

socialist standard

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

Fear and the Far Right



Inside the mind of Xenophobia



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THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 3 June** 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.

World Socialist Literature




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

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

Editorial

They call it sport, m'lud

Prepare yourself for the big business and sporting festival (we put them in this order for a reason) that is the World Cup. From the first game in Munich on 9 June to the final in Berlin one month later, there will be sixty-four matches, each one keenly contested by players, media and supporters alike.

Like all big international sporting occasions these days, sponsorship and advertising are very much the name and motivation of the game. The tournament's 'partners', such as McDonald's, Budweiser and Mastercard, are paying vast sums of money to get their brands and logos in prominent positions both during and between matches. Moreover, one ticket in eight (nearly half a million in all) will go to sponsors, enabling their bosses and other VIPs to enjoy the games while genuine fans are excluded. In many of the grounds, seating capacity has been reduced in order to increase the number and size of advertising hoardings and hence the income for the organisers, FIFA. The 'rights' to TV coverage will of course add millions more to their coffers.

No doubt the media will stoke up nationalist sentiments, especially the rivalry between England and Germany. 'Two World Wars, One World Cup' will be the refrain, particularly if the two countries play each other, as they may well do in the second round. Sadly, many of the supporters will echo the jingoistic nonsense of the press, fighting the wrong battles and misdirecting their energy and enthusiasm. How

many St George's flags will be flying from cars, houses and pubs while the tournament is on? Those supporters actually in Germany will additionally be paying the rip-off prices for tickets and accommodation, and trying to steer clear of the attention of police and hooligans.

Of course English nationalism is not the only kind which will be on display, for



each of the thirty-two countries competing will bring its own brand of patriotic myth to the proceedings. The invented and historically-accidental entities known as countries have become the focus of so many workers' loyalties, as if it really matters which bit of the earth people were born in or 'belong' to. It would be nice to think that meeting supporters from elsewhere will show that ordinary people, whatever language they speak or whatever passport they carry, have far more in common with each other than with their bosses and rulers.

So, if you like football, enjoy watching the World Cup if you can. But behind all the endless televised replays and the post-match inquests into fouls and off-sides, remember that it's all part of the greater game of dividing workers from each other. A socialist world would have no countries and no national teams. And there would be no sectional interests for some group of people at the expense of other members of the global community. In the meantime, the crying need is for workers to realise that nationalism is a diversion along the road - not to Wembley or Cardiff or Berlin - but to a sensible society.

Socialist Party Summer School 2006. Fircroft College, Birmingham, 21-23 July

WHAT'S LEFT OF THE LEFT?

What has happened to The Left in Britain? Has it happened in other countries too? Has capitalism itself changed? In other words, what is the social context and the climate of thought in which we are trying to promulgate socialism? During this weekend we shall try to piece together information from different countries to give us an indication of what is happening in today's capitalism and in particular what is happening to working class reactions to it so that we may make informed judgements about how best to direct our own efforts.

PROGRAMME

Friday Evening:	The state of The Left in China	Paul Bennett
Sat'day Morning(1):	The state of The Left in France	Adam Buick
Sat'day Morning(2):	The state of The Left in Germany	Norbert Sanden
Saturday Afternoon:	"The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" DVD showing	
Saturday Evening:	Relating to The Left in Britain	Brian Gardner
Sunday Morning:	The state of The Left in Canada	Tristan Miller
Sunday Afternoon:	Overseas reports discussed	Andy Davies (Chair)

Fircroft College is set in green gardens on the south-west side of Birmingham at 1016 Bristol Rd.(A38), one of the group of Selly Oak Colleges in the Cadbury foundation. From Birmingham New Street railway station, buses 61, 62, & 63 cost £1.20. Tea will be available in the common room from 4 o'clock on Friday afternoon.

Game On

A man from Sydney, Australia, buys an island populated by wild animals for \$26,500, and charges tax for hunting rights, as well as renting beachfront property. This is perfectly normal behaviour in capitalism. The money he earns from it is real enough. The island, however, does not exist. It is a virtual island, with virtual animals. (New Scientist, May 20)

Elsewhere, in Shanghai, a man lends his prized sword to a friend, who then secretly sells it for 7200 yuan (£500), back-pocketing the proceeds. Furious, the man complains to the police, who do nothing. Enraged, he breaks into his friend's house, and stabs him to death. The knife he uses is real enough, and the man gets life imprisonment for murder. No action is ever taken over the original theft, because the sword does not exist according to any known law. Real blood spilled by a virtual sword.

From Carolina, one man has made a fortune selling rare virtual furniture and other items, which, he discovered through a bug in the program, he could duplicate, and sell over and over again. Nobody knows if he has broken a law. The game company closed the bug hurriedly, but not before the man had cleared \$100,000.

Online gaming is moving beyond the purview of geeky kids. Virtual items and goods, though theoretically worthless, acquire value in the real world as players seek to shortcut the time-consuming process of acquiring them in the game, and serious money is being made in the 'grey market' of virtual trading. Now game currencies have been indexed to real currencies, and one game developer, MindArk, has launched an ATM cashcard that players can use to withdraw real cash, calculated according to MindArk's exchange rate of their 'game' wealth. The global trade in virtual goods is currently estimated at \$880 million and rising, with 30 million, mostly western and mostly affluent gamers, playing games for up to 18 hours a day. In one popular online game, Second Life, a third of the players spend more time in the game than in the real world.

It's not hard for socialists to see why people would want to escape the rigid fetters of real-time capitalism. People have been escaping the real conditions of life ever since the Greeks invented the outdoor theatre. What is slightly depressing but perhaps not very surprising is that people work so hard at their escapist fantasies only to create societies of lawlessness, savagery and insane self-destructive cruelty that make capitalism look like a pussycat by comparison. In one game, players are dedicated to the task of setting off virtual semtex bombs and blowing themselves and their online world up. In others, there are virtual assassinations, or random slayings, where players find their character has been murdered for no particular reason, apart from somebody's idle amusement. A player can take a long time, sometimes years, to build a character up, provide it with its special faculties and powers, as well as its virtual property. To be robbed and murdered after all this work is no small thing and can be deeply upsetting to the player. But this is the virtual wild west, and there is a nihilistic appeal. Law doesn't appear to work in people's interest in the real world (true, in many ways), so the idea is to get rid of all law and have an orgy of violence and blood in the games.

The problem is, as with the Shanghai murder, the violence is starting to spill over into the real world, prompting some observers to



suggest that law and punishment should be introduced into the games. The game developers are opposed. What is the point of

playing a game that lets you do nothing? That's just like real life, the very thing people want to run away from.

The other problem, from a socialist view, is the constant reinforcement these blood-thirsty games give to the perceived need for law and policing. For these are, in a way, highly moral games, in that they strongly emphasize what dread chaos results from 'amoral' or lawless behaviour. Socialism proposes to abolish all coercive law which serves class interests (which is to say, all property law, at the very least). What laws under capitalism socialism would retain as rules is a moot but interesting question. What is evident however is that no rational debate on the socialist need for laws, or rules, or their nature or means of enforcement, is possible among workers while they are bamboozled into believing that a society without repressive legal structures is always going to look like a scene from Conan the Barbarian. Play one of these online games for a week and you will either become a nightmare axe-murderer from the Dark Ages or you will be screaming for the return of capital punishment and school floggings.

Why normal bank clerks and home heating engineers should want to lead double-lives as marauding rapists and genocidal maniacs is a topic too large to enter into here. But it would be interesting to speculate what a socialist society would make of it. Would they look back at capitalism and trace a pattern from the Boy's Own stories of Empire days with their strongly moral content, through the poignant emptiness of punk culture and on into the cybernight of shoot-em-ups and global conquest games and say: there, that was a society in decline? By giving reality to the horrors of the repressed mind is capitalism liberating or enslaving us even more deeply? Will there come a point, perhaps with the total abolition of hard cash, when capitalism will itself become a virtual game, with a human population of players who try to amass arbitrary 'units' of currency in order to buy arbitrary artifacts? The difference between real life and a game is that you always have to return to real life eventually, but it is just possible that this difference may one day disappear, and our grip on reality may disappear with it.

Avatar character from Second Life

Game Off

On a more positive note, a friend who is a computer repairman reports a recent case where a young man came in to have his computer repaired. The graphics card, an expensive one, had blown, and the cost would be over £300. The man appeared, and was given the bad news. He went away to think about it. A week later he returned.

"£300 is a lot of money when you don't have a job. I can't get a job because I'm too busy playing online for 16 hours every day. I haven't been to a pub in two years, all my friends have disowned me, and I never see anybody. On top of that, I'm bored with the games because I am Grandmaster in all of them and can't be beaten. In the past week I've gone to the pub, gone to a party, found all my friends and even met some new ones. In fact, I've had the time of my life. Tell you what. You can keep the bloody computer."

And with that, he walked out into the real world.

Redirecting production to meeting needs

Dear Editors,

An important part of the Socialist Party's case for socialism as a world wide system where production takes place on the basis of need and for social use with free access to goods and services, is that there is sufficient productive capacity to produce such an abundance of socially needed and useful goods and services so as to enable free access, thus eliminating scarcity and the need for money.

At the present time there is self-evidently no such abundance in the actual production of socially needed and useful goods and services and it would appear on the surface that the gap between current reality and your aspiration is enormous.

I would be interested to know if there has been any work to try and prove that the required capacity to generate such abundance is in fact already in existence and that all that is required - as you imply - is that the existing means of production and distribution be simply redirected to socially useful ends, once a socialist majority takes power out of the hands of the capitalist class?

It ought to be relatively straightforward to - in albeit speculative and approximate terms - quantify the sort of total productive capacity, presumably in terms of required labour hours, required to generate an abundance of essential goods and services, to meet the basic needs of every human being in the world.

Then compare that with total productive capacity at the present time. Then show how much of existing productive capacity would be released upon the cessation of

wasteful, non essential and dangerous activities e.g. military production, state bureaucracy, finance related activities, shoddy consumer goods etc and therefore potentially able to be redirected to socially useful and needed production.

Then build in an assumption about much existing productive capacity could then be increased through the employment of labour saving technologies and at the same time show how massive reductions in working lives, working weeks and days - which must be one of the prime outcomes of the successful establishment of socialism and the true liberation of the working class - would be delivered, and still leave sufficient labour power to generate abundance.

To do this would be to surely produce an extremely decisive and compelling case for immediate social change, instead of having to rely on rather glib and optimistic assumptions, which to most people at the moment seem completely unreal.

ANDREW NORTHALL, Northampton

Reply: It is true that the growth and expansion of capitalism has developed a structure of global production that could be a basis for a socialist system. However, this is very different to saying that it is currently adequate to provide for needs. The main reason is that under capitalism production is determined by market capacity for sales and taking the system as a whole, market capacity is always much less than would be required to satisfy needs. It follows that people in socialism would need to expand useful production and practicality means that it would take time.

However, the freedoms that would be enjoyed which would make this straightforward. The bringing in of new means of pro-

duction would be free from the constraints of capital investment; the abolition of the market would mean that it could no longer determine what could be produced; with voluntary cooperation replacing the wage-labour relationship communities would decide what should be done and would be free to organise their resources to achieve those aims. This would be democratic control of the organisation of production directly for needs.

Some work has been done on the question of how existing useful production should be increased to be able to meet needs. For example, it has been suggested that world food production would have to be increased by at least 60 per cent to get to a position of sufficiency for everybody on the planet. In general this is a complex question; a growing socialist movement would no doubt develop its plans for what should be the priorities action following the establishment of common ownership. What we can say is that a socialist system would release huge powers of production with perhaps the only constraint being that they would have to be used in ways that safeguard the environment - *Editors*.

S is for Socialism

Dear Editors,

In an article in *The Nation* (17 April) entitled "The Left Needs More Socialism", Ronald Aronson states clearly that it is time for the 'left,' 'progressives', etc to stop being afraid of using the 's' word, recognise what they stand for and call a spade a spade.

He doesn't actually promote *socialism* per se but does promote what it stands for and says that progressives are failing to offer a real alternative (specifically in US politics

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BNP supporters

The BNP advances - what does it mean?

The BNP gained seats in the May local elections because it put together a better package of lies than the mainstream parties.

Despite recent claims to the contrary, the vast majority of British voters find the policies of the BNP nauseating. In the run up to the 2004 local and European elections and again during the 2005 general election, all manner of people, organised in their respective groupings, mobilised against them, from Labour and Conservative Party activists and the myriad left-wing groups, to student bodies, church groups and trade unions. Back in 2004, Searchlight, the anti-Nazi magazine, produced 28 versions of a newspaper targeting the BNP election campaign and distributed 1.5 million copies in areas where the BNP were perceived as posing the biggest threat. Prior to this year's elections, Searchlight handed out 400,000 copies of their newspaper in 16 versions as well as quarter of a million post-cards and again the left and the unions campaigned where the BNP were felt to be most active.

This time round, by all accounts, the panic was just as big as in 2004. In the wake of a huge election push by the BNP, Searchlight identified 18 key "battle-grounds" where the neo-Nazis had to be confronted. Other anti-racist groups observed how the BNP, standing 364 candidates, were as strong now than at any time since 1982, when it displaced the National Front as Britain's favourite bone-

head magnet. Ever the pessimists, anti-racist organisations believed BNP pre-election claims could be an underestimate and suggested that a 5 percent swing to the BNP could see them increase their tally of councillors to 70.

Regardless of how much these smiley-faced fascists claim to have changed their image, supposedly booting out the bone-headed troublemakers of yesteryear, they still represent the politics of hate - and their writings and statements still contradict the respectable shirt-and-tie image they try so hard to project. For over six months BNP literature had been portraying the coming elections as a "Referendum on Islam", linking the threat of Islamist terrorism in Britain to the Labour Government's asylum and immigration policies and the war in Iraq. One BNP leaflet, handed out in the wake of the 7/7 bombings in London, declared: "If only they had listened to the BNP."

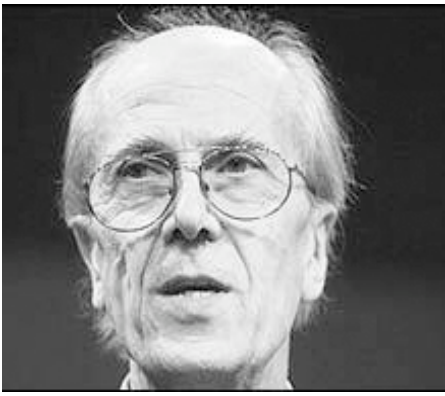
Moreover, the BNP's anti-Islam position has gained in prominence since Nick Griffin was acquitted of racial hatred charges at Leeds Crown Court back in February. It did not help that the judgment came at the same time as the hullabaloo over the anti-Muslim Danish cartoons and the consequent display by a handful of young Muslims dressed as suicide bombers and demonstrating in London, a coinci-

dence that allowed the BNP to pass itself off as the champion of freedom of speech and all things British.

Overnight, the BNP moved further to the right in its anti-Moslem line of attack. Heartened by what they perceive as a lowering of tolerance for Islam, the BNP has become more obsessive. Speaking to the *Observer*, (24 April), Simon Darby, the man BNP leader Nick Griffin has appointed to take over should an appeal to re-convict him go ahead, said: "We are giving voice to the concerns of ordinary people, Yes, part of it is still about race." Since 9/11 and 7/7, he says, "things have changed: the new issue is Islam".

Wave of patriotism

Two years ago the BNP were fortunate to ride a wave of patriotism - a tool they can use to great effect when it suits - in the run up to the election, with voters going to the polls as the 60th anniversary of D-Day was being commemorated and rammed down our throats every night on TV, and the English football team were gearing up to compete in Euro 2004 and when manufacturers were reporting sales of 4 million St George flags. This time round they could count on the nationalism whipped up by the World Cup taking place in Germany as well as the patriotism created by the Queen's 80th birthday celebrations. And



Lord Tebbit: 'BNP more Left than Right'



Margaret Hodge: '80 per cent of electorate would vote BNP'

neither is their raw branch of nationalism that unique in today's climate where UKIP and the Conservative Party can make huge gains in the European elections on a "say no to Europe" platform, proclaiming the merits of British sovereignty, and where the Labour Party is all too ready to send British troops off to far away lands to protect the interests of Britain's ruling elite.

Recent scandals within the mainstream reformist parties, particularly the Labour Party, and coming in election week, clearly helped boost the BNP vote, resulting in their tally of councillors leaping from 20 to 48. Not least of which was the Home Office fiasco involving the release of foreign prisoners from British prisons, many of whom went on to reoffend, and which played straight into BNP hands. The sleaze turned many would-be voters away from the polling stations too - something the BNP further capitalised on with their supporters making a point of going to the polls. For instance, the BNP claimed a surprising win from Labour in Solihull, when it won the Chelmsley Wood ward by 19 votes, taking its first seat on the council there. But look closely and we see that in Chelmsley Wood 74 per cent of the electorate did not bother turning up to vote.

In the borough of Dagenham and Barking, the sitting Labour Party MP, Margaret Hodge, clearly made the BNP look like the party of the moment when she announced shortly before the election that she had discovered massive support for the BNP, offering that as many as 80 per cent of the electorate would vote for them. She commented: "That's something we have never seen before. They used to be ashamed to vote for the BNP. Now they are not." The media, of course, made much of this, with the BNP thriving on the oxygen of publicity.

Of course there were other factors at play in Dagenham and Barking where the BNP is now the main opposition to Labour with 11 councillors, such as the government's refusal to allow the council to build houses and the council's allocation of housing on a points basis. The areas continuing deindustrialisation, marked by job

losses in the docks and at the Ford plant in Dagenham, was also an issue the BNP could mobilise support around. Where the mainstream parties were seen as having let voters down, that was where the BNP found the greatest success.

Lord Tebbit, writing in the *Daily Telegraph* (21 April), had this to say about the BNP:

"I have carefully re-read the BNP manifesto of 2005 and am unable to find evidence of Right-wing tendencies. On the

"things have changed: the new issue is Islam"

other hand, there is plenty of anti-capitalism, opposition to free trade, commitments to 'use all non-destructive means to reduce income inequality', to institute worker ownership, to favour workers' co-operatives, to return parts of the railways to state ownership, to nationalise the Royal National Lifeboat Institution and to withdraw from Nato. That sounds pretty Left-wing to me."

It certainly does sound like left wing reformism, with the assumption being made that capitalism can be managed for the good of all.

Stuart Jeffries, considering Lord Tebbit's comments in the *Guardian*, (28th April), remarked that: "the notion that the BNP might be considered left-wing shows the political vacuum that Labour has created. Not that many of those who will vote BNP next week want to nationalise the commanding heights of the economy. Rather, alienated from their traditional party by its shameless plutocracy and neglect of its core support, some white working-class voters will opt for a party that offers easy lies about their plight." Suggesting that BNP support is rooted in the failure of mainstream reformism, Jeffries continued: "Blair may not be responsible for populist racism, but he and his party are responsible for putting despair

in place of hope from politics for many, and thus making the election of racists likely in several British towns."

Considering the views of the Labour and Conservative parties on asylum and the former's part in upsetting the Islamic world in recent years, their concern for the apparent rising support for the BNP does seem a mite misplaced. Labour and the Tories may well abhor the policies of the BNP, but have been unsuccessful in confronting them where they have made significant political gains because to do so would mean acknowledging the shortcomings of a system they champion and which gives rise to the politics of race and hate.

The BNP is more the product of the total failure of all the reformist parties to make capitalism a fit society to live in. And this is not really the fault of the mainstream parties, for they are controlled by the system and not vice versa, despite their claims and promises. When capitalism fails to deliver, when despondency and shattered hopes arise from the stench of the failed promises and expectations that litter the political landscape, is it any wonder that workers fall for the scapegoating nonsense of fascists and the quick fix they offer?

The hundreds of thousands of misinformed workers who swallowed the BNP spiel in May are the products of the demoralising system we know as capitalism, deluded into thinking that neo-nazi solutions to social problems - which they have been led to believe are largely rooted in the colour of a person's skin - would suddenly improve their miserable lives. In truth, a shortage of council housing and poorly-maintained housing estates, low wages and pittance benefits are no more the fault of asylum seekers than the mainstream parties, who mistakenly believe capitalism can be run in the interests of the workers. At the end of the day the BNP simply put together a better package of lies and, just like the other reformist parties, promised voters little more than extra space at the trough of poverty - and tens of thousands, their minds numbed by the politics of reform, fell for the scam. ■

JOHN BISSETT

The witch hunt against ex-prisoners from abroad shows that xenophobia is now more than ever official policy.

Exporting Crime



Above: John Reid, Charles Clarke, and inside Brixton prison



It was in a desperate attempt to erase from the voters' consciousness the idea that his party would ever be indulgent towards law breakers that Tony Blair and his opinion sculptors chiselled out the pledge that a New Labour government would be "tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime". That smooth phrase covered just about everything as far as crime went and it opened the way to a succession of Acts of Parliament which brought in new laws, regulations, surveillance and intrusions. Anti-Social Behaviour Orders had the effect of making many offences imprisonable when they had not been before. Procedural restraints on courts were relaxed to encourage offenders to plead guilty when they were innocent. New prisons have been opened in an attempt - unsuccessful as it happens - to gobble up those who fell foul of Labour's new penal policies. If all this had any real effect on the crime figures it has not been persuasively obvious but in any case the idea behind it all was to convince the voters - who are so often the sufferers from crime - that, whatever the truth of the matter, New Labour was doing something about it; given time they would eliminate it altogether.

But a serious problem with snappy, headline-grabbing slogans - Homes Fit for Heroes, You Never Had It So Good, The Pound in Your Pocket - is that capitalist society has a nastily remorseless habit of undermining them. When that happens the slogan ceases to be voter-seductive and becomes instead a repellent embarrassment. This has been the case over the government's record on deporting offenders who are foreign nationals on their release from prison. It did not sit easily with Blair's promise to be tough on crime, that such people should be free; the implicit fear was that they would use this freedom to commit other, perhaps even more serious, offences. As the media frantically dug for evidence, Home Secretary Charles Clarke admitted that at least five of the released foreign prisoners had committed further drugs-

related and violent offences; two others had been accused of rape, although in one case the charge had been dropped through lack of evidence.

Somalia

Most damaging of all was the case of Mustaf Jama, who came here as an asylum seeker from Somalia and for that reason was not sent back to that country when he had served a three-year jail sentence for robbery. Jama is one of the prime suspects for the murder of the police officer Sharon Beshenivsky in Bradford. He cannot at present be charged with this murder because he seems to have fled to Somalia, although the fear that he would have been killed if he had been sent back there was enough to keep him in this country. Predictably, this fuelled the tabloid hysteria and encouraged the fantasy that the country was infested with foreigners who were using their early release from prison to rack up even more offences. The uproar became so loud and insistent that it cost Charles Clarke his job; in spite of Blair's ritualistic assurances of boundless and never-dying confidence in him, Clarke was re-shuffled out of the Home Office and onto the back benches.

Another ritual was the official response to the pending storm of publicity. Last summer the Home Office admitted that there were some 400 released prisoners who under government policy might have been deported. But recently, in response to the determined chiselling away of the governmental wall of denial by the media and MPs, this figure was raised to 1023 - some of them convicted of murder, rape or child abuse. For a short time Clarke said that about 90 of these had been convicted of the "most serious" offences but one of the first actions of his successor John Reid was to raise this estimate to 150 and to elaborate by saying that to include those sentenced for robbery would put the total into "hundreds". Almost by the day, the situation looked worse for the government. It is as well to bear in mind that this mess - partly

a cumbersome, doomed attempt to distort the facts and partly a deliberate attempt to conceal the truth - was the work of the Home Office, which is so prominent in composing and enforcing the laws which are designed to instruct the rest of us in how to behave as the underclass in this society. The exposure of the concealment and the deception must have contributed to the Labour Party losing so many council seats in the recent local elections and perhaps, through the stimulation of a whole clutch of dangerous prejudices, to the relative success of the BNP.

Brixton

When he was Home Secretary in the 1960s the late Roy Jenkins said that it would be unacceptable for the prison population to reach 42,000. Now it is fast approaching 78,000 which, although there are many more places available than there were in Jenkins' day, is the officially defined maximum. The Prison Reform Trust has stated that of the 741 prisons 142 are occupied above the limits of health and safety. An ex-governor of Brixton, which is a typically hectic, stressful London prison, has said that too many people are being given custodial sentences; these were the words of a man whose reputation was as an unusually perceptive and humane holder of his office. However, during his time at Brixton a few prisoners managed to fiddle their way into an evening's freedom; the matter came to light when they were apprehended trying to wangle their way *back inside* in time to avoid detection. It was the end of Brixton's unofficial evenings at liberty and, when the outraged laughter had died down, of that governor's regime there.

Attempts to explain the increase in the prison population are soon confronted with the fact that the property rights of capitalism make for a huge cobweb of repression and denial of access to human

resources. Within that, as symptoms of class society, there is the fact that the incidence of crime can go up or down in response to a number of influences. One of them is that working lives and survival are as stressful, if not more so, than they have been for a long time. Another is that New Labour rhetoric about getting tough on offenders has resulted in stricter conditions on Community Orders and the courts, responding to the urgings from Downing Street, using prison sentences more often

“the country was infested with foreigners using their early release from prison to rack up even more offences”

than in the past. Then there is the fact that female crime has increased, so that more women are going to prison. And there is the rise in custodial sentences on foreign nationals who come before the courts. Over the past five years this figure has increased by 75 per cent, while that for British nationals has gone up by 11 per cent.

The foreign nationals in British prisons originate in over 160 countries, among them Jamaica, Somalia, Afghanistan, Algeria. These are countries notable for violence and social instability. In some cases - for example Somalia and Sierra Leone - there are problems in deporting released prisoners because it is too dangerous to fly there. Jamaica is described by Amnesty International (and other organisations) as a place where "Violence and

crime are rife (and where) Police officers are allowed to kill with impunity". United States Embassy staff in Jamaica are officially advised to avoid the inner city area of Kingston and of other towns and not to use public buses. Unsurprisingly, some of the people who come here from these strife-torn places bring their own strategies of survival, which might entail breaking the law here. Drug offences - mainly trafficking - account for about 60 per cent of the prison sentences and for 80 per cent of women prisoners, many of whom have harrowing stories to tell, of the poverty and fear in their home country which persuaded them to accept the hazardous role of smuggling in the drugs. It is a sad, tragic picture which is not relieved by vengeful punishment.

Delusions

New Labour's response to this situation is to take powers to deport released prisoners wherever possible - they plan to make this an automatic procedure in future - which may relieve some very short term problems as it enables the government to pose as taking drastic measures which will reduce crime at a stroke and so boost their chances of being returned at the next election. But it takes no account of the fact that other countries can return British nationals (there are some 800 in EU jails at present). It will not affect the level of crime here by British nationals, which has proved impervious to government policies, because crime, like private property, poverty, repression, is endemic to capitalism. The policy of trying to export foreign criminals is presented as something considered, effective and durable when in fact, apart from stimulating some of the nastier delusions such as racism and xenophobia, it is another panicky episode of exhausted futility. ■
IVAN



Cooking the Books (1)

Capitalist ideals

"The unacceptable face of capitalism" has become a standard term for excusing some

excess of capitalist enterprise as if capitalism could ever have an acceptable face. At the annual jamboree of the Institute of Directors at the end of April, Todd Stitzer, chief executive of the Cadbury Schweppes group, whined that "business bashing has become everyone's favourite sport".

"He said recent scandals and disasters, from 'Enron to Arthur Andersen to Exxon Valdez and Bhopal', were not typical. 'These episodes did expose the unacceptable face of capitalism . . . But the business world is not populated by malignant people determined to harm others and exploit the world for base profit'" (Daily Telegraph, 27 April).

He was also reported as saying that businesses had to try to convince the public that companies were "capitalists with ideals" (Times, 27 April).

Of course Stitzer and other heads of capitalist corporations are not (or at least

the vast majority of them aren't) "malignant people determined to harm others and exploit the world" but it remains true that their "ideal" is, and has to be, maximising profits, base or otherwise.

The personal views and motivations of business leaders are not relevant to the way the capitalist system works. Business leaders are cogs in the economic mechanism of the accumulation of capital out of profits derived from the surplus value produced by the class of wage and salary workers. They have to pursue a policy of maximising profits, even if this might "harm others and exploit the world", as this is what has to be done for their particular company - in fact, for any company - to stay in the competitive struggle for profits. If they didn't do it, somebody else would be found who would.

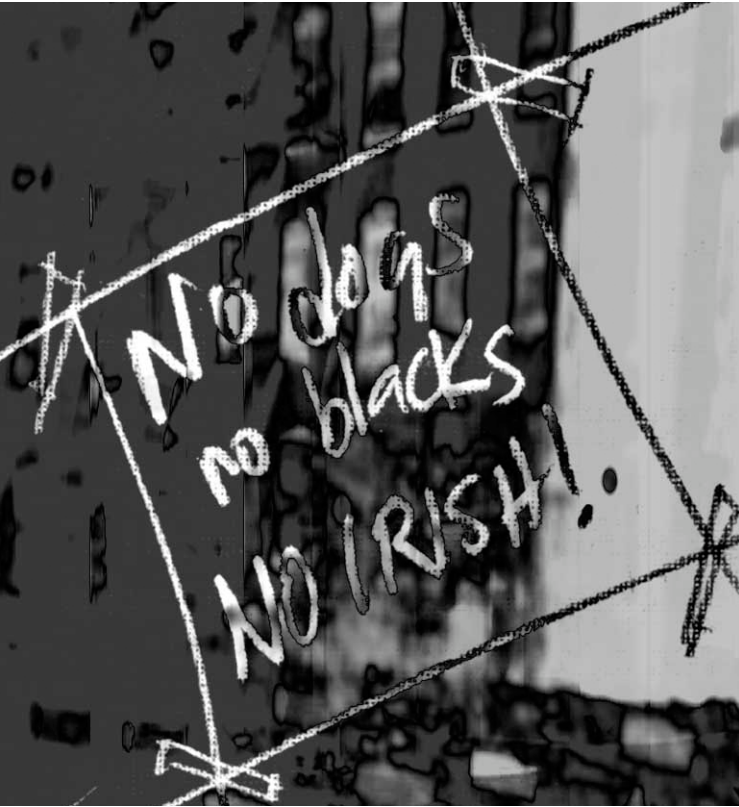
It is true that some of them seem to have completely internalised putting the making of profits before everything else and delight in applying this ruthlessly, and that this has earned business its deserved reputation for having an interest only in the bottom line. Others, such as Stitzer, may have some qualms about what they are doing, but do it all the same.

Then there was the case of the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital Trust which was tricked by a consortium which had

contracted to build a new hospital for them. The "re-financing" deal was exposed by the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, whose (Tory) chairman, Edward Leigh, called it . . . "the unacceptable face of capitalism".

What happened was that, after the hospital had been built, the consortium Octagon was able to obtain better financial conditions for the money it had borrowed to build the hospital. An extra £116 million was raised which, according to the (Tory) MP for Norwich South, Richard Bacon, was used "not to build more wards or a new cardiac unit. The sole purpose of this extra borrowing was to speed up the rate of return to investors" (Times, 3 May).

Octagon had done nothing illegal. They had merely used their financial expertise to get a favourable deal for their shareholders at the expense of a hospital trust inexperienced in such matters. It happens all the time. In fact, such wheeling and dealing is virtually all that goes on in the City of London where not an ounce of wealth is created, but where financial capitalists try to trick each other - and any inexperienced suckers they come across - out of what has been produced by the working class.



The Equality Act, which came into force earlier this year, covers discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender, disability and race. Yet it illustrates the point that government legislation cannot in itself change people's attitudes.

Prejudice and Equality

Knowing the history or etymology of a word does not always tell anything about its current usage or meaning. *Silly*, for instance, used to mean 'blessed', but that is just irrelevant to the way it is used now. Sometimes, however, a word's origin or structure can be quite revealing. *Prejudice*, for instance, means 'pre-judge': to form an opinion about a person or idea or thing in advance without the benefit of a proper understanding.

A prejudice may well involve categorising someone in a particular way, perhaps just because of their appearance: they may be black, Jewish, female, gay, shifty-looking, 'foreign', or whatever. They may be wearing clothing which suggests that they are a Muslim, or a shirt of a football team you dislike, or just a hoodie. Or you may hear them say a few words and decide that you don't think much of their accent. In all these cases, a person is being judged - and perhaps dismissed or ignored - by being seen as a member of some group of people, rather than as an individual. Such a prejudice might be justified by saying that 'they' are all lazy or untrustworthy or potential terrorists, or just not the sort of person you want to be in any way associated with. Stereotyping along these lines is one of the foundations of prejudice and bias.

Ideas like racism and sexism are not respectable these days, and most people will deny being prejudiced - if you think you aren't, try the online test at <http://www.understandingprejudice.org/iat/>.

Prejudice may be merely a matter of dislike, but when it influences the way you behave and leads to some disadvantage for

the other person, then that's discrimination. Someone may be denied a job for reasons quite unrelated to their ability to do it, or they may be refused service in a shop, or made to wait in a queue. And there are far worse things, too, such as racist murders or

“Many Christians have objected that they can no longer ban 'undesirables' from their premises”

attacks on anyone who belongs (or appears to belong) to some demonised group.

Capitalism is full of examples of prejudice and discrimination. Gender and race have been the most obvious examples, with women being confined to the home, earning lower wages than men, having fewer educational opportunities, being subjected to domestic abuse, and so on. People with dark skins have been treated as less than human, enslaved, confined to the worst housing and worst jobs, lynched and brutalised. The Nazi onslaught on Jews and many other groups, such as Slavs and Roma, is probably the most notorious and despicable example.

Where there is a problem, capitalism often sees the chance of a reform, designed to alleviate some of the worst excesses and make it look as if the system and those who

run it care about the most downtrodden. So there is now plenty of legislation against discrimination. For instance, the Equality Act, which came into force earlier this year, covers discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender, disability and race. Yet it illustrates the point that government legislation cannot in itself change people's attitudes. Many Christians who run bed-and-breakfast establishments have objected that they can no longer ban 'undesirables' from their premises: gays, satanists, Muslims, even other brands of Christian - all may be viewed as not the right kind of person (*Observer* 26 March).

But it's not just a matter of likes and dislikes. So often prejudice and discrimination under capitalism can be traced back to competition, for jobs, houses or government handouts. If 'they' come over here and take jobs that belong to white workers, then unemployment among whites could be reduced or eliminated by sending 'them' back or at least by putting them at the end of the line for jobs. The housing problem would surely be far less serious if 'they' were not allowed to jump the queue for council houses. Some group of people can be selected as scapegoats who are blamed for all the ills of society: unemployment, homelessness, crime, violence, insecurity, poverty. Tragically, workers who suffer from these problems will often put the blame onto fellow workers, who in fact may well be even worse off than they are.

Not all prejudice can be said to be caused by competition. Religious bigots, such as the christian B&B owners, can

introduce their own forms of intolerance, backed up by nothing more than a dislike of anybody who is in some way different from themselves. And ideas can change, however slowly. Gays and lesbians, for instance, rarely have to keep their sexuality secret nowadays (though in plenty of countries this is not the case). Discrimination against disabled people is far less widespread than it once was. But of course, nobody could pretend that racist ideas are a thing of the past.

And there is one form of discrimination that cannot disappear under capitalism, because it is built in to the system's very bones. This is discrimination on the grounds of wealth and power: a relatively small number of people have a great deal of both, while the vast majority (the working class) have little of either. It's only workers who have to worry about discrimination in terms of jobs and housing: if you live off profits and have several luxury apartments and a country mansion, then you hardly need to worry about not being 'one of us'. Equalising pension arrangements for men and women doesn't affect you if you're a millionaire whose post-retirement standard of living will barely take a cut.

The Socialist Party's Declaration of Principles claims that a Socialist society will involve 'the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex'. In a world where competition for housing and jobs is no more, where all take an equal part in producing for need and running society democratically, it will be absurd to suggest that any kind of prejudice could still exist. Maybe we will still form first impressions of a person we meet, but that will be based on their own character and behaviour, not on lumping them in with some ill-defined grouping. Being a Socialist implies opposition to all kinds of prejudice and a determination to treat people as equals and as individuals. ■
PAUL BENNETT

Business invades education



because it is linked with energy, using one's initiative, setting something up. It is youthful, can be satisfying, even dramatic in an otherwise somewhat dull and routine world.

Capitalist values have a secure foothold in the later stages of education such as sixth forms, colleges of further and higher education. As a contributor to the Business Daily programme of the BBC World Service remarked (28 April), "Business people actually teach the courses."

There are also moves to get even young children interested in "enterprise". You're never too young to learn about buying and selling and making a profit (don't think about exploitation - just experience it when you grow up).

There has never been a time in capitalism when the two worlds of business and education have not had some kind of relationship with each other. Since the early years of the Industrial Revolution business owners have wanted - and given money to promote - the education of children up to a standard that will enable them to become efficient and profitable employees.

Today, however, the influence of business interests on education has gone much further. Business people, and those in the media who promote their interests, have become much more assertive in the role they see business playing in education. Government policies, such as driving the new city academies, are designed to strengthen the link between what goes on in educational institutions and what goes on in workplaces.

Popular language plays a part in all this. "Enterprise" has become an over-worked cliché. It is seen as a good word

The question of whether young entrepreneurs come from entrepreneurial families of not seems to be unresolved. What is not in doubt is the rarity of successful entrepreneurs. A youngster may feature in the media by boasting about making a million or so from finding a gap in the market at the age of perhaps 12 or 13. But the sobering fact is that 80 percent of new businesses fail within two years.

Some of the winning entrepreneurs make a point of saying that it isn't so much the money that they find satisfying but the sense of achievement and meeting a need. Fine. The most enterprising thing we can do is to work to replace a system of gross inequality, deprivation and destruction with one in which meeting human need is at the top of the agenda. ■
STAN PARKER

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The sun goddess Amaterasu

Japan: A woman for Emperor?

No male heir born in 40 years sparks a debate about bringing "gender equality" to the Japanese monarchy. What is the role of the Japanese monarchy? Would a female monarch be a step forward?

Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi is an unlikely advocate of women's rights. But earlier this year the well-coiffed leader was keen to promote gender equality. Not for all women, mind you, or even a few, but rather a four-year-old girl known as Her Imperial Highness Princess Aiko. He supported an effort to revise the Imperial House Law that would allow her to "ascend" to the throne one day. Why this concern for the plight of royal women? Well, the fact that no male heir has been born for the past 40 years might just have something to do with it. Unless something is done, or a prince is born, the monarchy faces the prospect of withering away.

Koizumi responded to the succession crisis by setting up an advisory council in late 2004, which issued a report recommending that women and their descendants be granted the right of succession. The proposal had strong public backing and seemed uncontroversial, this being the 21st century. So it came as a surprise when right-wingers mobilized to oppose the reform. Considering that the reform was intended to save-not abolish-the monarchy, it seems strange that these "traditionalists" (to use a charitable term) are dead-set against it. But there is a certain logic that underlies their stance.

Some commentators have explained the fierce opposition to the reform as stemming from sexism, pure and simple. In a February 23 *Asia Times* article, J. Sean Curtis argued that the opposition to the reform, which he views as "a significant leap forward" for gender equality in Japan, "exposes the deep-seated anti-female bias at the heart of the Japanese establishment." Certainly, those opposed to the reform are sexists. But in this case their motivation is not merely to keep women in their place, but to keep all Japanese workers in their place.

Above all, they treasure the monarchy as a valuable means of fostering nationalism. Their concern, often explicitly stated, is that casually throwing away one long-held dogma could threaten the entire ideology surrounding the "imperial household." Suddenly admitting the triviality of male lineage, after harping on its importance for centuries, could raise other doubts, including the question of why a monarchy is even necessary. Monarchy enthusiasts found it

"Here we have *Mein Kampf* in reverse, with an "Aryan" peeing in the sacred gene pool"

hard enough to accept the idea that the emperor is *not* a deity, which Emperor Hirohito admitted in 1946. And some still haven't let go of this idea, as reflected in Prime Minister Mori's comment, in 2000, that "Japan is a divine nation, with the Emperor at its center." Today, they are unwilling to make further sacrifices.

In particular, the traditionalists cling to the notion of an unbroken "eternal" line of succession on the paternal side stretching back 2,666 years. Starting on February 11, 660 B.C., to be exact. This "bloodline" is said to be the longest in the world and the very *essence* of Japan. Perhaps psychology can account for the odd fixation on length, but there is also a social explanation. The idea of continuity is comforting to the rulers of Japan. They have a vital interest in convincing workers that class-divisions will always exist-as symbolized by a distinction between royals and commoners. At the

same time, almost conversely, the monarchy conveys the idea that all Japanese are part of a family headed by the emperor that transcends class. Of course, the "facts" mobilized to support this comforting and useful notion are not so convincing.

First of all, outside of Nazi scientific circles, anyone who harps on the importance of blood in relation to genealogy, not to mention its purity, is regarded as a fool. Even if "blood" is a synonym here for DNA, considering that every child is the product of a man's sperm and woman's egg, it is hard to see why the male side of this equation should be fixated on.

Turning from biology to history, the claims of the traditionalists hold up no better. The figure of 2,666 years is based on the first recorded histories of Japan, *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters) and *Nihon Shoki* (Chronicles of Japan). Both texts are a mixture of myth and historical fact, written in the early eighth century at the behest of the imperial family to boost its prestige. Given this patronage, it is not surprising that the authors were prone to exaggeration. Not only is the length of the imperial line stretched out considerably, but the origin of the Japanese monarchy is actually traced back to a sun goddess named Amaterasu. Those who rely on facts, rather than historical fiction, generally think that the first "emperor" (*tenno*) appeared some time around 400 AD. Unfortunately, carrying out such archeological research in Japan is impeded at every step by the Imperial Household Agency, which restricts access to tombs and artifacts.

The first emperors, whenever they existed, were hardly social types unique to Japan. Similar despots emerged throughout the world, as an early manifestation of class divisions. (In fact, there is speculation that the imperial family is of Korean origin.) And if older is better, as jingoists in Japan insist, they would have to bow down to



From left: Imperial Highness Princess Aiko; Emperor Hirohito; Prime Minister Mori; Prime Minister Koizumi

lands where these religious/political leaders scratched and crawled their way to the top many centuries earlier. Granted, as our jingoists would surely point out, the Japanese monarchy stretches all the way to the present. But this is only because the emperor was grafted on to subsequent modes of production, whereas despots in other lands often had the good grace to exit the historical stage after playing their roles. The name *tenno* may remain-although even it was only coined in the eighth century-but the person bearing this title has been shaped by the times, tossed back and forth by the tides of history no less than the "commoners."

Traditionalists speak of the imperial family as the core of the Japanese nation, but apart from the early centuries of real power, emperors have functioned primarily as figureheads. During the feudal Edo Period, for example, it was the Tokugawa clan, based in Edo (Tokyo) that ruled over a network of fiefdoms, while the Emperor rusticated in Kyoto. Some have argued that the 1868 "Meiji Restoration" (capitalist revolution) marked the emperor's return to real power, but despite the emperor taking on new ideological significance under capitalism, his role has remained primarily symbolic; first as a unifying symbol wielded by the revolution's leaders to forge a modern nation-state, and later as a bulwark against calls for greater democracy and as a tool to mobilize workers to fight imperialist wars. Even if we accept the argument that some emperors, most notably Emperor Hirohito, played an active political role, this does not deny that the ruling class *as a whole* utilized the emperor as a useful ideological tool.

Since the light of such historical facts erodes their cherished myths, the traditionalists' campaign against the reform has relied heavily on scare tactics. The rank-and-file have been told that a female emperor would be more susceptible to manipulation by politicians or that "Japanese culture" is incompatible with a man playing second-fiddle to his empress wife. And their Japanese blood really boiled when former trade minister Takeo Hiranamu depicted a nightmare scenario, in which Princess Aiko becomes the reigning empress, "gets involved with a blue-eyed foreigner while studying abroad and marries him" so that their child becomes the emperor. Here we have *Mein Kampf* in reverse, with an "Aryan" peeing in the sacred gene pool.

Most of their energy was focused on attacking the reform, but the traditionalists

did manage to offer a few solutions as well. One was to swell the ranks of royal welfare recipients by reviving the status of royals who were stripped of their titles after the war. The emperor's cousin, Prince Tomohito, offered a more cost-effective solution. Quite unburdened by new-fangled notions of equality, he suggested the reintroduction of concubines, whose wombs could service the needs of crown prince and nation alike.

But before other solutions could be offered, the debate suddenly came to a halt in February. Whether they realized it or not, the opponents of reform had an ace up their sleeve in the emperor's mustachioed second son, Prince Akashino. While the debate was raging, he set aside his research on catfish (I'm not joking!), to attend to a vital matter with his wife, Princess Kiko. The royal couple, already parents of two teenage daughters, announced that a third child is due in September. This revelation immediately silenced talk of reform-although the birth of another girl might rekindle interest in gender equality.

Compared to the insincere reformists, the traditionalists are refreshingly principled. They have little use for equality in general, not to mention gender equality, and do not conceal this fact. This is reflected in other efforts they are making to mold society, all supported by Koizumi, such as: revising the history textbooks so children "feel good" about Japan, forcing schools to display the national flag and students and teachers to sing the national anthem, encouraging politicians to visit the war-glorifying Yasukuni Shrine, or revising the Constitution to cut out the bits about democracy and human rights. Their message is simple: "Obey!" Although it remains to be seen whether this prewar template of nationalism, centered on the emperor, will be effective.

We have looked at unprincipled "reformists" and block-headed traditionalists, but what are we to make of those who *genuinely* saw the reform as a step, or even a leap, forward for gender equality? Can an institution based upon inequality become a beacon for equality between men and women?

Just posing this question highlights its absurdity. But more importantly, this view of an empress as a positive role model implies that achieving gender equality is primarily a matter of changing people's way of thinking. This ignores the relation between the social system (capitalism) and

the way people think and act. The continued existence of discrimination against women throughout the world suggests that there is such a relation. There is not space here to fully explain this, but in part gender discrimination stems from the general interest of capitalists to divide the working class, and the tendency of employers to hire a man over a woman if childbirth or raising a child might interfere with work.

To be fair, capitalism has contributed to gender equality by bringing large numbers of women into the workforce, to be exploited along with their male coworkers. And states are willing to introduce legislation to protect women's rights when gender discrimination *itself* negatively affects the smooth functioning of the profit-making system. In Japan, for example, there is alarm over the extremely low birth rate. Unless the state opens the doors to foreign workers, which it is reluctant to do, it may have no choice but to improve working conditions so more women can continue working after childbirth. If this does occur liberals will be ready to supply the flowery rhetoric, but the fact remains that the state would be acting in the common interests of capitalists, not because their "way of thinking" suddenly changed. It is also worth remembering that the state *giveth*, and if conditions change, the state will gladly *take* away (or at least curtail) any right - whether it be health-care and pension benefits, shorter working hours, or women's rights.

And even *if* capitalism could be reformed to eliminate gender discrimination forever, we would still be left with the inequities of this system. Capitalist equality is limited to the relation between buyers and sellers of commodities. Workers, as the sellers of labor-power, are also granted this right (although few commodity owners are swindled so regularly). This marketplace equality, however, conceals inequality within production, where workers have no choice but to work under, and enrich, the owners of the means of production (capitalists). Under this system, gender equality is nothing more equality between men and women as wage slaves. And even this remains an unfulfilled dream.

Socialists are serious about achieving equality-between men and women, and between *all* human beings-and recognize that true equality can only be achieved when humanity bids farewell to capitalism. ■
MS

An economist who remained loyal to the end to the discredited view that government intervention can make capitalism work in the interest of the majority.

John Kenneth ('J.K.') Galbraith, who has died at the age of 97, was probably - after John Maynard Keynes and Milton Friedman - the most famous economist of the twentieth century. For decades he argued against the dominance of the free market economy in favour of a reformed and humanised capitalism which could be made more equitable and tolerable by government intervention.

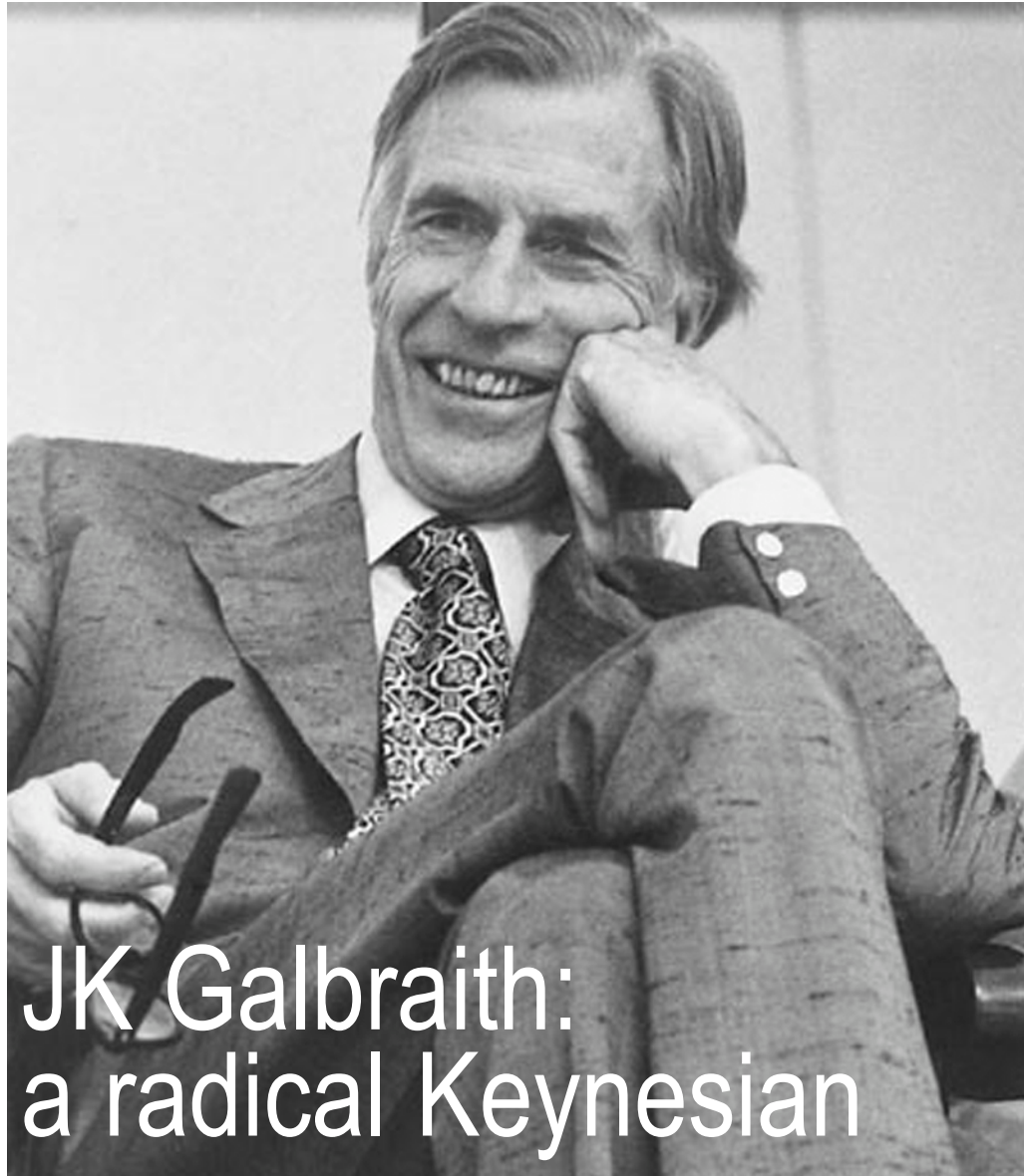
A Canadian by birth, he became part of a group of Keynesian supporters at Harvard University in the US that included Paul Samuelson and James Tobin. Galbraith's career at Harvard led him to become Professor of Economics and something of a radical disciple of the Keynesian belief that poverty and inequality in capitalism - and the related phenomenon of the boom and slump trade cycle - could be reformed away by well-informed and -intentioned governments. From the 1950s onwards he was to write a number of books, all penned in a popular and readable style, which challenged popular misconceptions about society and the economy. In particular, his books *The Great Crash: 1929* (1955), *The Affluent Society* (1958), *The New Industrial State* (1967), *Economics and the Public Purpose* (1974) and *The Nature of Mass Poverty* (1979) established him as a leading commentator on developments within the capitalist economy and a critic of many prevailing orthodoxies.

Galbraith liked to see himself as a rebel and an outsider, which was true up to a point. For a short time in the early 1960s, though, he served as the US Ambassador to India under John F. Kennedy, and was later an advisor to L.B. Johnson and other Western politicians (including, in a critical and somewhat ad hoc capacity, current UK Chancellor Gordon Brown). His pre-occupations were with aspects of the capitalist system that critical thinkers found most dysfunctional: its tendency to promote economic growth (in terms of capital accumulation) at all costs; its inability to address profound issues of wealth inequality; and the tendency for the concentration of capital and the growth of monopoly, in particular, to undermine the more idealistic free market notions of 'consumer sovereignty' within capitalism.

Crises and slumps

Arguably Galbraith's finest work was his historical account - and critique - of the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the subsequent prolonged trade depression. In many respects, his work serves as a warning to those who feel that capitalism naturally tends towards an equilibrium state of rising productivity and steady growth. What Galbraith detailed was the circumstances in which arguably the greatest trade depression the world has ever known came to develop and cause such widespread misery.

Although Galbraith over-emphasised the actions of the US government and the



JK Galbraith: a radical Keynesian

Federal Reserve banks, his underlying assessment of the crash was a sound one. He argued that it was caused in large part by the market-driven over-expansion of the producer goods sector of the economy (the sector producing factory machinery, steel, etc for industry) in comparison to the consumer goods sector during the preceding boom years. This had meant in practice that in the competitive drive to accumulate capital, profits were re-invested to expand productive capacity at a disproportionate rate: far more so than was justified given the fall at the time in the share of wages and salaries in National Income. It was this over-expansion of the producer goods sector which led to the production of consumer goods in excess of available market demand and the subsequent downturn in the economy.

Galbraith was affected quite profoundly at an intellectual level by the 1930s slump, as were many others who became attracted to Keynesian economics. Indeed, Galbraith was at the forefront of those who ridiculed the view that, if left to its own devices, the capitalist market economy would naturally tend towards an equilibrium state of steady growth and full employment and that it was somehow government intervention that prevented markets from working properly. Galbraith's view, which he was to explore in different respects in his published books, was just the opposite.

For Galbraith, the 'classical' economists and the so-called monetarists who resurrected some of their views from the 1970s onwards posited an idealised version of the market economy that was as over-simplified

as it was driven by a defence of privilege. Galbraith wittily deconstructed many of the economic models on which it rested, highlighting issues such as monopoly, price-fixing, imperfect information and the various possible influences exerted not just by abstract 'producers' and 'consumers' but by advertisers, suppliers and trade unions too. In the days before corporate scandals such as Enron, he recognised that corporations do not always carry on their activities for the benefit of investors like shareholders, and that the natural growth of large corporations within capitalism sometimes led to practices within organisations which were designed to benefit those who internally controlled them first and foremost.

In many respects, it was in his critique of wider capitalist society that Galbraith was on his strongest ground, recognising imperfections in the system that others willed away. One of his most famous remarks was that "the modern conservative is engaged in one of man's oldest ever exercises in moral philosophy; that is, the search for a superior moral justification for selfishness". His withering critique of Arthur Laffer's theory of how lowering income tax on the rich would increase government revenue, and of the illusory benefits of 'trickle down economics' was a prime example. And in arguably his most famous work, *The Affluent Society*, he took up a critique of the way in which capitalist enterprises try to ensure their expansion by manufacturing artificial 'wants' through advertising and other means. While this owed something to an earlier analysis by Thorstein Veblen, it was nevertheless

considered subversive and hotly disputed at the time.

Keynesian economics

Whatever insights Galbraith developed into the workings of capitalism and despite his attacks on its most vigorous defenders, he was hampered by two key, related aspects of his approach. First, his unremitting adherence to Keynesian economic theory and second, his inability to be able to countenance anything that went beyond a reform of capitalism.

Galbraith's view was that where capitalism failed (and he acknowledged that it failed frequently) it was the duty of governments and the 'public sector' generally to step in, whether in terms of economic management, regulatory frameworks for corporations, or measures designed to assist the 'underclass' of unemployed and unemployables. A consistent thread in all his writings was an overly-optimistic and exaggerated view of the ways in which capitalism can be reformed so as take power and wealth away from the rich and give it to the poor. His views on this had been influenced by his experiences as an economist and civil servant in the wartime Roosevelt administration. Then he had been put in charge of price controls in a period where, due to the central direction needed because of the war effort, the US was the nearest it has ever come to having a 'command' style economy. As unemployment and inflation were both low at the time, Galbraith saw this as confirmation of the powers Keynesian 'demand management' techniques possessed in dealing with the inefficiency and inequality of unfettered capitalism.

When the economy returned to 'normal' in the decades after the war, the supposed benefits of the Keynesian approach soon proved elusive, not just in the US but in other countries too where his advice was sought. And even when the radical Keynesian approach was given explicit government backing and was implemented with some enthusiasm (on the grounds that the patient hadn't previously been receiving a

high enough dosage of the medicine), the results were not encouraging. This was the case across much of Western Europe as well as the US, where prices began to rise alongside increased unemployment.

One of the most notable examples of radical Keynesian failure was in the UK, where in the first two to three years of the Labour government of 1974-9, state regulatory measures generally were increased, a prices and incomes policy was instituted, state borrowing rose to pay for increased government capital expenditure, and the tax system was restructured to disproportionately hit those on the highest incomes. But the result was a near doubling of unemployment and annual price rises at nearly 27 per cent (the latter mainly caused by an over-issue of paper currency not convertible into gold, which became the ubiquitous outcome of the type of lax monetary policy favoured by radical Keynesians).

In this respect, Galbraith is likely to be remembered as an economist who was far more adept at criticising the indefensible than he was at promoting a workable alternative to it. Indeed, it was precisely the failure of his type of Keynesian approach which heralded the return from the 1970s onwards of the free market economic orthodoxy he detested, championed by his sparring partners like Milton Friedman.

Missed opportunity

Unfortunately, the political economist who had a rounded explanation of why the free market does not work, and whose theories indicated why reform of capitalism in the guise of Keynesian economics would be no more successful, was not someone Galbraith was ever attracted towards or studied really seriously: Karl Marx. While Galbraith was capable of making pithy and apposite comments about the Soviet Union - "under capitalism, man exploits man. Under communism, it's just the opposite" - he never seemed to get too far past the popular prejudice against Marx existing in much of US academia. That so-called 'Russian communism' was in reality an extensive and dictato-

rial form of the type of planned state-run capitalism that he otherwise had a penchant for, in particular seemed to escape him.

In the rather lazy fashion of other American academics he was wont to attribute to Marx views which were distorted interpretations of his theories, such as that capitalism would somehow collapse because of the long-run tendency of the rate of profit to fall, or that the working class in capitalism was condemned to endure conditions of ever increasing misery. This was a shame, because although capitalism is so complex and anarchic that no one individual can attain a perfect insight into it, Marx came a lot nearer than most. The great body of his work still stands the test of time, and far more so than that of either the apologists for the free market or Keynesian interventionists like Galbraith himself.

While Galbraith thought that certain types of capitalism (particularly free-market capitalism) were highly problematic, Marx took a rather different view. This was that it was capitalism *itself* that was the problem because it was fundamentally based on the pursuit of profit before human needs, was at root anarchic and uncontrollable, and was characterised by class division and an antagonistic system of income distribution that could not be planned or wished away.

It is interesting to look back on the 97 years of Galbraith's life, and to reflect on the capitalist trade cycle, inflation, the concentration of capital, the nature of commodity production and much more that he addressed. Marx provided a framework that could successfully account for these phenomena while at the same time demonstrating why capitalism can never be reformed so as to run in the interests of the vast majority of its inhabitants. These were insights that Galbraith flirted with but no more, and this was to the detriment of his otherwise urbane and pithy analysis, and most certainly to the detriment of those who lived under the governments he advised. ■

DAP



Cooking the Books (2)

Towards an economic crash?

"Imbalances 'pose risk of recession'" ran a headline in the *Times* on

28 April. The US has a "huge" balance of payments deficit "heading for 7 percent of national income this year", explained another article. "In turn, Asia has built up vast current account surpluses and foreign exchange reserves".

The balance of payments is basically the balance between payments coming into a country from the sale abroad of its exports (visible and invisible) and payments going out to pay for its imports (visible and invisible). A deficit exists when imports exceed exports. To pay for exports from the country, dealers in other countries have to acquire the country's currency while importers into the country have to acquire foreign currency. If a country has a balance of payments deficit, the demand for its currency will be less than that for foreign currencies, so its currency

will tend to fall in value (whether through formal devaluation or through floating downwards). The opposite will be the case for a country with a balance of payments surplus; the value of its currency will tend to rise.

Given the US payments deficit and the Asian countries' surplus, what would normally happen is that the dollar would fall and the Asian currencies rise in value. That this has not happened yet to any great extent is because the countries involved find the present situation to be in their interest. The Asian countries, especially China, with their undervalued currencies benefit from being able to export more (because the price of their exports is lower than it would normally be, making them more competitive), while the US benefits from the Asian countries using part of their surpluses to fund the US government by lending it money (through purchasing its Treasury Bills).

There is a general recognition in international capitalist circles that this situation cannot continue indefinitely - that, sooner or later, in one way or another, the exchange rate adjustments must take place. The big question is how. The ideal solution of "a relatively stable adjustment", according to Mervyn King, the Governor of the Bank of

England appearing before the House of Commons Treasury Committee, would be for this to "happen gradually over ten years in fits and starts".

But he went on to outline another possible scenario:

"You can certainly imagine cases where the sharp fall in exchange rates could well lead to a fall-off in financial stability, and start to lead to a disorderly adjustment which could be very costly and might involve recessions in some countries".

Some critics of capitalism are arguing that this is what is inevitably going to happen (for instance, Loren Goldner in an article at <http://home.earthlink.net/~lrgoldner/blowout.html> predicting an "inflationary blow-out"). This is certainly a possibility, as King admits. But it is not inevitable. King's other scenario for a "relatively stable adjustment" is also a possibility.

Monetary matters are the froth and bubbles on the real economy. Even so, mismanaging them can provoke an economic crash that might not otherwise occur. But mismanagement is not inevitable. Slumps are only inevitable when caused by movements in the real economy.

Graham Harvey: We Want Real Food. Constable £9.99.



Criticisms of food production usually concentrate on the supermarkets: with their emphasis on selling homogeneous produce and driving down the prices they pay to the producers, they play a major role in depriving consumers of healthy and tasty food.

The fast-food industry is also attacked for its bland tasteless pap. In this book, though, Graham Harvey points the finger of blame at the companies that produce artificial fertilisers.

It is true that life expectancy is far greater than it used to be and that diseases like TB and cholera are almost things of the past in Britain. But degenerative diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and arthritis are reaching epidemic proportions. Harvey ascribes this to a change in the make-up of the soil, owing to the increased use of nitrogen compounds in fertiliser, which itself has been pushed by the companies who make big profits from selling the stuff. Traditional farming exploited the minerals in the soil that contributed to a healthy lifestyle, but modern methods have relied more and more on chemical fertilisers that destroy these nutrients. According to one study, for instance, carrots lost 75 percent of their magnesium and copper between 1941 and 1990. Minerals have various roles in protecting and promoting human health: copper, for instance, is important for the functioning of the liver, brain and muscles, while selenium protects against the onset of a number of kinds of cancer.

Harvey's solution is a programme to reintroduce these crucial minerals to the soil. But this will face a problem: "For the best part of half a century, the chemical industry has effectively vetoed every attempt to remineralize over-worked soils and restore the health benefits to everyday foods." So "What's needed is leadership - from farmers, retailers or politicians." Effective government legislation could supposedly promote sensible agriculture and hence healthier and tastier food. But food production would still be at the mercy of the profit motive rather than be aimed at satisfying human need. Assuming that Harvey's science is on the right lines, he makes a convincing case for changing the way in which agriculture is organised, but the problem is that this cannot be divorced from how society as a whole is run.

His website at <http://www.wewantreal-food.co.uk/> is also of interest, though we wouldn't recommend bothering to write to supermarkets asking them to change their ways.

PB

Say What You Mean

Steven Poole: Unspeak. Little, Brown £9.99.

Which word would best describe those who use violence to oppose the US-UK occupation of Iraq? 'Terrorists' is condemnatory, while 'resistance' (with its echoes of those who opposed Nazi occupation in Europe)

may register approval. Perhaps the most neutral term is 'insurgents'. This is one of the examples that Steven Poole uses to show that choice of words is important, that the labels attached to people or ideas can affect attitudes towards them.

Socialists are well aware of this, of course, the very word 'Socialism' having been dragged through the mud of dictatorship and Labour Party politics. But Poole does have some instructive examples to discuss. For instance, Republicans in the US have been advised to talk about 'climate change', rather than 'global warming', on the grounds that the former is less frightening. The UN General Assembly had in fact already used the euphemism of climate change, which does not specify in which direction the change is proceeding, under pressure from Saudi Arabia and the US, both of which have interest in playing down the effects of burning fossil fuels. Equally, 'genetically engineered' has often been replaced by cosier-sounding terms such as 'genetically modified' (usually shortened to 'GM'), 'genetically enhanced' and 'biotechnology foods'. And 'ethnic cleansing' sounds so much less nasty than the straightforward 'genocide'.

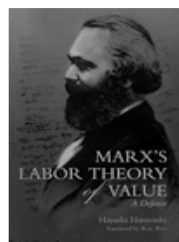
In the mealy-mouthed platitudes of capitalism's apologists, even military operations have to be given nice-looking names. Hence Operation Enduring Freedom (US invasion of Afghanistan) and Operation Just Cause (the invasion of Panama in 1989). The invasion of Iraq was going to be called Operation Iraqi Liberation, till someone realised that the initials spelled OIL! The 'war on terror' is another snappy phrase, one which Poole regards as absurd because you can't have a war against a tactic or technique.

And this 'war' has itself given rise to a great many mendacious expressions. Think of 'extraordinary rendition', which refers to transporting supposed enemies to countries where they will be tortured: 'rendering' is a word used in industrial meat-processing, so perhaps the phrase is not so inaccurate after all. 'Sleep management' is what is more honestly known as 'sleep deprivation'. And 'abuse' is used in place of the taboo word 'torture', so that the government responsible for torturing prisoners can take refuge in the position that it's really only subjecting them to abuse.

It needs to be said that the reality of capitalism and its works is what's really objectionable, not the names that smell of roses but cover up the filth beneath. Socialists have always called a spade a spade, not being frightened to expose capitalism and the capitalist class. But Poole's book is a useful reminder of some of the ways in which defenders of the status quo go about their business

PB

Marx's Labor Theory of Value. A Defense. By Hyashi Hiroyoshi. Universe. 2005. \$26.95



It has always been our contention that it is the workings of capitalism, with the problems it causes those obliged to work for a wage or a salary for a living, that throws up socialist ideas and not just the educational and propa-

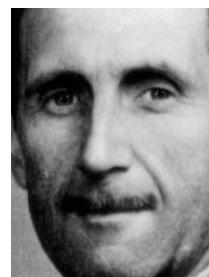
gandistic activities of those workers who have already become socialists. This book is a confirmation of this

Written by a member of a group that emerged from the student wing of the Japanese Communist Party in the late 50s and early 60s, it makes the point that money and value will disappear in a socialist society because production will no longer be carried out by independent economic units (whether individual owners, capitalist corporations or state enterprises) and will no longer be for sale on the market. It also expounds the view that the Russian revolution was not a "socialist" or "proletarian" revolution and that the regime it established was never socialist, but state capitalist from the start as, given the historical circumstances, capitalism was the only possible development.

As a book put together from articles written at different times, it suffers from a lack of flow, and some of the polemics in the earlier part of the book about the nature of value are obscure, being directed at authors not known in this part of the world even if well-known in Japan. This said, there are useful discussions in later chapters on Adam Smith, the parts of Volume III of *Capital* devoted to interest, credit and rent, and on the two different definitions of "productive labour" to be found in Marx's writings.

ALB

The Social and Political Thought of George Orwell: A reassessment. By Stephen Ingle. Routledge. 2006. £65 (hardback)



Despite the title this is more a work of literary criticism than political theory. But since Orwell wrote mainly on political and social subjects the two are intertwined.

Orwell considered himself a socialist and was briefly a member of the ILP in 1938. Later, he wrote for the leftwing weekly *Tribune* and was a declared supporter of the post-war Labour government. In fact one of the issues Ingle discusses is whether Orwell should be described as a "Trotskyite" or as a "Tribunite". He opts for a third choice: "ethical socialist".

Although we wouldn't regard him as a socialist in our sense, he was always clear, at a time when few others besides ourselves were arguing this, that Russia had nothing to do with socialism. Which was why the Russia-lovers called him a "Trotskyite" and why his fear of being assassinated was not entirely groundless.

Two of Orwell's works in particular have been appreciated by socialists. *Homage to Catalonia*, an account of events in Barcelona in 1936 and 1937 when workers took over the running of the city and the subsequent suppression of this by the so-called "Communists". And *Animal Farm*, a brilliant satire on Bolshevism (including Trotskyism).

The main book for which Orwell is known is *Nineteen Eighty Four*. This paints a horrifying picture of a world in which the evolution towards a totalitarian state-capitalism (which, in the 1940s, many to the left of the Communist Party thought was under way) has been completed. It was mainly

Continued on Page 18

Modern Times

Modernism 1914-1939: Designing a New World, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, until 23rd July, £9 adults.



This is an engaging, varied and well structured exhibition put together by the V & A, focusing on 'modernist' approaches to architecture, art and the application of science between the wars. The exhibits, ranging from paintings and posters, through to recreated designs and excerpts from film shows like Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (above) and Chaplin's *Modern Times*, are suitably and accurately described throughout, generally being set in an appropriate theoretical context.

Although modernism was a varied and dynamic movement, its central themes were an important part of early twentieth century life. In particular, the search for human improvement (if not perfectibility) through the application of the scientific method, rationalist approaches to problem solving and the consideration for human progress that permeated art and architecture, were important milestones in the history of capitalism. With modernism, they probably reached their fullest expression so far.

Some sections examine the link between modernism and concepts of social and political utopia, particularly those emanating from the workers' movement, and others invite consideration of how authoritarian regimes in Russia, Germany and Italy either enthusiastically used - or reticently accommodated themselves to - modernist precepts.

The work of modernist artists such as Mondrian and architects such as Le Corbusier are stunning and prominently featured, along with subsequent applications of their work. Indeed, it is evident (and telling) just how often the design innovations and imaginative approaches of such individuals were limited or distorted by a social and economic system with its own imperatives and strictures, from giant 'social housing' projects to the commercialisation of art.

Not everything that came out of modernism was commendable by any means - the 'Taylorism' of the modernist factory production line being a particularly mixed blessing. But it is interesting to imagine how a socialist society - which could have been far more closely aligned to the general modernist approach - might have utilised

and applied modernist ideas and techniques for the benefit of humanity. In fact, it is difficult for a socialist to take a tour of the exhibition without thinking this at almost every turn.

By the early twentieth century, the capitalist system had developed a worldwide division of labour and sufficient productive capacity for a socialist society built on abundance to be viable as a possible alternative to it. In this sense, capitalism had become politically obsolete. But at a social and technological level, modernism in this period represented both the struggle to transcend and improve capitalism at the same time, to ensure that forward-thinking, scientific and structured methods were applied for the improvement of society. In the absence of socialist revolution, this took the form (even if by default) of trying to renew or perfect commodity society for the perceived needs of humanity.

In many respects, this represented the apogee of conscious, coherent planning and scientific application within capitalism. Thereafter, it influenced post-war reconstruction before being buried by the eclecticism, anti-rationalism and general scepticism towards grand projects for human advancement typified by the anti-scientific backlash of 'postmodernism'. Today, postmodernism represents the incoherence and chaos of a capitalist society that has spurned systematic attempts at social improvement, being a product of the commodification and isolation of everyday life, with the attendant breakdown of social relationships and coherence this has involved.

For all its faults, modernism represented a hope for a brighter future through the search for collective human improvement by scientific, rationalist methods and planning. In rejecting this, postmodernism has since confirmed capitalism's inability to progress in a sustained and coherent manner, and is symbolic of its general descent into impotent micro-politics, disorder and the intellectual void.

DAP

East Anglia

Saturday, 24 June, 12 noon to 4pm

12 noon: Informal chat.

1pm: Meal.

2pm to 4pm: Showing of video "Capitalism and Other Kids' Stuff" followed by discussion.

The Conservatory, back room of Rosary Tavern, Rosary Rd, Norwich.

Central London

Saturday, 24 June, 3pm

GLOBALISATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Speaker: Brian Johnson

Socialist Party Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, London SW4 (nearest tube: Clapham North).

Manchester

Monday 26 June, 8 pm

GLOBALISATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Speaker: Brian Johnson

Hare and Hounds, Shudehill, City centre.

Socialist Walk: a Thames tour of Rotherhithe.

Sunday, 11 June 11.00 am.

Meet at Canada Water tube station.

For information contact:

Vincent Otter on **07905 791638** or **020 8361 3017** or Richard Botterill on **01582 764929**

Central London Dayschool

Saturday 10th June, 1.30pm to 5.00pm

FOOD AND ENERGY PRODUCTION IN A POST CAPITALIST WORLD

1.30pm: Welcome. Tea, Coffee, Biscuits

2.00pm: "The End of the Oil Age?"

Gwynn Thomas examines the worsening problems arising from energy production and the advantages open to a socialist society in dealing with them.

Questions and discussion

3.20pm: Break

3.30pm: "Solving the Hunger Problem."

With the numbers of seriously undernourished people doubled over the last 30 years, Pieter Lawrence explains how a socialist society could stop deaths from hunger.

Questions and discussion.

4.50pm: Conclusion

Room 9, Friends Meeting House (side entrance), 173 Euston Road, London NW1. (Opposite Euston mainline station). Nearest tubes: Euston, Euston Square.

but, by implication, in other parts of the world too). "... the real Marxism, although no longer embodied in movements or governments, has never been truer or more relevant. Most of the world's main problems today are inseparable from the dynamics of the capitalist system itself." He stresses the inevitable dichotomies of the capitalist system and gives examples of socialism's values "nourishing community life", e.g. "The socialist standards of fairness, democracy, equality and justice are as much a part of daily life as are capitalism's values of privilege, unequal rewards and power."

He states that "...social movements for environmental protection, women's rights, racial equality sooner or later run up against institutional constraints imposed by capitalism. Then they discover they can't achieve

their goals without becoming anti-capitalists" and goes on to suggest that as such individuals and groups "try to coalesce around increasingly global alternatives" they should not be timid in naming this 'socialism'.

I read the article with a growing feeling of warmth towards him for putting the case so convincingly to readers, most of whom will call themselves leftists, progressives, democrats or liberals, but most of whom, also, are wary of associating themselves with the 's' word and need to be pushed out of their comfort zone. If they really do want a different world, a different way of living they first have to face up to the facts and see that a little reform here and there will not give them what they're seeking, and complaining about 'the others' won't do it either.

JANET SURMAN, Turkey

aimed at those left-wing intellectuals who thought that Russia was "progressive" and deserved support. Inevitably, and whatever Orwell may have intended, it was used by the West as an ideological weapon in the Cold War.

Ingle mentions that Orwell and Aldous Huxley offered contrasting views on how class society might evolve. It has to be said that, in the event, Huxley in his *Brave New World* turned out to be more prescient than Orwell. Capitalism has survived not by treating workers more and more brutally, but by making them think they are happy - happy slaves who don't even realise they are slaves rather than down-trodden proles.

ALB



The Mosley Movement Today: British Fascism's New Look

1932 saw the birth of the "British Union of Fascists," with their black shirts and uniforms, armoured cars, their provocative marches through the East End of London, and their Mass rallies. To-day, over 20 years later, the movement is still with us. They still hold out-door meetings, and recently Sir Oswald Mosley, held a number of indoor meetings in Birmingham, Kensington, Brixton, and elsewhere. True, it does not have the membership it had in the 'thirties. No longer are members allowed to wear uniforms.

Since the war, when over 800 of its members spent a number of years in prison, the movement has been re-organised and renamed. The B.U.F. is now "Union Movement." The word "Fascism" has - for the time being? - been dropped; no doubt because of its unpopularity. But the British Fascists continue to call themselves "Blackshirt." At the London County Council

Elections 1955, their candidates in Shoreditch and Finsbury urged electors to "Vote Blackshirt." And "Wake 'Em Up at County Hall."

"Union Movement" retains its pre-war "Flash" sign on its literature, banners, flags and badges.

To-day we no longer see "British for the British," or "Britain First," chalked or whitewashed on walls; although such slogans as "Slump or Mosley," or the letter "K.B.W." (Keep Britain White) can sometimes be seen in Kensington, Hackney, Brixton, and elsewhere.

"National Socialism," the phrase under which the German Nazis operated, has given way to Mosley's latest: European Socialism"-yet another contradiction! British Fascism wears a New Look!

(From an article by "PEN", *Socialist Standard*, June 1956)



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

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 brought 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.



Panic Aboard SS New Labour

A strategically timed withdrawal from government need not ruin a political career

If Tony Blair had been an officer on board the *Titanic* it is quite likely that, as the liner subsided into the icy sea, he would have occupied himself in re-arranging the seating on the deck. In that way, he might have hoped to convince the richer and more influential passengers that he was taking action to compensate for the design flaws which had made the ship so sinkable. This may even have persuaded the Cunard Steamship Company to overlook the fact that he had failed to notice the iceberg which ripped open the ship's hull while he was on watch. But that's quite enough on maritime disasters; what about this latest reshuffle in the government? (Of course "reshuffle" is another felicitous word - using the same dog-eared set of cards with the same paltry values but flicking them out in a different order hoping for a change of luck).

When it comes to political parties like New Labour "luck" means government ministers being able to give the impression that their control over capitalist society is such that they can neutralise causes of concern like crime, sickness and pollution. If they can parade statistics which support their self-assessment of the effect they have, they are rated as a success and can look forward to promotion to other, more important and more attention-attracting, jobs. But if they can't provide those statistics they face the sack. And if the government as a whole are in a crisis of inability there is liable to be a tidal wave of sackings, washing away some prominent politicians and encouraging the impression that we are ruled by a fresher, more energetic, government. This was how it was with Harold Macmillan's "Night of the Long Knives" in 1962, when the supposedly unflappable Prime Minister was so panicked by some spectacular by-election defeats that he fired, among others, his Chancellor of the Exchequer and odd-job man Selwyn Lloyd.

Clarke

There have been similarities between Macmillan's panic and Tony Blair's recent blunder into the minefield of political reality in conflict with party imagery. Among the prominent victims of Blair's reshuffle was Charles Clarke, the third in a succession of Home Secretaries who have all pledged to cure crime with a mixture of symptom repression and social surgery. Before he became Home Secretary Clarke, living down his reputation as a fiery student left-winger, held a succession of increasingly important posts. He became Education Secretary after Estelle Morris had resigned - or sort of been sacked - because she could not keep up with the job. Clarke, who obviously *could* do the job, put down his marker as a convert to the opponents of a range of traditional Labour policies when he supported the concept of specialist secondary schools and argued that state funding should not be available for "unproductive" humanitarian research. In case there was any misunderstanding he also said that

"Universities exist to enable the British economy and society to deal with the challenges posed by the increasingly rapid process of global change."

Which at least signalled that he had grasped the proper role of schooling in capitalism's competitive, commodity-based system without any nonsense about developing individual talents. And to drive the point home he introduced the Bills which established top-up university fees - even although his party's election manifesto had solemnly promised not to do this.

Clarke had to be one of the favourites to succeed David Blunkett when the latter finally had to give up being Home Secretary. This must have been very satisfying to the one-time Head Boy of the exclusive Highgate School, afterwards President of the Students' Union at Cambridge, which was a kind of apprenticeship for the job of President of the National Union of Students. As the Home Office is one of the three big government jobs anyone who gets there might assume they will one day make it to Number Ten. Except that the Home Office is known as a graveyard of political ambition, with quite a few career corpses - like Rab Butler, Roy Jenkins and Douglas Hurd. That fact puts Clarke's sacking - or rather part-sacking, part-resignation - in another perspective. As Anthony Eden, Harold Wilson and Aneurin Bevan learned, a strategically timed withdrawal from government need not ruin a political

career. It is no coincidence that soon after Clarke had left the Home Office he was said to have a promise from Gordon Brown of a prominent job in a future Brown government.

Reid

As a canny, long term operator Clarke will be aware that he has to keep an eye on a particular rival - John Reid, his successor as Home Secretary. Since he came into the job Reid has devoted himself, while being careful to formally salute Clarke's industry and skill in the Home Office, to undermining Clarke's hopes of reviving his career, by publicising higher and higher figures for the foreign nationals who should have been deported after release from prison. He has recently described the situation he inherited at the Home Office as having "...some very serious and systemic underlying problems..." and there is no secret about who he considers to be the likeliest person to sort them out.

Like Clarke, Reid is a fully paid up member of the Left Wing to Right Wing Tendency. "I used to be a Communist," he once said; "I used to believe in Santa Claus". Not that he is averse to a little gift, like in 1993 when, during the Bosnian war, he spent three relaxing days at a luxury hotel beside a lake in Geneva with his friend the indicted war criminal Radovan Karadzic. At home he has keenly supported measures calculated to raise the blood pressure of the most placid Old Labour devotee - like compulsory Identity Cards, top-university fees and the Iraq war. Speaking on plans to introduce the American company Kaiser into the Health Service, he sneered at anyone having doubts about this privatising measure with the hint that they suffer from intellectual rigidity: "I believe that a preparedness to learn and improve is a sign of strength, not of weakness". The ex-Education overlord Reid is as well known for his robust vocabulary as for preparedness to refashion his principles; told that he had been promoted to secretary of State for Health he responded: "Oh fuck. Not Health". So far he has been too busy undermining Clarke's reputation to let on about how he feels at being Home Secretary; no doubt he was mollified by the fact that, as MP Frank Field put it, he would "certainly" be among those to challenge Gordon Brown for the Labour leadership.

Beckett

Reid's enemies (and there are plenty of them) in the Labour Party will be hoping that his intention to unravel the chaos at the Home Office will come to grief in face of what Clarke called its "seriously dysfunctional" style of operation, once cursed by David Blunkett as "a culture of incompetence and deliberate undermining of official policy". Others have had much the same opinion about the Foreign Office and perhaps that was why Margaret Beckett was promoted to take over there - the first ever female Foreign Secretary. Beckett is known (or should that be damned?) as "a safe pair of hands", which means she can be relied on to bat away any inconvenient questions about Labour's doomed attempts at efficiently managing British capitalism. She is another reborn left-winger, who once savaged Neil Kinnock for his refusal to back Tony Blair against Denis Healey for the Deputy Party leadership.

On another occasion she deeply upset Joan Lester (herself no stranger to making massive adjustments in her political standpoint) by accepting Callaghan's offer of the very job in Education that Lester had resigned over expenditure cuts. Beckett is well known for her unpretentious demeanour, what with her caravan holidays and her readiness to repair her make-up while sitting chatting in the pub. But nobody should be deceived that she will fail to represent the international interests of British capitalism for if the ups and downs, as well as the moves from left to right and back again, prove anything it is her steely resolve to do whatever her job demands.

So these are the new seating arrangements on the deck of the crippled ship. The lifeboats are filling up; being privileged and ruthless helps with getting a seat in them. But there is no prospect that anyone can repair that massive gash in the plates below water. Apart from the few socialists, nobody seems able to offer any idea other than waiting to be picked up by another, equally unhelpful, crew. ■

IVAN



Voice from the Back



What Immigration Problem?

The US government has recently had a crack down on illegal immigration and the French and British press have been full of the problems of immigration in those countries, but for one group there seems to be no problem in settling in another country.



Abramovich - Roman holiday

"Seven of the wealthiest billionaires living in Britain come from overseas, according to this year's Sunday

Times Rich List. Indian steel magnate Lakshmi Mittal comes out on top with a fortune estimated by the newspaper at £14.8 bn. Roman Abramovich drops to second place, but the Russian oil tycoon and Chelsea football club owner is reckoned to be worth £7.5 bn." (BBC NEWS, 3 April). So far none of the seven billionaires seem to be having any trouble with housing, schools or social security and no one has suggested passes or tagging for any of them.

Not So Bright

When socialists attack the inequalities of capitalism we are often told by its defenders that the owning class deserve their wealth because of their hard work or superior intellect. No one could ever accuse Paris Hilton of hard work, she recently celebrated her 21st birthday by having 5 birthday parties in 5 different countries, attended by thousands of friends. The rich tend to have more friends than the poor. If she couldn't be accused of hard work she certainly could not be accused of possessing a grasp of world affairs. "The word 'mother' confused her, a friend of Paris Hilton explains the hotel heiress's request to meet Mother Teresa's children in preparation for playing the nun in a new film" (Observer, 16 April).

Primitive Accumulation

In recent months we have highlighted the process of the capitalist class grabbing land and throwing off the previous occupants in India and China. Now from Botswana comes another example of this "primitive accumulation of capital" so well

described by Karl Marx in Capital in the 19th century. "Since 1997, more than



Diamonds are not a bushman's best friend

1,500 Gana and Gwi Bushmen have been evicted from their homes in the Kalahari" (Observer, 16 April). They have been found to be "primitive and a barrier to progress" ever since De Beers took an interest in the area's diamonds. .

A Fishy Story

Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan are in dispute with Iran in a bitter controversy. What is it all about? Civil rights, nuclear armament? No way. This is about caviar! "Iran may be increasingly out of favour with the UK Security Council, but the UN Secretarial for



International Trade in Endangered Species gave the country the thumbs up last week, when it gave Iran's quota to export 44,000 kilos of caviar this year. Exports from

the other countries have been banned by the UN since January" (Times, 27 April). The price of caviar is currently £6,000 a kilo, so the furore is easily understood. After all Russia alone caught 650 tonnes in 2001. Millions or thousands of hard currencies is more important than war, poverty or civil rights to capitalist governments.

Do-Gooders Do Badly

"The world is failing children by not ensuring they have enough to eat, says the UN Children's Fund (Unicef). It says the number of children under five who are underweight has remained virtually unchanged since 1990, despite a target to reduce the number affected. Half of all the undernourished children in the world live in

South Asia, Unicef reported. And it said poor nutrition contributes to about 5.6 million child deaths per year, more than half the total" (BBC NEWS, 1 May). Despite the efforts of Unicef and countless well-meaning charities capitalism is still starving millions of children to death every year.

The American Nightmare

The journalist Heather Stewart in her Letter from Washington describes the contrast between the rich and poor in what is described as the most affluent country in the world. "Men in chinos and women with neat hair and brilliant white teeth sip giant cappuccinos or chat animatedly into their cellphones. ...Look closer, though, and there are signs of another DC. Tired looking black men stand on street corners holding out the same giant coffee cups to collect coins. The Washington Post details a horrific crime



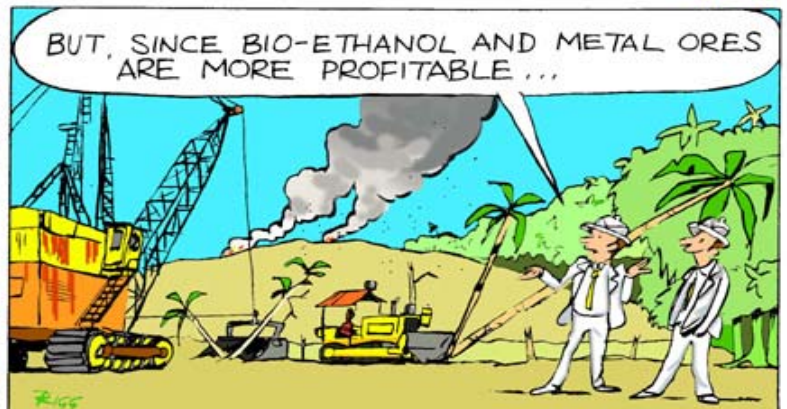
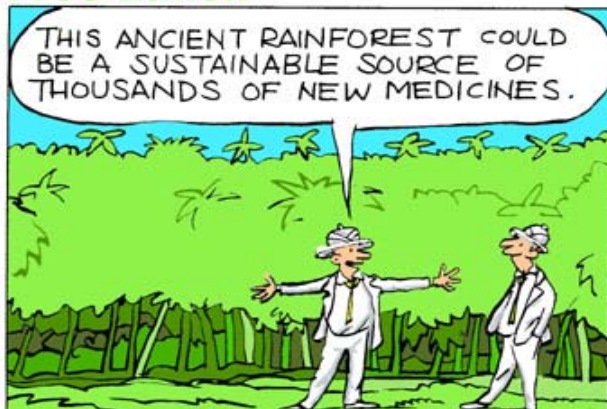
DC Undercurrent - slums next to Congress in Washington

wave of car-jacking and gunpoint robberies. Less than a mile from the grandeur of the White House are neighbourhoods with all the deprivation and social issues of the poorest inner cities" (Observer, 23 April).

A Depressing Tale

"Depression is the biggest social problem in the UK, says Richard Lanyard, a health economist who advises the Government on mental health. He claims that 15 per cent of the population suffers from depression or anxiety, and that the cost in lost productivity is about £17 billion" (Times, 2 May). It is typical of capitalism that not only does it drive us screwy, it can only see mental ill-health as a productivity problem.

Free Lunch



by Rigg