

THE

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# SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

## Big Tech and the State

Who's got the whip hand?



Also: Hobson's choice  
Big Tech and the state  
How we live and how we  
might live (5)

What is socialism?  
Fake socialism  
John Prescott: a Labour man  
through and through



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## Introducing the Socialist Party

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

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



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

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

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

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

# The change of rulers in Syria

WHEN THE brutal 50-year tyranny of the Assad dynasty collapsed last month, people danced in the streets in many parts of Syria as they contemplated an unprecedented new beginning. Joyous crowds looted the Presidential palace, while the titular head of the Ba'ath party dictatorship skulked off to Moscow.

The fall of the secular Arab nationalist dictatorship alters the balance of power between the various states in the region, with Turkey and the United States the winners and Iran and Russia the losers. The winners took quick advantage of the initial power vacuum. Turkey sent its proxies to attack the Kurdish nationalists who control a large part of Syria including the oilfields. Indeed, Turkey must have given the victorious Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) Islamists the green light to march on Aleppo and then down to Damascus.

The United States benefits from a weakened Iran, the main threat to its current domination of the wider region and the oilfields and the trade routes out of it.

Israel, too, wasted no time in exploiting

this tense, multiplayer Game of Thrones scenario, by bombing Syria's navy to the bottom of the sea, as well as a host of other targets, and pressing forward in the Golan Heights. Their reasoning is obvious. One or other group is eventually going to take power in Syria. If it's a group that hates Israel, they can hate Israel without missiles and a navy. In a world where relations between states is based on 'might is right', Israel wants another weak neighbour like Lebanon.

What was surprising was the rapidity with which the dictatorship collapsed. Its conscript army was reluctant to fight and the general population, suffering from increased economic hardship due to Western sanctions (the cruel way the West employs to undermine a dictatorship it doesn't support) was ready to welcome a change of regime

HTS seems keen to solicit international recognition, which means making some concessions to capitalist liberal democracy, but it has been designated a terrorist organisation by the West, and there's a \$10m price on the head of its leader

Ahmed al-Sharaa, aka Abu Mohammed al-Jolani. Indeed this former al-Qaeda and ISIS fighter has publicly praised the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, and faced home-turf protests that his Sharia-law regime in the province of Idlib was as bad as Assad's. But he has also faced protests by Islamic hardliners who think he's not fundamentalist enough.

The political direction of travel is not obvious at the time of writing, and any spark could set off civil war. For the sake of the people of Syria, newly released from a tyranny that looked eternal, we can only hope not. As for the long-term future, it would seem almost churlish to point out that, if the country doesn't go into meltdown, they'll get the wage-slavery and the limited political 'rights' that workers have in many other capitalist countries, while a new privileged Syrian ruling class exploiting them emerges. That, unfortunately, is the best-case scenario, in the absence of an imminent global socialist revolution. The worst-case scenario doesn't bear thinking about.

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# The next big thing

MAINSTREAM NEWS stories are an endless diet of misery which activists seem to force-feed themselves, under the highly contestable assumption that bad news motivates people to action, rather than into depressed fatalism. If you feel the need for an injection of positivity this January, you ought to try the many free science news websites.

The reason science stories are often positive is because science is about solving problems instead of despairing over them. Now it is true that sometimes those problems are ones that science itself accidentally created. Nobody's perfect. The law of unintended consequences is always at work, so we ended up with lead in petrol, CFCs in fridges and 'forever chemicals' in Teflon. Worse, because science is forced to obey the capitalist prime directive of profit, too often these unintended consequences become 'unattended externalities'.

Even so, reading science news is a good way to maintain a 'can-do' perspective on the world. And socialists have another reason to be interested, because science can offer glimpses of emerging tools and techniques that global socialism might, just might, be able to use in the future, even if they are deemed uneconomical in the present.

Take the current anxiety about micro and nanoplastic particles now being found in almost every animal cell on Earth, together with those forever chemical compounds which don't break down naturally and have been found in human blood, organs and breast milk. The long-term consequences of all this are unknown, and mainstream news treats it as an unmitigated disaster. But new research has shown how to remove up to 94 percent of nanoplastics from water by just using carbonised epoxy ([tinyurl.com/3emjj3zc](https://tinyurl.com/3emjj3zc)), while a team in China have developed a sponge filter that they say can remove 99.9 percent of microplastics ([tinyurl.com/26aeyzyu](https://tinyurl.com/26aeyzyu)). Forever chemicals can be broken down using expensive high-energy processes, but new light-powered catalysts are thought do the same job at a fraction of the energy cost ([tinyurl.com/4tuut2wd](https://tinyurl.com/4tuut2wd)).

As is well known, renewable energies are intermittent and require back-up storage, generally in the form of lithium-based batteries. But lithium mining or via brine extraction is energy intensive and environmentally destructive. A new



study suggests that half of all lithium requirements could actually come out of wastewater instead ([tinyurl.com/9u3s9vbs](https://tinyurl.com/9u3s9vbs)) while an alternative approach offers a low-energy and sustainable means to extract it directly from seawater ([tinyurl.com/598ner25](https://tinyurl.com/598ner25)).

Socialist society will most likely pivot away from the unsustainable capitalist-era obsession with private car ownership, towards comprehensive public transport, but there will still be a role for electric vehicles. At present the battery is the most expensive and least durable part of an EV, but a new type of single-crystal electrode lithium-ion battery could outlast the vehicle it's in, and then see a 'second-life' usage as grid energy storage ([tinyurl.com/y54mutfm](https://tinyurl.com/y54mutfm)). Lithium is used because it's light, so it has an optimal power to weight ratio, but the heavier sodium has similar properties and is 500 times more abundant, so sodium-ion batteries are under development for grid storage, which doesn't need to move. Problems to date have been low power and slow charging times, but a high-power sodium-ion battery is in development that can charge in seconds ([tinyurl.com/dcjksn6](https://tinyurl.com/dcjksn6)).

Battery life and weight currently make long-distance aviation infeasible, but what about old tech in the form of airships? Sustainability concerns are changing attitudes to next-gen air transport, and multiple airship models are in development, including the carbon-fibre and all-electric Pathfinder 1 (no relation), the hydrogen H2 Clipper and the helium Flying Whales, with the UK Airlander 10 expected to be in commercial service by 2026. Helium is hard to get, but the manufacturers point out that airships don't consume it, they store it, and only need occasional top-ups. If capitalism can do airships, why not socialism?

For short hops, some European companies are developing electric vertical take-off and landing (EVTOL) craft for use as low-cost, noiseless and emission-free air taxis. But they've run into funding problems recently as investors are sceptical of getting a good return on investment (ROI). That's one problem the technology wouldn't face if a democratic socialist

society was, for some reason, smitten with the idea of roof-hopping public transport systems ([tinyurl.com/32v98hn8](https://tinyurl.com/32v98hn8)).

In other tech news, AI is an order of magnitude greater consumer of electricity than conventional computing, and an important question is where all the electricity is going to come from. One team believes they can cut AI power consumption by 95 percent simply by rejigging some algorithms ([tinyurl.com/2vyy657j](https://tinyurl.com/2vyy657j)). Global warming is creating a global water crisis, and desalination plants are power hungry, but a new method promises zero-electric solar desalination ([tinyurl.com/27px8tx9](https://tinyurl.com/27px8tx9)). There's a plan to stop millions of tons of e-waste by printing circuits onto tree leaves ([tinyurl.com/5n84c8ts](https://tinyurl.com/5n84c8ts)). And self-heating concrete is a thing, if you mix it with paraffin, and could be used for de-icing roads ([tinyurl.com/yjxjae4k](https://tinyurl.com/yjxjae4k)).

In health news, a new biomaterial can regrow cartilage in old joints, meaning no more knee replacements ([tinyurl.com/3kebxvsj](https://tinyurl.com/3kebxvsj)). A twice-yearly injection reduces HIV risk by 96% ([tinyurl.com/3nu6vbdud](https://tinyurl.com/3nu6vbdud)), more effective than PrEP pills which have to be taken daily. Asthma research has seen the first breakthrough in 50 years with a monoclonal antibody treatment that isn't a steroid so it doesn't lead to osteoporosis ([tinyurl.com/mw9tafa7](https://tinyurl.com/mw9tafa7)). And a raft of new research confirms what we already suspected, that nature is good for us. Studies show that time spent in woods, fields or gardens – especially if you get mud on your skin – seems to realign your body's microbiome with 'good' bacteria that are lost through urbanisation and are now believed to inhibit a colossal range of gut-implicated 'urban' illnesses (*Good Nature*, Kathy Kelly, Bloomsbury, 2024).

This only scratches the surface, and of course not all developments will pan out. But the key takeaway from science news is the awareness that the next huge breakthrough, the discovery or invention that changes everything, is just as likely to happen tomorrow as in a hundred years. If that's not a reason for optimism, we don't know what is.

PJS

# Hobson's choice

ON 20 January Donald J Trump will be inaugurated as the 47<sup>th</sup> president of the United States of America.

Hopefully, given the American predilection for violence, Donald Trump won't in the interim have suffered the fate of Caesar, like a lot of other American presidents, political figures, civil rights advocates and so on. We come not to bury him and certainly not to praise him.

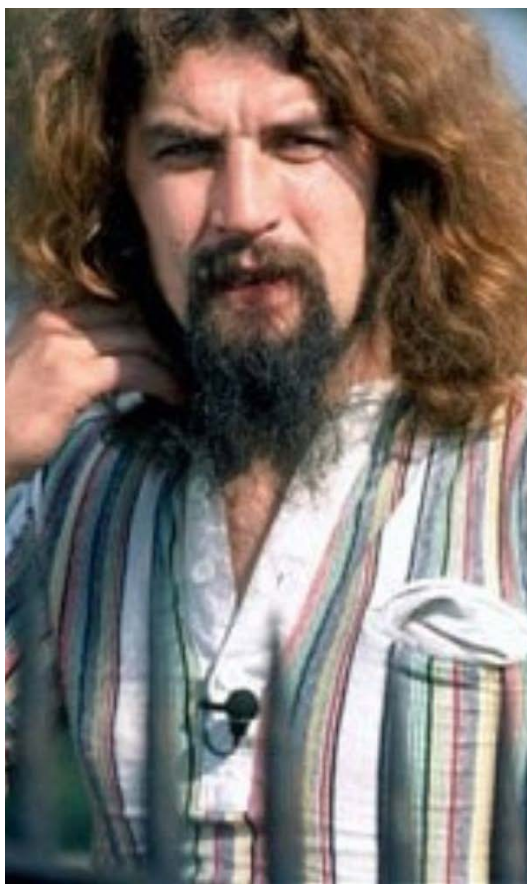
'Life is a tragedy for those who feel, and a comedy for those who think.' This aphorism seems particularly pertinent given the reaction which the election of '47' seems to have generated. The media, and social media especially, went into paroxysms of rage, frustration and general crazed madness. The meltdown displayed by individuals, who seemed to think that upon being sworn into office Trump was immediately going to pass an Enabling Act, was off the scale. The ire and emotion directed at Donald Trump would be more positively channelled into changing the capitalist system.

Robert Tressell in his book, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, gave an example of how those who favour the alternative are treated:

'At the conclusion of the singing, Bert turned another picture into view. "Ere we 'ave another election scene. At each side we see the two candidates the same as in the last pitcher. In the middle of the road we see a man lying on the ground, covered with blood, with a lot of Liberal and Tory working men kickin' 'im, jumpin' on 'im, and stampin' on 'is face with their 'obnailed boots. The bloke on the ground is a Socialist, and the reason why they're kickin' 'is face in is because 'e said that the only difference between Slumrent and Mandriver was that they was both alike".'

There's nothing comic of course about the American adult population voting for the continuation of capitalism. Socialists have to live with the result of this happening time and time again, but socialists don't throw their toys out of the pram. They just roll up their sleeves and work harder to make socialists.

It's said if America sneezes the rest of the world catches a cold. One objective the incoming President has declared is the implementation of protectionist economic measures, ie, raising tariffs on foreign imports. This action is intended to have a negative impact on America's economic rivals and competitors, but it will also damage the economies of 'friends



**"The desire to be a politician should bar you for life from ever becoming one."**

**Don't vote. It just encourages them...."**

*- Billy Connolly*

*But we say:  
"Do vote, but not for capitalism..."*

and allies' (sic). Is it likely that American workers will see some material benefits in the next four years? Possibly, if only for a while. American capitalists will almost certainly see their wealth and power increase. But what about the working class in the rest of the world? Can they expect a mild dose of flu, or pneumonia? However, as demonstrated by the UK Labour Party's recent performance, politicians will simply lie in order to gain power, so nothing they say is set in stone.

Thomas Hobson (1544–1631) owned stables in Cambridge, and is said to have told those wanting a horse, take the one in the stall nearest the door or don't bother taking one at all. 'Hobson's choice' therefore means there is no choice. For voters in the November US election, just as in all states claiming to be democracies across the world, it's always Hobson's choice, because whatever inducements are offered the result is always to the benefit of capitalism.

The Scottish stand-up comedian Billy Connolly said, 'The desire to be a politician should bar you for life from ever becoming one. Don't vote. It just encourages them'. In socialism we won't need them and we won't have them.

But this is not to say that voting and

elections are useless. The World Socialist Movement aims to use political means in order to implement the change to a socialist society across the world. As we say in our pamphlet *What's Wrong With Using Parliament?*:

'Control of the state is operated by those who hold political power as a result of being elected via universal suffrage (the vote). This means they have to get the formal agreement, at election times, of the majority of the people. This is not too difficult since most people are imbued with capitalist ideas and see no alternative to present-day, capitalist society with its class ownership, production for profit, working for wages and rationing by money... there is a more positive reason for winning control of political power. The state is an instrument of coercion, but it has assumed social functions that have to exist in any society and which have nothing to do with its coercive nature: it has taken over the role of being society's central organ of administration and co-ordination. Gaining control of the state will at the same time give control of this social organ which can be used to co-ordinate the changeover from capitalism to socialism'.

**DC**

## A fuss about NICs

IN THE week before the budget last October the *i* newspaper carried an article headlined 'Hiking employer NI will hit working people, OBR warned Tory government,' with the subheading 'Experts say the comments by the Office for Budget Responsibility show increasing employer NI is a tax on "working people"' (tinyurl.com/5xyt492t).

In the event Chancellor Rachel Reeves did increase employer National Insurance Contributions (NICs), which led the media and opposition parties to claim that the government had reneged on its promise not to increase taxes on 'working people' (defined, in the end, as those in employment). We are far — very far — from holding a brief for the government, but the claim that the increase in employer NICs will push down wages doesn't hold water.

In its comments for Reeves's budget, the OBR repeated:

'The specific changes to employer NICs increase the costs of employment for firms which is mainly assumed to be passed on to employees through lower real wages, and which also reduces employment' (obr.uk/efo/economic-and-fiscal-outlook-october-2024/#).

So, they weren't actually saying that the increase would lead to this but that, in their calculations, they had assumed that it would. However, they didn't explain why they assumed this.

As a measure that increases labour costs, it could be expected to have some effect on employment, but the assumption that it would lower 'real wages' (the amount wages can buy in relation to prices) is unwarranted. The OBR seems to have meant that it would result in employers increasing the price of what they are selling, resulting in workers being able to buy less with their wages. But this assumes that, faced with an increase in costs, employers can simply pass this on to consumers through increasing the price of their product, which is not the case.

The TUC understood the situation better. Employers, they pointed out, will:

'have a range of options on how they can cover these increases. They can absorb the costs and many will choose this option. They could also raise productivity by investing in their business, raise the prices they charge customers, or seek to suppress wage growth in their organisation. It can be difficult to predict what balance of these approaches

employers will opt for and it will vary greatly between firms and industries.

'Workers will be particularly interested in the extent to which employers seek to shift the burden onto them by holding down wages. One thing is for certain — there is no automatic link between business tax and worker wages (...) how the costs are shared will depend on the growth trajectory of the business and economy and on the bargaining power of workers' (tuc.org-tinyurl.com/4d5ha737).

This is substantially correct, although they could have also pointed out that the price increase option would only be open if any increase was 'what the market will bear'.

It's not true that a tax that increases employer labour costs would inevitably lead to lower pay. You can see this where labour costs are increased through workers obtaining a wage increase.

The employer would have the same options that the TUC mentions. If, as the OBR assumes, an increase in labour costs leads to 'lower real wages', then so should such an increase due to higher wages. It amounts to the old fallacy that an increase in wages is pointless as it merely leads to an increase in prices which nullifies it, a fallacy exposed by Marx in 1865 in his lecture to British trade unionists, later published as *Value, Price and Profit*.

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# Halo Halo

## Bash the bishop

Not going to do a 'told you so' but how often have we said, don't put your faith in leaders? The Church of England was founded by Henry VIII, the serial wife abuser and uxoricide. Mad at the Pope who wouldn't allow him to divorce his first wife, Henry formed the Church of England, put himself in charge of it and disbanded Catholic monasteries, convents and religious institutions. As is the case up to the present day, a lot of wealth was held by these establishments. So Henry snaffled the lot.

In November 2024 the CEO of the C of E - known as the Archbishop of Canterbury - resigned after it was found that he had failed dramatically to safeguard the victims, young males, of a serial abuser. 'The Bishop of Birkenhead said she couldn't guarantee that abuse is not still going on in the Church. "We still have this institutional problem where we are not putting victims

and survivors at the centre. In some ways, we are not a safe institution". The British monarch is always supreme head of the Church of England. Twenty six bishops including the Archbishop of Canterbury have a seat in the House of Lords and are entitled to vote.

## Anime

Anime is animation, hand drawn or computer generated. It originated in Japan.

The Web says that in 2023 the global Anime industry was worth over thirty-one billion dollars. So what does anime have to do with religion?

The Catholic Church is holding a jubilee this year. Designated Pilgrims of Hope, it's being held apparently as 'a year of hope for a world suffering the impacts of war, the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and a climate crisis.' Sure, that's going to make a big difference to a world that continues to be beset by all the ills inherent in the capitalism system.

So, the church has, like football teams and various big business and military organisations, got itself a mascot. The mascot is of a young blue-haired, wide-eyed, cross-wearing female named Luce, Italian for light. The word 'mascot' comes from the French meaning 'lucky charm.' Sounds a bit secular to us. The resemblance to anime characters is unmistakable.

The Vatican said that the mascot was 'part of the Vatican's goal to engage with the pop culture so beloved by our young people'. She, Luce, (pronouns not specified), debuted at an Italian comics and games convention in October 2024. One assumes the ad agencies responsible for this are laughing all the way to the bank. Public reaction, as to any form of capitalist or religious propaganda, should be that of The Who – won't get fooled again.

A more appropriate mascot would have been the Pardoner from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The equivalent of a snake-oil salesman, the Pardoner travelled around swindling folk, persuading them that if they bought his relics they would be absolved from their sins.

## DC

Bregman believes we should be more positive about human potential. 'We're at a point in our history where we have such amazing opportunities to make the world a wildly better place', he says. 'Our best days are in the future' (**Prospect**, [tinyurl.com/2p92eh4z](https://www.prospectmagazine.com/2p92eh4z)).

A 'very rare' 77-year-old slice of the cake served at Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip's wedding sold for £2,200 (\$2,800) this week, according to auction house Reeman Dansie. The cake, which no longer looks edible, survived for almost eight decades since the wedding day on November 20, 1947 (**CNN**, [tinyurl.com/pen6cba9](https://www.cnn.com/pen6cba9)).

Yunus' claims to be overseeing a transition to 'true democracy', aimed at realising 'social justice' after the increasingly authoritarian rule of Hasina, are belied by the brutal attacks on garment workers (**WSWS**, [tinyurl.com/yxtwrk9m](https://www.wsws.org/yxtwrk9m)).

'The Turkish police catch 100 to 150 migrants every night. They have no mercy on them. They break their arms and legs (**BBC**, [tinyurl.com/cfwtkn5n](https://www.bbc.com/cfwtkn5n)).

I'm all for supporting a new and viable political group but let's look at what we already have before trying to reinvent the wheel (Guardian, [tinyurl.com/2k4cs8ws](https://www.guardian.com/2k4cs8ws)). (These links are provided for information and don't necessarily represent our point of view.)

# Tiny tips

We may be much more entertained by charity now. But on account of the Band Aid format, we are now arguably less knowledgeable about why some people suffer terribly around the world – and in no better a position to put an end to it (**The Conversation**, [tinyurl.com/4bae96jr](https://www.theconversation.com/4bae96jr)).

Today, political scientists and pollsters use 'the working class' to describe members of the work force who do not have a college degree. By that definition, the number of working-class Americans has been declining as the country has grown wealthier and more educated. According to the Census Bureau, nearly 38 percent of Americans had at least a bachelor's degree in 2022, up from just 17 percent in 1980. There's a major exception to that common definition, however. Marxist scholars use "working class" quite differently—typically encompassing anyone who depends on wages to survive, regardless of their educational experience (**Reason**, [tinyurl.com/ym4dbeab](https://www.reason.com/ym4dbeab)).

In fact, the Democratic Party, the party of the slavocracy, of Jim Crow and of Hiroshima, Nagasaki and the Vietnam War, has never been a party of the working class. It has, and will always be, a capitalist party. Sanders' political role...is to use his nominally 'independent' designation to provide the Democratic Party with a veneer of credibility in order to contain opposition to the whole capitalist system (**WSWS**, [tinyurl.com/e44mxevt](https://www.wsws.org/e44mxevt)).

What happened during the pandemic especially, was a good tutorial about how to do things. First of all, what pandemic showed us was the Hollywood utopian, you know, imagination of the future of humanity is absolutely bullshit, because when crises happen, people tend to help each other and be in solidarity, and they become even more, even loving, you know, towards each other. So we have to imagine politics as a, you know, natural disaster or like a disaster, like a pandemic, and we have to act like that (**New Internationalist**, [tinyurl.com/369wtz3p](https://www.newinternationalist.com/369wtz3p)).

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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](mailto:spgb@worldsocialism.org)

**MIDLANDS**

**West Midlands regional branch.** Meets last Sat. 3pm (check before attending). Contact: Stephen Shapton. 07309090205. Email: [stephenshapton@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:stephenshapton@yahoo.co.uk).

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

**Yorkshire Regional branch.**

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

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

**SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST**

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

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

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

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# Will capitalism implode?

NOTHING QUITE so vividly demonstrated the absurdity of existing society and that it had run well past its sell-by date than the phenomenon we call a depression. By what insane topsy turvy logic could it be that the very abundance of goods that industry churned out should become the source of intense misery to those who had produced this abundance? How absurd that with technology having been developed to the point where human want could be eliminated, this very want should become magnified.

Glutted markets meant mass layoffs, the indignity of the dole queue and the desperation of trying make ends meet. Even in a boom time, needs go unmet; now in a depression the perceptible gap between what people have to put up with and what is materially possible, widened as never before.

It is facts like these that should prompt us to reconsider whether, in the kind of society we live in today, technology or technological innovation can actually deliver 'abundance'. But delivering abundance doesn't seem to be the real purpose behind such innovation — making our lives more secure, happy, and content. Behind the smoothly executed fakery of the advertisers, the dissimulation of the pasted-on smiles of the actors who perform in these adverts, another ulterior motive is at work —making a profit by meeting paying demand which, for most people, is limited.

Some argued that crises and depressions were becoming, if not permanent then, at least, progressively worse. Even the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) had contended that whatever existing measures might be undertaken to overcome such crises this simply meant, 'paving the way for more extensive and more destructive crises, and by diminishing the means whereby crises are prevented'.

However, a quick comparison of the Great Depression of the 1930s and the 2008 global crisis should dispel any such notion. The former event was, by most standards, far more destructive and socially disruptive than the latter, thus refuting the claim that there is some built-in tendency for crises to get progressively worse. As an article in the *Economist* (10 December 2011) pointed out:

'The shock that hit the world economy in 2008 was on a par with that which launched the Depression. In the 12 months following the economic peak in 2008, industrial production fell by as much as



it did in the first year of the Depression. Equity prices and global trade fell more. Yet this time no depression followed. Although world industrial output dropped by 13% from peak to trough in what was definitely a deep recession, it fell by nearly 40% in the 1930s. American and European unemployment rates rose to barely more than 10% in the recent crisis; they are estimated to have topped 25% in the 1930s' (economist.com/node/21541388).

Even when the idea was mooted that the working class would act consciously, and in a united fashion, to deliver the *coup de grâce* to a demonstrably dying system it was assumed that the desire to do so could only have arisen out of the intense hardship workers experienced within a capitalist society in its apparent death throes. That in itself is a highly questionable thesis. The 'absolute immiseration' of workers is, if anything, more likely to impede, than promote, the kind of mindset it will take to get rid of capitalism.

In any event, the very fact that capitalism is still very much alive (if not exactly well) should make us think twice about all such prognoses concerning the 'impending collapse of capitalism' — irrespective of the particular route by which it is supposed to reach this point. What needs to be questioned is the very notion of 'collapse' itself with all its unfortunate mechanistic and millenarian overtones.

In the Great Depression of the 1930s when many on the Left believed fervently in the imminent collapse of capitalism, we in the Socialist Party brought out a landmark pamphlet called *Why Capitalism will not Collapse* (audio version here: [tinyurl.com/4b8pekkz](https://tinyurl.com/4b8pekkz)). The pamphlet pointed out that previous crises, going back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, had all likewise prompted predictions of apocalyptic collapse on much the same grounds yet these had all proved unfounded. There was no compelling reason for thinking that things would be any different in the future. Capitalism would only disappear if and when workers clearly wanted that to happen and that was something that could not be imposed on them from above — or, indeed, behind their backs.

Apart from anything else there is no 'internal' mechanism one could identify that would mechanically cause the system to collapse. Of course, it is conceivable that capitalism could be brought to a shuddering halt as a result of some 'external' factor intervening — such as a global ecological catastrophe or a nuclear war — but that is a different argument and, in any case, it is not quite consistent with what the term 'collapse' conveys, which would suggest some kind of systemic or internal implosion.

**ROBIN COX**

# Big Tech and the state

WHAT IS Big Tech? How did it get so big? Has Big Tech got too big for the rest of the capitalist class?

Big Tech is a loose definition to describe the largest digital technology-based enterprises – it always includes Google (Alphabet), Facebook (Meta), Amazon and Apple. Microsoft is usually included now, sometimes Tesla, the electric car manufacturer, and Nvidia, the semiconductor manufacturer, and some perspectives will include the Asian firms: Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent, and Xiaomi – who by their nature and size fulfil a similar role.

As socialists we understand the integral role of technology in capitalism. In the *Socialist Standard* No 9 in 1905 we said:

‘The capitalist-class, the most revolutionary class that has ever oppressed human society, cannot increase its riches but by incessantly revolutionising the means of production by the never-ending introduction of new applications of the mechanical, physical, and chemical sciences to the industrial tool. Its thirst for inventions is so insatiable that it has created factories of inventions’ (tinyurl.com/bdfdr2s4).

Whilst most employees in Big Tech are supporting existing products rather than being inventors – factories of inventions seems like a suitable description of commercial research departments or startup companies.

And of course many years earlier Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* wrote:

‘The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments

of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society’ (tinyurl.com/mrxrrj8b).

Marx also wrote at length about Machinery and Modern Industry in *Capital* Volume 1 (tinyurl.com/26ahpz6h).

Whilst many analysts of the left and right sides of capitalism have defined capitalism in our current era variously as platform capitalism, the app economy, surveillance capitalism, and techno-feudalism. The fundamentals of capitalism in terms of social relations are the same and the driving forces are the same, but they are right to recognise that capitalist enterprises have organised themselves differently from other eras.

## Technology in perspective

We are not living in a world where most of society is working in information technology, but many use it as part of their jobs.

The Office for National Statistics report *UK Digital Economic Research: 2020* showed that using the OECD’s ‘narrow’ definition of the digital economy, digital products accounted for 5 percent of Gross Value Added (GVA) in 2020. Using the wider OECD definition, products significantly affected by digitisation accounted for up to 20.7 percent in 2020, down from a revised figure of 21.2 percent in 2019. This report showed that research, health, finance, retail, manufacturing and real estate industries are all larger than the digital products sector in terms of GVA (tinyurl.com/29r5jesp).

You can’t eat technology for dinner, it doesn’t keep the rain off and you can’t ride it into town, but technology helps produce food, houses and transportation – more and more efficiently with every iteration. The massive amounts of quantitative analysis, the number crunching, and instant communication, has enabled production at scales and efficiencies not seen before.

Productivity figures from sweatshops in Cambodia, for instance, can be analysed in air-conditioned offices in California and decisions made and responses delivered in a matter of seconds.

Some of the Big Tech enterprises are in direct competition: Google and Facebook (which includes Instagram and Whatsapp) are selling ads, giving opportunities to platforms that want to gather information about you to put ads right in your face. Google and Facebook are said to share a duopoly in online advertising.

Amazon is mainly known for its online retail and delivery business, but most of its operating profit is in ‘the cloud’ (tinyurl.com/yc2j3s4h) – that is data centres where it rents out disk space and computing power. Second in the data-centre business is Microsoft (MS), which is primarily about business software and operating systems (OS), and Google is also pushing into the data centre market.

Apple are primarily in consumer hardware – iPhones, iPads, laptop and desktop computing – in the more developed world the iPhone is the dominant mobile phone technology. In the less developed world, Google’s Android OS dominates but the hardware comes from different suppliers.

## How did big tech get so big?

Analysts have identified four phenomena that allowed Big Tech to emerge: deregulation, financialisation, globalisation and technological convergence.

Often cited as the key piece of deregulation that paved the way for social media was Section 230 of the 1996 US Telecommunications Act (tinyurl.com/34kb64b6) which stated:

‘No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider’.

Social media sites, it can be argued, are fulfilling the same role as paper publishers who are responsible for what they publish, but for social media after Section 230 it was considered that anything posted on



them was ‘user-generated content’ – and users were responsible, not publishers.

Software rarely has the regulatory safeguards that physical products have – think of trying to sell a car with no brakes or a kettle that catches on fire. Fujitsu has paid private compensation for its part in the UK Post Office scandal and, unusually, is also facing criminal proceedings ([tinyurl.com/u2xz9zx7](https://tinyurl.com/u2xz9zx7)). In July this year 8.5 million MS Windows servers were made inoperable due to a faulty software update from an anti-virus company. Delta Airlines, whose operations were massively disrupted, are suing the anti-virus company claiming the outage cost them \$500 million, with 1.8 million passengers affected ([tinyurl.com/4kaj3s2x](https://tinyurl.com/4kaj3s2x)). Only those who can afford to sue them will get any money back.

Perhaps ‘lack of regulation’ is a better term – it’s largely a case of legislation not being able to keep up with the rapid innovation of digital services.

The expectation of profits means big tech firms don’t have to look far for sources of investment, which means they can expand in-house, or alternatively acquire smaller firms to increase market share either by embracing or extinguishing a rival technology. A current example is OpenAI, owners of ChatGPT, with an estimated \$2 billion in revenue in 2024, though yet to turn a profit due to the huge cost of training AI models ([tinyurl.com/2cub8my8](https://tinyurl.com/2cub8my8)). Twitter, for example, made profits in 2018 and 2019, the first since its inception in 2012. Since Elon Musk took over and renamed it, revenue has fallen sharply and ‘X’ has massive debts ([tinyurl.com/rbtsh74f](https://tinyurl.com/rbtsh74f)).

Globalisation allowed Big Tech companies to minimise their tax burden and move production to places with lower wages. They often have European headquarters in low-tax Ireland. Many consumers are familiar with Microsoft’s Indian Tech Support call centre, while the Foxconn City Factory complex in Shenzhen, China, makes parts for Apple products, and a global army of content moderators work for Facebook and ChatGPT in less developed parts of the world.

Technical convergence basically means devices doing more and more and being linked over the internet. Whilst a telephone handset makes calls, a camera takes pictures, a torch shines a light and a computer runs apps, in a smartphone these roles are combined into one device. These hardware functions rely on software to work, providing apps through app stores, and gateways to other services such as shops, entertainment and games. Both Google Play Store and Apple App Store charge a fee to stock software in their

stores, and up to 30 percent commission on app sales and in-app purchases. This is a part of what is known as platformisation ([tinyurl.com/5ybrxmdv](https://tinyurl.com/5ybrxmdv)).

## Too big?

Any casual follower of the industry will have noticed that the tide seems to be turning. The section on the *Wall St Journal* website providing advice for potential investors warns that:

‘Governments around the world are evaluating the impacts that massive tech platforms and social networks have on businesses and consumers. In the coming months, regulations in the European Union and the United States will likely take effect, pushing tech companies to prioritise data protection, harm reduction, the ethical use of AI, and commitment to sustainability goals’ ([tinyurl.com/yht6pccp](https://tinyurl.com/yht6pccp)).

Over the years there have been a number of skirmishes but the 2023 EU Digital Markets Act, and the EU Product Liability Directive currently being revised to include digital technology, are more significant. A US federal judge ruled in August that Google had violated US antitrust (anti-monopoly) law by maintaining an internet search monopoly. In October the US Department of Justice said in a petition to the court that it may recommend dismantling Google’s core businesses, writing that:

‘That would prevent Google from using products such as Chrome, Play, and Android to advantage Google search and Google search-related products and features — including emerging search access points and features, such as artificial intelligence — over rivals or new entrants’ ([tinyurl.com/yra87jxe](https://tinyurl.com/yra87jxe)).

The Digital Markets Act (DMA) is an EU regulation that aims to make the digital economy ‘fairer’ and more contestable. It became applicable in May 2023. The DMA aims to ensure a higher degree of competition in European digital markets by preventing large companies from abusing their market power and by allowing new players to enter the market ([tinyurl.com/ypxe7k6c](https://tinyurl.com/ypxe7k6c)).

Twenty-two services across six companies – Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, ByteDance, Meta, and Microsoft – were identified as ‘core platform services’ by the EU in September 2023. The companies are known as ‘gatekeepers’ due to the ‘durable market position in some digital sectors’ and because they also meet certain criteria related to the number of users, their revenue, or size.

However, there have been accusations from US-based commentators that the rules were carefully constructed so as not to affect European companies and that it is purely about protectionism. As

one example, Spotify, a Swedish company which trades on the New York Stock Exchange via a company in Luxembourg, could well have been on the list.

Almost 40 years after it came into force, the European Union is undertaking a major revision of the Product Liability Directive (Directive 85/374/EEC) ([tinyurl.com/4hsz2vzr](https://tinyurl.com/4hsz2vzr)). The aim of this reform is to adapt ‘the standards to the conditions and needs of the digital single market’. To this end, software will in future be considered as a product.

The UK government prior to the general election this year also passed the Digital Markets, Competition, and Consumers Act (DMCC), a similar piece of legislation which surprisingly is the only one to include some protection for consumers, specifically for mis-selling and secondary ticket-pricing, such as the recent fiasco with the tickets for Oasis concerts.

We know there is a to and fro that goes on between lawmakers and Big Tech whilst the laws are being drafted, as Big Tech tries to make sure the legislation, if it has to exist at all, isn’t too damaging.

What’s in store for Big Tech in the future? Will we see monopolies destroyed, and how much will that affect the working class as a whole? Of particular interest to us is, how will it affect us as socialists?

## Does it matter?

So in the current era of capitalism we have seen the immensely innovative system undergo great changes in the forces of production, and these changes are ongoing. Perhaps monopolies in certain markets will be broken, or perhaps it is a tendency for states always to be reactive and too slow.

As socialists the monopoly we are mainly concerned with is the monopoly that the capitalist class has over the means of producing wealth, and creating a socialist society where no such monopoly is possible, as everything in and on the world will be owned in common and managed democratically.

Here and now our job as socialists is to make socialists, and digital technology is a major method of promoting socialist ideas – so with changes in the platforms and networks we use there could be profound effects for spreading socialism. There might be profound effects if and when the socialist movement gets big enough to become a threat to capitalism, and when we do win there might be big consequences in having forces of production so complex and powerful at our disposal. Then the factories of invention will go from merely servicing the capitalist system to becoming communities for finding creative solutions to fulfil human needs.

**PDH**

# How we live and how we might live (part 5)

PREVIOUSLY WE looked at how we live under capitalism. It's now time to change tack and consider how we might live in a socialist future. This does two jobs: it clarifies many confused issues about what socialists are proposing. It also provides a useful platform from which we can look back at our current capitalist society with greater objectivity, highlighting its many antisocial characteristics.

Human societies, like individuals, are adaptive. They are not completely uniform. So along with a rich legacy of cultural differences, socialist communities are likely to organise themselves differently from region to region. We are a practical species, and we develop our institutions to take advantage of local features like resources, topography, climate, etc. And societies don't stand still. Regional variations will themselves evolve over time as communities try out new solutions to emerging problems. In a world of variety and change it is impossible to be specific about the detailed institutions a future society would develop. We are free to speculate on them, of course, but we should not become too wedded to our conjectures.

## Peering into the future

We also need to remember that purely speculative conceptions of a post-capitalist world will always be influenced by our own perspectives. They will include elements of wish-fulfilment, or assumptions derived from our lives within capitalism. No one, no matter how creative or perceptive, can stand outside their own society any more than they can stand outside their own skin. As is often observed of speculative fiction, our projections of the future are often no more than elaborations of the present. Our imaginations, it seems, do not stretch far beyond what will comfortably fit into our familiar framework of ideas. One of the biggest difficulties many people have when first approaching the idea of socialism is that they try to imagine a post-capitalist society through capitalist spectacles. Inevitably they end up constructing impossible hybrids in their minds, like Dr Doolittle's pushmi-pullyu animal with a head at each end, one peering forward, the other, back. So, it is worth reflecting on the fact that any society built on a rejection of capitalism's defining features would necessarily appear unfamiliar to us, so unfamiliar, in fact, that it might even strike us as incomprehensible or self-contradictory, just as traditional, non-western societies appeared to the first anthropologists.

Peering into the future is a tricky



business. Certainly, there are trends and regularities we can extrapolate from, a few things we can infer and some others that we can guess at, but none of us has a crystal ball. To some extent we all go into the future blindly. And that's particularly true when it comes to predicting the course of events. We know from the science of complex systems that detailed historical movements cannot be known in advance. This doesn't mean, however, that we can say nothing at all about the future. Far from it. Socialists like William Morris living in the Victorian era admittedly had no ability to predict the path that capitalism would travel over the next 150 years, and they may well have been astonished at the legal forms and institutions it developed along the way. It is extremely unlikely, however, that they would have been surprised to learn that 20th century capitalism has been marked by poverty, war and even the threat of human-induced climate change, or that economic booms and slumps, unemployment, waste, homelessness, corruption, and much else has marked its progress. The historical details may elude us, but once we have an understanding of a society's foundational structure then its general features become relatively easy to predict.

So, if we are to draw confident conclusions we must dive deep beneath the superficial features of a society. And that seems possible. Societies are not random assemblages of people living arbitrary lives. Each one is built on definite foundations which determine much about its general character, and influence the kind of institutions and practices it can sustain and develop. A society's foundations set the conditions

that motivate people and give meaning to their lives. They determine that some behaviours and choices are socially possible while others are not. They determine how individuals relate to each other, the values they hold, and the kind and extent of freedoms available to them.

Earlier in this series we showed how a society's foundations are grounded in our biological nature, which requires that we must actively produce the things we need to survive. All human societies, past or present, have had to organise themselves in some way to produce for their collective needs. We saw, for instance, that capitalism organises production upon the basis of the employer/employee property relationship. We saw that this relationship has definite consequences for those living under it. It ensures that we relate to one another as isolated property owners; that we experience competition and conflict at every level of society; that the majority live with personal insecurity; that they spend much of their time acting under the direction of others with little say in how their work or communities are organised; that a significant proportion of them live in poverty, unable to participate fully in their communities; and that all are in danger of suffering intermittently from the many horrors of national and international conflict.

We can predict with considerable confidence that while capitalism persists these miseries will continue into the future without relief. The only way to rid ourselves of them, therefore, is to replace capitalism with something else. But how? And by what means? And how can we ensure that what replaces capitalism will provide a better life for us in the future?

## Life after capitalism

In his 1884 talk, 'How we Live And How we Might Live' William Morris explored one way of conceiving life after capitalism. He asked his audience to consider what it might mean to live in a world lacking the employer/employee relationship and therefore the vast apparatus of capitalist profit-making. He traced out a society stripped of capitalism's multiple antagonisms, property-based hierarchies and hard-wired competition. Analyses of this kind are eye-opening and useful, but they are not in themselves sufficient. We need to go further, to analyse socialism in the same way that we previously analysed capitalism by identifying its productive relationships. The best way to do this is to consider how we can make an effective transition between the two.

Today, there is no necessary or objective reason why capitalism should continue to exist. It drags on only by the inertial agreement of the vast majority of people whom it employs. It can be terminated the moment they collectively withdraw their consent to capitalism's employer/employee relationship. As the roles of employer and employee are mutually dependent, the withdrawal of support for one necessarily means the disappearance of the other. And because ownership of the means of production (the factories, machinery, materials, transport systems, etc) is currently invested in employers, their disappearance requires that it is transferred to new owners.

Socialists argue that ownership of these essential elements of society should fall to the community as a whole. Anything else would be to reintroduce some form of the employer/employee relationship and the capitalist market in which it is embedded. With the means of production taken into common ownership, the products society creates then need to be distributed according to some method. We argue that they, too, should be owned in common and distributed according to need. There are various ways this might be achieved. We propose that access to the products of society should be open and free to all. There are two reasons for this. First, no one is in a better position to assess an individual's needs than that individual. Second, having open access to the means of production has enormously beneficial consequences for society which we will examine next month.

So, in place of the competitive employer/employee property relationship, socialism's central productive relations as identified here are common ownership, free association and free access. As we will see, even before we start thinking

about the decisions people need to make in a socialist society or what institutions they would need to develop to organise it, these fundamental structures will have a profound effect on how it functions. The board is now set up and we can start to see how the game proceeds.

As a first observation, we can sketch out one difference between capitalism and socialism that immediately appears. This is the amount of social control that a socialist society would have over what is produced. It reveals that there is a straightforward relationship between production and consumption, one which is obscured by capitalist relations. Given any level of production, society can, for instance, choose to produce more and therefore consume more. Or it can produce less and consume less. If we produce less then we have more time to pursue other personal and social interests. So, there is a choice to be made between consuming more and doing more. In capitalism, by contrast, the link between production and consumption is broken by the huge apparatus of profit-making which squats between them, determining and distorting both. The drive it sets up to accumulate capital for the employers of labour overrides and eradicates any preferences a community might have. In socialism this juggernaut is removed, social control is set free and social choices expand dramatically.

## Unreasonable fears

But what of the reservations many people have about the whole idea of socialism? As Morris observed, a lot of us shy away from change even when our welfare depends upon it. And having an unclear conception of the future naturally raises not-unreasonable fears. We can, however, address those fears by putting

them in context and considering how realistic they are in relation to a future communitarian world. Three great fears regularly strike people when introduced to the idea of socialism, and they are embodied in three human stereotypes which haunt our imaginations like Dickens's three Christmas ghosts. The first two appear in the guise of the greedy person and the lazy person. The third is supposedly embodied in all of us and summed up in the question, 'who will do the dirty work?'

These figures are raised up as convenient defeaters whenever the proposal is made that we take personal responsibility for making a real change to our world. We are quick to insist that they make a harmonious world impossible, so there is no point in even thinking about it. It's an understandable reaction. Greedy people, for instance, are real, aren't they? The guy in the sharp suit manipulating markets and people from behind their massive desk at company head office. The rumpiled politician leaning over the members' bar in the House of Commons, scheming to feather their own nest. The greedy person is everywhere, feeding at the trough, taking too much of everything and leaving too little for others. That's the stereotype. But how real is it? Is greed inbred in our human personalities or is it an adaptive behaviour to the deeply competitive social world we currently inhabit? Are any of these figures really a thing?

Next month we will start to confront these three ghosts, and lay them to rest. In the process, we will dismiss a number of misconceptions about the socialist case and reveal much about the means by which it can overcome the inevitable miseries of capitalism.

**HUD**



# What is socialism?



OVER THE years, the word ‘socialism’ has been used to mean many different things – in particular to describe the aims and principles of many different organisations and the policies of many different governments and regimes. Nowadays, in the UK, socialism is associated in most people’s minds with small left-wing organisations or at a stretch even the Labour Party, or with countries like China, Cuba, Venezuela and the former Soviet Union.

We have always denied that socialism means any of these things. Since our foundation in 1904, we have always defined socialism as a world-wide, democratic, moneyless society in which everyone will have free access to all goods and services according to their needs. We have further maintained that socialism can only come about through a majority of people consciously choosing it, ideally through voting at the ballot box.

However, before our definition of socialism and the way it can be achieved can be meaningfully understood, we must explain our view on the present system of society and why we consider it must be abolished and replaced.

## Present-day society

The present system of society, based on minority ownership and buying and selling, is commonly known as capitalism. It exists all over the world, in China, Cuba, Venezuela and Russia for example, as

well as in the UK, America and Europe. It has not always existed, and it will not exist for ever. It is not an evil conspiracy but a type of social order which has been necessary for the progress of mankind. It has developed science and technology to a previously undreamed-of degree, done wonders for global health, united the world in communications and educated more people than ever before to a high degree of knowledge and adaptability.

But capitalism has not fully applied its advances for the full benefit of the majority of the population, and it cannot. It has not united the world politically. Wars go on all the time essentially due to the competition within or between nations over resources, raw materials and trade routes. The threat of a big war which would wipe us all out still remains. Nor has it used the sophisticated knowledge and technology it has created to ensure useful, dignified and happy productive activity for the majority. In fact it has put a curse on work. Work for most people is equated with something unpleasant in life.

What capitalism has done is to create a potential abundance of wealth capable of satisfying everyone’s needs, but without being able to realise that potential. This is because it is not geared to distributing wealth freely but to the rationing of it by means of the market and the wages system.

It operates by exploiting the majority of the population. By exploitation we do not

mean that the majority earn starvation wages or live in 19<sup>th</sup> century conditions, though some do, especially in the global South. What we mean is that those who work are a source of wealth that is taken from them, that they produce a greater amount of wealth than they get back in wages or salaries. Unfortunately, most people do not see this, misled as they are by the culture of acceptance in which they grow up, their education and the media they are exposed to. They tend to see the world as a place in which we should all count ourselves lucky if we are given a chance to earn enough to enable us to exist from day to day.

The fact is that the world’s wealth is produced but not owned by that large majority who, in order to live, are obliged to hire themselves to an employer for a wage or salary. So while no one would deny that, in most countries, conditions of life have vastly improved over the last century, it is still, for example, the case that millions of children live in poverty even in 40 of the world’s richest countries.

## The working class

This large majority of people who produce most of the wealth but own none of it to speak of we refer to as ‘the working class’. To many people class is defined by such things as upbringing or education or occupation. These may be useful classifications for some purposes, but to socialists the working class is composed of all those who through economic necessity are obliged to sell their energies to an employer in order to live, ie, the vast majority of the population. The working class is therefore a class of wage and salary earners and as such includes not only manual workers but also people who are often referred to as ‘middle class’ such as office workers, civil servants, engineers, doctors, teachers, etc.

The interests of the working class are diametrically opposed to the interests of the other class in society, the employing or capitalist class, comprising those who own enough to live (land, shares in companies, farms, offices, etc.) without needing to sell their energies to an employer. Another possible arrangement for capitalism is one in which the state, via its bureaucrats, takes over capital, wholly or in part, in order to exploit workers. This can consist either in selective nationalisation of certain industries or complete state control. We call this state capitalism.

Socialists have no personal grudge against capitalists either as individuals or as a class. We simply point out that their interests will always be opposed to the people they employ. In short, society today is a class-divided society.

## Reforms

Apart from the continual battle inherent in the capitalist system between employee and employer over pay and working conditions, capitalism also produces a host of other intractable problems. Among these are wars and the threat of war, unemployment, poor housing, homelessness, anxiety, loneliness and unsatisfying work, all of which add up to a society in which there is much strife and dissatisfaction and, for many, a generally insecure and frustrated existence. Suggestions for reforms to improve things come continually from the political parties involved in running the system. But once brought in, reforms rarely have the beneficial effect claimed. At best they tinker at the edges of problems and can even create new problems requiring further reform. And of course they may be reversed when a new party comes to power.

Well-meaning individuals often say that you can have socialism as your long-term aim but still campaign for reforms in the meantime. We say that this is merely putting off the day and channelling energies that could be usefully employed in bringing socialism nearer into activities whose results are uncertain and which may have the effect of bolstering capitalism rather than help get rid of it. So we do not consider it our function to campaign for reforms or seek support on the basis of reforms.

So far it has been comparatively easy for the dissatisfaction of workers to be channelled in a reformist rather than a socialist direction. Some people might even say that there is not that much dissatisfaction among workers at all, that on the whole they are quite happy with things as they are. But perhaps what they should say is not 'happy' but 'resigned'. What most people want is a quiet secure life for themselves and their families, but capitalism tends to deny them this. Their plans are constantly being put in jeopardy by crises, job reorganisations, new government policies, disruption of various other kinds, and, depending on which part of the world they live in, wars and day-to-day violence.

## Socialism comes from capitalism

What makes us think workers will ever take action? Well, there is certainly no guarantee, but capitalism has already

created a large, organised, highly trained working class which carries out by itself all essential productive, administrative and educative activity throughout most of the world and which has an increasing interest, because of its subordinate social and economic position and its conditions of work, in challenging the status quo. Capitalism has also produced, and carries on producing, the material conditions necessary for the establishment and practical organisation of a united world-wide society, ie, rapid world-wide communications and a potential abundance of goods and services. In addition many of the problems of modern capitalism (pollution, climate change, threat of war, terrorism, recessions, etc.) are world problems that can only be approached on a world scale even within the present system and that tend therefore to spread a consciousness of the need for world solutions generally.

We know that none of this means socialism is just around the corner. And socialists at present are a tiny minority. But, as we have pointed out, capitalism is a system of constant agitation and rapid change in which nothing is constant or sacred and which itself has provided, and will continue to provide, fuel for the spreading of socialist ideas.

## How to get socialism

Because socialism will be a fully democratic society in which the majority will prevail, though with full rights of dissent for minorities, it follows that socialism can only be set up democratically, ie, when a majority have come to want and understand it. Socialism cannot be handed to people by an elite which thinks it knows what is good for them. Such a minority revolution could only fail and lead to minority rule, as happened in Russia, China and those other countries which are often called socialist (or communist), but which we call state capitalist.

And being a majority revolution, socialism has no need to initiate violence. The street-fights-and-barricades vision of revolution belongs to a romantic past and anyway could not possibly stand up to the might of the modern state. In any case, in most of the economically advanced countries of the world where workers are the most numerous and highly trained, capitalism has been forced to give them certain elementary political rights, in particular the vote. This means that, when a majority decide they want socialism, they can organise themselves as a leaderless democratic political party and use the ballot box to send their delegates to legislative assemblies with a mandate not to form a new government to oversee the

capitalist system but to abolish capitalism and its whole machinery of minority rule.

Sceptics may ask: will the capitalist class allow this to happen? Our reply is: what can they do against a politically conscious majority from all sections (including police, army, etc.) of the working class?

## What socialism will be like

What will socialism be like once established? Well, we obviously cannot provide a blueprint for it, as the precise details of its organisation will be democratically worked out by the majority who decide to establish that society and to live in it. But we can make certain general statements about its nature.

We can say that it will mean the end of buying and selling and of all the other financial and commercial institutions like money, prices, wages, banks and insurance.

We can say that, with the disappearance of such factors as financial cost and competition, it will mean people planning production democratically and using the highly sophisticated technology in existence to provide for their wants and taking freely what they need from the abundance of resources made available by that technology.

We can say that it will mean voluntary cooperation, work as pleasure not toil, and all human beings as social and economic equals.

We can say that it will mean complete democracy in all departments of life with freedom to choose one's activities and occupations and without people being pushed around by decisions from above or by any kind of arbitrary authority.

We can say that socialism will be world-wide – it cannot be anything else. 'Socialism in Britain', for example, is a contradiction in terms, and anyway the world is now so closely united in terms of communications, fashions and the rapid flow of ideas that, if people in one country were ready for socialism, the rest of the world could not be far behind. The establishment of this world community founded on common ownership and democratic control is the only solution to the major problems of modern life. It may seem some way off, but if you agree with us and help spread socialist ideas, you will bring it nearer. And if you join the Socialist Party, you will find yourself a member of a unique political organisation, one which is completely democratic, has no leaders and no secrets, and in which all members have an equal say; one, in other words, that foreshadows the way in which socialist society itself will be organised.

**SOUTH WALES BRANCH**

# Fake socialism

IN OCTOBER there was a by-election to elect a new ward councillor in South Acton, London borough of Ealing. One of the 8 candidates was David Hofman standing for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). Though TUSC is nominally an umbrella organisation of various unions and small left political groupings, it is in fact dominated by the 'Socialist Party', the organisation that arose in 1997 when the so-called 'Militant Tendency', which operated within the Labour Party to try and push it to the left and then renamed itself 'Militant Labour', was effectively expelled by Labour together with its members. It initially called itself the 'Socialist Party of England and Wales' (SPEW), but later dropped the 'England and Wales', effectively hijacking the commonly used name of our own Party, the Socialist Party of Great Britain.

But what kind of organisation is this so-called 'Socialist Party', which campaigned for election in South Acton under the name of TUSC? Is it a socialist organisation in the sense that we understand socialism, ie, a moneyless, wageless society of common ownership, voluntary cooperation and free access to all goods and services? Or is it something different?

In an interview with *Ealing News*, the TUSC candidate for South Acton, David Hofman, outlined its aims and objectives ([tinyurl.com/bdhj3yeu](https://tinyurl.com/bdhj3yeu)). Having pointed out that he had been one of those expelled from the Labour Party in the 1990s, Hofman explained that among his recent political activities had been 'the campaign to retain Ealing libraries, and other campaigns to save local services' and that he had been involved in assisting and participating in various trade union activities. The main issues he said he was campaigning on were restoration of the winter fuel allowance, recently removed from some pensioners by Keir Starmer's new Labour government, and the need to 'tackle the housing crisis'. If elected he would campaign on Ealing Council to give emergency heating grants to pensioners in need so that they did not have to choose whether 'to heat or eat', and he would campaign for the Starmer government to return to Ealing funding 'stolen' from it by Westminster via austerity policies since 2010. This, he continued, would allow the Council 'to start addressing the housing and other local service issues and to avert 'further rounds of cuts,



Credit: David Hofman

closures, redundancies, and outsourcing of services', via 'a no-cuts needs budget'. The candidate's election leaflet contained a further 'wish list' of reforms including mass council house building, a £15 an hour minimum wage, well-paid jobs for all, free public transport and an end to privatisation of utilities.

It would be churlish in a way to argue with such aspirations, especially those such as helping pensioners to keep warm that might be achievable, even if in fact most of the candidate's proposals for reforms are probably not achievable within the framework of the system we live in. But even if they were, they would remain just that – reforms. They would be relatively small tweaks to how the buying and selling system operates, the system that inevitably means vast disparity of wealth between those who own the means of living and those who are obliged to sell their energies to produce goods and services for sale on the market. David Hofman did show an awareness of this disparity in talking about wealth being 'concentrated in the hands of a tiny minority', but that was combined with a failure to appreciate that this cannot be rectified by what are small- and possibly short-term- reforms which leave the basic blocks of the system in place – money, wages, buying and selling, production for profit not need. In other words, it would be no more than tinkering at the edges. As a sage once said, 'The system cannot fix the system'.

In the end, the TUSC grouping that Hofman stood for in that by-election,

though claiming to be socialist, is not socialist at all. Like so many left-wing groups, it is a reformist alliance that not only never says a single word about socialism in its genuine sense, as the candidate never did in his interview, but in sticking to advocacy of reforms, leads people to think that this is what socialism is, so causing confusion.

In his interview the candidate did talk about the need to 'help bring a new workers' party into existence', but our news for him is that one already exists, the Socialist Party (of Great Britain). Of course, we remain to be recognised as such by the vast majority of workers. But the plain fact is that only when the message we exist to propagate gains that recognition, will we be on the way to the real societal change that is socialism. At the same time we recognise that the social consciousness on the part of the majority of workers needed for this is not something that can be rushed or conjured into existence. It can only develop at its own pace and the single purpose of the SPGB is to assist that process as much as possible by helping to spread the idea of what socialism really is.

David Hofman, despite the attractive package of reform measures TUSC was advocating, got only 18 votes, quite possibly fewer than would have gone to a candidate presenting a straight socialist programme of abolition of capitalism and its buying and selling system and a society of free access based on from each according to ability to each according to need.

**HKM**



# John Prescott: a Labour man through and through

MANY OF the obituarists of the late Lord Prescott quoted him as saying that despite all his achievements, he'd be known for that one punch on a protestor on the campaign trail in Rhyl. The more serious obituaries covered his career as a politician, achieving the high office of Deputy Prime Minister, and alluding to the Jaguars and the affair. Tony Blair himself came out and was full of praise for Prescott, and acknowledged how much his premiership needed its deputy. Corbynites remembered the time he defended their man on Question Time. Above all, though, his Lordship was a man of the Labour Party through and through, and it is worth going back behind the Punch and Judy of high office to the thing that first brought him to prominence: the 1966 seamen's strike.

## The seamen's strike

Prescott was one of the co-authors of a pamphlet *Not Wanted on Voyage: The Seaman's Reply* published by the National Union of Seamen, Hull Dispute Committee, in June 1966. It was written because 'owing to the biased nature of the Pearson Inquiry Report recently published it is vitally necessary that a counter-balance is put out to put the seamen's fight into perspective'. They alleged that 'so biased is the Pearson Report against the seamen's case that one cannot but feel that it was simply set up to capture public opinion, including trade union and Labour Party opinion – which so far has supported the seamen – and marshal it against us'.

Much of the pamphlet deals with the minutiae of overtime and pay rates, but the core claim for the seamen was for a 40-hour week at £14. As the historian EP Thompson described the strike: 'The British seamen, after decades of near company unionism had accomplished that most difficult of industrial actions (in an industry whose members may at any point be scattered across the seven seas), a national strike with high morale and solidarity' (*Writings by Candelight*, p. 53). The Wilson government infamously alleged that the strike was prompted by Communist Party agitators, claiming 'The moderate members of the seamen's executive were terrorized by a small professional group of Communists or near Communists.' As Thompson notes, there were no Communists on the seamen's executive.

The authors alleged 'Our case has not been treated on its merits. Social justice has been overridden by political expediency.' They claimed that 'the Government's obsession with the incomes policy has been evident throughout the strike. We had to be beaten, because our claim was a "breach in the dyke of the incomes policy"'. Hence, although the powers were never used, the Wilson government declared a state of emergency over the strike. 'There is a wealth of evidence we could produce to show that behind the Government, in its resistance to our just demands, stand the International Banks, the financial powers that really direct the Government's anti-wage policy.'

Prescott and his co-author went into detail as to how the make-up of the Pearson Commission indicated that the fix was on, in particular, how the appointment of Joe O'Hagan (General Secretary of the furnace maker's union) to the commission was intended to neutralise any opposition in the TUC, as he held the chair of the General Purposes committee. This is indicative of their approach of looking at the personnel involved in the structures of power. They went into great detail over the personal connexions between shipping owners and the press barons.

They noted of the shipping industry: 'In the past, British shipping contributed on a major scale to the earning of foreign exchange, but in this field too, its recent record is one of consistent decline. Between 1952 and 1962 shipping's contribution to Britain's earnings abroad fell by over £111 million, or by an average of 3½% per year.'

Likewise: 'Most of our major competitors developed the bulk container transport method during the 1950's, whilst our shipowners [...] did nothing'. This, they alleged, was down to the 'shipowners' incompetence'. Their complaint, essentially, was that the wrong people were in charge.

'This backward, selfish group of owners, through their spokesman, arrogantly claim (ignoring the whole miserable record we have described) that "the national interest" so often thrown at the seamen by Press, TV and Government, IS THE SAME THING AS THE SHIP OWNERS' INTERESTS' [emphasis in original].

They urged the nationalisation of the



industry but clearly envisaged that as being a mere change in the personnel at the top, and still cast the question of how shipping serves 'the national interest' in a world of competing states.

## Poacher turns gamekeeper

Prescott and his co-author also alluded to Labour's previous record, stating:

'The goodwill of the bankers, the ill-will of the working class. How familiar a story that is of Labour Governments, when we cast our minds back to Ramsay MacDonald and the 1929-31 government.'

Nowadays, we could add a few more Labour governments to that list.

Prescott had first stood for Parliament the same year as the strike. In 1970 he got elected MP for Hull East. By the 1990s, he was the shadow transport spokesman, extolling 'public private partnerships' as an alternative to nationalisation and a way of getting the industry to serve the national interest. He would later be part of the Blair government that institutionalised PFI as the default way of funding government projects.

By 2002 he was standing in the House of Commons, updating MPs on the situation with regard to the firefighters' strike:

'This Government cannot be asked to find additional money outside the agreed Government spending limits. To do so would risk fundamental and lasting damage to the economy. An inflationary pay rise for the firefighters would lead to inflationary pay rises elsewhere in the public sector, and that in turn would lead to job losses, inflation and mortgage rises' ([tinyurl.com/PrescottHOC20022226](http://tinyurl.com/PrescottHOC20022226)).

He affirmed that 'The Bain review has proposed a way forward. That is the basis for discussion.' He clearly learned the lessons of the Wilson government. 'The goodwill of the bankers. The ill-will of the workers'. An epitaph for Prescott and the Labour Party.

**PIK SMEET**

## Einstein got it right

FOR THE first issue of *Monthly Review* in May 1949 Einstein contributed an essay entitled 'Why Socialism?' ([monthlyreview.org/2009/05/01/why-socialism/](http://monthlyreview.org/2009/05/01/why-socialism/)). He began by explaining that humans are naturally social animals but that the structure of present-day society prevents this from being properly expressed, leading to the 'crippling of the social consciousness of individuals', and that 'the economic anarchy of capitalist society as it exists today is, in my opinion, the source of the evil'.

He explained the workers' situation under capitalism: 'For the sake of simplicity, in the discussion that follows I shall call "workers" all those who do not share in the ownership of the means of production – although this does not quite correspond to the customary use of the term. The owner of the means of production is in a position to purchase the labor power of the worker. By using the means of production, the worker produces new goods which become the property of the capitalist. The essential point about this process is the relation between what the worker produces and what he is paid, both measured in terms of real value. Insofar as the labor contract is "free," what the worker receives is determined not by the real value of the goods he produces, but by his minimum

needs and by the capitalists' requirements for labor power in relation to the number of workers competing for jobs. It is important to understand that even in theory the payment of the worker is not determined by the value of his product.'

The ideological apologists of capitalism are still trying to refute this as a recent contribution to *Mises Wire*, entitled 'Albert Einstein and the Folly of Marxist Sympathies', shows. The author, Kgalthiso Darius Leshaba, challenged Einstein's endorsement above of Marx's theory of worker exploitation:

'The first problem we run into is the concept of value. It has been firmly established that economic value isn't intrinsic, that "The measure of value is entirely subjective in nature." Value is not transferred somehow from labor to product. In fact, the direction of the imputation of value is exactly the other way around. The economic value of labor is determined by the value of the final product it aids in producing' ([tinyurl.com/bdh7d6je](http://tinyurl.com/bdh7d6je)).

Leshaba was quoting Carl Menger (1840-1921), the founder of the so-called Austrian School of economics, who came up with a theory aimed at refuting Marx or, in the words of the Mises Institute, 'corrected theoretical errors of the old classical school. These errors concerned value theory, and

they had sown enough confusion to make the dangerous ideology of Marxism seem more plausible than it really was' ([tinyurl.com/3r7n4wy2](http://tinyurl.com/3r7n4wy2)).

To say that economic value is 'entirely subjective' is to confuse use-value and exchange-value and assumes that production is carried on simply for the use of consumers. Obviously a commodity, as an item of wealth produced to be sold, has to be useful to somebody, otherwise it wouldn't sell. The demand for it could be said to be 'subjective' in the sense that it depends on the buyers' preferences but this merely explains the pattern of (paying) demand for something. It does not explain the supply.

No firm is going to produce a commodity unless it calculates that the income from selling it will at least (in practice more than) cover the prices of what it had to buy to produce it. So cost of production comes into it and that does not depend on the preferences of consumers. The claim that production costs (including wages) are subjective because their value is derived from being used to produce some consumer good whose value is said to be subjective is just assuming what has to be proved. It doesn't explain the division of what national income statisticians call 'added value' into wages and profits and is not taught these days even in bourgeois economics.

## Film Review

# Miracle on 34th Street (1947)

*We deconstruct a 'classic' film that is always shown on some TV channel over Christmas.*

FOR THOSE who don't know, this is a Christmas film about a nice, elderly man – called Kris Kringle – who gets a job as a department store Santa Claus, but thinks he really is Father Christmas. Kringle befriends: a lawyer (whom he later moves in with); his girlfriend (whom he also works for at Macy's department store); and her little girl from a previous relationship.

The story has two main plots that connect. The first is about a court case in which the lawyer has to prove that Kringle is the real Santa Claus in order to stop him from being put in a mental hospital. The second plot is about Doris (the single mother) who won't let her daughter believe in Santa Claus or use her imagination in any way, because she wants her to have a realistic outlook on life. It's not entirely clear why she decided to do this, but it has something to do with Doris's husband/Susan's father abandoning them both.

Even though this film is regarded by many



Credit: Getty Images

as a Christmas classic, from a socialist point of view it's terrible. Firstly, Kris Kringle is used as a metaphor for God, with the film being an allegory about why it's important to have faith. In that respect, the famous ending of this film is what Americans would call a giant cop-out. The New York Post Office decides to send Kringle all the letters they get from children addressed to Santa Claus (they do this to cut down on their waste). Because of this, the judge rules in favour of Kringle due to the Post Office (a branch of the US government) recognising that he is Santa Claus.

The ending of the 1994 remake makes a lot more sense. In that version, Kringle is proven to be the real Santa Claus because 'In God We Trust' is written on US bank notes, which shows that if the US Treasury is allowed to put its faith in God on the currency – without the requirement of evidence that God exists – then the people

of New York should be allowed to believe Santa Claus is real without evidence.

Another reason why this film is bad from a socialist perspective is because of a subplot in which Kringle uses his position (as the department store Santa) to advise parents to go to other stores to get what their children want for Christmas if Macy's doesn't have it. This leads to a lot of positive feedback from customers, and also to Gimbels (Macy's main market rival) copying them. And, wouldn't you know it, this leads to both stores making super profits, therefore, they don't have to compete with each other anymore. How wonderfully reformist!

In conclusion, it's not hard to see why this is regarded as a classic. However, it's very preachy and believes that rival businesses can and should co-operate with each other in order to optimise the interests of both capitalists and customers.

**MATTHEW STEARN**

# The latest celebrity to be accused

Credit: BBC



GREGG WALLACE MBE used to be most well known for presenting BBC One's *MasterChef* cookery competition, but now he's the latest celebrity to be accused of sexual misconduct. By late November, 13 women had made allegations against him, apparently of sexually harassing-type behaviour and inappropriate comments while they were working on various TV shows. Some of these complaints date back years, raising questions about how they were dealt with at the time, and why any abusive behaviour continued.

At the beginning of December, Wallace posted a video on Instagram denying the allegations and saying his accusers were 'a handful of middle-class women of a certain age', which surely he didn't think would calm the situation down. His accusers reacted by criticising him for his dismissive tone, while other journalists and commentators wore the phrase he used as a badge of honour, and also literally on badges, as well as on t-shirts and mugs. Even the government got involved. After Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy met with the BBC's senior management, a spokesman for the Prime Minister made a statement that Wallace's comment was 'completely inappropriate and misogynistic'. Wallace then posted a self-pitying apology for the offence caused by his remarks, technically not apologising for the remarks themselves. Some future editions of *MasterChef* were dropped from the schedules and Wallace isn't likely to be getting any other work pending an investigation. Further allegations of groping and indecent exposure followed.

Right-wing pundits such as Simon Webb of History Debunked and Alex Phillips on

Talk TV were critical of the importance placed on Gregg Wallace's actions in the news, above those days' other events such as Syria's Assad government losing control of the city of Aleppo. Of course, to complain about the story's prominence in the news is to add to its prominence. When right-wing commentators criticise the story they are likely to be doing so because they feel that it's an example of what they would see as the leftist trend of people being overly offended. Leo Kearsse's flippant stance was that targeting Wallace reveals the hypocrisy of left wingers who ignore non-white male perpetrators. Still, you don't have to be right wing to notice that the story has been especially prominent on the BBC's news output.

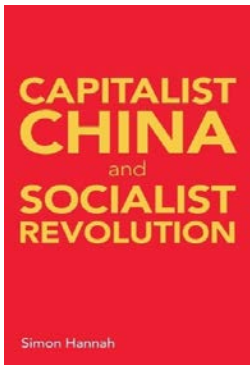
One reason for this is that the BBC wouldn't want its reputation to be harmed further by giving the impression it isn't taking seriously allegations against one of its stars. Only a few months earlier, newsreader Huw Edwards, who was usually called on to present coverage of the state's most prestigious occasions, was convicted of possessing child pornography. Edwards and Wallace have now both joined the list of TV presenters and actors who have been accused of sexually harassing or abusive behaviour to various extents: Russell Brand, Jay Blades, John Barrowman and Noel Clarke, among others. And the BBC – and the media in general – is still shamed by predators such as Rolf Harris, Stuart Hall, Gary Glitter and Jimmy Savile. Residual guilt about some of these abusers being able to continue for years probably also accounts for the BBC appearing to be so open now about accusations against Wallace.

While the actions of these men aren't equivalent to each other, there is a pattern behind this type of behaviour. Presumably, the high status these people had in TV circles gave them confidence, a sense of superiority over others and the opportunities to act on this. The power imbalance has led to misdemeanours ranging from crass comments to the most abhorrent crimes. The same pattern is found elsewhere in the media, as shown by film mogul Harvey Weinstein being jailed for rape and sexual abuse offences, and the sexism and sexual violence found in some aspects of hip hop and rap culture. Outside the media industry, allegations of sexual abuse by Harrods owner Mohamed Al-Fayed have come to light after his death, having been curtailed during his lifetime by threats of litigation against complainants. He was one of the few rich enough to buy some secrecy, but otherwise, how high profile a perpetrator is tends to equate to how prominently they are reported on, once the story breaks. A famous name attached to sexual misconduct attracts lucrative newspaper sales, social media posts and clicks on websites. The depressingly high number of other instances of sexual harassment and abuse in different workplaces hasn't been reported on as widely as the scandals in the media industry.

The TUC's *Still Just A Bit of Banter* report from 2016 said that more than one in ten women reported experiencing unwanted sexual touching while at work. And in 2020, the government published the *Sexual Harassment Survey*, which found that 29 percent of people in employment had experienced some form of sexual harassment through their job. Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy is considering introducing new codes of conduct for people working in the arts in an attempt to address abuse in that industry, but the problem exists across all sectors and runs deeper than reforms can control. The power imbalance which lies behind instances of sexual abuse is a consequence of the hierarchies which come with employment. The structure of workplaces in capitalism puts people on different levels, with those in higher positions having influence over those lower down. This creates the conditions for people with damaged and damaging attitudes towards women, children or other groups to act in an abusive way. Addressing this problem means addressing the structures in society which enable it to happen.

**MIKE FOSTER**

## Working class China



**Capitalist China and Socialist Revolution.** By Simon Hannah. Resistance Books, 2023. 67pp.

This pamphlet begins with some indisputable truths: ‘The working class in China is massive – the largest in the world. But they often work in terrible conditions with few effective rights and no independent trade unions. They labour under an authoritarian government calling itself “socialist with Chinese characteristics”’. Its author then goes on to further characterise modern China as a country run by a ‘pro-business’ party, which, while calling itself ‘communist’, is so only in name. Nor is he impressed by those on the political left who defend China simply on the grounds that its government has massively developed the country’s productive forces and in so doing has lifted millions out of absolute poverty. He points out that this process has not been a prerogative of China and that globally capitalism has ‘lifted millions of people out of abject poverty, whilst condemning millions of others to live in misery’. He goes on to say that ‘the Chinese state corresponds to all the definitions of a capitalist state’, in which ‘both the state sector and the private sector follow capitalist imperatives of growth’.

Nothing here at all that socialists would disagree with. But disagreement does start when he asserts that this state of affairs (ie, China being capitalist) only began in 1976 ‘with the economic and political reforms after the death of Chairman Mao’. The author does recognise that things weren’t great under Mao and that the various schemes adopted by his regime such as the ‘five-year plan’ and ‘the Great Leap Forward’ were abject failures that heaped suffering on the people and led to, among other things, mass famine. Yet, at the same time he definitely soft-peddles that disastrous rule, even referring to it at one point as ‘a new course towards socialism’, albeit one that didn’t go to plan. But little is said about that overall, with the main criticism reserved for what happened after Mao’s death when Deng Xiaoping took over leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and, as quite rightly observed here, opened up the economy to the world market, something he described, in a supreme exercise of

smoke and mirrors, as ‘using capitalism to develop socialism’. The writer then goes into significant detail to show how this process of integration into the world market continued and intensified in the decades that followed continuing to the present day and how it was coupled with increasingly authoritarian political control by the CCP, which has managed, sometimes by brute force, to keep the lid on protest, as, for example, in the slaughter of students and workers at the Tiananmen Square protest of 1989. As for the current situation in China under the leadership of Xi Jinping, he quotes the words of a recent Hong Kong opposition activist: ‘Today’s CCP, with its fusion of both political and economic power, its hostility towards people enjoying basic rights of association and free speech, its xenophobia, nationalism, Social Darwinism, cult of a corporate state, “unification” of thought, etc., is now comparable to a fascist state’. And he points to the fact that China, in its mix of state and private ownership, has more billionaires than any other country in the world, while workers are largely denied independent trade unions and, if they protest, are likely to be arrested or battered into submission by the police.

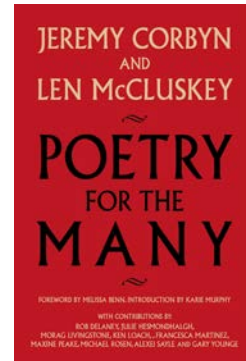
None of this can be denied, but what is hard to understand is how the author can see redeeming features in what happened previously (ie, under Mao) and can somehow see what is happening now as fundamentally different from- and worse than- the repressive and tyrannical state capitalism that existed then. He correctly points to the fact that ‘state ownership does not equate to socialism’, but it did not under Mao either. Mao’s journey was just as much down ‘the capitalist road’ as that of his successors.

As to how China will develop in the future, the author rightly sees this as unpredictable, but avers that the ruling party may not be ‘as homogenous and united as it pretends to be’ and its leader, Xi Jinping, not quite so impregnable as he may seem. So he does not see it as impossible that China may develop into ‘a liberal democratic capitalist state on the model of Western democracy’ or into ‘a Russian style capitalism controlled by a small and powerful aristocracy’. But, as he makes clear, any such arrangement would still be capitalism. As an alternative to this, he calls for a society ‘not based on profit but on need, social development and human capacity’. As to whether this can happen in a single country or whether it must be global, there appears to be some contradiction in his mind. The fact that he sometimes makes reference to ‘socialist countries’ suggests that he does not necessarily see socialism as a world system, as we insist it must be. At the same time he does talk about the need for ‘an international working class movement’, and the ‘Anti-Capitalist Resistance’ group

under whose aegis this pamphlet is published states its aim as ‘social transformation, based on mass participatory democracy’. Whatever the case, it is clear that socialism, meaning a system of free access to all goods and services based solely on human need, cannot exist in just one country. It must, by definition, be a world society and one that has to be consciously brought into being and then organised cooperatively by a majority of workers who have taken democratic action to opt for it.

HKM

## Poetry



**Poetry for the Many.** Compiled by Jeremy Corbyn and Len McCluskey. O/R Books. 2024.

‘Poetry tells truths that often cannot be expressed in discourse or prose. It gives meaning to the inner-self and allows for people to think freely.’ So says Jeremy Corbyn in his opening remarks. He goes on to state ‘It can be just an expression of thoughts that may at first appear as random but, when written down on paper or screen, can become more coherent and take on a deeper meaning’.

Socialists are surely in favour of any means by which people are engaged in a process of deeper consideration of the world in which they live. Anything that challenges individuals to look beyond the glossy blandishments of the mass and social medias must be regarded as positive.

I first became actively involved with poetry as a writer and performer 50 years ago with the Tyneside Poets. The stated aim of the group was to encourage a widespread appreciation of poetry outside the walls of academia and the classroom. Through its regular meetings, readings and publications the Tyneside Poets group pursued its aims in a wide variety of settings and locations, giving opportunities for people, who otherwise would have been denied such, to publish and publicly read their own poems.

In the late 1970s I co-edited with Gordon Phillips (a fellow Tyneside Poet) two anthologies of poems by young people. Looking for a title for the collection we were inspired by a line in a letter accompanying one submission. Having expressed his wish to have his poem published he then pleaded

'please don't tell my friends'. This poignant request became that title.

In a world of rap and poetry slams it may be difficult to appreciate how poets and poetry were regarded by many back then. Tyneside Poets was not unique as similar groups flourished around Britain. The small press became a movement in its own right, a sort of democratisation of the word.

So, 'Poetry for the Many' is by no means a novel notion. But the title implies a certain difference. However unintentionally, it, implicitly at least, suggests a notion that is fundamental to reformist politics.

That is the idea of something of benefit being given to those who are presently deprived of it by circumstance. The many are passive recipients rather than active agents on their own behalf. That it is an anthology compiled by two well-known public figures invites the question whether it would have found a publisher had it been by A. Non and A. N. Other.

This is not to question the motives of Corbyn and McCluskey, but to reflect on the very nature of how capitalism influences all aspects of society. The back cover quotes Robin Campbell of UB40 fame, 'Poetry and music for the many!'... 'encouraging the working class to embrace and enjoy culture'.

This suggests a rather restricted view of what constitutes the working class. If we are using the socialist definition, the 99 percent or so who depend on the sale of their labour power for their means of life, then there is already a large number of that class who 'embrace and enjoy culture'.

'For the many' was the slogan promoted by Jeremy Corbyn, his allies and supporters, during his ill-fated tenure as leader of the Labour Party. An apt comment on leadership is chosen, perhaps knowingly, by Len McCluskey, a poem by Roger McGough:

#### The Leader

I wanna be the leader  
I wanna be the leader  
Can I be the leader?  
Can I? I can?  
Promise? Promise?  
Yippee I'm the leader  
I'm the leader  
OK what shall we do?

It's almost possible to hear this in the voice of Lenin following the storming of the Winter Palace. Or maybe Corbyn after his surprise election to the Labour Party leadership. Perhaps it's any leader confronted by the reality of administering capitalist society.

Compiling any poetry anthology is a subjective process. If the selected criterion is poetry for the many then questions of accessibility and obscurity come into play. After all the objective is to encourage through engagement rather than possibly

discourage due to difficulty. Consequently, many of the poems included here are well known, Wordsworth's 'I wandered lonely...', Blake's 'Jerusalem', Owen's 'Dulce et Decorum Est' and others similarly popular. If the purpose is to engage a new audience for poetry then these are good inclusions.

All the poems are prefaced with an introduction by whoever did the choosing. Reasons for the choice of poet and poem are given, along with the significance to each individual. This is the case for approximately three quarters of the poems. The final quarter is given over to choices by such as Ken Loach, Maxine Peake, Michael Rosen and Alexei Sayle amongst others.

The political ethos underpinning this anthology can be traced to its foundation. This was a gathering for the Politics and Poetry Event in Liverpool's CASA club, October 2021. Karie Murphy in the anthology's introduction sets the scene. 'On the stage is a trio of stalwarts of the Left: Jeremy Corbyn, Len McCluskey and Melissa Benn.'

Thus the somewhat washed out and limp red flag is nailed to the mast. We do not doubt the sincerity of Corbyn and McCluskey in their love of poetry and their wish to bring others, undoubtedly many, to a similar appreciation.

However, from a political point of view, this is still poetry as a commodity people can, literally, buy into. Their role is that of consumers, guided by '...stalwarts of the Left' a self-selected poetic vanguard.

A mitigating reply might be that as stated on the cover 'All royalties from sales of *Poetry for the Many* will be donated to the Peace and Justice Project'. No matter how worthy a cause it does not confront the actual issue that peace and justice can only be achieved through abolishing capitalism, and not fine words.

To paraphrase Marx, 'The poets have only interpreted the world...The point, however, is to change it'.

DAVE ALTON

## Origins of patriarchy



Friedrich Engels referred to the 'overthrow of mother-right' as 'the world historical defeat of the female sex', meaning that women became subordinate to men and 'the woman was degraded

and reduced to servitude'. This implied an earlier time where women had far more power and authority, in matrilineal or matriarchal societies. The Socialist Party's 1986 pamphlet *Women and Socialism* criticised this account on the grounds that there was no universal stage of matriarchy and that relationships between men and women have changed over time to meet the needs of society.

In this book Angela Saini makes a similar point, that early societies varied greatly, and 'the emergence of patriarchy could never have been a single catastrophic event'. A lot of material, in different places and at different times, is covered, but often it is hard to draw firm conclusions.

Societies where descent is traced through the female line are found in many parts of the world, though rarely in Europe. The Khasi community in north-east India, for instance, is matrilineal, with a child belonging to her mother, and men do not have rights over property or children. But it is not matriarchal, as family authority rests with the mother's brother, though this power is not absolute. Some men have objected to this system recently, but others have defended it. In North America the Seneca have adopted a patrilineal naming system, but tribal membership remains matrilineal, despite the efforts of missionaries and government agents to institute a more patriarchal system.

Unfortunately, the book's main claims are let down by an unconvincing chapter on the status of women in Russia and Eastern Europe under Bolshevism, in what is termed here 'state socialism'. Abortion was legalised in the USSR in 1920, though this was reversed under Stalin in 1936, in order to boost birth rates, and it was made legal again in 1955. East Germany saw a massive increase in the number of crèche places, and by 1959 almost every pharmacist in the Soviet Union was a woman. On the whole, though, patriarchy was 'dented' rather than smashed. Saini does not discuss this, but the division into rulers and ruled was of course not even dented (see chapter 3 of our 1986 pamphlet for more on women in Russia.)

In Iran many women supported the movement against the Shah, but the Islamic Republic clamped down on women's freedoms, with abortion made illegal and the wearing of the veil being mandatory. As this and other examples show, patriarchy is 'being constantly remade in the present, and sometimes with greater force than before.' And patriarchy is not a single phenomenon, rather there are plural patriarchies, existing in different ways in different cultures.

PB

# The fat of the land

EVEN A newspaper like *The Sun* should be asked to explain itself at times. On 22nd November its editorial said: 'Britain's future is bleak, sombre and perilous . . . the British are fat, lazy, complacent — and deeply in debt'.

Who are 'Britain' and 'the British' in this statement? Clearly, *The Sun* does not mean everyone. Harold Wilson and Edward Heath are both fat, but they are not deeply in debt with bleak futures. Denis Healey is fat. So is Reginald Maudling. The Houses of Parliament are full of fat people, and they are only outweighed by the Institute of Directors. Nobody supposes, however, that these are the target of *The Sun's* unkind words and its sombre warning.

What it means is the working class, and it's a funny thing how the idea of a working man being fat is equated with national disaster. (...) *The Sun* was in fact commenting on, and supporting, a report on 'Britain's plight' by the Hudson Institute of America: *experts say poverty is on the way*. (...)

On 5th December similar forecasts and warnings were given in a review by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research. According to this, in 1975 prices will rise still higher and

unemployment will grow. Both teams of 'experts' had plans to urge. The National Institute thought import controls would prove necessary; the Hudson Institute would remedy things by 'a new national six-year economic policy' run by 'Britain's best economists and administrators'.

The latter scheme is presumably to ensure that, whatever happens, the fat and the thin remain distinguishable. How little use it would be otherwise is shown by one of *The Sun's* remarks:

'Leadership—or lack of it—is one element, of course. We are all of us unfortunate to live in an age of political pygmies. But perhaps we are already beyond the stage where we could be rescued by inspired leadership.'

Which is saying that things have come to a crisis under unimpressive dolts, but would be no better under geniuses.

The fallacy of all this is treating the impending crisis as an abnormality. Words like 'doomsday', 'peril', 'saving Britain' and 'the Dunkirk spirit' imply it to be a millennial catastrophe; but that is only a way of calling for more sacrifices from the workers. The reality is that the crisis is a normal phenomenon of capitalism.

## Action Replay

# Make sport great again?

THERE HAVE been many reactions to Donald Trump winning the US presidential election, from concerns about the effects of the introduction of import tariffs to worries about the impact of the proposal to deport millions of illegal immigrants and possible consequences for global climate policies. In addition, some people have wondered what the implications for sport might be, with many power-holders, but by no means all, welcoming his return to office. He has been described as the most 'sports-focused president' in US history, though no doubt the interests of the American capitalist class will be at the top of his agenda.

The 2026 football World Cup will be hosted jointly by the US, Canada and Mexico. The FIFA boss, Giovanni Infantino, seems to be very friendly with Trump, and this may help to smooth over problems with visa applications and checks at the border to enter the US for players, journalists and supporters from some countries that could qualify for the tournament (Iran, for instance). The US is also hosting this year's new 32-team Club World Cup, which has given rise to a lot of complaints about there being too many matches. And the US is preparing a joint bid with Mexico to host the 2031 Women's World Cup. Trump has fallen out with the US women's team, though this is

unlikely to undermine the bid.

In this connection, Trump has said he would ban all transgender women from female sports, including trans-inclusive teams. But the 2028 Summer Olympics are due to be held in Los Angeles, and the International Olympic Committee lets individual sports determine their own gender policies. The IOC boss, Thomas Bach, is rather less keen on Trump, and (unlike Infantino) did not congratulate him on his re-election. Bach's term in office ends this year, but in any case, it is not clear whether Trump would have any influence in this area.

Trump's own sporting connections are

most obviously with golf, as both player (though he is notorious for cheating) and owner of courses. It has been suggested that he might be able to end the dispute in the game between the established tour and the Saudi-funded LIV tour (see Action Replay for February 2024), and he claimed he could do this in fifteen minutes. Top golfer Rory McIlroy took Trump's side on this, but didn't help his case by describing Elon Musk as 'the smartest man in the world'.

If Trump can bring an end to the war in Ukraine, then resolving the split in golf should be a piece of cake or, maybe, a six-inch putt.

PB



# World Socialist Movement Online Meetings

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

## January 2025 Events

### World Socialist Movement online meetings

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

Weekly WSP (India) meeting

#### Sunday 12 January 10.00 (GMT)

Central Online Branch Meeting

#### Friday 3 January 19.30 (GMT)

No Meeting. Holiday break

#### Friday 10 January 19.30 (GMT)

2025: More of the same?

Discussion on what happened in 2024 and what is likely to happen in 2025

#### Friday 17 January 19.30 (GMT)

Sixty years a Socialist and before

Speaker: Janet Carter

#### Friday 24 January 19.30 (GMT)

Capitalism in India

Speaker: Andy Thomas

#### Friday 31 January 19.30 (GMT)

Communism: An idea that is reviving

Speaker: Adam Buick

### Socialist Party Physical Meetings

#### LONDON

#### Saturday 26 January 3pm

'The good will of the bankers, the ill-will of the workers': A look at the life of John Prescott

Speaker: Bill Martin

Socialist Party Head Office, 52 Clapham High Street, London

SW4 7UN. Nearest tube: Clapham North. Nearest rail station: Clapham High Street.

#### MANCHESTER

#### Saturday 15 February, 2pm

Talk on 'Work'

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

#### CARDIFF

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

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

### Party News

London branch stood a candidate in the local council by-election in Junction ward of Islington council on 28 November. It is a ward that we had contested three times before. This time, a candidate endorsed by Jeremy Corbyn, the local MP, stood and mounted an intensive campaign of leafletting and door-knocking, resulting in more local interest than normally in such elections. In private he claimed to be a socialist but, fortunately, did not add to the confusion by repeating this on his leaflets. Not that this prevented the Tory candidate claiming that there were 'four varieties of socialism on offer'. Apart from the Corbynist and the Labourite, we were the only one of the other five candidates who did any leafletting. Five members distributed some 3000 leaflets, covering every accessible letterbox in the ward. The result, on a turnout of just over 21 percent was: Labour 785; Jackson Caines (Corbynist) 550; Green 219; LibDem 156; Conservative 113; Independent 97; Socialist 22. There is another council by-election pending, in Lambeth, due to a councillor climbing further up the greasy pole by becoming an MP which the branch is intending to contest when he finally gets round to resigning.

## 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.

# A letter to my son

THE 'Life and Times' column I wrote for this year's April *Socialist Standard* had the title 'Horror in the Middle East'. Choosing Sides' ([tinyurl.com/2s3re9fx](http://tinyurl.com/2s3re9fx)) and talked about the support that has built up for the Palestinians in the Gaza conflict and the widespread condemnation of Israel for its role in the fighting. It asked whether this could be attributed to the oldest hatred – antisemitism. Its conclusion was that it was not antisemitism that underlies it but rather the association of Israel with the United States and 'the anti-Americanism on the left of Western politics which dates back a long way'.

The column gave rise to discussion, disagreement and controversy on the Socialist Party's various online forums and, when I showed it to my son, not a member of the Party, he didn't have an entirely positive reaction either. He attributed the sympathy and support the Palestinians are getting not mainly to anti-Americanism but rather to the vast amount of media coverage being given to this particular conflict. We discussed this and agreed to disagree. But then a little later I was going through some papers of my own, and I came across a copy of a letter I had written to him over 20 years ago, shortly after the 9/11 attack. It struck me how related what happened then was to what is happening now, even if in different countries and with different protagonists. What do I mean by this? This may become clear if I reproduce parts of that letter:

*'Since you brought up the present world political situation yesterday, just an amplification here.*

*The virulent anti-Americanism that is prevalent on the left has a historical, if entirely irrational, origin. When Russia emerged as the champion of 'socialism' after the Russian revolution, throughout the world those who were on the left supported it. So bewitched were they by what was largely rhetoric that, even when Stalin murdered millions in the 30s, made a pact with Hitler at the beginning of the second world war and later set up ruthless dictatorships in all the countries of Eastern Europe, in those peoples' eyes Russia still remained the 'homeland' of socialism, to be supported at all costs. The consequence was that, when, after the second world war, the world divided*

*into two capitalist camps, led by Russia (state capitalist) on one side and America (private capitalist) on the other (the so-called 'Cold War'), the great villain for the left was America. In an unshakeable double standards mentality, the Russian abuses were ignored or apologised for (eg invasion of Afghanistan, setting up of client dictator states elsewhere - Korea, Syria, Angola, etc.), and all similar actions by the Americans were seen as evil rapacious acts designed to extend and further American power, which they of course were. So strong was the emotional attachment to Russia that even those left-wing people and groups who criticised it in various ways and even in some cases recognised it as a form of capitalism still hung on to it at bottom as fundamentally being on the right side. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the left no longer has a country to cling on to (unless Cuba or, for some, China), but what has remained as a legacy of former times is the hatred of America as the symbol of world capitalism (not that most of them even know what the word means) and the epitome of evil.*

*The other things that have remained among left-wingers is a continuing opposition to those regimes or countries that America backed during the Cold War, especially Israel, and support for those countries that Russia backed during that period, especially those that have one-party states (eg, Syria, Palestine, Cuba). Ironically that rhetoric has now been bent to the service of fundamentalist Islam. If, historically, wars in the modern world have been struggles for markets, raw materials, trade routes and strategic positions, what you have here, in fundamentalist Islam, is the ideological product of 'normal' wars fought in the past and, in fact, much more difficult to fight than a normal war. In his writings Marx continually talked about 'the contradictions of capitalism'. He usually meant phenomena like the existence of poverty among plenty, or of opposing factions within the owning class of a country causing political instability. And here is another (though obviously unforeseeable in Marx's time) 'contradiction of capitalism', the military power that usually goes with economic power having difficulty in prevailing over the force of a religious ideology which should belong to previous centuries. Though nothing can justify the plane*

*bombing in New York, it's fatal to get drawn in and say you support one side or another.*

*At bottom it's probably not a problem that can be solved, at least not in the short term, and even if it somehow does get solved or alleviated, it will tend to create further unforeseen problems. So whatever people say, it is in the end a problem for those who have created the breeding ground for it in the first case, those who rule.'*

So how is what happened in 2001 (and the period immediately following) related to what is happening in the Middle East today? Well, these events show us how phenomena in capitalism have a habit broadly of repeating themselves. It shows the tendency the system engenders in people to take one side against another in a conflict failing to recognise the underlying causes of the conflict. Then there is also that 'instinctive' reaction of opposition by the left and other so-called 'progressive' forces to any association with the United States. And there's also the inevitable failure of that reaction to result in any positive outcome for any of those caught up in the conflict. So the massive demonstrations we saw following 9/11 against the Western policy of invading Iraq and Afghanistan had not the slightest impact on events, and, once the invasions had taken place, the opposition to them faded into the background. In the same way, the current large-scale movements in Western countries in favour of the Palestinians and against Israel will die down as the conflict there takes its course and the outcome is decided by the governments that manage the capitalist system, an outcome which will be largely dependent on the economic and military strength of the different sides.

For this reason, were I to write another letter to my son now about the current conflict in the Middle East, the points I would make would be oh so similar to those I made 20+ years ago when yet another of capitalism's crises had exploded and people were being drawn into the futile activity of supporting one side against the other.

**HOWARD MOSS**