (as it does), why does the government not simply create the money to use the resources? If it did this, it wouldn’t need to worry about borrowing money and so wouldn’t be in thrall to international speculators. Which is essentially what Polanski and the Greens are saying.

The trouble is that this ignores the way the capitalist economic system works. Wealth is produced in the profit-seeking sector of the economy in response to the prospects of making a profit. Governments as such produce no wealth; to get the money to buy what they need to carry out their activities they have to resort either to taxation of the profit-producing sector or borrow from those who have acquired money from that sector. When the government creates money it is not creating any new wealth, only claims on existing wealth. It can create as much of these claims as it likes but, if it creates more than the economy needs for its buying and selling and other monetary transactions, then the result will be a fall in the purchasing power of the claims and so a rise in the general prices level, or inflation.

If a Green government were to simply create and spend the money to protect the environment or to eliminate poverty or to improve living conditions generally, the most likely result is that there would be a one-time spurt in economic activity but in time there would be an inflation which could get of hand. Apologists for capitalism, such as Prynn, happen to be right when they point this out.

The conclusion to be drawn is not to accept that profits have to come before people, but that it is futile, and even counter-productive, to try to prevent this under capitalism. What is needed is to get rid of the profit system altogether and to use resources to simply and directly produce what people need. But this is only possible on the basis of the common ownership of the world’s productive resources. It would then no longer be a question of what should come first — profits or people? — because profits wouldn’t enter into it at all.

**ADAM BUICK**

# The cost of money

A MUSICAL ensemble undergoing a restructuring has formed a small committee to consider the details. An important factor was the membership fee. Although the musicians were all amateurs, in the best sense of that word, there were regular costs to be met. This meant that while the fees were not exorbitant, none the less they were significant. This raised an issue: an aim of the ensemble was to encourage players of various abilities to participate, including those whose financial circumstances would make the fees prohibitively expensive.

The simple solution was to accept that individual circumstances could be taken into consideration, with fees reduced or waived. One committee member, in particular, was enthusiastic in his support of this arrangement, declaring, 'As a socialist I'm all in favour.' He was an active member of the Labour Party, obviously mistaking a commendable act of social altruism as an expression of socialism. Indeed, it could appear to conform with the socialist maxim, from each according to ability, to each according to need.

However, while individual needs in this specific context were to be met, the ability referred to in this instance was the ability to pay, not play. A skilled musician's opportunity to play would depend on a financial arrangement. If at some future time expenses were such that an accommodation of non-fee payers was no longer sustainable by the ensemble then the concession could be withdrawn. The player's desire and ability to play would still exist, but would be denied.

The determining factor, money, remains decisive in straightened circumstances. The ensemble's proposed inclusive action is an example of solidarity, again giving the lie to the oft-voiced opinion that human nature is greedy and selfish. There is no requirement for the ensemble to be so considerate as there are a goodly number of members already. It has grown over the decade of its existence and continues to grow. It is now looking to develop a youth section if that can be funded. Back to money again as the crucial factor before the needs and abilities of young people can be identified and met.

The ensemble meets weekly to develop its skills and programme of public performances. The individual musicians devote a significant portion of their time to daily practice at home. In other words they work hard, but entirely

unremunerated. Another refutation of the seemingly 'common sense' argument that people will not work unless paid. Rather, they pay to work.

This is but one example of what is happening across society, people working voluntarily in a wide range of circumstances, already freely giving of their abilities to fulfil needs both personal and communal.

A moment's consideration should enable most people to think of those they know and circumstances where they come across volunteers. If all volunteers withdrew their efforts tomorrow, society would severely suffer as a consequence. There are many volunteers who devote more time and enthusiasm to their volunteer activities than ever they do, or did, to the drudgery of their paid employment. This seems particularly the case for those who are officially retired.

The claim that socialism won't succeed, because it relies on the great majority working cooperatively and voluntarily without financial incentives, is contradicted by the evidence. It is happening now, even though the dominant ethos is all about money. If the social, economic and political context was socialism, having been actively achieved by the vast majority, then what might now be termed altruism would actually be the norm. Very different to how things are presently arranged.

## Council services

The borough in which the ensemble operates has recently issued its council tax requirements for the coming financial year. The rate has risen again, to a chorus of much grumbling. There is also a breakdown of the council's spending. Two major items of expenditure are social care and children's services. In the jargon these are 'big ticket' items. The problem is they become ever more expensive year on year. Social care has become a huge fiscal responsibility because many more people are failing to die in their seventies as was the case until fairly recently. Medical science and technology has advanced markedly, while working in the unhealthy atmospheres of heavy industry has declined, along with smoking,

What should be a cause of widespread celebration is marred by the cost. That science and technology comes at a price, as does the residential and home care for those requiring it. Families opening their council tax bills see the increase

as putting further strain on stretched household budgets.

While the council is working under legal obligations to provide these services, a sense of responsibility also motivates councillors to do their best for those with needs. As Labour councillors they may well consider themselves socialists in this context. Theirs is a 'socialism' trying to mitigate the worst consequences of capitalism. Social care, for example, to look after elderly workers past the stage of being exploitable labour. In previous times it would have been the workhouse. The workhouse system was developed, at least in part, as a response to perceived rising costs on the parish rates of poor relief, such as the Speenhamland system. Council tax is the modern equivalent of the parish rates and is equally a matter of contention amongst those who must pay.

The bottom line, as it is often called these days, determines how needs are met. Whether it's being involved in an ensemble, or some similar group, or looking after the elderly or children, the fundamental factor is money. No matter the political perspective, left, right or centre, debates and discussions revolve around the sums of money involved. For some such as the ensemble the decisions are collective ones, made by the whole group.

With public finance, local or national, the arbiter is the law. The price, paid by those who are dependent on what is described as the public purse, is rationing. If a need cannot be met due to there being insufficient funds to pay for it, then it will remain unmet. Even if provision is made it may not be sufficient or of suitable quality. Even in a social, and sociable, organisation such as the ensemble, a change in financial circumstances amongst those who pay may result in the withdrawal of concessions for those who can't, albeit with heartfelt regret.

Socialism requires the maxim – from each according to ability, to each according to need – to be fully realised for everyone. This can only occur in a society in which the profit motive no longer operates and there are no prices for anything, money having become redundant. Until then, the Labour – and all too common – misunderstanding of socialism will continue to equate it with forms of charity, whether voluntary or legally enforced.

**D. A.**

# Britain's energy trilemma

THE APPROACH of the UK government to energy is characterised by a trilemma. It tries to balance out the need to reduce carbon emissions, supporting national energy security and control the costs of the transition. The hidden premise behind all of these, is the class nature of society and the need for the government to negotiate with the owners of energy generating resources, without threatening their control of their property and securing a tribute from them to allow the change.

People speak about the costs of transferring to renewables. Initially this was largely down to the fact that the infrastructure for generating energy through fossil fuels already existed. The cost of energy, like any commodity, depends on how much labour it typically takes to produce it. Capital, that is past labour, reduces the need for fresh effort. So, no good or process has an inherent cost, just the relative cost of how much society is geared towards carrying out the activity.

Renewables and other sources of generation originally appear more costly compared to oil and gas, but that is only because the means of obtaining and using the latter are already in place. To build a renewable energy network within a capitalist society means persuading the owners of capital that there will be profits to be made in carrying out that activity: but the structural advantage fossil fuels have means that the markets, of their own accord, will not promote this change.

UK government has created *designed* markets. Renewable Obligation Certificates were used, as a means of transferring payments from people who obtain their electricity from fossil fuels to renewables companies. These are still supported by the government, but the scheme is closed, and has been replaced by Contracts for Difference (CFDs): the government auctions off licences to supply energy at a fixed cost, the supplier will repay any excess income, or be paid if market prices for electricity fall below the fixed 'strike price'. This removes volatility from the market, and allows capitalists to invest with an almost guaranteed rate of return.

Even then, there have been auctions where few firms applied at the stated strike price, and the government has had to raise their offer in order to entice more investment.

Finally, there is a cost of 'balancing the grid', paying producers to stop producing or start producing, to offset



Credit: Adobe Stock

the unbalanced and intermittent nature of renewables (or if, say, the wind is generating energy too far away from where the grid can carry it to be used adequately). This is expected to reach a cost of £8 billion per year by 2030. Effectively transferring profits to the energy producers via taxation.

The overall market price tends to be set by the most expensive resource, which in the case of energy, is unsubsidised gas on the world market. The loss of Russian gas from the market (and the wider shocks of the Russia-Ukraine war) has pushed the cost of gas up, which means, overall, we have seen significant upward pressure on energy bills, which in the end hit the consumer. Those on fixed incomes will bear the brunt, whilst workers in employment will struggle to pass on the burden to their employers.

This isn't helped by the anti-democratic approach governments take. In order to hide their powerlessness in the face of the capitalists' interest, they simply plough on with the policy behind closed doors. The system of subsidy and incentive is opaque (at best) alongside the complicated character of the energy markets that have grown up. Most people will only see the cost of heating their homes going up.

Into that space step voices which claim climate change is a hoax, that subsidies to renewables are making electricity more expensive and that if we just resumed extracting fossil fuels bills would come down. Such voices have the backing of some in the energy industry, or other capitalists who rely on cheap energy for their operations. They would put immediate profits against the cost of the effects of climate change (or even gambling that the costs won't affect them primarily).

In the meantime, the changes already made have been impressive. In 1991, according to the National Grid, only 2 percent of electricity came from renewable

sources compared to over 50 percent by 2023. Coal has been practically eliminated as an electricity generation source. The UK has a target of <math>50\text{gCO}\_2\text{ per kW hour}</math> in 2023 the average was 140g. Nonetheless, total emissions were 50 percent of those in 1990.

Total renewable energy generation needs to double by 2030 to stay on track. Most of that, apparently, is planned. This will be helped by the tumbling of the costs of renewable generation on a global scale, partly due to China's massive investment in renewable energy. Although over half of China's electricity comes from coal, growth of coal generation there is slowing, and renewables are expanding faster. This enables China to export renewable technology. For the first time, this year, less than 50 percent of a growing electricity output worldwide came from non-renewable sources.

This fall in costs, though, presents a problem for the subsidised capitalists, as it means that overall renewable electricity generation will never be as profitable as they would hope.

As we build socialism, we will be confronted by the context of climate change, and will inherit the energy system as it is now. Obviously, we would be able collectively and democratically to discontinue some wasteful branches of energy use, but we would still need to heat homes and provide power for the projects we do want to carry out. The Royal Society has carried out research that suggests all of the UK's energy needs could be met from wind and solar alone (with sufficient capacity for storage in the form of hydrogen).

The issues of energy generation and climate change are solvable, even within capitalism, but the need is urgent and worldwide democratic co-operation offers us the best and speediest chance and that will require ending the tribute to capital.

**PIK SMEET**

# Throwing custard over the Crown Jewels and shoplifting at Waitrose

LAST DECEMBER a group called Take Back Power made news by throwing apple crumble and custard over a glass case containing the Crown Jewels in the Tower of London. Describing itself as a 'nonviolent civil-resistance group', Take Back Power, though talked of as a successor to Just Stop Oil which has now dissolved itself, has a new and different agenda focusing on what can broadly be called 'economic inequality'. Its declared concerns are matters such as the cost of living and, in particular, what it describes as 'unfair taxation'. To bring attention to such issues, its members are promising mass shopliftings of 'high-end' stores such as Waitrose and redistribution of the food removed to those who need it. Such activities are seen as a way of exerting pressure on the government to set up what they call 'a permanent citizen's assembly – a House of the People, which has the power to tax extreme wealth and fix Britain'. This echoes the words on the sign carried by those arrested at the scene of the apple crumble and custard event: 'Democracy has crumbled – tax the rich'.

## Daily Mail v Take Back Power

The group was the subject of a predictably derogatory report in the *Daily Mail* on the occasion of its formal launch in January of this year (tinyurl.com/34e23662). One of its founders, Arthur Clifton, was reported as telling the audience at the founding event: 'We have seen that food is locked behind skyrocketing prices. Less and less people can afford less and less food'. And then the article went on to mention that two of those involved in the 'custard' protest were 'an NHS worker and a former doctor' and pointed out that Clifton was 'privately educated' at 'one of the country's top public schools' and came from a wealthy family. In so doing it lit the blue touch paper for its discerning readers in the comments facility on the website. Typical examples of comments were:

*'Terrorists, by another way and means. They need locking up.'*

*'Start prosecuting and imprison these vandals & thieves with long sentences.'*

*'Morons and jealous half-wits.'*

*'Why do this lot always look like they need a good bath!!'*

*'If they hate capitalism why not moving to China or Cuba? or ... North Korea?'*

*'Anti-capitalist group: the upper-middle*



Credit: Take Back Power

*class way of saying "thieves".*

*'Middle class privileged kids playing at politics.'*

*'A few baseball bats and pickaxe handles would soon sort these goons out.'* (from *Big Richard of Birmingham*)

*'Live rounds, now!'* (from *Shampoo Bamboo of Sheffield*)

Such comments are of course to be looked upon with the contempt they deserve, but of real relevance to the venture they are commenting on are a number of points made in earlier editions of the *Socialist Standard* about Take Back Power's predecessor group, Just Stop Oil.

## Single-issue groups

Firstly, single-issue groups, no matter how well supported they may appear to be at a given time, tend to have limited impact, if any, in the longer term. Recent history illustrates this when we think of, for example the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the Anti-Vivisection Society, Occupy, Extinction Rebellion, which either become extinct when members tire of working hard for little visible gain or soldier on even when they get overtaken by events and changing conditions make the issue they are campaigning for seem less relevant. In general, it must be said that such organisations are nothing if not commendable for their concern for human welfare and the sincerity of their intentions. And on occasion they can be judged to have had some kind of positive impact on society or on social attitudes. But this is usually because their agenda becomes aligned with the needs of the social and economic system we live in (capitalism), making what they are campaigning for

useful or necessary for the continued smooth running of that system. Examples of this are the campaign for a National Health Service in Britain at the end of the second world war (basically a necessary back-to-work scheme for efficient employment), and the Civil Rights movement in the US which was at least partially successful in improving conditions for the black minority. One of its effects was to put them in a less inferior position to the white majority in the labour market and so giving employers a wider pool of workers to choose from. In the end, such 'successes' as there have been among single-issue campaigns form part of the list of never-ending reforms that capitalism itself always needs to facilitate its operation.

## What does 'anti-capitalist' mean?

Secondly, though the *Daily Mail* article referred to Take Back Power as an 'anti-capitalist group' and a number of its readers' comments picked up on that, when looked at closely the group's aims and activities are not 'anti-capitalist' in any meaningful way. It envisages its ambitions as being achieved within the framework of the current system of money, wages and buying and selling. They involve either influencing existing governments or leaders or somehow having a part in government themselves. There is nothing 'anti-capitalist' in this. Anti-capitalism (or 'socialism' as we would call it) means a social system without governments or leaders based on common ownership of all goods and services and free access to all the necessities of life for all. Reforms to the current system (even a conglomeration

of them) cannot provide that. Nor does anti-capitalism or socialism have anything whatever to do with China, Cuba or North Korea, as suggested by some of the *Daily Mail's* keyboard warriors.

## Class

Thirdly, some explanation is needed regarding 'class', especially given that the protestors in question are referred to in the newspaper as 'middle-class' (and therefore not 'working class'). The important reality to grasp is that there are very few of us indeed who are not 'working class'. This is in the sense that the overwhelming majority of us need to find an employer to work for in order to have a wage or salary as a means of survival. And that will certainly be the case for virtually all those who gathered on 17 January at Limehouse Town Hall in London to formally found Take Back Power. We can say with a good degree of certainty that very few of them indeed, if any, belong to that small group of people who do not have to sell their energies to an employer day by day because they own enough wealth to be able to live comfortably without doing that, ie, those who belong to the tiny minority of people who own most of the earth's resources – those we call the capitalist class.

## Who pays taxes?

Finally, while the idea that imposing higher taxation on the rich and reducing it for the poor may seem superficially attractive, it is, when examined closely, fundamentally wrong-headed. It's true that most people have an image of the

state and its government as a kind of 'neutral' agency standing above society, to which all must contribute. In this view state revenue is the 'public purse', which we all have to support through taxation. But the main burden of taxation in fact rests on the tiny minority of people who own the vast majority of the wealth (the capitalist class) and who the government extracts it from in order to maintain the whole machinery on which the system depends for its orderly functioning. And they pay it out of the profit accruing to them from their ownership of the means of production and distribution over the whole of society. If they were prevailed upon to pay even more than they already do, it would have the effect of eating into the profit which is the life blood of capitalism, cause disinvestment, economic decline and possibly worse, and make workers even poorer as wages declined and unemployment rose.

## Mirages, dead ends and the real deal

So in all these terms Take Back Power's aim of a society run by a 'Citizens' Assembly' which would tax 'extreme wealth' is nothing more than a mirage. It is a mistaken notion that, within the framework of a society founded on buying and selling, things could be run in a notably more equitable way than at present. If, by some unimaginable quirk, such an experiment did come to be tried, it would quickly become clear that whoever or whichever body was running things, they would quickly have to bow to the dictates

of profit and to a similar order of things as exist already for the vast majority (ie the workers) and effectively carry on running capitalism. While we can thoroughly agree with the statement made by Take Back Power that governments 'serve the super rich' and 'do not care about working people', their plans for somehow reducing the wealth of those they call 'the obscenely wealthy' could not possibly be realised within the existing framework of social organisation with its governments and monetary exchange.

The 'guru' of Just Stop Oil, Roger Hallam, who has recently served a prison sentence under the British state's arsenal of repressive laws for involvement in tactics like blocking roads or gluing yourself to paintings, is on record as saying 'If you don't upset people, then nothing happens'. It remains to be seen whether Take Back Power will now go in for similar actions to try and attract attention to their cause. But even if they are successful in this, what they will be spreading is attention to what can only be a dead end. What is needed is a wider view of how society works than that adopted by any single-issue campaign. The working class does indeed need to 'take back power', but it needs to do that in a way that focuses not on social or economic reform within the framework of capitalism, but on a change from a society of production for profit to one of production for need based on common ownership of the world's resources and free access to all goods and services.

**HKM**



Credit: Getty Images

# Capitalism to blame not ‘neoliberalism’

ADNAN HUSSAIN, MP for Blackburn, one of the four pro-Gaza MPs who are allied with Corbyn in the Independent Alliance parliamentary group, was as such one of the provisional leaders of Your Party. He subsequently quit Your Party but is still a member of the Independent Alliance and he still agrees with the new party’s basic position that capitalism can be reformed so as to benefit the many.

*The Socialist* (the paper of one of the remnants of the Militant Tendency) reported that he told a meeting in Blackburn on 30 August:

“Neoliberal policies have destroyed the unity of communities”, creating loneliness, isolation, and mental ill-health. He said that the new party will fight for the funding needed for housing, health, education, and transport, and to reopen youth clubs and community centres’ ([tinyurl.com/25kh7t2u](https://tinyurl.com/25kh7t2u)).

Normal reformist rhetoric, encouraging the mistaken belief that capitalism could be made to provide adequately these essential services that people need.

That it is ‘neoliberalism’ that is the problem has been a constant theme of his tweets. For instance, this on 23 October:

‘Capitalism, unrestrained, measures everything, even human life, by its economic yield. Neoliberalism then sanctifies this as “freedom.” The result? A society where dignity is traded for productivity and compassion is seen as inefficiency’ ([tinyurl.com/3aevdhfk](https://tinyurl.com/3aevdhfk)).

This suggests that it is neoliberalism — unrestrained capitalism, or giving capitalist enterprises freer rein to pursue profits as they see fit — that results in this, and that state intervention to restrain capitalism could prevent it. But it wouldn’t.

All the things he criticises — communities destroyed, people treated as things — have happened, but because of capitalism. Governments have had to give priority to profit-making as that is what drives the capitalist economy. Public services and amenities are paid for out of taxes and taxes fall in the end on profits. So, after the post-war boom came to an end in the mid-1970s, governments had to

decide between maintaining these services and encouraging profit-making. It wasn’t a real choice as, capitalism being what it is, a system driven by profit, they had to give priority to profit-making.

Corbyn himself always criticises neoliberalism rather than capitalism itself. But it is not the ‘neoliberal capitalist order’ that is the problem. It is the capitalist production-for-profit system as such. Neoliberalism is not a system but a policy forced on governments, particularly since the 1980s, of reducing state intervention in the economy. A return to more state intervention won’t prevent capitalism measuring everything by its ‘economic yield’ or putting productivity before dignity and efficiency before compassion. No action by a reformist government can change that. In fact, any serious attempt to restrain capitalism from giving priority to profit-making and to spend more on meeting people’s needs would provoke an economic downturn as the search for profits is what drives the economy.

## Roger Hallam’s new plan

ROGER HALLAM, the man behind the failed Just Stop Oil campaign, has emerged from prison a reformed character. He has now abandoned civil disobedience as a way of trying to change things and has embraced electoral action. He is not, however, in a position to say what he really thinks as, if he did continue to advocate breaking the law, he’d be sent straight back to prison to serve the rest of his 2025 four-year prison sentence.

In January he brought out a three-hour video and podcast called *How To Start a Revolution in 2026*, subtitled ‘ordinary people can run society — but only if we build the structures to let them’ ([tinyurl.com/mpvsjz8](https://tinyurl.com/mpvsjz8)). The subtitle gives a clue to what he means by ‘revolution’ — a radical change in the way political decisions are made.

He proposes that elected local councillors should be answerable to and overseen by citizens’ assemblies selected by lot. It’s basically a scheme for a functioning participatory democracy. It’s not necessarily a bad proposal in itself. The trouble is that Hallam envisages it being implemented under capitalism. What he is in effect proposing is a reform of the political superstructure of capitalism while leaving its social and economic base untouched.

But it is not a lack of democracy that causes the problems that the non-owning

majority face today. It’s the capitalist system of minority ownership of the means of life and production for profit. Not even the most radical democratic decision-making structure can change or overcome the basic economic law of capitalism that making profits must come before all other considerations. Given capitalism, citizens’ assemblies would be no more able to solve the problems the majority face than existing governments or local councils. His proposed new democratic and community-led political structure could only work on the basis of the common ownership of the means of life. That is the only basis on which there would be neither vested interests nor coercive economic laws standing in the way of gearing production to meeting people’s needs.

So much for the goal but what about the means to get there? Here Hallam has drawn up a detailed plan of how to mobilise people at local level to put up their own candidates and win, involving regular weekly door-knocking, postering, telephoning, targeting non-voters (over 60 percent in most local council wards), meet-ups, and fund raising. He is prepared to put his money where his mouth is and try out his plan. The chosen place is Lambeth in London, currently controlled by an unpopular Labour council. He intends

to organise candidates in all 25 wards and expects, even promises, that if his plan is carried out Labour will be kicked out.

Hallam may have embraced electoral action but he hasn’t changed his view from his Extinction Rebellion days that only a minority is needed to bring about political change. He still says: ‘Mass movements don’t grow by persuading everyone. They grow by activating a specific minority — roughly five per cent of the population — who are alienated, capable, and waiting for something credible. Most people will never mobilise’.

Lenin thought much the same. The results of the elections in Lambeth in May will show how large a following Hallam’s vanguard can get. But it would only be to reform the political set-up not for a social revolution to end minority ownership of the means society needs to survive.

### ALB

#### The SWP reforms

In the article in our January issue on Your Party ([tinyurl.com/yc28edk5](https://tinyurl.com/yc28edk5)) we pointed to the SWP’s hypocritical position in demanding that YP should have democratic internal elections while its own Central Committee was not chosen democratically. Members only had the choice of voting for or against a slate hand-picked by the outgoing committee. It has now been reported that at its conference in January the SWP has changed this to allow other candidates than those selected and recommended by the outgoing committee ([tinyurl.com/yh4wcyms](https://tinyurl.com/yh4wcyms)). Not quite so undemocratic but still not democratic as those on the outgoing committee’s slate will still have an advantage.

# Reporting on reporting

Credit: BBC



JOURNALIST STEVE Rosenberg hasn't chosen the easiest of careers. His appearances on BBC News as their correspondent in Russia raise questions about how free he is to investigate and report on what's happening there, especially since the war in Ukraine reignited in 2022. The *Panorama* episode *Our Man In Moscow* (BBC One) offers an answer by showing what Rosenberg, his producer and camera operator do between the times we see him on air. Their trip to the city of Tver to interview people on the street is interrupted by both the police and state media asking what they're doing, with the producer saying this could have turned out to be 'much worse' than an identity check. The forums and summits which they and other journalists attend are as slickly presented as those anywhere else. Although Rosenberg says that some of the attendees are now reluctant to speak to the BBC, he has put in questions to Putin on a couple of occasions. At an annual press conference, Rosenberg lists some of Russia's problems then asks Putin 'do you think you have taken care of your country?', to which he predictably replies in the affirmative. The following year, Rosenberg asks what future Putin plans for Russia, including militarily, and is told 'there will be no operations if you treat us with respect'. Rosenberg's analysis is that the Kremlin's confidence is fuelled by Europe being weakened because it is distanced from Trump's America.

Steve Rosenberg became interested in Russian culture and language during his teenage years in Chingford. His first visit to Russia was in 1987, when the Soviet Union was starting to open up more to global markets, and he was there a few years later when it broke up. Having lived and worked as a reporter in Moscow since the mid-1990s, Rosenberg is now the BBC's

Russia Editor. He's nostalgic for the country he saw when he was younger, which he tells us had more optimism. He describes the time when Putin came to power by saying 'it felt as if this huge black cloud had come over'. Being a journalist there now is compared to walking on a tightrope: 'You can't relax, really, for a second. You want to report accurately and honestly about what's happening, but you don't want to fall off the tightrope onto the minefield below, and hit a mine'.

According to Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index, Russia ranks 171<sup>st</sup> out of 180 countries ([tinyurl.com/265xr4vz](https://www.tinyurl.com/265xr4vz)), making it among the most restricted places for what news is reported, how and by whom. Virtually all media produced there comes from state-owned or affiliated organisations, with controls on its content increased further due to the war. Military personnel are banned from speaking to journalists, and the dissemination of 'unreliable information' about the armed forces is punishable by up to 15 years in prison. Dozens of critics of the authorities and the war are currently jailed, some for spying charges, and most foreign reporters have left the country. Rosenberg explains that he's one of the few western journalists remaining in Moscow, as he walks through an empty office which used to be bustling with colleagues.

Rosenberg and his crew have got used to being monitored by the state, learning that it's safest to calmly present the required documents when approached by the police while out reporting. They are also followed by plain-clothes agents, one of whom denies this when Rosenberg challenges him. These agents wouldn't be too concerned that they have been rumbled, for the reason that Rosenberg is likely to be more unsettled and restrained being aware

that they're watching him. The authorities will probably watch the *Panorama* documentary too, which Rosenberg, his colleagues and BBC executives would realise, and so they wouldn't have included anything too incriminating.

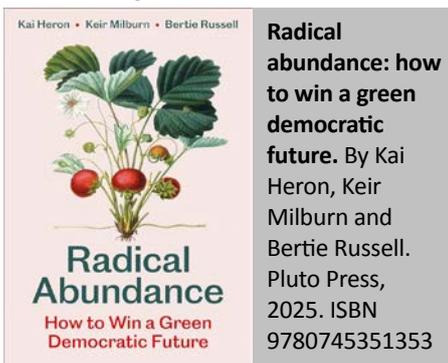
Rosenberg isn't popular with the nation's state-owned media either, which depicts him as an anti-Russian propagandist by selectively editing quotes from his reports. We see some Russian journalists questioning him on his reporting, albeit in their role as state lackeys. Television is more prominent as a source of information in Russia than in western countries: nearly two-thirds of its citizens mainly get their news in this way, according to Reporters Without Borders. We see a clip of an angry TV show host calling Rosenberg a 'conscious enemy of our country' and (oddly) a 'defecating squirrel, constantly surprised by things'. Admirably, Rosenberg perseveres with his job despite the tense position it places him in, walking his tightrope. He comes across as professional and sincere, having developed a personal understanding of Russian culture and politics.

While the context Rosenberg works in is different to that of most reporters, it illustrates how journalism isn't as simple as a dogged pursuit of the truth. In Russia more than elsewhere, the restrictions and threats hanging over journalists will shape their approaches and the words they use. Many have been silenced completely, further limiting awareness and viewpoints. Alongside this, the Russian state's media has become even more empowered, dominating the market. Legislating speech is an obvious admission by the state that it wants to control the narrative, skewed to promote both the ruling elite and the system which enables it.

Journalism is moulded not only by regulation, but also by what's acceptable to the organisations which produce it. Being an employee of the BBC, Rosenberg has to work within the corporation's frame of reference. This isn't just its editorial guidelines, but its overall ethos as part of the establishment, creating both conscious and subconscious bias in its news output. So, the war between Russia and Ukraine is analysed only on the surface level of capitalist politics, between rival governments. Mainstream journalism, whether in Britain, Russia or anywhere else wouldn't examine more fundamentally how the war is between factions of the capitalist class for their economic interests, not those of the working class.

**MIKE FOSTER**

## Beyond the state



**Radical abundance: how to win a green democratic future.** By Kai Heron, Keir Milburn and Bertie Russell. Pluto Press, 2025. ISBN 9780745351353

This is an interesting attempt to consider the transition to a society of common ownership in a concrete and practical fashion. The authors identify what they call the two invariant aspects of transition: ‘popular protagonism’ and ‘contested reproduction’, and these are necessary to overcoming the ‘metabolic control of capital’. That is, changes to formal ownership and state control are insufficient means for dealing with what they call the dialectic of ‘bullshit abundance’ (ie the abundance of pollution, authoritarianism, inequality, etc.) and artificial scarcity (the failure to meet real human needs) of commodity society.

As suggested by the title, this book is partly a rebuttal to the ‘Abundance’ deregulation theme that has emerged in the United States (as exemplified by the book of that name by Klein and Thompson, which we reviewed in our November 2025 issue). What they propose though, is something they call ‘Public Common Partnerships’. This is a riff on public private partnerships, or what they identify as the process of the state de-risking capital investment as a means of promoting economic growth. In their version, assets and enterprises that are otherwise unprofitable for capitalists can be taken over by tripartite bodies, made up of representatives of the workforce, representatives of the public authorities and a community trust. The last of these has a responsibility for distributing any surplus generated by the enterprise: either as a return to workers, further investment, or support for other such partnerships. As such, these bodies bring in those more broadly concerned with the reproduction of society, eg those engaged in child rearing or caring, rather than those directly employed. The surplus is in the hands of the community.

They argue that these bodies would enable ‘contested reproduction’ and ‘popular protagonism’ fulfilling community needs while also being an educational tool for increased popular participation in the economy. The authors are clear they do not consider this a magic bullet, but rather a practical tool for spreading de-commodified

practice and an educational experience. They pose it, rather, as a political wager, that might move things in the right direction. As they note, they are not calling for the abandonment of other forms of struggle, but adding this into the mix.

They do, in one chapter, though, speculatively examine how a network of these PCPs could plan food production across an entire country. They look to leveraging ‘Council Farms’ which, despite decline, cover thousands of hectares in the UK. They look to movements in Brazil, Venezuela and Kerala as examples to follow.

The authors themselves work on such structures as practitioners, and they point to a number of examples of where such models have been implemented: including a take-over of an in-door market in Tottenham and a pharmaceuticals plant in France.

This does come close, though, to the islands of socialism suggestion that is frequently put to us: the idea that socialism can be created in bits, rather than as a hard change-over from capitalism, which can simply ‘outcompete’ capitalist methods.

The issue is that their examples come from taking on peripheral parts of the capitalist system, bits that it no longer finds productive, which means that these PCPs mostly survive precisely because they are not a threat to the metabolic control of capital. Should they ever become so, the state would be called in to intervene. As the authors note, by the 1970s, in the UK, around a third of housing was council housing: Margaret Thatcher disposed of that with the stroke of a pen, and there is no reason to suppose that a ‘self-expanding commons’ of PCPs could not meet the same fate.

While the authors might well in fact relish such a contest as an opportunity to expand the contestation of reproduction, it seems likely that the result would be the same as the outcome of the Thatcher era: state power would prevail.

Particularly, as the authors claim it doesn’t require political organisation to set up PCPs, but rather public agitation (although how political/governmental bodies come to be involved other than through sympathetic politicians getting involved seems to be a question). If political organisation becomes required, then why go the roundabout way of challenging capital through these bodies, rather than striking at the legal and political structures that sustain it?

This then brings us back to the problem of using PCPs as some sort of educational tool. The working class already manage capitalism from top to bottom, we just do not do so in our own interest. There is

no reason to suppose that those, like the Tottenham traders, who engage in a PCP to save their local market or bottle plant, or whatever, will have a desire or interest in challenging the ‘metabolic control of capitalism’. As with any reform-minded movement, the majority of those attracted will be for the immediate goal itself, and they would balk at going further, or even be actively opposed.

This leads us to suggest that there may be a third invariant aspect of transition: consciousness. Unless there is a conscious desire to do away with capitalism, and at least some idea of what is supposed to replace it, there cannot be meaningful popular protagonism, much less contested reproduction.

This book raises important issues around the way in which transition to a non-commodity society can be achieved. The proposed PCPs are at worst harmless, and at best could form a part of the way that the working class can defend its own interests within capitalism (or, maybe, even organise society post-capitalism).

The authors are correct that a wider network of activity is required beyond the state, but for us that is the conscious mass movement for socialism that must include taking political control of the state as a minimum to stop it being used to prevent the spread of a self-managed and co-operative way of organising society from emerging.

**PIK SMEET**

## Better, not more



**Less: Stop Buying So Much Rubbish: How Having Fewer, Better Things Can Make Us Happier.** By Patrick Grant. William Collins £10.99.

In the August 2022 *Socialist Standard*, we reviewed Phillip Coggan’s *More*, which deals with the expansion in production over the centuries. Grant’s book is a kind of counterpart to that, advocating the making of fewer things. The author is a fashion designer, business owner and judge on a TV programme to do with sewing. Here we will focus on his general remarks, rather than his account of his own history in business (he is founder of the Blackburn-based Community Clothing, [communityclothing.co.uk](http://communityclothing.co.uk)).

The development of capitalism meant that the interests of business took precedence over everyone else, including

those who did the work and produced the goods. Only the rich benefited from this, and the emphasis switched to increasing output and consumption, rather than happiness. The fashion industry in particular grew via social manipulation, with seasonal fashions having a fixed shelf life. Many companies spend more on marketing and selling their products than on making them, and over thirty percent of all the clothing made is never sold, with fast fashion brands such as Shein and Temu leading the way here. Shein's marketing strategy is simple: 'make an unfathomable quantity of incredibly low-quality stuff, sell it cheaply, aggressively acquire customers, swamp the competition.' A new product is launched every three seconds. A mention of Oscar Wilde's remark that 'fashion is merely a form of ugliness so absolutely unbearable that we have to alter it every six months', would have been apposite here, except that it seems now to be a matter of days rather than months.

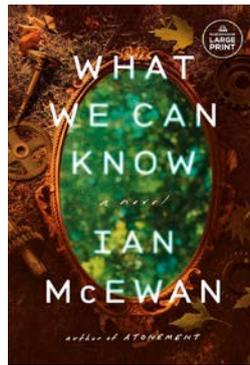
The quality of much of what is produced has declined over the last several decades (though cars may well be an exception). Cheaper products usually mean higher profits, of course. Fewer raw materials means clothes are often skinnier, shorter or thinner, and overcoats contain far less wool than they did fifty years ago. From the 60s and 70s, synthetic fibres such as nylon, polyester and acrylic became widely available and many manufacturers of natural-fibre fabrics went out of business, especially as offshoring became more common. The owners of companies that produce poor-quality goods are extremely rich (H&M, for instance). When you buy a garment online, you cannot judge its quality.

Moreover, few people nowadays love their jobs, even though work can contribute to personal happiness. These days far fewer people actually make things for a living, and there is a lack of workers in manual trades, which are not just 'manual' as they require a lot of knowledge and cognitive processing. One aim should be the creation of skilled fulfilling local jobs. Clothes, the author argues, can be produced in a way that will ensure that they age so as to provide pleasure to the wearer. Older second-hand goods can still be of high quality, and the better an object is, the more likely it is to be repaired.

There seems to be no mention here of degrowth, but a lot of what Grant advocates would imply a reduction in the amount produced and even an end to the continuous economic growth of capitalism. Much of what he says here could certainly be considered for adoption in a socialist world, but it is hard to see how it could be implemented under capitalism.

**PB**

## Futuristic



**What We Can Know.** By Ian McEwan. Jonathan Cape. 2025. 301pp.

What a fine novelist Ian McEwan is. Apart from being a superb craftsman of language and plot and a massively perceptive observer of human behaviour, his widely read fiction often contains strong social or socio-political elements offering serious food for reflection. Even more trenchant on this front than others of his novels is his latest, *What We Can Know*, which also stands out for its strong futuristic content. Yet, set as it is in the year 2119, it also reflects back on the present day at a moment before climate change and nuclear conflict have caused global populations to halve, seas to rise massively and biodiversity to decline. And it offers a constant interplay between the imagined future, which humanity's response (or lack of response) has shaped, and the world of today.

As it moves between these two time periods, it reveals the details of what is imagined to have happened through human mismanagement of the planet and its resources and technology. So, for example, scores of cities, including Glasgow and New York, have vanished and there is no longer any kind of globalised economy. Yet despite the wars, genocides, floods, famines, viruses, droughts, tsunamis, starvation and disease that have decimated the population, human society has carried on ('we scraped through' is the expression survivors use). As for Britain, what is left of it is an archipelago (ie a group of small islands) that is all the remaining population has left following the inundations caused by rising seas, and whose 'finest achievement was not to be at war'. Though run by corrupt elite 'Citizens Committees', there is relative order in society and formal education still takes place. We are told that: 'Significant parts of the knowledge base were preserved. Many institutions crawled through the gaps between catastrophes. People lived at poverty level but they lived.'

The main character is an academic at the University of the South Downs teaching history (for which he receives half the pay of his science and technology colleagues) and at the same time working on the biography of a poet who lived 100 years

earlier. Hence his interest in that (our) era. Could those pre-inundation populations not have done 'something other than grow their economies and wage war?', asks one of his students, which makes the teacher himself wonder whether 'many of humanity's problems could have been solved' before planetary havoc set in. But could it have been different? The question is left in the air.

Obviously the precise circumstances laid out as having led up to this future are no more than speculation. Yet it is speculation plausibly depicted, building on the political and environmental instability of the world we live in today, in which, as the author puts it, 'capitalism... invents furiously and persuades us of new needs'. Not that his well-founded and pungent comments on various aspects of current or recent reality (for example, 'These were the early Thatcher years, and there was crazy greed in the air') are accompanied by any proposed solution or clear course of action regarding the problems he perceives. Little more in fact than the kind of wishy-washy statement he made in a recent interview to the magazine *Positive News* that: 'We just have to stop doing bad things and do good things'. No recognition, therefore, that those 'bad things' come out of a bad system, which, in order to stop those things getting worse, needs to be replaced by a better system.

But it would be wrong-headed not to recognise that *What We Can Know* is a work of fiction and that, in the final analysis, there is no obligation for fiction to be prescriptive or to propose remedies. The main virtue of McEwan's writing lies in its power to create believable human character and interaction through effective use of language, so allowing the reader to see truthfulness in what is depicted. It is especially in the clever and nuanced 'looking-back' element of his story that the author does this most consistently. He captures some highly recognisable realities of the social and political mores of the current age, while also managing to weave much 'human interest' into his narrative, for example a highly sensitive portrayal of early onset Alzheimer's, a love story or two, and a crime of passion. No short review can in fact do justice to the book's overall literary merit, but the following passage can be seen as a typical example of its acuteness of perception and mastery of language: 'Memory is a sponge. It soaks up material from other times, other places and leaks it all over the moment in question. Its unreliability was one of the discoveries of twentieth-century psychology.'

**HKM**

# Bert Ramelson buries Lenin

WHAT HAPPENED when the BBC's 'Newsday' interviewed the industrial organiser of the Communist Party would have been more suitable for the Goon Show, or Monty Python. Bert Ramelson, keeping a perfectly straight face, point-blank denied everything that the Communist Party was founded on and peddled for over thirty years!

True it is, as he said in the interview, that he only joined the CP in 1936; whereas some of us knew it intimately since 1920. However, that should not prevent him (or anybody else) knowing the facts. The interviewer did not know a great deal about the subject, and questioned from a prepared brief.

But even the political department of the BBC had heard that the Communist Parties were founded on 'Leninism'. That is, seizure of power by an intrepid, resolute minority of 'professional revolutionists', leading the working class — who would then lead the 'toiling masses' (meaning peasants) to socialist victory. For thirty years a vast mass of pamphlets, books and newspapers flogged the Leninist dogma of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', meaning minority action.

Many able writers waded patiently through Marx's work to show that, from The Communist Manifesto onward, Marx never used this then-popular French slogan to mean anything else than

majority democratic methods. For instance, Lucien Laurat, who in Marxism and Democracy quotes The Communist Manifesto:

'The first stage in the working class revolution is the constitution of the proletariats as the ruling class, the conquest of democracy.'

No use! For thirty years CP writers and speakers denounced democracy and exhorted the workers to follow 'Marx's best disciple' Nikolai Lenin. Parliament was a useless 'gasworks', elections a waste of time (although they regularly took part in them, but 'only for propaganda, comrade'). The state would be smashed and 'bourgeois' parliaments replaced by Soviets, 'the workers' democracy' (...)

Understandably, the interviewer politely raised the question of the CP's present policy, and its past. 'Was it not the case that the CP had advocated 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' in the past?'

'Not any more', replied Bert. Not any more! And do you know why, dear reader? Let Bert tell you. Because there has been 'so much misunderstanding of what Marx really meant'. He actually said this. 'Marx meant the action of the vast overwhelming majority', said Bert; the CP has not used the phrase in any document since 1950, to avoid any more misunderstanding.

*(from article by HORATIO, Socialist Standard, March 1976)*

## Action Replay

# Icy conditions

THE 2014 Winter Olympics took place in the Russian city of Sochi (see Action Replay for December 2013 and April 2014). There was plenty of controversy attached to them, with environmental problems prominent and up to a third of the cost of staging the Games lost in corruption and embezzlement. Many cities are now reluctant to bid for the Games, because of the costs involved.

This year's Games were held last month in Milano Cortina, meaning Milan and Cortina d'Ampezzo (which, according to Wikipedia, is 'an upscale summer and winter sport resort'). Again, there were problems with corruption (*Guardian* 31 January): in October three men were arrested and charged with controlling the distribution of drugs in Cortina, controlling some of the nightclubs and forcing the local council into awarding Games-related construction contracts (the bill for the Games will be well over £4bn). The methods of intimidation allegedly used included threats and beating people up.

The Open Olympics 26 report managed to get the Games' organisers to publish their financial dealings online (see PDF - [tinyurl.com/nczd45hp](http://tinyurl.com/nczd45hp)). This has shown that much of the money being spent will be on road projects which won't be completed until after the Games are over.

And it's not just in Cortina. A new ice hockey venue in Milan was still unfinished at the end of January, with the hospitality boxes and press area far from ready. There had also been complaints that the rink was too small and the ice was unsafe. Demonstrations took place in the city over the environmental impact of the Games, to which the police responded with tear gas and water cannons, and there were reports of sabotage of railway lines.

Another controversy has been over the role that the thuggish US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) will play.

Let's ignore jokes to the effect that Trump misunderstood the kind of ice needed at the Games. Describing them as 'a militia that kills', the mayor of Milan said they would not be welcome in the city. It appears that in fact a separate ICE department, Homeland Security Investigations, will provide intelligence and so on, as it has done at previous large sporting events, but will not conduct any kind of enforcement operations (officially, anyway).

As at some previous Olympics, there will be a new sport at this one, ski mountaineering (skimo), a combination of skiing and mountain climbing. At least it's more clearly a sport than breakdancing, introduced at the 2024 Summer Olympics.

**PB**



Credit: AFP

# 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.

## March 2026 Events

### World Socialist Movement online meetings

**Friday 6 March 7.30pm**

**Have you heard the news?**

Open discussion on recent events.

**Friday 13 March 7.30pm • What's going on in Canada**

Speaker: Ray Rawlings

**Friday 20 March 7.30pm • Doughnut economics**

Speaker: Paul Bennett

A look at Kate Raworth's book *Doughnut Economics*, focussing on her analysis of whether basic human needs are being met globally and the extent to which society is keeping within planetary boundaries such as climate change.

**Friday 27 March 7.30pm**

To be announced

**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 March 3pm**

**Subject to be announced**

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

**CAMBRIDGE**

**Tuesday, 14 April 7pm**

Informal meetup of party members and sympathisers with a view to starting regular public meetings in the Cambridge area.

Devonshire Arms,  
1 Devonshire Rd,  
Cambridge CB1 2BH.

**CARDIFF**

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

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



## Declaration of Principles

This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.

### Object

**The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.**

### Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e. land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class

will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

# Scumbag or not?

'HE'S JUST a scumbag.' That's what my neighbour said to me about a local landlord who's bought up literally dozens of properties in the area and is letting them to students room by room. The neighbour doesn't like to be surrounded by students since she sees them as potentially rowdy and trouble-makers. But she's also indignant that, whenever this landlord purchases a property, he puts up one of his 'To Let' boards at the front. In our street there are currently seven houses in succession with those signs on them. In her estimation it makes the place look untidy – 'like a slum', as she puts it. And even when a property is let and people are living there, the board stays up – presumably for publicity purposes.

As for myself, though I don't mind the students and don't find them troublesome, like my neighbour I'm not particularly happy about all those boards up there permanently. I contacted the landlord's letting company and actually spoke with him. He's a young chap called Nick who I've known since he was little when his father ran the now defunct shop at the corner of the street. We had an entirely friendly conversation in which he said that it was 'letting season' at the moment but assured me that the boards would come down at the end of the month when that period was over. But the boards stayed up and, when I tried to contact him again, I couldn't get hold of him personally and was told by people in his office that they'd pass on the message. Nothing happened and I've sort of given up on that.

Since his boards are not just in my street but on properties all over the area (there are literally dozens and dozens), I asked one of the local councillors whether landlords were entitled to keep their boards up long-term like that. He told me they weren't and that local regulations state they should be taken down once properties have been let. But the rub, he told me, was that, since it would take too much in the way of time and resources for the council to go round checking and enforcing, all it would do was to inform landlords of their legal duty but with no follow up.

So is Nick a scumbag for what he's doing? In fact, are all landlords scumbags, as a friend of mine once suggested, since what they're doing is



exploiting the very basic need people have for shelter and, if they (be they students or anyone else) don't have the money to pay for it, then tough? But there again isn't that how the money and buying and selling system works more widely, ie, if you can't pay, you can't have? In a conversation I once had with a different landlord about this very thing, he expressed the view that someone who grasps opportunities to make money is doing nothing wrong but simply being enterprising and deserves to be rewarded for, as he put it, 'showing good judgement'.

Actually, looking around my area there's a whole range of types of landlords. Some of them own just a single property or maybe two and use the income from that to supplement what they earn from working for an employer or from small-scale self-employed activity. Others, like Nick, make it their living, become small-scale capitalists, and are always looking to expand. Other properties still are bought by large private equity companies who spend significant time and expense improving them before letting them out and don't need to get back the money they've spent on them in the short term, since they're regarded as long-term investments which will ultimately turn a profit for the companies' shareholders. Of course, there are also landlords (or would-be landlords) who come a cropper in all this in not being able to find tenants at all. The property or properties they own, and on which they may have taken out mortgages, become an albatross around their neck rather than a source of profit and they end up having to sell, so incurring a loss rather than any kind of profit.

But then that's the way the dog-eat-dog, anarchic system we live in works

at so many different levels. It creates winners and losers even among would-be capitalists. Of course, being a winner or loser in quite that way doesn't apply to the majority of people, those who are members of what we would call 'the working class' and who have to sell their energies to an employer day by day in order to provide for themselves and their families. Some do it fairly comfortably, others a lot less so, but there are very few who don't live with insecurity about whether their wage or salary will be enough to satisfy their material aspirations and indeed, in many cases, whether the employment that brings in that wage or salary will itself continue to be secure.

But coming back to Nick, is it fair to call him a scumbag? What he's done is to inherit the couple of properties his father owned and taken things, as another neighbour put it, 'to a new level'. He's seen opportunities and grabbed them. Can we blame him for that? Probably not, after all making money is what capitalism invites us all to do if we can. And that will carry on until the majority of us collectively decide to get rid of it and bring in a new society of free access to all goods and services where we're not constantly pitted against one another but follow the more natural human path of cooperation. Then we'll truly be able to satisfy all our needs, for shelter as well as for life's other necessities. In the meantime, no one would object if Nick took down those boards.

**HOWARD MOSS**