

# socialist standard



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

## Democracy gets a re-tread

### Jack London and *The Iron Heel*



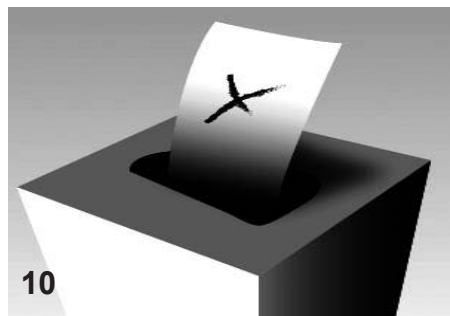
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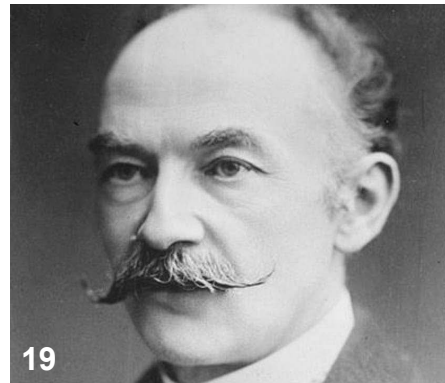
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The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 5 January** at the address below. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the editorial committee at: The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High street, London SW4 7UN.

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## Introducing The Socialist Party

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

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

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

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

## Editorial Why the Green Party is wrong

PEOPLE are right to be concerned about what is happening to the environment. Materials taken from nature are being transformed by human activity into substances which nature either can't decompose or can't decompose fast enough. The result is pollution and global threats such as the hole in the ozone layer and global warming.

There really is a serious environmental crisis. The issue is not whether it exists but what to do about it. The Green Party has one view. We have another.

The Green Party sees itself as the political arm of the wider environmental movement, arguing that it is not enough to be a pressure group, however militant, like Greenpeace or Friends of the Earth. Greens, it says, should organise as well to contest elections with the eventual aim of forming a Green government that could pass laws and impose taxes to protect the environment.

We say that no government can protect the environment.

Governments exist to run the political side of the profit system. And the profit system can only work by giving priority to making profits over all other considerations. So to protect the environment we must end production for profit.

Pollution and environmental degradation result from the inappropriate ways in which materials from nature are transformed into products for human use. But what causes inappropriate productive methods to be used? Is it ignorance or greed, as some Greens claim? No, it is the way production is organised today and the forces to which it responds.

Production today is in the hands of business enterprises, all competing to sell their products at a profit. All of them—and it doesn't matter whether they are privately

owned or state-owned—aim to maximise their profits. This is an economic necessity imposed by the forces of the market. If a business does not make a profit it goes out of business. "Make a profit or die" is the jungle economics that prevails today.

Under the competitive pressures of the market businesses only take into account their own narrow financial interest, ignoring wider social or ecological considerations. All they look to is their own balance sheet and in particular the bottom line which shows whether or not they are making a profit.

The whole of production, from the materials used to the methods employed to transform them, is distorted by this drive to make and accumulate profits. The result is an economic system governed by uncontrollable market forces which compel decision-makers, however selected and whatever their personal views or sentiments, to plunder, pollute and waste.

Governments do not have a free hand to do what is sensible or desirable. They can only act within the narrow limits imposed by the profit-driven market system whose rules are "profits first" and "you can't buck the market".

The Green Party is not against the market and is not against profit-making. It imagines that, by firm government action, these can be tamed and prevented from harming the environment. This is an illusion. You can't impose other priorities on the profit system than making profits. That's why a Green government would fail.

The Green Party fails to realise that what those who want a clean and safe environment are up against is a well-entrenched economic and social system based on class privilege and property and governed by the overriding economic law of profits first.

If the environmental crisis is to be solved, this system must go.

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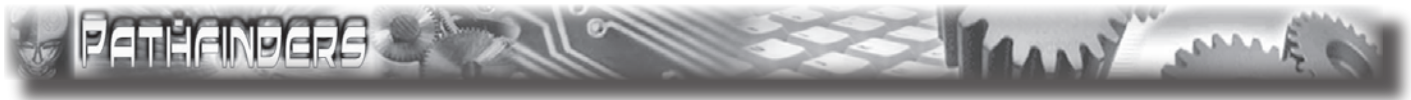
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# Why the minus 16.3 percent happy face?



In today's science lesson, boys and girls, we are going to discover that if you put a Mentos mint into a large plastic bottle of cola, you get a huge explosion that sends a geyser rocketing into the sky. Then, when you have wiped fizzy rain off your school blazers, we're going to debate whether the Mentos mint company are using this curious fact in their school programme, Put the Fizz Back into Science, in order to advance scientific interest among you little ones because none of you like science anymore (*New Scientist*, Dec 1) or whether they are shamelessly marketing their sugary sweets through the school back-door, under the guise of education (The commercialisation of our classrooms, BBC Online, Dec 9). And don't you listen to silly old NUT teachers who got the government to ban junk food ads on children's hour TV last year. We don't want to spoil all your fun, that's why we left in a 'spike' of alcohol ads between 4pm and 6pm instead, because we know that one in five of you little darlings under 15 regularly gets drunk.

Our science head believes in telling you the facts of life, which are that advertisers spend £300 million a year targeting the classroom, because they know you clever little boys and girls will recognize 400 brands before you are 10, and that brand loyalty starts young (Adverts impact on children, BBC Online, Dec 9). In fact, you young'uns are so foxy and grown-up that ASDA have been naughtily selling black and pink lace lingerie for children and Tesco have been saucily selling pole-dancing kits in their toy section (BBC Online, April 6).

But it's not all pants, poles and paedophilia, children. Next we're going to show you some serious programmes from the BBC Learning Zone which tell you all about how wonderful and safe nuclear power is and how much money you can earn if you work for the industry when you grow up. Don't pay any attention to grumpy old independent nuclear consultant John Large when he says "It's a blatant piece of propaganda, that's not an educational tool." What does he know? And don't worry if the BBC say it was a mistake and they didn't mean to do it. Well honestly, they put the programme out twice, didn't they?! (BBC Online, Dec 9).

Oh look, and now poor Ann-Marie is crying big wet tears because she just failed her SATS, the little loser. Well, children, science can do anything now. So let's have some fun and measure how sad she is!

"The true measure of a nation's standing is how well it attends to its children – their health and safety, their material security, their education and socialization, and their sense of being loved, valued, and included in the families and societies into which they are born." With these words, UNICEF prefaces its new report entitled *Child poverty in perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries 2007* (<http://tinyurl.com/3yvz8b>). It is a statistical survey, an approach explained in the introduction: 'To improve something, first measure it.' 40 indicators are spread across six categories, namely: material well-being, family and peer relationships, health and safety, behaviour and risks, and children's own sense of well-being (educational and subjective). Surprisingly, or perhaps not, the UK finds itself overall bottom of the league, at number 21 out of 21 countries. The UK and the USA find themselves in the bottom third of the rankings for five out of the six categories.

UNICEF concludes: 'There is no obvious relationship between levels of child well-being and GDP per capita' (p.5) And indeed, children didn't seem interested in material things: "Material goods and leisure activities were not, in general, seen

as top priority by children. Relationships with family were seen as the most important determinant of well-being, followed by friends, school and pets." (P.43)

The theme emerging from the UNICEF report is that, essentially, money can't buy your child happiness. Interestingly, this rather anti-materialist theme has been echoed by various other statistical studies based around the new 'science' of measuring happiness. For example, the 178-nation 'Happy Planet Index' lists the south Pacific island of Vanuatu as the happiest nation on the planet, while the UK is ranked 108th. This survey, compiled by think-tank the New Economics Foundation (NEF), notes that Vanuatu is ranked 207th out of 233 economies when measured against Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and suggests that 'people can live long, happy lives without consuming large amounts of the Earth's resources' (BBC Online, July 12, 2006). Scientifically speaking, the NEF survey is probably worthless, given that Vanuatu has a population of just 209,000, which means that to get an equivalent rating the UK has to produce 300 happy Brits to every one happy Vanuatuan, a statistically unlikely achievement. If Vanuatu had a king, for example, Britain would have to find 300 kings.

So how do the scientists do their research? "It may sound silly but we ask people 'How happy are you?'" Ed Diener, Professor of Psychology at Illinois University, defends the approach thus: "The measures are not perfect yet I think they are in many ways as good as the measures economists use" (<http://tinyurl.com/ftkaw>). To socialists, this is no recommendation at all, given that capitalist economics has roughly the same predictive power as astrology.

What further undermines these dubious studies is the fact that there is no agreement over categories or parameters, so that numerous surveys come up with contradictory results. The World Values Survey of 2005 cites Iceland as happiest country, at 94 percent happy, followed by most of Northern Europe, deteriorating the further south or east one goes, ending with Bulgaria at 'minus 24 percent happy' (<http://tinyurl.com/39awdb>). If one feels minus a percent or two happy about this result, there is always the survey done by the University of Leicester in 2006, in which Denmark emerges as happiest country despite having the second worst suicide rate in Europe (Independent, Aug 1, 2006).

Obviously nobody is suggesting that if wealth doesn't make you happy, try poverty. But the correlation of wealth and well-being ceases beyond a certain point. As Professor Daniel Kahneman of the University of Princeton puts it: "Standard of living has increased dramatically and happiness has increased not at all, and in some cases has diminished slightly. There is a lot of evidence that being richer... isn't making us happier."

Yet another survey in the UK found that 81% of the UK population agreed that the Government's primary objective should be the creation of happiness rather than wealth, although this looks suspiciously like a weighted response to a loaded question. Other studies have shown that the most reliable happiness indicators are friendship, marriage, life-meaning, and life-goals.

It seems that children and adults are not all that different. As the various surveys show, extreme deprivation aside, they both want the same kinds of 'soft' reinforcements, not the 'hard' currencies of materialism. But capitalist culture inflicts a ruthless and reckless propaganda war on its people, aiming its sharpest spears at the young and defenceless. Then, in an effort to show that it cares, it invokes a parody of science, counting tears, measuring trauma, like a psychoanalyst with a pocket calculator. Governments don't mind if you cry, so long as you buy. If one hundred percent of children, and adults, reported being one hundred percent 'minus happy' with capitalism, it would not change anything. What will change things is when those people stop being statistics, and start being statistically significant, by showing one hundred percent minus cooperation with their tormentors.



Silly ceremony

Dear Editors,  
 “I, [...], do solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm that on becoming a British citizen, I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, her Heirs and successors, according to law.”

The above is the Affirmation of Allegiance required to be taken by applicants for British citizenship, at one of New Labour’s more inane gifts to the nation, the Citizenship Ceremony. Any applicant for British citizenship has to attend such a ceremony within six months of their application being accepted. Failure to do so means that one’s application is deemed unsuccessful, and that the whole tortuous process must be started again.

I recently found myself attending such a ceremony as a guest, struggling to keep a straight face as the Lord Mayor of Bristol, in his full regalia, informed us, while standing in front of a picture of the Queen, that, in Britain, “No-one is above the law.”

Twenty-three new citizens, plus their guests, were present to hear the Lord Mayor eulogise about the Greatness of Britain and its democratic institutions. Tellingly,

however, he opened his speech by reiterating a couple of questions from the Citizenship Test (analogous to the Theory component of a driving test), which all of the new Citizens were required to have passed before reaching this stage. Unaccountably, not one of them could remember the literal meaning of Prime Minister or how many members the Welsh Assembly has.

I took some small encouragement from the fact that slightly more citizens chose to take the Affirmation of Allegiance, rather than the Oath (which beings, “I [...] swear by Almighty God”). However, the overall effect reminded me of nothing more than a school assembly, with a hall full of bored students intoning words to prayers which they find more or less meaningless.

And this, of course, is the point. The whole process has less to do with “citizenship” per se than with reminding workers who have often overcome massive difficulties and obstructions in order to be allowed to settle here (admittedly not the case for the person whose guest I was) of precisely who is the boss, and showing that they are expected to be good little boys and girls.

Needless to say the proceedings

ended with the playing of the National Anthem. Not wishing to embarrass my partner, I confess that I did stand up for the wretched dirge (albeit with my fingers firmly crossed throughout!).

Surely the world can be organised more sanely than this? Why should it not be the birthright of every human being to settle in any part of our planet (or even to continuously travel around it, should one so require), and be accepted as an equal member of one’s community without having to participate in silly ceremonies to prove one’s worthiness to do so? Why should we have to swear (or affirm or whatever) Allegiance to anyone? As Leon Rosselson wrote in his song “The World Turned Upside Down”, “This world was made a common treasury, for everyone to share.” However, until the world’s working class unites consciously and politically to ensure that the treasury can indeed be shared, a minority class with retain control and the rest of us will continue to be expected to be grateful when we’ve passed enough of their patronising “tests” (and, of course, have sufficient funds) to be able to relocate from one part of the planet to another.

SHANE ROBERTS, Bristol.

Contact Details

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 LONDON

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**Enfield and Haringey branch.** 2nd & 4th Monday. 8pm. Angel Community Centre, Raynham Rd, N18. Corres: 17 Dorset Road, N22 7SL. email: julianvein@blueyonder.co.uk

**South London branch.** 1st Tues. 7.00pm. Head Office. 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN. Tel: 020 7622 3811

**West London branch.** 1st & 3rd Tues. 8pm. Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace (Corner Sutton Court Rd), W4. Corres: 51 Gayford Road, London W12 9BY

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MIDLANDS

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**Southeast Manchester.** Enquiries: Blanche Preston, 68 Fountains Road, M32 9PH

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**Redruth.** Harry Sowden, 5 Clarence Villas, Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 1PB. Tel: 01209 219293

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**Edinburgh branch.** 1st Thur. 8-9pm. The Quaker Hall, Victoria Terrace (above Victoria Street), Edinburgh.

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**Glasgow branch.** 3rd Wednesday of each month at 8pm in Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road, Glasgow. Richard Donnelly, 112

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**West Lothian.** 2nd and 4th Weds in month, 7.30-9.30. Lanthorn Community Centre, Kennilworth Rise, Dedridge, Livingston. Corres: Matt Culbert, 53

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## Introducing a new regular column that takes a look at events around the world

Preparations for a US attack on Iran are well advanced. American planes probe the country's air defences. Commandos infiltrate Iran on sabotage and reconnaissance missions. A new military base is built close to the Iraq/Iran border at Badrah. The Fifth Fleet patrols in the Gulf and along Iran's southern coast.

Political preparations also continue. Accusations against Iran are elaborated and repeated ad nauseam. Pressure is exerted (with variable success) on other countries to assist in the war plans. Aid and encouragement are given to separatists in ethnic-minority areas of Iran: Arab Khuzestan in the southwest, "southern Azerbaijan" in the northwest. Resolutions are pushed through at the U.N. Security Council and in the US Congress to create a "legal" justification for aggression.

Why are the currently dominant capitalist interests in the US so bent on war with Iran? The war propaganda provides a highly distorted and incomplete picture of the real reasons.

### "War against terror" – Stage 3?

An attack on Iran will be sold as the next stage, after Afghanistan and Iraq, of the "war against terror." What does this mean?

As with the attack on Iraq, the claim may be made, explicitly or implicitly, that the Iranian regime is connected in some way with Al-Qaeda. This time round the claim would be even more deceptive, as Iranian leaders denounced 9/11 and helped the US depose the Taliban in Afghanistan. The terrorism charge is also based on the real Iranian support of Hizbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine. This, however, means enlarging the meaning of "terrorist" to cover any armed movement that opposes the regional interests of the US and its allies. Finally, the US Congress has passed a resolution – supported, incidentally, by leading Democratic presidential contender Senator Hillary Clinton – declaring Iran's Revolutionary Guards (an elite section of its armed forces) a terrorist organization. This justifies military action against them as part of the "war against terror."

### Another "disarmament war"?

Above all, the Bush administration claims that Iran is very close to acquiring nuclear weapons and that a nuclear-armed Iran would be an unprecedented threat to world peace. The same claim was used to justify

# Iran in the crosshairs

the attack on Iraq. No nuclear weapons capability was discovered after the invasion, but the claim had served its purpose. Iran is enriching uranium for a civilian nuclear power program under IAEA supervision, but there is no evidence that its leaders seek nuclear weapons and it will not be in a position to produce them for several (perhaps ten) years. This is a consensus view of specialists not only at the IAEA but also at the CIA and Pentagon.

Nevertheless, Iran is a rising power with ambitions of exerting influence in a region crowded with nuclear powers (Israel, Pakistan, India, Russia and China, not to mention the US nuclear presence). As such it is very likely to acquire nuclear weapons at some point. It might be willing to barter the nuclear weapons option for international recognition of its status as a regional power, but that is precisely what the US and its allies are unwilling to grant.

While the risk of accident or miscalculation does increase with the number of nuclear powers, there is no serious reason to suppose that Iran would be more dangerous than any other state with nuclear weapons. All nuclear states are prepared to resort to nuclear weapons under certain circumstances.

"Nuclear non-proliferation" started as an international agreement to confine nuclear weapons to the members of a small exclusive club. It has now come to mean "disarmament wars" to deny nuclear weapons status selectively to regimes considered hostile to US interests (listen to an interview with Jonathan Schell on [www.therealnews.com](http://www.therealnews.com)). The US seeks to prevent Iran from going nuclear because it would shift the balance of power in the Middle East, making American nuclear capabilities less intimidating and depriving Israel of its regional nuclear monopoly.

### Oil and gas, dollars and euros

While the US does want to prevent Iran from eventually acquiring nuclear weapons, this does not explain the urgency of the preparations for war. The key factor is control over resources, in particular oil and natural gas. The US seeks to restore and maintain control over the hydrocarbon resources of the Middle East, a region that contains 55 percent of the world's oil and 40 percent of its gas.

The occupation of Iraq marks an important step toward this goal. The petroleum law that the US is imposing on Iraq will give foreign companies direct control of its oilfields through "production sharing agreements". Iran, which alone accounts for 10 percent of world oil and 16 percent of world gas, is the main remaining obstacle to regional domination.

Control over oil has various aspects. One is control over price – gaining the leverage to ensure the continued flow of cheap oil to the American economy. Another is control over who buys the oil. The country that buys the most oil from Iran is now China, a situation that upsets those in the US who view China as a major rival and future adversary. Arguably, however, the most important issue is which *currency* is used to price and sell oil.

As the position of the dollar in relation to other currencies weakens, the dollar

is ceasing to function as the world's main reserve currency. Countries are shifting their foreign exchange reserves away from dollar assets toward assets denominated in other currencies, especially the euro. Dollar assets now constitute only 20 percent of Iran's reserves.

Similarly, oil producers increasingly prefer not to receive dollars for their oil. In late 2006 China began paying for Iranian oil in euros, while in September 2007 Japan's Nippon Oil agreed to pay for Iranian oil in yen. Continuation of this trend will flood the US economy with petrodollars, fuelling inflation and further weakening the dollar. It is feared that the result will be a deep recession.

Occupying oil-producing countries may seem like an obvious way to buck the trend, although the effect is bound to be temporary. In 2000 Iraq began selling oil for euros; subsequently it converted its reserves to euros. Since the US invasion it has gone back to using dollars. This may be an important motive for attacking Iran too.

### The shifting geopolitical map

The collapse of the Soviet Union enabled the US to establish a temporary global geopolitical predominance, though at the cost of enormous military expenditure that exceeds that of all other countries combined. Like the dominant position of the dollar, this cannot last very much longer in view of the progressive economic decline of the US.

The geopolitical map of the world has begun to shift, and Iran occupies a central place in this process. The framework of a potential anti-U.S. axis exists in the shape of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which brings together Russia, China and post-Soviet Central Asia. American strategists fear further consolidation and militarization of the SCO and its expansion to draw in other major Asian states and, first of all, Iran, which already has close ties with both Russia and China. (India, though for the time being firmly aligned with the US, may follow.) So here too attacking Iran may be seen as a way of averting a threat to US predominance.

### Senseless wars

There is a certain logic to the motives that drove the US to war in Iraq and may drive it to war with Iran. Nevertheless, these wars make no sense even in capitalist terms (let alone from the working class and human point of view). It is not just that costs are likely to exceed benefits, as was the case in Vietnam, for instance. They are senseless because under current world conditions the goal of securing long-term US predominance is unattainable. At most, the loss of economic and geopolitical primacy may be deferred for a few years, but it will be all the more precipitous when it does come.

The faction of the American capitalist class currently in power refuses to recognize this reality. Even their "mainstream" opponents in the "Democratic" Party are rather reluctant to do so. Admittedly, the top brass do not want another quagmire. Perhaps their resistance will save the day.



# SIMON THE SOCIOBIOLOGIST



IT'S A LOVELY DAY... THINK I'LL TAKE A STROLL AROUND THE NEIGHBOURHOOD. MUCH AS MY ANCIENT HUNTER GATHERER ANCESTORS WOULD HAVE DONE, IN FACT.

SO...  
HI SIMON! I'VE JUST GIVEN BLOOD! FEEL A BIT FAINT, BUT GLAD I'VE DONE MY BIT, YOU KNOW?

HMM. A CLASSIC CASE OF RECIPROCAL ALTRUISM. YOU'RE ONLY PERFORMING THE GOOD DEED IN THE EXPECTATION THAT YOU YOURSELF MAY BENEFIT FROM A SIMILAR GOOD DEED, ONEDAY...

WELL, THAT SURE PUT HIM STRAIGHT! BUT WHAT'S ALL THIS?...

HELP ME! MY BROTHER HAS FALLEN IN THE CANAL. HIS FOOT HAS CAUGHT ON SOMETHING. HE'S DROWNING!

HMM. A GOOD EXAMPLE OF KIN SELECTION. YOU SEE, YOUR BROTHER HAS 50 PER CENT OF YOUR GENES SO TO YOU, HE IS WORTH SAVING. BUT NOT TO ME.

THAT CERTAINLY TOLD HER! BUT WHAT HAVE WE HERE? LOOKS LIKE MORE TROUBLE...

HELP SIR! I'M BEING BULLIED BY A BIKER BOY!

HMM. THIS BIKER BOY IS OBVIOUSLY THE ALPHA MALE. YOU SHOULD ACCEPT YOUR LOWER, SUBSERVIENT STATUS IN THE PECKING ORDER.

LATER...  
HI SIMON! YOU KNOW I'VE BEEN GOING STEADY WITH KATE FOR A WHILE NOW? WELL, I'M TAKING HER OUT TONIGHT, FULL ROMANTIC CANDLELIT DINNER TREATMENT, AND I'M GOING TO PROPOSE! LIKE THE RINGS?

I SHOULDN'T BOTHER. SHE HAS BEEN SEEING SOMEONE ELSE WHO IS RICHER, YOUNGER, HEALTHIER AND BETTER LOOKING THAN YOU. HE WILL REPRESENT A BETTER BET FOR THE SUCCESSFUL PROPAGATION OF HER GENES.

THESE PEOPLE! IT'S REALLY JUST BASIC EVOLUTIONARY PSYCHOLOGY.

OH SIMON LOVE! YOU COULDN'T HELP ME. THERE'S A BIG SPIDER IN MY BATHROOM. YOU KNOW I HATE THEM... YOU COULDN'T GET IT FOR ME?

DEEP ROOTED PHOBIAS OF SPIDERS, SNAKES, HEIGHTS, STRANGERS, CONFINED SPACES HELPED OUR DISTANT ANCESTORS TO AVOID DANGER AND THUS LIVE LONG ENOUGH TO SUCCESSFULLY REPRODUCE AND PASS ON THEIR DNA.

SO DON'T WORRY ABOUT YOUR PHOBIAS.

HMM. IT'S A NICE DAY HERE IN THE PARK. OF COURSE, WE FIND GREEN OPEN SPACES AESTHETICALLY PLEASING FOR SOUND EVOLUTIONARY REASONS. NO FOREST TO PROVIDE COVER FOR POTENTIAL PREDATORS

...JUST AS IT WAS FOR OUR DISTANT FOREBEARS, STOOD ON THE ANCIENT AFRICAN GRASSLAND OR SAVANNAH.



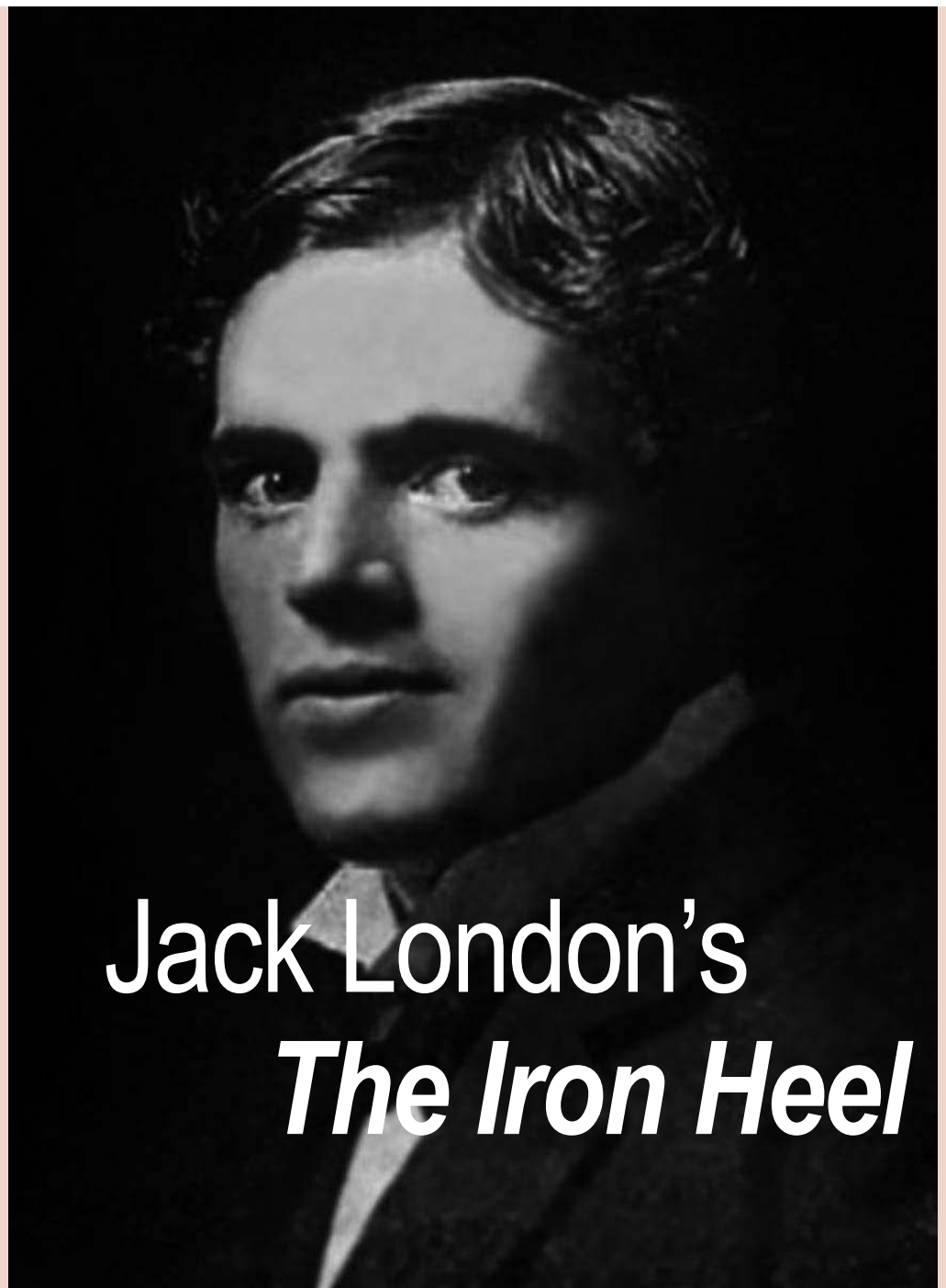
*London's widely read The Iron Heel was published a hundred years ago. But how realistic was it and how much of a socialist was Jack London?*

**B**y the time he had published *The Call of the Wild* in 1903 and *White Fang* in 1905, Jack London had established a reputation as the author of highly profitable popular fiction and adventure stories. He had risen to become the highest-paid American author of his era and with his income secure he set about writing a novel expressing his individualistic brand of militant politics. Aroused by the failure of the 1905 Russian Revolution, the inability of the Socialist Party of America to build on earlier electoral successes and the popularity of the serialisation of *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair's novel about working conditions in the meat-packing industry, London quickly completed a new novel, *The Iron Heel*, which was published one hundred years ago in 1908. After his death the work became an influential classic of anti-capitalist literature with prophecies and warnings that, according to the introduction to the most recent Penguin edition, 'Aryan nationalists and communists alike have championed' ever since.

The novel combines two narrative themes: an inner autobiographical narrative set mainly in the period 1912-1918 and a secondary narrative providing an historical commentary on the fictional 'Everhard Manuscripts' from centuries in the future. The work is essentially the autobiography of Avis Everhard, a woman steeped in social prejudice who falls in love with and later marries a 'socialist leader' and then discovers the realities of capitalism. Under the guidance of her husband Ernest she becomes a revolutionist seeking to overthrow the 'Oligarchy' – the combination of the large monopoly trusts that had bankrupted smaller capitalists and reduced farmers to serfdom and the majority of workers to slaves.

This elite has created a military caste – the 'Mercenaries' – as a private army and undermines working class solidarity by establishing a privileged 'labour caste' from skilled workers in essential industries. The 'Oligarchy' has absolute authority over civil law and political institutions, exercising power through force and intimidation, bolstered by the prejudices propagated through the press, church and education system. The novel ends after the unsuccessful 'First Revolt' against this elite.

*The Iron Heel* was not an entirely original work, heavily influenced by the work of other authors. London took inspiration from H.G. Wells' apocalyptic fantasy *When the Sleeper*



# Jack London's *The Iron Heel*

*Walks* (1899) and from the idea of a 'double-view' achieved by opening a second narrative in the future, in Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backwards* (1888). To this he adds images of summary executions and unrestrained violence from the 1871 Paris Commune, using this as a historical model for his 'Chicago Commune' that stirred memories of the infamous Chicago Haymarket Massacre of 1886.

The novel was also closely modelled on Ignatious Donnelly's *Caesar's Column* (1890), a melodrama set in the New York of the future which, like London's later work, revolved around political intrigue, secret agents, disguises and spies. Both novels are interwoven with love stories and end in cataclysm. London relocates the scene of this cataclysm from the New York to Chicago. His central theme was drawn from W. J. Ghent, the author of *Our Benevolent Feudalism*, a work 'which foresaw the "complete integration of capital" into an iron fisted dictatorship' (Richard O'Connor, *Jack London – A*

*Biography*). Even London's title, *The Iron Heel*, which is the condemnatory phase dramatically used by London's hero Ernest to describe the 'Oligarchy,' turns up in many other contemporary political and literary works as a symbol of oppression.

Much of what is related in the narrative of Avis Everhard London gleaned from newspaper articles and the printed views of 'muckrakers' such as Lincoln Steffens and regular contributors to the Oakland newspaper *Socialist Voice*, including William McDevitt and Austin Lewis. London's opportunistic reliance on this newspaper was demonstrated in 1906 when at a time when it was publishing articles denouncing organised religion, London – for the only time in his literary career – denounced the church, and he devotes several chapters in his novel to the theme.

'Borrowing' ideas and phrases was second nature to London and he was repeatedly accused of plagiarism. Moreover his habit of appropriating



the work of others was not just confined to newspaper articles. Chapter seven of his novel, *The Bishop's Vision*, is almost identical to Frank Harris's essay 'The Bishop of London and Public Morality', published years earlier. London tried to explain his tendency to plagiarise to Elwyn Hoffman, by saying: 'expression with me is far easier than invention. It is with the latter I have the greatest trouble, and work the hardest' (Andrew Sinclair, *A Biography of Jack London*).

London was not widely read in the works of socialist literature and he never really understood socialism. His politics were a blend of conflicting theories: a mixture of emotional demands for 'social justice' acquired during his early life, interwoven with ideas of racial superiority and social Darwinism. He had joined the Socialist Labor Party (SLP) in 1896, a period in which the SLP supported a programme of 'immediate demands'. When these were dropped in 1900, London was one of those who left the Party and after standing as the Social Democratic Party's candidate for the mayor of Oakland in 1901 he joined the reformist Socialist Party of America (SPA). London's 'socialism' was always overshadowed by the conviction that the strongest must inevitably triumph over the weak and by a resolve to drag himself out of the 'social pit' by becoming a prosperous writer even when this meant being criticised for compromising his principles and political convictions.

After completing *People of the Abyss*, an account of working class life in the East End of London and arguably the only truly 'sincere work' that he ever wrote, London became increasingly disillusioned with the 'underfed parodies of humanity' who refused to 'fight' for a new society. By 1903 his frustration with the working class and his views on social Darwinism were widely acknowledged and drew criticism from the membership of his own political party. He responded with accusations that the SPA leadership was weak and doomed to fail and though he stood as its candidate for the mayor of Oakland in 1905, it was clear, even before he began his novel, that his sporadic flirtation with 'socialism' was over.

Although he remained a Party member, believing his 'socialist credentials' enhanced his reputation, it is certain that by 1906 that London had already 'parted ways with the idea of a mass working-class movement to overthrow capitalism and establish a new society' (Robert Barltrop, *Jack London, the Man, the Writer, the Rebel*). *The Iron Heel's* reputation as a 'socialist' classic, deriving from London's scathing attack on capitalism in the first half of the novel, does not conceal the fact that it was 'also his statement why socialism was not achievable in the foreseeable

future' (Barltrop). The novel is London's pessimistic declaration that the working class is incapable of self-emancipating and in it he does not even credit the 'socialist' movement with the eventual downfall of the fictional 'Oligarchy,' which instead implodes under its own internal weaknesses and divisions.

London unquestionably believed that capitalism should be replaced, but never explains 'socialism' or how it can be achieved. His main indictment of the capitalist system in *The Iron Heel* is that it is managerially incompetent, 'blind and greedy', and wasteful. As well as this, London is convinced that an alternative society cannot be achieved without leaders. He creates the character Ernest as his alter ego, a 'socialist leader' (a contradiction in terms) who stands above the working class as an embodiment of London's image of 'socialist' man, a 'blond beast such

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## **"His politics were a conflicting mixture of emotional demands for 'social justice', interwoven with ideas of racial superiority and social Darwinism"**

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as Nietzsche has described', the personification of self-sacrifice and martyrdom.

Ernest is the leader that London always wanted to be. But Ernest is betrayed – in the same way that London felt he had been – by comrades who refuse to listen to him and by an irresponsible working class, 'the refuse and scum of life', incapable of helping itself and unworthy of his leadership. London's fictional 'socialists' view the working class with dread and refuse to build class solidarity with what they see as an abject and uncontrollable mass. The novel concludes on a note of disgust aimed less at the detested 'Oligarchy' than at the working class, whose mindless behaviour is said to have contributed to the defeat of the 'First Revolt.' The remnants of the 'socialist' movement are driven away to continue a terrorist war for centuries into the future until the weakened 'Oligarchy' finally yields.

The vision articulated in *The Iron Heel* is the social Darwinian struggle in which the strongest must always be supreme. It is developed within the framework of a quasi-religious fable. The setting is summed up by one critic in the following way: 'For the individual capable of it, a transforming moment of inspired vision; for those

in society incapable of such a vision, a providential catastrophe and ultimately the regeneration of society through martyrdom' (Charles N. Watson, *The Novels of Jack London*). The work is peppered with biblical phraseology and religious symbolism as Avis experiences 'a new and awful revelation of life'. The story builds towards an apocalyptic conclusion reminiscent of religious deliverance when the 'evils' of capitalism will be purged from the world and, through sacrifice and martyrdom, society will be reborn as 'The Brotherhood of Man.'

The dramatic idealisation of the main protagonists, the heightened romanticism of the action, and the virtual absence of the working class for much of the novel all accentuate an infatuation with leadership. Some have justified the novel's lack of realism in various ways. Trotsky, for example, explained the work as a didactic tale where the author was interested 'not so much in the individual fate of its heroes as in the fate of mankind' (Joan London, *Jack London and His Times*). But is this an adequate defence for a tale whose core message is one that consigns the working class to an essentially passive and insignificant role in the social revolution?

So *The Iron Heel* is a decidedly anti-socialist work by an author who wrote more from his heart than his head. When it was first published the novel received unfavourable reviews even from so-called 'socialist' journals and the *International Socialist Review* described it as 'well calculated...to repel many whose addition to our forces is sorely needed'. It is difficult to disagree with Robert Barltrop's judgement that London's 'socialism' was always a self-deception where 'the pleasures of intellectual company, of being lionised, of always having a platform waiting, caused him to set aside or rationalise the differences which were plainly there'. It is perhaps not surprising that London's egotism, overblown self-esteem and overriding preoccupation with his personal finances led Mark Twain's to remark: 'It would serve this man London right to have the working class to get control of things. He would have to call out the militia to collect his royalties.'

Jack London died in 1916 at the age of 40. In 1945, George Orwell said that had he lived 'in our day, instead of dying in 1916, it is hard to be sure where his political allegiance would have lain', and went on: 'One can imagine him in the Communist Party, one can imagine him falling victim to the Nazi racial theory, and one can imagine him the quixotic champion of some Trotskyist or Anarchist sect.' *The Iron Heel*, still open to all kinds of unsettling interpretations, will undoubtedly continue to be considered a classic of its time, although worryingly perhaps for all the wrong reasons.

**STEVE TROTT**

# And they call this *Democracy?*

*"It's a truism, but one that needs to be constantly stressed, that capitalism and democracy are ultimately quite incompatible." (Noam Chomsky, Feb. 1970 at a talk at the Poetry Centre, New York)*

To present a random sample of examples to back up this statement: Received opinion in the so-called 'developed' countries would have one believe that democracy is grounded in the electoral system; that if one can cast a vote periodically then representation of the people is taking place and one can't grumble. However, even at that level the electorate are fooled at best and cheated at worst. Fooled into believing they elected a government of the majority of the electorate, as with Blair and New Labour and cheated – twice – by Bush who effectively stole both of his presidential terms at the expense of thousands of disenfranchised voters. Once in power it's quite simple to strengthen that power. Bush conveniently sacked unfriendly District Attorneys in favour of more right-leaning, cooperative allies during his term but was then surprised and disappointed when one of his international allies against terrorism in Pakistan recently followed his example and sacked his judiciary because they dared question his constitutional right to a further term as president/dictator. On the healthcare issue in the US, specifically the attempt to bring free healthcare to millions of poor children, Bush simply and brazenly said that whatever Congress voted he would veto it – democracy in action.

Deliberate lies and misinformation were promulgated about the use of depleted uranium during the first Gulf war and later in the Balkans conflict. A US army report released six months before the first Gulf war detailing the risks of depleted uranium use was suppressed and only unearthed later by a researcher, revealing that the army failed to follow regulations which obliged them to give medical tests to soldiers exposed to or wounded by DU munitions. When forced into admission that soldiers had been in contact with contaminated equipment they initially owned up to a few dozen individuals and it took activists and the media seven years before the Department of Defense acknowledged the thousands of unnecessary exposures. Similarly in the Balkans, the US and NATO initially denied the use of DU and then refused to reveal where it had been used, resulting in delays in clean-up operations and ongoing exposure for many more citizens. How many servicemen and civilians have been exposed in the most recent conflict in Iraq is undetermined. There is still a veil being drawn over

*The Goddess of Democracy, University of British Columbia*



the issue by the 'authorities' and many affected servicemen are still not receiving compensation or allowances whilst a callous indifference is being shown to the number of children being born with horrible deformities in Iraq.

It's interesting how many democracies give great favours to their elected representatives. You'd think that a fat salary, an expense account, numerous junkets around the world and revolving doors into consultancies and directorships would be ample reward, but no, let's throw in immunity from prosecution for crimes whilst in office. Why? There have been no good reasons proffered for this stance and generally citizens – the voting public, those on the receiving end of democracy – are outraged by such overt hypocrisy and elitism. It's recently been announced that Jacques Chirac, former President of France, is to be investigated for alleged corruption while mayor of Paris. In Turkey, whilst MPs have full judicial immunity when in office, the citizenry mustn't criticise the military, the flag nor the founder of the Republic or be seen or heard to be insulting Turkishness, whatever that is. Similar examples around the globe abound. There is an anecdote in Howard Zinn's *A Power Governments Cannot Suppress* about a question asked of the judge by a juror in the case of a break-in to steal draft records as a protest against the Vietnam war. Zinn had testified for several hours about the Vietnam war not being fought for freedom and democracy but for "tin, rubber, oil as repeatedly specified in internal memoranda of the government" and Samuel Braithwaite, the juror, a veteran of 11 years in the US army, asked "If, when a citizen violates the law he is punished by the government, who does the punishing when the government violates the law?" Good question.

When governments or regimes aren't quite to the liking of the richer democracies then a little help in getting it right doesn't go amiss. Money can be channelled in through lobbyists, media groups and NGOs. Western-leaning candidates can be hailed and promoted and propped up until they run out of uses or worse, transgress the controller's rules at which time, in an Orwellian switch, regime change becomes necessary yet again.

The long-running saga (open sore) of Palestine/Israel continues. The most recent history of these lands shows that democracy is acceptable for some but not for others. Even after the overwhelming victory of Hamas in the internationally acclaimed free and fair elections the big powers couldn't accept this as a suitable democracy. Democracy must fit into strict parameters condoned by the powerful. Funds were withdrawn

by the EU, the US backed Israel's withholding of payments, even when Hamas agreed to include members from the losing party Fatah to attempt to make a unity government.

The world's largest democracy, India, has a few pertinent examples of how capitalism and democracy are incompatible. Arundhati Roy (novelist and activist) is a well known critic of the governments there, both local and national and is a defender of people's rights on the issue of big dams. In her book *The Cost of Living*, on the topic of the Sardar Sarovar dam on the Narmada River, she says that what began 10 years previously as a fight for one river valley eventually "began to raise doubts about an entire political system. What is at issue now is the very nature of our democracy. Who owns this land?" The dam site and adjacent areas were already under the Indian Official Secrets Act when in September

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**“Nothing's perfect, people say. No, but how long do you wait before you pull a rotten tooth?”**

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1989 50,000 people from all over India gathered in the valley pledging to fight 'destructive development'. What followed was more democracy in action. The site was "clamped under section 144 which prohibits the gathering of groups of more than 5 people." Local people continued to protest and many pledged to drown rather than move from their homes. The Japanese Friends of the Earth's campaign resulted in getting their government to withdraw 27 billion yen loan to finance the project and more international pressure mounted on the World Bank. The democratic knock-on was more repression in the valley with government policy being described by one minister as to "flood the valley with khaki." At stake were huge contracts involving important and already wealthy people. Never mind that big dams have long been discredited for reasons including devastation of farmlands and forests, sedimentation creating shorter than estimated life spans, salination and waterlogging of land irrigated downstream, etc etc. It's even questionable whether there will be enough water to reach Gujarat's towns at the end of the chain – the original stated purpose from as long ago as the early 1960s. At stake also were the lives and livelihoods ultimately of millions of people, but these people had little or no money so couldn't be part of the equation. They were simply disposable and although

supposed to be compensated or given new land this simply isn't happening. Democracy forges ahead, enriching minorities and further impoverishing millions.

In the free world, in the long-established democracies, in the newly fledged wannabe democracies, the virus of the anti-terrorism crusade is spreading fast bringing tighter laws and increased controls, reining in freedoms with world-wide use of police and/or troops against civil protest, laws akin to those foretold by Orwell and Huxley – too weird to be thought true by many. Take care of being suspected of even thinking about committing a subversive act. This really brings to life one of Joseph Heller's characters of some 40 years ago who "was jeopardising his traditional rights of freedom and independence by daring to exercise them." Complacent populations allow it to happen. Uninformed, ignorant populations allow it to happen. People have accepted the one-sided terms and conditions with little or no question, without signing a contract. There is no contract, just a one-way edict. It's commonly said that everyone has an equal chance in life, something that, to anyone with a working brain bigger than a peanut, is patently not true. A system so stacked in favour of a few over many can't be seen as just. How has this crumbling edifice called democracy managed to stand for so long? "Nothing's perfect," people say. No, but how long do you wait before you pull a rotten tooth? Are these governments and their democracies relevant to their populaces? Are they credible?

This has all been said before, in other ways, in other places, by other people but it seems not loudly enough yet, not often enough yet, not yet by enough people. "Is it monstrous to think about how to create the possibility of human relationships based on equality, on social justice and on solidarity and relationships from which the use of violence, terrorism and war is excluded by common accord?" wrote Gino Strada, an Italian war surgeon for ten or so years, in his book *Green Parrots*.

Enough people speaking out and acting in accord with their conscience, not cowed down, refusing to be brainwashed, not suffering from the comfort of amnesia or the ostrich syndrome *can* bring about social change. Howard Zinn stresses that "our most deadly enemies may not be hiding in caves and compounds abroad but in the corporate boardrooms and government offices where decisions are made that consign millions to death and misery – not deliberately but as collateral damage of the lust for power and profit."

When and where, if ever, was a

**continued on page 21**

# The nature of human nature

*The cultural anthropologist Ashley Montagu once said that what cultural anthropologists were really interested in was “the nature of human nature”. So what do they think it is?*

evolution of *homo habilis* (toolmaking Man, if you don't like Dawkins's translation) into modern humans was not just a question of biology but also of culture; that it was a biological-cultural co-evolution. That, as Man made and used tools, natural selection favoured those with a more powerful brain and so a greater ability to learn and, crucially, to think abstractly (i.e. of something not present to the senses). Since abstract thinking and language are probably indissolubly linked, this depended on the development of the vocal cords and other parts of our speech organs. The end-result was us, some 150,000 years ago, on the savannah, or open grasslands, of East Africa.

Since then the most noticeable biological change was the development of the different varieties of our species – sometimes mis-called “races” – as isolated groups of *homo sapiens* adapted biologically through natural selection, over many thousands of years, to the different physical environments in which they lived.

Otherwise human adaptation has been cultural rather than biological: humans making use of their biological capacities, to build-up a social tradition so as to better adapt to their environment, which is then passed on to a new generation through teaching and learning rather than through genes.

“Cultural anthropology is concerned with the study of man's cultures. By ‘culture’ the anthropologist understands what may be called the man-made part of the environment; the pots and pans, the laws and institutions, the art, religion, philosophy. Whatever a particular group of people living together as a functioning population have learned to do as human beings, their way of life, in short, is to be regarded as culture” (Ashley Montagu, *Man: His First Million Years*, 1957).

Culture allows humans to adapt to a new or changing environment much, much more rapidly than biological adaptation through natural selection ever could. Cultural adaptation is measured in decades while biological adaptation is measured in tens of thousands of years. Other animals do have a culture in the sense of a tradition of behaviour that is passed on through learning, but none can vary and develop it as humans can. So, the capacity for adaptation through cultural change can be said to be a distinguishing feature of our species. It is of course a biologically-determined capacity, dependent upon in particular a powerful brain and the capacity to speak and on the extended period of childhood during which culture

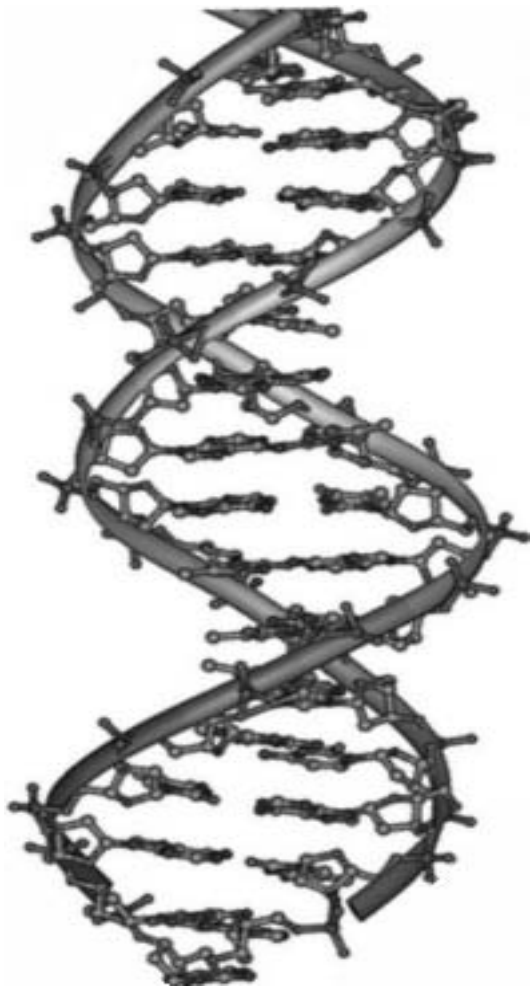
can be learned.

This is “human nature”: the set of biological capacities enabling humans to learn, teach and develop culture, which is a non-biological means of adapting to the environment in which they find themselves. Faced with a new environment, humans can and do adapt their behaviour not their biological make-up. Because culture is non-biological and not fixed, the cultural anthropologists emphasised that educability, behavioural adaptability and flexibility was the key feature of human nature, what made us human:

“The most notable thing about human behaviour is that it is learned. Everything a human being does as such he has to learn from other human beings. From any dominance of biologically or inherited predetermined reactions that may prevail in the behaviour of other animals, man has moved into a zone of adaptation in which his behaviour is dominated by learned responses. It is within the dimension of culture, the learned, the man-made part of the environment that man grows, develops, and has his being as a behaving organism” (Ashley Montagu, *Man and Aggression*, 1968).

This biological capacity for culture, for learning behaviour and passing on to other humans and to other generations, was clearly an adaptive advantage and it is this that has allowed our species to spread and survive in all parts of the world, despite the widely differing environments. Much less of the behaviour of other animals is learned (and what is learned is essentially repetitive from generation to generation) and much more is governed by what used to be called “instincts”.

This is a word that has long fallen out of favour in scientific circles, but it would simply denote a fixed response to a given stimulus – like the literal knee-



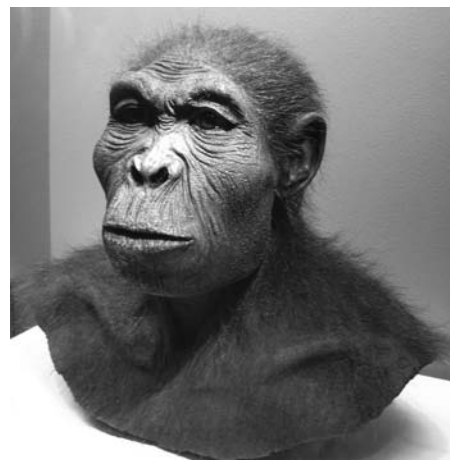
**T**oday, all humans are members of the same species, *homo sapiens*.

We know what our main features are: upright position freeing our hands, stereoscopic vision allowing us to see things in three dimensions, a long period of growing up, the anatomical ability to utter a wide range of sounds, and, last but not least, a powerful brain as the centre of our nervous system. These are all genetic features, inherited via our genes, and are what distinguishes us, genetically, from other animals and living things.

Before us there were other species of *homo* (Man) but which are now extinct. The most well-known of these was Neanderthal Man which only became extinct about 30,000 or so years ago. Then there were the likely direct ancestors of our species: *homo habilis* (which Richard Dawkins translates as “handy Man”) and *homo erectus* or upright Man. The currently available evidence suggested that the first Man, as distinct from the last Ape-Man, emerged about two million years ago.

But this is partly a question of definition since biologists distinguish the first Man from the last Ape-Man by brain size – an inevitably arbitrary, genetic distinction. Anthropologists have introduced another but non-biological distinction: the generalised making and use of tools. While the ability to make tools depends on biology (free hands, good eyesight, more powerful brain) the actual making of the tools – and what they were and how they were used – does not; it is learned not inherited and, as such, part of what anthropologists call “culture”.

It is now generally accepted that the



*Homo habilis* - reconstruction



jerk reaction in humans. Or moths flying into lights. Another, more complicated response would be squirrels reacting to the shortening of periods of daylight by going into hibernation.

What the brain does is to allow a period between the stimulus and the response. The more developed the brain the wider the range of possible behavioural responses that the organism can make on the basis of its own past experience. We are the animals with the most developed brain and it is one that allows us the greatest choice of behavioural responses. So much so, the cultural anthropologists argued, that it can be said that we don't really have any instincts. According to Montagu, any "instincts" that might have existed in the pre-human ape-men from which we evolved would have disappeared in the course of evolution:

"Instead of leading to fixed responses to the environment, man's evolution has been such as to make him the least behaviourally fixed and most generally educable or plastic of all living creatures. It is this very plasticity of his mental traits that confers upon man the position he occupies. The acquisition of this capacity freed man from the constraint of the limited range of biologically predetermined responses that characterises all other animals" (*Human Heredity*, 1963 edition)

"... man is man because he has no instincts because everything he is and has become he has learned, acquired, from his culture, from the man-made part of his

environment, from other human beings" (*Man and Aggression*).

The scientific consensus that was established in the 1940s, 50s and 60s was that it was "human nature" to be able to have a wide range of behavioural responses to the environment; that human behaviour was learned not innate; that it was culturally not biologically determined. This was confirmation that there is nothing in the biological nature of humans that would prevent us living in the co-operative, non-hierarchical, society of self-motivated individuals that socialism would be.

Since then the biological determinists have regrouped and counter-attacked, claiming that there still are "biologically predetermined responses" in humans. They have made some headway in that biological determinism is more intellectually acceptable than it was fifty years ago. People like Konrad Lorenz, Robert Ardrey, Desmond Morris, E. O. Wilson, Richard Dawkins and Steven Pinker – none of them anthropologists – have been able to achieve some popular success. But they have only done this by playing to the gallery, exploiting the fact that most people have a negative view of human nature – inherited from the Christian dogma of original sin and innate human depravity – and knowing that they could sell their books by pandering to this prejudice. Ardrey, Morris and Pinker also appealed to anti-intellectualism to ridicule and marginalise the scientific findings of the cultural anthropologists by painting

them as an arrogant, liberal elite.

But they have failed to show how genes *could* determine human behaviour (as opposed to setting limits to it). Basically, genes are self-replicating codes for the production of the proteins in the cells of which we (and all other life-forms) are made. What they govern is the development and renewal of our physical, material bodies. They don't govern behaviour – that depends, as the cultural anthropologists have established, on our social and cultural environment.

The biological determinists hoped that advances in genetics would back up their case, but it is proving to be their undoing. Molecular biologists are making huge advances in identifying and discovering the effect of individual human genes. And they are not discovering genes for any behaviour, only for how the human body develops and renews itself – and what happens when a gene is faulty or abnormal or unusual. In which case the person concerned will suffer some, usually crippling bodily defect, but which genetics holds out the hope of someday being able to correct.

The findings of the cultural anthropologists still stand. All human social behaviour has to be learned and so is culturally not biologically determined. A key distinguishing feature of our species is behavioural adaptability. Human nature is not a barrier to socialism.

**ADAM BUICK**



## Cooking the Books 1

### Dreaming of a super cycle

On 19 November the *Times* published a special supplement on "Minerals and Mining". One optimistic article "Boom time for world-wide mining" raised the prospect that world mining was entering a "super cycle" and that "we are now in the early stage of a prolonged upward shift in prices, fuelled by the industrialisation of China and India".

Industrialisation involves not just the building of new factories but also the uprooting of people from the countryside and their move to urban industrial centres to work. One expert spoke of "the movement of anything from around 10 million to 20 million people per year into an urban setting" in China, so increasing the demand for new houses, roads, administrative buildings and the other features of an urban infrastructure.

Copper is used extensively in the construction industry, for electric wiring and the like. Recent years have seen a boom in the price of copper and the other base metals, zinc (used for galvanising steel and batteries) and nickel (also used in steelmaking), attributed largely to the increased pace of industrialisation in China since 2003. The optimists believe that their "super cycle" will be the third in the last 150 years, according to the *Times* "the previous two occurring around the end of the 19th century as the US became a major economic power and the second being the post war expansion of the Japanese and European economies after 1945".

Three days later, the headlines of the *Times* business section told a different story: "Fears of recession in US spook commodity markets" and "The wheels are coming off the supercycle":

A metals analyst, Nick Moore gave his opinion:

"'The supercycle has a flat tyre,' Mr Moore said, referring to a theory promoted by some analysts and mining groups which suggested that extraordinary demand from China and India would sustain continued long-term growth and prevent the traditional boom and bust cycle of the mining industry. 'China is not the tooth fairy that can absorb all the ore'".

Of course since, as on all markets, speculators operate on the commodities market, too much store should not be set on short-term changes there. But the state of the US economy is relevant since China is not industrializing on its own: the motor is exports. If, due to a recession in the US, these fall off so will China's demand for copper and zinc and the mining industry will suffer from "overcapacity". Hence the comment of the *Times* Business Editor, James Harding, that "in the longer term, there is concern that the industry has retained its tendency towards over-supply, adding production capacity and removing the squeeze that props up prices".

In other words, the classic scenario under capitalism. When the market for some product is expanding, all the firms supplying it assume that this will continue and invest in new productive capacity; when all this comes on stream it is found that supply exceeds demand and boom turns to bust and slump. The mining industry has traditionally been prone to this because of the longer time needed to explore for, find and extract minerals than to build a factory. The last time the world mining industry went through a slump was in the 1990s:

"At that time, with lower demand and lower prices, and in the midst of technological change, metals were, as Tulpulé [chief economist at Rio Tinto] puts it 'passé'. This of course led to a lack of investment in plant, a fall off in exploration, and a declining growth on the supply side" (*Times*, 19 November).

As long as capitalism lasts, this zigzagging between boom and slump will always be the course of economic activity.



*Home is where the money is - World Bank, Washington*

nearest the centre being granted the largest share of the remunerations and benefits that form a part of the “overhead costs” that capital incurs, and those at the outside who are deemed to be totally non-productive by the elites, receiving nothing – not even the right to exist.

Whilst those who are near to the centre refuse to see the faults and failures of the system, there are two groupings who recognise the failings only too well – those on the outside who are robbed of everything, often even their lives, and those at the centre – the thieves and murderers themselves, aka the elites.

We are conditioned to believe that the free-market capitalist system has always been around and because it’s the only system that actually works, will always be around. First, it actually doesn’t work.

Free-market capitalism, left to

its own chaotic and predatory devices would self-destruct in very short order. Second, there really is no free-market capitalist system in the developed world – the “free-market” is reserved for the rest of the world, the people and resources that are there to be exploited and plundered.

In the developed world the elites have established a system of protectionism and state intervention through subsidies that pass as government contracts; the defence industry with its associated satellite firms is perhaps the definitive example. Through these and similar routes the elites can regulate their economies in an attempt to balance the short-termism that is inherent in the “maximum-profit-now-regardless-of-consequences” free-market. Whilst scorning “big government” in public the capitalists are creaming off vast amounts of money from the so-called public purse through government contracts and through bail-outs for “vital” industries where greed, fraud and ineptitude has resulted in the likely collapse of part of the capitalists’ empire. Witness the revolving door that allows the so-called Captains of Industry or key managers within the bureaucracy to be “fired”, handed huge severance payments and then immediately rehired somewhere else on even higher remunerations. Could there be a better indicator that the elites recognise that there really is no skill in “working” the system, only chance? As long as you are a paid-up member of the free-market masonic club there will be warm hand-shakes and even warmer hand-outs as you head off for your next boardroom appointment.

The logic and rationale of socialism is that at its heart lies the principle, not of maximising profits for the few, but of meeting the *needs* of everybody on the planet. From that it follows that exploiting people or the environment upon which they depend for the short-term benefit of a few chosen individuals is purely illogical and irrational. Witness that illogicality, that irrationality of capitalism in the following comment by Noam Chomsky in conversation with David Barsamian, “Keeping the Rabble in Line” on a news item in the business section of the *New York Times* (7 February 1992) about a report prepared by Lawrence Summers, chief liberal economist at Harvard, for the World Bank setting out its

# “Socialism is Illogical and Irrational”

*Free-market capitalism, left to its own chaotic and predatory devices would self-destruct in very short order.*

I’ve been told that socialism is illogical on a number of occasions when attempting to discuss the pros and cons of socialism and capitalism . . . not that the proponents of that view can offer any evidence that the present system of free-market capitalism is either rational or logical. Theirs is the response of the semi-secure, semi-comfortable, and semi-informed; they sit within the bubble that the system allows them, observing the world through the reversed telescope of capital’s media machine. What they see, hear and read “informs” them and shapes their world-view.

When compared with much of the rest of the world their semi-existence looks infinitely better than that of the vast majority of humankind. Better not to rock the boat, better not to question, better to be satisfied with one’s lot, better to follow the advice of our leadership, after all, didn’t we elect them to take the difficult decisions in our name? Following the crisis of “9/11” didn’t Bush suggest that the best contribution the citizenry could make was to kick-start the economy back into top gear? Don’t think, don’t question – consume!

The capitalist system is rather like an onion. At the centre sits the elite controlling the system and drawing to themselves the fruits of the labours of the rest of us. From this centre each skin or layer gets progressively bigger with those

**“As long as you are a paid-up member of the free-market masonic club there will be warm hand-shakes and even warmer hand-outs”**



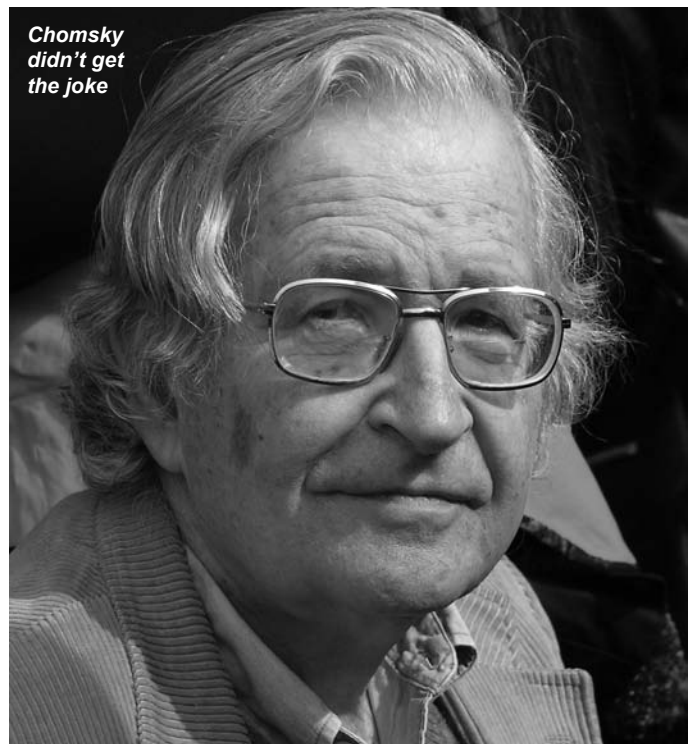
position for the Rio conference in June that year:

“The idea is that the rich countries should take the position, led by the World Bank, that the problem of pollution is that the poor countries, the Third World, don’t follow rational policies. ‘Rational’ means market policies. Many of them are resource and raw material producers, energy producers, and they sometimes try to use their own resources for their own development. That’s irrational. That means that they are using resources for themselves, often at below market rates, when there are more efficient producers in the West who would use those resources more efficiently. That’s interference with the market. Also, these Third World countries often introduce some measures to protect their own population from total devastation and starvation, and that’s an interference with the market. It’s an interference with rational market policies. The effect of this Third World irrationality is to increase production in places where it shouldn’t be taking place, to increase development where it shouldn’t be going on, and that causes pollution. So if we could only convince those Third World countries to behave rationally, that is, to give up all their resources to us and stop protecting their own populations, that would reduce the pollution problem. This *document was produced with a straight face*” (author’s emphasis).

The same day on the same page of the *New York Times* there was another unrelated article, reproduced from the *Economist* magazine, about a World Bank internal memo, written by the same Lawrence Summers, which had leaked. The NYT included an interview with Summers in which he claimed that the article was meant to be sarcastic. Chomsky commented:

“The World Bank memo added to what had been said in the article about Third World irrationality. It said that any kind of production was going to involve pollution. So what you have to do is do it as rationally as possible, meaning with minimal cost. So suppose you have a chemical factory producing carcinogenic gases that are going into the environment. If we put the factory in Los Angeles, we can calculate the number of people who will die of cancer in the next forty years. We can even calculate the value of their lives in terms of income or whatever. Suppose we put the factory in Sao Paulo or some even poorer area. Many fewer people will die of cancer because they’ll die anyway of something else, and besides, their lives aren’t worth as much by any rational measure. So it makes sense to move all the polluting industries to places where poor people die, not where rich people die. That’s on simple economic grounds.”

Summers did point out in his memo that there might be some counterarguments based on human rights and the right to a certain quality of life. But he further points out that if we allow



Chomsky didn't get the joke

these arguments to enter into our calculations, then just about everything the World Bank does would be undermined.

In the fifteen years since that report there is plenty of evidence of its principle thrust, the export of hazardous production processes to poorer areas of the world, in action. The same principal works in all areas of production. Capital is international, it goes where the profit is and in the process it undermines the position of the workers in the areas it leaves behind, opening them up to greater exploitation as wage and benefit costs are driven down ready for whatever menial service jobs may be introduced for some in the next stage of the capitalist merry-go-round. Capital has no conscience and neither do those who function at the higher levels of the system who benefit from it.

So, there you have it, on the one hand the rationality and logic of free-market capitalism, a world devoid of humanity in every sense. Corrupt, polluting and choking to death on the consequences of its own greed and immorality. On the other hand you have the rationality and logic of socialism, a world where humanity can thrive, where the challenges of meeting the needs of every human being on the planet are balanced against the needs of the planet. Where everyone, including Mother Nature, has a voice and a place at the table, where there are no weak and poor, where there are no needy, where there are no outsiders . . . and no money. The choice is ours; we have to want change enough to bring it about. We have to build socialist thinking one brick at a time, spread the message one person at a time. Last November pundits were predicting the “Perfect Storm” economic collapse scenario due to the convergence of high oil prices and the credit crisis. Both of these events were triggered by the logic and rationality of capitalist greed and corruption; the first through an illegal attempted grab of resources and the second through greed for the easy money to be made out of sub-prime mortgages and the subsequent selling on of re-packaged and concealed risk to other greedy “suckers”. In both instances the capitalists are making vast fortunes or are being bailed out from the “public purse”, screened from the consequences of their greed and crimes. Some might feel that this “event” will provide a window of opportunity where the masses will suddenly get the socialist message by osmosis. Don’t hold your breath! Socialism is about spreading the truth, about making socialists and only socialists can do that. Socialism is logical, rational, pro-people, pro-environment, and above all pro-active. □

ALAN FENN



Fangs a lot - World Bank protester, 2005

# The thoughts of Premier Brown (thirty years ago)

*In 1975 Gordon Brown edited The Red Paper on Scotland, a collection of articles by leftwing Labour activists. He wrote the introduction (“The Socialist Challenge”) from which the passages below are taken.*



• “[T]he basic questions which face the Scotland of the nineteen-eighties remain unasked as well as unanswered: who shall exercise power and control the lives of our people? How can we harness our material resources and social energies to meet the needs of five million people and more? What social structure can guarantee to people the maximum control and self management over the decisions which affect their lives, allowing the planned co-ordination of the use and distribution of resources, in a co-operative community of equals?”

• “It is argued that what appear to be contradictory features of Scottish life today—militancy and apathy, cynicism and a thirst for change—can best be understood as working people’s frustration with and refusal to accept powerlessness and lack of control over blind social forces which determine their lives. It is a disenchantment which underlines an untapped potential for co-operative action upon which we must build.”

• “[T]he discontent is a measure of the failure of both Scottish and British socialists to advance far and fast enough in shifting the balance of wealth and power to working people and in raising people’s awareness—especially outside the central belt of Scotland in areas where inequalities are greater—about the co-operative possibilities for modern society.”

• “[T]he question is not one of structures not of territorial influence, but of democracy — how working people in Scotland can increase the control they have over the decisions which shape their lives and the wealth they alone produce — and in doing so aid the struggle for a shift of power to working people

elsewhere.”

• “If the prospects for the least fortunate are to be as great as they can be, then they must have the final say—and that requires a massive and irreversible shift of power to working people, a framework of free universal welfare services controlled by the people who use them.”

• “But socialism will have to be won also at the point of production—the production of needs, ideas and particularly of goods and services. And that demands ending the power of a minority through ownership and control to direct the energies of all other members of our society.”

• “[T]he experience of the sixties shows that the market can no longer be seen as the efficient allocator of resources and indeed that the productive forces within our economy have outstripped the capacity of the market.”

• “The more automation there is, the greater is the need to deal with the social consequences by increased public expenditure; yet the more the government raises in taxation, the more urgent is the need for more automation. Thus, increasingly, the private control of industry has become a hindrance to the further unfolding of the social forces of production. Consequently, Michael Barratt Brown has convincingly argued that increased state intervention in social and economic affairs implies that it is no longer realistic to envisage a socialist commodity exchange market in a transition from capitalism to socialism . . .”

• “Workers’ Power”

• “What has often been cited as an irresolvable clash in socialist theory between regulating material production according to human needs and the principle of eliminating the exploitative domination of man over man can only be met through producers controlling the organisation of the production process.”

• “Gramsci’s relevance to Scotland today is in his emphasis that in a society which is both mature and complex, where the total social and economic processes are geared to maintaining the production of goods and services (and the reproduction of the conditions of production), then the transition to socialism must be made by the majority of people themselves and a socialist society must be created within the womb of existing society and prefigured in the movements for democracy at the grass roots. Socialists must neither place their faith in an Armageddon of capitalist collapse nor in nationalisation alone. For if the Jacobin notion of a vanguard making revolution on behalf of working people relates to a backward society (and prefigures an authoritarian and bureaucratic state), then the complexity of modern society requires a far reaching movement of people and ideas, acting as a stimulus



**for people to see beyond the immediacy and fragmentation of their existing conditions and as a co-ordinator for the assertion of social priorities by people at a community level and control by producers at an industrial level. In such a way political power will become a synthesis of—not a substitute for—community and industrial life. This requires from the Labour Movement in Scotland today a positive commitment to creating a socialist society, a coherent strategy with rhythm and modality to each reform to cancel the logic of capitalism and a programme of immediate aims which leads out of one social order into another. Such a social reorganization—a phased extension of public control under workers’ self-management and the prioritising of social needs set by the communities themselves—if sustained and enlarged, would in E.P. Thompson’s words lead to ‘a crisis not of despair and disintegration but a crisis in which the necessity for a peaceful revolutionary transition to an alternative socialist logic became daily more evident.’”**

Pretty radical-sounding stuff. We can’t go so far as to say that he was a socialist, but he did employ the language of socialism, talking in terms of “ending the power of a minority through ownership and control to direct the energies of all the other members of our society”, of “eliminating the exploitative domination of man by man”, of “the producers controlling the organisation of the production process”, of “the wealth that they [working people] alone produce”, of “workers’ power”, and that “the market can no longer be seen as the efficient allocator of resources” as well as the solution as lying in the establishment of “a co-operative community of equals”.

His present views, as Chief Executive Officer of British Capitalism PLC, are far, far from those expressed here. But the question is: is this is a personal failing of an individual who has betrayed their earlier views or a predictable consequence of the views outlined in the last extract?

In that extract Brown outlined a gradualist strategy for getting from capitalism to what he called socialism, a series of reforms “to cancel the logic of capitalism” and “a programme of immediate aims which lead out of one social order into another”. That was the original aim, many years ago, of those in the Labour Party who wanted to do more than just trying to tackle immediate problems as they arise, as any government has to. But instead of the various Labour governments – since the first one under Ramsay MacDonald in 1924 until the last but one under Callaghan voted out in 1979 – taking measures to cancel the logic of capitalism, they were obliged by economic and political circumstances to *apply* the logic of capitalism. Which involved giving priority to profits and profit-making and taking various anti-worker measures in pursuit of this aim (wage freezes, strike-breaking, anti-union laws, benefit cuts). Having no mandate to do anything else but govern capitalism, they had to do this, inevitably on capitalism’s terms. Gradualism didn’t, doesn’t and can’t work.

In the end the Labour Party itself came to embrace the logic of capitalism and to drop all pretence of trying to replace capitalism with some other social arrangement. Under Blair, and with the full support of Gordon Brown, Labour became the open supporter of the market economy and capitalist economic system that everyone today can see it is.

There will also have been an element of opportunism

involved. The Labour Party is a party of professional politicians, and one thing professional politicians want is to be able to enjoy the fruits of government office from time to time. Some time after Labour lost the 1992 election Brown must have decided that Labour was unelectable with the sort of programme he had embraced in the 1970s and 80s and that any such talk had to be abandoned if he was ever to become a Minister of the Crown. Which he duly did, but his past is still there to haunt him.

ADAM BUICK

## Bottom line building

Like everyone else with an email address we get loads of spam. Most go straight into the trash can, but the subject of one – “Crack Patient Paying Problems with these Helpful Hints” – caught our eye. It turned out to be a plug for an audioconference in America on “Tried-and-True Ways To Get Chiropractic Patients to Hand Over Their Dues”. The message began:

“Getting patients to pay their bills at your chiropractic office isn’t always the most successful part of the visit. And even a handful of patients who don’t pay their bills can start adding up – and hurting your practice’s bottom line. But you can learn less-stressful way to collect pays, deductibles and co-insurance in this 1-hour session. Your expert speaker, Marty Kotlar, DC, CHCC, CBCS, will provide strategic advice on everything from gathering patient information to forming an office policy explaining the patients’ financial obligations. Don’t miss this bottom-line-building session . . .”

Chiropractics is an “alternative medicine” that is regarded by most conventional doctors as quackery (it is based on the idea that by manipulating the spine you can deal with ailments in other parts of the body, a bit like reflexology claims for manipulating your toes). But that’s not the point since no doubt teleconferences also take place in America about how conventional doctors can boost their bottom lines too - except that it does not fit in with the caring image that “alternative medicines” seek to cultivate as a way of attracting paying customers.

In Britain NHS doctors – and patients – are freed from this stress since the doctor’s fees are paid to them directly by the government. Not a solution, we imagine, that Marty Kotlar will be proposing in his teleconference, even though chiropractors in Britain would dearly like to get in on the act and even though doctors’ practices in Britain are, with government encouragement, going the American way and converting themselves into profit-seeking businesses. Of course to the extent that they take on private patients these medical businesses do face the problem of getting patients to pay up, as do unrecognised “alternative” practitioners and NHS dentists. So perhaps, after all, they could learn something from listening in to Marty Kotlar’s “bottom-line-building session”.

Most people, in Britain at least, find it abhorrent that people should have to pay for medical treatment and health care. And they’re right; if you are ill, you should get treatment whether or not you can afford to pay for it. Socialists go further. We say the same as-of-right access to what you need should apply across the board, to housing, heating, electricity, food, clothes, transport, entertainment.

But this will only be possible once the means for producing these things have become the common property of the community as a whole instead of being, as at present, provided by profit-seeking businesses owned by rich individuals, corporations or states.



**Cooking  
the  
Books 2**

# The trouble with gods

*Those fortunate enough to live in relatively secularized societies should not underestimate the global power of religion.*



**An Aztec human sacrifice**

**G**ods do exist, in a certain sense (I use the word “gods” as a gender-neutral term that includes goddesses). Humans create them in their own image, though without being aware of doing so. The fact that gods are male or female in itself strongly suggests that they are creatures of the human imagination. But they infest the mind as powerful, capricious and mysterious beings who demand endless worship and praise, reverence and obedience, devotion and propitiatory sacrifice. The gods in the head of the believer thwart the development of confidence, self-respect, rational enquiry and independent judgment.

In this way the idea of domination and submission is imprinted in the psyche as a model for relationships between beings. That model is then readily applied to social relationships – to the relationship between man and woman, master and slave, and so on. The Moroccan scholar Fatma A. Sabbah has shown how this works in the case of Islam in her brilliant (pseudonymous) study *Woman in the Muslim Unconscious* (Pergamon Press, 1984), but her analysis applies equally well to the psychology of “God-fearing” Jews and Christians.

The imaginary world of the divine, in turn, draws its inspiration from the real world of human power structures. God is “king of the

universe”, the archangels and angels are his ministers and officials, and the devil has the job of running the Gulag.

My argument is that it is above all these psychological effects, and not specific religious dogmas and practices, which make god worship a bulwark of class society. That, surely, from the socialist point of view is the main trouble with gods.

## Objections

It may be objected that some religious beliefs do not seem compatible with the division of society into classes. An obvious example is the idea that “we are all equal

in the eyes of God.” Beliefs of this kind have, indeed, inspired peasant uprisings. “When Adam dwelled and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?” asked John Ball in the 14th century.

This objection is not completely groundless. Submission to gods does not always and automatically translate into submission to human masters. But surveying the broad sweep of history, I still think that accepting divine authority tends to predispose people to accept human authority as well.

Another possible objection is that belief in gods predates class society. Primitive people already feared gods who embodied the uncontrollable forces of nature. People were in thrall to gods before they were in thrall to other people. And yet this made them especially vulnerable to oppression and exploitation when other conditions were in place for the transition from primitive communism to class society.

## God-kings and priestly castes

Many of the earliest rulers made the most direct use of their subjects’ belief in gods by demanding that they themselves be worshipped as gods (the Roman emperors, for instance) or – more often – as descendants or earthly manifestations of gods. Egyptian pharaohs claimed descent from the creator sun-god Atum or

Re. The Inca was descended from the sun god Inti, while the Aztec king represented the fire god Xiuhtecuhtli (Bruce Trigger, *Understanding Early Civilizations*). The Shinto belief that the Japanese emperor was descended from the sun goddess Amaterasu held sway right up to 1946, when Hirohito renounced divine status.

Some religions directly support the class structure by sanctifying the entire ruling class. The best-known case is the sanctification of the priestly Brahmin caste in Hinduism, although the Indian caste system no longer corresponds precisely to the class structure. Judaism also has its “pure” priestly caste – the *cohanim*, who trace descent from Moses’ brother Aaron.

## Still mighty foes

By and large, however, the mechanisms through which religion supports class society (capitalism) are nowadays indirect. It is still risky to challenge the powers that be, but – except in a few countries like Iran – it no longer counts as sacrilege. The image of God has even started to mutate from that of the irate patriarch to that of the “sympathetic” social worker.

And yet in large parts of the world religion still occupies a very important place in people’s hearts and minds. Those fortunate enough to live in relatively secularized societies should not underestimate its global power. The gods remain mighty foes of their deluded human creators.

**STEFAN**

**2006 SOCIALIST STANDARD INDEX**

An index of articles in 2006 can be obtained by sending two first-class stamps to Socialist Standard, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN



# What they did to Thomas Hardy

*The writer Thomas Hardy died, eighty years ago, in January 1928. Here's what we said at the time.*



**P**rimarily this journal is an organ of political propaganda. As such, any attempt to appraise the work of the late Thomas Hardy would be somewhat out of place. But there is one feature connected with his death which needs underlining and emphasising. We refer to the attitude of that old enemy of mankind, the Church. Here was a man who throughout most of a long and thoughtful life, had no use for the Church and its teaching whatever. Although at one time an orthodox Churchman, he has since confessed he found no happiness therein. As an artist in life, he truthfully portrayed the part played by the Church in rural conditions. He

recognised its utility to certain primitive, immature minds. But, as a man, he had no need of it. He saw men and women as the puppets of circumstance. He saw life as a “Chequerboard of Nights and Days

Where Destiny with Men for Pieces plays.”

And to Destiny he imputed an almost impish irony. Throughout his works, like a theme, there runs this thread of cynical frustration.

But it seems there are heights of irony of which even Hardy never dreamed. For hardly had he breathed his last, before the Church, whose teachings he had repulsed in life, claimed his corpse for her own. Apart

from the fact that he was a known Agnostic, Hardy had specifically recorded in the opening sentence of his will, his desire to be buried with his own folk at Stinsford. No matter, he was a great man, too great for the Church to attempt to belittle, so they annexed him. There was a further difficulty : Hardy was known to have opposed cremation, and cremation is necessary before burial in the Abbey. The way out of that dilemma was easy. Ignore it. Hardy was dead anyway. What of his relatives, his friends? Yes! they were opposed to the old man's last wishes being trampled on. The *Daily News* correspondent interviewed his brother Henry, his sister Kate, and a cousin, Teresa Hardy. He records :—“They were all very emphatic in declaring their disappointment at Hardy being taken away from them. . . . Teresa Hardy, when I asked her if she did not appreciate the honour done to her cousin, said : ‘There is nothing in honour. He wanted to be buried in Stinsford Churchyard, and I think it is cruel not to do as he wished.’ “ Even the Mayor of Dorchester, Mr. W. F. Hodges, said the proposed Abbey burial would leave a sore feeling in the town.

No matter! The Church must have its poppy-show. An ingenious expedient was suggested. As they could not have Hardy's body buried with his ancestors, the local Rector suggested they might have a piece of him, and it was hurriedly arranged that poor old Hardy's heart should be cut out and buried at Stinsford. As all the world knows, this was done. What Hardy would have thought of the whole proceeding, one can imagine. It is difficult to conceive anything more repulsive and disgusting, in an age which so constantly claims to be “enlightened,” and the comments of posterity should be worth reading. Sentiment still plays an important part in human affairs, and possibly will so continue for many years to come. But it is hard to imagine the sentimental majority of people viewing the barbaric mutilation of gentle old Hardy's body with any feelings other than loathing.

**WTH**

### Food to make you fast

**Chew on This.** By Eric Schlosser and Charles Wilson. Penguin £6.99.

Schlosser is the author of *Fast Food Nation* (reviewed in the *Socialist Standard* for November 2002), and this book covers some of the same ground as the earlier one. That's to say, it looks at the power of fast food companies, especially McDonald's, and the nature of the food they serve.

McDonald's is the largest purchaser of beef in the United States, and this position has enabled them and the other big meat-packing companies to drive down the price



**A Kosher McDonald's in Israel**

paid to ranchers, many of whom have gone out of business. The raising and slaughtering of pigs, cattle and chicken has been aimed squarely at making profits, with little regard for the conditions of the animals or the workers. Chickens, for instance, will live barely six weeks and never see a blade of grass. They die increasingly of heart attacks, caused by a thick layer of fat around the heart.

Of course the fast food companies don't want their customers to think about where the food comes from and how it's made. They'd rather you didn't reflect on the manufactured flavours that are added, or the fact that food for children is made as sweet as possible. Massive amounts of advertising are aimed at kids, who are naturally very susceptible and can influence where their parents take them to eat. Further, the advertising isn't confined to food, as giving away or selling toys is another means to get the kids in.

The employees are often not much older than children, given the fast food industry's reliance on teenage labour. Teenagers are simply cheaper and easier to control. They mostly earn the minimum wage, which in the US is worth less in real terms than it was fifty years ago. There is a large turnover of staff, and the derogatory label 'McJob' sums things up well.

It may even be a McWorld that is developing, as the fast food chains expand outside the US and Europe. The first Burger King opened in Baghdad just nine weeks after the US-led invasion in 2003. The UK has long been part of the McDonald's empire, with 2.5 million people eating there every day.

Capitalist-style fast food treats

appallingly the animals that it raises and kills. It's also bad for the workers it employs and bad for the consumers who eat it.

**PB**

### Local histories

**The Class War Radical History Tour of Notting Hill** by Tom Vague, *Psycho Geography*, 2007. **Camden History Review 31**, Camden History Society, 2007

The Class War pamphlet, the 'souvenir programme' of a recent London march maturely entitled "Bash The Rich", is a rambling and rather unfocussed (as the doubtlessly pseudonymous author's name would suggest) example of the local radical history writing which is currently fashionable. In this case it also is an unintended comment on the Class War organisation, which has itself become historic. Nonetheless the pamphlet might help locals gain "the sense of place in time" necessary to overcome the crazy disconnectedness of London living which makes political action in the capital so difficult to achieve nowadays.

In contrast the politics (and arts) issue of the *Camden History Review* is, as one might expect coming from



**London: crazy and disconnected**

the premier local history organisation of the capital, immaculately produced and finely focussed. The piece on Camden's MPs is a rather old-fashioned biographical exercise, useful mainly for reference; however, the articles on the fight for a free library in Highgate and the St Pancras Civil Defence revolt of 1957-58 are prime examples of how on-the-ground-floor writing can help illuminate the real processes of history. The particular lesson to be learned from these two cases is that within capitalism every advance in the freedom of knowledge or the search for peace has to fought for tooth and nail. And how fruitless such actions, whether achieved via constitutional reform or direct action, ultimately are. The Socialist Party gets a mention in the fourth political essay, on the radical history of Grays Inn Road, as a radical organisation which once had its head office in the area and which pushes the solution

– production for use not profit – to all capitalist problems from attacks on libraries to warmongering.

**KAZ**

### History writing

**All Knees and Elbows of Susceptibility and Refusal.** Edited by Anthony Iles and Tom Roberts, 2007. Available online at [www.caughtlearning.org/all\\_knees\\_and\\_elbows/](http://www.caughtlearning.org/all_knees_and_elbows/)

The clumsy title comes from E. P. Thompson's phrase to describe the difficulty of writing "history from below." After the Second World War, a group of Communist Party historians including Thompson, Christopher Hill and Rodney Hilton set out to bring the experiences of the working class to the fore in the study of history. This was to some extent a reaction to structuralist and functionalist interpretations in which workers' experiences and abilities to effect social change were downplayed or ignored. The most famous example of "history from below" is EP Thompson's classic *The Making of the English Working Class*, first published in 1963 and still worth reading.

But Thompson's concept of class is controversial in some quarters:

"If we stop history at any given point, then there are no classes but simply a multitude of individuals with a multitude of experiences. But if we watch these men over an adequate period of social change, we observe patterns in their relationships, their ideas, and their institutions. Class is defined by men as they live their own history, and in the end, this is its only definition."

Some have seen this definition of class as being subjective, but Thompson must be right in saying that class is not simply an economic category but also an historical concept. The working class was not just the product of capitalist social relations or the industrial revolution: "The working class made itself as much as it was made," wrote Thompson. Writing history from below means not invoking "iron laws" and ignoring the abilities of the working class to effect social change on the one hand, or getting lost in the detail and denying the importance of class on the other hand. This short pamphlet discusses these and other problems in writing history.

**LEW**





## OBITUARY

### EDMUND GRANT

Edmund Grant, a life-long member, died, at the end of November after being incapacitated and out of circulation for the past six years. His father was a Party member and he himself joined in 1950 at the age of 16 and was a member of successive North London branches. As a conscientious objector to "national service" in the State's killing machine, he was ordered to work instead in Colney Hatch psychiatric hospital. Partly brought up in Argentina, he was a fluent Spanish speaker and also spoke other European languages, which helped him find employment as a shipping clerk. Later he was employed by Remploy. He was a member of the Executive Committee for many years and the Party's candidate at the 1964 and 1970 General Elections. He spoke outdoors, at Hyde Park, White Stone Pond and elsewhere, and indoors at lectures and in debates, including one against the National Front. He wrote occasionally, mainly on Spanish and Latin American affairs, for the *Socialist Standard*. He was an early member of the William Morris Society and of the old ASTMS trade union. Our condolences go to his wife, children and grandchildren.

**S.C. writes:** Eddie Grant personified Oscar Wilde's 'soul of man under Socialism' and served as a model as well as a mentor to many of us who had the patience to

learn from him. (Eddie was not given to abridged versions of the case for Socialism – or of anything else.)

Eddie exemplified a boundless humanism: kindly, jocular, literate, cosmopolitan and never dogmatic. He hated what he called 'narrowness': that particular sclerosis of the intellect which characterises the true believer who knows because he knows. What made Eddie's knowledge so remarkable was his capacity to explore the peripheries of his own experience and understanding, searching for reality in global corners too easily overlooked by others. His linguistic ability helped here, but more important was a deep and uncommon cultural sensibility to different ways of living, thinking and working. His knowledge of European and Latin American history and politics was extensive, as was his great appreciation of music, dance, fine art, literature and the theatre.

Given these broad aesthetic enthusiasms, Eddie's life-long interest in the art and socialism of William Morris is hardly surprising. He was an active member of the William Morris Society and encouraged many others to explore and learn from Morris's constructive approach to socialism. Indeed, like Morris, there was something about Eddie that was particularly unsuited to the absurdities of the money system; doing a job; possessing a passport; or confronting the anti-social. (I was with Eddie when he was mugged one night on the

way home from the Executive Committee; his combination of genuine incomprehension and indignation so frustrated the knife-wielding muggers that in the end they jumped off the train at the next stop in search of a less verbosely recalcitrant victim.) Of course, this was nothing to compare with the *legalised* robbery against which Eddie fought with no less determination.

Many of us gained from Eddie an inescapable core of socialist consciousness. He gave us a foundation for seeing and making sense of history which could only have been absorbed through personal interaction with someone whose principles and behaviour were in accord. His sensitivity to both the personal and global dimensions of power inequalities led him to develop a sophisticated commitment to socialism as a mode of living as well as a system of production. Until his health finally prevented him from doing so, Eddie pursued this commitment with a vivacity and joviality that none who knew him could forget. His truly awful puns reflected a mind that could not resist mocking the absurdity of the world around him. He enjoyed laughter and refused to believe that politics must be deadly serious. Above all, Eddie inspired his fellow socialists not simply to get what they want from the world, but to want more and better from the world – a world that is poorer for his absence.

## from page 10

population last asked how they would define democracy? We, the people, in countries large and small, are *told* that we have democracy. We are told this by leaders who say we should trust them, who keep information from us because that's in our best interest, who deliberately lie to us, who can have us stopped and searched in the interest of national security, who have us watched night and day in our town centres, who listen in to telephone conversations, who have access to more and more of our personal information, bank details etc., who can put blocks on our access to the internet, who have centralised computer records to use, (or lose) as they choose, who can rein us in and let us out with special measures, who decide whether we can show dissent. And they call this democracy. And people buy it.

Nearly 40 years on from Chomsky's talk at the New York Poetry Centre what can be said about the incompatibility of capital and democracy? That capital continues to widen the rifts between people, between sections of community,

between countries; that capitalism is enabling a tiny minority to own an ever-increasing share of the world's wealth to the detriment of billions of people; that capitalism turns a blind eye to democracy, preferring simple acquisition.

Democracy needs no self-aggrandizing leaders with big egos to polish, no experts and specialists with projects linked to big business and personal gain as motivation. Democracy needs no rallying cries causing flag-waving nationalism. Democracy, in essence, is simple and easily understood. Democracy speaks the whole truth (without an oath), reveals all the evidence, enables informed discussion and decisions and requires inclusion for all in dialogue. Democracy means common ownership and control of the world's assets for the benefit of and in the interests of all. Democracy's responsibility is to every member of the world community.

**JANET SURMAN**



Want to receive notifications about upcoming Socialist Party meetings, events, and publications? Then subscribe to *spannounce*, our new announcement mailing list. Point your web browser at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/spannounce/> or send an e-mail to [spannounce@yahoogroups.com](mailto:spannounce@yahoogroups.com).

**CLARIFICATION:** the editorial in the December issue may have given the impression that we were not opposed to the "criminalisation" of racist ideas. As advocates of free speech, we are opposed to making the holding of any ideas a crime.

## Meetings

### West Midlands Regional Branch

Sunday **20 January** 2pm  
Branch meeting.  
11 Dagger Lane, West Bromwich, B71.  
Phone: Ron Cook: 0121 553 1712.

### Central London

January meeting will be on Wednesday  
9 January at 6.30 pm. at the Old Crown  
pub, 33 New Oxford St, WC1.

### West London

As the first Tuesday of the month is  
New Years Day, the branch meetings  
in January, in the Committee Room,  
Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace,  
W.4, will be on the second and third  
Tuesdays, 8 and 15 January.

### Manchester

Monday **28 January**, 8.30pm  
'Social Care-Less'  
Unicorn, Church Street, City Centre

### South West Regional Branch

Saturday **12 January**, 2pm to 5pm.  
Is socialism inevitable? Does it depend on  
the actions of the Socialist Party or will it  
happen anyway?  
Village Public House, 33 Wilton Road,  
Salisbury (near Salisbury railway station).

### East Anglia

Saturday **26 January**, 12noon to 4pm  
The Conservatory, back room of Rosary  
Tavern, Rosary Rd, Norwich.

## Upset in Accra: Dr. Nkrumah upsets his friends



In 1951 the Gold Coast legislature for the first time represented all the territory's inhabitants, voting in secret ballot. The elections of 1951 and 1954 were won by the Convention People's Party (CPP), whose leader, Dr. Nkrumah was brought from jail to fill the newly-created post of Prime Minister. The CPP stood on a programme of independence from British rule and when they won a third overwhelming victory in the 1956 elections, Whitehall agreed to the inevitable. At midnight on 5th March, 1957, the Gold Coast ceased to exist and the State of Ghana took its place. A new national anthem—Ghana Arise, by Hector Hughes, a British Labour M.P.—was substituted for God Save the Queen. ( . . . )

The first signs that Ghana was going to betray the hopes of its friends came when Dr. Nkrumah appeared to be fostering his own little personality cult, by having his head stamped on the new coinage and going to live in Christiansborg Castle which, as the old residence of Danish and British governors, is heavy with unpleasant memories. Then came the expulsions and a Special Bill to allow Mr. Edusei

to deport two men without the right of appeal. The municipal councils of Accra and Kumasi were suspended and so was the chief of the 300,000 Akim Abuakwa tribe. Several members of the opposition were kidnapped and from the other side, a plot to assassinate Dr. Nkrumah was alleged. In this hysterical atmosphere, it seemed. Africa's immaculate embryo democracy had been born a deformed dictatorship.

The truth of the matter is that last March saw the end of Nkrumah's days of agitation and faced him with the realities of power over a country which is trying to make its way in the capitalist world. The first reality was a staggering fall in the price of cocoa, so that the first budget was chillingly austere and the Ghanaian workers were told that it would be unpatriotic to ask for higher wages. They had expected better than this from Nkrumah ; a national transport strike was called and rioting broke out in Accra. Another difficulty is that Nkrumah is struggling to establish government on modern capitalist lines and to stamp out the old system of tribal rule.

(from article by Ivan in *Socialist Standard*, January 1958)

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## Declaration of Principles

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

### Object

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

### Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1.That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.)

by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

2.That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

3.That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

4.That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom,

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

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6.That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7.That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8.The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.





# Money, Money, Money...

It was a bit like an archaeological dig as enthusiastic excavators exposed, one layer after another, not the remains of some prehistoric wanderers but the identities of Labour leaders who had been offered and in some cases accepted, donations to help their campaigns in contravention of the rules of their party and, even more to the point, against the law which their own government had introduced. Day after day the incriminated names emerged from the soil of Westminster: Gordon Brown and Harriet Benn (who both refused): Hilary Harman and Peter Hain (who both accepted). Then there were the people outside the Commons but who, as party officials, must have known what was going on and how troublesome it could be but who apparently did nothing to stop it; people like Labour's funds organiser John Mendelsohn (who put up a defence so feeble as to be incredible) and Party Secretary Peter Watt (who could find nobody to say how blameless he was and why he should not under any circumstances be required to leave his job over so insignificant a peccadillo so had to carry the can and resign). After the Honours for Loans affair, which so bitterly flavoured the final months of the Blair government, another such scandal was the last thing on Gordon Brown's wish list.

## Illegal

The law in this matter is clear; in the case of any donation over £200 the party must record the full name and address of the donor, who must be a registered voter in this country. If the amount is over £5000 these must be reported to the Electoral Commission. In view of this it is not advisable for a donation to be accepted unless the source of it is known to the party. What is not acceptable under the law is that the donor's identity should be obscured by the money passing through the medium of another person. This was what happened with those generous gifts from David Abrahams, a man who has been variously described as one of the party's strongest supporters and their third largest financial backer. While there is no question about his support for Labour and the fortune he has given to the party, there are other aspects about Abrahams which are rather less clear.

To begin with there is his name; to the tenants of some properties he manages in Newcastle he is known as David Martin. Then there is his age, variously given as 53 and 63. When he was resisting being deselected as the Labour candidate in William Hague's seat in Richmond Yorkshire he presented himself as a married man with a young son. Perhaps he did this under the impression that an image of domestic stability would help his case but there were serious doubt about this, aggravated by clashes between him and a divorced woman who asserted that he had more or less hired her and her 11 year old son to pose as his family. Not surprisingly, when he was re-adopted (by one vote) by the Labour Party in Richmond a group of party officials resigned in protest. Abrahams has explained the confusion over his identity by saying that he is a very private person, although a party activist thought him "the pushiest person I ever came across" and to an MP he was "The kind of person you sometimes see at conferences and such - hanging about and wanting to shake hands with everyone".

## The Builder

For all his cunning and survival skills Abrahams was less than totally discreet in his choice of people to conceal his identity by acting as channels for his gifts. One woman, who professed herself puzzled by the matter, said she was a lifelong Tory; another was his secretary. But the most exciting material for the scandal-excavating media was Ray Ruddick, said to be a director of Abrahams' property company but who works as a builder, and leaves his ex-council house each day in a battered old Ford Transit. Ruddick is reputed to have given £140,000 to the Labour Party during the five months since Gordon Brown became Prime Minister but what he said about it was: "I can't stand Labour. I can't stand any

politicians...I'm off to the bingo to see if I can win that sort of money". This penetrative comment dragged the matter down to the appropriate level of a farce - but one which seemed to have brought Labour's spin machine almost to a standstill, unable to respond in the customary manner of diverting attention onto their opponents.

All political parties must be preoccupied with money and the bigger the party the more immediate and desperate their preoccupation. A lot of design, effort and organisation must be devoted to the task of, essentially, persuading millions of people that all the evidence available to prove the impotence of those parties must be disregarded so that they are willing to trust again policies which have been massively discredited. To convince voters of the usefulness of choosing between one hopeless way and another requires a big effort and a lot of money and the parties, steeped as they are in capitalism's obligingly acquisitive morality, do not need to be too choosy about how they come by it. For them, custom, rules and laws are there to be broken if by that they can win advantage over their rivals for power. What this means is that Labour are not alone in financial manipulation; the Tories and the Liberals have similarly disreputable histories.

## Dodgy Tory Finances

The source of the funding of the Tory party is as prudently obscure as it needs to be -and it goes back a long way. Most infamously, in 1993 the businessman Asil Nadir fled to Northern Cyprus, out of the clutches of any extradition treaty, to escape prosecution arising from him defrauding the Polly Peck company of some £34 million. Since then he has often told of his desire to return to England to face the music. If he does so he may well be greeted by some old Tory friends, anxious that the years in exile have not stunted his generosity which, just before his hurried departure, ensured that he gave them £440,000. More recently a Berkshire company going under the name of Bearwood Corporate Services has been a generous, if selective, donor; it is owned by Bearwood Holdings which is itself 99 percent owned by an investment company entirely owned by Lord Ashcroft, previously Conservative Party treasurer and now Deputy Chairman of the party. The Bearwood contribution did not go to Conservative central office but to individual parties in marginal constituencies. But the effects were uneven; in the 2005 election of a sample of 15 seats six were held by Labour, six were won (2 of them gains) by the Tories and three (one gained) by the LibDems. There are questions about Ashcroft's legal status as a donor, connected to his complex financial affairs and whether he is disqualified from donating by really being domiciled in a tax haven.

Another large corporate donor was IIR Limited, a company dealing in conference and training facilities. This firm's donations were registered with the Electoral Commission but they said that they were made personally by their chairman Lord Laidlaw. In fact Laidlaw is a tax exile, Scotland's second richest person; he sold IIR Ltd, for £7 million, in 2005 and is one the four biggest donors to the Tory party.

And so it goes on; what is abundantly clear is that the finances of the big players in the political game are anything but clear and open and accessible. The wealth of people like Abrahams and Ashcroft originates in the exploitation - the wage-slavery - of the working class, who are deceived by the political parties so generously financed into supporting the social system which keeps them in their inferior position. That is the motivation for the millions of pounds which, through a variety of labyrinthine accounting methods, finds its way into the coffers of the Labour and Tory parties and others like them. Through their exploitation and their votes for these parties at the polls workers are paying to keep themselves subjugated.

IVAN



# Voice from the Back



## Land Of The Free

Behind all the bombast of "land of the free, home of the brave" national anthem in the USA lies a sinister reality. "From the 1880s to the 1960s, at least 4,700 men and women were lynched in this country. The noose remains a terrifying symbol, and continues to be used by racists to intimidate

### Strange Fruit regrowing?

African-Americans (who made up more than 70 percent of lynching victims). In the past decade or so, only about a dozen noose incidents a year came to the attention of civil rights groups. But since the huge Sept. 20 rally in Jena, La., where tens of thousands protested what they saw as racism in the prosecution of six black youths known as the 'Jena 6,' this country has seen a rash of as many as 50 to 60 noose incidents. Last Tuesday, for example, a city employee in Slidell, La., was fired after being accused of hanging a noose at a job site a few days earlier. These incidents are worrying, but even more so is the social reality they reflect. The level of hate crimes in the United States is astoundingly high — more than 190,000 incidents per year, according to a 2005 Department of Justice study." (New York Times, 25 November)

## Death In A Harsh Society

The latest figures on deaths in winter make for harsh reading and illustrate the fate awaiting many British workers when they are unable to work anymore. "More than 23,000 people died of cold last winter despite it being one

of the mildest recorded, according to the Office for National Statistics. Of these deaths, 19,200 were among those aged 75 and over. Charities called it a 'national scandal' and gave warning of more deaths this winter because of higher fuel prices and colder temperatures." (Times, 29 November)

## Heiress On The Run

She was left \$12 million but it was a mixed blessing as she received threats from blackmailers and kidnappers. "Their threats forced concerned friends to bundle her onboard a private jet under a new identity and take her into hiding. Her location is a closely guarded secret but she is reportedly living somewhere in Florida under 24 hour guard." (Times, 4 December) It is reported that her annual upkeep is \$300,000 but this includes a rotating security team. Oh, did we mention she has weekly grooming visits and has to visit the vet for her liver condition? Yes, the vet! For she is a white Maltese dog called Trouble whose former owner was the hotel tycoon Leona Helmsley.

Go on tell us that capitalism isn't crazy!



Maltese fall-guy - A 'Trouble' stand-in

## Old Age Fears

In so-called primitive societies that practiced a hunting-gathering existence, the elderly were protected and respected as knowledgeable members of the group. In modern capitalism the old are looked upon as a burden as can be seen from these findings. "Britons are living in fear of growing old in a society that fails to respect the over-65s or provide adequate support for those in need, a Guardian poll reveals today. ...The ICM poll found: 40% of Britons fear being lonely in their old age. Two thirds of the adult population are 'frightened' by

the prospect of having to move into a care home; More than 90% said they knew they could not survive on the state pension and would need to rely on savings." (Guardian, 3 December)

## Promises, Promises

Back in 1999 the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair promised to halve the number of poor children in 10 years and eradicate child poverty in 20 years. "The government's approach to tackling child poverty has lost momentum and is in 'urgent need' of a major rethink, a charity has said. A Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) report said there has been no sustained progress in the past three years. One in three UK children live in poverty. A report by the Treasury select committee fears the pledge to halve child poverty by 2010 is in doubt." (BBC News, 3 December) This is typical of reformist politicians — make promises, preferably far into the future and they will probably be forgotten when the next election comes along.

## The Price Of Gold

About a quarter of a million mineworkers downed tools on Tuesday in South Africa, the world's top producer of gold and platinum. "This year's death toll has reached 200, mostly owing to rock falls and explosions in several mines. Many mines have been unchanged for decades but recently reopened, thanks to high world prices that have made them profitable again." (Times, 5 December) The miners are concerned about the lack of safety in the mining industry which one striker described as "dripping in blood". The average wage of a miner in South Africa is about \$200 a month. None of them will be wearing gold or diamonds, that is for sure.



Worth its weight in blood

## Free Lunch



by Rigg

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