

socialist standard



April 2009
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Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain - Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

It's time to make up your mind



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done?
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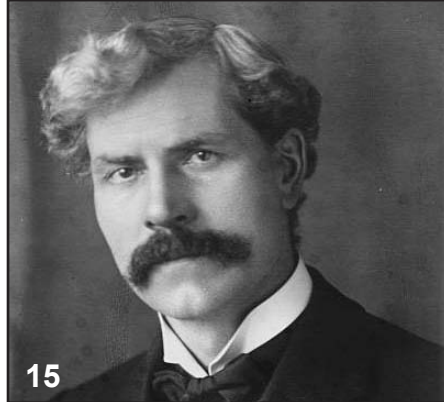
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THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 4 April** at the address below. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the editorial committee at: The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High street, London SW4 7UN.
tel: 020 7622 3811
e-mail: spgb@worldsocialism.org

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

What is socialism?

This may come as a surprise to regular readers of the *Socialist Standard*, but apparently “we are all socialists now”. A claim made (incorrectly) on various occasions during the last century has resurfaced.

On both sides of the Atlantic, western-style capitalism has supposedly succumbed to a socialism of sorts. UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown is a socialist again according to some in the media, and not only the new US President Obama, but also some of the final regulatory activities of the Bush administration have been deemed in some quarters as “socialist”.

The *Socialist Standard* and the World Socialist Movement have however decided not to shut up shop in triumph at this speedy success. This use of the term socialism to describe a few mild amendments to capitalism is of course just lazy thinking and sloppy journalism. It is also partially the legacy of a century of supposed revolutionaries and radicals – from V I Lenin to K Livingstone – who have viewed state control of productive resources as somehow a part of a genuine revolutionary project, and who have in the process served to confuse the case for socialism as a genuine alternative to capitalism.

The “socialism” being referred to relates then, to nothing more than the fact that governments in North America and Europe have bailed out the banks and are in the process of doing the same for the car industry and various other struggling sectors of the economy.

This attempt to position socialism as a mere version of capitalism – rather than a fundamental alternative to it – defuses it. This is why we strongly argue that these terms should be used accurately.

World socialists argue – and have done consistently for over 100 years – that nationalisation of sectors of the economy (e.g. manufacturing, mining, oil and gas extraction, power distribution, transport), or “socialisation” as it is termed in the US, is a measure used to differing degrees by every capitalist economy in the world.

Indeed, far from somehow being in some sort of contradiction with capitalism, government ownership is in reality an absolutely essential aspect of capitalism in all regions around the world. Some parts of the economy are simply too central, too important to all the other parts of the economy, for their survival to be left to chance or the vagaries of the market.

For example, during the First World War, many pubs located close to munitions factories were nationalised. This wasn't an example of early government concern with the binge-drinking menace that is currently preoccupying politicians, but was undertaken in order to enable the watering-down of the beer and other means of controlling consumption by workers in these factories, thereby minimising the risks of accidents with serious consequences for this critical industry in time of war. Left to its own devices, the market system would bite off its own (invisible) hand and happily unleash drunk workers into explosives factories.

For world socialists, socialism means a moneyless, wageless, classless and stateless society. Socialism is not just a “nice idea”, nor a change of name. It doesn't refer to tinkering on the margins of the profit motive, but – in contrast to the phoney ideological debate over “nationalisation” – represents a genuine alternative to capitalism.

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How scientific are scientists?

What is Andrew Marr, a well-known political commentator, doing presenting a BBC2 science programme about Darwin's 'dangerous idea'? Evidently, having used up their stock of one biologist the previous month when they trundled David Attenborough out of retirement, the BBC are now reduced to pilfering from the politics office. The first thing our ex-Presbyterian Andy does in his new role of science correspondent is issue a dire warning that we shouldn't treat Darwin as a deity or Darwinism as a religion (*The Danger of Worshipping Darwin*, BBC Online, 5 March).

Socialists have heard this sort of criticism before, from people who equate any system of organised thought with religion, in wilful disregard of the difference between organised thought and organised fantasy. Scientists do have their heroes, but they don't worship them as infallible gurus because it is recognised that argument from authority is inferior to argument from evidence. Socialists take the same view of Marx and other revolutionary thinkers.

It's a pity Marr couldn't direct his uncalled-for advice where it might do some good – at real rather than imaginary religious folly. Someone who *does* think he's an infallible guru has just lately been going round Africa telling the locals that wearing condoms will make their AIDS problem worse, not better (BBC Online, 18 March). Yes folks, the Pope pulls another blinder, advocating 'fidelity and abstinence', straight after criticising his own US division for last year's record-busting 800 sex-abuse cases, which cost the Catholic Church \$436m in 2008 (BBC Online, 14 March). Mind you, this is the guru who told us recently that Darwinian evolution is consistent with the book of Genesis.

Socialists are opposed to all religious superstitions but don't often trouble to condemn them because their advocates seem to do that better themselves. In Tanzania, the latest get-rich-quick scheme is to round up albino humans, murder them, cut them up, and sell their body parts as magic potions promising to make the owner wealthy. Meanwhile in South Africa there is an epidemic of what is called 'corrective rape', where lesbian women are gang-raped in order to make them 'girls' again. The fact that the women are often murdered afterwards suggests the rapists are not too interested in the 'corrective' aspect of it all. Unless they're thinking of the afterlife.

Someone else keen to send women to an early afterlife is

Samira Jassim, aka 'the Mother of Believers', who tells us how she recruited 80 female Iraqi suicide-bombers. Her clever trick was to have the women raped by her pious and devout male assistants and then tell the victims they would never get into heaven unless they committed a 'purifying act' to expunge their 'shame'. What this shows is not only the folly of ignorant belief and the despicable manipulation that 'gurus' can exercise, but also that these 'gurus' don't believe this hokum themselves. It has often been observed that the higher one goes in any religious organisation, the less belief there is.

Perhaps, at bottom, religious people don't really believe, but they force themselves to pretend to. There are signs that this is the case. One piece of evidence was the huge outpouring of obviously genuine grief among Catholics when the last pope shuffled off his mortal coil. Since, according to doctrine, he had gone off to sit on the right hand of God and enjoy perfect bliss, one might have expected them to celebrate. But they don't, and in fact new research suggests they fight against death harder than non-believers, demanding every treatment and medication in the book, even when prolonging the agony actually increases their misery (*Pious 'fight death the hardest'*, BBC Online, 17 March). Again, this is the opposite of what you'd expect if religion was giving these people any real comfort. It seems that the Pope and his ilk aren't very keen to check out themselves, although they're often happy enough to speed other people on their way, through murder or murderously bad advice.

So how does Andrew Marr have the effrontery to equate science with religion? It seems utterly daft. But does that mean science is a noble endeavour and a paragon of value-free rationality?

One man who doesn't think so is the physicist Lee Smolin. He is scathing about the 'sociology' of the science community, which he invokes to explain why physics has languished for the last thirty years in the doldrums of unverifiable string theory rather than investigating any more promising avenues of thought: 'Good ideas are not taken seriously enough when they come from people of low status in the academic world; conversely, the ideas of high-status people are often taken too seriously' (*The Trouble With Physics*, Allen Lane, 2006). For Smolin, the old-boy culture of risk-averse conservatism is so strong that it has brought physics to a crisis where one must ask fundamental questions about what science is.

It is a shame that Smolin, following Popper, carelessly brackets 'Marxism' with witchcraft and Intelligent Design. He would be surprised to know that socialist theory (rather than the state-capitalist parodies of North Korea etc that he has in mind) actually accords very well with the principles of scientific enquiry he himself sets out, and that socialists could help to contextualise the problems besetting physics.

Smolin points out that there are more scientists working today than in the whole history of science, however he doesn't consider that many of them are doing things which are utterly useless or downright destructive because science, like any industry, has to operate within the priorities and limitations dictated by the capitalist system. He recognises that the scientific method suffers because science is organised hierarchically, but doesn't see that the same criticism can be applied to all branches of human activity. He demands democratisation and diversity in physics as if physics alone is the problem and these things are already established in other fields.

What sets science apart from religion is not that it works perfectly, but that it has the capability to be self-correcting. This is also the crucial distinction between capitalism, which is unable to correct its own suicidal blunders because it is in thrall to uncontrollable economic laws serving a powerful elite, and non-market, non-hierarchical socialism, which has no such agenda and which can therefore collectively determine the best course of action based on the available evidence.

Darwin's statue at the Natural History Museum - a bit too worshipful?

The money system

Dear Editors

The letter by Ken Scragg and the articles by Janet Surman in your issues of December 2008 and January 2009 herald a further evolution for homo sapiens.

We are a primitive lot. Every few decades the money system collapses and we write tomes trying to explain why, but we still cling to it as if it were sacrosanct, an integral part of us. Yet it is no more than a reflection of the primitive assumption that resources are scarce, a set of symbols that are supposed to represent those resources; but symbols are not the resources themselves nor do they produce anything, only lead to the infinite complexities of marketing and exchange in which everything that we do is controlled by cost. In a moneyless system there would be only production and distribution according to demand, a simple matter in these days of instant communication.

Economists hope that the recession will end and once again be followed by boom, but there is a limit to the creation of ever-more trivia to employ us and to stimulate our greed, so that unemployment is likely to increase without limit.

The basic tenet of the capitalist system and the one over-riding impediment to social advance is the limit we impose on the quantity of money in circulation to preserve its value, so that to rid ourselves of the money system would require no more than to allow the quantity of it to increase until it lost all value, a process that, despite all our efforts to control inflation, is happening gradually all the time.

Without that impediment there would be an advance in human understanding as significant as were the development of speech or writing. Money is just a parasite.

We are very clever but by failing to distinguish between cleverness and intelligence, cause and effect, we have allowed our primitive emotions of greed, selfishness and aggression to control our intellectual and social development, leaving us struggling against each other in wars and political/economic cut-and-thrust that defeat all attempts at social advance.

Directly or indirectly all social problems, all human sufferings have their origin in the money system. There would be no arms trade, so none would be produced or promoted; and with drugs available

only on prescription we would be healthier.

Janet Surman mentioned a few of the inefficiencies and wastes of the money system, its inequalities and use of power. Its endless complexities frustrate all human endeavour. No doubt she could have gone on and on for the simple reason that nothing can be done with money that could not be done more efficiently without it. Efficiency depends upon simplicity.

MELVIN CHAPMAN, Bath

Reply: Actually, what we want is not just to abolish money but to see established a society based on the common ownership of the means of wealth production, where money would be redundant. We don't think this will happen through money gradually losing its value, as you seem to be suggesting. It will require a determined political struggle against those who currently own and control the means of production and benefit from the money-wages-profits system that is capitalism - *Editors*.

Greenpeace

Dear Editors

For what it is worth (really nothing) I have supported Greenpeace over a number of years. In response to a recent questionnaire as to what I thought of Greenpeace I said that the world's problems in my opinion could only be resolved by the dismantling of capitalism. I received a reply recommending me to have a look at the New Economics Foundation. I did this and replied as follows.

I have looked at the NEF Website and have to say that NEF is simply another reformist outfit that thinks with a little tinkering capitalism will work. On this evening's BBC 5 o'clock news mention was made that 40,000 homes having been repossessed in the current crisis - 40,000 homes lying empty. I heard Dyson (vacuum cleaners) the inventor saying that by encouraging children in schools to learn engineering Britain could reclaim some of the lost ground in manufacturing, etc. We live in a society in which goods and services are carried out solely with the aim of making a profit. People are ejected from good homes because they haven't the means to repay debt. Goods are manufactured abroad because labour is cheaper and owners can achieve more profit. These are the laws of the 'free' market economy. Oceans are poisoned because of 'cheap' disposal of waste.

Rainforests are cleared to make way for moneymaking industries. Farming, cattle raising etc. Despite the efforts of the likes of Oxfam and Greenpeace, etc the world situation is worse now than ever. People in the Third World starve not because there isn't enough food *but* because they are too poor to buy it. Think of that.

The alternative is a cooperative form of production whereby goods are produced not for profit but to meet needs. This means that ownership of the means of creating wealth, i.e. factories, land resources have to be taken away from the few who currently own them so that they become the property of all the people under democratic control.

Just think - governments are currently subsidising car manufacturers to keep people producing cars that are not needed in order to keep people in jobs. I have sympathy for the poor devils thrown out of jobs leading to all sorts of problems (loss of homes etc) but what a crazy state of affairs.

I received a reply saying that by their calculations we've only got about seven years to get on top of the problem of climate change and that the writer didn't think the change of economic system I was suggesting could be made in that sort of timetable. Maybe not, but what if the problem just cannot be solved within the present economic system? That would be seven wasted years.

PETER FINCH, Reading



The latest edition of *Imagine*, the Socialist Party of Canada's journal, is out now. Cheque or money order for £1 (including postage) to The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High street, London SW4 7UN.

Antics in the South China Sea

The recent incidents in the middle of the South China Sea, in which a large American ship was “harassed” by various Chinese boats, have a comical aspect. The “harassment” seems to have been mostly a matter of uncomfortably close approaches, flag waving, and beaming lights. The most violent moment was when the Americans used fire hoses to drench the sailors on a boat that had come too close, inducing them to strip to their underwear.

These antics, however, may be the prelude to more serious conflict. An armed clash between China and the US is, perhaps, more likely to occur in the South China Sea than in the context of a putative Chinese invasion of Taiwan.

A spy ship

Many reports have described the American vessel, USNS Impeccable, as a “survey ship” or “ocean surveillance ship.” This creates the misleading impression that such ships exist for the purpose of oceanographic mapping or scientific research.

In fact, although they are unarmed and have civilian crews, the “survey ships” belong to the US navy and their function is to collect military intelligence. They are really spy ships.

The main job of the survey ship deployed in the South China Sea is to track the Chinese submarines that patrol there, operating from a base at the southern tip of Hainan Island. These are nuclear submarines carrying intercontinental ballistic missiles – that is, they constitute China’s “nuclear deterrent.” The tracking is done by means of underwater sonar arrays attached to the ship by cables. There was some attempt by Chinese sailors to sever the cables and set the arrays adrift.

It is true that USNS Impeccable, lacking armaments more powerful than fire hoses, does not by itself pose a direct threat to the submarines. But the data it collects could be passed on to another vessel equipped with anti-submarine missiles. In other words, the spy ship is a key component of anti-submarine warfare capability. It is therefore no surprise that the Chinese government should want it to leave the area.

Legalities of carve-up

It is in large part with a view to securing a sanctuary for its nuclear submarines that China asserts the right

to control most of the South China Sea, an area of some 2 million square kilometres – to turn it into a “Chinese lake.” The legal case cooked up by its diplomats involves claiming the three main archipelagos in the sea as Chinese territory and then demarcating an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) 200 miles (320 km.) wide around them as well as Hainan Island and along the shore of the mainland.

Finally, China seeks to erase the distinction between territorial waters and an EEZ. The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) prohibits the presence of a spy ship in territorial waters, but not in an EEZ. The US position is that USNS Impeccable did not enter China’s territorial waters – it was 75 miles (120 km.) off the coast of Hainan at the time of the incidents – so its activity is perfectly legal.

Of course, it does not matter to us as socialists which side has the better case in terms of international law. The whole world is the common heritage of mankind, and we do not recognize the right of capitalist powers to carve it up among themselves.

Other issues

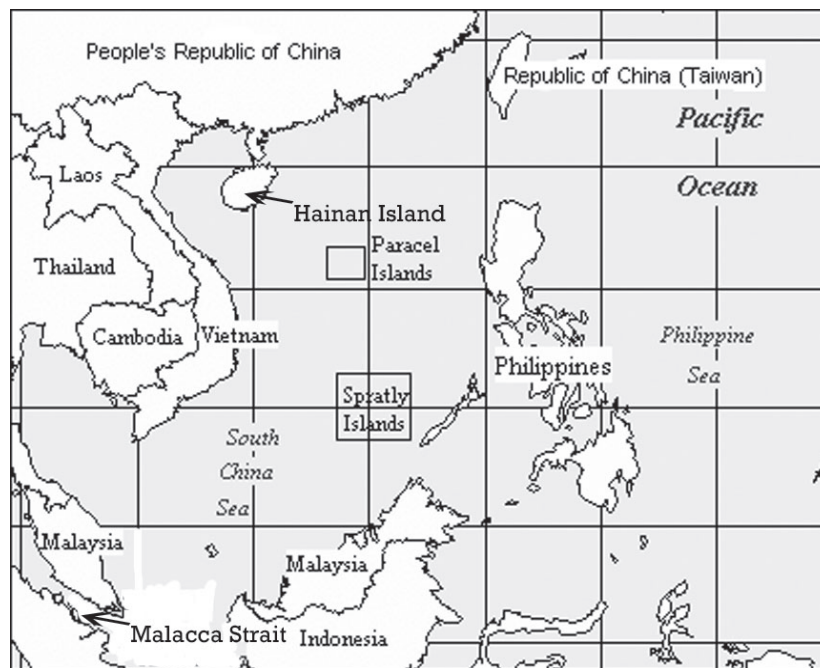
While the military issue is the direct cause of the current clash between China and the US, as it was of a similar clash involving aircraft in 1991, there are also other major issues at stake.

First, rights in the South China Sea are crucial to control over vital shipping lanes. The shortest route between the Indian and the Pacific Ocean passes through

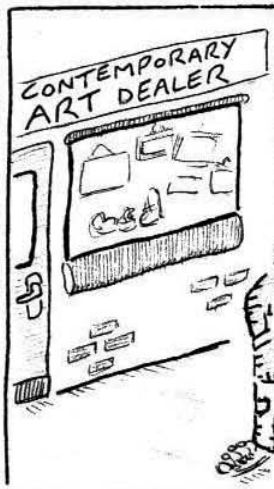
the sea. This, for instance, is the route taken by tankers transporting crude oil from the Gulf to East Asia. One rationale for the US presence is to keep the sea routes open: if China were allowed strategic dominance it could close off the Malacca Strait, which connects the South China Sea with the Indian Ocean.

There are also plenty of resources to fight about in and under the sea, including valuable fishing grounds and still unexploited oil and gas fields. This is the underlying reason why it is so difficult to unravel the complicated tangle of territorial disputes over the sea and its islands among the six coastal states: China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, Taiwan and the Philippines. In 1974 and 1988 these disputes led to military clashes – in both cases between China and Vietnam.

STEFAN



IRE OF THE IRATE ITINERANT



I'VE LONG HAD AMBIVALENT FEELINGS ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF 'ART'...

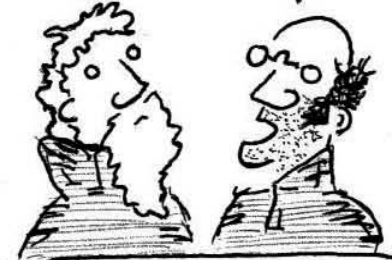
...ON ONE HAND, IT SURELY RATES AS A NOBLE, BASIC HUMAN IMPULSE, A BASIC EXPRESSION OF WHO WE ARE! THINK OF THE BEAUTY OF THE ANCIENT CAVE PAINTINGS OF LASCAUX.



BUT, ON THE OTHER HAND, ART IS OFTEN USED BY WELL-HEELED FOLK AS A WAY TO EXPRESS THEIR PERCEIVED CULTURAL SUPERIORITY OVER THOSE THEY CONSIDER THEIR INFERIORS.

THEN THERES THE FINANCIAL ASPECT. ARTISTS HAVE LONG HAD TO WHORE THEMSELVES OUT TO RATHER CRISLEY BOURGEOIS TYPES. THINK OF CHARLES SAATCHI AND HIS COLLECTION OF 'BRIT ART', AND YOU KNOW THIS TRADITION IS ALIVE AND WELL!

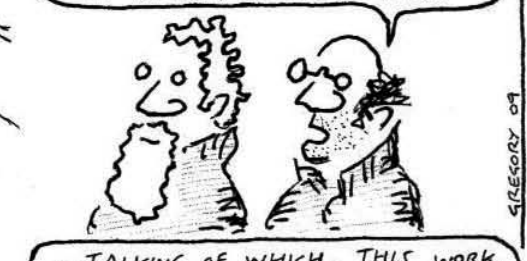
INDEED, MANY OF THAT 'BRITART' CREW HAVE MADE SOMETHING OF A FETISH OUT OF THE PURPORTED VALUE OF THEIR WORKS. IT'S COOL TO MAKE LOTS OF MONEY!



DAMIEN HIRST'S LATEST MULTI-MILLION POUND SALE IS PROUDLY ANNOUNCED! DIAMOND ENCRUSTED SKULLS? LOVELY. AND MARC QUINN'S SOLID GOLD STATUE OF KATE MOSS ADOPTING SOME YOGA POSITION STRAIGHT OUT OF THE KAMA SUTRA... NICE.

FOR THE RICH IN UNCERTAIN ECONOMIC TIMES, ART CAN REPRESENT A SAFE BET. AND MERCHANT BANKS, FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS, HAVE COTTONED ON.

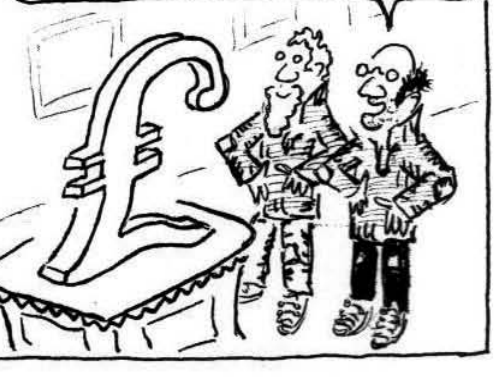
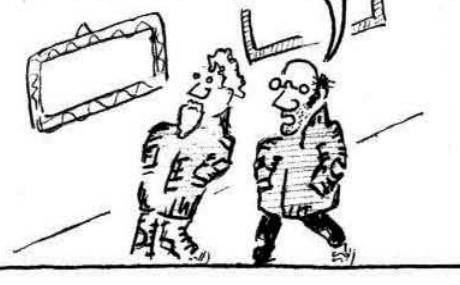
FORGET ALL ABOUT AESTHETIC APPRECIATION, - A VAN GOGH IS A SUREFIRE SHREWD INVESTMENT! AND ANY IMPRESSIONIST IS WORTH ITS WEIGHT IN GOLD. AT LEAST. SO, THAT SUMS UP THE ART WORLD. THE BOURGEOIS FEELING SMUG ABOUT ALL THE EXPENSIVE ART HANGING ON THEIR WALLS.



I ADMIRE ARTISTS LIKE L.S. LOWRY, BERYL COOK, WHO GENUINELY APPEALED TO ORDINARY WORKING CLASS PEOPLE... WHICH IS WHY THE ART ESTABLISHMENT, SUCH AS BRIAN SEWELL, SO HOLD THEM IN DISDAIN. ART, IF IT'S ABOUT ANYTHING AT ALL, IS ABOUT SNOBBERY.

AND MAINTAINING THE GULF BETWEEN THOSE WHO APPRECIATE ART, - THE BOURGEOISIE... AND THOSE WHO DON'T - THE PROLES, THE PLEBS, THE CHAVS. IT'S ALL ABOUT TASTE, DEAR...

... TALKING OF WHICH. THIS WORK, SET IN SOLID GOLD, SHOULD BE COMMENDED FOR GETTING STRAIGHT TO THE POINT! PERHAPS TONY AND CHERIE BLAIR WOULD BE INTERESTED?



GREGORY 09

Pieces together

IT'S A MAD, MAD WORLD

"Supertankers that once raced around the world to satisfy an unquenchable thirst for oil are now parked offshore, fully loaded, anchors down, their crews killing time. In the United States, vast storage farms for oil are almost out of room. As demand for crude has plummeted, the world suddenly finds itself awash in oil that has nowhere to go. It's been less than a year since oil prices hit record highs. But now producers and traders are struggling with the new reality: The world wants less oil, not more. And turning off the spigot is about as easy as turning around one of those tankers. So oil companies and investors are stashing crude, waiting for demand to rise and the bear market to end so they can turn a profit later. Meanwhile, oil-producing countries such as Iran have pumped millions of barrels of their own crude into idle tankers, effectively taking crude off the market to halt declining prices that are devastating their economies." (*International Herald Tribune*, 3 March)

PREPARING FOR WAR?

"China is aggressively accelerating the pace of its manned space program by developing a 17,000 lb. manned military space laboratory planned for launch by late 2010. The mission will coincide with a halt in U.S. manned flight with phase-out of the shuttle. The project is being led by the General Armaments Department of the People's Liberation Army, and gives the Chinese two separate station development programs. Shenzhou 8, the first mission to the outpost in early 2011 will be flown unmanned to test robotic docking systems. Subsequent missions will be manned to utilize the new pressurized module capabilities of the Tiangong outpost. Importantly, China is openly acknowledging that the new Tiangong outpost will involve military space operations and technology development. (*Spaceflight News*, 2 March)

CRISIS? WHAT CRISIS?

"At an exclusive soiree tomorrow evening at an upmarket London bar, an elite circle of VIPs will sprawl on velvet beds as they receive relaxing, complimentary massages. Around the corner at an equally glamorous event, guests will be entertained by circus performers and big-name DJs as they sip champagne. Most of Britain may be in cost-cutting mode as the recession worsens, but it seems that someone forgot to tell the fashion industry. London Fashion Week kicked off its 25th anniversary celebrations by popping bottles of Moet et Chandon before 10am yesterday, and fashion labels promised a weekend of opulent and expensive parties." (*Times*, 21 February)

A FREE SOCIETY?

"A jobless Taiwan man released from prison two years ago asked police to send him back so he could eat, police and local media said Tuesday, a grim sign of hard economic times on the island. When police found the 45-year-old convicted arsonist lying on a street in a popular Taipei shopping district, he requested a return to life behind bars, nostalgic for the 10 years he had already served, the China Post newspaper reported. Wang had also contacted police separately with his request, a spokesman said. Officers who found him bought him a boxed lunch but declined to send him back to prison, the police spokesman said. 'We advised him to keep looking for work,' he said. 'I don't know why he can't find a job. Maybe employers think he's not suitable or that he's too old.' Taiwan is in recession, with a slump in exports leading a record economic contraction in the fourth quarter of last year." (*Yahoo News*, 24 February)

Contact Details

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

LONDON

Central London branch. 2nd Weds. 6.30pm. 2nd Wednesday 6.30pm. Coffee Republic, 7-12 City Road, EC1 (nearest Tube and rail stations Old Street and Moorgate).

Enfield and Haringey branch. Thurs 26th. 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

Pimlico. C. Trinder, 24 Greenwood Ct, 155 Cambridge Street, SW1 4VQ. Tel: 020 7834 8186

MIDLANDS

West Midlands branch. Meets every two months on a Sunday afternoon (see meetings page for details). Tel: Tony Gluck 01242 235615

NORTHEAST

Northeast branch. Contact: Brian Barry, 86 Edgmond Ct, Ryhope, Sunderland SR2 0DY. Tel: 0191 521 0690. E-mail 3491@bbarry.fs.com

NORTHWEST

Lancaster branch. Meets every Monday 8.30pm. P. Shannon, 10 Green Street, Lancaster LA1 1DZ. Tel: 01524 382380

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

Bolton. Tel: H. McLaughlin.01204 844589

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

Carlisle: Robert Whitfield. E-mail: rewcb13@yahoo.co.uk tel: 07906 373975

Rochdale. Tel: R. Chadwick. 01706 522365

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

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cooking the books

Saved by the slump?

WHEN THE last report of the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was published two years ago, we pointed out that its assumption of a “very rapid economic growth” between now and 2010, on which the more realistic of their assumptions was based, was unrealistic:

“Ironically, the only thing that may save the world from the problems that a 2.8 percent rise [in average global temperature] would cause is that the economic growth and technological innovation will not be as rapid as the IPCC report assumes. (. . .) The assumption that there will be no world economic slump or prolonged period of stagnation between now and 2100 is quite unrealistic. Given capitalism, something like this is bound to happen during this period, so that the use of fossil fuels won't be as rapid as this IPCC's scenario assumes.” (*Socialist Standard*, March 2007)

We must confess that we didn't expect to be proved right so soon.

There is, however, another side to this. While the current interruption of growth is reducing energy consumption it has also made coal relatively cheaper compared to its non-CO₂-emitting alternatives, nuclear and the renewables (wind, tide, solar, etc). Not so long ago, burning coal was less profitable than burning natural gas (which gives off less CO₂) – the non-renewables don't get a look in here – but now the situation has changed:

“The margin earned from burning coal, according to Société Générale, is about €15 per megawatt hour, compared with €7 from natural gas. (. . .) At Deutsche Bank, Mark Lewis, the head of carbon research, fears that the price may have fallen to a level at which some utilities may be tempted to invest in conventional coal-fired power stations” (*Times*, 18 February).

The slump is also wreaking havoc with the EU's “carbon trading” scheme, which was touted as the market way to reduce CO₂ emissions. Under it power stations are given an allowance of how much CO₂ they can emit without being penalised. If they succeed in reducing their emissions to below this level they can sell the unused part of their allowance to other firms that want to exceed theirs. These allowances are in effect licences to pollute and a market in them was supposed to develop, and did tentatively.

What is happening now is that, with the reduction of production and so of energy consumption, power stations can easily reduce their emissions below their allowance and so have been trying to sell them. As most of them are in the same position, supply is exceeding demand and the price of these licences to pollute has collapsed. According to the *Times*, “in July a tonne of carbon sold for €35, but today it fetches less than €9”. Which means, of course, that it's now cheaper to pollute.

That's the way the market works. As the current depression is confirming, the market is far from being, as taught in textbooks and proclaimed by businessmen and politicians, the most efficient way of allocating resources. The magic of the market is a myth. The madness of the market is nearer the truth.

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Banks, who needs them?

If there was production directly for use we wouldn't need banks

Are the banks and greedy and incompetent bankers to blame for the current economic crisis? That's what a lot of people think and what the media seems to want us to think. Certainly, bank directors generally are greedy – awarding themselves huge “salaries”, bonuses and pensions – and some of them are incompetent on their own terms. But blaming them is to let the real culprit off the hook: the capitalist system of production for profit.

Capitalism inevitably brings about from time to time a fall in production (despite plenty of unmet needs). Banks and bankers are no different from other capitalist enterprises and their directors. When there are profits to be made they go for them and the devil take the hindmost. In the real economy this results in overproduction relative to market demand; in the financial sector it results in the overexpansion of credit, fuelling speculative bubbles.

Both of which inevitably eventually end in tears. Overproduction leads to cut-

backs in production, factory closures and redundancies; overexpansion of credit leads to not all loans being repaid and to bank losses and credit crunches. In fact, normally it is overproduction that brings about the contraction of credit and the pricking of speculative bubbles. Which is where we are now.

If the capitalist system of production for profit is to blame, the only way to avoid periodically-occurring crises is to get rid of it and replace it with a new and different system. But what? Socialists advocate that production be carried on purely and simply to meet people's needs. Production for use instead of production for profit, or rather, production *solely* for use since even under capitalism what is produced has to be useful (or at least seem to be useful), otherwise it wouldn't sell and there'd be no profit to be made out of arranging for it to be produced.

But before there can be production solely for use, we – society – will have to be in a position to control production, to decide what (and how and where) things are produced, and we can only do this if the places where things are produced and the materials to produce them are no longer the exclusive property of rich individuals, corporations and sovereign states. They must have become instead the common property of the whole of society. Which is not the same as state ownership, or nationalisation, as states never represent the interests of the whole of society but only of

a privileged minority within it.

Common ownership is in fact the same as no ownership. It means that nobody or no group can exercise ownership rights over any productive resource. These will simply be there, to be used to produce what people need. But how? It will simply be a question of finding some way of deciding what people want and then of arranging for this to be produced. “Simple” not because it really will be that simple, but simple compared with what has to happen today under capitalism where money – and the drive to make more money – complicates things.

The aim of production under capitalism is for those who own and control workplaces to make a monetary profit, to end up with more money than they started off with. This involves selling what has been produced and at a higher price than was paid for the resources, including the working skills of the actual producers, used in producing it. Everything has a monetary value. To calculate profits, the cost of everything bought and the income from everything sold has to be recorded. In other words, a whole superstructure of monetary accounting is imposed on the actual process of production. Banks come into it as gatherers of funds to lend to other capitalist enterprises.

Of course, with production solely for use, a record in physical quantities of the resources used in producing something will have to be kept too. But under capitalism this is duplicated by parallel

“Banks and bankers are no different from other capitalist enterprises and their directors. When there are profits to be made they go for them and the devil take the hindmost”

records of the monetary value of these quantities. In socialism, with production solely for use, this second recording will disappear, so simplifying the organisation of the production of wealth. After all, all that is needed to produce wealth are materials that originally came from nature and humans with the skills to fashion these into useful things.

Production for use

Even without money and monetary calculation it will still be necessary to co-ordinate the relations between the different workplaces. One suggestion that has been put forward by socialists is what has been called “self-regulating production for use” which, for goods and services for individual consumption, would operate on the same basis as the market is supposed to operate today.

According to economics textbooks, production today is initiated in response to how “consumers” choose to spend their money. They “vote” for what they want to be produced by what they spend their money on. Those who own and control workplaces producing particular types of consumer goods and services respond by organising the production of what people have chosen to buy. If people choose to buy more, they get their workers to produce more; if people choose to buy less, they get their workers to produce less. These workplaces producing consumer goods order the materials to produce them from other workplaces and they from their suppliers and so the initial paying demand works its way through the whole network of workplaces, through those producing machinery to mines and farms producing the original materials from nature.

Of course this ignores the fact that the money most consumers have to spend is limited by the size of their wage or salary, the total amount of which depends on how much labour those who own and control workplaces want to employ. Which depends on how much profit they think they can make by selling their product. In other words, it is the prospects for profit-making, not consumer demand, that initiates production and determines what

is produced; the level of consumer demand, and its ups and downs, is a consequence of this. But, leaving this aside, it is true that under capitalism signals as to what to produce are conveyed via the market.

With socialism, and production solely for use, the consumer really will be the start of the process leading to the production of things and services for individual consumption, only the message



Why we don't need bankers: Fred Goodwin

will be conveyed not by what they can afford to pay for but what they actually take to satisfy their needs. We can imagine that they go into a super-store as today and take off the shelves what they need. What is taken off over a given period will be recorded and transmitted to suppliers. If stocks are down, this will be a signal to produce more; if they are slow to move that would be a signal to produce less – and so on throughout the whole productive network. It will be more or less self-regulating like today except that the messages will be conveyed as required amounts only and not this and their monetary value.

This is only one suggestion as to how the production and distribution of wealth, or at least of consumer goods and services, could be organised without money. Other more directly planned arrangements would have to be made for expanding productive capacity and

infrastructure projects as well as for introducing new products.

But whatever the arrangements, with production solely for use, money will have no place. So neither will the complications that it brings to the organisation of the production of wealth. Money may make the world go round under capitalism but it also, from time to time, stops the world going round, creating unused resources alongside increased unmet needs.

With production solely for use, overproduction could still occur but only by accident (and it would be overproduction in relation to real needs, not in relation to paying demand as today) but this would not have the consequences it does today. It would not clog up production and lead to its interruption. Production in other sectors would continue as before. So would consumption since what people can consume would not be tied to working for a monetary income as today. Everybody would be able to satisfy their needs, irrespective of whether or not they were currently working, without being restricted by the amount of money they have.

No money means of course no banks either. Saving, borrowing and lending will have no more sense in a production-for-use society than buying and selling. So, what we say about the banks is not regulate them, nor nationalise them, but make them redundant. Abolish them, along with all the rest of the complicated, financial superstructure of the capitalist production-for-profit economy.

ADAM BUICK

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What is to be done?



As capitalism loses some of its legitimacy, what should those who want to get rid of capitalism be doing?

After the battle of El Alamein, Churchill famously said “This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning”.

In some ways, the socialist position on the latest slump should be similar (minus, of course, the celebration of mass slaughter). Capitalism has lost its veneer of invincibility, which is much of its strength. Pundits who a couple of years ago would have referred to “the economic system” – as if there was no other – have started to refer to capitalism. And as the possibility of pensions fades out of view, job security becomes a memory (to those who ever had it), people lose their houses, their savings, we can expect a similar reaction amongst those members of our class who had previously had no cause to question their life’s trajectory within capitalism.

It is therefore imperative to use this opportunity, as capitalism’s feet of clay are broken, to build afresh rather than patch up the past. And we are building from a weak base. Across the entire spectrum of political opinion membership numbers in parties are down – the working class has been demobilised politically, and often

only ageing cadres remain, preserving political traditions rather than engaging in productive activity, recruitment and debate.

The battle of ideas

The first, most important battle is to continue the destruction of capitalism’s legitimacy in the minds of our fellow class members. That is, to drive the development of our class as a class-for-itself, mindful of the fact that capitalism is a thing that can be destroyed and a thing that *should* be destroyed. As it rapidly crumbles from a high peak to a lower base, most workers “shouldn’t need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows”, as the song has it.

The second is to develop an effective medium of engagement between workers and politics. A great deal of energy has been expended on this topic in the past, mainly because all political parties which lose membership will, understandably, see this as an institutional failing. This is frankly hubris. For an organisation to think that it is *capable* of single-handedly failing the working class is to reject the materialist approach, that our ideas come from our life

circumstances and not from an all-knowing vanguard. This medium of engagement has to take account of society's development; open-air meetings at Hyde Park, for example, may be superseded by Second Life. The only way to establish this is to explore all avenues and reinforce those that work, while remaining confident in the class's revolutionary potential.

The third is to ensure that the right ideas for the working class win out, and constitute the basis for the overall class struggle. Historically this battle of ideas has been waged both in the mind – in debates, lectures and social events – and on the streets. We of course favour the first approach, and do all we can to keep activity there. This is not just a matter of aesthetics. All of capitalism's power, including its coercive power, is in the hands of the working class; fighting can only firstly divide us and secondly weaken us.

Capitalism digs its own grave

While socialists have few resources, capitalism's own failings have far more reach and power to convince our class of the folly of capitalism than we possess – the largest organisations claiming to be revolutionary may just about win a couple of column inches with a large demonstration, as opposed to daily front page news of corruption, failure and despair from the mainstream press. Capitalism will provide its own gravediggers. Existing organisations can at best address points two and three above – re-establish a mass political culture amongst our class, whilst engaging in debate between the various political traditions and throwing the matter open to our class, that the best ideas win in terms of membership.

This also determines the level of cooperation between these traditions. All, presumably, want a climate in which working class ideas can flourish. Though some may be powerful enough to have their own mass papers, in practice preaching is only to the converted.

Authoritarian parties are hostile at the second level: rather than defending their own ideas, they create their own political ghettos, such as the old Communist parties which denigrated and suppressed their opposition so as not to compete (and fail) at the level of demonstrating the relative values of their ideas. This is where streetfighting plays its role: physically removing opposition that one cannot overcome in a battle of hearts and minds, whilst destroying the climate in which the working class can find its way. The revolution is aborted in the process, not defended. This is another reason why a socialist revolution must be peaceful, at least as far as our class is concerned.

By contrast, a genuine revolutionary party in capitalism is, by definition, a party of the working class. A depoliticised working class *cannot* make a socialist revolution. It must be a party that operates at the level of discussion between workers, not so as to fetishise a particular political form but because a successful socialist revolution is made by the working class coming to revolutionary ideas.

Let's have a party

This brings us to defending our own political tradition. We are a party of the third part, so to speak: we focus on debate between traditions, engaging workers in the process, whilst maintaining the medium (finding out how people engage in politics, making the process a positive one). Even if we had the power to affect the news, we would have no need to engage in 'propaganda' in its pejorative sense; the simple facts damn capitalism amply enough, and it is enough to shout these facts from

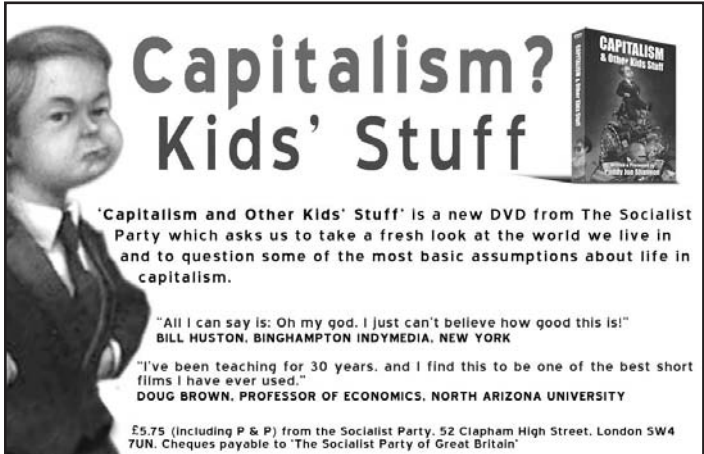
the rooftops along with our call to action.

We focus our differences at the level of ideas. Front organisations are only organisations that suppress debate and engage in conflict at a lower level. Classic cases are the recent Socialist Alliance, and Respect, coalitions which have been the means for various Left traditions to draw working class support together, all to then vie with each other to recruit for members within this pool. Only in such an environment could one use the word 'comrade' to refer to an organisational enemy. The *Weekly Worker* often carries records of physical ejections from meetings, even beatings, amongst these supposed comrades. The working class is profoundly deterred by these antics; perhaps more importantly, the idea that workers can never attain more than "trade union consciousness" is made self-fulfilling by denying debate.

The coming months and years will see many organisations, calling themselves working class, trying to establish or re-establish themselves. Calls will be made to support this or that country, this or that leader, this or that party. There is a simple way to negotiate this maze: those that do all they can to make space for the working class themselves to become revolutionary, are revolutionary: all others are impostors. The object must be nothing short of a society that has the liberation of our class from capitalism as its precondition: the abolition of wage slavery. We have the power to do this if we are confident and not distracted. We as a class must be trusted with our own decisions, and credited with the ability to know our own interests. And there should be no preaching of violence within the class; we fail when our energies turn against each other. In effect, this means that the revolution should be as peaceful as possible; all those who now bear arms are workers like ourselves, and history has shown how unwilling workers can be to fire on each other unless backed into a corner. But we should be hostile to all those who try to sow defeatism amongst our class, doubt our revolutionary ability or ability to organise ourselves, who attempt to turn our energies to their own ends.

We have, of course, more to say than this. Lessons from history that have been learned, the writings of past revolutionaries, and more. But these things are a touchstone to avoid the errors of the past: the revolution should be for the class and by the class, together as comrades. We may not, this time, end capitalism. But we can sense the beginning of the end; and get going a political party with socialism as its objective, not small reforms but the overthrow of capitalism – that is the end of the beginning.

SJW



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Northern Ireland: a return to violence?

Violence will not make people into socialists

Two British soldiers shot dead at Masserene Barracks in Northern Ireland, and a policeman shot dead in Craigavon, by dissident Republicans who want to re-draw the present political frontiers. Instead of dividing the six counties from the rest of Ireland, the frontier (they demand) should be moved and instead divide Ireland from the somewhat larger island to the east, containing the capitalist entity known as Great Britain. But socialists do not want to re-draw any frontiers: they want to abolish frontiers. Frontiers are entirely artificial boundaries, whether by land or sea. All a frontier does is to mark out one bit of the Earth's surface where one ruling class has power from the next bit of the Earth's surface where another ruling class has power. Since socialism would put an end to the ruling class of every state, frontiers would cease to have any meaning, and would therefore cease to exist.

No violence, no death or injury, will bring socialism any closer. Socialism will be brought about when the great majority of the world's people want it to be brought about. We want to change people's ideas. Violence will not make people into Socialists.

Banging a cudgel down on someone's head is not going to alter the

ideas inside that head, at least in any worthwhile way. Rational discussion will finally make Socialists. We believe that by considered argument we can show how co-operation and mutual assistance will achieve what we all want to achieve – a peaceful, harmonious, and contented existence. Violence we leave to others.

People who support a capitalist state, people who support a capitalist party, are led remorselessly into supporting violence. But it is interesting how often politicians

“People who support a capitalist state, people who support a capitalist party, are led remorselessly into supporting violence”

and journalists who steadfastly support violence when it comes from what they think is “their own” side, nevertheless quickly explode with anger when it comes from someone else. One columnist on the *Times*, David Aaronovitch, champions Israel against the Palestinians; he therefore has had to write torrents of words trying to show that the deaths of well over a thousand men women and children in Gaza, killed by Israeli bullets and bombs, are excusable, because it is only in retaliation for the Israeli civilians killed the rockets fired by Palestinian militias. He also supported the invasion of Iraq by the Americans and the

British. So he has had to write more floods of words defending the deaths of some hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, as well as many British and American soldiers, because all that was merely a by-product of getting rid of Saddam Hussein, a brutal dictator who was hostile to the Americans. (Let's not mention all those brutal dictators friendly to the Americans, who the Americans have propped up.) It's hard to say how many Iraqis have died, of course. As the American general who led the attack on Iraq said about Iraqi casualties, “We don't do body counts” (though American casualties were reported with great care). But the lowest figure that the most dedicated warmonger has come up with is 100,000. Other people have said the number of violent deaths since the invasion is 600,000 – some contend that the true figure is a million. And that is not counting all the other hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians who have been injured, but have survived, all the maimed and the handicapped, all those who will never walk again, all those who will never see again. The boy whose whole family was killed, and both of whose arms were blown off by a bomb, was still alive, so did not himself add to the total of deaths. Never mind! If you support one capitalist state against the other capitalist states, supporting violence is what you have to do: and that is what this columnist has had to do.

After writing reams of comment justifying the deaths, the injuries, and the destruction in Gaza and in Iraq, and no doubt having felt very uncomfortable having been forced, by his political beliefs, to do it, he has leapt with avidity on the deaths of the two British soldiers in Northern Ireland. (He wrote his column before the death of the Craigavon policeman.) Now, at last, he obviously feels, he can be on the side of the angels (*Times*, 10 March).

The Belfast 'Peace Line'. Socialists don't want to re-draw frontiers: they want to abolish them.

The two deaths are “terrorism”, and a return to “the ‘armed struggle’” which is only “a euphemism for strolling up behind someone and blasting their brains out all over their children”. He poured scorn on the idea that any “grievance” that “springs from real social and political conditions” can ever justify such “an act of terror”. The suggestion that the shooting might be revenge for the recent re-introduction into Northern Ireland of “army intelligence” operators, or perhaps “spies” as some might call them, led to an eruption of anger on the columnist’s part. “Rubbish. Really, absolute rubbish.” This action merely shows that “violent republicanism is back in a new, potent, death-dealing guise”, a “return to killing in Ulster”. This is merely “the first atrocity in a desired new cycle of attacks, arrests, martyrdoms . . . and crying children”. Those supporting the killing are merely “unattractive men with bald heads and pallid skin”, who “imagine themselves to be Wolfe Tone or James Connolly reborn”, or else “middle-aged matrons, brought up in the purple of Republicanism, but now with roots showing through the dye”. Any supposed “grievance comes second. The desire to hate and kill comes first, and then grubs around in the shit for its excuse.” Strange to think that in 1798 Wolfe Tone, and in 1916 James Connolly, would have been the target for similar attacks by writers in the respectable newspapers, though perhaps this writer has broken new ground with his scatological language, and his fevered imaginings about the supposed physical unattractiveness of his opponents.

The shootings at Masserene Barracks and at Craigavon were indefensible, the deaths were indefensible, the motive (the redrawing of capitalism’s frontiers) was indefensible. But how a man can write many pages justifying the deaths of half a million or more, and then work himself up into a rage of furious indignation over the deaths of two, defies any rational explanation. People who oppose all violence, all killing, are at least being consistent: but people who support capitalism, who support this or that capitalist state, will find that they are defending violence, and defending killing, whether they want to or not. So they cannot help sounding hypocritical when they then jump over the fence and try to denounce violence.

ALWYN EDGAR

Socialist Standard April 2009

Capitalism’s reserve army of labour

Full employment is not the normal state of capitalism

When Ramsay MacDonald’s second Labour government came to power in 1929, unemployment had been at a steady 10 percent of the working population for several years, around 1 million. Within a year, the effect of the Great Depression was to send unemployment rocketing to 2.5 million, causing the collapse of that second Labour attempt to reform capitalism.

MacDonald held steadfastly to classical economic views. He frowned on the dole as a cause of indolence and unemployment, and believed that equilibrium in the jobs market could be found. That is, full employment will come if barriers to wages finding their “natural” level are removed. He was, thus, content to agree to the May Report which included cutting the dole to those two and a half million, in order to balance the government’s budget. That was the move that caused his government to collapse, and for MacDonald to go down in Labour Party history as the great traitor, as he jumped ship to form the National Government.

Manifestly, this did not work, and unemployment remained steadfastly high. Dole or low dole, workers were simply unable to find jobs because the capitalists of the time held steadfastly to their principle of “no profit, no employment”. Their mistake had been to cling to

the myth, exploded by Karl Marx more than 60 years before, that full employment is the normal state of capitalism, and unemployment the exception.

Entirely to the contrary, Marx demonstrated that not only was a pool of unemployed workers the norm under capitalism, it was in fact intrinsic and essential to the workings of the wages system for there to be such a pool. He referred to it as the “industrial reserve army”. For Marx, the relative size of this reserve had a direct effect on the level of wages – as it increased, wages shrank, and vice versa. The upward limit of wages was the point at which they began to unduly impact on profitability. High wages would lead employers to either discover labour-saving processes, or simply lay off staff and cut back operations.

This indicates how the industrial reserve army works both ways. Economic historians attribute the rise of the United States as an economic and industrial power house to the relative scarcity of skilled labour in the nineteenth century (exacerbated by the fact that workers could strike out to find frontier land, rather than accept unemployment). This compelled American capitalists to improve the intensive exploitation of their capital in order to be able to effectively use the labour resources to hand. That is, that capital has an



Unemployed workers queue for work, New York City, 1933.

incentive in not letting the reserve army get too large.

Another feature of Marx' theory was that the unemployment is not a function of population. That is, it is not simply growth in the number of mouths to feed that causes unemployment, but that it is a wholly determined variable based on the state of the investment of capital. As more capital is brought into play, so too is more labour. Unemployment is a relative phenomena based simply on the ratio of employees to those seeking work. This can clearly be seen in UK statistics. In 1900 the population was around 38 million, and unemployment stood at around 5 percent, at the end of the Twentieth Century the population was close to 60 million, and unemployment was still only around 5 percent, its changes do not track population growth..

People can be taken out of this reserve army. For example, in the 1960's Harold Wilson's Labour government had to seriously debate whether the country could afford to raise the school leaving age to 16, drawing all those young workers out of the labour force at a time of nearly full employment. Nowadays, under the current Labour administration, they have a policy of keeping at least half of school leavers in full time education until they are 21. Many commentators have noted that incapacity benefit has become prevalent in areas of large stagnant unemployment over the years. That, and the dole, allow some sections of the workforce to become economically inactive, and thus no longer contributing to the labour pool and the reserve army.

Interestingly, the latest figures from the Office for National Statistics in the UK suggests that as times become more straightened, these economically inactive people are entering the labour market. At the same time, underemployment has grown. People are working fewer hours (and thus making less money) in order to retain some sort of employment. Although they are not unemployed, they are part of the reserve army, in as much as many of them would, if they could, convert to full time work if it was available.

The latest figures, for January, show that unemployment in Britain has now passed the 2 million mark. Although in absolute terms those numbers are similar to the level of unemployment that destroyed MacDonald, because the total and working populations have increased it is not yet as drastic. Those figures, though, only represent a return to the levels of the late 1990's. Indeed, in the Thatcher years, figures of nearly three and a half million were seen (and that resulted in collective bargaining by riot in some particularly hard hit areas). It should also be noted, though, that national figures vary regionally, and poor areas, like inner city London, the North East and Glasgow, say, already had higher than national average unemployment, and are likely to be more swiftly affected by the current rises than elsewhere.

One new aspect of the current round of unemployment is the role of EU migrant labour. As a highly mobile workforce with little by way of invested roots, it may well soak up some of the costs while leaving the resident workforce of the UK less hard hit, although the figures above seem to indicate, so far, otherwise. Indeed, British citizens are emigrating less, and this off-sets any trend. In the days of the Empire, one way of regulating the reserve army of labour was emigration, and it seems the EU fulfils a similar role today. That said, unemployment is uneven across the EU, and is itself growing.

PIK SMEET



Capitalism is working

The *Times* (9 March) carried an article by Eamonn Butler, the director of the Adam Smith Institute. Yes, they are still around, even if it might be thought that they would be keeping a low profile these days, given that the pursuit of profit has yet again led to overproduction and a financial and economic crisis, a really big one this time.

Butler began by quoting a speech by an American professor called Boettke at a recent gathering of Mad Marketeers in New York:

"If you bound the arms and legs of gold-medal swimmer Michael Phelps, weighed him down with chains, threw him in a pool and he sank, you wouldn't call it a 'failure of swimming'. So, when markets have been weighted down by inept and excessive regulation, why call this a 'failure of capitalism'?"

That depends on what you mean by capitalism. Boettke seems to mean the spontaneous operation of production for profit and the market. But that's not really capitalism; it's just a policy that some capitalists (and their paid and unpaid publicists) have favoured at some times.

Capitalism is a system of production for sale on a market with a view to profit. Ideologists such as Butler and Boettke are assuming that there is some irreconcilable conflict between the profit system and government intervention. But there isn't. Capitalism has never existed without government intervention and never will. For a start, it is based on the exclusion of the majority from the ownership and control of the means of production, which are monopolised by a profit-seeking minority. A state is needed to maintain this exclusion. This has to be paid for, so taxes have to be levied. Capitalists in one country are in competition with capitalists from other countries, and governments have always intervened to help "their" capitalists with tariffs and subsidies and, if need be, by military action.

So, capitalism and the state are not incompatibles. They go together. What is true is that the consensus of capitalist opinion varies at times as to the desirable degree of government intervention. What seems to be annoying the Adam Smith Institute today is that their ideological rivals, the Keynesians, who have no qualms about government intervention in the capitalist economy, are making a come-back because of the present crisis.

"Up to now", Butler wrote, "the Keynesians have made the running. Greed, they say, has brought down the world economy. Only massive public spending can revive it". If by "greed" Butler means the pursuit of profits, the Keynesians are not against that, even if they certainly are in favour of trying to spend the way of the crisis. But that's just an alternative policy for the profit system to the one favoured by the Adam Smith Institute. It's not a negation of capitalism.

Butler proffers his own explanation for the crisis: "excessive regulation" (of course). This assumes that, without this, the crisis would not have occurred. He rather undermines this approach by concluding his article by saying that "occasional crises are the cost of the prosperity that entrepreneurial capitalism brings".

So, crises are going to occur anyway, even in his ideal, unregulated capitalist world! And what, without excessive regulation to blame, would they be caused by if not by the pursuit of profits leading to overproduction in some sector in relation to the market, from which the only way out is a crisis to eliminate the lame ducks and the deadwood, as capitalists like to refer to their inefficient colleagues? In this sense, Boettke is right. This and other crises don't represent the "failure of capitalism", but capitalism working normally.



Food: commodity or need?

Enough calories are already produced in the world today to avoid anyone having to starve. It's just that millions can't afford to buy the food containing them.

Air, water, food; the three essential requirements of life. Humans can survive for barely 2-3 minutes without air, several days without water and at most a few weeks without food. In our earliest days all were born with totally free access to these most basic necessities of life – access as required. Now we still have free air, if of questionable quality, although it is possible to buy a refreshing booster session of pure, clean oxygen in such cities as Tokyo. Water is still freely available to some – an ever-shrinking number – although many of these have to manage with a contaminated or disease-ridden supply, daily risking serious illness or even death. It has become a commodity denied to many, a basic requirement of life withheld, leading to aggressive acts in local, national and international arenas. Food, like water, finds those at the end of the supply chain, those who *need* the commodity rather than those who desire the profit, are the least likely to be consulted regarding the supply.

According to T. Lang in *The Ecologist* (March 2008) food is a \$6.4 trillion-a-year economy, selling a necessity of life, which impoverishes more people than any other sector. There has to be a moral conundrum here if some of us are reduced to a daily recurring position of no money, no meal. .

The discussion as to whether the world does or can produce enough food for the current population is generally heard through the loudspeaker of the economic/political sector which suggests that overpopulation is the problem. However, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation's figures for 2006 there are enough calories for everyone even in most of the poorer countries, pointing to the fact that hunger is simply a problem of the barriers to distribution.

For example, in India between 2001-3 where

20 percent of the population (212 million) were undernourished there were 2440 available calories per person per day.

Another example is that in Ethiopia in 2001-3 with 46 percent of the population (31.5 million) undernourished there were 1860 available calories per person per day.

So, if enough food to feed domestic populations is available, why do so many have to go without and where does the surplus go? Lack of money is the answer to the first part and export to the second. Remember the Irish 'potato' famine when thousands upon thousands died of starvation as a result of potato blight decimating the crops of the indigenous population? Food was not scarce, there was plenty of production of food for export and for the wealthy but beyond the means of the local poor whose staple diet was potatoes. What's different but the century, the geographical location and the sheer scale of the iniquity of the market? The "market" – as if this were a lifeless entity with no human input. The market – in control or out of control, controlling or controlled – can have no moral or ethical standards for these are human qualities to be included or discounted at the decision-making, policy-making processes.

The export of food from the South on a grand scale is part of what leaves millions undernourished but export is a two-way process. The North also exports food to the South, highly subsidised food which makes it untenable for farmers in the importing country to compete, forcing them to switch to crops for export or go out of business. Thus the cycle continues. More impoverishment. More hunger. A glance at the 2008 subsidy figures of the US reveals \$50+ billion given in particular to export crops. In diminishing order, corn, wheat, cotton, soybeans, rice, sorghum, barley, peanuts. Absent from the subsidy list are fruit and vegetables and crops grown for local US markets.

One of the legacies of the colonisation of the South by the North has been the imposition of methods of farming along with the types of crops to be grown. Huge areas of previously diverse multi-crop forests were reduced to plantations growing single crops specifically for export – bananas, sugar cane, pineapples – decimating the land through soil erosion from this unsuitable method

of farming and taking away the land and livelihood of local peasants. The heavy-handed, arrogant approach of incomers showing no regard for centuries old successful sustainable methods of farming.

Reinforcing food's place as a commodity rather than a right to a need is the way decisions are made by transnational corporations with respect to environmental consequences. The North's subsidised food puts populations in poor countries off their lands and into urban environments where they then work in manufacturing; manufacturing that has been exported there for their cheap labour. A World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987 reported that transferring manufacturing to the South was the same as exporting pollution. Lawrence Summers, when at the World Bank (he's now Obama's chief economic adviser), put his name to a document which only half-jokingly suggested that exporting pollution to the poorer countries was a good idea financially on another count – people in those countries died younger anyway from other diseases and we would be saving on our own pollution clean-ups and health-care bills by so doing. Had Southern pollution control met minimal Northern standards the annual bill would have been \$14.2 billion more. In other words, make it impossible for peasant farmers to compete with your highly subsidised food crops, watch them migrate to cities where they can no longer even grow food for themselves and employ them cheaply in polluting manufacturing jobs producing goods for export back to you.

“You are what you eat” or “Food is Life” may be seen as mantras of diet-obsessed wacky people but on a science-based, physiological level they happen to be true. To be effectively nourished and maintain decent health requires an adequate supply in reasonable balance of

carbohydrates, protein, fat, vitamins, minerals and fibre. Fresh, whole foods, uncontaminated by polluted air and water or dozens of chemical sprays and manufactured additives. More and more studies contradict the conventional view of the industrial agricultural complex, generally upheld by politicians, which pushes farming on a huge scale and uses manufactured fertilisers, pesticides, herbicides, hormones and genetically modified seed, promoting the idea that bigger is better. It may yield more profit but that is about all. Outside the industrial agricultural complex it is recognised that organic methods are more favourable to producers, soil, sustainability of the environment and to the consumers. A 2007 report from the University of Michigan said that an organic world could yield over 2,641 calories per person per day and that small farms are the most productive. This could be interpreted that food viewed as a need rather than a commodity is a viable prospect and enough could be available for all when the requirement for profit is removed. Unfortunately, as yet, this is a disparate group of movements and pressure groups worldwide which has far from the political clout of the entrenched industrial agricultural complex and transnational corporations' lobby which leaves us with the obvious conclusion that the *only* solution is the urgent dismantling of the system of commodities in favour of one of free access for all.

(References from Wayne Roberts' “The No-Nonsense Guide to World Food” – one of a series from *New Internationalist*).

JANET SURMAN

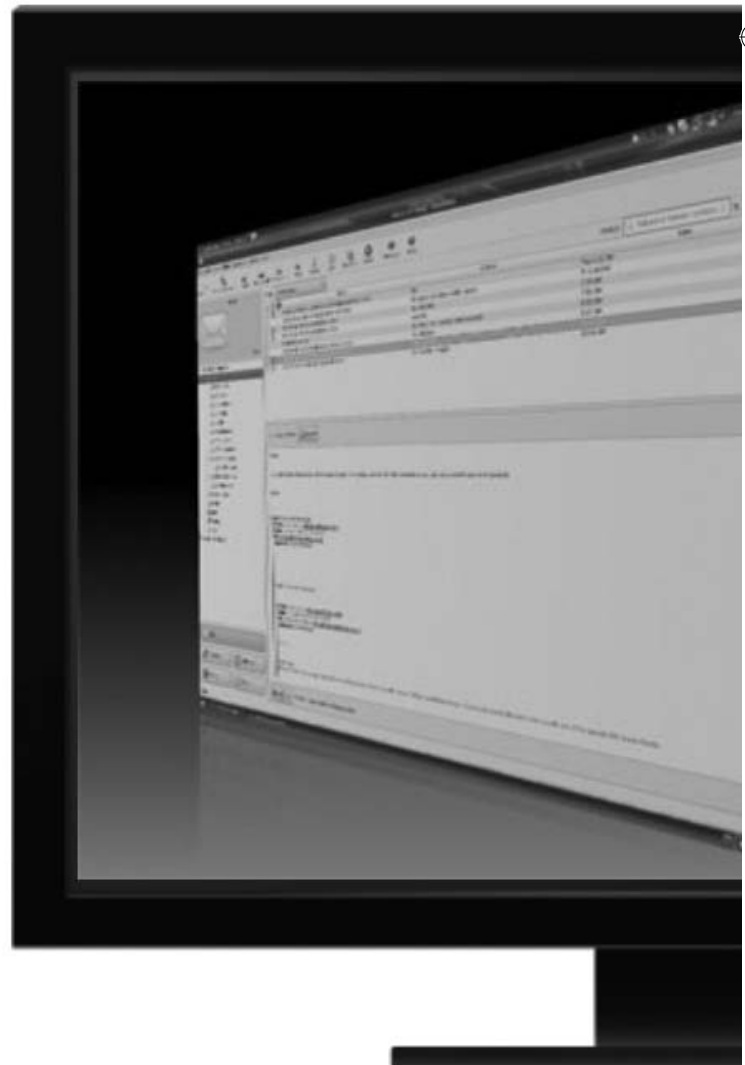
Socialism: an open source society

A socialist describes his personal experience of open source software - and its socialist implications.

A little over a year ago I started to use something in my daily life “that'll never work” because “it's human nature, mate”; “No such thing as something for nothing, a free lunch”; “People don't work for pleasure, you know, they only work because they have to or to make money”. Yet here I am, totally chuffed with this thing that is so opposed to much of the preconceived notion of “Human Nature” and the ways of this wicked world that it can't possibly exist let alone bring some pretty unbridled pleasure to this 65 year-old anorak.

Any idea what I'm talking about?

Here're some more clues. Thousands of people enthusiastically cooperate on thousands of collaborative, inter-related projects that bring new “products to market” whilst constantly upgrading and improving existing core “products”. Many of those people work for little or no financial gain, indeed,



some have worked to the deficit of their own financial situations. They don't just collaborate in "the office", they collaborate across the borders of nation states, religious divides and the apartheid walls of economics and race; Russian with Chechen, Iranian with American, Palestinian with Israeli . . . they do it without seeking permission from priest or politician. They do it to fulfill a passion for the skill and knowledge they bring to the work they do and a shared ideal of bringing the very best in computer operating systems and software to the ordinary people of this world . . . free!

I'm talking about Linux based Open Source and Ubuntu in particular. Ubuntu is an ancient African word that means "humanity to others".

Based on personal experience, there isn't a better or more "socialist" way to do your computing. You can download the whole caboodle if you have the wherewithal free of charge or do as I did and order an installation disc which is also free. And free really means free, Ubuntu is shipped to anywhere in the world post free . . . you're free, and even encouraged, to make copies and give them away . . . as long as they're free!

Installation is seamless and painless; upgrading is seamless and painless. All of the basic programs you could need and a few more beside are pre-installed, all are Open Source and free (of course) and because they are created by enthusiasts they are fully featured, look attractive and work.

So, now you're up and running and you want a few extra trinkets to handle all those quirky things many of us like to do with our computers. Things like doctoring perfectly normal snapshots so that they look like something from the crazed world of Dali or personalising our "desktops" (something I'm convinced goes back to school desks, penknives and being summoned

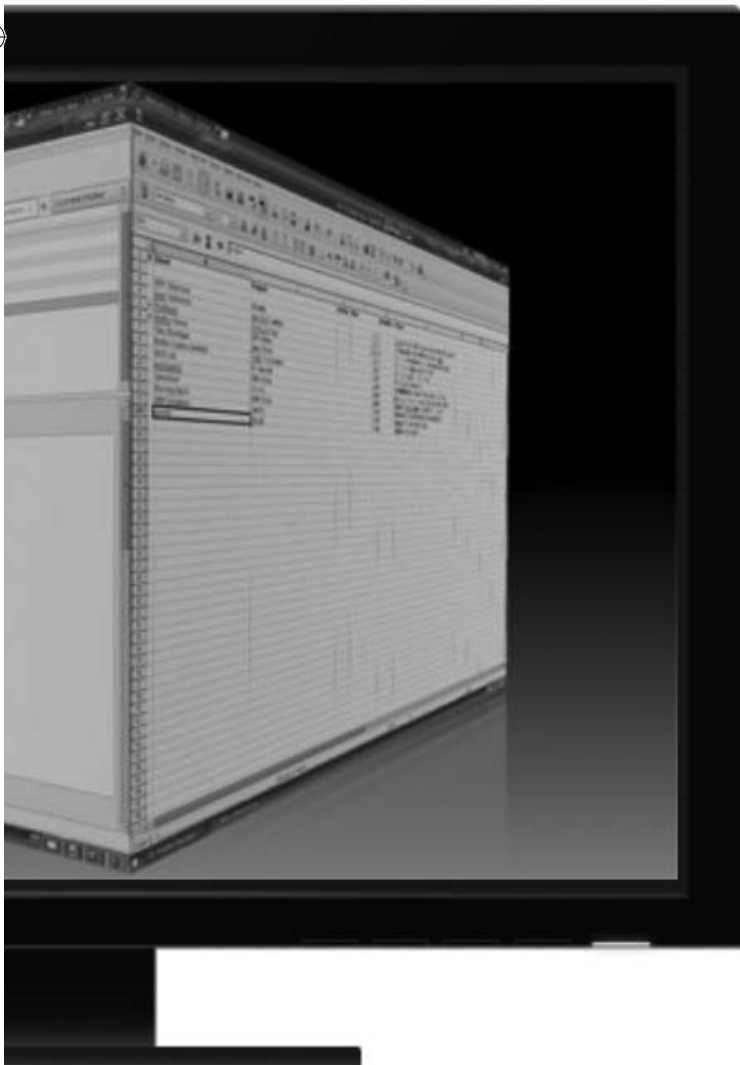
forward for institutionalised ritual humiliation). With Ubuntu there's no digging out those CDs you've saved for years from computer mags to see if there are any freebies that'll maybe come close to meeting your particular fantasies . . . you just click on "Add/Remove Programs" and browse through what seems like thousands of programs in various categories. Each has been created by an individual or team that loves computing and has poured their passion into making each offering the best it can be. Better still, from the average user's perspective, everything is, yes, you guessed it, free.

I suppose I'm a bit like a new convert or a former smoker, on the one hand full of enthusiasm for the new "reality" and on the other filled with scorn for what had gone before. The enthusiasm is not without foundation; Ubuntu claims to "work out of the box" and it does just that – perfectly. There are no annoying screens telling you that you *have* to register this or that, no registration keys to be pasted in, no time limitations before you have to pay up and no intrusive demands for personal information or email addresses so you can be deluged with stuff you don't need or want. Under Ubuntu my computer "talks" to all of my cameras and cards without recourse to specialised programs, something it never did under Windows and my "Photo Shop" type program is as beautiful on the eye and as functional as the one that ships with Mac. Programs install and uninstall without leaving behind digital detritus to slow or crash the system and such is the make up of Ubuntu that it is simply not open to outside attacks by virus, root-kit and much else in the way that Windows is. It's like taking a cool shower on a hot day . . . so refreshing! How can something so good be free? I mean, it's not the way of the world, is it? It's not human nature to do something for nothing, is it? Without "market forces" quality goes down the drain and mediocrity becomes the norm, doesn't it?

Look at Microsoft; based on size of usage they must be the world's standard. I've used their products for years in many different incarnations. They've built their fortune off my back . . . have you checked lately what one of their products costs? And not just them. I've lost count of the number of programs I've paid for to try and improve or protect their bloated, worm-holed operating system from all the nasties out there in cyber-space only to dump them a few months or years down the road. Or worse still have them destroy my set-up and data that I should have backed-up but had put off yet again! Been there? Hey! That's the way it is in this techno-corner of the capitalist world, let the buyer beware; you pays your money and takes your choice. Not any more, comrades. There really is a better way out there and it's called Open Source, it has superior "products" and an ethos that we can each embrace. Computing for human beings.

Is this beginning to sound like a promo for a socialist computing Utopia? Or is it a preview of how the world really ought to be? Much of Open Source is at the real cutting edge of technical development; a huge percentage of the servers around the world, machines that run those multi-national companies and the Internet run on Linux based software. They pay a lot of money for that privilege, money that keeps Open Source afloat and enables we plebs and peons to receive our free CDs mailed free of charge, to freely download free applications and freely make use of this wonderful working example of human co-operation. In fact, every individual user of Ubuntu is encouraged to join the community and contribute in any way they can, from translations to critique to ideas to programming skills; use what you need and contribute what you can . . . where have we heard that before? Next time someone throws "human nature" in your face or tells you that socialism will never work offer up Open Source as proof that human beings are better co-operators and contributors than many give them credit for.

ALAN FENN



Socialist Party Merchandise

Teeshirts:

Blue with polar bear and 'If you were a polar bear, you'd be a socialist' plus party website address.

Yellow, with blue and green globe 'The world is a treasury for all' plus party web site address on.

Sizes: S, M, L, XL, XXL.

Mugs:

One style: 'Duet' - Red and white

with 'Only sheep need leaders' (pictured) and

website, with "Famine? War? Pollution? Capitalism is the Problem. World Socialism s the Solution" and party telephone number.



Pens:

Blue and white, with blue ink 'Only sheep need leaders' and a sheep plus party website. Red and white, with blue ink 'Workers of the world unite' plus party website Black with black ink. 'Only sheep need leaders!' and a sheep plus party website.

Baseball caps:

navy blue, with embroidered "World Socialist Movement" on.

Balloons:

different colours, with "World Socialist Movement".

Prices:

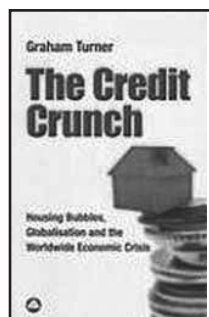
Tee shirts £7.00 each (**state size when ordering**). Mugs £5.00 each. Pens £0.50 each. Baseball caps £5.00 each. Balloons 15p each.

Postage and packaging

£2.50 for the first £10 and then £1.50 for subsequent £10 worths or part thereof. Please send cheque or postal order (no cash) made payable to SPGB SW Regional Branch, c/o Veronica Clanchy, FAO: South West Regional Branch, 42 Winifred Road, Poole, Dorset. BH15 3PU. Any queries, please phone 01202 569826. Please include own phone number or other contact details.

A deficit of logic

The Credit Crunch. Graham Turner. 2008. Pluto Press.



Graham Turner has made a number of appearances on BBC2's *Newsnight* in recent weeks, helping Paul Mason deconstruct the credit crisis and slump.

Turner is a Keynesian of sorts and a fan of 'quantitative easing' i.e. of central banks flooding the financial markets with liquidity in the hope that this will get banks lending again, literally giving people more money to spend. As history demonstrates though – and Marxian economics explains – the practical effect of this is further doses of currency inflation as it is likely to accelerate the continuing overissue of inconvertible paper currency that has been going on since the Second World War.

This book is currently one of the most widely available explanations of the financial crisis in UK bookshops. But in essence it is a confused book and Turner seems to think that the reason the Keynesian remedy hasn't worked on any previous occasion is because the policy levers weren't pulled in quite the right order, or at quite the right time.

As an illustration of the book's confusion, there are a large number of pages discussing in great detail what Turner apparently sees as the supposed significance of trade deficits and surpluses in various countries affected by the asset price bubble. But then he concludes, all of a sudden and for no particular or stated reason – much in line with the historical evidence but against the line of his own argument presented here – that 'It does not matter that much whether a country is running a trade deficit or a surplus: a bubble is a bubble, and there are far too many around'. Indeed.

Though it includes some interesting and useful statistical data and graphs, after this point it was difficult to take the book entirely seriously and George Cooper's rival explanation in the *Origin of Financial Crises* (reviewed in March) is clearer, more in accordance with reality and much to be preferred.

DAP

Capitalist childhood

A Good Childhood: Searching for values in a competitive age. Richard Lazard and Judy Dunn. Penguin, £9.99. 2009.

Some of us have a good childhood; others don't. Of course it all depends on what you mean by a good childhood. Is it to own a lot of things – or to be happy? Is it more important to have a good relationship with others – or with yourself?

This book is based on the report of an 18-month survey sponsored by the Children's Society, and is written by an economist and a psychologist. It deals with a wide range of issues connected with childhood: family, friends, lifestyle, values, schooling, mental health and inequalities. Its centre-left viewpoint is well illustrated by the remark "With immense courage the Labour government committed itself in 1999 to abolishing child poverty by 2020..."

The authors are critical of excessive individualism, by which they mean "the belief that the prime duty of the individual is to make the most of her life, rather than contribute to the good of others". They reject some features of the face of childhood in present society, but they want to scrub that face clean rather than remodel it. Thus the media "should be embarrassed at the amount of physical violence which they put out and advertisers should be embarrassed at their encouragement of premature sexualization, heavy drinking and over-eating". No question of the media and advertisers stopping their malign and profit-seeking influence on youngsters—just suggest that they should feel embarrassed at what they do.

The authors are far from holding the view that there is no such thing as society. Indeed they write of moral education that "it needs to offer a vision of a good person and a good society". But most of the solutions they propose to childhood problems are at the level of individual behaviour rather than societal change: "If we want to improve our quality of life, we must above all produce better people."

Archbishop Rowan Williams, patron of the Inquiry Panel, contributes an elegantly waffly 12-page afterword in which he claims that "the report ask far more from

churches and religious communities – as it does from all kinds of bodies in our society”. The text does in places have a vicarish tone (“Children are a sacred bush”). But the nearest the report gets to churchy religion is to refer to spirituality as “an uplifting experience”,
SRP

Surviving

***Selling Your Father's Bones.* By Brian Schofield, Harper Press, 2008**



This is a fascinating account of the fate of Nez Perce (rhymes with Fez Purse) people of the north west of the USA and their land. It uses the narrative of

the desperate 1877 flight from their old homeland in the Wallowa valley towards exile in Canada, as a means to describe the exploitation and near destruction of the West through a particularly rapacious form of capitalism. The industrial pollution (the mile wide purple pit of Butte, Montana, is very memorable) and destructive agriculture are vividly depicted. As a history of a “Native American” group, it is especially useful as it brings the subject right up to date – an annoying feature of books of this nature is the close of the narrative at the loss of political independence, usually deep in the nineteenth century. The contrast between the desolation left after the death of the settler’s dream (the scary empty landscapes of *No Country for Old Men*) and the relative success of the communitarian Nez Perce rewards the reader with vicarious pleasures and hints towards the very real benefits, both economic and social, which socialism will bring.

KAZ

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Exhibition Review

Rank or class?

Rank, the Leeds Art Gallery

“Rank” is an art exhibition organised by Alistair Robinson of the Northern Gallery for Contemporary Arts in Sunderland and on display across the North until the autumn. Its subtitle, “Picturing the Social Order 1516-2009”, pretty much describes its content – a collection of visual depictions of class throughout the centuries. The early material, including a full set of Gustave Doré and Henry Mayhew prints, as well as fascinating and detailed Booth’s poverty map, is excellent and well worth seeing. Sadly nothing so complimentary can be said about the modern material. Where not dominated by slickly produced but impersonal graphs and charts, it is crude, amateurish and incomprehensible.

However, it is not simply a difference in style but a difference in message. Despite the statement by the organisers that “Rank, Situation, Class and Hierarchy are still with us” the message of the moderns is nothing of the sort. Instead of the notion of social class - us and them, whether for good or bad – butchly depicted by the traditional material, we are presented with mere economic inequality – a range of economic states from the long term unemployed (17.5 percent of the population apparently) to the professional or manager. The slogan “No Them - Only Us” prominently displayed in “Rank” becomes one of ersatz social inclusion, a brushing over of the real divisions between owner and owned, a con job which no recipient of a wage, pension or dole - payments from our masters - should take in.

Class is not a moral issue of inequality as depicted here but a social question of ownership and control, whose effects are not just poverty in the narrow economic sense but have echoes throughout society: the machine-like, distorted nature of work – the hellish grind we call wage slavery, the degradation of family and social life; the subjection to the tyranny of the state power; above all, the sense that life under capitalism is not a full human one but one in which the worker is reduced to a unit of production and consumption.

The reduction of class to mere economic inequality – the patronising image of the starving little black baby and the ▶ **22**

Meetings

Annual Conference

Friday **10 April** 10.30 to 5.30

Saturday **11 April**, 10.30 to 5.30

Socialist Party Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, London SW4
 All Welcome.

Public debate

Thursday **23 April**, 7.30

SHOULD CAPITALISM HAVE A FUTURE?

Yes: John Meadowcroft (Lecturer in Public Policy)

No: Richard Headicar (Socialist Party)
 Brockway Room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1

Manchester

Monday **27 April**, 8.30 pm

Discussion on Class

Unicorn, Church Street, City Centre

Capitalism in Crisis: A May Day School for Socialism

Saturday **2 May** 10.30am till 6.00pm

The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street SW4 7UN Tube: Clapham North

IS THE PROFIT SYSTEM WORKING?

1. Capitalism & Economics - Brian Gardner (Glasgow Socialist Party)
2. Capitalism, Resources and the Environment - Gwynn Thomas (South London Socialist Party)
3. Capitalism & Society - Simon Wigley (Central London Socialist Party).

Food and Refreshments will be available:

Public debate

between the Anarchist Federation and the Socialist Party:

“What are the similarities and differences between the Socialist Party and Anarchist positions?”

University of East Anglia

Saturday **30th May**, 2 - 5pm

more details to follow.

Lothians Discussion Group

(under the auspices of the Socialist Party Edinburgh Branch)

Venue: ACE, 17 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh

Every 4th Wednesday of the Month

Time: 7.30pm-9.00pm

Contact:

Fraser Anderson: Fraser@prolerat.org

Jimmy Moir: jimmy@prolerat.org

single mother living on baked beans (which thankfully we were saved from in “Rank”) – minimises and marginalises the results of class divided capitalist society. Without the knowledge of class as a social relationship with real personal effects, the worst of which we can mitigate through collective action called the class struggle, the socialist movement would become little more than a charity.

Particularly irritating in “Rank” was the obligatory Karl Marx quotation. The Big Beard’s works are literally crammed with punchy one liners yet this is a (deliberately?) dull and long winded quote from *The Communist Manifesto*, which as even the dumbest social science graduate

knows was written by Marx and Engels (the latter possibly having a larger contribution). It accompanies a Dyson cartoon depicting John Bull happily dancing to Master Capitalism’s tune. Given his well known interest in class struggle - resistance to the gay dance - this doesn’t really show much respect to Chucky does it?

“Rank” is on display at the Leeds Art Gallery until 26 April, then at the Northern Gallery for Contemporary Arts in Sunderland from 15 May to 11 July, and finally at the Grundy Art Gallery, Blackpool from 24 July to 5 September.

KAZ



More Trouble in Africa



WHEN THE Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was set up in 1953, it was known to be against the wishes of most of the African population in Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia. They did not want to be taken out of the control of the British Colonial Office to be handed over to domination by the white settlers, whose attitude, as shown particularly in Southern Rhodesia, is much like that of the South African Government. Opponents of Federation, including the British Labour Party, foresaw that tension would increase and were not surprised by the recent disturbances in which a number of Africans were killed by Government forces. Among the Africans the idea of early independence for Nyasaland has been given a powerful stimulus, associated by some of them with more ambitious ideas of a wider nationalism, taking in all Africa.

Are they right? Will “independence” make them better off and happier? Their African leaders tell them there is no doubt about the matter. And it is quite obvious that most Africans would prefer to put up with a lot of inconvenience, even hardship, to escape living under a government which operates or tolerates a colour bar against them. Africans are only behaving like other people, for history is full of examples of resentment of, and revolt against, the imposition on subject

groups, or racial, national, religious and language barriers. And because it has happened so often we have plenty of information about its consequences: nobody need please ignorance.

What then has national independence done for the mass of the population, whether we take the European nationalist movements of last century, such as the Italian struggle against Austria or the Balkan countries’ struggles against Turkey, or the quite recent new States set up in former Colonies? Without going into details we can say that national independence is good for local politicians, lawyers, army officers, manufacturers and business men; it opens up careers and money-making opportunities for them, as also for local holders of government civilian posts who may have found their advancement hindered while a foreign administration had control. Sometimes the achievement of national independence helps to speed up industrial development where this has been deliberately limited by the governing Power and may make it rather easier for workers to form trade unions.

(From front page article by ‘H’, *Socialist Standard*, April 1959)

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.



The Rise and rise of “Harperson”

After the next election, spare a thought for those whose job is to analyse and interpret the result – especially those who must point out, among the national assumption that the votes have led to an effective, much needed change in society, that all that has happened is the substitution of one set of reactionary prejudices for another. Consider, for example, the matter of Harriet Harman and all that is thereby implied. She emerged into the political universe in the guise of a feminist so revolutionary and steadfast that one wit could suggest it would be more consistent with her proclaimed principles if she changed her surname to Harperson. This piece of pedestrian humour harked back to the times when anyone observing the House of Commons benches (and even more so those in The Other Place) could be understood for remarking that the only possible government must be overweighted with mature, wealthy, overbearing males.

From that observation it was only a short, if misdirected, step in logic to the conclusion that the problems – poverty, lack of proper housing, social alienation, war – of current society must spring from that prescribed composition of the occupants of the seats of power. And from that position it was tolerable – if not sustainable – to argue that the only certain remedy for those ills was to elect governments weighted with younger, less monied, more dynamic females. Which returns us, abruptly, to the matter of Harriet Harman – Chair and Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, Leader of the House of Commons, Lord Privy Seal, Minister for Women and Equality, QC – and hovering contender for the Party leadership in the event that anything should “happen” to Gordon Brown – like being ditched by Labour after too emphatic an electoral defeat.

Family

Harman is very much a product of the traditionally well-heeled Labour political families with connections significant enough to encourage party members to feel comfortingly patronised by them. (Although what this does for the patronisers is, of course, a matter for speculation). In her background are to be found the Earl of Longford, Lady Antonia Fraser and, earlier, some of the Chamberlain family who once dominated Conservative politics. True to this tradition, Harman was for five years the legal officer of the National Council for Civil Liberties (now Liberty); in that capacity, on the Grunwick picket line, she met her husband. In 1981 (this seems hardly believable now, were it not that for a politician everything is to be believed) she rebelled against the “royalist orgy” of Prince Charles’ marriage to Diana Spencer by joining with Peter Mandelson and others on a cross-Channel ferry for a republican protest away day in France. “We were a happy band, we had a great deal of fun” the then editor of the *New Statesman* assured us. But this kind of behaviour had to be curbed soon afterwards – in October 1982 Harman joined the other Honourable Members who had fawned so loyally over the doomed royal couple



Harriet Harman

when she won a by-election in Peckham. Her wilder indiscretions looked to be further tamed when, in 1984, she was raised to the opposition front bench, speaking on social services, health and then Treasury matters. After Labour’s 1997 victory Blair put her in charge of the misnamed Department for Social Security but she was sacked after a little more than one year; fulfilling her brief to “reform” the system she had cut the benefit of lone parents but – perhaps more crucially – she had crossed swords too often with junior minister Frank Field.

Iraq

Proving that she has the resilience essential to anyone with ambitions to claw their way up the greasy pole, Harman quickly bounced back; in June 2001 she became Solicitor General – the first woman to hold the job. Since then she has risen steadily, leaving behind her female rivals such as Hazel Blears and Caroline Flint. This is unlikely to have happened without her demonstrating a uncritical readiness to support the government policy on matters such as the “anti-terrorist” laws, the imposition of identity cards, the renewal of Trident. She also voted for the invasion of Iraq – which caused her considerable discomfort later when she appeared to have changed her mind. Responding to a question from Jeremy Paxman on *Newsnight* she confessed: “If I’d have known if there weren’t weapons of mass destruction I wouldn’t have voted for the war. Clearly it was a mistake”. However this was no unconditional conversion because she did not keep to her implied promise when agreeing with Paxman that the Labour Party should apologise for the attack. In any case this was all much too late to save the buildings wiped out by the missiles and the bombs and the tens of thousands of people who had been killed. But it was well timed for Harman’s campaign for the Labour Deputy Leadership, after her own poll had persuaded her that the public favoured her above the other candidates.

Goodwin

Labour MPs in the Commons are often driven to a restless embarrassment at Harman’s performance when Gordon Brown is away and she takes over at Prime Ministers Questions. This is not a time for the considered, meticulously argued response; the MPs want something to make them jeer and wave their order papers. It does not help to have Harman fumbling and stuttering, for example when she said that Fred Goodwin, the sacked ex-boss of the Royal Bank of Scotland, was awarded a knighthood for his work for charity when, as any City wide-boy knows, it was for “services” to banking. The same can be said when she, a solicitor and a QC, announced that the government would stop Goodwin collecting the pension awarded him by the bank he wrecked, in spite of the fact that to do so would be illegal. But these are only incidents in Harman’s drive for the top, in which she is ready to attempt to conceal all unhelpful facts and bend any others.

IVAN



Voice from the Back

Homeless And Clueless

Politicians of all the major political parties have "solutions" for what they call the "homeless problem". In fact there is no homeless problem, what we have is a poverty problem. Here is a recent press story that shows that there are plenty of empty houses available if you have the money. "The number of properties in Britain lying empty is set to pass 1 million. New figures will show that Britain is on course for a record number of houses and flats lying empty. Some of the rise has been caused by home owners facing repossession. Other empty homes were bought by property developers who have since struggled to raise the money to renovate and refurbish them for occupation." (*Daily Telegraph*, 10 February) Inside this crazy social system fish are dumped back in to the sea, fruit is allowed to rot on the trees while millions of people starve, so it comes as no surprise to learn that people in Britain go homeless while 1 million homes lie empty.

Shandon House, MOD owned, 10 years empty



The Terminator

In the movies Arnold Schwarzenegger often played the hero, but in real life he has had to bow to the realities of the capitalist system that has slumps and booms undreamed of in the Hollywood fantasy land. "Cash-strapped California is to start notifying 20,000 state workers that they may lose their jobs. A spokesman for Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger made the announcement after California lawmakers failed to approve a \$40bn (£28.2bn) budget. California, the world's

eighth biggest economy, has been hit by the housing crisis, unemployment and falling consumer spending. ..California has already laid off state workers for two days a month, put 2,000 public projects on hold and delayed tax refunds." (*BBC News*, 17 February) Inside the real world

of capitalism Schwarzenegger has had to play the villain by terminating many workers' means of earning a living.

Labour In Action

The World Bank recently estimated that 2.8 million children could die by 2015 if the global financial crisis is not checked. Commenting on this the Prime Minister Gordon Brown said: "It is as if the entire population of Rome were to die in the next five years." (*Times*, 21 February) This from the leader of the Labour Party who vigorously defends the killer society that is the buying and selling of capitalism. Hypocrisy cannot go further surely when Gordon Brown suspends parliament debate because of the death of the child of one of his opponents in a vote-catching move. He will not of course suspend the running of capitalism or its parliament over the possible death of 2.8 million kids.

Capitalist Priorities

Despite the economic crisis in the US the government recently announced an increase in its military budget. "The collision of modern American life with the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression has had some strange and unintended consequences. In Alpine, Utah, for example, a school has cancelled the entire 6th grade, with the teachers at Mountainville Academy dismissed just before Christmas and the 12-year-olds merged with the 7th grade." (*Times*, 21 February) That is the priorities of capitalism - keep up military expenditure to protect the owning class's markets and sources of raw materials, but sack teachers and worsen the education of workers' children.

The Wasteful Society

In the most developed capitalist society on Earth we learn of this horror story. "The US jobless rate jumped in February to 8.1%, according to official figures from the Labor Department. The number of people out of work rose by 651,000 during the month. Both figures were bigger than expected. ...President Obama said that the number of jobs lost so far in the recession was "astounding". Speaking in Ohio, he added: "I don't need to tell the people of this state what statistics like this mean," saying that he had signed his economic stimulus package in order to save jobs. The extra 161,000 jobs added to December and January's figures mean that almost two million jobs have been lost in the past three months." (*BBC News*, 6 March) Think what this means, two million workers are being debarred from producing things that are necessary for human existence. Why? Because it isn't profitable enough. Two million workers and their kids are being impoverished not because of some failing on their part but because of this awful society we all live in. Don't you think it is time that those 2 million workers in the US thought of an alternative society? Shouldn't you?

Free Lunch

by Rigg

