

THE

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# SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

## Tories sunk, Labour steams ahead



Also: Nothing to get excited about  
The Euros – how beautiful is the game?  
Where Farage won  
The Big Picture

Government by the few for the few  
How society works  
Danger: conspiracists at work  
Something to think about



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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'



# Instant recoil

OUTRAGE AND condemnation poured forth from the forked tongues of world leaders at the 'horrific and heinous' assassination attempt on Donald Trump, which left him posturing bloodily but heroically unbowed, and soon plundering his spectacular PR gift for all it was worth (oh yeah, and y'know, sorry about the dead people, whatever). Biden once again failed miserably to rise to the occasion by describing the attempt as 'not appropriate'. Smelling blood, press hacks were all too quick to drag up his embarrassing quote from only days before that it was 'time to put Trump in a bullseye'. Things just couldn't have got any worse for Geriatric Joe. After he'd staggered incoherently through a TV debate that left his supporters aghast and huge numbers of his own influencers publicly wanting him out, this rifle shot was the coup de grace. Biden duly quit, leaving lame-duck VP Kamala Harris with an impossible uphill battle and Trump the seemingly unstoppable juggernaut.

His more wild-eyed acolytes even started wearing simulated ear bandages, as Trump's bloodied ear raised him to mythic and, it would seem, unprosecutable status. They may bury him one day, but that ear belongs in a museum.

Some of the 'outrage' will have been for form's sake. A lot of people might have privately wished the attempt had succeeded. Trump is a blustering renegade who can be expected to disregard facts or reason. His comments about a possible 'third term', in defiance of the constitution, have sown plenty of disquiet. His implied warnings about withdrawing support from NATO could spark a budget-busting arms race across the world as individual states look to their defences in the face of real or perceived threats from Russia or China. In practice though, the administration may well rein in his worst excesses.

Nonetheless, he is an abject and repulsive metaphor for capitalism's screw-you ideology. Perhaps that's why so many of the rich love him, and dismiss

concerns about his MAGALomania as Trump Derangement Syndrome. They don't seem unduly worried that he might turn the powers of the state against them, if he decides he doesn't like them. He's one of them, after all. Meanwhile many poor Americans have somehow convinced themselves that this fraudulent, conceited, misogynistic man-baby is their best friend. Just like turkeys welcoming Thanksgiving.

The shooter, barely out of his teens and apparently a young conservative, tragically wasted his life for another delusion. Politicians, even populist demagogic ones like Trump, can't change how capitalism fundamentally works, so shooting him wouldn't make any difference. That's thinking with the heart, not the head. He would just be replaced by someone else who, if not necessarily as personally repellent, would nonetheless still carry out the repellent work of managing the system in the interest of the rich, and entirely at the expense of the poor and the planet. And besides, socialists could never condone political murder. There really is only one solution to all this. If the collective misery of the 99 percent is ever to end, capitalism itself needs putting down.

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# Lions and lionesses

HIGH DRAMA last month as the England team lost in the European Championship football final, and the press agonised about ‘heartbreak’ and ‘devastation’ amid photo spreads of downcast faces and slumped shoulders. ‘Everyone was truly gutted’, said one player. Well, perhaps gutted is the wrong word. Gutted is being made redundant, or homeless, or being turned down for an operation, or having to face a Job Centre inquisition or go to a food bank three times a week. These affable young men get paid around £200,000 a week, while their manager earns £5m a year. The poor lambs will no doubt get over their melancholy.

The press were inconsolable though. How much longer does England have to wait for a Euro or World Cup title, they sobbed. It’s been 58 years!

But wait, what about when England won the European Championship in 2022? Don’t the women count? Oh dear, this is awkward. The women’s game is not the same, you see. There are even those who mutter that women don’t really play football, they play *at* football. Perhaps those critics don’t realise that women’s football used to be hugely popular and drawing crowds of 50,000 until it was summarily banned by the all-male FA in 1921, supposedly for being too unladylike, but really for eating into the FA’s profits ([tinyurl.com/ycxh4e55](https://tinyurl.com/ycxh4e55)). Even today there’s a built-in bias. At a UK average height of 5’3”, women have to play on the same standard pitches with the same goalmouths as average 5’9” men, meaning that they have to work harder than men to play the same game ([tinyurl.com/mrxvxyzw](https://tinyurl.com/mrxvxyzw)).

As a reminder, England’s women managed to do what its ‘young lions’ couldn’t do in two generations, beating Germany to the title in front of a mixed stadium crowd of 87,000 ecstatic, flag-waving patriotic loonies. Now there’s nothing but silence and collective amnesia. 58 years, wails the press. The women ‘lionesses’ who held up the trophy to that deafening applause must view all this in bafflement. “Er, hello... hello?”

But seriously, some women have bigger things to worry about than equality on the pitch, like getting a post-footy kicking from violent spouses. A 2013 Women’s Aid survey showed a rise of 38 percent in domestic violence incidents when England lost a major game. And, tragic but true, they’re not even safe when the match goes the other way. A 2022 report from the Warwick Business School notes a 47



percent increase in domestic violence whenever England *wins* a World Cup or Euro match.

The *Independent* quotes one woman: ‘So now I don’t follow any football, my fiancé is not into football and if I’m being honest I don’t think I ever would have got with somebody who had a big interest in football because it’s just left me scarred and for me it was just filled with fear, and fear of what mood he was going to come home in, and just walking on eggshells.’ To underline the message, Women’s Aid took the Baddiel and Skinner *Three Lions* song tag ‘Football’s coming home’ and turned it into the darkly sinister ‘He’s coming home’ ([tinyurl.com/4xh6sev6](https://tinyurl.com/4xh6sev6)).

Women aren’t the only ones who need fear the outcome of football matches. Many sports fans, watching the England side’s successful five-out-of-five spot kicks against Switzerland in the quarter-final penalty shootout, will have remembered the sickening racism following the failure of three players (all of them black) to score in a similar shootout against Italy in 2021. The three players endured hideous online abuse that resulted in a police investigation and 11 arrests. Tory politicians including the Home Secretary Priti Patel duly weighed in with official condemnation, after having previously scoffed at the England team ‘taking the knee’ in support of Black Lives Matter, describing the action as wokism and ‘gesture politics’. Justifiably incensed, footballer Tyrone Mings scored a sizzling counter-strike on Twitter: ‘You don’t get to stoke the fire at the beginning of the tournament by labelling our anti-racism message as ‘Gesture Politics’ and then pretend to be disgusted when the very thing we’re campaigning against, happens’ ([tinyurl.com/4f2vswu7](https://tinyurl.com/4f2vswu7)).

And indeed it did happen. A study by a number of universities showed a 30 percent rise in racial hate crimes in London

in the weeks following that match. The researchers were interested to know if such ‘trigger events’ caused increased incidents generally, or in a more uneven and localised way. In fact the increases were seen most in boroughs already known for such violence: ‘This supports the assumption that trigger events do not have a homogenous effect on societies, but rather reinforce existing attitudes.’ Well no surprise there. Guns only shoot people if they’re already loaded. One scrap of positive news is that the reverse might have some effect too: ‘The Egyptian-born, Muslim striker “Mo” Salah joined Liverpool FC in 2017, which, according to a different study, led to a significant decrease in Islamophobic violence and attitudes in the city’ ([tinyurl.com/y248y54t](https://tinyurl.com/y248y54t)).

People who follow sport but not politics might believe the one has nothing to do with the other. But sport is political, and politics is often sport. Many stayed up late, or indeed all night, to watch the 4 July general election results come in, as the micro-dramas including the toppling of ‘big beasts’ made for compulsive viewing. Arguably Britain’s first-pass-the-post electoral system is better understood as a championship sporting event than as any serious and legitimate exercise in democracy. And just like a sport, everyone knows it makes no real difference who wins. Monday morning, it’s back to the same old slog.

And that slog is capitalism, the enslavement of the vast majority by a tiny bunch of super-rich crooks. There’s a way to beat that rigged game, but only if the world’s disempowered workers stop growling at each other, and start working as a team with a serious common goal. Let the lions and lionesses come together. Their roar would shake the world.

**PJS**



# Nothing to get excited about

REPORTING THE result of last month's general election, Reuters said 'Keir Starmer returned the Labour Party to power'. 'Power' is not the right word as it suggests that being the government gives its members more control than they actually have and in fact generally believe they have. It suggests that they have the power to control the economy and make it work as they want. However, the capitalist economic system operates according to economic laws which are beyond the control of governments, however resolute or well-intentioned those who compose them may be.

Of course, governments are not completely powerless. There are some things they can do. They control the armed forces and other means of coercion. On the economic field they can control the issue of the currency, levy taxes, grant subsidies and impose tariffs. But they do not control and cannot control the way the economy works. They can pass laws and draw up plans about economic matters, but this does not mean that these laws and plans can be implemented as envisaged nor, if they are, that they will have the

intended effect. Capitalism is an economic system that operates according to its own economic laws which governments ignore at their peril.

These economic laws can be summed up as:

- the capitalist economy is an integrated world economy; there is no 'British economy' or 'German economy' or even 'American economy'. What exists is a world capitalist economy which dominates all countries.
- since government activity does not produce any wealth, all the resources consumed by governments, whether for 'defence' or social reforms, have to come from the surplus over costs created in the productive sector of the economy, whether private or state.
- the private sector is motivated by the search for profits since these are the source of funds which private enterprises need to continue productive activity; in fact, making a profit is the only reason why this sector produces anything.

Given this, it is more accurate to say that when a party wins an election and gets to form the government what happens is

that they come into office. Members of their party replace as ministers members of the outgoing party. It's a replacement of decision-making personnel, but personnel without the power to make the economy work otherwise than it does.

It would be a rhetorical flourish to describe them as office clerks since they do have more decision-making power than that. A better term would be that are the middle management of the world capitalist economic system. Like middle managers they are given a remit from above with some leeway as to how to implement it. In the case of governments, the remit is to apply the economic laws of capitalism that dictate that priority must be given to profits and conditions for profit-making. Although the economic laws of capitalism are impersonal they are not self-enforcing but require personnel to enforce them, and this is what governments are alongside the executives of business enterprises.

All that happened on 4-5th July was a change of middle management. Nothing to get excited about.

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## The Euros – how beautiful is the game?

MANY PEOPLE in England will have been disappointed that England didn't win their final. Yet records were broken, for example the maximum number ever of TV viewers for a football match, tens of thousands of people travelling abroad not to see a match live but to be in the country where it was taking place. There was also an outpouring of patriotism, jingoism, nationalism – call it what you like – probably never before witnessed over a sports event. But that's what the system we live under is good at – distractions from the daily grind offering momentary thrills to mitigate the condition of powerlessness that most of us experience in our daily lives. Supporting a team, especially if it's a winning one, may manifest itself, at least momentarily, as a kind of power- even if some would label it bread and circuses.

But what is that powerlessness of our daily lives? Largely it's the necessity we are under to sell our energies to an employer for a wage or salary day in day out whether we get satisfaction or fulfilment from that activity or not. We ignore that at the risk of dire poverty or destitution. We spend most of our lives, as one commentator has put it,

'under conditions of duress and unfreedom'. The exhilaration we may feel in supporting a sports team and witnessing it play – and hopefully succeed- in an event such as the Euros serves as a kind of poor substitute for the lack of opportunity to express our own talents freely in our daily lives.

Not of course that most people perceive the paid work they are forced to do for a living as a form of subservience or oppression, so docile have they been made by the conditioning process of the society they have grown up in. Part of this conditioning is the stress put on the need to regard as special and superior the country they happen to have been born into – so-called patriotism. This can even mean that, in the event of a conflict between the leaders of their country and the leaders of another, many people are willing to fight and even lay down their lives for the abstraction of patriotism.

Of course supporting your 'national' team is far from fighting a real war or laying down your life. In fact for many it's a genuinely enjoyable experience. But the paroxysm of 'national pride' that an occasion such as the European Football Championship

elicits and, last month, was encouraged at all levels is also a mirror of the unthinking worship of the idea of differences and divisions between men and women living in different parts of the planet –the anti-human mentality of better and worse, of winners and losers. Nothing could be more antithetical than that to the socialist pursuit of unity between peoples and the establishment of a stateless, borderless world of free access to all goods and services. In such a world, we will all be autonomous individuals pursuing our own goals and interests but at the same time exhibiting social reciprocity in all areas. In such conditions, apart from cooperating in work and production, we may also enjoy taking part in sport or watching and appreciating the skilful sporting activities of others but we will do this in a socially healthy way. It will no longer take the current grotesque form of fanatical fandom, of the passing thrill offered by a 'hyped-up' form of mass entertainment billed as a life-shattering event but in reality little more than a brief distraction from the daily grind of life under the buying and selling system that is capitalism.

# Some reformists never learn

WHEN, AFTER losing the European elections to the National Rally (formerly the Front National), Macron called a snap election, the politicians regrouped to contest it. On the left, the hard-left breakaway from the 'Parti Socialiste' France Unbowed, the Communist Party, the Greens and the PS itself formed a New Popular Front (NFP) which emerged as the largest group in the National Assembly.

In an article in the *Guardian* (2 July), Julia Cagé and Thomas Piketty (yes, him) described its economic policy and the logic behind it. They wrote of its: 'ambitious policies to improve the purchasing power of poor and lower-middle-class people. These reforms include a substantial increase in the minimum wage, wages indexed to prices and free school lunches. Most importantly the NFP wants to prioritise investment in the future by increasing public spending on infrastructure – throughout the country, including in isolated rural areas – as well as in health, education and research' ([tinyurl.com/ywkv76](https://tinyurl.com/ywkv76)).

The two are co-authors of a book about elections in France since 1789 in which they concluded that it was people in small towns and rural areas that tended to vote far-right 'first and foremost because of socio-economic concerns: they lack purchasing power, they suffer most from the lack of investment

in public infrastructure', adding 'and they feel that they have been abandoned by governments of all stripes in recent decades'. Hence the rise of the far-right.

This seems plausible enough; it's unlikely to be just because they want to kick immigrants out or stop more coming in (that's only the false solution proposed by the far-right). Cagé and Piketty reckon that, if the parties of the left increase purchasing power and spending on public infrastructure they can win people away from the ex-Front National.

An increase in people's purchasing power through higher and indexed wages and benefits and more government spending on public services and amenities is all very well but where is the money to come from? Ultimately, there is only one source: the profits of business enterprises. But the pursuit of profits is what drives the capitalist economy and if you tax them too much to redistribute income to the 'poor and lower-middle-class' or to pay for first class health care and education that will provoke an economic slowdown, making this unsustainable. That's the way capitalism works and can only work: by giving priority to profits over satisfying people's needs. Despite the political slogan, profits cannot be put before people.

The last time this was tried in France was in 1981 after Mitterrand was elected President and a government including the Communist Party came into office. In June the new government increased people's purchasing power by putting up the minimum wage, pensions, family allowances and housing benefit but the result was a disastrous failure compared to which what happened under Truss was a storm in a teacup.

The increase in benefits had been paid for by recourse to the printing press; as a result, the internal price level in France got out of line with the international level. The franc was devalued in October and again in June 1982. By this time, the government had learned the lesson that if you are in office under capitalism you must respect its economic laws, and rowed back on its reforms, giving priority instead to trying to revive the profits of business enterprises and adopting a policy of 'rigueur' regarding wages and benefits. In March 1983 the franc had to be devalued for a third time.

While, to judge by the programme of the NFP, reformists in France have not learned by their previous failures to improve people's lives by increasing their purchasing power, reformists in Britain have. The new Chancellor of the Exchequer here is skipping trying to do this and going straight to the 'rigueur' stage, called here fiscal responsibility.

**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.**



**Friday 16th August:**

**19.15–20.45:** Keith Graham on *Political Consciousness: What Can We Learn From Marx?*

**Saturday 17th August:**

**10.00–11.30:** Brian Gardner on *'They Are Many, We Are Few': The Political Consciousness Of The Capitalist Class?*

**14.00–15.30:** Paddy Shannon on *Political Consciousness - Could GenZ Be Onto Something?*

**19.15–20.45:** Cat Ryland gives *An Introduction To Communist Future*

**Sunday 18th August:**

**10.00–11.30:** Darren Poynton on *Socialist Consciousness, Solidarity And Democratic Virtues*

In-person bookings have closed, but talks will be streamed through Zoom: [zoom.us/j/7421974305](https://zoom.us/j/7421974305)

For more details about the sessions, visit [worldsocialism.org/spgb/summer-school-2024/](https://worldsocialism.org/spgb/summer-school-2024/).

# Halo Halo

AS HORACE Walpole said, 'This world is a comedy to those that think, a tragedy to those that feel.' Rationalists find plenty within religion as a whole to occasion mirth, with some individual ones especially capable of producing belly laughs. But there are times when it's very hard to echo Eric Idle's exhortation at the end of *Life of Brian* to always look on the bright side of life.

Michael Palin said this about the 1979 television debate about the controversial film: 'He (Bishop of Southwark) began, with notes carefully hidden in his crotch, tucked down well out of camera range, to give a short sermon, addressed not to John or myself but to the audience... He accused us of making a mockery of the work of Mother Teresa, of being undergraduate and mentally unstable. He made these remarks with all the smug and patronising paraphernalia of the gallery-player, who believes that the audience will see he is right, because he is a bishop and we're not.'

American bible-bashers continue to press for their fantasies to be imposed upon children within public schools:

'At a curriculum committee meeting school board Director Jordan Blomgren requested that "both sides" should be presented to students about evolution and climate change, stunning onlookers. 'My question always comes down to the content,' said Blomgren, who is also a teacher. 'Like, you know [the] Earth's been around for billions of years. Are you talking about both creation and evolution, like just having both... making sure that we're showing both sides.' A mother said "My kids are heavy into STEM, I don't want them to be ill-prepared because Jordan wants to take up space complaining about fossils. I really don't want my kids to be taught creationism. That's for a Christian school, not a public school'" (Buckscountybeacon.com 5 June).

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They don't give up, do they? Oklahoma's

top education official has ordered all public schools in the state to teach the Bible and the Ten Commandments to their students, a move that critics claim violates the US Constitution: 'He called the Bible "one of the most foundational documents used for the Constitution and the birth" of the United States. It is a necessary "historical document to teach our kids about the history of this country, to have a complete understanding of Western civilization, to have an understanding of the basis of our legal system". Every classroom in Oklahoma from grades five to 12 must have a Bible, and all teachers must teach from the Bible in the classroom.'

'Requiring a Bible in every classroom does not improve Oklahoma's ranking of 49th in education,' State Representative Mickey Dollens said in a statement. 'The state superintendent should focus on educating students, not evangelizing them.'

'The Oklahoma directive comes a week after the governor of Louisiana signed a law ordering all public schools to display the Ten Commandments in classrooms.'

It's August. Time to start buying those Christfest baubles now appearing in a store near you.

DC

# Tiny tips

The richest 1% of Norwegians held 22% of net wealth in 2022, according to Statistics Norway. That compares with 34% in the US, 30% in Germany and 21% in the UK (**Yahoo, [tinyurl.com/37nhayk2](https://tinyurl.com/37nhayk2)**).

Senior Chinese leaders... are engaged in corruption and hiding hundreds of millions of dollars in wealth by using relatives to disguise their activities, according to a report by the Congressional Research Service. By 2012, Mr. Xi had amassed at least \$376 million in company investments, an indirect 18% stake in a rare-earth mineral company worth more than \$311 million, and \$20.2 million holdings in a technology company, according to a CRS report based on published information from news outlets about the hidden wealth (**The Washington Times, [tinyurl.com/2p833cfp](https://tinyurl.com/2p833cfp)**).

Among the 2,300 sewer cleaners under the employment of the KWSC, to do manual scavenging to unclog the drains, he claims

to have taught Adil the dos and don'ts of diving into the slush. 'You have to be smart to outdo death, which is our companion as we go down,' he says. It is not the army of cockroaches and the stink that greets you when you open the manhole lid to get in, or the rats swimming in filthy water, but the blades and used syringes floating that are a cause for concern for many as they go down to bring up the rocks and the buckets of filthy silt (**IPS, [tinyurl.com/27wmk6yt](https://tinyurl.com/27wmk6yt)**).

Umm Shadi, 50, called for Hamas to 'end the war immediately without seeking to control and rule Gaza'. 'What have we gained from this war except killing, destruction, extermination and starvation?' she asked. 'Every day the war on Gaza increases, our pain and the pain of the people increases. What is Hamas waiting for?' (**Yahoo, [tinyurl.com/3ze25xkp](https://tinyurl.com/3ze25xkp)**).

The military leader of Hamas has said he believes he has gained the upper hand over

Israel and that the spiralling civilian death toll in Gaza would work in the militant group's favor, according to a report by the Wall Street Journal, citing leaked messages the newspaper said it had seen. 'We have the Israelis right where we want them,' Yahya Sinwar told other Hamas leaders recently, according to one of the messages... In another, Sinwar is said to have described civilian deaths as 'necessary sacrifices' while citing past independence-related conflicts in countries like Algeria

(**Yahoo, [tinyurl.com/y663cdt9](https://tinyurl.com/y663cdt9)**).

Graham stressed that helping Ukraine in its fight against Russia could also have strategic economic benefits for the U.S. and Western countries. 'They're sitting on \$10-12 trillion of critical minerals in Ukraine. They could be the richest country in all of Europe. We don't want to give that money and assets to Putin to share with China,' he told Brennan on Sunday. 'If we help Ukraine now, they could become the best business partner we ever dreamed of. They're sitting on a goal mine. To give Putin \$10-12 trillion that he will share with China is ridiculous'

(**Newsweek, [tinyurl.com/5e78zhpc](https://tinyurl.com/5e78zhpc)**).

*(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.

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# The politics of envy

IN CAPITALISM, the basic marker or criterion of status is material wealth. The more wealth you can accumulate and display, relative to your peers, the more status you attract. The same goes for them. We are talking, in other words, of a zero-sum game. Crudely speaking, if Jane's accumulated material wealth increases and overtakes John's, then her status in the eyes of society will rise while his will fall.

In principle, as long as there is somebody wealthier than you in our present-day society, the motivation to accumulate more wealth, and hence more status, remains. This is not quite as far-fetched as it might seem. Even among the super-rich who have absolutely no reason to want for anything, 'making comparisons' can become an all-consuming obsession.

George Monbiot refers to one of their ilk - a Saudi prince by the name of Alwaleed - who was the subject of an article published by *Forbes* magazine in March 2013. Let Monbiot's words speak for themselves:

'According to one of the prince's former employees, the *Forbes* global rich list "is how he wants the world to judge his success or his stature." The result is "a quarter-century of intermittent lobbying, cajoling and threatening when it comes to his net worth listing." In 2006, the researcher responsible for calculating his wealth writes, "when *Forbes* estimated that the prince was actually worth \$7 billion less than he said he was, he called me at home the day after the list was released, sounding nearly in tears. What do you want?" he pleaded, offering up his private banker in Switzerland. "Tell me what you need"' (*Guardian*, 6 May 2013).

This is someone who, as Monbiot points out, owned (at that time) a 747 plane with its own specially installed throne to sit on, a palace with 420 rooms, a private amusement park and zoo and, according to Alwaleed himself, \$700 million worth of jewellery and yet, still, he was apparently not satisfied!

It would seem, then, that the title of Monbiot's article is entirely apt in this case: 'Why the politics of envy are keenest among the very rich'. Indeed. Not that this is going to deter those who regard any criticism of the 'very rich' as a class as tantamount to the 'politics of envy'. That's rich, as one might say, coming from these staunch defenders of the very rich when it is precisely 'envy' that lubricates the very system of status acquisition under capitalism. They don't



mind endorsing capitalism but, seemingly, do mind when it is spelt out to them what exactly this entails.

In any case, perhaps those who accuse others of engaging in the 'politics of envy' regarding the super-rich are somewhat off base in their criticism. As the 18th century Scottish Enlightenment philosopher David Hume [inset] shrewdly noted in his *Treatise on Human Nature*, envy tends to be quite selective as an emotional response. It is one that is likely to become more intense, the more socially proximate the object of one's envy:

'It is not a great disproportion between ourselves and others which produces envy, but on the contrary, a proximity. A common soldier bears no envy for his general compared to what he will feel for his sergeant or corporal; nor does an eminent writer meet with as much jealousy in common hackney scribblers, as in authors that more nearly approach him. A great disproportion cuts off the relation, and either keeps us from comparing ourselves with what is remote from us or diminishes the effects of the comparison'.

Hume had a point. Envy is stimulated to the extent that we believe it realistically possible to match or surpass, in terms of our material possessions, the person with whom we compare ourselves. We tend not to feel particularly envious of the multi-millionaire because we do not seriously

envisage ourselves ever enjoying the lifestyle of such an individual. So we evict the very thought of it from our minds or, at least, recognise it for the mere idle reverie it is. However, we may very well be envious of our neighbour with his gleaming new car provocatively parked outside our front door. It somehow contrives to make us feel a little more inferior - a little devalued. The point is that we feel devalued only because we have bought into a value system that judges people in terms of their material wealth.

If envy is the spur to enhancing our social standing, it also an emotion that helps to reproduce the kind of society that typically makes such judgements. For that reason alone, envy is precisely not the sentiment of those who would want to fundamentally change the kind of society we live in. Obsessively aspiring to become a wealthy capitalist is probably not going to be very conducive to wanting to get rid of capitalism.

What envy does is to both reinforce, and reflect, the extremely unequal distribution of wealth and income that is to be found in society today - such inequalities being considered indispensable to the system of money incentives upon which this society depends.

**ROBIN COX**

# Where Farage won

A LEPROUS body rots not from the head but from the extremities: this applies also to our diseased body politic. Starved of the lifeblood of economic activity, England's forgotten peripheral towns have become necrotic tissue, an economically irrelevant expulsion of the disabled, the unemployed, the retired, along with a sufficient garrison of minimum-wage staff to run the tills and dole counters and care homes: the underpaid and the undermourned.

## Welcome to Clacton

A decision was made, long ago, to arrange matters in this way, first under Thatcher and then under New Labour and subsequent governments. The focus would be the City, and such industries that were most profitable to export such as the arms trade, and the rest of the nation's economy that was ill-served by this focus would be maintained by subsidy and the dole, paid with largesse from profits. Then once this policy was in place the other shoe dropped and the subsidy was withdrawn. A wildly unequal society emerged where a regional working class possessing only the ability to labour found no one who would buy, and no one who would make up the difference. There is a profitable economic axis from London to Liverpool with industry either side of the line: agricultural labour in the shires; but at the periphery there is despair brought and compounded by the arrival of uneconomic migrants who can no longer afford to live alongside those who still have wages.

These inward migrants of course blame immigrants of a darker hue for their troubles. A classic case of a post-hoc argument, whereby cheap labour arriving in the economic centres coinciding with the displacement of English workers is treated as a cause. And there is a certain reason: arriving workers are simply better skilled and less organised, commanding lower wages and conditions for a given productivity. Instead of insisting on integrating new arrivals, as workers in the core are wont to do, they blame them for their troubles. Which is why they can be found abusing lifeboat crews and hapless seaborne migrants, resisting the immigrant wave across the South Coast like so many latter-day Cnuts.

This is the classic view, but there are significant mitigations. For example, during the Corbyn years the Clacton Labour branch as least trebled in size, hardly a



sign of universal right-wing opinion. In local politics, Clacton has one Labour ward, largely of local people who work in the town. Jaywick, which one would think the most viscerally aggrieved, returned two independents, at least one of which is of a left-Labour bent and a former Labour councillor. The trend for much of the town, however, is for Conservative councillors in the business town wards but pro-Brexit independents dominating most of the just-scraping-by residential areas of the town, who are by and large expelled Conservatives. Further out, like some political chromatography experiment, the countryside is Tory, the villages are LibDem, and neighbouring Harwich and Dovercourt, being a working town, is pretty solidly Labour. So there's nothing in the sea air that necessarily drives the Reform/UKIP vote. Inland, political views normalise. And where there is local economic activity, politics arguably fall almost as Left as one can expect south of the Wash. Brexit and anti-immigrant politics express themselves partially across the dispossessed, but mainly the displaced from London, and mainly east London, who are arguably the plague carriers, self-employed traders such as plumbers but also East End retirees migrating down the A12 corridor, bringing the knuckle-dragging Alf Garnet politics of the I'm-all-right-Jack boomer generation. Meanwhile the spouses of such workers are under pressure to, well, espouse their spouses' views for the sake of a quiet life.

## Electoral evidence

This picture tends to be supported by the electoral evidence. It is hard to recall, fifteen years on, how significant the BNP was in the 2010 general election: the year the Clacton constituency was formed, now separated from the more industrial (and Labour) Harwich. They received 4.6 percent in Clacton, but in the East End of London Nick Griffin achieved a record 14.6 percent of the Barking vote. Dagenham and Rainham was their second most successful at 11.2 percent; Thurrock at 7.9 percent, Upminster at 6.4 percent, Basildon 5.6 percent, Romford at 5.2 percent, all kept their deposits. The BNP imploded after 2010, but the hate they had inhabited and encouraged lingered, and as the years passed this rough beast shuffled along the road towards Clacton, waiting to be reborn.

If we look at the Clacton general election results we find the following. In 2010 the Tories won 53 percent, Labour 25 percent, LibDem 12.9 percent, BNP 4.6 percent, and 'Tendring First' (a grouping expelled from the Conservatives) 2.5 percent. In 2014 the Conservative MP, Douglas Carswell, switched to UKIP and forced a by-election which he won with 59.7 percent, with Conservative Giles Watling on 24.6, and Labour with 11.2 percent. The LibDems had collapsed to 1.3 percent. In 2015 Carswell kept the seat for UKIP with 44.4 percent as opposed to 36.7 percent for the Conservative candidate. In 2017 Carswell



didn't stand, Watling secured 61.2 percent for the Conservatives, but Labour got 25.2 percent with a local (now Green) Left candidate, and UKIP trailed at 7.6 percent with a new candidate. In 2019 Watling gained 72.3 percent of the vote, Labour 15.5 percent under a centre-right unknown (the initial Left candidate was smeared as an antisemite and replaced by head office), the LibDems won 5.8 percent, the Greens creeping up on 2.8 percent. Which brings us to the current 2024 result with Farage on 46.2 percent for Reform, Watling for the Conservatives on 27.9 percent, a foisted (but later withdrawn for apparently being too charismatic!) Labour candidate on 16.2 percent, and the LibDems on 4.4 percent and Greens on 4.2 percent. There was an additional 1 percent for two disgruntled UKIPpers standing as independents: one had been the Reform candidate before Farage thrust him aside.

So, wading through the data, the right-wing vote in Clacton (Con, UKIP, Reform, BNP, Independent) was 61 percent in 2010 but has been steady at about 75 percent since. There was a pulse of personal and UKIP support in 2014 and 2015 for Carswell's candidacy which may have helped drive further into the rump vote for

a few extra percent. 2017 was left-Labour's year under Corbyn, gaining fully 10 percent from the Conservative vote, but sinking back later to an average 15 percent. And in 2024 the right-wing vote was arguably 'average' for the seat. Farage didn't take votes off Labour, LibDem or Green (who increased their vote by 50 percent with left-Labour votes), he simply split the Conservative vote, doing much worse than Carswell did for UKIP a decade ago. Both right and left have radicalised, the right to Reform and the left to the Greens, while a 10 percent vote, rootless since the LibDem's self-immolation, has swung to Carswell, to Corbyn, and now straddles LibDem and Green.

## How did he do it?

As a Clacton resident, I can speak to how the trick was done. Money. They rented prime town space for a campaign office, just round the corner from the Wetherspoons pub. There were the Reform leaflets. Then there were several 'personal communications' from supposed private citizens, like a doctor begging us to vote Reform to save the NHS. As well as enormous and copious signage, there were A-frame flatbed lorries with mobile signs,

at least one with a massive TV display, and also parked on prominent bridges, across not just the constituency but the surrounding council area. And of course the celebrity factor of Farage's name. And, as Channel 4 discovered, racists from London come down to spread their filth door to door.

In conclusion, there hasn't been a shift to the right. There has been a shift rightwards within the right (and, within the left, leftwards), while 10 percent of voters will vote for anything that looks fresh. While Thatcher defeated the National Front by stealing their policies, so the far right has metastasised within the Conservatives and Farage is holding what now amounts to an internal debate. But whereas many Northern towns can see the same right-wing voters emerge in the same place decades later, London has flung its white, politically dispossessed to the coastal periphery. In the end, Clacton's political change may depend on probate as a resentful post-war generation, that watched the Empire fall and colonials progress to equals, and then shuffled to the coast to retire, shuffles a little further off.

**CLACTONIAN**



Credit: Lucy North/PA



# The Big Picture



Credit: Jeff Moore/PA

I HAVE a few friends who are politically active. One with the Green Party, another for Labour. A third is/was in the Jeremy Corbyn camp, though comes from a Trotskyist background. All three agreed the priority in the election was to get the Tories out.

I must confess to an emotional sympathy with this sentiment. The Tories seem to embody the worst political features of selfishness, virulent nationalism and an absence of empathy for the plight of others. Their appeal is to encourage such in others. However, the socialist knows no matter how accurate this view may be, the alternatives cannot offer policies of significant difference. They may well have varied and more humanely positive motives, but the practical outcomes of their governance would be so similar to a Tory administration as to be virtually indistinguishable.

This is because at root the political

problem was not the Conservative Party, no matter how unpleasant it may be, but the economic system that drives all government policy, whatever party label it is enacted under, capitalism.

## Billions of pounds required

It was instructive listening not to what the parties claim to be offering the electorate, but the advocates for various groups and sections of society. Child care, for instance, the expense or lack of it, inhibiting family incomes and, often, women's career opportunities. Billions of pounds required.

Care for the elderly presents increased life expectancy as an ever burgeoning financial burden society must find billions for.

The National Health Service is unable to meet the demands made upon it. People

in long term pain or dying prematurely for want of appointments, treatment and operations. Hospitals literally crumbling. Another pot of gold required.

Many incomes are below what workers and their families require simply to sustain themselves. Men and women often doing two, sometimes more, jobs and still not having enough money to afford rent, never mind buy, a home, or put adequate food on the table. Food banks and income credits/benefits required: more billions of pounds.

The mantra of the anti-Tory parties was that all this, and more, was the result of 14 years of Conservative government. Which surely poses a question. Why would they intentionally govern to deprive the vast majority of what they need?

Perhaps it is because they are the nasty party. Yet, if this was the case they would be foolishly prioritising their visceral nastiness at the expense of their hold on government. Surely, if they could simply arrange the

money transfers to meet all such urgent needs they'd garner the votes of the electorate for the foreseeable future.

The argument may well be made that the Conservative Party is in such collusion with the capitalists their priority is to protect capitalism's profit-making at the expense of the workers, the great majority. This analysis is correct, as far as it goes.

Unfortunately, the Tory motivation, in this respect, is not unique to them, but fundamental to whichever party assumes government responsibilities. It is instructive to consider what occurred when a Tory administration acted against the interests of capital.

No one could accuse Liz Truss as being anything other than an archetypal Tory, other than she has blonde hair rather than a blue rinse. Yet her premiership was brief and quickly ended not via the ballot box, but the actions of the market. The leader of the democratically elected government was brought down because she was perceived to be a threat to the financial structure of capitalism. No secret cabal required, no illicit meeting of shadowy figures acting on behalf of capital. Merely the mechanisms of the market were enough to be self-protecting and dispense with the prime minister. What price democracy?

All this will have been, and still is, perfectly obvious to the now Prime Minister and his Chancellor of the Exchequer even when they saw themselves as the government in waiting. The Labour Party campaign in this general election was founded on protestations of fiscal probity.

It's time for a change, but without spending more. Or at least no increase in taxation. As taxation is the only source of government income, other than borrowing which is also being disavowed, the financial requirements just to sustain society, set out above, cannot be met.

## Not created by governments

Unless, of course, there is the sharp upturn in the country's economy that is being cited as a potential wellspring for meeting the increased and increasing demands. There is historical precedent. The post-Second World War boom did enable an expansion of government spending on social programmes by Labour and Conservative administrations.

But that financial boost was not created by governments. The recovery from the destruction of the war created the possibilities for capitalism to exploit and create the wealth. It was starting from the very low baseline of the economic depression preceding the war and ended rather abruptly in the 1970s.

Since when, governments have largely been managing greatly reduced financial resources. The Thatcher years saw manufacturing subordinated to finance capitalism and the supposed free market. That baton was then handed on, via John Major, to the Labour administration of Tony Blair. His government benefited from a financial uplift for a while, then in 2007-8 came the crash. By the 2010 general election the Conservative opposition was proclaiming 13 years of Labour misgovernment as being responsible for the general financial woes.

This was as an unjustified claim as is the present Labour one of 14 years of Conservative maladministration. The similarity of time periods is interesting. Governments create neither booms nor busts. Undoubtedly if they did there would only be booms.

So, voting Labour, whether of the present Starmer, or previous Corbyn, variety could not fundamentally change the economic situation. It matters little how good or bad their intentions are. The Green Party could, along with the Liberal Democrats (and even Reform), make whatever promises they wish as they won't be in a position to realise them.

Even a proposal such as the basic income, advocated by the Greens, is really just another form of benefit that would have to be funded. Ultimately, that funding, via income tax, business tax or some sort of tax, would come from capital. However attractive that might seem initially, it is a subtraction from wealth creation that capitalism would be bound to react to. The markets would decide and an economic downturn would be of no benefit for workers.

## International dimension

It always has to be kept in mind that capitalism, while it has national iterations, is an international system. A government policy, no matter how well intentioned, that was deemed adverse to capitalism would see its productive resources relocated elsewhere.

Presently some FTSE 100 companies are deserting the City to relocate in other stock exchanges. Their motivation is simply expectation of greater financial returns. The Henley Private Mitigation Report indicates that 2024 will see a net loss of approximately 9,500 of what the report terms high-net-worth individuals, compared with 4,200 the previous year. The Henley is a consultancy that monitors migration trends. It reported that between 1950 and the early 2000s Britain saw a continuous influx of millionaires. That trend has now been seriously reversed. This has been exacerbated more recently

following Brexit with 16,500 leaving between 2017 and 2023.

Such is surely a demonstration of how government policy, even if implementing the decision of the ballot box, can adversely affect capital decision making. No matter how determined a particular government might be to access the wealth of non-doms, for instance, those funds all too easily migrate.

This is how capitalism works, no matter how reformers wish it were otherwise. Consider what happened to British manufacturing in the Thatcher years. For example, it is still possible to buy the quintessential British motorcycle the Royal Enfield, but made in India.

Any short-term gain made by a basic income will be undone in the medium to long term. Just as has, and is, happening to the welfare state and National Health Service.

## What's the alternative?

Supporters of the 'let's get the Tories out' parties asked what other alternative there was. Truth can be difficult, especially when it is inconvenient or not immediately helpful. The only truthful response is, look at the big picture.

There is indeed a better way. That is a worldwide commonwealth based on meeting people's self-defined needs through production based on those same people contributing whatever they can. Then there will be no need for billions or even trillions of pounds or dollars or whatever as there'll be no money.

Capitalism transcended by socialism is the only solution. Otherwise, the electorate are merely voting to maintain what presently is with all its ills unaddressed and beyond solution while things stay as they are. Every vote, for whichever party, is a vote for capitalism.

Voters can decide they will pursue real change, but they must act consciously together to achieve it. No party, including The Socialist Party, can deliver it for them. It is undoubtedly a tremendous task and responsibility. Although it does not address immediate concerns which are so very difficult for many, it is the only real alternative.

Capitalism has developed the technology and the means for the socialist change, but its own fundamental motivation of capital accumulation through profit-making will always prevent it from being generally beneficial.

So democracy will either continue to be the means of choosing governance on behalf of capitalism, or become part of the change to socialism. That is the big picture.

**DAVE ALTON**



# Government by the few for the few

MANIFESTOS HAVE been published, promises have been made and intentions made opaque by the vagueness that always accompanies the usual mixture of hope, cynicism and downright duplicity displayed by establishment politicians. We can now all sit back and await the inevitable failures, betrayals and hypocrisy of a new government.

This is not a statement of cynical bitterness or even one resulting from the betrayed hopes of the past but merely a recognition of what the state (of which the government is merely the executive) was created for and how it has evolved. We are always told at election time that the people have the power to create political change by voting for one political party or another – this lies at the heart of the claim that ours is a ‘democratic’ country. Many believe the last 14 years of Tory rule has been a failure but the rich have become richer, the state has become ever more powerful and the Washington oligarchs couldn’t be more pleased with the government’s subservience to their imperial needs. From a ruling class perspective the Tories have delivered everything they desired.

Of course, there have been the odd ideologues who actually believe the propaganda and seek some kind of radical right-wing changes (Braverman, Truss, Patel etc.) who have rocked the boat but they have been seen off and it was business as usual. These individuals, together with their left-wing counterparts like Corbyn, Galloway and Abbott, really seem to believe that government action can improve people’s lives. Perhaps a reality check is timely for those idealists and for anyone who still believes that a government can be a vehicle for the profound change that our society so desperately needs.

## The origin of parliament

The relationship between the King and his barons had, since medieval times, been a tense struggle for money and power. On many occasions actual wars broke out, and there were subsequent attempts to reach a settlement between the King and his court and the barons and their private armies,



*The signing of the Magna Carta by King John June 15th 1215*

of which the most famous were a series called Magna Carta. The King was obliged to call on the advice of the kingdom’s magnates before raising taxes or going to war etc. This is the origin of governance through parliament.

As the nation-state became increasingly centralised during the Tudor period the financial system grew ever more complex requiring a specialism that was quite alien to most aristocrats. The ‘House of Commons’ became ever more important as it consisted of those who knew how to exploit the labour force for profit and so contributed the lion’s share of taxable revenue. This evolution was accelerated by the political revolution of 1642 and subsequently, despite an attempted counter revolution by the King in 1688, the capitalist class through their representatives in parliament became the dominant political and economic power. However, the purpose of the government did not change as its primary purpose remained to serve the economic needs of another tiny parasitic class.

Governments and the states they control have never existed to serve the needs of the people as a whole but only to preserve the wealth and power of parasitic elites. The first rule of any parliament is: thou shall not over-burden the wealthy with taxes, and so the running of the nation’s infrastructure is always accomplished with the least expenditure possible. The

second rule is to ensure that no laws should be passed that in any way impede profitability, and so ensure that those who create wealth never have direct access to it, but only through a system of rationing called wages and salaries. Despite this, many political idealists continue to believe that social improvement is possible using the state and its government. But why this political illusion and the normalisation of this political lie?

## Republicans ancient and modern

The capitalist class’s need to legitimise their form of government has a long history. Many ‘gentlemen’ historians of the past, and some even today, look back to the likes of Cicero as a hero of republican virtues, struggling against malign populists and demagogues like Catiline and Julius Caesar. He allegedly stood for constitutional values and anti-tyranny, but this overlooks his involvement with the murder squads that were sent out by the Senate to destroy anyone who spoke of reforming the system to benefit the people. His hands were drenched with the blood of those who challenged the oligarchs in control of a Senate (government) that ensured their continual accumulation of wealth and power.

There is no evidence that Catiline or Caesar ever intended to destroy Rome and we have only Cicero’s words to that effect.



Of course he never mentioned the class interests that he served and all his rhetoric about the 'Republic' merely obscured his real motive to preserve the power and economic interests of the patrician elite. All reformers were demonised as wreckers of society – sound familiar?

Any governments who call themselves republics are essentially the same as their ancient counterparts. They believe in an elite that are entitled to rule through tradition and, usually, inherited wealth. Although the UK calls itself a constitutional monarchy it is, in fact, no different from the capitalist republics described above – the monarch is one of the wealthiest capitalists of them all. So the tradition for all capitalist governments is to talk continuously about democracy whilst ensuring its impossibility. But the gloomy gothic corridors of power within Westminster are not the only, or even the most important, centre of political power.

Since the Second World War the ruling class of this country have aligned themselves with the interests of the Washington oligarchs and so become willing subjects of US imperialism. No

UK 'foreign policy' is decided without consulting this military empire (aka NATO). Even after Brexit, the EU together with the WTO and the World Bank have a significant impact on what Westminster can do economically, and this leads us to another great power on the global stage, the multi-national corporations. Their lobbying of governments is unceasing and connections with politicians, corrupt or otherwise, is undeniable. Many of the same individuals are involved in these organisations which can deservedly be called 'the establishment'. They all share a common interest in defending their trade-routes, market share, cheap labour, natural resources etc. from the other capitalist cabals of Russia and China. But all of them are subject to the ultimate power of the anarchic fluctuations of capitalist economics which none of them, it would seem, have much understanding of.

The excuse of the recent Tory government for its manifest failures were the COVID pandemic and the war in Ukraine – both of which might have been predicted but would anyway have been ignored by the overriding necessity

for economic 'growth' and bigger profits. Given all this one is tempted to ask, what is the point of national governments? The oligarchs of ancient Rome, like Cicero and Cato, could tell you why – to preserve the illusion of national/tribal communal interest and deny class division so as to exclude the majority from power.

Starmer is no different from his war-mongering predecessor Blair and will do anything to placate the power of the 'establishment'. Like Cicero he will claim to be a protector of legitimacy and justice but will be infinitely flexible when he is required to excuse genocide in Gaza or persecute the sick and the unemployed. Remember, the parasites and their defenders like the Labour Party depend on the masses of workers to produce the means and wealth for their own continued exploitation. The real historical power belongs to us workers and we must turn away from these hypocrites, liars and fools and take responsibility for this world into our own hands.

**WEZ**

# How society works



DO WAGE increases lead automatically to price increases? If they do, there would presumably be no point in fighting for a wage rise, as it would just mean that prices of goods would go up too, and people would be no better off. Looking further into this issue reveals a great deal about how society works.

In fact, higher wages need not mean higher prices, because prices aren't determined by wages. In many industries, wages are relatively high but prices low, and in others wages are low but prices high.

To see what's behind this, we should step back a bit and look at what constitutes a wage and how prices are determined. Prices are of course influenced by supply and demand, but there has to be more

to it than that, since what happens when supply and demand cancel each other out? What really matters is the value or exchange value of some good, and that depends on the amount of labour that was needed to produce it. Not just the last stage of production, but all the labour that went into obtaining the raw materials, the buildings, the machinery and so on. Why do TVs cost a lot more than electric kettles? Because far more labour goes into producing the TVs. The price of something is essentially based on its exchange value, but supply and demand can affect it as well.

As for wages, these are in fact also a price: the price of the worker's labour power, or ability to work. Labour power has its own value, that of the value of what

is needed to produce, maintain and train the worker: the cost of rent, food, heating, transport, clothing, entertainment etc. So a worker produces enough value to get paid sufficient to live on and bring up a family. But – and here is the big revelation – the worker will be forced to work for longer than that. In four hours' work, you may produce enough to keep you going, and that is what you'll get in wages. However, your employer has bought your labour power and can make you work for longer than that, say for seven hours. In those three extra hours, the value of what you produce goes to the employer: this is known as surplus value, and is what constitutes profit for the boss.

In that example, you work four hours for yourself and three hours for your employer. That is exploitation, and it lies at the heart of the current economic system. By all means struggle for higher wages, and against wage cuts and longer hours and harder work. But you should also be aware that, however hard you fight within the present system, you will always be in a subordinate and precarious position. The real solution is to combine with fellow workers and fight for the abolition of the wages system!

**P B**

# Danger: conspiracists at work

THE ASSASSINATION attempt on Donald Trump immediately gave rise to a frenzy of conspiracy theories. One story that quickly spread was that the whole thing was staged by supporters of Trump. One US-based YouTube account said the picture was just ‘too damn perfect’ and described how they got ‘the flag positioned perfect and everything’. But more widespread was the idea that assassination was ordered by anti-Trumpers of various kinds – the CIA, Barack Obama, Hilary Clinton, Mike Pence, or even Joe Biden. What has unfolded since then has been straight out of the conspiracy theory playbook with committed activists on social media who deny almost everything (the Covid pandemic, climate change, mass shootings, terror attacks) putting out a panoply of overwhelmingly improbable stories. In their minds not just one thing is suspect and said to be the subject of a hidden conspiracy but very many.

Another striking example of such ‘invented knowledge’ is the idea that ‘weather manipulating’ or ‘geo-engineering’ is taking place enabling governments to control both weather and climate for sinister purposes. Such stories have been around for some time but spread more widely in the UK recently based on the erratic and unusually cool weather experienced in June and July followed by one of the

wettest winters in recent years. This is being done, so the claims say, by such methods as ‘cloud seeding’ (which does actually exist and was experimented with in the 1950s but shown to have only small, localised impacts) and ‘solar radiation management’. There is even talk of ‘chemtrails’, said to be a secretive plot to spray people with dangerous chemicals. As a result, according to the Royal Meteorological Society, weather forecasters have been on the end of significant abuse from conspiracy theorists on social media, accused of hiding truths about weather from the public. One user on ‘X’ wrote, ‘Imagine watching the geoengineers at work, and you report the weather without telling the truth about what really is going on. That is sick’. No attention is paid of course to the reality that, on a warming planet, warm air is able to hold more moisture, which in turn fuels more intense rainfall and erratic weather conditions. All this is dismissed as ‘climate scam propaganda’.

The BBC’s fact-checking service, ‘Verify’, which looks into stories circulating on the internet that may seem the result of some form of conspiracy theory or at least questionable, has found no evidence for such theories and credibly debunked them. But what one writer has termed ‘belief perseverance’ among conspiracy theorists persists even in the face of solid contradictory information and facts.

Of course those who spread such ideas will say that the BBC is itself part of the conspiracy seeking to exercise control over people and the environment and take away their ‘freedoms’ and therefore its findings cannot be trusted. And it must be said that it has been ‘verified’ that in past times the BBC did function as a servile collaborator of the Secret Services when it came to the British state’s attempts to sniff out ‘subversion’.

Luckily the myths propagated by conspiracy theorists are rarely shared by whole populations, as they might have been in the past. They tend rather to exist among a certain segment of the population, perhaps as an expression of despair among people who find their existences particularly confusing, stressful and alienating, feel impotent to influence events or their own lives, and so seek consolation in such theories. It is only a pity that many other myths are shared by large swathes of people: for example worship of non-existent gods, devotion to leaders, the idea that one’s accidental country of birth somehow makes that place superior to others, and in particular the acceptance of class-divided society based on obscene wealth for the few and just getting by or dire poverty for the many as a natural and unchangeable way of organising human society.

**HKM**

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## Troubled Times – *Exhibition review*

THE IMPERIAL War Museum North at Salford Quays is currently running an exhibition on ‘Northern Ireland: Living with the Troubles’, which deals with the period of violence which lasted from the late 1960s to the signing of the Good Friday agreement in 1998 and caused the deaths of over 3,500 people. It is on until the end of September.

One of its main themes is the different perspectives on developments from the ‘loyalist’ and ‘nationalist’ sides (though both are in fact loyal to different nations). This extends even to basic facts, such as who had guns in the Battle of St Matthew’s on 27–28 June 1970, in which three people were killed. Views representing both versions of what happened that night are given.

Many of the statements and other exhibits should cause visitors to think a bit. For instance, a poster shows Tufty the

squirrel (used to teach children about road safety) warning kids not to pick up things in the street, as they might be dangerous. A former member of the Provisional IRA says that you have to ‘depersonalise’ people in order to shoot them. The members of fire services were stoned on an almost daily basis. People would go out to shop and find soldiers in gardens and checkpoints on roads; they had to go through turnstiles and bag searches in order to get into the centre of Belfast. Most victims of the Troubles were civilians, not soldiers, police or paramilitaries.

The glossary accompanying the exhibition states that loyalism was ‘primarily working class in nature’, and class is mentioned a number of times in the displays, though without any definition. The vast majority of those killed were working class, and a Sinn Féin member is quoted as saying that there

was a class issue across communities, but that the fundamental constitutional question was the real dividing line.

A final film with a variety of quotes claims that Northern Ireland now has more institutionalised sectarianism than ever, and that a war continues, using words rather than bullets. A United Ireland will not end sectarianism, it is said, and Brexit has led to trade and border concerns within the North.

It’s not mentioned in the displays, but Troubles-related tourism now takes place in Belfast; it’s an example of ‘dark tourism’ (cf the Jack the Ripper Museum in London).

This is an informative exhibition, from which visitors are likely to draw different conclusions, perhaps including that nothing of any significance for the vast majority of people was being fought over.

**PB**



# Something to think about



PRIVATE PROPERTY ownership stands between us and any real meaningful freedom. The power it gives is not safe in anyone's hands. The world society we propose does not use it. It would therefore have to abolish the concept and use of money.

In the new society, all things would be freely made and freely given. There would be nothing to pay, and no money to pay it with, since there could be no wages for work done.

Perhaps you ask: how are we supposed to get work if nobody is going to get paid for it? Why should we even get out of bed in the morning? The simple answer is: if nobody can be bothered to make the slightest effort then we've all had it.

But work itself, like so many other things, would change out of all recognition. Gone would be the Boss, and fear of the sack. Gone would be the drudgery of doing a job you hate just to pay the rent. Instead, great opportunities would open up for people to choose their job, to change jobs more frequently, to work far shorter hours.

It is not simply work that would change for the better. Warfare would change too – out of existence. Can you think of a war that was fought, in reality, over anything other than money, and ultimately, control of resources? We can't. Whatever the propaganda made us all believe at the time, all the wars of history have been squabbles over money, land, trade

routes and so forth. In the new society, arguments like that just couldn't arise, because no one would own these things in the first place.

We think the new society could benefit all in an enormous number of ways.

Free travel anywhere in the world; pleasant, interesting work to choose; a sense of feeling useful, of belonging, of playing a part in things; a strength in yourself to be yourself, and not to have to take orders from anybody at all. Imagine waking up in a world where nobody in it is starving to death. Imagine being able to walk around at night without fear. Imagine having time for things, and for people. Imagine having enough at last, without having bills to make your life a misery.

One day. But it's not going to happen without you. If any group of hot-blooded rebels tries to go it alone, without the agreement of the rest of us, it will end in bloodshed, terror and chaos, as it always has in the past. Socialists are democrats. We could never support such madness, and we would never instigate it. The proper road to a peaceful and democratic society is by peaceful and democratic means, and so members of our Party spend their time not in building bombs but in building agreement.

## Diggers Festival in Wigan

*'True commonwealth's freedom lies in the free enjoyment of the earth'* (Gerrard Winstanley 1652).

STRIPPED OF his religious, patriarchal views, Winstanley is still relevant today. He saw that:

**Freedom has an economic basis** and is impossible in a property-based society.

**Society is structured to maintain the privilege of a few.** Laws are made essentially to defend property and official religion is designed to terrify us into submission.

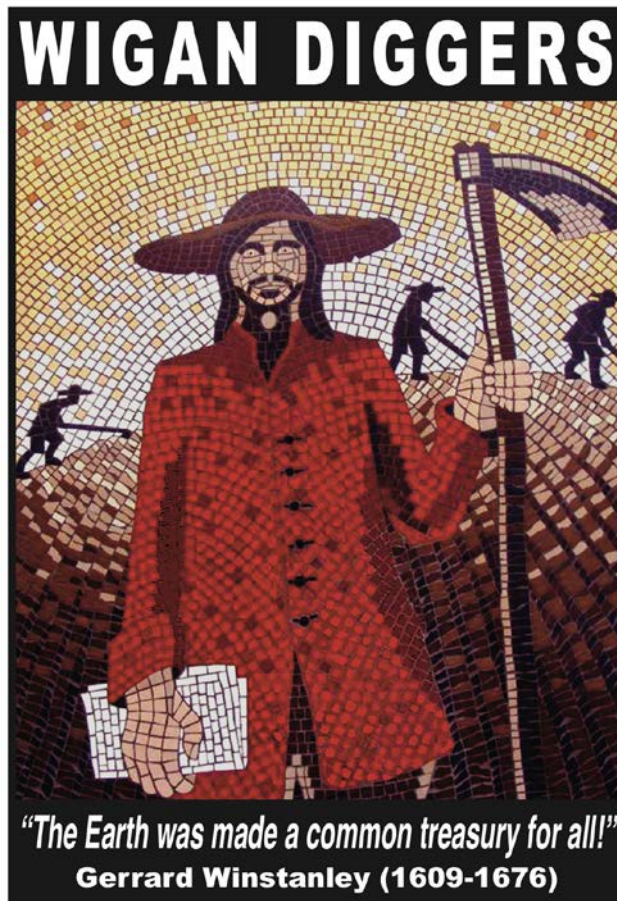
**Buying/selling causes war and keeps us poor.**

Winstanley's answer was much like ours. A society where things are produced purely to meet human need (no form of exchange), where production and distribution are based on democratic, informed consent, and everyone can achieve their full potential.

This is what we mean by socialism. Everyone can have a life of material security – provided the majority takes control of the world's resources from the capitalist minority.

Even if you came today just for a pint and the music, you might want to consider joining with us to put things right at last.

*Leaflet to be distributed at this year's Diggers Festival in Wigan in September.*





## Should tokens make the world go round?

IN 2022 Jan Philipp Dapprich, a researcher at a German university, published a paper entitled 'Tokens make the world go round: socialist tokens as an alternative to money' in which he argued that 'non-circulating tokens should be used as an alternative to money for distributing consumer products to the population in a socialist economy' ([tinyurl.com/rkcdhhra](https://tinyurl.com/rkcdhhra)).

That he is talking about a socialist or communist society (terms which he says can be used interchangeably) is clear from how he envisages the production of all goods taking place. The places where they are produced 'are collectively administered by the people or by institutions accountable on their behalf. Since all firms would share the same owner, there is no need for firms to exchange goods, as the general public would remain the owner of those goods either way'; 'production units would simply receive raw materials and pass on their finished products, as specified by the plan without paying or receiving payment. There would thus be no need for money as a medium of exchange within the realm of production'; 'The constraints, benefits and costs of production are to be evaluated in purely physical terms.'

So, he is recognisably talking about what

we (and Marx) mean by socialism.

Marx, writing 150 years ago in some private notes published after his death as *The Critique of the Gotha Programme*, did discuss the possible need for a system of non-circulating tokens (vouchers that would be cancelled after being used to redeem some product) to distribute consumer products in the early days had socialism been established at the time, though he envisaged it eventually being abolished in favour of distribution according to self-determined needs.

Marx may have had a point had socialism been established in 1875 but it wasn't, so this could be regarded as an academic issue. Dapprich, however, thinks that some token system (not necessarily the one mentioned by Marx) would still be required if socialism were to be established today; in fact he thinks that this should be a permanent feature of a society based on the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production. He goes so far as to describe free access as envisaged by Marx as 'pie in the sky'.

His argument is that this is unnecessary anyway 'because the 'needs principle' of the higher phase can be sufficiently realised within the token system'. This can be done, he suggests, by the wider

provision of free services such as health care and by giving tokens to those unable to work or to work fully. But why? His hidden assumption is that, with free access, there might not be enough to go round and that therefore the consumption of some will need to be limited, even if at a generously high level, so as to ensure that more urgent needs of others are met.

He does mention the argument that 'since we have seen significant increases in productive capacities since the nineteenth century, during which Marx was writing, perhaps the token system is already outdated'. This is precisely a point we have made but Dapprich dismisses this, rather too offhandedly, as 'unconvincing' without saying why.

But whether or not society has the capacity to produce enough consumer products to satisfy likely self-assessed needs is the crux of the matter at issue. If it has, as we contend, then the case for a permanent non-circulating token system falls.

In any event, once common ownership and production directly for use have been established, should there arise some temporary shortage of some products it would be up to those around at the time to settle how to deal with it. Drawing up a blueprint for this now, without knowing the exact circumstances or the preferences of people then, is literally academic.

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# Anti-social media

ITVX'S RECENT drama serial *Douglas Is Cancelled* draws on several of society's current trends to produce an unsettling description of how status impacts on people. Its writer, Steven Moffat, is known particularly for his contributions to more fantastical fare such as *Doctor Who* and *Sherlock*. His best scripts carefully guide how much information the viewers and characters have as the story progresses, often by playing around with story structure. *Douglas Is Cancelled* uses techniques (and actors) familiar from Moffat's other work, with its subject matter being the television industry itself. Potential viewers are warned that 'spoilers' about how the plot is resolved are mentioned below.

The Douglas of the title, portrayed by Hugh Bonneville, is a longstanding TV journalist, co-hosting a popular news programme with the younger Madeline, played by Karen Gillan. A social media post accusing Douglas of telling a sexist joke at a wedding goes viral, leading to concerns among Douglas, his agent, and his producer Toby (Ben Miles), that enough of a negative reaction and suspicions of chauvinism will get him 'cancelled'. The backdrop of social media being crucial in how we perceive people is a given. Anyone with a profile on X, Facebook, Instagram or TikTok knows they've put themselves in an arena where their words are scrutinised and judged publicly, with the stakes being higher for those already in the public eye, such as trusted television news presenters. Even a hint of scandal creates interest, and each repost, comment or like lucratively promotes the social media platform itself as well as whatever's trending. The combative nature of online discourse is represented in the drama by Douglas's teenage daughter, sensitive to any kind of perceived offence.

The focus of *Douglas Is Cancelled* isn't 'cancel culture' though, but the culture of the news media industry. The script contains many cynical swipes at journalism, such as Toby saying of journalists, 'having opinions about things we didn't witness is the entire point of our existence', and Madeline using 'every dirty trick' interviewers employ to get to their subject. Key to the plot is when Douglas angrily says 'the truth needs a little help now and then... our audience wouldn't understand the truth even if we had the guts to tell it or knew what it was in the first place'. In the context of the story, these lines



Credit: ITVX

lead to Douglas's downfall because of how they dismiss both his audience and his profession, even though he's right to recognise that journalism isn't as objective as it pretends. The bias of a mainstream media outlet reflects the prerogatives of its owners, with their 'truth' being a stance which both reinforces their own position, however subtly, and less subtly, also attracts viewers and therefore income.

The media's attitude to the truth isn't really the focus of *Douglas Is Cancelled*, though. Its target turns out to be how the industry has mistreated women. Much of episode three is a flashback to just before Madeline secured the job as co-presenter, set in a hotel room where Toby is trying to manipulate her into having sex with him, using psychological tricks to confuse and control her. This thread of the story reminds us of the accusations of sexual harassment and rape made against American film mogul Harvey Weinstein and others, which revealed the extent of abuse in the industry. In the drama, Toby uses the influence he has as an established producer over Madeline, who is made vulnerable by being at the start of her career. He has this influence because of the imbalance of power between his position and hers. Employment, and the hierarchies which it involves, inherently encourages us to objectify people and treat them according to their status in the organisation. Some people, such as Toby and his real-life counterparts, represent how this attitude can lead to the most

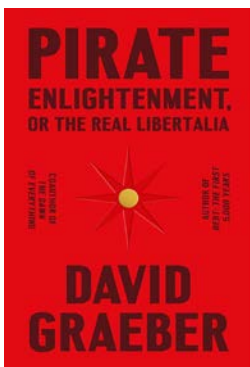
dehumanising and damaging extremes. The drama doesn't only highlight how abusers have operated, but also that people like Douglas, who ignored the situation Madeline was in and then made jokes about it, enable the perpetrators. Even though the 'casting couch culture' is being exposed and tackled in real life, the conditions which create it remain.

Despite being promoted as a 'comedy drama', *Douglas Is Cancelled* describes a grim, sordid news industry, with relationships shaped by rank within the profession and by the cut and thrust of social media beyond. The similarities to real life situations make the serial very much a product of, and reflection of our times. But behind the modern trappings of social media and anti-social media executives, an old story is being retold. When a workplace, an industry and, indeed a society is structured so that some individuals are in a position of power over others, then the resulting hierarchies allow some people to become abusers. Legislation, policies and procedures aim to prevent and ameliorate harm, but can't address the structural causes which enable abuse. Employment itself is exploitative, even if when it doesn't involve people as toxic as presented in *Douglas Is Cancelled*. The damage caused by and to the characters is expertly acted by the serial's small cast, helped by a precisely-crafted and perceptive script.

**MIKE FOSTER**



## Pirates



**Pirate Enlightenment, Or The Real Libertalia.** By David Graeber, Penguin, 2024

The Age of Enlightenment is usually said to be the intellectual movement that occurred mainly in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, based on knowledge learned by reason and evidence. Graeber argues that the Enlightenment did not begin in Europe and that its true origins are to be found on the island of Madagascar, in the late seventeenth century, when it was home to several thousand pirates. This was in the Golden Age of Piracy which lasted no more than fifty years, but it was also an experiment in radical democracy as the pirate settlers attempted to apply the egalitarian principles of their ships to a new society on land. Those also involved were Malagasy women, merchants, traders and escaped slaves. They were exploring ideas that were ultimately to be put into practice in Europe a century later.

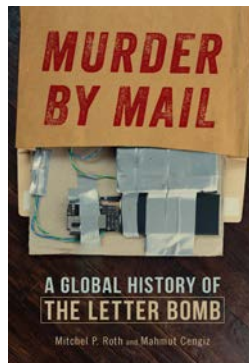
This short book was first written to be a chapter of a book on 'divine kingship' Graeber co-authored with fellow anthropologist Marshall Sahlins. Graeber obtained a doctorate under Sahlins doing ethnographic research in Madagascar. Graeber died in 2020. This book answers the question: since they were wanted men who couldn't go home, what happened to the pirates who wanted to escape or retire? The answer seems to be: they often settled in north-east Madagascar, a large island (one thousand miles long) to the east of Africa. Libertalia is the name given to the utopian pirate experiment, even if there was never any actual settlement that bore that name. Piracy is still practised in that part of the world.

Graeber's treatment of piracy and Madagascar is convincing. He argues that what unifies the pirate Enlightenment of Libertalia and the later Age of Enlightenment was an intellectual movement which was conversational. In Libertalia there was an expectation of rational conversation, on an egalitarian basis, of such subjects as liberty, authority, sovereignty and much more. There is however no persuasive evidence of the pirate Enlightenment feeding into the later Enlightenment, as Graeber claims. He admits that he is being 'intentionally

provocative' as if he knows the evidence he presents is flimsy and speculative. In this respect he is following in the buccaneering tradition of not letting the facts get in the way of a good story.

LEW

## Mail Bomb



**Murder by Mail: A Global History of the Letter Bomb.** By Mitchel P. Roth and Mahmut Cengiz. Reaktion Books. 2024.

It's not often we get to review true crime in the pages of the Socialist Standard. However, this book isn't your industry-standard sensationalist pulp about Charles Manson or Jeffrey Dahmer. Instead, it's a well-researched, exhaustive compendium of the history of the mail bomb, or 'Infernal Machine' as the authors point out was its original nom de guerre. This device has been used not only by political zealots, religious extremists, and anarchist assassins but also by hot-tempered lovers, family feuders, and jealous friends.

The history of the mail bomb is as rich as you would expect from such a unique device. But beyond the contraption itself, what really makes a mail bomber tick? Unfortunately, the scope of this subject is so wide and the history so varied that the authors don't have much room for the psychology behind the minds behind the bombs. However, each case does receive a few lines about the individuals (or groups or governments) involved, the situations they were in, and the goals they aimed to achieve. We learn that 'while the IRA is often credited with introducing terror to the British Isles, the first terrorist bomb to explode in Ireland in the 20th century was planted by suffragettes'.

The cases span from the American bomber who wanted to plot out a giant smiley face across the map of North America in recent history to the anarchist Mayday mail bombing campaign at the beginning of the 20th century, which aimed to assassinate J.P. Morgan and almost 20 other enemies of the working class, including the Minister of Labor, in one postal sweep.

What can we as a party take away from all this? We already know why we reject violence as a means and support

democratic revolution. But let's separate out the mail bomb as a firearm and cast a scientific eye over it. This is a suitable analogy as the earliest documented infernal device was a gun rigged up inside a hat box.

Theodore Kaczynski, aka the Unabomber, is a case in point. From the outside, 'Uncle Ted' appeared to be a genius frustrated with the 'techno-industrial' system, blaming not just capitalism but anything in human development after agriculture. His manifesto mainly critiqued left-wing parties and used (specious) logic to justify his personal campaign of violence and murder.

However, once you dig past the internet memes and media characterizations, Ted is just another mentally ill man with a grudge and zero social intelligence. If Ted were to start his campaign today, he would have more in common with alt-right Incels than anyone on the left.

Early signs of his mental illness expressed themselves in joke bombs of firecrackers mailed to love interests, and he was fired by his own brother for writing hundreds of harassing notes (poetry and jokes) to a former lover who had spurned him after their first date. Other red flags included breaking into his neighbour's house and defecating on the floor and other antisocial behaviour a good ten years before he mailed his first infernal devices.

Although the authors don't delve much into the psychology of the political groups conducting bombings, those we do learn about, and those not motivated by politics, share a common thread. The most disenfranchised, desperate, and mentally ill people resort to mail bombs. Despite all their work and planning, they needn't bother, as 80 percent of devices don't even ignite or trigger the main explosive. As the authors point out, you are 'more likely to get hit by lightning than die by a letter bomb'. Ted himself struggled for around ten years before he was satisfied with the level of violence his bombs were causing. In fact, he kept detailed diaries where he showed no regret in targetting students, shopkeepers, or receptionists but was only upset that his bombs were failing to kill anyone.

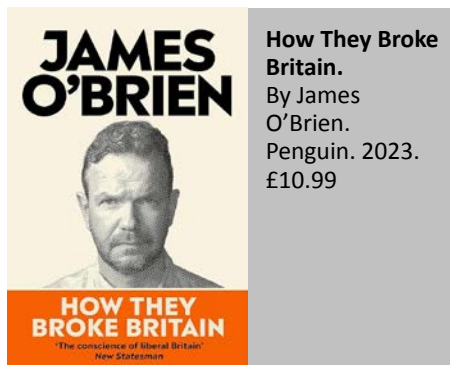
The majority of letter bombs won't reach their target but instead kill postal workers or secretaries, with very few making it beyond the sorting office. So, aside from the discussion of violence as a tactic, the infernal machine is objectively not a very effective way of killing people. In the 1980s and 90s, there seemed to

be a shift to postal explosives deliberately made not to kill but designed as a scare tactic. However, this too has become redundant as the media no longer picks up stories about such campaigns because the use of improvised devices has become so common in the United States that their impact is no longer of interest.

These arguments are redundant for us socialists as we oppose terrorist tactics. However, much like the many types of men (they are mostly men) documented in this book, the world's poorest are being stretched to their limits. This book serves as a handy device to show that this path has been trodden and the means didn't justify the ends. A compelling read, well-researched, and, despite the grim subject, humorous in places.

A.T.

## Broken Britain



**How They Broke Britain.**  
By James O'Brien.  
Penguin. 2023.  
£10.99

This is an entertaining and well-written book from the host of Britain's most popular radio talk-show. It has been floating around the top of the best-seller lists for the last few months and it is easy to see why. It taps effortlessly into the view that Britain has been hopelessly misgoverned for years and it focuses – with a chapter for each – on a number of the leading players, from media moguls Rupert Murdoch, Paul Dacre and Andrew Neil through, inevitably, to the likes of Johnson, Truss and Sunak. Dominic Cummings also gets his own chapter.

As with all books of this type, there is a tendency to overstate the role politicians in particular play with regard to the state of the economy, though where the book is most successful is the focus it places on the ideological ties and networks that have underpinned and sustained the dominant political assumptions of our time. These are the view that 'trickle-down' economics has some merit, that the EU was both a singular barrier to UK economic growth and also to genuine democratic sovereignty, that the poor are poor because they are essentially feckless and that immigration is the major issue of our times that should be (pre-)occupying political minds everywhere. As the General Election demonstrated, they

are dominant views that Sir Keir Starmer's Labour has done little to challenge.

O'Brien is strongest when he writes in detail of the revolving door that exists between the right-wing think-tanks generating this stuff, the right-wing media and the recently departed Tory government. Many people will not have heard too much about the plethora of secretive 'policy institutes' and similar that exist in and around Tufton Street in Westminster, but they will have seen their representatives pop up with unerring regularity on news and current affairs programmes for years, opining in the manner of independent 'experts' – the Centre for Policy Studies, the Institute for Economic Affairs, Civitas, the Adam Smith Institute, Policy Exchange and the bizarre Taxpayers' Alliance. These are the people who fomented and nurtured the likes of Liz Truss and O'Brien isn't in a forgiving mood towards them.

The think-tank/media/political nexus that has dominated UK discourse for years and which has more recently formed ever more bizarre offshoots like the increasingly unhinged GB News, is indeed laid bare. It is good stuff and worth buying for this alone.

Less intuitively, there is also a chapter on Jeremy Corbyn, largely on the grounds that he failed to provide effective opposition to this nexus. Much of what O'Brien says here has resonance too, though occasionally he is a little unfair perhaps:

'There used to be two ways for non-Conservative politicians to negotiate the UK's hideously right-wing media:

either you appeased them in the hope of avoiding their nastiest attacks or you took the fight straight to them and relied on sympathetic or impartial outlets to get your message out there. Corbyn and his closest advisers invented a third: completely fail to engage; alienate and demonise almost all journalists; claim constant victimhood; and offer up pathetic excuses when confronted with evidence of your own poor judgement' (p.268).

Arguably, this is more Corbyn of 2019 General Election vintage, as earlier one of the more successful aspects of his period leading Labour was the way his supporters built up alternative media in opposition to the mainstream (even though he lost in 2017 too, it was narrow and this is something that helped him win over 6 percent more of the vote than Starmer did in his recent landslide, amounting to almost 12.9 million votes compared to Starmer's 9.7 million). Indeed, while socialists have little to learn from the Corbyn experience generally, this aspect is interesting and O'Brien arguably seems to rather overlook the influence of alternative media like The Canary – which became the UK's third most popular politics news website – and related social media.

This is a minor caveat though, and there can be little doubt that much of what O'Brien has written is a tour de force, exposing and cataloguing a network of pro-capitalist, right-wing goons who have just received an unexpectedly large – to most of them at least – kick in the ballots.

DAP





# Ivan Illich, Intellectual

AS THE co-founder of the Centre for Inter-Cultural Documentation in Cuernavaca, Mexico, Illich seems to have a ready press for his ideas. His book, *Deschooling Society*, caused a minor explosion in the education world when it was published a few years ago. For those who do not have the time (or the patience) to read his “shrewd and passionate arguments” (*The Guardian*), BBC Radio 3 broadcast a long interview with him in April of this year. You can’t avoid him.

In the interview Illich explained his basic position, in this way: “It is my hypothesis that when the tools for production exceed a certain measure, they impose exploitative relationships on the society, no matter what political choice in ideological terms, the society thinks it has made.”

In other words, he is saying it is the size of the productive and other “processes” (eg, the education system) that is the cause of society’s problems. His favourite illustration is to compare the bicycle with the motor car. A “convivial society” he says “...can only arrive on the bicycle. With shoes alone we are not efficient

enough. And with cars we are already over-efficient and impose an exploitative mode of production on the entire society.” (...)

It is on the basis of production for profit that cars are produced to snarl up the cities and pollute the air. Illich is right to point out the appalling effects on the planet we inhabit, but it is the profit system that draws forth cars from the witches’ brew of capitalism. Merely urging people to go back to bicycles is about as sensible as King Canute ordering back the waves.

Illich stated in the interview that the “convivial society” he wants can only be “a society which opts for voluntary poverty.” In other words he wants to abandon technological progress and put everyone in rags on a bicycle. (...)

Workers must learn to treat the ideas of such intellectuals with the contempt they deserve. A “convivial society” cannot be achieved by pedalling on a bicycle. Capitalism itself must be abolished, and a society based on common ownership must be established in its place.

(from *Socialist Standard*, August 1974)

## Action Replay

# From top to bottom

BEING A successful sportsman can obviously be very rewarding, in financial terms and also as a ‘celebrity’. But there can be a lot of stress involved in getting to, and staying at, the top. Those who are talented but are not among the elite often have to struggle to survive, let alone progress.

For instance, Billy Harris, now ranked fifth among British men’s tennis players, received a wildcard to play in this year’s Wimbledon championships, though he lost in the first round. But ten years ago he was travelling around Europe, from one tournament to the next, sleeping in his van and parking at McDonald’s. Each winning match earned him a couple of hundred euros, and in 2018 he was eventually able to get rid of the van and fly to destinations. But in comparative terms, he did quite well for, as a Lawn Tennis Association coach noted, ‘about 80% of his age group just faded away and stopped playing tennis.’ So perseverance and luck were about as essential as ability.

Writing in the *Guardian* (27 June), the former professional tennis player Conor Niland referred to the purgatory of playing in the lower tiers of the tour: ‘a liminal space that exists only to be got out of as quickly as possible’. Isolation and loneliness were constant features of travelling and touring, especially in small

towns with little to do.

Back in the 1980s, professional golfer Chris Moody spoke to Danny Danziger for the latter’s *All in a Day’s Work*. It was, he said, a seven-day-a-week job, and one you had to work really hard at in order to make money. A tournament would occupy four days, and the rest of the week was taken up with travelling and practising. Being away so much meant it was ‘a very anti-social existence’, making personal relationships really difficult. And your brain tended to be dulled, as so much effort was put into planning and practising and watching your diet.

Moreover, getting to the top need not

mean that everything will then go well.

British cyclist Bradley Wiggins (famed for his sideburns) won the Tour de France in 2012 as well as Olympic medals. But he has now been declared bankrupt, with his company having massive debts. Wiggins had a troubled childhood, yet became a very successful cyclist. He retired in 2016, but then struggled to find a role in life. His marriage broke up, and he is reportedly sofa-surfing.

So sporting achievement can require a lot of work and often results in people falling by the wayside, and even success stories can lead to big problems.

**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.

## August 2024 EVENTS

### World Socialist Movement online meetings

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

Weekly WSP (India) meeting

#### Sunday 11 August 10.00 (GMT + 1)

##### Central Online Branch Meeting

#### Friday 2 August 19.30 (GMT + 1) • Activity Meeting

What branches have done last month and are planning this month.

#### Friday 9 August 19.30 (GMT + 1) • Did you see the US news?

Host: Darren O'Neil

#### Friday 16 August 19.15 (GMT + 1) • Political Consciousness:

##### What lesson can we learn from Marx?

Speaker (from Summer School): Keith Graham

#### Friday 23 August No Meeting • Bank Holiday weekend

#### Friday 30 August 19.30 (GMT + 1) • Did you see the news?

Discussion on recent subjects in the news. Host: Howard Moss

## Socialist Party Physical Meetings

### WORCESTER

#### Friday 16 to Sunday 18 August

##### Socialist Party Summer School

##### Political Consciousness: From society to ideology

For programme of talks see page 6. Can be followed on Zoom.

St.John's Campus, Worcester University, Henwick Gardens,

Worcester WR2 6AJ.

### LONDON

#### August Bank Holiday Monday 26 August 10.30-8pm

##### Carshalton EcoFair

The Socialist Party will have a stall at this event.

Carshalton Park, Ruskin Road, Carshalton, SM5 3DD.

### CARDIFF

#### Street stall every Saturday 1pm-3pm (weather permitting)

Capitol Shopping Centre, Queen Street (Newport Road end).

#### Party News: Election results

The Socialist Party stood candidates in last month's general election and also in the previous month's elections to the Greater London Assembly. Here are the detailed results.

#### General Election

Clapham and Brixton Hill: Ribeiro-Addy (Lab) 24,166; Curtis (LD) 6,161; Yuen (Green) 5,768; Saroy (Con) 4,360; Matlock (Reform) 1,758; Key (Ind) 406; Martin (Soc) 122.

Folkestone and Hythe: Vaughan (Lab) 15,020; Collins (Con) 11,291; Wright (Reform) 10,685; Brett (Green) 3,954; Ngan (LD) 1,736; Khanom (TUSC) 249; Allen (Fairer Voting) 240; Thomas (Soc) 71.

#### Greater London Assembly

Barnet and Camden: Clarke (Lab) 70,749; Redmond (Con) 51,606; Tokley (Green) 18,405; Emery (LD) 12,335; Forhad (Reform) 7,703; Martin (Soc) 1,369.

Lambeth and Southwark: Ahmad (Lab) 84,768; Sheppard (Green) 35,144; French (LD) 22,030; Wallace (Con) 22,121; Sharp (Reform) 8,942; Buick (Soc) 2,082.

## 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.



# To park or not to park?

THE STREET I live on has reserved parking for residents. This should mean there's a place for me to park my car outside or near my house. Until relatively recently, that was always the case. But lately things have changed and now it can be difficult for me to find a place anywhere on the street meaning that sometimes I have to drive around nearby streets looking for (and not always finding) a space not reserved for residents. What's going on?

Well, first of all there's an increasing number of families in the area with more than just one car and then more and more students from the local University living in the area are turning up in cars. In the past they would get booked by wardens for parking outside their rented accommodation, but now they've twigged that, if they get their logbook changed to their student address, they're entitled to a parking permit.

## Cars, cars, cars

But over and above all this there's simply an ever-increasing number of vehicles on the road. That's a function both of the fact that more and more people find them a convenient way to get from one place to the other and also that they're being used to transport the increasing number of goods of all description that people are ordering online. How long can this continue?

How many more vehicles can roads, both local and long distance, take before log jams of vehicles become even more frequent than they are already and, as a matter of course, the number of vehicles looking to park exceeds the number of places available. Can anything be done about it? The answer to this question has to be not very much. There have been some attempts by government and other authorities to cope, such as additional motorway lanes or charges for entering certain areas. But measures like these, apart from being limited in scope, often give rise to further problems, for example the obvious danger to road users caused by the removal of hard shoulders to accommodate extra motorway lanes.

I know the objection will be raised that the writer of this article, as a self-confessed car owner, is part of the problem. Which up to a point I accept, but I also know I'd be happier with travel arrangements that didn't push me to jump into the car to get from A to B but



instead provided an easy communal means of transport – something that only exists to a small and erratic extent in the production for profit system we live under.

## Growth, growth, growth

In fact, when looked at in the context of how things work in general, the car situation can be seen as something of an emblem of capitalist production as a whole, that is the system's imperative to produce ever increasing numbers and kinds of goods with a view to profit regardless of social advisability or longer-term consequences. In the recent general election, a watchword of all the major parties was 'growth', something always projected as desirable since it evokes an increase in wealth or prosperity that will somehow make people better off or happier. At bottom of course that tends not to happen, since 'growth' has no power to overcome or even tame all the other negative factors arising from the unpredictability of the system we live under (eg, inflation, job reorganisation, unemployment, recession, war).

Though, in their everyday lives, most people illustrate in countless ways by their actions and attitudes that they'd rather cooperate with others than compete against them, the pervading dog-eat-dog ethic that informs the way the capitalist system works and dictates the drive for 'growth' forces producers to compete against one another to get their products on the market and sold to buyers – very often regardless of any intrinsic necessity.

In the UK, for example, there are more than enough houses and other forms of accommodation to satisfy everyone's

need for shelter and decent accommodation, yet many people go homeless or poorly accommodated while properties are left empty and more houses continue to be built. And, to return to transport, there are large masses of cars that are little used by their owners or lie on garage forecourts, while more and more are produced each year adding, as this article began by saying, to the problem of finding places to park them.

## Control?

How can all this be brought under control? Quite simply it can't – at least not under the buying and selling imperative of capitalism, whose only urge is to continue to produce more so that profit can continue to be made by that tiny minority of people who own the means to produce – we would call them the capitalist class. Or rather, it all could be brought under control, but only if we, the vast majority forced to sell our energies for a wage or salary to an employer, were to opt via democratic political action to establish a different kind of society – one of voluntary cooperation, of production for use not profit, and of free access to all goods and services based on the principle of from each according to ability to each according to need. Such a society would have and would need – I venture to speculate – far fewer cars than the present one. Nor would there be a shortage of places to park them.

**HOWARD MOSS**