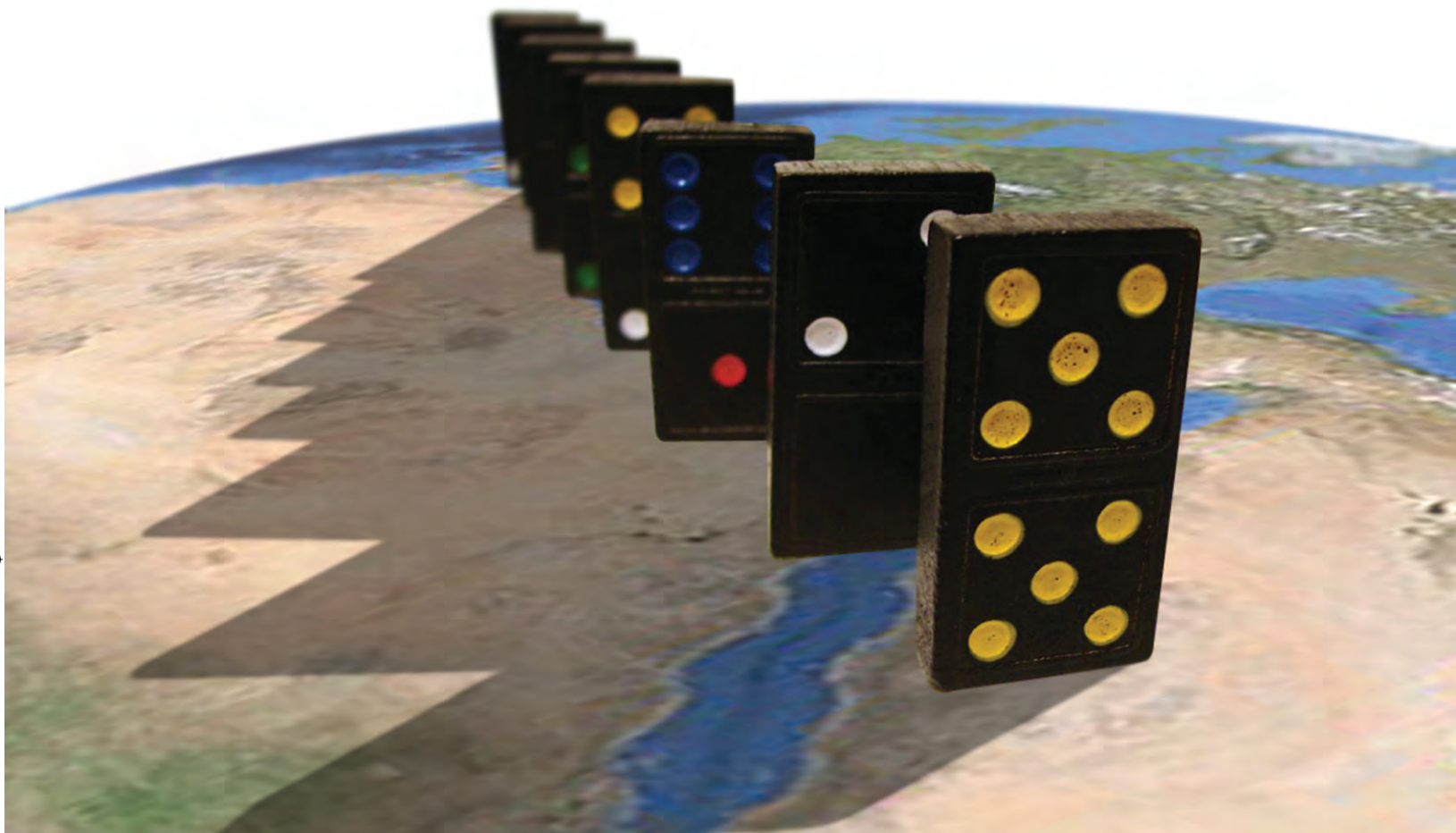


# socialist standard



March 2011  
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Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain - Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement



## Fall of the Pharoahs?

### People power in North Africa



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**The Socialist Party**  
52 Clapham High Street  
London  
SW4 7UN  
Tel: 0207 622 3811  
Email: spgb@worldsocialism.org  
Website: www.worldsocialism.org/spgb  
Blog: http://spgb.blogspot.com

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The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 2 April** at the address above. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the Editorial Committee.

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## Contact Details

### UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

#### LONDON

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

**Enfield and Haringey branch.** Thurs 10th and 24th March, 8pm. Angel Community Centre, Raynham Rd, N18.

Corres: 17 Dorset Road, N22 7SL.

Email: julianvein@blueyonder.co.uk

**South London branch.** 1st Tues. 7.00pm.

Head Office. 52 Clapham High St, SW4

7UN. Tel: 020 7622 3811

**West London branch.** 1st & 3rd Tues. 8pm, Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace (Corner Sutton Court Rd), W4.

Corres: 51 Gayford Road, London W12 9BY

#### MIDLANDS

**West Midlands Regional branch.** Meets last Sunday of the month in the Briar Rose pub, 25 Bennetts Hill, Birmingham B2 5RE. Tel: Tony Gluck 01242 235615.

Email: tonygluck111@btinternet.com

#### NORTHEAST

**Northeast branch.** Contact: Brian Barry, 86 Edmond Ct, Ryhope, Sunderland SR2 0DY. Tel: 0191 521 0690.

Email: davejewell@bushinternet.com

#### NORTHWEST

**Lancaster branch.** Meets every Monday 8.30pm. P. Shannon, 10 Green Street, Lancaster LA1 1DZ. Tel: 01524 382380

**Manchester branch.** Paul Bennett, 6 Burleigh Mews, Hardy Lane, M21 7LB. Tel: 0161 860 7189

**Bolton.** Tel: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589

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

**Carlisle:** Robert Whitfield.

Email: rewcb13@yahoo.co.uk  
Tel: 07906 373975

**Rochdale.** Tel: R. Chadwick. 01706 522365

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

#### YORKSHIRE

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

**Todmorden:** Keith Scholey, 1 Leevue Ct, Windsor Rd, OL14 5LJ.

Tel: 01706 814 149

#### SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

**South West Regional branch.** Meets every two months on a Saturday afternoon in Salisbury. Shane Roberts, 86 High Street, Bristol BS5 6DN.

Tel: 0117 9511199

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

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

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

#### EAST ANGLIA

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

Pat Deutz, 11 The Links, Billericay, CM12 0EX. n.deutz@btinternet.com

David Porter, Eastholme, Bush Drive, Eccles-on-Sea, NR12 0SF.

Tel: 01692 582533.

Richard Headcar, 42 Woodcote, Firs Rd, Hethersett, NR9 3JD.

Tel: 01603 814343.

**Cambridge.** Andrew Westley, 10 Marksby Close, Duxford, Cambridge CB2 4RS.

Tel: 07890343044

#### IRELAND

**Cork:** Kevin Cronin, 5 Curragh Woods, Frankfield, Cork. Tel: 021 4896427. Email: mariekev@eircom.net

**Newtownabbey:** Nigel McCullough. Tel: 028 90852062.

#### SCOTLAND

**Edinburgh branch.** 1st Thur. 8-9pm. The Quaker Hall, Victoria Terrace (above Victoria Street), Edinburgh.

J. Moir. Tel: 0131 440 0995.

JIMMY@jmoir29.freeserve.co.uk Branch website:

http://geocities.com/edinburghbranch/**Glasgow branch.** 3rd Wednesday of each

month at 8pm in Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road, Glasgow. Richard Donnelly, 112 Napiershall Street, Glasgow G20 6HT. Tel: 0141 5794109.

Email: richard.donnelly1@ntlworld.com

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

Tel: 01328 541643

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

Email: matt@wsmweb.fsnet.co.uk

#### WALES

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

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

Tel: 01446 405636

### INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS

**Latin America.** J.M. Morel, Calle 7 edif 45 apto 102, Multis nuevo La loteria, La Vega, Rep. Dominicana.

#### AFRICA

**Kenya.** Patrick Ndege, PO Box 78105, Nairobi.

**Swaziland.** Mandla Ntshakala, PO Box 981, Manzini.

**Zambia.** Kephah Mulenga, PO Box 280168, Kitwe.

#### ASIA

**India.** World Socialist Group, Vill Gobardhanpur. PO Amral, Dist. Bankura, 722122

**Japan.** Michael. Email: worldsocialismjapan@hotmail.com.

#### EUROPE

**Denmark.** Graham Taylor, Kjaerslund 9, floor 2 (middle), DK-8260 Viby J

**Germany.** Norbert.

E-mail: weltsozialismus@gmx.net

**Norway.** Robert Stafford.

Email: hallblithe@yahoo.com

**Italy.** Gian Maria Freddi, Casella Postale n. 28., c/o Ag. PT VR 17, 37131 Verona

**Spain.** Alberto Gordillo, Avenida del Parque 2/2/3 Puerta A, 13200 Manzanares.

### COMPANION PARTIES OVERSEAS

#### World Socialist Party of Australia.

P. O. Box 1266 North Richmond 3121, Victoria, Australia.. Email: commonownership@yahoo.com.au

**Socialist Party of Canada/Parti Socialiste du Canada.** Box 4280, Victoria B.C. V8X 3X8 Canada.

Email:SPC@iname.com

**World Socialist Party (New Zealand) P.O.**

Box 1929, Auckland, NI, New Zealand.

**World Socialist Party of the United**

**States P.O.** Box 440247, Boston, MA

02144 USA.

Email: wspboston@covad.net

# 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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## Editorial

### What's the alternative?

“WHAT’S THE alternative?” As capitalism remains mired in crisis, and criticisms of the system become more commonplace and compelling, expect to hear this question asked more and more. It is often used politically and rhetorically – because every sensible person is supposed to know the answer. The idea that “There Is No Alternative”, or TINA, is one of Thatcher’s enduring political legacies. It will often be asserted angrily in political debate, which is revealing. No one feels the need to angrily assert the truth of the law of gravity. No one, then, should feel the need to angrily assert the fact that there is no alternative if there isn’t one. They do because there is.

The Trades Union Congress (TUC), a federation of Britain’s main trade unions, has organised a national demonstration against the government’s spending cuts, which will take place on 26 March. The demonstration has been called a ‘March For The Alternative’. Which sounds great. At last, after decades of ‘TINA’, an alternative! Unfortunately, the TUC’s alternative looks much the same as ‘business as usual’. The alternative, according to them, is ‘Jobs, growth, justice’. This is indistinguishable from what every political party in this country, whether of the left or right, promises every election time. We should not be too surprised by this. The TUC, like all trade unions, exists to win a better deal for wage-slaves. This is a laudable aim, and we support it. But we do not just want to win a better deal for wage-slaves. We want to abolish slavery. We are wage-slavery abolitionists. As one socialist famously put it, we ought not to exaggerate to ourselves what these trade-union struggles and dem-

onstrations and ‘actions’ can achieve. “We ought not to be exclusively absorbed in these unavoidable guerrilla fights incessantly springing up from the never ceasing encroachments of capital or changes of the market.” Instead, we need to organise for something new.

That was Marx in 1865. Unfortunately, his advice has been mostly ignored, including by those counting themselves as his followers, ever since. As the linguist and social critic Noam Chomsky puts it, “the effort to overcome ‘wage-slavery’ [has] been going on since the beginnings of the industrial revolution, [and] we haven’t advanced an inch. In fact, we’re worse off than we were a hundred years ago in terms of understanding the issues.”

Chomsky is right, and it’s the reason we in the Socialist Party devote so much of our time and energy to promoting an understanding of the issues. We seem, in fact, to be the only political organisation in this country to take this task at all seriously.

The alternative, then, is not the amelioration of our suffering under the wages system. It is the abolition of modern slavery – the emancipation of labour. Under slavery, you are sold to a master once and for all. Under wage slavery, you hire yourself out by the hour or the week or the month. The basic relationship between master and slave has not changed. We need to get rid of the master, take the means of making a living under our collective ownership and control, and organise our own lives, democratically, and on the basis of freely organised, freely given work. In a word, the alternative is socialism.



# Double Bubble Trouble

THE 'PEOPLEQUAKE' currently tearing up streets across North Africa is not just about dictatorial rulers and lack of democracy, it's also about poverty, unemployment, corruption, social exclusion, simmering religious tensions and, significantly, rising food prices.

World wheat prices rocketed by 50 percent during 2010, and countries which are net importers of wheat, and whose populations spend on average a third or more of their income on food, are the most badly hit by these rises. The Japanese investment firm Nomura has created a Food Vulnerability Index (NFVI) of

Rank	Country	NFVI Index	food % of total consumption
1	Bangladesh	101.5	53.8
2	Morocco	101.3	63.0
3	Algeria	101.3	63.0
4	Nigeria	101.3	73.0
5	Lebanon	101.2	34.0
6	Egypt	101.0	48.1
7	Sri Lanka	101.0	39.6
8	Sudan	100.9	52.9
9	Hong Kong	100.9	25.8
10	Azerbaijan	100.8	60.2
11	Angola	100.8	46.1
12	Romania	100.7	49.4
13	Philippines	100.7	45.6
14	Kenya	100.7	45.8
15	Pakistan	100.6	47.6
16	Libya	100.6	37.2
17	Dom Rep	100.6	38.3
18	Tunisia	100.5	36.0
19	Bulgaria	100.5	49.5
20	Ukraine	100.5	61.0

80 countries in its report *The Coming Surge in Food Prices* (<http://tinyurl.com/6eoz4d9>). In the top 10 of these countries are Egypt, Algeria and Morocco, as well as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Hong Kong. In the top 20 are Tunisia, Romania, Ukraine and Libya. If another surge in prices is imminent, as Nomura predicts, the NFVI may suggest where the political heat will burn hottest.

Let us however dispose of one misconception at the outset – the volatility of food prices does not correspond with a similar volatility in the supply of food. The 80 percent increase in global wheat prices in 2008 occurred during a 'super-harvest' of American wheat and has been blamed squarely on speculators in Chicago and Minneapolis who have only recently converged like locusts on the world's farm crops (see for instance 'How Wall Street starved millions and got away with it' by Frederick Kaufman, *Harper's Magazine*, July 2010). That speculators were entirely responsible for creating a financial 'food bubble', as Kaufman claims, is frostily denied by Goldman Sachs, the chief bad-guy of his essay, but also disputed by several other independent reports, citing other factors such as the 40 percent crop loss due to the Russian drought, as well as floods in Pakistan and China, and the spike in oil prices which nowadays correlate closely with food prices. Nevertheless, speculator-frenzy was sufficient to alarm the Indian government into banning all agricultural futures trading in 2008.

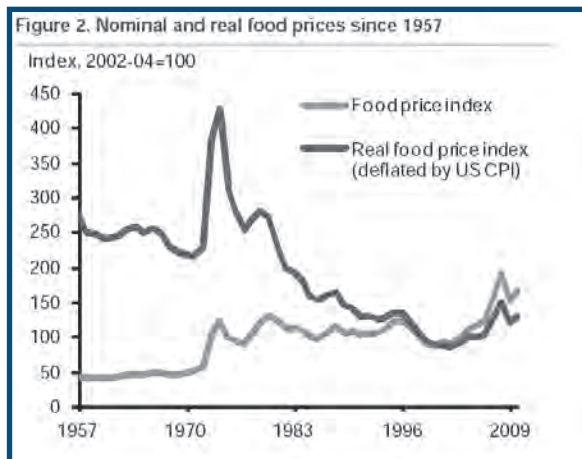
Another misconception is that population is causing food prices to rise. Global population has been rising steadily for decades while real food prices have been falling since 1970. World population is expected to reach around 9.5bn by 2100 but a recent report from the

UK Institution of Mechanical Engineers (<http://tinyurl.com/4vodmec>) argues that the anticipated food demand can be met with current engineering methods and that the barriers are largely political. They point to the 25 percent wastage of post-purchase food in developed countries, and the staggering 50 percent average post-harvest crop loss in developing countries because of poor storage and management: "It is evident that the barriers to deploying solutions are not technological. The issue is often one of implementation and in this area action should be taken by society and political leaders at national, regional and local levels" (*Population: One Planet, Too Many People?* p.40).

Meanwhile, other researchers are less optimistic, citing the unsustainable exhaustion of non-replaceable water supplies driving much of current global food production. In China an estimated 130m people rely on food produced through overpumping groundwater, in India around 175m, while Saudi Arabia, currently self-sufficient in wheat, has almost drained its fossil aquifers and next year's harvest may be its last (*New Scientist*, 5 February). Agriculture accounts for 70 - 85 percent of global water consumption and half the world's population live in countries with falling water tables. Lester Brown, president of the Earth Policy Institute, argues that this environmental 'food bubble' could burst at any time, with catastrophic consequences: "No civilization has survived the ongoing destruction of its natural support systems. Nor will ours.... the world is only one poor harvest away from chaos" (*'When Will the Food Bubble Burst?'*, *Earth-Policy.org*, 12 January).

The UK engineers agree over the problem: "Indeed if there is one common factor that [we have] identified in the issues relating to water around the world, it is the unsustainable abstraction of groundwater at a higher rate than natural replenishment allows" (Population report, p.24) but they point out that this does not need to be so: "Given current techniques and capabilities there is no valid reason why there should be a shortage of water for human use. Fundamentally, there is no shortage of water on the planet to meet the anticipated rise in consumption of 30 percent by 2030. There is however, a spatial and temporal misalignment of supply and demand" (p.5). China, whose water is mostly in the south and population centres in the north, is currently dealing with this 'misalignment' in a refreshingly low-tech way, with a big canal. Other countries, given the removal of economic and political barriers, could theoretically do the same.

World food supply is affected by a number of factors, including population growth and rampant urbanisation, land and water depletion, invasive species, pollution, climate change and El Nino events. But prices are a function of the market system and volatility here is also driven by protectionism, speculation, oil costs and consequent biofuel demand, and plain old fashioned hoarding to inflate prices. The problem with the forecasts of Nomura, the engineers and the Earth Policy Institute, is that they are obliged to think within the capitalist box, and as far as solutions go that box is pretty much empty. Socialists can only hope that the world doesn't have to starve half its population to death before coming to the conclusion that leaders are not going to change anything and that capitalism is the real bubble that needs bursting.



**Sweet charity?**

Dear Editors  
 I am writing to ask for your further explanation of a matter which has puzzled me, arising from the item "A Merry Christmas" on page 23 of the January issue. Commenting on the annual appeal of Crisis UK, the writer describes the organisation's workers and volunteers as "well-meaning" and "obviously sincere", but continues with the words "charity doesn't work". Well, no, inasmuch as while capitalism exists, there will almost certainly be homeless people needing help all through this and every year; but, nevertheless, it does work in that, for those few days at Christmas, some homeless people had some relief and comfort which they would not have had without that "charity". Wasn't that partial and temporary help better than nothing? Isn't it possible that some of the people who worked to provide short-term help to some of capitalism's victims, might also be working for the transformation of society to world socialism? Isn't it possible for socialists to have both short-term and long-term aims? Can the achievement of world socialism really come about through ignoring immediate specific sufferings of individual human beings?

**Andrew Durrant, Garvestone, Norwich**

**Reply:** Yes, charity can make a difference to an individual's life; it is 'better than nothing'. But it's not much and certainly not enough,

like trying to empty a lake with a teaspoon.

You partly answer your own query when you say that "while capitalism exists, there will almost certainly be homeless people." It's for this reason we stated that "charity doesn't work" - i.e. that it can't cure the problems it seeks to address. Whether it be homelessness or some other charitable concerns, such problems are an inevitable product of a society where profits matter above all else. So while some individuals can and do benefit from charity, it doesn't stop the problem continually arising.

The sufferings of our fellow humans (and ourselves) is surely part of the motivation for socialists to organise to put an end to capitalism. As individuals - if inclined - we can choose to give what we can afford and spare time to help where needed, but for the Socialist Party our sole aim is nothing but socialism, however long it takes  
 - *Editors.*

**March madness**

Dear Editors  
 Demonstrations in support of denied democratic rights in some countries lacking free elections and free speech are one thing; they have no other way of expressing their politics, so take to the streets. Here we do have people power and it is called an election.

Governments in the UK know they have a mandate and they also know that the 'opposition' usually has the same politics as they have.

This is true about the issues of privatisation and public sector job cuts. Labour councils under a Labour government were closing down council-run residential homes for the elderly before the 2010 general election. Demonstrations aimed at changing government policy have failed in their objectives in the UK. CND rallied thousands to ban the bomb in the fifties and early sixties. When the Harold Wilson Labour government was elected in 1964 CND's high hopes were dashed. Britain stayed nuclear and vast sums went to the manufacture and maintenance of nuclear horror weapons.

In 2003 a million marched against the Tony Blair Iraq attack. Blair lied, people died. There were no weapons of mass destruction, but the USA and UK had them and still do. Despite being exposed a liar Blair got back in when Labour won the 2005 general election. Marching around London streets, shouting at empty government buildings and tourists is futile. Violence at such demonstrations angers and disgusts the majority of workers. As for cuts, sackings in and privatisation of the NHS, these are going ahead and the majority of voters fully endorsed these ConDem policies. At least the SPGB don't lead mobs of confused workers into riots. There is a minority amongst demonstrators who are trying to do just that.

**Rob Jameson, York**

**Reply:** You are right. We don't.  
 - *Editors.*



*A sideways glance at capitalism through some of its products. This month: the razor.*

**The Best a Man Can Get?**

IT WAS a nostalgia web-site which first coined the phrase "jumping the shark". This referred to the decline in the quality of the 1970s TV show "Happy Days" which ran out of ideas and ended up with a desperate episode where the show's star water-skied over a shark.

Socialists argue over just when capitalism "jumped the shark": when its dynamic and revolutionary nature was overtaken by its wastefulness and unhumanitarian priorities. It would be churlish to criticise all product developments inside capitalism. Just most of them. A good example of this is the razor blade, the earliest example of which was a long open sharp metal blade. Unlikely to pass product safety regulations nowadays, it nonetheless - in skilled hands - did the job. The development of the safety razor was a useful advance. Encasing the blade in plastic to minimise the depth of any inadvertent cut, the safety razor was a big hit when first developed.

The market leader Gillette held the patent for stainless steel blades which did not rust so readily, but had not acted on it. Why not pass this benefit onto the consumer? Because they

made more profit from selling lots of the inferior carbon steel blades which blunted easily. Perhaps not the best "a man can get", then.

Similarly the move by Bic and then all manufacturers into disposable shavers meant lower up-front cost for the consumer but larger long-term revenue. In particular the adoption of the cartridge system (separate blade unit from the handle) meant that the manufacturer "locked in" the customer to their brand which - unsurprisingly - wouldn't fit any competitors'.

The wholly disposable razor came next, followed by adjustable heads. One sharp cookie came up with the idea of having two blades side-by-side, on the dubious grounds that this somehow made for a closer shave. It wasn't long before the main competitor responded with a three-blade system.

Whatever next? Crack teams of researchers worked night and day in labs to keep ahead of the competition. They finally came up with "Quatro" - yes, you guessed it, four blades. The careful reader will have detected a trend here, and you'd be right: a fifth blade soon followed.

Your own local supermarket will betray a thousand similar stories of artificial restrictions, artificial needs and wasted human ingenuity. While we split hairs as to when capitalism jumped this particular smooth-skinned shark, the steel mills of China are ratcheting up production again as news comes in (January 2011) of the Dutch supermarket chain Albert Heijn announcing the launch of ... yes, right again... a six-blade device. Happy days!

*Next month: We look at that modern symbol of all that is great about capitalism apparently, the laptop.*



# Workers of the World – in it together

WHEREVER WE are situated on the globe we workers repeatedly find ourselves up against challenges we are unable to deal with as individuals. In isolation we are feeble against the power of states, governments and laws protective of business owning interests. The only way to make headway (often temporary) against overwhelming odds is to be part of a larger group, usually a trade union. The challenges – related to earning capacity, conditions of work, ability to support self and family – are all necessary considerations within the overall political system in which we live. There is no opt-out clause enabling real free choice.

Because of the manner in which the political/economic system works there can only be room for a certain limited number, a percentage of the workforce, to be employed. Even in times of so-called full employment there is always still a pool of unused labour, surplus to requirements in large areas of the world. Capitalism is a competitive system through and through; businesses competing with each other for the available customers and resources, being taken over, going bust, accumulating into larger and larger conglomerations to cut or save costs; workers competing for fewer vacancies, being forced to accept longer hours, reduced pay and benefits to stay in the game. Who doesn't recognise this scenario?

## The negatives of competition

Awareness is growing worldwide that this competitive system is wreaking havoc on the environment on every continent as it also increasingly causes misery for people on an ever-widening scale. Resources and labour are the two requirements to be accessed as cheaply as possible in order to turn them into the biggest profit possible with little or no regard for any consequences. Externalities – issues such as poor air quality leading to severe health problems, forced removal of populations to enable mineral extraction and large dam projects or large scale homelessness and poverty following massive layoffs in times of economic difficulties – are simply ignored.

Competition can certainly be a positive motivation in sport and games for enjoyment, a healthy challenge, self-fulfilment and the like – but not in day-to-day living or as a requirement for putting bread on the table and a roof over our heads. In these situations the negative force of competition puts undue stress on workers causing unnecessary aggravation, even going so far as to wreck family life and be the reason for thousands of suicides every year. Divide-and-rule has proved to work brilliantly well against different sectors of the workforce nationally and works equally well internationally; note the recent clamour for jobs outsourced to Asia and Mexico to be brought back to the US and rising antagonism

across Europe, even government inspired, to groups of immigrants from other nations of the same EU who might be taking our jobs.

## Peasants suffer too

“For over a 100 years those who thought they knew what was happening in the countryside around the world have predicted the disappearance of the peasantry. Surely, by now, they should all be gone! Instead, integrated into La Via Campesina, peasants are turning up everywhere, a troublesome and discordant voice in the chorus extolling the praises of globalisation.” (*Historical Overview of La Via Campesina* by Annette Desmarais.)

La Via Campesina is a global organisation formally created in 1993 with members in 56 countries across five continents. It sees small farmers in the South as the victims of “neoliberal globalisation” (their term), and, with its inexorable competition for profits, seeking out the cheapest resources, the cheapest labour, countries with the poorest safety records etc, a policy of discrimination against the poorest members of world society,



Victim of 'neoliberal globalisation'? A Mexican corn farmer

## The choice is ours

Land Grab, the takeover of productive land (and water) for the profit of outside interests and 180 degrees opposed to traditional agricultural methods, is expanding in a growing number of African countries. Farmers in many parts of the world as well as Africa have traditionally lived together collectively, sharing land, with no concept of land ownership. Governments in these areas being taken over have been corrupted by the chance of becoming mega-rich through deals with foreign third parties to sell land and water rights and as a consequence, an externality, leave many of their citizens homeless, landless and without livelihoods.

A chapter in François Houtart's *Agrofuels* on the 'deadly sequence of crises' sums up the situation facing us all. All of what we are up against 'is a logic which pervades our entire economic history from the last two centuries.' In other words, it is no accident but a deliberate plan which is causing so many of us so many different problems as wage earning workers, whether as public service workers in Britain, farmers in Africa, miners in New Zealand, Chile and China or manufacturing workers in North America. We, the workers, are in this together if we are to make a difference, if we are to bring about the change we so desperately need.

Shall we continue forever to accept being individual wage slaves in the great divide and free-for-all that is capitalism or shall we, the common people, together reclaim what has been stolen from us and choose a *social* system of life together in mutual cooperation, truly free for all?

JANET SURMAN



## Capitalism will not be controlled

GORDON BROWN will go down in history as a failure. Politically, as a prime minister who never won an election. Economically, as the man who arrogantly and pompously announced that his policies had led to the end of the boom/bust cycle, only to find himself a year or so later presiding over capitalism's biggest slump since the 1930s.

Philip Collins commented on this claim in his column in the *Times* on 7 January:

"Weirdly, the Labour Party appeared to have concluded that capitalism had become stable, ordered and pliant. They need to read their Marx again, They'll find a picture of capitalism as creative, destructive, radical, disruptive and prone to cycles of boom and bust, even when commanded to behave by Labour chancellors."

But had they ever read Marx in the first place? Not that the Labour Party has ever accepted Marx's analysis of capitalism. They haven't even used the word "capitalism" for years. A previous Labour Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, once famously declared that he had never got beyond a long footnote on page 2 of *Capital*.

Brown, on the other hand, as a leftwing student leader in his youth and as author of a book on the ILP leader Jimmy Maxton, would probably have read some Marx. As would his successor as chancellor, Alistair Darling, if he really was once a member of the IMG (though he might have therefore been more familiar with Lenin than Marx). The Miliband brothers would have heard of Marx and his ideas from their father and perhaps even read some.

Collins used to be a speechwriter for Blair but he doesn't seem to have made Blair make this criticism of Brown. They, apparently, had other things to argue about. But his description of Marx's view of capitalism is substantially correct.

If Harold Wilson had persisted he would have found (some 500 pages later) Marx's description of the course of capital accumulation:

"The life of industry becomes a series of periods of moderate activity, prosperity, over-production, crisis and stagnation" (chapter 15, section 7).

In a boom the competitive struggle for profits leads to overproduction (in relation to its market) of one sector of the economy that then spreads to other sectors. Capital accumulation stalls. During the resulting slump the conditions are created (through lower wages, interest rates, and asset values and the elimination of unprofitable businesses) for a slow recovery and eventually another boom which, like the previous one, will eventually bust. And the cycle continues.

Brown's Tory opponents forget that he wasn't the first chancellor to have claimed to have ended the boom/bust cycle. Nigel Lawson, Thatcher's chancellor from 1983 to 1989, also believed he had done so. David Smith, the economics editor of the *Sunday Times*, recounted in his 1991 book *From Boom to Bust*:

"Even before an economic miracle was being proclaimed in the late 1980s, the Conservative Party's boosters had declared that Nigel Lawson had achieved something, without explicitly trying for it, that had eluded all previous post-war Chancellors. He had, it was said, abolished the business cycle, a boast that Lawson was happy to live with..." (p. 196). "...until," Smith added, "it proved to be woefully misplaced," when the recession of 1990-91 broke out.

So, it's not just commands from Labour chancellors to behave that capitalism ignores. It does the same to commands from Tory chancellors too. In fact, to commands from any government, including Tory-Liberal coalitions, as the decline in GNP in the last quarter of 2010 showed.

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## Jumpers for Jesus?

DO YOU, in your area, get those leaflets designed to look like charity appeals stuffed through your letterbox every week or so, asking for your unused items of clothing (in good condition) to be sold to help others in need? If you do, check the small print at the bottom to see if there is a registered charity number. There probably won't be. (The point here is not that charities are better than anyone else at dealing with poverty. They're not. It's just an example of how some businesses will happily pretend to be charities in order to make a few bob.)

Where I live there are at least three commercial groups who come round regularly leaving large plastic bags to be stuffed full of clothing which they then cart off and flog. It's a lucrative business. They even pinch each others bags of goodies sometimes.

One of these leaflets recently had in large red print across the bottom: "God will reward your good hearts."

I took it down to my local Trading Standards Office and pointed out that the claim was totally unreasonable. If God is happy to sit on his arse and do nothing while millions starve needlessly I think it's being a bit optimistic to expect him to reward me for giving my old socks and underpants to a private recycling firm. The man behind the desk gave me a puzzled look, then took the leaflet and consulted one of his colleagues. He came back a few minutes later and quietly apologised. "No," he said, "there was nothing they could do."

Apparently it's quite acceptable to not only make these claims on behalf of God in churches up and down the country every Sunday, but now, even

on commercial firms' trading leaflets as well.

Now it seems that the Salvation Army is also willing to let a commercial business make vast profits out of people's charitable donations of clothing – made under the assumption that because it is the Salvation Army, their donations will be used to aid the poor.

An article in the *Guardian* (31 January) describes how a firm in Kettering does very well out of Salvation Army charity. Its boss and three fellow directors have apparently made almost £10 million for themselves since 2008 through a deal in which they collect some 2,500 tonnes of clothes each month from the Salvation Army recycling banks and sell them in eastern Europe.

Trying to justify this Dave Hinton (or Lieutenant Colonel David Hinton, to give him his full Salvation Army title) stated "It would be naïve to believe or expect that such an operation would not incur administrative costs."

The boss of the company, Nigel Hanger, was much more open about it though. Clearly not a man to mince his words, he stated: At no point have I ever not said what I am in this for, I am in business to make profit as best I can in the proper manner and to make as much money as I can for myself and my family."

Doesn't it make a refreshing change to meet an honest businessman?  
N.W.



## Tiny Tips

A quarter of all of Britain's income tax revenues this year will be paid by just one per cent of earners, according to official data:

<http://tinyurl.com/5ttoaxn>

The British crime map doesn't feature corporate crime so it is a bit like a British flood map that registers only bathroom floods:

<http://tinyurl.com/6bfdmpc>

Egypt's secret police, long accused of torturing suspects and intimidating political opponents of President Hosni Mubarak, received training at the FBI's facility in Quantico, Virginia, even as US diplomats compiled allegations of brutality against them, according to US State Department cables released by WikiLeaks:

<http://tinyurl.com/6zrf8ew>

Four decades after the Green Revolution seemed to be solving India's food problems, nearly half of Indian children age 5 or younger are malnourished. And soaring food prices, a problem around the world, are especially acute in India:

<http://tinyurl.com/6g4r7j9>

In one of the deadliest strikes on the Pakistan army, a schoolboy suicide bomber sneaked into a heavily-guarded Pakistani

army training centre in the country's north-west today and blew himself up in the midst of a parade, killing 31 soldiers and leaving 40 more

wounded. "It was a suicide attack by a 12-year-old bomber in school uniform," top police officer Mr Abdullah Khan said:

<http://tinyurl.com/6y7vsrk>

A jury in western New York deliberated for only an hour on Monday before finding a television producer, who ran a cable studio designed to promote understanding of his Muslim culture, guilty of beheading his wife:

<http://tinyurl.com/4wfxh4w>

It seems President Hosni Mubarak isn't the only leader who has grown out of touch with ordinary people following an extended period in power. Tony Blair has praised the Egyptian dictator as a "force for good". Appearing on Piers Morgan Tonight on CNN, the former British PM said: "Where you stand on [Mubarak] depends on whether you've worked with him from the outside or on the inside.

"I've worked with him on the Middle East peace process between the Israelis and the Palestinians and on that issue, I have to say, he's been immensely courageous and a force for good."

<http://tinyurl.com/69enc44>

Joe Biden says Egypt's Mubarak no dictator, he shouldn't step down...and wonders what the Egyptian protesters want:

<http://tinyurl.com/4v74o82>





# Grow up and understand

YOU CAN'T help feeling sorry for coalition ministers with their sleepless nights and restless days having to do something they call Taking Tough Decisions even when these lead to thousands of people catapulted into unemployment, agonising over whether to pay the rent or mortgage or buy food or try to keep warm in the winter. So it helps to know that, at any rate for those struggling ministers, there is another way. Some spin doctor in the deeper recesses of Westminster has come up with the idea that the victims of current policies might regard themselves as less repressed and impoverished if they could accept it all in a more mature and perceptive manner. One great advantage of this reasoning would be that it promises to be stunningly cheap to operate. Another is that any residual resentment by penurious benefit applicants and the like might well be stifled by their feelings of guilt at their own inadequacy in accepting reality.

## Clegg

Here, for example, is Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, seemingly unshaken by his being abruptly transmogrified from the focus of a national mood of "Cleggmania" into "the most hated man in Britain". The tension between the LibDems and their patient fans was aggravated by the fact that Clegg had led his party into the coalition along a path of dishonoured pledges and his excited complacency at holding so eminent a governmental post. Last November, before the Commons voted on the proposal to increase the university tuition fees, Clegg wrote to the President of the National Union of Students and, after asserting that the government's intention was that graduates on lower incomes would be better off than now, stated that "I believe it is crucial that all of us are able to ensure that people know the true picture". Take note of the use of words like "crucial...all of us...ensure...true picture..." designed to imply that anyone who does not fit into this compliant mould has defects which are – well, crucial. This argument might be more effective if it was not put by the same Nick Clegg who, when he was touting for votes during the general election, said that to raise tuition fees would be "a disaster". So while we consider how to maintain a maturely informed attitude among the confusion, can we also settle where we place Clegg? Are we impressed that he eventually admitted the LibDems (including himself) should have thought more carefully before signing those flamboyantly reckless pledges? Or would it be more instructive to remember that this confession was a response to lost votes and the fact that Cleggmania had decayed into a septic memory of a disreputable past.

## Cable

Which brings us to the Deputy Prime Minister's deputy who, while never embellished by Cablemania, has coincidentally been reduced from the world's most immaculately insightful economist to piteously Vincible Vince. Among a procession of savaging blunders in early November Cable boasted to two undercover reporters from the *Daily Telegraph* who came to his constituency surgery pretending to need his advice that he had the power to scupper

Rupert Murdoch's attempt to completely take over BSkyB and that to get his own way in the coalition he could operate the "nuclear option" of threatening to resign from it. Although supposedly a hardened political operator, the terror of affluently bonused bankers, Cable seemed powerless of suspecting that he was being set up precisely to embarrass himself in such an unwise, almost terminal, style. An outraged David Cameron swiftly relieved him of these feverish delusions – and of some of his ministerial responsibilities. But he clung on as Business Secretary, in which post he had brushed aside the protests at the planned rise in tuition fees: "I think a lot of the people who are protesting actually don't understand what's being proposed. It doesn't actually affect them – we're talking about a system of graduate contribution that will only affect people who start going to university in a couple of years' time". There are however problems for anyone eager to give any weight to Cable's views in this matter since he has himself demonstrated a distinct confusion in understanding – at times declaring himself to be in favour, then against, the rise in fees, then that he would abstain from voting (there are no prizes for guessing that, when he came to it, ambition overruled and he obediently supported the rise). But how are we to regard anyone so susceptible to trickery and confusion, who nevertheless tells us that we "don't understand" our everyday problems?

## Cameron

From the other bit of the coalition David Cameron, in what seemed like a fit of exasperation, hit out at the opponents of the "reform" of what are called public services (in which this government is merely following Labour's policy). Cameron's complaint is that the critics need to grow up and realise that what counts is the standards of the service rather than which organisation – state, private, charity – delivers it. Well growing up – although not in the way Cameron means – is mostly a useful, not to say necessary, process from which a certain education is assumed to follow. But until that happens we must work with the outrageous fact that an Old Etonian, ex-member of the vandal Bullingdon Club such as Cameron can lecture us about maturity when he is unable – or perhaps reluctant – to confront the fact that the working class exist under continual pressures of survival in their everyday lives. Dependency on employment in order to survive is a vastly educative, maturing experience. For example the housing charity Shelter recently reported that some 3 million people have problems paying their rent or mortgage, which means that millions of people live under the persistent threat of being homeless. According to Shelter's chief executive "thousands of people are hanging on to their homes by the skin of their teeth...". That is the kind of experience which should be enough to result in such enlightenment about capitalism as to be mightily serious for the Tories, Labour, LibDems and all other supporters of this chaotic, degrading social system.

IVAN



*Sleepless nights and restless days... it's time to grow up*



# Egypt: The hard road to political democracy

*What will happen in Egypt now? Will the army keep control until a new leader acceptable to the West emerges?*

**A**t the time of going to press, the “revolution of anger” in Egypt seems to be entering a new phase. Tahrir Square has been reopened to traffic and commerce. Massive political demonstrations are over, at least for the time being, but strikes and protests by various groups of workers continue. The employees of the National Bank of Egypt have forced the resignation of its chairman, a Mubarak ally. Ambulance drivers, public transport workers, and even the police are demonstrating for better wages and conditions.

Many Egyptians are dissatisfied with what has been achieved so far, and with good reason. Mubarak has gone. But what sort of democrat is the man who took over from him on 31 January – Omar Suleiman, assassin and torturer-in-chief of the dreaded Mukhabarat (General Intelligence Service)? The demand to suspend the emergency law that permits detention without charge has not been met, nor have political prisoners been released. The ruling military council has set no firm timetable for elections and transition to

civilian rule. They have made plenty of promises, but who is naïve enough to trust them?

To understand what is happening in Egypt, we must first understand the nature of the ruling regime.

## **A military oligarchy**

The regime is not a personal dictatorship. It can survive the removal of Mubarak or any other specific figure. It is a military oligarchy. The main power centre is the supreme command of the armed forces (the eleventh largest in the world). In addition, there is a ruling party – under Nasser the Arab Socialist Union, renamed by Sadat the National Democratic Party – but its role is secondary.

The military regime has its origins in the Free Officers’ Movement, which overthrew the British colonial puppet king Farouk in 1952. Its domestic and foreign policy has changed over time, under the successive leadership of Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak, but the regime itself has remained the same. It has never been in the least bit democratic.

Why then does the Trotskyist

*International Socialist Review* tell us that Egypt “has been ruled by a dictatorship for 30 years, with arrests and torture a constant occurrence” ([socialistworker.org/2011/02/11](http://socialistworker.org/2011/02/11))? Only 30 years? Didn’t Nasser too jail thousands of political opponents? Ah, but those were “progressive” and “anti-imperialist” jails – and that makes all the difference, doesn’t it?

Before regaining independence, Egypt was ruled by a succession of empires. Before that it endured the despotism of the pharaohs. Mubarak too was popularly known as “the Pharaoh”. Egypt has been a dictatorship for 11,000 years.

## **From Nasser to Sadat and Mubarak**

This is not to deny important differences between the Nasser and post-Nasser periods.

Nasser conducted a protectionist policy on behalf of national capital. A state-owned iron and steel industry was created. The Aswan Dam was built. In 1956 the Suez Canal was nationalised, leading to armed invasion by Britain, France and Israel. Social reforms were undertaken.

Land was redistributed and rents paid by tenant farmers controlled. A minimum wage was established. There were also reforms in the areas of housing, health, education, women's rights and family planning. In foreign policy Egypt was formally non-aligned; in reality it became a client state of the Soviet Union.

Nasser's successor Sadat expelled Soviet advisers, realigned Egypt with the West (and eventually with Israel), and replaced protectionism by an "open-door" policy. Currency controls were loosened and foreign companies invited to invest in tax-free "enterprise zones". Mubarak went further in the same direction. Cheap food imports were allowed to flood the country, ruining Egyptian farmers. The gap between rich and poor widened. The country fell deeply in debt to the international financial institutions and became financially dependent on US aid.

Much of state industry was privatised. As was later to occur in post-Soviet Russia, valuable state assets were acquired on the cheap by a handful of businessmen with inside connections. That is how Ahmed Ezz, a close friend of Mubarak's son Gamal, emerged overnight as a wealthy steel tycoon.

Another lucrative scam was the legal requirement that a foreign investor must *give* (not sell) a local partner a 20 percent stake in his venture. The "local partner" always happened to be a general or high official.

Mubarak and his family were themselves the greatest beneficiaries of this "crony capitalism". The family fortune has been rumoured to be as much as \$70 billion (£43.5 billion). Both of Mubarak's sons are billionaires in their own right. Most of this money is held in British and Swiss banks or invested in American real estate.

It should be noted that under Mubarak the regime did not serve the interests of the whole capitalist class. Some businessmen did very well, while others lost out. For example, Ezz used his political clout to

force other businessmen to buy his steel rather than importing cheaper steel from China. Similarly, it was difficult for businessmen lacking inside connections to obtain bank loans. This helps explain why some businessmen back the opposition.

### The clan and the regime

While most Egyptians want an end to the military regime, the *immediate* target of the "revolution of anger" was the "Mubarak clan" – Mubarak, his family and their closest allies and associates. The demonstrators wisely took care not to offend the military as an institution. According to some analysts, the Mubarak clan had powerful enemies inside the regime (resentful, perhaps, that they were not getting their fair share of the loot) who used the protests to mount a "half-coup" – meaning a coup against the clan but not the regime. Perhaps this is to overstate tensions inside the regime. It is clear, however, that there were people in the ruling group who did not belong to the Mubarak clan and who were prepared to sacrifice it in order to save the regime. (Apparently they were encouraged to take this step by the Obama administration.)

This was one reason why no attempt was made to use the army to suppress the protests. Another likely reason was that the generals judged that the soldiers and junior officers could not be relied upon to obey orders to shoot into the crowds. The security police – the "thugs" who mysteriously appeared "out of nowhere" riding horses and camels – could be used, because they were more isolated from ordinary people and more effectively under clan control, but there were too few of them to scare off the enormous masses of demonstrators.

### Youth movements and trade unions

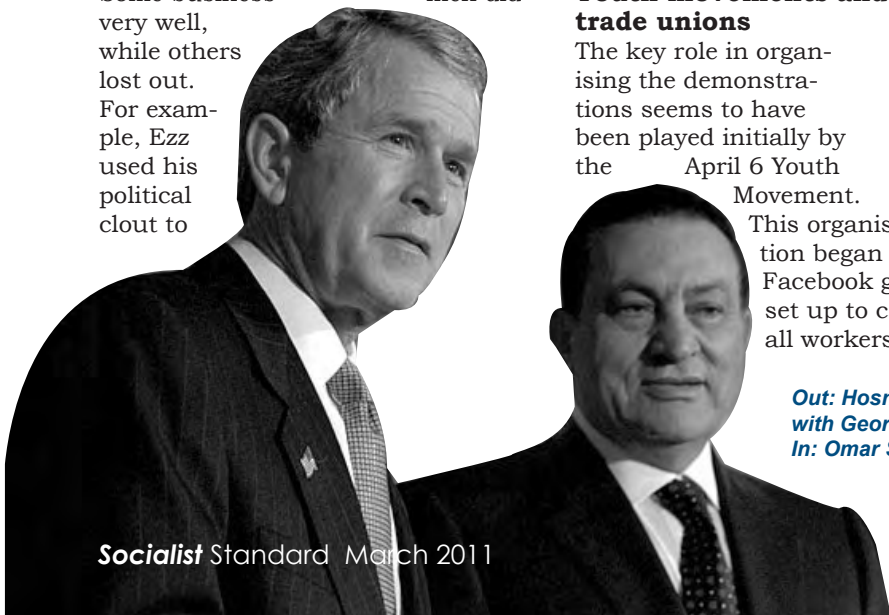
The key role in organising the demonstrations seems to have been played initially by the April 6 Youth Movement.

This organisation began as a Facebook group set up to call on all workers to stay

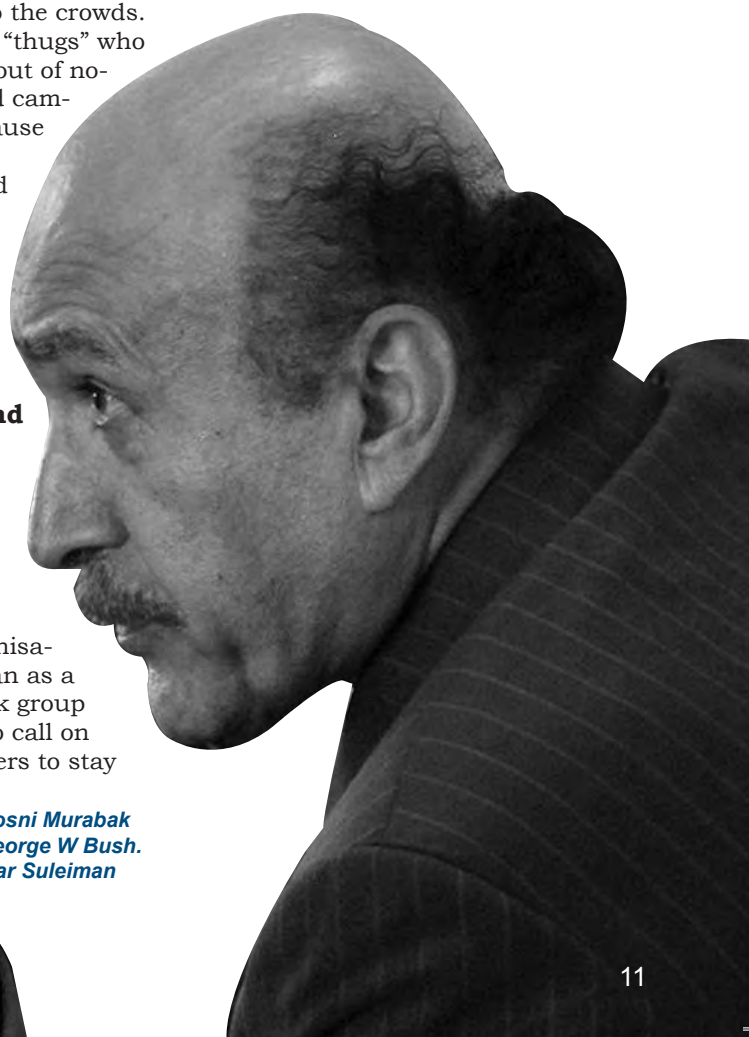
at home on 6 April 2008 in solidarity with striking textile workers. (There has now emerged a new umbrella organisation called the Youth Coalition for the Revolution of Anger.)

So the demonstration organisers appear to have been closely connected with the workers' movement and, in particular, with the campaign to create independent trade unions to replace the old state-controlled Egyptian Trade Union Federation. The textile workers tried to establish an independent union in 2006–2008, but large-scale arrests of activists made this impossible at that time. One of the major gains of the "revolution" was achieved on 30 January, when an independent trade union movement finally emerged in the form of the Federation of Egyptian Trade Unions.

An important point that media coverage fails to convey is that the mass political demonstrations are only part of the upheaval. There are also numerous strikes and protests over "bread and butter" issues. That is not surprising when you consider the rising prices of staple foods and the fact that 40 percent of Egyptians have to survive on under \$2 (£1.30) a day. While political demands are uppermost in Cairo, it seems that material demands are much more prominent in other cities. In Port Said, for instance, crowds angry over the shortage of housing set fire to the local state



Out: Hosni Mubarak with George W Bush. In: Omar Suleiman



security headquarters, the governor's office and the main post office.

### The opposition parties

The regime selectively and intermittently allowed opposition parties to exist but restricted their activity. As a result, these parties are all very small – except for the Moslem Brothers, who despite being illegal were able (like Islamists in other countries) to take shelter in the mosques. Observers estimate that only 5 percent of Egyptians support any of the parties.

Almost all of the opposition parties belong to one of three categories.

First, there are several *liberal capitalist* parties that advocate civil rights and “free enterprise.” An example is the New Wafd Party. These parties are backed by a number of prominent businessmen.

Second, there are various *Islamist* parties. The Moslem Brotherhood is the largest of these, but not the only one.

Third, there are parties that regard themselves as leftist or socialist. What this usually means in the Egyptian context is loyalty to the legacy of Nasser, so it is more accurate to call these *Nasserite* parties. Thus, the National Progressive Unionist Party (known for short as Tagammu) “defends the principles of the 1952 revolution”.

Some parties combine Nasserite with Islamist ideas. For example, the Umma Party stands for “socialist democracy with Sharia (Islamic law) as the main source of legislation” (!). Finally, there is also an environmentalist Green Party.

It is hard to see what can come out of the negotiations that Suleiman is conducting on behalf of the regime with leaders of various opposition parties. None of the parties played any part in organising the “revolution” and few demonstrators regarded the parties as representing them. In fact, due to popular suspicion the negotiations may further weaken the parties' base of support. A report from Suez mentions mass resignations from the parties participating in the negotiations, including Wafd and Tagammu, and connects this development with the creation of a Council to Protect the Revolution in Al-Arish



'Day of Anger' protesters

(near the border with Gaza).

### Who would win free elections?

The weakness of the parties makes it very difficult to predict who would win free elections if they were held today. As the theme of social justice has been prominent in the upheaval, the popular appeal of the liberal opposition may be limited. Social protest can work to the advantage of either Islamists or the left. Given the secular nature of the protests (not only were Islamic slogans conspicuous by their absence: there were also slogans in support of Moslem-Christian unity), the left may do quite well. The Moslem Brothers obviously have considerable support, but they themselves apparently do not think they are strong enough to gain power at this stage.

The existing left-wing opposition parties, however, are handicapped by their Nasserite orientation. To the extent that the demonstrators are against the military regime and committed to democracy, they might hesitate to vote for parties that hark back to an earlier form of the same anti-democratic regime. And, of course, only the older generation has direct memories of the Nasser period. So conditions may be favourable for the emergence of a new democratic left, possibly linked to the independent trade unions. There may even be potential for the spread of genuine socialist ideas.

### Dragging out the transition

The uncertain outcome of elections is one reason why the generals aim to delay the transition to democracy as long as they can. They may also seek to retain a power of veto and other prerogatives even after a civilian government takes office, as well as an

ability to reassert control whenever they consider it necessary – as in the “Turkish model”.

The wish to delay democratisation is clearly shared by the American and European governments on whom the Egyptian generals depend. These governments are great champions of elections, but only provided that the outcome is predictable and acceptable to them. They need time to prepare the ground for such an acceptable outcome – in particular, to

select parties and politicians who can be trusted to respect Western interests and then give them financial, PR and other aid to help them win. Candidates for this role – El-Baradei, for instance – are well aware that pleasing Egypt's Western patrons is at least as vital to their prospects as pleasing their fellow citizens.

### How much time is needed?

Statements from the ruling military council hint that six months may not be enough. German chancellor Angela Merkel has drawn a parallel between the transition in Egypt and the process of German reunification, suggesting that a whole year may be needed. And just in case the results of political engineering are disappointing, the generals and their patrons probably want to keep open the option of dragging out the transition indefinitely, perhaps co-opting a few handpicked opposition figures into what remains basically a military regime.

In the meantime, it is the job of the regime to restore and maintain “order” and “normality”. Ordinary people must stop making trouble and get back to work! To achieve that, the regime can be expected to combine – or perhaps alternate between – sweet talk and arrests, appeasement and repression. Neither approach will easily succeed.

As socialists, we do not regard political democracy in itself as sufficient to emancipate humanity. But we do recognise that it provides by far the best conditions for the development of the socialist movement. That is why we wish those well struggling for political democracy in Egypt – and, indeed, throughout the world

STEFAN



## Tunisia – people power, but...

The lightning rapidity and relative ease with which Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was chased out of Tunisia in January, is a clear testimony not only of the power of the masses but also (though unknown to many) how vulnerable and cowardly many a dictator is. Hours before his ignominious flight, Ben Ali appeared on television visibly shaken and pleading with the people to give him time to address their problems. Too late; the masses were already up in arms. It is said that the capitalist system digs its own grave. But it does not do so willingly. It is an inevitable fate that it must fulfil; it developed the internet to enhance its insatiable crave for profits but, ironically, it is the same internet that the masses will use as a collective organiser to mobilise the exploited to bury the system. The present upheavals in the Arab countries are one such example.

Elsewhere in the Arab lands, this defiant action of the Tunisians sent frosty shivers down the spines of the other dictators and, apprehensive of a possible domino effect, some of these rulers started making jittery reforms to avert a similar (and deserved) fall.

In Tunisia, discontent with the government was deep and widespread, cutting across class lines. The low income earners had no hope of escaping poverty because the government had no way of providing them with jobs. The middle income earners had little chance to improve its lot because the government had so badly sapped the economy that there were few government services and the development of business was virtually impossible except for the few who had close ties with top officials. Many of those who did no more than merely question or complain about injustice were thrown into jail. Many useful people were turned into beggars.

### Pernicious adulation

These dramatic events in the Arab lands (and they are still unfolding) also reveal, in black and white, the negative role that the corporate media plays in the struggle for the emancipation of mankind. On the eve of the uprising, one would have thought, going by what the media wanted the world to believe, that Tunisia was a kind of heaven-on-earth. For instance, in 2002, a number of ‘Special Reports’ on Tunisia were published in *New African* – so far the leading English Language magazine on continental Africa – that need some paraphrasing and scrutiny here. They were, in the main, prepared by one Anver Versi.

According to him, visionary political leaders like Ben Ali are saviours and so when Ben Ali took charge of the country 15 years ago, he called the process *The Change*. Many at that time took the words at their literal value; most at that time did not fully grasp what he meant. When one looks at Tunisia at that time and what it has become today, one feels the full, stunning impact of the words, *The Change*:

“These 15 years have seen one of the most remarkable transformations in modern history of the world. From a country teetering on the brink of social economic and political collapse, Tunisia today is on the threshold of entering developed world status. And this was achieved without any miraculous discovery of gold or oil. The country has also not borrowed heavily to finance its growth, neither has there been any ‘Marshal Aid’ from wealthy nations. Growth has been maintained at a steady 5% per annum despite a four-year drought. Industrial efficiency has been gained without the loss of employment. The infrastructure has quadrupled. Education is universal and incomes have increased by 400%. Eight out of ten households own their homes and there is hardly any poverty. The rights of children are protected by law. An advanced social security programme is in place.”

Versi wrote further that “in Tunisia the term ‘solidarity’ is not a political slogan for organised groups. It stands for the principle ‘one for all and all for one’. ‘Solidarity’ means that you are never alone; your problems are not yours only; you are not isolated but part of an intricate chain. Since a chain is as weak as its weakest link, it is everybody’s duty to ensure that the weak links become stronger with each passing day.” Versi added that according to Ben Ali, the National Solidarity Fund, which is the vehicle used to reintegrate marginalised groups, has been so spectacularly successful that delegations from virtually all corners of the globe arrive almost every week to study how it works. It is a remarkable journey undertaken at a dizzying speed. A miracle indeed!

The above pernicious adulation typifies the mercenary media’s manipulation of public opinion which, unfortunately, is swallowed hook, line and sinker by many. But even if that was actually the reality in Tunisia only a few years ago, how could the situation of the majority of the people be so messy today? To be able to reconcile this rather bizarre equation, one needs to consider the inner workings of the trap set for Tunisia (and indeed all peripheral states) by the capitalist

system..

### Free trade with the EU

Tunisia was the first country to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union. According to the terms of the Agreement, the EU and its Association partners would introduce a Free Trade Zone in 2010. This would mean that tariffs and other protective barriers would be eliminated. This was way back in July 1995. The Agreement provided that Tunisia would be given enough time and room to adjust its national structures to fit into the partnership. It would also not surrender its competitive advantages, such as its cheap labour. Naturally, a less developed nation joining an

policies and co-ordinate with Tunisian authorities. They would work together with the Tunisian Ministry of Co-operation and Investment and provide technical management assistance to improve productivity. They were also to budget aid money against reforms and disburse funds after checking that targets had been met. They would also link with lending institutions like the World Bank for more loans. The office then proceeded to open up trade services such as insurance, banking and other commercial and professional set-ups.

That marked the beginning of the end. The government failed to understand that the tighter the grip of the capitalists on industry, the more intense is the poverty of the masses and the more marked are the riches of the few.



### Decorated donkeys

Coming back to the crisis, the demonstrations continued in spite of the ignominious flight of Ben Ali. This is understandable because those individuals who, in one way or the other, helped mess up the lives of the ordinary people were the same who came back as the interim government; a clear case of the decorated donkey still being an ass.

But one thing is obvious; no matter who are brought in to assume leadership of the country, the plight of the ordinary Tunisian will not see any significant improvement. The so-called opposition are no better than the likes of Ben Ali. At the beginning of 2002, for instance, the opposition parties and some civil organisations were invited to contribute to the framing of a draft constitution before it was put to the public to vote on. Later, the secretary-general of the Popular Unity Party (PUP) one of the six opposition

parties, Mohammed Bouchiha, gleefully commented that the reforms marked the crossing of the Rubicon and signified a point of no return in the development of modern Tunisia. "The system has now been changed as we demanded," he said.

On the issue of the reforms dropping the limitation on presidential terms, Bouchiha said, defending the open system, "That was an irrelevancy; the clause was brought in when President Ben Ali revoked the President-for-Life system introduced in the latter stages of Habib Bourghiba's administration. But if the electoral system is fair, why should the public be denied the opportunity to vote in the candidate of their choice as many times as possible?"

Now, observers across the anti-capitalist spectrum may enthusiastically welcome the courageous action of the people but the fact is that the opposition is not a unified ideological entity. It is a random collection of (often irreconcilable) groups whose interest in getting rid of the

But the Tunisian rulers, and that is always the bait, were made to believe that with time they could compete on an equal footing with their European counterparts. The Agreement also provided for a 12-year transition period after which it would come into force for the implementation of the free trade arrangement. However, Tunisia had started dismantling tariffs on industrial goods in 1996, two years before the agreement came into force in 1998. It would therefore be able to enter the Free Trade Zone by 2008.

The EU opened an office in Tunis and the grants started flowing in. A 40-strong team from the European Commission flew in. Its function was to carry out EU

government only happens to coincide now. Though such an amorphous group may be able to seize power, they can hardly help the masses as they do not have any common and well-thought-out agenda except that they want to see the back of the leader. And even if they are able to hammer out some sort of radical programme, they will soon be forced to make concessions to the same ruinous capitalist world around them as there is virtually no possibility that massive foreign aid will be offered them to alleviate the poverty of the populace.

Thus, the untold hardship visited on the masses and which necessitated the mass action can only be possible (and will always be so) under the capitalist system. This system is based on an insignificant minority of the world owning all the means of production and distribution of wealth i.e. land, factories, transport and communication networks, the media etc. These few individuals control all the wealth of the world whereas the majority have nothing and have to work for the owning class to continue making their profits. It is this sort of relations that is the source of all the suffering in the world.

Therefore, it is only when this profit-driven system is abolished and replaced with a system that is operated on the basis of ownership of the world's resources by the whole of humanity that such uncalled for situations in society can be done away with. But this cannot be achieved except when there is a concerted action on a global scale. Individual countries may rise up and chase away their leaders but it does not solve the problem. It is only when the majority of mankind and in particular the working class understand the capitalist system and, based upon this understanding, decide to do away with capitalism and replace it with a better mode of organising society (call it socialism) that the human race will be really human. For, such a socialist system will be run on the basis of collective ownership of the world's resources for the use and benefit of all.

**SUHUYINI**

## Zambia: the riots in Barotseland

The events that took place in Western Province on 14 January strongly and correctly underpin that Zambia's politics are tribalist – that tribalism in Zambia exists and is partly instigated by self-seeking politicians through inciting disgruntled ethnic groups in order to advance their political objectives.

What is called nationalism comes to emphasise political allegiance to the state. Political states in Africa were mapped out by European imperialist nations under the guise of economic interests and military influence. Thus African kingdoms and empires were brutally decimated and different ethnic groups were forcibly integrated into colonial states and protectorates.

British imperialism (colonialism) was politically, religiously and poetically lampooned as bringing civilisation. What is known today as Zambia consists of 72 ethnic groups and the Lunda-Luba speaking tribes comprise 90 percent of Zambia's population. Politically and linguistically the Bemba remains one of the dominant tribes. The Lozi and Tonga remain linguistically and culturally differentiated from the Lunda-Luba complex tribe. It is undeniable that rigid ethnic and tribal patterns exist in Zambia today as a major factor determining the strength of political parties.

The Barotseland Agreement was enacted on 7 May 1974 in London between the then Prime Minister of Northern Rhodesia Kenneth Kaunda, the Litunga of Barotseland and the British colonial government. The document in itself signified the end of British protectorate of Barotseland and entailed the incorporation

of Barotseland (Lozi) into a self-governing independent state of Zambia under the leadership of Dr. Kenneth Kaunda. There is nothing sinister about the Barotseland Agreement that needs to be revised today as a way of protecting and safeguarding the political and economic aspirations of the Lozi-speaking peoples of Western Province. Thus recent calls for political and ethnic separation of the Lozi-speaking people from Zambia is mainly propagated by a bunch of political hooligans without any viable backing from the political fraternity.

It may be juxtaposed that calls for revising the Barotseland Agreement and the consequent bouts of mob violence that took place in Western Province in January were partly the outcome of economic backwardness that still prevails in Western Province. The mob went berserk, stoning vehicles and damaging public property. The police replied with live ammunition and two lives were lost.

What we are now saying is that economic underdevelopment that prevails in Western Province was the main motivating factor behind the violence that took place otherwise than political dissatisfaction with the Barotseland Agreement as such.

Political rebels within the ruling MMD have blamed President Rupiah Banda for having seemingly deviated from the political legacy of the late Levy Mwanawasa – economic development through tackling corruption and money laundering.

Favoured by political fortune Banda automatically became acting President when Mwanawasa died in 2008. In the presidential elections held in 2008, Banda managed to win with a mere majority of 350,000 votes against Patriotic Front president Michael Sata and became the fourth president of the republic of Zambia.

Apart from the Bemba, the Lozi and Tonga have played a prominent rôle in Zambia's domestic politics such that any beleaguered political pronouncements on events taking place in Western Province tends to elicit feelings of Lozi tribal parochialism against the ruling MMD. Because the violent mobs in Western Province were attacking non-Lozi we may infer that there is any ethnic rebellion there.

It is sad to note, come 2011 general elections, the majority of workers and students in urban areas of Lusaka and the Copperbelt will massively vote for Michael Sata of the PF, whereas the peasants in rural village communities will vote for the MMD. The people who live in towns believe that PF leader Sata will achieve economic miracles in the belief working conditions in Chinese-owned mines will improve and new jobs will be created. Those who live in rural village communities are content with fertiliser subsidies, new schools and paved roads and will vote for the MMD.

But wealth and power under capitalism can only be realised through legalised exploitation of some people by others. This is a complete contradiction of socialism that envisages a future society in which economic and political privileges will not exist because goods will be produced for consumption and not for sale – while racial and ethnic taboos will not prevail because there wouldn't be political leaders nor class interests to defend.

**KEPHAS MULENGA**

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# A century of progress?

*Workers are still being killed in fires in garment factories because of locked doors.*

**M**arch 25 will be the centenary of the greatest workplace disaster, prior to 9/11, in America's history – the infamous fire at the Triangle Shirt Waist Factory in New York. Because of a locked door, 146 people died, most of whom jumped to their deaths on the street nine storeys below, obviously preferring a quick and painless end over being burned to death.

The Triangle Company occupied the top three floors of the ten-storey Asch building at the intersection of Washington Place and Greene Street in Greenwich Village. Architect Joseph Asch had boasted his building was fire-proof, which structurally it was. This didn't mean everything in it was.

No one knows exactly what started the fire, but the most likely explanation was a cigarette end that had not been extinguished, was thrown into a barrel of unused clothing material. Smoking was prohibited for the obvious reason that the materials were flammable. Some of the cutters constantly defied this ban, believing themselves to be a cut above the other employees (no pun intended) and as such, thought the law didn't apply to them. Workplace snobbery being another of the many ways capitalism divides worker against worker.

The fire began around 4:45 p.m. which was quitting time for the near 500 employees. Factory manager, Sam Bernstein, the brother-in-law of one of the owners, Max Blanck, attempted to douse the flames rather than sound the alarm, an action that cost many lives.

The fire, which began on the eighth floor, sped rapidly to the ninth and tenth, cotton being very flammable. Many did escape, some in the elevators (a few even threw themselves on top of it) and

some made it to the roof. Ladders were extended from a nearby building to the roof.

Among those who scaled them were the owners, Max Blanck and Isaac Harris, (betcha couldn't see that one coming.)

Twenty four died on the fire escape, which did not extend to the ground and was too flimsy to hold that much weight and collapsed.

Though the fire department was called and arrived quickly and extinguished the blaze in thirty minutes, their ladders could only reach as high as the sixth floor. Those who died did so because the door on the Washington Place side of the ninth floor was locked. Controversy raged between whether it was locked to prevent people leaving early or to make them leave by the Greene Street door, then enveloped in flames. The usual procedure was, when they left by the Greene Street door, they would have their handbags checked to see they were not taking home products they had made. In other words, the company had to protect their legal theft as opposed to illegal theft. Whatever the reason for the locked door it made no difference to the deceased. Their choice was death by fire, or jumping.

Most of them were young immigrant women from Italy and the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe. Though no one knows what their thoughts were, it's

possible that Jewish girls, having seen in the pogroms, what fire could do to their bodies, jumped so they would be identifiable. Those who remained in the building were identified by a shoe or a lock of hair, or jewellery; six were never identified.

Nothing should have been surprising about the fire which was a tragedy waiting to happen, especially at a time where there was so little workplace safety legislation in effect in America.

In the early 20th century, approximately 40,000 people lost their lives every year to workplace injuries: in mines, foundries, factories and on railroads. What made the Triangle fire sensational is the fact that so many died so quickly, so horrifically and in America's most populated city.

For three months officialdom did nothing about it except point fingers. State governor, John Dix, said he was "powerless", an amazing comment, which was interpreted as, "I don't care." Mayor, Bill Gaynor, told his secretary to deal with it, who then referred the matter to the Fire Chief, Ted Croker. This worthy had risen to power by the patronage of his uncle, Richard Croker, once head of Tammany Hall, the most powerful political organisation in America. Croker blamed the Building Department, who blamed the Fire Department.

State Labour Commissioner, John Williams, said it didn't come under his jurisdiction and building owner, Joseph Asch, said he had fulfilled all his obligations. Harris and Blanck said the doors were never locked during working hours. The head of the reformist Socialist Party of America, Meyer London, sneered that, whilst safety reform should be enacted, it probably wouldn't be, and that nothing would be done about the tragedy.

The press understandably demanded that someone be held accountable. William Randolph Hearst, even created his own panel of

*The Asch building today. Contemporary accounts of the fire stated that 'fifty girls' jumped to their deaths from upper storey windows*



experts in engineering, real estate and fire prevention to suggest new laws for safer workplaces for his paper, *American*, to advocate.

For a time, it looked like London would be proved right, but a young man, ambitious for political office, District Attorney, Charles Whitman, persevered in his attempts to prosecute the owners.

Whitman interviewed survivors and hired a detective to go to the ninth floor and find the lock of the door that opened onto the Washington Place stairs. This lock showed it had not been opened, whereupon the detective, Barry Flood, secured an indictment against Blanck and Harris, whom he arrested.

The defendants obtained the services of Manhattan's most successful attorney, Max Steur, who had himself

ing hours. Steur emphasised it would be ridiculous if they were locked, considering the constant coming and goings of delivery people, errand boys and salesmen etc. All this was ludicrous when one considers that, when a fire prevention expert inspected the premises in 1909, he noticed the door on the Washington Place side was locked during working hours. Survivors, themselves, had said Harris was constantly checking to see the door was locked.

Judge Thomas Grain, charged the jury to decide, beyond a reasonable doubt, whether or not the defendants were aware the door was locked during working hours. The jury concluded they were not aware of it, so they were acquitted.

The "innocent" partners successfully filed insurance claims that worked

*"Fire tore through a Bangladesh garment factory, killing at least 25 workers who made clothes for Western retailers including Gap and injuring more than 100. Most of the victims died after jumping from the 11-storey building, witnesses said. Workers said that some of the exits were locked" (Times, 15 December 2010).*

During the century since the fire, laws concerning workplace safety have been passed and enforced, till by 2006, (the last year this author could get figures for), only two percent of all deaths by accidents in the US were workplace related. As necessary as such legislation is, it is nevertheless merely an improvement within capitalism. But, as long as capitalism lasts, such events will occur. The fact they occur less frequently is no reason to defend capitalism

Obviously, they will happen more in countries where safety laws either don't exist or are not enforced. In Bangkok in 1993, nearly 200 workers died in a toy factory, where the doors had been locked by their bosses to prevent them from taking toys home. There are other examples, especially from Bangladesh (see boxes).

Despite the tremendous technological advances we've seen, life hasn't changed much under capitalism. Nor, can it be argued, such events are history in capitalism's greatest power. In 1991, in Hamlet, North Carolina, 25 people died in a fire at a poultry plant, also because of locked doors.

With the profit motive being the main determining factor in production, it would be naive and idealistic to expect capitalists and politicians, who attempt to administrate capitalism, to care. Perhaps, nobody said it better than software capitalist and investor, Kevin O'Leary, who expressed his feelings on altruism by saying, "The emotional tie that I have at the end of the month is when I count the cash." He also told a prospective business partner, "There's something nasty about you and I like it."

Socialists cannot say with any degree of certainty that there will be no workplace deaths in a socialist society. The exact nature of work and the workplace will be determined by the needs of society and the technology available. What socialists can say, is that with the abolition of money and therefore the profit motive, the very death blood of capitalism, priority will be given to workplace health in general and safety in particular. Events like the Triangle Fire will never occur again.

**STEVE SHANNON**



*Victims' remains being removed in coffins*

once been a garment worker.

Steur, knowing he couldn't prove the door was unlocked, resorted to cheap tricks like examining the handbags of survivors to see how many garments they could possibly have smuggled out. This was done in attempt to create sympathy among the jurors and to show the reasoning for keeping it locked.

Blanck and Harris, naturally enough, said they weren't aware of any doors being locked during work-

out to about \$400.00 for every dead worker.

Civil lawsuits were brought against the owners by the relatives of the deceased, but since Steur again defended them, nobody got a penny. Instead, twenty three relatives managed to get the princely sum of \$75.00 each from an insurance company.

It is of small, if any, consolation to the relatives of the victims that the fortunes of the Triangle Company gradually declined, and by 1918 had ceased to exist. By 1920, Harris and Blanck split up, neither being prosperous after.

A person who took a great deal of interest was Frances Perkins, herself an eyewitness to the fire. Fifty years later she unveiled a memorial plaque to the victims, at the sight of the tragedy. Perkins became America's first female cabinet minister, when President Roosevelt appointed her Minister of Labor in his New Deal government. This proved women could run capitalism just as incapable as men.

*"Several hundred protested in Dhaka and Gazipur yesterday, after locked gates were blamed for the death of 21 people in a fire at a Bangladeshi factory that made sweaters for H & M. Most of the victims of the blaze were women who suffocated on the top floor of the seven storey Garib and Garib factory. The nephew of one of the victims said that the gates had been locked, trapping them. The National Garment Workers Federation said, "These workers were killed by the factory's blatant disregard for worker safety." (Times, 27 February 2010)*

# Wages and the cost of living (again)

As inflation begins to kick off again, is it a return to the 1970s?

The government and the Confederation of British Industry are banking on an “export-led recovery”. They are hoping that, with the fall in the value of the pound making exports cheaper, there will be an increase in production in the sectors producing for export which will have a knock-on effect on the rest of the economy.

There is no guarantee that this will happen, especially as others – in particular, the US and German-dominated Euroland – are hoping for the same. But there is another side to a fall in the value of a currency. While it makes exports cheaper, it makes imports dearer.

When, in the days of formal devaluations, the Labour government of the day was forced in November 1967 to devalue the pound, by 14 percent compared against the dollar, the Prime Minister Harold Wilson made his famous remark about the “pound in your pocket”:

“From now the pound abroad is worth 14% or so less in terms of other currencies. It does not mean, of course, that the pound here in Britain, in your pocket or purse or in your bank, has been devalued. What it does mean is that we shall now be able to sell more goods abroad on a competitive basis.”

Technically, he was right. If you had a pound in your pocket it didn't become 86p (in today's money). But he was being disingenuous as he knew that the devaluation would make imports dearer and so lead to higher prices for imported goods. The cost of living would go up, leading to “the pound in your pocket” not being able to buy as much as previously.

It's happening again now. The government has let the foreign exchange value of the pound fall; the price of imported goods (such as oil and gas, and oranges and bananas) has gone up. So, as a result has the cost of living. Figures for January for the Consumer Price Index showed

a rise of 4 percent compared with the previous January, well above the 2 percent that the Bank of England is supposed to keep it at.

It's going to continue. According to Sean O'Grady, the Economics Editor of the *Independent* (21 January), there is “mounting evidence that manufacturers are having to pass a rapid rise in import costs on to the consumers – with the acceleration in imported inflation at its highest since 1975, the year that recorded the highest import inflation in modern British history.” He went on to quote the CBI's chief economic adviser, Ian McCafferty:

“Manufacturers have come under intense pressure to pass on rising costs: they have increased prices markedly in this quarter [last quarter of 2010], and expect to raise them at an even faster pace over the next three months. This will drive further inflationary pressure in the wider economy.”

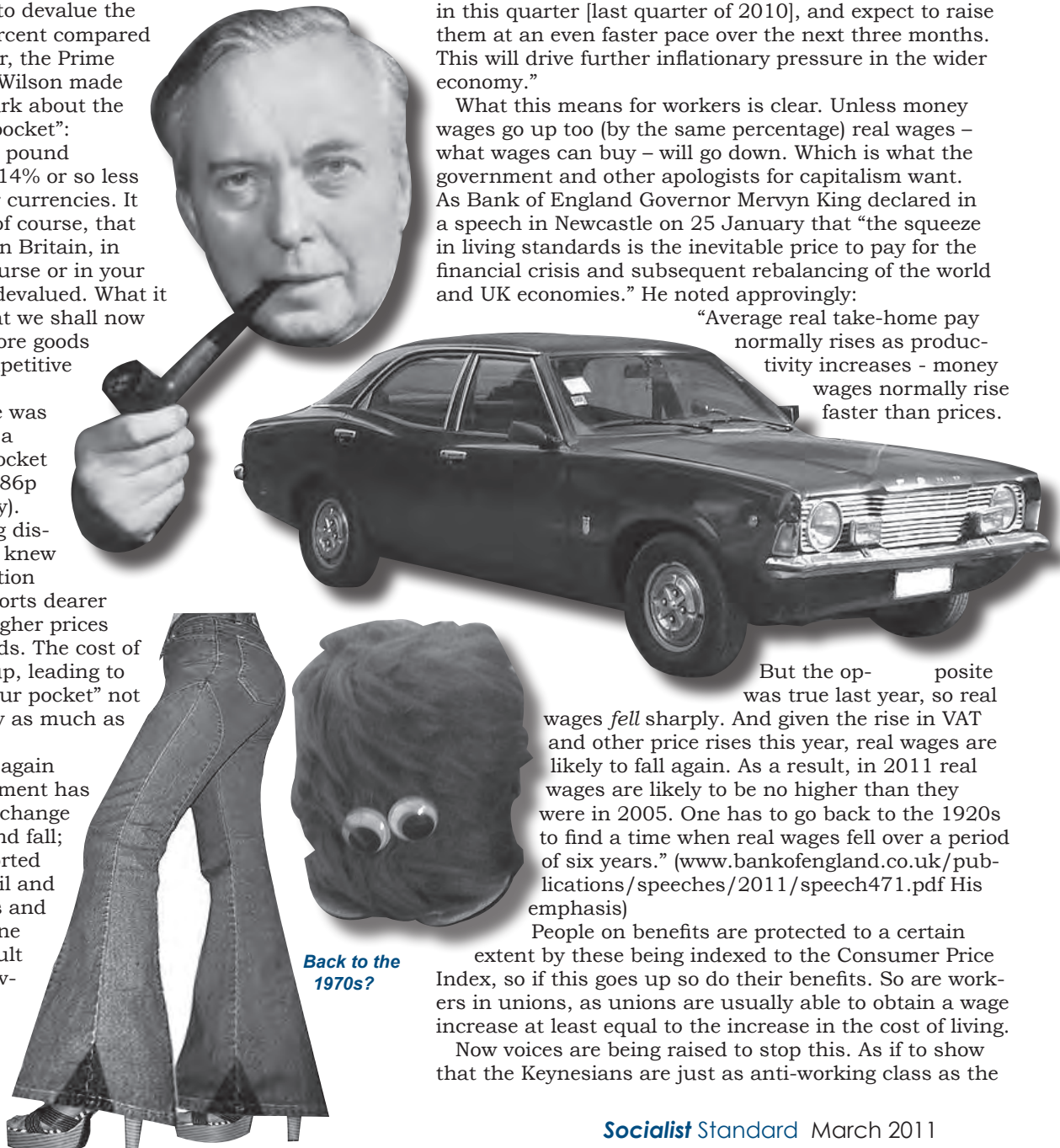
What this means for workers is clear. Unless money wages go up too (by the same percentage) real wages – what wages can buy – will go down. Which is what the government and other apologists for capitalism want. As Bank of England Governor Mervyn King declared in a speech in Newcastle on 25 January that “the squeeze in living standards is the inevitable price to pay for the financial crisis and subsequent rebalancing of the world and UK economies.” He noted approvingly:

“Average real take-home pay normally rises as productivity increases - money wages normally rise faster than prices.”

But the opposite was true last year, so real wages fell sharply. And given the rise in VAT and other price rises this year, real wages are likely to fall again. As a result, in 2011 real wages are likely to be no higher than they were in 2005. One has to go back to the 1920s to find a time when real wages fell over a period of six years.” (www.bankofengland.co.uk/publications/speeches/2011/speech471.pdf His emphasis)

People on benefits are protected to a certain extent by these being indexed to the Consumer Price Index, so if this goes up so do their benefits. So are workers in unions, as unions are usually able to obtain a wage increase at least equal to the increase in the cost of living.

Now voices are being raised to stop this. As if to show that the Keynesians are just as anti-working class as the



Back to the 1970s?

Free Marketeers, Keynes's biographer Lord Skidelsky and Michael Kennedy wrote to the *Financial Times* (29/30 January) claiming that "the indexed incomes policies of the 1970s were a national disaster". They called for increases in the cost of living due to increases in the price of imported goods to be excluded from the Consumer Price Index. Which of course would mean a reduction in the standard of living for those with indexed incomes.

Tim Shepherd replied the following week (*Financial Times*, 5/6 February) warning that manipulating the cost of living index would be "a slippery slope that will reduce the credibility of the indices" (as if this hadn't already happened – only last October the government changed the link for benefits to an index that goes up more slowly). But he too asserted that "real wages need to fall when the terms of trade move against an economy".

The terms of trade compare export prices with import prices and "move against an economy" when more exports are needed than before to pay for the same amount of imports. But this is precisely what happens when the value of a country's currency falls; it decreases export prices and increases import prices, so increasing the gap between them.

So it really could be the return to the 1970s that Lord Skidelsky and the others fear. Then, governments, both Labour and Tory, tried all sorts of ways to hold wages down – wage restraint, incomes policies, wage freezes, anti-union laws – and the workers and their unions fought back. Strikes were more frequent than today. The governments and the media described this as a wages-prices spiral, blaming the workers for fuelling it with their wage demands. But it was more of a prices-wages spiral, with workers trying to keep their wages going up in line with rising prices (caused, at that time, mainly by currency inflation).

Strictly speaking, an increase in import prices is not "inflation" as inflation is not any particular price increase but only (as the word itself suggests) an increase in the general price level due to an overissue of the currency. Currency inflation is still moderately practised by governments who often aim to keep it at around 2 percent a year. One of its effects is in fact to increase export prices along with all other prices and is a factor in whether a currency floats up or down relative to others.

If the rise in the cost of living is going to speed up as in the seventies then the workers' response will have to be what it was then – to push, including by going on strike, for money wages to go up to maintain living standards, even though this time, given mass unemployment, employers will be in a stronger position.

What this confirms is that built-in to capitalism is a class struggle between workers and employers. But it's not just over wages and working conditions. It's ultimately over the ownership and control of the places where wealth is produced.

As capitalist ownership of the means of production is created and upheld by the state, the struggle needs to be carried over from the workplace on to the political field. It means organising not only in trade unions and the like to wage what is essentially a defensive struggle. It means organising politically to put up candidates against the parties of capitalism (Tories, Labour, Liberals, Greens, Nationalists) with a view to wresting political control from them and using it to declare private, class ownership of the means of production null and void so that they become the common property of society as a whole. This is why, in addition to trade unionism, a socialist political party is needed.

**ADAM BUICK**



## Was the crisis just a mistake?

THE FINANCIAL Crisis Inquiry Commission set up by the US government reported at the end of January. They concluded that the crisis of 2007 and 2008 was the result of "human action and inaction, not of Mother Nature or computer models gone haywire", but "of human mistakes, misjudgments, and misdeeds" and so avoidable (<http://www.fcic.gov>).

Obviously, the crisis was the outcome, even if unintended, of decisions by humans to behave in particular ways, but that's not at issue. We need to know why the economic decision-makers involved took the decisions they did. What was the context of their decisions? What were the constraints acting on them?

The driving force of capitalism is the pursuit of profits by competing enterprises. As the Commission put it, "in our economy, we expect businesses and individuals to pursue profits..." If there is a chance to make a profit from some activity then the businesses in that field will go for it. If the profits are high enough then other businesses will enter the field to share in the bonanza.

This is what happened in the US. From 1997 until 2006 there was a boom in house building and buying. Big profits were to be made from lending money either directly to housebuyers or to businesses that did so. Easily able to borrow funds at relatively low rates of interest, the Wall Street investment banks decided to get in on the act, and in a big way.

"The large investment banks and bank holding companies," the Commission reported, "focused their activities increasingly on risky trading activities that produced hefty profits." The prospect of making "hefty profits" out of lending money to build and buy houses led them to borrow more and more money to take part in the chase after them:

"In the years leading up to the crisis, too many financial institutions, as well as too many households, borrowed to the hilt, leaving them vulnerable to financial distress or ruin if the value of their investments declined even modestly. For example, as of 2007, the five major investment banks – Bear Stearns, Goldman Sachs, Lehman Brothers, Merrill Lynch, and Morgan Stanley – were operating with extraordinarily thin capital. By one measure, their leverage ratios were as high as 40 to 1, meaning for every \$40 in assets, there was only \$1 in capital to cover losses."

Note the matter-of-fact acceptance here that banks cannot create money out of thin air but are dependent on themselves borrowing the money they lend.

The Commission criticised the investment banks and other financial institutions for taking such risks but could those involved in making these decisions have decided otherwise? Could they have decided to forgo the chance of making the 'hefty profits' that were there to be taken? No, because if one of them decided not to pursue these profits, the others would have enthusiastically taken their place. It wasn't a mistake on their part. Given the competitive, profit-seeking nature of capitalism they had to take the decisions they did. In that sense the financial crisis was not avoidable.

It was outside the remit of the Commission to examine the housing boom whose collapse in 2006 triggered the financial crisis. They merely recorded that "when housing prices fell and mortgage borrowers defaulted, the lights began to dim on Wall Street". If they had gone further into the housing boom and why it ended, they would have discovered that it was a classic case of the pursuit of profits leading to overproduction (too many houses being built in relation to what people could afford to buy) and perhaps revised their view that "the profound events of 2007 and 2008" were not "an accentuated dip in the financial and business cycles we have come to expect in a free market economic system."

## What's got to go

### Zeitgeist: Moving Forward



"...I'm 94 years old now and I'm afraid my disposition is the same as it was 74 years ago, THIS SHIT'S GOT TO GO!"

And so begins *Zeitgeist: Moving Forward*, the third film in a series of independently produced and distributed films by Peter Joseph. For those unfamiliar with these films, which have enjoyed considerable success on the internet, perhaps a quick recap will be useful.

In 2007, following on from a live music and visual production, the film *Zeitgeist* was released on the internet. The content of the film was concerned with religion, 9/11 conspiracy theories, and fractional reserve banking. After viewing this film 'social designer' and ex-Technocrat Jacques Fresco contacted Joseph with details of his techno-utopian life work known as the Venus Project. Peter Joseph was so impressed by this that he devoted a large part of his next film the *Addendum*, and his subsequent life, to expounding these ideas.

In the closing lines of this second film, and as an apparent near afterthought, contained the words 'Join the Zeitgeist Movement dot com'. On the back of this Joseph has been able to amass a large following on the web and through this fan base co-ordinate an international release comprising of 341 screenings without the association of a major distributor.

*Moving Forward* itself follows a similar format to the last film in that it is composed of interviews with various academics and journalists, though the range of interviewees is wider this time. There has also been the addition of cartoon animated sequences and other light-hearted sequences that help break the film up giving it a well rounded feel.

The first section of the film is concerned with how society affects physiology and psychology. The film criticises concepts such as 'human nature', genetic determinism, nature versus nurture in a way that would be acceptable to socialists, indeed in places covering issues close to those in the Socialist Party pamphlet *Are We Prisoners of Our Genes?* Nothing too ground breaking or controversial here but so far so good. Unfortunately things go rather downhill after this.

The shaky economic analysis of the first two films makes a re-appearance. Apparently private property originates not

with the beginnings of agriculture but with the works of John Locke. Capitalism starts not with the rise of the mercantile class and the creation of a landless proletariat but with the works of Adam Smith. We are told that the current economic system is characterised by 'cyclical consumption' as if consumption under any other system of production could ever be anything other than cyclical, all goods get used up or wear out eventually.

An unfortunate consequence of this section is that it gives the impression that monetary reform would be at least some kind of partial solution. We are told that the problem is that the 'life cycle' of commodity production has become dis-attached from the 'money cycle' of the market and that people are forced to work because of the debt created by fiat currency; as if the market was ever primarily about human need and people didn't have to work before the advent of consumer credit and the abandonment of the gold standard.

The fact is that a more thorough and scientific analysis of the capitalist system has already been undertaken, and well over 100 years ago, in the works of Marx; the makers of the film seem ignorant of this probably as they imagine he advocated the continuation of the money system. In fact Marx, along with all true socialists, recognised that money would pass away with the passing away of private property and capitalism.

Though, to be fair, despite these false beginnings the analysis is at least on the right track. In the closing lines of this sequence the narrator states that the fundamental problem facing humanity is not to do with greedy bankers or a secret ruling elite but 'is in fact the socio-economic system itself at its very foundation'.

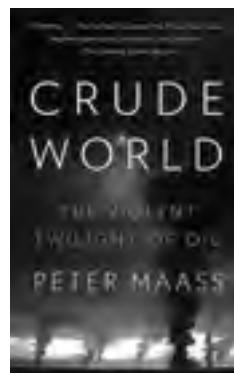
The next section of the film, entitled 'project earth' is mainly concerned with the Venus Project's proposed technical solutions to the world's problems. Anyone who has seen the *Addendum* would be familiar with what's on offer here. Hi-tech circular cities, vertical hydroponic farms and such-like are suggested as ways of producing enough means of subsistence for the world's population to live comfortably; and perhaps they will be, but such ideas can only be taken as vague suggestions as it is impossible to know what other technological possibilities would have come into fruition by the time such a society becomes a real possibility. The underlying message here is that the technological means for the manufacture of abundance are already in existence, again something which socialists would not disagree with or haven't said before.

A weakness of the film is that there is no mention of how to get from here to there. Democracy is written off as a fraud since monetary interests are the real guiding force in society. Whilst we would say this is true of all major parties we would also

continued page 22

## Troubled Waters

*Crude World.* Peter Maass.  
Penguin. £10.99.



The delta of the River Niger is an enormous wetland, once a flourishing ecosystem with a wide range of life forms. But now it is not a wildlife sanctuary: rather it is a horrendous landscape

of ruined villages, devastated populations and roving armies. The reason for this is simply the delta's vast oil reserves and the prospects for wealth and power that these entail.

This is but one clear example of the 'resource curse', which states that countries dependent on the export of resources such as oil are susceptible to more corruption and warfare but less freedom or economic growth. In this enlightening book, Peter Maass surveys a number of cases and shows how oil rarely produces benefits for those who live in the places where it is found.

In Equatorial Guinea, for instance, the discovery of offshore oil led to enormous riches for the dictator-president Teodoro Obiang. Few local workers were employed in the exploring and drilling work, and massive profits were made by American companies like Exxon. The US government, and various lobbying groups, played their part in supporting Obiang and keeping him friendly to American business. This is particularly important as Chinese companies start flexing their own oil-producing muscles.

In Ecuador Texaco was able to do more or less as it wished, since the officials of the newly-formed state oil company knew next to nothing about oil. The natural gas that came to the surface with the oil was just burned off, which can be deadly for both people and environment. Rivers and land have been contaminated and the government left with massive debts.

The profits, of course, go to the oil companies and their owners. Lee Raymond received \$686 million for his thirteen years as chief executive of Exxon-Mobil, while billions went to share-holders. As Maass points out, oil companies in fact do not 'produce' oil, they simply take it from the ground. Extracting, purifying and

transporting oil are complex tasks (performed by skilled workers), but selling oil to realise the profits is not difficult. What is needed in the first place is a licence from the local government to explore and extract oil, which is why the oil industry is usually rife with corruption and works closely with diplomats and generals to ensure this kind of access.

So a substance used to provide fuel and warmth also causes wars and destroys the environment. Inevitable consequences of a world that belongs to a privileged few and is driven by profit.

**PB**

## Kropotkin

***Mutual Aid. An Introduction and Evaluation.* Iain McKay. AK Press.**

Socialists have always recommended Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*, including it on lists of books for sale. Kropotkin was an anarchist, but had been a scientist (geographer) himself and in this book was writing as science writer. It was originally written as a reply to T. H. Huxley, the biologist known as "Darwin's Bulldog", who had argued that both in nature and in human society "life was a continual free fight, and beyond the limited and temporary relations of the family, the Hobbesian war of each

against all was the normal state of existence".

Huxley was a biologist and an expert on Darwin's views, but here was expressing a popular prejudice; in fact, more than this, a view that justified the division of society into rich and poor, oppressors and oppressed. As Iain McKay puts it in this pamphlet:

"In its most extreme form, this became 'Social Darwinism' which (like much of sociobiology today) proceeds by first projecting the dominant ideas of current society onto nature (often unconsciously, so that scientists mistakenly consider the ideas in question as both 'normal' and 'natural'). ... Then the theories of nature produced in this manner are transferred back onto society and history, being used to 'prove' that the principles of capitalism (hierarchy, authority, competition, etc.) are eternal laws, which are then appealed to as a justification for the status quo!"

Kropotkin produced the evidence from scientific studies to show that this was not the case, neither in nature nor in society. In nature a "struggle for existence" certainly went on, but cooperation ("mutual aid") was just as much "a factor in evolution" (the book's subtitle) as competition. It wasn't just a struggle of members of the same species against each other to survive and so leave more offspring; in many species cooperation was a survival strategy

with the less cooperative having less chance of survival and so leaving less offspring.

McKay goes into detail to show that many sociobiologists, including Dawkins himself, accept this, even if on the basis of mathematical models. Kropotkin can be seen as a bit of a sociobiologist himself in that he too argued from animal behaviour to human social behaviour. Only two of his book's eight chapters are devoted to biological evolution, the rest dealing with human social behaviour and social evolution. However, these are governed by quite different factors that have nothing to do with genetics. But Kropotkin did at least turn the tables on the Social Darwinists by arguing that it was capitalism, not socialism, that was against human nature.

McKay's 60-page pamphlet is a useful account of the background, significance and influence of Kropotkin's book.

**ALB**

## WSM FORUM

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- Can't make it to a meeting?
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## Brooker's Bile

TELEVISION IS a "flickering fibbing machine", according to uber-critic Charlie Brooker in *How TV Ruined Your Life* (BBC2). Using a snappily-edited mix of archive clips, flippant sketches and scalpel-sharp observations, his six-part polemic describes

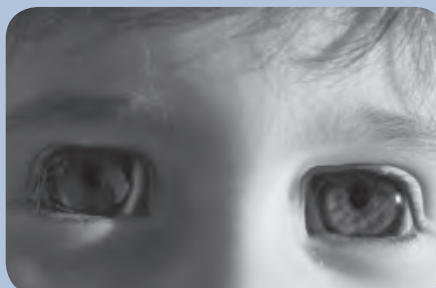
how manipulating and distorted television has become. Brooker bases his argument on 'Cultivation Theory'. This claims that if we spend too much time gawping at the goggle-box, then our expectations, morals and fears are more likely to be influenced by what we see on screen than what we experience in real life. For example, television has conditioned us to be frightened of dark city streets because this is the setting for so much televised violence. And, he argues, production companies have got away with this by presenting violence in a glossy, titillating way through public information films ("government-approved mini horror movies designed to fear you into not going all dead") and scare-fests like *Crimewatch* and *Wire In The Blood*.

In his second episode, Brooker focuses on how different demographic groups are portrayed on television. Young adults are "mindless jiggling gits", dads are "tragic shuffling pitiful individuals", and

older people are "hilarious irrelevances". TV encourages us to perpetually look youthful – and makes us feel inadequate if we don't – through dross like the "devastatingly mean makeover show" *Ten Years Younger*. This trend manifests itself as 'aspirational television', where Brooker's bile is focused in episode three. The theory behind aspirational programming is that "if you watch beautiful fun-loving people on TV you'll somehow feel like they're your friends, whereas in reality of course you're essentially just a tramp staring at them from the other side of the room". Some of his examples are jaw-droppingly unedifying, like *My Super Sweet 16 UK*. This docu-soap follows slappably-spoilt brats, including one who stages an *X-Factor*-style audition to judge which of his sparkly-eyed acquaintances are fit enough to attend his birthday party. How our relationships are influenced by television is the target of Brooker's next episode. With hilarious bitterness, he shows us how television perpetuates the myth of 'the perfect relationship' through adverts that turn toothpaste into an aphrodisiac.

On first impression, it's easy to dismiss Charlie Brooker as misanthropic and sneering. But his acerbic tone is really just a way of filtering out those viewers he would consider too shallow to appreciate his arguments. Buy into his style, and Brooker's work is refreshingly perceptive, even exhilarating.

**MIKE FOSTER**



## Film reviews continued

add that a popular movement aimed solely at the transformation of society would be able to exploit the democratic system to its advantage. The closing words of the film are; "The in group will do all it can to stay in power and that's what you gotta keep in mind. They'll use the army and navy and lies or whatever they have to use to keep in power. They are not about to give it up because they don't know of any other system to perpetuate their kind".

For socialists it can only be heartening that a film questioning the material basis of modern society has enjoyed such success. But it is important not to get too carried away. The Zeitgeist Movement has certain attracted many well-meaning people though to the extent that this represents a cohesive organisation is debatable. Peter Joseph is solely responsible for the content of the films leaving the 'movement' to take a more or less passive role. If the movement is going to transform itself into an active agent for change it may well involve it becoming something else.

DP

## Bleak prospects

### NEDS



Dramas which attract adjectives like 'bleak', 'gritty' or 'brutal' have been one of the specialities of British film and television since the 1960s. *NEDS* fits firmly into this tradition, especially alongside *This Is*

*England, Scum* and early *Grange Hill*. The acronym stands for 'Non-Educated Delinquents' – a dismissive label for teenagers who turn from schooling to violence. John McGill – the film's lead character – has a promising start at school before pressures from home and his peers push him towards the dubious security of a gang. Most of the characters find themselves trapped in a life of being a victim or perpetrator of violence, or both. Succeeding in education is seen as the only escape, despite the lack of encouragement from jaded, chain-smoking teachers. Sadly, these themes are so common that the film could have been set almost anywhere and at any time. Often, it's only the accents and the flares which remind you we're in Glasgow in the early 70s. Writer-director-actor Mullan clearly feels passionate about showing us how some social institutions breed cruelty. Unfortunately, the audience isn't given quite enough detail about McGill's motivation, or that of his alcoholic father. And the film starts to unravel in the last act, partly because of jarring appearances by lions, Jesus and taped-on knives.

MF

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## Meetings

### Manchester

Monday 28 March, 8.30pm  
Discussion on the Middle East.  
Unicorn, Church Street, City Centre.

### Fircroft College, Birmingham

Friday 22 - Sunday 24 July 2011



Full residential cost (including accommodation and meals Friday evening to Sunday afternoon): £130 Concessionary rate: £80 . Non-residential cost (including all meals): £50.

To book a place, send a cheque for £10 (payable to The Socialist Party of Great Britain) to flat 2, 24 Tedstone Road, Quinton, Birmingham, B32 2PD. Or, use the paypal facility at [www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/donate.html](http://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/donate.html)  
E-mail [spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk) with any enquiries.

For full details of all our meetings and events see our **Meetup** site:  
<http://www.meetup.com/The-Socialist-Party-of-Great-Britain/>



## 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.

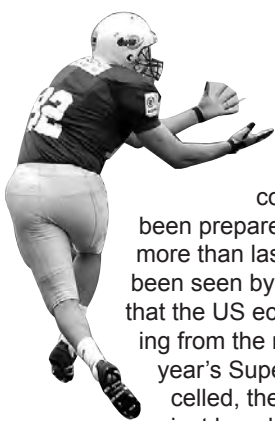


## Supplying the Grid

YOU MIGHT think that Premiership football manager is the shortest-lived career in sport. But being an American (gridiron) football player probably holds the title, for on average a player will manage less than four seasons before injuries take their toll. Notwithstanding this, the employers want to increase the number of competitive games played per season, from 16 to 18, with likely consequences for players' well-being. The owners also want to cut wages and bring existing contracts to an end, two years earlier than is laid down.

As a result, the players threatened a strike, with the next season, due to start in September, under threat. The top players may be millionaires, but there plenty of other players who are far less well-off and who need the free post-career healthcare that is provided after three years of playing. And the team owners are mostly billionaires, with franchises that have grown massively in value over the last decade. Moreover, they have apparently got television contracts that guarantee payment to them even if no games take place.

The climax of the American football season is the Super Bowl, held this year in Texas at the start of February. Advertising slots during TV coverage came in at



three million dollars for a half-minute commercial, and plenty of companies have been prepared to pay this, far more than last year. This has been seen by many as a signal that the US economy is recovering from the recession. If next year's Super Bowl is cancelled, then there will not just be a lot of disappointed sports fans, but disappointed TV executives too.

The players' and owners' representatives have now resumed negotiations, but it is still not clear if there is a real chance of a settlement. Even celebrity workers sometimes have to be prepared to withdraw their labour power in order to defend their working conditions.

PB



## "Democratic" Portugal

THE RECENT seizure of the *Santa Maria* by an armed group led by Captain Galvao, on the instructions of the exiled General Delgado, has focused attention on Portugal.

The Portuguese monarchy was overthrown in 1911, and after 15 years of political instability Dr. Salazar came to power. Amongst those who supported him were Captain Galvao and General Delgado. The regime in Portugal—Britain's "oldest ally"—is one of dictatorship, where only one political party is permitted and opposition is suppressed. The office of Prime Minister, held by Dr. Salazar, is the top job, with that of President merely the state figure-head. ( . . . )

General Delgado's avowed aims are first to oust Salazar. He says that he wants to lessen the economic gap between Portugal's tiny minority of wealthy families and her desperately poor working population, and to democratise the colonies; to have

universal suffrage both in Portugal and the colonies and vastly to improve education. Portugal is the least industrialised country in Europe, and Delgado may well have been reflecting that it is essential to have an educated working class in order to develop industrially.

The Socialist sympathises with aspirations to political democracy, but there is no guarantee that Delgado's professed aims would be achieved if he succeeded to power in Portugal, nor is there any guarantee that in a private property society, democracy, once obtained, will remain in being. He may, like many political candidates, be only dangling a bunch of carrots in front of the donkey's nose, in order to obtain personal support. It is possible that Delgado is voicing the aspirations of a new stratum of Portuguese society, a capitalist class whose needs, namely an educated working class, are directly opposed to those of the entrenched, almost feudal aristocracy administered by Salazar.

(from 'News in Review', *Socialist Standard*, March 1961)

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# Voice from the Back

## Behind the statistics

We are bombarded today by unemployment statistics but what we may often fail to appreciate is the real human misery behind those figures. "In California, former auto worker Maria Gregg was out of work five months last year before landing a new job – at a nearly 20% pay cut. In Massachusetts, Kevin Cronan, who lost his \$150,000-a-year job as a money manager in early 2009, is now frothing cappuccinos at a Starbucks for \$8.85 an hour. In Wisconsin, Dale Szabo, a former manufacturing manager with two master's degrees, has been searching years for a job comparable to the one he lost in 2003. He's now a school janitor. They are among the lucky. There are 14.5 million people on the unemployment rolls, including 6.4 million who have been jobless for more than six months" (*Wall Street Journal*, 11 January). Behind the faceless figures of unemployment are the millions of people like Maria, Kevin and Dale whose standard of living has collapsed and yet have still got to survive with their dependants in the dog-eat-dog society of capitalism.

## A sense of values

We live in a society where many are concerned about world hunger, homelessness and rising unemployment, but the British Government have much more important issues to concern themselves with – primogeniture. This deals with the perplexing problem of whether or not if Prince William has a daughter before a son she can become queen. "Luckily the Prime Minister has recognised that this a matter of the deepest seriousness... 'It is', said his spokesman, 'a complex and difficult matter that requires careful and

thoughtful consideration...'" (*Observer*, 23 January). A jobless father of several children might consider his unpaid mortgage a trifle more pressing than primogeniture. In fact he could well ask what the hell is primogeniture anyway?

## The widening gap

In an article describing the life of the extremely wealthy and the rest of us the *Times* recently laid out a list of some of these super-wealthy individuals living at present in London. The Indian billionaire Anil Agarwal worth \$6.4 billion, the Russian Alisher Usmanov worth \$7.2 billion and the Ukrainian Viktor Pinchuk a mere \$3.1 billion. "The extravagance



of the super-rich at a time when the vast majority of people are feeling the financial squeeze seems incongruous at best. But the reality is that the gap between the UHNWIs (ultra-high net worth individuals) and the rest is widening. Alan Greenspan, former Chairman of the US Federal Reserve, said recently that high-income individuals, banks and corporations had rebounded from the global downturn, while pretty well everyone

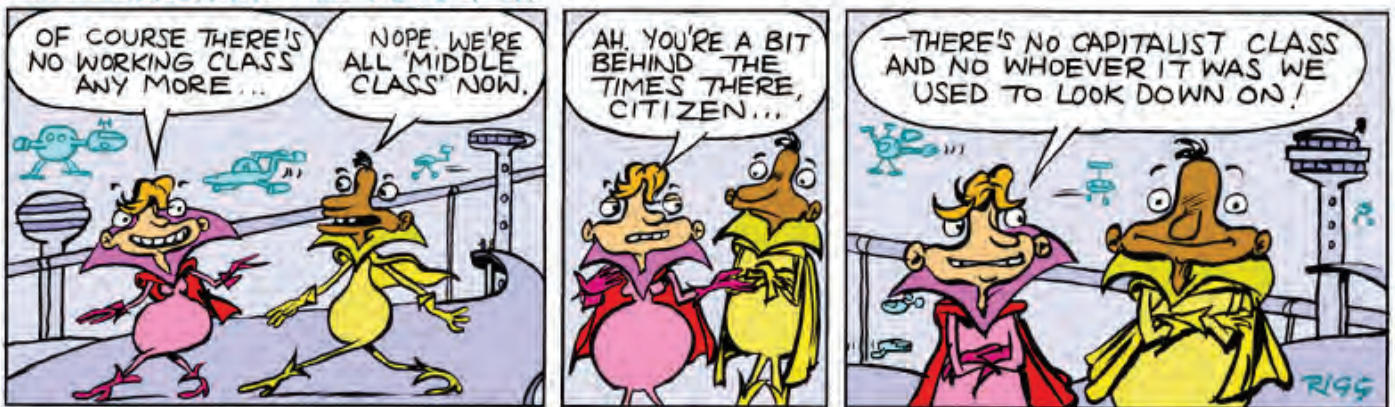
else struggled...The world's wealthiest 10 per cent now control 83 per cent of all assets" (*Times*, 5 February). When even the ultra-conservative *Times* can report on the widening class differences in capitalism the ultra-rich must be very convinced of the docility of the working class. Fellow workers – wake up!

## The National Ill-Health Service

One of the fallacies much beloved of British politicians is that the NHS is a no-expense spared service that provides patients with unbeatable treatment, but the evidence of Aseem Malhotra seems to contradict that claim. "The healthcare that clinicians offer is usually exemplary. Why, then, are the ill served such disgraceful meals? I mend hearts.

Then I see my patients served junk food by our hospitals. Fry-ups, burger and chips, fizzy drinks and ice cream for pudding. You would expect to see these delights on the menu at a McDonald's or Burger King. But, sadly, this is the sort of food that is also likely to be served at your local hospital. I work as a cardiologist at one of Britain's leading cardiac centres...Coronary artery disease is the biggest killer in the western world and a significant part of my job involves performing a lifesaving procedure, angioplasty, to restore the blood supply to the heart muscle. Coronary atheroma (fatty deposit within the artery wall) takes many years to develop and is the culmination of risk factors, of which lifestyle – and diet in particular – is a major contributor" (*Observer*, 13 February). Dr Malhotra asks why they are served such meals, but the newspaper provides the answer. "The majority of hospitals spend an average of less than £1 on each meal per patient."

## FREE LUNCH IN THE FUTURE...



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