

socialist standard

Journal of The Socialist Party - Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

Futures Trading



**Parecon versus Socialism:
Two post-capitalist visions
slug it out.**



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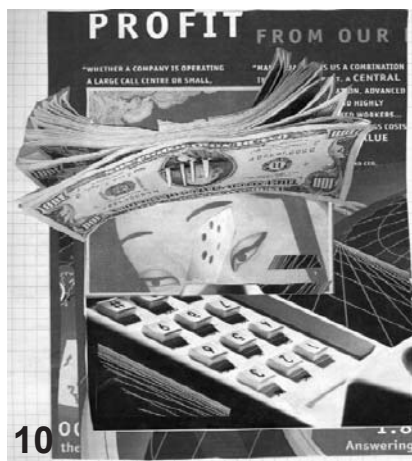
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socialist standard

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The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 1st April** at the address below. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the editorial committee at: The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High street, London SW4 7UN.
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Introducing The Socialist Party

The Socialist Party is like no other political party in Britain. It is made up of people who have joined together because we want to get rid of the profit system and establish real socialism. Our aim is to persuade others to become socialist and act for themselves, organising democratically and without leaders, to bring about the kind of society that we are advocating in this journal. We are solely concerned with building a movement of socialists for socialism. We are not a reformist party with a programme of policies to patch up capitalism.

We use every possible opportunity to make new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest elections when practical. Socialist literature is available in Arabic, Bengali, Dutch, Esperanto, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish as well as English.

The more of you who join the Socialist Party the more we will be able to get our ideas across, the more experiences we will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

The Socialist Party is an organisation of equals. There is no leader and there are no followers. So, if you are going to join we want you to be sure that you agree fully with what we stand for and that we are satisfied that you understand the case for socialism.

Editorial

Elections - what for?

We live in a world of inequality where wealth is the real source of power, profits come first and billions are poor through no fault of their own.

All communities are blighted by inequality and deprivation.

In the local elections in 4 May, as in all elections, you have a choice.

You can vote for candidates who would work within this system and help keep it going. Or you can use your vote to overturn it and end these blights once and for all.

Real power today does not lie in elected bodies but in the hands of those who own the world's wealth. Labour, Tories, Liberals and the others in this election are just arguing over how to use the scraps thrown from the billionaire's table. A system based on private property has to be run in the interests of its owners. Their profits have to come first.

So long as inequality of wealth and power exist elections such as these are just about who is to run this system. The only rational choice is to reject the compromisers and reformists and use every resource available to end it.

You don't need to vote for any particular party to get rubbish collected, schools built or amenities provided. Communities don't need leaders to get those things for themselves. You know what you need better than any careerist councillor ever could and, if there was real democracy, could easily arrange this. Under the present system, though, you only get them, so long as those who own the world make the resources available. But they always give

priority to making more profits, so these things are always under-resourced and never done properly.

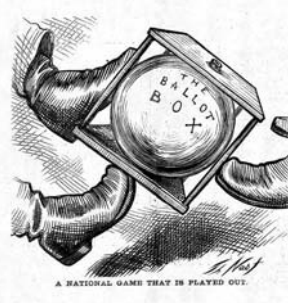
You can instead send a clear signal to other people like yourselves upon whose hard work this system is built that you want to put an end to it, by refusing to vote for any of the capitalist parties and instead writing "World Socialism" across the ballot paper.

When enough of us join together determined to end inequality and deprivation we can transform elections into a means of doing away with a society of minority rule in favour of real democracy and equality.

Our common efforts could feed, clothe and house every man woman and child on Earth without exception but we are held back because the owners of the world demand their cut before they'll let us use the world's resources. The iron laws of No Profit, No Production and No Profit, No Employment are a cage for us.

If you agree with the idea of a society of common and democratic ownership where no-one is left behind and where things are produced because they are needed, and not to make profits for some capitalist corporation or to enrich some bloated millionaire, and are prepared to join with us to achieve this, then vote for World Socialism.

The Socialist Party is standing candidates in Lambeth and Kingston in the London borough elections. For details and offers of help phone 0207 622 3811 or email spgb@worldsocialism.org



Given up on getting the facts?



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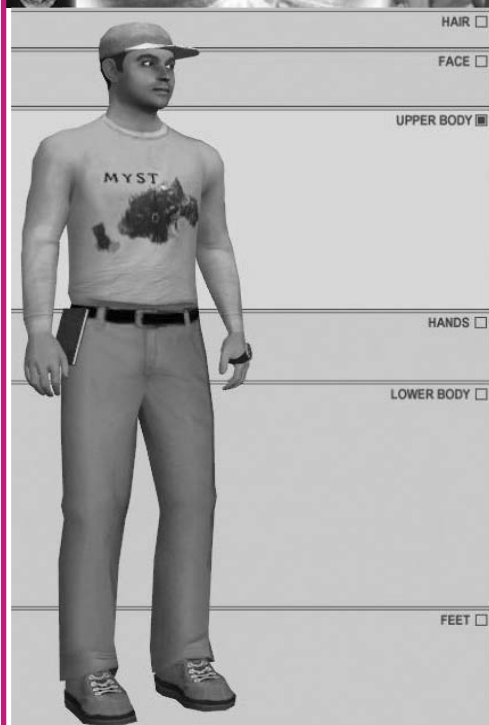
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Avatar, avachange

Anti-socialists who peddle the old saw about human nature being unchangeable ought to hang out more with the kids and play online computer games, because if they did they would soon realize just how malleable human behaviour actually is. A recent study by researchers in Palo Alto, California, took two groups of virtual reality gamers and

assigned them online cartoon representations, or avatars, which were deliberately given distinct physical characteristics, shorter or taller in the first group, and uglier or prettier in the second. Then they studied the behaviour of the gamers. (*New Scientist*, Feb 25, p.30). Those whose avatars were taller displayed consistently more assertive and aggressive behaviour while the shorter players were more acquiescent, and in the second group, the uglier players stood farther apart than the prettier ones. A quick and informal interrogation by Pathfinders of known local players reveals that this sort of behavioural change is common knowledge among gamers and in fact accounts for much of the appeal of virtual reality gaming. If our behaviour is so easily influenced by our perception of ourselves and our virtual surroundings, it is not hard to imagine a sea-change in human behaviour occurring almost overnight if our actual material surroundings were changed, say by the abolition of private ownership. The researchers plan to run the experiment next using age as the defining characteristic. We look forward to gamers, confronted by themselves with wrinkled skin and grey hair, suddenly becoming gurus of wisdom and maturity.

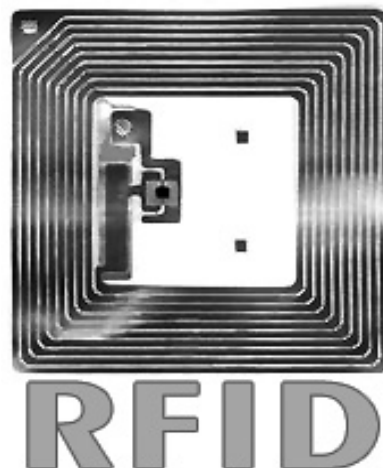
Drugs trial + Pro-Test

The controversy over animal testing has always generated more heat than light, and the temperature has now been turned up several notches on the regulo dial by two unrelated but curious events. One is the unprecedented 'coming out' of pro-test students in Oxford under the name 'Pro-Test', instigated by a young student disgusted with anti-testers' increasingly terrorist tactics against individuals as well as the alleged poor quality of the debate. The other is the catastrophic clinical trial of the drug TGN1412, developed by the German TeGenero biotechnology company, that left six UK volunteers in intensive care, with two of them in critical condition as this goes to press (*FT.com*, March 16). Early reports are suggesting that the paperwork for the trial was entirely in order and that the drug had already been extensively tested on rabbits and monkeys with no discernible adverse effects, so that it was deemed entirely safe to proceed with clinical trials in humans. What is especially interesting about this calamity is that both sides of the animal testing debate will immediately seize on it as proof of their position: the anti-testers will parade this disaster as evidence that animal testing is unable to prevent harmful drugs like Thalidomide and Seroxat, now TGN1412, from reaching humans, while pro-testers will be entirely justified in asking how many more potentially lethal drugs would have been tried on humans if animal testing had been banned outright. As with many things in science, both sides have a point, and there are no simple answers. Even in socialism, where there would be little likelihood of animal testing for non-medical purposes, eg. cosmetics (such research today account for around three quarters of testing), this debate would most probably run and run.

RFID, RDFI, DRIF, FRIED...

News that researchers have managed to infect state of the art RFID tags with a virus (*BBC Online*, March 15) raises a number of disturbing issues for the security of this new technology, as well as a highly interesting question for socialist revolutionaries in the wired world of the 21st century. These electronic Radio Frequency ID tags, which give every inanimate object the ability to identify itself electronically, can now be printed on cans of beans, and even sprayed on advertising posters, so that in the supermarkets of the near future the checkout till, barcode reader and human operator will disappear and your goods will be automatically identified in the trolley, and your bank account debited, as you push your wonky-wheeled chariot through the doors and into the carpark. Such 'smart-tagging' of products, posters, pets and even people carries huge benefits from a capitalist point of view, and not a few benefits from a future socialist society's point of view too (see *Socialist Standard*, Jan 2005), but none of this takes into account what happens when a virus introduces Factor X - the RF Identity Crisis. When all forms of hard cash have disappeared, and the circulation of money in the economy is replaced by the circulation of binary digits round a computer network, the money economy will have reached its zenith of efficiency, and its nadir of vulnerability. One smart hacker could in theory do by stealth what all the revolutionaries of history have failed to do by force - abolish price tags, wipe out bank accounts, mortgages, debts, profits, rents and fees, thus effectively 'rebooting' society and resetting all values at zero.

The question, for socialists, is whether they could ever condone, or advocate, such a draconian step, given the chaos which would quite likely ensue. Given the organized chaos of a society which at present lets most of its members suffer appalling deprivation within a sea of riches, the answer is surely not straightforward.



More on viruses

AOL, the American internet giant, have recently been hit by a double whammy. First, according to informed sources close to Pathfinders, their endorsed anti-virus partner Macafee turned out a March upgrade to their anti-virus software which, oh dear, oops, deletes certain vital Windows DLL overlay files, which is the equivalent of removing the spark plugs from your car engine. Then, within days, the Norton group produced their anti-virus upgrade which accidentally removes, yes, you guessed it, your AOL internet software. If anti-virus companies are going to carry on doing more damage to your computer than the viruses they are supposed to catch, surely the obvious question is: why don't they test these upgrades on virtual animals first? Remember, you saw this idea here first.

Lastly, on viruses

In case you missed this: the animals in the jungle are discussing who is the scariest of them all. 'Me', says the lion, and gives out a big roar. The animals shake their heads, unimpressed. 'Me', says the gorilla, and thumps his chest. The animals tap their paws, underwhelmed. Then the parrot lets out a sneeze, and everybody runs for miles.... You know it's serious when the jokes start appearing.

Work within capitalism?

Dear Editors

The article about Fair Trade (*Socialist Standard*, February) was certainly very interesting and the author puts forward a strong case, I haven't got the time to outline counter-arguments to all the points but I can give an overview of what we are calling for. As a development charity we are working to improve people's lives. You may disagree with the present socio-economic system but there is no current alternative, therefore, we think it is better to try and work within this system rather than just point out the difficulties and decide that nothing can be done. It also doesn't take in to account that not all benefits for developed nations are so overtly determined by economics. For instance, what about the problems caused by mass-migration due to poverty? Surely rich nations have a vested interest in helping poorer nations to try and stem this flow. Our position is quite clear. We want developed nations to stop putting tariffs on imports from developing nations, stop using protectionism that leads to dumping and allow developing nations to protect their fledgling industries. I disagree with the article, as this would make a difference to the lives of some of the poorest. They would be able to sell their produce domestically and eventually be able to export it. To read about our ideas on Fair Trade please follow this link: http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/fairtrade/index.htm

I think 2005 was a landmark year in the struggle against poverty. Firstly, there was the agreement to write off debt at the

G8, something that the author can't account for using his/her premises, Gordon Brown also reconfirmed the pledge to raise aid levels to 0.7 percent GDP. Added to this is the fact that due to the Global Call to Action against Poverty Campaign (GCAP) more people all over the world protested to end poverty then has ever been seen before. If we can keep the pressure on in this way we can force our governments to change their actions. Governments aren't just led by economic determinism, they are also led by public pressure. Therefore, while there is still a lot to be done we think that there have already been successes and that we need to keep up the pressure.

IAN SULLIVAN, Supporter Relations, Oxfam

Reply:

We have never denied that campaigning charities like Oxfam can, and do, help a limited number of people. Our case is that they will never solve the problem they have chosen to concentrate on. We note that you confirm that Oxfam does have a reformist approach, as you claim that there is no current alternative to "the present socio-economic system" (capitalism) and so pursue a policy of working within that system to try to reform it. We, on the other hand, think in terms of action to replace capitalism by a system in which begging bowls can be assigned to the museum of antiquities because, with common ownership and production for use, people's basic needs would be able to be met as a matter of course. - Editors.

Feeling Lucky

Dear Editors

My thanks for pointing out what www.worldmapper.org is worth a look (*March Socialist Standard*).

Readers of the *Socialist Standard* may think they know a lot of the answers and even more of the problems, but look worldwide and inequalities are somewhat more stark than between the two social classes you refer to. Are you feeling lucky? Then here's an old thought game. You are having a child and you are concerned that your child might not to live to see the end of its first year of life. You can choose when and where you give birth and your class. You have three options:

Your husband is a very rich factory owner living a hundred years ago in England, you have servants, a huge home and gardens (in say 1906). You are a middle class woman in Pakistan living in Islamabad in 2006. You are a working class woman living in Yorkshire in England in 2006. The respective chances of your child dying before their first birthday would be roughly: 1 in 10, 1 in 30 and 1 in 100. You could improve those chances further to 1 in 300 and almost 1 in 1000 by being middle class now in Yorkshire, or being that and moving to Iceland.

What I'm trying to point out is that the importance of class is contingent on both history and geography - and a woman giving birth in the world today cannot choose her history, or geography or class. You claim that "So, if 'where you are born' determines how your life will pan out, that has to be seen as a matter of class, not of geography".

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Enfield and Haringey branch. Tues. 8pm. Angel Community Centre, Raynham Rd, N18. Corres: 17 Dorset Road, N22 7SL. email: julianvein@blueyonder.co.uk
South London branch. 1st Mon. 7.45pm. Head Office. 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN. Tel: **020 7622 3811**
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The Easter Rising - 90 years on

Easter sees the 90th anniversary of the Easter Rebellion against British rule in Ireland. The Irish Cabinet - specifically, the government of the Republic of Ireland - and members of the Dail will watch as the Irish army marches past the General Post Office in Dublin's O'Connell Street where Pearse and Connolly established the rebel HQ in 1916.

After being cancelled for years the Rising Commemoration has been restored by the Ahern government, anxious to maintain its republican credentials against the growing threat of Sinn Fein in the impending General Election. The excuse for originally cancelling the Commemoration was that the army was so overstretched on foreign UN peace-keeping duties that it couldn't stage a march of a couple of hours' duration in Dublin.

The real reason, of course, was that the genuine inheritors of the political lunacy of 1916, the Provisional IRA, were actively engaged in the killing business, intermixed with bank robberies and crimes of violence not only in Northern Ireland

but in the Republic of Ireland as well. Celebrating the killings of those who had laid the foundations of the Irish state was regarded as honourable but the new killings of their latter-day progenitors were not. The fear was that the Provisional IRA might well be the political and military beneficiaries of a dramatic outburst of the patriotic emotion engendered by the establishment's recognition of a Rising that had even less justification than the resuscitation of the IRA in 1970.

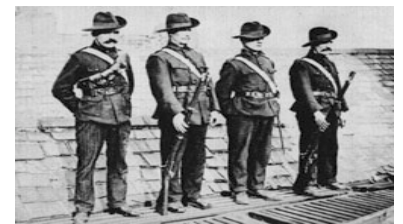
It was Dublin that bore the bloody birth pangs of the IRA when about 1,000 men of the Irish Volunteers coalesced with Connolly's 300-member Irish Citizen Army on Easter Monday 1916 to become the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and challenge the might of the British army as

well as units of the British navy in a fight for Irish political independence.

The Commander-in-Chief of the rebel army was a Dublin schoolteacher and poet called Patrick Pearse. At a practical level he appears to have been an inoffensive pedagogue but his writings reveal another side to the man, a side that might well have preoccupied a psychiatrist, for his alter ego was a soldier of destiny with an inclination for blood sacrifice.

In 1916 blood sacrifice was high on the agenda of world capitalism. Competition between opposing national segments of capitalism had spilled over into massive violence as hapless legions of working men contested on the blood-soaked battlefields of Europe in the interests of their masters. Pearse obviously felt the exhilaration of an absent participant; in 1915, when incompetent generals and field marshals were sending millions of men to assured death in northern France he wrote:

"The last 15 months have been the most glorious in the history of Europe. Heroism has come back to the earth... It is good for the world that such things should be done. The old heart of the earth needed



Clockwise, from top: The seven signatories of the Irish Proclamation: Padraig Pearse, James Connolly, Thomas Clarke, Thomas MacDonagh, Sean MacDermott, Joseph Plunkett and Eamonn Ceannt. All of the above men were executed by the British Government for their part in the Easter 1916 Rebellion. Central Dublin; members of the Irish Citizen Army; British troops sheltering behind a barricade; an Irish Volunteers meeting poster

to be warmed with the red wine of the battlefields. Such august honour was never offered to God as this."

In *The Story of a Success*, he complains:

"The exhilaration of fighting has gone out of Ireland... when people say that Ireland will be happy when her mills throb and her harbours swarm with shipping they are talking as foolishly as if one were to say of a lost saint, 'That man will be happy again when he has a comfortable income'. I know that Ireland will not be happy again until she recollects... that laughing gesture of a young man that is going into battle or climbing to a gibbet."

Thus, the idiocies of the Commander-in-Chief of the armed wing of Sinn Fein who, in kindness, we can only see as deeply mentally disturbed. But, along with Pearse, in creating what W B Yeats saw as the birth of "a terrible beauty" was James Connolly, one-time member of the Social Democratic Federation, who broke with that organisation a short time before the founding comrades of the Socialist Party of Great Britain and was one of those who combined in establishing a Scottish section of the Socialist Labour Party.

Connolly claimed to be a Marxist and described Marx as the greatest of modern thinkers. In 1912 during the great Dublin

lockout when the Irish Constabulary attacked the strikers, Connolly and James Larkin, the strike leader, had established a workers' defence organisation with the grandiose title of the Irish Citizen Army (ICA) that, in 1916, was to combine with a small section of the Irish volunteers as the IRA, whose political mouthpiece was Sinn Fein.

The Irish dramatist, Sean O'Casey, who was secretary to the ICA, said Connolly forsook the cause of the international proletariat for the insular romanticism of Irish Nationalism. In fact, Connolly's espousal of Irish nationalism could be more properly defined as a betrayal of the worker's trade-union cause as what he brought the impoverished members of the ICA out to fight for on Easter Monday was the right of a fledgling Irish bourgeoisie to establish legislative independence that would afford it trade protection, in the words of Sinn Fein, "...from English and other foreign capitalists".

Ironically, then, the people whose economic interests were to be fought for was the nascent Irish capitalist class; the very people who had locked out the Irish workers in 1912 and called out Crown forces to attack those workers; the very people who had led Larkin and Connolly to

conclude the need for a defensive Irish Citizen Army.

Sinn Fein, in its policy statement of 1907 had made clear the identity of the class it represented though it euphemistically referred to the Irish capitalist class as "home manufacturers and producers":

"If an Irish manufacturer cannot produce an article as cheaply as an English or other foreign capitalist, only because his foreign competitor has larger resources at his disposal, then it is the first duty of the Irish nation to accord protection to that manufacturer."

As an epilogue to the Rising we might recall the words of Patrick Pearse in *The Coming Revolution*:

"We might make mistakes in the beginning and shoot the wrong people but bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing."

In the Rising of 90 years ago which the political agents of Irish capitalism are commemorating this Easter, some 50 rebels were killed while more than four times that number of civilians died. It was the latter, innocent and, as it happened, uniformly poor, who were the real blood sacrifice and their deaths presaged even worse to come. ■

RICHARD MONTAGUE

How the market doesn't work

that the cogs in this marvellous mystery self-regulating machine are human beings who must be ground out to make it run smoothly, such a picture of the market system is quite, quite wrong.

A clear example stands before us from the recent news. Over the past year, television and radio has been reporting how people in well-paid City jobs have been leaving to become plumbers. The shortage of those skilled tradespeople has meant, according to market forces, that the price of their labour has risen. Accordingly, the price of a plumber's labour or labour power (depending on whether they are self-employed or not) has risen

to attract more people into the trade to fill up the gap between supply and demand. All of this sounds exactly like the market functioning perfectly.

The problem is that, at the end of January, BBC radio reported that the market for plumbing skills has become glutted - so many people were attracted into the trade that now there are more plumbers than there is work available. This can happen because, far from being the perfect mechanism for conveying information, the market can only convey information at the speed of trade. Prices will not be lowered until the plumbers start entering the market and begin lowering their prices to tout for trade against stiff competition. New entrants to the market will not be able to see that supply has been fulfilled until after the prices start to fall. People just entering training - having heard the word on the street - will not know until they are finished that the bottom has fallen out of the market, and that the arrival of them and their class mates has caused this.

However, even if some sort of mechanism was applied to coordinate between different branches of production, the problems of capitalism would still occur. Otherwise the state capitalism in the former Soviet bloc would have never collapsed and its system would have been seen to be more sturdy than the Western variety. Even with the greatest planning in the world, accidents happen, things change and perfect coordination is rendered impossible. The problem lies much deeper than that, though, in the very nature of capitalism itself.

If the plumbers could simply jump from the plumbing market to a different trade without any difficulty, there would be no problem - they would still be able to acquire the necessary use values with which to live. The problem is, however, that these workers have invested money that they need to recover - both in terms of paying for training and of earnings and promotions they would have gained had they stayed in their old careers. They have invested money in order to enter into the market, and in many cases may well have borrowed as well as using up their savings. In order to ensure they do not make a loss (which will risk their homes and families) they need to ensure that they get that money back - they have to return their initial investment back into its original form as money.

Many plumbers will be unable to do this, and will find themselves driven out of business, based on nothing but the mistiming of their investments and their inability to lay hands on cash. It will not necessarily reflect on their plumbing skills, their personality or anything about them, but simply the blind workings of the market. In order to obtain use values - the things they

When you're out on the stump discussing capitalism - face-to-face or on-line - you can guarantee some defender of the system that has left a third of the world population without clean water, nearly a sixth without enough food, and wrought

megadeaths upon megadeaths from wars within the last hundred years, will try and point out how the market is the most efficient system for allocating resources. A self-correcting mechanism without which we would all descend to barbarism and all advanced industry and technology would utterly cease to be. Leaving aside

Plumbers of the World - Unite!

(you have nothing to chain but your loos)

“Over the past year, television and radio has been reporting how people in well-paid City jobs have been leaving to become plumbers.”



We don't say 'leak' these days, Julian, we call it 'aggressive liquidity of assets'.

City traders adopting an honest occupation

need with which to live - they must secure exchange value. To stay in business, though, they must use some of the money - exchange value - they earn to pay debts or to ensure they are not out of pocket.

This process, or turning useful things back into exchange value, distinct from the particular usefulness of any given thing, is the essence of capitalism.

Anything that interrupts this process puts a spanner in the works of that shiny self-regulating machine - and miscoordination based on poor information is just one such (common) spanner. Whilst our example here is small affecting only a few thousand people at most, obviously, a major capitalist concern could lose billions of pounds and wreak havoc on millions of lives.

Some sharp-eyed pro-capitalists - skilled in misdirecting arguments from points on which they are losing - may choose to suggest that we have here accepted an important point of theirs. These people, they will claim, are willing to do the dirty work - the plumbing - solely because the price is right and they have been lured into the trade. Such nimble minds would actually find themselves too fast for their own feet. Many of the bored office workers (interviewed by journalists, another species of bored office worker) expressed their pleasure that they would find the work interesting and fulfilling, and that it was because the work paid a decent wage now that they were able to enter that trade.

So, in fact, it proves precisely our point once more - the requirements of exchange value hold back the natural co-operation and ability and desire to work of human beings, rather than enabling it. Socialism would be as prone to nature and accident as any system and so could miscalculate and produce too much of something. But as it would not be hamstrung by turning things into exchange values as capitalism is, it could just write off any waste as a misfortune to try and be avoided, rather than one to be exacerbated and spread by sackings and bankruptcies.

People's skills could be used when required and people would not find themselves dumped on the rubbish heap and denied access to their necessities of life just because they had worked hard and finished the job or because less of that type of work were no longer required. We would be able to enter into an age where communication conveyed at the speed of light could be used immediately, without having to be grafted onto the old operating system of society - like trying to read the internet on a pocket calculator. ■

PIK SMEET



Cooking the Books (1)

Living in an asset

At the beginning of March the Nationwide Building Society reported a fall in its house price index of 0.2 percent. They attribute

this to a mere blip in the market. Other commentators are not so sure; they see it as a sign that the predicted end of the present house price boom is nigh.

Actually, it is not really a boom in the price of houses. Houses are a product of labour and so have a value of their own but, once built, they are subject, through use, to depreciation and will only maintain their value if money is spent on their maintenance. With inflation, the price of a properly maintained house will tend to rise anyway, though, with gains in productivity in the building industry, the cost of building a house will fall.

What is booming is not the price of the house as a building but the price of the land on which it stands. As land is not the product of labour it has no value, just a price which Marx (in Capital, Volume I, chapter 3, section 1) called an "imaginary price-form" as it wasn't an expression of value. The price of land, however, is not entirely irrational but is calculated by "capitalising" the income it can be expected to bring. So, if a plot of land brings in an annual income (normally as rent) of £5000, it can be regarded as a capital-value bringing in an income of this amount and, if the rate of interest is 5 percent, as worth £100,000.

This in fact is how surveyors and property speculators calculate the monetary

value of a property, though over a longer period than a year. Because of the permanent, if at the moment fairly slow, inflation, "income" can include the expected rise in price by the end of the chosen period. Also, if the chosen rate of interest is different, then so will the monetary value. For instance, if, in the example above, the rate had been 4 percent the monetary value would be £125,000. If the rate had been 6 percent it would be £83,333.

Low interest rates will tend to encourage a rise in the actual selling price of land anyway because they will tend to increase the demand for it. This is especially the case with the land on which houses stand, in that the house with its land is generally bought by taking out a loan (a mortgage) and the lower the rate of interest charged on it the more people that can afford to enter the market.

Most people buy a house to be their home for the foreseeable future, but a significant number now buy a house as a financial asset which they hope will increase in price, so enabling them to realise a capital gain. This has introduced the same sort of speculative element into the housing market as exists on the stock exchange, with people gambling on an increase in what their asset is worth.

It is this that has led one school of capitalism-watchers to argue that not only does this make a housing bubble possible, but that a bubble actually exists at present and which will sooner or later burst, leading house-and-land prices to fall.

If this happens, then, in a period of relatively low inflation as at present, this price fall wouldn't be

absorbed by house-and-land prices not rising as fast as inflation but by them actually falling. There would be widespread negative equity and reposessions. And it wouldn't be just those who bought a house as a speculative investment who would get their fingers burnt. Those who bought a house merely as a place to live in would suffer too.

Capitalism is exposed as an irrational and anti-human system when a basic human need such as shelter can become the subject of stock-exchange-like speculation with all the consequences that can result when a speculative bubble bursts.



Parecon or socialism?

There are few political debates currently occurring of any real significance to the majority of the world's population. The debate concerning the nature of a post-capitalist economy ranks as the most important on the revolutionary agenda. Thus, we present recent correspondence between ourselves and the author of the book Parecon: Life After Capitalism

The review of Parecon: Life After Capitalism, appearing in February Socialist Standard, was troubling. The review says the economic system proposed in the book called participatory economics, or parecon for short, permits profits, just not excessive profits. But in parecon there are no owners. In fact there are no classes. More, no one earns income based on ownership of any kind. There are, therefore, no profits - none.

Yes, society produces a social product. Yes, some plants produce a total value of output greater, and in some cases even much greater, than the total value of their inputs, including their labor. But, no, this does not enrich anyone associated with those plants relative to the incomes, say, of people working at plants that are far less productive. Remuneration is uncorrelated to value of output save that people must do socially valuable labor to be remunerated for labor at all. What the reviewer says about profit affecting wages, etc., in parecon, is simply about some other system...unless the reviewer is saying, if total output for a parecon is lower, average income is lower, which is, of course, a truism, having zero to do with profits, which don't exist in a parecon.

The reviewer says, incredibly, that getting rid of private ownership of

production, markets, top down decision making, the corporate division of labor, and remuneration for property and power, the core economic institutions of capitalism, and replacing them with self managing workers and consumers councils, balanced job complexes, remuneration for duration, intensity, and onerousness of labor, and participatory planning, the core economic institutions of parecon - is correcting political dimensions, but not economics. I doubt the reviewer read the book. It is confined to addressing economic dimensions, not the polity.

I suspect that this reviewer thinks that because in parecon there are income, wages, and valuations - prices - it must be capitalism. This marks a major confusion. A letter I received from the host periodical signed off, "Yours for a moneyless, wageless world of common ownership." This too, is troubling.

In this world you desire to attain there is, I presume, production. Likewise, I assume you agree that people will consume. More, beyond production and consumption, is there some

regulation of what is produced and in what quantity? The alternative would be that anyone can produce anything, with no concern other than that they wish to. This is nonsense, but if there is regulation of how resources, energies, and labor are allocated to generate outputs, does that regulation reflect the preferences that both producers and consumers have and especially a full valuation of the relative contribution to well being and development of different choices? If it does, then to that extent it includes "money." The valuations are prices, albeit not necessarily as we have known them in market and centrally planned systems.

In turn, do people receive a share of the product? Obviously they must if they are to survive, much less attain their capacities. So, that being true, is there any correlation between the share one gets and what one does as one's work? If not, anyone can take anything, in any amount, and do no work - which, of course, is absurd, since demand would exceed supply. If there is a correlation, however, then there are to that extent "wages" according to some norm, even if the correlation is due to people collectively and responsibly establishing their own incomes. In parecon, these are the reasons why there are "money" and "wages." The task becomes having this



Earn or Burn?

limited money and wages, which is to say valuations and shares of income, inevitably present in any economy, in accord with our full aspirations and values.

Money - more importantly, relative valuations of products and processes - exists in a parecon, therefore, so that people might make choices in light of full and true social costs and benefits. Participatory planning facilitates the determination of true and full values as decided by the self managing population.

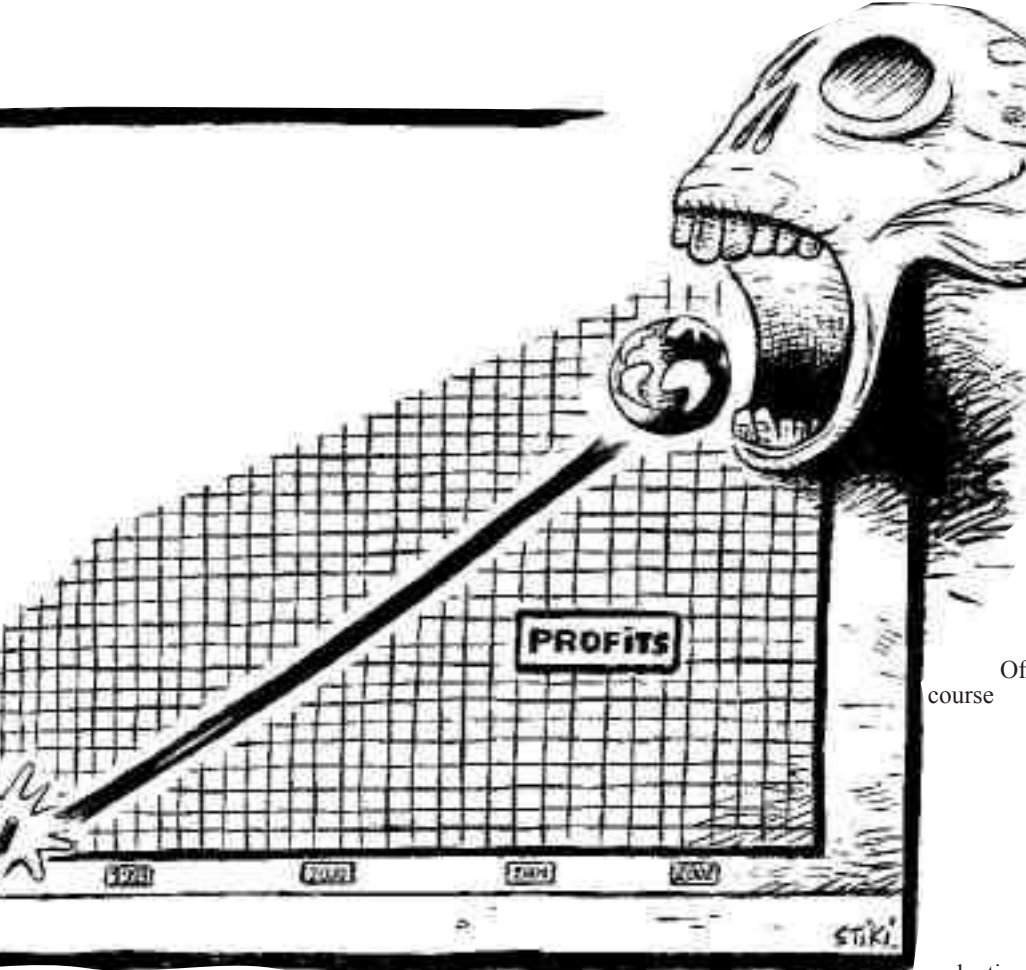
Wages - more importantly, shares of social product allotted to citizens - exists in a parecon so that, of course, we can all equitably benefit from the social product, and specifically so that choices regarding such things as how long people work, how hard we work, producing what items, and what we justly consume, can be determined by the population, again, in accord with true social costs and benefits and, as well, with attaining equitable outcomes and self management.

I would claim, and the book does claim, that parecon is not only a serious economy able to meet needs, develop potentials, incorporate true self management, and be not just profitless but, beyond that, classless - but is also as close to having no money and no wages as is possible without incurring immense damage. That is, it has valuations and it has income shares, like any economy, but not the pejorative aspects of either - distinguishing it from all capitalist, market, or centrally planned economies. ■
Michael Albert, ZNet / Z Magazine

Reply:

The gist of your complaint is that, contrary to the claim made in the review of your book Parecon in the February Socialist Standard, you maintain that there are no profits in parecon because "no one earns income based on ownership of any kind. There are, therefore, no profits - none". But this is only because you have defined profit as a property income. It's still there, however, as you admit in your second paragraph above: "... some plants produce a total value of output greater, and in some cases much greater, than the total value of their inputs, including their labour". For profit to exist - or more generally "surplus value" (rent, interest and profit) - it is not necessary that these accrue to individuals through their ownership of property. Profit is simply the difference between expenditure and income and derives from the unpaid labour of the workers. Profits therefore existed in the former state-capitalist USSR and exist in the present-day Vatican - even though there is





be able to take from the common store of wealth set aside for individual consumption what they judged they needed to live and enjoy life, irrespective of what they had contributed to production. Every able-bodied person would be expected to contribute something, but we don't share your bleak view that, in this event, not enough would be produced to satisfy people's needs (that "demand would exceed supply", as you put it) - and that therefore, not just profits, but the wages system too would have to be retained as a means of both obliging people to work and of limiting their consumption. Just like under capitalism.

Hence our original description of "parecon" as "post-capitalist capitalism", i.e. not post-capitalism at all. We would be prepared to refer to it as a "utopian blueprint for an ideal society" if you prefer.

Of course
Editors.

Rejoinder:

By any definition I have ever encountered, surpluses are not profits per se, though they may become profits under certain social relations, of course. Definitions aside, Parecon people's income, in any case, is not correlated to output, or to revenues minus expenditures, but to effort expended in socially valued production. No class takes income based on unpaid workers labor. No one does, other than those infirm and unable to work, that is. On the other hand, society and each of its members very much benefits if the total social product per time worked and inputs used up, is more, rather than less, socially valuable.

Saying that if a firm produces things of greater social value than it uses up, that means there are profits and the system is capitalist, is, honestly, absurd. In any economy, from now until the sun burns out and beyond, one will want workplaces of humans to actually generate more worth than they use up, of course. How the social product is then dispersed among the population is a very important issue, to be sure. Doing it according to effort, having also eliminated not only private owners above workers, but a coordinator class above workers, by balancing job complexes and instituting self management, is equitable.

Our real difference is probably best encapsulated in your calling the old Soviet

no individual ownership.

On page 132 of your book the rate of profit appears under the guise of "benefit cost ratio":

"Each round of planning, or iteration, yields a new set of proposed activities.

Taken together, these proposals yield new data regarding the status of each good, the average consumption per person, and the average production 'benefit cost ratio' per firm. All this allows for calculation of new price projections and new predictions for average income and work, which in turn lead to modifications in proposals ..."

<http://www.zmag.org/books/pareconv/parefina1.htm> (Chapter 8, subsection: Proceeding From One Proposal To Another)

You say the "benefit cost ratio" has nothing to do with profit because the "benefit cost ratio" will only benefit parecon society as a whole and not any individual. But as we have seen, this is based on a misunderstanding of what profit means. Moreover, you also claim on the same page in your book that:

"...workers' councils whose ratios of social benefits of their outputs to social costs of their inputs were lower than average would come under pressure to increase either efficiency or effort..."

Or go bust, presumably, unless profits were redistributed from workers' councils with above average ratios. This shows the limits of planning in "parecon", for in their planning considerations they must maintain profit rates. And while planning might be based on past or current profit rates, profits themselves are inherently unpredictable and this may scupper plans for the future. There is also the antagonism between wages and profits. Parecon society would need to maintain a positive rate of profit or lurch into crisis. This means that workers could not push up wages to the level that stopped profits being made, and this again sets definite limits to what can be planned.

production and consumption will be regulated in a socialist society. That's an essential part of it, but this does not require recourse to money either as a means of exchange or for costing products and production. Calculation - and "costing" - in socialism will take place in kind (in tonnes of steel, kilowatt-hours of electricity, person-hours of work and so on) without having to put a monetary value on anything and everything. Socialist society will decide - through democratic discussion and from what people indicate they want by what they take from the common stores - what it needs to satisfy individual and collective consumption, and to replace and expand (if need be) the productive apparatus and then will bring together the physical and human resources to produce this. This will be done in the most technically efficient way, after taking into account good working conditions and environmental considerations.

In implementing the long-standing

socialist principle of "from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs", socialist society breaks the link between work done and consumption. Rather than being "allotted" what to consume as under "parecon", people would



Social wealth - or social profit?



CAPITALISM

Union state capitalist, and my saying that since it didn't have private owners of means of production, and it didn't have markets, but it did have a ruling economic class composed of those monopolizing empowering tasks in the economy, it is far more sensibly called not capitalist, not socialist, but coordinatorist, after its ruling class.

I share your desire that a future desirable economy involve workers and consumers cooperatively negotiating economic activities and their distribution. That is what parecon accomplishes. Given space limits, I guess for now we just have to agree to disagree about a lot, beyond that

desire, however. ■

Michael Albert

Reply:

It is only under capitalism that the social surplus takes the form of a monetary surplus value and, as you admit, this is what will exist in "parecon". And this is what will be the imperative guiding and limiting its planning decisions. The institutional changes you advocate (no legal individual ownership of means of production, self-management, etc.) are inadequate reasons for claiming that capitalism has been overthrown.

We agree that the former Soviet Union did have a ruling class, but not that there were no markets there. Even the regime's ideologists admitted that there was "commodity-production", i.e. production for sale, and that buying and selling relationships existed between state enterprises. While there was no individual legal ownership of the main means of production (though there was of some things: dachas, works of art, state bonds, bank accounts), these means of production were not owned by society as a whole but effectively by a class which monopolised them, via the state, and which lived a privileged life from the surplus value extracted from the wage-labour of the workers. That is why we think the best description of that and similar societies was state capitalist.

Your attitude towards the former Soviet Union is revealing in that it shows that you had nothing against the continued existence there of the key features of capitalism that are production for sale, money, wages,

profits, etc but only to the fact that the economic system involving these was controlled by a privileged ruling class and not democratically by the workers. "Parecon" is thus revealed to be the idea of the economic system that existed in Russia "self-managed" by the workers. A sort of "self-managed capitalism" that could only exist on paper.

Socialism will break free from the financial bureaucracy of capitalist calculation. It will treat people as ends in themselves. It will produce directly for human needs. It will break the link between individual effort and individual consumption. That's what all those who consider themselves to be anti-capitalist should be aiming at. ■

Editors.



1906 - 2006

A Hundred Years of the Labour Party

The Socialist Party was formed in 1904. The Labour Party didn't come into being until two years later when a number of Labour and Liberal-Labour MPs, elected at the 1906 general election, set up a parliamentary group. We look at the Labour Party's dismal anti-socialist performance over the last hundred years.

The 1906 General Election is memorable for two reasons. Firstly, the Liberal Party won a remarkable landslide victory, returning 400 MPs to Parliament. Secondly the fledgling Labour Representation Committee (LRC), under the leadership of James Keir Hardie, trebled its vote to gain 27 parliamentary seats, increasing its representation to 29. These dramatic gains prompted the LRC to rename itself and a little over 100 years ago, in February 1906, the Labour Party came into being.

The earlier decision to set up the LRC was a response to dire working class poverty and more particularly to the legal threat to the trade unions, which were attempting to ameliorate these conditions. Throughout the nineteenth century the state had consciously obstructed collective bargaining, even though legislation passed during the 1870s exempted trade disputes from the conspiracy laws and legalised peaceful picketing. The 'new unionism' of the 1880s rapidly expanded trade union representation and, combined with the success of the London Dockers' strike of 1889, raised concerns that working people were becoming too organised and might mount a challenge to the owners' interests. The state and employers propagated the notion that unions were synonymous with 'socialism', which they claimed would lead to social disintegration, and they looked to the courts to weaken emerging unionisation that might defy the domination of capital.

The trade unions became receptive to the idea of parliamentary representation shortly after



The Labour Representation Committee - 1906



The Dock Strike of 1889 the great engineering lockout in 1897-8 and then the Lyons v Wilkins judgement of 1899 which reversed the provisions of the 1876 Trade Union Act that had allowed for peaceful picketing. The 1899 Trade Union Congress proposed a meeting between union representatives, the Social Democratic Federation, the Fabians and the Independent Labour Party to seek agreement on an agenda for parliamentary representation to secure political protection for 'free negotiation' with employers. The subsequent conference held in February 1900 agreed that the LRC would be supported by trade union affiliation fees and it elected Ramsay MacDonald as the new organisation's secretary.



Keir Hardie holding forth

The LRC's first priority was survival. It was desperately short of funds and its base was extremely weak. In 1900 only 13 percent of the working class had trade union membership and only 18 per cent of these were initially affiliated to the LRC - just 41 unions with 353,000 members. The new party had no programme as such and incorporated various groups that, while calling themselves socialist, held an array of conflicting views. Calls that the organisation should be based on a 'recognition of the class war' or commit itself to anything beyond trade union representation were rejected. The LRC

was convinced that capitalism could be humanised by reforms and refused to entertain any notion that the organisation should advocate socialism as an immediately realisable objective. Instead, its task was to reform capitalism and strive for a 'level playing field' to enable workers to negotiate 'a fair day's work for a fair day's pay' without state interference.

Trade union affiliations to the LRC were boosted after a disastrous strike in August 1900 by workers in the Taff Vale Railway Company. The workers demanded better working conditions and the right to join a trade union - the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS). The strike was broken and the employers pressed their advantage by fighting and winning a legal action for damages against the ASRS, thereby pushing the

union to bankruptcy and making future union strike action virtually impossible. This threat to trade unionism served to reaffirm the LRC's contention that only by winning political power could workers influence their conditions within capitalism, which in this case meant passing laws to reverse the court's decision and legalise industrial action.

Despite its weakness, the LRC ran 15 candidates in October 1900 and won two parliamentary seats - Keir Hardie winning Merthyr and Richard Bell taking Derby.

To many unions, however, affiliation to the LRC was not an automatic choice. A succession of unsympathetic Conservative governments between 1885 and 1905 had compelled unions to look to the Liberal opposition for support, although by 1900 some doubts had arisen about the Liberals' genuine commitment to trade unionism. Nevertheless many trade unions continued to support the Liberals and, in the same 1906 election that saw the LRC make its dramatic gains, 24 trade unionists were elected as Liberal MPs.

It would be misleading, however, to regard the LRC's 1906 electoral gains as

altogether surprising. They were in fact largely attributable to the organisation's willingness to make alliances with avowedly capitalist political organisations and in particular with the Liberal Party. As an organisation pledged to maintaining and eventually administering the capitalist system, the LRC saw no inconsistency to agreeing an electoral pact with the Liberal Party in 1903, whereby the Liberals agreed to run only one candidate in certain two-member constituencies, leaving the other anti-Tory candidate to come from LRC. The Liberals were eager to avoid splitting the anti-Conservative vote and the LRC was eager to increase its influence.

The fact that such a pact was forged says much about the intentions of the LRC and the later Labour Party. The Party's objective was to protect workers' conditions by striving to administer the system and to give workers a 'fair deal' within capitalism. The LRC and Labour Party never looked beyond this objective and accordingly did

everything in their power to mute any overt hostility to the capitalist system or attract opposition from the owners and their government. Ramsay MacDonald exemplified this strain of thought, arguing that the theories of Marx, the class struggle and the necessity of a politically conscious socialist working class without leaders enacting the social revolution were outdated and invalid notions. Instead, he embraced the views of Bernstein and the German

'Revisionists', that 'socialism' would come about gradually within the existing structure of society and develop as a result of the growing success of capitalism. It was therefore determined that the Labour Party's task was to promote this success and to pass useful reforms that would theoretically steer the working class towards a distant socialist society. It was an organisation where 'immediate demands' within capitalism took priority over everything else.

Not unsurprisingly the first legislative measure of the new Labour Party and its Liberal allies was to reverse the Taff Vale judgement. This was achieved under the Trades Dispute Act of 1906. The Labour Party also made small amendments to the



Ramsay MacDonald - the theories of Marx were 'outdated and invalid notions'.



Sidney and Beatrice Webb - architects of the Labour reformist programme

Workingmen's Compensation Bill and the School Meals and Medical Inspections Act, but by 1907 the Party had run out of ideas and was reduced to simply accepting Liberal Party reforms. The passing of the Trades Dispute Act, however, coincided with a reduction in real wages and a rising tide of industrial disputes, and these factors encouraged further union affiliations to the Labour Party. The affiliation of the Miners' Federation in 1909 was of major importance, since mineworkers' votes cast in favour of the Labour Party represented potentially another 60 parliamentary seats. Potential became reality in 1918 when the Liberal electoral pact was no longer in operation.

By the end of the First World War - in which the Labour Party abandoned any class solidarity and enthusiastically supported British capitalism - it was well on its way to becoming the main opposition in parliament. Towards the end of the war the planned extension of the franchise, combined with the 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia, prompted the Labour Party to redraft its constitution under the influence of the 'radical' Sidney Webb. The recast constitution included the famous Clause Four that was intended to appeal to the anticipated 'leftward' swing in public opinion and to draw a clear distinction between Labour and the Liberals by committing the Labour Party to nationalisation or state-run capitalism.

“At no time in its history has the Labour Party advocated revolution for socialism, but rather, relied on the pretence that state-run capitalism and reforms represented 'stepping stones' to a socialist society.”

The Labour Party participated in minority administrations in 1924 and again in 1929, but it had to wait until 1945 - and the carnage of another World War, in which it again wholeheartedly supported British capitalism - before fully completing the transformation from trade union parliamentary pressure group to a party of capitalist rule. The 1945 Labour government is best remembered for its programme of nationalisation that was touted as solving many of the problems of working people but failed miserably to do so. It is also remembered for its welfare reforms which were presented as bringing improvement to working-class conditions of life but whose main aim was to improve the efficiency of working men and women without provoking a general wage increase. Further opportunities for Labour Party management of British capitalism occurred in 1964 under Harold Wilson, in 1974 first under Wilson again and then James Callaghan, and finally under Tony Blair from 1997.

Given its early history it is hardly surprising that the Labour Party should have developed in this way. The LRC and later the Labour Party were never organised to challenge capitalism or eradicate the irreconcilable class differences between the working class and the owning class that lives on expropriated labour by virtue of their ownership of the means of producing and distributing wealth. At no time in its history has the Labour Party advocated revolution for socialism, but rather, until relatively recently anyway, relied on a cynical propagation of the pretence that state-run capitalism and reforms represented 'stepping stones' to a socialist society.

The Labour Party consciously steered the social-democratic or socialist movement of the early twentieth century away from social revolution to a futile policy of 'reformism', maintaining unswerving support for the exploitation of working people, the wages system, commodity production and the private ownership of the means of producing wealth. The one-hundred-year history of the Labour Party is one of deceit and opportunism that has given a bad name to socialism and induced working people to hand political power to representatives of their class enemy to administer capitalism against the working class interests that Labour has pretended to represent. ■

STEVE TROTT

More dirty work - in the Atlantic

Between 1965 and 1972, the British government expelled, deported or forced out the indigenous people of the Chagos Islands, and particularly Diego Garcia, known as the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT). This was because it had signed a "defence" agreement with the United States, leasing the islands to the US for an intelligence, military, and naval base and, later, a nuclear and fuelling depot for long-range bombers. The BIOT is located strategically in the centre of the Indian Ocean, so controlling it



Above: Lord Triesman; US B52 Bombers at Diego Garcia

provides power and influence in the whole of Southern Asia and much of the Middle East. (See "Dirty Work in the Indian Ocean", *Socialist Standard*, September 1996.)

History may never actually repeat itself exactly, but the present situation on the island of Ascension, midway between Africa and South America in the Atlantic Ocean, is very similar.

In 1956, the British government leased to the United States Wakefield Airfield, now a top-secret base on Ascension. According to the *Observer* (12.02.06), it is one of the Pentagon's most important military communications hubs; and is also used for troop deployments. Cable & Wireless and the BBC also have facilities on the island. Furthermore, Ascension is 1,000 miles off the oil-rich coast of West Africa.

About 1,100 people live on Ascension Island, some indigenous, many of them from St. Helena 750 miles to the south, and most of them British citizens. According to the *Observer* of the same date, after the Human Rights Act was adopted by the British government in 1998, the then Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, published a White Paper with the aim of bringing democracy to the island, as well as establishing a right of permanent abode, and full property rights, for all residents. Previously, although many of the islanders were born there, they were, and still are, only allowed to remain as long as they have jobs. In 1999, the British government pledged that this would change. Following Ascension's first general election in 2002, a local council was formed which went on to create a national park on the extinct volcano in the centre of the island. There was a plan to encourage eco-tourism to take advantage of the unique plant and seabird species, first

discovered by Charles Darwin in 1844. Many of the islanders bought shops and other small businesses. But it was all to no avail.

In January this year, the Foreign Office minister, one Lord Triesman, wrote to the Islanders informing them that the government had changed its plans, and that "they would not have a right of abode or right of tenure". They would be thrown out if necessary. Says the *Observer*:

"The Foreign Office is accused of covering up the true reason for its change in heart. Many blame the Pentagon for pressuring Britain. They believe the US wants to expand its military operations on the island and objected to plans to increase tourism. Washington does not want its activities to be subject to unwanted scrutiny. The west African coast has become of increasing strategic interest to the US, with discoveries of oil that have turned countries such as Equatorial Guinea into wealthy trading partners."

And Lord Triesman, who has allegedly bowed to the Pentagon's wishes, or dictates? He is better known as David Triesman who, as a sociology student at the University of Essex in the summer term of 1968, was suspended, but was later reinstated following a student occupation of the university. And who wrote an essay, "The CIA and Student Politics", in a Penguin Special book, *Student Power, Problems, Diagnosis, Action*, in which he exposed the CIA for financing and largely controlling the International Student conference and British NUS, adding: "The generation developing in this country will not want to pay mere lip service to the international struggle against imperialism, colonialism and racism; it will be in conflict with capitalism as the parent of these enemies."

It would seem that the good Lord Triesman has since changed his mind regarding American imperialism, the CIA and capitalism. ■

PETER E. NEWELL

More about a socialist scenario

Last month we discussed four scenarios outlined in a report by Foresight, a government thinktank, on transport over the next 50 years. We briefly described a fifth missing scenario - a socialist one, concentrating on transport. This month we add some more to a socialist scenario.

First politics. The Foresight report lists 60 "key drivers for change". The only one that is overtly political is "Decline in power of national governments", although "Culture of control" and "New decision-making frameworks" have political implications. Any socialist scenario has a central place for democracy, but not democracy as it is usually defined in capitalism. Socialist democracy is based on sharing in planning and decision-making, not having plans and decisions imposed on oneself or imposing them on others.

In socialism there will be no professional politicians - no one having an income from being elected. Access to goods and services will be free (made possible by the free work given to society by its members) for everybody, including individuals elected or appointed as delegates or representatives at various levels. In capitalism these levels are generally something like local, regional or global. There may well be some continuity in these levels, but as the socialist movement grows there will probably also be changes, reflecting different circumstances in different parts of the world.

Then **education.** The Foresight report says very little about this. Schools are



Education - for the socialists of tomorrow?

mentioned as an economic resource and "the growing crisis in higher education" is noted - and that's about it. A socialist scenario must have a great deal to say about education. Its aim will be to prepare people - participants, not consumers - to live in socialist society. There is education required to help bring about socialism as well as education as a feature of socialist society. The effort now put into socialist education is severely limited by lack of active socialists and money. Imagine what could be achieved if socialist schools, ► page 16



Cooking the Books (2)

Capitalism for ever?

On 2 March Jacques Attali, author of a recent biography of Marx in French (and former top adviser to President Mitterrand

and former head of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development), gave a talk with historian Eric Hobsbawm on "Marx for the 21st century" at the Jewish Book Fair in London.

Interviewed in the *Guardian* (25 February) he was reported as saying:

"Contrary to popular belief, Marx was not mistaken: capitalism will fall and be replaced by a socialist system. The only question is when. 'For Marx the fall of the rate of profit will appear when capitalism has exhausted its capacity for growth, which is not the case,' he says. 'Socialism will come after this.'"

Marx did indeed think that capitalism would prepare the way for and eventually be replaced by socialism (which Attali correctly identifies, both in his book and in

his talk, as a world non-market society in which money will have no place and in which goods and services will be freely available for people to take and use). And he could be interpreted as having argued (in the *Grundrisse*, in the section in Notebook VII on "Contradiction between the foundations of bourgeois production (value as measure) and its development") that, if capitalism were to continue long enough, productivity would eventually rise to such a level that the unit price of goods would fall so low (their labour-time content being so small) that they would be virtually free and that the prospect of making a profit would therefore be so low that the economic mechanism of capitalism would seize up.

Attali's reported answer here implies that Marx really thought that socialism would only come when capitalism had reached that stage. Which it clearly hasn't. So, capitalism would still have some way to go, until in fact it had not only come to dominate the globe (as at present and for at least a century) but had come to exist everywhere including in the currently "undeveloped" parts of the world in Asia, Latin America and Africa. Until, in short, capitalist globalisation had run its full

course.

Marx certainly thought that in his day capitalism still had some years to go before it could be replaced by socialism (which is why he supported non-socialist developments within capitalism which he thought would speed up the development of capitalism and with it the material basis for socialism, such as free trade, the victory of the North in the American Civil War, and German unity). But it is doubtful whether the passage from the *Grundrisse* was anything more than Marx saying what would eventually happen if capitalism were to go on for long enough. In other words, that there were theoretical reasons why capitalism could not literally go on forever. It did have an economic limit, even if this would be far into the future.

Marx can't be interpreted as saying that capitalism would, or should, continue for that long. His activities as a revolutionary socialist clearly showed that, on the contrary, he thought that capitalism could, and should, be ended by conscious working class action long before it reached its theoretical limit.

colleges, universities and distance learning projects were set up which treated capitalism critically and socialism sympathetically.

Socialists have long speculated about how education will differ in socialism as compared with capitalism. William Morris sought to narrow the differences between learning manual skills and book-learning. His pre-electronic predictions need updating, but there is also a case that education in socialism will not be as dominated by electronic gadgetry as capitalist education now is.

The way people work gets some mention in the Foresight report - "Movement away from office-based working" is one of the 60 Drivers for change. A socialist scenario has much more to say about work as a necessary, creative and satisfying activity. In socialism all the work required only to run capitalism will no longer be needed - no banking, insurance, financial services, sales and all money-related jobs will go. Harmful occupations connected with the "defence" (war) industry will be a thing of the past.

The elimination of work that keeps capitalism going will mean a vast expansion in the potential for useful work in socialism. Employment, and its flip-side unemployment, will be consigned to history. People like to do work that is useful to themselves, others and the society in which they live. Once financial coercion is removed there is no reason to suppose that there will be a shortage of volunteers. Obviously, men and women will prefer work that suits their abilities and interests, as well as the chance for change. Joy in work - in the past a privilege afforded only to the minority - will be available to all.

Lastly the media. The Foresight report does have something to say on this, but only the technical side. "Satellite location devices", "Smart antenna" and "Increasing use of 'telepresence' technology" are included in the Drivers for change. A socialist scenario may well have a view on such changes. But it will also be concerned with the content of the media, how that content is decided, and the circumstances in which it is used as a means of communication, information and education.

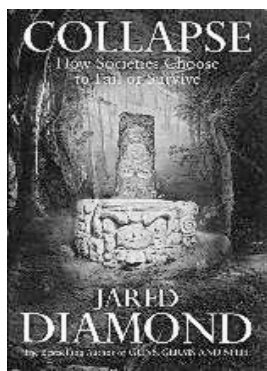
In contemporary capitalism, as Chomsky and others have pointed out, the ideal is that each person should be alone in front of a screen, subject to what they see and hear, deprived of opportunities to discover what they really think through communication and interaction with others. In socialism the media will be democratically organised and controlled, not manipulated by political and commercial interests. No need to write programs for future media output and input. But you can be sure that it will reflect and be part of a happier and less problem-ridden world than capitalism. ■

STAN PARKER



Protect and Survive

Jared Diamond: Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive. Penguin £9.99



This is another erudite yet readable book by Jared Diamond, following on from *The Rise and Fall of the T h i r d Chimpanzee* and *Guns, Germs and Steel*. His theme this time is how and why past societies have or have not collapsed, and how an understanding of such issues may be of help in the present-day world. The Maya civilisation of central America, for instance, collapsed in the early tenth century CE, after a period of 700 years or so. A number of contributing causes can be distinguished: population outgrew available resources, deforestation reduced the amount of available farmland, fighting among the Maya increased, a severe drought occurred, and the rulers had no interest in long-term concerns.

Diamond distinguishes five points that are generally relevant to societal collapse: environmental damage, climate change, hostile neighbours, friendly trade partners, and a society's responses to its environmental problems. Often, for instance, forest will be removed and soil eroded, or newly-introduced animals may eat native species or destroy crops: all this may cut the numbers who can survive in a particular area. Destroying unrennewable resources is particularly crucial. Unfriendly nearby societies can also play their part in disrupting production and everyday life. Globalisation has increased the importance of other (not necessarily nearby) parts of the world: China, for instance, accepts untreated garbage, including toxic waste, from other countries (for a fee, of course).

Like his other works, *Collapse* is wide-ranging and thought-provoking, containing much material that we can't do justice to here. A useful chapter on the Rwanda massacres of the 1990s makes the point that it was not a simple matter of Hutu against Tutsi. Many other factors played a part, including population pressure and falling world coffee prices. The final chapter asks what all the facts and theories that have been marshalled before mean to us today, emphasising 'the unsustainability of a world in which the Third World's large population were to reach and maintain current First World living standards.' Diamond's conclusion is that we need 'the political will to apply solutions already available', as if it were merely a matter of convincing politicians to do the right thing.

In fact he is far too uncritical in his acceptance of capitalism as the framework within which present-day problems have to be solved. He is well aware that companies exist to make profits, not as charities concerned to protect the environment. Yet, he says, it is not enough to blame ► page 18

Alternative voice

Democracy Now! Pacifica Radio. <http://www.democracynow.org/>



"Independent media has a crucial responsibility to go to where the silence is to represent the diverse voices of people engaged in dissent." Thus is the journalistic philosophy of Amy Goodman, host and executive producer of the New York-based radio/television news programme *Democracy Now!*, now in its tenth year. True to her vision, Goodman's one-hour show covers the stories ignored or suppressed by the corporate-sponsored media, and provides a platform for the politically underrepresented to give their views and commentary on stories reported by the mainstream news. Artists, leftist academics, peace activists, whistleblowers, union representatives, and independent journalists make up the majority of those interviewed. In many respects, then, *Democracy Now!* is like a daily edition of Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*, reporting on the activities of various segments of the working class to resist political and economic oppression.

Each show begins with Amy Goodman delivering ten minutes of headline news; while there is a tendency to focus on American politics, the show is much more international in scope than most other American news programmes. The remaining fifty minutes explores one or two stories in further detail via interviews or a live debate between a prominent activist or academic and a government spokesperson. Past guests have included academics Norman Finkelstein, Noam Chomsky, and Howard Zinn; authors Alice Walker, Arundhati Roy, and Salman Rushdie; and spokespeople from civil rights and activist groups such as Greenpeace and the American Civil Liberties Union. The plethora of voices critical of the government and society is a welcome diversion from the business and government cronies featured on most corporate news programmes. (And unlike other so-called "independent" or "public" media outlets, *Democracy Now!* is funded entirely by listeners, viewers, and foundations; they run no advertising and do not accept donations from corporations or governments.)

If the show has one fault, it is that it sometimes assumes a particular political group or ideology must have merit simply because its views are in the minority. Such was the case with a February show commemorating the assassination of black nationalist leader Malcolm X. Guests were brought in to heap praises upon the man, and a long excerpt from his speech "The Ballot or the Bullet" was played. No comment or criticism was made on his ►

East Anglia

Saturday 8 April, 12 noon to 4pm

12 noon: informal chat

1pm: meal

2pm to 4pm: Discussion of Conference Agenda and future activity

Venue: The Conservatory, backroom of Rosary Tavern, Rosary Road, Norwich.

All welcome.

Swansea

Monday 10 April, 7.30pm

GLOBALISATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Unitarian Church (next to Argos), High St, Swansea.

Chiswick

Tuesday 18 April, 8pm

RUSSIA: REPORT ON A RECENT VISIT

Speaker: Vincent Otter

Committee Room, Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace, W4 (nearest tube: Chiswick Park)

Central London

Saturday 22 April, 3pm

FREE SOFTWARE: DOTCOMMUNISM?

Speaker: Tristan Miller

Socialist Party Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, SW4

Socialist Party Annual Conference

Friday 14 April 10.30 to 6pm. Saturday 15 April 11 to 6pm

Head Office, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4.

SOCIAL (with food): Friday 14 April, 7pm. Manor Arms, Clapham Manor St, SW4 (nearest tube: Clapham North).

Edinburgh and Glasgow

Branches

DAY SCHOOL FOR SATURDAY 13 MAY 2006

In the Community Central Halls, 314 Maryhill Road, Glasgow

THE CHANGING FACE OF CAPITALISM

1.00pm to 2.15pm

WHAT NEXT FOR THE TRADE UNIONS?

The trade union movement has played an important part in the development of working class ideas, but now it finds itself in a crisis. Its political product the Labour Party has proven to be just another capitalist party. Brian Gardner (Glasgow Branch) considers the dilemma that it faces with the worsening of pension conditions and the insecurity of modern technology.

2.15pm to 3.30pm

THE DEATH OF THE LEFT?

The demise of the Russian and eastern European Communist Parties has led to a crisis on the so-called left. Various Leninist and Trotskyist groups claim to be socialist organisations. In this talk Paul Bennett (Manchester Branch) deals with their claims and offers the alternative of World Socialism with its rejection of leadership and the reform of capitalism.

3.30pm to 5.00pm

CAPITALISM? KIDS' STUFF

In this session we play a 50 minute DVD *Capitalism and Other Kids' Stuff* that likens the development of capitalism to a children's nursery. We examine how ownership gives rise to the state and all its coercive forces. We look at alternative ways of running society. We look at a moneyless, tradeless alternative to the profit system. This DVD was devised by and features Paddy Shannon (Lancaster Branch) He will deal with your questions and ideas.

Tea, coffee and light refreshments will be available, free of charge.

All welcome.

racist-separatist agenda, nor on his suggestion that the "black community" would be better off if blacks ran their own economy. Goodman, who is usually unafraid to pose hard-hitting questions, neglected to challenge the ludicrous implication that black workers would be any less exploited serving black masters than white ones.

Nonetheless, *Democracy Now!* serves a useful purpose in bringing underreported stories and views to the forefront. Until socialists can establish their own news programme, Goodman's show is a good supplement or even outright replacement for the corporate nightly news.

Democracy Now! is broadcast in London on Resonance 104.4 FM Thursdays at 11:00; across Europe on Sky Digital channel 0122 Monday to Friday at 15:00; and on the Internet via RealAudio, RealVideo, MP3, or Ogg Vorbis at

<http://www.democracynow.org/>.

TRISTAN MILLER



World Socialist Literature

World Socialist Review: the journal of the World Socialist Movement in the United States. £1.30 including postage.

Socialist Banner: the quarterly journal of the World Socialist Movement in Africa. £1.00 including postage.

From The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN.
Cheques payable to 'The Socialist Party of Great Britain'.

Summer School, Fircroft, 21-23 July, 2006

WHAT'S LEFT OF THE LEFT? Retreated or Defeated?

A slightly different format this year. Some speakers, but also some discussions groups considering papers and notes from overseas socialists. The object is to try to build up a global picture of the state of opposition to capitalism: what attacking moves and defences capitalist governments have made and what threats and/or opportunities this presents to the socialist movement.

Fircroft College has kindly held back its price increases so that we can maximise our numbers attending. Non-members are welcome. Full board for the weekend is £110. The Party can subsidise a small number of those attending at half price, but it's best to apply early. Free entry to all talks and discussion sessions.

For further information or booking a place (please don't leave it too late!) ring Ron Cook, 0121 553 1712

letters continued

I think that if it was quite as easy as that then there would no longer be a problem. It is a matter of class and geography and history (and sex, race and more) as to how you are treated, what your chances are and how your life will pan out or whether you will live through your first year to have a life at all. None of these are circumstances of your own making. In Britain - increasingly, geography is helping make class - but that is another story altogether.

DANNY DORLING, SHEFFIELD

Reply: We have no quarrel with the idea that a person's date and place of birth affects their chances in life. And we assume you wouldn't deny that class enters into the picture too. Our article dealt not with infant mortality but with the kind of job people are likely to have. There is no middle class (they're part of the working class). And it's the class people are born into (working class or capitalist) that

determines whether they will need to worry about working for a living. We appeal to workers on the basis of their class interests, not the question of being from Yorkshire or Iceland. Not everyone can move to Iceland, but we can get rid of class divisions. - Editors.

from page 16

companies, for 'ultimate responsibility' lies with us, 'the public', since we supposedly have the power to make destructive environmental policies unprofitable, e.g. by means of consumer boycotts or pressurising politicians to pass laws that force businesses to clean up the mess they have created. Sadly, this ignores the fact that capitalism needs profits and, while companies will sometimes be keen to play the environmental card if it suits them, they have to put profits first. No amount of legislation or boycotting can change this.

So the c-word to ponder is not 'collapse' or 'climate' but 'capitalism'. And the political will that matters is the will to replace capitalism with a sensibly-organised society, within which problems can be tackled in a way much more likely to yield effective solutions.

PB

WSM FORUM

- Want to talk about what you've just read?
- Can't make it to a meeting?
- Discuss the questions of the day with Party members and non-members online.

Join the forum via www.worldsocialism.org



Stalin the God and Stalin the Gangster

So the Stalin legend is ended, struck down by the hands that built it up. Three years after his death the Communist Party leaders of all nationalities who fawned on him and grovelled at his feet in his lifetime, and who slobbered hysterically at his funeral, vie with each other to speak ill of their dead hero. They now make charges that he was cowardly, conceited, ignorant and stupid, cunning and brutal, and his supposedly benevolent guidance of his admiring and loving people nothing but a betrayal of Communist ideals, a bestial reign of terror under which no voice of protest could be heard and no man of integrity was safe against arbitrary execution.

One thing we must, however, not forget. If the faction that wants to belittle Stalin carries the day we may expect the anti-Stalin campaign to be as richly ornamented with new lies as was the old campaign to build up the Stalin myth. History will be re-written again with no more regard for truth.

For the venal and sycophantic second-line leaders it is a cruel dilemma. While the dictator lived the drill was simple,. Since he was all-wise, when he turned they all turned; and fell over each other to praise his every tortuous twist of policy,. But, as has happened throughout history, the dictator's death launches his immediate circle into a bloody struggle for power, and the minor leaders and their followers suddenly have to make up their own minds which faction to support. So the British Communists are now anxiously disputing about the line they ought to follow,. This is the eventual fate of all organizations built up on leader-worship and Socialists can view their agonies with equanimity. The Communist Party has never been a force for Socialism and its disruption could only be a gain to the working class.



Stalin, by Picasso

(From editorial, *Socialist Standard*, April 1956)

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.



Hoey Hoo-Hah

Why does she stay in a party which, she says, imposes policies it was not elected on?

Say what you like about rebel Labour MPs, in most cases they are consistent - or should that be boringly predictable? *Foundation Hospitals?* Against. *War on Iraq?* Against. *Ban Hunting?* In favour. All tediously predictable. Then along comes Kate Hoey, Labour MP for Vauxhall, to upset the pattern. The big issue for Hoey - the one which has earned her the most publicity - has been her support for hunting which she demonstrated, on the day the "sport" was banned by Parliament, by riding out with the Beaufort Hunt. She says the ban is unenforceable, that it has actually made hunting more popular than ever: "It's part of the British rebellious streak that as soon as something is banned it becomes more attractive". Which raises the question of what she is doing in Parliament, where they lay down laws which ban all kinds of behaviour as a way of making them unattractive to even the most rebellious person. She has also said of the Labour Party: "They don't understand the countryside" - as if there is a lot more to "understand" than that the countryside is basically the same as the towns and cities, with a class structure which condemns one class to work for their living in varying degrees of poverty and insecurity.

Vauxhall

It is also fair to ask what drives her to be the MP for Vauxhall which, and including Kennington, Stockwell and parts of Clapham and Brixton, is as far from what most people see as the "countryside" as it is possible to be. It is, in fact, one of the toughest parts of London. To ensure that everyone, including the long-suffering voters of Vauxhall, knew where she stood on hunting, Hoey took on the job of chairing the Countryside Alliance - an organisation which tells us it campaigns about rural poverty and the decline of the villages but which was mysteriously silent on these issues until the 1997 Labour victory brought the first ever real threat to hunting. It was unfortunate timing that Hoey announced her new, additional job on the day the police shot John Charles de Menezes - at Stockwell station, in her constituency. This ghastly event did not dampen the Countryside Alliance's joy at her elevation to lead them, which they said they were "delighted" about. Not all the voters of Vauxhall felt the same: many of them, worried about the living conditions there and the shooting at Stockwell, expressed their angry surprise that their MP had the time to take on so much extra work when she manages to attend only 55 percent of votes in the Commons.

But Hoey's record of rebellion extends beyond hunting. She is against foundation hospitals (although she was once in favour of hospital trusts, which many traditional Labour people feared would be a first step in betrayal of the NHS), against student top-up fees, the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill, compulsory ID cards, the war on Iraq... She protests that it the others who are out of step, that the measures she opposes were not in Labour's manifesto - as if it would have made any difference if they had been. And why does she stay in a party which, she says, imposes policies it was not elected on? Even the Tories are confused about her. In October 1996 the mischievous MP Giles Brandreth recorded in his diary that he plotted about her with Sebastian Coe:

"Why don't we find someone to defect to us? We decided Kate Hoey was our prime target. We like her, she seems sensible, she isn't valued by New Labour."

And more recently a Tory MP in the *Daily Telegraph* showed that little has changed with her: "She spends more time in our division lobby than on the other side."

Jowell

Quite what the fatigued electorate of Vauxhall think of the fact that they have elected a Labour MP who votes like a Tory will be apparent at the next election. Meanwhile they may take some kind of hint from Hoey's assessment of Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell and her husband David Mills with their labyrinthine mortgages and offshore financial manoeuvres. Perhaps she is jealous of a more durable female rival but Hoey refused to acquiesce in the orchestrated campaign from Number Ten designed to discredit the

exposure of Jowell as motivated by gender prejudice. She was one of those who wanted Jowell sacked from leading Labour's campaign in the local elections, for, she "...grew up in a Labour Party that thought that taking money out of the country wasn't a very loyal thing to do". In fact the vast majority of the people of Vauxhall are not rich enough to practice that kind of "disloyalty"; as Hoey put it: "Most people have enough trouble just getting one mortgage".



Hoey: 'as soon as something is banned it becomes more attractive'

Before she joined the Labour Party Hoey was a member of an obscure Trotskyist organisation, which she later explained by confessing that "I didn't have much contact with ordinary people. So I didn't understand their concerns" (Brian Deer interview, *Sunday Times Magazine* 8 August 1993). After that embarrassing spasm she sat as a councillor in Hackney and Southwark waiting, with other hopeful future Labour stars, for the offer of a winnable seat. Hoey's chance came when the sitting MP for Vauxhall, Stuart Holland, resigned from the Commons to take an academic job.

Holland, who was a disciple of Tony Benn, was described by a fellow member of the Lambeth Labour Party as "...pitifully eager to acquiesce in whatever absurdities Lambeth Labour cared to expound". Holland's departure came as a relief to Neil Kinnock, tempered by the fact that the constituency party intended to replace him with Martha Osamor who, with her similar ideas, seemed to be no less of an embarrassment to the Labour leadership. So Hoey was imposed on a resistant local party as a "moderniser" - a word with a meaning we are all aware of now. She won the by-election with a majority of over 15000.

Sports Minister

Realising her ambition to be the first woman Sports Minister (she had a qualification in Physical Education, she had been Ulster high jump champion and Educational Adviser to a number of football clubs including Arsenal and Chelsea) brought Hoey up against the spin doctors of Downing Street. Against instructions from Alastair Campbell she criticised the decision of Alex Ferguson (a special favourite of Blair's) to withdraw Manchester United from the 1999 FA Cup, saying that the club's supporters had been treated in "a quite shabby way". She officially complained about the MBE awarded to Arsenal striker Ian Wright, because his behaviour on the field - shouting and swearing at other players and the referee - made him a poor role model. She lasted only a couple of years in the job.

And now, on the back benches there seems little more by way of a political career left for her. There is still her writing for the *Daily Telegraph*, there is chairing the Countryside Alliance and doing her abrasive best to upset her party as she goes into the opposing voting lobby. And of course there may be her memoirs, which should have the words Tally Hoey in the title. If she hangs on to Vauxhall there will be the job of ministering to the people there who, in their poverty, bad housing, crime and pollution, can be expected to be feeling distinctly unministered to. Like most rebels, Hoey will need to work at living up to her own image. Recently in the *Daily Telegraph*, she was described as wearing a Gucci watch and a jacket trimmed with fake fur. She did not miss this chance to boost her reputation for reckless confession: "The fur" she responded "was real. The Gucci watch was fake", provoking a spokesman for the Trading Standards Institute to remind her of the realities of commodity society: "We deplore any public figure who seems to be celebrating the purchase of counterfeit items" he sniffed (which probably gained Hoey a few more votes in Vauxhall).

It was Oscar Wilde who once described Hoey's favourite pastime as "the unspeakable in full pursuit of the uneatable". We may wonder what enduring, scathing epigram he would have fashioned about a Labour Minister indulging in such "sport" after her party had made all those promises about building a sustainably better society. Like all other "rebels" Hoey relies on the deception that she offers something so fresh and different that it has not been thought of before. In Wilde's absence let us sum up the futility of it all: the unmemorable in pursuit of the unpracticable. ■

IVAN



Voice from the Back



Salt In The Wound

The capitalist class hold the working class in contempt, but they seldom display it in such an arrogant fashion. "Workers at a doomed crisp factory yesterday slammed bosses' parting gift - a free 36p bag of low salt and fat variety. Many of the 250 staff, who will lose their jobs when the Walkers' plant in Swansea shuts next month, blamed them" (*Daily Mirror*, 9 February). When executives lose their jobs they sometimes get a "golden handshake", but this is the first time we have heard of what amounts to a "Golden Wonder" handshake.

Walkers Workers - Fried, crisped, and hung out to dry



Double Standards

In the USA at present, especially in border states, there is a great anti-immigration movement. Thus, with an election pending in Texas \$30 million is being

allocated to building three fences between the USA and Mexico. The trouble is, though, US capitalism needs cheap Mexican labour despite their political posturing. "Golden State Company which calls itself 'the top fence contractor in California' was recently caught for the second time in as many years employing illegal immigrants" (*Times*, 27 February).

When the fences don't work, for workers are good at dodging, the local authorities have got to get someone to evict Mexicans from the Land of the Free, so who do they get? Mexican immigrants - they're cheaper. "The city employs them to do it. They are paid to throw themselves off the land." Is capitalism a crazy society, or is it just us that think so?

Underhanded Censorship

The BBC often report on the government censorship that applies in the media. Only in foreign countries of course. Surely no one could imagine the BBC to be subject to government censorship. Think again.



Big Brother Corporation?

"The BBC launched a wartime purge on communists including Ewan MacColl, the folk singer and his wife Joan Littlewood, the theatre producer, documents declassified by MI5 reveal today.... From the late Thirties until the end of the Cold War, MI5 had an officer at the BBC to vet all editorial applicants, stamping the personnel records of anyone suspicious with a distinctively shaped green tag, or 'Christmas tree'" (*Observer*, 5 March).

Promises, Promises, Promises

The job of politicians is to promise things at election times and then explain later what stopped the promise from being kept, but promise things will be different next time. Here is a recent example. "Tony Blair pledged to cut the number of children living in poverty by a quarter, from 4.1 million in 1999 to 3.1 million by April 2006, as part of an ambitious three-stage drive to halve it by 2010 and eliminate the problem altogether by 2020.... new figures from the Department for Work and Pensions revealed it has fallen short by 300,000" (*Guardian*, 9 March). A red face for the Labour Party? Hardly. After all the 1945 Labour government promised to abolish poverty completely in its first term of office!

Aint What It Used To Be

"A billion just isn't what it used to be, said Luisa Kroll, Forbes magazine's associate

editor, revealing the 20th rich list in New York" (*BBC News*, 10 March). It is true there are a couple of songs that claim "Fings Ain't What They Used To Be" and "The Old Grey Mare Ain't What She Used To Be", but we imagine the billionaires on the latest role call won't be grieving too much. Bill Gates (\$50 billion), Warren Buffett (\$42 billion) and Carlos Slim (\$30 billion) can hardly be feeling nostalgic about the past.

The Rewards Of Age

After a lifetime of toil many workers look forward to the comfort and leisure of old age. Alas, for many it is just another of capitalism's illusions. "A third of



A billion just don't pay the gas bills like it used to...

pensioners are so poor that they cannot afford a day out or treat themselves to a meal in a pub, according to a report that paints a stark picture of retirement on a low income" (*Times*, 3 March). The report, published by the charity Age Concern, is entitled *Just Above The Breadline* and reports that many old workers are resorting to heating just one room, buying food on its sell-by-date and searching out second-hand clothes. As the Good Book says "Well done, good and faithful servant." But then you don't have to worry about that, do you? Because you will never grow old. Will you?

War Is Hell - For Some

The conflict in Iraq has killed and maimed thousands, destroyed housing and made life unbearable for millions, but it is not all bad news. "British businesses have profited by at least £1.1 billion since coalition forces toppled Saddam Hussein three years ago, the first comprehensive investigation into UK corporate investment in Iraq has found" (*Independent*, 13 March).

Free lunch

by Rigg

