

socialist standard



November 2009
Vol. 105 No. 1263
£1.50

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

Free at last...

Twenty years beyond the Berlin Wall



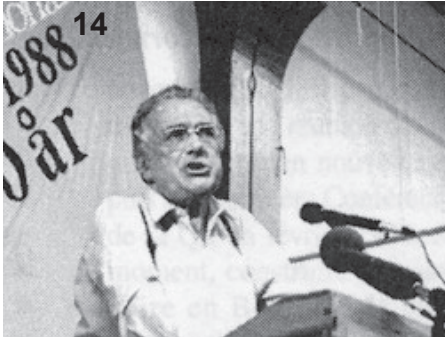
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THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 7 November** 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

Socialism was never tried

TWENTY YEARS ago this month the Berlin Wall came down, symbolising the end of the division of Europe into Western and Russian spheres of influence. Russia had lost the Cold War and its rulers under Gorbachev had decided they would no longer prop up the puppet regimes Russia had set up in Eastern Europe in accordance with the carve-up that Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin had agreed when they had met in Yalta in February 1945.

From this point of view, it symbolised a shift in imperialist power politics. Worse was to come for Russia when, two years later, the so-called "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics" broke up into its constituent republics, reducing the size of Russia to the smallest it had been for centuries.

There was some benefit for the people of the countries concerned. The limited political democracy which had existed in Western Europe was extended to them, allowing workers to organise in trade unions that were not part of the state machine as they had been and people to get together to express and disseminate differing political views, including socialist ones. The ending of the one-party dictatorships there was clearly a welcome development.

We had hoped for more. After all, we had long denounced the claim that these countries were "the socialist countries" in which the working class ruled, and we had been proved right. With them out of the way it should have been easier to propagate socialist ideas. Unfortunately, the opposite conclusion prevailed: that they had in fact been socialist countries

and that their collapse represented the failure of socialism.

Socialism, it was said, had been tried and failed and was now out-dated and irrelevant. Pro-capitalist intellectuals such as Francis Fukuyama even triumphantly proclaimed the "end of history" – that human evolution had come to a peaceful and harmonious end with the universal establishment of a market economy and governments deriving their legitimacy from elections.

A hard time followed for socialists and for anyone calling themselves socialist. In fact many of these dropped the pretence and argued that now the only choice was between different "models" of capitalism. We denied this and asserted that socialism was still relevant. What had failed in Russia and Eastern Europe was not socialism, but a form of capitalism where it was the state that had presided over the exploitation of the wage-working class and the accumulation of capital out of profits. It was this state-capitalist system that had failed, not socialism.

The fall of the Wall did not bring peace and harmony. Capitalism has continued to produce wars and economic crises, compounded by the threat of global warming. The general deprivation and alienation it creates has continued. The common ownership and democratic control of productive forces, with production directly for use and distribution on the principle of "from each according to their ability, to each according to their need", remains the only framework within which can be solved the problems facing the working class in particular and humanity in general.

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Gullibility Travels

ONE has to feel a bit sorry for Graham Mace who, keen to improve his car's green performance, bought an online 'hydrofuel conversion kit' in the hope that it would save 30 per cent on fuel consumption, only to find that it ran on snake oil instead ('Fuel boost device 'does not work'', *BBC Online*, 19 Oct). After chucking £700 at this miracle device he hadn't saved so much as a dribble of fuel, at which point a BBC investigation revealed the awful truth. It was a con.

But one wonders at the thinking here. Didn't it occur to him to wonder why none of his friends knew about this ingenious gadget, why garages or motor suppliers didn't stock it, or why it wasn't fitted as standard at the factory? And what possessed him, after shelling out the original £290 with no success, to spend a further £400 on 'upgrades' rather than cut his losses? Even if it had worked, he'd have had to drive to Vladivostok and back to make up for the outlay. What on earth was going on?

Consumer programmes regularly trot out the old standard: if it looks too good to be true, it probably is. But throw in a bit of seductive science and the consumer just seems to melt like warm butter, effectively separated from their money and common sense in equal measure. *New Scientist* notes that dodgy online companies think they can sell anything if they put the word 'quantum' in their blurb, like the 'quantum pulse device' that powers a 'human generator' and retails for a mere €420,000 (17 October). Hard to believe that anyone is dumb enough to fall for this supposed immortality machine, but you would only need one or two gullible net-travellers and you'd be made for life, so such stuff is always worth a punt to the scruple-free. If people can't summon the wit to do a bit of comparative research, one feels that they deserve everything they get (or rather, don't get) for their money.

Daft pseudo-scientific ideas have been around a long time though. Who hasn't been assured with huge confidence by someone wearing a copper bracelet that it helps them enormously with their arthritis? But in the first properly controlled trial, at York University, these often expensive jewellery accessories fared no better than placebos ('Bracelets 'useless' in arthritis', *BBC Online*, 16 October). What undoubtedly explains the popularity, and durability, of such urban myths is the effect of 'authority', whether it comes from one's peers, one's elders or

one's newspaper, even though not one of these can be trusted as far as you can throw a grandad or a printing press.

As the *Observer* reminds us in relation to current fears concerning the rise of racism (18 October), we are horribly suggestible. We know, for instance, that we would rather give wrong answers than right ones if it means fitting in better (Asch conformity experiment, 1951), that the 'only following orders' defence at Nuremberg is more than a mere excuse (the Milgram pain-inflicting experiment, 1961, and the Stanford prison experiment, 1971), and that it's a whole lot easier to start a Nazi party among liberal students than anyone would believe possible (Ron Jones and the 'Third Wave' experiment, 1967).

It's not our fault. We're a social species, with an outside brain as mad as it is miraculous, and science is about as natural to us as an abacus to a baboon. Gullibility is only another word for 'faith' or 'conviction', part of the social glue that binds us. It travels by express while reason has to plod on foot. But that's all the more reason to make an effort with our reasoning capacity, both in buying products and buying into ideas.

Improbability drivers

WHO would believe - a vegetarian spider and a stingless wasp? Both of these turned out to be true, in a 'truth is stranger than April fool' kind of way, as was the story about the Maldives politicians who held a cabinet meeting under water. While this excellent innovation should be made compulsory for all politicians (minus scuba gear) we look forward to a story about a 'benevolent species of capitalist' discovered lurking somewhere north of Basingstoke and miraculously still in business.

Wackier still is the theory put forward by two CERN physicists, that the Large Hadron Collider is being sabotaged by ripples in time returning from some future cataclysm where, oh cripes, they really do find the Higgs boson and nature revolts ('The Collider, the Particle and a Theory About Fate', *New York Times*, 12 October). That's the thing about quantum theory. It's so improbable anyway that theoretical physicists, like celebs, can talk any bollocks they like and still get serious media attention. Maybe we should start talking about 'quantum socialism' and thereby grab a few headlines.

Time to call time

AFTER the runaway success of Europe-wide anti-smoking legislation, much is now being made about 'passive drinking' as states gear up for a similar assault on that other popular working-class pastime.

Despite efforts by the UK government chief adviser on health, Liam Donaldson, to incite a wholesome evangelism among the public by tarring all drinkers as potential wife-beaters or lager louts, the concept of 'passive drinking' is just not going to hold its whiskey and water.

Anyone who's ever been in a pub knows perfectly well that wild-west saloon brawls do not break out as a rule nor do most customers get arrested or fall off buildings pretending to be superheroes.

The fact that more than half the UK's population ignore the government safety limits on alcohol (*Observer*, 18 October)

may be because a), the limits are too low to be of any practical value and b), the government has banned every other drug for spurious reasons so nobody believes anything they say. The half who stay below the limits are probably lying about it anyway.

It's not that there isn't a problem, of course there is. But the bigger problem is a patronising establishment which, not content with screwing workers into the ground, then presumes to lecture us about what's good for us using dubious arguments they fully intend to ignore themselves. For let's not be in any doubt, this is not about anti-drinking among the ruling classes. Let them swill their port and champers and snort their coke until they're cross-eyed and drooling over the chambermaids. This is about controlling the workforce, saving some police and hospital A&E expenses, and cutting absenteeism in the dark satanic wage-mills.

Maybe alcohol is the fifth biggest cause of premature death and disability worldwide (*New Scientist*, 14 October), but workers know damn well that capitalism is responsible for the other four, and that's what drives them to drink in the first place. Capitalists think they can save money by forcing puritanical self-denial on workers, but with the stress of exploitation we face, we don't need temperance, we need to lose our tempers.



Getting from here

Dear Editors

There are good reasons to welcome Rod Shaw's thoughts on the change-over to socialism ('The penny drops', August). One is that attempts so far by socialists to foresee "how the change came" have been far from brilliant. William Morris's scenario of a Trafalgar Square massacre leading to a popular uprising, etc in *News From Nowhere* may have been believable when he wrote it in 1890 but is today utterly incredible. The Party's pamphlet *Socialism as a practical alternative* predicts millions of socialists preparing "programmes of action for immediate implementation once the movement has gained control of the powers and machinery of governments."

A second reason for seriously

considering Rod's piece—even if we don't agree with all of it—is that it is imaginative and inspiring. It combats the negativity of those who claim that socialism is idealistic and against human nature, those who say "It's a nice idea but..."

Rod doesn't underestimate the importance of "taking control of the state machinery from those in power". But he recognises that socialism, like capitalism, is a whole and complete system: "Well before any official declaration was made, people had started to do what was needed to begin creating the new world."

When today we join the Socialist Party we join the world socialist movement; we withdraw support for capitalism even though we have to live in it for the time being; we take the first few faltering steps towards building the socialist future. A few

hundred of us make no impression on the dominance of capitalism; a few thousand of us will begin to make an impression. As our numbers grow we will infiltrate and revolutionise the media, the educational bodies, the workplaces, the arts, cultural, scientific, leisure and other worlds.

The hard part is to get from here to the beginning of there...

In "As Things Are Now" (September) Rod foresees what socialism will be like in just a few ways. We can all find some of what he says likely and acceptable and some unlikely and doubtful. The main thing is that as more of us give up supporting capitalism and start building a socialist world we shall put some flesh on the bones of common ownership, democratic control, production for use and free access.

STAN PARKER, London SW9

Billion dollar bribery

THE NEWS that the Serious Fraud Office have asked the Attorney-General to prosecute BAE on corruption charges has raised a hornets' nest of speculation in the British press about ethics, bribery and business practices. BAE is accused of paying millions of pounds in bribes to win contracts for aircraft in South Africa and the Czech Republic and the sale of air traffic control equipment in Tanzania.

In the past the SFO have investigated allegations of bribery by BAE in Saudi Arabia to win the £43 billion al-Yamamah deal. This was eventually dropped when Prime Minister Tony Blair intervened to retain the fighter contract on the grounds that thousands of British jobs were threatened. He never mentioned the real reason for turning a blind eye, Christian gentleman that he is - the immense profits that were in jeopardy!

So how come the SFO are prepared to proceed with the prosecution of BAE in this case? It would seem that BAE and the SFO were in negotiations about an out-of-court settlement that would have seen BAE pay an enormous great fine of millions without admitting any guilt, but these behind-the-scenes negotiations have broken down probably over the size of the fine or the extent of admitted culpability. We will probably never know the full extent of the skulduggery and chicanery that is going on in this behind-the-scenes trickery, but it has been reported that the SFO was looking for up to a £1 billion fine and the BAE was only offering in the region of tens of millions.

The reaction of the British press has been interesting. Some of them have suggested that bribery is the accepted

modus operandi with some foreign governments and that Britain should not tie its hands behind its back when dealing with rivals for these lucrative contracts. Others have claimed that if guilt is admitted this may harm BAE in future negotiations for contracts with the USA - their single biggest customer.

The journalist Antonia Senior in her support for BAE is particularly frank in her analysis of the past practices of British commerce. "We may be incorruptible at home, but when dealing with Johnny Foreigner all bets are off. The moral transgressor is the receiver of bribes, not the payer. It's Johnny's fault, of course; we can't expect the same standards from a foreigner. This jingoistic hypocrisy has long been a feature of British adventures abroad, whether they are in the military or economic line. We lied, bribed and slaughtered our way to an empire that we subsequently imbued with Christian piety. The pursuit of profit at the expense of morality has been the basis of our foreign policy for as long as we called ourselves British." (*Times*, 2 October)

The BAE bribery case is by no means unique. At the end of September the SFO successfully pursued Mabey & Johnson, the bridge builders for a bribery deal in Iraq and obtained a £6.6 million fine. Indeed this success may have emboldened the SFO to turn the screws on BAE. Whether BAE is eventually prosecuted or some old pals act wins the day it is impossible to tell, but this latest episode is just another example of the duplicity, fraud and criminality that lies at the heart of world capitalism.

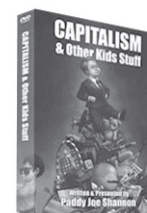
RD

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Malawi:

Children Of The Tobacco Fields

WE ALL know that tobacco harms those who smoke it. Few are aware of the damage it does to those who pick and process it.

The “children’s organisation” Plan International recently issued a report about children in Malawi, some as young as five, who toil up to twelve hours in the tobacco fields for an average daily wage of 11 p. (*Hard Work, Long Hours and Little Pay*)

The finding that has attracted most attention is that these children are being poisoned by the nicotine “juice” they absorb through the skin – and also ingest, as they have no chance to wash hands before eating. Many of the ailments that plague them – headaches, abdominal and chest pain, nausea, breathlessness, dizziness – are symptoms of Green Tobacco Sickness.

But much of their suffering has nothing to do with nicotine. All have blisters on their hands. All have pains – in the shoulders, neck, back, knees – caused by overexertion of their immature muscles. About a third of the children are coughing blood, which suggests TB.

Many of the children examined had been beaten, kicked or otherwise physically abused by estate owners or supervisors. Many of the girls had been raped by them. One boy had deep knee wounds as a result of being made to walk across a stony field on his knees as punishment for “laziness”.

Who owns the estates?

Who are these estate owners?

Commercial tobacco farming in Malawi began late in the 19th century, when it was the British colony of Nyasaland. White settlers seized much of the best arable land for plantations of tea, coffee, tung trees (for their oil, used as a wood finisher) and – mostly -- tobacco. Even today the majority of owners of large estates are descendants of the colonial settlers, although now there are also black owners.

In 1948 some tung and tobacco plantations (estates) were taken over by the Colonial Development Corporation, funded mainly by the British Treasury. After Malawi gained formal independence in 1964, these came under state ownership. Later they were reprivatised. Another recent change is the direct acquisition of some estates by international tobacco companies.

The estates were established on land stolen from traditional peasant communities. The process began in colonial times but continued even after independence, under the Banda regime. Land theft impoverishes local communities and compels those worst affected to offer themselves – or their children! – to the estate owners as wage slaves.

Tobacco is also grown on many small family farms. Here too, children work and suck in nicotine juice, alongside their parents.

The tobacco cartel

Malawi’s tobacco market is dominated – through subsidiaries – by two international corporations, Universal Corporation and Alliance One International. These corporations operate a cartel, refusing to compete and colluding

to keep tobacco purchase prices low. This in turn intensifies the pressure on farm owners to minimise costs by exploiting cheap or free child labour – a practice that the corporations hypocritically claim to oppose.

Representatives of the corporations sit on several committees that advise the government of Malawi on economic policy. By this means they ensure that their interests are served and block any initiatives to diversify the economy and reduce the country’s dependence on tobacco.

The main reason why child labour is so prevalent in Malawian agriculture is the poverty – in particular, land hunger – of most of the rural population. This reflects not any absolute shortage of land but rather the highly skewed pattern of land ownership. Large tracts of land lie fallow on the big estates.

A pathetic contrast

How does Plan International propose to help the children on the tobacco farms?

Well, it will “educate farm owners and supervisors” and persuade them to provide the children with protective clothing. Taking the tobacco companies’ PR at face value, it will urge them to “scrutinise their suppliers more closely”. It will not, however, support a ban on children picking tobacco because that is “unrealistic” – as indeed it is if you refuse to challenge underlying social conditions.

But what a pathetic contrast such “realism” makes with Plan International’s “vision” of “a world in which all children realise their full potential in societies that respect people’s rights and dignity”!

Environmental degradation

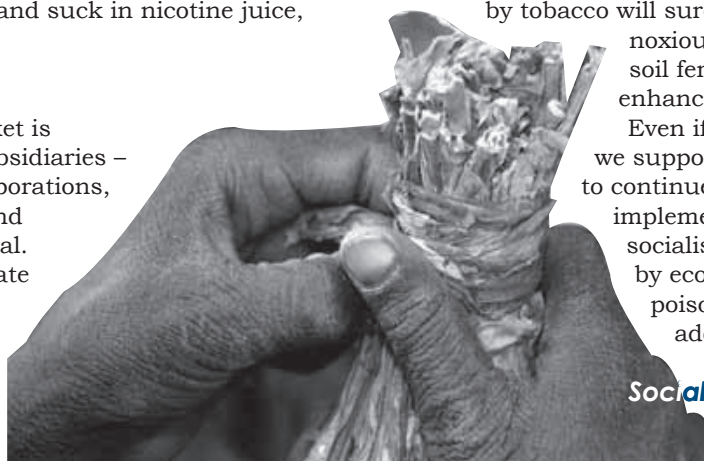
Besides ruining people’s health, tobacco degrades the environment. The tobacco monoculture that dominates much of Malawi depletes the soil of nutrients. It also causes extensive deforestation, as trees are felled to provide firewood for curing the tobacco leaves, and this in turn further erodes the soil. Water sources are contaminated. After over a century of tobacco cultivation, all these processes are already far advanced. (For fuller analysis, see the chapter by Geist, Otanez and Kapito in Andrew Millington and Wendy Jepson, eds. *Land Change Science in the Tropics: Changing Agricultural Landscapes*, Springer 2008.)

Tobacco in socialist society?

Will tobacco be grown in socialist society? On a small scale, possibly, by addicts for their own use. But it’s hard to imagine socialist society making planned provision, within the framework of democratic decision-making, for tobacco production. People aware of all the harm caused by tobacco will surely prefer to halt cultivation of this

noxious weed. They will seek to restore soil fertility, reverse deforestation and enhance local food supply.

Even if, for the sake of argument, we suppose that the decision is made to continue producing tobacco, will it be implemented? Will the free people of socialist society, no longer spurred on by economic necessity, voluntarily poison themselves just to feed others’ addictions?



IRE OF THE IRATE ITINERANT



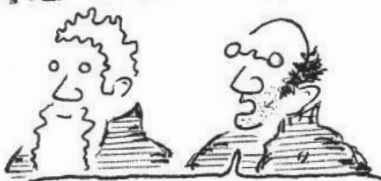
HMM. LOVE THESE SMALL ADS... 'LOANS £50-£1000' YOUR KNEECAPS AS COLLATERAL, THEY MIGHT ADD.



BUT ARN'T BANKS JUST GLORIFIED LOAN SHARKS, REALLY? ON A BIGGER SCALE. WITH A SHEEN OF RESPECTABILITY. WITH HUGE BAILOUTS FROM GOVERNMENT. BUT OTHERWISE MUCH THE SAME THING...



AUSTAIR DARLING THROWS AWAY MORE OF OUR MONEY, REPEATING THE MANTRA 'WE'VE GOT TO GET THE BANKS LENDING AGAIN' BUT ISN'T THAT HOW WE GOT INTO THIS MESS IN THE FIRST PLACE?



... AND THAT CONFIDENCE HAS EVAPORATED BIG TIME, LATELY! CAN GOVERNMENT PUT IT BACK? MAYBE YOU CAN'T FORCE AN IDEA LIKE CONFIDENCE. IT'S EITHER THERE OR IT AINT.



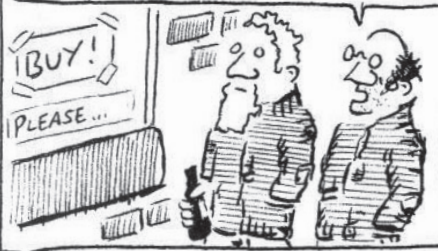
BANKING IS LARGELY BASED ON CONFIDENCE. SAY SOMEONE OWES YOU £100. THAT FIGURE IS REAL IN YOUR HEAD, AS LONG AS YOU BELIEVE THIS PERSON CAN OR WILL PAY YOU BACK. ONCE YOU START TO DOUBT THIS, THE £100 YOU THOUGHT YOU HAD JUST MAGICALLY EVAPORATES...



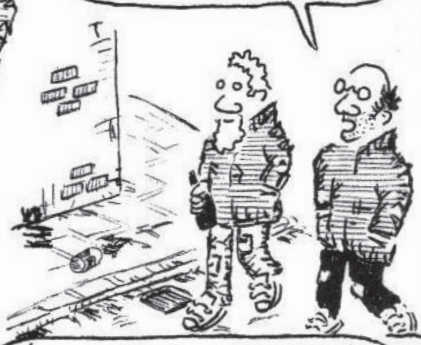
OF COURSE, THE WHOLE CRISLY APPARATUS OF CAPITALISM RESTS ON THIS NEBULOUS CONCEPT OF CONFIDENCE... THE STOCK MARKET WILL KEEP GOING UP! SO WILL HOUSE PRICES. AND PEOPLE WILL KEEP BUYING. WHAT A WAY TO RUN A SOCIETY. PRETTY CRAZY, LOOKING AT IT OBJECTIVELY...



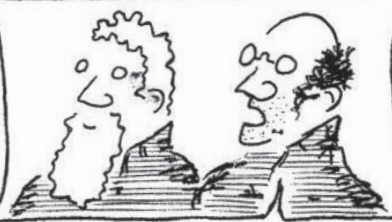
BUT PEOPLE WILL SAY 'THAT'S JUST THE WAY THE WORLD IS'... MAYBE. OK. I'LL TAKE THEM AT THEIR WORD...



... WHICH NO ONE EVER DOES! WE JUST ACCEPT THIS AS THE NORM. ECONOMIC GROWTH IS UNQUESTIONABLY TAKEN AS THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF OUR CULTURE, THE RAISON D'ETRE. IS THAT A GREAT STATE OF AFFAIRS?



... I'M READY TO ACCEPT CAPITALISM AS AN INNATE FEATURE OF HUMAN NATURE. BY 'CAPITALISM', I MEAN BUYING, SELLING, TRADING, SOME INDIVIDUALS AMASSING GREAT WEALTH, OTHERS DON'T. HENCE INEQUALITY...



... 'NATURAL' FACETS OF THE HUMAN CHARACTER. BUT WE LEARNT NOT TO GLORIFY THESE TRAITS SOME TIME AGO. ISN'T IT ABOUT TIME WE DID THE SAME WITH THE GREED OF THE MARKET?...



... AND SOME INDIVIDUALS WILL WANT TO LEAVE THIS AMASSED WEALTH FOR THEIR OFFSPRING TO INHERIT, HENCE THE BASIS OF CLASS SYSTEMS. ALL THIS BEHAVIOUR MAY BE INNATE. MAYBE. BUT THAT DOESN'T MAKE IT RIGHT, MAKE IT GOOD... OR EXCUSE IT. TRIBALISM AND WARFARE ARE ALSO PROBABLY INNATE...



GREGORY 09



Pieces together

Warren's Wallet

"Castles in France. Islands in the Caribbean. Private jets. With a collective \$1.27 trillion at their disposal, the members of The Forbes 400 could buy almost anything. How about a country? A quick glance at the CIA Fact Book suggests the individual fortunes of many Forbes 400 members are as big as some of the world's economies. Bill Gates, America's richest man with a net worth of \$50 billion, has a personal balance sheet larger than the gross domestic product of 140 countries, including Costa Rica, El Salvador, Bolivia and Uruguay. The Microsoft visionary's nest egg is just short of the GDP of Tanzania and Burma. Warren Buffett, who lost \$10 billion in the past 12 months and is this year's Forbes 400 biggest dollar loser, still has a fortune the size of North Korea's economy at \$40 billion." (*Yahoo Finance*, 2 October)

Silent Tsunami

"Tens of millions of the world's poor will have their food rations cut or cancelled in the next few weeks because rich countries have slashed aid funding. The result, says Josette Sheeran, head of the UN's World Food Programme (WFP), could be the 'loss of a generation' of children to malnutrition, food riots and political destabilisation. 'We are facing a silent tsunami,' said Sheeran in an exclusive interview with the *Observer*. 'A humanitarian disaster is unrolling.' The WFP feeds nearly 100 million people a year." (*Observer*, 11 October)

Bombs wa-hey!

"The Pentagon comptroller sent a request to shift the funds to the House and Senate Appropriations and Armed Services Committees over the summer. The comptroller said the Pentagon planned to spend \$19.1 million to procure four of the bombs, \$28.3 million to accelerate the bomb's 'development and testing', and \$21 million to accelerate the integration of the bomb onto B-2 stealth bombers. The notification was tucked inside a 93-page 'reprogramming' request that included a couple hundred other more mundane items. Why now? The notification says simply, 'The Department has an Urgent Operational Need (UON) for the capability to strike hard at deeply buried targets in high threat environments. The MOP is the weapon of choice to meet the requirements of the UON.' It further states that the request is endorsed by Pacific Command (which has responsibility over North Korea) and Central Command (which has responsibility over Iran)." (*ABC News*, 6 October)

Contact Details

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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).

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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 8.00pm. 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

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Skipton. R Cooper, 1 Caxton Garth, Threshfield, Skipton BD23 5EZ. Tel: 01756 752621

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SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

South West branch. Meets every two months on a Saturday afternoon (see meetings page for details). Shane Roberts, 86 High Street, Bristol BS5 6DN. Tel: 0117 9511199

Canterbury. Rob Cox, 4 Stanhope Road, Deal, Kent, CT14 6AB

Luton. Nick White, 59 Heywood Drive, LU2 7LP

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

EAST ANGLIA

East Anglia branch. Meets every two months on a Saturday afternoon (see meetings page for details). David Porter, Eastholme, Bush Drive, Eccles-on-Sea, NR12 0SF. Tel: 01692 582533. Richard Headicar, 42 Woodcote, Firs Rd, Hethersett, NR9 3JD. Tel: 01603 814343.

Cambridge. Andrew Westley, 10 Marksby Close, Duxford, Cambridge CB2 4RS. Tel: 07890343044

NORTHERN IRELAND

Newtownabbey: Nigel McCullough. Tel: 028 90852062

SCOTLAND

Edinburgh branch. 1st Thur. 8-9pm. The Quaker Hall, Victoria Terrace (above Victoria Street), Edinburgh. J. Moir. Tel: 0131 440 0995 JIMMY@jmoir29.freeserve.co.uk Branch website: <http://geocities.com/edinburghbranch/>

Glasgow branch. 3rd Wednesday of each month at 8pm in Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road, Glasgow. Richard Donnelly, 112 Napiershall Street, Glasgow G20 6HT. Tel: 0141 5794109. E-mail: richard.donnelly1@ntlworld.com

Ayrshire: D. Trainer, 21 Manse Street, Salcoats, KA21 5AA. Tel: 01294 469994. E-mail: derricktrainer@freeuk.com

Dundee. Ian Ratcliffe, 16 Birkhall Ave, Wormit, Newport-on-Tay, DD6 8PX. Tel: 01328 541643

West Lothian. 2nd and 4th Weds in month, 7.30-9.30. Lanthorn Community Centre, Kennilworth Rise, Dedridge, Livingston. Corres: Matt Culbert, 53 Falcon Brae, Ladywell, Livingston, West Lothian, EH5 6UW. Tel: 01506 462359 E-mail: matt@wsmweb.fsnet.co.uk

WALES

Swansea branch. 2nd Mon, 7.30pm, Unitarian Church, High Street. Corres: Geoffrey Williams, 19 Baptist Well Street, Waun Wen, Swansea SA1 6FB. Tel: 01792 643624

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Out of control

SOME people are looking to China as the motor that will pull world capitalism out of its current slump. This ignores the fact that China's double-digit rates of growth were led by exports, in large part to America and Europe. When these parts of the world entered the slump China, too, was affected. As the *Times* reported last year (17 October):

"In the northern Chinese port of Quinhuandao, a dark mountain formed by nearly nine million tonnes of surplus coal soars from the dockside. By the end of the next week, the famous storage area – a dirty barometer of Chinese industrial demand – could be completely full of unwanted fossil fuel . . . [T] hose swelling piles of surplus coal, which is used for most of China's electricity generation, indicate falls in demand for energy, a key measure of economic activity."

In response the Chinese government decided to try to spend its way out. Some 4 trillion (a million million) yuan of stimulus money was injected into the economy, mainly in the form of lending by the State banks. But things didn't turn out as planned. Most of the money was used to expand productive capacity without regard for the chances of selling the extra output (though some seems to have gone to fund a property and stock exchange bubble). In an article headlined "Beijing moves to halt growth juggernaut as supply starts to run away from demand" (1 October), *Times* Asia business correspondent, Leo Lewis, reported:

"China's State Council calculates that the impact of this year's 140 billion yuan (£13 billion) investment spree in steel mills will be to lift overall national production capacity some 40 per cent above the country's entire annual demand. The same dynamics reportedly apply to cement (. . .) The astronomical levels of corporate investment, warn senior economists, place the booming Chinese economy at increased risk of a sudden collapse in growth."

So, the brakes are being applied:

"The Government of China has launched an attack on overcapacity in its heavy industries with a series of stinging curbs on new factories, smelting plants and port-building projects. (...) In the absence of such controls, said the statement from the Chinese Cabinet, 'it will be hard to prevent vicious market competition and to increase economic benefits, and this could result in facility closures, layoffs and increases in banks' bad assets.'"

It's the same old story of headlong capitalist expansion, financed in this case by government funding, leading in the end to overcapacity and overproduction in relation to market demand. The Chinese government's attempt to spend its way out of the slump is risking the very thing they were trying to overcome: "a sudden collapse in growth".

Which goes to show that governments can't control the way capitalism works and that, if they try, the chances are they'll make things worse. Capitalism is an uncontrollable economic system that gets its way in the end, one way or the other.

Who would have thought a wee little packet of fake blood could threaten to unravel an entire culture. But so great is the threat of the "Artificial Virginity Hymen" -- a kit that helps women fake their virginity -- that prominent Egyptian conservatives are calling for an all-out ban. Not only that, they are also demanding the exile of anyone who traffics it. <http://tinyurl.com/ybwa2vp>

"What creationists believe about human origins we get from the Bible," said David Menton an acclaimed anatomist and also a creationist. "The creation of the world takes place on page one of the Bible. If you throw out the first page of the Bible you might as well throw out the whole thing. If you can't live with the first page then pitch out the remaining thousand pages." <http://tinyurl.com/yelwnvm>

The gap between wealthiest 10 percent and the rest of America is worse than at any time on record. Two-thirds of all income gains from 2002-7 went to the top 1 percent. The Walton family alone is worth more than the bottom 100 million Americans combined. Wal-Mart is a major player in the "dead peasants insurance" game; it's alleged that dead peasant insurance payouts are used for executive bonuses: <http://tinyurl.com/yh3p25r>

Amnesty International has highlighted a case of a man facing execution in Texas. The human rights group has revealed a Texas man faces execution after jurors at his trial consulted the Bible when deliberating his fate: <http://tinyurl.com/yzctplu>

Israel is making preparations to carry out military attacks in Iran after December, a French magazine reported overnight Wednesday: <http://tinyurl.com/yjkf8mj>

That Haiti needs the attention cannot be overstated. Unemployment hovers at around 70 percent, experts say, and over half of the population lives in extreme poverty. Violence broke out in June as students demanded an increase in the minimum wage to \$5 from \$1.75 — which were daily rates, not hourly ones. Haiti's extremely low labor costs, comparable to those in Bangladesh, make it so appealing: <http://tinyurl.com/y9mnxpw>

When the Berlin Wall crumbled, East Germans imagined a life of freedom where consumer goods were abundant and hardships would fade. Ten years later, a remarkable 51% say they were happier with communism. About the same time a new Russian proverb was born: "Everything the Communists said about Communism was a lie, but everything they said about Capitalism turned out to be the truth." <http://tinyurl.com/yek2lqm>

We are fast approaching the time of the next great battle over evolution. The Neo-creationists will be corporations, and they will argue that they could not possibly be descended from human beings...The rape case of Jamie Leigh Jones was just a logical step forward in the long-standing Republican effort to lock Americans out of the nation's courthouses, an effort undertaken on behalf of corporate supremacy. A woman is gang-raped by her fellow employees at government contractor KBR. The company says her contract prohibits her from seeking justice in court. <http://tinyurl.com/yk33ans>

The fall of
"Communist":
Why so peaceful?

In late 1989 and early 1990, in the space of a few months, the "communist" regimes in a string of East European countries fell from power. They were soon followed by the "Soviet" regime in Russia itself, which collapsed in the wake of a failed coup in August 1991.

Almost everywhere the change occurred more or less peacefully. This seemed especially remarkable in light of the history of these regimes, which in the past had made ruthless use of violence to suppress opposition. In Russia three anti-coup protestors were killed while trying to halt and disable a tank. There was one major case of violent transition – Romania, where Ceausescu's dictatorship was overthrown in December 1989 at the cost of about 1,100 dead and several thousand wounded.

In Poland and Hungary, the ruling parties had already agreed to give up their power monopoly in 1988, when they entered negotiations with opposition forces to plan the details of the transition. In East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria, they were not quite so willing to give way, but nor were they willing to do what was necessary to retain power – that is, crush the rising wave of popular protest by force.

A lack of will

The crucial immediate cause of the demise of the "communist" regimes was the fact that – except in Romania – they did not even make a serious attempt at violent suppression of opposition forces. They lacked the will to do so.

Consider, for instance, what happened at the Berlin Wall on 9 November, 1989. In response to a confusing announcement that the regulations for through passage were to be relaxed, a crowd gathered and started pushing their way past the guards.

The guards, heavily outnumbered, frantically telephoned various officials to ask whether they should use their firearms, but no one was willing to give them instructions. So they did nothing.

Even the coup plotters in Russia never gave the troops under their command orders to shoot into the crowds that were blocking their way. They too were reluctant to shed large amounts of blood, and that may well have been their undoing.

Why were all these "communist" officials so deficient in ruthlessness? In a few cases, including that of Gorbachev, humanitarian scruples or squeamishness may have played a part. For most of them, however, the main reason was probably a loss of inner confidence in the future of the state-capitalist system. They sensed that its transformation was inevitable. And accepting the inevitable was greatly eased for many of them by the expectation of doing no less well for themselves under private capitalism.

Nomenklatura capitalism

Historically, whether the transition from one type of class society to another is predominantly violent or peaceful has always depended on the ability of members of the old ruling class to adapt themselves to the new socio-economic relations and merge smoothly into the new ruling class. In the transition from feudalism to capitalism, for instance, the British aristocrats merged into the rising capitalist class, while their French counterparts had to be overthrown in a violent upheaval.

In most cases, the transition from state to private capitalism has been closer to the "British" model. Many (though by no means all) "communist" bureaucrats, both in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union, welcomed the privatisation of capital because they saw the opportunity to exploit their official positions to establish themselves as private capitalists.

This applied especially to top managers in the state ministries in charge of potentially lucrative industries like oil and gas, which could be – and were – reorganised as private (or mixed state-private) capitalist corporations. Lower-level managers and specialists were able to siphon off resources for private businesses now legalised under the guise of "cooperatives." Quite a few Communist Youth League officials also found ways to set up in business.

Far from all the "new" private capitalists were former members of the party-state "nomenklatura" (bureaucracy). In particular, quite a few emerged from the criminal underworld. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of "nomenklatura capitalism" was widespread enough to disillusion many activists of the "anti-communist" revolution, who concluded that there had been no real "revolution" at all.

Between Moscow and Brussels

In the East European countries another factor was at work. For sudden and unexpected as the "velvet revolutions" may have appeared at the time, the conditions that made

them possible had developed gradually over the previous decade or so.

Above all, Eastern Europe was no longer strictly within the sphere of Soviet influence. Soviet troops were being withdrawn from the region. The “Brezhnev doctrine”, which had justified military intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968, was dead. Hard-line East European leaders could no longer count on economic or military backing from Moscow: Gorbachev had made that clear to them. Lacking confidence in their own strength and accustomed to dependence on the Kremlin, they were not likely to act decisively on their own.

Moreover, a number of the East European countries (especially Poland) were deeply in debt – to the tune of over \$100 billion – to Western creditors, making them vulnerable to Western pressure. Their economic ties were increasingly with Western Europe rather than with the Soviet Union or one another. Close economic ties had developed between East and West Germany. Hungary was already seeking to join the EEC.

Thus, in terms of great power alignments, Eastern Europe in 1989 was a “grey zone” between Moscow and Brussels, in the middle of a process of reorientation from east to west. At some point this external shift was likely to trigger a corresponding internal change from state to private capitalism. Awareness of this reality weakened the resolve of “communist” leaders to struggle against the tide.

The counter-example of Romania

It is helpful to compare the cases of peaceful transition with the clear counter-example of Romania. Here the army, police and special security forces (*Securitate*) were ordered to disperse protesting crowds by force – and did so. As the popular rising escalated, however, the defence minister decided at a certain point to thwart Ceausescu’s orders and back his rival Iliescu. This split the army and security forces into opposing factions, which then fought one another until the capture, “trial” and execution of Ceausescu finally decided the issue.

In contrast to the collective leaderships of the other East European regimes, Ceausescu exercised a strict personal dictatorship. Thus, the views of a broader power elite, many of whom might have accepted the transition to private capitalism, carried little weight. And Ceausescu himself was certainly not lacking in

self-confidence or ruthlessness.

Moreover, he was largely independent of outside powers. He had broken Romania’s ties of dependence on the Soviet Union long before. Nor was he vulnerable to Western pressure: although he accepted loans from the West in the 1970s, he repaid them in full in the 1980s by exporting consumer goods (thereby exacerbating domestic shortages and discontent).

Would orders have been obeyed?

The “post-communist” transition was peaceful (except in Romania) because leaders did not try to retain power by force. But would they have succeeded had they tried? Would their orders have been obeyed?

It is impossible to be sure, but I think the answer is probably – yes, on the whole. Even a highly unpopular regime – and few can have been so deeply hated as Ceausescu’s – can crush an unarmed (or even lightly armed) populace so long as it has at



Yeltsin addresses a crowd during the attempted coup of August 1991

its disposal disciplined armed forces equipped with modern weaponry. This is confirmed by recent experience in Iran and Honduras. As we have seen, the guards at the Berlin Wall were prepared to use their firearms if ordered to do so.

The likely outcome is harder to predict in the case of Russia during the attempted coup of August 1991. Soldiers and commanders were unsure what to do, but that was because with the president (Gorbachev) removed from the picture it was difficult to tell who constituted the legitimate authority – the plotters’ emergency committee, Yeltsin, or perhaps neither? (This created the possibility of civil war, as in Romania.) However,

the duty to obey orders that clearly did come from a legitimate authority was never in question.

Implications for the transition to socialism

What implications does this have for the transition to socialism?

We might hope that when conditions are ripe the capitalist class will cede power as readily as the “communist” regimes did in most of Eastern Europe. If so, all the better. But there is reason to suspect that it might not happen that way.

In some respects, the transition from capitalism to socialism may be more difficult than past transitions from one type of class society to another. Members of the ruling class in one class society, be they British aristocrats or Russian bureaucrats, may accept the transition to a different class society in the expectation of being able to convert their privileges into a new form, but they can hardly hope to retain privileged status in a classless society.

In the World Socialist Movement, we consider it essential to aim at a peaceful transition to socialism. This is not only because we shrink from the prospect of bloodshed, though there is no shame in that. Above all, we reckon that in any violent confrontation with the capitalist state the working class faces the near-certainty of defeat and massacre – and the odds grow steadily worse as military technology advances.

It would be unnecessarily risky to count on all of the soldiers defecting to the side of the revolution. Special precautions will surely be taken to insulate the armed forces from the contagion of socialist ideas and bolster their discipline – that is, their readiness to obey

orders.

Under these circumstances, it is a foolhardy and dangerous anachronism to conceive of the socialist revolution in terms of a popular uprising. Of course, a popular movement is essential, but that movement must constitute itself as the legitimate authority in society through the democratic capture of the state. Even then it is conceivable that some people will try to take violent action against the socialist majority, but it will be much easier to thwart such people – if necessary, by using the armed forces against them.

STEFAN

On all sides we hear it said that “after 1917 a Marxist utopia was realised in our country,” that we had a “communist regime” or “socialist state,” that “we were building socialism and communism,” and so on. This makes it essential for us to grasp the true essence of Marxism, to understand what socialism and communism are.

From a scientific – in particular, Marxist – point of view, communism (or socialism, as Marx and Engels rarely distinguished between these two concepts) means an absolutely free society of universal equality and abundance, in which all people work – more precisely, seek self-realisation – voluntarily, in accordance with their abilities and inclinations, and receives goods in accordance with their needs.

This is the second stage, the phase of socialism or communism (or communism, strictly speaking). The first stage (or, more rarely, socialism in the narrow sense) means almost the same, with the sole difference that there is still some connection between how much labour an able-bodied person has given society and the quantity of goods that he or she receives.

But for Marx and Engels, as a rule, the words “socialism” and “communism” were synonyms.

And so, socialism or communism is the complete liberation of each person and all humanity from any form of exploitation and oppression! The government of people is replaced by the administration of things. The absence of any state power over people!

Socialism in a single country?

Marx and Engels categorically denied the possibility of establishing socialism or communism in a single country or in a few countries. They even denied the possibility of the sustained victory or success of a workers’ revolution in a single country – let alone in a backward or not very developed country. For a whole number of serious reasons.

Let us start with the fact that such concepts as “socialism” or “communism” are absolutely incompatible with the concept of “the state.” For a real Marxist, the very idea of a “socialist” or “communist” state is empty nonsense, the height of absurdity.

Of course, so long as another, hostile system exists, especially if it dominates the greater part of the planet, there can be no question of the state dying out. Let us imagine a state in which a workers’ revolution takes place but is not soon followed by a world revolution. That state is forced



to compete with other states in the surrounding world in the accumulation of armaments, heavy industry, and so on.

But competitive accumulation – of capital, in the final analysis – runs counter to the popular need to give priority to consumption. It prevents expansion of the conquests of the revolution and makes it necessary to preserve the state. Giving priority to consumption would require abolishing a fundamental feature of capitalist society – accumulation for the sake of accumulation. For this two conditions are needed: workers’ self-management (working people themselves taking control of production) and the elimination of national borders (that is, of competition on a world scale). The latter also requires abolition of the state.

An analysis from Russia makes many of the points we do.

From the elementary foundations of Marxism it follows that such phenomena as commodity-money relations and the law of value are absolutely incompatible with socialism. For capitalism, according to Marx and Engels, has two chief defining defects. First, goods have to be produced as commodities (for sale), in the form of commodities, thereby giving social relations a fetishized, mercantile character. Second, the basic purpose of production is the extraction of surplus value, which is the source of the exploitation of man by man.

It is self-evident that money and the state can only die out together.

Commodity-money relations cannot exist in the absence of state structures. For money is backed up by the assets of the state bank. Given commodity production, competition, the necessity for each state to compete economically with other states, a common measure of some sort is needed to calibrate inputs and outputs in comparison with other countries. Therefore, prices inevitably exist so that records can be kept of value. Finally, some way is needed to monitor the effectiveness of economic activity.

In order to realise the specifically capitalist tendency of accumulation for the sake of accumulation, two things are necessary. First, workers must be alienated from the means of production and from the results of their labour. Second, there must be competition between capitalists. In the absence of workers’ revolution on a global scale, the pursuit of surplus labour in the world as a whole inevitably thwarts any attempt to establish socialism, even if it is undertaken in a highly developed and wealthy region.

Socialism – a world system

Thus, socialism or communism can only be a world system. In this respect it resembles capitalism, which also arises at the international level, becoming a world system as it expands to absorb the pre-capitalist periphery. According to Marx, capitalism is characterised by the concentration of the means of production in the hands of a few, the organization of labour as social labour, and the creation of a world market. In principle, two world systems cannot exist simultaneously.

“Dictatorship of the proletariat”

For a long time the Bolsheviks

justified their dictatorship by calling it “the dictatorship of the proletariat.” Marx used this term to mean not dictatorship as a repressive political regime but social dominance of the working people as a counterweight to the exploiters (while they still exist) – a workers’ semi-state. He put forward this idea in opposition to the idea, popular in his day, of the dictatorship of revolutionary leaders.

The democratic power of the working class, the conquest of true, broad democracy, and not the power of any leaders – that was and is the meaning of “dictatorship of the proletariat.” Undoubtedly, such a regime is not socialism. It is still capitalism, although of a milder and more democratic variety.

The Bolshevik party dictatorship

The Bolshevik party dictatorship has its origins in the upheaval of 1917. After the fall of the autocracy, Russia won great democratic freedoms and became (for a short time)



“Repression intensified, filling the rapidly expanding Gulag with prisoners”

the most democratic state in the world. However, the provisional government failed to act. It did not begin peace negotiations and made no attempt to get out of the war. It did not embark on agrarian reform. It took no measures against the forces of reaction. The people got neither peace nor bread nor land. What is more, despite all the rights and freedoms, strong democratic institutions (apart, perhaps, from the Soviets) were not created in the country. Thus, there was nothing surprising about the Bolshevik takeover. A reactionary military dictatorship was also a real possibility at the time.

The Bolshevik regime claimed the mantle of a workers’ state. However, in a workers’ state (more precisely, semi-state) there would have been

the broadest freedom and human rights, with political power exercised democratically through Soviets, trade unions and competing political parties.

The actual situation, alas, was nothing like this. Political power was exercised mainly through a dictatorship of the Bolshevik party and vanguard, with all forms of democracy restricted from the very first months. Yes, in the early years there were progressive, humane laws in various spheres. (To what extent they were observed is another question.) But the main trends were negative: further curtailment of democratic rights and freedoms, consolidation of the one-party system, secret police repression even within the ruling party, formation of a hierarchy of officials appointed from above.

Stalin’s industrial revolution

The Stalinist faction, which in 1925 had introduced the anti-Marxist conception of “building socialism in a single country,” gained full control by the end of the 1920s. The chief concern of the ruling group was now the forging of a “great power”; this required expansion of the industrial base through unrestrained exploitation of the working people – for the sake, above all, of successful compe-

tion with the outside world, with foreign states. In practice, this meant the rapid accumulation of capital.

By the 1930s the authoritarian state had evolved into a totalitarian state. It was precisely at this period that the gap between the higher-ups and the masses deepened into an abyss. By means of so-called “collectivisation” the peasants were either, in essence, enserfed or driven from the soil and turned into a reserve labour force for industry. (Those who managed to get to the cities became, as a rule, hired workers.) Repression intensified, filling the rapidly expanding Gulag with prisoners.

During the first five-year plan, real wages declined by at least half, while the working day lengthened. Thus, the living standard of the absolute majority of the population fell substantially and exploitation sharply increased.

The Stalin regime was totalitarian state capitalism with significant elements of serfdom and slavery (which weakened but did not disappear even after the tyrant’s death). In practice, it accomplished an industrial revolution – that is, the accelerated accumulation of capital. To a large extent, this was primitive accumulation. We find pertinent parallels between industrialisation under Stalin and the path followed by Japan from the bourgeois “Meiji revolution” to World War Two. There too, capital grew rapidly. There too, despotic methods were used to modernise the economy, create an industrial base and strengthen military might, with the state playing a major role.

Thus, both under Stalin and later we had in Russia a right-wing dictatorship with a state monopoly over the economy. Stalinism is a broader concept than the Stalin regime. In the USSR, the Stalinist era lasted from the late 1920s until the collapse of the “Soviet” “socialist” system in 1991 (with various changes and modifications, of course).

Bureaucratic state capitalism

Stalinism is bureaucratic state capitalism. The bulk of direct producers did not own means of production and so were forced to sell their labour power to the real owner of those means of production – a special group called the nomenklatura. The members of this group belonged to a hierarchically organized system for the appropriation and distribution of surplus value. The ruling class of the Soviet Union was therefore a state bourgeoisie. It was an exploiting class that through the possession of state power owned the means of production, the whole of the so-called “national economy.”

In this way the traditional ultra-conservative status quo was re-established and the Russian Empire restored.

For several decades, both under Stalin and after his death, the ruling class or state bourgeoisie governed the country through a powerful and ramified bureaucratic apparatus. They relied on the age-old traditions of the Russian Empire and out of inertia continued to make formal and hypocritical use of pseudo-socialist, pseudo-communist, pseudo-left and pseudo-Marxist slogans. Such slogans were a convenient means of masking their real aims and playing on the sincere faith of many people, both inside the country and abroad.

Vladimir Sirotin, Moscow

(Translated by Stefan)

How could anyone have seriously argued that the workers ruled in Russia?

Workers State? Pull the other one

Incredible as it might seem millions believed that Russia under Stalin and his successors was some sort of “Workers State”. Most – those in and around the official “Communist” parties – thought it was a workers’ paradise, socialism even. A minority – the Trotskyists – wanted to have their cake and eat it: to claim credit for what they saw as Russia’s achievements but to repudiate the things they didn’t like. They called it a “degenerate Workers State”. One of these was the Belgian journalist and academic, Ernest Mandel (1923-1995), a biography of whom by Jan Willem Stutje *Ernest Mandel, A Rebel’s Dream Deferred* has just been published in English translation by Verso.

“Workers State” is a bit of a contradiction in terms, but if it is to mean anything it would have to mean that the workers controlled the state; which could only be done through some democratic mechanism. But the workers never controlled the state in Russia. Within a few years of the Bolsheviks seizing power in November 1917 they had suppressed all other parties and established a one-party dictatorship. While he was a member of the government Trotsky justified the description “Workers State” by arguing that the Bolshevik Party, which controlled the state, was the party of the workers who therefore controlled the state through it. When, however, he and his followers were banned too he could no longer use that argument. So, in the *Revolution Betrayed* (1936) he came up with another: that Russia was still a “Workers State” because most industry was nationalised, there was central planning and a state monopoly of foreign trade. This, despite his admission that state power was actually controlled by a privileged “bureaucracy” and his producing statistics to show that the workers were badly off and oppressed

This argument was so absurd that it soon aroused criticism within the ranks of his own followers. Some refused to describe a state in which the workers were oppressed and powerless as a “Workers State”. They disagreed about what to call it – some saw it as a new exploitative class society, others as “state capitalism” – but agreed that it wasn’t any kind of “Workers State”, not even a degenerate one. Trotsky stuck to his “degenerate Workers State” theory till one of its agents assassinated him in 1940.

Mandel had become a Trotskyist while still a teenager and during the war took part in underground Trotskyist activity in Belgium where his family lived. He was caught in 1944 and spent the remainder of the war in labour camps in Germany. After the war he emerged as one of the leaders of the Trotskyist “Fourth International”. One of the photos in this book is of a meeting of six leaders of this organisation in Paris in 1948. Of the six two had or came to regard Russia as state-capitalist. But not Mandel. He stuck to Trotsky’s dogma, and even extended it, describing the puppet regimes Russia set up in eastern Europe as “deformed Workers States”.



Dogma

In 1969, in a polemic against Michael Kidron, of the International Socialism group of Trotskyists (later the SWP) who argued that Russia was state capitalist, Mandel wrote:

“Ever since social-democratic opponents of the Russian October revolution hatched the theory of ‘capitalism’ continuing to exist in the Soviet Union, supporters of that theory have been faced with a difficult choice. Either they consider that Russian ‘capitalism’ has all the basic features of classic capitalism as analysed by Marx, to start with generalized commodity production, and that it also shows all the basic contradictions of capitalism, including capitalist crisis of overproduction— and then they have a hard time discovering evidence for this. Or they admit the obvious fact that most of these features are absent from the Soviet economy, and they then have to contend that these features are not ‘basic’ to capitalism anyhow, which in the last analysis only means exploitation of wage-labour by ‘accumulators.’” (*The Inconsistencies of State Capitalism*, p. 11).

As a matter of fact the social and economic system in Russia did exhibit the basic features of capitalism: minority control of the means of production (via nationalisation); generalised commodity production (i.e. generalised production for sale and the use of money); the accumulation of capital valued in money out of profits; and, in particular, yes, the exploitation of wage-labour by those who monopolised the means of production. Of course there were differences from what Mandel called here “classic” capitalism, due to the specific circumstances under which the system had come into being and developed which had resulted in a hugely increased economic role for the state. Hence state capitalism. In any event, even if Mandel’s narrow definition of capitalism as private enterprise is accepted, that would not make Russia into any kind of “Workers State”, only some new form of exploitative class society.

Disappointment

After discussing the “increasing rights for factory managers” then being granted as part of economic reforms introduced by the Russian government, Mandel declared:

“We are therefore convinced that capitalism could be restored in the Soviet Union or in any Eastern European country only after breaking the fierce resistance of the working class. (...) Given the present constellation of social forces, both nationally and internationally, we think it very unlikely that this resistance could actually be broken under these conditions, and that capitalism could be restored either in the Soviet Union, or in Yugoslavia, or in any other bureaucratically degenerated or deformed workers’ state.” (p. 16)

When this happened (and we, neither, saw this happening within twenty years) the working class put up no resistance to the transition from state capitalism to a more “classic” type of capitalism. Clearly, they did not share the same illusion as Mandel about Russia and its satellites being some sort of workers’ regime and so worth defending. Because Mandel and his Fourth International did believe the workers would resist, they placed great hope in the outcome of events in eastern Europe in the 1980s, trying to establish Trotskyist cells there. According to Stutje, they had some rather limited success in Poland and Czechoslovakia. But the outcome – a full return to “classic” capitalism rather than a regenerated “Workers State” – must have been a great disappointment. In fact, reading between the lines of this biography, Mandel never seems to have recovered from it.

Earlier Mandel had offered his expert advice as an economist to one of the “deformed Workers States” – Cuba when Che Guevara was Minister of Industry between 1961 and 1964. He visited Cuba a number of times and supported Guevara’s view that enterprises should be financed by direct grants from the central government and not be instructed to balance the books from their own activities. In other words, he was in favour of a much more centralised form of state capitalism than existed (or was eventually adopted).

Having said this, when it came to writing about “classic” capitalism Mandel was not too bad. In his *Marxist Economic Theory* (1962 in French, 1968 in English translation) he set out to show, on the basis of contemporary facts (and not just on the facts from the 1850s and 1860s that Marx had used), how Marx’s analysis of capitalism was still valid. The English hardback edition was divided into two volumes, the first of which, dealing with Marx’s theories, can still be recommended (the second part, dealing with the theories of Lenin and Trotsky and the nature of Russian society relapsed into Trotskyist scholasticism). His introductions to the Penguin edition of the three volumes of *Capital* are also good, as is his short pamphlet *An Introduction to Marxist Economic Theory*, even though it introduces

the dubious concept of “neo-capitalism”, which he later called “late capitalism”.

Duplicity

Politically, Mandel was a dyed-in-the-wool Trotskyist, explaining every working class failure by a lack of the right leadership, i.e. of a Trotskyist vanguard. He also practised the dishonest Trotskyist tactic of “entryism”, joining the reformist Belgian “Socialist”



Party in 1951, with a view to winning a leftwing following which he hoped to lead out of the party to form an open Trotskyist vanguard party. He achieved some success, even rising to be for a short while the editor of the BSP’s daily paper, *Le Peuple*. He lost this post when another paper he helped edit, *La Gauche*, criticised the party’s leadership. *La Gauche* advocated “structural reforms” of capitalism, basically the nationalisation of the holding companies which dominated the Belgian economy. This was popular amongst many workers in the coal, steel and manufacturing industries of the French-speaking part of Belgium, and Mandel managed to get the support of some of the union leaders and local politicians there.

According to Stutje, it was not until 1961 that Mandel told one of the trade union leaders that he was a Trotskyist:

“Until now Mandel had always kept quiet about his membership of the Fourth International. Now it was time to break the silence. He went to Yerna’s office and confessed to his bewildered friend, ‘I need to tell you the truth. I am a member of the Fourth International.’ Yerna was disappointed that his comrade had not trusted him sooner” (pp. 80-1).

In the end, as later with Militant in Britain, the inevitable happened. In 1964 Mandel and his followers were booted out of the BSP. In a letter to Ken Coates (then a fellow Trotskyist, later a Labour MEP) that year he told him: “A left wing had been built in the Socialist Party from 1961 on, accompanied by an autonomous, clandestine Trotskyist core group” (emphasis added).

According to Stutje,

“The question of when, where and how to leave the SP was clearly on the agenda from the early 1960s. Mandel had only wanted to make sure they left with a substantial group – and by that he meant thousands” (p. 85).

In the event, the main trade union leader he had relied on went off at a tangent and embraced Walloon (i.e. French-speaker) nationalism and Mandel left with a few hundred only. But a new bandwagon soon came along – student unrest – and he was able to jump on that, influencing student leaders such as Alain Krivine in France, Tariq Ali in Britain (both of whom became Trotskyists) and, to a lesser extent, Rudi Dutschke in Germany (who didn’t but, like Daniel Cohn-Bendit, eventually joined the Greens). Tariq Ali, though no longer a Trotskyist but still an admirer of Mandel, has written the foreword to Stutje’s biography.

Mandel was perfectly aware of what socialism really was as he had written in his polemic with Kidron:

“socialism means a classless society. It therefore presupposes not only the suppression of private property of the means of production, henceforth managed in a planned way by the associate producers themselves, but it also calls for a level of development of the productive forces which makes possible the withering away of commodity production, of money, and of the state.” (p. 17)

According to him, however, the productive forces had not yet reached the necessary level of development, so socialism was not an immediate possibility. Only a new society – based on nationalisation, planning and a state monopoly of foreign trade – was. He called it “transitional society” but it would only have been a form of state capitalism and state capitalism is not, as the experience of Russia in the last century showed, a step towards socialism. It turned out to be, in the joke circulating towards the end of the regime, “the longest route between capitalism and capitalism”.

ADAM BUICK

The campaign to win the young to war has come a long way from the 'Your Country Needs You' poster with the pointing finger of Kitchener used in the 'First Great War'.

Joining the killing machine



As is usual at this time of the year, we are called upon to remember the dead, the fallen of wars; not only two 'World Wars' but of recent continuing wars in far away places. Poppies sold, a festival of remembrance held and televised, boy-scouts, girl-guides, sea, air and army cadets, new and old soldiers march down to the local war memorial to repeat that yearly ritual, customary observance and practice.

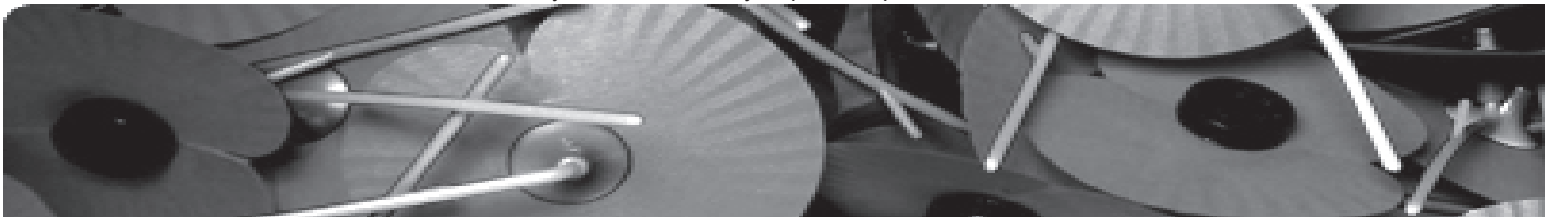
The main event is held at the Cenotaph, the monument built to honour people whose remains are interred elsewhere or whose remains cannot be recovered and lie scattered across the fields and arable land of France; as was and still is the case for many casualties of that First

the last and current century. This year's remembrance falls in the year that marks the 70th anniversary and outbreak of the Second World War and as usual the Queen and her Royal Family dressed-up as Fleet Admirals, Air Marshals and Field Marshals with medals and self-awarded honours, will join our political leaders in honouring by this act of remembrance the war dead who, we are told time and again, gave their lives for the freedoms that we (supposedly) enjoy today.

During the summer with its cricket field, pubs and a centuries-old church Wootton Bassett became the focuses of international media attention, not unfortunately because of its idyllic picturesque

English town in all respects but one: every

corpse that returns from Britain's wars abroad passes through it. In what has become a public show of respect? Wootton Bassett is near Royal Air Force Lyneham, the base to which the country's war dead are returned. Commencing about two years ago, townspeople began gathering for the processions of each soldier as the body, in a flag-draped casket, was moved from Lyneham to a coroner's office in Oxford. The inaugural processions were attended by just a dozen saluting war veterans at first. Crowds then swelled to the thousands when the repetition of these sad processions became commonplace as the convoy of coffins through Wootton Bassett turned from a trickle to a stream.



Newspapers carried front page coverage that included pictures of mothers, fathers, wives, children and in some cases distraught girlfriends of the fallen. Anyone who picks up a newspaper or owns a television set cannot have failed to miss the risks that are involved and taken by the young in the modern

wars that are Afghanistan and Iraq and have proven to be oh so deadly.

Every now and again, Brown and Cameron, before the exchange of insults during questions to the Prime Minister, will pay a tribute of hollow words acknowledging deceased military personnel. But with the public witnessing the return of young military casualties the pendulum of public opinion began to stick and stay put on questioning or opposing the military mission. The government during the summer, sensing the public perception, gave support to the first ever armed forces day, the idea being that parades and ceremonies would be held in every community around the war memorial to honour the role and function of armed forces personnel past and present - to use government language - honouring their commitment. This year's main national celebration was held at the Historic Dockyard in Chatham, Kent. The official party included Prime Minister Gordon Brown and his wife Sarah, the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester, and the Chief of the Defence Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup.

The Somme, 1916



Brown said: "The people that have come here today have shown the high esteem and regard in which they hold the Armed Forces of our country. The Armed Forces who do so much, the families who make such sacrifices. I don't

think we say thank you enough, today is our chance to say it and say it with one voice, thank you very much to our Armed Forces."

Brown's comments, were, if nothing

else, very telling about government and military strategists' concerns and about having public opinion on side. If opinion is off side, then one thing is for sure and that's that it's not directed against service personnel who are merely uniformed workers, working like any other workers under instructions. The British armed forces have some of the most difficult and far-flung commitments to maintain. Major commitments in Afghanistan and Iraq co-exist with others from peacekeeping in Cyprus to patrolling the Falkland Islands. To meet these commitments, an estimate is made of the required number of trained full-time personnel, known as the 'trained requirement'. The actual number of trained personnel, known as the 'trained strength', is usually slightly less than requirement. The trained requirement in 2007 stood at 183,610; the trained strength stood at 177,760, of which 99,280 were in the army, 34,940 in the navy and 43,550 in the air force.

In terms of personnel, the UK regular armed forces are the third-largest in Europe after Germany and France. Britain is the world's largest military spender after of course the US, and its armed forces being the most stretched in the world, over £2 billion is spent each year on recruiting and training 20,000 new personnel to replace those who either leave or are killed on active duty. The armed forces, as the statistics show, draw their non-officer recruits mainly from among young people with low educational accomplishment living in poor communities. A large proportion joining for disadvantaged reasons, including the lack of civilian career choices; a survey in the Cardiff area in 2004 found that 40 percent of army recruits were joining as a last resort and the army revealed in 2004 that while roughly 45 percent of all young people leave school with 5 GCSE subjects graded A-C only, 17 percent of all Army recruits in 2003-04 had English at A-C level, with the figure for Maths at about 10 percent. On average Army recruits have 0.9 of a GCSE at grade A-C. ... Records also show that 24 percent of all Army applicants in 2003-04 were unemployed for a significant period before applying.

The killing locomotive that is the army always needs fuel to feed into its boiler, so tens of thousands of pounds are spent on newspapers and the media convincing youngsters to sign away (no apology) their lives. On the way back from visiting a friend, I found one of those free

newspapers that are handed out every evening at tube stations in London and lying on the seat next to me on the train on which I was travelling, what caught my eye was a double-page spread advertisement placed in the London *Metro* by the army and, I assume, acting on instructions from the Ministry of Defence and the government. The advertisement carried the image of a beautiful young woman in combat fatigues. I have no reason to believe that this young person isn't a serving member of the armed forces and with the looks of a model.

The advert had a personal testimony of army life given by Major Laura Blair, 31, (can you believe that name) who is a member of the Adjutant General's Corps; they apparently specialise in HR Personnel. Laura, if she does exist, says wonderful things about army life and ends by advising anyone who may be interested in an army career to either pop into one of the Army Careers Offices dotted around London or visit the Army Show Rooms in Hounslow or Dalston to find out just what life in uniform could offer them.

Recruitment literature for army careers emphasises potential benefits: career interest and challenge, comradeship, the active lifestyle, travel and training opportunities. It omits to mention or obscures even blots out: the radical change from a civilian to a military lifestyle, ethical issues involved in killing, risks to physical and mental health, the legal obligations of enlistment, the state's legal and moral obligations to its armed forces personnel, and the right of conscientious objection. By suggesting that soldiers are highly satisfied with army life, the literature also glosses over the ambivalent attitudes of the majority. The omissions conspire against the potential recruit's right and responsibility to make an informed choice about whether to enlist. The literature also does little to enable parents to ask searching questions of their children and of recruiters in order to assure their children's best interests.

One thing that remains the same about war is that workers fight it and die in it, and that's best summed-up by the last surviving soldier to have fought in the trenches of the First World War who died earlier this year: Henry John "Harry" Patch (17 June 1898 – 25 July 2009) – known as 'the Last Tommy'. Harry, apparently, hated war, and called it "organised murder, and nothing less."

NL

AFGHANISTAN

Lying about dying

The pressure to misinterpret the deaths, as the bodies come back, as nobly purifying is a cynically orchestrated propaganda exercise intended to justify the war.

Among the rituals so consoling to our Servants of the People in Westminster is the solemn roll call of the names of recently fatal casualties of the Afghanistan war proceeding to formulaic assurances of grief, of sympathy for family and friends and an assertion, defiant of a mass of disruptive facts, that from the dead will blossom a victory to bring a happier, freer Afghanistan and a safer Britain. All of this will happen, argue the MPs, through some process so far undefined. Meanwhile it is notable that the casualties' names are exclusively those of members of the British armed forces; the fighters on the other side and the hapless Afghan people who die terrified in their homes from the blast of the missiles do not get a mention. It is all very satisfactory for the Honourable Members on the green benches, dreaming of their expense claims while scheming of how most effectively to avoid any too probing questions from their constituents about the policy of satisfying the appetite of that voracious war.

This is reflected in the style of the heavily publicised repatriation of the dead soldiers, brought in flag-draped coffins to a military airfield and, after a ceremonial unloading, paraded through the streets of the nearby town – all carefully orchestrated and recorded by the TV news cameras. It would be a very brave person who defied this official smothering of doubts about the reasons for the troops being in Afghanistan. Part of this disreputable process is the eulogising of the dead who, one after another, are remembered, each in their own way, as a rare combination of courage, good humour, compassion, intellectual power...An example of this receptive attitude was a full page article by Audrey Gillan – who has some direct experience of Afghanistan – in the *Guardian* of 23 September about the late Corporal Michael Lockett: "...one of the most affable and funniest...one of the most courageous...handsome face and bright blue eyes flickering...Each time I met him I admired (him) more..." In another case – which did not have the advantage of being written up by a doting journalist – a dead soldier was praised because he had "loved" being a sniper – loved, in other words, practising his craft of abruptly and clinically killing people as if there can be no higher human talent.

Two Friends

But among the hysteria a more sombre and realistic event intruded – a young man by the name of Barry Delaney in a woman's dress weeping for his best friend

Kevin Elliott who was killed in an ambush in August. Three years ago the two agreed that if Elliott was killed Delaney would attend his funeral dressed like a woman. On his last leave Elliott told Delaney that he was terrified to go back to Afghanistan and could see no proper reason for the British army being there. Delaney is chronically unemployed, living in Dundee where there is a persistent problem – which Elliott avoided by joining the army when he left school at 16. In this context it is particularly pertinent that the Ministry of Defence report a 25 per cent rise in army recruits in this year of the recession – more than at any other time since 2005.

Delaney and Elliott do not conform to the stereotype so lovingly fostered onto us by media hacks. Elliott told of many ingloriously gruesome episodes, such as while trying to leave the battle under fire having to scoop up from the dust the body parts and internal organs of another soldier. Experiences like that are likely, in every case except the most hardened or resistant, to devastate a person's morale so as to insert unforeseen, unwelcome and unmanageable aspects into their personality so damaging as to make the effect endure for a long time after the immediate experience has expired. The *Guardian* quotes Professor Tim Robbins, former head of trauma and stress services at St. George's Hospital: "If we are asking people to do appalling things, to take part in regular firefights and hand-to-hand combat, you get to the stage where it de-sensitises them to violence".

Prisoners

The durability of these effects was illustrated by a recent survey by NAPO, the Probation Officers' trade union, which estimated that there are over 20,000 ex-service personnel – over twice as many as are in Afghanistan – being processed by the criminal justice system such as police, courts, prisons and the like. Of these 8,500 have committed offences serious enough to get them sent to prison, making a tenth of the total prison population and the largest single identifiable occupational group there. In many cases their offences were the immediate result of excessive consumption of alcohol or drugs, or both. The most common offence was for domestic violence, usually by men on their wives as an anarchic response to the stress of the discipline required by a close living relationship. Typical examples are, firstly by a man who went through two spells in active war zones: "Hard to reconcile the devastation, horror and distress of the war with the comfortable life"

and secondly a man who in his first few days in the Iraq war saw a friend blown up; he now has nine previous convictions beginning in 2005, of which two were for domestic violence and he is known by his ex-partners as a “Jekyll and Hyde” character. Facts like these throw serious doubt on the official propaganda, abetted by the media weasels, that the British forces in Afghanistan are unique in being impeccably mannered and humane. In addition they raise the question of whether Kevin Elliott was driven to join up when he left school because the army offered him better prospects than a life on the bread-line.

Torture

An example of how soldiers, of whatever nationality, are liable to respond to the everyday stress of militarism was the case of Baha Mousa, who was working as a receptionist in a Basra hotel until the day in September 2003 when 120 British soldiers (from a group known as “The Grim Reapers”) raided the hotel and took him, with nine others, into detention at the Battle Group Main camp. It was there that Baha Mousa – called “fat boy” or “fat bastard” by the soldiers – was subjected to a process of “conditioning” – or more accurately torture – until he died with 93 separate injuries to his body including a broken nose and fractured ribs. A video recording shows Baha Mousa, with other detainees, hooded and forced into stress positions, being screamed at, abused and threatened. At the subsequent enquiry there was evidence suggesting that Baha Mousa was arrested and tortured because he had complained after seeing some of the soldiers breaking open a safe in the hotel and stealing money. One of the soldiers admitted to this but probably did not help his case by saying he wanted the money “to make a collage”. There was a court martial but, in what looked suspiciously like a closing of ranks, the blame was focussed on only one of the soldiers, who then had to plead guilty to inhumane treatment while the others were acquitted. Counsel for the Ministry of Defence did his best for his majestic client by apologising for the “brutal violence” and “appalling behaviour” of the soldiers. Which left just the government and the media to do their best to plaster over such an embarrassing episode and insist that things are different now, as the soldiers go about the business of killing and of being killed in Afghanistan.

Distress

The pressure on us to misinterpret the deaths, as the bodies come back, as nobly purifying is a cynically orchestrated propaganda exercise intended to justify the war, to obscure the fact that the great powers’ interest in Afghanistan does not arise from any concern for the people of that country but from its position in an area vital to the interests of those powers, rather like the situation when it was an unwilling participant in the “Great Game” of Victorian imperialism. It is almost as a grisly tradition, that those same powers should readily support any Afghan tribal ruler no matter how corrupt and repressive – and that so many of the attempts to control the place through conquest have failed. It is hardly surprising that some of the soldiers should begin to ask why they are there and what the end will be for it all. The official response is to promote a massive lie with insidious propaganda fashioned to strait-jacket any tendency to dissent from the popular delusions. The killing goes on as the government gambles that their lies will be more acceptable than the distress of facing reality.

IVAN



Free is cheaper?

ON 12 October the London *Evening Standard* converted itself from a paying into a free newspaper, claiming to be the first “free quality newspaper”. That’s a bit pretentious since, as class-conscious Londoners know, the *Evening Standard* has been a consistently anti-working class rag opposing any strike by London workers, and a rag remains a rag even if it’s free.

Ironically, a couple of months earlier its business page had commented:

“It had to happen: after the £1 store, came the 99p variety, and now the 89p shop is on the way. Retail Week says the Annauth family, who dreamt up the 89p store (“at least 10p cheaper than elsewhere”) in Dorset, will create 20 jobs. They intend to open other branches. Soon, there will be the 79p store, then 69p. In fact, why not have the ‘nothing store’ and have done with it?” (17 August)

Why not indeed and that’s what will happen in socialism (though the quality will be much higher than the shoddy sold in these shops today). But we’re living in capitalism, so how can a paper be free and still make a profit? From advertising, stupid. What newspapers are selling is not so much news to their readers as advertising space to advertisers. To this they do of course have to attract readers and so contain material of interest to them or which fits in with their views or prejudices. But that’s not their main purpose, nor their main source of income.

The more readers a paper has the wider the audience of potential buyers it can offer advertisers. Requiring people to pay inevitably puts some off and so reduces readership. Hence the rise of the free, give-away paper. There are already a number of London-wide free papers and competition from them has affected *Evening Standard* sales. So, under its new owner, Russian oligarch Alexander Lebedev, its business strategists have decided to bank on an increased readership from being free bringing in more in advertising revenue than the loss of revenue from sales. As Dan Sabbagh explained in the *Times* (9 October):

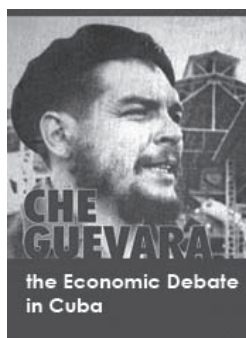
“This is a title that sold about 450,000 copies as recently as five years ago, but competition from freesheets (including News International’s thelondonpaper) pushed its paid-for sales down to 110,000 in August. At that sort of level, cover price income of a miserable £10 million or so is so small that it might be worth gambling on a massive increase in advertising income by printing twice the number of copies and giving them away.”

Even before he became a socialist Marx had remarked that “the primary freedom of the press lies in not being a trade” (www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1842/free-press/ch06.htm). That’s a good point. The commercial newspapers, which proclaim themselves the “Fourth Estate” and trumpet that they are essential defenders of our “freedom”, are not a free press at all. What they mean by freedom of the press is the freedom for them as newspaper businesses to print what they like without government interference or any degree of democratic control.

The only free press today is small-circulation magazines like us whose main concern is to get ideas across, not to make a profit. And in socialism all papers will be free to take and read – and free also of commercial advertising.

Che in power

***Che Guevara and the Economic Debate in Cuba.* By Luiz Bernardo Pericás. Atropos. New York, 2009**



Guevara's cult status rests on the fact that he was a martyr to his cause, fighting to free the poor in the Third World from oppression and exploitation (by US imperialism).

Pericás probably thinks he is enhancing Guevara's image in describing what he did when he was a member of the Cuban government from 1959 to 1965, two years before he met his death in Bolivia. In fact he reveals what would have happened in the event of the guerrilla-led peasant insurrections that Guevara championed triumphing.

In Cuba Guevara was successively head of the National Bank and Minister of Industry. As such he played a key role in the construction of state capitalism in Cuba, even though he thought he was constructing "socialism" as a step towards the moneyless "communist" society that he seems to have genuinely wanted. According to Andrew Sinclair in *Guevara*, "he dreamed of the single wage-scale in which everybody would earn the same wage or would earn according to needs until money could be abolished altogether". This may have been his longer-term dream but equal wages was not what he introduced when he was Minister of Industry.

The policy the Cuban government pursued (made all the more necessary by the US embargo) was to industrialise the country on the same sort of lines as Russia had done, putting in place the same structures: a one-party state, state enterprises, integration of the trade unions into the state, a harsh labour discipline banning strikes, imposing labour passbooks and severely punishing absenteeism. As can be seen from this book, Guevara implemented and justified all these things. Hardly freedom from oppression and exploitation. The same thing happened in Vietnam.

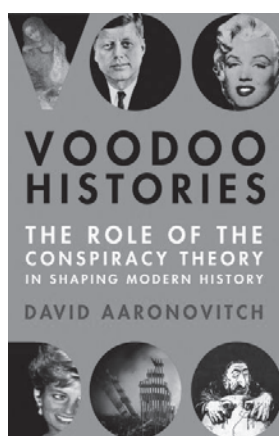
Pericás's book details the discussions that went on while Guevara was a member of the Cuban government and amounts to an

economic history of Cuba during this period. The translation (from Portuguese, as the author is from Brazil) is not perfect. If the author had proof-read himself he would surely have changed "mercantile production" to the more familiar "commodity production" and "good" to "commodity".

ALB

Conspiraloons

***Voodoo Histories: The Role of the Conspiracy Theory in Shaping Modern History.* By David Aaronovitch, published by Jonathan Cape, 2009**



Perhaps the most disastrous of all conspiracy theories is the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. This is largely based on a book written by a Parisian lawyer in

the 1860s as a satire on Napoleon III. It was altered later in the nineteenth century by a Russian secret policeman to depict a Jewish conspiracy to take over the world. The man who popularised the Protocols around the world was the capitalist Henry Ford. Published by Ford's publishing house in the 1920s (along with other anti-semitic literature), subsidised with five million dollars, it sold half a million copies in the US alone. After mounting complaints about his anti-semitism Ford recanted and apologised, but Adolf Hitler saw him as a hero and the Protocols formed the basis of his world-view in his manifesto *Mein Kampf*. The rest, as they say, is history. Aaronovitch thoroughly demolishes this conspiracy theory, as he does with the alleged conspiracies in Stalin's show trials, McCarthyism, the deaths of President Kennedy, Marilyn Monroe, Diana, the story underpinning Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* (in a chapter entitled "Holy Blood, Holy Grail, Holy Shit"), the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon (in which some claim the Bush government were complicit) and more besides.

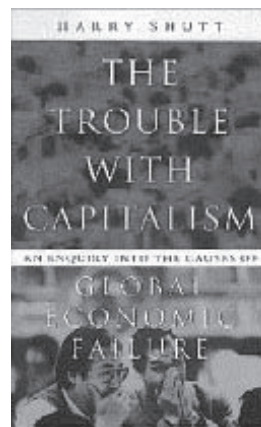
Aaronovitch argues that belief in

conspiracy theories is harmful since it "distorts our view of history and therefore of the present" and can lead to disastrous decisions. He detects a pattern in which conspiracy theories are "formulated by the politically defeated and taken up by the socially defeated". Conspiracies become an excuse to explain away a movement's own inherent weaknesses or unpopularity by attributing blame to a ruthless enemy. Aaronovitch claims that capitalism is not the cause of conspiracy theories since "[s]tate ownership in Russia was no guarantee against the most fabulous of conspiracy theories". But this mistakenly assumes that state ownership is incompatible with capitalism. When President Bush effectively nationalised some financial institutions in last year's "credit crunch" this was done for the benefit of American capitalism as a whole. In any case, capitalism's continued existence does not require a conspiracy or a conspiracy theory. All it requires is the support, or more likely acquiescence, of the overwhelming majority in their own exploitation.

LEW

Boom and bust

***The Trouble with Capitalism.* By Harry Shutt, Zed books.**



It is easy to see why the publishers have re-issued this book that first came out in 1998 – in it Shutt argued that a devaluation of capital assets could not be avoided for ever and

that when it eventually did happen it would take the form of a big crash.

Mat Little, who interviewed Shutt for *Red Pepper* this January, summarised what Shutt sees as the contradiction of capitalism that leads to recurring business cycles of boom and bust:

"According to Marx, capitalism is a system of accumulation. Profits are made but can't all be consumed by owners. Extra profits need to be recycled through the market. The only way you can successfully recycle them is to either expand your existing business or diversify into

another business,' says Shutt. 'It all depends on the ultimate consumer, consuming more and more. It has to grow, growth is built in.' The problem is that as profits are invested into the market, generating more profits that in turn have to be reinvested, production expands until it reaches a level that can no longer be absorbed by consumers. The market is glutted, and recession results. But the destruction of capital and jobs creates pent-up demand for the whole process to begin again in time. That, in brief, is the business cycle." (www.redpepper.org.uk/Prophet-of-doom)

Although Shutt does not write as a Marxist, this is one of the explanations of the capitalist business cycle put forward by some in the Marxist tradition. It implies that all capitalist crises are caused by the overexpansion (in relation to paying demand) of the sector producing consumer goods. But while the crash of 1929 can be explained in this way, the history of capitalism shows that the overexpansion of any key sector or industry can provoke a contraction of production through a knock-on effect on the rest of the economy.

Shutt explains the 25-year period of expansion after the end of WW2 in terms of the satisfaction of the market for affordable consumer durables and the end of this post-war boom as a result of the slowing down of this market. Capitalist enterprises were thus, he says, left with a 'mountain of cash', profits which could not be re-invested in expanding production, which he also describes as a 'capital glut' in the sense of an oversupply of investible funds.

What would normally happen in such a situation is that, in accordance with the law of supply and demand, capital would be devalued; which a crisis would bring about, so restoring the rate of profit (because this is calculated as profit divided by the value of capital). Only, according to Shutt, this did not happen on any large scale in 1974 because the authorities (governments and central banks) took steps to try to stop this, by facilitating the channelling of the surplus of investible funds into non-productive activities such as lending to consumers or speculation on the stock exchange or in property:

"This massive flow of funds – which is not being allowed, as would be dictated by traditional capitalist rationale, to self-destruct through the natural operation of the business cycle – has to find an outlet in

more or less speculative forms of investment." (p. 179)

Writing in 1998 Shutt saw the various financial crises till then – the stock market crash of 1987, the Mexican debt crisis of 1994-95, the financial problems of the Asian 'tiger economies' in 1997 – as signs that this was not sustainable and as harbingers of the Big Crash to come. Now, with the bursting of the dotcom bubble in between, he sees the Crash of 2008 as the expected big one:

"What the prolonged amassing of this huge surplus of capital cum fraud-driven credit bubble, means, according to Shutt, is the inevitable crash – the inexorable end of the business cycle – is going to be far more severe than it would otherwise have been. 'I think we are looking at negative growth, for an absolute minimum of two or three years and I wouldn't be surprised if it's five or ten. That would be a depression,' he says." (Red Pepper interview).

Since our failure to foresee the post-war boom with our prediction that WW2 would most likely be followed by a slump, just as after WW1, we have tended to be wary of making such predictions ourselves. So, we will just record this as the opinion of one person who has studied the matter.

ALB

Ya Basta!

Enough. By John Naish: Hodder £7.99.



Naish coins the word *enoughism* to describe the idea that most people's material wants are satisfied, so we should not aim to consume yet more. In a

world where more people are obese than starving, we need to draw a limit to what we eat or otherwise buy. If you are earning the median income for the country you live in, striving to earn more is unlikely to make you happier, and even the filthy rich (with over \$125 million) don't feel much more contented than the average worker. Don't try to earn more by working more, since long hours of employment are bad for you. Working over 41 hours per week is likely to give you high blood pressure, while

voluntary work tends to increase the life span.

It is surprising to be told that 'In the Western world we have now effectively have everything we could possibly need'. This ignores the extent of homelessness and other kinds of want that exist even in relatively prosperous societies; one child in three in Britain lives in poverty, for instance. Even basic needs like food, warmth and shelter are not met for many, many people.

But Naish does have some interesting things to say about consumer society. With many goods, we are offered not a genuine choice but a whole range of trivial 'options' that are really all the same (whether it is a matter of shampoo or digital cameras). Cars and fashion are further clear examples of where people are pressured into having the latest innovation. All-you-can-eat buffets are becoming increasingly popular: though don't they really show that people are not that well off after all, as well as how they behave in a society of scarcity when the constraints are temporarily removed?

It's unlikely that socialism will be a kind of consumer paradise, and the notion of enoughness will probably apply, since there will be no profit motive to persuade people into having the latest of everything. We have no reason to think that he's a socialist, but Naish does see some of the implications of a truly human society when he writes of the need to 'explore anew our old, nourishing and truly sustainable natural human resources – qualities such as gratitude, generosity and the urge for human connection'.

PB

Labour, Lib-Dem, Tory



The Socialist Standard examines their case

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Meetings

London Winter Film Programme

Sundays at 6pm at 52 Clapham High St.

1 November -- *The Fog of War* (life & times of Robert McNamara - 95 mins)

15 November -- *Matewan* (mining dispute in 1920's Virginia - 142 mins)

29 November -- *Sicko* (American healthcare under scrutiny- 120 mins)

Chiswick

Tuesday 17 November 8pm

FUNNY MONEY

Comical currency crank DVD (45 mins) followed by discussion.

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

Glasgow

Wednesday 18 November, 8.30pm

THE ZEITGEIST MOVEMENT

A member of this movement will open up the discussion.

Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road

Manchester

Monday 23 November, 8.30 pm

Discussion on The Case for Socialism Unicorn, Church Street, City Centre

East Anglia

Saturday 14 November, 12 noon to 4pm

Quebec Tavern, 93-97 Quebec Rd, Norwich NR1 4HY

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The Darwin Centenary



AS THIS month is the hundredth anniversary of the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, a book that raised a storm in its day, we are devoting considerable space in this issue to Darwinism and its relation to Marxism, particularly as Marx published the first section of his main work the same year.

Darwinism is an outlook based upon certain fundamental propositions put forward by Charles Darwin, just as Marxism is an outlook based upon certain fundamental propositions put forward by Karl Marx. Books by both of them were published in 1859 which clearly stated their fundamental propositions, and each devoted the rest of his life to accumulating facts in support of the theories that had been put forward. In both instances their theories have been enriched and qualified in certain directions by subsequent investigation, but in neither instance has the accuracy of their fundamental propositions been affected.

Just as Darwin brought order into biological investigation,

so Marx brought order into social investigations. Darwin demonstrated that living forms evolve and Marx demonstrated that social forms evolve.

(...)

In the early years of the Socialist Party of Great Britain the Darwin controversy was still at white heat. We accepted his theory of evolution and had to defend it from the platforms and in our literature. Now the antagonists have fled the field, the evolutionary theory is generally accepted, and the various religious denominations, which used to be its bitterest opponents, are trying their hardest to digest it into their deluding creeds, just as the economists and historians are trying to digest and demoralize Marxism.

(Editorial, *Socialist Standard*, November 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.



TV Debates – much ado about nothing

If the general election is to go down in history it will not be through encouraging any prospects for the vital revolutionary, invigoratingly therapeutic society – but for the leaders of the tedious, outworn and discredited parties surprising everyone by agreeing to display their reactionary absurdity in a televised confrontation. That is, supposing the debates ever happen; there is likely to be some time before the election and a mass of obstacles to be negotiated before the leaders' agreement has any meaning. There is, to begin with, the likelihood that the idea sprang from their panic, which convinced them that they had nothing to lose. For Gordon Brown there is the fear that the exposure of New Labour's blundering chaos will lead to their practically disappearing come polling day. David Cameron will be anxious that his gamble on trying to replace his party's Thatcherite reputation as the Nasty Party with one for being Caring Conservatives may not come off in time. And Nick Clegg must be suffering anxiety about the fate of his pose as the real alternative way or running capitalism – with the unasked-for help of Vince Cable – and the effect of any failure on his ambition to make him the new brand of British politics. A crisis on any one of these could fatally undermine the debates.

Rows

Meanwhile it is not only TV soap addicts who wonder why viewing time should be allocated to the debates when there is already face-to-face confrontation in Prime Minister's Questions. Can there, it may be asked, be anything more, anything different, to be said about trying to tame and administer this strife-torn, repressive society? One response might be that anyone devoted to the ructions of *Coronation Street* would find much to divert them in the weekly posturing and screeching in the Commons. But witnessing at first hand the behaviour of our law-makers at their work may be encouraging them to, in more than one sense, switch off. Which would mean the wastage of all the meticulously detailed preparation being poured into the debates – the jockeying and the intrigue, the anguished rows about who will speak when, who will moderate, be in the audience, decide where everyone sits, winds up the discussion... it will be more than just a matter of assuaging some massive egos. Then there will be the analyses, with all parties claiming to have won the debate even if they lost the vote. A lot of this will revolve around the hope, by each participant, for the kind of seminal exchanges in debates between the candidates in previous US Presidential Elections which were widely supposed to have crucially affected the result.

Kennedy vs Nixon

The first example of this was in 1960, when Kennedy ran for the Democrats against Richard Nixon – both of them hardened, ruthless political operators with a suitably determined machine looking after them. In the first of four debates, watched by 80 million people, Nixon took part although he was still recovering after hospital treatment

for an infected knee injury. His appearance – weary, sick and pale – was made worse by his refusal to wear the usual make-up, which drew attention to his facial stubble. He seemed shifty and hesitant so that Kennedy, whose image was rested, fresh and healthy, impressed the millions of voters who preferred leaders who looked like that. The following debates were not so damaging to Nixon and in any case it was doubtful whether his sorry appearance had any crucial effect on the election because Kennedy won by the smallest of margins – 0.1 per cent of the vote – and even at that there was strong evidence of fraud in Texas – where Vice Presidential candidate Lyndon Johnson held sway – and Illinois where Mayor Richard Daley could always get the vote out by hook or by crook. In any case Nixon, stubble and all, eventually bounced back, winning the Presidency in 1968 and then, emphatically, in 1972 until his being sucked down into the Watergate affair exposed how shallow and saleable are what our leaders like to call their morals.

Carter vs Reagan

Another, less startling, example was in the election of 1980 when Ronald Reagan presented as a relaxed and fluent ex-film actor (albeit mainly in B movies) against the anguished born-again christian President Carter. Reagan took to the debates like – well, like any seasoned Hollywood star. The media loved it when he dismissed Carter's attack on his record of voting, as Governor of California, against Medicare and Social Security benefits, with the contemptuous phrase "There you go again!" Reagan ran away with the election, with nearly 10 per cent more than Carter of the popular vote. This was called the "Reagan Revolution", which ran into the following election and to some extent carried George H.W. Bush into the White House in 1988.



The debates, in America and here, are intended to promote the idea that leaders are crucially significant and that workers should vote for them and not for what they and their parties represent, in denial of the real experience which points to the leaders' impotence in face of the inexorable demands of capitalism. So when the debates are staged here we cannot look forward to anything more constructive, nor even interesting, than the customary, tedious drone in feeble response to the system's persistent crises. It may be that some wretched participant will try to wriggle out of a particularly difficult question by imitating the Reagan approach – Brown satirising Cameron covering his ineptitude in assumed sincerity; or Cameron raising a laugh with Brown's memories of being brought up as a son of the manse; or both of them savaging Clegg's ambition to be treated as more than a querulous upstart. In doleful times it might get us chuckling, amid our contempt for the exhausted excuses which, even now, are probably being written into the script.

IVAN



Voice from the Back

Too much Money at the end of the Month

When reporting poverty in the world the international media often assume that it is a condition that exists only in Africa or Asia but here is an example of its very real existence in the so-called developed world. "Nearly 60 per cent of Canadians would have trouble paying the bills if their paycheque was delayed by one week, a new poll suggests. The Canadian Payroll Association survey says not only are the majority of Canadians living paycheque-to-paycheque, but they have little ability to put money away for their retirement. The survey, released Monday, said 59 per cent of Canadians would have trouble making ends meet if they missed a paycheque."

(*Canadian Press*, 14 September) This paycheque-to-paycheque existence is the norm for most members of the world's working class irrespective of where they live.

Famine and Feast

Capitalism is a social system that produces all sorts of contradictions. Tremendous technical advances should mean a better society but inside capitalism it leads to better ways to maim, kill and destroy. Improvements in the production of food should lead to a happier world but it produces exactly the opposite. "The number of hungry people will pass 1 billion this year for the first time, the U.N. World Food Program (WFP) said, adding that it is facing a serious budget shortfall" (*Yahoo News*, 16 September). While a million human beings suffer starvation producers of food are destroying it to force up prices. "An emergency meeting over



100 kiloton w76 Trident warheads

the collapse in the price of milk will be held by Europe's agriculture ministers. The crisis talks have been convened by Sweden as farmers in mainland Europe continue their 'milk strike', dumping hundreds of thousands of litres of milk on farmland.... In an attempt to end the milk lakes and butter mountains, the European Commission is unwinding its dairy support system" (*Times*, 24 September). Butter mountains and milk lakes while a billion starve – capitalism has certainly outlived its usefulness.

Up in smoke

Every day in the newspapers and on the TV we are confronted by earnest politicians who assure us that they are doing everything possible to lessen the prospects of another nuclear horror story like Hiroshima or Nagasaki. A great deal of concern is being shown by these politicians as to whether Iran has a nuclear bomb. This concern seems a trifle ludicrous when the USA has 9,400 nuclear warheads and Russia has 13,000 of them. In fact when they are being frank, as the writer of this newspaper report is, they know that nuclear disarmament is an impossibility inside capitalism. "Later this month United Nations inspectors will visit Iran's secret nuclear facility near Qom to find out if the Islamic republic is about to become the world's tenth nuclear power. Whatever they find, the world already has enough nuclear weapons to destroy every single nation on the planet. With approximately 23,000 warheads, there is enough deadly material for 2.3 million blasts the size of Hiroshima. ... The world is committed to nuclear

disarmament in principle, in practice it will never happen." (*Times*, 6 October)

Onward Christian Bankers

Banking, insurance companies and the myriad financial off-shoots that make up the City of London are central to the running of modern capitalism. They produce nothing of course but then neither do the industrial capitalist class. It is probably a bit unfair to say the City produces nothing. It certainly produces nothing useful, but it produces hypocrisy in large doses. "As bankers last month began gearing up for a bumper bonus season, Rowan Williams, the archbishop of Canterbury and head of the Anglican church, bemoaned their lack of repentance. "We haven't heard people saying, 'Well, actually, no, we got it wrong and the whole fundamental principle on which we worked was unreal, empty', " Mr Williams told bankers in September. Such rhetoric echoes that of Lord Turner over the summer, when the chairman of the Financial Services Authority spoke in moralistic terms about the need for banking to become 'socially useful' again. Hector Sants, his chief executive, has even explained his move to a regulatory



job in terms of a sense of Christian 'duty' to give something back to society after a 30-year career in money-making." (*Financial Times*, 7 October) We expect Archbishops to utter hypocritical nonsense, after all it is their stock in trade, but when financiers rant on about "Christian duty" and banking becoming "socially useful"

it is a bit hard to bear. Speed the day when banks and other financial institutes are part of the unlamented history of capitalism along with all its apologists, both religious and secular.

Free Lunch

by Rigg

