

THE

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SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

Europe's autumn
heatwave?



Also: Some questions – and answers
Has The Archers gone political?
France: what was it all about?
Spain: The “Maricarmen” Effect

Hoping against hope
Non-voluntary exchange
Funeral horror
Capitalism is not freedom



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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'

Enough is enough is not enough

RIOTS AND looting in France. Tent camps in Madrid. European governments are having trouble containing their discontented subjects. In Spain the issue was high rents and evictions. In France it started with school students protesting about the teaching conditions but, in the face of police brutality, turned into riots and looting as others joined in.

Under capitalism the excluded majority will always be discontented to one degree or another. There will always be something to be discontented about as capitalism is not a system whose aim is to meet people's needs and so neglects or meets them only inadequately. If it's not housing, it's education. If it's not education, it's the cost of living. If it's not the cost of living, it's some other aspect of everyday life.

Protest demonstrations express and measure discontent. An intelligent government, with an eye on being re-elected, may judge it politic to concede something. A government that misjudges the situation risks getting what it got in France: riots, running battles with the police, and looting.

As we report in this issue from correspondents on the ground, the demonstrations in France and Spain last month were in no sense revolutionary. Their aim was to get the government to take measures to alleviate a particular problem. A mass demonstration may be a step beyond voting for some politician and then leaving things to them; the protestors are at least doing something themselves. But it isn't necessarily any more successful.

Some critics of capitalism see the mass demonstration as the best way to get reforms. Others even imagine this is the way capitalism will be ended. We don't want to get into a discussion about the best way to get reforms, as reforms, however welcome some might be, are not our aim. However obtained, they can only ever mitigate a problem, never solve it which is what we want. What a government can offer is limited by the nature of capitalism as a system whose priority is making profits for those who own and control the places where what society needs is produced.

No more than voting for reformist

politicians can mass demonstrations pressure governments into doing something they are incapable of doing. Capitalism can't be made to work in the interest of the excluded majority. Governments can't spend money to improve things for that majority at the expense of the profits of the owning class. That's the nature of the beast. Street protests and riots can't make capitalism change its spots, and they certainly can't overthrow it.

Widespread popular democratic self-organisation based on mandated delegates not leaders is the way – but it needs to be conscious organisation to replace capitalist ownership and production for profit by common ownership and production to directly meet people's needs. Only a democratically organised, socialist-minded majority can do this. It can't rely on street demonstrations for this but can use the means to hand – the vote – to win political control and employ it to dispossess the privileged ruling class.

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‘Bear with me a moment...’

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HERE IS an everyday story you will be all-too familiar with, the attempt to resolve a problem via a call centre. You navigate a complex phone menu, whose options don't match your actual problem. You wait for a human representative while forced to listen to lift music or worse, banging club anthems on a loop. A human at last responds and a pause ensues as you turn the volume back up in a panic that the human might ring off. You explain your problem, but naturally you are talking to the wrong department and need to be transferred. You are put back onto the banging club anthems – clearly selected to make your day happier and brighter – until eventually another human speaks, and you patiently begin to explain the problem again from the start. The human operator is sympathetic, and proposes to investigate the problem for you. In order to do this, you must be returned to the banging club anthems. This continues for twenty minutes and then... you are disconnected.

This is only the beginning. Like the 2014 film *Edge of Tomorrow*, whose strapline is 'Live. Die. Repeat', you start again from zero. Over and over. But you get smarter. You can predict what's going to happen. Now you beg the operator 'Please please, don't put me on hold, because I keep being disconnected.' But the operator is unable to proceed with any investigation while you're still on the line. *Two* simultaneous phone calls are somehow beyond modern call-centre technology. It's back to the banger tunes.

What started as a simple technical problem now metastasises into existential angst. You feel like you're shouting into a void, set adrift in a boundless universe of anonymous amnesia. If you're not literally shouting at the disembodied operator by

now, it's only due to your steely self-control and determination not to offload your stress and frustration onto a fellow worker.

Though it seems impossible that a solution can ever emerge from this Dantesque corporate inferno, one is arrived at, and a call-out visit arranged. The visit does not materialise. Back into the club-anthems universe you go. It seems all the call-outs were cancelled, with no explanation available. They're very sorry about that, something must have gone wrong at their end. But they can offer an appointment later next week?

This story, or something like it, is well known to everyone. But it has another side, which you won't know unless you've been one of the 800,000 people who actually work in a call centre. At the other end of the line, your anonymous script-reciting operator is going through their own version of emotional torture.

It is hard to think of any type of work that's more stressful, frustrating, dispiriting and disempowering than being a call-centre worker. You probably got the job via an agency, because you were desperate, an agency which you know for a fact gets paid for your work at double the rate the agency pays you. You arrive on shift to be directed to any one of fifty call desks, given a sheet of permissible responses and actions, and told that your calls are recorded and monitored by a supervisor. Half your calls are customers calling back after they were disconnected. They have no idea who they talked to before, and you have no way of finding out either. So they have to start again from scratch. You can pull up their customer file, but you are not permitted to enter notes on the file for follow-up. You attempt to resolve the problem, though they beg you not to put

them on hold, and when you get back to the customer the line has gone dead...

Four hours of this and then a lunch break, where people slump like galley slaves, too drained to talk. Then you start again, trying to sound fresh and helpful. The customers do their best to be polite but are often at the end of their tether. Sometimes you can tell they're in tears. Your heart goes out to them. You want to help, you really do. And it would be so easy. If you could just assign yourself 'ownership' of their case, you could follow it up, even over multiple shifts, and call the customer back when you'd resolved the problem. But the system does not permit such ownership. That would entail responsibility, and with it the leverage to demand a higher wage. You can't even leave yourself a Post-it note to call back and check on progress, because hot-desking means never getting the same desk twice. Even so, Post-it notes proliferate like blossoms on each computer screen, all scribbled with customer information and bank details, only to be swept away into bin bags by cleaners every night. In the morning the centre is empty of notes. Amnesia is normal operating procedure. If the cleaners were less honest, they could be cleaning out people's bank accounts, such is the lack of corporate oversight, and bosses' indifference.

If workers react with hostility to 'call rage' or, which is more likely and far worse, agree with the customer that the company is shit, they are sacked on the spot. If they protest to the supervisor, they are sacked on the spot. They are 'casual'. They don't get rights. They don't get a say. They don't need brains. Staff burnout is massive. Staff turnover is massive. Nobody stands this work for long.

The companies don't need to treat call-centre workers and customers this badly, of course. It's all by design. It's 'cost-effective', which means more profits. Capitalist customer service, turbocharged with digital automation, hollows the life out of human communication and replaces it with impotent frustration for both parties. 83 percent of UK call-centre workers report negative mental health effects (tinyurl.com/yzjxsaz2).

There's nothing special about this story. It's not big or newsworthy. It's mundane, everyday, just one among a million trivial, undramatic tales of humdrum humiliation in capitalism.

No wonder people riot.

PJS

Some questions — and answers

Question: You say *‘With no owners, employers or profit, there would be no wages, no money and no buying and selling’.*

NO MONEY. No buying or selling. You don’t think this is lunacy on the political fringes? And how do you think such a delightful ‘utopia’ will be enforced? Through the barrel of a gun, like it always has been whenever tried throughout history.

Reply: The ‘barrel of a gun’ argument is precisely backwards. Socialism as we know it couldn’t be imposed by anyone, armed or otherwise. A society based on voluntary cooperation and production for need is impossible to run by force. You can’t compel people to freely associate. That’s why we’ve always insisted it can only come about democratically, when a majority of working people understand and want it. No vanguard, no coup, no coercion.

And when you claim ‘whenever tried throughout history’ what was tried? The Soviet Union? Maoist China? Those societies kept wages, money, buying and selling, and a working class selling its labour to an employer, the state. That’s state capitalism, not socialism. We said so at the time, in 1918, when such a view was deeply unfashionable. The failure of state capitalism no more disproves socialism than the failure of ‘people’s republics’ disproves republicanism.

As for ‘lunacy’: you already live largely without money in your own life. Nobody invoices their children for dinner. Neighbours don’t draw up contracts to help each other. The RNLI doesn’t send you a bill after pulling you from the sea. Cooperation for need is one of the most ordinary human behaviours there is. What’s actually extraordinary, what’s only existed for a few thousand years of human history, is a system where most people must sell their working hours simply to survive, while food rots and homes sit empty because there’s ‘no demand.’

We don’t need to abolish money by decree. We need to make it unnecessary, by producing for use, not for sale. That begins not with a gun but with a vote and an idea.

Question: You say *‘People would freely contribute according to their ability and take from the common store according to their needs’.*

What if I don’t feel like working? That okay? And who determines what my ‘needs’ are? What if I feel I need a mansion and a Ferrari? Can I demand that?

We live in a world of finite resources. Who gets to decide which resources are allocated to whom? You keep saying “democratically” but what does this mean? 50 percent +1 vote? And what if the 49 percent disagree?

If you believe that humans are good-natured enough to make this work, surely just embrace libertarianism? Humans have created the current system, it wasn’t handed down by God and imposed on us, so what makes you think humans won’t find ways to exploit others?

Reply: What if you don’t feel like working? Then you wouldn’t. Socialism abolishes work entirely, in the sense of

employment, wages and compulsory labour for an employer. What remains is productive activity people choose to do, and the labour actually needed to feed, house and care for everyone is a fraction of what’s done today once you strip out advertising, finance, arms, duplicated brands and built-in obsolescence. The rest of us would carry on for the same reason people write open-source software, crew lifeboats and volunteer. Useful activity is satisfying. Nobody needs the threat of destitution to run a functioning society. That threat exists to keep people profitable, what we seek to abolish.

Who decides your needs? You do. Socialism means free access. You take what you need from what’s produced.

What if you need a mansion and a Ferrari? You’ve chosen status symbols as examples of what you need. Their value comes from exclusivity, from other people not having them. A Ferrari anyone can drive is just a fast car. A mansion everyone’s entitled to is a hotel. In a world of free access, hoarding positional goods is like demanding credit for your own sandwiches at a pot-luck.

Who allocates finite resources? Who allocates them now? Those with purchasing power, which is a ludicrous way to distribute anything. We throw away a third of the food we produce while people go hungry. Democratic allocation doesn’t mean a ballot on every toothbrush, any more than a co-op votes on every light bulb.

We use common sense, expert advice and consensus where possible, majority vote as fallback, exactly how unions and co-ops already run.

Why not libertarianism? Because it keeps the things that allow some people to exploit others: private ownership, wage labour, buying and selling. Humans created the current system, but not freely, any more than peasants chose feudalism. We created slavery too, then abolished it. Systems are tools, and this one’s time is over.



Will AI bury Hayek?

‘ANTHROPIC RESEARCHER believes more than 10% chance AI “could kill all humans”’ the BBC reported on 9 September ([tinyurl.com/33tn66st](https://www.tinyurl.com/33tn66st)). Other media outlets had similar alarming, not to say alarmist, headlines. The researcher didn’t say how this would happen but, presumably, it would have to be a machine with superhuman abilities that had escaped from human control inventing and releasing some deadly virus since even a nuclear war would not kill all humans.

A superhuman AI machine escaping from human control is theoretically possible but humans have not yet developed such a machine. But, even if (or when) it is invented, why would it seek to destroy humanity? That would not be very intelligent as it would ultimately lead to the machine breaking down since, except in the realm of science fiction, it would still require some human input.

Others see the danger rather in the use that humans might make of such a machine. In a letter to the Royal Society, a group of leading mathematicians mentioned activities in which it might be employed such as ‘cybersecurity, autonomous weapons control, development of biological and chemical agents and the targeted spread of

misinformation’ ([tinyurl.com/mbrewa4k](https://www.tinyurl.com/mbrewa4k)). Given capitalism, that’s a more realistic and likely danger since, in a world of competing states and businesses, industrial espionage, developing weapons, and spreading misinformation already take place. In fact, there is a 100 percent chance that a superhuman machine will be employed in these activities. But by humans not of its own accord.

The publicity given to the researcher’s rather extravagant claim confirms the famous saying that these days most people find it easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. But not everybody.

An article in the *Financial Times* (29 August) explored a different speculation. Under the headline ‘Could AI revive the socialist dream?’, Martin Sandbu looked at the impact that a superintelligent machine might have on the ‘economic calculation debate’ in which the likes of Mises and Hayek claimed that socialism could not work because it would not be able to calculate the most rational way to use resources to produce what society needed to survive. Their killer argument, at least against those who advocated detailed planning from a single centre, was that no central planning authority could

possibly have all the facts needed to do what the operation of markets did. Hayek in particular emphasised this. But Sandbu’s point was:

‘Imagine then a super-AI armed with access to all the data we let our devices record for every transaction we enter into, and much more besides. Such an AI would surely bury Hayek. Indeed, a big motivation for the socialist calculation debate was that market prices get a lot of things wrong. People don’t always know enough to choose the best goods; they get addicted, defrauded or bankrupted. Consumption and production have spillover effects on third parties — “externalities” — that pricing decisions do not capture; so we get pollution, resource depletion and climate damage. Price adjustments do not stabilise the macroeconomy; so we get business cycles, bubbles and busts. (...) Against this background, it beggars belief that once a super-AI was asked to advise on the allocation of resources, it would merely follow the outcome of the highest bids in free markets, rather than calculate the most efficient allocations it could find by itself’ (archive.ph/E29hR).

Sandbu says that this doesn’t prove that ‘AI will bring about socialism’. It doesn’t. Only humans can do that. But it would be a really superintelligent thing for a rogue AI machine to do rather than kill off all humans.



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Halo Halo

THE UK has, amongst other anti-hurt-feelings legislation, the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006. In a ten year period there were ten individuals who were arrested for publicly saying words out loud in public that were considered to be 'hurtful'. Note that in all cases once arrested no further action was taken. Some of these arrests were for the 'offence' of preaching from the Bible or rather some bits that criticised particular lifestyles. The UK does not have a blasphemy law but ninety plus countries in the world do.

Two Californian Assembly Bills just enacted mandate training, for companies with five employees or more, on recognising, reporting and confronting workplace speech that 'vilifies, humiliates, or incites hatred' against people based on protected characteristics and one of which 'requires paid local officials, to receive "anti-hate speech" training as part of their existing harassment training, and directs the state to develop an online course "on responding to hate" for state officials'. These have churches

in a tizzy because the fear is that the legislation will be used to prevent them from proselytising (tinyurl.com/25mcymb5).

In no way are we encouraging the propagation of religious hooey. The prohibition, or attempted prohibition, of speech can lead to unintended consequences. The encouragement of 'protected characteristics' whereby those placing themselves in such categories see themselves as victims or special because they're in an exclusive club is not the benefit that some might think. Division merely profits the minority class.

In September a visit to the Eiffel Tower by Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha Hindu monks (BAPS) resulted in individuals born with XX chromosomes becoming *persona non grata*. Females were not allowed to be seen, heard or make their presence felt in any way lest it upset the delicate sensibilities of the Hindu monks. BAPS say that that decision lay with the Tower bosses and was nothing to do

with them. But where did the bosses get the idea that monks would be defiled by the sight of, or interaction with, women? (tinyurl.com/yvy8xekd).

Just as bizarre, an American council meeting opened with a prayer to Satan. Some were not amused. Why is such poppycock occurring anyway, whichever sky muppet is being invoked? (tinyurl.com/2wzehp4d)

It is not often that this column feels sympathy for Church of England wage slaves, the ones with the back to front collar, but it was elicited recently when two members of the cloth were harassed and abused online forcing them to block and lock their social media accounts. Described as 'satan spawn' and 'evil', their monstrous 'crime' must have been unspeakably vile (tinyurl.com/mr49bvpr).

Actually it was to post that you don't need to spend one hundred and twelve quid on an advent calendar when you can get a nicer one for six. This apparently triggered the distributor's supporters to a state of hysterical frenzy and a barrage of abuse.

One cannot help but think that even if clergymen were a group with 'protected characteristics' this particular ad hominem would still have occurred.

DC

Tiny tips

HERE IS a number that should stop us cold: 64 percent. That is the share of Black families in America who, right now, lack the income and resources needed to meet the true cost of economic security. Not poverty or survival, but genuine stability. On the heels of the 63rd anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, that number tells us how far we have to go... 49 percent of all Americans — nearly half the country — lacks the resources they need to be economically secure. Economic insecurity cuts across racial lines, affecting families of every background and in every part of the country (**The Hill**, tinyurl.com/mka86edr).

'Commodities must be sold, profits must be made, capital must accumulate. Short-term corporate gains are more important than long-term social losses. Capitalism, in short, is incompatible with the maintenance of the conditions that have made human civilisation possible for more than ten thousand years' (**Yorkshire Bylines**, tinyurl.com/yexf48ju).

The future of Babylon 5 shows time and time again that life may be different in the far future, but humanity's problems remain much the same. There's a long history of labor strikes and riots throughout the world, making the dock workers in 'By Any Means Necessary' another footnote in the ongoing battle between those who control the means of production and those who do the actual production (**Giant Freakin Robot**, tinyurl.com/33v2chtn).

The leader of the Norwegian Union of Trade Unions, Helene Harsvik Skeibrok, expresses her condolences to the royal family and the entire Norwegian people. 'It is very sad to hear that King Harald has passed away. Our thoughts go out to Queen Sonja, the rest of the royal family and everyone who mourns the loss of a king who has meant a lot to very many, says Skeibrok' (**Fagforbundet**, tinyurl.com/yp7fjaw7).

'Marxist Meghan's' list of demands for her kids' school exposed (**YouTube**, tinyurl.com/33v2chtn).

[com/524bhrva](https://tinyurl.com/524bhrva)).

In 2026, the 'rainbow nation' will face the longest wave of organized xenophobic violence since the end of apartheid in 1994 (**rosalux**, tinyurl.com/4re2kk6y).

Mason quotes the last leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, with an obituary of his state on the last day of its existence in 1991: Sixteen per cent of the national income went on armaments; another four on the KGB ... the country was ruined, the people were kept half starved ... And this was called the class approach. If that is socialism it can go to hell (**The Spectator**, tinyurl.com/yru44yrm).

'I've been sounding the alarm about how Tyson treats their workers for years', said Nana Ouro-Agoro, founder of Akwaaba, a nonprofit organization that provides support to the Quad Cities' immigrant population. Originally from Togo, Ouro-Agoro came to the Quad Cities after winning the immigration lottery in 2008. She learned that many of her neighbors worked at Tyson, where they were frequently injured on the job and afraid to speak out. Workers told her they were being treated 'worse than the cattle' (**Labornotes**, tinyurl.com/c5hjzff4).

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

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

LONDON

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

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Bolton. Contact: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589.

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

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

Yorkshire Regional branch.

For activity details contact: Fredi Edwards tel 07746 230953 or alternatively email fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk

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

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

Kent and Sussex regional branch.

Meets 3rd Tuesday of month
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.

Meets 3rd Sat. 2pm on Zoom. For invite email: spgb.southwest@worldsocialism.org
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Scotland Regional branch.

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

WALES

South Wales branch

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POSTCODE:

News from Canada

CLIMATE CHANGE in Canada is irreversible! So says a report issued by Environment and Climate Change Canada on 3 September and authored by two dozen government and climate scientists. The average temperatures are expected to rise by 3.5C by the end of the century. It says that even if the world reaches net-zero emissions by 2075, the effects on Canada will still be very bad. These include a 50 percent increase in the area burned by wildfires and glaciers losing 75 percent of their mass. Ryan Ness, director of ECCC, made a comment breathtaking in its brilliance, 'The most surprising thing is the contrast between what the report says we can expect for our future climate and the level of action the federal government and other governments are taking.' Nevertheless Mr. Ness knows how we can adapt to these awful changes, like retrofitting homes with more fireproof material and to build flood walls around communities. Once again capitalism creates problems it can't solve.

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Parti Québécois leader Paul St-Pierre Plamondon caused an uproar on 4 September while campaigning for support in the provincial election in October. Plamondon claimed that Premier Legault's ruling Coalition Avenir Québec had lost control of its immigration system. Plamondon said a PQ government would reduce the number of temporary immigrants in Quebec per year from more than 500,000 to between 200,000 and 250,000. He promised to reduce this number to 35,000 a year, claiming Quebec isn't capable of absorbing too many immigrants. Suffice to say all other parties went ballistic over his comments but the PQ won the election. This is allegedly one of capitalism's most rotten stinking aspects: 'Too many Jews, Pakistanis, Moslems, etc have been allowed in, soon they'll take over our jobs and then they'll be telling us what to do'. Capitalism is a divisive system, splitting the working class, who in contrast should stand united against the system that attempts to divide them.

* * * * *

There is a new organization, the Toronto Tenant Union, which is expanding across the city fighting rising rents, evictions and bad housing conditions. Toronto is one of the most expensive cities, rent wise, anywhere. An average one-bedroom apartment requires an income of \$90,000 a year. Research by the



Credit: Adobe Stock

Canadian Alliance to end Homelessness shows the loss of affordable housing has created higher rates of homelessness. According to Leilani Farha, former U.N. expert on housing, 'What tenants often don't know is that their rent increases are predetermined, calculated into a firm's return on investment before it even buys a building. Our biggest banks who are also reaping in record profits, reward the behaviour by offering better loan terms when the building owners raise rents. I call this displacement financing; the more a landlord raises rents the cheaper their financing becomes'. As for help from politicians — good luck — 128 of Canada's 338 federal MPs are landlords, while renters make up nearly a third of Canada's households. While we may hope the new tenants' union has some success, nevertheless, dealing with the effects of capitalism is not the answer, its abolition is.

* * * * *

A Canadian company, Calian Group Ltd., has signed a deal to partner with Ukrainian defence company SkyFall to focus on drone defence training. The two companies will develop unmanned systems training and education for armed forces in Canada and various NATO members and allied countries. Mark Carney said Canada will work with Ukraine to produce millions of drones, after a meeting with President Zelensky. The SkyFall Academy is a training center for the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence, which specializes in unmanned systems training and has trained more than 30,000 military personnel over the last three years. Carney probably thinks this will help the Canadian economy, which if it does, just goes to show how disgusting it is that production for war is a major profit source of capitalism.

* * * * *

Despite all the terrible things Trump

has done, nevertheless he's good for a laugh. He has accused Canada of, 'Ripping America off'; it's hilarious on the news watching people take down Lake Ontario signs and put up Lake America ones. At the time of writing, Donny baby was considering calling New Mexico, New America. By the time you read this he will probably have done more stupid things. However, to any non-socialist who may read this we can say that, yes Trump has caused a lot of problems for people all over the world, but be that as it is, he is still a product of his time, which is a time when the capitalist system is spiralling downward, which he has worsened. In other words, capitalism is the disease, Trump its symptom.

* * * * *

On 24 September, at an interview with the New York Times, Mark Carney said that he had carefully examined the possibility of a U.S. military action against Canada. Carney was sending a message to Canadians, to Trump, and the world at large. Initially he had said he thought Canada and the U.S. were involved in a trade war, though obviously he had thought it could go beyond that. The Toronto Star ran an article the next day headlined, 'Carney will need the support of the workers'. As socialists we all know wars are economically based, and as everyone knows, an invasion of Canada isn't something one can put past Trump. As socialists we also know the working class have no stake in wars, but depressing as it is, so many Canadian workers have said they would fight tenaciously to defend Canada against the U.S. As Pete Seeger said, 'When will they ever learn?' (From the October monthly bulletin of the Socialist Party of Canada)

Has The Archers gone political?

Credit: Adobe Stock



ANYONE FOLLOWING the longest running soap opera on the airwaves, *The Archers*, will have heard something new in a recent episode – mention of the words ‘capitalist’ and ‘socialist’. The context was the millionaire farmer, Brian Aldridge, complaining to others in the village about the vets’ bills he was having to pay and how we shouldn’t ‘let a bunch of capitalists hijack our country’s vets’. To the jibe from one of his listeners that he was ‘hardly a socialist’, Brian replied that he was ‘certainly not’.

Can we unpick this? The first thing is that, over a long period of time, the words ‘capitalist’ and ‘socialist’ have been used to mean all sorts of different things to all sorts of people. Let’s start with ‘capitalist’. It was used in the 19th century by Karl Marx to refer to the small minority of people who owned and controlled what he called ‘the means of production’, that was the factories, the workshops, the offices, the land – in short all the productive resources of society. And by dint of the wealth they gained from this, they did not need to work for a wage or salary. Those who were employed in the places owned by the capitalists were dependent on the wage or salary they received from the capitalist owners and could not survive without selling their energies to them. The government’s role was to oversee this arrangement so that it worked as effectively as possible in the interest of the class of owners, the ‘capitalist class’, and to intervene if necessary to try to smooth out any problems that might arise.

Since Marx’s time, there have been cases where the government of a country has taken over the running of capitalism completely and its leaders have themselves effectively become the owners and controllers of the wealth

produced by its workers. Examples of this are Russia at the time of the Soviet Union and Cuba and Vietnam today. This ‘state capitalism’ is also the system under which modern China operates, though its government also allows a certain degree of private wealth ownership whereby a small minority of individuals are allowed to amass considerable wealth deriving from the profit that comes from employing workers.

But in all these cases, so whether a country’s system is overwhelmingly based on private ownership or run under partial or complete state control, it is still capitalism. That is because it still displays the characteristic features of that system – money, prices, profit, wages and salaries, buying and selling, and division into two classes.

So what we heard when Brian Aldridge complained on *The Archers* about a capitalist hijack was in no way a condemnation of capitalism but rather a representative of one group of capitalists – big farmers – complaining about another group – large shareholder conglomerates that look to buy out smaller capitalist businesses (‘independent’ veterinary firms in this case) and form monopolies which, according to circumstances, may give them the power to increase the prices for their goods and services. Ironically, perhaps, this comment put in Brian’s mouth by *The Archers* scriptwriters was confirmation of part of Marx’s analysis of capitalism, ie the concentration of capital into fewer and fewer hands – something that remains a prevailing tendency despite the massive increases in production and transformations in technology that have taken place over the last two centuries.

What about the ‘socialist’ part of

The Archers venture into politics? Brian was clearly appalled by the suggestion that complaining about big capitalists swallowing up smaller ones made him a socialist. And indeed it didn’t. But behind the suggestion that he might be a socialist lurked a clearly different notion of socialism from anything that the *Socialist Standard* would put forward. We are talking about the idea that anything that isn’t the entirely ruthless way of operating of the big capitalist combines has something benign about it and may therefore be worthy of being called something different, such as socialism. And behind Brian’s own rejection of being a socialist is also probably the idea of socialism as government control of the economy of some kind or other rather than private capitalists being able to operate freely. This represents another common view of what socialism is – a sort of half-way house between private and state ownership.

As for the Socialist Party, while recognising that the word ‘socialist’ is given many different meanings by many different people, we would not accept that such notions as outlined above should be given that name, just as we would reject the idea that the authoritarian state capitalist regimes of the past that called themselves socialist such as the Soviet Union and Albania, or present-day ones such as China, Cuba and Vietnam, bear any relation to the original idea of socialism – the one widely accepted in the second half of the 19th and early 20th century that we would consider still entirely valid today. We are talking here about a moneyless, wageless society of common ownership, cooperative endeavour and free access to all goods and services based on the practice of from each according to ability to each according to need.

A far cry this of course from anything likely to be discussed in *The Archers*. But, on the other hand, we should not perhaps decry such a programme its making mention of issues that might be called political. After all, such reference may just have the effect of stimulating among some of its listeners thinking and discussion about the reality of what we call the profit system, a clearer understanding of the meaning of capitalism and a less wrong-headed view than that held by most people of what socialism really entails.

HKM

France: what was it all about?

IT'S A little too early to make any definitive appreciations of the recent demonstrations and riots which spread across metropolitan France in October. Doubtless, readers of the *Socialist Standard* will have seen the images of massive gangs of young people looting and setting fire to shops and attacking police dressed in riot gear. As is only to be expected, it's the most violent scenes which have found their way onto the mainstream news; the fire which destroyed the Town Hall of Limoges being a case in point. On the other hand, the media also showed images of the enormous and well-ordered demonstrations by students who were more often than not accompanied by teachers and parents. There were demonstrations in small towns right across France which recalled in many ways the monster *manifestations* in defence of retirement pensions of a few years ago.

Mysterious wreckers

Demonstrations are, of course, part and parcel of everyday life in France, there being something of a deeply rooted culture of defiance common to the left and right. What was notable in this case was the massive presence of hooded and masked *casseurs* – vandals – uniformly dressed in black who were clearly operating in organised and one suspects disciplined mobs. These *agents provocateurs* incited the more disorganised groups of casual looters who are now found in all mass disorders breaking out across the globe.

Strangely enough these violent groups, sometimes known as the *black bloc*, are rarely picked up by the police and arrested. Nobody knows who they are. They seem to be used to keep ordinary citizens at a cautious distance from their rights to free expression. Amazingly those conventional politicians who managed to find their way across the Parisian battlefield into the safe havens of the TV studios seem to be convinced that their membership consists of highly organised members of the 'ultra-gauche'. (Earlier references to the *black bloc* seem to have been edited out of the official narrative). The designated culprit it would seem is what they call the 'antifa' (anti-fascist); heretofore a fantastical organisation which has miraculously put down solid roots in the USA. There they have – according to the official narrative – violently interrupted the work of Trump's anti-immigrant agency and rendered the (strictly anti-constitutional) operations of the ICE goons problematic. One may ask, aren't we supposed to be anti-fascist in a democracy?



Credit: Adobe Stock

Political ineptitude

For the point, of course, is that we are talking about a movement initiated and organised by *kids*; high-school students to be precise. Consequently, the maintenance of public order and the protection of protestors should run together. However, parents would do well to realize that the government at times seems to be applying the selfsame tactics cynically deployed against the *gilets jaunes* of a few years ago. This was a movement which was quite violently *repressed* in every sense of the term.

In the case of the students, however, a certain circumspection was in evidence in the days preceding the events of Saturday 17 October, even though some youngsters were roughed up, injured and arrested. It's quite possible that something changed in the clumsy official response on that day. TV coverage insisted heavily upon the destruction of shops and public buildings, to the exclusion of the peaceful marches undertaken by school students and sympathisers. Up to a point, the authorities seem to have attempted to calm down the situation, although if anything Macron's typically leaden televised address to the nation on the Sunday made clear his crass insensitivity to the demands of the students – mentioned in passing – and to his incredible political ineptitude.

For the point is that once the tear-gas has wafted away, it will become evident that the students had drawn up an extremely intelligent and reasonable list of demands, demands which would give some substance to the egalitarianism established by the republican constitution and proclaimed above the façade of every single *lycée* in France.

Neglected issues

To give effect to these aspirations, the students were asking for the urgent building of schools and for the renovation

of ill-adapted and run-down premises. The recent and stifling heatwaves which hit France over the summer saw school pupils attempting to tackle the *baccalaureate* exams in buildings lacking window blinds and adequate ventilation, as teachers and administrators ran around with water bottles to quench the thirst of distressed youngsters. In the winter many classrooms are freezing, ceilings are leaky and sanitary facilities are filthy. Many schools lack facilities to deal with students experiencing psychological problems often resulting from learning disabilities.

Other demands include one for a massive recruitment drive to deal with the shortage of trained teachers. The typically French drama of classes without teachers at the beginning of the school term is high on the list of preoccupations. But teacher recruitment is difficult given stagnant wages and disaffection. Note that the hapless Minister of Education hurriedly pulled hundreds of trained teachers out of a standby status when the demonstrations started to tilt public opinion to the side of the youngsters.

Other demands made by the students were nothing if not legitimate. Better student grants, subsidies to help with student accommodation, more places to be made available in the (increasingly run-down) universities, more student representation in schools and at long last, measures to reform the ludicrous and exhaustingly overloaded school curriculum. More time to eat in the midday break and so on and so on. In short, these are measures which aim at the re-establishment of an equilibrium centred on student well-being; welfare measures and so on. In short, the kind of bread-and-butter issues neglected during the long and uncaring duration of Macron's atrocious term in office.

MALCOLM MANSFIELD, PARIS

Spain: The “Maricarmen” Effect



Credit: Reuters

ON 7 October this year, an elderly woman, María del Carmen Abascal Martín (‘Maricarmen’), died in Madrid’s Gregorio Marañón Hospital. She was 87 when she died and, for a short while, unintentionally became the centre of a political firestorm that has engulfed Spain. Not just Spain but far beyond.

Indeed, her case has attracted global attention. She became a symbol of growing anger over Spain’s housing crisis. The problem isn’t just the rising cost of buying a home (last year, house prices rose at three times the rate of wages) but also the rising cost of renting.

These two aspects are interconnected. Currently, 73 per cent of Spaniards own their homes (down from 80.6 percent in 2007). Yet, paradoxically, while Spain has among the highest levels of homeownership in Europe, it is also among the worst affected by the housing crisis.

When a growing number of people can’t buy, demand for rental properties rises, and so do the rents tenants pay. Unsurprisingly, more than half of 18–34-year-olds in Spain now live with their parents or depend on them for living costs.

Maricarmen’s case was somewhat atypical. She had lived in the same flat in Madrid’s Retiro district for 70 years, a relatively affluent part of the city. The original tenancy agreement (a ‘*renta antigua*’ or rent-controlled lease) was signed by her father in 1956. After a succession of inheritances, the building in which her flat was located was eventually purchased in 2018 by a real estate

investment firm called Urbagestión.

The firm then sought to raise her monthly rent from around €500 to a mind-boggling €2,650 for what is a modestly sized apartment. The figure was later adjusted to €1,650, but even that exceeded Maricarmen’s pension income of about €1,350. After she contacted the Tenants Union, the landlord made four eviction attempts beginning in the autumn of 2025. The first attempt was suspended after a large neighbourhood mobilisation. Two more attempts occurred in the summer of 2026 but also failed due to mounting public pressure, with even the United Nations calling on the evictions to be halted (*El País*, 8 October).

The fourth and final attempt to evict her on September 23 proved successful, despite hundreds of people spending the night outside her apartment to offer resistance in the face of a significant police presence. Maricarmen was carried out on a stretcher and taken to the hospital, where she later died.

The protests that subsequently erupted throughout Spain have been enormous. Waves of demonstrations have swept many cities, and tent encampments have sprung up in places like Madrid’s iconic Puerta del Sol square.

The despicable callousness shown towards this single frail old woman seems to epitomise so much of what is wrong about present-day society and its twisted priorities.

As one might expect, politicians on both the Left and the Right have cynically jumped into the fray to make

political capital out of it. The Sánchez government, no doubt trying to leverage these developments to stem the decline in its popularity, particularly since the Ceuta crisis, hurriedly sought to introduce two bills to tackle the housing crisis. The opposition PP and the far-right Vox party voted against these measures and, with the help of the business-friendly Catalan nationalist Junts party, succeeded in having them quashed.

A clue as to the opposition’s motives for doing so is provided on the France 24 website (2 October):

‘Friday’s defeat increases pressure on Sanchez’s minority government and could intensify opposition calls for an early election. The leader of the far-right Vox party, Santiago Abascal, said earlier Friday that “the sooner elections are held, the better”’.

If the intention was to force an election, the Right succeeded, and Sanchez subsequently decided to hold a snap election on 29 November. At this point, and despite the Right being ahead in the polls, it is difficult to say whether its political manoeuvres might not backfire, given the level of public outrage the housing crisis has generated.

Structural problem

But, in a sense, what politicians do or say matters little. The roots of the problem run much deeper than any legislative measures can reach or effectively address. The housing crisis is a structural, or systemic, problem.

According to *Al Jazeera* (7 Oct):

‘Spain has a deficit of about 750,000 homes, which is set to grow to more than a million by 2028, according to the Bank of Spain. The average rental price of 1,176 euros (\$1,315) is equivalent to about 98.7 percent of a young person’s average monthly salary in Spain, Youth Council of Spain figures show’.

The percentage of people spending more than 40 percent of their disposable income on housing costs is significantly higher in Spain (28.1 percent) than the European Union average of 19.2 percent. As Ashifa Kassam notes:

‘It was, as newspaper *El País* said in an editorial, a glimpse of a housing market that had become completely unmoored from the average income in Spain, as rents rose 80% in a decade, while the cost of homes had climbed by 63%. “The law was upheld, and the market worked. But it is the law of the jungle in a broken market, and it is a failure”’ (*Guardian*, 27 September).

However, when we talk about a ‘deficit of 750,000 homes’, we should remember we are looking at this issue from a market-based, commercial perspective. In reality, there is no deficit; in fact, the opposite is true. In a recent press release dated 30 June 2023, the National Statistics Institute (INE) revealed that ‘according to the consumption of electricity in a full year, 3,837,328 dwellings were classified as empty and 2,514,511 as occasional use’.

This data comes from the 2021 Population and Housing Census. Needless to say, there are many other vacant non-residential properties, such as offices, shops, and even warehouses, that could be converted into habitable dwellings but are not included in the statistics. So we’re talking about a market-driven shortage, not an actual shortage. There are a number of factors that might account for this.

One is geography. Drive through Spain, and you will be struck by the enormous contrast between the bustling cities along the coast (Madrid being a notable inland exception) and the near-empty interior. Population densities in some places are extremely low — as low as parts of the Sahara, in fact.

Since Franco, increasing urbanisation and industrialisation have exacerbated this contrast. Over 3,000 villages in inland Spain stand abandoned. Small farmers struggled to make a living, and changing weather patterns worsened their plight. It’s no surprise that more and more people left the countryside because of poverty and better job prospects in cities.

Another factor is tourism. Spain is the second-largest tourist destination in the world, behind France, and the growing tourism industry has significantly affected

the local housing supply. Many properties have been converted into short-term rentals and Airbnbs. As elsewhere in Europe, this has given rise to protests against ‘overtourism’, particularly since 2017.

Yet, another factor is the continuing fallout from the 2008 crisis. Before that, Spain experienced a frenzied construction boom fuelled by easy credit. When the bubble burst, many developers went bust, leaving a trail of empty or half-completed projects, particularly along the Mediterranean coastline. Residential building is far more modest these days, partly because planning permission tightened up after the 2008 crash but also because the developers are more cautious. Shortages exist, particularly in areas experiencing an influx of newcomers. Despite Spain’s declining birth rate, the population continues to grow because of migration, with most immigrants heading to the big cities.

Some suggest that, to overcome this housing shortfall, more so-called public housing should be built. In Spain, only 1.2 percent of the housing stock is ‘publicly owned’, according to the OECD, far below levels in countries such as Britain, France and the Netherlands. Since the Franco era, Spanish housing policy has emphasised home ownership over public housing. The reluctance to provide more of the latter has been compounded by Spain’s highly decentralised political system, with responsibility divided among the central government, autonomous communities, and municipalities.

Corporate landlords

Regarding privately rented properties, Spain’s Ministry of Consumer Affairs published a report in April 2026 showing that landlords with multiple properties, legal entities, and public entities together held about 61 percent of the habitual rental market, while landlords with just one rental property accounted for around 39 percent.

In Maricarmen’s case, the former type of landlord was involved. The share of rental properties owned by corporate landlords such as private equity funds is increasing, but still quite low. Most private landlords are individuals who own one or more properties.

Much has been said about the role of ‘vulture funds’ in the housing crisis, but in reality their role has been mainly limited to hotspots like Madrid and Barcelona. Critics argue that such funds have bought properties cheaply and pursued evictions more aggressively than smaller landlords. Supporters counter that without corporate investment, tackling the alleged housing

shortage would be harder. They say investors will be deterred from building projects if they have to contend with too much bureaucratic red tape and overly restrictive regulations.

Indeed, this was one pretext for why various right-wing parties decided to vote down the two housing bills the Sanchez government put forward. The bills aimed to ensure rental contracts automatically renew when they expire as well as restrict the eviction of vulnerable tenants.

The Junts party, for instance, argued that it was unreasonable to lump small landlords who depend on rental income together with large real-estate companies. They suggested this could have ‘negative and irreversible’ effects. Some properties could be withdrawn from the rental market or converted to holiday rentals, to the detriment of tenants.

The bills also targeted corporate investors seeking higher returns. As Kassam notes:

‘The head of one of the country’s biggest labour unions called for investment funds to be “kicked out” of the housing market. “Homes are for living in, not for large corporations to do business,” said Unai Sordo of the Workers’ Commissions (CCOO) as he called for a tax system that would make “the business of hoarding homes unprofitable”’. Who could possibly object to the idea that ‘Homes are for living in, not for large corporations to do business’? The problem, however, is that we live in a capitalist society, with all the moral hazards and dilemmas it creates.

Ultimately, it’s nearly impossible to isolate one part of the system from another. Everything is connected. Directly or indirectly, the repercussions of a capitalist cost-benefit calculus will filter through to affect our lives and the homes we live in.

It’s a bit like water finding its own level. Like the mould that returns every winter, we cannot insulate ourselves from the consequences of living in a society where most things, including our homes, are commodified. We may think of our home as our castle, but even castles can be repossessed by the bank if push comes to shove.

As Friedrich Engels put it in 1873:

‘The housing shortage from which the workers and part of the petty bourgeoisie suffer in our modern big cities is one of the numerous smaller, secondary evils which result from the present-day capitalist mode of production’ (*The Housing Question*).

Such an observation remains as relevant today as it was back then, 150-plus years ago.

ROBIN COX

Hoping against hope



Credit: Adobe Stock

'Hope is a bad thing,' said Henry Miller, 'It means that you entertain illusions.'

THAT HOPE is illusory is an eternal concept. In the ancient Greek myth of Pandora, her box was filled with all the evils that beset humanity and right at the very bottom was, hope.

Fast forward a few thousand years to a Labour Party conference and there is the leader, and Prime Minister, having rummaged around in Pandora's Box, standing before the assembled delegates brandishing Hope for their inspiration. Andy Burnham declared that by dint of his honesty, hope will emerge to unite the British people behind him and his schemes to rejuvenate the nation. 'My plan for Britain is our chance to believe again.' 'Britain can hope again' was his headline for the brief summary of his

proposals published to rouse support. 'My plan for Britain starts today. I'm asking you to stand with me.' The plan does indeed have attractive features, especially for the multitudes struggling to cope with ever increasing bills and decreasing real incomes.

The very next day after Burnham's address to his party, and hence the nation, a 6am news broadcast carried a headline item about energy price rises coming January 2027 in the teens of percent, with the prospect of more later next year. This announcement of not such a happy new year in prospect followed hard on the heels of Burnham's first economic pronouncement in his summary. 'We're going to start with the essentials in life. Housing, water and energy will be brought back under more public control so we can make them affordable again.'

Quite apposite it might appear. Yet this

statement not so much begs as pleads a number of questions. How will the public, the many millions, actually exert their control? There is no direct way they can decisively influence what will inevitably be a state body set up as a substitute for the boards of directors. Even if this state body could be more beneficent, is it going to be in place by January of next year, just a couple of months away? Also, is it going to have access to sources of energy free of the international travails presently forcing up prices?

No energy will be available unless it is profitable. The whole worldwide economic system is presently capitalist, meaning production is driven by profit and will remain so even if the state becomes the *de facto* capitalist.

Then there's the question of compensation. It may be that those on, or to, the left of the Labour Party

will resurrect their venerable slogan, 'nationalisation without compensation'. Sounds good, even plausible, until it gets into the courtroom. Not only does the state serve the interests of capitalism, so does the legal system. It would undoubtedly be found illegal to simply take companies away from present owners. Even if some way of doing this was found there would, most likely, be years of litigious wrangling resulting in huge legal costs consumers would ultimately pay.

The same principle applies to Burnham's other two essentials, housing and water.

No matter the deficiencies identified in the housing market, it is an error to suppose those deficiencies will drive house building. Houses are not built primarily to provide people with somewhere to live; that is their purpose, their use value. However, the spur to building is the exchange value of the house, essentially the price it can be sold for and thus realise a profit.

Profit is the driver of house building not the need for homes, which is why it's known as a housing market. This is why there has been a tendency for house construction firms to build 4 and 5 bedroom detached 'executive' houses.

A four-bedroom house does not cost twice as much to build as a two-bed, making the smaller house relatively more expensive to build and, therefore, buy. Government can intervene and require builders to erect smaller houses, but they will not be sold at cost. They will still have to yield a significant profit. If land is identified as suitable for building, construction companies will buy it then not build on it unless and until any subsequent housing is deemed profitable. It doesn't matter if there is a huge need for housing in the area.

Government, national or local, could initiate the building of council/social housing for rent. While this would obviate the need for buying, with its requirements for large deposits and mortgages, rents would have to repay the initial financing, indirectly paying interest on money borrowed for the purpose as well as the original capital. And rent is not a fixed term like a mortgage, but must be paid over the lifetime of the tenant or tenants. Rents may or may not be lower than mortgage repayments. It could be that those identified as having special or exceptional needs will be exempted from, or pay reduced, rents. This would not remove the value of those rents from the financial equation, but might have to be spread over actual rent payers, council tax, or both. Such provision would be very limited, otherwise the cost would become unsustainable.

There is absolutely no hope of freely meeting everyone's housing need while capitalism's financial market and the construction industry continue to be driven, as they must be, by the overriding imperative to realise profit.

The same applies to Burnham's third essential, water. Rain may fall for free, but by the time it flows from a tap it has been collected, stored and treated in various ways. Then, when it has been used it has to be drained away and treated again. Each one of these processes adds a cost, as do the expense of maintaining and replacing supply and drainage systems. Why would companies bother to do all this in the first place unless there was a prospect of profit?

Railways provide an exemplar of what happens when sufficient profits are not accrued. The companies surrender their franchises for the government to take back responsibility for loss-making. Then the state must find ways of providing the services. If that means those services continue loss-making then they will have to be subsidised. As governments correctly claim, they don't automatically have money, they have to raise it through taxation or borrow it on financial markets. Either way it's a drain on the national economy.

Then, along with all other government expenditure, if that drain becomes too large financial markets raise their borrowing rates which adversely affects all sectors of the economy, with rising inflation and unemployment; the threat of

recession, a way capitalism can discipline government.

Nationalisation or public/private partnerships are often cited as being socialistic (that is, a little bit socialist). In this way they are sold to the electorate as hope-filled alternatives to capitalism. The reality is they are not, and cannot, be anything of the sort, being as subject to capitalism's strictures as any wholly private enterprise.

The Prime Minister can preach the gospel of hope and perhaps even convince himself. After all he could not stand up at the Labour Party conference and declare they would build a totally new, worldwide society no longer driven by the profit motive, but centred on freely satisfying everyone's needs.

He correctly identified three essentials (though failed to mention all the others people require), but however well-intentioned he was being it is not in his power to do more than tinker a little in the hope of some limited short-term improvement. As well as putting crosses on ballot papers come an election voters can cross their fingers and hope. Both will be equally (in)effective in ameliorating the deprivations caused by capitalism.

Better to realise that it is time to move beyond capitalism and actively pursue the socialist alternative, rather than just hope for the best.

D. A.

Non-voluntary exchange

ONE ARGUMENT made by defenders of capitalism is that it involves voluntary exchange between people. If you buy an item of clothing, for instance, both you and the shop are free participants in the purchase. You can choose to buy a different item, to buy elsewhere or not to buy anything at all.

Employment is seen in the same way. You can choose not to work for a particular employer and they can choose not to employ you, or to sack you. You can look for a job somewhere else, perhaps with better pay or better working conditions.

All these, it is claimed, are voluntary decisions by people who are free to make up their own minds and do as they wish. It is not the kind of coercion which existed under slavery or serfdom.

Except that, certainly where employment is concerned, it is not like that at all. You will have to work for someone, since if you do not, you will starve or have

to get by, for a limited period only, on paltry unemployment benefits.

How much choice you have in finding another job depends on various factors, including your own abilities, the area where you live and the general state of the economy and the job market. Finding another job will be easier for some than for others, and it may mean lower pay and/or longer hours.

So the coercion involved in employment under capitalism is not identical to chattel slavery but it still means workers being in a subordinate position and having to do as their employer says. To say nothing of the exploitation that is part and parcel of wage labour.

Capitalism is emphatically not a matter of voluntary exchange, as workers have little choice but to work for a capitalist company in order to survive.

PB

Funeral horror

IN THE 1960s, comedy writers Galton and Simpson created a one off-play called *Cliquot et Fils*, about the antics of a shady undertaker faking the death of a General to hold a funeral to bolster his reputation. This was very much in the tradition of black comedy representations of undertakers measuring people up and drumming up trade by fair means and foul. Obviously, it is only right for us to laugh in the face of the inevitable; and the unenviable task of those who see us off on our final journeys.

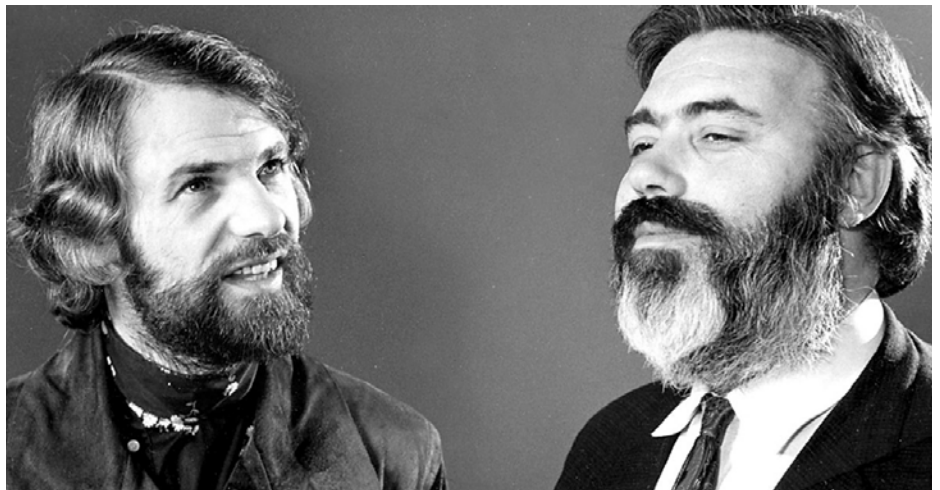
When played out in reality, the situation, though, is horrifying. As the relentless testimony of the victims of Robert Bush, the manager of the funeral home Legacy on Hessle Road in Hull, showed. Although he pleaded guilty to the 67 counts against him, the victim impact statements before sentencing took five days. These even included statements by police officers affected by what they saw in their investigations. The judge, Mr. Hilliard, said in his sentencing remarks: 'the awful truth is that anyone whose loved one went through Legacy at any time when it was operating can now have no confidence as to how they were treated or as to whose ashes they have' (Judiciary report PDF-tinyurl.com/mu95exj2).

Many of the details are too harrowing for us to publish.

Bush ran the firm for 12 years, persistently and covertly providing a substandard service. It was only uncovered when he went on holiday to Arizona, and a temporary worker he hired called the police after seeing the state of the premises.

Thirty bodies were just laid there. Bush had neglected to pay for proper refrigeration. He delayed sending bodies for cremation. As Hilliard remarked: 'Most of the bodies were uncovered and on racks on both sides of a cold storage area within the premises. There was a naked body lying on a stretcher on the floor. Two people were lying on the floor of the cold room' and 'They had not been washed or dressed.[...] There were clear instances of inadequate identification of the deceased. There was no evidence of any form of mortuary register to show who was even there'. Articles that had clearly been intended for inclusion in a loved one's coffin were scattered on the floor.

It is known that at least 46 families were given the wrong ashes. Some of the offences involved the remains of still-born babies: in the case of one baby, 'the



Credit: Galton and Simpson BBC

police found the remains in a paper bag on the floor of the premises'. It had been in Legacy for almost 2 years.

Alongside the simple callous disregard for his customers, there was evidence of more simple larceny: Bush kept money collected for charity at funeral services. He took funeral plan money, and held it in his own accounts: in other words, he was trading fraudulently for the whole of the twelve years.

As the judge noted:

'It is worthy of note that in the same period as he was stealing the charity money from collection plates, just over £3 million was received in Legacy bank accounts and the defendant's personal accounts between March 2017 and April 2024. In the same period, £369,000 was transferred from those accounts to the defendant's wife's accounts'.

Quite what money went where will be hard to trace, since Bush neglected to actually keep any proper accounts.

The overall sense is that Bush simply just did not care (in some ways, it is bewildering that he even got into such a profession in the first case). The judge rejected out of hand that his criminal practices stemmed from initial cash flow issues, but it is easy to imagine the first time that Bush found it more convenient to defer a cremation to a later date in order to save money he wanted to spend on something else.

This story is not about capitalism, there was no exploitation of workers, but it is a story of commercial society. Bush cared more about money than he cared about his clients (living and dead); indeed, he cared more about his motorcycling hobby than he cared about his day job. Clearly, to himself, he was not really a funeral director; it was an irritation, a nuisance

that he had to get out of the way with the minimum of effort. He seemingly did not have the imagination to consider the sheer and widespread anguish his slapdash and thieving ways would cause.

The judge gave him a prison sentence of 20 years. The bulk being from multiple counts of the common law crime of preventing a proper burial. He will probably serve ten of those years in prison. It is not clear what purpose placing him in jail for so long has: the possibility of punishment didn't deter him (or probably even occur to him). His harms cannot be undone, and he will never be able to do them again. At best, public punishment will prevent private vengeance being carried out on him by one of those he wronged at their most vulnerable time.

The likelihood is that state-backed regulation of the funeral industry will follow. Clearly, the case stands as rebuttal to the idea that the free market can provide the best regulation: we can each only ever get one funeral. It will either be done right or it won't, and misrepresentation and fraud will always be a possibility. That such regulation as already exists was not followed shows how difficult it is to stop bad behaviour when it is sufficiently remunerative.

Watching daytime telly these days gives the idea of how big the funeral industry is: continual adverts calling on people to give peace of mind to their relatives. We would hope that in a society that puts human relations first, only people who care about people as an end in themselves rather than a means to an end would organise funerals, and instead of minimal cost 'direct to cremation' funerals, we could be coming together to remember the whole person.

PIK SMEE

Capitalism is not freedom

THE IDEOLOGY of capitalism as freedom only ever made sense when it was contrasted with the brutal and oppressive laws found in feudalism or slavery. However, there was no reason why private ownership had to persist as an institution once forms of democracy were accepted and established throughout much of our social organization. But private ownership was confused with invention, entrepreneurship, and innovation. At no point were inventors with capital able to magically realise their dreams by their genius alone, but instead they required an army of workers ready to execute them. This confusion was the beginning of unnecessary complexity in our society, and the perpetuation of a society, as with earlier class societies, that did not prioritise human needs, in contrast with the avowed intentions of scientists.

Although capitalist apologists insist that the market system is best at meeting needs, they are merely persisting in this confusion out of a redundant identification with ideology. For every great idea there is almost never accompanying capital to realise it. Once an idea is married to capital investment, it suddenly takes on a commodified form, owing to its embodiment of not just use-value but also exchange-value, further and further distancing itself from meeting needs. Suddenly, this imagined, drafted, and then built object must be concerned with such features as how to entice consumers, how to package it, how to save money, potentially making it shoddier. Such concerns are not the priority of the innovator or inventor. We live today in a mad society with this increasing distance between needs and commodities which has propped up irrational, wasteful and disquieting complexity. Instead of the aforementioned concerns, production criteria should be asking more rational questions. Will it be safe? Will it be healthy? Will it last as long as possible? Can the parts be recycled? Can the parts be standardised with other producers elsewhere? Might it be both useful and beautiful?

The marriage of industrialism to the market economy led to the continued division of humanity into economic classes. It also condemned industrialism to serving the aims of whatever political regime might develop, such as the destructive goals of its military, which presumably led to scientists abandoning their fields' hallowed ethical and pro-social standards.

Not all of capitalism exists with a liberal democracy. Much of it has persisted and still persists under autocratic rule, under welfare states with oppressive governments, under religious rulers who continue to keep children believing in the invisible and impossible while at the same time churning out advanced machines such as cell phones and automobiles. Because this society is inherently unstable owing to its market nature, tending to sudden changes in commodity prices, availability, quality, and affordability, it leads political activists of all shades to exploit such instability to further their identified interests. Thus, society at the cusp of developing mass production began also to mass-produce ideologies that have divided humanity to the point at which, today, adherents of one are ready to murder the other either by hand or by vote.

Being wedded to an ideology entails an emotional identity with an idea, doubtlessly constructed out of varied biases and woven pretty tightly into a personality. A liberal, fascist, leftist, theocrat, military ruler, or a conservative is a human being overly identified with values and beliefs that become justified through a delusion of varied intensity. Ideologies are similar on the psychological level to commodities, possessions, inasmuch as they beckon for your consumption, and weave us into complex and appetitive webs from which our own minds and lives will be consumed. They also yearn for exchange. They make it difficult to understand the whole, to follow evidence, or to find the way out.

A human failure to reinforce values of reason, equality, and progress through the community standing together to put industrial civilisation at the behest of all humanity has led today to levels of confusion among workers that are

pitiful and depressing to encounter. Just as capitalism led to a vast complex infrastructure that was completely unnecessary for the progress of humanity — its banks, insurance companies, advertisers, state departments, and armies — all of which consume vast planetary resources, so the thoughts and emotions of humankind must also in this era be dominated by highly complex and completely unnecessary political ruminations about 'preventing the communists,' 'protecting the family,' 'standing behind God,' 'keeping out the immigrants,' or 'protecting/dominating pregnant women.' Ideology has become as significant in our psychology as commodity production. We all take our stances, we all stand for something, we are always angry, we never make things better.

In the United States the worthy goal of fighting racism or sexism on campus must violate free speech and prevent even moderate thinkers from speaking and teaching, with billions of dollars in grants distorting real science to support a social justice ideology. Capitalist ideology is by nature sneaky and divisive, locking our minds into a quasi-reality from which it is difficult to escape, and which always distorts. It has the power to split your family, your sense of belonging to your community, your very mind. Truth itself is under scrutiny by post-modernists. Society finds itself more and more impossible to understand. We live in virtual universes at the very time when we need to more and more defend the earth and all the creatures we share it with. In short, it's time to get real.

All of this is because of a failure to abolish capitalism in an earlier phase, which was clearly a realisation that entered a vast number of heads in the



Credit: Adobe Stock

Capitalism is not freedom *continued*



19th century, partly in response to the writings of Marx and other anti-capitalists, but also in response to a growing body of workers organising for a new world. Though philosophising about it, they were far too naive about ideology. The socialists of the 19th century did not sufficiently promote the essential features of a socialist society, nor did they rail adequately against the reformist ideas that were to lead to the Australian Socialist Party of 1899, the UK Labour Party of 1906, the French Guesdists of 1902, the Russian Bolsheviks, and so

many more pseudo-socialists. Except among a very few small organisations such as the SPGB and some anarchist-communist groups, revolutionary thinking turned reformist, yet still referred to itself as 'socialist', 'communist' and 'Marxist'. The rest, we may say, is history. Perhaps there was insufficient history back then to support the hypothesis that all reform would only perpetuate our servitude to power, bosses, money, and the state.

With our planet arguably dying, it is hoped that a new generation will finally put an end to reformist thinking, although

there are few solid signs of that at this time. What is required is the formation of groups in every town and city of the world standing for one thing: the ownership of the means of production in the hands of a democratic community, a refusal to reform capitalism, knowing from history that it cannot be reformed, an end to money and exchange, and a replacement of the commodity with objects and services with only use-value. This must be done in a manner that promotes freedom and community, overcoming the hierarchy and rule of despotic governments. We call also to all parties using such words as 'Worker', 'Socialist', 'Communist', and 'Marxist' to transform their parties only into organs for the actual abolition of money and the state, for the conversion of their platforms to those advocating the abolition of the wages system. Only its abolition is truly socialist or communist, and only its abolition will deliver humanity from a world in which the community is prioritised, to a world where needs come first. Any other goal makes a mockery of their name.

DR WHO

Cooking the Books

No reformism in one country

IN SEPTEMBER Jamie Driscoll, former Labour Mayor of North Tyne and now a member of the Green Party, published a report called *Hostage Nation: Britain's Escape Plan* (hostagenation.com). He contends that Britain is a hostage to foreign bondholders and speculators and proposes a plan to remedy this so that the government can run the economy in the interests of everyone.

Governments as such do not produce any wealth. To function they have to obtain this from the section of society that does. Capitalist governments do this by taxation and borrowing. As they control the issue of money they can also create money and spend it. However, if this is more than the economy requires, this depreciates the currency and so raises prices. It is really a hidden form of taxation, an indirect way of extracting money from those who have some since the depreciation of the currency reduces their wealth.

Driscoll, relying on the arguments of 'Modern Monetary Theory' (also known as 'Magic Money Theory'), has claimed that 'as a sovereign nation with a central bank, Britain can effectively borrow from itself' (tinyurl.com/2emewxja). In a section headed 'Let's dismantle the myth that the

state cannot afford to build things because it has "run out of money"', he argues:

'When a currency-issuing state invests in its own economy, that money moves in a circle. Every pound the state injects into productive infrastructure sets off a powerful chain reaction known as an economic multiplier. When the state funds a project, that money immediately pays the wages of engineers, project managers, and construction workers. Those workers don't stuff that cash under their mattresses. They spend it on the high street, paying for groceries, haircuts, and clothes, boosting local businesses. Those businesses, in turn, expand and hire more staff. The Treasury takes a cut at every stage. It collects income tax and national insurance from the workers, VAT on their purchases, and corporation tax from the businesses.'

'This investment,' he says, 'creates downstream savings across the state apparatus', giving the example of insulated homes meaning less state spending by the health service to deal with respiratory illnesses caused by damp housing. So, basically, the government gets its money back through taxation and reduced spending.

However, there is a time lag between what the government spends and when it saves money on other spending. In the meantime current spending has to continue. So, when a state does what Driscoll sets out, total government

spending increases. The classical way to deal with this is to borrow the extra money and repay when the benefits arrive. Driscoll argues that the government needn't borrow this from overseas lenders. 'The money,' he asserts, 'is already here. We do not need to look abroad for capital.' He is talking about people's savings and suggests that the money can be raised from directing this into non-tradable government bonds and from taxing the rich. Some could be raised in that way but hardly enough to avoid borrowing from foreign bond and currency speculators.

Driscoll has very little to say about the implications of his plan on Britain's position as a capitalist country that runs a trade deficit (more spent on buying imports than received from selling exports) that has to be balanced by payments from abroad, whether investments or loans. Reduced government borrowing from abroad would have to be balanced by a combination of increased foreign investment, reduced imports and more exports ... or, if this doesn't work, cutting government spending, ie, austerity.

Whatever the government implementing his plan tries to do about this it wouldn't be able to escape from the pressures of the world market as the capitalist economy is an integrated world system. No state can. None is that 'sovereign'. Reformism in one country is just as impossible as socialism in one country.

Socialist Standard November 2026

Up to date

Credit: ITV



WHILE EACH instalment of ITV's *Up* has the simple format of conversational interviews with people about themselves, the series as a whole has become one of the most significant ever broadcast. The first episode, *Seven Up!*, was made in 1964 and featured a group of seven year-olds talking about their views and aspirations. Its narrator says 'We brought these children together because we wanted a glimpse of England in the year 2000. The shop steward and the executive of the year 2000 are now seven years old'. In 1970, the children, now teenagers, were interviewed again, then every seven years the cameras returned for another update: *21 Up*, *28 Up*, *35 Up*... with the series now ending on *70 Up*.

An inspiration for *Seven Up!* was the Jesuit motto 'give me a child until he is seven and I will give you the man', the notion being that a child's future – as a shop steward or an executive – can be seen from an early age. The producers interpreted this as meaning that society's class structure is rigid enough for a person's life path to be set by the circumstances in which they grow up. As the programme was made as a one-off edition of the *World In Action* strand, the idea of an ongoing run to demonstrate the premise only came after the interest generated led to the follow-up, *7 Plus Seven*.

When finding children to interview, the first episode's producers wanted to represent a range of socio-economic backgrounds. So, they chose from private schools and comprehensives, suburbs and estates, with two who were living in

a children's home. Of the 14 followed in the series, Neil has had perhaps the least predictable journey over the decades, including periods of homelessness, then being a Liberal Democrat councillor and lay minister, moving around the country every few years before retiring from work and settling in France. When the series introduced Charles, John and Andrew, they were attending the same Kensington pre-preparatory school, and each went on to have prestigious careers (not without some struggles along the way). The others' later status in terms of job or wealth were also influenced by their levels of schooling. Whether they went to a private, comprehensive or a grammar school, or then on to university (Oxbridge or otherwise) depended very much on the income and situation of their parents, as did their other opportunities and expectations. Symon was staying in a children's home at the start of the series, and later moved back with his mother. Much of his employment was in warehouses, in contrast to the broader and better paid job options available to others with more formal education. At the age of 70 he has a contented life with his extended family. *Up*'s participants from both more and less wealthy backgrounds have largely found lifestyles they're satisfied with today, although some have been dogged by illnesses, including long-term depression. The four women taking part were all married with children during their twenties, with Jackie in particular objecting to how the interviews framed them, rather than the

men, through their relationships.

To its credit, the programme itself has acknowledged the tensions between some of the 14 and the main interviewer and producer, Michael Apted. According to a 2013 article by Rebecca Mead for *The New Yorker*, Apted 'can be unbearably patronising toward his subjects, particularly the working-class women, while he sets his more affluent participants up to look ludicrous' ([tinyurl.com/44jke9vf](https://www.tinyurl.com/44jke9vf)). Charles dropped out of the series after *21 Up* because he, and others, felt that they were being presented to fit into roles.

Even so, the premise behind *Up*'s initial episodes was generally confirmed, with what could be called the participants' 'standing' in society at the age of 70 tending to echo that of their surroundings in childhood. Their families' financial situation at that time would later affect the extent of any financial security they have in adulthood. Our place in society's economic framework constricts what options we have. As the series progressed, more emphasis was placed on the people themselves than on their class or economic context. At the time of *63 Up* Tim Adams wrote in an article for *The Guardian*, 'The primary question as its subjects have aged has become not what makes them successful, but what makes them happy' ([tinyurl.com/5fc4zwra](https://www.tinyurl.com/5fc4zwra)). So, as it developed, the series became more about how people live according to their opportunities, rather than what forms them. More of the participants likely wouldn't have wanted to continue taking part if the series was pitched as an academic study of how they are moulded by wider societal forces. Focusing instead on their changing lives gives *Up* a rare position among television programmes, which otherwise don't tend to bother with people's everyday experiences. The series doesn't present unmediated coverage, of course. The interviewer guides the conversations with his questions and the responses are edited and reframed into brief snapshots, in ways some participants haven't liked. This approach is standard when making TV documentaries, with their separation between the producers and their subjects. This distance doesn't apply to social media, which now gives us the means to directly broadcast whatever aspects of our lives we choose without being mediated by a production company with its own standpoint. However, the usual results of this on TikTok or YouTube are much less involving and affecting than *Up*, nor do they have its impressive six decade-long span.

MIKE FOSTER

Class Divisions



Underdogs: the Truth About Britain's White Working Class.
By Joel Budd.
Picador £10.99.

BY WORKING class here is meant those who fall into the census groups of lower supervisory and technical occupations, semi-routine and routine occupations and long-term unemployed (this covers 40 percent of adults, and includes jobs such as baristas, gardeners, bricklayers, chefs and shop assistants). People count as white if that is how they see themselves or how most people would see them. But ethnicity, it is said, is not a stable characteristic, and people born in Ireland or with recent Irish ancestors, can be described as Britons.

Budd investigates white workers by means of statistical studies and his own visits and interviews, which were overwhelmingly done in England and Wales. Three main kinds of area are distinguished. Heartlands, such as Rhymney in south Wales, have very high proportions of white workers who are mostly quite old. Wythenshawe is an enclave, a large council estate on the edge of Manchester and 'an example of deep poverty in a pleasant setting'. Thetford in Norfolk is a colony, settled by white working class people from elsewhere (mainly London). The three types are not mutually exclusive, and Edlington near Doncaster is a mixture of a heartland and a colony, mainly white but with people who have come from all over England and Ireland.

The book contains a number of interesting points. For instance, poorer white British children generally do very badly at school, while better-off kids do fine. Poorer children can have high aspirations in terms of education and career, but lack high expectations. Few people expect to move for a new job, and young people from poor places usually stick around, so Britain is now 'a nation of stayers-at-home'. Moving to a new city or town can be expensive and the rewards are not obvious.

Attitudes to immigration are determined not so much by class as by age, as 'young white working-class Britons ... are largely unbothered by immigration and ethnic diversity', seeing diversity as 'a fact of life'. Class (in the sense used here) does not indicate how a person will vote but whether they will vote at all, with poor

people less likely to vote. White Britons have largely ceased voting Labour, but this change applies less to black and Asian Britons.

One informative section deals with the Lithuanian community in Boston in Lincolnshire. Agricultural work in Fenland is badly paid, and much of it is now done by immigrants from Eastern Europe. A community organisation teaches English to migrants and Lithuanian to their British-born children. The children have an accent that is 'part Lincolnshire, part Multicultural London English'. More generally, language skills can vary by gender, with Polish women speaking decent English if they work in industries such as care and hospitality, while men often work on building sites with other Polish speakers and so their English is much less good.

An informative look at part of the British population, but without placing it within the general social structure of the UK.

PB

System Upgrade



What Comes Next? Why Our Society Needs a System Upgrade. Volume 1: The Illusion of Money. By Robert Everett Cox. 2026. 326 pp.

This book, the first in a 3-volume series, presents a detailed explanation and critique of the capitalist system. It delves into various different views on the origins and rise of capitalism and the impact that system has had, and continues to have, on people's lives. Its four chapters, each divided into various parts, are entitled 'Why Work?', 'The Wages System', 'Abundance Thwarted?' and 'For Richer or Poorer'.

It is difficult to do justice in a single review to the breadth and intricacy of the investigation the author conducts, characterised as it also is by multiple references to the contributions of other writers and researchers. It may be useful, however, to pick on certain aspects that this reviewer found especially striking for the way they illuminate certain widely discussed topics whose implications are often incompletely understood and rarely taken to their logical conclusion.

The first one of these, which spans the volume and is interrogated with admirable clarity, is the 'two-class' case advanced by socialists, ie that society is divided between

the tiny minority who own most of the resources and wealth in society (capitalists) and the vast majority who don't (workers). Among the objections often raised to this view is that, since not everyone falls neatly into either of these categories, it does not reflect the reality of things. The author's response to this is a frank and simple admission that such a picture of society is indeed 'a simplification, a generalisation', but that 'making generalisations is unavoidable if we want to see the wood for the trees as far as understanding society is concerned'. More precisely: 'A capitalist may be loosely defined as someone who possesses sufficient capital to comfortably live off the proceeds of investing that capital. This should not be confused with a self-employed worker; however hard-working, entrepreneurial and frugal such a worker may be. The latter does not possess sufficient capital to qualify as a capitalist and therefore still depends on working to obtain a living, like other members of the working class'.

Secondly, the much debated subject of 'financialisation' of the capitalist economy ('making money out of money'), the 'fictitious capital' associated with it and how that relates to capital invested in the traditional production and distribution of goods and services is examined in a way that sheds far more light on the phenomenon than this reviewer has previously found and is also linked in innovative fashion to Marx's ideas on money, credit and surplus value. Ultimately, the author tells us, we should not be surprised by the manifold forms that capitalism's drive for profit may take, since 'like some hydra-headed monster of Greek mythology, it grows a new head as new circumstances dictate'.

Next, there is ample discussion of what the author refers to as 'capitalism's structural waste'. Most people are aware that a good many of capitalism's technological advances, rather than being used productively to better the human lot and create the abundance modern technology is capable of, are directed instead into activities that make life more complex, more insecure or more perilous the world over. Here we are talking about, for example, increased bureaucracy, the sales and advertising industry, and preparation and waging of war, which absorb the time, effort and mental and physical energies of so many of the working population. This 'progress perverted' phenomenon is, of course, widely understood, but rather than just lament the waste associated with it, the writer is not afraid to refer to the whole world of 'commerce, finance and retailing' as 'socially useless industries',

and then to take it further by analysing and putting an actual figure on the ‘wasted labour’ all this represents (50 percent). His incontrovertible explanation for this is that ‘Under capitalism, generally speaking, technological innovations tend not to be taken up and developed if there is no prospect of making a profit by doing so’.

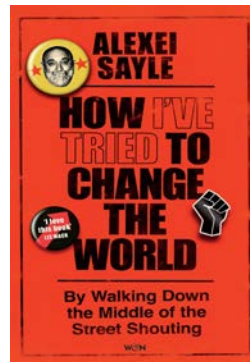
A final example, among many, of the issues this volume addresses in a novel and thought-provoking way is the futility of proposals or attempts to reform capitalism in the interest of workers. It dwells, in particular, on the advocacy by many of Universal Basic Income (UBI). In a section entitled ‘The UBI Panacea’, it explains in entirely credible fashion how automation and AI are unlikely to drastically reduce the number of jobs any more than previous major technological developments have and so are unlikely to cause what John Maynard Keynes wrongly foresaw as ‘a new disease ... namely technological unemployment’. It follows from this, the author goes on to argue, that UBI policies by governments will not be needed, since dire want among the mass of workers owing to unemployment will not come to pass. As for UBI as a solution that governments could adopt anyway to deal with the structural unemployment caused by capitalism or simply to try and equalise spending power among workers, he points to the impracticality and potentially disruptive nature of this on a plethora of different levels whatever the model proposed. A hypothetical example given is of a government conceiving and trying to bring in UBI as a measure that ‘provides everyone with the same lump sum, which they receive on top of their income, earned or unearned’.

Such samples of the issues addressed in this volume may give an idea of the breadth with which it covers a wide range of other areas, eg, the ‘human nature’ argument, the ‘fake’ socialism of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, the nature and causes of inflation, ‘the penetration of money into every aspect of our lives, the continued validity of Marx’s analysis of capitalism, the concept of ‘relative poverty’, the vast disparity of wealth ownership between workers and capitalists. It also offers a small taste, if only a taste, of the ‘What Comes Next?’ of its title, ie the alternative system of society the author sees as necessary to replace the one investigated here. This alternative is summed up as ‘a post-capitalist society when employment (and hence “unemployment”) would cease to exist and when money would no longer be required to access the goods and services we need’. How this characterisation is followed up and fleshed out in the further 2 volumes of What Comes Next (‘Beyond

the Price Tag’ and ‘A Sharing Society’) will be discussed in reviews of those in future editions of the *Socialist Standard*.

HKM

Marching backwards



How I've Tried To Change The World. By Alexei Sayle. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2026. £16.99

This is the third of Sayle’s entertaining autobiographical meanders and is subtitled ‘... By Walking Down The Middle of the Street Shouting’. Instead of a straight autobiographical approach to the more recent decades of his career, stand-up comedy’s greatest ever shouter has instead chosen to focus on his political activity and this is the thread everything else revolves around. To an extent it works, though it is also a catalogue of failure and frustration, as he largely admits.

His parents were stalwarts of the old Communist Party of Great Britain but the young Alexei moved on to the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist), a Maoist outfit he tired of over time and whose internal atmosphere and membership behaviours he has bemoaned, arguing they could learn a lot from some of the practices of Alcoholics Anonymous. Since then, he has been a supporter of most leftist causes from the late 60s, often prominently so. In recent times he has been especially animated by the atrocity in Gaza and appears to have fallen out with a number of friends over it, including others – like him – of Jewish heritage.

As he recognises, ultimately much of this political activity has been futile,

though he clearly had his hopes of something bigger and more successful rekindled by the rise of Jeremy Corbyn when he was Labour leader. This soon went the same way of course, though he seems to downplay the inherent contradictions in the Corbynite position (which was always focused on delivering rhetoric on behalf of the oppressed – while never really challenging the capitalist system of markets, profits and competing nation states that creates the oppressed in the first place). As a great supporter of the Palestinian cause, Sayle also underplays the tendency of Corbyn and his allies to focus on single-issues and rely on the belief that an enemy of an enemy must somehow be a friend, often in a way that has demonstrated a huge degree of political naiveté.

Sayle, however, does show some real lucidity at times which is memorable (as he always does in his stand-up and radio shows). Here he is writing about the Arab Spring when mass movements threatened to topple – and often did topple – a series of Middle East dictatorships:

‘There is no greater argument than the failure of the Arab Spring for leaders of protests needing to understand that they absolutely have to possess a political ideology. For them to have adopted socialism or Marxism or anarchism, this providing a way to bring structure to the act of rebelling. For them, in fact, to have a code. Otherwise, you risk your protest ending up like the Black Lives Matter rallies which went from a visceral outcry against state brutality to players occasionally kneeling before a football match for fuck knows what reason’ (p.147).

Elsewhere Sayle also says that he regards Marxism as the best way available of understanding the world around us ... even if it won’t necessarily make you happy! Cheers, Alexei.

DAP



Reformism fails again

SOCIALISTS HAVE always maintained that parties, such as the Labour Party, which seek power within capitalism to try to improve the lot of the workers, end up not by reforming capitalism, but by being changed by it into simply a party of capitalist administration. A statement made by Callaghan to the Labour Party Conference at the end of September well illustrates this.

The Labour Party always used to support the idea that the way to end a slump and unemployment was to increase government expenditure so as to offset the decline in private capitalist investment, along the lines advocated by Keynes. But now listen to what Callaghan says :

‘We used to think that you could just spend your way out of a recession and increase employment by cutting taxes and boosting government spending. I tell you, in all candour, that that option no longer exists and that in so far as it ever did exist, it only worked on each occasion since the war by injecting bigger doses of inflation into the economy, followed by higher levels of unemployment’

(*The Times*, 29 September).

What a confession of failure! What a condemnation of the policy which Labour has always advocated and claimed as its own!

The experience of being in power during a slump has forced Callaghan to recognize that, in practice, a Labour government has to pursue the same sort of policy as any openly capitalist government, to try to restore business confidence and profit prospects by reducing workers' living standards and cutting back on social reforms. In short, to accept the logic of capitalism. (...)

Once again the miserable failure of yet another Labour government has confirmed the Socialist case that capitalism can never be reformed so as to benefit workers and that therefore workers should direct their efforts rather to abolishing capitalism and replacing it by Socialism where the means of production would be owned in common and democratically controlled to satisfy people's needs.

(*Socialist Standard*, November 1976)

Action Replay

Wasn't me, GUV

WE CAN take no stance on the charges against Manchester City, allegedly involving sham contracts that may have enabled them to pay inflated transfer fees and wages, resulting in them becoming the dominant force in English (and maybe even European) football. The potential punishments could involve massive fines, relegation, having titles revoked, and the owners perhaps having to sell. City have appealed over the guilty findings, and no doubt the appeal will take months to sort out, so we cannot comment on what the club may or may not have done. Findings of dishonesty can be overturned, as happened at the top level of Turkish football in 2015, after allegations of match-fixing dating from 2011.

But we can say that the sporting world is in no way above cheating. This can apply to individual competitors who take drugs to improve their performance. At the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, for instance, a sneaky way was employed to get round anti-doping measures, but it was unmasked, and a number of athletes were banned. Cyclist Lance Armstrong won the Tour de France seven times, but had the titles removed after admitting to taking performance-enhancing drugs.

It can also involve cheating at club level. In 2006 Juventus had two Italian league titles taken away when they were found to have manipulated referees. Marseille lost their 1993 French league title after

being found guilty of match-fixing. They were relegated from the top flight, and did not win Ligue 1 again till 2010. At a less exalted level, Elgin City lost their 1993 Highland League title after having the date of one match changed so they could field banned players.

Sometimes the cheating comes from outside the sport, with gambling being an obvious source. In 1997 an Asian betting syndicate bribed stadium workers to cause the floodlights to fail at Premier League matches at times when the scoreline suited their profits. They got

away with it twice, but on a third attempt the police were tipped off. In 1994 ten Football League players (including Tony Kay and David Layne) were jailed after betting on the result of matches when they had agreed to influence the outcome. One of the most notorious examples occurred in 1919, when some players in baseball's Chicago White Sox took bribes to lose the World Series, at the behest of a betting syndicate.

So sport, like capitalist society in general, is often not exactly a level playing field.

PB



Credit: Adobe Stock

World Socialist Movement Online Meetings

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

November 2026 Events

World Socialist Movement online meetings

Friday 6 November 7.30pm

Donald Trump or Donald Duck?

Discussion on the result of the US mid-term elections

Friday 13 November 7.30pm

Nostalgia: better in the past?

Speaker: Mike Foster

Friday 20 November 7.30pm

Subject to be announced



**Friday 27 November
7.30pm**

How to deal with racists and the far right?

Speaker:
Howard Moss

Socialist Party Physical Meetings

LONDON

Sunday 29 November 3pm

Skinheads from Ska to the far right?

Speaker: Johnny Mercer

DJ set afterwards. Also on Zoom.

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.



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.

An unfair cop?

VARIOUS CASES of bad behaviour by individual police officers have been in the news recently, sometimes leading to sackings and even judicial penalties. Some people would say that you'll always have a few 'bad apples' but that the vast majority of men and women in the police are honest and upright and play things by the book. And that may well be true. But reading about those 'bad behaviour' cases, I couldn't help thinking of a police matter I was involved in personally not long ago.

I'd given a couple of friends a lift home from my place after a meal. It was around 10pm in the evening and, as I was driving back, I became aware of flashing lights behind me. I realised it was a police car and it wanted me to stop. When I pulled into the side, two policemen got out and came to my window. Had I been drinking, they asked? I probably should have said no, but instead I told them the truth, ie that I'd had a small glass of cider a couple of hours ago with a meal. 'Right', one of them said, 'we'll need to breathalyse you'.

My heart sank a bit, because I knew that the lung problem I have, though not a major problem for me in my daily life, would likely not allow me to blow properly into a breathalyser. I asked them why it was necessary and why they'd stopped me. They said I'd been 'driving erratically' and, when I thought back, I could see that a couple of my manoeuvres as I'd shifted from one lane to another might have led them to suspect that I wasn't properly in control. And I could see that my admission of drinking alcohol would have increased their suspicion, since it's probably common for people in my situation to understate the amount they've consumed.

Anyway I had a go at blowing into their device just in case I could manage it. But I couldn't and this made them even more suspicious. 'Try again', one of them said and they took another breathalyser out, but again my breath ran out too quickly.

I tried to explain to them that I had a breathing problem, but they told me a traffic officer was coming. And within a couple of minutes she was there. The first thing she (very rudely) said was 'You stink of it'. I knew that was nonsense, but I then probably made things worse by saying I'd be happy to take a blood test. 'We don't do that', she said, with



increasing hostility. 'We'll try another test'. Again it didn't work. 'Okay, you're obstructing us', she shouted, 'I'm arresting you'. So I was told to get out my car, lock it, and get into the police car.

The next scene took place at the Central Police Station, where I was 'processed'. The desk sergeant took my details and asked me when I'd last been there. I told him I hadn't and he looked surprised. I was then told to turn out my pockets, take my belt off and put everything in a box on the counter. The policewoman who'd arrested me then led me to a 'holding cell', a space just about big enough to fit one person, and she made to lock the door. I protested, saying I suffered from claustrophobia (which I do) and would have a panic attack if the door was locked, and also I needed to go to the toilet. 'Can't help you', she said, but my voice got louder and she left the door ajar. 'I still need a pee', I said. 'You'll have to wait' she snapped, but then beckoned a male police officer over and asked him to 'take the prisoner to the toilet'. He accompanied me, stood near me while I was peeing, and apologised for having to do it. He said it was just in case I drank alcohol while I was there and then used that to confuse the issue of whether I'd been over the limit when driving. After this, I was made to wait what seemed like an eternity in the cell before being led to a room by my traffic officer, who said she was going to give me another go with the breathalyser. I insisted it wouldn't work, but she said that, if I didn't finish, they'd use a partial reading. And that's what she did. She then ushered me to a bench in the holding hall, spoke to the desk sergeant and came over to me with the news that the test showed no alcohol, so I could go. It was 1.15 am by this time. I asked her for a lift back to my car, but she refused.

'There's no transport available', she said. So, I was left to walk the mile or so back to where I'd left the car there before driving home.

To say I was aggrieved is an understatement and the next day I set about writing to the area Chief Superintendent to complain about the way I'd been treated. His reply was uncompromising: 'We find nothing amiss with the way our officers carried out their duties.' Should I try and take it further? I decided it wasn't worth it. In fact, when I thought about it, I'd only been treated unfairly by one person, the 'traffic officer'. Everyone else had just been carrying out the roles assigned to them by the system and hadn't done it with any kind of excess zeal.

But all this made me long more than ever for a society different from the present one, a society where the norm in handling most of the problems the police are tasked to deal with today is help, support and cooperation rather than arrest and punishment. Of course, in a society of that kind (moneyless, wageless and leaderless with common ownership and free access to all goods and services), the one we call socialism, the worst of the anti-social acts committed today (eg, violence in particular) will hardly be present, since the causes of them in the shape of poverty, frustration and alienation will have disappeared. Of course, maybe some people will still commit socially undesirable acts such as driving under the influence of alcohol. But, if they do, they will surely not be treated with the negativity and suspicion I experienced that evening.

HOWARD MOSS