

socialist standard



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Capitalism's 'Natural' Disasters

Why the poor
suffer more



USA and the
S-Word
page 6



Hoon
or buffoon?
page 23



Free Lunch
page 24



FEATURES

10 Haiti - an un-natural disaster

The reality with earthquakes is they kill so many only if we let them. They are inevitable, but the death toll is not.

12 Christmas bombers

The son of a Nigerian banker wasn't the only one on a bombing mission at Christmas.

14 Who bailed out the bankers?

They tell us that we "the taxpayers" did? But it's not as simple as that.

15 Beyond capitalism

Attempts to reform capitalism, whether through parliament or dictatorship, have failed. This leaves conscious majority revolution as the only way forward.

17 The market versus cooperation

Difficulties with cooperation arise when the restrictions of the market start to operate.

18 Car boot capers

Shopping, it's said, is the new religion, the new opiate of the people.

REGULARS

3 Editorial

4 Pathfinders

Machine in the ghost

6 Material World

America and the S-Word

7 Cartoon

Ire of the Irate Itinerant

8 Pieces Together

8 Contact Details

9 Cooking the Books 1

Dreams and nightmares

17 Tiny Tips

19 Cooking the Books 2

The yellow brick road

20 Reviews

Cronies or Capitalists?; First as Tragedy...; Red Planets

22 Meetings

22 50 Years Ago

"You've never had it so good"

23 Greasy Pole

Hoon or buffoon?

24 Voice from the Back

24 Free Lunch

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THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 6 March** 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

Calling on Beelzebub

OFF HAITI the USS Carl Vinson, an aircraft carrier, enables military helicopters to transport food, water and medical supplies to people on the island who desperately need them. USAF air traffic controllers guide planes from all over the world carrying other supplies and equipment to land safely at the airport at Port-au-Prince. A US hospital ship and naval vessels from other countries wait offshore.

Socialists are perhaps not alone in seeing the irony of organisations that normally deal in death and destruction being called in to deal with a situation caused by a Nature that has wreaked death and destruction. For armed forces are just that – bodies of trained men and women whose mission is to kill and maim people and to destroy and demolish buildings. Just as at the very same moment other military helicopters and planes from other aircraft carriers are doing in another part of the world, Afghanistan.

Still perhaps we should at least be grateful for small mercies and not complain when, for once, the armed forces put aside their weapons and do something useful for a change. In any event it is what the people of the world want. It is clear that people all over the globe do genuinely feel for their fellow humans when they are hit by an earthquake as in Haiti or by a tsunami as in and around the Indian Ocean five years ago. They want to help and they do help in whatever

small way they can. A sign that, deep down, people do consider themselves as members of a single human community, as people of the planet Earth.

Only a callous buffoon of an American money-seeking bible preacher could say that the earthquake was an act of a god angry at the people of Haiti for some sin they are supposed to have committed. The scorn with which his claim was greeted shows how far removed we now are from the times when this would have been the standard explanation, accepted even by the victims.

Humans are not able to prevent earthquakes but, quite apart from the fact that much that could be done to mitigate their consequences is not done for reasons of cost, a united socialist world provides a better framework than capitalism for dealing with these inevitable Acts of Nature. That today armed forces have to be (partially) diverted from their normal destructive activities to deal with these natural disasters brings out that under capitalism, with its division of the world into competing states, there is no permanent international rescue service of trained men and women, having its own helicopters, landing craft and, yes, even aircraft carriers. As there could and no doubt will be in a socialist world. Without guns of course.

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Machine in the Ghost

ENTHUSIASM CONTINUES apace for the online movie-cum-movement phenomenon Zeitgeist, with its articulate, clean-cut and photogenic presenter Peter Joseph touring even harder than Bob Dylan, it seems, to bring word to the world about the 'resource-based economy' idea which sounds so new to everyone else and so uncannily like socialism to us. Socialists should applaud and encourage the efforts of Peter Joseph and Zeitgeist activists everywhere to popularise the ideas of non-market production for use, especially because anti-socialists everywhere will do their best to discredit them with any damn-fool argument they can think of.

That's not to say that there aren't issues of disagreement, of course. There is a strange emphasis on the technological aspects of the case for a post-capitalist future and proportionally little to say on the role of human activity and decision-making. It's clear from recent lectures by Peter Joseph ('Where are we now?' et al, 2009, *YouTube*), that far from being merely a matter of emphasis, this bespeaks a quite different perspective on history:

"I think it is safe to say ... Technology is the fundamental catalyst for progress and change. It is by far the primary factor driving the development of human civilisation not only in the facilitation of achieving specific ends but also in the more subtle manifestation of our belief systems, philosophy, frames of reference and how we interpret the world around us."

It is not safe to say any such thing. If technology was the fundamental catalyst for change then Ancient Greece would have had steam locomotives and China would have ruled the world since the Renaissance. The problem for the 'technologist' is to explain why these things didn't happen.

Socialists are materialists, and materialists look at history as a process of general underlying 'tectonic' shifts in material conditions which give rise to often drastic changes, growths or collapses of superstructures built on them, for example, political, social, cultural and technological outgrowths. In this view, technology doesn't determine change but is both determined by and proactive on underlying material conditions.

In giving technology this unique driving power, Zeitgeist risks overlooking other motors of history, not least the importance of human organisation itself. "Everything in regard to social organisation is a technical process" says Peter Joseph, adding for emphasis: "Society is a technical creation. Science and tech is the overarching element that governs the entire mechanism of social organisation." From this the conclusion automatically follows that "Those who study those attributes should be given, not control, but the forefront of participation."

He pours scorn on those 'paranoid' types who would fear abuse of power by this implied class of technocrats, asking "What would be their incentive?" Well, who knows? In a free-access world what would be the incentive for crime? We don't know that either, but that's not to offer a cast-iron guarantee that there wouldn't be any. Given the Zeitgeist apparent indifference to human self-determination as a key factor in society and given also a hundred centuries of brutal oppression by power-mad elites who monopolised knowledge among other things, is it really so unreasonable to feel disquiet over this? While the technicians are minding the machines, who's minding the technicians?

The emphasis on technology develops into a more serious problem however, and one that needs addressing now. Zeitgeist argues that capitalism is opposed to technological progress, hence the need to abolish it. To take one example, Peter Joseph uncritically repeats the claims of the popular film

Who Killed the Electric Car? (2006). This film argues that in the 1990s there was a huge potential American market for electric vehicles (EVs) but that the carmakers and government-backed oil industry deliberately sabotaged it. The problem for the film is that it is the arguments of General Motors (GM), not the pro-EV lobby, which are being borne out by events. Market demand, production costs, technology and the supplies and fuelling infrastructure really were *not* viable in 1996, and we know that because they are still not ready today (see for instance 'Drivers resist the electric switch', *Guardian*, 16 January). Even as the dust settles over the electric car 'scandal' there is a raft of new EV products on the market from GM competitors and from GM itself. Even if GM really were as dumb and parochial as the conspiracy-buffs like to think, the Japanese and the Indians certainly weren't. The market is maturing. Capitalism is working in just the way that Zeitgeist says that it can't. It's changing.

All that's a matter for capitalism and car nuts, and of no interest to socialists. But they are of huge interest to Zeitgeist, appearing as they do to back up the central argument that capitalism relies on inefficiency and outmoded technology.

This proposition is so demonstrably wrong as scarcely to be worth spelling out. Incredibly, Peter Joseph implies that capitalism will never find a cure for cancer because it will undermine cancer industry profits, and ditto for cheap solar panelling and the power industry. Logically, if capitalism was so anti-progress there would never have been any technology in the first place, nor any industrial revolution. To attack its 'inability' to promote technology is to attack it not at its weakest but at its strongest point. Alarmingly, Zeitgeist is choosing precisely the worst ground for its battle-line.

In fact, capitalism has cured or eradicated plague, typhus, syphilis, cholera, polio and smallpox, regardless of the money already being made in treating those diseases. It abolished steam power, horse power and gas light despite its huge investment in those infrastructures. Its achievements cannot and should not be denied unless one wants to look ridiculous. Indeed its greatest achievement is its potential undoing: it has embraced technological progress so successfully that productive processes now make it entirely feasible to move beyond capitalism altogether.

Workers need to know their enemy, not underestimate or misunderstand its methods. Most of the problems humans have are not caused by lack of technology, but lack of equal access to resources. Millions die because they can't afford food or clean water or basic cheap medicines. War, violence and oppression are not technological problems, they exist because there are power elites who get their power from private property we humans should not allow anyone to own in the first place. These are the real weaknesses of capitalism, the ones which will not go away, the ones Zeitgeist really ought to be attacking instead of, like EV-nuts, bemoaning its 'failure' to deliver the latest tech.

It's possible that Zeitgeist are reluctant to confront the reality of ruling class power, in case the merest hint of conflict causes the enthusiasm to evaporate and the followers to melt away.

But we're not making the class war up, and we can't wish it away: "There's class warfare, all right," Mr. (Warren) Buffett said, "but it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning" (*New York Times*, 26 November, 2006). Tiananmen Square students innocently thought they could win freedom by pushing flowers into gun barrels.

In their zeal to promote a vision of a happy-tech cyber-future, the Venus visionaries are tip-toeing on a dangerous edge. In replacing class struggle with a faith in machines, Zeitgeist has created a spectre which will return to haunt them.



Abolishing money

Dear Editors

Why on earth should there be cuts in any or all of the public services, as intimated by the main three political parties vying for votes in the forthcoming general election? These public services are essential to our health and social wellbeing. At the same time each party advocates and provides support to the very institutions that sap the lifeblood of the nation and spawn malpractices.

The N.H.S, Education, Housing, Old Age Pensions, Transport, Childcare, Single parents, Care of the elderly, are among the most obvious worthy of ongoing and increasing investment and support yet these are being targeted for reductions or, at best, stagnation. This need not be the case. A change is needed, indeed a change is essential and long overdue. And not a weak-kneed Barack Obama style change.

This is an extremely wealthy country in terms of development, infrastructure, skilled technology, inventiveness, art, theatre, sport, social cohesiveness and friendliness etc. but it is gradually losing its way on the altars of greed and possessions and a me-first doctrine. So much of all the wealth derived from the pluses is dissipated and wasted. We have a nation that is engulfed and at the mercy of a monetary system. So many of our recent generations have been persuaded that the pursuit of personal financial advancement is the requisite lifestyle (in the Thatcherite mode of devil take the hindmost) that whatever may be their preferred interests occupationally they gravitate to those which patently offer the greatest scope for achieving fast and vast income providing your scruples are on a back burner and there is no consideration for general wellbeing.

Thus we now have a potentially actively and productively caring and sharing extremely wealthy society based on a powerfully intellectual platform becoming a downgraded self-seeking one that is willing to be

Labour, Lib-Dem, Tory



The Socialist Standard examines their case

antisocial and wasteful and, if need arises adopt criminality, in reaction to an overbearing self important administration which has lost any plot to which it might have once aspired.

The answer, the only feasible answer, is to remove those institutions referred to above by removing the tools of their trade. Abolish money and in doing so recover the personnel space and resources which rightly belong to the people of this country. Consider the beneficial knock on effects of such a move.

E. W. Reynolds, Swindon

Reply: We agree that money is a barrier to getting things done but we don't simply want to abolish money. We want socialism – the common ownership and democratic control of productive resources – where money will be unnecessary. And we don't think that this could be done, as you seem to be suggesting, just in one country - *Editors*.

No Alternative

Dear Editors

I'd like to contribute to the debate/discussion on globalization.

Marx wrote 'The handmill gives you society with the feudal lord and the steam mill gives you society with the industrial capitalist,' and if writing now he might well say that the microchip gives you society with the global capitalist – in accordance with the materialist conception of history as formulated by Antonio Labriola in 1897.

As Marx wrote and as anyone who has made a sustained study of capitalism knows, the centrifugal expansionism of the capital system's dynamic will drive the system to its ultimate limits.

What the capitalist class and their administrative arm (Maggie Thatcher, Frederick Von Hayek, Francis Fukuyama et al.) want most to instil in the minds of the working class is that capitalist production and distribution of life's necessities and wants is a natural and, above all, moral system. It is their heart's desire and 'wet dream' that capitalism is viewed as an entelechy, developing itself in a process of self-realization, thereby reducing history to a process without an active, creative, doing subject; an automaton driven by the dead laws of history and nature, i.e., There Is No Alternative.

Globalization, I suggest, is not a tendency nor a phase of capitalism,

but the logical progression of the system. Capitalism is almost at its non plus ultra – the only move left it is either to turn and eat out its own guts, devolving into barbarism, or to be replaced with socialism. Our message surely must focus on the planetary destruction and global warming resulting from production for profit that will annihilate the only liveable world we know to exist.

There Is No Alternative – to socialism

J.R. (by email)

Socialist Party Merchandise

Teeshirts:

Blue with polar bear and 'If you were a polar bear, you'd be a socialist' plus party website address. **Yellow**, with blue and green globe 'The world is a treasury for all' plus party web site address on.

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

MUGS:

One style: 'Duet' - Red and white with 'Only sheep need leaders' and website, with "Famine? War? Pollution? Capitalism is the Problem. World Socialism s the Solution" and party telephone number.

PENS:

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

BASEBALL CAPS:

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

BALLOONS:

different colours, with "World Socialist Movement".

Prices:

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

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American Public Opinion and the S-Word: Weakening of a Taboo?

IN APRIL 2009, interviewers working for the Rasmussen agency asked 1,000 people: 'Which is a better system – capitalism or socialism?' 53 percent said capitalism, 20 percent socialism, and 27 percent were not sure.

Although 'capitalism' came out the clear winner, commentators were shocked that almost half the respondents failed to give the 'correct' response on a matter so crucial to the dominant ideology.

'Capitalism', 'socialism' and 'the free market'

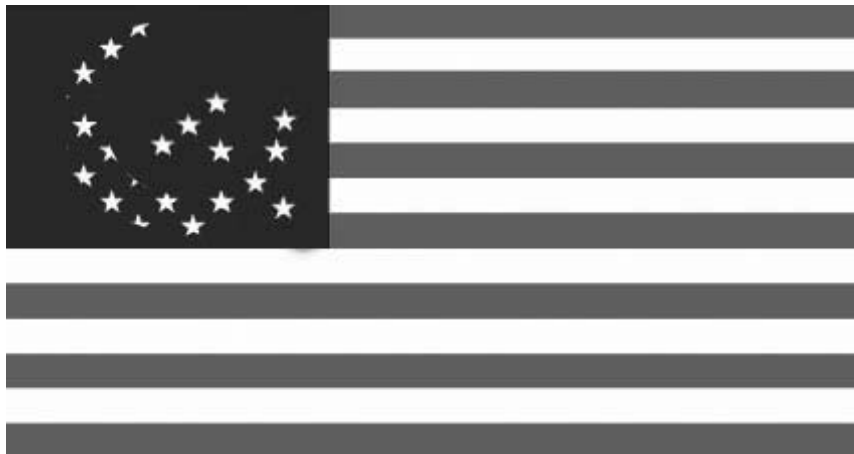
The interviewers did not define 'capitalism' or 'socialism', so we are left to guess what respondents understood by these words. No doubt most of those who answered 'socialism' did not have a clear or accurate idea of what it means. Nevertheless, socialists can take encouragement from the evident ability of a sizeable proportion of people to resist indoctrination by the corporate media, which never have anything good to say about any kind of 'socialism'. Even the fact that so many Americans do not react negatively to the S-word itself is significant: people who do not take fright at the word are more likely to be open to consideration of the idea.

A clue to how Americans interpret 'capitalism' is found in another Rasmussen poll (May 2009). Here people were asked: 'Is a free market economy the same as a capitalist economy?' 35 percent replied yes, 38 percent no. This result puzzled the hired ideologists of capital, who do equate the two concepts and like to use 'the free market' as a euphemism for 'capitalism'.

Yet another poll (December 2008) asked: 'Which is better – a free market economy or a government-managed economy?' 70 percent preferred a 'free market economy' and only 15 percent a 'government-managed economy'. This implies that there is a substantial body of people (about 17 percent) who are in favour of 'the free market' but against 'capitalism'.

In the US 'capitalism' is widely associated with big business and 'the free market' with small business. Hatred for big business commonly goes along with admiration for small business. In the frequent polls that compare the approval ratings of various occupational groups, small business owners regularly come out on top, while corporate CEOs (together with politicians) end up at the bottom.

Those who are 'against capitalism but for the free market' are, perhaps, still influenced by the old populist idea of the good society as a relatively egalitarian community of small independent producers – farmers, fishermen, craftsmen, doctors, etc. This utopia has its roots in an idealised image of early rural colonial society in New England and Pennsylvania, before its transformation by industrial capitalism.



Young people more inclined toward 'socialism'

The proportion of respondents who say that 'socialism' is a better system than 'capitalism' varies with gender, age, race and income. Women are slightly more likely than men to prefer 'socialism'; people with high incomes (over \$75,000 per year) more than twice as likely as people with low incomes (under \$40,000); and blacks almost twice as likely as whites, with equal proportions favouring 'capitalism' and 'socialism' (31 percent each).

Variation with age is especially striking. Proportions preferring 'socialism' in the older age groups (40 and over) are well below average. In the 30 – 39 age group the proportion rises to 26 percent and in the 18 – 29 age group to 33 percent (with 37 percent favouring 'capitalism'). If we focus specifically on women aged 18 – 29, we again find an equal division of opinion: 36 percent for 'capitalism' and 36 percent for 'socialism'.

Why?

How might these very hopeful findings be explained?

If we believe widespread stereotype, nothing needs explaining: young people are 'naturally' rebellious and older people 'naturally' conformist. In fact, this is far from always the case. Rebellious and conformist generations tend to alternate. The young rebels of the 1960s gave way to the young conformists of the 1980s. The pendulum is now swinging back. For three reasons.

First, deteriorating economic conditions. This is the first generation of young people since the Great Depression who have no hope of maintaining, let alone improving on, their parents' standard of living. They face a grim and uncertain future.

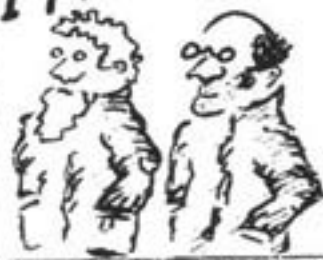
Second, an increasing number of young people pay less attention to the corporate media, preferring to rely on the Internet. This exposes them to a broader range of ideas, including socialist ones.

Finally, the end of the Cold War. During the Cold War, 'socialism' and 'communism' were associated with a forbidding external enemy. Advocating them marked you out as a traitor. We protested that what we stood for was something quite different, but our voice was barely audible. We hoped

that with the end of the Cold War it would become easier to spread socialist ideas. We felt disappointed that this did not seem to happen. The disappointment was premature. Attitudes do change in response to circumstances – but only when a new generation comes of age. For today's young Americans the Cold War is ancient history.

STEFAN

IRE OF THE IRATE ITINERANT



IT SEEMS OBLIGATORY, IF YOU'RE A RIGHT-WING TABLOID COLUMNIST, TO WAIL INCESSANTLY ABOUT 'BROKEN BRITAIN' COME RAPIDLY TO THE DOCS.

... BUT, YOU KNOW, IT'S ALWAYS THEIR FAULT, NOT MINE. NOT THIS CRUDDY TABLOID THAT PAYS ME MEGABUCKS FOR SPUTTING THIRD RATE BAR ROOM BIGOTRY...



THIS TABLOID WHICH HAS DONE SO MUCH TO DUMB US DOWN AS A NATION OVER THE LAST 30 YEARS SO WE WORSHIP WEALTH, FAME, CELEBRITY, PLAY THE LOTTERY (REMEMBER TABLOID BINGO?) AND FEEL DEEPLY DISSATISFIED BECAUSE WE'RE NOT RICH.



AND ISN'T IT SAD? THESE ARE DISSOLUTE YOUNG MEN, WITH NO STAKE IN SOCIETY. THEIR ONLY COPING STRATEGY IS TO LOOK TOUGH, HIDE BEHIND A MASK OF ACRESSION, TO WIN THE RESPECT OF THEIR PEERS.



IS BRITAIN BROKEN? WELL, WE'RE CERTAINLY BROKE, AFTER GIVING ALL OUR MONEY TO THE BANKERS. BUT LET'S NOT OWELL ON THAT. LET'S HAVE A GO AT IMMIGRANTS. ALWAYS AN EASY TARGET. OR THE GANGS OF FERAL YOUTHS SUPPOSEDLY ROAMING OUR STREETS. HOODIES, CHAVS, NEETS... THEY TERRIFY US! BUT HAVEN'T TEENAGERS BEEN SCARING US SINCE THE DAYS OF TEDS, MODS, SKINHEADS?



IT'S TOO EASY TO GET ROSE EYED AND NOSTALGIC ABOUT SOME IDEALIZED PAST. YES, THERE IS MORE CRIME, DRUGS, VIOLENCE, FAMILY BREAKDOWN NOW THAN THERE WAS 50 YEARS AGO. BUT EVEN BACK THEN, THERE WERE PLENTY OF BACKSTREETS IN GLASGOW AND LONDON YOU WOULDN'T VENTURE DOWN!



OF COURSE, OUR TABLOID WRITER WOULD BLAME THE 1960s - THE START OF THAT WHOLE LIBERAL CONSENSUS THAT APPARENTLY GOVERNS SOCIETY NOW. HE'S DEAD AGAINST IT. BUT NOT AGAINST 18 YEAR OLD GIRLS NAKED ON PAGE 7.



AND WOULD WE REALLY WANT TO GO BACK TO THAT BRITAIN OF THE 1950s... A WORLD OF BACKSTREET ABORTIONS, GAY MEN PERSECUTED TO THE POINT OF SUICIDE, THE POLICE RAISING YOUR HOUSE BECAUSE YOU HAVE BOOKS BY HENRY MILLER, JAMES JOYCE, D H LAWRENCE...



SO THERE YOU HAVE 'BROKEN BRITAIN'. THE WORST THING ABOUT IT TO ME WAS THE WAY BUCCANEERING CAPITALISM CHEWED UP AND SPAT OUT OUR COMMUNITIES... LOOK AT THE (EX) MINING, STEEL, SHIPBUILDING AREAS. IT'LL NEVER HAPPEN TO THE CITY OF LONDON, FUNNILY ENOUGH THOUGH...

... THEY'LL BE COUNTING THEIR BONUSES FOR A LONG TIME YET. AND IT'S THAT INEQUALITY, THAT UNFAIRNESS, IT BREEDS THE ALIENATION ON THE STREETS. THAT'S THE REAL TROUBLE WITH THIS COUNTRY, ALWAYS HAS BEEN.

THE TABLOID OWNERS NEVER GO ON ABOUT THAT, AND WHY SHOULD THEY, DRINK VERY WELL INDEED SAT IN THEIR MULTI-MILLION POUND HOME COUNTRY MANSIONS?...





A FRIGHTENING WORLD

"It is Europe's dirty secret that the list of nuclear-capable countries extends beyond those that have built their own weapons – Britain, France and Russia. The truth is that Belgium, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands store nuclear bombs on their air-force bases and have planes capable of delivering them. There are an estimated 200 B-61 thermonuclear-gravity bombs scattered across these four countries. Under a NATO agreement struck during the Cold War, the bombs, which are owned by the U.S., can be transferred to the control of a host nation's air force in time of conflict. Twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Dutch, Belgian, Italian and German pilots remain ready to engage in nuclear war" (*TIME*, 4 January).

THE OIL INVASION

"British companies have benefited from the award of oil contracts in Iraq because of the decision to help to overthrow Saddam Hussein, Gordon Brown's chief foreign policy adviser told the Chilcot inquiry yesterday. Simon McDonald said British companies had "done pretty well" in a recent auction of oil rights and that Britain had "privileged access" to the Government of Nouri al-Maliki, the Prime Minister" (*Times*, 6 January)

MERCHANTS OF DEATH

"Two UAE orders for military helicopters and guided bombs capped a remarkable year for procurement in which the Emirates became the largest foreign purchaser of US defence equipment, a Pentagon agency said. The UAE, which has peacekeepers in Afghanistan, awarded Sikorsky Aircraft a US\$171 million (Dh628m) contract for 14 UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters, which are used for tactical transport. Separately, the US defence security co-operation agency, a unit of the Pentagon, said last week it had notified Congress of a potential sale of enhanced guided bomb units, parts, training and support to the UAE for about \$290m. The same agency said in November that in the last fiscal year the UAE became the largest foreign purchaser of US defence equipment with sales of \$7.9bn, ahead of Afghanistan (\$5.4bn), Saudi Arabia (\$3.3bn) and Taiwan (\$3.2bn)" (*The National*, 2 January).

Contact Details

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

LONDON

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

Enfield and Haringey branch. Thurs 26th. 8pm. Angel Community Centre, Raynham Rd, N18. Corres: 17 Dorset Road, N22 7SL. email: julianvein@blueyonder.co.uk

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

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

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MIDLANDS

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

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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

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East Anglian Regional branch.

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Hethersett, NR9 3JD. Tel: 01603 814343.

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

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cooking the books

Dreams and nightmares

It ended well, the article in the *Morning Star* of 8 December: "The dream of a moneyless, socialist society can become a reality." Unfortunately, the rest of the article, by Gerry Gold, contradicted this.

Gold, a supporter of the Old Labourite Labour Representation Committee, was offering a way out of the current crisis. No, he was not advocating the common ownership and democratic control of the world's resources as the basis for going over to production directly for use instead of for profit and to distribution on the principle of "from each their ability, to each their need" instead of in response to paying demand.

What he was advocating was some radical reforms to capitalism such as closing down the Stock Exchange and outlawing hedge funds and derivatives and "replacing the entire for-profit financial system with a not-for-profit network of socially owned financial institutions providing essential services. Many examples of these already exist – mutually owned building societies, credit unions, the Co-operative bank",

If there are still going to be financial institutions this is hardly making "the dream of a moneyless, socialist society" a reality. It can't even be called a dream, just a sanitised reflection of today's humdrum everyday existence, with the only noticeable difference being no banks on our high streets only building societies.

Gold went on: "With the elimination of private-equity shareholding and the abolition of speculation on the money markets the techniques developed by global capitalism can be used to clear payments between enterprises within and between countries. Accounting systems can be used and further developed to be open to public scrutiny." Then followed the passage about a moneyless society.

Lenin used the same argument in *Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?*, composed a month or so before the Bolsheviks seized power:

"Capitalism has created an accounting apparatus in the shape of the banks, syndicates, postal service, consumers' societies, and office employees' unions. Without big banks socialism would be impossible. The big banks are the 'state apparatus' which we need to bring about socialism, and which we take ready-made from capitalism; our task here is merely to lop off what capitalistically mutilates this excellent apparatus, to make it even bigger, even more democratic, even more comprehensive. Quantity will be transformed into quality. A single State Bank, the biggest of the big, with branches in every rural district, in every factory, will constitute as much as nine-tenths of the socialist apparatus. This will be country wide book-keeping, country-wide accounting of the production and distribution of goods, this will be, so to speak, something in the nature of the skeleton of socialist society."

His thinking was that if there was one big State 'Bank' it would be possible to account for the use of resources, and their transfer between productive units, without monetary exchanges. This was the view also of those other European Social Democrats of the time who realised that socialism would be a moneyless society and who thought about how production and distribution might be organised without money.

There may have been something in it, but it was never going to work in economically backward Russia. And it didn't. After a period of so-called "War Communism" till 1921 when money was hardly used, it was Lenin himself who called for a return to money – and not just any old paper money, but a gold-based rouble. The Bolsheviks did retain state power, but the outcome was the nightmare of state capitalism.

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Haiti - an un-natural disaster

Earthquakes are inevitable, but the death toll is not

The earthquake in Haiti and similar misfortunes are presented as unavoidable natural disasters. To some extent, this is true. But it ignores the consequences of the deliberate pursuit of profit at the expense of environmental protection. It is not a coincidence that the number of victims of recent disasters such as the Asian tsunami and the Katrina hurricane and now Haiti are clearly related to the degree

of their poverty.

The reality with earthquakes is they kill only if we let them. They are inevitable, but the death toll is not.

It is collapsing buildings that take lives, not tremors in the ground. Throughout the animal kingdom, creatures have adapted to survive in their surroundings, but in our environment, where earthquakes are a fact of life, though nature challenges us to do something to protect

ourselves, capitalism compels us to surrender safety to monetary profits and savings. No matter how severe earthquakes are, if buildings were properly built in the first place, then the vast majority of people would survive.

This does not happen under capitalism, particularly in poorer countries, since the unavoidable pressure to make and save money affects what does, or more importantly, does not happen. There are pressures to build quickly and slapdashly to meet housing needs by landless labourers forced by poverty to find work in urban areas; inferior materials and construction methods are used in accordance with market forces, with poor people getting poorly-built homes; building inspectors are persuaded by politicians or back-handers to ignore breaches of rules so that businesses get the cheap employees they want and workers get hovels they can afford; landowners lobby governments, hand over party 'donations' or resort to simple bribery to have new housing built on their land, even if it is unsuitable or downright dangerous. With, moneyless, socialism human needs and safety come second to nothing.

Though seismologists don't know precisely where or when earthquakes may strike, general areas of risk are identifiable. In a socialist society, how we respond to this information would be very different. There would be far greater freedom for those in danger to move to safer areas—action under capitalism that can involve huge financial losses from writing off unsafe homes, shifting businesses to where workers then live, adapting that region's infrastructure to aid in exploiting the new workforce etc. And those who, for whatever reason, chose to reside in seismic zones, they would then have access to the best buildings capable of withstanding the most powerful of quakes.

Although Japanese and Californian architects have designed 'active buildings', some on top of massive rubber shock absorbers or with computerised counterbalancing systems that identify and counteract seismic shocks, what's the likelihood of such sophisticated technology being used under capitalism on multi-storey dwellings in poverty-stricken areas for workers on subsistence wages? Using superior designs, building methods and materials, there is no reason why populated areas should suffer any loss of life or major disruption after experiencing very powerful quakes.

The surviving victims of the disaster in Haiti need food, fresh water, clothing,

medication and many other items. Some of those needs are being met, but not nearly enough. Governments of the richer countries have offered niggardly help. Ordinary citizens, appalled by the extent of the tragedy as revealed by the media, have responded generously to appeals by the charities. In times of natural disasters volunteers are never lacking, nor slow to offer assistance, whether practical or monetary. Humans are endowed with the ability to sympathise and empathise with their fellow humans. Humans derive great pleasure from doing good, are at their best when faced with the worst and will go to extraordinary lengths to help alleviate the suffering of others.

Most natural dangers are well known and socialism would not need to leave communities exposed to them. This would avoid many disasters. Also, contingency plans would exist throughout the regions and at a world level for the relief of any catastrophe. Emergency supplies of food, clean water, medical supplies would be maintained at strategic points whilst machinery, equipment and helpers would be moved quickly to the area of crisis. The present appeals for money are a pathetic substitute for the availability of real resources and the freedom

that communities in socialism would have to immediately use them.

We have access to more comprehensive information and news coverage about world disasters than any previous generation of humans, and yet it appears that people don't feel driven to bring about an end to such catastrophes. It seems our society has been influenced to believe that nothing can be done. That big death tolls from quakes, volcanoes or droughts are inevitable. What efforts do the media make to change this, by explaining both capitalism's culpability and socialism's solutions? If people don't understand, then all there will be are yet more channel-changing 'Not-another-disaster. There's-nothing-I-can-do' indifference.

- from the Socialist Party's blog Socialism or Your Money Back at <http://sosocialismoryourmoneyback.blogspot.com>



Left: a US soldier in the grounds of Haiti's damaged presidential palace

Christmas bombers



Umar Farouk
Abdulmutallab

*The son of a Nigerian banker
wasn't the only one on a bombing
mission at Christmas*

A Nigerian Muslim, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, thought he could contribute to solving the world's problems by getting on an American airliner from Europe to the US. on Christmas Day 2009, and then trying to blow it up just as it approached Detroit. This appeal to violence can be (and has been) seen in many prominent figures, from Bush and Blair to the Islamist extremists. Though, curiously enough, those who plan and defend their own violence are the most vocal in denouncing violence committed by the other side. In fact both sides, in any of the disputes raging round the world at the moment, claim that their own violence is only made necessary because of the violence coming from their opponents. The truth of the matter is that capitalism produces

violence as inevitably as water freezes when it gets cold enough.

Those who start the violence off and direct it, of course, suddenly become shy and retiring when it actually has to be done. When will you hear about a radical imam, who has preached many lengthy sermons about the holy duty of jihad, and about the unimaginable happiness awaiting suicide bombers in paradise, with seventy-odd virgins each (though surely they must be running out of virgins by now?) – when will you hear about that sermonizing radical imam taking his own advice and becoming a suicide bomber himself? Probably about the same time that you hear about President Obama and Prime Minister Brown risking death by serving as private soldiers in hostile territory in

Iraq or Afghanistan.

Incidentally, the regular announcement that another British soldier has “given” his life in Afghanistan is simply wrong. A soldier killed after being sent to a belligerent foreign country by the British government has not “given” his life: he has had it taken from him. He has had it stolen by a system of society that unavoidably gives rise to continuous discord and struggle, which from time to time turns into open armed conflict, resulting in combatants on both sides being awarded brief unwanted moments of celebrity as dead heroes, followed often by long-term suffering, financial and other, for their bereaved families.

As for this Nigerian who failed to blow up the plane, and therefore

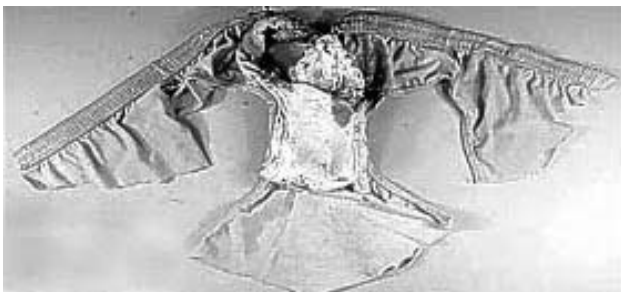


From University College London...

failed to kill himself and 290 other passengers and crew – of assorted nationalities and religions – does this failed suicide bomber believe that when he finally dies perhaps years hence, does he believe he will then go to paradise and get say thirty-six virgins (half the full quota) for a good try? That might be thought ludicrous; but it isn't more ludicrous than many beliefs passionately held by those who have failed to use their common sense in order to work out why exactly so many human beings (under the pressures of competing capitalist states) spend their entire existence not trying to co-operate with the rest of the human race in order to make things better for all of us, but in trying to murder other human beings.

So Abdulmutallab has now gone on trial in the United States, charged with "trying to use a weapon of mass destruction [a bomb] aboard a U.S. aircraft", a crime which is punishable by imprisonment for life. This underlines the reality: what you do is not counted good or bad in itself: it is held to be good or bad

To this: the remains of Abdulmutallab's underwear in which an explosive device had been hidden



according to where you do it and who you do it to. All those who dropped "weapons of mass destruction", or bombs, from US and allied aircraft on to towns and cities across Iraq, which (along with the rest of the military onslaught) resulted in the

deaths of perhaps half a million Iraqis, and all those who ordered these bombardments, are regarded in the US (and its allies) as having performed a noble duty.

Abdulmutallab came to Britain to study. He spent three years at University College, London, between 2005 and 2008. Nor was he was scraping along among the down-and-outs: his father was a banker in Nigeria. It would be interesting to hear from those who support the present system why a man

who was at London's university for three years, consorting with Britain's academic elite, and presumably not living among the poorest of the poor, was so impressed by what he saw and experienced there that not long afterwards he turned out to be so hostile to Western society that he was found trying to murder some hundreds, a random selection, of his fellow humans.

After living in London, Abdulmutallab went to Yemen, a territory much of which was fortunate enough to be ruled by the British for over a century up to the 1960s. Encountering the British Empire at first hand should surely have made the Yemenis allies and supporters of the British for ever, but for some reason al-Qaeda is a powerful force in the country. Since Abdulmutallab had lived both in the UK and in Yemen, the blame game started immediately.

Gordon Brown grabbed valuable publicity (he has to fight an election by May, so he loses no chance of headlines) by calling an international conference to consider the "terrorist threat from Yemen". In fact, this was hot air, even more obvious than usual: there was already going

to be an international conference on Afghanistan in London on 28 January, so Gordon Brown's new emergency summit was merely going to be held "in parallel" with this already-arranged conference. This was followed some days later by an

announcement by the Yemeni Deputy Prime Minister, to the effect that Abdulmutallab had "joined al-Qaeda in London". So each country blamed the other for driving Abdulmutallab into al-Qaeda.

The US response to attacks by Islamic extremists was to establish a prison at Guantánamo Bay. Photos from this establishment proved so harmful to US propaganda about "American freedoms" that President Obama has promised to close it (though he has failed to keep to his declared timetable). The US authorities now believe that 20 percent of the prisoners released from Guantánamo Bay have since "turned to terrorism". Does this mean that the US accepts that 80 percent of those released from Guantánamo Bay were not terrorists at all? The Guantánamo Bay prisoners were mostly poor Asians, seized at gunpoint, interrogated by methods

To Yemen...



that amounted to torture, and thrown into a specially unpleasant jail, built in Cuba so that its inmates would not be able to access the boasted impartiality and safeguards of the American judicial system, and held there for years in humiliating conditions without trial, so they could never find out what they were accused of and try to offer a defence. It would seem amazing that these men (never having had the chance of hearing about socialism, and however indifferent they may have been to the conflict before their incarceration) did not on release immediately fly into the welcoming arms of al-Qaeda, on the grounds that if two forces are fighting each other, then if you hate the one you have to support the other. If after all their gruesome ill-treatment by the Americans only 20 percent have actually "turned to terrorism" since their release, it implies that most of them never were terrorists.

ALWYN EDGAR

Who bailed out the bankers?

They tell us that we “the taxpayers” did? But it’s not as simple as that

People are angry at the banks. They blame them for causing the crisis. They blame them for having to be bailed out and then still paying their top people obscene bonuses. They see them as producing nothing, just making money out of shuffling money around.

Some of these criticisms are justified. Some are not. Banks don’t produce anything useful, even if they perform a useful, in fact an essential role, under capitalism. On the other hand, they didn’t cause the crisis, even if they did overstretch themselves like any other capitalist business does when faced with easy profits. It is this general capitalist drive for profits that causes crises from time to time. They were bailed out, but not by us.

Not by us? Weren’t they bailed out by the taxpayers and aren’t we the taxpayers? Yes and no. They were bailed out by the government, whose main source of income is taxes, but, no, we are not “the taxpayers”.

True, anybody in employment can produce their payslip and point to a deduction for income tax. But who actually pays this to the state? You don’t. Your employer does. In fact you never see the money that is deducted from your gross pay. It was never really yours. Putting it on your payslip is a bit of creative accounting. What’s important is the bottom line – your net pay, what you actually take home.

Even if you did have to actually pay income tax yourself, as you do with some taxes (council tax, for instance), it wouldn’t make much difference since it’s your net pay – what you have to live on – that’s important for the labour market. Apart from the fairly short term this has to reflect the economic fact that, if you are not paid enough, you won’t be able to keep your working skills in proper working order and your employer won’t be getting what they are paying for.

If, instead of your employer paying “your” income tax, you had to pay it yourself the employer would have to let you take home more to cover this so as to allow you

enough after-tax money to keep your skills in working order.

It’s the same with sales taxes such as VAT. This increases the cost of living, and so the amount of money you need to fully reproduce your working skills. It’s not really paid by you, but is passed on to your employer.

In the end, then, whoever physically pays them to the state, taxes fall on employers (and other property owners). We wage and salary workers are not the real taxpayers. They are.

It is true that the profits, out of which members of the capitalist class pay taxes, originate in the surplus value that productive workers create over and above the value of the mental and physical energies they sell to their employer for a wage or a salary. So, yes, ultimately taxes and bailouts to banks do come from the wealth workers produce. But not directly. We’ve already been fleeced. Taxes fall on those who have fleeced us. They are the ones who, via the state, bailed out the banks.

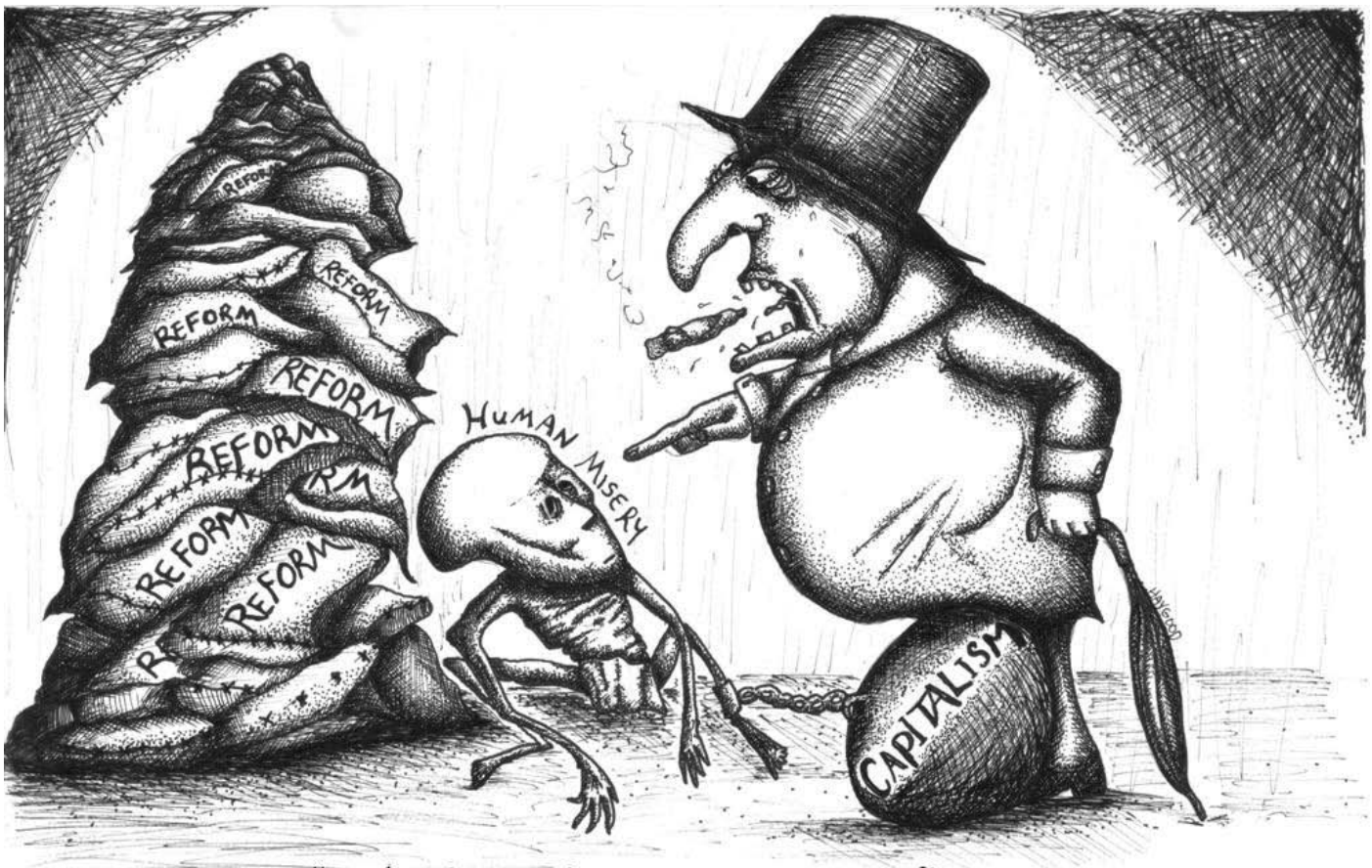
They didn’t like having to do this, even if they recognised its necessity. And they don’t like the banking capitalists exaggerating. Hence their attempt, via the media, to mobilise us against “the bankers”. But the excesses of the bankers, outrageous as they are, are not really our problem. It’s a case of thieves falling out, over what’s already been robbed from us. Certainly bankers are useless parasites, but parasites on parasites – on those who directly exploit productive labour.

Not all the money to pay for the bail-outs came from taxes. Some came from money the government borrowed – from other capitalists. The capitalist class, as taxpayers, don’t like this either because it means that a portion of the taxes that fall on them has to go to repay with interest those capitalists who lent the government the money. That’s what servicing the so-called ‘National Debt’ (actually the debt of the capitalist state) involves: a transfer of wealth from one section of the capitalist class to another section. So, again, not our problem. It’s their debt not ours.

Except that the capitalist class – and their political representatives in the Labour, Tory and Liberal parties who are vying with each other with talk of a ‘new Age of Austerity’ and ‘savage cuts’ – have started a campaign to defray some of the costs of these payments to their fellow capitalists by cutting down on the payments and services they reluctantly provide for the working class. But then, under capitalism, workers always get the shitty end of the stick. Which is one good reason why we should not put up with capitalism any longer.

ADAM BUICK

Bailed out: the infamous Fred Goodwin



“You’re Never Satisfied!”

Beyond capitalism

Attempts to reform capitalism, whether through parliament or dictatorship, have failed. This leaves conscious majority revolution as the only way forward.

Long before capitalism had emerged as the dominant social order and imposed its exploitive social conditions on the working class that it had created there arose within the minds of human beings the dream of a life beyond mere survival. The dream of a freedom and dignity beyond that of some category of slave to a privileged hierarchy that controlled their means of life.

The triumph of capitalism and its ongoing development – what Marx referred to as the opening of the womb of social labour – gave strength and reality to the dreamer; opened new vistas of potential wealth and social development. Entirely new social relations nourished a new reality in which a literate and articulate working class would emerge to challenge their masters.

In the degrading squalor of 19th century capitalism men and women began debating the substance of their puny dreams; people became politicised to the extent of demanding some amelioration of their miserable conditions as well as an input into the political system

that governed their lives. The working class had its martyrs who won for us the rights – limited and reversible – that obtain today within the politics of capital and labour.

Alternative system

By the mid-19th century the pioneers of the early socialist movement, and especially Karl Marx, had subjected capitalism to a rigorous investigation and exposed the fact that, while its role had been historically progressive and while it retained a capacity for improvement, it was now a reactionary system of social organisation. Not only was it based on the exploitation of the proletariat, the producers of all real wealth, by a minority parasite class but it had created, and must retain, a political system that stood between the working class and its social emancipation.

Marx did not draw up a detailed blueprint for a socialist society because such a detailed picture of socialism was dependent on the state of development of capitalism at the time of the perceived social revolution nor could he presume the democratic decisions of a socialist conscious majority following the conquest of power. More pertinently, by exposing the processes whereby capitalism carried out its exploitation of the working class he clearly laid down markers as to what would not exist in a socialist society.

As history rolled over into the 20th century there was a widespread understanding of the meaning of socialism among those elements of the working class who were politically aware. Large sections used the term socialism in the sense in which Marx had used them, viz: a world community in which society as a whole would own and democratically control its means of life: where money, wages and class would not exist and the principle underpinning the production and distribution of wealth

would be, 'from each according to their ability and to each in accordance with their need'.

Dissent among socialists was not about the nature of socialism but about the best way of achieving it. Unfortunately, this question created a graveyard of broken hopes and disillusionment. The story of those hopes and their failure has been well documented in this journal over the decades and it is not the purpose of this article to re-visit the arguments or draw personal blame for the events of the past.

Reform policies

There can be no doubt that the real casualty of the errors and internecine disputes of the past has been socialism itself. As just pointed out, aside from the means of its achievement, there was wide consensus among those calling themselves socialists as to the nature of socialism. At that time socialists and their organisations did not offer reform policies as an end in themselves but rather as strategies that would lead to the eventual overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of socialism. Among some parties it was even customary to post socialism as the core objective together with a panel of what were called 'Immediate Demands'.

Those who founded the Socialist Party opposed this view; we argued that our socialist objective imposed its own means of achievement; that socialism could only be brought into being and could only continue to function on the basis of its conscious acceptance by the widest possible majority of society – which meant, effectively, the working class. The task of the socialist political organisation was, therefore, to promote an understanding of socialism to the end of taking political control away from the capitalist class and instituting a system of common ownership rooted in democratic control.

The basis of our argument was that the material conditions for socialism existed now but it could only come into being when the working class had matured politically to the point where it could commit itself not only to its rights within the new society but, also, to its responsibilities. Leading the workers along the path of reform was not equipping them for their historical revolutionary role but was in fact establishing the

contrary idea that capitalism could be made to function in the interests of the class it exploited.

Socialism today

Earnestly, we can say now, we wish we had been wrong in our analysis of the situation. We wish the British Labour Party and the Social Democratic parties elsewhere who made up the Second International and their myriad of Left-wing supporters had succeeded in chipping away at the fortress of capitalism, had demolished it and created a sane socialist society.

We wish that despite the lack of the material and ideological conditions for socialism in Russia in 1917 the Bolsheviks had performed a social miracle and that Russia and its satellite imitators had not become brutal totalitarian states where the case for socialism was treason.

We wish, too, that when we propagate socialism today we were not confronted with the argument that the awful things that happened in Russia (before that country abandoned state-organised capitalism in favour of a property-owning bourgeoisie) had something to do with socialism.

Similarly, we wish that the appalling record of failure, treachery and authoritarianism which has become more and more the political stock-in-trade of British Labour and kindred parties in Europe was not still perceived by some people as having some association with socialism.

On another plane, we wish that our class brethren were emancipated from the fetters of leadership and authority, an aspect of class society severely adopted and promoted by the disparate organisations of 'the Left'. People who know what they want and how to get what they want do not need leaders. History, especially the history of our class, is littered with evidence of the treachery and deception of leaders; the very concept is a heritage from the various forms of class slavery in which mental servitude is an important social suppressant.

As someone remarked at the beginning of the French Revolution of 1789, "The great only appear great because we are on our knees; let us rise!"

RICHARD MONTAGUE

The market versus cooperation

Difficulties with cooperation arise when the restrictions of the market start to operate

A neighbour goes on holiday and another keeps her greenhouse watered. Then he goes away and she willingly feeds and waters his cat. The local school recruits volunteers from the community for a reading programme to benefit the students. A rota of parents run extra-curricular sports options. An army of volunteers delivers regular meals to the housebound and incapacitated via 'meals-on-wheels'. Volunteer drivers take the infirm and elderly to doctors' and hospital appointments or for occasional outings. Youth groups, sports clubs, drama societies, music groups, choirs and orchestras, baby-sitting circles, car-pools, annual fête organisations, donations of books, clothes and household items to charity shops, staff in charity shops, community gardens, environmental projects – all thrive on willing cooperation, on people pulling together for the mutual benefit of all. It's what people do. It's what people *like* to do. It's what gives many a sense of purpose; to be a useful part of society; to add to the general well-being of a group of people who together make up a community. Cooperating is easy. It's natural and it's a vital

element in building enriched communities, strengthening ties through shared purpose.

Difficulties with cooperation arise when the restrictions of the market start to operate. Take, for example, the mindset of those who wish to employ a similar cooperative outlook in their search for universality in the routine task of shopping. For those who wish to uphold a universal standard in dealings with others making the 'right' choices is a road littered with obstacles. The universal standard that says what's fair for you is fair for me; that decries the double standards of much of transnational trading; that believes that all people have a right to the dignity of adequate food, water and shelter. The connections along the production-delivery-consumer chain are many, often intricate and invisible to the end-user. To assess the true picture of the impact of any purchase the consumer would need to know the details (in the case of food) of the seed and chemical suppliers, growers, processors, packers, transporters, wholesalers, retailers and any other in-between handlers. The universalist would need to know the working conditions, rates of pay, living

conditions etc. of all those involved at each step of the process including auxiliaries; cleaners, maintenance workers, shelf stackers and cashiers and to know that each of them could also be in a position to choose to be a consumer of this product – and if not, why not? If each of those contributing work along the chain are not in a similar position to be able to consume the end product then the question must be what makes one work day or one job that much more ‘valuable’ than another. Universality sees something awry when one worker has to work a mere ten minutes in order to earn enough for a burger, another must work all day and yet another will never have enough money accumulated for such a luxury. Same for a pair of big-name trainers, designer-labelled clothes or simple everyday foodstuffs.

So, those who happily cooperate within their communities find themselves in a position where their efforts to apply some level of universality in their dealings with fellow humans along the supply chain are thwarted by the market. The market is not in the control of universalists; it belongs to capital and capital prefers to buy cheaply and sell dear. It is more profitable to produce in the poorer countries where weaker labour laws and less regard for human rights ensure longer working hours for miserable wages; where the externalities of poor air quality, contaminated water and degraded environments can be disregarded; where the simple ‘accident of birth’ can condemn an individual to lifelong drudgery.

It is possible to campaign and have some limited success against some of the outrages, but here, also, accident of birth dictates who is the campaigner and who the object of the campaign, the victim to be saved. It is much more difficult for impoverished populations to organise and campaign and get a result than it is in the more developed world. Different standards apply as is evidenced in the massive amounts of dangerous waste exported to poorer countries to be dealt with by their even poorer communities. The particular geographical spot on the globe of each accident of birth will determine for a large majority the outcome they can expect, be it Europe, Asia, Africa or the Americas. Apart from geography historical, cultural and socio-economic norms can be other constraining factors. Expectations and aspirations are passed down culturally as in large parts of the world where male dominance is still overwhelming, enabling the entrapment of young females into the semi-slavery of sweatshops for barely a living wage. The socio-economic group into which one is born within the larger geographical context, urban slum or leafy, spacious suburb, also determines to a large extent the educational alternatives and possibilities, the earning potential and therefore the lifestyle of the individual.

To bring the benefits of more widespread cooperation into the whole of our lives will take a simple shift of emphasis. It will require us to focus more careful attention on the ‘us-and-them’ syndrome. What’s holding us back are the confused and confusing ideas we hear regarding the many and varied ‘us-and-them’ scenarios. Some believe “they” are immigrant workers taking “our” jobs; some that it’s “those” non-union groups who are undercutting “us”; some that younger, cheaper employees are taking the jobs of the more experienced and expensive; and yet others blame governments for allowing “our” jobs to be outsourced to some other “them”. Every country has a different set of immigrants to blame, legal and illegal and one population can easily be misled to wrongly blame another.

What we really need to recognise is that we are all fellow human beings, fellow workers who are being used by capital in whatever manner suits *their* ends. When “we”, the massive worldwide majority, shift our mindset and focus together on the removal of the *real* “them” unfettered cooperation can truly come into its own.

JANET SURMAN



Tiny Tips

The migrants are managed by a Mafia-run employment system, the caporalato, that operates like a 21st century chain gang. Saviano says that those who object to low wages or poor working conditions are simply eliminated — and not just by a pink slip. “It’s a military system. The farm and factory owners employ the Mafia caporali to bring the workers. The immigrants wait on the roads, the caporali pick them up and take them to the work. If they complain, they get killed.”

<http://tinyurl.com/ye37o32>

Despite more than a dozen international conventions banning slavery in the past 150 years, there are more slaves today than at any point in human history:

<http://tinyurl.com/ykfzer7>

Civil freedoms around the world lost ground for the fourth straight year in 2009 with Iraq improving, Afghanistan falling back and China acting as if it were under siege by its own citizens, Freedom House said on Tuesday. Bahrain, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Yemen moved into “not free” category, raising the total to 47 from 42 in 2008. The number of electoral democracies fell from 119 to 116, the lowest since 1995:

<http://tinyurl.com/y9gcudl>

Workers at a Sussex-based electronics firm were today left “devastated” after being told in a video message that manufacturing at their factories is to end and 220 jobs moved to Korea and the Czech Republic:

<http://tinyurl.com/ye9fhca>

Zuma famously likes to spend as much time as possible among his cattle in his native homestead at Nkandla, in northern KwaZulu-Natal province, where he is building a huge palace. In South Africa, R3m (£250,000) buys a pretty decent house, but Zuma’s new house there is costing R65m (£5.4m). ..It is a strange sight. Zuma, brought to power with the support of the ANC left, the trade unions and communist party, is ever more imitative of the Zulu monarchy – even down to the leopard-skin attire. It may have nothing to do with socialism, but then nor do, or did, the quasi-royal dynasties of many communist states such as the Kims of North Korea, Romania’s Ceausescu and the Zhivkovs of Bulgaria. And it should not be thought that these contradictions are embarrassing to Zuma. On the contrary, he is having the time of his life:

<http://tinyurl.com/yemc8h4>

One of the most callous reactions to the Haiti disaster thus far has come from televangelist Pat Robertson, who told viewers of his Christian Broadcasting Network on Wednesday morning that he knew the real reason for the quake: The country’s long-standing pact with Satan:

<http://tinyurl.com/yfm745x>

It has emerged that Kim Kardashian, the American reality television star, commands at least \$10,000 per post. Many of Kardashian’s tweets are mundane - “I must have pinched a nerve in my neck... I need a massage” - but when she mentions advertisers such as Nestle or the fast-food chain Carl’s Jr, she receives four-figure sums:

<http://tinyurl.com/ygjcsbv>



Car Boot Capers

Shopping, it's said, is the new religion, the new opiate of the people.

Once upon a time, as a youngster, Sundays – pre-television and transportless – I used to stretch in front of one like the dry and arid sands of the Sahara Desert; never ending and devoid of activity. The oasis in the day, for me, was the evening time when the crackly sound of Radio Luxemburg playing the pop music hits of the day came over the transistor radio. My mom's Sunday roast was always appreciated though even if I didn't know then the hard work that went into it in a very non-labour-saving kitchen. For a very brief spell I was packed off to the local Sunday school but I'm happy to say that the boredom of that experience outweighed even that of the traditional 'day of rest' with restricted pub opening hours. Consequently I did not succumb to the mind-numbing brainwashing of religion.

Recently I watched a Nick Hornby film, *Fever Pitch*, and was struck by the piece where Ruth Gemmell berates Colin Firth for his obsession with measuring out his life according to the length of the football season. We all measure out our lives in 'coffee spoons' in one way or the other whether by the natural seasons, sporting ones, or in artificial capitalistic 'financial years' or 'results quarters'. For the majority of us this measure is that of waiting for the next weekly wage packet or monthly salary cheque. The long-ago Sundays to which I refer were days to be endured rather than enjoyed. In those days a tramp around a muddy field was just that. Fresh air and exercise but without the added excitement of boxes of vinyl singles and long playing records to leaf through, and beef burger stalls filling the air with the smell of fried onions.

For some the season that provides most joy is 'on hold' pending dry weather and the certainty of not getting one's car bogged down in the 'parking area'. Wikipedia tells us, cautiously, that the world's first 'Boot Fair' or 'Boot Sale' was held in Kent in 1980. 'The title or name 'Boot Fair' was coined

by the originator and organiser, Barry Peverett, in order to create the curiosity that ultimately ensured that car boot sale events became a run-away popular success and a burgeoning nationwide weekend activity.'

Shopping, it's said, is the new religion, the new opiate of the people. One of the arenas where this is demonstrated is the Car Boot. Bargains galore! A visit to a Car Boot evokes many sensations. I'm not sure if one of these is the adult equivalent of a child visiting a toy store or sweet shop. A cornucopia of commodities, a positive plethora of unused, unwanted possessions, a galaxy of gew-gaws awaits the early bird and the searcher of useless plastic objects! Car boots offer an opportunity to acquire some practical commodity, or simply something 'because it was cheap'. Fifty pence? I'll give you twenty five. Ok, thirty, sold. You can get unwanted children's toys, outgrown clothes, VHS cassettes – superseded by a newer technology, DVD copies – cheaper than the original!, You can get electrical goods that scream at you *caveat emptor!* Buyer beware! You can get books that should have been remaindered the day they were published. You can get knick-knacks, the garish, the gaudy, the tasteless and much more at the car boot.

Not everyone might be so flamboyant as the couple profiled in the *Daily Mail* who sold 'a silver-plated tray, a pair of candlesticks and some designer shirts' from the back of a Bentley and made £260 which they planned to use for 'lunch at Le Gavroche,' but the motivation is the same. (www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1196634/Found-The-couple-Bentley-boot-sales.html). Why would you rise at half five in the morning to load your vehicle with all the prerequisites necessary to stand in a field for seven hours and display your wares for the approbation of the passing crowd? Simple. To convert those items into cash. Each of those items whether useful, worn out,



kitschy, or merely decorative shares a common constituent. Each was made to be sold, most so that the 'surplus value', i.e. profit, in it could be realised. Each item wasn't made to be aesthetically pleasing, long lasting, efficient, or made to contribute to the benefit of society or to the happiness of the individual. Apart from the trinkets produced for tourists the rest was originally made solely to produce profit for the benefit of a minority.

You will often find a stall displaying the sign, 'free'. I once heard someone asking at such a stall, 'how much are these then?' The concept of giving away things that you no longer want to people who can make use of them is an admirable one. There are sites on the internet dedicated to acting as a 'middleman' to facilitate such actions. But not everybody is convinced of the argument for a society based upon free access: 'At least one of your founding bloggers saw the bumper sticker below plastered on someone's car today. 'Healthcare for people – not for profit.' Would anyone blame a doctor for taking a baseball bat to the car this was affixed to? We can't help but wonder what other professions the morons who believe this slogan think should have all incentive removed. Homes for people not for profit; food for people not for profit; education for people not for profit. This list could go on forever" (www.foundingbloggers.com). Actually, yes it could.

Those Sundays of long ago might appear, to me, with the passing of time, to represent a more innocent, less exploitative time. If that were so then I would be talking nonsense. The social system then, as now, compelled those who owned nothing but their ability to work to seek out someone prepared to pay for those abilities in the knowledge that such as one-sided contract could be of benefit to one party only. One cannot turn the clock back. We can, though, turn the clock forward. Is a car boot all you really aspire to?

DAVE COGGAN



The yellow brick road to nowhere

"In an economy where the currency is not tied to the value of gold, the central bank can simply print more and more money, to fund the expansion of the economy and of central government. Over time, that will erode the purchasing power of the currency, but as long as that happens slowly through moderate inflation, no one seems to mind." So the *Independent* (2 December) reported the views of US Congressman Ron Paul who wants to abolish 'the Fed', the Federal Reserve, America's central bank, as well as going back to a gold-based currency.

Paul cannot be called a currency crank, as he has a correct understanding of what causes inflation and his solution would work to stop it, if that what was wanted, even if it would be unnecessary, pointless and a waste of resources.

Money originated as a commodity, i.e. something produced by labour that had its own value, which evolved to be the commodity that could be exchanged for any other commodity in amounts equal to the value of the other commodity. Various things have served as the money-commodity, but in the end gold and silver were almost universally adopted. Paul offered a reason: "Most people think gold is beautiful, that's why it's money. It's because it's beautiful and rare and divisible and it lasts a long time. We don't use lead." Beauty didn't have much to do with it, but being rare (i.e. requiring more labour to find and extract from nature, so concentrating – unlike lead – much value in a small amount), divisible (so easily coined) and long lasting did.

As capitalism developed it was found that gold itself did not have to circulate, but that paper notes could substitute for it as long as those accepting or holding it could be sure that they could always change them for gold. Up until WWI in most countries the currency was gold coins and paper notes convertible into gold. The Great Depression of the 1930s led to the major capitalist countries abandoning this convertibility. Since then the currency nearly everywhere has been inconvertible paper notes.

With an inconvertible paper currency, the amount of money is no longer fixed automatically by the level of economic transactions, nor is there any limit to the amount of paper currency that can be issued. It is this that Paul objects to because, if the central bank issues more paper money than the amount of gold that would otherwise be needed, then the result will be a depreciation of the currency; the paper money will come to represent a smaller amount of gold with the result that prices generally will rise.

If Paul had his way, the Fed would no longer manage the issue of the currency. This would pass to the Treasury Department which would only be allowed to issue paper money if it had the equivalent value of gold in Fort Knox. This would be a further absurd waste of resources as much more gold would have to be mined – just to store in places like Fort Knox.

Paul thinks that a return to a gold-based currency would eliminate crises such as in the 1930s and today. This is an illusion. There was a gold-based currency up until WWI, yet crises occurred regularly, including a Great Depression in the 1880s and a hundred years ago the same sort of banking crises as today. Capitalism goes through its boom/slump cycle whatever the currency. No monetary reform can change that.

Russian bourgeoisie

***Cronies or Capitalists? The Russian Bourgeoisie and the Bourgeois Revolution from 1850 to 1917.* David Lockwood. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009. £39.99 / \$59.99**



This study by David Lockwood, who teaches at Flinders University in Australia, is important in two ways. It contributes both to the history of Russia in the decades leading up to the establishment of the Bolshevik regime and to the theory of historical materialism.

As history, the book traces the evolution of the political attitudes and activities of the big capitalists of late Tsarist Russia, with special emphasis on the Russo-Japanese war and insurrection of 1905, World War One and the upheavals of 1917. The author debunks the Bolshevik view of the capitalists as dependent on Tsarism and therefore unable to fight for a bourgeois revolution (thereby justifying Bolshevik leadership). On the contrary, they consistently opposed the archaic Tsarist state as a fetter on the development of the productive forces.

However, according to Lockwood, it was not the capitalists who eventually played the decisive role in overthrowing Tsarism and modernising Russia. This role was assumed, especially after the outbreak of war in 1914, by a new social force known as “the Third Element” – technical specialists of various kinds in voluntary coordinating bodies like the War Industry Committees, in city and provincial government and in the army. These aspiring technocrats were the backbone of a new “developmental state” that displaced the old state in February 1917 and took final form under the Bolsheviks.

This brings us round to the author’s general contribution to Marxian theory. He emphasises that the tasks of the bourgeois revolution need not be – and, in fact, usually are not – carried out by the bourgeoisie itself. In Russia, in Japan after the Meiji Restoration of 1868, and in other late industrialising countries, these tasks have generally been carried out by a modernising state. The role of the state is immensely strengthened under conditions of intense military competition and,

above all, during wars.

Lockwood argues in this connection that the state belongs not to the superstructure of society (alongside law, ideology, etc.) but to its basis. That is, the state is a specific type of production relation that interacts with other production relations (in modern times, with capital). I agree that it is less misleading to assign the state to the basis than to the superstructure, but perhaps it is best to treat it as a third category, distinct from both basis and superstructure.

While in most respects the author’s exposition is admirably clear, he might have made a greater effort to avoid confusion over terms. The problem is that central concepts – *capital, capitalism, capitalist, bourgeois, bourgeoisie* – can be understood either in a narrow sense, to refer only to private ownership of the means of production, or in a broad sense that also encompasses state ownership. In the World Socialist Movement we use these words in the broad sense. Lockwood uses them in the narrow sense until the final chapter, when without warning he switches to the broad sense, even calling the system established by the Bolsheviks “state capitalism” (inside quotation marks that suggest reservations).

Nevertheless, on the whole we can recommend this book. Unfortunately, like most academic works, it is quite expensive and there is no paperback edition. Get your public library to order it.

STEFAN

Leninists in Space

***Red Planets - Marxism and Science Fiction.* Ed. Mark Bould & China Miéville. Pluto Press. 2009.**



Lots of people like science fiction stories, and many SF stories contain elements of Marxist ideas. Thus, the capital notion to educate and inform SF readers everywhere about the true nature and implications of what they’re reading.

Sadly, that’s not what you get. One quickly learns, in the conflation of science fiction with modernism and in the conflation of modernism with political vanguardism, that this is a collection of essays by and for Leninist academics. Any pretension to a simple, lively and accessible

Marxist guide for SF enthusiasts and political ingénues soon goes out the window in favour of a dense and often tedious discourse designed principally to be read, one suspects, by the other contributors. To be sure, there are some good bits, including an interesting history of utopian fiction detailing the birth of science fiction along with industrial capitalism. Curiously though, Aldous Huxley and George Orwell seem to have been airbrushed out of this history, an omission that to a non-Leninist looks a bit fishy.

Making heavy weather of definitions (do we need a whole chapter on whether fantasy is allowed to be called SF?) the writers tell us that SF is not simply a futuristic way of presenting dark realities or bright possibilities. No, it is a ‘literature of cognitive estrangement’ which has two phases, one inflationary and one deflationary, which are homologous to the two sides of Marxism – ‘transcendent vision’ versus ‘astringent demystification’ (p73). Learn this, and parrot at parties.

There are some well-aimed swipes at futurist thinkers who resolutely avoid any political thinking, for example Ray Kurzweil’s ideas on the Singularity: “The whole point of Kurzweil’s speculation ... is precisely to bring us to utopia without incurring the inconvenience of having to question our current social and economic arrangements” (p106). And they have issues with how the class struggle tends to be subsumed by aesthetic navel-gazing: “As actual, lived communism recedes into the past (only a Leninist could possibly write that!) it is tempting to read this shift from revolution to art as part of a retreat from real-world politics” (p201). The trouble is, this book reads like part of that retreat.

There is a tendency to over-theorise as well, finding a Marxist message in everything or else a reactionary viewpoint under every stone, Kubrick’s ‘colonialism’ in *2001 A Space Odyssey*, for example, or the ‘racist structures of the western imaginary’ in *The Matrix* (this despite the fact that the role of Neo, the hero, was written originally for the black actor Will Smith). More significantly, the ‘Two Deaths’ argument posits a distinct and discrete historical period between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the fall of the Twin Towers, even though there is no real Marxist justification for this – it simply plays well for Leninists obsessed with supposed historical crisis points.

It’s not as if science fiction writers themselves are incapable of intelligently critiquing the genre.

They do, and they do it very well. Still, an accessible Marxist critique would have been a worthwhile contribution. Instead, with a lofty and elitist presumption of familiarity, the writers ignore the opportunity to bring Marxist ideas to a new audience in favour of what often smells like a self-congratulatory exercise in exclusion. This is a shame, and it's the opposite of what science fiction writers and indeed science writers themselves set out to do, including many of those discussed in this book. Worth reading for real Marxist SF connoisseurs only, the book seems less disposed to shed light on science fiction than to shed academic respectability on Leninism, and as such will no doubt form a valuable and useful contribution to the publishing credits and departmental status of those who contributed to it.

PJS

First as Tragedy, Then as Farce.
Slavoj Žižek. Verso, 2009. £7.99.



Has Slavoj Žižek (the superstar Slovenian “theorist”) signed a piece-work contract with Verso Books? One can’t help wondering because this slim volume brings his tally

with that publisher alone to around 21 titles. This Stakhanovite output would be more impressive were it not for his notorious habit of recycling old material, like any good stand-up comedian does.

This two-chapter book is no exception: Žižek seems to have rapidly assembled it by combining his favourite quotes and theoretical hyperbole with some recent news stories from the unfolding economic crisis.

The first chapter (lamey entitled: “It’s Ideology Stupid!”) promises a “diagnosis of our predicament, outlining the utopian core of the capitalist ideology which determined both the crisis itself and our perceptions of and reactions to it.” Setting aside the question of whether ideology can determine a crisis, Žižek does at least provide some valid observations on capitalist ideology’s aims to shift the blame for a crisis away from the capitalist system itself. Yet few of his ideas strike the reader with much force of insight or novelty; and the chapter is haphazardly

organized – as if Žižek’s only aim was to squeeze in as many of his treasured anecdotes as possible.

The second chapter (“The Communist Hypothesis”) lays out some of the “communist” ideas that have seasoned Žižek’s recent books. He dances around the question of how to define “communism”, however, choosing instead to locate the “set of antagonisms which generates the need for communism”.

That is at least a start, the reader might think, as it is true that communism (socialism) is not some abstract, ethical ideal, but rather the *real* solution to problems that cannot be resolved under capitalism. If the problems (or “antagonisms”) of capitalism are clearly explained, the nature of communism – as the solution – will in turn come into view.

But any initial hope that Žižek will eventually explain “communism” dissolves as soon as he unveils those “antagonisms,” said to be: (1) “the looming threat of an ecological catastrophe”; (2) “the inappropriateness of the notion of *private property* in relation to so-called “intellectual property”; (3) “the socio-ethical implications of *new techno-scientific developments* (especially in biogenetics)”; and (4) “the creation of *new forms of apartheid*, new Walls and slums” (author’s italics).

What clear image of communism can possibly emerge from such an overly specific – and basically random – list of contemporary problems?

Žižek tries to avoid getting entangled in his own antagonisms, so to speak, by asserting that the fourth one (also referred to as the separation between “the Excluded and the Included”) is “qualitatively different” from the other three, which would somehow “lose their subversive edge” without it. Of course, Žižek might have defined that key antagonism more precisely as the *class division* between capitalists and workers – but where’s the fun in that?

The ambiguity of the fourth antagonism allows the author to bend it to his will, in a way not possible with a clear concept like “class”. In particular, it allows Žižek to insist on the (false) distinction between “communism” and “socialism,” condemning the latter for wanting “to solve the first three antagonisms without addressing the fourth”. On that basis Žižek says that socialism is no longer the “lower-phase” of communism (as Lenin had asserted to first introduce the false distinction), but rather the “true competitor” and “greatest threat” to communism.

Given his astounding indifference to what communism actually means, it is no surprise that Žižek cannot fathom workers consciously aiming for a new form of society. The task for his brand of revolutionary is not to explain to fellow workers what communism is, why it is necessary, and how it might be achieved, but rather “to wait patiently for the (usually very brief) moment when the system openly malfunctions or collapses, have to exploit the window of opportunity, to seize power – which at that moment lies, as it were, in the street”.

Žižek insists (repeatedly) that he takes such ideas seriously – even ending the book by advising fellow intellectuals that it’s “time to get serious once again!” – but he is careful to insert just enough ambiguity and humour in his hard-as-nails Leninism to free himself from any real responsibility. Unfortunately, more than a few leftists (including the ageing “New Leftists” at Verso Books!) take Žižek’s “communist” ideas seriously, which only shows how misunderstood communism (socialism) is today.

MS

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Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London. WC1 (nearest tube: Holborn)

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28 February - *Comrades* part 1 (film about Tolpuddle Martyrs)

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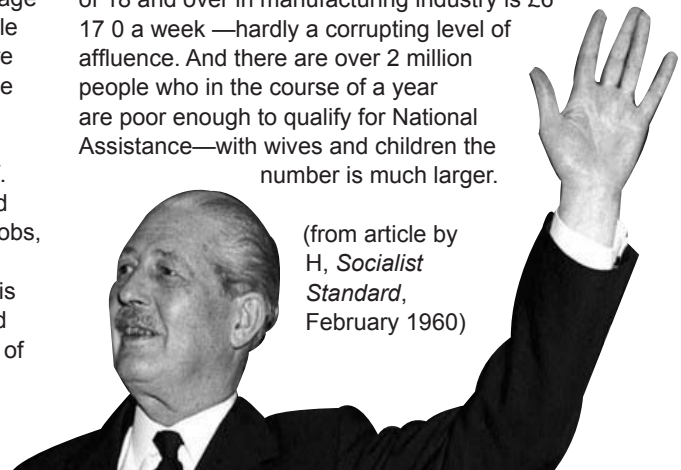
"You've never had it so good"



WHAT IS really astounding about Macmillan's boast is that, at least on average, it contains an element of truth, remembering however that the rich too are in the average figures. The state of most British workers really is a little better than it has ever been before. Of course there are large numbers of clerical workers (including most of the civil service, bank clerks and others) who are worse off than they were before the war, and some industrial workers, including London busmen, are also worse off. But with fewer unemployed and several million married women enjoying the dubious advantage of doing two jobs, home and away, working class purchasing power has gone up. But what a commentary on capitalism that this small advance can be hailed as a social revolution and set the church worrying about the corrupting influence of working class "riches"!

Just about the turn of the year agricultural workers advanced to £8 a week for 46 hours toil. Hundreds of

thousands of other men in industry and transport are on much the same level. The average earnings of women of 18 and over in manufacturing industry is £6 17 0 a week—hardly a corrupting level of affluence. And there are over 2 million people who in the course of a year are poor enough to qualify for National Assistance—with wives and children the number is much larger.



(from article by H, *Socialist Standard*, February 1960)

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.



Hoon or Buffoon?

IT MAY not have been too clear to him, in those anxious days when he was wheedling his fellow Labour MPs to consign Gordon Brown to a future spending more time with his memoirs, but Geoff Hoon was not alone. One of the many ways in which the Labour Party is not unique is that its history is cluttered with such plots which failed through a crucial hesitation to dispose of a leader who is sheltering behind the ramparts of Number Ten. The problem for the plotters – as it was for Hoon and Patricia Hewitt – was that they could not argue that their leader was responsible for unacceptable levels of poverty, sickness, massive casualties in war; instead they had to rely on the single calculation about electoral liability. If Brown was able to show that the majority of workers will still vote Labour in spite of all the stresses they have to face there would simply not be grounds for conspiring to change the leadership. As it is, Hoon was left to argue that he has the ideas to make him more attractive electorally than Brown. So how does he match up to this?

To begin with – Hoon or Buffoon? A rigidly principled, sacrificial leader inspired by an all-dominating obsession with human welfare? Or another one of those tiresome temporary left-wingers who in their youthful exuberance traded on the assumption that within the universal horrors of capitalism there is a simple remedy – trust them with the power to socially massage us with those uncomplicated policies which sounded so convincing at Labour Party conferences but which are always rather more complex in what turns out to be practice? According to a Diary item in the *Guardian* of 8 January an old associate of Hoon's, an MEP with him in 1984, recalls where he fitted in then: "His reputation was that of a smart arse know-all...He would use other people's faces as a stepladder to get what he wanted".

Slick Lawyer

In the beginning Hoon had a lot going for him; the son of a railwayman he was the first person in his family to go to university – to Cambridge to study law – then a lecturer in law at Leeds University during which time he qualified as a criminal barrister. Years later his fellow Labour MP Chris Mullin could comment that "... everyone knows that, like all slick lawyers, he could make the opposite case with equal dexterity". Thus usefully equipped he followed his time as an MEP by election to the Commons and in 1999 his first big job as Minister of Defence. Perhaps too big, for his time in that office was notable for the attack on Iraq and all the lies, betrayals and bigotry which are yet again being glimpsed, painfully and bitterly, in the Chilcott Enquiry. How did Hoon deal with the pillage, savagery and fear in that desperate place?

In tune with the other cowed dummies on the Labour benches front and back he satisfied himself with a robotic insistence that, whatever the facts the invasion was necessary because Iraq had developed weapons which under the control of Saddam Hussein, were an immediate threat to other countries. On the BBC *Breakfast With Frost* on 2 February 2003 he asserted that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction which "...present a real threat not only...to the people of Iraq and surrounding regions... but also to the safety and security of the world". On 23 June 2003 he stated in a Written Answer

to the Commons that two trailers had been observed in Iraq which were mobile weapons laboratories. In fact information had been passed to weapons inspectors and to Dr. David Kelly, the scientist whose death later in that year remains a source of menacing controversy, that the trailers were for inflating hydrogen balloons to be used in artillery ranging and had been sold to Iraq by the British company Marconi.

Cluster Bombs

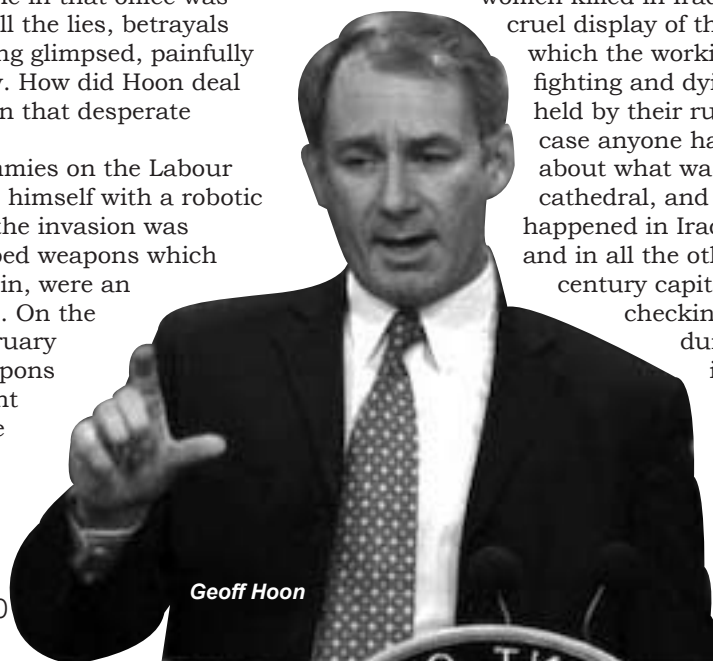
When it was suggested to him in an interview on BBC Radio 4 that an Iraqi mother whose child had been killed by one of the hundreds of cluster bombs which had been dropped there might not thank the British army Hoon dismissed the matter: "One day they might." In October 2001, commenting on civilian casualties in the invasion of Afghanistan Hoon boasted about "the astonishing accuracy of the bombing" and when he was asked how it came about that in the small hamlet of Kumar as many as a hundred people had been killed he brushed the question aside as Kumar was "...not a village in any normal sense of the word".

But "astonishing accuracy" was not a phrase used by Hoon when he was under pressure to explain some apparent discrepancies in his expense claims. These claims were completed, in a manner by now familiar, with a keen regard for detail with the popular "flipping" between one home and another but in this case with some individual embellishments. For example putting in a variety of claims for a whole year in advance for a home in Derbyshire (his constituency is at Ashfield) before stating that another house was his second home. For example when he was allocated – for security purposes – a luxurious rent-free grace-and-favour flat in Admiralty House he let out his other home in London which, as he had registered it as his main home, he had been allowed to claim for. When these affairs came to light Hoon said it had all been caused by an "inadvertent overlap in bill payments" or an "inadvertent administrative error". Amid rumours of a possible police investigation he repaid £384.

Memorial

Last October, as a former Defence Secretary, Hoon joined other callous and ruthless cynics from what are known as the great and the good at St. Paul's Cathedral in a memorial service for the British service men and women killed in Iraq. It was a typically cruel display of the contempt in which the working class, who do the fighting and dying at such times, are held by their rulers. And Hoon, in case anyone had any wrong ideas about what was happening in that cathedral, and about what had happened in Iraq and Afghanistan and in all the other outrages in 21st century capitalism, contributed by checking his mobile phone during the service. There is, unhappily, no reason to hope that he received the kind of message which he and the others deserved.

IVAN



Geoff Hoon



Voice from the Back

Green Shoots Of Recovery?

Financial "experts" keep claiming that world capitalism has recovered from economic crisis and point to the increase in some stocks and increases in bankers bonuses as evidence of that recovery. They completely ignore the mounting unemployment and the repossession of workers houses. Here is a recent example of homelessness in the USA. "That insecurity is becoming more common in the suburbs these days. Officials say that homeless shelters are suddenly filled to capacity, with some suburban communities resorting to housing families in motels, for the first time in years. On Long Island, Nassau County officials have seen the number of people seeking shelter rise by 40 percent compared with this time last year, while in Suffolk, the number of families seeking shelter for the first time rose by 20 percent. In Connecticut, in an annual one-day survey taken in January, the number of people in emergency shelters was 33 percent higher than the year before" (*New York Times*, 11 December). So while financial "experts" talk of economic recovery thousands of workers in the most advanced capitalist nation in the world huddle into homeless shelters. A typical example of capitalism in action.

Capitalism Is Obscene

Every day we are confronted by appeals to help the starving, the undernourished and the children dying from lack of clean water or simple medical attention. We are beseeched by well-meaning workers to give a few pounds to this or that charity appeal. It is an everyday experience for workers but how do we relate to this piece of information? "Four directors at Paulson Europe, the London-based arm of one of the world's most successful hedge funds, took home more than £50m last year after successfully betting on the near-collapse of the UK banking sector. The four directors – which include Paulson & Co, the US hedge fund run by billionaire investor John Paulson

– saw profits at the partnership rise 37pc to £50.8m in the year to March 2009, according to documents filed at Companies House. The highest paid director, likely to have been Paulson & Co, received £28.6m. The three London-based directors – Nikolai Petchenikov, Harry St John Cooper and Mina Gerwin – split the remaining £22.2m between them" (*Daily Telegraph*, 7 January). In a society of extreme poverty such wealth is truly obscene.

This Sporting Life

There was a time when sport was supposed to be a pleasant physical exercise. The popularity of association football inside capitalism made it an activity much adored by workers too unfit to play it themselves, but keen to follow the efforts of their local sporting heroes. With the development of capitalism football has just become another business opportunity. Its development more likely to be followed by financial journalists rather than football ones. "Manchester United is exploring a bond issue as part of efforts to refinance its £700m debt, with the English Premier League champions in talks with two banks about how to reorganise its borrowings. JPMorgan and Deutsche Bank are advising the football club on its options. It is one of a number of clubs whose debts have alarmed football authorities. People familiar with the situation said the options under consideration included the issue of high-yield bonds. These would be used to refinance bank debt or payment-in-kind notes – an instrument that allows borrowers to roll over cash interest payments – which helped Malcolm Glazer, the US sports franchise owner, and his family take over Man United in 2005 in a £790m leveraged buy-out. The club would be the latest company to take advantage of the recovery in bond markets to refinance

debt" (*Financial Times*, 2 January). Every activity that capitalism touches it turns into commodities.

Behind The Glamour

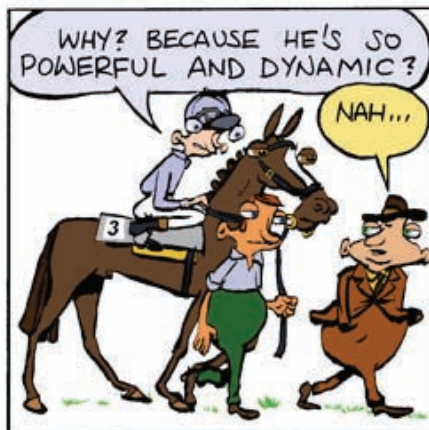
Capitalism is a society based on deceit. It purports to be based on freedom yet it is a ruthlessly class-divided society that enslaves millions in its quest for greater and greater profits for its owning class. A good example of the facade that is capitalism is the recent completion of the tallest building in the world the Burj Khalifa in Dubai. This 2,717 foot edifice has 600 apartments, 300,000 square feet of office accommodation, the world's highest swimming pool and mosque. Behind this facade of opulence lies another story. "Many of Dubai's construction workers live on starvation wages: £120 a month on average for a six-day week, with shifts of up to 12 hours...Construction workers on the Burj Khalifa have rioted on several occasions, including in March 2006, when 2,500 protested at the site, and again in November 2007. A Human Rights Watch survey found a cover-up of deaths from heat, overwork and suicide in the emirate. The Indian consulate recorded 971 deaths of their nationals in 2005, after which they were asked to stop counting" (*Observer*, 10 January). Death, destruction and exploitation, that is what lies behind this monument to capitalism's avarice.

Construction workers in Dubai



by Rigg

Free Lunch



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