

# socialist standard

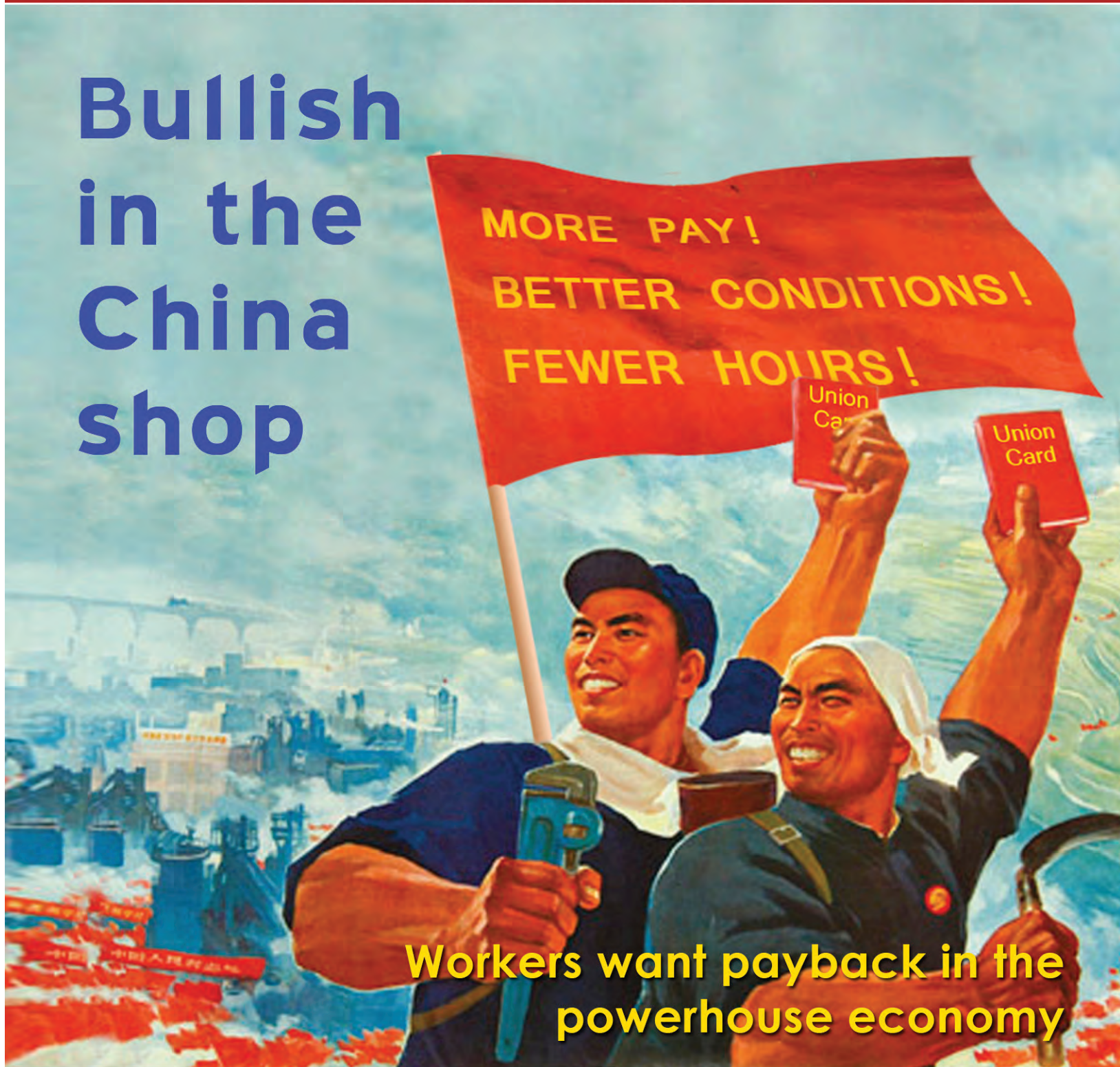


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Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain - Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

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powerhouse economy



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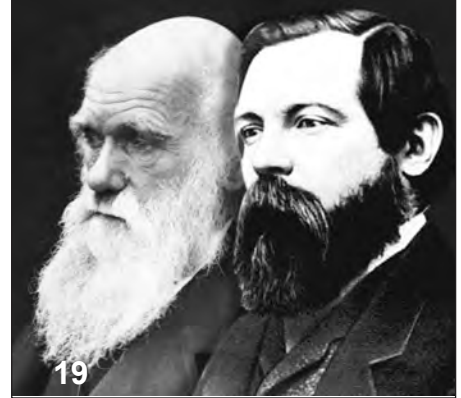
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#### THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 2 October** 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](mailto: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

### Make austerity history

FIFTY YEARS ago politicians and pundits were promising that automation and increasing productivity would mean a shorter working week, an earlier retirement age and a doubling of the standard of living every twenty-five years. As late as 1979 Chris Evans, "a psychologist and computer scientist" was predicting that by 2001 "we will all have a 20-hour working week and retire at fifty" ([www.computinghistory.org.uk/det/4236/The-Mighty-Micro](http://www.computinghistory.org.uk/det/4236/The-Mighty-Micro)). No, not Chris Evans, the celebrity radio presenter, though it might as well have been.

Listen to the politicians now. All the talk is about austerity, cuts and pain. Public sector workers, those on housing benefit and the jobless are the main targets but everybody (except for businesses and shareholders) will be hit one way or another. And the retirement age is to go up not down.

Why? Why this failure to realise the promises of yesteryear? Because we are living under capitalism, and capitalism is not geared to meeting people's needs and improving our lives. It's an uncontrollable system geared to making and accumulating profits.

In 2008 the accumulation of profits - which Gordon Brown foolishly thought would just go on and on - faltered as it regularly does from time to time. This presented the government with its own financial problem - tax revenues fell, so they had to borrow more - but also with the job of facilitating conditions

for the revival of profit-making.

That's why they're axing government spending, freezing government wages, cutting benefits, keeping interest rates low and, last but not least, lowering corporation tax on profits.

There's no guarantee that this will work, but there is a guarantee that people will suffer.

With millions of able bodied people sitting in enforced idleness, with factories closed or working short time, with an abundance of natural resources, skills and technical know-how, it's surprising that we are being told that we will have to undergo a period of austerity. But it's a lie.

If the profit system did not exist, and if we all owned in common the places where useful things are produced, we could reap the benefits of scientific advances and modern technology to provide plenty for all, so making poverty and austerity history.

The resources to provide enough healthy food, decent housing, good health care and other amenities for all exist now and have done for many years, but the profit system stands in the way. All the advances in technology over the last fifty or so years mean that austerity is even more unnecessary today that it was then. In fact, every scientific advance, each new invention makes socialism all the more possible.

The fact that the politicians are now talking about a "New Age of Austerity" in a world of potential plenty is a damning indictment of capitalism.

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## Taiga, taiga burning bright...

FIRES ARE nothing new in the Russian boreal or northern forest. In fact 20 to 35 thousand wildfires annually affect between 0.5 and 2.5 million hectares of Russian forest ([http://www.taigarescue.org/\\_v3/files/pdf/99.pdf](http://www.taigarescue.org/_v3/files/pdf/99.pdf)). However the fires this August have been severe enough to reduce entire villages to ash and melt car engines, due to the worst heatwave for decades, with temperatures reaching 42°C. Deaths from the fires were reported at 30 but there were also 2000 deaths from drowning due to people trying to cool off in rivers <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/aug/02/russia-heatwave-wildfires-deaths>.

Although careless humans are thought to be directly responsible for most Russian forest fires, it may be that careless humanity is indirectly responsible for the rest. The cause of the Russian heatwave is also the reason why August was a washout in the UK but catastrophically so in Pakistan, while the Japanese baked: there is something funny going on with the polar jet stream.

Jet streams are fast-moving wind layers a few hundred miles across but only a couple of miles thick, circumnavigating the globe in meandering loops at the tropopause, the region at around 6 - 9 miles high which separates the dense troposphere from the stratosphere. Airliners save time and fuel by riding these streams and reducing drag in the thin atmosphere, but the streams are unpredictable, splitting, combining and even going back on themselves, and causing potentially fatal clear air turbulence. When a loop meanders south, cold wet air rushes down into the loop from the north, which is when the UK gets drenched. Where it loops upwards, hot dry air reaches northerly climes, giving Muscovites an excuse to get out the sun-lounger. All this is well understood and the explanations, to do with orbital velocity ratios and temperature, are straightforward. What is not understood at all, and which results in the UK being flooded in summer and frozen last winter while Siberia is incinerated, is why these meandering loops suddenly, and for weeks on end, come to a dead stop. Something is obstructing it, and nobody knows what.

It would be a truism to say that climatology is not a well-understood science. This is what makes the climate change debate so lively. But what is particularly alarming at the moment, in view of this level of uncertainty, is the amount of serious talk around about geoengineering.

On the face of it, there is a case for this. Capitalist ruling elites are never going to cooperate to reduce carbon emissions, that much is becoming painfully obvious. Even if they stopped all emissions today, the effects of what is already up there will be felt for centuries. The first 'tipping point' in a cascade of tipping

points may have already been reached. Desperate times call for desperate measures. Maybe it's time to call in the engineers.

There are two approaches to this, as outlined in the 2009 report of the Royal Society, *Geoengineering the Climate: science, governance and uncertainty* ([royalsociety.org/WorkArea/Downloads](http://royalsociety.org/WorkArea/Downloads)). The first involves carbon dioxide removal (CDR). This covers everything from carbon sequestration to ocean fertilisation with iron filings to encourage plankton blooms. Though CDR is seen as the preferable alternative, the techniques are expensive, not proven, largely untested (or where tested don't work - plankton just don't take carbon to the grave with them as was believed), and above all slow. There may not be enough time for these techniques to make any difference.

The second approach is solar radiation management (SRM). This is a fancy phrase for fast-acting tricks to stop the sun's rays getting through, but which do nothing about the long-term carbon problem. Techniques range from the cheap and frankly silly - painting house rooftops white - to the hi-tech Heath Robinson - erecting mirrors in space. One feasible suggestion receiving a lot of attention is the idea of chucking between one and five million tons of sulphur annually into the stratosphere in order to create atmospheric haze or 'global dimming', an effect known from volcanic case studies and from 20th century post-war industrial pollution. The irony of polluting the planet in order to avoid the consequences of polluting the planet can hardly need elaboration. And here we meet the jet stream again, for at the tropopause convection currents are horizontal, not vertical, thus it is supposed that all this sulphur, once up there, will stay permanently on top of what amounts to a set of impermeable tinted window tiles. But here's the rub: climatology is an uncertain business. As the Royal Society report admits: 'Indeed there is a range of so far unexplored feedback processes, which could become important with a permanently engineered sulphate layer'.

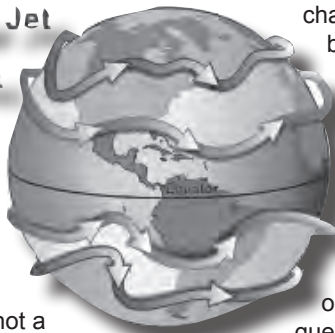
Since volcanic sulphur emissions are associated with ozone depletion, and since ozone is thought to be instrumental in the lateral convection processes in the stratosphere, it does not seem beyond the bounds of possibility that a depletion in one could result in a collapse in the other. If all this sulphur ended up crashing through into the troposphere and the cloud layer, it would give us a global dose of sulphuric acid rain the like of which we have never seen. Then we would be fried whatever the weather.

Whether for CDR or SRM, most advocates of geoengineering emphasise that this is not an 'instead of' emissions reduction option, it's an 'as well as', but opponents have pointed out that prominent advocates of this approach belong to those same conservative think-tanks which have all along been climate change deniers. The fear is that geoengineering is being touted as a cheap fix in order to avoid doing anything worthwhile (ie expensive) to solve the problem of carbon emissions. The deepest fear, of course, is not that geoengineering wouldn't work, but that it would, and that it would do something catastrophic. It's like setting about neurosurgery with a trowel and a lump hammer, while wearing a blindfold.

It is entirely of a piece with capitalism's modus operandi that it sleepwalks into a problem and then guessworks its way out of it, while arguing bitterly about whose fault it is and who's going to pick up the bill. But there is one other interesting fact about the jet stream which, if the world gets a lucky break and the bickering capitalists get booted off the planning committees, socialists may well be able to turn to good account: "According to one estimate, of the potential wind energy in the jet stream, only 1 percent would be needed to meet the world's current energy needs. The required technology would reportedly take 10-20 years to develop" (Wikipedia). Now that would be one hell of a windmill.

Polar Jet

Subtropical Jet



Living wage or...

Dear Editors

I must declare from the outset that I am a fellow traveller with the SPGB in as much as seeking the abolition of the wage system, but in the *Socialist Standard's* recent Cooking the Books column 'What's a "Living Wage"?' (June), I was left disappointed by the way in which the living wage was represented.

The first problem with the article is where (discussing the Green Party's flagship policy of raising the National Minimum Wage to £8.10/hour) it states that £16,848 pa. 'hardly qualifies as an adequate "living wage".' This feels a little disingenuous.

Let's be honest about this: of course £16.8k a year is not comfortable, and it is certainly not fair. It is still several thousand shy of the current national average, but it is also several thousand closer. However, the difference it would make (before we get onto potential wider economic repercussions of the wage rate) to those currently on NMW would be phenomenal.

This is a difference not only of nearly £5k a year but has a multitude of knock-on benefits the article neglects to mention, the most important and obvious being the positive impact on health (one of the key grounds for the living wage) due to reduced stress levels.

This leads me comfortably into my next point. As a seasoned London-based organiser around the London Living Wage, one of the most uncomfortable facts I've had to deal with in campaigning for the living wage is that paying the London Living Wage has been *good for employers*; it is *good management of capitalism*.

A better wage rate (albeit still suitably low) means fewer employee sick days taken and a much lower turnover in employee numbers. The former relates specifically to the aforementioned health benefits, the latter relates often to simple time-management.

So many NMW workers have to work multiple jobs to make up enough hours in order to gain enough money to cover rent and provide the cheapest meal for their families. Staff turnover can be high for NMW employers due to employees taking up work at sites marginally closer to home, etc. In many respects the living wage can be more about time rather than money.

The article states that the first effect of legal living wage rate

would be that "some employers would go bankrupt." Of course this is a definite possibility in the current economic crisis with many employers already teetering on the edge.

On the other hand, however, the kind of employers most likely to be adversely affected would (obviously) be those dependent on super-exploitation: I'm thinking especially of cleaning, security and catering agencies.

But the roles employers for these firms provide are those which are, broadly speaking, already exploited to saturation point, i.e. there is scarcely a surplus of workers (or at least not a surplus of work-hours - admittedly something different). These are by no means the only NMW job types, but they constitute a significant proportion and are (at our current level of technology) extremely difficult to substitute for any kind of improved machinery. We aren't yet at the stage where robotic androids could perform all the tasks a security guard or cleaner does.

If these agencies - subcontractors, beneficiaries of privatisation - were to collapse under wage bills, this does not therefore necessarily mean mass unemployment (except possibly on a very temporary basis) as the roles require being re-hired for as immediately as they are lost.

In a lot of cases this would presumably take the form of these out-sourced services being brought back in-house to the sites on which

they are employed. This can be and often is in fact cheaper for site-owners as it cuts out duplicate management posts between the site-company and the outsourced company (both of which are paid for by the site-owner).

In short, it can work out cheaper in more ways than one to pay workers more. It is not necessarily as straight-forward as the article suggests. A living wage can be as much 'living' for the employer as it is for the employee.

Finally, and in my eyes most importantly, the article ends that 'workers should replace the green demand for a "Living Wage" by the revolutionary demand for the "Abolition of the Wages System".' As I mentioned, in principle I agree. However, this simple sentence does injustice to the value living wage struggles have.

For myself the main and most important benefit of the London Living Wage is that it lifts workers and their dependents not only out of the deeper throes of poverty (though not completely altogether) but that it also lifts them out of the harshest insecurity and psychological vulnerability imaginable.

It is not a coincidence that those on the NMW are among the least likely to be unionised. I'm certain the SPGB understands the mechanism used by bosses in holding workers down through the wage system. In London, living wage struggles have galvanised workers' organisations (especially grassroots unionisation), and have recently begun to really politicise workers. It instils consciousness.

If the wage system can be represented by the image of a boss stamping on a worker's face, then the living wage might be removing the boss's foot from the worker's neck. She's still going to get stamped in the face, but she's a little freer to start fighting back.

The demand to abolish wage-slavery is certainly the most important one. However, in our current situation it is *only through* living wage struggles that any kind of *meaningful* revolutionary discourse can exist. The living wage question is the first line in this discussion which, if followed to its natural conclusion, ends by agreeing to overthrow exploitation altogether.

An interesting question Cooking the Books should ask is where, if at all, in this discussion the 'transitional demand' for a National Maximum Salary might be.

JOSEPH ROBERTSON,  
London

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## ...abolition of the wages system?

### Reply:

Let's get one thing clear from the start. We have nothing against workers struggling for and getting higher wages if they can. We favour this, even if we think that ideally this should be tied to struggling to abolish the wages system altogether. Our members, as workers, join trade unions. So, we hope your campaign to get London employers to pay some of their workers more succeeds, even if we don't like the term "living wage" any more than "fair wage". There's nothing fair about the wages system and we're against people having to work for a wage to live.

Wages (and their other name, salaries) are a price - the price of the labour power, or working skills, that workers sell to an employer. Most people are forced by economic necessity to do this to get a living, to obtain the money to buy the things they need to live.

The wages system implies the division of society into those who own and control the means for producing wealth and who need to employ people to operate them and those who, owning no means of production, have to sell their working skills to them. It implies a class divided society. But more. Employers are not philanthropists. They only employ workers if they think there's a profit in it for them. The source of their profits is the difference between what they pay their workers as wages and what they receive from the sale of what their employees produce. So, the wages system also implies exploitation, the extraction of unpaid labour from the workforce. That's why there is not, and cannot be, any such thing as a fair wage.

The abolition of the wages system involves abolishing the class division of society by making the means of production the common property of everybody under democratic control. Then nobody will be obliged to work for someone else for a wage. Instead, the principle "from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs" will apply. People will co-operate to produce what is needed and then everybody will have free access to it to satisfy their needs, without having to pay. In fact money will have become redundant.

What we were criticising in the article was the proposal of a political party to increase the present legal minimum wage by over 40 percent and call the result a "living wage". We pointed out that this was just

another empty vote-catching promise which, even if implemented, wouldn't have had the expected effects. We would have thought that it was generally accepted that higher wages do lead employers to introduce labour-saving machinery. An example of this in reverse would be how many garages have abandoned car washing machines as hand washing done by asylum seekers (probably getting less than the minimum wage) has become cheaper. You yourself concede that an imposed increase of the order proposed by the Green Party - by nearly £5k a year - could lead to an increase in unemployment for the lowest-paid, even if you think this would only be temporary.

We do not agree that "in our current situation it is *only through* living wage struggles that any kind of *meaningful* revolutionary discourse can exist." These probably are producing an increased trade union consciousness among a section of the working class, but the struggle for higher wages and better working conditions (better conditions for the sale of labour-power) is not the same as socialist understanding of the need to get rid of the wages system altogether by bringing the means of production into the common ownership and democratic control of the whole population. That does not rise spontaneously out of the mere struggle for higher wages but requires the presence and activity of socialists to point this out directly.

Incidentally, for what it's worth, Marx didn't think much of such demands as "fixing the minimum wage by law", which was one of the reform demands of the French Workers Party he had a hand in helping to set up in 1880. He wrote, referring to the proposer of this: "I told him: 'If the French proletariat is still so childish as to require such bait, it is not worth while drawing up any program whatever.'" (Letter to Sorge, 5 November 1880, [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/letters/80\\_11\\_05.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/letters/80_11_05.htm))

As to the demand for a "National Maximum Salary", we don't think that this is something that those

who want to abolish the wages system should get involved in. The bloated "salaries" received by many top business people and government officials are not really the price of their labour power but a disguised way of getting a share of the surplus value extracted from the unpaid labour of the workers. - *Editors.*

## Imperialism

Dear Editors

It was reported on Sunday 11 July 2010 that a boy of seven works a 98-hour week in Delhi to supply products to the British high street chain Poundland.

What is the SPGB position on the conception of imperialism through Lenin, Bukharin and Luxemburg and the idea of an aristocracy of labour? WIRRAL SOCIALISTS (<http://www.wirralsocialists.com>)

### Reply:

We have never accepted the view that a section of the working class in the developed capitalist countries - the so-called "aristocracy of labour" of skilled workers - shares in the proceeds of the exploitation of colonial and now 'Third World' countries. The wages paid to skilled workers here reflect the higher quality - due to more education, training and skill - of the labour power they have to sell.

It was only in 1920, in a preface to the French and German editions, of his *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* that Lenin introduced the idea that a section of the working class in the imperialist countries shared in the booty extracted from capitalists, workers and peasants in the rest of the world. This was to try to secure the support of anti-colonial movements for his beleaguered regime in Russia. It was a political manoeuvre - "workers and colonial peoples unite" - that went against the basic principle of Marxian economics that wages represent the value of the labour-power a worker sells and contain no element of surplus value.

The original 1916 edition of the pamphlet did not contain this. It was a fairly run-of-the-mill analysis of imperialism and colonialism as put forward by Social Democrats of the time: that it was due to the higher profits to be made in the colonies and less developed countries than at home. The only real objection was to its subtitle of "the highest stage of capitalism" since capitalism had been "imperialist" in the 18<sup>th</sup> century too.

Rosa Luxemburg's *Accumulation of Capital* (1912), however, was based

## Party News

The World Socialist Party (New Zealand) now runs two local radio stations: Radio 88.3 Imagine, Manurewa (located in South Auckland) and Radio 106.9 Imagine, Brooklyn (located in Wellington).

## Letters continued

on a faulty analysis of capitalism: that it suffered from a chronic shortage of home purchasing power that drove capitalist countries to seek markets outside capitalism, in the less developed parts of the world. Apart from its descriptive parts it is of little value.

The Bolshevik Bukharin's *Imperialism and the World Economy* (1916) developed the idea of a single capitalist world economy and anticipated the role that the state was to play in supporting the overseas economic interests (markets, raw material resources, investment outlets, trade routes) of the capitalist firms established within its borders.

All three (and others) were trying to analyse the phenomenon of capitalism coming to dominate the whole world, as it did towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to which the term "imperialism" was given. This was not the best term since imperialism is not something separate from capitalism and all capitalist countries, not just those

normally labelled "imperialist", are prepared to use force to further the vital economic interests of their capitalist class. - *Editors*

## Pete Seeger again

Dear Editors

For a nonagenarian, Pete Seeger sure possesses some staying power. First Roy Beat and now Stephen Shenfield (April and August issues) have gone into print, both missing the main thrust of the March article. Instead, they laser-in on my flippant swipe at the Left's perennial practice of hijacking every convenient bandwagon - "good cause" - to promote itself.

In no way was I "dismissing" or "belittling" the Civil Rights Movement as they suggest; merely noting its inbuilt shortcomings. A southern negro could, of course, be summarily lynched for much less than displaying revolutionary tendencies; a reluctance to step into the gutter or an admiring glance ("rape") sufficing,

All of us abhor Capitalism's myriad injustices and obscenities but recognise that the solution begins with a rational understanding of the root causes rather than an emotional piecemeal assault on their effects. Is this "Sectarian"? Having pored long and hard over my dictionary, I can only conclude that in commonsense everyday terms it's nothing of the sort. Personally I'm happier with "Socialist".

ANDREW ARMITAGE

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## Contact Details

### UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

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

**Enfield and Haringey branch.** Thurs Sept. 9 and 23, 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

#### MIDLANDS

**West Midlands Regional branch.** Meets every two months on a Sunday afternoon (see meetings page for details).

Tel: Tony Gluck 01242 235615.

Email: tonygluck111@btinternet.com

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**Bolton.** Tel: H. McLaughlin.

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

Richard Donnelly, 112 Napierhall Street, Glasgow G20 6HT. Tel: 0141 5794109.

Email: richard.donnelly1@ntlworld.com

**Dundee.** Ian Ratcliffe, 16 Birkhall Ave, Wormit, Newport-on-Tay, DD6 8PX.

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

Falcon Brae, Ladywell, Livingston, West Lothian, EH5 6UW. Tel: 01506 462359

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#### WALES

**Swansea branch.** 2nd Mon, 7.30pm, Unitarian Church, High Street. Corres:

Geoffrey Williams, 19 Baptist Well Street, Waun Wen, Swansea SA1 6FB. Tel:

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**Cardiff and District.** John James, 67 Romilly Park Road, Barry CF62 6RR.

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### INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS

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### COMPANION PARTIES OVERSEAS

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# Fascists Take Over Russian Communist Party

IN A Russian-language document now circulating on the internet, Yevgeny Volobuyev, a member of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) in St. Petersburg, “sounds the tocsin to warn of the danger of the CPRF finally turning into a fascist party.”

Volobuyev explains that Russian fascists have been arguing for a long time on their websites about “what to do with the CPRF.” Some said that they should just put communists “up against the wall”, but others argued that they should first join the CPRF and take over its structures. In recent years, with openly fascist organizations like Russian National Unity fragmenting and losing legal status, “fascists and people inclined toward fascism streamed into the CPRF.” There they found many party leaders “demoralised by the collapse of the Soviet Union” and sympathetic to their cause. With the help of these leaders, they “were able to create an unofficial fascist faction inside the CPRF” (officially the party does not allow factions). They also managed to gain control of the party’s internet sites.

The infiltrators would have been less successful had the ground not been so well prepared for them. Ever since the CPRF was founded in 1993, it has been dominated by the Russian nationalist (“patriotic”) tendency led by Gennady Zyuganov. Until now, however, the party also had a place for people who still call themselves “internationalists” and “Marxist-Leninists”. (For an analysis of tendencies within the CPRF, see Chapter 3 of Stephen D. Shenfield, *Russian Fascism*, NY: M.E. Sharpe 2001.)

## Mass expulsions

That is now changing. The fascist faction, acting through its allies in the party leadership, is carrying out individual and mass expulsions with a view to purging the CPRF of all opponents of Russian nationalism: “The party organizations of entire regions are being destroyed.” Some local branches, such as the one to which Volobuyev belongs, have been targeted simply because of their multiethnic composition. “The situation has descended to the point of measuring skulls.” Only people of pure Russian descent are wanted.

The “internationalists” are accused of refusing to participate in the “national liberation struggle” against Jews and other ethnic minorities branded as enemies of the Russian nation. Many party members are also accused of “neo-Trotskyism” - on the face of it an absurd accusation, as Volobuyev remarks, because with hardly any exceptions they have never read Trotsky and have no idea what Trotskyism is, let alone neo-Trotskyism. But the Russian nationalists know that Trotsky was the most prominent opponent of Stalin, whom they count as one of their own. And they know that Trotsky was a Jew.

## “Communist” oligarchs

The nationalists and fascists in the CPRF are allied with various party figures - all of ethnic Russian origin, of course - who are also big businessmen (“oligarchs” in current Russian parlance). One such figure is Alexander Afanasyev, owner of a chain of pharmacies. According to Volobuyev, the motive underlying the destruction of 22 of St.

Petersburg’s 29 district party organizations was to clear a space on the CPRF list of candidates for Afanasyev to get a seat in the State Duma (parliament).

Another “communist” oligarch is the CPRF functionary and insurance and vodka tycoon Sergei Shtogrin, currently deputy chairman of the Duma Committee on Budgetary and Tax Issues. Shtogrin has argued in favour of encouraging greater alcohol consumption as a way of increasing state revenues.

## The Leninist organizational model

Most of the fascists’ victims do not understand what is happening. They believe that a “mistake” has been made and that “if they appeal to Zyuganov and the Central Committee truth will triumph”. As “disciplined and law-abiding communists”, they are reluctant to consolidate their forces by creating an “internationalist” or “Marxist-Leninist” faction, because that would break party rules.

This sense of “discipline” reflects the basically undemocratic structure of the CPRF, which remains wedded to the Leninist organizational model of “democratic centralism”. It is clear from Volobuyev’s account that ordinary members and even branch organizers still look to remote leaders for guidance and initiative. They take pride in the awards they receive from the leaders and are chastened by their reprimands - just like in the good old days of the “Soviet” regime.

The undemocratic structure of the party facilitates the fascist takeover in other ways too. There is weak democratic oversight of the process of admitting new members, so there is no effective barrier to the infiltration of people whose real views are incompatible with party principles. Arbitrary decisions can be made “from above” to expel members and whole branches without adequate explanation.

## What next?

Assuming that no effective moves are made to block the fascist takeover of the CPRF, what are the likely consequences for Russian politics? The CPRF will lose many of its local activists and depend increasingly on funding from oligarchs. It may end up with little to distinguish it from Zhirinovskiy’s Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia, competing with the LDPR for the same extreme Russian nationalist electorate.

Some new organizations may be formed by “internationalists” expelled from the CPRF. These people do not share the same views except on the admittedly important issue of nationalism. Some

would like to restore some version of the “Soviet” system. Others think in terms of reforming private capitalism or envisage some kind of “market socialism”. Perhaps at least a few will be prompted by their experience in the CPRF to move toward a more democratic mode of organization and conception of socialism.

**STEFAN**

CPRF leader  
Gennady  
Zyuganov







## Overproduction or underconsumption?

"IS MARX'S analysis of capitalism still valid today?" asked Jonny Ball in the anarchist paper *Freedom* (19 June). While trying to be generally sympathetic to Marx, he didn't always get it right. According to him:

"Crises are not so much of a problem of overproduction, as this in itself is not a problem if people have the purchasing power to buy back what they produce, but the trigger in any recession is in fact, underconsumption."

To back this up he quotes "the Marxist writer George Jackson" who wrote about production before 1929 increasing "without a corresponding increase in the ability of the great labouring masses to buy back what was being produced" and that therefore "it was underconsumption (not overproduction)" that led to the stock market crash of 1929.

Overproduction occurs when too much of some good has been produced in relation to the market demand for it (not the same as the real need for it). It can affect any type of good - raw materials, steel, ships, consumer goods, anything.

Underconsumption has been defined in various ways but all have in common the view that consumer (paying) demand is too low.

Cruder versions of underconsumption theory argue that, because workers cannot buy back all they produce, a chronic shortage of purchasing power is built-in to capitalism, requiring for instance exports to bridge the gap. It is true that workers cannot buy back all they produce but total paying demand is not made up just of what workers buy; it also includes what capitalist firms buy (raw materials, buildings and equipment, finished and semi-finished products).

More subtle versions argue that because the share of consumer demand in total demand is too low this prevents sustained, balanced growth. On this theory a crisis is precipitated when the production of consumer goods increases faster than consumer demand, which is mainly that of wage and salary workers.

A crisis can be triggered by such an overproduction of consumer goods, and a case can be made out for this being a factor in 1929, but this is not the only way a crisis can be triggered. Overproduction in any sufficiently important sector of the economy can do

this. This is why it can be said that overproduction (not underconsumption) is the cause of crises, as the anarchic, competitive struggle for profits leads to the total production of capitalist firms in a particular sector coming to exceed the paying demand for its products and this having a knock-on effect throughout the economy.

It is not clear what Ball means when he says that overproduction "in itself is not a problem if people have the purchasing power to buy back what they produce". If this is the case then there is no overproduction. Maybe he means overproduction in relation to needs rather than to paying demand, but this is not the sense that "overproduction" is usually used in economics.

But who is this "Marxist writer" George Jackson? Yes, it is George Jackson, the Black Panther and Soledad Brother, who was murdered in prison in 1971 at the age of 29. He spent his time in prison reading up on things and did become reasonably well-informed, but he would not have regarded himself as an authority on Marxian economics.

In any event, his "Marxism" was the so-called "Marxism-Leninism" of Mao Tse Tung. Not quite the same thing. Despite this, he did argue cogently for a moneyless society:

"Consider the people's store, after full automation, the implementation of the theory of economic advantage. You dig, no waste makers, no harnesses on production. There is no intermediary, no money. The store, it stocks everything that the body or home could possibly use. Why won't the people hoard, how is an operation like that possible, how could the storing place keep its stores if its stock (merchandise) is free? Men hoard against want, need, don't they? Aren't they taught that tomorrow holds terror, pile up a surplus against this terror, be greedy and possessive if you want to succeed in this insecure world? Nuts hidden away for tomorrow's winter. Change the environment, educate the man, he'll change. The people's store will work as long as people know that it will be there, and have in abundance the things they need and want (really want); when they are positive that the common effort has and will always produce an abundance, they won't bother to take home more than they need.

Water is free, do people drink more than they need?" (Soledad Brother, Letter of 17 June 1970).



## Tiny Tips

According to one organizer, a scrappy former bank teller named Wu Lijuan, there are at least 70,000 people seeking to regain their old jobs or receive monetary compensation, a sizable wedge of the 400,000 who were laid off during a decade-long purge. Like many other state-owned companies, the banks slashed payrolls and restructured to raise profitability and make themselves more attractive to outside investors. "They tossed us out like garbage," Ms. Wu, 44, said before a recent protest, scanning fellow restaurant patrons for potential eavesdroppers. "All we're asking for is justice and maybe to serve as a model for others who have been wronged." For a government determined to maintain social harmony, the protests and petitioning are vexing. Compared with

farmers angry over seized land or retired soldiers seeking fatter pensions, the bank workers — educated, organized and knowledgeable about the Internet — are better equipped to outsmart the public security agents constantly on their trail:

<http://tinyurl.com/38bjlza>

"Women demand men have houses and cars, why can't men demand women be virgins?" asked one man on the Tianya site. "So, greedy women, remember, you have to protect your hymens, because those are big dowries for you to exchange for money." Some men who were interviewed agreed about the importance of finding a virgin. "I really care about virginity," said Xia Yang, product manager for a technology company. "If you go to buy a cellphone, of course you'd want to buy a new cellphone. Who would spend the same amount of money to

buy an old cellphone that's been used for two years?" The virginity debate also underscores a contradiction in modern China: As the nation becomes more freewheeling, there remains a deeply conservative core:

<http://tinyurl.com/23jdcjm>

The report listed numerous areas in which China's military is on the march. China is deploying a new class of nuclear-powered submarines equipped with intercontinental ballistic missiles. It is pouring money into space warfare systems and cyberwarfare capabilities. It is developing a "carrier killer" anti-ship ballistic missile. China has "the most active land-based ballistic and cruise missile program in the world," the report said. Beijing "now possesses one of the largest" forces of surface-to-air missiles in the world, it added. And it has the "largest force of principal combatants, submarines, and amphibious warfare ships in Asia."

<http://tinyurl.com/2c9xm2b>



# China's working class drives capitalist development

*The heroic and inspiring struggles of China's working class will only lay the ground for new and improved exploitation methods - unless, that is, the struggle turns political - and socialist*

“I do the same thing every day,” said one employee at the Foxconn factory in Shenzhen, China, where more than ten workers have committed suicide. “I have no future.” Many, perhaps most, workers will know exactly how he feels. But to the bourgeois mind, it’s all an impenetrable puzzle. There was something criminally stupid and sickeningly idiotic about the reaction to these suicides of Terry Gou, the billionaire founder and chairman of the company, which makes electronic parts for the likes of Apple and Dell. According to a report in *Bloomberg Businessweek* (7 June), Gou said that he had no idea why the suicides were happening. “From a logical, scientific standpoint, I don’t have a grasp on that,” said Gou. “No matter how you force me, I don’t know.” Another worker interviewed at the factory might have given the hapless Gou a few clues: conversation and human interaction on the production line is forbidden, bathroom breaks are kept to ten minutes every two hours, and workers are yelled at frequently and fined for breaking the rules. According to a report in the *Daily Telegraph* (27 May), the pace of work in China is so intense that 50,000 workers a month burn out. When the workers go home at night, their hands continue to twitch and mimic the motion of the production line. Overtime last year was an average of 120 hours per month per worker, bring their weekly hours up to 70. And yet Gou continues to apply his mind in vain to the intricacies of science and logic in search of an answer to the mystery of the suicides. While the search goes on,

the company installed netting around outdoor stairwells of dormitory buildings to prevent people from jumping. It’s nice to hear that they care so much. The desperate measures taken by the poor souls at Foxconn have succeeded, however, in making things slightly better for the workers they left behind. Foxconn has since boosted wage levels by 30 percent and promised further 66 percent rises from October - conditional, of course, on worker performance.

A slightly happier story of worker revolt comes from the Denso car parts plant in China’s southern province of Guangdong. A 21-year-old worker, who had never been on strike before, told the *Observer’s* Jonathan Watts (4 July) that she was worried, yet excited and determined when the action began. “We started our shift at the normal time, but instead of working we just walked around and around the workshop for eight hours. The managers asked us to return to our jobs, but nobody did.” The next day this was repeated, the corporate union begging the workers to return to work. Again they refused. There was no chanting, no speeches, no violence. Nervous of a crackdown from the ruling ‘Communist’ Party, the workers have acted very cleverly. Nobody is named as a leader or organiser, leaflets are used to make demands instead of computers or mobile phones, which can be traced to individuals, and, on the day of the strike, the frustrated management had to push for the official union to organise a vote so that there was someone to negotiate with. But a quiet and dignified determination not to work until the demands for improved pay were met won the day.

This struggle, and many more like them, along with a fall in the numbers in the reserve army of labour, have improved the bargaining position of workers in China, and wage levels are now predicted to be on an unstoppable upward trend. The “spate of strikes has thrown a spanner into the workshop of the world”, says

*The Economist*. There are lessons here for all workers, and other groups in southeast Asia and the rest of China have not been slow to learn them. If the factory down the road or just across the border has won 50-odd percent or more pay rises, and improved conditions, why not us? Labour disputes in China were 30 percent higher in 2009 than a year earlier, and Guangdong alone saw at least 36 strikes between 25 May and 12 July, according to the *Economist*. Several cities have raised the minimum wage by up to 20 percent. Chinese labour costs have tripled in the decade after 1995 (although this was offset, for the capitalists, by a fivefold increase in productivity). And the example is beginning to spread, not only throughout China, but throughout the rest of the southeast Asian region too, especially in Vietnam and Cambodia and Laos - regions with reserves of cheap labour, and which capitalists have been eyeing up, along with inland areas in China, as possible alternative locations for their businesses if the Chinese workers get too 'bolshy'.

But, interestingly, this is not generally seen in the bourgeois press, including the papers so far quoted, as a bad thing. This might surprise those who are used to seeing wage demands and union organising closer to

in time. The capitalism currently flourishing there is pretty much indistinguishable from the capitalism of Victorian England that Marx and Engels spent so much of their lives analysing. The historian Tristram Hunt, in his entertaining biography of Engels, compares a passage from Engels' *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, written in 1844, with the testimony of a Chinese migrant worker in Shenzhen in 2000. They are indistinguishable from each other, and the story is the same as in the relevant sections of Marx's *Capital*: 12-hour days, overtime with shifts sometimes going on for 40 hours at rush times, 'accidents' and loss of limbs due to the pace of work and inadequate provision for human need, no breaks for meals, low wages, the exhaustion and crippling of the human body as a sacrifice to the altar of profit-making. How did China get to this depressing state of affairs? And where is it heading in the near future? Well, let's turn to the textbook. In abstract, Marxian terms, the recent history of China's development goes something like this.

China's period of state-led primitive accumulation and capitalist industrial development began under Mao (a period falsely called 'communism' in mainstream



Opposite page from left: Foxconn worker; Terry Gou, Foxconn chairman. This page: Foxconn suicide attempt; striking workers at Denso Guangzhou Nansha Co. in Guangdong province.

home ritually denounced as silly, greedy, selfish, and so on. This is the standard liberal line of being against all wars, and in favour of all progressive movements for change, as long as they took place in the past, or are happening in another country. But there are also sound, pro-capitalist reasons for welcoming the strikes and the pay rises. The capitalists and their representatives in the press will probably have been led to these reasons more by their practical involvement in the world and their nose for profit than any deep understanding of theory. But for those of us familiar with Marxian theory, their pronouncements were entirely predictable. Look at the history of China through Marxian lenses, and the motivation behind Western capitalists' cautious welcoming of Chinese wage struggles will become clear.

### China's textbook development

The standard view portrayed in the capitalist media is that, once upon a time, China experimented with communism. When it realised what a ghastly mistake that was, the country came to its senses and converted, at least partially, to the standard, Western, free-market system - the only system that works, as all right-thinking people know as a matter of common sense. So much for the fairy tale. The truth is somewhat different. In fact, the story of China is pretty textbook - if the 'textbook' we take is Karl Marx's *Capital*.

Looking at China today is very much like looking back

accounts, but differing in particulars, not in substance, from what has happened historically in all the advanced capitalist nations). This development was, in capitalist if not human terms, an enormous success. However, like all capitalist development, sooner or later it ran into barriers to its further expansion. It needed, in particular, to increase labour productivity, reform and improve the productivity of agriculture, and attract foreign capital. Reforms under Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s, culminating in the massacre at Tiananmen Square, aimed to move the state-capitalist economy to a more market-based system, while at the same time destroying many of the working class's (and peasantry's) customary entitlements to the means of living (the destruction of the Chinese working class's moral economy, perhaps we could call this, following the process described in EP Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*). This created a free labour force - free in the double sense of free to choose an employer, and free from the ownership of, or any entitlements to, the means of production or living, and hence free to starve or live in grinding poverty if you choose not to enter the labour market on capital's terms. Further reforms in the 1990s then sought to integrate Chinese capitalism into the world market, opening China, and particularly its vast reserves of cheap labour-power, to exploitation by foreign capital.

With the creation of and access to this free working class, global capital could then embark in earnest on

**“Capital, dead labour, can live vampire-like only by sucking the blood of the living. By sucking the workers dry, it destroys the basis of its own life - yet still it can't help itself.”**

the strategy of extracting 'absolute surplus value' - this means, in the absence of any customary or legal or moral limits to the working day, the capitalist class sweats the working class to produce as much profit as possible. The workers are made to work more and more for less and less. This was successful in China for a while - and was indeed hailed as an economic miracle by Western apologists for slavery. And a miracle it was - not only were there bumper profits to be made for the owners of capital, but the influx of cheap goods into Western economies helped to keep a lid on the value of labour power, and hence Western wage demands.

But again, the limitless drive to accumulate capital always hits up against real-world limits in the end. In the case of the extraction of absolute surplus value, the limits are real and obvious enough. There are only so many workers on the labour market, and those that are working can only work so many hours in the day without collapsing or dying. Capital, dead labour, can live vampire-like only by sucking the blood of the living. By sucking the workers dry, it destroys the basis of its own life - yet still it can't help itself. Even if it wanted to, or began to feel moral pangs about its own behaviour, the



**The family of a Foxconn suicide victim mourn and protest**

external force of competition drives it on regardless. Enter into this picture, then, the working class itself. Unless these human beings are to meekly put up with being crippled and tortured for ever, with being beaten down into a position worse than that of slaves, worse than that of the most maltreated beast of burden, then working-class resistance is inevitable. The working class itself, then, begins to demand a limit to its own exploitation - a shortening of the working day, an increase in wages, an improvement in working conditions, and so on. Although this will, in the short term, eat into the profits of capital, and hence be bitterly resisted, in the long term, this is in the interests not just of the workers, but of the sustainability of capitalist development itself.

In fact, more than that, it drives capitalist development forward. As working-class gains are generalised, the capitalist again opens up an offensive, this time not in the direction of open, naked, unashamed, brutal exploitation, but with the more subtle and veiled technique of 'relative surplus value' extraction. This means that, with wages rising and profits slipping, it becomes economic for the capitalists to invest more in machinery and technology. This enables them to extract more profits not from sweating, but from improved productivity - producing more stuff in less time with fewer workers. Technological development, then, hailed by the capitalists as the fruit of their own genius, is driven by the struggles of the working class. And what

should be an advance and a benefit for humanity and a cause for celebration becomes little more than a tawdry counter-attack in the class war. And the working class's own heroic and inspiring efforts to carve out a life worth living merely lays the ground for their future, more sophisticated, exploitation.

And that's why capitalists, even those who haven't read their Marx, can come to welcome the demand for higher wages.

### **Disastrous consequences**

What the mainstream press misses or downplays is the potentially disastrous consequences of this development for humanity. The first is that, as well as exhausting the worker, the development of capitalism also threatens to destroy the environment. China is facing a serious environmental crisis, including pollution and the exhaustion of its soil, which are a threat to itself, but also the emission of ever more greenhouse gases, which is a threat to us all. Rising wages also give rise to a consumer market, which in turns drives further capital accumulation, urbanisation, and pointless and wasteful and environmentally damaging consumerism. There is also the prospect of another devastating world war. This is pointed out in a very good and prescient series of articles in issues 14 and 16 of the libertarian Marxist journal *Aufheben* (see <http://libcom.org/aufheben>). As the development of an internal consumer market and urbanisation proceed, a possible outcome is that China will move from its current position as a mere workshop at the service of global capital accumulation, to a centre of accumulation in its own right, and hence a competitor to the United States and Europe. This would of course mean that Chinese capital would develop needs and interests of its own, which in turn could easily lead to inter-imperialist conflicts over oil and other raw materials. Indeed, some argue that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were pre-emptive moves on the part of the US to win strategic control over such things from China from the start.

There is an alternative, of course, to such doomsday scenarios, and it's one that the ruling elites are very well aware of, in China as elsewhere. This is how the *Economist* put it:

“As students of Karl Marx and of history, China's party leaders will know that labour movements can begin with economic grievances and end in political revolt. By concentrating people in one place, Marx argued, factories turn a crowd of strangers into a 'class': conscious of its interests, united with each other and against the boss.”

And a working class organised politically could take the initiative out of capital's hands and develop instead in a socialist direction. The *Economist* doesn't mention such a possibility and probably wouldn't take the prospect that seriously anyway. Perhaps it will be proved right to do so. But it's where socialists place their hopes nonetheless. As a 20-year-old strike leader at a Honda plant in Foshan, Li Xiaojuan, quoted in the *Guardian* (30 June), says, “we must not let the representatives of capital divide us”. Workers in this country could do worse than follow developments in China very closely, and imitate their very fine example. The struggles must, however, turn not only political but socialist if our efforts are to do more than merely lay the ground for a new round of capitalist exploitation - or worse.

**STUART WATKINS**



# A Socialist visits capitalist China

One evening in early July, the Air China plane took off from London on an eleven hour flight to Beijing, through seven time zones. This was to be my first visit to China.

With a knowledge of Russian, one fact about the flight which particularly interested me was that a very large part of the journey would be across the Russian Federation.

## Over Russia

After some snoozing in a window seat, I awoke to see the lights of St. Petersburg, 38,000 feet below, with the Gulf of Finland, to the left and the immensity of Lake Ladoga, stretching north-eastwards, to the right. When covered with ice during World War 2, that lake had played a very important role in providing the inhabitants of Leningrad with a lifeline, during the siege of the city by the German Wehrmacht.

I snoozed a little more, occasionally waking up to see the enormity of the Russian taiga (forest), stretching for hundreds of miles, past the Urals and into Siberia. When I awoke again, it was daylight and a vast lake emerged below - Lake Baikal - the world's largest freshwater lake by volume, looking quite different, from when I had visited it at ground level in 1989. A flight to Beijing really does give an idea about the size of Russia.

After crossing Mongolia with its mountains and the wilderness of the Gobi Desert, the plane gradually descended into Beijing.

## Arrival in China

Thirty-nine degrees Centigrade, with very high humidity. Almost like a wall of heat! Those were the conditions on

my arrival in Beijing. The taxi ride along the highway to my hotel was rather reminiscent of urban scenery in New York or Chicago, except that the advertising hoardings were overwhelmingly, but not exclusively, written in Mandarin Chinese characters. Just this one hour journey conveyed an immediate impression of China's very significant capitalist economic development and modernisation, at least in the eastern part of the country.

Like in Russia and other developing countries, many young Chinese are keen to meet foreigners and to practise their English. All the same, as I had realised before my arrival, the proportion of the population with a significant knowledge of English was not large. Hardly surprising really, because of China's only relatively recent increased communications with the West. Nevertheless, around the Forbidden City and Tiananmen Square, there was no shortage of young guides willing to accompany foreigners around, describing the sights. This was very worthwhile and an opportunity to find out more about the way of life.

## Impressions of Beijing

Attractive, neatly kept parks such as Zhongshan, with ornate, colourfully painted pagodas, gates and red Chinese lanterns. Tiananmen Square, despite its sinister connection with the events of 1989, is very impressive, particularly when the buildings are floodlit at night.

Pollution. Traffic jams in much of the city, where there are many more cars than 25 years ago. However, a large number of people still commute by pedal cycle, together with many of the young on motor scooters and bikes. Metal fencing, segregating the slower lanes for local

traffic, provides some limited protection for cyclists from larger, faster vehicles. In spite of this, travelling by road in Chinese cities is stressful, like in other Asian cities, such as Bangkok and Kolkata.

Some beggars on the streets, hustlers peddling their wares. Many of the "hutongs", or alleyways, with their old houses are being demolished in favour of modern buildings. Visit the shopping mall and street of Wangfujing, near the centre of Beijing, and you could be in almost any western shopping area, apart from the predominance of advertising in Chinese language characters. However, many signs, such as those indicating street names are transliterated into Pinyin, a form of Chinese using the Latin alphabet. In numerous places, promotion of the products of Sony, Panasonic and Samsung, etc., is visible.

## Capitalism in China

Without doubt, capitalism dominates China, just as it does the rest of the world. Of course, the form of capitalism is somewhat different from the West. For many years, from 1949 onwards, state capitalism was very much in evidence. Now, the Chinese so-called "Communist" Party is still the only permitted political party. The inverted commas are certainly needed, since the ruling party is no more communist or socialist than Marks and Spencer in the UK.

A huge wave of privatisation has taken place, with commercialism nearly everywhere: on the streets, in the media, etc. Pretty much the same as you would see in the West.

Journeys on the Beijing metro turned out to be of interest. Well air-conditioned! Yes, the underground in London could learn something from this. As I stood in

the carriage, I noticed that many of the passengers were looking at the walls of the passing tunnel, much more closely than would be the case in London. I soon realised why. As the train rushed between stations, electronically projected still and movie images, primarily in the form of advertising, were visible, like on a TV screen - more of capitalism's propaganda. As in other world cities, many commuters look fixatedly at the screens of their mobile phones and other electronic devices.

### The Great Wall

A visit to the Great Wall gives an impression of how far the Chinese tourist industry has developed in recent years. The Wall is one of the world's most memorable sights, as it winds its way across rugged mountain ranges. Reading the guidebooks had prepared me for the large number of tourists that would be there, and also for the fact that a northerly direction was the best way to go, to get away from the crowds.

All the same, as I did so, it was strange to look back and to see throngs of humanity slowly moving along the tops of the Wall, snaking in the distance, over the rising and falling slopes of the mountains.

Capitalism packages most of the world's sights, with coach and car parks, entry fees, souvenir shops, cafes, restaurants, etc. Despite this, with a little planning, it is still possible for a person to ignore most of the commercialised tat and to marvel at what one has come to see.

### Yunnan

From Beijing, I travelled to Kunming in Yunnan province. This city lies in the south-western part of the country, about 2,000 meters above sea-level. Here I met up with an English language teacher from Canada and her husband, who were spending nearly a year in China, before returning to North America.

I had talks with local Chinese students in the Yunnan University tea-room and found that they were very interested to hear about ideas from the West, since far fewer Westerners are to be found in Kunming than in Beijing.

During my stay in Yunnan, I made journeys into rural areas. Much of the province is very scenic because of its mountainous nature. In the valleys and flatter areas, much of the land is used for agriculture. Little mechanisation is used in farming, with most of the labour in the fields and orchards being done by hand. The work is very arduous, involves long hours and the income is low. That is why many younger people are migrating into the towns and cities. In

some parts of the countryside factories are being constructed where the terrain is favourable.

### Similarities Between China and Russia

Because of my interest in Russia, I could not help but notice certain similarities between the two countries. The governments of both have used Leninist slogans in their propaganda. The two have presented themselves, in the past as "ideological adversaries" of the Western powers. Now, they still have authoritarian regimes, with a strong emphasis on nationalism, and are frequently portrayed as political rivals to the West.

State capitalism is no longer so dominant in China and Russia, and, like other parts of world, both have significantly embraced privatisation. Gideon Rachman in the *Financial Times* (8 January, 2008) says:

"The new Russo-Chinese model is authoritarian rather than democratic. It attempts to marry capitalism with a large state role in the economy. It holds out the promise of western consumerism for a rising middle class, while rejecting western political liberalism. Rather than relying on democracy or communist



Traffic in Beijing

ideology to create loyalty to the political system, the Russian and Chinese elites increasingly stress a combination of economic growth and nationalism."

At the United Nations, China and Russia often oppose the Western policies of exerting pressure on repressive governments - in Sudan, Iraq, Iran, or Serbia. It should be added though, that in the past, a Sino-Soviet split revealed rivalries between Mao's China and the Soviet Union. In addition, there is still a strong element of mutual suspicion and strategic rivalry, with the Russians wary of the potential expansion of China into sparsely-populated, mineral-rich Siberia.

Officials of the two countries are often ambiguous in their statements about

democracy. They declare that liberal democracy remains a long-term goal - but that their countries "must be given time". They maintain that they will be "democratic" - but they will not allow that idea to be defined for them by outsiders and foreigners.

Gideon Rachman says: "President Hu Jintao of China has called democracy 'the common pursuit of mankind'. However, the official Chinese line tends to be that small steps are being taken towards a more democratic system - through village-level elections or contested elections within the Communist party - but that it is vital to avoid the 'chaos' that could be unleashed by a naive rush towards democracy".

### China and Global Capitalism

Very clearly, capitalism is a global system. More recent developments in China have shown how much that country is a part of the system. Increased privatisation is an example of this.

The Zhongshan or Mao suit, as it is known in the West, which was widely worn in the sixties and seventies has overwhelmingly been replaced by Western style clothing. Most younger people dress very much like their counterparts in the West.

One amusing instance of how things have changed was when I visited a lake land area on the edge of Kunming. Sitting on some benches was a group of elderly men. One appeared to be in his eighties and was holding an ancient Chinese stringed musical instrument. An example of the older part of Chinese culture, to be sure and yet, as I looked at him, I noticed that he was wearing on his head an American style baseball cap, with the word "Sexy" in English, emblazoned across the top.

### Capitalism in China

The form which capitalism takes can vary in different parts of the world. In China, the state still has a more important role to play than in the West. Although the ruling party is the only permitted political organisation, how much longer this continues to be the case, remains to be seen.

According to *Forbes Magazine* (8 October, 2007), in 2007 China, with 108, ranked second behind the US, in the number of dollar billionaires. Yang Huiyan, (\$16.02 billion) came top of the Chinese list, while Xu Rongmao (\$7.03 billion) came second. During the reform period, inequality has clearly risen in terms of wealth ownership and, additionally in such areas as household income, consumption of consumer goods,

and social outcomes in education and health. On the other hand, economic growth during the past 25 years has brought about a reduction in absolute material poverty. This, of course happened under capitalism earlier in history, in Europe, for example.

During recent times, many workers have lost their previous job security and subsidised housing. According to Amnesty International (*Western Australian*, 3 March 2007), millions of Chinese workers who have migrated from the countryside to the urban areas are "overworked, underpaid, denied access to health care, education for their children, and even the right to live permanently in the cities which use their labour, and are treated as an underclass".

The Amnesty report continues: "They are forced to work long stretches of overtime, often denied time off when sick, and labour under hazardous conditions for paltry wages. As well as being exploited by employers, migrant families face discriminatory government regulations in almost every area of daily life."

### Conclusion

China has its own social cultures, such as "guanxi", a system of favours, services and obligations between individuals. Nevertheless, as it develops, it has become increasingly a part of the world capitalist system.

For me, the visit to China was both memorable and instructive. Memorable, because of the sights, different culture and helpful, friendly people, whom I met. Instructive in the political sense.

In the West, much of the population has been deceived by mainstream propaganda into mistakenly believing that capitalism can only be accompanied by "political democracy". Nothing could be further from the truth. During the Industrial Revolution, when capitalism developed in Britain and parts of western Europe, for a long time the right to vote was completely absent for the large majority of people, and trade unions were threatened by governments and employers. Privatised capitalism has co-existed and does co-exist quite comfortably, with authoritarian regimes in South America and Africa, as well as with past dictatorships in Europe, such as those of General Franco, Hitler and Mussolini. The state controlled version of capitalism emerged in the Soviet Russia and later in China. Now, Russia and China persist with authoritarian regimes, with which a more privatised version of capitalism has made a convenient accommodation.

Certainly, China never was even remotely "socialist" or "communist" in 1949 or afterwards.

**VINCENT OTTER**



## A look at the 'other China'

**S**tart with Hong Kong. A bouquet of modern capitalism. Concrete, glass, steel. Banks, hotels, skyscrapers. Streets bedecked with anti-pollution face masks. And residents who advise visitors come to marvel not to drink the water. Then escape to a leaf-shaped island of some 24 million population which became known to untroubled, disinterested people outside only because it was the country of origin of much of the cheap electrical equipment they bought from their local branch of Currys or Comet. Once reliant on the export of cheap textiles or consumer goods the island rose to be among the world's leading manufacturers of computer software and hardware. Not to overlook bicycle parts, some of which are used at a London East End branch of the not-for-profit Social Enterprise to help train locals who are homeless, isolated or unemployed (or perhaps all three) to make a kind of living as bicycle mechanics.

Within the island's demographic stew there are some half a million descendants of about a dozen aboriginal tribes, settled with others who came over from mainland China. Together they can claim to be now one of the most peaceful societies in Asia.

So - welcome to the island of Taiwan, to *Ilha Formosa* (*beautiful island*), to the Republic of China - a misleadingly splendid name for a state which is no longer a member of the United Nations and is recognised by only the likes of Belize, Malawi, the Vatican... Welcome to the beautiful scenery, the mountains, the golden beaches. To the flyovers whisking you above the factories and past the driven schools. To the

nation state which exists by, through and in with, one tough work-ethic.

### Martial Law

Of the competing mercantile powers it was the Portugese who, about 1590, "discovered" Taiwan - and gave it the name *Ilha Formosa*. A long period of war, rebellion and murderous poverty while Taiwan was a "province" of China ended in 1895 when the Japanese occupied the island. This was supposedly "in perpetuity" but it came to an end in 1945, after a half century of martial law. Japanese rule was harsh - an estimated ten thousand people were killed - but not corrupt and it developed an educational system as well as roads, railways and industry. In 1943, as the Allied leaders were carving up the Far East in expectation of Japan's defeat in World War Two, a "peace" conference in Cairo decided that, as a spoil of war, Taiwan would be "returned" to China under Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Kuomintang



(KMT). United States Vice President Truman's response described the island as "America's unsinkable battleship".

Towards the end of the war there was a subtle change in the vocabulary of the Allied powers' intentions; Taiwan was to be "temporarily occupied" on their behalf by the KMT. But this was soon undermined when civil war broke



out on mainland China between the KMT and Mao Tse Tung's "communist" forces. Preoccupied by those more pressing events, Chiang left the running of Taiwan to his deputy Chen Yi, whose regime was barbaric enough to provoke many "liberated" Taiwanese to regret the end of Japanese rule. In 1947 a minor incident connected to the state monopoly of the tobacco trade inflamed a series of widespread protests which were crushed with mass arrests, torture and execution of up to 30,000 people. (The day when it started - 28 February - is now a national holiday in Taiwan and New Park in the capital city Taipei was re-named 2-28 Peace park). That horror was a foretaste of things to come.

### White Terror

By 1949, as the KMT on the mainland were facing defeat Chiang Kai-shek took refuge in Taiwan, where he continued to insist that one day he would prevail. Meanwhile martial law returned under The White Terror, with mass arrests of those alleged to be "attempting to overthrow the government". Over 90,000 were taken in this way and at least half of them were executed. The scene of much of this was Green Island Lodge - a prison on a volcanic island separated from Taiwan by a few miles of nausea-inducing Pacific Ocean. Here there is lush scenery, one of the world's three seawater hot springs, golden beaches, pristine coral reefs and dazzling tropical fish. This is where many Taiwanese come to enjoy a short break - if they can ignore that close by are a museum and a human rights memorial in place of the notorious prison where so many victims of The White Terror suffered and perished.

Apart from his willingness to commit atrocities, the defeated Chiang Kai-shek became something of an embarrassment to the

Americans. In 1971 President Nixon and his Secretary of State Henry Kissinger offered an "opening" - a carefully chosen word of flexible interpretation - to China and, as if that was not enough, Taiwan lost its membership of the United Nations to China. During the following year the US and China met and agreed on a "communiqué" which, while not actually saying that Mao had won the civil war, "acknowledged" (more

of those careful words) that the new China was a unified country of which Taiwan was a part. This betrayal of what was supposed to have been an unshakeable commitment was settled after the negotiators had been pleased by an especially sumptuous meal, encouraging Nixon's odious chief arm-twister, replete, to assure his hosts "After a dinner of moatal and Peking Duck I'll sign anything". Well, he *was* Henry Kissinger wasn't he...

### Elections

Chiang Kai-shek died in 1978 and his son Chiang Ching-kuo took over with an easier, less repressive hand. While martial law was still in operation it was possible in 1986 for the first official opposition - the Democratic Progressive Party - to be formed and to win a significant number of seats in the next election. In process with these changes in 1987 martial law was brought to an end; free elections are now an established part of political life on the island and the election of 2000 brought an end to KMT rule. It should be said that it is not unknown for elected members to try to sort out their differences through a punch-up in the Chamber and for political business to be obstructed through allegations of corruption. In 1991 the KMT claim to link Taiwan and the Chinese mainland was formally abandoned. Symbolic of the clearing away of a lot of the obstructive anachronisms imposed on the Taiwan of the 1940s, many of the statues of Chiang Kai-shek were vengefully torn down. It was symbolic too of Taiwan feeling its way into place as an independent competitor in global capitalism.

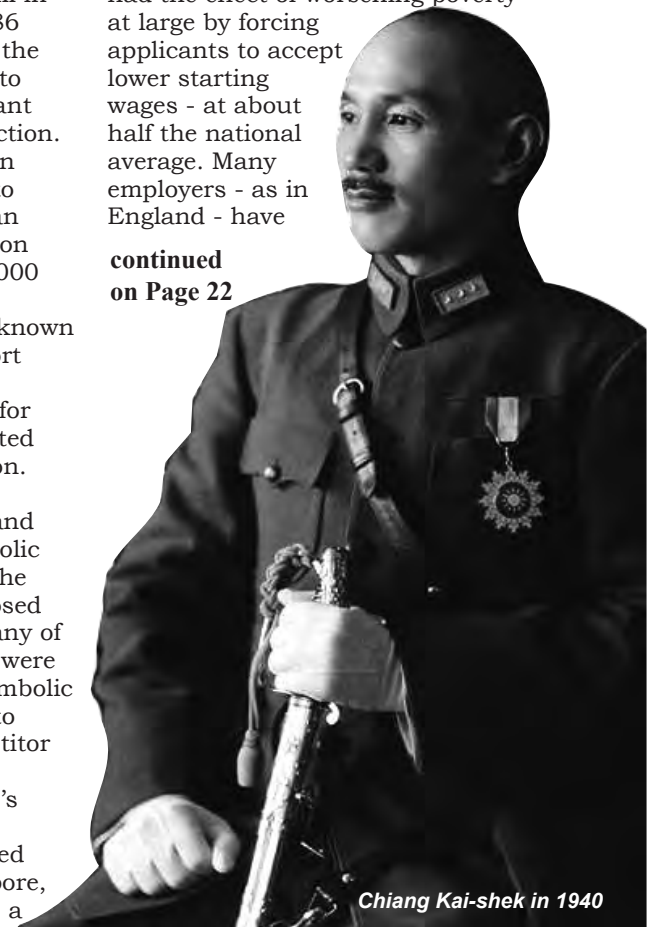
Part of this process is Taiwan's promotion of itself as a tourist attraction to rival the best offered by the likes of Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia. "Where else" bellows a

full page ad in a Sunday newspaper colour supplement "would you find time-honoured traditions that thrive in perfect harmony with the chic and the avant-garde". Apart from its "breathtaking scenery" the island's vibrant ambition is testified to by "the city's skyscrapers" - among them Taipei 101, the world's second highest building, with the fastest elevator to whisk you from ground level to the top viewing spot in a matter of seconds so smoothly that you are unaware of moving. All of which demands that the Taiwanese people live by a patriotism manufactured as surely as those computer parts. And it all soaks down to the children, who devotedly learn the officially sanctioned Mandarin language - often along with English and Japanese - during an average 12-hour day in the classroom with extra tuition in Maths and Science at private cram schools on a Saturday.

### Unemployment

But hard work, to whatever degree, has not been able to insulate Taiwan from capitalism's chaos. The present world recession has cruelly broken the dream of ever-flowing Taiwanese prosperity. Unemployment is an encroaching problem no longer confined to the poorer, under-educated families but now also affecting graduates. A government subsidy intended to persuade companies to take on graduates has had the effect of worsening poverty at large by forcing applicants to accept lower starting wages - at about half the national average. Many employers - as in England - have

continued  
on Page 22





# For or Against Parliament?

**PEOPLE WHO come into contact with the Socialist Party and learn that we advocate revolution are often surprised that the revolution we urge is one that can be brought about by parliamentary means. They are used to associating revolution with the violent overthrow of governments, not with peaceful democratic elections. This is understandable given that, historically, revolutions of whatever kind have tended to be accompanied by bloodshed and violence and most organisations or political parties calling for revolution still envisage, whether explicitly or otherwise, violent means.**

But the latest Socialist Party pamphlet, *What's Wrong With Using Parliament? The Cases For and Against the Revolutionary Use of Parliament*, makes it clear that, for the establishment of the wageless, moneyless free access society based on the common ownership and democratic control of the means of life that defines socialism, it is essential for the revolution to be brought about by a majority using democratic means. And since such means are available in most countries in the form of elections by universal suffrage, there is no reason why these should not be used in order for that majority to take control of governments and establish a worldwide socialist society.

While this is the basic premise of the pamphlet, most of it is actually taken up explaining why the common objections to the use of parliament to carry out revolutionary action do not hold water. These are objections often put by those such as anarchists who may broadly agree with the kind of society we want to establish but believe that any attempt to do so by parliamentary means is doomed to failure. There are two main arguments along these lines.

The first argument is that socialists elected to a capitalist parliament will not be able to withstand the 'system' and either will find that it forces them into complying with the status quo or will be seduced by being part of the 'power structure' and will voluntarily fall in with it ignoring their roots and the mandate on which they were elected.

The pamphlet answers this argument firstly by showing that the capitalist form of democracy, though seriously flawed, has in fact no formal means of preventing

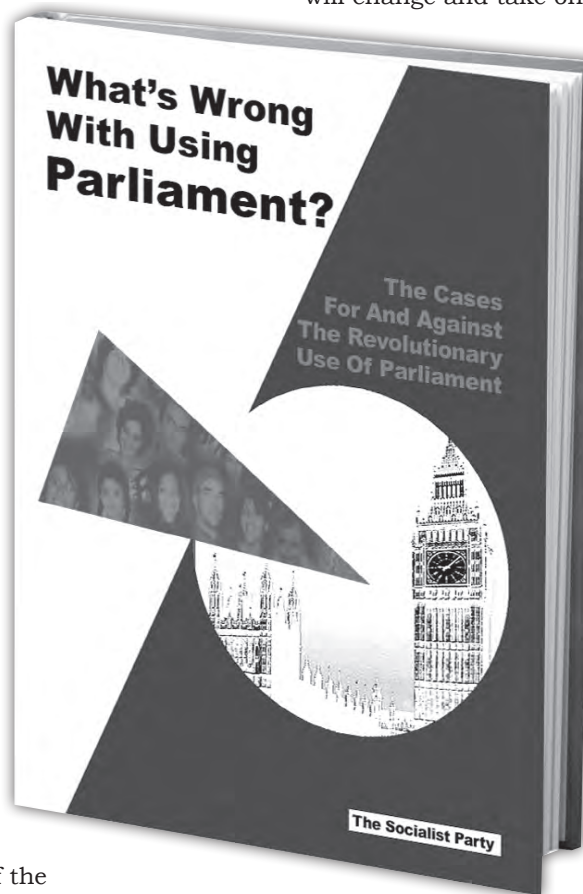
sufficiently determined individuals representing a politically conscious majority from using the political system it has developed in order to overthrow it. It deals with the 'power corrupts' idea by arguing that the delegates in question would be operating in a different social framework from the one that currently exists, one that would be shot through with the notion of participation and democratic accountability at all levels. It expresses the idea in the following way:

"With the spread of socialist ideas all organisations will change and take on a participatory democratic and socialist character, so that the majority's organisation for socialism will not be just political and economic, but will also embrace schools and universities, television, film-making, plays and the like as well as inter-personal relationships. We're talking about a radical social revolution involving all aspects of social life."

A far more advanced form of democracy therefore than offered to us by capitalism today, where once every few years we are asked to put an X on a ballot paper to choose the best capitalist-management team from amongst competing groups of politicians, who then go away and take all the decisions that influence our lives without consulting us. Yet weak democracy is better than none and, as the pamphlet makes clear, it still provides a means for the majority to take political power once a socialist majority has emerged.

The second argument against the use of parliament is that the powers-that-be would never tolerate a democratic takeover by a socialist majority because of the loss of authority and privilege this would mean for them. They would therefore, if necessary, prevent it by force. There are many suppositions underlying such an argument but the main one is that there is somehow a power behind or beyond elected governments that in reality controls them (some kind of shadowy group or committee or boardroom that is really in control) and that, therefore, if its position is seriously threatened it has the means at its disposal to clamp down on those threatening it and will not hesitate to use violence to do so, perhaps in the form of a coup or a military takeover.

The pamphlet confronts this position by challenging the 'conspiracy theorists' to provide evidence that there is a conspiracy behind government and the way the system is organised and argues that, while capitalism



with its inbuilt rivalries and vested interests may provide a fertile breeding ground for many individual conspiracies, no evidence exists or has ever been presented that there is an overall conspiracy running capitalism and its governments. That being the case, any attempt to use violence to prevent socialism being brought about by a majority in parliament with undisputed democratic legitimacy would have to be made not by people in the 'background' but by non-socialist politicians, yet how would they go about using violence against a majority that included workers from all walks of life and occupations, including the police and armed forces? Is it conceivable that they would obey orders from politicians to suppress the majority of their fellow-socialists and, even if there were enough elements from those quarters who would be prepared to take such action, would they not be overwhelmed by the majority who would oppose them in self-defence?

The essence of the socialist position on the use of parliament is summed up in the following way towards the end of the pamphlet:

"Once there is an organised, determined majority, the success of the socialist revolution is assured, one way or the other. It is then a question of the best tactic to pursue to try to ensure that this takes place as rapidly and as smoothly as possible. In our view, the best way to proceed is to start by obtaining a democratic mandate via the ballot box for the changeover to socialism. The tactical advantage is that, when obtained, it deprives the supporters of capitalism of any legitimacy for the continuation of their rule."

The other, related point made is that the organisation of the socialist majority that develops within capitalist society will reflect - will have to reflect - the essentially democratic nature of the future society it will establish. It will in fact have to prefigure that society and so be entirely democratic, and without a leadership which can impose decisions on the rest. All important decisions, in fact, will come from the majority via referendums or meetings of mandated, wholly accountable and recallable delegates. In this light, it is not surprising, as the pamphlet points out, that those groups who support left-wing, Leninist-style 'revolution', with its ideas of leadership and decision-taking by a vanguard, dismiss socialism by the ballot box as 'utopian'. Not that the 'socialism' those groups say they stand for amounts to anything more than some form of tightly organised state control of capitalism. Not either that the 'socialism' they endorse is any closer to a society of free access and democratic control than the aims of supporters of established parties such as the Labour Party who wish to press their parties into somehow overcoming the economic realities of the profit system and bringing in reforms that will allow it to be governed more humanely.

So this pamphlet puts the case for a revolutionary use of the ballot box to establish socialism and in so doing provides powerful arguments against those who advocate a more benign form of capitalism via parliamentary reforms, against those who want to bring in forms of rigid state control over the capitalist system, if necessary by minority action, and, more specifically, against those who seem to share the socialist aims of a stateless, free access society but still think that parliament cannot be the route to achieve it because the ruling class will never give up power without the use of armed force.

**HOWARD MOSS**

**For a copy of *What's Wrong With Using Parliament? The Cases For and Against the Revolutionary Use of Parliament*, send a cheque / money order for £1.50 payable to "The Socialist Party of Great Britain" to 52 Clapham High St, London SW4 7UN.**



## Labour and labour-power

IN PART two of his article "Is Marx's analysis of capitalism still valid today?" (*Freedom* 31 July) Jonny Ball tackles Marx's theory of surplus value which he correctly says is central to this analysis. This is how he presents it:

"Its basic premise is that in order to make a profit, the capitalist must pay the worker a sum lower than the amount the worker actually produces. The owners of the means of production, of Capital, will always try to keep costs, such as wages, to a minimum in order to extract the maximum amount of surplus value from their workforce, while those who do not own capital are obliged to sell their labour in order to live at a price that is determined not so much by the value they produce, but by the whims of an employer, who will receive the bulk of their workers' produce in the form of profit."

No doubt Ball was trying to be sympathetic to Marx but, unfortunately, this is not a satisfactory depiction of Marx's theory. Marx did see the source of surplus value as the unpaid labour of workers, but he never held the view that what workers were paid was determined "by the whims of an employer".

Even when, in the 1840s, Marx spoke in terms of workers selling their "labour", he argued the value of the commodity they sold was determined, as in the case of all other commodities, by the amount of labour-time required to produce and reproduce it and that its price fluctuated with supply and demand.

Later, in exile in Britain in the 1850s, when he had more time to study the workings of capitalism, Marx came to draw a distinction between "labour" and "labour-power". Labour-power was the ability to work, the skill to produce something, while "labour" was the result of the exercise of these skills, the expenditure of labour-power. What workers sold to their employers was their "labour-power" not labour. Labour in fact couldn't be bought and sold, only the commodities in which it was embodied could be.

So crucial was this distinction to Marx's considered analysis of capitalism that when in 1891 Engels republished Marx's 1849 article *Wage Labour and Capital* (still a basic introductory text to Marxian economics) he corrected the text on this point, explaining in his Introduction, "According to the original, the worker sells his *labour* to the capitalist for wages; according to the present text he sells his *labour power*" (Engels's emphasis).

This distinction solved the problem of exactly how profit arose from the exploitation of workers. Workers were paid (generally and more or less) the full value of what they sold - their labour-power - yet were still exploited because the exercise of their labour-power produced a greater value than that of their labour-power. This "surplus value" was the source of their employer's profit and of all capitalist property incomes.

Up until then pro-working-class thinkers and activists had tended to see profits as arising either from employers paying workers less than the value of what they sold (i.e. by cheating or swindling them) or from them selling what workers produced above its value (i.e. through profiteering or ripping off their customers).

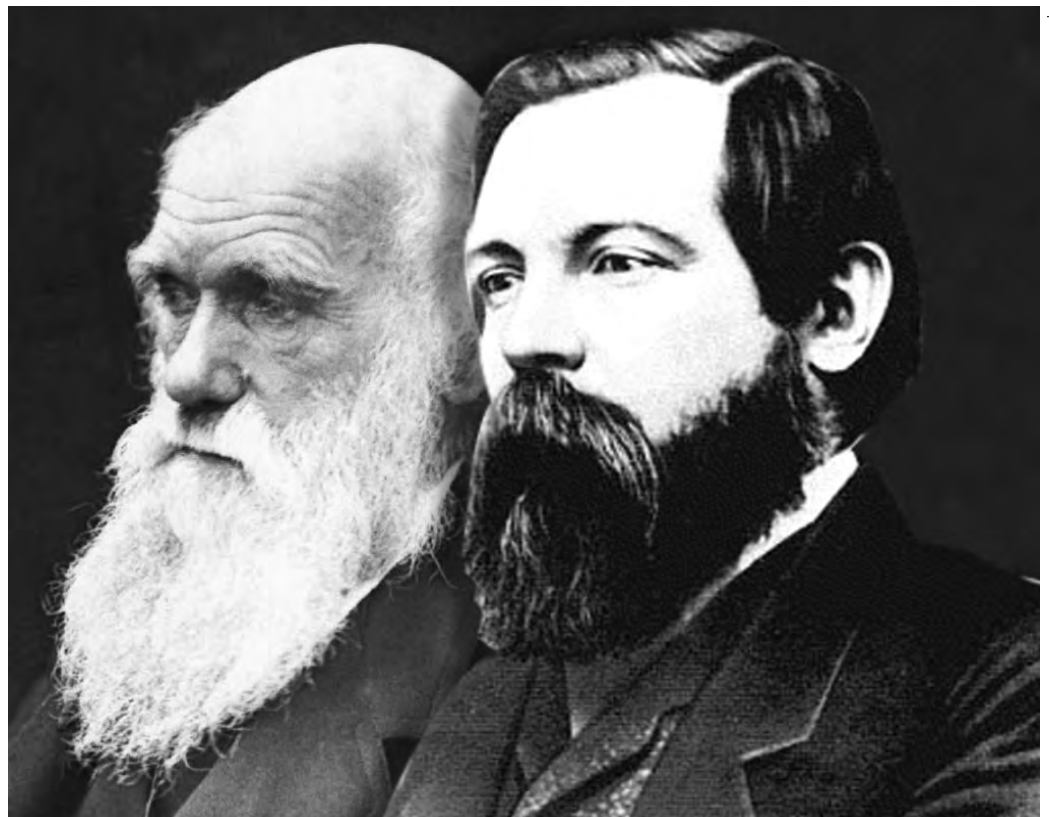
Both these do go on under capitalism but Marx held that, as explanations of working class exploitation, they were unsatisfactory as they suggest that this has its origin in exchange not production and that it could be ended by "fair wages" or "fair trade" rather than by making the means of production the common property of all.

Unlike Marx, Engels continued his interest in Darwin and things Darwinian beyond the initial general public furore created by the publication of *Origin*. Apart from references to Darwin in his correspondence with Marx and others, the first major piece of work Engels produced was the notes for the unfinished *The Rôle of Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man*, written between May and June 1876, over five years after the publication of the *Descent*.

This speculative, but interesting, work which includes a strong element of Lamarckism (but even Darwin had to resort to a version of Lamarck), can be seen as a Marxian response to the "Man's place in nature" debate in at least two important ways. First of all, it attempts to show in what way humans are different from other animals. Unlike Darwin, who was eager to point to the similarities across species, to indicate the origins of typical human behaviour in a simpler form in other species, and that humans were only quantitatively different from animals, Engels was adamant in showing both the difference and similarities between humans and other animals. Whilst speculating in how human labour activity had evolved from earlier forms along with the evolution of physical organisation, and therefore within the Darwinian explanatory framework, he was also wanted to show how human labour differed from that of lower animals. Following the same line of argument he and Marx had arrived at thirty years previously in *The German Ideology*, he wrote:

"Animals...change the environment by their activities in the same way, even if not to the same extent, as man does, and these changes, as we have seen, in turn react upon and change those who made them...But animals exert a lasting effect on their environment unintentionally and, as far as the animals themselves are concerned, accidentally. The further removed men are from animals, however, the more their effect on nature assumes the character of premeditated, planned action directed towards preconceived ends" (Marx and Engels *Collected Works*, volume 25, p.459).

"In short, the animal merely uses its environment, and brings about changes in it simply by its presence; man by his changes makes it serve his ends, masters it. This is the final, essential distinction between man



# Engels on Human Evolution

*Engels followed the impact of Darwin's ideas more closely than Marx. He may even have read Darwin "The Descent of Man".*

and other animals, and once again it is labour that brings about this distinction" (ibid., p.460).

In addition to this evolutionary explanation of the difference between human and animal labour, Engels's argument can also be seen as a materialist response to Wallace's "unseen spirit" explanation of the difference between humans and animal. Furthermore, Engels also opposed the mental materialism of Darwin, who based the difference between humans and other animals in the more developed and complex mentality of humans; a form of idealism that had dominated Western philosophy since the rise of Christianity:

"All merit for the swift advance of civilisation was ascribed to the mind, to the brain. Man became accustomed to explain their actions as arising out of thought instead of their needs (which in any case are reflected and perceived in the mind); and so in the course of time there emerged that idealistic world outlook which, especially since the fall of the world of antiquity, has dominated men's minds. It still rules them to

such a degree that even the most materialistic natural scientists of the Darwinian school are still unable to form any clear idea of the origin of man, because under this ideological influence they do not recognize the part that has been played therein by labour."

## Did Engels Read The Descent?

Engels seems to have kept up with the Darwinian literature on human evolution, making reference to T.H. Huxley, Ernst Haeckel, John Lubbock Charles Lyell and Alfred Russel Wallace, although it is not always clear which of their works he is referring to. So it is somewhat surprising that there is no explicit reference to *The Descent* or to what Darwin wrote on the matter. But seeing that he had read all these other authors, who had made their contribution before 1871, and that Darwin was the most important figure in this group, it would seem unusual that Engels would not read *The Descent*. Also, he had five years to read him before he started work on *The Rôle of Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man* in May 1876.

There is, however, some textual

evidence that Engels did read *The Descent*. In the second paragraph of his pamphlet, Engels writes:

"Darwin has given us an approximate description of these ancestors of ours. They were completely covered with hair, they had beards and pointed ears, and they lived in bands in trees."

This description attributed to Darwin comes in part from *The Descent*. In Chapter 6, "On the Affinities and Genealogy of Man," Darwin writes:

"The early progenitors of man must have been once covered with hair, both sexes having beards; their ears were probably pointed, and capable of movement; and their bodies were provided with a tail, having proper muscles"

(Darwin *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 1871; Penguin edition 2004, p.188).

The reference to "they lived in bands in trees" too seems to have come from *The Descent*, as Darwin writes:

"We thus learn that man is descended from a hairy, tailed quadruped, probably arboreal in habits, and an inhabitant of the Old World." (p. 678)

Therefore, unless Engels got these from another author, these two separate references provide adequate justification for thinking that Engels did read *The Descent*.

## From Darwin to Marx: From Biology to History

Human beings possess a dual character, as both biological and historical beings, in a radically different way from any other animal.

For non-human animals, the biological, structural determination of their activity is dominant. As they get more biologically complex, they acquire the capacity for their activity to be modified by previous interactions with the world, but they live in the "now"; their activity is concerned with adjusting to the immediate circumstances they are interacting with. They have a blind past, as a species and as individual organism, but not a history.

Only humans have history. Through their linguistic ability and social co-operation, human beings have over centuries achieved (it is not nature-given) a greater degree of purpose and agency than any other species. As a result, they not only have a history, but can make history. But making history requires that the impersonal, law-like relations of the capital relationship, of production for profit, be destroyed and replaced by a free association of producers who create a world in their own interests and their own purpose. Only then will humanity shift from a determined pre-history to a determining history.

**ED BLEWITT**  
(concluded)

## Book Reviews

### Profits first again

***Agrofuels : Big Profits, Ruined Lives and Ecological Destruction.***  
**François Houtart. Pluto Press**



Whilst fundamentally an investigation into the pros and cons of agrofuels this book is, in large part, a critique of 'the dominant economic discourse' which repeatedly overlooks both ecological and social externalities - the negative effects of industrial and agricultural development etc. Throughout the chapters Houtart reveals the links which lay bare the logic of capitalism with example after example of how the profit motive gets in the way of social and environmental concerns; the incompatibility between taking care of the majority's needs and ensuring the most profitable returns; and which ensure that externalities will continue to be ignored until they impact on profits.

Early on he suggests that the 'socialist' countries of the 20th century in Europe and the USSR would have done well to heed Marx's warning that capitalism destroyed the two sources of its own wealth, nature and labour, implying that, as their model was supposed to be different from the one which dominated world economy, they should have avoided the terrible environmental degradation and social problems of which they, too, were guilty. As those regimes were just a different way of organising capitalism we really shouldn't be surprised that they performed no better.

Agrofuels are discussed in detail with impeccable references for each aspect. What they are, where they are grown, the main players, world views as to their potential for inclusion in the alternative fuel debate, ecological effects and effects on populations plus their place in the newest form of accumulation, the neo-colonialisation of land acquisition. The main argument throughout is that agrofuels are like any other commodities and that capitalism's logic requires that the needs of the North subsume the output of the South.

As far as any statistics are concerned the author reveals a catalogue of horrors of ecological devastation and social destruction



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all in the cause of profit. However, he goes on to expound that agrofuels could have only a minor role to play in a wholly different system anyway and that the information we are being given by the companies producing them is limited, biased, way too optimistic and ignores all externalities. The true story of agrofuels is mostly one of increased emissions of greenhouse gases compared with using fossil fuels, insufficient available land, huge quantities of nitrates creating dead zones around coasts and the forced removal of untold numbers of people.

An interesting discussion regarding externalities is the individualisation of responsibilities as a characteristic of neo-liberal thought and practice. The challenges that people face in getting to work, for instance. The time wasted using public transport or the decision to use personal transport is an individual choice and, therefore, an individual or socialised problem which can't be taken into account in the financial calculations, can't be factored into business profit margin calculations and the process of capital accumulation. Similarly migrations towards towns or foreign lands are attributed to personal decisions (unrelated to loss of land or livelihood in the case of monocrops for agrofuels or other purposes) - and the individualisation of the problem thus becomes a mechanism of externality.

The capitalist way forward would be to continue apace growing more crops for the rich world's fuel, with the knock-on effect of creating more hungry people and a further degraded planet. Insisting that no global solution will be found without challenging the contemporary development model and reiterating that agrofuels are aggravating and exacerbating ecological and social problems, he goes on to state that a new philosophy of the relationship between human beings and nature is required. Use value rather than exchange value; favouring human beings over capital; human needs becoming the motor of the economy; energy becoming a use value aimed at satisfying the real needs of humans and not to serve the accumulation of capital. 'Such a post-capitalist model, which some call the socialism of the 21st century, stresses values and the qualitative aspects of life, and democracy as a means.'

Pointing out accepted socialist values of true democracy - participation in decision-making, production for need, redistribution of wealth (which for us comes about

from common ownership and the abolition of money), with human beings in balance with nature - it's like a handbook for socialists just needing the final chapter explaining that the fulfilment of the ideas to this point will be brought about not by any reforms of the current system and not by convincing capitalists to be kinder, fairer or more human-centric but by the democratic self-emancipation of the working class.

JS

## More tea, vicar?

**For All the Tea in China.** Sarah Rose. Arrow. £8.99.



In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the British Empire, via the East India Company, made vast fortunes from selling opium to China and buying tea from China with part of the proceeds (the tea

was then re-sold in Britain at much higher prices). All attempts to grow good-quality tea outside China had failed, though it was realised that doing so would lead to even greater profits. The ruling Qing dynasty made sure that the secrets of tea were not exported outside China.

Discovering new plants and crops was an important aspect of the British Empire. Botanists sailed with Captain Cook to Australia. Nathaniel Ward had invented a kind of portable glass house, nowadays known as a terrarium, to keep plants alive without water on long voyages.

In 1848 the East India Company employed Robert Fortune - yes, that really was his name - to travel to China and obtain (i.e. steal) tea plants and seeds, together with knowledge of how to cultivate them, and bring them back to Calcutta and the Himalayas. After many vicissitudes - attempts to transport plants were unsuccessful - Fortune was eventually able to transplant seeds in Ward's cases. Then in 1851 he persuaded a number of Chinese experts to work in India and give advice on how to plant and irrigate tea and how the Indian workers should cultivate it. As Rose says, all this was pure industrial espionage, 'the greatest theft of protected trade secrets that the world has ever known'.

The Chinese monopoly on tea

was broken, and it would now be spread to Ceylon, Kenya and so on, to the immense profit of those who ran the British Empire. In addition, it increased the demand for sugar, hence the colonisation of the Caribbean, and led to improvements in sailing boats and the development of the tea clipper. And of course it had an enormous impact on daily life in Britain.

Rose's book is mostly a rather over-dramatised popular history, but also makes some useful points about the consequences of Fortune's plundering of the secrets of tea and its relation to the spread of empire and the development of capitalism.

PB

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## Meetings

### London

Clapham  
Saturday **11 September** 6pm  
'Hunter, Fisherman, Shepherd, Critic:  
Karl Marx's Vision of the Free Individual'.  
Speaker: Stuart Watkins.  
Socialist Party premises,  
52 Clapham High Street, SW4 7UN  
(nearest tube: Clapham North)

### East Anglia

Saturday **18 September** 12pm - 4pm  
12noon: informal chat / branch business  
1pm - 2pm: meal  
2pm - 4pm: continuation / agenda  
Venue: Quebec Tavern, 93-97 Quebec  
Road, Norwich NR1 4HY.  
(The meeting takes place in a side room  
separate to the bar.)  
All welcome.

### London

Chiswick  
Tuesday **21 September** 8pm  
"Saint" Newman and Miracles'  
Speaker: Adam Buick  
Committee Room, Chiswick Town Hall,  
Heathfield Terrace, W4  
(nearest tube: Chiswick Park)

### Manchester

Monday **27 September** 8.30pm  
'Socialism and Fashion'  
Speaker: Keith Scholey  
Unicorn, Church Street, City Centre.

### Lancaster

Monday **27 September** 8.00pm  
'The Zeitgeist Projection'  
Gregson Centre, Moorgate, Lancaster.

### London Day School

Saturday **25 September** 12.00noon  
'CAN YOU BUY HAPPINESS?'  
Speakers: Ed Blewitt, Peter Rigg, Brian  
Johnson  
Ed Blewitt - 'Happy shopping'.  
Peter Rigg - 'Consumerism on the  
couch'.  
Brian Johnson - 'The family and  
consumerism'.  
Each talk will last about 20 to 30 minutes  
followed by discussion.  
Refreshments at appropriate times.  
Evening social with music from Peter  
Rigg.

Socialist Party premises, 52 Clapham  
High St, SW4 7UN (nearest tube:  
Clapham North)

### Continued from Page 16

pressed their workers to take temporary unpaid leave, or have stopped taking on new staff altogether. And there remains a serious problem of youth unemployment, with the rate for 15-24 year olds about twice that for the workforce as a whole and looming over it all is the real prospect of them being sucked into the ranks of the long-term unemployed.

After a history of savage repression, Taiwan is struggling now for a place among the trend-setters of Twenty-First Century global capitalism. For example they are trying for admission to bodies such as the United Nations and there are missions working for unity with China. As one guide (Robert Kelly and Joshua Brown, *Lonely Planet*) put it: "So is Taiwan at a crossroads, or a precipice?" And it may also be asked - what will this do to a beautiful island which has already suffered so grievously? Will it turn out to be a modern capitalist power as frantic, as restless and as abrasive as Hong Kong?

IVAN

### Harry Pollitt



WHAT A tragedy was the life of Harry Pollitt! Here was a man who, horrified by the conditions of the working class as he had known them in his youth, set out in a genuine attempt to improve those conditions. He conceived a personal dislike of "the bosses," and was determined to "make them pay" for what the workers had had to suffer. Yet Harry Pollitt never gained a thorough understanding of the forces that mould modern society, in Russia as well as in Britain. As a result, his deeply-felt hostility to the ruling class in Britain simply resulted in his becoming, indirectly, an overseas ally of the Russian ruling class. It is not enough merely to oppose capitalism, as one has known it: one must be for its alternative, Socialism. Had Harry Pollitt succeeded in his efforts, he would merely have been instrumental in establishing state capitalism in Britain, in place of the variety we have at present. And that would have left the workers exactly where they are now.

(From "The Passing Show" by A.W.E., *Socialist Standard*, September 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.



# Home Sweet (?) Home

DAVID CAMERON and his Coalition Gang are working tirelessly to introduce the novelty of a more balanced economy, fortified against any repeat of the so-called Credit Crunch, the collapse of the banks, the calamitous recession. Their proposed method is anything but novel - cutting spending so as to reduce what are known as services, lowering our living standards, enforcing a larger element of austerity into our daily lives. That is also true of the terminology - punitively flavoured - which they call into use to excuse their policies. How often in the past have we heard of the need to "tighten our belts"? Of unavoidably therapeutic "tough decisions" which have to be taken? The assurance that "we are all in this together"? The concept of mendacious, self-promoting ministers proposing to take their belt in a few notches is risible enough to lighten an hour or so at the Job Centre. From experience we know that "tough decisions" are not something we participate in; they are imposed on us to teach us to mend our ways. And are we supposed to be "all in it together" with a government crowded with millionaire wealthy products of the public schools? Like Eton?

## Evictions

A provocative, newsworthy addition to the groups whose profligacy has landed the country into its present desperate state - like the inveterate unemployed, the chronically disabled, the pensioners - has recently been unearthed by David Cameron - the long term council tenant. "There is," he recently told a Birmingham audience, "a question mark about whether, in future, we should be asking when you are given a council home, is it for a fixed period? Because maybe in five or ten years you will be doing a different job and be better paid and you won't need that home, you will be able to go into the private sector". This was more than just random speculation: a consultation paper suggests that councils should keep an eye on their tenants so that, if they are observed to be rattling around in some three-bedded mansion when strictly speaking they could manage on just two, or living it up with expensive holidays abroad on an income to compare with some of Cameron's friends in banking they can be made to "downsize" - in other words kicked out. Presumably it will be overlooked that to restrict council housing according to a tenant's income would dissuade unemployed, or low-paid, people from trying for a better situation - which could mean council estates sinking into concentrations of workless poverty with all that means in terms of alienation, crime, sickness. This would serve to justify the prejudices about council estates, about the behaviour of those who live there and the conditions they create for themselves - which Cameron was appealing to.

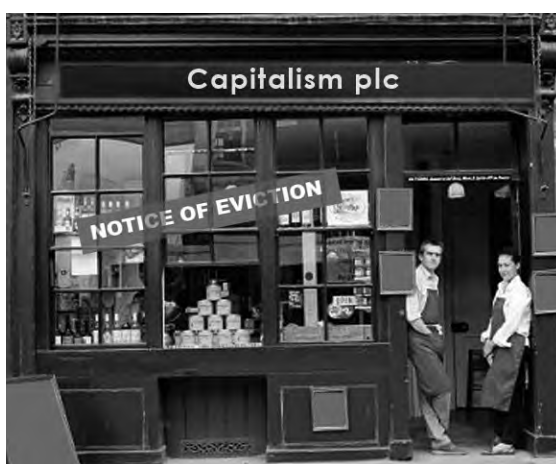
## Estates

Among the expected minor tsunami of response there was one supporting both Cameron and his implied threat to the stereotypically pampered but ungrateful council tenant: "I grew up on a council estate just after the war and it was not a bed of roses". Indeed. One such estate in west London can be as bustling at the middle of a week day as a town centre - because there are so many workless residents there, out on the drab streets rather

than going quietly mad inside their tower block. It was in fact from the balcony of one such block that a TV set was once vengefully aimed at an unpopular fellow resident taking the air below. During bad weather it was not sensible to visit one tower at another estate a few miles away. The lifts were likely to be out of order and the stair well made perilous by the rain or snow driven through the holes hammered by the residents in the surrounding concrete walls. But these were tragic chapters in what might once have been presented as a happy fiction - a romance - of the human benefits of well-built, comfortable, secure social housing.

## Fit For Heroes

The whole massive and expensive question - clearing slums as well as the provision of stable and affordable homes - was among the preoccupations of politicians for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At times it was a crucial factor



in determining the standing of the minister concerned - as in the case of Harold MacMillan and his promise to arrange the building of 200,000 council houses a year. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, in recognition of the profitability benefits of a safely accommodated work force, the principle responsibility for housing was placed with local authorities so that social housing became in effect homes which were built, owned, managed and allocated by the council. Several measures, such as the Addison Act of 1919

which purported to provide the promised Homes Fit For Heroes after the First World War, were designed to ensure the smooth running of the system. But there were some unforeseen problems, among them the reluctance of tenants to be dragged from communities which, however rancid, had the merit of neighbourly cohesion and support, to be dumped in some blandly frigid new development a long way off. And in any case the slums persisted; by the outbreak of the 1939/45 war there were some 470,000 of them, bad enough to be knocked down.

It can be assumed that the council's living-space police implied by Cameron's scheme will be selective about those they spy on. Cameron himself, for example, will be exempt from their attentions in spite of his possessing two large homes, one in a trendily costly part of London and the other in Oxfordshire with wisteria which has to be trimmed - naturally paid for by his expenses. Between them he and his wife have a fortune of some £3 million. Chancellor George Osborne (whose first name is actually Gideon - he changed it because "life was easier" as a result) is heir to a fortune arising from the family wallpaper firm and a huge property portfolio. He spent his early life in a £3 million mansion in Berkshire with a swimming pool, tennis court and gamekeeper. These two, and their associates, have no concept of what it means to live under poverty - of struggling in unsavoury, cramped homes, of the fear of being homeless through ill health, unemployment or eviction. The most effective way of informing them of these realities would be to evict the very system which shelters them.

**IVAN**



# Voice from the Back

## Progressing Backwards

During the last ninety years or so the working class have been promised by reformist politicians that if only they were in power the working class would enjoy a better standard of living. Foolishly they have swallowed that piece of nonsense and have endured a world war, countless local wars, massive periods of economic slumps, poverty and unemployment. One of the major promises of the reformers was that of improved health care but what is the reality? "The gap between the health of rich and poor is greater now than at any time since modern records began, a study shows. Government initiatives have done little or nothing to close the gap between the life expectancy of poor people and those who are wealthy, researchers from universities in Sheffield and Bristol, writing in the British Medical Journal, said. They looked at deaths between 1921 and 2007" (*Times*, 23 July). Ninety years of progress according to the reformers - ninety years of futility is more like it!

## Bargain Basement Exploitation

"One of Britain's fiercest and most ostentatiously successful business men has been enlisted to spearhead the Government's attack on public spending. Sir Philip Green, a man with a reputation for making brutally effective commercial reforms, has been asked by David Cameron to lead a no-holds barred examination of departmental budgets" (*Times*, 13 August). In his personal life Sir Philip is anything but frugal or economic. He spent £5 million on his 50th birthday party, £4 million on his son's bar mitzvah and £30 million on his yacht. We imagine what impressed Cameron about Green was his ruthless exploitation of his workers. Here is an example of how fortunes are made in the retail business. "Indian workers are paid just 25p an hour and forced to work overtime in factories used by some of Britain's best-known high street stores ... Some of the biggest names on the British high street are at the centre of a major sweatshop scandal.

An Observer investigation has found staff at their Indian suppliers working up to 16 hours a day. Marks & Spencer, Gap and Next have launched their own inquiries into abuses and pledged to end the practice of excessive overtime, which is a flagrant breach of the industry's ethical trading (ETI) and Indian labour laws" (*Observer*, 8 August). It is estimated that



Philip Green

Green has a fortune of over £4 billion made in such firms as Bhs, Topshop, Evans, Miss Selfridge and Dorothy Perkins - that exploitation rather than his personal lifestyle is what has impressed the cost-cutting Cameron.

## The Growth Of Inequality

One of the great illusions of the 21st century is that only in the past had we this awful set-up where "robber barons" intent on grabbing more and more wealth out of the poor exploited masses had their existence. How 19th-century we are led to believe, because we do not live in such a society today. But do we? "Many of the great fortunes of American history - those of the Rockefellers, Andrew Carnegie and the Fords - are now mighty foundations that have long outlasted their founders. Recent years have seen the greatest disparity of wealth in America since the Golden Age of the 1920s. A recent study found that the top one per cent of Americans now receive 15 per cent of the country's total income - about double the rate of the 1960s and

1970s" (*Times*, 5 August). Capitalism was based on the exploitation of the working class by the capitalist class in the days of Rockefeller and Carnegie - it still is.

## "Humanitarian" Slaughter

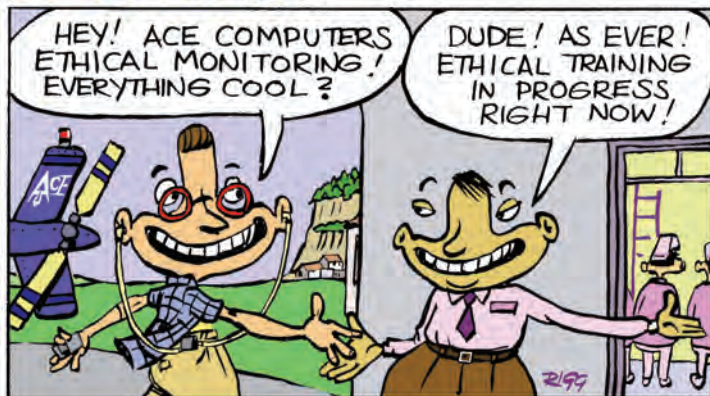
Capitalism is a blood-thirsty rapacious society, so it is no accident that its supporters have had to invent euphemisms to cover up its carnage. In recent years we have heard of "collateral damage". This is used when a school or a hospital is blown up. To cover up the madness that leads to troops killing their own numbers we have "friendly fire". The Israeli government have sunk to a new level even for them with the following news item: "The Israeli military has imposed restrictions on the use of white phosphorus munitions, which led to civilian deaths and casualties in Gaza last year. Israel told the UN that it would deploy them only when approved by a "humanitarian affairs officer" (*Times*, 22 July). What would be the job description of a "humanitarian affairs officer"? Someone adept at describing burning to death from white phosphorus as a "pleasant, almost painless termination" perhaps?

## 15 year-old with injuries from white phosphorus after Israeli bombing, Jan 2009



## Free Lunch

by Rigg



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