

socialist standard

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Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain - Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

Islamic State

Anything for the profit



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Oswald's
'Marxism'
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The Socialist Party is like no other political party in Britain. It is made up of people who have joined together because we want to get rid of the profit system and establish real socialism. Our aim is to persuade others to become socialist and act for themselves, organising democratically and without leaders, to bring about the kind of society that we are advocating in this journal. We are solely concerned with building a movement of socialists for socialism. We are not a reformist party with a programme of policies to patch up capitalism.

We use every possible opportunity

to make new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest elections when practical. Socialist literature is available in Arabic, Bengali, Dutch, Esperanto, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish as well as English.

The more of you who join The Socialist Party the more we will be able to get our

ideas across, the more experiences we will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

The Socialist Party is an organisation of equals. There is no leader and there are no followers. So, if you are going to join we want you to be sure that you agree fully with what we stand for and that we are satisfied that you understand the case for socialism.

If you would like more details about The Socialist Party, complete and return the form on page 23.



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DECEMBER 2015

Editorial

Neither God nor State

PARIS, 13 November 2015. Yet another atrocity in the name of religion. A deliberate attempt to kill as many innocent people as possible, at a pop concert, an international football match, and at random in the streets. Of course there was a political motive behind it. It was as President Hollande said, an act of war.

The 'Islamic State', which governs parts of Syria and Iraq, to which the perpetrators owed allegiance and on whose behalf they carried out the atrocity, is at war with various ordinary capitalist states – Syria, Iraq, the United States, Russia, Britain and of course France as well as others.

Deliberately targeting civilians is against the Geneva Convention but not, apparently, against sharia law nor (if you are on the winning side) against *realpolitik*, as Dresden, Hamburg, Hiroshima and Nagasaki show. Once a war starts in the end anything goes because, if a state loses, then even the life of its rulers is at stake, let alone their position as rulers or the economic interests of its capitalists.

We are dealing, then, with a war atrocity, and wars arise from capitalism. They occur when, in the competition between states for sources of raw material, trade routes, markets, investment outlets and strategic points and areas to protect and acquire these, the rulers of a capitalist state feel that their 'vital interests' are at stake and that they have more to lose by not going to war.

In the Middle East what's at stake is who controls its oil resources and the routes by which the oil reaches the rest of the world. The US and its allies ('the West') have been determined to control this and largely do, but this control has

always been challenged by local elites. During the Cold War period these used secular nationalism to win mass support, but in 1979 Iran set a new trend, which has since become dominant, by exploiting religion instead. So, anti-Western feeling there, expressing the interests of local elites, now takes the form of militant Islam.

In 2002 President George W Bush denounced Iran, Iraq and North Korea as an 'axis of evil'. The US State Department quickly added Cuba, Libya and Syria. These all became targets for 'regime change'. The first to undergo this was Iraq, then Libya, with disastrous results in both cases. Syria was to be the third. This attempt has had an even worse result. Playing the Sunni Muslim card, financed and armed by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, has created a monster that has taken the already extreme version of Islam imposed in Saudi Arabia to an even further extreme, wanting to go back to the 8th century and employing the barbarous methods of that time to get there.

The reaction in France to the atrocity has been to treat it as an attack on the 'French nation' whereas it was more accurately an attack on the French state. The result has been a reinforcement of French nationalism and of the false 'sacred union' between workers and the ruling class. Yet atrocities committed in the name of the nationalism of so-called 'nation-states' are less than those of religion only because these have not been around for so long.

The anarchist Bakunin raised the slogan 'Neither God, nor Master'. Adapting it as our response to the Paris atrocity: Neither God, nor State, but Humanity.

Digging optimism

THERE'S A bit of a revolution going on in archaeology at the moment. It started a few years ago with the excavation of the temple complex of Göbekli Tepe in southern Anatolia in Turkey. The structure consists of concentric circles of 20 ft high, 20 ton stones and the earliest phase of building is dated to the Epipaleolithic, a period of post-glacial hunter-gatherer groups that came before the Mesolithic era, and long before the agricultural developments of the Neolithic. At somewhere between 10,000 and 20,000 years old, Göbekli Tepe is the oldest known temple structure in the world.

That's if it is a temple. So far nobody is quite sure, and guesses have ranged from a sanctuary to a banquet and festival venue to a proto-religious centre devoted to Sirius, the dog star (*New Scientist*, 14 August 2013).

What nobody disputes is the remarkable fact that there is no sign of agriculture anywhere near the temple, nor any trace of a permanent settlement. In archaeological terms this is an anachronism, and it's not just Göbekli Tepe. At the Syrian site of Tell'Abr, dated 11,000 BP, and also at Dja 'De and several others, pre-agricultural villages - consider the significance of the phrase - have been excavated with large communal buildings, while at Wadi Faynan in Jordan what looks like an amphitheatre has been excavated, dating to 11,600 BP. Somehow hunter-gatherers who knew neither the potter's wheel nor the plough were doing large scale monumental building 3,000 years before settled farming, and 7,000 years before the Pyramids (*New Scientist*, 2 October 2013).

To say that these discoveries have blown a hole in orthodox theory is putting it mildly. The assumption has been that environmental limitations, possibly population growth, or global warming or some other factor, caused distressed humans to abandon their hitherto successful foraging life and develop settled agricultural techniques. You could sum it up as 'necessity is the mother of invention'. Marxian materialist thought has been in agreement with this narrative, and indeed through Marxist archaeologists like V. Gordon Childe may even have been the parent of it.

Some modern archaeologists are now asking themselves whether we've got it all wrong. Instead of changes in material conditions creating changes in overlying cultural strata, could major changes in the cultural superstructure instead have caused seismic changes in the material basis of society? To a socialist, that's rather like asking if you can boil a pan of water without turning the gas on.

Something's certainly wrong with the picture. Evidence is gathering that, instead of a sudden headlong rush into farming spurred possibly by some calamitous event, an extended period of 'proto-farming' grew up alongside and complementary with hunting and gathering, in which human groups acquired the knack of managing forests and game. In other words, there was slow agricultural evolution, not fast revolution, and it took place independently on every continent. Moreover, the great advances of farming technology, such as hybridisation of different strains for higher yield, tended to come about during phases of material plenty, not need, quite the opposite of what orthodox theory predicts (*New Scientist*, 31 October).

A plausible explanation for this is that while foraging provided the main diet, proto-farming was a sort of hobby which produced not the basics but the luxuries, and groups were in no hurry to rely on it as a main food source. This makes sense because the technology of hybridisation must have been a lengthy, trial-and-error business, and not one to be conducted in a hurry when times were particularly tough. Indeed some Scandinavian sites show that when the farming failed, the groups went back to foraging, and not the other way round.

If this view is right, it lends sustenance to the idea that



The 'temple' complex of Göbekli Tepe

early 'temples' like Göbekli Tepe were really feast-centres for gatherings of otherwise nomadic tribes, perhaps coming together to celebrate some seasonal prehistoric equivalent of Christmas, and that settled living and farming grew, organically and much later, round such established centres.

There is another factor to consider. It has been well documented in studies that humans have a bias towards loss-aversion, meaning that they are more likely to act to prevent a loss than to achieve a gain.

In the context of the pre-Neolithic this implies that agricultural technology could have developed after the fact of material plenty, in order to preserve it, rather than before it, in order to acquire it.

What's wrong then is not materialist thinking in itself but a particular iteration of it. If we factor in loss-aversion as a material motivator, we see that human social change can still be understood perfectly well in materialist terms, just not quite in the way we imagined.

And what, queries the impatient reader, does any of this have to do with the cost of my gas bill?

Just this: there are many people out there who, although sympathetic to socialist ideas, have failed to lend a hand or get involved in promoting the case for socialism for the simple reason that they have a fatalistic, even millennialistic view of social change. In short, they imagine that socialism, or any large-scale upheaval, can only come about after some global cataclysm which knocks out the entire governing apparatus of capitalism. That this amounts to an argument for doing nothing is almost beside the point. It's not a political stratagem, it's a suicide note, and a more depressing view of humanity and of the future would be hard to come by.

What if such people have got it backwards? What if recent work in archaeology is telling us a different story, that instead of being driven forward by disaster and desperation, humans are spurred on by the *dolce vita*? Other things being equal, how much more motivating is it to offer a vision of the future based on a history of successes, than to offer dark and gloomy forebodings based on a history of failures? After all, we humans have got a lot of things right as well as wrong, and despite capitalism's rat race and rigged laws, values of tolerance, empathy, equality, mutual aid and democratic cooperation are surprisingly resilient in almost every country.

If we want people to come together in support of collective liberation from an economic system that's outdated, restrictive, destructive and viscerally unequal at every level, perhaps we ought to start creating arguments that build on the abundance of energy and creative genius that humans have, and not do what everyone else does, beat people over the head with a big nailed stick.

That way, maybe we could finally extend the season of goodwill to a year-round phenomenon.

PJS



Too Little Too Late

That's the most that will ever be done under capitalism about the problems that global warming will bring.

The way the capitalist system works rules out the effective action at world level that is needed to begin tackling the problem. It even encourages economic activities that contribute to it.

Capitalism is based on production being controlled by profit-seeking enterprises which, supported by governments, compete on the market to buy resources and sell products. This competitive pursuit of profits is the essence of capitalism. It's what capitalism is all about and what prevents any effective action to deal with climate change.

Nobody can deny that global warming is taking place. Nor that, if it continues unchecked, it would have disastrous consequences – such as rising sea-levels and increased desertification – through its effects on the climates of the different parts of the world. There can only be argument over what is causing it. Most scientists in the field take the view that it has mainly been caused by the increase in the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide in the atmosphere largely as a result of the burning of the fossil fuels, coal, oil and gas.

If this is the case, then one part of any solution has to be cut back on burning these fuels. But this is not happening. In fact, on a world scale, their use is increasing. This is because this is currently the cheapest way of generating the energy to drive industry – and the logic of capitalism compels the

profit-seeking enterprises that control production to use the cheapest methods. If they don't, their competitors will.

What is the solution? First, the competitive struggle for profits as the basis for production must be ended. This requires that the Earth's natural and industrial resources become the common heritage of all humanity. On this basis, and on this basis alone, can an effective programme to deal with the problem be drawn up and implemented, because production would then be geared to serving human interests and no longer to make a profit for competing enterprises.

There will be those who say that we haven't the time to wait for the coming into being of this, in their view, unlikely or long-distant solution, and that we must therefore do something now. In this age of apathy and cynicism when any large-scale change is dismissed, this may seem a plausible argument but it begs the question. It assumes that a solution can be implemented within capitalism. But if it can't (as Socialists maintain), then concentrating on something now rather than on changing the basis of society and production will be a waste of valuable time while the situation gets worse.

*- leaflet handed out at climate change events.
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Seasonal Goodwill, Dodgy Deals and Unreliable Witnesses

JINGLE BELLS, jingle bloody bells. Yes, it's that time of year again. A month of enforced jollity is about to be inflicted on us. And to make matters worse, *The Apprentice* is back on the box, that weekly display of arrogant, immature toadies stabbing each other in the back in an attempt to impress Alan Sugar and his sidekicks with their dodgy business deals.

An hour of that every week could certainly affect your mental health. You find yourself thinking; If only Marx had been a better businessman. Instead of hiding away in the British Museum reading room every day he'd have invested in a Father Christmas outfit and a false beard and got himself down to Oxford Street with a suitcase full of plastic, happy nodding worker gnomes. At £5.99 each (batteries extra) they'd have sold like hot cakes and we'd have had socialism years ago.

Fortunately, the Apprentices will have all been fired by Christmas, but as for Christmas itself, the only known ways to ensure a festive free December are to apply for a place on the Mars colonization programme or to join the Jehovah's Witnesses. And the Mars mission is probably more oversubscribed than the vacancies (144,000) in the Jehovah's Witnesses heaven.

So unless you want to spend the rest of your days reading *The Watchtower*, (mandatory for 'witnesses' to prevent them 'falling into darkness') you'll just have to put up with it. Whatever you do, *don't* invite them round to share your turkey. They are mad. Honestly, you'd have more fun with a paper hat, a balloon and a cracker, surrounded by screaming kids and broken toys, while attempting to plough through volume three of *Capital* with the Queen's speech on the telly in the background.

What's really irritating about them though, apart from their numerous attempts to forecast the end of the world, so far unsuccessfully, are their sanctimonious, infantile publications, *The Watchtower* and *Awake*.

Take the September issue of *Awake* for example. 'A Balanced View of Money' it promised us on the front cover. Exactly what's needed we thought, and excitedly looked forward to reading their views on the accumulation of capital and, definitely, something on the production of absolute and of relative surplus value. But guess what? All we could find was the warning that 'the love of money is a root to all sorts of injurious things', and a heartbreaking account of how Daniel and his friend Thomas fell out after the car Thomas bought from Daniel broke down, and he demanded his money back.

Not what we were hoping for, but at least we learned one thing. Never buy a secondhand car from a Jehovah's Witness.

NW



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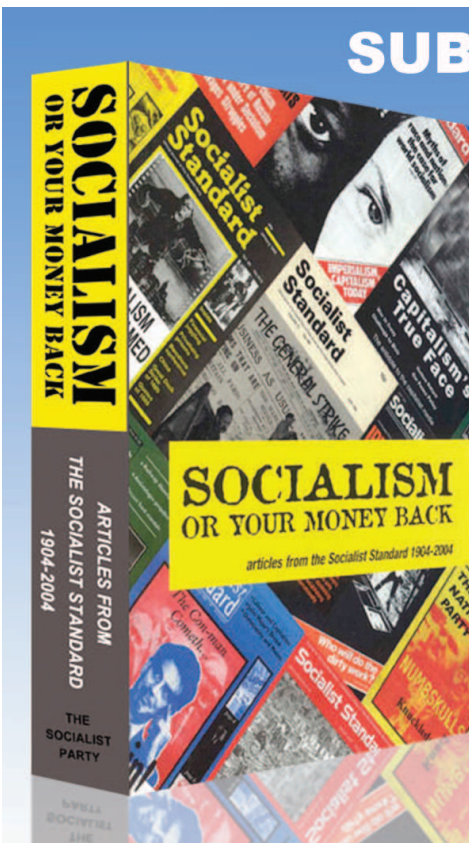
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THE INDEPENDENT





You can't buck the market but you can abolish it

'THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE TO CAPITALISM, COMRADE', wrote Tory Lord Finkelstein addressing John McDonnell in the *Times* (14 October). A few weeks later the same paper carried a news item on an opinion poll conducted for a Tory thinktank, the Legatum Institute, headed 'VERDICT ON CAPITALISM: UNFAIR AND CORRUPT' (3 November).

The two headlines are probably an accurate reflection of current popular opinion – that there is no alternative to capitalism even though it's not up to much. McDonnell, though, probably does see an alternative to capitalism but a long way off, in the meantime wanting to reform capitalism so it's not so harsh on workers, maybe in fact not so 'unfair' or 'corrupt'. But it was a statement by the Corbynista Labour MP Diane Abbott that Labour 'have always been a Keynesian party' that particularly annoyed Finkelstein.

Since it wasn't until the 1930s that Keynes formulated his famous theory of how (supposedly) to control capitalism while the Labour Party had been founded thirty years previously, the 'always' in Abbott's statement is wrong (though Keynes did in fact provide an academically respectable justification for the spending policies the Labour Party had always advocated).

But this wasn't Finkelstein's point:

'Labour was founded as a socialist party, not a Keynesian one. Keynes developed his ideas about borrowing as a way of saving capitalism from itself. Socialists rejected the very idea. They wanted to replace capitalism altogether, not patch it up with macro-economic policy.'

Finkelstein does give here a quite good description of the socialist attitude to Keynes. The trouble is that it does not apply to the Labour Party. It was not founded as a socialist party, but merely as a trade union pressure group in parliament and did not even claim to be socialist until 1918 when a new constitution containing Clause Four was adopted.

Quite apart from this clause committing the Labour Party to nationalisation, or state capitalism, rather than socialism, this made no difference to its policy which could accurately be described as being to 'patch up' capitalism.

Later in his article Finkelstein admitted that in the 1930s 'a hybrid emerged of planning, partial public ownership and Keynesianism' as Labour policy. This in fact remained Labour's ideology until the 1990s when Tony Blair persuaded the party to drop it as the price of getting back into office (always the leaders' top priority). So, to that extent, Abbott was right and Finkelstein had conceded it. What Corbyn and McDonnell represent is not a return to Labour's never-existing socialist origins, but merely to the hybrid described above.

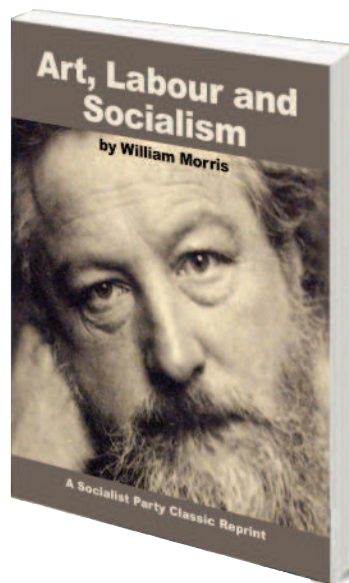
When tried, as under Wilson and Callaghan in the 1960s and 70s, it didn't work and, here, Finkelstein scored a point in the subtitle of his article: 'John McDonnell has ignored the lesson the late Lord Howe taught the Labour Party forty years ago – you can't buck the market.' That's right, you can't buck the market, at least not for long. In the end the economic forces of capitalism dictate what governments can and must do – put profits first – not governments controlling capitalism.

But 'you can't buck the market' doesn't mean that there is no alternative to capitalism. It means that the alternative has to involve the disappearance of 'the market' and the replacement of production for sale on a market with a view to profit by production solely and directly to meet people's needs, on the basis of the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production.

SOCIALIST PARTY PUBLICATIONS

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by William Morris



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Without control of the police or being able to create a truly independent judiciary people will still be able to be jailed for their political beliefs or actions. A National League for Democracy (NLD) government won't be able to use the military budget to try to rein in the army. The army sets its own budget. The government has to make do with the money left over. No surprise, then, that military spending is higher than health and education combined.

'BURMESE GENERALS throw in the towel' was the headline in the *Times* (12 November). 'President Thein Sein, the former Junta general, promised to hand over power to Ms Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy.'

Office maybe, but not power. The fact is that the military of Burma (these days also called Myanmar) have not yielded political power to the will of the people.

On the Common Dreams website Mark Farmaner explains the constitutional reality (www.commondreams.org/views/2015/11/09/think-burma-democracy-now-think-again): to end economic sanctions and their pariah status, but having no wish to surrender control of the country and aware that they couldn't win an election, the solution for the military elite was a new constitution which has the appearance of democracy yet which still left them in control.

Just in case an NLD government should still try to implement policies the military doesn't like, above both parliament and government is a National Defense and Security Council. Constitutionally, it is the most powerful body in Burma. It has eleven members, six of whom come from the military, so it has a built-in majority. It could overrule decisions made by an NLD government. If these checks on the power of the government were not enough, the military also inserted clauses in the constitution that give it the right to retake power for vague and unspecified 'national security' and 'national unity' reasons. In the special case of Aung San Suu Kyi, the military placed a specific clause in the constitution that a president can't have children who are citizens of foreign countries, which she does, just to prevent her ever becoming president.

Perhaps the constitution can now be amended? The generals foresaw the possibility and this is the importance of the 25 percent of seats quota for the military in parliament. To change the constitution, more than 75 percent of MPs have to vote for it so the military have a veto over constitutional reform. No change unless they agree to it.

This is not political democracy. The military dictatorship has tried to ensure that the state continues to be their 'executive committee' while offering the sop of token democracy. The military are fully integrated into the commerce of Burma, trading as capitalists in their own right, and to preserve their business interests they want to remain in control of the state. Mark Farmaner aptly describes it as 'democracy on a leash'. Even so the NLD won enough seats to be able to appoint the president. In Western democracies, a situation where the military are not under the control of the government and where the military appoint key government ministers, would be considered completely unacceptable.

The fact is the global capitalist system is willing to turn a convenient blind eye to reality if it provides access to Burma's resources and markets. Aung Suu Kyi's international reputation

will help attract business and the multinationals are eager to see many more 'Made in Myanmar' labels. Despite what the *Times* claimed, there are a few more rounds to go before Burma attains political democracy.

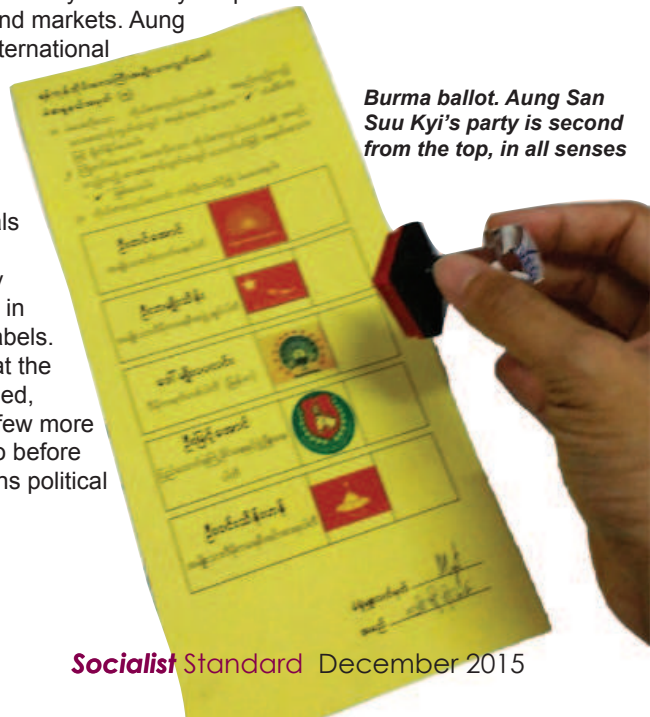
ALJO

Burma polling station, 2015 elections



The democratically elected MPs will be joined in the new parliament by another 116 MPs, all appointed by the head of the army, 25 percent of the total, who will choose one of the two vice presidents, and like them, will be a soldier. The head of the Burmese army also gets to choose key government ministers. The Defense Minister, Home Affairs Minister and Border Affairs Minister who will all be serving soldiers. This puts the armed forces outside of the control of the new government. The new government will not have control over the police, justice system, security services or issues in ethnic states where the army, according to numerous human rights organisations, have been committing war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Burma ballot. Aung San Suu Kyi's party is second from the top, in all senses





Liz and her life and loves

What Is This Thing Called Love? was Cole Porter's epic contribution to musical morale in the slump of the 1930s. A more recent example of the misuse of the word was when

Prime Minister David Cameron assured us that 'I love the NHS', provoking a rage of response from the doctors, nurses, technicians, carers about how and why this thing Cameron calls 'love' could actually mean government policies so designedly restrictive and damaging to their work and to the patients who rely on their skills and application. And then, from the opposite Benches, there was another politician who, looking to impress us, declared that that 'Labour is the party I love'. This was Liz Kendall, as she announced that she was a candidate in the Labour Party's recent leadership election. Mysteriously, she was at first presented as the favourite until reality in the form of the membership vote put her at the bottom, in fourth place. Which was when it was revealed that her 'love' for Labour was not so strong as to persuade her to accept that result as the democratic will of the party and to support Jeremy Corbyn as the party leader.

Cambridge

Kendall came of a political family; her father was a Labour councillor before joining the Lib Dems and then re-joining

Labour. As a child she enjoyed an outing with the two parents on their local canvassing so that, if the time ran out, she



Liz Kendall

might throw a childish tantrum when there were no more doors for her to knock on. After grammar (non-selective) school she went to Cambridge and, in shock after the result of the 1992 general election under the calamitous leadership of Neil Kinnock she decided to 'join the party and help fight to make sure it never happens again'. Whatever she meant by 'it' did eventually happen again, with Tony Blair and his government's predictable failure to maintain their support in the miserable swamp of capitalism. After achieving a double first and being captain of the university women's football team Kendall held a succession of spin-doctor jobs including a period as Special Adviser to Harriet Harman, who in the chaos of Labour in 1998 was sacked from the government. Kendall was rejected as the Labour candidate in Tony Benn's old seat at Chesterfield and worked for Patricia Hewitt who judged her to have 'a core of steel' which was just as well as in 2010 Hewitt herself was suspended after allegations of corruption over political lobbying for cash, which did not prevent her subsequent appointment to such rewarding posts as Special Consultant to the massive pharmacological combine Alliance Boots and to a private equity company with links to BUPA hospitals. This was not, from Kendall's point of view, all disaster because it led to her being chosen as Hewitt's successor as the Labour candidate for the rock-solid seat of Leicester West, which she won in 2010 with a majority of 4017 despite a decline of 7.6 percent in the Labour vote.

Malnutrition

In her maiden speech in the Commons Kendall made a point of the stark problems in Leicester West particularly of the children there; more than a third of them growing up in what she called workless families, with life prospects wrecked by their poverty. In some parts of the city they are more likely to die before they are five, to do badly at school and then struggle to survive on low paid employment. Perhaps there were some Members there that day who assumed that she would be among the more restless and challenging wing of her party. But it did not happen like that; her core of steel operated in support of the measures calculated to intensify the poverty in her constituency. She supported the £23.00 benefits cap and the proposals to enforce a contributory system of benefits on the grounds that the present one had allowed too many people to exist without any pressure, such as lack of food and housing, to get paid employment. For the NHS she is in favour of what she called 'patient choice' which is actually a proposal to encourage more private investment with its prospects of massive profits for some dominant companies -- such as Alliance Boots and BUPA -which have what she describes as 'a role for the private and voluntary sectors where they can add extra capacity to the NHS or challenges to the system'. Pertinent comments on Kendall's attitude on this were from the Health and Social Care Information Centre that the number of admissions to hospitals from malnutrition rose during the past year, from 5469 to 6520; and there was the estimate from the European Nutrition for Health Alliance, that as many as 40 percent of hospital patients in the UK are malnourished on admission, causing many to be undiagnosed through inadequate screening. In fact the Tameside hospital in Greater Manchester now encourage the staff of their A and E department discreetly to offer food boxes to any patients who on discharge are malnourished. There are similar arrangements at hospitals in Birmingham and Newcastle.

Thieving

A continuing review of Kendall's record finds that she supports limiting immigration through a points-based system, and the abolition of the right for immigrants to claim tax credits and benefits. She stands for the continuation of the universally destructive nuclear Trident submarine programme (which she obediently calls a 'deterrent') with expenditure on it exempt from cuts such as those imposed on essential services. Among her many fundamental euphemisms is one which applies to the entire system of class ownership and production for profit when she announces that she is 'firmly on the side of wealth creation', ignoring the harsh reality that it is that very system which all too often reduces wealth production when it is not profitable enough. Some time ago Kendall was angry when she found that another Member had stolen a tuna sandwich which she had left in a fridge at Portcullis House, used by the MPs as their offices. She attached an angry note to the fridge door: 'I do not appreciate this and warn other people...' to which the reply, in another note, was: 'I took it... and I'd do it again'. In spite of all she had been through, Kendall seems to be unaware that stealing will come most readily where many are occupied with managing the entire system of theft.

IVAN

What is the 'Islamic State'?

لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله



ISIS stems from the breakdown of Iraq. Its core is former officers of the Iraqi army that served under Saddam and were displaced by the Americans when they disbanded the Iraqi army after the conquest of that country. Those officers found themselves marginalised further by the capture of the state by an expressly Shia political party (under the sway of Iran). The army had been dominated by a confessional and cultural Sunni section of society. They were able to turn to their co-religionists to recruit support to mobilise against the new government. Although Islamic State (as a group) was already formed, and had emerged from Al Qaeda in Iraq and other Islamist insurgent groups, it was this lash up with experienced military commanders that allowed them to make their breakthrough, around 2010.

It was their combat expertise, the poor moral of the new Iraqi army, and the general lack of government authority in several Sunni provinces, that allowed ISIS to capture the heavy weapons and advanced military equipment that enabled it to advance quickly and overrun Iraqi army positions to take control of vast swathes of the country in the north. The other contributory factor in its growth was the breakdown of civil order in Syria, which enabled ISIS to become a participant in that civil war.

Tellingly, in the unrest, Fallujah (already twice bloodily pacified during the US occupation) rose again. Whilst ISIS nominally maintains it controls the city, it is reported that the revolt was by local tribes, using ISIS assistance and military support.

ISIS is thought to have about 30,000 fighters, and about 8 million Iraqis under their control. That is not sufficient military force to subjugate an entire population (before the uprising, about 1 in 20 of the Syrian population were employed in the Ba'athist security forces, which partly explains the regime's resilience, and gives an indication of the scale of resources needed to completely suppress a population). In order to hold this population, it projects an image, with global reach, claiming to want to create a universal Caliphate and convert the world to genuine (ie. its brand of) Islam.

The organisation is concerned with having a fearsome reputation, just as every bandit, feudal baron and Mafioso has needed in the past, in order to protect itself and continue its business. It is all about respect and appearance. Hence the, frankly, incompetent terror attacks on Paris, which were more about show and spectacle than about any sensible military strategic goal. Indeed, it has been noted that when they first encountered significant resistance (the Kurds of Kobane) poor morale and training of ISIS forces saw them handsomely beaten.

Their reputation, though, allows them to carry out their commercial operations. According to Channel Four News ISIS has been able to seize over \$400 million in bank robberies. A further \$40 million comes from kidnap and ransom operations. Its main source of regular income, though, is the \$100 million it makes through selling oil, most of it, surprisingly, to the Assad regime in Syria (<http://tinyurl.com/oxp3nfv>). The American historian and blogger Juan Cole:

"I would argue that Daesh (ISIS) is analogous to the pirate enclaves of the early modern period. Al-Raqqqa, Palmyra, Mosul, Falluja and Ramadi function for it as desert ports, as Tortuga and Port Royal did for pirates in the Caribbean and St. Mary's on Madagascar did for pirates in the Indian Ocean. It is easy to be misled by the organization's language of "state." It is a militia of some 25,000 fighters who conduct raids. They don't actually do much governing of the places they dominate, and mainly extract resources from them. Tribal raiding states in it for the loot have been common in Middle Eastern history, as with Nadir Shah in the eighteenth century. Looting one city pays for the raid that lets you loot the next. They even make the people who want to emigrate and escape their rule pay a sort of exit ransom" (<http://www.juancole.com/2015/11/modern-raiding-pirate.html>).

Paying their respects to the Paris victims, Moscow, November 2015. Scenes like this occurred across Europe and the world.

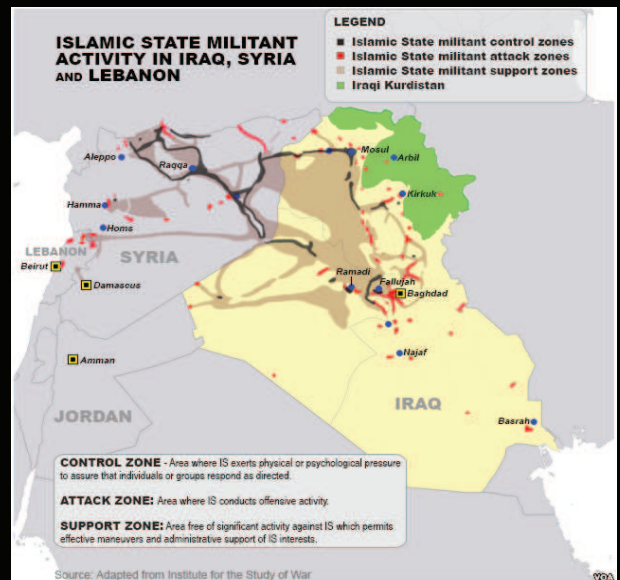


Essentially, then, in his view ISIS is the most spectacularly successful mafia operation in history.

ISIS, far from being an existential threat to the western way of life, is in fact a species of a phenomenon seen time and again in history. Its economic basis is the availability of a natural resource which can be extracted with little labour but which commands a high price (other examples are metals and diamonds in Africa, or narcotics in South America). It complements this resource by the proximity of a disposable, largely uneducated population, whom it can recruit to do its dirty work and fighting. It extends this principle with the mass kidnap of woman, and institutionalised forced marriage and rape as a reward for its soldiers. It is, in essence, no different from the Mexican drugs cartels that terrorise the border regions of that country, and infiltrate and direct the governments there.

Essentially, unlike capitalists who live off surplus value, ISIS and its leadership live off the direct expropriation of material surplus wealth, much as a feudal aristocracy did. Hence why its medieval economics rely on medieval methods of rule. The local populations do not have to be disciplined or mobilised into its system, the way workers have to be, merely passively present to extract wealth of fighting manpower from whenever it is necessary.

The role of religion in this context is to keep the local population compliant, and to help attract recruits. A common confession of faith creates the idea of a common identity, and legitimises the excesses of the ruling gang. It also helps to attract ideologues and recruits from abroad. Its most useful role is in attracting money and support. ISIS follows the Wahabbist trend of puritanical Islam that is prevalent in Saudi Arabia. This (and links between Iraqi and Saudi tribes) allows it to obtain funding from Saudis. That Saudi Arabia is itself locked in a regional power struggle with Iran, which in its turn uses the Shia strand of Islam to spread its influence, means here are geostrategic elements to the precise doctrine



followed by ISIS.

The other use for Islam by ISIS is to set its stall out against the Great Powers of America and Europe, and their legacy in the Middle East. ISIS expressly rejects the boundaries drawn up by the colonial powers, and seeks to mobilise people in the region behind it against the Western Powers. Islam is embedded into the culture and history of the region, and in the state building manner of 'selective invented traditions' it is trying to forge a polity against the great gangsters of the Western militaries, who are sufficiently successful to make their grabs (which tend to be in terms of the territories and the resources in the ground, rather than their movables directly) almost invisible to the eye.

Whilst Islam as a religion is not the only mobilising factor in the Middle East, it's clear that it has managed to take the role of being at the forefront of nationalism from the state capitalism of an earlier period as expressed in Nasserism, the Ba'athist regimes in Iraq and Syria and the PLO.

PIK SMEET



Tough opposition - Kurdish fighters near Tall Tamer, Syria, May 2015

The false promise that is **Jeremy Corbyn**



Whilst John McDonnell might put ‘generally fermenting the overthrow of capitalism’ as his interest in his *Who’s Who* entry, sadly that isn’t enough to make a socialist of the man. It takes more than verbal flourishes to emancipate the working class. Rather than socialism, his talk is of working in partnership with enterprise and business to ensure economic growth, as in his Labour conference speech. Whilst we hear promises of nationalisation of the railways and possibly even some utilities, it seems this state ownership stops short of the real productive capacity of the country. But what is this state ownership anyway? Will rail travel be free once the crony capitalists are ousted and denied their bonuses? Hardly. The likelihood is that the railways will simply be a business run by agents of the government and probably on some form of commercial basis.

But what has Corbyn, the great herald of the new New (or Old?)

Labour himself said? Well, at the conference he said he’d be the champion of the self-employed. But in fact he didn’t say much about the economy, rather gave a kind of framing speech to provide an overall sense of his position and counter some of the accusations in the media: he loved his country; believed in open discussion; wanted more for the many not the few, etc. Not much actual flesh on the bones of this advert. The idea was that John McDonnell would open that black box, as above.

What can we charitably infer? He’ll try to tax the rich a bit more, try to make corporations pay some more tax, build some more houses and control business (certainly the utilities) a bit more. Oh, and maybe reduce tuition fees. And, oh yes, there might be some quantitative easing – printing money, to you and me – to give the economy a bit of a push, as he thinks growth is a good thing.

Does any of this ring any bells

with anyone? Haven’t we been here before? Or, is this the time when they *really* mean it: when they will *really* make a difference? This brings up two questions: what makes this brand of Labour significantly different to any of the others? And, will what is on offer have any chance of really making a lasting difference?

Previous Labour governments

There have been eleven previous Labour governments. We can choose from those led by Ramsay MacDonald, Clem Atlee, Harold Wilson, and Tony Blair.

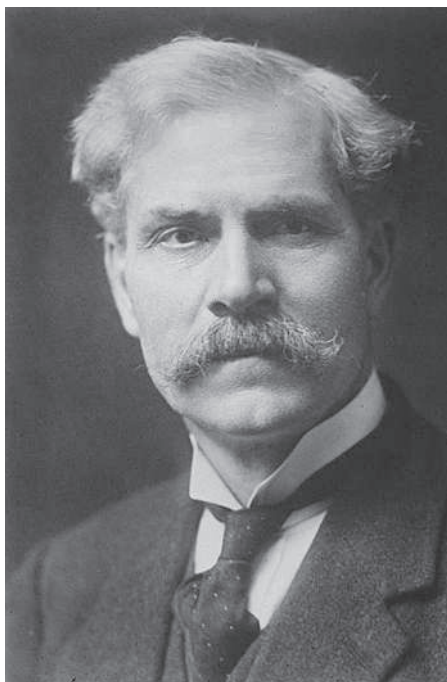
The first period, before World War Two, can be called cohabitation. The first Labour government under Ramsay MacDonald was a minority administration propped up by the Liberal Party lasting 11 months and so it’s not really surprising they didn’t achieve very much. In fact it was little more than what were called the Wheatley houses, which was a programme of cheap council housing. Nice but not exactly earth-shattering.

Ramsay McDonald was back in office in 1929 and this administration lasted until 1931 but again another minority government. This one vacillated about Keynesian-style measures of public works to address large-scale unemployment. However it fell apart and led to the National government which addressed the recession by means of the type of austerity that we currently see: cutting benefits and government spending to get out of recession. This man of promise called himself socialist and he ended up implementing these kinds of measures as part of that government, and was actually expelled from the Labour Party.

The Attlee period might be called ‘the land fit for heroes’. This is probably regarded as the most radical and successful Labour government that was elected after World War Two. Their offer to the voters was to destroy the five ‘Giants’ of Want, Squalor, Disease, Ignorance, and Unemployment. This government was certainly committed to improving the lot of the working class. The creation of the welfare state, and rebalancing the economy to address poverty

were priorities. They nationalised about 20 percent of the economy but abandoned plans to nationalise farming. However the senior staff in the nationalised industries remained in place. It was simply a case of new owners, or perhaps old wine in new bottles. There was no worker control on offer. Additionally industries nationalised were mostly those that were completely run into the ground from lack of investment and the War effort.

Trying to square the circle for this bankrupt economy with social aspirations was never going to work. Joining the Korean War did not help, and by 1950 health prescription



Ramsay MacDonald: expelled from the Labour Party

charges appeared; so much for free cradle to grave healthcare. Then there was the formation of NATO and the nuclear weapons programme. It is worth noting that Attlee signed up to the terms of the Marshall Plan which required a large measure of the regulation for business to be removed, which is quite similar to the way in which the IMF operates today. American capitalism seldom comes without large strings attached. But give them their due, the Attlee government set up a variety of welfare structures that many of the baby boomers benefited from, and endured mostly intact until the so-called 'sweeping away of socialism' under Thatcher.

Harold Wilson's first administration was 'the acceptable face of capitalism'. Wilson was elected in 1964 with a minority government and a platform called New Britain. A second election in 1966 brought

a majority administration which lasted through to 1970. Nobody really claims this regime was socialism although it did do major work on social reform: education, housing, social security and workers' rights. But ultimately the economy faltered; which led to cuts including school milk in secondary schools (that wasn't Thatcher), dental charges, increased National Insurance deductions, benefits not linked to average wages, prescription charges being scrapped but then reintroduced, tax allowances being cut, and a doomed programme of building cheap high-rise flats. Their attempt at playing the money markets went wrong with the



Clement Attlee: set up a variety of welfare structures

devaluation crises from which the government never really recovered.

The first Wilson administration can certainly lay claim to a number of major pieces of social reform, for instance the repeal of the death penalty, decriminalisation of homosexuality, changes in the law regarding divorce, abortion and race. However this is social tinkering. It is not changing the relationship of power in any meaningful way.

Harold Wilson's next regime, which led into James Callaghan's, can be termed 'the period of walking a tight rope'. The first was in a minority administration and re-election in 1974 saw a wafer thin majority of four. This meant the government was never in a particularly powerful position and effectively its five years in office were spent riding the storm of an economic recession brought about largely by the oil price hike and the bursting of the Barber boom. Again, the major impact was a series of social tinkering: tenancy rights, improved benefits, Sex Discrimination Act, prices

commission, and workers' rights. However the government finally ground itself out in the so-called Winter of Discontent, after borrowing from the IMF (again) led to large cuts in government expenditure.

Which brings us to Tony Blair. New Labour had set out its stall as the party of capitalism when at conference Tony Blair called for the abolition of Clause Four, probably the last vestige of anything resembling socialist intent within the Labour Party structure. In 1997 there was a pledge card provided to voters which didn't offer much in terms of radical social change – which was pretty much the overall picture of the Blair administration. They promised to cut class sizes, fast track offenders, cut NHS waiting times, reduce under 25s unemployment and have tough rules for Government spending. What was on offer was a managerial approach to capitalism: we can run it better than the Tories.

So we got the minimum wage (at a very low level) and Sure Start but we also got PFIs, Iraq, the rich got richer, and corporations got much more powerful and they also paid less tax. We were told this was a new kind of economy where boom and bust was beaten for good – but this hubris crashed in the banking crisis of 2008.

Could Corbyn be any different?

Not much of a record for eleven election victories: not much socialism anywhere in the picture. Not much of a basis to think Corbyn will make a massive impact. Has he distanced himself from all that? Apart from apologies promised for Iraq (even Blair is working on that now), it sounds very much like he's offering a Wilson Mark 2: bits of nationalisation, taxing the rich, government spending and more welfare. Even Denis Healy, a right winger, as Chancellor offered to tax the rich until their pips squeaked. Not much of that kind of talk here.

So, will it work anyway? What Labour is trying to effect is a benign and responsible capitalism: a system where they accept there is an unequal distribution of wealth and power but where the state is enabled to act as an arbitrator and redistributor thereby minimising the impact of this inequality within certain limits. This is all the while still remaining a member of all sorts of capitalist power blocks (e.g. WTO, EU) because they want to maintain global trade. So the theory must be that while the rest of the world carries on trying to lower costs and hence wages, Britain will manage

to continue trading with them and somehow maintain decent wages and conditions. Presumably, this is predicated on the notion that they will somehow be able to redistribute the excessive profits of business and have lots of internationally desirable commodities and services for sale, cheaply enough to maintain



The Marshall Plan: required a large measure of the regulation for business to be removed

Britain's position as the sixth or seventh largest economy in the world. One wonders at what point does this wonderful government start to dismantle the financial services industry which makes a huge contribution to the economy but contributes not one iota to production?

The point is if you want a bigger economy, the last thing you are going to do is start making life too difficult for big players. You have to find some way to coexist with these capitalist enterprises, which means you have to recognise their interests in one way or another. Sure, you'll try to curtail the egregious excesses but in reality you'll let them get on with it in some regulatory framework or another.

We have regulatory frameworks at the moment for all sorts of things: Ofwat, Ofgen, Ofcom, Ofsted, Ofraill. Accepting that these ones are charades and that Corbyn will introduce big tough ones, the problem is that governments only last five years at most. Someone else can come in later and water them down. What has been the trajectory of the NHS since inception? What was the trajectory of the nationalised industries? All have started with great aspirations and fallen under the millstone of government funding decisions. Just a little bit of prescription charging to start with and then where do we go?

Here's the rub, then. Even if

“Jeremy Corbyn may look like a breath of fresh air but he’s as stale as the party he now leads”

Corbyn did manage to tame the forces of capital enough to raise the economic condition of the bottom 50 percent and similarly reduce differentials in Britain, he would not really be addressing the distribution of power. Sooner or later that power would reassert itself, particularly if there was an economic downturn. What would stop the rich choosing to take their money elsewhere or to simply sit on it? To stop the investment and the trickle down supply and whatever else? Desperate not to have them do that, there would be all sorts of concessions. What would stop the large corporations, foreign and UK, simply moving their activity overseas? Unless this remains a country friendly enough to business, business will prefer to be



Anove: James Callaghan: ‘walking a tight rope’. Below: Tony Blair: brought a managerial approach to capitalism



Harold Wilson: ‘the acceptable face of capitalism’



somewhere else.

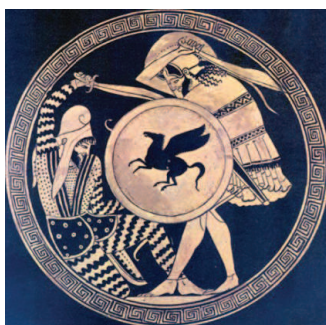
Remember the event during the Major government called Black Friday? International currency speculators bet against the pound staying in the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (a precursor of the euro) and forced Britain out. Having a financial system which runs on credit and borrowing as Britain does, the government has to borrow money to make ends meet. We have seen the effects this circus can have on countries' abilities to run themselves – Greece is a recent example. Unless your government is self-sufficient (as none is), sooner or later you'll need to go to the money men and offer them a proposition that they like. Otherwise you will go without and their money will go to someone else.

Sad but true. The truth is that unless this whole approach is entirely rethought and scrapped for a better system, we're onto a loser. How fortunate then that help is at hand: socialism. Abolishing money and the whole financial exchange mechanism means those who have large amounts of wealth and influence are suddenly deprived of all that power: they could make hats out of their bank notes for all the difference it would make. A system of production for use as determined democratically is the only way by which the working class can achieve emancipation. Jeremy Corbyn may look like a breath of fresh air but he's as stale as the party he now leads.

HOWARD PILOTT

From Political Economy to Vulgar Economics

The history of economic research came up as an independent science in the seventeenth century. However, that didn't happen all of a sudden. Long ago since ancient times, the process of rudimentary conceptualization and formation of political economic ideas had begun cropping up. The ancient Egyptians, Greeks, Hindus and other peoples were already acquainted with such economic categories as commodity, exchange, money, price, loan interest, commercial profit, and others. There are very interesting ideas and data in ancient Egyptian *papyri*; the *code of Hammurabi*, the ruler of Babylonia; the *Vedas* of Ancient India; Homer's *Odyssey* and other works of the ancient Greek poet; the writings of Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle and other philosophers of Greek antiquity, and so on. However, what the ancients knew about economic categories was just embryonic.



Ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Hindus (right) knew about political economic ideas. Below: William Petty

The history of economic thought begins with the works of Xenophon, Plato and especially Aristotle, who made the first step towards a theoretical understanding of the economy of the ancient Greek society (which was at the stage of demise of the primitive-communal system and the rise of slavery), and articulated some remarkable ideas on value, commodity exchange, and the earliest forms of capital: trading (merchant's) and usury capital.

Capitalist structures first took shape not in production, but in trade and monetary operations in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Eventually this evolutionary process of the upcoming capital came to be known as Mercantilism that expressed the interests of merchant's capital in England, Italy and France. Its principal spokesmen were William Stafford and Thomas Mun in England, Antonio Serra in Italy and Antoine de Montchrestien in France.

The term '*Political Economy*' was first coined by the French mercantilist Antoine de Montchrestien in his *Treatise of Political Economy* (1615), which contained recommendations on how to run the state economy and multiply the country's wealth. The term was derived from three Greek words: '*politikos*' – state, social; '*oikos*' – household or its management; and '*nomos*' – rule of law, and so meant 'the laws of state management'.

Later on, in the eighteenth century, bourgeois political

economy was developed by the Physiocrats: François Quesnay, Turgot, and others. Quesnay was a French economist of the Physiocratic school. He is known for publishing *Tableau économique* (Economic Table) in 1758, which provided the foundations of the ideas of the Physiocrats. Turgot, Baron de l'Aulne, commonly known as Turgot, was a French statesman (and economist in his own right) heavily influenced by Quesnay.

In contrast to the mercantilists, they switched the emphasis in economic research from the sphere of circulation to the sphere of production.

Bourgeois political economy in that period [from the 17th century to the 1830s] was advanced by William Petty (1623 – 1687) in England and Pierre Boisguillebert (1646 – 1714) in France. They were the pioneers in formulating the labour theory of value. They were in effect the founders of classical political economy, which



reached its peak in the works of the Scottish economist Adam Smith in the eighteenth century and the English economist David Ricardo in the early nineteenth century.

Karl Marx observed in 1859 in the section

'Historical Notes on the Analysis of Commodities' in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: 'The decisive outcome of the research carried on for over a century and a half by classical political economy, beginning with William Petty in Britain and Boisguillebert in France, and ending with Ricardo in Britain and Sismondi in France, is an analysis of the aspects of the commodity into two forms of labour – use-value is reduced to concrete labour or purposive productive activity, exchange-value to labour-time or homogeneous social labour.' In *Capital* (1867) he defined political economy: '... by political economy I understand the economy which since the time of W. Petty has investigated the real relations of production in bourgeois society'.

Marx made a distinction between such men as Petty, Smith and Ricardo and their successors. He wrote of the former that they devoted their efforts 'to the study of the real interrelations of bourgeois production', while the latter were 'content to elucidate the semblance of the interrelations' and to act in effect as apologists for the capitalist class. He called them 'vulgar economists'.

Engels had already warned, and shown great foresight, in 1843 when he wrote in his *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy*: 'The nearer to our time the economists whom we have to judge, the more severe must our judgment become. For while Smith and Malthus found only scattered fragments, the modern economists had the whole system complete before them: the consequences had all been drawn; the contradictions came clearly enough to light, yet they did not come to examine the premises and still accepted the responsibility for the whole system. The nearer the economists come to the present time, the further they depart from honesty'.

BINAY SARKAR

Lee Harvey Oswald, 'Hunter of Fascists' ?

In October the media reported a claim that a notorious photo of Oswald clutching a couple of 'Marxist' papers was not a fake. We will let the experts settle that one, but in what sense is Oswald being regarded as a 'Marxist'?

Many claim that the assassination of President Kennedy on 22 November 1963 by Oswald was part of a conspiracy rather than the act of a lone gunman. In some way we can be reminded of the Reichstag Fire of 1934, readily blamed by the Nazis on a 'Communist conspiracy' but, in fact, a lone arson attack by the Council Communist, Marinus van der Lubbe.

Lee Harvey Oswald was a leftist who at one point in his life defected to Russia; a self-professed Marxist who became opposed to Russian-style 'communism', declaring at one point, 'I never had a card to the Communist party. . . I am a Marxist, but not a Leninist-Marxist. . .' In



Left: Oswald clutching 'Marxist' papers. Above: Oswald in the US Marines. Right: General Edwin Walker

addition to defecting to Russia, he later also distributed leaflets for the pro-Castro Fair Play for Cuba Committee. The photograph in question shows him clutching his Carcano rifle, holding up two newspapers, *The Militant*, of the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party and *The Worker*, of the CPUSA. He inscribes on the back of one of those photos 'hunter of fascists.' Oswald had already made an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate the far right-wing General Edwin Walker. His wife Marina said that he considered Walker to be the leader of a 'fascist organization.'

Some say that his self-proclaimed Marxism was a ruse but every person on record who knew him – family members, co-workers, associates – say he held his political views sincerely. Oswald flaunted his 'communism' in the Marine Corps, to the point that other marines called him 'Oswaldskyvitch.' Norman Mailer, in his book on Oswald, *Oswald's Tale*, shows with ample evidence that he was a Marxist of sorts, as have Gerald Posner and Priscilla Johnson McMillan who document his leftist beliefs from the time he was 15 and was given a pamphlet defending the Rosenbergs, executed for spying for Russia. Oswald said that this pamphlet got him interested in reading socialist literature and that he later borrowed Marxist books from the New Orleans public library and that it was confirmed by classmates that he was reading these library books. Oswald became and stayed – however simplistically he understood it – a 'communist'. We have Oswald's public and private writings professing to be a Marxist and an admirer of Castro as well as his public and private behaviour supporting this.

During his defection to Russia he became disillusioned with life there. He wrote: 'No man, having known, having lived, under the Russian Communist and American capitalist system, could possibly make a choice between them. There is no choice, one offers oppression the other poverty. Both offer imperialistic injustice, tinted with two brands of slavery.' His diary entry for the period August-September 1960 reads: 'As my Russian improves I become increasingly conscious of just what sort of society I live in. Mass gymnastics, compulsory after work meeting, usually political information meeting. Compulsory attendance at lectures and the sending of the entire shop collective (except me) to pick potatoes on a Sunday, at a State collective farm. A 'patriotic duty' to bring in the harvest. The opinions of the workers (unvoiced) are that it's a great pain in the neck. They don't seem to be especially enthusiastic about any of the 'collective' duties, a natural feeling. I am increasingly aware of the presence, in all things, of Libezin, shop party secretary, fat, fortyish, and jovial on the outside. He is a no-nonsense party regular.' And in January 1961: 'I am starting to reconsider my desire about staying. The work is drab, the money I get has nowhere to be spent. No nightclubs



or bowling alleys, no places of recreation except the trade union dances. I have had enough.'

Back in Dallas, he told an acquaintance that the people in Russia 'were poor. They worked and made just enough to buy their clothes and their food.... The only ones who had enough money to buy anything else ... the luxuries of life, were

those who were Communist Party officials ... high ranking members of the party.'

Another acquaintance said that Oswald 'seemed to classify all members of the Communist Party as opportunists who were in it just to get something for themselves out of it.... and [he] thought they were ruining the principles which the country should be based on. In other words, they were not true Communists. They were ruining the heaven on earth which it should be.'

Oswald's belief in 'communism', as he understood it, was no doubt genuine. On more than one occasion he differentiated between 'Marxists' and 'Leninists/Communists'. Of course he was no Marxist in any sense that we understand but he did get one thing right, ironically about the futility of assassinating leaders. A police interrogator records him as saying:

'Since the President was killed, someone else would take his place, perhaps Vice-President Johnson. His views about Cuba would probably be largely the same as those of President Kennedy... When the head of any government dies, or is killed, there is always a second in command who would take over.'

ALJO

Paul Mason waits...

Paul Mason (economics editor at Channel 4 and author of the recent book *Postcapitalism: a guide to our future*) has reported on a paper by the Morgan Stanley economists Charles Goodhart, Manoj Pradhan and Pratyancha Pardeshi (*Guardian Weekly*, 2 October). Their argument was that global demographic trends have resulted in a glut of labour that has exerted a downwards pressure on wages for the past three decades (the result of a baby boom in developed economies, urbanisation in the industrialising economies and the entrance of millions of women into the workforce). As urbanisation peters out and birth rates fall, it is suggested, a labour shortage will develop leading to a rise in the bargaining power and wages of the labour force. This will counter the predictions of rising twenty-first century inequality by the likes of Thomas Piketty. We will find out in good time who is closer to the mark.

In practice any gains by workers will depend not only on global economic conditions (the vagaries of the business cycle) but on the balance of class forces (improvements in pay and conditions need to be maximised by a strong trades union movement) and on the economic, political and cultural conditions in different localities. Mason, however, regards the report as grist to the mill for his ideas as to how a post-capitalist world may materialise. Faced with the possibility of a higher paid labour force, Mason asserts that the stimulus for businesses to introduce labour saving technology will be increased. He uses the example of McDonalds, which he says is introducing touch-screen technology to replace that portion of its labour force currently taking orders and payments from customers.

The pursuit of flexible labour markets



Sitting it out - Ronald McDole-Queue



End of menial labour? A self-service dog-washing centre, Tel Aviv, Israel

over recent decades has led to a substantial increase of employees on temporary and informal contracts (a section of the workforce Mason calls the 'precariat'). Mason cites another recent report by economists (at Delft University) that such flexible workforces come at the expense of expanded management and limited incentive to increase productivity through technological innovation. Hence the reason that 'it's common to hear politicians of all stripes say that wages need to rise.' Mason is concerned that these politicians succeed in tackling the presence of the 'precariat'. The theory goes (as set out in his recent book) that continued increases in productivity will

see the value of goods reduce to the point where they become virtually free heralding a transition to a post-capitalist era, a sort of lengthy and convoluted transition from capitalism to a kind of communistic society.

Need for conscious political action

Capitalism undoubtedly does demonstrate a tendency for the price of goods to fall over time due to the development and implementation of labour saving technology. This drive to reduce labour costs (to maximise profits) is a basic feature of capitalism and not just when wages are rising, after all the touch-screen technology being

...for Godot

introduced by McDonalds is being carried out despite its labour force consisting of the 'precariat'.

The drive to innovate may well be stimulated by rising wages but it is doubtful whether the trend for increasing productivity will reduce the value of a significant amount of goods to the point where their value is negligible at any point in the next 50-100 years, despite the fact that some (mainly digital) goods can or could do. Such developments certainly do highlight a major contradiction of capitalist production - an increase in material wealth (more goods) leads at the same time to a fall in the value (per unit) of those goods. However, waiting for this trend to result in a post-capitalist world will probably be like waiting for Godot.

There are contradictions enough in capitalist production for workers to see the necessity in ending it, not just following through the logic of its development. Just as the transition from feudalism to capitalism entailed political struggle, battles over different visions of the future, of different ideals, so will the transition from capitalism to socialism. The difference is that now the struggle is not over one group of owners, of rulers, supplanting another in a struggle in which intentions and ideas were often veiled (by religion) and unconscious. Marx has some interesting things to say on this when he writes about the fetishism (veiled appearance) of commodities:

'The veil is not removed from the countenance of the material process of production, until it becomes production by freely associated men, and stands under their conscious and planned control' (*Capital*, Vol. 1).

In other words, the transition from capitalism to socialism, by necessity, has to reject capitalist social relations (appearing as a society of free and equal exchange but based on exploitation and the extraction of surplus value from workers) and establish a new society of free association and conscious and planned control of economic activity. In other words, the transformation of a society based on commodities and value (buying and selling) to one based on the free exchange of use-values, the establishment under democratic control of the means of living (nature, factories, transport, etc.). A transition between capitalism and socialism must therefore have to be conscious and clear-sighted and involve a relatively short period of rapid social change, a revolution, a break from one kind of society to another.

The contradictions within capitalism of the kind that Mason cites, that make some goods effectively free (as examples of different social possibilities), may be part of the story of how such a revolution comes to pass. However, there will, at some point, need to be a conscious process of social change and not, as Mason suggests, a lengthy opaque and semi-conscious process where various policies are advocated that would encourage the digital revolution in order to transfigure capitalism rather than end it.

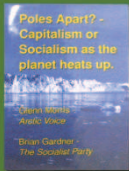
COLIN SKELLY

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Yes, we have no economic policy

OR, PUT another way, we don't have any policy for trying to manage the capitalist system.

This is for two reasons.

First, we don't want to manage the capitalist economy. We want to end it.

Second, we don't think that it can be managed.

The economic policies of all the other parties assume that it can whereas experience shows that it can't. Rather than governments controlling capitalism, it's been the other way round. Governments have to react to what capitalism throws at them. They are like people in a small boat on a choppy sea, powerless to control what is happening to them and only able to take puny counter-action.

A revealing recent example of how governments can't control the way capitalism works was the claim by Gordon Brown when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, to have finally ended the boom/slump cycle (echoing, incidentally, a similar claim by Nigel Lawson twenty years earlier). Within a couple of years the biggest slump since the 1930s hit the world, including Britain.

All the Labour government and the subsequent Tory/Lib Dem coalition could do was to react to it. And react to it on capitalism's terms - by cutting back on government spending so as to reduce the burden of taxation on profits, the lifeblood of the capitalist system, in the hope that sooner or later profitability would be restored and a profit-led recovery begin.

Ironically perhaps, this lets the Labour Party off the hook as far as one criticism is concerned - the Tories blaming the economic situation after 2008 on Labour's economic policy. This is unfair as it was the internal workings of the capitalist system that brought about the slump. The history of capitalism shows that it goes through a repeating boom/slump/boom/slump cycle, with a big slump breaking out every 50-60 years. There's nothing any government can do about this. So it was capitalism, not Labour, that has caused the 'economic mess' as the Tories called it.

But this works both ways. Just as capitalism spontaneously caused the crash of 2008 and subsequent slump it has also spontaneously caused the present modest economic recovery. The Tories are claiming this as the result of the economic policies pursued over the past five years. But they are claiming credit for something that was going to happen anyway sooner or later (in the event, far later than they expected) because in a slump the devaluation of capital and the fall in real wages, by restoring profitability, create the conditions for a profit-led recovery. That's the way capitalism works.

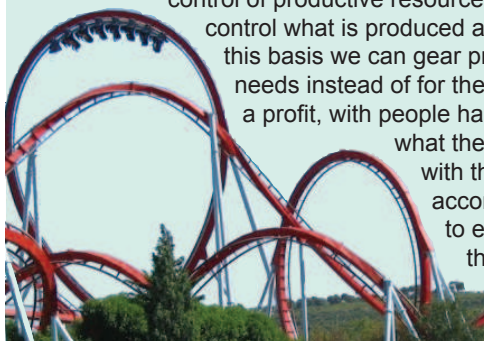
So, governments can't control the way the capitalist economy works. They can only work with it, putting profits and conditions for profit-making before meeting people's needs adequately and before other considerations such as safety at work and protecting the environment. Capitalism is a profit system that runs on profits and can only work by giving them priority. Governments have to accept this and in the end they all do.

This is the only way capitalism can work. It can't be reformed to work in any other way. This is why it has to go and be replaced by a system based on the common ownership and democratic

control of productive resources so that we can really

control what is produced and distributed. On this basis we can gear production to meeting needs instead of for the market or to make a profit, with people having free access to

what they need in accordance with the principle 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs'. In a word, socialism (in its original sense).



Mary Barnes

EARLIER THIS year there was an exhibition of paintings by Mary

Barnes (1923-2001) at the Nunnery Gallery, Bow in East London. The works came predominantly from the collection of psychiatrist Dr Joseph Berke, who is 'Boo-Bah', Mary's therapist and friend. Mary was an Army Nurse in the Second World War, in 1949 she converted to Roman Catholicism which was a rebellious and unusual step, representing a break from staid and bourgeois Anglicanism. But when she was 29 she was diagnosed as schizophrenic. With her condition seriously deteriorating, in 1963 she read RD ('Ronnie') Laing's *The Divided Self*, and contacted and began regular therapy sessions with him.

Laing and fellow psychiatrist David Cooper were heavily influenced by Jean-Paul Sartre's Marxist Existentialism which was expounded in *Search for a Method* (1957), and *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960). Sartre aimed for a synthesis of Marxism and Existentialism, seeing Marxism as the dominant philosophy and existentialism as a reinforcing ideology. Sartre proposed Existentialism and Marxism as a possible means of understanding humanity and the world as a totality. Laing and Cooper in their 1964 book *Reason and Violence*, a Sartrean synopsis saw a combination of a Hegelian-Marxist dialectic with an Existentialist psychoanalysis that incorporates individual responsibility into class relationships, thereby adding a properly Existentialist dimension of moral responsibility to a Marxist emphasis on collective and structural causality. For Laing and Cooper, mental illness was a normal, functioning element of the capitalist world we live in, and that it was in fact a perfectly rational response to an insane world and must therefore be treated as such.

In 1965 Laing, Cooper, and Berke set up the Philadelphia Association at Kingsley Hall in East London, a therapeutic community. One of the first members was Mary Barnes. Laing believed that a breakdown, if allowed to progress without medical intervention, could lead to a more stable state of mind. Thus Mary was encouraged to give in to, and regress to, a state of helpless infancy so that she could grow up again into sanity. She became the patient of 'Boo-Bah' Berke, regression therapy and a psycho-dynamic discourse ensued. Mary discovered her gift for painting, and her condition improved. Mary became a *cause célèbre*, featuring in a June 1968 *Sunday Observer* article *How Mary Barnes grew up again at 42*, and held her first solo exhibition in April 1969 at the Camden Arts Centre.

Mary's canvases are full of vivid colour and often depict religious imagery. *Trees* shows a figure on a tree in a crucifixion pose while *Crucifixion*, with its 'INRI' is much more explicit. Mary wrote that 'Ronnie especially liked *The Vine*, a crucifixion painting of Christ as the vine.' (*Mary Barnes: Two Accounts of a Journey Through Madness* Mary Barnes and Joseph Berke 1971) William James in

The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902) suggested that religious emotions may be deranged but are crucial to human life, religious experiences can be irrational but nevertheless are largely positive as after a religious experience the ideas and insights usually remain and are often valued for the rest of the person's life. Marx identified that 'Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering.' (*Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*) In *The Politics of Experience* (1967), Laing wrote 'we are born into a world where alienation awaits us. We are potentially human beings, but are in an alienated state, and this state is not a natural system' which owed a huge debt to Marx's writings on alienation in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*.



Crucifixion, 1967

state is not a natural system' which owed a huge debt to Marx's writings on alienation in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*.

Mary's *Volcanic Eruption: Explosion of IT* (1969) is the centrepiece of the exhibition, all primary red, green, yellow, orange, and black colours in seismic flourishes. Mary wrote 'in December 1965 I had a dream that I think must have been about IT: walking along a road... I saw a man in a dark suit and beret. He reminded me they would soon be testing the bomb.' The exhibition features her metal trunk with a handwritten note sellotaped to it 'Mary Barnes Art Work, paintings etc. of mainly Kingsley Hall period 66-70.' There are photographs of Boo-Bah and Mary at the publication of their book, Mary at a performance of David Edgar's 1978 play *Mary Barnes*, and a photograph of Mary in 1990 visiting Sweden where she

frequently gave talks to both psychiatrists and patients. This particular photograph shows Mary meeting a patient deemed too dangerous to meet face-to-face.

For the rest of her life Mary showed her work worldwide, usually accompanied by lectures on mental health issues, and the benefits of psychotherapy. According to Laing's son, 'Mary became a show-piece for Ronnie's central theory of the potential healing function of extremely disturbed forms of behaviour.' (*RD Laing: A Biography* Adrian Laing 1994) The exhibition epitaph is Mary's hymn to Berke: 'Boo-Bah, Ascension Day, Hip-pip Hooray! Joe, I love you with the burning heart of the Sun' which is testament to the humanism of radical 'anti-psychiatry'/Existential Marxist psychotherapy.

STEVE CLAYTON



Fire and Water, undated

Beyond anarchism

The Next Revolution. By Murray Bookchin. Verso. 2015.



Murray Bookchin was among the strongest of figures to come out of twentieth century American radicalism. As well as being known for the establishment of 'social ecology' (a

criticism of social problems coupled with ecological concerns) he also developed a political programme known as 'libertarian municipalism' which he saw as a method for getting from our present society of minority control and environmental destruction to a new rational and ecological society of mass democratic control.

The basic building block of libertarian municipalism is the community or neighbourhood assembly, face to face meetings where citizens meet to discuss and vote on the issues of the day. These assemblies elect mandated and recallable delegates who then link with other assemblies forming a confederated council, a 'community of communities'. The difference between this form of delegate democracy and our current form of representative democracy is that in a representative democracy power is given wholesale to the representative who then is free to act on their own initiative; in a delegate democracy the initiative is set by the electing body and the delegate can be recalled at any time should the electing body feel that their mandate is not being met, thus power remains at the base.

Bookchin saw the setting up of such assemblies as a task that could be initiated now, even if the only

functions they could have initially were moral ones. He also saw that, as a means for extending the democratic legitimacy and for the further confederalisation of these bodies, it would be necessary to elect town and city councillors sympathetic to the cause. This position eventually led to Bookchin making a break with his previously held anarchism. Bookchin criticised the anarchists for holding a false theory on the nature of power. Instead of seeking to abolish power, which Bookchin thought was impossible as it is always a feature of political and social life, the purpose of an emancipatory politics should be to ensure that power is in the hands of masses and is dispersed equally among them. Bookchin used the classic example of Barcelona in July 1936 to illustrate this point. The defeat of the military coup meant that the CNT (an anarcho-syndicalist union) and its armed militias were now the only real power in the city. Despite this, and because of their anarchist ideology, the CNT refused to enter the government and to exercise the political power that they already had, thus leaving the door open for the eventual Stalinist take over. By refusing to take power, Bookchin argues, the anarchists did not destroy power but merely transferred it into the hands of their enemies. While the CNT did hold power in the factories and workplaces a vast swathe of real governmental power, from the administration of military affairs and the overseeing of justice, was left in control of the liberals and Stalinists who would later use this power to reverse the gains of the July victory.

Through the gradual building up of the power and spread of assemblies Bookchin hoped that libertarian municipalism could lead to a situation of dual power where the authority of the assemblies would

eventually challenge that of the state. This brings us to our criticisms. Bookchin held that there was a distinction between the statecraft of professional politicians as the administrators of the governmental machine and politics proper as practised by free citizens engaging in the direct democracy of their self-managed communities. Whilst this distinction may be fair to a certain extent the practical conclusions that Bookchin drew from this do not seem to be very cogent. Bookchin thought that, in order to avoid becoming agents of the state, councillors standing in favour of libertarian municipalism should only stand for posts in local elections. If the majority of the population were in favour of libertarian municipalism then they would be able to use their votes to elect delegates at all levels of the state and so realise their programme that way.

Failure to exercise political power at all levels would have the result of handing power to their opponents. Despite his criticism Bookchin repeats the mistake of the Spanish anarchists.

Moreover, Bookchin thought that councillors favourable to libertarian municipalism should stand on a typical reformist programme with its 'minimal' and 'maximum' demands. We would hold that it is this, rather than the supposed principle of 'power corrupts', that led to the 'revolutionary' parties of the past degenerating into nothing more than mere administrators of the existing order. Once elected on a platform of short term reforms it is these that come to take precedence over any 'maximum' long term revolutionary goals which fade away permanently into the background. In order to stay in power the party has to appease those who voted it in on a reformist platform.

In recent years the ideas of Bookchin have found an unlikely testing ground in Rojova, a semi-autonomous Kurdish area in north eastern Syria. Abdullah Öcalan, a former Leninist and imprisoned leader of the PKK, came across the works of Bookchin whilst in prison and saw their potential for organising the Kurds, a people without a state.

As an introduction to Bookchin's thought this book is not a bad place to start but as this is a collection of articles republished from various sources there is a certain amount of repetition of ideas and themes. Despite some significant differences there is much that the Socialist Party would agree with and find of use.

DJP

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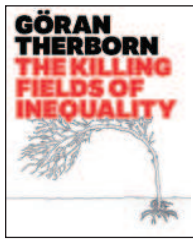
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Vital Changes

The Killing Fields of Inequality.
By Göran Therborn. Polity £14.99.



Yet another book on inequality and its consequences? Yes, and one that contains a lot of statistics but that also has some new points to make

about the types of inequality and their impacts on people's lives.

Therborn distinguishes three kinds of inequality. The first is vital inequality, dealing with people's life chances (life expectancy, likelihood of years without serious illness, etc). The second is existential inequality, referring to people's autonomy, dignity and freedom (thus covering any discrimination on the grounds of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and so on). Lastly is resource inequality, primarily a person's wealth and income but also including the support they receive from their parents.

As this suggests, one of the book's strengths is its emphasis on inequalities other than those of income and wealth. Therborn argues that what should be aimed at is 'equality of capability to function fully as a human being' (taken from the writings of Amartya Sen) and

'the rights of all children to a good enabling childhood'. As the book's title suggests, vital inequality is an important aspect of this, and in Ukraine, for instance, life expectancy is three years less for men than it was in 1990. In London among many other places, your lifespan depends to a large extent on how well-off you are. In general, lack of control over your life is bad for your health: the poorer you are, you are not just likely to die younger but to suffer more years of ill health.

As for existential inequality, discrimination on the grounds of gender is decreasing but still exists and is sometimes quite extreme (in South Asia, for instance). Therborn argues that existential equalisation is a non-zero-sum game: if women or gay people are in general subject to less prejudice or oppression, it does not by itself affect the lifestyles of the privileged. In contrast, resource equalisation is zero-sum: if the share of the poorest in the world's

wealth increases, that of the elite will decrease. Hence the rise in resource inequality in recent years, with countries such as Brazil and South Africa being the most unequal. And it was recently reported that there are more billionaires in China than in the US.

But, as so often in books along these lines, it is in the last couple of chapters that the author disappoints. Therborn accepts that capitalism will be around 'for the foreseeable future', and he appeals to the middle class (vaguely characterised as the non-rich and non-poor) to align with the poor. This way they can combat both the suffering of the poorest and the exclusivism of the oligarchs, leading to 'an egalitarian enlightened society'. But he gives no reason to believe that egalitarian capitalism is possible.

PB

Scottish Green

Humanity at the Crossroads. A Political and Humanist Dialogue.
By Raymond Garbet. Newton Books. Edinburgh, 2015. 260 pages.

This is a self-published book by a long-term member of the old Communist Party of Great Britain who is now a member of the pro-independence Scottish Green Party and so shares the illusion that an



Cheapness at a price

SUPERMARKET CHAIN Aldi opened its first British store as long ago as 1990, but it took the recent economic downturn for it to

grow into the booming profit-factory

we know today. Like Poundland and Primark, Aldi found its strength in an economic climate where we've got less disposable income, and have turned to the shops which are flogging things at the lowest prices. Aldi now has 600 stores in Britain, with plans to double this number in the next five years. Meanwhile, comparatively upmarket Tesco, Sainsbury's and Morrisons are closing branches and shelving plans to open more.

Suspicious of how this growth has been achieved, Channel 4's documentary strand Dispatches went undercover in Aldi's *Supermarket Secrets*. Two reporters wearing hidden cameras get jobs as new recruits to Aldi's army, hoping to find out about its 'dynamic business model'.

Despite the show's title promising secrets, Aldi's strategy is familiar. Punters are drawn in by cheap prices, which are possible through strict cost cutting elsewhere in the business. Obviously, it's Aldi's workforce which has to deal with the pressures to increase efficiency and productivity. The employee handbook lists

their various time targets, such as scanning 1,200 items through the till each hour, or one every three seconds. A training video tells staff that 'you dictate the speed of the transaction, not the customer'.

The pace that shelves are stacked is also set by targets, which employees try to meet by chucking loaves of bread into place and climbing on shelves because it's quicker than fetching a ladder. The speed that workers have to work means that corners are cut and health and safety policies aren't followed. Three quarters of Aldi's staff said they had health and safety concerns in a union survey.

Workplace targets tend to be unrealistic in any business, as they are set by managers without enough experience or empathy with how things are on the ground. The higher up in an organisation someone is, the further they are removed from the practicalities they make decisions about. What senior managers can see clearer is the drive to make money. Even though Aldi says that from 2016 it will pay better wages than any other retailer, staff have been expected to be at work fifteen minutes before their shift starts, which over a year

translates as a week of unpaid labour. This is illegal, although, of course, it's considered acceptable for workers not to be paid back the wealth they create which is creamed off as profits. Aldi's owners recently enjoyed profits of £260.3million in the UK, but this comes at a cost to its staff.

MIKE FOSTER



independent Scottish government would be able to buck the economic laws of capitalism and put people before profits.

He is also a member of the Humanists (hence the book's subtitle). As such he rejects religion (which he defines as any belief in the exist of a 'soul') but doesn't call himself an atheist because that is saying what you are against not what you are for, preferring 'Secular Humanist'; which is fair enough. Basically, he sees the way forward for humanity as the UN taking action to deal with climate change, world poverty and human rights abuses; a worthy internationalist perspective but another illusion to expect that collection of capitalist states to do anything about any of these.

If you buy the book you get a Trotskyist pamphlet thrown in free as he has a 20-page interview with Colin Fox, ex-MSP and leading member of the Scottish Socialist Party (which Garbet annoyingly refers to as the Socialist Party) and representative within it of the old Militant Tendency. The trouble is that it is outdated as Fox puts his group's pre-Corbyn line that the Labour Party is finished and so for the need for a new union-based workers party, stressing 'the enormous obstacles that exist in reclaiming the Labour Party as Jeremy Corbyn has been attempting for years.' But, to be honest, we didn't see it coming either, not that it makes any fundamental difference. That Fox is no socialist is summed up in his last word: 'we want to create a society where everyone receives a decent wage.'

ALB

Meetings

For full details of all our meetings and events see our **Meetup** site: <http://www.meetup.com/The-Socialist-Party-of-Great-Britain/>

Manchester Branch

Friday 11 December 2015, 8.30 pm
Seasonal Social
The Unicorn, 26 Church Street, Manchester
M4 1PW

East Anglian Regional Branch

Saturday 12 December 2015, 2.00pm
'The Argument Clinic: Logical Fallacies and Cognitive Biases: How thinking about thinking can help give new perspectives to old arguments' – A workshop
Speaker: Darren Poynton.
The Windmill pub, Knox Road, Norwich
NR1 4LQ

West London Branch

Tuesday 22 December 2015, 8.00pm
Seasonal Social
Chiswick Town Hall - Hogarth Room,
Heathfield Terrace, London W4 4JN

Kent & Sussex Regional Branch

Brighton Discussion Group
Wednesday 13 January 2016, 7.30pm-9.30pm
'The Ecology and Socialism'
Guest Speaker: Brian Morris
The Brighthelm Centre (Pelham Room - 1st Floor) North Road, Brighton BN1 1YD
(4 minutes walk from Brighton rail station)

London Economics Debating Society

Monday 25 January 2016, 7.00pm
'Scarcity and Infinite Wants: The Founding Myths of Economics'
Speaker: Adam Buick (Socialist Party)
Venue: Details in January issue of the *Socialist Standard*.

SOCIALIST STANDARD INDEX FOR 2014

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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.

50 Years Ago

Christianity or Socialism

THIS MONTH Christians celebrate the birth of their Christ. It is therefore appropriate once again to examine the Christian religion and its relations to socialism and the working class.

Christianity is a comparatively recent religion but it is thick with the debris of man's earlier superstitions. The pagan influence on the Christmas festival is especially well marked, for December 25th was a holy day long before Jesus Christ was even thought of. Primitive man worshipped the sun because the course of his life was dominated by the yearly round of that planet in the heavens. This practice was wide spread but especially in northern countries mid-December was



The sun-god Mithra

thought to be a critical time, as the days became shorter and shorter and the sun itself weaker. Great bonfires were lit to give the sun god strength and, when it became apparent that the shortest day had passed, there was great rejoicing. Thus the Roman winter-solstice festival, held on December 25th in connection with the worship of the sun-god Mithra, was known as the birthday of the unconquered sun-god. (...)

Christmas is supposed to be a time of good cheer, when the harsh reality of this world is briefly forgotten. But it is impossible to disregard capitalism even at this time of the year. We address our Christmas message to the working class, about to enjoy yet another wretched holiday under capitalism—the system they chose to perpetuate when they voted for the Labour and Tory parties last October. That man of the people, the sanctimonious Harold Wilson, has gone on record as talking of “our quest for the Kingdom of God on earth”. After one year of Labour government the conclusion is inevitable; God and Mr. Wilson are forced to administer capitalism in the interests of the ruling class as ever. But then Mr. Wilson is not a socialist—and neither is God.

(from article by J.C., *Socialist Standard*, December 1965)

ACTION REPLAY

Sadness in the Beautiful Game

A YEAR ago on the morning of 22 December, Clarke Carlisle was hit by a lorry on the A64 near Bishopthorpe, North Yorkshire. Carlisle was an ex-footballer and former spokesman for the Professional Footballers Association (PFA). He was subsequently charged for his third drink-driving offence and sentenced to 150 hours unpaid community service.

Five months later, outside Islington magistrate's court he stood before a camera looking directly at it – and apologised for something no human should be pushed to do – deliberately stepping out in front of a lorry in a suicide attempt. 'His expression of remorse for the lorry driver was desperate to observe' (*i* newspaper, 18 May).

Since being nursed back to health by the Cygnet hospital, Harrogate, Carlisle has helped to establish a foundation to help those suffering from mental health and related drug/alcohol problems and has met with politicians to elevate this dual condition in the media.

Clarke Carlisle's return to society will not be welcomed by all. Some will shun him, believing that he deserved a custodial sentence. His behaviour

has been described by those who know him as – drink – do damage, be briefly remorseful, do damage, etc. This typically reckless behaviour has turned people against him. He has since apologised for his conduct and says he is a different person now. He has a new goal and his campaigning for more public and governmental recognition of the problems associated with the dual problems of alcohol and mental health is a worthy cause that may help him along the road to redemption



Clarke Carlisle

Carlisle has experienced remorse and bleak loneliness. His journey towards sobriety and tackling his mental health issues should not be ignored by the wider public. His involvement is

a positive response to his own turmoil. Mental health problems affect one person in four with anti-depressants being prescribed widely to the public.

But we now await the 'cuts' the Conservative government is forcing on the public. It's likely that mental health services will be badly affected as the government also encourages more privatisation of the NHS. It is not good news. KEVIN

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Voice from the Back

Kill capitalism

You want to know more about socialism, who are you gonna call? Jeremy Corbyn? Antonio Costa? Bernie Sanders? No, they can't see beyond capitalism. You will learn more from the console/computer game Assassin's Creed, where Marx's call for workers of the world to unite is repeated along with the following biography: 'Karl Heinrich Marx (1818 - 1883) was a German philosopher, economist, journalist and sociologist considered the founder of the ideology of Marxism ... Throughout his life, Marx published several books, the most famous of which are arguably *The Communist Manifesto* and *Das Kapital*. His work in economics laid the basis for much of the current understanding of labour and its relation to capital, as well as subsequent economic thought. Although many revolutionaries, such as Vladimir Lenin, Mao Zedong and Fidel Castro would later cite Marx as an influence, their fidelity to Marx's ideas is highly contested' (assassinscreed.wikia.com, accessed 7 November).

Same shit, different century

'Communist [sic] dictator Nicolae Ceausescu's iron-fisted rule of Romania was marked by several decades of brutal repression, fear and intimidation. But the most shocking details to emerge after his death were the conditions in the country's orphanages -- where thousands of emaciated and diseased babies were found slowly dying in filth infested cradles. Images of their plight shocked the world when broadcast in 1989. Now, 25 years on, these orphans have been found still living rough in underground sewers throughout the country -- where diseases such as HIV run rampant and drug addiction is rife' (dailymail.co.uk, 6 November). State capitalism then, crony capitalism today.

Cruising to Chernobyl

Capitalism can seem like a crazy system where war, waste and want exist alongside wanton excess. Yet these are



De-populated Chernobyl village...

endemic features of a form of society which has outlived its usefulness rather than crazy per se. However, the following news item suggests that exceptions are to be found. 'Plans to link a chain of rivers and canals in Poland, Belarus and Ukraine may release radioactivity from the remains emitted by the Chernobyl nuclear power station disaster of 1986, environmental experts say. The project, which would complete a huge trans-Europe waterway, is designed to increase trade between the three north European states, and to foster tourism and encourage more environmentally-friendly freight transport ... Andrei Rehesh, secretary of the Commission on the Development of the E40 Waterway, the European Commissions name for the trans-Europe link, told journalists visiting the canal near Brest of the regular trips made through the zone by the river craft. These take them within an estimated 500 meters of the Chernobyl plant itself' (truthdig.com, 1 November).

Blood money

We would like to think that bear baiting is extinct, but it continues in Pakistan and the USA. Similarly barbaric, cock fighting takes place in many countries. One clue as to why is given here: 'at the Bangkok Cockpit in Samut Prakan, a province on the outskirts of the capital, a 1,000-strong throng cheers on a pair of avian fighters whose necks are locked in combat as bets furiously exchange hands ... A few weeks later the same stadium raked in 22.2 million baht (\$618,000) for a record-breaking bet, venue manager Banjerd

Janyai told AFP. In this lucrative industry "good fighting birds" can sell for more than \$85,000, he added, with Thailand exporting cocks to neighbouring countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia and buyers arriving from as far afield as France and Bahrain' (news.yahoo.com, 1 November).



Popular in Afghanistan...

Unsafe sex in a dangerous world

'Indian Defense Minister Manohar Parrikar will leave for Moscow and St. Petersburg Friday, October 30 to finalize two defense deals ...(over \$1.8 billion USD) to acquire new equipment that (were) just approved by the Defense Acquisitions Council' (valuewalk, 1 November). Meanwhile, in the world of the 99 percent, we read 'India provides free condoms under its community-based AIDS prevention programme that targets high-risk groups like sex workers ... The shortages come after Prime Minister Narendra Modi slashed federal AIDS funding in February by a fifth' (asaiaone.com, 6 November).

No pies!

Capitalism exists worldwide. Nearly one in four Americans have more credit card debt than emergency savings and two out of three exist paycheck to paycheck. Yet members of the 1% have money to burn. Take Kanye West for example. He '... spends a whopping £120,000 a YEAR on getting his hair done ...' (heatworld.com, 3 November). Clearly it is time for capitalism to meet its Sweeney Todd in the form of an enlightened working class.

FREE LUNCH

