

THE

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SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement



A hard rain's gonna fall

Also: Christmas every day?
Slicing the pork barrel thin
Fascism: what does it mean?
Brewing up a storm?

How we live and how we might live (4)
Marx was right about workers and wages



Features

Christmas every day?	5
Slicing the pork barrel thin.....	10
Fascism: what does it mean?..	11
Brewing up a storm?.....	12
How we live and how we might live (4).....	14
Marx was right about workers and wages	16
Was capitalism historically inevitable?	17

Regulars

Editorial	3
Pathfinders	4
Cooking the Books I	6
Halo Halo.....	7
Tiny tips	7
Material World.....	9
Cooking the Books II	18
Proper Gander	19
Reviews	20
50 Years Ago.....	22
Action Replay	22
Meetings	23
Life & Times	24

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'

Trump triumphs

SO THE 'isolationist' section of the ruling class has won control of political power in the United States. This was one of those rare elections under capitalism where the choice was not simply between two different management teams to implement the same basic policy. It was one, as over Brexit here, where there were real policy differences between two sections of the ruling class and where the issue was put to the mainly working class electorate to decide. As in Britain, the dominant section of the ruling class was outvoted.

'Isolationism' has been defined as 'a political philosophy that advocates for a nation to avoid involvement in the affairs of other countries, especially in their wars, and only engaging in wars if attacked'. It has always been a trend in US history, explaining their late intervention in both the last century's world wars. Since the end of the second of these, which resulted in the US becoming the dominant world power at the expense of Britain and France and their empires, 'interventionism' as the 'world's policeman' has been the main

feature of US foreign policy.

Will Trump end this? He has made it clear that he is not interested in continuing the war in Ukraine — a European war — but he still sees Iran and China as threats, to US commercial interests, respectively in the middle and far east. So, we can't expect a complete retreat from the unashamed 'American imperialism' favoured by the Democratic Party and until recently by the Republicans too.

'America First' will have implications on relations between the capitalist states and trading blocs into which the world is divided. If Trump goes ahead with imposing tariffs on all imports, including from the EU, Japan and Britain, this would unleash a world trade war. If he puts US interests as a fossil fuel producer ahead of the general world capitalist interest to try to do something about climate change this will hinder the already feeble international measures to deal with it.

What about the working class? Properly defined not just, as in American usage, those without a college degree but all

those economically obliged to try to find an employer to get an income. They will remain in this same basic position and will still face the problems that the politicians on both sides promised to solve.

Why, then, did so many vote for him? It will have been, in the words of one of Bill Clinton's advisers, 'the economy, stupid'. Workers in the US, as elsewhere, have been experiencing the effects of more rapidly rising prices than in the past few decades and voted against the incumbent government which they mistakenly blamed for this (rather than capitalism). There will also have been the mistaken belief that Trump, as a perceived successful and tough businessman, was a good person to deal with it.

Mistaken they were, but they weren't one reactionary mass voting for a supposed would-be dictator. They were voting for the price of groceries to come down. They will be disappointed in that Trump won't be able to make them 'prosperous again'. No government can make capitalism work for the benefit of the working class.

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Climate of crisis

YOU MIGHT think, given much of the news last month, that the howler monkeys had taken over the zoo. Some of Donald Trump's executive appointments were widely viewed as stark raving bonkers. Matt Gaetz, 'the most investigated man in the United States Congress', suspected of underage sex and sex-trafficking, and friend of far-right conspiracy nuts and Holocaust deniers, was made attorney general. Tulsi Gabbard, avowedly anti-Nato and allegedly pro-Moscow, was made director of national intelligence, prompting critics to suggest that in future there won't be any. The world's richest man, Elon Musk, who sacked the janitors at Twitter so workers had to bring their own toilet rolls, has been given a job to cut state spending. And the president-elect put Robert F Kennedy, the vaccine sceptic and 5G conspiracy nut, in charge of the Food and Drug Administration, Medicare, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 'That sound that you just heard was my jaw dropping, hitting the floor and rolling out of the door,' as one professor put it.

In the words of the *Economist*, Trump is an aroma many people don't want to sniff. His attitude to the 'climate hoax' is also well known. He is fully expected to pull the country out of the Paris Agreement once again, just as the latest UN report announced that, far from restricting warming below 1.5 or even 2.0°, the world is on track to warm by 2.6 to 3.2°. The likelihood of the world's biggest fossil-fuel producer bolting for the door and leaving everyone else holding the bag may well have overshadowed the two COP meetings that took place last month, as participating states must have calculated that if the USA bailed, then probably China would follow, leading a stampede of 'every state for itself'. COP16 met in Cali, Colombia to discuss ways to preserve biodiversity in the face of what is being called the sixth mass extinction on Earth, but broke up in chaos. Then COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan started badly with its own chief executive being caught on film making oil deals, the country's president calling their gas resources 'a gift from God', and fossil-linked lobbyists outnumbering the delegates, making the event look like a mafia-led War on Drugs initiative. No wonder a former UN secretary general and



a former UN climate chief have written to the UN saying that the COP climate talks are 'no longer fit for purpose' (tinyurl.com/ycyrf5bj). And all this just after the publication of *The 2024 State of the Climate report*, which begins: 'We are on the brink of an irreversible climate disaster. This is a global emergency beyond any doubt. Much of the very fabric of life on Earth is imperiled' (tinyurl.com/2dpp255v).

Something else Trump has no time for is the World Health Organization, which has since the last pandemic been attempting to negotiate a collective global accord in time for the next pandemic, but which last month also failed to reach agreement. The reason for the failure is the same reason the climate talks never get very far, and it's not Trump, it's the capitalist competitive market system. The 194 WHO member states certainly understand that the next pandemic is a matter of when, not if. They know perfectly well that they don't want to be caught with their pants down and unable to react, like last time. So they have every reason on Earth to cooperate. But they just can't. For one thing, poorer countries can't afford to scale up their health facilities, meaning richer countries would have to foot the bill, a big ask given their many other financial commitments. An even more pressing issue is the transfer of technology for vaccine development and production, part of the Pathogen Access and Benefit-Sharing System (PABS). Poorer countries want PABS to be mandatory (of course), but the WHO is an entirely voluntary scheme, and big countries are reluctant to bear all the R&D costs only to give away their valuable intellectual property for nothing. They are insisting on merely giving away a certain percentage free, and a further percentage at cost price, a proposal that infuriates poor countries who are invariably on the sharp end of diseases like Ebola, bird flu and Mpox. Negotiations

are further stalled on the establishment of the Global Supply Chain and Logistics Network, which is intended 'to facilitate equitable, timely and affordable access to pandemic-related health products.' All parties are agreed that this is highly desirable and in everyone's collective interest, but squabbling continues over just one word, 'unhindered', to go in front of the word 'access'. Once again, poorer countries obviously want this, while rich countries are afraid to cut their own pharma industries off at the knees (tinyurl.com/5fs7f294).

When you consider the world's urgent and existential need to mitigate climate change, halt a mass extinction, and prevent the next pandemic, and that instead of acting, countries always end up paralysed by the competing requirements of the market, you realise that capitalism as a planetary management system is about as helpful as Superman building his own kryptonite factory.

But since it would be unseasonal to end on a sour note, a recent study found that the news might not be entirely as bad as you think it is, and that there has been an 'increase in media coverage of crises, but not in the number of crises' (tinyurl.com/bddry85d). Researchers looked at news articles from *The Times*, going back to 1785, along with parallel studies of the *Guardian*, *Economist* and others, and concluded that there has been a notable increase in 'crisis rhetoric' rather than in actual crises, and not for the usual reason that 'if it bleeds, it leads'. They pin the blame on 'intensified crisis PR' from pressure groups, better public education creating a more acute perception of crises, and a proliferation of politicised media outlets. But crisis or not, we're definitely going round in circles, even if not quite circling the drain.

PJS

Christmas every day?

IN 1961 Viv Nicholson, whose husband had won the equivalent of over four million pounds on the football pools, became famous after declaring she would 'spend, spend, spend'. Which she then proceeded to do. At this time of year, without that amount of geld available to you, do you feel pressured to follow that example? Do you wish you were like Viv and could win loads of lucre on the national lottery. That would solve all your problems, wouldn't it? Or would it?

Festivity: 'a joyous feast, holiday or celebration'. Do you buy into Christmas because it makes you temporarily forget how pitiful it is to be a wage slave? Not that you're being pressured. Much. The retail outlets have been selling Christmas commodities since September. Poverty, or struggling with the rising cost of living or unaffordable energy bills is no excuse. Not believing in the Christmas fairytale doesn't excuse you from participating. The UK now has more atheists than believers in a fairy tale. So what are you celebrating? It's a British tradition, you say? Christmas trees, Charles Dickens, God bless us one and all, blah blah. The Queen's, oops, King's Speech telling you that no matter how bad your year has been the privileged ruling class have had it much worse.

Is it because the kids expect presents, expensive ones too? Do you want them to be embarrassed because their friends got much better ones? They'll probably still be dissatisfied. Don't you realise that the true meaning of Christmas is spend, spend, spend until it hurts? Is no one thinking of the poor capitalists and their profits? Oh, you are fighting your way through the Boxing Day sales where wage slaves in shops are forced to work the holiday to add to capital's rapacious pursuit of even more profit. They don't have a choice. This applies to many other workers in various industries. Selling your mental or physical labour power is necessary to live in a capitalist system.

The mainstream media will no doubt have faux anger stories about a single parent spending huge amounts of money on presents for their children. This will elicit gasps of horror in the comments section from the indignant who will be incensed that someone on benefits can afford to do that. 'I work long and hard and I can't afford to do that', they will cry. 'It's my taxes that's paying for that!' Note that in order for the media to manufacture outrage the story has to be about someone being supported by the state.



Once there was a time when preparations for the winter festival did not begin until a week or two before... Home-made paper chains as decorations. Catching the bus with your mom to go shopping in the local town or village to buy all the necessary prerequisites. Salvation Army bands busking in the streets, guilt-tripping passers-by into putting money in their hat. It's for charity! It should be noted that the lyrics of many carols would have made William McGonagall ashamed to have written them.

Charities love Christmas. An excellent time to prick people's consciences and get the money rolling in. The homeless and dispossessed may enjoy a few days of respite at Christmas before once more disappearing out of sight and out of mind. Society won't begrudge them a little warmth, some decent food and a warm bed, but will happily turn them back onto the streets and leave them to their fate.

Oh, how naive we were then. Pillowcases of presents to open when you awake. At that age there was no conception of how hard it might have been for your parents to provide the gifts. Your dad getting up early to build a fire in the grates to warm the rooms. Him making the first cup of tea of the day for everyone and adding a generous measure of whisky to it, even for the thirteen year old. Mothers and female relatives working as hard as they did every day, or even harder, with no labour-saving devices to help them.

This is not to romanticise the past, but to highlight that for many of us it would be many years before we learnt how exploitative the capitalist system is and discovered that there was and is a better alternative. Back then there

was no knowledge of how one's parents might have had to scrape and save to buy their children presents and provide the enjoyable, but ignorant, experience.

Season of goodwill to all men, women and children? Not to those who are still being killed and maimed because some capitalists within particular states are intent on fulfilling their desire for yet more profit irrespective of the cost to innocent lives. Is there likely to be a Christmas truce, like the one in the First World War, in the conflicts currently raging across the world? You wouldn't bet on it, and in any case a cessation of hostilities for one day is hardly sufficient. Hostilities across the world need to be suppressed forever. What is the likelihood of that happening under capitalism? Zero.

When the 'festivities' have ended what is there to look forward to? The rich will get richer, the poor won't, and the global working class will continue to be exploited. The world will continue to be a less safe place.

Greg Lake sang that the Christmas you get, you deserve. Don't you think you deserve something better than capitalism? Don't wait until another year has gone by. Make your new year's resolution a Lennon one... 'Imagine there's no countries. It isn't hard to do. Nothing to kill or die for. And no religion too. Imagine all the people living life in peace.' There's many more benefits to a system where goods and services are produced for use, not profit. No classes, no leaders either. Give yourself and everyone else a real present – socialism.

DC

No such thing as a workers' budget

'WHAT WOULD be a workers' Budget?' the Trotskyist Workers' Liberty asked on Budget Day (tinyurl.com/mr2vjb35). With graffiti on a wall saying 'Tax the Rich' as an illustration, the article expounded:

'A workers' budget would tax the rich heavily'. 'A workers' budget would rebuild public services and restore real wages and benefits'. 'Increase corporation tax'. 'No easing of the rules can square the circle and win the resources needed to rebuild public services and real wages without taking from the millionaires'.

Taxing the rich to increase wages and benefits and provide better public services is fantasy politics. It's not going to happen and, if it was tried, would precipitate a massive economic crisis.

The article cites a calculation that 'a wealth tax, increased capital gains tax, and a few other items could raise £50 billion a year', but that's only 6.25 percent of the £800 billion currently spent on health, education, and pensions and other benefits. So the bulk of the money 'to rebuild public services and real wages' would have to come from taxing profits. The article mentions doubling corporation tax to over 50 percent of profits (but even that wouldn't raise enough). This would

reduce both the incentive and the amount for private corporations to re-invest in maintaining and expanding production. Hence, the reduction in production and a massive increase in unemployment.

The slogan 'Tax the Rich' assumes the continued existence of the rich, the continued division of society into the rich and the rest, into a class which owns the means of production and lives off an unearned property income (profit, interest or rent) and a class which, excluded from such ownership, depends on working for an employer for a wage or salary.

The assumption is that the rich should continue to exploit the workers but that part (most) of their income should be taxed away to pay for higher wages and better public services for the rest. It is the fantasy of capitalism being made to serve the interests of the non-capitalist majority.

The absurdity, let alone the infeasibility, of such a social arrangement — the capitalist as capitalist for the benefit of the working class — is obvious.

Some naive leftwingers might believe in this but we doubt if the leaders of Trotskyist groups do. For them, proposals for a 'workers' budget' will be an application of the cynical tactic of

proposing something to attract worker support but which they know won't work, in the expectation that, when it doesn't, the disillusioned workers who fell for it will turn to them for leadership in an assault on the capitalist state.

Real socialists are honest. We say that under capitalism there can be no such thing as a 'workers' budget' as this implies that capitalism could be made to operate in the interest of the majority class of wage and salary workers and their dependants. But experience has repeatedly shown that it can't. The only budget that there can be is a capitalists' budget.

What the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves, set out on 30 October was what the British capitalist state plans to spend in the next tax year (which in the UK, for some odd historical reason, starts in April) and how it intends to pay for it.

The various measures she announced were based on the supposition that the government can bring about growth. But it can't. The most it can do is to create conditions that could encourage business investment. This in fact is what all budgets have to try to do and why they must all be capitalists' budgets. There can be no such thing as a workers' budget.

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Halo Halo

SHAKESPEARE USED the idiom ‘He who sups with the Devil should have a long spoon’. The ‘Devil’ is a character in a fairy story, similar to the one wherein this month millions still ‘celebrate’ the birth of a made-up ‘messiah’.

As a writer in a previous *Socialist Standard* wrote, ‘religion is intensely anti-working-class... the whole panoply of belief, ritual, salvation and miracle stands against the interests of all working people.’ The Catholic Church and totalitarian states have much in common.

Proponents of mumbo jumbo, the Catholic Church, should have used a longer spoon. A United States Commission on International Religious Freedom report noted that ‘the Vatican entered into an undisclosed agreement with the Chinese Communist Party (sic) in 2018 that established cooperation between Church authorities and Chinese officials in appointing bishops. But “the government has unilaterally installed CCP-aligned bishops without the Vatican’s consultation

and approval” despite that agreement’.

‘Chinese officials have ordered the removal of crosses from churches and have replaced images of Christ and the Virgin Mary with images of President Xi Jinping. They have also censored religious texts, forced members of the clergy to preach CCP ideology, and mandated the display of CCP slogans within churches. “Ultimately, the Chinese government is solely interested in instilling unwavering obedience and devotion to the CCP, its political agenda, and its vision for religion, not protecting the religious freedom rights of Catholics”’ (Ncresister.com).

In Malaysia, where almost two thirds of the populace practise Islam, the state’s official religion, the government is seeking to enact a Mufti Bill which would grant ‘greater authority to religious courts, potentially eroding the rights of non-Muslims’. ‘The Mufti bill is not just about religious matters. It’s about power and control. If this bill passes, it could lead to a situation where religious authorities have the final say

on a wide range of issues, from personal relationships to public policy. Supporters of the bill contend that it is necessary to strengthen the role of Islamic law to uphold traditional values. They argue that the bill would not infringe upon the rights of non-Muslims.’ Flying pigs come to mind. Oh, not halal. Flying gibbons or crocodiles?

Christmas, and hopefully all other religious festivals, may be on its way to extinction. The UK now has more atheists than people who believe in the existence of God.

‘Queen’s University Belfast, in a global project Explaining Atheism (nearly 25,000 people from six countries surveyed) to find out why people become atheists and agnostics. found that the common notion of the “purposeless unbeliever”, lacking a sense of ultimate meaning in life, objective morality, and strong values is not accurate, challenging the stereotype that atheists lead lives devoid of meaning, morality, and purpose. Dr Lee said: “The UK is entering its first atheist age. Whilst atheism has been prominent in our culture for some time, be it through Karl Marx, George Eliot, or Ricky Gervais, it is only now that atheists have begun to outnumber theists for the first time in our history”’.

DC

Tiny tips

... a tiny minority of about 0.6 percent of the population, own 45 percent of the country’s total wealth. For workers... the situation in Germany, is becoming increasingly precarious (**WSWS, tinyurl.com/5yyh2nwe**).

... support for Hezbollah — as well as opposition to it — still fall primarily along sectarian lines. Polling by The Washington Institute late last year found that 34% of Sunni Muslims and 29% of Christians expressed a positive view of Hezbollah, while 93% of Shias said they approved of the group (**NBC, tinyurl.com/ve3vkrv5 on Lebanon**).

As he watches the world go by each day from the shade of his porch in southern Havana, Ramone Monteagudo, 72, a retired history teacher, has a front-row seat for the wreckage... Now flies swarm over a sea of rubbish in the sticky heat. He watches some of his poorer neighbors — who until a few years ago had enough

to eat — pick leftover food out of the rot. ‘When it comes to food and medicine, we’re living through an extraordinarily difficult situation’ (**Truthdig, tinyurl.com/95djk3u**).

It was done for the Viet Cong in numerous countries during the US involvement in Vietnam. It was done for the African National Congress (ANC). It was done for the Irish Revolutionary (*sic*) Army (IRA). Across the United States, Europe and Australasia, all three organisations, demonised as terrorist outfits, received tacit, symbolic support from protestors. In some cases, support was genuine and pecuniary. Now, the Lebanese Shia militant and political group Hezbollah, designated a terrorist organisation in a number of Western states, has inspired flag holders to appear at protests against the expanding conflict in Gaza and Lebanon (**Dissident Voice, tinyurl.com/3228hw7s**).

Saudi Arabia has executed 213 people so

far in 2024, more than it has in any other calendar year on record, as the kingdom competes for a seat at the UN Human Rights Council (**Middle East Eye, tinyurl.com/mt6u7pa8**).

‘...The ratepayers’ association and the ANC led municipality are working together to evict poor black people, to destroy our homes and communities. They say that our presence reduces the value of the land, as if value is just a question of the price of the land and has nothing to do with the value of land for the human beings who live on it. They say that we must be removed because we are a health hazard as we must use the bush to relieve ourselves whereas the obvious solution to the lack of sanitation is to provide sanitation. They say that we are ‘chasing tourists away’. The strong element of racism driving all this is often openly displayed on the social media used by the white residents of the gated communities. The black elites who live in the gated communities are silent about this racism” (**Dissident Voice, tinyurl.com/46xn56z2**).

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

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

MIDLANDS

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

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North East Regional branch.

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

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

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

Bolton. Contact: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589.

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

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

Yorkshire Regional branch.

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

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

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

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

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

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

spgbsw@gmail.com
Brighton. Contact: Anton Pruden, anton@pruden.me

Canterbury. Contact: Rob Cox, Contact: spgb.ksrb@worldsocialism.org

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

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

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

Essex. Contact: Pat Deutz, 11 The Links, Billericay, CM12 0EX. patdeutz@gmail.com.

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

IRELAND

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

SCOTLAND

Edinburgh. Contact: Fraser Anderson f_raz_1@hotmail.com

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

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Contact: botterillr@gmail.com or Geoffrey Williams, 19 Baptist Well Street, Waun Wen, Swansea SA1 6FB. 01792 643624

Central branch

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

INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS

AFRICA

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

AUSTRALIA

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

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

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Poverty and taxing the rich

OXFAM REGULARLY publishes reports about global poverty. Its most recent one points to how ‘the richest 1% have more wealth than the bottom 95% of the world’s population put together’ (oxfam.org.uk/mc/4erdxk/). It accuses the ‘ultra wealthy and powerful corporations of tax dodging and exercising monopoly control of important products such as Covid vaccines to increase profitability’. As a result, it goes on, the pandemic has resulted in the emergence of at least 40 new vaccine billionaires. The charity complains that its efforts to reduce world poverty are being undermined by large corporations and the ultra-rich who, with their control over the global economy, are responsible for exacerbating problems like extreme inequality and climate change. In an interview with the Voice of America (VOA) radio network, Nabil Ahmed, director of economic and racial justice at Oxfam America, states: ‘The wealth of the world’s five richest men has doubled since the start of this decade. And nearly five billion people have got poorer’ (tinyurl.com/64ev7dfa).

So what does this report, as well as others produced by Oxfam, advocate to tackle the problems it carefully documents and makes public? As often before, Oxfam puts emphasis on what it calls ‘fair taxes’. To be precise, it calls for ‘fairer taxation of large corporations and the ultra-wealthy’. In his VOA interview, Nabil Ahmed is quoted as saying: ‘We live in a world in which mega-corporations are paying next to or little to no tax’. They are, he says, ‘shaping the rules in their favour ... at the expense of ordinary people’ and ‘fuelling inequality within and between countries’. He argues that governments should ‘claw back’ revenues from the rich ‘to be able to invest in their people, to be able to meet their rights’.

Superficially such an approach may seem sensible and desirable, and the Oxfam report praises a campaign proposed by Brazil’s government in favour of a 2 percent minimum tax on the world’s richest billionaires. This, it claims would raise up to \$250 billion from around 3,000 individuals and would pay for food, healthcare, education and tackling climate change. However, this fails to consider several crucial factors. First of all, any ‘extra’ taxation money raised by governments from their capitalist class is just as likely to be used to pay off state debt as to help workers or to ease climate change. Then, more importantly, it will always be



Credit: Alex Rosenfeld

impossible for governments collectively to agree to universal tax levies, largely because they will all be looking to carry out their duty of encouraging ‘growth’ in their own country at the expense of other states and of supporting their own capitalist class at the expense of others. Nor is the capitalist system as a whole controlled by individual governments or by governments collectively, and disagreements easily break out between them as they seek to defend their own ‘patch’ in the world of competition and profit- something we see happening in many places right now.

It is no surprise, therefore, that, while the Brazil proposal apparently has the support of some countries, for example South Africa, France and Spain, it is opposed by others, including the United States, whose treasury secretary Janet Yellen stated at a G20 meeting last July: ‘Tax policy is very difficult to coordinate globally and we don’t see a need or really think it’s desirable to try to negotiate a global agreement on that’. So a solution along the lines suggested by Oxfam to tax the mega-rich and cancel debt burdens seems in fact little more than a well-meaning pipe dream.

And we can also see that, since the 1980s, when Oxfam changed its approach from being a mere money-collector to

putting a lot more effort and resources into trying to offer explanations (if not always well founded) as to the causes of world hunger and deprivation, not a great deal has changed. Oxfam continues to devote considerable time and effort into proposing what it sees as explanations for the ills afflicting society, but, unfortunately, it still can’t come up with viable remedies. This is not for want of trying but because it fails to pinpoint the fundamental cause of those ills, which is that, in the system we live under, profit will in the end always trump need. And governments, no matter what their intentions, can never remedy that, since they are the system’s servants not its masters.

What is needed is a switch in perception, a new consciousness, not by the super-rich or governments but by the majority of those who have to sell our energies for a wage or salary – ie, most of us. This is a switch that will enable humanity as a whole to see the necessity of organising things differently, of using the resources of the whole planet sanely and rationally and in the interests of all its inhabitants – on the basis, that is, of a classless, worldwide society without frontiers which produces goods and services cooperatively and solely for human need not profit.

HKM

Slicing the pork barrel thin

THE LABOUR Party's new autumn budget, presented by Chancellor Rachel Reeves, has made notable changes to universal credit and other benefits. However, these updates have raised concerns for vulnerable communities.

We've been speaking with people currently on benefits, universal credit, and Personal Independence Payments (PIP) about their experiences in the UK today.

Claire, 35, who transitioned from ESA to universal credit and works part-time in administration in Sheffield, is disabled due to genetic and autoimmune conditions. She also receives PIP. Claire says 'The job centre is horrible; it's not set up to support disabled people properly. They lack time, resources, and training.'

Toni, 44, is self-employed in events management in London, but her part-time universal credit isn't enough. 'I was fine when I worked in Europe; my business thrived for nearly a decade. But since Brexit, the cost of living crisis, and COVID, my business has tanked. Event venues are closing, and there are no opportunities for those without access to Europe. I have no options unless I retrain at my age!'

Starting in April 2025, benefits including universal credit will rise by just 1.7 percent. This means only a few extra pounds per month for claimants who have been

struggling to make ends meet from one capitalist crisis to the next.

Claire believes the support is inadequate for disabled individuals wanting to work, saying it falls short of previous options like disabled tax credits, which provided more effective assistance.

Reeves announced a cap on universal credit deductions for debt repayments, lowering it from 25 percent to 15 percent of the standard allowance. This aims to ease financial pressure for over a million households, potentially saving them around £420 a year.

'It's disheartening,' Claire reflects, on her feeling of alienation from society. When asked about the impact on her mental health, she added, 'Yes, the challenges of universal credit deepen my sense of isolation.'

Toni feels society has abandoned her: 'I worked hard for years and paid into the system, but when COVID hit, my business got no help. I was dumped on the dole and left to fend for myself, which only makes me feel more alienated.'

Claire adds 'They're just continuing the previous government's policies. I didn't agree with them then, and I still don't. The system doesn't support disabled people or consider different levels of disability.'

They're also concerned about the new

measure allowing the DWP direct access to bank accounts. This approach to combating fraud feels like a surveillance tactic that will erode trust among unemployed workers. What they feel they need are real job opportunities, not increased government intrusion into their lives.

Labour will uphold the Conservatives' reforms to the work capability assessment, making it harder for disabled workers to qualify for the highest level of incapacity benefits. This could affect over 420,000 people, resulting in a loss of about £5,000 in annual support for many.

A new £240 million 'Get Britain Working' initiative aims to provide work, skills, and health support for people with disabilities and long-term health conditions. This includes the already controversial idea of sending job coaches into mental health wards to push the severely ill back into work.

The earnings threshold for carer's allowance will rise to £10,000 a year, allowing more unpaid carers to qualify for support. However, we note that the broader social care system remains underfunded and profit-driven.

Labour has also decided to keep the two-child limit on benefits, which denies extra support for families with more than two children and pushes many deeper into poverty.

Claire expressed her concerns about no longer receiving cost of living payments and the reduced eligibility for the Warm Home Discount, making it harder for her to heat her home amid rising costs.

The budget fails to adequately address the financial strain on the UK's most vulnerable. Small increases, targeting the working poor with threats of prosecution and debt recovery measures, don't meet the real needs of those struggling, especially when many families rely on food banks or multiple jobs just to get by.

Claire remarked, 'We will struggle even more than before.' She envisions a truly socialist society prioritising adequate material support and holistic health care for everyone.

Neither the Labour Party nor the Tories can solve these issues. The current government may offer minor increases, but they remain trapped in a system that prioritises market whims over people's needs. 'The market giveth, and the market taketh away.'

Names have been changed to avoid potential targeting or sanctions.

A.T.

Credit: Kirsty O'Connor



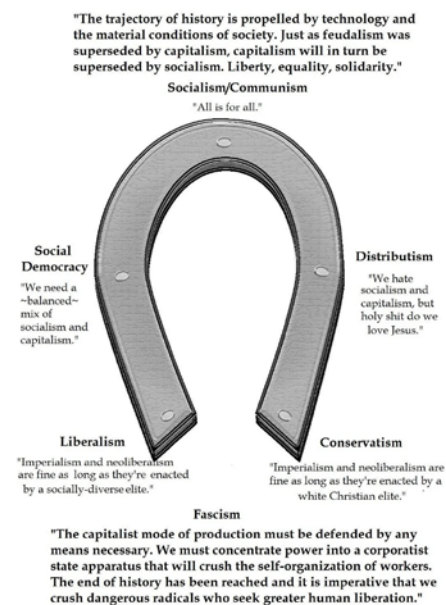
Fascism: what does it mean?

THE OXFORD University Press blog spot has a place on its website where writers are invited to contribute opinion pieces on topics in which they are considered to have expertise. One such recent piece, 'The horseshoe theory in practice: how Russia and China became fascist states', by Professor Michael Cort of Boston University, US, argued that the fascism of Germany and Italy in World War 2 has been replicated since then by two other societies that called themselves communist and so saw themselves at the other end of the spectrum from fascism – Russia and China (tinyurl.com/2uvyvcn9).

The arguments presented are that those governing these countries used 'massive and brutal force to overhaul the societies they controlled', set up highly authoritarian states headed by a dictator, encouraged 'a belligerent racial nationalism', and controlled 'a capitalistic economy subject to state control known as state capitalism'. The points made here are actually similar to those to be found in a recent *Socialist Standard* review of a book by the historian John Foot entitled *Blood and Fire, The Rise and Fall of Italian Fascism*. In that review, Russia and China are described as 'the closest things that exist to the kind of system excavated and characterised so expertly by John Foot in his exploration of Italian fascism' (tinyurl.com/34b767n7).

Horseshoe theory

In order to try and account for the similarity between fascism and what Professor Cort variously describes as 'socialism', 'communism' or 'Marxism', he calls upon the so-called 'horseshoe theory', which 'postulates that political



similarities and differences should be viewed not as points on a straight line but rather as places on a horseshoe'. He explains that, in the common 'linear political model', fascism and communism (or right and left) are commonly placed at opposite ends of the spectrum, therefore appearing radically different, whereas, if political systems are seen as a horseshoe and communism and fascism are at its left and right ends respectively and curving towards each other, they can be seen to be extremely close ('a narrow horseshoe space') to each other rather than radically far apart. So, closely facing each other as they do, it is suggested as no surprise that they are not far apart at all in substance.

What socialism is

But is the 'horseshoe theory' necessary to explain the similarity which this blog writer correctly notes? Only, we would argue, if you accept his description of the kind of societies existing in Russia and China as socialism (or communism). If we look at the reality of Marx's own concept of socialism or communism (which Professor Kort seems not to have done), we quickly see that it bears no relation to what happened in Russia under Lenin, Stalin and others, or to China under Mao, Deng Xiaoping and now Xi Jinping. It needs to be understood that, in the writings and ideas of Marx, socialism and communism were terms used synonymously to mean a marketless, moneyless society of voluntary work and free access to all goods and services based on the principle: from each according to ability, to each according to need. Since Marx's day, the terms socialism and communism have undergone much distortion and misrepresentation, a process which began largely in the early part of the last century with the Bolshevik revolution in Russia and then later in China under Mao. Both terms became equated with state ownership of all productive forces

and services and repressive dictatorial state control, these arrangements being called 'socialism' as the supposed prelude to an alleged later stage, 'communism' – a distinction never made by Marx. Following this, any kind of regime leaning towards the same kind of totalitarian set-up was readily labelled socialist or communist, and since Marx was assumed to have planned all this in theory (he didn't), it was also called Marxist.

Myth and reality

This is the myth unfortunately espoused by Professor Cort. But he manages to entangle things even more. He tries to argue that what caused China in particular to become – and still to be – a fascist state (as in the title of his piece) was that it had been, wait for it, 'communist'. Yet it is far from clear what he means by this, since at the same time he describes China as 'a tightly controlled state capitalist economy'. He also states that the Chinese Communist Party has 'abandoned socialism', yet that it still practises a form of 'Chinese Marxism'. The mind reels here, and even more so when, in a triumphant flourish, the writer concludes that 'to communism's (or Marxist socialism's) horrific record of economic failure, totalitarian tyranny, and death on a genocidal scale must now be added another grim legacy: fascism'. And this even though none of the negative, 'fascist' features he quite accurately attributes to the regimes that have ruled Russia and China has anything whatever to do with communism, socialism or Marxism.

Clearly, despite Professor Kort's authorship of a number of books about Russia, China, the cold war and similar subjects which the OUP blog informs us of, here at least he fails to demonstrate a clear and comprehensible view of certain key concepts necessary to understanding the history and politics of recent times.

HKM

Brewing up a storm?

Credit: Anadolu / Contributor / Anadolu via Getty Images



AFTER 29 October of this year many more people, (particularly in Spain) will, one suspects, have become a lot more familiar with the acronym DANA. It stands for *Depresión Aislada en Niveles Altos* (Isolated Depression at High Altitudes).

A DANA is a rather unique meteorological phenomenon, often experienced at this time of the year on the Iberian peninsula. It begins with a large slow-moving mass of circulating cold air, breaking off from the jet stream and settling over the peninsula at an altitude of about 9,000 metres. What then happens is that warm air sucking in moisture from the Mediterranean is forced upwards by mountain ranges and collides with the cold air above, precipitating a torrential downpour mainly along the Mediterranean coastline.

Temperatures are a critical factor. According to the World Meteorological Organization website: 'For each 1°C of warming, saturated air contains 7 percent more water vapour on average. Every additional fraction of warming therefore increases the atmospheric moisture content which in turn increases the risk of extreme precipitation events' (31 October).

Friederike Otto of the World Weather Attribution organisation argues that climate change has made extreme rainfall 12 percent more intense and twice as likely (*Guardian*, 4 November). This is something we had better get more used to, she suggests. We need to build more resilience to deal with events like 29 Oct – better infrastructure, more effective early warning systems and so on.

But, of course, in capitalism this boils

down to spending money on something that doesn't yield a financial return; predictably, it will meet some resistance. What seems like just plain commonsense has to constantly do battle against financial priorities and short-term thinking just to reach some sort of compromise.

Aggravating factors

In any event, it would seem that people in those parts of Spain affected by the storm of 29 October had not really been prepared for what happened. Of course, it was expected that there would be heavy rainfall since this is what normally happens around this time of the year in this part of the world. What was not expected was the sheer intensity. AEMET, the national weather forecasting service had, as early as 25 October, issued a warning but this had been largely ignored and apparently, even ridiculed by climate change denialists as 'alarmism' ('October 2024 Spain floods', Wikipedia).

It's not just atmospheric temperature that matters, so too does sea temperature since this affects the take-up of moisture into the atmosphere. Since the 1980s, the Mediterranean has warmed up by about 1.5 degrees. Water, of course, retains heat longer than land so this has implications not only for the intensity of precipitation but, also, the timing of DANA events (in the past, they were more common in September or early October).

As one commentator explained, it takes just a tiny increase in the sea's temperature to make a big difference: 'The DANA encountered water temperatures

around 72 degrees Fahrenheit (22 degrees Celsius) off the coast of Valencia, while the usual temperature for this time of year is around 70 F (21 C). That difference may seem small, but it is enough to supply the storm system with extra energy' (tinyurl.com/mryeymre).

The storm that followed caused a truly unprecedented amount of damage – most particularly to communities in the autonomous region of Valencia but also in areas as far afield as Andalucia and Castilla-La Mancha. Some communities received a year's worth of rain in the course of a few hours. The impact of this enormous volume of water in such a short space of time was made worse because of the recent drought, making the soil hard and unable to absorb the water rapidly enough.

Other aggravating factors included vegetation loss, inappropriate farming techniques and rampant urbanisation along the Mediterranean coastline, covering the land with impermeable surfaces. Speculative building projects have resulted in housing units being constructed ridiculously close to old water courses prone to periodic flooding.

As of early November, we still do not know the full extent of the damage, but the tragedy has already been dubbed Europe's worst flood-related disaster since 1967. The death toll is currently 217 and rising. There are still many more people unaccounted for and reported missing.

Rescue teams have been searching for bodies in underground car parks such as the Bonaire shopping mall near Valencia airport, as well as river mouths where

currents may have deposited bodies. Additionally, at the time of writing, there are still many flooded underpasses and basements that have yet to be inspected, not to mention remote rural locations.

It is not just the lives lost and damaged that define this tragedy. The physical destruction has been catastrophic: houses washed away or structurally weakened, countless roads blocked or partially destroyed, bridges broken up and swept away like mere matchstick structures.

Video clips have revealed the fearsome sight of enormous volumes of fast-flowing water gouging out the sides of once bone-dry *barrancos* or carrying countless cars down narrow streets, along with the flotsam, to some final resting place where scores of them can be found piled up like metal corpses in what are perhaps some of the most hauntingly emblematic images of this whole dreadful event.

Beyond the urban areas, thousands of hectares of crops have been seriously affected. In Almeria's greenhouse belt that supplies a significant fraction of the UK's fresh vegetables, initial estimates suggested at least 4,500 hectares of greenhousing have been seriously damaged by hailstones—the plastic shredded beyond hope of repair.

Pent-up anger

Very understandably, all this has aroused a great deal of anger among local people. In quite extraordinary scenes, the Spanish monarchs, along with the prime minister, Pedro Sanchez, were pelted with insults and lumps of the ubiquitous mud that cakes the streets of the towns they visited. Accused of being 'assassins', they prudently decided to cut short their scheduled tour of the area.

Predictably, political opportunists have waded into the fray with far-right elements, like supporters of Vox, protesting against the Sanchez government for its inexplicable tardiness in sending in the army to help. For their part, leftwing groups like Podemos, have called for the resignation of the Valencian president, Carlos Mazón of the conservative People's Party, not least because of his decision last year to scrap the Valencia Emergency Unit (UVE) as a 'superfluous expense'. The UVE was set up to respond to emergencies precisely like the current one, but such is the stupidity of short-term thinking that it is only with hindsight that we can now appreciate its potential value.

Much criticism levelled at the authorities has focused on the question of why people were not alerted sooner to give them more time to reach high ground and safety. According to an Al Jazeera report (3 November): 'When authorities sent

alerts to mobile phones warning of the seriousness of the flooding and asking people to stay at home, many were already on the road, working or covered in water in low-lying areas or underground garages, which became death traps'.

AEMET, as mentioned, knew of the approaching storm and issued a yellow warning a few days before it broke. On 29 October, it converted this into a red warning: 'AEMET issued a red alert level warning very early on Tuesday, the day of the Dana, but life pretty much went on as normal until hours later when the torrential rains began to fall, and the rivers began to overflow in inland Valencia' (4 November, Sur in English).

As that day dragged on and conditions deteriorated Mazón held a press conference at about 13.00 claiming that 'the storm would dissipate by 18:00' (Wikipedia). Of course it did no such thing and matters steadily worsened. Only by 20:11 did the *Generalitat Valenciana* issue a general SMS alert to the public to stay indoors while around midnight on 30 October, 'Mazón's social media team deleted a tweet claiming the storm would dissipate'. Astonishingly, Mazón also apparently rejected offers of help from firefighters in Catalonia, Navarre and Bilbao.

It was not just the regional government that was at fault. Many businesses in the area adamantly insisted that their employees turn up for work that day and in the evening, despite the obviously deteriorating circumstances, thereby putting the latter's lives at risk. That speaks volumes.

Political bickering

Of course, it is all too easy to get embroiled in the blame game when it comes to 'natural tragedies' when we should really be focusing on the wider picture. Strangely, though, weather forecasters are often the first to cop the blame. One recalls the famous gaffe by the BBC weather forecaster, Michael Fish, in 1987 on the eve of the Great Storm reassuring his viewers that there was no hurricane on the horizon, (though as an afterthought he suggested it might become 'quite windy'). One truly feels for poor Mr Fish and the backlash he endured but predicting the weather has never been an exact science.

Blaming the weather forecaster is precisely what seems to have happened on this occasion as well – except that AEMET actually got its forecast spot on. That did not stop Alberto Feijoo, leader of the Popular Party, springing to the defence of his comrade Carlos Mazón and, in desperate need of a scapegoat, claiming that AEMET had not forewarned the public sufficiently

promptly (31 October, elDiario.es).

Undoubtedly, the descent into political bickering and backbiting has hampered efforts to deal with the situation. It has also provoked a huge amount of public anger at the 'political class' – not just over the delay in warning people but also because of the delay in responding with practical help.

A complicating factor is that Spain has a relatively decentralised system of regional government. There are protocols to be followed as to when central government can become directly involved in the affairs of regional governments and Mazón seemingly dragged his feet when it came to formally raising the official crisis level which would have automatically triggered central government involvement. Of course, when the latter did get involved it was already too late, in the view of many.

In any event this all set the scene for what has been the one truly positive and outstanding development to emerge from this whole sorry saga – the awe-inspiring and magnificent efforts of ordinary working people to handle the situation themselves. Unwilling to wait any longer for the authorities to take action they themselves set about the monumental task of rescuing others, locating bodies and cleaning up. Even those who had lost everything.

Wave of solidarity

The mobilised power of mutual aid is indeed a wonderful and inspirational sight to behold. There are videos circulating on the internet of truly enormous columns of volunteers – thousands upon thousands of people – buckets and mops in hand, trudging on foot from one part of Valencia to another (travel by car being impossible and, at the time of writing, forbidden by the authorities).

This spontaneous voluntary effort originated in social media – for example among groups of young Telegram users – as a bottom-up initiative. Predictably, this has not stopped the authorities from muscling in on the act

'From now on, all the organisation is in the hands of the *Generalitat*. A "wave of solidarity" that needs "coordination", said Mazón in an institutional message. "We are doing this to better organise, transport and segment the aid of those who are lending their solidarity"' (2 November, Sur in English).

That smacks of the typical politician trying to save his bacon while claiming the kudos for what others have done. Nevertheless it won't detract from what the latter have shown themselves amply capable of achieving as working people – not ordinary but extraordinary.

ROBIN COX

How we live and how we might live (part 4)

IN HIS 1884 talk, 'How we Live And How we Might Live', William Morris set out to describe what socialism can offer to working people that capitalism can't. He began by inviting his audience to imagine a world without the miseries of poverty and war, curses that class societies like capitalism inflict upon us. In earlier articles in this series we explored how, in the modern world, the source of those ills lies in the deep structure of capitalism itself. This month we will explore those causes a little further and look at some of their consequences.

At the heart of modern capitalist societies lies a property system of universal competition based on the employer/employee relationship. This is a relatively recent development. Earlier ways of making a living by common access to the land or through small-scale craft work, for example, were largely extinguished as capitalism advanced and came to dominate Western Europe and America, and then later, the world. Today, everyone born into a capitalist society is forced to rely on the market to obtain what they need. According to their circumstances, they are forced into the role of an employer or an employee. If they are members of a cooperative or the owners of a small business, they must take on both roles, and manage the conflict between them.

Maximising profits

The aim of any capitalist business is to make a profit. It uses money capital to purchase materials, part-finished goods, machinery, office equipment, and other physical means of production. Crucially also, it buys human labour-power. It sets this and machinery to work on its purchased materials in order to produce goods for sale on the market. If the business has judged the market correctly, it will receive back from the sale of its products a sum of money equal to the capital sum originally advanced plus an additional amount — its profit — derived from workers' labour. A portion of this money it will put into a fund for reinvestment in future production. Another portion will be used to pay taxes, rent and overhead costs like insurance. A third portion will be taken as revenue by the owners of the business or allocated as interest to shareholders.

If a business wants to stay in the market it must continuously receive back more money than it initially advanced. This is not just an aim but a necessity imposed by capitalism's competitive property system. This additional sum, the business's profit, is



what allows it to grow. Growth, like profit, is not a choice, but a necessity enforced by the system. Let's say our business owner has a very simple, inexpensive lifestyle (just for the sake of argument. Bear with us!). Could they not choose to keep their business small and make a minimal profit? For some small businesses who have found a niche market, that might be possible, at least for a while, but capitalism is a competitive society. Businesses compete for the money in your pocket. They know that if they do not grow by introducing labour-saving machinery, for example, or by taking advantage of economies of scale, then their competitors will, and they will be in danger of being priced out of the market. Competition drives growth in a capitalist economy.

To ensure that businesses stay competitive in the market, they must not only grow, but they must also maximise their profits. If at any time our frugal business-owner needs to replace less efficient or worn-out equipment, their low profit levels could well be a liability. If they need to borrow for this same purpose or simply to bridge the gap between investment and return, they may find themselves in difficulty. Lenders and investors aim, like other capitalists, to maximise their revenue, and will not be attracted to invest in businesses which cannot pay a going rate of interest. Thames Water, in the UK, is currently in just such a quandary. It is in dire need of inward investment, yet its inability to generate sufficient profit in the future has led its potential investors to declare it 'uninvestable'.

To maximise income, businesses need to minimise their costs. In particular,

they need to minimise their labour costs by keeping down their workers' wages. Capitalist competition tends to result in businesses each making the same average rate of profit with respect to their invested capitals. By lacking direct competition, however, near-monopolies and cartels can often raise their individual rate of profit above the average. Exceptionally innovative businesses like those in the high-tech sector can often do the same, at least temporarily. Raised profits in these industries give their highly trained and creative workers scope for negotiating higher wages, especially, as is often the case, if their skills are in short supply on the labour market.

Below average

The bigger the front, however, the bigger the back. While some businesses can raise their profits above the average, others must operate below it. These need to keep wages down more firmly. Businesses of this sort often rely on a lot of partially skilled labour, which is often more plentiful and cheaper to buy in the market place. To get the maximum productivity out of their workers for minimum cost, their work regimes are often pressured, tedious and exhausting, leaving employees dispirited and lacking in self-esteem. Businesses of this kind tend to rely on a heavy disciplinary management style. They can demand long, irregular or unsocial hours of work. And if the law of the country permits, they tend to provide low levels of sick and maternity leave, and scant holiday pay. They often provide workers with little training or career development, giving them fewer chances to better their situation. When the market is in

one of its cyclical declines and profits fall, their workers, being easily replaceable, are quickly laid off and find themselves surviving on minimal state benefits or, in the worst case, unable to pay rent and becoming homeless. And so the downward spiral continues.

Workers living on the poverty line and with few prospects sometimes gravitate towards the informal 'black' economy. This consists of businesses often operating in a highly competitive market that are fighting to minimise costs. Under these conditions, operating outside the law becomes a risk worth taking. For workers this has some advantages. If they get paid 'under the table' they can avoid deductions for tax and national insurance. The downside is that such companies tend to pay low wages, offer no training or possibility of advancement, and provide no arrangements for holiday or sick pay or other statutory benefits.

Another possibility which has always been an option for those with low skills and poor prospects is the criminal economy. For men, today, this generally means theft or burglary, or selling drugs. Most thieves are young men with few saleable skills. Despite the glamorous image perpetuated by heist films, a life of crime for most has few real rewards and the chances of getting caught are high. Selling drugs on the street is often gang-related and dangerous. And for the average dealer it nets little income. For women, entering the criminal economy generally means sex work or shoplifting where the prospects are even worse. Voluntary sex work is inherently dangerous. It is often illegal and dominated by pimps who skim off significant portions of a woman's earnings. Shoplifting is stressful, provides low levels of income and again carries a high chance of arrest.

Race to the bottom

Poverty is not an unfortunate accident. It is a built-in feature of capitalism's competitive property system and its employer/employee relationship. Businesses maximise profits by holding down wages, but they will take whatever means they can find to minimise costs. They will use cheap materials in their products like non-biodegradable plastics, or they will externalise costs by pumping waste into rivers and into the atmosphere. And just as the need to minimise costs drives pollution, so the competitive pressure towards growth fuels climate change. Damage to the human and natural environment is also a built-in feature of the capitalist system.

In 2005, Gordon Brown, then UK Chancellor of the Exchequer,

commissioned Nicholas Stern to conduct research and report back on how moving to a low-carbon economy in the UK might be managed. *The Stern Review*, when it was finally delivered in October of the following year, was a vast, 700-page monster of a document. It has since spawned a significant academic industry. Today, however, its arguments seem ridiculously optimistic. It concluded that if states were to cooperate, the drivers of climate change could be economically managed, and CO2 levels kept below a threshold that at that time was thought to be sustainable. Skimming through its summary today, what stands out is the political naiveté on which it rested, its entire weight pirouetting on one tiny, innocent-sounding word: 'if' – 'If states collaborate...'

Capitalism is not a collaborative system, nor is it designed to solve common problems. It is a system of ruthless competition. In the years before and since *The Stern Review*, it has demonstrated over and over again just how impossible it is for capitalist states to achieve the level of international cooperation Stern hoped for. Every year since 1995 thousands of scientists, politicians, and 'stakeholders' have sat closeted together in the UN's COP meetings, thrashing out the issues. The effective outcome of all this activity has been negligible. Beyond a legally binding commitment of each participating country to implement its own greenhouse gas reduction measures, little has been achieved. Globally capitalism is still pumping CO2 into the atmosphere like there is no tomorrow. This year alone, CO2 levels have been soaring.

In 2013, George Osborne, Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Cameron government, summarised the problem in a carefully worded statement: 'I want

to provide for the country the cheapest energy possible, consistent with... playing our part in an international effort to tackle climate change. But I don't want us to be the only people out there in front of the rest of the world'. And there we have it. Cheap energy is the key to keeping businesses competitive in the global marketplace. In a world of international competition, no country can afford to commit to using more expensive forms of energy unless all do. Finding anything but the loosest and most ineffective agreements on this issue has proven impossible. At the opening of the 29th meeting of COP last month in oil-rich Baku, Azerbaijan, Simon Stiell, the Climate Change Executive Secretary for the UN, made yet another plea for international cooperation to stem the rise in global temperatures. It is a plea that over thirty years has yet to generate meaningful results.

And so, here we are. War, poverty, pollution and climate change are just a few of the features damaging human life and disfiguring our world, all of them rooted in capitalism's wage-labour/capital relationship which sits like a supermassive black hole at our economy's galactic core. The only real and permanent solution to capitalism's woes lies in its elimination. Yet, what kind of a society would that produce? In his talk 140 years ago last month, William Morris considered what kind of a world might result from eliminating capitalism's class society. Yet we can ask, what would such a world look like in its own terms, and what might we be able to say about it? Is it feasible? How would it operate? These are the questions we will turn to next month in the *Socialist Standard*.

HUD



Marx was right about workers and wages

IN AN article for *Mises Wire* on 14 September a certain Allen Gindler sets out his view as to ‘Why Marx Was Wrong about Workers and Wages’ (tinyurl.com/477xrf5s).

We are told that ‘the Marxist approach to labor, which treats it as a commodity to be controlled by the state, is fundamentally flawed and dangerous to human liberty’. But Marx never advocated that, in a socialist society, ‘labour’ should be a commodity controlled by the state. In fact, he thought that in socialism ‘labour power’ should cease to be a commodity — something bought and sold on a market — and endorsed the slogan ‘Abolition of the Wages System’. The very fact that the wages system features in ‘ostensibly Marxist societies’ such as ‘the Soviet Union, China under Mao, and Cuba’ shows that they were not the sort of society that Marx envisaged replacing capitalism. They would more accurately be described as forms of ‘state-run capitalism’, but certainly not socialism.

‘By labour power or capacity for labour,’ wrote Marx, ‘is to be understood the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he exercises whenever he produces a use-value of any description’ (*Capital*, chapter 6).

This is a human capacity which exists in all forms of human society — humans work, and must work, to produce the useful things they need to survive. It is part of the human condition.

Labour power is not the same as ‘labour’ which is the product resulting from the exercise of human labour power: ‘When we speak of capacity for labour, we do not speak of labour, any more than when we speak of capacity for digestion, we speak of digestion’ (chapter 6).

‘What economists therefore call value of labour, is in fact the value of labour-power, as it exists in the personality of the labourer, which is as different from its function, labour, as a machine is from the work it performs’ (chapter 19).

Under capitalism labour power is bought and sold and so is treated as a commodity, even if a peculiar one. Gindler cites Karl Polanyi in *The Great Transformation* as arguing that labour power is a ‘fictitious commodity’ in the sense that ‘it is not

produced for sale but is an inherent aspect of human life’. He misses Polanyi’s point which is not that it is a mistake to call labour power a commodity but that he was criticising such ‘an inherent aspect of human life’ being treated as a commodity, as something bought and sold on a market. Marx himself made the same point.

Similarly, Marx would not have disagreed with Mises himself that ‘labor cannot be treated as a commodity in the same way as goods and services because it is intrinsically linked to human choice and action.’ Textually, Marx wrote that ‘in contradistinction therefore to the case of other commodities, there enters into the determination of the value of labour-power a historical and moral element’. In fact, the whole Marxian concept of the economic class struggle is based on the purveyors of labour power being humans who choose and act and struggle to get the highest price for what they are selling and to be treated with some degree of dignity.

This distinction between ‘labour power’ and ‘labour’ is fundamental to Marx’s theory of wages and surplus value, but Gindler seems to be completely unaware of this, using the two words interchangeably as if they meant the same. He writes: ‘[I]f labor power is a commodity, it is a very strange one indeed. According to Marx, this commodity is always sold below its value. In other words, workers are constantly selling their ability to work for less than it is worth, generating surplus value for the capitalist. But this raises a fundamental question: if labor is a commodity, why is it the only commodity that is consistently sold below its cost?’

In his writings on the economics of capitalism in the 1840s before *Capital* was published in 1867, Marx did accept the general view then prevailing amongst opponents of capitalism that workers were exploited through being forced to sell their ‘labour’ below its proper price. But further research and thought in the 1850s led him to make a distinction between labour power and its product (labour), and this is the view he puts in *Capital*. What workers sell is their labour power and, normally, at its value reflecting what it cost to create (what workers have to buy to keep themselves in working order and raise future workers to replace them in due course).

Marx’s theory of worker exploitation is based precisely on workers selling their labour power at its value. Surplus value arises as the difference between the value of labour power and the value of what workers produce. Actually, Gindler got it right in his opening paragraph when he wrote that ‘Marx argues that, under capitalism, workers are forced to sell their labor power to capitalists, who exploit them by paying wages that are less than the full value their labor produces’.

Gindler is not alone in mistakenly thinking that what workers sell for wages is their labour. It was made by all economists before (and in fact after) Marx. He tries to prove his point by introducing a self-employed plumber: ‘A plumber who owns their own tools and operates independently does not sell their labor power to a capitalist; instead they provide a service directly to customers and charge a fee for their work.’

According to him, in Marxist theory ‘this self-employed plumber would somehow be selling their labor power below its value’. But he had just said that the plumber does not sell his labour power! In fact, what self-employed plumbers sell is a commodity (their plumbing work) in which their labour is embodied and at a price which covers its cost of production plus the extra value their labour added. They get the full value of what they are selling.

Gindler apparently thinks that employed workers are in the same sort of position as a self-employed worker; that employed workers are each selling the product of their labour to their employer and getting the full price for it. Leaving aside the question of where, then, would the employer’s profits come from, Gindler needs to ask himself why self-employed plumbers sell their product at a higher price than the price that employed plumbers get from their employer for supposedly selling the same product. The embarrassing answer for him is that self-employed plumbers are selling the product of their labour while employed plumbers are selling their labour power with the product of their labour appropriated by their employer.

ADAM BUICK

Socialist Standard December 2024

Was capitalism historically inevitable?

AS WITH any 'origin' story it is notoriously difficult to know where to begin. We might start with the demise of the dinosaurs due to the 'lucky' asteroid that struck the Earth some 66 million years ago allowing mammals to flourish in their stead; or we might start with the transition of hunter gatherer communities into private property slave city states; or we might avoid all of these hypotheses and go straight to the Battle of Plataea in Greece in 479 BC.

Why? Because arguably the global capitalism we see today is mainly of a European origin and, in particular, many of its curses and blessings can be assigned to the little island of Britain. We will try to seek out all of the whys and wherefores of this theory and ask if the described economic developments could or would have happened anywhere else on the planet. Inevitability is the totem of any theory of determinism but can we ever be certain that any area of human activity could aspire to this fatalistic description? So let's return to the Greece of 479 BC where the story begins and see if it will prove to be a robust theory or even elevate it to a tale of historical inevitability.

The Battle of Plataea saw the Persian attempt to conquer Greece finally come to an end. The outcome of any battle can be unpredictable both in terms of who will win and the long-term implications of an outright victory but on this occasion we see that the colonisation of Greece and all of the cultural implications that this implied did not occur. The subsequent intellectual and political flowering of Classical Athens could not have taken place under Persian hegemony. Thus, the adoption of Greek culture by Imperial Rome would not have happened and its rediscovery during the Renaissance could not have occurred in Europe.

It might be argued that, like Vietnam and Afghanistan in our time, the Greek states could never have been completely defeated by the superpower of its time but it was not close to being inevitable that Greece would become the dominant cultural force in European history. And again if Rome had not finally defeated the Carthaginians at the Battle of Zama in 202 BC the conquest of Europe and the subsequent spread of the death cult of Christianity – albeit in constant tension

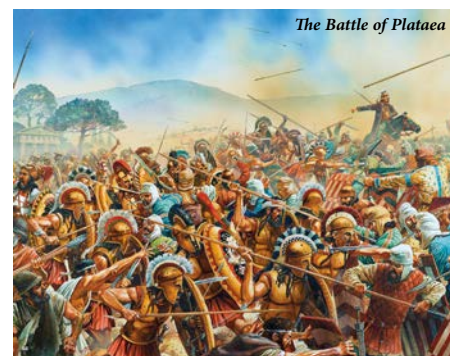
with the rationalism of the Classical inheritance – would not have evolved into the European Reformation where the protestant cause became the ideology of the revolutionary bourgeoisie.

In its Puritan incarnation in England this ideology would be the foundation of the revolutionary victory of the capitalist class and the release of finance to invest in inventions and their application during the industrial revolution. This was all made possible by the victory of the parliamentary (bourgeois) army at the Battle of Naseby in 1645. In ideological terms it would seem that too much was dependent on the outcome of battles and the adoption of a historically arbitrary religion to maintain that capitalism was inevitable. But if we look at the underlying material economic trajectory and the class struggle it created what do we find?

We can see that all of the ancient civilisations of note were based on a slave economy. The majority of these slaves were captives of war but as the major empires consolidated the wars became fewer and so the number of slaves decreased. This together with the obvious economic advantage of letting the slaves (now called serfs) have a small holding of land for their self-sufficiency (thus saving the lord their upkeep) made the transition to feudalism ubiquitous in Europe.

There had always been trade between cities and principalities (mercantile capitalism) and many of these merchants became rich and yearned for commensurate political power. Eventually this conflict became violent and these merchants (proto-capitalists) displaced the kings and lords in revolutions that enabled capital to invest in wage labour and amass their fortunes from the subsequent accumulation of surplus value.

The particular nature of the ideologies that were used to get the majority to fight and die for their cause seems secondary to the class struggle and productive innovations that provoked them. In this Marxian scenario the classical inheritance and the ideology of Christianity would not be of primary importance – the human capacity for technical innovation would initiate different modes of production which in turn would create antagonistic social groups (classes) which alone could drive progress and be



independent of the contemporary ideologies that were used to understand and justify this phenomenon. It would not be until the emergence of socialist thinking that these dialectical economic and social forces could be fully understood.

It is challenging trying to imagine alternative histories – Europe without the inspiration of classical Greece and Rome; the world without the combination of an early bourgeois revolution and a preponderance of surface coal to power the industrial might that allowed the small island of Britain to rule much of the globe; the world without the capricious act of Constantine the Great making the obscure cult of Christianity the official religion of the Roman empire etc.

Yet these phenomena were all dependent on the uncertainties of war and could have gone either way depending on various elements including blind luck. Europe's state religion might have been one of the forgotten cults of Carthage and the lingua franca of the world might be Phoenician-based instead of English. But the Marxian contention is that we would still have ended up with global capitalism even if it would have taken longer (the French had to wait a full 150 years after the English for their revolution and Germany didn't have one at all). Speaking of warfare, some soldiers came to believe that if a bullet had their name on it there was nothing to be done other than accept one's fate – let's hope that the world can enjoy many years of the equality and peace delivered by socialism before a meteorite crashes into Earth with our species' name written on it.

WEZ

Another reformist dreamer

IN A speech last year, Rachel Reeves name-checked Mariana Mazzucato who, she said, had long argued that ‘the state’s role is not simply to correct the failures and redress the negative externalities of free markets... Success has always rested upon a partnership between the market and the state’ (tinyurl.com/3m78s2mx).

Although Mazzucato is seen as a radical thinker she has nothing against capitalism as such. Nothing against the private ownership of productive resources. Nothing against production for sale on a market with a view to profit. What she is against is the present ‘dysfunctional form of capitalism’ characterised by ‘the excessive financialization of companies and remorseless pursuit of shareholder value’. As she quotes on her website (marianamazucatto.com) she is on ‘a mission to save capitalism from itself’. She wants to ‘change’ capitalism, as she put it in her 2020 book *Mission Economy: A Moonshot Guide to Changing Capitalism*, by ‘restructuring business so that private profits are reinvested back into the economy rather than being used for short-term financialized purposes’. In other words, she is a theorist of reformism. Hence her attraction for the Labour Party. Even under Corbyn, John McDonnell went around echoing her call for an ‘entrepreneurial state’.

Mazzucato’s reform to capitalism is for the state to play a pro-active role in the economy by setting an aim to be achieved — a social or economic problem to be solved — and then mobilising the help of private capitalist corporations to achieve it by ‘shaping’ markets for them. Hence the title of her book which argues that the US government’s 1962 mission to get a man on the Moon within ten years is the example to follow.

There are indeed occasions when capitalism’s spontaneous aim of profit maximisation is set aside. When a country is at war, the ‘mission’ becomes to win ‘whatever it costs’ and the state mobilises resources to achieve this. It is instructive that the only successful example of her ‘change’ to capitalism that she can bring forward had a military dimension. The United States government did not want to get a man on the Moon for scientific reasons but to gain superiority over Russia in rocketry.

Mazzucato herself notes this and asks why a state could not similarly mobilise resources to achieve some peaceful aim such as solving the housing problem or creating a good health and care service. The same question was put by reformists to those who in the 1950s and 60s argued that capitalism had been saved from supposed collapse by providing markets through becoming a ‘permanent arms economy’.

Why, the reformists asked, couldn’t capitalism become a ‘permanent welfare state economy’; why couldn’t the state provide extra markets by spending instead on social reforms?

The permanent arms economy theorists struggled to find a coherent answer. In the end, life itself settled the matter — excessive spending on arms turned out to undermine a capitalist state’s international competitiveness by increasing the tax burden on its capitalist enterprises and diverting profits that might otherwise have been invested in cost-cutting innovations. Which explained why in the 1960s Germany and Japan, which weren’t allowed to spend so much on arms, did better on world markets. Excessive arms spending wasn’t saving capitalism but was a burden on the states that practised this. The answer to the reformists was that excessive spending on the welfare state and other social reforms was not practicable because it, too, would be a burden on any capitalist state that tried, undermining its competitiveness.

The same applies to Mazzucato’s reformist project. If, outside of war, the state were to set a purpose for the capitalist economy other than profit maximisation and taxed capitalist corporations to pay for it, this would inhibit, not encourage, growth. In seeking to maximise profits capitalism is not being dysfunctional. It is being itself and can’t be changed to function in any other way.

Party News

Newport Radical Book Fair

LAST MONTH marked 185 years since the historic Chartist uprising in South Wales. It was celebrated by the Newport Rising Festival, a series of commemorative events in and around the city. One of these was the Newport Radical Book Festival held at the Corn Exchange and advertised as ‘a free entry book fair featuring radical publishers, campaign groups, and activists running stalls selling new and used books, posters, stickers, pamphlets, zines and merchandise, plus workshops and talks’.

The South Wales Branch of the Socialist Party had a stall there run by a group of branch members. Among publishers, groups and other organisations in the hall were Resistance Books, Eco-Socialists, Stand up to Racism, the Bristol Radical History Group and the Carmilla Distro Anarchist Queer Collective. In engaging with visitors and other stall holders, we found more than a little interest and sympathy among them when we put to them our view of how capitalism fails the vast majority of people and the need to replace it by a society of free access to all goods and services. Visitors

took away with them a significant amount of the literature we had brought with us, with *Socialism or Your Money Back*, our book of collected articles from the *Socialist Standard*, particularly popular. We were offering copies of this handsome volume left over from when it was published at the time of the Party’s 100th anniversary free of charge, but several visitors insisted on offering payment – £10 in one case, which we managed to bid down to £5, and £20 in another case with the ‘purchaser’ insisting on the ‘donation’.

This Saturday event was for us an alternative to the weekend street stall the branch normally runs in Cardiff city centre. But the difference here was palpable. At the street stall, we are the ones doing the approaching trying to get members of the public interested in our ideas and our wares and all too often meeting with apathy. At the Newport Radical Book Festival we found, quite differently and refreshingly, that a fair number of those attending were already broadly sympathetic to what we had to say and were prepared to enter into discussion and exchange ideas with us. So a day well spent.

Gwynn Thomas

We are saddened to have to report the death in October of longstanding member Gwynn Thomas at the age of 85. Gwynn was born into a Welsh-speaking small farming family on the island of Anglesey (Ynys Môn). After national service in the RAF and moving

to London to work in the civil service, he joined the old Paddington branch in 1964. In the course of his nearly sixty years membership Gwynn engaged in the whole range of socialist activity: selling the *Socialist Standard* outside tube stations, speaking at Hyde Park, indoor lecturer, writer, election candidate. He was a member of the Executive Committee and Party Treasurer for a number years and also on the Editorial Committee of the Standard for a time, as well as the Pamphlets Committee. Latterly he was the secretary of the South London branch. He was a diligent and conscientious man with a particular interest in exposing the horrors of war (and at one stage was engaged in research about political opposition to the world slaughters that occurred last century). Our condolences go to his family

Graham Taylor

We have just learned of the death of Graham Taylor in Denmark. He joined the Central Branch of the Party in 1988 as a teenager. Originally from Gillingham in Kent he later moved to Denmark where his mother hailed from. Besides being our contact there, he contributed the occasional article to the *Socialist Standard* as well as transcribing articles and pamphlets to go on the internet, an essential part of our current activity. A sad loss to the socialist movement at the comparatively early age of 52.

Far into the far right

Credit: Channel 4



DESPITE ITS promotional graphics promising a flashy spy thriller with steely black-clad secret agents, Channel 4's documentary *Undercover: Exposing The Far Right* was more sobering than spectacular. Cameras followed investigators from advocacy group Hope Not Hate as they went incognito among far-right activists to learn more about how they operate. As Hope Not Hate's Director of Research Joe Mulhall says, 'the far right often present one image to the world, and what they're saying when they think no-one is listening is different. We have to be in the room when they think no-one's listening'.

Two researchers who get 'in the room' are Harry Shukman and Patrik Hermansson. They travel from London to Tallinn, Warsaw and Athens, with Harry wearing a hidden camera and adopting the persona of 'Chris' to infiltrate a far-right network. This is composed of the richer, entrepreneurial type of activist, rather than the thuggish, St George's flag-wearing variety, but their attitudes are the same, as shown when secret filming reveals abhorrent racist views.

By attending meetings online and in person as 'Chris', Harry pieces together information about what he calls a 'very secretive company': the Human Diversity Foundation, whose CEO Emil Kirkegaard is described as a 'scientific racist'. One arm of the company arranges and funds research into 'race science', with articles published by its other arm, the Aporia website, established by ex-RE teacher Matt Archer. Aporia's essays defend conservative values, with an unnerving emphasis on discussing genetic differences between groups. The documentary goes on to explain that the Human Diversity Foundation is a replacement for the Pioneer Fund, a

financial backer of the far right. Being a charity, the Pioneer Fund had to disclose its funding sources, but as a private company, the HDF has no such requirement. 'Chris' is keen to find out the identity of a donor willing to invest \$1.3 million, who Kirkegaard says is 'between white nationalist and libertarian'. When 'Chris' asks if this person's views could attract criticism, Kirkegaard replies 'he's so well off that it doesn't really matter what they say', which was one of the more depressing lines in the programme. Harry and Patrik eventually learn that the donor is Andrew Conru, a millionaire who made money in the early years of the internet by setting up online dating sites. Captions at the end of the documentary say that Archer and Conru have now ended their involvement with the HDF.

A previous covert operation by Hope Not Hate to infiltrate the fascist group National Action helped prevent a murder attempt on Labour MP Rosie Cooper, and was later dramatised for ITV. The documentary features its work to investigate and expose other far-right players, such as Paul Golding and Tommy Robinson. Golding, leader of the Britain First party, is filmed by Harry's hidden camera saying he wants the country to deteriorate, as he sees it, so that this will motivate more people towards the far right. Tommy Robinson (formerly of the English Defence League) was found guilty of defaming a 15-year-old refugee from Syria, and went on to break a court order by repeating his claims in interviews and broadcasts. He was sent to prison for this in October 2024, with evidence for his trial contributed by Hope Not Hate.

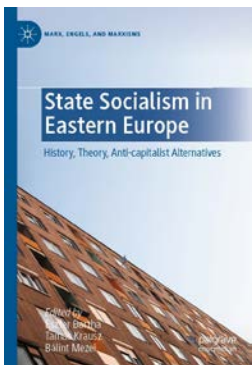
Fighting the far right comes with risks of threats and retaliation; its ideology attracts people attracted to violence. The

documentary itself was pulled at the last minute from premiering at the London Film Festival in case its screening led to reprisals. And while it was being recorded, Hope Not Hate's founder and CEO Nick Lowles heard that the police had arrested someone who was arranging to have him targeted. The programme shows the strength and perseverance of those such as Patrik and Harry in particular who have kept up a persona to go undercover amongst such hate-fuelled people, although they'll have to find other activities now their identities have been broadcast.

Contrasted with the bravery of the investigators is the confidence of the far right, no doubt boosted by the wealth available to organisations such as the Human Diversity Foundation. The documentary focuses on revealing Conru's identity, but presumably there are also other millionaires who feel that their privileged status is best defended by investing in 'race science'. The more money which goes into researching 'race science', the more it can gain traction in the market for ideas, regardless of the weakness of its arguments. The far-right activists featured in the documentary promote their ideology with a professional, business-like approach which suits their aims. The HDF aspires for its research to influence public policy and the views of the capitalist class, whereas the likes of Tommy Robinson and Paul Golding aim to attract support among the working class. This potentially makes the HDF and its associates more dangerous than the 'populist' far right, because of the power wielded by the elite. Even with a proportion of the capitalist class backing 'race science' – ie, race-based eugenics, how successfully they could translate this into furthering their own wealth would depend on the vagaries of the economic market and attracting broader support. Still, it's concerning that 'race science' is now more prominent as part of the far right's ideology than at any time since the 1930s. That far-right ideology, and not just 'race science', is more prominent now than any time since the 1930s. Hope Not Hate aims to combat this tendency by unearthing how its organisations are run and working with the police when they break the law. However many successful investigations they complete, the struggle is too wide for them to win, as it will continue as long as the societal conditions exist which breed far-right ideology.

MIKE FOSTER

Unsocialist



State Socialism in Eastern Europe: History, Theory, Anti-capitalist Alternatives.
 Edited by Eszter Bartha, Tamás Krausz and Bálint Mezei. Palgrave Macmillan, 2023. 356pp

The term ‘State Socialism’ in the title of this book is used to refer to the system that existed in the Soviet Union and the regimes of the Soviet bloc from the late 1940s until the whole edifice crumbled from 1989 onwards. Though it is clear that this system was not socialism as we would understand it but rather repressive state capitalism masquerading as socialism, this has not prevented many academics who study the history of that era from continuing to refer to it as socialism and indeed as ‘really existing socialism’. And this is precisely what we find in this collection of 14 essays, which focus predominantly on aspects of how those regimes, especially Hungary, were organised in the period when they were part of the Soviet bloc. The way the editors describe it is as an attempt ‘to address the long theoretical, conceptual and political debate on the interpretation of “actually existing socialism” in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe’.

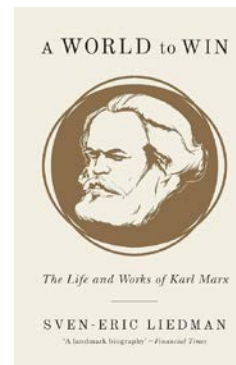
But while such debate may give academics something to occupy their minds with, in reality the single most important thing to know is that the regimes in question were not in any sense socialist but simply represented a different – and invariably more repressive – way of managing the buying and selling system known as capitalism. That system, wherever it exists or has existed, is one of money and wages, economic inequality, and a small class of employers ruling the roost over a large class of employees, even if this consideration seems far from the minds of most of those contributing to this volume. The chapter by Susan Zimmerman on work and gender politics in ‘State-Socialist Hungary’, for example, while clearly the product of comprehensive and painstaking research, confines itself to description and analysis of how those particular aspects of capitalism manifested themselves in post-war Hungary and in no way challenges the idea of whether ‘socialism’ can exist within the framework of an economic system of buying and selling and production for the market. In his essay on Hungary between

1963 and 1985 (sometimes referred to as the period of ‘goulash Communism’), Bálint Mezei discusses what he calls ‘Hungary’s third road experiment of socialism’. Another chapter, jointly written by the editors as an introduction to the anthology and entitled ‘From Socialism to Neo-Liberalism: Lessons from Eastern Europe and Hungary’, states the book’s intention ‘to draw a historical lesson from the state socialist experiment in Eastern Europe and Hungary, which can be instructive in the search for an alternative to the global neoliberal capitalism’. Yet this too, despite its title, shows few signs of appreciating that the main lesson to be learned from the topic under discussion is that the passage from one system to another in Eastern Europe with the fall of the Soviet bloc was in fact a passage from one kind of capitalism (state capitalism) to another (private capitalism) and that the only viable alternative to either cannot be some form of ‘socialist state’, since socialism is by definition a worldwide, stateless society as well as one without classes, markets and contractual relations.

Close to 40 years ago (and so before the collapse of the Soviet-backed regimes of Eastern Europe), a book entitled *State Capitalism: the Wages System Under New Management* was published by Palgrave Macmillan, the same publisher as for the volume currently under review (*State Capitalism.pdf* (libcom.org)). It stated the unerring truth that ‘private capitalism and state capitalism are equally suitable institutional arrangements for allowing capital to exploit wage-workers’, a truth vindicated by history since that time yet still not fully grasped by many academics. In addition, as an alternative to either form of capitalism, the book’s authors, Adam Buick and John Crump, also stated the need for a society that abolishes both the wages system and the production of goods and services for the market, replacing it with a system of voluntary cooperative work and production for use. The collection of essays currently under review also claims to ‘contribute to the discussion about anti-capitalist alternatives’, but its overwhelming focus is on the organisational variants of capitalism and, looking forward, with a nod to perhaps minor changes to the ‘neoliberal’ regimes that have now taken over that may allow a few more crumbs to fall from the table. A look back at Buick and Crump’s analysis would surely help the contributors to this volume to see the wood for the trees.

HKM

Not reliable



A World to Win. The Life and Works of Karl Marx. By Sven-Eric Liedman. Verso. 2018.

Liedman is a retired professor of the history of ideas at the University of Gothenburg. This 700-page intellectual biography of Marx was first published in Swedish in 2015. As a description of the development of Marx’s ideas, linked to contemporaneous economic and political events and his changing personal circumstances, it is interesting and informative enough. When, however, it comes to discussing Marx’s economic theory it is far from reliable.

Liedman has Marx as crude underconsumptionist who explained crises as resulting from the total market-price of what is produced inevitably exceeding, from time to time, total paying consumer demand, resulting in a glut which has to be cleared before production can resume, leading to the next glut. He also sometimes confuses ‘constant’ and ‘fixed’ capital and even ‘variable’ and ‘circulating’ capital.

As a historian of political philosophies Liedman is particularly interested in Marx’s theory of ‘the fetishism of commodities’ (his view that where there is widespread production of articles for sale — commodities — the producers come to be dominated by the movement of their own creation that commodities are) but a passing remark later shows that he hasn’t even understood that Marx envisaged the abolition of commodity-production:

‘Luxemburg can be said to have been correct on another point in relation to Lenin and his followers: in the future society Marx sketched out, there is a market for goods and not a completely regulated planned economy. But the market is equal, in contrast to the kind that characterised capitalist society’ (pp 426-7).

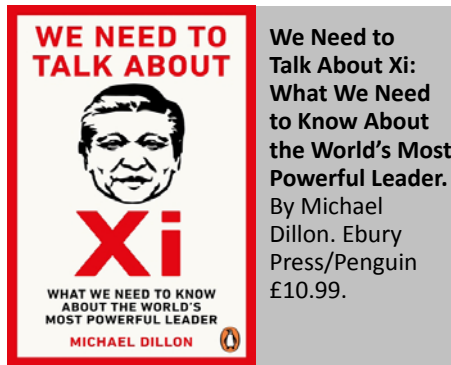
Marx as a ‘market socialist’! Incredible. In fact, the section of *Capital* on the fetishism of commodities appears before Marx introduces the concept of capital and capitalism; it assumes a market economy with no exploitation of the producers.

Luxemburg too envisaged future society as a ‘natural economy’ where there would be production directly for use and no longer for sale. He also has Rosa Luxemburg (p. 594) as a member

of the Reichstag in 1914 when women in Germany didn't even have the vote.

ALB

Dreams and Schemes



We Need to Talk About Xi: What We Need to Know About the World's Most Powerful Leader.
By Michael Dillon. Ebury Press/Penguin £10.99.

Xi Jinping is general secretary of the Chinese 'Communist' Party, president of China and chair of the country's Central Military Commission. This combination certainly makes him one of the most powerful people on the planet, and here Michael Dillon summarises his personal history and political policies, against the background of developments in China, especially since the death of Mao Zedong. Little is known of his private life, but who cares?

Born in 1953, Xi gradually worked his way up through CCP ranks, working in various provincial posts. In 2002 he became a member of the Central Committee, and in 2007 of the Politburo Standing Committee. He became general secretary of the party in 2012, and his five-year term was renewed in 2017 and again in 2022. The expected practice was for the general secretary to serve two such five-year terms before stepping down, but Xi has overturned this. He is apparently seen by others in ruling circles as a 'safe pair of hands', though he is also less collegial and more authoritarian.

Dillon says that Xi has reversed much of the modernisation of the Chinese economy begun under Deng Xiaoping, though without saying a great deal about this. And he has lost support among 'captains of industry', who see him as not sufficiently friendly to business. A few years ago he announced a clampdown on the billionaires with plans to 'regulate excessively high incomes' (NBC News, 5/9/21), though it is not clear that this has had any real effect.

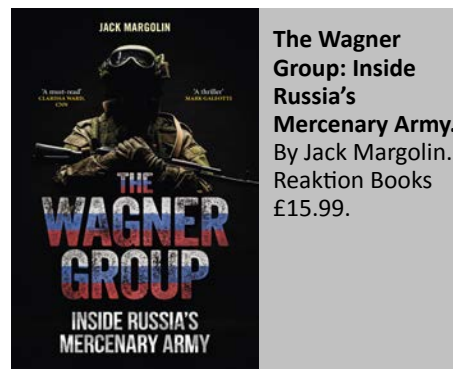
The authoritarian side has been made plain not just in the general attacks on dissidents but in events in Hong Kong and Xinjiang. In both cases, Xi has run things behind the scenes, making local leaders appear responsible. In Hong Kong, for instance, a man was recently jailed for fourteen months for wearing a T-shirt with a supposedly seditious slogan on it. Many Uyghurs in Xinjiang have been sent to 're-education camps' as they

are euphemistically called, in order to suppress demands for independence for the region. Finding information about developments there is difficult, but Dillon states that there has been much damage to social and religious networks, and also to the economy, with many workers being removed from their posts.

Allegedly Xi has less interest in international affairs, though the Belt and Road initiative has been an expensive and potentially influential policy. His extremely vague China Dream may see the country as a global power like the US, but clearly he is primarily interested in maintaining his own power and that of all those who rule China, whether private capitalists or part of the state and party bureaucracy.

PB

Paid to Kill



The Wagner Group: Inside Russia's Mercenary Army.
By Jack Margolin. Reaktion Books £15.99.

Mercenaries have existed through much of history, at least since Ancient Greek times. A well-known recent example was the US firm Blackwater, which has since undergone a number of name changes after some of its employees killed seventeen Iraqi civilians in 2007 (the killers were imprisoned, but later pardoned by Trump). The term 'private military contractor' is sometimes used as supposedly sounding less nasty. Here Jack Margolin recounts the history of the Wagner organisation; his work is diligently researched, though quite a lot remains unclear.

The boss of Wagner was Evgeniy Prigozhin, a thug who had spent nine years in prison for theft but later became a business-owner. After the collapse of the USSR, private military companies began to flourish, often doing the dirty work that state security services preferred to steer clear of. Wagner seems to have originated in eastern Ukraine in 2014, as pro-Russia separatists endeavoured to set up regimes not linked to Kyiv, and it may even have been created by the Russian state.

In 2015-6 Wagner soldiers fought in Syria, defending the Assad government on behalf of Russia but also making a profit from Syrian oil. Many front companies were put in place then and later, and an agreement was signed with

the Syrian regime that entitled Wagner to up to a quarter of the revenue from oil extracted at sites they had 'liberated'. Attention was then turned to Africa, fighting and making profits in Sudan and then the Central African Republic with its sizeable mineral resources. Wagner established a regional hub in Libya and in 2022 its fighters were responsible for a massacre at Moura in Mali, where at least five hundred people were killed and women and girls were raped. It is not possible to put a figure on Wagner's income from government payments (including the Russian state) and its profiting from resource exploitation.

Wagner probably became most notorious for its part in the Russian invasion of Ukraine from 2022, though it took a few weeks for it to play any role. It was allowed to recruit from prisons, promising amnesty to those who 'volunteered'. They had perhaps five thousand fighting in Ukraine, most of them convicts, which helped the Putin regime to avoid introducing conscription. Deserters were killed, often with a sledgehammer, which became a kind of symbol of Wagner.

But as the invasion wore on, Wagner and Prigozhin began to distrust Russia's military leadership, a feeling that was mutual. In June 2023 it was decreed that private military companies would have to sign a contract with the Ministry of Defence. This would put Wagner and others in a subordinate role, Prigozhin refused to accept it, and a mutiny or putsch took place. A convoy of Wagner vehicles and fighters occupied the city of Rostov, in the hope that Russian army soldiers would join them. A march towards Moscow started, but this was abandoned after an intervention from Aleksandr Lukashenko, president of Belarus (though it is not clear precisely what happened). Wagner forces were evicted from Russia and moved to Belarus. Then in August a plane carrying Prigozhin and other Wagner leaders crashed north of Moscow, killing all those on board. According to Margolin, it is pretty likely, though not absolutely certain, that it was Putin who ordered Prigozhin's assassination, just as other rivals and critical journalists have been killed.

Margolin suggests that embattled governments may well continue to make use of private military forces, as will rebels too, with the state not having an absolute monopoly on violence. But whoever does the fighting, it will be in the interest of rulers or would-be rulers of one kind and another, and it will be ordinary people who will suffer and be killed.

PB

Whatever happened to 'full employment'?

IN THE 'Queen's Speech' on 29th October Mr. Wilson included a pledge about unemployment. 'My government', it read, 'in view of the gravity of the economic situation, will as its most urgent task seek the fulfilment of the social contract as an essential element in its strategy for curbing inflation, reducing the balance of payments deficit, encouraging industrial investment, maintaining employment, particularly in the older industrial areas, and promoting economic and social justice.'

Maybe Labour Party supporters are reassured by this mumbo-jumbo, but they ought to examine the small print very carefully. If they do they will notice how the form of the pledge about dealing with unemployment has been discreetly watered down. Now it is part of a 'strategy', along with other aims, all of them dependent on the nebulous 'social contract', and the word 'full' has been dropped. And all of it stems from the grave economic situation — their euphemistic way of describing a normal crisis of capitalism, aggravated by the inflation that Tory and Labour governments alike have brought about and are still promoting.

When the first post-war Labour government came into office in 1945, buoyed up with the fatuous belief that they had mastered

capitalism and abolished crises for ever, their committal to deal with unemployment was in very different words. Then it was 'Jobs for All' and 'Full Employment'. In the early post-war years (due among other things to making good wartime destruction) unemployment was exceptionally low. In several years average unemployment then was under 300,000, about 1.2 per cent., and of course the Labour and Tory governments claimed credit for it.

Since the mid-fifties unemployment has been moving to higher levels, but as late as 1966 in the Wilson Labour Government John Diamond MP, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, boasted that they had got unemployment down from 1.6 per cent, to 1.2 per cent, and 'that is how we propose to continue doing it' (Hansard, 6th March 1966). Capitalism, however, was not listening to Mr. Diamond and by the time they went out of office in June 1970 unemployment had gone up by about a quarter of a million to 579,000 (2.5 per cent.). In October 1974 it was 643,000 (2.8 per cent.), and with unemployment rising in most parts of the world the Government's advisers are fearful that next year it may pass the million mark, as it did in 1972.

(Socialist Standard, December 1974)

Action Replay

Games and the Olympics

IN A 2013 Action Replay we raised the question of whether chess counted as a sport. We felt that maybe it did, as the top players were required to take drug tests. But of course chess does not involve any physical exercise, which is usually counted as an essential aspect of sport.

Similar questions have arisen more recently, in connection with this year's Olympics, as to whether certain other activities are to be considered sports. This applies to rhythmic gymnastics, skateboarding and breakdancing, for instance, which are certainly physical but somehow do not resemble traditional sports. As another example, people now often see martial arts as a sport rather than a form of combat.

And the same may apply to gaming or esports (electronic sports), competitions involving video games, where people compete either individually or in teams. There is little physical effort, other than pressing buttons and so on, but they can be psychologically quite demanding. They can be played for fun, but there are also professional players, and the whole enterprise is surprisingly big, with plenty of people watching others play. Nearly a hundred million watched the 2018 final of the world championship for one video game, League of Legends, for instance.

Recently the International Olympic Committee announced that the inaugural Olympic Esports Games will be held next

year in Saudi Arabia. The country has over 23 million gamers, with a hundred full-time professional esports players, and its Minister for Sport described it as 'a global hub for professional esports'. Women there are apparently participating more and more in esports, and indeed in sport more generally. Such is the official picture, anyway, no doubt designed to counter claims of how much discrimination Saudi women suffer from.

Just like other sports, capitalist companies have seized on esports to promote their products, in what has been termed esportswashing (nakedcapitalism.com, 25 August). Car manufacturers, oil

companies and even the US armed forces have signed sponsorship deals with the esports industry. The fanbase is global, mostly young and overwhelmingly male, and they are a good target for capitalist concerns that need to boost their public image. Saudi Arabia was already using football for more general sportswashing (see Action Replay for October 2023), so this is not all that new.

As sports expand and adopt new methods of playing, much of the marketing and other paraphernalia stay in place.

PB



Credit: Belga

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.

December 2024 Events

World Socialist Movement online meetings

Sundays at 19.30 (IST) (Discord)

Weekly WSP (India) meeting

Sunday 8 December 10.00 (GMT)

Central Online Branch Meeting

Friday 6 December 19.30 (GMT)

Political Comedy: Joking and Provoking

Speaker: Mike Foster

Friday 13 December 19.30 (GMT)

Life and Times of the Socialist Standard

Speaker: Howard Moss

Friday 20 December 19.30 (GMT)

No Meeting. Holiday break

Socialist Party Physical Meetings

GLASGOW

Saturday 7 December from 12 noon • Radical Bookfair

The Socialist Party will have a stall at this event.

Quaker Meeting House, 38 Elmbank Crescent, G2 4PS

(near Charing Cross station).

LONDON

Saturday 14 December from 11am • Book and records sale

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

Nearest tube: Clapham North. Nearest rail station: Clapham High Street.

CARDIFF

Street Stall Every Saturday 1pm-3pm (weather permitting)

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

Declaration of Principles

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

Object

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

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

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

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

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

An Everyday Story?

I'M NOT a soap opera fan. But I do make one exception: the Archers. I've tuned into it more or less daily for years and - though I've sometimes found the story lines ridiculous, trivial or far-fetched, and have vowed to stop listening, I still find myself drawn back to the goings-on in the fictitious village of Ambridge, to its improbable cast of characters, and to what the BBC used to call 'an everyday story of country folk'.

Though rarely referencing current news events, the programme has in more recent times taken to including among its story lines ongoing issues of broad social interest. Examples have been drug dealing, coercive control, modern slavery, alcoholism, and, most recently, the crime of perverting the course of justice as committed by one of its teenage characters, George Grundy. George had always been a problematic young man, causing trouble for himself and those around him, but then he took it to a whole new level. He found himself driving a drunken Alice home in her car and when it crashed, endangering the lives of people in an oncoming car. He moved his torpid, inebriated passenger into the driver's seat to evade responsibility and incriminate her. It worked for quite some time, but then the truth came out and, despite his genuine remorse about what he had done and how it had affected other people's lives, he was sent down for three years by a stern, unforgiving judge – a sentence perfectly permissible in law.

Before the fictional court proceedings, online discussion abounded among Archers fans about the likely sentence with most seeming to favour a suspended sentence and/or community service, especially given his guilty plea, his repentance and the fact that it was a first offence and no one was seriously hurt in the incident. In fact George had actually put himself at risk by rescuing from the river the people in the car he'd crashed into. But the judge was implacable, and a fearful, desperate George was sent to a prison for older criminals since all young offenders' institutions were full. This gave rise to much further discussion and protest among listeners. But there was nothing to be done. The law had spoken.

Obviously, the Archers is a fiction. Yet stories like this do shed light on aspects



of the way the society we all live in is organised. Most crimes committed in this society are to do with property or money in one form or another – theft, robbery, fraud, etc. Some of these manifestly cause pain, misery or loss to others. Some do not in the sense that when large institutions (banks, building societies, etc) are affected, there are no manifest individual victims. But in all cases, if the perpetrators are found, the system inflicts punishment on them because a society based on property and money cannot allow 'illegal' methods of procuring those things to take place without the threat of such punishment. Otherwise the whole basis of that system would risk being undermined. But does a society, even one based on property and money, need to punish those who violate its norms not by stealing or such like but by what can broadly be called antisocial behaviour, in George's case, for example, trying to blame someone else for your own misdeed?

Well, certain countries, for instance Denmark and New Zealand, practise what is called restorative justice, whereby individuals who commit antisocial acts are asked to face their victims, discuss with them what they have done, and ideally to understand, empathise with them and work with them to repair the harm – and then hopefully to learn lessons for the future. And even in the UK, some courts and judges take the view that, if there is genuine remorse and understanding on the part of an offender who has behaved in an antisocial fashion, a suspended sentence or work in the community is a better solution than locking that person away. Of course, any such solution is always an individual one, since the social and economic inequalities inherent in the system of society we live under – capitalism – and its dog-eat-dog mentality will always provide a fertile breeding

ground for what is known as 'crime', even if, despite that, most people most of the time exhibit a natural inclination to help rather than to harm others.

This leads on naturally to thoughts of what the situation will be in the moneyless society of voluntary work and free access to all goods and services that socialists advocate and work to bring about. Clearly in that society theft and other 'property crime' will be obsolete. There will be no point in 'stealing' what is readily available to all. Also, since it will be a society without the coercion of wage and salary work with each member simply working according to their ability and taking according to their needs, we would expect there to be essentially positive connections between its members. However, it would probably be naïve to imagine that it will be a society entirely without personal conflicts or even violent confrontations between individuals. But if such there were and resolution needed to be found, surely this would be in terms of the kind of restorative practice we have already seen happening at least on a small scale even under the current system, so that genuinely repentant or remorseful individuals are given a 'second chance' and punishment such as removal of liberty is only considered if that proves unsuccessful.

George in the Archers was not given that 'second chance'. So when he gets out of prison, will the troublemaker return to Ambridge a reformed character, or will he just continue as before and keep carrying out 'antisocial' acts of one kind or another? If what is known to usually happen in the real world is realistically reflected in the Archers, then the second of these options is the more likely. But time will tell.

HOWARD MOSS