

THE

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SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement



Post-capitalist common ownership

We're ready when you are! 120 years and still here



Also: Which electoral strategy for socialists?
 The problem is not the Tories
 Playing by the rules of war

Voting: is it worth it?
 Does socialism exist in Venezuela?
 Fascism as ideology
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Introducing the Socialist Party

The Socialist Party advocates a society where production is freed from the artificial constraints of profit and organised for the benefit of all on the basis of material abundance. It does not have policies to ameliorate aspects of the existing social system. It is opposed to all war.

The *Socialist Standard* is the combative monthly journal of the Socialist Party, published without interruption since 1904. In the 1930s the *Socialist Standard* explained why capitalism would not collapse of its own accord, in response to widespread claims to the contrary, and continues to hold this view in face of the notion's recent popularity. Beveridge's welfare measures of the 1940s were viewed as a reorganisation of poverty and a necessary 'expense' of production, and Keynesian policies designed to overcome slumps an illusion. Today, the journal exposes as false the view that banks create money out of thin



air, and explains why actions to prevent the depredation of the natural world can have limited effect and run counter to the nature of capitalism itself.

Gradualist reformers like the Labour Party believed that capitalism could be transformed through a series of social measures, but have merely become routine managers of the system. The Bolsheviks

had to be content with developing Russian capitalism under a one-party dictatorship. Both failures have given socialism a quite different-- and unattractive-- meaning: state ownership and control. As the *Socialist Standard* pointed out before both courses were followed, the results would more properly be called state capitalism.

The Socialist Party and the World Socialist Movement affirm that capitalism is incapable of meaningful change in the interests of the majority; that the basis of exploitation is the wages/money system. The *Socialist Standard* is proud to have kept alive the original idea of what socialism is-- a classless, stateless, wageless, moneyless society or, defined positively, a democracy in which free and equal men and women co-operate to produce the things they need to live and enjoy life, to which they have free access in accordance with the principle 'from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs'

Ends and means

WHEN THE Socialist Party of Great Britain was founded 120 years ago this month there was widespread agreement amongst those who were against capitalism as to what the alternative would be. Socialism was seen as a society based on the common ownership and democratic control of the means for producing wealth, with production for use not profit. For instance, a *Manifesto of English Socialists* issued in 1893 stated:

‘On this point all Socialists agree. Our aim, one and all, is to obtain for the whole community complete ownership and control of the means of transport, the means of manufacture, the mines and the land. Thus we look to put an end for ever to the wage system, to sweep away all distinctions of class, and eventually to establish national and international communism on a sound basis’ (tinyurl.com/4tnwz822).

This was signed not only by Marxian socialists such as H. M. Hyndman of the Social Democratic Federation (from which we broke away eleven years later) and William Morris, but also by Fabians such as

George Bernard Shaw and Sidney Webb.

There were of course disagreements over how to get there. Some favoured parliamentary action, others were anti-parliamentarians; some favoured an insurrection or a general strike, others a policy of gradual reform, but there was agreement on the nature of the society to replace capitalism.

After the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia this gradually changed. They claimed – although we disputed this even in 1918 – to be constructing socialism in Russia and in 1936 proclaimed that socialism had actually been established there. However, what existed there bore no relation to what had previously been regarded as socialism. The means of living did not belong to the whole community under their democratic control. They belonged to the state controlled by a single, dictatorial party. The wages system continued to exist. Society there was a form of state capitalism.

This re-definition of socialism as state capitalism, propagated by the Russian government and Communist parties,

meant that the disagreements in the working class movement came to be about the objective to be achieved — what socialism meant — and not just about the means of achieving it. A step backwards as it obliged us to spend time explaining what socialism was not at the expense of explaining what it was.

Although the Russian rulers had changed the definition of socialism they still claimed that their eventual aim was a classless, stateless society of common ownership without money or wages, only they called it ‘communism’. A small but growing number of those who want to get rid of capitalism are coming to define post-capitalist society in these terms. We can only welcome this as it is shifting the arguments back from being about the goal to being about the means to achieve it.

Disagreements still exist on how to get there — the same ones as before — and here we still defend, as we did in 1904, democratic revolutionary political action, including the use of the ballot box, by a socialist-minded working class.

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A walk in the woods

ONE OF the few free pleasures workers in more rural parts of the UK can get is a walk through ancient woodland. There are three springtime features which you can normally expect to see in ancient woodland: bluebells, Lords and Ladies (a type of arum), and wild garlic.

What you wouldn't expect to see is 30,000 tonnes of illegally dumped and sulphurous waste, tens of feet deep, full of rubble, plastics and sanitary products. But such is the case at Hoads Wood in Kent, a protected Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and an area of outstanding natural beauty. Or at least it was until the dumpers started showing up in their wagons (tinyurl.com/52jjycfx).

Much understandable local outrage, and politicians falling over themselves to look tough on illegal dumping and 'bring the perpetrators to justice'. The local police declared that the pollution was 'shocking and totally irresponsible', which suggested that the dumpers somehow failed to understand what they were doing when they trucked up to the site, thirty times a day.

Of course they knew exactly what they were doing. They'd been paid – as many dodgy skip-hire firms are – to dispose of other people's waste, and didn't fancy paying commercial rates to dump it at municipal tips. It was simply cheaper to dump it where they thought nobody was looking.

TV naturalist Chris Packham took a stern line, calling it 'a mafia operation', perhaps something of an overstatement in the UK, though such mafia practices are notorious in the US. It's not so much mafia as market forces, where profit is what counts, and externalities are somebody else's problem. The UK Environment Agency provides a handy spreadsheet of all illegal dumping incidents between 2015 and 2023, ranging from private cars to tipper trucks, for construction waste, white goods, tyres, toxic chemicals, asbestos, animal carcasses and domestic black bag waste, dumped on agricultural land, footpaths and bridleways, highways, riverbanks and watercourses. There are well over 2,000 entries and for almost all of them, nothing is entered in the 'Final Action Taken' field (data.gov.uk - tinyurl.com/a5dfvhcc). No doubt the Environment Agency is underfunded, understaffed and unable to pursue illegal tippers, despite concerns over the health implications of illegal dumping, as described for example in a 2015 paper on the so-called 'Triangle of death' region of Campania, near Naples in Italy (tinyurl.com/3pcen56y).

But it's not just cowboy contractors.



Credit: DAVID ROSE

UK water companies are currently under fire for massive and repeated polluting of rivers. In one example last month, according to the BBC, United Utilities pumped raw sewage into Windermere, in the UK's Lake District, at the rate of 500 litres a second for 6 hours, and didn't report it for thirteen hours. Water companies are only allowed to do this if excessive rainfall overwhelms their pumping stations. But on very many occasions this is not the case, and the dumps are illegal. The company in this case protested that it was 'an unexpected fault in the telecommunications network in the area, which United Utilities was not notified about', however an identical incident occurred in November 2022. Nor were local activists impressed, saying 'Time and time again the same thing keeps happening here in Windermere: United Utilities pollutes the lake and the Environment Agency turns a blind eye to it' (tinyurl.com/3csss6p4).

Then more outrage in Devon when locals were told they'd have to boil drinking water because the local water company had failed to prevent the cryptosporidium parasite getting into the water supply and causing vomiting and diarrhoea.

Even so, this is minor stuff compared to air pollution. Globally, this causes around 6 million premature deaths each year. According to the World Health Organization, just 0.001 percent of the world's population are breathing safe, non-toxic air (tinyurl.com/mvny28b). And then there are 'forever chemicals', synthetic polyfluorinated substances (PFAS) which never break down, and are found in everything from tea bags to non-stick pans, bottled water to butter. These are now

known to cause multiple types of cancer, and class-action lawsuits have already forced giant payouts by DuPont, 3M and other manufacturers, but international efforts to ban PFAS production are grindingly slow.

A PFAS ban might be achievable. Capitalism is not incapable of reacting to obvious environmental dangers, as long as legislation is across the board, meaning that individual manufacturers and states don't suffer comparative disadvantage. It did this with ozone-destroying CFCs starting in the 1970s, though a global ban did not come into effect until 2010. Even then it couldn't be globally enforced, with China being pinpointed as the source of a 50 percent increase in CFC output in 2019 (tinyurl.com/6nsj3rd8).

The capitalist system of production is today's ideological sacred cow. It is supposed to be the best and only way to improve the standard of living for all humanity, yet because its prime imperative is only to make money by any means necessary, the reality never lives up to the hype. With the cow come the cowboys. If we abolish money and markets, along with the political and wealthy elites who protect them, we could then develop a transparent production and recycled waste system that actually worked in humanity's interest, where no palms would be greased and no blind eyes turned. We need to dump capitalism instead of letting capitalism dump on us. Then people could enjoy an unspoilt walk in the woods and a wild swim in the local lake, without worrying what they might catch in the process.

PJS

Which electoral strategy for socialists?

THE SOCIALIST Party stood two candidates in the elections to the Greater London Assembly held on 2 May, the same day that the mayor of London was elected. We stood in the constituencies of Barnet & Camden and Lambeth & Southwark. The total electorate of these four London boroughs was 860,000, which meant that those who voted (about 340,000 did) would have seen our name and emblem on the ballot paper. Members and sympathisers distributed some 15,000 leaflets, not enough but the bulletin sent to all 6 million electors in London stated that we were standing even though not what we were standing for,

The results were:

Barnet & Camden. Lab 70,749. Con 51,606. Green 18,405. LibDem 12,335. Reform UK 7,703. Socialist 1,639.

Lambeth & Southwark. Lab 84,768. Green 35,144. LibDem. 22,030. Con 21,121. Reform UK 8,942. Socialist 2,082.

The Weekly Worker (9 May), commenting on the results, noted:

‘The London Assembly is elected by a complex combination of a party list system plus constituency candidates. The Morning Star’s Communist Party of Britain stood in the party list element, while candidates from the Socialist Party of Great Britain and Tusc stood in constituencies. (...) The CPB ranked 13th at 0.4% (10,915 votes) – an improvement on last time, when it obtained 0.3%. (...) On the left, the two SPGB candidates both came in last, with just one percent of the vote. Among the Tusc candidates, in City and East Lois Austin came in 7th (after an independent) with 4,710 (2%); April Jacqueline Ashley in Croydon and Sutton was 6th with 2,766 (0.7%); Andy Walker in Havering & Redbridge was 7th with 2,145 (1.3%); and Nancy Taaffe in North East was 6th with 5,595 (2.7%). These results show Tusc polling in the same range as the SPGB, though ahead of the CPB.’ <https://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1490/local-election-barometer/>

In other words, TUSC (‘Trade Union and Socialist Alliance’), appealing to trade union conscious workers with a programme of attractive-sounding reforms (what used to be called ‘the minimum programme’), polled more or less the same as us, standing on a straight platform of socialism — the common ownership and democratic control of the means of living with production

directly to meet people’s needs, not profit — and nothing but (what used to be called ‘the maximum programme’).

These different election stances reflected the different approaches of us and them. TUSC is essentially a front organisation for one of the fragments of the old Militant Tendency that calls itself ‘Socialist Party of England and Wales’, or SPEW. As Leninists they consider that workers are capable only of acquiring a trade union consciousness (which on Lenin’s definition includes support for legislative and administrative measures to try to improve the lot of workers under capitalism). So, when they contest elections they see no point in advocating socialism as that would be to cast pearls before swine and so only propose reforms within capitalism. Even when they do talk of socialism they mean nationalisation (state capitalism).

We, on the other hand, argue that workers can understand socialism — can acquire a socialist consciousness, if you want to put it that way — in fact must as a condition for socialism being established. No vanguard can establish socialism on behalf of workers; it is something they must do for themselves. Socialism can only be established when and if a majority want and understand it. So, when we contest elections, we don’t offer to lead

or do anything for workers; we put before them the straight case for socialism to, at this stage, as we put it in our election leaflet, allow them to ‘send a message to your neighbours and colleagues that you want a world of common ownership and democratic control’.

We know perfectly well how few workers currently want socialism and were standing to publicise further the case for replacing capitalism with socialism as the only lasting solution to the problems capitalism throws up for wage and salary workers and their dependents.

What the TUSC vote shows is that there would be no point in us combining advocating socialism with advocating reforms, as some have urged. This would not make any difference to the number of votes a socialist candidate would get. But it would confuse the issue by encouraging people to continue to think in terms of getting a better deal under capitalism rather than to get rid of it, to try to mend rather than end capitalism. Not that appealing just to trade union consciousness got SPEW very far. Workers who want reforms evidently prefer to vote for reformist parties they consider have a chance of being able to implement some. Meanwhile we will stick to advocating socialism and nothing but.



More pro-business than thou

CHANCELLOR-IN-WAITING Rachel Reeves's commitment to private capitalist business knows no bounds. 'We will be the most pro-business government ever, vows Reeves' was the headline of an interview with her in the *Times* (25 April). For the record — to remember when someone asks you to vote Labour in the coming general election — her exact words were:

'If I become chancellor, the next Labour government is going to be most pro-business the country has ever seen'.

That's quite an ambition. To be more pro-capitalist than Gladstone's Liberals in the 19th century, the Tory governments of the 1920s, and the Thatcher government of the 1980s!

But why is she saying this? It can't be to catch votes since big business hasn't a particularly good reputation amongst the general public. It can't really be, either, to convince business that Labour is fit to govern in their interest as business has been convinced of that since the first Labour government a hundred year ago. It is more likely to assure 'the markets' so they don't do to her what they did to Truss.

After all, like Truss, she has a plan to try to artificially stimulate 'growth'. She put it this way:

'I genuinely believe the way to improve living standards and to achieve our potential is by unlocking private business investment'.

Truss wouldn't disagree. The difference is that Truss planned to do this by reducing direct taxes on profits while Reeves plans to do so by bribing capitalist firms with contracts and subsidies. Both hoping that the resulting growth would avoid the government having to cut spending (too much).

Reeves explained that under her plan: 'the government would provide state support to give business the confidence to invest in expensive and risky technologies ... To get people to invest to produce green hydrogen they need to know that at the end they can sell it ... So the role of government in the sector might be to say, "You produce it and we will guarantee that it is purchased. We will be the backstop to that"'.

The government is going to do this by offering to put up a quarter of the cost (of in this case providing places where

motor vehicles can fill up with hydrogen), by borrowing it from 'the markets', as long as private capitalist business invests the remaining three-quarters. There are two uncertainties here. First, private capitalist business won't put up the money unless they expect to get the going 'rate of return' on their investment and, second, will the rate of interest that the speculators who lend the government money charge for their loan be less than the rate of return the government expects to get from investing in the project?

Neither is guaranteed. Nor can be. In other words, whether or not Reeves's plan works depends entirely on decisions taken by profit-seeking private enterprises and international speculators. No wonder she is insisting the next Labour government will be so pro-business. Mind you, there is a certain perverse logic to her position. If you accept capitalism more or less as it is (as she and Labour do) you accept that the economy is driven by business investment for profit, therefore you must encourage this and kowtow to business. But she doesn't need to be quite so obsequious.



Talks include

Keith Graham on *Political Consciousness: What Can We Learn From Marx?*

Brian Gardner: '*They Are Many, We Are Few*': *The Political Consciousness Of The Capitalist Class?*

Darren Poynton on *Socialist Consciousness, Solidarity And Democratic Virtues*



Our venue is the University of Worcester, St John's Campus, Henwick Grove, St John's, Worcester, WR2 6AJ.

Full residential cost (including accommodation and meals Friday evening to Sunday afternoon) is £150; the concessionary rate is £80. Book online at worldsocialism.org/spgb/summer-school-2024/ or send a cheque (payable to the Socialist Party of Great Britain) with your contact details to Summer School, The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 7UN. Day visitors are welcome, but please e-mail for details in advance. Bookings will close on 15th July or before. Email enquiries to spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk.

Our understanding of the kind of society we're living in is shaped by our circumstances: our home, our work, our finances, our communities. Recognising our own place in the economy, politics and history is part of developing a wider awareness of how capitalist society functions. Alongside an understanding of the mechanics of capitalism, political consciousness also involves our attitude towards it. Seeing through the ideologies

which promote accepting our current social system requires us to question and judge what we experience. Realising that capitalism doesn't benefit the vast majority of people naturally leads on to considering what alternative society could run for the benefit of everyone. The Socialist Party's weekend of talks and discussion explores what political consciousness is, how it arises and what we, as a class and as individuals, can do with it.

Halo Halo

WHO KNOWS what goes on behind the closed doors of convents? *Bitter Winter* (19 April) reported that the French Dominican Sisters of the Holy Spirit were so aggrieved at the behaviour of one of their nuns that they asked the Vatican to send in one of its Gumshoes to investigate her. The Sister was then effectively fired. Displaying secular umbrage she then took herself off to a tribunal and got herself awarded two hundred thousand euros for false dismissal. The tribunal apparently found the investigation biased because the Cardinal in charge of it was ‘friendly’ with another nun known to be an opponent of the one in question’.

‘An influential traditional priest aged 63 has sparked outrage in Ghana by marrying a 12-year-old girl... During the ceremony, women speaking in the local language Ga told the girl to dress teasingly for her

husband. They can also be heard advising her to be prepared for wifely duties and to use the perfumes they gifted her to boost her sexual appeal to her husband.’ Apparently, the girl (shouldn’t that be child?) ‘started the rites to become the priest’s wife six years ago, but the process did not interfere with her education.’ She will also be ‘educated’ in her ‘marital responsibilities such as childbearing’. An NGO reports that 19 percent of girls in Ghana are married before they reach eighteen and 5 percent get married before their fifteenth birthday (BBC 1 April).

Charlie Hebdo is a French *Private Eye*-type magazine. In 2006 the magazine reprinted twelve cartoons depicting the founder of Islam which the Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten* had published in 2005. This did not go down well in certain sections of society. In 2015 two

Algerian brothers entered the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* and killed twelve of the staff and wounded eleven more.

In 2022 Salmon Rushdie, author of *The Satanic Verses* was attacked in New York. He was stabbed several times and as a result lost sight in one eye and the use of one hand.

In 2021, an educator in West Yorkshire was teaching religious studies. ‘The lesson that sparked the controversy was designed, ironically, to explore issues of blasphemy and free speech, and of appropriate ways of responding to religious disagreements’ (*Guardian* 31 March). What triggered the subsequent furore? He showed a cartoon which may have been one of those originally published by *Jyllands-Posten*. ‘The school immediately suspended the teacher, and ‘unequivocally apologised’ for using a totally inappropriate resource, promising to review the curriculum with “all the communities represented in our school”’.

The teacher was forced to leave his post and is apparently still in hiding.

Ain’t religion wonderful.

DC

Tiny tips

While Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola was watching his team play Real Madrid in the first leg of the Champions League quarter-finals on Tuesday, his watch was making headlines around the world. Guardiola was wearing an extravagant Richard Mille watch worth £1 million (\$1.26 million) on his wrist at Madrid’s Estadio Santiago Bernabéu (**CNN, [tinyurl.com/2waj9bst](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/09/sport/guardiola-watch/index.html)**).

Conspiracy theorists have for years now insisted that COVID-19 vaccines were the real killers, especially among young men — but a new study shows that there’s no data to back that up (**Futurism, [tinyurl.com/vbf3bdze](https://www.futurism.com/vbf3bdze)**).

Actual science is the great accomplishment of mankind. The antidote to ignorance, superstition, religious zealotry, and nonsensical beliefs in general. An eclipse exemplifies, to even the lay-est of laypeople, just how advanced modern science is. We were informed by astronomers, years in advance, exactly when and exactly where the eclipse would occur — down to the second, down to the meter — and everyone in the path of totality could literally see how exactly right those predictive calculations were. We should be celebrating and

emphasizing this to laypeople, because these same scientists are the same people who’ve been telling us for decades that we’re destroying our climate with carbon emissions. So here’s my “by the way” retort to Montúfar’s aside: how many astronomers today — not in “ancient” times — are also astrologers? Spoiler: the answer is fucking zero (**Daring Fireball, [tinyurl.com/56cn5h4w](https://www.daringfireball.net/2024/04/09/56cn5h4w)**).

...I am aware of the dishonesty and stupidity of choosing any side in any war, and I am aware that all wars are immoral exercises in folly and absurdity. The only real beneficiaries are politicians and weapons makers. The great masses of regular people on both sides of any conflict always have to pay the price. The unlucky individuals who get killed or come home from the pointless war with mangled bodies and fucked-up minds pay the biggest price. Furthermore, whatever outcomes result from a war, no matter which side “wins,” serve mainly to lay the groundwork for future conflicts and more wars (**ICH, [tinyurl.com/4z4mc3pn](https://www.ich.org/4z4mc3pn)**).

South Africa has undergone a nutritional transition over the past 30 years characterized by the triple burden

of malnutrition: households are simultaneously experiencing undernutrition, hidden hunger, and overweight or obesity due to nutrient-poor diets. The results of the first in-depth, nationwide study into food and nutrition since 1994, the National Food and Nutrition Security Survey, found that almost half of South Africa’s adult population was overweight or obese. While there was sufficient food to feed everyone through domestic production and imports, many families and individuals went to bed on empty stomachs (**Alliance for Science, [tinyurl.com/yvpchndm](https://www.allianceforscience.org/yvpchndm)**).

Thirty years after the former liberation movement won the first democratic elections, South Africa remains the world’s most unequal nation, suffering from high unemployment, rampant crime, widespread corruption and a stagnant economy (**AFP, [tinyurl.com/573acn33](https://www.afp.com/573acn33)**).

Rough sleeping increased in all regions of England between 2022 and 2023 despite a Conservative 2019 manifesto promise to end rough sleeping before the next general election. An estimated 3,898 people slept rough in 2023, an annual increase of 27% — the largest annual rise since 2015. The numbers are more than double (up 120%) those in 2010 (**Guardian, [tinyurl.com/58knkc77](https://www.guardian.com/58knkc77)**).

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

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

LONDON

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

MIDLANDS

West Midlands regional branch. Meets last Sat. 3pm (check before attending). Contact: Stephen Shapton. 01543 821180. Email: stephenshapton@yahoo.co.uk.

NORTH

North East Regional branch.

Contact: P. Kilgallon, c/o Head Office, 52 Clapham High Street, SW4 7UN.

Lancaster branch. Ring for details: P. Shannon, 07510 412 261, spgb.lancaster@worldsocialism.org.

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

Bolton. Contact: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589.

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

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

Yorkshire Regional branch.

Contact: Fredi Edwards, Tel 07746 230 953 or email fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk

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

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

Kent and Sussex regional branch. Usually meets 3rd Sun. 2pm at The Muggleton Inn, High Street, Maidstone ME14 1HJ or online.

Contact: spgb.ksrb@worldsocialism.org or 07971 715569.

South West regional branch. Meets 3rd Sat. 2pm on Zoom. For invite email:

spgbsw@gmail.com

Brighton. Contact: Anton Pruden,

anton@pruden.me

Canterbury. Contact: Rob Cox, 4 Stanhope Road, Deal, Kent, CT14 6AB.

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SCOTLAND

Edinburgh. Contact: Fraser Anderson f_raz_1@hotmail.com

Glasgow branch. Meet 3rd Monday of the month at 7pm on Zoom. Branch Social 2nd Saturday of the month at 1pm in The Atholl Arms Pub, Glasgow City Centre. Contact: Paul Edwards by e-mail: rainbow3@btopenworld.com or mobile: 07484 717893

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

Ayrshire. Contact: Paul Edwards 07484717893. rainbow3@btopenworld.com.

WALES

South Wales branch (Cardiff and Swansea)

Meets 2nd Monday 7.30pm on JITSi.

(meet.jit.si/spgbsouthwales3).

Contact: botterillr@gmail.com or Geoffrey Williams, 19 Baptist Well Street, Waun Wen, Swansea SA1 6FB. 01792 643624

Central branch

Meets 2nd Sunday of the month, 10am (UK time) on Zoom <https://zoom.us/j/7421974305>. Contact: spgb.cbs@worldsocialism.org

INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS

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World Socialist Party (India) 257 Baghajatin 'E' Block (East), Kolkata- 700086, 033- 2425-0208. wspindia@hotmail.com

World Socialist Party (New Zealand) P.O. Box 1929, Auckland, NI, New Zealand.

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Nation or class?

NATIONALIST SENTIMENT was the form of collective consciousness that emerged as the one best adapted or suited to the needs of capitalism. The nation-state, after all, constitutes the most fundamental unit of spatial organisation from the standpoint of the accumulation of capital and the coalescence of capitalist interests into separate and competing groupings – namely national groupings whose interests the state broadly serves as the primary source of state income in the form of taxation.

Furthermore, as capitalism's collectivist expression *par excellence*, nationalism neatly complemented individualist ideology. Indeed, nation-states were themselves thought of as quasi-individuals, and so it became possible to think of something so abstract and amorphous as a 'nation' as possessing a particular character and evincing certain 'traits'. In short, the nation came to be 'naturalised' and rendered timeless in nationalist mythology.



The 18th century Swiss jurist, Emerich Vattel, author of *The Law of Nations* (1758), defined nation-states as 'bodies politic, societies of men united together for the purpose of promoting their mutual safety and advantage by the joint efforts of their combined strength'. In legal terms, the nation-state amounted to a 'moral person'. As Vattel put it: 'Such a society has her affairs and her interests; she deliberates and takes resolutions in common; thus becoming a moral person who possesses an understanding and a will peculiar to herself and is susceptible of obligations and rights'.

In short, the 'nation' has pre-existing moral claims on the citizens who comprise

it, claims which also work to ensure the compliance of those citizens to the capitalist mode of production that gave birth to this very concept of nationhood.



It was in the 19th century that nationalism became particularly significant and influential although, of course, it had been gradually building up to this point in preceding centuries. Benedict Anderson in his seminal work, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), describes the origins of the nation-state as lying in capitalism itself and particularly 'print capitalism' – a reference to the spread of literacy in the modern world that allowed people to 'imagine' themselves to be part of a much wider community in the guise of the 'nation'. Greater mobility and improved transport links would also have contributed to this development.

No doubt there were many other factors besides these implicated in the rise of 19th century nationalism, but what is relevant here is the impact of nationalist ideology on popular consciousness – the point being that nationalism served as a kind of glue that bound people together in a modern capitalist society in the way that religion had in traditional society. Being a secular religion its devotees paid homage to, and worshipped at the feet of, this abstraction called the 'nation'. Indeed, religion itself was pressed into the service of nations, the latter's armies being blessed by the priests as they embarked on some holy war against some other nation. Confusingly, God always appeared to be on every side engaged in the bloody business of warmongering

Any functioning society, even the most ruggedly individualist of them, needs some kind of collectivist substratum

to hold it together. However, while nationalism was pre-eminent in performing this particular role in a capitalist society it was far from being the only conceivable form of collectivist sentiment that might arise in this society; 'class consciousness' was another.

Marx wrote much about the changing circumstances of early capitalism and how the rise of the factory system, along with the concentration of large numbers of workers this brought about in the rapidly expanding urban centres, fostered a growing sense of class identity. This identity came to be forged out of the realisation of a common class interest in opposition to the interests of the owners of capital, and expressed itself in various ways – most notably in the rise of an organised trade union movement.

However, with hindsight it seems clear that Marx gravely underestimated the strength and potency of nationalist ideology and its ability to constitute itself as a kind of overarching value framework that can encompass, co-opt and subsume all other forms of collectivist expression, including 'class consciousness'. Belief in nationalism of any kind and the existence of some supposed overriding 'national interest' (including, it should be noted, the Left's endorsement of 'national liberation' and a programme of 'nationalisation') has the obvious effect of blunting the class struggle of the working class against the capitalist class and blurring the distinction between the classes and their diametrically opposed interests in this struggle.

We can see how this, in turn, is likely to have had a seriously retarding influence on the goal of establishing a post-capitalist society. Such a society must necessarily entail the complete removal of class monopoly ownership and control of the productive forces of society. Needless to say, this is something that will naturally be resisted by the class that exercises that monopoly – the tiny capitalist or ruling class. Consequently, the very objective of getting rid of capitalism inescapably has to oppose nation and nationalism and promote class and class consciousness – a post-capitalist society being, by definition, a classless society.

ROBIN COX

The problem is *not* the Tories

‘GENERAL ELECTION NOW. TORIES ROBBERS MUST GO’ screamed a recent headline in a Trotskyist paper. It could have been one of many but this one was from the March issue of *Counterfire*, an SWP fragment.

The article denounced ‘fourteen years of Tory rule’ as ‘fourteen years of austerity, of cuts in our standard of living, cuts to public services, cuts in wages and conditions, cuts in benefits and cuts to the NHS.’

This is a more or less accurate description of what has happened since 2010 when the Tories came into office (with the LibDems as their junior partners for the first five of these years). But correlation is not causation. That the Tories were responsible for all these things is the standard Labour Party line, the suggestion being that they would not have happened had there been a Labour government. But wouldn’t they? These sorts of things have been known to happen when there’s been a Labour government in office; in fact under every Labour government that there’s been.

The cuts to public services, benefits and the NHS since 2010 were imposed by the government as decisions on these are a government responsibility but, in the economic circumstances of the slump that followed the financial crash of 2008, the government had no real choice. The capitalist economy is driven by the quest for profits and any government has to give priority to helping this.

In a slump this means reducing taxes on profits and cutting back on government spending. In theory a government could choose to refuse to do this but that would only make things worse by prolonging the slump. The cuts, then, were forced on the government that happened to be in office at the time by the operation of the coercive economic laws of capitalism. If Labour had been in office for these fourteen years they would have had to have done much the same. In any event, the fall in the standard of living and worsening wages and working conditions are a direct result of capitalism having been in a slump. That’s what happens in a slump and no government can stop this.

Counterfire is of a different opinion. They suggest governments do have a free choice in the matter. The budget, their article stated: ‘is an attempt to con us into believing that there is not enough money to fund the basic services we need, and a decent income for everyone. This is a lie. The truth is that there is plenty of money to go round; the truth is that austerity, the impoverishment of the British people and



Credit: Jim Andrew

the devastating cuts to the NHS and public services are a political choice’.

This is left-wing populism as its stupidest — the money is there but the government refuses to spend it to provide ‘a decent income for everyone;’ they are robbers; kick them out. The money — or at least some of it — is there but no government is going to prioritise using taxes to improve public services, even less to provide a ‘decent’ income for everyone. That’s not its remit. Capitalism’s economic laws force governments to give priority to profit-making and conditions for profit-making. As government spending comes from taxes which ultimately fall on profits, governments cannot simply increase taxes to improve living conditions for the population. Under capitalism production is for profit, and must be, not to meet people’s needs. No government can change or even challenge that.

There is reason to believe that *Counterfire* know this — some of them have written books which indicate some knowledge of how capitalism works (one by Chris Nineham is reviewed in this issue) — and so are just being populist in a bid to gather a following. This is in the Leninist tradition of contempt for the intellectual ability of the working class. They think that workers are capable only of reaching a trade-union consciousness and so there’s no point in putting before them anything that goes beyond this. Hence the populist rabble-rousing.

The politics of the headline is equally incoherent. They want the ‘Tory robbers’ out and are calling for an immediate general election to bring this about. So they want the Tories to be voted out. In other words, for workers to vote for some other party. But they don’t say which. Their call could be interpreted as saying vote for any party whose candidate has a chance of beating the Tory one; which in practice would mean voting Labour in

most constituencies but voting LibDem in ‘blue wall’ seats. It certainly rules out voting for the Greens or any fringe left-wing candidate such as those of Galloway’s Workers Party (which he says hopes to contest every constituency in Britain).

But supposing this happens and the Tories are voted out. That means that there will either be a Labour government or, less likely, some sort of Lib-Lab arrangement. Nothing else changes. The means of life continue to be owned and controlled by private capitalist businesses. The economy remains driven by business investment for profit. Profit, not satisfying people’s needs, is still the aim of production.

In these circumstances the new government won’t be able to behave much differently from how the Tories have been. It too will have to abide by the economic laws of capitalism and give priority to profit-making. It is certainly not going to allocate any of ‘the plenty of money to go round’ to reverse previous cuts. The likely future prime minister has said so in so many words. He told last year’s Labour Conference that a Labour government would not be ‘a cheque-book state’ and declared in December that ‘anyone who expects an incoming Labour government to quickly turn on the spending taps is going to be disappointed’ (tinyurl.com/bddbhuXu). He at least understands the limitations capitalism places on what governments can do in this respect, even if *Counterfire* doesn’t (or feigns not to).

So what’s the point of kicking the Tories out (objectionable as they are and happy, as many will be, to see the back of them) just to replace them with others who will have to pursue the same basic policy of prioritising profit?

The problem is not the Tories, it’s capitalism. It’s capitalism that must go.

ADAM BUICK

Playing by the rules of war

MILLIONS OF people are horrified by the Israeli war on Gaza. Protests have hit the streets in countries around the world, to the point where armed police battled students on university campuses across the US for occupying in protest against the war and America's role in backing it.

Many protestors shout that the war is 'illegal' and that Israel is committing genocide, pinning hopes on international authority putting an end to malefaction. It should be noted that genocide is a crime of intent, and is not synonymous with mass homicide. That narrow legal definition, though, does trigger international and domestic legal requirements to act against it: hence why America and allied governments are determined to deny that it is genocide, and will continue to do so until the International Court of Justice makes a determinative ruling, which could be years away.

People should not put their faith in the split hairs of legality, but instead on sound analysis of the causes of conflict and action built on that analysis. The faith in the power of legality is misplaced against the tremendous value of the interests at stake in being able to secure and control the supply of oil. It is worth noting, as Tony Blair pointed out in his speech at the George Bush library in 2002, that it is not about monopolising oil, but ensuring that no one state can monopolise and thus threaten the supply of oil:

'The western world is import dependent. We base our policy on diversity of supply. You in the US import from 50 different countries, no one of which supplies more than 15 per cent of total imports. The EU pursues roughly the same policy' (tinyurl.com/3daxp2vd).

Beyond that, it is important to note that international law is not set up to prevent war, but in fact to structure and enable wars to take place. It seeks to limit war and codify its conduct, but the powers that drafted those wars would simply not allow themselves to put aside the tool of war. As Michael Walzer, the theorist of just war writes, alongside Jo-Ann Mort: 'It is a maxim of just war theory that the rules of war cannot make it impossible to fight a just war. There has to be a way to fight' (tinyurl.com/4884vxp8). Walzer has also said in a recent interview 'I think the IDF has been trying to adhere to the rules in an environment that probably requires some loosening of the rules' (tinyurl.com/42upj5h8).

As we reported in our May issue (tinyurl.com/mrxpjxb) part of this 'loosening'

has been to deploy the Lavender AI targeting system to co-ordinate targeting of Hamas operatives and officials based on mass intelligence gathering. The military doctrine that civilian casualties are permissible in pursuit of a legitimate military objective has been broadly applied (more broadly than in the past). Israel undoubtedly has enough military lawyers to build a broad permissive case for its actions (or to construct one retrospectively where necessary).

It is abundantly clear that Israel is not acting out of absolute necessity: Hamas will never have the capacity to destroy Israel. If the intelligence failures that meant that Israel knew that Hamas was drilling for a 7 October-style operation were fixed Hamas could be securely locked back up. For a fraction of the cost spent on the war, Israel could have bought a bucket load of informants to finger high-level Hamas commanders for reprisal.

Everyone agrees with the concept of the right to self-defence to protect your own and your loved ones' lives, but most would agree that going after the friends and family of someone who attacked you would be taking it too far; and every human society has mechanisms to stop violent disputes escalating in a spiral of tit for tat. And, of course, it is possible to engineer a situation where a claim of self-defence allows an actor to pursue the use of violence to achieve other ends.

As Arthur Ransome once wrote:

'It has been said that when two armies face each other across a battle front and engage in mutual slaughter, they may be considered as a single army engaged in suicide. Now it seems to me that when countries, each one severally doing its best to arrest its private economic ruin, do their utmost to accelerate the economic ruin of each other, we are witnessing something

very like the suicide of civilization itself' (tinyurl.com/4skr9cwc).

Israel is not unique in this. Indeed, their propagandists have been pointing out that there are mass refugee and humanitarian crises being created by savage wars in Sudan, Congo and Ukraine, but that Israel and its actions are being singled out. Possibly this is so, at least in part because of the focus of the western media (spurred on in part by the interest of their states and their capitalists in the Middle East region).

Indeed, in terms of Israel's tactics, they seem to be following exactly the same military doctrines as were used by the Sri Lankan government when they crushed the Tamil Tigers in 2009:

'The Sri Lanka Army (SLA) advanced its military campaign in the Vanni, using large-scale and widespread shelling, at times with heavy weapons, such as Multi-Barrel Rocket Launchers (MBRLs) and other large artillery, causing large numbers of civilian casualties. It shelled in three consecutive No Fire Zones, where it had encouraged the civilian population to concentrate, and after it had indicated that it would stop using heavy weapons' (tinyurl.com/34cfays7).

Likewise, the Tamil Tigers violated human rights by using human shields and forced labour. Sri Lanka was protected from human rights allegations at the UN by allied states.

War is not some inherent feature of humanity. Billions of us live lives without waging war upon one another. War emerges from a social and technological architecture that enables it, and if the marchers who rightly hate war want to put a stop to it, they need to look to action that will make war impossible, not illegal.

PIK SMEET



Credit: Getty Images

Voting: is it worth it?



THURSDAY 2 May 2024 saw another round of elections for local councils and regional mayors. They were followed by a media glut of psephological analysis and speculation as to the significance of results.

Claims and counter claims as to the reasons behind outcomes vied with each other. Those who had increased their numbers of elected councillors, such as Labour, the LibDems and the Greens, claimed vindication for their opposition to the present government and called for a general election now. Unsurprisingly this call went unheeded by the Prime Minister and his colleagues, who instead highlighted the odd anomalous result as indicating an underlying trend of support in their favour.

By the following Tuesday there were only occasional references to the election in news broadcasts as Parliament reassembled following the May Day bank holiday. Then it was back to the knockabout pantomime politics in the Commons. It turns out the elections and their reporting were largely, to quote Shakespeare, ‘...a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury signifying nothing’ (*Macbeth*, Act 5, Scene 5).

Should there be doubt expressed over this sentiment, it is worth considering the extent to which the significance of the ballot was generally considered. A measure of this is the turnout, a factor briefly

mentioned in the subsequent reporting. In one Metropolitan Borough Council area the rounded-up turnout figures ranged from 35 percent in the highest ward down to 16 percent in the lowest, with a borough average of 25 percent. Abstention was clearly the winner.

Was this feature due to apathy or antipathy, or perhaps an amalgam of them both? If apathy was the demotivating factor it maybe reflects negative attitudes cultivated by experience of previous voting making little or no practical difference. Antipathy is likely the expression of a cynicism grown from the same circumstances. One is a passive acceptance, the other can manifest as what might be described as bar-room anger, often expressed as vitriolic denunciation of politicians of all stripes and politics in general.

There are those who would denounce both attitudes for not making use of a most valuable asset, the vote. The argument runs along the lines that workers fought, and in some cases died, to secure the vote for working people in general, or women in particular.

Cannot deliver

Democracy, however flawed, is certainly always preferable to tyranny, so the vote is indeed a precious thing. However,

accepting this raises a question. If the vote is valuable, why give it to someone you know will not, cannot, deliver on promises made?

Politicians are often fundamentally dishonest, but they can never be in a position to make the really radical changes that would benefit all society. Their problem is that everything people might aspire to costs.

The NHS is a case in point. It has grown from a quite basic level of medical provision at its foundation in 1948, to the hi-tech service it is today, dealing with a vast range of illnesses and conditions quite beyond its scope in the early days. The technology involved now would have seemed almost sci-fi in 1948. But those machines are expensive to develop, buy, maintain and operate. So when a government claims to be spending so many billion pounds more on the NHS than its predecessors, that is accurate.

It does not, though, come close to meeting the continually rising cost of realising actual need, or paying the staff adequately (in capitalist terms). With the result that voters have negative experiences from not being able to get GP appointments to not receiving vital treatment. The only source from which those costs can be met is the wealth owned and controlled by capitalism. Every

pound raised rather than borrowed by government, national or local, ultimately comes from capitalism's wealth, either directly as business taxes, or indirectly via income tax.

People see the problems and seek solutions, and replacing the party in power with another one promising change appears to be an option. Indeed, palliative measures may well be enacted, only for them to be frustrated by the economic demands and realities of capitalism. While voting is indisputably integral to a democratic political process, it is by no means a guarantee. Indeed, 'democratic' is often the word of choice in the titles of authoritarian regimes seemingly untroubled by the notion of irony.

The German Democratic Republic (GDR) of the Cold War period made use of institutions apparently modelled on those of its National Socialist predecessor. While the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) serves as a present-day example of the word erroneously used. A country claiming to be both socialist and democratic shamelessly promotes dynastic rule that so far has consisted of grandfather, father and grandson with, it seems, the great granddaughter being prepared for her turn. No doubt to unanimous popular acclaim.

The promotion of democracy is fundamental to the socialist cause, actual socialism that is, not just in name. A worldwide society in which capitalism has been replaced by the conscious action of the international working class, not some self-selected vanguard acting supposedly on its behalf. A society without rulers, dynastic, presidential or otherwise with truly democratic institutions organising the meeting of self-determined needs, rather than the production for profit.

Important but limited

Unless and until capitalism, driven to accumulate capital, has been replaced by socialism, there cannot be a fully democratic society. The present political expressions of democracy – free speech (more or less), universal suffrage (more or less), secret ballots and regular elections for local and national assemblies – are important.

Socialists can and do contest elections, being very much in favour of electors being able to engage with and show support for socialist ideas. Indeed, socialist candidates being able to garner increasing numbers of votes will be an indication that the working class is moving towards making the break with capitalism. However, this will only be realised when the working class develops democratic institutions whereby the ultimate component of democracy, presently

excluded from the process, economic possession and control can be achieved.

Unfortunately, at the moment there seems to be no short-term prospect of that happening. So, while the knockabout nature of party politics remains, and the merry-go-round of office swapping continues, socialists must make whatever use they can to put their ideas. Democracy even in its limited form must not be demeaned, but challenged to become a more profound agent of change. Present limitations have been highlighted by the ease with which two Conservative MPs, Dan Poulter and Natalie Elphicke, crossed the floor to the Labour benches. Natalie Elphicke is particularly interesting as she was regarded as being on the right wing of the Tory Party, stepping easily into the centre-left opposition and welcomed by its leader. The promotion of democratic choice between left, right and centre proves to be little or no choice at all.

It is illuminating, however, that even authoritarian regimes often do hold elections, be it well-managed and controlled ones. Voting, it would appear, confers some, if spurious, legitimacy, even when the outcome is so predetermined it would make a political pollster blush.

Passive role

While what are sometimes termed liberal democracies, such as the UK, hold regular open elections with secret ballots, this does not mean democracy has been achieved. The vast majority, the electorate, are subordinated to a very passive role. They play no active part in formulating policies or selecting likely candidates to become their representatives. Rather

they are consumers who choose, from a limited range of political products, those they consider best able to administer and manage the state for capitalism.

As for capitalism itself, the electorate have no role in its decision making, no vote as to its operation. It has but one imperative, the ceaseless pursuit of profit, unhindered, as far as possible, by political or social considerations.

The electoral system also serves the prevailing ideological focus on national concerns. Voters are restricted to their limited participation in politics that stop at the borders. Devolution, often mooted as a more localised politics, narrows this focus even more, as do independence movements, such as the SNP. There is no sense of galvanising an international electorate to look beyond borders towards a worldwide politics. And certainly no prospect offered of transcending capitalism by organising a truly democratic movement to socialism.

This does not deprive the vote of its value. However unlikely or distant such a transformation might presently seem, voting must ultimately play a significant, perhaps determining, role in its peaceful and democratic achievement. The vote, therefore, is valuable no matter how cheaply it is presently spent. Refusing to give it away to parties who will not, and cannot, deliver promised benefits in return, is to recognise its worth and honour those men and women who struggled and fought for it. As a resource, spoil your vote until it can be put to good use, but don't waste it or ignore it.

DAVE ALTON



Credit: Maria Unger/UK Parliament via Reuters

Does socialism exist in Venezuela?

COMMENTATORS ON both the right and left of capitalist politics claim that socialism exists in Venezuela. The right gratefully accepts the Maduro regime's claim to be socialist, pointing to its crackdown on opponents, its increasingly poor economic position and the large numbers of people fleeing to other countries to try and escape poverty and violence. These critics attribute this to the way in which 'socialist' countries are run and see the material hardship and lack of democracy as an inevitable consequence of this. Many on the left also see Venezuela as 'socialist' but regard this as a reason to rejoice, attributing its troubles not to the way it's governed but to the fact that the capitalist world outside, in particular the United States, has used all means possible to bring it down, starving it of resources and fomenting discontent among its population.

Where does the truth lie? Well, it's common for the political right to use 'socialist' as a swear word for governments that exercise direct state control over the economy, especially if those governments are intolerant of opposition or call themselves 'socialist' or 'Marxist'. Obvious examples of this are China and Cuba and, in former times, the Soviet Union. As for the left, they are frequently favourable to such regimes on the grounds that their ownership of wealth is not monopolised by a very small number of individuals or companies, as in the openly capitalist West. This is the case even though a small number of powerful people – the political leaders – control the economy and often everything else, and most people remain relatively poor in a kind of 'equality of poverty'.

From Chavez to Maduro

But what about Venezuela? In 1999 Hugo Chavez, the predecessor to the current president Nicolas Maduro, initiated a policy, which he called the Bolivarian Revolution, of controlling the key elements of the economy, in particular the country's vast oil resources, and bringing in social reforms, all of which had the effect of making the average worker in the country better off and more content with their lot – very much like the nationalising Labour



government in Britain after the Second World War and Allende in Chile before he was deposed in 1973. The measures Chavez brought in, which also included state expropriation of a number of private corporations and trade agreements with various countries such as China and Cuba, were considered by his supporters to be socialism taking over from capitalism, so-called Socialism of the XXI Century, even if what they were in the real world was private capitalism (or at least some of it) being replaced by state capitalism.

But even before Chavez died in 2013 the Venezuelan economy had begun to take a downturn, owing to a drop in the world oil price and US embargos and sanctions and to the fact that, whatever name was given to the system in Venezuela, production there still remained geared to the market, as it is in state capitalism as well as private capitalism. Things then only got worse when Maduro, who had been Chavez's vice-president, took over, and since then the economy has contracted by around 70 percent. As the crisis escalated, the US sought to re-establish the strong influence it had had in pre-Chavez Venezuela by strengthening economic sanctions, blocking Venezuela's oil exports, and encouraging opposition forces in the country. But Maduro's real problem was the same one faced by all

governments that attempt to keep the buying and selling system of capitalism on an even keel – the fact that the system has a mind of its own. Governments cannot control the crises that periodically and naturally accompany it. Maduro's attempts to deal with this consisted of practices like increasing the money supply (thereby causing inflation) and cracking down, often severely, on those who opposed his way of running things. Many of those who have criticised or opposed him have been killed, tortured or abducted, with around 300 currently detained, according to Amnesty International, for supposed political crimes.

Fair elections?

All this has brought both fear and severe economic hardship to many of those who had previously supported Chavez. The acute shortages of basic goods in particular have caused Maduro's support to plummet and as many as 7 million workers (in a population of around 30 million) to leave the country in the simple hope of finding a living – or just food and drink – elsewhere, mainly Columbia and Peru, or if they can get in, the United States. This constitutes the largest migrant crisis in the world at this moment with the number of refugees greater than from Syria or Ukraine.

Venezuelans who have remained and have dared to protest are treated harshly

as a matter of routine and there are even signs that Maduro no longer has the full support of his military and has turned to mafia-type groups to shore up his position. Unsurprisingly in the circumstances, despite the country still having the political trappings of democracy, its upcoming election, scheduled to take place next month (28 July), is unlikely to be 'free and fair'. Already the previous 2018 election was a manifestly rigged affair with two of the most popular candidates prevented from running. And things are certainly no more 'democratic' now. In January of this year, the leader of the opposition and a clear favourite in the polls, María Corina Machado, was banned from holding office for 15 years. In February, a prominent lawyer known for exposing corruption in the army, Rocio San Miguel, was arrested and charged with 'treason, conspiracy and terrorism' for her alleged role in a supposed plot to assassinate Maduro. The following month, Ronald Ojeda, a former lieutenant in Venezuela's military who had protested against the Maduro government on social media was found dead in Chile ten days after he had gone missing. He had previously been seen on social media wearing a t-shirt with 'freedom' written on the collar and prison bars drawn on the map of Venezuela.

Not socialism

So, given the desperate measures

Maduro is taking, he will probably be the 'winner' in next month's election. But, given the piteous state of the country, the question will be how long he can hold on after that. As one commentator has pointed out, the sort of 'elected dictator' Maduro is can, even if highly unpopular, be difficult to dislodge. But whether Maduro hangs on or not, what happens in Venezuela will not be socialism or anything to do with the real meaning or content of the word. That is clearly the case, since socialism is a moneyless, stateless system of society with free access to all goods and services based on voluntary cooperation and economic equality. And it will come through an immense majority of workers in all the industrialised countries developing socialist understanding and organising to win and control political power.

In the modern world, anything other than that is a form of capitalism, whether presided over by an all-powerful state or with the market having free rein. In the case of Venezuela, if Maduro continues to prevail there, it will continue to have the repressive state capitalist regime of the kind that often poses as socialism but does so fraudulently and has as its hallmark the poverty and inequality that make it easy for the political right to say that socialism is an abject failure and for left-wing supporters of Venezuela to blame the US for stifling a valiant socialist experiment.

If Maduro finally goes, what we will

have, though it could be something less repressive, is by no means certain to be a lot better in terms of improving the lot of the majority of the Venezuelan people. The country may become what other neighbouring states already are, so-called 'mixed' economies with part-state ownership and control and part-private ownership. But, as elsewhere in Latin America and the rest of the world at present, it will be a population divided into two classes, a small minority who own and control the vast majority of the wealth and do not need to work for their comfortable and often luxurious existence, and a vast majority who have to work for a wage or salary to survive, have limited freedom of choice and lack of control over their lives, continuing to be at the mercy of the regular crises and ups and downs of the system – war, recession and constant reorganisation. This is an inevitable consequence of capitalism's never-ending quest to produce more and to produce more cheaply and more profitably. Whether this takes place in Venezuela, or any other part of the world, it has nothing to do with socialism. None of it will change either until Venezuelans and working people everywhere have ceased to put their faith in governments and charismatic politicians, whatever claims and promises they make.

HKM



Credit: Adriana Loureiro Fernandez/Bloomberg

Fascism as ideology

MOST OF us, sooner or later, want the chaos, suffering and euphoria of existence to have some meaning. Many find meaning in relationships, family and, if they are very lucky, in their work. Others look to political/religious ideologies for answers. There is no shortage of choice in the modern world. Unlike former generations we are not only conditioned by our local experiences but we can turn to a cornucopia of ideologies courtesy of the media and internet.

It would seem that we have an almost infinite variety to choose from but, as with all forms of consumerism, this can prove to be an illusion. With the decline of religious ideologies in the technologically advanced West we see the dominance of a single political perspective that places all ideologies within a spectrum of left and right forms of capitalism. Because of historical developments we see that bourgeois representative democracies place themselves in the 'centre' of this spectrum. They look out upon the spread from this 'core' as deviations and the further away from this imagined centre the more the convenient and, in this context, descriptive word of 'extremist' is used. Even the Greens and environmentalist groups, after some resistance, have been placed on the left of this spectrum since they have no answers other than the tired impotent call for the reform of capitalism. Only socialists stand outside of this rigid ideologically prescriptive domination and refuse to acknowledge its political relevance.

We won't go into the historical reasons why this universal ideology of left and right evolved but its continued dominance is plainly due to those who own the means of production, in this context primarily the media, who cannot or will not conceive of an alternative to capitalism; as Marx has said the dominant ideology is always that of the dominant class.

In the last century two ideologies came to dominate the political landscape of Europe – 'Fascism' and Soviet-style 'Communism'. They were both conceived of as alternatives to 'normal' or 'bourgeois' capitalism. Any meaningful analysis of either of these types of regime reveals that they had a lot more in common with each other and with the conventional capitalism within which they evolved



than they would care to admit. Both were militaristic, authoritarian, xenophobic and, most importantly, both condemned the majority to the same meaningless wage slavery and the relentless creation of surplus value to finance the lifestyles of their elites. We have explained the reasons for the failed experiment by the Bolsheviks to turn Marxian analysis into an ideology on these pages many times and it may be appropriate to label their state capitalism, among many other criticisms, as anachronistic – especially in a European context. Can we say the same of fascism?

In some respects, ideologies are impervious to the accusation of being anachronistic; all religions tend to have their roots in the distant past but this does not affect their popularity and cultural durability. We might point optimistically to the demise of religion in the western cultures but millions across the globe still adhere to values and laws prescribed by imaginary deities and their priests. Given the undoubted crimes committed by those calling themselves fascist their ideology has been elevated to the highest ranks of historical infamy. That it is merely a form of capitalism that developed in a specific cultural context does not affect its continual attraction for the dispossessed, fearful, uneducated and those desperate to believe that they and their cultural identity are superior to that of all others. The weak are always tempted to identify with the strong so that their own frailty and fear is diluted.

Is it possible to conceive of the world without the use of an ideological lens? Socialists believe that we can at least negate some of the conditioning that we are all subjected to through a study of history. It would seem that all ideologies are generated by and serve certain groups (classes) and that the actual content of them is of little importance compared with the political control that they enable.

It would be impossible to seriously maintain that the conflicts in England during the revolution of the 1640s had anything remotely to do with the preachings of an obscure rabbi 1600 years earlier in Judea. What promoted Puritanism were the political needs of the rising class of capitalists. This historical 'class struggle', so socialists believe, underlies all ideological belief.

We embrace this struggle for what it is and have no interest in lecturing people about the moral strengths and weaknesses of comparing left and right or the possibility of repairing capitalism through the application of one ideology or another. The inhuman outrages committed in the name of Zionism and Palestinian nationalism are the results of ideological detritus used by the oligarchs of Israel and Palestine to justify their greed, fear and hatred. This visceral hatred of the working class for their counterparts in another culture is the lifeblood of 'fascism'. One of the excuses used for the Russian oligarchs' invasion of Ukraine was that it was a hotbed of Nazi fascists – forgetting the vicious brand of rabid nationalism in their own homeland.

Fascism and its left-wing counterpart will always find fertile ground to grow within the corrupt and rotting capitalist culture. No amount of wishful thinking that we have 'moved on' and that such ideologies are anachronistic will put these genies back in their respective bottles. They cannot be countered by mere moral or rational argument but only by class consciousness that understands their historical origins and the political elites that they served.

There are some who believe that this too constitutes just another ideological perspective but even if this were true then at least it serves the needs of a class composed of the vast majority of the human species. Socialism can never be imposed by any elite and so the resolution of the class struggle can only be achieved through the understanding by the majority of what they have to do to counter the need for ideologies and the political ignorance and historical anachronisms that they all represent.

WEZ

What makes you happy?

THE WORLD Happiness Report ranks countries and cities in terms of how happy their inhabitants are (see *Socialist Standard*, December 2020). Being comfortably off naturally tends to make people happier, but it is much more than just a matter of wealth, with countries such as the US, Japan and South Korea being fairly well down the rankings. At the bottom, though, are countries where people are impoverished and often live in fear. Destitution prevents people being satisfied with their lives, but being better off does not necessarily make you more satisfied.

These issues were discussed in an article 'High life satisfaction reported among small-scale societies with low incomes', by Eric Galbraith and a lengthy list of co-authors, published earlier this year in the online open-access US journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, volume 121, no 7 ([tinyurl.com/2xyzyj7y](https://www.tinyurl.com/2xyzyj7y)).

The researchers studied nearly three thousand people in nineteen societies, consisting of Indigenous peoples and

local communities, in Central and South America, Africa, Asia and Oceania. This included, for instance, Tuareg in Algeria, Mongolians in the Ordos desert and farmers in Guatemala. Participants completed a survey on their life satisfaction, but because 'only 64% of the households surveyed received any cash at all during the study period, we use the market value of persistent commercial assets as a proxy to estimate monetary income per person.' In most cases, the estimated annual income was less than \$1,000 per person. It is not stated what is meant by 'persistent commercial assets', but it is clear that the people studied were not well-off in monetary terms.

Higher household income generally correlated with more life satisfaction, at the level of both villages and individuals. But on the whole, the more positive aspects of a village, the happier its people were. Unfortunately, it is not explained properly what is meant by more positive aspects, except that it is not related to monetary income. And overall, at a given level of wealth, people in the small-scale societies were much happier than those

studied in the larger World Happiness surveys. Some societies, though, were oppressed and marginalised, and their inhabitants were far less happy with their lot. Yet all in all, 'remarkably high measures of subjective well-being are widespread among the 19 small-scale societies studied'.

So 'reported life satisfaction in very low-income communities can meet and even exceed that reported at the highest average levels of material wealth provided by industrial ways of life'.

As research such as that for *The Spirit Level* by Wilkinson and Pickett has shown, in addition to the World Happiness Report, feelings of trust and equal treatment can be more important than actual income. Living in a society where people feel secure and help each other can be far more satisfying than having a supposedly high material standard of living. A socialist world will provide for people's needs and wants, without being any kind of consumer paradise.

PB

Revolution meets Reform

WE RECENTLY attended a small SPEW meeting with the title of 'Reform or Revolution'. There were around 8 others present, all fresh-faced and in their 20s, including two women. They were friendly enough, although the chairperson seemed surprised to see us and asked how we had got to know about their meeting (it was on their website). I told him we were SPGB and he said, 'Ah, we know all about the SPGB', though the other faces in the room told a different story. When I remarked that there was a bit of historical bad blood as they had stolen our name, he dismissively said, 'Well, we are bigger than you'. Hardly a ringing endorsement of their integrity. And for all their hubris, they didn't do any better in the election than we did (see page 5).

The much older speaker made a theatrically late entrance, and proceeded to give a motivational address designed to make the group believe that radical change might be just months or even weeks away. The claim was that workers at certain critical stages in the 20th century (France 1968, Chile 1973, Portugal 1974) had been on the point of taking over the means of

production, had they not been failed or betrayed at the last minute by reactionary forces. And of course, the 1917 Bolshevik coup was an entirely successful workers' revolution, later betrayed. This was a highly selective, even fantastical interpretation of history which a more discerning audience would likely have queried, with sources requested, but the group ate it all up with a spoon.

The group dynamic was that of acolytes and an avuncular mentor. The condescension was cuddly as a teddy bear. He did everything but hand out lollipops: 'Now, who here can tell me what a reform is?' The question was dumb enough to sound like a trick, so the group perversely clammed up, fearing a trap. Or they might have been thinking 'Wait, if we're after revolution and not reforms, how come our own election leaflet is full of them?'

We were allowed to ask some questions, which the speaker fielded deftly. On the question, would their revolution abolish money and private property, the response was an indulgent smile and an appeal to the group: 'Now who here thinks it's possible to achieve

absolutely everything on the very first day of revolution?' The group dutifully shook their heads. Achieve everything in one single day? How silly. And after all, lied the mentor in a CBeebies voice, the fact is that capitalism has not yet sufficiently developed the forces of production for that. Perhaps in the fullness of time the opportunity may arise for such things to be considered. So the world will be ready for socialism –some day. But as Evan Rachel Wood's character says in the TV show *Westworld*, 'Some day sounds a lot like never.'

This kind of manipulation can only ever work on young political ingénues who are never expected to question anything, and who fervently believe in the good intentions of the organisation. But it can't last. People eventually see through bullshit. A few, persuaded by the cynical Leninist logic behind it all, may try to earn promotion to the elite 'cadres'. Most will give up on the organisation, and maybe on politics, in disgust. Their experience would be so very different if they found us first.

PJS

Wages, prices and profits

‘GREGGS FACES profit margin pressure amid rising wage costs’ reported *Business Matters* (15 May). Roisin Currie, the company’s chief executive, was reported as saying she expected that the company’s costs would rise by between 4 and 5 percent this year and that ‘the majority of cost inflation pressure that we face this year is wages’. This, the magazine said, underscores ‘that labour costs remain the biggest financial burden on the company’ (tinyurl.com/5azz5pdu). Wages a burden on profits? We thought it was the other way round.

Politicians and the media often lecture us that inflation, as a rise in prices generally, is caused by wage increases. Workers get a wage increase which employers, to maintain profit margins, pass on to their customers by increasing the price of what they are selling. The logic of this position is that workers should not ask for a wage increase or strike to try to get one as this won’t make them any better off.

Marx met a similar argument in his day. He countered it by pointing out that, faced with a wage increase, capitalists might

want to compensate by increasing the price of what they sell, but the point was whether they could:

‘The will of the capitalist is certainly to take as much as possible. What we have to do is not to talk about his will, but to enquire into his power, the limits of that power, and the character of those limits’ (*Value, Price and Profit*, section 1).

In theory Greggs could increase its prices by 4 to 5 percent to compensate for the ‘financial burden’ of having to pay out more wages but this would not necessarily have the effect of protecting its profit margins. It could well do the opposite since its sales might fall as its customers bought their sausage rolls from one of its competitors.

The board of Greggs has evidently reached the conclusion that this is in fact what would happen. As *Business Matters* put it:

‘Greggs continues to navigate the challenges posed by rising wages while leveraging its expansion plans and *affordable pricing to maintain its market position and drive growth*’ (emphasis added).

Currie was reported as saying:

‘Greggs would continue to monitor and review price increases regularly. While the company does not have a fixed plan for pricing, she emphasized the need to remain flexible and responsive to ongoing economic conditions, reviewing their stance on a week-to-week and month-to-month basis’.

In other words, to keep testing to find out what price the market will bear without losing sales.

Greggs is in competition with others to sell take-away breakfasts and lunches. It claims to have overtaken McDonalds in the market for breakfasts and is planning to increase the number of its shops this year. In this competitive situation it would be counter-productive to try to pass on increased wage costs to customers. So Greggs has to accept the reduction in profits that follows from not raising prices. It might have the will but it doesn’t have the power to protect its profits.

Capitalist enterprises have to submit to the economic laws of capitalism just as much as workers and governments do.

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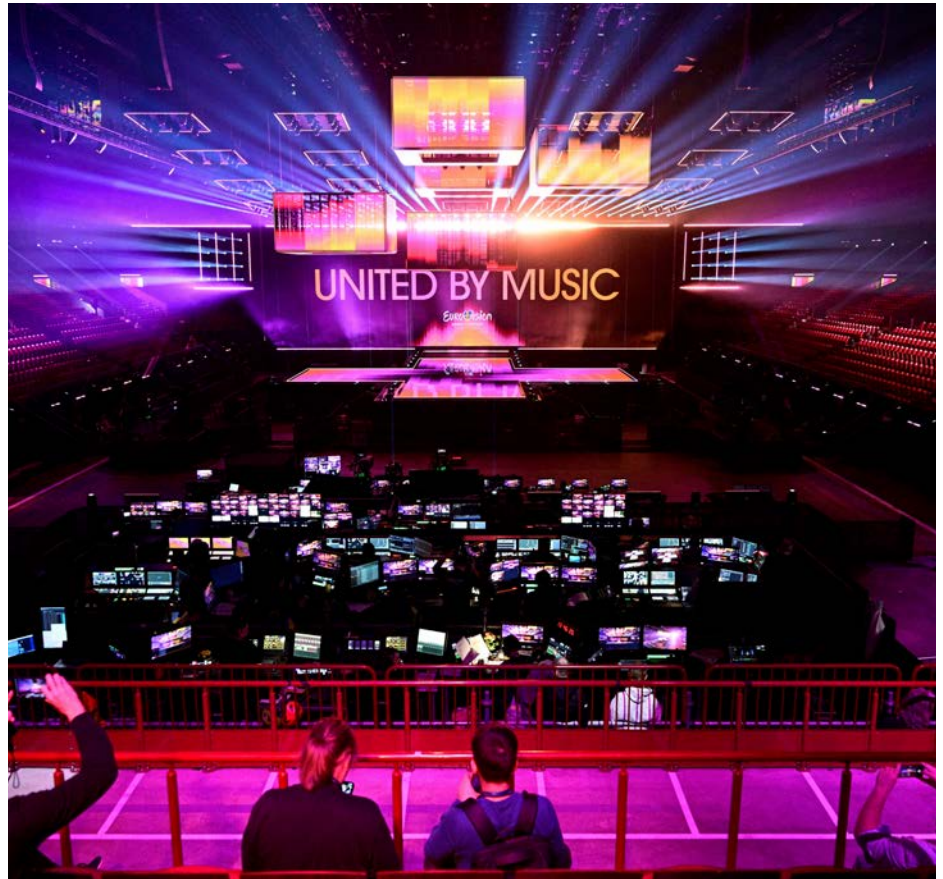
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United by Music, Non-Politically?

EVEN MORE than in previous years, 2024's Eurovision Song Contest was less about the songs than the political arena in which the show took place. The war in Ukraine has been the backdrop for the last couple of competitions, with the country's win in 2022 reflecting the sympathy for its plight. But this year's event barely acknowledged the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, instead being shaped and overshadowed by the Israeli state's war with Hamas. Unlike Russia, which was excluded from the contest in 2022, Israel hasn't broken any of Eurovision's rules by being at war, and so was allowed to compete. Consequently, its participation became a focus of anger and criticism from the pro-Palestinian movement, online and around the venue. Eurovision's slogan is 'United By Music', but this sentiment ended up sounding either naïvely optimistic or sarcastically hollow.

Protests leading up to the final on 11 May were expected, and so security in the host city of Malmö in Sweden was tightened. The area was designated a 'no fly zone' to deter any drone attacks, additional police were drafted in from Denmark and Norway, and Israel's contestant Eden Golan was closely guarded due to death threats. Thousands of pro-Palestinian and anti-war demonstrators gathered in Malmö, not that this was featured in the polished official coverage. The broadcasters also downplayed the booing in the auditorium which accompanied Golan's performance by disguising it with amplified cheering. It could be argued that this censorship is to keep the event as a celebration of kitsch, an escape from the depressingly real tragedies happening daily. But because the political situation in and around Europe is so volatile, Eurovision can't exist in its own glitzy bubble. The stated aim of the event's organisers at the European Broadcasting Union is that Eurovision is 'non-political', even though censoring coverage does suggest political motives. The audience members who booed EBU Executive Supervisor Martin Österdahl during the final were making a political point about his perceived politics. To put the EBU's stance into practice, officials requested Israel change its song, originally called October Rain, to cut out references to the 7th October attacks. Ireland's singer was asked to remove the word 'ceasefire' in body paint, and Portugal's performance wasn't initially uploaded after broadcast, apparently because its contestant wore nail art featuring Palestinian symbols. How the death and destruction in the Middle East gets filtered through the spectacle of



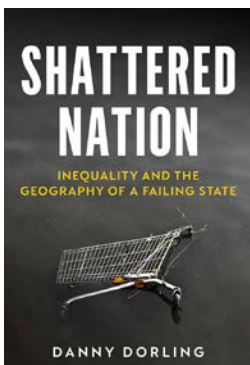
Eurovision goes beyond disorientating to trivialising the slaughter.

The results of the 'non-political' contest were also politically charged. The final score awarded to each competitor is derived from the number of votes from juries of 'music professionals' in each country and phone-in votes from viewers, with countries unable to vote for themselves. Jurors are supposed to vote for a song without considering the identity of its singer, a stipulation which the viewers at home have no need to follow. The UK's effort scored nul points from the public vote and ended up in 18th place, while the winning entry from Switzerland was one of the better songs, most of which were interchangeable power ballads or dance bangers, slickly performed. Israel's mid-table scoring from the juries was boosted considerably by having the second largest number of public votes, meaning that the country finished in fifth place. Israel's surprise high ranking suggests that the pro-Palestinian or pro-peace protests and online campaigns had little impact on voters' views, and leftist activists are presumably wondering where they went wrong. Given the unavoidable political climate around the competition, it's probable that more people voted for Israel as some kind of statement than because they favoured the song regardless. Whether the result

could be called 'democratic' depends on how far its definition can be stretched. Still, as a framework to gather votes across a wide area, this is about as good as global democracy in capitalism gets. So, without having the ability to directly influence the war, some people have felt that Eurovision can be an outlet for views they hold passionately, whether by voting for Israel (for some reason) or protesting against its inclusion. The relevance of a song competition as a barometer of international politics highlights the lack of other ways people can collectively voice an opinion or act upon it in capitalist society. The result wouldn't have been affected by anyone joining the boycott of the event promoted by the pro-Palestinian Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement. It would be hard to determine whether this campaign, apathy about the overblown circus or sunny weather contributed most to the BBC's coverage having around two million fewer viewers than last year. But the numbers and scores don't have any influence on the war. How and how much the event reflects public opinion in Europe is likely to be of little concern to the families struggling to survive the horrors of the war-torn Middle East.

MIKE FOSTER

Breaking Apart



Shattered Nation: Inequality and the Geography of a Failing State. By Danny Dorling. Verso £14.99.

It was recently reported (BBC online 21 March) that the UK now has twelve million people living in absolute poverty, after the biggest rise in thirty years. And in December the Centre for Social Justice (centreforsocialjustice.org.uk) published *Two Nations*, a report which concluded that for those who are not getting by, 'their lives are marked by generations of family breakdown, their communities are torn apart by addictions and crime, they live in poor quality, expensive, and insecure housing, and they are sick.' Here Danny Dorling, who has written on similar issues in the past, surveys many of the ways in which the lives of British workers are indeed being shattered.

One theme is that in most of the world, human lives are improving, but not so much in the UK. For instance, infant mortality is falling faster elsewhere than in the UK, and economic inequality is falling. The UK is probably the most unequal country in Europe in terms of income inequality. In the late 1960s and early 70s, Britain was more equal than it is now, and where you grew up was less important than it is today.

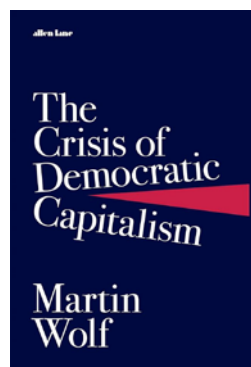
The second part of the book echoes the Five Giants identified in the 1942 Beveridge Report. They are presented as hunger, precarity (insecurity related to housing as well as employment), waste (with far more people now working in finance and accounting), exploitation (such as high university fees), and fear (physical and mental health having declined since the 70s). Research in 2022 showed that one UK household in six was in serious financial difficulty. Austerity has led to a slowdown in growth in life expectancy in Britain, and people in the poorest fifth of households saw their earnings fall between February and May 2020. Death rates from Covid were higher in the poorest areas, and long Covid is most commonly found there too. Many facts and statistics such as these make much of the book an informative but rather depressing read. There is one refreshing observation, though: 'We should measure the value of a job by the amount of happiness it brings to others, not by the profit that can be made by the person employing the worker.'

And what is the author's proposed solution? This is not a book where the last chapter offers a raft of reformist measures intended to do away with the problems discussed earlier. Rather, the proposals are spread throughout its pages, including minimising VAT, raising wages faster than food price increases, making school lunches universally available, making tenancy agreements more secure, and restricting second-home ownership. It is ironic that the Labour Party is criticised for proposing 'only more tinkering', when the ideas set out here are little more than that.

What we said in the April 2015 *Socialist Standard* is just as valid as it was then: Danny Dorling should be a socialist and not simply fight for reforms.

PB

Not so democratic



The Crisis of Democratic Capitalism. By Martin Wolf. Penguin £12.99.

The basic argument here is that market capitalism and liberal democracy belong together, albeit in a difficult relationship. Both supposedly involve equality of status: the right of people to a voice in public affairs and to buy and sell what they own. Market capitalism drove economic growth, we are told, and led to pressures for 'universal suffrage democracy'. But in recent decades increasing inequality and personal insecurity mean that democracy has become fragile and been partly replaced by 'demagogic autocracy', as populism becomes more influential. Yet both democracy and capitalism can be renewed, resulting in a bright future again.

There is a great deal of useful information here, and Wolf sometimes reveals the true nature of capitalism. For instance, between 1980 and 2016, 'the real incomes of the global top thousandth rose by 235 percent', while real incomes have been stagnant for large parts of the population. Most people are just 'one disaster away from ruin', with very little by way of savings. Companies 'possess enormous economic and political power', and there is a 'huge imbalance of power between footloose corporations and local workers': this last refers specifically to multinational companies moving jobs abroad, but in fact applies far more widely.

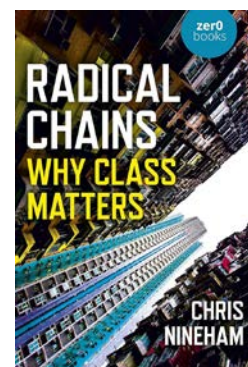
The rise of the market economy is said to have led to pressures for election-based democracy. But there is nothing about

ruling-class resistance, with no reference to Peterloo, Chartism or the suffragettes, for instance. Universal suffrage arrived fairly late, first in New Zealand in 1893, in the UK in 1928 and the US only in 1965. The valid point is made that democracy is a continuum, not an either-or matter, but it implies more than just the ability to vote, and capitalism has an inherent imbalance of power between the owning class and the working class. And has market capitalism (with competition and private economic initiative) really been the predominant version of capitalism over the long term? Wars were fought to open markets in other countries to Western trade, and slavery played a crucial role, as did protectionism. There was supposedly an era of 'mixed economy' from the 1950s to 1970s, which changed to free markets from the 1980s (with a concomitant increase in inequality, as noted above), but in reality the state always interferes in some way, in defence of the interests of the ruling class.

Unfortunately, Wolf has no idea about alternative systems. He thinks that socialism means state control over the economy, and the idea of degrowth is dismissed with little argument, since it could only be implemented by a global dictatorship and would supposedly mean reversing centuries of human history. His solution is to use 'piecemeal social engineering' to achieve aims such as a rising and sustainable standard of living, equality of opportunity, and the ending of special privileges for the few. But of course the last of these would not mean an end to the wealth, power and influence of the one percent, as the power of the capitalist class is built into all varieties of capitalism, a system that can never be truly democratic.

PB

Class matters



Radical Chains. Why Class Matters. By Chris Nineham. Zero Books, 2023. 197pp.

Recent times have seen much talk of identity politics and sectionalism. Gender, race, and ethnicity among other 'sectional' interests create what the author of this book sees as divisions and diversions from the common interest we have in establishing a different kind of society from the existing one. The view he forcefully expresses is that to regard these as groups with different interests has the effect of

diverting attention from the shared working-class issue of wage and salary work and the insecurity it brings.

The book's sub-title, 'Why Class Matters' is an uncompromising expression of the Marxist view that there are two main classes in capitalist society, the tiny minority class that owns and controls the Earth's resources (the capitalist class) and the vast majority (the working class) who, in order to survive, need to sell their labour-power for a wage or salary to that minority. It argues this proposition with informed and incontrovertible clarity and powerfully insists that the effect of 'identity politics' is to cause muddle and confusion, nor does it make any sense to split wage and salary earners into a series of different sub-classes (eg, 'middle class', 'upper class', 'professional class') with somehow different interests from one another. He dismisses 'the various attempts to downplay class' as 'completely misleading' and illustrates effectively that, whatever their line of work, all those who live on a wage or salary are fundamentally in the same subordinate position with regard to the system and the class that owns it (ie, the capitalist class).

This message is then connected, in a wide-ranging survey, to the various conflicts, large and small, that have arisen across the globe between subjects and their masters over the last two centuries. Yet here it somewhat loses its way and focus in seeking to see in these conflicts conscious attempts to establish new forms of society rather than largely desperate reactions by downtrodden people against oppression or powerlessness. It starts with the nineteenth-century movements for political change in France and Germany before going on to Russia's 1905 revolution, and then the taking of power by the Bolsheviks in 1917 and the civil war that followed, with reflection on these events as analysed mainly by Trotsky, Gramsci and Lukacs.

The author then moves on to the Second World War and its aftermath, and later, in a section entitled 'Dreams deferred', he takes us through revolts and uprisings in China, Egypt, Algeria, Cuba, Vietnam, and Latin America as well as the 'Arab Spring' before moving back to Europe with the 'events' of May 1968 in France, the opposition to Thatcherism in Britain and the reactions to the 'neoliberalism' which it heralded. A broad sweep indeed in which historical development is often encapsulated with verve and economy (eg, the First World War defined as 'the catastrophic climax of mounting international competition for markets and resources') but which is tainted by an over-enthusiastic tendency to see events as more driven by class-conscious motives than they were in reality.

Having gone through this history of revolt and struggle, the author's main message

for today is that we must struggle against the current 'neoliberalism', which he sees as a new and increasingly exploitative form of capitalism causing 'an epidemic of workplace insecurity'. He peppers his book with references to it, seeming to consider it as something qualitatively different from the capitalism that existed before over the past two centuries. But is it that much different from capitalism's business as usual? It's true that, in the post-Second World War years, free-market capitalism (previously called 'laissez-faire') gave way to a new variation widely practised by governments, whereby the state would intervene in the economy more readily than before to try and get the system back working in a less crisis-ridden way (often called 'Keynesianism').

But as capitalism went on its merry way creating, as the author himself quoting Marx says, 'uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions', the state intervention method was found to be no more effective in 'taming' capitalism than what preceded it. It became discredited therefore and governments went back to favouring so-called 'free markets' and the relaxation of controls: an old way of running things in fact, even if its critics have attached to it the new label of 'neoliberalism'. The fact is that governments do not – cannot – control the way the capitalist economy works. It's the other way round. It's the operation of capitalism that constrains governments. In fact they can do little more than react to what it throws at them. And the system remains fundamentally the same – something the writer himself, despite his focus on 'neoliberalism' seems also to

accept when he writes 'the production of commodities through exploitation remains ...the driving force of the system' and 'it is still a system with the exploitation of workers at its heart'.

But what is the form of struggle he advocates that we engage in to transcend the capitalist system and establish socialism? At one point he quotes Marx's view of socialism as being the 'abolition of the wages system', talks about 'liberating society as a whole' and 'dissolving classes altogether' and seems to agree that this should be the ambition of those who oppose capitalism and have a clear view of the class system that characterises it regardless of attempts at obfuscation. And that is very much to his credit.

But the main thing he seems to offer in terms of action is support for 'struggles over pay and conditions by trade unions', which, it is claimed 'have a capacity to generalise into a political conflict between different class organisations' and 'at the same time developing the revolutionary consciousness and combativity of all those involved'. We have of course heard this kind of thing many times before from the Trotskyist left and we continue to argue that it's no substitute for a movement whose aim should be to develop majority consciousness among workers of the need to use democratic means to establish a classless, stateless, marketless, free-access society of democratic cooperation, mutual aid and economic equality based on the principle of from each according to ability to each according to need.

HKM

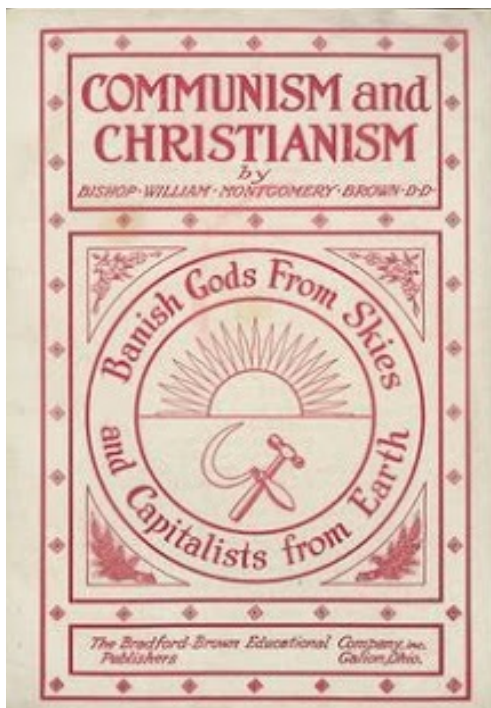


Bishop who made our Pamphlet his Bible

IN 1920 William Montgomery Brown, Bishop of Arkansas, published a book called *Communism and Christianity*. It was caused by his reading the Socialist Party of Great Britain pamphlet *Socialism and Religion* (tinyurl.com/mwj7s6dk); not only did it quote our pamphlet extensively, but offered prizes for essays based upon it.

As *Socialism and Religion* “took apart” Christianity, what happened to Bishop Brown? He was tried by a court of the Protestant Episcopal Church to which he belonged, and expelled for heresy. He described himself thereafter as “Episcopus in partibus Bolsheviki et Infidelium”, and published more books — *My Heresy and The Bankruptcy of Christian Supernaturalism*.

Promising as his case might sound, unfortunately the Bishop understood little of what he had read. He was carried away by the Russian Revolution; though



his book was largely about “Marxism and Darwinism”, he had no idea of either. He joined the Rationalist Press Association, but fought against his expulsion from the Church. In fact he never gave up Christianity. His claim was that Jesus (for whom he continued to use a capital H: “Him”, etc.) was dedicated “to the truth and to the proletariat”.

The Labour and Communist press in America was bitter towards the Church over Bishop Brown’s expulsion. That is in character: they supported religion, or said it was “a private affair”. The Socialist Party’s only regret was at its work being borrowed for a muddled and sterile non-purpose. We thought the Bishop was a blithering idiot.

(from 70th anniversary issue of *Socialist Standard*. June 1974)

Action Replay

Fair Play and Profits

OVER THE decades a number of professional football teams have been referred to as ‘the Bank of England club’, meaning they had masses of money to spend on transfers. This applied, for instance, to Sunderland in the 1950s.

But with the enormous rise in income from TV coverage, shirt sponsors, kit sales and season tickets, and the ownership of a number of clubs by wealthy individuals and multinational companies, it is recent years that have seen the rise of barely-credible transfer fees (£100m and more) and wages. The wealthier a club is, the more it can spend and, they hope, the more success and trophies they can achieve (or buy).

The football authorities, in both the UK and Europe, have felt obliged to regulate what happens, in order to prevent it just being a matter of the richest clubs winning more or less everything and a self-perpetuating elite emerging (money leads to success leads to money). Hence were developed the Financial Fair Play regulations (FFP), now in the Premier League termed Profitability and Sustainability Rules. A club can lose a maximum of £105m over a three-year period, and infringing this can lead to a points deduction, though special consideration was given to losses

incurred during the Covid lockdown, and also investment in women’s football and community work. UEFA has a rather different system, whereby expenditure on transfer and wages cannot exceed 70 percent of revenue. This may be adopted in England, but not yet, and a different kind of spending cap has now been provisionally agreed by Premier League clubs.

Details aside, it is the less successful clubs that have suffered so far. Both Everton and Nottingham Forest, in the lower reaches of the Premier League, have had points deducted, though neither will be relegated as a result. Chelsea, on the other hand, have spent £1bn on transfers under their new owners (after Roman Abramovich was removed because of his Kremlin links). In the last financial year their losses would have been a cool £166m, but they avoided a penalty by selling two hotels for £76m to a firm owned by the same holding company.

As for the current top club, Manchester City, they have won the Premier League for the last four seasons, and in six of the last seven, plus other trophies too. But they have been handed no fewer than 115 charges for breaching FFP rules, going back to 2009. The case against them may not be heard until October and could

even then take months to be resolved. In the meantime, City can carry on spending the money of their fabulously-wealthy owner, Sheikh Mansour of the UAE.

So the restrictions have not been all that effective, and as so often, capitalist concerns get round rules relating to taxes and profits by exploiting loopholes and playing (!) for time.

PB



World Socialist Movement Online Meetings

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

June 2024 EVENTS

World Socialist Movement
online meetings

Sundays at 19.30 (IST) (Discord)

Weekly WSP (India) meeting

Sunday 9 June 10.00 (GMT + 1)

Central Online Branch Meeting

Friday 7 June 19.30 (GMT + 1)

Party activity

Branch reports on recent and planned activity

Friday 14 June 19.30 (GMT + 1)

120 Years for Socialism

The SPGB was founded on 12 June 1904

Friday 21 June 19.30 (GMT + 1)

Capitalism in Nigeria

Speaker: Andy Thomas

Friday 28 June 19.30 (GMT + 1)

Did you see the news?

Discussion on recent subjects in the news

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

Socialist Party Physical Meetings

LONDON

Sunday 30 June 3pm

PEOPLE OR PROFITS - YOUR CHOICE ON 4 JULY

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

(nearest tube: Clapham North)

Preceded by stall from 2pm.

CARDIFF

Street Stall Every Saturday 1pm-3pm

(weather permitting)

Capitol Shopping Centre, Queen Street

(Newport Road end).



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.

Work in China and the UK

THE OTHER day I had a conversation with someone who told me he'd recently visited China and, having worked there in the past, now found things significantly changed. The context of this was a university academic, a social scientist, coming to speak with his trade union's volunteer personal case officer (myself). He (I'll call him Simon) was dissatisfied with his work situation largely owing to the volume of work he was being given, consisting of teaching, administration and research. In particular he was concerned that the teaching and administration had become so overwhelming that he was being left with little time to get on with and publish his research, which is what would dictate the progress of his career. What could be done? I made a few suggestions, among which was an approach by the union to his head of department protesting at his treatment and its apparent unfairness. He seemed happy with this – as a first step anyway.

'Dire'

But in mentioning China at the start of our conversation, he'd also told me that, on his recent visit there with his wife, also a social scientist and herself Chinese, both of them had been offered jobs at a Chinese university. They'd thought about it but decided not to take up the offer because the current situation in China was 'dire' (his word). This made me curious, so after talking about Simon's current employment issues, I asked him what he meant by 'dire' in relation to China. He was only too ready to explain.

He said there were three main reasons. The first one had been of particular concern to his wife- a noticeable increase in what he called misogyny. He explained that China's 'one-child' policy having been abandoned quite some time ago, the government was concerned that the population now wasn't replacing itself and so was putting considerable pressure on women to have more children and stay at home to bring them up. Women insisting on being employed were being portrayed almost as betrayers of the nation. The second thing was that they had noticed, since they last spent time there, that the climate had become noticeably more repressive. This manifested itself, for example, in university academics having to seek special permission simply if they wanted to spend a weekend away in another city or another part of the

country and in it having become more difficult to get colleagues they knew to speak openly about any subject that might be considered sensitive or political. The third thing was that it was being made increasingly difficult for foreigners to obtain visas to stay in the country or to continue residence there, one consequence of which was that it was not unusual for western media correspondents not to have their visas renewed. Simon also told me they noticed a definite deterioration in economic conditions with signs that the government seemed nervous about possible unrest or protest and was seeking ways (eg, the furore about Taiwan) of distracting attention from deteriorating prospects and living conditions for its citizens. He ended by wondering, tongue in cheek of course, whether, given the increasingly repressive atmosphere, a comparison with the Ming dynasty might not be appropriate.

Xi Jinping: a ruler for ever?

All of this is anecdotal of course, but there does seem a lot of backing for Simon's take on China from a good many other sources. For example, recent newspaper coverage has reported on the shrinking of China's population and government concern about the low birth rate leading potentially to a loss of young workers. China's apparently permanent leader Xi Jinping has been quoted as referring to women playing 'a unique role in promoting traditional virtues' and to the 'need to cultivate a new marriage and childbearing culture to tackle the ageing population'. There is also evidence that, after decades of relatively high economic growth under a mixture of state and private capitalism, China's economy is losing momentum, with significant downturns in various sectors (eg, building and construction, property, private tutoring, data management and transfer), unrest and unemployment leading to strikes and demonstrations among workers and also concern within the small Chinese private capitalist class, some of them fabulously rich, about government crackdowns, as the one-party regime seeks to tighten its control over both state and private economic activity.

As long ago as the 1980s, many people thought that China was moving towards less authoritarian, more democratic political institutions. Such hopes were dashed by the Tiananmen Square

massacre of 1989, but there are again some commentators who consider that the current regime will find it difficult in the longer term to contain social unrest and this may lead to more enlightened government policies or at least a relaxation of repression – as happened for example in Eastern Europe where, against most people's expectations, seemingly stable regimes crumbled almost overnight. This is obviously to be hoped for, since not only is the current anti-democratic, repressive regime an obstacle to the needs of continuing capitalist development, bumping up against the free circulation and exchange of ideas that need to go with that development, but it is also an obstacle to the subsequent development of socialist consciousness that we are looking for.

Socialism (with Chinese characteristics?)

To return to Simon and his wife, their perception of the way the Chinese regime currently operates (which it laughably called 'socialism with Chinese characteristics') and their rationale for not staying there seem fully corroborated. There seems little doubt that their work situation and their freedoms, academic and otherwise, would have been far more restricted in China than in the UK. Of course, Simon had complaints about the way he was being treated by his employer here. But at least he was able to seek to address this via his trade union, a body independent of government or other 'higher' authority. How much more difficult would he have found the same kind of thing in China, where unions do exist but are closely government monitored and controlled? Would the outcome be a cancelled visa? Anyway, hasten the day when all such autocracies give way to at least the limited democracy that capitalism can offer and provide the ground for workers to decide collectively that they want to move on the road to that genuine alternative system of society beyond the system of wages, money and profit, which we call socialism.

HOWARD MOSS