

THE

October 2024 • Volume 120 • Number 1442 • £1.50

# SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

## 58 recommendations

But capitalism  
walks free



Also: A plague on both their houses  
Labour landslides: then and now  
An unquenchable blaze  
How we live and how we might live

Labour's capitalist wealth fund  
Party News: Three leaflets  
In the wild



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## Introducing the Socialist Party

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

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



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

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

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

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

# The capitalist witches' brew that led to Grenfell

THE FINAL report of the Inquiry into the Grenfell Fire makes devastating reading.

There was an active lack of interest in fire safety at the heart of central government: 'In the years between the fire at Knowsley Heights in 1991 and the fire at Grenfell Tower in 2017 there were many opportunities for the government to identify the risks posed by the use of combustible cladding panels and insulation, particularly to high-rise buildings, and to take action in relation to them. Indeed, by 2016 the department was well aware of those risks, but failed to act on what it knew' (Executive Summary (tinyurl.com/GrenfellExec), p. 7).

Then the most damning paragraph of the report: 'One very significant reason why Grenfell Tower came to be clad in combustible materials was systematic dishonesty on the part of those who made and sold the rainscreen cladding panels and insulation products. They engaged in deliberate and sustained strategies to manipulate the testing processes, misrepresent test data and mislead the market. In the case of the principal insulation product used on Grenfell Tower, Celotex RS5000, the Building Research Establishment (BRE) was complicit in that strategy' (p. 10).

A regulatory body had been captured by the construction industry: 'The National

House Building Council (NHBC) [...] failed to ensure that its building control function remained essentially regulatory and free of commercial pressures. It was unwilling to upset its own customers and the wider construction industry by revealing the scale of the use of combustible insulation in the external walls of high-rise buildings, contrary to the statutory guidance' (p.14).

The local authority, Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC), managed the property at arm's length through a Tenants Management Organisation (TMO): 'RBKC and the TMO were jointly responsible for the management of fire safety at Grenfell Tower. The years between 2009 and 2017 were marked by a persistent indifference to fire safety, particularly the safety of vulnerable people. [...] RBKC was responsible for overseeing the TMO's activities, not monitoring its operations on a day-to-day basis, but its oversight of the TMO's performance was weak and fire safety was not subject to any key performance indicator' (p. 16).

The TMO allowed an unqualified person to be the fire safety manager, who carried out substandard assessments:

'The demands of managing fire safety were viewed by the TMO as an inconvenience rather than an essential aspect of its duty to manage its property carefully' (p. 17).

The TMO 'wanted to reduce the cost' by using the specific type of cladding panel that failed so appallingly but were badly advised by an incompetent firm of architects. In fact: '[not] one of those involved in the design of the external wall or the choice of materials acted in accordance with the standards of a reasonably competent person in their position' (p. 19).

Here, then, were the ingredients of the capitalist witches' brew that caused Grenfell: a housing market largely geared towards the wealthy, with workers squeezed into as little land and living space as possible. Politicians driven by an ideological aversion to regulation and a desire to please the construction industry. A local authority holding its tenants (many of whom were vulnerable people on benefits) at arm's length as an unwelcome cost not to be listened to. A regulator captured by the industry it is supposed to regulate. Builders concerned with growing their profits over the wellbeing of the people who will live in the buildings. Unscrupulous manufacturers willing to gamble with people's lives to sell a few more units of their goods, knowing profit-hungry builders wouldn't look too closely and would cut them in on the action.

Grenfell was not a mistake but the result of a combination of regular occurrences under capitalism.

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# Boeing – out in the cold

AFTER NEARLY three months on the International Space Station, two astronauts are to be marooned there until next February as their proposed transport home, Boeing's Starliner capsule, remains out of service after a host of thruster failures, software glitches, parachute problems and helium leaks. The astronauts are being philosophical about it, but Boeing will be aggrieved at losing credibility points to its arch-rival NASA co-contractor, the Elon Musk-owned SpaceX, which will now take on the responsibility for bringing the astronauts home ([tinyurl.com/3bj3ua2t](https://tinyurl.com/3bj3ua2t)).

Boeing is fast becoming a byword for 'omnishambles' with a recent history that showcases just how capitalist competition and corporate profit-chasing can result in highly uncreative destruction.

When Boeing swallowed up the last of its US aviation rivals in the 1990s, it saw the chance to adopt a less product-oriented and more shareholder-focused and monopolistic approach which sought to maximise returns by outsourcing not just part production but the cost of part development too, while also extorting price reductions. This put the squeeze on suppliers, who were faced with a Hobson's Choice of a bad deal or no deal at all. But outsourcing creates complexity, and this compartmentalised approach on the wide-bodied 787 Dreamliner resulted in delays and overruns and never delivered the savings expected ([tinyurl.com/fsmbd8mz](https://tinyurl.com/fsmbd8mz)).

While Boeing wrestled with a problem of its own making, its major European rival, the joint venture Airbus, announced the re-engined narrow-body A320neo, which it claimed could cut fuel use by up to 35 percent. This caused consternation at Boeing, whose 50-year-old 737 had previously dominated the core-segment single-aisle market. To compete, Boeing really needed a brand new plane, but the lead-time to mass production of an all-new design, outsourced or not, would be far too long, and Boeing were already haemorrhaging buyers to Airbus. So bosses resorted to the least-worst option, to re-engine the 737. Morgan Stanley said of this 'reactionary' solution, 'Boeing's hasty decision to re-engine the B737 is a clear indication of the success and strong competitive positioning of the A320neo' while another business analyst was 'astounded at the Airbus smackdown' ([tinyurl.com/36rkdrr](https://tinyurl.com/36rkdrr)).

Enter the 737 MAX. But when you put new and bigger engines on a 100-ton aircraft they alter its centre of gravity and flight characteristics. Normally this



Credit: Boeing

would necessitate costly flight simulator retraining and recertification of pilots. Instead Boeing used a background software fix known as the Manoeuvring Characteristics Augmentation System (MCAS), which altered the plane's rear flaps in response to sensor signals. As long as it worked properly, they reasoned, the pilots didn't need to know about it. So Boeing did not tell them about MCAS or include it in the pilot manual. The Federal Aviation Administration wasn't too worried, despite whistleblower allegations of its regulatory capture by Boeing, and agreed with the company to give pilots just an hour of training on an iPad, without mentioning MCAS. Boeing weren't worried either. They had calculated the likelihood of a 'major failure' (one not resulting in the loss of a plane, which is termed 'catastrophic') as once in every 223 trillion flight hours – around 2 billion years of annual MAX fleet service ([tinyurl.com/549z2ahj](https://tinyurl.com/549z2ahj)).

In the event they had two catastrophic failures in less than 6 months. The sensors and control panel light didn't work properly, and pilots did not know about MCAS or how to override it when it malfunctioned. In October 2018 a Lion Air 737 MAX 8 crashed in the Java Sea, killing all 189 people. Airily dismissing this as ground crew and pilot incompetence, Boeing announced record \$100bn earnings the following January. But in March 2019 an Ethiopian Airlines MAX 8 also fell out of the sky, killing all 157 on board. Clearly this was no coincidence, and Boeing immediately saw its orders, stock prices and reputation plummet. Its CEO promptly resigned, though with a cosy retirement package of \$80m in stock options ([tinyurl.com/498cvau4](https://tinyurl.com/498cvau4)), and the new CEO issued a *mea culpa* to the US Senate, accepting the company's responsibility for the deaths and agreeing to pay compensation and submit to regulators.

And then, despite all the regulation, a door panel blew off an Alaska Airlines flight in January this year, because bolts were missing. How could this happen?

Multiple whistleblowers had faced company reprisals after drawing attention to falsified inspection reports and a string of unsafe practices due to cost-cutting and inadequate staff training. In July Boeing pleaded guilty to criminal conspiracy after being found to violate the terms of the regulatory agreement, meaning the company now has a criminal record ([tinyurl.com/mv4av7m2](https://tinyurl.com/mv4av7m2)).

On top of that, Boeing workers have been on strike against a union-busting and bullying culture, pay rates that have not increased in 16 years as the cash-strapped company grinds down on its own workforce, and 'panic mode' as managers hound staff to keep quiet over quality concerns ([tinyurl.com/ysjh9mnc](https://tinyurl.com/ysjh9mnc)).

Now Boeing has \$60bn of debt and is 'one level above being potentially downgraded to non-investment grade status- junk status'. But nobody wants Boeing to collapse, not the airlines, who are faced with a global shortage of aircraft and fear an Airbus monopoly even more than the current Boeing-Airbus duopoly, and not the US government, which relies on Boeing's aerospace defence arm and fears market capture by a major Chinese competitor like Comac (*Economist*, 20 June-[tinyurl.com/422k64cc](https://tinyurl.com/422k64cc)).

Airbus has seen A220-300 engine failures, diversions, groundings and supply chain problems but no crashes, and its stock has gone up, not down. The story of Boeing shows what can happen when market competition tightens the screws, and things like quality control, adequate training, product performance and company honesty begin to crack and splinter. Accidents will still happen in non-market socialism, but not because someone is eyeing the balance sheet instead of the safety inspection reports.

Meanwhile the astronauts continue to float in the ISS, patiently above it all. Compared to what many others have suffered at Boeing's hands, they might consider themselves lucky only to be left out in the cold.

PJS

# A plague on both their houses

THIS ISSUE is published before the US presidential elections on 5 November so we are unable to comment on the result. But we can analyse the campaign and what is at stake.

Most elections under capitalism are simply about which band of professional politicians shall occupy executive and ministerial posts. In other words, about a change of personnel to continue with the same basic policies. This was the case in the recent UK elections. On some occasions, however, the capitalist class are split on some key economic issue and the only way this can be settled is via the ballot box.

In Britain, this was the case over whether or not the British state should remain part of the European Union. One section of the capitalist class wanted to withdraw to avoid EU regulation of their financial activities while another section, the majority, wanted to stay in.

In a capitalist political democracy the only way of settling such conflicts of interests within the capitalist class is to put the matter to the electorate to decide, an electorate overwhelmingly composed of workers. The rival sections of the capitalist class each spend millions in propaganda to try to get workers to vote for their candidates. The section that wins gets its way. The government is formed by their political representatives who have a mandate to implement that section's policy. In Britain those in favour of leaving won a referendum and a subsequent general election, so Britain left. Had the vote gone the other way Britain would have remained in the EU.

In such elections there is something more than a mere change of personnel at stake — for the capitalist class, though not for the working class, whose interests are opposed to all sections of the capitalist class and who are not required to take sides.

The current presidential election in the United States is one such example. The basic split in the capitalist class there is the old one between those who favour free trade and those who favour protectionism, which has foreign policy implications. Harris represents that section which favours the status quo and support for existing international bodies set up to promote freer trade. Trump represents those who want to protect US manufacturing industry from outside competition by imposing a tariff on all imports. Harris wants to continue the war in Ukraine and bombing Gaza. Trump just wants to bomb Gaza.

If the election was a contest as to



which candidate has the least unpleasant personality Harris would be the lesser evil. But that's not the issue. It's which section of the US capitalist class shall get its way, a matter of indifference to workers and of equal opposition to both by socialists.

Because it is the working class electorate that will decide, both sides have to spin their policy in a way that will dupe workers into supporting them. Thus Trump courts the Christian right and other social conservatives while Harris presents herself as a champion of liberal values. Trump's appeal is mainly to whites, Harris's mainly to voters of colour. Trump mainly to men. Harris mainly to women. But none of these is the real issue, even though how voters react to them will decide which section of the US capitalist class gets its way.

The US system for electing the president is peculiar. In other countries with elected presidents, the candidate who wins is the one who gets the most votes, whether in a first or second round. In the US this is not necessarily the case — it is the candidate who wins the most votes in an electoral college composed of members representing the states that make up the union, whose number broadly reflects the electorate of each state and who (except in a couple of small states) vote as a bloc. When Trump won in 2016 he got fewer votes than Hilary Clinton but more in the electoral college. This was because Clinton won easily in California and New York but this didn't increase her representation in the Electoral College. Who wins here is decided by who wins in a number of key 'swing' states like Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Georgia but also smaller ones like Arizona. This is not fully democratic but is the procedure that has evolved in the United States for deciding who shall chair the executive committee of its ruling class.

Under the US constitution, the president cannot get their way unless their party has a majority in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. The House of Representatives is elected on a normal democratic basis from constituencies of roughly equal size. Only one-third of the Senate is elected every two years, a constitutional arrangement put in place by the Founding Fathers to prevent a majority for any radical proposal (such as land reform) getting its way for at least six years.

The Democratic Party leaders got Biden to withdraw as they were afraid that, if he stayed as their candidate, they risked not winning a majority in the House of Representatives and Senate, and so not being in a position to block what Trump might do that would be against the interest of the US capitalist class as a whole. In fact, their strategy is just as much aimed at this as at electing Harris as President so that, if she loses, they will still be able to block Trump doing something the section of the US capitalist class they represent doesn't want, such as abandoning Ukraine or starting a world tariff war.

Trump is portrayed by some of those who support Harris as a 'fascist' who wants to install himself as dictator. This is an exaggeration for vote-catching purposes. A more sober assessment is given by one of Trump's economic advisers, Stephen Moore of the notorious right-wing think-tank The Heritage Foundation. When asked what Trump would do if elected President again, he said that 'Trump would be pragmatic in office and focus on the needs of business to drive economic growth' ([tinyurl.com/2n4ftxp3](https://tinyurl.com/2n4ftxp3)). Perhaps not so different, then, than what the new Labour government here has said is its approach.

# 'The markets' before people

IT WAS always a bit of a mystery why Rachel Reeves was so insistent on presenting the Labour Party as the 'Party of Business' and emphasising that, if she became Chancellor of the Exchequer, she would enforce stringent government spending rules with a rod of iron.

This can't have been aimed at catching votes; that would be too much like asking for turkeys to vote for Christmas. Nor even to reassure British business; these would know from past experience that a Labour government would be a safe pair of hands as far as looking after their interests was concerned. It seemed that the only explanation could be to reassure 'the markets' so as to avoid the fate of the unfortunate Truss government; to reassure, in other words, the international speculators who buy and sell currencies and who lend money to governments by buying the bonds they issue.

That this may well have been the reason was revealed on Sunday 1 September by the member of the Cabinet sent out that day to tour the radio and TV studios to defend the Labour government's decision to take away the winter fuel allowance from most pensioners. Newspaper

headlines the following day reflected what Lucy Powell, the Leader of the House of Commons, had said: 'WINTER FUEL PAYMENT CUT HELPED STOP "RUN ON THE POUND" SAYS LUCY POWELL. "We would have seen the markets losing confidence", Leader of the Commons said' (*iNews*).

'UK FACED ECONOMIC CRASH IF WINTER FUEL PAYMENT WAS NOT AXED, POWELL SAYS. The Commons Leader says Rachel Reeves's decision to cut the payment was a "difficult decision" with "no alternative"' (Belfast-based *Irish News*).

Her exact words, as recorded by these newspapers, were, respectively: '... why we had to do that was because if we didn't, we would have seen the markets losing confidence, potentially a run on the pound, the economy crashing ...' ([inews.co.uk/news/politics/winter-fuel-payment-cut-stop-run-pound-3255323](https://www.inews.co.uk/news/politics/winter-fuel-payment-cut-stop-run-pound-3255323)) and 'If we hadn't taken some of these tough decisions we could have seen a run on the pound, interest rates going up and crashing the economy. It's something we were left with no alternative but to do' ([tinyurl.com/yhs7t6se](https://www.tinyurl.com/yhs7t6se)).

What she meant couldn't have been clearer: that to retain the confidence of the international speculators and investors

who trade in currencies and government bonds, the new Labour government had no alternative but to cut government spending.

Some might question whether the situation was that drastic. But that's not the point. The government considered that it was and, in their role as guardian of the general interest of the British capitalist class as a whole, took the required action to maintain the confidence of 'the markets' by cutting its spending. In theory they could have cut something else — so-called defence spending, for instance — but, presumably to convince the markets how serious they were, deliberately chose to cut some social benefits, in this case those for pensioners.

In any event, the markets were satisfied. Under the headline INVESTORS DEFEY ECONOMIC GLOOM WITH SCRAMBLE FOR UK BONDS, the *Times* (4 September) reported: 'The record demand for gilts suggests that financial markets are shrugging off worries about the UK's fiscal sustainability for now, after the government said it needed to carry out immediate spending cuts to prevent a collapse in the pound.'

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# Halo Halo

RUSSIAN PRIESTS have joined a long list of various clergymen of various nations in their channelling Bob Dylan's *With God On Our Side*. Giving a blessing to a nuclear weapon is possible even though such arms 'have tremendous destructive power', Konstantin Tatarintsev, an archpriest of the Russian Orthodox Church, and first deputy head of the Synodal Department for the Armed Forces and Law Enforcement Services, told RIA Novosti (August). Sanctifying something that 'sows death' might normally be considered 'unacceptable,' [not normally, always], he said. Nuclear arms are also 'the weapons of containment', he explained. Their purpose is to ensure that no other nations that possess such weapons could use them against Russia, adding that 'it is a guarantee of peace'. Mutually Assured Destruction.

According to Tatarintsev, the prayer used to bless a weapon goes back to the Middle Ages. It places a personal spiritual responsibility on its wielder not to misuse

it for evil ends. He also said that pretty much any weapon, including the nuclear triad, can be considered 'sacred' when it is used to protect 'our fatherland and the holy sites located on its territory'.

\*\*\*

Worshippers in Ohio have been left stunned after a 75 year-old statue of the Virgin appeared to blink as they gazed upon her – with photos capturing the mysterious moment. The International Pilgrim Virgin Statue of Our Lady of Fatima was making its way across the region as part of a tour when it allegedly shut and open its eyes on 2 August while on display at the Basilica of St. John the Baptist. [Allegedly being the operative word.] The statue has visited more than 100 countries, including Russia and China, and is believed to be the closest likeness of a documented apparition of Mary in 1917 said to be 'worthy of belief' by the Catholic Church. Many who have visited the statue have since claimed they've witnessed medical

miracles, including a young boy some believe was cured of malaria (*Daily Mail*, 10 August 2024).

This recalls a piece in the September 2023 Halo column which bears repeating:

Does anyone remember the *Only Fools and Horses* episode, The Miracle of Peckham, where Del Boy scams money from exploiting a weeping statue of Mary in the local church? The 'miracle' occurs because the lead of the church roof has been nicked and when it rains the water drips down and off the face of the statue. Has the Pope seen this episode and is it one of his favourites?

Miracles don't happen! The pontiff has been berating his flock for believing in 'miracles' and weeping Madonnas in particular. 'Apparitions of the Virgin Mary are "not always real", he said, in what appears to be an indirect reference to a woman who drew thousands of pilgrims to pray before a statue that she claimed shed tears of blood.' 'The Madonna has never drawn [attention] to herself,' he said (*Guardian*, 4 June 2023).

Who are the biggest charlatans? The Catholic church or those preying upon unthinking believers?

DC

# Tiny tips

Billionaire wealth has risen by more than 1,000 percent since 1989, with the number of billionaires tripling to 164 since 2010. Over the same period, the average worker lost £10,200 through wage suppression enforced through record-low strike activity policed by the trade union bureaucracy. One-fifth of people in the UK live in poverty, and 25 percent of all children. Nearly 3 million rely on food banks. For the poorest 10 percent of UK households, living standards have fallen by 20 percent compared with 2019–20—a drop in income of £4,600 (**WSWS**, [tinyurl.com/mjajc6m](https://www.wsws.org/en/article/2024/08/01/uk-poverty-2024)).

Pastor Mboro is a self-styled prophet with thousands of followers across South Africa. He has claimed to perform miracles such as healing people during sermons and delivering a fish from the womb of a pregnant woman (**Yahoo!** [tinyurl.com/4usnrbsb](https://www.yahoo.com/news/pastor-mboro-claims-to-deliver-fish-from-womb-of-pregnant-woman-120000788.html)).

The book begins with a poignant reminder that we are all migrants: 'Even if you are

not a migrant, your ancestors were. If they had not migrated, you would not be alive' (**Impact Investor**, [tinyurl.com/4xuemy6c](https://www.impactinvestor.com/news/2024/08/01/migrants-ancestors)).

I meet Najwa Abdul Awa, holding an image of her dead son. I ask her if she's scared about what might be around the corner. 'Of course not', she replies with a smile. 'I sent my first son for martyrdom with pride. And I'm willing to send my second and my third son too. We will not stop, she says, until Israel vanishes' (**Sky News**, [tinyurl.com/mxx8rm33](https://www.sky.com/news/israel-vanishes)).

The pro-Palestinian organizers gathered for 'coffee with comrades' ...The main speaker, a University of Massachusetts Amherst PhD candidate, took the stage. He donned a keffiyeh and a Cuban Communist Party cap emblazoned with a red star, and began discussing readings by Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, and Leila Khaled, a former Palestinian militant and first woman to hijack an airplane. 'Our political system is falling apart', William Chaney, the PhD candidate, said in an

interview just before his lecture began. 'If we want to leave the world better, we have to look back and learn lessons' (**Boston Globe**, [tinyurl.com/5ductrb3](https://www.bostonglobe.com/2024/08/01/lectures-2024/)).

In America, 1 in 4 cancer patients go bankrupt or lose their homes because of the outrageously high cost of care and 68,000 die a year because they can't afford healthcare (**Common Dreams**, [tinyurl.com/wptkej2](https://www.commondreams.org/news/2024/08/01/cancer-patients-bankrupt)).

... the great lie of nationalism: the fact that there is no organic bond between an ethnic group and a specific terrain, that no stretch of soil belongs by divine or natural right to those who speak a particular language or have a certain skin-colour. The country was never yours to claim back. Immigrants haven't robbed you of what was never your property in the first place (**UnHerd**, [tinyurl.com/2d8a9ah2](https://www.unherd.com/2024/08/01/nationalism)).

In general, human beings are remarkably altruistic. Rather than feeling destructive impulses, most of us feel a natural impulse to help others, to nurture their development and alleviate suffering (**The Conversation**, [tinyurl.com/2u85xn4w](https://www.theconversation.com/2024/08/01/human-beings)).

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

**UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS**

**LONDON**

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

**MIDLANDS**

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

**NORTH**

**North East Regional branch.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Yorkshire Regional branch.**

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

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

**SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST**

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

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

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

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

**Canterbury.** Contact: Rob Cox, Contact: [spgb.ksrb@worldsocialism.org](mailto:spgb.ksrb@worldsocialism.org)  
**Luton.** Contact: Nick White, 59 Heywood Drive, LU2 7LP.

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

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

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# Non-market socialism is feasible

ALL THE necessary techno-infrastructure required to enable a post-capitalist society to function effectively already exists today; we don't need to reinvent the wheel. A self-regulating system of stock control involving 'calculation-in-kind', making use of disaggregated physical magnitudes (for instance, the number of cans of baked beans in stock in a store) rather than some single common unit of accounting (such as money) as the basis for calculation, is something that already operates well enough under our very noses within capitalism, alongside monetary accounting. Any supermarket today would, operationally speaking, rapidly grind to a complete halt without recourse to calculation-in-kind to manage and monitor the flow of goods in and out of the store.

At any point in time our supermarket will know more or less exactly how many tins of baked beans it has on its shelves. The computerisation of inventory management has made this task so much simpler. Our supermarket will know, also, the rate at which those tins of baked beans are being removed from the shelves. On the basis of this information it will know when, and how much fresh stock, it will need to order from the suppliers to replenish its existing stock – this simple arithmetical procedure being precisely what is meant by 'calculation-in-kind'. It is applicable to every conceivable kind of good – from intermediate or producer goods to final or consumer goods.

Calculation-in-kind is the bedrock upon which any kind of advanced and large-scale system of production crucially depends. In capitalism, monetary accounting coexists alongside in-kind accounting but is completely tangential or irrelevant to the latter. It is only because goods – like our tins of baked beans – take the form of commodities that one can be beguiled into thinking that calculation-in-kind somehow depends on monetary calculation. It doesn't. It firmly stands on its own two feet.

Market libertarians don't appear to grasp this point at all. For instance, according to Jesús Huerta de Soto: '... the problem with proposals to carry out economic calculation in natura or in kind is simply that no calculation, neither addition nor subtraction, can be made using heterogeneous quantities. Indeed, if, in exchange for a certain machine, the governing body decides to hand over 40 pigs, 5 barrels of flour, 1 ton of butter, and 200 eggs, how can it know that it is not handing over more than it should from the standpoint of its own valuations?' (*Socialism, Economic Calculation and*

*Entrepreneurship*, 1992, Ch 4, Section 5).

This passage reveals a complete misunderstanding of the nature and significance of calculation-in-kind in a post-capitalist society. Such a society is not based on, or concerned with, economic exchange at all. Consequently, the claim that 'no calculation, neither addition nor subtraction, can be made using heterogeneous quantities' is completely irrelevant since such a society is not called upon to perform these kinds of arithmetic operations involving a common unit of account. This is only necessary within an exchange-based economy in which you need to ensure exchanges are objectively equivalent.

On the other hand, even an exchange-based economy, like capitalism, absolutely depends on calculation in kind. As Paul Cockshott rightly notes: 'Indeed every economic system must calculate in kind. The whole process of capitalist economy would fail if firms like Honda could not draw up detailed bills of materials for the cars they finally produce. Only a small part of the information exchanged between companies relates to prices. The greater part relates to physical quantities and physical specifications of products' (*Reply to Brewster*, Paul Cockshott's Blog, 28 August 2017).

In his *Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth* Mises claimed that the application of in-kind calculation would be feasible only on a small scale. However, it is possible to identify extant or past examples of calculation-in-kind being implemented on a fairly – or even very large scale. For instance, Cockshott refers us to the fascinating case of the first Pyramid at Saqqara, built under the supervision of Imhotep, an enormous undertaking by any standard, involving nothing more than calculation-in-kind. Another example was the Inca civilisation, a large-scale and complex civilisation that effectively operated without money.

However, it was really the emergence of linear programming that has effectively delivered the *coup de grâce* against this particular line of argument peddled by Mises and others. It has removed what Mises considered to be the main objection to calculation in kind – that it could not be applied on a large scale basis.

Linear programming is an algorithmic technique developed by the Soviet mathematician Leonid Kantorovich in 1939 and, around about the same time, the Dutch-American economist, T. C. Koopman. As a technique it is widely and routinely used today to solve a variety of problems – such as the logistics of supply



chains, production scheduling, and such technical issues as how to best to organise traffic flows within a highly complex public transportation network with a view to, say, reducing average waiting times.

To begin with, the computational possibilities of this technique were rather limited. This changed with the development of the computer. As Cockshott notes: 'Since the pioneering work on linear programming in the 30s, computing has been transformed from something done by human 'computers' to something done by electronic ones. The speed at which calculations can be done has increased many billion-fold. It is now possible to use software packages to solve huge systems of linear equations' (Paul Cockshott, 2007, *Mises, Kantorovich and Economic Computation*, Munich Personal RePEc Archive, Paper No. 6063).

Computerised linear programming allows us to solve some very large-scale optimisation problems involving many thousands of variables. It can also help to solve small-scale optimisation problems.

In short, linear programming provides us with a method for optimising the use of resources – either by maximising a given output or by minimising material inputs or both. The problem with any single scalar measure or unit of accounting (such as market price or labour values) is that these are unable to properly handle the complexity of real world constraints on production which, by their very nature, are multi-factorial. Calculation-in-kind in the guise of linear programming provides us with the means of doing precisely this since it is directly concerned with the way in which multiple factors interact with – and constrain – each other.

While a non-market system of production could operate well enough without linear programming, there is little doubt that the availability of such a tool has now put the matter of whether such a system is feasible or not, beyond dispute.

**ROBIN COX**

# Labour **landslides**: then and now



IT WAS to no one's surprise that a Labour government was elected in 2024. The Tory administration was falling apart, the opinion polls were deafening, and Labour presented itself as ready to take over. On the other hand, it was to everyone's surprise that a Labour government was elected in 1945. Britain was one of the allied powers that had defeated Hitler with its highly popular Conservative prime minister ready to continue in office, there were no opinion polls to take into account, and the only experience the Labour Party had previously had of power was brief and bitter. And yet, in the July 1945 election, what happened would nowadays be called a landslide – for Labour. Can what happened to Labour then and in the years that followed be compared to what is happening to it now and may happen in the future?

## Welfare state

It is often said that Labour's triumph in 1945 shocked its leader, Clement Attlee, who claimed that he had seen reducing

the Conservative majority as his best hope. But rather than depending on the views or hopes of political leaders, election results, as has often been demonstrated, hinge more on what has been called 'a readiness for change' among the electorate. And this is the likely explanation here. The report drawn up by the Liberal Party's Sir William Beveridge in 1942 proposed what it called 'social insurance' for the British population, a plan for the state to provide social security (eg, sickness and unemployment pay, old-age pensions, free healthcare) for everyone. This was followed in 1944 by a government committee recommending the nationalisation of services such as gas and electricity.

The Labour Party was enthusiastic about the programme, calling it a new 'welfare state', while the Conservatives were lukewarm. And this may well have been the main driver of the electorate's preference for Labour. The way George Orwell put it, in an article published in late 1945, was that Labour had seized an opportunity it did not create. At the

same time Orwell expressed doubt that Labour would end up delivering on all of its manifesto, which proclaimed: 'The Labour Party is a Socialist Party, and proud of it. Its ultimate purpose at home is the establishment of the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain—free, democratic, efficient, progressive, public-spirited, its material resources organized in the service of the British people.'

What then happened when Labour came to power is a matter of historical record. Coal, gas, electricity, iron and steel, railways, civil aviation, telecommunications and the Bank of England were nationalised with full compensation to their previous owners.

General state benefits for the unemployed, sick and aged were brought in. A National Health Service was established supplying health care free of charge with staff at hospitals becoming government employees. There is no doubt that these represented significantly beneficial change for the vast majority of British workers.

However, even though the Labour Party had proclaimed itself to be ‘a Socialist Party’, this was certainly not socialism in the sense we understand it as a society of free access to all goods and services. In fact Labour now in office made no attempt to challenge the existing social order of capitalism, whereby the vast majority of the wealth was owned by a tiny minority and production and distribution of the means of life took place on the basis of profit rather than need. What it sought to do in fact was to make that order more secure by suggesting to workers that, via nationalisation, they had more of a stake in it and that, with ‘social security’, protest and challenge to the existing system were unnecessary since, whatever their circumstances, they could rely on being looked after ‘from the cradle to the grave’.

## Downhill

In reality the unspoken rationale of Labour’s ‘welfare state’ was to try to make production more efficient and more cost effective by the state having more control over it and to remove unnecessary hindrances to workers’ productivity by trying to create a more benign form of capitalism. Yet none of this could prevent the usual crises that beset the market system from presenting themselves. After an initial ‘honeymoon’ period, prices began to rise causing workers to press for wage increases and to industrial unrest. Labour’s response was a policy of ‘wage restraint’, which brought it into collision with striking workers, leading, for example, to the use of troops to replace dockers for unloading ships.

Later things went further downhill when there was a financial crisis and a run on the pound led to devaluation and further price rises. And, with the ‘free’ health service becoming unpredictably expensive, plans were made for charges to be brought in for prescriptions as well as for NHS dentures and spectacles. As it all unravelled, it became increasingly clear, if it not been already, that no Party committed to running the buying and selling system of capitalism in any form could adjust it to work in the interests of the majority class in society, those obliged to sell their energies to an employer for a wage or salary in order to survive. Yet this was evidently not clear enough to most members of that majority class – the working class – when in 1951, if with no great enthusiasm, they voted capitalism’s other team, the Tories, back into office. Never more than on that occasion did the words of the old socialist dictum ring true: ‘Governments are not elected, they are dismissed’.

## Landslide to where?

That’s something that can also be said of the outcome of this year’s election. No one would claim that there was any great love among the electorate for Keir Starmer and his Labour Party, yet this time too, as in 1945, Labour gained a landslide victory over the outgoing Tories. What this showed is that, as ever in capitalism, governments – in this case the Tories – do not control the system they are meant to manage. The system, or to be more specific, the market, which is its beating heart, has a mind of its own, an unpredictable one, and all governments can do is tinker at its edges and hope that somehow such tinkering will keep the pieces in place. If they try anything too drastic, it is very likely to make the situation worse, as Prime Minister Truss found to her – and her party’s – cost just a short time ago.

So how is Starmer who, like his Labour counterparts did in 1945, has called himself a socialist, planning to tinker? His election manifesto, ‘Our Plan to Change Britain’, held out such promises as ‘a rebuilding of our country, so that it once again serves the interests of working people’, ‘to drag my Party away from the dead end of gesture politics and return it once more to the service of working people’, and ‘to kickstart economic growth by reforming Britain’s economy’. It’s obviously quite unclear what all this means – if anything. But in stating that ‘the economy is about things like money, businesses and buying and selling things’, it is clear what kind of society he’s wedded to.

And what does another of his promises, to ‘focus on long-term strategy, not short-term distractions’, mean? How, in fact, in the hurly-burly of capitalist politics, can any party focus on much more than ‘short-term distractions’? After just a few weeks in power, in fact, Labour are already finding themselves having

to face a whole cluster of ‘short-term distractions’ – race riots and a dearth of places for offenders in prisons already full to bursting, a potential ‘run on the pound’ leading them to scrap the winter fuel allowance for pensioners who may already struggle to put the heating on, and cash-strapped universities on the verge of bankruptcy. They’re blaming the previous Tory administration for leaving ‘a black hole in the economy’, and they’re saying, despite all the fine rhetoric in their manifesto, that ‘things will get worse before they get better’ and that we must ‘accept short-term pain for long-term good’. They are clearly not about to have the same ‘honeymoon’ period’ as their counterparts in the 1940s.

## Alternative team

So how do the two Labour governments – the 1945 one and the 2024 one – compare? The earlier one came to office in the shadow of the 1930s’ economic depression and then six years of war, and so virtually any steps it took were perceived as representing more stability and security than Britain’s workers previously had. But after 3-4 years of what has been called ‘rebuilding space’, the reality of capitalism’s priorities set in and led to it losing the favour of the electorate and being dismissed from office in 1951. The current Labour government, as we have seen, seems to be running into trouble more quickly than its post-war predecessor, again under the pressures of needing to give priority to profit-making over meeting people’s needs. Yet it would be premature to predict that it will be less or more long-lived than the 1945 government, since we cannot foresee the precise effects that the twists and turns of the market system will have on the alternative team for managing British capitalism that is currently in office.

**HKM**



# An unquenchable blaze



IMAGINE WAKING at night inside walls of dripping flames in a fire that's engulfing your flat in the tower block that is your home. A crackling storm of searing flames, where the walls turn to molten polyethylene (uPVC), a material described by Peter Apps, an editor at Inside Housing magazine, 'like a solid petrol' burning. It's a material that melts as it burns, which it does easily at low temperatures. The air itself becomes as hot as the fire itself, scalding your lungs with each breath. Many victims of fire die in hospital from burn damage to lungs, days or weeks later after inhaling a suffocating thick black petroleum-based smoke. One element of the chemical cocktail released from burning uPVC is cyanide.

The escape routes, once familiar corridors and communal areas, now transformed into dark labyrinths of despair. The firefighters had told you stay put for safety but now the building's uPVC shell is quickly and fully alight, dripping flaming materials floor to floor.

Grenfell Tower's residents experienced this horror on 14 June 2017, when the 24-storey block was engulfed in fire, causing 72 deaths. The fire began with a malfunctioning fridge-freezer but spread due to the building's combustible cladding, revealing systemic safety failures in UK construction and government oversight.

## Survivor and campaigner testimonies

Survivors and bereaved families had consistently criticised the lack of accountability from authorities. They argue that Grenfell happened because the people in power saw the residents as expenses, not individuals. Grenfell Action Group (GAG), which was instrumental in raising concerns before the fire, repeatedly warned that a disaster was inevitable. Their warnings, however, were ignored. In a blog post written months before the fire, GAG chillingly predicted, 'only a catastrophic event will expose the ineptitude and incompetence of our landlord'.

Testimonies to the Inquiry, whose final report was published at the beginning of September, revealed that fire safety was sidelined in favour of cost reduction and aesthetics. Architects and contractors ignored basic safety practices, contributing to the mass killing. As lawyer Stephanie Barwise KC, representing survivors, noted, there were repeated opportunities to prevent the fire, but none were taken.

The inquiry has also shone a light on the inequality and indifference shown towards social housing tenants and marginalised communities.

## Refurbishment and cladding

It started with regeneration. Decisions in relation to Grenfell made during the refurbishment of the tower avoided consulting residents who before the fire had formed a residents' committee. The refurbishment project was carried out by private contractors under the direction of the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (KCTMO)

Following decades of deregulation and privatisation, social housing management has often been outsourced to private contractors, as was the case with KCTMO, which managed Grenfell on behalf of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. This system of privatised management prioritised efficiency and cost-reduction over the safety of the residents.

Originally, fireproof cladding was planned for Grenfell's refurbishment. However, the material was downgraded to save money. An email from one contractor revealed that lower quality cladding was selected to save money despite warnings about the fire risk posed by the material. As one Inquiry expert aptly described it, 'the cladding was a time bomb waiting to go off'.

The decision to downgrade the type of cladding was made to increase profits for the subcontractor. It directly led to the

rapid spread of the fire. It was a decision that didn't involve the people whose lives would be affected, but whose lives were ended by this decision. The money 'saved' on the cladding and which ultimately ended 72 lives was £293,368.

Grenfell was a block in the midst of one of the most affluent areas of London, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, and was considered by its rich neighbours as an eyesore. The cladding served more for aesthetic purposes, making the building blend in with the affluent neighbourhood of Kensington rather than improving its safety. It was, as one resident put it, just 'lipstick for the building'.

The residents themselves pointed out that they were more concerned with the activities inside the building such as the decommissioning of the communal boiler in favour of installation of individual boilers in the hall outside of the flats. These boiler cupboards were installed so the KCTMO could reduce their own servicing costs while passing the cost of heating and hot water to individual residents, while still jacking up service charges, an area where regulation doesn't prevent extortion of residents. These same boiler installations were cited by one victim of the fire as what prevented him from getting his daughter and pregnant wife out of the building during the fire. What was previously a straight line to the fire exit was now a series of enclaves that in the thick tar of petroleum-based plastic fuelled smoke, had trapped his family.

## Systemic inequality and class divide

The KCTMO repeatedly ignored safety concerns raised by residents. Residents had formed grassroots resistance against the faceless body managing their lives, but their warnings fell on deaf ears. The KCTMO, motivated by cost-cutting, neglected the safety of Grenfell's working-class residents. The residents were living in unsafe conditions.

Social inequality, an essential aspect of capitalism, was a core underlying cause of what happened. Survivors and campaigners pointed out that the fire would likely not have occurred in a building which housed wealthier residents, because standards of safety and maintenance would have been higher. Edward Daffarn, a Grenfell resident and campaigner, stated:

'We were treated as second-class citizens because of our postcode and because we were poor'.

Dr Lee Elliot Major, a social mobility expert, concurred: 'Grenfell exemplifies how housing policy in the UK, driven by neoliberal economics, has led to a profit-

driven culture where the most vulnerable are treated as afterthoughts'.

A major critique emerging from the Grenfell fire is how capitalism treats housing as a commodity rather than as satisfying a basic human need. Housing policy has shifted towards encouraging individual ownership, with little regard for the safety of those left living in social housing. This has been underfunded and neglected for decades, often outsourced to private contractors whose primary concern is profit, not safety. Grenfell epitomises where this leads.

## Corporate negligence and government deregulation

The corporate entities involved in Grenfell's refurbishment, which included Rydon, Arconic and Celotex, are rightly criticised for their role in the mass killing. These companies continued to sell or install materials that were known to be unsafe, driven by the profit motive. Internal documents from Arconic, for example, showed that the company knew their cladding was highly flammable but continued to supply it because it was cheaper and there was little regulatory pressure to stop doing so.

These corporate entities are not just the few bad apples. Maximising profits is the standard practice not just in the housing and building industry but within all capitalist enterprises. Everyone living under capitalism is subjected to this law of the jungle that permeates every aspect in life.

The role of successive governments in the mass killing cannot be overlooked. They must share the blame. The previous Labour government brought in the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, weakening fire safety regulations. This measure transferred responsibility for fire risk assessments to building owners and landlords, who rely on private contractors who, as always under the pressure of profit-making, are incentivised to minimise costs rather than maximise safety.

The Tory-Lib Dem coalition government which took over from Labour in 2010 is also to be blamed for its role in the policies and decisions that contributed to the Grenfell Tower fire, especially Eric Pickles, who was its Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government from 2010 to 2015. His time in office was marked by several actions related to fire safety and housing regulation, many of which are now seen as contributing to the fire.

Pickles cut back on regulations including fire safety, as part of the broader government push to reduce public spending and further 'cut red tape'.

Under Pickles's leadership, there was a move to reduce the burden on housing developers and councils to meet stringent safety standards. One example was the weakening of building regulations, which reduced the requirement for fire safety inspections in some types of properties.

This drive to deregulate was touted as making construction and housing development more cost-efficient, but by unleashing profit-seeking private companies it compromised safety; it was an outgrowth of capitalist ideology that places emphasis on reducing government oversight in favour of what are euphemistically termed market-led solutions. Profit always trumps the lives of working-class people. As socialists we know no matter how much the market is regulated no length of leash will hold back the mad dog of capital from attacking when his food bowl is threatened.

## The role of capitalism

The decisions leading to the Grenfell killings are a reflection of capitalism's systemic failures. The drive for profit at all costs, the deregulation of safety standards, and the neglect of social housing tenants are all inherent features of this economic system. As a result, the lives of working-class people are deemed expendable in the pursuit of wealth.

In 2017 in the aftermath of the fire David Lammy, now Foreign Secretary in the current Labour government, summed up the situation as: 'This is what happens when you deregulate and allow market forces to dictate safety in housing. Profit comes first, people come second'.

Grenfell is not just a story of corporate and governmental negligence; it is a symbol of deep-seated inequality. The fire exposed the glaring class divides in London, where working-class residents of social housing are treated as expendable. Now that the Inquiry has reported, the survivors and campaigners remain determined to hold those responsible accountable and to ensure that no other community suffers the same fate.

For survivors and the bereaved, this remains elusive. As survivor Edward Daffarn stated during his testimony: 'No one has been held to account for what happened at Grenfell. We don't just want words; we want to see real change.'

'Justice for Grenfell' is not merely about criminal charges or compensation—it is about systemic change, ending capitalism with its class inequality and profit priority.

**A. T.**

# How we live and how we might live

(Continued from last month)

IT IS November, 1884. William Morris, designer, author and revolutionary socialist, stands before an audience assembled at his London home delivering a talk: "How we live and How we might live". Six hundred miles away across the North Sea in Berlin, representatives of the European powers are gathered, negotiating, bargaining, manoeuvring, carving up the African continent into agreed spheres of influence and exploitation. The British are becoming anxious and a bullish jingoism is percolating through society. The United Kingdom has recently lost its world lead in manufacturing to the rapidly growing capitalist powers of continental Europe. Rivalry among them is heating up.

Morris assesses the situation shrewdly. He observes: 'it is now a desperate competition between the great nations of civilisation for the world-market, and tomorrow it may be a desperate war for that end.'

That 'desperate war' among the 'great nations of civilisation' would come eventually in the cataclysm of 1914-18. War, of course, was nothing new, and the 'great nations' were no strangers to it. Even as their representatives in Berlin haggled over African territories, the French and Dutch were fighting separate colonial wars in China. Industrial capitalism, birthed in the early decades of the nineteenth century, had shown no capacity for limiting mass violence. Quite the contrary. The nineteenth century had exploded across the European landmass with the muskets and cannons of the Napoleonic and Coalition armies. Throughout the century the long destructive arc of capitalist violence ripped through a multitude of colonial and European territories and states. It began the new century on the southern tip of Africa with Brits and Boers fighting it out in a hail of machine gun fire and rifle bullets.

The slaughter continued in a multitude of conflicts. It failed miserably to end with 'The War to End All Wars', rose to new heights of violence between 1939 and 1945, and by the millennium, had left behind it vast material devastation, 230 million dead, and an untold number of broken lives. The arrival of the twenty-first century didn't disappoint. It opened with a flood of civil wars and insurgencies, and with a cynical and drawn out conflict in Iraq.

Today, some twenty years later our TV screens and news media are filled with narratives of the current slaughter in



Ukraine and the Middle East. Elsewhere, less newsworthy but no less deadly conflicts rage around the globe: in Cameroon and Haiti; in Yemen and Mexico; in the deserts of northern Africa, and in the mountains and plains of South America. Warfare appears to be a fixture in human affairs. It changes its colours and pretexts with each new conflict, but never disappears- despite the fact that few sane people actually want it. Once again, this raises the question that Morris asked of another seeming fixture of human life, poverty: why? Why poverty? Why war? Why do we see no end to it, no relief?

## Why war?

It would be easy to settle on a simple answer to his question, one we see everywhere online, in the media and sometimes even in academic texts – 'human nature'. We hear those words pronounced sagely at home and in the pub. It's just the way we humans are, we say. The truth however, is that we humans like simple explanations, something that we can pin down in a weighty phrase or with a shake of the head, and then tuck away in the back of our minds before returning to the immediate problems of daily life. But is war so simple? It takes vast organisation and resources to conduct a modern war. It takes a great deal of thought and preparation. Human nature, geared to quick instinctive responses does not seem to fit the bill.

In his talk, Morris addressed the questions of war and poverty as they affected British society in his own time, yet he might just as well have been speaking for us today. Poverty and the drive to war persist even though a lot has changed in the scope and impact they have on our lives. Under the competitive pressures of a capitalist market, the advance of

science and technology has led to the increased mechanisation and destructive power of war. It has led to the growth of a huge and lucrative armament industry, and to growing stockpiles of weaponry. It has vastly increased the possibility of widespread, even global destruction.

Disarmament agreements that offered some reassurance over past decades have now fallen by the wayside. Competition has once again grown fierce and borders have closed. Poverty, too, continues to scar communities in the capitalist West, and in the countries of the 'developing world' subject to capitalism's long reach and market imperatives. With the capitalist advance and the destruction of traditional economies, however, poverty arises less often these days from a result of natural scarcity, and more frequently from lack of ability to pay.

## Escalating crises

Time moves on. This is 2024, not 1884, and in addition to the historical blights of poverty and war, we are now facing potential catastrophes of a kind that Morris never had to deal with. After decades of evasion and denial, few now are unaware of the escalating crises of climate change, loss of species diversity and of pollution. Climate change has made itself felt around the world in the large scale destruction of lives and property brought on by extreme weather systems. In David Attenborough's well publicised words to the United Nations, climate change has now become 'widespread, rapid, and intensifying'. It poses threats to food security, access to fresh water and to natural resources. It is altering the migration patterns of human beings, creating social division and disruption. And of course, as always, it is the poor that suffer most.

Since 1950, that is, within the lifetime of

many people, over half of all the world's species have become extinct, and much of this is driven by capitalist imperatives and human action. From what we now understand of the interdependency of all life on the planet, this loss is not just a matter for sentimental regret. The excessive rate at which species are being lost or diminished is putting severe pressure on the ability of ecological systems to adapt. Ecologists warn that beyond a certain limit these natural systems are likely to become unstable or collapse. Seventy-five percent of the genetic variation in crops has disappeared in the last 125 years through selective breeding for commercial purposes. It is irretrievable. A lack of genetic diversity leaves crops more vulnerable to disease, pests and invasive species but also to the effects of climate change. Not only does this threaten global food security but it can have disastrous consequences for local populations who are tied into the capitalist system and are dependent upon revenue from the sale of crops.

Pollution too, is reaching new levels, and creating new threats. Here in the UK, the media keeps us aware of local problems like our polluted waterways. But this is only scratching the surface. Air, land and water pollution has a significant global impact on ecosystems and on human health. According to the World Health Organisation, almost 99 percent of the global population is now breathing air that exceeds quality limits, creating cardiovascular problems, strokes and respiratory diseases. Today, eight million deaths annually are attributed to air pollution. The land, too, is rapidly deteriorating from an onslaught of pollutants from landfill sites, from agricultural pesticides and fertilisers. These pollutants, along with untreated sewage, leak into the water supply contaminating seas, lakes and rivers. Oil spillages and accumulations of plastic waste kill animals and destroy habitats.

In the face of all these current crises, it seems we have become paralysed, unable to act effectively. And that requires an explanation. Looking around at our advances in science, in engineering, in medicine, and in so many other fields, it's clear that we are a practical and problem-solving species. The capitalist system which currently dominates our lives and directs our activity is so often credited with a capacity to innovate,

and yet when it comes to collective problem-solving in areas such as these, it seems impotent.

It is not that these problems have lacked attention or proposed solutions. A vast amount of human energy has been expended on them. The outcomes, however, have been inadequate, and the solutions proposed have been superficial and ineffective. Globally, we are still pumping huge quantities of climate-altering carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. The long string of international gatherings since the first 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm has achieved little. The internationally agreed Kyoto protocols have been established but their targets have remained largely unmet. The annual COP meetings have been attended by heads of state, politicians, and thousands of business representatives, lobbyists, journalists, negotiators and scientists. Weeks have been spent in intense exchanges and negotiations, yet with very little positive result.

## A single origin

So what is going on? Why have we made so little progress? In recent years there has been a growing recognition that these crises: climate change; loss of species diversity; and pollution are not separate problems. They influence and magnify one other. They cannot be separately addressed. Fashionable terms like 'the polycrisis' or 'the metacrisis' have been popping up to describe this new understanding like bubbles on the surface of a rapidly flowing river. There is an acknowledgment that these crises have a single origin. This is an advance of sorts.

Some, at least, have come to the realisation that it is no longer sufficient to blame superficial features of our society like particular industries, businesses or political ideologies. And there is little to be gained by blaming vague abstractions like

'human nature'. It is becoming acceptable, even in the conventional media, to acknowledge that the problem lies in something much more fundamental, in the way we organise ourselves as a global society to produce the things we need (or think we need) in order to live. It lies, in other words, in the structure of the capitalist economy.

Despite this advance, we soon hit a problem. There is disagreement on what capitalism fundamentally is. It gets defined in terms of its surface features. But superficial definitions give rise only to superficial and ineffective solutions. Economic textbooks and business sites tell us, for example, that capitalism is the private ownership of the means of production (factories, machines, raw materials, etc). 'Libertarians' tell us that capitalism is no more than voluntary exchange. These abstract definitions are both highly ideological and highly reductive. They tell us very little about the complex nature of the world we actually inhabit. Worse still, they are inaccurate.

Capitalism is an impersonal system. It matters very little how the means of production are owned, or who owns them. The central feature of capitalism, the accumulation of capital by means of wage labour, remains the same whether businesses are owned by individuals, partnerships, families, cooperatives, groups of shareholders or by the state. So what is this thing we call capitalism, and how is it responsible for so much that appears wrong with our world?

*In next month's Socialist Standard we will dive down into its workings and start to look at the ways in which all these features are generated in our own time by what lies at the heart of capitalism itself.*

**HUD**



# Labour's capitalist wealth fund

THE LABOUR Party used to believe that if the government controlled the 'commanding heights of the economy' — such as the central bank, coal, electricity, steel, railways — it would be able to control the way the capitalist economy worked as it would make state capital investment rather than private capital investment the driving force. If private capital investment faltered then the state could step in and invest instead.

The 1945 Labour government did implement widespread nationalisation but things didn't work out as planned. The theory was premised on the state industries making sufficient profits. In practice, while they did make a profit most of time, it wasn't enough and they themselves had to borrow money. As they were providing a monopoly service to the private sector there were pressures not to charge too much so as not to undermine the competitiveness of private capitalist firms on export markets. They were also burdened by having to pay interest on the compensation bonds paid to the former owners. Then, after Labour was voted out of office in 1951, oil — in private hands — began to outcompete coal as a means of generating power for industry and the transport of goods, undermining any 'commanding' position the government was supposed to have.

In opposition, as Patrick Maguire pointed out in an article before the election in the *Times* (21 June), some Labour strategists began to question the commanding heights theory and to suggest that there were other ways of controlling the economy such as monetary and tax policy without needing to take industry out of private hands. This view was put forward by Labour politician Anthony Crosland in 1956 in his book *The Future of Socialism*. According to Maguire: 'Crosland said something heretical. Profits were not only a precondition of rapid growth but something that socialists must "logically applaud" as a driver of industrial expansion and investment'.

The view of the current Labour leadership, Maguire went on, is basically the same: 'That a Labour government that wishes to transform public services needs to encourage private investment and, yes, profit'.

Something, of course, that the Conservatives and Liberals had always accepted.

Actually, Crosland questioned whether capitalism was still capitalism and whether what had evolved in its place was still dominated by the profit motive, but it

is revealing that, when his book was republished on its fiftieth anniversary in 2006, he was perceived by Labour leaders as saying that the economy was driven by private capitalist firms seeking to make a profit and that this must be applauded and encouraged. But this was a lesson the Labour Party had learned in the meantime from its experience in office in the 1960s and 70s.

Maguire's article was entitled 'Reeves's plan for growth is built on private cash'. What she is setting up is a 'National Wealth Fund' to mobilise private capital to invest in the transition to a low-carbon economy in the expectation that this will stimulate growth in the rest of the capitalist economy ('boost growth and unlock investment' as the government press release put it - [tinyurl.com/59ckdkdv](https://tinyurl.com/59ckdkdv)).

The idea is that, for a particular project, the state will put up a quarter of the amount needed as long as private investors put up the rest, with any profits to be shared pro rata. To work, the project will need to be profitable; otherwise no private capitalist firm will be interested. As one of those involved in the scheme told the *Times* (15 July):

'This is going to sink or swim based on its return generation. If this loses money it'll be in trouble. It's absolutely critical that it makes money'.

For the private capitalist investors of course, not just the government.

The government is banking that putting up a quarter of the money will attract private capital that otherwise wouldn't be interested as the risk of not generating enough profit was too high. This might indeed attract some private capital. But, as Mehreen Kahn, the Economics Editor of the *Times* has pointed out:

'Labour has made a virtue of "derisking" private sector investment. The danger

is a state that will end up underwriting corporate profits while nationalising losses in the rush to fix a longstanding investment gap by throwing money at private finance' (16 July).

In any event, the commanding heights of the economy remain occupied by private capitalist enterprises and so the economy will be driven by how much these decide to invest, which in turn will depend on how much profit they judge they can make. That means that whether or not there is the growth that the Labour government wants (to pay for promised improvements in public services) will be up to those deciding on private capital investment. To have any chance of succeeding, the government will have to pander to private capitalist industry and serve its interests.

This they already pledged to do when they proclaimed themselves the Party of Business. During — and for — the elections they added that they were pro-worker too. But it is not possible to be both pro-business and pro-worker as there is an irreconcilable conflict of interests between the capitalists and the workers arising from the fact that profits originate from the difference between what workers produce and what they get paid. Any party that takes office under capitalism is forced to give priority to profit-making as this is what drives the capitalist economy and so has to be pro-business, even if it might want to be pro-worker and even if initially it brings in some pro-worker measures. This is the experience not just of all previous Labour governments but of similar governments everywhere. The newly-elected Starmer Labour government won't be — can't be — any different. As will become evident. As we said, capitalism was the problem, not the Tories. It still is.

**ADAM BUICK**





# Party News: Three leaflets

## To end the rage, end capitalism



The media love it when racists riot, because disaster sells.

There's less interest in the real story, of cooperation, of solidarity against racism, of mutual support, shown by the vast majority of people.

People like you, here at this event.

There are those who say that humans are by nature greedy, selfish and cruel, and that peaceful and cooperative co-existence will never be possible.

That's nothing but an excuse to justify a violent, warring system that, deep down, we all hate, in which billionaires lounge on their yachts while the rest of us scrape by, obey their stupid laws, and do all the hard work of running society.

It's capitalism that drives many to a nameless rage they take out on innocent people around them through racism, homophobia and domestic violence.

And it's capitalism that has become, to quote campaigner George Monbiot, 'a weapon pointed at the world', a system of runaway profiteering that is threatening our collective survival.

It's time to declare we've hit peak capitalism.

We can do so much better.

We have the tech and the know-how to upgrade to a sustainable world of democratic common ownership, with no nation states, leaders, rich elites or money.

Making everything free will make everyone free.

Making everyone free will end the rage.

If you want this, say so – tell people you want to move beyond capitalism, because you'll be surprised how many agree with you.

And contact us to help get the message out.

*Leaflet handed out at ongoing anti-racism events.*

## Green capitalism? No chance!

We need rational stewardship of the biosphere for our survival.

But the world is in the hands of a tiny capitalist minority, all in furious

competition with each other to stay ahead of the pack.

All their grubby investment decisions are taken in private and only for profit. There's no overall rationality, no 'grand design'. It's a crazy casino.

Environmentalists say you can't have infinite growth on a finite planet, and that's true. So can we tame the casino? Can we magically rig capitalism so it pursues only modest or even zero growth?

That would be a feat for the ages, like turning a tiger vegetarian, or convincing a Great White shark to give back to the community.

Capital only wants to do one thing, make a profit, faster and faster, on and on, and buggler the externalities. You'll never make it change. You'll never make it green.

The only way to get rational stewardship is to get rid of capitalism.

We need to take the world into collective democratic ownership, with no market system or production for profit, and no rich class of irresponsible gamblers to ruin it for the rest of us.



*Leaflet handed out at Green Party Conference in September.*

## Against all capitalism's wars

Why this war with all the death and destruction wars bring? It's not, as it might seem, another example of an undying enmity between two groups – Jews and Arabs – but a fight between different capitalist factions over land, resources and strategic routes. And not just between the government of Israel and the Hamas regime in Gaza. The greater issue is who controls the oilfields in the Persian Gulf and the trade route out of it, with Israel being supported by the West to counter the threat from Iran and Iran promoting militant Islamism to undermine Israel.

In Gaza, the Hamas organisation, who are both anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic, came to power via elections in 2007 with the stated aim 'to raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine'. But that was the end of any form of democracy

there and, in their time in office, they have crushed multiple protests by rivals, expelling their officials to make sure there would never be a round of elections and killing dozens of their own people, many of them civilians. During that time the people of Gaza have been plunged increasingly into poverty with, for example, 40 percent unemployment, with their leaders enriching themselves assisted by backers from other Arab countries and enjoying multi-million-dollar land deals, luxury villas and black market fuel from Egypt.

The continuing oppression by Israel (a country by the way where 25 percent of households live on the poverty line) has also of course been a significant factor, as its government has sought to facilitate the enrichment of its own capitalist class by grabbing land and keeping a tight lid on protest. Now the lid has come off- and in the most horrific way.

There is no excuse for the horrors unleashed on innocent people by Hamas nor for Israel's savage retaliation, killing thousands, attacking hospitals, depriving a land of food, water and power and flattening its infrastructure regardless of what may happen to the inhabitants in the short and long term. No wonder there are calls for a ceasefire to alleviate the sufferings of the people of Gaza.

Of course Israel's government will support its own capitalist class to the hilt – after all that is its role. And it is all part of a playbook, which we see played out time and time again as governments representing their capitalist classes fail to resolve conflicts by diplomacy and resort to horrifying violence. We can only repeat the same thing we have always said when this has happened – that workers (in this case Arab and Israeli ones) have no interest in fighting one another but have a common interest in uniting with workers throughout the world to abolish capitalism and establish socialism, a world without borders where the Earth's resources will belong to all humanity and are used to produce what people need, not profits for the few who currently own and control these resources.

*Leaflet handed out at anti-Gaza War protests.*



# Harris in Blunderland

'BELIEVE ME, as president, I will go after the bad actors and I will work to pass the first-ever federal ban on price gouging on food,' Kamala Harris declared in a speech on 16 August, adding: 'My plan will include new penalties for opportunistic companies that exploit crises and break the rules' ([tinyurl.com/7c373bda](https://tinyurl.com/7c373bda)).

Price gouging is not a term employed this side of the Atlantic where the equivalent would be 'profiteering' or 'rip-off'. Basically, it's when a firm or individual selling something to the general public takes advantage of some temporary shortage to jack up the price and reap an extra profit beyond what they would get in normal times.

What Harris was promising appeared to be to bring in legislation to stop the price of food rising, a people-pleasing promise when there's a cost-of-living crisis.

Actually, when you look at the small print, all she was promising was legislation at federal level to prevent this when a State of Emergency had been declared such as for a forest fire, a hurricane or some other disaster. It wouldn't apply in the case of a supply chain problem or a temporary shortage arising from some

other economic or industrial cause. In any event, many of the states of the US already have such legislation.

In her first interview after officially becoming the Democratic Party's candidate, Harris went further and promised not simply to stop grocery prices rising but to actually bring them down:

'Prices in particular for groceries are still too high. The American people know it. I know it. Which is why my agenda includes what we need to do to bring down the price of groceries' ([tinyurl.com/5eyfpf7m](https://tinyurl.com/5eyfpf7m)).

She didn't explain how she was going to do this. A federal act to punish 'opportunistic companies that exploit crises' won't do it. Nor will naming a raft of measures an 'Inflation Reduction Act' as the Biden administration has already done.

These days 'inflation' is defined as a rise in some index of the price of a basket of consumer goods, whatever the cause. This can be caused by a depreciation of the currency through over-issue (the main cause since the 1940s) or by an exceptional rise in the prices of some key products in the basket of consumer goods (which was the main cause from 2020 till this year due to supply chain problems as a result of the

Covid epidemic). In neither case would price controls work to stop 'inflation' any more than a command by King Canute stopped the tide coming in.

'Inflation', then, is the difference between what the index was at one date compared with what it was at a previous date. What this measures is *the rate of increase*. So, 'bringing inflation down' is reducing the rate at which prices are rising, not bringing prices down. Doing the latter would be 'deflation', which is what Harris seemed to be promising.

This is theoretically possible, but it would require a change of policy on the part of America's central bank, the Federal Reserve, which currently aims to keep the rate of increase in the general price level at 2 percent a year (even if not very successfully in the past few years). In other words, that prices, including the price of groceries, should *rise* at this rate every year.

Since it is unlikely that the Fed will abandon this policy or that she will pressure them to do so, we can confidently predict that a President Harris will not bring down the price of groceries. Anyone who votes for her because she has pledged this will find that they have been ripped off.

## Exhibition Review

# In the wild

THE MANCHESTER Museum (part of the University of Manchester) underwent a sizeable redevelopment last year. One result of this is a much larger space for temporary exhibitions, which is currently occupied by 'Wild', a display on until June next year.

It is a thought-provoking exhibition, featuring paintings, animals as taxidermy mounts, and information displays that focus on specific projects concerned with rewilding ('letting nature take care of itself, enabling natural processes to shape land and sea, repair damaged ecosystems and restore degraded landscapes', [rewildingeurope.com](https://rewildingeurope.com)). An interesting concept is the baseline, a time when an ecosystem was healthier, though this can be subject to various interpretations.

Beavers were hunted to extinction in the UK about four hundred years ago, but they are now being re-introduced, as they build dams and so on, being 'natural engineers'. In Yellowstone National Park in the US, the

last wolves were deliberately killed in 1926, but this led to there being too many grazing animals, and wolves were re-introduced in the 1990s.



Knepp in West Sussex ([knepp.co.uk](https://knepp.co.uk)) is the first major rewilding project in England. Its soil made it unprofitable as a dairy farm, and from 2001 it was transformed into a naturalistic grazing system with a range of habitats and herds of cattle, ponies and pigs. But, of course, it still has to make a profit, and this is achieved by means of safaris, accommodation such as yurts, and

selling meat. It has been criticised as not truly being rewilding, as the landscapes are not in any real sense natural.

The Isle of Arran off the west coast of Scotland now includes the South Arran Marine Protected Area ([arrancoast.com](https://arrancoast.com)), aiming to 'protect and restore a diverse, abundant and beautiful marine environment'. In Lamlash Bay this includes a No Take Zone, where no fish or shellfish can be taken from the water, seabed or shore. This is intended, among other things, to protect beds of maerl, a coralline pink seaweed that forms a space where small species can find food and hide from predators.

The exhibition makes the point that there can be a contradiction between rewilding and using land for housing and food. At the end, three possibilities are set out: prioritise nature and leave it to do its own thing; prioritise the relationships between humans and nature; or prioritise nature for the benefits it provides to people. These are hardly mutually exclusive, and different ones could be applied in different areas, rather than there being a single global policy. But issues such as this may well form part of democratic discussions and decision-making in a socialist world.

**PB**

# Flipped Off

Credit: Channel 4



PROPERTY MAKEOVER shows have been a regular fixture-and-fitting in the TV schedules since the BBC's ratings hit *Changing Rooms* in the '90s. This century, the genre itself has been made over, going upmarket from redecorating neighbours' lounges to renovating entire houses. BBC One's *Homes Under The Hammer* has been popular enough for 27 series of formulaic episodes of the presenters looking round tired properties being sold at auction, meeting the people who buy them, and catching up again after refurbishments have been carried out. Announcing any profit made from the homes' recalculated monetary value is the programme's punchline, and appropriately, its title sequence features model houses wrapped in banknotes.

Wanting to snare some of the BBC's viewers, Channel 4 responded with *The Great House Giveaway*. This has taken the setup of before-and-after renovation and stretched it out to go into more detail about the process in between, adding a game show element with contestants and prizes. The 'giveaway' in the title is misleading, as the contestants aren't given a house, but are there to win money towards a deposit to get on the 'property ladder'. Paired up and with varying amounts of expertise, they revamp a dilapidated semi or bungalow purchased at auction by the programme makers. With a timescale and a budget to replace bathrooms, knock down walls or install new kitchens, the aim is to re-sell the house afterwards at a higher price. The format is televised 'flipping': the practice

of buying a property to sell it again at a profit rather than live in it. This profit is the contestants' prize, after costs for going over budget, stamp duty, council tax, auction fees, utility bills, loan interest, insurance, solicitors and surveyors are deducted. More recent editions were filmed when the property market 'went haywire', leading to many refurbished houses being sold at auction for less than expected, and sometimes at a loss.

We watch these programmes to see the buildings being transformed from run down to done up, with the financial stakes intended to add some tension and adrenaline. The programme makers realise that paying stamp duty or calculating loan interest aren't as visual as someone swinging a mallet at a fireplace, so it's understandable that they don't dwell much on accounts and bureaucracy. But emphasising the renovation over the finances, at least until the reveal of the profit or loss at the end, distracts from the tawdry basis of *The Great House Giveaway*. The contestants slog for months doing up each property for an uncertain amount of financial reward, if any, making it harsher than the average gameshow.

Both *The Great House Giveaway* and *Homes Under The Hammer* illustrate the commodification of where we live. The property being renovated is understood in terms of its financial value: the amount of money it sells for, the cost of materials and labour, the admin and legal fees, the hoped-for surplus. It's a good thing that a house gets renovated in each episode, but in *The Great*

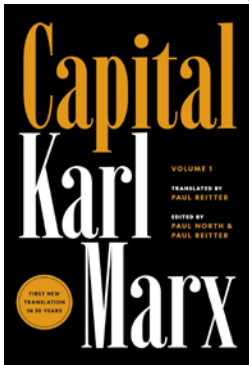
*House Giveaway* especially, this is a means to a monetary end rather than because it benefits whoever moves in. Alongside this commodification is the separation between who owns a house and who lives in it. If we're renting, we're beholden to the landlord, and if we have a mortgage, we're in debt for decades, and in both situations we risk losing the right to live in our home if we don't keep up with the payments. In capitalism, much of our sense of security comes from how secure our home is, and this depends on how strong we are in the turbulent economic market.

People living in a future society of free access and common ownership of land and industries will have a different kind of relationship to where they call home. We can't really empathise with this now, as our view is shaped by living within capitalism's alienating system. The sense of security which would come with a home in socialism wouldn't rely on something external and out of our control, as in capitalism, but on whether it suits our own needs. With production directly aimed at satisfying what communities require, there would be no reason for people to live in overcrowded, damp buildings made of shoddy or dangerous materials. We could have the flexibility to choose whether to remain in one home for years or decades, or to travel around, staying in different places for shorter periods. There would likely be a wider understanding of what makes a household, with the freedom to live by ourselves, in families, with friends or as part of larger groups. These variations exist now, of course, but the difference is that in capitalism, our choices are constrained by our economic position, while in a socialist society, our choices would be based only on preferences and practicalities.

Communities would still need some oversight of how housing is organised, with frameworks agreed democratically based on what's needed. The concepts of 'owning' and 'renting' properties as we understand them now wouldn't apply, as these relate to an economic and legal context which won't exist. There could be some kind of agreement between a household and a community about how long they plan to live in a particular home, if the circumstances require it. And communities would still have to make sure there are the resources, the know-how and the means to build and maintain homes, which will be more straightforward without having to take finances into account. A socialist society might even have television programmes about renovating properties, although any retro broadcasts of *The Great House Giveaway* or *Homes Under The Hammer* will be nigh-on incomprehensible.

**MIKE FOSTER**

## New translation of Das Kapital



**Capital. Critique of Political Economy, volume 1.**  
By Karl Marx.  
Translated by Paul Reitter.  
Princeton University Press.  
£24.50.

The fruit of five years' work, Paul Reitter's new translation of *Das Kapital* was published last month. It lives up to its claim to be a translation into colloquial (American) English, especially as regards the descriptive and historical parts. It really does read like something written this century as opposed to the now rather clunky original 1887 translation by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling under Engels's direction.

However, there are some words that cannot be said to be colloquial, in particular *valorization*, *metabolize* and *subsumption* which don't appear in the 1887 translation and, in the case of the first two, could not have done. They first appeared in the 1976 Penguin translation by Ben Fowkes. Reitter has added a fourth — *thingly*. The 1887 version translates them as, respectively, 'production of surplus value', 'material change (or circulation)', and 'subjection'. These are clearly more colloquial. As to *thingly*, this was translated as 'material', but most people will probably read it as 'thingy', which won't be too wide of the mark.

Reitter has taken great care and there can be no doubt that his translations here are an accurate literal translation of the native German words, but, as with all translations, the question is who is the translation for. At one time *Capital* was read and studied in the working class movement. Now, unfortunately, it is read mainly by academics in the field of Marx studies. For them, such words present no problem and interpreting their meaning provides ample room for learned disputations, and, for those whose first language is English, puts them in a position to follow the arguments by those whose first language is German. Fair enough, but they don't make it easier for ordinary working-class militants who want to understand how capitalism works and how they are exploited.

*Metabolism* is now acceptable and perhaps *subsumption* too but not *valorization*. It hardly existed in 1887 and is now used, in economics, to mean the

same as 'monetization,' making money out of something. Of course this is what capital is used for too but so are many other things that have nothing to do with workers being used to produce surplus value for capitalists (and all to do with putting a price on everything). The word 'valorization' blunts, even obscures, that what's involved is the exploitation of workers.

For example, in Reitter's (and Fowkes's) translation, the title of the chapter which introduces the concept of surplus value is 'The Labor Process and the Valorization Process'. In the 1887 translation it's 'The Labour Process and the Process of Producing Surplus Value'. Further, even of itself, 'valorization' doesn't bring out in a clear and immediately comprehensible way what Marx was getting at. The 1887 translation defines capital as 'self-expanding value', which conveys the idea of capitalist production as a spontaneous process of producing surplus value. For Reitter, it is 'self-valorizing value'. Thus, Reitter's 'capital's life process is nothing but its own movement as self-valorizing value' (p. 280) compares unfavourably, in terms of easier understanding, with 1887's 'the life-process of capital consists only in its movement as value constantly expanding, constantly multiplying itself' (end of the chapter on 'The Rate and the Mass of Surplus-Value').

This is not to dismiss the usefulness of Reitter's work. Not at all. You just need to read 'expansion of value' every time the words 'valorization' or 'valorize' occur. His translation reads well and is accompanied by 50 pages of very useful end-notes to explain his choice of words as well as Marx's citations (in Latin, Greek, French and Italian) and references to now obscure persons. It will stand the test of time and can be recommended for those who want to read in modern English Marx's own exposition of his abstract-labour theory of value and his description, from a working-class point of view, of how the working class in England came into being, its working and living conditions in and up to the 1860s, and struggles to limit the working day.

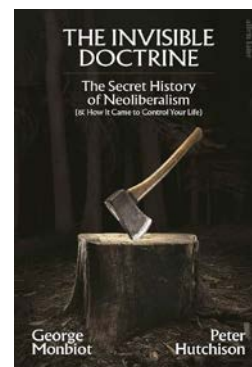
It is unfortunate that the publishers haven't let readers simply read Marx in his own words. Instead they have chosen to introduce the new translation with both a 15-page Foreword and a 30-page Editor's Introduction, both claiming to set out what Marx meant. Both are decidedly unhelpful and undermine the rest of the book. The Preface is mainly gibberish by someone who dismisses as 'fantasy' what she calls 'a perfectly rational, controlled and transparent communist political economy on the far side of a capitalist

epoch'; according to her, *Capital* is a work of philosophy, a 'deep ontological and epistemological critique of capitalism'. The Editor, too, sees Marx as basically a philosopher and opines that in *Capital* 'nowhere really does Marx condemn the capital system or call for revolution'. But, then, both of them are philosophers who only want to interpret the world.

Reitter's translation is of the 2nd German edition (1873), the 1887 translation is of the 3rd German edition (1883) while Fowkes's was of the 4th German edition (1890). So now all three German re-editions are available in English. Not that there is any significant difference between them. One inconvenience, though, is that the chapter numbers in Reitter's translation don't always correspond to those in the other two which readers in English of Marx have become used to.

ALB

## The Invisible Doctrine



**The Invisible Doctrine: The Secret History of Neoliberalism (& How It Came to Control Your Life).** By George Monbiot & Peter Hutchison (Allen Lane)

This small book embraces some pretty big ideas, of interest to socialists. It's a collaboration between US radical filmmaker Peter Hutchison (whose past work ranges from *Iron Man* to the Noam Chomsky documentary *Requiem for the American Dream*) and journalist George Monbiot. Monbiot's trajectory is also of interest for socialists. From run-of-the-mill environmental reform campaigner in the 1990s his writings over the last 20 years detail a growing revolutionary political consciousness.

The objective of the book is to shed light on the significant political changes — 'capitalism on steroids' as the authors put it — that have occurred in the last 50 years and understand the extent to which these are predictable consequences of a concerted ideological offensive by the ruling class.

The book traces the intellectual origins of neoliberalism back to Hayek and von Mises. These ideas (privatization, cut taxes, deregulation etc) originally confined to academia were nurtured, funded and propagated by US business interests. (Monbiot has previously done much to shed light on the murky business origins

of all the impressive-sounding institutes, thinktanks and lobbyists that actively try and manage political debate).

The authors make an attempt to argue that neoliberalism is distinct from classical laissez-faire liberalism, in that it emphasizes economic freedoms but pays less attention to the philosophical liberties of the individual that are usually bundled in. Adam Smith may have felt it necessary to expound on the benefits to society of the 'invisible hand'; in contrast neoliberals don't really care what the consequences are – the free market is the objective. For our part we have to be hopeful that workers increasingly see an invisible hand that gives them a very visible 'two-fingers'. I'm not sure whether neoliberalism merits its own chapter in any political history of exploitation and oppression, but socialists would perhaps see it as a more honest philosophical rationale for capitalism. Either way the authors don't get lost in the angels-on-pins philosophy, and are pretty explicit: 'Neoliberalism is class war'.

The authors argue that neoliberalism's disdain for anything beyond the market means that democracy is being degraded globally. We used to be told that capitalism and democracy were ideologically intertwined in a glorious revolutionary project. That was nonsense of course (the vote was just a necessary concession made by capitalists to keep workers on-side) but nevertheless democracy is a pretty heavyweight argument, one worth trying to have on your side. Harder to argue though in an era when free-market ideology appears to travel hand-in-hand with openly authoritarian demagogues; the recent Elon Musk/Donald Trump interview is a clear example (but perhaps not so much 'hand-in-hand' as just two hours of mutual rimming- apologies to *Socialist Standard* readers for the mental image invoked).

World socialists are arguably unique as a political movement in how explicit we are in our confidence in the capacity of our species to understand the world we live in (given a chance) and act in our collective interests to create a democratic, participative and conscious revolution. We are therefore very interested in the spread of political ideas, including pro-capitalist ones. The ideas of von Mises and Hayek have clearly had impact. It helps to have a billionaires' blank cheque of course, but the story of neoliberalism lends strength to the argument that ideas, particularly if they can be framed in a coherent narrative, actually matter. The unopposed march of neoliberal ideas has partly been because the left has been unable to adequately create its own narrative. World socialists would argue that this is because so much of the left are in denial; deep-down they

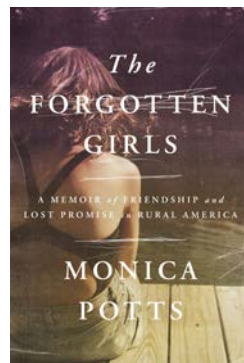
are actually wedded to capitalism.

Many supposedly 'anti-capitalist' books end with a whimper as the author provides a list of reforms, a mild wish list. Monbiot and Hutchison end their book more substantially, suggesting the potential for some sort of alternative narrative, a 'politics of belonging'. This involves acknowledging the remaining non-market commons around us that we share, and interesting concepts such as private sufficiency/public luxury are discussed that should be of interest to world socialists. There are glimpses of how this may be pre-figured and developed *within* the capitalist state (a contentious point for most world socialists) but don't let this put you off. In the final chapter the authors make a strong and refreshing argument, that every world socialist will echo, against reformism:

'Far from being a shortcut to the change we want to see, it is the morass into which ambition sinks. System change as the neoliberals and the new demagogues have proven is, and has always been, the only fast and effective means of transformation'.

**B. G.**

## Country Lives



**The Forgotten Girls: a Memoir of Friendship and Lost Promise in Rural America.**  
By Monica Potts.  
Penguin £10.99.

The author was born and brought up in the small town of Clinton in Arkansas. Her book has two main themes: life, especially for women, in an isolated area, and the story of her friend Darci.

Like much of the rural US, Clinton has social and economic problems, made worse by the 2007–8 crash. Services such as schools and post offices are closing, industries are leaving, and poor white people – women, especially – are dying younger than a generation ago. Clinton is part of the Bible Belt, and evangelical churches are very powerful. There are high rates of sexual abuse and childhood trauma, and women in particular are discriminated against. 'The church set girls up to be of service to everyone and in charge of nothing' and 'Women were held morally responsible for everything that happened in their families and communities. They were supposed to sacrifice everything for their children, even their own happiness and mental health.'

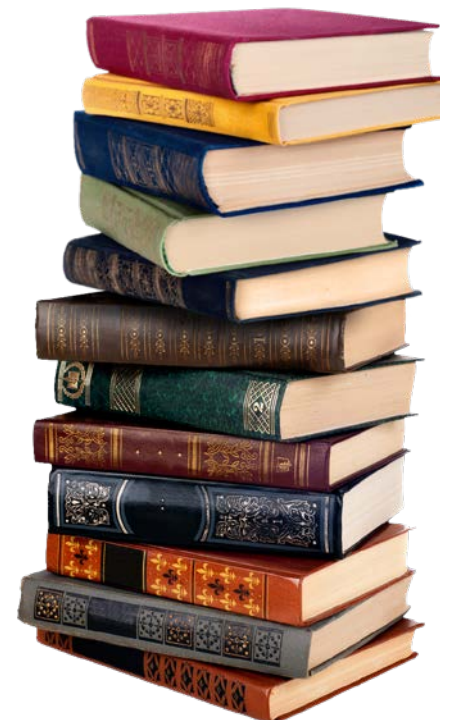
They find it hard to imagine a single life and are expected to do what their husbands tell them. There is a high rate of teenage births, and what sex education there is emphasises abstinence. The area is very conservative, is strongly anti-abortion and supports Trump.

Potts was, partly by chance, able to move away, attend college and become a journalist, though she later moved back to Clinton with her partner. Darci, however, was not so lucky. She lost her virginity at fourteen (to an eighteen-year-old); another local girl got married at fifteen, to a man nine years older. By the age of sixteen, Darci had a live-in boyfriend. She had some talent as a musician and played at music festivals, but drug-taking meant she missed so much attendance that she was unable to graduate from high school. She was emotionally and physically abused by partners, and had two children in her twenties. She stole smallish sums from an employer, but this eventually totalled \$13,000, and she was sentenced to probation. Various jail spells followed drug charges and violating probation.

One of Potts' cousins says to her: 'Can you imagine waking up in your life, at thirty-five, and realising you have nothing?' This aptly characterises the lives of Darci and people (not just women) like her: they are depressed, break the law in various ways, go to jail, are released, but then the cycle starts again. Poor white people are badly off, but feel that at least they are not black and at the bottom of the 'rigid racial hierarchy'.

This is a vivid account of working-class life in some of the poorest parts of the US, and a reminder of how capitalism treats so many people in the 'land of the free'.

**PB**



# Confucius, Lin Piao and the CCP

LIN PIAO is dead and in disgrace. Confucius who died a couple of thousand years earlier is getting the treatment reserved for high-ranking renegades — scapegoats of the Chinese 'Communist' Party. (...)

The Chinese 'Communist' Party set out to develop and control capitalism, and now claim to have set up a Socialist society. Socialism will come sure enough, but in spite of them. What any student of Marxian economics would recognise as an emerging capitalist state was described as 'People's Democratic Dictatorship' and when the state had gained control of the greater part of industry and agriculture it was supposed to have carried out the transition to Socialism. A state of affairs where, on their own admission, classes and the class struggle still exist.

This is not a harmless deception as capitalist society can only work against the interests of the working class and any government trying to run it must come into conflict with the workers. Part of any government's armoury of weapons in this conflict are arguments designed to get workers to make sacrifices for the mythical nation and warn them of the dangers to the

workers of wanting more of the wealth which they produce. Although there may be power struggles taking place in the top ranks of the government, the Lin Piao-Confucius campaign is also a weapon in the class war against the workers. Once workers become aware of their class status they will see through the deceits and come to understand that a class-less society cannot be brought to them from above. They will then form their own Socialist party in opposition to those who at present administer their exploitation. (...)

The Chinese 'Communist' Party having pursued the national liberation of China are, despite their protestations to the contrary, nothing but a party of capitalism. They have taken the terminology of Socialism and used it to disguise the State capitalism they administer. The 'Thoughts of Mao' may serve them now, but such is the dynamic of capitalism that they will 'become antiquated before they can ossify' and become redundant like 'the ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions' of Confucius.

*(from Socialist Standard Special Issue on China, October 1974)*

## Action Replay

# Bulls, lions and cuts

IN JULY it was claimed that there had been massive job losses at the British Basketball League. But our focus here will be on a similar situation in another leading sport. That same month, the *i* reported that Rugby Football League and Rugby League Commercial, the organisations at the top of the game, were likely to make at least ten members of staff redundant. The big clubs are not happy with how the sport is being run; in particular, the marketing company IMG is being paid £450,000 a year, but so far to little effect, with no new sponsors found and TV coverage reduced.

Rugby league is the eighth most popular sport in the UK, but Super League attendances average well below ten thousand. Financially, the sport is not in great shape. In 2022 every Super League club in England lost money, the total (after tax) being over £12m; this figure excludes Catalans Dragons, who play in Perpignan in France. The largest loss was of £2.5m at Huddersfield Giants, and the smallest, at Salford Red Devils, was still over half a million. Salford may be helped out if the local council take full ownership of the Community Stadium where they play. Wigan Warriors had an operating loss of over £1m, from a turnover of £6.6m (they lost over £1.75m in 2021). Government support during Covid has been ended, and the loans involved are

now having to be repaid.

Bradford Bulls, who play in the Championship as a part-time club, make use of a corporate hospitality suite to boost their income. The owners put in cash, and insist on keeping the elite academy, which costs £140,000 a year to run. Wakefield Trinity were the top-spending team in the Championship: they had been relegated from the Super League, have an extremely rich backer, and are still full-time, though they may have to leave their Belle Vue stadium, as it does not comply with current standards.

Central funding has decreased quite drastically, largely because of a cut in TV

coverage. In League One — the lowest of the three tiers — Swinton Lions, for instance, have suffered a reduction in central funding of £150,000 since 2021. In 2023, West Wales Raiders, based in Llanelli, withdrew from the league. In the last few decades, attempts to expand the sport to clubs in Blackpool, Chorley, Nottingham and Sheffield have all been unsuccessful.

Three clubs, including Bedford Tigers, have applied to join League One next season. So maybe league can still expand beyond its traditional heartlands, but it will probably be a struggle.

**PB**



# World Socialist Movement Online Meetings

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

## October 2024 Events

World Socialist Movement online meetings

**Sundays at 19.30 (IST) (Discord)** • Weekly WSP (India) meeting

**Sunday 6 October 10.00 (GMT + 1)**

**Central Online Branch Meeting**

**Friday 4 October 19.30 (GMT + 1) • Did you see the news?**

Discussion of recent subjects in the news.

**Friday 11 October 19.30 (GMT + 1)**

**Capitalism and the Grenfell Tower Fire**

Speaker: Anthony Thomas.

**Friday 18 October 19.30 (GMT + 1) • Reflections on Georges Sorel**

Speaker: Joe White. Talk on Georges Sorel (1847-1922), the French revolutionary syndicalist thinker.

**Friday 25 October No Meeting**

Eve of October Planning Meeting.

**Saturday 26 October 10.30 to 17.00 (GMT +1)**

**October Planning Meeting**

Hybrid meeting to discuss Party activities in 2025 (see physical meetings below).

**Sunday 27 October 12.30 (GMT)**

**North East Branch members 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.

## Socialist Party Physical Meetings

**LONDON**

**Saturday 26 October • October Planning Meeting 10.30 to 17.00**

This is a meeting of all Party members to discuss activities in 2025.

Following a Conference resolution carried this year, it replaces the Autumn Delegate Meeting. It will be a meeting of Party members, not of Branch delegates, so anyone can attend and speak and vote as of right. It will be a hybrid meeting, held in person at Head Office and online over Zoom. As for all our meetings it is open to non-members.

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).

**Online study group: How capitalism works**

Starts Wednesday 17 October at 7.30pm. All welcome.

Daunted by the prospect of reading Marx on economics? This mini-series might be for you. It's an introduction to key aspects of capitalist economics, so no previous knowledge necessary. Using a free study document (PDF) of 9,500 words, the series will not be 'taught'. You will need to read a section of the document before each session and bring any questions or observations to the group.

Depending on progress, we expect the group to run over 4 evenings only, so it isn't a huge commitment.

To attend, send an email to [spgb.asstsec@worldsocialism.org](mailto:spgb.asstsec@worldsocialism.org), using the subject line: 'How capitalism works'

## Alan Johnstone

**Readers will have noticed that there have been no articles for a while from ALJO who wrote the Material World column and was a prolific contributor to our blog. We ourselves have not heard from him in Thailand for well over a year.**

**Alan joined the Edinburgh Branch in 1970 while a teenager and rejoined in 2003. Before his retirement he worked for Royal Mail and was an active member of the Communication Workers Union.**

**If anyone has any information about him or his whereabouts could they please get in touch with us.**

## 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.

# Advertising for a gardener

I RECENTLY posted a message on my local Facebook page asking if anyone could recommend a gardener to tidy up my overgrown but not too large back garden. I got 28 (yes 28) replies from helpful members of the group. My quandary now was deciding which one to contact with a view to getting the work done. I proceeded to draw up a short list – entirely unscientifically – and from it I chose one one – Tom the Gardener – on the basis that his address showed he lived close to me. Tom said he'd come round later that day to look at the work to be done, and he did. The main question during his inspection was whether I wanted the fairly large laurel bush, which was almost a tree and was cutting out light, cut down completely or to just have the top part taken off it. We got back into the house and I was pretty gobsmacked when he told me that the cost of tidying the garden and doing the 'small job' (ie, removing the top part of the laurel) would be £1,700 and, if I wanted it, the 'big job' (ie, cutting it down completely) would be £4,000. He told me he could start the next day. I said I'd think about it, but he seemed to twig that the answer was likely to be no, since he began to talk about how costs had 'skyrocketed' in recent times and how just to deposit the green waste at the Council site 'cost a fortune'. Anyway we said our goodbyes and I knew I'd have to find someone else.

When I had another look at my 'short list' to try and decide where to go to next, there was one name on it I rather liked – GreenspaceSOS. I looked at their Facebook page and website and my first impression was reinforced. It said 'GreenspaceSOS is a non-profit Community Interest Company. All profits made by our garden and estate maintenance service go towards delivering free services for vulnerable people and groups throughout our communities struggling with their overgrown gardens and green spaces. We recognise the physical and mental health benefits that access to good quality green space can provide.'

It then added (and this caught my eye in particular): 'Due to receiving an overwhelming number of enquiries asking whether we deliver a normal 'paid-for' garden maintenance service, Greenspace SOS have decided to open our books to paying customers



who would like a reliable, trustworthy, professional, friendly, clean, and ethical garden service for 2024! Bingo! Or so it seemed. And actually it was. I wasn't looking to have my garden done for free, but the 'paid for' option gave me hope. So I duly emailed Greenspace SOS and got a quick reply. Paul offered to come round and look in the next couple of days. And he did. I immediately took to him. He was obviously knowledgeable about the work and his friendly, courteous manner inspired confidence. He quickly told me that, though he could cut back or cut down the big bush, he didn't want to reduce its height to any great extent, because it was likely that birds were nesting in it and they shouldn't be disturbed. I hadn't thought of that and I was obviously sympathetic. He asked me if he could take photos of the garden with a view to sending me a quote and promised to get back to me soon. He did that a couple of days later, quoting a sum of £140. In its own way, this shocked me as much as Tom's £1,700. A friend suggested that maybe he'd inadvertently left off a nought at the end.

Anyway I got back to him to say fine. But when he came to do the work the following week, the first thing I said was I thought £140 was incredibly little. But he said it was all right and that at least cleared my mind of the missing nought suspicion. It was a good number of hours work for Paul and he did a truly excellent job of pruning, shaping and clearing as well as leaving everything very clean. I asked him how they (their website said that he, Gav and Ian were a team of 3) managed financially if most of their work was done for free and they seemed to charge little even for paid work. He told me they applied for various grants that were

available for assisting disadvantaged individuals or groups (eg, elderly and disabled, extra care housing schemes, an animal rescue centre, St John's Ambulance), and also canvassed donations from local businesses. They were content to live on relatively little themselves and had the satisfaction of knowing they were in some way lighting up the lives of people who had little materially and were contributing positively to the health of communities. When I asked him how they disposed of the waste, he said they had to pay for that at the council site – at which I insisted that £140 really was too little and he had to take a few more tenners, which, thank goodness, he accepted.

Since then I've recommended GreenspaceSOS to two friends, both needing work in their respective gardens, and they've both agreed terms with him. Paul has emailed to thank me. But I've also mused about how to account for all this. As I see it, Tom, who I've actually got nothing against, is bowing to capitalism's everyone-for-themselves ethic, whilst Paul, Gav and Ian are resisting this and preferring instead to embrace a community and mutual aid ethic. Good for them, and it also provides at least a glimpse of evidence that, when we get a socialist world of common ownership and free access to all goods and services, human beings, eminently flexible as 'human nature' is, will be perfectly capable of acting in the interests of the community as whole, especially as it will also be in their own interest to do so – and that includes Tom the Gardener's interest as well.

**HKM**