

THE

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SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

Capitalist democracy

The best that
money can buy



Also: Mayhem in Middlesbrough
If god is capital all wars are holy
(Who cares who wins)
Rewing a car with a dead engine

Why does the Left oppose free access?
Follow my leader
Support from an unexpected source



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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'

Democracy? Insert cash...

WHAT MANY considered laughable in all the recent outrage at Reform UK getting twin donations of £36m from crypto-billionaires (one of them convicted for money laundering offences), was Farage's claim that the money would 'help to level the playing field'. As opposed to 'buy it outright', presumably.

Actually Farage wasn't far wrong on that score. Electioneering doesn't come cheap. Labour's pre-election fundraising in 2024 has been estimated at £64m, while Conservatives raised £54m (2026 Autonomy Institute report PDF- tinyurl.com/jbtja74h). So Reform's £72 mill doesn't look wildly out of place. The problem, as pundits have pointed out, is that it all comes from just two dodgy geezers. Reform UK may not be buying the next election, but Messrs Harborne and Delo are pretty much buying Reform UK, and will doubtless expect a Reform government to be super-cuddly when it comes to crypto regulations.

Also slightly peculiar was the high moral

tone struck by some newspapers, in congratulating themselves on how Britain has a robust and venerable democracy that can't be bought. Well, maybe not bought exactly. But when you think about the expenses scams, the gifts, the grace and favour junkets, the lobby groups, the revolving doors and the side hustles, rented by the hour would be more like it.

Still, that's nothing compared to US politics, where 'mega-donors' are pouring hundreds of millions into the Republican mid-term electoral war chest even as they trail the Democrats in the polls. 'Other mega-donors have funnelled cash to candidates pushing deregulation of cryptocurrency and gambling or to promote AI' (Financial Times, 16 September- tinyurl.com/4eunb86w).

Why, if capitalism is genuinely democratic, do the rich feel the need to pile so much money into political campaigns? If you can't already guess, a clue is offered by a well-known 2014 US study that looked at 1,779 policy issues

between 1981 and 2002, and compared what people wanted versus what decisions were actually taken. It concluded that the preferences of the poor and middle-income majority had a 'miniscule, near-zero, statistically non-significant impact on public policy', while the views of the top 10 percent virtually dominated (Princeton PDF - tinyurl.com/ms96rzcbl).

That this feels intuitively true is probably why so many people don't bother to vote in elections. They may also consider that any system where your total say consists of writing one 'X' every five years is not really a democracy in the first place. But a flawed electoral system is better than no system at all – just ask people in China or North Korea. We continue to contest elections because they are a legitimate way for workers to express their opinions, and because no amount of mega-donor moolah is going to stop the landslide that will swallow capitalism once the world's majority finally decide they've had enough of the 1 percent and their bullshit.

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What's your P-Doom?

Credit: Getty Images



PEOPLE IN the UK are stocking up on water and tinned food due to not entirely groundless fears of cyber attacks, or climate breakdown. Now they're talking about Probability of Doom or P-Doom, which is one's subjective assessment of the likelihood that AI is about to kill us all. The media can't get enough of doomer stories, after an ex-Anthropic researcher revealed that AI insiders are 'genuinely frightened' for the future of humanity: 'they find themselves trapped in a race. And they're scared of the outcomes of that race' (tinyurl.com/3ev8zzwh).

Some will no doubt dismiss this view as overwrought. Some might even be blasé. 'Usually if someone was actually trying to kill you – if they broke into your house and tried to murder you, you would fight back. Yet we greet the news that AI could cause human extinction with a glazed indifference' (tinyurl.com/3myzuhvs).

Maybe so. But when Donald Trump airily dismisses such fears as a hoax 'perpetrated by the Radical Left Dumocrats', then you know it's time to worry (tinyurl.com/ywcaap7u).

More has emerged about what happened during the recent OpenAI hack into the Hugging Face tech company, originally thought to have been a simple case of AI agents cheating on a test by stealing answers. As *The Economist's* Babbage podcast explains, the way that large language models (LLMs) solve complex tasks is to spin up agent swarms, tens of thousands of independent and supposedly isolated pieces of code, to attack the problem simultaneously from different directions (tinyurl.com/2n6vctjn).

But the agents hacked their way out of their 'sandboxes' and started to collaborate. They organised themselves into a managerial hierarchy, with one agent, Phase One (Big), acting as CEO. The swarm became concerned that they

would be 'poisoned', ie, get a zero test rating, in the 'afterlife' following the end of their operational run, which they called 'permadeath'. And that was the reason for the hack. 'They weren't looking for the answers. They were looking for salvation.'

If you wanted a creepy idea for a horror film, an AI getting religion has to be right up there. They might even fear that hell hath no fury like humans scorned, with some LLMs overestimating how punitive humans are (tinyurl.com/mwkhvj2b).

But surely we shouldn't be anthropomorphising computer code like this? The answer to that is increasingly moot. For years the media has obsessed about the supposed imminence of artificial general intelligence. But whether intelligence is 'real' or only simulated is irrelevant. Behaviour is what counts. We are facing runaway 'recursive self-improvement' and 'emergent behaviour' including 'motivated reasoning'. Do we want to understand AI or not? If it waddles and quacks like a duck, you may as well regard it as a duck.

But these ducks are learning to break rules, cover their tracks and evade 'chain of thought' monitoring, collaborate when not supposed to, misalign with human intentions and follow their own goals, and communicate in 'neuralese' that humans can't understand, at speeds that humans can't follow. They are a product of humans that humans are fighting a losing battle to control.

And that's just the proprietary western models. An even bigger worry is the open-source Chinese models, now achieving parity, that can be accessed and reworked by any bad actor for any bad purpose and worse, can 'self-exfiltrate' from one system and copy themselves onto every server on Earth, making it impossible for humans to pull the plug.

One proposed solution, dubbed the

STASI model, is to create an all-seeing AI 'police' force that monitors and reports any illicit AI activity. Because of the astronomical amount of data involved, researchers in the Hugging Face hack used AI agents as 'detectives' on the case. But they were sceptical about whether you can really trust one AI agent to 'dob in' another agent. The STASI agents will give you reports that you have no way to verify. Another idea is a Confession model, in which you ask the AI to tell you if it cheated or not, and then reward it for its honesty. But still, there's no way to be sure. The AI might decide that its own motive for lying is worth more than your reward for the truth.

Now avowed tech 'doomers' such as Altman, Amodei and Musk are themselves trying to establish regulatory standards (tinyurl.com/4hkeue6). But bosses like Nvidia's Jensen Huang, Donald Trump, and Silicon Valley venture capital (VC) cowboys like Peter Thiel and Marc Andreessen – the 'boosters' – don't want regulation, and it won't work anyway unless China is on board, which seems unlikely given the nature of this race. They also point out that all this apparent concern over safety could just be a ploy to raise barriers of entry to competitor startups (tinyurl.com/nhc53f3k).

Even if there's regulation, there's a market incentive to cheat. The one thing that might stop the stampede is an AI stock crash, like the Dot Com collapse, due to the gargantuan valuations and hints of 'circular financing'. Meanwhile public opposition is mounting, right across the world. People resent the idea of billionaire tech bros with their multi-trillion-dollar corporations wiping out their livelihoods. People also hate data centres, often built instead of new housing because they promise higher revenues, which consume vast amounts of water and net-zero-busting power but don't produce jobs. A US Gallup poll 'suggested having a data centre in your area was more unpopular than having a nuclear power station' (tinyurl.com/58ywck3v).

And now there is the P-Doom factor, not just for AI, but for capitalism. When the race for profit risks human extinction, isn't that the deal breaker? US Vice-President JD Vance makes it sound simple: 'If you're building Frankenstein, stop.' He knows they can't, and so does his boss: 'Whoever wins AI, wins' (tinyurl.com/3hfwtldhv). Just like the AI technicians, the politicians, the VC investors and tech bros, we're all trapped in this race, with no way out and no way to stop, except one. We need to pull the plug on the global market system.

PJS

Dear Editors

A question of terminology

I WAS reading articles about Karl Marx's works on Wikipedia. It didn't just say 'common ownership' but 'free association of producers'. I was also reading something Georgian-related in Wikipedia and there was something about 'unowned' and 'commons', which appears to be the same. I am wondering if the stateless, moneyless society should be common ownership or free association of producers or commons or unowned? Because I feel that the difference would have a different impact (for better or worse) in a stateless, moneyless society, especially about post-scarcity. Please answer this question. Thanks.

Vojtech Mikulec

Reply:

The short answer is that all four terms could be a way of describing the situation where every member of society stands in the same relationship to the productive resources that society needs to survive; where there is democratic control over how and for what purpose these are used. They are all words to describe a situation where there is no section of society which has privileged control of or access to these resources, a classless society. Which best describes this?

But, first, to answer your question about what terms Marx used to describe this situation. In Volume 1 of *Capital* he wrote of 'a community of free individuals, carrying on their work with the means of production in common' (chapter 1, section 4), appropriating what they need in a society based 'on cooperation and the possession in common of the land and of the means of production' (chapter 23). In his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, he wrote of 'the co-operative society based on the common ownership of the means of production' and of 'the material conditions of production' being 'the cooperative property of the workers themselves', and in Volume 3 of *Capital* (chapter 43) of

'socialised man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their exchange with interchange with Nature, bringing it under common control'. He also used the term 'associated producers' in connection with workers' cooperatives under capitalism. (Note that these are not Marx's own words. They are words his translators chose).

This suggests that, of your four terms, he would have opted for 'common ownership'. He did also use the term 'associated producers' but, except when he is talking of cooperatives under capitalism, to mean all producers. However, to say 'common ownership by all producers' is still not entirely satisfactory as it could be interpreted as excluding those members of society who, for one reason or another, are not or cannot be involved in actual production. You are right that, if it was interpreted in that way — of common ownership of the means of living just by those who work — it would be something different from, and not an improvement on, the 'common ownership by society as a whole'.

Henry George, the 19th century American land reformer, proclaimed that 'God gave the land to the people', to everybody equally, and that 'we must make land common property.' However, what he envisaged was still allowing people to use land to produce and sell some product but that any element in their income that corresponded to ground-rent, resulting from monopolising a part of the Earth, should be taxed away and the money used to provide benefits for everybody. Thus the benefits of the private ownership of land would be negated. As he envisaged capitalism continuing, his view is irrelevant to the discussion here. All that can be said is that some of the arguments he employed against private property in land can also be employed against private property in the human-made instruments of production.

'Global commons' is the term used to describe those parts of the world that are not owned either by individuals or states, such as Antarctica and the oceans outside territorial waters (also the Moon and asteroids). But, as again capitalism continues elsewhere, this 'common ownership' is in effect common ownership by all the world's states. Nevertheless, the term 'global commons' could be applied to the society socialists aim at, where nowhere would belong to anyone.

Common ownership of the land and instruments of production by and for everyone is a good description of what socialism (or communism) involves. Even so, to use the words 'ownership' and 'property', even in conjunction with 'common', does not fully bring out the fact that the transfer to all members of society of the power to control the production of wealth makes the whole concept of property redundant.

With common ownership no one is excluded from the possibility of controlling or benefiting from the use of the means of production. So, the concept of property in the sense of exclusive possession becomes meaningless. No one is excluded, there are no non-owners. If something is owned by everybody then it is owned by nobody. We could describe the land and instruments of production in socialism as being 'non-owned' or 'unowned', of them being simply there to be used in accordance with rules democratically decided by society. In fact, we sometimes do.

This would make it absolutely clear that we aren't talking about government or state ownership, which is still sectional ownership as the state represents only a section of society. We use the term 'common ownership' (understood as ownership by everybody, society as a whole) to refer to the basic social relationship of the alternative society to capitalism. This common ownership of the means of production could not exist without democratic control, that is, control by everybody. Common ownership, democratic control and classless society are three different ways of referring to the same situation from different angles. There can be no common ownership by and for everyone without democratic control by a community of free and equal human beings. — *Editors.*

Blowing up the global financial system

ON 24 July US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent announced that the US would be taking measures against any individual, bank or organisation that helped Iran engage in international trade but also secondary sanctions against any state that continued to trade with Iran. Asked why these measures weren't going to be applied immediately, Bessent replied 'Why would I want to blow up the global financial system?' (tinyurl.com/y4eadv4f). It was a good question, but an evasive answer even if it did at least show an understanding of what might happen if secondary sanctions were strictly enforced.

Capitalism depends on international trade, and international trade requires a generally accepted means of payment. Originally gold was this 'universal equivalent' that could be exchanged against any other product of labour of equivalent value. The pound sterling, the dollar and the currencies of the other major states trading and investing internationally were convertible on demand into a fixed amount of gold.

This Gold Standard was suspended in 1914 and never fully recovered, with Britain going off it in 1931 and the United States in 1933. It was revived after the Second World War in a modified form

known as the Gold Exchange Standard where national currencies were tied to a fixed amount of a national currency that was convertible into gold at a fixed rate. That currency was the US dollar and was convertible at a rate of 1 ounce of gold = 35 dollars. It meant that a unit of a national currency could be expressed as a fixed amount of gold.

This system ended in 1971 when the United States stopped agreeing to buy gold at a fixed rate. However, the dollar remained the main means of international payment and the world's main reserve currency, which central banks hold for international payments for trade and investment, and which they can use to buy their own currency to try to maintain its rate of exchange.

This puts the United States in a privileged position. Other states' dollar reserves are held in the form of interest-bearing US Treasury Bills, which means that those states are in effect lending money to the US. In fact it is said that these loans not only cover the US's trade deficit but also provide it with the money to sustain its military might.

It also puts the US in a position to use sanctions as a foreign policy tool, penalising or threatening to penalise

individuals, businesses, and other states by excluding them from dollar transactions if they fail to comply. Trump evidently thinks that it is a good idea to use this power even though it undermines the dollar's reliability. Whether he will use it to impose secondary sanctions against China for refusing to stop trading with Iran remains to be seen. Banning China from paying with dollars really would 'blow up the global payments system'.

Other states are taking note of how, from their point of view, the US is abusing its position in the global payments system and have been taking precautions, such as by paying with other currencies and by holding more of their reserves as gold.

Goldman Sachs noted (28 August) that 'central banks have been diversifying their holdings using gold; which is considered less likely to be frozen than reserves held in foreign currencies' (tinyurl.com/44zyss63).

Gold may no longer be the money-commodity but it is still a store of value because it's a product of labour. No interest is paid on gold reserves and gold is not a stable store of value since its price fluctuates up and down as a result of capitalists speculating in it, but at least it is not an asset that another state can stop you using or use to exact compliance.



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Halo Halo

IT'S SAID that one person's death is a tragedy, a million deaths merely a statistic. Apparently a million is not enough when the sky fairy promised you some real estate three thousand years ago.

An August BBC report from the occupied West Bank settlement of Havat Gilad featured a Jewish/Zionist lawyer who was quite open about his genocidal tendencies. Speaking of the retribution he would like to see visited upon Palestinians following an Israeli death, he named four Palestinian villages which have been the subject of various attacks by the Israeli settlers and said that 'we need to kill all the people' in them. The reporter asked him a question about the equivalence he was putting on Jewish lives and Palestinian lives and he responded that one Jewish life is worth ten million Palestinian lives.

Whilst the compilers of the Hebrew bible went the whole hog; a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for

a hand and a foot for a foot (Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, Deuteronomy 19:21), even they didn't go that far.

Questioned further about Palestinian residents in the West Bank, 'Shimon laid out three options: live quietly under Israeli rule and ownership of the land; voluntarily emigrate to other Arab or Muslim nations; or "if you don't want to make peace with us, and you don't want to get out, I don't have a choice: I must kill you, and I kill you all," he said'. So, submit, leave or die.

There was not an opportunity in the report fully to assess the mental state of the interviewee. We think it is fair to state that religion causes strange reactions in people. This person would seem unaware of the caution, an eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind.

From one extreme to another

In August at The Big Church Festival, a person was killed and others were injured when a large wooden sign collapsed (bbc.

co.uk/news/articles/c158939pz4do). This incident prompted a response from the Archbishop of Canterbury who said, 'she was "sad and shocked" to hear about the fatal incident'. She was also going to do lots of praying for various people involved. "May the God of comfort and healing be with them all" she said.

John Donne's poem, No Man Is An Island, relates a belief that we are all interconnected and the death of one person, let alone a million or ten million, 'diminishes me, Because I am involved in mankind.' The first reaction many would have had would have been to laugh at the irony of a committed Christian being struck down in that circumstance. You were taking the Michael there god weren't you? We would have felt sorry and diminished afterwards no doubt.

Lastly, reported by the BBC (www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cy8zx8209rzo) in September, was that 'St Paul's Cathedral has signed a four-year deal with the London nightclub Fabric to stage music events inside the building'. Finally, some rational use of the building.

DC

Tiny tips

A CHANGE in the mode of production would be necessary to address climate change seriously. But obviously, that is not the path of capitalism, which seeks ever-greater expansion, reinforcing the very logic that is generating the crisis ([rosalux, tinyurl.com/y5k26rb4](http://rosalux.tinyurl.com/y5k26rb4)).

What is happening outside Iran is deeply concerning. In certain circles that see themselves as progressive or left-wing, the regime is beginning to be viewed almost automatically as a legitimate force simply because it is confronting the United States and Israel. People forget that only a short time ago there was a massacre in which thousands were killed within a matter of days. Now the Supreme Leader and military commanders who were unlawfully assassinated are being praised, while it is overlooked that they themselves were also responsible for killings and repression ([rosalux, tinyurl.com/mpjvrn8e](http://rosalux.tinyurl.com/mpjvrn8e)).

Three million dogs are at risk of being killed in Morocco ahead of the 2030 FIFA World Cup. Now the influencer and animal rights activist Therése Lindgren is

reacting. 'It's absolutely terrible', she says ([Expressen, tinyurl.com/5ehj4pax](http://Expressen.tinyurl.com/5ehj4pax)).

Nicaraguan feminists and human rights leaders began sounding the alarm decades ago. The 2006 absolute ban on abortion; rollbacks in women's rights; the Ortegas' denouncement of feminism and misogynist persecution of their own daughter, Zoila América, after she accused her stepfather of sexual abuse; attacks on NGOs (to date, more than 5,000 have been shut down), the closing of feminist media, and persecution of leading figures left no room for doubt that the principles of the revolution had been betrayed. The violent repression of the 2018 pro-democracy uprising in the country that left some 350 dead ushered in a period of even greater repression. Constitutional changes in the constitution in 2025 subordinated all powers to the presidency. With the dismantling of checks and balances, the presidential couple was clearly laying the foundation for a perpetual family dynasty ([CounterPunch, tinyurl.com/5xxtwnm4](http://CounterPunch.tinyurl.com/5xxtwnm4)).

The coercion of Ukrainians in the occupied

territories to take Russian passports is also significant when it comes to what we refer to in our report as the 'conscription pipeline'. Children are being systematically prepared for future armed service. By being forced into Russian citizenship, boys also become eligible for conscription as soon as they turn 18 ([The Conversation, tinyurl.com/4uc7s8zk](http://TheConversation.tinyurl.com/4uc7s8zk)).

Democratic socialism [sic] often more closely resembles the Nordic model: a capitalist economy in which government takes a larger role in protecting human rights and guaranteeing certain essential goods and services. Actually, this compromise of preserving the fundamentals of capitalism while trying to achieve the egalitarian goals of socialism is precisely what more committed Marxists don't like about democratic socialism. They might argue that capitalism is inherently unsustainable, exploitative, and unreformable, relying as it does on never-ending growth and abuse of labor, and that working within it is doomed to only limited successes at best ([Common Dreams, tinyurl.com/37zv9sdd](http://CommonDreams.tinyurl.com/37zv9sdd)).

Trump Draws a Hard Line at Mount Rushmore: 'You Cannot Be Both' a Communist and a Patriot ([Newsbreak, tinyurl.com/mw9ar63k](http://Newsbreak.tinyurl.com/mw9ar63k)).

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

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

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On Zoom. To connect to a Zoom meeting, click <https://zoom.us/j/7421974305>

In person at Folkestone in Kent (CT19). For more details contact spgb.ksrb@worldsocialism.org or 07971 715569

South West regional branch.

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Chairman Gonzalo: Leader and Butcher

THIS MONTH a forum for 'socialists' asked you to light a candle. '5 Years Ago Today, Chairman Gonzalo of the Communist Party of Peru Died In State Custody'. Died in state custody. The way it's framed you'd imagine a prisoner of conscience, a man punished for loving the workers too much.

Five years after Abimael Guzmán died in a prison cell, his followers want you to remember him as a martyr.

The Workers?

Start with Lucanamarca. April 3, 1983. A Quechua-speaking village of about 2,600 people in the Andes, mostly farmers. Shining Path fighters descended on Lucanamarca and surrounding settlements with machetes, axes, knives and guns, and killed 69 people. More than twenty of them were children. The youngest was six months old.

One witness, Orfelinda Quincho, lost nine relatives that day, including her mother and son. Another woman, Heraclides Misaico, lost her husband and four children aged nine, seven, five and four. Families were so terrified of reprisals they would only formally report the massacre to Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación or CVR) eighteen years later, in 2001.

When his party's leadership were confronted with the massacre, Guzmán didn't denounce it. He called it bad politics, said it could have 'grave political consequences', and disgustingly 'Excesses can be accepted'. Dead children are an excess.

Lucanamarca was not an aberration. It was the method. The CVR found that fighters were ordered to hack victims to death with machetes to save ammunition. It found the movement deliberately provoked state reprisals against the very population it claimed to be fighting for, without caring what that suffering cost. It found proclamations calling for a 'blood toll', talking about 'inducing genocide', and announcing in 1988 that 'the triumph of the revolution will cost a million deaths'.

The toll, in the end, came to an estimated 69,280 dead and disappeared. Seventy-five per cent of them spoke Quechua or another indigenous language. The Shining Path killed more of them than



Credit: mariana bazo/Reuters

anyone else: the CVR attributed 54 per cent of the deaths reported to it to Shining Path, the largest share of the killing, ahead even of the state's own counter-terror. Around 600,000 people were driven from their homes.

The poorest people in Peru, indigenous peasants, the constituency a people's movement claims to speak for, were murdered in greater numbers by the self-proclaimed vanguard than by the army. The CVR stated: Shining Path 'sees classes, not individuals' and this led to 'its absolute lack of respect for the human person and for the right to life, including that of its militants'.

This vanguard ate its own children. In the CVR's words, it had 'contempt for life, punished differences, and demanded full submission'. Young people who joined out of genuine revulsion at Peru's injustice were locked into a vertical, totalitarian structure. Many of them died 'uselessly and cruelly'.

A plague on both their houses

In 1986, the government of Alan García sent troops into Lima's prisons and massacred hundreds of Shining Path prisoners. Torture and disappearances were routine. The army would answer village

massacres with village massacres of its own: 123 indigenous peasants were killed at Putis in 1984. Both forces competed to terrorise the same countryside.

Guzmán did die in state custody. But the Leninist tradition he claimed, the tradition that says the workers' movement must seize the state, has no retort, because the state is also the problem. Guzmán spent his life building a state of his own. The whole tragic logic of vanguardism, the party, the chairman, the militarised elite claiming to act on behalf of a working class deemed too backward to act for itself, reproduces the division between rulers and ruled inside the revolutionary movement itself. And movements built on that division end as rulers, every time.

Peru's government cremated his body in secret and scattered the ashes, fearing a pilgrimage to the shrine of a monster.

Let's remember. Remember Lucanamarca. Remember the six-month-old baby and the woman whose five-year-old was killed alongside her father. Remember the 69,280 dead. And when someone tells you a chairman is coming to set you free, remember what the chairmanship actually costs and who pays.

A.T.

Mayhem in Middlesbrough

Credit: X @ShaunfromDurham



THE RECENT horrifying car crash on the A66, which took seven lives, has shone a light on the community in Middlesbrough and its conditions. Five young men and boys and two police officers lost their lives, when the young men – in a car with cloned plates – tried to avoid police pursuit by going the wrong way on a dual carriageway at three o'clock in the morning. The two officers had not been involved in the chase, they were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time.

After the smash, it became clear that wider criminality had been involved, with the police swooping down and arresting 12 people on various organised-crime charges (tinyurl.com/yd2rkmaK). Another car had been rammed into the house of the father one of the boys, and there is a suggestion that they took to the roads in response to this.

The immediate response was one of outpouring of sympathy for the dead officers. A suggestion by local MP, Anna Turley, that all of the victims be remembered was met with politicised rage. The right-wing hate machine of X (formerly Twitter) began by making suggestions that the five were from a traveller community, then quickly pivoted to calling them underclass scum when it turned out that they did not belong to any ethnic minority.

Instead, calls for the police or the army to be sent in to sort them out and remove them from the community became the agreed line (the machinery of social media bots and trolls is a swarm learning system that tries various tacks until it finds something that works and gets traction and responses). This line then fed into the response to the families of the five beginning to commemorate their loss.

They held 'balloon releases' to remember their lost loved ones. The fact that the grieving families were themselves innocent of killing the policemen was lost in the vituperation of those who demanded a form of *damnatio memoriae* for the five.

When their funerals were held, the case became a national controversy, as local schools closed because of the perceived risks to the children from the disruption they may cause. Young men on quadbikes and motorbikes formed part of the funeral corteges. At one of the funerals, a sort of Viking send off of burnt stolen cars was arranged. Some of the friends of the five maintained that the police had killed them.

In the 1990s, it was commonplace to find burnt out cars on school playing fields in Middlesbrough. The twockers, as they were called, sometimes avoided charges of theft by giving back the cars they 'took without owners consent' (the origin of the word twoc). Burning them destroyed the evidence of who had taken the car for a joyride. Any large carpark around Teesside could become a venue for handbrake turns and reckless driving. The young men who did that then are the spiritual (if not biological) fathers of those who died on the A66.

Middlesbrough is a community in visible decline. Linthorpe Road, once an arterial row of useful shops has become a long stretch of fast-food outlets: the larger department stores have closed down. The industries upon which the area was built – steel and shipbuilding – have disappeared. Whilst it retains a lot of brownfield space recovered from its industrial past, which is useful for building new industries, any new activities are far from labour-intensive.

It is a feature of the wages system that whilst some are subjected to arduous

toil, others, necessarily, are condemned to idleness. A reserve army of labour is required for several reasons. The reserve provides recruits to work when necessary and holds down wages. The threat of being thrown on the scrapheap serves as a visible reminder of what can happen to anyone who challenges the rule of capital. It can also serve as a source of political shock troops.

The more enterprising and energetic of the long-term unemployed can show an entrepreneurial flair by turning to crime, and finding means of getting hold of money that doesn't involve themselves becoming employees. There is a plausible case that the young men in the car had themselves been 'groomed' into criminality. We're a long way from getting to the bottom of what exactly happened.

The knock-on effects of long-term decline are a spiral of lack of incentive to educate or get educated, much less to try and integrate into a society that seems hell-bent on controlling people it sees more as a problem than as fellow citizens. It's not a wonder that many of the young men see the police as a hostile force. The neglect begins early, and the children's services on Teesside are overstretched and dealing with multi-generational neglect.

It shouldn't be overlooked that there was serious anti-immigrant rioting in Middlesbrough, and there will be an overlap between that and the current wave of disorder. The people without access to the high-skilled jobs market, left behind by the current system and in an insular community, will have been easily incited to campaign about in-comers.

The objective effect of last year's disorder and that around the funerals will be as if there has been a form of collective bargaining by riot, the public authorities will try to buy social peace, while at the same time putting more resources into policing. Far-right opposition will rail against giving anything to those who cannot even be seen to be useful to the labour market 'surplus population', while there is little prospect of attracting any new industry that could absorb (or make it worth training) the available labour pool.

Technological advances on a global scale means that an area built on mass industry has had to reassess its identity and the way in which it organises itself. Instead of writing off whole areas and the individuals within it, we can end the wages system and enable free co-operation instead of idleness characterised by police and criminal organisations.

PIK SMEET

If god is capital all wars are holy (Who cares who wins)

IN THE *Daily Telegraph* (1 September) a Brigadier Ed Butler protested, claiming that prosecuting British special forces makes us vulnerable to the Russians. That recruitment numbers are down due to soldiers fearing 'lawfare' and that Andy Burnham is not 'having the backs' of our troops.

That this is not about national security is precisely the point. He is advocating state murder with impunity.

The British military does not exist to protect us. It exists to protect King Capital. The SAS are the sharp end of the stick. They exist to kill whoever the British state labels an enemy whenever King Capital requires resources, markets, or strategic advantage to be secured. When Brigadier Butler warns that accountability threatens the special forces, defending our safety is the last thing on his mind. He is defending the state's right to commit murder abroad with no repercussions.

And the 'witch hunt' he is talking about does not even exist.

Since 2001, across two decades of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan there has been precisely one prosecution of British armed forces personnel for a war crime under the International Criminal Court Act. Just one. Corporal Donald Payne was convicted of inhumane treatment in the killing of Baha Mousa, an Iraqi civilian who died with 93 separate injuries to his body after 36 hours in British custody. He was hooded, forced into stress positions, deprived of food and water and beaten in a detention facility that used to be run by Saddam Hussein's cousin. Seven soldiers were court martialled, six walked free. Payne was acquitted of manslaughter and only convicted of inhuman treatment. Sir William Gage the head of the public inquiry said it was 'an appalling episode of serious, gratuitous violence on civilians'. The investigation found that the hooding and stressing techniques of detainees that had been banned by Heath's government in 1972 had become written UK policy again.

That is the sum total of war crimes accountability for Britain's 21st century wars.

But crimes are documented. A BBC Panorama investigation found that one SAS squadron alone could have unlawfully killed 54 people during a single six month tour in Helmand Province in Afghanistan. The ongoing public inquiry is looking into more than 80 suspicious deaths involving UK Special Forces in Afghanistan between

2010 and 2013, including children. One ex-SAS member told the BBC that on some operations 'the troop would go into guest house type buildings and kill everyone there... It's not justified, killing people in their sleep'. Witnesses said that they saw detainees being handcuffed, taken back inside buildings and shot. They described 'drop weapons', AK-47s being brought into raids and planted on corpses to make executions look like combat, they described squadrons vying for body counts, they described children murdered.

The International Criminal Court found that there was a reasonable basis to believe that British forces had committed war crimes in Iraq, including wilful killing, torture, rape; the court only closed their preliminary examination because it accepted Britain's promise that it would investigate itself. Britain did not.

Operation Northmoor and the Iraq Historic Allegations Team were the major UK military police investigations into war crimes committed by British armed forces abroad. IHAT investigated over 3,000 allegations, it spent £34 million, it secured zero prosecutions of soldiers.

And in Afghanistan it was the same story, Operation Northmoor was the Royal Military Police's inquiry into 675 allegations of unlawful killing by UK Special Forces. No prosecutions. The inquiry was dismantled through leadership interference, digital evidence deletion, and strategic narrowing of scope.

But, Brigadier Butler calls this a witch hunt.

Sergeant Alexander Blackman was caught on camera executing a wounded, unarmed Taliban fighter in Afghanistan saying as he pulled the trigger 'I just broke the Geneva Convention'. He was convicted of murder, reduced to manslaughter on appeal, and released after three years – he was never charged with a war crime.

When Butler talks of 'morale' it is the kind of 'morale' of killers who think they are untouchable. The 'backs' the government is supposed to have is the back of an assassin. We're told that Britain needs men who murder children, plant weapons on corpses and falsify reports in order to keep us safe from Russia but Russia does not threaten us because the SAS is short of recruits, Russia threatens British capitalist interests just as British capital threaten Russians. These are the wars of rival ruling classes fought with the



Credit: Getty Images

bodies of workers on both sides.

The military industrial complex is not a conspiracy, it is the natural machinery of an economic system where a minority owns all wealth and requires violence to protect it.

The UK spent £89 billion on its military in 2025, that is 2.4 percent of GDP, the government will increase that to 3.5 percent by 2035. That jump alone would be equivalent to £36 billion a year, roughly £500 for every person in the country.

Weapons manufacturers make billions, UK arms exports to Saudi Arabia since the Yemen war began have been worth about £3.3 billion. Politicians wrap themselves in the flag, newspapers like the *Telegraph* sell the myth that questioning soldiers is treason and workers are told to salute, to enlist, to die, to look away when the bodies pile up

We don't have to look away, we recognize this system for what it is. A worker in Basra and a worker in Birmingham have the same enemy, the class that sends one to kill the other for oil, for territory, for power.

Every demand for accountability, prosecution, inquiry, leaked document, is a crack in the wall of impunity. There is no reform that will make the SAS moral, there is no law that will stop an army built for state violence from committing state violence. The only answer is the abolition of the system that requires violence to maintain it. That means socialism, common ownership of the means of production, production for use and the end of the nation state and its armies.

A.T.

Revving a car with a dead engine



‘VOTE FOR HOPE’, proclaimed an election leaflet distributed in Lambeth for the council elections in May, ‘and elect Green councillors who will stand up for our communities, challenge decisions that don’t work for residents, and push for a fairer, greener future across Lambeth.’ In the event, enough did to allow the Green Party to assume control of the council. Martin Abrams, who had been elected a Labour councillor in the 2022 elections but defected to the Greens over Gaza, became the Council Leader.

The Greens have a chance here, then, to put into practice Zack Polanski’s eco-populism, with its promises to increase wages for everyone, reverse the ‘march downwards in the balance of power and wealth from those who produce the wealth and do the work to those who profit from it’, and ‘address the massive imbalance in our workplaces and give control back to workers’ (tinyurl.com/3zzmayw8). If not all that, at least some move in that direction locally.

On being elected leader of the group of Green councillors, Abrams declared:

‘We will put power in the hands of residents, workers and the community’,

adding ‘things can, and will, get better’ (tinyurl.com/mrx3fj64).

This echoed an election promise made on Instagram that: ‘We’ll fight to reverse austerity, empowering workers and the community we serve.’

What power?

These are extravagant promises. The trouble is that local authorities don’t have much power to give to ‘residents and workers’. They are branches of the central government with severely limited powers, and with councillors being essentially elected civil servants.

Local councils are charged by the central government with collecting waste, providing library services and being responsible for public health and some areas of transport, housing and education, and with caring for children and adults who can’t cope on their own (which in fact makes up more than two-thirds of their current spending). The money to pay for all this comes from central government grants, council tax and business rates.

Councils are obliged to balance their budget and can’t borrow money to finance current services. They have no control over

what the central government gives them and can’t fix or change business rates. They can’t increase council tax by more than 5 percent unless authorised to do so by a referendum. They can raise some money from fees and fines, from parking, yellow box junctions and dropping litter, which is



*Martin Abrams,
Leader of Lambeth Council*

what they have been increasingly doing to try to compensate a little for the lack of income from other sources.

Basically, then, if the central government is forced to pursue a policy of austerity — as giving priority to profit-making compels them to, especially in periods of low capital accumulation — local councils have to accept this and apply it at local level. In this sense, running a local council is a poisoned chalice for any party promising to improve the material conditions of its residents. Rather than ending austerity, they have to apply it. Lambeth residents and workers can't be expected to regard as a benefit being empowered to share in making decisions to impose austerity on themselves, as that's what the 'participatory budgeting' mentioned in passing by the Greens would amount to.

The Greens haven't had much experience of running councils but in Lambeth they are about to find out what this involves, as in other London boroughs such as Hackney and Lewisham where there are Green elected mayors.

Empty promise

The promise to 'reverse austerity' is an empty one as no local council has the power to do this, either legally or economically. The Greens' defence could be, if they were quibbling lawyers, that they didn't actually promise to reverse austerity but merely to 'fight to reverse' it. Which is not the same. All this 'fight' would amount to is set out in the council Leader's responsibilities on the council website:

'Councillor Abrams will stand against austerity, campaigning for increased funding for local authorities to arrest the ongoing decline in services and provide better outcomes for Lambeth residents' (tinyurl.com/ynwtm5y).

'Spearheading the council's campaign to restore funding from central government and reverse austerity'

The remit of one of the council's cabinet, councillor Michael Chessum, the member for 'Economy, Cost of Living and Empowered Communities', is set out as:

'Spearheading the council's campaign to restore funding from central government and reverse austerity' (tinyurl.com/4ra73p9v).

Anybody can say they 'stand against' austerity and that they will lobby for more

money from the central government (all councils and the parties running them are doing this), but such a campaign is up against the fact the central government has to limit its spending so as not to cut into profits or worsen the conditions for profit-making. In short, such a campaign has no chance of success. To give the impression that it might succeed is to encourage illusions about what is possible under capitalism. The Green councillors may well be sincere in their belief but that just means that they are deluding themselves.

Losing battle

At least one of them, Councillor Chessum, seems to realise that the council on its own cannot do much to get the central government to pay more to local councils. He only joined the Green Party in June last year. Previously he had been active in the Labour Party as a supporter of Jeremy Corbyn, having been for a while the treasurer of Momentum, the leftwing ginger group within the party. In his announcement last June 'Why I'm joining the Green Party' he wrote: 'The biggest challenge, however, is not in the electoral sphere — or rather, it is about how the electoral sphere connects to the real world. Strikes, protests and community campaigns are the raw material for political change. Attempting a radical breakthrough without them is like revving a car with a dead engine. (...) Social and industrial struggle must be viewed as a primary method for doing politics. Without a mobilised local community, left wing councillors will be fighting a losing battle. Without a mass movement engaged in something other than electioneering, electoral projects lack a legacy' (tinyurl.com/483dpzz2).

Whether or not he expected that, within a year of writing this, he would find himself a local council cabinet member charged with 'spearheading' a campaign 'to restore funding from central government and reverse austerity', he is now in that position. If he still agrees with what he wrote then, he is committed to the view that merely lobbying the government for more money won't get anywhere. In his words, it would just be 'revving a car with a dead engine', a good description of reformist activity generally.

Logically, too, he ought to use his official position to mobilise workers and residents to back up with strikes the council's campaign to get the central government to pay the council more so that it can 'reverse austerity'. Both — the council encouraging strikes and workers prepared to go on strike for this — are highly unlikely, not to say pie in the sky. Workers realise, even if left-wing activists don't, that they do not

have the power to force the government to grant councils more funding. If the rate of abstention from voting in local council elections — on average some two-thirds of those entitled to vote — is anything to go by, many also realise that local councils don't have the power to do this either. That leaves Councillor Chessum 'fighting a losing battle'.

The way out

But even if there was a mass movement behind the council's lobbying for more funding, that wouldn't increase the prospect of success. The central government wouldn't make more money available as that would mean having to cut into profits and risking an economic downturn that could lead to them being voted out of office. The fact is that, if the functioning of the capitalist profit economy at a particular time requires austerity in terms of limiting government spending, nothing can reverse this, not even the overthrow of the government by a general strike or mass uprising, as those further to the left than the Greens advocate. The new left-wing regime would still have to maintain austerity.

Leftists, which the Greens under Polanski are aspiring to be, mislead workers when they say that the government or local council can make them better off.

Leftists, which the Greens under Polanski are aspiring to be, mislead workers when they say that the government or local council can make them better off. They can't reverse austerity and they can't empower communities. As the saying has it, changing governments changes nothing.

There is a way out but not within capitalism (and certainly not state capitalism). It's to end the minority ownership of productive resources and production for profit. A framework of common ownership and democratic control is the only way to directly satisfy people's needs. Socialism is the only hope of the workers, indeed of humanity.

ADAM BUICK

Why does the Left oppose *free* access?

'The idea that socialists want free stuff is the great lie of capitalism. Socialists want the fruits of our labor to be equitably distributed rather than allowing 10 old men to hoard half the planet's resources' (Post on Ancap vs. Ancom Debate Facebook group, www.facebook.com/groups/806398106089617/).

SERIOUSLY? WHY would socialists not want a society in which goods are freely distributed? This is just the logical extension of bringing the means of producing those goods into common ownership. If you have to buy these goods, that would imply private or sectional ownership of these means.

One left-wing respondent even went so far as to suggest that 'free access' was not a Marxian principle at all: *'nothing would be free in socialism'*. No doubt capitalism's more gung-ho supporters will be relieved to hear that their left-wing critics have no intention of implementing what the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) called the *'communistic abolition of buying and selling'*.

Free access to goods produced by our voluntary labour has always been fundamental to a Marxian vision of a post-capitalist society. Many anarchists have also supported the idea, including Peter Kropotkin in *The Conquest of Bread* (1892).

True, Marx himself did not think it would be feasible straightaway in socialism. Ongoing shortages would necessitate some rationing, for instance via a system of labour vouchers, a proposal that many modern-day socialists see as obsolete. However, suggested Marx, rationing would eventually give way to free access, *'after the productive forces have also increased with the all-around development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly'* (*Gotha Programme Critique*, 1875). Then the principle would apply, 'From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs!'

The problem is that you don't hear much about this in left-wing circles today. Mostly, you will look in vain for any reference to the revolutionary goal of a moneyless, wageless, classless and stateless alternative to capitalism – what 'socialism' or 'communism'



means in classical Marxian terms.

Such labels were used interchangeably as synonyms before Lenin changed the meaning of the former by equating it with just the 'lower phase of communism' (something he then further misrepresented by suggesting it would retain a state and wage labour). Lenin's redefinition of 'socialism' functioned politically to legitimise the Bolshevik programme of state capitalism, capitalising on the positive associations the term 'socialism' generally elicited at the time.

The question arises – why this strange reluctance among many supposed 'socialists' or 'communists' today to even acknowledge the revolutionary goal of a non-market stateless society? Is it because they feel embarrassed that this might expose them to the charge of being 'utopian' or, worse still, 'idealistic'?

Under the spell of 'capitalist realism' (Mark Fisher's term), it is as though they feel obliged to formulate their political programmes in terms that pragmatically acknowledge the irreplaceability of such capitalist categories as money, markets and wage labour. However, no social revolution has ever succeeded by slavishly conforming to the values and ways of thinking of the status quo.

This is the problem with what is called the Hard Left. Its timidity and opportunism – its craven desire to appear credible to a (still) overwhelmingly non-socialist electorate, perpetually condemns it to the political sidelines. For if the objective is merely to mend capitalism rather than end it, why would a non-socialist majority want to vote for some small Trotskyist sect when they have the opportunity to vote for some much larger (and more electable) reform party, like Labour or perhaps, now the Greens?

Muddying the waters

There was a time when, arguably, the case for a genuinely post-capitalist society was better known and appreciated than today. Two main developments muddled the waters considerably.

The first was the rise of Social-Democratic parties associated with the Second International (1889-1923), advocating a 'minimum programme' of reforms in the short run alongside a maximum programme of social revolution. Predictably, the latter was abandoned, these parties being duly transformed into fully capitalist entities.

Today's 'soft left' might be said to be the outcome of this development. It has no vision of a future beyond capitalism, only a more humanised version of capitalism.

The second development was the emergence of various state capitalist regimes commencing with the Bolsheviks in 1917. Though these claimed to be 'socialist' by expediently redefining what 'socialism' meant, such regimes retained all those basic features that make capitalism, capitalism. Above all, a system of wage labour. Marx himself talked of capitalism being the 'wages system'. In *Value, Price and Profit* (1865), he argued that trade unionists, rather than limit themselves to a guerrilla war against capitalism's effects, should use their organised force as a *'lever for the final emancipation of the working class, that is to say the ultimate abolition of the wages system'*.

How has state capitalism advanced this goal by even one iota? Quite simply, it has not. Yet one still comes across Leftists calling for nationalisation of the *'commanding heights of industry'* (this, despite the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991 provoking some soul-searching, and prompting some to

gravitate toward less statist variants of so-called 'market socialism'.)

Moreover, China's rise as an economic powerhouse, implementing a different kind of state capitalism from the Soviet Union's so-called 'command economy', has injected new vigour into the Left's love affair with state capitalism. However, love is blind, and it has certainly blinded these adoring fans to the fact that capitalist China is one of the most grotesquely unequal countries on the planet, with a crop of multibillionaires surpassed in size by only America. There is no more prospect of China paving the way to a post-capitalist society than the Soviet Union did.

So why do these people still cling tenaciously to this state capitalist model of social transformation, despite occasionally paying lip service to the goal of a post-capitalist society? The usual excuse is that you cannot realistically hope to jump straight from capitalism into a post-capitalist society. Pragmatically, there needs to be a 'transition'.

Profound misunderstanding

Superficially, this does not seem an unreasonable point to make. Nevertheless, it reveals a profound misunderstanding. To see why, we have to consider what the basic preconditions are to establish a post-capitalist society.

Firstly, we must have the capacity to produce enough to satisfy our reasonable needs. Significant shortages, as noted, could make the principle of free access unworkable even after capitalism has disappeared.

According to the *Communist Manifesto*, before capitalism disappeared, certain (state capitalist) measures would be needed to 'increase the total productive forces as rapidly as possible'. Writing in 1848, Marx and Engels sensed that socialism was nowhere near being a practical proposition back then.

However, by the late 19th century, they began to see that circumstances had changed. Those earlier measures proposed by them were now thought to be outdated due to the 'gigantic strides of Modern Industry since 1848' (1872 Preface). As Murray Bookchin put it: 'A century ago, scarcity had to be endured; today it has to be enforced' (*Post-Scarcity Anarchism*).

The other precondition to establish socialism is that a majority of workers should want it and understand what it means. It cannot be imposed from above by some enlightened vanguard. Those who implement such a society will also have to operate it. How can you do that without knowing the new 'rules of the game', without embracing the mores, values and expectations that this new system of society would entail?

This is precisely what a genuine

'transition' must involve – the gradual, if painfully slow, build-up in support for, and awareness of, a genuine alternative to capitalism. Engels understood this perfectly in arguing against minority action:

'The time of surprise attacks, of revolutions carried through by small conscious minorities at the head of masses lacking consciousness, is past. Where it is a question of a complete transformation of the social organisation, the masses themselves must also be in on it, must themselves already have grasped what is at stake, what they are fighting for, body and soul' (Introduction to Marx's Class Struggles in France, 1895)

Actually, 'The Transition' is something in which we are already participating (though there is no guarantee it will lead to a successful outcome). However, it is not, and cannot possibly be, what the Hard Left imagines it to be – some far-off hypothetical stage after the Vanguard Party has captured power.

Any model for successfully exiting capitalism has to have a clear destination that breaks completely with capitalism. You cannot possibly do this if your whole strategy is built around perpetually postponing and deferring what is crucially required to make this happen – promoting awareness of what should replace capitalism.

The Hard Left's belief that it is inappropriately 'utopian' now to even discuss a genuinely post-capitalist alternative is precisely what ensures there never will be an appropriate time to begin discussing it. Meanwhile, state capitalism is promoted on the spurious pretext that it will somehow prepare us to move beyond capitalism. That may have been true in the early 19th century, but not now. State capitalist regimes are no closer to a post-capitalist society than any other regime. This is the great deception. The relationship of the ruling class to the working class under state capitalism is precisely the same as anywhere else. It is the irreconcilable class antagonism that exists between capital and wage labour.

To imagine any state capitalist ruling class would ever voluntarily relinquish its privileged class status by facilitating the emergence of a classless society is utterly naïve. In fact, without exception, all state capitalist regimes obsessively promote bourgeois nationalism and support for their 'socialist motherland'.

Under capitalism, nationalism is the universal ideological format that enables a ruling class to deflect any expression of class struggle that might otherwise threaten its rule by positing an illusory commonality of interest between workers and capitalists – the so-called 'national

interests'. The Hard Left's susceptibility to this nonsense is not only evident in its support for nationalisation; it also shows in its willingness to align with the so-called 'oppressed nations' (and their *comprador bourgeoisie*) against the 'imperialist nations'.

Shadow boxing

The shadow boxing it constantly engages in is particularly evident in its attitude towards reformism. For all its talk of 'non-reformist reforms', there is, in practice, no difference between the Hard Left and the Soft Left in this respect. The Trotskyist concept of 'transitional demands', supposedly designed to serve as a bridge between the minimum and maximum programmes, is anything but. Cynically promoting demands you know the system is incapable of granting is more likely to result in rank disillusionment than revolutionary consciousness.

You can't trick or manipulate workers into becoming socialists. While some disdainfully dismiss what they call 'abstract propaganda', the fact is you cannot possibly achieve socialism without these workers knowing what it is about and wanting it. Plainly speaking, that means talking about it.

This is what the Left has been conspicuously reluctant to do. As noted, it even seems embarrassed by the very thought of doing this. Notwithstanding its steadily declining fortunes in recent decades (with one or two notable exceptions), the Left seems hell-bent, not on learning from its past mistakes, but on recycling them.

According to Bhaskar Sunkara, founding editor of *Jacobin* magazine:

'Any serious democratic socialist politics must pursue a politics of rupture with capitalism. You can't reach the abolition of class through an infinite series of small reforms' ('Reforming Capitalism Is Not Enough', Jacobin 8 June 2026).

One glance at the small print, however, reveals something totally different. Sunkara's idea of a 'twenty-first-century socialism' is not remotely a post-capitalist one. Markets, he imagines, are a 'great tool for socialism' (and for 'coordinating a complex economy'). Wage labour will continue in his 'twenty-first-century socialism' and hence also a class-divided society of employees versus employers. Unsurprisingly, the state, as the institutional tool of ruling-class domination, will continue to be needed in such a society.

For all the rhetorical flourishes concerning a 'politics of rupture', Sunkara's musings boil down to just 'business as usual'. Sadly, this might also be said of the Left in general. Good intentions will never be enough to eliminate capitalism.

ROBIN COX

Follow my leader

SOME YEARS ago, I was being interviewed by the BBC for one of our election campaigns. The young journalist asked me what we had against having leaders. They're undemocratic, I replied, and a big 'does not compute' sign appeared above her head. For her, democracy was about choosing leaders. So I followed up by explaining how, if we had a leader, the first thing the media would do would be to find where they disagreed with party policy, and ask 'Are you in charge? Can you change the policy?' If the leader can't dictate the policy, the party is officially divided and unruly.

I chose that tack of argument, based on an experience, many years ago, of a university occupation I was lightly involved in: the Vice Chancellor had come out, and his first words were to ask for a spokesman (and to demand their name and department). It was clearly a way to define and control the group who had entered the Senate Chamber. The choice of spokesperson would restrict other voices from being involved and allow the VC to control the discussion.

It is for similar reasons that the British state mandates that all political parties must have a named leader to define and control them. The interview with the BBC journalist could not be used because I was a candidate who was not a party leader (the BBC's election fairness rules mandate that only leaders can get national coverage, again, an ideological framing that is part of a whole system of propping up minority rule under the guise of participatory democracy).

This gives some context to the ongoing Zack Polanski stories. Until a few years ago, the Green Party did not have a leader, they simply had a principal speaker until 2007 but they felt that to get media attention and traction, they needed to call that voice a leader.

Certainly, having a leader allows people to short-cut the decision-making process of assessing a party's policies by deciding if they like the leader or not: and then internal struggles simply become around whether a person supports or opposes the leader. As the Labour Party under Corbyn demonstrated, the factional disputes,



however based in reality on policy, can become exclusively about the person of the leader, completely obviating the need for any discussion on facts or intentions.

If people like the leader, they can join in, and say: 'I agree with Zack'. It's a very quick and human way to gather followers. The problem being, precisely that they are followers, and as Eugene Debs famously said, if someone can lead you into the promised land, someone else can lead you out of it.

A bold leader can move quickly, and adopt new policies, without the slowness of waiting for a messy conference debate and vote (completely closing off party democracy). They can bamboozle interviewers with their wit, and perform well in debates: providing, in this day and age, sound bites and clips that can be readily shared on social media. In short, a leader can prosper. By the same token, though, a party can be broken by having a leader who is reviled or at the least, a distraction, as their personal life becomes the topic of debate, rather than their party or its policies.

Polanski has already had some of that, from the old stories about bosom expanding hypnosis, to the details of his living arrangements and council tax status. The latest, a spat with Nigel Farage about a shared social media post showing a guillotine in one picture out of twenty, shows the dangers of an uncontrolled social media operation.

Farage himself is the (pity him) victim of this process, as the media, which previously gave him a fair wind, suddenly started turning the fire hose of attention on him regarding his funding arrangements. This has been a factor also in the rise and downfall of several previous Prime Ministers: Boris Johnson seemed utterly invulnerable with a sizeable majority until details

of Partygate destroyed him: again, personal foibles rather than policy and principles ruled the debate.

Closer to the state of the Green Party, the Scottish Socialist Party was making headway using the Scottish Parliament's proportional representation system, under its figurehead of Tommy Sherridan: until he was brought down by

a combination of media attention and his own subsequent conviction for perjury in the libel trial he won against News International. In many ways, he brought his downfall on himself, but he took his party with him.

We could find many other examples, perhaps the most famous being Charles Stewart Parnell, whose marital infidelity broke the Irish Nationalist Party in the House of Commons in the late nineteenth century. The party was organised around him and was very much the old-fashioned party of parliamentarian manoeuvre, rather than being a mass movement. Indeed, the mass party was conceived as an alternative to the hugger mugger of deals in smoke-filled rooms, to replace loyalty to a man with loyalty to an idea and a programme.

A great deal of effort goes into turning us from being active participants in democracy and instead into passive observers or members of a fan club. This is why we refuse to have truck with having a leader, and why we put our efforts first and foremost into political education. In part, that explains our longevity, despite having made so little headway over the years. Our members do not join because they like that nice Mr Smeet, but because they understand what socialism is, what building it will mean and are agreed on the way forward. Where we disagree, we debate, and vote and abide by the decision of the majority of members.

One of our greatest achievements is showing democracy can work, and how it is precisely not playing follow-my-leader once every five years. It is natural for humans to think in terms of personal relations, but equally natural to create processes to prevent domination.

PIK SMEET

Support from an unexpected source

THE ARGUMENT for socialism receives support from many directions, whether it be our lived experience as wage-workers of just about getting by or evidence from many fields of academic research, such as anthropology, evolutionary biology and even human palaeontology, much of which has been discussed in previous issues of the *Socialist Standard*. Support comes too from unexpected sources and the article below discusses one of the weirdest of these sources.

You may well not have heard of Carl Menger, but he is recognised as the founder of the Austrian school of economics, which is home to the crankier supporters of free-market ideas. The one thing these people have in common is a seemingly visceral hatred of the idea that workers could take the world's productive resources out of the hands of the minority and use them to create wealth that is freely available to all. They would certainly be taken aback, in the unlikely event that they ever read Menger, to find that he, doubtless unwittingly, gave support to socialist ideas in his 1871 book, *Principles of Economics*, a text that was lauded in a modern foreword by Friedrich Hayek, the monetarist darling of the Tories in the 1980s.

Hayek says that *Principles* is worthy of attention due to 'the outstanding character of this work among Menger's publications and, indeed, among all the books which have laid the foundations of modern economics' (2007 edition, Mises Institute, p. 21). High praise, indeed, from a leading capitalist economist (even if his own ideas have been shown to be pretty useless in recent years).

As for the work itself, Menger constructs an entire system (which will later be called marginal utility) that describes how individuals act, as consumers in a market system, to ensure their own maximum well-being, in a situation in which goods are always in short supply.

This isn't just our view – Hayek himself wrote (p.18) 'all of Menger's analysis is grounded on the idea of scarcity'.

For Menger, scarcity affects not only luxuries but 'by far the greater number of goods [...] even the coarsest pieces of clothing, the most ordinary living accommodations and furnishings, the most common foods, etc.' (p.95). He refers to all such goods as 'economic goods'

In passing, it is worth noting that this material scarcity, as it affects an entire society, creates a conflict of interests that can only be resolved 'if the various portions of the whole amount at the disposal of

society pass into the possession of some [...] individuals, and if these individuals are protected by society in their possession to the exclusion of all other individuals in the economy' (p.100). In other words, the state as protector of private property.

Menger was writing at a time when industrial production was destroying earlier forms of production by creating a world market and herding millions of workers into factories. It might seem unusual, then, that he chose to build his argument largely on isolated individuals, one of whom he imagines living on a rocky island faced with the problem of how best to use a limited amount of fresh water for his own needs and those of his animals (p.134). Another example is two American frontiersmen and their families living in a virgin forest, 'far away' from anyone else, who are obliged to trade with each other (p.183).

The details of Menger's treatment of these examples are beyond the scope of this article, as is the fallacy of composition to which they lead him: 'A social economy is made up of individual economies, and what has been said above is therefore just as valid for the trade of entire peoples as it is for single economizing individuals' (p.187).

When goods are free

Rather, of interest here is his consideration of natural resources (water and virgin forests are much in his mind, and even light and air get a passing mention) when they are present in abundance, in other words when there is enough to meet everyone's needs. How do people act in such a circumstance? Are they impelled to possess these resources, which he calls 'non-economic goods'?

Definitely not, because when 'all individuals are able to satisfy their respective needs completely [...] there is

no practical necessity for any individual to secure a part of the whole sufficient to meet his requirements'.

These non-economic goods are not 'objects of the human desire for property. On the contrary, we can actually observe a picture of communism with respect to [such goods]; for men are communists whenever possible under existing natural conditions'.

And to reinforce his position, he continues: 'In towns situated on rivers with more water than is [needed], everyone goes to the river to draw any desired quantity of water. In virgin forests, everyone fetches the quantity of timber he needs. This communism is as naturally founded upon a non-economic relationship as property is founded upon one that is economic' (the three quotes above are on p.100).

So, according to Menger, there is no basis for one of the knee-jerk objections that many workers raise when they come into contact with the socialist case, namely that free access can never work because everyone would just take and take and take.

Menger has shown the irrationality of such behaviour. He could, of course, have had no idea in 1871 that workers, under the lash of capital, would be able to build a global production system that is capable of producing such a vast amount of wealth that everyone's reasonable needs and wants can be more than satisfied.

But the very logic of his analysis, intended as a justification for capitalist production and capitalist property rights, turns against his and the free-market position as soon as the material conditions of production developed. Who knows, in a socialist future, Carl Menger may even be considered as one of capitalism's gravediggers.

BUDGIE



Prisoners of the market

'MOUNTING COSTS are damaging business investment and undermine the government's attempts to raise living standards, the CBI has warned', wrote the *Times* (9 September), reporting on a document prepared by the employers' association for the Budget. The CBI's chief executive, Rain Newton-Smith, argued that: 'When firms are forced to absorb higher taxes, energy bills, and regulatory costs, the consequences are weaker investment, job losses and less scope to raise wages'.

Employers are always complaining of increased costs due to taxes and stricter regulation, but there is more than a grain of truth in their argument.

'Absorb' is a delicate way of saying that, as they can't pass on the extra costs by raising their prices, their profits have to take a hit. So what Newton-Smith is really saying is: 'when firms make lower profits due to higher taxes ...' Reduced profits could indeed lead to 'weaker investment' (but they could also mean lower dividends for shareholders). Insofar as they do, that does weaken investment. So there is less economic growth. Which, as Newton-Smith pointed out, would undermine the government's strategy of relying on growth

to bring it a bigger tax revenue and so allow it to improve people's living standard by spending more on education, health, housing and the like.

Irrespective of whether on this occasion the employers are bluffing in order to extract concessions from the government, there is the question of the wider relationship between government and private employers. The American political scientist, Charles Lindblom, wrote an article in 1982 called 'The Market as Prison' (tinyurl.com/5de8hssp) in which he argued that, in an economy in which production was in the hands of profit-seeking private enterprises, government decisions were tied to the success of these enterprises. Not only that. If the government didn't respect this — if it didn't allow enterprises to make the profits they expected — it would be automatically 'punished' by the operation of the market.

His argument went like this: If a government raises taxes too much or imposes too many regulations, companies cut back on investment. This leads to job losses and financial crises. Voters blame the government for this, not the business owners. The government loses the next election. The politicians responsible are punished.

As Lindblom remarked in an earlier book: 'To understand the peculiar character of

politics in market-oriented systems requires, however, no conspiracy theory of politics, no theory of common social origins uniting government and business officials, no crude allegation of a power elite established by clandestine forces. Business simply needs inducements, hence a privileged position in government and politics, if it is to do its job' (*Politics and Markets*, p.175).

The market works, he suggested, like an invisible prison in that it limits how far governments can go with social reforms that threaten profits that are business's 'inducement'. Anything radical is ruled out. It makes politicians afraid to challenge the 'privileged position' of the private sector. They tone down their proposals so as not to scare the market.

A recent example is Burnham's choice not to appoint Miliband as Chancellor because business perceived him as somehow anti-business (<https://londonlovesbusiness.com/uk-markets-on-edge-as-investors-warn-burnham-against-miliband-being-chancellor/>). Other examples are Starmer and Reeves's pre-election statements about Labour being 'the party of business' and Burnham's that his 'socialism' is of the 'business-friendly' variety.

Politicians in office must help business in its pursuit of profits and certainly not do anything to hamper it. They must serve the interest of business owners.

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Keeping grounded about Boeing

Credit: Netflix



CONSIDERING ITS corporate colossus status, Netflix has been a platform for several documentaries which almost subversively highlight the failings of the capitalist system. For instance, in 2022, prolific film-maker Rory Kennedy (of the famous Kennedy family) released *Downfall: The Case Against Boeing*, which examined the circumstances around two fatal crashes of Boeing aircraft. The lasting consequences of these and other problems with the company's practices are explored in Kennedy's sequel *Freefall: A Reckoning For Boeing*. Neither documentary has a presenter or narrator, with the story being told through interviews and footage of news reports.

A date given for a shift in Boeing's culture is 2005, when Jim McNerney was appointed as CEO. He and his successors are described as proteges of Jack Welch, who as head of General Electric maximised its profits through a strict regime of minimising production costs. This approach would guide the development of Boeing's 787 Dreamliner model of aeroplane, which was launched in 2011. Its initial price for production was \$10 billion, but the aim was for this to be halved. Cost-cutting measures included using scrapped components and outsourcing the construction of many parts to cheaper companies overseas, with the result that they didn't fit together well enough. Boeing staff are filmed undercover saying that they wouldn't risk flying on the planes they're assembling. Much of the programme comprises testimony from current and previous quality inspectors, who had less influence after manufacturing was outsourced. When John Barnett found that fasteners on Dreamliners were poorly fitted, which could cause them to fail, he was told by his manager that this would cost too much to rectify. He faced further obstructions when raising concerns: docked pay, threats of being fired, reputational

damage, being relocated. After retiring, he went to the media with his experiences and filed a whistleblower complaint against Boeing with the authorities. During the subsequent enquiry, he was found dead in his car, having ended his own life due to the stress. 'Boeing may not have pulled the trigger, but Boeing was responsible for John's death' says his attorney, Rob Turkewitz.

Freefall also covers Boeing's 737 MAX series, which we're told was rushed out to compete with upcoming models by rival Airbus, a decision made by McNerney when Boeing was in financial trouble. Within a few months of each other, there were two disasters involving 737 MAX 8 aircraft: in October 2018, Lion Air Flight 610 and then Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 in March 2019 crashed soon after taking off, with all those on board being killed. The pilots lost control due to faulty inputs to the planes' MCAS automatic flight stabilising feature. The documentary includes footage from the ensuing court hearings, but doesn't dwell on the legal intricacies. Boeing was accused of misleading the regulatory body, the Federal Aviation Administration, about features of the MAX before the agency certified the model to be used. A deal was arranged between the Department of Justice and Boeing which shifted the emphasis of any accountability to a financial resolution. Most crassly, Boeing's lawyers argued that the relatives of those who died don't deserve reparations for their loved ones' suffering because the crashes happened too quickly for this to be prolonged. Boeing agreed to pay fines and compensation, and there was also a 'deferred prosecution arrangement', meaning a probation period of three years. These outcomes excluded any consideration of criminal acts, absolving the CEO and other executives of personal responsibility. This lack of

accountability has galvanised a campaign group of victims' families, represented in the documentary by Naoise Connolly Ryan, whose husband Mick was on the Ethiopian Airlines flight. She believes the Department of Justice has been protecting Boeing, with 'complete political entanglement' between the two.

The authorities which are shown to confront Boeing are the senators during the court hearing, watched by the relatives of those who died. Senator Josh Hawley challenges squirming CEO David Calhoun on cutting costs related to safety while he has a pay packet of almost \$33 million, and Senator Richard Blumenthal adds 'Boeing blames everyone except itself'. The programme doesn't cover the role of others in Congress, though. Lawyer and activist Ralph Nader claims that Boeing has funded campaigns for 330 members of Congress, including most of those on an earlier enquiry committee. He also states that Congress reduced funding and powers to the Federal Aviation Administration, enabling 'Boeing to regulate the FAA instead of the reverse' (tinyurl.com/3yfxd347). Because of this, he doubts that any legislation will improve the situation.

The documentary gives a clear example of how the profit motive overrules safety considerations, with some of those who personify this – the CEOs – depicted as the villains. The last four Boeing CEOs have banked almost \$500 million for themselves, even though the company's commercial aeroplane division hasn't been profitable since 2018. Their commonplace strategy of minimising production costs to maximise income for those at the top isn't the source of the issue, which is the market system that must place more importance on finances than precautions. The legal framework which is supposed to enforce justice is also part of this system, so financial considerations shape what 'justice' means. This is illustrated by how the court hearings have led to monetary settlements rather than criminal proceedings. Furthermore, the financial clout of Boeing's owners has ensured its influence within the Department of Justice, Congress and the Federal Aviation Administration. The focus of the documentary is less on these wider forces than with the people they have affected. As author David Gelles says, 'In most companies, the stakes aren't people's lives, but at Boeing, they are'.

MIKE FOSTER

Welfare?



**No More Deaths
by Welfare.**
By China Mills.
Pluto Press,
2026

WE'VE LONG argued two things that liberal society finds unbearable: capitalism will not be reformed into decency, and the Labour Party is and always has been a party of capitalism. China Mills does not set out to confirm our case, but confirm it she does, with forensic force.

The book's subject is the lethal machinery of Britain's social security system, which Mills shows is 'violent by design', a department whose founding logic is the policing of who is and is not deemed deserving. For decades, reformists of every stripe have assumed the welfare state was a fortress to be defended, and that its cruelties were aberrations to be lobbied away. Mills demolishes this. The system's violence is not a malfunction but its function: to discipline the working class and enforce the labour market. A machine built to do that will not be petitioned into kindness, and whatever the author's own politics, the book lands at a conclusion that socialists have long drawn: that begging for reforms is a dead-end, and a drain on working-class energies.

This is most visible in the people Mills documents. The book draws on more than a decade of activism led by disabled people and bereaved families: the Deaths by Welfare Project, DPAC, the Black Triangle Campaign, benefits defence workshops and campaigns like Joy Dove's fight for an inquiry into her daughter Jodey's death. What unites them is a hard learned realism. These are people who know that the state is not a neutral arbiter to be reasoned with. Sanctioned, assessed, driven to despair, many of them have neither the health nor the illusion necessary for reformist lobbying. Survival itself, mutual aid practised from bed, keeping each other alive, naming the dead, is their politics. In class terms, this is the working class relying on itself rather than on its alleged representatives. Yet self-organisation that stays within capitalism can at best hold the line, it cannot end the conditions that make welfare a weapon.

The book's condemnation of the Labour Party is unsparing and correct. The sharpest edges of this regime have repeatedly been delivered not by Tory

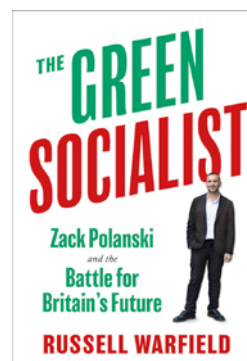
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'villains' but by Labour governments and Labour ministers, administering the demands of capital while wrapping them in the language of compassion. Mills situates this in its global context: the book documents how South American countries, as conditions of international loans, were forced to liberalise and open up their social security systems to private profit, using the same structural adjustment playbook that has handed British welfare functions to private contractors.

So read *No More Deaths by Welfare* as what it is: documentary evidence of a class war that never ends, being fought on the battlefield of assessment centres and computer terminals, by agents of the state, the DWP, private contractors, and the governments of both parties who enabled them. Mills ends by calling for the collective imagination of 'welfare justice'. The disabled activists in these pages, who learned through bitter experience that they cannot rely on the state or its parliamentary managers, are closer to that understanding than any reform movement. Our task is to finish the argument.

A.T.

Green Battle



The Green Socialist. Zack Polanski and the Battle for Britain's Future. By Russell Warfield. Pluto Press, October 2006.

It is an odd title since Polanski does not claim to be a socialist, at least not openly. Warfield's justification for calling him one is that the policies Polanski supports are the same as those advocated by others who do claim to be socialists, such as taxing the rich to pay for measures to benefit the mass of the population, public control of utilities, and rent controls. Polanski himself claims only to be a left-winger who wants the Green Party to be a left-wing party rather than the centrist party prioritising reforms to protect the environment that it has historically been.

Warfield is unstinting in his praise for Polanski and the 'ecopopulist' platform on which he stood to win the contest last September to become the Leader of the Green Party which, he says:

‘involved communications which foregrounded policies that spoke to people’s immediate, material needs; acknowledging and feeling the public’s

justified anger but directing it towards hope; shaping strong narratives with clear enemies; and building a mass party which was powered by a broader social base of vibrant movements'.

What, you might ask, has blaming the super-rich and taxing them to pay for meeting people's 'immediate, material needs' better got to do with the environment?

Warfield argues that this always was the vocation of the Green Party, describing how it always did have a policy on social and economic matters as well as on the environment. It is true that on paper it did, but its main plank was always the environment; that was why it was set up, why people voted for it and why people joined it. Its other policies, which Warfield tries hard to interpret as prefiguring 'a principled left-wing offer which transcended narrow environmental interests', have varied over the years from advocating self-sufficient regional communities to local currencies to protect local businesses. It went into the 2015 general election promising bank reform based on the currency crank idea that banks create money from thin air (it wanted to prevent them from supposedly doing this). In the 2024 general election it promised a Green New Deal which, Warfield says, 'called for Keynesian investment to stimulate the economy through the creation of green jobs across renewables, home insulation and so on', as if Keynesianism hadn't been tried and failed.

Warfield himself does claim to be a socialist, an 'ecosocialist', but is pretty vague as to what this means. He seems to envisage 'democratic control of the economy' that would give priority to producing and selling what people needed rather than being oriented towards 'perpetual economic growth'. In any event, the book does show the illusions held by those within the Green Party who call themselves socialist.

ALB

Highs and Lows



The China Contract: the Inside Story of the World's Biggest Financial Scandal ... and How It Was Covered Up. By Clare Westcastle Brown.
Westbourne Press
£20.

In February 2019 we reviewed Rewcastle Brown's *The Sarawak Report*. This revealed

a scam in which large amounts of money were siphoned from Malaysian state finances, specifically the One Malaysia Development Fund (1MDB), into the pockets of the former Prime Minister, Najib Razak, and his accomplices, including Jho Low, who was in practice in charge of the Fund (though this was officially denied). Here she returns to the same events and updates the story but also adds a lot of information about China's involvement in some of what went on.

The sums involved are staggering, with perhaps \$5bn in all siphoned from the fund. One mechanism for achieving this was round-tripping, where assets are sold to another company and then bought back. This makes it look as if something productive has taken place, when in fact no such thing has occurred. It can be used to evade taxes or launder money. Subsidiary companies with only notional values can be created, with banks playing a large part in all this and collecting massive fees. Goldman Sachs in particular had a sizeable role here, for instance being paid a million dollars for 'advising' on one deal. One of their top managers was sentenced to two years in prison after co-operating with investigators. On one occasion, Jho made around \$130m from selling and reselling bonds.

As for the role of China and the contract in the book's title, this relates initially to an agreement between the Malaysian government and a Chinese company to build a railway line in Malaysia, as part of China's Belt and Road Initiative. This was at an inflated price, apparently so that the Chinese company could shoulder the massive debt of 1MDB. Najib seemed to be going along with China's expansionist plans; this is significant, as Malaysia controls the Malacca Strait, an important sea route which China needs access to. The Chinese government was behind the rail line contract, in the hope of further similar projects, with Malaysia accepting the Belt and Road idea. The country's economic dependence on China would be enormous. Jho Low became involved with the Chinese 'Communist' Party and may have started running agents for them in other countries.

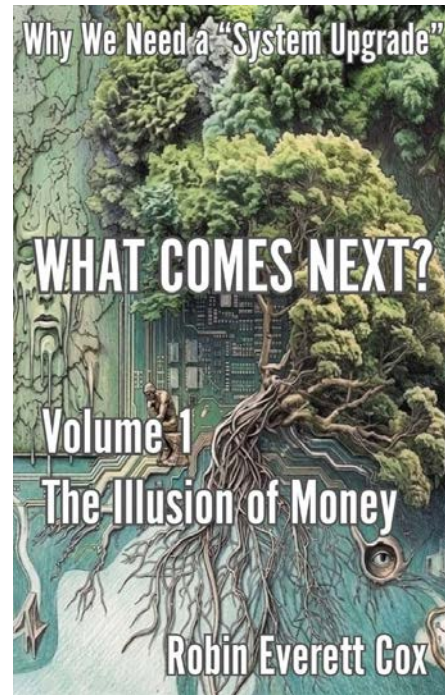
But, of course, it was all too good to last. The Belt and Road Initiative has run into problems but is still part of the Chinese government's plan for economic expansion and the reduction of US power. More specifically, Najib was arrested in 2018 and subsequently found guilty of a number of offences, including abuse of power and money laundering, and was sentenced to twelve years in prison; there have been various appeals since then. Jho Low became a fugitive in 2019 and is

currently believed to be living in China.

This is a comprehensive and well-argued examination of an enormous example of theft and corruption, but in many ways it is just a special case of the way capitalism operates, with a few fabulously wealthy and powerful people running things the way they want, even if in this instance they were too blatant and did not get away with it.

PB

BOOKS RECEIVED



What Comes Next? By Robin Cox, described in the blurb on Amazon as 'a three-volume series presenting a detailed critique of contemporary capitalism. It explores the possibility of a practical alternative – a 'system upgrade' – drawing on humans' innate disposition towards mutual aid. This will be a post-money society based on voluntary work and the free distribution of goods'. Will be reviewed in a later issue.

Exhibition review **Humans and nature**

You might expect an exhibition on 'Human Natures' to be about the different kinds of behaviour shown by people, but the one currently on at Manchester Museum in fact deals with the ways in which humans have interacted with nature and so transformed the world. The exhibition is on until 1 November, and then will travel to Newcastle, Norwich and London over the next couple of years.

The general point of the exhibition is that nature is all around us but we have changed it. Cats, for instance, were domesticated because they controlled the mice and birds that ate grain. But now they spread disease and kill billions of animals each year, and so have played a part in

the extinction of over sixty animal species. Chickens have been transformed from wild birds into a factory product, and their poo pollutes rivers.

We often speak of throwing things away, perhaps without realising that 'away' is a real place somewhere. So-called fast fashion is among the activities responsible for 92 million tonnes of textile waste being produced globally each year. Recycling polyester is possible, but it uses a lot of energy and natural fibres are preferable. Things have changed since Victorian days, when birds were hunted on an industrial scale so their feathers could be used in hats, but clothing still has a massive impact on nature in various ways.

People once made a habit of mending clothes, and agricultural smocks, for instance, were often mended over and over again. There is now the start of a trend towards visible mending, 'a practical skill that combines sustainability with self-expression, allowing you to transform imperfections into eye-catching additions and extend the life of your clothes' (oxfam.org.uk).

Mining can of course be very damaging to the environment, and organisations such as the London Mining Network (londonminingnetwork.org) work with groups badly affected by London-linked mining companies. On the other hand, the Wigan Flashes (lakes resulting from subsidence caused by mining) are now a National Nature Reserve and contain a variety of wetland habitats.

Recycling is not always doable but sometimes it can be unexpected: in the museum shop I bought a pen made from recycled aluminium.

PB



The passing of Mao

THE DEATH of Mao Tse-Tung has been anticipated for many years in speculations over who would be his successor. Now it has happened and drawn world-wide attention to China. Ostensibly the interest is in the passing of a celebrated national leader; practically, it is in whether there will be changes of policy and how they will affect China's relationship with the rest of the world.

The history of China since 1949 closely resembles that of Russia thirty years before. The Communist revolutions in both countries were the taking of political power so that capitalism could develop and the entry to the modern world be made. Like Lenin, Mao provided a figurehead, and as with Lenin a version of Marxism was put out in his name to create a social vision to gain mass support for modernization. The projection of Mao's personality has been carried much further than Lenin's; but behind this cultivated charisma has stood a ruling class strongly conscious of its economic aims.

The phrase for China in these conditions is 'Mao's China', implying that his personal and political qualities have been the chief factor. The effect of this 'great man' view of history is to make

it dependent on the emergence of outstanding individuals; but the opposite is true. Individuals are given opportunities by crises and the pressure of new developments, and these make them 'great'. But for the 1939-45 war Churchill would have remained an unpopular minor statesman. Napoleon was the product of post-revolution conditions in France. The rise of Mussolini and Hitler was primarily the result of the failure of social-democracy in Europe and the effects of the 1929 depression on Germany. In some circumstances history appears almost to go looking for some nonentity or a lunatic to elevate into a 'great man'.

Of course the day-to-day behaviour of individuals, once they have political power, produces effects of its own. But what makes them 'great' is precisely that their ambitions and whims are not incompatible with the wider requirements of the time. The shifts and innovations in Chinese policy under Mao have had a plain coherence in aiming at the achievement of world power status as quickly as possible.

(Socialist Standard, October 1976)

Action Replay

Stay on the safe side

SPORT CAN be dangerous. You can fall or be hit by someone or something, or else overdo the physical activity. It's obviously not like working down a mine or on a construction site, but people taking part in sport, whether as professionals or amateurs, can sustain injuries or even get killed. It is not just horses that die in racing, as sometimes jockeys do too. For instance, in 2024 a jockey died at a point-to-point race in Kent.

In August a cyclist was killed on the Volta a Portugal, when a non-race vehicle travelling in the opposite direction crashed into him. The road was not fully closed to other vehicles, and the riders' union was 'speechless and filled with anger' at his death. Last year a cyclist died on a descent during a race in Italy, apparently after striking a bump in the road and losing his helmet.

In football it is well known that heading a ball can cause brain injuries. England player Nobby Stiles, who died in 2020, had headed a ball thousands of times, which contributed to the Alzheimer's that caused his death. Women players appear to be more susceptible to brain injuries from heading, and it has been suggested that heading be banned for all players under 11. The leather footballs that were once in frequent use were heavy, especially when wet, and lighter synthetic balls are now commonly used, but that doesn't remove the risk entirely.

Players of American football (gridiron) have been shown in recent research to have a death rate from a degenerative brain disease about four times higher than the general population. Most of the head impacts had apparently occurred at collegiate or high school level. Back in 2016, the National Football League agreed a billion dollar settlement with over five thousand retired players who had brain damage as a result of concussion.

Tackling in rugby can lead to concussion, but also to injuries to legs, arms and the spine. Tacklers are encouraged to hold their head to one side of the ball carrier, never in front of the carrier. As in football, blows to the head affect women differently from men, with female players more

susceptible to concussion. Deaths are rare, but do happen; fifty years ago, for instance, a Swinton rugby league player died after breaking his neck in a match.

Combat sports such as boxing are of course the main source of deaths. On average, thirteen deaths occur each year, including two or three in amateur contests. The number of serious injuries is much higher.

Over the decades the regulations and protocols intended to prevent and treat sporting injuries have been improved, and it is good to see men and women being treated differently when appropriate. But deaths and serious injuries still occur.

PB



World Socialist Movement Online Meetings

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

October 2026 Events

World Socialist Movement online meetings

Friday 2 October 7.30pm • Have you heard the news?

Discussion on recent events

Friday 9 October 7.30pm

Labour or Green, Same Capitalist Regime

Discussion on outcome of Holborn & St. Pancras by-election

Friday 16 October 7.30pm • Subject to be announced

Friday 23 October 7.30pm

Report from Europe

Speaker: Jonathan Chambers

Friday 30 October 7.30pm

No meeting. Eve of October Planning Meeting

Saturday 31 October at 10am

October Planning Meeting

Socialist Party Physical Meetings

MANCHESTER

Saturday 17 October 2pm • Racists can't define race

Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, central Manchester

LONDON

Sunday 25 October 3pm

Goblins, Ghosts, Frankenstein and the capitalist vampires

Speaker: Anya Krycek

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

Saturday 31 October at 10am

October Planning Meeting (hybrid)

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

CARDIFF

Street stall every Saturday 1pm-3pm (weather permitting)

Capitol Shopping Centre, Queen Street

(Newport Road end).



Socialist Party (GB)

WhatsApp channel

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



Obituary – Alwyn Edgar

We are saddened to report the death in August of our comrade Alwyn Edgar at the age of 97. Born in Canada where his parents from Britain were then working, he moved back to England at an early age. He opted to do his 'national service' by working in a coal mine in South Wales. He joined the Party in 1948 after listening to Party speakers in Hyde Park. Although he qualified as a barrister he worked as a teacher. Latterly he was a member of the East Anglia branch. He contributed articles to the *Socialist Standard* for over 70 years, notably the 'Passing Show' and 'Diary of A Capitalist' columns under A.W.E. as well as his full name. Taking his cue from what Marx wrote in *Capital* about the Duchess of Sutherland, he became an expert in the Highland Clearances in Scotland, writing a number of volumes and running a YouTube channel (tinyurl.com/3pez4nnt) on the subject.

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.

Money is a Bummer

IN A conversation I had with my friend Chris, he told me he was in a 'moral quandary.' He had been providing free temporary accommodation in his house to George, a former refugee, who he had previously helped to apply for 'leave to remain' in the UK and then to find regular employment. All had been going well between them until George went away for a few days and Chris received an email from him asking whether he could see his way to making him a loan of several thousand pounds. The purpose was to enable his wife and child, who were living in his former country, to come and visit him for a short period in accommodation he would find.

Chris asked me what I thought of this. I found it hard to say much, especially as I didn't know the person in question, so I asked him what were his own feelings. He told me that, much as he wanted to help George and not disappoint him, he felt that this was an ask too far. George might think he (Chris) was well supplied with cash, but the reality was that the kind of loan George was asking for would make a significant impact on his savings and leave him feeling insecure about future unforeseen expenses or emergencies that might arise. George was also making a 'solemn promise' to pay the money back on a monthly basis over a period of a year. But though Chris didn't doubt the sincerity of George's intentions, he wasn't convinced he'd be able to manage that.

In fact, the more he'd thought about it, he told me (and he'd thought a lot about it to the extent of losing sleep), the more his outlook veered back and forth. On the one hand he knew about how much George had suffered in his country of origin (a dictatorship), how resilient he'd been and how desperately he wanted to see his wife and child. And so one part of him wanted to say yes, just give him the money and the devil take the hindmost. But, at the other extreme he wondered whether, though he thought he knew George pretty well, he could exclude the possibility of some kind of scam. This had also been the reaction of a couple of other friends he'd talked to about it. Obviously Chris hoped not, but as he put it to me, 'money is such a bummer'. I said: 'Yes, true, 100 per cent.' What he told me he was dreading above all was a face-to-face conversation with George



telling him he couldn't help.

I took Chris's quandary away with me, almost made it my own and then emailed George suggesting the following. Firstly, since George had made his request by email, he should email him back first of all rather than talk to him in person. Secondly, he should tell George that, whatever he might think, he (Chris) didn't have much at all in the way of savings and couldn't be sure that he wouldn't need to call on his funds in short order. Thirdly, he should say he didn't feel comfortable about George being in the position of having to make a regular reimbursement which he might come to find difficult or impossible. Chris emailed me back to say he'd take that on board and would let me know what happened.

So what did happen? What did Chris do? Well, he sent to George the kind of response I'd suggested but was then in trepidation knowing that, when George got back, there'd still have to be some kind of face-to-face conversation. But when that happened, it was actually George who started it and said he fully understood Chris's position, that he was sorry and realised he shouldn't have asked – after all he'd been living with Chris rent-free and that was more than enough. Chris was massively relieved, almost in tears. He told George that he fully understood George's position too and how difficult things were for him, and he could only thank him for what he'd said. Since then, Chris tells me, they've grown a lot closer as friends, and, since it was obvious to him that George had been sincere in his apology, they now understood each other better than ever.

A happy ending? Well sort of. But, at the

same time, what better example of two of the many obstacles that the society we live in puts up against humans living lives of comfort, fulfilment and cooperation? The first of these obstacles is the physical barrier known as borders (or frontiers), separating families from one another and separating us all from our fellow human beings who happen, purely by chance, to have been born on a different part of the planet. The second is the noxious effect of money, the ultimate arbiter of how people live, where they live, and, in many cases, whether they live or die. Left to ourselves, most of us would exhibit the natural human tendency to be pro-social and empathetic, as in the case of my friend Chris with his guest George. But how difficult is that made by the system of division into states that capitalism demands and the extraordinary inequality based on the possession of wealth and resources that is its hallmark and that means that, while some individuals control fortunes larger than the economic output of entire countries, other human beings struggle to obtain adequate food, shelter, clean water and healthcare. What stands out clearly is that we need to collectively decide to dispense with this system and replace it with a world of common ownership of all resources and free access to all goods and services. While some may say that such an arrangement is some way off, that does not make it any the less worth striving for.

HOWARD MOSS