

THE

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# SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

## ALT-Riot

## Media whips up hatred



Also: Do we need vouchers?  
 Artificial scarcity  
 Extreme reaction  
 How we live and how we might live

The media and the mob  
 Billionaires behaving badly  
 Cash or cachet?  
 Party News



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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'



# Stopping the boots

IT SHOULD not surprise us that a wave of far-right rioting has swept the country.

This is, surely, physics.

In some respects, there has been a rightward shift in mainstream UK politics since the rise of Thatcher and neo-liberalism. The media has been key in driving this, not just the billionaire rags but national broadcasters and papers of record. Farage's 34 Question Time appearances since 2000, along with every other far right-winger that could be squeezed into a suit, are testament to a deliberate complicity.

On the other hand, over the last decade elements on the left in this country have arguably been deliberately smeared by these same agencies in a moral panic about anti-semitism. To be anti-colonial was anti-semitic, and increasingly to be anti-capitalist was to be anti-semitic, with capitalism as a semitic trope. By the time the press had finished, surveys suggested the general public thought that fully thirty percent of left-wingers, consisting of the country's most notable and self-styled anti-racist campaigners, was anti-semitic. And

at the same time, of course, immigration was touted as being the main cause of our problems and the signifier of whether any politician was to be taken seriously or not.

Faced with such an overwhelming barrage of Farage, and scattershot of Oakeshott, neo-nazis are granted licence and anti-racists need bar their doors. It was, surely, pretty inevitable.

Or, this is what we should think. In fact, public decency prevailed. Tens of thousands protested against the far-right riots. Because there is more than physics at play.

We are all capable and responsible social beings, despite the conformist pressure of the mass media, and for every four fascist thugs there are four thousand people from all walks of life standing against them. Yes, with four thousand different reasons for doing so, but this variety of thought can sometimes be a strength when a single dogma is not, because it originates with the individual as an independent thinker rather than being spoon-fed from a single source.

We are not playthings of external forces,

even Question Time, unless we choose to surrender. We are not governed by the stars or by television, or even by our stomachs; merely alienated from our decision-making, political ability. We have a choice and standing against racism is the right one.

Life-skills learned in struggles under capitalism are essential for making the socialist revolution. Such actions are not to be dismissed. They are not the revolution, but they are something. If socialism is the liberation of the individual, then the work of making socialists entails people coming to their own conclusions. That will still be happening, in fact most of it will be happening, in the course of revolution itself when the floodgates will be opened to a rapid change of perspective.

Take heart from the solidarity expressed across Britain in the last weeks. It was not the revolution – but the solidarity it engendered can over time feed into more positive developments, rather than being simply a reaction to the negative.

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# There will be riots

THE SUN is out, the sky is blue, I'm rioting today, how about you? Politicians in the UK have good reason to look with trepidation on the period of their summer recess. It's not only when the small boat crossings reach their peak. It's also when riots are most likely to happen. There's an underlying pressure of discontent that exists year-round and year-on-year, generally simmering through the cold winter months, but ready to explode periodically when reaching a critical mass, if weather permits, and if touched off by some suitable trigger event. This year the pretext was the dreadful stabbing to death of young children in Southport, which certain vicious individuals wasted no time in exploiting with invented claims that the alleged perpetrator was a Muslim illegal immigrant, when he was actually born in Cardiff and had a Christian father.

Comparisons were inevitably drawn in the UK media with the last lot of major riots in England in 2011. There too the trigger event – the fatal shooting of a North London alleged gangster – was obscured by confusion and misinformation, with the police and eyewitnesses providing contradictory accounts. In the ensuing orgy of arson and looting, the original trigger was largely forgotten, having served its purpose.

Echoes of similar misinformation events reverberate back through history. In a particularly notorious instance in 1255, 'Little Saint' Hugh of Lincoln, a 9-year-old boy, was alleged to have been ritually murdered in a 'blood libel' sacrifice by Jews. The chronicler and Benedictine monk Matthew Paris offered a fantastically ghoulish account in which the boy was tortured, whipped, run through with pikes, crucified and disembowelled before being thrown down a well. The atrocity seems to have been fabricated to incite popular hatred against Jews, and served its purpose admirably. In no time at all, a Jew was found and tortured into confessing, after which he was executed, followed by 18 more Jews who bravely refused to recognise the validity of the kangaroo 'show trials'. The ritual murder accusation was not the first to be made against Jews, but it was the first to be officially endorsed by the ruling monarch, Henry III. What was not widely advertised at the time was that the king had previously sold his right to tax Jews to his brother Richard, Earl of Cornwall, thereafter decreeing that the property of any Jew committing a crime would be forfeit to the Crown. This gave the perpetually hard-up king a transparent



Credit: Getty Images

motive for endorsing such stitch-ups. A further 71 Jews were subsequently condemned to death, but by then the fraud had become so farcically obvious that even the Church, and Richard of Cornwall, felt honour bound to intervene, and the victims were released. But the bogus story continued to have legs. It later popped up in works by Chaucer and Marlowe, and was still doing the rounds in 20th century America. In 1955 the Church of England shamefacedly mounted a plaque at Hugh's former shrine in Lincoln Cathedral, relating how 'trumped up stories of ritual murders of Christian boys by Jewish communities were common throughout Europe during the Middle Ages and even much later. These fictions cost many innocent Jews their lives... Such stories do not redound to the credit of Christendom, and so we pray: Lord, forgive what we have been...' ([tinyurl.com/4zuc47ae](http://tinyurl.com/4zuc47ae)).

Probably the most die-hard English Defence League sympathiser would dismiss the obvious historical parallel. Just because blaming 'foreigners' is a tactic as old as history, doesn't mean today's far-right are wrong. But they should still pause and ask themselves the cui bono question- who gains from this claim? With hindsight it's clear that the king and the landowners had a clear financial incentive to discredit and persecute people they owed money to, which led to executions, pogroms, expulsions, and the forced wearing of yellow badges, decreed by the Vatican 700 years before the Nazis. The Church too is thought to have had an incentive in creating little 'saints' whose shrines would be lucrative draws for pilgrims. Who gains today? Ambitious populists looking to ride to power on a wave of anti-immigrant votes. Capitalist elites who delight in watching workers fight each other. Desperate individuals eager to blame their failings on those weaker than themselves.

Back in the Middle Ages, most people were illiterate, with no education and no ability to fact-check. People today have no such excuse. If they still choose to believe fake tales, it's not because they can't help it, it's because they don't care about the truth. They have sunk into sociopathy, and are no help to socialists.

According to the Torah, the Jewish people used to ritually burden a goat with their sins and send it off to get lost in the wilderness. Jesus performed the same function for Christians by getting himself crucified. But the biggest scapegoaters of all are states and their ruling elites, particularly when it comes to violent crimes like the one in Southport. 'The many causes of and potential solutions to knife crime are well documented in extensive research.... Social issues including poverty and deprivation, serious mental health issues and online radicalisation are all part of the prevalence of knife crime. The lack of a proper home, violence in the home, lack of resources and money, parental neglect, adverse childhood experiences, supply of drugs ... are also sometimes part of the picture' ([tinyurl.com/5ey3aam2](http://tinyurl.com/5ey3aam2)). What capitalist state could do anything about any of these, even if it wanted to? To abolish poverty, the wellspring of so many social ills, you would have to abolish private wealth ownership, which is the foundation of capitalism. That's exactly what socialists propose. Capitalist officials will simply lock up the perpetrators as deviants, and look the other way.

Nobody can predict when or where the next riots will happen. But as long as capitalism lasts we can be sure that there will be riots, and usually it will be innocents who get the blame.

**PJS**

# Do we need vouchers?

Dear Editors

Just one note on what seems to be the main disagreement with my article [Cooking the Books 2, August 2024 Standard]:

‘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.’

I do address this point in the article: ‘I am not convinced by this line of thought though, since the token system is perfectly capable of adapting to increases in productivity. As productivity increases one of three things (or any combination of these) can be done. First of all, the increased productivity can be used to produce more goods using the same labour. This means more consumer products could be afforded by consumers with their tokens. Secondly, the same amount of consumer products could be produced while lowering labour time, meaning that workers would have more free time while being able to enjoy the same material standard of living.

Thirdly, the resources dedicated to public expenditure could be increased to improve sectors like healthcare, education or provisioning for those unable to work.

No matter which of these measures, or combination of measures, is taken, increases in productivity are no problem in the lower stage at all, in fact they would improve people’s living conditions without any need to fundamentally overhaul the token system of the lower stage.’

**Philipp Dapprich**

**Reply:**

We understood your point to be that Marx was mistaken to envisage the non-circulating voucher system that he mentioned in 1875 eventually giving way, when productivity had increased enough, to distribution on the basis of ‘from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs’ where everybody could take freely what they needed. This, you say, on the grounds that the voucher system could be adapted to distribute goods and services according to an individual’s needs.

Our argument is that, in view of the ‘significant [in fact enormous] increases in productive capacities since the nineteenth century’, it is now possible for a socialist

society to introduce free access fairly quickly.

Assuming that you accept that the capacity to produce now available to society is sufficient to satisfy the needs of everyone, the question is: why, then, would a voucher system be necessary which after all is a form of rationing, even if at a generous level?

We wouldn’t deny that in theory a voucher system could be devised to take into account increased, and increasing, productivity in the ways you suggest. But a voucher system would involve using up a considerable amount of resources to administer (recording the time worked by each individual of working age, calculating and adjusting the ‘price’ of the goods and services to be redeemed, etc), which would be wasteful as well as not needed.

The only objection to free access would be that it wouldn’t work because people would take more than they needed. But why would they? People don’t even do that today under capitalism when certain things are lastingly free to take and use. Surely not because it is human nature to be greedy? — *Editorial Committee.*

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## Artificial scarcity

WE’RE OFTEN encouraged to make changes in our personal lifestyle on the grounds that this can help change things or at least do something to help us move in the right direction. We should make sure we know, for example, where the food we eat is grown, how ‘sustainable’ its production and distribution methods are, and, if possible, to ‘buy local’. The idea is that our food buying choices will help reduce carbon emissions and contribute to the battle against ecological deterioration and global warming. It is also suggested that more radical lifestyle choices like vegetarianism or veganism can play a part in this by freeing up for direct food production land currently used for crops to feed the vast number of animals raised and slaughtered everywhere in the world.

And it’s true that, if large numbers of people made such choices, it might indeed lead to different methods and types of food production, reduce the mass slaughter of living creatures and also have some impact on climate change. But none of this would make any appreciable difference to the day-

to-day problems faced by many millions of people throughout the world. These are such problems as poverty, homelessness or precarious housing, and, above all, the need for the vast majority of us to sell our energies to an employer for a wage or salary day in day out or find ourselves without the means to live decently. The fact is that, whatever the method of production or the goods produced, so long as this happens with a view to the goods being sold on the market and people needing money to buy them, we will still have the system we call capitalism and all the problems and contradictions it throws up.

The main contradiction is that we now have the means to produce enough food and all else to sustain the whole world at a decent level several times over and to do so without polluting the environment or changing the climate, yet under the capitalist system of production for profit this cannot happen. Instead it creates artificial scarcity, causing millions to go hungry and many more to live insecure or highly stressed existences. A new report

by Unicef published in June this year (*Child Food Poverty: Nutrition Deprivation in Early Childhood* – [tinyurl.com/yc8ppcv7](https://tinyurl.com/yc8ppcv7)) revealed that around 181 million children worldwide under 5 years of age – or 1 in 4 – are experiencing severe child food poverty, making them up to 50 percent more likely to experience wasting, a life-threatening form of malnutrition. To make things worse, capitalism’s methods of production put massive stress on the ecosystem, fast pushing it, according to some, to the brink of collapse.

Time therefore for workers throughout the world to vote collectively to change that system and move to a moneyless, marketless society of free access and voluntary cooperation – which we call socialism. In that society people will put their natural human capacity for cooperation and collaboration to work and use the resources of the earth to secure a decent life for all while maintaining the environment so as to ensure a steady state of ecological balance.

**HKM**



## Trumponomics

'ON THE campaign trail, Trump has floated a ten-per-cent tariff on all imported goods, and a sixty-per-cent levy on those from China' (*New Yorker*, 15 July- [tinyurl.com/mrxcw7ss](https://www.tinyurl.com/mrxcw7ss)). He also wants to devalue the dollar vis-à-vis other currencies. In an interview with *Bloomberg Business* he 'called the strong dollar "a big currency problem" and "a tremendous burden on our companies"' (*Times*, 29 July). Tariffs and dollar devaluation, that seems to be what his plan to Make American Capitalism Great Again amounts to.

The capitalist class in any country is not a monolithic bloc when it comes to commercial matters. There are differences between those whose business is exports, those who face competition from imports, those who import raw materials and parts, those who neither export nor require imported materials. What Trump has in mind would affect these groups differently.

A 10 percent tariff on all imports would benefit some US manufacturing companies by protecting them from outside competition. But this would mean an increase (not necessarily proportionate but what the market will bear) in the price of their products. Insofar as these are consumed by workers this would exert an

upward pressure on wages, which would affect all capitalist employers even those involved in neither exports nor imports. It would also risk, in fact provoke, retaliation by the other country or trading bloc, which would affect exporters, who in the US mainly produce food for humans and animals.

When in 2018 his administration put a 25 percent tariff on imported steel and 10 percent on aluminium, the EU retaliated with tariffs amounting to nearly \$3 billion on US imports. China reacted too. As the *New Yorker* noted, 'when Trump imposed tariffs on some Chinese goods in 2018, Beijing retaliated with levies on American imports which hurt American farmers and manufacturers', adding:

'If a new Trump Administration introduced universal tariffs, many other countries would face enormous domestic pressure to respond with similar measures. In the worst-case scenario, Trump's policies could lead to an all-out trade war'.

A world-wide trade war in fact, since Japan, India, Brazil and others would join in as well as China and the EU.

A fall in the value of the dollar compared to other currencies would make US exports cheaper and so be welcomed by exporters. But it would also make imports more expensive and so be unpopular with companies that rely on them, whether to sell or to use to produce something else.

Because the dollar is the world's reserve currency, held by states and companies to settle their international transactions not only with the US but also with each other, a fall in its value would have worldwide repercussions.

It would reduce the value of the reserves held by other states and companies. These are mainly held in the form of US Treasury bills and bonds; in other words, is money lent to the US government and which allows the US to run a trade deficit but also to finance its huge military budget. Making the dollar weaker might benefit US exporters but could make borrowing from abroad more difficult. Some US capitalists disagree with Trump's approach and the matter (in which workers have no interest) will be settled at the ballot box in November.

Trump may act the boor (and be one) but he is essentially a businessman and wants to use the same sort of tactics — involving bluffs and deals — against US capitalism's economic rivals that competing capitalist companies apply against each other. States do this anyway but generally more diplomatically. A Trump administration would make it clear for everyone to see that economic rivalry between states is about supporting their companies in the competitive struggle for profits.

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# Halo Halo

AMERICAN WOBBLY activist Joe Hill's song, *The Preacher and the Slave*, describes how 'Long-haired preachers come out every night, Try to tell you what's wrong and what's right'. But when asked for a bite to eat will decline and say you'll have to wait till you get to heaven to experience the good life:

'You will eat, by and by, In that glorious land above the sky; Work and pray, live on hay, You'll get pie in the sky when you die.'

One wonders what Joe Hill would have made of the contemporary preachers who decided that rewards in heaven were for the poor, the downtrodden and the working class, but they, the preachers, wanted theirs here, now and plenty of it thank you very much.

The *South China Morning Post* (27 April) featured '8 of the richest televangelists of 2024.' Type 'rich pastors' into a search engine and many more than eight are listed. Sitting at Numero Uno was Kenneth

Copeland with an estimated worth of 300 million dollars. A Kenyan website, Tuko.co.ke has his worth listed as 760 million dollars.

The *South China Morning Post's* eight nominees are all American whereas the Kenyan site is far more international, listing Nigerians, Malawians, Zimbabweans, South Africans as well as Americans. The gullible are found all over the world.

A common feature these snake-oil salespersons seem to share is a predilection for private jets and vast property empires. Also in on the racket are women but they don't appear to come anywhere near the amounts amassed by the males. Joe Hill's song: 'Give your money to Jesus they say.' What they've always meant was 'give it to me'.

Meanwhile, in Karachaevo-Cherkessia, a Muslim-majority region in southern Russia, the Islamic authorities have banned the wearing of the niqab, citing risks posed by the practice to security and sectarian

tolerance, and follows a similar move in Dagestan. The niqab is a type of garment worn by women in some parts of the world which covers the body and face, except for the eyes. The Muftiate denounced people who claim that the niqab is mandatory in Islam, stating that the false claim is 'introducing strife and division into society'. Under current circumstances there, the garment and similar items that fully cover the face 'inflict practical harm to Muslims and threaten discontent in relations between religions and ethnicities'.

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The UK National Secular Society notes a report from the Commission for Countering Extremism which highlights the link between UK religious (Islamic) charities and anti-blasphemy extremism. It says that there is a 'new generation' of activists working to 'make blasphemy a key issue of concern for British Muslims'. Incidents highlighted include 'a teacher in Batley forced into hiding after allegedly showing pupils a drawing of Muhammad in 2021; screenings of the film *The Lady of Heaven* cancelled following protests in 2022; and a pupil receiving death threats in 2023 after a Quran was lightly damaged at a Wakefield school'.

DC

# Tiny tips

Religion in the twenty-first century is alive and well across the world, despite its apparent decline in North America and parts of Europe. Vigorous competition between and within religious movements has led to their accumulating great power and wealth. Religions in many traditions have honed their competitive strategies over thousands of years. Today, they are big business; like businesses, they must recruit, raise funds, disburse budgets, manage facilities, organize transportation, motivate employees, and get their message out (**Princeton University Press, [tinyurl.com/2s3wfm2f](https://tinyurl.com/2s3wfm2f)**).

Around one quarter of all Canadians are living in poverty, according to a new report authored by several non-governmental organizations. The report comes in the midst of a historic cost of living crisis for working class Canadians and bumper profits for big business... banks and war profiteers (**wsws.org, [tinyurl.com/3s423b86](https://tinyurl.com/3s423b86)**).

What about your country's relations with the German government?

...It was hostile to us, the Greens and the SPD wanted to prevent the sale of weapons to us [Saudi Arabia] before the election. But now, the Greens are in government and are authorizing these arms sales. The foreign minister herself announced it (**Der Spiegel, [tinyurl.com/yxuwk75](https://tinyurl.com/yxuwk75)**).

... India's richest 1% own around 40% of the country's wealth, according to Credit Suisse data cited by a 2023 Oxfam report, while more than 200 million people continue to live in poverty. One study by the World Inequality Lab in March found that the gap between India's rich and poor is now so wide that by some measures, there was more equality in India under British colonial rule than today (**Time, [tinyurl.com/3pb4h6m5](https://tinyurl.com/3pb4h6m5)**).

A Palestinian activist known for organising anti-Hamas protests in Gaza has been taken to hospital after an attack by a group of masked men. Amin Abed, 35, was admitted in critical condition after being kidnapped near his home by five assailants on Monday afternoon. A well-known activist, Mr Abed

told the BBC: "I will not stop using my right to express my rejection of the 7 October attack." Public dissent against Hamas has grown in recent months as residents of Gaza grow angry at the huge toll inflicted on the enclave since the start of the war (**BBC, [tinyurl.com/ysdzajk5](https://tinyurl.com/ysdzajk5)**).

The \$320 million project—which consists of a floating offshore barge and 1,800-foot causeway to the shore—was touted as eventually being able to accommodate up to 150 aid trucks per day. Instead, it facilitated the shipment of the equivalent of about a single day's worth of prewar food deliveries while operating for a total of less than three weeks (**Common Dreams, [tinyurl.com/3szfp9ez](https://tinyurl.com/3szfp9ez)**).

In Rwanda's case, Kagame paid an astonishing \$50,000 per month to public relations firms to present himself as a transformative leader while doing very little for his people. Did you know that the President travels in a convoy of two luxurious Gulfstream jets, each costing \$66.5 million? (**BAR, [tinyurl.com/349u2dx5](https://tinyurl.com/349u2dx5)**).

Every worker should be able to feel joy on Monday morning instead of anxiety on Sunday night (**Libcom, [tinyurl.com/39sm75ru](https://tinyurl.com/39sm75ru)**).

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

**UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS**

**LONDON**

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

**MIDLANDS**

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

**NORTH**

**North East Regional branch.**

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

**Lancaster branch.** Ring for details: P. Shannon, 07510 412 261, [spgb.lancaster@worldsocialism.org](mailto:spgb.lancaster@worldsocialism.org).

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

**Bolton.** Contact: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589.

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

**Doncaster.** Contact: Fredi Edwards, [fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk)

**Yorkshire Regional branch.**

Contact: Fredi Edwards, Tel 07746 230 953 or email [fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk)

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

**SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST**

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

Contact: [spgb.ksrb@worldsocialism.org](mailto:spgb.ksrb@worldsocialism.org) or 07971 715569.

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

[spgbsw@gmail.com](mailto:spgbsw@gmail.com)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**IRELAND**

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

**SCOTLAND**

**Edinburgh.** Contact: Fraser Anderson [f\\_raz\\_1@hotmail.com](mailto:f_raz_1@hotmail.com)

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

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

**Ayrshire.** Contact: Paul Edwards 07484717893. [rainbow3@btopenworld.com](mailto:rainbow3@btopenworld.com).

**WALES**

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# Taking the gold



EVERY FOUR years the Olympics give us a demonstration of human skills, determination and intelligence. Athletes from around the world compete for honours: yet in each Olympics, it seems, only a handful of countries take home the bulk of the medals. We could reasonably expect raw human ability to be evenly distributed around the globe, and yet, the Olympics shows us that of the 200 countries and territories that compete, US, China, Australia and some European nations will win most of the events.

Racists would attribute this to some sort of inherent national ability and superiority on the part of those nations. Of course, there are more sensible explanations. The Olympics represent the sporting culture of the countries that established them: people in many countries just do not have the same interest in these sports. In many countries, there is not the participation, much less the infrastructure, to find and train the most able sports people.

Engagement in sport requires the time to train, and billions of people around the world are tied to long working weeks (and many of those simply do not have the diet available to realise their sporting potential). On top of which, some states, like the UK, spend millions on training, supporting and honing their athletes.

Further, some states are able to attract talent through migration, offering opportunities and citizenship that others cannot match.

The participation of the other countries is essential to the spectacle, though: after all, for someone to come first someone has to come second, or even last. In many ways, the Olympics can be seen as a mechanism to transfer sporting glory from a global majority to a minority.

## North and south

As such, it serves as a good metaphor for the way that wealth is concentrated internationally. In July this year, Hickley, Lemos and Barbour published a paper in the journal *Nature Communications* entitled 'Unequal exchange of labour in the world economy' ([tinyurl.com/24hw4ej2](https://tinyurl.com/24hw4ej2)). In it they argue 'wealthy nations rely on

a large net appropriation of labour and resources from the rest of the world through unequal exchange in international trade and global commodity chains'.

They analysed data, from 2021, showing the global breakdowns of types of labour performed, and the relative prices/wage costs of that labour. Around the world, they suggest that 9.6 trillion hours of labour were performed in the world economy. 2.1 trillion hours went into traded goods (including services). They divided the world into the global North (based on the IMF list of advanced economies: USA, United Kingdom, etc) and the global South (all other countries).

The overall net balance of trade was in favour of the global North, amounting to 826 billion hours of labour transferred from South to North. They note there is no sectoral imbalance (ie, the global South is not just producing primary products, but also intermediate and finished goods for consumption). The South is not just performing unskilled labour, but highly skilled labour across the full range of economic activities, and 'This appropriation roughly doubles the labour that is available for Northern consumption but drains the South of productive capacity that could be used instead for local human needs and development'.

They explain that the: 'Dynamics of unequal exchange are understood to have intensified in the 1980s and 1990s with the imposition of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) across the global South. SAPs devalued Southern currencies, cut public employment and removed labour and environmental protections, imposing downward pressure on wages and prices. They also curtailed industrial policy and state-led investment in technological development and compelled Southern governments to prioritise "export-oriented" production in highly competitive sectors and in subordinate positions within global commodity chains. At the same time, lead firms in the core states have shifted industrial production to the global South to take direct advantage of cheaper wages and production costs, while leveraging their dominance within global commodity chains to squeeze the wages and profits of Southern producers. These interventions have further increased the North's relative purchasing power over Southern labour and goods'.

That is, through control of international institutions and control of finance. We

could add in the raw power of ownership, as many industries when decolonisation occurred still belonged to Northern capitalists. We could add naked corruption as another mechanism. And some capitalists in the periphery choose to invest their profits in the North rather than locally. Although not included in their list, we can add military dominance as well, as some Northern states will use force to ensure their position in the global chains, as well as providing the military resources that prop up rulers in the global South.

Hickley *et al* find that 'Southern wages are 87–95% less than Northern wages at the same skill level, ie, for equal work as defined by the ILO. Southern wages are 87% less for high-skill labour, 93% less for medium-skill labour, and 95% less for low-skill labour'. This is also part of the driver for imbalanced trade. They conclude:

'Given this dynamic, it is clear that the North's development model cannot be universalised, as it relies on appropriation from elsewhere. Furthermore, it is unlikely that the North's current levels of aggregate consumption could be maintained under fair trade conditions'.

And as they note: 'It should be understood that unequal exchange is ultimately driven by the corporations and investors that control supply chains, and the states that determine the rules of international trade and finance, not by workers or consumers'.

## Globalised workforce

There is a clear class issue here. The 9.6 trillion hours of labour that the authors calculate are performed in the world economy are performed by a globalised workforce that is being exploited through producing more value through their work than it costs in wages to maintain and reproduce their ability to work. Capitalists, North and South, compete to grab a share of this surplus value. What the authors have in effect uncovered is how successful, and how, the capitalists of the North have been in this struggle at the expense of the capitalists of the South.

They also calculate that 'globally, labour received, on average, 51.6% of world GDP during the 5-year period 2017–2021' and that this represents a global decline in the share going to labour. But it does not follow that a more equal sharing between the capitalists of the North and South of the 48.4% up for them to grab would alter this.

**PIK SMEET**

# Extreme reaction



Credit: @Bairdian/X

WEDNESDAY, 7 August found me on a day's family excursion to Brighton, particularly to visit the exaggerated opulence of the Royal Pavilion. An edifice, if ever there was one, symbolising the class division of society.

This Regency Pavilion was built in the latter part of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a time of dramatic economic change in Britain. This early period of the industrial revolution would witness the emergence of the Luddites and a perception by the British state of a danger of insurrection. Machine breaking and mill burning caused the authorities to respond with force and punitive punishments, up to and including capital sentencing. There was much talk of shadowy influences, such as 'General Ludd', orchestrating these outrages.

Riots were a feature of affairs in the eighteenth century. Between 1756 and 1757, stores and shipments of food were looted. Again in 1766, poor harvests and the consequent rising price of wheat and corn resulted in riots across England; 131 recorded between September and the following August. The government reacted, in those pre-police force days, by deploying military units. Large numbers of people were arrested and eight shot dead. Special commissions of assizes were set up that imposed sentences including hanging, transportation or imprisonment.

If these sentences were intended to deter future outbreaks they failed. There

were further such riots between 1770 and 1774. This was the period just before the building of the Royal Pavilion.

## Ready-made headlines

Walking from the railway station I had a brief conversation with a couple who had come into Brighton to visit a particular shop. Originally their intention had been to arrive later in the day, but the shop was planning to close at 3 that afternoon. The rioters, it seemed, were on their way. Not eighteenth century rioters looking for cheaper bread, but twenty-first century malcontents demanding that immigrants and immigration be dealt with. The tragic murder of three young girls in Southport had been hijacked, largely via social media, by malicious individuals and groups.

Immigrants, especially those who had arrived uninvited on England's shores in inflatable small boats, were extrajudicially condemned by minority opinion of guilt by association with that dreadful murder. That the one arrested was not an immigrant proved immaterial. For nights running, firstly in Southport, then across England more widely, a number of immigrant accommodations were besieged, as also, as in Southport, were mosques; Muslim equals immigrant seems to have been the 'logic'.

The disturbances gave the media ready-made headlines and stories for the August period traditionally referred to as the silly season by the media. Parliament

is not sitting, so while there is terrible news from abroad, domestic issues are in short supply. A few riots provide dramatic footage for the TV news channels, and are a gift for journalists to report and opine about. Watching footage of howling mobs confronting lines of police generates feelings of insecurity and reinforces the notion that society faces perpetual threats.

## Far right and far left

Following the recent elections in France in the first round of which populist nationalism triumphed, only to be thwarted in the second by an alliance of convenience of liberals, social democrats and what's termed the far left, it was inevitable that participants in the riots would be labelled extreme right.

Left and right are exceedingly broad political categories, designations that emerged in the national assembly of eighteenth century revolutionary France. So broad that extreme right easily covers neo-nazis/fascists, demagogic nationalists, racists and such like. Far left encompasses those who adhere to some degree or other of Leninist organisation of which there are many and various. Most claim to be socialist, though not advocates of a post-capitalist worldwide moneyless commonwealth based on the principle of meeting everyone's needs.

The problem with the left and right designations is that there is no actual



intention of ridding society of capitalism, as they are descriptive of relative political positions within capitalism. Left socialist? Right fascist? What about national socialists? Right-wing socialists? Left-wing Nazis?

What comes through is the confusion of ideas, a confusion helping to maintain capitalism by keeping people divided. It has the effect of focusing most political vision myopically on that other political category, the centre, as the alternative. Offering the alternative to capitalism that socialism is demands going beyond these political categories and an engagement by the vast majority of people to consciously challenge and then transcend capitalism, overthrowing by democratic means the apparent necessity of the status quo.

## Underlying insecurity

Undoubtedly, those who took an active part in the various disturbances were motivated by a variety of reasons. However, like those in the eighteenth century food riots, the basic cause is economic. In present-day society only a privileged few prosper, most experience financial insecurity and some suffer downright poverty. Those with very little are fearful of losing the little they do have.

Dr Abdul Hamid, chairman of the Abdullah Quilliam Mosque in Liverpool, confronted by demonstrators, recognised underlying insecurity as the basic problem. Then 'the other' is perceived as a threat, those who are seen to be outside limited perspectives. Dr Hamid said there is a 'fear of the unknown' and 'if they don't get answers, they will try to find any excuse to label you'. Adam Kelwick, a



mosque volunteer, went on to say of the demonstrators, 'I don't think they knew what they were protesting about – I think they're just angry, fed up.'

Mosque members made a point of meeting rather than confronting those outside. Conversations took place and food rather than half bricks were exchanged. Then, Kelwick went on to point out, 'Some of the most vocal protesters, after everyone else had gone, came inside the mosque for a little tour.'

Extreme rightists? Or those with ill-defined grievances who got caught up in something that, for a while, got out of control. As Kelwick observed, 'None of the people I spoke to mentioned Southport'.

## The good news

In a Brighton pub for lunch I overheard the manager on the phone confirming they were definitely closing at 6 that evening. Later that afternoon, walking back to the railway station I saw a number of shops being boarded up. That evening it seems there was an outbreak of nothing happening: no riots, no confrontations. The news featured the Prime Minister vowing

judicial punishment for all participants in disturbances. He may have to reintroduce capital sentences and transportation to be true to his word, as the prisons, it seems, are already near enough full.

The good news is that very quickly there were far more diverse groups of people declaring their common humanity with migrants, than the very much smaller numbers of antagonists. Although reported, this was nowhere near as big a story. Bad news is more dramatic it seems.

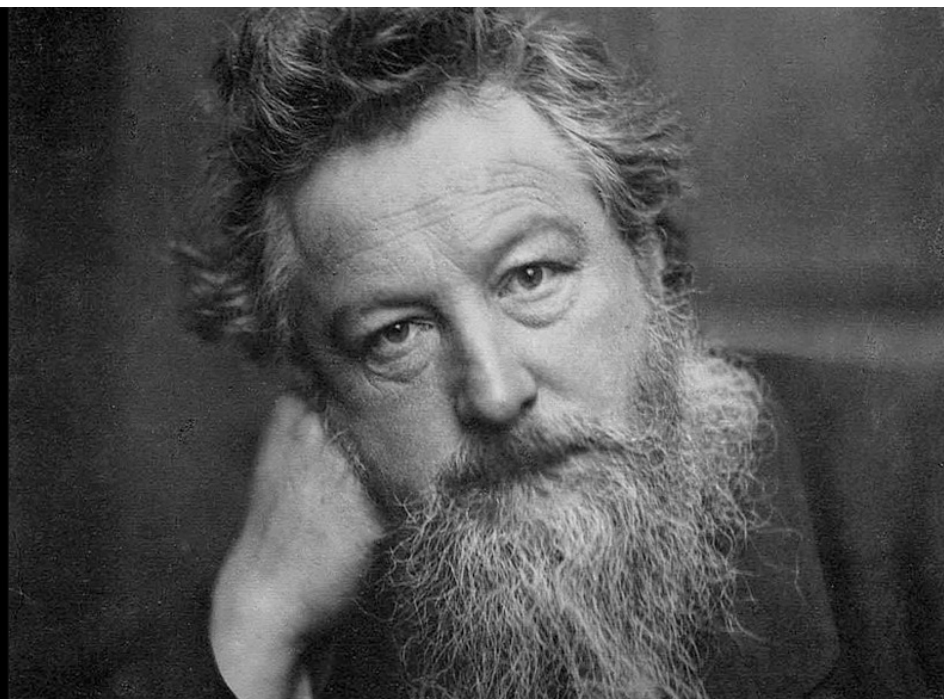
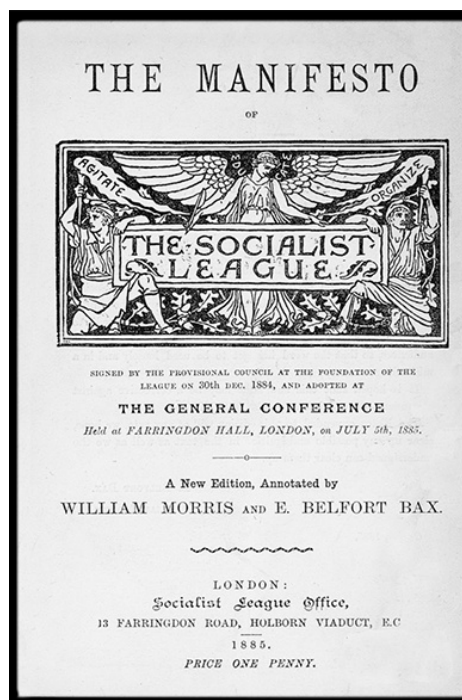
For the immigrants who were targeted it was a highly distressing few days. Those involved in the riots should ask themselves why people put themselves through all the hardships of migration. They might realise that they have more in common economically with migrants than what seems to divide them. Certainly, one overwhelming common interest that all but the privileged few has, migrant, demonstrator and those watching on TV, is in removing capitalism, the insecure society that of itself breeds riot and social disturbance.

**DAVE ALTON**



Credit: Reuters

# How we live and how we might live



THE YEAR is 1884. It is a cold and foggy, late-November night down by the River Thames in London. Groups of people are hurrying along the road towards a tall Georgian building overlooking the river. As they arrive they are shown into an attached coach house, adapted for the occasion as a meeting room. They greet each other familiarly and shake hands with the house's owner who is to give a talk titled, 'How we Live And How we Might Live'.

The name of the building is Kelmscott House and its owner is William Morris, a man widely admired as an artist-designer, a publisher, a printer, a founder of the Arts and Crafts Movement, a novelist and a poet. To his visitors, however, he is a revolutionary socialist. So, on this evening, Morris rises, and begins his address:

'The word "Revolution", which we Socialists are so often forced to use, has a terrible sound in most people's ears, even when we have explained to them that it does not necessarily mean a change accompanied by riot and all kinds of violence, and cannot mean a change made mechanically and in the teeth of opinion by a group of men who have somehow managed to seize on the executive power for the moment.'

Morris's opening remarks are not directly connected to his main theme. It seems he is issuing a challenge. He proceeds carefully but uncompromisingly, laying out his views on the nature of revolution. He warns: '...people are scared at the idea of such a vast change, and beg that you will speak of reform and not revolution. As, however, we Socialists do not at all mean by our word revolution what these worthy people mean by their word reform, I can't help thinking that it would be a mistake to use it.'

Revolution or reform? This is the challenge Morris issued to his listeners seated in his coach house that evening. They, like he were members of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), which, only a few months earlier, had declared itself to be a 'socialist'. Political declarations, however, often ring hollow under examination, and Morris was aware that many of the Federation's members, including its leadership, were committed not to 'a change in the basis of society', but to a programme of government reforms of capitalism.

Morris had recently arrived at a crossroads in his political development. And that was an issue for him. Revolution, he believed, was the way forward, and it

was antithetical to reform. So, which route would the SDF take? Did he perhaps intend his opening remarks to sound out the membership on this matter? If he did, then the response came swiftly. In less than a month he and several others severed their connection with the SDF, and founded a new organisation, the Socialist League one firmly committed to the revolutionary aim of bringing about 'a change in the basis of society'. Morris drew up its constitution.

## Palliatives

Morris focused his talk in the coach house on the persistence of working class poverty, which despite some amelioration over the previous fifty years remained starkly visible on the streets of 1884. Why, he asked his listeners, was poverty still a thing? And what was the solution? Revolutionary socialists in late Victorian England commonly referred to government reforms as 'palliatives'. It's a term not often heard today in political debate. It cuts through the rhetoric and exposes reforms for the ineffective things they are. At best, they aim to alleviate some particular ill with which capitalism burdens wage or salary workers. Governments announce reforms with great fanfare, especially at election



times. Once enacted into law, however, many reforms have a short lifespan. They persist for a few years, until they hit the next cyclical crisis in the economy, or until a new political party is elected with a different agenda. Promises get reneged upon, funding is cut back or withdrawn and eventually the entire programme gets buried under the rubble of the capitalist profit machine and party politics.

What now remains, for instance, of the Labour government's 1999 pledge to reduce child poverty to below 10% of children? Governments threw a great deal of money at the problem, and despite an initial success, the programme failed to meet its target for 2010. From that time on child poverty began rising again until the programme was abandoned in 2015/6. Now little more than twenty years later, child poverty is worse than ever. Palliatives do not persist. And because they do not attack social problems at their root, problems quickly recur.

We are now 140 years on from when Morris gave his address. Poverty is no longer as visible to us on the streets as it was then. We no longer see people walking the pavements unshod or in torn and filthy clothes. Yet, it is far from invisible. No one can have failed to notice the growing number of homeless people these days on the pavements of British towns and cities. And today a great deal of poverty is hidden away. Yet if we look hard enough, we will find, for instance, that in 2023, three million people in the UK appealed to food banks for food relief. That's one in twenty of the population who did not have enough to eat for some part of last year. According to UK government statistics, one in five, are in danger of food poverty. In the United States, the world's richest nation, the number of people visiting food banks last year hit 26 million, one American in 13. Perhaps we should not be too complacent about the 'progress' that has been made since Morris's time.

Taking a longer view, we can look back at the history of the UK. Since capitalism began to emerge in the late eighteenth century, levels of poverty have fluctuated over time. The numbers have sometimes been relatively high or relatively low, yet at no time in those two and a half centuries has poverty been eradicated. It has remained a persistent feature of working class life throughout. And this is the case not only in the UK, but in every developed capitalist nation on earth. Poverty is endemic to the capitalist system, and Morris's question remains to be answered: 'why'? Why, despite repeated attempts by governments everywhere to eliminate it is it so persistent and so universal? The literature on poverty and its elimination

gives a clue. It is vast and international, yet perhaps the most interesting thing about it is that the solutions it proposes are uniformly superficial and reflect the political dogmas of those with power.

## Poverty persists

Neoliberals confidently identify the source of poverty in blockages in the operation of the 'free' market. They point the finger at trade union action and large scale industrial bargaining, at minimum-wage legislation and 'excessive' welfare payments to the unemployed. If distorting influences such as these were removed they claim, the market would balance itself, and poverty would disappear. Poof! Gone!

For traditional conservatives, the origin of poverty lies in the decline in the family, and (condescendingly enough) in working class culture. Without a stable (heterosexual) family structure children are not properly socialised or educated. This leads to welfare dependency, loss of initiative and self esteem. It leads to crime as an alternative to wage working. And of course it leads to a loss of deference to necessary hierarchical structures.

Labourites and Social Democrats have historically seen poverty as a failure of government to provide sufficient regulation of the labour and housing markets and a lack of spending on public services and benefits. More recently they have 'discovered' that the poor lack 'social capital'. Barriers to upward mobility are to be found in weak community ties and supportive organisations.

Building on these and other superficial analyses, nation after nation has applied sticking plasters on the problem. Yet poverty persists. Decade on decade. Relentlessly. And to the extent that government programmes have brought some relief to working people, their effects have been limited and temporary. The application of such programmes, however, costs money, and in periods of low profitability, they get jettisoned altogether and working people are once again abandoned to the mercy of an unstable market economy.

The Labour Party, which committed itself to eliminating child poverty in 1999, is now back in power. Keir Starmer, in his bid for the party leadership in 2020, declared that he would make tackling poverty a major commitment. By now, however, we know that when put to the test a great many political declarations ring hollow, and Starmer's 'commitment' quickly became buried in the rubble of capitalism's economic instability and party politics. Right now, British capitalism is sunk in one of its down phases, so it is unsurprising that no renewed commitment to eliminate

child poverty appeared in the 2024 Labour Party Manifesto. During the election campaign, few Labour candidates spoke out on the issue. Once safely elected to their seats, however, the indignant voices of Labour back benchers have been raised against the leadership resulting in the first big ideological battle within the new governing party.

## Priority for profits

In a delicious piece of political theatre, a brave Tory defender of working class living standards, Suella Braverman, devoted her first speech as an opposition MP, to raising the issue of the two-child benefit cap imposed by her own party in 2019. The aim of this benefit restriction according to Braverman was to ensure that the unemployed 'make the same choices as those supporting themselves solely through work'. Decoded, this means it was intended to discourage the poor from having children. The policy, she declared had not worked. (Highlighting a Tory failure, it seems, is less motivating than stirring conflict within the Labour Party.) And so, in the name of 'the family', that sacred Tory shibboleth, it is suddenly now essential to repeal this wicked policy and- astonishingly!- end poverty in Britain for good! Starmer, however, is adamant that his government's priority must be to restore profitability in the country before the next palliative is proposed. Why does this sound familiar?

So many social reforms have been introduced over the decades to eliminate the evils of capitalism. Apart from those that have little or no effect on profitability, only a few have proven to be of lasting benefit to workers, some have been detrimental, and almost all have been eventually watered down or abandoned. So Morris's question returns, again and again: 'Why'? Why do reforms fail to relieve the strains of working life? Well, here's a thought. What if the source of these problems lies not in declining family values, in blockages of the 'free' market, in the failure of government regulation, in social exclusion, in greed, in self-interested politicians or in anything else of that kind? What if the source of the problem is to be found in something far more fundamental to the capitalist system- something as central to it as the wages system? What if the only solution to the problem of 'How we Live' is not reform but, as Morris realised 140 years ago, 'a change in the basis of society'. Over the coming issues of the *Socialist Standard* we will dig down into this question.

**HUD**

# The media and the mob

THE RECENT riots, triggered but not caused by the Southport stabbings, have reopened the debate concerning who should have the right to disseminate information (news). The 'establishment' mainstream media have resumed their unceasing war against the 'misinformation' of social media.

At the heart of this debate lies the terror of our rulers and their media that they will lose control of the political narrative that they have monopolised for so long. They conveniently forget that their newspapers' continual demonisation of immigrants has normalised racism for many and that in their desperation to evade EU banking rules through lying about the benefits of 'Brexit' it has been the mainstream media who have created the noxious racist atmosphere that fed the violence.

Loathsome internet 'influencers' like Tommy Robinson, Andrew Tate and Katie Hopkins would have no cultural platform were it not for the unceasing propaganda of the mainstream media. The media have created a Frankenstein monster and now that it has served its purpose they need to control and tame it. The elite of both left and right politics condemn the 'mob' violence without taking any responsibility for creating the toxic cultural atmosphere that made it inevitable.

'Somebody — was it Burke? — called journalism the fourth estate. That was true at the time no doubt. But at the present moment it is the only estate. It has eaten up the other three. The Lords Temporal say nothing, the Lords Spiritual have nothing to say, and the House of Commons has nothing to say and says it. We are dominated by Journalism' (Oscar Wilde).

This was true until very recently when those outside of the media establishment (fourth estate) discovered the internet and found their voice. The powerful have always known that the control of information and, more importantly, its interpretation, is vital to their interests. Sometimes we are told that we have a 'free press' but the claim that it is not 'state owned' in no way guarantees that it is 'free'. Owning the mass media has always been a preoccupation with the parasite class and the classic Murdoch versus Maxwell struggle was an example of this pissing contest for status within their class.

Their basic narrative is that capitalism is the only possible, and indeed the highest, creation of civilised economic organisation. This fact turns most of their 'news' content into mere political



Credit: Jon Cherry/Getty Images

propaganda. Presumably they are aware that they are lying but it is not always as starkly simple as that; take the proposition that high taxes are bad for the economy since they deter investment and thus employment — and from a capitalist perspective this is true. But, from a working-class perspective, low taxation for the rich means an enfeebled infrastructure (schools, hospitals, etc) which impacts exclusively on their class and so renders the cuts bad for their economic and social needs — also equally true. No amount of 'fact checking' can resolve the reality of this class struggle as within capitalism such internal contradictions are always present. Indeed, this is the primary 'fact' contained in any interpretation of information — the rest is pure rhetoric.

From the time of Ancient Rome the 'people' are considered to be a mindless mob when they indulge in any protest against conditions. The protagonists of the 'Farage riots' were universally condemned as mindless thugs without any reference to their representatives in Parliament (Reform Party) or the legitimisation of such actions by none other than the former president of the USA Donald Trump who lionised the rioters at the Washington Capitol building. The rioters of the infamous 'Gordon riots' were similarly condemned with no reference to the toxic anti-Catholic culture which, like the anti-Muslim environment of the UK today, was created by the establishment for their own political needs.

The alleged disappointment of Nigel Farage when he discovered that the murderer in Southport was not a Muslim is an example of the instincts of the monstrous demagogues that capitalism creates. The present political system effectively locks out the people from any democratic expression of their concerns

for five years so it is no surprise that such imposed political impotence will erupt into violence occasionally. Only the time-honoured right to a 'petition of Parliament' still exists but this cannot change anything in the absence of real democracy.

Although the 'outrages' of racist violence are universally condemned by agencies of the state they do provide a useful distraction from the real causes of the symptoms of capitalism. Immigration, racism, culture wars, two-tier policing and myriad other social problems conveniently divert the working class from prosecuting the class struggle.

All of these problems affect the majority who live in the real world of capitalist exploitation but not those who benefit from it. They have no concern for, or knowledge of, those living in poverty; without access to proper health care; poor education; terrible industrial relations, low wage jobs etc, etc.

The former Home Secretary under Thatcher, Willie Whitelaw, said, as he gazed out on the extensive grounds of his mansion, that the race riots of the early eighties did not belong in the England that he recognised. Most of the racist thugs who joyfully attacked hotels containing immigrants have no knowledge or understanding of that other world of luxury and decadence. They only know the daily struggle to make a living that occasionally fails completely to provide for their own and their family's needs. Someone must be to blame for the misery and the capitalist media always have ready-made scapegoats available to distract the politically naive from the culpability of the parasites whose cause they slavishly serve.

**WEZ**



# Billionaires behaving badly

ELON MUSK, one of the wealthiest individuals on the planet, has decidedly and publicly embraced right-wing ideologies. Not only does he wield significant influence in media, but he now owns Twitter, which he has skewed to the right. He reactivated several right-wing accounts, such as those of Tommy Robinson, and even before purchasing Twitter, Musk publicly stated that he would reinstate Donald Trump's account.

One of Musk's more baffling decisions was to ban the use of the biological term 'cisgender' as hate speech while simultaneously allowing a surge of actual hate speech on the platform. This coincided with his dismantling of the reporting system, which had functioned relatively well before the media platform acquisition.

Musk's shift to the right has become increasingly overt. He recently hosted a chaotic Twitter rally for Trump, where the two billionaires discussed various topics, with Musk noticeably struggling with the very technology he paid \$44 billion for. From this semi-candid discussion, socialists can discern the deepening ties between these two cheerleaders of capital.

Trump's attacks on trans people have escalated, as seen in his comments during a rally in Bozeman, Montana. In his usual stilted delivery he made slights about transgender athletes in the Olympics and pledged to strip funding from any school that promotes critical race theory or 'transgender insanity.' Trans media commentator Erin from Erin in the Morning noted that Trump is 'doubling down' on his anti-trans rhetoric.

Musk's alignment with right-wing politics wasn't a road to Damascus revelation. While dating Grimes, mother of his trans daughter Vivian, Elon would espouse his trans-humanist ideas, a kind of utopian technocrat dream. Grimes herself, famously photographed with the Communist Manifesto, claimed to subscribe to 'Fully Automated Luxury Space Communism' while Elon described himself in the vaguest of terms as an anarchist despite the anarchists denouncing his claim at the time, citing his emerald mine owning and anti-union activities.

It was by May 2020 that Musk signalled his alignment with alt-right ideas and their misinformation by tweeting, 'Take the red pill!' This phrase, from the film *The Matrix*, has been adopted by reactionary groups as a metaphor for rejecting leftist views in favour of alt-right narratives.

Vivian Wilson describes her father as '[throwing] me to the wolves in what was one of the most humiliating experiences of my entire life'. Vivian herself made tongue-in-cheek posts in response to Musk's comments, where he described her as 'killed' and 'dead.' She wrote, 'Last time I checked I am, indeed, not dead,' and 'I look pretty good for a dead b\*\*ch'. Vivian publicly refuted Musk's claims that she was influenced by a 'woke mind virus,' highlighting his absenteeism and criticising his need for validation from 'red-pilled' right-wing supporters.

Musk is more interested in mining space gold and creating an off-planet capitalist fiefdom than in solving the pressing ecological problems we are facing on Earth. His silence on climate change during his Twitter conversation with Trump is

very telling. Instead of addressing these challenges head-on, Musk seems to believe that becoming a MAGA technocrat wizard priest is the path to becoming the first Martian king.

As socialists we understand that what snake-oil Musk is selling is the extension of capitalism into space but we advocate for a society where all individuals, regardless of their gender identity, are treated with dignity and respect. It is imperative to challenge the harmful ideologies perpetuated by those in power. We stand in solidarity with Vivian and transgender individuals facing similar struggles, while emphasising the urgent need for a socialist revolution and a society free from the capitalist magnifying glass that uses misogyny as a tool to fracture our class.

**A.T.**



# Cash or cachet?

IN THE 1860s, William James, one of the founding fathers of psychology, declared that ‘the most deep-seated need in human nature is to be appreciated’. Of course, ideas about ‘human nature’ are many and varied and socialists would argue that there is actually no fixed human nature but simply ‘human behaviour’, which is highly flexible and varies enormously from place to place, person to person and time to time according to the circumstances in which human beings find themselves and the pressures and influences upon them. But whether we call it ‘human nature’ or anything else, there can be little doubt that human beings are, as William James observed, prone to caring deeply about their standing in the eyes of others, about what a recent series of BBC radio programmes called ‘Status’ ([bbc.co.uk/sounds/series/m0021hc4](http://bbc.co.uk/sounds/series/m0021hc4)).

## Ultra-social

The author and journalist, Carl Honoré, who presented the ‘Status’ programmes, traced this tendency to the fact that humans are a highly cooperative species (‘ultra-social’, it is often called) who, had they not been ‘wired’ to cooperate, could not have survived the various different stages of social development they have been through. He pointed in particular to the most long-lived of these stages, the hunter-gatherer one, where survival was based on close collaboration among members of the group in which they lived and where those who excelled at bringing back food to be shared by the tribe were those who would earn the

most prestige or ‘status’. This, he went on, was the ultimate reward and, as a driving force, has been fundamental to all the various different forms of human society that followed. So, despite the fact that those societies – and in particular the current one, capitalism – have laid ever-increasing emphasis on competition, this has not prevented cooperation continuing alongside it and at the same time, without which in fact we could not carry on living and working together. And a crucial reason for that, according to Carl Honoré, is that we are built to care intensely about what other people think of us – even if we may not openly admit it. In fact, it is one of the key experiences creating in us feelings of what we know as ‘happiness’.

Of course, modern capitalist society, with its winner-take-all mindset, often frustrates this natural tendency to contribute to the wellbeing of others and the community and the welcome esteem and appreciation it generates for us. This was something emphasised by the programme’s presenter, when he referred to ‘the economic insecurity baked into global capitalism’ as a significant factor preventing us from fulfilling our role as social animals and preventing us from creating ‘relationships and communities that make everyone feel valued’. In capitalism we focus on making a living for ourselves, because we need to, often to the detriment of working together with others, of ‘helping the tribe’ and achieving the satisfaction that creates. Not of course that we never experience such satisfaction. Our natural ‘ultra-social’ urge to help and to be of use to our fellow humans manifests itself in all manner

of small ways in our lives more or less every day, helping to offset the ‘zero-sum’ experience that capitalism tends to make of life.

## Seeking happiness

In the last of his five programmes, Carl Honoré, called for ‘a political earthquake to fix an economic system that denies basic dignity to so many’ and the need ‘to build a world where everyone thrives’. These ideas sound very much like what the Socialist Party has advocated and campaigned for throughout the 120 years of its existence. He further stated that ‘the first step to settle a problem is to lay it out on the table’ and that too is precisely what we have never stopped trying to do during that period. But it is of course up to workers as a whole, including Carl Honoré, to break free from the current system, to grasp the nettle of that problem and to take the necessary democratic political action to solve it. What is certain – and emerges clearly from what the presenter lays out – is that the natural human tendency to cooperate will be a perfect instrument for the establishment and operation of a moneyless, wageless society of voluntary work and free access based on the principle of from each according to ability to each according to need. In such a society our ‘craving for status’, our desire for the approbation of others, will have full scope for satisfaction, contributing both to the wellbeing of our fellow human beings and to our own personal happiness.

**HKM**





# A Special Branch report

IN 2014, following a scandal, the government set up an official inquiry into undercover policing. This Undercover Policing Inquiry has been hearing evidence ever since. By 2018 the inquiry had confirmed that undercover police had, over decades, periodically infiltrated the following groups and movements:

'Anarchist groups, Animal Liberation Front, Anti-Apartheid Movement, Anti-Fascist Action, Big Flame, Black Power movement, Brixton Hunt Saboteurs, Anglia Ruskin Churchill Society (Young Conservatives), Colin Roach Centre, Dambusters Mobilising Committee, Dissent!, Earth First!, Essex Hunt Saboteurs, Friends of Freedom Press Ltd, Globalise Resistance, Independent Labour Party, Independent Working Class Association, International Marxist Group, International Socialists, Irish National Liberation Solidarity Front, London Animal Action, London Animal Rights Coalition, London Boots Action Group, London Greenpeace, Militant, No Platform, Antifa, Operation Omega, Reclaim the Streets, Red Action, Republican Forum, Revolutionary Socialist Students Federation, Socialist Party (England and Wales), Socialist Workers Party, South London Animal Movement (SLAM), Tri-Continental, Troops Out Movement, Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, West London Hunt Saboteurs, Workers Revolutionary Party, Young Haganah, Young Liberals, Youth against Racism in Europe' (Wikipedia / Undercover\_Policing\_Inquiry).

Since then, groups like Just Stop Oil, Extinction Rebellion, Islamist and far-right groups will also have been infiltrated.

We are not on this list. One reason might be that, as all our meetings and records (except the membership list) are open to the public as a matter of principle, a police spy would not need to actually infiltrate us to find out what we were up to. Even so, this has not prevented the police spying on us, as a document published on the Inquiry's website in July shows ([tinyurl.com/27d5fn7](https://tinyurl.com/27d5fn7)).

As can be seen, it's a report on a debate between us and a well-known Labour Party MP, Ron Brown, in 1988. It happens to be fairly accurate. In fact, the 'secret and reliable source', whoever they were, seems to have been impressed by our speaker and the case he presented. The abbreviation '(ph)' stands for phonetic, indicating that the spy wasn't clear how the name of the person who chaired the meeting was spelt. 'UI' means under investigation, indicating that we as a Party were being 'investigated' by Special Branch, even if not infiltrated. It

Socialist Standard September 2024

S. B. No. 1 (Plain)

Special Report }  
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SUBJECT.....

The Socialist Party

Reference to Papers  
400/73/213

Box 500

HN90

M.P.82(E)

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METROPOLITAN POLICE

SPECIAL BRANCH

9th day of December 19 88

1. The following information has been received from a secret and reliable source:-

2. "On Wednesday, 7th December 1988, between 8pm and 10pm, at the Council Chamber, Lambeth Town Hall, a debate was held by the Socialist Party (SP) (aka the Socialist Party of Britain/Great Britain) entitled 'Which Way Forward for the Working Class?'. Approximately 25 persons attended, which was considered, by the organisers, to be a poor turn-out.

3. The chairwoman, [Privacy] (ph), introduced the two main speakers who were Ron BROWN, Labour Party MP, and Steve COLEMAN of the SP.

4. Steve COLEMAN spoke first, attacking Labour Party policies and accusing it of being a traitor to the 'working class' and of being almost as 'capitalist' as the 'Tories'. He quoted, at length, the Labour Party's past record to back up his allegations. COLEMAN presented himself as a powerful orator who was both amusing and convincing in his argument.

5. BROWN spoke for the next 25 minutes, choosing not to answer COLEMAN's allegations but presenting Labour Party policy on numerous issues.

6. After both speakers had finished, the meeting was opened up to the floor for debate. The meeting was closed after another hour."

7. Special Branch references:-

Ron BROWN	MP
Steve COLEMAN	UI
[Privacy] (ph)	UI

1 HN109

CHIEF SUPERINTENDENT

is not clear whether the spy was actually a member of the police force or (perhaps more likely) just an ordinary snout, or how much they were paid.

## METROPOLITAN POLICE SPECIAL BRANCH

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# Another reform stops working

THE FRONT page of the weekend edition of the *i* paper (3/4 August) read:

## **‘Thousands of ‘affordable’ homes stand empty despite housing crisis.**

- New homes built under Britain’s ‘affordable housing’ rules remain empty because housing associations do not have funds to buy them under ‘crazy’ system, it is told
- Entire developments are also delayed as potential buyers pull out due to budget squeeze, with major housebuilders unable to find purchasers for 1,000 homes each
- Properties earmarked for homeless families among many vacant for up to three years.’

So-called affordable housing is not necessarily affordable to all of those who need housing. What it is, is inferior housing produced so that it can be let at a lower than average rent. It is provided for under Section 106 of a housing reform — the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 — which empowers local authorities, when granting planning permission, to make an agreement with a speculative housebuilding company under which the company offsets some of the side-effects of its housing development. One such offsetting measure can be to provide a certain amount of ‘affordable housing’.

Local authorities can’t require too much of this, which costs the company money (as they could otherwise build and sell higher quality housing), or the company will walk away and no extra housing at all will be built. But that’s not the problem here.

Section 106 housing is not allowed to be sold to individuals and is normally bought by housing associations and local councils to let to tenants at a lower than average rent (reflecting its lower than average quality). According to the paper’s report, housing associations have not been buying these houses as much as they once did as they are short of money, and housebuilding companies have stopped some housing developments because they are losing money on unsold ‘affordable’ housing.

When socialists say that capitalism cannot be reformed we mean that it cannot be made to work in a way different from how it does — as a profit-making system in the interest of those who own and control the means for producing what society needs to survive. It cannot be reconfigured so as to work in the interest of the majority of the population who are excluded from ownership of productive resources.

This does not mean that within the framework of class ownership and production for profit measures can’t be introduced aimed at dealing with problems that the system continuously generates, for the owning few as for the excluded many.

In fact, one of the remits of a government is to introduce measures aimed at solving a problem for the few or at mitigating one for the many. Governments are proposing and implementing such ‘reforms’ all the time.

As far as the excluded many are concerned, the word ‘mitigate’ is appropriate since the problems they face can never be solved within the capitalist system; all that can be done is to soften the impact to some extent. But even this doesn’t always last. If it involves the government spending money, this tends to get reduced in an economic downturn.

Some reforms work for a while but then give rise to another problem. The scandal exposed by the *i* paper is an example. A reform enacted to help lower paid workers access housing that they can afford is not working as intended. A further reform is required to try to mitigate this new problem. It’s like whack-a-mole. You mitigate one problem and another pops up.

Houses intended for the lower paid standing empty while people need them is indeed crazy, not to say outrageous, but is not simply due to a reform not working as intended. It’s the sort of thing that will keep reoccurring in one form or another when, as under capitalism, houses are built to be sold at a profit rather than just to be lived in.

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## Party News

THIS YEAR’S Summer School was held in Worcester over the weekend of 16-18 August. The theme was political consciousness. Keith Graham covered Marx’s view, arguing that, as we could no longer maintain, as Marx did, that socialism was inevitable, the emergence of a socialist political consciousness was even more crucial. Brian Gardner showed that, while the working class was not that conscious of its own interest, capitalists most certainly were of theirs. Paddy Shannon wondered whether Generation Z might not be contributing to raising political consciousness in the sense of breaking down barriers within the working class by promoting gender and sexual orientation equality.

There were two guest speakers.

Interviewed by Mike Foster, Cat Rylance, of Communist Future, explained why she had stood as a candidate in the recent general election canvassing door to door for a society in which private property rights over means of production and wage-labour would be ended and from each according to their ability to each according to their needs practised. Asked why the group had chosen ‘communism’ rather than ‘socialism’ to describe this, she said that this was to make a clean break with the reformist social-democratic politics as instanced by Corbynism. Both this and Trotskyism gave the impression that the aim of socialists or communists was the reforms they advocated rather than a different society to capitalism. What was needed was people who put advocating a different society first.

She felt that the best way to advance this was by working within the Left. Some of those present questioned this.

Darren Poynton set out the ‘Roman republican’ conception of ‘freedom’ as freedom from being dominated as contrasted to the still dominant liberal conception which saw it as freedom from interference. He pointed out that the republican conception would be achieved in a classless society based on the common ownership of the means of life as this would be a society in which no one would have dominion over anyone; with full democracy, in which everyone could have an equal say, nobody would be able to subjugate anyone.

As well as the talks and the discussions they prompted, the event included a one-off board game on the theme of political consciousness and an exhibition about how the subject has been covered in the Socialist Standard. And between the sessions, the weekend was a welcome opportunity to catch up with friends and comrades over a meal or in the nearby pub.





FOR SOME journalists, the ‘freedom of the press’ has meant the ‘freedom’ to get information for a scoop by any unscrupulous method, especially tapping phones. ITV’s documentary *Tabloids On Trial* was a reminder that the ‘phone hacking scandal’ is still being played out in the courts, over eighteen years since it first became public. Much of the programme is taken up with ITV News’s Rebecca Barry interviewing people involved, such as ex-journalists and celebrities. Footballer Paul Gascoigne, now looking older than his years, talks about the damage done by newspaper exposés of his personal life and how reporters learned the details. Actor Hugh Grant alleges that *The Sun* used information about him gathered through microphones in window boxes, medical records ‘blagged’ from the NHS and burglary. Singer Charlotte Church tells of how she was targeted by the press from when she was a teenager, and says they became an ‘inescapable abuser’. Ex-Prime Minister Gordon Brown says that when his phone was hacked, this risked the leak of state secrets to the press. Even Prince Harry is interviewed, telling us that the surveillance and mistrust it led to ‘sucks’. When he won his civil court case against Mirror Group Newspapers in December 2023, the judge ruled that phone hacking and illegal information gathering was ‘habitual and widespread’ in the company.

The spare heir isn’t the only royal to have been affected. In 2005, the royal family (or their staff) noticed that some of the details in *News of the World* articles about them could only have come from voicemails, so they contacted the police. A reporter and private investigator were subsequently convicted of phone hacking, and the investigation closed after a few months with the Metropolitan Police claiming there was ‘insufficient evidence’ of any other wrongdoing at the newspaper. As Nick Davies, an investigative journalist who uncovered the scandal, says in the documentary, they ‘very very nearly got away with that’. Then, in 2011, it was revealed that *News of the World* journalists had also hacked into the phone of murdered teenager Milly Dowler while she was missing. The resulting backlash led to the newspaper closing down.

The Leveson Inquiry began the same year, collating reports from thousands of people who had information about them gained surreptitiously by journalists and contracted private investigators. At the hearings, senior newspaper staff and reporters all denied knowledge of phone hacking, except James Hipwell, who said that it happened daily on *The Mirror*’s showbiz desk, then overseen by Piers Morgan. Interviewed for the documentary is Paul McMullan, previously of the *News of the World*, who admits that phone hacking was commonplace and accepted, opining that privacy was something that people may want, but don’t need.

Many of the celebrities and others have won damages in court, and civil cases are ongoing, including that raised by Prince Harry. Cases have been or will be against behemoths Mirror Group Newspapers, News UK Newspapers (part of News Corp, which owns *The Sun* and now-defunct *News of the World*) and Associated Newspapers, which includes *The Daily Mail* and *Mail on Sunday*. As pointed out by ex-broadsheet editor Baroness Wheatcroft, considering that this is an industry-wide crime with thousands of victims, there have been few criminal convictions. Only eight journalists or private investigators and one senior figure (*News of the World* editor Andy Coulson) were found guilty of hacking-related crimes. An explanation for this low number suggested by the documentary is that the police were reluctant to investigate because of their connections with the press, described by ex-newspaper editor Paul Connew as ‘almost a mutual backscratching relationship’. Hugh Grant remarks that the police were ‘as dangerous as the reporters’ because they would tip off journalists. An undercover police officer working at a private investigator firm says that what he reported back to the Met was ignored because their senior staff were friendly with those at *The Sun*. The Tories dropped the Leveson Inquiry before any links between the police and the papers were investigated. The documentary is careful not to go too far here, raising more questions about how close those links between parts of the establishment have been.

The suggestion that phone hacking is part of a bigger issue in a more

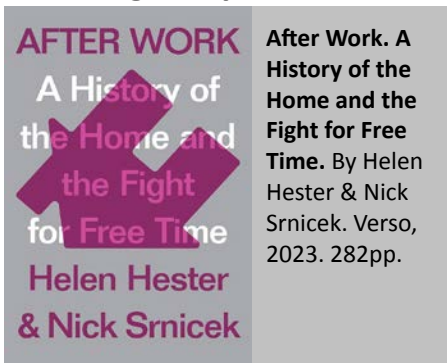
fundamental way is made by Prince Harry, of all people, in calling the claimants including himself the ‘Davids’ to the Goliath of the ‘vast media enterprise’. He seemingly recognises that even his own status and wealth is dwarfed by the clout of the media industry, with its central role in the capitalist economy. The phone hacking scandal is notable in that it has wronged some of those at the top of capitalism’s hierarchy, also including Gordon Brown. The capitalist class and its representatives benefit from how the system – including the media industry – exploits people, but because they are newsworthy, they’re subject to being exploited by the media themselves. And it appears to be only the very richest victims – like the prince and the ex-PM – who can afford what’s called justice. Even Hugh Grant hasn’t got the money to cover the £10 million in legal fees which a victory in court would cost him, hence him agreeing an out-of-court settlement with *The Sun*.

Of all those interviewed for the documentary, investigative journalist Nick Davies has the widest and clearest view of the scandal. As he explains, the ‘ruthless determination’ for profits has driven tactics such as phone hacking, ‘blagging’ and stealing, regardless of the welfare of their targets. If these tactics provide information for salacious stories which sell more newspapers, creating more profit, then those tactics will be used. As Paul McMullan states, the illegality of phone hacking didn’t prevent journalists using it as ‘almost an industry standard technique’. Now that this practice has been exposed, the backlash against it has made it no longer feasible, and therefore no longer profitable.

The media industry has changed since the years when phone hacking was widespread. Then, printed newspapers weren’t as seriously threatened by the proliferation of online news providers as they are now. Changes in how we consume news have eroded the prominence which newspapers once had, and the disgrace of the phone hacking scandal has helped speed up their decline. What hasn’t changed, though, is the ‘ruthless determination’ for profits which drives the media industry and those who work within.

**MIKE FOSTER**

## Progress perverted



**After Work. A History of the Home and the Fight for Free Time.** By Helen Hester & Nick Srnicek. Verso, 2023. 282pp.

A key concept in this book is ‘social reproduction’. What the authors mean by this is work in areas such as healthcare, education, catering and social services, as well as the essential, ‘unpaid’ work people do outside of the workplace and largely at home (cooking, caring, cleaning, etc.). They examine the contribution of this kind of work to keeping human society operating across the whole range of other work taking place in the production and distribution of goods and services. Their approach to this is to trace the evolving history of that social reproduction, in particular as it has operated in the domestic sphere over the last century and a half, the influence on it of advancing technology (eg electricity, gas, sewerage, running water, waste removal), and the changes in attitudes and expectations this has brought about. Referring to themselves as ‘socialist republicans’, they devote the final chapter of their book to examining what the future might hold for social reproduction and the home generally, especially in an imagined new social context referred to variously as ‘post-work’, ‘post-capitalism’ or ‘post-scarcity’.

This is a detailed many-faceted exposition which draws upon multiple sources and studies. They point to how capitalism forces many workers ‘to waste precious hours of their lives on work that is neither stimulating, creative nor productive’, how much of the ‘free time’ spent at home is taken up with unsatisfying chores, especially for women, and how wasteful (‘a colossal squandering of human time, effort and labour’) is the organisation of people into atomised individual housing units which makes each person or family continually repeat activities such as cooking, laundering, washing up and cleaning rather than save energy, time and trouble by making communal activities of them. In their analysis of how the organisation of work and home in capitalist society presents obstacles to activity that satisfies individuals’ needs and talents, they also point tellingly to how, in ways we will all recognise, technology, ‘rather than

reducing the amount of time spent on work ...more often than not ... seems to lead to more work’, while, if the social conditions were different, that same technology could ‘serve as an ally in the quest for temporal autonomy and for the recognition, redistribution and reduction of reproductive labour’.

It is in their final chapter, entitled ‘After Work’, that they put the most detailed flesh on what they consider could, given the right social conditions, constitute truly fulfilling non-coercive progress for human society. After offering a thoroughly recognisable picture of work under capitalism (eg, ‘the majority of us must give up forty hours or more per week in exchange for survival, typically selecting from a narrow range of possible jobs where decisions over what we do on a daily basis ultimately lie outside of our hands’), they talk about how ‘real freedom requires the absence of domination’, which currently workers are subject to both from their bosses and from impersonal market forces, while what is needed is for work to become ‘the focus of more freely chosen commitments’. What do they envisage? While not claiming to offer a ‘sketch’ rather than a blueprint, they look, for example, to ‘a free time infrastructure’ where ‘people have opportunities to develop their capacities and pursue collective projects’ with ‘infinite possibilities for human interaction’. They look to provision of ‘non-nuclear living arrangements’ with ‘more experimental models of early years care’. They look to communities being ‘turned from passive recipients of technologies into networks of active creators’. And, commendably, all this is envisaged as being within a framework of ‘from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs’.

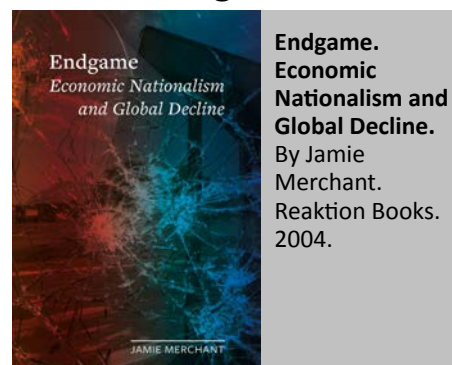
There is, however, is a key criticism to be made of the way this ‘imaginary’ (a word frequently used by the authors) is presented, in that it all seems to be seen as doable within the framework of the current society of money and wages, buying and selling and government control – in other words within the market system which the book has previously and quite rightly condemned as drastically limiting personal and social freedoms. So, for example: it expresses support for ‘government policies’ aiming ‘to provide support for public and community-based systems of care;’ it talks of ‘a free time infrastructure’ that provides ‘free museums’ and ‘free school meals and breakfast clubs’ for children’ – implying of course the continuation of overall social transactions via money; and,

even more explicitly, it advocates ‘decent wages and better conditions for domestic workers’. In other words everything it commends is envisaged as happening via government action within the money system and without – or at least prior to – the establishment of the society of voluntary work, democratic control and free access to all goods and services that is the very essence of socialism. This seems to indicate a failure on the part of the authors, despite their obviously positive intentions and explicit aspiration for the ‘construction of a better world’, to accept that, so long as we have a system of governments overseeing the money and wages system, that system itself will not allow well intentioned reforms to come to fruition willy-nilly and any reforms that do get enacted can just as easily be reversed if those ‘impersonal market forces’ they refer to dictate it.

So, while there is much to reflect on here in terms of the kind of life that might be possible if workers were set free from ‘the realm of necessity’ that capitalism imposes, a good deal of that will only be feasible once workers in a majority take the necessary political action – ideally via the ballot box – to do away with governments and with money, wages and profit and cooperatively organise society. The Socialist Party is sometimes – unfairly – called ‘utopian’ for advocating this, but the true utopianism lies in trying to somehow see as possible true freedom in work and association within the framework of a social and economic system that by definition cannot allow it.

**HKM**

## Endgame?



**Endgame. Economic Nationalism and Global Decline.** By Jamie Merchant. Reaktion Books. 2004.

Is globalisation coming to an end and capitalism returning to a period like that between the two world wars of the last century when economic nationalism and beggar-thy-neighbour policies were the norm? Merchant makes out a case for this, starting from basically Marxian premises.

He describes how, from the point of view of actual production, the world is one system involving workers everywhere:

‘Pick a typical product of contemporary globalization — say a laptop computer.



The laptop is sold for money by the company that owns it only as the end result of a transnational sequence of extraction, processing, manufacturing, assembly, transportation, and distribution, involving thousands of laborers doing different kinds of work for a range of contractors across dozens of countries' (pp. 125-6).

In the course of such 'planetary assemblages' the world working class, as a class, produce a pool of surplus value from which firms and states compete to draw a share as profits. The profits of capitalist firms do not depend on how much surplus value its workers might be said to produce; in fact some firms, as those in the inflated financial sector, don't produce any but are very successful in capturing some. The profits a firm makes depends on how well it is organised to draw profits from the world pool of surplus. In this, firms are helped by states.

'National competition,' Merchant writes, 'is competition over the global surplus product. Monetary policies, tax laws, corporate subsidies and trade agreements are some of the measures states take to assist their national corporations in raising profitability, that is, in capturing more of this global surplus' (p. 98).

He defines 'globalisation' as the period when global production, and so the pool of global surplus value, was expanding. The governments of the leading capitalist states favoured the liberalisation of world trade by abolishing or lowering tariff barriers as they believed that this would lead to world trade expanding even more.

Merchant's basic thesis is that this period is coming to an end because the continuing mechanisation imposed by competition has led to a fall in the rate of profit, resulting in 'the global pool of surplus value available for redistribution as profits shrink[ing] relative to total capital invested worldwide' (pp. 153-4).

Competition to capture profits has become more intense — more of a zero-sum game — and states are being compelled to intervene more actively to try to steer profits to enterprises within their boundaries. 'Global productivity growth', he writes, 'appears to be over for the foreseeable future. The result is likely to be a kind of stasis state in which national governments must take ever more extreme measures to compensate for the paralysis of private capitalism' (p.134). Hence the rise of economic nationalism and of parties advocating 'national sovereignty'.

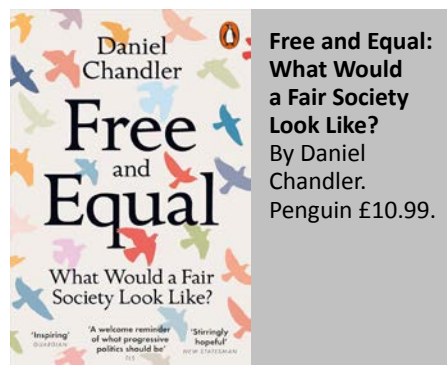
Slow productivity growth and slower expansion of world production are

plausible explanations for the observable move away from globalisation, as so-called 'neo-liberalism' on a world scale, and towards economic nationalism (from governments subsidising selected enterprises as supposed engines of growth to the rise of nationalist and nativist political parties). Whether this is the endgame for capitalism is another matter.

In the final chapter Merchant seems to envisage capitalism being overthrown and the wages system abolished by spontaneous mass rioting. That's another matter too.

ALB

## Limited Choices



**Free and Equal:  
What Would  
a Fair Society  
Look Like?**  
By Daniel  
Chandler.  
Penguin £10.99.

In 1971 the political philosopher John Rawls published *A Theory of Justice*. This has had a massive impact in the academic world, giving rise to a great many articles and books discussing its argument, but it has so far had few consequences in practical politics, and that is what Daniel Chandler sets out to alter here. He presents arguments for a 'fair society', which Rawls referred to as 'realistically utopian'. This review will focus on Chandler's proposals, sometimes looking at the theoretical background to these.

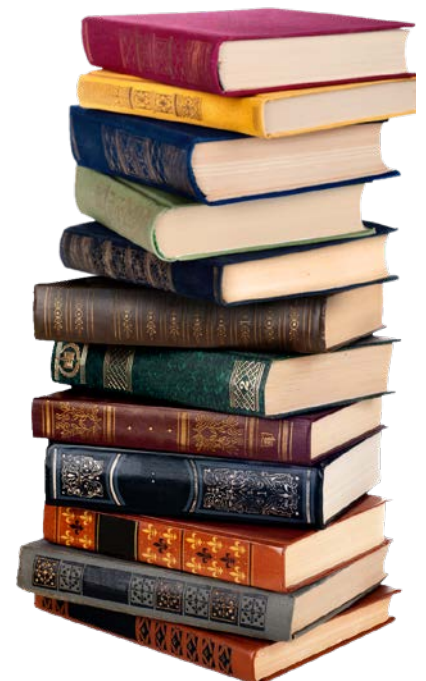
Essentially, a programme of reforms is set out, including universal basic income and a higher minimum wage. There would be increased taxes on capital income, more progressive inheritance tax and an annual wealth tax on the largest fortunes. Employees should have more say in how their workplaces are run, and co-management (which is found in Germany) would mean workers and owners sharing control rights within a company. Worker co-operatives might be an improvement on this, though. Fee-paying schools would be abolished, and more would be spent on children from less-advantaged backgrounds. University education would be financed by combining free tuition and income-contingent loans. Politics could be made more democratic if corporate donations to political parties were banned and there was a cap on individual donations. Each citizen could be given a

'democracy voucher', so they could make an annual donation to a party or candidate of their choice. A combination of electoral and direct democracy would make political equality more likely. Communities could be in charge of local budgets, perhaps by means of citizens' assemblies.

Rawls' work is based on a thought experiment. In Chandler's words, 'we should ask ourselves what kind of world we would choose to live in if we didn't know who we would be within it'. Presumably people would opt for a world with little inequality or discrimination, with nobody's life experience dependent on their gender, ethnicity or sexuality, with equality of opportunity as far as possible. But the trouble is that both authors' views are stuck within capitalism. Chandler writes: 'We should rely on markets to distribute most consumer goods and services because the alternative would be some form of state-controlled rationing.' But this is not the only alternative: a society of free access and production for use based on the common ownership of the means of living could provide a decent life for everyone.

The few remarks made here about socialism are not at all enlightening. Chandler says it is not clear what sort of society socialists today stand for. In a note he states that socialists now advocate reforms, rather than the use of public ownership and central planning, as supposedly used to be the case. But acquaintance with the case of the Socialist Party would show that we oppose reformism and have a definite proposal for future society, and this does not involve central planning. A better response to Rawls' thought experiment would be a world without money or classes or states or borders, and this is entirely realistic.

PB



# The war in Cyprus

THE GREEK nationalist agitation for enosis (ie, union) broke out in 1931. It was suspended during the war, when Cypriot troops were part of the Allied armies, and resumed not long after it. The Atlantic Charter of 1941, a set of wartime humbug-platitudes, laid down the principle of self-determination for “all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live”, but in 1947 the British government ruled out any change of status for Cyprus. In a plebiscite in 1950 the Cypriots – of whom Greeks form four-fifths – voted overwhelmingly for union with Greece.

From 1954, with Archbishop Makarios as leader of the Greek population, the guerrilla organization EOKA waged war on British rule. A military governor was appointed by the British government, and in 1956 Makarios was deported. Besides the EOKA campaign, Turkish Cypriot nationalists pressed claims for a partition of the island and fought the Greeks. The “solution” of 1960 was a constitution in which Greeks and Turks shared in government – no enosis, no partition; Greece and Turkey stationed token forces there; and Britain retained sovereign rights in certain areas

for military purposes. Near-war again in 1963, and shells and bloodshed in 1974.

Why is Cyprus important to Britain and other world powers? Its economy, apart from some minerals and a lot of cheap wine, is insignificant. But in the Middle Ages Cyprus was a vital entrepot for commerce with the east, and every trading state established stations and bought trading rights there. In the 19th and 20th centuries it has remained a vital strategic point. Disraeli in 1878 wanted it as a link in a scheme to defend British interests in India; Eden in 1956 declared that the possession of a British base in Cyprus was necessary to protect British and West European oil supplies. (...)

While Turkey and Greece fight for advantages and pickings from the other’s need for Cyprus, their peasants and workers remain poverty-stricken. Futile bloody slaughter, indeed: capitalism lives, and the workers die. Stop it. Stop your nationalism, and your support for this wretched system – quickly!  
(*Socialist Standard*, September 1974)

## Action Replay

# Faster, higher, fraternity

THE OLYMPICS comes round every four years, and this time it was the turn of Paris. The French capital had hosted the Games twice before, in 1900 and 1924. The 1900 Games were only the second of the modern era, and they were run more by the French state than the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Quite apart from the nationalism that you might expect, there was emphasis on military applications, with the events including not just target shooting but also cannon-firing and ballooning (which had potential uses in terms of spying and so on). In 1924 forty-four nations competed, compared to just twenty-nine in 1920; Germany was banned from both these Games, because of the First World War.

Over two hundred nations were represented this year, but of course, capitalism being what it is, there is more to be said. Athletes from Russia and Belarus competed as Individual Neutral Athletes, without flags or anthems. There was also an IOC Refugee Olympic Team, consisting of athletes from various countries and reflecting the fact that there are millions of displaced people globally. ‘This unique project demonstrates the IOC’s commitment to standing with refugees and supporting them through sport at elite, but also grassroots, levels’ (olympics.com).

The city of Paris benefitted from the publicity and increased number of visitors. There were complaints that advantage was being taken of a captive audience, with increased prices for buses and the Metro, and also for attractions such as the Louvre and Eiffel Tower, plus higher tourist taxes in hotels. This was balanced, though, by a concern that some tourists might avoid Paris because of the congestion caused by the Games and increased security clampdowns. Visitor numbers did indeed drop in some cases.

Some of the ticket prices also gave rise to protests, with the most expensive tickets for finals in athletics and basketball being priced at €980. In response, it was

stated that such prices helped make the lower prices for other tickets possible, with nearly half of those available priced at €50 or less, and one tenth at just €24. The cost of staging the Games was reduced by using existing venues and facilities where possible.

We should also point out that the Olympics are not just about sport, national rivalry and money-making. Over 200,000 condoms were provided in the Olympic Village. It’s probably not connected, but it may have been good to see that Head & Shoulders was adopted as the official Olympic shampoo.

**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.

## September 2024 Events

### World Socialist Movement online meetings

**Sundays at 19.30 (IST) (Discord)**

**Weekly WSP (India) meeting**

**Sunday 8 September 10.00 (GMT + 1)**

**Central Online Branch Meeting**

**Friday 6 September 19.30 (GMT + 1)**

**Activity Planning Meeting**

**Friday 13 September 19.30 (GMT + 1)**

**[Subject to be chosen]**

Speaker : Andy Davies

**Friday 20 September 19.30 (GMT + 1)**

**Some more ways that socialism can heal the world**

Speaker: Paddy Shannon

**Friday 27 September No Meeting**

**Why wars happen**

Speaker: Howard Moss

## Socialist Party Physical Meetings

### WIGAN

**Saturday 7 September**

**Wigan Diggers' Festival**

The Socialist Party will have a stall at this event from 11.30 to 6pm.

The Wiend, Wigan town centre, WN1 1PF

### MANCHESTER

**Saturday 28 September, 2pm**

**Get that capitalist off your back**

Friends Meeting House, Mount Street,  
Manchester city centre, M2 5NS

### LONDON

**Sunday 29 September, 3pm**

**Where do we go from here?**

Public meeting, Socialist Party premises, 52 Clapham High Street, SW4 7UN (nearest tube: Clapham North. Underground: Clapham High Street).

### CARDIFF

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

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

## Declaration of Principles

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

### Object

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

### Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

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

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

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

# Being your own boss

THERE USED to be many local shops in my area. Now, as almost everywhere, they are few and far between. Yet this doesn't stop some people, whether brave or foolhardy, from trying to buck the trend and open a new shop of their own. For example, not too long ago a gentleman knocked on my door and told me he was going round the area asking residents what they thought of his idea of converting the empty shop on the corner of my street into a sandwich bar-cum-delicatessen. Did I think it would work? Would many people use it? Would I use it? I didn't want to knock his obvious enthusiasm, but I felt obliged to tell him, that, though I might use it occasionally, I didn't think he would get enough customers for it to work. He carried on knocking on doors but the shop never opened and I'm sure he made the right decision. It was a venture that would have involved time and energy in abundance not to speak of significant financial outlay, so he was obviously right to do his 'market research' first.

## Doughnut Shop vs Cafe

But not everyone is equally strategic. Earlier this year a new shop did open just round the corner from me – a doughnut shop. It offers a wide range of doughnuts to take away or to eat with tea or coffee or chocolate at tables. It's an inviting ambiance and the doughnuts look – and taste – very nice indeed (I've tried them myself). I saw the local family who own it spend literally months setting it up with all the work, energy and expense that involved and they're now running it with the utmost friendliness and obvious efficiency. But my first thought (perhaps I'm a born pessimist) was that it couldn't survive. It's offering a non-essential item at a time when, by common consent, there's a cost-of-living crisis. Yet maybe I was wrong, because initially there were queues down the street. And even when things settled down, there always seemed to be people in there. But now, as I pass by, custom seems increasingly sparse. The many students who live in the area have gone home for the summer and it seems empty most of the time. It has begun advertising 'special offers' – eg, 3 doughnuts for the price of 2 – and is advertising itself on the local community Facebook page as a place which groups can use free of charge for their meetings. But that doesn't seem to be working and,



though, at the time of writing, it's still open, I seriously wonder how long it will last. The return of the students is some way off and it's obvious that a small business of that kind needs consistent and ongoing trade to be successful. That's not happening now and will it happen even when the students get back?

Then, to make things worse, down the road, no more than a couple of hundred yards away, another shop is about to open up – a sandwich and cakes café in a premises that's been derelict for years. It's bound to constitute competition to the doughnut shop, while at the same time, after perhaps an initial flourish, being itself unlikely, at least in my judgement, to attract enough regular clientele to be commercially successful. And this, just like the doughnut shop, after much time, energy and expense put into it by its hopeful owners.

## Domination

So what's happening here? Well, for those people who own little but their energies and skills as a means of making a living (ie, the vast majority), the only option – if they can find it – is employment by a boss of some kind for a wage or salary. But a small number see an escape route in trying to set up their own business and so becoming self-employed. In this way they will at least escape the domination of a boss. The trouble is that, as many find, this is also a risky and insecure route, since they do actually remain subject to a boss – a different one that dominates the system we all live in – that unfathomable, uncontrollable force called the market. It's true that a few such businesses – very few – will succeed, provide a living for their owners and even prosper and grow. But the vast majority fail, often fairly quickly and with severe financial and other consequences to their owners and families. So, in the case of my local doughnut shop,

no matter how friendly and efficient its owners are, the sad bottom line is likely to be that all their trouble and expense will be in vain and they will end up regretting they decided to try and become their own bosses.

## Dead company walking

Of course, this can also be the fate of large and established businesses. A current BBC radio series, 'Toast' has delved into the demise of once thriving and well-established companies such as Safeway supermarkets and Little Chef road eateries. Its conclusion was that they went under due to 'market conditions' becoming unfavourable, then of course causing their employees to lose their jobs and large swathes of all kinds of resource having to be scrapped. Another recent programme, 'Dead Company Walking', attempted to find an explanation for the fact that businesses are currently failing at a higher rate than ever. But its explanation remained at a fairly superficial level, one of symptoms rather than causes. Above all it failed to touch at all on the real reason for failure, whether of small or large companies, which is the built-in instability and unpredictability of capitalism with its market system, from whose potential ravages no business of any kind is safe. Nor, of course, did the programme mention that there is in fact an alternative to the colossal waste of time, energy and resources all this involves, which is for workers of all kinds (ie, the vast majority of the world's population), to act consciously and collectively to put an end to the market domination they live under and opt for a society of free association and free access.

**HOWARD MOSS**