

THE

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SOCIALIST STANDARD

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain

Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

Made it Ma,
top of the
world!

Capitalism's
white heat



Also: No let up
Assassinations or class struggle?
Taylor Swift, food banks and insecurity
What is socialism?

Irish General Election: same old,
same old
Crisis and scandal – Happy New Year?
'Socialism' more popular than
'Capitalism'



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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'

Trump – what now?

ON 20 January Donald Trump officially became president of the United States, much to the consternation of almost 50 percent of the US electorate, and many others around the world. When Trump lost the 2020 election, much relief was expressed by those who feared that he would have established some kind of dictatorship, stamping on all dissent and taking draconian measures against all 'progressive' forces. Similar fears are now being expressed.

He says he knows how to quickly resolve the Russia-Ukraine conflict (even if he seems to have moved away from his earlier 'single phone call' boast). He has promised mass deportations of 'unregistered' people. He has vowed to counter attempts to limit fossil fuel and carbon emissions. He has proposed heavy taxes on imports from foreign countries, especially China. And he wants Greenland and the Panama Canal.

Will any of this happen? Whoever has to run the capitalist system in any country often sees their 'best laid plans' go awry, because capitalism cannot be controlled by governments. Trump's desire to take over those other territories could only

come to fruition if other global players inexplicably chose not to resist. And his mass deportation plans are likely to meet obstacles at local, state or international levels, making them no more successful than his previous plan to build a wall and make Mexico pay for it.

His promotion of the fossil fuel industry may have earned him votes in the 'rust belt', but - with climate change implicated in multiple disasters including the recent Los Angeles fires- it could end up losing him support. If his confidence over the Russia-Ukraine war is based on cutting off weapons to Ukraine, he might find that Ukraine manages to get its weapons elsewhere, making him look impotent.

What would he say if such failures, or one of capitalism's periodic downturns, lose him support? Some say he won't care, because he will have established a police state that lets him rule unhindered. But advanced capitalist democracies like the US, and others such as the UK, Canada, Germany, France, Holland, Sweden, South Korea, etc, have well-entrenched mechanisms for preventing dictatorships. That's true even if the

would-be dictator surrounds himself, as Trump seems to be doing, with a cohort of compliant disciples who compete to express the most extreme views.

Examples of Trump's puerile narcissism abound, for example, pinning the blame for the Los Angeles fires on the state governor, Gavin 'Newscom' Newsom. Expect further vilification of opponents by him and his best bro, the increasingly preposterous billionaire Elon Musk. Journalist Patrick Cockburn in *The i Paper* calls it 'the most crazed administration in US history'. Another commentator calls it 'the power of dumb'. Even so, it will still have to play by capitalism's rules.

What has happened in the US seems aeons away from the kind of society we advocate – leaderless, moneyless, wageless, frontierless and entirely democratic. But even if the US election had voted in the 'lesser evil' (ie, the Democrats), that party would still have been obliged to run the system in a business-as-usual way, ie, in the profit-seeking interests of the tiny minority who monopolise the majority of the wealth. And so it will continue as long as most wage-slaves continue to support, or at least acquiesce in, capitalism and the profit-seeking force that drives it.

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Regreened and pleasant land

IN WHAT may be an omen of the new Trump incumbency, Elon Musk's SpaceX rocket underwent a 'rapid unscheduled disassembly' last month. In a similarly unpromising start to the MAGA 2.0 regime, large areas of Los Angeles also underwent their own version of a rapid disassembly as winter wild fires raged along the beachfronts and through the Hollywood hills. When even millionaire celebs' houses are burning down, you know the world is in crisis.

The LA fires were particularly devastating because of the 'weather whiplash' effect. Global warming is disrupting weather systems and rainfall patterns, making wet events in Southern California wetter, and dry events longer. Heavy rain a year or so back resulted in a profusion of new foliage, which then dried out during the subsequent and prolonged drought, creating a mass of kindling just waiting for the next lightning strike or discarded cigarette butt (tinyurl.com/vp6fd9jv).

This weather whiplash effect is being felt around the world, leading in many places to increasing floods and desertification, aided and abetted by human activity including deforestation, industrial farming and overgrazing, soil degradation, building, mining and pollution. It's estimated that 25 percent of global land will be under threat by 2050. The Gobi desert in Mongolia and China is expanding by around 6,000 square kilometres a year, causing tens of thousands of migrants to flee to the cities. The Sahara, a desert the size of the United States, is advancing by around 48 km a year, exacerbating land conflicts in already poverty-stricken areas. The Thar desert



in north-west India, for centuries held back by the natural barrier of the Aravalli mountains, is now blowing dust storms across croplands and into cities as the government have failed to prevent illegal mining of those same mountains.

Capitalism, which cares nothing for consequences, is the real 'tragedy of the commons', in which Earth's common resources are owned and controlled privately and for private gain, to the impoverishment of all. In socialism, where resources would be commonly owned and managed, this unnecessary tragedy could be shunted into reverse. We don't even need new technology to do it. We can simply apply ancient techniques used by the Egyptians and the Inca to create artificial water-harvesting structures to regreen the land.

Some of this is already happening. One famous regreening project is in the Sahel, the wide strip of semi-desert that borders the southern edge of the Sahara. Contrary to popular belief, it does rain in the Sahara, but rarely, and the water runs off the dry and impermeable ground in violent flash floods, leaving nothing behind. But since 2007, locals have been digging crescent-shaped depressions in the ground to catch the run-off, with deep sinkholes to permeate the sub-soil. The result has been a return of trees – a natural barrier to Saharan dust storms – and lush vegetation. The 'Great Green Wall' project runs right across Africa from coast to coast, involves 22 countries, and aims to restore 100 million hectares of marginal land by 2030 (youtu.be/udaihReGAA).

Look online for stories about regreening deserts. They're everywhere. Take Ethiopia, birthplace of coffee and once a 'garden of Eden' with at least 66 percent forest and woodland cover, reduced by human activity to 3.1 percent by 1982. It stopped raining and the wells dried up, causing droughts and biblical famines. But local community projects have been building micro-watersheds consisting of terraces, deep trenches, check dams and percolation ponds. Since these started, 13 streams have returned, of which 6 now flow throughout the year. Project lead Tony Renaudo put it plainly: 'If you give nature a chance it will heal itself' (youtu.be/RBP2uRQk5pQ).

China's Kubuqi desert project is one

of the world's most successful, where desertification expanding at a rate of 10,000 km² per year in 2000 has been reversed, leading to a re-greening of 2,000 km² annually, using only local rainfall.

Also in China, the Loess Plateau had been stripped bare by overcropping and overgrazing, causing soil erosion, flooding, desertification and dust storms. The 35,000 km² project was explained to local volunteers this way: you need to 'dress' the landscape – the hilltops need to wear hats (trees), the hills need to wear belts (terraces), and the valleys need shoes (dams). They regreened the entire area in a decade.

In India, monsoons come for just 3 months, giving farmers a fleeting window to produce just one annual crop, before 9 months of drought. The Paani Foundation project in India's Maharashtra region hosts an annual Watercup competition to see which village can install the most water-harvesting structures within 45 days. Thousands of villages have participated since 2016, replenishing the water table in just one season and saving an estimated 145 billion gallons of water in 4 years, enabling 2 or more crops a year, creating food security, and ending migration to cities.

The Arvari river in north-west India had been dry for 60 years, with monsoon water simply running off the dry earth. In 1986 they started building water-harvesting crescents as in the Sahel, and by 1995 had restored the river year-round. They've since done the same thing with four more dry river systems (youtu.be/TpozW1CAxmU).

Saudi Arabia has used subterranean water for crop irrigation but this is not sustainable as low rainfall can't replenish the water table. The west-coast Al Baydha project, begun in 2010, built dams, channels and ditches to direct the floodwater into long-term storage areas, with the result that local vegetation was able to survive a 30-month drought without artificial irrigation (youtu.be/D6Kz_OcOgVE).

These and many other projects are being done now, not thanks to capitalism but in spite of it. What they mostly require is simply the cooperative labour of vast numbers of local people who understand what they're doing and why they're doing it. It's a tantalising foretaste of what socialism could achieve on a world scale, once the barriers of private ownership and profit-seeking are torn down, and more of us start rolling our sleeves up.

PJS

No let up

SO WHAT'S happened over the globe in the year just gone by? It's certainly been full of news. But same old, same old. Wars, economic crises, climate mess, insecurity, poverty, homelessness, hunger, starvation. No let up. And by some measures even worse than in previous years.

In a country like Britain which has a milder version of most of these ills, even those who suffer the most tend to count themselves lucky. They may be suffering from being hard up, poorly housed, unemployed or precariously employed, but at least they're not being bombed to smithereens or, except in very rare cases, actually starving to death. Whether managing to cope by selling their energies to an employer day by day to keep their heads above water or suffering trauma and worse from not finding a way to do this, very few look for the real cause, the root cause, of the problems that beset the society they're obliged to live in.

Very few understand that the present society is based on class division – between the tiny few who own the means of living and enjoy an unearned income as profit and don't need to work as wage slaves, and the vast majority who have no choice but to hawk their skills around the job market to earn a living.

Not that the people who have to do this – the working class – don't complain about the way things are run and the organisation of the world around them. They do. But they tend to complain about each issue individually as though it's a series of unconnected phenomena with no underlying common cause. They don't connect the dots, which, if they did, would lead them to that root cause, which is not bad or inappropriate government policies but the whole social and economic system we live in, capitalism.

So what can be done? Well, definitely not the kind of flip from Tweedledum to Tweedledee that we saw in last year's general election. We saw how as soon as the new administration came to power, it was beset with similar problems to the

old one and is proving no more adept at dealing with them. By definition, in fact, they can't be dealt with, since governments don't control the system they're supposed to govern. The system with its unpredictable, uncontrollable market forces controls them. And this forces them – whether they like it or not – to take measures which cause discontent among both workers and, as we've seen, even among sections of the owning class on whose behalf they operate.

The alternative? Mass global consciousness of what capitalism – the market and profit system – means in any of its forms. Mass global consciousness of the need for a different way of organising human affairs – moneyless, wageless and leaderless – based on production for use not profit, on voluntary cooperation, on free access to all goods and services, on the principle of from each according to ability to each according to need. If we get in any way closer to that consciousness by the end of 2025, then something at least will have been achieved.

Assassinations or class struggle?

LUIGI MANGIONE allegedly assassinated the capitalist Brian Thompson, CEO of a health insurance company, after seeing his own mother's prolonged suffering after being denied health insurance coverage in North America, where healthcare is unsocialised by design. The shot was heard around the world and ignited the long dormant class consciousness of North America. The outpouring of support for Mangione's alleged act has been politically surprising for many of the lapdogs of capital. The media especially has been caught on the back foot, seeing political pundits booed by their own audience as the public celebrate the alleged act.

Capitalism and political violence go hand in hand. As Malcolm X said, 'violence is American as cherry pie.' It's just not usually cutting in this direction. We will see this same political opera play out again and again as capitalism tumbles from one crisis to the next, economic and environmental, and as society becomes more individualistic and fragmented from both wings of the political spectrum, as well as an increase in violence inspired by conspiracy theorists. Examples abound from 'pizzagate' or the 'MAGA bomber' Cesar Sayoc.

Western society's morals advocate for people to only use peaceful means of achieving social change, but capitalism is anything but peaceful. The inherent tensions

between classes in a capitalist society lead to situations where violence is inevitable when the oppressed are spoken to everyday in the language of violence by capital.

The state, as argued by Max Weber, is defined by its monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force. In this regard, the 1 percent wields power through the apparatus of the state, enforcing laws and maintaining order to protect its property. So, when the working class resorts to violence, it is typically a reaction to an unyielding system that allows no channels and permits no voice.

Consider the words of Marxist revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg, who once stated, 'Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently.' Where the state fails to provide avenues for dissent, the working class feels compelled to take matters into their own hands, an act not of frivolity but of desperation. To condemn such an act will serve the oppressive structure of the status quo that continues to render peaceful protests ineffectual.

The job of a socialist party in this context is not to support the wild actions of rugged individualists but to provide paths of mass action with a coherent philosophy, uniting disparate efforts into a collective strategy. Antonio Gramsci emphasised the importance of a 'war of position' in establishing hegemony, advocating for a

broad ideological struggle that counters individualistic acts of defiance with systemic solutions. The party must provide structure to the movement, demonstrating that the fight against oppression is not one of isolated and ultimately futile gestures but part of a large revolutionary struggle.

The late historian Eric Hobsbawm pointed out the 'social bursts' of violence that erupt during times of severe inequity. The working class mobilisation amidst such strife, far from being vilified, should be understood within the broader narrative of class conflict.

The state's response to dissent is a reflection of its inherent class interests. The role of a socialist party is not only to channel individual acts into a collective aim but also to recognise and respond to the realities of revolutionary action, acknowledging that, while peaceful revolution is its aim, understanding the circumstances that lead to violence is crucial in the pursuit of a free society. It is through this synthesis of theory and practice that the socialist movement can articulate its vision for the future, one where productive resources are held in common, and where the state, and its monopoly of violence, will be a thing of the past.

A.T.

A good question

ON 8 December the Deputy Prime Minister, Angela Rayner, did the rounds of the television studios to publicise the Labour government's plan to get 1.5 million new homes built over the next five years. The next day the press gave her a hard time with such headlines as 'Rayner contradicts herself saying there "is plenty of housing" then admits there's a "housing crisis"' (tinyurl.com/3vjw84v4).

One of the things she said was: 'There is plenty of housing already, but there's not enough for the people that desperately need it.'

This is saying that there is enough housing available but that it's too expensive for a lot of people. Which would indeed be a paradox. It would also mean that what is called the 'housing crisis' is not a crisis arising from there not being enough homes but from people not having enough money to be able to buy the homes that are for sale. In other words, a crisis due to people being too poor to pay for what they need.

So, strictly speaking, we should be talking about an 'affordability crisis'. In which case, building more houses won't

solve the problem. As the headline of an article in the *Times* (11 December) by columnist Alice Thompson asked, 'Building homes is fine but who will buy them?'

Good question, as Rayner would have had to prevaricate had this been put to her. Houses today are not built to provide accommodation for people, however desperately they might need it. They are built to be sold with a view to making a profit. As the Home Builders Federation explained to Thompson, 'bluntly' as she put it, 'Builders can only build if buyers can buy'. The problem is that not enough buyers can buy.

In fact, not only is the affordability crisis preventing people using existing housing; it is also preventing more houses being built: 'Big commercial housebuilders already have stockpiles of land where planning permission has been granted ... yet more than 40 per cent of homes granted planning permission are paused.'

Thompson went on to explain why: 'This is because housebuilders only build at the rate they can sell. Taylor Wimpey's chief executive, Jennie Daly, defends the strategy thus: "We are not

delivering more homes than the market can absorb".'

Since the population of Britain is expanding there may well be a paying demand for more houses to be built and the profit-seeking housebuilding firms will meet this spontaneously. Whether this will lead them to build another 1.5 million over the next five years is another matter. They will certainly try not to build 'more than the market can absorb'. The 1.5 million target will only be met if the market expands enough. But this would require dealing with the 'affordability crisis' by giving more money, one way or the other, to those who currently 'desperately need' better housing but can't afford it because it's too expensive.

That's not going to happen, if only because the present government is actually cutting back on housing benefit by not increasing the rate in line with rising prices. Besides, if subsidising people to buy a house or flat became the norm then employers would not need to pay the same amount of wages. It would be back to square one.

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Halo Halo

CAMILLE PAGLIA is an American academic, brought up Catholic, later atheist. She described an early experience where she learnt the lesson which is one that all religions and cults teach – don't ask questions, we know better, do as you're told!

'The Catholic Church in the Fifties was at its most dogmatic and censorious, and I struggled restlessly against its rules. As we were being drilled for Confirmation, I asked the nun in our catechism class, "If God is all-forgiving, will he ever forgive Satan?" This innocent and it seems to me, interesting question produced a violent response. The nun turned beet-red and began screaming at me – odd, I thought, since we were sitting in the pews of the church. My question, needless to say, was not answered. That was when I knew there was no place in the American Church of that time for an enquiring mind.'

The experience appears not to have dampened Paglia's ardour for asking awkward questions. There are still no places within religion for enquiring minds.

* * *

Creationism adherents are throwing their toys out of their prams. Wikipedia is biased against religion, they cry. Wikipedia states that there are over ten thousand distinct religions in the world. Those seeking elucidation from within its pages shouldn't take everything found there to be gospel. Creationists have taken umbrage with Wiki because it lists 'Creationism,' aka 'intelligent design,' as a pseudoscience. They've resorted to 'statistics' which allegedly show how many Creationists there are in the world. We all know what is said about statistics. We think Wikipedia is being overly generous in using even that term (World Religious News, tinyurl.com/y2f7uc5w).

* * *

As if the inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro's favelas don't have enough to contend with, the BBC reported that criminal gangs had taken 'control of a group of five favelas in the north of the city – now known as the Israel Complex – after one

of their leaders had what he believed was a revelation from God... gangsters see themselves as "soldiers of crime", with Jesus as "the owner" of the territory they dominate'. The report says that 'the gang selling these branded drugs is the Pure Third Command, one of Rio's most powerful criminal groups, with a reputation both for making its opponents disappear, and for fanatical evangelical Christianity. Controversially, some have dubbed them "Narco-Pentecostals"'.

* * *

What does a hundred thousand dollars buy you these days? Two tickets to the 'One America, One Light Sunday Service'. This was an 'interfaith prayer service' which took place the day before Trump's inauguration as US president. Seems like the only faith on display was that of devotion to the mighty buck rather than the Almighty. Whoever organised this is an amateur compared to the Evangelists who pull in millions of dollars yearly. Did the participants offer up prayers to the Omnipotent One? What are the chances He, or his team, answered them? A bargain though if they got to meet the Holy Trinity, Trump, Vance and Musk.

DC

Tiny tips

DESPITE THE Pentagon's repeated failures to pass audits and various alarming policies, 81 Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives voted with 200 Republicans...to advance a \$883.7 billion annual defense package (**Common Dreams**, tinyurl.com/3489enm6).

In Iran, the mandatory hijab law has been a contentious point of resistance ever since the Islamic Revolution in 1978. But it has become much more widespread in the past two years after the killing of Mahsa Amini, who was arrested by the morality police for not wearing a hijab correctly, and died in custody. Women have been at the forefront of this resistance, engaging in protests as part of the Woman, Life, Freedom movement. It has called for the abolition of compulsory hijab laws and an end to gender-based oppression. But rather than acknowledging these acts as legitimate political protests, the Iranian state has increasingly sought to frame them as symptoms of individual mental illness (**The Conversation**, tinyurl.com/46sk3cnm). Yet another gruesome gang horror has

played out in Haiti, as at least 184 people -- most of them elderly-- were variously slashed, hacked or shot to death on the orders of a warlord who'd been advised that aging slum residents had used sorcery to give his son a severe illness. Interim Prime Minister Alix Didier Fils-Aimé called it 'a barbaric act of unbearable cruelty'. The brutality was reportedly ordered by Monel 'Mikano' Felix, who leads the Wharf Jeremie gang. The carnage took place on Friday and Saturday in the densely populated seaside slum of Cité Soleil, a neighborhood in the capital city of Port-au-Prince which *The Guardian* has called Haiti's 'most notorious slum... Much of the slum is an open sewer...infant children bathe in water contaminated with sewage. The stench is unbearable' (**Zero Hedge**, tinyurl.com/47xy94vw).

As temperatures rise because of global warming Arctic areas that were previously frozen may become navigable, and natural resources more easily exploited, setting off competing claims. Blair said: 'This growing access is already enticing nations to the

region, heightening security challenges and geopolitical competition'. China and Russia are working together to gain control over the region, say analysts (**Financial Times**, tinyurl.com/2234xfxm).

The mosquito has determined the fates of empires and nations, razed and crippled economies, and decided the outcome of pivotal wars, killing nearly half of humanity along the way. She (only females bite) has dispatched an estimated 52 billion people from a total of 108 billion throughout our relatively brief existence. As the greatest purveyor of extermination we have ever known, she has played a greater role in shaping our human story than any other living thing with which we share our global village (**Penguin Random House**, tinyurl.com/s6t6fup).

Malaria killed almost 600,000 people in 2023, as cases rose for the fifth consecutive year, according to a new report from the World Health Organization (WHO). Biological threats...climate and humanitarian disasters continue to hamper control efforts...Officials said a \$4.3 billion annual funding shortfall was among further challenges (**Mother Jones**, tinyurl.com/2m9e64ex).

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

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

LONDON

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

MIDLANDS

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

NORTH

North East Regional branch.

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

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

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

Bolton. Contact: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589.

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

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

Yorkshire Regional branch.

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

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

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

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

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

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

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

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

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SCOTLAND

Edinburgh. Contact: Fraser Anderson f_raz_1@hotmail.com

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

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

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

WALES

South Wales branch (Cardiff and Swansea)

Meets 2nd Monday 7.30pm on JITSi.

(meet.jit.si/spgbsouthwales3).

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

Central branch

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

INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS

AFRICA

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Socialist ideas on the internet

AS WE all know, the internet has virtues and vices. One of its virtues is that it allows ideas and information to be exchanged among people, often in different parts of the world, with an ease that would have been impossible in pre-internet days. So we, in the Socialist Party, can more readily than ever find out about other individuals or organisations who have come to conclusions similar to ours and share, or are close to sharing, our views on the system we live in and the need to replace it with a different kind of system. We are talking here about a society of free and equal access to all goods and services with no buying and selling or wages and salaries and with the technology and the abundant resources of the planet used to satisfy needs and not for profit-making ends. An example of such like-mindedness is to be found on the Facebook site called 'A Group Where We Are All Active Against Capitalism'. It carries its own self-description:

'This group exists to support the abolition of the power of capital through the transformation of the means of production from private to social ownership. This will only be achieved by the working class emancipating ourselves world wide.

The revolutionary reconstitution will also involve the ending of wage labour and all elements of capitalism as the global proletariat (the working class within capitalism) lays the basis for a sustainable future for humanity.

That transition to a socialist/Communist/cooperative world will eliminate all the horrors associated with the Imperialist period including military conflicts and ecological destruction.

The replacement for such barbarism will be a stateless, classless, moneyless society based on free association and production and distribution according to need.

We are open to all individuals and organisations who are in broad agreement with that position. We actively seek to host contributions that are in accord with that position from any source.

For the avoidance of doubt we will not carry posts that support any existing or proposed nation state.

Neither will we carry posts supporting the historic or continuing theory and practice of state capitalist entities such as the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China or similar regimes.

Forward to an end to capitalism!

It would be hard to find a closer likeness to our own position and aspirations. And this



being the case, one might expect the posts on the site to be largely supportive of its objectives or at least asking honest questions of those. Yet this is by no means always what one finds. Rarely, in fact, do those posts contain clear mention of aspirations like the end of wage labour and 'stateless, classless and moneyless' social arrangements.

What is to be found on the whole are the kind of reformist calls for various improvements to what already exists that regularly come from those on the left who (mistakenly in our view) call themselves socialists or communists. So there are plenty of references to, for example, state ownership of industry, more 'rights' for workers, laws to favour trade unions, better health care, higher taxes for the rich, etc., etc. Calls, in other words, for more crumbs from the table, for a more benign form of capitalism. And mixed in with them we also often find support for, or defence of, states or regimes within capitalism that are somehow deemed to be 'progressive' (eg, Cuba, China, Vietnam). Any posts that challenge this tend to elicit the response that yes, in reality and ideally we want the same thing as you, but that's likely to be a long way off and we need to improve things as much as possible 'in the meantime'. So they are deaf to the obvious reality that if you put off the demand for socialism, you continue to put off socialism itself.

Maoist mythology

A prime example was to be found on that site in a recent post entitled 'Is Maoism Marxist?' and providing a link to an article written by Steve Leigh from a website called 'A Marxist View of Current Events' (tinyurl.com/58n9w2m8). Leigh, who describes himself as 'a member of Seattle Revolutionary Socialists and Firebrand, national organization of Marxists, 50 year socialist organizer', begins by asking 'What is our relationship to Maoism?' and 'What Maoist ideas, if any, have merit?'. He goes on to outline the history of Mao Zedong's gradual rise to political prominence in China from the late 1920s onwards leading to his eventual takeover in the late 1940s and then

authoritarian rule of the country till his death in 1976. Much of what the writer has to say actually makes good sense – for example that Maoism was a form of Stalinism which, via its economic policies, caused 'widespread famines' (the 'Great Leap Forward') and, in its oppression of those who were not held to be in conformity with Maoist doctrine, practised mass persecution and killings of its supposed enemies (the 'Cultural Revolution').

The writer also criticises Mao and Maoism for putting forward the idea that 'socialism' can be developed and achieved in a single country and has to be imposed on workers by a revolutionary leadership rather than workers establishing it democratically themselves. But he then goes hopelessly awry in declaring that 'the Chinese revolution had many positive aspects to it' (tell that to its millions of victims) and that 'all of these things are towering historical accomplishments'. Clearly some of the mythology of China under Mao being in some sense positive and having something to do with socialism has stuck with Steve Leigh, as it has with many others on the Left.

The reality is that, rhetoric apart, China under Mao and subsequent regimes have been anti-socialist dictatorships bearing no relation whatever to the society of voluntary cooperation, democratic organisation and economic equality via free access to all goods and services which the Socialist Party stands for and consistently advocates and that the website which gives access to this article declares that it too endorses. So why, one might ask, does such a website, which says it will not carry 'posts supporting the historic or continuing theory and practice of state capitalist entities such as the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China or similar regimes' give a platform to articles like this. Of course, a free exchange of ideas from all sides is entirely desirable, but why carry without any attempt at response ideas or material that do nothing to promote – and indeed even contradict – the aspirations it claims to stand for?

HKM

Taylor Swift, food banks and insecurity

WHEN TAYLOR Swift gave substantial donations to food banks in each UK venue she played at during her 2024 UK tour, she was widely praised for her generosity. One of the effects, according to charities, was that it allowed them 'breathing space' as they struggled to keep up with demand. Another effect was to highlight the fact, often hidden from the wider gaze, that food banks are as widespread as they are. And it led some people at least to question the reasons why they are so necessary for so many.

Increasing hunger

To put some figures on their use, according to recently published figures by the Trussell Trust, the UK's largest food bank charity, Trussell is currently making around 3 million deliveries to food banks annually, while accepting that this figure represents a significant underestimate of actual demand. Nor does it include networks such as Independent Food Aid (IFAN), which supports around 550 food banks, or Food Bank Aid which supplies around 20,000 people a week at 32 food banks. And, of course, there are myriad other food banks organised locally and independently by charities, churches and volunteer community groups. IFAN has

reported a 25-50 percent rise in supplies needed over the last year, while the Trussell Trust shows well over half a million new people using their food banks for the first time in 2023/24, with over a third of the recipients being children, of whom the number receiving food packages has doubled over the last five years. And given the well-known fact that many struggling families, especially those with children, do not turn to food banks but suffer in silence cutting back on food or skipping meals, campaigners have raised the issue of potential life-long risks to physical and cognitive growth for children who may suffer from malnutrition.

Increasing homelessness

The growth in the number of people struggling to feed themselves, therefore, seems exponential, driven, according to a recent IFAN survey, by such factors as cost-of-living increases, Universal Credit waiting times, low wages, insecure work, and disability costs. And of course none of this takes fully into account homeless people who may not be using food banks to survive. In London, for example, the most recent figures showed a 29 percent increase in rough sleepers compared to the previous

year with over 4,000 people seen sleeping rough between April and June 2024, close to 2,000 of these 'new' to the experience. A spokesperson for the mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, who has pledged to 'eliminate' the problem, said: 'No one should have to sleep rough on our country's streets, so it's shameful that numbers are rising in London and across the country.' Recent reports have shown that the increasing homelessness feeding this has a number of triggers, one of which is people's inability to pay rising rents, even when in regular employment or in receipt of all available benefits. A recent case that garnered much publicity was that of a 75-year old woman, Susan Curtis, made homeless in Romford, East London, when the landlady of the home she had lived in for 13 years sold up and evicted her, and she found all other accommodation well beyond her means. A report on this on the BBC news website told us that she was now living in poor health in a small hotel room without proper cooking or other facilities. She said she felt 'on the edge' and 'hopeless', scared that things would get even worse and she would end up on the streets. She added that 'it's a brutal system and I feel ill-equipped to deal with it', thus summing up the plight of the 100,000+ households (including around 130,000





children) in the UK living in hotels, B&Bs and other temporary accommodation.

The charity Shelter was founded in 1966 with the promise to get rid of homelessness in Britain within 10 years. Today, close to 60 years later, its aim of 'a safe, secure, affordable home for everyone' seems further away than ever. In a special debate in the House of Lords on 29 April last year, anti-poverty campaigner and founder of the *Big Issue* magazine, John Bird (now Lord John Bird) said that millions of children are 'inheriting poverty' and called for an 'enormous mind shift in tackling destitution'. He called upon the government not to try and ameliorate or accommodate poverty by on-off emergency measures but to eradicate it by tackling the causes. Worthy and well-meaning words of course, and when, several months after, in November 2024, he perceived government lack of interest in this, he walked out in exasperation on a session of the parliamentary select committee on homelessness and rough sleeping, proclaiming it a farce.

Lord Bird's Ministry of Poverty

The farce is to imagine that an end to homelessness, food banks and poverty is even feasible within the framework of the system we live in. It is of course not, since at the end of the day, profit based on 'growth' must always trump need and this is what those in government who oversee that system will always give priority to. The best they can ever do is provide band-aids to put over the sore of poverty rather than end its domination over so many

lives. A prime example of this is the very latest solution suggested by Lord Bird. As co-chair of a new All-Parliamentary Group Business Responses to Social Crises, he is calling for a 'Ministry of Poverty', yet at the same time, he is quoted as saying that its purpose would be 'to tackle issues such as poverty and the housing crisis through entrepreneurship'. The idea that 'entrepreneurship', a mainstay of the system of which poverty and insecurity are inevitable features, could actually solve such problems is nothing short of baffling, especially as at the same time he also seems to accept that the worst poverty is largely down to the fortunate or unfortunate circumstances of your birth and early existence, something that the statistician, David Spiegelhalter, has labelled 'constitutive luck'.

The machinery of abundance

As is widely accepted, we live in an era where there exist adequate resources and the technology to make beneficial use of them which could provide a decent life for all. As far back as 2009, Tristram Stuart's book, *Waste*, worked out that 'farmers worldwide currently provide the daily equivalent of 2,800 calories of food per person – more than enough to go round', and estimated that, if food were produced and distributed rationally (meaning for need rather than for profit), there could be enough to feed those going hungry 23 times over. Yet, while there are patently enough resources to feed and house everyone on the planet, large numbers continue to go hungry and homeless.

And, even in countries such as the UK, where food is manifestly plentiful, many people, as we have seen, are still forced to have recourse to food banks. So why should it be that the machinery that could give abundance leaves so many people in want and forces them to live hopeless, fragmented lives which both waste their natural potential and make them unhappy?

Comfort and dignity

Pensioner Susan Curtis's final word was that she would like to be living 'a comfortable and dignified life'. Who wouldn't? That is what everyone would want for themselves and for others. Yet we live under a system where very few can be sure of having that – at least for all of their lives. Even those who are not among the 16 million living in poverty in the UK and who have employment that allows them and their families to live with reasonable comfort, can never be fully secure. They can never know quite how long that will last, living as we do in a system which is inherently unstable and prone to crisis and where very quickly insecurity may loom. And this will always be the case until we get together democratically to establish a different social order, a moneyless, marketless society of free access to all goods and services, one in which the rule of the market and the coercion of paid employment are replaced by planned cooperation and democratic association, one in which every single person is able to develop their interests and abilities with full social support and without the gun of material insecurity to their heads.

HKM

Irish General Election: same old, same old

A GENERAL election was held in Ireland at the end of November 2024 and the outcome seems to be that the two main parties of the outgoing coalition will be set to form the next government. As such, the electorate voted for continuity rather than change; clearly without much enthusiasm as evidenced by a particularly lacklustre campaign and with a low turnout of below 60 percent. Housing (lack of) and the cost of living were the two top issues. While there was nothing surprising about the result, the outcome has confirmed the solidity of a number of trends in the Irish political scene that have been apparent for some time.

The Government

The two centre-right parties of Fianna Fail and Fine Gael have continued to maintain their hegemony over government in the Republic. Both parties achieved approximately 20 percent of the votes cast with the former winning 48 seats and the latter 38 seats in the 174 member parliament. Both parties have been around in some form since the formation of the state in 1921 and there has never been a government since that did not include either or both of them as the dominant component. In fact, for the first 60 years of the state's existence, general elections were primarily a contest between them with Fianna Fail having the edge and being capable of forming a single party government with over 50 percent of TDs (MPs). By contrast, Fine Gael always needed some additional support from smaller parties to form a government.

Originally Fianna Fail were more interventionist in terms of the state and the economy (erroneously and opportunistically labelled as 'socialist' by some commentators of the time) while Fine Gael were a little more socially liberal and also had more of a classical free enterprise philosophy which supposedly favoured the wealthier end of society. But both parties were never dogmatic in their approach to managing the Irish economy and over the years the economic differences between them have narrowed. One other point of divergence between them was that Fianna Fail was more stridently nationalistic in terms of



the constitutional position of Northern Ireland and Ireland's relationship with the UK while Fine Gael adopted a more conciliatory position. However, since the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, these differences too have diminished and now there remains relatively little antagonism between the supporters of Fianna Fail and Fine Gael. So much so, that their voters now transfer votes to each other, reflecting their similar approach to politics, and this transfer of voter preference is crucial to a party's success in the version of proportional representation that Ireland uses in its elections. Inevitably since they are now generally seen as two sides of the same coin by the electorate, their combined share of the vote has progressively fallen, so together they can expect to receive just over 40 percent of votes cast, whereas less than 40 years ago they would achieve over 80 percent of the vote between them. However, because the opposition is fragmented, they still dominate government formation.

Although they were the incumbent parties of government, they both had a reasonably good election by recent standards. The economic background to the election is that currently Ireland has a strong economy, tax revenue to the government is high and there's quite an amount of money to be distributed to the electorate. With capitalism in a boom phase, governments without much difficulty can plausibly claim to be excellent managers of the economy and reap the electoral rewards. The two parties produced very similar manifestos and campaigned on a 'more of the same' ticket.

Much of this largesse is due to corporation tax from the many US multinationals in the pharmaceutical, biomedical and financial technology fields that take advantage of Ireland's low corporate tax regime. Whether Trump's return and his protectionist statements will threaten this, remains to be seen. He made similar noises about American multinationals avoiding tax through their Irish operations when he was first elected in 2016 but never followed through on his rhetoric.

The Opposition

For the opposition parties, the outcome of the election was mixed. Sinn Fein retains its position as the main party of opposition having about as many TDs as Fine Gael on 19 percent of the vote and giving it 39 Dail seats. However, the party was at over 35 percent in the opinion polls just two years ago and could then confidently have expected to form the next government. It proved unable to even replicate its performance at the last general election of five years ago. Its relentless upward trend has certainly stalled but has not been reversed. The party stood on a centre-left platform: more government spending on affordable housing, cheaper childcare, reducing taxes on the low paid, more help for carers and of course advancing a united Ireland. While the optimism that they were on course to form the next government has diminished, they still remain poised to take electoral advantage of any future downturn in the economy.

Also in this centre-left political space are the Irish Labour Party and the Social Democrats (the latter essentially a breakaway group from the former). These parties are equal with 11 TDs and five percent of the vote each and stood on almost identical platforms: greater effort to meet Ireland's climate change targets, more spending on disability support, a stronger stance against Israel with regard to the Gaza war, building more affordable homes and increased funding of the health service. Compared to its recent fortunes this was a 'good election' for Labour but overall it has been in a long-term steady decline. Sinn Fein and the more recent Social Democrats have usurped its claim to be the standard bearer of left-wing

opinion in Ireland. One other centre-left party, the Green Party, did very poorly, lost nearly all its seats and its votes seemed to have moved over to the Social Democrats. It was the small, third leg of the outgoing government and seems to have paid the price for resentments about the costs associated with dealing with climate change; by contrast Fianna Fail and Fine Gael were more adroit on this issue and cynically managed to project the unpopularity of some green policies implemented by the whole government solely onto the Greens.

Away from the centre-ground there is another small party, technically an alliance between two parties, People Before Profit-Solidarity that in the usual terminology is described as ‘hard’ left. They are descended in part from various Trotskyist groups that have entered mainstream politics allied with popular protest movements and want to see much more substantial and direct state involvement in the provision of housing, energy and healthcare; a type of state-socialism. After the election they have three TDs, down from five previously.

At the other end of the spectrum, the ragbag of far-right, anti-immigrant micro-parties had a very poor outing with their self-proclaimed imminent breakthrough not materialising. The last remaining group that can be considered are the Independents who can be more accurately termed non-party TDs. They are almost 20 in number, some of them former mainstream party members, preferring to stand as independents for the freedom of manoeuvre it gives them without the constraint of having to stick to a party line on any issue. Generally these politicians never reveal any explicit ideology apart from a nebulous populism and focus on selling their parliamentary votes to the main parties to ‘deliver’ for their particular constituencies. While a few are seen as

left, most of their vote is conservative in nature and they share the same views as Fianna Fail and Fine Gael on most matters.

Government formation

In summary then, the general election delivered a fragmented outcome with the three largest parties each receiving about 20 percent in the polls and roughly obtaining 40 seats each. The era of single-party government shows no sign of coming back. Clearly the electorate is more fickle with traditional party loyalties continuing to decline. The combined Fianna Fail / Fine Gael vote is decreasing but the opposition is fragmented; there was no left surge and the electorate has so far proved resistant to right-wing, nationalistic populism. As for the previous 40 years, the general election is followed by a prolonged session of horse trading where the parties initially speed date each other to ascertain whether any compatibility exists and then the serious negotiation ensues between like-minded partners. With pre-election polling a reasonably accurate predictor of the broad levels of support for each party, even before the results are known, the parties were posturing about the demands they would make of other groups before considering entering government. Sinn Fein went through the motions of exploring a ‘government of the left’ although even at the outset this seemed highly unlikely and right now it seems the next government will be a Fianna Fail and Fine Gael coalition augmented with eight, mostly rural, like-minded Independent TDs. With government coffers in a healthy financial state, their straightforward pork barrel demands should be deliverable without too much difficulty.

In fact a noticeable feature of this election is how similar in content were the manifestos of all the six larger political parties; Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, Sinn Fein, Labour, Social Democrats and the Greens,

with the differences being more to do with presentation and style. They would all like to be in government (especially as times are good) and they don’t want to be constrained by awkward manifesto commitments that could rule out any potential coalition partners. All six parties made promises about providing more affordable housing (the only difference being the precise number of houses to be built each year) and greater funding of healthcare and disability services. The two centre-right parties talked more about support for business and farmers while the four leftish parties made a case for devoting more resources to the low paid.

Plus ça change

The general election of 2024 in Ireland is unlikely to be remembered for its exciting political campaign, vigorous and inspiring debates or momentous outcome. In spite of the strenuous efforts of the rival parties to fabricate a sense amongst the electorate of there being substantial difference between their offerings, people could see that all that was really on offer was more or variants of the same. The only question was which particular set of politicians would implement it. The process was a vindication of the socialist position that under capitalism, elections involve rival parties, all who want to administer capitalism, engaging in a manufactured popularity contest with the winners chosen by the electorate. The incumbent parties stress their proven competence in government which is not difficult if the economy is going well. Equally the opposition parties have a greater challenge to replace the government in good times. So the main factor in all this tends to be the state of the economy. Simply if the economy remains strong, the government should be able to deliver some of what was promised; the promises themselves were not too extravagant. If the economy worsens, they will not be able to do so. However, the state of the economy, particularly in Ireland, really depends on external factors and is set by the international operation or health of capitalism and no party can control this.

The best illustration of why the system itself is at fault and cannot be fixed by the electoral scheming of conventional party politics is that even though the economy has been buoyant for over 10 consecutive years, on such a basic need as housing, many Irish workers have had to live continuously with the insecurity of short term accommodation and rents that swallow up most of their disposable income. Unfortunately, there is no sign this will end any time soon.

KEVIN CRONIN



How we live and how we **might** live (part 6)

‘Socialism will never work. They [socialists] always forget about human nature!’

PLAYING THE ‘human nature’ card is one of the most common attempts to short-circuit discussion about the viability of socialism. Those who lay it are generally coy about saying what exactly they mean by this phrase. How does ‘human nature’ function? How is it expressed? What – if anything – triggers it? When challenged on these issues, critics generally become vague or inarticulate or wave their hands about a good deal. If pressed further, many of them come up with a vision of human beings as pre-programmed automatons. Others, less reductive, picture us as biological pressure cookers that periodically overheat. Others still, shake their heads and speak of moral degeneracy or believe in something akin to magic or original sin. When, however, they are asked to describe what they believe to be the concrete manifestations of ‘human nature’ they perk up. They become suddenly explicit – and very much more concise. Human beings, they say, are greedy, lazy and violent. And that pretty much settles the matter. ‘Next question.’

Human beings are not born as blank slates. We do have a specific ‘nature’, unique to us, and this has consequences when we interact with the environment. We are a social species, so we have a biological need for human contact and association. It is why we live in communities and have economies. We have autonomic reflexes which protect us from harm. We involuntarily fixate our attention on perceived threats, for instance. Similarly, our nervous systems will remove our bodies pretty sharpish from accidental contact with extreme heat – all without consulting our brains or waiting for us to decide how to act. These reactions seem hard-wired into us, yet even they can be overcome by our conscious awareness or social learning.

Biological mechanisms are complex and subject to ongoing debate among scientists, so few of us are qualified to pronounce upon them. What we can do, however, is to leave ‘human nature’ to one side and turn our attention to something much more graspable: human behaviour. When discussing socialist society, it is human behaviour and the external conditions that influence it that tell us what we need to know. We know,



for instance, that, in the scientific jargon, our human behaviour is ‘plastic’: that is, it is extremely variable and adapts itself to different environments, physical and social.

The primary goals of humanity: obtaining food, clothing, and shelter; and finding ways to relax or engage socially with others, are necessary to our survival. They do not change with place or time. The way we organise ourselves to obtain these goals, however, varies considerably from society to society. So, while these goals remain the same, the way we have to act to meet them changes according to the nature of our social environment. The organisation of society is like a maze, and different mazes require us to take different routes to arrive at the same goal. Yet not all of our goals are universal. Some arise out of the particular way a society is organised and are specific to it. The need to accumulate capital, for instance, is an essential goal of capitalism, though one not found in other societies.

Apart from autonomic reflexes and a few other neurological mechanisms, human actions are always purposeful. If a certain course of action fails to deliver our goals, then it will cease to motivate us and lose its value. In this way, changes in forms of social organisation bring with them changes in attitude and values. So, when socialists argue that human beings would think and act differently in a socialist society, they are not imagining humanity has undergone a mysterious change of heart or that some unlikely alteration has taken place in ‘human nature’, but only that people have made a practical adaptation to changed circumstances.

Capitalist apologists who claim that human beings are intrinsically greedy, lazy and violent rarely make much effort to justify their assertions. These claims though are useful. By turning them on

their heads, we can use them to explore how a socialist society of common ownership and free access would function and, by comparing it with capitalism, throw light on the functioning of both societies. Last month we made a start by looking at greed. We can now take that forward.

What about the greedy person?

Human lives are mutually dependent. We live in dwellings, eat food, walk pavements, wear clothes, use tools made by hands other than our own. Almost everything we do is made possible by other people’s labour. Yet our direct awareness of this social dependence is obscured by the way capitalism reduces our relationships to the impersonal and seemingly objective business of monetary exchange. In capitalist society the effects of the employer/employee property system ripple out among us, influencing everything we experience and everything we do. Individuals, families and groups locked into their property bubbles are economically isolated from one another and forced to compete on multiple levels. Capitalism’s system of economic isolation divides us, breaks our sense of connection and removes the safety net of communal support. It leaves us insecure. Economic isolation and insecurity together lead us to prioritise our own needs in ways that are careless of the needs of others. The system makes us greedy.

For businesses to survive in a competitive capitalist marketplace they must constantly outguess and outperform one another. Market competition demands ruthlessness, and it ‘rewards’ greed. Competition between businesses for the money in consumers’ pockets results in psychologically sophisticated marketing

and advertising campaigns which impose a relentless pressure upon us to buy and consume. As communities break up and human connection dissolves further into the market scrum, an insatiable inner emptiness opens up inside us which we try helplessly to fill with more and more purchases. Greed becomes social, a way of life.

When we think of greedy people, it is often those with an abundance of wealth that we call to mind. And research in social psychology confirms the validity of this perception. Despite all the pressures of capitalism, people with little wealth often find ways of being remarkably generous, a quality rarely included in the list of attributes drawn up by those who promote the idea of 'human nature'.

A good place to find a capitalist (or wannabe capitalist) in all his unabashed glory is in the world of neoliberal or so-called 'libertarian' ideologues. These folk (predominantly male) can be found hovering around the websites of capitalist think tanks like The Mises or Cato Institutes in the US or the Adam Smith Institute in the UK. They will tell you unapologetically that what they want out of life is a 20-bedroom mansion and a luxury ocean-going yacht. (It is nearly always a mansion and a yacht – visible capitalist icons of wealth and status.) They like to ask, mirthfully, how in a society without private property or money anyone would prevent them from simply taking these things for themselves? We could tell them that nobody needs to and that the social relations of a socialist society would do the job for us. We could tell them, but they would be unlikely to listen.

A capitalist society puts no obstacles in the way of anyone who wishes to live in a 20-room mansion – on the sole condition, of course, that they have sufficient wealth to pay for it. In capitalism a poor person

can be greedy, just like a rich person, but they have no chance of being greedy on quite such a grand scale. So, let's for now grant some wealth to our wannabe advocate of greed. And let's watch as, in a capitalist society and in the full expression of his ambition, he occupies his 20-bedroom mansion. Once installed he immediately uses his wealth to employ others who, lacking any other means of support, must sell their labour power wherever they can. In return for a wage they will work under his orders and act in his interests, maintaining his property, cooking, cleaning, shopping for him, and attending to his every whim in satisfaction of his desire for luxury living.

Who will clean the 20-bedroom mansion?

Now change the social scenery and consider the same individual acting with the same greedy intent in a society of common ownership and free access. In this scenario the capitalist employer/employee property system is now only a historical memory. Our greedy person requires no exclusive wealth to obtain their property, and indeed, they have none. Their aim, though, as before, is to live a luxurious lifestyle in a 20-bedroom mansion. As promised, we will not apply any force to try to stop them.

Almost immediately they notice a difficulty. Their 20-bedroom mansion is rather large with high ceilings and elaborate mouldings and with corners where dust can settle. It requires a great deal of cleaning and tidying and maintenance. So who will do this for them? With all those around them now having open access to what they need, they are genuinely free to contribute their labour only as they choose. 'Self-interest' has now given way to personal autonomy.

If others are to tend to the greedy person's needs, they must do so voluntarily. Yet who will volunteer their labour to pander to his or her whims and desires? They no longer possess personal wealth, neither the power, nor the mystique of power, nor the status that goes with it. Without any of these things, they are now a free person with a 20-bedroom-sized headache.

If they cling to their desire for their mansion, it seems that they now have two options. They must spend inordinate amounts of their time performing housework, doing shopping and maintaining their property, or they must live in squalor. Neither of these options we can assume add up to their conception of luxurious living. Nor will their occupancy of a large property bring them new power or status or admiration. Quite the reverse. They may well find that their greedy, and now frankly eccentric, behaviour will win them nothing but laughter and social opprobrium. The same can be said of any other exceptional or 'greedy' demands they might wish to make, like wanting to possess several private residences. Perhaps they will still dream of possessing a Jeff Bezos-style ocean-going yacht. Or maybe they will begin to realise that no-one is going to donate their labour to build, crew, maintain and fuel it. Will such a society even build yachts of this kind?

Not biological programming

Greedy behaviour is not simply a direct expression of biological programming called 'human nature'. It emerges when the satisfaction of fundamental human needs is thwarted by external conditions. In capitalism, those conditions take the form of economic isolation imposed by the employer/employee property system. When that economic isolation and the insecurity it creates are eliminated and replaced by a system of common ownership, free association and free access the motivation for the kind of greedy behaviour that could endanger the stability of the system, vanishes into thin air.

'Human nature'-type objections to socialism are almost always based on a poorly conceived notion of what socialism is. More often than not the confusion arises because the critic is projecting onto a socialist society many of the limiting features of capitalism. This may tell us something about our current world, but it tells us nothing about its socialist replacement.

Next month we will continue to explore the nature of socialist relations and address a number of questions that they inevitably throw up.

HUD



Crisis and scandal – Happy New Year?

THE FIRST few days of 2025 has seen the news dominated by two features, neither of which are anything new. That there is a housing crisis is a frequently covered issue, while, unfortunately, reports of sexual exploitation are all too common.

Friedrich Engels, accounting for the many privations he documents in his 1845 book, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, draws what would have been a controversial conclusion. Despite laissez-faire being the dominant economic attitude he voiced the necessity of the state playing a much more active mitigating role.

Subsequent history bore this out. The slums and overcrowded tenements of the new industrial towns Engels saw had, just 45 years later, resulted in government action. The 1890 Housing of the Working Classes Act enabled London councils to begin building houses, with Bethnal Green seeing the first of these in 1896. This initiative was extended to councils outside London by the 1900 Housing of the Working Class Act.

The poor physical health of so many working men revealed by First World War recruitment led to such state intervention being further extended in 1919 by the Housing Act. Also known as the Addison Act, it made housing a national responsibility, requiring local authorities to build 500,000 new homes over three years. The rationale was that healthy homes would furnish a healthy population. How ironic and tragic that over a century later, during a time when health services are being overwhelmed, there is currently a housing crisis.

The present government, echoing the one of 1919, has done what it seems all governments do when facing a serious social problem, it has set a target. 1.5 million homes to be constructed by 2029, around 370,000 a year. That is 140,000 more than the quota set by the previous administration. All well and good, to an extent, if building on that scale actually happens. The real problem ultimately is not housing but wealth, or the lack of it.

A recent radio interview with a woman in Liverpool illustrates the difficulties. She has two young children and presently is having to live with her own mother in

her two bedroom home. This means the younger mother and her daughters are required to share a bed. Her local authority has a duty to house this woman and her children. Its failure to do so is due not to malfeasance, but to not having the physical property to supply. Nor does it have the resources to build houses.

Affordable housing, whether to buy or rent, is supposed to be an obligation on builders. However, builders do not build to meet need, they do so to make profit. They are driven by the same ethos as all of capitalism. More modest, cheaper properties do not cost substantially less, pro rata, to build than larger, premium properties that can command higher-end prices. A house, just like a single brick, is a commodity that must return the best possible profit for its maker.

Around Barnsley, for example, there are a number of brownfield sites for which planning permission has been granted. Many of these permissions have subsequently lapsed without a brick being laid. Whatever potential for profit exists or existed on these sites it seems insufficient for the market to act. The local authority has not been unwilling or obstructive, nor is there an absence of housing need. No matter whether targets are set locally or nationally, that need will not be met if there is a more pressing need for money.

No matter how sympathetic the radio interviewer, the listeners, politicians and pressure groups, that Liverpoolian woman and her children are, in brutal capitalist terms, not economically viable. It is quite possible that those children, and all too many like them, are or will become vulnerable. The scandal dominating the news at the moment is the seemingly huge sexual exploitation of children, dating back over decades.

Like the housing crisis this is by no means a new phenomenon. The age of consent to marry, in England in 1700, was 12 for a girl, 14 for boys. The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885, raised the age to 16 for girls, with more severe punishments for those procuring those under 13.

Just as housing need is addressed by politicians setting targets, so they deal with this exploitation through establishing, or calls to establish,

enquiries. These meet, gather evidence, propose action and then the story drops from the headlines until it re-emerges years later when little has changed.

How such things are legally considered reflects the prevailing economic structure of society. The 12-year-old requirement referred to the minimum age a girl could marry and was first established in the 13th century. Then the feudal system based on land ownership led to marriages via which estates could be secured and expanded through marriage. The Crown, then being the arbiter of law, determined that minimum age by which a female could wed.

By the time Engels was writing his book capitalism had become, and still is, the system through which social relations are produced. Virtually anything can be turned into a commodity for sale. It is a system based on the exploitation of individuals' labour.

That labour might be employed in making widgets or supplying a service. Child labour in the UK is mainly prohibited except for a few exceptions that are highly regulated. When it is sex work that's the issue, and there are children involved, legal and moral disapprobation is invoked.

However, for those so steeped in capitalism's overriding ethos they are willing to risk repercussions, legislation is an inconvenience to be circumvented. If there's a demand there will be suppliers. The worldwide trade in illegal drugs is a more visible example.

These crises and scandals are undoubtedly connected. At the root of both is money and the power it confers, or nullifies, depending on a person's financial circumstances. Houses will be built, young persons traded, if there is profit to be made.

For as long as capitalism is allowed to continue, both legal and illegal pursuit of profit will be the ultimate determinant of whether people's needs, in all respects, will be met. Political posturing and moral handwringing will not make a fundamental difference. Crises and scandals will remain distressing and recurrent features of headlines.

HKM

'Socialism' more popular than 'Capitalism'

OPINION POLLS are worth what they are worth. In many cases the answers depend on how the question is framed. And they can't distinguish between a passing off-the-cuff reply and a deeply-held opinion. Still, within these limitations, they are not entirely useless. Selecting a representative sample to question, if done properly, has been shown to be broadly valid.

In December YouGov published the result of a poll carried out in August to find out what people thought of what it called 'political ideologies'. A representative sample of 2,127 adults in Great Britain (ie excluding Northern Ireland) were asked 'Do you have a favourable or unfavourable opinion of the following' — Liberalism, Conservatism, Socialism, Communism, Fascism, Nationalism, Feminism, Capitalism, Populism, Anarchism, Environmentalism, and Libertarianism. Those polled could answer 'very favourable', 'somewhat favourable', 'somewhat unfavourable', 'very unfavourable', as well as 'don't know' (tinyurl.com/ye36v5w2).

Since none of the twelve *isms* was defined, those questioned were in effect being asked to give their reaction just to the word. On average about a quarter replied 'don't know', rising to nearly a half for 'populism' and 'libertarianism' (not surprising in this case as it is not a commonly used word). Amongst those who did express an opinion, the most favoured were Environmentalism and Feminism. The only others with a positive net favourable opinion (more favourable

than unfavourable) were Liberalism and Socialism. The remaining eight all had a net unfavourable opinion, the most unfavoured, by far, being Communism, Anarchism and Fascism.

The word Socialism was more favoured, by quite a margin, than the word Capitalism. 38 percent were very or somewhat favourable to Socialism and 36 very or somewhat unfavourable. For Capitalism the figures were 30 and 45 percent. 10 percent expressed a very favourable opinion of Socialism compared with only 5 percent for Capitalism. For very unfavourable, the figures were 17 and 18 percent.

This echoes the result of other polls, even in the United States, but what does it mean? Obviously those questioned weren't understanding 'Socialism' in our sense (otherwise we'd be well on our way there). So in what sense was the word being understood?

Commenting on the result, the US website, UnHerd, pointed out: 'Each of the 12-isms needs to be understood on at least two levels. There's the academic meaning of the words, of primary interest to political scientists and ideological obsessives, and then there's how normal people react to them as labels'.

And

'As for socialism, the public perceptions focus on the social part rather than the -ism. Tony Blair was well aware of that and famously redefined Labour's creed as (note the hyphen) "social-ism", by which he meant the "moral assertion that individuals

are interdependent". Actual socialists who believe in a centrally planned economy still exist, of course, but for most people it just means security, solidarity and clapping for the NHS' (tinyurl.com/y4nvczsn).

Of course 'actual socialists' don't believe in a centrally planned state-capitalist economy such as used to exist in the USSR, but we do exist. But that those who have a favourable opinion of socialism are really expressing a preference for social-reformism seems reasonable. It is understandable that many should prefer this to letting the market rip.

In any event, it can't be bad for us 'actual socialists' that some 45 percent of those questioned had an unfavourable opinion of capitalism (however understood). That gives us a foot in the door.

One interesting result concerned who had a 'very favourable' opinion of the word socialism. The top ones were 28 percent of Green Party voters, 19 percent of those aged 18-24, 18 percent of Labour voters, 18 percent of Remain voters and 18 percent of those in Scotland. Even 7 percent of those who voted for the Liberal Democrats. Since there were over four times as many Labour voters questioned as Green Party ones, in absolute terms most of those who had a favourable opinion of the word socialism were Labour voters.

We already knew this from our own experience of doing better on average in elections when we contest safe Labour constituencies and wards.

ALB

Exhibition Review

Being here

BLACK PEOPLE may be said to have been excluded from art in two ways. Firstly, there have until fairly recently been few black artists, and secondly, black people have been rarely depicted in works of art and, where shown, are often placed in a subordinate role. These and other issues are addressed in an exhibition of the work of Barbara Walker, 'Being Here', at the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester. The Whitworth display closed in late January, but it will move to the Arnolfini in Bristol from March.

Walker (www.barbarawalker.co.uk) was born in Birmingham in 1964, and only in 1996 did she obtain a BA in Art and Design. Since then she has been a prolific artist, in

both painting and drawing, and one aspect of her oeuvre is that she usually works in series, producing not just individual works but linked pieces.

Between 1998 and 2005, for instance, she painted a series of portraits of black people under the heading of 'Private Face': friends and neighbours shown undertaking everyday tasks such as playing cards or having their hair arranged. 'Louder than Words' (2006–9) focuses on her son Solomon, who was frequently subject to stop and search by West Midlands Police. The report forms from the searches have portraits of Solomon or local scenes added to them. Also included is a reference to the police killing of Jean Charles de Menezes in London in 2005, a newspaper report with a drawing of Solomon on it.

Perhaps the most original and striking

is the series Shock and Awe (2015–20). Walker scoured archives for photos of black soldiers in the two world wars, such as a South African general inspecting members of the South African Native Labour Corps in France in 1917. Her drawing based on this photo, 'Parade II', emphasises the soldiers, and the general is an almost blank outline. A similar approach is taken in other drawings from the same series, and again in Vanishing Point (since 2018), where classical paintings are re-presented in a new way, with the black individuals drawn more precisely and the white people (the focus of the original paintings) again shown as outlines.

All in all, an unexpected and thought-provoking exhibition.

PB

A false dilemma exposed

SOME PEOPLE say that, to save the planet, humanity is faced with a terrible dilemma: as the world cannot support 8 billion humans and more all with the same living standard as in the West, either a quarter of the world's population is going to have to remain living in dire poverty or those in the West are going to have to have their living standard cut drastically.

This is to assume that the standard of living that a lot of people in the West have can only be met in a capitalist way, that is, as a byproduct of the accumulation of more and more capital out of profits, or 'growth' as it is often called. But this is not the only way in which such a standard of living could be sustained, as Jason Hickel and Dylan Sullivan explain in an article 'How much growth is required to achieve good lives for all? Insights from needs-based analysis' published last September (tinyurl.com/34afrw7z).

They start from what a 'decent living standard' might be: 'Recent empirical studies have established the minimum set of specific goods and services that are necessary for people to achieve decent-living standards (DLS), including nutritious food, modern housing, healthcare, education, electricity, clean-cooking stoves, sanitation systems, clothing, washing machines, refrigeration, heating/cooling, computers, mobile phones, internet, transit, etc'.

Then they work out how much resources would be required if production were to be geared to meeting these needs of everyone on the planet, and conclude:

'Provisioning decent-living standards (DLS) for 8.5 billion people would require only 30% of current global resource and energy use, leaving a substantial surplus for additional consumption, public luxury, scientific advancement, and other social investments'.

What they are calling for is the redirection of the aim of production from seeking profits to be accumulated as more capital towards meeting people's needs. They are aware that this goes against the logic of capitalism:

'This is challenging within a capitalist market economy, however, because capital generally requires increasing aggregate output (GDP) to stabilize accumulation and because in capitalist economies any reduction of aggregate output triggers social crises characterized by mass layoffs and unemployment. Furthermore, under capitalism, decisions about production are made by wealthy investors with the primary goal of maximizing private profits, rather than meeting social and ecological goals. Necessary goods and services that are not profitable are often underproduced'.

However, although they talk in terms of 'post-capitalist' approaches, they still envisage production aimed at giving people

a decent living standard being introduced while retaining finance (even though 'public') and money income (even if at or above a guaranteed minimum). To be fair, they do envisage many of the services and amenities being provided free of charge.

This is to be achieved through the state intervening in the capitalist economy and overcoming its economic laws. This in effect is global economy reformism. But, experience of the many reformist governments at national level in many different countries has shown that governments cannot overcome the economic laws of capitalism and that, if they go too far in trying to do this, this 'triggers social crises characterized by mass layoffs and unemployment'. Which leads either to the government doing a U-turn or to it being voted out of office.

The plain fact is that production under capitalism cannot be redirected from profit-seeking to meeting people's needs. That can only be done after capitalism has been abolished and society reorganised on the basis of the common ownership and democratic control of the world's natural and industrial resources.

Despite not realising this, Hickel and Sullivan are to be commended for having shown that the world can support all its current population (and more) without exacerbating ecological breakdown.

Obituary

Binay Sarkar

(24 January 1941 – 23 July 2024)

BINAY SARKAR passed away 23 July 2024 in IRIS Hospital, Baghajatin, leaving behind a void that can never be filled. Born in Betalan, Bankura, West Bengal, to Dharmadas and Tarasundari Sarkar, he rose from humble beginnings to become a torch-bearer of knowledge, compassion, and courage.

He started his education at Kotulpur High School and later studied at Ramananda College, Bishnupur, where he eventually served as a Professor of Economics. His students remember him as not just a teacher but a guide who nurtured minds and inspired them to question the world.

Binay Sarkar had been a member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) but left in the 1980s and was one of the founding

members of the World Socialist Party of India (WSPI) in 1995. This dream was not born out of ambition but from his deep desire to awaken people. He wanted them to see a world where equality and justice could thrive. He spent his life spreading awareness about socialism. He urged everyone to understand the differences between Marxism and Leninism. He believed change was possible, even when only a handful stood with him.

He was a man of simple habits and profound thoughts. He loved books (and wrote a number as well as many articles) and spent his days trying to awaken people's conscience. He wanted the world to understand that wealth and power were illusions, while kindness and fairness were

the real treasures. Those who stood with him saw a man who never gave up on humanity, no matter how many times it disappointed him.

Binay Sarkar's passing leaves behind more than memories. It leaves behind a mission. Those who stood with him, though few, carry his ideals in their hearts. His vision of a better world will not end with his death. Those who knew him will walk the path he showed and hold on to the hope he believed in.

To us, your fight is not over. We will carry it forward. You are not just missed; you are irreplaceable.

ABHISHEK CHOUDHURY

Socialist Standard February 2025

All over the shop

Credit: Netflix



NETFLIX RELEASED *Buy Now! The Shopping Conspiracy* just before the Black Friday spending bonanza, since when we've also had the pre-Christmas push to shop and the post-Christmas sales aligning with retailers starting to stock up for Easter. While the documentary engagingly describes how capitalism turns us into hungry customers and consumers of short-lived commodities, predictably it's not as subversive as it wants to appear.

As is the norm, the programme starts with a quick-fire round-up of what's to come, which is largely interviews and clips of stock footage, archive news and content from vloggers. Between these are CGI scenes of panoramas of piles of rubbish (an idea recycled from the 2008 film *Wall-E*) and billboards displaying words like 'buy' and 'consume' (an idea recycled from the 1988 film *They Live*). AI is also invoked with the presenter being Sasha, apparently a disembodied expert on 'how to succeed in business'. Sasha outlines 'the five most important lessons in profit maximisation', which provide a framework for the documentary, although 'her' presence quickly becomes annoying, perhaps deliberately.

The first of these lessons is 'Sell More', in which we're introduced to the people interviewed throughout the programme, including ex-employees of corporations who became disillusioned after realising what the brands they were promoting really represent. Some particularly interesting contributions are made by Maren Costa, previously a 'User Experience Designer' with Amazon. She talks about her initial excitement at creating new ways to make products tempting (right down to the most effective font colour) and easier to buy (with 'one click'), until she realised she was working within 'an intentional, complex, highly refined science to get you to buy stuff'. Although the focus was

on selling Amazon's stock, Maren says 'I don't think we were ever thinking about where does all this stuff go?' Buying tech or clothes tends to involve getting rid of whatever has been replaced, as described in the second section 'Waste More'. Producers have known for a long time that shortening the lifespan of a commodity means that a new one will be bought sooner, increasing sales further. The most notorious example of this planned obsolescence was when the durability of incandescent lightbulbs was set by a cartel of companies in the 1920s. Another approach is to make it impossible to mend broken appliances, such as when the fixings on the cases of Apple iPhones changed so their backs couldn't be unscrewed. Gadget manufacturers have even filed lawsuits against organisations such as iFixit to prevent their devices from being repaired. Items are often thrown away before they're even used, as shown in footage of Amazon employees destroying serviceable goods because it's cheaper to do this than redistribute them.

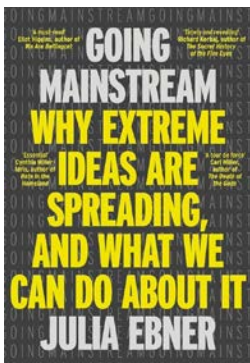
The third lesson 'Lie More' covers how we're encouraged to believe that products are or can be recycled to distract us from their real environmental impact, not only how they end up adding to piles of waste, but also the CO2 emissions caused by their manufacture. If we have the impression that a brand has green credentials, we're more likely to buy its merchandise. The practice of 'greenwashing' – pretending to be eco-friendly – is, according to Maren, a 'double evil' as companies are not only harming the environment, but also pacifying people. In the fourth section 'Hide More' we're told about how the amount of waste generated by commodity production is disguised through the irresponsible ways it's dealt with. Discarded items are moved across the planet to where it's cheaper for them to

be disposed of, such as countries without much legislation about handling hazardous scrap. Unfortunately, around this point the documentary loses momentum. The fifth section 'Control More' is very brief, despite it hinting at explaining the word 'conspiracy' in the show's title. Maren says that staff at the highest level have to commit to 'backing the company no matter what', so after she spoke out about Amazon's carbon emissions, she lost her job. 'They don't want anyone disrupting that story' which presents a company as admirable even though it reinforces the damaging normality of pushing out more and more shoddy products which often end up littering beaches in Africa.

After over an hour of vividly highlighting problems, *Buy Now! The Shopping Conspiracy* doesn't have much to say about solutions. It winds down with each of the interviewees giving glib optimistic lines which brush over the detail of what they previously described. The views of the writer and director Nic Stacey don't seem to be any more thorough. When asked about how the problem of waste could be resolved, he said 'companies need to creatively think about ways that they can extend the lives of the products they make. And we need policy change; governments can help put legislation in place to manage the end of life of a product' (tinyurl.com/3fsuuenh). This hasn't happened because it hasn't been in the interests of the capitalist class which owns the companies, although their role isn't explored in the documentary. There is little explanation of the overriding need for production to accumulate profit for those capitalists, which leads to practices such as manipulative advertising, planned obsolescence, greenwashing and making more refuse than can be handled. Nor is the wider economic context of the global commodity market sketched out, even though this underpins how companies have to operate. Two of those prominently criticised in the show are Apple and Amazon, and their Siri and Alexa virtual assistants sound similar to the dislikeable virtual presenter Sasha. Both companies are rivals of Netflix, who stream the documentary: Apple TV and Amazon's Prime Video division compete with Netflix for subscribers, even though for many years, Netflix has relied on its data being hosted by the Amazon Web Services cloud. As Netflix is part of the same media market, it also has to follow 'the five most important lessons in profit maximisation' outlined by Sasha. So, it isn't going to broadcast anything which delves too deeply into why.

MIKE FOSTER

Awakened, Not Woke



Going Mainstream: Why Extreme Ideas are Spreading, and What We Can Do About It.
By Julia Ebner.
Ithaka £10.99.

The basis for this book is that far-right ideas have become mainstream and so more widely accepted. The author investigated a variety of movements, on-line and in person, to find out what made people accept the views in question. She also spoke to opponents of such positions and, for instance, presents arguments for the reality of climate change. She also says that trans rights and feminism are not mutually exclusive.

The groups dealt with here are incels (involuntary celibate women-hating men), climate change deniers, transphobics, white nationalists, anti-vaxxers and sympathisers with Putin's Russia (among other things, Russia's state propaganda machine fuels conspiracy myths). The internet is a fruitful recruiting ground for such groups, especially messaging apps such as Telegram. Online harassment of people they disagree with is common, and some Extinction Rebellion supporters have received death threats.

One point made is that adopting one conspiracy theory makes a person more likely to accept others too, and there are plenty of people who belong to more than one group. For instance, there is a sizeable overlap between white nationalists and climate change deniers, and also with anti-vaxxers. Many of those who support conspiracy theories see themselves as 'awakened', having seen through the lies of the establishment and the traditional media. Online groups in particular foster a feeling of belonging among people who are alienated and perhaps lack social skills. Vested interests and right-wing organisations provide sizeable funding for those who attempt to undermine the scientific consensus on climate change.

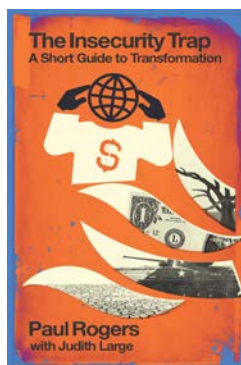
One of the nastiest organisations examined here is in the UK, Patriotic Alternative, where practically everything is seen as 'white genocide'. By 2066, supposedly, 'indigenous people' will be a minority in Britain (the date is presumably not a coincidence). White Lives Matter sees white people as being victimised, while All Lives Matter fails to acknowledge discrimination against black people, and

has only evolved as a movement since the rise of Black Lives Matter.

The final chapter deals with what can be done to fight against the spread of extreme ideas. It includes such suggestions as dealing with the sources of discontent, not just symptoms, and 'prebunking' disinformation (empowering people to spot factual distortions before they occur). The interesting part of the book, though, is the exploration of extremist views and why people are attracted to them.

PB

Polycrisis



The Insecurity Trap. A Short Guide to Transformation.
By Paul Rogers, with Judith Large.
Hawthorn Press, 2024.
92pp.

The main author of this book, Paul Rogers, Professor Emeritus of Peace Studies, sees the world as being in a 'polycrisis', whose principal features are wars, right-wing populism, poverty and environmental breakdown. He refers to it as an 'insecurity trap', in that the disruption caused by these factors makes everyone's life prone to uncertainty and instability. Viewing the factors in question as planetary and often interdependent, his declared purpose is to suggest ways in which we can set about 'navigating' them on that same planetary level. In her Foreword, the book's co-author sees humanity as having the technology and productive capacity to achieve world-wide security for all as long as these are not perverted in the service of, for example, fomenting hatred between peoples or producing increasingly sophisticated weapons of war.

One of the major obstacles to this, according to this book, is the free market, or 'neoliberalism' as it is referred to, which it sees as beginning seriously in the 1980s, in the era of Thatcher and Reagan, and having intensified since (though it is also recognised as a way of running capitalism that dates back to the 19th century). It is a way of organising things, the authors tell us, that focuses on 'the prioritisation of private enterprise in place of state ownership'. It also, they go on, eschews 'cooperative intergovernmental action' and turns its back on the environmental and military drivers of migration, pushing

'the richer states to close the castle gates and concentrate even more than at present on looking after themselves'. This in turn makes them 'terribly ill-suited to responding to global challenges', such as pandemics and climate breakdown and much more suited to encouraging the arms industry to supply weapons for use in the wars easily prone to breaking out. 'Now thrive the armourers', as they put it.

So, what is the solution Professor Rogers and his co-author have to offer to these ongoing and interlocking problems which affect the whole of humanity? First and foremost, they see 'the need for cooperation at every level from neighbourhoods right through to intergovernmental level', especially in view of increasing climate breakdown which 'an economic model rooted in competition cannot cope with'. In support of this they provide a long list of 'small steps' people could take to 'cooperate' with one another on a daily basis (eg, use of cloth or paper bags rather than plastic ones, conserving water, using chemical-free products, car sharing, volunteering to help in food banks). They also suggest involvement in support of production of local food, sustainable energy, 'ethical' banking and campaigns such as against the arms trade and against fossil fuels, and in favour of, for example, Amnesty International. They advocate all of this, and much more – and this is where the problems arise- within the framework of the existing system of buying and selling and dependence on money and the market. In addition, they want to skew the system as it currently exists by having a much larger degree of state ownership of industry and services, arguing that, if governments have more control, they can control 'market fundamentalism', introduce more regulation and reform that will make things less unequal, and can also, for example, tax the wealthy, bring in carbon reduction programmes, invest in electrification, and adopt 'green' policies generally.

But what all of this fails to reckon with is that, with all such change – if it were possible – we would still be left with capitalism with its market and its money system. Nor would anything of what is proposed change the profit imperative that drives it. At best it would amount to a tinkering at the edges of that system and would certainly not have the effect of mending the inequality that characterises it. Above all, it would do nothing to create the more 'sharing' system the authors wish for, nor to remove the 'insecurity trap' which the authors' well-meaning aim is to do away with. Above all, whatever individuals or individual governments may do to attempt to ease the burden on the most deprived, what cannot happen in

a world of competing national economic interests is the 'intergovernmental cooperation' that this book advocates for. That is an illusion, because all governments are an expression of the interests of the owners or controllers of wealth in their country – whether that wealth is state managed or privately owned – and will only cooperate with other governments to the extent that those interests are not unduly affected. They cannot act against the profit motive and they do not possess the power to regulate the profit system as they wish. That is the bleak truth of the world we live in and the kind of 'small steps' and advocated by these authors are destined to remain just that and not to lead to any larger change or a different kind of society.

It is in fact a failure of the imagination not to look beyond 'small steps' and to a completely different kind of world (a moneyless, stateless, leaderless one with free access for all to all goods and services) – one which is eminently realisable once majority consciousness of the need for it spreads and leads to democratic political action to bring it about. It will be a society of planned cooperation which takes advantage of existing technologies in a sustainable way and in which everyone can develop their interests and abilities with full social support and live without the ever-present threat of the pervasive material insecurity the authors of this book rightly perceive and are so keen to see removed.

HKM

Left currency crankism



Time to Get Rid of Money. It's just not worth it.
By Phillip Sutton.
Old Moles Collective.
60 pages.

This booklet is a classic example of being right for the wrong reason. It starts off well enough by saying that 'it has been said that money is the root of all evil but this is wrong; it is class society' and that 'getting rid of money can only happen when the working class takes power and gets rid of capitalism'. After that, it's downhill all the way as the author, strangely from someone who has emerged from the Left Communist milieu, embraces a currency crank theory of banking and money.

We are told that:

'It is a total myth that banks need or use savings in order to lend out money. This monetary system is what Aaron Sahr

has called "Keystroke Capitalism" ie, money is quite simply a product of using a keyboard as the banks create money by making and recording loans on their computer!!' (his emphasis).

and that:

'... the whole financial system is based on creating money out of thin air ... The whole financial industry really is just based on creating electronic assets (ie, virtual money) that are loans on which interest can be charged. What a system — an electronic data entry costs virtually nothing but earns interest for the bank!'

To back up this incredible view Sutton cites a 2014 article from the Bank of England *Quarterly Bulletin* (tinyurl.com/58bd8rus). Although this does state that banks create money when they make a loan, this is just a definition and does not imply that they do this from thin air. This said, the article's authors have only themselves to blame when ignorant or naive people take their words literally.

Sutton writes that:

'In modern capitalism it appears that in the money creation process, it is the borrowers that determine the money supply, and the only restriction on this credit is the ability, or perhaps the willingness, of borrowers to put forward existing assets as collateral against a loan'.

If you think that banks can simply create money to lend at interest by a few keyboard strokes, this is a logical deduction — the only limit to what banks could lend would be the amount requested by credit-worthy borrowers.

In an appendix Sutton reproduces a long section from that Bank of England article which includes this passage which contradicts his claim above:

'Although commercial banks create money through lending, they cannot do so freely without limit. Banks are limited in how much they can lend if they are to remain profitable in a competitive banking system'.

If he read, beyond the introductory summary, the part where the authors expand on this he would find it is not 'a total myth' that banks need funds to back up a loan. The article explains what happens *after* a bank has used its keyboard to record a loan when the borrower then begins to spend the money.

When the borrower does this, most of it is likely to go to people who bank with other banks; so the lending bank will have to transfer money to another bank (if some of the recipients bank with the same bank that will go towards reducing its outgoings). What happens is that at the end of the day (literally) banks clear what they owe each other. If a bank has more money going out than coming in it covers

this by drawing on its reserves. But this cannot continue indefinitely as at some point its reserves would be exhausted. The article goes on:

'Banks therefore try to attract or retain additional liabilities to accompany their new loans. In practice other banks would also be making new loans and creating new deposits, so one way they can do this is to try and attract some of these newly created deposits. In a competitive banking sector, that may involve increasing the rate they offer to households on their savings accounts. By attracting new deposits, the bank can increase its lending without running down its reserves. Alternatively, a bank can borrow from other banks or attract other forms of liabilities, at least temporarily. But whether through deposits or other liabilities, **the bank would need to make sure it was attracting and retaining some kind of funds in order to keep expanding lending**' (their bold).

So much, then, for the idea that banks don't need to fund the loans they make. The article then explains what does limit bank lending:

'And the cost of that [attracting funds] needs to be measured against the interest the bank expects to earn on the loans it is making, which in turn depends on the level of Bank Rate set by the Bank of England. For example, if a bank continued to attract new borrowers and increase lending by reducing mortgage rates, and sought to attract some new deposits by increasing the rates it was paying its customers on their deposits, it might soon find it unprofitable to keep expanding its lending. Competition for loans and deposits, and the desire to make a profit, therefore limit money creation by banks'.

Sutton's misunderstanding of the nature of money and banking leads him down the same road as other adherents of the Thin Air School of Banking — that debt is the problem.

'... it is the super-rich which owns the majority of debt in the world whereas the working class, which suffers most from the burden of debt, actually owns very little of that debt ... Given the level of debt today, it would have to be one of the first tasks of the working class to cancel all debts even if it cannot completely eliminate money quite so easily'.

This makes the booklet a curious combination of Left Communism and currency crankism. But, to be fair, the author does want to see the working class eventually establish 'a society of abundance in which people are rewarded for their contributions by the free provision of their personal needs'.

ALB

Who is Mao Tse-Tung?

IT IS the purpose of this article to show what Mao really stands for by examining The Thoughts of Chairman Mao ('The Little Red Book'). This Chinese Bible contains extracts from Mao's voluminous writings. There are quotes from his early works written when as a guerrilla leader, Mao (and his Red Army) were such a thorn in the side of the Chiang-Kai-Shek regime, right through to the 1960s. Now Mao's ideas are so influential in China that they actually do serve as the equivalent of religious dogma. (...)

Mao's own words show that he is in favour of keeping the Chinese workers in poverty. In 1958 (nine years after the revolution!) he wrote:

'Apart from their other characteristics, the outstanding thing about China's 600 million people is that they are 'poor and blank'. This may seem a bad thing, but in reality it is a good thing' (p. 36 — our emphasis).

It must be such a comfort for the poverty-stricken Chinese to know their leader thinks it is good for them to be poor. Mao does not make it clear that he thinks it is good for the leaders to be poor! (...)

In order to ensure that the workers are kept down, Mao can't resist urging on them abstinence and sacrifice:

'To make China rich and strong needs several decades of intense effort, which will include, among other things, the effort to practise strict economy and combat waste ie, the policy of building up our country through diligence and frugality' (p.186).

If those words had been spoken by Wilson or Heath in crisis-ridden Britain you would not have been surprised.

The similarity between Mao and other capitalist politicians is so striking as to make one rub one's eyes in disbelief at the sight of people in the West waving banners with Mao's picture on them and proudly calling themselves 'Maoists'. Mao is just as much an anti-Socialist as his one-time hero Stalin was. They both have in common the fact that they successfully exercised a dictatorship over the proletariat in their own country. When workers throughout the world learn to examine the contents of the packet and refuse just to accept the label, the fraud of Mao Tse-Tung will also be a 'Museum piece'.

(Socialist Standard, February 1975)

Action Replay

Fifteen to one

IN DECEMBER last year Tom Ilube stepped down as chair of the Rugby Football Union (RFU) for England. He said that this was because 'recent events have become a distraction from the game'. Some rugby fans thought he kept rather a low profile as chair, but there was more to these recent events than that.

The RFU chief executive Bill Sweeney was paid £742,000 for the year to June 2024, plus a bonus of £358,000, intended to make up for salary cuts during Covid. But all was not well in the governing body or in the sport more widely. The RFU had operating losses of nearly £38m and proposed to make over forty staff redundant as part of 'restructuring' (a standard employers' euphemism). There have been plenty of calls for Sweeney to resign too, and some member clubs tried to call a special general meeting with a vote of no confidence in him. This was declared invalid on bureaucratic grounds, but the RFU later changed their position and agreed to hold the special meeting, but not until March at the earliest.

The RFU's income derives from match day and event income at the England home ground of Twickenham, plus broadcast revenue, and now a massive amount from insurance company Allianz for naming rights at the stadium. But

World Cup years mean fewer matches there, so smaller income.

And lower levels of the game are suffering. The Community Clubs Union says there has been a big increase in walkovers, where one club is unable to field a team, and a lack of match officials. Lost financial support from the centre plays a large part in these problems. The CCU says it intends to be 'an independent voice of the clubs and community game'. This would mean, for instance, more equitable funding between professional and community rugby.

Back in December a BBC reporter visited Finchley Rugby Club in North London. They

run three teams, fewer than in previous years, and, like other similar clubs, they play a major role in introducing young people to play the sport. As the chair says, 'the support base for national rugby is at grassroots clubs. They're the people who will get the international tickets and watch it on TV. This is where kids fall in love with the game.' Grants from the RFU have been cut, and the fear is that redundancies at the centre will have a big impact on local clubs. At Finchley most of those who help out are volunteers and sponsorship is mostly in kind, rather than financially.

As so often under capitalism, those at the top do very nicely, while those lower down, whether at the centre or at local level, struggle to get by and exist on precarious terms.

PB



Credit: Sky – Bill Sweeney

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.

February 2025 Events

World Socialist Movement online meetings

Sundays at 19.30 (IST) (Discord)

Weekly WSP (India) meeting

Sunday 9 February 10.00 (GMT)

Central Online Branch Meeting

Friday 7 February 19.30 (GMT)

Report from the Membership Committee

Friday 14 February 19.30 (GMT)

Have you heard the news?

Discussion of recent events

Host Dougie Mclellan

Friday 21 February 19.30 (GMT)

Employment

Speaker: John Cumming

Employment seems to be our main purpose in life according to our masters and their media machine. Woe betide any wage slave who finds him or herself surplus to an employer's requirements.

The torments in store for the unemployed are even worse than those suffered by the employed wage slave. In addition to being blamed for their own misfortune and stigmatised as "shirkers", they will be forced on to schemes which are alleged to "help them back into work"! What is the alternative to this mad cycle of misery, whether employed or unemployed?

Friday 28 February 19.30 (GMT)

Planned Obsolescence

Speaker: Richard Field

Socialist Party Physical Meetings

MANCHESTER

Saturday 15 February, 2pm

Talk on 'Work'

Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, city centre, M2 5NS
Studs Terkel's book *Working* begins, 'This book, being about work, is, by its very nature, about violence – to the spirit as well as to the body ... To survive the day is triumph enough for the walking wounded among the great many of us.' This talk will look at one form of work, employment under capitalism, and will mainly make use of the words of workers themselves, as recorded by Terkel and others. We'll ask why employment is like this, and whether it is necessary.

LONDON

Sunday 23 February 3pm

Who's afraid of Donald Trump?

Speaker: Adam Buick

Socialist Party Head Office, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN. Nearest tube: Clapham North. Nearest rail station: Clapham High Street.

CARDIFF

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

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

Socialist Standard indexes

The indexes of articles in the Socialist Standard in 2023 and 2024 are now available. Send a stamped addressed to Socialist Standard, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN.

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.

Veganuaries – do they work?

IS VEGANISM weird? That's the question the organisation behind Veganuary asked recently on their website as they urged people to go vegan for January and then, if possible, to carry on with it forever. Of course, their answer was no, it isn't weird. In fact, they said, it's 'part of something huge'. And they had various celebrities on their site backing them, eg Joaquin Phoenix, Billy Eilish, Chris Packham, Sarah Pascoe. Their statement of intent was: 'Our vision is simple; we want a vegan world. A world without animal farms and slaughterhouses. A world where food production does not decimate forest, pollute rivers and oceans, exacerbate climate change, and drive wild animal populations to extinctions'.

Animal welfare

This took me back many years to when I was a student and anything but a vegan or even vegetarian. I remembered being openly (and immaturely) contemptuous of a fellow student who was vegetarian. Little did I know that many years later I myself would decide to go vegetarian and then a long time after that – fairly recently in fact – vegan.

How did that happen? Well, I became a vegetarian when I found the idea of eating the flesh of another sentient being too difficult. Later- much later- when a vegan friend suggested I attend an online talk by a leading advocate of plant-based eating, the suffering dairy farming brought to animals was also brought home to me and I saw no alternative but to go the whole hog and move to veganism. The speaker, Dr Klaper, described as 'an internationally recognized clinician, teacher and speaker on diet and health', told us he had himself grown up on a dairy farm in the USA and that seemed to make his talk on 'The Most Powerful Strategy for Healing People and the Planet' all the more authentic. I also found it impressive in that he avoided being openly proselytising, simply sticking to simple facts in three key areas: animal cruelty, human health, and the environment. While the animal cruelty area was the one of most immediate interest to me, I also appreciated the case he put forward in the other two, even if I could think of some counter-arguments from opponents.

Veganism effective?

But what about Veganuary? It's certainly possible that, if it does result in

more people going vegan or vegetarian on a permanent basis or at least eating less meat or fish, it might lead to a reduction in the cruelty suffered by animals. But would it do much to lessen the hold of animal agriculture over the world's food supply and reduce the raising and slaughtering of vast number of animals almost everywhere. An argument often heard that says it wouldn't, because the relative monopoly over food production held by a small number of big producers means that, even if they respond to a 'market' need to produce vegan 'alternatives' (as some of them are in fact doing), the effect of this will just be to increase their profits and investment power, so allowing them to produce meat and milk products more cheaply and more enticingly than before and thereby potentially increase animal suffering and exploitation.

And would an increase in veganism do much to solve the climate and environmental problems that the current system's unbridled quest for 'growth' and profit has brought about? Some of the effects of what is happening were outlined in a recent article for the Earth/Food/Life project by Vicky Bond, animal welfare scientist and president of the US-based Humane League. She wrote:

'Factory farming touches every aspect of our planet, from emitting massive amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere to contaminating the groundwater, rivers, lakes, and streams we rely on for fresh water. Factory farms house animals in crowded and often filthy conditions, subjecting millions of cows, chickens, and pigs to the worst forms of abuse for the entirety of their short lives. Driven by the demand for cheap eggs, meat, and dairy, the animal agriculture industry has disastrous consequences for the planet'.

She went on to reveal that in 2024 animal agriculture accounted for almost a third of fresh water used globally and that, every day in the US, it withdrew 2 billion gallons of water from freshwater resources. One of the reasons she gave for this was the large quantities of water used by slaughterhouses both in electrified stun baths and in scalding tanks for feathering chickens. She went on: 'Because this method of slaughter is so terrifying for chickens, they also use vast amounts of water to clean feces and vomit from the chickens' bodies afterwards' (tinyurl.com/5yz7crxf).



Feeding the beast

Yet it is clear that, even if there were a significant reduction in meat-eating and so in animal agriculture, as Bond would like, the environment would continue to be polluted and the climate would keep on warming owing to the demands of the economic system we live under, that untameable 'beast' of production for profit. Faced with the system's need to feed the beast, our food choices would do little to contribute to stopping or reversing ecological deterioration or global warming.

It is decades too late now for me to apologise to that fellow student for ridiculing his choice of vegetarianism. Of course, I would if I could, since I feel that in a sense that we are 'on the same side'. But, having said that, nothing in the Socialist Party's case for a moneyless, marketless society of free access and voluntary cooperation demands adherence to any particular kind of diet. That is, and will always be, a matter of personal choice. But the fact is that, choice of diet apart, the Earth has sufficient resources to feed (and house and clothe) all its inhabitants to a highly comfortable level a number of times over, once we, the human species, decide to put our natural capacity for cooperation and collaboration to full use and apply those resources to make sure that all – whether they choose to be vegan, vegetarian or anything else – have enough healthy food to eat and the certainty of a decent, secure life. Failing this, under the existing worldwide system of production for profit and buying and selling, those who do not have money to buy will go hungry, very many more will lead insecure and highly stressed existences, human health will not be well safeguarded, and the ecosystem will continue to be in imminent danger of collapse.

HKM