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 carillion

also: Marx @ 200

Populism

Turkey



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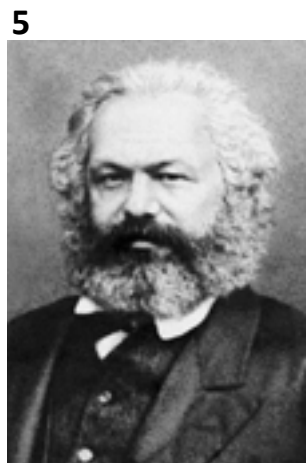
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Editorial

Privatisation no better

THE RECENT collapse of the construction company, Carillion, has put the government's Private Finance Initiative (PFI) policy under the spotlight. Under this policy, private companies are contracted to finance and manage public sector projects, such as building and maintaining schools and hospitals. On completion, the building or service is leased back to the government, which then must make an annual payment for a period of 25 or more years. The main advantage for the government is that much of the costs can be kept off the government balance sheets.

PFI was first introduced by the Conservative government in 1992 following a deep recession when public sector finances were tight. The Labour government of 1997-2010 extended greatly the use of PFI, particularly in the NHS, hailing it as a means of harnessing private capital for social ends. The Coalition government of 2010-2015 continued with PFI and rebranded it as Private Finance 2 (PF2), which was supposed to provide greater transparency and accountability.

However, private contractors normally borrow money at a higher interest

rate than the government and in many contracts, private companies have been able to milk as much as they can from the deal. Thus, in many cases, the total costs have been considerably higher than if the government had undertaken the work itself. PFI repayments have placed a heavy burden on many NHS trusts, reducing their ability to hire doctors and nurses and provide medical care. Also, in bidding for PFI contracts, investors have had to reduce their costs which exert downward pressure on workers' pay.

An argument for PFI was that the risk lay with the private contractors, when in fact it has been the government that has had to bail out the projects when either the firm goes bust or, as was the case during the financial crisis of 2008-2009, the banks would sometimes refuse to lend the money.

As to be expected, PFI has its critics. MPs have complained of the extra costs to the taxpayer. John McDonnell, the Shadow Chancellor, has pledged that not only would a future Labour government end the use of PFI deals but would also bring existing PFI contracts 'back in-house'. The Royal Bank of Scotland chairman, Howard Davies, when appearing on BBC Question

Time, has called it a 'fraud on the people'.

Few things better illustrate how capitalism treats everything, including healthcare and education, as commodities to be bought and sold for a profit than PFI. However nauseating it is to witness private companies making millions out of essential social services, ending PFI and returning to the old system of government procurement would not resolve the problems of meeting working people's needs. Before PFI, the provision of public services were still circumscribed by what the market system could afford. As for the costs to the taxpayers, it has to be borne in mind that although workers do pay taxes, the burden of financing the state ultimately falls on the capitalist class. The real fraud that is enacted on working class people is the capitalist system itself which appropriates their unpaid labour to enrich the capitalist minority.



Introducing the Socialist Party

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.

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Space Oddity

A dummy dressed as an astronaut rides a red Tesla Roadster into space (with Bowie's *Space Oddity* playing on a loop on the in-car stereo), courtesy of SpaceX's Falcon Heavy rocket, and leaves a smoke-trail of divided opinion behind it. It was a publicity stunt worthy of the Marvel character Tony Stark, and indeed SpaceX CEO Elon Musk has been credited as the inspiration behind Robert Downey Jr's portrayal in the films (Musk even had a cameo part in *Iron Man 2*). Fans of SpaceX enthuse on the ability of private capital to do what NASA and its Russian equivalent Rocosmos never did and build a cheap reusable rocket, although this isn't strictly fair as SpaceX is NASA-funded. Still, it is undoubtedly impressive to see two of the booster rockets make perfect synchronised landings. Ideally it should have been three but the other one crashed. As Musk only gave the initial launch a 50:50 chance of not blowing up on the launch pad, this nevertheless has to be counted a resounding success.

In the interests of balance someone had to gainsay this billionaire-boy-and-his-toys story though, and Van Badham no doubt spoke for many with the observation that 'space exploration should be an initiative of nations, not just some rich guy' (*Guardian*, 9 February). Socialists would quarrel with the word 'nations' of course, since nations don't represent the people as liberal journalists carelessly assume, but are run in the interest of rich guys. But this is the whole problem with the capitalist entrepreneur / visionary / philanthropist thing – it's always the agenda set by the rich guy, never as a result of collective or democratic debate. Even when they're trying to do good things, like Bill Gates and his malaria programmes, it's still essentially a vanity project by a rich guy, not a consensual project by a world community. You wouldn't run a local club like that, but for some reason it's ok to run the world that way.

Opinions remain divided between those who think Musk is a modern-day Edison, and those who think he's a workaholic wacko with an amazing ability to solicit huge amounts of investment and then lose it. His Tesla Roadster may have ridden triumphantly into the heavens, but his Tesla company has been riding in the opposite direction after posting a \$2bn loss for 2017. Whether ultimately he hits paydirt or the skids, the very fact that he has the power to launch junk into space without public involvement, debate or oversight is an indictment of capitalism's glorification of the rich and its perverse tendency to let the super-elite tail wag the social dog.



The next big thing? You must have blinked...

Science is only separated from science fiction by time, luck and lab work, but the predicted Singularity – that epoch-making culmination of exponential tech growth first mentioned in this column in January, 2006 – has so far failed to appear. While futurologists continue to throw darts at calendars to produce arrive-by dates for this supposed big-tech-bang, detractors have instead dared to suggest that the pace of tech growth, far from being exponential, is stalling and even slowing down (technologyreview.com/s/601199/tech-slowdown-threatens-the-american-dream/). They point to a tech-driven economic revolution between 1870 and 1970 that changed workers' lives so fundamentally that any subsequent change has been comparatively cosmetic. Though the internet and social media have been a huge cultural change, their economic effect has been 'disruptive' within existing markets rather than productive in new ones, while real wages have gone down in some places since 1972. Still it would be a curmudgeonly capitalist who reduced the benefits of technology to a dry profit and loss balance sheet. Artificial Intelligence – the usual suspect in singularity theories – is today all around us, and while its ability to beat the world's top chess and Go players may have only limited real-world application, it works pretty well for Amazon and Google searches.

Wired Magazine thinks that 2018's next big thing might go unnoticed because people won't recognise it for what it is (wired.co.uk/article/we-will-ignore-2018s-biggest-innovation). But maybe we've already missed it. What if we're already inside the Singularity, and just don't realize it? After all and contrary to prediction, it doesn't have to be an AI-led event, nor does it have to be just one thing, or happen all at once. The printing press took around seven decades to spread across Western Europe. Few people in the 1450s would have realised that a technological revolution was taking place. Perhaps we are equally oblivious, or perhaps we're simply good at taking things in our stride. Three quarters of the UK population now possess a low-cost pocket tool into which hundreds of other tools have been folded in a way that just a generation ago would have been inconceivable. Like a Swiss Army knife with an infinite number of extensions, today's smart phone is a recorder, video camera, GPS navigator, alarm clock, egg timer, diary, juke box, book library, games hub, TV, mini-cinema and radio player, payment card, banking service, translator and world encyclopaedia. You can tune your guitar with it, check how late your train is and whether it's raining at your destination, you can use it as a spirit level or a torch, and point it at speakers so it'll tell you what song is playing. And of course you can phone or text people or join conferences via Skype. Older readers who remember slide rules might be amused to learn that if today's 256gb iPhone X had been built in 1957 it would have been the size of a 3-kilometer-wide hundred-storey building, cost one and a half times the world's GDP, and required 30 times the world's total energy capacity (bradford-delong.com/2017/09/do-they-really-say-technological-progress-is-slowing-down).

The singularity, however it is defined, represents an event beyond which human civilisation will change in unfathomable ways. In this sense, socialism is a political singularity. Currently all the intellectual and creative power of the world's population is stunted by being forced through the bottleneck of property relations and the market, yet the pressure against this bottleneck is growing along with the individual's access to communications. Once this bottleneck breaks and the gigantic potential of human capability is released, we may then consider that the singularity began much earlier than we ever realised, when we got that first phone contract.

PJS

5 May 2018 marks the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of Karl Marx in Trier, in what was then Prussia and is now Germany. Marx went on to become a major figure in the founding of the modern socialist movement and many will be marking the event with reverence. But so what, you might ask? Surely Marx isn't relevant today? Why do socialists today want to read and talk about the ideas of a nineteenth-century philosopher?

Marx has two main legacies for socialists today. Firstly, Marx helped us to understand the economics of capitalism by explaining that it is a system based on the exploitation of workers by capitalists that occurs during the process of the production of commodities, as opposed to the point of sale. Secondly, he developed a view of history that placed people and their social and economic development at its centre and not religion or any other notion of an ideal society that floats apart from real life. Today this is more or less how most people think of and understand history and the world around them, although many people simultaneously hold religious views and some argue for secular, 'postmodern', diluted versions of idealism.

Critique of political economy

Marx's major work, *Capital*, was a critique of economic thought up to that time (1867). The classical political economists, such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo (who Marx regarded as the last of the scientific investigators of capitalist political economy) had argued that labour was the source of value. Following on from this conclusion, critics of capitalist competition like John Gray, Thomas Hodgskin, William Thompson, and John Francis Bray reasoned that what was wrong with capitalism was that an unequal act of exchange was taking place outside of the process of production – workers were not receiving the full value of their labour. From the working class perspective this infant labour theory of value was a great stride forward in understanding the relation of labour to capital. The claim that labour was the source of value and that workers therefore had the right to the value that they created was a bold step towards explaining why it was that capitalists, who did not work and so created no value, were getting richer; whilst those who laboured, and so created value, were getting poorer (often absolutely, always relatively). From the capitalist standpoint this was the Achilles heel of classical political economy, and the reason why it was abandoned in favour of a view of economics as the study of the competition of choices for the allocation of scarce resources, which is still the basis of modern mainstream economics.

The enduring legacy of Karl Marx was that he developed the arguments of the classical political economists to their conclusion (which they themselves had avoided) and was able to develop a withering criticism of capitalism. Classical political economy had been unable to explain profit convincingly. After all, how could profit be accounted for if the value of a commodity was the

labour embodied in it and labour had been sold at its value by the worker? This was why the early critics of capitalism placed so much emphasis on the idea that a portion of the value of their labour was being corruptly usurped by capitalists, merchants, bankers and the like who were taking over from the landed aristocracy and the 'old corruption' of court politics to become the wealthiest members of an increasingly industrial society.

Marx argued that the classical political economists had missed a crucial link in understanding how capitalism works and what profit actually is. Rather than workers being paid for their labour, Marx argued, they were in fact paid for their labour-power. The value of this labour-power varies according to (1) the cost of reproducing labour-power (in other words the cost of feeding and housing workers and their dependants) and (2) the amount of labour embodied in the labour-power of a given worker (in other words the value of a doctor's labour is more than an unskilled machinist because the many hours of education and training received by the doctor are bound up in their labour, unlike the machinist who performs only simple labour). The crucial point is that the difference between the value of what workers produce and what they are paid in exchange for their labour-power is the source of surplus-value, otherwise known as profit. This was the source of increasing capitalist wealth and not unequal exchange. Workers are paid an equivalent; not for their labour, the product of which is owned by the capitalist, but for their labour-power which they sell at a price around its value (sometimes more sometimes less depending on the given state of the labour market in a given branch of industry).

Materialist Conception of History

Marx's view on history can be gathered from different parts of other critiques and historical works he put together. They can be summed up by the first line of the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles' and in the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859):

"In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness."

An awful lot has been written about what became known as 'historical materialism', particularly in the second half of the twentieth century when



it became fashionable among Marxist academics. It is not determinist as it critics insist – it does not suggest that change happens automatically, that ideas mechanically reflect technological and economic change; after all these changes often require new ideas and political interventions. Marx is merely arguing a rather simple point, that ultimately the material world provides the limits of our perception. Our thoughts must always relate to the real world, to the necessity for food and shelter and social production and to current social and economic relationships and the struggles associated with them. Although thought obviously feeds back into how we perceive the world and therefore act, thought itself does not exist independently of material reality. Marxian socialists accept the importance of ideas in creating social change but reject the notion that ideas can come from outside experience, as a vision, and transcend it to establish a new social reality.

Marx was challenging the religious views prevalent in the nineteenth century that the material world was shaped by our ideas, which ultimately were derived from God. Marx countered this by asserting that, on the contrary, our



Greed -- or need?

In the last week of January the media reported 'riots', really little more than pushing and shoving, at some supermarkets in France after the Intermarché chain reduced the price of Nutella, the nut-based spread, from €4.50 to €1.40 for a limited period. Similar scenes were reported in Wrexham in 2014 when the 99p Store there decided to temporarily sell their wares at 50p instead.

According to opponents of socialism, such behaviour confirms their view that it is human nature to be greedy and that this is what would happen in socialism where everything on the shelves of the distribution centres would be available for people to take for free. However, there is a great difference between the situation under capitalism and that is socialism.

For a start, in capitalism some people's income is so low that they have to buy what they need in Poundlands and 99p

ideas emerge from our experience of the material world. These ideas then feed back into our experience by acting to re-shape it through social and political struggle. Limits are placed on the actions of individuals by their social and economic context – so changing the social and economic basis of society is therefore, for Marx, the fundamental point of political action. This is what industrial capitalists in the nineteenth century were doing to displace landed capitalists as the dominant power amongst their class – in the process creating a new theory of society (modern economics) to further propel it and justify it. It is also, crucially, what Marx thought that socialists needed to do to create a new society. Ideas without a change in the economic basis of society could not result in a socialist society. This economic change is not pre-determined and requires class conscious political action to make it a reality – capitalism would not collapse on its own or evolve itself into a new form of society.

For Marx, capitalist production involved the production of commodities for exchange, wages, and profit. Its opposite was a society with rational, planned production for use, with co-operative labour under conditions of free association. In other words, there would be no need for exchange in socialism and therefore no reason for money to exist – given that its reason for existence was as a facilitator of exchange. But socialist revolution won't happen by itself – we need to make it happen.

Among the dead-end political movements that followed in the century after Marx's death in 1883 were Labour governments and nationalised industries and the Bolshevik revolution and other so-called 'Marxist' regimes around the world. These political projects attempted to create a fairer world, which they called 'socialism'. Marx – read in his own words – helps us to understand that they could not deliver the societies they sought because they left the capitalist process of production intact. The lesson for the supporters of Corbyn's Labour party should be obvious.

COLIN SKELLY

Stores which enterprising capitalists have set up to sell them cheap, low-quality necessities. So, when those on low incomes learn of huge price reductions somewhere they hurry to take advantage of this and get their hands on the reduced-price goods while stocks or the offer last.

This is not an expression of some built-in human greed. In the circumstances it is actually rational behaviour to satisfy needs based on the knowledge that this is not a permanent situation and that prices are soon going to rise again.

In socialism free access to what people need won't be a one-off but will be permanent and the stores will always be well stocked. The 'Soledad Brother' George Jackson put it rather well in one of his prison letters:

'Consider the people's store, after full automation, the implementation of the theory of economic advantage. You dig, no waste makers, nor harnesses on production. There is no intermediary, no money. The store, it stocks everything that the body or home could possibly use. Why won't the people hoard, how is an operation like that possible, how could the storing place keep its stores if

its stock (merchandise) is free?'

After pointing out that it is in conditions of insecurity that people hoard, as 'nuts hidden away for tomorrow's winter', he answered his question:

'The people's store will work as long as people *know* that it will be there, and have in abundance the things they need and want (really want); when they are *positive* that the common effort has and will *always* produce an abundance, they won't bother to take home more than they need. Water is free, do people drink more than they need?' (Letter of June 17, 1970).

The other difference from capitalism is that nobody will be so severely rationed by the size of their wage packet or their hand-out from the state as to be only able to access low-quality things to satisfy their basic needs. In fact such low quality stuff wouldn't be produced in socialism. Why, in a society where production will be geared to meeting people's needs, would inferior goods that don't satisfy these needs properly be produced?



What's 'Appropriate' then?

IT IS some time now since we could expect to be warmed and comforted by those big, declaratory Monday morning newspaper photographs of Prime Minister Theresa May, pondering on the most hopeful date to call the next election and how meanwhile she might wrestle with the likes of Boris Johnson, Michael Gove, Liam Fox (remember him?), Gavin Williamson... She was obediently tailed by her husband James May and in accord with their respective backgrounds they were then emerging from some parish church not far from the Chiltern Hills. Mr May was smiling, which could have been motivated by the fact that he is a top executive of one of the biggest and most powerful financial institutions which controls assets worth trillions of dollars, including shares in Amazon and the popular coffee house Starbucks, which have both been listed by Theresa May in her sights for action (or whatever it is) against the keenest of tax avoiders. A lot has happened since then to undermine the political standing of the Prime Minister and her partner. For example there has been the exposure of the relationship between so many of their followers and assistants which has been such as to justify the term 'inappropriate behaviour' which means the opposite of something suitable and proper. It is called sexual abuse.

Misconduct

But on that day, making their way from that local manufactory of delusion, Mrs May and her husband gave no hint that they were in fear of any particular crisis awaiting them in Westminster and beyond. Which probably made it more difficult for them to confront their raw feelings about what their supporters in Parliament and beyond had been up to. There was the brutal reality about the sexual misconduct of a clutch of Honourable Members towards party members and supporters, even as the facts were beginning to emerge. Much of it was revealed in what rapidly became known as the Spreadsheet of Shame – a survey which named 36 particular performers on that score. The events – the abuses – revealed in that document included 'handsy behaviour' or of a former Member suggesting to his secretary that she might enjoy it to 'feel' how long his penis was or another planning to encourage a staff member to get drunk to assist his unwanted sexual advances.

Climbing

Notably prominent – to his own discomfort – in all of this has been Mark Garnier the Conservative MP for Wyre Forest Worcestershire, whose local opponents

are likely to be undermined by the very existence of the thousands who regularly support him. Garnier attended a couple of expensive local schools after which he became a junior clerk in an investment bank in London. This led to a partnership in a firm of hedge fund managers. In his politics he has contested Wyre Forest four times as a Tory. On his first attempt there he lost to an independent candidate but after that in 2010, 2015 and 2017 he won and his present majority is in the region of 13,000. Political climbing runs in the family; a cousin of his did a spell as Solicitor General and he himself was Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for International Trade from July 2016 until being sacked in January 2018 – an event which was greeted by a local councillor



who '...would just like to congratulate Theresa May on making a very sensible decision... definitely the right move by the Prime Minister'. At that time Garnier was operating in a style which involved him asking his secretary, one Caroline Edmondson, to buy him some sex toys in a Soho shop while he publicly lauded her as a 'sugar-tits'. The official government line on Garnier's sacking was that it was to make way for new blood while he was also in breach of the ministerial code – except that this was contradicted soon afterwards when he was cleared by an official enquiry. Not surprisingly Garnier blurted out that he was bitterly disappointed at being punished for behaviour which he was assessed as not responsible for. It did not seem to occur to him that this was typical of the ruthless, unpredictable technique in the world of capitalist 'justice'. Then there was Damian Green who was until recently one of Theresa May's special favourites as her First Secretary of State – effectively Deputy Prime Minister – until she had to 'ask' him to resign because he

was so deeply involved in activities which once encouraged his then future wife to comment that 'He's got a very strong sex drive, he's just not all that discriminating'.

Inappropriate

The affair of the misbehaving MPs, the appointments, the disputes, the sackings, was in response to their 'inappropriate' behaviour – a fascinating word for use in survival, even success, in the political world. To begin with, it does have some effect in diminishing the gravity of some of the MP's actions, for example when the focus was on Mark Garnier. But there are many examples of governmental policies and actions which are considered as 'appropriate' but which in their effects are of the cruellest, and most damaging. One of the more recent was a report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, on behalf of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which described the day to day effects of governmental policies which operate in response to the current problems of British capitalism. Helen Barnard who is head of analysis of the Rowntree Foundation, is quite clear about this: 'Low-income households are facing a difficult 2018, with rising prices, frozen benefits and a wage squeeze all putting further pressure on household incomes'. If Theresa May, as she drifted through the church door that day, had asked herself how effectively she could continue to play a role in this class divided society she might have felt the need to use that word 'appropriate'. For this is typical of the crime against our very language, of how capitalism distorts every aspect of our lives. It is only the socialists who stand and work against this malignant chaos.

IVAN





FOR WHOM THE CARILLION TOLLS



The collapse of Carillion has brought the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) into the headlines once more, much to the delight of the Corbynite crowd in the Labour Party. PFI was, essentially, outsourcing state facilities and services to the private sector, delivering the same outcomes for the public but under private for-profit management.

For politicians there were advantages: at certain times, under accounting rules, PFI arrangements would not add to state debt, since the private firms would have to borrow to finance the project (build the prison, school, hospital, etc.). Further, the ongoing liabilities for maintaining the building would fall on the private company, and not add to the government estate. The wider benefit would be that it would also keep the headcount of state employees down, and create a downward pressure on wages as workers would be divided between firms.

From an ideological point of view, it was about asserting that private sector management techniques are more efficient and capable of delivering services than the public sector, where employers are subject to political pressure as well as market pressure. Further, from a capitalist point of view, the state is inherently unproductive, even where it provides useful services. From this perspective, all expenditure by the state is a barrier to the accumulation of capital and the growth of the capitalist economy.

Profit funding initiative

PFI raised the option of making profits out of these services, and adding to the gross profits of the economy. For New Labour politicians, this raised the fantasy of ending the antagonism between state and private sector, making serving public needs profitable. That it expanded the options for the soft corruption of what *Private Eye* calls the 'Westminster revolving door' would have helped.

Giving ex-politicians seats on the boards of firms has long been a way of ensuring compliance from MPs and Ministers: it doesn't need to be a direct quid-pro-quo of corruption proper, but a generalised reward for services to being pro-business. With outside firms bidding for state contracts, the possibility arose for ex-Ministers to become 'advisors' to the firms that had serviced their departments, added to the feather nest.

There have been obvious problems with PFI: unlike directly employed staff, corporate entities work strictly to contract, and there have been a rash of instances where the precise terms of the contract turn out to be poorly drafted, and the firm has refused to take on work or costs that would normally reasonably be associated with the service they are providing. Schools in Edinburgh basically fell down, as the builders had

cut corners in order to boost their profit margins. PFIs have turned out to be more expensive in many instances than if the government had borrowed the money directly.

The fantasy of reconciliation has hit the rocks in Carillion: not because the firm was incompetent or specifically venal, but, rather, because of the crisis-prone nature of capitalist markets themselves. Carillion is a construction company that has specialised in winning Government contracts, or buying up firms with Government contracts.

As Jonathon Ford wrote for the *Financial Times*: 'Carillion's balance sheet shows the extent of its dependence on these ethereal assets. At the end of 2016, things that could be sold in a crisis (ie fixed assets and stocks) accounted for just 5 per cent of the total. Its solvency thus depended on the valuation of intangibles accounting for nearly 40 per cent



of the balance sheet. Almost all of those were goodwill — acquired with the many companies Carillion acquired over the 18 years of its existence.'

<https://www.ft.com/content/c856fcbce-fea6-11e7-9650-9c0ad2d7c5b5>(ft.com, tinyurl.com/y7xh4xz9)

The company existed as something of a phantom based on the income derived from government projects, sub-contracting the actual work of owning machinery and tools to smaller firms. This was fine, so long as the contracts kept rolling in. Carillion will have been one of the big losers from the Tory governments' long-term austerity drive, such as when they cancelled the schools building programme. As the blogger Michael Roberts notes:

'It seems that it had taken on too many projects from the UK public sector at prices that delivered very narrow margins. So, as debt issuance rose and profitability disappeared, cash

began to haemorrhage. Carillion ran up a huge debt pile of £900m. But this did not stop the Carillion board lying about their financial state, continuing to pay themselves large salaries and bonuses and fat dividends to their shareholders. In contrast, the company did little to reduce a mounting deficit on the pensions fund of their 40,000 global staff, putting their pensions in jeopardy. Indeed, Carillion raised its dividends every year for 16 years while running up a pensions deficit of £587m. It paid out nearly £200m in dividends in the last two years alone. The recently sacked CEO took home £660,000 a year plus bonuses.'

(thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2018/01/18/carillion-and-the-dead-end-of-privatisation/)

In other words, a classic case of a capitalist firm expanding as fast as it could, irrespective of the eventual constraints on the size of the market. That the board kept paying out dividends (huge firms, like Apple, occasionally choose not to pay dividends, in order to help develop asset growth), suggests that the firm had become very much a money-go-round, sucking in investment to win more contracts to pay dividends to suck in investment and contracts. This could have gone on, had the economy generally, and the government spending, kept on expanding.

As '*Socialist Economic Bulletin*' notes:

'revenues were barely changed between 2010 and 2016 at just over £5 billion and net assets actually shrank, even before the latest collapse to zero...The model came crashing down because of austerity. The main reason revenues are flat between 2010 and 2016 is that the Tories (and the Coalition before them) slashed public sector investment in roads, rail, ports and housing, and took an axe to real current spending, in areas such as education services, the NHS, the justice system, and so on. The pace of new privatisations and PFI since 2010 was not enough to top up the bucket with a big hole marked austerity.'

(<http://socialisteconomicbulletin.blogspot.co.uk/2018/01/jeremy-corbyn-is-right-carillion-should.html>)

We have pointed out in these pages before that the only way in which PFI can be made profitable is often by 'sweating' the workforce, and driving down wages: the structural inability to be able to do this (due to legal and trade union constraints) means that the profit margins for these sort of deals are tight; and many firms end up handing the contract back (or selling it on to another firm).

Interest charges

Labour will make hay over the questions of how the government could keep awarding contracts (and, indeed,

anyone who has ever been anywhere near public sector procurement could tell you that checks and guarantees of financial health are an essential part of the process). But, venality, political expediency and outright corruption have always gone hand in hand with the market system. This is especially so, as PFI-style deals are subject to commercial confidentiality (and the firms running the contracts are themselves exempt from freedom of information laws).

The National Audit office has produced a report on PFI deals, which points out:

'There are currently over 700 operational PFI and PF2 deals, with a capital value of around £60 billion. Annual charges for these deals amounted to £10.3 billion in 2016-17. Even if no new deals are entered into, future charges which continue until the 2040s amount to £199 billion.

(www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/PFI-and-PF2.pdf)

Further, there remain accounting and structural reasons, other than value for money, which may drive public bodies into considering PFI deals, even if Corbyn and McDonnell manage to clamp down on the practice (should they ever form a government).

The debates around PFI, though, are essentially about differing methods of borrowing money: McDonnell has committed himself to a version of Brown's rules about only borrowing to invest in capital structures not current spending, and the last Labour manifesto promised to expand certain benefits and spending areas. So they will have to borrow, which means giving interest payments to the same capitalist robbers who invest in Carillion. In either case, the need to go and ask the owners of wealth for funds on their terms is a way of disciplining the state: its only other option is to tax directly to fund all its activity, but that would inevitably cut into profits and the accumulation of capital: with the most likely response being a capital strike as fund holders refuse to invest and try and hold their assets where the tax man cannot find them.

The real debate is not about the actual contractual structures by which the government persuades the owners of the world to let them fund services, but about us being able to directly control our own efforts and labour to attend to our own needs. Any notion that ending PFI is a strike against capitalist fat cats is illusory

PIK SMEET



IN SEARCH OF POPULISM

So-called populist movements are on the rise, from the US to Turkey. But this prompts the question: is 'populist' just a label people attach to views they dislike, or does it reflect a consistent political position?

Some definitions of populism may make it sound reasonably attractive, such as, 'A political doctrine or philosophy that proposes that the rights and powers of ordinary people are exploited by a privileged elite, and supports their struggle to overcome this' (Wiktionary). But the term is subject to various interpretations, and it can be very hard to pin down what if anything unites those termed populists.

One account of populism is by Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser in *Populism: a Very Short Introduction*, where they describe it as 'thin-centered', meaning that it is not by itself a complete political position. Rather, it has to be combined with other ideas, which may include nationalism or agrarianism, and even racism. Populists, then, can support a range of different policies and proposals.

Another useful contribution is Jan-Werner Müller's book *What Is Populism?*. His main argument is that criticising and opposing elites is part of populism, but that there are other essential aspects too. Specifically, populists are anti-pluralist in that they believe that only they represent the people, with their opponents being 'enemies of the people'. Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán said earlier this year that '2018 will be the year of the restoration of the will of the people in Europe', and of course only he and his party know what that will amount to.

Moreover, 'the people' here does not mean the whole population or even the non-elite majority of the population. Rather, only some people really count as 'the people' (sometimes qualified as 'the common people' or 'the pure people'). Thus Nigel Farage claimed that the Brexit vote represented a 'victory for real people', so excluding from this category those who voted to remain in the EU. Müller gives a 2016 quote from Donald Trump that is bizarre even by his standards: 'the only important thing is the unification of the people – because the other people don't mean anything.' Moreover, many – though not all – populist movements see the pure people (of whatever nationality) as being white and indigenous, with immigrants excluded. And an 'underclass' of unemployed or benefits recipients may be regarded as not part of the real people either.

Other typical characteristics of populist parties that Müller identifies include: belief in conspiracy theories, with the elite conspiring in various ways against the people and their true representatives; being internally monolithic, with the general membership subordinate to a single leader; seeing enemies everywhere and still acting like victims even when in office. Not all such parties will adopt all of these, however.

The main text of his book was written before Trump's election as US President, but he is still able to say quite a bit about how populists behave when in charge of government, on the basis of developments in Hungary, Poland and Turkey. One point is that they tend to 'occupy' the state, which might mean appointing their supporters to supposedly non-partisan civil service positions, making the court system far more responsive to government policies, and capturing institutions that oversee the media. This is usually done quite openly and brazenly, rather than in the more subtle way that traditional

parties might operate. In Hungary Orbán argued that anyone who criticised the government was in effect criticising the Hungarian people, who had elected it. In Venezuela Hugo Chávez more or less set up his own ruling elite, in the name of the 'Venezuelan revolution'.

Another important issue, one not really dealt with by Müller, is just who are the elites that populists attack. It is primarily the political establishment, career politicians who are often viewed as corrupt and far removed from the concerns of hardworking people. But it rarely extends to the capitalist class and the millionaire and billionaire members of the one percent. Some American workers have described Trump as

bringing issues such as immigration and 'law and order' onto the political agenda; it is extremely centralised, and so differs from the Tea Party, which was more of a social movement. On the left, Occupy Wall Street was also a social movement, but it has never really gone beyond this. Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece are other examples of left-wing anti-austerity populist parties.

The Wiktionary definition quoted earlier illustrates the point that populism tends to have a far more positive image in the US than in Europe. This is largely due to the history of the People's Party, also known as the Populists, who had quite an impact in the 1890s; their candidate gained over a

million votes in the 1892 presidential election. Their politics involved supporting farmers, in particular against the banks and railway companies who charged high rates for loans and transport, and advocated government control of railways and the telephone system. The party faded after it merged with the Democrats in 1896, but some of its policies were adopted by the major parties. Müller, however, claims that the People's Party was in fact not populist, apparently because they did not really claim to stand for 'the people'.

Given the range of positions taken up by populists, and the fact that populism is an attitude as much as a real political stance, it can clearly be difficult to provide a simple discussion of populists' views. It might be said that, while much else they say is objectionable, they at least offer some critique of a society divided into an elite (however defined) and the rest of the population, and that workers who are contented with their lot do not support populist parties and movements. They must in some sense be angry and resentful, even if they choose the wrong targets as the focus of their anger. But crucially, supporters of populism have no conception of the nature of capitalism and of their own status as exploited workers. Vague appeals to some variation of 'the people' are no substitute for genuine class consciousness, for seeing those forced to sell their labour power as a class with a shared interest in getting rid of the wages and profit system.

Left-wing variants of populism are little different: in power, Syriza in Greece was unable to do much to challenge the socioeconomic system they encountered. The Occupy movement in the US has been described as 'a genuine grassroots movement for economic justice' (David Graeber: *The Democracy Project*), but in practice it had few clear demands and never formulated a real picture of a future society that went beyond capitalism. Doing so needs much more than simply objecting to inequalities of power and wealth: it needs a realisation of the class basis of capitalism and of what a class-free society can be like.



'one of us', because he is not part of the political elite, but this of course overlooks the fact that he is a capitalist and does not share the interests of US workers.

This issue of the status and make-up of the elite is discussed more fully by Mudde and Rovira. They note that there are a number of other examples of populist leaders who have been capitalists, such as Silvio Berlusconi in Italy and Ross Perot in the US in the 1990s. But they present themselves as political outsiders, as honest individuals who have made their fortune despite the corrupt politicians and so are part of 'the people', not part of the despised elite. Some populists in the US distinguish between Main Street and Wall Street, but without making a real distinction between workers and capitalists.

As noted, the 'thin-centered' nature of populism means that it can form part of a range of views. It is mostly coupled with various right-wing positions, as with UKIP and the Tea Party in the US. In France the Front National has succeeded in

million votes in the 1892 presidential election. Their politics involved supporting farmers, in particular against the banks and railway companies who charged high rates for loans and transport, and advocated government control of railways and the telephone system. The party faded after it merged with the Democrats in 1896, but some of its policies were adopted by the major parties. Müller, however, claims that the People's Party was in fact not populist, apparently because they did not really claim to stand for 'the people'.

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TURKEY WHAT'S GOING ON?

'What on earth is going on in Turkey these days?' It's a good question. What indeed is going on in Turkey.

There are no simple answers because there is usually no clear grasp of the complexities of the socio-political-cultural anachronisms that make up Turks and Turkey. A 'riddle inside a mystery inside an enigma' comes to mind and yet Russia is an open book when compared with Turkey.

Turkey is a one-man dictatorship, a police state.

On the day following the failed coup of 15 July, 2016 the recently elected president declared a state of emergency. This was illegal on two counts: first, the presidency does not assume executive authority until after the general election in 2019; second, constitutional law states that, 'Extraordinary regimes (state of emergency) can be declared only in the case of widespread violence that cannot be contained.' The coup attempt of 15 July unfolded only in Ankara and Istanbul and was overturned within six hours at most.

What followed the declaration of the state of emergency and its renewal every three months since has had a profound effect upon the lives of every Turk. Over the past eighteen months the number of people sacked from the bureaucracy (armed services, police, judiciary, doctors, administrators, schools and universities, etc.) stands at approx. 125,300. 50,500 have been arrested, 169,000 are subject to legal proceedings. These people are not just without jobs, they are now unemployable. They have families who depend on them. Six news agencies, 50 newspapers, 18 television channels, 29 publishing houses, 20 magazines, 22 radio stations and 1,528 associations have been banned. 145 journalists have been arrested, and 2,500



journalists have been left jobless because of the closure of media outlets. Ten members of parliament have been arrested and are held in prison. Many elected mayors from the HDP and CHP political opposition parties have been removed from office and 'administrators' have replaced them.

Dissent or disagreement is dangerous and can lead to assault, imprisonment and death. Illegal, armed militias such as Halk Özel Harekatı (People's Special Security) and the Osmanlı Ocakları 1453 (Ottoman Hearths 1453) which are aligned with the ruling party are seen on the streets, dressed in similar style to ISIS and other Takfiri groups (Sunni muslim extremists), ready to attack any protesters often in collusion with the police. This is their slogan: *'Erdoğan means the nation. One dies for Erdoğan, one kills for Erdoğan. Those who tried to test this on 15 July saw it for themselves.'*

Social media is patrolled by paid trolls looking for deviants. A wrong word on Facebook or Twitter can result in a midnight raid by police and internment for months awaiting a hearing in a system purged of non-believers. Social media platforms are monitored nationally and controlled via regional throttling or 'off switches'. Regardless of your ISP everything passes through just one state-controlled portal. The list of banned or censored websites is massive – from the atheistic views of Richard Dawkins to Wikipedia. A single word in a blog-post can see a site blocked. The levels of control are what Big Brother's wet dreams were about. Virtual Private Networks are the only way of avoiding censorship. Self-censorship is the most common way to avoid the all-seeing eye.

So, if Erdoğan and the AK Party divide the country almost exactly in half, as they do – what unites it? Nationalism and the symbols of nationalism. Turkey is a young country born out of the ashes of the Ottoman Empire. Back then there was no real concept of what a 'Turk' might be or a Syrian or Kurd for that matter. Within the empire there were only Ottomans and as Atatürk set about creating the Turkish state (founded 1923) he was faced by a largely uneducated and indifferent population. His tool to weld these disparate peoples into one entity was his own brand of ultra-nationalism and personality cult as the saviour of the Turks. It served him and his successors well but as time has shown it is an explosive force on a very short fuse.

Turks have been raised on a diet of nationalism, first via their parents, then at school, the national football and basketball teams, flags everywhere – flying from flagpoles and houses, carved into the mountainsides along with Atatürk's words in letters a mile high, 'Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyene' or 'Happy Is He Who Calls Himself A Turk'. Then, for young men, comes conscription and 'serving the nation' and the chance to become a 'martyr' with a full military funeral and a flag flying over their grave. Conscientious objection has no status in the legal code. Money can buy the more affluent a reduced term at a 'cushy' posting.

For the vast majority national pride is not an option – they have mostly been offered no other way of thinking. Turks



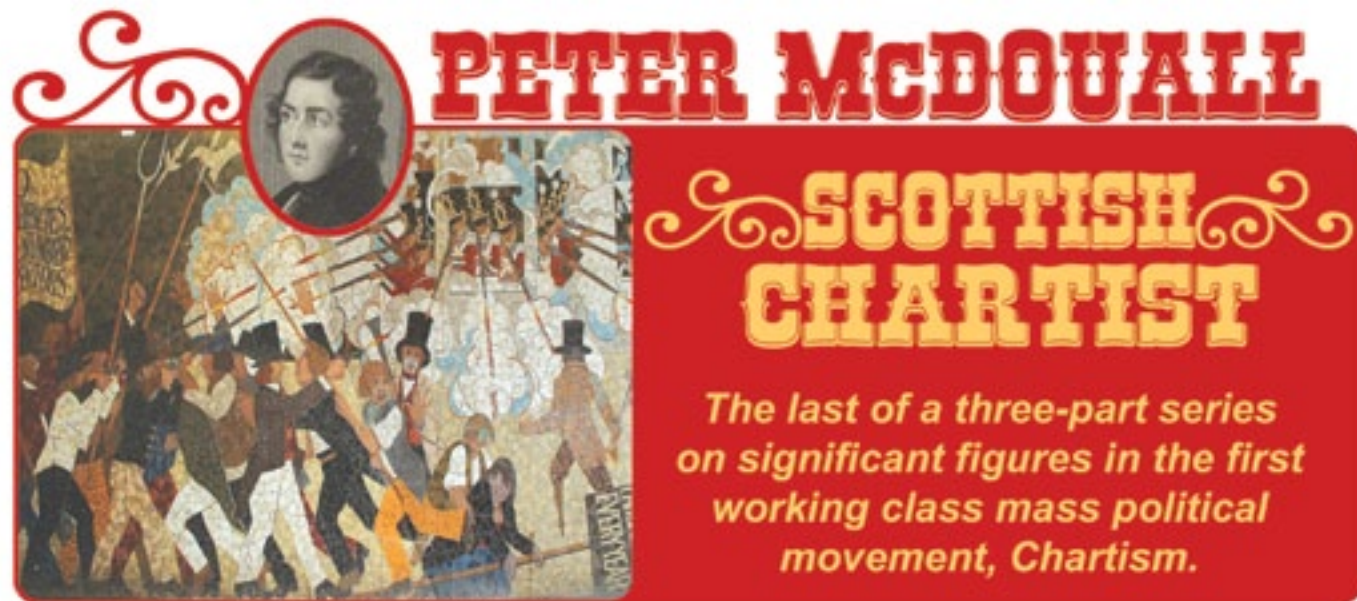
are some of the kindest, most warm-hearted and generous of people. Self-deprecating, they are masters of making fun of themselves and yet if you insult their country or their flag, something they would never do, then you could well be facing your worst nightmare.

It is this characteristic that politicians like Erdoğan foster and exploit when the need arises. At the height of his popularity he began a truly constructive process of reconciliation with the Kurds. 'Secret' negotiations were happening with Abdullah Öcalan from his prison cell. Whilst things were moving ahead on that front behind the scenes there were problems with the credit-bubble powered economy and deep levels of corruption within the regime, with their cronies and by Erdoğan personally. As the reality began to dawn on people he and the AK Party began to dip seriously in the polls – something had to give and that something was rapprochement with the Kurds.

A series of, probably, false-flag bomb attacks occurred including in Ankara. In what amounted to a civil war in the south-eastern provinces the army and paramilitary police were unleashed complete with tanks and helicopter gunships. Kurdish towns and enclaves were obliterated. Unknown numbers were killed and displaced before 'peace' was achieved. The flags waved, the media cheered and every political party except the predominantly Kurdish HDP applauded the strength of Erdoğan. Then came another astute move. He invited into the administration the far-right National Action Party/MHP and thus cemented his nationalist credentials and shored up his falling popularity.

Finally, like a gift from the gods, on 15 June 2016 came the attempted coup followed by the declaration of a (permanent?) state of emergency and rule by presidential decree. This will probably extend beyond the upcoming election period and ensure that countless thousands of opposition ballot papers that disappear into rubbish tips at each election will not be the subject of any recounts. The rest, as they say, is history.

What does the future hold for the country? Whilst Erdoğan lives, he rules. That said there are persistent rumours about his health and there is no successor in sight who has his metal and political cunning. Many Turks speak of civil war, but not openly, of course.
A.N.



We are indebted to the late Raymond Challinor for his biography of Peter McDouall but which endeavours to make McDouall out to be yet another in the long run of 'Scottish Lenins'. (marxists.org/history/etol/writers/challinor/1981/xx/mcdouall.html).

George Julian Harney was to recall, 'No man in the Chartist movement was better known than Dr McDouall'. Peter McDouall (M'Douall) was a significant figure in Chartism. Imprisoned twice, dying at a relatively young age, it is not an exaggeration to say that McDouall gave his life for Chartism.

Peter McDouall was born in Newton Stewart, Wigtownshire, and served as an apprentice to a surgeon in his home town, then studied at Glasgow and Edinburgh. He subsequently moved to Lancashire, first to a Burnley practice and then to the small cotton town of Ramsbottom. He came to Chartism radicalised by his exposure to the bleak factory conditions in industrial Lancashire and was a campaigner for factory reforms, becoming involved in the ten-hour day agitation. Following the arrest of Joseph Rayner Stephens, McDouall took his place in the forthcoming Chartist convention as a delegate for Ashton under Lyne, a militant Chartist centre with which McDouall was to be closely associated for the rest of his life. In the first convention in 1839, McDouall was a foremost advocate of physical force and, later, of the 'sacred month', the Grand National Holiday (or General Strike). He was 'an advocate for the arming of the people, in defence of their constitutional rights, and although he deprecates the idea of turning any deadly weapon against the lives and property of any portion of the community, he boldly avows that he would take his place with the people to resist any unconstitutional aggression that might be attempted upon their few existing rights and liberties', according to *The Charter portraits of delegates*, in 1839.

He also became a staunch advocate of the power of the ordinary worker. He explained:

'The Trades are equal to the middle class in talent, far more powerful in means and much more united in action' and again 'The agitation for the Charter has afforded one of the greatest examples in modern history of the real might of the labourers. In the conflict millions have appeared on the stage and the mind of the masses has burst from its shell and begun to flourish and expand.'

In August, he was sentenced at Chester to twelve months' imprisonment for sedition. On his release in August 1840, McDouall toured the north of England and Scotland and while in Glasgow, he married the daughter of a warder at Chester

Castle, where he had served his sentence.

In Scotland, an estimated 200,000 people assembled to hear speeches from White, Collins and McDouall. The huge procession marched on to Glasgow Green and *The Scots Times* reported 'the old radical spirit' had been revived and that 'Chartism is supreme in Glasgow'.

McDouall spoke at many other meetings around Scotland. The massive demonstrations and expressions of democratic sentiment revealed the existence among working people of a common aim and purpose. The question of what was to be the next step forward was posed with great urgency and on this issue, the Chartists were deeply divided. Supporters of moral force refused to sponsor McDouall's meetings where he combined an exposition of Chartist principles with a denunciation of the moderates who clamoured for an alliance with the middle class. McDouall, however, no longer believed in making impassioned speeches urging the use of force. Wild revolutionary rhetoric had led to rash actions in England and Wales, with disastrous consequences, which had been largely avoided in Scotland. As he told Edinburgh Chartists:

'We gave our passions the rein; but you have been more cautious, you have suffered less - you gave the reins to reason.'

This did not mean that he had renounced the use of force. What he now appeared to advocate was the possession of weapons for defensive purposes. If the authorities resorted to violence in an attempt to crush Chartism, he thought the moral force men would be the first to desert. McDouall understood the need to avoid riots and premature uprisings which culminated in defeat and demoralisation. For this reason, he was highly critical of the Newport uprising that occurred in November 1839. In a letter from prison, he argues it had been an 'ill-managed, foolish and quixotic adventure'. Such setbacks interfered with the Chartist Movement which would grow due to 'The financial disarrangement, the foreign difficulties, the domestic insurrection, will all merge in the end into a grand revolutionary outbreak. No power on earth can prevent it.'

In 1841 and 1842 McDouall played a prominent role in the recently formed National Charter Association and headed the poll for the executive in both years. He also published his own *Chartist and Republican Journal* in 1841. Past defeats, he judged, could all be attributed to this cause:

'Our associations were hastily got up, composed of prodigious numbers, a false idea of strength was wrought up to the highest pitch, thence originated a sense of security which subsequent events proved to be false, and why? Because no real union existed at the bottom.'

McDouall's answer to the problem was to turn to the newly-forming working class; only it had the necessary potential strength. He believed Chartists should be active in the trade unions, win them over for the cause and use them as a basis for Chartist agitation.

However, some Chartists saw the trade unions not as possible allies but as rivals. A number of Yorkshire Chartist branches had a rule that members should take part 'in no agitation but for The Charter.' They regarded union activity as a diversion, side-tracking people from the real struggle. Sometimes this suspicion was reciprocated. In North East England for example, some trade unionists had actually struck at the beginning of the 'sacred month' but since it had turned out to be such a fiasco, some of them severed their Chartist connections.

On another issue, McDouall was opposed to the growing British Empire.

'Let all who have possessions in India, or all who profit by what you call 'our Indian possessions' be off to India, and fight a thousand battles for them as they like... but let them not mock our degradation by asking us, working people to fight alongside them, either for our 'possessions' in India, or anywhere else, seeing that we do not possess a single acre of ground, or any other description of property in our own country, much less colonies, or 'possessions' in any other, having been robbed of everything we ever earned by the middle and upper classes... On the contrary, we have an interest in prospective loss or ruin of all such 'possessions', seeing they are but instruments of power in the hands of our domestic oppressors.'

He stood for parliament at Northampton in June 1841 but came bottom of the poll. After representing Ashton in the convention of April 1842, he was the principal supporter of the general strike movement in August and it was he who drafted the executive's very forceful address to the people. The government offered a £100 reward for his apprehension, but he escaped to France, where he lived for the next two years. He was able to return to Britain without prosecution during 1844 and resumed his life as a Chartist agitator, publishing *The Charter: What It Means! The Chartists: What They Want!* in 1845.

1848 was Europe's Year of Revolutions. He spoke at numerous rallies spurring masses of people into self-activity. After he spoke at Glasgow in March a riot occurred, followed by another in Edinburgh, where there were shouts of 'Vive la Republique' and 'Bread and Revolution'. Although McDouall's presence led the authorities to link him with the disturbances, it seems that those responsible were destitute Irish and unemployed Scots.

He then again unsuccessfully contested the parliamentary seat of Carlisle. He was a member of the Chartists national assembly and, once more elected to the executive, was at the heart of another insurrectionary conspiracy where he ended up doing two years' hard-labour gaol for his part in the abortive Ashton-under-Lyne rising. His family suffered badly during this time, and a daughter, aged 10, died. After his release and after a failed attempt to re-start his medical career, McDouall took his family and emigrated to Australia in 1854, but died soon after arriving. His family returned to England to an impoverished future. The *Northern Star* wrote in 1848:

'When he came among you, he had good property in Scotland, a profession and a practice, which realised him several hundred pounds annually, besides a large sum of accumulated money in the bank. All of which has been spent long ago in the advocacy of the rights of the people.'

ALJO

THE CHARTIST MOVEMENT

THE FIRST WORKING CLASS PARTY IN HISTORY AND THEIR STRUGGLE FOR UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE

1832 First Reform Act enfranchises businessmen and gives greater representation for industrial areas but leaves out workingmen.

1834 New Poor Law introduces workhouses.

1836 London Working Men's Association founded.

1838 People's Charter and National Petition: 6 points: universal adult male suffrage, secret ballot, no property qualification for MPs, payment of MPs, equal constituencies, annual parliaments.

1839 Chartist Convention. Commons rejects First petition. Newport Rising, as maybe as many as 20,000 workers walked from surrounding South Wales to free Chartist prisoners. 20 killed.

1840 Trial for high treason of those who led the Newport Rising. National Charter Association founded.

1842 Commons rejects Second petition; Mass strike in North West and other areas to resist wage cuts ('Plug Riots').

1843 More Chartist trials. Prominent Chartist Feargus O'Connor's Land Plan, to make workers smallholders rather than wage slaves, launched.

1846 Corn Laws repealed, reducing cost of living for workers and so the wages employers had to pay.

1847 Ten Hours Bill, restricting the working hours of women and young persons (13-18) in textile mills to 10 hours per day, passed.

1848 Kennington Common Demonstration. Commons rejects Third petition. Trials of Chartist leaders. Ernest Jones and 4 others sentenced to two years in prison for sedition and unlawful assembly.

1858 Last national Chartist convention





Capitalism is a society of inequalities, in how both wealth and power are distributed. These inequalities have often affected women more adversely than men, and campaigns for women's rights have been ongoing for over a century. But the debate around gender equality is no longer just about differences in wages or opportunities. Allegations of sexual harassment and abuse in Parliament and the entertainment industry especially have highlighted how some men have exercised their power. Also, the debate has broadened due to increased awareness of issues affecting transgender people, many of whom have felt marginalised.

How should socialists respond to the new prominence given to gender politics? What does gender inequality tell us about capitalist society, especially how it shapes gender roles? And how does the issue impact upon revolutionary politics? The Socialist Party argues that sexism and misogyny are expressions of how capitalism is inherently divisive and unequal. So, the solution is to

address these problems at their source, by uniting to replace capitalism with a society based on equality and freedom.

Our weekend of talks and discussion will examine how

gender issues relate to wider society and to revolutionary politics. Full residential cost (including accommodation and meals Friday evening to Sunday afternoon) is £100. The concessionary rate is £50. Day visitors are welcome, but please book in advance.

E-mail enquiries should be sent to spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk. To book a place online, go to spgb.net/summerschool2018, or send a cheque (payable to the Socialist Party of Great Britain) with your contact details to Summer School, The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 7UN.



What the Poor Law pays

We know what determines the level of income of those in employment – it's the cost of recreating their working skills in conjunction with the class struggle and the play of supply and demand – but what about those not in work? What determines the income they get as a handout from the state?

Some light on this was shed by some top secret documents found at the end of January in a filing cabinet in a junk shop in Australia. One of the files concerned the work of a cabinet sub-committee, known as the 'razor gang' (down under they call a spade a spade), whose remit was to slash payments to the unemployed as a way of relieving the burden of taxation on profits which had fallen in the slump that followed the financial crash of 2008.

Normally such documents only become available after 30 or so years, but the files related to a much more recent period:

'One file revealed that Tony Abbott, the former prime minister, considered banning anyone under 30 from accessing income support in a radical proposal

before the 2014 budget. Some of his ministers, it said, wanted to ban what the documents termed "job snobs" from receiving unemployment benefits.'

However, the then prime minister didn't get his way:

'The proposal was crushed by dissenters in his cabinet who feared that, if implemented, it might force jobless young people into homelessness, crime and other anti-social behaviour.' (Times, 1 February).

There you have it: what governments dole out to the those not in employment for one reason or another – 'benefits' doesn't seem the right word – is the minimum they think they can get away with without provoking too much 'anti-social behaviour', in particular crime, which would cost them money to deal with.

Dealing with the unemployed and the unemployable has been a problem for capitalism right from its beginnings, premised as it is on the existence of a class without access to means to themselves produce what they need. In the first instance this involved driving people off the land, which began in England in the 16th century.

The first attempt to deal with this were the Poor Laws, which made providing for those unable to acquire any money

to live the responsibility of the parish where they were born. Those who ventured away from their parish were denounced as 'sturdy beggars' – and whipped and branded, as Marx describes in chapter 28 of Volume I of *Capital* on the 'Bloody Legislation against the Expropriated since the End of the Fifteenth Century'. Right up until the middle of the last century this remained administered locally by Poor Law 'guardians'.

In 1948 the post-war Labour government made it a national responsibility, run by a board doling out 'national assistance'. Over time the name changed, first to 'social security' (a nice Orwellian touch) and then to its present 'income support'. But it's still basically the 'poor law' with the government assuming the role of Dickens's Poor Law Guardians, paying out as little as they can so as to minimise the burden on the capitalist class of maintaining those not in employment.

Basically, then, the answer to what determines the level of income of those not in employment is what the government thinks it can get away with without provoking riots or encouraging those affected to turn to crime. It doesn't always work as the spontaneous riots of 2011 showed.



Delicious Chips For Their Tea

THE CO-OP has recently announced that it will open a hundred new food stores across the UK, although you won't be able to shop in one of these unless you're a fictional character. That's because it's going to open on *Coronation Street*, as part of ITV's biggest product placement deal to date. The plans also include a branch of Costa Coffee appearing in Weatherfield for Gail and Ken to buy their skinny lattes from. Soaps have always had an association with sponsorship - the term 'soap opera' comes from how early serial dramas used to be funded by soap manufacturers.

Product placement, or embedded marketing, is when a company pays for its commodity or brand to be included within a medium, especially a TV programme, film and, these days, YouTube video. This marketing strategy has been around since the 19th century, with rumours that works by Jules Verne and Eduard Manet of all people featured real-life brands they had been paid to include. American movies and television shows have incorporated paid-for promotion of products for as long as the media have been around. For example, the characters in *One Tree Hill* often have cans of Sunkist soft drinks in their fridges, courtesy of a marketing deal. Historically, product placement has been illegal in Britain, although this didn't stop advertisers getting their brands within programmes, such as coverage of sponsored sports events. The law changed in 2011, and the first deal involved Nestle paying for a coffee machine to appear in ITV's magazine show *This Morning*. The regulations were probably relaxed to keep commercial television more attractive to advertisers who might otherwise turn their attention to the ever-expanding

marketing opportunity that is the internet. By late 2015, ITV alone had broadcast over 4,000 hours of programmes featuring product placement, including viewer-magnets like *The Only Way Is Essex*, *The X-Factor* and *I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out Of Here!*, as well as soap operas. ITV Media's website contains a wealth of vomit-inducing corporatespeak: '[product placement] offers a truly unique marketing opportunity as products are showcased within natural settings more relatable to viewers and in turn, providing inspiration or in some cases, validation for purchase choices'. The website helpfully gives some examples: 'Emmerdale residents were thrilled to discover that David's shop had now begun stocking McCain's frozen foods, and on-screen families were soon seen tucking into delicious chips for their tea'. And it proudly boasts about the first instance of 'behaviour placement' in a deal between Visa and *Corrie*: 'the action of contactless payment was ... threaded through into the storylines, with completely natural interactions; impacting even the most resistant non-users. Not only did Visa show characters using the card machine (complete with the beep

could be open to interpretation. And the rules don't apply to films or programmes made elsewhere and if no payment or deal involves the broadcaster, which is why, for instance, the BBC can transmit including the FedEx brand. It's also why all the mentions of the Co-op, Visa, McCain's etc in this article don't count as product placement, as these firms haven't coughed up to the SPGB to promote their wares (and aren't likely to).

When product placement is too noticeable, then it jars. The 1988 film *Mac and Me* wasn't received well partly because its placed products were so blatant, with Coca-Cola, Sears, Skittles or McDonald's featuring in what seems like every scene. More recently, advertisers have been a bit more sophisticated in their approaches. The American sitcom *Black-ish* has had a plotline paid for by Procter & Gamble, in which the characters are inspired by P&G's own real-world campaign to raise awareness of racism. The show has often discussed social issues, and so it should, but there's something odd with a debate

about racism being commercialised in this way. Ofcom's guidelines wouldn't allow something to be made in Britain with the levels of product placement seen in *Mac and Me* or *Black-ish* (yet), but when the tactic is more subtle, then it's arguably more insidious. When Rita in *Corrie* gets back home from shopping and unpacks a Co-op bag while she's chatting with Gemma, the advertising is almost subliminal. It's one thing to know you're being enticed to buy



sound you'd hear in real life!), but they also placed stickers in key locations. What could make the action seem more everyday than Norris using Contactless to buy his milk from Dev's shop?'

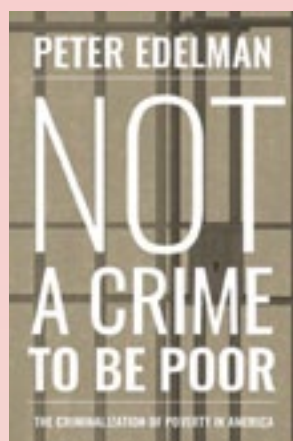
Telecommunications regulator Ofcom has set guidelines for how product placement can be practiced in the UK. Some products (such as alcohol, tobacco, baby milk and medicine) and programmes (like the news, children's shows or any on the BBC) can't be used in this way, and broadcasters must display a 'PP' logo on-screen for a few seconds in relevant shows. A placement must be 'editorially justified' and not give 'undue prominence' to the product, although these terms

a product, it's another to be unaware you're being manipulated.

We've got used to the commercial breaks which interrupt what we watch on most channels, but they don't invade the programmes in the same way as product placement does. We pay a visit to *Coronation Street* for the characters, plots and ideas, and expect it to somehow be 'above' being cheapened by advertising. But TV shows and films aren't made in a bubble away from market forces, they have to get funding, attract viewers and make money. The market system reaches into anywhere there's a buck to be made, even into places that aren't real.

MIKE FOSTER

One Law for the poor



Not a Crime to Be Poor: the Criminalization of Poverty in America. By Peter Edelman. The New Press \$26.95. PB

In 2010 sixteen-year-old Kalief Browder was charged with stealing a backpack. The judge set bail at \$3000, but his family could not afford this. He refused to plead guilty to a crime he had not committed, and so was sent to the notorious Rikers Island jail in New York City. He spent three years there awaiting trial, eight hundred days of this in solitary confinement. He was eventually released (never having been tried, let alone found guilty), but now had severe mental health problems and committed suicide in 2015.

This horrendous example is one of many discussed in Peter Edelman's enlightening book. In the US today it is often a crime to be poor, and particularly to be poor and black or homeless or mentally ill. Cuts in government funding since the Reagan era have led to courts relying on 'users' to pay for the legal system, which means the accused or just those arrested without being tried. People often plead guilty in order to avoid a long period in jail before a trial; otherwise they may be held in jail for a low-level offence for which the prescribed punishment is a fine. The size of fines has been increased, and people can be fined extra for not paying immediately.

Another consequence of reduced funding was an attempt in some areas to reduce the number of calls to 911 by requiring landlords to evict tenants who call the emergency number too often. This was even applied to women who rang to seek protection from domestic abuse.

At least 300,000 people in US jails and prisons have serious mental illness, and this includes one in three incarcerated women. The penal system has in many ways been used as a substitute for a proper system of mental hospitals and addiction centres. Corizon is a for-

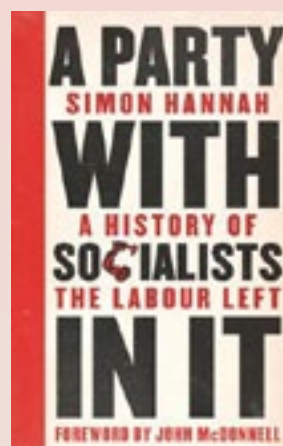
profit company that provides mental and medical care in prisons and has an annual revenue of around \$1.5bn; but various scandals have led to it losing many of its contracts.

A criminal record can have enormous implications for the whole of a person's life, and the links between poverty and imprisonment lead Edelman to refer to a 'cradle-to-coffin pipeline'. People may serve multiple periods in jail for not paying fines and fees to the court. Poverty can be a cause of getting a criminal record, but also a consequence, as such a record can reduce a person's chances of getting a decent job, and many laws prevent those with a criminal record from, for instance, obtaining a licence to cut hair.

In his final chapter, Edelman examines a number of attempts to reduce poverty and cut the links between poverty and crime. He has to admit, though, that their usefulness is limited: of one project in Minneapolis he notes that it 'is making an identifiable difference in the lives of many poor people' but it 'has not yet been able to affect the overall poverty in the neighborhood as a whole.'

PB

Really?



A Party with Socialists in it. A History of the Labour Left. By Simon Hannah. Pluto Press. 2018. 250 pages.

It was Tony Benn who wrote that 'the Labour Party has never been a socialist party, though there have always been socialists in it' which Hannah has taken as the title of his book. The first part is true but the second depends on what you mean by 'socialist'.

When it was founded in 1900 as the Labour Representation Committee, the Labour Party was to be a group of MPs, separate from the Liberals and Tories, to press for legislation in favour of trade unions and their members and didn't actually become the Labour Party, as a parliamentary group, until it had some MPs elected in the 1906 general election. It didn't even claim to be socialist. However, one of its constituent parts, the Independent Labour Party (ILP)

that had been founded in 1893, did. In 1918 the Labour Party adopted a new constitution which included the famous Clause IV, which committed it (on paper and in the very long-term) to full-scale nationalisation; it also allowed individuals to join directly rather than via the ILP or the Fabian Society, which marginalised the ILP which eventually, in 1932, broke away and so was no longer 'in' the Labour Party.

Hannah's history is that of the ILP up to 1932 (which he sees through rose-tinted spectacles), the Red Clydesiders, Sir Stafford Cripps and the Socialist League, Bevan and the Bevanites, Benn and the Bennites, and, now, Corbyn and the Corbynistas.

But were they socialists? They certainly considered themselves to be but understood socialism as the implementation of Clause IV. As this envisaged the nationalisation of 'the means of exchange', it implied the continuation of production for the market and the wages system; in effect state capitalism. Basically, they were leftwing reformists.

Hannah himself, an ex-Trotskyist, sees socialism as nationalisation under workers' control but this is no way forward as, given production for the market, workers would be forced to run their industry on capitalist lines. He describes Benn's politics as 'greater democracy, greater worker involvement in industry, and a more accountable political class' and Corbyn's as 'anti-neoliberal without being anti-capitalist.' Both true.

ALB

Anti-Bolshevik



The Kronstadt Unprising. By Ida Mett. Theory and Practice (www.theoryandpractice.org.uk).

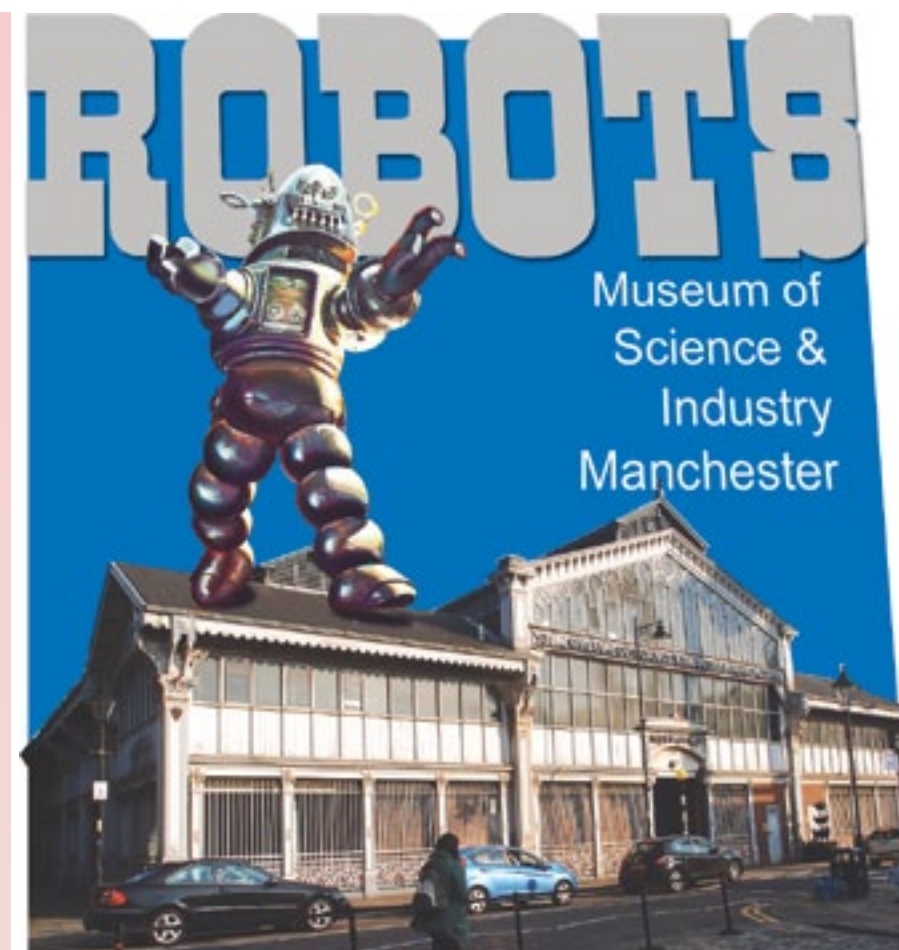
In March 1921, after the civil war in Russia had ended with the victory of the Bolshevik government, strikes broke out in Petrograd and other cities demanding an improvement in living conditions, basically the 'Bread' part of the 'Peace, Land and Bread' slogan that the Bolsheviks had used to win enough popular support to seize power. In Kronstadt, an island fortress and naval base commanding access to Petrograd, the armed sailors went further.

They deposed the Bolshevik officials, locked some of them up, and demanded free and secret elections to the soviets (councils), in effect a genuine 'soviet government' rather than the one-party rule of the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks responded by sending in the Red Army to suppress this challenge to their rule. At least 4000 insurgents were killed or executed.

This is a reprint of Ida Mett's classic pamphlet on what happened. Written in French in 1938, it set out to refute the Bolshevik view that it had been a counter-revolutionary plot hatched by the French secret service, led by Tsarist generals, etc. She succeeded well enough in making her case. As a native Russian-speaker (she was an anarchist exile from Russia living in France), she had access to the proclamations and declarations of the Kronstadt 'provisional revolutionary committee' and was able to show that they were demanding the 'soviet' rule that was supposed to have been established in November 1917 following the overthrow of Kerensky, but which had in fact resulted in the dictatorship of the Bolshevik party. One of the declarations she quoted denounced the 'state capitalism' of the Bolshevik party. All of their declarations are now available in English translation on the Marxist Internet Archive website. Her article was published in 1948 (not in 1938 as stated in this and previous English editions) under the title 'The Kronstadt Commune: the bloody twilight of the soviets'. Mett explained in a preface to a reprint of the French edition in 1970 that the syndicalist publication, *Révolution prolétarienne*, to which she had submitted it turned it down on the grounds that it was too hostile to Trotsky who was then being hounded by the Stalin regime that ended in his assassination in 1940. (It wasn't as hostile as the Kronstadters' declarations, though, which denounced him as 'Field Marshal Lord Trotsky').

Lenin and Trotsky do come out badly as what happened at Kronstadt showed that Bolshevik Russia was already in their day a brutal one-party dictatorship whose leaders would stop at nothing to hold on to power, i.e. well before Stalin was in control. To this day the very mention of 'Kronstadt' makes Trotskyists squirm. This reprint includes the preface to the original edition published by the old Solidarity Group in 1967 and one by Murray Bookchin to a reprint in 1971. It is not the complete pamphlet as the opening chapter on the revolutionary role of Russian sailors in 1905-6 and in 1917 was not translated and has not yet been.

ALB



Some of the earliest objects that could be considered as robots were constructed by the catholic church from around 1500. They were clockwork machines that, for instance, showed Jesus on the cross shedding drops of wooden blood. Most people had no idea how they worked and regarded them as being based on magic. Thus the machines demonstrated the power and authority of the church.

So begins an exhibition at the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester, on until the middle of April, which covers robots from the early days to the present and even the future. In medieval times anatomists described the human body as a complex machine, while clockwork models were used to show the movements of heavenly bodies. Later, automatons were built that performed actions such as dancing, and these enjoyed a golden age in the eighteenth century.

But it was in the last century that robots began to come into their own, with electric batteries used rather than clockwork. There is a section on cinematic representation of robots, including a replica of Maria from Fritz Lang's 1927 film *Metropolis*, which is described as 'the first blockbuster robot'. Industrial robots began to be used in factories from the 1960s, to carry out specific repetitive tasks, and for safety reasons they could not work with people.

There has been much technical progress in recent years, some of it exemplified in the displays. For instance, one company makes 3D-printed bionic hands that can be used not just by robots but also by people with amputations. Kaspar (developed at the University of Hertfordshire) can help children on the autism spectrum, for instance to read facial expressions and to feel less intimidated. Other examples included in the display are Baxter and YuMi, both of which can work alongside people. All this raises the problem of robots displacing human workers: a recent report (*Guardian*, 29 January) argues that up to a quarter of jobs in the northern UK could be replaced by robots by 2030, with Mansfield being the worst hit.

A question posed at the end of the exhibition we can lead to the reader to ponder: should robots be gender-neutral?

PB



50 Years Ago

Labour and the Health Charges

Anthony Greenwood, now a Cabinet Minister, told Labour's 1963 Conference, on behalf of the Executive:

"I repeat... the pledge we have given you before this, that we shall remove the existing charges in the National Health Service."

Again, for the 1964 election *The New Britain* read:

"The most serious attack on the Health Service made by Conservative Ministers has been the increasing burden of prescription charges imposed by them on those least able to pay. These charges will be abolished. Labour emphatically rejects recent proposals to introduce new charges for General Practitioner services; our aim is to restore as rapidly as possible a completely free Health Service."

This time they were lucky. Wilson became Prime Minister and Kenneth Robinson Minister of Health. Sure enough, in a few months Labour redeemed its pledge. On 17 December Robinson announced the ending of prescription charges "which, since 1952, have created a financial barrier between the patient and the treatment he needs". He went on

to state that in time they would also redeem the other part of their pledge:

"There will remain charges for dental treatment and appliances and those for spectacles. It is our aim to abolish these charges also."

He did not say that for teeth and spectacles the financial barrier had existed since Gaitskell erected it in 1951.

In 1966, with *Time For Decision*, Labour faced the electorate, with the declaration that there were some principles they would not jettison "whatever the pressures". One of those principles was that "even in times of economic crisis those in need should be helped by the state". They brought forward their abolition of prescription charges as proof.

Less than two years later this principle is jettisoned. Wilson announced the restoration of prescription charges for many people at a rate of 2/6 an item. Far from abolishing the dental treatment charges, as Robinson promised, Labour raises them by 10/-. Charges for teeth and spectacles remain.

(from *Socialist Standard*, March 1968)

back to the garden.' It is emotionally and intuitively easy, if you just listen to yourself and keep the courage of your convictions.

Like her grandfather, she was an incurable optimist who believed humanity still has a future. Pessimism is merely the long shadow of ignorance. The choice is clear.

R.E.

Think Globally - Act Globally

Think globally — obviously. Global warming, world poverty, globalization, the threat of world war — their very names show that we are faced with world problems. It ought to be equally obvious that these problems can only be solved on a global basis, by action, at world level.

So, who coined the phrase 'act locally'? Whoever imagined that these problems could be solved by a mass of scattered actions at local level? But this is what has been put forward by Greens, socially-minded Christians and others as a serious political strategy.

Some of those involved in these puny, isolated local struggles have begun to realise the inadequacy of this approach. They have organised regular demonstrations on the occasion of meetings of international organisations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organisation and the European Union.

But many of them have still not got hold of the right end of the stick, and still see the answer as lying in a retreat behind the protective tariff walls of national states and even smaller units.

If global warming, world poverty and the other problems facing humanity are to be solved, then world structures must be created to deal with them. We must act globally. The resources of the Earth must stop being the property of multinational corporations, national states and rich individuals and become instead the common heritage of all humanity.

Within this framework of a world socialist society without frontiers appropriate institutions can be set up at world, regional and—yes—local levels to tackle the problems that are caused, not by globalization as such, but by the fact that globalization is taking place under a system where the uncontrollable economic imperative is to make profits and accumulate more and more capital, regardless of the effect on people or the environment.

Meetings

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

MARCH 2018

LONDON

Sunday 18 March, 6.00 p.m.
Film Evening
The Square
Socialist Party's Premises
52 Clapham High Street
London
SW4 7UN

Saturday 24 March, 2.00 p.m. – 4.00 p.m.
Bitcoins: Tulips from Cyberspace
Venue: Quaker Meeting House
20 Nigel Playfair Avenue
London
W6 9JY

MANCHESTER

Saturday 24 March, 2.00 p.m. – 5.00 p.m.
The Right to be Lazy
Venue: Friends Meeting House
Mount Street
Manchester
M2 5NS

APRIL 2018

LONDON

Saturday 21 – Sunday 22 April,
10.30 a.m. – 5.00 p.m. both days
Annual Conference
Socialist Party's Premises
52 Clapham High Street
London
SW4 7UN



Obituary

Karla Rab, 1940-2017

Karla Rab died on September 15th at age 77 in her Somerville, Massachusetts home.

A fifth-generation socialist, she learned 'by osmosis' that the most worthwhile cause to struggle for is to wake up the working class to its enlightened self-interest — the immediate abolition of capital's anachronistic employment system.

She imbibed the influence of a socialist family upbringing from her earliest years, and went on to make it her vocation on joining the World Socialist Party founded in 1916 by her grandfather Isaac Rab and others. She was a practical visionary who took an active organizing role in party activities; after some re-organization c. 2000, she performed her role as Postal Corresponding Secretary with gusto. In 2010, fulfilling a promise she had given Rab to 'do something' with his voluminous correspondence, she published *Role-Modeling Socialist Behavior: The Life and Letters of Isaac Rab*, a multi-faceted undertaking at once a biography, a history and a memoir. Her natural editorial talents were appreciated by all her collaborators.

Everything of any value, she knew, starts with the human imagination, independently of reality, as long as you plug it back into the real world. Karla grew up immersed in a culture of optimism. She knew she really could make the world a better place, not just in a moral sense but as an actual historical reality.

And there was a way to achieve this goal. All you had to do was get everyone to understand that the world humans have evolved, the terrible mess we have made of human society, has a tangible and specific cause. While we have improved some aspects of our existence, we have done so at the expense of our better nature, and the 'progress' we imagine is inherent in our civilization is a process of tying society in knots. Humans have gotten themselves into a progressively knottier condition, and the end results are beginning to look pretty grim.

Karla learned as a child that the way to cut the Gordian knot is to re-imagine a society that once again returned to a need-oriented model of human nature in which people everywhere understand the stake they have in each other's well-being. This is something we all know how to do, but which ever since agriculture was introduced we have been educating each other to forget. But it takes only a little self-enlightenment to break this momentum.

Since there can be no limits to how this reawakening takes place, our destiny as humans is to do this re-thinking of ourselves on a global scale. We all have it in us to retrace our steps and 'get

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.

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Global misery

'There must be something rotten in the very core of a social system which increases its wealth without diminishing its misery...' This comment is as valid today, quite possibly more so, than when it first appeared as part of the introductory sentence to an article penned by Marx in the *New York Daily Tribune* of 16 September 1859. He observed that the 'Irish famine of 1846 killed more than 1,000,000 people, but it killed poor devils only. To the wealth of the country it did not the slightest damage' (*Capital*, Vol. 1, p.658). Back to the present: 'global wealth increased by £7.3 trillion in the year up to June. More than 80 percent of this new prosperity was enjoyed by the top one per cent of the population. Meanwhile, the poorest half got no increase.' And if that was not miserable enough newstatesman.com (22 January) adds 'Oxfam has spoken to workers in US poultry factories who use nappies because they're denied toilet breaks. In Bangladesh, a garment worker would have to work a lifetime to earn what the CEO of one of the top five fashion retailers makes in just four days.'

Down and out in London

Signs of class division were obvious in Marx's time and remain so today. 'Number of homeless people sleeping on streets in England hits highest level on record. More than 4,500 people were recorded as sleeping rough on any given night in autumn last year – a figure that has more than doubled since 2010' (independent.co.uk, 24 January). The needs of the homeless are not met because they do not constitute a market. Thus we are told (theguardian.com, 4 February) 'London councils have granted property developers planning permission to build more than

26,000 luxury flats priced at more than £1m each, despite fears that there are already too many half-empty posh ghost towers in the capital. Builders are currently constructing towers containing 7,749 homes priced between £1m and £10m, and have planning rights to build another 18,712 high-end apartments and townhouses, according to the Observer. Housing campaigners said the figures show councils are prioritising the needs of the super-rich over those of hardworking young Londoners.' Existing without adequate shelter is a feature of capitalism worldwide.



Down and out in Calais

Luxury properties in London and elsewhere will remain empty, particularly if the market shrinks. 'Rich Folks Are Fleeing London and Lagos, Wealth Report Shows' (bloomberg.com 31 January). Some of the 99 percent move in search of slightly better living conditions, trying to reach London after leaving Nigeria for example, but at risk of becoming stuck en route – perhaps in Calais or Libya. 'One year ago, the Italian government, backed by their European counterparts, agreed on a dodgy deal with the Libyan government that has trapped thousands in misery. People are being forced to endure torture, arbitrary detention, extortion and unthinkable conditions in detention centres run by the Libyan government,' said Iverna McGowan,

Director of the Amnesty International, European Institutions Office' (amnesty.org 2 February). According to Indu Prakash Singh, Leader, ActionAid India's Urban Knowledge Activist Hub, there are at least 3.7 million homeless in India. 'We are now the 6th wealthiest nation in the world, and in terms of growth of wealth creation, we have beaten all wealthy countries including China, US and UK. Overall, India created a wealth of \$8230 billion in 2017' (track.in, 2 February). And who created all that wealth? India's workers.

Weltsozialismus

The stateless Marx lived in London from 1850 until his death in 1883. 'Britain on the eve of the EU referendum reached its wealthiest position in modern history, according to figures showing the vast gulf between the richest 1% and the poorest in society' (guardian.com 1 February). This gulf between a small parasitical minority and the huge majority who own little more than their ability to work is to be found worldwide. 'Income disparity has been a persistent problem in recent years for Indonesia, which has the sixth-worst inequality in the world, according to Oxfam. Indonesia's four richest men have more wealth than 100 million of the country's poorest people' (forbes.com, 2 February). And Oxfam's cure? More reformist platitudes: 'What we're saying in the report is that corporations shouldn't be paying out massive dividends until they can show that everyone in their supply chain is getting a living wage... We shouldn't have a situation where countries and companies are able to reduce their margins by employing slave labor.' Marx's solution: the abolition of the wages system.

