

socialist standard

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The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 4 February** 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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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.

New readers, see page 19



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JANUARY 2012

Editorial

Neither London nor Brussels, but World Socialism

NO WEALTH is produced in The City. It is a place where the proceeds of working-class exploitation transformed into rights to a property income are the subject of trading, speculation and gambling. Around this has grown up a whole range of “financial services” – wheelers and dealers of one kind or another – vying for a share. In short, it is entirely parasitic on those parts of the world economy where wealth is actually produced by those working there.

So – apart from the fact that the Conservative Party has always been committed to defending the interests of The City, going back to the time when it was the place through which the loot plundered from the British Empire was channelled – why did Cameron make such a fuss about defending The City “from Europe” and expect people to think that this was a good thing? After all, is not The City the habitat of the same bankers that the media has been vilifying since 2008? It is, but they’ve got him over a barrel just as they had the previous Labour Government.

According to the *Times* (12 December), the financial services sector (not just The City) makes up ten percent of UK GDP and contributed £53 billion as taxes for the upkeep of the government. In addition, The City achieved a “trade surplus” of £36.4 billion, a measure of how much surplus value produced in the rest of the world it sucks in. Clearly, The City is an important part of the British capitalist economy which no government can ignore.

But The City is not the only section of the capitalist class. There are also the businesses producing for export. It was precisely to further their interests by gaining them free access to a wider European market that Britain joined the “Common Market” in the first place. They still benefit from the single market with its common standards and regulations and do not want Britain to withdraw from the European Union. To placate them, Cameron has had to make it clear that the government has no intention of doing so.

He did win the plaudits of his backwoodsmen, the Eurosceptics, but they represent small businesses producing for the home market (and financed by some bigger businesses in the same position). They want a referendum on withdrawal, which they expect to win. It is precisely because they could well do so that no government is going to hold one. They are not there to govern on behalf of small businesses but of Big Business.

This is a dispute between different sections of the same capitalist class which should be left to them to settle for themselves. No working class interest is involved. We don’t care whether or not there is a referendum on the matter and, if there is, wouldn’t take part in it except to write “World Socialism” across the ballot paper. As socialists we refuse to pander to petty nationalism but work to promote a world without frontiers where the Earth’s resources have become the common heritage of all.

The Speed of Enlightenment



Moore, Cox & Minchin

ANYONE INTERESTED in physics yet curmudgeonly enough to hate UK TV's newest scientific celeb Brian Cox must be having a miserable time of it at the moment. The nation's favourite teen-throb professor is enjoying a quantum celebrity, appearing almost everywhere simultaneously on live gigs, radio and TV, as well as the Christmas hot-selling bookshelves. Mathematics has its amenable Marcus de Sautoy, archaeology its balding Baldrick, but physics has wormed its way into the nation's Higgs Bosom with a photogenic superstar who unlike most celebs actually knows what he's talking about. The secret of Brainy Brian's success is not that he's especially good at explaining physics, because he isn't, and in fact often overreaches himself. Nor is it his disarming aura of schoolboy innocence, which he wears in the full knowledge that whenever he says 'Big Bang' half the adoring audience are thinking of something other than cosmology. The real reason is most likely that science, and especially physics, is downright intimidating for most people, but it's hard to be intimidated by the man who co-authored New Labour's diabolically cheesy election song even if he is a professor of particle physics. It's well known that any science book with an equation in it will not sell. People take fright at anything that looks difficult. But with Cox in charge, things can only get better.

Back in olden days when it was assumed that science was interesting in itself, and when there were only 4 channels and no internet, TV presenters could afford to be eccentric. There was no image to promote, no need to look cool and sexy, and oddball characters like James Burke, Magnus the Windmill Pyke or lispng David Bellamy were anything but. The only ones left of this old school are Patrick Moore, the Churchill of astronomy, orbiting a TV black hole for fifty years, and St David Attenborough, the only man ever to be canonised by popular consent while still alive.

Today science doesn't just have to combat the aggressive ignorance of increasingly influential religious zealots, it also has to combat the fickleness and attention-deficit disorder of a fast-food-media audience which is perpetually dazzled for choice. In TV, if the target demographic doesn't like the message, you do shoot the messenger. As this column has noted before (April 2011), studies show that people accept or reject facts depending on who is delivering them. So no wonder science is getting a shot of showbiz pizzazz.

But there's no doubt that people are interested, when one considers the recent hoo-ha about faster-than-light neutrinos and the more recent hubbub over the Higgs quasi-result. There is a demand for understanding, if it can be made accessible enough, proof that contrary to the fears of Dawkins Doomsayers the Enlightenment is not about to perish beneath Dark Satanic Forces. Perhaps, in a world of discredited politicians, bent journalists and coppers, kiddy-fiddling priests, venal financiers

and vacant know-nothing 'reality stars', scientists are seen as the last real deal, the only experts left with any authenticity, genuinely interesting things to say, and no squalid private agendas.

Add these credentials to youthful good looks, and it's easy to see why Brian Cox and others are getting the star treatment. Now they are playing 'stadium gigs' as if they were rock stars, lecturing audiences amid music and comedy about biology, chemistry and quantum mechanics. At a recent *Uncaged Monkeys* gig it was debatable if the audience grasped fifty percent of it. It wasn't so bad when Ben Goldacre did a session denouncing drug companies for not

releasing test results, since this was a purely political argument, or even when Simon Singh did a presentation on probability theory, since there wasn't a shred of mathematics in it. But here was the problem: where the show was comedy there was no content, and where there was content it was no fun. Brian Cox soon reminded audiences why he's a professor, with an eye-glazing exposition of proton gradients in submarine black smokers that had half the audience secretly ordering Modafinil and other alleged IQ enhancers on their iPhones. Even Tim Minchin, brought in to leaven the stodge with music and comedy, managed to look slightly fearful.

Tim Minchin, a kind of latter-day Tom Lehrer with eyeliner, explains in a recent *New Scientist* interview why he likes to incorporate militant pro-science and atheism into his material (16 November). The interview strikes an odd discordant note when he is quoted as saying: 'It is entirely appropriate to appeal to authority, in life. For pragmatic reasons, you can't know everything. If you say 90 per cent of scientists believe this, that's an appeal to authority. [...] Your job is to figure out what a good authority is.'

Of course he's right, up to a point, but it would be easy to take the wrong lesson from this. It's no good replacing one set of priests with another. Science can and should be participative, and you don't need to be an expert to think scientifically. One organisation which makes this clear in a practical way are the Sceptics in the Pub, a national network of 25 groups to date which meet in pubs to discuss topics of general interest, including the debunking of pseudoscientific claims. It's a fast growing new pub game that anyone can play, and another healthy sign that capitalism hasn't managed to brainwash critical thought clean out of us.

If only the same could be said of politics, which is another theatre where there is a large passive audience and a small troupe of actors. Given the way that politics is routinely conducted, it's no surprise that people have no respect for it. But this removes the will to understand what needs to be understood about how the world works, and this is why radical opposition to capitalism is dogged with misconceptions and circularities. Socialists try to operate in the same way that scientists do, by looking dispassionately at evidence without prejudging the conclusions, by testing theories with prediction, and by challenging assumptions, including their own. It's not always easy to do, but it's not that hard either, and it's a refreshing way to think, compared to the vacuous sloganeering of the Left. In socialist politics, as in science, one can always be learning, and one should always be participating. When people start approaching politics the same way they do science, it won't take photogenic young celebs to tell them what needs doing with capitalism.

Anti-socialism

An enquirer from the United States has sent us the following piece of anti-socialist propaganda doing the rounds there and has asked us to comment on it, adding "why do so many people think Socialism is a dirty word?"

"An economics professor at a local college made a statement that he had never failed a single student before, but had recently failed an entire class. That class had insisted that socialism worked and that no one would be poor and no one would be rich, a great equalizer. The professor then said, 'Okay, we will have an experiment in this class'. All grades would be averaged and everyone would receive the same grade, so no one would fail and no one would receive an A. After the first test, the grades were averaged and everyone got a B. The students who studied hard were upset, and the students who studied little were happy. As the second test rolled around, the students who studied little had studied even less, and the ones who studied hard decided they wanted a free ride, too, so they studied little. The second test average was a D! No one was happy. When the 3rd test rolled around, the average was an F. As the tests proceeded, the scores never increased, as bickering, blame and name-calling all resulted in hard feelings, and no one would study for the benefit of anyone else. All failed, to their great surprise, and the professor told them that socialism would also ultimately fail because, when the reward is great, the effort to succeed is great, but when government takes all the reward away, no one will try or want to succeed. Socialism has never worked anywhere in the world. It cannot be any simpler than that. Please pass

this on, and remember – there is a test coming up – the 2012 elections."

Reply: Our enquirer is right: many people do regard socialism as a dirty word, and that's because of the meaning they attribute to it. It's often equated to the former Soviet Union or to Cuba or China or to social reforms by the state. But our perspective on what socialism means is entirely different. So, predictably, the problem with what the 'economics professor' has to say about socialism is that he's answering the wrong question. He takes on and tries to undermine the idea that in a socialist society everyone would be equal in all ways. But that's not what socialism is about.

Socialism is a society in which everyone will be free to exercise and express their abilities and aptitudes whatever these may be and in which the whole idea of 'failing' or 'passing' would be absent. The important thing would be 'contribution'. 'From each according to ability, to each according to need' sums it up. All this would be based on a moneyless, wageless society of voluntary work and co-operation, in which everyone would have equal access to all goods and services. So there would indeed be equality in

the economic sense ('no one would be poor and no one would be rich') but, far from creating uniformity and mediocrity and a general lowering of standards as the professor suggests, this would be a basis upon which people could work to express themselves fully and fruitfully for their own satisfaction and the good of all. In fact, the professor's idea that, 'when the reward is great, the effort to succeed is great', fits in well with a socialist society, for what greater reward can there be than to contribute to the general wellbeing (even many rich people in today's highly individualistic, competitive society feel that) and to earn the approbation of others? And of course there would be no government to take that reward away, since socialism by definition depends on people running their own society democratically, not on having any government structure to do it. Socialism has indeed never 'worked anywhere in the world'. But that's because it has never been tried.

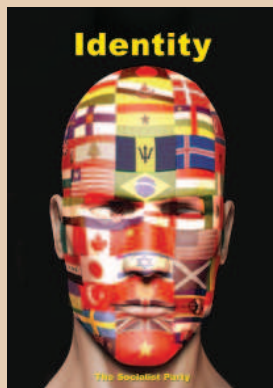
Socialism will be a society in which there is no private ownership (or put another way, one in which everyone owns everything). It's hard of course to lay down the exact details of how a society of common ownership will function, but, given appropriate safeguards, is there any problem (especially with the technology we now have) in people engaging in their chosen activities (be that fruit/vegetable growing, computer designing, airplane manufacture, etc.) and delivering or making those products or services part of a common store on which people can draw as and when needed?

Human beings want to and need to exploit their potential via work if the conditions for them to do so are congenial. The problem with the current system of society is that it so often forces people to do work they don't want to do or can see no point in – all to get money to survive. We all (or nearly all) want to do work of some kind, but employment (which is what work is in the present society) is a different thing. Capitalism in fact has put a kind of curse on work making so many of us see it as by definition something unpleasant that we are forced to do.

Finally, you can't have the fully democratic society that socialism will be until the vast majority of people want it. In other words, you can't impose it, and if you try to do that you'll be defeating its whole purpose. It simply couldn't work, since it is a society based on willing cooperation. – *Editors*



New Leaflets from The Socialist Party



Identity

Examines and debunks ideas of nationalism

Questions and Answers About Socialism

Answers questions non-members often ask about socialism and The Socialist Party

Orders: Up to 10 £1 p and p. Over 10 and up to 50 £3 p and p. Larger orders, write for details to The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN.



Look out. He's behind you!

RIGHT! THAT'S Christmas over and done with. We've had enough mince pies, mistletoe and baby Jesus to keep us going till next December when the whole bloody farce kicks off again. It's pantomime season now, so let's take a look at one of religion's other comic characters.

Every good pantomime has its villain, and the Catholic Church is no exception. This baddie doesn't usually get a look in over Christmas, but recently he's been back in the news. It's our old friend Satan.

If you've been possessed by the devil recently, Father Gabriele Amorth is the man you need. He's been the Vatican's chief exorcist for 25 years and claims to have carried out 70,000 exorcisms. (And in case you haven't got a calculator handy, that's 2,800 a year or 7.67 exorcisms per day, seven days a week). And some people say the clergy don't earn their money.

Father Amorth hit the headlines back in March 2010 when he informed the *Telegraph* online that people possessed by Satan vomit shards of glass and pieces of iron. And the Catholic sex abuse scandals happened, he said, because Satan had managed to get a foot in the door at the Vatican. "The Devil resides in the Vatican and you can see the consequences". "He can remain hidden, or speak in different languages." "At times he makes fun of me. But I'm a man who is happy in his work."

Nevertheless, he reported, there were now "cardinals who do not believe in Jesus and bishops who are linked to the demon". Fortunately, he reassured us, "His Holiness believes wholeheartedly in the practice of exorcism".

In November the *Telegraph* again reported Father Amorth's

concerns. "Practicing yoga is Satanic, it leads to evil just like reading Harry Potter," we were told. Science, he said, was incapable of explaining evil. "It's not worth a jot." Even children who are possessed gain superhuman strength, he explained, and have to be held down by up to four people.

Perhaps this is not the best example he could have given. The image of a child being held down by four sweaty priests won't do much to help his case.

What Satan makes of all this, goodness only knows, but he's probably not too concerned. There's no way they're going to get rid of him. Think of all those priests, rabbis, mullahs, etc it would throw out of work.

In fact, Satan has his own church now, and a website. See www.churchofsatan.com.

"Our members span an amazing political spectrum," the blurb informs us. They include "Libertarians, Liberals, Conservatives, Republicans, Democrats, Reform Party members, Independents, Capitalists, Socialists, Communists, Stalinists, Leninists, Trotskyites, Maoists, Zionists, Monarchists, Fascists, Anarchists and just about anything else you could possibly imagine".

Hmm, not sure about the "socialists" or "communists". Other than that, though, they sound a right bundle of fun. Questions on their membership application include:

- Are you satisfied with your sex life?
- How many years would you like to live?
- Do you feel oppressed or persecuted in any way?

No wonder the Catholic Church's chief exorcist is confused.

NW



Saudi authorities have executed a woman convicted of practicing magic and sorcery:

<http://tinyurl.com/c2ggowx>

In Indonesia the province of Aceh adheres to the strict precepts of Sharia law. If caught by the religious police, residents face public flogging and prison. Still, the rich have ways around it:

<http://tinyurl.com/c747hfz>

A shoulder-mounted laser that emits a blinding wall of light capable of repelling rioters is to be trialled by police under preparations to prevent a repeat of this summer's looting and arson:

<http://tinyurl.com/cedxgur>

Rather than asking how the financiers would make a living if we forbade interest, we should be asking, "why have financiers at all?" We are the only species on the planet that uses money. Why must we pay to live on the planet we're born on?

<http://tinyurl.com/ccp5pyw>

It's an old dream among anthropologists — one that goes back to Rousseau. In 1968, Graeber's own teacher, Marshall Sahlins, wrote an essay, "The Original Affluent Society," which maintained that the hunters and gatherers of the Paleolithic period rejected the "Neolithic Great Leap Forward" because they correctly saw that the advancements it promised in tool-making and agriculture would reduce their leisure time. Graeber approves. He thinks it's a mistake when unions ask for higher wages when they should go back to

picketing for fewer working hours:

<http://tinyurl.com/buqlbqp>

The results of an experiment in which rats opened a door to free trapped cage-mates astonished scientists. No reward was needed and not even the lure of chocolate distracted the rescuing rats. "This is the first evidence of helping behaviour triggered by empathy in rats," said US study leader Professor Jean Decety:

<http://tinyurl.com/c9aqajq>

According to current estimates, Indian men outnumber women by nearly 40 million. That startling gender gap, activists say, is the result of gendercide. Nearly 50,000 female fetuses are aborted every month and untold numbers of baby girls are abandoned or murdered. "It's the obliteration of a whole class, race, of human beings. It's half the population of India," said women's rights activist Ruchira Gupta of Apne Aap Women Worldwide. Part of the reason is money. Girls are a financial burden to their parents, who must pay expensive dowries to marry them off:

<http://tinyurl.com/c73ql2j>

Every now and again, one reads an editorial that stops the reader in his tracks. On 8 December, with the headline "War Inevitable To Tackle Indian Water Aggression," Pakistan's Urdu-language *Nawa-e Waqt*, issued such a screed. *Nawa-e Waqt* bluntly commented on India's Kashmiri water polices and Islamabad's failure up to now to stop New Delhi's efforts to construct hydroelectric dams in Kashmir, "India should be forcibly prevented from constructing these dams. If it fails to constrain itself, we should not hesitate in launching nuclear war because there is no solution except this."

<http://tinyurl.com/76x9mkg>



The gnomes of the market

THE EUROZONE is an economic area in which 17 different countries have agreed to use a common currency, both internally and externally. In the years between 2002 when it was introduced until the crash of 2008 the economies of these countries were growing and investors (largely banks) were prepared to lend the governments their money to cover their budget deficits by purchasing their bonds. They took the view that their money was safe as the governments would be able to pay the interest and repay the loan out of future tax revenues.

The crisis upset this as economic growth, and tax revenues from it, fell. Some Eurozone countries had borrowed an amount that was higher in relation to their GDP than others and so were harder hit. They are now denounced in the financial pages of the press (generally more favourable to creditors than debtors) for having been "profligate".

Creditors began to fear for the repayment of their loans and brought pressure to bear on the governments concerned by refusing to lend them more except at higher, penal rates of interest. They have gone farther, making it a condition for future lending at lower rates that the governments cut their spending so as to have the money to repay any loans. They picked off the governments one by one: Ireland, then Portugal, then Greece; and now Italy, with Spain and even France possibly next.

All this has been done impersonally through "the markets" but not the less effectively for that. The debtors are not entirely at the mercy of the creditors because they always have the nuclear option of bringing the whole house down by defaulting; in which case the creditors would lose all or most of their money. So creditors have an interest in not pushing the debtors too far and in coming to some arrangement which will ensure that they get most of their money back, eventually.

These negotiations have taken place through governments (rather than being left to "the markets") and have resulted in the holders of Greek government debt agreeing to being repaid over a longer period and even to a "haircut", i.e. the writing off of some of the debt.

Critics of the euro have gleefully shouted "we told you so". Here for example is the *Times* on 7 November:

"Greece's crisis might have been a localised problem rather than a continental threat, but it has been aggravated by the common currency. It has also been rendered more difficult to resolve owing to the inability of weaker Eurozone members to devalue their currency and thereby secure an adjustment in living standards."

A downward adjustment, that is. Depreciating a currency (these days by letting its value float downwards rather than a formal devaluation as in the days of fixed exchange rates) leads to imports costing more, so reducing living standards that way.

Despite the political rhetoric, it is not certain whether the British capitalist class really wants a return to a situation where some of its major European competitors, France, Italy, Spain, would be free to let their restored national currencies float downwards, so making their exports cheaper. One of the reasons Britain stayed out of the euro was precisely to retain the flexibility to do this, knowing that their competitors couldn't.

The *Times* admits that Greece would still have had to reduce living standards even if it hadn't been in the euro. So, it's a question of damned if you're in the euro and damned if you're not. In other words, it's not being in the euro that's the problem, but being in a capitalist world. After all, Britain is not in the euro but the government is still having to impose austerity.

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The *Troubled-Teens* Business

ON THE internet I keep running across the same image - the scowling face of a teenage boy - accompanied by the words: *Fix Defiant ODD Children*. It is an ad for a “Total Transformation Program” that will “empower” you to “stop defiance, backtalk and lying” and “regain control of your child, your family and your life”.

ODD, in case you’re wondering, is the “diagnosis” that psychiatrists now pin on disobedient youngsters: Oppositional Defiant Disorder. Until recently no one had ever heard of it.

Numerous programs to “fix” disobedient kids are on offer to American parents. Many are residential programs run by private entrepreneurs in “boot camps” and other locked facilities located both inside the US and outside (in Mexico, Jamaica, Costa Rica, etc.). Or you can send your child off on a gruelling “wilderness expedition” in the harsh desert landscape of the Southwest.

Force and deception are routinely used to trap children in these programs, which usually entail physical and/or emotional cruelty inflicted in the name of “tough love”. Abuse and deprivation sometimes result in death – in particular, when complaints of pain and exhaustion are not believed. (See, for instance, nospank.net/boot.htm: Torturing Teens for Fun and Profit.) In many places, victims are made to attack and humiliate one another and extract “confessions” (often fabricated) in spectacles reminiscent of “struggle meetings” in Maoist China.

Maia Szalavitz, author of *Help At Any Cost: How the Troubled-Teen Industry Cons Parents and Hurts Kids* (Riverhead Books, 2006), estimates that 10-20,000 teens are held in several hundred abusive programs at any one time. The programs are very lucrative business ventures, as fees are high while costs are kept low. Total profits are thought to be well over a billion dollars a year.

Why so desperate?

What makes people so desperate that they will abandon their own children to the “tough love” of strangers – and pay through the nose for the privilege?

Parents are, of course, alarmed at the perils their children face – perils that even if exaggerated by sensationalist media reports are real enough. They worry especially that their children will start using street drugs. Many feel unable to cope with such problems and easily fall prey to any huckster who claims to have a solution.

The decline in the economic position of working people over the last few decades has made it even harder for them to cope. Compensating for falling real wage rates by working longer hours or even taking two jobs, parents are left with little time or energy to devote to bringing up their children.

Another factor is the strength of religious fundamentalism in large areas of the US. The “tough love” approach (which also includes corporal punishment, for example) is especially prevalent among fundamentalists. Many abusive programs call themselves Christian. Authoritarian relations within the family are an important part of the fundamentalist creed. Preachers tell parents not to feel obliged to tolerate or respond to “backtalk” – in other words, to

listen to and reason with their children.

Targeted by advertisers

But are children inherently more difficult to bring up nowadays? Doesn’t every generation imagine that their children are especially hard to understand and deal with?

Be that as it may, there are good reasons for thinking that the task facing parents has become even more daunting. One significant change concerns advertising. In the past, except for items like sweets and chocolates, advertisers aimed only at adults. Now, as Juliet B. Schor describes in her book, *Born to Buy* (Scribner, 2004), children are a primary target of advertising and marketing campaigns.

Exposure to these campaigns makes children anxious and obsessed with status. To acquire and maintain status they must nag their hard-pressed parents to buy them lots of expensive junk. Otherwise their peers will look down on them. Even apart from the anti-adult messages conveyed by some ads, this puts children and parents on a direct collision course.

When some relatives of mine refused to buy something demanded by their son, he lay down on the floor of the store and screamed until they gave in – just to escape the embarrassing situation.

Attention deficit disorders

Then we should bear in mind the harm done to children’s mental capacities by long periods in front of a television. Research shows that the more hours of TV watched per day the more likely a child is to suffer from an attention deficit disorder. Video games have a similar destructive effect. How can a parent reason with a child who is unable to pay sustained attention?

This does not mean that TV and video games are solely responsible for attention deficit disorders. There is evidence that toxins in the environment such as organophosphates contribute to these disorders by disrupting thyroid hormones (Philip and Alice Shabecoff, *Poisoned for Profit: How Toxins Are Making Our Children Chronically Ill*, Chelsea Green Publishing 2010, pp. 92–95).

Profit at both ends

Many of the underlying causes of the difficulty of bringing up today’s youngsters – from the excessively long hours worked by their parents to TV advertising and environmental toxins – stem directly from the profit drive of capitalist business.

The same relentless and remorseless drive for profits underlies the fraudulent promises to “fix” ODD and other supposed mental disorders by means of dangerous drugs or abusive programs.

So, capitalists make huge profits at both ends, both in causing and in pretending to solve the problem. It is all good business for them.

And it all counts as “economic activity” for inclusion in the GDP statistics that prove how prosperous, productive and highly developed the country is.

STEFAN





Theresa May ... or May Not?

WHEN THINGS are that desperate it is worth trying anything. Which is why the voters swing from one discredited party to another and

back again and why they have at times experimented by trying women to lead the government instead of the wearily ineffective men. But then came the real experience of Golda Meir, Angela Merkel, and Maggie Thatcher. And now, there is Theresa May, the first female chair of the Conservative Party and, after holding other lesser roles, Home Secretary – only the second woman to land in what one of its incumbents, Jack Straw, once called a “ministerial graveyard”. The first female to be there was Labour’s Jacqui Smith who will not wish to go down in history as a minister who claimed parliamentary expenses for the cost of her husband watching television pornography.

On that matter, a media-gratifying coincidence revealed that Theresa May’s name is close enough to that of a

soft-porn actor, known as Teresa (without the h) May, to cause some embarrassment but Theresa (with the h) brushed it aside by allowing only that, “We do get telephone calls from time to time from people who want to book me to do programmes which are perhaps not about politics...She may think it slightly estranged that some people might like to earn their living as a politician”. Indeed. But Teresa (without the h) might think it more than slightly strange that politicians should adopt such a self-justifying attitude on an issue such as pornography when the living which they “earn” relies on established venality with no regard for the suffering of the people they are elected to represent. All this suggests that there is no significant difference between their way of getting a living and hers. Theresa (with the h) May is married to a banker, they live in the lush rural beauty of Berkshire and between them they own two houses worth £1.6 million. She signalled her moving up the Greasy Pole by changing her wear for designer products, notably her shoes; “She is,” rhapsodised her press officer, “the most glamorous woman in the House of Commons”.

“Rising star” was how one journalist assessed her as she emerged onto the Front Bench. Industrious self-publicist Boris Johnson recorded, as an MP, “...the upcoming *bête noire* as I spotted some months ago ... even John Berrow was fulsome”. But the *Daily Telegraph* was not ecstatic on her elevation to Shadow Secretary for Education and Employment: “...while she is clearly competent she has done little that obviously merits so swift an ascent”. And now there is some cause to question whether she and her pretty shoes and pricey dresses have not persuaded her to overreach her political safety zone. For since she attained the heights of the Home Office she has been linked – to put it mildly – to enough blunders, misjudgements and clumsy handling of delicate issues to suggest that she is a serious candidate as a victim of Cameron’s first reshuffle. If that happens there will be much referring back to her speech to the Tory conference in 2002 when she suggested to the constituency members

that their electoral failure could be something to do with the fact that the voters saw them as “the nasty party”. That was a phrase which has become attached to her very name regardless of the fact that a party which tries to be “nice” will not survive very long its exposure as politically useless to the requirements of capitalism.

As Jack Straw and not a few others quickly found out, the Home Office is no place for impulsive, ill-informed decision-taking. In these terms, Theresa May has not succeeded where others have failed. Rather, there is some evidence that when in difficulty she tends to bend the truth and shovel responsibility onto others. Last October she spoke at the Conservative Party conference on one of her favourite obsessions – abolishing the Human Rights Act. What she said went down very well with her audience for she gave an example of an illegal immigrant who came from Bolivia in 2009 and recently won an appeal against a Home Office attempt to deport him “... because – and I am not making this up – he had a pet

cat”. This was eagerly accepted by the assembled Tories, and the headline-writers got busy. There was, however, a drawback. The Royal Courts of Justice, which had allowed the appeal, stated that the grounds were that the man was in a stable, genuine family relationship with a British woman and the cat was not material in the case but only one of the pieces of evidence. To make it worse for May, the case did not involve the Human Rights Act; the appeal succeeded on the grounds that the attempt to deport the man contradicted an established Home Office policy. There was more embarrassment for May when Lord Chancellor Kenneth Clarke weighed in with his opinion that her speech was “laughable and childlike”. All in all, not a good day at the Home Office for her.

And that was not the end of it.

Another crisis was the policy of temporarily suspending immigration checks at airports when they are under pressure. News about this was seen likely to encourage a vengeful neurosis among the voters who feared the country being invaded by welfare-seeking cat-owners from places like Bolivia and suicide bombers ready fitted up with their devices. On the hook over this, May tried to pass her responsibility in the Commons and at the Home Affairs Select Committee, onto unauthorised decisions by the man in charge, one Brodie Clark – who denied May’s accusation and, taking such pride in his 40-year record as a civil servant, resigned his job, had his say to that same committee and announced that he would be taking out an action for constructive dismissal. The matter has yet to be resolved.

The Home Office was once described by a Home Secretary as “not fit for purpose”. He got it partly right, except that it is not just a ministry or a government with that problem. The society outside the ministry’s doors is constructed and conditioned to operate against the interests of the majority of its people, while those who attain positions of power soon learn to develop the techniques of passing the buck – onto other people or onto details such as the gender of those rulers. If we are to deal with all aspects of social dislocation it is necessary to begin from a more sustainable basis.

IVAN



May (left) - whose speech about welfare-seeking cat-owners was described as “laughable and childlike”

Too many people or not enough food production?

On 31 October the world's population was said to have reached 7 billion. Would this be a problem in socialism?

The Twentieth Century saw the biggest population increase in human history. This was due in some part to medical advances which lessened the death rate in many countries and to the increase in agricultural productivity attributed to the green revolution. However the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) considers the perceptions of a continuing population explosion to be false. World population is expected to go on rising but less rapidly than it has been. The birth rate even in poor countries has been falling (for example in Bangladesh where women are on average having three children where their mothers were having six). Annual births in the world have levelled at about 134 million per year since their peak at 163 million in the late 1990s. However, as births still outnumber deaths, the world's population is expected to reach nine billion between 2040 and 2050. A UN projection suggests that after peaking in 2050 the figure for total population could start falling.

There are debates about the numbers of people the Earth could support. An extravagant example was given in 1967 by Professor Colin Clark who worked out each person's land requirement for American-type food consumption. Taking world resources of agricultural land at "10.7 billion hectares of standard land equivalent," he concluded that this could feed 47 billion people at "maximum standards". He also estimated a much higher level on a subsistence diet (*Population Growth and Land Use*, p. 153). The possibility of feeding an estimated figure of between 30 and 35 billion people "with existing technology, assuming it was properly deployed" was attributed to the FAO by Prof. Samuel Preston in a *Horizon* programme in

June 1992 (transcript p.8).

While such projections may serve as a useful contribution to the argument that the size of the population is not the reason people are malnourished, we must not appear to be complacent as to how needs can be met: "We are already eating into our capital, collectively consuming the renewable resources of 1.5 planets" (populationmatters.org). The best prospects lie with a change to common ownership and democratic control but this also means making plausible suggestions which do not assume socialism as a magic panacea.

Enough

According to the FAO, detailed analysis shows that "globally, there is enough land, soil and water, and

"We are already eating into our capital, collectively consuming the renewable resources of 1.5 planets"

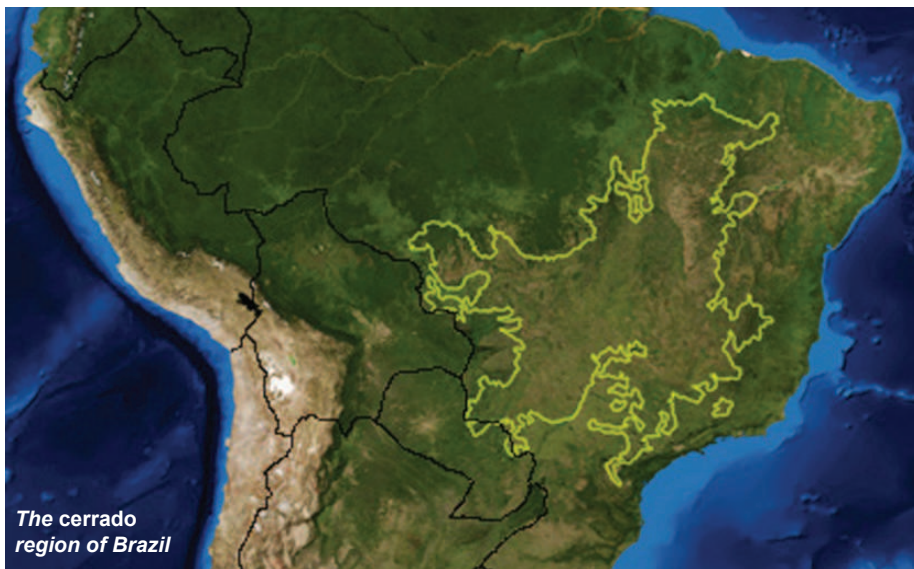
enough potential for further growth in yields, to make the necessary [increase in] production feasible." However, the policy environment has to be favourable to agriculture to make "feasible" become "actual" (*World Agriculture: Towards 2015/2030 Summary Report 2003*). The report also acknowledges that globally the likelihood is that producers will continue to satisfy "effective" market demand but that this does not help the millions of people who lack the money to buy or the resources to produce what they

need for themselves.

The summary report also gives reasons for expecting the demand for agricultural products to continue to grow but more slowly. It attributes this to the less rapid rise of the world population, and to a rising proportion of the world population having reached "fairly high levels" of food consumption.

It gives the example of China where by 1997-99 the average daily food consumption had reached 3,040 kcal – only 10 percent short of the level in industrial countries. The aggregate food consumption is expected to grow in the next three decades but at only a quarter of the rate seen in the previous three decades, and though the population is also expected to grow during the same period this will be at only a third of the rate of the previous three decades. By contrast there is considerable scope for increase in food consumption in India but, unlike China where the demand for meat has been part of increased food consumption, the cultural traditions favour vegetable diet. A 2006 Interim Report based on UN data and projections also sees indications for a "rather drastic slowdown in world demographic growth" in prospect. The fact remains that in the coming decades food supplies must and will be increased. However, as the FAO admits, if it is within a system of market production, this will still leave millions of people too poor to have secure access to food. A different scenario emerges when market production is replaced with a system where food is grown and processed simply to be eaten.

More land resources are available. For example, Brazil has more spare farmland than any other country, at least 300million hectares. Since 1996 Brazilian farmers have increased the



amount of land under cultivation by a third, not in Amazonia, but mostly in the *cerrado*, an area previously thought to be unfit for agriculture being too acidic. The various methods used have included adding up to five tonnes of lime per hectare, no-till agriculture, and growing soybeans - not formerly a tropical crop. Cross breeding with a variety of grass brought from Africa has also been used to produce a new variety of higher-yielding grass feed so that the amount of pasture has been extended - likewise the beef herd. Needless to say, the main purpose of this increased production is sale and profit including the export of palm oil.

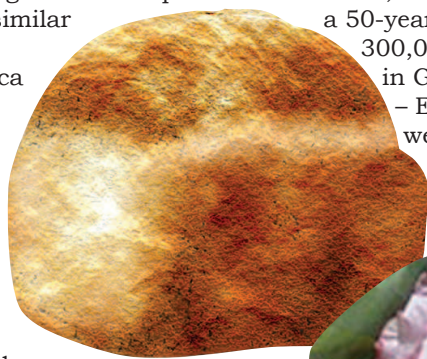
The success achieved in the savannah of the *cerrado* in Brazil and elsewhere has encouraged the investigation of land with similar problems in other regions. Attention is turning to Africa as having an "abundance of natural resources including water" but very unevenly distributed. The FAO estimates that there are more than 700 million hectares of potential additional land available for cultivation in sub-Saharan Africa. In the Guinea Savannah region - an area twice as large as that currently planted to wheat worldwide - only 10 percent of some 600 million hectares of potentially cultivatable land is currently farmed. (FAO Media Centre: 2050 2009)

Land grabs

In recent years a scramble for land has developed involving some 7.6 million hectares worldwide. This "agri-colonial" acquisition of land means an expansion in production and shows what could be done if the only intention were to feed people.

However, the aim is profit and not the meeting of needs. Many hectares of the land acquired are not intended for growing food but crops for biofuel. It was reported in 2009 that a former Wall Street banker had acquired 400,000 hectares of fertile ground in Southern Sudan from a local war lord - with the aim of looking for oil and uranium. Local people lose out in these land deals.

Much of the land grab is taking place in Africa, in Ethiopia, for example, where the process is encouraged by the government with advertising which includes, "vast fertile, irrigable land at low rent" and "cheap labour" (*Irish Times* 30 January 2010). Sai Karaturi, a Bangalore businessman and one of the world's biggest private landowners, has acquired



Bread or roses? Cash crops, such as flowers, could be abandoned in favour of food production.

it was reported in May 2011 that the Ethiopian Government has now reduced the concession by two-thirds, partly to allow for the migration of antelope (*Businessweek* 18 May). The same report mentioned criticism of Ethiopia's policy of renting land cheaply to foreign



investors to grow cash crops while 13 percent of its 80 million people rely on food aid and domestic farmers are being dispossessed. Investors include companies from India, China, and Saudi Arabia as well as from Ethiopia.

Cash crops

Crops are grown for sale, but the term "cash crops" refers to the need of developing countries to export in order to get foreign exchange. Fresh and processed fruit, and vegetables, fish, spices, nuts and flowers account for half of farm exports from developing countries and are overtaking coffee, tea and rice. In 2003-4 these exports were worth \$106 billion.

Perhaps the most obvious cash crop which could be abandoned in favour of food production and without affecting anyone's diet is flowers. Bangalore businessman Sai Karaturi - through Karaturi Global, an Indian company and the world's largest producer of roses - has flower farms in both Kenya and Ethiopia producing 1.5 million rose stems daily for European markets (*The East African* 14 July 2008). Only 40 percent of the flower farms in Ethiopia are owned by Ethiopians. Power cuts could be a problem for flower growers there, but power is guaranteed to flower farms, which are given priority over other businesses including manufacturers of porridge and feeding paste for malnourished children. In Kenya, ranks of greenhouses and fields are devoted to producing flowers as well as high value crops such as green beans and peas for European consumers. In Columbia, millions of roses are grown for Valentines Day bouquets. Drought and a drop in the market affected the flower growers in 2009 especially in Uganda.

So, while reports warning about food supplies continue, population growth is not the problem that it is suggested to be: the rate of population growth has slowed, and although there will still be a sizable increase in population in the coming decades and a need to increase food production, there is the potential to increase the amount of land under cultivation, which a socialist society freed from production for profit will permit.

PAT DEUTZ



Rouble-makers

The concluding part of our article on how some capitalists originally accumulated their capital.

Roman Abramovich grew up poor: both his parents died when he was young, and he was brought up by an uncle. He was nothing out of the ordinary at school or in the army where, after two years, he was still a private; though as a soldier he is said to have sold contraband petrol to the officers of his unit. He married young and “married well” as the phrase is, because his wife’s parents gave the newlyweds a wedding present of 2000 roubles, worth at the time about £1000 (which was more valuable then than now). With this starting capital he set himself up as a street trader, selling plastic ducks. Abramovich’s present fortune is about ten thousand million pounds, so one’s first thought is that he must have sold a lot of them. Reports suggest that the ducks (which could be relied on not to quack) were smuggled in, thus avoiding the due taxes and increasing the resulting profits. (All this private buying and selling was then illegal, of course.)

Abramovich then went into trading automobile parts, retreaded tyres, other plastic toys and commodities generally. But the significant fact is that Abramovich was twenty when Gorbachev came to power, and small private businesses became tolerated. So Abramovich began making plastic dolls. This, in our society, means that he was able to organize other people into making plastic dolls which he then sold, keeping the surplus value.

Soon Abramovich was forming and liquidating numerous companies: he was into bodyguard recruitment, pig farms, and trading in oil and oil products. As one of the first out of the starting gates into private merchandising he was now making a lot of money – though some press reports claim it was not always along



Roman Abramovich

Badri Patarkatsishvili in better days



completely legal channels. There were occasional setbacks. In 1992 a goods train arrived in Moscow carrying diesel worth 3.8 million roubles. Abramovich met it and gave instructions for a different destination. He was arrested, charged with stealing state property and held in prison. But the people who got the oil duly paid for it, so Abramovich got out of jail and it was all forgotten.

Abramovich got to know Pyotr Aven, businessman and politician, who was in 1992 the Minister for External Economic Relations and, in 1994, the President of the Alfa Bank, one of Russia’s largest. On Aven’s yacht Abramovich met an even greater personage, Boris Berezovsky, who was in Yeltsin’s inner circle.

Abramovich made sure he became close to Berezovsky: their families even holidayed together. Berezovsky provided Abramovich with what is known in Russia as “krysha”, literally meaning roof: that is, with contacts, with political protection and, indeed, with a connection to the very centre of Russia’s government – to Yeltsin and Yeltsin’s friends. Berezovsky became Abramovich’s “godfather”. Abramovich paid for this personal line to the centre of power with vast amounts of money: according to Abramovich on the witness stand in the current case, he paid Berezovsky during the 1990s no less than 2.5 billion dollars – well over a billion pounds (*Times*, 11 November). It was money well spent, since the 1990s was the decade when Yeltsin was disposing of Russia’s state industries. After cosyng up to Berezovsky, Abramovich now cosied up to Yeltsin and his entourage, including his daughter Tatyana Dyachenko and his security chief Alexander Korzhakov. Soon he had an apartment in the Kremlin and was proving the truth of the old saying – it’s who you know that counts.

Yeltsin had come to power in 1991 when, like many other politicians, he was going to make everything fine for everybody. A year or two later (like many other politicians) he was despised as a failure. In 1996 he had to stand for re-election. He desperately needed money to finance a

political come-back. Various auctions were held of state assets. Abramovich wanted to get hold of Russia's oil industry – refineries, exploration enterprises, marketing company, everything – in a new entity called Sibneft. Abramovich's witness statement to the court says, "Mr Berezovsky helped him acquire Sibneft in one of several rigged government auctions. These privatizations . . . allowed a group of oligarchs to gain control of vast state assets relatively cheaply in return for supporting Boris Yeltsin's re-election campaign" (*Times*, 29 October). These are Abramovich's own words, very carefully considered – telling untruths in a court case would rank as perjury, so he must have felt sure of what he wrote down. Since another Russian company, Gazprom, bought 73% of Sibneft in 2005 for 13.1 billion dollars, which would value the whole of Sibneft at 17.9 billion dollars, or at least a hundred times as much as Abramovich paid for it, one can agree that it was bought "relatively cheaply" and that the government auction must indeed, to use Abramovich's word, have been "rigged". In court, Berezovsky's lawyer said that "an oil refinery manager who had opposed the deal that underpinned Mr Abramovich's initial fortune had 'died in difficult circumstances . . . he drowned'. Tantalizingly, no further detail was given" (*Times*, 2 November).

Abramovich moved on to consider the Russian aluminium industry. He said in his witness statement: "Prior to 2000, the Russian aluminium industry was disorganized, its assets were split between a number of different owners, and some of the players in the industry resorted to forceful methods and violence to protect their interests." So he "was not keen to get involved in the industry, given its violent and unstable history. Criminal groups were fighting fierce battles for control of the profits generated . . . and dozens of businessmen had been killed in this struggle for control." In fact, "someone was murdered 'every three days' at that time". This period became known as "the aluminium wars." However, another oligarch, Badri Patarkatsishvili, persuaded Abramovich to go for it, in return for the small consideration of half a billion dollars for his help as an intermediary. (Patarkatsishvili unfortunately died suddenly at his Surrey mansion in 2008, aged only 52, the very day after sending an urgent message to Abramovich saying, "he had something very alarming to tell me, and asking me to meet him urgently." They decided it must have been a heart attack.) Abramovich, in alliance with another oligarch, Oleg Deripaska, successfully acquired Russia's aluminium industry. Subsequently he extended his holdings in other Russian industries.

Deripaska, of course, was the man who hosted a holiday party on his luxury yacht in the eastern Mediterranean in 2008. The guests included Nathaniel Rothschild, George Osborne and Peter Mandelson.



Mandelson was then the EU Trade Commissioner, and the EU had reduced aluminium tariffs, thus benefitting Deripaska. Some commentators alleged that it was inappropriate for Mandelson to accept Deripaska's hospitality, but probably they were annoyed at not having been invited to sunbathe on the yacht. Others claimed that Osborne tried to get Deripaska to contribute to Conservative Party funds, but no doubt it was all a misunderstanding.

Abramovich insists he has earned his success. His wealth, he said, he had "generated through hard work and by taking risks associated with doing business in Russia". It is true that some of those hopefuls who started out like Abramovich with the same aim of taking over some of Russia's state industries have now retired to the nearest cemetery. Some of the men who took "the risks associated with doing business in Russia" are no longer with us; they have died of "lead poisoning", to use the old euphemism, unless it was suspected that more exotic means of settling business disputes had been employed. And it is certainly true that all wealth is generated through "hard work"; it is only necessary to add that the person doing the hard work and the person getting the wealth are not always identical.

Abramovich's evidence is currently causing raised eyebrows in London's High Court, as he explains that he often gave out inaccurate information to the public and to potential shareholders, about who really owned his companies ("mainly for reasons of security"), that he signed important business documents which carried an intentionally incorrect date and that some people who signed documents as acquiring shares were not in fact acquiring shares at all – all of which would be offences under English company law. "If backdating documents is something that is not very ethical, then perhaps we can be accused of that. This practice existed in Russia and for sure we have done it," said Abramovich. "If backdating this agreement is a sham, then so be it," he told the court. "This is a uniquely Russian story," Abramovich asserted. Other documents recording purchases, Abramovich told the court, contained the names of people who were supposedly purchasers and recipients of shares but in fact were nothing of the kind. "It is a Russian tradition", Abramovich told the (somewhat surprised) court. Indeed, some of the state companies apparently were kind enough to give important assistance to the oligarchs who were bidding to take them over. *Private Eye* (11 November) said: "the puzzled judge did try but failed to get Abramovich to explain exactly why state-owned companies would assist in their own purchase without any written agreement. Another 'uniquely Russian story'."

Abramovich is now very close to Putin. He apparently interviewed politicians to see if they were suitable candidates for Putin's cabinet. Abramovich has become enormously rich and, not surprisingly, has a squad of



Not everyone likes Berezovsky

forty security officers to look after his personal safety. According to the *Daily Mail* earlier this year, he has four homes in Russia, two in the U.S., and three in France. In England he has six flats in Knightsbridge, and the Fyning Hall estate in West Sussex (not to mention a Premier League football team). He also owns the *Eclipse*, a luxury yacht 560 feet long, which has two swimming pools, two helicopter landing pads, several subsidiary boats or tenders and a submarine. According to reports in the papers, he has several other luxury yachts. He also has a Boeing 767, an Airbus 340, several helicopters, and ten luxury cars – a Porsche, a Rolls, a Ferrari and so on. However, he told the court that he had been “astonished by Mr Berezovsky’s spending habits when they met in 1994, and that he did not want a similar ‘extravagant lifestyle’” (*Times*, 2 November). So Berezovsky must have been living it up.

In the 2011 *Forbes* list of the world’s richest men, Abramovich was only the ninth richest man in Russia (where there are now no fewer than 114 dollar billionaires). So there are eight Russians who probably wonder how Abramovich can make do with so few houses, cars, luxury yachts and so on.

In the present clash of the tycoons, Berezovsky claims that the vast amounts of money Abramovich paid him were dividends from Berezovsky’s share of the companies acquired from the state in the 1990s, while Abramovich says they were nothing more than payments for Berezovsky’s services in keeping Abramovich’s name before Yeltsin as an appropriate man when Yeltsin wanted to make more money out of state assets. These matters will not be easy to decide when whole industries changed hands with little more than a nod and a wink, or in transactions recorded at best in documents which were unfortunately false as to date, and as to personnel, and as to share-holdings. (“It is a Russian tradition.”)

Several other cases involving the Russian oligarchs are down for early hearings in London. But surely any unbiased person who reads the reports of the current case must, on the facts revealed there alone, abandon any support of capitalism. The courts and the judges and the lawyers can argue till the cows come home about whether one oligarch has done the dirty on another, or whether one oligarch ought to have a few billion more and another oligarch a few billion less. It all misses the essential point completely. What these two oligarchs are arguing about is not about creating industry: the Russian oil industry existed and still exists; the Russian aluminium industry existed and still exists. Nothing in all these nefarious dealings in Moscow altered the basic facts of those industries. All this laborious and expensive squabbling in London is concerned with one thing only: which extremely rich person shall have more of the surplus value produced by these industries, and which shall have less. As Abramovich himself said in the courtroom about the Russian aluminium industry, “criminal groups were fighting fierce battles for control of the profits generated”. Not a single voice has been heard, either in the courtroom or in the lengthy reports of the proceedings in the papers, asking the essential question: why should the Russian oil-workers and the Russian aluminium-workers go to their work every day and produce oil and aluminium, and have so much of their hard work creamed off to in order to provide disgustingly extravagant luxury for people who probably couldn’t even explain what it is the oil-workers and the aluminium-workers do.

But then, that is what capitalism, whether the state variety or the private variety, is all about.

ALWYN EDGAR



Revolution or reform?

This key question is also being debated among some in the Occupy Wall Street movement.

The Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement is united in its outrage against grotesque social inequality and in its desire to bring an end to the dominance of a tiny minority (the “1%”) over the will of the majority. So it was disingenuous – or daft – for onlookers to say that the movement has no demand. The demand for social equality is clear enough, but the critics who ignored, then ridiculed the OWS movement understood “demands” in the specific sense of concrete reforms to make things less bad.

Somewhat strange logic, if you stop to consider it: as if it were up to the victims of capitalist inequality to figure out how to turn a profit-chasing system built upon worker exploitation and minority ownership of the elements of production into an egalitarian society.

No. The demand has been made by OWS – at the very least a demand for less social inequality. So it is up to capitalism itself (or those who fancy themselves to be at its helm) to either try to meet the demand or defend inequality.

Of course there are those – and indeed many – within the OWS movement who remain hopeful that capitalism can be reformed to the point of at least being less awful, and who believe that this is a goal worth fighting for. And the Democratic Party and its allies are doing their utmost now to keep Hope for (reformist) Change alive. Some might say that the reality of capitalism in the months and years to come will dispel those hopes. But it seems both foolish and dangerous to wait around for yet another lesson in the School of Hard Knocks. So the nascent “reformism versus revolution” debate among OWS participants is a welcome development.





Recent camp at Lancaster

Still, it is hard to gauge how far the “revolutionary camp” has gained ground. And even if they are gaining momentum, there is the question of how the word “revolution” is being used. For its meaning has been stretched rather thin after a year that saw the “Tunisian Revolution” and the “Egyptian Revolution.” These were indeed momentous events that sent one smug dictator into exile and another to jail (even though the military remained embedded in power). But a change in government, no matter how repulsive the one toppled, is not in itself a social revolution.

There are those within the OWS movement, however, who are using the term “revolution” in a more specific and appropriate way, in the sense of a

transformation that replaces capitalism with a fundamentally new social system. One of the clearer statements in favour of revolution was made by the radical cartoonist and syndicated columnist Ted Rall, in an article titled “Revolution Versus Reform” (www.rall.com/rallblog/2011/11/22/syndicated-column-revolution-versus-reform). There are many things a socialist

can agree with in this article; there are more than a few head-scratchers too. And then there are some important points that are not addressed at all.

First the things that might just as well have appeared in a Socialist Standard article. Such as the idea that revolutionaries “don’t want to nibble around the edges of a system they despise” and if they “get their way...capitalism won’t exist.” He is also right to point to how reformist victories of the past are often rolled back later.

In short, Rall highlights the vision between the reformists who “see the system as broken and in need of repair” and the revolutionaries who think that the “system itself is the problem.” His own conclusion is: “Amending the Constitution won’t do the trick. Electing better officials isn’t enough. Yes, the system is broken. But that’s not the main point. The system is irredeemable. Nothing short of revolution will do.”

Yes, yes, and yes again to what Rall is saying. But at times his critique of capitalism – or “the system” as he often calls it – does not rise above the level of moral outrage. He writes, for instance: “Revolutionaries ... think the system is inherently unfair, corrupt and violent; that unfairness, corruption and violence are the system.”

The denunciation of capitalism is justified, for who could deny its tendency to be unfair, violent, and corrupt? But throwing adjectives at capitalism does not do much damage. Better to understand, simply, that it is a system of production carried out to generate profit – a trick that can only be turned by exploiting labour. And this “magic” is performed even when the worker receives “fair” payment for his or her labour-power (at its market value). Unfairness, corruption, and violence do not really get to the heart of the matter.

In fairness to Rall, he wrote on his blog, in a response to a comment on his article, that he is “currently working on a book that proposes what should follow the Revolution.” So, we can only look forward to seeing whether he has envisaged a new society that is truly beyond capitalism, rather than reformism in a revolutionary guise.

If the OWS movement as a whole is not animated by a vision of what can replace capitalism, it seems hard to imagine that it will be able to develop beyond the stage of demonstrating the widespread frustration with the status quo.

MS



Capitalism on Trial?

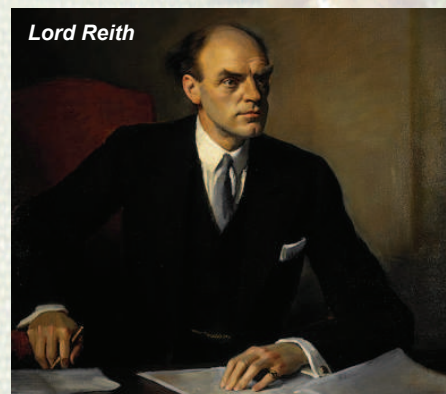


How the BBC rigged capitalism's acquittal.

Lord Reith, the founder and Director General of the BBC, famously gave the wink that “[the British establishment] know they can trust us not to be really impartial”, a policy that he and his successors have pursued with great consistency ever since. The BEEB may veer politically a little to the left or to the right, but it never deviates from promoting the interests of the British capitalist class. Interestingly, though, it has always trusted its highbrow radio stations, Radios 3 and 4, to debate political and economic issues a little more frankly than its mass-market television news programmes. This may be because Radio 3 and 4 listeners are relatively few in number and are assumed to be properly on-message. (As a group, they are more likely to have been through the mill of higher-education and professional training.) It was no surprise, then, to find that in the summer of last year, Radio 4 put out a two-part series called ‘Capitalism on Trial’. The verdict it would deliver, was, of course, never in doubt.

The producers invited a group of professional philosophers, historians, economists and journalists to the studio to deliver their opinions (presumed to be ‘evidence’) on the subject of capitalism. These were joined by a management consultant and hedge-fund manager, presumably to give the programme something of what passes on Radio 4 for a “real-world” edge. Predictably

absent from the discussion was anyone with a less elevated view formed at the sharp-end of capitalism during this time of crisis - anyone, that is, who could have punctured this Radio 4 bubble of lofty intellectualism in a trice. If this was a trial, then the jury was rigged, the witnesses carefully ‘vetted’ and the judge nobbled. The council for



Lord Reith

the defence (who also happened to be the presenter of the programme) was that well-known and impartial commentator on current affairs, Michael Portillo.

Early in the programme Michael hinted at the purpose behind all this. “As a former politician,” he said, “I think about whether we can maintain public support for a system that many associate with inequity and unfairness.” This was the task then: to defend capitalism from its critics and re-establish its credentials in the minds of

an increasingly doubtful and hostile public. How was this to be achieved? Simply: by sleight of hand, omission and fraud. In Portillo’s final summing up he announced, for instance, that capitalism had been put on trial and “compared to the alternatives, favourably and unfavourably....” This claim was very revealing. It was simply false. No meaningful comparison had been made during the one-and-a-half hours of the series. Like many Radio 4 programmes, the producers and editors had stitched together a series of sound-bite opinions with commentary from the presenter to lull the audience into thinking it all added up to a coherent analysis.

It would have been foolish for the BEEB to deny or skirt round the current recession and national debt kerfuffle. The programme’s strategy was, therefore, to come clean on these events and then to try to explain them away. This, as sometimes happens on talk radio, led to several interesting admissions. There was an eager and unseemly rush by the contributors to tell us, for example, that capitalism was necessarily a very unequal society. We learned, in fact, that capitalism invariably created ‘victims’. We learned that its economic downturns, such as we are currently experiencing, are normal and inevitable and therefore to be endured. We learned also from one Crispin Odey, a hedge-fund

manager who pocketed £23 million by betting that the crisis would happen (a small personal detail omitted from the programme) that to function properly, capitalism needs an environment of 'trust' and also a profitable banking sector, something, he warned authoritatively, that "may not be popular news to the public." Presumably he perceived a distinction, between "the public" and Radio 4 listeners who were, sophisticated enough to understand his point. Or maybe he didn't care – you got the feeling that when he referred to 'us' or 'we' he was not talking about anyone who earned less than five-figures annually.

Despite all this we discovered that all these unfortunate-sounding features of capitalism were really rather good and necessary things. Inequality was an excellent motivator, we were told, without which capitalist enterprise could not function. Downturns in the economy, though inevitable, were positively to be welcomed as part of a cycle of "creative destruction." And even capitalism's need to create victims can, fortunately, be legitimised by ensuring that those "who do badly out of it don't suffer too much" – a great relief, no doubt, to all those who are currently having to rely on the 'generosity' of the state or trying to keep the landlord at bay.

We heard further that the credit crunch was not actually capitalism's fault. What had happened in 2008 was a "departure" from capitalism or was, at least, an "extreme" or "very dysfunctional" form of it. Alternatively, the crisis had resulted from the system not living up to its "principles". "In a very fundamental sense, [it had] stopped working." Voice after voice was raised to assure us that the actions of the bankers were, in some mysterious way, aberrations, and we were left to suppose that they were somehow not driven by the engine at the heart of capitalism itself: the remorseless pursuit of profit. No-one raised the possibility that capitalism itself might be dysfunctional.

Some of the most fantastically piliated opinions came from Jamie Whyte, a free-marketeer, introduced to us by Michael as 'a philosopher' but currently working as a management consultancy researcher. Jamie told us with disarming frankness that within capitalism there could be no equal opportunities. The idea was "nonsensical," he said, "a myth". But then he let us in on a secret. Though the idea was a myth, it was a most valuable myth, because if you really

believed it, it might give you a "good shot at the top [and] increase your chances." He didn't develop the logic of his own statement that, in a competitive capitalist world without equality of opportunity, the majority would remain helplessly stuck at "the bottom" whatever they believed. Nor did he add that such myths delude working people into the false belief that there is a realistic chance of capitalism fulfilling their needs, a belief that works much to the benefit



Above: Crispin Odey, who pocketed £23 million by betting that the crisis would happen. Below: Michael Portillo, who can't imagine an alternative to capitalism.



of their employers.

And the fairy dust just kept on falling...

"Abject poverty is... dreadful", claimed Jamie, mustering in his voice all the conviction of a telephone answering service. "And of course one would want to eliminate that." (Indeed one would!) "Capitalism", he argued, "has proved over the centuries to be the best economic arrangement for getting rid of abject poverty." Clearly Jamie's cloud has not touched earth recently. He hasn't been out on the streets of Britain speaking to the increasing number of workers learning to cope with homelessness, or to the women fleeing domestic violence who are being forced, now in significant numbers, onto the streets through hostel closures, or to the rising numbers of those predicted to die this winter because they cannot afford adequately to heat their homes. What Jamie principally objects to, though, is not abject poverty but the irritating concept of relative poverty: "I see [the concept

of relative poverty] as a threat to the market mechanism that creates the wealth that stops people actually being materially poor." Perhaps someone should tell him that it is not the 'market mechanism' that creates wealth but the productive labour of the working class.

As workers, we have always been patronised by those like Jamie Whyte who embrace a utopian vision of capitalism but who cannot grasp the idea that we might aspire to something slightly better than a life of relative poverty (even if, in his view, this is "not bad"). Some of us might even be attracted by the idea of a life of "equal opportunity" and economic security in which we are able to make a genuine contribution to the world in which we live and have the freedom to make real choices.

Characters like this live in an ideal, intellectualised world where economic cycles of boom and bust are "to be welcomed, because in the downturns, bad companies go out of business and entrepreneurs with new ideas take over or elbow aside the weak performers - what some call Creative Destruction." In other words, recessions are really just the necessary means by which capitalism cleanses itself of inefficient companies, restores profitability and makes possible the next boom. This is true, and to Michael and Crispin this is an exciting, elegant and intellectually satisfying idea.

To most of the rest of us, on the other hand, recessions load our economically insecure lives with ever more pressing problems and threats: loss of livelihood, dignity, home and maybe even family. At a time when many of us are facing redundancy and there is little on offer but insecure, part-time, low-paid work; when claiming benefits is becoming an increasingly hard and humiliating experience; when many of us are cutting down on basic food items to pay rising rents; when lives are going down the pan, it is possible that some of us will perhaps fail to appreciate the elegance and regenerative power of "creative destruction". We might believe that a society which cannot remain efficient except by periodically raising the normal levels of poverty and misery to even greater than usual levels is not worth supporting. We might even be antagonistic to the idea of efficiency when it means the efficient exploitation of our own labour. It might be that we want to turn our backs on capitalism and consider an alternative.

As Michael picked his way among

his witnesses' contributions, introducing and reflecting on them, or ignoring them when they raised an inconvenient point or two, his line of argument became gradually clearer: it may be that capitalism creates victims; it may actively create inequalities; and it may visit both relative and abject poverty upon working people, but against these minor inconveniences (and many others we could add) there is one outstanding fact: capitalism is the most fantastically successful way of creating wealth humanity has so far evolved.

And we can wholeheartedly agree with this. But to it we would add that capitalism's purpose, and only purpose in creating all this wealth is to fill the relatively few but ample pockets of the capitalist class into which much of it flows. For capitalism creates poverty just as inevitably as it creates wealth, and the wealth it creates does not drive out poverty but merely towers above it and makes it intolerable. We would also add a certain emphasis to Michael's claim: that capitalism is the most fantastically successful way of creating wealth humanity has evolved – *so far*.

As every producer knows, a programme's conclusion is all important because the last thing listeners hear will be the thing they take away with them. In his summing up, Portillo speaks of capitalism and its current state of contraction: "my guess is that it will emerge, however bedraggled from its battering. But maybe that's just because I cannot imagine the alternative." And so, finally, we come to the big message, the one that the series has been moving towards. And it is this: **THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE**. After all the odd and insubstantial claims, this is the system's keystone argument. No wonder, the producers avoided making comparisons.

And it is at this point, too, that we are allowed to see clearly the spectre that has been hovering indistinctly over the programme throughout, the spectre of Karl Marx, whose writings are for the first time in many years showing signs of generating popular interest. This is a danger point for capitalism and we are about to be warned.

The warning comes in a final contribution not from Portillo but from Gareth Stedman Jones, academic and reformed leftist: "...when Marx came to trying to think out how would you have an efficient and productive society without a market this is where I think he got stuck." That's it then: there is no use in looking for an alternative to capitalism - like it or not, you are lumbered with it, chum, because even Marx couldn't find a way out. But to socialists listening (those that were still awake by this time) this claim will have come as something of a surprise. Marx was not foolish enough to try to make detailed predictions of a future society (it is, of course, impossible to predict in detail what any society will look like even a few years ahead, even a capitalist one) but he was far from "stuck" for an explanation. Gareth Stedman Jones is a disillusioned Leninist who formerly held as his 'Marxian' touchstone the very unMarxian Russian revolution. It's understandable, then that he would be unable to admit this.

Marx, in fact, derived from his analysis of capitalism several definite conclusions. To be sustainable, a post-capitalist society would need to abolish the source of class conflict: private ownership of the means of production. Because of this, a post-capitalist world would necessarily be classless and stateless. And without private ownership there could be no money or exchange. Such a society would also necessarily be global – just as capitalism is now.

When Portillo and the BBC shut down discussion on an alternative to capitalism, it is worth considering whose interests they are protecting, especially since, by their own admission, we live, at present, in a structurally unequal, victimising and unstable form of society - one incapable of meeting human need.

HUD



Clueless

ONE OF the first things George Osborne did on becoming Chancellor in May 2010 was to headhunt a whizz-kid economic forecaster to head a new Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR). For Osborne's 2010 budget the OBR forecast that GDP would grow by 2.3 percent in 2011. It also made forecasts for the years up to 2015. We commented in this column in August 2010:

"Long-term predictions are even less reliable. Even so, the OBR has indulged in this, predicting (and we record the figures for future reference) that in 2012 growth will be 2.8 percent, in 2013 2.9 percent, and 2.7 percent in 2014 and 2015. This is not worth the paper it's written on. It's like the Met Office predicting a barbecue summer in two years time."

In his Autumn Statement on 29 November Osborne revealed that the OBR had gone back to the drawing board and come up with some new figures:

"They expect GDP in Britain to grow this year by 0.9% - and by 0.7% next year. They then forecast 2.1% growth in 2013, 2.7% in 2014, followed by 3% in 2015 and 3% again in 2016."

Given the unpredictable nature of capitalism, the chances are that the figures for the years after 2012 will turn out to be just as wrong.

The day after the Autumn Statement, there was a one-day public sector general strike. For the occasion, the *Morning Star*, which is close to the "Communist Party of Britain" (the nearest thing to the old "Communist" Party), brought out a special, free edition. It contained an article by Jerry Jones, the economic expert of the *Morning Star* and CPB, which revealed that those at the opposite end of the political spectrum to Osborne are just as clueless.

The CPB claims to be Marxist but Jones's analysis was not based on Marx's view that what drives the capitalist economy is investment by capitalist enterprises in search of profit. He argues that, on the contrary, capitalism is motivated by "economic demand" as if it were a system geared to what people want to buy; and that the current economic crisis is not a lack of profits but a lack of paying demand.

From this faulty analysis his faulty conclusion follows: that the state should invest in new productive activities, so putting money into workers' pockets and increasing economic demand that way. This is Keynes rather than Marx, but where's the state to get the money to invest? Easy:

"The fact is that governments could simply tell their central bank - the Bank of England in Britain's case - to print the money or its electronic equivalent and hand it over to the government to invest."

Jones himself then poses the question: "But doesn't 'printing money' cause inflation?" He answers "No" on the grounds that the "true cause" of inflation is not "too much money floating around" but is "always insufficient supply, or investment, to meet growing economic demand."

But, in the end, this is the same thing. The price of any good will go up if the paying demand for it exceeds its supply but, since paying demand is generated in production, the only way that total demand can come to exceed total supply (Jones's assumption) is by it being inflated by the government "printing more money" (more accurately, printing more money than the economy needs).

The inflationary policy advocated by Jones might temporarily induce some increased production but would eventually lead to "stagflation", as it did when tried in the slump of the mid-1970s. The *Morning Star's* Keynesian reformism is not a viable alternative. Only socialism is.

Are you a wage slave?

Most people object to being told that they are a wage-slave but why?

The notion of wage slavery, taken reasonably, is actually rather difficult to refute. The idea that we are in an entirely different social position to chattel slaves is based upon the assumption of our freedom. But this sense of freedom is an illusion which rests upon the contradiction between law and reality. The law grants us personal liberties, and we therefore have the right to make our own decisions: where to live; who to work for; or whether to work at all. But underlying this veil of freedom are the real, material, physical facts, and they run as such: you can only live where you can afford to live; you can only work for someone who will willingly employ you; and while you are under no legal obligation to work for anyone at all, you will find it a struggle to live while not doing so. The welfare state will be your (miserable) safety net, but only as long as you abide by the contract agreeing to actively seek employment.

Whether we *choose* the wages system or not, we are in reality bound to it, and within this system we enter into contracts with employers whereby the value we create for them is more than the value we receive in wages, and thus they make a profit through our exploitation. We are not *by law* bound to a single individual, but, *in fact*, to the capitalist class as a whole. With the acknowledgment of these simple truths, the illusive veil of freedom is dissolved, and laid bare is the reality in which we are still in chains.

Such a strong feeling of personal aversion to claims of wage slavery no doubt stems from a sense of pride. But this objection to the mere notion of wage-slavery only acts to perpetuate the reality of the condition: people's misplaced sense of pride paradoxically serves to maintain their humiliating position. Imagine, of those chattel slaves who fought for political emancipation, if they had instead simply denied the existence of slavery. But it's difficult to express the common sense behind, and the political importance of, the term 'wage-slavery' when somebody has already decided that what you're saying is offensive.

The term 'socialism' has been immersed in so much bullshit that it is often necessary to revert to the basics when discussing it. Failure to properly define terms often results in being associated with an entirely different

political stance, and one which is, conveniently, much easier to attack.

We do not see ourselves, as many of the Left do, as being distinct and detached from the rest of the working class (that is, all of those who work for a wage or salary), but as being part of the working class movement as a whole. In fact, we firmly hold that *the emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself*, which means that workers do not need, and must not have, leaders in the revolution. We, like Marx, have always stood in staunch opposition to anyone that says otherwise (Lenin and his Bolshevik Party of "professional revolutionaries," for example). In this sense, the explanation of the socialist case to other workers is a sign not of our condescending superiority but of our political equality.

Something else frequently encountered is some people's instant feeling of outrage at someone espousing the socialist case while living in what they judge to be a more comfortable position than their own. But this acts to make their own feelings of hardship an *obstacle to*, rather than a *catalyst for* change.

This is misplaced, because it rests on the misunderstanding that socialists are people who simply whinge about capitalism and the rough hand it deals to us. What we are actually trying to express, however, is the position of workers in relation to capitalists, whatever their wage might be. The point is to show exactly *what capitalism is* – i.e. the exploitation of wage-labour, production for profit, a market system – in order to illustrate how it can, and why it must, be changed.

We often meet the protest, "Well what do *you* do to improve things?", as though a lack of effort to improve or reform capitalism somehow makes the argument less valid. But we have never claimed to be concerned with the improvement of capitalism; while acknowledging the necessity of the defensive actions of trade unionism within capitalism, the Socialist Party case is in fact openly anti-reformist. This is because no amount of adjustment to capitalism can completely eradicate the problems which are *inherent* within it.

We do not simply advocate a more equal, fair form of capitalism which is



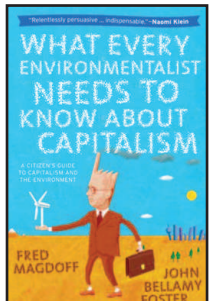
a little bit kinder to workers, but the abolition of capitalism altogether: that is, the abolition of private property and of the wages system, and the establishment of a society based upon the doctrine of "from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs". Given the required nature of the revolution, i.e. carried out by the majority, all we can really do at present towards achieving this is to try to persuade other workers of its necessity. The time will come for more practical efforts towards socialism, but while the majority of workers still support capitalism we are, alas, not yet there.

But why is it that we socialists constantly have to justify ourselves? Those who are so quick to erect barriers against the spread of socialist thought should consider the question: what is it that you are defending, and in whose interest? Capitalism is an inefficient social system which causes a catastrophic level of death and destruction on a daily basis. It is a system in which many are forced to live in poverty or die through starvation in a world of unprecedented abundance; a world capable of providing life's necessities for all of its inhabitants. Capitalism is a miserable social order in which those who own but do not produce live parasitically off the labour of those who produce but do not own. But its continuation ultimately depends upon the continuation of workers' consent. We have withdrawn ours and we urge you to do the same: until then, the onus for justification lies with you.

CBH

Need to end capitalism

What every environmentalist needs to know about capitalism.
By Fred Magdoff and John Bellamy Foster. Monthly Review Press. 2011.



Overall the book contains a very good analysis of the causes of the world's environmental problems which it is claimed are largely attributable to the global economic system

of capitalism. Bearing in mind the book is aimed at environmental activists and those concerned with the problems associated with global warming, climate change and the general degradation of the state of the planet, the authors are spot on with this early statement: 'It's essential to break with a system based on a single motive – the perpetual accumulation of capital and hence economic growth without end.'

The chapters unfold neatly revealing the depths of inequality between rich and poor, individually and collectively, including the relative size of their ecological footprints. A clear case is presented as to the illogicality of an expectation that capitalism can be organised a different way to be made 'green.' The growth imperative of capitalism is explained and linked to its antagonism to the health of our environment in that what's good for economic growth is bad for the environment and vice versa. The wide spread of capitalism's ever expanding reach and resultant damage is comprehensively covered, including the imperialism of land grab, resource wars, water as an urgent resource problem, the exploitation of aquifers adding to annual sea level rise, damage as a result of careless but deliberate exploitation and externalities in their many guises. How appropriately the authors suggest amending the well known phrase, 'the tragedy of the commons' to 'the tragedy of the private exploitation of the commons.'

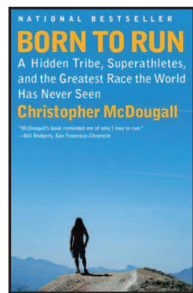
When it comes to how we should deal with the causes and what is promoted to achieve the break with the system based on the perpetual accumulation of capital and economic growth without end, however, things take a turn for the worse. The final chapter is a disappointing list of

rules, regulations, what could, should and must be done to put people and the environment before profit. It's disappointing because these demands are all reformist based. Having read this far it must now be plain for readers to see that without first dismantling the very economic system that the authors have so successfully discredited right up to the final chapter there is no way that anything will change for the better, neither for people nor for the environment. Capitalism has been reformed many times and in many different ways and still it continues to progressively worsen the environment. If socialism is to be achieved it has to mean much more than transitional reforms to a democratically planned economy.

JS

Marketing crap

Born to Run. By Christopher McDougall. Profile Books.



Hundreds of scientists recently convened in London to untangle half a century of sports and leisure propaganda that more supportive shoes are better. Running is one of the most natural

things human beings can do; it is as good for you as long periods of sitting are bad for you. It is as vital to our sustainability as a species as is breathing, eating and reproduction. Christopher McDougall was puzzled, then, to learn from podiatrists that recreational running is blighted by injury. His research led him to write this best-seller which spawned the movement that is challenging the supportive shoe orthodoxy. The journalist for *Men's Health* tells the tale of his time with the Tarahumara tribe from Mexico.

"In Tarahumara land, there was no crime, war or theft ... Fifty-year-olds could outrun teenagers, and eighty-year-old great-granddads could hike marathon distances up mountainsides. Their cancer rates were barely detectable." They did no stretching or warming up, partied all night and got drunk on beer the night before a race. The races could last two days. Some runners could do 300 miles or 12 full marathons back to back. When the Tarahumara were introduced to Leadville 100 mile Ultramarathon in Colorado in 1993,

they revolutionised ultra-running and broke records, a 52 year-old Tarahumara runner finished first, a 46 year-old Tarahumara runner finished second.

The barefoot movement that the book has spawned simply contends that supportive shoes encourage unhealthy habits. These include heel strikes rather than toe strikes, and pronation which causes knee injury. The book stops short of asking why the lucrative trainer industry has ignored or suppressed this evidence and sells bad running shoes. The answer is that some scientific studies and research is in the interests of capital to sponsor, and other studies are not. As cultural theorists such as the Frankfurt School have observed, the culture industry does not just fail to meet needs, it actually creates false needs and artificial desires too.

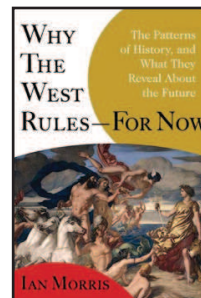
Since the co-founder of Nike (and champion sports coach) Bill Bowerman liked to claim responsibility for the popularity of recreational running with the publication of *Jogging* in 1962 then the industry ought to be responsible even on its own terms. Eventually even Bowerman concluded Nike were "distributing a lot of crap" in order to "make money".

Although the scientific consensus now is inconclusive, trainer companies have already started selling shoes with minimal support to simulate the effect of going barefoot. So in the trainer industry, just as in capitalism generally, no crises are permanent, just unnecessarily wasteful and extremely destructive.

DJW

End of geography

Why the West Rules – for Now. By Ian Morris. Profile Books.



The basic question addressed by Morris is why in recent times the Western part of the globe has been dominant over the Eastern part. Britain's rulers, for instance,

sent armies and gunboats to humiliate the Emperor of China in the nineteenth century and extract trading concessions, rather than vice versa. It is important to realise that the West (more precisely, the rulers in the West) has not always been top dog: from the sixth to the eighteenth centuries

the East was more developed. Morris summarised his views in an article in *History Today* in October 2010, which can be read for free at www.historytoday.com/ian-morris/latitudes-not-attitudes-how-geography-explains-history.

Morris defines the 'West' as societies descended from the original core region of southwest Asia, so encompassing Europe and the Americas. The 'East' is those societies descended from the early civilisations between the Yellow and Yangzi rivers. Social development is quantified by looking at four criteria: energy capture (the capacity for extracting energy from the natural environment and for using it), urbanism (the size of a society's largest city, as a proxy for the ability to organize complex situations), information processing (the power to communicate information) and the capacity to make war. The higher the score, the more powerful and developed a society is, and the more able it is to impose itself on others. The West was more advanced till around the middle of the sixth century CE and again from around 1800, when development leapt upwards, first in the West (the Industrial Revolution) and then in the East. The West is still ahead (especially in war-waging ability) but, as the title of the book suggests, this may not last for long.

Biological explanations (to the effect that people from the West are more intelligent) do not hold up, since human beings are basically the

same everywhere. Rather, the factors behind the differences are claimed to be essentially geographical. A period of global warming around twenty thousand years ago led to the growth of agriculture in the 'Hilly Flanks' (covering the valleys of the Tigris, Euphrates and Jordan rivers) and so to a distinctive 'Western' core. At the end of the last Ice Age, agriculture began between 20 and 35 degrees north, a region with plenty of domesticable plants and animals (unlike, say, sub-Saharan Africa). Millennia later, by around 700 CE, China was a unified empire, with an enormous capital city and woodblock printing, while the West remained divided and much less developed, in the period known as the Dark Ages. But it was Europeans who encountered and exploited the Americas, because it was easier for them to cross the Atlantic than for Chinese explorers to cross the Pacific. Chinese fleets sailed through Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean in the fifteenth century, but distances and prevailing winds meant that sailing eastwards into an empty ocean was unlikely to be attempted.

Western Europe (especially Britain) was well-placed to start off industrialisation because it could build on the gradually-accumulating technologies of previous centuries, but also because it possessed plenty of natural resources, colonies and warships, much more so than China at the time. We might add that it benefited from the profits of the

slave trade, too. The various graphs that Morris presents suggest that the East will overtake the West in development early next century; compare predictions that China will become the biggest economy within just two decades, though Morris is not simply dealing with China. He argues, however, that geography will soon cease to mean anything anyway, as globalisation undermines real differences and produces a true worldwide system.

Morris's work is probably most reminiscent of Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel*, which emphasised the importance of environmental factors, such as the relative shortage of domesticable animals in Africa and the Americas, in determining the course of historical development in different areas. In *The Enigma of Capital*, David Harvey accuses Diamond of a geographical or environmental determinism: on Diamond's view, he says, 'Africa is poor for environmental reasons, not ... because of centuries of imperialist plundering, beginning with the slave trade'. This objection misses the point, though, since there needs to be an account of why it was Westerners who enslaved Africans, rather than vice versa. A geographical explanation is perfectly compatible with the view that the slave trade contributed to the impoverishment of Africa. In connection with the determinism objection, Morris is right to quote Marx to the effect that people make their own history



Reflections on Black Mirror

A VIDEO is posted onto YouTube showing Britain's beautiful new Princess tied up and crying. She struggles to read out loud a message from her kidnapper: she will be killed

unless the Prime Minister has sex with a pig, live on television. The first story in Charlie Brooker's trilogy of state-of-the-nation dramas – *Black Mirror* – wasn't going to be easy viewing. The bizarre, nightmarish scenario was acted and directed with thorough seriousness, making the programme feel more like a fly-on-the-wall documentary, drawing the viewer in.

Brooker (right) is savvy enough about the media to make the viral spread of the threat across the internet central to the plot. The kidnapper's message zooms through YouTube, facebook and twitter without the traditional methods of communication – press releases, newspapers and television news – being able to keep up. The new types of media are changing how we relate to the world. Information is open directly to more people, to interpret, spread and act upon. According to Brooker, this turns us into social-networked, YouTube-sharing voyeurs, for whom everything is titillation. He's saying that reducing events to tweets and facebook updates cheapens them, and robs them of their real meaning.

Back in the drama, the government's improvised back-up plans fail, and the situation for the Prime Minister and the Princess gets fist-clenchingly desperate. The kidnapper's deadline for the live bestiality broadcast is approaching. Like the crowds gathering in front of their screens, the viewer is both appalled and dragged into watching, thinking, 'will they really show it?'

Brooker succeeded in crafting an intelligent, challenging drama. Anyone hearing about the premise and tuning in for a PM-on-porcine-action trashfest would have found themselves to be the target of Brooker's bile. The final scenes shifted the blame for the horrible situation to the gawping masses. This is where Brooker is perhaps too cynical about our lust for what we watch on our screens, whether on a television, computer or smartphone. So, *Black Mirror* is best watched as a warning of the risks of alienation by the share-and-spread immediacy of modern media.



but under circumstances they have not chosen themselves; their geographical situation being part of those circumstances.

Astonishingly, the word 'capitalism' is absent from the book's index, though there is much discussion of industrialisation and industrialists (i.e. capitalists). It is all very well to say that 'Change is caused by lazy, greedy, frightened people looking for easier, more profitable, and safer ways to do things', but there needs to be explicit recognition that this often involves people getting others to work for them, and so exploiting them. Life for the earliest workers in capitalist factories was in no way easy or safe, and the profits went to the owners, not to those who toiled in the factories. The owners were not so much lazy and frightened as hungry for wealth and power.

Marx attributed the growth of the industrial working class to deliberate acts by the capitalists, fencing off the countryside and so driving people into towns to labour as propertyless wage workers. Rather, says Morris, it was due to increases in life expectancy and hence in population (Britain's more or less doubled between 1780 and 1830). But he does not seem to deny that the rural dispossession took place, and it clearly contributed to the availability of urban workers as a labour force to be exploited by the new lords of capital.

One thing the book does show is that societal arrangements are never permanent. We could turn its theme around and say that the capitalists rule – but only for now.

PB

Meetings

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

CLAPHAM

Sunday **15 January**, 2.30-5.30 pm
(note earlier starting time)
Capitalist Propaganda and the Mass Media.

Speaker: Rob Worden.

Sunday **29 January**, 2.30-5.30
(note earlier starting time)

The Hunger Pangs of the Proletarian Mind: Poverty and Alienation.

Speaker: Simon Wigley.

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

Manchester

Monday **23 January**, 8.30 pm
'British Trotskyism: a Historical Survey'
Unicorn, Church Street, City Centre.

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Declaration of Principles

This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess

but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local,

in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

50 Years Ago

The Common Market—the Real Issue

THE COMMON Market has become front-page news. Papers that could hardly spare it a thought a few short months ago now give it headlines. Special features set out to explain things in simple terms for “the man in the street.” On radio and TV it is the same. Even ITV did a series and got criticised for slanting the programme too heavily in favour of Britain going in.

There is plenty of such criticism, of course. Dire warnings of what will happen to us if Britain goes into the Common Market are matched by equally dreadful ones about our fate if she stays out.

We are told of other possible consequences. Of how the Government is thinking of going over to decimal currency—after hesitation on the part of its predecessors for close on a hundred and fifty years. And of the way Mr. Marples is apparently making preparations just in case we have eventually to drive on the right hand side of the road! How much keener can British capitalism’s representatives show themselves than that?



Ernest Marples, MP

But, more seriously, why this sudden about-turn? Why, after resolutely refusing to have anything to do with the Common Market for years, is the British Government desperately trying to get in? Even in 1958, when the writing was pretty plainly on the wall, they still preferred to set up the rival firm EFTA (the Seven) rather than come to terms with the Six. They had the chance of joining then and turned it down. (...)

The reason, then, for British capitalism’s change of front is the one we should always seek when we wish to discover the motive for the really important activities of capitalist nations and their political spokesmen—the motive of harsh, real, cold economic interest.

Plain and inescapable is the fact that if British capitalism does not go into the Common Market, it is going to be left isolated in a world increasingly under the sway of the economic power of the Six. This isolation will become more and more pronounced as the Market’s internal tariffs fall and its duties on imported products increase. Eventually, if the avowed aims of the Common Market were to be achieved, British capitalism would be left high and dry. The Tory Government has, belatedly, woken to the danger and is now fighting a desperate last-minute battle to avert it.

(Editorial, *Socialist Standard*, January 1962)

ACTION REPLAY

Pass the Port

IF WAR is the continuation of politics by other means, then international sport can be a form of politics too. National sports teams are often used to increase a country’s prestige and influence or to make some political point.

Probably the most notorious example was the ‘cricket test’ proposed by Norman Tebbit in 1990, and supposedly failed by many British people of Asian descent. So someone whose family was from Pakistan might support Pakistan against England (even if they supported England when they played, say, Australia). It was never quite clear what this was meant to show, apart from Tebbit’s own nastiness.

In fact, a closer look at the concept of a national team can tell us quite a bit about the notions of nationalism and patriotism. Bahrain, for instance, has acquired



Norman Tebbit, who proposed the ‘cricket test’

a set of Olympic-class athletes by granting citizenship (and plenty of money too, no doubt) to established stars from elsewhere (such as Morocco and Ethiopia). Switching national allegiance for sporting reasons is not exactly rare, and even the current England cricket team (strictly, England and Wales) contains a number of players who started out as South Africans.

Even when the country was split between East and West, a combined German team competed at some Olympic Games. Ireland is represented on a thirty-two county basis in hockey and rugby union, but Northern Ireland and the Republic go their separate ways in other sports. The North competes alongside England, Scotland and Wales in football, for instance, and at the Commonwealth Games, but not at the Olympics, where a combined Great Britain team

takes part.

So the concept of ‘nation’ in international sport is pretty fluid. Not that any of this stops nationalists claiming that sporting success for ‘their’ country shows how superior its people are.

PB

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Voice from the Back

A Sick Society

The owning class are always seeking ways of increasing their profit margins and one way of doing that is by decreasing their expenditure on welfare and health. "People should be signed off for long-term sickness by an independent assessment service not GPs, a government-backed review says. The review also suggests tax breaks for firms which employ people who suffer from long-term conditions. It is estimated the changes would send 20% of those off sick back to work" (*BBC News*, 19 November).

In sickness and health the working class must be kept toiling to keep those profits rolling in.

Hard Times?

Everyone is aware that we are living in hard times, the media tells us this everyday, but it is not too tough for some people. "This huge superyacht is so sleek you'd almost be forgiven for mistaking it for a floating limousine. This is no coincidence - the 'Sovereign' yacht is based on the design of a limo, and even comes with its own matching car. And the vessel fit for a king could be yours, if you're willing to shell out a mere \$132million - that's £85million" (*Daily Mail*, 3 December). They are not making such things unless they know that some extremely rich people are potential customers.



Sovereign Yacht - something else Clarkson would kill for?

Figures Don't Lie

Politicians like to claim that under their benign guidance we are all better off but what do their own statisticians find? "New figures from the Office of National Statistics show that average salaries

in the UK have fallen by 3.5% in real terms as pay rises fail to keep pace with inflation. An average full-time employee earned £26,200 in the year to April, up 1.4% on the previous 12 months. However, with inflation running at 5%, that amounts to a pay cut" (*The Week*, 23 November). It is true that statistics don't lie - unlike some politicians.

Optimism And Reality

With the discovery of oil and gas in the North Sea many optimists predicted that gas for home heating would cost next to nothing. Another piece of optimistic

capitalism show just how hollow such claims are. "British families are suffering the worst squeeze in living standards for more than half a century, and will be no better off in 2016 than they were in 2002. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) revealed yesterday that the average family on middle income will have £2,496 less to spend next year than three years ago" (*Times*, 1 December). Mr Cameron's family will probably survive though, don't know about yours!

Bighead Blows It

Up to two million workers went on strike on 30 November and on the BBC programme, *The One Show*, Jeremy Clarkson the BBC motoring correspondent had this to say about the strikers: "Frankly, I'd have them all shot. I would take them outside and execute them in front of their families. I mean, how dare they go on strike when they have these gilt-edged pensions that are going to be guaranteed while the rest of us have to work for a living?" (*BBC News*, 1 December). Let us just hope

for Jeremy's sake he doesn't have a road accident on one of those overpriced super-charged motor cars of his and has to rely on the attention of an ambulance driver or a nurse who can remember that particular piece of arrogant bombast.



prediction about the future was that with the great technological advances we would soon enjoy a much shorter working week and we would all be retiring a lot sooner. A glance at your last gas bill shows the hollowness of the first prediction, but even wider of the mark was the second one. "More than 6 million (28%) of today's over-50s expect to work past the state retirement age, according to the working late index compiled by LV. They expect to work an extra six years, the retirement specialists said" (*Sunday Times*, 27 November). The realities of capitalism often leave the optimists looking foolish

A Family Man?

The Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron is fond of the role of "the family man" and is often reported as praising "family values", but the realities of

FREE LUNCH

