

THE

November 2024 • Volume 120 • Number 1443 • £1.50

SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

US election result: workers lose



Also: A mental state
 Food, insecure food
 Should 'we' consume less?
 What the heck is Cultural Marxism?

How we live and how we might
 live (3)
 Lenin was wrong, Marx was right



Features

A mental state 5
 Food, insecure food..... 10
 Should 'we' consume less?..... 11
 What the heck is
 Cultural Marxism?..... 12
 How we live and how we might
 live (3)..... 14
 Lenin was wrong,
 Marx was right 16

Regulars

Editorial 3

Pathfinders 4
 Cooking the Books I 6
 Halo Halo..... 7
 Tiny tips 7
 Material World 9
 Cooking the Books II 18
 Proper Gander 19
 Reviews 20
 50 Years Ago..... 22
 Action Replay 22
 Meetings 23
 Life & Times 24

Cover image: ©iStock

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'

Fireworks on November 5?

AS WE go to press the US presidential election is approaching its conclusion amid a febrile atmosphere of fear and mutual loathing, with each side trolling the other during a punishing schedule of rallies in the decisive swing states, and Trump-backer Elon Musk offering to pay \$1m a day to petition-signers in Pennsylvania.

'What happens on 5 November could change the world we live in,' pants the *Guardian*, reflecting the breathless fascination of the world's media for an election which may in truth have a significant bearing on tariff-versus-free-trade tensions playing out across world markets, as well as on Israel and the Middle East war, the war in Ukraine, the growing power of China, and implications for US carbon commitments. Many fear the consequences of a Trump victory. Many others fear the fireworks Trump may unleash if he rallies his fanbase to reject a defeat.

According to Pew surveys, domestic US voters are not overly concerned with geopolitical questions or foreign trade, and even less with global warming. 81 percent of those polled say their main concern is the economy, which a barrage of Republican

disinformation has represented as a failed basket-case under Biden. This isn't so, objectively speaking. The economy is in fact very healthy, at least for wealth owners, but for many workers it's a catastrophe of low wages and high prices. Both things can be true, of course. A healthy economy of desperate workers is capitalism's ideal operating condition.

Many US voters probably grasp, at some deep level, that they don't matter, their views don't count, and their needs will go unmet. The Democrats make no apology for standing primarily for the urban, college-educated, white-collar 'middle class', by implication writing off the rural, non-college, blue-collar majority as a rabble and a lost cause. If capitalist democracy is a rigged circus anyway, some will think, why not elect the most outrageous clown, if only to wind up the establishment and the liberal woke opposition?

From an outside perspective, this vicious race to the bottom looks frankly surreal, framed as it is partly by America's privately owned and heavily polarised news media, with Fox touting Trump and CNN touting Harris, and partly by their peculiar libel laws,

disguised as 'free speech', in which anyone 'has the right' to slander and tell lies about anyone else without the legal obligation to substantiate or retract.

Unlike the recent UK general election, there is no foregone conclusion here, with polls showing Trump and Harris neck and neck. But we can certainly predict that, whoever wins, and failing a global environmental disaster or nuclear war, American workers will not see much if any difference. Governments can't control markets anyway, regardless of ideologies. They are like rollercoaster riders, hanging on for dear life as capitalism hurtles through its booms and slumps, powered by its own insatiable frenzy. The main effect of capitalist elections is not to bring about real change but to promote the illusion of change while the runaway acceleration of exploitation remains unaddressed and undisturbed.

So, whichever way it goes, the working class won't win. There is no way to win, except by abolishing capitalism in favour of truly democratic global common ownership. Otherwise, all the glamour and fireworks are merely sound and fury, signifying nothing.

FREE
3-month trial
subscription
to the
**socialist
standard**



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



Please send me an info pack Please send me a trial subscription to the **socialist standard**

Name.....

Address.....

Postcode.....

Subscription Orders should be sent to the address above. **Rates:** One year subscription (normal rate) £15. One year subscription (low/unwaged) £10. Europe rate £40 (Air mail). Rest of the world £40 (surface). Voluntary supporters subscription £20 or more. Cheques payable to 'The Socialist Party of Great Britain'.



Nobel efforts

THE NOBEL Prize awards have been no stranger to controversy over the years, both for awards they should have given but didn't, like most famous writers and virtually all women, and awards they shouldn't have given but did. These included the 1949 Medicine prize for the prefrontal lobotomy, the 2019 Literature prize to a Bosnian genocide denialist and Slobodan Milošević fanboy, and most famously, the 1973 Peace prize to Kissinger, the carpet-bomber of Cambodia, which caused two Nobel Committee members to resign in disgust and prompted the equally famous retort from musician Tom Lehrer that satire had become obsolete.

Media pundits were quick to spot certain oddities about last month's Nobel awards. Feathers had been ruffled earlier when the head of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute pointed out that 'We have now over 50 armed conflicts around the world' and suggested that perhaps nobody deserved the Peace prize this year (tinyurl.com/4c84a9zp). In the event they gave it to Hiroshima survivors, a clear stand-by choice.

The Physics prize went not to physicists but to two computer scientists for their early work in AI and neural networks. Reasonable enough, one might say, given that computer science didn't exist in 1896 when Alfred Nobel established the prize topics. A mathematics Nobel might have been nearer the ballpark, but there isn't one of those either, a fact emphatically not due to the popular gossip that it was revenge for Mrs Nobel having an affair with a mathematician (Alf was never married). In fact, Nobel also ignored dozens of other valid research disciplines, which reflects the deep capitalist truth that the rich always get to dictate to the rest of us what is important, just like today's vainglorious and increasingly deluded 'effective altruist' billionaires.

As for the winning computer scientists, you may remember one of them, Geoffrey Hinton, as a well-known poacher-turned-gamekeeper who resigned from Google in 2023 to renounce AI and warn the world that it was about to kill us all. Given that the prize is awarded to those who, in Alf's own words, 'conferred the greatest benefit to humankind', one might have expected a noble prizewinner to refuse to accept the medal and the money, however Geoff appears untroubled by such qualms.

Still, there must be a lot of physicists



out there doing vital Nobel-worthy work, surely? Not according to the popular YouTube doyenne of theoretical physics and clunky jokes, Sabine Hossenfelder, who claims (no joke) that 'physics is dying' because it's become an unfalsifiable pseudoscience whose only purpose is to chunter out meaningless papers in support of funding bids to prop up the physics community's wage bill (tinyurl.com/5n93hdmb). It might be true that they have a vested interest in stringing us along with string theory, loop quantum gravity, multiverses and endless made-up particles, but perhaps Sabine would say that, as she thinks the idea of an elegant Theory of Everything is a romantic mirage, and besides, popular YouTubers also have a certain vested interest in being controversial, don't they?

AI had a more direct role in clinching the Chemistry prize, through Google DeepMind and its groundbreaking work on protein folding. Proteins do everything that matters in your body, but there are 100,000 of them and nobody understands how they work. Their exact function depends on what shape they fold into, and working this out for just one protein used to be a 3-year PhD in itself. The DeepMind AlphaFold2 programme can now do it in seconds, triggering a revolution in potential new treatments.

The Medicine prize meanwhile was for work in newly discovered microRNA, which is how genes, when sending messenger-RNA 'photocopies' to cells with template instructions for building proteins, effectively Tippex out certain instructions and not others.

What's called the Economics Nobel is really an ersatz 1968 add-on by a Swedish bank and denounced as a 'false Nobel prize' by modern relative Peter Nobel, on the grounds that he considers economics a pseudoscience, a conclusion which will not raise socialist eyebrows. This year's 'Economics' prize was for interesting empirical research into the question why some countries are so much richer than others. 'Culture' and geography have been

mooted, but these researchers, observing that many poor countries were formerly European colonies, opted to look at 'settler mortality' statistics. They concluded that where mortality was low, and Europeans were able to settle and farm (Australia, North America), they also imported their existing social, economic and political institutions, giving the colony a massive head-start. Where mortality was high due to malaria and yellow fever (West Africa, Haiti, etc), they instead kept their distance and imposed vicious, extractive regimes including the slave trade. In sum, liberal democratic institutions are enablers of prosperity, not the other way round. Hooray for liberal capitalism then, which has obviously not resulted in a billionaire elite, global poverty, war and climate change.

Honourable mention ought this year to go to an Ig Nobel prize winner who, instead of discovering something silly about mammals breathing through their anuses, actually found out something useful about centenarians living in so-called 'blue zones' of super-longevity, which is that the blue zones don't exist, neither do most of the centenarians, and the 'data' is almost entirely the result of poor, faked or lost records, and pension fraud by relatives (tinyurl.com/4hzna4ka). Many rich capitalists are obsessed with cheating death and living forever. This finding pisses on their chips and allows hard-pressed workers to enjoy some schadenfreude for once.

Would there be Nobel prizes in socialism? Probably not ones named after someone who got rich by blowing things up, including his own brother. And certainly not cash prizes, of course (there wouldn't be any money). The concept of 'prize' is so integral to the fabric of competitive capitalism (prize and price are the same word in several languages) that some will find it hard to imagine a culture that doesn't need such incentives in order to do worthwhile research. But socialists, who understand the value of intrinsic motivation, won't have a problem.

PJS

A mental state

AN ACQUAINTANCE recently confided that he now avoids news media, broadcast and printed. Because it is generally so depressing it is adversely affecting his mental health. A constant round of outrageous reports of depressing episodes of inhumanity.

As a long-time member of the Labour Party he is already disillusioned by the Starmer administration. The ready acceptance of gifts of substantial financial worth, while, with seemingly ill-considered haste, snatching the winter fuel allowance from many pensioners who really need it.

He is an example of the contention that though the Labour Party is not, never was and never will be, socialist, there are some with socialist ideas, however inchoate, within it. This friend came with me to hear a Socialist Party speaker in Sheffield. After the meeting he told me that he agreed with the analysis of capitalism put forward and that he was pleased to hear the case for democratic change, rather than revolution through violence too often voiced by Trotskyite and other Leninist groups.

However, he did have a major caveat, the frequently proffered defence of reform. The Tories, then the governing party, were doing increasingly dreadful things to workers and their families. It's all very well having a principled view of socialism, but the priority is to effect change, however marginal, immediately.

There remains, for him, a strong notion that for all the failings of Labour in government, many clearly outlined by the speaker, nonetheless the welfare state in general and the NHS in particular were a triumph of socialist ideas enacted by the 1945 Atlee government.

So it is that the Labour Party continues to occupy the 'socialist' political ground on which even those disaffected continue to stand. The siren song of the Starmer Labour Party consists of one word, CHANGE!

Although that political vessel very quickly ran aground on the economic rocks of capitalist reality (no change there then) this particular crew member, even now, isn't prepared to abandon ship. He is not alone.

Murderous conflicts

Then there is the Middle East, the Ukrainian attrition, and various other murderous conflicts going on. Yes, the socialist analysis of capitalism may be absolutely correct, but socialism?

A worldwide commonwealth based on the principles of production to freely

meet self-defined needs in a moneyless society to which all contribute, also freely, whatever they are able? Even accepting there are frequent instances of people working together and for each other's benefit, where is there any indication that enough human beings will ever collectively pursue such a course?

These are my friend's questions, and why he has turned off the news. His mental health is suffering as he desperately tries to hang onto socialist notions that are constantly denied by the dystopian world as it is.

As a socialist I too at times find it difficult to square socialist principles with the evidence of human limitation I witness when I turn the TV news on. He is not alone in wondering why humanity appears so incapable of learning from its history.

Surely Russian military authorities must be aware that the reduction to rubble of Stalingrad not only did not bring victory to the invading army, but rather served as an exemplar of resistance that completely thwarted Nazi imperial ambitions.

Then, four decades later, Russian forces were driven from Afghanistan despite being in nominal occupancy of the country. Such aggression doesn't subdue but engenders determination to fight back. Why would there be any expectation that Ukraine would be different?

America, for all its technological superiority, was defeated by a force employing the humble bicycle to transport supplies along the Ho Chi Minh trail. And following dreadful loss of life, military and civilian, the two sides then, eventually, became reconciled.

War becomes mythologised and integrated into national ideologies. Remembrance Sunday in the UK has elevated the 'fallen' into heroic defenders of freedom, rather than the reality of terrified young men dying in mud, squalor and savagery. When the next instalment of the war to end all wars led to the deliberate bombing of towns and cities this horror became the spirit of the Blitz, supposedly a demonstration of a character unique to the British.

The Middle East is the present martial spectacle. Recently, the BBC carried two reports illustrative of the pervasive twisted logic such conflicts produce. One was an Israeli spokesman insisting that his country is acting in proportionate self-defence. This was followed by an Iranian supreme something or other who was equally insistent that the missiles launched at Israel

were a proportionate act of self-defence.

Putin, of course, claims the non-war war was launched against expanding NATO influence and Nazis in Ukraine, an act of self-defence. It would appear that most wars are merely conflicting 'self-defences'. It seems that it's always the other side that is the aggressor; most definitely, 'not us!'

And while this and similar sophistry is spewed out across news media we sit and watch as the appalling death toll, mainly amongst non-combatants, including a horrendous number of children, continues to mount. As mere spectators there is an ever-growing sense of powerlessness. Critical voices raised are all too readily accused of anti-semitism or Islamophobia. But most can only look on and despair, or press the off button on the remote. Such is the source of the impact on my friend's, and many, many others', mental health.

Alienating effects

War is the extreme expression of the alienating effects of capitalism. All the financial problems afflicting people, public services failing because they are too expensive to be adequately run and myriad other difficulties people have to deal with that, ultimately arise from the profit imperative.

There is a general awareness that all is most definitely not well, either nationally or internationally. However, a political cognitive dissonance prevents serious engagement with how to treat those widespread ills.

The 'Christmas Truce' of 1914 on the Western Front is illustrative of this. Soldiers from both sides laid down their arms, including British imperial troops from India who didn't have the Christmas imperative for peace on earth. They fraternized openly, defying their high commands, and there emerged a shared realisation that the propaganda that had convinced them of the barbarism of their 'enemies' was a lie. Within days they were killing each other again at the behest of their nation states.

Ukrainians and Russians, Israelis and Palestinians similarly have far more in common than might be guessed listening to their comments when interviewed. The 'other' remains the barbarian who must be vanquished for the general good. And so the slaughter goes on.

Is it any wonder that mental health problems have become an increasing issue in society? Talking therapies and/or pharmaceuticals may, in some cases, act as first aid. However, there is only one cure, socialism. Unfortunately, at the moment, the 'patients' remain reluctant to take it.

DAVE ALTON

Pocket money

AT THE end of August Starmer proclaimed that 'things will get worse' but that later they will 'get better'. There is, he said, 'a budget coming in October, and it's going to be painful', adding 'we have no other choice' (tinyurl.com/yc3tt3u3). By now we will know how painful and in what way.

Only as recently as May the Labour Party was promising to deliver '**more money in people's pockets**' [their emphasis], improving living standards everywhere and helping working people keep more of the wealth that they create' (tinyurl.com/2yz4j8se).

Some 40 percent or so of the adult population in the UK get a part of their money income from the government such as child benefit, state pension or universal credit. The government can also increase the minimum wage, and it can reduce income tax rates resulting in take-home pay going up. So it does have some power to literally put 'more money in people's pockets'.

It also has the power to take money out

of people's pockets. We already knew that the present government has the will to do this as one of the first things it did on entering office was to cut most pensioners' income by £300. So when this government says it will make things get worse, that's one politician's pledge that we can be sure will be honoured.

This doesn't necessarily have to take the form of reducing the nominal amount of money paid to people. It could also take the form of not increasing this more than the rise in the price level. Otherwise, how else could workers get to 'keep more of the wealth that they create'?

What Starmer was implying was that the Labour government was going to inflict pain on people by reneging on its promise to put more money in their pockets. He is claiming that this is needed as a condition for things to get better later. 'To accept short term pain for long term good', as he put it. It's a line that workers have often been sold — you'll get jam tomorrow if you tighten your belts today.

The jam tomorrow is presented as a growing economy that will bring the government more in tax revenue and so enable it to 'put more money in people's pockets' by increasing benefits or reducing income tax as well as to spend more to improve education, the health service and social amenities generally. But while the government does have the power to make things worse in the short term, it doesn't have the power to create a growing economy. That, therefore, is essentially nothing more than a hope.

It is possible that the economy will grow a little faster but this would not be as a consequence of what the government may do. The capitalist economy moves through a never-ending series of boom-slump cycles and the Starmer government could be lucky and still be in office when it enters a boom phase. This won't last of course since sooner or later the economic downturn phase will follow. And then workers will again be asked to tighten their belts in the hope of jam tomorrow.

NOW ON SALE

SOCIALIST PARTY OFFICIAL LOGO BRASS BADGE

This full colour enamel-type badge is made on brass with a secure pin fastening. It measures 25mm in diameter



Price £4 each with inland postage & packing or £3 each if collected from Head Office

To order: write to The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN. Please make remittances payable to The Socialist Party of Great Britain or buy online at: <https://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/product/party-enamel-badges/>

Other merchandise and our extensive range of literature is also available from: <https://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/store/>

For prices for overseas or wholesale orders please email spgb@worldsocialism.org with badges as the subject or telephone 020 7622 3811

Halo Halo

SOCIALISTS ARE wrong! Who says so? Apart from everyone who shills for the capitalist class, the pope, that's who. In particular, pope Leo XIII. You may have missed his papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum*.

Well, it was over one hundred and thirty years ago.

Leo writes of a 'great mistake' embraced by the socialist-leaning labour movements, which is the notion that 'class is naturally hostile to class' and 'wealthy and the working men are intended by nature to live in mutual conflict.' This view, he asserts, is 'so false ... that the direct contrary is the truth.' 'It [is] ordained by nature that these two classes should dwell in harmony and agreement, so as to maintain the balance of the body politic,' Leo claims. 'Each needs the other: capital cannot do without labor, nor labor without capital.'

By 'nature' did he mean the sky deity? Which one, Zeus, Ra, Varuna, Yahweh? Apologies to all of the sky deities who didn't get a mention here but the list is

too long to include them all. Early priests had discovered that propagating the myth that unpleasant fictional beings could be mean enough to ruin the lives of the populace unless sacrifices were made through wealth accruing to their self-styled intermediaries, the priest class. Popes continue to deceive the gullible in similar ways.

Leo must have spat out his wafer and choked on the altar wine when *The Communist Manifesto* came out in 1848. Pope of the day Pius IX wasted no time in composing a retort.

Pius's 1849 *Nostis et nobiscum* calls socialism and communism an 'iniquitous plot' and 'perverted teachings': 'The special goal of their proponents is to introduce to the people the pernicious fictions by misapplying the terms "liberty" and "equality." The final goal teachings, whether of Communism or Socialism, is to excite by continuous disturbances workers and others, especially those of the

lower class, whom they have deceived by their lies and deluded by the promise of a happier condition. They are preparing them for plundering, stealing, and usurping first the Church's and then everyone's property. After this they will profane all law, human and divine, to destroy divine worship and to subvert the entire ordering of civil societies.'

As Jimmy Cricket used to say, and there's more. 'The crafty enemies of the Church and human society attempt to seduce the people in many ways. One of their chief methods is the misuse of the new technique of book-production. They are wholly absorbed in the ceaseless daily publication and proliferation of impious pamphlets, newspapers and leaflets which are full of lies, calumnies and seduction.' Keep the masses in ignorance! Guess Pius IX would have hated social media.

From 1560 to 1966 the Catholic Church had an Index of Forbidden Books, *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*. The sheep who allowed the church to regulate even their sex lives were forbidden to print or read publications from this list.

Other totalitarian regimes who thought likewise spring to mind.

DC

Tiny tips

'I cried deep inside of my heart', said Nisa, now 32, recounting her first contract wedding. 'Who wants to sleep with an old man? I did this purely for the money, so my parents can eat and my siblings can go to school.' With her encouragement, her sister also became a contract bride, bringing in a dowry of \$3,000 for her first marriage because she was a virgin. Nisa estimated that she herself has been in 20 contract marriages ('Sex tourism in Indonesia sells itself as Islamic temporary marriage' (**Los Angeles Times**, [tinyurl.com/mu4bmddz](https://www.tinyurl.com/mu4bmddz)).

'Interestingly, some of these people were supporters of the communist regime only a few years ago. There are of course others who are still convinced by CCP propaganda, who believe that China is the safest place in the world and that everywhere else is in chaos', Cui adds. He attributes China's economic development to "the hard work of the people" who are exploited by Party leaders. As an example of the lack of political rights, he cites the fact that the

regime has taken away the freedom and wealth of nouveau riche figures like Xu Jiayin and Jack Ma. He cites the words of late Premier Li Keqiang, who made public in 2020 that some 600 million Chinese live on less than US\$140 a month (**Equal Times**, [tinyurl.com/3pvbu3e3](https://www.tinyurl.com/3pvbu3e3)).

As for national liberation, all one can say is that with friends like Hamas, Palestinians do not need enemies. Rather than freedom, the so-called 'Islamic Resistance' has nothing to offer them but poverty and bloodshed. Hamas's position is crystal clear. 'These are necessary sacrifices', military commander Yahya Sinwar said of the mass destruction in Gaza in a communication with fellow Hamas leaders in Doha, Qatar (**Daniel Lazere**, [tinyurl.com/2zc5jx52](https://www.tinyurl.com/2zc5jx52)).

'While Ukraine presses on with its incursion into Russia's Kursk region, its troops are still losing precious ground along the country's eastern front – a grim erosion that military commanders blame in part on poorly trained recruits drawn from a

recent mobilization drive, as well as Russia's clear superiority in ammunition and air power. "Some people don't want to shoot. They see the enemy in the firing position in trenches but don't open fire. ... That is why our men are dying," said a frustrated battalion commander in Ukraine's 47th Brigade' (**Libcom**, [tinyurl.com/5dkhbcu2](https://www.tinyurl.com/5dkhbcu2)).

Ahn Chang-ho, who opposes anti-discrimination laws, also rejects the theory of evolution and wants creationism lessons in schools. A former judge nominated to lead South Korea's human rights body has sparked outrage with his comments against the LGBTQ community and the theory of evolution, with observers citing him as proof of the country's flawed system for official appointments. Ahn Chang-ho, 67, is under scrutiny for his statements in parliament suggesting that homosexuality is a tool used by communists to incite revolution (**MSN**, [tinyurl.com/5n89bnnx](https://www.tinyurl.com/5n89bnnx)).

In a healthy ecosystem, the various sets of animal...get along with each other without the need of any system of authority or dominance—indeed, without overriding structure or organization of any kind soever (**Counterpunch**, [tinyurl.com/238f7mw](https://www.tinyurl.com/238f7mw)).

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

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

LONDON

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

MIDLANDS

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

NORTH

North East Regional branch.

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

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

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

Bolton. Contact: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589.

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

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

Yorkshire Regional branch.

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

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

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

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

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

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

spgbsw@gmail.com

Brighton. Contact: Anton Pruden, anton@pruden.me

Canterbury. Contact: Rob Cox, Contact: 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.

Cambridge. Contact: Andrew Westley, wezelecta007@gmail.com. 07883078984.

IRELAND

Cork. Contact: Kevin Cronin, 5 Curragh Woods, Frankfield, Cork. 021 4896427. mariekev@eircom.net

SCOTLAND

Edinburgh. Contact: Fraser Anderson f_raz_1@hotmail.com

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

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

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

WALES

South Wales branch (Cardiff and Swansea)

Meets 2nd Monday 7.30pm on JITSi.

(meet.jit.si/spgbsouthwales3).

Contact: botterillr@gmail.com or

Geoffrey Williams, 19 Baptist Well Street, Waun Wen, Swansea SA1 6FB. 01792 643624

Central branch

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

INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS

AFRICA

Kenya. Contact: Patrick Ndege, PO Box 13627-00100, GPO, Nairobi

Zambia. Contact: Kephias Mulenga, PO Box 280168, Kitwe.

AUSTRALIA

Contact: Trevor Clarke, wspa.info@yahoo.com.au

EUROPE

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

Norway. Contact: Robert Stafford. hallblithe@yahoo.com

Italy. Contact: Gian Maria Freddi gm.freddi@libero.it

Spain. Contact: Alberto Gordillo, Avenida del Parque. 2/2/3 Puerta A, 13200 Manzanares.

COMPANION PARTIES OVERSEAS

Socialist Party of Canada/Parti Socialiste du Canada. Box 31024, Victoria B.C. V8N 6J3 Canada. SPC@iname.com

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

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

World Socialist Party of the United States. P.O. Box 440247, Boston, MA 02144 USA. contact@wspus.org

Publications to order

PAMPHLETS (£4.00 each unless stated otherwise)

- What's Wrong With Using Parliament?** £2.50
- Ecology and Socialism**
- From Capitalism to Socialism** £3.50
- Africa: A Marxian Analysis**
- Some Aspects of Marxian Economics** £5.50
- How the Gods Were Made by John Keracher**
- Marxism and Darwinism by Anton Pannekoek**
- Art, Labour and Socialism by William Morris**
- How We Live and How We Might Live by William Morris**
- The Right to be Lazy by Paul Lafargue**
- Socialist Principles Explained** £2.50
- The State and the Socialist Revolution by Julius Martov**
- An Inconvenient Question**
- Sylvia Pankhurst on Socialism** £3.00
- Why Socialists Oppose Zionism & Anti-Semitism** £3.50
- Rosa Luxemburg on Socialism**
- The Magic Money Myth**

BOOKS

- Strange Meeting: Socialism & World War One** £4.50
- Are We Prisoners of Our Genes?** £5.50
- Socialism or Your Money Back** £4.00
- Centenary of the Russian Revolution** £8.00
- All of the above books (25% discount)** £16.00

DVD

- Capitalism and Other Kid's Stuff** £5.75

All prices include postage and packing. For six or more of any publication, reduce the price by one third.

*Return this form along with your cheque or money order to: **The Socialist Party, Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN***

NAME:.....

ADDRESS:

.....

.....

POSTCODE:.....

Cosmetic Tourism

A RECENT *Daily Mirror* headline ran ‘Mum of five dies after butt-lift treatment’. It explained how Alice Delsie Preet Webb failed to recover from an operation by an unregistered practitioner which involved injecting hyaluronic acid and dermal fillers into the backside (a so-called ‘Brazilian butt-lift’). This apparently was the first time anyone in the UK had died from this procedure. But, as confirmed in a recent article about ‘cosmetic tourism’ in the *Times* by Sarah Ditum, such outcomes are far more common when people (largely women) decide to take a holiday abroad and at the same time have cheap surgery done on various parts of their body they consider need improvement. She referred to a website which asks the question: ‘Why not take full advantage of the charming beaches and sunshine while sparing some time for dental treatment?’

The trouble is that it sometimes goes wrong and people end up with wonky teeth, a lopsided smile, uneven size breasts, tummy folds rather than tucks, and even worse. In fact, since 2019, as the article tells us, ‘at least 28 British medical tourists have died following treatment in Turkey’. And that’s not counting the much larger number who return home with complications which they then need to try and get fixed by the NHS. Of course, many of the thousands who do this each year are lucky and for them it works out as they would want. But it’s definitely a gamble and, according to the article, the reason women are prepared to take that gamble is that they want to be, as the article puts it ‘the best version of themselves’ and not ‘substandard’. And, given the prohibitive cost of such surgery in the UK by regulated medical professionals, they see no alternative but to seek it out more cheaply in less regulated countries – Thailand, Mexico, Slovakia or – the most common destination- Turkey.

Society of the spectacle

But why is it that people want to look different from the way they are in reality? In the late 1960s the French writer Guy Debord published *The Society of the Spectacle*, which presented the idea that ‘all that once was directly lived has become mere representation’. His point was that, because of the atomised and consumerist nature of capitalist society, an obsession with outward appearance (ie ‘the spectacle’) had taken the place of the authentic reality of social life and



relationships. People’s lives were mediated by images of perfection which they were made to feel they had to live up to. This led them to focus on the superficial and become alienated from their fellow humans and from socially beneficial interaction.

Though this was theorised more than 50 years ago, it is surely more relevant than ever today. While it is true that, in any kind of society, people may find certain aspects of their physical being less than satisfactory, they are more likely to focus on that if other aspects of their life fail to offer them satisfaction and the ability to fulfil their natural talents and capacities.

This is precisely the case in modern capitalism where the vast majority of us are obliged to expend most of our energies working for an employer in activities we are unlikely to have chosen freely but are dictated by the needs of the market on the employer’s side and the need to keep the wolf from the door on the worker’s side. And this work, including the conditions in which it is carried out, is unlikely to represent any kind of real fulfilment of the individual’s personal needs or aptitudes. So is it any wonder if, outside working hours, workers’ minds are occupied with superficialities – sporting spectacles, stars of entertainment, the lives of royalty and other ‘celebs’, and also perceived flaws in their own physical appearance?

Life blood

Capitalism’s need to constantly find ways of supplying its life blood – profit – means that it can only seek to relentlessly sell things, to provide the means for workers to cultivate and spend money on those superficialities. So it’s no surprise that, for example, music concerts starring people’s ‘idols’ are promoted with ticket prices as high as they are likely to be able to scrape together money or credit for. Nor is it any surprise that, held back as they are from fulfilling their real talents or needs by lives dominated by wage and salary work, the feelings of powerlessness and inferiority this engenders make them easy prey to the cult, to the idol, to the hero, to the conspiracy theory, and to the cheap cosmetic procedures promised by potentially dubious practitioners.

In the society of the ‘quick buck’ we live in, tainted as it is by money and the profit system, should we therefore be surprised if the products we are offered for purchase do not serve the purpose they claim to but upset our expectations, and even – in the case of botched cosmetic procedures – make our life even more uncomfortable than we perceived it as in the first place? It’s time we got rid of the false value system that puts appearance before substance, that puts ‘looking good’ over being truly human.

HKM

Food, insecure food

IT GOES without saying that food is the most basic need of human beings. Survival, health, growth: all depend on sufficient quality and amounts of food. Indeed, human history can in part be seen as an effort to acquire adequate food, whether from gathering, hunting or growing.

But despite the advances in technology, plenty of people today still struggle to provide enough food for themselves and their family. They suffer from food poverty or food insecurity, which can be defined as 'when a person is without reliable access to enough affordable, nutritious, healthy food' (red cross.org.uk), or as 'insufficient or insecure access to food due to resource constraints' (sustainweb.org). This does not only apply in the global South, but in so-called developed countries too. It has been estimated that over seven million people in the UK were living in 'food insecure households' in the UK in 2022–3 (an increase of 2.5 million over the previous year). This included one child in six and one working-age adult in nine. One solution that has been proposed is to provide free school meals to all children. Things may get worse if some farmers reduce production, as may happen, largely due to labour supply problems.

In the US the situation is also deteriorating. In 2023, almost 18 per cent of households with children were food-insecure, a small rise from the previous year. In 2009, the proportion was just over one in five; the figure fell after the financial crisis but then began to rise again during Covid

when school lunches came to an end.

Yet it is in underdeveloped parts of the world that food insecurity is at its most serious. A recent UNICEF report stated that 181 million children worldwide under the age of five lived in severe food poverty (one child in four). Global food security deteriorated between 2019 and 2022, worst of all in Syria, Haiti and Venezuela. Large parts of Africa are in really dire straits, as is much of South Asia. In Somalia almost two-thirds of children live in 'extreme food poverty', while in Gaza the figure is nine children out of ten.

Famine, as defined by the UN World Food Programme, involves such criteria as 30 percent of children suffering from acute malnutrition, which is far more severe than food poverty. No countries currently meet the definition, but that does not stop the overall food situation from being dreadful.

The UN Environment Programme recently issued a Food Waste Index Report 2024, which contains some quite astonishing facts and figures. Globally, over a trillion US dollars' worth of food is thrown away each year; this leads to perhaps a tenth of greenhouse gas emissions and occupies nearly thirty per cent of agricultural land. The waste occurs in various places, including households, retail and supply chains, though it has to be remembered that the data in middle- and low-income countries is probably pretty unreliable. And some inedible matter is included, as the distinction between edible and inedible is not always

clear. Reducing food waste is obviously a good thing, but in a world based on profit and with billions of impoverished people it is not straightforward.

According to Action Against Hunger (actionagainsthunger.org.uk), 733 million people (one person in eleven) go hungry. Rising temperatures and extreme weather have worsened the crisis, as have Covid and conflicts. But, as they say, 'There's more than enough food produced in the world to feed everyone on the planet.' It does not reach all those who need it, partly because of food waste, but also because of poverty. The UN Environment Programme states that it is perfectly possible to feed ten billion people, if the world population reaches that figure. Reducing CO2 'could positively impact the nutritional value of the food produced', while restoring biodiversity would make it easier to cope with pests and disease. An increase in plant-based diets would produce less greenhouse gas and need less water. Replacing monoculture with regenerative farming, using rotational methods, would restore wildlife and soil.

One of the immediate priorities in a socialist world will be ensuring that there is enough food for everyone, that nobody suffers from food insecurity. We cannot say now just how this will be carried out, as we do not know what the food situation will be at the time that socialism is established. But we can say that scientists and farmers know how to go about growing enough good-quality food for all, and know how to co-operate with others to make food insecurity a thing of the past.

PAUL BENNETT



Should 'we' consume less?

IN HIS recently published book *Slow Down: How Degrowth Communism Can Save the Earth* (tinyurl.com/35knyn98), Kohei Saito contends that: 'Almost every one of us living in a developed country belongs to the world's richest 20 percent' and that our exploitative 'imperial mode of living' allows us to enjoy an 'extravagant lifestyle' at the expense of workers in the Global South – an echo of the discredited Leninist theory of the 'labour aristocracy'.

Moreover, suggests Saito, it is 'we' who are 'coddled by the invisibility of our lifestyle's costs' who inflict far more damage on the environment than do they – our fellow workers on the other side of the planet. 'We' will 'not be able to truly combat climate change if we all fail to participate, as directly interested parties, in the radical transformation of the Imperial Mode of Living'. That means disengaging, starting now under capitalism, from consumer culture 'while also reducing the volume of everything we consume'. At the end of the day there seems to be little here to distinguish Saito from what the degrowth eco-pessimists have to say, apart from his invocation of 'communism'.

Matt Huber and Leigh Phillips make a valid point in their review of Saito's book:

'Saito also sees this primarily not as a battle between classes of workers and capitalists, but global regions: "the injustice of socially vulnerable people in the Global South countries bearing the brunt of climate change although the carbon dioxide was emitted, for the most part, by the Global North, which brought on this disaster."

When it comes to who in the Global North is responsible, Saito is more liable to point at himself and other workers than capital: "Our rich lifestyles would be impossible without the plundered natural resources and exploited labor power of the Global South" (Jacobin, 9 March 2024, tinyurl.com/2wxjhffz).

Was Marx a productionist?

Saito also claims that, as far as Marx was concerned, there was an 'epistemological break' in the latter's writings that began sometimes during the 1860s.

This epistemological break has been characterised as representing a move away from a "linear, progressive view" of history, marked by "productivism" and "Eurocentrism", and towards a new vision of communism'. Saito does at least accept that 'communism' means a moneyless, wageless, classless and stateless



alternative to capitalism which is based on the twin principles of free access to socially produced wealth and voluntaristic labour as the basis of wealth production.

In short Marx, according to Saito, abandoned historical materialism and the acceptance of capitalist technological progress in favour of 'de-growth communism' in which the needs of the population would be catered for within clear limits imposed by nature itself.

Marx did indeed acknowledge the necessity and importance of capitalist technological progress in preparing the ground for a future communist society, but his standpoint cannot plausibly be called a 'productionist' one. There are many passages in the early writings of both Marx and Engels that suggest a deep concern with the environmental impact of economic growth and are hardly compatible with the kind of Promethean or productionist outlook sometimes attributed to them. Their assessment of capitalist technological advancement as being 'progressive' was contingent inasmuch as it suggests there will come a point when it could no longer be characterised as such. At this point it would become redundant or even reactionary as a mode of production.

Limits to lifestyle changes

You cannot expect capitalism to gradually disappear through the incremental accumulation of minor adjustments to the way we live and do things. The whole system is fundamentally held together and underpinned by the brute fact of minority ownership and control of the means of wealth production and the consequent alienation of the great majority from these means. It is only when the latter take matters in hand and seek to democratically bring about fundamental change from the bottom up that capitalism will finally disappear.

We cannot hope to bring about the fundamental change required through mere lifestyle changes within the framework of existing capitalist society. This is not meant to discourage individuals from wanting to make such changes. These could conceivably help even if only in symbolic, more than practical, terms. But the basic problem we face as a society is not really the result of individuals somehow having made the wrong lifestyle choice.

Saito is not entirely wrong, however. 'Lifestyle choices' matter up to a point insofar as they are bound up with the question of social values. After all, a working class, still receptive or responsive to the values that underpin a capitalist consumer ideology, would surely not yet be ready to undertake the transformation of society itself. Their readiness to do that surely presupposes a transformed worldview on their part. In other words, a shift in values.

It is difficult to see how a strategy of, today within capitalism, 'reducing the volume of everything we consume' is going to succeed. Reducing consumption means reducing the market demand for the good in question. Normally, the response of businesses in these circumstances would be to reduce the price of this good. In other words, to reboot or stimulate market demand.

You as one individual might indeed have the strength of will and moral resolve to resist the lure of a bargain offer but there is nothing to say that your neighbour will follow suit. This is the problem with the system; it has the uncanny knack of being able to pick us off one by one so long as we confine our thinking to its conceptual parameters.

We cannot buck the market while we live in a market economy. It is this that sets limits on what we can achieve by way of lifestyle changes. Only by eliminating capitalism will we be in a position to adapt how we produce and consume in ways that suit ourselves and our long-term future on this planet.

ROBIN COX

What the heck is Cultural Marxism?



YOU MAY have seen it on a clumsy wojack speech bubble via a Facebook group or on Twitter, more than likely in a 4chan meme, but the buzz phrase 'Cultural Marxism' has entered the political lexicon. A term rooted in the theoretical work of the Frankfurt School, which sought to apply Marxist theory to culture, it has also been appropriated to denote a sinister conspiracy theory. That is to say, it initially referred to Marxist critiques of culture but has been adopted by some right-wing and far-right groups to describe perceived threats from progressive social reforms. Members of the Jewish community and anti-racist groups hold that using this term perpetuated antisemitic conspiracy theories.

In 2019 the *Guardian*, referring to Suella Braverman, reported 'Tory MP Criticized for Using Antisemitic Term "Cultural Marxism"'. Other Tory MPs have been criticised for this including the Croydon South MP and multi-millionaire landlord Chris Philp ([tinyurl.com/skkr33e](https://www.tinyurl.com/skkr33e)). Somehow he retained his seat in this constituency that has large parts among the country's lowest twenty percent deprived areas.

This portrayal of Marxism is a misrepresentation that conflates a broad and complex set of ideas into a monolithic threat. As a party with a strong basis in Marx's actual writings, we can easily dismiss this definition as not only

inherently incorrect but also because the term serves not as analysis but as a dog whistle for any type of racist, misogynist or bigoted behaviour.

In politics, a dog whistle is the use of coded or suggestive language in political messaging to garner support from a particular group without provoking opposition or for avoidance of true understanding. Much like 'woke mind virus' and 'social justice warrior', what 'Cultural Marxism' means isn't as important as who it is being used against and who's listening.

Cultural Marxism 1.0

'Cultural Marxism' initially referred to the work of the Frankfurt School, a group

Socialist Standard November 2024

of Marxist theorists established in the 20th century, intellectuals like Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse, who aimed to expand on Marx's work by applying Marxism to cultural and social phenomena. The goal was to understand why capitalist societies had not yet collapsed despite the inherent contradictions that Marx had drawn attention to.

The Frankfurt School theorists argued that culture, ideology, and mass media play significant roles in maintaining the status quo by shaping public consciousness and discouraging revolutionary thought. They explored concepts such as the 'culture industry,' which describes how popular culture is mass produced to reinforce consumerism and passive acceptance of the capitalist system. These ideas were not about destroying 'First World culture' but about critiquing how cultural forms are manipulated to maintain the capitalist dominance.

Gramsci contributed to this school of thought with his concept of 'cultural hegemony'. He posited that the capitalist class maintains control not just through force or economic power, but by dominating cultural norms and values, peddling the capitalist worldview as common sense. This notion emphasized the need for a counter-hegemonic culture to challenge and replace the dominant capitalist ideology with socialist ideas.

Appropriation and distortion by the far-right

In the cold dead claws of the alt-right, Cultural Marxism loses its meaning as a critical theory and is presented as a pejorative term engineered to invoke the conspiracy theory that Marxists are covertly campaigning to subvert 'White' culture by accepting the value of equality between race, genders and sexuality. The distorted view accuses these socially progressive changes as part of a coordinated effort to destroy 'White' culture. Popping another red pill and through fash-tainted glasses, this conspiracy theory goes on that Cultural Marxists are waging a war against traditional and Christian values to weaken the West from within. This reframing is a gift to the alt-right fash, reformed to paint itself as the victim of a red terror and saviour of Western civilization against a perceived cultural invasion.

The alt-right's use of 'Cultural Marxism' as a catch-all term for everything it opposes — feminist, multiculturalist, LGBTQ+, atheists, even the vegans — serves to rally the right and reactionaries against imaginary bogeymen (but usually minorities) and anyone really. This

approach allows them to cosplay as the last line of defence against an existential cultural threat. As Slavoj Žižek noted in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 'The more we discuss the impact of political correctness, the more we lose sight of the actual economic struggles'. This diversion helps the alt-right avoid engaging with tangible issues of capitalist exploitation and economic hardship and racial inequality. Paul Mason in *Post-Capitalism* added 'The conspiracy theory of "Cultural Marxism" is an attempt to reduce complex social phenomena into simplistic and unfounded narratives.'

Let's make sense of the frothing-at-the-mouth rhetoric.

From a socialist perspective the appropriation of Cultural Marxism is a deliberate calculated distraction from hardships and truths facing workers. By focusing on cultural battles it serves the interests of the ruling class by preventing the working class from recognizing its own power. Meanwhile, the capitalist class continues to exploit labour, accumulate wealth, and consolidate power, largely unchallenged by a fragmented and tired populace.

Rosa Luxemburg argued that 'the most revolutionary thing one can do is always to proclaim loudly what is happening'. Thus we argue that the real struggle is not over culture or identity but over who controls the wealth generated by the working class. The focus should not be on fighting imaginary cultural enemies of fictional conspiracies but on the working class organizing to liquidate the capitalist system that exploits them.

This alt-right myth is a convenient albeit dangerous tool for the ruling class to attack the working class, keeping us divided and distracted. By promoting fear of cultural change, the capitalist class can avoid accountability for the economic exploitation and inequality that capitalism perpetuates.

Who smears wins

The tactics used by the alt-right in promoting the Cultural Marxism narrative is a direct lift from the 20th century fascist propaganda tactic of scapegoating with fear-mongering. Smears and vitriol, less blood and soil, more shite and bile. Fascist states thrived on dread and fear of the external enemy — whether it be other nations, communists, a minority, or immigrants — this all served to unify their base and justify extreme political violence. By positioning themselves as defenders of traditional 'White' values against a supposed cultural onslaught of the unknowable hordes and heathens, they seek to rally disaffected individuals around a nationalist identity and exclusionary vision.

In *The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism in Europe*, Paul Hanebrink, Associate Professor of History at Rutgers University, points out that 'for much of the twentieth century, Europe was haunted by a threat of Judeo-Bolshevism myth'. He examines the unfounded and damaging narrative that falsely connects Judaism with Bolshevism. This myth emerged in early 20th century Europe and falsely claimed that Jewish people were behind the rise of Russian 'communism'. The conspiracy theory was employed as a propaganda tool to justify antisemitic policies and actions, contributing to the persecution of Jewish communities and supporting authoritarian regimes. He underscores the myth's impact on European politics and society, demonstrating how such harmful narratives can distort public perception and fuel discrimination.

Fascism relies on an us-versus-them mentality, which is why the alt-right's use of 'Cultural Marxism' as a bogeyman is so effective. It allows them to present themselves as the last line of defence against a cultural apocalypse, even as they promote intolerance, exclusion, and violence. As political theorist Hannah Arendt observed in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 'The essence of totalitarianism is not merely a system of government but a state of mind that relies on fear and hate to unite and control'. The alt-right's approach is not new; it's a recycled form of demagoguery used to maintain control through division and fear.

This approach ultimately serves the interests of the capitalist class as by promoting cultural conflict, it enables them to continue to exploit labour and amass wealth without facing unity of resistance.

Socialism offers a world where the wealth we create together is used to meet our needs, not to enrich a privileged few. It's about a future society where we work cooperatively, where resources are shared equitably.

Socialists have a clear-eyed understanding of the challenge we face and reject the false narratives peddled by the alt-right, other bad faith actors and their allies. It's essential to recognize that the real struggle is not over culture but over economic power and control. By dismantling the capitalist system, we create a society where cultural diversity is celebrated and where all people have the opportunity to participate fully in shaping the world around them.

A. T.

How we live and how we might live (3)

IN HIS London talk in November 1884 William Morris admonished his hearers that if they wished to be honest, they would 'call competition by its shorter name of war'. He was referring to the war that rumbles on at the very heart of capitalist society. To engage with our world, that war is something we have to track down and confront.

As noted in last month's article, there is a growing awareness that the origin of modern crises like human-induced climate change, species loss and pollution have a single origin in the mechanics of a capitalist economy. We ask, therefore, what is capitalism? The answer we get, unfortunately, is usually an ideological one designed to obscure rather than reveal the system's true identity. Often it is a paper-thin definition such as 'capitalism is the private ownership of the means of production'. Dissatisfied with this, we might plunge into the tangled world of capitalist economic theory, with its abstract analyses of markets, money, scarcity, demand schedules, etc. Common descriptions of capitalism get abstract very quickly. However, we can start to address this question another way by putting some solid ground beneath our feet. We can start by asking: what is an economy? The answer, at the broadest level of generality, is that it has something to do with humans and how they relate to one another in society. So let's start with humans.

The first thing we can say is that whatever real or outlandish claims we make about ourselves, one thing stands out: we are physical beings in a physical world. We have biological needs for food, clothing, shelter and social contact. These needs we must satisfy continually if we are to survive. Second, we don't survive well on our own. We have always lived together in communities. Evolutionary biologists tell us that we are a social species and that we are evolved cooperators. We operate with high levels of trust and sociability. The bloke next to us on the tube train may be irritating, but we generally find ways of getting along together for our mutual convenience. This behaviour contrasts sharply with that of our nearest relative. Cram a random collection of chimpanzees into the confined space of a rush hour tube train and the result will be soaring stress levels and, ultimately, carnage. We are, in fact, hyper-cooperators. We cooperate with strangers and even with other species. Social media is bursting with videos of humans supporting each other as well as rescuing cats, elephants, dolphins, kangaroos, eagles, sloths – you name it.

14



Not only do we live together in communities but we also work together to create the things we need. Levels of economic dependence vary between human societies, but we have never lived by producing individually for ourselves and consuming only what we have individually produced. We have survived by dividing up tasks among ourselves which are required to produce the things we need, and then sharing out the results according to some agreed method. And that gives us a pretty good definition of an economy: an economy is the way we organise ourselves to collectively produce and distribute the things we need.

At different points in time and in different parts of the world people have organised themselves in different ways. Some of our societies have similar features to our own; others are remarkably, even bizarrely, different – so different, that if we didn't have the published field research of anthropologists, we might have dismissed them as fantasies or as unworkable.

Employers and employees

So, what is a capitalist economy? How do we divide up tasks within it to produce and distribute what we need? Central to the organisation of capitalism is an apparently simple social relationship – one that is reflected across most of society. It's so familiar to us that we rarely question it, yet it has enormous consequences for our lives. This is the relationship that exists between the roles of employer and employee, between those who buy labour power and those who sell it. It is the wages system. People can to a limited extent move between these roles, but the roles themselves are fixed. This is not a

relationship that is central to all human societies, and in many, it does not exist at all, but its existence and its centrality are what define capitalism.

An important feature of this relationship is that employers and employees are mutually dependent. Neither can exist without the other. Eliminate one and you eliminate both. The relationship is held together through a process of exchange: labour power for money (wages). It's a process of buying and selling. And this requires the existence in society of a system of individual ownership- private property. Like the employer/employee relationship itself, not all human societies are built on the institution of private property. Some, like those of immediate return societies, own everything in common. People who own things in common do not exchange them; they do not buy and sell.

We think of property in terms of the objects we own. But this can be misleading. Pick up and examine a mobile phone, for instance, and describe it thoroughly. It has a certain shape, colour, weight, design. It feels a certain way in the hand. It has a definite set of functions. However, no matter how carefully and minutely you examine it, you will find nothing about it that tells you it is someone's property. Property is not a natural attribute of things; it is a social relationship between people, an agreement to behave towards certain objects in specified ways. And for those who don't behave towards them as society demands there will be social consequences.

A capitalist society, therefore, gives us rights and powers over things that are agreed to be our property, but denies those rights and powers to others. We accept this arrangement because we have been born into a pre-existing system of

property owners and we have learned its rules. Property relationships occur in several different kinds of society, but a property relationship that expresses itself centrally through the employer/employee relationship is unique to capitalism.

One major consequence of a society founded on a property relationship is that it isolates individuals, families and groups from one another and divides them into defined property units. We can think of these units as property bubbles. You live in your property bubble with the things that society agrees to treat as your property, and I live in mine. Property is transferred from one bubble to another by means of exchange. An arrangement like this creates a tension between our cooperative way of living and producing things, and our individual ownership of them. That tension manifests as competition.

The property-based employer/employee relationship is the source of most forms of competition we experience throughout our lives and occurs at many levels of society. Employees, who live by selling their labour power for a wage are forced to compete with one other for their income at job interviews. Those who have jobs often find themselves in competition with others for promotion. In the world of employment, every penny that an employer pays to their employees is a penny less for themselves and vice versa, a condition that sets up a competition for how the company's income is shared out.

Businesses exist in their own individual property bubbles, causing them to compete with each other in the market for the money in consumers' pockets. They lobby governments for legislation that will favour their business or their sector over that of others. Governments and businesses compete in our globalised economy for access to the world's resources, markets, and trade routes. Governments negotiate and deploy their militaries to secure strategic advantage or forceful control over them. All this competition has its source in the fundamentals of a property-based employer/employee relationship.

Property-based competition

In his address, Morris reminded his hearers that, 'Our present system of society is based on a state of perpetual war', that is, on perpetual competition and perpetual conflict. When we compete over

something as crucial as the means of life itself, or over a means of access to it – money – competition turns inevitably to conflict. In every kind of society, there are conflicts of interest, but the degree to which such conflicts exist and the degree to which they are resolvable depends on how extensively competition is built into a society's structure. In capitalist economies, competition is universal. It is an objective feature of the system which gets turned ideologically into a positive value. It is taught in schools, it is often deliberately built into workplace relationships. It is a game among the wealthy and powerful that is played for high stakes. In our world, competition is impossible to eradicate without eradicating capitalism itself. Government reforms can do nothing. Even at their occasional best, they succeed only in providing temporary, partial and inadequate relief for competition's many negative consequences. Competition and the conflict it creates are unending. Attack one problem here, and another breaks out elsewhere.

By its nature, capitalist property-based competition creates and exaggerates conflict at every level of society, and results in every degree of harm. It exists in the trivial and in the catastrophic, in the occasional awkward splitting of the cost of a restaurant meal, and in the devastation of vast mechanised warfare that rumbles on endlessly around the globe. Property-driven competition penetrates into the heart of the family. It erupts in arguments over domestic incomes; it tears family members apart over legacies. When relationships fail, it often turns acrimonious and ends up in the divorce courts. During disputes over pay and conditions the implicit competition between employer and employee breaks out into open conflict. Such conflicts can go on to have side effects which ripple out across society causing social disruption and

individual tragedy as recently seen in the action taken by rail staff and junior doctors.

Capitalism is a cockpit of competing interests. It leads to clashes of all kinds. It provokes racial conflict and social 'unrest'. It expresses itself in disinformation and propaganda wars. Competition over access to wealth and the status it brings drives people into conflict with the property system itself and leads to corruption, theft, embezzlement, fraud and many acts of violence and murder. Competing firms engage in industrial espionage and resort to strategies to put their competitors out of business and to extract money out of the pockets of workers. Governments attempting to protect or further the interests of companies within their territories introduce tariffs leading to trade wars, rising international tensions and diplomatic breakdowns. Conflicts over access to markets, resources and trade routes lead to threats and sanctions and ultimately to military actions and mass carnage.

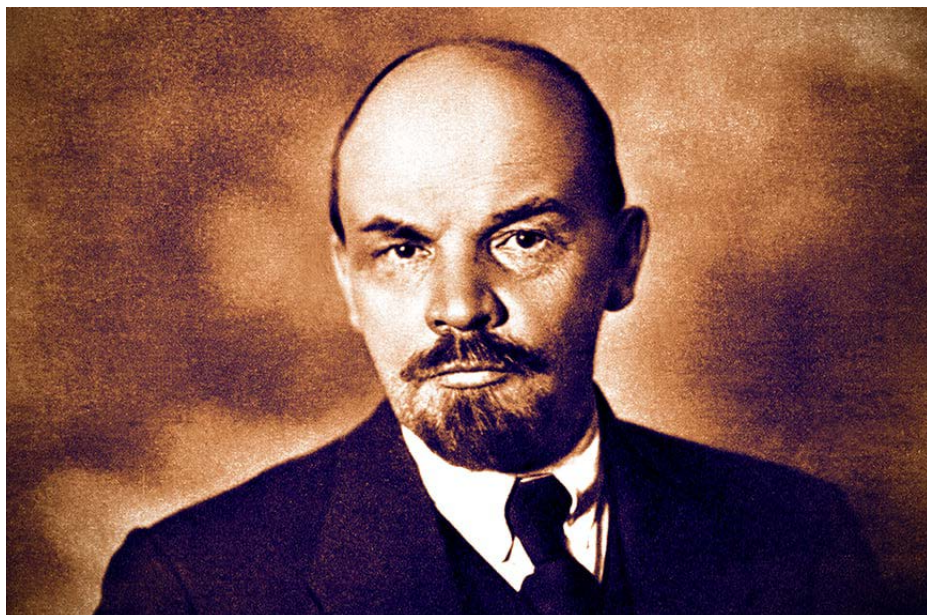
When addressing the harm wrought by poverty and military conflict on our world we frequently point the finger of blame at surface causes such as government and business practice or at intangibles such as greed and 'human nature'. We shy away from their real root causes which lie hidden in plain view in the operation of capitalism's international property system. Emerging crises, such as climate change, loss of species and pollution get blamed on individuals: profit seeking capitalists, grasping politicians or bankers when, in reality, they are the inescapable consequences of capitalism's property-based employer/employee relationship. Under present conditions, these problems are insoluble.

Next month we will look in more detail at how capitalism's conflicted nature underlies these social ills.

HUD



Lenin was wrong, Marx was right



DURING THE 125 years or so since the Bolsheviks took power in Russia, the *Socialist Standard* has published numerous articles about that event and its acknowledged leader, Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (Lenin). The view those articles have taken is that what Lenin and the Bolsheviks did in 1917 and after, despite their claim to be following Marxist ideas, ran entirely counter to Marx's advocacy of a democratically run, marketless, socialist society based on production for use not profit and on the idea of from each according to ability to each according to need. Instead, Lenin set up a tyrannical one-party regime run by and in the interests of a small group of bureaucrats with the market mechanism still operating even if commanded by the state, amounting to a form of capitalism – state capitalism. Furthermore Lenin's – and then Stalin's – Russia failed Marx's 'test' for socialism (or communism – he used the two words synonymously), which was that such a society had to – could only- arise from advanced capitalism, not from what existed in Russia in the early 20th century, ie, an economically underdeveloped, largely agricultural society in which capitalism had barely begun to take hold. It could not possibly 'jump' the capitalist stage and somehow go straight to socialism – something in fact that Lenin, from his speeches and writings, showed he knew, even if this did not stop him from claiming to follow Marx and to have the aim of establishing socialism.

Marxism-Leninism?

One of the inevitable outcomes of such claims by Lenin has been that, over the period since these events, the cry has

gone up – and continues to from many ill-informed quarters- that Marxism (or socialism) has been tried and failed. Not only, so the story goes, did it preside over unbridled violence and brutality, starvation and other unimaginable horror in the years of 'war communism' (1918 to 1922) and show itself to be an entirely undemocratic authoritarian form of society for decades after that. It also, though Lenin himself died in 1924, sowed the seeds for a dictator – Stalin- to take absolute power and establish an authoritarian tyranny in which people were arrested, deported and slaughtered in their thousands at the arbitrary whim of an all-powerful leader.

There have of course also been others – not just writers in the *Socialist Standard* – who have studied the ideas and events in question closely, seen through these arguments and concluded that the Bolshevik takeover under Lenin and what happened later in the Soviet Union can in no reasonable sense be seen as Marxism or socialism in action. A recent example worth citing is the 2021 book by Steve Paxton, *Unlearning Marx. Why the Soviet Failure was a Triumph for Marx*, which, by careful analysis of the social and economic situation of Russia in the period leading up to 1917, illustrates 'the failure of capitalist production to penetrate the lives of the mass of ordinary Russian producers' and the inevitably premature nature of the seizure of power by Lenin and the Bolsheviks 'in the name of the proletariat' (June 2022 *Standard* review, tinyurl.com/yc7hedas). The writer's conclusion is that, since 'Marx specifically predicted that projects like the Soviet Union would fail', such an outcome does not in any way mean that 'socialism has been tried

and found wanting'. Another interesting example arises from the 2005 discussion on Marx on the BBC Radio 4 programme, *In Our Time*. The presenter, Melvyn Bragg, urged the three participants, all well known as practitioners of political ideas and philosophy though not necessarily as socialists or adherents to Marxist ideas (A.C. Grayling, Gareth Stedman Jones and Francis Wheen), to confirm the 'received' wisdom that Lenin's imposition of revolution from the top down (as well as that of later dictators such as Mao, Pol Pot, etc.) was a reflection of Marx's ideas. But all three disagreed vehemently. One stated that Marx had become a 'magical name' that people liked to quote but whose ideas had been distorted by figures such as Lenin, who in fact had 'turned Marx on his head'. Another said that others 'took, adapted and twisted him'. The third participant was even more robust in stating that what happened in Russia (and later elsewhere) 'vindicated Marx's point', ie, that revolution imposed from above by 'heroes on horseback' inevitably 'leads to a police state' and so was 'a negation of everything he [Marx] stood for and argued for'. In this light the association implicit in the claim to be 'Marxist-Leninist' often made by those on the left can be seen as a stark contradiction in terms. This also receives confirmation from parts of Lenin's own speeches and writings of 1921-22, in which, with Russia in a piteous state after the mass violence, destruction and brutality of its civil war, he admitted defeat by stating 'our attempt to implement socialism here and now has failed' and talked about the need 'to fall back on state capitalism in many economic spheres'.

Lenin in context

Of course, there are those who find value and relevance in Marx's ideas but are not necessarily averse to their 'adaptation' by later political figures such as Lenin who claim Marxist inspiration. An example of this is to be found in the recent book by the American left-wing academic, Paul Le Blanc (*Lenin, Responding to Catastrophe, Forging Revolution*. Pluto Press, 2023). The key to the association Le Blanc is prepared to make between Lenin and Marx is to be found in the title: 'Responding to Catastrophe, Forging Revolution'. Implicit in this is the idea, often repeated in the pages of an invigoratingly written book that sweeps us informatively through the whole of Lenin's personal and political life, that the Bolshevik leader, while following in Marx's footsteps, had to adapt and

respond to the circumstances he and Russia found themselves in at the time, to be 'flexible' (a frequently used word). Hence Lenin's work becomes a kind of Marxism in action, 'open, critical-minded', adapted to 'a particular historical situation' and conditioned by 'interactions with others'. In support of this, the author quotes a reference by Lenin to the words of Marx and Engels that 'our theory is not a dogma but a guide to action'. So, according to Le Blanc, Lenin, while sharing and aiming for Marx's fundamental goal of a free, classless, stateless society, found himself having to deal with 'living realities and actual struggles, not abstract revolutionary "correctness"'. In this light, therefore, according to the author, far from the 'architect of totalitarianism' Lenin is often presented as by conservative commentators, he was rather a leader ready to face the twists and turns of a reality that was 'complex, ever-changing and contradictory' and to take action accordingly – the justification for which Lenin himself framed as the application of 'revolutionary dialectics'.

Yet Le Blanc is not always or unequivocally ready to accept such justification, and it would be unfair to characterise his study as some kind of uncritical rehabilitation of Lenin. It is, however, difficult not to sense a 'benefit of the doubt' tendency and this throws up a number of seeming contradictions in the way Lenin's thought and actions are presented – the author seeming on occasion to want it both (or all) ways. So, while keen to present Lenin as a Marxist in action striving for socialism, he also states (realistically as pointed to by the evidence) that Lenin saw 'the upcoming revolution' as 'not a transition to socialism, but a transition to a capitalist social and political order'. Again he refers to Lenin's understanding of nationalism as a 'secular faith' and 'the great rival of socialism', while at the same time pointing to a view he expressed that 'there were different forms of nationalism – some worthy of support, others worthy of denunciation'. He refers with brutal frankness to the 'emergency measures' taken by Lenin's 'new Communist regime' in the period of Russia's civil war ('one-party dictatorship', 'Red Terror', 'persecution of party dissidents') and the 'repressive bureaucratic dictatorship' that came after, yet this does not prevent him from describing the early years of the 'Communist International' which Lenin was closely associated with as demonstrating 'heroic and impressive qualities, crackling with insights'.

Even-handed?

All this could of course simply be regarded as a form of 'even-handedness'

on the part of the author, and so entirely positive. But it could also perhaps be understood by reference to the phenomenon of 'cognitive dissonance' which Le Blanc himself spends a paragraph explaining. Under this dynamic, confronted with evidence that conflicts with our well-established worldview, we experience an uncomfortable mental conflict which tends to make us dismiss that evidence and simply carry on as before. Examples he gives of this are people currently denying 'the documented reality of climate change' and others 'not wanting to acknowledge the horrific realities associated with the Stalin regime'. So, in the case of this author's take on Lenin, while himself presenting evidence of the 'horrific realities' he presided over and what most people would regard as outright distortions (not just 'adaptations') of Marx, we have an ongoing attachment to the man, the Bolshevik takeover and the overall claim that Lenin's ideas seem more relevant than ever now.

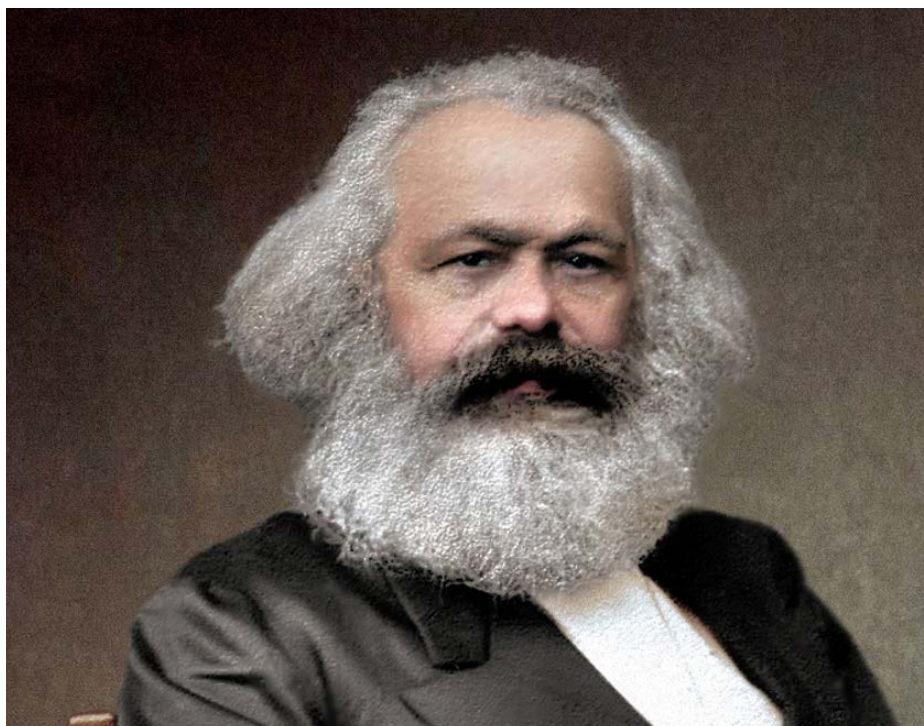
Of course, even if the Socialist Party will see this as a serious blind spot in the author's analysis of the historical struggle for a socialist society from Marx onwards, there is much in his book that socialists would accept and agree with. We would not, for example, want to challenge the author's brilliantly incisive description of modern capitalism ('a voracious market economy designed to enrich already immensely wealthy elites ... intimately connected with environmental destruction engulfing our world') or his clear characterisation of class society in capitalism ('the working class is those who make a living (get enough money to buy basic necessities and perhaps

some luxuries) by selling their *ability to work* (their labor-power) to an employer. Out of the labor-power, the employer squeezes actual labor in order to create the wealth that is partly given to the workers (usually as little as possible), with the rest of this labor-created wealth going to the employer'). On the other hand, we would see as misguided various of the 'remedies' for this often heard on the Leninist or Trotskyist Left which the author seems to quote with approval, for example the need for workers to have the correct 'leadership' for a new society to be established and 'experiences of struggle that will convince working people of the inevitability of revolution and the significance of communism'. We would also challenge that other commonly held left-wing perspective found in this book of 'Lenin good, Stalin bad' (ie, that there was no continuity between the two), though we would heartily agree with one commentator's view noted here that 'Stalinism was as different from socialism as the hippopotamus from the giraffe'.

Right or wrong?

So was Lenin a Marxist (or a socialist)? Perhaps in the end what Paul Le Blanc's eminently readable book can be taken as saying is that he would have liked to be and considered himself one but that circumstances prevented it. But wasn't that what, if you were a Marxist, you should have known was bound to happen, since Marx saw socialism as arising from advanced capitalist development not from the chronically underdeveloped society that was early twentieth century Russia?

HKM



The 'overriding financial objective'

'PAY RULING "threatens Next stores"' read a headline in the *Times* (20 September), reporting on an employment tribunal ruling that women workers in the company's shops should have been paid the same as men working in its warehouses. Next's chief executive, Lord Wolfson (the son of the founder), was quoted as saying: 'Whether we open or close stores will depend on the individual store's profitability. So you would never expect a retailer to open a store that wasn't planned to make a profit.'

Knowing how capitalism works, we certainly wouldn't expect that. In fact, we wouldn't expect a capitalist enterprise like Next to do anything if it didn't plan to make a profit from it. As Next put it in this year's half-yearly report to shareholders:

'The overriding financial objective of the Group remains the same — the delivery of long term, sustainable growth in Earnings Per Share' (tinyurl.com/44zkry3h).

In other words, to provide shareholders with a growth in the value of their shareholding. 'Earnings Per Share' (EPS) is, basically, profits per share, a company's after-tax profits divided by the number of its shares. To increase this is the 'overriding financial objective' not just of Next but of all companies.

A company's profit is typically the difference between what it receives from sales less what it costs to run the business. In Next's case, in the first half of this year its sales (and other) revenue was £2,860m and its costs £2,408m, resulting in a before-tax profit of £452m, which is about 16 percent. This is its 'profit margin'. It means that for every £ of what Next sells they pocket 16p as profit, the rest going to cover their costs (including wages). After-tax income was £341m, the amount used to calculate EPS.

A company increases the value of its shares by increasing its profits. One way this can be done is by reducing the costs of running the business. This is why Next is so dissatisfied with the legal ruling on equal pay; implementing it will increase their costs and so reduce their profits.

Another way is to increase revenue from sales. As companies don't normally have control over the prices they charge — they are limited by competition to what the market will bear — the main way to do this is to sell more, to 'grow'. But the aim is not simply to increase revenue. It is, as Next puts in their report, referring to new areas for growth, 'to maximise profitable growth' (their emphasis). The increase in sales must outmatch the cost of bringing this about.

However, not all the profits a company

makes are re-invested in growing the business. As Next says in its report:

'Our established businesses generate more cash than we are able to profitably invest in the Group, so managing our capital to ensure high returns, and returning cash that cannot be profitably invested to shareholders, remains a central discipline of the Group.'

In Next's case, they invest some of this surplus cash in other companies, the income from which adds to their overall profits. Another part is used to buy back some of its shares which besides distributing money to some shareholders also increases EPS (profit per share) by reducing the number of shares in issue, reducing their supply and so other things being equal pushing up the price. Yet another part is paid to shareholders as dividends. Other companies have a different mix. Some pay no dividends and re-invest all their profits in profitable growth, from which shareholders benefit through the value of their shares going up.

Whatever a company decides to do, the aim is maximise the financial benefit to shareholders. This reflects the logic of capitalism of increasing the value of invested capital (though shareholder capitalism is not the only possible framework for this).

SOCIALIST PARTY OFFICIAL LOGO T-SHIRTS • £12 Including UK P&P*

Printed on 100% cotton and available in black, purple or red with the official Party logo and short web address in white. Available in M/L/XL/XXL (while stocks last). £10 if collected from Head Office.



To order: Send £12 per shirt payable to The Socialist Party of Great Britain, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN (or Paypal as email address below) stating colour and size required with your name, address and phone number. *Overseas orders (and enquires): Please email for a price first with 'T-Shirt Order' in the subject line to spgb@worldsocialism.org

Mailing bags recycle with supermarket carrier bags

Not-so special offers

Credit: BBC



SUPERMARKETS LIKE to make us think they are there to help us keep the cost of our shopping down, with slogans such as Morrisons 'Price locked low' and Sainsbury's 'Hey big saver'. Cheesy catchphrases are just one of the strategies which the supermarkets employ to attract punters keen for a bargain. Some of their other tactics were explored in an edition of BBC One's Panorama called *Supermarket Deals: How Good Are They?*

Reporter Michelle Ackerley starts with some supermarket own-brand, pre-prepared cuts of meat and fish. The packaging sneakily makes the cuts look larger than they are, with the label or sleeve covering an empty space in the tray instead of more meat. Consequently, the customer assumes they're getting a better deal for their money than the reality. While this trick dates back as long as goods have been sold, traditional supermarkets such as Tesco and Morrisons have had to find newer approaches since budget rivals Aldi and Lidl have appeared and snared some of their customers. One of the ways they have responded is to advertise that some of their products are the same price as their equivalents in the discount supermarkets. Michelle recruits two families to trawl round the stores looking for 'price-matched' goods, who find out that this involves more effort than usual, without much difference in what they spend. Only a few hundred items out of tens of thousands are 'price-matched', but the ubiquitous signs around the aisles advertising them give the impression there are more. These signs are often bright red and yellow, colours which, according to Ele Clark, retail editor of

Which?, we are 'programmed' to associate with 'a great offer'.

'Price-matching' isn't just a psychologically savvy way of promoting products, though; it also affects how they are made. Michelle compares similarly priced, similarly sized foodstuffs from Tesco and Aldi, which we might expect to be of similar quality. However, chicken nuggets from Tesco had less chicken in than those from Aldi, and tins of Tesco coconut milk contained less coconut than their Aldi equivalent. To match the price charged by Aldi, Tesco have scrimped on the ingredients because their other costs are higher, with both stores' pricing expected to allow a profit. From the shopper's point of view, Tesco's inferior versions are worse value than Aldi's, and this is disguised by them being at the same price. But more fundamentally, this illustrates how products are designed and manufactured according to what's most profitable for the companies rather than with the aim of making them as good as possible. The documentary describes another example of this: shrinkflation.

Shrinkflation is the practice of reducing the size of a product while maintaining the same sale price. Shrinking it means saving on rising production costs, allowing a wider profit margin, with the consumer losing out by getting less for their money. Chocolate bars and bags of crisps are most obviously smaller than they used to be, and Michelle shows us how the New York Bakery Co has kept its bagels the same width, but deviously increased the size of the hole in the middle. As Ele says, if

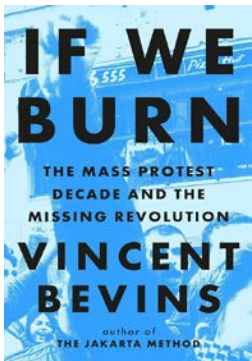
the price of something remains the same, we don't always notice when it has been subject to shrinkflation.

Perhaps to counter the risk of customers being put off by inferior or shrinkflated comestibles, supermarkets aim to maintain them with loyalty card schemes, such as Tesco's Clubcard and Morrisons' More Card. When shoppers who have signed up for a loyalty card make purchases, they accrue points which can then be redeemed back as cash vouchers, and they are also eligible for discounts on particular items. A browse round a branch of Sainsbury's shows that the price reductions which come with having their Nectar card tend to apply to cakes, crisps, fizzy drinks and alcohol, rather than staples such as meat and vegetables. As retail expert Kate Hardcastle says, seeing that something is on special offer can be enough temptation to buy it, even if we didn't originally intend to. Rebecca Tobi of The Food Foundation adds that because unhealthy snacks tend to be cheap to make, there's a commercial incentive for companies to push their sales to maximise profits. She wants 'systemic change', but defines this merely as having offers on healthier produce. As well as encouraging customers towards profitable comfort food, loyalty cards also provide the supermarket with valuable data on spending patterns which feeds into their marketing machine.

All the tricks and techniques shown on Panorama's exposé are consequences of goods being commodified, or produced for sale. A can of beans isn't just a can of beans, it's an economically quantified unit whose end form has been shaped by what's profitable for the owners of the companies which manufacture and distribute it. The quality and amount of its ingredients aren't decided upon to make it better to eat, but according to what's cost effective. Its packaging isn't only designed to preserve the food inside, but also to publicise and exaggerate it. And when it's sold to us, we're made to believe we've got a decent deal if marketing strategies such as price-matching and loyalty cards have worked. These strategies cynically and subtly aim to manipulate our choices so we spend more and keep coming back. Competition between supermarkets for market share fuels a race to the bottom as far as the quality of goods is concerned, while profits for the capitalist class soar.

MIKE FOSTER

Missing revolution



If We Burn. The Mass Protest Decade and the Missing Revolution. By Vincent Bevins. Wildfire, 2023. 336pp.

The years 2010 to 2020 saw a possible record number of protest movements over a single decade in different parts of the globe. In many places change of one kind or another was being sought. This book chronicles and seeks to make sense of many of the movements in that ‘mass protest decade’. These include protests that took place in the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ countries (Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain, Yemen), in Latin America (Brazil, Chile), in Hong Kong, South Korea, Ukraine and Turkey, and also, if fleetingly, in Algeria, Bolivia, Syria and Libya as well as via the Occupy Wall Street movement. What is found by the author as a common feature of almost all of them is that they ‘failed’, in the sense that the activists didn’t get what they wanted and in some instances (eg, Egypt, Brazil, Hong Kong) unleashed outcomes that were worse than what existed before. The author’s detailed knowledge of these events arises from his actually being present on the ground in some countries in his role as a foreign journalist for an American newspaper (*The Los Angeles Times*) but also of multiple personal interviews conducted later in many countries with key protagonists of the happenings in question. This result is a wickedly intricate account that takes us fascinatingly close to the lived experience of those directly involved.

In searching for answers to the failures he catalogues, the factors the author tends to see as most important are faulty methods of organisations and too much ‘horizontalism’ (ie, lack of hierarchical leadership). But, despite the grasp he has of the social and historical background of the territories in question, both through research and personal experience, and his presence on the ground in some of them, this book suffers from a failure on the part of the author to get to the bottom of the underlying nature of and reasons for these protests. He seems determined to frame them as attempts at fundamental social change, even revolution, on the part of those involved, yet if examined closely, a better explanation for the protests and the street demonstrations is a far less

radical one. They are largely attempts by people feeling oppressed, disadvantaged or outraged by one aspect or another of how their society is run to try and push those who govern into ways of managing the system they live under more benignly, more ‘fairly’. But key is the reality that they are looking for that system- capitalism- to be reformed, not overthrown.

Throughout the history of capitalism, in different parts of the world, such protests seeking piecemeal changes have come and gone and will continue to do so, sometimes achieving small improvements but, inevitably, failing to change the basic nature of the system we live under. Their precise targets vary, but what unites them is that they involve tinkering at the edges of the ongoing problems and crises that capitalism throws up. Above all, they do not stem from a consciousness that the buying and selling system needs to be replaced by a different one of voluntary cooperation and free access to all goods and services – which we would call socialism. So the decade of false dawns the author delves into here is only actually part of a century or more of similar campaigns aimed at trying to make capitalism work in ways that run counter to its needs and its nature.

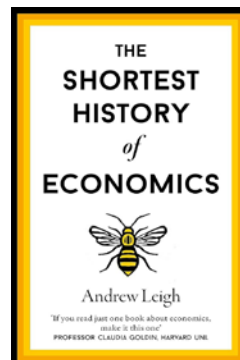
A further reservation this reviewer would have is the author’s ‘sloppy’ use of the words ‘socialism’ and ‘socialist’, employed as a kind of catch-all to mean either some form of state capitalism or any kind of protest or revolt looking to reform certain aspects of capitalism-- to make the lives of workers, the majority class, more liveable within it. So we are told, for example that: the Students for a Democratic Society movement in the US in the 1960s ‘advocated for a more socialist economy’; the fall of the Soviet union led to ‘the rapid collapse of allied socialist states’; Tunisia had taken on ‘elements of Nasser’s socialist model’ and was not the same since ‘the end of Arab Socialism’; and in Hong Kong ‘the movement contained elements that ... defended aspects of the old socialist system’.

Despite this, there are moments in this book where the author does show a clear understanding of the system we are up against, one whose purpose, in his own words, is ‘to make all the world’s states porous to international capital and open up all the planet’s resources for extraction and commodification’. And he does also come close to glimpsing the kind of world marketless, leaderless society that would transcend the kinds of problems, constantly and inevitably thrown up by capitalism, that the protests examined here focus on. That glimpse can be found, for example, when he talks about

‘constructing a movement that can stand the test of time, in addition to remaining democratic and accountable’ and ‘a world when artificial distinctions and narrowly self-interested activities melt away’ and ... ‘our society truly is participatory’.

HKM

Dismal



The Shortest History of Economics. By Andrew Leigh, Old Street Publishing, 2024

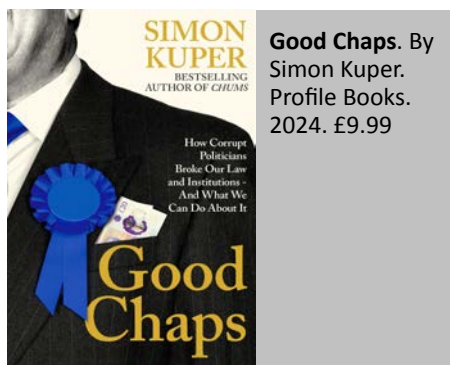
Thomas Carlyle described economics as ‘the dismal science’. But Carlyle was a racist, writing in 1849, who believed slavery should be reintroduced in the West Indies. The ‘dismal’ view he was attacking was the economics of the time which he saw as regarding all peoples as equal (and not, as is commonly supposed, to the dismal Malthus doctrine of overpopulation and famine). Andrew Leigh’s book on the history of economics is, he tells us, ‘the story of capitalism’. Capitalism is defined as the existence of markets and economics studies how people ‘maximise their wellbeing in the face of scarcity’. Scarcity is an important assumption made by most economists. Just as the slaves in the markets of the West Indies were subjected to deliberate scarcity, it avoids economists having to confront the artificial scarcity of modern capitalism for wage slaves.

Leigh endorses Thomas Hobbes’s view of human life as ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short’. ‘Hobbes was right’, declares Leigh, and he argues that human history has been a long struggle to overcome that condition. With the application of the correct economics, of course. However, Hobbes’s view was not based on anthropological or archaeological evidence but on the English Civil War of 1642 to 1651. He fled to France while the civil war raged and while there wrote *Leviathan*, published in 1651, from which the above quote is taken. In Hobbes’s hypothetical ‘state of nature’ (that is, human nature) a ‘war of all against all’ exists and this calls for an authoritarian state to keep the peace. There can be no doubt that much of human history is a record of struggles, but if Hobbes was correct the ‘war of all against all’ should have meant that we would all still be living in caves, without hope for the future.

The fact that human productivity has increased enormously since settled agriculture took place about 10,000 years ago has mainly been due to the adoption of new technologies, not the following of economics wisdom. Leigh claims that at the turn of the twentieth century the Englishman Alfred Marshall 'was the world's most influential economist'. In academia perhaps, but the accolade surely belongs to Karl Marx. Leigh doesn't mention him, and that's probably just as well. A running argument of this book is the alleged superiority of capitalism over communism in practice. The 1917 Russian revolution was a 'communist revolution'. Cuba established a 'communist dictatorship'. East Germany had 'communist rule'. North Korea has had 'decades of communism'. They all failed miserably, of course, but none of those regimes claimed to have established communism. Leigh is by no means alone in making this mistake but it is a serious flaw in his book. So when he writes of Russia and China that they have recently 'transitioned from communism to capitalism, this is simply not true. No country in the world has claimed to have established communism. Ever.

LEW

Such good chaps



Good Chaps. By Simon Kuper. Profile Books. 2024. £9.99

This is effectively the sequel to Kuper's excellent *Chums*, reviewed in the September 2022 *Socialist Standard*. The focus this time is the idea that English gentlemen (and it's usually men) have always been trusted to follow the rules and 'play the game', this being an intrinsic tenet of a public school and Oxbridge upbringing. Kuper catalogues how in recent years this seems to have gone very badly awry.

In the 1960s and 70s, these types started to get rather pushed out of politics and the upper echelons of the civil service and other professions, though far from disappearing entirely. Under David Cameron (Eton and Oxford) they started to reassert their natural right to govern again, but with a twist – this being that the gentlemen's code they had abided by in earlier eras had largely been eroded by the type of ruthless competition that capitalism promotes, and the narcissism and inflated egos that go with it. It found ultimate

expression, of course, in the tawdry and shambolic government of Boris Johnson (Eton and Oxford).

Of particular interest to Kuper is the financial base to this political superstructure – exemplified by the buccaneer capitalists that massaged Johnson's ego so thoroughly and who have sought influence through the connections to which they can buy access. Many of these have been arriviste Mayfair hedge-fund managers and private equity tycoons – the same types of people behind the likes of Reform UK and GB News (often people bizarrely casting themselves as 'outsiders' to the traditional City of London and media establishments). And of even more interest still, many in these circles have been Russian oligarchs. As ever, Kuper sums up this type of development beautifully: 'The moment Russians became British citizens, they were allowed to give to political parties. From about 2012 through 2022, they were the foreign nationality that topped the list of British political donations. Naturally, they gave to the ruling party rather than the powerless Opposition.

The Tories were delighted. It was as if extraterrestrials had stepped out of a spaceship on Parliament Square and inexplicably begun handing them money. The Russian you met over whiskies in 5 Hertford Street was charming. Of course he wasn't working for the Kremlin! Don't go all *Le Carré* on me. And if you did make the effort to perform the most basic due diligence on where his money came from, well that might get in the way of taking it' (p.94).

Kuper details many instances of Russian donations and influence to the Tory Party. To cite just one example, these include Lubov Chernukhin, whose husband became – at the tender age of 32 – deputy finance minister under Putin and later chair of the Russian state development bank. By 2023, she had donated £2.4 million to the Tories and was a member of the Party's secretive 'Advisory Board' which was restricted to mega-donors who were entitled to monthly meetings with the Prime Minister and Chancellor. This is just one of several instances of this type and in case you are wondering, the embarrassing connections with the father-and-son press magnates the Lebedevs are also described in all their glory.

As the Tories fell from grace in the last couple of years (and some of the Russian connections became embarrassing after Putin's invasion of Ukraine) the money started to dry up. There's an interesting chapter on how Labour started to Hoover up significant donations before the General Election instead, including from David Sainsbury, Dale Vince and Gary Lubner (of the family that own Autoglass and who reportedly gave £5 million alone). Kuper says Labour's donors tend to have more of an obvious ideological affinity with them (rather than being people who will simply cosy up to whoever is in power) though it will be fascinating to see whose interests 'the government of service' will effectively serve – even if rather more indirectly. We think we can guess.

DAP



‘Vote for them but ...’

THE PUBLICITY organizers of the International Socialists certainly know how to produce an election poster to catch everyone’s eyes. Their technique is so simple too, even the most politically apathetic passer-by cannot fail to notice a poster designed to produce a laugh. ‘Defeat the Tories’ it cries, ‘Vote Labour, but no to social contract’. ‘Vote Labour, but’ indeed! It’s a bit different from the usual IS rubbish of ‘Vote Labour, then . . .’ (and then kick them out and put us in their place.)

Unfortunately it has a slight flaw. No-one seems to have told the IS that there is no provision on a voting slips for ‘buts’. How convenient it would be if there was, but there is not, there are no if’s, and’s or but’s about it at all. If you vote Labour you get Labour, you get continued uncontrollable capitalism, you get futile reformism, you get nothing for the future of the working class, and you get nowhere towards Socialism. And whether you get social contract or not is totally irrelevant.

No matter how sincerely a Labour government wishes to protect

the interests of the workers, no matter how benignly they impose their unwanted ‘leadership’ upon us, they can do nothing other than be puppets of the economic forces of capitalism. It makes no difference whether Tory or Labour govern, the real power is that of the capitalist system and only its replacement by a genuine Socialist society will do.

When will International Socialists realise the futility of ‘Vote Labour’, and when will they realise that Socialism will only be achieved when we have awakened the social consciousness of the working class throughout the world? Socialism will be won by struggling to free the minds of the workers from their capitalist bonds, and never by putting in a Labour government and then trying to overthrow it by violently accentuating the evils of capitalism.

(Socialist Standard, November 1974)

Action Replay

The Price Is Right, or wrong

THERE HAS been a lot of media coverage about the cost of attending concerts by Taylor Swift and Oasis, and some – though much less – on the prices of tickets for sporting events. Particularly in the context of profitability and sustainability rules, football clubs now have to rely more on income from ticket sales, sponsorships and merchandise.

One particular case where fans objected was Aston Villa, who are back in the top European competition this season, after forty years away from it. Most fans will pay at least £70 to watch a home Champions League game, but in the top seats it will be over £90. The club at least changed their mind after trying to double the cost of disabled parking for the season. They have a kit deal, and shirt deals with betting companies to help them out a bit.

And it’s not just football. Tickets for top boxing events can cost upwards of £200. Also, there have been complaints about Lord’s cricket ground in London charging £95 to watch the fourth day of the Test against Sri Lanka, when the ground was less than a third full. Most years Lord’s hosts two Tests (out of six), while some well-known venues, which tend to be a lot cheaper, miss out. The MCC is a bastion of privilege and has been accused of racism and sexism. It is also a home of profit (over £67m in 2023).

Twickenham, the home of English rugby union, has now been renamed the Allianz Stadium, after the world’s

largest insurance company, which has also acquired the name of Bayern Munich’s football stadium in Germany, as well as the rugby league ground in Sydney and a football stadium in São Paulo. Murrayfield Stadium in Edinburgh hosts Scotland’s rugby union internationals: except it’s now Scottish Gas Murrayfield. The Millennium Stadium in Cardiff is now the Principality Stadium. Plenty of other grounds are named after sponsors: Emirates, Etihad, Vitality, Amex and so on. And of course most big stadiums host not just sporting events but music concerts etc as well. In the US National Football League, far more stadiums have sponsors’ names than is the case in England.

Another way of boosting income for both football clubs and the European governing body UEFA is to increase the number of games. So the league stage of the Champions League (and other European competitions) has now been changed to eight matches per club rather than six, with an additional knock-out round for many of those participants too. Players complained that too many games made them tired, and there was even talk of a strike. Fifpro, the union for the very top players, stated that legal action against Fifa was ‘inevitable’ after the number of matches for the Club World Cup was increased too.

PB



Credit: Getty Images

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.

November 2024 Events

World Socialist Movement online meetings

Sundays at 19.30 (IST) (Discord)

Weekly WSP (India) meeting

Sunday 10 November 10.00 (GMT)

Central Online Branch Meeting

Friday 1 November 19.30 (GMT)

Big Tech and the state

Speaker Piers Hobson

Despite all the artificial intelligence, corporations bigger than states, and assertions of 'technofeudalism' replacing capitalism, the capitalist still seeks to maximise profits by exploitation and the state still acts as the executive committee of the whole capitalist class.

Friday 8 November 19.30 (GMT)

The US presidential election

Discussion about the result.

Friday 15 November 19.30 (GMT)

Yet more ways that socialism can heal the world

Speaker: Paddy Shannon



Friday 22 November 19.30 (GMT)

Work

Speaker: Paul Bennett

Studs Terkel's book *Working* begins, 'This book, being about work, is, by its very nature, about violence – to the spirit as well as to the body ... To survive the day is triumph enough for the walking wounded among the great many of us.'

This talk will look at one form of work, employment under capitalism, and will mainly make use of the words of workers themselves, as recorded by Terkel and others. We'll ask why employment is like this, and whether it is necessary.

Friday 29 November 19.30 (GMT)

Did you see the news?

Discussion on recent subjects in the news.

Socialist Party Physical Meetings

LONDON

Socialist Party Head Office, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN.

Nearest tube: Clapham North.

Nearest rail station: 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.

4-Wheel Drive Toyota Tundra

IT'S BOLTON Central Library on an evening in late November 1984. The large meeting room is full for a debate between myself representing the Socialist Party and the local Tory MP, Tom Sackville. The subject is 'Is socialism compatible with freedom?' and a well-known local cleric is in the chair. We both have 20 minutes to put our respective cases and another 10 minutes to respond. We do that, and then it's thrown open to the floor. The hands go up for questions and observations and we both respond. I'm gratified that a lot of the discussion focuses on the definition and description of socialism I've tried to communicate – a democratically run society of voluntary cooperation, a moneyless, wageless, stateless world of free access to all goods and services based on the principle of from each according to ability to each according to need.

I was worried that we might get bogged down in discussing the old 57 varieties of 'socialism' (Russia, China, Cuba, Scandinavia, social reform, etc.), so I did my best to dismiss all that quickly at the beginning. And it seems to have worked, since hardly anyone – not even my Tory opponent – is trying to tar socialism with any of those brushes. I'm pleased too that it's all calm, civil and good-natured, since those are always the best conditions for rational argument and useful exchange of ideas. At the end it probably can't be said that anyone is the winner, but importantly, from my point of view, the socialist case has been aired clearly and unambiguously in front of a large audience. As an enthusiastic member of the Party's local branch says to me afterwards: 'I've never been to a meeting of this kind where the constant focus was on our view of socialism.'

That was a long time ago. Yet we've not stopped debating, since debating is our life blood as socialists. We've been doing it for the whole 120 years of our existence (wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist_Party_of_Great_Britain_debates). But, apart from hustings at election times, face-to-face debate has become more and more difficult to organise in recent years, as discussion of all kinds increasingly takes place online. But though this lacks the immediacy (and often the politeness) of face-to-face exchange, it does not prevent discussion from continuing and, in fact, can reach far wider and more faraway audiences than is possible in a debating hall. The Socialist Party has adapted to this



by having its own website (worldsocialism.org/spgb) and Facebook page (facebook.com/groups/worldsocialism) and its members often participate in discussion and debate taking place on other sites organised by groups in various parts of the world with similar or closely allied ideas.

One of these is Moneyless Society (facebook.com/groups/1299924940356627), whose aim is 'obsoleting money', so sharing a key element of the society we are looking to see established. To give an example, a recent discussion on the Moneyless Society site involved a range of people, including SPGB members, debating with a distinctly non-socialist contributor. Casey began by quoting approvingly words from early 20th century free-market theorist, Ludwig von Mises, and then argued that we should be pleased with the market economy because it 'puts the common man in the driving seat' and 'we average Joes get to enjoy luxuries not even conceived of 100 years ago thanks to the innovation capitalism breeds'. He added that he'd 'like to hear from socialists in this bunch what's wrong with this statement'. So not just an echo chamber, and a provocative start which sparked quick responses. The first one in fact was from me, stating: 'The main thing to be said about the "average Joe" is that, far from being "in the driving seat", he spends most of his life hanging on to the job he's got (if he's got one) and hoping and praying that the market system he lives in doesn't determine he'll lose it.' Casey's not ill-considered response was: 'So society should allow Joe to continue working an obsolete job that no longer serves a purpose?' At this point someone called David intervened to comment on how technology, both before and during the capitalist era, has made it possible to produce more with less work. And then it got a little tetchy when Casey mentioned, as evidence of the success of the market system, that he has a 'four-wheel drive Toyota Tundra with tons of features' and so 'capitalism for the win'. David's sarcastic

reply was: 'I humbly suggest that we disband this list. After all, Casey says he drives a Toyota Tundra. What possible argument in favor of socialism could ever top that?'

But then it became more serious with Casey putting the argument that modern-day vehicles have many features that previous ones didn't have and that make them more appealing. This has been achieved by competition, and so, 'because of that we all benefit'. A further contributor, Michael, then intervened to dispute Casey's earlier assertion that 'capitalism breeds innovation', arguing that 'collective ownership' can innovate just as well as 'private ownership'. At this point it wasn't clear whether for Michael 'collective ownership' meant state ownership (ie nationalisation) or socialism in our terms (ie, a common ownership and free access society). But Casey seized on this anyway to bring up the Soviet bogeyman and suggested a comparison between 'the US and the USSR and the advancement of everyday life for everyday citizens', together with a story about Boris Yeltsin being amazed as he toured a grocery store in Houston.

At this stage I felt obliged to jump in again myself and say: 'What on earth has Yeltsin got to do with socialism? Absolutely nothing.' The closing 'speeches' had Casey stating that 'we are all better off for Bill Gates becoming a billionaire, not the other way round', and two late contributors weighing in, the first one, Paul, saying that, in capitalism, 'people are forced to buy not what they want but what they can afford, even if it's cheap and nasty, out of what it's profitable for companies to produce'. The second, Steven, on a slightly different tack: 'Less than 100 [...] people in the world today own the equivalent of that owned by the poorest 50%- that's 4 billion people. If that doesn't tell you something is wrong, what will it take?'

All this is a far cry from Bolton Central Library in 1984. But what it shows is that debate still goes on, argument still goes back and forth and, if anything, now that most of it is online, it has a potentially bigger, more receptive and geographically wide audience than in the pre-internet days of outdoor platforms in town centres or parks or draughty meeting rooms in libraries or halls.

HOWARD MOSS