

THE

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# SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

## LOONEY TURNS



*"That's all for  
Democracy, Folks!"*

2024 UK General Election



Also: Our candidates  
What is socialism?  
Elections worldwide  
The myth of consumer sovereignty

Small change  
A socialist future?  
All change for the gravy train  
Shoplift



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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'

# A chance to vote for socialism

IN THE coming general election, you're being asked to vote for parties who all have the same way of looking at things. They all support the continuation of the present system of money and wages, buying and selling and production for the market rather than for human need. There are marginal differences between them as to how this system should be run, for example with more or less control or ownership by government rather than by private companies or individuals.

But whichever one of them comes to power, the same thing always results – crises of one kind or the other, damage to the environment, wars causing death and suffering in various parts of the world, and in the UK many people going without even the basics of food and housing. This is in a country – and a world – that could produce abundance for everyone and easily satisfy the fundamental interest shared by everyone – a secure, comfortable life for ourselves and our families.

But this is not possible – and never will be possible – in a world where a

tiny majority of people possess the vast majority of the wealth, governments run this system and the vast majority of people have to be satisfied – if they are lucky – with just getting by.

Voting for any of the established parties in the forthcoming election will not help to change this and in fact will just mean more of the same. But the election will nevertheless give you the opportunity to register your opposition to the existing system of society by voting, in the two constituencies the Socialist Party is contesting – see page 5 – for the Socialist Party candidate and, everywhere else, for none of the candidates or parties who are standing but by writing 'Socialism – a world of free access' across your ballot paper and doing this in your thousands.

When enough people are prepared to do this and take democratic action to bring the new system of society about, we already have, with modern means of communication and technology, the means to give everyone on the planet a comfortable life in a society of voluntary

cooperation and planned abundance. This will be a society of free access to all goods and services, without buying and selling, without markets, without leaders and without frontiers – a society where people co-operate freely and produce what is needed to satisfy everyone's needs.

## STOP PRESS:

News just in for 4 July elections (see your area for a detailed breakdown). Overall confirmed results are as follows: Capitalism has won an overall majority, while socialism also came second and simultaneously trailed in third place. Stand by for our special in-depth analysis on the hugely positive differences this result will make to your life and the future of the planet, but don't hold your breath as there won't be any.

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For a 3-month trial subscription to the **socialist standard**, or to request more details about the Socialist Party, complete and return this form to **52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN**.



Please send me an info pack



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# Up for grabs

PARTY POLITICS may have been grabbing the UK headlines in the past few weeks, and continue to do so worldwide as 2024 sees a record 2 billion voters going to the polls in 50 countries, but behind the scenes, capitalist states and corporations are continuing their efforts to grab everything they can get their hands on in a relentless pursuit of future profits.

Billed somewhat improbably as 'the biggest story of the 21st century', a new documentary called *The Grab* goes into detail about how, overnight, a Chinese firm became the owner of almost one in four American pigs, while Saudi Arabian investors were behind land acquisitions in Arizona and Zambia, and various other state and corporate actors have been busily acquiring overseas food and water resources in a bid to fence in future supplies that are set to be as contested as oil was in the last century ([tinyurl.com/2p8setzp](https://tinyurl.com/2p8setzp)).

It's hard though to see this as genuinely 'shocking' unless one genuinely has no idea how capitalism works. Capitalism is all about grabbing, plundering and poaching, much of it routinely under-reported. Take species extinction, driven by climate change but further exacerbated by retail markets. Wild endangered species are being poached for bushmeat, with the accelerator effect that the rarer the animal becomes, the more valuable it is as a commodity.

The black rhino is now critically endangered due to poaching, with a population collapse of 96 percent. Endangered pangolins are the world's most poached animal, for use in Chinese so-called traditional medicine or to make American handbags and cowboy boots, while African elephants are predicted to go extinct within 50 years. In Uganda and Rwanda, a perpetual war over gorilla poaching claims lives every year as national park rangers face being murdered by poachers who themselves have no realistic alternative sources of income. In the Congo five million tonnes of bushmeat are exported every year, mostly for the wealthy Asia market. Bonobos – that iconic species much admired for their non-violent and non-hierarchical behaviour – are now endangered by devastating poaching. To this toll can be added antelopes, buffalo, African grey parrots (99 percent population crash in Ghana), orang-utans, chimps and gibbons, lions, tigers, turtles and a variety of less well-known species ([tinyurl.com/y8y9bkxt](https://tinyurl.com/y8y9bkxt)).

Animals don't even have to be alive to be poached. A recent story detailed how the private and often illegal trade in fossils is getting in the way of genuine



science, because the dollar value of big-ticket items, like a recently discovered complete Stegosaurus fossil, mean that museums often can't afford to outbid private collectors and so lose much valuable research material. Even worse is the ruthless plundering that accompanies illegal digs, with bones being smashed and fossils removed with no documentation to show where they came from, rendering them useless for future research purposes ([tinyurl.com/mvtkehmd](https://tinyurl.com/mvtkehmd)).

It would be pointless to blame the individuals behind all this, who are simply being pragmatic about what they need to do to survive and thrive in capitalism, just as corporations do. If we collectively abolish the right of private individuals to own socially necessary resources, and thus remove at a stroke the basis of the buying and selling money system, all of the above would cease in an instant.

But while the dollar signs are flashing, there will be no signs of improvement, in any field of endeavour. Readers of this magazine may recall previous articles (eg, December 2015- [tinyurl.com/yc77ta34](https://tinyurl.com/yc77ta34)) on the mysterious archaeological site of Göbekli Tepe in Turkey, whose discovery threw the materialist 'standard model' of human social development into utter disarray. At the time, only 5 percent of the extensive site had been excavated, with the 95 percent remainder concealing who-knew-what assumption-busting discoveries. So, nearly ten years on, how much more of the site has been excavated and what new exciting things do we know? The answers are none and nothing, thanks to private sector management. A deal with the World Economic Forum has resulted in the site being left 'for future

generations', which is a thinly veiled excuse to stop funding research and instead start monetising what little has been exposed with the erection of enclosures and walkways, which involve driving huge steel spikes into unexamined archaeology for the purpose of generating tourist dollars ([tinyurl.com/sz538uzm](https://tinyurl.com/sz538uzm)).

But perhaps the biggest indictment of capitalism's disregard of decency in favour of dosh is right above our heads, on most nights of the year. Last month China unfurled its flag on the dark side of the moon, which in the last year has seen landings by India and Japan, along with private US firm Intuitive Machines. Nasa is aiming for a 2026 crewed landing, while China plans to send humans there by 2030, with all parties keen to build permanent bases using frozen water assumed to be in deep craters at the moon's South Pole. And what of the venerable 1967 Outer Space Treaty, signed by 100 countries to the effect that no nation could own the Moon? Well, that was when nobody had even got there, and the likelihood of finding anything useful there was the faintest of moon glimmers. But now that large quantities of rare earth minerals, iron, titanium and helium-3 are known to be there, states are taking a much less high-minded view. The US in 2015 passed a law allowing itself to mine and sell any space material, and other countries are scrambling to give themselves similar 'legal' permissions ([tinyurl.com/5n8avhxc](https://tinyurl.com/5n8avhxc)). Really, capitalism ought to be called 'The Grab'. But for all workers who live under the moon, what's really up for grabs is a vastly better collective future without it.

**PJS**

Folkestone and Hythe

# Want *real* change? Vote for a new world

FOR THE last 120 years the Socialist Party of Great Britain has been fighting for a new world. A world owned and democratically controlled by all the people on this planet instead of a tiny minority interested only in raking in profits at the expense of human happiness and the health of our fragile planet.

This new world will be a world without borders, with free access to the abundant wealth we will create by working together, A world where work is freely contributed according to our abilities and interests. Where communities self-organise without the need for leaders.

A world in which we will live in harmony with the planet, taking just what we need to live a good life. We will grow food locally and build houses and public buildings using the best materials and in sympathy with the natural environment. We will choose

the most sustainable – not the most profitable – forms of generating power.

We believe recent advances in technology have made this new world possible to bring about as soon as enough people want and vote for it.

Contrast this vision of how we could live with the appalling reality we will be forced to live whichever 'mainstream' party is elected on July 4th.

A collapsing health and social security system; growing childhood poverty; construction of monstrous blocks of housing for the rich along the Folkestone seafront and harbour arm while most Folkestone residents live in increasingly unaffordable and dilapidated rented accommodation or struggle to afford a mortgage; profit-driven water companies pouring raw sewage into Folkestone and Hythe's rivers and beaches. Add to this the

daily tragedy of fellow humans risking life and limb to cross the Channel to escape the poverty and war directly caused by the global profit system carving out empires across Africa and the Middle East.

It does not matter which of the 'main' political parties you vote for – Conservative, Labour, Greens, Lib Dems and the rest. They all support the continuation of the profit system with all the deprivation, destruction and division it brings.

A vote for the Socialist Party is not a wasted vote. It is a positive choice rejecting the horrors of the profit system and embracing a new future for humanity free of poverty, war and environmental devastation.

**If you agree VOTE SOCIALIST on Thursday 4th July.**

Clapham and Brixton Hill

# Vote Socialist

THE SOCIALIST Party urges a truly democratic society in which people take all the decisions that shape their lives. This means a society without rich and poor, without owners and workers, without governments and governed, a society

without leaders and led.

In such a society people would cooperate to use all the world's natural and industrial resources in their own interests. They would free production from the artificial restraint of profit and establish a

system of society in which each person has free access to the benefits of civilisation.

Socialist society would mean the end of buying, selling and exchange; an end to borders and frontiers; an end to organised violence and coercion, waste, want and war.

You can use your vote to show you want to overturn capitalism and end the problems it causes once and for all. When enough of us join together, determined to end inequality and deprivation, we can transform elections into a means of doing away with a society of minority rule in favour of a society of real democracy and social equality.

If you agree with the idea of a society of common and democratic ownership where no one is left behind and things are produced because they are needed, and not to make a profit for some capitalist corporation, and are prepared to join with us to achieve this then vote for the SOCIALIST PARTY candidate BILL MARTIN.



Promoted by the Socialist Party of Great Britain on behalf of Bill Martin, both of 52 Clapham High Street, SW4 7UN, and of Andy Thomas, of 74 Linden Crescent, CT19 5SB

# The blame game

ACCORDING TO the media, the main issue in the election has been the state of the economy. The Labour Party has made it the central point in their campaign, seeking to blame the outgoing Conservative government for slow growth and stagnating living standards. In a typical example of their (rather overblown) propaganda Rachel Reeves, the would-be Chancellor of the Exchequer, stated:

‘The Tories have had 14 years to fix the nation’s roof. Instead, they smashed the windows, kicked the door in and burnt the house down. Here’s the honest truth about Rishi Sunak’s record in power in ten words: our country is poorer and working people are worse off’ (fundraising email to Labour supporters, 25 May).

This is to put the blame for the current state of the economy entirely on the government. It is to assume that a government can control the way the economy works. This is an assumption made not just by the Labour Party but shared by the Tories themselves and by other groups of politicians who aspire to be the government such as the Lib-Dems and the Greens. But it is mistaken.

The economy is driven by the quest for profits by private and state enterprises competing to sell the goods and services that they employ workers to produce or provide. This gives rise to impersonal economic forces which determine the level of production and employment.

Governments can only react to the economy as it goes through its never-ending cycles of expansion and contraction. They can’t control this. As far as the operation of the economy is concerned, governments just preside over what is happening; they are in office but not in power. The power that they do have to intervene in the economy, through taxation, subsidies and spending, is limited by the state the economy is in at any particular time and the permanent need to give priority to profit-making and conditions for this. It is this that leads them, when the economy is not growing, to cut spending on public services and social benefits.

In the political game played by parties competing to stay in or come into office, the ploy of the Outs, when a government is forced to cut back its spending, is to blame

the Ins for what the operation of capitalism has forced them to do, which in this election the Labour Party has been playing for all its worth. On the other hand, when capitalism is in a period of expansion which a government happens to be presiding over, the ploy of the Ins is to claim credit for this even though this has nothing to do with what they have done.

While the economic policy a government pursues can’t make things better it can make them worse. The short-lived Truss government is a case in point. A government which tried to spend its way out of a period of contraction or stagnation would be another.

The Labour Party has learned this since the end of the 1970s and its current policy is based entirely on trying to encourage economic growth. It’s a gamble. They could be lucky, as the Blair government was for a time, and be in office when the capitalist economy spontaneously expands, but it doesn’t look like it. A government can no more bring about growth than it can spend its way out of a period of slow or no growth.

A Starmer government won’t be able to fix the roof either. On the other hand, when the windows get smashed and the door kicked in, they won’t be to blame; capitalism will be.



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

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

**Paddy Shannon on *Political***

***Consciousness - Could GenZ Be Onto Something?***

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



**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/](https://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](mailto:spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk).**

The University of Worcester, St John's Campus, Henwick Grove, St John's, Worcester, WR2 6AJ.

The event includes a bookstall, exhibition and exclusive publication.

**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

ACTOR BRIAN COX: 'the *Bible* is one of the worst books ever' (*MailOnline* 30 April).

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'Right', said Om. 'Now...listen. Do you know how gods get power?' 'By people believing in them', said Brutha. 'Millions of people believe in you'.

'People said there had to be a Supreme Being because otherwise how could the universe exist, eh?... But since the universe was a bit of a mess, it was obvious that the Supreme Being hadn't in fact made it. If he had made it he would, being Supreme, have made a better job of it... Or, to put it another way, the existence of a badly put-together watch proved the existence of a blind watchmaker. You only had to look around to see that there was room for improvement practically everywhere. This suggested that the Universe had probably been put together in a bit of a rush by an underling while the Supreme Being wasn't looking in the same way that Boy Scouts' Association minutes are done on office

photocopiers all over the country' (*Small Gods* Terry Pratchett).

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A website going under the name of Islamic Socialism (Marxist Leninist) offers the following oxymoron positing that religion and socialism go hand in hand:

'We are Islamic Socialists because we are Muslims first and socialists second. Our main beliefs are Allah is one and that Muhammad (PBUH) is his messenger. Second to that is opposition to capitalism. To oppose capitalism is no less than to fight in the cause of Allah... the only answer is an Islamic Socialist society following Sharia. A state for the Muslims that follows in accordance to Sharia and opposes a financial minority growing off the backs of the majority through social revolution and the regulation by a religious vanguard'. Straight from the Lenin playbook, with a twist.

\*\*\*

Joe.co.uk. 14 May, carries an article quoting research from an American

University which posits that, 'children raised without religion were "less vengeful, less nationalistic, less militaristic, less authoritarian. And more tolerant, on average, than religious adults."' More confirmation of the socialist view that religion has a negative effect on humans. Praise the Lord and pass the loot! Yet another American Evangelist making a very nice living thank you by selling the buy-into-religion-and-win-the-lottery falsehood. He's correct however that poverty is a misery suffered by many across the world. That, however, is down to the present social system. The solution isn't to make preachers rich, it's the abolition of capitalism. 'Televangelist and prosperity gospel preacher Jesse Duplantis, who has an estimated wealth of twenty million dollars, has called poverty a "curse" and said his wealth – which includes a private jet and a 40,000 square foot mansion- comes from being "blessed" by God' (*The Christian Post*, 29 April). News from the National Secular Society, 21 May, that the 2022 census showed that results from the 2022 Scottish Census found that '51.1% of people in Scotland have no religion. In 2011 the figure was 36.7%.' *Slàinte Mhath!*

DC

## Tiny tips

The gap between rich and poor has widened particularly in countries that have become more integrated into the global economy, such as China, Russia and some Eastern European countries.... 'The influence of globalization on income inequalities worldwide was greater than we had expected', summarizes Valentin Lang, junior professor of International Political Economy at the University of Mannheim and author of the study. 'We were particularly surprised that these differences were mainly due to the gains of the richest and that the lower income groups benefited little or not at all' (**ZeroHedge**, [tinyurl.com/3yut8tx4](https://tinyurl.com/3yut8tx4)).

Still, over the years the men have been re-considering many of the customs they took for granted in their youth. This includes even female genital mutilation – which is practiced on daughters as a rite of passage. 'We've noticed that it makes our girls weak', says Lengees. With hindsight, Lengees says he wishes he could have traded his past Moran life for an education. 'Look at this phone my children gave me', says Lengees,

holding it out. 'I only know how to press this button to answer it if someone is calling me. I can't even call out.' Being illiterate, he says, 'is like being a deaf person. You don't understand the language people are using. It's like you're not even fully in the world' (**NPR**, [tinyurl.com/398t33nv](https://tinyurl.com/398t33nv)).

...Topham noted how the Smurfs live in a Kibbutz-like farming community and rely on self-sufficient methods of means and production. Moreover, the Smurfs coexist happily without using money, sacrificing themselves for the greater good of the community: (**Movieweb**, [tinyurl.com/5e3xd37y](https://tinyurl.com/5e3xd37y)).

'New study in Nature confirms that if we want to avoid the next pandemic—we should stop destroying biodiversity, heating, and polluting the planet', Diarmid Campbell-Lendrum, who leads the World Health Organization's climate change unit and was not involved with the study, wrote on social media. 'Just one more reason to go for a greener, healthier future' (**Common**

**Dreams**, [tinyurl.com/4watyu2y](https://tinyurl.com/4watyu2y)).

Salman Rushdie says free Palestinian state would be 'Taliban-like' (**Middle East Eye**, [tinyurl.com/3jc5thpb](https://tinyurl.com/3jc5thpb)).

'Millions of children across the country do not have anywhere safe and decent to call home. These children are living without space to study, play or even have a good night's sleep; while their parents struggle to afford essentials like food and clothes' (**wsws.org**, [tinyurl.com/2f97tdke](https://tinyurl.com/2f97tdke)).

It is a system driven not by human needs and wants, but by the pursuit of profit that has no end. This system has only been around for a few hundred years. But in that short time it has reshaped the world with new technologies, infrastructures and innovations. This has given us the potential to truly meet the needs of everyone, to give everyone a life of freedom and fulfilment (**Communist Future**, [tinyurl.com/37544ybr](https://tinyurl.com/37544ybr)).

The US government is currently considering a reclassification of Vietnam under the US Tariff Law as a "market economy," which would provide Vietnam major economic benefits, even though Vietnam does not satisfy basic labor rights standards (**Human Rights Watch**, [tinyurl.com/2nwb4e28](https://tinyurl.com/2nwb4e28)).

(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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk)

**Yorkshire Regional branch.**

Contact: Fredi Edwards, Tel 07746 230 953 or email [fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk](mailto: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](mailto:spgb.ksrb@worldsocialism.org) or 07971 715569.

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

[spgbsw@gmail.com](mailto:spgbsw@gmail.com)  
**Brighton.** Contact: Anton Pruden, [anton@pruden.me](mailto:anton@pruden.me)

**Canterbury.** Contact: Rob Cox, Contact: [spgb.ksrb@worldsocialism.org](mailto:spgb.ksrb@worldsocialism.org)

**Luton.** Contact: Nick White, 59 Heywood Drive, LU2 7LP.

**Cornwall.** Contact: Harry Sowden, 16 Polgine Lane, Troon, Camborne, TR14 9DY. 01209 611820.

**East Anglia.** Contact: David Porter, Eastholme, Bush Drive, Eccles-on-Sea, NR12 0SF. 01692 582533. Richard Headicar, 42 Woodcote, Firs Rd, Hethersett, NR9 3JD. 01603 814343.

**Essex.** Contact: Pat Deutz, 11 The Links, Billericay, CM12 0EX. [patdeutz@gmail.com](mailto:patdeutz@gmail.com).

**Cambridge.** Contact: Andrew Westley, [wezelecta007@gmail.com](mailto:wezelecta007@gmail.com). 07883078984.

**IRELAND**

**Cork.** Contact: Kevin Cronin, 5 Curragh Woods, Frankfield, Cork. 021 4896427. [mariekev@eircom.net](mailto:mariekev@eircom.net)

**SCOTLAND**

**Edinburgh.** Contact: Fraser Anderson [f\\_raz\\_1@hotmail.com](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:rainbow3@btopenworld.com).

**WALES**

**South Wales branch (Cardiff and Swansea)**

Meets 2nd Monday 7.30pm on JITSi.

([meet.jit.si/spgbsouthwales3](http://meet.jit.si/spgbsouthwales3)).

Contact: [botterillr@gmail.com](mailto: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](mailto:spgb.cbs@worldsocialism.org)

**INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS**

**AFRICA**

**Kenya.** Contact: Patrick Ndege, PO Box 13627-00100, GPO, Nairobi  
**Zambia.** Contact: Kephias Mulenga, PO Box 280168, Kitwe.

**ASIA**

**Japan.** Contact: Michael. [japan.wsm@gmail.com](mailto:japan.wsm@gmail.com)

**AUSTRALIA**

Contact: Trevor Clarke, [wspa.info@yahoo.com.au](mailto:wspa.info@yahoo.com.au)

**EUROPE**

**Denmark.** Contact: Graham Taylor, Fiskergade, 90, 1G, DK-8000 Arhus C..

**Norway.** Contact: Robert Stafford. [hallblithe@yahoo.com](mailto:hallblithe@yahoo.com)

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# Who voted for Elon Musk?

ACCORDING TO mainstream economic theory as taught in schools and universities, the capitalist is fully entitled, by definition, to whatever they receive, be this modest or spectacularly large; they bore the risk by investing 'their' capital and so fully deserve the return it yields – a risk, nonetheless, that they can mitigate by expanding their already diverse investment portfolio and by taking considerable comfort in the legislative convenience afforded by the Law of Limited Liability.

The risk to the worker, on the other hand – whether we are talking about death or injury as a result of industrial accidents or the prospects of being made unemployed should the business close down as a consequence of entrepreneurial miscalculation – may not even be acknowledged, let alone 'rewarded'. Our worker, unable to pay that medical bill or make the next mortgage repayment, might well find themselves, unlike our capitalist, homeless and on the street.

Risk *per se* may well be part of life but the kind of risks we are talking about here should, you would have thought, be dispensed with or pared down to a bare minimum – not glorified as that mindless machismo or short-sighted and selfish folly we associated with a so-called 'rugged individualism'. The problem is that this is not possible today. 'Risk' in this latter sense is a built-in attribute of a ferociously competitive market economy that is itself simply taken for granted as the necessary context of all entrepreneurial decision-making.

The dogma that the capitalist provided the capital that got the production process going not only fails to address the question of where that capital came from in the first place; it also seeks to justify the return they receive on the grounds that they have to cover the operating costs of their business – unlike their employees who, happily, do not have to bear the heavy burden this entails.

But this overlooks that matter of where our capitalist derives the wherewithal to cover these costs – not to mention the fact that any inventory or equipment they may purchase out of this money remains, legally, entirely theirs. Such inventory or equipment was, needless to say, not produced by them – although at times you might be forgiven for thinking from the pronouncements of apologists for capitalism that that is precisely what happened. The issue, however, is not

what contribution our capitalist made to production but, rather, where they got the money to make that contribution in the first instance.

An entrepreneur who owns a business that produces a product for which there is brisk demand, might be said to be 'rewarded' by society, according to this argument, in the sense that they are thereby enabled to become extremely rich by attentively responding to, and serving, this demand. Society – consumers in general – as it were, passes judgement on this product in the act of buying it. Their approval in the form of a market purchase is purportedly tantamount to a desire to reward our entrepreneur for making this product available on the market.

However, it is not difficult to see why such an argument (which is raised with surprising frequency) is little more than a specious and self-serving rationalisation. To begin with, the product itself, from its conception and design through to its manufacture, marketing and sale, is likely to involve the labour of a great many workers employed or subcontracted by our entrepreneur. Even so, these, unlike our entrepreneur, are not likely to find themselves suddenly enriched on account of their contribution to making this highly desirable product available to the public.

On the contrary, the entire revenue from the sale of this product will go to our capitalist entrepreneur, in the first instance, simply by virtue of their ownership of the business itself. What they then personally end up with in money terms, after deducting from that revenue all those production costs, including the wages bill, is a residual magnitude which can vary depending on other factors – including, of course, how much, or how little, they pay their workforce.

How the social product comes to be divided up has little or nothing to do with

the public's opinion of our entrepreneur or the putative role they perform.

More than likely their existence will be completely unknown to consumers. These consumers are not concerned with 'rewarding the producers' for producing this product, let alone the entrepreneur who has employed these producers to produce it. That is a completely unwarranted imputation. All that the public is concerned with is the desirability and price of the product in question.

There is simply no way of effectively testing this proposition anyway, since the very valuations the public are supposedly making with respect to these different occupations in society (and the differential incomes they command) are themselves expressed through, and subject to, the limitations of, 'effective demand' – that is, demand backed up by purchasing power.

What this means is that even if we grant the argument that the public are, as it were, 'voting' for our entrepreneur, or their business, with each pound, dollar or whatever spent counting as a vote cast, it is still the case (to continue with this metaphor) that some have vastly more votes at their disposal compared to others and, indeed, that many of these others may as well be considered completely disenfranchised as far as a great many products in the market are concerned. That is to say, their 'economic votes' are prevented from being expressed in the determination of these products' prices by their inability to afford these products in the first instance.

In any case, what is being asserted is a completely untestable proposition. Who decided – or voted for – Elon Musk to become the richest individual in the world? The answer is, of course – no one.

**ROBIN COX**



# What is socialism?

AT THE beginning of the election campaign Starmer was reported as saying that he considered himself a socialist. According to Chris Mason, the BBC's Political Editor, 'Starmer told me today he sees himself as a socialist. For those scared of that label, he said he saw it as putting "the country at the service of working people"' ([tinyurl.com/6cfvzach](https://www.tinyurl.com/6cfvzach) 27 May, 18.04).

Few can have believed that Starmer is in any sense a socialist, but it at least provoked the media into talking about 'socialism'. In an 'explainer' article, the *Guardian* (28 May) even asked 'What is Socialism?' Their answer reflected dictionary definitions, which describe how a word is used rather than how it should be:

'Like many political philosophies it means different things to different people. But broadly socialists believe all human beings are of equal worth and that society should be organised to reflect that. Fairness, equality, justice and the common good are the foundations of socialism. The wealth created by humans should be used to benefit everyone. Some socialists believe that key industries and sectors, such as utilities, transport and housing, should be owned by the state and run in the public interest rather than for private profit. Other socialists believe that all industries and sectors should be run this way' ([tinyurl.com/t4yrd4j5](https://www.tinyurl.com/t4yrd4j5)).

We have inherited a definition of socialism which we consider to be both logically and historically correct — a system of society based on the common ownership and democratic control of the means of living by and in the interest of the whole community. But we can go along with some of the things the *Guardian* says. For instance, that 'all human beings are of equal worth and that society should be organised to reflect that' and 'that wealth created by humans should be used to benefit everyone'.

On the other hand, describing the foundation of socialism as fairness, equality, justice and the common good doesn't tell us anything as different people have different opinions as to what is fair, just or in the common interest. Supporters of capitalism could — and in fact do — claim this for capitalism.

The question is: on what basis would society have to be organised to ensure everybody is of equal worth and wealth used to benefit everyone? In our view it could only be on the basis of the means of living (land, industry, transport, communications, etc) being the common property of the whole community. In other



words, belonging to everybody but this is the same as belonging to nobody. A socialist society is one where no individual or group of individuals has ownership or controlling rights, in law or in fact, over the resources to produce what society needs to survive as this puts them in a privileged position vis-à-vis the rest of society.

A classless society means that everybody stands in the same relationship to the means of living as everybody else, each having the same opportunity to have a say in how society is run, through democratic procedures of one kind or another. Without the means of living being commonly owned and democratically controlled, the wealth that humans create cannot be used to benefit everyone. Only once freed from the constraints of sectional ownership and the economic forces set in motion when there is production for the market, can society be in a position to do this.

The *Guardian* (and dictionaries) attempt to grasp the idea of common ownership, which is indeed the basis of socialism, by equating this with 'public/government ownership' defined as ownership by the state. But the state is not the same as the community. The state is an institution standing above society controlled by and for a section only of the members of society. Under capitalism it is controlled by that section that owns and controls the means of living. The 'public interest' is their interest and 'public ownership' is ownership by them as a class. What government ownership amounts to is state capitalism.

Ever since our foundation in 1904 we have consistently argued that government ownership is not socialism. See, for instance, 'Nationalisation not Socialism', March 1908 ([tinyurl.com/2z62mrhb](https://www.tinyurl.com/2z62mrhb)) and 'Evolution and State Capitalism', April 1910 ([tinyurl.com/mtzxx7ah](https://www.tinyurl.com/mtzxx7ah)).

That state capitalism is the same as socialism is the most common misunderstanding as to what socialism means. It can even be described as the illusion of the epoch. It is only on the basis of this mistake that the Labour Party (at one time, a long time ago) and Russia when it was the USSR could be described as socialist.

What Starmer thought socialism is was not clear, but he did mention to Chris Mason that it meant 'the country in the service of working people'. That's not socialism either. In fact it's how the Conservatives might describe conservatism and the Lib Dems liberalism. But at least it is something that a Starmer Labour government can be judged by.

The trouble for him is that a country with a capitalist economy simply cannot be made to serve the interest of 'working people', or the social class made up of people who, through being excluded from ownership and control of the means of living, are forced by economic necessity to sell their working skills to some employer. A society based on minority ownership and production for profit can never be made to work in their interest as making profits for capitalist enterprises ahead of satisfying people's needs is built into it. Hence the problems that the working class face. As these arise from capitalism, they cannot be solved without getting rid of capitalism.

We confidently predict, therefore, that Starmer will fail in his endeavour to make capitalism serve the working class. Socialism, properly understood as the common ownership and democratic control of the means of living, is the only framework in which people can be social equals and production re-oriented to serve people's needs.

**ADAM BUICK**

# Elections worldwide

ELECTIONS ARE not just happening in the UK this year: around the world there have been national elections in South Africa, Bangladesh, Mexico, Taiwan, Indonesia and Pakistan already. The United States is due to have an election in November. There have even been elections in Russia and Iran and European Parliamentary elections. There may be more, but what is certain, is that a majority of the human species will vote in national-level elections at some point in this year.

This is something worth taking on board: particularly for ourselves as socialists who maintain that a worldwide revolution is possible. It becomes conceivable that in one particular year, socialist movements could win elections not just in a preponderance of states, but with a majority of the species on the planet.

This is the first time in recorded history that so many people will be engaged in this way, and the likelihood is that such occurrences will become more common. Yet, despite the spread of democracy, we still see the overall rule by a minority. The capitalist class holds sway both within and between states. The evidence is that democracy is a form of government that supports and promotes minority rule.

The first factor to take into account is the very division of the world into nation states. Many electrons have been sacrificed in recent stories about Georgia's new Foreign Agents law (widely seen as a pro-Russian imposition to cut out western NGOs and other bodies). Yet, the UK has recently passed a similar law which makes it an offence to work as an agent of a foreign government. As it is worded, it's not entirely inconceivable that were a part of the World Socialist Movement to win an election anywhere in the world, it could lead to our members being proscribed (as we would be acting as part of a single worldwide organisation).

On top of that is the process that can be most easily demonstrated in Russia and Iran. In both countries, great steps are taken to restrict who is able to stand, with candidates being vetted by an electoral commission. Whilst in the abstract, this could lead to protest votes being cast for smaller parties (since there are multiple candidates in the elections) the bombardment of propaganda is one-sided so people feel there is no point to voting against the incumbent (or, in many cases, will be persuaded that he is the best candidate).

In Iran, this results in very low turn-outs, down to 40 percent. In Russia, there are suggestions that the vote is inflated

by outright ballot fraud and box stuffing (there are no independent observers in Russia, so it's hard to say).

This process still happens in the 'open' democracies in some ways, where the barriers to standing are financial, time availability and co-ordination. Concentration of wealth gives the capitalist class minority the head start in being able to organise around winning elections.

Counting the ballots is a vulnerable point in electoral politics, hence why Donald Trump has been able to maintain his claims of voter fraud. This technique was pioneered in Kenyan Presidential elections, and works by filling the airwaves with claims of cheating, backed up by having enough energised supporters to mean the claims cannot be easily ignored. Clearly, this approach is backed up by clever psychological studies of group behaviour. All over the world, skilled professionals are paid precisely to game any election rules to try and support one faction over another.

Even where such blatant fixes aren't in place, the whole structure of representative elections is actually stacked towards minority rule. In practice, parliaments and legislatures only ever have one vote: who is the government? Handing power to an individual executive in practice creates an elected monarch. The so-called division of power much vaunted by liberal doctrine simply frees up the executive branch to behave as it wants, with parliaments being oversight committees on the activity of the executive.

That is not to say they have no influence. Parliaments can threaten to obstruct the executive and rob it of authority. Indeed, this is a way in which minority politics operate, since it is in the interest of parliamentarians to form minority factions which threaten the overall majority, and

quietly exact policies from the executive in return for their continued loyalty.

Likewise, the existence of the executive allows for a band of courtiers who jockey for position and patronage: they have privileged access to information (especially timings of announcements) and the ability to co-ordinate easily because their numbers are small and they are personally known to one another. They can offer each other jobs and opportunities to make contacts.

Here again, the inequality of wealth rears its head. The small number of courtiers can themselves be courted, and if not outright bribed, they can be made aware of the revolving door between politics and business: comfortable sinecures await those who prove sufficiently pliant to business interests. If they all move in the same circles, they form a common way of looking at the world which means they do what is needed without even having to be asked.

Informal networks and factionalising are almost inherent to human society and cannot be eliminated, but the more open and diffuse the decision structures are, the less these traits can have an effect on the outcomes of decisions. The fact that the billions who vote are in effect insulated from the day to day decisions by the election of intermediaries in parliament simply exacerbates the opportunities for scheming and domination.

Election and delegation of defined functions would continue to be an essential part of running a society based on common ownership, as would (indeed) some representative bodies. The abolition of concentrated private wealth and the active participation of the billions in ensuring that as many decisions are taken as closely as possible to the public gaze means that we can look to transforming the current means of deception and fraud into a means of liberation and effective administration for us all.

**PIK SMEET**



# The myth of consumer sovereignty

IN HIS seminal work, *Stone Age Economics* published in 1972, the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins controversially suggested that hunter gatherers, though conspicuously lacking in those sundry accoutrements of what we call 'civilisation' – like money, fast cars, an 80-inch flat-screen TV and a semi-detached terrace in the suburbs – may nevertheless have constituted what he called the 'original affluent society'.

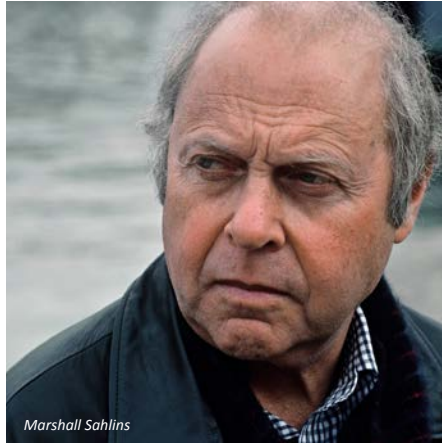
This was a startling claim, to say the least. It certainly challenged what we conventionally mean by the term 'affluence'. As Sahlins noted:

'By the common understanding, an affluent society is one in which all the people's material wants are easily satisfied. To assert that the hunters are affluent is to deny then that the human condition is an ordained tragedy, with man the prisoner, at hard labor, of a perpetual disparity between his unlimited wants and his insufficient means. For there are two possible courses to affluence. Wants may be "easily satisfied" either by producing much or desiring little.'

'Producing much' is what Sahlins called the 'Galbraithian way' to affluence – named after the economist, J K Galbraith, who had written a book in the 1950s called *The Affluent Society* – although Galbraith himself was somewhat ambivalent about the whole subject of affluence.

As he saw it, the age-old problem of scarcity had been largely overcome. The emphasis on increasing productivity and output, he argued, may have been apposite in earlier times when large swathes of the population had little option but to endure grinding poverty. However, this was no longer the case in the post-war era of mass production and consumer plenty. Hence, society's priorities needed to change – from delivering yet more affluence to dealing with the challenges that affluence threw up – such as glaring inequality and environmental destruction. Amongst other things, concluded Galbraith, this called for more Keynesian-style government regulation of the economy, more investment in the public sector and so on.

As a consumption theorist, Galbraith was very much influenced by earlier writers in that tradition – like Thorstein Veblen, author of *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), for instance. Galbraith argued that the conventional wisdom regarding the role of consumers had become outdated – that is, the idea that the 'consumer is king'. According to this, whatever the consumer wants, businesses obligingly provide.



Marshall Sahlins

For Galbraith, the boot had since transferred to the other foot: it was now the producer who was king and the consumer, the subject. The consumer was, for instance, now more of a price-taker than a price-maker, a tendency that would have been reinforced by the increasing concentration and centralisation of capital in fewer hands. In short, the increasing domination of the economy by giant corporations.

Because of their large size, these corporations were not so much constrained by market competition when it came to setting prices. Nor for that matter, by the single-minded quest to maximise profits. That might well still be the primary goal of small businesses or, indeed, the shareholders of large corporations. However, suggested Galbraith in another book entitled *The New Industrial State* (1964), the former were in decline while the latter had largely lost control to a specialist planning and technical elite – dubbed the 'technostructure' – intent upon promoting technical efficiency and expanding the corporation out of undistributed profits.

In that sense profits still mattered; the corporation would prefer, for example, to finance itself rather than depend on bank loans and this obviously required that it be profitable. But the point that Galbraith was making was simply that the pursuit of profit was not of such overriding importance as it once was and that other objectives had entered into the frame alongside profit-making. With hindsight, however, things have not turned out quite like Galbraith imagined, with 'shareholder capitalism' now back firmly in the driving seat.

## Dependence effect

For him, all these various developments also gave rise to something that he called the 'dependence effect'. By this he meant consumer preferences had become more dependent on, or conditioned by, the corporate imperatives of big business.

These latter were to increase sales and thereby make the fullest possible use of the large-scale productive capacity they had built up and so reap the benefits of scale economies. In other words, to some extent, these imperatives were technologically driven. While the resulting price reductions might, in the short run, seem to adversely affect the revenue stream of a business and hence its profits, in the long run it enabled the business to undercut its competitors and so capture a larger slice of the market.

However, what this also meant is that more demand for these products had to be created, or stimulated, in order to justify and maintain a high level of output. Price cutting would help in that respect but, in addition, boosting demand necessitated resorting to intensive advertising and 'salesmanship'. In short, by generally promoting a culture of emulative and acquisitive consumerism.

Strictly speaking, the aim was not so much to satisfy the wants of the consumer as such. Rather, it was to ensure that the consumer remained perpetually unsatisfied and forever in a state of wanting more. In short, it was to promote the idea of 'consumption for the sake of consumption' (mirroring 'production for the sake of production').

Galbraith argued from what he called a commonsensical premise that the more amply a person's wants are supplied the less urgent will those wants become. However:

'If the individual's wants are to be urgent they must be original with himself. They cannot be urgent if they must be contrived for him. And above all they must not be contrived by the process of production by which they are satisfied. For this means that the whole case for the urgency of production, based on the urgency of wants, falls to the ground. One cannot defend production as satisfying wants if that production creates the wants.'

In other words, the institutions of modern advertising and salesmanship 'cannot be reconciled with the notion of independently determined desires, for their central function is to create desires – to bring into being wants that previously did not exist'.

Predictably enough, Galbraith's arguments were excoriated by hostile critics like market libertarians for whom the concept of consumer sovereignty was something sacrosanct. It was key to their model of competitive market economy that works to maximise economic welfare in strict accordance with the wants of rational actors expressed through the

market. Since these are essentially both rational and sovereign it was not for anyone else to question or frown upon such wants – whatever might be the social or environmental costs of satisfying them.

Any suggestion that consumer preferences might be moulded by institutional forces emanating from outside or beyond the individual themselves was regarded as anathema, an affront to the individualistic worldview of the market libertarians. If individuals were so easily manipulated, what is to prevent them making irrational choices, perhaps leading to some or other suboptimal outcome that might tarnish the good reputation of the free market?

Rejecting the very idea of a ‘dependence effect’ thus committed these market libertarians to the view that our wants (whether urgent or not) must necessarily always be ‘original’ to the individual themselves – or, to use Galbraith’s expression, will always spring from their own inner disposition alone. Suggesting they can be conditioned or shaped by some external force or factor had one further consequence. It could potentially call into question that most sacred of dogmas upon which much mainstream economic thinking hinges – namely, that our wants are insatiable. For if we can be persuaded to buy more we can also be persuaded to want less and therefore to buy less. Clearly, that would not be in the interests of the business community.

## Manipulating wants

For Galbraith, that is precisely what this community was in the business of doing – persuading consumers. As he argued, if wants were genuinely original or innate to the consumer then what would be the point in advertising at all. The consumer would seek out and find the product that might satisfy their particular want of their own accord. The fact that the product is so relentlessly publicised strongly suggests that the purpose of the advertisers is to expand the consumer’s wants or even to supply them with completely novel wants that they did not even realise they had.

Naturally, this has prompted a counterargument from Galbraith’s critics that advertising can be justified on the grounds that it is merely alerting us to the existence of useful products we might otherwise have overlooked. However, this counterargument strikes one as being somewhat disingenuous.

To begin with, there is the sheer scale of advertising to consider. It seems absolutely disproportionate to what the market libertarians claim its purpose to be. It does not seem credible, to put it mildly, to suggest that businesses, ferociously

competing against each other for a bigger slice of the market, would spend such vast sums of money merely to provide a public service, as it were – of informing the consumer of the availability of these products and thereby enabling them to better satisfy their wants.

Galbraith might have been naïve if he imagined that advertising could somehow be pruned back to a bare minimum in a competitive market economy. But his critics were no less, if not considerably more, naïve in their understanding of what advertising is about. Its purpose is, very clearly, more to persuade than inform. This is evident in the very of techniques of advertising itself. These involve repetition, reinforcement and the copious use of emotional associations, fantasy, irony and downright innuendo. Such techniques are demonstrably manipulative in style, often preying on people’s vulnerabilities and sense of self-esteem.

In the early days of advertising there was, arguably, rather more in the way of factual or informational content to adverts but those days have long gone. The dark arts of the advertisers have evolved way beyond that since then. Advertising today, suggests Andrew Simms, is about mind control. Like air pollution it seeps into every nook and cranny of our lives. Indeed, it is reckoned that the average American citizen is exposed to anywhere between 4,000 and 10,000 adverts every single day:

‘Advertising works by getting under your radar, introducing new ideas without bothering your conscious mind. Extensive scientific research shows that, when exposed to advertising, people “buy into” the materialistic values and goals it encourages. Consequently, they report lower levels of personal wellbeing, experience conflict in relationships, engage in fewer positive social behaviours, and experience detrimental effects on study and work. Critically, the more that people prioritise materialistic values and goals, the less they embrace positive attitudes towards the environment – and the more likely they are to behave in damaging ways.’

More ominously, Simms goes on to refer to the findings of neuroscience on the effects of advertising on the human brain: ‘advertising goes as far as lodging itself in the brain, rewiring it by forming physical structures and causing permanent change. Brands that have been made familiar through advertising have a strong influence on the choices people make. Under MRI scans, the logos of recognisable car brands are shown to activate a single particular region in the brain in the medial prefrontal cortex. Brands and logos have also been shown to generate strong preferences between virtually identical products, such

as fizzy drinks – preferences that disappear in blind tests. Researchers looking to assess the power of advertised brands concluded that “there are visual images and marketing messages that have insinuated themselves into the nervous systems of humans” (*Guardian*, 11 October 2021).

If we accept that the purpose of advertising is more to persuade than to inform then this puts our market libertarians in an essentially untenable position. It means having to concede that our wants are not necessarily those that are original to ourselves and that, consequently, we are not at all like the sovereign individuals depicted in individualist mythology, driven by impulses that arise entirely within ourselves. It means having to acknowledge that we are, indeed, social animals capable of influencing and being influenced by others.

Given the manipulative nature of advertising it follows that weakening or removing its influence would result in a situation in which consumer wants would indeed more closely approximate those of our hypothetical sovereign individual. Therein lies a delicious irony – the fact that market libertarianism through its endorsement of the practice of advertising would appear to be in league with those very forces that threaten our individual sovereignty and our ability to rationally think for ourselves.

## Untenable position

Faced with the incontrovertible evidence that advertising does indeed contrive to expand our wants or introduce new ones, some market libertarians have adopted a somewhat different tack than that of outright denial. This might be described as an exercise in damage limitation.

A case in point was the prominent free market supporter, Friedrich von Hayek. Hayek contended that it was a gross exaggeration to suggest corporations could determine consumer preferences through the power of advertising alone. That is undoubtedly true although it misses the larger point. The inculcation of consumerist values in the population is not something for which any one particular agency or institution can be held solely responsible. It is woven into the very fabric of life under capitalism.

It arises from the system’s competitive dynamic and its built-in disposition to grow without limit. The relentless accumulation of capital that competition compels finds its correlate in the no less relentless drive to boost market sales by means of which the economic surpluses to finance that accumulation can be realised.

**ROBIN COX**

# Small change

ISLINGTON NORTH used to be the sort of quiet Labour safe seat where the staff could weigh the Labour vote and all go home. The Rise and Fall of Jeremy Corbyn has turned it into a place where national politics is played out.

With his campaign as an independent candidate (noticeably, he has not used his 'Peace and Justice Foundation' to create a new party, nor joined in with any other left party), Corbyn was early out of the blocks with leaflets delivered by volunteers: 'Corbyn, an Independent Voice for All of Us'.

This was his chance to put out an uncompromising personal manifesto, freed from the shackles of Labour Party compromise. But the only time socialism is mentioned in the whole leaflet is an endorsement from a member of the Jewish Socialist Group, though only in that group's name. Given how central Corbyn's support for Palestine is in his personal politics (to the extent that it was the core of the antisemitism smear used against him) this

is the only reference to the Gaza conflict, and it is a reference only to Corbyn's call for a ceasefire.

The list of policies (broad strokes as befits a leaflet) are for a more equal society, housing for all, a greener Islington, fully public NHS and peace and human rights. No mention of common ownership of the means of production.

Of course, a well-established candidate has the right to stand on their record; and Corbyn does, listing the campaigns he has been involved in over the years, like standing up for the local hospital, saving the number 4 bus, and turning a disused space into a park. All laudable local things.

It is a failure of an opportunity to make a case for socialism if that was his priority, and what we are left with is a clear case that what Jeremy Corbyn has always stood for is campaigning for small changes. Win or lose, this leaflet is his political testament.

P. S.



# A socialist future?

ONE OF the many organisations standing candidates in the general election is the newly founded Communist Future (see their no-frills website at communistfuture.com, which includes their manifesto). They are contesting just one seat, the Manchester Central constituency.

They say in their manifesto that the working class are those who have to work for a wage. Capitalism cannot achieve the potential of giving everyone a life of fulfilment, as a small minority own most of the resources needed to produce and distribute goods and services, resulting in crisis and instability. Instead of capitalism, they stand for a society with no class system: the means of production should be the shared property of everyone and be democratically managed. The communist future will be 'a society of freedom and fulfilment for all, a setting free of human potential.'

This all sounds very promising, and is on the same sort of lines as the case of the Socialist Party, though it would be good to hear a bit more about what their future society would involve, such as implying the ending of wage labour. On the other hand,

## COMMUNIST FUTURE

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Communist Future will be standing in Manchester Central at the general election.

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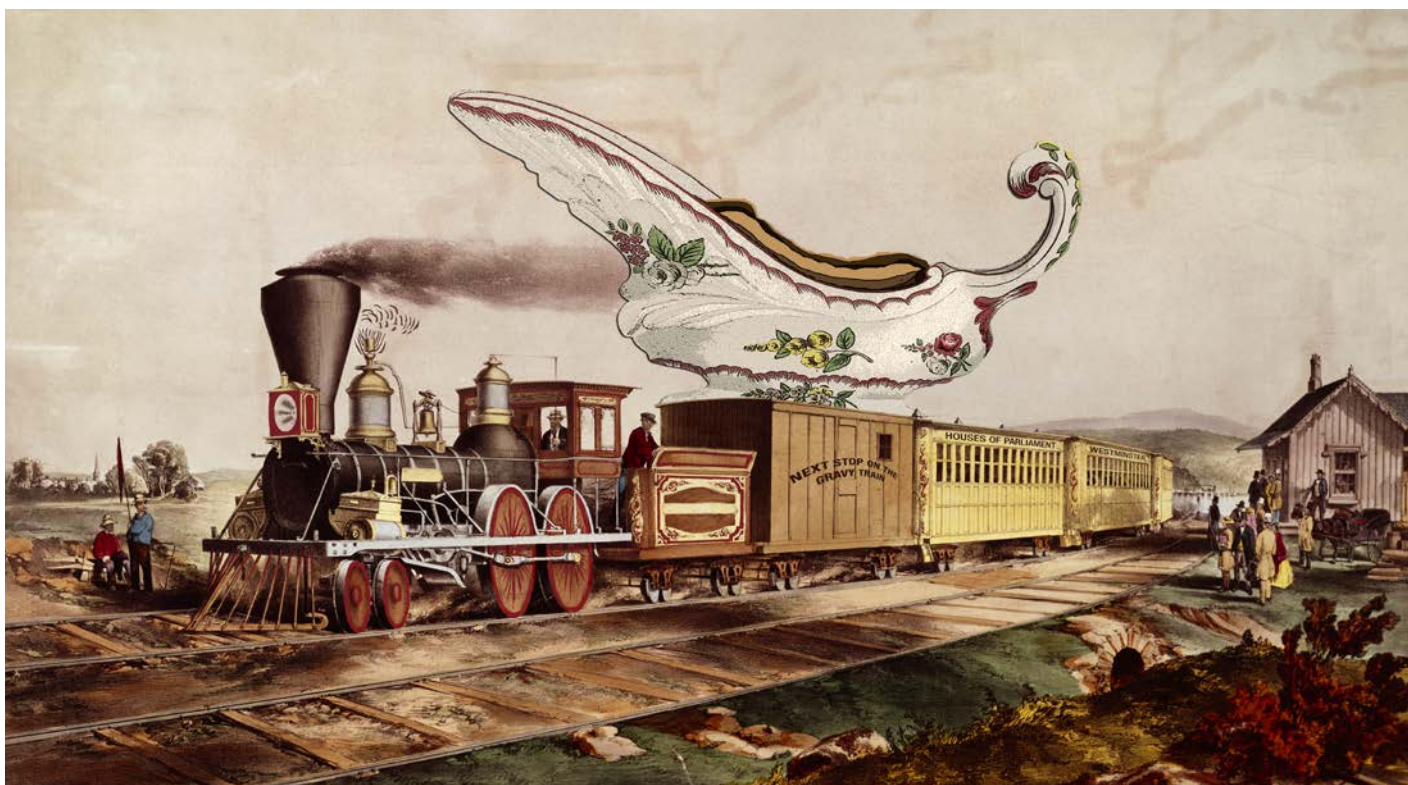
Communist Future do express support demands for reforms, such as controls on rents and reduced working hours, though accepting that these can only provide short-term gains. They also support 'demands that promote political freedom', including an end to the House of Lords and the monarchy. They say they are not standing in

the election in order to do things for people.

So they could certainly say more about the kind of society they want, and their advocacy of reforms is a sticking point. But it is certainly encouraging to see such an organisation making its voice heard.

PB

# All change for the gravy train



THE NEXT prime minister on the gravy train arriving at the Westminster platform will have won a general election with bold promises of change. Welcome to more of the same shit, different day!

At the time of writing, we can't say with total certainty what the outcome of the election will be. And unless you are someone who enjoys a flutter at the bookie's in the hope of predicting the result of such an event correctly, the reality is that it will make little or no difference to your future as a member of the working class.

What with the two mainstream parties of Labour and the Tories alongside the likes of the Lib Dems, the Greens, or the more colourful characters such as Nigel Farage from Reform UK, or George Galloway of the Workers Party all offering 'change,' it is impossible to understand just how much society could realistically be reformed to include the content in each of their false speeches and empty rhetoric. Unless of course they had developed new magical powers. A potential claim that would probably surprise no one, had one of them dared to make it. Or perhaps that would be taking Artificial Intelligence a bit too far.

Even by a professional politician's standards. Frankly, in the absence of there being an SPGB candidate in your area, you may well as vote for the Monster Raving Loony Party. Or if you want to make a more meaningful statement, try writing 'World Socialism' across your ballot paper. It will be noted by the vote counters and tellers.

Should there be a new government on 5 July (aka executive committee of the capitalist class) one thing we can say for sure is that whichever leader appears victorious will no doubt be declaring what glorious days lie ahead as they take up residence at number 10 Downing Street.

Having just spent the last six weeks successfully convincing enough voters that they represent the party of change, much like characters from a Batman movie with Rishi Sunak playing the part of Joker and Keir Starmer playing the part of Riddler, it was barely possible to distinguish any degree of sincerity or integrity between them as they both tried to outfox each other with a combination of dubious facts and figures during those cringeworthy televised debates. How often have we heard before that they will be the solution

of all that is wrong, before we are exposed to another five years of lies, deceit and excuses as to why they have failed to deliver on their false promises? And when the honeymoon period is finally over, it will not be long until they start blaming the previous administration for the mess they inherited when things inevitably start to go wrong, as they fail to fulfil the promises and commitments of their pre-election manifesto. Instead of being honest and accepting that the real problems we face in society lie in the economic priorities that underpin capitalism's insatiable appetite for profit at the expense of real human needs.

In summary, no matter which party goes on to govern, so long as the status quo remains, the outcome will once again mean victory for the capitalist class and defeat for the working class. Only when the majority of workers across the world develop a true understanding and consciousness of the need for socialism will we be able to form the kind of society necessary to fulfil our individual and collective needs.

**PAUL EDWARDS**

# Shoplift

A FUNNY thing happened on the way to the forum, well not the forum but a supermarket store, owned by German capitalists. Sunday morning at ten and the place was busier than a Japanese commuter subway station during rush-hour.

This was an unfamiliar store. In familiar ones a yellow sticker on an item signifies that the commodity is near to, or almost past, its sell-by date, so a sharp money-saving eye is always on the lookout for such. Glimpsing such coloured things, they were not as they first appeared. Stickers on items in the various meats section turned out to be security tags. These were then found on many other different goods across the various aisles.

Socialists are generally law-abiding and tend to react as anyone would when their probity is called into question. After reciting the whole of Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* the checkout was finally arrived at. Here something unexpected occurred. With the meagre commodities placed upon the conveyor belt the wage slave operating the till asked if the shopping bags could be checked to make sure that they were empty.

Non-plussedness caused temporary speechlessness. Light bulb time. They think there might be commodities in bags that had been appropriated without the gelt made toward the profits of the German capitalists. There's a first time for everything and this was the first time this writer has ever been confronted with such a request.

Finally, the response was articulated. Yes, one did mind. Till person's training kicked in as they began the spiel about how such intrusion was company policy and how much shoplifting cost the store annually. This programming of the wage slaves in such occupations means that refusals are a regular occurrence and some behavioural psychologists have worked out that an appeal of this nature would overcome any objections the customer might have. Think of the poor capitalist!

At this point words passionately overflowed regarding the iniquities of capitalism. This did not go down well. Totally misunderstanding at whom the diatribe was aimed the till person responded with 'if you're abusive I won't serve you'!

The thought arose, it's exploitative capitalism that abuses the vast majority in many different ways.

Some deluded individuals, when



confronted with a situation which is an abuse of civil liberties, respond with, 'I don't mind, I've nothing to hide and neither should anyone mind if they haven't done anything wrong'. This is an erroneous view in a surveillance society. An under-the-counter button was now being jabbed furiously.

Enter stage left the in-house security. The attitude of this member of the working class couldn't have been more different. Unlike the cashier he behaved in a perfectly pleasant, reasonable manner. This offered an opportunity to explain the objections to having one's bag searched.

If this tale was being retold on some confessional social media sites it would end with everyone queuing and listening, then finally bursting into cheering and applause. Followed no doubt by a mass rendition of the *Internationale*. One has to know when to cut one's losses.

One glance at the faces of those in the queue behind was sufficient to show that it was time to graciously concede. Explaining that one did not want to keep anyone waiting any longer I said look into the bags if you want to. Just as graciously the security guard indicated that that would not be necessary. The bags were not examined. 'Security' was someone the narrator would have liked to have a long conversation with about socialism. Commodities run through till, paid for, exit narrator with mental note never to visit that particular supermarket again.

Socialists are generally very non-prejudiced men and women. Apart from in one case. Socialists are very prejudiced

when it comes to capitalism. There are, of course, many people who dislike capitalism, but not all of those, even the ones who term themselves socialists, want to see its replacement by a class-free, wage-free, money-free, leader-free, nation-free society.

There's none so blind as those who will not see. Knowing that a socialist society would provide free access to quality goods and services if only a majority of the working class understood and wanted it, makes transactions designed to further enrich capitalists hard to bear.

The reasons for shoplifting are varied: the economic necessity of doing so because particular commodities necessary for life are unaffordable or in order to profit by selling on the commodities more cheaply than are available in store. A previous shoplifting article in the Life and Times column of the *Socialist Standard* in October, points out that some may shoplift as an act of 'disobedience to the authority of the private property system'. However, as that article explains, 'it is not a particularly positive or constructive way to help do away with that system'.

Reflection upon that event by the narrator was one of sadness that the other customers and staff, in that location, were unaware that angst-ridden capitalism could be, as Life and Times correctly has it, replaced with a system 'in which the stores of the world can be made freely available to them – and to everyone'.

DC





THE CELEBRATED Welsh actor, Michael Sheen, takes the lead role in a new play about the celebrated Welsh politician, Aneurin ('Nye') Bevan. With a script by Tim Price and under the direction of the National Theatre's artistic lead Rufus Norris, the scenario has Sheen, dressed in pyjamas and close to death in a hospital bed, going back in memory through the key moments of his life. A series of scenes, sometimes surreal in their framing, show him progress from stammering schoolboy to coal miner, from trade union activist to rebel Labour MP, and finally from the back benches of parliament to government minister overseeing the establishment of the NHS.

The play has already had what can be called 'rave reviews'. The *Times* declared that 'Sheen burns with genuine passion', the *i* paper called it 'a taut and fluid triumph', and other words used to describe it have been 'spectacular' 'mesmerising' and 'unrepeatable'. The full house of around 2,000 at the performance I attended were indeed mesmerised, as was I, by Sheen's performance and indeed by the performance of the whole cast of actors around him, taking parts such as Bevan's wife, Jennie Lee, his best and most longstanding friend, Archie Lush, and his bitter political adversary, Winston Churchill. One could not but be powerfully drawn into Bevan's journey, both mental and political, and in particular into the leading role he played in setting up the 'welfare state' immediately following the Second World War as Labour government Minister for Health and Housing. His role in this, and particularly in the NHS, is the play's main *raison d'être*, so that even the staunchly conservative *Telegraph* had only words of praise for Sheen's performance and went so far as to refer to the production as 'a valiant and valuable affirmation of the NHS'.

The question of course that a reviewer in the *Socialist Standard* must ask, even while sharing the widely positive view of the production itself, is to what extent its unmitigated praise of Bevan and his politics is justified. Prior to the

formation of the NHS in 1948, workers who could afford it generally contributed to various small insurance policies to provide a form of insurance for medical treatment. But many did not. And this was cumbersome and inefficient, and above all a hindrance to workers' productivity. It was decided by the wartime coalition government, therefore, in line with the recommendations of the 1942 *Beveridge Report*, to reorganise the health system under central control. Both main parties, Labour and Tory, committed to such a reform in their 1945 election manifestos, and so when Labour won an overwhelming victory in that election, it fell to that party to put it into operation.

The justification for this and other welfare reforms was summed up in the *Beveridge Report*:

'Social insurance and the allied services, as they exist today, are conducted by a complex of disconnected administrative organs, proceeding on different principles, doing invaluable service but at a cost in money and trouble and anomalous treatment of identical problems for which there is no justification.'

In other words, it was going to be more efficient and more cost effective for the services in question to be streamlined and brought directly under state control. So while no one would deny the famous adage of Bevan's, repeated in the play, that 'no society can legitimately call itself civilised if a sick person is denied medical aid because of a lack of means', it has to be borne in mind that the main rationale of this reform was to make the system of workers selling their energies to an employer for a wage or salary more efficient and not first and foremost to benefit those workers.

The Socialist Party's frequent characterisation of the NHS as 'a cheap back-to-work service' or a 'way of patching up workers' may seem a little over-cynical, especially as the nationwide hospital and free medical advice and treatment system that was set up under the supervision of Bevan as Labour health minister in 1948 was clearly of

benefit to workers who no longer had to find the money to pay for medical treatment. But, that said, there can be no doubt that it was not introduced with benevolence in mind. Indeed, such an arrangement was soon mirrored in various other countries whatever the professed ideology of the governments in office there. The fact is that 'welfare' reforms were necessary to guard against social breakdown, a situation potentially detrimental to capitalism and its profit-making imperative.

Yet of course, as many reforms, the NHS never worked quite as intended. The 'free' health service soon became unpredictably 'expensive' and certain charges (eg, for prescriptions) were introduced, and it has rarely not been in a state of crisis. Today's increasing waiting lists, difficulties in securing GP appointments and overwhelmed emergency units show how the economic forces of capitalism constantly beguile the intentions of well-meaning reformers such as Bevan.

There can be little doubt about Bevan's sincerity, at least in the early and middle part of his life and career, as focused on in this production. He was a spellbinding orator not afraid to be seen as a rebel and to use the strongest terms possible to state his credo (once famously referring to the Tories as 'lower than vermin'). But, in the end, his was the idealism of someone who threw his energy into political life under the impression that capitalism could be adjusted to work in the interests of the working class. And what, as a celebration of the man, this play fails to convey is that this impression was a mistaken one and indeed that Bevan himself, in later years, moved from expressions of triumphant idealism towards pragmatic acceptance of capitalist politics and its limitations. It was in a private pay-bed in an NHS hospital in fact that he ended his days, the bed from which we are taken in this play through the key moments of his life. But thoroughly recommended as a spectacle.

**HOWARD MOSS**

## UBI no solution

'WE'LL NEED universal basic income — AI "godfather"' (bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cnd607ekl99o). The godfather in question was Professor Geoffrey Hinton, so dubbed because he was a pioneer of neural networks on which AI is modelled. He told BBC Newsnight that a scheme 'giving fixed amounts of cash to every citizen would be needed because he was "very worried about AI taking lots of mundane jobs". (...) He said while he felt AI would increase productivity and wealth, the money would go to the rich "and not the people whose jobs get lost and that's going to be very bad for society"'.

It's a common view: AI will lead to mass unemployment with a consequent reduction in paying demand; the remedy to this is 'the government paying all individuals a set salary regardless of their means'. This would both sustain paying demand and reduce inequality.

But it is not a new idea. The same analysis and the same proposal were made sixty years ago, but in relation to 'cybernation', a word that has dropped out of common use but which means 'the control of an industrial operation or task through processing of information with a computer'. In March 1964 a group of left-wing intellectuals formed an 'Ad Hoc Committee on the Triple Revolution' and drew up a report for presentation to

President Johnson. One of these revolutions was the 'cybernation revolution'.

They argued that 'the rate of productivity increase has risen with the onset of cybernation' and that 'an industrial economic system postulated on scarcity has been unable to distribute the abundant goods and services produced by a cybernated system or potential in it'. To remedy this, they proposed:

'... it is essential to recognize that the traditional link between jobs and incomes is being broken. The economy of abundance can sustain all citizens in comfort and economic security whether or not they engage in what is commonly reckoned as work. Wealth produced by machines rather than by men is still wealth. We urge, therefore, that society, through its appropriate legal and governmental institutions, undertake an unqualified commitment to provide every individual and every family with an adequate income as a matter of right' (tinyurl.com/3362249j).

They were in effect saying that capitalism had solved the problem of producing enough for everyone but had not solved that of distributing it. Theirs was a proposal as to how capitalism could do this. Johnson of course took no notice of their report. Cybernation continued but there was no consequential massive increase in technological unemployment. So where did they go wrong?

One reason was assuming that mechanisation (of which automation, cybernation and now AI are instances) takes place as soon as it just becomes technologically possible. Under capitalism it is only applied if it is cheaper than having the work done manually or by some already established machine. This slows down technological progress.

Nor does technological progress come in all at once but spreads only slowly. Overall productivity does increase but only at a fairly modest rate (averaging around 2 percent a year). This gives the economy time to adjust. There is some technological unemployment but new employment opportunities (though not necessarily for those displaced) open up as capital accumulation proceeds.

Paying a basic income to everyone while maintaining private ownership of machines and production for profit won't work, because it would undermine both the profit motive and the wages system, two essential features of the capitalist system. The money to do this could only come from taxes and taxes ultimately fall on profits, reducing the incentive that drives capitalism. It would undermine the wages system by reducing the economic pressure on the excluded majority to work for an employer to get money to buy what they need to live.

Capitalism is inherently incapable of solving the problem of distributing enough for all.

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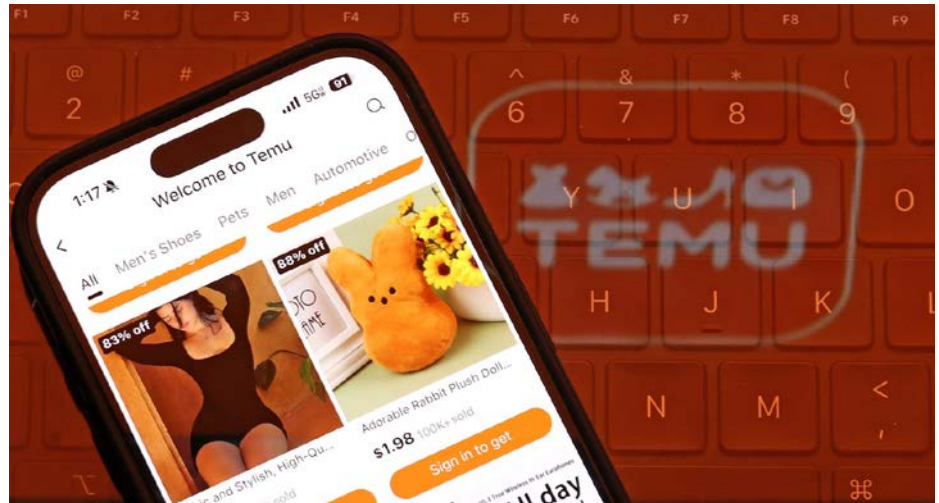
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# Temu's temerity

IN THE market of online marketplaces, Amazon and eBay's dominance has recently been challenged by young upstart Temu. Like its competitors, Temu offers a dizzyingly wide range of commodities such as clothing, household items and jewellery which can be delivered to your door in just a few clicks. Since its launch in September 2022, Temu has rapidly expanded to having half a billion users worldwide. A quarter of the British population has downloaded its app, encouraged by social media advertising and influencer recommendations.

Temu's business model is to be a platform for thousands of other companies to sell their products direct from China to customers worldwide. It doesn't have enormous depots like Amazon does, and therefore avoids associated costs, allowing it to charge less for its wares. Of course, this cheapness has come at a price. Complaints about the quality and safety of Temu's products attracted the attention of Channel 4's *Dispatches*, whose documentary aimed to tell *The Truth About Temu*. Predictably, the programme was too brief to give more than an outline of each problem, nor explain the wider context of how such companies fit with capitalism.

Reporter Ellie Flynn buys some items through Temu to check how they compare with the way they're advertised. Some products come with false claims that they have been certified as safe by recognised organisations, and a baby walker harness purchased for £2.68 snaps within seconds when tested with a bag of sand. Flynn looks at news reports of people who have lived through tragedies after ordering items from Temu: a woman whose house burnt down due to a faulty Tablet and a girl who suffered burns from glue when applying fake fingernails. Flynn arranges for toxicology tests on some items she has bought, including a 'gold' necklace priced at £2.97 which is revealed to have twice the legal amount of lead and 27 times more cadmium than permitted. She also orders saw blades and BB guns without the website checking her age. Temu replies to these concerns with corporate-speak statements that it has withdrawn some products pending checks and that it maintains 'rigorous quality controls', although insufficient safeguards appear to be in place.



Hoping that low prices are enough of a distraction from risks isn't the only approach used by Temu to manipulate us into buying. Its app is designed to entice us into spending more time, and therefore more money on the site. Flash sales, mini games, prizes and deals are jazzed up with colourful, cartoonish graphics. Emerging Technology consultant Nina Jane Patel says that the app is 'gamifying the shopping experience, but on steroids'. The aim is to make buying entertaining in a way closer to playing games and gambling than just swiping through a catalogue. Flynn arranges for her brain activity to be measured while using Temu's app, and compares these results with what's recorded while shopping from Amazon and playing a casino app. When using Temu, there were spikes of pleasure-related stimulation recorded, presumably when a particularly alluring bargain was found, a pattern with similarities to when the gambling app was being played.

This experiment shows how the capitalist system conditions our attitude to our possessions. In a society of scarcity and rationing through money, we're likely to react with a buzz of satisfaction, even if it's near-subliminal, when we acquire something, whether by shopping or gambling. Temu has exploited this learned response with lucrative results, but in a way which pushes at the boundaries of what's considered acceptable practice, at least in the UK. Iain Duncan Smith, in his role as Vice Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Gambling Related Harm has been investigating the implications of Temu being based on a gambling-like system, such as how this can lead to addictive behaviour.

In the documentary, Smith says that the personal data gathered when people buy through Temu has to be shared with the Chinese government under its National Security Law. This data would then be passed on to the state's intelligence service to sift through for anything nefariously

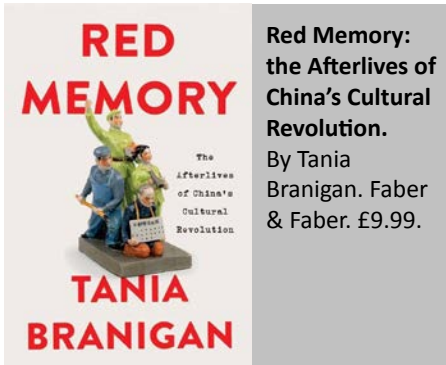
useful. Temu denies sending information to the Chinese government and says that its data policy is on its website, which Flynn can't find.

How much notice will the Chinese state take of the UK's regulations about the use of data? Similarly, the UK's health and safety laws are difficult to enforce when products are coming in from overseas. While this demonstrates how national barriers add a layer of complications to how goods are distributed in capitalism, the issue isn't only in China's awkward relationship with Western countries. Although all the vendors selling through Temu are based in China, Temu itself isn't wholly a Chinese business. Its parent company, PDD Holdings has its headquarters in South Korea and its 'legal domicile' is in Ireland. Despite any links to the Chinese state, Temu is not rooted in only one country, reminding us that its owners in the capitalist class sit above national borders.

And it's the profit-hungry motives of the capitalist class which really drive Temu's approach. Its products are sold as cheaply as possible to maximise the potential number of customers, lured in by marketing and held onto using gambling's techniques. A profit margin can be maintained if costs are kept low by cutting corners during manufacturing and distribution. The quality or suitability of the end product isn't an important consideration, nor is the waste of resources in shipping goods across continents, nor is the wellbeing of the staff involved. Temu represents some of the worst aspects of capitalist society, but this is what has made it a success, in capitalist terms: PDD Holdings is worth an estimated £170 billion to its owners and shareholders. To the rest of us, it's an example of how capitalism turns what we need and want into shoddy commodities made to enrich the elite.

**MIKE FOSTER**

## Remembering and forgetting



**Red Memory: the Afterlives of China's Cultural Revolution.**  
By Tania Branigan. Faber & Faber. £9.99.

The Cultural Revolution lasted officially from 1966 to 1976, with the first couple of years being the most violent and disruptive. Perhaps two million were killed and thirty-six million 'hounded' in some way. It is not possible to understand China today, says Branigan, without understanding the Cultural Revolution. Her concern here is not so much with what happened then as with how it is remembered (or not) nowadays.

It is generally viewed as Mao Zedong's way of destroying opposition within the Chinese 'Communist' Party, and people denounced family members and others for supposedly taking the 'capitalist road'. The first victim in Beijing was a teacher battered to death by her pupils. Her husband documented her death, but the Red Guards responsible were never charged, presumably because they had connections with powerful people. But there were factions within the Red Guards, and some were later criticised and jailed.

From 1970, many Red Guards were sent to the countryside to live and work in communes (this included the present ruler, Xi Jinping). This is probably the only part of the Cultural Revolution that is still regarded in a positive way, viewed by many as 'fresh air, comradeship and honest toil', even though many young city-dwellers died while living on communes. Mostly, though, the events have been banished from public memory, although a number of memoirs and novels dealing with it were published in the years following. But this came to an end, and it now receives little coverage in textbooks, which certainly do not refer to the murders and suicides that took place. Unlike the 1989 Tiananmen Square killings, references to the 1966–76 period are not completely taboo, but they are carefully controlled. The CCP later described the Cultural Revolution as a catastrophe.

A museum dealing with the Cultural Revolution was set up, by a wealthy private individual, in the small southern town of Shantou, though it was later shut down. Amazingly, there are a number of Cultural

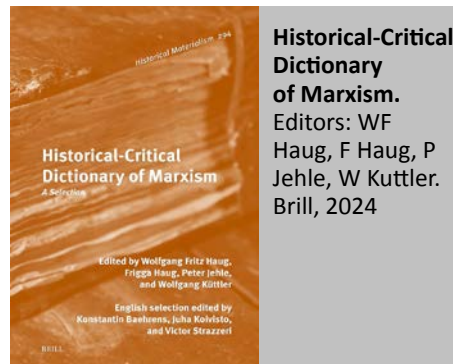
Revolution restaurants, where waitresses wear Red Guard uniforms. These, says Branigan, are 'serving up tragedy as farce'.

The days of Red Guard terror are over, but China remains a country where people have little freedom and an authoritarian regime is in charge. Xi has enormous personal power, the families of dissidents are punished and their children may be expelled from school, and the state tries to control people's beliefs and emotions. Normal discussion is not tolerated, and of course it is now far easier to gather information on people. One apparently unrepentant Maoist tells Branigan that in today's China, 'eighty-five per cent of ordinary people can't afford to buy a home or get medical care or education'.

A well-researched study of how rulers can manipulate the ruled and even impose amnesia.

**PB**

## Not concise



**Historical-Critical Dictionary of Marxism.**  
Editors: WF Haug, F Haug, P Jehle, W Kuttler.  
Brill, 2024

This is a selection of essays by a Berlin-based group of contributors, translated into English, in what the publishers claim is the Historical Materialism Book Series. It's an open-access title freely distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Licence. The start of the Foreword gives some indication of where they are coming from:

'The sudden downfall of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc after 1989, an upheaval of cataclysmic proportions, left many of us in a state of shock, disbelief, grief, relief, doubt and hope. It forced us to take stock of what was irretrievably lost, and what could and should be saved'.

The result is this book. Its scope is impressively wide-ranging but pithy it ain't. Anyone looking for concise dictionary definitions will be disappointed. Each of the 30 entries gives a detailed historical background but in crucial respects some are uncritical. Among the contributions you might not expect to find are entries on *Cooking, Hackers, Hope and Intellectuals*.

In the essay on *Communism* we are told that it is without classes, without state, without market and without contractual relations. However, the writer then poses the question:

'Which form of trans-subjective relationship can determine such a society, without opening itself to the constitutive intersubjectivity of a new kind of social contract? Communism threatens to become an activist or operaist variant of an absolute knowledge in the sense of the Hegelian objective spirit.'

Whether the writer is being deliberately obscure or bullshitting is difficult to say, but this way of writing occurs frequently in this book. We are also told that socialism is a transitional society between capitalism and communism, where 'social activity is still subject to the organisation by state planning'. Marx and Engels made no such distinction. Lenin did, though in the entry on Lenin's Marxism this is not explained. Most of the contributors to this book refer to the former USSR as an example of 'state-socialism'. There is no stand-alone entry on socialism.

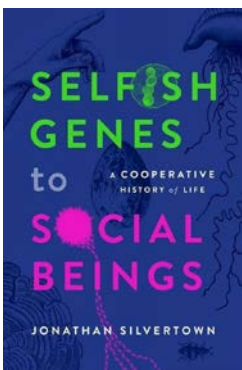
The essay on Crisis Theories is probably the best of the book. It makes the point that Marx's writings on this subject are 'somewhat disjointed or even contradictory'. For three decades Marx wrote about underconsumption theories, overproduction theories, disproportionality theories, profit-squeeze theories, and overaccumulation theories which take the 'law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall' as their starting point. The author argues that cyclical capitalist crises only emerged in the 1820s. In 1844 Engels was to state that 'periodically recurring' crises were an inherent feature of capitalism. This point is important because some influential defenders of capitalism wrote before this time. For instance, Jean-Baptiste Say's *Traité d'économie politique (A Treatise on Political Economy)*, published in 1803, declared that 'the value we can buy is equal to the value we can produce'. This 'law' is usually interpreted as saying 'supply creates its own demand'. Or, more precisely, that the normal state of an economy is equilibrium in which total demand equals total supply. This notion can still be found in some branches of capitalist economics where any imbalances are said to be 'self-clearing'. This may have been the case when Say wrote but not when capitalist production became a competitive disequilibrium.

Lenin and Leninism are treated largely uncritically and the writings of Antonio Gramsci are given reverential handling. Most of the entries, to a greater or lesser extent, are guided by his thinking. For Gramsci, 'organic intellectuals' had a key role to play in social transformation. They would provide the cultural politics that would allow the working class to establish its hegemony. In Gramsci's version of Leninism, capitalism is a system

of privilege and oppression, but he said it is ‘the duty of the “leader” to explain the source of these privileges and this oppression’ to the working class. This is the way to socialism, so it is claimed. This cult of political leadership is a line of theory and practice which stretches back through the twentieth century from Gramsci to Lenin, to Kautsky and the Second International. Its failure wherever it is tried is a vindication of any basic understanding of Marxism: that the emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself. There is no understanding of that anywhere in this book.

LEW

## Social beings



**Selfish Genes to Social Beings. A Cooperative History of Life.**  
By Jonathan Silvertown.  
Oxford University Press, 2024, 236pp.

This is a remarkable book. It attempts to cover in a couple of hundred pages the whole 4 billion year history of life on earth – so obviously not just human life. Its author, a specialist in evolutionary ecology, does his best while not shirking necessary biological technicalities, to make it comprehensible to the everyday reader, to the non-specialist. Molecules, bacteria, cells, fungi and genes and their place in and contributions to the development and ongoing-ness of life are all investigated and explained both in their simplicity and their complexity. And it wears its expert knowledge lightly, interspersing it with jokes and other flashes of humour, largely via analogies from everyday human behaviour (eg, ‘insects are airliners for microbes, which travel in the gut, and just like an airliner, parts of the vessel are more hospitable to passengers than others’, or ‘Darwin forbid that I should suggest that nature is a con artist, but who can deny that she has a wicked sense of humour?’).

The book’s main point, the conclusion drawn from its painstaking and expert scientific analysis, is expressed in its subtitle (‘A Cooperative History of Life’) ie, the idea that life, all life, is and has only ever been possible through cooperation and teamwork between its various elements, and this also applies to human society and development. The author lays in its grave, if it was not there already, ‘the stereotype

of nature red in tooth and claw’. In other words, he shows incontrovertibly that evolution is explained not by competition but by cooperation which, observed and analysed here, is ubiquitous in nature, not just in microbes and plants and animals but in humans too.

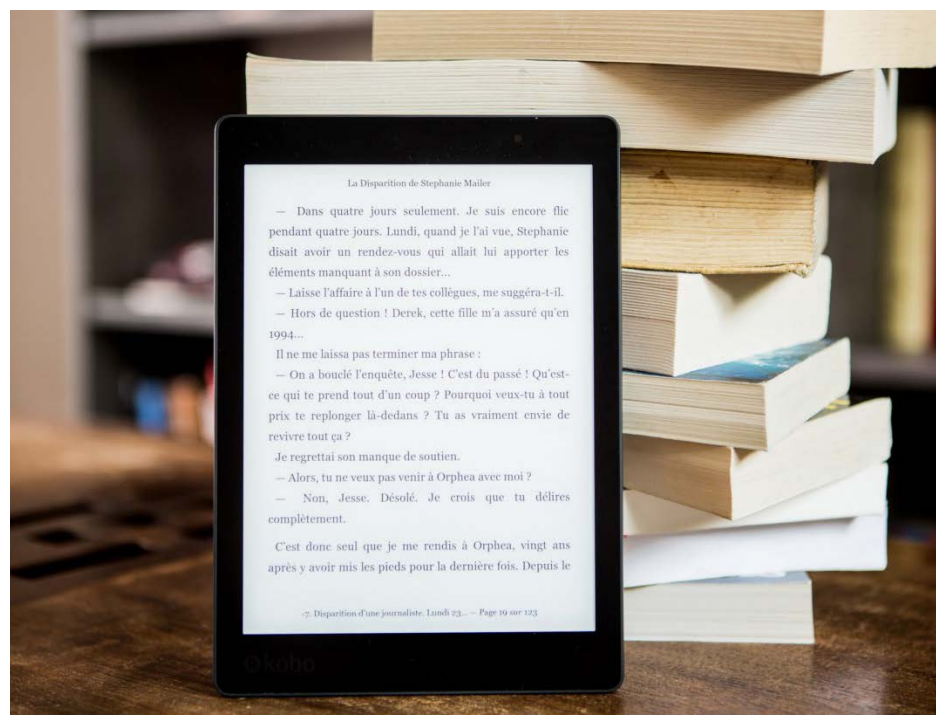
So, while largely about pre-human and non-human life, this study has important things to say about human life. It illustrates how central a role cooperation plays – and has always played – in human interaction and how this applies even in the most dire and challenging circumstances, for example wars and disasters. Underlying this is the fact that, most of the time, cooperation rather than selfishness or competition confers mutual benefit. Not of course that human beings are not capable of selfishness, going it alone or ruthless competition, and indeed it is that kind of behaviour – violence, brutality and the like- that tends to make the news. But the point made here is that cooperative behaviour is far more fundamental and deeply woven into our lives – and into all life – no matter how circumstances and the socio-economic system may militate against it. As the author puts it, ‘cooperation survives in spite of conflict’.

He is not of course alone in making arguments of this kind and is quick to acknowledge the slew of thinkers and writers who, over the last 20-30 years, have contributed to laying to rest the widely held secular version of original sin, ie, the notion of human beings as essentially wicked and Machiavellian and needing to be kept in check by a higher authority. As he puts it, ‘writers on this subject outbid each other in trying to describe just how cooperative we are,

and there is little doubt that superlatives are justified’. Among the ‘superlatives’ he quotes are ‘super-co-operators’ and ‘ultra-social species’, providing references to the works in which these appear in his notes and list of ‘further reading’. To emphasise this, he makes the point that ‘we are daily considerate towards people whom we have never seen before and may never see again’ and, if we are particularly annoyed when someone is inconsiderate, that is because ‘a norm has been broken’; thus ‘anti-social behaviour provides the exception that proves the existence of a pro-social rule.’ The other element he points to in typical human interaction is ‘having a good reputation’, seen as ‘important to attracting co-operators and acquiring the benefits, which is why we are so intensely interested in what others think of us’.

Despite his intense focus on cooperation and the natural human tendency to what he calls ‘community of interest’, the author is careful not to take up any explicit political position. It is, however, difficult not to sense that, if it were put to him, he would look favourably upon the idea of a system of voluntary cooperation in production and distribution and a wageless, moneyless society organised on the basis of from each according to ability to each according to need. After all, he does (somewhat improbably in the context) devote a short chapter of this book (‘A river of glowing light’) to the Russian anarchist and naturalist Peter Kropotkin and to his view that ‘justice for the masses could only come by abolishing the state altogether and replacing it by spontaneously organised cooperation’.

HKM



# Fascism, violence and the Left

ON SATURDAY 15th June in London the National Front held a march to a meeting to protest against an amnesty for illegal immigrants. An attack on the march was made by left-wing groups, culminating in a battle with mounted police in Red Lion Square, and a young student was killed.

The inevitable accusations of “police brutality”, the headlines and questions in Parliament ensued. All this followed the National Union of Students’ resolution to prevent “fascists” and “racists” speaking. On 18th June the International Marxist Group announced that unless a July march of Orangemen supported by National Front is banned, it will attack that too.

The policies and attitudes of the National Front are detestable. So are those of the International Marxist Group and its collaborators. The latter include the Communist spokesmen for the National Union of Students who have expounded its policy of forcible suppression, and the Labour fools in the scarcely-known but ill-named “Liberation” group.

Their assertion is that unless “fascism” is crushed we are in danger of the rise of a dictatorship party, which would suppress

democracy and persecute its opponents and those it did not favour. If that danger exists it is represented equally by the IMG, the Communist Party and other organizations of the left. What is THEIR aim? To suppress democracy and put down rivals.

Like the Communist Party when it made a policy of attacking British Union of Fascists marches in the nineteen-thirties, IMG hope to obtain support by posing as the defenders of freedom. But the CP’s policy then did not apply only to fascists. At one period Labour Party meetings were ordered to be broken up. At other times our own meetings have been shouted down and disrupted. Make no mistake about this: these protesters are not Marxists or liberationists or democrats, but power-seekers wanting to suppress whoever disagrees with them. (...)

The problem for the working class is not fascism but capitalism. Racism and other forms of oppression are symptoms of it. Socialists feel as strongly as anyone about them; and we know the solution of them to be the abolition of the capitalist system and its replacement with Socialism.

*(from Editorial, Socialist Standard, July 1974)*

## Action Replay

# Best foot forward

IN MAY the professional cyclist Lizzy Banks decided to retire from the sport, although UK Anti-Doping found that she was in no way responsible for the traces of banned substances found in a positive doping test. However, her life had been ‘torn apart’ after she was suspended for ten months, during which the prospect of a two-year ban hung over her, even though nobody claimed that she had knowingly taken the drugs. The ordeal had cost her around £40,000, quite apart from the mental stress.

Drugs are banned in sport, precisely because they work and can improve performance, sometimes markedly so. An endurance sport such as cycling is particularly prone to doping. As the Banks case shows, athletes are susceptible to being charged even though innocent. They may have to be very careful about what they order at a restaurant or coffee shop in order to avoid ingesting something that’s banned, and have to set aside an hour each day when they may be randomly tested.

And there is a backlash, with proposals for a so-called Enhanced Games to take place sometime, somewhere, with no rules against

doping in place. This is intended as a kind of rival to the Olympics, though it is not clear if it will ever get off the ground. The website enhanced.org describes it as ‘the Olympics of the future’, and claims that sport is safer without drug testing.

Of course, all sportspeople go to lengths to improve their performance, from becoming fitter to adopting better techniques of whatever kind. They may also use better equipment, but this can lead to problems too. In 2020 World

Athletics banned the Alphafly running shoes produced by Nike, which had carbon plates and sizeable midsoles and were claimed to increase speed (eg, in marathon running) by 3 percent. Athletes wearing them had dominated medal-winning at some events.

Such kit is sometimes described as ‘technological doping’, and the World Anti-Doping Agency can ban items considered to be ‘against the spirit of the sport’. For instance, a swimsuit that increased buoyancy was banned in 2009 by swimming’s governing body. Nike has since created a revised Vaporfly shoe that seems to have gained official acceptance; it costs £200 or more. Tennis rackets may be claimed to be ‘the best’, and the interpretation of this will vary depending on a player’s ability.

Sportswear companies of course compete against each other to produce and sell the most supposedly efficient shoes and so on. Competition in the capitalist marketplace echoes that in the sports arena. Sometimes the line between what is deemed acceptable and what is not can be very uncertain and maybe arbitrary.

**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.

## July 2024 EVENTS

World Socialist Movement  
online meetings

### Sundays at 19.30 (IST) (Discord)

Weekly WSP (India) meeting

### Sunday 14 July 10.00 (GMT + 1)

#### Central Online Branch Meeting

### Friday 5 July 19.30 (GMT + 1)

#### The general election

Discussion on the result

### Friday 12 July 19.30 (GMT + 1)

#### How We Live and How We Might Live: Capitalism, Poverty and Global Crises

Speaker: Richard Field

### Friday 19 July 19.30 (GMT + 1)

Subject to be announced

### Friday 26 July 19.30 (GMT + 1)

#### Did you see the news?

Discussion on recent subjects in the news

## Socialist Party Physical Meetings

### LONDON

Sunday 28 July 3pm

Where do we go from here?

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).



## Declaration of Principles

*This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.*

### Object

**The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.**

### Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e. land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class

will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

# Asylum hell

I WAS recently invited to a wedding. The couple getting married were a young man from Africa and a local girl from my own area – Francis and Sarah I'll call them. It was a modest affair – Registry Office with 20-30 people and then a buffet reception in a local community centre with a slightly larger attendance. The couple already had two children and were obviously devoted to each other. They'd met when Francis, who'd fled his country, was waiting for his umpteenth asylum application to be heard and processed. His parents had been killed in internecine fighting between religious groups in his country and, fearing for his life, he'd managed to find someone to help him escape, get to France and from there cross to the UK. All this when he was only 15 years of age. Now, on the day of his wedding, he was 31 and had only recently been granted leave to remain in this country – and that on a temporary basis. Before this he'd lived for a dozen years in limbo.

## Threat of deportation

How did I come to know him? One day, out of the blue, a friend who regularly supports asylum seekers asked me if I'd attend court with one of them the following week since she'd arranged to go on holiday. I agreed and from there I sort of got drawn in. Francis had been 'picked up' by Home Office officials when he'd gone for one of his monthly sign-ons at the local police station. From there he'd been taken to a 'safe place' with a view to deportation. In the event the judge at the court hearing found that the necessary formalities for deportation hadn't been satisfied and he was released pending further scrutiny. But he would still have to report to the local immigration office once a month. I said I would go with him.

So once a month I would accompany him to the processing place. Every time he went he was petrified he wouldn't get out but would be bundled into one of the Home Office vans waiting menacingly outside. So I made a point of dressing up (ie suit, collar and tie) reasoning that, whatever their intentions, they might have more compunction about snatching him if an older well-dressed man (who might even be his solicitor) was with him. In the event they never tried it again,

but he did continue to be put through hell, with all the long drawn out, complex applications and appeals he made being rejected. This was largely on the grounds that they didn't believe his story. And it's true that he didn't have evidence to prove it, and of course I couldn't be absolutely sure myself. But it didn't matter to me. As a socialist who wants a world without frontiers or discrimination of any sort, whatever anyone's story, I was an open borders person.

## Mind games

Every time Francis applied or appealed against a decision, he was made to travel half the length of the country – usually to the immigration office in Liverpool – to deliver his application by hand, even though that process itself took around 10 minutes. How did he survive during this time? Well, the friend of mine who had been kind enough to give him a room in her house to live in and some financial support, also got one of the local universities to accept him to follow a degree course in Business Studies free of charge. And this despite the fact that, in the beginning at least, he knew very little English. But he turned out to be a bit of a prodigy, mastering English very quickly and becoming a fluent speaker and writer. So much so that, on completing his course, he was awarded a first-class degree. And this was a key part of his next Home Office application. He hoped that they would recognise him as someone who could usefully contribute to the society he was desperate to live in. Instead he got knocked back again. Their response to his academic achievement was that he'd be able to contribute usefully to his home country when he went back there.

The rejection was nothing new. 'Mind games' was the way he described it. Yet even if he couldn't work, had no entitlement to any means of living and still faced deportation, he somehow managed to stay positive. This was rewarded when he met Sarah. She took him to live with her, they had a child and, when he applied again, he went down 'the family route'. To the surprise of us all, this time they relented and gave him short-term permission to stay. These decisions are often thought to be hit and miss, depending even on the mood of the Home Office caseworker at the time, so maybe

this time that person got up on the right side of bed? But, anyway, this was a start and meant that at least Francis had the legal right to work. And he quickly found a job – in a delivery depot on the night shift. And then he moved to working in a care home, something he liked better and found a good deal of satisfaction in. He still works there, his leave to remain having been extended – hopefully indefinitely. So given the treatment asylum seekers get and the social and political demonisation they're subject to, I think we can say he's one of the lucky ones. When I attended court with him at the beginning, I witnessed one poor individual being dragged away to be put on a plane – the anonymous fate of so many, and of some of Francis's own friends.

## Abolish borders?

So the wedding was a happy event for him – and for me – especially considering that so many desperate people leave their homes through poverty or oppression only to find that the better life they were hoping for elsewhere doesn't materialise and they may even be pushed back forcibly to the place they were escaping from. So Francis, though it may be thought that, as a care worker, he's not fulfilling his potential, has been luckier than many in a system that divides groups of people up by borders and denies them the right to movement across the planet for all that a sane socialist society would offer. But this can only come with the abolition not just of borders and states but of money, wages and the whole of the profit system.

**HOWARD MOSS**

