

# socialist standard

April 2012  
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Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain - Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

## Meet the Captains



**100 years of 'unsinkable' capitalism**



Glad to  
be GLA  
page 5



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page 14



page 23



# socialist standard

APRIL 2012

## contents

### FEATURES

**The Titanic disaster 100 years on** 10

**Who was to blame?** 12

**What about the deckchairs?** 12

**Maritime disasters** 13

**Syria: Bashar lives up to his name** 14

**Now and then** 16

**From tancraft to the Cloud** 18

### REGULARS

**Pathfinders** 4

**Halo Halo!** 6

**Brief Reports** 6

**Cooking the Books** 7

**Material World** 8

**Greasy Pole** 9

**Reviews** 20

**Proper Gander** 21

**Meetings** 22

**50 Years Ago** 23

**Action Replay** 23

**Voice from the Back** 24

**Free Lunch** 24

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The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 5 May** 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

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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

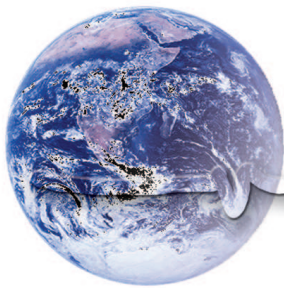
to make new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest 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.**



# socialist standard

## Editorial

APRIL 2012

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## Profits before people, again

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AT LEAST the Coalition government knows how capitalism works – it runs on profits, so priority must be given to profitability and profit-making. It's written all over their economic policies and was confirmed in last month's budget.

The only way capitalism gets out of a slump is when profit-making opportunities reappear. When they do, "growth" resumes. This means that, in a slump, any government must not do anything that will adversely affect profitability and profit-making prospects. Just the opposite, it must encourage these. That is, if it is going to do anything. Another option is to simply let spontaneous economic forces operate to restore profitability, as through unprofitable firms going bust and their assets passing cheaply to their rivals and increased unemployment pushing down wages.

A government can help restore profitability in two ways. It can reduce taxes on profits. In the budget, for the second year running, the Chancellor announced a cut in corporation tax, a direct tax on profits. This reduces government revenue, which means that it has to cut back on some of its other spending, as the present government is doing with a vengeance, forcing local councils to reduce public amenities and slashing payments to those who can't find or who are unable to work. With more to come.

The second way a government can help restore profitability is to reinforce the downward pressures that mass unemployment exerts on wage levels. Two recently announced measures openly proclaim this as their aim.

The Chancellor confirmed that national pay bargaining for public sector workers is to be replaced by regional bargaining on the grounds that the present system results in wage levels in some regions being too high, so high that to attract workers

employers have to pay higher wages than otherwise. The aim of regional pay bargaining is to reduce wages – and so boost profitability – in areas of the country where public service workers are considered to be overpaid.

The minimum wage is to go up in October but by only half the rate of price increases. So, it's going to be reduced in real terms. For those under 21, the rate is not going to be increased at all. Business Secretary Vince Cable justified this on the grounds that it would make it easier for young people to get a job, i.e. the lower wage is aimed at boosting the profit prospects of firms employing workers on the minimum wage.

But what about taxes on the rich that have also been announced? That's a side-show. "Tycoon taxes", "mansion taxes" and the like are not taxes on profits, but taxes on the consumption of the capitalist class. A government can safely increase them in a slump as they don't affect profitability. This even has the political advantage of allowing them to justify the austerity measures imposed on the rest of the population as "fair" as even the rich are effected.

It is true, though, as the Labour Opposition has been quick to point out, that this propaganda ploy has been rather undermined by the government's reduction of the rate of tax on incomes over £150,000 from 50 to 45 percent, supposedly to attract overseas businesspeople to come to invest in Britain. But, as the traditional party of the rich, the Tories can't clobber their clientele too much.

There is no alternative under capitalism. As long as capitalism lasts all governments have to pursue a policy of giving priority to profits. Profits before people is the rule. It's why we need socialism.



## War – the Enders in Sight

THE RECENT news that a US soldier in Afghanistan has gone loopy and machine-gunned a whole bunch of small children will have shocked even those veteran war-observers with long memories of such 'My Lai'-type massacres. With the omniscience of modern communications it is no longer feasible to hush up such inevitable excesses, and the incident is bad news for politicians and strategists trying to wind down Western involvement in Afghanistan and extricate their countries with some shred of dignity.

But it will also add weight to the arguments of developers aiming to remove human agency altogether from the battlefield. As technology and economies of scale continue to accelerate, these arguments are gathering force. Existing military 'training' involves the unsavoury business of trying to turn sentient mammals into cold-blooded killing machines without conscience, self-regard, emotion or independent thought. The problem is, it doesn't work and never has worked. Despite thousands of years of history and the most intense training schemes ever devised, humans are just not very good at war. Most soldiers in wartime never fire on or even at the enemy, despite their supposed motivation for doing so. Of those that do, the stress can easily send them over the edge, resulting in embarrassing murder sprees.

Practically and tactically, robots are better. They shoot what they are supposed to shoot; obey without demur; don't rape or torture; don't sleep, eat, desert, mutiny, fight each other, get ill or go mad; they retain functionality even when damaged; and they do not tie up rescue resources when badly damaged. No grieving populations need await casualty figures; no moral tide threatens to wash away public resolve; no breast needs beating at military reversals; no songs of regret need writing about Little Johnny never coming home because Little Johnny never went in the first place. If war has its own form of utopia, this is it.

The main problem with robots is that they are stupid and likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. Artificial intelligence systems can give a measure of independent decision-making to battlefield robots along the lines of the self-driving car or the Mars-lander, but giving autonomy and firepower to machines risks the same kind of blow-back effect that banished gas as a viable battlefield weapon. For the moment, humans have to be in charge.

The process of robotising warfare is however under way. Unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) drones fly sorties and strafe enemy targets,

while improvised explosive device (IED) drones trundle up to suspicious roadside objects in a selfless act of identification before the bomb disposal experts move in. The Pentagon recently invited manufacturers to design 'disposable' satellite systems for intelligence, reconnaissance and surveillance that could be launched in the field by a soldier using a handheld device (*BBC Online*, 14 March). Research is ongoing into powered exoskeletons. Essentially, these install the human controller inside the armoured robot. Problems with power supplies, however, mean 'robosquaddie' is still some way off.

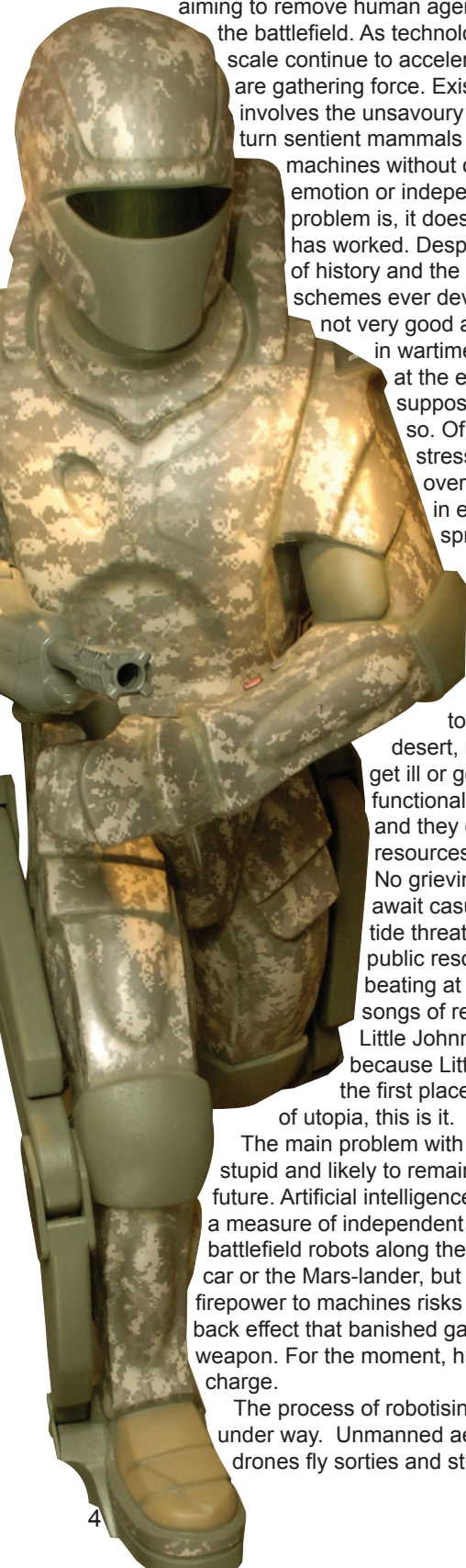
One might be tempted to imagine future battles being fought entirely between robot armies without any direct human agency at all, but this is unlikely because humans will always remain the final offensive option. What is likely is that the generals will be increasingly removed from the reality and consequences of their decisions. The 1985 novel *Enders Game*, currently in film production, describes one such war, fought by humans but commanded remotely like a computer game.

Wars in the future may in any case not be decided on any physical battlefield, but is in the virtual space of the internet. Fast becoming the nervous system of the world, and already awash with amateur viruses and professional adware and spyware, the internet is now hosting covert state attacks on social and political infrastructure.

Last November Foreign Secretary William Hague warned of such attacks during a cybersecurity conference in London. He avoided mentioning China and Russia by name but in any case the finger points in both directions, and most state administrations have some form of a cyber 'defence' department devoted to hacking and undermining economic adversaries.

All this is to put in somewhat larger perspective recent news reports about the 'boring' nature of ICT lessons in British schools. That the state should decide to direct so savage a critique at a central part of its own education strategy is surprising and the question needs to be asked: why this, and why now? The ICT syllabus was, like every other syllabus, designed around the supposed needs of future employers at a time when young people had little access to computers and wouldn't know a spreadsheet from a spark plug. Today computers are vastly easier to use, but more to the point, with social networking changing the youth lifestyle, students are often more tech-savvy than their mostly unqualified teachers. The overwhelmingly office end-user orientation of the school syllabus will comfortably turn out armies of low-paid administrative assistants, but that's not going to reignite the white heat of British technological creativity and employers know it. Apps, games and cyber-security are where it's at, and for that you need to get 'under the bonnet', down among the program code. The recent anti-establishment successes of hacktivist groups, Anonymous and Lulz-Sec have caught states flat-footed, but they're catching on fast. Virtual war is coming, and the state with the most IT-literate population will be the one which wins, or at least survives, the coming cyber-conflicts.

For socialists there is an upside to all this. As the needs of capitalism become ever more sophisticated, power flows into the hands of the workers whose job it is to run that system. But it is a perpetual arms-race between the ruling elite and workers, each one learning to be smarter, faster and more devious than the other. When workers in Iran, Burma and Egypt broke out in rebellion, the state shut down communications channels in a massive denial-of-service which protesters found ways around. But in Syria the regime was cleverer and hacked the rebels' own communications, flooding them with gibberish. The Syrian regime may win in the short term through sheer medieval brutality, but you can't run a modern state without a sophisticated infrastructure and a working class trained to run it. And that inevitably gives capitalism its Achilles heel, and workers their ultimate weapon against war itself.

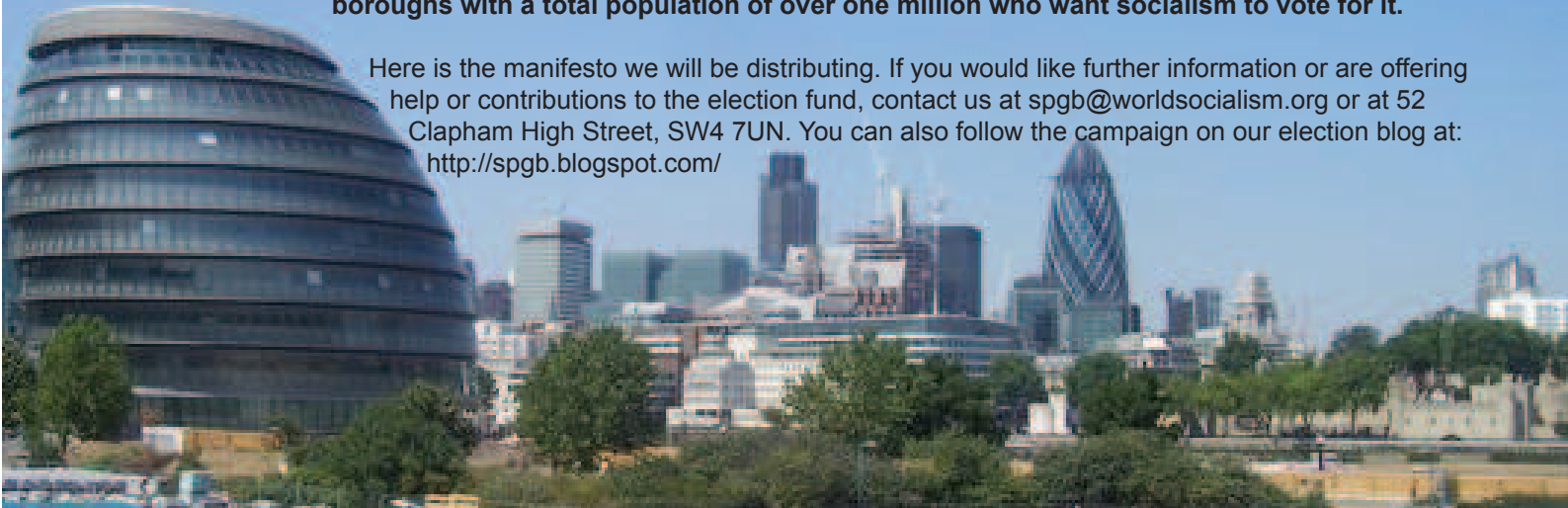




# Greater London Assembly elections

In the elections for the Greater London Assembly on 3 May the Socialist Party will be contesting two of the 14 constituency seats, giving the chance for those in four London boroughs with a total population of over one million who want socialism to vote for it.

Here is the manifesto we will be distributing. If you would like further information or are offering help or contributions to the election fund, contact us at [spgb@worldsocialism.org](mailto:spgb@worldsocialism.org) or at 52 Clapham High Street, SW4 7UN. You can also follow the campaign on our election blog at: <http://spgb.blogspot.com/>



## It's up to you

No politician can help you. They all say they are going to have to make you worse off because of the crisis. In other words, to make you poorer to protect the wealth of the 1% who own the world. It's their system of making goods and services to sell for profit that led directly to the crisis. So long as we have this production for profit, we'll have periodic crises and politicians wringing their hands over them.

The only way out is to change the rules of the game: to change the system by putting an end to minority ownership by replacing it with the democracy of common ownership by and for everybody. Enough resources, know-how and skills exist already to provide comfortably for everyone. It's the profit system that prevents this. We need to do away with it and instead produce and access goods for needs.

At the moment so many people think that there's no alternative that they are shrugging their shoulders and hoping for the best. If a few of us stand up and say "we will not put up with this, we want something better" then the idea that resources should be owned in common and used to satisfy people's needs can get on the agenda as the only genuine alternative to capitalism and austerity.

We need to organise to bring about a world where the Earth's resources have become the common heritage of all and where every man, woman and child on the planet can have free access to what they need to lead a decent and satisfying life.

If you want this, vote for the Socialist Party candidate in this election, to let people know where you stand, and then come and join us in campaigning for socialism.

The Socialist Party candidates are:  
Lambeth & Southwark: Daniel Lambert  
Merton & Wandsworth: William Martin

### **Election Activities:**

Saturday 14 April, 12 noon  
Literature stall outside Socialist Party premises: 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN  
Leaflet distribution: Clapham Junction.  
Saturday 21 April, 12 noon  
Literature stall: 52 Clapham High St  
Leaflet distribution: Tooting (meet at tube station)  
Saturday 28 April, 12 noon  
Literature stall: 52 Clapham High St  
Election Meeting: 52 Clapham High St, 4pm (see Meetings page).





## The Right to be Offended

THERE HAVE been no reports in the papers lately of gangs of agnostics, atheists or socialists armed to the teeth, roaming the streets and stringing up priests, parsons and mullahs from the lamp posts. Nor have secularist snipers been hiding in the vestries and slaughtering old ladies as they toddle into church to sing their hymns on Sundays.

So what were the howls of protest about “militant”, “offensive”, “aggressive”, “dangerous” and “deeply intolerant” secularists all about that found their way into the press during February and March and sent an outraged Baroness Warsi scuttling off to discuss the matter with the pope?

Well, it seems that secularists have indeed been on the rampage. There have been several instances where these dangerous individuals had been quite openly voicing their opinions. And as we know, other people’s opinions can be deeply offensive to religious believers.

In January, for example, a cartoon of Jesus and Mohammed enjoying a pint together appeared on a University student’s Facebook page to advertise a pub social. After a request was made for the advert to be removed it was pointed out that most Moslem students appeared not to be bothered by it. But the treasurer of the Muslim Students Association thundered: “*It is not for atheists to decide what will or will not offend believers of different religions*”. Well everyone has the right to be offended but care needs to be taken. Offence like that must play hell with the blood pressure.

Then there was the nonsense at Bideford where council business included prayer sessions. “*Religious freedom is an absolute right, and so is freedom from religion,*” protested atheist councillor Clive Bone. Hardly a “deeply

intolerant” stance, but it offended the pious and pompous Communities Secretary Eric Pickles. “*For too long, the public sector has been used to marginalise and attack faith in public life,*” he whinged. The Bishop of Exeter agreed: “*Every time there is a survey of religious beliefs in this country, around 70 per cent of the population profess a faith*” he claimed.

Not so, said a poll commissioned by the Richard Dawkins Foundation. This showed overwhelmingly that of those who ticked the ‘Christian’ box in the last census did so simply because they considered that they were decent people, or because their parents said they were Christian. Very few of them believed in the precepts of Christianity.

So, judging from recent events, what can “militant”, “deeply intolerant” and “offensive” non-believers learn from religion about tolerance? Well, not much.

In November 2004 after the Dutch film maker Theo Van Gogh produced his film, *Submission*, portraying violence against women in Islamic societies an offended Islamic extremist brutally slaughtered him.

Dr George Tiller was the medical director of a women’s clinic in Kansas which carried out abortions. Although he was highly regarded as someone committed to women in need of help, others disagreed. He was shot through the eye in May 2009 by a devout religious pro-life group assassin.

And in January 2011, in Pakistan, Salman Taseer made the mistake of criticising Pakistan’s blasphemy laws. He was shot 27 times with a sub-machine gun.

As has been mentioned in this column before, the reason many people believe their religion is true, is that the more they study it, the more they realise that God hates the same people that they do.



## Brief Reports

AFTER NEWS that a man managed to survive for two months in a frozen car by hibernating, there has been a flurry of unconfirmed reports that some old people in parts of Scotland are managing to survive the winter on a state pension. “I can’t believe it’s true,” said Pensions minister Ian Duncan Smith, “but if it is, we will certainly be looking at making cuts.” A leading clinician explained that in certain unusual circumstances it may be possible for the elderly poor to stay alive when the state doesn’t want them to: “They might be doing it by setting fire to all their furniture and eating their slippers. And we shouldn’t rule out cannibalism. We would love to research this phenomenon more closely, but of course there’s no money.”

JEREMY CLARKSON’S remark that the 30 November public sector strikers should be executed in front of their families was not in breach of broadcasting rules, Ofcom has ruled. The remarks sparked 31,000 complaints to the BBC. “It’s a disgrace,” said one licence holder, “everybody knows that strikers’ families should be executed too. It’s the only language these Bolsheviks understand.” Mr Clarkson commented, “I’m sorry I used the word ‘executed’. What I meant to say was ‘hanged, disembowelled and boiled in lard’. Now everyone will think I’m a gay liberal.”

THE US commander in Afghanistan has apologised over reports that Nato troops had “improperly disposed” of copies of the Koran. In a statement he said, “We wish to reassure Moslems everywhere that it is our policy to shoot them while showing their

storybooks the utmost respect. We regret any offence caused. Normal toilet paper has now been restored to the latrines.”

THE PRINCE of Wales has admitted he was a failure as a schoolboy football captain at an event for his Prince’s Trust Football Initiative. Speaking to a group of famous footballers, the Prince told them his school team never won a game with him in charge. “It’s nice that he’s honest about it,” said Tottenham’s Jermain Tothepoint, “and it explains why he’s never been much cop as a prince either.” A spray of mixed wallflowers and antirrhinum sprang to the Prince’s defence: “He might not know much about architecture, but he knows how to water a plant, and he keeps us amused.”

FIRMS AND charities are to be invited to bid for a payment-by-results scheme to try to get MPs into work or training, in a project launched by Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg. “Many MPs are not in employment, education or training, and do nothing all day but sit in front of a computer looking at stock figures. Many of them have complex problems, including truancy, idleness, a lack of motivation and disengagement from the electorate. It’s crucial to help these people now before the next election and unemployment hits us all.”

MANY LARGE retail stores have expressed concerns over another government work experience scheme which has been derided as “slave labour”. One chief executive blasted critics of the scheme: “It’s ridiculous to imply these trainees are worse off than our regular staff. This is making us look bad to our shareholders. Let’s get this straight, all our employees work in slave conditions, not just a few miserable trainees.”





## Cash mountains, why?

IN HIS City column in the London *Evening Standard* (21 February) Anthony Hilton commented on the fact that at the moment “firms are awash with cash”:

“It is certainly highly unusual for companies to be in such surplus. Over the past half-century in both Britain and America, companies have shown themselves far more likely to be borrowers than savers. It is different now because they are behaving differently. Companies are sitting on mountains of cash because they have decided no longer to invest it. The ratio of investment in GDP in the developed world is about the lowest it has been for 60 years. What we now see – in Britain and the United States in particular – are corporates running themselves for cash rather than growth.”

This is indeed how many capitalist corporations are behaving at the moment, but the way Hilton puts it makes it seem that this is a deliberate change of policy objective on the part of those in charge of them: in the past they aimed at growth by re-investing the profits they made; now they have decided to use them to build up their cash reserves instead.

But why? This doesn't make sense in terms of capitalism as a system where capital is accumulated out of profit and then reinvested in production, (i.e. growth), and where those who Marx said “personified capital” (today the top executives of capitalist corporations more than the individual capitalists of his day) are “merely a cog” in a social mechanism which obliges them to “keep extending his capital, so as to preserve it, and he can only extend it by means of progressive accumulation” (*Capital*, Vol 1, ch. 24, section 3).

Hilton's explanation is that a target for building up profits that are not necessarily re-invested is attained more easily and quickly than a target for growing the size of the business; so top executives prefer to set such targets as easier for them to achieve and so claim their bonuses. “The bonus culture,” he says, “is destroying the system. The focus on the short term has led to a calamitous fall in investment which has unbalanced the entire national economy.” In short, it has even caused the present crisis.

The present crisis has been caused by a lack of investment; in fact, that's what it is, a fall in investment which has had knock-on effects, on consumer demand and government debt as well as on output and employment. So Hilton is not entirely wrong when he writes:

“Conventional wisdom holds that the mess we're in is the result of governments spending too much. But it could also be thought of as the consequences of firms spending too little.”

This, in fact, is how it should be thought of. The present slump has been caused, and is continuing, because of the reluctance of companies to re-invest any profits they are still making to expand production. But not for the reason Hilton suggests. It's not because companies have decided to deliberately build up their cash reserves. It's because they have calculated that they won't make any or enough profit if they do invest. So they don't, and as a result their cash reserves build up. Hilton has got it the wrong way round.

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# Balochistan: Redrawing the Map of Southwest Asia

*“There will be no peace... For the rest of our lifetimes, there will be multiple conflicts in mutating forms around the globe... The role of the U.S. armed forces will be to keep the world safe for our economy and open to our cultural assault. To those ends, we will do a fair amount of killing”* (Lieut. Col. Ralph Peters (Ret’d) in summer 1997 issue of *Parameters* (published by the U.S. Army War College).

In JANUARY, the U.S. State Department expressed “concern” at the human rights situation in Pakistan’s province of Balochistan, where the government is fighting a secessionist insurgency. There have been atrocious violations of human rights in Balochistan for many years, but the U.S. had never complained about it before (at least in public). Then in early February there were congressional hearings on Balochistan.

Why this sudden burst of interest in a previously ignored region?

## Background

The Baloch are an ancient people, thought to be mainly of Persian origin. They live in southwest Pakistan and southeast Iran, scattered over a vast expanse of mostly desert and mountain terrain. Balochistan is the largest of Pakistan’s provinces, covering 44 percent of the country’s area.

The economy and society of Balochistan are very underdeveloped. It is, however, rich in gas, coal and metals. Most of these resources have yet to be exploited. Four foreign companies are mining copper and gold – the Metallurgical Corporation of China, Antofagasta Minerals (Chile), Barrick Gold (Canada) and BHP Billiton (Britain and Australia). American companies do not appear to have a foothold. A new deep sea port at Gwadar began operations in 2008, its management entrusted to the Port of Singapore Authority.

When the British Raj was partitioned in 1947 the Baloch rulers wanted to join India, but geographical location forced them to accept incorporation into Pakistan. Initial promises of autonomy were later broken. Insurgencies against both the Pakistani and the Iranian government have continued intermittently ever since but grew in intensity in the 1990s and 2000s.

## The Baloch lobby

So long as Pakistan remained a reliable client state of the U.S., the Americans turned a blind eye to Balochistan. Now, however, Pakistan is moving out of the U.S. sphere of influence, which in turn makes continued U.S. occupation of Afghanistan untenable (see *Material World*, March 2012). In this context, the ‘Baloch card’ is a way to exert pressure on Pakistan.

The official U.S. position stops short of support for an ‘independent’ Balochistan, but a lobby in favour of such a policy has appeared in Washington (see Eddie Walsh in *Al-Jazeera*, Feb. 2012). It is possible that the options openly advocated by this ‘Baloch lobby’ are being secretly considered inside the U.S. government bureaucracy.

The Baloch lobby includes a group of members of congress that is said to be bipartisan, although its main spokesmen – Representatives Dana Rohrabacher (California), Louie Gohmert (Texas) and Steve King (Iowa) – are Republicans. Other active participants are Ralph Peters, the retired army officer and novelist quoted above, and M. Hossein Bor.

The key role in liaising between the lobby and its regional clients is probably played by M. Hossein Bor,



RALPH PETERS, ARMED FORCES JOURNAL

an Iranian-American corporate lawyer at the New York law firm of Entwistle & Capucci and a former adviser to the governments of the United States, Afghanistan and Qatar. It would be relevant to know whether among his corporate clients there are any companies interested in investing in Balochistan.

## Redrawing the map

The Baloch lobby accepts that the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan can no longer be considered allies of the United States. Accordingly, they seek to re-establish American influence in Southwest Asia by undermining and breaking up the three neighbouring “enemy” states – Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran – and creating a new state (or possibly more than one) that would be totally dependent on the U.S.

Political, financial and military support for the Baloch secessionist cause is an important part of such a strategy. As the Baloch homeland straddles the border between Pakistan and Iran, this policy would be directed against Iran as well as Pakistan.

Iran might also be targeted by support for other secessionist movements inside that country – in the Arab southwest, the Azeri northwest and the Kurdish west.

With regard to Afghanistan, the Baloch lobby advocates shifting support (including the provision of arms) from the Karzai government back to the Northern Alliance – the Uzbek and Tajik warlords in northern Afghanistan whose ground forces helped the U.S. defeat the Taliban regime at the beginning of the intervention. This policy, which would be feasible only with the full cooperation of Russia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, points in the direction of a north-south partition of Afghanistan.

It is very doubtful whether Pakistan as a state could survive the loss of Balochistan. A unified Pashtunistan, controlled by the Taliban and its allies, may emerge in northern Pakistan and southern Afghanistan. The provinces of Punjab and Sindh may then draw closer to India. This would more or less complete the redrawing of the map of southwest Asia along ethnic lines.

## What about Pakistan’s nukes?

Whatever advantages the U.S. might conceivably obtain from the strategy pushed by the Baloch lobby, it would entail enormous dangers. Dismantling Pakistan raises the question: what happens to the country’s nuclear weapons? Will U.S. Special Forces seize and disable them? Hopefully, caution will deter the U.S. from embarking on such adventures.

Hopefully too, all those well-intentioned people who think that ‘we’ should act to ‘free oppressed peoples threatened by genocide’ will ponder the real considerations that guide the foreign policy of capitalist states.

**STEFAN**





# All in what together?

SUCH IS the glut of material it is not necessary to drill too deeply into political history to excavate an impressive sample of pledges, slogans, phrases deposited by our leaders which they came to regret. For example during the devastating slump of the 1930s a few million unemployed who had returned from the war bitterly questioned the meaning of Lloyd George and his 'Land Fit For Heroes'. In the 1960s there was Harold Macmillan dreamily talking of a time when a customarily struggling people 'never had it so good'. Labour Prime Minister, James Callaghan never lived down 'Crisis? What Crisis?' when he was asked, as he returned from an economic summit in the West Indies in 1979, about his plans to deal with British capitalism's turmoil. The fact that he did not say this (it was no more than a reporter's version of what he had said) did not lessen the impression of a flippant dismissal of a serious problem and led to the loss of Labour votes. And recently, as the present recession (of a kind widely assumed by the economic experts to be a thing of the past) rumbled into its stride, David Cameron attempted to rally us with the assurance that: 'We are all in this together'.

## Ancestry

What right has Cameron to speak to us in this way? Well, in this social system with its historically characteristic class structure there is all he needs to give him that right. His background is rich in antecedent; through his paternal grandmother he is a direct, if illegitimate, descendant of King William IV and, through tortuous lineage, a fifth cousin of the present queen Elizabeth. Apart from being blue-blooded, he is (possibly to his own relief) a son of a family with a long and lucrative history of high standing in banking and trade. His late father benefited from a family tradition of being a senior partner in one of London's richest, most powerful stockbrokers. If this is not enough to secure his superior place in the social hierarchy, Cameron is married to a step-daughter of Viscountess Astor who, apart from being a descendant of Charles II was the owner and designer of an exclusive jewellery business and is now the CEO of a home furnishing design company. In other words, Cameron has all he needs to assert his place in the class structure of capitalism, which encourages him to lay down the laws governing our lives in the interests of his class. And which includes swamping us with repression and manipulation, at times denying the reality of it all with specious claims to have common interests with us. This is, put simply, another aspect of the class struggle.

## Divided

David Cameron can be relied on to tell us every now and again that he is 'passionate' about all sorts of plans, chances and prospects. So we might ask how he judges his government's response to his widely publicised call for national unity to deal with the recession – as we are all in the mess together. There are many examples in opposition to this, of an emphasis on people being officially divided between hard workers and dole-scroungers, between genuine invalids and fraudulent incapacity benefit claimants. Some time ago we had to endure government spokespeople relating how 'decent, hard-working' people can be seen at five o'clock in the morning trekking to work through dark and silent streets where, behind curtains, benefit fraudsters slept blissfully on. We heard about Boris Johnson complaining that

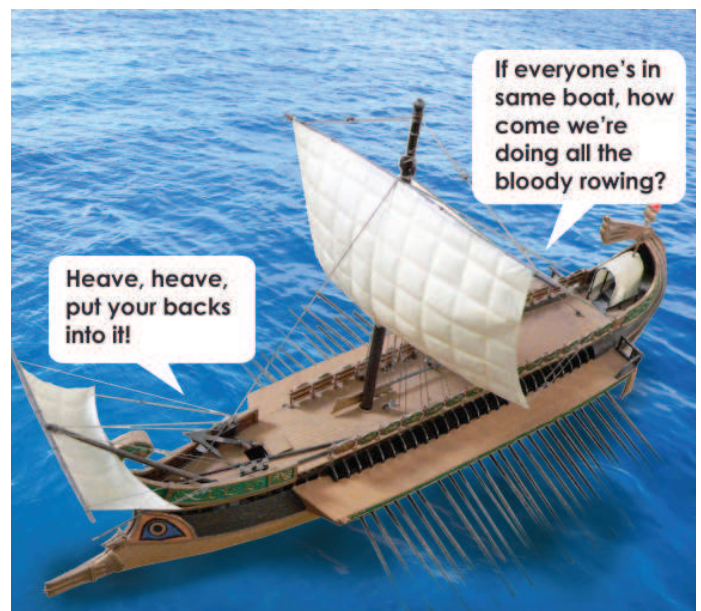
in a sandwich bar he is often served by someone from abroad – because the English are too lazy to compete with diligent foreign workers for such jobs. And a particular victim of this kind of demonising has been, and is increasingly, the disabled.

## Disabled

In this cause, the gutter media have joyfully joined the campaign to support the government propaganda that the benefits system is being bankrupted, publishing photographs of incapacity benefit claimants refereeing football games or running in races. This has stimulated an upsurge in discrimination – sometimes abuse or violence – against disabled people commonly assumed to be cheating for their benefits. Charities like Scope, Mencap, Leonard Cheshire, Royal National Institute for the Blind, report regularly receiving calls about this and believe it to be officially encouraged. The head of campaigns at the National Autistic Society has stated that The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) where Iain Duncan Smith is secretary 'is certainly guilty of helping to drive this media narrative around benefits, portraying those who receive benefits as work-shy scroungers or abusing the system that's really easy to cheat'. The Head of Policy at the Disability Alliance said his organisation is hearing of higher levels of verbal abuse: 'It seems to be growing as a result of a misperception of much more widespread abuse of benefits than actually exists. That's being fed by the DWP in their attempts to justify massive reductions in welfare expenditure.' (The intention is to reduce total Disabled Living Allowance payments by 20 per cent by 2015/6.)

So what does Cameron think about his call for unity being used to divide people? That catchphrase of his has passed with the others into a disreputable history, leaving us with two questions. What is the 'it' which we are urged to be 'in'? And do we want to be there with him? Do we want a society typified by people existing, in this country apart from elsewhere, in such peril that a cut in state benefit reduces them to desperation, needing to choose between buying food and heating their home? Are we impressed by politicians' transparent efforts to justify this? There is a simple answer: we can do better and as a start we can expose the likes of Cameron and their insidious defence of the indefensible.

## IVAN



# The Titanic Disaster 100 Years On

*This April will witness the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the sinking of the RMS Titanic. Many words will be written in the capitalist media about the disaster, but what of the class aspects of the tragedy and has anything really changed in the last century?*

The *Titanic* came into being purely for the speedy conveyance of the rich and wealthy classes between Britain and the US. Opulence and luxury were the watchwords of her design and construction, rather than safety. Designed around class division and reflecting the extremes of wealth and poverty in Edwardian Britain, the vessel featured Turkish baths, gymnasiums, electric lifts, ballrooms, dining rooms, a swimming pool and a library for the first class passengers – all designed to attract the wealthiest clients and secure the biggest returns for the investors in White Star Lines.

The now famous story of the *Titanic*'s maiden voyage and her striking an iceberg off Newfoundland is too familiar to need repeating. Also familiar is the often quoted lack of adequate lifeboat provision, although according to the maritime laws at the time, *Titanic* surprisingly carried more than she was legally required to. What is more interesting from a socialist's perspective is how the class divide, evident in the design of the vessel, continued to make itself felt throughout its operation and right on to the end of the disaster.

The ship carried a total of 2,224 people including crew, and 1,554 of these died on that fateful night, mostly from drowning and hypothermia in the near freezing waters. For the survivors, it is more than apparent that class was a survival factor. At the time, the standard procedure was for women and children to go first into the lifeboats, but significantly, aboard the *Titanic*, this meant first and second class women and children and not those in steerage. No second-class children and only one from first class died, but 52 children from steerage perished. Of the first-class female passengers, 97% survived, some with their lap-dogs, as did 86% of second-class women. By comparison, only 46% of third-class women made it off the ship. Men of all classes bore the brunt of the



*The sinking of the Titanic as depicted by artist Willy Stöwer.*

death toll, but again, significantly, 84% of third-class men died against 33% in first class. Overall, the third-class passengers and crew amounted to 80% of the total lives lost that night.

Various enquiries into the disaster inevitably focused the blame on members of the dead crew and the poor safety provisions.

Whilst the latter criticism may be valid, no enquiry ever took into account the significance of a vessel such as *Titanic* in the first place, nor touched on the inherent class divisions on board which resulted in such tragedy for the 'lower orders'. To do so would have been to call into question capitalism itself. *Titanic*, for example, had sufficient lifeboats for first-class passengers only, not for third. Further, hardly any mention was made of the US immigration laws which required complete physical isolation of the third-class passengers from the rest of the ship. This alone meant that many steerage passengers never even knew of the existence of lifeboats, let alone where they might be found. Many were physically prevented from escaping from the vessel until it was too late.

The *Socialist Standard* of the time drew more incisive conclusions and made the comparison with other disasters to befall the working classes. The May 1912 edition reported:

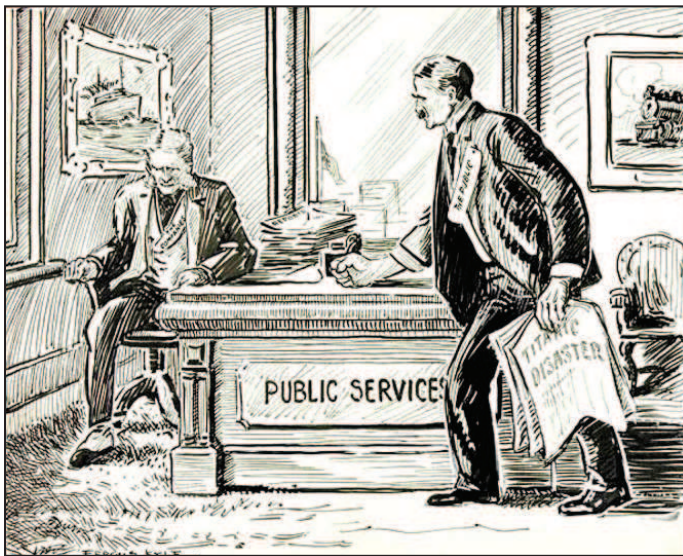
*It must not be forgotten, however, that capitalist companies invariably choose for responsible positions those men to do what they are paid to do. It is all moonshine to talk of the captain being in command. They command who hold his livelihood in their hands. If he will not take risks and get the speed they want, then he must*



*give place to one who will.*

So at the bottom it is the greed for profit and the insatiable desire for speed on the part of the rich that is responsible for the disaster, whatever conclusion the Committee of Enquiry may come to.

“The actual details of the wreck afford a further opportunity of pressing home a lesson. The evidence of the survivors and the evidence of the official figures of the saved, show that even on the decks of the sinking liner, and to the very end, the class struggle was on. Those who had clamoured for speed were the first to monopolise the boats, and the way was kept open for them by the officers’ revolvers. Even the capitalist newspapers are compelled to admit the significance of the figures. Of the first class men 34 per cent were saved: of the steerage men only 12 per cent. Figures like those are eloquent enough without the evidence of the officer who admitted



**“The Margin of Safety Is Too Narrow!” An original cartoon depicting a man representing the public with a copy of a newspaper with the headline ‘THE TITANIC’ pounding his fist on a ‘PUBLIC SERVICE’ desk belonging to a man representing ‘The Companies’**

that he kept steerage passengers from a half-filled boat with shots from his revolver.

Much has been made of the fact that the cry “Women and children first” was raised, and it is not necessary to cast aspersions on the courage of any man who survives. The salient fact is that it was not a question of courage but of class. “Women and children” meant women and children of the wealthy class. Of first class women and children practically all were saved, some even with their pet dogs. Of the steerage women and children more than half perished. The “chivalry” of the ruling class does not, save in very rare instances, extend itself to the class beneath them.

The awful loss of life has not prevented the *Titanic* from becoming a commodity along with everything else in capitalism. Apart from the massive profits made from two major films (*A Night To Remember*, 1958; and *Titanic*, 1997, which grossed \$1.8 billion) and dozens of minor ones, the discovery of the wreck by Dr Robert Ballard in 1985 has spawned even more interest and bickering over the profits to be made from the disaster.

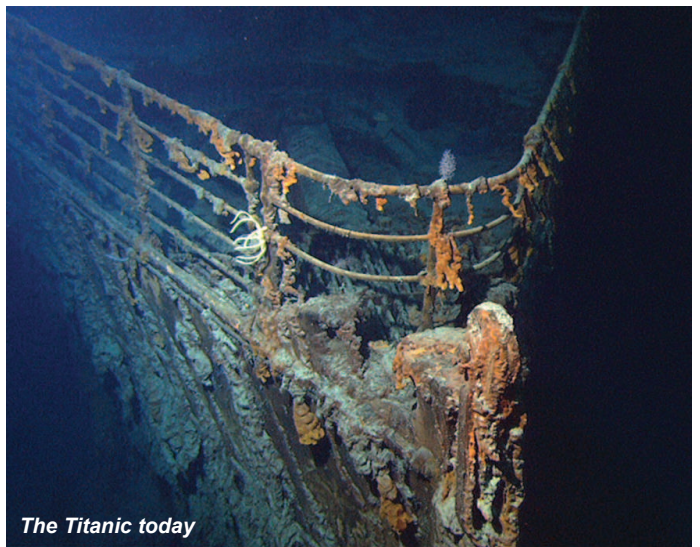
In 1994, RMS Titanic Inc., a subsidiary of Premier Exhibitions Inc., was awarded ownership and salvaging rights by the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia. On 24 March, 2009, it was revealed that the fate of 5,900 artefacts retrieved from the wreck would rest with a U.S. District Judge’s decision. On 12 August, 2010, Judge Rebecca Beach Smith granted

RMS Titanic Inc. fair market value for the artefacts but deferred ruling on their ownership, and the conditions for their preservation, possible disposition and exhibition until a further decision could be reached. On 15 August, 2011, under a French court decision, Judge Smith granted RMS Titanic Inc. title to thousands of artefacts from the *Titanic* that it did not already own. The grant of title was subject to a lengthy list of conditions relating to the preservation and disposition of the items. The artefacts can be sold only to a company that will abide by the conditions and restrictions as set out. RMS Titanic Inc. can profit from the artefacts through exhibiting them.

In addition, the current anniversary will see the re-release of the 1997 movie *Titanic* in 3D, at least two new mini-TV series and a £77million exhibition at the former Harland & Wolff shipyard in Belfast. One can expect a rake off from other merchandise. But more macabre (and indicative of the profiteering nature of capitalism), is the offer by a UK travel company of a full transatlantic cruise which will follow the exact route of the *Titanic*. The cruise will keep the exact timings and pause over the spot of the sinking. This dubious event also offers its patrons the opportunity to dress up in period costume and ‘enjoy’ themed entertainment and food from the era.

The sinking of the *Titanic* and the interest in it will continue for some time yet, but it is sad that the same conditions which brought about her very existence 100 years ago are still prevalent today. The widening wealth gap; the vastly different treatment of people based purely on their income; and the poor treatment of workers in the rush for speed and profit are all hallmarks of the system that was in place in 1912 and is still with us today. Disasters on the same scale as the *Titanic* are still happening and for the same basic reasons. Despite the massive loss of lives throughout the past century, the working classes are still not learning from the lessons once experienced by their forefathers. The class divide apparent in Edwardian Britain and reflected in the *Titanic* disaster, still exists in modern-day Britain and the answers offered by socialists then apply just as clearly today. As the *Socialist Standard* concluded at the time:

*We are not of those who expect any great results from this ocean tragedy. Working-class lives are very cheap,*



**The Titanic today**

*and the age that abolishes the Plimsoll Line at the demand of those greedy for profit is hardly likely to insist upon the provision of proper means of life-saving or the careful navigation of passenger vessels. Murder by wholesale may be committed without doing violence to “law and order,” so long as it is committed by the capitalist class in the “legitimate” scramble for profits.*

**David Humphries**



## Who Was To Blame?

SEVEN DAYS after the *Titanic* settled at the bottom of the Atlantic the first of the enquiries charged with answering questions, exposing negligence and apportioning blame, got under way in New York's Waldorf Astoria hotel. Central to the enquiry would be the questioning of Bruce Ismay, Chairman and Managing Director of the White Star Line, who had been on the *Titanic* throughout its first and last voyage. In the chair was William Alden Smith United States Senator for the state of Michigan, whose opposition to alcohol drove him to try to prove that the *Titanic's* captain and other officers had been drinking when the ship hit the iceberg. Smith's questioning was resented by the officers for its ignorant bluster; for example his asking Fifth Officer Lowe what an iceberg was made of ("Ice, I suppose, sir" was Lowe's answer). And again when he asked Second Officer Lightoller about the possibility of some passengers taking refuge in *Titanic's* watertight compartments to be rescued later.

But in spite of what has been called his 'raucous scapegoating,' Smith carried on, matching his persistent pressure against Ismay's stonewalling. Smith was, after all, a politician who had to have regard for his votes and for the "Yellow Press" of the tycoon William Randolph Hearst who nursed a long-standing

**A**  
**member**  
**writes...**

THE TITANIC was a family theme in my wife's family - her mother's grandfather (that is, my wife's great-grandfather) went off in 1912, having booked his passage on this marvellous new apparently unsinkable ship, to visit a daughter who had emigrated to Canada, and nothing was heard (no mobile phones then) till the news came of the sinking. So my mother-in-law went down (aged 3) with her father several days running to see the lists of the drowned and the saved in the local Post Office window. Then they found out - my wife's great-grandfather had missed the boat, and went over safely on a later ship. So it's not always a good idea to be punctual.

Here are some figures for numbers of people saved -

First class	202 out of 325	62%
Second class	118 out of 285	41%
Third class	178 out of 706	25%
Crew	212 out of 908	23%
Whole ship	710 out of 2224	32%

Apparently they had iron grille doors to keep the third class passengers in their own part of the ship, and in the panic following the collision with the iceberg the stewards didn't get round to unlocking them all. So some third-class passengers found it difficult to get to the lifeboats. Apart from that the designer had had to reduce the number of lifeboats in order to make room for more first-class cabins and their private promenade decks. J. Bruce Ismay, head of the White Star line, was aboard, and though five other ships warned the *Titanic* of icebergs in the area, apparently he insisted on full steam ahead, so as to make a fast (and profitable) crossing. But luckily Ismay found a place on the lifeboats, and was saved.

So the usual moral - don't be poor. **AE**

personal antipathy to Ismay. For his part, Ismay had influenced the design of the *Titanic* in its early stages, reducing the number of lifeboats, for example, partly because the "practically unsinkable" liner was safer than any lifeboat. And when on the day of the collision the Captain, Edward Smith, gave him a vital telegram warning of ice directly ahead Ismay simply put it in his pocket instead of passing it on to the ship's officers.

But in the chaos after the collision Ismay stayed on board to help other passengers into the boats until there were no others left there and an officer more or less ordered him to jump in. He then sat in the boat's stern apparently in a coma until he was taken aboard the rescue ship *Carpathia*, when he demanded, and was given, food and a stateroom apart from the other survivors. He spent the rest of the voyage under sedation. And what of other wealthy passengers? There was Lord Duff Gordon who took over a lifeboat with just his wife and her maid, and seven crewmen to row. While Lady Duff Gordon commiserated with her maid on the loss of her "beautiful nightdress" he was giving each of the crewmen five pounds, seemingly as a bribe to either row away from the drowning people or to keep silent about the entire incident.

The given history of the *Titanic* is concerned largely with scapegoats, from Captain Edward Smith to the seven crewmen in the boat with Duff Gordon and the assertively influential Bruce Ismay. But there is more to it than individual culpability which takes no account of the chaos and waste endemic to capitalism with its privilege and exploitation which we still have to live with. After all, only a couple of years after the *Titanic* the world launched another tragedy which cost the lives of millions of its people.

**RC**

### What about the deckchairs?

EVERYBODY HAS heard the saying about "re-arranging the deckchairs on the *Titanic*". It has become a stock phrase to describe some futile or pointless activity, especially in the face of some impending disaster.

It's also a neat way of describing what all governments of capitalism do, not just in the present economic crisis but generally. Not that capitalism is sinking - it's not going to collapse of its own accord, even if it is no longer sea-worthy - but it is failing in that it is not properly meeting the needs of the vast majority of people. It can't ever do this because it is a system based on exploitation of those who actually produce wealth by their work, in the interests of the small minority who live off that exploitation.

People who propose some measure to make this system 'fairer' - and this includes opposition parties, single-issue groups and campaigning charities as well as governments in office - are therefore just re-arranging the deckchairs. Much better, socialists say, to steer away from the icebergs of economic crisis, war and global pollution and head for socialism where we can lastingly arrange the deckchairs for the benefit of all.



# Maritime Disasters

The movie, *Titanic*, was a big money-maker for Hollywood. Its plot was an unlikely melodrama between a seemingly rich girl and a poor boy. The *Titanic* itself was simply the backdrop to their romance. The movie grossed over \$600 million dollars, placing it at number two on the all time box office lists. Here's another list.

The sinking of the *Titanic* was number three in the all time list of non-military maritime disasters. At number one, with a death toll reckoned to be 4,375 people was the Philippine's ferry MV *Doña Paz*. Originally it ferried passengers in Japanese waters, when its passenger capacity was 608 people. The MV *Doña Paz* sank after a collision with the oil tanker MT *Vector*. It took eight hours before the Philippine authorities learned of the accident, because the *Doña Paz* had no radio. And eight more before any rescue attempt. The owners, Sulpicio Lines,



The *Doña Paz*

claimed that 1,499 people were aboard. Later inquiries alleged that a further 2000 were not on the ship's manifest. This was reinforced by the recovery of 21 bodies, and only one was to be found on the official manifest.

The *Doña Paz* was insured for a million dollars. The owners offered an indemnity for those on the official manifest of \$472 each. The *Vector* was later revealed to be operating without a licence, with no properly qualified master, and without a lookout. The victims' families pursued claims against both companies, but both were cleared of financial liability.

At number two is the Senegalese government-owned ferry MV *Le Joola* which sank off of the coast of The Gambia in September 2002. At least 1,863 people died on a ship built to carry a maximum of 580. It also had a long history of being poorly maintained. The *Le Joola* was built only to navigate in coastal waters but was sailing beyond its coastal limit when high winds and rough seas struck - the probable cause of the ferry's capsizing. It's believed that many people would have survived the sinking, but official rescue teams didn't arrive until the following morning.

Once again compensation was offered to the victims' families. In contrast to the owners of The *Doña Paz*, the Senegalese government decided that a human life was worth around \$22,000. Several officials were dismissed including officers of the Senegal Armed Forces who it was deemed failed to respond quickly enough to the sinking. No criminal charges were ever brought against anyone for the gross overcrowding and poor maintenance of the MV

*Le Joola*.

There's not much in these two disasters to spark the mind of the Hollywood capitalist. What about calling it *Murder on the High Seas: a story of profit, greed and inhumanity*? But there's no glamour in a movie about thousands of piss poor people drowning on vastly overcrowded, hulking ferries. That's simply a reality of life under capitalism.

\* \* \*

'For those who've come across the seas/We've boundless plains to share.' These words come from the Australian national anthem. But a rider needs to be added - unless the state has decided that you're an illegal immigrant.

In August 2001 the Australian state, headed by the Howard administration, refused permission for the Norwegian freighter MV *Tampa* to enter Australian waters. The *Tampa* had rescued 438 Afghan refugees from a distressed fishing boat. The boat was only designed for a crew of 27, and lacked any form of safety equipment. When the captain of the *Tampa*, Arne Rinnan, attempted to enter Australian waters he was threatened with prosecution as a people smuggler by the Australian state. The refugees were eventually transported by naval ship to the Island of Nauru to newly built detention camps. Consequentially, a new policy that sought to prevent illegal immigration by sea was to be enacted. Polls taken by Australian Television suggested that 90% of the anthem singing population supported Howard. Two months later

Two months later a suspected illegal entry vessel, SIEV X, entered Australian waters without permission. Over 400 asylum seekers were on board this nameless, ramshackle Indonesian fishing vessel. On 19 October it sank in international waters; 353 human beings drowned. One



The *Le Joola*

of the claims the Howard administration made for its new policy was that, through the efficiency and dedicated work of the Royal Australian Navy, it would prevent people smuggling. The Royal Australian Navy had been issued with stringent orders to monitor and intercept all SIEVs.

Three non-Australian vessels went to the aid of the SIEV X over a period of two days. There must have been considerable radio activity during this period between the rescue ships. But the Australian State claims that it was unaware of the sinking until three days after the event when the 45 survivors, including an eight-year-old boy who lost 21 members of his family, disembarked in Jakarta.

A 2002 Australian Senate Select Committee investigation

continued page 17

# SYRIA



## Bashar lives up to his name

*Anybody can claim to be an opponent of the present Syrian government, but what kind of a regime is it proposed to establish in its place?*

They have been calling it “the Arab Spring”. Various dictators around the Mediterranean have been overthrown, and successor regimes, more or less distinct from the ones that went before, have been installed. Tunisia’s dictator was thrown out first, to be followed by the dictators of Egypt, Libya, and the Yemen. Now there is a more or less open rebellion in Syria, aimed at overthrowing Bashar al-Assad, the local despot.

The lands stretching across from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf were among the earliest areas to develop what is often called “civilization” - that is, human beings living en masse in larger and larger cities. The Syrian city of Aleppo, for example, has been continuously inhabited for at least five thousand years, and Damascus probably for nearly as long. Several religions trace their origins to this part of the world. Fervent believers in the book of Genesis have often speculated that the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve, the talkative serpent, and the extremely fertile tree which produced “knowledge” as well as apples were located somewhere in the vicinity. This move to city-dwelling was the result of the spread of the idea of private property, where the land and trading concerns, and anything else which produced wealth, belonged to a small upper class, while the rest of the population, virtually propertyless, worked for the benefit of this group of owners.

Separate states came into being, each ruled by a group of owners. Inevitably, violence became common as people tried to seize economic and political power for themselves within a state, and as each state tried to impose its power on neighbouring states. And so the human race began to know organized warfare. As societies based on private property became more common there was more strife and more violence, and the lands to the east of the Mediterranean became the scene of repeated conflicts. Surrounded by great land masses – Asia to the east, Africa to the south-west, and Europe to the north-west – invading forces came repeatedly from all directions; great armies murdered, looted, raped, and destroyed; empires rose and fell. The result was a great hotchpotch of peoples, each believing themselves to be racially different from those around them, and having different and hostile religious beliefs and loyalties.



### Imperialist carve-up

A hundred years ago, this area was part of the Ottoman Empire, ruled by Turkey. Then came the First World War of 1914-18, which the allied powers

claimed was to protect the rights of small nations, but which turned out in the end (as you might have expected) to be more about extending the rights of big nations - or the rulers of those nations, at any rate. The Ottoman Empire was on the losing side in that war, and so was carved up at the end of it for the benefit of the victors. The lands between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf were shared between two of the victorious Allies, Britain and France. Britain got (for example) a stretch of territory which it divided up into three separate states, Iraq, Transjordan, and Palestine; and France divided up its share into Syria and Lebanon – the latter was kept separate because it seemed it might well have a Catholic majority (like France).

After the share-out at the Treaty of Versailles, both Britain and France had to deal with rebellions in the newly acquired territories. Iraqis who objected to the British take-over were bombed into submission. One Arthur Harris was a young squadron-leader there. He had found how effective (and risk-free) it was to bomb obnoxious tribesmen on the North-West Frontier in India, and now he did the same in Iraq, helped by the fact that the rebellious Iraqis had no aircraft or anti-aircraft defences. The young airman is supposed to have said, “the only thing the Arab understands is the heavy hand.”

Bomber Harris was able to put these lessons to good use in the Second World War when he organized the carpet bombing of working-class areas in German cities – that was where the factory workers lived; the houses were smaller and closer together, and of course bombing richer areas would not kill or injure so many of the people who actually did the work. The French had the same problems in Syria as the British did in Iraq; Syria saw a widespread revolt in 1925-7. Fortunately the French were able to bring in troops with much better modern armaments against the lightly armed Syrians, so they were able to establish their superiority.

### Coups and counter-coups

Then came the Second World War, which revealed that both Britain and France had now fallen into the ranks of second-class powers, and neither was able to keep up its colonial empire. Iraq became independent, and so did Syria. The prize of forming the government of Syria and ruling it on behalf of its native upper class was vigorously contested. Coups and counter-coups were constant: in the ten years between 1946 and 1956 there were twenty different governments and four newly-drafted constitutions. The same story of violent take-overs continued, even including a “union” with Egypt in 1958, which fell apart in 1961. But such regular upheavals are not good for business; and in 1963 the so-called “Arab Ba’ath Socialist Party” took over. It was not Socialist at all, of course; it had a programme under which the state would run industries and would enforce stability without bothering too much about free speech and so forth.

For a time the fighting for office continued, but now the hostilities were between factions within the Ba’ath Party. A new group seized power in 1966. One of the successful plotters, Hafez al-Assad, became Minister for Defence. After four years and a final capture of authority: Hafez al-Assad became President, and, in fact, dictator. (The two leading members of the former government went to jail.) Hafez was an Alawite, that is, a member of a Shia Muslim sect, and before



long Alawites were put in positions of control in the army and in every government body. This was particularly necessary, because most Muslims in Syria are Sunnis, and many Sunnis regard the Alawites as heretics. Any opposition was dealt with as every dictator deals with it: imprisonment, torture, death. Hafez is accused of carrying out thousands of extra-judicial killings. An attempted assassination in 1980 failed: the machine-gun missed. Within hours, 1,200 Islamists held in jail had been slaughtered in their cells at Tadmor Prison by armed groups led by Rifaat al-Assad, the dictator's brother. But after the confusion and uncertainty of the previous decades most of the Syrian upper class was happy to go along with the new regime. As for the ordinary Syrians, with Hafez, now in control of the newspapers, the radio, and every other means of information, was able to create a nationwide feeling that stability was better than the disorder and constant shifts of the past and began building up his own personality cult. As the Russians had been propagandized into supporting Stalin and the Germans brainwashed into supporting Hitler, so the Syrians were now conned into supporting Hafez. There was still trouble from some malcontents, especially from those who fancied becoming the rulers themselves. In 1982 there was an insurrection in the city of Hama led by the Muslim Brotherhood who wanted to establish a stricter form of Islam. Hafez ordered the troops in – picked formations commanded by his brother Rifaat – who bombarded Hama, destroying much of the old city and killing (estimates differ) between 15,000 and 40,000 Syrians, nearly all civilians. Rifaat, it seems, later boasted that he had killed 38,000 people in Hama. Two years afterwards Rifaat tried a coup of his own, aiming to replace his brother; it failed, and Rifaat now lives in exile in London. But being the brother of the dictator he had been able to assemble extensive business interests, and he now lives in some comfort in a ten million pound mansion off Park Lane. If you kill one person you will probably end up in jail; but killing thousands seems to have fewer repercussions.

### Hereditary despot

Like many dictators, Hafez wanted to be the boss even after he was dead. He had several sons, and the eldest, Bassel, was groomed to succeed him. His second son, Bashar, was allowed to go his own way, and he became a doctor. In 1992 he came to England and studied to become an ophthalmologist – an eye specialist. Then in 1994 Bassel was killed in a car crash. Without asking the Syrians or (apparently) even his own family Hafez now decided that Bashar would have to be the next strong man. And when Hafez died in 2000 the tame Syrian parliament that had previously passed an Act to say the President had to be at least 40 now hurriedly passed another Act to say that he had to be at least 34, which, by great good luck, was exactly Bashar's age. So Bashar was promoted to field-marshal, which is a rank not many eye doctors have reached, and took over as dictator. There was a "vote", of course, in which Bashar was the only candidate, and it was announced that 97.3 percent of the Syrians had voted for him. (An improbable result: in our discordant society it is unlikely that 97 percent of voters would agree what day of the week it was). He ruled for seven years, and then another "vote" was held. This time the officials in charge thought it would be a good idea to claim an even better result, so they said that 97.6 percent had supported the dictator.

Bashar has proved to be a chip off the old block: dissent is dealt with by torture, imprisonment, and death. When early in 2011 a big demonstration was held against his rule, the demonstrators were chased away by the security forces. The regime announced first that there had been no demonstration, and second that there had been a demonstration in favour of Bashar. Protests continued in many towns and cities across the

country; soldiers began deserting and taking their guns with them. Now Syria appears to be on the brink of civil war, with the army moving in to kill any who oppose Bashar and bringing up artillery to pound any supposedly disloyal areas. Districts regained by government forces are decorated with corpses, either with their throats cut or decapitated. Some estimates of the dead put the total as high as 8,000. Many other countries have decided that Bashar cannot survive and regularly issue statements deploring Bashar's excesses, though Russia and China, in both of which democracy is a rude word, cannot apparently see anything wrong with Bashar's dictatorship. It is curious to hear the American government, rulers of a country which killed at least 100,000 Iraqis (many think the death toll was at least half a million, or even a million) claiming how shocked they are by a death toll so much smaller than the one they have achieved.

Some people in Syria still support Bashar. They include



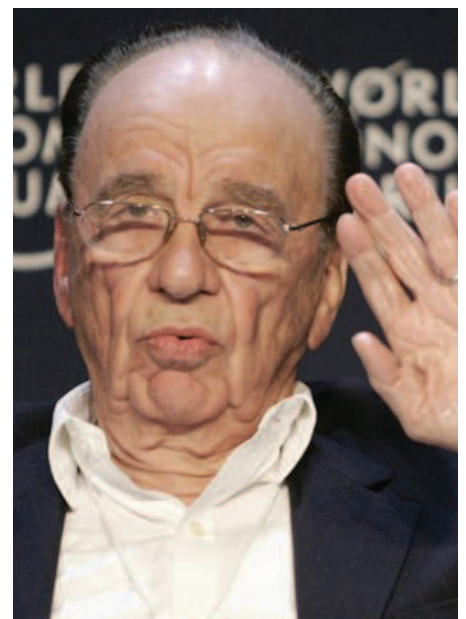
Alawites, since the privileged position they have held since Hafez took power may provoke revenge if Bashar falls; the Druze, an unorthodox Muslim sect; and the Christians of half a dozen different denominations. All of them fear that if Bashar is succeeded by a Sunni government extreme Islamists may persecute minorities. And, of course, Bashar's close friends and relatives back him to the hilt. Bashar's wife is called Asma. Her parents were Syrians living in London, and she was brought up in England. And while Bashar's trusted soldiers and militias polish up new ways to torture and murder the regime's opponents, Asma has been ordering luxury goods from Paris, including a £10,000 consignment of chandeliers and silver candlesticks. Why shouldn't Bashar's inner circle champion him?

The opponents of Bashar are from every point in the political spectrum, including some who, if they gained power, might well establish a regime compared with which Bashar would look like Little Bo Peep. Those who opposed Stalin included loathsome dictators like Hitler; those who opposed Hitler included loathsome dictators like Stalin. Anybody can claim, probably with absolute sincerity, to be a zealous opponent of the present Syrian Government; but a much more significant question is this – what kind of a regime is it proposed to establish in place of Bashar's? There are those who think that if Bashar was killed out of hand like Gaddafi of Libya, or hanged like Saddam Hussein of Iraq, or put on trial like Mubarak of Egypt, or chased away into exile like Ben Ali of Tunisia, then democracy with free speech and free elections would miraculously appear fully formed. That may, to say the least, be over-optimistic. No one knows exactly what the future holds; but it is certain that at the present time anybody or any group replacing the present rulers of Syria will continue to run Syrian capitalism for the benefit of the Syrian capitalists, whatever cosmetic reforms they may think it necessary to make.

**ALWYN EDGAR**

# Now ... and then

***In a socialist society, people will still eat and drink and love and argue, much as they do now. But in other respects, socialism will be very different from capitalism.***



*From left: Lakshmi Mittal, Richard Branson and Rupert Murdoch*

**C**apitalism involves a great deal of inequality, which manifests itself in various ways. We'll begin with inequality of wealth and income. A look at job ads in the paper will show the differences in wages on offer, but that is only a small part of the story, for the income of the richest people is far higher than anything that comes from a wage or salary. The wealthiest family in Britain is the Mittals whose joint worth is over £17bn, while Richard Branson has a mere £3bn. In contrast the median wage for full-time employees is just over £25,000 a year, and the maximum weekly benefit for a person over 25 on jobseeker's allowance is a paltry £67.50. In his recent book *Injustice*, Danny Dorling argues that as many as one quarter of households in Britain are 'just getting by'. The extent of poverty is shown by the

spread of pound shops and charity shops and the increasing numbers resorting to payday loans to survive. Of course such problems do not arise at the top of the wealth and income pyramid, where a couple of years ago Lakshmi Mittal paid £78m for a twelve-room mansion in Kensington.

In contrast, socialism will be a society based on equality. This will not involve everybody consuming the same amount of goods; rather, it means that via free access everyone has at the very least their basic needs and wants satisfied, and nobody is privileged in the way that a small part of the population is now. We can't make all homes the same, but nobody will live in a twelve-room mansion and no-one will live in a slum or a home that is too small for them either. Likewise, nobody will have to choose between heating their home and eating or have to keep

saying no when their child wants new clothes. It is unlikely that socialism will be a consumer's paradise, and people will soon appreciate what having 'enough' involves, but it will emphatically not be a society where people are forced to go without.

### **Power**

Inequality is not just a matter of consumption, for under capitalism there is inequality of power as well. This is partly a straightforward consequence of poverty, for being poor means you have less control over your life: you cannot make a genuinely free choice to move house or take a holiday or even have an evening out if you cannot afford these things. More widely, you may have to stick with a boring or dangerous job if you need the pay but have no realistic chance of finding anything else. And being poor creates a



great deal of stress in the struggle to make ends meet. But the rich have no such worries, and further they are far more likely to exercise control over the lives of others. When Rupert Murdoch decided to close the *News of the World*, this was a stark illustration of the power held by a few 'captains of industry'. The same kind of thing happens when production is outsourced to another country that offers lower wages and maybe less government regulation. It is all very well to say that Britain is democratic, but electing MPs is not enough to make 'rule by the people' a reality. And the rich exercise massive influence by means of donations to political parties and organisations (see the US primaries and presidential elections for clear examples of this).

Socialism will instead furnish the context in which people can take control of their own lives, by enabling them to undertake useful and rewarding work, with plenty of leisure time too. In fact there may not even be the clear distinction between work and leisure that obtains now. But people will be able to switch from one kind of work to another, more or less as and when they wish, and they will be able to travel and see the world without restrictions like passports and borders and ticket prices. And at societal level, there will be true democratic control of production. For instance, decisions about the use of resources and the balancing of environmental concerns will be made by those involved or their freely-chosen representatives, without politicians or millionaires or pressure groups of the powerful influencing what is decided (or just deciding on their own). Moreover, decisions will be made by people weighing the pros and cons for themselves, not on considerations of profit. There is no simple answer to the question of how democratic procedures would operate in Socialism, but we can say at the very least that it will be a far more democratic society than capitalism can ever be.

### Violence

Lastly, we can look at the issue of violence. Capitalism is a violent society in many ways, from the battlefield to the workplace. In the US-led invasion of Iraq from 2003 (misleadingly called 'Operation Iraqi Freedom'), 4,800 coalition soldiers were killed and (though estimates vary widely and even rough accuracy is unlikely) several hundred thousand Iraqis. Those killed in capitalism's wars are by no means all combatants: the nature

of warfare has changed, with air raids and bombs and the shelling of towns, so that far more civilians than soldiers are killed and injured. As far as workplace violence is concerned, on official figures there were 171 fatalities among people doing their jobs in Britain in 2010–11. In addition, 24,700 suffered major injuries at work. In the US, the figures are far worse, with 4,547 fatal work injuries in 2010, and over a million cases of non-fatal occupational injuries and illnesses. More generally, as Studs Terkel wrote in *Working*, his collection of interviews with American workers: 'This book, being about work, is, by its very nature about violence – to the spirit as well as to the body.'

Socialism will have no countries or classes that compete frantically with each other, so we can say emphatically that there will be no wars. We cannot equally assert that there will be no workplace deaths, just as we cannot say there will be no traffic accidents. But, with the profit motive removed, there will



**Capitalism: a violent society, from the battlefield to the workplace**

be a stress on health and safety at work that goes far beyond what happens under capitalism. It will be in nobody's interests to introduce or maintain dangerous working practices, and safety will be the number one priority. Many tasks which cannot be made entirely safe can perhaps be performed by robots or other machines, while others may simply be left undone to see how crucial they really are. Terkel's description applies not to work in general but to work under capitalism, i.e. employment.

We should not give the impression that socialism will be a society without problems. But in any number of respects it can be contrasted with capitalism to show how it will solve or avoid many present-day problems and how its establishment is a matter of the utmost urgency.

**PAUL BENNETT**

### from page 13

concluded that: 'While no government department was found to be to blame for the tragedy, the Committee was surprised that there had been no internal investigations into any systemic problems which could have allowed the Australian government to prevent it from occurring'.

In 2006 the Australian Education Minister, Julie Bishop, attacked a PhD student's study on the drowning



of SIEV X's human cargo, which was due to be taught in Australian high schools. Ms Bishop said the study "promoted a political agenda". On the same day the government decided that a permanent memorial to the 353 drowned was not appropriate.

So for some, 'who've come across the seas/We've boundless plains to share'. But those without the permission of the state might find that they're sharing a watery grave with 353 people who simply wanted a better life. The Australian national anthem, like all national anthems, is designed for the consumption of the gullible and docile wage slave and is a paradigm of the hypocrisy and bullshit that is intrinsic to capitalism.

**New Socialist Party Pamphlet**  
**What's Wrong With Using Parliament?**  
**The Cases For And Against**  
**The Revolutionary Use Of Parliament**

Send cheque / money order for **£1.00** payable to "The Socialist Party of Great Britain" to 52 Clapham High St, London SW4 7UN.



# From Handicraft to the Cloud

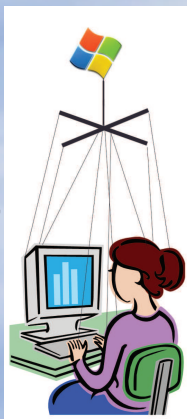
## Part 2 of 2 - The 21<sup>st</sup> Century

### The Internet versus the iPod

The first year of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century was a remarkable one for mass personal computing in many respects including the launches of Windows XP, the iPod and Wikipedia. In 2001, XP was introduced for both home and office users - for over a decade, these had been separate. For home users it was the first version of Windows that required activation (Microsoft Office soon followed suit). Installation CDs were not included with new XP computers which discouraged experimenting with alternative systems. Various legal and illegal projects took the XP operating system and stripped it down for performance gains, proving it could still be functional with less bloatware. Windows Media Player was 'bundled' (included in the installation) but was still unpopular, being bloated with eye-candy, and many users replaced it. XP also removed the command-line interface option, a key route out for power users.

The *Scratchware Manifesto* (at the *Home of the Underdogs* website) sums up the state of games development but the comment equally applies to software generally.

"An industry that was once the most innovative and exciting artistic field on the planet has become a morass of drudgery and imitation. A project that costs millions must have a development team to match; ten people, twenty, thirty, more. It must take years from project start to completion. It must involve so many talents, and so much labour, that no single creative vision can survive. ... You need thirty talents to develop a game? Bullshit. Richard Garriott programmed *Ultima* by himself in a matter of weeks. Chris Crawford developed *Balance of Power* sitting by himself at his Mac. Chris Sawyer created *RollerCoaster Tycoon* - last year's number 1 best-selling game - almost entirely on his own. What do you need to create a game? Two people and a copy of Code Warrior. You need millions in funding to create a great game? Garbage! As recently as 1991, the typical computer game cost less than \$200,000 to develop. *NetHack*, still one of the best computer games ever created, was developed for nothing, by a development team working as a labour of



love, in their spare time."

It wasn't that Microsoft was incapable of innovation, nor was it a company uniquely bad for users' needs. Windows XP actually introduced decent multi-user accounts albeit some 10 years after Linux. But Microsoft has held back many features that might have made life easier for users. In Windows Neptune, Microsoft experimented with task-orientated interfaces (allowing users to focus specifically on relevant tasks without unnecessary screen clutter) pre-empting by about a decade those of the Chromebook and Ubuntu Linux Unity. Unlike XP however, Windows Neptune was never released. Driven by short-term commercial and compatibility considerations, the standard desktop metaphor of files and folders remained for the mass of users while no-one got to hear about alternatives. Microsoft even tried to incorporate the desktop metaphor into the Windows phone, which finally proved its uselessness beyond all doubt. Windows 8, predicted for release at the end of this year, finally drops the desktop metaphor to some extent. Eventually perhaps Microsoft will provide features long in existence such as live CD/USBs from which you can run an operating system, bespoke installations rather than bloated generic ones, unattended installations you don't have to babysit, and installation direct from USB.

The internet had effects on the industry in ways which both benefitted and hindered users. At the turn of the millennium, the hacker ethic of sharing was dramatically revived, Napster popularised peer-to-peer sharing of information, principally music. It was tremendously popular and free access but it was also illegal. After Napster's demise at the hands of the industry, Apple launched iTunes Store in 2003 which was only accessed through iTunes software and could only update iPods. Such artificial software 'lock-ins' were a way to stimulate hardware sales in the post "computer in every home" heyday.

The sharing ethic was also channelled into legal collaborative efforts. Many innovations came from the Free and Open Source Software movements. Linux had become a workable operating system for ordinary home users and Knoppix introduced the first popular live-CD environment.

14th century monastic scriptorium - the first multi-user desktop environment



Puppy Linux stripped down bloated operating systems without harming functionality and proved modern software can run on old systems. Debian Linux was software with an ethical sharing philosophy. Wikipedia dwarfed all of these innovations, becoming one of the biggest encyclopedias in human history. Several CD-Rom based encyclopedias that had been considered so innovative only a few years before promptly went bust.

### Analysing the trend

Criticism of the industry is varied and to some extent constrained by the industry press reliance on advertising revenue from the targets of their criticism. Some criticism is little more than vendor tribalism, but some goes deeper, exploring the mode of production itself. In one popular article, commentator Joel Spolsky in December 2003 claimed somewhat idealistically that making software is not a production process, as if design is not part of production. Some, like Eric S. Raymond, came up with a novel critique. He makes much of the open source aspect, but little of the free access part. In a 2008 essay he says "More precisely, I hate the proprietary software system of production. Not at the artisan level; I've defended the right of programmers to issue work under proprietary licenses because I think that if a programmer wants to write a program and sell it, it's neither my business nor anyone else's but his customer's what the terms of sale are." This is similar to those who complain that software encloses content in "walled gardens" and want to tear down the walls, but are still content to let the produce of these gardens be



```

c:\windows> Run Hello
Hello. You're not supposed to be here.
c:\windows> Run Why not?
Because you're a user, and we don't allow users to do
anything clever anymore.
c:\windows> Run Why not?
Because if you can write your own software, we can't
sell it to you. It's all about the money.
c:\windows> Run What about free access?
Syntax error. Unknown term in statement.
c:\windows> Run Don't I get a say?
In your dreams buddy.
c:\windows> Run But you don't do what I want
What do you want?
c:\windows> Run Empowerment and self-determination
Syntax error. Unknown term in statement.
c:\windows> Run To be free
Syntax error. Unknown term in statement.
c:\windows> Run Install Linux
System Error. Fatal BIOS fault. Don't do it!
c:\windows> Exit

```

## Conclusion

The personal computer revolution bears comparison to the Industrial Revolution, only the personal computer revolution has happened more quickly. The sum of all human knowledge will soon be available at our fingertips. The tools to create any recordable media such as film, music and books will be too. 'Infosocialists' such as Anonymous and HackBloc (whose motto is 'Exploit code not people'), the GNU Foundation and anarchist Richard Stallman all support the free software movement and co-operative enterprises such as Linux. There are also Lawrence Lessig and the Electronic Frontier Foundation who approvingly argue that 'free culture helps free markets', clearly only seeing part of the solution from a socialist perspective. History and industry trends show that all code should be the common treasury of all and developers should be encouraged to develop

passive consumers into empowered knowledgeable end users. Although Marx wrote some notebooks on the history of technology they are now lost, so perhaps the last word should go to Harvard professor David Zittrain's predictions of the end of personal computing.

"The PC is dead. Rising numbers of mobile, lightweight, cloud-centric devices don't merely represent a change in form factor. Rather, we're seeing an unprecedented shift of power from end users and software developers on the one hand, to operating system vendors on the other—and even those who keep their PCs are being swept along. This is a little for the better, and much for the worse." (David Zittrain, 2011)

**DJW**

### Further reading:

*Inside the Black Box: Technology and Economics* (1983) by Nathan Rosenberg (particularly Chapter 2).  
*Autonomist Marxism and the Information Society* (1994, 2004) by Nick Dyer-Witford, Treason pamphlet  
*Cyber-Marx* (1999) by Nick Dyer-Witford.  
*The Anarchist in the Library* (2004) by Siva Vaidhyanathan.  
*Free Culture* (2004) Lawrence Lessig.  
*Free culture, P2P networks, alternative economic models, and why some people do not want freedom* (2005) by Jorge Cortell  
*Critical Information Studies: A Bibliographic Manifesto* (2006) by Siva Vaidhyanathan.  
*Why I Hate Proprietary Software* (2008) by Eric S. Raymond.  
*Karl Marx on Technology and Alienation* (2009) by Amy E. Wendling.  
*Free Software, Free Society* (2010) by Richard Stallman.

exploited by private interests.

The most radical voices tend to come from the free software movement who add free access (an aspect of freeware) to their open source critique of walled gardens. Even among these advocates it is becoming clear that free access and open source software is not enough. Founder of Linux, Linus Torvalds complained of the "users are idiots mentality" on 12 December 2005.

"This "users are idiots, and are confused by functionality" mentality ... is a disease. If you think your users are idiots, only idiots will use it. I don't use Gnome, because in striving to be simple, it has long since reached the point where it simply doesn't do what I need it to do."

## The present

This leads us to the present where the industry has resorted to practices blatantly not in the interest of users such as the Microsoft policy to "extend, embrace, extinguish open standards". Software aims for complete simplicity for the mass of home users while at the same time being increasingly difficult for power users to work with. App stores are characterised by software or content as a commodity with ultimate control by the store owner, which is a far cry from the hacker ethic. Even free software supporters talk approvingly of creating app stores. Maybe they would even support remotely bricking (disabling) iPhones if they are jailbroken (hacked) in order to update their applications.

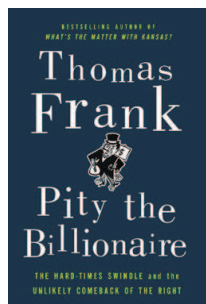
Some primitivists seek solace in retro-computing and *oldversion.com* has the slogan "because newer is not always better". Meanwhile Microsoft markets new versions of Windows with gimmicks including a 3D desktop, better voice recognition, touchscreen and Office with a ribbon interface. These gimmicks extend to using bogus version numbers. Windows 7 was actually revealed to be marketing hype and known internally as Windows 6.1, meaning that it was a lot less different than it pretended. Microsoft is working on artificially locking new hardware to only work with Microsoft operating systems, no doubt calling this better 'security'. Windows 8 invites users to hand over the ability to wipe clean their computer data to remote Microsoft servers, supposedly for greater ease of use. Then there is 'shovelware'. Sales of new hardware are driven by low prices subsidised by advertisers who 'shovel' in pre-installed low-value software as advertising filler.





**Poor Old Capitalists**

*Pity the Billionaire.* By Thomas Frank. Harvill Secker. £14.99.



If you have been paying attention to the Republican primaries, you have probably been shocked by the low level of political debate in the US. Personal attacks, vacuous appeals to religion and

the use of 'liberal' as a swearword seem to be the common ground in speeches and debates. In the book under review, Thomas Frank looks at the politics and tactics of the 'newest Right', as he calls them.

The banking crisis and recession have led, not to calls for more government control of the economy, but for less regulation and the introduction of a genuine 'free market'. Despite the Reagan and Bush regimes, it is claimed by many that 'true conservatives' have never really been in charge and the market has never had a proper chance to impose its discipline on the economy, as there has always been some state interference.

The Tea Party movement is the most obvious manifestation of these ideas. Interestingly, Frank argues that the Tea Party is essentially based on small-business owners who see government regulation as a matter of time-wasting interference in their activities, in contrast to the checks and balances that were (to some small degree) imposed on the big banks. The smaller capitalists tended to borrow money against their homes, so the collapse of house prices left them far less able to borrow and made them look on with envy at the bank bail-outs.

Along with this is an ideology of individual responsibility, the view that those who make it succeed by their own efforts and those who fail and suffer deserve to do so. Where once communities might have rallied round to help someone whose home was being repossessed, now many people are pleased to see a person losing a home that they should never have tried to buy in the first place.

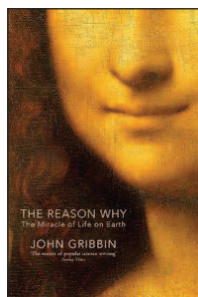
Frank shows how the Democrats have made no serious attempt to respond to these illusions. And he makes a valid point that the real role of the state is far from what the conservatives imagine: 'neither federal nor state governments have ever mounted a campaign to intern

the free-market faithful or blacklist the hardworking proletarians in the Chicago futures pits. However, they have used force over the years to break up strikes, imprison labor organizers, keep minorities from voting, round up people of Japanese descent, and disrupt antiwar movements.'

**PB**

**Reason**

*The Reason Why.* By John Gribbin. Allen Lane. £20.



In the 1960s, a group of heterodox Trotskyists known as the Posadists shackled the UFO craze, then sweeping the world, to 'socialism' (in their case doubtless meaning some form of half-baked developmental dictatorship).

Their leader Juan Posadas 'reasoned' that since these alien visitors were technologically advanced they must also be communists, and called for their assistance and our emulation. Now it is likely that UFOs were nothing more than secret US aviation experiments (could anything be more otherworldly than stealth aircraft such as the B-2 or the F-117?), but the question remains "where are the aliens"? Gribbin answers with Occamist precision: "They are not here because they do not exist".

Subtitled "The miracle of life on earth", this book seeks to argue why life, especially intelligent life with advanced technological capacity, is extremely unlikely to be duplicated in our galaxy, if not, indeed, the universe. While the influence of the moon in making the earth habitable is well known, the author contends that there is a wide range of other factors at work. As an astrophysicist, he most effectively explores the really large ones to do with the peculiar position, composition and geography of our solar system, but seems on unfamiliar ground with evolution (for instance, rating the intelligence of Troodon, the most advanced dinosaur, as on a par with a baboon, whereas most reliable sources rate it as a clever chicken) and ventures not at all into history – how unlikely, looking at the untold eons of hand to mouth survival, is the evolution and survival of technological civilisation? Like Posadas, Gribbin also ventures into science fiction with a purely

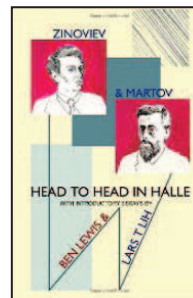
speculative account of the emergence of complex multi-cellular life in the early Cambrian involving the collision of Venus and a supercomet. Despite its limitations, which include a lack of illustrative diagrams, this is a worthwhile book, with a firm and easily accessible scientific background.

The implications are clear. If we are indeed alone, what a crime it is to put the fate of civilisation in the hands of the capitalist system whose reckless wars and insane waste of resources endanger our very survival as a species. As the twenty-first century progresses and human knowledge and abilities expand, it will become increasingly obvious that only socialism can provide the necessary preconditions for our continued long-term existence.

**KAZ**

**Split**

*Zinoviev & Martov: Head to Head in Halle.* With introductory essays by Ben Lewis and Lars T. Lih. November Publications. 2011.



In October 1920 the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD), which had broken away from the pro-war SPD in 1917 and which numbered amongst its members

social pre-WWI Social Democrat tenors as Kautsky, Bernstein and Hilferding, met in Halle to decide whether or not to affiliate to the Russian Bolsheviks' "Comintern" or "Third International".

The German authorities allowed the head of the Comintern, Gregory Zinoviev, to enter Germany while the Bolshevik authorities allowed the leading Menshevik Julius Martov to leave Russia, both to take part. Zinoviev spoke for over four hours in what Ben Lewis claims was "one of the most significant speeches of the 20<sup>th</sup> century workers' movement."

Lenin had justified the Bolsheviks seizing power in backward Russia on the grounds that this was only the first event in the world socialist revolution. He also justified the Bolsheviks using all means to stay in power – including suppressing opponents, invading Poland and stirring up a holy war against the West amongst Muslims, all of which Zinoviev defended in his speech – until they were rescued by the



**The Way Back** (2010)

Directed by Peter Weir



This DVD is bleak, long and grim. In these respects it may accurately

represent the allegedly true story of an escape from a Siberian gulag in 1942. It is based on the bestselling book *The Long Walk* by Slawomir Rawicz who claimed to have escaped the gulag with six other POWs and walked 4,000 miles south through the Gobi Desert, Tibet and the Himalayas to British-ruled India. In a concession to commercial pressures, the dialogue is in English with a Russian accent, which does little for its credibility. Colin Farrell portrays a violent Russian petty criminal with nationalistic ideas and a tattoo of Lenin and Stalin on his chest. As by far the most interesting character it is a shame that he decides to stay in Russia out of some misguided loyalty "to the motherland". As might be expected, the film makes some attempt to tie valid criticism of the Soviet Union into criticism of Communism by including, for instance, a desecrated church. Even if you can put this to one side (and these parts are small enough to ignore) the film is still only averagely enjoyable.

DJW

revolution spreading to Europe and in particular Germany.

In 1920 the leading Bolsheviks were still in this mode. There is no doubting their sincerity, only their judgement. Zinoviev's main argument was that as the world revolution was under way you were either for or against the government of the one place where it had already triumphed. How divorced from reality he was can be gauged from his claim that in England "the beginning of the proletarian revolution can be clearly seen". He added, "I am convinced that in two or three years, it will be said that this was the beginning of a new era. The proletarian revolution has a great chance in England."

In his contribution Martov argued that the workers in Europe were certainly discontented but that this was not an expression of socialist consciousness but of elemental despair. He accused the Bolsheviks of exploiting this to come to power instead of trying to turn it into the socialist understanding required before socialism could be established, a view which he claimed the USPD was committed to. Hence the title of his talk "May the USPD be preserved".

Referring to Russia, he said that the Bolshevik party had "conquered state power in a country with a proletariat that was numerically insignificant, a country with an insignificant productivity of labour, with a complete lack of the basic economic and cultural preconditions

for the organisation of socialist production - and these objective conditions presented the Bolsheviks with an insurmountable obstacle for the realisation of their ideals." He went on to point out that "the development of the revolution in the West ... is not going as quickly as the Bolshevik party had reckoned when it obtained state power through a fortunate confluence of circumstances and then used this power in an attempt to turn Russia into a socialist country by a radically accelerated path."

The extent to which the Bolshevik leaders really did believe at this time that they were turning "Russia into a socialist country" can be gauged from a passage in an article included in this book that Zinoviev later wrote on his "Twelve Days in Germany":

"We are approaching a time when we shall do away with all money. We are paying wages in kind, we are introducing free tramways, we have free schools, a free dinner, perhaps for the time being unsatisfactory free housing, light, etc."

Zinoviev won the debate and a majority of the USPD voted to affiliate to the Comintern and become the Communist Party of Germany (the minority eventually rejoined the SPD). But within a year Martov was proved right about the Bolsheviks' prospects in Russia. In 1921 they were forced to abandon trying to establish a moneyless society and to introduce the New Economic Policy, described **continued page 22**



**Right whinger**

IF THE Daily Mail made television programmes, they would probably look like BBC 2's *Rights Gone Wrong?* This is a show designed to raise the collective blood pressure of that semi-fictional breed of Little-

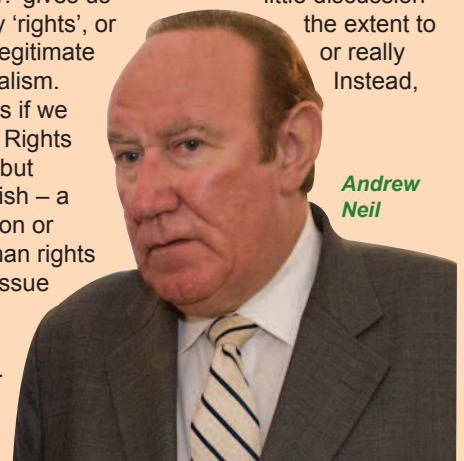
Englander obsessed by 'political correctness gone mad'. As its predictable title suggests, the show looks at whether our 'human rights' laws have become detached from the "decent mainstream majority". Presenter Andrew Neil voices concerns that the European Convention on Human Rights is being used to take "away the rights of victims to protect the rights of people who don't deserve them".

Neil, with his permanent frown from years of indignation, tells us that the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) has drifted from its trusty British origins. He describes the instigator of the ECHR as "the greatest of great Britons", "the man who saved Europe": Winston Churchill. Ostensibly, these 'human rights' laws were first put together as a Europe-wide declaration against Nazism and the Soviet Union. But since then, according to Neil, they have been misused by distant judges and jobsworth lawyers. This yearning for the days when the ECHR was supposedly used responsibly goes hand-in-hand with being nostalgic

for the days of routemaster buses and Magna Carta. Behind this dewy-eyed view often lurks xenophobia, which on this programme is directed towards European senior judges.

By describing the 'human rights' controversy as a conflict between Strasbourg diktats and 'British common sense', the programme misses the point. While it's true that the controversy over 'human rights' legislation reflects the chasm between lawmakers and the general public, it also highlights how laws reinforce capitalist ideologies. But you wouldn't find this interpretation in a show fronted by a right-wing whinger like Andrew Neil, the patron saint of patriots. Obviously *Rights Gone Wrong?* gives us of what we mean by 'rights', or which any 'right' is legitimate fulfilling within capitalism. Neil rhetorically asks if we want a new Human Rights Act "that is modern but quintessentially British - a sort of Kate Middleton or Daniel Craig of human rights laws". Pitching the issue in this vacuous way is hardly likely to improve the debate.

Mike Foster



Andrew Neil

by Lenin as “state capitalism” or the development of capitalism under the control of the “proletarian state” (as he called the Bolshevik regime). Four years later when he broke with Stalin, Zinoviev went further and described Russia’s nationalised industries as “state capitalism” (see *Weekly Worker*, 8 January, 1926) and was criticised by both Stalin and Trotsky for admitting this.

Lih says that Martov could be seen as a sort of “premature Trotskyist” in that he applied the same arguments to why the Russian Revolution would degenerate (economic backwardness and isolation) “to events and processes that the Trotskyist tradition treats in a more admiring way” - in fact from day one of Bolshevik rule.

Martov, wisely, did not return to Russia and died in exile in Germany in 1923. Zinoviev ended up being shot in 1936 as a “counter-revolutionary”, a victim of the same sort of terror and logic he had defended in Halle in 1920.

ALB

## Labour, Lib-Dem, Tory



The Socialist Standard examines their case

## Meetings

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

### London

Sunday **1 April**, 3.00pm  
**APRIL FOOLS.**  
 Speaker: Paddy Shannon.  
 Socialist Party premises, 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN.  
 (nearest tube: Clapham North)

### Cardiff

Tuesday **10 April**, 7.30pm  
**WHAT IS SOCIALISM?**  
 Speaker: Richard Botterill  
 Cardiff Arts Centre, 29 Park Place,  
 Cardiff, CF10 3BA.

### London

Saturday **14 April**, 3.00pm  
**THE CONSUMER**  
 Speaker: Glenn Morris.  
 Socialist Party premises, 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN.  
 (nearest tube: Clapham North)

### East Anglia

Saturday, **21 April**, 2.00-5.00pm  
**MYTHS ABOUT MONEY AND BANKING**  
 Speaker: Adam Buick  
 The talk will include the showing of a widely circulated (on the internet) 40 minute video “Money as Debt” followed by a critique.  
 Premier Inn, Norwich Nelson Hotel (opposite the train station), Prince of Wales Road, Norwich NR1 1DX (The meeting room can be accessed by going through the Costa Coffee Café and down the stairs. Once downstairs, the room is set back, Prince of Wales Road end) .

## The Socialist Party Summer School:

# PROTEST

**6 - 8 July 2012**  
 Harborne Hall, Birmingham

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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

## Nonsense about Race

THE LATEST piece of nonsense to come from race-obsessed South Africa is the news that there has been an official ruling that the Japanese are to be classified as white.

Looking for the base economic motive that is usually to be found lurking behind the high-sounding racial twaddle, we find that the South African government is very anxious just now to encourage trade with Japan. Naturally, it would



not do to make the Japanese suffer all the indignities which are the common lot of the black part of the population. A Japanese businessman thrown out of a hotel reserved for whites or pushed into the dingy part of a post-office to wait his turn with the downtrodden blacks might cancel his order for South African wool!

As so often happens with this racial nonsense, the perpetrators find themselves getting more and more involved in their own idiocies. On this occasion it appears that the locals find it hard in practice to distinguish between the Japanese and the Chinese. Since the Chinese are officially labelled as non-white, the Japanese are still being insulted since they are continually being mistaken for Chinese.

The whole affair has become all the more absurd because South Africa is now very keen on developing trade with China and is having to consider classifying the Chinese also as white.

(*Socialist Standard*, April 1962)

## SOCIALIST STANDARD INDEX FOR 2011

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# ACTION REPLAY

## Naming Ceremonies

YOU MAY well have thought that the Zambian football team won the Africa Cup of Nations back in February. But in fact it was the Orange Africa Cup of Nations, since this is one of the increasing number of international sporting competitions that have adopted sponsorship to the extent of incorporating a multi-national company into their name.

It is, however, mostly domestic competitions and stadiums that have attracted sponsors' names. Football's Carling Cup has had several, such as the Milk Cup when it was sponsored by the Milk Marketing Board (something scarcely credible now). It had started life as the simple League Cup. Rugby union has the Aviva Premiership, rugby league the Stobart Super League, and cricket the Clydesdale Bank 40. Some

mileage is got from the fact that it's the FA Cup with Budweiser, rather than the Budweiser FA Cup, as if that made a big difference. Alcohol, banking and insurance seem to be popular sources of sponsorship.

The trend to new stadiums in recent years has led to sponsors' names being commonly used to label the new ground, such as the Etihad and the Emirates. Sometimes existing stadiums have been renamed, if only temporarily: for a few years, York City's ground rejoiced in the name of KitKat Crescent, under a deal with Nestlé. Newcastle United have played at St James' Park since 1892, but last year the owners decided that this was not 'commercially attractive' (St James himself not having very deep pockets presumably) and so renamed it the Sports Direct Arena after the company run by the club's owner. This is only a temporary move, mind, pending the identification of a long-term sponsor.

Clearly sport is just part of the increasing importance of the global brand in modern-day capitalism.

PB

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# Voice from the Back

## Hunger In The USA

When world hunger is mentioned it is usually assumed that the problem is peculiar to Africa or Asia, but this is not the case. "Here in the United States, growing numbers of people can't afford that most basic of necessities: food. More Americans said they struggled to buy food in 2011 than in any year since the financial crisis, according to a recent report from the Food Research and Action Center, a nonprofit research group. About 18.6 percent of people – almost one out of every five – told Gallup pollsters that they couldn't always afford to feed everyone in their family in 2011" (*Huffington Post*, 29 February). The USA may well be the most powerful country in the world but that doesn't stop sections of its working class suffering hunger.

## An Expensive Round

The owning class are very concerned about the drinking habits of the working class. The government is attempting to put through legislation that would limit cut-rate drink offers at supermarkets and pubs. It would have little effect on the following boozers. "A businessman blew £125,000 on a single bottle of the world's most expensive champagne while buying a round of drinks for more than £200,000 in a night club. The financier ordered a 30-litre double Nebuchadnezzar-size bottle of Armand de Brignac Midas bubbly along with £60,408 on other beverages for his 10-man entourage" (*Daily Mail*, 5 March).



research review by paleoceanographers at Columbia University, published in *Science*, the oceans may be turning acid far faster than at any time in the past 300 million years. .... The authors tried to determine which past acidification events offer the best comparison to what is happening now. The closest analogies are catastrophic events, often associated with intense volcanic activity resulting in major extinctions. The difference is that those events covered thousands of years. We have acidified the oceans in a matter of decades, with no signs that we have the political will to slow, much less halt, the process" (*New York Times*, 9 March). With its mad drive for profits the capitalist system is destroying the oceans and all its diverse life forms.

## Capitalism Is International

The *Daily Mail* has a history of nationalism but even by its standards it went over the top with this story. "How Qatar bought Britain: They own the Shard. They own the Olympic Village. And they don't care if their Lamborghinis get clamped when they shop at Harrods (which is theirs, too)" (*Daily Mail*, 10 March). So how come this backward Gulf state has become so powerful? The answer is simple. In the last two years Qatar has become Britain's biggest supplier of imported liquefied natural gas. When profits are to be made the owning class are truly international. Only misinformed workers imagine they are British. Do you know the nationality of

the people who own the company you work for or do you want to join in a chorus of Rule Britannia with the *Daily Mail*?

## Conspicuous Consumption

The press have recently made great play of how a rich woman, former beauty queen Kirsty Bertarelli and her husband Swiss-Italian pharmaceutical tycoon Ernesto Bertarelli have purchased a yacht for £100 million. "Britain's richest woman may have set a new benchmark in floating status symbols with a new boat that costs £250,000 just to fill up with fuel" (*Metro*, 5 March). The yacht is 315 foot long – an improvement on their old 154 foot one, but it is dwarfed by Roman Abramovich's 538 foot yacht. Such reports of conspicuous consumption are circulating at a time when millions of people are starving.

## A Green And Pleasant Land?

The illusions of nationalist and religious freaks alike that England is something special and is, in the words of William Blake, "a green and pleasant land" are nonsense. "New data has revealed the number of people sleeping rough in England has risen by 23 per cent in a year. .... The statistics show that on one night in 2011 there were 2,181 rough sleepers in England, up 413 from 1,768 on the same night the previous year" (*Independent*, 23 February). Surely the concept of "pleasant" should at least include a pillow and a blanket or at least a mattress?

## Oceanic Pollution

Changing the pH of seawater – a measurement of how acid or alkaline it is – has profound effects. Ocean acidification threatens the corals and every other species. "According to a new



## FREE LUNCH in the Future

