

socialist standard



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

Chumps' Tea Party



Overboard for Palin's American Dream



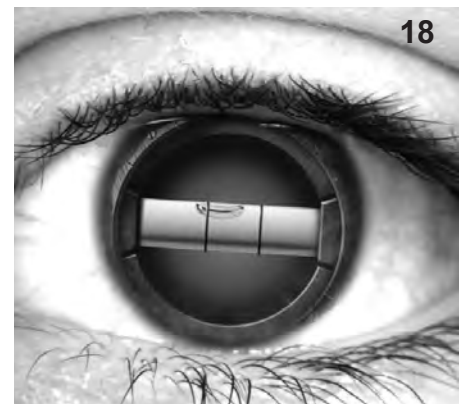
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THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 8 January 2011** 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

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Introducing The Socialist Party

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

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

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

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

Editorial

The revolution begins ... again

In 1855, riots broke out in London's Hyde Park in protest over a Sunday Trading Bill. Karl Marx was there and the next day declared that he did not think he was exaggerating in saying that "the English Revolution began yesterday in Hyde Park". Marx did not begin, but nor did he end, a long history of embarrassingly premature predictions of the demise of the British ruling class.

On Wednesday 10 November, a demonstration, long planned and organised jointly by the University and College Union and the National Union of Students, took place in central London to protest against the government's cuts in education funding. The demonstration was expected to be the usual poorly attended, tame and boring affair – marching from one spot to another, waving placards, and chanting slogans.

The reality was somewhat different. Around 52,000 university workers and students attended, and the demonstration quickly turned into "something resembling a Mardi Gras carnival", as a reporter for *Red Pepper* magazine put it. "The young faces and large grins, combined with incessant whistle-blowing, trumpet blasting and drum beating, all mix[ed] together to form ... a fun-filled, party-like atmosphere." A breakaway from the march, 200 strong according to a reporter from the *Guardian*, then broke into and occupied 30 Millbank, the Conservative party's campaign headquarters. Once inside, the demonstrators quietly staged a protest – alongside some minor scuffles with the police and a broken window, ludicrously blown up out of all proportion by the mainstream

media – and issued some inspiring propaganda:

"We stand against the cuts, in solidarity with all the poor, elderly, disabled and working people affected. We are against all cuts and the marketisation of education. We are occupying the roof of Tory HQ to show we are against the Tory system of attacking the poor and helping the rich. This is only the beginning."

Commentators from both the Leninist and anarchist left predicted that the day marked the beginning of a new politics – another Poll Tax-style rebellion, according to some; a mass revolutionary insurrection a week Wednesday, according to others. Did the English revolution begin yesterday at Tory HQ?

We in the Socialist Party are more cautious. We welcome any upsurge in the militancy and resistance and organisation of our class. But we also know, from bitter experience, that work of an altogether quieter, patient, more political kind is *also* needed. The skirmishes in the class war must be fought if we are not to be reduced to beasts of burden. But as human animals capable of rational thought and long-term planning, we must also seek to stop the skirmishes by winning the class war, and thereby ending it. This is only possible if the capitalist class is dispossessed of its wealth and power. That means that the working class as a whole must understand the issues, and organise and fight for these ends themselves – by organising a political party for the conquest of state power that will convert the means of production into the common property of the whole community.

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Orwell as can be expected...

THE UK science community has been heaving a small sigh of relief lately having suffered less damage than expected from the spending cuts. True, the boffins are facing a funding freeze, keeping their £4.6bn budget at 2010 levels for the next 5 years, meaning a probable cut through inflation of around 10 percent in real terms, however this is as nothing compared to the mass cattle-trucking of scientific projects in the direction of the knacker's yard that many had expected. But before the techies had even reached for a pipette of champers in celebration they were sobered by the further alarming news that the director general for science and research, the official in charge of that science budget and traditionally from respectable scientific stock, could soon be replaced by a – gasp – civil servant ('UK research spending decisions set for a shake-up', *New Scientist online*, 17 November).

It would be a mystery to anyone who has been following the Orwellian tactics of the Con-Dem Coalition lately why scientists should be shocked at this. Indeed, despite what they may think, they have still got off lightly. It could have been far worse.

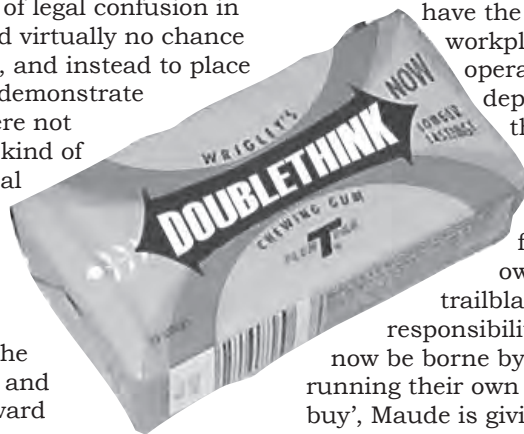
A miasma of doublethink pervades the Con-Dem Coalition's every political pronouncement as they manoeuvre to secure their grubby rich friends every concession while bamboozling their victims into believing that they are the ones getting more 'freedoms'. Home Secretary Theresa May, for example, has been loudly ridiculing the Equality legislation planned by that silly Harriet Har-person, claiming that inequality somehow makes you free ('Theresa May scraps equality in the name of fairness', *Guardian*, 17 November). The Equality Duty was designed to end decades of legal confusion in which victims of discrimination had virtually no chance of redress against big corporations, and instead to place the responsibility on employers to demonstrate through good practice that they were not discriminating in the workplace, a kind of guilty-until-proved innocent reversal of emphasis. Instead, in a spin of doubletalk, May uses the very failures of the old legislation to argue against any new legislation that might potentially solve the problem. In the name of fairness, the bosses get themselves off the hook and discriminated groups can look forward to having to make all the running to get anyone to listen to them – just as it's always been. They are free to complain, and the bosses are free to ignore them, which is what the Coalition means by freedom.

Similarly emancipated are workers everywhere on medication, as the Government cuts the cojones from the drug regulatory body the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) and hands prescription powers entirely to GPs. No longer shall poor old Mrs Jones be denied the £30,000 treatment that might have kept her in miserable pain for an extra six weeks, because that demonic nest of Doctor Deaths at NICE considered it not worth the money – now any GP can prescribe anything! Anything, that is, that their budget can afford and that they can be badgered or bluffed or blackmailed into buying by the omni-present pharmaceutical salesmen. No more Mr NICE Guy, now it's Mr Market and drugs for whoever can pay the most and shout the loudest.

Best to stay healthy and away from doctors then, but in that case you'll be taking advice on how to stay healthy from the very businesses which have always devoted so much of their time and your money in making you unhealthy in the first place. With a cynicism that could collapse lungs, the Health Secretary has given up the usual murky practice of consulting with big business behind closed doors before making health policy, and handed the power of policy-making entirely over to the businesses. In what is one of the most blatant displays of English Tea Partyism, and in a broadside designed to de-mast the dreaded Food Standards Agency, Andrew Lansley has set up new 'responsibility deal' networks to deal with obesity, alcoholism, exercise, behavioural problems and health and safety at work, in which key consultants are members of Unilever, the Wine and Spirit Trade Organisation, Mars, all big supermarkets and a raft of other commercial interests not famous for their health credentials. In the craven old days, a minister would at least formulate policy first and then run it past these moguls to see what he could get away with. In the galloping gutlessness of the new order, Lansley has simply invited the moguls to come up with *their* proposals and run them past him, in order to see what he can get past the media. An early casualty of this supine approach has been the abandonment of the simple and easy to understand 'traffic light' nutritional coding system in favour of a different system known through studies to be incomprehensible to customers, despite the fact that some supermarkets had already agreed to give the traffic light system a try ('Good for the nation's health – or big business?' *Guardian*, 13 November).

What next, one wonders? The handing of UK defence policy to the arms industry perhaps. Meanwhile the doublethink redoubles as public sector workers are being liberated from their jobs and told that they have the freedom to take over their former workplaces and run them as 'John Lewis co-operatives', after the style of the mutualised department store. Taking the name of this column cruelly in vain Francis Maude, the minister in the Cabinet Office in charge of civil servants, has launched 12 'Pathfinder' initiatives, fledgling public-service but employee-owned mutuals who are the supposed trailblazers for a new era in which all responsibilities formerly borne by the state will now be borne by social workers and health visitors running their own co-ops. As Thatcher gave us 'right-to-buy', Maude is giving us 'right-to-run', but not everyone is fooled by the spin. As some pundits point out, such co-ops will have a huge uphill struggle, and most will collapse and be eaten up by, yes, you guessed it, the big corporations. And what is so liberating about exposing public services to the free market anyway? wonders Unite General Secretary Tony Woodley: "You go to John Lewis to buy a sofa or a fridge, not to have chemotherapy" (*Guardian*, 17 November)

In view of these developments, the science community should think itself lucky it's only getting a civil servant to administer its budget. In a year from now it could be a McDonalds executive. The proof that capitalism is fundamentally not good for healthy science or the science of health is made clearer by the fact that, although government regulation solves none of the basic problems facing science in a money age, the further the drift towards an unregulated free market, the worse it gets for science, as indeed for everyone else.



Capitalism's limits?

Dear Editors

Capitalism is reaching its expansionary limits and being driven by these limits to substitute saturation for expansion. It is turning inward and "eating out its own guts". The result is "barbarism".

"Normal" capitalism generated profits through expansion (growth). Apart from some margin for maneuver in near-earth outer space, it no longer has room for profitable expansion. This drives the system to "expand" inward, deriving profits from forcing down production costs by cutting wages, forcing more family members onto the labour market, and imposing higher productivity levels on workers (intensified exploitation), thereby increasing the quantity of commodities but degrading their quality. Here again, force is an essential factor.

As Rosa Luxemburg wrote in *The Accumulation of Capital* in 1913, capitalism always needs an "outside" somewhere. Although material conditions have changed since Rosa's time, this remains true in a "metaphorically substantive" sense.

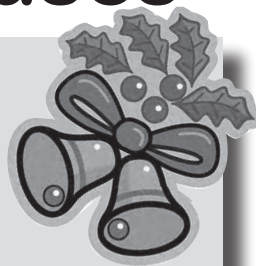
With capitalism expanded to its spatial limits and turned inward, exploitation and profits grow apace. The biosphere, however, is a fixed system of reproduction. It took "time out of mind" to generate the hydrocarbon fuels that production for profit has consumed in the course of less than 200 years. It is true that "biological resources, if rationally exploited, are renewable and therefore practically everlasting" (*Standard*, November 2010, p. 6). But globalised capitalism does not follow a rational logic and already has a toe in the waters of barbarism. Socialists must be the lifeguards on this shore: there is no alternative to socialism.

Joe R. Hopkins, Florida, USA.

Reply: As we pointed out in a reply to a letter in the September issue, Rosa Luxemburg's book was based on a faulty analysis of capitalism even if its descriptive parts about the barbaric effect of the spread of capitalism are good. We don't accept that capitalism does have any "spatial limit" - *Editors*.



Santa's New Clauses



**Memo to: Little Helpers Team Leaders
To be cascaded to all staff**

Dear Colleagues

As we approach our busy season I feel it only fair to remind you of the financial difficulties we find ourselves in as a result of the on-going recession. As you know, the juvenile gratuity market is experiencing heavy turbulence and we are committed to making savings wherever possible. As your Chief Executive I am setting a personal example by reducing my 2.6% annual growth in intake of mince pies and sherry by approximately 0.8%, phased in over the next fifteen years.

Certain scurrilous tabloid newspapers have been spreading unsubstantiated rumours that I have awarded myself a bonus of ten million pounds. In fact it was a modest seven million pounds 'performance & productivity' reward – which reflects well on all of us, by the way! – plus one million for the Management Consultation exercise with myself, one million in stress-related compensation for writing this, and one million in shares which may go down as well as up.

Needless to say, our core business strategy still revolves around putting children first, and Management has agreed a bold new plan to ensure our competitiveness in the difficult times ahead:

- To enhance efficiency and fairness we must recognise that unfairness is more efficient, and thus end the practice of a Universal Entitlement to Presents.
- The work-shy must play their part in maintaining the true spirit of Christmas. It is hardly fair on taxpayers that those on benefits who refuse to work for nothing should continue to expect presents for their children.
- We will no longer be delivering free chocolate to children in hot countries – it only melts. Instead we will introduce a fair trade agreement – their arable land in exchange for toy guns, pistols, machetes and napalm.
- You may have heard that those spiteful Fire Fighters threatened to go on strike on Bonfire Night, which would have spoiled the fun for so many young ones – obviously it wouldn't be right to reward *their* young ones this Christmas!

Meanwhile, let's remember that special group who have had a very tough time lately and borne it all without complaint. Our hard-working Cabinet ministers and Captains of Industry in the C.B.I. (Collect Bank Interest) have taken courageous and selfless decisions in order to resuscitate our ailing economy – a task which has earned them No Thanks Whatsoever from the ungrateful population – their children deserve our special kindness this Yuletide. With the money saved from the undeserving, we can afford to pay all these children through college courses at £9000 per year!

With all of us making sacrifices, here's where you can play *your* part in making Christmas special for certain children the world over. The great news is that you get to keep your jobs, providing you agree to certain new terms and conditions. Your friends in the Reindeer Union have already welcomed these new clauses with open legs and the Abattoir Sub-Provision has not been invoked even once!

There will be a downward restructuring of wages, holiday and sick pay entitlements to zero while the statutory retirement age will be infinitely extended so that now you can work for eternity.

Failure to accept this generous offer will necessitate the immediate relocation of the Grotto and Workshop to New Zealand where all staff will be replaced by sub-minimum-wage Hobbits.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Ho, ho, ho, and have a Merry Austerity,

Santa

Santa



Beyond “Peak Oil”: *Dirty Oil*

IT IS widely held that the world has reached or possibly passed “peak oil” – the point beyond which oil production is expected to decline. Some suggest that “peak gas” is likely to follow within a few years, while two recent reports claim that even “peak coal” too might be reached by 2025 (energybulletin.net/node/29919). If so, 20 years from now all three hydrocarbons may be in decline.

This is good news, isn't it? Doesn't it force the capitalists to switch to cleaner and less harmful sources of energy?

Yes, market forces will push things in this direction, but not very fast. It is projected that even in 2040 oil production will have fallen only to half its current level (peakoil.com). The normal functioning of capitalism will take several decades to complete the transition – much too late to prevent climatic catastrophe.

But there is worse. The main near-term prospect is rapid expansion in “non-conventional” oil extraction from oil sand (or tar sand), oil shale and deep-water offshore deposits. These forms of “dirty” oil are far more damaging to the environment even than the ordinary kind.

A barren moonscape

Oil sand is a thick mixture consisting of 10 percent bitumen (crude oil), 85 percent sand, clay and silt, and 5 percent water. Its first commercial exploitation is proceeding in the Athabasca region of northern Alberta, Canada. This entails removing it from the ground and delivering it to initial processing plants. The output of these “upgraders” is pumped through pipelines to refineries in various parts of the U.S. for further processing. The U.S. already imports more oil from Canada than from any other country.

As Antonia Juhasz says in *The Tyranny of Oil* (Harper 2008, pp. 291--2), “millions of acres of boreal [subarctic] forest have been transformed into a barren moonscape. Mammoth, lumbering creatures of steel have replaced the wildlife. The machines work 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, ripping vast open pits into the earth, up to 3 miles wide and 200 feet deep. Among the machinery is the world's biggest dump truck, which stands three stories high.” (See also: Andrew Nikiforuk, *Tar Sands: Dirty Oil and the Future of a Continent*, Greystone Books 2008; *National Geographic*, March 2009 for photos; onearth.org/node/2243.)

Fort McMurray, the centre of the industry, attracts workers from Canada's depressed Maritime Provinces and from as far away as India and China. The pay is high, but so is the cost of living. And so is the level of pollution – even higher than in China's cities. Many die before their time of cancer or lung disease.

Cooking rocks

Oil shale is a type of rock that when crushed and heated to 430° C. releases a solid material called kerogen that yields a heavy oil. There are vast deposits of oil

shale in the Green River Formation (GRF), which mostly lies under public lands in the western American states of Colorado, Utah and Wyoming. The rock is mined from deep below the surface, hauled, crushed, and then “cooked” in huge furnaces or “retorts”. However, Shell is working on a new technology to cook the shale in the ground, using electric resistor heaters like those in your toaster, so that the oil can be extracted in liquid form (Juhasz, pp. 296--318).

Oil sand and oil shale still account for under 10 percent of global oil extraction, but this proportion will increase as new deposits are opened to exploitation and conventional oil production declines. The Orinoco oil sands in Venezuela contain at least as much oil as those in Alberta; other countries, such as Trinidad and Madagascar, have smaller deposits. Australia has a

substantial amount of oil shale and a processing facility in Queensland.

Being very costly, extraction from oil sand and oil shale is only profitable when oil prices are sufficiently high. This is why operations in the GRF in the 1960s and 1970s were abandoned, only to be resumed in recent years. Unfortunately, continuing high demand for oil and its declining supply is likely to keep prices high.



Athabasca River delta and Alberta Tar sands operation

Impact on global warming

We all know that hydrocarbons are the worst energy source in terms of greenhouse gas emissions. And yet the production and consumption of oil from these non-conventional sources has a much greater total impact on atmospheric greenhouse gas levels even than the use of conventional hydrocarbon sources. Producing a barrel of oil from oil sand is estimated to emit about three times as much greenhouse gas as producing the same barrel by conventional means, largely due to the massive amounts of energy needed to mine, transport, upgrade and refine the oil sand. Another factor is the loss of carbon sink from permanent stripping of the boreal forest. Despite claims to the contrary, the forest is not and cannot be reclaimed after the oil sand is extracted.

Offshore drilling for oil or gas in water deeper than 150 metres – and many rigs drill in much greater depths than this – also adds to global warming, because it releases methane into the atmosphere from methane hydrates (ice-methane compounds) on the seabed. Methane is a greenhouse gas 23 times more potent than carbon dioxide.

Despite all the talk about the need to do something about global warming, despite all the policy strategies, emissions targets and ingenious incentive schemes, governments have failed to constrain the extraction of dirty oil. If even this energy source, the most harmful of all, cannot be ruled off limits, then what can be the purpose of those strategies, targets and schemes? Presumably only to conceal the helpless complicity of governments in face of the blind and relentless drive of capital to expand.

STEFAN

PUBLICATIONS ORDER FORM

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An Inconvenient Question: Socialism and the Environment

One of the major problems of capitalism is pollution – as capitalists cause long term damage to the environment for short term gain. This pamphlet outlines the Socialist case for a better, cleaner world run for people, not for profit.

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A Socialist Life by Heather Ball

A collection of sort stories by *Socialist Standard* writer Heather Ball. Many readers liked her distinctive writing style, finding it full of charm, warmth, humanity and humour. Sadly, Heather died before she could complete her writing project. This collection, published by the Socialist Party, presents the case for Socialism on the basis of individual, everyday experience.

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Are We Prisoners of our Genes?

The argument that our behaviour is determined by our physical inheritance may pose as science, but in reality it is a socially determined prejudice used as part of a crude political ideology. Faced with such objections to socialism, the first thing that needs to be done is to clarify what is going to be meant by the term 'human nature'.

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Articles from the *Socialist Standard* covering many key events of the last hundred years as they happened. This book will be of interest to those wanting to study the political, economic and social history of the twentieth century, as well as to those committed to the interests of the majority class of wage and salary workers who want a different society to replace the profit-wages-money system that is capitalism.

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THE RICH GET RICHER

"The shift of income to the top has occurred in the most prosperous English-speaking nations, such as Australia, Britain, and Canada. But it has been most pronounced in the United States. Thirty years ago, the richest 1 percent of Americans got 9 percent of total national income. By 2007, they had 23 percent. Last year, new census data show, the rich-poor income gap was the widest on record. Wealth is more unevenly distributed. The top 20 percent of wealth-holders own 84 percent of America's wealth." (*Christian Science Monitor*, 18 October)

PAY UP OR BURN DOWN

"A small rural community in western Tennessee is outraged and the fire chief is nursing a black eye after firefighters stood by and watched a mobile home burn to the ground because the homeowner hadn't paid a \$75 municipal fee. South Fulton city firefighters – equipped with trucks, hoses and other firefighting equipment – didn't intervene to save Gene Cranick's doublewide trailer home when it caught fire last week. But they did arrive on the scene to protect the house of a neighbor, who had paid his fire subscription fee. 'I just forgot to pay my \$75,' said Cranick. 'I did it last year, the year before. ... It slipped my mind.' Later that day, Cranick's son Timothy went to the fire station to complain, and punched the fire chief in the face." (*AOL News*, 6 October)

SITUATIONS VACANT

"In Baltimore this weekend more than a hundred Roman Catholic bishops and priests gathered to discuss a skills shortage within their congregation; it seems there are simply not enough exorcists. Just as US industry has suffered a lack of engineers, the number of men capable of casting out demons has declined, even as demand for their services has increased. In parts of the country they are now harder to find than a good plumber." (*Times*, 15 November)

CAPITAL GAINS

"The bosses of Britain's largest companies are enjoying lavish pay rises despite the wobbly economic recovery, with most of the surge in rewards coming from long-term incentive schemes and gains from share options. The chief executives of FTSE 100 companies have seen their pay surge by 55% in a year, according to a report released yesterday by research group Incomes Data Services (IDS), while across the top 350 listed companies, total board pay rose by an average of 45%." (*Guardian*, 29 October)

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Corres: 17 Dorset Road, N22 7SL. Email: julianvein@blueyonder.co.uk

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

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

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Northeast branch. Contact: Brian Barry, 86 Edmond Ct, Ryhope, Sunderland SR2 0DY. Tel: 0191 521 0690. Email: davejewell@bushinternet.com

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

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

YORKSHIRE

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

Todmorden. Keith Scholey, 1 Leeview Ct, Windsor Rd, OL14 5LJ. Tel: 01706 814 149

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

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

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

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

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

EAST ANGLIA

East Anglian Regional branch. Meets every two months on a Saturday afternoon (see meetings page for details).

Pat Deutz, 11 The Links, Billericay, CM12 0EX. n.deutz@btinternet.com David Porter, Eastholme, Bush Drive, Eccles-on-Sea, NR12 0SF. Tel: 01692 582533.

Richard Headicar, 42 Woodcote, Firs Rd, Hethersett, NR9 3JD. Tel: 01603 814343.

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

IRELAND

Cork. Kevin Cronin, 5 Curragh Woods, Frankfield, Cork. Tel: 021 4896427.

Email: mariekev@eircom.net

Newtownabbey. Nigel McCullough. Tel: 028 90852062.

SCOTLAND

Edinburgh branch. 1st Thur. 8-9pm. The Quaker Hall, Victoria Terrace (above Victoria Street), Edinburgh. J. Moir. Tel: 0131 440 0995.

JIMMY@jimoir29.freemove.co.uk Branch website:

<http://geocities.com/edinburghbranch/>

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

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

Email: richard.donnelly1@ntlworld.com

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

Tel: 01328 541643

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

WALES

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

Cardiff and District. John James, 67 Romilly Park Road, Barry CF62 6RR. Tel: 01446 405636

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cooking the books

Zero-sum games

“CURRENCY TRADING,” wrote Anatole Kaletsky in the *Times* (8 September), “is undoubtedly a zero-sum game for the world as a whole, in the sense that every currency trader’s profit represents a cost borne by some other trader, business or consumer. Despite this, however, currency trading can be hugely profitable for Britain, if most of the profits are made in the City of London and most of the losses are borne in some other country”.

This is very true but it doesn’t just apply to currency trading. It applies to all profit-chasing.

The source of all profits is surplus value arising from the unpaid labour of productive wage and salary workers. Although this surplus value is created in production it is only “realised” (i.e. converted into money) on the market, but each capitalist firm does not realise the surplus value produced by its own workers. If this were the case then labour-intensive industries would tend to be the most profitable. In fact, however, they are no more profitable than industries which employ more machinery and less labour.

The tendency under capitalism is for the same amount of capital to realise the same profit. This comes about through an averaging of the rate of profit, the average being the total amount of surplus value produced divided by the total amount of capital invested.

As Marx explained in Volume 3 of *Capital*:

“Thus although the capitalists in the different spheres of production get back on the sale of their commodities the capital values consumed to produce them, they do not secure the surplus-value and hence profit that is produced in their own sphere in connection with the production of these commodities.” (Chapter 9).

In effect the whole capitalist class exploits the whole working class:

“The basic notion in this connection is that of average profit itself, the idea that capitals of equal size must yield equal profits in the same period of time. This is based in turn on the notion that capital in each sphere of production has to participate according to its size in the total surplus value extorted from the workers by the total social capital; or that each particular capital should be viewed simply as a fragment of the total capital and each capitalist in fact as a shareholder in the whole social enterprise, partaking in the overall profit in proportion to the size of his share of capital.” (chapter 12).

This is why profit-chasing by all capitalist firms is a zero-sum game. The total amount of profits that can be realised by all firms together is limited by the total amount of surplus value that has been produced. Each capitalist firm – more accurately, each block of capital – strives to secure the maximum amount of profit it can. It is in fact through this that the averaging of the rate of profit comes about as capital leaves low-profit fields to flow into fields with higher profits.

The more profit one firm realises the less there is for the others. This means that firms are competing not only against other firms in the same field of activity but against all other firms. It’s a competitive struggle for profits amongst all blocks of capital.

On the world level, as Kaletsky pointed out about currency trading, the more profit the capitalist firms in one country can secure the less there is for the capitalist firms of other countries. Which is why international rivalry and downward pressures to be “competitive” are built-in to capitalism and why world cooperation for the common good is ruled out.

Tiny Tips

The corporate clout of the mining industry trumped political ideology in Canada when members of all political parties helped to narrowly defeat a bill late last month that would have imposed standards on Canadian mining companies operating in developing countries:

<http://tinyurl.com/3aya2vs>

Up to 200,000 Haitians could contract cholera as the outbreak which has already killed 800 is set to spread across the battered Caribbean nation of nearly 10 million, the United Nations said:

<http://tinyurl.com/2vbw5ws>

A Christian woman has been sentenced to hang in Pakistan after being convicted of defaming the Prophet Mohammed:

<http://tinyurl.com/39zct86>

Unemployed workers will be barred from claiming benefits for up to three years if they repeatedly refuse job offers under radical plans to reform the welfare system:

<http://tinyurl.com/34k9hf9>

Israel will begin constructing a barrier on its border with Egypt within the next

two weeks. The government has said that the central purpose of this fence is to keep the growing number of illegal migrants from infiltrating the country:

<http://tinyurl.com/3xx3ddd>

Six years after it first debuted, the \$1,000 frittata at Norma’s in New York’s Le Parker Meridien hotel continues to draw attention. Called the “Zillion Dollar Lobster Frittata”, the dish is made with six eggs, lobster claws and 10 oz. of Sevruga caviar:

<http://tinyurl.com/28wdvp6>



POOR ‘WILL BE PUSHED OUT’ OF SOUTHERN ENGLAND Bath, Chelmsford, Newbury and Maidstone are among towns that will become “no-go” areas for the poor within 15 years because of the coalition government’s plans to cut housing benefits. The claim, made by the Chartered Institute of Housing, followed the Archbishop of Canterbury’s intervention. He said he was worried by the proposal of Work and Pensions Secretary Iain Duncan Smith to threaten the long-term unemployed with benefit cuts:

<http://tinyurl.com/3alxu7e>

Some 42,389,619 Americans received food stamps in August, a 17% rise from the same time a year ago, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which tracks the data. That number is up 58.5% from August 2007, before the recession began. By population, Washington, D.C. had the largest share of residents receiving food stamps: More than a fifth, 21.1%, of its residents collected assistance in August. Washington was followed by Mississippi, where 20.1% of residents received food stamps, and Tennessee, where 20% tapped into the government nutrition program:

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

Can the Tea Party save the American Dream?

The right-wing Tea Party movement is, according to some commentators, turning into a mass, 'grassroots' movement and revolutionising politics in America. Is it?

If the 'lame-stream media', to steal an appropriate phrase, is to be believed, then there has been a 'massive', indeed 'historic', change in the biggest economy and the most powerful country on the planet. The United States' mid-term elections, held last month, midway between the four-yearly presidential elections, saw the biggest swing to the Republican Party for 72 years. The Republicans now hold a majority in the House of Representatives, and fell just short of control of the Senate, only four years after voters handed both chambers of the US Congress to the Democrats. A conservative revolution has swept the nation. At least, that's the lame-stream view. But in truth, nothing much has changed.

The Republicans and the Democrats are essentially two wings of the same party – the Business Party – and there's very little to choose between them. During election campaigns, significant policy differences are downplayed or ignored completely – largely because they don't exist – and which wing wins depends on which has succeeded in attracting the most investment from sections of the capitalist class, spent the most money, and delivered the most effective PR/advertising campaign.

As for what voters themselves might be thinking, the election results don't tell us all that much, as Stefan points out on our American party's website (<http://wspus.org/2010/11/the-meaning-of-the-u-s-midterm-election-results>). The truth is that most voters, and a disproportionate number of Democrat voters, stayed at home, and that the success of the more 'progressive' Democrats was at least as noteworthy as the success of the more-right-wing Republicans – in fact, a lower proportion of Americans voted Republican in 2010 than in 2008. In any case, as a result of the way the electoral system works, the votes of just 3 percent of citizens make all the difference between a Democratic and a Republican landslide. So much for the rise of conservatism.

But perhaps the most interesting thing about the election, and the campaign leading up to it, was the growth of the so-called Tea Party movement. This is a network of hundreds of supposedly 'anti-establishment' conservative groups across the US, which, if nothing else, energised the Republican Party and made the election campaign slightly more interesting. No one knows just how many

Tea Partiers there are – it's not a single organisation with a membership or leadership – but it has had a significant impact on American politics, if only because the lame-stream media has obligingly given it a voice and credibility.

The relatively lame performance of the Tea Partiers in the election would seem to draw into question the common claim that the Tea Party represents a significant popular force, with a mass 'grassroots' following. But last month more than half of Americans in a Rasmussen poll said they view the Tea Party favourably – that's despite the fact, or perhaps because of the fact, that the Tea Party has no manifesto, no clear policies, and no clearly expressed ideas about what it would do should it win power. Instead, the party makes its stand on reducing the deficit without specifying how, cutting taxes, 'taking back' America from a supposedly corrupt 'establishment', and abolishing vast swathes of government, including such evils as environmental protection legislation, subsidised healthcare for the poor and elderly, and unemployment benefit.

To the extent that this is a grassroots movement, then, it is a movement of people organising against their economic interest. The reasons why this happens are many, not least of which is that people have been conned into it by a PR campaign funded by billionaire businessmen. But the Tea Party is also saying things – about the bankruptcy of the economy, about the rottenness of government and other institutions – that ordinary people are increasingly interested in hearing.

Why has the Tea Party risen to prominence now?

The context for the rise of the Tea Party is a profound and deep crisis – economic and ideological. Let's take the economic aspect first. It is certainly true, as apologists for capitalism will be quick to tell you, that capitalism has continued to be very good at creating massive amounts of wealth. But whose wealth? The wealth of the nation is now concentrated in fewer hands than it has been for 80

years, says Robert Reich, a professor of public policy at the University of California at Berkeley, and former secretary of labour under Bill Clinton (<http://robertreich.org>). Almost a quarter of total income generated in the United States is going to the top 1 per cent; and the top one-tenth of one per cent of Americans now rake in as much as the bottom 120 million. In 1973, chief executives were on average paid 26 times



the median income. Now the multiple is 300. That's what they mean when they say nothing can match capitalism for creating wealth.

At the other end of the scale things are getting pretty desperate. Wages for the majority of the population have stayed flat since 1973, while work hours and insecurity have increased. And that's for those 'lucky' enough to have a job. America is facing 'the worst jobs crisis in generations', says Andy Kroll in a report for TomDispatch.com (5 October), with the number of unemployed exploding by over 400 percent – from 1.3 million in December 2007, when the recession began, to 6.8 million this June. As a result, 11 million borrowers – or nearly 23 percent of all homeowners with a mortgage – now find themselves 'underwater', that is, owing more on their mortgages than their houses are worth. In June of this year, over 41 million Americans were relying on food stamps from the Federal government to feed themselves. That's an 18 per cent year on year increase. Thirty cents of every dollar in personal income now comes from some form of government support.

In short, capitalism is in its biggest crisis since the Great Depression. This means that wealth is returning to its 'rightful owners', the capitalist class; the workers, meanwhile, must make do with austerity.

The American Dream

Meanwhile, the related ideological crisis is presenting itself as the 'end of the American dream', or, as Edward Luce in the *Financial Times* (30 July) puts it, a crisis in the consciousness of the middle class. Lame-stream media commentators often have lots to say about the 'middle class', but they will very rarely define what they mean by the term. This is very wise on their part, because it would quickly become obvious that the 'middle class' includes just about everybody, which would make people think about just what it is they're supposed to be in the middle of. The 'middle-class' couple Luce interviews for his article work as a 'warehouse receiver' (he lugs stuff around a warehouse) and an 'anaesthesia supply technician' (she makes sure nurses and doctors have the stuff they need) – surely working-class jobs by any definition. Hilariously, Luce cannot even bring himself to describe the woman's father – an uneducated miner – as working class without wrapping scare quotes around the term. 'Working class' is clearly a taboo term – the working class is not supposed to exist.

Still, it's not a taboo socialists respect. As working-class people, with jobs, living in the richest country on the planet, and with a joint income about a third above the US median, Luce's interviewees could think themselves not too badly off, relatively speaking. They lived in a house on a nice, tree-lined street, never went hungry, and turned on the air-conditioning when it got too hot. Once upon a time, says Luce, 'this was called the American Dream'. Now, it's a different story. Their house is under threat of repossession, their son was kicked off his mother's health insurance and only put back on at crippling cost, and, as the couple say themselves, they are only ever 'a pay cheque or two from the streets'. Who

isn't? We're all middle class now, after all. This 'economic strangulation', as Luce puts it, began long before the recession – as we pointed out above, wages have been flat since 1973 – but is only now being really felt as the credit cards are cut up, jobs lost, and state spending on social services cut back.

But it's not just that things are bad. Americans are also losing confidence that things will get any better: a growing majority of parents do not think their children will end up better off than they are, for example. Another important ingredient in the American Dream has gone off. It is this growing majority of disaffected working-class people, who had been convinced that they were middle class and doing pretty well, who are looking for answers. And unless they look very hard indeed, beyond the lame-stream, the only answers they're hearing with any coherence at all are coming from the Tea Party.

The appeal of the Tea Party

It can't be denied that Tea Party ideas have some superficial appeal. The Tea Party was described by Ben McGrath in *The New Yorker* as a collection of, among other things, "Atlas Shruggers". No doubt McGrath could be confident that his American audience would understand what he meant by this. *Atlas Shrugged* is a novel by Ayn Rand and, according to an often-quoted American survey of readers, was ranked second only to the Bible as a book that had most influenced their lives. It was a tiny,

unrepresentative and biased survey, but still, there's no doubt that the book provokes strong feelings among its readers and admirers and is a best-seller in the US – no small achievement given the book's length and the fact that it is explicitly a novel exploring abstract philosophical ideas. The strong feeling it provokes in most socialists is revulsion – it is a manifesto for unrestrained capitalism, proclaims the virtues of selfishness, and the characters

we are supposed to look up to as models of human moral virtue are vile, self-serving monomaniacs and workaholics.

But it's not hard to see the appeal of Rand's ideas either. She is committed, at least in theory, to individual freedom, independence from all authority, and writes inspiringly of human achievement – in Rand, human life is not a pit of despair, but an exciting adventure, full of possibility. The best social and economic system for realising human potential, according to Rand, is capitalism. But not really-existing capitalism – more a utopian vision of what a free market, laissez faire future might be like if only people acted rationally and according to their own interest, and the state got off people's backs. Rand was interesting, but wrong. Marx's *Capital* shows that capitalism – even when it is operating perfectly well, without corruption or unnecessary state interference – must nec-



Saving the American Dream? Leading Tea Party member Sarah Palin, with admirer above.

continued page 22



*The only flourishing industry
in Ireland now seems to be
economic punditry.*

Ireland in recession

A fellow socialist recently sent me an economic article critiquing the contrasting financial approaches of the various governments in Europe to the current crisis. It wasn't the first article that I've read on this subject. Ever since the storm broke in autumn 2008, the media in Ireland has filled the airwaves/newspaper pages with an endless procession of economists commenting on various aspects of Ireland's severe economic situation and either second guessing the government's decisions on various policy matters or attempting to persuade the people that they have much cleverer solutions to 'our' problems. Part of my weariness with all this analysis stems from the fact that as a socialist I know booms and slumps are an inevitable part of the economic operation of capitalism and there was clearly an unsustainable boom occurring in Ireland over the years 2004 to 2008. So now we have the consequent contraction which is just going to have to be endured as long as capitalism governs our lives.

In fact, the only flourishing industry in Ireland now seems to be economic punditry and whether you open a magazine, turn on the TV, listen to the radio or surf the net for news, you won't have long to wait until you encounter the predictions of economists mainly drawn from either academia or the financial institutions or on some rare occasions, the trade unions. Because Ireland's situation is deemed so critical, we even have Nobel prize winning economists from the United States commenting on us, while just a few years ago we wouldn't have merited any attention from them as they'd probably have been pre-occupied with China.

In fact one popular media economist, David McWilliams, currently has a travelling roadshow where he tours the country, filling halls and theatres with his views. As the publicity blurb for his ridiculous 'Outsiders' tour goes "McWilliams believes Ireland's political and social divide is not so much about rich and poor, young and old, urban and rural, but about Insiders and Outsiders". This strange mixture of showbiz and economics has climaxed in a 'Kilkenomics' festival held in Kilkenny in late November where stand up comedy will be interspersed with economic analysis. On its website one of the topics listed for discussion is to be '23 Things they don't tell you about Capitalism'. As the man said, you couldn't make it up.

What's tiresome about all the contributors to this public debate, is that in spite of furious argument over some superficial points, essentially they're all singing from the same hymn sheet. Corrective action is needed to deal with Ireland's soaring debt and it's only the time scale (whether it should be over 4 or 6 years) and the areas of public spending to be excluded from cuts (such as old age pension) that are in contention. It is now anticipated that a general election is only months away and it's noticeable that the main opposition parties have moderated their criticism of the government's budget approach; they know full well that room for manoeuvre is extremely limited and if elected (which seems very probable at the moment) they will be implementing the hair-shirt budgets over the next four years.

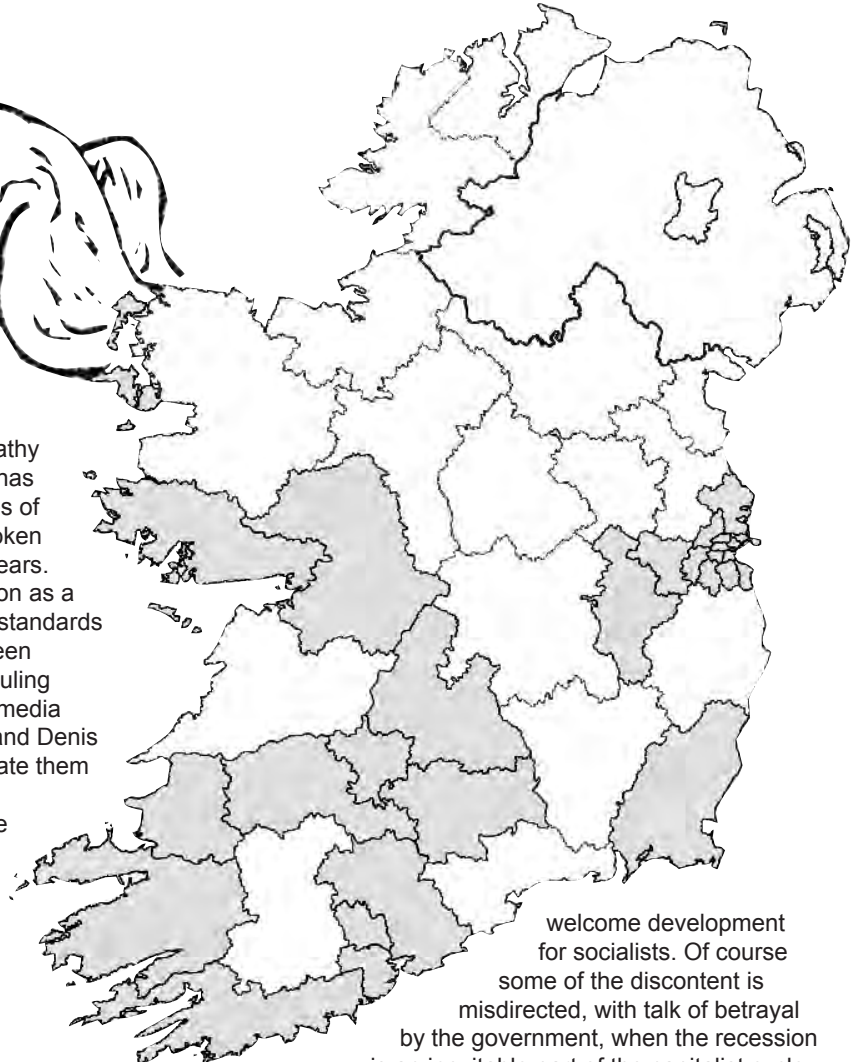
To give some background, it now seems accepted that whatever reality lay behind the Celtic Tiger phenomenon had by about 2003/2004 been replaced by an old-fashioned, foundation-less credit boom based on the expectation that property (both residential and commercial) was destined to appreciate at a significant level beyond any other type of investment. This led to a frenzy of construction, some clearly insane even to non-socialists, where perfectly functioning warehouses, hotels and office blocks were demolished so their footprint could be used for even more profitable apartment blocks and fancier hotels.

By 2006 the unsustainability of what was happening began to be widely commented upon in everyday life though this didn't seem to ring any warning bells with Brian Cowan, the then minister of finance, subsequently promoted to Taoiseach (Prime Minister). The crash has highlighted a structural weakness in Irish politics whereby that opaque interaction between the politicians and leading business people (particularly property developers) masked the rationale for economic decisions. By 2008, a huge proportion of Irish government revenue was attributable, directly or indirectly, to the construction sector in terms of which has now all but vanished. This has left an almost twenty billion euro gap between the government's annual income and expenditure. The problem has been exacerbated by the government's initial decision to give a very wide ranging guarantee to all the main banks' creditors. As the scale of losses (fifty billion and counting) has turned out to be much greater than anticipated, this has increased Ireland's need

to borrow. Whether the government naively underestimated the risks from this banking strategy or was responding to the pressing needs of some well-connected business people has been hotly debated since.

The predominant response to date in Ireland has been a fearful resignation rather than any outright 'resistance' as has intermittently been seen in the strikes and demonstrations of France and Greece. Partly this is due to an apathy that has swathed many broken over the years. Unemployment has risen sharply and emigration as a social phenomenon has returned. A reduction in living standards is seen as inevitable in the medium term. There has been a deliberate divide and rule strategy employed by the ruling class with a vociferous campaign, championed by the media outlets controlled by the media tycoons Tony O'Reilly and Denis O'Brien, waged against public sector workers to separate them from private sector employees.

That is not to say that people are not angry about the situation and the heavy penalties and burdens they are now expected to bear as a result of reckless and profligate activities of bankers and developers. What is perceived to be most galling is how, when the senior executives in many financial institutions knew that the balloon was going up, they negotiated or arranged legally watertight generous exit packages for themselves, without a care for the consequences to the mass of the people. It certainly has raised questions about the 'fairness' of the system which is a clearly



welcome development for socialists. Of course some of the discontent is misdirected, with talk of betrayal by the government, when the recession is an inevitable part of the capitalist cycle, albeit exacerbated by the greed and incompetence of the local ruling class.

The power of capitalism over people has never been more nakedly exposed. The government's daily mantra is the need to restore confidence in Ireland's position to 'the market' when we know 'the market' is fundamentally that very small number of people who control multi-billion financial investment decisions. So each government action is quantified as to whether it has reassured the markets (which we're constantly told is a good thing) or has caused uncertainty ('a very bad thing') as the more uncertain the markets are, the greater the interest rate Ireland must pay on the loans it needs to raise. The fact that it's naturally in the market's interest to either doubt, or at least feign doubt, about Ireland's economic outlook in order to justify higher loan charges is never commented upon, which shows the whole deal is really a gigantic scam. Perceived wisdom is that it should be easier to make socialists in a recession when the shortcomings of capitalism are more evident. This capitalist recession will eventually end and the Irish economy at some time in the future will inevitably return to growth. If there are more socialists in Ireland at that future time, then at least one positive outcome will have resulted from this sorry and preventable mess.

KEVIN CRONIN



State schools have always turned out various grades of worker. Now universities are to be allowed to charge the going market rate for their courses.

Education as tainted by capitalism



The Browne review of higher education in England proposes the abolition of the £3,290 cap on tuition fees and declares that there should be no limit on what universities can charge their students. It plans for typical fees of over £9000 per year for a degree course, with a continuation of the system of loans. In addition to a loan for the tuition fees, most students would have a further loan (for maintenance) of £3,750 and would have interest to pay on that, as well.

Once in employment, former students would begin to repay the cost of their loans (together with interest) from a salary level of £21,000 per annum, upwards. This is not a high income to have to start paying back the loan, particularly for workers living in cities, where the cost of living is higher. Therefore, huge numbers of young people, on modest salaries will face these loan repayments, on top of either having to pay high rents for accommodation or taking out large mortgages. Economists have been advising people not to get further into debt but the Browne Report will undoubtedly contribute to the level of debt rising significantly for many.

The university guide, *Push*, estimated in August 2010 that student indebtedness could rise to £25,000 for a degree course. Clearly, for many

with the extra expenses of accommodation, books, other course materials, etc, the figure would be substantially higher, quite likely, in excess of £30,000.

So, the result of this is that most working class students will have an unenviable choice: either (1) to enter higher education and to be burdened with enormous amounts of debt, especially when accommodation and maintenance are considered, or (2) having to give up higher education altogether, with the guaranteed consequence of limiting their social, cultural and economic advantages.

This is all capitalism can offer the vast majority of people: a huge burden of debt which induces a form of enslavement or missing important opportunities in life in order to reduce the debt.

As regards schools, dubious methods are being resorted to by more affluent parents in an attempt to get their children into schools which occupy a higher position in the league tables of the exam treadmill. Many of these better off parents often try to segregate their children from those of poorer backgrounds, through the use of tutors, private schools and faith schools. Desperate efforts are made by some parents in an attempt to get their children into the desired schools. The measures employed include moving house into the catchment area of the targeted school or allowing their children to move temporarily into the homes of relatives or friends who live

Left: the education 'system'

in the sought after catchment area. All of this, in an attempt to deceive the LEA (Local Education Authority).

Then, there are the exams themselves: GCSEs, AS-levels and A2-Levels, with the perennially critical claim that “standards are dropping” in comparison with the past. Lesson time is largely devoted to the demands of passing these exams, rather than giving students a real understanding and appreciation of the subjects which they are supposed to be studying. In fact, many believe that lessons are much more about how to pass the exams rather than learning about the subjects for their own sake. Numerous teachers complain about the rigidity of the syllabus and about how their lesson plans are being constantly supervised, something which previously only applied to those who were in their first six months probationary period.

Aims of the Education System

Political leaders and mainstream educationalists usually claim that the purpose of education is along the following lines:

(1) Acquisition of knowledge, development of mental and physical skills and personality to enhance the life of an individual.

(2) The achievement of the above, it is then declared, will enable individuals to make a contribution towards the overall economic, social and cultural wealth of society.

To a limited extent, in the developed countries at least, much of this has been partially achieved. However, in a class-based society such as capitalism education, like much else, is subordinated to the interests of the ruling class. Those interests fundamentally involve the creation of profit which is a vital source of the wealth of the capitalists.

Although on occasions, mainstream education may refer to isolated ideas which criticise some of the policies of ruling elites (generally policies which took place in the distant past, such as Britain’s involvement in the slave trade from the 16th to the 19th century), the reality is that the education system has rarely radicalised students. Usually it has taught them to accept the status quo and to fit into it. This lack of radicalisation of students has been maintained through the following factors:

- The very limited nature of the education received by many students. Most of that education is geared to the demands of industry and commerce.

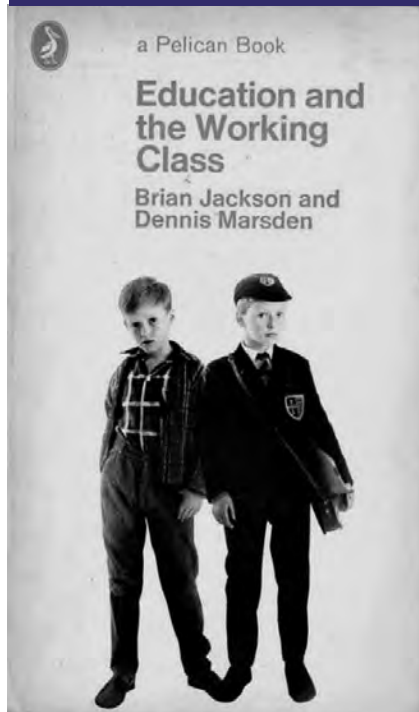
- Capitalism has so far at least, managed to pressure most students

into thinking more about getting employment at the end of their course, rather than to consider becoming radical.

- The prevalence of status quo ideas in the education system: the values of religious organisations in feudal times and, since the beginning of the industrial revolution, the



Above: Kenneth Baker, one of the architects of the Education Reform Act. Below: Jackson and Marsden’s *Education and the Working Class*



values of the capitalist class.

- In more recent times most people’s understanding of the society in which they live has been influenced hugely by an expanding media, much of which is controlled by wealthy corporate owners and other commercial interests.

In the present society the main aim of education is to provide the knowledge and skills base necessary for employment in capitalism. A workforce educated according to the demands of the profit system will then maintain and, in favourable trade cycle periods, boost the wealth of the owners of the means of production.

An obvious consequence of these objectives of education has been a strong emphasis on subjects considered to be relevant to employment: maths, English, science, computer and business studies. The Education Reform Act of 1988 set up the National Curriculum which was designed to standardise what was taught in schools. The intention of this was to facilitate assessment and led to the creation of “league tables” showing the academic performance of schools in exams. Most significantly, maths, English, science and information technology were established as compulsory subjects up to the minimum school leaving age of 16. In contrast, under the 2002 Education Act, subjects such as history, geography, foreign languages, art and music could be dropped at the age of 14 since most of them were thought to be less relevant to the employment process.

Education and Income Group

Under capitalism, there has always been a very strong income factor determining educational achievement. Children from better off homes overwhelmingly do better than those from poorer families. The children from deprived backgrounds are frequently and erroneously labelled as being “less able” by those educationalists who are entirely ignorant of the vital socio-economic factors influencing educational development and the gaining of qualifications.

A useful book which refutes the claims of the “less able” educationalists is *Education and the Working Class* by Jackson and Marsden, written in 1962 and which has been on the reading lists of many teacher training courses. The authors concentrate mainly on differing levels of educational achievement within the working class itself (as mainstream sociologists frequently do). They show by statistics and surveys, how children of unskilled manual workers are far more likely to leave school early, with few qualifications. In contrast to this, those with white collar, managerial parents, were more likely to pass a greater number of school exams and then to go on to university. Aspects of the book may be criticised by socialists for its emphasis on the ma-

terial, social and economic divisions within the working class itself, rather than including a comparison with the children of the capitalist class. Nevertheless, it is still of significant value since it illustrates clearly how a lack of material resources and encouragement can seriously affect a child's progress in education.

In 2007 a report entitled *Chicken and Egg: Child Poverty and Educational Inequalities* by Donald Hirsch, shows how little has changed, after another 45 years of capitalism. By the age of three, Hirsch concludes that "being in poverty makes a difference equivalent to nine months' development in school readiness." He continues: "At each stage of compulsory schooling, the poverty gap grows. In particular, there is a big jump early in secondary school, with poor children nearly two years behind by the age of 14."

Hirsch adds: "Children who do badly at primary school are less likely to improve at secondary school, if they are poor. Children who are only slightly below average at primary school are more likely to be among the worst performers at secondary school, if they are poor."

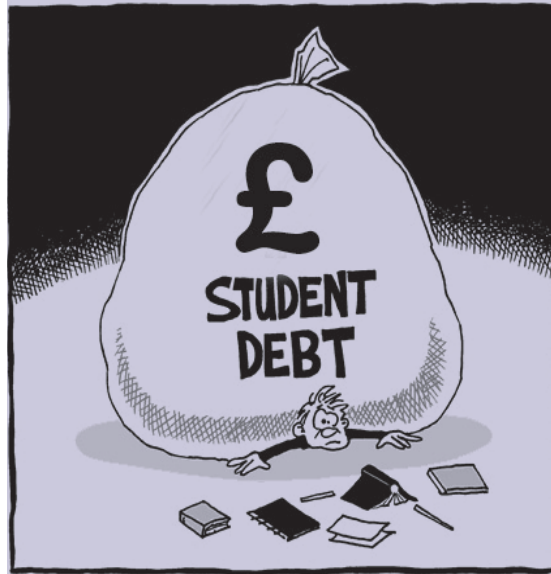
Young people with parents in manual occupations remain far less likely than others to go to university. Even though their prospects have improved, they have not been the main beneficiaries of university expansion. Children of non-manual workers are over two and a half times as likely to go to university than children of manual workers."

Like Jackson and Marsden, Hirsch is mainly looking here at different layers of the working class. All the same, it is a clear demonstration of how material circumstances in capitalism affect outcomes in education.

In February 2010 the Sutton Trust supported research which showed that "the vocabulary of children from

the poorest backgrounds lags more than a year behind that of their classmates from richer homes by the time they start school."

"Those from the poorest 20 percent of homes, where household annual incomes averaged £10,300 before tax, had an average developmental age of 53.6 months...Children from families in the richest 20 percent, on around £80,000 reached a development age



of 69.8 months."

In other words, children from the more affluent homes had a developmental age more than 16 months ahead of those from poorer homes. This is clearly a result of material circumstances.

Certainly, the demands of the capitalist education system, to restrain monetary expenditure and investment, cause highly significant barriers, particularly for children from more deprived backgrounds. Additionally, these cutbacks create real problems for many other working class children from less deprived backgrounds. The wealthy can purchase places for their children in private schools and universities, usu-

ally without any fear of indebtedness. For the rest of the population (the working class), the situation is very different and in recent years these inequalities have been increasing rather than diminishing.

Education in Socialist Society

So, what would education be like in a socialist society? A detailed description obviously cannot be given since it will be up to the people at the time to decide upon exactly which forms education would take. However, it is very clear that, in complete contrast to capitalism, socialism will put human need first. The welfare and needs of people, both as individuals and as a community will be treated as a priority.

The importance of developing to the full, the mental, physical and social abilities and talents of everyone, as individuals, will undoubtedly be recognised. Most significantly, education will inevitably be considered a life-long process and certainly not something to be compartmentalised into time slots, as happens under the present system. As a result of this, people will be able

to lead far more satisfying lives than could ever be even remotely achieved under capitalism. This satisfaction would derive from the contributions to the overall material, intellectual social and cultural wealth of society which people would be able to make and, of course, from the fact that, as individuals, they would be able to enjoy the fruits of the common store.

A quotation from Chapter 2 of the *Communist Manifesto* sums up the situation well:

"In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."

Here, the term "free development" can be taken to include education. In socialist society there would be no financial constraints since the monetary system will have been abolished and production will be carried out solely for human need. The stresses and strains of cutbacks and needless austerity measures will finally have been abolished forever and at last, humanity will be able to move forward, considerably through genuine and effective education, towards real progress, both as individuals and as a community.

VINCENT OTTER

NEW SOCIALIST PARTY PAMPHLET

What's Wrong With Using Parliament? The Cases For And Against The Revolutionary Use Of Parliament



Addresses arguments put by those who desire a classless, moneyless society but who do not see parliament as relevant to achieving this.

To order a copy complete the form on page 7.

All in it together?

The gap between those at the top of society, and the rest of us, is actually getting bigger. That applies throughout capitalism, and it is the case even in Britain, after thirteen years of Labour Governments – which promised to run capitalism in the interests of all of us. This inequality has even got Conservatives worried. So much so that sometimes you see an article in *The Times*, the house-journal of British capitalism, which make you wonder if some disgruntled sub-editor has put it in as a joke. Michael Portillo, former Tory M.P. and indeed former aspirant for the job of Tory leader, has just made a speech about the way things are going. Anatole Kaletsky, the *Times* economics expert (who, clearly, is very far from being a Socialist), complained that the inequality “is putting democracy in danger” (*Times*, 10 November). Portillo (wrote Kaletsky) denounced the “greedy, irresponsible behaviour of Britain’s wealthy financial and managerial elite”.

“The chief executives of middle-sized financial companies (who of course are also large shareholders) receive average salaries of £2 million and continue to vote themselves pay increases, at a time when ordinary workers face cuts in their pay and pensions. Such disparities could prove incompatible with democracy, according to Mr Portillo.”

Reports from other countries suggest that this is a general trend in capitalism throughout the world. What about America, self-appointed world’s policeman, raising the banner of freedom and a fair society across the globe?

“Another shocking statistic quoted by Mr Portillo: inequality has now become so extreme that America’s 74 richest citizens receive more income than the bottom 19 million combined.”

David Cameron says “we are all in this together”. As usual, some are more in it than others. And what very many people are in, up to the neck, is the muck and slime at the bottom of society.

Why do Portillo and Kaletsky, both enthusiastic supporters of capitalism, fear this trend in society? It’s simple. In the end, if you take a typical worker, whose head has been filled since he was born with propaganda that the capitalist system is the best system of society ever devised by man, and is indeed the only possible system – if you take him and kick him hard enough, finally

even he will turn round and kick you back. If there were a lot of extremely poor people, then a well-to-do person could hardly walk down the street without the fear of a physical attack by someone demanding money.

There is a story that in the days of Charles II a settler in the American colonies returned to London for a visit, and he brought two Native Ameri-



Kaletsky



Portillo

cans with him, to impress them with the flaunting displays of wealth in the capital city. When the visit ended, he proudly asked them that they thought of the ostentatious spectacle. They were greatly puzzled. “Why”, they asked, “don’t the poor people kill all the rich people?” Clearly there were a lot more poor than rich: and since the majority could easily overcome a small minority, why did they not take such an obvious step to put an end to such manifest unfairness? The answer, of course, is the unremitting barrage of propaganda in all “civilized” societies to persuade everyone that rich people are rich because they are in some way better than the rest of us. The Native Americans had not been subject to that kind of bombardment.

Why is this making some supporters of capitalism unhappy? It’s simple. If you refuse benefits to someone who “refuses to take a job”, what will he do? Lie down somewhere out of sight and quietly die? Or try and knock some richer people over the head and grab their money?

If you go to South Africa, you can

see what might happen. Because of government policies during the half century after the war, when apartheid regimes kept down the great majority of South Africans who didn’t have a white skin, and refused them any worthwhile education, and any equal chance in the job market with whites, not to mention any reasonable place to live, etc – because of all that there is a great gap between the richest and the poorest. Well-to-do South Africans travel along the well-constructed broad roads in their expensive air-conditioned cars, passing black South Africans who are walking along the hard shoulder, and who live often in shacks without water on tap, or electricity, or mains sewage. The result is a very high crime rate. Poor people see wealth all round them, and not surprisingly want to grab a bit for themselves.

South Africa has one of the highest homicide rates per capita, if not the highest, in the world. So you pass large houses surrounded by high brick walls, with prominent notices outside – “Armed Response”: which means that if you dare to offer any threat to the owners of the house (e.g. if you try and pinch anything), they will use guns to try and kill you. If you are driving a car in Johannesburg, you are very unwise to stop at a red light, because this will be an open invitation to someone holding a gun to step into the car, and order you out. The car is then driven off, and you can walk – carjacking, it’s called. An acquaintance of mine, who was an ambulance driver, actually lost his ambulance in just that way – ambulancejacking. Now, of course, apartheid is overthrown, and everyone can vote, but the main change so far is that the new successful black politicians, and their relatives and friends, are all suddenly (surprise, surprise) much richer; so some thousands of black people are now driving expensive air-conditioned cars, and living in houses protected by “Armed Response”. But there is still an enormous discrepancy in wealth between the richest and the poorest, along with the high crime rates which always accompany such inequality.

So the theory among some members or supporters of the upper class is that it may be cheaper in the long run, and certainly more pleasant, to keep social benefits at a level which means that rich people have less fear of being robbed in a personal attack, or of having their houses burgled.

ALWYN EDGAR

The Levellers

After his visits to Iceland in the 1870s, William Morris concluded that 'the most grinding poverty is a trifling evil compared with the inequality of classes'. Where life was hard, there was little alternative to all being poor, but where some people were far richer and more powerful than others, that was far worse, since it was so unnecessary and deleterious. The consequences of inequality have recently been set out at length in *The Spirit Level* by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (published by Penguin, and reviewed in the *Socialist Standard* for June 2009). The authors have established a website (The Equality Trust, <http://www.equalitytrust.org.uk>), which is aimed at 'the widest public and political understanding of the harm caused by inequality'.

The book's subtitle, *Why Equality is Better for Everyone*, suggests the main thrust of its argument. The authors begin by discussing the relation between economic growth and standard of living on the one hand, and life expectancy and happiness on the other. As might be predicted, a low standard of living in a country means low life expectancy (fifty years or less), and an increase in per capita income means people living longer (to over seventy years). But there comes a point at which the relationship disappears, and the wealthiest countries (such as the USA and Norway) do not have greater life expectancy than the rather less rich (like Greece and Germany). A similar point holds for the proportion of people who describe themselves as 'quite happy' or 'very happy': the first stages of economic growth lead to people being happier but those in the richest countries are no happier than those in the slightly less rich.

But things are different when comparisons are made within one country.

In the US, for instance, those living in better-off areas do live longer than those in poorer areas. And for a whole set of health and social problems, Wilkinson and Pickett use a very wide range of data to argue that the more unequal countries have more of the problems. The rates for mental illness, to take one example, are far higher in the US and UK than in less unequal countries such as Germany and Japan.

In addition to mental illness, the problems covered are: levels of trust, life expectancy and infant mortality, obesity, children's educational performance, teenage births, homicides, imprisonment rates and social mobility. For thirty 'advanced' capitalist countries, the level of inequality is measured by the ratio of the income of the top to the bottom 20 percent (so the top includes many slightly better-off workers). To compare inequality across US states, they use a more complex measure called the Gini coefficient. In each case, they do not just record the correlation between inequality and the extent of the problem, but also discuss why such a correlation should hold. And countries tend to perform badly on all the measures if they do badly on one:

"If...a country does badly on health, you can predict with some confidence that it will also imprison a large proportion of its population, have more teenage pregnancies, lower literacy scores, more obesity, worse mental health, and so on."

Let's look more closely at some of the problems. The level of trust is measured by how many people agreed with the statement 'most people can be trusted'. In Portugal only 10 percent agreed (!), in Sweden 66 percent. The proportion in the US who agree has fallen from 60 percent in 1960 to under 40 percent in 2004. It is quite a commentary on the nature of

"If a country does badly on health you can predict that it will also imprison a large proportion of its population, have more teenage pregnancies, lower literacy scores, more obesity and worse mental health"

capitalism that so many people do not trust others. As Wilkinson and Pickett say, 'High levels of trust mean that people feel secure, they have less to worry about, they see others as co-operative rather than competitive.' And inequality causes lack of trust, rather than vice versa.

As for obesity, a greater proportion of adults and children are overweight in more unequal countries, and this correlation is stronger for women than for men. Lack of exercise and reliance on fast food are the main causes here, and unemployment also tends to lead to weight gain. A more tentative argument is that people suffering from stress respond to food by accumulating fat around their middle as well as by comfort eating. Socialists don't normally argue that socialism would drastically reduce the extent of obesity, but maybe it will.

In the case of violence, the general argument is that it is in most cases triggered by humiliation and loss of face when people feel they are disrespected or looked down on. Shame and lack of social status (in terms of education, income, housing, etc) can make us all resentful, even if relatively few will react with violence. And 'increased inequality ups the stakes in the competition for status: status matters even more'. Many research studies have shown that violent crime (especially homicides and assaults) is positively linked with inequality. In the US, 72 percent of juvenile murderers grew up in homes without fathers, as family breakdown leads to inter-generational cycles of violence.

In the book's final part, Wilkinson and Pickett set out their ideas for 'a better society'. Some of the general points here are perfectly fine, such as recognition of the importance of friendship and mutual help: 'human beings have a unique potential to be each other's best source of co-operation, learning, love and assistance of every kind'. From a long-term historical point of view, the current highly unequal societies are exceptional, since the vast majority of humans have lived in extremely egalitarian societies.

What they argue for, of course, is a more equal kind of social system, in the belief that this will improve the quality of life for all. However, they stand not for socialism, but for a less unequal form of capitalism. There are different roads to greater equality, say the authors, but they all need to address the basic cause of inequality, the institutions that employ us. So the solution they advocate is for employees to own and control the companies that employ them. Workers might then vote for the chief executive to earn ten times the average wage (thus reducing but not eliminating inequality).

Yet this leaves the wages-prices-profit system of capitalism untouched. Most people will still have to work for wages, companies will still have to make a profit, workers will lose their jobs when the company can no longer make a profit from their labour power, the environment will still be desecrated in the search for cheap raw materials and higher profits. The waste of capitalism, with its banks and credit cards and accountants and ticket-collectors, will remain, as will the causes of wars.

It is clear that slightly less unequal versions of capitalism are possible, but also that they do not put an end to social problems, as even the more egalitarian versions still have them. It will take a socialist society to do away with the grotesque inequalities of capitalism and its inherent problems.

PAUL BENNETT



Currency wars

"MORE THAN a dozen countries", the *Times* (11 November) reported, "have been intervening in the foreign exchange markets to weaken their currencies and protect exporters, raising fears of a rerun of currency wars that damaged the world economy in the 1930s."

The 1930s – that's the spectre currently haunting those in charge of trying to run capitalism. Then, faced with the contraction of world trade, states tried to grab as much as was left by resorting to protectionism, export subsidies and devaluations. The conventional wisdom is that this only made things worse, deepening and prolonging the depression.

The World Trade Organisation (WTO), and its predecessor GATT, have made it difficult for states to adopt protective tariffs and export subsidies. So, all that's left, to try to get the better of their rivals (and it's a war of each against all), is to devalue their currencies.

Strictly speaking, since the collapse in 1971 of the Bretton Woods agreement, which had laid down fixed exchange rates between currencies, the sort of formal devaluation that the Labour governments of the 1960s were forced to carry out no longer occur. Currencies now "float", which means that their exchange rate with other currencies is determined by supply and demand on foreign exchange markets.

Normally (if there's a level playing field) what would happen is that the more a state exported the higher would be the demand for its currency due to those buying the exports having to acquire some to pay for these. This would lead to the currency's exchange rate rising; which would make its exports more expensive. Similarly, a state with a balance of trade deficit would find its currency's value fall; which would make its exports cheaper. So matters would be more or less self-regulating.

That's the theory. The real world is rather different, since governments can influence the exchange rate of their currency by affecting the supply and demand for it. If they want to keep its exchange value low (so as to encourage exports by making them relatively cheaper) they can increase the supply on foreign exchange markets by themselves selling more there (printing more if necessary). Which is what has been happening:

The US points the finger at China but China is not the only state trying to grab a bigger share of world trade in this way. One of the main reasons why Britain didn't join the euro was that this would have prevented it letting the pound float downwards to encourage exports. The US too has recently been increasing the supply of dollars (via "quantitative easing") with this end partly in view as a means of putting pressure on China to upvalue the yuan.

The matter was the main item of the agenda of the G20 summit in Seoul in November, but all that was agreed was to adopt a pious declaration condemning "competitive devaluations" and wishing for "market-determined exchange rates". Some sort of agreement may eventually be cobbled together. But maybe not. The competitive struggle for profits built-in to capitalism has already prevented agreement on a further round of tariff reductions, let alone on what to do about the threat of climate change.

A socialist life

Role-modeling Socialist Behavior: The Life and Letters of Isaac Rab. Karla Doris Rab. Lulu.com.



This book is a worthy account of the life and works of one of America's unsung working class heroes, Isaac Rabinowich, commonly known as Rab. Through the medium of his granddaughter's

personal account of Rab's family life, it is particularly valuable to be able to view a Socialist such as Rab as a real person, tolerant and enlightened, not just a faceless propagandist. Well illustrated, this is a useful and thought-provoking book, carried out in a charmingly eccentric style.

The story of Rab is, in a sense, the story of real Socialism in America. Rab was born on 22 December 1893 in Boston, the old home of American 'freedom'. His parents, Sheppie and Sarah, had recently arrived from the shetlets of eastern Europe but were literate and engaging, attributes which Rab inherited in spades. Rab also inherited his father's socialist background, joining the Socialist Party of America at the age of sixteen. Despite his humble origins, Rab excelled academically and was accepted for Harvard. However, wanting to be a real worker rather than an academic drone, he headed instead to an agricultural college in Ohio. A chance flood destroyed his practical project and exhausted his financial resources, so, in the summer of 1915, he headed to Detroit, where a well-placed class mate acquired him a job at the Ford's factory. Via the Detroit local of the SPA, he soon came into contact with Adolph Kohn and Moses Baritz, two SPGBers fleeing the effects of the First World War. The encounter was to change his life. Kohn and Baritz won Rab over to Marxism, to which he would dedicate the rest of his life.

On 7 July 1916, Rab and 42 other attendees of Kohn-Baritz classes established the Workers' Socialist Party of the United States, along the lines of the Socialist Party of Great Britain. Faced with political repression, the group was to be short-lived and in 1919 was reconstituted as a social club known as the Detroit Socialist Education Society. Shortly after Rab was sacked by Ford for his political activities and moved with his wife and young family

back to Boston.

The 1920s were difficult both politically and personally for Rab and it was not until the end of the decade that things began to move again. On a national level, comrades in New York began to issue a journal, *The Socialist*, Rab being one of the foremost contributors. Shortly thereafter, on 12 September 1930, the Workers' Socialist Party was reformed, with Rab a member of first Executive Committee. In Boston, Rab helped form a Socialist Education Society which in 1931 became the Boston local. It was around this time that Rab became friends with Anton Pannekoek, astronomer and Marxist theoretician, who stayed with Rab during trips to America. Rab was also on good personal terms with the council communist Paul Mattick.

In 1939, editorship of *The Western Socialist*, previously a journal of the Socialist Party of Canada, was moved to Boston because of fears that the paper might be suppressed due to the outbreak of the Second World War, it becoming a joint publication with the WSPUS. The following year, national headquarters was moved to Boston too. Boston remained the centre of WSPUS activity in North America for the next forty years.

Boston local continued its extensive social and political programme into the '40s, which were, perhaps, the golden age of the WSPUS. In 1947, confusion with the Socialist Workers' Party, a Trotskyist organisation, caused the WSPUS to be renamed the World Socialist Party, a significant development which has spread throughout what is now known as the World Socialist Movement.

The 1950s, as in this country, were a period of rapid and steep decline for real Socialism. The WSPUS was dogged at this time by controversies over the ballot and violence. Rab and the Socialist stalwarts, however, carried on with same enthusiasm.

Better times came in the 1960s, with the revival of radical politics with the Civil Rights and anti-Vietnam War movements and the opening up of new media for propaganda activities. The US Party was particularly enthusiastic in its use of radio programmes.

Rab remained throughout his life an active trade unionist, latterly as a member of the International Typographical Workers Union. He died in 1986.

Details on how to obtain a copy, write: WSPUS, P.O. Box 440247, Boston, MA 02144, USA or email spgb@worldsocialism.org

KAZ

South American elections

Dancing with dynamite. Social movements and the State in Latin America. Benjamin Dangl. AK Press.



Anarchists and anti-parliamentarists are always pointing to the overthrow of Allende in Chile in 1973 as an example of how the ruling class will not accept defeat

at the polls, not even by leftwing reformists let alone by the election of a majority of socialist MPs.

They are behind the times. The last 15 or so years have seen the election and survival of leftwing presidents in a number of South American countries (Bolivia, Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador, Argentina, Uruguay and even Paraguay), some of them with programmes more radical than Allende's. There was indeed an attempt to overthrow one of them (Chavez in Venezuela in 2002) but this failed due to popular resistance and the refusal of the armed forces to back it.

Of course this doesn't show that the ruling class might not stage a coup in the event of a socialist election victory, but it does rather undermine the argument that elections can never be a way to win control of political power.

In this book, brought out by an anarchist publishing house, Dangl examines the relationship – the "dance" – between "social movements" (in favour of land rights, legalising factory occupations, getting amenities in shanty towns) and the elected leftwing governments. He argues that the social movements should not put up candidates themselves nor let themselves be dominated by leftwing parties; instead, they should maintain their independence and continue to employ "direct action" to try to get what they want.

However, he is unable to take up a strict anti-parliamentarist stance because he can't deny the logic of the movements preferring a government that will help them to leaving political power in the hands of those opposed to their aims. None of the movements have, as Dangl is obliged to record, adopted this stance but have voted and even campaigned for the leftwing presidents.

OBITUARY

JACK BRADLEY

We regret to announce the death of Jack Bradley, aged 85, at his home on 7 November.

Jack joined the party in 1949. Before that he had come across the works of Marx and Engels, not as you might expect in the bookshops in Charing Cross Road in London, but whilst serving with the RAF in India towards the end of World War Two. He used to recall how British troops in India were incensed when at the end of the war they were told that strong armed forces would have to be maintained to fight the next war.

Like many of his generation he was expecting great things from the new Labour government and joined the Labour Party, but he was particularly disappointed to learn that the former owners of the newly-nationalised industries were not being given one-off payments, but rather government bonds, which didn't change their privileged positions.

Jack was an active member until a few years ago, particularly in publicity where he favoured emphasising the "one world" nature of socialism. The dangers of nuclear weapons was one of his special interests. In 1954 when the Japanese tuna fishing boat Daigo Fukuryu Maru (Lucky Dragon 5) was contaminated by nuclear fallout from a US atom bomb test in 1954, Jack and other members of the then Wood Green & Hornsey Branch wrote to the local paper of the nearest town to the incident offering their sympathy. Residents wrote to the *Hornsey Journal* to thank the branch for their letter. The editor, however, unjustly suspected some sort of put-up job and only made a guarded reference to the matter.

He always kept his eyes open for political ideas which were close to

extensively, mostly on Vietnamese folklore and Vietnamese and Chinese history. Several volumes of his work have been published in French; this is the first to appear in English.

In France Ngo Van progressed beyond Trotskyism to council communism. Articles that he wrote in 1968 on Third World struggles and the war in Vietnam are included in the book and express a point of view very similar to that of the World Socialist Movement. The book also contains helpful background notes and many photos, sketches and paintings by the author, who besides his other talents was an accomplished artist.

STEFAN

ours like those of the French ex-Trotskyists of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and the German ex-Trotskyists of *Contemporary Issues*, alerting other members that these had come round to the view that Russia was state-capitalist. Murray Bookchin (under various pseudonyms) was associated with this latter group for a time and Jack circulated his articles on how capitalism was destroying the world's ecology long before the Green Party was heard of. He himself liked to describe socialism as "one green world".

He was a collector of books and pamphlets on socialism and related subjects, and had several rooms full of them. He also amassed a collection of leaflets and documents of leftwing political organisations, some of which they might have preferred to forget. He did considerable research to see if the 17th century communist Gerrard Winstanley could have had any knowledge of Thomas More's *Utopia* via the publisher of a contemporary re-edition of its English translation. Unfortunately none of this original research was ever published.

He didn't fly aircraft when he was in the RAF, but in later years he obtained a pilot's licence for light aircraft—he had contempt for airliners, describing them as "flying computers".

Until a few years ago, he was a regular attendee at Enfield & Haringey branch meetings, but because of his slight build and age, he began to feel more and more apprehensive about venturing out at night, although he would still attend when he was able to get a lift from a member. His last job was for Westminster Council where he became a night duty officer.

We offer our condolences to his daughter, Alyson.

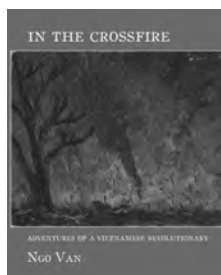
J.V.

The case for a mass socialist movement not taking electoral action is just as weak since this would be to leave the apparatus of the state in enemy hands. A socialist movement is no more likely to do this than the present-day social movements in South America have.

ALB

Revolutionary

***In the Crossfire: Adventures of a Vietnamese Revolutionary.* Ngo Van. Eds. Ken Knabb and Hélène Fleury. AK Press, 2010.**



This book preserves the memory of a part of the history of the class struggle that might otherwise be lost. The author, Ngo Van, was born in 1912 in a village

in what was then called Cochinchina – the southernmost of the three sections into which the French colonialists divided Vietnam. He came to maturity at a time of social upheaval. Peasants rose up against landlords and tax collectors, workers struck against atrocious conditions (the death rate on the rubber plantations reached 40 percent a year), and demonstrators demanded independence from France. These rebellions, and their savage repression by the colonial regime, are vividly portrayed in the memoir.

The political groups involved in the upheaval were very diverse. The Stalinist Vietminh were active, especially in the countryside, but there were many other anti-colonial movements that were not yet under their control. In the cities there were also several Trotskyist organizations. Chance contacts and revulsion against the regimentation within the Vietminh drew Ngo Van to Trotskyism and in 1935 he helped to establish a new Trotskyist group – the League of Internationalist Communists.

The Vietnamese Trotskyists were caught literally in the crossfire, hunted down both by the Sûreté (French colonial security police), who tortured and jailed them, and by the Vietminh, who simply killed them. The author was one of the few who survived by escaping abroad. From 1948 until his death in 2005 he lived in France.

While earning a living as an electrician, he remained politically active. In retirement he wrote

Meetings

Chiswick

Tuesday 7 December 8pm
EDUCATION AS IT IS AND HOW IT
COULD BE.
Speaker: Vincent Otter
Committee Room, Chiswick Town Hall.

SEASONAL SOCIAL

Tuesday 21 December 7.30pm
Barley Mow pub, 9 Barley Mow
Passage,
Chiswick, W4 4PH

East Anglia

Saturday 11 December 2pm
TWO SHORT FILMS - RSA Animate
Series
Smile or Die and *21st Century
Enlightenment*
The Workshop, 53 Earlham Road,
Norwich NR2 3AD.

London

FILM EVENINGS
Sunday 12 December 6pm
The Year of the Sex Olympics
Introduction by Mike Foster.
Socialist Party premises,
52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN
(nearest tube: Clapham North)

from page 11

essarily produce misery and exploi-
tation; and that the state, far from
standing in the way of free markets,
was an absolutely essential tool for
creating and maintaining them.

The truth is that, whatever the ap-
peal of the Tea Party or Ayn Rand to
working-class people, the ideas are
unlikely to have the desired impact
for one good reason: the business
elite and the capitalists, who Rand
and the Tea Party hold up as mod-
els of human virtue, don't like them

Kennedy to run U.S. capitalism



MR. KENNEDY'S victory at the American polls came as the culmination of years of patient ambition and at the end of a campaign of open cynicism, such as we have come expect from capitalist political parties.

When he started his attempt to win the Democratic nomination, Mr. Kennedy had several question marks against him. The principal of these was whether he could unite the trade unions, the industrial cities and the backward Southerners into supporting him. We now know how skilfully he did this, by the careful choice of his Vice-Presidential candidate and by the promises and opinions which he uttered. Such was the success of these tactics that, long before election day, many on-the-spot correspondents were prophesying that Kennedy's campaign would be irresistible.

Mr. Nixon showed a similar determination to win the presidency. Here is a man with an established reputation for single-minded

ambition which has led him into some unsavoury actions. Many people will remember Mr. Nixon introducing his pet dog into a television programme in which he was offering evidence of his integrity as a servant of the American public.

Mr. Kennedy based some of his case upon an appeal to the patriotism of American workers, alleging that United States' influence abroad has steeply declined during the Eisenhower presidency. Nixon's reply—similarly an appeal to patriotism—was that it was insulting even to suggest that U.S.A. is a second-rate power.

This, then, was an election campaign of by no means an unusual kind, in which members of the working class were asked to vote on issues of personality, nationalism and capitalist power politics, none of which has the slightest effects upon their basic interest (...)

It is depressing that American workers should be impressed by—indeed be part of—slick, high pressure salesmanship and cynical drives for power. For after the shouting and the ballyhoo have died, capitalism, in America and the rest of the world, remains unscathed.

(From editorial, *Socialist Standard*, December 1960)

either. As Lisa Lerer and John McCormick put it in a cover story in *Bloomberg BusinessWeek* (13 October), Tea Party ideas:

“... may sound like a corporate dream come true – as long as the corporation in question doesn't have international operations, rely on immigrant labour, see the value of national monetary policy, or find itself in need of a subsidy to boost exports or an emergency loan from the Fed to survive the worst recession in seven decades. Business leaders who favour education reform, immigration reform, or investment in infrastructure can likely say goodbye to those ideas for the short term as well.”

So there's little danger of

capitalists going too far in supporting “free market” or “laissez faire” capitalism – they understand their own business interests too well. The only remaining danger is that these ideas will continue to have a poisonous appeal for the working class, and to radical movements genuinely searching for answers to social problems. It's up to socialists to provide better answers and get them out there. Can the Tea Party save the American Dream? Probably not. Socialists certainly hope not. The American Dream has always been just that – a dream. Now, though, the dream is turning into a nightmare. It's time to wake up.

STUART WATKINS

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.



Woolas – another fine mess

THERE ARE limits. As Phil Woolas, until recently the MP for Oldham East and Saddleworth, was confronted when the Election Court found that during his campaign in May 2010 he lied about his Liberal Democrat opponent. Rather more complicated and exciting, if the Court judgement stands there will be a succulently fascinating by-election which promises to expose the ruthless assassnatory tactics of the participating parties, including the fact that, for all their mock indignation at Woolas' methods, the LibDems are not noted for having any more scruples than the rest. It will also provide the LibDems with an opportunity to explain to their angry, bewildered supporters why, in their euphoria at being part of the Coalition, they betrayed the election pledges they made – such as on child benefit and university tuition fees. It is likely to be an ugly, if entertaining, experience in which it has to be borne in mind that the whole process, for example Woolas and his mangling of truth, happens in order to transform one of the mendacious, grovelling candidates into an Honourable Member who, for example, cannot henceforth be denounced as a liar because the worst that is allowed to be said about anyone who gets to sit on those benches is that they suffer from some confusion over reality. Those are the kinds of limits which Woolas is said to have offended against.

Lumley

There are some significant differences of opinion about Woolas' conduct of his career as an MP and a Minister. On the one hand a Labour Party member who contested for the candidature in the 1995 by-election saw him as "...a hard-working member and a decent and conscientious person". But a political correspondent prefers "a political bruiser, not universally liked, whom some colleagues think got what he deserved at the election court..." And in the *Guardian* Julian Glover weighs in with "...an unpleasant authoritarian and parliament will be better off without him..." That first election campaign in 1995 was notable for the rancour of Labour's personal attacks on the LibDem candidate as being "high on tax and soft on drugs". This designed exploitation of some nasty, deep-rooted prejudices impressed even Peter Mandelson, who admitted "...not only our opponents but some in Labour would denounce our 'negative' tactics...For tactical reasons, I felt we had little choice". Woolas won the re-arranged seat in 1997 and thereafter rose steadily up the greasy pole until in October 2008 he became minister responsible for Borders and Immigration. It was then, in May 2009, that he was trapped into a confrontation, before a horde of ravenous TV cameras, with the popular actor Joanna Lumley to answer for the Labour government effectively refusing Gurkha ex-soldiers to settle in this country. Woolas wordlessly squirmed in embarrassment – Lumley breathes rather than speaks and was using hazy concepts like fairness and gratitude while he had to have regard for his budgets – and agreed to re-open the matter.

Cable

One inconvenient outcome of Woolas' electoral misdemeanour was the stimulus it gave to the pressing question of why similar penalties are not unvaryingly applied to any MP who employs false promises to smooth their way to Westminster (although if that were the case there would be very, very few bottoms on the green benches). The actual response has been worked to exhaustion by LibDems fearfully insecure of their place in the Coalition. Here, for one, is Vince Cable in the House of Commons on 12 October: "Yes I signed the pledge (on university tuition fees). But the current financial situation is appalling, truly appalling. All pledges have to be re-examined from first principles". But this is the man who was promoted to us by his party as not just an agile ballroom dancer but an economist so deeply learned as to be able to see beyond the economic horizon to what is approaching and to take the



necessary steps to avert any crisis such as the one which is now gripping the world. So it is necessary to ask: are there any other disasters which Cable has failed to see? And from the prolix depths of this ignorance did he offer any other pledges, attractive to a spellbound electorate, which he is now about to renege on?

Clegg

And what about the LibDem leader who, smugly satisfied at having outsmarted all rivals – including Cable – for the top job, felt able to patronise him as the most hopeful therapist for British capitalism? Since the LibDems slithered into partnership with the Tories Clegg has been under the most severe pressure about the party's disowned promises. This is how on 23 October he referred to child benefits and tuition fees: "I feel very bad. I have had to eat those words...this is not capricious, it is not ideological, it is not happening overnight, it is thoughtful and it is a plan over four years..." And in the Commons on 10 November: "I of course acknowledge that this is an extraordinarily difficult issue ... Because of the financial situation we have had to put forward a different policy..." But Clegg has been touted around the political scene as a hugely knowledgeable, clever operator. With such a glowing reputation how could he have been so insensitive to the gathering storm that he not only made those pledges but allowed the rest of his party to do likewise? Why should we have any confidence that he will become any more hopeful over the next four years?

Clegg and Cable now pose as serious politicians, relieved and grateful to have been put right about the election pledges which, they now admit, were recklessly ill-informed. Are their excuses really the best they can offer to cover their impotence and dishonesty? Are there any other pledges which they will betray in the hope of nurturing their sleazy ambitions? Should we, in other words, believe anything they and their like say? Is it not preferable to treat them all with the contempt they deserve while we work on for the revolutionary change in society.

IVAN

Voice from the Back

Cold And Skint

One of the illusions that seems to persist about capitalism is that in Britain it is gradually getting a little bit better, but the facts contradict that notion. "The number of households struggling to afford to stay warm has more than doubled in the past six years according to official figures. An extra 2.5 million homes have gone into fuel poverty since 2004, a report by the Department of Energy and Climate Change said. Homes are defined as living in fuel poverty if they have to spend more than 10 per cent of their income to maintain a minimum temperature of 21C in their main living area."



(Times, 15 October) "Almost two-thirds of older people in Northern Ireland cannot afford to heat their home through the winter, it has been revealed. The fuel poverty rate among people aged over 60 is up 15% on four years ago and now stands at 60.5%, according to the latest House Conditions Survey. The study conducted by the Housing Executive shows that the situation is even worse for older people living on their own – with almost four-fifths officially designated as living in fuel poverty. (Independent, 28 October) Amidst all these bureaucratic figures one thing is obvious, during the last six years more working class kids and old folk have had to go to bed shivering. This is progress?."

Profits Before Safety

In their ruthless pursuit of bigger and bigger profits the owning class care little for human life or the pollution of the planet, but even

by their standards the oil rig disaster in the Gulf of Mexico illustrated a complete contempt for humanity in capitalism's efforts to cheapen production costs. "The companies involved in drilling the BP Macondo well in the Gulf of Mexico were aware that the cement they used to seal the well before it blew out was unstable. That is the conclusion of a US presidential panel investigating the reasons behind the April 20 explosion and ensuing oil leak. Both BP and the US company Halliburton had received test results on the cement showing it to be unstable - but neither acted on the data." (The Week, 29 October) All the companies involved are trying to shift the blame for the explosion on to each other, but the truth is that capitalism by its very nature causes such disasters. Capitalism, let's face it – is a disaster!

Another Illusion Goes

One of the illusions about capitalism that its supporters are always proclaiming is that it is a ruthlessly efficient society that rewards honesty and punishes double-dealing. It is not a view shared by the capitalist class themselves as illustrated by this recent European Commission

report.. "The European Commission has fined 11 of the world's largest airlines £799 million for their part in a conspiracy to fix the price of cargo shipments. British Airways is among the carriers to be fined and has been ordered to pay a 104 million euro (£90 million) penalty." (Times, 10 November) The capitalist class are fond of lecturing workers about honesty, but when extra profits can be realised they are not adverse to a bit of sharp practice.



Big Bucks Ballot

Defenders of American capitalism are fond of claiming that it is a model of democracy in action. It is however a strange sort of democracy wherein money is the real dictator. Take the election campaign of Meg Whitman for the California Governorship. "With nearly two weeks to go before the election the eBay billionaire's campaign to become chief executive of California has already smashed all records. At \$140 million (£89 million) it is the most expensive non-presidential campaign in American history and the deepest any candidate has ever delved to fund their campaign." (Times, 25 October). There is nothing unique in large corporations pouring millions of dollars into election campaigns, but in this case we have an individual spending a grotesque amount that represents about \$8.24 for every one of California's 17 million registered voters. Her opponent has spent a "mere" \$20 million, that is just over a \$1 a voter.



Free Lunch

