

socialist standard



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

Taking it to the wire

Why capitalism borders on madness



Kill ratios
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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.

If you would like more details about The Socialist Party, complete and return the form on page 23.



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FEBRUARY 2011

Editorial

The power to change the world

IT IS always inspiring to see people power in action, as in Tunisia last month, where it forced the local dictator to flee after twenty-three years in power. It shows that people are not always passive victims but have the potential to topple capitalism not just dictators.

In all countries society is divided into two classes: those who own and control productive resources and want them operated to bring them a financial profit and the rest of the population who depend on them to live.

All governments have to give priority to profits and profit-making as this is what drives the capitalist economy. When profits are under pressure, as at present, they have to impose an added austerity on the population which inevitably brings them into conflict with them.

One of the key jobs of any government is to keep the population quiet, basically to avoid them rioting. In a developing capitalist country such as Tunisia this can't be done without regular recourse to brute force. Which is why most of the governments of such countries are more or less authoritarian, compared, that is, with those of the more developed countries where lies and trickery generally do the job.

This situation is tacitly accepted by Western governments as they want social peace, however obtained, in the countries where they have profit-seeking investments. They need governments there that keep the people down. As long as a government does this they can

expect support, as Ben Ali got from France for years. But woe betide a dictator unable to stop the population getting out of hand. He may initially continue to be supported but eventually an exit strategy will be prepared for him – exile in a country where he and his family can live off the loot all far-seeing dictators stash away.

When a dictatorship is toppled people feel empowered by what they have done but that is not enough. One demonstrator in Tunisia, asked what he expected to happen next, replied simply "I don't care. I'm just glad to see the back of him". But "what next?" is the key question as kicking out a dictator does not change the economic realities of capitalism – nor the repressive role of governments.

We take no pleasure in pointing out that any new government in Tunisia, even though less corrupt (or not corrupt at all) and enjoying more legitimacy, will still have to keep the population down in the interests of capitalism.

The only way the population in Tunisia, and elsewhere, can avoid having to protest at an artificial scarcity being imposed on them in a world of potential plenty is to join with workers in the rest of the world to get rid of capitalism, its class rule and its production for profit. This means making the natural and industrial resources of the Earth the common heritage of humanity. It means establishing a world without borders where the resources which already exist can be used to provide plenty for all.

The final frontier

A ROW has blown up between the US Congress and Nasa over people-carriers. Congress is insisting that Nasa stick to its plan of developing a rocket capable of taking manned missions beyond low earth orbit by 2016, which Nasa sniffily says it can't do (*New Scientist*, 22 January). Presumably Congress doesn't want Richard Branson or SpaceX to corner the space tourism market but the warring parties seem to have overlooked what the US Air Force is up to. The military has just lobbed a highly classified 13 tonne satellite into space aboard a Delta IV rocket (*BBC Online*, 21 January) and could presumably be modified to do the same thing for a crewed spacecraft. This is the second huge satellite sent up by a Delta rocket in the past three months on behalf of the National Reconnaissance Office, which reports to the CIA and the Department of Defense. The NRO are of course keeping zipped about the payloads but surveillance is the most likely purpose.

Congress is also doubtless embarrassed that Uncle Sam is having to rely on Russian rockets to get its own and the European Space Agency's astronauts up to the International Space Station (ISS), now that the space shuttle fleet has been all but mothballed. Once considered a lunatic folly and, at around \$160bn, estimated to be the most expensive object ever constructed, the ISS has survived cuts, shuttle disasters, air leaks, meteorite punctures and bad press to acquire an almost iconic status. In space technology, anything that actually works for longer than 6 months tends to do that, like Hubble and the Mars Rover. The Italian astronauts currently cooped up in this flying garage are texting, twittering, Facebooking and doing live TV interviews, while some genuinely useful science is also being done in the microgravity conditions.

In defiance of the recession, the space business is booming, due largely to satellite broadcast services like BSkyB. UK space companies are reported to have a turnover of £7.5bn with a 15 percent annual rise in employment (*BBC Online*, 8 November 2010). With this kind of growth potential the UK government has now decided to get in on the act and start to sever its highly expensive commitments to the European Space Agency, the French and German dominated group which co-manages the ISS. This April, the UK Space Agency will be inaugurated with its own £200m annual budget, around one fifth of the space budgets of France and Germany. Meanwhile the European Commission has announced that



What's going up, doc? Delta IV launch, Vandenberg, Cal. 21 January

the Galileo project, a 30-satellite GPS system for the EU, will cost around €5bn, just one day after a senior Galileo contractor was sacked for calling the whole project 'a stupid idea' (*BBC Online*, 18 January).

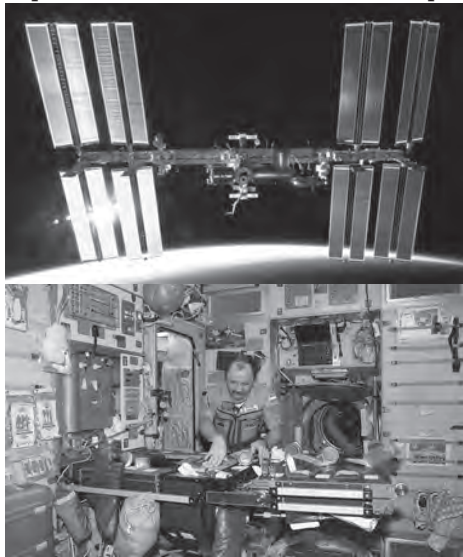
A socialist might also wonder why we need all these satellites, given that most of them do pretty much the same thing. Well, we don't, but the various competing sections of the ruling class do. The Navstar satellites that make up America's GPS system are controlled by the military, giving the US a huge advantage in any future power-plays as well as wars. First to break the GPS dependence was Russia, with its Glonass system, then the US tried to stop the EU developing Galileo. Now every country that can buy or borrow the technology is lofting its own satellites and GPS systems into space, for fear of being shut out by enemies or simply by trade

competition. In January China announced development of its own Beidou Navigation System. India meanwhile has sent up 7 satellites and would have sent up another one last month but the rocket blew up. 52 countries currently have payloads in orbit and the queue for rockets is getting longer. ESA claims 2011 is 'the year of the rocket' and is planning one launch every month.

Of course the various countries are talking about making their GPS systems compatible so they can share, but that's not what they're up there for. Any future war without satellite navigation and surveillance is unwinnable, as Iraq found out twice. Even Belarus, Colombia and Iran have their own satellites. Ominously, both the USA and China have in recent years used surface missiles to shoot down their own satellites, but rockets will only reach so far. Those in medium to high earth orbit would require space-based technology, possibly lasers, which would have to be pretty hefty, possibly requiring a heavy lift rocket like the Delta IV.

The sky is getting pretty crowded these days, with approximately 3,000 satellites in orbit. That they don't crash into each other too often is due to the vast ranges of these orbits, although two satellites the size of small cars did pile into each other at 7 miles per second in February 2009. The US Space Surveillance Network is still trying to find all the pieces, on top of the 8,000 other pieces of junk they are tracking, all of them barrelling around the globe at 13 times the speed of a bullet. Space tourism is likely to be a risky business in more ways than one.

On the positive side, a former SpaceX engineer has started a fund to buy a comms satellite from a bankrupt firm and plant it in geostationary orbit where developing countries can use it (*New Scientist*, 22 January). *Buythissatellite.org* argues that internet access is a human right, but more pragmatically points out that since India is now bringing out a \$12 laptop there is no great reason why everybody can't get online. So far the fund has raised \$30,000, which wouldn't pay for a rocket's spark plug. Funny that Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook, now valued at \$50bn, hasn't thought of buying himself some popularity by putting up the cash. Once we have passed that other final frontier into socialism, this kind of problem would not even arise. Press button, move satellite, end of.



Hardly Star Trek - the ISS inside and out

Papal Bull

Dear Editors

I was disappointed that the article in response to the Pope's visit ('Against Religion', *Socialist Standard*, November) failed to address the reasons why his attack on secularism and atheism was objectionable. The article was introduced as a reply to the Pope's assault, but it really consisted of a generic dismissal of Christianity.

The arguments put forward are not solid or up-to-date. The Vatican has never presented the bible as its main evidence for the existence of God, and does not hold that it contains infallible history or geology – there are no "Biblical accounts of the Earth's age".

You write that the bible is full of contradictions, which isn't criticism. The bible is a compendium of books written over 1600 years by dozens of different authors in a similar number of styles and genres – no-one claims it is (or could be) consistent.

The article makes fair points, but like a lot of attacks on Christianity it beats the Church over the head with a stick it didn't make – typically refuting claims that no-one is making and calling non-existent dogmas nonsense.

I would have rather seen the Pope's mantra of blaming relativism turned on his own subculture.

The Catholic Church twists and adapts its form and content to suit the age and defend its power – the Vatican was only mildly embarrassed when one of its priests became dictator of Slovakia, but at least in the 1930s the Church was openly Fascist.

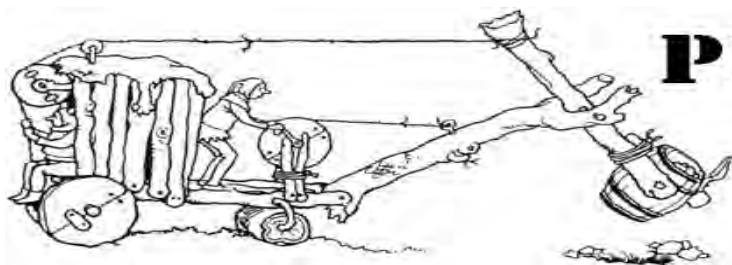
We can easily dismiss the Pope and his visit in 2010 as irrelevant. We can do the same for the Royal Wedding this year. But the fact remains that thousands of people will be engaged by these events and by the messages they give out. A critical socialist response needs to be incisive and to the point – generic and dismissive doesn't cut it.

Eddie Jarvis (by email)

Reply:

You are correct. The article was a criticism of christianity generally and not of the dogmas of the Roman Catholic church in particular or of the arrogant, superstitious (he believes in miracles) and deluded (he thinks he's god's representative on Earth) man who heads it. His particular sect might not place much store in the stories of the bible but lots of other christian sects do. They think the bible is literally true and also that it is consistent – as you would have thought would those who think its authors were inspired by god when they wrote it.

– *Editors.*



PRODUCTION VALUES

A sideways glance at capitalism through some of its products. This month: bottled water

It may come as a surprise to younger readers to learn that water hasn't always come from the supermarket in plastic bottles. There was apparently a time when you could drink it pretty much for free, straight out of the tap. Just as if it fell out of the sky!

But that was in the bad old days. Before consumers wised up and demanded that all those empty spaces waiting on supermarket shelves were filled with rows of different brands of bottled water. Petitions, campaigns and protests demanding new beverage "experiences" finally forced manufacturers and retailers in the 1980s to relent and meet consumer demands for water filtered through Corsican volcanic rock, carved from ancient arctic glaciers or condensed from mountain clouds in Fiji. (These high-end products are of course in the minority. Most products, despite the iceberg or mountain stream on the label come via a tap in an industrial estate, across from an abattoir, just off the M6).

To think that there was a time when we used to think there was just water! H₂O our science teachers used to call it, which does scant justice to the range of minerals,



fizz and flavourings that can now be pumped into this "pure" product. None of which appears to make much real difference, it has to be said. According to the *Observer*, one blind tasting panel praised a particular water's 'fresh, sweet, lemony aroma' only to inform them it came from a tap in a Birmingham public toilet. Taking the piss surely.

Under capitalism there is nothing new under the sun. Not even rain. The market wasn't of course responding to a real demand so much as completely creating that demand. Perrier and Evian are hardly even an example of capitalism's supposed dynamic inventiveness, more a case of "old wine in new bottles".

Humans need water. But capitalism doesn't need humans – unless they can be employed or sold to. So because they are too poor, 3,000 children die each day from diseases caught through drinking tainted supplies. Their mistake? - to be born not as capitalists, nor even as consumers under the market system. In some regions wars are fought over which capitalist controls the water. Every time a borehole is dug a common resource is sucked up, enclosed and sold back to us. Does capitalism think we will swallow anything? Clear as.

Next month: We look at "the best a man can get". A cure for cancer?! Of course not, we're just looking at the razor blade.

Training to Kill, Training to Sell

IS AGGRESSION part of our human nature? Are we born killers? Socialists don't think so. Nor, as it so happens, does Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman, a military psychologist who claims to have invented a new science called "killology".

In his book *On Killing*, Grossman shows that without special conditioning almost all of us are extremely loath to kill anyone. For the "masters of war" (as folk singer Julie Felix called them) this is a big problem. Brigadier General Marshall found that only 15-20 percent of American foot soldiers in World War II ever fired their rifles (and some of those deliberately missed). Similar results have been obtained for the American Civil War and World War I.

We have powerful inhibitions against killing our own kind, and these inhibitions remain strong even when we are under direct threat of being killed ourselves. Trauma in war veterans is rooted mainly in feelings of guilt at having killed. Medics and others who though constantly exposed to the danger of death are not required to kill rarely suffer trauma.

How then did so many people manage to get killed in these wars?

Well, a tiny minority (2 percent) did enjoy killing and made a vastly disproportionate contribution to the body count. Also, inhibitions are much weaker when due to distance or for some other reason you can't see your victim's face. Where weapons are operated by teamwork, social pressure comes into play and the sense of personal responsibility is diffused. Finally, a soldier will generally kill if an officer is right behind him yelling: "Kill him, for God's sake, kill him!"

In response to Marshall's study, the US armed forces developed more realistic and psychologically intrusive training methods. During physical exercise new soldiers chanted: "Kill, kill, kill, kill!" Instead of aiming at the bullseye on a geometrical target, they learned marksmanship by shooting at human-shaped silhouettes. And they were forced, by means of specially designed head and eyelid clamps, to watch many hours of gory war films that desensitised them to the sight of carnage.

The new conditioning methods were effective. The proportion of soldiers who fired their rifles soared to 50 percent in the Korean War and 90 percent or higher in Vietnam. At last soldiers were made to act like efficient killing machines. Of course, they were not really machines. As human beings they paid for their "improved performance" in intensified trauma.

Today's young people are also being conditioned to kill by watching increasingly violent films and television programming. Most dangerous of all are interactive video games that simulate armed combat. Using the same methods as in military training, they inculcate the practical skills as well as the psychological response mechanisms needed for efficient killing.

I was struck by one of the reader's reviews of *On Killing*

at the Amazon site. The reviewer, a sales manager, comments that his profession has a problem that closely resembles the generals' problem of soldiers who are reluctant to kill. Many of us, it appears, are not just insufficiently aggressive to kill people. We even aren't aggressive enough to clinch a sale!

Perhaps, the reviewer muses, the same methods that work so well on soldiers could be adapted for use in the field of sales. The mind conjures up an image of squads of uniformed salespeople at boot camp, chanting "Sell, sell, sell, sell!" as they run.

The literature on training sales personnel discusses a dire condition called Inhibited Social Contact Initiating

Syndrome or (more narrowly) Sales Call Reluctance. This syndrome, we learn, affects over a quarter of salespeople. They have negative thoughts and emotions that inhibit them from trying hard enough to sell things. Companies can test job applicants to screen out those prone to the malady by purchasing a "diagnostic" questionnaire (110 questions).

The emotions that inhibit sales workers from performing well are of various types – at least twelve, according to

"behavioural scientist" George W. Dudley, author of *The Psychology of Sales Call Reluctance*. Many, for instance, feel embarrassed to solicit sales from individuals of higher social status than themselves.

The main problem, however, is lack of aggression. People feel "distress, fear and anxiety" at the mere thought of seeming "pushy".

Sales coach Paula Crutchley has a confession to make: "When I first started in business, I sometimes felt overly concerned about the feelings of others." (Shame on you, Paula!) View the initial sales contact as building a relationship, she advises. "This point of view will make the process easier on your soul." Although she has learned not to be "overly" sensitive or considerate, her soul is still giving her trouble.

Her colleague Tom Crouser expresses a tougher outlook. Here is his comment on the "toxic condition" of "yielding to others": "Children are taught that it's rude to impose your will on anyone. But selling is all about imposing your will on others." Being a manager, he adds, is also all about imposing your will on others.

The soldier, the salesperson and the manager do indeed share a common plight. They are required by their bosses to dominate others. However, it is not *their own* will that they impose, but rather the will of those who dominate them and others through them. In order to impose this alien will, they must constantly suppress their own. The clash between this inner will and the insecurely internalised will of the boss causes them agonising inner conflict and confusion. The class struggle rages within their souls.

STEFAN





cooking the books

Doom and gloom

IN NOVEMBER David Segal of the *New York Times* interviewed a number of economists to see what ideas they had about how to get out of the current slump (www.nytimes.com/2010/11/28/weekinreview/28segal.html).

His opening words were “we are not going to shop our way out of this mess”. Which is true enough since capitalism is not a system geared to meeting consumer demand but one driven by capital accumulation out of profits. Consumer demand merely reflects capital accumulation. If capital accumulation stalls, as at present, so does consumer demand. Consumer demand can only increase if capital accumulation does; it can't wag the dog.

The silliest suggestion came from Professor James K Galbraith who proposed paying unemployed workers their full social security benefits when they reached 62 which, he claimed, would create jobs because “they would have 22.5 percent more purchasing power than they would if forced to wait until the age when full Social Security benefits kick in”. But where would the money to do this come from? Only by transferring it from somewhere else in the economy, but this wouldn't increase overall demand. Since he was also recorded as saying that “we're likely to see a situation that makes people angry and miserable for years” he didn't seem particularly convinced that his proposal would be adopted.

Professor Gar Alperovitz saw the way-out as via more employee-owned enterprises. “If the economy and the government don't have an answer to the problem,” he said, “people are forced to try social enterprise.” But such enterprises – small businesses such as laundries – are not going to generate enough investment to get capital accumulation going again. In fact they survive largely by paying lower wages and accepting lower profits than a business normally would. Most will probably eventually go bust anyway.

Others realised that only something that would stimulate capital investment might work. Someone suggested investing in “green energy initiatives” but wasn't too convinced that this would happen as, not being profitable in the short run, it would require government subsidies to get started. Someone else suggested that as the average age of the population was rising there would be more demand for medical treatment and that this could generate investment in technological breakthroughs in this field.

A mad marketeer from the Cato Institute pointed out, correctly as it happens, that “time was a key ingredient to a recovery”. Yes, time for the slump to create the conditions for a slow recovery, through unemployment exerting a downward pressure on wages and spare capital exerting a downward pressure on interest rates, both of which help to restore the rate of profit. He, however, looked forward gleefully to another consequence: governments cutting their spending to lower taxes on profits. “I think,” he said, “we also have a bubble in the labor market for state and government employees and over the next two years we might see as many as one million of these employees lose their jobs.”

Professor Andrew Caplin saw the answer in a growing inequality of wealth and income providing jobs for “the poor and middle class to cater to the economy's biggest winners” servicing them as cooks, nutritionists and financial advisers. “Professor Caplin worries,” reported Segal, “that this concept might be caricatured as ‘cater to the rich’.” As well he might, but, given capitalism, he was on the right track. Increased inequality – a shift in favour of property-incomes – is a necessary, though not a sufficient, condition for a resumption of capital accumulation and, when it eventually does, will lead to a further increase in inequality.

That's all capitalism has to offer – periods of pain alternating with periods of increased inequality. It's not so much economists as the system they study, capitalism, that's dismal.

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Witch side are you on?

It's always strange when, after conversion from one religion to another, someone says "I was born a Christian" (or Muslim, or whatever), "but I've converted to Hinduism/Judaism/The Celestial Flying Teapot" or whatever it is. Of course, none of us is born Christian or Muslim or anything else. We're born with no knowledge or beliefs in any god. In fact we're all born into a state of atheism.

If someone 'born' into a religion – any religion – suddenly became aware of the fact that by some freak occurrence it was the wrong god they had been born with, and they had to convert to another one, surely God only has himself to blame. These gods certainly move in mysterious ways.

There's been a bit of juggling from one deity to another in the news lately. The strangest case by far must be that of Christine O'Donnell the 'Tea Party' candidate for a seat in the US Senate. After apparently being brought up as a God-fearing Christian her faith in Jesus was shaken. "I dabbled into witchcraft," she admitted. "One of my first dates with a witch was on a satanic altar." Maybe she once wrote to Santa but mistakenly sent the letter to Satan. We'll never know.

However, by the time the midterm elections were under way she had found

Jesus again. After reassuring the American public that "I'm not a witch" she went on to explain to them the truth about (amongst numerous other things) Evolution, Socialism and Masturbation.

"Evolution is a myth. Why aren't monkeys still evolving into humans?"

"America is now a Socialist economy. The definition of a Socialist economy is when 50% or more of your economy is dependent on the federal government".

And her views on masturbation were numerous and detailed. Hardly the sort of thing sensitive readers of the *Standard* want to hear. Well OK then, just one – "Masturbation is a form of adultery." Do you think she's been doing it wrong?

As someone once pointed out. "The trouble with political jokes is that they sometimes get elected." This one didn't.

Back in the UK Lauren Booth, an English language Iranian TV channel journalist, and Tony Blair's step-sister in law, spent most of October hogging the headlines with her conversion to Islam. "Almost unnoticed to me, when praying for

the last year, I had been saying 'Dear Allah' instead of 'Dear God', she informed readers of the *Guardian* while complaining about the 'screams of faux horror' from her fellow columnists. In fact they were mostly screams of laughter at the latest antics from Blair's extended family.

Tony himself, of course, famously recently undertook a religious conversion when he decided to become a Roman Catholic and nipped off to Rome with Cherie for an audience with the Pope. Imagine being a fly on the wall at his first confession when he was asked about his role in the Iraq war.

It must be confusing now in the Blair household. "Hide the pork pies and the communion wine, Lauren's coming round". Fortunately Roman Catholicism and Islam do have one thing in common. Both are dominated by old men wearing long black dresses. Maybe that's the attraction.

NW



Wicked witch o' the West

Christine O'Donnell

Tiny Tips

Sofia Whitcombe began her day with the startling realization that she might not be exactly who she thought she was. "My whole life, I thought I was a Capricorn," the 25-year-old New York publicist said. "Now I'm a Sagittarius? I don't feel like a Sagittarius!" Countless people were astonished by the "news" in Monday's *Star Tribune* in which Minneapolis astronomy instructor Parke Kunkle affirmed that the Earth's "wobble" has shifted the zodiac signs. The buzz has raced across the Web like a shooting star. Some people seemed angry. "I believe it's a zodiac scam," said Jose Arce, 38, from Fort Lee, N.J., who runs a body shop. "I've known myself to be a Sagittarius, I believe, since I was born. So to come up now with some new sign? It's unacceptable!"

<http://tinyurl.com/4a2yqyk>

A bluefin tuna fetched a record 32.49m yen (£254,000) today at

the first auction of the year at Tsukiji market in Tokyo, but the fish's

growing popularity across Asia has raised fears it will soon be fished into commercial extinction. The 342kg tuna easily beat the previous record, set exactly 10 years ago when a 202kg fish fetched 20.2m yen. Market officials are accustomed to seeing prices rise during the new year auction at Tsukiji, the world's biggest fish market, but today's winning bid was unexpected:

<http://tinyurl.com/26fkvw1>

Catholics who receive communion at Sunday mass believe the sacred wafer they swallow contains the body of Christ. New York health officials have warned the parishioners of a Long Island church that the wafers they received on Christmas Day may have also contained hepatitis:

<http://tinyurl.com/26vmp2n>

Everyone curses the taxman, but Romanian witches angry about having to pay up for the first time

are planning to use cat excrement and dead dogs to cast spells on the president and government today. Also among Romania's newest taxpayers are fortune tellers – but they probably should have seen it coming:

<http://tinyurl.com/338hnlk>

Men and women have been banned from shaking hands in a district of Somalia controlled by the Islamist group al-Shabab. Under the ban imposed in the southern town of Jowhar, men and women who are not related are also barred from walking together or chatting in public. The BBC's Mohamed Moalimuu in Mogadishu says the penalty would probably be a public flogging:

<http://tinyurl.com/38o8osw>

Using an expanded definition of poverty, the U.S. Census Bureau said it determined that 15.7 percent of Americans -- 47.8 million -- live in poverty:

<http://tinyurl.com/32nogn4>





Nothing New In Old And Sad

OLDHAM AND SADDLEWORTH – or, for those living in the wrong part of it, Old and Sad – is a parliamentary constituency in Manchester with an electoral history such that it has accrued a reputation – again, depending on where someone might live in it – of renown or notoriety. Even before the recent by-election the votes revealed acute political entanglement compounded of poverty, crime, racism, riots... All three major parties have won the seat during the last 20 years and it provided the first case in almost a century in which the campaigning was brutal enough to cause an elected MP – Phil Woolas – to be turfed out, leading to the recent by-election. In 1995 an authentic Socialist – a member of the Socialist Party of Great Britain – stood. The 46 votes cast for him were a sensible measure of the electors’ readiness to misuse their political power by preferring the usual rag-bag of reformist sterility.

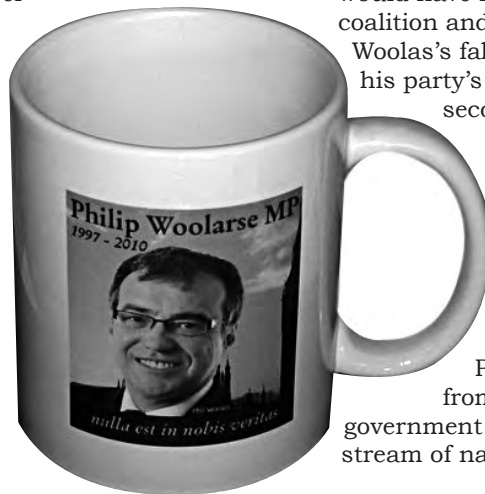
Poverty and Sickness

The constituency make-up is varied, from Saddleworth’s relative affluence to the social and racial mix of Oldham with its crowded terraces. Oldham is rated as 33rd among the country’s most deprived areas, with five of its wards among the worst 10 percent. The 1998 unemployment rate among ethnic minorities bore no relation to their proportionate presence. The grim link between poverty and sickness yields a death rate almost one third above the national average. From this noxious soil erupted the riots in May 2001 – the worst of their kind in the United Kingdom for fifteen years. In a history of consistently bitter electioneering 2010 was only the most recent example. Labour’s 1995 campaign was managed by Peter Mandelson, whose style was later excused by Woolas: “Peter may be a bastard but at least he’s our bastard.” The campaign of the then successful LibDem Chris Davies was guiltily excused by their future leader Charles Kennedy: “By-election hand-to hand electoral combat can throw up trenchant exchanges and tricky campaign behaviour. In days gone by I have experienced the occasional sharp intake of breath where some of my own side’s literature has been involved.”

Tory and LibDem

It might have been expected, as an opening to the Age of the New Politics, that the January by-election would have encouraged something fresh and novel from the candidates. Well, no. The Tory candidate, Oldham-born Kashif Ali, a “self-made” (however that is interpreted) local barrister signed a “clean politics” pledge but this excursion into stunning naiveté did not impress the other two principal candidates – or the electorate. His vote fell from 11773 in May, when he was a close third, to 4481, leaving him a long way behind the LibDem. There was a popular rumour that the Tory leadership had Ali running a quiet campaign, in case too high a vote for him would embarrass Nick Clegg: this was fiercely denied by the Tories, as if such back-stabbing would be foreign to all they stood for. LibDem Elwyn Watkins (whose polling day mail shot referred to him as just “Elwyn” without

mentioning his party) presented himself to the people of Old and Sad as: “...unlike some career politicians (did he mean Cameron and Clegg?) I have worked in the real world...I was taught the value of hard work, discipline and sticking with it...I’ve been made redundant twice – I know what it’s like.” He had made enough money to bankroll his candidature – and the legal challenge to Woolas – in something called “turning factories round”, including four years as “business analyst and financial adviser” to a Saudi Arabian sheik. And what about the embarrassment of that pledge he signed to oppose the rise in tuition fees? “If I had been elected in May I too would have had to compromise. I would go with the coalition and vote for it.” Unable to benefit enough by Woolas’s fall, or perhaps to escape being tainted by his party’s reputation for broken promises, his vote in second place was down by some 3000.



Labour Choice

The Labour Party chose Debbie Abrahams, who in the Colne Valley constituency in May came third with a vote falling from 17536 to 14589. She has had a career as a health professional, including five years as chair of the Oldham Primary Care Trust – a job she resigned from in 2006, in protest at what the Labour government were doing to the NHS: “I have seen a steady stream of national policies introduced...which threaten



Debbie Abrahams

these values and the future of a NHS that is equitable and free at the point for need...was how she announced this at a large Keep A NHS Public rally. But this does not mean she cannot “compromise” as dourly as any LibDems; now she blankets whatever doubts she has about her party and its policies by meaningless drivel about it being “...important that

the real issues and concerns of people in the borough are not lost during this election campaign...” Asked about Woolas, she merely said she felt sorry for him, that he had “paid the price for what he had done”.

The voters seem to have agreed with this, as the Labour vote held firm and Abrahams won and to have been angered by hearing from the Tories and LibDems – as they once heard from the Labour government – that the current problems of British capitalism are rooted in their slacking in superfluous jobs for high wages or living in luxurious homes on welfare benefits. Even if some of them may be among the 2000 local authority workers who will be sacked as the local authority make their expenditure cuts. There is nothing new in this – nothing new in the stress with the deprivation nor in the victims’ misguided response to it all as they divide their support among an unremarkably hopeless coalition of wangers.

IVAN

Let the walls

come tumbling down

How much longer are you willing to sit around and let a tiny minority divide us?

According to the Bible, 1400 years before our saviour arrived on Earth, the walls of Jericho came tumbling down; demolished by the buglers of the Israelite army marching around the city walls blowing their trumpets. No mention is made of any aural damage.

Walls have had several roles in society since their inception. Several thousand years ago our ancestors would have built rudimentary walls for shelter against the elements, and these eventually evolved in to the walls of communal living spaces.

With the emergence of private property walls began to assume a new role in society: the defence of landed property. Kings, queens, emperors and a motley assortment of nobles laid claim to the land through divine approbation and conquest. What had once been held in common ownership gradually came to belong to a tiny minority that enforced their ownership through coercion.

Fortress and City walls were not enough for some rulers. The threat of losing the property that had been stolen from the majority led to the construction of fortifications of immense proportions. The Great Wall of China was under construction from the 5th century BC up until the 16th century to protect the Chinese Emperors from a northern threat to their borders. Nowadays, it is a major tourist trap. However, it is doubtful whether the tourist guides reveal that 'it is estimated that over one million workers died building the wall' [wikipedia.org].

Medieval walled cities had become commonplace, but walls also served another purpose for those in power, and that was for imprisonment. Dungeons were often used to hold prisoners prior to execution or transportation. And, there was also debtors' prison, where the debtor was impris-

oned until the debt was repaid. But it wasn't until the 19th century that the modern prison system took root, beginning in Britain, when incarceration was viewed as a punishment in its own right. Walls could now be seen to confine members of society as well as repel them.

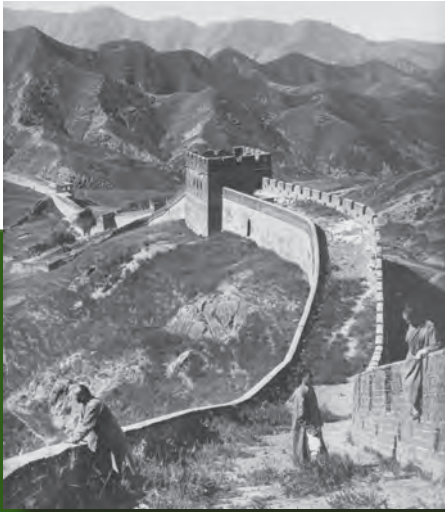


The Berlin Wall demonstrates how capitalist states can contain and control their populations. The construction of the 'Wall of shame', as the West Berlin state dubbed it, began on the 13th of August 1961. The state capitalist elite of East Germany declared that it was erected as a defence against fascists who were conspiring to impede the 'will of the people' from the building of a socialist state – which is a contradiction in terms. Its real function was to prevent the mass emigration of East German workers to the private capitalist workshops of the West. However, by 1989 the economic decline of the Russian empire led to a change in policy by their ruling elite, and

access to Russian coercion was to be denied to the puppet states. It was this that brought about the tumbling of the Berlin Wall.

Amid the rejoicing some people in power were not as jubilant as the East Berliners, and millions elsewhere. Margaret Thatcher, wary of a united Germany, was reported to have pleaded with President Gorbachev 'not to let the Berlin Wall fall', and to 'do what he could to prevent it happening' (*The Hindu*, Sep 15 2009). Similarly, the French President, François Mitterand warned Mrs Thatcher that a unification of Germany could lead to them making 'more ground than Adolf Hitler had', and 'that Europe would have to bear the consequences' (*Times*, 10 September 2009). Both quotes offer an insight into how the competitive nature of capitalism affects the thinking of its leaders, and directly works against the overwhelming majorities' hopes, dreams and desires of living in a humane world.

Israel's ruling elite ordered the construction of their wall in 1994, and duly baptised it the 'Separation Barrier'. You would have thought that the Israeli's might have recalled the wall that the Nazi's imprisoned 400,000 Jews behind in what became known as the 'Warsaw Ghetto' prior to their elimination, but evidently memories are short, and propaganda long. The justification for its construction is that it has been built to protect Israeli's from Palestinian suicide bomb attacks. Opponents regard the wall as a means to further annex Palestinian land, and that security is just a subterfuge. The wall also violates international law as laid down by the International Court of Justice. However, 'justice' under capitalism inevitably pans out as 'might is right', especially when the US is your Godfather.



Left: Jericho. This page, clockwise: the Great Wall of China; fortress city Galway; waving over the Berlin Wall; the Israeli Separation Barrier.

The establishment of an Israeli state was the goal of Zionism and its founder Theodor Herzl's entry in his 1895 diary reveals the thoughts of a 'righteous' man:

"We must expropriate gently the private property on the state assigned to us. We shall try to spirit the penniless population across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, while denying it employment in our country. The property owners will come over to our side. Both the process of expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discretely and circumspectly" (*Righteous victims*, p. 21-22).

The Israeli 'settlers' are also opposed to the barrier, but their opposition is because it appears to relinquish the Jewish claim to the 'Land of Israel'. This is the land that God promised to the descendants of Abraham. This is a biblical deal struck between God and the Jewish 'people' some 3500 years ago. It is also the ideological engine of Zionism, and the Likud party's rationale for the expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza.

Voltaire once wrote that 'if God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him', and like the ancient mariner, Jonah, who was supposedly swallowed by a whale, millions of people swallow the Bible's fairy tales as literal truths. And this suits the powerful; if it didn't the Bible, and all of the other 'holy books' would have been consigned to the fiction shelf of the Children's Library a long, long time ago. Within the Bible's pages we have a superman walking on water, and feeding four thousand people with a shopping bag of groceries. The Red Sea opening up to allow the 'chosen people' to cross, but the 'all loving' God deciding in his infinite wisdom to drown the pursuing Egyp-



tians. There's a man whose hair is the secret of his immense strength. A midget slaying a giant. Talking snakes, talking bushes, a dead man coming to life, and the useful trick of turning water into wine. Pages and pages of fantasy. But, in the hands of religious fanatics, and conniving élites these tall tales create intense misery for millions of people. And the 'Separation Barrier' is a symbol of that suffering.

Another 'separation barrier' has been constructed in the 'land of the free'. This 1951 mile long wall acts as a ragged border between the United States and Mexico. The justification from the US side about why they have erected this wall is that it is to deter drug smugglers and prevent illegal immigration. On neither count can the US authorities claim any success. The US is awash with drugs, as is the rest of capitalist society, and the answer to drug abuse does not reside in the construction of a wall.

The US Border Patrol in 2005 apprehended 1.2 million people trying to cross over from Mexico, and by their own estimates they only catch 1 in 4. In a country where it is estimated that 40 percent of the population live below the poverty line, it does not take a George Bush to understand what it is that drives these people to leave their homes and families for an uncertain future in a hostile country.

The North American Free Trade

Agreement (NAFTA), like every other trade agreement is always constructed to benefit the few to the detriment of the many. Contrary to the rhetoric of the capitalist media, NAFTA had a predictable effect on the Mexican people. The peso crashed soon after the NAFTA was passed, and those already struggling were pushed further in to penury. Economic migration became inevitable as this Oxfam report underscores:

"NAFTA has created dramatic economic dislocations in Mexico. These economic impacts, among other factors, are leading Mexicans to migrate...For example; imports of U.S. corn have severely affected the local Mexican agricultural sector. NAFTA arrangements have helped increase the imports from 3 million metric tons in 1994 to more than 5 million metric tons in 2002. Also, the brief rise in outsourced U.S. manufacturing that helped the Mexican economy has ceased as these factories have now moved to Asia" (OXFAM; USDA, Nadal, 2002).

Even the walls that once gave us a feeling of security is undermined by capitalism as the debt incurred on the commodity that people have been persuaded to call their homes, has been transformed in to four walls of anxiety through the threat of unemployment, or just a few upward ticks in interest rates. The question is how much longer are you willing to sit around and watch a tiny minority dominate your life? Why not help us to bring the walls of capitalism tumbling down? We are asking you, as Shelley, once did to:

"Rise like lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number
Shake your chains to earth like dew

Which in sleep had fallen on you.
Ye are many. They are few."

ANDY MATTHEWS

The craziest border in the world?

All borders are mad – it goes with the territory – but perhaps the world's craziest border is that between India and Bangladesh.

The very existence of the border is itself an act of madness, even in nationalist terms. This can best be seen on the western section of the border. On the Bangladeshi side of the border, Bengali speaking farmers tend their crops. Whilst on the Indian side of the border Bengali speaking farmers tend their crops! Linguistically, ethnically and culturally the people of Indian West Bengal and Bangladeshi East Bengal are identical, differing only in religion. The Islamic religion forms the sole basis of Bangladeshi nationalism, the state's only reason for existence, the only reason for the existence of the border. Nationalism based on religion is a lie compounded by falsehood: the lie of the mythical nation overriding all real class interests; the childish falsehood of the big man in the sky. In any case, neither Bangladesh nor India are religiously homogenous – around one fifth of the population of Bangladesh are Hindu, despite years of oppression, and a similar proportion of Indians are Muslim – making India the world's third largest Islamic country.

The line of division between India

and Bangladesh has its origins in the 1947 carve up of Imperial India. East Pakistan, as Bangladesh was known until 1971, was constructed in great haste from the districts of the Province of Bengal with a Muslim majority. Whilst West Pakistan (current Pakistan) had a reasonably



coherent frontier – deserts, rivers and mountains – East Pakistan was an amorphous blob with no clear geographical divide. The border line is, to say the least, wiggly.

An enclave is a fragment of one country entirely enclosed by another. Approximately 80 percent of the world's enclaves can be found along the northern stretch of the India-Bangladesh border. There are 92 Bangladeshi enclaves in India, 21 of which are counter-enclaves (i.e. Bangladeshi enclaves located in an India enclave within Bangladesh). India has 106 enclaves in Bangladesh including three counter-enclaves, and the world's only counter-counter-enclave. The latter, an enclave within an enclave within an enclave, is a jute field near the village of Dahala-Khagrabari. The enclaves range in size from 26 km² to a mere 53 square metres (Upan Chowki Bhaini, the smallest international enclave in the world).

Within the enclaves, known locally as Chitmahals, life is not pleasant. With the exception of one or two of the larger territories which have always been reasonably well organised, the fragments are outside the state system, their 70,000 inhabitants, known as the Nowhere People, effectively abandoned. Censuses are not taken, electoral rolls not made up and taxes not

collected. There are no proper roads, no hospitals, schools and police force. The enclaves are hives of ignorance, poverty and lawlessness, their inhabitants robbed, raped and murdered with impunity, a poor life experience even in terms of the rural subcontinent. Without a visa inhabitants cannot legally cross the border to go to school, hospital or market. However since they cannot obtain a visa without visiting the 'mainland', residents are effectively prisoners within their tiny fragments of land. The Latin root of the word enclave, *inclavatus*, meaning shut in or locked up, is indeed appropriate.

An additional 50,000 former inhabitants of the Indian Chitmahals are resident in India proper. Some left during or immediately after the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war, but most have fled during the last decade as community relations have deteriorated. These individuals are in a particularly poor plight, being recognised neither as Indian citizens nor as refugees and thus not being entitled to national benefits, such as they are, or international relief efforts.

The enclaves date back to a treaty of 1713 between the Maharaja

was not ratified by India, which had most to lose and was hobbled by an unstable political situation. Recently the position of the largest enclave, Dahagram-Angarpota, has been improved by the creation of the Teen Bigha corridor, a neck of land transferred from India to Bangladesh in 1992. Access however is only permitted during daylight hours.

Economically the effect of the division has been devastating. The border cut the great metropolis of Calcutta from its eastern hinterland, no mean factor in that city's decline, and elevated the minor provincial town of Dacca to capital status. India's highly productive north east was left isolated from the rest of the state – the rail link between Calcutta and Assam was severed in four places and not restored until a quarter of a century later. Particularly affected by the dislocation has been the area on the eastern section currently known as Tripura. Tripura has a 856 km border with Bangladesh but is linked to the Indian mainland only by a neck of land which narrows down to a mere 60 km wide. Illegal trade in this area alone amounts to some \$1.5 billion per annum – a tidy sum

south, through rich farming land to the forests and mountains of the north. Approximately 50,000 people have been made homeless by the erection of the fence. Although the suppression of terrorism is a stated aim (United Liberation Front of Assam rebels and various Islamist groups use Bangladesh and India respectively as safe havens), smuggling is a more important motive.

Immigration too is a factor in the erection of the fence. Poverty stricken Bangladeshis are migrating in droves to the newly developing lands of northeast India – it is estimated that there are around 20 million Bangladeshis illegally resident in India. Goaded by aspiring political leaders, the Assamese are particularly wary of being 'swamped' by migrant Banglas and have exerted considerable pressure to 'stem the tide'.

The erection of the barrier has not been unchallenged. In places, the construction runs close to or on the border, contrary to a 1974 treaty between Bangladesh and India which banned building in the proximity of the border. This has led to clashes between the Bangladesh Rifles and



A thinly guarded section of the India/Bangladesh border

of Cooch Behar and the Mughal Empire (the latter was taken over by the British in 1765 but Cooch Behar endured until 1949, one of the last princely states to cede to India). In Raj days, the existence of the enclaves was a mere matter of land ownership since there were no trade barriers and the enclaves were economically self-sufficient in any case. Only with the post-colonial carve up, did the Cooch Behar enclaves become at all significant. A territorial exchange was first proposed in 1958, and agreed by a 1974 treaty between India and Bangladesh however this

of duty lost to the governments concerned. Across the whole border around 100 people per year lose their lives mostly due to anti-smuggling actions – the Indian Border Security Force in particular has a tendency to shoot first and ask questions later.

In the last ten years, the Indian government has been erecting a fence along the border. The chain link construction topped with barbed wire stands 3.6 metres high and, with 3406 km authorised, will be by far the longest enclosed border in the world. This is a mighty construction task running from the mangrove swamps of the

India's Border Security Force with casualties inflicted on both sides.

A subcontinental Common Market between India and Bangladesh has been proposed and this would indeed make a certain degree of sense. However the degree of political ill-will makes an end to the division unlikely in the near future. Socialists are often reviled for their unrealistic utopianism in opposing 'natural' national divisions. Only by individual case studies can we find out how unnatural and insane such national divisions really are.

KAZ

Ghana – can oil make a difference?

Who fill benefit from the discovery of offshore oil in Ghana?

The fanfare and euphoria that greeted the discovery of oil in Ghana is not only based on the assumption that it will help boost the not-so-healthy economy of this poor nation, but other factors also lie behind all the hoopla. The reality of the actions of the global oil magnates in African countries is one such factor. They act in brazen defiance of the norms of civility and dignity of the local populations. The humiliating treatment meted out to Liberia's Charles Taylor due, in part, to his refusal to do business with Dick Cheney's Halliburton is a prime illustration of such corporate arrogance. But more importantly, the expectation of Western oil companies to make their super-profits is also a cause of the excitement.

The debates

When the actual pumping started in mid-December, the world media was full of all sorts of stories about Ghana hitting the jackpot. As discussions on the issue livened up attracting comments and analyses from Ghana and especially the BBC and RFI, the Squealers of the Ghanaian government got down to work. Amidst all this hullabaloo the PR people loudly rejected the claims of the 'prophets of doom' that Ghana will go the way of Nigeria, Angola, etc, where the oil wealth has become a curse rather than a blessing. They claimed that stringent measures have been put in place to forestall the grim prospect of corruption, mayhem, kidnappings and killings that Nigerians have had to contend with all these years on account of the petro-dollars.

However, it soon came to light that as the Squealers were frantically trying to convince the hardened sceptics to drop their deep-seated cynicism over

the project, the legislature had not even discussed the matter in parliament yet.

Not that parliamentary approval is of any relevance here since, generally, laws passed under this money-dominated economic system are either in favour of the rich and powerful or against the poor. But the fact that it had not even been done suggests that, contrary to government claims, no precaution whatsoever has been taken against the possibility of Ghana going the way of Nigeria, Angola and co. Or, even more seriously, that the Western companies have bulldozed the Ghanaian authorities into having the drilling started without ensuring that adequate protective legal mechanisms were in place. Contrary to what the Ghanaian authorities might claim, the investors are obviously the senior partners in this whole enterprise.

Then, later, some concerned Ghanaian observers suggested that even before the drilling had got started, Ghanaian policy-makers were already using the anticipated oil proceeds as collateral to contract loans from abroad. An ominous beginning if the rumour turns out to be true.

Production relations

The development of modern industry, brought about by the profit-oriented economic system, makes it necessary for the production of wealth to be socialised. This means that the point of production is not the individual factory, goldmine, oilfield, etc but society in general. It follows therefore that those who control



Niger Delta militants training Ghanaians



society are the ones who effectively control the use of the wealth produced. It is neither those who do the hard labour nor those who manage the workplace, i.e. the factory, goldmine or oilfield.

As the state, whether directly or indirectly, is the recognised controlling body of any society, it is an undeniable fact that whoever controls the state is the de facto controller of society and, by extension, the wealth produced.

It is also common knowledge that the political leadership in Africa, and indeed in all former colonies, have, to a large extent, the same tastes and lifestyles as the ruling elite of the former colonialists. The two groups share the same consciousness. Both work towards the preservation of the status quo – the exploitative relations of production – as it is the guarantor of their luxurious and parasitic lifestyle.

The so-called New World Order being vigorously pursued by these leaders in the West and their “experts” and advisers is nothing but an attempt at intensifying the exploitation of the world’s resources in the interests of the Western big business community whose interests Western governments serve. This insignificant minority of multi-billionaires control the wealth and political leadership of the West by virtue of their ownership of the means of production and distribution of wealth – land, factories, railways, the media, communication networks etc.

The states and governments of the former colonies are under the complete control of the Western powers and if any of these poor countries shows the slightest sign of attempting to resist Western domination, such a country is brutally forced to ‘cooperate’. That is in conformity with the near-invariable practice of the powers that be. There are too many examples of this state of affairs to need any mention here. Thus the whole of society and its resources are effectively controlled by the rich minority and they alone determine what to produce and how to use the wealth thereof.

Consequently, governments of the peripheral countries, who also represent their local business community, will, in accord with inherited convention, leave no stone unturned in enticing Western multinational corporations to come and invest in their countries. They do so with the hope that the local money-owners may get the chance to pick some crumbs falling from the rich table of the foreign investors.

To facilitate foreign investment, the governments are ordered to create an ‘enabling environment’, an expression which is a euphemism for holding down the ordinary citizenry for the investors to mercilessly exploit as cheap labour.

The Ghanaian reality

In Ghana, those at the helm of affairs, in routine fashion, fail to realise that not all are fools. Gold, bauxite, manganese, diamonds, cocoa, timber, just to name a few, have been produced since time immemorial. If ever any ordinary citizen benefited from the proceeds of these resources by way of, maybe public conveniences, untarred roads, ill-equipped health centres, few schools or some such tokens of basic necessities, then it was an unintended necessity.

That an overwhelming majority of Ghanaians have been wallowing in abject poverty while the old boy network lives in stinking affluence tells a lot. Though information on how the national cake is distributed is deliberately made unavailable or at best scanty, yet it is not entirely unknown. The several coups d’état, firing squads, commissions of enquiry etc are open pointers as to how the cake is shared.

Today, oil is being pumped and, in this world of money-

based economy, exploitation cannot be avoided since production is carried out for the sake of making profits. It would be a contradiction to have a money-based system without profit. If investors can’t make a profit, they will keep their money, but if they can realise a profit, they are going to do so at the expense of the worker and the host country. Then their collaborators in the form of local politicians and business people will be given the task of using sophistry to cover up the truth. Since the Ghanaian masses are effectively excluded from the decision-making process, except for the periodic elections during which time they are hoodwinked into voting for which bunch of looters to come and rob them, they are left helpless.

Corporate journalism

Those who could have saved the situation are the journalists who, at least, are able to peer into the corridors of power and have an idea of what is going on in there. Now, it is received opinion that Ghana is one of the few countries in Africa where press freedom has developed to a stage that is almost unassailable. It is therefore expected, and observers of the Ghanaian oil scenario have concurred with this, that the vigorous press will serve as an uncompromising watchdog over the operations of those involved in the business. It is thus claimed that the eagle-eyed vigilance of the ubiquitous journalists will put fear into officials who may try to get involved in any financial misconduct. But the snag is the kind of journalism that is practised in Ghana and, indeed elsewhere in this profit-oriented world.

Corporate journalism is stunted journalism. The media houses operate to make a profit, just like the oil companies pumping the oil. And since the process of making profits necessarily entails shady deals, graft and unconventional methods, the media personnel cannot but play the game according to the rules. And that, exactly, is their stock in trade.

However, it is not to be discounted that there are individual journalists who may profess genuine intent in their work. But corporate media as an institution is an indispensable cog in the profit-making machine and hence works in accordance with the odious practices of the system. And that is precisely why they refer to themselves as the fourth estate of the exploitative ruling class.

Not surprisingly, the media coverage is terrible. It would not be an overstatement to say that over ninety percent of media activities is devoted to three trivial issues.:

1. Entertainment – to divert attention from real issues of official theft, but not to genuinely satisfy people’s spiritual needs.
2. Advertisements – to promote the consumption of worthless or fancy goods.
3. Misinformation – to keep the masses ignorant.

An instructive case of such disinformation was seen on New Year’s Day when BBC’s Network Africa was summing up the important events of the past year – 2010. It was written by Elizabeth Ohene, a former BBC journalist and also a former minister in the previous government in Ghana. She wrote that she was surprised to learn that Ghana had just been promoted from a least developed country to a ‘middle income’ one. Who did it and why?

All said and done, Ghana may not go through the kind of physical violence and killings that is the lot of Nigeria today. However, it will surely experience the other aspect of what is happening in oil-rich Nigeria. The oil corporations will siphon off more than the lion’s share of the proceeds from Ghana. Then the political and business leadership will stash away as much as they can. And finally, the ordinary citizens, like their counterparts in Nigeria, will continue to live below the needless but inescapable poverty line.

SUHUYINI

An unrepentant banker

Bankers' bonuses: who's to blame for the greed?

Bob Diamond, Barclays bank's chief executive, and one of Europe's highest-paid bosses, last month faced a grilling from the Treasury Select Committee, a cross-party body appointed by the House of Commons. Those expecting a replay of previous confrontations between MPs and bankers – in February 2009, for example, when the bankers said they were 'profoundly sorry' for their role in the financial crisis – were to be disappointed.

Diamond was unrepentant. In answer to questions from MPs, he said it was about time that unfair public criticism 'moved on' so bankers could stop apologising and get back to business as usual. MPs wanted to know if Diamond was going to show 'restraint' on bonuses this year (no), refuse his own bonus (probably not), act more responsibly and increase lending to business (impossible to do both), accept personal liability for the failing of institutions (no) and if he was 'grateful' to 'the taxpayer', ie, the state, for bailing out the financial system and keeping him and his whole industry in business (grudgingly, and after much evasion, yes. In other words, reading between the lines, no).

Diamond's performance added fuel to the fire of the ongoing bankers' bonus controversy. Ministers in the present government, while campaigning for power, said they were determined to do something about the arrogance and excessive wealth of the bankers. And to be fair, they are doing *something*. In fact, as Will Hutton puts it in *The Observer* (16 January), compared with Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling, business secretary Vince Cable and chancellor George Osborne are 'fire-breathing radicals', clamping down on tax avoidance, taxing bank profits, setting targets for bank lending, regulating hedge funds and contemplating more banking reform and regulation. But so far, they are being relatively timid about bankers' bonuses. Why? Now that they have taken

power, they, in common with all governments, accept the reality of capital accumulation and their role in it. And that means not doing anything that will frighten the financiers too much.

Capitalists united – and divided

That remains true even in the face of an increasingly numerous opposition. After all, as Hutton says, the issue of bankers' bonuses is uniting everyone in outrage – 'from captains of industry bewildered how top bankers can earn so much more than they do to the newly unemployed who wonder what they have done to deserve poverty and hardship while the moneymen pocket millions'. That the state bailouts have poured into the pockets of private individuals, and the poorest and most vulnerable will be left to pay the price in terms of job losses, benefit cuts, and reduced levels of social services and so on, we have already stated (see *Socialist Standard*, *passim*). But how come we are also seeing criticism from captains of industry and government ministers and the business press and so on? Not so long ago, bankers could rely on them being 'intensely relaxed' about such matters. Why now so increasingly angry and vocal?

Partly it is a fear of social unrest and breakdown. It also reflects divisions within the capitalist class. As a class, the capitalists are united by the need to promote the conditions necessary for investment and business activity. For that, they need, for example, a supply of compliant and affordable labour, a state willing and able to provide socially necessary





infrastructure, a financial system to facilitate the processes of capital accumulation, a vibrant consumer market, and so on. On issues such as these, capitalists stand united. But the capitalist also finds himself in competition with his comrades. Capitalists have differing needs and interests depending on exactly how they get their hands on the spoils of exploitation – whether as landlord, financier, industrialist, retailer or state official, for example. In the usual course of things, this is just the stuff of competition, of ‘business as usual’, the undertow of everyday life. But when crisis hits, everything breaks to the surface. As Marx puts it (in *Capital*, Volume 3, Chapter 15):

‘So long as things go well, competition effects an operating fraternity of the capitalist class [...] so that each shares in the common loot in proportion to the size of his respective investment. But as soon as it is no longer a question of sharing profits, but of sharing losses, everyone tries to reduce his own share to a minimum and to shove it off upon another. The class, as such, must inevitably lose. How much the individual capitalist must bear of the loss, *ie*, to what extent he must share in it at all, is decided by strength and cunning, and competition then becomes a fight among hostile brothers. The antagonism between each individual capitalist’s interests and those of the capitalist class as a whole, then comes to the surface...’

Who wins out in this struggle is not simply a reflection of factional power, as the Marxist academic David Harvey points out (*The Limits To Capital*, Chapter 7). The existence of surplus value (profit) in money form is ‘the most adequate form of capital’, which means that ‘the moneyed interest enriches itself at the cost of the industrial interest in the course of [a] crisis’ (Marx). This, then, helps us understand the row about bankers’ bonuses. It’s a row about which class, or which fraction of a class, is going to be landed with the costs of the crisis. We see, therefore, that Marxian theory is not esoteric mumbo-jumbo or outdated rubbish, as often claimed, but a powerful explanation for what is actually going on in the real world. If you understand

Marxian theory, bankers’ multi-billion-pound bonuses and the row surrounding them no longer look so much like an insane aberration, but a logical consequence of social and economic structure. Bankers are enriching themselves at the expense of industry and workers? Well, OK, that’s what we would *expect* to happen...

What is to be done?

The question is what is to be done about it. As Harvey says, however the class struggle eventually plays out, however the losses of the crisis are finally distributed between factions of the capitalist class, and between the working and capitalist classes, and whatever the power struggle that ensues, the necessary result will be the destruction of value (closure of workplaces, the laying off of workers, destruction of surpluses, defaulting on debt, cutting of state services, and so on) so that a new round of capitalist accumulation can begin. This is totally irrational and insane from the point of view of human needs, but inevitable and logical from the point of view of capital accumulation.

The film-maker Charles Ferguson, whose investigative documentary *Inside Job* exposes the delusions and deeds of the bankers during the course of the crisis, says that, ‘Those responsible [for the crisis] blame the system. Or they blame the bubble caused by irresponsible borrowers. Some of them blame low interest rates. In a grim way, it’s actually amusing to watch them blame anyone except themselves’ (*Evening Standard*, 17 January). The film-maker’s contempt for those who line their pockets and profit from social disaster is justified. But actually, in a sense, it’s the bankers who have got it right. It *is* the system that is to blame. And we should indeed ‘move on’ – from blaming capitalists who are as much at the mercy of the system as the rest of us, to an understanding of the world we live in and how it works. Politically, that means moving from a demand for ‘regime change’ to one for ‘system change’.

STUART WATKINS

Capitalism's current crisis is not just economic and financial.

Capitalism's crisis of legitimacy

The recent worldwide recession has led not only to an economic crisis, but also a crisis of political legitimacy for the global system of capitalism. In Britain the ruling elite and in particular the coalition government are attempting to side-step this fact by claiming that "we're all in it together." Of course in some ways we are, the impending state spending cuts and inevitable redundancies and reduction in public services to vulnerable people being imposed by these hard-boiled public schoolboys will obviously affect those of us in the working class far more than the small minority of capitalists. The narrative from central government is that swingeing cuts in borrowing and public spending need to be enacted, in order to restore profitability to UK Capitalism plc.

And so in this allegedly different political landscape, we hear new terminology and concepts such as 'The Big Society', 'The New Localism', an increased role for 'Civil Society', 'Ethical Consumer-ism' and of capitalism's concern for the 'The Environment'.

Are these recent, reformist style trends evidence of the state's attempt to mask the realities of a class-divided society? Over the next few years, what other coping strategies will the capitalist class use to try to find some stability for their system? How can individuals and the working class as a whole respond to this in a way which will best reflect

our interests? What sort of future do we want to see?

Possibly the most profound trend that is now emerging and rapidly advancing is not necessarily the recent decline in profitability of the wages system of production, but a decline rather in the confidence of the ruling class to convince us of the validity of their system. It seems the legitimisation crisis transcends the sphere of domestic capitalist politics and extends to the spheres of religion, nationhood and the state, liberal democracy and the most basic tenets of human liberty.

Thatcher's mantras

When Thatcher was Prime Minister in the 1980s she endlessly repeated the slogan "There is no alternative" (shortened as TINA). In economics, politics and political economy, it came to mean that there was no alternative to the status quo of their economic system and economic liberalism. It is still the main slogan of economic liberalism, arguing that free markets, free trade, and capitalist globalisation are the only way in which modern societies can go, as any deviation from their doctrine is certain to lead to disaster. Thatcher's affinity for the phrase led to the author Claire Berlinski choosing it as the title for her biography of the former Prime Minister.

In the early nineties, Francis Fukuyama wrote a book named *The End of History and the Last Man*, which in a similar strain argued that liberal democracy had triumphed over so-called communism, actually authoritarian state capitalism, and the historical struggle between competing political systems within capitalism was over, though apparently there could still be future events. This trend dovetailed into a political fashion for "Rugged Individualism". Indeed, Thatcher in her third term of office regularly claimed "There is no such thing as society."



Change of rhetoric

Today, far from Thatcher's 'There is No Alternative' rhetoric, we now get an apologetic, "We're All in this Together" from our so-called leaders.

We now have an offer from the state for us to be part of the "Big Society". At first sight this apparently bold initiative at rolling back the state may seem appealing. But strip it to its core and one suspects other motives.

In a speech in Liverpool on 19 July to re-launch what critics say is a vague idea, the still newish Con-Dem Coalition Prime Minister David Cameron insisted that what he terms "the Big Society" is at the heart of his policy agenda:

"We need to create communities with oomph! Neighbourhoods who are in charge of their own destiny, who feel if they club together and get involved they can shape the world around them."

And with one eye on the detailed government spending cuts that were to be announced in October, Cameron insisted his attempt to revive community action was driven by "great passion" rather than the need to save money:

"It is not a cover for anything. This would be a great agenda whether we were having to cut public spending or whether we were increasing public spending.

"This is not about trying to save money, it is about trying to have a bigger, better society."

I wonder how many people really believe him.

And while all that and far more is going on, we as apparently individual, and certainly individuated, citizens are micro-managed keenly by armies of state officials in terms of our health, personal habits, children and domestic waste disposal. We are implored to consume ethically and to be mindful of our Environmental Impact and Carbon Footprints.

It seems capitalism in the coming decade is likely to be a miserabilist, reactionary affair in which personal responsibility and self-reliance is propounded as the dominant ethos within society. Is this the future we want?

This scenario could be so very different. How can we reach for the sort of world many people long to see, a world in which poverty, hunger, war and ruination of the quality of life for the majority of people can be abolished? That means going beyond capitalism to a society in which things like money, nation states, official government and production for profit are abolished.

"Capitalism is only unbeatable as long as everybody thinks it is. As soon as everybody thinks it is finished, then it will be finished. We therefore need to keep in touch with what other people are really thinking. And we need to explain, tirelessly, where the only viable future for the Human race lies – in that post-capitalist society of common ownership of the world. It is impossible to be neutral in this struggle." (Ron Cook, *Yes, Utopia!*)

ANDY P DAVIES

Correction

In our review of Michael Lebowitz's book, *The Path to Human Development: capitalism or socialism?*, in last month's *Socialist Standard*, we attributed to him the passage "it is important that we live the revolutionary process as a great organism and not as a vanguard atop a complacent mass". In drawing our attention to the fact that he did not write this, Michael Lebowitz said that "the phrase itself doesn't embarrass me as I reject the vanguard party (but not leadership as such) as it is understood". He added: "Incidentally, let me recommend to you and your comrades my new book, *The Socialist Alternative: Real Human Development* (Monthly Review, 2010), which explores much more deeply the themes posed in *The Path*. As for the vanguard question, I'm taking that up right now in the book I'm working on (*The Conductor and the Conducted*), which explores what I call 'vanguard relations of production.'"

In fact the passage was a quote from a review of his book by Ivan Drury in the Canadian Trotskyist paper *Socialist Voice*. We apologise to him and are pleased to make this correction.



Ed's dad

"My Dad," Labour Leader Ed Miliband told BBC Radio 5, "would have considered himself a socialist too, but he would have said we need to have public ownership of everything." (*Times*, 27 November).

It's true, his dad, Ralph Miliband, was a leftwinger who identified "socialism" with full-scale nationalisation, or state capitalism – as we pointed out in a review of his book *The State in Capitalist Society* in the August 1969 *Socialist Standard*:

"This is a confusing book in which Miliband sets out to prove what he takes to be the Marxist theory of the state. Although he does define his terms he uses words like 'capitalism' and 'class' in a non-Marxist way. Capitalism, he holds, is based on *private* enterprise, *private* profit and *private* accumulation. This raises suspicions, which are confirmed, that he has an odd view of Socialism too. Russia, he says, is 'collectivist', 'non-capitalist' and, in an unguarded moment, even 'socialist'. The concept of state capitalism is clearly unintelligible to him and is nowhere discussed, not even in relation to nationalisation in the West."

Nationalisation is not socialism as it is only a change of owner and employer, leaving workers still having to sell their labour power for a wage or salary and still exploited for surplus value. In the West the former owners were paid compensation and so continued to receive a property income but as interest on government bonds rather than as dividends. In Russia the beneficiaries were those who dictatorially controlled the state and awarded themselves a privileged income as bloated salaries, prizes, country houses and other benefits in kind.

Ralph Miliband's best known book is probably his 1961 critical history of the Labour Party from a leftwing Labour point of view, *Parliamentary Socialism*. In the concluding chapter, entitled "The Sickness of Labourism" he observed:

"By the late fifties, the Labour leaders, obsessed as they were with the thought of electoral success, had come to be more convinced even than were their predecessors that the essential condition for that success was to present the Labour Party as a moderate and respectable party, free from class bias, 'national' in outlook, and whose zeal for reform would always be tempered by its eager endorsement of the maxim that Rome was not built in a day – or even in a century. Never indeed had Labour leaders been so haunted by a composite image of the potential Labour voter as quintessentially petit-bourgeois, and therefore liable to be frightened off by a radical alternative to Conservatism."

Plus ça change. There was nothing new about New Labour, except that Blair succeeded where Gaitskell failed in getting rid of Clause 4, which committed Labour on paper to full-scale state capitalism.

He went on to quote from the study of the 1959 General Election by David Butler and R. Rose their view that the Labour Party "as in all recent elections ... played down any claim to stand, as a socialist party, for a radically different form of society ... it asked the voters to say that it could administer the mixed economy welfare state better than the Conservatives".

Which is precisely what Ed Miliband is on record as promising to try to do. As he told the *Observer* (29 August): "I'll make capitalism work for the people". Oh no, he won't – because that's not possible, not even if he followed his dad's line and nationalised everything. State capitalism can't be made to work for the people either.

Made in Dagenham



Made in Dagenham depicts the true-life struggle of female workers for equal pay, in 1968 in the Ford Plant in Dagenham.

Produced by 'BBC Films', it stars Sally Hawkins as Rita O'Grady, the girls' main spokesperson, Rosamund Pike, as Lisa Hopkins, the wife of a Ford executive, who opposes him when the women strike, and Miranda Richardson, who delivers a crackerjack performance as Minister for Employment, Barbara Castle. Castle is initially angry that after two years of Labour Government, with a large minority, they've had 26,000 strikes, lost five million working days and now, these women want to add to it.

Ford's Dagenham plant in 1968 was the fourth largest auto manufacturing plant in the world, producing 3,000 cars a day. It comprised an area of 42 million square feet, employed 55,000 men and 187 women. The women were previously classified as semi-skilled, but were demoted to being unskilled with a corresponding pay cut, which wasn't objected to by the Union. According to their shop steward, played by Bob Hoskins, "This has nothing to do with being unskilled. Ford decided to pay you less, because they can, because you're women."

Initially, the strike, opposed by the Union, was to upgrade the women to semi-skilled status but under O'Grady's fiery leadership, became a battle for equal pay for equal work. The women, all 187 of them, sewed seat covers, but nowhere in *Made* do you see one man doing that. Equal work?

Most of the movie deals with opposition from men in various areas. The overall view is, in 1968, most Englishmen were chauvinistic. Though this reviewer hasn't lived in England since 1966, he knows the depiction was reasonably accurate.

Without seat covers the Plant shut down. Laid-off male workers bitterly opposed the strikers, which caused problems in the marriages of couples who were both employed at Ford. O'Grady's husband was extremely nasty when their fridge was repossessed. This made the women more bitter, considering they were supportive of the men when they were on strike.

Union leaders begged them to return to work. One, in a fit of profundity, declaimed, "Marx said men make history; he didn't say women make history." The word 'man' in the greater sense, which is how Marx meant it, carries no gender

connotation.

In desperation, an executive from head office in Detroit came over to put the world to rights. This economic genius argued, to grant equal pay, would shoot up the price of product, which would kill the market. Surveys have shown, an average of 7 percent of the price goes to wages and salaries, including that of high-price CEOs. A few years before the strike London busmen were out all summer for higher wages. A survey, conducted a year later, showed that for every pound received in extra fares, only two shillings (then one tenth) went towards wages.

Perhaps the most perceptive comment in the movie is when Lisa Hopkins tells the guy from Detroit, Ford should take a leaf from Vauxhall's book and not be so aggressive towards the union. Though Hopkins didn't say it, this aggression stems from the early days when Henry Ford did all in his considerable powers, to prevent unions getting a foothold in his plant.

After the strikers crash the Union's national conference, the delegates vote in favour of equal pay and Castle, realising the women won't quit, sides with them even after being warned by Harold Wilson, "Don't upset Ford, I've enough trouble with Americans." The women settle for 93 percent of their demand. In 1970 the UK Parliament passed the Equal Pay Act, which was soon adopted by other countries. Even Ford management accepted it.

The movie, directed by Nigel Cole, is well acted, fast moving, totally absorbing and contains some humour, arising from real life situations. Perhaps, the funniest is when an attractive girl finks on the rest by entering the plant for a photo shoot and double crosses the company.

Though *Made* is recommendable, this reviewer has one small quibble. The thrust of it is no different to millions of movies; you don't know what you can do until you try. Certainly, one must admire O'Grady and her friends, who had no previous experience of negotiating and propagandising. Nevertheless, *Made* depicts people fighting for improvements within capitalism. At one point, the shop steward says, "Someone has to stop those exploiting bastards from getting away with what they've been getting away with for years." Meaning forcing them to be less exploitative. The question of no exploitation full stop, is never addressed. One thing which Marx said that the union official never repeated is "...abolition of The Wages System." The most a Socialist can say about the women is their aims were alright as far as they went, but they didn't go far enough. For real equality, a society where all will stand equal in relation to the tools of production, is the only answer.

STEVE SHANNON

Inconsistent

Ecology and Socialism: Solutions to Capitalist Ecological Crisis.
Chris Williams. Haymarket Books 2010.



The introduction bodes well with clear statements of where the blame lies for the ecological mess we're now in. 'We live in a social system predicated on endless expansion'

and 'The blind, unplanned drive to accumulate that is the hallmark of capitalist production – the profit motive – has created the problem of climate change, not individuals' profligate natures or overpopulation.' The book's title is 'Ecology and Socialism' and the ecology side is explained admirably well. (Williams gives ecology courses as part of his work at Pace University, N.Y.) but not the socialist aspect.

The first four chapters cover the science of climate change, debunk the myth of overpopulation (an excellent chapter that can be read in isolation) and 'make the case as to why there can be no such thing as sustainable or environmentally friendly capitalism'. Williams's arguments are backed up with well-documented notes in which he refers to a host of well-known and well-respected ecologists, scientists and writers, along with named articles and reports. Although he repeatedly states that capitalism as a system is the cause of the world's environmental problems he also stresses that it is neoliberalism that has speeded up the process detrimentally. In fact, at this stage, by pages 57/58 some reforms to neoliberalism are listed as being a way 'to roll back the hostility' that small farmers have suffered.

Unfortunately, from a very promising beginning, Williams quickly negates the case he started to build ostensibly for socialism by saying in one breath the productive forces need to be in the hands of the producers and in the next that we, as workers, must fight for "good unionised jobs". There is a definite lack of coherence in his argument from hereon in. He writes of "solutions", but how many solutions can there be to capitalist ecological crisis? If the argument has been all the way through that it is capitalism

that has caused the ecological crisis then the solution must be single and particular: get rid of the cause.

He does address the difficulty of writing for an American readership in that the general misconceptions widely held by many US citizens as to what socialism actually is may prevent them from serious consideration of these or similar arguments. Perhaps it is this that has led to his muddled thinking when attempting to lay out what socialism is? He states and agrees with Marx's position that ecology (nature) and socialism are inextricably linked but goes on to muddy the water by detailing more of an overhaul than an overturn of capitalism. He claims that separate nation states and borders could not exist but nowhere is there any mention of a moneyless world. And that the government needs to be pushed into making changes – as it has been before – by millions of people fighting for change in this area or that; but no mention of how reformism is an endless treadmill of two steps forward and two steps back.

In comparing the US situation with that of Europe he has this to say, 'As European capitalism has survived and prospered with tougher governmental regulatory controls and greater restrictions on corporations, it is clear that we can win important and life-enhancing reforms without threatening the overall structure of capitalism.' Are we to seriously consider that 'European capitalism' has done or is going to do anything beyond nodding towards serious climate change reversal? And what

of the statistics of the unemployed, homeless, malnourished; how do they fit into the 'important and life-enhancing reforms?' Then he goes on to say that reforms, theoretically possible in capitalism, will only be made if politicians are 'forced' to implement them (by us). So now, it seems, we are to devote all our spare time and energy to demonstrations and strike action for a bit of reform here and there. Surely if all that mass energy is to be rallied we go for the whole thing – system change – now heard so often, and even featured on the book's cover, but obviously misunderstood by many to mean a system of reforms. To end the chapter there is a hint that he doesn't really support what he's written when he writes of competing capitalist states that can't plan and coordinate on the global level required and that, 'such planning could only realistically come about through a completely different way of organising production – one based not on making a profit but meeting human need'.

Williams doesn't seem to have really come to his own conclusion yet as to what he sees as the alternative. Where are his proposals as to how we rid ourselves of the profit motive? If we don't rid ourselves of the profit motive? He offers plenty of solid argument to back up the idea that only a society not driven by the profit motive would benefit both labour and nature positively and yet Williams seems to shy away from total commitment. How can he write that nothing short of totally remodelling the world on a social,

political, technological, cultural and infrastructural level within a fully democratic process carried out by those who will be affected by those decisions, with no nation states or borders and therefore no resource wars – and then add that the Global South will require 'technological help, capital and training' (my emphasis).

He has shot himself in the foot by seemingly offering an alternative, having given ample reasons why capitalism can't change its logic, but by being far too ambiguous about the solution(s) he offers. Conspicuous by its absence is just what Williams proposes is our actual route to this ill-defined alternative society.

JS

Not consistent

***A User's Guide to the Crisis of Civilization ... and how to save it.* Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed: Pluto Press, 2010, £19.99**



The author is an Executive Director of an 'independent' think-tank, working within the sphere of International Relations theory. He has written a very interesting and useful book, but it's

not always an easy read. The subject matter is dense, and there is an immense amount of material packed



Know your onions

Tonight on *In The Know*: "The recession which has left thousands of American home-owners destitute for the first time may be giving rise to a new form of bigotry. Are traditionally-poor Americans being unfairly prejudiced against the Nouveau Poor?"

Also, "A recent poll finds that many ... lobbyists are fed up with politicians accepting their money and then not coming through with promised legislation. Are politicians failing our lobbyists?"

In these exasperating times, it's often hard to tell what's satire and what's real, but, yes, the above were fake. Both were introductions to parodies of news programmes made by The Onion, the bratty little brother to America's media giants like *USA Today*, CNN and Fox. The Onion began as a satirical newspaper in 1988 and has since expanded into spoof television shows, among other media. From 2007 (or "since 1896" according to the title sequence) these were only broadcast through the internet. However, last month saw the debuts of the *Onion News Network* and the *Onion*

Sportsdome on American cable television. These series are expanded versions of the sketches accessible through theonion.com.

As well as spoof news and sports reports, The Onion produces *In The Know*, a panel discussion show for its overconfident and misinformed pundits. And *Today Now's* breakfast television presenters keep everything light and frothy, whether they're unveiling the new batch of child stars "grown in the Disney genetic engineering lab" or giving tips to help you "pretend you give a shit about the election".

Not many gags make direct political points; examples here include "Bush tours America to survey damage caused by his presidency" and "Gap unveils new 'For Kids By Kids' clothing line". Instead, most sketches highlight how the media sensationalise events, such as "Horrific crash a sad reminder of Princess Diana". So, the jokes often come through the fake journalists missing the real issues and trying to give stories a heart-warming or empowering spin, such as "anonymous hero donates hospital 200 human kidneys" or "first female dictator hailed as step forward for women". And in that way, The Onion's perception of how television works is spot-on.

MIKE FOSTER

into its 300 pages.

Ahmed argues that a conjunction of crises is facing humanity, comprising a massive threat to modern industrial civilisation. The crises are global warming, energy scarcity, food insecurity, economic instability, international terrorism, and the tendency towards an erosion of democratic rights. What he stresses and successfully demonstrates is how the various crises are interconnected, and make worldwide systemic change to humanity's political economy not just desirable, but inevitable. He also rightly insists that these global crises are not aberrations but are actually "integral to the ideology, structure and logic of the global political economy". As such, they can not be solved by either minor or major policy reforms "but only by drastic reconfiguration of the *system itself*".

There is certainly plenty for socialists to agree upon in this urgent and appropriately alarming book. Ahmed advocates a radical extension of democracy, with a need to localise and decentralise political power, the need for sustainability and balance in our relationship to the environment, and a consequent rejection of the values of rampant consumerism. Many of the suggestions outlined for future social organisation are also useful and necessary, but the question arises as to what type of system they should take place in.

In stating that he is using a "Political Marxist Framework", the author contends that "global crises are generated directly by the operation and structure of the global system" with its untrammelled pursuit of profit. However, a

problem arises with his emphasis on 'neoliberal capitalism'. This description is fair enough when referring to a specific phase of development within global capitalism, but it seems it's not capitalism in its entirety that he rejects, despite his desire to see it radically restructured.

Ahmed does say we need to "fundamentally reconfigure the relationship between labour and capital," but not to the extent of eradicating private ownership of the means of production. Instead, he argues that it should be massively extended "*to facilitate universal access ... by all individuals and communities*" (original emphasis). If there is to be 'universal access', why retain private ownership? Work – labour – is a social activity; and if all own, then none do. It's better, therefore, to end the system of 'production for profit' and all the paraphernalia of the class-divided system.

To be fair, he does describe his solutions as a "tentative template", and insists that we all need to be involved in developing responses to our problems. The issue remains of what direction a "post-carbon revolution" will take. The danger is of a continuing and refined super-exploitative society dominated by the interests of a small minority, but a more hopeful scenario is also put forward of large grassroots movements emerging worldwide to push humanity in a more equitable direction. This book provides plenty of reasons why the task of building a political movement for socialism is more urgent than ever.

RW

Meetings

Manchester

Monday **28 February**, 8.30pm
Discussion on Education
Unicorn, Church Street, City Centre

London

Film Evenings, Sundays 6pm

13 February: "They Live"

Introduction by Stair.

27 February: "The People Speak"

Introduction by Jacqueline Shodeke.
Socialist Party premises, 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN (nearest tube: Clapham North)

Chiswick

Tuesday **15 February** 8pm

WHAT IS THE CASE FOR SOCIALISM?

Speaker: Dick Field.

Committee Room, Chiswick Town Hall,
Heathfield Rd, W4 4JN (nearest tube: Chiswick Park).

For full details of all our meetings and events see our **Meetup** site:

<http://www.meetup.com/The-Socialist-Party-of-Great-Britain/>

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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.



Cue for a Change

IT'S NOT uncommon for sports to change their rules in order to become more popular with the public, or at least with broadcasters and advertisers. Cricket is the most obvious example, with various limited-over versions and now Twenty20, with its limited duration, having become very well attended.

The latest sport to see a change in format is snooker, with the Power Snooker concept. There are fewer red balls and some innovations to scoring but, more importantly, there is a set time span of thirty minutes per match. This is intended to avoid some of the supposed problems



with traditional snooker, where some frames take a lot longer than others and some are just unexciting (however skilful) with lots of safety play. A more or less standard length for matches is of course much more attractive for television.

Moreover, spectators are encouraged to interact with players, rather than just sit in respectful silence, and the players can wear a live microphone if they wish. And, to cater for the laddish element among spectators, both referees are women. Each has her own website (something not thought to be common among football referees, for instance).

The staid world of 'ordinary' snooker is fighting back, with a one-frame knockout tournament (maximum ten minutes per frame) in Blackpool at the end of January. 'Blackpool Beauties' will walk victorious players out of the arena, while 'two bouncers with character' will 'escort players through the "walk of shame" as they exit' (www.worldsnooker.com).

All this appears to have little if anything to do with sporting prowess and everything to do with getting the punters in, and especially the sponsors and the TV companies. Hence the glitz and glamour and the time limits. And it's hardly surprising to learn that the rich guys behind Power Snooker have worked previously in the entertainment industry rather than sport.

PB

The Strike in Belgium



THE BELGIAN strike is an attempt on the part of some of the Belgian workers to force the Government to resign or change its method of dealing with the economic crisis. The Government, a coalition of Christian Democrats and Liberals, has precipitated this situation by its austerity measures.

These consist of cuts in the social services such as the Belgian equivalent of the National Health Service, in the education programme, in unemployment pay, and in coal subsidies, along with the introduction of a Means Test and what is called "additional temporary taxation." The Belgian local authorities are also to be empowered to impose additional income taxes of their own. (...)

Socialists feel deep sympathy for the Belgian workers on strike. But they realise that their action is futile as a means to achieve anything but temporary respite from the encroachments of their masters on their standard of living, and that they are jeopardising their chances of

achieving even that by using the strike weapon against the State, instead of using it to back up wage demands with which to offset the effect of the Government's policy.(...)

Governments do not develop reforms or pruning schemes because their attitude to the working class is necessarily either sympathetic or antagonistic. Governments administer the affairs of a capitalist economy in the interests of the national capitalist class. The Belgian workers would be well advised to consider this fact in relation to the present situation, recognising that a change of government is merely a change of label.

A more fundamental change is needed. Austerity, in a world of potential plenty, is always the lot of the working class under capitalism. It is not enough to demonstrate against one type of capitalist government. The workers must organise consciously to abolish the present economic system and establish in its place their own system of society—Socialism.

(Editorial, *Socialist Standard*, February 1961)

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Voice from the Back

Poverty And Wealth

American patriots like misguided patriots elsewhere in the world are fond of holding up "their" country as a paragon of fairness and equality, but where is the equality in the following figures quoted by the ultra patriotic CNN? "The richest 1% of U.S. households had a net worth 225 times greater than that of the average American household in 2009, according to analysis conducted by the Economic Policy Institute, a liberal think tank. That's up from the previous record of 190 times greater, which was set in 2004" (*CNN Money.com*, 23 December). The truth is that the USA like every other country in capitalism has a wide gap between the haves and the havenots.



of the working class the reality is much more sordid. "A fifth of homeless people have committed 'imprisonable offences' to spend a night in the cells and more than a quarter of women rough sleepers took an 'unwanted sexual partner' to escape their plight, new research out today shows. A survey of more than 400 rough sleepers by Sheffield Hallam University reveals the desperate steps taken by the homeless to find shelter... Unwanted sex has become a way out of homelessness for many. One in seven men and 28% of women had spent a night or longer with an unwanted sexual partner to 'accommodate themselves'" (*Guardian*, 23 December). The reality behind the Hollywood fantasy and the pop song magic is that poverty destroys even the best of human aspirations. It is not the sort of thing Frank Sinatra would sing about – is it?

Poverty And Ill-Health

It is often claimed by supporters of the NHS that while poor people may live in sub-standard housing and experience economic insecurity they have at least access to excellent medical care, but this is a complete fallacy. "Maternity services are close to breaking point and care for mothers is worsening, the UK's leading midwife warns in a dramatic plea over the declining state of childbirth on the NHS. Labour wards are struggling to give women the proper quality of care under the 'relentless' pressure of a record birth rate, staff shortages and increasingly complex births, says Cathy Warwick, general secretary of the Royal College of Midwives" (*Observer*, 2 January) So you are exploited inside capitalism but at least you were born unlike some members of the working class that were even denied that by capitalism's drive to cheapen production – and even reproduction.

Poverty And Sex

Every Hollywood romantic screenplay and lots of popular songs depict the magic of love but for many members

Poverty And Credit Cards

One of the jibes often thrown at socialists is that the concept of world socialism is an idea that has been outgrown by the 21st century. We are constantly being told that we live in a new modern society where far from suffering the poverty of the 19th century members of the working class now have bank accounts, credit cards and mortgages. This rosy portrayal is hardly backed up by recent figures released by the charity Shelter. "Nearly one in ten of those in private rented accommodation used their credit card to cover the housing bill in the

year August 2010, while about 8 per cent of mortgage borrowers did the same, the housing charity said. In many cases, residents struggling to make ends meet have withdrawn cash from their card to pay housing costs, pushing them deeper into debt" (*Times*, 6 January). Charity claim that two million now use their cards to pay their housing costs. This is hardly the new poverty-free society that its supporters claim.

It's Not Cricket

As children if we happened to be born in England we were taught about "sizzling sixes over the tuck shop roof" and nonsense about "play up play up for England chaps" and other such foolishnesses about cricket. If you happened to watch the England v. Australia cricket matches on TV you may have seen grown-up children still indulging in that nonsense. They call themselves "the Barmy Army" and who are we to argue with that adjective? Behind the worthwhile sporting endeavours of all the cricketers concerned lurks the usual sordid commercialism of capitalism. "This week, the England and Wales Cricket Board will try to capitalise on the first Ashes victory in Australia for 24 years by auctioning the rights to sponsor home Test matches from 2012. It is talking to a number of potential replacements for the current sponsor, Npower, in the hope of netting up to £5m, 25% more than the previous deal" (*Observer*, 9 January). You may have seen it as a great 3-1 victory – they saw it as a great commercial opportunity. That is capitalism for you.



Free Lunch

